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**Between Negotiations and Ongoing Resistance**  
The Situation of the Afghan Insurgency

*1. Introduction*

In this contribution we will ask what political and military capabilities Afghan insurgents currently possess. How much political influence are they able to exert in Afghanistan? Is their concept of population control territorial? What are their political aims? Do they seek negotiations or do they attempt to win by military means? Considering the brief character of this contribution and the, at best, patchy information about the insurgents due to difficulties to access them in a systematic manner, we cannot claim to provide a full picture but an analysis of the information available. What we do is rather to point out some of the most recent developments of the insurgency and offer some interpretation. Empirically, our research rests on published academic and media accounts as well as on interviews during recent field trips to Afghanistan or by telephone as well as experience in dealing with Taliban officials directly while they were in power.

Following different political goals, a wide range of actors violently defies the claim of the Afghan government representatives to rule the whole country. In order to understand this phenomenon in the most comprehensive way, we therefore use a wide definition of 'insurgency'. We define it as organized armed opposition to holders of state positions. The functioning logic and motives of the insurgency therefore is also dependent on their adversary – political state representatives. In a country like Afghanistan social categories such as 'state' and 'non-state' are not as clear cut as in the West. In this regard, it

would be wrong to see the Afghan conflict as one between a reified insurgency and an equally reified state. Rather, both are constituted by diverse networks of competing actors in changing alliances, who – independent of their formal position – may at times cooperate and at times compete with each other. It is therefore necessary to characterize these networks first. Without doubt, however, the Taliban is the by far largest and best organized component of the insurgency on which we focus most of our analysis.

One may broadly differentiate between representatives on the national level in the highest state offices and those on the sub-national level in the provinces, both of which are connected through hierarchical networks but have a different history of relations to today's insurgency. The post-2001 political establishment on the national level is composed of two major elements: first, foreign educated Afghan technocrats with international backing, who mostly returned from exile, and, secondly, the leadership of those former *mujahedin* organizations (*tanzim*) with whom the decisive international actors have cooperated since the beginning of the intervention.<sup>1</sup> The highest *mujahedin* leaders were involved in ferocious fights with the Taliban between 1994 and 2001, which still makes them suspicious about any negotiations, while key players in the 'Karzai camp' (who also have been part of *mujahedin tanzims*) in the mid-1990s have tried to cooperate with the Taliban movement. On the sub-national level there seems to generally be more continuity in terms of office holders following the fall of the Taliban.<sup>2</sup> With the probable

<sup>1</sup> Timor Sharan, 'The Dynamics of Elite Networks and Patron-Client Relations in Afghanistan', *Europe-Asia Studies* 63 (2011) 6, pp. 1109-1127.

<sup>2</sup> Sarah Lister, *Understanding State-Building and Local Government in Afghanistan*, Working Paper, No. 14, London, Crisis States Research Centre, May 2007, pp. 3-6; Martine van Biljert, *Between Discipline and Discretion. Policies Surrounding Senior Subnational Appointments*, *AREU Briefing Paper Series*, Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, May 2009, pp. 7-9.

exception of the Taleban's former heartland, the south, where significant reshuffles took place after their fall<sup>3</sup>, holders of important offices on the provincial and district level generally seem to stem from those groups that had inhabited them before.<sup>4</sup>

In this essay we concentrate on the insurgency's decision-making elements. Among these, we broadly distinguish between those who were part of the national level political establishment before 2001 and are trying to regain this position and those who joined the insurgency after 2001 and are trying to achieve rather local aims.

The most important part of the insurgency is the Islamic Movement of the Taleban (which now officially uses "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan", to project the rightfulness and continuity of its government), who were driven from power in late 2001 and – despite some initiatives to join it – not integrated into the post-2001 national level political order. The Taleban was not part of the educated *tanzim* leadership class, which goes back to Islamist opposition groups established as early as in the 1950s at Kabul University and, independently, at *madrassas* in various provinces. Instead, its founders were mainly Pashtun field commanders and foot soldiers who, in the form of *taleban* fronts,

fought in South Afghanistan against the communist government and the Soviets as mid-ranking commanders in some *tanzims*. (They also belong to a younger generation than both the *tanzim* leaders and their most important commanders.) Based on local kinship ties in the Kandahar region and comradeship in earlier battles, formed the Taleban movement around its leader Mullah Mohammad Omar in 1994 as a reaction to the devastating civil war period which followed the fall of the communist government in 1992. Over the next years, it extended its reach by adopting additional local commander networks. With the support of Pakistan and significant parts of the mostly Pashtun rural population in the south, as well as beyond the border in Pakistan, it promised to end the fragmented rule of local commanders and had conquered almost the whole country by 2001.<sup>5</sup>

In contrast to Mullah Omar and his followers, the second but much smaller major force of the insurgency, the Hezb-e Islami Afghanistan (Islamic Party of Afghanistan, HIA) wing of this *tanzim*'s founder Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, was one of the core leaders of the 1970s armed Islamist opposition. During the 1990s it decisively lost ground, and fighters, to the Taleban. Hekmatyar eventually fled the country, staying apart from the Taleban but also from his arch-enemy Jamiat-e Islami Af-

<sup>3</sup> Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop. The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan 2002-2007*, New York/Chichester/West Sussex, Columbia University Press 2008, p. 16.

<sup>4</sup> Country wide quantitative data on the distribution of sub-national state positions is lacking. In cases where it is available, it seems to support this interpretation. See for the northeast Philipp Münch, *Local Afghan Power Structures and the International Military Intervention. A Review of Developments in Badakhshan and Kunduz Provinces*, *AAN Thematic Report* 03/2013, November 2013, pp. 64-65.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan. A Cultural and Political History*, Princeton Studies in Muslim Politics, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press 2010, pp. 255-258. Besides Mullah Omar's network, the constituency of commanders Mansur and Haqqani are most important within the Taleban. Thomas Ruttig, *How Tribal Are the Taleban? Afghanistan's largest insurgent movement between its tribal roots and Islamist ideologies*, *AAN Thematic Report* 04/2010, April 2010, pp. 11-13.

ghanistan (Islamic Association of Afghanistan), the Northern Alliance's (NA) core *tanzim*. The NA became the decisive partner of the US-led intervention in 2001 and Hekmatyar was excluded from the eventual post-Taliban power sharing agreement at the Bonn conference.

The exclusion of both HIA and the Taliban from the Bonn settlement and the US-driven "mop up" of "Taliban remnants", even of those who either wanted to join the new regime or remained inactive, were the main reasons for the start of a new organized insurgency relying on fall-back positions in Pakistan. A political wing of the HIA however, became increasingly integrated into the post-2001 political establishment. Followers of the two insurgent groups are motivated by different reasons. The hard core of the Taliban movement's fighters is found in Kandahari networks, linked to their leaders by deep rooted personal relationships, comprised of young dropouts of the southern rural society, refugees who were trained in Taliban-led *madrassas*, and – in later years – radicalized young fighters from all over the country. HIA, in contrast, largely relies on hierarchically structured but non-traditional networks of party cadres who are often educated and from an urban background. However, a large number of foot soldiers and their commanders, especially beyond the Taliban

heartland in the south and east, decided to join the insurgency because they were excluded from power after 2001 or were dissatisfied with local rulers and associated with one of the groups to oppose the existing rulers.<sup>6</sup> Against this backdrop, we will first deal with recent developments in the leaderships of the Taliban and of Hekmatyar's HIA wing.

The Taliban have participated in attempts to establish a direct negotiation channel with the US government, but continue to reject negotiations with the Kabul government. In contrast, the Hekmatyar-led insurgent faction of HIA has taken the initiative for negotiations with Kabul.<sup>7</sup> To answer our leading question we will therefore start to ask whether these contacts have changed the stance of both insurgent movements' leaderships towards the Afghan government.

In addition, we take a look at more recent developments in the Taliban leadership that may point to different stances on whether to prioritize a political or a military 'solution' with implications for their policies. We will also examine the Taliban's and HIA's military capabilities and achievements in the recent past, as to be able to conquer the whole country requires a large constituency of loyal fighters and support – either active or passive – in significant parts of the population.

<sup>6</sup> Giustozzi, Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop, pp. 33, 38, 54-69; Thomas Ruttig, *The Other Side. Dimensions of the Afghan Insurgency: Causes, Actors and Approaches to 'Talks'*, *AAN Thematic Report* 01/2009, July 2009, pp. 7, 10, 14. On the South, see Martine van Bijlert, *The Battle for Afghanistan. Militancy and Conflict in Zabul and Uruzgan*, *Counterterrorism Strategy Initiative Policy Paper*, Washington, DC/Sacramento, CA, New America Foundation September 2010, pp. 8-10, on the Center see International Crisis Group, *The Insurgency in Afghanistan's Heartland*, *ICG Asia Report*, N°207, Kabul/Brussels, June 2011, pp. 6-7, on the Northeast see Münch, *Local Afghan Power Structures and the International Military Intervention*, pp. 34-35, 61-62.

<sup>7</sup> Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, *Third Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2082 (2012) Concerning the Taliban and Other Associated Individuals and Entities Constituting a Threat to the Peace, Stability and Security of Afghanistan*, S/2013/656 United Nations, 11 November 2013, para. 6-11, 22-23.

Finally, we will look at the situation of the local level insurgency and ask if these armed groups, whether associated with the Taliban, HIA or not, pose a risk to the Afghan government.

## *II. Situation of the National-Level Insurgency*

### **II.1. Taliban**

#### *II.1.1. Taliban Operations*

Figures on violence in Afghanistan are politically contentious and almost impossible to verify. It is also often not clear – even in cases in which the insurgents declare responsibility – if attacks or other operations can be attributed to them. Some experts even come to the conclusion that most of the attacks on government officials are not carried out by insurgent but by other unaffiliated local armed groups and represent inter-factional violence.<sup>8</sup> Either way, overall violence and incidents involving the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) were on the rise from 2013 until the time of writing in the first half of 2014, giving no indication that Taliban operations have significantly decreased.<sup>9</sup> Clearly, the Taliban continued an intensive campaign of assassinations against senior representatives or prominent supporters of the government

and other high-ranking Afghan power brokers as well as spectacular, complex attacks against government installations and ISAF bases. In 2014, they increasingly targeted foreigners, focusing on less secure civilians, especially in Kabul. This shows that they continued to shift away from open operations against foreign forces and ANSF to covert, commando style actions.<sup>10</sup>

The question remains, however, what the Taliban have achieved so far by engaging in violence. They were able to disturb the first round of the 2014 presidential elections with numerous attacks and deny access to voting centers in some parts of Afghanistan, but did not achieve their publicly declared aim of disrupting the whole process.<sup>11</sup>

This points to the question of how the Taliban exert domination: through territorial control or indirect influence? Generally, this should not be seen in a Manichean way – it is a combination of both. The fact that ANSF are present in one area or the government is represented in a district centre does not mean that they control it, since there are also informal accommodations between both sides.<sup>12</sup> In some cases ANSF bases exist next to villages which are openly dominated by the Taliban, who are, however, not strong

<sup>8</sup> A former ANA general estimated the share of non-Taliban attacks against the ANA at 50%, another Afghan security expert gave the figure of around 80% of attacks of these groups against civilian and ANSF targets. Interviews Philipp Münch with former ANA general and Afghan security expert in Kabul, 13 and 16 November 2013. See also Arne Strand, 'Perspectives of Local Violence. Revenge, Mediation and Conflict Resolution' in *Local Politics in Afghanistan. A Century of Intervention in the Social Order*, ed. by Conrad Schetter, London, Hurst 2013, pp. 231-243, 231.

<sup>9</sup> General Assembly and Security Council, *The Situation in Afghanistan and its Implications for International Peace and Security*. Report of the Secretary-General, United Nations, A/68/789–S/2014/1637 March 2014, para. 14, 17, 22; Department of Defense, *Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, April 2014, pp. 10-11.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas H. Johnson, 'Taliban Adaptations and Innovations', *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 24 (2013) 1, pp 3-27, 13-16; Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, *Third report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team*, para. 5, 53; General Assembly and Security Council, *The Situation in Afghanistan*, para. 17.

<sup>11</sup> International Crisis Group, *Afghanistan's Insurgency after the Transition*, *Crisis Group Asia Report*, N°256, Kabul/Brussels, 12 May 2014, p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> Department of Defense, *Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, p. 13.

enough to remove them and vulnerable to their offensive actions.<sup>13</sup> Often, however, Taleban influence is invisible or sporadic, projected through its shadow administration, including roving and stationary courts, by frequent 'patrols' of fighters and through sympathetic mullahs and other informers who act as the movement's eyes and ears, which provides them the power of coercion. Geographically, current information indicates that the Taleban are still strongest in their core's heartland in the south and in the regions of influence of their closest affiliated networks in the east and southeast.<sup>14</sup> Territorial control can be best described by the 'leopard-skin model', with most district centers under (often only nominal) government control, a handful of districts fully controlled by the Taleban and most other districts with a degree of Taleban control. In this framework, the Taleban have exerted uninterrupted control over large swathes of territory, reaching from southern Herat and eastern Farah through parts of Ghor (Pasaband), northern Helmand (Baghran and other districts), Uruzgan and northern Kandahar to the western half of Zabul (Dehchopan, Khak-e Afghan) and southern Ghazni. In contrast, Hezb-e Islami has pockets of influence, mainly in Logar, Wardak, Kapisa, east of Kabul, Parwan, Baghlan and Kunduz. The situation in the eastern region (Nuristan, Kunar and parts of Nangrahar) is much more opaque, with

an often indistinguishable mix of Taleban, HIA, remnants of Hezb-e Islami (Khales), Salafi groups and a new generation of insurgents who do not use any label, and additionally Pakistani Taleban and other armed groups.

Starting in 2013, and simultaneous with the withdrawal of ISAF forces from certain areas, core Taleban and affiliated groups have made territorial gains and occasional cut off major highways, particularly in the north. In some cases, and as a symbolic step, they have taken over abandoned ISAF forward bases (like in Kejran, Daykundi, October 2013) or used larger concentrations of fighters to take ANSF bases, as in the case of Omna district in Paktika in late May 2014 and in Ghaziabad (Kunar) in February 2014. They are also increasingly occupying district centres temporarily, particularly in peripheral areas (for example recently Yamgan and 2012 Warduj in Badakhshan and several districts in Nuristan in 2011 and 2012) or clusters of villages, as in the Qaisar and Ghormach districts of Faryab in 2014. On the other hand, the expansion of the Afghan Local Police (ALP) and so-called 'local uprisings' (often ALP in disguise) have pushed them back from other areas, for example in Ghazni province.<sup>15</sup>

Armed groups beyond the Taleban's heartland in the northern half of the country, especially in Kunduz, Badakhshan,

<sup>13</sup> See e.g. the report of a journalist who was imbedded with the Taleban in Charkh district in Logar. 'This is Taliban country', Al Jazeera Fault Lines, 16 April 2014, accessed 5 June 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/faultlines/2014/04/taliban-country-20144108610575181.html>.

<sup>14</sup> Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, Third report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, para. 3, 44; Department of Defense, Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan, p. 11.

<sup>15</sup> Hadi Ghafari, 26 rebels killed as forces recapture ex-ISAF base, *Pajhwok*, 10 October 2013; interview with local informant, 1 June 2014; 20 Afghan Soldiers Killed in Taliban Attack in Kunar, 23 February 2014; Ghanizada, District falls to Taliban control in Badakhshan province, *Khaama*, 20 May 2014; Thomas Ruttig, Afghan Politicking after the Rebellion in Tajik Badakhshan, AAN, 16 August 2012; Fabrizio Foschini, New Battles and Old Wants in Nuristan, AAN, 2 June 2012; Fabrizio Foschini, The Enteqal Seven (2): Around Mehtarlam, an 'Insurgency Corridor' in the Making, AAN, 10 May 2011; Obaid Ali, Security Forces Spread Thin: An Update from Contested Faryab Province, AAN, 11 June 2014. On general developments: Thomas Ruttig, After the 'Operational Pause': How Big is the Insurgents' 2013 Spring Offensive? AAN, 2 June 2013; Borhan Osman, Can the Taleban Outwrestle the Government? An Assessment of the Insurgency's Military Capability, AAN, 25 March 2014, accessed 5 June 2014.

and Faryab but also in the Herat region, often affiliate with the Taliban or simply use the label. Closer examination of these cases, however, reveals the very local aims of these groups.<sup>16</sup> To exert national dominance, the Taliban leadership would have to persuade a significant number of commanders of armed groups linked with the current government all over the country to switch to their side – as they had done in the 1990s. In those days, the commanders judged the Taliban's side as the winning one due to their cohesion, resources, and direct Pakistani support.<sup>17</sup> Now, however, incentives to join the Taliban are obviously not strong enough and the foreign funded ANSF is still able to repel attacks on major population centers.<sup>18</sup>

#### *II.1.2. Developments in the Taliban Leadership*

It is almost impossible to prove the reliability of publications about the Taliban leadership's composition, meaning that any information on it has to be treated with caution. What can be taken as granted is that it is still based in Pakistan and gives orders to its followers inside Afghanistan. To date, the Taliban leadership has not issued any coherent political program to its followers or the wider public. Their repeatedly stated political aims are: expulsion of all foreign troops from Afghanistan and return to a 'truly Islamic' order, based on the Quran, which entails their own return to power.<sup>19</sup> Over the past few years, however, they have increa-

singly laid out parts of their politics in statements ascribed to Mullah Omar and addressed to the Afghan people, particularly on Islamic holidays. This includes offers for an inclusive 'post-occupation' political system, regulations about education and the work of NGOs, and offers of good neighborliness to regional countries. At the same time, Taliban statements and action on current political issues – such as the current elections – can often be contradictory.<sup>20</sup>

To issue orders to their followers, the Taliban leadership has developed a formal military hierarchy and shadow administrative structure. At its top stands Mullah Omar, legitimized as *amir ul-momenin* ('commander of the faithful'), advised by a leadership council. Below him are three *shuras* ('councils') that, at least initially, had regional responsibilities, among them the *shuras* of Peshawar and Quetta – the latter not to be confused with the leadership council. Personal relationships between *shura* members and individual commanders or other office holders, however, often transcend the formal structure.<sup>21</sup> In this sense, there are also reports – however not fully verified – that a competition for influence in the movement has developed between the Quetta and the Peshawar *shuras* and that Peshawar is obtaining an increasing amount of direct resources.<sup>22</sup>

There also is a constant competition for influence between various commander networks in the leadership council for

<sup>16</sup> See on Faryab International Crisis Group, Afghanistan's Insurgency after the Transition, pp. 10-14, on Kunduz and Badakhshan Münch, Local Afghan Power Structures and the International Military Intervention, pp. 34-36, 61-64.

<sup>17</sup> Barfield, Afghanistan, pp. 259-260.

<sup>18</sup> Osman, Can the Taliban Outwrestle the Government?.

<sup>19</sup> Ruttig, The Other Side, pp. 18-19.

<sup>20</sup> See, on the general acceptance of elections Borhan Osman, Adding the Ballot to the Bullet? Hezb-e Islami in Transition, AAN, 6 May 2013.

<sup>21</sup> Ruttig, The Other Side, p. 17.

<sup>22</sup> See for example: Antonio Giustozzi, Turmoil within the Taliban. A Crisis of Growth? *Central Asia Policy Brief*, No. 7 Elliott School of International Affairs, The George Washington University, January 2013 and Claudio Franco, The Evolving Taliban. Changes in the Insurgency's DNA, AAN, 19 May 2013.

control over the Taleban's central military commission and for the ear of and access to the *amir ul-momenin*, which has not, however, led to significant splits of the organization so far; prominent Taleban members such as Agha Jan Motassem have left the movement as individuals but usually claim to be still part of the movement. This can possibly be explained by the larger influence of Pakistani military elements on the Peshawar *shura* (which includes the Haqqani network, which developed links to the Pakistani military long before the Taleban existed as a movement) whereas the mainly Kandahari leadership has a history of maintaining autonomy from Pakistani political influence.<sup>23</sup> The most recent significant change in the Taleban leadership has been the retirement of the Taleban's overall military commander, Mullah Abdul Qayyum Zaker, in April 2014, who has been widely considered a 'hawk'.<sup>24</sup> Some Afghan newspapers and usually well-informed sources stated in June that he is to be followed by Maulawi Ibrahim Sadr.<sup>25</sup> It is still open to debate whether this reshuffle is a sign that the pro-talks elements are gaining more weight in the Taleban movement again or whether he was banished for failing to disrupt the first round of the 2014 elections.

### *II.1.3. Contacts, Talks, Attempts to be Integrated in the Post-2001 Establishment*

Chances to reach to a political settlement and the inclusion of the Taleban, or significant parts of it, were squandered early in the Bonn process. For its eight years in power, the Bush administration rejected any "talks with terrorists" and the forces of "Operation Enduring Freedom" (OEF) immediately started to mop up "Taleban remnants".<sup>26</sup> The US blockade of any contacts was bolstered by the misconception – which is still alive – that al-Qaeda and the Taleban were parts of one 'terrorist syndicate'.<sup>27</sup> This negated possible faultlines between both organisations, the most important of which being the contradictions between the purely Afghan agenda of the Taleban and the international *jihadi* agenda of al-Qaeda.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, despite willingness to negotiate or even surrender among members of Mullah Omar's inner circle, a negotiation process did not start and Taleban leaders willing to negotiate were pushed back into the insurgency.<sup>29</sup> In the following years, a small number of leaders returned to Kabul individually and became the core of the group of so-called 'reconciled Taleban' that, again in vain, offered themselves as a channel for contacts. Some of them

<sup>23</sup> See Thomas Ruttig, 'The Haqqani Network as an Autonomous Entity' in *Decoding the New Taliban. Insights from the Afghan Field*, ed. by Antonio Giustozzi, London, C. Hurst & Co 2009, pp. 57-88.

<sup>24</sup> Sami Yousafzai, "Top Taliban Commander Resigns, Revealing Major Rift in the Leadership", *The Daily Beast*, 25 April 2014, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/04/25/top-taliban-commander-resigns-revealing-major-rift-in-the-leadership.html>.

<sup>25</sup> Telephone interview Philipp Münch with representative of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Kabul, 13 June 2014.

<sup>26</sup> Anand Gopal, *No Good Men among the Living: America, the Taliban, and the War through Afghan eyes*, New York 2014, p. 121.

<sup>27</sup> See for example: Terror Expert and Obama Advisor Bruce Riedel: 'Protecting America's Heartland from Attack', interview with Bruce Riedel, *Spiegel*, 8 April 2009, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/terror-expert-and-obama-advisor-bruce-riedel-protecting-america-s-heartland-from-attack-a-618182.html>.

<sup>28</sup> Alex Strick van Linschoten, Felix Kuehn, *An Enemy We Created: The Myth of the Taliban / Al-Qaeda Merger in Afghanistan, 1970-2010*, Oxford 2012.

<sup>29</sup> Gopal, *No Good Men among the Living*, p. 104.

later joined the High Peace Council, established by President Karzai in 2010 as a government vehicle to bring about direct contacts.<sup>30</sup> Only after Barack Obama took office did a significant US-backed initiative start to revive contacts with the Taliban to explore common grounds for negotiations. However he simultaneously started a troop surge in 2010 and intensified targeting operations against Taliban leaders all over the country and in Pakistan in order to force them to accept the US terms of negotiations. Since the Taliban ideologically hardened under fire and Obama had declared at the beginning of the 'surge' that he would start to significantly withdraw troops by July 2011, the Taliban has to date refused to talk to the Afghan government, obviously hoping for victory after the international military troop reduction. Though unsuccessful so far, the most recent developments concerning talks with the Taliban benefitted from channels which had been established with German support through Qatar since late 2009.<sup>31</sup> Significantly, these contacts had the blessing of the Taliban leader. However, they excluded the Afghan government. Kabul therefore sabotaged this process – as well as other efforts like the 2012 attempt by the UN to start an 'intra-Afghan peace dialogue' in

Turkmenistan.<sup>32</sup> At first, the US and Taliban representatives put a swap of prisoners on the agenda to build confidence. But in 2012, the talks broke down as a result of resistance from the Republican-dominated Congress against the swap, an outcome perceived as a breach of confidence by the Taliban. In March 2012, it unilaterally broke off contact. When an attempt to revive the contact was made by establishing a Taliban liaison office in Qatar in June 2013<sup>33</sup>, Karzai protested because the Taliban had projected it as a quasi-embassy by showing the insignia of their Emirate. Qatar closed the office just one day later. Nevertheless, the political team of the office remained in Qatar and finally facilitated the contested prisoner exchange. On 1 June 2014, the only US captive of the Taliban, Sergeant Bowe Bergdahl, was exchanged for five senior Taliban officials detained at Guantanamo bay. Again, the Afghan government was not involved in these proceedings.<sup>34</sup>

Karzai continues to put his hopes in Taliban splinter groups such as that of Agha Jan Motassem, who has announced that he wants to set up a Taliban political party (but was disowned by the Taliban leadership)<sup>35</sup> and a new political organization, Rah-e Nejat Afghanistan ('A

<sup>30</sup> Martine van Bijlert/Thomas Ruttig, "Warlords' Peace Council", *AAN*, 28 September 2010.

<sup>31</sup> Christoph Reuter, Gregor Peter Schmitz and Holger Stark: "Talking to the Enemy: How German Diplomats Opened Channel to Taliban", *Spiegel*, 10 January 2012, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,808068,00.html>.

<sup>32</sup> "Turkmenistan, UN to co-operate on restoring Afghanistan", *Central Asia Online*, 27 February 2012, [http://www.centralasiaonline.com/en\\_GB/articles/caii/newsbriefs/2012/02/27/newsbrief-08](http://www.centralasiaonline.com/en_GB/articles/caii/newsbriefs/2012/02/27/newsbrief-08).

<sup>33</sup> Unofficially, it existed since late 2011 already. See: Thomas Ruttig, "An Address for the Taliban in Qatar", *AAN*, 16 December 2011, <http://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/an-address-for-the-taliban-in-qatar>; Borhan Osman and Kate Clark, "Who Played Havoc with the Qatar Talks?", *AAN blog entry*, 9 July 2013, <http://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/who-played-havoc-with-the-qatar-talks-five-possible-scenarios-to-explain-the-mess>.

<sup>34</sup> Eric Schmitt and Charlie Savage, 'American Soldier Freed by Taliban in Prisoner Trade', *New York Times*, 1 June 2014, A1.

<sup>35</sup> Sayed Sallahuddin, "Senior Taliban Leader Motasim Freed by UAE, Returns to Kabul to Help Afghan Negotiations", *Washington Post*, 21 April 2014, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/senior-taliban-leader-motasim-freed-by-uae-returns-to-kabul-to-help-afghan-negotiations/2014/04/21/e270268c-c982-11e3-93eb-6c0037d0e2ad\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/senior-taliban-leader-motasim-freed-by-uae-returns-to-kabul-to-help-afghan-negotiations/2014/04/21/e270268c-c982-11e3-93eb-6c0037d0e2ad_story.html).



Path to Rescue Afghanistan'), started by Mullah Sayyed Akbar Agha earlier in 2014.<sup>36</sup> Motassem's group, however, has already been active for three years but not produced any impact on the insurgency in terms of defections. Akbar Agha, meanwhile – who had temporarily headed a splinter group, Jaish-e Muslimin (2004-05),<sup>37</sup> that had concentrated on abducting foreigners – might provide a bridge to some active Taleban elements but mainly represents the criminal element of the insurgency. It also is still open to debate whether the retirement of the Taleban's overall military commander Mullah Abdul Qayyum Zaker,<sup>38</sup> considered a 'hawk', is a sign that the pro-talks elements are gaining more influence in the Taleban movement again or whether he was banished for his failed attempt to disrupt the first round of the 2014 elections.

## II.2. Hezb-e Islami Afghanistan

Aside from the Taleban, the insurgent wing of the HIA remains the second biggest national insurgent movement. Its major field commander is Kashmir Khan, who is active in eastern Afghanistan.<sup>39</sup> Allied only for convenience and for short pe-

riods of time with the Taleban locally, it has lost significant influence to them in recent years. In many cases HIA commanders switched to the Taleban, or clashed with them. Therefore, the insurgent wing of HIA is concentrating on securing some local influence and on high-profile attacks against foreigners in Kabul, which usually receive disproportionately high international media attention.<sup>40</sup> Hekmatyar's opposition to the central government after 2001 has frequently been characterized as an 'ideological' one.<sup>41</sup> Apart from his aim to force the international military presence out of Afghanistan, his political goals, Islamist and nationalist in nature, do not – as in the case of the Taleban – seem to differ much from those of other former *mujahedin* who are part of the government.<sup>42</sup> The conflict should therefore rather be seen as one of competing interests.

The fact that the member states of the international military coalition did not cooperate with him in 2001 – though they did during the 1980s – put Hekmatyar against them. His long-standing rivalry with Jamiat<sup>43</sup> seems to be the reason for his opposition to the post-2001 Afghan state,

<sup>36</sup> Akbar Agha, interview with *Channel One TV* (Kabul), 25 February 2014.

<sup>37</sup> "Jaishul Muslimeen Returns to Taliban Fold", *Pajhwok News Agency* (Kabul), 23 June 2005.

<sup>38</sup> Sami Yousafzay, "Top Taliban Commander Resigns, Revealing Major Rift in the Leadership", *The Daily Beast*, 25 Apr 2014, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/04/25/top-taliban-commander-resigns-revealing-major-rift-in-the-leadership.html>.

<sup>39</sup> Interview Philipp Münch with senior representative of HIA's Helal faction in Kabul, 19 November 2013; Muhammad Ali Khan Saif, 2014 Afghanistan's Testing Times. An Analysis of the Political Situation and the Insurgent Forces, *SISA Report*, No. 17, Oslo, Centre for International and Strategic Analysis, March 2014, p. 33.

<sup>40</sup> International Crisis Group, *The Insurgency in Afghanistan's Heartland*, p. 15; Thomas Ruttig, *Bomb and Ballot. The many Strands and Tactics of Hezb-e Islami*, AAN, 19 February 2014, accessed 27 May 2014, <http://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/bomb-and-ballot-the-many-strands-and-tactics-of-hezb-e-islami>, p. 3-4.

<sup>41</sup> See e.g. Kenneth Katzman, *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy*, RL30588 Congressional Research Service, 9 April 2014, p. 14.

<sup>42</sup> See on the general ideological similarity of post 2001 government and anti-government *mujahedin* groups Ruttig, *The Other Side*, p. 8. On the latest political aims of Hekmatyar's HIA see Ruttig, *Bomb and Ballot*, p. 5.

<sup>43</sup> See e.g. Nils Wörmer, *The Networks of Kunduz. A History of Conflict and Their Actors, from 1992 to 2001*, *AAN Thematic Report 02/2012*, AAN, August 2012, pp. 8-9.

with its strong Jamiati component. He is not an enemy of the current government as such, however, since Karzai has distributed state positions to members of the political wing of HIA since at least 2004 in order to balance out his Jamiat competitors in the central government and in the provinces, nor of the national political establishment as a whole.<sup>44</sup> Obviously recognizing that he would not be able to win militarily against the central government and even losing ground to the Taliban in the insurgency, it is not surprising that he has been approaching the central government since at least 2009. After unsuccessfully proposing a peace plan to Kabul in 2010, which included the withdrawal of all foreign troops and general elections among 'Islamic' parties only, Hekmatyar did not oppose the 2014 presidential elections. He even gave some public support to his former deputy Qutbuddin Helal after the latter had initially declared himself a candidate without consulting his leader.<sup>45</sup>

The members of HIA's political wing may serve as a bridge between Hekmatyar and the Karzai government.<sup>46</sup> Most of the

former were higher functionaries of the party during the Jihad against the communists and the following civil war, who in the first years after the fall of the Taliban tried to integrate into the political establishment. The latest wave of senior HIA leaders to leave the Pakistani exile was convinced by the material benefits of the High Peace Council, which was established in 2010.<sup>47</sup> Through the ALP program, which was started in the same year by ISAF and the Afghan government, even armed HIA groups were integrated into the formal state structure.<sup>48</sup> Despite Hekmatyar's anger about their defection, the senior HIA functionaries still have not cut all links with him in order to be able to realign with him in case he returns to the political scene.<sup>49</sup> As became most visible at the forefront of the 2014 presidential elections, the political HIA wing is split in several factions. One faction, lead by Minister of Economy Abdul Hadi Arghandiwal, declared its support for presidential candidate Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, a member of HIA's original arch-enemy Jamiat. Arghandiwal's deputy Mohammad Khan is one of Abdullah's vice presidential candidates.<sup>50</sup> But a number of significant pro-

<sup>44</sup> On this policy in the northeast see Münch, *Local Afghan Power Structures and the International Military Intervention*, p. 64.

<sup>45</sup> Javed Hamim Kakar, 'Hekmatyar Calls for Elections in 2014', *Pajhwok Afghan News*, 20 October 2012; Osman, *Adding the Ballot to the Bullet?*, pp. 1-4; Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, *Third report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team*, para. 23.

<sup>46</sup> International Crisis Group, *The Insurgency in Afghanistan's Heartland*, p. 15 gives the figure of 'at least' 49 HIA members with 'leadership positions as members of parliament, provincial governors or members of the cabinet' as of 2011. Five of them are ministers. Ruttig, *Bomb and Ballot*, p. 5.

<sup>47</sup> Interviews Philipp Münch with representative of the political HIA wing's Sabawun faction and with senior representative of the Helal faction in Kabul, 14 and 19 November 2013; Osman, *Adding the Ballot to the Bullet?*, p. 3.

<sup>48</sup> Ruttig, *Bomb and Ballot*, p. 6.

<sup>49</sup> In private, all interviewed HIA members declared that they were dissatisfied with Hekmatyar's policy of continuing the fight but stated that they would follow him again if he would return to peace. Interviews Philipp Münch with representative of the political HIA wing's Sabawun faction and with representatives of the political HIA wing's Helal faction in Kabul, 14, 15, and 19 November 2013.

<sup>50</sup> Interview Philipp Münch with representative of the political HIA wing's Sabawun faction 14 November 2013; 'Islamic Party Voices Support for Contender Abdollah, not Helal in Afghan Election', *Noor TV*, 19 February 2014 1300 gmt; Ruttig, *Bomb and Ballot*, pp. 6-7.

vincial HIA leaders who formed the 'Union of HIA Shuras' in the 2014 elections, including a 2006 splinter party led by the former head of the HIA intelligence committee, Wahidullah Sabawun (Hezb-e Muttahed-e Islami-ye Afghanistan, United Islamic Party of Afghanistan) and the former head of the political committee of HIA and current vice-head of the HPC, Qazi Amin Waqad, did not follow. They decided to support Dr. Zalmay Rassoul.<sup>51</sup> After it became clear that he had not reached the final round, they declared their support for Dr. Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai.<sup>52</sup> Their colleague Hezbi Helal only won 2.75 per cent of the vote and ultimately joined Ashraf Ghani for the second round, while a HIA spokesman stated that the party would boycott the second round of elections.<sup>53</sup> Applying a double strategy of signaling readiness for negotiations and exerting military pressure, Hekmatyar has never ceased to attack foreign troops, especially in Kabul.<sup>54</sup> The party is also involved in sporadic fighting with the Taleban for control of certain areas, mainly in Wardak and Baghlan.

### III. Conclusion

US President Barack Obama's 27 May 2014 statement that set 2016 as the deadline for the US troop presence in Afghanistan<sup>55</sup> has again changed the framework that influences whether the Afghan insurgency will continue and possibly take over power or whether a political settlement, as the basis for wider reconciliation, will be found. It might

strengthen those in the insurgency further who, once Obama had scheduled the withdrawal of most combat forces at the 2014 end of year, concluded that they can wait out US/NATO presence and then push for a solution against a weakened Afghan government. (If ISIS' recent territorial gains in Iraq and Syria are consolidated, this might encourage such a view even more.)

On the other hand, the ANSF have also made progress with regard to their support in the population. The international community is ready to support Afghanistan for up to another decade. Therefore, the short-term chance for an all-out military victory of the Taleban is comparatively small. With the prospect of having another three years to wait until they can start a military offensive that doesn't face a significant international force, but an end of the military presence in sight, the Taleban might still be *persuaded* to talk. Quick territorial gains, however, even marginal (e.g. some district centers or a provincial capital), larger ANSF desertions and, most of all, a large reduction in or stop to foreign military aid after 2016 might change the position to the Taleban's advantage. The Taleban hawks will use any post-2014 foreign military presence as an argument to continue the insurgency. Strong elements in the Taleban, however, still seem to be open to a political settlement. The movement has – against the claims of official Afghan government and other propaganda – roots in the society; it is more

<sup>51</sup> Interviews Philipp Münch with representative of the political HIA wing's Sabawun faction and with representatives of the political HIA wing's Helal faction in Kabul, 14, 15, and 19 November 2013; 'Leadership of Divided Hezb-e Eslami Party Backs Rasul for Afghan President', *Afghan Ariana TV (BBC Monitoring South Asia)*, 22 February 2014 1530 gmt; Ruttig, *Bomb and Ballot*, p. 6.

<sup>52</sup> Ghanizada, 'Hezb-e-Islami Shura Endorses Ashraf Ghani in Election Runoff', *Khaama Press*, 9 May 2014, <http://www.khaama.com/hezb-e-islami-shura-endorses-ashraf-ghani-in-election-runoff-6084>.

<sup>53</sup> 'Rebel Group to Boycott Afghan Presidential Runoff', *Pajhwok Afghan News*, 21 April 2014.

<sup>54</sup> Ruttig, *Bomb and Ballot*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>55</sup> White House website, Statement by the President on Afghanistan, 27 May 2014, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/05/27/statement-president-afghanistan>.

than just an externally manipulated terrorist outlet, and its local networks that are primarily active in the areas of their origin are not interested in a further destruction of the country. (Although these elements may also speculate about a political victory, either through persuasion – using its Islamic and anti-corruption credentials – or force, by eliminating opponents from within the system.) But as they are not paid mercenaries, they will also not accept any solution that does not consider their interests, and honour, and treats them as a minor conflict party that has either the choice to lay down arms and join the legitimate government or be defeated. One of the aims of a *process towards negotiations* should be to weaken and isolate extremist elements within the movement and external jihadist groups.

It may or may not be helpful to conclude a settlement with HIA's insurgent wing which, on the surface, is behaving in a conciliatory manner. On the one hand, it could set a precedent that such a deal is possible; on the other hand, it is militarily so marginal that political inclusion might trigger a comeback of a re-unified and much stronger HIA, which would destabilize the system more than it stabilizes it. The party, and particularly its leader Hekmatyar, are known to be extremely opportunistic – as its ever-changing position vis-à-vis the current elections has shown – and can also quickly turn against any settlement again. In this context, the current situation might be preferable: the elements which are ready to distance themselves from the insurgency are part of the establishment, but on the condition that Hekmatyar's comeback is not allowed. The calculation in international diplomatic circles to create a pro-talks dynamic within the Taliban movement by

starting negotiations has failed so far, as there are no negotiations. The approach was simply too narrow-minded. First, it was driven by the US interest to withdraw its troops and create a conducive environment for talks, without sufficiently taking conditions on the ground into consideration. Secondly, it excluded the Kabul government, making it hostile to initiatives it did not lead; the general deterioration of the US-Afghan relationship was allowed to influence the environment further in a negative way. Thirdly, both the US and Kabul's approach was not inclusive enough, as they reduced "reconciliation" to talk with the Taliban without grounding it on a genuine Afghan societal consensus. Too many political groups feared that a political agreement between Kabul and the Taliban would simply diminish their influence in the country.

Although the timeframe for ending the insurgency by peaceful means has shrunk further – with 30 more months of a US troop presence (and political attention guaranteed by that) – the door to negotiations can still be opened within this window. There have been some hopeful track II initiatives that need to be continued and deepened in order to recreate mutual trust and understanding about all sides' interests.<sup>56</sup> The international community needs to understand that such a process – with its multi-faceted internal and regional dimensions – will be so multi-layered that it probably needs much more time than just three years.

The ground work to prepare for such a long process, which will have no guarantee of success, needs to be done now, starting with efforts to end the war and relieve the burden of bloodshed and destruction from the Afghan population and,

<sup>56</sup> For more background on the Taliban's and the Kabul government's interests, see: Thomas Ruttig, *The Road through Qatar, a Dead End? Chances and hurdles for a political solution in Afghanistan including the Taliban*, *Central Asia & The Caucasus*, Volume 14, Issue 3, 2013, [http://www.ca-c.org/online/2013/journal\\_eng/cac-03/04.shtml](http://www.ca-c.org/online/2013/journal_eng/cac-03/04.shtml).

simultaneously, prepare mechanisms and the agenda for a broader Afghan societal debate about how Afghanistan's political system should look like in the mid-term. This includes much more than just aspects of military security. (On the opposite, the increased militarization of Afghan society with its politically fragmented official armed forces, the multitude of official and unofficial militias, as well as the country's current political economy of acquiring rents for 'fighting terrorism' are big hazards in themselves.) In this context, strengthening the ANSF by continuing ex-

ternal support could even be counterproductive, also when it results in neglecting other sectors of Afghan society.

A simple power-sharing deal with the Taliban - without keeping up the so far embryonic unsustainable and instable social systems and political institutions that emerged after 2001 and deep-reaching reforms of the partially dysfunctional current system - would leave Afghanistan in the same environment that created each of the armed conflicts since 1975, only with a different set of actors in power.

20<sup>th</sup> May 2014

## Health Care and Health Infrastructure in the GCC

Possibilities of Cooperation between Germany and the Arab Gulf States

Berlin, 13<sup>th</sup> November 2014, 11.00 a.m. – 04.00 p.m.\*

Several states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), have made healthcare coverage mandatory for their citizens. Compulsory healthcare concepts have either been recently implemented or are already in the first phase of being rolled out. The latest initiative by a GCC state is the Dubai Health Insurance Law. It requires all citizens to get health insurance, either through the company they are working for or arranging coverage themselves. This opens up entirely new possibilities for the medical sector in those GCC states. While the insurance sector is set for growth, with healthcare spending expected to increase by 11.4% until 2015, the overall demand for healthcare in the GCC is predicted to rise by 240% within the next 20 years. German expertise both in training personnel and technologically advanced equipment are in high demand in the GCC countries.

In addition, medical infrastructure needs to be developed as well. The Emirate of Dubai for example is executing hospital projects worth USD 900m and planning to spend further USD 2bn on future schemes. Qatar's state-owned Hamad Medical Corporation is executing three hospital projects, and planning to increase the number of hospital beds to roughly 3.500 by 2015. In Saudi Arabia about 49 projects, worth USD 9.3bn, are being carried out and 13 hospital schemes, worth USD 6.8bn, are being planned. This need for expertise and technology creates enormous potential and opportunities for German enterprises from the medical sector.

The German Near and Middle East Association / NUMOV is organising a high-ranking international conference on new developments in the health sector in the Near and Middle East generally and cooperation between Germany and the Near and Middle East in particular. Representatives from Germany, Qatar, the UAE and Saudi Arabia will present current potential and challenges in this quickly developing sector. The conference aims to create a platform for German and Gulf states actors working in the health care sector to exchange experiences and resources and to evaluate future potential for cooperation.

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