

“WE’RE NOT COUNTERINSURGENTS”: DEVELOPMENT AND SECURITY IN  
AFGHANISTAN, 1946-2014

by

WESLEY LLEWELLYN ATTEWELL

B.A., The University of British Columbia, 2007

M.A., The University of British Columbia, 2009

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## **Abstract**

It is not possible to understand international development in isolation from the geographies of military, political, and capitalist violence. In particular, it is necessary to analyze the interconnections between development and security: the development-security nexus. In order to illuminate the role that development plays in the West's historical and ongoing efforts to pacify insurgent populations, it is important to interrogate the assemblages of actors, knowledge, and power that enliven diagnostic moments of counterinsurgency warfare.

More specifically, the dissertation explores the ways in which the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has, from the Cold War onwards, practiced development as an ostensibly humanitarian form of counterinsurgency warfare in Afghanistan. It shows how USAID, for most of its institutional history, has been forced to grapple with Afghanistan as an ongoing – and seemingly insurmountable – problem of development-security. Three case studies – the Helmand Valley Project (1946-1978), the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan (1980-1992), and the ongoing assault on the Afghan narco-economy (2001-present) – reveal the shifting contours of development-as-counterinsurgency praxis in relation to broader institutional, political-economic, and geo-strategic contexts.

These allow three substantive claims to be advanced. First, USAID has historically championed increasingly “total” forms of rural development as the key to transforming populations of potential insurgents into “governable subjects”. Second, these “total” forms of development practice are fundamentally geographical in the sense that they strive to pacify insurgent populations through the production of spaces that are meant to “model” new forms of modern and liberal life. These new spaces served as laboratories in which development professionals forged new counterinsurgency techniques, put them to the test, and subsequently, evaluated their utility. Third, while these development practices are represented by USAID as productive, humanitarian, and therapeutic, they are nonetheless undergirded by – and provide a legitimating armature for – techniques of population management that are destructive of life, such as kill-capture operations and crop eradication schemes.

## Preface

This dissertation is an original intellectual product of the author, Wesley Llewellyn Attewell. UBC Research Ethics Board certificate number H13-00884 covered the interviews reported in these pages.

With the exception of Figures 13, 14, 15, and 16, all images and maps used in this dissertation were sourced from US government documents, and hence, are public domain. Figures 13, 14, 15, and 16 are reproductions of maps originally published by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. They were reproduced by Eric Leinberger, a cartographer working for the UBC Department of Geography.

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## List of Abbreviations

AD(L)P/E	Alternative Development/Livelihoods Program - East
AD(L)P/S	Alternative Development/Livelihoods Program - South
ADS	Agricultural Development Scheme
ADT	Agricultural Development Training
ASSP	The Agriculture Sector Support Program
AVIPA	Afghanistan Vouchers for Increased Production in Agriculture
BINL	The Bureau of International Narcotics and Law-Enforcement
CAS	Commercial Agricultural Sales
CBHAP	The Cross Border Humanitarian Assistance Program
CEP	The Commodity Export Program
CHDP	The Central Helmand Drainage Project
CJITF	Combined Joint Interagency Task Force
CPEF	Central Poppy Eradication Force
DAI	Development Alternatives, Inc.
DEA	The Drug Enforcement Administration
FOA	The Foreign Operations Administration
GLE	Governor Led Eradication
H(A)VA	The Helmand (Arghandab) Valley Authority
HVAS	The Helmand Valley Advisory Service
HVP	The Helmand Valley Project
IDEA-NEW	Incentives Driving Economic Alternatives – North, East, and West
ICA	The International Cooperation Administration
IOCC	Interagency Operations and Coordination CEntre
JPEL	Joint Prioritized Effects List
NACP	The Narcotics Awareness and Control Project
O/AID/REP	Office of the Aid Representative for Afghanistan Affairs
PPA	Program, Planning, and Analysis
PREU	Poppy Reduction and Elimination Unit
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
PVO	Private Voluntary Organization
RADP	Regional Agricultural Development Programs
SLDP	The Shamalan Land Development Project
TCA	The Technical Cooperation Administration
TIMER	Technology Innovations for Market-led Economic Rehabilitation
UNDP	The United Nations Development Program
UNODC	The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNTAM	The United Nations Technical Assistant Mission
USAID	The United States Agency for International Development
USAID/Afghanistan	The USAID mission to Afghanistan
USOM	The United States Operation Mission
VITA	Volunteers in Technical Assistance

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## **Dedication**

To Lisa and Cowboy.

# 1 “Nothing will ever be the same again...”<sup>1</sup>

“When everyone is dead, the Great Game is finished. Not before”.

- *Kim*, Rudyard Kipling.

## 1.1 Slouching towards irrelevance

Shortly after the American-led invasion of Afghanistan was launched in the fall of 2001, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) quietly began to set the stage for its long-anticipated return to the Afghan theatre. USAID started thinking about “restarting” its development mission to war-torn Afghanistan – which had previously been suspended in the early 1990s pending a peaceful resolution to the bloody civil war that was threatening to tear post-Soviet Afghanistan to pieces – in late October, early November (Kingsley 25 November, 2012). By this point in time, the US military’s Northern Alliance proxies had wrested control over many key urban strongholds – including Mazar-i-Sharif and Kabul – away from the beleaguered Taliban regime. The security situation in Mazar-i-Sharif, in particular, was stable enough to accommodate a preliminary scouting visit by Andrew Natsios, then the administrator of USAID (Kingsley 25 November, 2012). On the strength of this visit, Natsios decided to set in motion the process of officially reopening USAID’s development mission to Afghanistan. By mid-November, Natsios received the “thumbs up” from the State Department, the National Security Council, and the White House. Six weeks later, Natsios dispatched a small expeditionary force to Kabul, staffed by well-respected USAID officials, such as James Kunder.

The team was expected to hit the ground running. However, as Kunder (2003) noted in testimony before the House Committee on International Relations on 16 October, 2003, it rapidly became clear that Afghanistan was going to provide “one of the most complex reconstruction challenges the US government has encountered anywhere”. Afghanistan, Kunder (2003) reminded his audience, had been “one of the poorest places on the face of the earth” before the Soviets invaded in 1979. The following quarter-century of conflict and devastation had only exacerbated this state of affairs. What Kunder’s team found upon its arrival to Kabul was a “place where all

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<sup>1</sup> (Khadra, 2002).

the trappings of a nation-state had been obliterated” (Kunder 2003). Kunder (2003) estimated that in 2003, the country remained “at or near the bottom of every socio-economic indicator used to measure human and economic progress”.

In Kunder’s testimony, Afghanistan appears as a nation-state, to paraphrase Yasmina Khadra (2002, 2), “in an advanced stage of decomposition”. In *The Swallows of Kabul*, Khadra (2002) evocatively describes Taliban-era Afghanistan as a land of “nothing but battlefields, expanses of sand, and cemeteries”, where “everything appears charred, fossilized, blasted by some unspeakable spell”. To the inhabitants of Taliban-era Afghanistan, it seemed “that the whole world was beginning to decay, and that its putrefaction [had] chosen to spread outward from here, from the land of the Pashtuns” (Khadra 2002, 2). Afghans had to be convinced that this process could be reversed; that the ousting of the Taliban would actually usher in a ‘bright, new tomorrow” (Khadra 2002, 2). Such was the primary responsibility of USAID’s new development mission to occupied Afghanistan.

In many ways, the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan – itself a complicated affair, involving multiple lines of command and orders of battle<sup>2</sup> – proved catalytic for USAID. As John Norris (2013) points out, “by September 10, 2001, [USAID]...was increasingly slouching toward irrelevance”. It was still recovering from its struggle to prevent a Republican-controlled Congress from folding it into the State Department. This mid-1990s crisis of institutional legitimacy was precipitated in large part by “deficit hawks” such as North Carolina Senator Jesse Helms, who questioned the strategic necessity of maintaining a sizable autonomous US foreign assistance program in a post-Cold War world (Rezendes 1995). Helms and his supporters introduced the first of numerous “foreign-affairs reorganization bill[s]” in both the House of Representatives and the US Senate on 3 May, 1995 (Barber 1995).

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<sup>2</sup> The invasion and occupation of Afghanistan was carried out by two distinct, yet related, military forces, operating in tandem. On the one hand, the US led a multinational coalition force to Afghanistan, where it conducted combat operations against terrorists and insurgents under the banner of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). On the other hand, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) established a parallel “International Security Assistance Force” (ISAF), tasked with providing security throughout the Afghan countryside. Many of the key players in the Afghan theatre – such as the US and the UK, to name the two most prominent examples – played an important role in both of these campaigns.

Although USAID weathered this legislative onslaught, its victory was pyrrhic. As Norris (2013) explains, Helms and his supporters may have failed to consolidate all of America's foreign affairs agencies into the State Department, but they were successful at imposing massive budget cuts on USAID. In order to absorb these austerity measures, USAID cut its staffing levels by 29% over the next five years, crippling its ability to directly implement development programs in the process (Roberts 2014). Much of this development work was gradually outsourced to for-profit firms and non-governmental organizations. As a result, USAID was reduced to little more than a "contracting agency", disconnected from "what's happening on the ground" (Norris 2013; Roberts 2014).

For these reasons, executive and legislative confidence in USAID was, by 2001, at an all-time low. But 9/11 – and the "War on Terror" that followed – catalyzed a revitalization of USAID. The invasions and occupations of first Afghanistan, and subsequently Iraq, opened what Norris (2013) calls the "spigots of resources for the agency". Alongside defence and diplomacy, development was now seen by Democrats and Republicans alike as one of the three pillars of the "war on terror" (Mawdsley 2007). In the introduction to his administration's 2002 "National Security Strategy" (NSS), President George W. Bush pledged to use 9/11 as an opportunity to 'bring the hope of democracy, development, free markets, and free trade to every corner of the world' (White House 2002). According to the Bush administration, the roots of terror and insecurity were to be found among "them", not "us" (Gregory 2004). Working on the assumption that "poverty, weak institutions, and corruption can make weak states [like Afghanistan] vulnerable to terrorist networks and drug cartels within their borders", the Bush administration championed development as a non-violent pathway to security (White House 2002).

Such rhetoric, to be sure, traffics in many of the same imaginative geographies that buttress America's global "War on Terror" and its accompanying "architectures of enmity" (Gregory 2004, 20). By representing the "West" and the "Orient" as the wellsprings of development and terrorism, respectively, the 2002 NSS powerfully designated a "familiar space which is 'ours' and an unfamiliar space beyond 'ours' which is 'theirs'" (Said 1979, 54). Under the sign of such an imaginative geography, "'their' space [was]...seen as the inverse of 'our' space: a sort of negative, in the photographic sense that 'they' might 'develop' into something like 'us', but also

the site of an absence, because ‘they’ [were] seen somehow to lack the positive tonalities that supposedly distinguish ‘us’” (Gregory 2004, 17).

However, imaginative geographies – and the architectures of enmity they uphold – do not operate merely at the level of discourse. Rather, they always intervene in the world in profoundly material ways. As Derek Gregory (2004, 20) reminds us, they “inhabit dispositions and practices, investing them with meaning and legitimation, and so sharpen the spurs of action”. With the unveiling of the 2002 NSS, USAID found itself under increasing pressure to become more directly involved in America’s post-9/11 imperial misadventures in both Afghanistan and Iraq. The result was an increasing interconnection between development and security, or, what Mark Duffield (2010) calls a “development-security nexus”. From 2001 onwards, USAID was called on to help the US military pacify raging insurgencies in Afghanistan and Iraq. By redressing basic socio-economic problems through development interventions, it was widely believed that USAID could help the US military “win” Iraqi and Afghan “hearts and minds”. Modern war could then be re-scripted and sold to Western publics as liberal, humane, and good (Gregory 2008).

For commentators like Norris, 9/11 functions as a watershed moment in the history of USAID. Before 9/11, USAID was “slouching towards irrelevance”. After 9/11, USAID was revitalized and rejuvenated. Tasked with overseeing the reconstruction of occupied Afghanistan and Iraq, USAID went from being Congress’ punching bag to receiving almost unflinching support from politicians on both sides of the aisle. By 2010, USAID’s budget had more than tripled from its pre-9/11 levels, ballooning from approximately \$6 to \$22 billion a year<sup>3</sup>. These resources were mobilized to help USAID rebuild its hollowed-out workforce. Between 2001 and 2012, USAID increased the size of its direct-hire staff from 2,077 to 3,466 (Norris 2013).

This is a seductively powerful narrative, but it is also fundamentally problematic, because it abstracts USAID’s increasing national security relevance in the post-9/11 period from a broader historical-geographical context. It achieves this by overselling the transformative capacity of

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<sup>3</sup> Throughout this dissertation, dollar amounts are in USD, unless otherwise stated.

9/11. In the preface to *The Colonial Present*, Derek Gregory (2004, xiv-xv) calls on his readers to:

“resist those histories punctuated by sharp breaks from one period to another, with their homogenizing sense of Time – always in the singular – and those narratives that celebrate History – always with that imperial capital – as the unambiguous advance of Reason. History is always more complicated than that: always plural, always contested, and shot through with multiple temporalities and spatialities”.

Similarly, I argue that 9/11 did not mark an “epochal rupture” in USAID’s history. While the events of 9/11 undoubtedly spurred the regime in Washington to (re)discover the interconnections between development and security, in this dissertation, I show how USAID’s resurgence as an ambivalent practitioner of counterinsurgency has a “complex genealogy that [reaches] back into the colonial past” (Gregory 2004, 13). Following Walter Benjamin (1968, 261), this dissertation once again demonstrates the need for a conception of history “whose site is not homogenous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now”.

Tracking backwards and forwards from 9/11, this dissertation explores how USAID has long championed development as the key to securing the Afghan people from the threats posed by the forces of Cold War communism and contemporary Islamic extremism. Inasmuch as USAID has been forced to grapple with Afghanistan as an ongoing – and seemingly insurmountable – problem of development-security, the country served as a crucible where various techniques for pacifying restless populations have been developed, tested, and refined (McCoy 2009). Through an extended consideration of three case studies – the Helmand Valley Project (1946-1978), the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan (1980-1992), and the ongoing assault on the Afghan narco-economy (2001-present) – I trace the shifting contours of this development-security nexus over time and space.

Drawing on scholarship in post-colonial development studies, geo-political economy, and critical military geography, my own empirical research has been guided by four key questions:

- 1) How has development been practiced as a more humanitarian form of counterinsurgency in Afghanistan?
- 2) How has Afghanistan served as a laboratory of development theory and practice?
- 3) What new spaces have been produced through this entanglement of development and counterinsurgency?
- 4) And finally, are these new spaces productive or destructive of life?

Through these questions, I shine a spotlight on the interplay between violence and improvement that is inscribed in the workings of USAID's various interventions in Afghanistan.

My dissertation advances three substantive claims. First, I show how USAID has historically attempted to transform Afghans into governable subjects through increasingly neoliberal forms of rural development. Second, I argue that these development practices were geographical. USAID assumed that the life-chances of rural Afghans could be improved by reconfiguring the spaces in which they lived and laboured. Third, while USAID framed these development practices as humane and therapeutic, I conclude that they were nonetheless undergirded by – and have provided a legitimating armature for – more destructive techniques of population management. Overall, my dissertation complicates conventional understandings of how restless populations are pacified by bringing into sharper focus the tensions and anxieties that animate USAID's long history of trying to secure Afghanistan through development.

This introductory chapter lays out the theoretical and methodological framework for this dissertation. First, I argue that conventional, state-centric attempts to situate Afghanistan on a broader geopolitical chessboard have proven inadequate to the task of understanding USAID's development interventions in the Afghan countryside. Second, I extend the academic literature on the development-security nexus by subjecting it to a geographical critique that triangulates the insights of postcolonialism, Marxism, and feminism. My aim here is twofold: to show how USAID has historically served as an arm of the American national-security state; and to theorize USAID's development mission to Afghanistan as a form of governmental power that improves the lives of certain Afghans at the expense of others. Third, I detail the methodologies that I plan on mobilizing to answer my research questions. And finally, I outline the remaining chapters of this dissertation.



## 1.2 Playing the “Great Game”

It has by now become commonplace to speak of Afghanistan as a nation-state over which a so-called “Great Game” is being fought. The term is attributed to Captain Arthur Conolly, an officer of the British East India Company who, from 1823 to 1842, conducted a number of expeditions to Afghanistan. In a letter written to Major Henry Rawlinson, a newly appointed political agent based in Kandahar province, Conolly proclaimed: “You’ve a great game, a noble game before you”. In another passage, Conolly continued:

“if the British Government would only play the grand game, help Russia cordially to all that she has a right to expect – shake hands with Persia – get her all possible amends from Oosbergs – force the Bokhara Amir to be just to us, the Afghans, and the other Oosberg states, and his own kingdom – but why go on; you know my, at any rate in *one* sense, *enlarged* views. *Inshallah!* The expediency, nay, the necessity of them will be seen, and we shall play the noble part that the first Christian nations of the world ought to fill” (Brysac and Meyer 2006, 127).

According to the historian Malcolm Yapp (2001, 181), the meaning of Conolly’s letter was quite clear. Conolly “believed that Rawlinson, in his new post, had been given an opportunity to work for the regeneration or the advancement of the civilisation of Afghanistan” and it was therefore “a species of humanitarianism, not the frustration of the designs of Russia, which occupied Conolly’s thinking”.

The supposed “humanitarianism” of Conolly’s original formulation was lost in subsequent usages of the phrase. Not only was the geographical scope of the term extended to encompass Central Asia, its “noble, humanitarian associations” gradually gave way to an “uneasy adventurist quality similar to that which ‘imperialism’ was to possess in liberal formulations of the 1870s” (Yapp 2000, 182). This new meaning of the term was popularized in Rudyard Kipling’s novel, *Kim*. *Kim* tells the story of Kimball O’Hara – the orphaned son of an Irish soldier in the Indian army – who becomes entangled in a British Secret Service plot to foil a Russian attempt to fan the flames of insurgency in the northern regions of Punjab.

*Kim* has long provided grist for the mill of postcolonial literary critics, who have offered a number of different readings of the function that the concept of the “Great Game” serves in Kipling’s broader narrative. Edward Said (1994), for instance, posits the existence of two different “Great Games” in *Kim*, each one linked in its own way to a broader geopolitics of imperial counterinsurgency. On the one hand, there is the “precise political economy of control” that was championed by Kim’s commanding officer in the British Secret Service, Colonel Creighton, for whom the “greatest sin [was] ignorance”. According to Ian Baucom (1999), this particular “Great Game” was concerned primarily with mapping – or mathematizing – the Indian subcontinent. Over the course of the novel, Kim is gradually enlisted into this effort as an “imperial cartographer”. “Wherever he goes”, Baucom (1999, 93) argues, “he will at once extend the quadrant of colonial control and accelerate his own transformation into an imperial adding and measuring machine”. This was a fundamentally calculative enterprise, one that sought to “control the empire less by occupying it than by knowing it, classifying it, and rendering it visible” (Baucom 1999, 93; see also Richards 1993). Said juxtaposes Creighton’s totalizing cartographic ambitions with Kim’s inability to perceive the “Great Game” in all of its “complex patterns”. Instead, Kim enjoys intelligence service as a literal game from which he derives a certain boyish pleasure. What Said (1994, 138) distills from *Kim*, accordingly, is a theorization of the “Great Game” as “less like a story – linear, continuous, and temporal – and more like a playing field – many-dimensional, discontinuous, and spatial”.

These are complex and entangled arguments, a proper treatment of which is well beyond the scope of this dissertation. Baucom (1999), in particular, seeks to complicate Said’s – and Richard’s – reading of *Kim* “as a minor specimen of the tragic” by drawing attention to the profound fragility and anxiety of Colonel Creighton’s “precise political economy of control”: which, for Baucom, actually arises from the latter’s dependence on the pleasurable, immersive experiences foregrounded by Said (1994). Such anxieties, however, were lost on imperial officers such as Lord Curzon, later Viceroy of India, who sought to up-scale Creighton’s “precise political economy of control” to entire geographical regions. As he famously put it:

“Turkestan, Afghanistan, Transcaspia, Persia – to many, these words breathe only a sense of utter remoteness, or a memory of strange vicissitudes and of moribund romance. To me, I confess,

they are pieces on a chessboard upon which is being played out a game for the domination of the world” (Gregory 2004, 31).

While this was, as Gregory (2004, 31) notes, an “extraordinarily instrumental view of a land and its peoples”, it nonetheless provides an “accurate summary” of how the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century “geopolitical maneuverings” of imperial Britain and Russia “shaped the formation of the modern state of Afghanistan – a ‘purely accidental’ territory, Curzon called it – out of the shards of rival tribal fiefdoms and ethnic loyalties”.

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Afghanistan continued to serve as a “playing field” upon which broader geopolitical struggles for power took place. This was particularly true of the Cold War that was waged between the US and the Soviet Union. Although this Cold War “Great Game” initially manifested itself in Afghanistan in the form of foreign assistance, technicians, and massive modernization projects (see Chapter 2), it eventually intensified into a full blown proxy war (see Chapter 3). Over time, Afghanistan was fundamentally transformed by the role that it was recruited to play during this Cold War “Great Game”. As Charles Hirschkind and Saba Mahmood (2002, 347) write: “The vast dissemination of arms, military training, the creation of a thriving drug trade with its attendant criminal activity, and all of this in circumstances of desperate poverty, has had a radical impact on the conditions of moral and political action for the people in the region” (Hirschkind and Mahmood 2002, 347).

It is also widely argued that the end of the Cold War did not bring the “Great Game” to a close, but rather, fundamentally transformed it. Gregory (2004, 45) suggests that the post-Cold War period witnessed the emergence of a “new ‘Great Game’ in which the stakes were those of political economy rather than ideology”. Gregory’s claim is exemplified by the late-20<sup>th</sup> century writings of Zbigniew Brzezinski (1997), who prophesied that Eurasia – with a particular emphasis on the Central Asian republics, including Afghanistan – would remain the “grand chessboard” upon which geopolitical *and* geoeconomic struggles for global primacy would be played. Similarly, Barnett Rubin and Ahmed Rashid (2008, 30) argue that despite a century of geopolitical machinations, the “[Great Game] continues”: except now, “the number of players has exploded, those living on the chessboard have become involved, and the intensity of the violence and the threats it produces affect the entire globe”.

The persistence of this “Great Game” heuristic into the 21<sup>st</sup> century is important because it continues to license narrowly state-centric understandings of Afghanistan and its people. Here, the work of Barnett Rubin is particularly instructive. Rubin (1995) theorizes late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Afghanistan as a classic buffer state (see also Bayly 2014). Established as a modern nation-state in the aftermath of the two Anglo-Afghan wars, its geopolitical purpose was to separate – and by extension, secure – the territories controlled by the British and Russian empires. To ensure the stability of the Afghan nation-state, Britain supplied its local proxy – the Amir Abdul Rahman Khan – with the cash and weapons required to pacify any potential threats to this established order of things. Under the terms of this agreement, Khan was required to hand over control of Afghanistan’s foreign policy to his British benefactors. Otherwise, Khan was mostly left to his own devices.

Although Afghanistan remained a buffer state for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the terms of its engagement with foreign superpowers shifted over time. During the 1950s, for instance, Afghanistan’s Prime Minister Daud leveraged the country’s geostrategic importance to extract increasing levels of foreign assistance from both the US and the USSR. Afghanistan, in Rubin’s (1992, 78) estimation, “became a sort of rentier or ‘allocation’ state, deriving over 40 percent of its revenue in every year since 1957 from ‘revenue accruing directly from abroad’”. These revenues, in turn, “made it possible for the state leadership to expand the apparatus under its control without bargaining with or being accountable to its citizens, who were not called upon to finance the state’s expansion with taxes derived from their own productive activity” (Rubin 1992, 78).

As the Cold War entered its twilight, however, Afghanistan gradually lost its importance as a buffer between Soviet and American interests. After the Berlin Wall fell in November 1989, the US and the Soviet Union opened up lines of communication in an attempt to peacefully resolve a number of outstanding conflicts, including the proxy war in Afghanistan. As a result of these efforts, both the US and the Soviet Union agreed to help the United Nations transition Afghanistan away from Communist rule by brokering a cease-fire, ending the supply of arms to both sides, establishing an interim government, and engaging in reconstruction (Rubin 2013).

Unfortunately, this plan never came to fruition. Instead, the insurgency against the Soviet client regime in Kabul escalated into a full-blown civil war. As Afghanistan descended into violence and anarchy, it began to take on characteristics typically associated with “failed” states (Rubin 1995). Such states are not only deemed to be incapable of meeting the basic needs of their citizens, but are also seen as sources of regional insecurity and, by extension, as threats to the international community. When the Taliban seized power in 1996, it was widely hoped that they would exert a stabilizing influence on the political climate in Afghanistan. Unfortunately, the Taliban chose not to build on inherited public institutions, and instead, strengthened certain elements of the state – specifically, its security and commercial components – while deliberately neglecting or side-stepping others. Thus, while Taliban-controlled Afghanistan could no longer be described as a “failed state”, it remained an “internally ruthless, totalitarian political entity, linked to a transnational shadow economy”, as well as “opposition and terrorist groups on a region-wide basis, including al-Qaeda” (Duffield 2007, 155). It had become, in other words, a “rogue state”.

Grand narratives of this sort – where one Great Game dissolves into another – are powerfully seductive, but as Gregory (2004) reminds us, they obscure as much as they reveal. As I have shown, the protagonists of such narratives are invariably states (and state actors). Lost from view are the “multiple, conditional, but none the less powerful agency of those whose destinies these foreign players sought to manipulate” (Gregory 2004, 45; see also Bayly 2014). To paraphrase Ann Stoler and David Bond (2006, 95), what is striking about much of the state-centric work that aims to situate Afghanistan on a global geopolitical chessboard is that it foregrounds the “macroscales of policy and strategy, security and design” while nonetheless remaining “unmoored to micromovements of peoples who are subject and scarred, beholden to and invested in these empires on the ground”. They tell us remarkably little about how such broader scale geopolitical machinations have historically “exerted an insistent presence” on the “intimate social ecologies” of the Afghan people; about how “structured imperial predicaments” at the macro scale manifest themselves in the intimate micromanagement of Afghan life (Stoler and Bond 2006, 93).

The shortcomings of such state-centric narratives were rendered visible for all to see as Operation Enduring Freedom ran its course. Initially, Operation Enduring Freedom was enabled through a series of geographical maneuvers that sought to fix the rhizomatic and capillary networks of transnational terrorism in which al-Qaeda was involved within the ostensibly bounded and coherent space of the Afghan nation-state (Gregory 2004). The objective of this exercise was to demonstrate that al-Qaeda could be defeated by conventional forms of military violence: specifically, the kind of high-technology, just-in-time warfare that was the end-result of the US military's so-called "Revolution in Military Affairs" (Gregory 2004, 2010; see also Bell and Evans 2010). Although such "virtuous" forms of modern warfare initially served as the "operative dogma" of the global War on Terror, the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq have "proven to be irresolvable through military dominance and technology savvy" (Bell 2011, 315; Der Derian 2009). The Bush administration thought that it could win the War on Terror in Afghanistan and Iraq by simply "smoking" the terrorists out of their "holes" (Bell 2011, 315). What resulted instead was a "complex emergency", characterised by widespread corruption, mounting violence, and a looming humanitarian catastrophe (Bell 2011, 315). As Colleen Bell (2011, 316) argues, "the very method that was expected to crush an insurgency actually helped to proliferate it", exposing "not just the limits of superior firepower, but the inapplicability of the whole model of conventional warfare to concluding conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan".

In order to combat these raging insurgencies, the US military required a doctrinal alternative to the Revolution in Military Affairs. The first indication of what this alternative might look like was signalled by the Department of Defense's publication of Directive 3000.05 on 28 November, 2005. The Directive was noteworthy for mandating that so-called "stability operations" be "given priority comparable to combat operations and be explicitly addressed and integrated across all DoD activities, including doctrine, organizations, training, education, exercises, materiel, leadership, personnel, facilities, and planning" (DoD 2005, 2). As Jennifer Morrison Taw (2010, 2012) points out, the Directive offered a very vague and all-encompassing definition of stability operations as any civilian or military intervention undertaken during times of peace or conflict to help establish and maintain the particular forms of order that are essential to advancing US interests and values across the globe. In the short term, stability operations conducted under conditions of conflict, emergency, and state failure would strive to secure local

populations, restore their access to basic services, and address pressing humanitarian needs. As envisioned by Directive 3000.05, however, the end-state goal of stability operations would be to “help develop indigenous capacity for securing essential services, a viable market economy, rule of law, democratic institutions, and a robust civil society” (DoD 2005, 2). While the DoD recognized that these were tasks that had traditionally been performed by non-military actors, it nonetheless justified Directive 3000.05 on the grounds that civilian institutions were at best, ill-suited to, and at worst, incapable of intervening effectively in environments wracked by violence and insecurity. It was therefore incumbent on the US military to seize the initiative and begin the difficult task of conducting preliminary stability operations in these so-called “non-permissive environments”. The expectation was that these initial interventions would eventually result in the creation and expansion of a “security bubble” in the theater of operations, thereby making it possible for the US military to cede many of its stabilization responsibilities to civilian actors and institutions.

Directive 3000.05 did not introduce the concept of stability operations to US military doctrine. Rather, the genealogy of stability operations stretches back to the earliest moments of American settler colonialism and imperialism. It is by now widely accepted that the US military has, throughout its long and bloody history, accumulated more experience in conducting stability operations than in waging conventional campaigns (Taw 2010, 2012). The US military has participated in a number of domestic and foreign conflicts – including the so-called “Indian Wars”, the Civil War, the Spanish-American War, the colonization of the Philippines, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War, to name only a few examples – that, in one way or another, have served it as crucibles of counterinsurgency and stability operations (McCoy 2009). What has nonetheless remained constant throughout this long stretch of history is the US military’s continued obsession with both preserving and enhancing its ability to wage conventional forms of intra-state warfare. Stability operations, in other words, have historically taken a back seat to conventional ones.

In the immediate aftermath of the Cold War, the situation began to shift. No longer constrained by a Manichean strategic vision that divided the world into two opposing geopolitical blocs led by nuclear-equipped superpowers, the US military gradually began to reconsider both its role in

the world more generally, as well as its historical approach to stability operations in particular. This new culture of experimentation was catalyzed in part by key figures in the Clinton Administration, such as the Secretary of State Madeline Albright, who “increasingly turned to the US military as a tool of foreign policy, broadening the scope of operations for which US troops were deployed, as well as deploying them much more frequently” (Taw 2010, 393). These policymakers believed that the US, as the world’s preeminent superpower, had a moral responsibility to spearhead the effort to protect human rights, promote democracy, pre-empt war, and resolve conflicts around the globe. The US military was uniquely qualified for this role because “there was no other organization that could be so readily deployed and sustained, that was so organized and efficient, that had such flexibility, and that could undertake such a wide range of missions, simultaneously, when necessary” (Taw 2010, 393). As a consequence, the US military found itself engaging in more stability operations than ever before. Between 1992 and 1998, it conducted 26 stability operations: 16 more than it had conducted in the period spanning 1960 to 1991 (Morrison Taw 2010, 393).

This uptick in in the number of stability operations being conducted by the US military was controversial. While “progressive” soldiers represented stability operations as the way of the future, their “traditionalist” colleagues argued that the US military’s ability to wage conventional warfare was being compromised (Taw 2010, 2012). In spite of these fundamental differences in opinion, both camps nonetheless understood stability operations as comprising a suite of activities and interventions that were “other than war”. What both camps shared, therefore, was an unwillingness to consider the planning, training for, and execution of stability operations as integral to the US military’s core mission of waging war. Given this particular context, it is unsurprising that it was the Revolution in Military Affairs – and not stability operations – that emerged as the dominant American approach to war-fighting at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Ryan 2014; Taw 2010, 2012). Instead of embracing the “personnel heavy, confusing slogging efforts that, with the exception of the Gulf War, had typified US deployments since the end of the Cold War, with civilians clogging the area of operations, mission creep, and ever changing end-states”, the US military instead opted for a “view of warfare as sleek, fast-paced, space-age combat between highly-trained, tech-laden professional soldiers and airmen” (Taw 2010, 395). Unfortunately for the US military, the mainstreaming of the Revolution in Military Affairs did



little to diffuse the tensions between the traditionalists and the progressives. Once it became apparent that the Revolution in Military Affairs was not delivering results in either Iraq or Afghanistan, the progressives seized their chance to offer up stability operations as an alternative model for countering insurgencies, resulting in the publication of Directive 3000.05. According to Taw (2010, 2012), Directive 3000.05 was revolutionary for two reasons. First, at no other time in the history of US military doctrine had stability operations been accorded a strategic and tactical value equal to that of offense and defense. Taw (2010, 388) describes this decision as the “armed forces’ most fundamental adjustment since the establishment of the Department of Defense in 1947, arguably more foundational than the 1987 Goldwater-Nichols reorganization”. Furthermore, the US military’s elevation of stability operations to a primary mission signalled an expansion of its mandate to include peacetime interventions. In recent years, commentators such as Taw (2012) and Jan Bachmann (2014) have pointed to a gradual militarization of peacetime – or Phase Zero – operations as a cause for concern. The publication of Directive 3000.05, therefore, not only legitimized a blurring of war and not-war, but also made it difficult to determine, to borrow Derek Gregory’s (2011, 248) turn of phrase, “where the battlespace begins and ends”. It effectively broadened, in other words, both the temporal and the geographical scope of military operations (for a discussion of war as “permanent”, “unending” or “everywhere”, see Duffield 2007; Gregory 2011; RETORT 2006).

By elevating stability operations to the status of offense and defense, Directive 3000.05 also opened the door for the US military to assert its dominance across the full spectrum of war and conflict. According to John Morrissey (2015), the US military began to conceive of offense, defense, stability, and civil support not as separate elements of any given overseas mission, but rather, as the four interconnected pillars of an overarching rubric for intervention that was termed “full spectrum operations”. The concept of “full spectrum operations” was meant to serve as a blueprint for constructing an “ambitious US global forward presence that promises not only neoliberal correction for some of the world’s most volatile yet economically pivotal spaces, but correction for the forms of liberal ‘underdevelopment’ seen as a threat to the ‘Western way of life’” (Morrissey 2015, 610). The US military envisioned this forward presence being advanced in concert with civilian institutions and actors. Accordingly, the US military worked alongside the State Department and USAID to establish a number of institutional mechanisms for

transforming this vision of interagency cooperation into reality. While Morrissey (2015, 613) acknowledges that the “gestation of ‘full spectrum operations’ goes back a long way in the US military”, he traces the origins of its most “modern day orientation” to August 2004. This was when the US military, frustrated by the difficulties of achieving political and economic stability in occupied Iraq and Afghanistan, came together with the State Department to establish an Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS). Housed in the State Department, the core mission of S/CRS was to “lead, coordinate, and institutionalize US Government civilian capacity to prevent or prepare for post-conflict situations, and to help stabilize and reconstruct societies in transition from conflict or civil strife, so they can reach a sustainable path toward peace, democracy, and a market economy” (Morrissey 2015, 613). On account of its institutional linkages with the State Department, USAID was also enrolled in this broader interagency effort. In 2005, USAID’s director, Andrew Natsios, testified to Congress that he had recently redefined the agency’s core missions in order to align them better with the new “whole of government effort to promote stabilization operations” (Ryan 2014, 52). USAID’s new stabilization-friendly missions included: “the promotion of transformational development (including building indigenous capacity for health care, education, and social and economic progress); strengthening fragile states; providing humanitarian relief; supporting geopolitical interests (‘through development work in countries of high-strategic importance’); and addressing global issues (including combating criminal activities, such as money laundering and trafficking in persons and narcotics)” (Ryan 2014, 52).

So far, we have seen how proponents of stability – and by extension, full-spectrum – operations and the Revolution in Military Affairs advanced competing visions of how the US military should pre-empt and neutralize threats to America’s national security in the post-Cold War world. It would nonetheless be a mistake to understand this competition between the progressives and the traditionalists as zero sum. In fact, as implemented under the sign of full-spectrum thinking, stabilization activities were meant to complement the forms of high-technology warfare that have become the hallmark of the Revolution in Military Affairs. This complementarity was constantly stressed in military doctrine, which, according to Morrissey (2015, 615), “envisage[d] ‘full spectrum operations’ as a historic and revolutionary shift from an ‘either or’ view of non-lethal actions with combat operations to an inclusive doctrine that

emphasizes the essentiality of nonlethal actions with combat actions”. Morrissey’s (2015) claims are corroborated by Bachmann’s (2014, 131) critique of how the US military “polices” Africa, where he demonstrates that “killing terrorists and the refurbishment of schools are not in disagreement, but serve in their synthesis of welfare and coercion the same objective of social ordering through the concept of stabilization”. Furthermore, even staunch advocates of the Revolution in Military Affairs – including Donald Rumsfeld – acknowledged that it was essential for the US military to become proficient at conducting stability operations and waging irregular warfare if it wanted to have any hope at winning the global war on terror (Ryan 2014).

Stability operations doctrine not only complemented the Revolution in Military Affairs, but also shared its highly state-centric framings of the global war on terror. According to both Louise Moe (2016) and Bachmann (2014), stability operations are often executed in a “top-down” manner that prioritizes the ordering of fragile states, rather than domestic populations. One of the core assumptions of the US military’s stability operations doctrine is that states are the only legitimate sources of security. The implication here is that the institutions and structures of fragile states must be normalized before violence can be decreased. The extent to which state normalization has occurred, therefore, becomes the “fundamental measure of success in conflict transformation” (Department of the Army 2008, 2-12). What stability operations doctrine cannot account for, however, are the ways in which post-conflict state structures are often captured by forces whose relationships with local populations are highly antagonistic. This was precisely what happened during the US occupation of Afghanistan. As Mike Martin (2014) and Jonathan Goodhand (2000, 2004, 2005, 2009) have shown, one of the consequences of the occupation was to populate the Afghan state apparatus with unpopular warlords and tribal leaders who had previously been ousted by the Taliban due to their tendency to predate on local communities. Unsurprisingly, this compromised state apparatus went on to serve as a source of instability and insecurity in the countryside.

As the challenges confronting the occupying forces in Iraq and Afghanistan intensified from the mid-2000s onwards, it rapidly became clear to the US military that a top-down, state-centric approach to stabilization was inadequate to the task of “winning the hearts and minds” of local populations. In order to combat the insurgencies raging in Iraq and Afghanistan, the US military

partook in a “rush to the intimate”, spurred in part by the revision of its “Counterinsurgency Field Manual” (FM 3-24) in December 2006 (Gregory 2008; Stoler and Bond 2006). From this point forward, the “operative dogma” of the broader War on Terror gradually shifted from conventional, enemy-centric forms of counterterrorism to culture- or population-centric modalities of counterinsurgency. What the US military rediscovered, in effect, was the kind of intimate, lived, and “all-enclosing” version of the “Great Game” that emerges out of Said’s (1993, 139) reading of *Kim*. Intimately familiar with the “local colors” and the “exotic details” of the populations amongst which they conducted counterinsurgency, colonial agents such as Kimball O’Hara served as one of the templates upon which the US military’s new culturally-informed “warrior intellectuals” – Thomas Ricks’ (2007) terminology – was modeled<sup>4</sup>.

Most genealogies of 21<sup>st</sup> century counterinsurgency argue that the US military first rediscovered population-centric warfare in Iraq, and not Afghanistan. It is widely assumed that FM 3-24 was revised in response to the deteriorating situation in Iraq. FM 3-24’s insights were subsequently stress-tested and refined in Iraq, which served the US military as a crucible of counterinsurgency thinking and practice (Gregory 2008a; McCoy 2009). Inspired by counterinsurgency’s “successes” in Iraq, the US military then imported it to Afghanistan as part of the Obama administration’s 2009 “surge” in troops (Chandrasekaran 2012).

The mainstreaming of counterinsurgency thinking in Afghanistan, in turn, precipitated a gradual shift in how it was framed as an object of power/knowledge. While talk of a new “Great Game” in Afghanistan continued to persist, another current of thought began to gain popularity amongst academics and policymakers alike. No longer was Afghanistan understood as a state that needed to be situated on a broader geopolitical chessboard. Nor was it exclusively represented as a failed or fragile state that needed to be “stabilized” through the prosecution of full spectrum operations. Instead, it became increasingly commonplace to speak of Afghanistan as an amalgamation of different populations that needed to be known and rendered legible before they could be governed and managed. The scale of analysis therefore shifted from the macroscale of

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas Ricks himself was reportedly a huge fan of Kipling. When NPR asked him to recommend a number of “books that will help you understand Afghanistan”, it is no coincidence that one of his choices was another one of Kipling’s short stories, *The Head of the District* (NPR 2009).

geopolitics and state relations to that of the intimate, the village, the household, and the community (see also Cullather 2006). State-centric thinking, to put it differently, was deemed inimical to population-centric counterinsurgency.

This narrative, however, glosses over how Afghanistan served as a crucible of population-centric counterinsurgency long before 2009 – albeit one that has been conducted by civilian, rather than military actors. Counterinsurgency’s linkages to “traditionally civilian” forms of international engagement – such as development or humanitarianism – have been well documented (Bell 2011, 311). According to Bell (2011, 325), what is particularly unique about the US military’s revised counterinsurgency doctrine is that it “reformulates the objective of war from defeating of one’s enemies to securing a population, strategizing power to the level of society, and deepening links between military aims and civilian modes of intervention”. Although Bell (2011) usefully calls on her readers to consider how counterinsurgency entails a “restrategization of war through the civil realm” – to borrow Lisa Bhungalia’s (2015, 2312) wonderful turn of phrase – it is important to remember that this process is always anxious and incomplete. Although Bell (2011, 325-6) claims that traditional “enemy-centric” forms of warfare have increasingly been subordinated to “governance and reform”, all available empirical evidence suggests that killing remains of central importance to counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan. Bell’s (2011, 325-6) eagerness to show how counterinsurgency builds on – instead of merely co-opting – development theories and practices ensures that military actors remain the primary protagonists of her study. While civilians are represented as a source of counterinsurgency knowledge and expertise, they are not seen as practitioners in their own right.

Bell is not the only scholar to focus their attention on the counterinsurgency practices of military actors. Patricia Owens’ (2015) recent investigation of how counterinsurgency manifests itself as armed social work in Afghanistan similarly occludes the role that civilian actors play in the effort to pacify rural populations. In contrast with Bell and Owens, I argue that the US military’s recent turn towards population- or culture-centric counterinsurgency in Afghanistan cannot be understood in isolation from USAID’s long history of trying to secure rural Afghans through development. These efforts are both related to, yet also fundamentally distinct from USAID’s enrollment in stability and full-spectrum operations. All too often, there has been a tendency in

the academic literature, as well as amongst policy makers, to conflate stability operations with both development and counterinsurgency. One common critique of stability operations that has been most forcefully advanced by Roger MacGinty (2012) is that they often take the form of “control-oriented” programs that are designed to address the short-term objectives of their military implementers, rather than the long-term felt needs of their ostensible beneficiaries. As we shall see in the next section of this chapter, academics who research the interconnections between development and security similarly theorize development as a conservative and control-oriented form of counterinsurgency that seeks to fix and contain the “underdeveloped” in place, both physically and socially (Duffield 2007). Christian Dennys (2012), however, argues that it is problematic to conflate development and stability operations in this manner. According to Dennys (2012, 7), ideal type development programs seek to “emancipate communities, broaden the horizons of a new generation, and allow people to live healthier and more productive lives”. In this sense, they prioritize change and transformation over stabilization and control. This is not to imply that development programs are always successful at unleashing transformative forces that are productive and beneficial. As Dennys (2012, 8) writes, “if they alter social and political dynamics too fast, they can lead to a backlash by conservative groups, or unrealistically increase expectations, leading to frustrations which can become violent”<sup>5</sup>. Regardless of whether the forces unleashed by development programming are productive or destructive, however, Dennys basic point is that they are not inherently stabilizing, and hence, should not be understood as such.

While Dennys is critical of the tendency to conflate stabilization and development, one might argue that he is guilty of a similar discursive maneuver. In Dennys eyes, counterinsurgency and development share a similar end-state goal: namely, the total transformation – or refashioning – of the target population or society. While this may be true of some counterinsurgency operations, it is less so for others. Much of the existing scholarship on counterinsurgency operations, in fact, suggests that they are often conducted in ways that exploit and reproduce certain existing social, cultural, political, and economic formations (Belcher 2014; Gregory 2008a; Owens 2015). While Dennys never arrives at a more nuanced understanding of counterinsurgency that accounts for its

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<sup>5</sup> Very similar claims have been made by Vinay Gidwani (2008), whose study of agricultural development in Gujarat emphasizes developments power to surprise, to destabilize, and to incite violence and aggression.

different varieties – limited, full-spectrum, enemy-centric, population-centric, etc. – his theorization of development as a transformative and potentially destabilizing change process is worthy of further critical scrutiny. As we shall see in the next section of this chapter, USAID has, ever since its inception in 1961, sought to foster change and spur transformation in the so-called “developing” world. USAID, however, was not necessarily “aiming for standards of living”, to paraphrase one of its first administrators (Norris 2014). Instead, its target was the poor themselves. Through rural development interventions, USAID hoped to inculcate within the poor a burning desire for self-emancipation, self-actualization, and self-improvement.

### **1.3 USAID and the national security state**

It is often suggested that the immediate post-Cold War period has been marked by a merging of development and security. According to Mark Duffield (2001), the emergence of such a “development-security nexus” was largely spurred by fundamental shifts in the contours of modern war. The phenomenon of modern globalization, Zygmunt Bauman (2001, 14) tells us, has induced a new type of war (see also Mbembe 2003). Whereas older forms of conflict were animated by traditional geopolitical concerns – primarily, territorial security – Bauman’s “globalization-induced wars” stem from conditions of chronic poverty, widespread inequality, and state failure. These “new” or “21<sup>st</sup> century wars” are waged in the “global borderlands”: peripheral spaces where many metropolitan actors and agencies believe that “characteristics of brutality, excess, and breakdown predominate” (Duffield 2001a, 309; Kaldor 2013; Munkler 2005). Their protagonists are not “professional armies”, but rather, a “volatile mix of para-state and non-state actors, including militias and guerrilla forces, whose alliances and allegiances are notoriously unstable” (Gregory 2010, 166). Heavily reliant upon the informal and criminal circuits of shadow globalization for sustenance, these “new wars” are often disavowed by metropolitan powers as “illegitimate” (Jung 2003). In contrast with the “virtuous” or “liberal” forms of high-technology violence being perfected by Western militaries – which were discussed in the previous section of this chapter – the “new wars” plaguing the “global borderlands” are said to lack ideas, ideals, interests, definite goals, or purposes (Der Derian 2009; Bell and Evans 2010; Evans 2010, 2011; Gregory 2010)<sup>6</sup>. Instead of killing to make life live, the “new wars” are

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<sup>6</sup> For a highly useful comparison of these “two sorts of ‘new war’”, see Gregory (2010).

“waged for [their] own sake, and nourish those who wage [them]” (Dillon and Reid 2009; Gregory 2010, 167).

Many social scientists have been quite critical of the “new wars” thesis. Helen Dexter (2007), for instance, argues that Kaldor (2013) and Munkler’s (2005) re-discovery of the “new wars” is undergirded by Eurocentric assumptions about what constitutes “war” in the first place. One can theorize the “low-intensity conflicts” of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century as “new” only by discounting the “hot” conflicts that erupted in Cold War Algeria, Vietnam, Malaya, or Afghanistan – to name only a few examples – as something other than conventional forms of warfare. As Dexter (2007, 1062) points out, this narrative of novelty provides a “legitimizing discourse for contemporary strategic violence”. Specifically, it mobilizes an imaginative geography that distinguishes “our” wars – civilized and legal forms of policing that target only combatants – from “their” wars – barbaric and criminal moments of brutal violence that invariably result in the ethnic cleansing of civilian populations. In so doing, the “new wars” thesis “does not simply describe, but also invokes a powerful moral order” that enables the West to cloak its violence in the supposedly neutral language of policing (Dexter 2007, 1069).

Building on Dexter (2007, 1062), I argue that the “new wars” thesis does not merely validate a “military response when this might otherwise be difficult”, but has also “become the new ideological template” for the “current international security [regime]” within which USAID is ensconced (Chandler 2007, 484). Given the widespread – and highly problematic – understanding that “new wars” have recently flourished in dangerous conditions of underdevelopment, it is hardly surprising that conflict and violence have increasingly become “central concern[s]” within mainstream development theory and practice (Duffield 2001, 1). In order to ensure that “development and stability” prevail in the “global borderlands”, international organizations such as USAID are expected to be “aware of conflict and its effects and, where possible, gear their work towards conflict resolution and helping to rebuild war-torn societies in a way that will avert future violence” (Duffield 2001, 1). In this way, war and security are increasingly being incorporated into development theory, discourse, and practice (and vice versa). Duffield (2001, 2) analyses this “shift in aid policy towards conflict resolution and societal reconstruction” not “merely as a technical system of support and assistance, but as part



of an emerging system of global [liberal] governance”. Polyarchical, non-territorial, and networked, this “new” development-security nexus brings together governments, non-governmental organizations, military institutions, and private companies in order to effect a radical agenda of societal transformation in the global borderlands (Duffield 2001).

Although Duffield (2010, 54-5) acknowledges that development has served as a “technology of security” since the “dawn of industrial capitalism”, he nonetheless identifies two factors that are supposedly novel to the current post-Cold War conjuncture. First, the development-security nexus has played an increasingly central role in the global effort to constrain the ability of the poor and the marginalized to move and circulate. Second, the focus of the development-security nexus has shifted from states to their inhabitants. Duffield (2010, 55) argues that the “nature and implications of [this] contemporary development security nexus” can only be understood if “development and underdevelopment are reconceived biopolitically”. Drawing inspiration from Foucault’s (1988, 2003) work on biopolitics, Duffield tracks how aid policy is now focused on supporting, maintaining, and enhancing the life-chances of populations and communities abroad. Development practitioners, in particular, have become obsessed with determining the minimum level of need that must be fulfilled so that people can live.

Duffield situates this biopolitical turn in development theory and practice within a broader context of political economy. He considers it no coincidence that the threat posed by “underdevelopment” intensified – rather than dissipated – during the immediate post-Cold War period. Having totally exhausted all “viable systemic alternatives”, neoliberal capitalism became free to indulge its basic drive to exploit fresh opportunities for accumulation in the global borderlands through further rounds of enclosure and dispossession. In the process, it constantly evoked a “surplus population – that is, a population whose skills, status, or even existence are in excess of prevailing conditions and requirements” (Duffield 2007, 9). Confronted thusly by the global proliferation of such irrelevant and dangerous forms of life, the purpose of development increasingly became twofold. On the one hand, development was tasked with helping such populations achieve a state of sustainable homeostasis or self-reliance. On the other hand, development subjected these populations to a comprehensive spatial politics of containment that

maintained – rather than reduced – the destabilizing “life chance divide” that continues to bifurcate the “developed” world from its “underdeveloped” other (Duffield 2010, 57).

Duffield’s work has proved enormously influential amongst social scientists. The development-security nexus concept has been taken up, expanded upon, and reconfigured by a growing number of writers (Chandler 2007; Pupavac 2005; Stern and Ojendal 2010). If Marcus Power (2010) is to be believed, human geographers have been slower on the uptake. In Power’s (2010, 435) estimation, “the study of ‘development’ in Geography has conventionally been kept apart from other sub-disciplines like political or economic geography by a well-established division of labour which casts an engagement with the geographies of the non-Western world as ‘area studies’ or constructs development as a technical or managerialist domain, shorn of all politics”. Without a doubt, the field of critical development geography has, over the course of its long intellectual history, been much less parochial than Power seems willing to acknowledge. In recent years, however, there has been a noticeable upswing in the number of critical geographers who have been making important contributions to the study of the development-security nexus. Generally, their contributions have fallen into one of two categories. Critical geographers have excelled at shining a spotlight on the geopolitical discourses that legitimize the ongoing securitization of development (Mawdsley 2007; Mohan and Power 2010; Sharp 2013; Sharp et al. 2010, 2011; Slater 1993). They have also mapped the spatial practices that give the development-security nexus its concrete form (Fluri 2011; Lopez 2015; Reid-Henry 2011, 2013).

Until recently, this emerging body of geographical scholarship was largely silent on USAID’s entanglement in such spatial configurations of development power, knowledge, and practice. Geographers such as Jamey Essex (2013) and Lisa Bhungalia (2015), however, are beginning to explore the central role that USAID plays in safeguarding America’s national security interests abroad. From their work, I tease out two claims that will be critical for this dissertation. The first is that USAID came into existence as an arm of the American national security state. The second is that USAID has consequently become directly embroiled in major counterinsurgency campaigns, both during the Cold War, and in the colonial present. In what follows, I will flesh out these two claims by triangulating Essex and Bhungalia’s work with my own empirical research.

Essex (2013) traces the origins of USAID back to the ruins of the Second World War. Physically and economically devastated by approximately six years of “total” war, Europe called on the international community to help with the rebuilding efforts. On 2 April, 1948, the United States established the “Economic Cooperation Act” – more commonly known as the Marshall Plan – which assumed responsibility for stabilizing Europe, “not as a permanent program”, but rather, as an “emergency tool of assistance” (USAID 2002). The outlines of the Marshall Plan were first sketched out by President Truman’s Secretary of State, George Marshall, at Harvard University on 5 June, 1947. According to Marshall, it was only “logical that the United States should do whatever it is able to do to assist in the return of normal economic health in the world, without which there can be no political stability and no assured peace” (Marshall 1947). Although Marshall claimed that his Plan was “directed not against any country or doctrine, but against hunger, poverty, desperation, and chaos”, in practice, it was undergirded by the logics of “mechanistic” anti-communism (Gibson 1986). Tellingly, Marshall envisioned its purpose as “the revival of a working economy in the world so as to permit the emergence of political and social conditions in which free institutions can exist”. It is no coincidence that Marshall articulated his Plan only three months after President Truman called on Congress to “support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation” by the forces of global Communism (Truman 1947). Marxists such as Jacques Charrière were also quick to criticize the Marshall Plan for having “no other fundamental principle than political goals, to the extent that this imperialist power considers its political security is placed in danger through the existence of too miserable populations” (qtd. in Judd 1948).

Although the Marshall Plan was an emergency measure, its consequences were long lasting. According to Essex (2013, 29-30), the Plan “shaped and enacted geopolitical and geoeconomic discourses that laid foundational components for American policy and strategy through the first three decades of the Cold War and that also helped shape the establishment and conduct of USAID as an institution”. These discourses, in turn, “envisioned national and global versions of sociospatial order predicated on American political, military, and economic hegemony and forms of class compromise that negated radical challenges to Fordist and Keynesian models of economic growth, labour management, and political legitimization” (Essex 2013, 30).

As part of this broader project, President Truman globalized the Marshall Plan through the establishment of what would eventually become known as the “Point IV” program. First outlined in January 1949 as part of Truman’s (1949) second Inaugural Address, Point IV was envisioned as a “bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas”. According to the President, more than half of humanity was living in “conditions approaching misery”. Plagued by inadequate access to food, ravaged by disease, and handicapped by primitive and stagnant forms of economic life, the poverty of these masses was deemed to be a “threat both to them and to more prosperous areas” (Truman 1949).

For the first time in history, however, humanity possessed “the knowledge and the skill to relieve the suffering of these people”. While the material resources at Truman’s (1949) disposal were “limited” – this despite the enormous flows of capital that were being channeled to Europe via the Marshall Plan – America’s “imponderable” stores of technical expertise were “constantly growing” and hence, “inexhaustible”. Given America’s pre-eminence “among nations in the development of industrial and scientific techniques”, Truman (1949) believed that it was uniquely qualified to help “peace-loving peoples” abroad “realize their aspirations for a better life” through the provision of technical assistance. Bequeathed with the gift of technical knowledge, the “free peoples of the world” would be able to produce, through their own efforts, “more food, more clothing, more materials for housing, and more mechanical power to lighten their burdens”. In contrast with older forms of imperialism, Truman (1949) promised that Point IV would generate economic benefits for all participant countries through “cooperation” and “democratic fair-dealing”. The economic interests of the US, in other words, would be fulfilled not through the domination and exploitation of colonies for profit, but rather, through international acts of philanthropy.

Although Point IV ostensibly symbolized America’s commitment to helping the “least fortunate members” of the “human family” achieve the “decent, satisfying life that is the right of all people”, Truman’s (1949) consistent deployment of qualifiers such as “free” or “peace-loving” betrayed the imaginative geographies that undergirded this emerging ensemble of militarized

techno-science. Unless they demonstrated a willingness to throw off the yoke of Communism, Point IV effectively abandoned populations living on the wrong side of the Iron Curtain to wallow in “conditions approaching misery” (Truman 1949). In order to administer and implement the Point IV concept, the US government established a “Technical Cooperation Administration” (TCA) in June 1950. Under the auspices of the TCA, American experts and advisors were dispatched to various countries around the globe where they implemented, in collaboration with non-governmental organizations and local counterparts, a diversity of technical projects (Berger and Borer 2007). Afghanistan was no exception, and on 7 February, 1951, it agreed to cooperate with the “Government of the United States of America...in the interchange of technical knowledge and skills and in related activities designed to contribute to the balanced and integrated development of the economic resources and productive capacities of Afghanistan” (Department of State, 1951).

The barely veiled anti-communism of Point IV was rendered even more explicit in the “Special Message” that Truman delivered to Congress on 24 May, 1951, which called for the establishment of a “Mutual Security Program”. In this speech, he evoked a Manichean world divided into two diametrically opposed blocs of power:

“Our country has greater economic strength and larger potential military power than any other nation on earth. But we do not and we should not stand alone. We cannot maintain our civilization if the rest of the world is split up, subjugated, and organized against us by the Kremlin. This is a very real and terrible danger. But it can be overcome. To do so, we must work with the rest of the free world: we must join other free nations in common defense plans; we must concert our economic strength with theirs for the common good; and we must help other free countries to build the military and economic power needed to make impossible the communist dreams of world conquest” (Truman 1951).

Spurred in part by the outbreak of the Korean War in the summer of 1950, Washington established a “Mutual Security Agency” (MSA) on 31 October, 1951 in order to bring America’s military assistance programs together with the economic aid being provided to “underdeveloped areas” under the umbrella of Point IV (Berger and Borer 2007; Truman 1951). The MSA was to serve as the front line of defence against the combined threats of communist military attack on the one hand, and its “allies of starvation and sickness” on the other (Truman 1951). Here we can

begin to see some of the ways in which the dual imperatives of development and security were becoming entangled under the aegis of Cold War geopolitics.

Initially, the MSA and the TCA were distinct foreign assistance institutions. On 1 August, 1953, however, they were both transferred into an autonomous “Foreign Operations Administration” (FOA) (Glick 1953). Tasked with consolidating economic and technical assistance on a global basis, the FOA was later incorporated into the State Department’s “International Cooperation Administration” (ICA). Although the ICA’s mandate to administer aid for “economic, political, and social development purposes” was both “vast and far reaching”, its ties to the State Department meant that it had “no authority over military aid and only partial control over agricultural surpluses and food aid” (Essex 2013, 31; USAID 2002). These limitations made it difficult for the ICA to find solid footing in an operating environment that was being increasingly shaped by national security concerns. Around this point in time, both the State Department and the US military increasingly began to view economic and technical assistance “as an arm of military and political security” (Lowenthal 1986, 16). This, in turn, meant that the ICA had to start justifying its development programming on geopolitical grounds.

As the stakes intensified for the ICA, so too did levels of public scrutiny. According to Essex (2013, 31), “several congressionally commissioned reports highlighted failures and gaps in American aid programs”, while quasi-fictional accounts of the diplomatic and strategic missteps plaguing America’s Cold War abroad brought the “perils of incompetent and poorly planned development and military assistance” into sharper public focus. By 1960, public and Congressional support for America’s ineffective and fragmented foreign assistance institutions had dwindled precipitously (Norris 2014; USAID 2002). In response to this growing dissatisfaction, the incoming Kennedy administration pledged to make significant changes to America’s foreign aid programs.

The cornerstone of the Kennedy administration’s reorganization effort was the Foreign Assistance Act (Duffy 1991). Unveiled in March 1961, the Act was Kennedy’s attempt to consolidate and centralize the fragmented multiplicity of foreign assistance programs into one overarching agency. In contrast with its predecessors, this “United States Agency for

International Development” would adopt a more “comprehensive approach to managing aid, built around country-based strategies and long-term development planning” (Essex 2013, 32). Kennedy’s plan catalyzed a vigorous debate over foreign aid reform that centered on “traditional arguments of thrift, economy, and ingratitude” (Duffy 1991, 17). The public at large was generally opposed to foreign aid, with some citizen groups representing it as an expensive “give-away” that the United States could ill afford. Others – particularly, Congressmen from the South and the Midwest – worried that foreign assistance would be provided to America’s economic competitors abroad (Essex 2013).

Supporters of foreign aid reform, in contrast, justified it on geopolitical grounds. In his remarks to the House of Representatives, Kennedy argued that the United States, as an upstanding member of the international community, an emerging economic powerhouse, and a bastion of freedom, was obligated to provide foreign assistance on moral, economic, and political grounds. According to Kennedy (1961):

“To fail to meet [these] obligations now would be disastrous; and, in the long run, more expensive. For widespread poverty and chaos lead to a collapse of existing political and social structures which would inevitably invite the advance of totalitarianism into every weak and unstable area. Thus our own security would be endangered and our prosperity imperiled. A program of assistance to the underdeveloped nations must continue because the Nation’s interest and the cause of political freedom require it”.

Kennedy clearly framed the Act in fundamentally geopolitical terms. Tapping into an intensifying climate of geopolitical fear on Capitol Hill, proponents of the Act identified an “aid gap” between the United States and the Soviet Union that had to be closed in order to check Communist aggression in the Third World. This politically astute strategy proved impossible for opponents of the Act to overcome and in August 1961, the bill was handily ratified by both the House and the Senate (Essex 2013). As a result, the Kennedy administration was given the green light to establish USAID, which began operations in November 1961.

This history of USAID has necessarily been crude and truncated, but it shows that the agency – and each of its institutional predecessors – was conceived as an arm of the American national

security state<sup>7</sup>. This is not to suggest that USAID and the American national security state can simply be reduced one to the other. As we will see, an institution like USAID is animated by a diversity of different logics, and hence, its relationship with the other arms of the American national security state will always be tense, anxious, and ambivalent (see also Bhungalia 2010, 2012; Essex 2013). Instead, I draw attention to USAID's historical entanglement with the American national security state in order to challenge the notion that the development-security nexus is largely a product of the immediate post-Cold War period. Indeed, from the outset, USAID administrators were under no illusions regarding the role that the agency was expected to play in the intensifying Cold War. As David Bell, the agency's administrator from 1962 to 1966, put it, "fundamentally, A.I.D's purpose is national security" (qtd. in Norris 2014). For Bell, this meant working towards a "world of independent nations capable of making economic and social progress through free institutions". "Economically", Bell continued, "we're not aiming for standards of living", but rather, for "internal dynamics, self-sustaining growth".

USAID figured predominantly in Bell's worldview as the positive, generative, and therapeutic arm of the American national security state. The expectation was that USAID would help the world's poorest populations derive concrete material benefits from America's single-minded pursuit of its national security interests abroad. In this sense, Bell's conception of the interconnections between development and national security stands in stark contrast with Duffield's. Whereas Bell framed development as a catalyst of growth, accumulation, and self-improvement in the so-called "Third World", for Duffield, it serves as a locus of disciplinary (bio)power whose primary concern is with violently fixing potentially insurgent populations within an extended archipelago of highly securitized spaces. It is tempting to assume that these two different understandings of how development begets national security are fundamentally incompatible. Recent empirical research in geography, however, shows that they often informed USAID's missions abroad in equal measure.

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<sup>7</sup> The origin of the American "national security state" is often traced back to passing of the National Security Act of 1947 (Nelson 2009). This piece of legislation led to the establishment of the first "National Security Council" whose membership would include representatives from the Departments of State, Army, and Navy (Nelson 2009). Its task was to synchronize America's military and foreign policies, while simultaneously coordinating an "intrusive intelligence agency and internal domestic surveillance" (Nelson 2009, 267). Over time, the Council would go on to form the core of a broader "national security state". Under its watchful eye, "the perceived need for security from the nation's enemies, known or unknown, [influenced] every part of national life" (Nelson 2009, 265).



Nowhere is this better exemplified than USAID's involvement in the Vietnam War. Under pressure to develop a "civilian economic and social component to the counterinsurgency effort in Vietnam", USAID spearheaded the "other" war for rural "hearts and minds" through two distinct, yet related suites of spatial interventions (Phillips 2008). In order to pacify insurgent South Vietnam, USAID produced spaces that were designed to physically and psychologically separate rural populations from National Liberation Front fighters. In these loci of counterinsurgency and modernization, USAID advisors were given free rein to create a "favourable environment" of "legitimate social revolution" – "friendly to the [government of South Vietnam] and poisonous to the [National Liberation Front]" – in which the Vietnamese people could "begin to effect their own destiny" (French and Puritano 1996, 3; Porter and Unger 1966, 50). This archipelago of counterinsurgency spaces was secured through a policing effort that sought to assay and manage the diverse flows of bodies, commodities, and capital constantly traversing the countryside of South Vietnam. To this end, USAID advisors provided the South Vietnamese police forces with training and technical assistance in the areas of resource denial, population control, prison management, and neutralization.

It is beyond the scope of this introduction to explore how the interplay between rural development and police training worked in practice (see Attewell 2015). But, it is necessary to note that for many commentators, the Vietnam War functions as a sort of proto-9/11, a radical break-point or rupture in USAID's institutional history whose afterlives haunt everything that the agency has done since. USAID personnel who cut their teeth in Cold War Vietnam would go on to shape agency's mission to post-9/11 Afghanistan (Phillips 2008). More significantly, USAID's direct involvement in the "other" war for Vietnamese "hearts and minds" remains exemplary of the ways in which violence and destruction serve as the necessary prerequisites of development. Elsewhere, I show how USAID, over the course of the Vietnam War, became increasingly implicated in the assassination, administrative detention, and torture of suspected National Liberation Front insurgents (Attewell 2015). This "will to destroy life" proved highly controversial amongst domestic lawmakers, who were alarmed by the "inhumane" steps that USAID had taken to "win" over Vietnamese "hearts and minds" (Willenson 1974). As a result of this crisis of legitimacy, domestic lawmakers passed significant revisions to USAID's parent

legislation in 1973. Under the terms of the revised Foreign Assistance Act, USAID was no longer legally permitted to support what George Orwell (1936) once called the “dirty work of Empire”. Instead, development assistance from this point forward would be geared solely towards improving the life-chances of the world’s “poorest majority”.

As I show in the third chapter of this dissertation, these legal restrictions did not prevent USAID from practicing development as a form of insurgency in Soviet-occupied Afghanistan. Nor did they discourage USAID from waging counterinsurgency by proxy in the various theatres of the global War on Terror. Indeed, critical human geographers are beginning to focus their attention on USAID’s ongoing entanglement in contemporary counterinsurgencies. Bhungalia’s (2015) work, for instance, traces how counterinsurgency practices are being mobilized by USAID in contemporary occupied Palestine through humanitarian and development interventions. She argues that the “various NGOs and development contractors through which USAID operates are simultaneously tasked with dividing, surveilling, and policing the Palestinian population on behalf of the US state to which they are contracted” (Bhungalia 2015, 2313). These actors, to put it differently, are refashioned by USAID into civilian counterinsurgency practitioners. Cloaked by the mantle of development and humanitarianism, these civilian counterinsurgents have helped the US national security apparatus proliferate itself throughout the occupied territories of Palestine, facilitating, in turn, the development of ever more sophisticated and fine grained modalities of control, policing, and disciplinary power.

While USAID’s mission to Afghanistan shares some common ground with its activities in Palestine – particularly its reliance on proxies such as non-governmental organizations and contractors – this does not mean that Bhungalia’s ideas can be applied neatly to Operation Enduring Freedom. As Bhungalia (2015, 2311) herself notes, “the economy of calculations made in Palestine is different from the calculations that inform military interventions in Iraq, Afghanistan, or Yemen”. But if there is a thread that runs through all of these different moments of articulation, it is that USAID’s development interventions in contexts such as Vietnam, Palestine, or Afghanistan have generally been concerned with the government and management of restless rural populations. USAID, to put it differently, has historically practiced development as a form of governmentality. The next section of this chapter will sketch out the theoretical

contours of this governmentality by bringing Duffield's work on the development-security nexus into conversation with critical development geography.

#### **1.4 USAID as governmentality**

Duffield's work on the development-security nexus owes a huge intellectual debt to what is now known as the "post-development" school of thought. A useful definition of "post-development" is offered by Gillian Hart (2001, 654), who argues that the term has come to encompass a diversity of inter-disciplinary writings that, while differentiated along multiple epistemological axes, are nonetheless "united by antagonism to Development as a normalizing, deeply destructive discursive formation emanating from the 'west'". For post-development scholars such as Arturo Escobar (1995), the notion of capital-D development is fundamentally compromised by its historical ties to modern discourses of reason and science, which tend to reduce social questions to technical problems to be solved by experts in rational decision making and management: namely, development professionals (Gidwani 2002). Accordingly, post-development scholars firmly reject the notion that capital-d Development can be reformed, and instead, place their faith in the grassroots social movements that began to emerge in the post-Cold War period.

Duffield draws inspiration from the post-development school of thought in two ways. First, he theorizes the development-security nexus as a "dazzling, all-encompassing, and totalizing spatial form" of biopower (Coleman and Grove 2009, 491). Second, he promulgates a strident discourse of anti-development that valorizes above all else a politics of resistance based on the "solidarity of the governed" (Duffield 2007, 234). While there is much to admire about Duffield's emancipatory politics, his work reproduces many of the same problems that previously plagued postdevelopment scholarship. A geographical critique might draw attention to the "rather crude, top-down conceptions of power" that run through much of Duffield's work, which often fails to touch down and engage with the tense, partial, and uneven ways in which development articulates with security in the global borderlands (Hart 2001, 654). Much like the postdevelopment scholars that preceded him, Duffield has also "arrived at the surprisingly simplistic conclusion that to move beyond development orthodoxy is to hoist the banner of anti-

development” (Gidwani 2002, 6). Duffield’s work glosses over the inherent ambivalence of development theory and practice. Hence, Duffield cannot speak to the ways in which development “may transform (or carry the promise of transforming) places in liberatory ways, while in other cases, it may tighten the noose of existing unfreedoms or oppression” (Gidwani 2002, 6).

This dissertation seeks to move beyond Duffield’s path-breaking, yet problematic critique by instead theorizing the development-security nexus as a form of governmentality. In Hart’s (2004, 92) eyes, the concept of governmentality allows for a “far more precise diagnosis” of the “rationalities of [development], the forms of knowledge and expertise they construct, and the specific and contingent assemblages of practices, materials, agents, and techniques through which these rationalities operate to produce governable subjects”. While there is a well-established scholarly tradition of studying how governmentality works in advanced liberal democracies, these studies are often limited by their “striking Eurocentrism”, as well as by their tendency to deliberately obscure the messiness and precarity of everyday forms of rule (Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Li 1999). For critical geographers and other spatially-inclined social scientists keen on provincializing such debates, development has served as a productive vehicle for exploring how governmental power is exercised in (post)colonial contexts. Much of this work distinguishes between how development projects are conceived and how they are actually accomplished in practice (Hart 2004). In so doing, it illustrates how governmentality is itself a conjunctural enterprise that is always precarious and hence, prone to crisis (Hart 2004). Michael Watt’s (2003) seminal exploration of development and governmentality is exemplary in this regard. His ethnography of the various “economies of violence” at work in the Niger Delta shows how development is leveraged by various local actors to produce an interlocking palimpsest of what he calls “governable spaces”.

Critical development geography continued along this intellectual trajectory throughout the 2000s. By 2010, the continued relevance of this line of inquiry indicated to Jim Glassman (2010, 2) that critical development geography had “long since moved well beyond Escobar”. To support this claim, Glassman (2010) draws attention to Joel Wainwright (2008) and Vinay Gidwani’s (2008) recent analyses of the weaknesses and contradictions that characterize specifically capitalist

modes of development in (post)colonial contexts. While both Wainwright and Gidwani are critical of mainstream development theory and practice, they nonetheless recognize the “impossibility of not trying (or desiring) to develop” (Glassman 2010, 2). In Wainwright’s (2008, 9) view, what is required is not the “facile negation” of development that is advanced by Escobar and his successors (for example, Duffield), but rather, a specifically postcolonial Marxist critique that examines “its power, its sway, as an aporetic totality”: or, perhaps more accurately, a specifically postcolonial Marxist critique of development as a form of governmentality. This is precisely what is offered in the recent work of Tania Li (2007) and Vinay Gidwani (2008). Bringing Duffield into conversation with Li and Gidwani will help me arrive at a more nuanced understanding of how USAID has historically brought development and security together in the Afghan countryside.

Drawing inspiration from Li (2007), I argue that USAID’s development interventions in Afghanistan are as much about improving the life chances of surplus populations as they are about containing them in a resilient state of homeostatic self-reliance. They are animated, in other words, by what Li (2007) calls a “will to improve”. Ever since USAID – or, the TCA, as it was then known – first arrived in Afghanistan in 1951, it implemented “programs that set out to improve the condition of the population in a deliberate manner” (Li 2007, 1). Such programs left an indelible mark on the livelihoods and identities of rural Afghans. They were implemented by a benevolent cadre of trustees – technicians, experts, professionals – whose objective was not to dominate rural Afghans, but rather, to optimize their capacity for action, and to direct it towards self-improvement.

Li (2007) situates the “will to improve” in the grid of power relations that Foucault named “government”. According to Foucault (2007, 133), the essential issue of government was to introduce “economy” – that is to say, “the proper way of managing individuals, goods, and wealth” – into political thought and practice (see also Prakash 1999). In Foucault’s (2007, 133) words, “to govern a state will thus mean the application of economy, the establishment of an economy, at the level of the state as a whole, that is to say [exercising] supervision and control over its inhabitants, wealth, and the conduct of all and each, as attentive as that of a father’s over his households and goods”. This art of government was unleashed by the emergence of

population as a discrete object of both analysis and intervention. Populations were determined to possess “[their] own regularities”: a death rate, an incidence of disease, a cycle of scarcity, etc. (Foucault 2007, 141). As populations became the target of various governmental schemes to better their health, what resulted was a “complex” that sought to regulate how individuals related to various “things”: wealth, resources, territory, customs, habits, accidents, epidemics, and death, to name only a few examples (Foucault 2007, 134).

USAID’s development mission to Afghanistan was similarly governmental. USAID argued that the true constraint to the development of Afghanistan was rural Afghans themselves. Dismayed by their traditional attitudes and subsistence practices, USAID sought to improve their conduct “by calculated means” (Li 2007, 5). Given that it has never been possible for USAID to “coerce every individual and regulate their actions in minute detail”, it has instead operated by “educating desires and configuring habits, aspirations, and beliefs” (Li 2007, 5). To paraphrase David Scott (1995), USAID “[set] conditions, artificially so arranging things that [Afghans], following their own self-interest, will do as they ought”: namely, improve themselves. This desire to “create a spirit of self-help” is one of the general leitmotifs that runs through much of USAID’s development activities in Afghanistan. By “installing” in rural Afghans a will and an ambition to work for higher standards of living, USAID believed that it could provide them with a “foundation for self-perpetuating economic and social progress” (Galloway 1959; Haq 1959). Initially, USAID adopted a piecemeal approach to helping rural Afghans help themselves, centered on “practical demonstrations” and “extension programs”. Gradually, however, it realized that change would have to be “total”, “comprising all aspects of life at the same time” (Galloway 1959). “The will to improve the condition” of the Afghan people, in other words, became “expansive” (Li 2007).

What did this look like in practice? As Gidwani (2008) reminds us, every project of rule requires some kind of machinery through which it realizes itself. USAID’s mission to Afghanistan was operationalized not only over, but also through space. This was a two-part process. First, USAID’s trustees distributed themselves territorially throughout rural Afghanistan, entering into ongoing relations with target populations in order to lay down the groundwork for long-term development interventions. Through these channels of contact, USAID unleashed a “multiplicity

of forces to reassemble matter in space and summon particular sorts of ‘conducts’” from rural Afghans (Gidwani 2008, 129).

In this dissertation, I show how the contours of USAID’s “will to improve” Afghanistan have shifted over time. More specifically, I argue that it has gradually become oriented towards the market. Following Essex (2013), I trace the origins of this shift back to the fallout from the Vietnam War. In the early 1970s, it was widely believed that USAID had underperformed in Vietnam because it had become too bloated to function properly. At the height of the Vietnam War, USAID’s staffing levels had reached an all-time high, with the agency employing over 18,000 personnel globally. Of this figure, almost 5,100 (approximately 28 percent of its total staff) had been deployed to Vietnam. Congress, accordingly, called on USAID to reduce the overall size of its foreign service corps by transferring some of its employees to other government agencies (Essex 2013, 49). This was not, as Essex (2013, 49) points out, a simple exercise of “bureaucratic weight-shifting”. Rather, this process speaks to the ways in which market logics began to “trump” military strength as the “primary ordering mechanism for the state system” (Essex 2013, 3). By the mid-1970s, such geoeconomic discourses began to reorient USAID towards “greater participation with and reliance on market mechanisms and the private sector” (Essex 2013, 49-51).

It is tempting to theorize these shifts in development theory and practice as yet another example of how the “ideational project of neoliberalism was folded into (more or less) coherent programmes of socioeconomic and state transformation” from the early 1970s onwards (Peck 2008, 3). Neoliberalism is now generally understood as a “theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (Harvey 2003; 2005, 2). As many have pointed out, neoliberalism is not a coherent project that emerged into the world fully formed (Mirowski and Plehwe 2008; Peck 2008, 2010). Like USAID, its origins can be traced back to the immediate post-World War II period. According to Peck (2008, 4), neoliberalism was never defined by a “pristine moment of mountaintop clarity” but rather, was a “transnational, reactionary, and messy hybrid right from the start”. The neoliberal ideational project came into

being as a reactionary critique of non-market forms of governmental practice. Neoliberals such as Hayek framed Nazism as the natural outcome of socialist and Keynesian political-economy. Their “visceral distaste” for welfare-statism propelled a broad attempt to restore and maintain some form of market rule. Like the 19<sup>th</sup> century champions of *laissez-faire* who preceded them, neoliberals were united by a shared belief in the importance of free trade, labour market flexibility, and social state retrenchment. Neoliberals, however, “expressly sought to transcend the ‘naive ideology’ of *laissez-faire* in favour of a ‘positive’ conception of the state as the guarantor of a competitive order” (Peck 2008, 7). They recognized that in a context such as war-torn Europe, “the restoration and maintenance of market rule would call for some form of state engagement” (Peck 2008, 14-5). The state had to be made to work for – and not against – the market. Where the different neoliberal factions diverged was in their unique approaches to the “distinctively post-laissez-faire question of appropriate forms and fields of state intervention in the socioeconomic sphere” (Peck 2008, 7). The immediate challenge facing them, therefore, was to “determine a set of tightly constrained, yet positive, functions for the state, as the foundation for a designed market order” (Peck 2008, 14-15)<sup>8</sup>.

Once these initial efforts bore fruit in domestic contexts, neoliberals were then free to turn their attention towards resuscitating market orders the world over. USAID undoubtedly played an instrumental role in helping the American national security state construct such a “restless landscape of actually existing neoliberalism” abroad (Peck 2008, 33). These “New Directions” in foreign aid were first signalled by President Nixon in a special message that he delivered to Congress in 1969. In stark contrast to the optimistic sense of exceptionalism that pervaded Point IV, Nixon argued that no single government possessed the resources necessary to single-handedly improve the life prospects of the world’s poorest majority. Accordingly, it was imperative that USAID enlist the “energies of private enterprise, here and abroad, in the cause of

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<sup>8</sup> Neoliberalism’s concern with delineating a new art of market-oriented government has been the subject of much lively debate within economic geography. Geographers such as Wendy Larner (2003) and Robert Fairbanks (2012) have advocated theorizing processes of neoliberalism and neoliberalization through the Foucauldian lens of governmentality. Clive Barnett (2006), in contrast, has been skeptical of these efforts, noting that “neither the story of neoliberalism-as-hegemony or of neoliberalism-as-governmentality can account for the forms of receptivity, pro-activity, and generativity that might help to explain how the rhythms of the everyday are able to produce effects on macro-scale processes and vice-versa” (12). While I am broadly sympathetic with Barnett’s (2006) concerns, I believe that they can be addressed in part by moving away from the top-down and all-encompassing theoretical frameworks that he criticizes towards the more partial and contingent understandings of governmentality that figure prominently in the work of post-colonial development scholars, such as Li (2007, 2014) and Gidwani (2008).



economic development” (Nixon 1969). For Nixon, private enterprise was not only one of the most effective engines of development, it was also necessary to maintain the USAID program in a time of increasing austerity. This turn towards the market would eventually be enshrined in the Nixon administration’s 1973 revision to the Foreign Assistance Act. In addition to gearing development assistance towards meeting the “basic needs” of the world’s “poorest majority”, these revisions also encouraged USAID to assume more of a managerial role within an expanding assemblage of development actors, including private contractors, non-governmental organizations, international financial institutions, other bi- and multilateral agencies, and even the beneficiaries of aid themselves (Essex 2013).

Throughout the 1970s, USAID was under enormous pressure to endorse economic liberalization and other market-oriented policy reforms as the “only acceptable path to development and rubric for aid programming” (Essex 2013, 69). Essex (2013, 53) argues that the “increasing insistence that USAID promote institutional and political restructuring to facilitate liberalization and other market-oriented policy reforms in developing states became so dominant by the late 1980s” that it catalyzed a “fundamental rethinking of how it made and enacted development strategies”.

As it turns out, USAID was not the only arm of the American national security state that began to embrace some of the key tenets of neoliberal thought in the post-Vietnam period. Indeed, the expectation that USAID would gradually orient its overseas development programming towards markets and the private sector was paralleled by a substantive shift in how the US military was envisioning its broader mission to stabilize insecurity in a post-Vietnam world, particularly in the regions of the Middle East and Central Asia. MacGinty (2012, 28) argues that the US military’s conception of “stabilization” has historically been driven not only by “ideas of control”, but also by a desire to “create compliant, market-friendly any-states that do not threaten the international order”. This is exemplified by the US military’s establishment of Central Command – or, CENTCOM – in 1983. From the very beginning, the *raison d’être* of CENTCOM was to ensure the “military-economic securitization” of the Middle East and Central Asia (Morrissey 2014, 15). CENTCOM’s activities were guided by the notion that the achievement of a substantive geopolitical forward presence in the Central Region – through mechanisms such as military manoeuvres and exercises, war games, prepositional programmes, basing agreements,

infrastructural improvement schemes, and the development of access and logistics sites – was an essential prerequisite to securing America’s geoeconomic interests more broadly. According to Morrissey (2015a, 2), CENTCOM “has perennially likened itself as the ‘Guardian of the Gulf’, tasked with safeguarding the free market global economy”. At the heart of CENTCOM’s securitization discourse lies the notion that military regulation and oversight is necessary to enable markets, open up commercial opportunities, and ensure the smooth circulation of resources in the “geopolitically precarious, yet geoeconomically pivotal space of the Central Region” (Morrissey 2015a, 8).

On the face of things, one might argue that there has been a certain degree of synchronization between the post-Vietnam War mandates of USAID and the US military. Both institutions were tasked with fulfilling a broader “military-economic security mission” that has historically involved “entangled geopolitical and geoeconomic visions” (Essex 2013; Morrissey 2014, 17). USAID would establish enabling environments for neoliberalism overseas through development interventions, while the US military would supply the forward geopolitical presence necessary to secure and safeguard these efforts. These synergies at the level of strategy and doctrine, however, were not realized overnight. “Keeping the global economy open” may have been “central to CENTCOM’s grand strategy from the beginning”, but as Morrissey acknowledges, the first deployment of CENTCOM forces to this effect did not occur until 1987, when Kuwaiti oil tankers passing through the Strait of Hormuz were reflagged with American ensigns during the so-called Tanker War (Morrissey 2015a, 2, 6). USAID’s turn towards neoliberalism not only proved to be similarly protracted, but also quite fraught as well. As both James Ferguson (2010, 183) and Li (2014) remind us, “invention in the domain of governmental techniques is rarely something worked up out of whole cloth”. What my research shows is that USAID’s development mission to Afghanistan has evolved through a partial, uneven, and improvisatory process of grafting, whereby newer elements (market-oriented policies) were imperfectly sutured onto older forms of governmentality (the “total” approach to rural development) (Li 2014). What resulted was not a singular, undisputed, and undifferentiated vision of development theory and practice, but rather, a hybridized, contested, and contradictory amalgamation of Keynesian, neoclassical, and (neo)liberal logics.

I trace this process of grafting in my dissertation. From chapter 3 onwards, I show how USAID became increasingly obsessed with transforming rural Afghanistan into an “enabling environment” for market-oriented agricultural production. These “enabling environments” were produced through a diversity of mundane space- and scale-making practices, taking many different concrete forms: agricultural training centres, model villages, demonstration farms, experimental bazaars, agroeconomic clusters, area-based development schemes, and the like. In these spaces, USAID introduced rural Afghans to modern agricultural inputs and technologies; trained them in the latest agricultural best practices; and honed their entrepreneurial capabilities. USAID’s ultimate goal was to help rural Afghans transform themselves from subsistence farmers who “needed to be protected from the full force of market discipline” into “entrepreneurial subjects “deemed fit to be governed in a [neoliberal] manner” (Li 2014, 38).

Historically, the core assumption that guides these market-oriented forms of development governmentality is that all Afghans, no matter their ethnicity, class, or gender, are equally capable of acting – and being governed – as rational economic subjects. This assumption, however, has not always been borne out. Certain segments of the Afghan population have benefitted disproportionately from USAID’s rural development interventions, while others, unfortunately, have been left behind, or even worse, ignored. Rural development in Afghanistan, to put it differently, has historically fostered certain lives at the expense of others. In the final theoretical section of this introduction, I will expand on this claim in greater detail.

## **1.5 USAID and the geographies of uneven development**

A common criticism of USAID’s rural development programming in Afghanistan is that it fails to account for the ways in which local populations remain deeply divided along classed and gendered fault lines. Consequently, it tends to exacerbate already existing geographies of uneven development.

In the Afghan countryside, differential class relations often manifest themselves through uneven land tenure regimes. Rural Afghans access the means of agricultural production – chiefly, land – through a diversity of mechanisms, including individual private ownership, sharecropping

arrangements, and lease-holding agreements. Much to the detriment of sharecroppers, tenants, and itinerant labourers, USAID has historically oriented its rural development interventions in Afghanistan towards individual landowners. Whenever possible, USAID has preferred to distribute technical assistance through so-called “progressive farmers”, who are generally blessed with access to land, capital, and credit, as well as a propensity towards innovation and local leadership. On occasion, USAID has even prevented land-poor Afghans from participating in rural development initiatives. As we shall see in chapter 4, USAID’s refusal to tailor its rural development initiatives to the different classes of farmers was especially problematic from 2009 onwards, when it became embroiled in the civil-military effort to stabilize southern Afghanistan through counternarcotics programming.

Second, USAID’s “will to improve” the condition of Afghan populations has always been gendered. Feminist geographers have long argued that development programs both shape – and in turn, are shaped by – the gender politics practiced by target populations (Casolo and Doshi 2013; Fluri 2008, 2011; Radcliffe 2006; Sharp et al. 2003). As Deniz Kandiyoti (2007) notes, the battle lines that have been drawn over the politics of gender in Afghanistan have deep historical roots that stretch from the 19<sup>th</sup> century rule of Amir Abdur Rahman Khan all the way up to the contemporary counterinsurgency that continues to be waged in the Afghan countryside. Although this history tends to be represented as an ongoing three-way tug-of-war between meddling state forces, a conservative Islamic clergy, and a rural population keen on safeguarding its political-economic autonomy, this macro-scale framework tends to lose much of its explanatory power in contexts where “central governance apparatuses have restricted reach and the vast majority of women have little contact with state, market, and civil society organizations” (Kandiyoti 2007, 175). Instead, Kandiyoti (2007, 175-6) argues that “women’s life options are primarily conditioned by the fortunes of the communities and households in which their livelihoods and everyday lives are embedded” and therefore, it is “to these contexts that one must turn for a more realistic appraisal of the opportunities and constraints they face”.

According to Lina Abirafeh (2005), it was not until Kabul fell to the hardline Taliban on 27 September, 1996 that the international aid apparatus began to seriously engage with the problem of gender relations at the community or household level. From this point forward, women in

Afghanistan have shot to the top of development, media, and military agendas. Indeed, the invasion and occupation was partially justified on the grounds that the Taliban were inhumanely restricting the ability of Afghan women to participate in the political, economic, and cultural life of their communities. USAID, as a result, found itself under increasing pressure to “mainstream” gender into its development mission to Afghanistan.

Initially, many at USAID were resistant to this idea. A common complaint that reappeared in a number of the interviews I conducted was that gender relations in Afghanistan could not easily be ameliorated by technical assistance, and hence, lay outside of USAID’s mandate. These individuals represented “gender mainstreaming” as a policy imperative that had been inappropriately foisted on to USAID by the “Washington establishment”, as well as by “Hollywood celebrities” (Kingsley 25 November, 2012). Given USAID’s initial reluctance to intervene on gender relations at the household or community level, it is perhaps unsurprising that its efforts, as many feminist academics have pointed out, have been plagued by significant problems. Generally, it is argued that USAID fails to recognize how the gender politics in Afghanistan play out within a broader context of complex influences (Kandiyoti 2007). USAID’s half-hearted effort to mainstream gender into its development programming in Afghanistan is criticized on the grounds that it: deploys an instrumental and Eurocentric understanding of gender, resulting in the proliferation of women-only activities (Abirafeh 2005, 2009; Azerbaijani-Moghaddam 2006); that it adopts a highly technical approach to what is fundamentally a political problem (Abirafeh 2005, 2009; Kandiyoti 2007a); and perhaps most significantly for the purposes of this dissertation, that it is undergirded by a highly simplistic understanding of how rural Afghan women spatially navigate their own lifeworlds (Fluri 2009, 2011, 2012; Nguyen 2011), as well as the sphere of the economy (Davis 2005; Ganesh et al. 2013; Grace 2004).

Many of these criticisms are exemplified by USAID’s ongoing “alternative development” effort to wean Afghan farmers off of poppy cultivation. Although much of this alternative development programming was couched in gender neutral language that foregrounds the “rural poor” or “farmers” as the primary micro-agents of development, in practice, it is men that disproportionately benefit from the “will to improve”. This was especially true of alternative

development programs that championed marketization and commercial agriculture as the only legitimate pathway to a better life in the Afghan countryside. USAID and its implementing partners made no attempt to address the spatial and socio-cultural barriers that have historically prevented Afghan women from accessing land, labour, and markets. Instead, most alternative development programs effectively fixed women within the space of their households.

Implementers of these alternative development programs uncritically accepted at face value the mainstream consensus that oppressive gender regimes effectively prevent Afghan women from making meaningful contributions to rural household economies. As a result, “women’s economic activities” were rarely integrated into broader marketization efforts, even when USAID ramped up the pressure on its implementing partners to better mainstream gender into their alternative development programs.

So far, I have suggested that USAID has made certain Afghans live while simultaneously letting others die. But this framing is insufficient to account for how USAID has sought to secure Afghanistan through development, for it effectively rescripts violence as an unintended consequence of these efforts. In addition to being classed and gendered, USAID’s “will to improve” the condition of Afghan populations was also inherently violent. As Eyal Weizman (2012) cautions, we must always be aware of the stick that hides behind any carrot. Thus, while USAID tends to represent its development interventions in rural Afghanistan as productive, humanitarian, and therapeutic, I conclude that they are nonetheless undergirded by – and have provided a legitimating armature for – more destructive techniques of population management. According to Michel Foucault (2003), the fundamental contradiction of a form of (bio)power that takes as its object “the population” is that it must kill – or at the very least, let die – to make live. In order to secure and improve populations, threats to their survival must be extinguished. As demonstrated by Anderson (2010), Bhungalia (2012), and Gregory (2008a) – amongst others – no form of population management better exemplifies the potential lethality of biopolitics than counterinsurgency. In his exploration of the ways in which the US military attempted to pacify insurgent Baghdad in the mid-2000s, Gregory (2008a) suggests that an interplay between the “sovereign right to kill” and the “calculated administration of the right to life” is inscribed in the workings of counterinsurgency. Similarly, Bhungalia’s (2012, 256) “close analysis of emerging tactics of population control in Gaza” illustrates “neither a ‘pure’ politics of life or death”, but

rather, a “more complex management of the two”, which is “achieved through the modulation of crucial life-sustaining and life-eliminating flows into and out of the territory”.

Up until 1973, USAID’s development interventions in the so-called “Third World” were as lethal as they were productive. From 1962 to 1973, to name but one example, USAID provided “Public Safety” assistance to the government of South Vietnam, directly implicating the institution in the torture, administrative detention, and assassination of National Liberation Front insurgents carried out by local police forces (Attewell 2015). This practice was not idiosyncratic to USAID’s involvement in the Vietnam War. Police training, in fact, was a key component of USAID’s development missions to key Cold War client states, including the Philippines and Nicaragua (Kuzmarov 2012; McCoy 2009). USAID was eventually stripped of its police training mandate by the 1973 revisions to the Foreign Assistance Act: the same revisions, incidentally, that ostensibly reoriented USAID towards pro-poor and market-oriented forms of development theory and practice. Following Ben Anderson (2012), it would nonetheless be a mistake to assume that the 1973 revisions to the Foreign Assistance Act had effectively severed USAID’s connections with contemporary ways of abandoning, damaging, and destroying life. From 1973 onwards, it remained commonplace for USAID’s development interventions in Afghanistan to be characterized by an interplay between improvement and violence. In Soviet-occupied Afghanistan, USAID provided operational support to the *mujahideen* resistance through the construction of a transnational logistics network designed to channel much needed development and humanitarian assistance to rural populations. This long and bloody history continues to haunt USAID’s alternative development efforts in post-9/11 Afghanistan, which were meant to serve as a counterbalance to more destructive forms of population management, such as crop eradication and nexus targeting. It is precisely USAID’s simultaneous implication in these broader projects of violence and improvement that I hope to foreground in this dissertation.

## **1.6 The USAID complex**

In order to translate this theoretical framework into an empirical research program, I eschew easy negations of development as a mere smokescreen for discipline, domination, and destruction. Such framings problematically suppress the “interactive” and “improvisational dimensions” of

development “encounters” (Pratt 2008, 8). Following Mary Louise Pratt (2008), I instead argue that USAID’s long-standing effort to secure Afghanistan through comprehensive programs of improvement is best researched from a “contact perspective”. Historically, Afghanistan has served not so much as a “buffer state” as a “contact zone”. While Pratt was writing about different times and places – Latin America and South Africa in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, respectively – she nonetheless offers a complex language through which to explore how USAID’s involvement in the effort to modernize Afghanistan has precipitated an extended and ongoing moment of contact between a diverse constellation of development-security practitioners, on the one hand, and rural Afghan populations, on other. Development in Afghanistan has produced spaces in which “peoples geographically and historically [came] into contact with each other and establish[ed] ongoing relations” (Pratt 2008, 8).

As a result of these encounters, both Americans and Afghans were “constituted in and by their relations to each other” (Pratt 2008, 8). Indeed, rural Afghans regularly responded to rural development interventions in ways that forced USAID and its implementing partners to modulate and rethink the methodologies, techniques, practices, strategies, and tactics they brought to bear upon the problem of insecurity. While these moments of encounter usually involved “conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict”, the asymmetrical relations of power linking Americans to Afghans were never straightforward, nor rigid. More often than not, the responsibility for carrying out programs of improvement was delegated to certain colonized subjects who previously benefitted from training and capacity building efforts. Like their American counterparts, these Afghans identified numerous deficiencies in the populations they were tasked with improving (Li 2007). As new programmers, their “support [became] technical, a matter of instructing people in the proper practice of politics” (Li 2007, 24-5). In so doing, they shared in the “will to improve”, and by extension, were themselves complicit in the gradual governmentalization of Afghanistan.

In order to explore this ongoing moment of contact, I focus my attention on the complex of actors, discourses, institutions, technologies, infrastructures, policies, programs, ideological statements, and regulatory frameworks that USAID has mobilized to secure the Afghan people from the threats posed by the forces of Cold War communism and contemporary Islamic



extremism. Although USAID has a long history of working with public- and private-sector implementing partners, the division of development labour has become progressively neoliberalized over time. As a result, USAID's programs are now being implemented almost exclusively by a powerful "development-industrial complex"<sup>9</sup> that now handles upwards of more than \$12 billion worth of projects annually (Roberts 2014). In this sense, USAID itself has become nothing more than a glorified "distribution channel" for development capital (Roberts 2014, 6).

Sue Roberts (2014) has recently attempted to map the USAID complex. By combing through audits, contracts, and budgets, Roberts (2014, 15) motions towards some of the ways in which this complex "feeds and is nourished by spatializations" that invoke "far-flung spaces of need and intervention", as well as agglomeration economies and material circulations that are much closer to "home". Although this is important – and incredibly difficult – work, it nonetheless provides us with no sense of what the main players of this development-industrial complex actually *do* on a day-to-day basis.

My own research program historically and geographically extends Roberts' (2014) work through a mixed method approach. I conducted approximately 3 months of research in Washington, D.C. It is important for me to note up front that my research program, for various security reasons, did not take me to Afghanistan. This, in turn, necessarily places confidence limits around the conclusions that I draw from my empirical research. This is not to apologize for the research that I did conduct. Rather, it is merely to acknowledge that my analysis of USAID's rural development interventions in Afghanistan will always be somewhat distanced and disembodied.

Although my wide-angle view from the metropolis prevents me from fully recovering the thoughts and motives of the real people who activated – and disrupted – USAID's development programs in rural Afghanistan, it nonetheless enables me to make other, no less powerful claims about imperialism as lived practice. In his 2013 study of the Central Intelligence Agency's "landscapes of denial", Andrew Friedman opines that the study of the material and cultural

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<sup>9</sup> Following Nick Turse (2008), I henceforth use the term "complex" or "USAID complex" as a shorthand for this agglomeration of political-economic power.

spaces that give American empire its concrete form – such as “the fields of development and destruction caused by US counterinsurgency and modernization campaigns” – remained “dispersed”. While scholars had “forcefully described the varied and underappreciated ways that the United States most certainly claimed space at home and abroad – if not always directly ruled it – as a significant feature of its empire”, such lines of inquiry had tended not to understand themselves as a field (Friedman 2013, 13). Friedman (2013, 13), in contrast, stressed the necessity of “pursuing it as one”: “not only for the intimate and ingrained qualities of US imperial relations revealed through its inhabited settings around the world, but for the ways material spaces testify to the nature and endurance of US imperialism through time, a record of effects that tends to vanish within the single moment of imperial warfare, violence, or occupation that conventionally organizes so much of the study of US intervention abroad”.

In order to better understand the “stretched out and sequential connections” that have historically linked USAID to the “fields of development caused by US counterinsurgency and modernization campaigns” conducted in rural Afghanistan, I combined semi-structured interviews<sup>10</sup> with a close reading of what I describe elsewhere as an “archive of the colonial present” (Attewell et al. 2012). My research program brought me face to face with the civilian and military professionals who, at one point in their career, had worked for – or with – the USAID complex in post-9/11 Afghanistan. These professionals do not occupy elite positions of power within the broader American national security apparatus. Rather, they are generally employed as middling and highly mobile “trustees” – in the sense described by Li (2007) – who forge, implement, and refine their “practices of expertise” while circulating throughout a “vast web of Empire” that stretches from Washington DC and its suburbs – Bethesda, Fairfax, Arlington, Alexandria – all the way to the foreign guesthouses and field sites that dot the countryside of rural Afghanistan. As Li (2007) notes, these are ambivalent figures: enthusiastic practitioners of development-security who nonetheless remain capable of critically reflecting on their experiences in the field. Following Ananya Roy’s (2012) injunction to render the familiar strange, I critically engage these ambivalent figures, appreciating both the breadth and the depth of their mundane forms of expert knowledge, as well as the sincerity of their desire to make Afghanistan better than it is, all the while refusing to take what they say at face value (Li 2007). In so doing, I illuminate the

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<sup>10</sup> Throughout my dissertation, I cite these interviews not only by year, but also by month and date as well.

forms of power and knowledge through which they are constituted, as well as the ways in which they navigate a “complex terrain of complicity and resistance” in order to produce multi-scalar spaces of development-security work (Roy 2012, 37).

I conducted 15 semi-structured interviews with these actors. I established contact with these key informants through a combination of cold-calling and snowballing. Each interview lasted a minimum of one hour and was conducted in a variety of settings: the cafeteria of the Ronald Reagan Building, suburban office complexes, local cafes, and participants’ homes. Given my small sample size, these interviews were not meant to provide a comprehensive account of USAID’s development mission to post-9/11 Afghanistan. Instead, they helped shine a spotlight on the ways in which particular members of the USAID complex attempted to secure Afghanistan through development in specific times and places. Whenever possible, I encouraged my key informants to speak at length on USAID’s embroilment in the Afghan counternarcotics campaign. Not only did these interviews provide me with new insights into the workings of the USAID complex in Afghanistan, they also surprised me as an invaluable source of industry gossip.

I supplement these primary sources with close readings of four different “archives of the colonial present” (Attewell et al. 2012). The first archive is made up of documents that can be broadly be described as journalistic. It includes newspaper articles, blog posts, leaked documents, memoirs, and oral histories. I constructed this archive of documents over the course of my doctoral program. On a regular basis, I combed through various sources, such as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Guardian*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *Registan*, *Danger Room*, and the *Afghan Analysts Network*. I then identified relevant sources and sorted them into various Word documents, organized by subject. Finally, I analyzed, coded, and annotated these documents in order to extract points of relevance to my chosen case studies.

Academics have long been critical of the ways in which journalistic sources have been used for social science research. Ortiz et al (2005), for instance, argues that journalistic sources often do not meet “acceptable standards” for event analysis. If they are used improperly, they can “distort findings and misguide theorizing”. While I am sympathetic with Ortiz et al.’s (2005) concerns,

my dissertation instead approaches journalistic sources with a “humble understanding that, although not without its flaws, it remains a useful data source” (Earl et al. 2004). As I argue elsewhere, journalistic sources have an important role to play in radical critiques of the colonial present. This is not to represent newspaper articles, blog posts, or leaked documents as objective sources that furnish researchers with unfiltered access to the “real world”. Nor is it to suggest that they can stand in for peer-reviewed academic sources. Rather, it is merely to argue that the current model of academic publishing is, by its very nature, ill-suited to keeping up with an empirical context as volatile as occupied Afghanistan. By the time an article or a monograph appears in print, its empirical data is almost immediately out of date. Journalistic sources can help fill these empirical gaps in our theoretical narratives by documenting the banal and humdrum materialities of contemporary military violence and occupation, almost in real-time.

The second archive is largely composed of the various reports, fact sheets, audits, and evaluations that are produced by members of the USAID complex. USAID’s development programming is not simply conceived in Washington, D.C., and then implemented in rural Afghanistan. Rather, the continued functioning of the USAID complex can only be assured if rural Afghanistan can somehow be *brought back* to Washington, DC. To this end, USAID’s implementing partners are constantly subjecting their work in the Afghan countryside to a “series a discontinuous transformations” that aim to reduce its locality, its materiality, its multiplicity, and its continuity while simultaneously amplifying its compatibility, its standardization, its textuality, its calculability, and its relative universality (Latour 1999, 70). Drawing inspiration from the work of Bruno Latour, I argue that USAID’s implementing partners secure this discursive double movement by producing a chain of “circulating references”. According to Latour (1999, 67), these are “strange transversal objects” – photographs and videos, transcripts and field notes, samples and specimens, metrics and indices, surveys and questionnaires, etc. – that, at each stage in a “purification” process, successively reduce *and* amplify the “original situation” without ever being able to substitute completely *for* it. In the Afghan context, this is a process that results in the production of reports, audits, or memos: documents that will then circulate back to Washington, DC, where they will help shape future rounds of rural development programming. Generally, these “circulating references” are made available through USAID’s in-house archive, the “Document Experience Clearinghouse”. Like my semi-structured

interviews, they provide a partial and provisional sense of what the USAID complex does on a day-to-day basis.

Given their provenance, it would also be a mistake to accept the narratives spun by these “circulating references” at face value. My third archive, therefore, is designed to help me cross-check the data that I glean from both these documents, as well as my interviews. It draws from a series of research databases such as the “Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit”, which serves as a repository for a number of quasi-academic reports, penned by commentators who, for the most part, have conducted extensive fieldwork in rural Afghanistan. These reports combine the immediacy of journalistic sources with the theoretical and academic rigor of peer-reviewed journal articles. I rely on them to help narrow the confidence intervals of my primary source data.

Finally, in order to better understand how the activities undertaken by the USAID complex are shaped by – yet also shape – the conduct of full spectrum operations, I assembled and engaged with a fourth archive, consisting of documents that were sourced from the US military. These documents can largely be sorted into two general categories. One subsection of this broader archive contains key pieces of US military doctrine, including the revised field manuals on stability operations (3-07) and counterinsurgency (3-24), Department of Defense Directives pertaining to stabilization activities, progress reports, and strategy guidelines. I read these selections of doctrine alongside first-hand accounts of military operations that have either been published on platforms such as the *Small Wars Journal*, in memoirs, or in online databases such as *WikiLeaks*’ “Afghan War Logs”. Taken together, this archive will help me properly situate USAID’s development mission to Afghanistan in relation to the broader context of stabilization and counterinsurgency work that has been undertaken by the US military in the Central Region.

As both Eyal Weizman (2012, 146) and Simon Reid-Henry (2013, 3) remind us, however, it is incumbent on radical scholars to “counter a tendency to presentism” in much of the literature on liberal war and humanitarianism by “connecting the destruction of the present – the rubble piling before our feet – to a longer and ongoing history of destruction and displacement thus far denied”. Aside from a few notable exceptions, the historiography of USAID remains almost non-

existent (see also Carter 2008; Essex 2013; Kuzmarov 2012). Instead, USAID tends to appear as a fleeting presence in the marginalia of other historical works. In order to attune my dissertation to the myriad ways in which afterlives of colonial pasts are constantly erupting into the lifeworlds of the present, I also conducted careful and targeted archival research at the US National Archives and Records Administration's (NARA) College Park facilities, as well as at the National Security Archive (NSA) located in George Washington University's Gelman Library. At NARA, I worked with in-house archivists to pull boxes of documents from two specific record groups: 286 (the "Records of the Agency for International Development") and 469 (the "Records of the US Foreign Assistance Agencies"). I also combed through the boxes of cables, memorandums, policy documents, and reports archived as part of the NSA's "Agency for International Development (AID) Documents" collection. Finally, I supplemented this analog archival research with documents pulled from online resources, such as USAID's Document Experience Clearinghouse, the Afghanistan Centre at Kabul University, and finally, Richard Scott's "Helmand Valley Archive".

"Genealogy", as Foucault (1977, 139) reminds us, is "gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary", operating on a "field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times". How, then, does one navigate such an uncertain epistemological terrain? Here, I am guided by Ann Laura Stoler (2010, 1), for whom "archival documents serve less as stories for a colonial history than as active, generative substances with histories, as documents with itineraries of their own". Cognisant of the ways in which the very process of archiving often imposes a measure of coherence, as well as a sense of teleology, on what is otherwise a piecemeal and confused documentary record, my own critical approach follows what Laleh Khalili (2012, 6) – drawing inspiration from Foucault – calls the "genealogical historical method". According to Foucault (1977, 76), genealogy's objectives are fourfold. It must "record the singularity of events outside of any monotonous finality"; "it must seek them in the most unpromising places, in what we tend to feel is without history"; "it must be sensitive to their recurrence, not in order to trace the gradual curve of their evolution, but to isolate the difference scenes where they engaged in different roles"; and finally, "genealogy must define even those instances when they are absent, the moment when they remained unrealized". By understanding the "colonial present" not as the "final term of a historical development", but

rather, as a “current [episode] in a series of subjugations”, my genealogy of USAID situates the agency within a broader “hazardous play of dominations” (Foucault 1977, 83). In so doing, I illuminate the archival record as a product of both a “field of [forces]” and a “will to power” (Stoler 2010, 53).

## 1.7 Outline

This dissertation is divided into four empirical chapters. It opens with a genealogical investigation of USAID’s mission to win the Cold War in Afghanistan through development. Chapter 2 turns on USAID’s first attempt to modernize Afghanistan: the (in)famous Helmand Valley Project (HVP). First conceived as a showcase for the transformative potential of heavy engineering, the HVP rapidly acquired a well-deserved reputation for causing more development problems than it was solving. In an attempt to rectify this state of affairs, USAID and its predecessor institutions reconfigured the HVP along increasingly biopolitical lines. As a result of this process, USAID gradually realized that change in the Helmand-Arghandab Valley would have to be “total, comprising all aspects of life at the same time” (Galloway 1959). The Afghan inhabitants of the Valley would have to be installed with the will and the ambition to work for higher standards of living. Although this reconfiguration of the HVP was never fully realized in practice, the insights that it generated would ultimately go on to inform future rounds of development in Afghanistan.

Chapter 3 explores how USAID practiced development as a form of insurgency in Soviet-occupied Afghanistan. Barred from operating within Afghanistan, USAID supported the *mujahideen* resistance from Pakistan by channeling humanitarian – and later, development – assistance to its civilian representatives. Although this cross-border assistance program was initially designed to provide the *mujahideen* “fish” with a “sea to swim in”, it was eventually retooled into a more long-term effort to develop rural Afghanistan from a distance. This cross-border rural development effort was riven by an internal tension. It represented USAID’s first attempt at grafting more neoliberal – or perhaps more accurately, neoclassical – elements of governmentality on to the “total” approach to rural development that had been characteristic of the HVP. Once again, however, these shifts in rural development practice remained partial and

contested. Confronted by a looming food security crisis, USAID was ultimately forced to put its plans to marketize rural Afghanistan on hold. At the time, it was widely assumed that these initiatives had received “less than full support” from USAID. Accordingly, many in the professional development community began to question USAID’s ability to effectively superintend the “roll-out” of neoliberalism to the (post)colony.

The final two chapters connect this long history of development and improvement to USAID’s ongoing alternative development efforts to wean Afghan farmers off of poppy cultivation. Over the course of these chapters, I will compare and contrast a number of different alternative development programs that were implemented by the USAID complex in Afghanistan’s southern and north-eastern regions.

Chapter 4 focuses on the so-called “stabilization” model of alternative development programming that became hegemonic in the southern provinces of Helmand and Kandahar between 2009 and 2013. The USAID complex was tasked with stabilizing areas that had recently been cleared by coalition and International Security Assistance Forces through the implementation of quick-impact crop substitution programs. While these “stabilization” forms of alternative development programming were initially represented as success stories, their unintended consequence was to dispossess many land-poor Helmandis – specifically, sharecroppers and tenants – of their precarious access to the means of subsistence. These land-poor Helmandis, in turn, were displaced into the more remote desert regions of the province, where they began to monocrop opium poppy in an attempt to eke out a subsistence living. Through an exploration of this case study, I will consider whether the “stabilization” model of alternative development can be understood as a form of “primitive accumulation” in the sense envisioned by Karl Marx (1976).

Chapter 5 interrogates the “rural development” model of alternative livelihoods that came to the fore in the north-eastern region of Afghanistan. In contrast with the alternative development programs analyzed in chapter 4, the “rural development” model championed more long-term interventions that were designed to establish an “enabling environment” for licit, market-based forms of agricultural production and exchange. In this sense, they functioned as what Michel



Foucault (2008) describes as “environmental-type interventions”. But while these “rural development” forms of alternative livelihood programming made certain segments of the rural population in north-eastern Afghanistan live, they also let others die: specifically, those who were already disadvantaged by virtue of their gender and their geographical location. Finally, although these “rural development” forms of alternative livelihoods programming are often represented as more humanitarian, and therapeutic than USAID’s counternarcotics efforts in southern Afghanistan, I argue that they were also marked by an interplay between improvement and violence.

The concluding chapter reflects on the contributions that this dissertation has made to the study of the development-security nexus. Overall, my dissertation shows that the precarious ligatures linking development and security in the Afghan countryside are rapidly coming undone. In contrast with theorizations of the development-security nexus as a totalizing and all-encompassing spatial form of (bio)power, my dissertation suggests that it is constantly on the verge of being disassembled into its constitutive “multiplicity of poorly articulated – even contradictory – projects and spaces” (Coleman and Grove 2009). My dissertation, therefore, complicates established narratives about how biopower is exercised in the global borderlands.

## 2 “Exploding out into the open...”<sup>11</sup>

“One thing I can say is that that the Americans working and associating with this people conducted themselves in such a manner that will make all future visitors welcome to Afghanistan. And due especially to the King’s efforts, this once remote country is taking its place amongst the most responsible nations of Asia”.

- Glenn Foster (Whitlock 2014)

“We enjoy particularly good relationships with our Afghan friends in the Helmand Valley”.

- Howard Lockwood, 1961

“The personal letters of Carl Kohler, Technical Advisor to the Helmand Valley Authority, if compiled, should be entitled, ‘Frustration’”.

- Weston Drake, 1958

### 2.1 The happiest of times

On 5 July, 1962, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) invited the “combined American community” of Kandahar to “come out and enjoy [themselves]” at a “Fourth of July Celebration” in Mansil Bagh Park. Represented by Marvin Green (1962), the Acting Assistant Area Executive Officer for USAID/Kandahar, as a “long overdue” opportunity to get the community “together in mind and purpose” while simultaneously cementing its relations with local Afghans, the festivities began at 8:00 in the morning and lasted until 6:00 in the evening. According to a program drawn up for the event, American and Afghan revelers partook in a variety of activities, including ball games, sack races, a potato push, a pie eating contest, a dizzy relay, and tonga cart rides, to name only a few examples (Green 1962).

Archival documents like this one, shown in Figure 1, capture a small slice of what life was like for Americans living and working in the Helmand-Arghandab Valley – henceforth, the Valley – during what Monica Whitlock (2014) describes as Afghanistan’s so-called “Golden Age”. This

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<sup>11</sup> (Foster, qtd. in Whitlock 2014)

# P R O G R A M

08:30	Ball Game	(Mr. Jose Bayani)
10:00 - 11:15	Swimming	
11:15	Flag Raising & National Anthem (Mr. Curtis)	
	Ambassador Steeve addresses the group if he wishes to do so.	
11:30 - 13:00	Lunch	
13:00	Sack races	(Mr. John Givens)
	First group - age 5 years - 8 years	
	Second " - " 9 " 12 "	
	Third " - Men	
	Fourth " - Women	
14:00	Water Show	(Mrs. Hibbett)
14:30	Greased Pole Contest	(Mr. Jim Alsbaugh)
15:00	Dizzy Relay	(Mr. Ed Whelan)
15:30	Thres-legged race	(Mrs. Reilly)
	Age group - 5 thru 8 years	
	- 9 " 12 "	
	- Adults	
16:00	Pie Eating Contest	(Mr. Ed Whelan)
	Age group - 12 years and under	
	- Adults	
16:30	Potato Push	
17:00	Races	
	50 Yards dash- 5 thru 8 years	
	50 -do- - 9 " 14 "	
	50 -do- - Women	
	1000 -do- - Men	
17:15	Sponge Relay	(Mrs. McMillan)
17:30	Nuts and Bolt Contest	(Mr. Pacifico)
	Nail Pounding Contest	
17:45 - 18:00	Group Singing	

Bingo games will be held through the afternoon. Cards will cost 10 afghanis for each game. Winner take all.

Tonga cart will be available for rides all afternoon.

We will try to show Movies in the Palace during the afternoon.

\*\*\*\*\* 108 \*\*\*\*\*

Figure 1: Program, "Fourth of July Celebration" (Green 1962)

was a time, Whitlock argues, when Afghanistan “faced the future with confidence”: a “hopeful moment” in Afghan history that has been “all but forgotten” in the intervening decades since the early 1960s. This amnesia, however, is gradually giving way to new forms of nostalgia, thanks in part to the recent re-discovery of some silent films that were shot and produced by a young American engineer, Glenn Foster.

Employed by the legendary American construction and heavy engineering company, Morrison-Knudsen, Foster lived and worked in southern Afghanistan – specifically, in both Kandahar and Helmand provinces – for seven years. During his time in Afghanistan, Foster used a 16mm camera to film scenes of “Afghan life and landscapes, of engineering projects, of Christmas parties in the American community”. Most of Foster’s films take place in and around Mansil Bagh, a former royal palace in Kandahar that the Afghan king, Zahir Shah, had bequeathed to Morrison-Knudsen to use both as an administrative center and as a residential compound. What Foster captured on film was not some exotic Oriental landscape, but rather, one dotted by “modern American-built houses, with lawns, low fences, and front gardens” (Whitlock 2014). The viewer, Whitlock (2014) writes, is taken right inside this faithful reproduction of American suburbia, and immersed in its “lively details”: large drinks, endless cigarettes, Christmas dinners, swimming parties, beauty pageants, egg-and-spoon races, and pie-eating contests.

These were not spaces exclusively inhabited by American expatriates. Over the course of the Cold War, approximately one million Afghans were lured to the Valley by the prospects of good jobs, schools, and land. These migrants gravitated to the “Little Americas” of southern Afghanistan, such as Mansil Bagh or Lashkar Gah, the new capital of Helmand province. Through Foster’s lens, “we meet Americans and Afghans sharing the same space with amusement and curiosity – comfortable with one another and working side-by-side” (Whitlock 2014). As Saeeda Mahmood, the daughter of an Afghan civil servant who also ran the local cinema in Lashkar Gah, reminisces, these were the happiest of times:

“We grew up all together. No one said, you are this, and we are that. Some of our neighbours were Americans. We used to invite them at Eid, they’d invite us for their parties. I remember Santa Claus would come, on a donkey, bringing us all presents” (Whitlock 2014)

Drawing inspiration from Mary Louise Pratt (2008), one might argue that these archival materials illuminate the ways in which spaces such as Mansil Bagh or Lashkar Gah served as contact zones where two distinct cultures met, clashed, and wrestled with one another. Although Afghanistan was never officially colonized by the United States during the Cold War, the story of the Valley is nonetheless best understood from a “contact perspective” that pays close attention to the asymmetrical interactions between Americans and Afghans, and the hybrid understandings and practices that emerged out of such relationships (Pratt 2008). In spaces such as Mansil Bagh or Lashkar Gah, young Afghans like Saeeda came into contact with a certain, liberal instantiation of American culture, and absorbed a number of its key tropes and elements. Educated, ambitious, and relatively progressive, they flicker in and out of Foster’s film footage, dressed not in *burqas* and *shalwar kameezes*, but in flower-print dresses, high heels, and letterman jackets. According to Foster, they were even known to enjoy a competitive game of baseball or tug ‘o war: both of which were American imports to southern Afghanistan.

The Americans, however, brought something else with them to southern Afghanistan: the promise of development. Through their interactions with their new American neighbours, colleagues, advisors, and employers, the Afghan inhabitants of the Valley gradually became “aware that there is a better way of life beyond their borders and they [wanted] some of these things” (Foster, qtd. in Whitlock 2014). Having connected the Afghan people to life possibilities “never before contemplated”, the task of Americans working in contact zones such as Mansil Bagh and Lashkar Gah was to reorganize the “conditions – or ecology – of [Afghan] life for its own betterment” (Gidwani 2008, 70). As James Michener (1963) put it, the United States would help the Afghan people modify their land to its limits, while remaining free.

In this chapter, I illuminate the spatial dimensions of the United States’ Cold War mission to improve Afghanistan. According to a report commissioned by USAID in 1988, Cold War Afghanistan “provides a [uniquely valuable] case study in the application of development assistance theory and practice” (Williams et al. 1988, 1). The report shows that from 1955 to 1979, approximately \$600 million – a “very large level of aid” at the time – was provided to Afghanistan, “a relatively small country which was at an early stage of development”. Afghanistan, as a result, became one of the highest per capita recipients of American foreign

assistance during the Cold War, a significant proportion of which was channeled into one flagship project. This was the Helmand Valley Project (HVP): an ambitious effort to reclaim and resettle a large, arid swath of territory in southern Afghanistan (see Figure 2). Through the HVP, water – and, by extension, life – would be provided to the people of southern Afghanistan.

The HVP occupies a special place within USAID’s own genealogical imagination as one of the largest and most (in)famous of its integrated rural development projects. Although this “pioneering endeavour” has “been the subject of a library full of assessments, evaluations, and audits”, until very recently, its rich, “strange” history seems to have been “forgotten” by academic and mainstream commentators alike (Baldwin and Clapp-Wincek 1983; Curtis 2009). The imperative to situate the post-9/11 invasion and occupation of Afghanistan in its proper historical context, however, has led scholars such as Cullather (2002, 2010) to rediscover the HVP as a particularly formative moment in US-Afghan relations.

Building on this nascent historiography, I show how the HVP served USAID and its predecessor institutions as a crucible of rural development. My argument proceeds in four broad steps. First, I will critically review the emerging body of literature that explores the historical geographies of development in Cold War Afghanistan. The consensus of this literature is that American modernizers framed many of the development problems confronting ordinary Afghans in narrowly technical terms. In this narrative, USAID appears as an “anti-politics machine”, incapable of either addressing the basic felt needs of local populations or properly diagnosing the underlying political-economic or socio-cultural drivers of development problems. While this imaginative theoretical framework usefully illuminates many of the discursive self-deceptions that were necessary to ensure the continued existence of the HVP, it pays less attention to the quotidian ways in which development was actually practiced in Cold War Afghanistan.

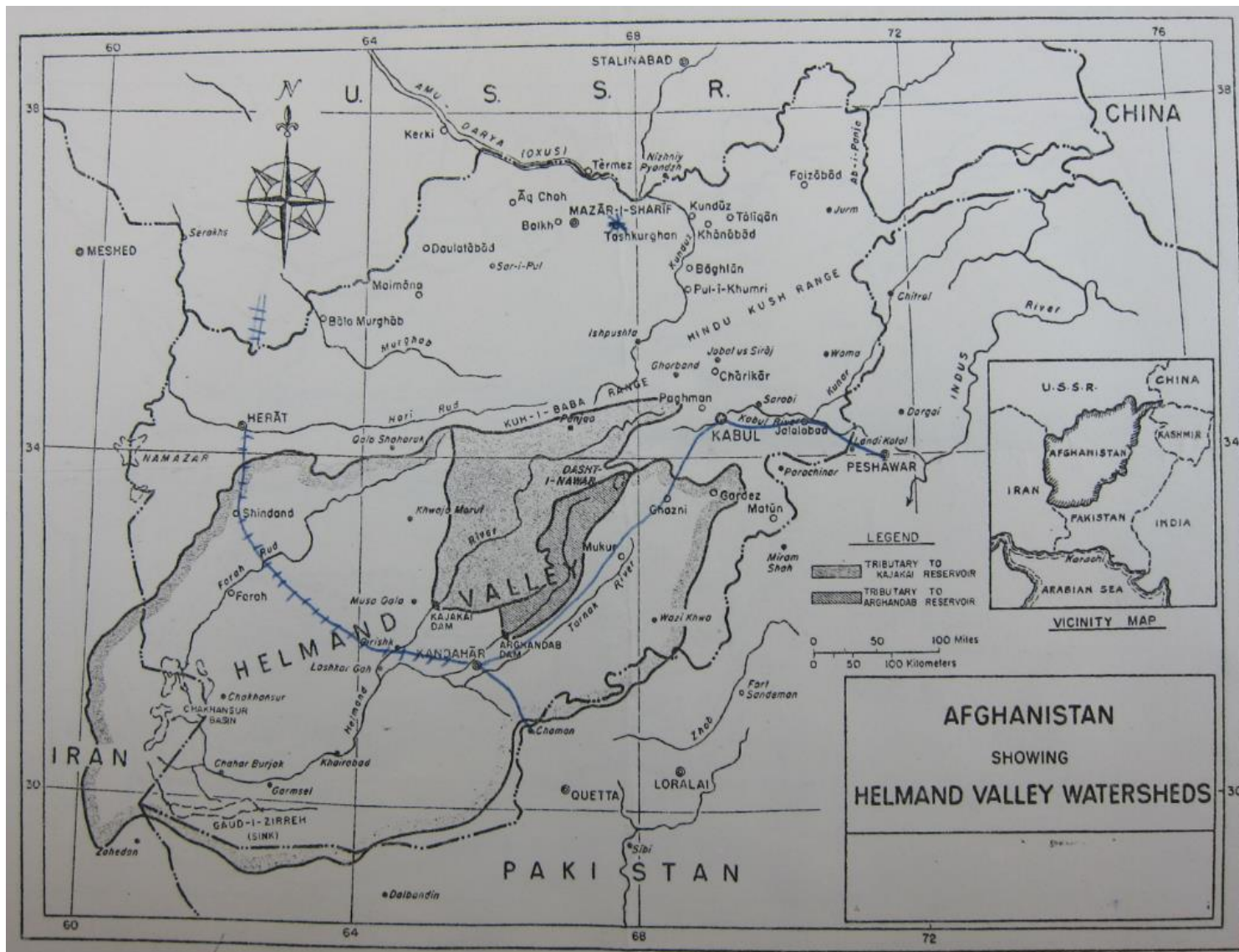


Figure 2: Map of the Helmand Valley Watersheds (Schwartz 1960)



In contrast, I theorize the HVP as an improvised constellation of space-making practices. Conceived from the outset as a showcase for the transformative potential of anti-communist modernization theory, the HVP's obsession with heavy engineering began to cause more development problems than it was solving. In order to stave off total mission failure, American advisors had to do two things. No longer able to rely upon the reserves of foreign exchange that the Afghan government had accumulated during the Second World War, HVP advisors were forced to secure additional funding from the American government. As a result of this process, the HVP was enrolled into a broader "world-building alliance" whose primary task was to wage a developmental Cold War against the forces of global communism (Barnes and Farish 2006, 809). From this point forward, broader geostrategic calculations would drive development-security praxis in the Valley.

Furthermore, the HVP was gradually reconfigured along biopolitical lines. This shift in approach was a partial and contested process that emerged out of a series of tense negotiations between a succession of American implementing institutions, their Afghan counterparts, and the intended beneficiaries of HVP programming. Initially, USAID framed the traditional agricultural practices of local farmers as the real constraint to development in southern Afghanistan. Accordingly, USAID established spaces – such as agricultural training centres or demonstration farms – where farmers were introduced to modern best practices, inputs, and technologies. USAID, however, quickly realized that it was not enough to simply "extend" agricultural assistance to Afghan farmers. Rather, change in the Valley had to be "total", comprising "all aspects of life at the same time" (Galloway 1959, 14).

This "total" approach to rural development was exemplified by the Shamalan Land Development Project (SLDP). Implemented from between 1967 to 1973, the SLDP was an attempt to upscale the "demonstration farm" concept to the village level. It combined a complete re-engineering of the biophysical landscape with a comprehensive capacity building effort. The SLDP, however, failed to consider the needs and desires of the "mass of the people", spurring them to resist, and ultimately, derail the project.



Finally, I show how the failures of the SLDP worked in conjunction with broader sea changes in development theory to ensure that any future attempt to develop the Valley would engage with the basic needs of rural populations. The HVP, in other words, was to function more as a “desiring” than an “anti-politics” machine (Gidwani 2008, 73). This is a shift in approach that continues to haunt USAID’s ongoing efforts to develop Afghanistan in the humanitarian present.

## **2.2 The HVP as machine**

Recent work in geography has shown how water, in its very materiality, is highly political, in the sense that it often figures centrally in – and even exerts a substantive influence over – struggles for power and authority (Bakker 2012; Sneddon 2012, 2015; Sneddon and Fox 2011). Given that water is a necessary prerequisite to the flourishing of both human and non-human life, it is invariably subjected to schemes that seek to control how it is distributed over space and through time.

Throughout history, the implementers of such schemes have generally understood modern technology as the key to harnessing and redirecting the productive power of capricious hydrological systems. Irrigation technologies, in particular, played an important role in forging linkages between space and state (Prakash 1999). In British India, for instance, the colonial administration rapidly realized that it would have to assume full responsibility for repairing, maintaining, and constructing irrigation infrastructure, in large part to secure the fiscal resources necessary to ensure its political health. These efforts formed part and parcel of a broader attempt to lay down an interlocking grid of public works throughout British India, the purpose of which was to transform it into a “unified, secure, and productive colony” (Prakash 1999, 161). As Gyan Prakash (1999, 163) argues, many of the irrigation and canal projects undertaken by the colonial administration in the 1850s were explicitly designed to “engineer a stable, prosperous, and loyal political and social order through technical means”.

As the 19<sup>th</sup> century transitioned into the 20<sup>th</sup>, the notion that irrigation projects had an important role to play in the technological reorganization of rural societies became even more entrenched amongst successive generations of reformers. This claim is exemplified by the rapid proliferation

of river basin development projects throughout the so-called “developing world” during the Cold War (Sneddon and Fox 2011). According to Sneddon and Fox (2011), while Cold War river basin development programs were often represented as purely technical exercises, they were nonetheless “rife with geopolitical calculations”. As Sneddon (2012, 3) writes, the global geopolitical imaginations of the American national security state played a central role in “identifying regions and resources suitable for programs of technological intervention”, creating new geographies of development in the process (Sneddon and Fox 2011, 452). Under these overarching conditions of heightened geopolitical tension, the resulting river basin development projects were enrolled in the global effort to contain the expanding influence of the Soviet Union in the so-called “developing world”.

While an examination of the interconnections between Cold War geopolitics and economic development can help explain why river basin development came to be perceived as a crucial “weapon” in the global Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, it is less helpful in elucidating how reclamation was actually practiced in the hum-drum materialities of contact zones such as southern Afghanistan (Sneddon and Fox 2011, 451). Such questions, in contrast, figure prominently in the emerging literature on the HVP. According to historians of the HVP such as Nick Cullather (2002, 2010), it functioned very much as an “anti-politics machine”.

The “anti-politics machine” concept emerges out of James Ferguson’s (1990) seminal exploration of the “development industry” in Lesotho. Ferguson (1990, 256) noticed that under no circumstances does the development industry in Lesotho allow its role to be “formulated as a political one”. As Ferguson (1990, 256) writes:

“By uncompromisingly reducing poverty to a technical problem, and by promising technical solutions to the sufferings of powerless and oppressed people, the hegemonic problematic of ‘development’ is the principal means through which the question of poverty is de-politicized in the world today. At the same time, by making the international blueprints for ‘development’ so highly visible, a ‘development’ project can end up performing extremely sensitive political operations involving the entrenchment and expansion of institutional state power almost

invisibly, under cover of a neutral, technical mission to which no one can object”.

In Ferguson’s (1990) view, the development apparatus in Lesotho was not unique in its ability to seemingly de-politicize the thorny question of poverty. Indeed, he tentatively suggests that it might be possible to show elsewhere that “technical ‘development’ interventions ostensibly organized around such things as agricultural production, livestock, soil erosion, water supply, etc., have in fact often had ‘instrument effects’ that would be systematically intelligible as part of a two-sided process of depoliticization and expansion of bureaucratic state control” (Ferguson 1990, 267).

In the intervening decades, scholars have answered Ferguson’s concluding call for more robust comparative research by bringing the anti-politics machine concept to bear upon different historical and geographical contexts (see Li 2007; Mitchell 2002). It has proved especially useful to scholars grappling with the legacy of the HVP. Cullather (2002, 524), for instance, argues that American advisors dispatched to the Valley worked hard to subordinate “complex social and political problems within the more manageable engineering problem of overcoming the water constraint”. “Resolution”, as Cullather (2002, 524) writes, “became a matter of apportioning cubic yards of water and kilowatt-hours of energy” through construction schemes and technical assistance programs.

Cullather (2002) is indispensable for showing how such an anti-politics of development played a key role in planning, sustaining, and eventually, dooming the HVP. In this chapter, I productively extend his research by complicating his discussions of the anti-political dimensions of the HVP in two ways. First, I draw attention to the enormous amount of work that goes into rendering something technical. If Prakash (1999, 160) is correct to theorize technology as “not only the instrument, but also the substance of state power”, then it follows that an intervention like the HVP also doubled as an arena of contestation and struggle. Following Prakash (1999), to claim the capacity to reconfigure space through technology was to simultaneously demand a stake in the affairs of the state. Indeed, my empirical research reveals that the HVP was shot through with dissensus. As I show later on in this chapter, the very act of “rendering technical” was a considerable political achievement, invariably the end-result of a difficult and drawn-out

process of negotiation and contestation. As the HVP ran its course, it became increasingly difficult for all parties involved to reach any sort of consensus on the best course of developmental action. Tensions, in particular, came to a head over the Afghan reluctance to plan rural development programs in the careful and methodical ways demanded by their American counterparts.

Furthermore, as Vinay Gidwani (2008, 87) reminds us in his analysis of rural development interventions in Gujarat, every plan “needs a machinery to realize itself”. While the “anti-politics machine” concept is useful for exploring how complex problems were rendered amenable to planning, it is less well suited to understanding how American and Afghan modernizers translated the resulting schematics and blueprints into concrete development activities and interventions. Following Gidwani (2008, 70), these plans, more often than not, entailed putting into relation “parts” – rural Afghans, American technicians, government officials, modern irrigation technology, and agricultural organisms – that had previously been separate. The HVP attempted to forge these connections by distributing its technicians and trustees territorially throughout the countryside of southern Afghanistan. Through these interactions with the HVP, rural Afghans would be introduced to – and encouraged to desire – “life functionings” that would otherwise be impossible to achieve in the “absence of connection”. While this approach was meant to make the prospect of a better life a “visible possibility” for rural Afghans and not merely a “fleeting abstraction”, it also had the unintended consequence of generating further opportunities for conflict and disagreement (Gidwani 2008, 74). When the time came to implement rural development programs in the field, American and Afghan modernizers found themselves confronted not by “productive” or “abstract” units who could be counted on to behave in certain predictable ways, but rather, by autonomous political subjects with needs, desires, and expectations that had to be fulfilled – or shaped – in order to ensure success (Cullather 2002).

Cullather (2002, 532) argues that over the 42-year history of the HVP, development in southern Afghanistan fundamentally remained “a problem of scarcity”: first, of water and power, and later, of organization, talent, and mentality. What my research shows is that from the mid-1950s onwards, the HVP was not only commanded by the problem of scarcity, but also became

increasingly preoccupied with conducting the conduct of rural Afghans. It operated as a particularly Keynesian form of governmental power, concerned above all with securing the “welfare of the population, the improvement of its condition, [and] the increase of its wealth, longevity, health, etc.” (Foucault 2007, 141). Under the sign of the HVP, rural Afghans were asked to modulate their behaviour in two concrete ways: first, by adopting modern agricultural technologies, inputs, and techniques; and second, by embracing a nascent biopolitics of “self-help”. Here, improvements in the life-chances of the Afghan people were assumed to go hand in hand with sea changes in their overall “mental outlook” (Haq 1959, 1).

The power of the HVP, therefore, did not lie exclusively in its admittedly unparalleled ability to continuously “evacuate the political from the stage” (Gidwani 2008, 89). Rather, the HVP also functioned as what Gidwani (2008, 129) describes as a “desiring machine”, unleashing a “multiplicity of forces to reassemble matter in space and summon particular sorts of ‘conducts’ from human and nonhuman actors”. The HVP, to be sure, was not always successful at enticing rural Afghans to do – and desire – as they ought. As Gidwani (2008, 136) cautions, the relationships that make up any given development machine can always “conjugate and multiply into new flows that undercut” such configurations of power, practice, and knowledge. This is something that USAID experienced first-hand, when its attempt to re-engineer the Valley in its totality was resisted – and ultimately derailed – first by agro-ecological processes, and second, by the “masses of the people”.

As the next sections of this chapter will show, however, it was precisely this long history of failure that led Afghan desires to become an increasingly important driver of rural development in the Valley. This is not to suggest that the anti-political functions of the HVP were somehow eclipsed by biopolitical ones. Rather, it is merely to theorize the HVP as a complex and anxious amalgamation of contradictory logics, sutured together and given concrete form through spatial forms of rural development practice. In what follows, I explore how early efforts to reclaim the Valley through heavy engineering schemes resulted in the waterlogging and salinization of prime agricultural lands. I argue that the HVP’s eventual adoption of increasingly governmental forms of development practice was spurred largely by the need to formulate an effective response to these mounting problems.

### 2.3 “Time and science are changing the world”<sup>12</sup>

Although Lloyd Baron (1973, 5) notes “evidence of a long history of agricultural production” in the Valley, he nonetheless traces its transformation into an object of modern development back to the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Between 1910 and 1914, Governor Osman of Kandahar province began to resurrect the traditional canal – or *karezze* – system that had once supplied copious amounts of irrigation water to this former “bread basket” region of Central Asia (Williams et al. 1988, 78). These efforts were eventually supplemented throughout the 1930s by German and Japanese engineers, who were hired to repair and improve the original hand dug canals (Baron 1973, 7-8).

Although this work was interrupted in 1942, when an Allied ultimatum forced all Axis personnel to leave the country, the Second World War proved to be a blessing in disguise. The war furnished Afghanistan with profitable export markets for certain key commodities. Not only were Afghan farmers called upon to provision the Allied armies in India, rural shepherds also benefited from a wartime explosion in the demand for Afghan karakul<sup>13</sup> pelts. According to Cullather (2002), the war had devastated the traditional European demand centers for karakul pelts, enabling New York to reposition itself as the global hub of the fur industry. Cut off from their traditional suppliers by Axis submarines, New York furriers began to source karakul primarily from Afghan exporters, purchasing nearly two and a half million pelts a year.

Afghanistan’s enrollment in these lucrative circuits of wartime exchange enabled its government to accumulate a reserve of foreign exchange valued at approximately \$100 million. Key government officials such as then Prime Minister Mohammad Daoud felt that this money was best spent tackling the problem of underdevelopment, lest Afghanistan “die as a nation” (Dupree 1959). To this end, the Afghan government devised a plan to bring modern irrigation infrastructures to the Girishk, Nad-i-Ali, and Marja districts of the Valley (Baron 1973; see Figure 2). Cognizant that local engineers possessed neither the expertise nor the heavy equipment necessary to implement this plan, the Afghan government turned to the United States

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<sup>12</sup> Text of a poem written by Mahmud Tarzhi, Chief of Afghanistan Bureau of Translation in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>13</sup> Karakul are a highly prized variety of sheep native to Central Asia.

for aid (Dupree 1959). Trained in the West, many members of Afghanistan's Royal Family not only adopted Western ideas as their own, but also felt a deep sense of kinship with their "American friends" (Dupree 1959). King Mohammad Zahir Shah, for instance, felt that "America and Afghanistan, with their pride of independence, and their belief in the dignity of the individual, have always been close spiritual cousins" (Dupree 1963, 4).

In 1946, the Afghan government hired the largest American heavy engineering firm, Morrison-Knudsen, to oversee the reclamation of the Valley. At the time, Morrison-Knudsen was most well-known for being one of the eight companies<sup>14</sup> that built the Hoover Dam. The Dam played an instrumental role in transforming the "unpeopled, forbidding" desert of California's Imperial Valley into what President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1935) described as a "twentieth century marvel". Indeed, for Roosevelt, the Dam did more than merely regulate the Colorado River. As he put it on 30 September, 1935, the Dam was symbolic of his "New Deal":

"In a little over two years, this great national work has accomplished much. We have helped mankind by the works themselves and, at the same time, we have created the necessary purchasing power to throw in the clutch to start the wheels of what we call private industry. Such expenditures on all of these works, great and small, flow out to many beneficiaries; they revive other and more remote industries and businesses. Money is put in circulation. Credit is expanded and the financial and industrial mechanism of America is stimulated to more and more activity. Labour makes wealth. The use of materials makes wealth. To employ workers and materials when private employment has failed is to translate into great national possessions the energy that otherwise would be wasted."<sup>15</sup>

As I want to show, the HVP was haunted, in a diversity of ways, by this New Deal spirit.

Prior to the outbreak of the Second World War, Morrison-Knudsen's heavy engineering expertise had largely been deployed exclusively within the territorial confines of the continental

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<sup>14</sup> The others were Bechtel, Kaiser, Utah, McDonald & Kahn, J. F. Shea, Pacific Bridge and General Construction: all of whom would go on to be movers and shakers in the American military-industrial complex.

<sup>15</sup> Although the Hoover Dam is often represented as a shining example of what President Roosevelt's labour-friendly "New Deal" policies could achieve, most of the firms involved in its construction – including Morrison-Knudsen – were resolutely anti-union (Linder 1994). According to Glassman (forthcoming), "the firms completed the project by subjecting their poorly paid workers to exorbitantly difficult working conditions, reinforced by militarized repression".

US When America finally entered the conflict in December 1991, the logics of total war meant that strategic firms like Morrison-Knudsen were called upon to serve the US military overseas. Morrison-Knudsen, in particular, was enrolled into “Contractors, Pacific Naval Air Bases”, a consortium that was hired by the US military to build strategic infrastructure in key Pacific Theatre hotspots. These World War II projects established path dependencies that kept the company tethered to the American national security state throughout the Cold War (HBS 2012). While the HVP was the first Cold War project that Morrison-Knudsen was hired to execute in the “Third World”, it would certainly not be the last. Indeed, the Cold War would eventually take Morrison-Knudsen to Sri Lanka, Iran, the Congo, and South Vietnam, to name only a few examples (Carter 2008; Sneddon 2015).

From the outset, the problematic of development in the Helmand Valley was framed in highly technical terms. According to Lloyd Baron (1975, 2), Morrison-Knudsen’s engineers – or, Emkayans, as they were known colloquially – judged “water scarcity” to be the “critical constraint to agricultural surplus generation” in southern Afghanistan. For precisely this reason, irrigation became the “*sine qua non* of agricultural development in Afghanistan”, and, by extension, the “logical priority for the allocation of scarce” reserves of foreign aid capital (Ministry of Planning 1963, 8; Baron 1975, 2). As Baron (1975, 2) put it:

“Since the actual annual run-off [of the Helmand River] far exceeds the annual domestic utilization, the problem appeared simply technical. In order to store the seasonal run-offs, assure an adequate supply, and increase on-farm irrigation efficiency, capital intensive irrigation delivery systems would be necessary to replace the inadequate traditional structures”

Such conclusions were not idiosyncratic, but rather, were very much in line with the development thinking at the time, which “favoured capital formation, primarily for infrastructure, as the best means for moving the stagnant economies and traditional societies of Third World countries towards sustainable economic growth” (Williams et al. 1988, 16). The fact that capital intensive development projects could be planned, implemented, and evaluated in accordance with the economic logics of cost-benefit analyses made them appealing to both aid agencies and prospective beneficiary countries alike. Developing governments were also drawn to these kinds of projects precisely because they promised to bring about modernization without



requiring fundamental changes to the “deeply entrenched” social, political, and cultural structures of target societies (Baron 1975, 9-10).

Normally, Morrison-Knudsen would not have begun to implement any plan that had not been green-lighted by detailed soil, ground water, and drainage surveys. According to Dupree (1973), however, the Afghan government apparently talked Morrison-Knudsen out of doing this crucial preparatory work. As a result, the Emkayans produced flawed engineering designs that failed to account for the biophysical characteristics of land in the Valley. It did not take long for these flaws to become apparent. By April 1948, impromptu surveys of the construction work on the Boghra Canal revealed to Morrison-Knudsen that the soils of Nad-i-Ali, Marja, and the Shamalan were dense and gravelly, and hence, plagued by poor natural drainage. Most of this land would become waterlogged when repeatedly irrigated, pulling salts and alkalis all the way up to the surface through capillary action (Cullather 2002). Because saline and alkaline soils require more irrigation water to maintain acceptable levels of agricultural productivity, drainage problems were only exacerbated over time, eventually resulting in complete desertification.

Unsurprisingly, early rounds of reclamation work were plagued by precisely these problems. The construction of a small diversion dam at the mouth of the Boghra canal, for instance, “raised the water table to within a few inches of the ground”, resulting in a “snowy crust of salt [that] could be seen in areas around the reservoir” (Cullather 2002, 523). As farmers living in nearby Nad-i-Ali discovered – many of whom had been settled “before the character of the soil and conditions affecting irrigation were understood” – the agronomic consequences of soil salinization and alkalization were severe, catalyzing precipitous declines in agricultural productivity (Ministry of Planning 1963).

Although these findings were immediately reported to the Afghan government, their importance was “apparently minimized by one or both parties” (Michel 1959, 153). Morrison-Knudsen remained a fervent believer in the transformative power of “capital formation” and pushed for sub-surface drains to be constructed in all of the affected areas. Morrison-Knudsen also informed the Afghan government that it would not be deepening its commitments to southern Afghanistan “until a thorough survey of the entire valley had been made” (Franck 1954). The Afghan

government, however, saw no need for such costly and time-consuming surveys, arguing that “even a 20 percent margin of error in estimating the acreage or water supply could not detract from the project’s intrinsic value” (Williams et al. 1988; Franck 1954).

This proved to be an incredibly controversial decision, spurring some commentators to criticize the Afghan government for being “guided by political expediency rather than technical merit” (Williams et al. 1988, 80). It is also important to remember, however, that by 1947, the Afghan government no longer possessed the reserves of foreign exchange required to implement Morrison-Knudsen’s new suggestions, surveys notwithstanding. Two years of drought had devastated Afghanistan’s agricultural export economy, while “interruptions of trade across Pakistan cut to 52,000 the number of Karakul lambskins...arriving in New York in 1947, compared with 3,332,000 in 1946” (Franck 1954, 2). This produced a significant trade deficit with the US that had to be balanced by exhausting Afghanistan’s foreign exchange reserves. Unwilling to interrupt its development projects, the Afghan government was forced to secure an outside source of funding in order to retain Morrison-Knudsen as the contractor for the HVP (Franck 1954, 2). This unenviable task was delegated to an Afghan Economic Mission that was sent to Washington, DC, in the fall of 1948, under the leadership of the Minister of National Economy, Abdul Madjid Zabuli Khan.

By dispatching this economic mission to Washington, DC, the Afghan government set in motion a series of processes that would substantively shape future rounds of development in the Valley. As I will show in the next section of this chapter, the Afghan government’s decision to solicit additional funding from the US ensured that the HVP would become enrolled in the machinations of Cold War geopolitics. Rural development in the Valley would no longer be narrowly focused on reclaiming the deserts of southern Afghanistan. Rather, it would also be geared towards securing the Afghan people from the threat of global communism.

## **2.4 The geopolitical-economies of competitive coexistence**

The target of the Afghan Economic Mission was the American Export-Import Bank. The Bank was created by the Roosevelt administration on 2 February, 1934, in response to the “widespread

unemployment and disorganization of society” wrought by the Great Depression (Roosevelt 1934). Its mandate was to “[finance] and to facilitate exports and imports and the exchange of commodities between the United States and other Nations” (Roosevelt 1934).

Initially, the Bank limited itself to assisting domestic exporters. America’s entry into the Second World War, however, inspired the Bank to focus its attention on catalyzing economic development abroad (Patterson 1943). To this end, the Bank offered to fund sound international development projects through long-term loans at “reasonable” interest rates. According to Patterson (1943, 81), these loans were important for two reasons. First, they promised to “have tremendous implications for the future economic and political structure” of beneficiary nations. Second, these loans were meant to serve as a shining example of American benevolence. Not only were these the sort of “reasonable” loans “for which it would be difficult to accuse the US of imperialism”, they were also the “type of aid which private investors could scarcely be expected to make” (Patterson 1943, 79).

Throughout the 1940s, Washington demonstrated an increasing willingness to fund international development efforts (Franck 1954). In 1948, for instance, President Truman had requested that Congress increase the Bank’s lending authority from \$3.5 billion to \$4.0 billion. These new funds were earmarked to help “under-developed countries” fund “well-planned” and “economically justified” state-building projects (Franck 1954, 6). The Afghan Economic Mission, therefore, could not have timed their visit better. Encouraged by this new climate of largesse in Washington, the Afghan Economic Mission hoped to convince the Bank to provide the HVP with a \$55 million loan.

Securing a loan of this magnitude proved more challenging than the Afghan Economic Mission anticipated. When the Mission first made contact with the Bank in October 1948, Afghanistan had not yet been situated on the “checkerboard” of the looming Cold War (Franck 1954, 6). In order to get its foot in the door, the Mission did not have to frame their pitch in geopolitical terms. It did, however, have to justify the HVP as economically sound. A key point of contention proved to be Morrison-Knudsen’s estimates of the HVP’s potential income stream. The Bank also worried that the HVP’s sheer size and scope would eventually prove excessive with respect

to the financial and administrative capacity of the Afghan government. In response to these criticisms, the Emkayans on the Mission represented the HVP as a “necessity beyond price”. The value of the HVP was likened to that of an “operation to a person suffering from acute appendicitis” or “food to a starving man”. Framed thusly as a stark matter of life and death, Morrison-Knudsen argued that the HVP was “therefore properly not to be considered as a subject of economic study” (Franck 1954, 18).

Unconvinced, the Bank flatly rejected the Mission’s original proposal. In November 1949, however, it surprisingly agreed to provide Morrison-Knudsen with a significantly reduced loan of \$21 million (Franck 1954, 34). Not only would this loan cover the costs of completing the existing Kajakai Dam and Boghra Canal projects, it would also enable Morrison-Knudsen to extend the HVP into Kandahar’s Arghandab Valley (see Figure 3). Although the Bank still considered Morrison-Knudsen’s economic justifications for the HVP “exaggerated”, it nonetheless agreed that “the potentialities of the [agricultural] projects appear so great that even if the claimed benefits are discounted substantially, the resulting benefits could still be of a magnitude which would justify the undertaking of these important projects” (Franck 1954, 34). Despite its complaints regarding a general paucity of reliable data on the Valley, the Bank also refused to fund the surveys that Morrison-Knudsen had re-inserted into the Mission’s original proposal. As one commentator argued, this “later proved to be [a] fatal weakness of the project” (Baldwin and Clapp-Wincek 1968, 2).

What inspired the Bank to override many of its reservations and go ahead with the loan? According to Franck (1954, 34), the loan emerged out of an increasing convergence of geopolitical and economic interests. Throughout 1949, the Bank found itself under mounting political pressure to fund the HVP so that it could be incorporated into the broader anti-communist program otherwise known colloquially as Point IV. In the introduction of this dissertation, I briefly touched on both Point IV and its action arm, the Technical Cooperation Administration (TCA). Although I will not be reproducing these discussions here, it is important to point out that Afghanistan was eventually pulled into the gravitational orbit of Point IV on 7 February, 1951, when it agreed to cooperate with the “Government of the United States of



America...in the interchange of technical knowledge and skills and in related activities designed to contribute to the balanced and integrated development of [its] economic resources and productive capacities” (The Department of State, 1951). This extension of Point IV assistance to Afghanistan led to the establishment of a “United States Operations Mission” (USOM/Afghanistan) in early 1951 (Michel 1959, 164). Although the first TCA technicians were deployed to Lashkar Gah in the fall of 1952, they did not actually become active until a second work agreement was signed in the spring of 1953 (Michel 1959, 164). Their work in the Valley, in turn, was slowed to a crawl by the time-consuming necessity of clearing operations with both Kabul and Washington. For these reasons, USOM/Afghanistan acquired a reputation for being the “step-child” of the broader Point IV program: a stigma that still haunts USAID to this day (Michel 1959, 164).

While the TCA was busy setting up USOM/Afghanistan, the Bank conducted its first inspections and evaluations of the HVP, which singled out the division of development labour as a major area of initial concern. Originally, Morrison-Knudsen was tasked with all of the heavy construction work, while the Afghan government assumed responsibility for preparing and resettling all of the reclaimed land. Maintaining this division of labour, however, proved difficult. The Afghan government simply fell so far behind that in early 1951, it offloaded the responsibility for reclaiming, preparing, and settling approximately 16,000 acres of land along the Boghra canal to Morrison-Knudsen (Franck 1954, 39). Unconvinced that Morrison-Knudsen itself was up to the task, the Bank’s auditors, drawing inspiration once again from the New Deal, called on the Afghan government to create an autonomous “Helmand Valley Authority” tasked with efficiently superintending the resettlement of all project lands (Report 1955; Stoaks 1955). Established in July 1952, the Authority was initially successful at accelerating the pace of resettlement. A vast majority of the new arrivals, however, were former nomads that possessed no knowledge of proper farming techniques and practices. Within the short time frame of three years, severe water-logging and salt accumulation problems had spread to Darweshan, Seraj, Tarnak, Garmser, Shakhansur, and the Arghandab Valley. By 1956, “more than 35 percent of the irrigable lands in the Helmand Valley [were] seriously affected by salinity and alkali conditions”. As salt “[whitened] the land”, many of the new settlers simply decided to abandon

their farms (Davis 1956). Those who remained were “barely able to subsist, as each year, the problems multiplied” (Williams et al. 1988, 82).

Although Morrison-Knudsen was a private-sector contractor, its continued failure to solve these problems reflected very poorly on the American government. This was because many of the new settlers in the Valley did not “distinguish between the TCA or ICA adviser who was supposed to ‘recommend’ but not ‘do’ and the Emkayan engineer who was supposed to ‘do’ but not ‘recommend’” (Michel 1959, 165). Instead, the presence of TCA advisers in the Valley was perceived as an official White House endorsement of Morrison-Knudsen. Consequently, Morrison-Knudsen’s failures reflected badly on the American government in the eyes of rural Afghans. From this point forward, prestige rehabilitation served as the “touchstone which would drive sustained and higher levels of official US funding for the Helmand Valley Project over the next two decades” (Williams et al. 1988, 10). This meant that there were great geopolitical and financial incentives to paint an “exceptionally optimistic” portrait of development progress in the Valley (Williams et al. 1988, 83). One of the very first reports produced by the TCA team that was dispatched to Lashkar Gah in 1952 optimistically “projected unrealistic economic returns for the Valley” (Williams et al. 1988, 83). This report, in turn, was instrumental in helping Morrison-Knudsen and its Authority counterparts secure additional funding from the Export-Import Bank in the mid-1950s.

America was eventually forced past the point of no return in 1955. This was the year that the Soviet Union ushered in a new era of “competitive coexistence” in Afghanistan by disbursing over \$100 million in foreign aid credits to the government of Daoud Khan. This “economic offensive” helped finance the construction of airports, highways, factories and dams in some of the other key regions of Afghanistan. Embroiled in a “‘strange kind of cold war’, fought with money and technicians instead of spies and bombs”, Afghanistan became “a new kind of buffer, a neutral arena for a tournament of modernization” (Cullather 2002, 530). These new conditions of “competitive coexistence” meant that the TCA – now known as the “International Cooperation Administration” (ICA) – had no choice but to get further “sucked into a haphazard effort with no prospect of final success” (Baldwin and Clapp-Wincek 1983, viii). Failure to do otherwise would “result in ‘chaos and dire’ consequences for American political interests in that

part of the world” (Baldwin and Clapp-Wincek 1983, viii). As USOM/Afghanistan Director Robert Snyder emphasized in a cablegram dated 10 January, 1956, “any spectacular canal failure (such as December 14 Seraj, see above<sup>16</sup>) particularly dangerous to US in that it would strengthen hand; (A) those in USA who desire to drop HVA project before successful results shown (which disastrous US prestige) or (B) those who discouraged possibility carrying through financing HVA from GOA/US sources and strongly tempted turn USSR take over” (Snyder 1956)

So far, I have shown how the HVP was enrolled by key ensembles of militarized techno-science into a global anti-communist “world building alliance” (Barnes and Farish 2006). The techno and geopolitical logics that undergirded this process were an outcome of both global and regional scale-making projects. From the perspective of the TCA and the Bank, the development of the Valley was perceived as a minor part of, “first, a global geopolitical vision of a bipolar and contested world where newly independent states needed convincing of the efficacy of alliance with the United States and, second, a regional vision of [Central Asia] seen exclusively in terms of US strategic interest” (Sneddon and Fox 2011, 458). Through its interactions with the Bank and the TCA, the HVP was rescaled from a regional to a global development project.

This rescaling of the HVP precipitated a gradual movement away from capital-centric approaches to developing southern Afghanistan. Morrison-Knudsen’s ambitious construction and engineering schemes were increasingly linked to the water-logging and salinization of project lands. If the US was to stave off the disastrous possibility of total project failure, rehabilitate its damaged reputation amongst rural Afghans, and ultimately, win the “strange kind of cold war” being waged against the Soviet Union, it would have to gradually rebuild the HVP development machine from the ground up. As I argue in the next section of this chapter, this was achieved in two ways. First, this – and subsequent – phases of the HVP were marked by a gradual, partial, and contested turn towards more people-centric forms of development theory and practice. Second, the ICA gradually wrested control over the day-to-day implementation of the HVP away from Morrison-Knudsen and instead, assigned the responsibility for overseeing the broader shift

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<sup>16</sup> Here, Director Snyder is referring to the breach of the Seraj Canal that occurred on 14 December, 1955, flooding hundreds of acres and stopping flow below the town of Yakchal (Snyder 1956).



in strategy to the American government's Bureau of Reclamation. Although these changes were ostensibly meant to breathe new life into the HVP, old habits proved more difficult to break than expected.

## **2.5 “We have American advisors running out of our ears”**

By the mid-1950s, audits of the HVP were beginning to call into question the appropriateness of techno-centric approaches to developing the Valley. In 1956, the Tudor Engineering Company prepared a report on behalf of the ICA that described the “cultural techniques” of the new settlers as crude, antiquated, and inefficient. The Tudor (1956, 40-42) survey identified three specific problems that required immediate attention.

First, many farmers believed that they could prepare for future water shortages by over-irrigating their fields in the present. Second, the average farmer was “strongly influenced by precedent and not easily induced to alter methods of cultivation which have been practiced for centuries, if not millennia”, and consequently, was “able to do little more than feed and clothe himself and his family” (Tudor 1956, 41). Finally, Tudor also claimed that farmers were “seriously handicapped” by a lack of modern farming equipment. In other words, the problem was not so much the HVP per se, but rather, the farmers themselves. In order to re-constitute itself in the face of this looming catastrophe, development discourse – as exemplified by the Tudor survey – practiced a “self-deception” and downplayed the damaging consequences of techno-scientific approaches to developing the Valley (Mitchell 2002).

Accordingly, the Tudor survey recommended that ICA develop and implement a “realistic and practical” program of “capacity building” designed to “extend” improved agricultural and administrative practices to Afghan farmers. Tudor's call for improved extension services was not idiosyncratic. In one memorandum dated 13 January, 1954, the Export-Import Bank revealed that it had wanted to discuss the issue of technical assistance with Morrison-Knudsen. Morrison-Knudsen, however, was not competent in that particular field, and instead, the Foreign Operations Administration (FOA) was given a chance to develop a new technical assistance program for the HVP (Evans 1954). Given that the FOA was already advising the resettlement of

the Valley, it seemed well placed to assume a leading role in these new “capacity building” efforts (Edgerton 1954).

Although the FOA was a willing partner in this endeavour, it initially felt that the “primary operational responsibility must rest with Afghan nationals if Afghanistan is to carry forward the successful operation of this type of project when foreign nationals are no longer available to assist” (Fitzgerald 1954). The FOA, in other words, wanted to help the Afghan people help themselves. In response, Glen Edgerton, the Bank’s managing director wrote a letter to D. A. Fitzgerald, the FOA’s Deputy Director of Operations, informing him that this division of labour was not feasible, owing to a lack of “adequately trained Afghan nationals” capable of successfully operating large and complex development projects (Edgerton 1954). Instead, the Bank asked the FOA to relax its second conditionality and instead adopt a more flexible approach that accounted for the “temporary and unusual circumstances” of the HVP. Fitzgerald was willing to compromise and eventually, green lighted the establishment of a “Helmand Valley Advisory Service” (HVAS) tasked with providing the Authority with technical assistance in the fields of agriculture, engineering, and health (Report 1955).

From the outset, the HVAS helped chart new directions in the agricultural development of southern Afghanistan. As an advisor to the Authority, it helped reclaim potential agricultural lands, facilitated resettlement, and established extension and demonstration services (Evans 1955; HVAS 1954). On any given day, an HVAS agricultural advisor might have to distribute new seed varieties, demonstrate proper fertilization techniques or bloodless castrations, install latrines, and assist in the planning of crop rotations and pest control work (Chief 1954; Stoaks 1955; see Figure 4).

Whenever possible, HVAS agricultural advisors also attempted to Afghanize these extension efforts. HVAS opened an “Extension Training Centre” in the Nad-i-Ali area on 4 October, 1953. Its primary objective was to train promising graduates of the TCA’s Kabul-based “Vocational Agricultural School” into “Village Level Workers” capable of: (1) “[helping] villagers to help themselves to a better farm living” and (2) identifying other Afghans who happen to possess a special aptitude for extension (von der Lippe 1954). Trainees were not only taken on tours to



Figure 4: Robert Snyder discusses plowing methods in the Logar Valley (ICA 1957)

field sites, but also participated in classroom discussions concerning the philosophies, principles, methods, objectives, scope, and history of extension. Trainees, in turn, were expected to put this knowledge to work in both the Extension Training Center, as well as in local villages, where they were evaluated on their ability to demonstrate various agricultural techniques to their fellow Afghans (von der Lippe 1954).

HVAS' attempt to instill a new ethos of self-help amongst Afghan farmers received mixed reviews. On the one hand, the "self-help" concept would eventually serve as a one of the key building blocks of the Afghan government's "Five Year Plan for Rural Development". Drafted in 1957, this Plan argued that the material conditions and the mental outlook of the Afghan people would only be improved if they were "installed" with an "ambition" or a "determination" to work for higher standards of living (Galloway 1959). As the authors of the Plan put it, creating a "spirit of self-help, initiative, leadership, and cooperation among the villagers" would "provide a foundation for self-perpetuating economic and social progress" (Galloway 1959).

Some high-ranking Afghan officials, however, remained unconvinced by this new "self-help" mantra. In one memorandum dated 23 March, 1955, Dr. Abdul Wakil, the Authority's Vice President in charge of agriculture, proclaimed that he had "been associated with FOA technicians for the past two years and had come to the conclusion that the US assistance program had not been geared to the unique type of problems faced in the [HVP]" (Evans and Drake 1955). According to Dr. Wakil, the FOA was too accustomed to working in older and more established Iranian or Indian villages, where demonstration and extension were actually viable means of improving agricultural practices which had been handed down over centuries. Afghan farmers, in contrast, were not yet ready to learn how to help themselves. If the FOA was going to be effective in the Valley, it would have to adjust its stock extension and demonstration programs for settlers who knew next to nothing about farming (Evans and Drake 1955).

Technical assistance programs also faced criticism from senior American officials such as Robert Snyder, who argued that USOM/Afghanistan's continued prioritization of "technical" over "development" assistance met neither the needs of a "balanced program", nor the "challenges of the Soviet competition" (Drake 1955). These concerns were echoed by the

American ambassador, Angus Ward, who warned that “the Soviets have trained their heavy economic artillery on Afghanistan and the United States has in effect replied with technical advice on how to construct a pop-gun” (Poullada 1956). Ward, in particular, felt that the while the ICA’s projects were “no doubt very worthwhile per se”, they nonetheless “lacked both dramatic value and economic impact”. For precisely these reasons, they “compare unfavourably, in Afghan minds, with the specific, tangible, and eye-catching aid projects undertaken by the Soviets”. As one Afghan official complained, “we have American advisers running out our ears, but what do we have to show the people for all this American activity?” (Poullada 1956).

Unfortunately for Morrison-Knudsen, these criticisms of technical assistance did not lead to a newfound appreciation for the heavy engineering work that it had carried out thus far in the Valley. By July 1959, even the President of the Authority, Abdullah Malikyar, was beginning to lambast Morrison-Knudsen for failing to make the HVP “beneficial for Afghanistan” (Malikyar 1959). Morrison-Knudsen’s fall from grace could not have come at a worse time, as its contract with the Afghan government was slated to expire in the fall of 1959. Given the Afghan government’s mounting dissatisfaction with Morrison-Knudsen’s performance, it is unsurprising that the ICA decided to terminate its relationship with the firm. The implementing partner that the ICA hired to replace Morrison-Knudsen was the US Bureau of Reclamation.

One might argue that this changing of the guard speaks to how various technical assistance methodologies – such as self-help or extension – were becoming increasingly mainstreamed in Cold War development theory and practice. In response to critics such as Ambassador Ward, the ICA doubled down on its commitment to developing the Valley through a program of technical assistance. For E. D. White, Director of the ICA’s Office of Food and Agriculture, technical assistance was becoming “part of a new potent force on a new type of quiet battleground” where “more food and more kinds of food and improved living together with what men think is far more important than lead and gunpowder” (White 1959). Unlike Ambassador Ward and Director Snyder, White embraced technical assistance – and in particular, extension – as a “typically” American form of development practice that “neither the Soviets nor any other nation can claim”. Extension may not have been as “eye-catching” as the spectacular construction projects being funded by the Soviet Union, but its long-term effectiveness was beyond reproach.

What is interesting about White's defense of technical assistance and extension are the ways in which it motions towards a further widening of the ICA's agricultural development mandate. No longer narrowly concerned with producing "more food and more kinds of food", agricultural development programming was now expected to intervene on rural life as a *totality* in hopes of modulating the ways in which beneficiaries both *think* and *behave*. The anti-communist value of agricultural development, in other words, was increasingly seen to lie in its potential to generate useful *psychological* effects. Having shown how extension was rediscovered as the go-to solution to the salinization problems that plagued the HVP, the next section of this chapter will explore the subsequent totalization of the ICA's technical assistance programs.

## **2.6 Total development**

This new "total" approach was first operationalized not by the ICA in the Valley, but rather, by the United Nations Technical Assistance Mission's (UNTAM) "Shewaki-Charasia Demonstration and Training Unit" in the province of Kabul (Galloway 1959). Established in 1954, this unit sought to "change" Shewaki and Charasia from traditional to modern villages. This change was to be a "total one, comprising all aspects of life at the same time". As a result of their interactions with UNTAM technicians, villagers would "develop an incentive...to change and continue to change" (Galloway 1959, 14).

In the estimation of the ICA, however, UNTAM's programming in Shewaki and Charasia had failed to realize its "total" potential. Instead, demonstration and training in Shewaki and Charasia was likened to a "series of service operations in which most everything is given to the individual villagers with little apparent village contribution" (Galloway 1959, 15). Based on its field observations of the demonstration and training work being carried out in Shewaki and Charasia, USOM/Afghanistan identified two "basic weaknesses" of UNTAM's "total approach". First, by servicing individuals rather than communities, UNTAM's field programs failed to encourage, organize, and mobilize the rural population for self-action. Second, UNTAM technicians apparently made no effort to discover and meet the immediate felt-needs of the people. In order for UNTAM's total approach to "function" in Afghanistan, it would have to account for both of

these “basic weaknesses” by enacting what Mark Duffield (2007) calls a “biopolitics of development” (Galloway 1959, 13-4). Successful development programming would not take as its object the individual Afghan, but rather, would concern itself with intervening on and meeting the felt needs of rural populations.

Although the ICA’s HVAS never marketed itself as a “total” form of development praxis, the Galloway report argues that it nonetheless shared many of the UNTAM program’s “basic weaknesses”. Despite a “relatively successful” extension phase, the “total community development process of multi-purpose development [was] not taking place at the village level” in the Valley. Consequently, the “basic needs in self-improvement” of the “mass of the people” in the Valley were not being met (Galloway 1959, 16). To this end, the ICA worked with the Afghan government to establish a number of “community development centres” in various parts of the country. The guiding principles of these centres were: (1) “to help people to help themselves”; (2) “to increase the income of the farmers through economic activities”; (3) “to improve their health and living conditions”; and (4) “to expand educational opportunities for the rural people” (Haq 1959). In addition to materially improving all aspects of rural life, these centres also sought to catalyze changes in the “mental outlook of the people”, installing within them a will to not only build up their own villages, but also the country as well.

Although this new “total” development effort was represented as a “cooperative enterprise”, the expectation was that the Afghan government would only become involved in activities that were concerned with rural communities as a whole. This meant that a “substantial part of the development” would necessarily fall “on the shoulders of the villagers themselves” (Haq 1959). Spontaneous participation in these programmes would only occur if they were guided by the “immediate needs of the people”. Ideally, priority would be given to those needs which were expressed by the people themselves during a process of “discussion and close contact”. It was recognized, however, that the vast majority of the rural population might prove themselves to be incapable of articulating a coherent set of demands (Haq 1959). In such a situation, experts would be called upon to speak on their behalf.

Given the emphasis that it placed on individualism, entrepreneurialism, and self-help, it is tempting to see the objective of the “total” approach to rural development in southern Afghanistan as the production of proto-neoliberal subjects. But as Li (2014) reminds us, the neoliberal art of government is distinguished by its tendency to universalize the figure of the economic or market subject. At this point in time, the goal of the HVP was not to marketize Afghan farmers, but rather to establish and stabilize an internally coherent and self-sustaining agricultural economy in southern Afghanistan. In this sense, it arguably drew more inspiration from Keynesian principles of economic management than the free-market nostrums that began to circulate in the aftermath of the Second World War.

Bearing this in mind, I argue that the “total” approach to rural development actually harkens back to the forms of governmental power that took shape during the colonial period. Similar to colonialism, “total” development functioned by dividing rural Afghan populations into “types, each of which could be governed according to its nature” (Li 2014, 38). While no Afghan was ready to be exposed to the risks of market participation, some were deemed to be more capable of self-help than others. The objective of the “total” approach was therefore to provide members of the latter group with the educative guidance necessary to help them develop their capacity for self-help to acceptable levels. What was prized by the “total” approach to rural development was a curious figure poised on the dividing line between autonomy and dependence: one that possessed the will and the mindset for self-improvement, yet also lacked the knowledge and the expertise to act on these desires independently from the development machine that had established itself the Valley.

Before the ICA could put this “total” approach to work in the Valley, the longstanding dispute over the importance of planning would have to be resolved. As one memorandum dated 15 May, 1958 laments, “the past experience in the Helmand Valley has shown us that no matter how definite plans are made, the vagaries of the Afghans will soon completely confuse the picture” (Drake 1958, 2). Afghan technicians, apparently, “will take precipitous actions regardless of any American present in the Helmand Valley” (Drake 1958, 2). Undeterred, the ICA framed the termination of Morrison-Knudsen’s contract as an opportunity to finally do something about this. By the time that the ICA was succeeded by USAID in 1962, however, little progress had been



made on this front. The faultlines separating USAID from its Afghan counterparts, in fact, had become even more entrenched. Now that there was “more to be done” in the Valley than “just getting the land into shape for farming”, USAID was becoming increasingly frustrated with the Authority’s apparent “lack of appreciation of the necessity of planning” (Cudney 1964; Memorandum 1963). Alarmed by its willingness to do things “too fast, without adequate resources”, USAID argued that the only way for the Authority to “attack” the economy of the Valley as a “whole” was with a “comprehensive” plan (Cudney 1964a; Memorandum 1963).

The Authority resisted these efforts at every turn. When USAID “tried to discuss the need for economic analysis”, its “arguments were peremptorily brushed aside” by Dr. Wakil, who said “such studies are not really required” (Nalder 1964). Guided by the assumption that the Authority could “afford to make a few mistakes” and still generate a worthwhile return on its investments, Dr. Wakil believed that the project should instead be “developed as rapidly as possible” (Nalder and Plymale 1964). According to the Authority, planning processes tended to lead to delays and cancellations, rather than actual construction (Nalder and Plymale 1964). The Authority, in other words, was gradually losing its confidence in America’s long-term commitment to the project. Cognisant of the ways in which conditions change with the passing of time, Afghans such as Dr. Wakil firmly believed that the US’ willingness to continue bankrolling the HVP would only diminish in the future (Memorandum 1963a).

USAID was quick to downplay these concerns. Despite the intensifying criticism and proposed budget cuts that USAID was facing back on Capitol Hill, it informed its Afghan counterparts that it had no intention of pulling its support for the HVP (Hirsch 1965). These reassurances did not stop the Authority from trying to find ways around USAID’s insistence on making the provision of additional financial and technical assistance conditional on the completion of plans and surveys. At one point, it even proposed outsourcing this preparatory work to a private contractor, but USAID refused to endorse such as “turnkey approach”, calling once again for “intensive Afghan participation in the survey and planning stage” (Memorandum 1963a). USAID’s reluctance to compromise on the thorny questions of planning and surveys signalled to Afghan officials that its unstated intention – despite all assurances to the contrary – was to stall or even pull out of the HVP (Williams et al. 1988). By the early 1960s, then, the Authority and USAID

had, for all intents and purposes, reached a “complete psychological impasse” (Williams et al. 1988). Here, we can begin to see how the process of rendering complex development problems technical through planning was actually wrapped up in all sorts of contentious political considerations and concerns.

In hopes of breaking this stalemate, USAID attempted to circumvent the Authority by opening up direct lines of communication with rural populations. One strategy adopted by USAID involved incorporating Islam into the broader effort to develop southern Afghanistan in its “totality”. Whereas USAID might have previously framed Islam – and all of its supposedly retrograde practices, including the veiling and segregation of women – as fundamentally antithetical to modernization, it was now keen to emphasize its compatibility with a biopolitics of rural development. According to USAID, the “Moslem religion” has “one over-all aim”: improving the “welfare of the people”. While the “Moslem religion” has “much to say about agricultural matters”, many “farm people” are nonetheless “poorly informed about what the Koran, the Traditions say about agriculture; and about what they mean in light of the new problems and technology in Afghanistan’s agriculture today” (Reynolds 1962, 1). “As important and respected leaders”, Judges and Mullahs have a:

“big responsibility and opportunity to inform and guide the villagers. The Judges can give leadership with the Mullahs, as well as interpret wisely the Koranic Law on land inheritance, water rights, and related matters. The Mullahs talk with the villagers before and after prayers; they teach the children; they have a major influence on their thinking. Moreover, through history, the more effective Mullahs have constantly looked for things to improve their communities: better seed, new plants, improved livestock. With the world-wide, far-reaching move to produce more and better agricultural products to furnish a better living, and to feed and clothe the growing population, the Mullahs have a greater task than ever before” (Reynolds 1962, 1).

By bringing “Moslem teachings” to the “attention of the rural people” through agricultural committees, meetings, and demonstrations, it was hoped that religious authority figures would encourage farmers to produce more food and fiber, use water wisely, control weeds and pests, divide land properly, work hard, and, perhaps most importantly for USAID, seek the help of experts. “In this day”, writes Reynolds (1962, 3), “when all countries have men who are

specializing to find the best methods of successful farmers, and the secrets of nature, to improve agriculture; and when countries are helping each other, we find that: a. Mohamed said that any professional man is a friend of God; which gives encouragement to the modern specialists with their tools, fertilizer, better crops and livestock to teach farmers to produce more; and which means greater happiness to all”. Somewhat ironically, then, Islam was called upon to provide some much-needed legitimacy to a program of technical assistance itself undergirded by an unabashedly secular form of modernization theory. Americans like Reynolds (1962) squared this contradiction by understanding Islam not so much as a religion as a biopolitical system of community governance fundamentally concerned with improving the life chances of rural populations. Like development, Islam was traversed by a “will to improve”: or, at the very least, a gendered “will to improve” that specifically targeted men, and not women (Li 2007). Chandrasekaran (2012) argues that the HVP was as much about progressive social engineering – particularly in the realm of gender relations – as it was about development. Mixed schooling and the abolishment of the veil – and the practice of *purdah* more generally – were seen as desirable by American and Afghan modernizers alike. Unfortunately, when American trustees such as Reynolds (1962) endorsed Islam as a vector of modernization, they also uncritically reproduced its gendered hierarchies. In Reynold’s (1962) writings on the subject, the protagonist of agricultural development is always male. One example of a “Moslem teaching” that Reynolds (1962, emphasis mine) foregrounds is: “The Farmer and *His* Work Are Important”.

USAID’s concerted effort to work through religious authority figures is nonetheless important for two reasons. First, it betrayed USAID’s growing obsession with making the “traditional attitudes of subsistence peasants” yield to a “revolution in mental concepts (Dominy et al. 1967). Second, this new psychological approach to developing the Valley was not meant to eclipse, but rather, complement already existing forms of extension and demonstration work. The Judges and the Mullahs, after all, were being asked to help acclimatize male Afghan farmers to the technologies and the knowledges that were being shared by male American experts.

In this section, I have shown how the HVP’s extension programs served as building blocks for a broader biopolitics of “total” development. What did “total” development look like in practice? As we shall see in the next section of this chapter, USAID’s “total” development approach was

exemplified by the Shamalan Land Development Project (SLDP). Implemented by USAID, the Bureau of Reclamation, and the Authority from between 1967 to 1973, the SLDP was conceived as an attempt to fabricate a new and modern community out of wholesale forms of creative destruction. Unsurprisingly, the rollout of the SLDP was resisted by the very population it was meant to benefit in the first place, catalyzing further shifts in development theory and practice.

## **2.7 Bulldozers and rifles**

In 1969, Mildred Caudill<sup>17</sup> published a hagiography of the HVP that painted a very optimistic picture of Afghanistan's "Agricultural Awakening". Whereas farming had once "been a simple operation in the Valley, with methods and equipment virtually unchanged from one generation to another", the future of agriculture in Afghanistan looked exceedingly bright. According to Caudill (1969), this was because the Green Revolution had finally reached the Valley.

According to Curtis (2009), the "Green Revolution" was launched in the early 1960s by Norman Borlaug, who developed a revolutionary new type of high-yield wheat. Impressed by its test results, USAID decided to import 170 tons of this experimental wheat into southern Afghanistan (Curtis 2009; Long 1964). Existing patterns of settlement, however, initially confounded USAID's efforts to "add intelligence" to the HVP. In order to grow Borlaug's wheat efficiently, the small and uneven parcels of land that were common in the Valley would have to be "turned back into vast open spaces" (Curtis 2009). A "typical village distribution system" is depicted in Figure 5. Note how the various kinds of fields are not only of irregular size and shape, but also appear to be organized by crop type – corn, wheat, and vegetables – rather than property ownership. This suggests that if an individual farming household was tending to more than one crop, their landholdings would likely be scattered throughout the village.

Billed by USAID as *the* "total package of canal construction and land development", the SLDP promised to unleash the Green Revolution throughout the Valley by establishing a 200 acre

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<sup>17</sup> Mildred Caudill was the wife of Stanford Caudill, one of the members of the Bureau of Reclamation team working in the Valley. She was commissioned by Dr. Raymond T. Moyer, USAID's Assistant Director of the Helmand-Arghandab Valley Region, to produce – without compensation – a "historical sketch of the past, of the present situation, and the future potential of the Valley" (Caudill 1969, foreword).

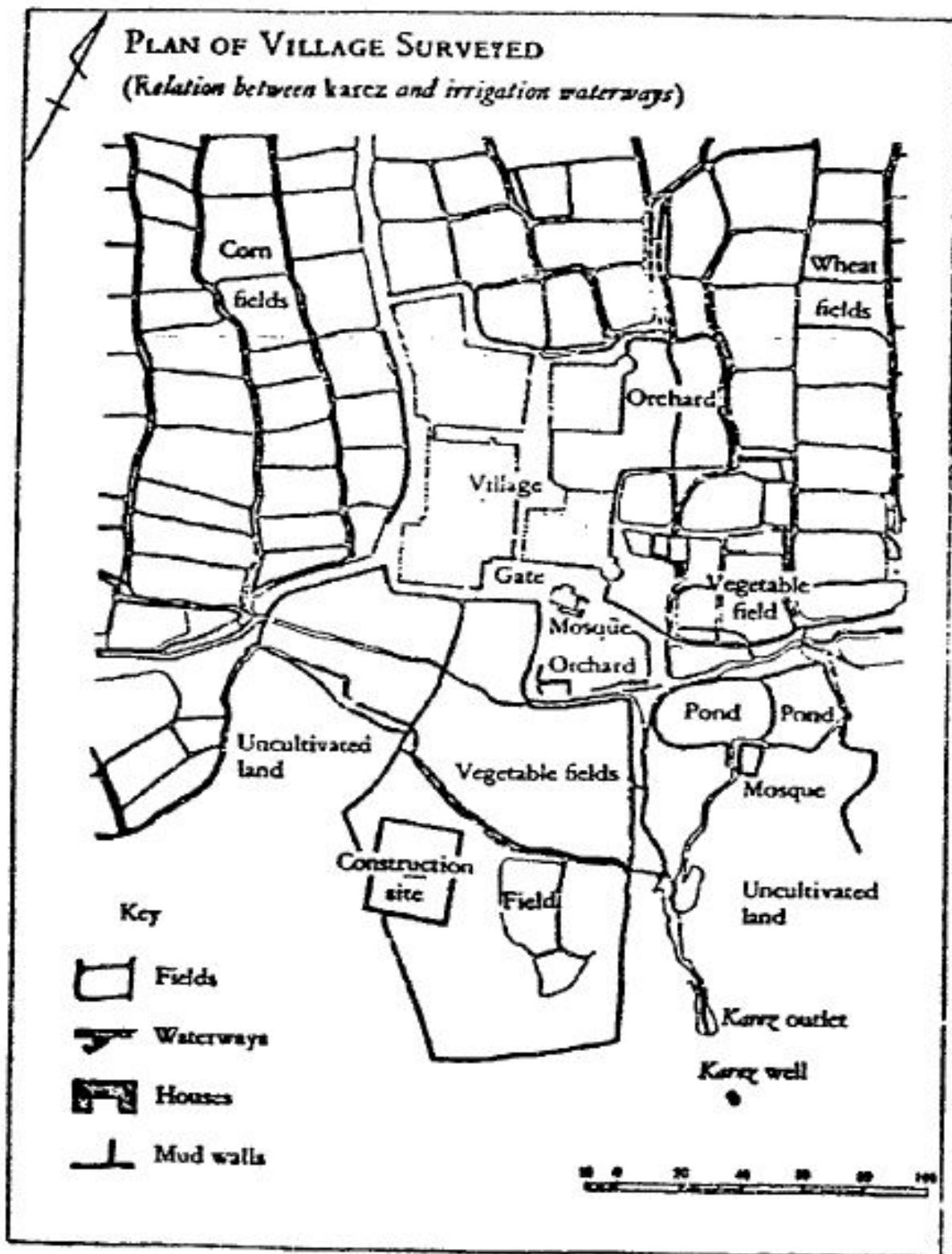


Figure 5: A typical village distribution system (Svendsen 1977)

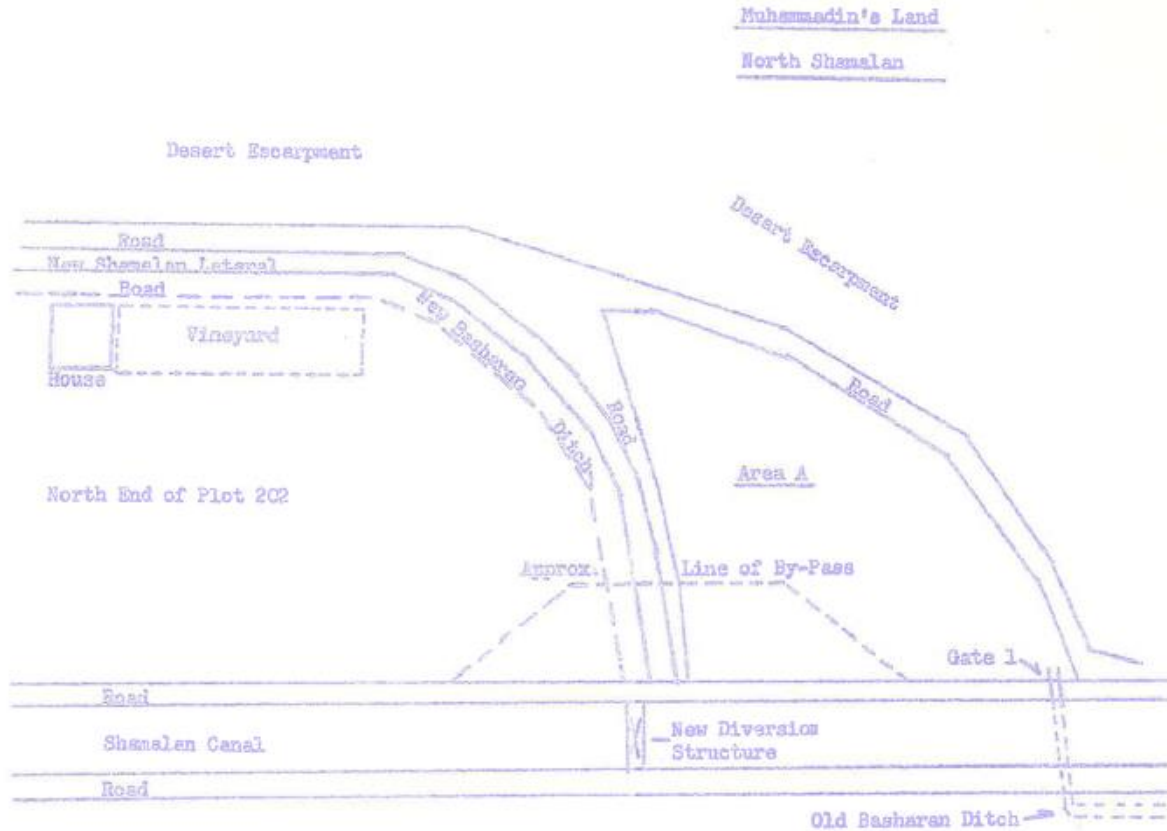


Figure 6: Muhammadin's land, North Shamalan (Scott 1973)

demonstration village in the Shamalan district (Scott and Uyehara 1972). The plan was to level this land with bulldozers, removing all houses, karezes, vineyards, and orchards in the process. Each farmer's fragmented land holdings would then be consolidated into one rectangular plot of equal size, bounded and serviced by modern irrigation canals. Figure 6 documents some of the infrastructural improvements that might have been typical of this process. As part of the SLDP, the land of a local farmer – Muhammadin – would have been upgraded through the construction of a diversion structure, a ditch, and a lateral. In order to help farmers like Muhammadin make the most of these infrastructural improvements, they would also be introduced to improved farming practices, inputs, and agricultural machinery (Dominy et al. 1967). Pending a successful demonstration of Green Revolution technologies in the Shamalan, USAID would be granted a mandate to modernize the rest of the Valley along similar lines (Scott 2011).

In its idealized form, the SLDP would result in a spatial reorganization of rural life. Traditional forms of irrigation, subsistence agriculture, and living would be swept away by bulldozers and replaced by an ordered, geometric, and modern landscape. This new environment was designed to do two things. First, by forcing farmers to live and work in two different places, the SLDP sought to cultivate new forms of village-based sociality. Second, the increased size and regularized shape of the new land holdings anticipated an eventual transition from subsistence to commercial forms of agriculture. According to Dominy et al. (1967), irregular land holdings of inadequate size would “only perpetuate subsistence agriculture” in the Valley by “denying the farmer the base and business volume upon which to build a commercial unit”. Under the aegis of the SLDP, then, technopolitics worked alongside biopolitics to socially re-engineer an entire community from the ground up.

In practice, however, the techno- and bio-political components of the SLDP worked at cross purposes. Given that the SLDP was launched as a “demonstration”, its core task was to secure the support of the local community. SLDP technicians, however, focused their outreach efforts on two distinct groups of local elites. According to Husick and Uyehara (1970), the traditional leaders – or “Khans” – were to be “given reasons to support [the project]” because they were the “key decision makers in the Helmand area”. Husick and Uyehara (1970) also argued that a major effort should be undertaken to identify, contact, and win over “progressive farmers” who are “more aware of the need for change” than the “mass of the people”. Husick and Uyehara, however, remained unconvinced of the need to directly secure the active support of the “mass of the people”. As they write:

“...the decision to support or not support the project will not be made by the mass of the people...this does not mean, however, that these people can be ignored. They must understand the project and what it will mean for them if we expect to receive the active cooperation we will need for the success of the project. They can also influence their leaders if they understand and support the project. ” (Husick and Uyehara 1970)

In this passage, the farmers of the Shamalan are represented neither as an active or a passive political force. They are governed, yet they exert an influence that cannot be ignored, nor easily quantified. The trick for SLDP technicians was to reach these people through a public relations

campaign that was “designed not to gain an active commitment from the people”, but to “create within them a favourable impression of the project” (Husick and Uychara 1970).

As part of this public relations effort, USAID hired a consultant, Richard Scott, to identify the felt needs and desires of local farmers. Neither an engineer nor a technician, Scott had been trained in anthropology and sociology. Although these were certainly disciplines that could be – and were – mobilized for technical and instrumental ends, Scott styled himself as more of a “social anthropologist” who placed great stock in the necessity of directly engaging with rural communities: a methodological imperative that animates most of the reports and memorandums that he produced while under USAID’s employ. Consequently, he brought a different kind of expertise to bear upon the problem of developing the Valley.

Before Scott was dispatched to the Shamalan to make contact with local farmers, he was given a revealing list of questions to answer by his supervisor. It included: “Are preparations for the on-farm land reshaping O.K. as far as the people problems are concerned?”; “is there going to be significant, preventable discontent?”; “are the tenants going to be odd-men out?”; “who makes farm management decisions on the affected land?”; “who do they listen to for farm management advice?”; “who should be chosen for agricultural development committees to move farm practice forward after leveling? How?”; “what should be the basis of such committees – village? Hamlet? Larger area?”; and finally, “do the extension men in the Shamalan need special training because of the new problems arising from land leveling, etc.?”. Based on these questions, it is clear that Scott was asked to deal with the local population as a problem of what Foucault (2003) would subsequently call biopolitics. The data collected by Scott, in turn, could be used to both anticipate and pre-empt future problems.

Scott (1971), however, was unable to find villagers who had been subjected to any sort of “long-term contact explanation” of the project by government officials. Most locals, in fact, had no “clear, consistent picture of the details of how the project is to function”. Contact had apparently been made with local elites, but contrary to expectations, most of them were opposed to the project on the grounds that it would lead to losses in the size and the productivity of their existing landholdings (Scott 1971). Scott’s fieldwork therefore called into question the wisdom



of narrowly focusing public relations efforts on local elites whose own self-interests predisposed them to opposing rural development activities.

To compound matters further, Scott discovered that Afghan survey crews were instructed not to discuss their activities with local villagers. In addition to believing that “villagers’ opinions are unimportant because they are too ignorant to understand what is good for them in the first place”, Afghan technocrats also assumed that “as long as no one knows anything and no one begins the actually socially disruptive process of land consolidation and leveling, peace can be maintained” (Scott 1971a). In Scott’s estimation, this reluctance to engage with the “mass of the people” was a problem requiring immediate attention. In order to do their job properly, implementers needed to have at their disposal “as much detailed information about the socio-cultural-economic context of the areas as [they] have about soil, subsoils, and topography” (Scott 1971). Armed with this information, USAID would have a better “indication of potential problems and from what quarters they are likely to come” (Scott 1971).

According to Scott (1971b), quick surveys would have shown that land in the Shamalan was already being farmed relatively successfully through irrigation schemes that were not technically perfect, but were nonetheless adequate for local purposes. As development would bring little new land into cultivation, most farmers did not understand its potential benefits. Instead, they chose to “see the work as reducing the size of their landholdings via the new canals, ditches, and drains” (Scott 1972). Villagers, in particular, were concerned about what would happen to their vineyards, orchards, and trees. While the Authority was supposed to reimburse farmers for any losses stemming from reclamation work, these payments were generally delayed, and at worst, non-existent. In response, farmers began to “sharpen [their] arms” (Scott 1972a). These tensions came to a head over the issue of land leveling. Although leveling was the most technically efficient solution to the Shamalan’s drainage problems, farmers faced “tremendous uncertainty as to what land they would get back, where it would be located, and if it would be as much as they had before”. Consequently, they refused to leave their land.

Scott’s investigations also revealed that agricultural production in the Shamalan was not being constrained by a lack of water, but rather, by an uneven political geography of resource

allocation. In the Shamalan, the distribution of irrigation water was overseen by *mirabs* who were often directly appointed by local elites. Given that one Khan would often act as the mirab for another, this system was explicitly designed to safeguard the interests of the local landlord class. This had enormous political-economic consequences, as questions of water distribution were intimately entangled with a local politics of patronage. Labourers, sharecroppers, and small farmers were expected to offer their political support to their local Khan in exchange for access to water. Each Khan, therefore, possessed the power to ensure that any one of these farmers could be left water short, should they step out of line (Scott 1971a). Unsurprisingly, a number of farmers in the Shamalan indicated that they supported the project because “it meant they would then get enough water”. They also correctly surmised that most Khans would withhold their support because their influence and power was derived in large part from their ability to control the allocation of scarce water resources.

Ultimately for Scott (1972b), the Shamalan district lacked not water, but rather, an equitable system of resource allocation. Irrigation water, to put it bluntly, was being misused by local systems of power (USAID/Afghanistan 1973). Unable to function independently of the local socio-political structures in which they were embedded, mirabs – and by extension, the water distribution systems that they managed – both emerged from and reflected a highly uneven political geography of power. Any technical scheme that ignored these political geographies was, from the outset, doomed to fail. In order to solve the Shamalan’s water problems, the control of its distribution would need to be transferred from local elites to foreign technocrats. Here, equal access to irrigation water would be ensured through the calculative practices of benevolent experts, rather than the arbitrary decision-making processes of entrenched elites.

Although Scott is critical of the SLDP, it would be a mistake to assume that he provides us with unfiltered access to the Afghan other. Rather, his critiques are articulated from an asymmetrical position of privilege and power. Scott speaks on behalf of local farmers, translating their felt needs and desires into terms legible to his superiors. In Scott’s writings, rural Afghans and their systems of governance are presented as strange, opaque, manipulative, and coercive (Scott 1973). In general, Afghans are seen as politically – as opposed to technically – deficient, and

hence, cannot be trusted to manage their own affairs at a local level. Hence, they remain in desperate need of guidance: just not the sort that was being provided through the SLDP.

Scott's attempt to paint a more complex picture of life and water usage in the Shamalan is nonetheless useful for two reasons. Not only does it highlight the analytical bankruptcy of USAID's belief in the transformative potential of Cold War technoscience, it also rescripts the SLDP as a particularly fraught moment of "encounter" that momentarily opened up a breach in the established neo-colonial order of things (Gidwani 2008; Pratt 2008). Indeed, the very "mass of the people" that had been written off as political non-factors by American and Afghan technocrats were eventually successful in resisting the rollout of the SLDP. As one Bureau of Reclamation Project Manager, J. K. Shankland (1973, 3), notes, it rapidly became apparent that the "necessary clearing of land titles and farmer's acceptance of the [SLDP]" was not obtainable in "any reasonable length of time". Given these seemingly insurmountable "socio-economic problems", it was eventually concluded that it was no longer "feasible or prudent" for all parties involved "to carry out the coordinated work plans for development of the Shamalan" (Shankland 1973, 3; USAID/Afghanistan 1973).

Although Scott was one of the first commentators to publicly criticize USAID's narrowly techno-scientific approach to development in the Valley, he was certainly not the last. Writing in the mid-1970s, Baron (1975) argues that an "unbalanced" proportion of the HVP has been myopically concerned with water scarcity. For Baron (1975), agricultural development in southern Afghanistan was not constrained by traditional irrigation practices, but rather, by an "inefficient and inequitable" system of on-farm water distribution. Any future attempt to remove the water constraint in the Valley would have to understand and alter the "total matrix of technological, social, and political institutions as they relate to this scarce factor of production". Similarly, as Louis Dupree (1973, 482) put it, "the problem...is not lack of water, but adequate control". Echoing Scott, Dupree (1973, 500-1) argued that "human engineers" – anthropologists, rural sociologists, and agricultural economists – could have helped USAID ensure that the "blows of change [fell] lightest on the most people".

In this section of the essay, I have shown how this “total package” of development failed to catalyze a “revolution in mental concepts” or a transformation of subsistence farmers into commercial entrepreneurs. In designing the SLDP, USAID prioritized technical over social feasibility on the assumption that the Afghan leadership shared its values and approaches to problems. According to Scott (1973a), this assumption was not borne out in practice. From the ostensibly “objective” perspective of USAID, the SLDP revealed the Authority as an institution incapable of functioning independently from the “local socio-political structures of the Helmand Valley”, as well as “within the broader national and bureaucratic frames” (Scott 1973a). The SLDP also served as a learning experience for USAID, highlighting the importance of taking the felt needs and desires of the “mass of the people” seriously. As I show in the concluding sections of this essay, this gradual biopoliticization of development programming in rural Afghanistan was also being mirrored at a broader, institutional level. Equipped with these new forms of development theory and praxis, USAID technicians would make one last Cold War visit to the Valley, determined to redeem themselves for their past failures.

## **2.8 The unfinished symphony**

In 1973, the impending termination of the SLDP was the least of USAID’s worries. Owing to its controversial involvement in the Vietnam War, USAID was facing a crisis of legitimacy back on Capitol Hill. Horrified by the inhumane ways in which development assistance was being misused in Vietnam, politicians on both sides of the aisle called on Congress to revise USAID’s mandate. According to Essex (2013, 53), these revisions “[put] in place a set of objectives and approaches that, over time, significantly altered the geostrategic framing and operation of American development assistance and the inner workings and external relations of USAID”.

As part of this “New Directions” mandate, USAID officially endorsed a “people-centered” approach to development theory and practice. Development aid was now supposed to “give the highest priority to undertakings submitted by host governments which directly improve the lives of the poorest of their people and their capacity to participate in the development of their countries” (US Congress 1973). These revisions were celebrated by USAID as a significant milestone. Williams et al. (1988) represented them as a significant break from past “capital-

centric” programs, which were judged “to have been on the wrong track”. One of USAID’s first opportunities to stress-test its revised development doctrine came in 1974, when Afghanistan’s new president, Mohammad Daoud – who had recently seized power in a political coup – called on American technicians to revisit the “unfinished symphony” that was the HVP. USAID accepted this challenge, transforming Afghanistan, once again, into a crucible of development.

Under the terms of its “New Directions” mandate, USAID was obliged to cede all planning responsibilities to its Afghan counterparts, who were keen to finally address the salinization and waterlogging problems that continued to plague much of the land that had previously been settled by the Authority (USAID/Afghanistan 1975). Working in close collaboration with the Authority, USAID developed a “Central Helmand Drainage Project” whose primary objective was to address the thorny question of on-farm drainage (USAID/Afghanistan 1975). A number of households in the Valley were “barely eking out an existence” on agricultural land that had the potential to produce a “respectable living by Afghan standards” if its drainage limitations could be overcome (USAID/Afghanistan 1975). It was precisely this “poorest majority” of farmers who would supposedly benefit the most from the new drainage project.

In order to help the Afghan government pass off what was essentially a “capital formation” project as a form of “people-centric” development, USAID invoked the logics of “cost/benefit” analysis. Although USAID acknowledged that traditional water use practices were exacerbating the salinization of land in the Valley, it nonetheless argued that no lasting solution would be found unless adequate drainage structures were put in place. A new drainage system also had the added bonus of being cheap and “virtually self-managed” (Barbour 1975). In contrast, modernizing water use practices – which are “deeply ingrained in the culture” – would “involve rather complex interactions among technical, bureaucratic, and cultural systems”. For this reason, the Afghan government did not possess the capability to substantively improve water use practices in the near and medium term (Barbour 1975).

Given his previous involvement in the SLDP, it is hardly surprising that Richard Scott was once again dispatched to the Valley in order to serve as USAID’s eyes and ears on the ground. Scott’s (1975) initial assessments of the drainage project were not positive, echoing many of the same

concerns that he had previously articulated during his site visit to the Shamalan. Not only did USAID leave a “great gap between the technical description of what is to be done and how it is to be implemented within the context of the social structure”, its justifications failed to account for “some of the most basic issues that have been recognized as having hampered the Valley development for the past 20 years, i.e., village-government relationships, and maximum utilization of the irrigation system construction”.

Scott’s worries proved prescient. While USAID’s working relationship with the Authority reportedly improved dramatically from 1973 onwards, both parties found it difficult to agree on a concrete work plan for the drainage project. According to Bruno Kosheleff (1978), when USAID was asked to participate in the project, it agreed to do so on the grounds that the drains would be constructed by hand, rather than heavy equipment. USAID could then plausibly claim that poor Afghans were benefitting from the wages that were being disbursed under the auspices of the project (Kosheleff 1978, 6). In contrast, the Afghan government believed that heavy equipment should be brought in first to construct or improve main drains (Barbour 1976). This would ensure that the smaller, on-farm drains could “empty efficiently” (Barbour 1976).

Heavy equipment, however, proved difficult to procure on short notice. Accordingly, USAID and the Authority instead focused their attention on organizing a labour force suited to the task at hand. While some of these labourers were either seasonal migrants or nomads, most were young and unmarried locals who generally came from landless households and hence, were in desperate need of money (Scott 1976a). These work-gangs dug on-farm drains in districts such as Marja or Nad-i-Ali for either a daily wage or for piece rates based on a “unit of earth moved” pay scale (Scott 1976b). As Figure 7 reveals, these drains were often run perpendicular to pre-existing irrigation canals, channels, and laterals. The result was a “gridding” of what had previously been a disorganized and unruly landscape of traditional subsistence farming. This process of infrastructural densification, in turn, was expected to produce momentum for a further governmentalization of rural communities in the Valley (Prakash 1999).

Instead of leveling the economic playing field for project participants, however, cash-for-work programs actually reproduced existing geographies of uneven development. On-farm drains



primarily benefited landed settlers, yet the project itself set in motion a process of proletarianization that effectively transformed the poorest inhabitants of the Valley into precarious day labourers. One might therefore productively conceptualize the drainage project as a “series of measures to impose work” on a destitute population that had nothing of value left to exchange for subsistence but its own labour power (Neocleous 2000, 19).

By focusing on “technical details” rather than the “total scene”, USAID again failed to “break from the past” (Scott 1975a). “A project”, Scott writes, “does not help farmers by simply constructing a system of ditches”. In order to encourage farmers to self-identify with the drainage project, USAID needed to work out a “detailed information scheme” that would allow all parties to “clearly register their desires relative to what is planned”. In order for the drainage project to connect Afghan farmers with new life possibilities, it would have to be “guided to some degree by these desires” (Gidwani 2008). Once everything was explained and demonstrated to rural Afghans, their cooperation, Scott assumed, would be forthcoming.

Before moving on, it is worth drawing attention to the ways in which Scott’s evaluations of the drainage project effectively absolved USAID from any wrongdoing. Instead, Scott blamed the “negative attitudes” of the Authority for leading USAID astray (Scott 1975a). Afghan technocrats not only demonstrated an increasing unwillingness to “do as they ought”, but also, apparently, an ability to “conduct the conduct” of their American advisors. From the mid-1970s onwards, however, there were some indications that, despite Scott’s reservations, the drainage project was actually beginning to show some positive results. As Rajiv Chandrasekaran (2012) notes, “on the first farms to receive new drains, yields increased to 75 percent of optimum production within a year”, leading some excited Americans and Afghans to believe that they “finally had a solution to the problem that had hounded them for thirty years”. This optimism was reinforced in 1975 by the publication of a “Farm Economic Survey”, which apparently provided “conclusive evidence” that USAID assistance was finally having a real impact on the per capita farm owner income in the Valley (Farouq et al. 1975). USAID/Afghanistan, unfortunately, never got the chance to assess the sustainability of these gains, for its plans to expand the drainage program across the Valley were put on hold in 1978 when Afghanistan’s



Communist party staged a political coup. In response, Washington ordered all government personnel stationed in southern Afghanistan to pack their bags and return home.

## **2.9 Change comes to the Valley**

In this chapter, I have shown how the HVP became increasingly obsessed with helping rural Afghans improve themselves. In order to carry out this “will to improve”, USAID and its predecessor institutions distributed themselves territorially, establishing ongoing relations with rural Afghans. Through these channels, they unleashed a “multiplicity of forces to reassemble matter in space and summon particular sorts of ‘conducts’ from human and nonhuman actors” (Gidwani 2008, 129). This process was mutually constitutive. Afghans could not readily control which forms of development were visited upon them. Nonetheless, they exerted an ambivalent and intangible influence over the ways in which development was practiced in the Valley. American modernizers did not possess a *carte blanche* to reassemble the spaces of the Valley as they saw fit. Instead, they always had to negotiate and compromise with their Afghan counterparts and beneficiaries. On occasion, their efforts to improve the “mass of the people” were actually derailed by a local politics of resistance. Such encounters encouraged USAID to adopt a more “total” approach to development theory and practice. While this progression was clearly delineated at the level of discourse and rhetoric, it was never fully realized in practice, as narrowly techno-scientific framings of development problems proved much more resilient than expected. What resulted instead was a messy entanglement of capital- and people-centric forms of development programming; of techoscience and biopower; of anti-politics and desire.

Rural Afghans were also transformed by their encounters with these machinic forms of developmental power. Over the course of the HVP, a class of technicians and programmers who shared in the “will to improve” rose to prominence in institutions such as the Authority. Like their American counterparts, this local cadre of technocrats found “numerous deficiencies in the population they [aimed] to support” that, in turn, could only be addressed by instructing their fellow Afghans in the proper “practice of politics”. As we shall see in the next chapter of this dissertation, this nascent class of technicians and programmers would go on to play a central role in the subsequent effort to develop Soviet-occupied Afghanistan from a distance.

It is often suggested that the US has yet to fully internalize the development lessons of the HVP and that as a result, history is on the verge of repeating itself in post-Taliban Afghanistan (Chandrasekaran 2012; Cullather 2002). As Cullather (2010, 132) writes:

“Fifty years after they started, American technicians are still trying to turn Afghans into safely mortgaged farmers. Afghanistan cannot be a stable modern state unless it can isolate and control its internal economy, and dams ‘improve’ agriculture not by increasing income or value, but by enclosing and regulating it. Throughout recorded history, Afghanistan has been a caravansary, a place for people and goods to pass through, but to its misfortune, development requires it to be enclosed”

In many ways, Cullather’s claims have been borne out by the events that have unfolded since the HVP was shuttered in 1978. There is perhaps no better example of how American technicians continued to work towards turning Afghans into “safely mortgaged farmers” than USAID’s attempt to restore agricultural production in Soviet-occupied Afghanistan to pre-war levels (which is the subject of the next chapter). But as the rest of this dissertation also demonstrates, the imperative to enclose and regulate Afghanistan’s agricultural economy was gradually supplemented by a tense and anxious drive to transform Afghan farmers into entrepreneurial subjects capable of being fully exposed to the risks and the uncertainties of the market. In USAID eyes, stability was increasingly assumed to derive not from isolating Afghanistan, but rather, from helping it reclaim its status as a caravansary open to globalized flows of capital, commodities, and expertise. In order to establish an enabling environment for market-oriented agricultural production and exchange in the Afghan countryside, USAID turned to the rural development practices— extension, demonstration, self-help, and the “total” approach – that were first put to work under the aegis of the HVP. In the intervening decades, these practices and concepts were refined and reconfigured as USAID became increasingly embroiled in the machinations of both the global neoliberal rollout, as well as the techno-scientific assemblages of modern war and counterinsurgency. The next chapter of this dissertation will begin to trace these anxious interconnections between rural development, counterinsurgency, and neoliberalism by making a site-visit to Soviet-occupied Afghanistan. It argues that USAID’s involvement in the *mujahideen* resistance served as a formative moment in the neoliberalization and the militarization of the agency’s “total” approach to rural development.

### 3 “We cannot back off now”<sup>18</sup>

“And then came the Russian tidal wave, with its apocalyptic armada, and its triumphant massiveness. The Afghan sky, under which the most beautiful idylls on earth were woven, grew suddenly dark with armored predators; its azure limpidity was streaked with powder trails, and the terrified swallows dispersed under a barrage of missiles. War had arrived. In fact, it had just found itself a homeland...”

- Yasmina Khadra, *The Swallows of Kabul*.

“You said, once, there are other ways to fight the Soviets. Maybe I’d be more useful here...you can’t underestimate the importance of the supply line from Karachi.”

- Kamila Shamsie, *Burnt Shadows*.

#### 3.1 Development as insurgency

On 24 December, 1979, Soviet forces invaded Afghanistan in order to prop up the communist Saur Revolution that had been launched only twenty months prior by the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). Although the Saur Revolution initially led to the formation of a government in which power was shared by the two main factions of the PDPA – Parcham and Khalq – this arrangement did not last long. By July 1978, Khalq subjected Parcham to a sustained campaign of violence and repression, and seized control of both the government and the PDPA. The Khalqis then embarked on a radical programme of rural transformation, which called for the provision of debt relief, the regulation of marriages, and the implementation of comprehensive land reform. Although this “revolution from above” is often represented as an attempt to “redistribute wealth and power from the rural rich to the rural poor”, Barnett Rubin (2002, 118) argues that these reforms were instead aimed at wresting control of the Afghan countryside away from local strongmen and placing it in the hands of the state. Convinced that these reforms were not in their best interest, rural Afghans began to engage in acts of resistance. Although these initial instances of unrest were largely spontaneous and uncoordinated, over time, they gradually coalesced into a full-blown revolt, largely on account of the state’s unwillingness to compromise its reform agenda. Weakened by months of internal strife, the

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<sup>18</sup> (Humphrey 1988)

Khalqi state lacked the capacity to pacify this intensifying insurgency, and effectively began to disintegrate. According to Rubin (2002), it was precisely this breakdown of state order, rather than the increasing ferocity of the rural resistance, that prompted the Soviet Union to dispatch troops across the Amu-Darya.

The Soviet intervention was meant to be short-lived. Its objectives were simple: install a more responsive client regime in Kabul, and stabilize the rest of the countryside by crushing the *mujahideen* insurgency (Fielden and Goodhand 2001, 9; Rubin 2002, 109). *Mujahideen* fighters, however, proved more resilient than expected and what began as a short-term ground invasion rapidly morphed into a decade-long occupation. Much has already been written on the role that the US government played in both kick-starting and fanning this conflict. Former US National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski reportedly “convinced [President Carter] to sign the first directive for secret aid to opponents of the pro-Soviet regime in Kabul on 3 July, 1979, in an effort to goad the Red Army into invading” (Al-Jazeera 2003). These secret agreements were provided the sheen of official legitimacy on 23 January, 1980, when the Carter administration committed itself to resisting the Soviet expansion in and beyond Afghanistan (Fielden and Goodhand 2001, 10). Under the aegis of this so-called “Carter Doctrine”, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was given the green light to provide covert military and logistical support to the *mujahideen* insurgency (Coll 2004;).

Less well-documented is the role that USAID played in these so-called “ghost wars”. In the early 1980s, USAID found itself under intensifying pressure to support the *mujahideen* insurgency. Although USAID was initially reluctant to embroil itself in another Cold War conflict, it was eventually persuaded to establish an “Office of the Aid Representative for Afghanistan Affairs” – henceforth, O/AID/REP – in Pakistan. One of the main purposes of this office was to channel emergency relief to rural populations living in Soviet-occupied Afghanistan through a “Cross Border Humanitarian Assistance Program” (CBHAP).

In this chapter, I theorize the CBHAP – like the Helmand Valley Project before it – as a moment in a longer genealogy of governmental grafting. Through a careful examination of the CBHAP, I argue that it is best understood not as a static program, but rather, as one whose logics evolved in

accordance with the dynamics of the Soviet-Afghan conflict. Initially, the CBHAP was designed to strengthen to *mujahideen* insurgency. It assumed that if Afghan populations were provided with access to vital commodities such as food and medicine, they would be more likely to remain in Afghanistan, and in so doing, serve as a “sea” for the *mujahideen* “fish” to “swim in”.

Buoyed by this support, the *mujahideen* insurgency began to push Soviet forces back, securing vast swathes of the countryside in the process. Encouraged by these developments, O/AID/REP began to plan for the future. It wound down its cross-border humanitarian programming in favour of a more comprehensive and long-term effort to rehabilitate and reconstruct the countryside. Unfortunately for O/AID/REP, its employees were legally prevented from establishing direct contact with target populations by government-sanctioned restrictions on cross-border travel. As a result, O/AID/REP was forced to develop Afghanistan from its offices in Peshawar, Islamabad, and Quetta.

No component of the CBHAP better exemplifies this decision to develop Afghanistan from a distance better than the “Agricultural Sector Support Project”. First established in 1987, the aim of the ASSP was to rehabilitate Afghanistan’s devastated agricultural economy to pre-war levels. The need for rehabilitation was urgent, as current levels of agricultural production were simply insufficient to satisfy the food requirements of rural populations in Afghanistan, to say nothing of the millions who had fled to the refugee camps in Pakistan. To this end, USAID hired two implementing partners – Volunteers in Technical Assistance (VITA) and Development Alternatives Inc. (DAI) – to carry out a number of different cross-border rural development activities. The cross-border programmes implemented by Volunteers in Technical Assistance and Development Alternatives Inc. differed in substantive ways. Volunteers in Technical Assistance remained more or less committed to applying the “total” approach to rural development that was first put to work in the Helmand-Arghandab Valley, albeit modified in ways that were meant to account for the difficulties of improving the life chances of rural Afghans from afar. Volunteers in Technical Assistance’s efforts were geared towards establishing a network of quasi-governmental spaces in the Afghan countryside. Development Alternatives Inc., in contrast, sought to transform the Afghanistan-Pakistan borderlands into an environment conducive to the market-driven circulation of agricultural inputs, such as improved wheat seed, chemical

fertilizers, and agricultural machinery. Complicating Essex's (2013) claims that development theory and practice had, by the late 1980s, become substantively neoliberalized, Development Alternatives Inc. set in motion a highly partial and uneven form of marketization in the Afghanistan-Pakistan borderlands: one underpinned, in many ways, by the very logics of humanitarianism that it was supposed to have transcended.

As James Ferguson (1990) reminds us, however, development interventions always foster unintended consequences. The Agricultural Sector Support Project was no different. In the late 1980s, USAID began to worry that development assistance was being abused by certain *mujahideen* commanders to grow poppies. In order to address this problem, O/AID/REP implemented a "Narcotics Awareness and Control Project" in collaboration with any local authority figures who were willing and able to take a stand against poppy cultivation. Although a stringent regulatory framework prevented the Narcotics Awareness and Control Project from significantly reducing levels of poppy cultivation, it nonetheless foreshadowed the dialectic of "anger" and "mercy" that would eventually become the hallmark of counternarcotics operations in post-9/11 Afghanistan (see Chapters 4 and 5).

Finally, I conclude this chapter by reflecting on the lessons that O/AID/REP learned while implementing the CBHAP in Soviet-occupied Afghanistan. Ultimately, my analysis of the Agricultural Sector Support Project shows that by 1987, neoliberal thought had still not yet become hegemonic amongst the professional development community, at least in the sense described by Essex (2013). The neoliberalization of development theory and practice, in other words, remained an uneven, fraught, and hotly contested process.

### **3.2 Ghosts in the borderlands**

America's decision to entangle itself in the *mujahideen* insurgency against Soviet occupying forces is now widely understood as one of the more infamous moments of Cold War history. Prior to 24 December, 1979, the US and the Soviet Union had waged the Cold War in Afghanistan with "money and technicians instead of spies and bombs" (Cullather 2002, 530). The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan escalated this "strange kind of cold war" into a "hot" proxy

conflict. In a memo written two days after Antonov transport planes unloaded Soviet troops at Kabul's international airport, Zbigniew Brzezinski called on President Carter to ensure the vitality of the Afghanistan resistance (Coll 2004). This would mean working with Pakistan, China, and other Islamic countries – primarily, Saudi Arabia – to supply the rebels with money, arms, and technical advice. Carter acted on these recommendations, and in a Top Secret presidential finding signed in late December 1979, he tasked the CIA with establishing an “arms pipeline” to the *mujahideen*. At this point in time, policy makers in Washington did not believe that *mujahideen* forces could actually defeat Soviet forces on the battlefield. Instead, by helping the *mujahideen* mount a campaign of “harassment”, the CIA – working through the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence – aimed to increase the costs of invading Afghanistan (Coll 2004).

Initially, CIA logistics officers purchased thousands of bolt-action .303 Lee Enfield Rifles and routed them to *mujahideen* forces through Karachi. They also supplied the *mujahideen* with thousands of rocket-propelled grenade launchers, which were cheap, portable, and unparalleled at stopping Soviet armor in its tracks. In the hands of the *mujahideen*, these seemingly out-dated weapons proved remarkably effective, and by late 1981, rebel forces were operating freely in nearly every Afghan province (Coll 2004). Encouraged by these results, CIA field agents successfully convinced “the bureaucrats back in Langley” to expand the scope of covert operations by pumping increasing quantities of advanced weaponry and cash into Afghanistan (Coll 2004, 58). Soon, CIA logistics officers and their Pakistani counterparts were supplying *mujahideen* forces with AK-47s, 60-millimeter mortars, 12.7-millimeter heavy machine guns, and Stinger missiles. To make these weapons deliveries, the CIA maintained a fleet of trucks that made nightly trips from warehouses in Rawalpindi to drop points strategically located along the Afghan frontier (Coll 2004).

Derek Gregory (2011, 239) argues that war is shaped by the “slippery spaces within which and through which it is conducted”. The “ghost war” waged against the Soviets by *mujahideen* forces was no exception to this rule. According to Coll (2004, 17), Soviet forces bestowed upon their Afghan adversaries the name *dukhi* – or “ghosts”. This was because the Soviets “could never quite grasp and hold their enemy”: a “ghostliness” which derived, in part, from the *mujahideen*'s ability to disappear into the Pakistani borderlands when the situation demanded it (Coll 2004,

17). Here, my use of the term “borderland” is deliberate. Drawing inspiration from Gregory (2011), as well as Gloria Anzaldua (1999, 3), I argue that this transnational region is productively theorized as a “vague and undetermined place” in a “constant state of transition” that is “created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary”. This was the “Durand Line”, which was surveyed from 1894 to 1896 to demarcate the edge of British India. The Durand Line “bisected the cultural region of Pashtunistan, dividing villages and extended families with strong culture and kinship connections between them” (Gregory 2011, 240).

Ever since the partition of India resulted in the formation of Pakistan in 1947, the Afghan government has insisted that the Durand Line has “lapsed with the end of colonial rule” (Gregory 2011, 240). Although this position has consistently been rejected by the established body of international law, the question of the Durand Line remains unresolved. This fact shaped the Soviet-Afghan conflict in two important ways. First, it explains why Pakistan preferred to support Islamist *mujahideen* parties over nationalist ones, which tended to support the idea that an autonomous Pashtunistan could be carved out of the borderlands (Rubin 2002). Second, it meant that the borderlands remained an ambiguous and slippery space, with many of its inhabitants routinely crossing from Afghanistan into Pakistan and back without bothering with any border formalities.

For precisely these reasons, the Afghanistan-Pakistan borderlands have historically been understood by commentators such as Coll (2004) – and, to a lesser extent, Rubin (2002, 2013) – as a staging ground for war and violence (see also Gregory 2011). In crucial ways, their narratives recall how metropolitan actors tend to associate “borderlands” the world over with the characteristics of “brutality, excess, and breakdown” (Duffield 2001a, 309). According to Duffield (2001a), wars waged in and through borderlands are usually animated by greed and sectarianism, and invariably result in the reversal of developmental gains, the killing of civilians, the abuse of humanitarian assistance, and the abandonment of all pretense of civility.

Elements of this metaphor certainly speak to the Soviet-Afghan conflict. Over the course of the Soviet occupation, the Afghanistan-Pakistan borderlands simultaneously served *mujahideen* forces as the base of their operations, the site of their training grounds, and the territory through



which most of their supply chains traveled. While Soviet forces were ostensibly forbidden from engaging *mujahideen* forces within five kilometers of the Afghan-Pakistan border for fear of causing an international furor, this order was routinely disobeyed. Lester Grau and Ali Ahmad Jalali (2007) detail one incident where the Jalalabad-based 15<sup>th</sup> Spetsnaz<sup>19</sup> Brigade executed a raid on a *mujahideen* base camp in Kher which rapidly escalated into a cross-border assault on enemy positions located in Pakistan's Spin Boldak. Soviet air forces not only bombarded *mujahideen* camps on the Afghan side of the border (Weiner 1998), but also entered Pakistani air space on numerous occasions to pursue fleeing enemies, flatten their sanctuaries, and destroy their lines of communication (Higham 2003; Williams 2013). In so doing, Soviet forces extended Afghanistan's eastern borders into Pakistan's frontier provinces on a whim, transforming the Durand Line from a "colonial draftsmen's line" into a "violence curtain" (Nunan 2016, 210).

The Afghanistan-Pakistan borderlands, however, were not only traversed by local *mujahideen*, foreign jihadists, religious fundamentalists, spooks, drug traffickers, and gun-runners, but also by an expanding network of private contractors, USAID direct hires, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), expatriate Afghans, and embassy officials, all tasked with channeling much-needed humanitarian and development assistance to rural populations devastated by years of occupation. There has been some writing on these other cross-border flows of non-lethal commodities, humanitarian and development capital, and civilian non-combatants. Magnus Marsden (2012, 2016) shows how the Soviet-Afghan conflict both produced and set in motion complex "trading worlds" that straddled both sides of the border. According to Marsden (2012, 97), many merchants "came to embark on a life of trade when they or their fathers ceased to be employed by the Afghan state as the struggle with the *mujahideen* intensified". Similarly, Helga Baitenmann (1990, 62) argues that the Soviet-Afghan conflict erupted at a moment in time when key international actors – such as the donor nations, bilateral agencies, and the United Nations – were increasingly turning towards NGOs for help in alleviating the "pain that accompanies war and displacement" occurring in "regional 'hot spots'" around the globe. Baitenmann identifies three different kinds of NGOs that began to operate in and around the Afghan theatre. The first group – which was generally comprised of more well-known NGOs – assumed responsibility for providing humanitarian assistance to all of the Afghans who were fleeing the intensifying

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<sup>19</sup> The Russian Special Forces.

violence to refugee camps that had been established across the border in Pakistan. The second group sprung up to publicize the cause of the *mujahideen* in Western contexts. Most important for the purposes of this chapter, however, is the third group of NGOs that took it upon themselves to mount cross-border operations into Afghanistan.

According to Timothy Nunan (2016, 210) these “humanitarian guerillas” challenged the violent borderscapes that were being co-produced by Soviet and *mujahideen* forces. They did so by transforming the Afghanistan-Pakistan borderlands into a “moral and institutional geography no less spectacular” than the extra-legal violence that was being visited on the inhabitants of the region. While many of the United Nation’s (UN) specialized agencies – including the Food and Agriculture Organization, the United Nations Development Programme, and the World Food Programme – were effectively paralyzed by the administrative and the informational firewalls that the Soviet Union had erected around Afghanistan in the United Nations Security Council, other well-established international NGOs – such as Médecins Sans Frontières – quickly created their own “counterarchive” of humanitarian emergency that they mobilized to justify the activities that they were beginning to undertake in the borderlands (Nunan 2016, 221). By foregrounding the urgency of resolving this emergency in the global arena of public opinion, such a logic of “humanitarian geopolitics” helped subvert the traditional sovereign privileges and long timelines historically associated with the activities of UN agencies (Nunan 2016, 221).

The willingness of well-established NGOs to intervene in the Afghanistan-Pakistan borderlands quickly encouraged a number of smaller ones to follow suit. Most of these smaller NGOs were formed in response to the Afghan crisis. Their intended beneficiaries were all of the civilians and combatants who continued to live – and wage war – in Afghanistan. The first of these cross-border operations was launched in 1980. Up until the mid-1980s, the scope of action for these cross-border NGOs was limited. The deteriorating security situation on the ground meant that NGOs could only provide rural populations with access to survival assistance, such as cash-for-food programmes. NGO efforts were also hampered by a dearth of centralized infrastructure for distributing humanitarian assistance across the border. Generally, there were only two ways of reaching rural populations in need: by working, where possible, with local civilian institutions such as committees or shuras, or by collaborating with one of the few *mujahideen* commanders

who had set up basic – yet functioning – administrative services and structures in their own personal territories. While it is never easy for NGOs to operate in conflict zones, these cross-border humanitarian operations were particularly fraught. Given the unstable security situation, NGOs were often forced to avail themselves of the protective services of local authority figures, and invariably, became entangled in unrelated disputes. Cross-border operations were also illegal in both Pakistan and Afghanistan, which meant that NGOs also became “caught up in a web of corruption, being forced to pay bribes to Pakistani police and government officials and pay ‘protection levies’ for the right to travel inside” (Baitenmann 1990, 73). The extent to which NGOs fell victim to these various forms of rent-seeking is suggestive of how the business of supplying the means of war and insurgency produces, as Derek Gregory (2012) argues, “volatile and violent spaces in which – and through which – the geopolitical and the geo-economic” become “locked in a deadly embrace”.

The nature of these cross-border operations began to change in 1984, when USAID finally caved to mounting domestic political pressure and became more directly involved in the effort to provide non-lethal aid to *mujahideen* forces. Although Jamey Essex (2013, 47) claims that the Vietnam War “strongly tainted congressional and public views of direct intervention in foreign countries as part of a Cold War grand strategy”, the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan generated a strong bi-partisan political will to provide humanitarian assistance to ordinary Afghans. By 1984, Congress had already “earmarked several million dollars for direct aid to those inside Afghanistan” (Humphrey 1988). According to Senator Gordon Humphrey – one of the most vocal supporters of the *mujahideen* cause on Capitol Hill – the State Department was initially an unwilling partner in this enterprise. Seemingly unmoved by the enormity of the humanitarian crisis confronting ordinary Afghans, State “dallied at great length before finding a way to disburse this money” (Humphrey 1988, 2). In 1985, a frustrated Humphrey decided to force State’s hand. In collaboration with Senators Claiborne Pell, Robert Byrd, and Al D’Amato, Humphrey drafted legislation that called on USAID to both create and administer a formal “Cross-Border Humanitarian Aid Program” (CBHAP).

To this end, USAID established O/AID/REP across the border in Pakistan. It was initially tasked with designing and implementing the CBHAP (Greenleaf 1985). While the existence of the

CBHAP is often acknowledged by authors such as Rubin (2002) and Baitenmann (1990), its contours have generally only been sketched out in the broadest of brush strokes. In what follows, I dig a little deeper into the historical geographies of the CBHAP. Through an analysis of archival documents pulled from USAID's Document Experience Clearinghouse, the National Security Archive, and the Afghanistan Center at Kabul University, I will show how the CBHAP evolved over time and morphed over space. In so doing, I will foreground some of the ways in which humanitarian – and later development – assistance was mobilized to help *mujahideen* forces consolidate their control over the means of violence.

### **3.3 Learning from Mao**

The primary objective of the CBHAP was to alleviate the “suffering of the people in ‘free’ areas of Afghanistan” (Arnold 1987, 1). From the outset, CBHAP activities were shaped by the uneven geographies of the Soviet occupation. While Soviet forces exercised tight control over the majority of Afghanistan's urban centres, *mujahideen* forces operated more or less autonomously in the countryside. It should therefore come as no surprise that most of the emergency relief that was distributed under the auspices of the CBHAP was destined for *mujahideen* strongholds in the countryside. During my conversation with Elaine Kingsley (25 November, 2012) – one of O/AID/REP's first employees – she argued that the CBHAP was meant to discourage rural Afghans from fleeing to either the Soviet-controlled urban areas or to the refugee camps located in both Pakistan and Iran. As she puts it:

“...if you wanted the mujahideen to be successful in Afghanistan, they needed a base of operations... you needed to keep a civilian population centre through the villages in Afghanistan both to serve as...resources for R & R, for food, for intelligence...so it made sense to have assistance in Afghanistan, both from a purely humanitarian perspective, but also...so that the mujahideen could blend in normally and naturally within the community...as they were fighting” (Kingsley 25 November, 12).

Whereas USAID had previously played an instrumental role in the American attempt to “drain the swamps” of Cold War Vietnam, the CBHAP reportedly drew inspiration from Mao. As one advisor to the US government on its Afghan policy quipped: “The Soviets are trying to kill the fish [rebels] by draining the sea, and we're trying to keep the sea full” (Baitenmann 1990, 76).

From the outset, it was clear that the CBHAP would “face unique operational circumstances” (D’Angelo et al. 1989, 15). Owing to a US government policy that prohibited American citizens from entering Afghanistan, O/AID/REP was forced to operate out of offices based in Islamabad, Peshawar, and Quetta. (D’Angelo et al. 1989). As Kingsley explains (25 November, 2012):

“Because of the war and security restrictions...the assistance went cross border, but our American partners could not go cross border, or we could not know that they went cross border, and we certainly could not go cross border...because it was an act of war and we had no embassy presence that could provide us any support or guarantees”.

According to USAID, the challenges stemming from the CBHAP’s transnational nature were compounded by its inherent tensions (Butler et al. 1988, 1). In order to implement the CBHAP, O/AID/REP juggled operational and political relationships while striking a delicate balance between “short-term, war-related humanitarian objectives with long-term development concerns” (Butler et al. 1988, 1). In her brief analysis of the CBHAP, Baitenmann (1990) argues that the entry of USAID into the Afghan theatre further politicized the already-political humanitarian programmes that were being implemented by NGOs. By supporting anti-communist forces with non-lethal forms of aid, NGOs had, in effect, picked a “side” in the broader conflict. Willingly or unwillingly, the humanitarian work of cross-border NGOs both legitimized and furthered the US’ strategy of fomenting low intensity conflict in Afghanistan as a means of defeating the Soviet forces and their Afghan proxies.

USAID’s blatantly political intervention in the Soviet-Afghan conflict was very much in keeping with its bloody history of participating in Cold War counterinsurgencies. The political orientation of the CBHAP nonetheless “generated confusion and suspicion” amongst those actors who sought to steer USAID’s programs away from security concerns towards long term development (Butler et al. 1988, 1; D’Angelo et al. 1989). A number of USAID officials argued that political concerns could not serve as the basis for CBHAP activities, but rather, needed to be supplemented by technical analyses. Many worried that the secrecy surrounding the CBHAP would lead the public to believe that it was not justifiable on either development or humanitarian

grounds. In contrast with the CIA, USAID did not want to be “misperceived” as an “agency engaged in clandestine activities’ (Butler et al. 1988, 14).

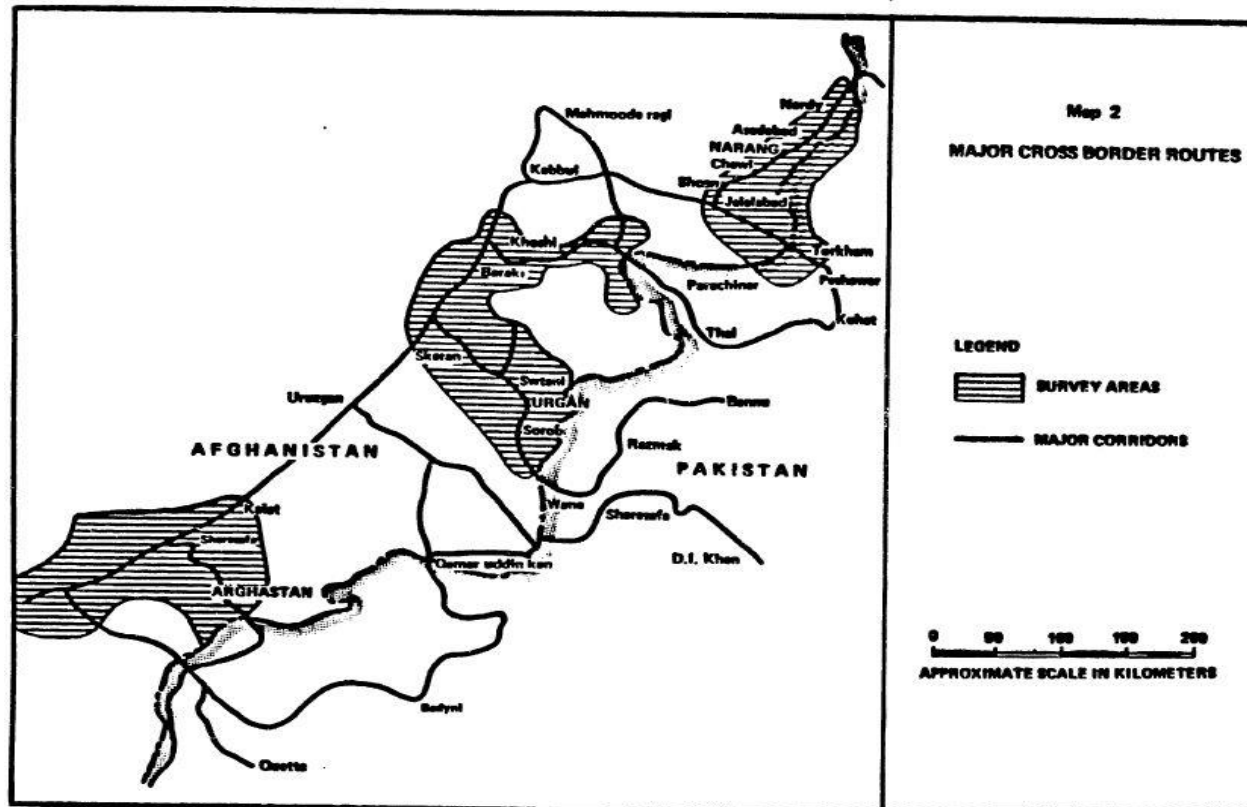


Figure 8: Major Cross Border Routes (Nathan Berger 1989)

Given the operational constraints identified above, how exactly did O/AID/REP get humanitarian assistance from Pakistan to rural populations in Afghanistan? According to archival documents, it tapped pre-existing NGO networks. Initially, non-American NGOs and contractors “were the only channels available to AID for reaching Afghans living in Afghanistan” (English 1988, 4). Through these efforts, vital commodities circulated from Pakistan to Afghanistan along a number of major cross border corridors, the most important of which are mapped in Figure 8. Figure 8 was drawn up in August 1989 using data gleaned from interviews that were conducted in the regions marked “Survey Areas” on the map. It is highly unlikely that these routes remained exactly the same from one year to the next. Nonetheless,

Figure 8 provides us with a nice visual approximation of what these transnational distribution networks might have looked like while the CBHAP was still in its infancy.

In an attempt to maintain a façade of humanitarian neutrality, a large number of these NGOs refused to accept direct US funding, making it more difficult for O/AID/REP to monitor their activities. In response, O/AID/REP began to shift its funding priorities towards American collaborators and NGOs, especially those who had already established working relationships with *mujahideen* commanders. As the CBHAP ran its course, however, it became increasingly clear to O/AID/REP that the geographical reach of American NGOs and contractors was limited by a tendency to “concentrate resources on a few commanders in a few regions” (USAID 1988, 2). According to Baitenmann (1990, 72), the (in)famous Panjshiri *mujahideen* commander Ahmaad Shah Massoud was a “favourite of the NGOs because of his institutional capacity”.

This geographical pattern of assistance distribution was, in part, the consequence of a decentralized *mujahideen* command structure. As Mike Martin (2014) reminds us, the *mujahideen* insurgency was not a unitary front, but rather, was primarily animated by local power dynamics. Its basic building block was a “band of men led by a commander” (Rubin 1989, 153). In order to secure access to weapons, cash, supplies, and political legitimacy, commanders affiliated themselves with one of the main *mujahideen* parties – or *tanzeem* – that were based in Peshawar. Generally, Islamist *tanzeem* tended to be favoured by commanders because they were prioritized by Pakistan and Saudi Arabia for funding (Rubin 2002). For the most part, the ties linking commanders to their *tanzeem* were instrumental, rather than ideological. This meant that the Peshawar-based *tanzeem* exercised minimal authority over the day-to-day operations of insurgent forces. The *mujahideen* command structure became more centralized in May 1985, when the seven main *tanzeem* were strongly encouraged by their American, Pakistani, and Saudi backers to form a “loose alliance” called the “Islamic Union of Mujahideen of Afghanistan”: henceforth, the Alliance.

In an effort to broaden the scope of its interventions in rural Afghanistan, O/AID/REP decided to involve the Alliance in the task of channeling humanitarian goods and services to Afghans living in the “liberated regions” of the countryside (Fielden and Goodhand 2001). USAID also helped

the Alliance establish a number of technical committees with the ostensible capacity to plan and execute development and humanitarian programming in the fields of education, health, and agriculture (English 1988). This relationship was represented as mutually beneficial for both O/AID/REP and the Alliance. Theoretically, working with the Alliance would enable O/AID/REP to extend the reach of its humanitarian programming throughout rural Afghanistan. In return, O/AID/REP and its implementing partners would not only provide *mujahideen* forces with access to Western expertise and publics, but would also help the Alliance develop an “institutional capability” to “perform the civil functions of government, and in the process, improve its credibility amongst the Afghan people as a viable alternative to the Communist regime in Kabul (D’Angelo et al., 1989; USAID 1988, 2).

In order to counter the Soviet destruction of crops and property in rural Afghanistan, O/AID/REP, in collaboration with its Alliance counterparts, established a “Commodity Export Program” to channel humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people. The Commodity Export Program provided war-affected Afghans with a range of vital commodities, including food, medical supplies, shelter, vehicles, and pack animals (USAID 1988). It was marked by a collaborative division of labour. First, the Alliance’s Logistics Committee identified the “goods for which there is the greatest need” (USAID 1988). This information was then conveyed to the American Manufacturers Export Group, a firm contracted by USAID to: a) “undertake local and offshore commodity procurement”; b) “arrange for and supervise transport of the commodities from the suppliers to warehouses in Islamabad, Peshawar, and Quetta”; and c) “monitor the distribution of...commodities to the [Alliance] and, to the extent possible, across the border” (English 1988, 39). According to English (1988), approximately 70 percent of these commodities were distributed from warehouses located in Peshawar, while the other 30 percent were stored in Quetta. Commodities were issued from program warehouses every day except Friday. In order to initiate this process, *tanzeem* representatives presented program agents with signed letters from Alliance officials indicating the commodities being requested and the intended geographical destination inside of Afghanistan. Upon receiving the requested commodities, *tanzeem* representatives were expected to sign for them, confirm their destination, and finally, fill out paperwork which would eventually be turned over to Alliance functionaries (English 1988). This process is diagrammed in Figure 9.



# COMPONENTS OF THE AFGHANISTAN COMMODITY PROGRAM

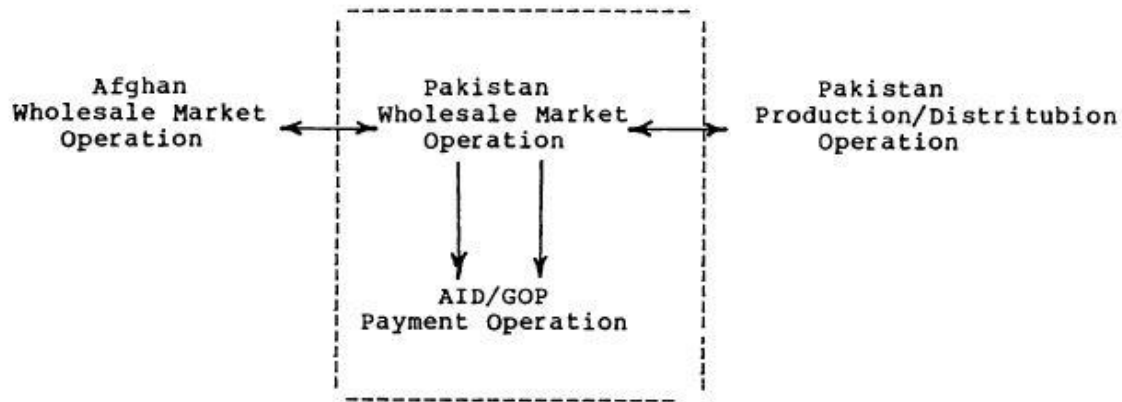


Figure 9: Components of the Afghanistan commodity program (USAID 1987)

The Commodity Export Program was not the only delivery mechanism for humanitarian goods at USAID's disposal. O/AID/REP also managed the field activities of the Pentagon's "Humanitarian Relief" program. Under the aegis of this program, serviceable and non-lethal excess materiel – such as clothing, tents, sleeping bags, and rations – were shipped from a number of "Contiguous United States" Defense Reutilization and Marketing Offices (DRMOs) to a centralized loading point – such as Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland – for palletizing, quality control, and onward shipment (USAID 1988a). Once a month, these commodities – along with humanitarian goods donated by civilians – were loaded onto United States Air Force C-5 or C-141 cargo planes and transported to Islamabad. Non-lethal excess materiel from European DRMOs were stored at Rheine-Main Air Base, and eventually, picked up by one of these flights. As soon as these planes arrived in Islamabad, their cargo was unloaded by Pakistani government officials and American Manufacturers Export Group agents, who took possession of the commodities and moved them to warehouses to await eventual delivery. As part of this Humanitarian Relief program, C-141 cargo planes also doubled as ambulances of last resort, carrying injured Afghans to the US, Europe, and the Middle East for free medical treatment otherwise unavailable at local hospitals. As of 4 May, 1989, the Pentagon had selected and

transported approximately 4.1 million pounds of excess non-lethal materiel to O/AID/REP on a total of 71 missions.

So far, I have shown how the Commodity Export Program helped the Alliance fulfill its logistical needs, and in so doing, set in motion a transnational space of humanitarian flows in the Afghanistan-Pakistan borderlands. This humanitarian infrastructure coexisted uneasily with the networks of economic and military actors that had long conducted business both in and through the Afghanistan-Pakistan borderlands. By 1986, however, the military situation on the ground had begun to shift. The Soviet Union was beginning to grow weary of occupying Afghanistan. At the 27<sup>th</sup> Communist Party Congress in Moscow, General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev expressed a desire to find a swift resolution to the Afghanistan problem, which he likened to a “bleeding wound” (Rubin 2002, 146). In March 1986, the US stepped up the pressure on the Soviets by providing *mujahideen* fighters with portable air defense systems and a steady supply of Stinger surface-to-air missiles (Kuperman 1999). *Mujahideen* insurgents used these Stinger missiles to wreak havoc on enemy helicopters and transport aircraft, forcing Soviet generals to change their air assault tactics (Kuperman 1999). As Coll (2004, 11) writes, the Stinger’s “potency sowed fear” amongst Russian forces. While it is clear that the Stinger had an immediate military impact on the Afghan-Soviet conflict, it would nonetheless be a mistake to assume that its use single-handedly hastened the Soviet withdrawal and, by extension, the eventual collapse of communism (Kuperman 1999). According to Kuperman (1999), archival evidence suggests that Gorbachev sought withdrawal from the moment he assumed the mantle of general secretary in March 1985: a goal that the Politburo agreed to pursue well before *mujahideen* forces acquired their first Stinger missile. The official decision to withdraw all Soviet troops by the end of 1988 was ultimately taken at a Politburo meeting held on November 13, 1986 (Rubin 2002).

As the Soviet will to occupy Afghanistan crumbled, O/AID/REP gradually realized that it would have to make plans for the future. Accordingly, the CBHAP gradually shifted gears and established a number of sub-projects that were designed to help the Alliance’s new technical committees find solutions to some of the more serious problems plaguing Afghanistan’s health, education, and agricultural sectors. These were, respectively, the “Health Sector Support

Project”, the “Education Sector Support Project”, and the “Agricultural Sector Support Project” (ASSP). Whereas the Commodity Export Program was focused on helping war-affected Afghans meet their base humanitarian needs, these various Sector Support Projects instead prioritized more long-term questions of reconstruction and rehabilitation.

Even though the tide of the Soviet-Afghan conflict was rapidly turning in favour of the *mujahideen*, the US government insisted on keeping its restrictions on cross-border travel in place. This prevented O/AID/REP from simply reactivating many of the same rural development activities that had previously been introduced to Afghanistan by the Helmand Valley Project. Instead, these established rural development approaches had to be modified to account for the difficulties inherent to implementing cross-border development programs.

In what follows, I trace this transformation of rural development practice through a careful exploration of the Agricultural Sector Support Project (ASSP). First established in 1987 by O/AID/REP and its implementing partner, Volunteers in Technical Assistance, the ASSP began its life as an attempt to establish a network of quasi-governmental spaces in the countryside of Afghanistan. It was hoped that these efforts would produce viable alternatives to the Communist regime: proxies that would be able to interact with rural populations on O/AID/REP’s behalf. As the ASSP ran its course, however, O/AID/REP forced Volunteers in Technical Assistance to split its contract with another implementing partner, Development Alternatives, Inc., who began to champion market-based approaches as the key to developing and improving Afghanistan from afar. According to Development Alternatives Inc., the Saur Revolution had inhibited the functioning of “free market” forces in Afghanistan. Over time, the ASSP would focus more of its attention on restoring Afghanistan to its pre-Communist “open market” situation.

At first blush, the ASSP’s shift towards more market-based approaches seems to support Essex’s (2013, 53) claim that by the end of the Cold War, neoliberalism and geoeconomic perspectives had taken a “firm hold within development theory and practice”. In my analysis of the ASSP, I want to complicate Essex’s account by suggesting that the neoliberalization of development theory and practice was – at least in rural Afghanistan – necessarily partial, tentative, and contested. I argue that this was related in large part to the difficulties that O/AID/REP and its

implementing partners faced in cleanly delineating where humanitarian and development programming began and ended under conditions of conflict and emergency. Although the establishment of the ASSP was meant to signal a movement away from emergency response towards development and improvement, a closer look at its day-to-day operations reveals that it remained guided by humanitarian concerns.

### 3.4 “Katarah, katarah, dareah meshah”<sup>20</sup>

The origins of the ASSP can be traced back to a noncompetitive grant that USAID awarded to a US-based NGO – Volunteers in Technical Assistance (VITA) – in 1986. VITA was one of the first NGOs to establish an effective and comprehensive rural works program inside of Soviet-occupied Afghanistan (Wolters 1992). Many of its founders and senior staff had cut their teeth doing rural development work in pre-war Afghanistan. One member of VITA’s senior staff team – Dr. Abdul Wakil – had previously been the Vice-President of the Helmand Valley Authority. This core of Afghans, in turn, was praised for displaying great political sensitivity and judgement (Frederic et al. 1991). Under their stewardship, VITA managed to maintain its neutrality in a politically volatile environment, as demonstrated by the “good network of relations” that it had established with the *mujahideen tanzeems* and their commanders (Frederic et al. 1991). VITA was thus “overqualified” to help the Alliance restore levels of agricultural production in rural Afghanistan to their pre-war levels (Frederic et al. 1991).

On the strength of its rural works program, VITA signed a formal three-year contract with O/AID/REP on 14 June, 1987, that led to the establishment of the ASSP. Under the aegis of the ASSP, VITA was expected to work with the Alliance to expand agricultural production in the liberated areas of Afghanistan (VITA 1994). The ASSP’s first “Activity Approval Memorandum” proposed a two-track strategy. Track I would be guided by the Alliance’s newly established Agricultural Council, which was supposed to initiate rural development activities in selected areas of Afghanistan (USAID 1992). This “Afghan Agricultural Project” was supported by Track II. As part of an “Informal Steering Committee” – which was also staffed by USAID representatives and members of the Pakistani government – VITA channeled financial resources

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<sup>20</sup> “Drop by drop, it becomes a river” (USAID 1992).

and technical assistance to the Agricultural Council, as well as any other private sector groups and organizations working in the Afghan countryside (USAID 1992).

This strategy was derailed almost immediately by the Agricultural Council's inability to grapple with "substantive or procedural issues" (VITA 1987, 2). One document published by VITA in September 1987 argues that the Council's "principal accomplishment to date" is the "fact that they continue to meet on a weekly basis, to talk about what they might do": "an important step forward for the Alliance", to be sure, but "not enough" for O/AID/REP (VITA 1987, 2).

Although VITA recognized the symbolic significance of the Agricultural Council, it was nonetheless concerned by the fact that the Alliance remained divided along geographical, ethnic, linguistic, sectarian, and personal lines. According to VITA, these "serious and far reaching" divisions effectively precluded the Council from quickly making the practical decisions necessary to "provide meaningful policy direction for the Afghan Agricultural Project" (VITA 1987, 2). The Council, in other words, was unable to serve as an effective counterpart to VITA.

Nor was it possible for VITA (1987, 3) to wait indefinitely for the Council and the *tanzeem* to "agree to a unified course of action which accommodates the myriad ideological issues which currently divide them". According to VITA, the situation on the ground was far too dire. "The provision of agricultural equipment, supplies, and related infrastructure", VITA writes, "is *literally a matter of life and death* for people in some of the rural areas of Afghanistan" (VITA 1987, 3). Given such emergency conditions, VITA felt that it was best if an "additional program option be added to the possible avenues available for delivering goods and services inside Afghanistan". If VITA was to have any shot at restoring Afghanistan's agricultural economy to pre-war levels, it would have to bypass the very institution that it had been tasked with assisting (VITA 1987, 3).

In order to meet the "virtually unlimited" agricultural needs of rural Afghans, VITA established a "Rural Works Division" (USAID 1992, 5). This third "Track" is best understood as a scaled-back version of the Helmand Valley Project that had been designed to be implemented under conditions of war and emergency. Mindful of the fact that "rural development in a context as heterogeneous as rural Afghanistan can become an all-inclusive labour", VITA sought to limit

Track III work to a “realistic package of activities which can be undertaken by a small group of engineers and technicians working under war time conditions”: namely, area development schemes<sup>21</sup>, transportation improvement projects, and minor irrigation rehabilitation work (VITA 1987, 5).

While infrastructural improvement programs have long been implemented in rural Afghanistan, the area development scheme concept was unique to the ASSP, and hence, is deserving of closer scrutiny. Area development schemes were highly spatial form of development praxis. The very first area development scheme was established in the summer of 1987. Encouraged by the success of this pilot effort, a further 9 were added by June of the next year. Area development schemes were established by teams of VITA staff who identified geographical areas of rural Afghanistan that were in dire needs of agricultural assistance. Initially, VITA’s Rural Works Division operated exclusively in “areas of opportunity” that were “defined to a large extent on the basis of security” (Ronco 1989, 41). In order for a particular area of rural Afghanistan to be designated as an area development scheme, local *mujahideen* commanders and political leaders would have to establish a security bubble for VITA’s teams to work in (Frederic et al. 1991).

What did this look like in practice? One document provides a detailed description of the process through which a hypothetical area development scheme might be established in rural Afghanistan. First, a team – composed of an engineer, and two technicians - would “undertake a survey of four possible area development schemes, and begin limited activities on the two which appear to be most feasible” (VITA 1987, 6). In this hypothetical case, the project area would be “located in a quiet corner of Nooristan” (VITA 1987, 7). Work would concentrate on assisting a cluster of approximately 15 villages with a combined pre-war population of approximately 20,000 residents. According to the authors of the report, the “proposed cluster of villages” was selected as a potential area development scheme site because:

“...access is relatively good; transportation costs are not astronomical; the people want to stay in the area, or return to it; the area is now defendable; the social structure is relatively homogenous, and the people are relatively easy to work with; the villagers of the impact area are relatively close together and form an integrated unit; there are two

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<sup>21</sup> Also known as “Agricultural Rehabilitation Schemes”.

principal irrigation canals which sustain agriculture and tie the proposed villages together socially and economically; the kinds of inputs required to assist the area appear reasonable and within the scope of the project” (VITA 1987, 7)

Once the team had settled on a site, it could begin to allocate ASSP assistance in “ways which reflect Afghan rural village sociology”, as well as the “prevailing economic conditions” (VITA 1987, 7). Generally, area development scheme teams would help local farmers find viable solutions to any war-related agricultural problems, such as: damage to agricultural infrastructure; a loss of draft power; a general deterioration in the quality of agronomic inputs; and the proliferation of grass, weeds, and shrubs on land that has been left untilled (Ronco 1989). To this end, area development scheme teams demonstrated various agricultural inputs – including wheat seed, bullocks, tractors, plows, and other equipment – rehabilitated rural infrastructures, and worked on an experimental basis with local businessmen to open “commercial channels” to and from Afghanistan (Mansavage 1988). In the aforementioned area development scheme, the team decided to help the local population get the two main irrigation canals back into service through cash-for-work initiatives.

By creating a network of area development schemes in the Afghan countryside – as mapped by Figure 10 – VITA hoped to furnish local authorities with “quasi-governmental services” (DAI 1989, 4). By mid-1988, VITA was convinced that the area development scheme concept could “serve as an institutional mechanism for delivering goods and services to facilitate agricultural rehabilitation, and in that sense, could help fill the ‘institutional’ void left by the defunct [Agricultural Council]” (Ronco 1989, 4). In this regard, VITA was “totally unlike a contractor providing technical assistance to a government” (DAI 1989, 4). Rather, it took on “operating functions normally associated with those of a government agency” (Ronco 1989, 32).

Furthermore, in contexts where local authorities were completely non-existent, VITA helped conjure them into being. As one report notes, agricultural development officers played a key role in this process. If a shura does not exist, for instance, the agricultural development officer “may go to the mosque and ask people to set one up” (Frederic et al. 1991, 16). Tasked with devising subprojects that address the basic needs of local populations, these shuras were considered a necessary prerequisite for ASSP development work. This process was often

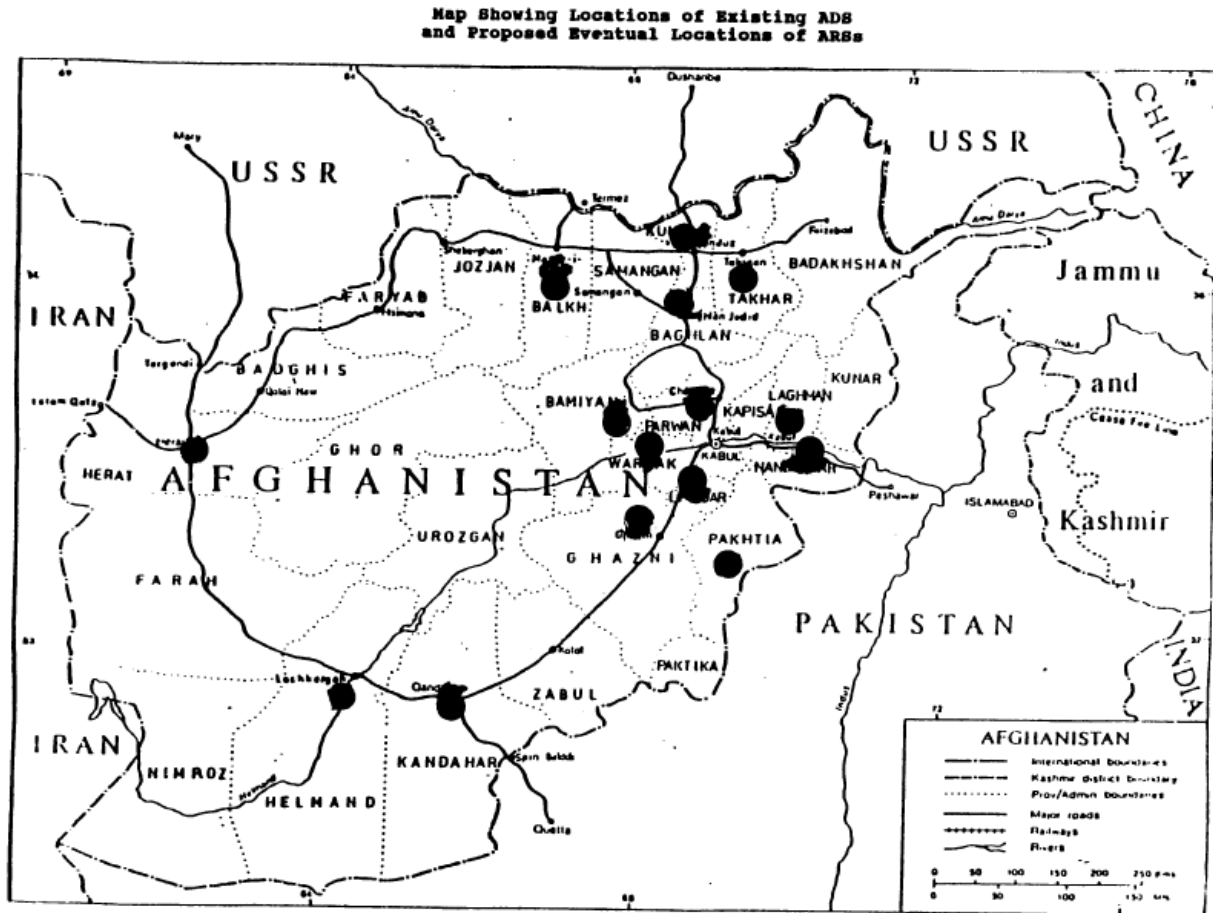


Figure 10: Map showing the locations of existing and future ADSs (Ronco 1989, 38)

represented as a highly democratic form of self-help. As one report puts it, rural works produced “far more than completed karezes and roads”, but rather, mobilized “communities to work on their own behalf, [helped] organize a rural population divided by a war, and sometimes catalyzed rebuilding efforts in devastated areas that might [have] otherwise [appeared] hopeless to refugees considering returning to their prewar homes” (DAI 1989a, 33). In actuality, however, local shuras were carefully managed by their assigned agricultural development officer, who adjudicated each proposed subproject on the grounds of feasibility, desirability, and sustainability. In this sense, the agricultural development officer acted as a sort of shepherd, tasked with helping their flock help themselves.

Although agricultural development officers were “given considerable operating flexibility in developing and implementing approved subprojects”, VITA maintained tight control over project



activities through an intricate system of monitoring and oversight. On the one hand, steps were taken to ensure that agricultural development officers circulated regularly between their field sites and VITA's Pakistani offices. Each agricultural development scheme, for instance, was funded through an impress account that could only be replenished if its development officer made a trip cross-border to produce receipts detailing all program expenditures. Agricultural development officers based in the eastern border provinces were expected to visit Peshawar every month or two, while those located in more remote provinces were encouraged to make a yearly pilgrimage to Islamabad (Frederic et al. 1991). On the other hand, VITA also developed a three-tier monitoring system in order to ensure that all agricultural development schemes were running smoothly. At the first level, two full-time monitors were stationed at each agricultural development scheme. These monitors also made regular trips to Peshawar or Quetta, where they provided their managers with detailed reports on all project activities. At level two, an additional 17 plain-clothes monitors performed clandestine inspections of approximately 75% of all agricultural development schemes. Finally, at level three, one quarter of all agricultural development schemes were subject to random technical inspections, which were carried out by teams of two to three Peshawar-based engineers (Frederic et al. 1991).

As the termination date of VITA's contract approached, evaluations and audits of the ASSP convinced O/AID/REP of the need for change. While VITA successfully renegotiated a new cooperative agreement with O/AID/REP in March 1990, its rural development mandate did not survive this process unscathed. Owing to improving security conditions, O/AID/REP decided that it was time for VITA to upscale its rural works operations. The Soviet troop withdrawal had begun on 15 May, 1988, and ended 9 months later on 15 February, 1989. While the Soviet Union still supplied the Kabul regime with aid and weapons, the overall loss of coercive resources effectively crippled its ability to pacify and control rural populations through military means (Rubin 2002). Accordingly, the government was forced to abandon its commitments to Leninist state-building and rural counterinsurgency (Rubin 2002). Its retreat from the Afghan countryside subsequently opened the door for *mujahideen* forces to liberate entire provinces, which made it safe for VITA to "work in more areas with greater selectivity regarding subprojects to be implemented" (Ruiz 1992). VITA's new cooperative agreement reflected these new geo-strategic realities on the ground by calling for area development schemes to be operated at the "provincial

level only” (Ruiz 1992). USAID hoped that up-scaling the area development scheme concept would enable the ASSP to exert a “positive influence on the establishment of government-like institutions” throughout the countryside of rural Afghanistan (DAI 1989a, 21). This new strategy would stabilize wider swathes of the countryside and lead to the establishment of even more area development schemes. Through its newly renamed “Agricultural and Rural Rehabilitation” subproject, then, VITA was being asked to governmentalize entire provinces.

Not all reviews of VITA’s rural development activities were positive. While one evaluation published in December 1988 argued that VITA had been “less successful in developing a specific agricultural assistance program than it had been in rehabilitating rural works”, it nonetheless saw promise in its “small, but highly successful experimental activity in distributing agricultural equipment through private commercial channels” (Frederic et al. 1991, 10). Although the evaluation called on O/AID/REP to expand this commercial channels program, it deemed VITA unqualified for such a task, and recommended that it be given instead to a contractor with more experience in agribusiness (Frederic et al. 1991, 10). O/AID/REP heeded this advice, stripping VITA of its responsibility for conducting extension, demonstration, and procurement activities. O/AID/REP consolidated these tasks into a new “Private Sector Agribusiness” (PSA) component, and in 1989, hired a new implementing partner – Development Alternatives, Inc. – to carry them out.

With these re-configurations of the ASSP, O/AID/REP effectively threw its weight behind two distinct – yet supposedly complementary – visions of how to best go about developing Afghanistan from afar. Whereas VITA sought to produce a micro-geography of government in rural Afghanistan, Development Alternatives Inc. promised to develop Afghanistan through the (re)establishment of market spaces in the countryside. In practice, however, Development Alternatives Inc.’s turn towards the market was uneven and partial. The *mujahideen*’s increasing success on the battlefield may have provided O/AID/REP with the operational freedom necessary to engage in more long-term rural development activities, but it also meant that all of the refugees – accounting for approximately 1/3 of Afghanistan’s total population – who had fled to Pakistan during the occupation could begin to repatriate *en masse* (McCorckle and Hostetter 1990, ii).

This was problematic for two reasons. First, it was widely accepted by development and humanitarian professionals that agricultural production – which, by 1987, had fallen to about 53% of Afghanistan’s pre-war levels (DAI 1992) – was “insufficient to support the existing in-country population, let alone a large number of refugees that will be returning as the political situation stabilizes further” (McCorkle and Hostetter 1990, 7-8). In a column penned for the ASSP’s monthly newsletter, Fayaz Khan prophesized that a massive “influx of returning refugees without a corresponding increase in agricultural production will certainly lead to the disruption of what is already a fragile socio-economic and political fabric” (DAI 1992a, 23). Second, technicians such as McCorkle and Hostetter (1990, ii) also lamented how “many young *mujahideen* have progressed from childhood to adulthood fighting the Soviet invaders and have missed learning how to farm through a traditional father-to-son relationship”<sup>22</sup>. As one of the ASSP’s employees, Haji Wais, put it in 1992:

“The farmers who worked the land have grown old. Their sons have grown up outside Afghanistan. This new generation of farmers needs to be trained. If we don’t train them, there will be a gap. Afghanistan will lose a generation of farmers” (DAI 1992a, 26).

In hopes of pre-empting these two problems, DAI accordingly became obsessed with achieving two rural development goals: a) helping Afghanistan become self-sufficient in grain production; and b) training the next generation of Afghan farmers. DAI’s ultimate goal may have been to encourage rural Afghans to participate in more commercial forms of agriculture, but the looming threat of humanitarian catastrophe ensured that the ASSP remained focused – for the most part – on helping beneficiaries meet their base subsistence needs. In the next section of this chapter, I will explore how DAI attempted to harness the power of the market to help meet these subsistence goals. In so doing, I will show how this conflation of development and humanitarian assistance effectively placed limiters on the neoliberalization of development theory and practice in rural Afghanistan.

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<sup>22</sup> Note, once again, how USAID and its implementing partners uncritically internalized a gendered division of labour that casts agriculture as men’s work. For a discussion of how Communist women’s organizations sought to nurture more progressive gender relations in Soviet-occupied Afghanistan, see Nunan (2016, Chapter 5).

### 3.5 Natural neoliberals?

In order to justify the appropriateness of a market-based approach to developing rural Afghanistan from a distance, its proponents first had to show how rural Afghans were naturally predisposed to behaving as economic subjects. Accordingly, private sector contractors such as Development Alternatives Inc. (DAI) and Ronco began to question USAID's long history of framing Afghan farmers as deficient and antiquated subjects in need of direct pastoral care. One assessment of the ASSP claims that Afghan farmers have historically "resisted government interventions and are skeptical of outsiders telling them how to farm" (Ronco 1989, 11). Instead, they are "much more receptive to the opportunity to have access to a piece of equipment or to one-time community services, such as cleaning or rehabilitating karezes, which have little threat of continued government involvement" (Ronco 1989, 11). Similarly, DAI argued that rural Afghans have historically been traders as much as they have been subsistence farmers. In its initial workplan for the ASSP, DAI suggests that prior to the outbreak of war, Afghans "enjoyed a vibrant private sector market economy consistent with their independent nature", trading a wide range of commodities with their Russian, Pakistani, Iranian, Chinese, and Indian neighbours (DAI 1989, 11). According to DAI, Communist aggression inhibited these "free market forces". By 1989, the previous "open market situation" had deteriorated to the point where:

"the supply of many essential commodities to the trade centers of the liberated rural areas [was] either restricted or completely blocked; the limited supplies of essential commodities present in Afghanistan [were] only available to farmers by way of trade centers under the control of the Kabul regime; and the cost of agricultural inputs [had] increased to the point where farmers [could] no longer afford to purchase their full requirements" (DAI 1989, 11)

Note what DAI emphasizes in this passage: that the war – and communism, more generally – had interrupted the flow of essential commodities both into and throughout the Afghan countryside. Here, it is implied that Afghanistan's ailing agricultural sector could only be revitalized once DAI transformed the countryside into a frictionless space conducive to the smooth, market-driven circulation of commodities and capital.

I argue that DAI's obsession with lubricating the flows of essential commodities stemmed from its worry that any lasting settlement of the ongoing Soviet-*mujahideen* conflict would potentially set in motion a general repatriation of all Afghan refugees living abroad. Such a massive influx of refugees would place a massive strain on agricultural production in Afghanistan, which would become "deficient in food for about nine million people". (DAI 1992, 8). In DAI's estimation, the "biggest challenge for Afghanistan [was] how to make the country self-sufficient in the fastest possible time" (DAI 1992, 8). According to Dr. Azam Gul, the director of the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan's Agricultural Department, there were two ways of achieving this goal. The first was to bring more land under sustained agricultural cultivation. This solution, however, was discounted by Dr. Gul, on the grounds that it would require a "substantial period of time and large amounts of investment capital which the country cannot afford" (DAI 1992, 8). The alternative – which was endorsed by both Dr. Gul and DAI – was to improve the productivity of existing agricultural land. As DAI (1992b, 1) would later quip: "if Afghanistan is going to feed its people, it needs to improve wheat yields".

The easiest way to achieve such improvements was to re-introduce Afghan farmers to improved wheat seeds (Saari 1992). As we saw in Chapter 1, this was not the first time that USAID had attempted to introduce Green Revolution technologies to Afghan farmers. The Mexipak varieties that had been distributed through the Shamalan Land Development Project, however, were no longer considered by many extension agents to be "improved", as they had, over time, not only lost their high-yield potential, but also developed a vulnerability to rust diseases (DAI 1992; Saari 1992, 9). The plan, therefore, was to wean farmers off of the Mexipak strain and instead, introduce them to more modern varieties, such as Pak 81, Pirsabak 85, and Bezostaya (Saari 1992; Sediq 1989). Once the use of these new improved wheat seeds had been mainstreamed amongst farming communities, then chemical fertilizers and agricultural machinery could be used to squeeze even more productivity out of the land. The primary objectives of the PSA were therefore two fold. First, to train farmers in the use of modern agricultural inputs. And second, given that most of these modern agricultural inputs could not be sourced domestically, to facilitate the trade of – or develop markets in – those that proved popular amongst farmers. Given the "lack of government services in Afghanistan", the private sector was expected to play

an important role in helping DAI achieve these objectives (Poulin 1990 1). From this point forward, the growth and development of Afghan agriculture was going to be market-based.

DAI's market-based approach was ostensibly designed to complement VITA's rural rehabilitation work in a diversity of ways. One report evocatively described the two subcomponents, respectively, as the "left" and "right" hands of the broader ASSP project (DAI 1989a, 27). Although DAI paid lip-service to the idea that both of these "hands" were equally important to the functioning of the ASSP, in reality it believed that VITA's approach was fundamentally misguided. For DAI, rural development interventions in Soviet-occupied Afghanistan had to be "reoriented away from a [NGO] perspective of short-term relief and high-visibility to a more mercantile and commercial perspective" (DAI 1989a, 35). As DAI (1989a, 29) elaborated in its technical proposal for the ASSP, many of the NGOs based in Peshawar were "inclined to donate commodities and provide free services". While such activities were useful in the short-term, they were ultimately unsustainable. According to DAI, the standard NGO approach had a proven track record of seriously distorting the economics of agricultural production in Afghanistan and as such, was marred by a legacy of failure. "Rather than being encouraged to produce useful outputs", DAI writes, "the Afghan farmers may be devoting their energy to entering the queue that receives free handouts" (DAI 1989a, 22).

DAI, in contrast, vowed not to make these same mistakes. Although DAI acknowledged that USAID's revised "ASSP [had] some elements of a quasi-governmental development program", it nonetheless pledged to establish self-sustaining commercial linkages between private trading partners and "paying agricultural 'customers' inside Afghanistan" (DAI 1989a, 22). In so doing, DAI hoped to "generate continuing mutually profitable development services and support" that did not require "recurrent government expenses" (DAI 1989a, 22). DAI believed that the development responsibilities that it inherited from VITA – demonstrating improved agricultural technology and practices to farmers and meeting demands for commodities and equipment through private sector channels – would help it achieve these goals. These responsibilities, in turn, were assumed by two of PSA's subcomponents: respectively, "Agricultural Development Training" and "Commercial Agricultural Sales".

The main objective of the Agricultural Development Training (ADT) component was to help Afghan farmers improve their agricultural productivity by showing them how to use modern agricultural inputs, such as improved seeds, chemical fertilizers, and farm machinery (DAI 1993). While extension and demonstration programs have long served as vectors of improvement in rural Afghanistan (see Chapter 1), what was novel about the ADT was the extent to which it was integrated with the private sector. DAI represented the ADT as the hinge that would bridge the “limited quasi-public sector agricultural activities” being undertaken by VITA and the “commercial agribusiness activities of the PSA component” (DAI 1989, 55). Ideally, any agricultural input demonstrated by ADT technicians would be made available for sale at the PSA’s new market centres (DAI 1993). By marketizing extension and demonstration work in this manner, DAI hoped that the private sector would become increasingly involved in both generating and fulfilling Afghan desires for modern agricultural commodities.

The vast majority of this rural development work was carried out at “ADT sites”. These spaces served as laboratories in which extension professionals were given free rein to test new agricultural techniques and inputs on local farmers (De Boer et al. 1992). In order for an area to be designated an ADT site, it had:

- 1) to be attractive to returning refugees;
- 2) to have great potential for high agricultural productivity;
- 3) to be located in close proximity to new or existing VITA offices so as to promote synergy with Agricultural and Rural Rehabilitation activities;
- 4) to house pre-existing shuras or other local organizations in order to ensure adequate levels of community participation in extension and demonstration activities;
- 5) to be poppy free (USAID 1987a).

By 1992, active ADT sites had been established in Helmand, Kandahar, Logar, Paktika, Wardak, Ghazni, Nangarhar, Baghlan, Takhar, Parwan, and Bamyan. Unfortunately, the establishment of further ADT sites in northern Afghanistan was prevented by “logistical and security constraints” (De Boer et al. 1992, 45).

ADT field sites were staffed by anywhere between three to thirteen extension agents. DAI tended to recruit these village-level extension workers from the very communities that they were

supposed to serve. Generally, these extension workers were farmers who cultivated their own land. (DeBoer et al. 1992, 65). After completing their initial training in Pakistan, extension workers returned to their assigned zone of operations, where they carried out trials, created demonstration plots for various crops and agricultural technologies, instructed farmers in recommended practices, distributed inputs, and finally, disseminated various kinds of mass media, such as crop production pamphlets, silk screen prints, and *Voice of America* radio programs (DAI 1992a; Ronco 1989; De Boer et al. 1992).

All available evidence suggests that it was the demonstration plot that spatially anchored all of these various extension activities in rural communities. In each province, at least five demonstration plots for each individual crop were established on land volunteered for this purpose by so-called “progressive-thinking” or “contact” farmers (Conje 1991, 16; DAI 1992a). According to Husain (1990, 35), these “early adopters” were generally “larger farmers who can better take risk (because they are wealthy) and undertake experimentation (because they have the land on which to do so)”. It was also important that they be regarded by their peers as “able and worthy of imitation” (Conje 1991, 16).

One extension agent, Pir Mohammad, estimated that these “progressive-thinking” farmers accounted for approximately 30% of any given rural community. The remaining 70% were invited to visit these demonstration plots, where they were encouraged to evaluate for themselves the potential benefits of adopting modern agricultural inputs. According to Pir Mohammad, this “non-progressive” group could be further sorted into one of two categories: approximately 57% were “undecided” farmers who expected extension agents to “do all the work for them”, while the final 43% were represented as “indifferent or hostile to any innovative techniques or practices” (DAI 1992a, 3). In Pir Mohammad’s view, however, even the most “tradition-bound” farmer could be “reached and educated”, given sufficient extension personnel and resources (DAI 1992a, 3).

While all of these mechanisms underscored DAI’s faith in the power of technology and technical assistance to modernize the behaviour of Afghan farmers, none of these potential benefits could be realized without some means of fulfilling the demand for the agricultural commodities that



had been generated by ADT extension activities. This responsibility was assumed by the PSA's Commercial Agricultural Sales (CAS) teams, who were tasked with supplying "10 key provinces with a significant range of commodities...essential to get agricultural production moving" at "affordable prices" (De Boer et al. 1992, 11).

Given the impossibility of sourcing many of these commodities domestically, however, how did DAI go about getting them to where they were needed the most? As noted earlier, DAI's Commercial sub-project was based upon the simplistic assumption that pre-war Afghanistan had been a smooth space of commodity flows. The task of the Commercial sub-project was, therefore, to conjure this imagined vision of pre-war Afghanistan into reality through rural development programming. One might argue that, in this sense, the Commercial sub-project was marked by an "obvious tensions" between its broad desire to indirectly set conditions and the practical necessity of directly manipulating outcomes (Li 2014, 44). A series of "loosely connected notes" prepared by Tariq Husain, one of DAI's trade and marketing advisors, suggests that this tension did not go unnoticed. At the level of discourse and rhetoric, DAI remained committed to upholding a fairly neoclassical approach to rural development. Husain (1990, 4) cautioned representatives of O/AID/REP and DAI from involving themselves directly in private sector activities. This did not necessarily mean, however, that the private sector was to be *laissez-faire*. Rather, Husain (1990, 4) argued that interventions in the private sector were justified so long as they created opportunities for arbitrage. Once these environmental conditions were set, "traders in hot pursuit of the rupee" would "do the rest: they [would] move goods from one place to another in pursuit of profits". Ultimately, the end-state goal of was to eventually "shift the responsibility for developing markets for new inputs from public sector extension services to the private sector" (Poulin 1990, 2). Under such an arrangement, new agricultural inputs would be introduced to rural Afghans not through rural development programs, but rather, through the proper functioning of market forces. Commercial channels, it was assumed, would be "more sustainable at the farm level" (Poulin 1990, 2).

In practice, however, the line between indirectly setting conditions and directly manipulating outcomes was incredibly blurred. In order to increase the export of vital agricultural inputs to rural Afghanistan, DAI attempted to promote both "trade facilitation" and "market development"

activities (Poulin 1990). According to Poulin (1990, 2), “trade facilitation” activities were meant to reduce the costs and regulatory constraints associated with importing agricultural inputs “for which there is an existing demand in Afghanistan”. While the idea of “trade facilitation” seems to violate the principle of *laissez-faire*, DAI believed that it could find ways of intensifying existing flows of agricultural commodities without resorting to what Poulin (1990, 2) characterized as “market-distorting subsidies”.

Poulin (1990) identified three general factors that were discouraging private sector merchants from establishing commercial channels to the Afghan countryside. First, transportation costs were inflated due to the persistence of wartime conditions inside of Afghanistan. Ongoing insecurity and bad roads meant that agricultural supply chains remained “vulnerable to fraud, theft, and abuse”, reportedly suffering more losses than any other project in O/AID/REP’s Afghanistan portfolio (USAID 1994, 10). Agricultural commodities and vehicles were in great demand and easily convertible to cash making them attractive targets for thieves and hijackers. This was especially the case when DAI was forced to extend its supply chains over greater distances, as demonstrated by the hijacking of huge wheat seed shipments that were destined for northern Afghanistan (USAID 1994). To reduce the costs associated with working under wartime conditions, DAI offered private sector merchants transportation rebates (Freed 1990, 3). DAI distinguished these rebates from “market-distorting subsidies” on the grounds that they only covered the rise in transportation costs brought on by the war.

Second, the complexity of the regulatory infrastructure that governed cross-border trade from Pakistan to Afghanistan also exerted a dampening effect on private sector activities. Under the terms of the 1965 Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement, commodities were only permitted to cross the border tariff-free if they were imported by entities based in any of the urban areas controlled by the Kabul regime. Given that the aim of the PSA was to channel agricultural inputs to farmers living in the *mujahideen*-controlled countryside, this was obviously not a viable solution to the problem at hand. At first, DAI tried to work around these regulatory restrictions by importing goods under the auspices of the US government and then delegating the responsibility for exporting them to Afghanistan to private sector traders. As Poulin (1990, 9) reminds us, however, one of DAI’s objectives was to extricate itself – and by extension, the US

government – from the business of importing agricultural inputs into Afghanistan. In order to make this happen, DAI had to find some way of helping private sector merchants avoid Pakistani custom duties and taxes. Otherwise, the business of exporting agricultural inputs into Afghanistan would remain “time consuming, prohibitively expensive, or even impossible” (Poulin 1990, 9).

DAI attempted to lubricate the cross-border circulation of agricultural inputs by representing private sector merchants as providers of humanitarian assistance. In September 1990, DAI was assured by O/AID/REP that the Pakistani government’s Afghan Affairs Advisors would share its “definition of humanitarian assistance to include subsidies to the agricultural business private sector” (Freed 1990, 1-2). Cary Raditz (1990, 6) subsequently called on the PSA to secure an official agreement from the government of Pakistan to “extend blanket coverage of ‘humanitarian aid’ provisions to cover private sector trade of fertilizer and other restricted ag-inputs to Afghanistan”. To this end, the PSA even offered to retain the services of a neutral inspection service to prevent any confusion from arising over whether agricultural inputs such as chemical fertilizers were being used for humanitarian or commercial purposes (Raditz 1990). By cloaking the activities of private sector actors in the mantle of humanitarianism, DAI hoped to circumvent established regimes of regulatory control in order to expedite the flow of agricultural inputs across the border.

Third, trade facilitation activities were also constrained by the general poverty of rural Afghan farmers, who were generally unwilling to purchase new and un-tested inputs at their full market value (Poulin 1990). DAI sought to assuage these fears by engaging in what it described as “market development” activities. For DAI, this implied “incurring losses during an introductory period to create a market for products that later become profitable enough to justify the initial investment” (Poulin 1990, 4). DAI incentivized reluctant private sector actors to test new products in rural Afghan markets by: initiating procurement processes with its own funds; reimbursing the promotion costs incurred by traders; offering goods on consignment; and agreeing to repurchase unsold inputs at a pre-determined price. DAI hoped that these “market development” activities would “demonstrate that the private sector can disseminate certain new technologies as effectively as agricultural extension services, and with more sustainability, since

innovations will be marketed based on farm level profitability, rather than solely agronomic rationales” (Poulin 1990, 10).

Whereas DAI’s trade facilitation activities were mostly carried out in Pakistan, a significant proportion of its market development work was actually prosecuted across the border in Afghanistan. As part of its broader project to expand “commercial trade links with Pakistan and other market economies”, DAI (1989, 9) established a number of bazaars and trade centers in rural communities “correlated geographically” with – or at the very least, “located in relatively close proximity” to – “existing or future [agricultural development scheme] units”. Each bazaar or trade center was staffed by three to four PSA agents who: a) helped advertise the existence of DAI’s program to potential customers; b) provided local merchants with up-to date information on all of the inputs available to Afghan farmers; c) ensured the continued circulation of commodities and capital; and d) produced reports, conducted surveys, and sketched out maps, such as the example included as Figure 11 (DAI 1989). Figure 11 is a sketch of the bazaar that was established at Now Zad, in Helmand province. What is particularly interesting about Figure 11 is that every stall depicted either sells “grain” or “fert[ilizer]”. This fact is suggestive of the emphasis that PSA agents placed on facilitating the trade of or developing markets in improved wheat seeds and chemical fertilizers. The preponderance of grain and fertilizer in this particular bazaar also highlights the ongoing importance of subsistence – as opposed to market-oriented – agricultural production to the livelihood strategies of households living in the hinterland of the bazaar.

Bazaars and trade centers were not merely free spaces of exchange. Rather, they often served DAI as laboratories of market development, where various techniques for transforming rural Afghanistan into an environment conducive to the “pursuit of profit” could be put to the test. For example, DAI representatives sought to build up credibility in targeted bazaars and trade centers through the “forward placement” of selected agricultural inputs (Freed 1990). Under this scheme, DAI held title to a particular commodity until it was delivered to a bazaar in a quantity established prior to shipment. This practice helped reduce the risk assumed by merchants in pioneering new products. DAI also went to great lengths to ensure that fertilizers and improved wheat seeds were equally distributed to all bazaars, irrespective of local supply and demand

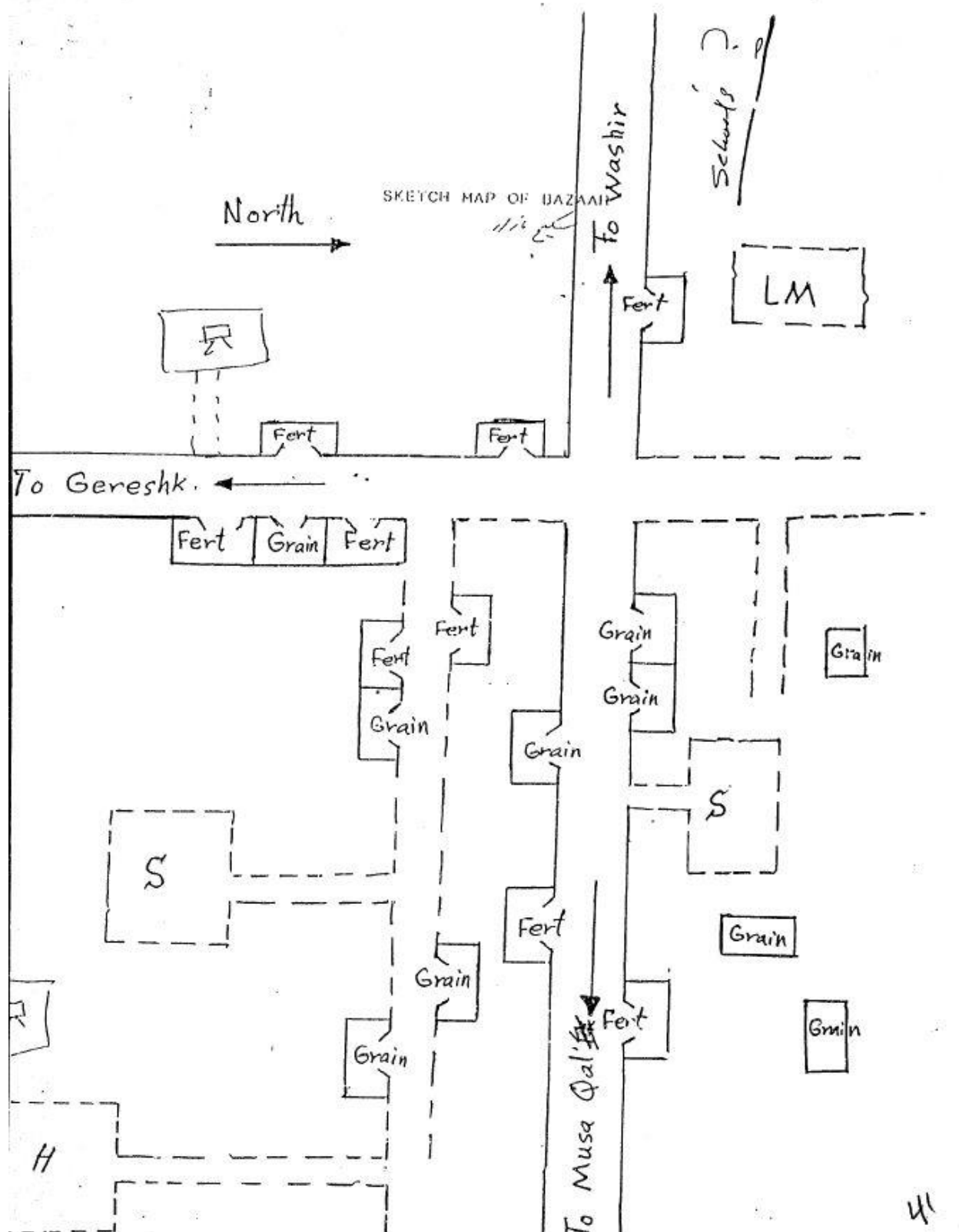


Figure 11: Sketch map of bazaar (DAI 1990)

conditions (Freed 1990, 6). While a market fundamentalist would have ignored underperforming bazaars, DAI instead decided that, at least in this particular instance, the market could not be trusted to develop rural Afghanistan in an equitable manner.

Throughout this section, I have tried to complicate Essex's important, yet somewhat sequential account of USAID's neoliberal turn by carefully engaging with DAI's attempt to restore Afghanistan to its pre-war "open market situation". My research shows that these efforts were animated, in many ways, by the very humanitarian logics that they were supposed to have transcended. Instead of orienting farmers towards producing *for* the market – as is characteristic of most rural development programs being implemented in Afghanistan's colonial present (Gregory 2004) – the looming threat of humanitarian catastrophe limited DAI to narrowly focusing its attention on promoting *market-assisted* forms of subsistence agricultural production. DAI obsessed over achieving food security and self-sufficiency in wheat: not transitioning Afghan farmers towards a commercialized monoculture of cash-cropping. It is in this sense that DAI's attempt to marketize rural Afghanistan is best understood as uneven, partial, and provisional.

This is not to suggest that DAI drew up no plans to undertake a more thorough commercialization of Afghan agriculture. In fact, both DAI and VITA made some preliminary efforts to revitalize Afghanistan's once-thriving horticultural sector" (DAI 1992a, 9; Sediq 1989, 1989a). For the most part, however, their immediate focus remained resolutely on helping Afghanistan become self-sufficient in wheat production. This did not stop experts such as Dr. Abdul Wakil from thinking "ahead towards the future when simple food requirements will begin to be met" (DAI 1992c, 9). Under such circumstances, it would no longer make much sense to prioritize wheat production when far more valuable horticultural cash crops could help Afghan farmers earn upwards of a billion dollars a year in badly needed foreign exchange. It was therefore imperative that Afghan horticulture "become an emerging priority in all assistance plans for the future" (DAI 1992c, 9). To quote Dr. Wakil:

"We can no longer afford to wait. NGOs and donor agencies need to make a stronger commitment to the long term growth of Afghan

horticulture. The economic future of Afghanistan depends on it” (DAI 1992c, 10).

Unfortunately, Dr. Wakil wrote these words in February 1992. This was around the time when the ASSP began to wind down, and as a result, Dr. Wakil’s vision never came to pass.

Although DAI devoted most of its energy to helping Afghanistan achieve self-sufficiency in food production, this did not necessarily mean that all Afghan farmers were exclusively cultivating wheat and maize. As James Ferguson (1990) reminds us, all development interventions have unintended consequences. Over the course of the Soviet occupation, an increasing number of Afghan farmers were deliberately choosing to align themselves with an alternative constellation of political-economic power. Here, of course, I am referring to Afghanistan’s burgeoning narco-economy. O/AID/REP and DAI had long suspected that some of the agricultural assistance being channeled to rural Afghans through projects such as the ASSP was actually being diverted towards poppy cultivators. Prior to the withdrawal of Soviet troops, O/AID/REP was able to downplay these suspicions. From the late 1980s onwards, however, mounting political pressure at home made it increasingly difficult for O/AID/REP to turn a blind eye to the problem of poppy cultivation. Accordingly, O/AID/REP established a number of projects that were designed to dissuade Afghan farmers from cultivating poppy. As I show in the final section of this chapter, these counternarcotics efforts were characterized by a dialectic of “anger” and “mercy”: or, to use more Foucauldian terminology, an interplay between necropolitics and biopolitics. While the difficulties of conducting cross-border counternarcotics operations eventually ground these flows of assistance to a juddering halt, they remain deserving of critical scrutiny. For as we shall see in Chapters 4 and 5, they foreshadowed, in many ways, the shape of things to come.

### **3.6 Anger and mercy**

By now, it is well-established that the CIA’s covert operations in Soviet-occupied Afghanistan catalyzed the transformation of the Afghanistan-Pakistan borderlands into the world’s largest heroin producing region. As Alfred McCoy (2003) demonstrates in detail, the CIA was aware that many *mujahideen* fighters were directly involved in the production and distribution of high-grade heroin. Because ruthless narco-lords “made effective anti-communist allies and opium

amplified their power”, the CIA chose not to stop their drug dealing, but rather, “tolerated it, and when necessary, blocked investigations”. The CIA’s covert operations effectively transformed Soviet-occupied Afghanistan into an “enforcement-free zone where all US foreign policy priorities” – in this particular case, the broader “War on Drugs” – “were [subordinated] to the agency’s mission” (McCoy 2003, 528). While the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) made some “weak” and “distant” attempts at drug interdiction in Soviet-occupied Afghanistan, the force of these counternarcotics operations was ultimately blunted by the CIA’s “direct alliances” with Afghan drug lords (McCoy 2003, 526).

McCoy’s views are not idiosyncratic but are shared by some O/AID/REP officials. As Kingsley (25 November, 2012) recalls, poppy cultivation was deemed an “acceptable income generation activity” for “certain muj in the east and southeast on the part of their managers and handlers”. While Kingsley insists that USAID was not directly collaborating with the CIA, she does not rule out the possibility that O/AID/REP inadvertently supported agricultural development in areas of rural Afghanistan that were also producing poppy. Although she herself was never able to cross the border to assess the validity of these rumours, she admits that O/AID/REP might have indirectly aided and abetted the emergence of Afghanistan’s narco-economy. These rumours are lent credence by the fact that DEA and O/AID/REP officials were actively discouraged from pursuing drugs in Afghanistan until 1988 (Peters 2010). In June 1986, for instance, one DEA agent was reportedly told by the US ambassador to Pakistan that drugs was the third biggest priority in Afghanistan, after “fighting the Soviets” and “stopping nuclear proliferation” (Peters 2009, 48). Similarly, Larry Crandall – who was the chief of the USAID mission in Pakistan at the time – reportedly quipped: “until we were sure that the Soviets would go in 1988, we basically put drugs on the back burner” (Peters 2010, 49).

In 1988, the security situation on the ground had improved sufficiently for Crandall to greenlight USAID’s first counternarcotics program for Afghanistan. In Crandall’s own words: “Since it now looked like we were going to win this thing, we couldn’t countenance a situation where we were supporting a group of people who were freedom fighters but also drug traders” (Peters 2009, 51). Unfortunately for Crandall, Afghan farmers had begun cultivating poppies in lieu of widely available licit alternatives long before Soviet troops began their withdrawal in 1988. This



increase in poppy cultivation was precipitated primarily by the material consequences of the occupation itself. In rural areas, the war caused severe damage to delicate agricultural ecosystems. Homes, farm-to-market roads, irrigation systems, and draft animal stocks were destroyed by years of aerial bombing and neglect. To make matters worse, both government and rebel forces had blanketed the Afghan countryside with millions of anti-personnel mines, effectively slowing rebuilding efforts to a crawl.

In order to survive in this devastated environment, Afghan farmers started planting poppies. In comparison with wheat, poppies were easier to grow, produced greater yields, and fetched greater farm-gate prices. Some Afghan farmers calculated that the “wheat yield for a typical family farm is 560 kilograms worth the equivalent of \$140”, while the “opium output on the same parcel of land would yield 14 to 18 kilograms of raw opium worth up to \$3,006” (USAID 1992a, 2). Another Afghan farmer located in Helmand province informed an O/AID/REP employee that he had recently planted poppies on a jerib (approximately half an acre) of land that he could otherwise rent at a rate of 12,000 Afghanis per month. According to this farmer, the opium resin produced by his poppy crop netted him a monthly of profit of 208,000 Afghanis on the open market (Samin 1992). The opium resin being produced by these farmers, in turn, would have eventually found its way to the heroin manufacturing industry that had recently emerged in Pakistan’s “Northwest Frontier Provinces” as the result of aggressive poppy eradication campaigns that had been mounted by the Pakistani government in collaboration with the US State Department’s Bureau of International Narcotics and Law-Enforcement (USAID 1989a, 1992b). Poppy cultivation, in other words, was a fundamentally transnational problem.

As poppy cultivation spread in rural Afghanistan, it eventually became a problem that USAID could no longer ignore. Figure 12 shows that by 1989, poppy was being grown at varying intensities in at least 22 provinces. Alarmed, O/AID/REP proposed to the Assistant Administrator for USAID’s Asia Near East Bureau that the ASSP be prohibited from funding “activities in areas where poppy is known to be cultivated” (USAID 1988c, 8). This proposed policy was codified into law with the passing of the general “Anti-Drug Abuse Act” of 1988.

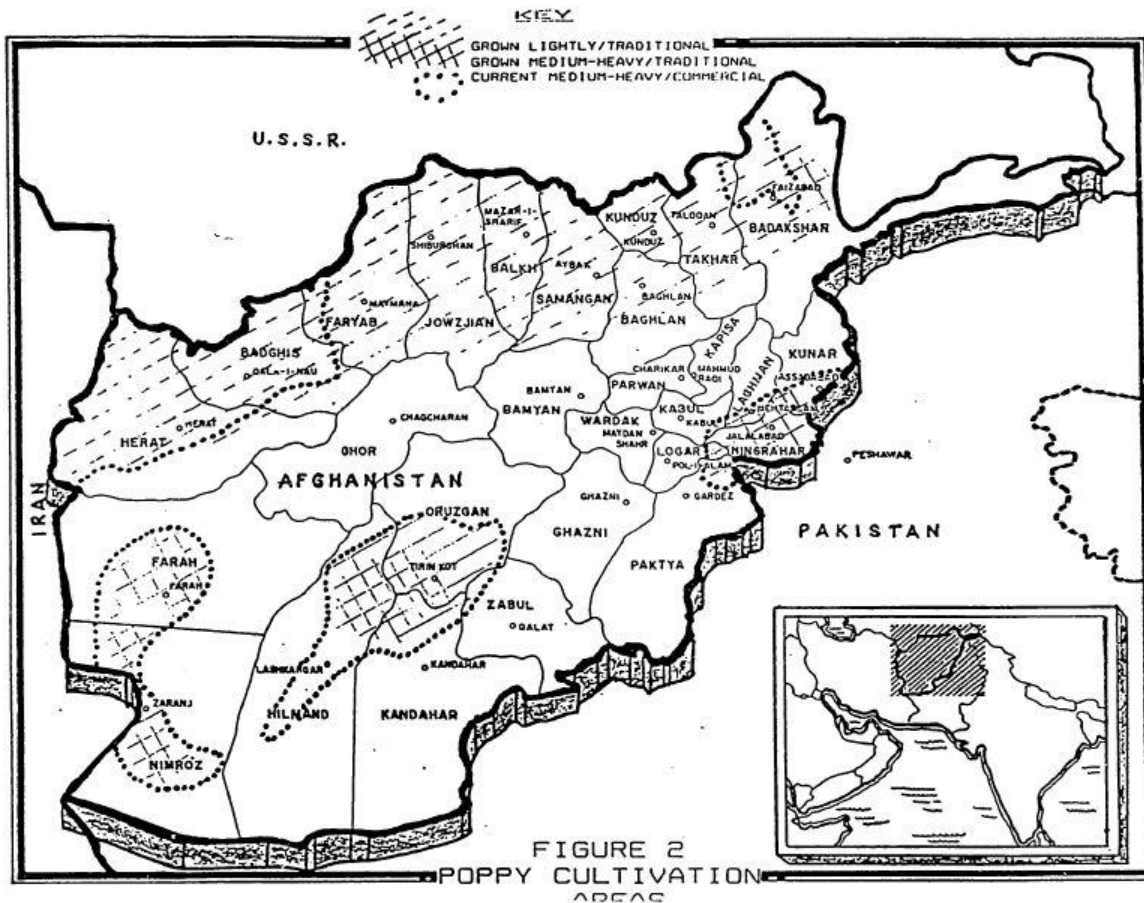


Figure 12: Poppy cultivation areas in Afghanistan (USAID 1989a)

Concerned by how Afghanistan remained the primary source of heroin in southwest Asia, Congress drafted a “Statement of Policy” which pressed the Afghan government to collaborate with *mujahideen* commanders in: a) reducing production and trafficking in their respective areas of operations; and b) initiating eradication, interdiction, and crop substitution activities in the countryside (USAID 1988b).

By the time the Anti-Drug Abuse Act was enacted in November 1988, O/AID/REP had already received a direct request for counternarcotics assistance from a *mujahideen* commander based in Nangarhar province. In exchange for a steady supply of food and agricultural inputs, the commander offered to curtail poppy cultivation in his territory (USAID 1990). Dubbed Project Alpha, this pilot narcotics control program was conducted under the umbrella of the Commodity Export Program. From November 1988 through June 1989, Project Alpha provided the

commander with agricultural tools, 600 metric tons of wheat, 46,788 kg of sugar, and 104,000 kg of ghee (Wolters 1992a). Valued at a total of \$159,264, these commodities were first delivered by Commodity Export Program staff from Peshawar to the commander's warehouse in a tribal agency located just adjacent to Nangahar province. From this warehouse, the commander assumed primary responsibility for transporting the commodities into Afghanistan, as well as for last-mile distribution at the district level (Wolters 1992a).

Over the course of Project Alpha, the commander was careful not to link the distribution of rural development assistance too closely to the eradication of poppy fields. This was because the commander did not want to get sucked into the "business of paying [farmers] not to grow poppy every year" (USAID 1989a, 68). Instead, he simply represented poppy cultivation as *haram* (forbidden) and told farmers that they should not engage in it. Only when farmers "[behaved] correctly" were they allowed to access the assistance that had been made available through Project Alpha. As the commander put it, "what works best is a combination of 'mercy and anger'; he supplies the anger, and [O/AID/REP] supplies the mercy" (USAID 1989a, 68).

The commander asserted that by spring of 1989, Project Alpha had successfully eliminated poppy cultivation in areas under his control (USAID 1989a). In response, O/AID/REP asked Volunteers in Technical Assistance to dispatch an assessment team to the Project Alpha area (USAID 1989a). Although the team's assessment was short on specifics, it nonetheless verified the commander's claims. It also praised the commander for wisely "keeping the source of the assistance secret", and recommended that Project Alpha be expanded on the condition that any future counternarcotics plans be developed and implemented by a more inclusive decision-making body (USAID 1989a, 69).

O/AID/REP acted on these recommendations, but it was ultimately unable to secure the additional funding required to keep Project Alpha running as a stand-alone project (USAID 1989a). As a result, Project Alpha was eventually rolled into a broader "Narcotics Awareness and Control Project" (NACP). The responsibility for implementing the NACP was contracted out to DAI. Its initial goal was to reduce – and eventually eliminate – poppy cultivation by stimulating rural development opportunities throughout rural Afghanistan (USAID 1992b).

O/AID/REP, however, rapidly discovered that it was “nearly impossible for any development program to replicate the income available from the cultivation of narcotics crops” (USAID 1992b, 2). Because the profit margins of drug traffickers were so high, they could easily crush emerging markets for licit alternatives by raising the farm-gate prices for opium resin (USAID 1992b). For this reason, O/AID/REP dismissed “strictly voluntary” approaches – which assumed that poppy cultivators would always respond positively to rural development activities – as “doomed to failure” (USAID 1992b, 2). Instead, historical “experiences” convinced O/AID/REP that counternarcotics efforts would only be successful if they were backed by the forced eradication of poppy fields: a responsibility which was typically delegated to the law enforcement institutions of host country governments (USAID 1992b).

Although the Soviet Union had withdrawn all of its forces from Afghanistan by 14 February, 1989, the war between the Alliance and the Communist regime raged on. Given its highly localized and fractured nature, the Alliance, at this point in time, possessed neither the authority nor the expertise necessary to undertake these law-enforcement responsibilities on behalf of O/AID/REP (USAID 1989a). O/AID/REP attempted to circumvent this problem by drawing inspiration from Project Alpha and collaborating with local leaders who not only possessed a monopoly over the use of legitimate violence, but also the will to take a stand against poppy cultivation (USAID 1989a). In order to guarantee the legality of the NACP, O/AID/REP entered into “poppy elimination agreements” with local authorities. Under the terms of these agreements, commanders or shuras were expected to enforce total bans on poppy cultivation. Such an Afghanization of poppy eradication enabled O/AID/REP to politically distance itself from counternarcotics activities (USAID 1988b). Counternarcotics activities, it was assumed, would only succeed if they were perceived by Afghans to be of their own initiative (USAID 1988b).

To secure consent for eradication, DAI did two things. First, it sought to “establish a psychological environment which will actively discourage...poppy cultivation” (DAI 1991, 29). In order to induce attitudinal changes amongst Afghan farmers, DAI encouraged local authority figures to participate in “community awareness programs”, where they were expected to “take a highly visible, public stance against narcotics cultivation, trafficking, and abuse” (Dixon 1991, 3). DAI promoted these programs through pamphlets, posters, banners, dramas, radio programs,

educational films, video vans, sports programs, and even popular songs (DAI 1991; Dixon 1991). DAI hypothesized that this strategy would help anti-narcotics messages reach a much wider audience, as local community leaders were assumed to be “more culturally attuned” to the sensibilities of rural Afghans (DAI 1991, 26)

While the logic undergirding these psychological operations may have “seemed reasonable from a Western cultural standpoint”, as Gerald Owens (1991, 5) – the NACP’s Chief of Party – pointed out, it made no sense from an “Afghan point of view”. Afghans could not be convinced that poppy cultivation was dangerous. According to Owens (1991, 6), the Afghan argument was: “we need the money...we produce the stuff for the corrupt westerners...it’s not our problem”. The implication here was that psychological operations on their own were insufficient to discourage Afghan farmers from cultivating poppy and hence, had to be complemented by efforts geared towards softening the economic blows wrought by eradication operations.

To this end, DAI focused the NACP on promoting what it described as “human capital development” (USAID 1992b, 17). This was a highly strategic maneuver that re-scripted the NACP as a benign development project designed to fulfill the basic needs of Afghanistan’s poorest majority. This cloak of benevolence provided O/AID/REP with the legitimating armature required to justify its support for destructive counternarcotics practices such as crop eradication. A fundamental interplay between a biopolitics of creation and a necropolitics of destruction was therefore inscribed in the core workings of the NACP.

In the “Activity Approval Memorandum” for the NACP, DAI proposed to establish a “Poppy Reduction and Elimination Unit” that would provide rural development assistance to rural areas that met a stringent set of criteria (USAID 1989a). These criteria included:

- 1) low intensities<sup>23</sup> of poppy cultivation;
- 2) local authorities willing and able to enforce a ban on poppy cultivation;
- 3) a need for development inputs that was not being met by existing O/AID/REP programing;

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<sup>23</sup> DAI defines a “low-intensity area” as one in which, for the most part, “cultivation is a recent phenomenon, triggered by conditions of war” (USAID 1989a, 40).

- 4) no discernible signs of a narcotics value chain, such as processing laboratories, monopoly buyers of opium resin, or poppy futures markets (USAID 1989a).

Once a site had been selected, local farmers would receive rural development assistance on a staggered basis. In the first year of project operations, farmers would not be provided with any inputs that might facilitate poppy cultivation. Once farmers had proved their commitment to poppy elimination, they would then become eligible to receive greater amounts of rural development support. Eventually, these “committed” farmers would help their areas return to their “pre-war agricultural status” by cultivating higher value crops, such as cumin, caraway, licorice, fruit trees, grapes, and vegetables.

If Poppy Reduction and Elimination Units were correctly managed, DAI believed that in three years, they could have a “major impact” on poppy cultivation in so-called “non-traditional” growing areas (USAID 1989a, 23). Unfortunately, the establishment of Poppy Reduction and Elimination Units was plagued by a series of problems. From the outset, DAI found it difficult to grasp the complex and nuanced dynamics of poppy cultivation in rural Afghanistan. DAI established an Information and Research Office, which carried out a number of studies, surveys, and small-scale extension projects in hopes of determining the precise combination of development activities most likely to precipitate a general reduction in poppy cultivation (USAID 1989a). Unfortunately, a number of different social, political, economic, cultural, and environmental variables ensured that crop substitution remained an “agricultural planning task that [was] clearly location specific” (USAID 1989a, 23). Although DAI agents were able to identify a number of licit alternatives to the opium poppy that offered competitive returns on investment when planted in easily accessible and irrigated land, these crops were “not likely to be identical from one valley to another” (USAID 1989a). To compound matters further, it proved impossible to find a crop that matched the income generated by poppy cultivation in more remote, rain fed locations.

Second, it was never clear as to whether Afghan poppy cultivators actually understood themselves as the “beneficiaries” of a project that essentially asked them to act against their own economic interests. By making the provision of development instance contingent upon poppy

eradication, the DAI effectively gave itself no margin for error. If alternative crops proved less than satisfactory to beneficiary populations, nothing was really preventing them from simply resuming poppy cultivation, leaving DAI with no choice but to cut off rural development assistance to particularly recalcitrant areas.

The most significant problem, however, was legal in nature. While Congress approved NACP operations in August of 1990, it delayed the full implementation of the Poppy Reduction and Evaluation Unit concept (Weerts 1992). To justify its decision, Congress argued that Sections 2291 (b) and (f) of the Foreign Assistance Act effectively prohibited O/AID/REP from “reimbursing” Afghan farmers whose poppy fields had been eradicated (USAID 1992b). To conform to the Foreign Assistance Act, O/AID/REP was forced adopt what were widely considered to be the “most stringent policies regarding assistance programs to poppy growing areas” (Miller 1991, 3). O/AID/REP’s strict management of its counternarcotics funding stream contrasted sharply with the more relaxed regulations that governed the activities of the United Nations Development Programme. As a result, NGOs preferred to fund projects in poppy growing areas through the United Nations Development Programme, which created a situation where the leverage of O/AID/REP restrictions were “rendered meaningless in terms of discouraging narcotics trafficking” (Miller 1991, 4). Adding insult to injury, Steven Weerts (1992a, 5) – a NACP Field Operations Director based in Peshawar – argued that Section 2291 should not have created problems for DAI, “unless it was interpreted in a very twisted way”. In Weerts’ (1992a, 5) estimation, it was irresponsible to deny Afghan farmers rural development assistance on the supposed basis of a tenuous “connection” to drug trafficking. This was because all “anti-drug programs (except for prevention programs) [have to] be conducted in drug-growing or drug-using communities or there would be no point to [them]” (Weerts 1992a, 5).

DAI tried to assuage Congress by adopting the multi-tiered system of monitoring that had first been introduced by VITA. In-house and external monitors would conduct unannounced visits to field sites, producing audits, evaluations, and reports that would be cross-checked with analyses of satellite imagery (USAID 1989a). Congress remained unconvinced, and only allowed Poppy Reduction and Evaluation Units to be established on a “limited basis” (Weerts 1992, 2).

Compounding matters further, all NACP activities were suspended in January 1991 on the basis

of perceived security threats. By 25 August, 1991, it became clear to DAI that the NACP was not going to secure full Congressional approval, and decided to cancel the project (Weerts 1992).

By all counts, the NACP was an abject failure, making absolutely no impact on levels of poppy cultivation in rural Afghanistan. This being said, it remains an important moment in the history of counternarcotics operations in Afghanistan. As I will show in the next two chapters of this dissertation, it foreshadows many of the ways in which counternarcotics operations are currently being prosecuted in contemporary Afghanistan. In this sense, the NACP served as a stress-test of the notion that successful counternarcotics operations entail a dialectical interplay of “anger” (eradication) and “mercy” (development).

Framing the NACP in this way raises a key question: what lessons did counternarcotics and development professionals draw from its failure? Here, the analysis contained in the end-of-tour report written by Bradford Miller – one the NACP’s Quetta-based Field Operations Directors – is particularly instructive. Miller (1991, 8) called on his peers to pay more attention to the ways in which “culture is influenced by, while at the same time, influences economic activity” in rural Afghanistan. Miller’s understanding of Afghan “culture” was undoubtedly tinged with shades of Orientalism. In one particularly exemplary passage, he bemoans the “characteristics of *the* Afghan culture that makes most Afghans unable or unwilling to report accurately”: a problem which was “especially acute for opium issues as it is now well known by Afghan leaders, and to a lesser extent, the general population that foreigners don’t like opium, which exacerbates the tendency to exaggerate or under report” (Miller 1991, 5). To his partial credit, however, he did recognize that future counternarcotics efforts in Afghanistan, “whether developmental, educational, or control-oriented”, would “require an extensive knowledge of the culture and society in which they are being conducted” (Miller 1991, 8). This is a lesson that remains under-appreciated by the contemporary Afghan counternarcotics campaign.

### **3.7 Abandoning Afghanistan**

Although the Agricultural Sector Support Project was not canceled outright like the Narcotics Awareness and Control Project, USAID’s desire to conduct cross-border agricultural



development clearly waned throughout the early 1990s. This was most clearly signalled on 16 November, 1992, when the Agricultural Sector Support Project's program budget for FY 93 was dramatically reduced from \$50 million to \$20 million (VITA 1994). While certain subcomponents of the Agricultural Sector Support Project were revamped in order to maintain their structure "as long as possible so that if policies and funding changes permitted, full-scale operations could be rapidly resumed", most field operations, at this point in time, were in the process of being phased out. Although there had been some talk of transferring VITA's responsibilities to an independent NGO or a foundation, USAID did not act on these recommendations for fear of losing directional control over rural development activities (USAID 1994). Consequently, VITA was instructed to terminate all operations on 31 December, 1993.

In the concluding section of Gerry Owens' end-of-contract report, it is suggested that few of O/AID/REP's cross-border development operations went according to plan. Given that "projects of this complexity and funding levels are really designed to operate under conditions of stability and a high degree of certainty regarding conditions in the host country", this is hardly surprising (DAI 1993, 5). As Owens writes, "the assumption that an Afghanistan free from Soviet invaders would be free to get on with the business of rebuilding never quite worked out". Instead, "the politics of a bilateral aid program also contributed to the overall complexity of achieving the project's stated objectives", diverting a great deal of attention away from the technical task of developing Afghanistan from a distance (DAI 1993, 3).

Ultimately, development professionals such as Owens believed that O/AID/REP had failed not because it had only partially committed itself to market-based approaches, but rather, because it had become mired in the *politics* of developing Afghanistan from a distance. In his critique of techno-politics and expertise, Timothy Mitchell (2002, 233) argues that development discourse practices what Partha Chaterjee calls a "necessary self-deception". In order to function properly, development must imagine itself as a "discourse of external rationality" that "forms no part of the object observed" (Mitchell 2002, 233). Drawing inspiration from Mitchell (2002, 233), one might argue that O/AID/REP was *literally* a "rational consciousness standing outside [of Afghanistan]" (Mitchell 2002, 233). As my analysis demonstrates, it was ironically this unique geographical context that made it impossible for experts like Owens to practice the "necessary

self-deception” that normally enables development to constitute, consolidate, and reproduce itself as a form of power/knowledge (Mitchell 2002, 233). In their day-to-day struggle to overcome the challenges that frustrated their long-distance efforts to provide *mujahideen* forces with non-lethal forms of assistance, O/AID/REP employees were constantly made aware of their embeddedness within multi-scalar configurations of geopolitical and geoeconomic power.

Perhaps this is why O/AID/REP and its implementing partners tried so hard to extricate themselves from the business of providing rural Afghans with technical assistance. This was exemplified by DAI’s attempt to shift the responsibility for promoting trade facilitation, market development, and extension services from the public to the private sector. The market, DAI hoped, might serve as an antidote to the creeping politicization of technical assistance and, in so doing, help its rural development programming regain some measure of neutrality. But as Owens usefully reminds us, DAI’s – and by extension, O/AID/REP’s – vision of a (not too distant) future where neutral market actors have assumed a leadership role in rural development efforts around the globe itself became the object of a contentious political struggle (DAI 1993). Owens specifically draws attention to the controversy that erupted “over the role that USAID should play in supporting the private sector as part of a solution to rebuilding Afghanistan” (DAI 1993, 3). The mere existence of this controversy complicates Essex’s (2013, 51) assertions that by the late 1980s, neoliberalism had taken a “firm hold” within American development theory and practice. Evaluations of DAI’s marketization efforts – and in particular, the ASSP’s Commercial Agricultural Sales sub-project – highlight just how uneven and contested USAID’s shift towards neoliberalism actually was. Although the Commercial sub-project successfully channeled a “considerable volume of materials” to Afghan farmers, it was nonetheless determined to be the “least successful” Private Sector Agribusiness component in terms of “meeting initial expectations” (De Boer et al. 1992, xii). This was partially due to the fact that the “immediate impacts” of the Commercial sub-project were “less obvious than other programs...where roads, bridges, mine clearing, irrigation system rehabilitation, and buildings provided immediate, tangible, visible impacts and [resulted] in a considerable flow of funds to local truckers, suppliers, contractors, and wage labourers” (De Boer et al. 1992, 54). On the basis of such poor performance reviews, a decision was taken to shut the Commercial sub-project down well in advance of the termination date for the broader ASSP. One evaluation explained the Commercial

sub-project's failure by suggesting that it had received "less than full support" from USAID (De Boer et al. 1992, 54). According to Essex (2013), critics of USAID have long argued that its programs often work against the interests of private capital. Similarly, the evaluation team noted that market-oriented projects have generally been difficult for USAID to implement. This is because "most characteristics of USAID are direct opposite of those most associated with the private sector operations in developing countries" (DeBoer et al. 1992, 5). For a Commercial Agricultural Sales-type intervention to succeed, O/AID/REP and its implementing partners would need to be "fully conversant with how private sector trading operations operate" (De Boer et al. 1992, 81). USAID would have to operate "as if [it] were a private sector company" (De Boer et al. 1992, 59).

As I show in the next two chapters, USAID's post-9/11 mission to Afghanistan has been shaped, in many substantive ways, by this criticism. As USAID became more directly involved in the recent counterinsurgency campaign in Afghanistan, market-driven rural development efforts were increasingly indexed to the geo-strategic imperative to "win hearts and minds". More specifically, they were seen by both civilian and military actors as the skeleton key to "conducting the conduct" of rural populations. If properly executed, they would discourage rural Afghans from engaging in unwanted behaviours, such as cultivating poppies. Indeed, O/AID/REP's failure to deal with the problem of poppy cultivation in the late 1980s and early 1990s generated a kind of "blowback" (Johnson 2002, 2007). In the intervening years since the Narcotics Awareness and Control Program was cancelled, poppy cultivation has become an entrenched way of life in rural Afghanistan. Now, more than ever, Afghan farmers are reliant upon poppy cultivation to ensure subsistence for their families. As America's post-9/11 occupation of Afghanistan ran its course, USAID was once again assigned the unenviable task of encouraging poppy cultivators to act against their own economic interests. To this end, USAID devised a number of "alternative development" programs that were implemented in various regions of Afghanistan. Through an in-depth exploration of this "alternative development" effort, I show how USAID encouraged market forces to play an expanded role in the pacification of the Afghan countryside.

## 4 “The star that took us from our homes”

“In the old days, farmers would keep a little of their home-made opium for their families, to be used during illnesses, or at harvests or weddings; the rest they would sell to the local nobility, or to pykari merchants from Patna. Back then, a few clumps of poppy were enough to provide for a household’s needs, leaving a little over, to be sold: no one was inclined to plant more because of all the work it took to grow poppies – fifteen ploughings of the land and every remaining clod to be broken by hand, with a dantoli; fences and bunds to be built; purchases of manure and constant watering; and after all that, the frenzy of the harvest, each bulb having to be individually nicked, drained, and scraped. Such punishment was bearable when you had a patch or two of poppies – but what sane person would want to multiply these labours when there were better, more useful crops to grow, like wheat, dal, and vegetables?”

- Amitav Ghosh, *Sea of Poppies*.

### 4.1 “A dangerous weapon”

Sometime in 1991, Afghanistan surpassed its long term rival, Myanmar, to become the world’s largest producer of opium (Chouvy 2009). On balance, Afghan farmers may have cultivated poppies less extensively than their Burmese counterparts (50,800 hectares vs. 160,000 hectares), but they nonetheless produced more metric tons of opium (1,980 vs. 1,728) (UNODC 2002). From this point forward, Afghanistan has remained the world’s leading producer of opium<sup>24</sup> (UNODC 2014). How did this state of affairs come to be? In the previous chapter, I showed how the Central Intelligence Agency and USAID helped *mujahideen* fighters resist the Soviet occupation in part by turning a blind eye to their intensifying involvement in Afghanistan’s growing opium economy. Although USAID was eventually pressured into implementing counternarcotics programming in rural Afghanistan alongside agents of the Drug Enforcement Administration, its efforts were crippled from the outset by a restrictive legal framework that prevented foreign assistance from being channeled to Afghan poppy cultivators. Undeterred, USAID drew up plans to follow up these failed efforts with a “full-scale alternative development project” that would serve as the centrepiece of a “sizeable counter-narcotics program in Afghanistan” (USAID 1991, 15).

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<sup>24</sup> It briefly ceded this position to Myanmar in 2001, for reasons that shall become clear shortly.

Mindful of the difficulties associated with trying to reduce poppy cultivation in Afghanistan from across the border in Pakistan, USAID made its involvement in future counternarcotics efforts contingent upon the establishment of a brand-new foreign assistance mission in Kabul. In the aftermath of the Soviet withdrawal, USAID anticipated that *mujahideen* forces would phase out their jihad and work towards forming a stable interim government (Kingsley 25 November, 2012; Rubin 2002). There were some signs that USAID's assumptions might actually be borne out. By the time that Soviet troops had completed their drawdown, the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) had already extended an olive branch to both rural populations and the *mujahideen*. In addition to calling off the counterinsurgency campaign being waged in the countryside, it softened its "revolution from above", renounced Leninism, and re-embraced Islam (Rubin 2002). As a result, the desire for jihad began to wane amongst key subsections of the *mujahideen* resistance (Rubin 2002).

Unfortunately, this also meant that *mujahideen* leaders were free to once again "behave as self-interested power seekers rather than defenders of Islam and Afghanistan" (Rubin 2002, 183). Spearheaded by commanders such as Ahmad Shah Massoud and Abdul Rashid Dostum – who were particularly bent on seizing the reins of state power – the *mujahideen* began to wage more conventional forms of warfare against the PDPA. By 1992, these efforts had culminated in the forging of an uneasy alliance between Massoud's *Jamiat-i-Islami* and Dostum's *Jombesh-i-Milli*, the aim of which was to liberate Kabul from the precarious grip of the PDPA (Gregory 2004). While Massoud had acquired substantial political legitimacy as a "national hero of the resistance", the rest of this "Northern Alliance" – particularly the powerful ex-regime militias that were commanded by Dostum – was widely disliked by Afghanistan's Pashtun majority. Any hope for a peaceful transfer of power was dashed once Pashtun commanders and government officials caught wind of the plan for a northern offensive. Worried that the northerners might "capture power at their expense", they threw their weight behind Gulbuddin Hikmatyar's *Hizb-i-Islami* and helped its fighters infiltrate Kabul (Rubin 2002, 271). As Northern Alliance forces closed in on Kabul, Hikmatyar's main force crossed the border and set up camp in the southern environs of the capital. The stage was therefore set for a three way battle for control over Kabul.

To pre-empt the threat of a potential *Hizb* coup, the Northern Alliance entered Kabul on 25 April, 1992. As soon as Kabul was “liberated” by the Northern Alliance on 30 April, the various militias were “at one another’s throats” (Gregory 2004, 37). Through roadblocks and checkpoints, the different factions of the Northern Alliance partitioned Kabul into a matrix of conflicting territorial enclaves, from which they embarked on an explosive campaign of looting, rape, and murder (Gregory 2004). Outraged that it had been denied a “prime position of power” in the post-PDPA order, Hikmatyar’s *Hizb-i-Islami* exacerbated the carnage by indiscriminately launching rockets and missiles into the heart of Kabul from its base in the southern outlying districts (Hartman 2002). As a result of these struggles for power, thousands of Kabulis were killed and injured, while countless others fled the city on account of the destruction and human rights violations wrought by *mujahideen* forces (Gregory 2004). In the words of Amnesty International (1995), Kabul was a “human rights catastrophe”.

As Elisabeth Kingsley (25 November, 2012) would later acknowledge, USAID had been both “naïve” and “blind” to assume that the liberation of Kabul would mark the end of the conflict. The agency, she argued, had failed to entertain the possibility that the insurgency might transition into a pitched battle for supremacy that “not only extended the life of the previous ‘humanitarian emergency’ but restructured it in ways that have become sadly familiar” (Rubin 2013, 28). Perhaps most shocking, however, is the fact that as Afghanistan “spiralled” into this “time of ‘anarchy’”, it also “fell off the map” (Hartman 2002, 483). Although one might have expected the US to concern itself with the worsening situation in Afghanistan, by this point in time, its willingness to intervene in what was shaping up to be a bloody civil war was undoubtedly lessened by Gorbachev’s monumental decision to resign as the president of the Soviet Union on 26 December, 1991. As Rubin (2013, 28) argues, the dissolution of the Soviet Union made it possible for the United States to “distinguish among interests that had all been lumped together under the Cold War”. “Distant” Afghanistan was no longer a national security priority for the US, while Russia lacked the capacity to maintain its position as the regional hegemon in Central Asia (Rubin 2013, 28). While these two erstwhile rivals had agreed in late 1991 to terminate aid to both sides of the conflict and help the United Nations establish an interim government, the collapse of the Soviet Union derailed these efforts. To quote Kingsley (25 November, 2012), “we’d won the [Cold War], who cares, we left”.

This had several important consequences. Without access to sources of foreign assistance, no single *mujahideen* faction proved capable of unilaterally seizing power by force. This opened the door for a new faction known collectively as the Taliban<sup>25</sup> to make its move. The Taliban was mostly comprised of former students of the religious schools – or *madrassas* – that sprung up to service the Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan (Gregory 2004). Disillusioned by the numerous brutalities that were being perpetrated by the Northern Alliance, the Taliban “sought to restore law, order, and stability to Afghanistan through the removal of the warlords and the imposition of a radically purified Islam” (Gregory 2004, 40). Despite its hardline ideology and its ties to Pakistan, the Taliban were seen as the only faction capable of stabilizing and governing Afghanistan (Baldauf et al. 2002; Hartman 2002). Perhaps more importantly, however, the termination of superpower patronage forced both the Northern Alliance and the Taliban to rely more heavily on informal sources of funding – such as smuggling and poppy cultivation – to finance their (para)military operations (Goodhand 2005; McCoy 2010).

By 1996, the Taliban had wrested control of Kabul away from the Northern Alliance, and had become the dominant politico-military force in approximately 90% of Afghanistan (Goodhand 2005; Human Rights Watch 2001). After taking power, the Taliban legitimized poppy cultivation by both protecting – and profiting from – it (McCoy 2010). The Taliban not only superintended a nationwide expansion of the narco-economy, it also signalled its tacit support of poppy cultivation by imposing a 20 percent tax on the yearly opium harvest (McCoy 2010). This accommodating attitude not only netted the Taliban an extra \$20 million per year in tax revenue, but also helped ensure a measure of political stability in the countryside. Many Afghan farmers had adopted poppy cultivation as an economic coping strategy in response to the agricultural devastation wrought by over a decade of war and occupation (Goodhand 2004). Not only was poppy more hardy and productive than licit alternatives, its cultivation was also more labour intensive, allowing it to serve as a source of seasonal employment to approximately a million Afghans. Furthermore, Afghan farmers were often forced to cultivate as a pre-condition to accessing crucial networks of informal credit (McCoy 2010).

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<sup>25</sup> A Pashto term which roughly translates to ‘religious students’ or ‘seekers of knowledge’ (Gregory 2004, 40)

In July 2000, however, the Taliban shifted policies and set about enforcing a total ban on poppy cultivation in the countryside. This ban was successful, ending Afghanistan's near monopoly over the global production of opium in less than one growing season (Crosette 2001). Many observers argued that the Taliban's policy shift was driven by both political and economic logics. It is speculated that by banning poppy cultivation the Taliban expected to be rewarded with increased levels of political recognition and foreign assistance from the international community (Crosette 2001; Goodhand 2004). Indeed, Secretary of State Colin Powell announced on 17 May 2001 that the US would support the Taliban's "welcome" ban on poppy cultivation by channeling \$43 million in emergency aid to help Afghan farmers mitigate the effects of the ongoing drought (Crosette 2001). Powell also promised that further deliveries of aid would be forthcoming if the Taliban could sustain its ban.

The Taliban's ban, however, was interrupted by the invasion of Afghanistan. Launched on 7 October, 2001, Operation Enduring Freedom toppled the Taliban regime through a combined air and ground offensive, spearheaded by Northern Alliance proxies. The successful invasion made it safe for impoverished farmers to resume cultivating poppies (Weiner 2001). This relapse did not go unnoticed by commentators, many of whom represented Operation Enduring Freedom as an opportunity to synchronize America's long-standing "War on Drugs" in Afghanistan with its new "War on Terror". As Golden (2001) put it, Afghanistan's opium problem would "soon be America's to solve".

In this and the next chapter, I show how USAID and its implementing partners became embroiled in America's attempts to solve Afghanistan's "opium problem". Drawing on interviews, newspaper articles, blog posts, research papers, project reports, and leaked documents, I show how the very parameters of USAID's engagement – its nature, its intensity, and its material ramifications – shifted over the course of Operation Enduring Freedom. I argue that counternarcotics professionals have gradually moved away from understanding poppy cultivation as an illegal activity that must be eliminated by any means necessary towards a more biopolitical approach that aims to empower rural populations through rural development interventions. The USAID development-industrial complex played a key role in this "alternative development" effort to provide Afghan farmers with long-term, sustainable, and economically



viable alternatives to growing poppy. Through an extended comparison of the counternarcotics programming that the USAID complex implemented concurrently in both southern and north-eastern Afghanistan, I will show how alternative development praxis not only shifted over time, but also varied across space.

In spite of these geographical and temporal variations, practitioners of alternative development nonetheless shared a commitment to counterbalancing the “anger” of conventional counternarcotics activities with more “merciful” forms of rural development assistance. For this reason, alternative development is often represented by USAID as a kinder and gentler form of counternarcotics. Alternative development, however, is not only undergirded by – and provides a legitimating armature for – more destructive forms of counternarcotics practice; it is also directly implicated in the more banal forms of violence that are experienced by rural Afghan households on a day-to-day basis. It is in this sense that alternative development serves as a “point of articulation” between a necropolitics of violence, disposability, and exploitation, and a biopolitics of improvement and life creation (Anderson 2010, 24).

In this chapter, I explore how counternarcotics was practiced in southern Afghanistan. This chapter is divided into five sections. First, I establish how and why poppy cultivation was (re)framed as a problem in post-9/11 Afghanistan. Second, I show how America’s attempt to solve Afghanistan’s poppy problem was marked by a strict division of labour. The Drug Enforcement Administration, the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law-Enforcement, and USAID were each called upon to assume responsibility for a separate “pillar” of this broader counternarcotics campaign: interdiction, eradication, and alternative development, respectively.

Third, I focus my attention on the concept of alternative development. Drawing inspiration from David Mansfield and Adam Pain (2005, 2), I argue that it is a profoundly confused and “unsatisfactory” concept that allows a diversity of rural development practices to “masquerade” under its label. I pay particular attention to the ways in which alternative development in southern Afghanistan has morphed over time. Initially, the USAID complex adopted what the Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction might describe as the “rural development” model of alternative livelihoods programming. As exemplified by Chemonics International’s

“Alternative Livelihoods Program –South”, this “rural development” model championed business-centric programs that sought to establish regional “value chains” and “agri-business clusters” in southern Afghanistan. Chemonics assumed that the “Alternative Livelihoods Program – South” would generate “trickle-down” benefits that would discourage farmers from cultivating poppy. As I will demonstrate, however, these assumptions were flawed.

From 2009 onwards, the contours of USAID’s alternative development programming in southern Afghanistan began to shift. Inspired in large part by President Obama’s “New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan”, alternative development in the south became increasingly indexed to the goal of “stabilizing” the countryside. This “stabilization” model of alternative development was largely put to work through quick-impact crop substitution programs that sought to provide poppy cultivators with heavily subsidized access to improved wheat seeds and fertilizers. Key examples include the “Helmand Food Zone” initiative, as well as International Relief and Development’s “Afghanistan Vouchers for Increased Production in Afghanistan” program.

While the “stabilization” model of aid is often critiqued for unsustainably distorting local economies and for negatively affecting the operational space of civilian actors, I argue that the real problem of alternative development initiatives such as the “Helmand Food Zone” was that it had unintended consequences that remain largely unacknowledged by their military or civilian implementers. Instead, I propose a different critical approach: one that pays closer attention to the ways in which “stabilization” forms of alternative development have resulted in the displacement and the dispossession of land-poor households in southern Afghanistan.

## **4.2 “More dangerous than terrorism”**

It is often argued that modern warfare cannot be understood in isolation from questions of political economy. “In wars”, David Keen (1997, 7) writes, “we see the creation of a new type of political economy, not simply a destruction of the old one”. In many ways, this claim is exemplified by post-Cold War Afghanistan (Rubin 2000, 2002). By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Afghanistan’s economy had been thoroughly “adjusted” by approximately two decades of violence, conflict, and war (Goodhand 2000).

The resulting constellation of economic activities has been theorized by academics such as Jonathan Goodhand (2000) as a “war economy”. According to Goodhand, Afghanistan’s war economy can be further subdivided into three distinct, yet related, components: namely, the combat, shadow, and coping economies. Although these sub-economies are broadly interconnected, each one involves “different types of actors, incentives, commodities, and relationships”, and as such, is characterized by unique dynamics and patterns of change (Goodhand 2000, 155). Afghanistan’s “combat economy” encompasses all activities that produce, mobilize, or allocate resources towards sustaining war and conflict (Goodhand 2000, 2005). The “shadow economy”, in contrast, exists largely outside of state-regulated frameworks. While its protagonists may profit from war, unlike the so-called “conflict entrepreneur”, they may “have an interest in peace, if peace can enable the maintenance or increase of profits” (Goodhand 2000, 157). Finally, the “coping economy” incorporates all of the livelihood strategies that are undertaken by the poorest segments of the rural population in order to meet their daily subsistence needs. These households participate in Afghanistan’s broader “war economy” not to accumulate assets or to predate on resources, but rather, to survive.

While the cross-border smuggling of gemstones and consumer goods continues to play an important role in sustaining Afghanistan’s “war economy”, it is poppy cultivation and the opium trade that have captured the attention of commentators. The poppy is often theorized as one of the lynchpins that holds Afghanistan’s combat, shadow, and coping economies together (Goodhand 2004). For rural households struggling to make ends meet, poppy cultivation is not only a lucrative livelihood strategy, but it also helps secure access to land and credit, while also functioning as a store of value. The poppy and its derivatives also help economic entrepreneurs – such as landowners who support sharecroppers and tenants, or traders who buy and sell opium – participate in the circuits of “shadow globalization” (Jung 2003). Finally, poppy cultivation fuels combat economies, as belligerents are known to finance their paramilitary operations by extracting rents from farmers and traders. In rural Afghanistan, therefore, poppy functions simultaneously as a conflict good, an illicit commodity, and as a means of survival.

Writing at the turn of the century, Barnett Rubin (2000, 1799) worried that “ending war in Afghanistan might transform the criminalized war economy into an even faster-expanding criminalized peace economy”. Echoing Rubin’s concerns, Goodhand (2004) initially argued that the responsibility for transitioning Afghanistan from a war to a peace economy could not be left to the private sector. Rather, it was imperative that the state be brought back into the picture. Only a strong state had the potential to harness the “central authority” required to “address the combat economy, redirect and harness the energies of the shadow economy, and support the livelihoods of those engaged in the coping economy” (Goodhand 2004, 167). As Goodhand (2008) would later acknowledge, however, such a state-building agenda was easily co-opted by Afghanistan’s narco-economy. Over time, Afghanistan’s narco-economy became a vehicle for helping Afghanistan’s conflict entrepreneurs accumulate the economic, social, and political capital required to “capture” parts of the state apparatus (Goodhand 2008, 412). Instead of assuming a leadership role in the effort to reduce poppy cultivation, the state increasingly acted as an impediment to reconfiguring Afghanistan’s war economies for peace-time conditions.

For these reasons, representatives of the international community began to view poppy cultivation as a mounting threat to the success of the post-invasion reconstruction mission to Afghanistan. Given that poppy cultivation was equally implicated in Afghanistan’s combat, shadow, and coping economies, it is hardly surprising that it was problematized in different ways by military, law-enforcement, and development professionals. As we shall see in the rest of this chapter, poppy cultivation in rural Afghanistan was often framed simultaneously as a problem of development, of law-enforcement, and of counterinsurgency. This speaks to the ways in which poppy cultivation became more or less entangled in all aspects of life in rural Afghanistan.

The counternarcotics campaign in post-Taliban Afghanistan was launched on 22 December, 2001, when Hamid Karzai was sworn in as the leader of the Afghan Transitional Administration. One of Karzai’s first orders of business was to reinstate a tougher version of the Taliban’s ban on poppy cultivation (Golden 2002). Karzai’s edict made it illegal for any Afghan to cultivate, manufacture, process, use, smuggle, or traffic the poppy and its derivatives (Schmemmann 2002). Any violations of this ban, Karzai warned, would be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law (Schmemmann 2002). Given the Karzai administration’s lack of a functioning army or police,

many international commentators publicly doubted its ability to enforce this decree. Despite these concerns, the Karzai administration gave select provincial governors orders to eradicate specific pre-determined hectares of poppy cultivation (Smith 2002; Waldman 2002).

The response to Karzai's new decree was ambivalent. On the one hand, it "delighted" Afghan drug traffickers. Ever since the defeat of the Taliban made it safe for farmers to replant poppies, the resulting oversupply of opium resin forced drug traffickers to dump their stocks on the open market. This led to a catastrophic decline in the price of opium. Eradication promised to reverse this trend, while adding an additional risk premium on current crop prices (Smith 2002). On the other hand, news of the ban worried farmers who had already planted poppies. They claimed that if their lucrative crops were destroyed, they would demand compensation from the government (Smith 2002).

It was around this point in time that influential actors began clamouring for the US to become more directly involved in the broader counternarcotics effort (Hodes and Sedra 2007). Antonio Maria Costa – then executive director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) – argued that the US military needed to pay closer attention to poppy cultivation because it was fast becoming an important source of funding for the insurgency (Gall 2003). Convinced that the US military would not be able to fight its "War on Terror" without "going against drug trafficking", Costa described Afghanistan as a country "at a crossroads": "either (i) energetic interdiction measures are taken now, and supported by the international community, or (ii) the drug cancer in Afghanistan will keep spreading and metastasise into corruption, violence, and terrorism – within and beyond the country's borders" (Gall 2003; UNODC 2003).

On 9 December, 2004, Karzai publicly endorsed the UNODC's framing of Afghanistan's poppy problem as a "cancer" requiring intense "chemotherapy" (Lancaster 2004). He warned that the drug trade was imperiling the effort to rebuild Afghanistan into a functioning, democratic state (Lancaster 2004). He described opium cultivation and heroin production as more dangerous than the Soviet occupation, the bloody civil war, or even contemporary terrorism. "Just as our people fought a holy war against the Soviets", Karzai proclaimed, "so we will wage jihad against poppies" (Lancaster 2004).

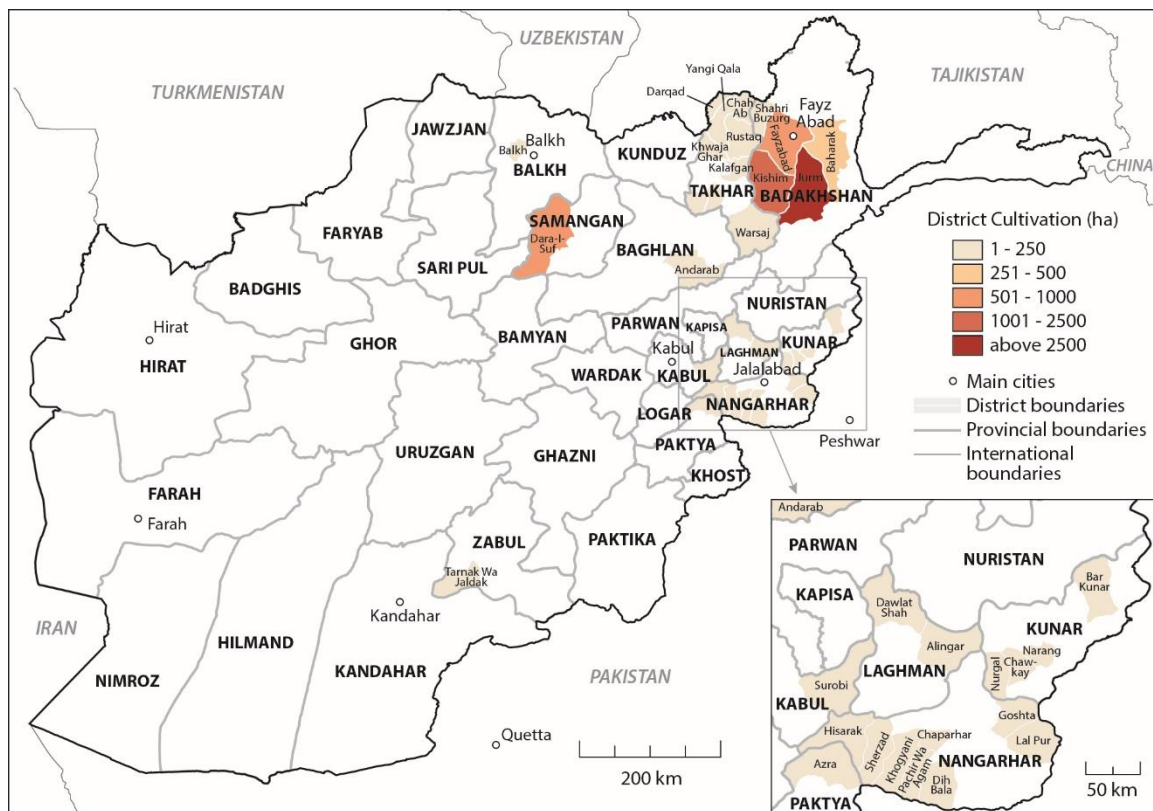


Figure 13: Afghanistan poppy cultivation in 2001 (UNODC 2004)

Karzai's call for chemotherapy was probably triggered by a conjunction of factors. While the Taliban's 2001 ban successfully confined poppy cultivation to the Northern Alliance strongholds of Samangan and Badakhshan (Figure 13), by 2004, it had expanded to all 32 of Afghanistan's provinces (Figure 14). It became particularly entrenched in the provinces of Helmand, Kandahar, Uruzgan, Nangarhar, Laghman, and Kunar (UNODC 2004). Most of these provinces were being targeted for infiltration by the Taliban's successors – henceforth, the neo-Taliban<sup>26</sup>. Accordingly, a number of commentators began to worry that the neo-Taliban was more directly involved in Afghanistan's opium trade than previously thought (Peters 2009). It was reported that neo-Taliban forces were offering protection and logistics services to poppy cultivators and drug lords (Peters 2009).

<sup>26</sup> Giustozzi (2008) distinguishes the neo-Taliban (2002 – present) from the “old Movement” (1996 – 2001) in a number of different ways. Not only was the neo-Taliban forced to recruit foreign jihadists and cultivate a new base of popular support, it also adopted a more flexible, globalized, and free-market approach to waging insurgency.

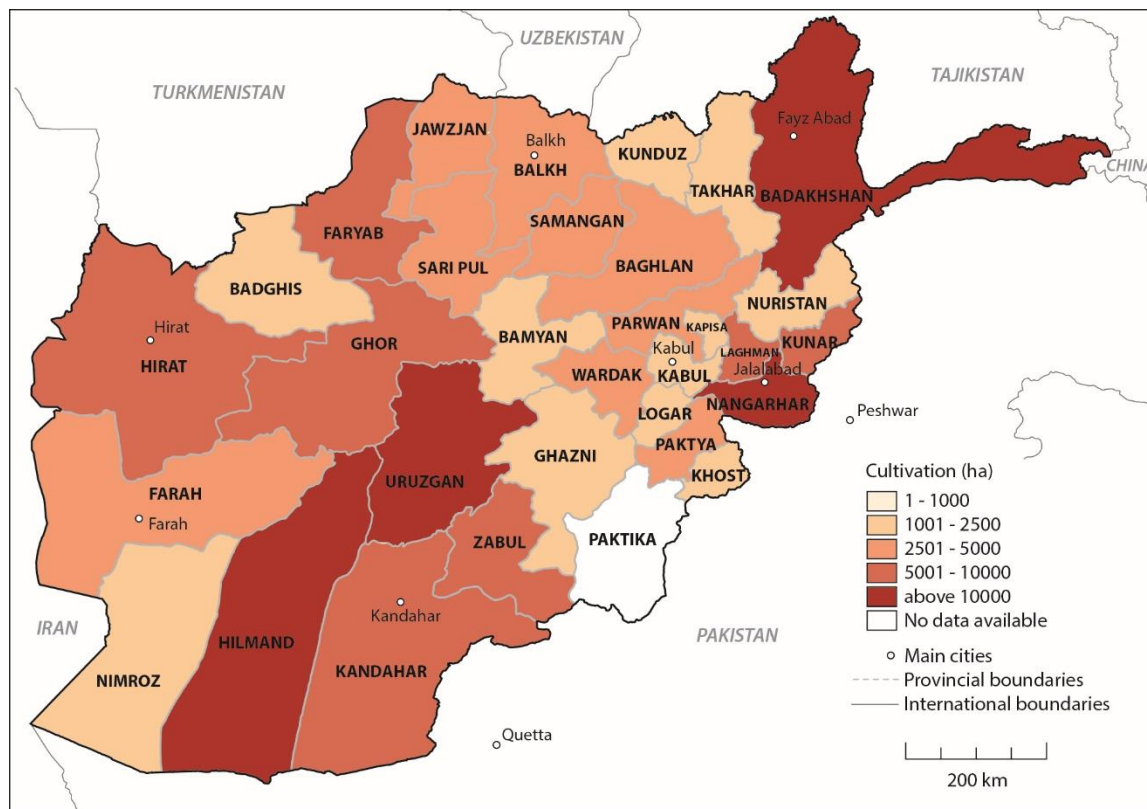


Figure 14: Poppy cultivation in Afghanistan, 2004 (UNODC 2004)

Despite the mounting evidence linking insurgents to poppy cultivation, many policymakers remained hesitant to endorse a military-led approach to counternarcotics. According to Karzai's Minister of Finance, Ashraf Ghani (2004), a "winning" counternarcotics strategy would have at least "four key elements": 1) a "long-term" plan for providing Afghanistan's police forces with the capability to maintain internal security throughout the countryside; 2) investments in projects that promise to stimulate economic growth by "rebuilding the country physically"; 3) an agricultural strategy that marketizes rural Afghanistan through land reform, micro-credit programs, agro-industrialization, and preferential trade agreements; and 4) an improved government infrastructure (Ghani 2004). In contrast with the UNODC, Ghani reframed poppy cultivation as a problem best solved by civilian law-enforcement and development professionals.

As it turns out, the US military had no interest in spearheading counternarcotics operations in rural Afghanistan. Instead, it framed counternarcotics as a form of "mission creep" that would

siphon resources away from its core counterterrorism mission (SCINC 2010). Accordingly, the responsibility for upholding the main “pillars” of the Afghan counternarcotics campaign – eradication, interdiction, and alternative development – was delegated to three civilian agencies: the Drug Enforcement Administration, the State Department’s Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, and USAID.

As the “world’s preeminent drug law enforcement agency”, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) was tasked with assuming responsibility for the “interdiction” pillar of the broader Afghan counternarcotics strategy (Harrigan 2011). Although the DEA had been forced to draw down its Afghan operations in response to the Soviet invasion, it reopened its Kabul Country Office in 2003 as part of a regional effort to control the flow of drugs and precursor chemicals into and out of Afghanistan (Harrigan 2011). The DEA did not officially commit itself to Afghanistan until 2004, when it announced its involvement in the “Kabul Counternarcotics Implementation Plan” (Braun 2005). As part of this effort, the DEA worked alongside the “Counter-Narcotics Police” to seize precursor chemicals and opiate stockpiles, destroy clandestine laboratories, and arrest drug traffickers (Allen et al. 2007). By working with the Counter-Narcotics Police to control the circulation of illicit commodities, capital, and bodies in the Afghan countryside, the DEA sought to deny the neo-Taliban access to the resources they required to wage insurgency (SCINC 2010).

In contrast with interdiction, eradication proved far more controversial. Initially, American officials championed poppy eradication as the “silver bullet” that would solve Afghanistan’s poppy problem. The responsibility for implementing eradication programming fell to the State Department’s Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (BINL). The BINL provided the Afghan government with the funding and technical assistance necessary to run two major eradication programs (Norland 2006). Although both of these programs aimed to reduce poppy cultivation in rural Afghanistan, they were operationalized at different scales. The first program called on the BINL to support the establishment of a “Central Poppy Eradication Force”, under the control of the Afghan Ministry of Interior. BINL sub-contracted out these duties to the private security firm, DynCorp International, which was provided with \$290 million to provide 720 police officers with the training and equipment required to conduct eradication



operations in insecure environments (OIG 2009). During a typical operation, a 23-man DynCorp support team deployed with 165 Central Poppy Eradication Force officers to a maximum of three different provinces, where they eradicated poppies for up to 30 days (Norland 2006).

The Central Poppy Eradication Force was established to complement already-existing “Governor Led Eradication” efforts. As early as 2003, President Karzai promised financial support to provincial governors who launched their own eradication efforts (OIG 2007). Provincial governors were expected to use any and all means available at their disposal to meet the targets set for them by the Karzai administration. Some governors rented out tractors and hired local Afghans to manually eradicate poppy fields; others mobilized local police forces and militias to spearhead anti-poppy efforts; and in provinces where government officials did not enjoy a monopoly over the means of violence, Governor Led Eradication targets could only be achieved by negotiating with poppy cultivators (Wood 2007).

The BINL supported Governor Led efforts in two ways. First, it rewarded provincial governors with \$135 for every hectare of poppy eradication that was verified by UNODC monitors (GAO 2010). Second, the BINL also hired DynCorp to run a “Poppy Elimination Program”. Poppy Elimination Program teams were dispatched to the seven top opium producing provinces – Helmand, Kandahar, Farah, Uruzgan, Nangarhar, Badakshan, and Balkh – where they supported Governor Led Eradication efforts in the areas of community outreach, development liaison, and information gathering (OIG 2007). Each Poppy Elimination Program team consisted of two international advisors – drawn from a diverse mix of backgrounds and expertise, including rural development, communications, law enforcement, surveillance, and data analysis – up to six government employees, six guards and drivers, and one translator (OIG 2007). In general, Poppy Elimination Program teams engaged local communities through working group meetings, key leader engagements, round table discussions, and media events.

These early eradication efforts were initially represented as successful. The almost total elimination of poppy cultivation in Nangarhar by 2004 was widely held up as a vindication of an eradication-centric approach to counternarcotics. Eradication statistics, however, tell a different story. Data collected by the Government Accountability Office (2010) shows that both the

Central Poppy Eradication Force and the Governor Led Eradication program consistently failed to meet the targets set for them by the Karzai administration. Furthermore, as David Mansfield (2008, iii) demonstrates, “dramatic reductions in opium poppy cultivation are difficult to sustain because of their powerful negative impact on the welfare of households”. Provincial authorities in Nangarhar may have successfully banned poppy cultivation from 2004 to 2006, but these gains were dramatically reversed in the 2006-7 growing season. According to Mansfield and Pain (2008), this was because “successful” bans on poppy cultivation were often achieved by complementing coercion with unfulfilled promises of development assistance. Such a strategy “typically reinforced the underlying determinants of opium poppy cultivation and led to poverty, insecurity, and resurging cultivation in subsequent years” (Mansfield and Pain 2008, 4).

While the effectiveness of eradication is still debated, its negative consequences rapidly became obvious. As early as 2005, the UNODC was already warning that “eradicated fields leave families in economic distress, trigger humanitarian disaster, and increase the temptation to join the insurgency” (UNODC 2005). As the counternarcotic campaign ran its course, it was determined that eradication was alienating farmers and driving them towards the insurgency, while also doing little to either slow down the trade in illicit drugs or to reduce traffickers’ profits (Rubin and Sherman 2008).

This alienation regularly manifested itself through violent forms of protest and resistance. In early April 2005, for instance, the Afghan government deployed eradication units to the Maiwand district of Kandahar, where they encountered armed farmers blocking access to local poppy fields (Cloud and Gall 2005). Gunfire was exchanged, killing at least one Afghan protestor and wounding several others. Over the next eight days, the resistance also spread to the Panjwayi, forcing local officials to solicit help from the Karzai administration, which proved less than forthcoming (Cloud and Gall 2005). Similarly, in Nangarhar, the ban on poppy cultivation “imposed a toll on the economic well-being of the population” that, in turn, “changed its level of support for the government” (Mansfield 2008, iii). Although farmers in Nangarhar reluctantly complied with the ban from 2004 to 2006, by the spring of 2007, forced eradication operations were beginning to result in unrest. On 2 April, for instance, more than 1000 residents of Bati Kot protested the poppy eradication campaign by blocking the Torkham-Jalalabad highway for an

extended period of time. In the ensuing clash with government security forces, 12 villagers and 4 police officers were injured, while a further 20 residents were arrested.

In order to diffuse these tensions, USAID was called upon to spearhead an “alternative development”<sup>27</sup> effort designed to provide Afghan farmers with long-term, sustainable, and above all, economically viable alternatives to growing poppy. To this end, USAID solicited bids from its implementing partners for three different “Alternative Livelihood Programs”, each one targeting a distinct geographical region of Afghanistan. Through these Alternative Livelihood Programs, USAID and its chosen implementing partners supported an “accelerated effort to change the economic landscape of provinces where the cultivation of opium poppy has historically been significant” (Chemonics 2005, 1). The objective of these Alternative Livelihood Programs was simple: to “improve the licit income opportunities and well-being of thousands of rural families by integrating them into a rapidly growing economy”, and, by extension, “to contribute to a reduction over time in the growing of opium poppy in the targeted areas” (Chemonics 2005, 1).

USAID’s “alternative development” effort placed particular emphasis on southern Afghanistan, which, by 2005, was rapidly becoming a hotspot of both poppy cultivation and insurgency. USAID awarded the four-year, \$119 million contract to implement the “Alternative Livelihoods Program” in the “Southern Region” (ALP/S) to one of its largest private sector implementing partners, Chemonics International. Although Chemonics (2016) was first formed in 1975 to implement a fertilizer program in Afghanistan, it had recently become famous for accomplishing alternative development “miracles” in Latin American drug-producing countries such as Bolivia, Peru, and Colombia (Havfenstein 2008). Many senior Chemonics employees who had cut their teeth on these projects were unsurprisingly tapped to apply their alternative development expertise in southern Afghanistan.

As I show in the next section of this chapter, Chemonics’ ALP/S was representative of a particular “model” of alternative livelihoods programing that sees rural development as the key to weaning farmers off of poppy cultivation. ALP/S was animated by a desire to promote large-

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<sup>27</sup> Or, “alternative livelihoods”.

scale commercial agriculture in southern Afghanistan. By strengthening “value chains” and establishing “agribusiness clusters”, Chemonics (2006, 10) hoped to generate “trickle down effects” capable of discouraging farmers from cultivating poppy. Such “trickle down” benefits, however, never materialized, ultimately forcing Chemonics to rethink its approach to the problem of poppy cultivation in southern Afghanistan.

### **4.3 “The real deal”**

The United Nations General Assembly officially defines “alternative development” as a “process to prevent and eliminate the illicit cultivation of plants containing narcotics and psychotropic substances through specifically designed rural development measures” that recognize “the particular socio-economic characteristics of the target communities and groups” (UNODC 2015). This official definition has been criticised for being vague and confusing. As David Mansfield (2001, 2006) points out, many foreign assistance professionals argue that alternative livelihoods activities differ little from those associated with typical rural development programmes. Alternative development is therefore a profoundly “unsatisfactory” concept that allows many different practices to “masquerade” under its label (Mansfield and Pain 2005, 2). Part of this has to do with how the Afghan government made alternative development one of the key pillars of its counternarcotics strategy. According to Mansfield and Pain (2005), this encouraged the USAID complex to understand alternative development not as a label for a concrete suite of counternarcotics techniques and tactics, but rather, as a broader sector unto itself, capable of attracting its own streams of funding. Consequently, USAID strategically assigns an alternative livelihoods label to any form of rural development taking place in a “drugs environment” (Mansfield and Pain 2005, 2).

This has not stopped policy makers from trying to impose a measure of coherence and structure on the messiness of alternative development work. It is now widely believed that over time, two regional “tracks” or “models” of alternative development have emerged (SIGAR 2010, 2014). The first “rural development” model is geared toward provinces in the northern, eastern, and western regions of Afghanistan. These alternative development programs are generally animated by a desire to transform the Afghan countryside into an environment that is conducive to the

cultivation of licit crops. According to the Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction (SIGAR) (2014, 14), this model “sees reductions in cultivation as a function of the wider reconstruction effort in Afghanistan”. It makes “rural development the objective and reductions in poppy cultivation an externality or side effect of that objective” (SIGAR 2014, 14). In order to improve the life chances of rural Afghans, it seeks to strengthen the relationships linking farming communities to both state and market institutions. For the most part, it assumes that if Afghan farmers can be convinced that it is possible to earn a comparable living by producing licit cash crops for market exchange, they will no longer feel the need to cultivate poppies. This particular model of alternative development, in other words, calls on market forces to play an expanded role in the pacification of the Afghan countryside. The second “stabilization” model is associated almost exclusively with the southern areas of Afghanistan. It is predicated upon the notion that reductions in poppy cultivation can be achieved rapidly by Afghan actors who possess both the political will, as well as the coercive capacity necessary to seriously tackle the problem (SIGAR 2010). Accordingly, it is generally characterized by “more targeted and quick-impact agricultural development activities, designed to secure newly cleared areas” (SIGAR 2014). While these alternative development programs are primarily implemented by civilian actors, they clearly draw heavy inspiration from the US military’s stability operations doctrine. In addition to being carried out in close cooperation with military forces, they also emphasize the short-term establishment of law and order over the accomplishment of long term rural development objectives. This is something that I will return to later on in the chapter.

SIGAR’s identification of two regional “models” of alternative development programming resonates powerfully with more general understandings of Afghanistan as a nation bifurcated into a stable north and an unstable south. A more historical analysis of how alternative development has been practiced in southern Afghanistan, however, reveals some of the complexities that are elided in SIGAR’s broader-brush narrative. The “stabilization” model of alternative development did not emerge out of nowhere. Rather, it was preceded by a number of interventions that shared commonalities with the “rural development” model of alternative livelihoods. This shift from a “rural development” to a “stabilization” model of alternative livelihoods was precipitated in large part by the fluctuating geostrategic context of southern

Afghanistan. What this shows is that alternative development was shaped by the slippery and violent spaces in – and through – which it was conducted.

No alternative development program implemented in southern Afghanistan better exemplifies this claim than Chemonics' "Alternative Livelihoods Program – South" (ALP/S). As USAID's flagship alternative development program for the southern region of Afghanistan, ALP/S was launched over a backdrop of intensifying insurgency and violence. By the time that the ALP/S was rolled out in 2005, the neo-Taliban resurgence in southern Afghanistan was already well under way. As numerous commentators have shown, insurgent violence in southern Afghanistan was driven in large part by old intertribal rivalries, as well as local resistance to the predatory rule of the four major warlords – Sher Mohammad Akhundzada, Malem Mir Wali, Dad Mohammad Khan, and Abdul Rahman Jan – that had been returned to power by the Karzai administration in the aftermath of the invasion (Farrell and Giustozzi 2013; Giustozzi 2008; Marin 2014). As early as 2004, the neo-Taliban was dispatching small infiltration teams to Helmand and Kandahar, where they were expected to serve as the "vanguard" of a future insurgency (Farrell and Giustozzi 2013; Giustozzi 2008). In addition to skirmishing with Afghan National Army patrols, assassinating local government officials, distributing "night letters" amongst rural communities, and establishing shadow institutions, these teams also tried to stir up resistance against the Karzai administration by manipulating local politics (Farrell and Giustozzi 2013; Martin 2014). These efforts bore fruit, and by June 2006, a number of key districts had fallen under neo-Taliban control.

In the spring of 2006, this resurgent neo-Taliban launched a significant offensive that took both the US-led coalition, as well as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's newly established International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) by surprise. According to Mazetti and Rhode (2008), this spring offensive increased the incidences of suicide bombings sixfold, as well as the number of American and ISAF casualties by 45 percent. ISAF countered by dispatching thousands of British and Canadian soldiers to Helmand and Kandahar provinces, respectively. As the story is commonly told, British and Canadian forces severely under-estimated the size, strength, and morale of their adversary. Consequently, the ISAF counteroffensive was too small to halt the neo-Taliban advance, yet "just large enough to antagonize the local population and

drive them further into the arms of the insurgency” (Farrell and Giustozzi 2013, 850-1). This narrative assumes, of course, that the neo-Taliban in southern Afghanistan could be understood as a unified and coherent insurgent movement. Instead, it is more likely that ISAF forces deployed into southern Afghanistan “blindly ignorant of the local politics underpinning” the insurgency (Farrell and Giustozzi 2013, 850-1). ISAF failed not because they underestimated the strength of an ostensibly coherent insurgent movement, but rather, because they insisted on making local contexts conform to a ham-fisted “government vs. insurgency” narrative (Malkasian 2013; Martin 2014). This made it easy for them to be manipulated by unscrupulous power brokers, further alienating local populations (Martin 2014).

It is impossible to understand ALP/S’s trajectory in isolation from this context of intensifying violence. Initially, ALP/S hewed closely to the “rural development” model of alternative livelihoods. Cognisant of the central role that poppy cultivation played in helping farmers in southern Afghanistan cope with crushing poverty, Chemonics focused the ALP/S on expanding “viable, sustainable, licit agricultural employment and income alternatives” (Chemonics 2005, 2). Through the ALP/S, Chemonics hoped to transform southern Afghanistan into an environment conducive to the expansion of non-farm service jobs and the establishment of “value-adding, agro-processing endeavours” (Chemonics 2005, 2). This showed that Chemonics was not interested in merely finding an alternative crop to the opium poppy. Instead, Chemonics set for itself the ambitious task of orienting farmers away from subsistence production towards large-scale commercial agriculture.

In many ways, the ALP/S foreshadowed the National Development Strategy that was officially adopted by the Afghan government in 2008, which championed large-scale commercial agriculture as a catalyst of pro-poor growth. The expectation was that commercial agriculture could – and would – benefit a “diverse range of rural residents, across farming scales” (Flaming and Roe 2009, 10). This valorization of commercial agriculture went hand in hand with a devaluation of subsistence production, which was represented as a backwards livelihood strategy that generates no income, perpetuates a cycle of poverty, and leaves rural households extremely vulnerable to external shocks (Flaming and Roe 2009). The National Development Strategy identified a number of “agriculture and rural development zones” which would be “centered on

regional market towns where the conditions for growth are most favourable” (Flaming and Roe 2009, 10). These zones would serve as targets for rural development interventions, which aimed to build up commercial value chains by empowering local agri-businesses.

Programs like the ALP/S highlight the extent to which the USAID complex became obsessed with the related concepts of “value chains” and “clusters”. The origins of the “value chain” concept can be traced back to the foundational work of Immanuel Wallerstein and Terence Hopkins (1986). They posit the existence of trans-state “commodity chains” – networks of “labour and production processes whose end result is a finished commodity” – that serve as the backbone of a globalized division of labour and, by extension, a world economy (Hopkins and Wallerstein 1986, 159). This path-breaking work proved influential amongst radical political-economists, as well as economic geographers and sociologists, who began to shift the focus of analysis from commodity to value chains. Gary Gereffi emerged as a key figure in this new “global value chains” literature. Gereffi argued that developing countries tend to access global markets indirectly by serving as suppliers to large multinational enterprises. By virtue of their status as “gatekeepers”, these so-called “lead firms” possess the power to dictate the terms and conditions under which developing “suppliers” participate in global value chains. In Gereffi’s eyes, it is important to understand how value chains are governed because this information can be used to help economic actors “upgrade” their ability to capture greater shares of the “value” that is added to commodities over the life of the production process.

As Marion Werner et al. (2014) note, this kind of thinking was enormously attractive to development professionals. It should come as no surprise that a number of its proponents – Gereffi<sup>28</sup> included – actively tried to market the global value chain heuristic to development agencies and policy makers. As Werner et al. (2014, 1242) write:

“the declining legitimacy of market fundamentalism has generated demand for new ways of explaining how globalized trade and investment flows can be harnessed to promote outcomes such as international competitiveness, growth, and employment. Value chain frameworks provide such an explanation, and in doing so,

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<sup>28</sup> In addition to writing a briefing paper for USAID, Gereffi (2009) led one of its “Breakfast Seminars” in September of 2012, where he spoke on the topic of “new trends in value chain upgrading” (Microlinks 2012).



legitimize the basic premise of market liberalization while simultaneously informing policies that promise to go beyond the macroeconomic ‘enabling environment’ approach”.

It should therefore come as no surprise that value chain perspectives are fast “becoming central pillars to a post-Washington consensus that sees a more active role for state and development institutions in ‘making markets work’, while reaffirming participation in the market cum value chain as the means and ends of development” (Werner et al. 2014, 1242).

This was precisely how USAID and Chemonics deployed the value chain concept in southern Afghanistan. The starting point of their analysis was the opium economy itself. According to Chemonics (2005, 2), “the poppy to opium and heroin system in Afghanistan constitutes a lucrative, model value chain” that provides Afghans with easy access to credit, land, water, and labour. The goal of the ALP/S was to reproduce a similarly reinforced value chain for a number of alternative crops (Chemonics 2006, 7). In order to overcome the “enormous challenge” of changing the “environment” of southern Afghanistan to “one that equally – in resources, substance, and timing – encourages licit crops and discourages poppy production”, Chemonics decided to work primarily through a combination of private- and public-sector mechanisms (Chemonics 2006, 7). According to Chemonics, southern Afghanistan was in desperate need of “value-added agribusinesses” capable of helping local farmers capitalize on emerging market opportunities by “[adding] value” to the fruits of their labour (Chemonics 2006, 8). In order for southern Afghanistan to become a competitive destination for long-term private sector investments, however, certain other needs had to be met. Foreign investors, as Chemonics pointed out, would shy away from areas perceived to be lacking either an adequate rule of law or a reasonably well-developed infrastructural backbone. While Chemonics argued that the market could serve as a crucial source of the required “capital investments in human resources and physical improvements”, it also called on the “public sector” to “create an enabling environment” that would “transform [southern Afghanistan] into an agro-industrialized zone” (Chemonics 2006, 9).

Chemonics’ use of the term “agro-industrialized zone” speaks to the ways in which the so-called “clusters framework” also shaped the design of the ALP/S. The clusters approach rose to

prominence in the 1980s amongst a group of scholars who were seeking a way to replicate the success stories of Italian and German industrial districts in developing countries. The clusters development paradigm was undergirded by the notion that “agglomerations of small and medium enterprises could achieve ‘collective efficiency’ and thus, take a ‘high road’ to competitiveness, if they adopted collaborative forms of networking and were supported by sector-specific institutions” (Werner et al. 2014, 1228). Given that the focus of the cluster model was resolutely on the local dimensions of economic activity, it proved insufficient for understanding the extra-territorial networks and governance dynamics that were becoming increasingly characteristic of capitalist accumulation in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries: precisely the sorts of topics that were beginning to be broached by global value chain scholars. Instead of dispensing with the clusters paradigm, development professionals began to explore its potential synergies with the global value chain framework. Much of this research was concerned with identifying connections “between the upgrading prospects of clustered firms and the governance dynamics of the global value chains in which these firms participate” (Werner et al 2014, 1228).

This research made an impression on Chemonics, who combined the cluster approach with the value chain framework to justify its up-scaling of alternative development activities in southern Afghanistan. Over the course of the ALP/S, development interventions targeted economic regions, rather than individual farmers. In order to accelerate licit economic growth in southern Afghanistan, the ALP/S mobilized an “area-based development strategy” in which “discrete economic interventions became linked and supported each other in integrated clusters” (Chemonics 2005, 5). More specifically, Chemonics hoped to agglomerate integrated value chains for promising alternative crops in and around major urban centres blessed with functioning institutions, infrastructures, and business services. These interventions were supposed to generate “trickle-down” benefits for farmers in the form of purchasing contracts, for example (Chemonics 2006, 10). As a result of these efforts, Chemonics would create a cadre of individuals capable of thinking and acting in ways that foster economic growth and create jobs in southern Afghanistan.

In an effort to identify those value chains with the potential to form the backbone of a regional agribusiness cluster, Chemonics (2006a) conducted seven studies focused on:

- 1) Fruits and vegetable processing;
- 2) Dairy production and processing;
- 3) A wheat flour mill;
- 4) A livestock feed mill;
- 5) Fish farms;
- 6) Drip irrigation;
- 7) Oilseed production.

On the basis of these studies, the ALP/S decided to pursue investor-based, demand driven agribusiness cluster opportunities for Helmand and Kandahar provinces in the fields of livestock, perennial horticulture, and immediate impact seed distribution. On the recommendation of its in-house research and analysis team, Chemonics (2006a, 16-17) focused most of its attention on empowering the local “livestock complex”, which had the “potential to be a major driver of licit economic development in southern Afghanistan”. According to ALP/S’ second year work plan, the integrated livestock cluster was to be developed and managed on a demonstration basis by a network of local agricultural associations in collaboration with Chemonics and its subcontractors. It was slated to include a commercial feed system, veterinary services, dairy production, fattened lamb production, a price information system, and rural financial services (Chemonics 2006a, 16). Once these demonstration businesses had become sustainable, they would be shopped to potential investors in order to commercialize them as quickly as possible (Chemonics 2006a, 18). Chemonics planned to complement these efforts by developing a secondary horticultural cluster focused on demonstration and market trial activities, as well as a stand-alone wheat seed distribution program that would provide farmers with an immediate alternative to planting poppy (Chemonics 2006a, 17).

In order to ensure the sustainability of these agglomeration economies, ALP/S also championed the importance of providing business development services to farmers in hopes of transforming them into “farmers-as-businessmen” (Chemonics 2006, 14). In addition to improving access to credit, supporting local business associations and development planning bodies, developing mass media campaigns, and establishing price information systems, ALP/S also proposed to construct an industrial park that would effectively serve as a “concentrated version of the more dispersed cluster and provide developed sites for business persons investing in agro-processing” (Chemonics 2006, 10-11; 2007, 2007a)

By the third year of ALP/S operations, however, the security situation in southern Afghanistan had worsened. The neo-Taliban intensified their ground campaign in Helmand in a bid to establish territorial control over key districts such as Now Zad, Sangin, Musa Qala, and Garmser. British forces were forced to defend these districts through the indiscriminate use of air power, artillery, and automatic weapons, inevitably killing civilians, destroying homes, and alienating many Helmandis in the process (Farrell and Giustozzi 2013). In response to this groundswell of discontent the British began to “operate in a different way, with less violence, and with a greater focus on the reconstruction that was one of the stated reasons for their campaign “(Martin 2014, 175). This had implications for the ALP/S. According to USAID’s Office of Inspector General (2008), British forces possessed the power to determine the areas in which Chemonics would be allowed to operate. Owing to an upswing in convoy attacks, suicide bombings, and improvised explosive device events, Chemonics was forced by the British to curtail its operations in prime poppy cultivating districts such as Nad-i-Ali and Marja. Although ALP/S activities were permitted to continue, they were limited to Lashkar Gah, and the four surrounding villages of Aynak, Bolan, Qale-i-Bost, and Karez.

Chemonics also responded to the deteriorating security situation in southern Afghanistan by replacing its initial alternative development strategy with one that promised to “win the confidence of the population” (Chemonics 2007, 3). No longer concerned with promoting “regional development” or “agribusiness clusters”, ALP/S was reconceptualised as an “attitudinal and behavioural change program” that would “create a critical mass of leaders and supporters, from the grassroots upwards to the provincial level in favour of the possibility of socio-economic change” (Chemonics 2007, 3). Instead of focusing its attention on businesses and firms, Chemonics’ (2007a) revised ALP/S would connect buyers directly to farmers, respond to community needs, and operate at the grassroots or village – as opposed to the regional – level. What all of this suggests is that the end-state goals of alternative development professionals and military actors operating in southern Afghanistan were, in some crucial ways, becoming increasingly synchronized.

How did this sea-change in strategy affect alternative development practice in the field?

Concerned that “market-driven development” might become nothing more than an empty slogan amongst rural populations, Chemonics (2007a, 6) began to appreciate the importance of making the ALP/S work more directly for farmers. To this end, Chemonics (2007a, 6) repositioned itself as a “deal maker” that would encourage local beneficiaries to engage in more commercial forms of agricultural production through mechanisms such as “contract farming” or “agricultural fairs”. The former linked farmers to markets in formal arrangements that mitigated economic risk, while the latter served as an opportunity for “producers, traders, buyers, investors, and input suppliers to make deals and contacts, show off Helmand agriculture, and learn of new technologies and opportunities” (Chemonics 2007a, 12-13). One particular fair was attended by more than 1700 people, who apparently conducted “\$5404 in actual sales on the day of the event and \$70,874 of agriculture and related products after the fair” (Wood 2007a). Chemonics also tried to incorporate rural communities more directly into its agribusiness interventions. The new ALP/S strategy, for instance, placed greater emphasis on building agricultural value chains by shifting the “farmer supply response” (Chemonics 2007b, 17). Chemonics launched new agribusiness initiatives that encouraged local farmers to produce chili peppers for international markets, while existing efforts to develop horticulture and livestock value chains in Helmand were also extended to Kandahar.

Unfortunately for Chemonics, auditors such as Checchi and Company Consulting, USAID’s OIG, and SIGAR determined the ALP/S’ revised “Implementation Strategy” to be “too little, too late”. While a number of factors – such as increasing insecurity, an ineffective eradication campaign, bureaucratic delays, and a high rate of senior staff turnover – were trotted out to justify Chemonics’ inability to reduce poppy cultivation in southern Afghanistan, auditors conceded that the implementation of the ALP/S had been marked by a number of problems (CCC 2007, 2010; OIG 2008, 1; SIGAR 2013).

First, the ALP/S was criticised for being unsustainable. According to Checchi (2010), many of the ALP/S’ activities were geared towards producing quick impacts, rather than long-term effects. Thus, while the ALP/S created feed mills, trained paravets, cultivated orchards, and established micro-nurseries, there was very little evidence that these agri-business activities were

sustained past the termination date of Chemonics' contract (CCC 2010). Similarly, ALP/S' training efforts prioritized short-term workshops over prolonged extension efforts. As Checchi (2010, 75) quipped, Chemonics only provided farmers with training in the "strict sense of the word". Any future attempt to introduce improved practices to Afghan farmers would not only have to be followed up with more extension services, but would also have to incorporate a "behaviour change component" as well (CCC 2010).

Second, it was also argued that the ALP/S was implemented without considering the needs of farmers. Chemonics' brand new chili pepper program, for instance, was essentially useless, as farmers found it difficult to both produce and market the crop (CCC 2010). This came as no surprise to Checchi (2010, 24), who argued that the program had been "implemented without full analysis of the whole value chain". Furthermore, the ALP/S' impact on women in "areas of employment, income generation, and empowerment" was slammed for being "very weak or nil" (Checchi 2010, 66). One of the earliest reports produced by Chemonics (2005a, 11) recommended that the ALP/S leadership "commit to the successful integration of women and other vulnerable groups into appropriate activities of the project". It also called on the ALP/S to hire a "Senior Gender and Economic Safety Net Specialist" to ensure that issues of concern to women did not simply fall by the wayside. Gender participation metrics suggest that these recommendations were not followed. According to Chemonics' own figures, only 30 women were trained in agricultural practices, compared to 43,030 men. Similarly, 202 women received seeds and fertilizers, as opposed to 110,478 men. Checchi (2010, 69) notes that Chemonics attempted to target women for training in business skills, but "even this effort was very low". Given that the participants in the ALP/S were overwhelmingly men, it is also likely that Chemonics' obsession with nurturing a "livestock complex" in southern Afghanistan had the unintended consequence of masculinizing a form of value-added agricultural production that had heretofore been controlled by women. As Diana Davis (2005, 81) argues, "livestock development that encourages the commercialization of milk production and/or the conversion to commercial meat production" tends to disenfranchise pastoral women from one of the most significant productive spaces that remains accessible to them (see also Sharp et al. 2003).

Checchi, however, buried its most damning criticism of the ALP/S in an appendix to its evaluation. According to Checchi, the ALP/S may have encouraged farmers in southern Afghanistan to cultivate poppy. Based on its analysis of UNODC maps, Checchi identified a simultaneous intensification and concentration of poppy cultivation in a number of key agricultural districts that straddled the Helmand River: precisely the districts that were targeted by the ALP/S. These geographical realignments, furthermore, were occurring at around the same time that counternarcotics efforts were being ramped up in southern Afghanistan. Checchi argues that the ALP/S transformed southern Afghanistan into a beacon for poppy cultivation by making cash and land available for agricultural production (CCC 2010). With an abundance of cash, farmland, and surplus labour, southern Afghanistan effectively “pulled” all of the poppy cultivation that was being “pushed” out of other provinces. Like the Helmand Valley Project before it, the ALP/S was exacerbating the very problem that it had been tasked with solving.

Despite all of these problems, the ALP/S was deemed to be “mostly successful” (CCC 2010, 30). This, however, raises a key question: successful for whom? Under the aegis of the ALP/S, alternative development assistance was focused on regions – or zones – where the conditions for economic growth and development were deemed to be most favourable. Ostensibly, Chemonics’ plan was to extend the reach of the ALP/S into some of the more remote regions of the countryside. In practice, however, the inhabitants of these areas of southern Afghanistan were generally expected to “wait their turn”. Given that these farmers were generally more prone to cultivating poppy, this prioritization was highly problematic (Fleming and Roe 2009). Furthermore, as Mansfield and Pain (2007, 16) point out, programmes which are characterized by “short-term cash for work projects and investments that support the growth of commercial agriculture with a focus on high-value crops and livestock” – namely, the ALP/S – generally favour “wealthier farmers in areas well-linked to markets, where the exit options out of the opium economy are greatest”. This geographically targeted approach, Mansfield and Pain (2007, 16) continue, is one that “ignores the interests and needs of the poor”, as “trickle-down effects, even if they were to come about, cannot be achieved overnight”.

Afghan policymakers responded to these criticisms by revising their rural development strategies. With the publication of the National Agricultural Development Framework in 2008,

the Afghan government committed itself to pursuing more bottom-up and inclusive approaches to rural development (Fleming and Roe 2009). Explicit efforts were made to “work with a broad range of stakeholders involved in the various stages of agricultural value chains”, as well as target hard to reach areas that nonetheless have high potential for growth (GoA 2008, 6). In recognition of the fact that the constraints of geography limited the potential for large-scale commercial agriculture in most Afghan provinces, the protagonist of rural development was envisioned to be the “middle-scale farmer”, which was defined as anyone who owns between one to 50 hectares of irrigated land. “Middle-scale farmers” were theorized as the “backbone for sustainable growth” in the countryside, based on the fact that they were responsible for producing upwards of 80 to 90 percent of Afghanistan’s agricultural output (Fleming and Roe 2009; GoA 2008, 6). While the balanced language of the National Agricultural Development Framework was meant to signal the Afghan government’s increasing concern with achieving a more equitable distribution of benefits and resources throughout the countryside, the strategy itself ensured that rural development programming remained resolutely focused on male farmers who owned irrigated land. This stubborn refusal to acknowledge growing levels of polarisation between landed, land poor, and landless farmers – as well as between men and women – would go on to haunt alternative development efforts in post-Surge Afghanistan (see Wily 2004, 2013).

The impact of these revisions to the Afghan government’s rural development strategy was uneven across time and space. The willingness of alternative development professionals to adopt many of the same framings, discourses, and practices that were championed in the new National Agricultural Development Framework was, more often than not, dependent upon the extent that they felt pressured to synchronize their activities and interventions with their military colleagues. Unsurprisingly, alternative development professionals who were based in Afghanistan’s more stable northern, eastern, and western regions possessed greater latitude to experiment with farmer-centric, geographically inclusive, and community-based approaches to the poppy problem. What SIGAR would eventually label as the “rural development” model of alternative livelihoods actually made its debut in these regions of Afghanistan. In the insurgent south, however, alternative development programming was reoriented towards the “stabilization” end of SIGAR’s continuum. To put it differently: whereas alternative livelihoods professionals operating in the northern, eastern, and western regions of Afghanistan were more or less free to



approach poppy cultivation as a problem of development, their southern colleagues were strongly encouraged to partake in civil-military operations that shared more in common with stability operations and full spectrum counterinsurgency. This was no doubt partially due to the fact that the security environment of southern Afghanistan was less permissive than that of the northern, eastern, and western regions of the country. As the insurgency intensified in southern Afghanistan, civilian actors found it increasingly difficult to operate without military support. Of equal importance, however, were the shifts in military strategy that were catalyzed by the battlefield “successes” of population-centric counterinsurgency in Iraq, as well as the publication of a new stability operations field manual (3-07) in October 2008. The new consensus of military commanders in Afghanistan was that Taliban forces could only be defeated through a population-centric counterinsurgency campaign conducted across the full spectrum of civil-military operations. It was precisely this kind of thinking that encouraged the Obama administration to try and reproduce counterinsurgency’s ostensible successes in Iraq by deploying a “Surge” of troops and civilians to Helmand and Kandahar as part of its “New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan”.

In what follows, I unpack this shift towards the “stabilization” model of alternative development in greater detail. First, I analyze it in relation to broader sea changes in military doctrine. Specifically, I argue that the increasing popularity of the “stabilization” approach to the problem of poppy cultivation in southern Afghanistan was spurred in large part by the US military’s belated realization that counternarcotics could no longer be considered “mission creep”, but rather, would have to be integrated into counterinsurgency efforts. Second, I situate the civilian turn towards “stabilization” in southern Afghanistan within a longer history of civil-military cooperation. In particular, I explore how the US military has attempted to operationalize its stability operations doctrine in rural Afghanistan by devising and deploying a number of different mechanisms for interagency collaboration. Third, I engage with criticisms of how population-centric counterinsurgency – especially its “clear-hold-build” variant – breaks down the operational firewall that is meant to safeguard the autonomy and the neutrality of civilian actors who work in theatres of conflict such as southern Afghanistan. I argue that the force of these critiques is blunted by their tendency to judge “stabilization” models of aid against an idealized and normative form of development practice that remains uncorrupted by the messiness

of counterinsurgency and warfare. I suggest that one way of moving beyond these easy critiques of the “stabilization” model is by paying closer attention to ways in which the alternative development programs that were rolled out by USAID in the wake of the “Surge” tended to gloss over particularly thorny questions of land ownership and access in southern Afghanistan, resulting in unintended, yet significant, consequences.

#### **4.4 Shape, clear, hold, eradicate, build**

Previously, I explored how the US military initially saw counternarcotics operations in Afghanistan as mission creep. The US military was able to maintain this position until 2007, at which point it found itself under intensifying pressure to confront the fact that Afghanistan’s “insurgency and drug trade flourish in the same lawless terrain, and are often mutually reinforcing” (Constable 2011).

Once again, a lot of this pressure came from the UNODC, which was concerned by the shifting geographies of poppy cultivation in rural Afghanistan. In addition to alienating rural Afghans, eradication operations were also reshaping the geographies of Afghanistan’s narco-economy. While the total hectares of agricultural land under poppy cultivation reached a new high in 2007, the number of provinces that had successfully been disconnected from Afghanistan’s opium economy increased from 6 in 2006 to 13 in 2007 (UNODC 2007). As Figures 15 and 16 suggest, poppy cultivation was, in fact, being concentrated in fewer and fewer provinces: particularly the insecure provinces located in southern and western Afghanistan (Bond et al. 2015; GAO 2010; UNODC 2007).

According to the UNODC (2007), the gradual concentration of poppy cultivation in Helmand and Kandahar over the mid-2000s highlighted three new circumstances that deserved further military scrutiny. First, the UNODC claimed that poppy cultivation in rural Afghanistan could no longer be associated with poverty, as Helmand and Kandahar were two of the richest provinces in Afghanistan. Second, the fact that the neo-Taliban controlled vast swathes of territory in southern Afghanistan confirmed to the UNODC that poppy cultivation was closely linked to the insurgency. Third, the UNODC accused the neo-Taliban of funding their insurgency by

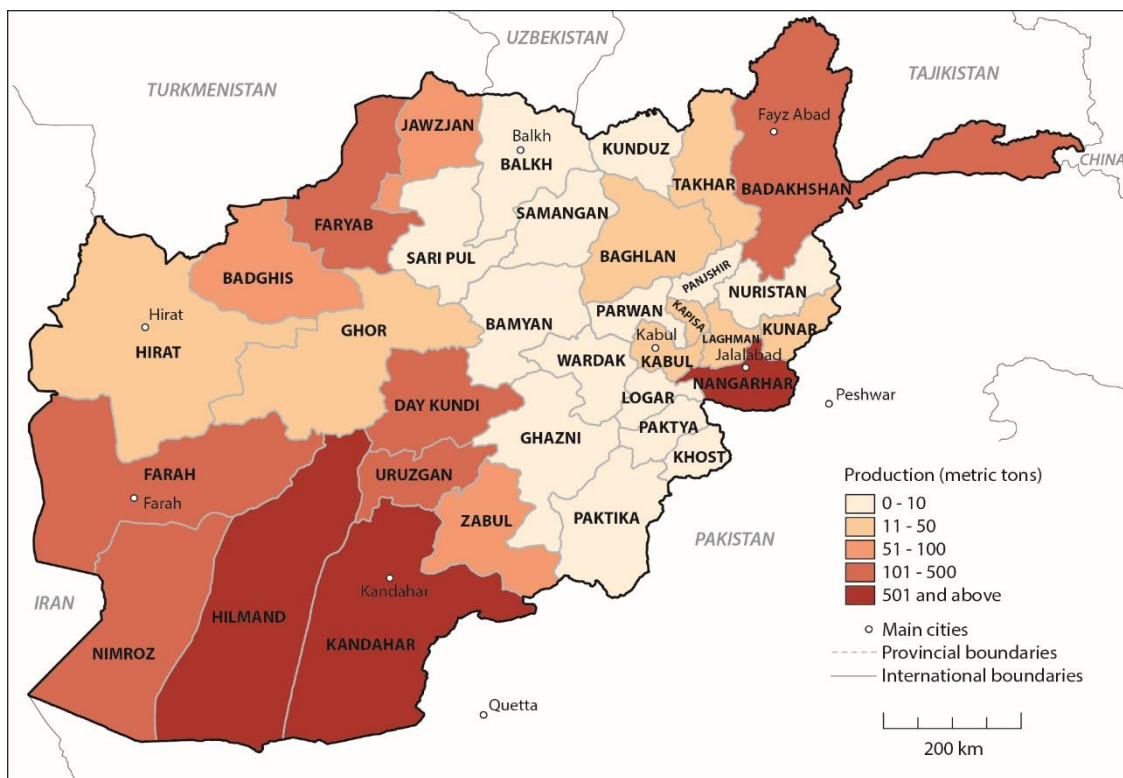


Figure 15: Opium production in Afghanistan by province (mt), 2007 (UNODC 2007)

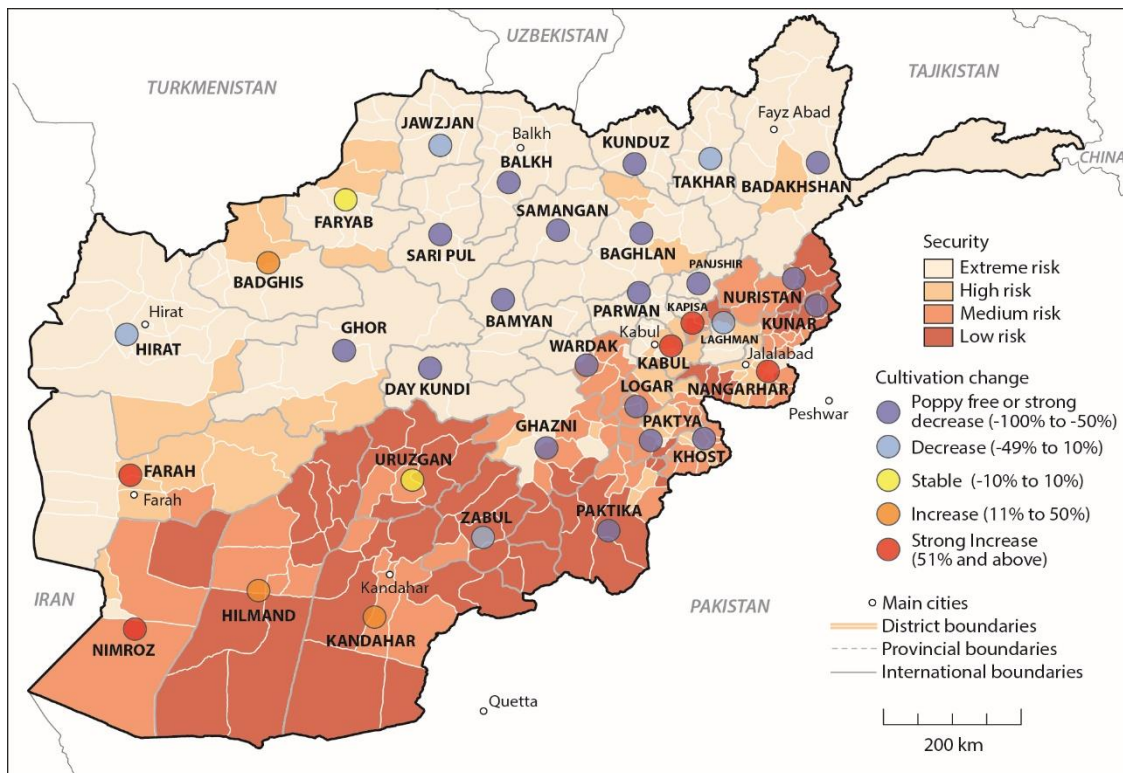


Figure 16: Security map and poppy cultivation change by province, 2006-2007 (UNODC 2007)

extracting resources from Afghanistan's narco-economy (UNODC 2007). For the UNODC (2007), the upshot of these new circumstances was that counterinsurgents could no longer disregard the threat posed by the emerging drugs-insurgency nexus. In order to prevent Afghanistan from collapsing under the "blows of drugs and insurgency", it was therefore imperative that the US military become more directly involved in the Afghan counternarcotics campaign (UNODC 2007, iv).

These claims have been thoroughly debunked by commentators as "misguided" (Mansfield and Pain 2007, 14). As Rubin and Sherman (2008 10) point out, "the difference between the 'rich' southern province of Hilmand and the 'poor' northern province of Balkh, according to the UNODC's own survey of household income, is the difference between an average daily income of \$1 per person in Hilmand and \$0.70 per person in Balkh". To compound matters further, as I demonstrated in the previous section of this chapter, much of the alternative development assistance destined for southern Afghanistan in the mid-2000s did not even go to the farmers who needed it the most.

It is also important to note that the neo-Taliban has never exercised direct control over Afghanistan's narco-economy. Instead, it extracts rents indirectly from cultivators, suppliers, truckers, and refineries through a tiered system of taxation whose proper functioning depends upon the maintenance of territorial control over key poppy cultivating regions (Peters 2009). The neo-Taliban has also become a key player in Afghanistan's booming "protection economy". Not only do local commanders provide security for tax-paying farmers by building defensive positions around their fields or by planting improvised explosive devices in anticipation of eradication, they also "protect" drug convoys by attacking security checkpoints or launching diversionary strikes to draw ISAF's attention away from known smuggling routes (Peters 2009). Although estimates of the neo-Taliban's annual drug related cash-flow range from \$70 million to \$500 million, the UNODC's relatively modest figure of \$125 million is generally accepted as the most "accurate": one that easily accounts for the bulk of the neo-Taliban's operational needs, such as wages, guns, supplies, munitions, and logistics (CFR 2009; Peters 2009).

Although the UNODC's claims were challenged, its representation of "drug money" as the "'oxygen' in the air that allows [insurgents] to operate" were gradually mainstreamed amongst American policy makers (CFR 2009), as well as the US military (SCINC 2010). These claims were used to de-politicize – and by extension, de-legitimize – both the neo-Taliban and poppy cultivators (Watts 2007). In September 2009, Antonio Maria Costa suggested that "drug money...*is starting to trump ideology*" in the sense that it has "gone from being a funding source for [the neo-Taliban] to *becoming an end in itself*" (UNODC 2009a, emphasis mine). The neo-Taliban, it was implied, should not be understood as an insurgent movement fighting to address political grievances, but rather, as a profit hungry narco-cartel. Similarly, American counternarcotics officials seized upon the UNODC's (2008a, 2) claims to represent Afghan farmers as nothing more than greedy opportunists who were undeserving of alternative development assistance (Schweich 2008).

However problematic, these arguments encouraged ISAF to "step up attacks on drug lords and narcotics traffickers who [were] supporting [the] insurgency" (CFR 2009; Shanker and Schmitt 2008). In October 2008, ISAF's commander, General David McKiernan, acknowledged the need for it to become increasingly involved in counternarcotics efforts. He considered the narcotics-insurgency nexus to be a "force protection issue" that had to be dealt with in a "military way" (Shanker and Schmitt 2008). The Pentagon agreed, and in December 2008, it authorized US forces to directly support counternarcotics missions being conducted in rural Afghanistan (SCINC 2010, 20). Selling this shift in counternarcotics policy to other NATO members, however, proved difficult. As Shanker (2008) notes, while no NATO members objected to the Pentagon's militarization of counternarcotics on legal grounds, a number of them – including Germany, Italy, Poland, and Spain – framed counternarcotics not as a job for the military, but rather, as a matter of police. Given that NATO members were permitted to opt out of missions that they felt were too risky in political or military terms, these tensions threatened to complicate future counternarcotics operations. Objections were also registered by American counternarcotics officials, who complained that the Pentagon was "muscling in everywhere" (Schweich 2008a).

The US military's decision to more directly involve itself in the Afghan counternarcotics campaign was therefore controversial on the grounds that it threatened to breach the traditional firewall separating the civilian and military spheres of authority. Although the intensifying nexus of drugs and insurgency in southern Afghanistan furnished the US military with a compelling strategic justification for reconsidering its position on the thorny question of counternarcotics, its about-face was also largely consistent with the gradual evolution in military doctrine that had been underway since the mid-2000s. As I noted in the introductory chapter of this dissertation, the publication of Directive 3000.05 in 2005 had previously laid the groundwork for the US military's incursion into fields of security work that had heretofore been dominated by civilian actors. Despite acknowledging that a number of stability operations tasks – such as counternarcotics – are best performed by non-military actors, Directive 3000.05 (2005) nonetheless called on the US armed forces to prepare for situations in which civilians may be forced to abdicate their stabilization responsibilities for whatever reason. The Directive's expectation that the US armed forces could – and would – “fill the gaps” when necessary was carried forward and entrenched with the publication of the Army's keystone field manual on stability operations (FM 3-07) in October 2008. According to FM 3-07, the purpose of stability operations is to “establish conditions that enable the efforts of the other instruments of national and international power” (Department of the Army 2008, vii). “By providing the requisite security and control to stabilize an operational area”, FM 3-07 (2008, vii) argues, “those efforts build a foundation for transitioning to civilian control, and eventually, to the host nation”.

In the context of southern Afghanistan, the security environment was not conducive for civilians to implement “rural development” forms of alternative livelihoods programming, setting the stage for the US military to involve itself more directly in such efforts. In order to achieve unity of effort in the realm of counternarcotics, the US commanders decided that the best course of action would be not to usurp the existing campaign, but rather, to synchronize, coordinate, and integrate military operations with civilian activities (Department of the Army 2008, 1-3). The US military, however, was well aware that certain facets of the Afghan counternarcotics campaign were becoming increasingly controversial. Stability operations doctrine may have legitimized the militarization of long-standing efforts to solve Afghanistan's poppy problem, but it was the mainstreaming of population-centric counterinsurgency thinking within the US

military that determined which pillars of the civilian counternarcotics campaign were worthy of ongoing support. As I noted previously, population-centric counterinsurgency had been rediscovered by the US military in the mid-2000s as part of a broader effort to shore up a rapidly deteriorating situation in Iraq (Gregory 2008a). This process – which culminated in the revision of the US military’s long neglected counterinsurgency field manual (FM 3-24) in June 2005 – was driven by commanders in the field, who adapted themselves to the unfamiliar battlespaces of cities such as Baghdad by improvising new tactics and strategies on the spot. Iraq proved to be a bloody crucible of counterinsurgency, and in September 2007, General David Petraeus reported that the insurgency was “under control” (Gregory 2008a; McCoy 2009). Petraeus attributed this turn around to “counterinsurgency practices that underscore the importance of units living among the people they are securing” and the use of “non-kinetic means to exploit the opportunities provided by our kinetic operations” (Petraeus 2007).

Buoyed by counterinsurgency’s “success” in Iraq, the US military embraced it with the fervor of the converted (Chandrasekaran 2012). Eager to turn around the Afghan war, the US military attempted to apply the lessons that it had learned from waging counterinsurgency in (largely urban) Iraq to (largely rural) Afghanistan. All of this was occurring just as the US military was beginning to assume greater counternarcotics responsibilities in rural Afghanistan.

Unsurprisingly, the US military decided to approach counternarcotics operations through the prism of counterinsurgency thinking. According to FM 3-24, counterinsurgency operations must be prosecuted in ways that are sensitive to the needs of occupied populations. Field manual directives rarely translate perfectly into practice, but American forces and their NATO allies eventually recognized that the material costs of eradication are disproportionately borne by Afghan farmers, who are often economically dependent upon a successful opium harvest in order to make ends meet (CFR 2009). Conscious of the need to “win hearts and minds”, the American military distanced itself as much as possible from eradication operations, and instead supported alternative development (Rubin and Rosenberg 2012).

Here, the US military was acting in ways that were largely consonant with its revised counterinsurgency doctrine. Economic development figures prominently in FM 3-24 as one of the key “Logical Lines of Operations” in population-centric counterinsurgency. FM 3-24 (2006,

5-2) defines “Logical Lines of Operations” as conceptual categories that give structure to all of the different activities being undertaken simultaneously by counterinsurgent forces to “isolate the insurgents from the population, address and correct the root causes of the insurgency, and create or reinforce the societal systems required to sustain the legitimacy of the [Host Nation] government”. Lasting victory, FM 3-24 insists, would prove elusive without establishing a “vibrant” economy and “viable” employment opportunities. This is because insurgents sometimes “foster the very conditions keeping the economy stagnant” so that they can “exploit a lack of employment or job opportunities” by supporting informal or illicit coping economies (FM 3-24 2006, 5-15). In Afghanistan, the neo-Taliban secured passive and active forms of popular support by positioning themselves as the legitimate defenders of rural interests. In order to “win the hearts and minds” of Afghan farmers, counterinsurgent forces had to restore the “freedom to conduct lawful commerce”. This was a five-step process:

- 1) Mobilize/develop local economic activity;
- 2) Initiate contracts with local businesses to stimulate trade;
- 3) Rebuild commercial infrastructure;
- 4) Support broad-based economic opportunity;
- 5) Support a free market economy.

Here, we can see how military commanders, like development professionals, strived to create an enabling environment for licit economic activity in rural Afghanistan.

This indexing of counterinsurgency with economic development was not idiosyncratic to FM 3-24. Similar claims, in fact, were advanced in the US military’s field manual on stability operations (FM 3-07), which was revised in October 2008. According to FM 3-07, it was imperative that stability operations support economic and infrastructural development. This was because “sound economic policies promote equitable, sustainable growth” and accordingly, are the key to “remedying underlying tensions in society” (Department of the Army 2008, 3-14). FM 3-07 envisions a “significant role” for the US military to play in helping local communities generate employment opportunities, stimulate markets, reconstruct destroyed infrastructures, inject cash into household economies, and generally foster recovery through other microeconomic interventions (Department of the Army 2008, 3-14). Before undertaking any such stability operations, however, the US military would have to familiarize itself with the



“economic fundamentals of the area – key markets, revenue producers, and price trends –” so as not to cause “unintended disruptions” to local economies that might nurture a relationship of dependency between target populations and foreign personnel (Department of the Army 2008, 3-15). Field brigades, in other words, had to resist the temptation to pursue short-term benefits at the expense of more long-term goals, such as “enabling self-reliance and the creation of a durable enterprise and job market” (Department of the Army 2008, 3-15). As we shall see later on in this chapter, the stabilization forms of alternative development programming that were implemented in southern Afghanistan from 2009 to 2013 did not always heed these warnings.

What distinguishes FM 3-07 from FM 3-24 is the particular emphasis that the former places on agricultural development programs. “The agricultural sector”, FM 3-07 tells us, “is a cornerstone of a viable market economy, providing crops and livestock vital to local markets and international trade” (Department of the Army 2008, 3-17). Luckily for the US military, stability operations that were designed to spur economic growth in local communities could also do double duty as catalysts of agricultural development. To drive this point home, FM 3-07 helpfully identifies a number of essential tasks that field units can perform to help support broader agricultural development efforts. Initially, these might include: “[assessing] the state of the agricultural sector; [securing] and [protecting] postharvest storage facilities; [rebuilding] small-scale irrigation systems; and [establishing] work programs to support agricultural development” (Department of the Army 2008, 3-17). As the agricultural economy stabilizes, military actors can shift their attention towards: “[protecting] water sources; [identifying] constraints to production; [assessing the] health, diversity, and numbers of animals; [channeling] food aid to promote market activity; [establishing] transportation and distribution networks; [encouraging] host-nation enterprise creation to provide goods and services to the agricultural sector; [and ensuring] open transit and access to local markets” (Department of the Army 2008, 3-17, 3-18). Based on this list of essential tasks, we can see that the US military’s efforts to support economic growth and agricultural development are linked by a shared concern with enabling markets, nurturing entrepreneurialism, facilitating circulation, and rehabilitating infrastructural networks.

These counterinsurgency and stabilization concerns had a substantive impact on the ways in which civilian professionals practiced counternarcotics in rural Afghanistan. Eradication operations, as I noted previously, were becoming increasingly unpopular amongst policy makers, pundits, and the mainstream media alike. In contrast with its predecessor, the Obama administration was sympathetic to these concerns. Nobody publicly excoriated the Afghan counternarcotics campaign more savagely than Obama's eventual Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Richard Holbrooke (2008), who described it as potentially the "single most ineffective program in the history of American foreign policy". According to Holbrooke (2008), eradication operations had not only failed to reduce the total area under opium cultivation in rural Afghanistan, but had also pushed desperate farmers into the arms of the neo-Taliban. In so doing, it was shoring up the insurgency that it was trying to undermine. Accordingly, Holbrooke (2008) called on the Obama administration to suspend eradication in "insecure areas" and in its place, intensify efforts to "improve security, build small market-access roads, and offer farmers free agricultural support".

Holbrooke's criticisms shaped the Obama administration's approach to counternarcotics in rural Afghanistan. On 27 March, 2009, Obama unveiled a "new strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan" which promised to complement a "surge" in troops with a "dramatic increase in [the American] civilian effort". By substantially increasing the number of agricultural specialists "on the ground", Obama (2009) hoped to help the Afghan government "develop an economy that isn't dominated by illicit drugs". While Obama sketched out his vision for counternarcotics in broad brush strokes, the task of fleshing out its details was delegated to Holbrooke who, by this point in time, had been tapped to spearhead the civilian "surge" as the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan. In June 2009, Holbrooke confirmed that the US was "phasing out" its support for crop eradication (Associated Press 2009). As Holbrooke quipped, "we are going to stop making the farmers the victims" (Reuters 2009).

From the outset, it was clear that Holbrooke and USAID were not on the same page when it came to alternative development. Holbrooke (2008) was critical of USAID's approach to alternative development in Afghanistan, arguing that it had been "tried elsewhere with almost no success". According to Holbrooke (2008), it would take years for market-oriented alternative

development programs to produce concrete results. Interviews conducted with key informants reveal that Holbrooke tried to shake things up by “[coming] in hard”, highlighting how “everything is broken”, and putting a “block” on a number of USAID’s procurements (Brown 18 October, 2012a). A number of USAID’s alternative development programs were caught in this “limbo period”, including Chemonics’ proposed follow-up to ALP/S. Entitled “Ideas Driving Economic Alternatives – South” (IDEA-SOUTH), it was informed by many of the lessons that Chemonics had learned from implementing ALP/S. Although the proposal for IDEA-SOUTH was submitted to Holbrooke’s office in April 2009, a lack of support stalled the procurement process. Holbrooke argued that IDEA-SOUTH problematically emphasized agribusiness over food security. USAID and Chemonics had designed IDEA-SOUTH to “support market-based value chains that could independently compete with poppy and provide a longer-term incentive for farmers” (OIG 2010, 8-9). Instead, Holbrooke envisioned IDEA-SOUTH as a new “New Deal” for Afghan farmers, based on a “soup-to-nuts” system of subsidies and prices supports (Chandrasekaran 2012, 107). A compromise between these two positions proved impossible to reach, and USAID cancelled the procurement process for IDEA-SOUTH on 14 June, 2009.

What emerged in its place? Holbrooke acted on his belief that alternative development should serve as a “counterinsurgency-stability tool” and replaced USAID’s “targeted agricultural assistance program” with a number of “voucher-based, quick response program[s]” (SIGAR 2010, 116). Under the aegis of these programs, alternative development professionals were expected to work alongside military forces to “hold” and “build” areas that had been “cleared” by more conventional enemy-centric operations. Holbrooke, in other words, played an instrumental role in ushering in what SIGAR (2010, 2014) would later describe as the “stabilization” model of alternative development.

The introduction of the “stabilization” model of alternative development was merely the latest moment in a long series of attempts to conduct stability operations in occupied Afghanistan. By February 2002, US Central Command had already established the first of a number of different mechanisms to facilitate civil-military cooperation. The first of these was the “Coalition Joint Civil Military Operations Task Force” (CJCMOTF), whose *raison d’être* was to “enable a speedy

conclusion to combat operations, as well as to build a foundation for sustainable post-conflict security” (Fields 2002, 2). Its tasks were fourfold:

- 1) Provide “assistance in the aftermath of unconventional warfare in order to ‘win hearts and minds’ and prevent a recurrence of hostilities”;
- 2) “show the benign face of the Coalition and international community at large” through “good works across the country”;
- 3) Connect local officials who supported the Afghan Interim Administration to crucial relief and reconstruction resources; and
- 4) Jumpstart reconstruction efforts in the “gap between the cessation of conflict...and the influx of reconstruction and development funds and agencies” (Fields 2002, 2).

These tasks would be implemented by “Coalition Humanitarian Liaison Cells” – or “Chiclets” – “six-man Civil Affairs teams augmented by a few civilian experts who accompanied Special Forces troops working out in the field” (Hodge 2011, 86).

While CJCMOTF styled itself as a “military NGO”, the Chiclets found it difficult to live up to these expectations. While they could “drill a well here or repair a school there”, they did not have the skills necessary to implement more long-term development projects (Hodge 2011, 86). It was precisely this problem that the “Provincial Reconstruction Team” (PRT) concept was meant to address. PRTs were conceived by Jeff Collins – then the deputy assistant Secretary of Defense for Stability Operations – in the early 2000s as “super-sized” civil affairs teams that would be staffed by a combination of military personnel and civilian actors sourced from the State Department, USAID, the Department of Agriculture, academia, and even non-governmental organizations. PRTs were supposed to embody many of the core principles of stability operations doctrine. They were initially deployed to facilitate reconstruction efforts in eight to ten key provinces outside of Kabul (USAID 2010, 35). After arriving in their assigned area of operations, each PRT mobilized squads of armed personnel to “clear” and “hold” various “non-permissive environments” so that civilian team members could work with local populations to implement a variety of different development projects (Hodge 2011; Taw 2012). The specific kinds of project implemented by each PRT was largely dependent upon the various kinds of expertise possessed by its civilian members. If a PRT was staffed with State Department

employees, its projects would generally be focused on ensuring good governance and political oversight. In contrast, PRTs with stronger ties to USAID or the Department of Agriculture might gravitate towards reconstruction and rural development projects, respectively (USAID 2010, 24). As stability operations and counterinsurgency thinking became increasingly hegemonic amongst US forces in Afghanistan, Collins' initial experiment was gradually expanded. By 2010, coalition and NATO forces were operating approximately 26 PRTs throughout Afghanistan (USAID 2010, 35).

In addition to establishing new institutional mechanisms for interagency cooperation, the US military also made heavy use of its pre-existing repositories of stability operations expertise: particularly, its special operations forces. Stabilization tasks have historically fallen under the mandate of special operations forces, whose core missions include direct action, special reconnaissance, psychological and information operations, foreign internal defense, and civil affairs (Taw 2012). While the revised FM 3-07 encouraged conventionally trained forces to take up some of the responsibilities commonly associated with special operations forces, the US military command continued to task Green Berets and Navy Sea, Air, and Land teams with conducting so-called "Village Stability Operations" in some of the more remote and insecure districts in the Afghan countryside (Taw 2012). As part of such operations, small teams of special forces established "Village Stability Platforms" by living full-time amongst rural communities (Green 2015). From these temporary bases, special operations forces engaged in a number of stabilization activities, including: conducting patrols, recruiting for local militias, engaging with key leaders, and nurturing local entrepreneurs (Briggs 2014; Burlingame 2012; Shreckengast 2012). There have also been attempts to embed USAID personnel in these special forces units. From 2006 onwards, USAID and US Special Operations Command worked together to "address the myriad of challenges posed by a growing insurgency" (Mann 2008, 1). Specifically, USAID assigned development advisors such as Sloan Mann (2008) to the US military's Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force – Afghanistan. According to Mann, this relationship was mutually beneficial. By coordinating and embedding with special operations forces teams, USAID development advisors gained the ability to operate in areas of Afghanistan that would otherwise have been written off as "non-permissive environments"

(Mann 2008). USAID's development expertise, in turn, ostensibly augmented the special forces units' ability to "shape" its area of operations (Mann 2008).

Embedding in "Village Stability Platforms" – and participating in interagency operation more generally – also provided USAID with access to sources of funding that were previously only available to military commanders. One of the most notorious examples was the Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP). As the largest source of funding available to military commanders in the field, CERP regularly dwarfed USAID's annual budget. In USAID's (2010, 22-3) own words, the "intent of the CERP is to shape the battlefield by funding projects that provide immediate, tangible, relief to the indigenous populations, as well as inject money into the local economies by providing jobs to the unemployed". In this sense, CERP was exemplary of how the US military was using money as a weapons system. Directive 3000.05 and FM 3-07 may have encouraged military commanders in the field to consider incorporating stability operations into their toolkit, but it was CERP that furnished them with the means and the resources necessary to translate these visions into concrete, material practice. CERP was significant because it added weight to the US military's "staging of itself as an institution ready, able, and necessary to the implementation of development strategies" (Gilbert 2015, 207). Under the sign of CERP, development went from being an "operation other than war" to a constitutive element of military interventions (Gilbert 2015).

The above discussion is suggestive of how the US military – in collaboration with its interagency partners or otherwise – grappled with the challenges associated with countering the intensifying Afghan insurgency. The US military tried to overcome these challenges by engaging in full-spectrum operations that sought to complement lethal with non-lethal actions (see Chapter 1). What the US military's deployment of PRTs, VSOs, and CERP in rural Afghanistan also demonstrated, however, was that achieving an appropriate balance of military and non-military power in the Afghan theater proved more difficult than expected. Before conventional soldiers could assume sole responsibility for "economic stabilization and infrastructure", "restoring economic production and distribution", and "initiating market reforms", they would have to familiarize themselves with an evolving set of calculations and considerations concerning the appropriate use of force in combat zones. The US military was well aware of this problem. As

FM 3-07 cautioned its readers, “every situation is unique”, and hence “requires a different combination of violence and restraint” (Department of the Army 2008, 2-3). Each of the aforementioned attempts to translate stabilization doctrine into interagency practice served the US military as micro-crucibles of full-spectrum thinking, where different conceptions of how best to integrate nonlethal activities with combat operations were put through their paces, evaluated, and further refined.

The US military’s quest to perfect this civil-military balancing act was widely criticized by both academics and practitioners alike. These criticisms generally fall into one of two categories. First, many civilian professionals have responded to calls for “taking interagency stability operations to a new level” (Mann 2008) by disparaging the US military’s ability to do development “properly”. Elisabeth Kingsley’s (25 November, 2012) comments are instructive:

“The military doesn’t do development. They do hearts and minds – also known as quick impact – projects. They build, they repair, they hand out. They do things with a short term goal in mind and...much of it does not address a root cause. It does not fix the problem. It’s a palliative...it is like a band-aid...it’s a piece of the development equation, but it isn’t development, because as we have always said, development takes a long time. It’s not about throwing lots of money. It’s a process, it’s about local ownership...and when you are fighting a war, and [you] tell a general, ‘oh, it’s going to take us five years to really show a long term impact’, he doesn’t want to fight for five years, he wants it over and done with”.

To put it differently, each member of the interagency had a very different agenda that shaped how it participated in the different models of stability operations, such as the PRT. For a Department of Defense whose overriding priority was quashing an intensifying insurgency, the PRTs appeared as an excellent vehicle for implementing quick-impact, small-scale, and short-term projects that aimed to pacify local populations by “winning [their] hearts and minds” (Taw 2012). The State Department and USAID, in contrast, viewed the PRTs as platforms for spurring reconstruction and development, respectively (Taw 2012). It was these differing – and sometimes incompatible – agendas that served as a basis for the interagency tensions alluded to by Kingsley.

Critical analyses of how the US military conducts stability operations have also picked up on the highly fragmented, uneven, and anxious nature of these interagency relationships. According to Morrissey (2015), domestic lawmakers have questioned the US military's ability to integrate development aims with combat operations in a non-superficial way. Despite the overarching shift towards stability operations in rhetoric, doctrine, and training that was kick-started by the publication of Directive 3000.05 in 2005, all available evidence suggests that the US military has made little progress in overcoming prior shortfalls in its capacity for non-lethal action (Morrissey 2015). In 2009, for instance, a study conducted by the US Army's RAND Arroyo Center concluded that the US military was ill-suited to leading or supporting post-conflict reconstruction tasks. The report concluded that the US military was half-heartedly trying to foster agency cooperation while simultaneously planning for its failure. As Emily Gilbert (2015) shows, these problems were not solved by the introduction of the "money as a weapons system" concept. The net consequence of programs like CERP was to support projects that emphasized the importance of international trade, entrepreneurialism, and market linkages at the expense of those that advanced "bottom-up solutions that attend[ed] to the real needs and interests of local populations" (Gilbert 2015, 213). Gilbert's (2015 213) point is that such a "militarized liberation of the economy runs counter to the principles of representation, equality, and redistribution that COIN and Stability Operations both ostensibly appeal to in their emphasis on good governance". Proponents of interagency operations countered these criticisms by linking "tactical deployment[s] of aid" to improvements in security (Mann 2008). But as Goodhand and Sedra (2010, s79) point out, the belief that "quick impact" projects can bring security by "winning hearts and minds" not only "overstates the transformative potential of development", but also "fails to appreciate the processes through which legitimacy is constructed in the Afghan context". They argue that it is just as likely that the "tactical deployment of aid" will undermine security, instead of shoring it up (Goodhand and Sedra 2010, s79).

Critics also identified the huge disparity between the budget and staffing levels of the Department of Defense and those of its civilian partners as a cause for concern. While the post-9/11 period was one of relative plenty for USAID – one official describes the institution as being "flush with cash, new hires, and strong congressional support" – the playing field of national



security was fundamentally uneven (Taw 2012, 129). Thus, even if the US military wanted to seriously augment the civilian components of PRTs and VSOs, this would prove difficult so long as the State Department and USAID remained on financial “life support” (Morrissey 2015, 621). This, in turn, had significant consequences for how stability operations were conducted in the field. As Taw (2012, 167) writes: “although PRTs are supposed to be one of the key answers to militarization, the shortage of civilian personnel, the PRTs’ heavily military structures, and DoD’s dominance in nonpermissive environments mean that PRTs end up being mostly military organizations that primarily undertake tasks that are military priorities”. Given that PRTs were generally funded through CERP, projects tended to “go where the money goes”, conferring upon military members far more influence over day-to-day operations than their civilian counterparts (Taw 2012, 167). For these reasons, interagency operations were often assumed to compromise the autonomy and the neutrality of their civilian protagonists. For Kingsley (25 November, 2012), the PRTs were the “start of an increasing militarization of aid”. Although she acknowledges that the “concept in and of itself...was a good one”, she nonetheless believes that the “moment...we shook hands with the military to do assistance, we lost our neutrality and independence, to the extent we still had any”. Azerbaijani-Moghaddam and her collaborators (2008) corroborate Kingsley’s claims, suggesting that NGOs and civilians who chose to work with the US military were subsequently perceived by Afghans to be “tainted”. Such an erosion of civilian space not only compromised both the security and the credibility of aid workers, it also negatively impacted the communities that required assistance (Donini 2009).

While these critiques of intersectional operations are important, they tend to represent the US military as a corrupting influence that perverts the ostensible benevolence of development discourse and practice for instrumental ends. The problem with the “stabilization” model of alternative development, however, is not simply that it leads to unsustainable, quick impact projects that distort local economies and erode civilian space. Rather, the problem is that such projects tend to have unintended consequences that stem from an unwillingness to consider how “stabilization” forms of alternative development might impact households that access land in highly precarious ways.

Instead, I propose a different critical approach: one that takes as its starting point Jonathan Goodhand's (2009, 23) question as to whether "the political and economic transformations wrought by the war and the drugs economy the motors for a process of primitive accumulation, in which the plunder of resources led to the transfer of surplus from peasants to bureaucrats and businessmen". I argue that while this is an interesting claim, it glosses over the extent to which the "rise of opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan has in a sense been a *stay of execution on an inexorable decline in the land-based economy of poor households with restricted assets and limited access to resources*" (Mansfield and Pain 2007, 18, emphasis mine). Poppy cultivation, to put it differently, has served land-poor Afghans as a bulwark against broader processes of dispossession and displacement, and, by extension, the siren call of urban informal economies. In the context of southern Afghanistan, then, perhaps the more interesting question to be asking is: can "stabilization" forms of alternative development programming be productively understood as a form of "primitive accumulation" in the sense envisioned by Goodhand (2009)?

Recent work in the social sciences has sought to theorize stabilization and stability operations as forms of "police" power. While many commentators believe that the US military's recent turn towards stability operations has resulted in a blurring of civilian and military roles, Bachmann (2014, 120) argues that these perspectives are inadequate to the task of understanding why US military operations are increasingly characterized by an interplay between pre-emptive attempts at social ordering and the judicious application of lethal force. Instead, Bachmann makes a case for considering stability operations through the lens of "police". Here, Bachmann riffs on Michel Foucault's (2007) loose definition of "police" as a mode of government popular in early modern Europe that employed various order-making practices to secure the welfare, the vitality, and the happiness of subject populations. Under conditions of "police", order was generally produced in one of two ways. On the one hand, the science of police was marked by an ambitious desire to extend the remit of regulation to encompass a seemingly heterogeneous constellation of things, activities, and even entire domains of social life that had previously exceeded the grasp of government. One administrative compendia analyzed by Foucault offers up an expansive list of police concerns that includes education, poverty, health, market regulations, religion, and morality, to name only a few examples. On the other hand, police scientists also recognized that

it was sometimes necessary for governments to use “reasonable” levels of force to secure order in contexts where regulatory interventions were failing to produce desired effects.

According to Bachmann (2014, 121), this expansive definition of police “attracted the critique of liberal thinking” in 19<sup>th</sup> century. As the story is commonly told, liberal critics dispensed with older ways of understanding police as a science of government in favour of a narrow reading that reduced the term to a mere short-hand for the institutions of government tasked with maintaining law, order, and internal security. Bachmann (2014, 125) tries to unsettle this chronology by exposing how the US military’s recent stabilization efforts in Africa can be linked to the older, more expansive definition of police through a shared emphasis on the “good administration of public life and the promotion of welfare for local communities”. While the connection that Bachmann (2014) makes here is important, his arguments problematically assume that nuances of contemporary military operations can be rendered legible only by reactivating a concept that first emerged in a completely different time and place. Bachmann, in other words, provides us with no sense of how the US military’s practice of police in the various theatres of the global war on terror depart from the forms of police science that were prevalent in early modern Europe.

Here, the work of Mark Neocleous (2000, 2014) becomes useful. Following Neocleous, Bachmann’s decision to theorize contemporary stability operations as a reactivation of older forms of police science misses the mark. This is because police has never actually gone away. Foucault may have believed that liberal and police approaches to the problematic of population management were incommensurable, but Neocleous (2000) shows that this was not necessarily the case at all. According to Neocleous (2000), liberalism did not supplant police as the basis of 19<sup>th</sup> century governmental reason, but rather, simply reconfigured its institutional form. The liberal state, Neocleous argues, downloaded many of its police responsibilities onto private sector institutions, such as hospitals, poor houses, and prisons. This new liberalized form of police was deployed to enrich the emerging bourgeoisie by mobilizing a “series of measures to impose work” on populations who had nothing left of value to exchange for the bare necessities of life but their own surplus labour power (Neocleous 2000, 20). In so doing, these new institutions of police helped transform the urban poor into a proletariat ripe for exploitation by an emerging capitalist space economy.

Unfortunately, Neocleous (2000) never really explores the colonial dimensions of such liberal forms of police. This is a deficiency that he tries to address in his more recent attempt to trace the emergence of a colonial “war-police-accumulation” nexus. According to Neocleous (2014), police in the colonies never occurred spontaneously, but rather, was always brought into the world through the extraordinary violence of war. Colonial administrators recognized that indigenous populations would never consent to their own proletarianization, but rather, would have to be coerced into accepting it. To this end, various police techniques – aerial bombardment, the man hunt, slavery, etc. – were deployed in the British colonies to violently deny indigenous populations access to any means of subsistence located “outside the political economy being imposed within the colonial order” (Neocleous 2014, 145). Neocleous, in other words, not only theorizes colonial police as a correlate of war, but also as a vector of primitive accumulation.

Neocleous’ attention is largely focused on examples of British – and not American – colonialism, and thus, his ideas cannot neatly be picked up and inserted into the context of post-9/11 Afghanistan. However, this process of transposition can be facilitated by placing Neocleous’ ideas in conversation with recent work in geography that is beginning to link alternative development and primitive accumulation. In particular, Kevin Woods (2011) and Teo Ballvé (2012, 2013) have convincingly demonstrated how alternative development programs in Myanmar and Colombia have gone hand in hand with processes of dispossession, enclosure, and proletarianization. First, farmers are violently dispossessed of their land by assemblages comprised of state, para-state, and international actors. Having been denied access to traditional modes of subsistence, these dispossessed populations are then subjected to a series of coercive measures that are designed to make them available for exploitation by emerging regimes of capitalist accumulation. In the context of both Myanmar and Colombia, the land – and labour – liberated by such ongoing processes of dispossession were mobilized to support the establishment of agribusiness plantations, centered on cash crops such as rubber trees or oil palms. One might argue that these alternative development programs bear the hallmarks of capitalism’s “original sin”, primitive accumulation. They are both symptomatic of broader processes which seek to divorce, in Karl Marx’s (1976, 874) own words, “the producer from the

means of production”. In so doing, they operate “two transformations, whereby the social means of subsistence and production are turned into capital, and the immediate producers are turned into wage-labourers” (Marx 1976, 874).

Ballvé (2012, 619; 2013) and Woods (2011) usefully highlight how dispossession and proletarianization “are not anathema to projects of modern liberal statehood” but rather, are “deeply tied to initiatives aimed at making governable spaces, expanding global trade, and attracting capital”. But can this theoretical framework be applied to the “stabilization” forms of alternative development programming that were implemented in southern Afghanistan over the course of Obama’s “Surge”? In the next section of this chapter, I grapple with this question through an exploration of two case studies: the “Helmand Food Zone” and “Afghanistan Vouchers for Increased Production in Afghanistan”.

#### **4.5 Making the desert bloom, again**

The “Helmand Food Zone” (HFZ) was the brainchild of the province’s governor, Golub Mangal. It was a civil-military affair, bringing together USAID, the British Department for International Development, the Afghan government, and the Helmand PRT. The HFZ program triangulated public information, alternative development, and law-enforcement activities. By “combining alternative livelihoods with improved security and governance”, Mangal hoped to “open an in-road into poppy country” (Dell 2008).

The HFZ was a 25,000 hectare area located near Lashkar Gah that was demarcated by the Mangal administration in 2008 (Dell 2008; Wood 2009). Farmers living within the confines of the HFZ were only permitted to grow licit crops such as wheat. As Dell (2008) notes, the HFZ exemplified the “carrot and stick” approach to counternarcotics. Dell (2008) offers a succinct chronology of the HFZ’s three phases:

“First, a governor-led public information campaign used local shuras to enroll farmers in a program to provide seed/fertilizer for wheat and fodder cultivation. Village elders and farmers have signed no-poppy pledges. Breaking the pledge will make their fields, along with any other poppy fields in these areas, liable to

eradication. Second, in early October, the governor's officials distributed seed and fertilizer (or vouchers for them), renewing the no-poppy pledges from recipients. Finally, in January through March, farmers who plant poppy will see their fields eradicated by the governor's police and the Poppy Eradication Force".

In 2008 alone, the HFZ program reportedly provided free wheat seeds and fertilizers to over 30,000 poppy cultivators. These counternarcotics efforts were seemingly rewarded, as farmers in Nad-i-Ali, Gereshk, and Garmser began to move their land back in to wheat production (Wood 2009a). These anecdotal accounts were eventually confirmed by a UNODC (2009, 8) report, which shows that by the end of the 2008-2009 growing season, poppy cultivation within the HFZ had declined by 37% and had mainly been replaced by cereal crops.

In addition to supporting the establishment of the HFZ, USAID also funded another "relief and stabilization" program entitled "Afghanistan Vouchers for Increased Production in Agriculture", or AVIPA. AVIPA was implemented throughout Afghanistan by the private-sector contractor, International Relief and Development (IRD). From 2008 to 2011, IRD worked closely with the Afghan Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock to distribute heavily subsidized vouchers for high quality agricultural inputs to drought-stricken farmers living in 18 different provinces. In order to help them make the most of this assistance, IRD also provided beneficiaries with training in best agricultural practices.

In May 2009, USAID expanded the scope and size of AVIPA – now dubbed AVIPA PLUS – in order to "provide counterinsurgency-stability programming in Hilmand and Kandahar provinces within an agricultural framework" (USAID 2010). According to the OIG (2010a), this decision was prompted by a conjunction of factors. On the one hand, the cancellation of IDEA-SOUTH meant that southern Afghanistan was not being serviced by a regional alternative development program. On the other hand, the US military had also requested that, "in preparation for the anticipated troop surge in the south that summer, USAID have stabilization activities ready to be initiated as the troops cleared Helmand and Kandahar" (OIG 2010a, 3). According to Chandrasekaran (2012, 109), Holbrooke championed AVIPA PLUS as a "fundamental break from the past and an important first step in achieving his [alternative development] goals". While USAID proposed spending \$150 million on AVIPA PLUS – itself a "staggering amount of

money to disburse over just one year in two insecure provinces” – Holbrooke signalled his commitment to the program by effectively doubling its budget (Chandrasekaran 2012, 109).

The component of AVIPA PLUS that was focused specifically on southern Afghanistan was known as AVIPA PLUS SOUTH. Like its predecessor, AVIPA PLUS SOUTH was an “agricultural voucher” program that sought to channel packages of high quality wheat seed and improved fertilizers to as many farmers as possible (Bond et al. 2015). Specifically designed with stabilizing Helmand and Kandahar in mind, AVIPA PLUS SOUTH subsidized its seeds and fertilizer packages at higher rates. It was assumed that if AVIPA PLUS SOUTH could provide “a more substantial economic benefit to farmers”, then they would be more likely to support the Afghan national government than collaborate with the neo-Taliban (Bond et al. 2015, 117-18). In addition, AVIPA PLUS SOUTH also introduced farmers to higher-value crops – such as corn, beans, okra, melon and spices - launched a suite of cash-for-work activities, and provided micro-finance (Bond et al. 2015).

Both the HFZ and AVIPA PLUS SOUTH were widely represented as counternarcotics success stories. Governor Mangal attempted to link declining levels of poppy cultivation in Helmand to the establishment of the HFZ (Dell 2009). Similarly upbeat claims were made by Embassy officials, who described the HFZ program as the “decisive factor in reducing poppy cultivation in Helmand this year” (Wood 2009a). According to Wood (2009a), the success of the HFZ program inspired a number of local authority figures to request that similar initiatives be undertaken in their own backyards: this despite the fact that local insurgents were beginning to target wheat distribution centers (Wood 2009b).

AVIPA PLUS SOUTH also got off to a successful start. In Nad-i-Ali and Arghandab, elders defied Taliban directives by insisting that villagers be allowed to take part in AVIPA PLUS SOUTH (Eikenberry 2010; Trofimov 2010). Insurgents in Nawa reportedly began laying down their arms, choosing the certainty of cash-for-work wages over the dangers of jihad (Eikenberry 2010). By “carpet bombing” Nawa with US dollars, AVIPA PLUS SOUTH “jolted” the local economy by a factor of three to four, substantively impacting the environment of insurgent

formation in the process. To locals, district officials, the Marines and USAID representatives, AVIPA PLUS SOUTH “seemed to be a wonder drug” (Chandrasekaran 2012, 192).

These sentiments were echoed by one of my interviewees, Andrew Metcalf. Metcalf was an American infantry officer who, approximately 10 months into his Afghan deployment, took over a battalion based in Kandahar province. Metcalf thought very highly of AVIPA PLUS SOUTH. He felt that it helped land- and credit-poor farmers extricate themselves from what he described as a “permanent poverty trap”. He singled out two aspects of AVIPA PLUS SOUTH for praise. First, it discounted the costs of agricultural inputs by up to 90%, making them accessible to even the poorest farmers. Second, it furnished local Afghans with a proud sense of ownership in the program by “[using them] to promote, to sell the seeds, to provide the coordination” (Metcalf, 26 October, 2012). According to Metcalf (26 October, 2012), the only problem with AVIPA PLUS SOUTH – and this was “the problem with a lot of the money in Afghanistan” – was that it was “regulated through such a burdensome bureaucracy”. As Metcalf (26 October, 2012) recalled:

“AVIPA had a one year contract, we did one seed distribution, highly, highly beneficial. All the people came back and said, ‘hey, we want this again’, and other people came, like, ‘hey, we...didn’t have this in our area, but we’d be willing to come here to get it’. You know, just received rave reviews while [AVIPA PLUS SOUTH] money ran out because the contract was up...the guy told me it was a six month review process to see if they’d get any more money. And so you just lose kind of any sort of momentum”.

This is the familiar critique of civilian development programming, in which USAID is represented as overly bureaucratic and fundamentally incapable of producing concrete results within a reasonable time frame.

For others, the lustre of both the HFZ and AVIPA PLUS SOUTH rapidly wore thin. According to some civilians who were working for IRD in southern Afghanistan, AVIPA PLUS SOUTH was fueling local tensions, raising expectations to unsustainable levels, promoting waste and fraud, and finally, privatizing a lot of work that had previously been done in common (Chandrasekaran 2012). Likewise, the HFZ program was accused of distributing inferior strains of wheat seed to local farmers: an “avoidable error” that “needlessly undercut the long-term



investment by the UN and Western governments in Helmand's legal agricultural markets" (Havfenstein 2010).

However, even these critical accounts gloss over the mass displacement of land-poor Helmandis that was precipitated by the massive reductions of poppy cultivation in the HFZ. This is hardly surprising, given that the "whole phenomenon of uprooted Afghans" is "barely visible on the aid community radar screens" (Donini et al. 2015, 26). One exception to this trend is the research that is being produced by members of the Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit. According to Mansfield (2011, 26), while poppy "represents an important source of on-farm income for many farmers, its labour-intensive nature means that it also provides opportunities for the land poor to either rent or sharecrop land, as well as offering off-farm employment to labourers during the weeding and harvest seasons". Generally, poppies cannot be easily harvested through the labour of an average-sized household. Accordingly, land-wealthy Afghans often subcontract the task of cultivating poppy to other community members through sharecropping or leasing arrangements. Under the terms of such agreements, the sharecropper or the tenant is allowed to cultivate poppy, on the understanding that the landowner will be entitled to a cut of the harvest. The viability of these arrangements is dictated in large part by the health of the local narco-economy. As Mansfield and Pain (2007, 13) point out, "were the land-wealthy to cultivate less labour-intensive crops, the land would no longer be available to sharecroppers or for lease, but would instead be farmed using family labour of the landowner or relatively few wage labour inputs".

This is precisely what happened in the HFZ. Fishstein (2014, 46) argues that "the forced shift from opium poppy to less labour intensive crops such as wheat set in motion a chain of events which reduced the amount of land available for renting or sharecropping, hurting the landless and the land poor who rely on such arrangements". As the demand for tenants and sharecroppers in the HFZ plummeted, the land-poor found it increasingly difficult to continue living in the area. To compound matters further, the landless and the land-poor were typically barred from availing themselves of initiatives such as the HFZ or AVIPA PLUS SOUTH (Fishstein 2014; Mansfield 2014). In so doing, "stabilization" forms of alternative development programming effectively dispossessed sharecroppers and tenant farmers of their access to the means of subsistence.

Instead of being absorbed into the informal economies of urban centres such as Lashkar Gah or Kandahar City, this displaced population attempted to escape the reach of both government and international forces by migrating to the *dasht* – or desert – areas north of the Boghra Canal. This land was not held in common, but rather, had been enclosed immediately after the fall of the Taliban regime by local commanders who lived just south of the Boghra Canal. Beginning in 2004, the commanders commoditized this land, and made it available for purchase or rent at relatively affordable prices. Swayed by the tantalizing prospect of being able to own land and build a house – and unthinkable proposition in their home districts – many of the sharecroppers and tenants displaced by the HFZ and AVIPA PLUS SOUTH decided to buy into the *dasht*. Making the *dasht* bloom, however, proved difficult and costly. According to Mansfield (2015):

“The desert land needed to be cleared, levelled, and fertilised. Machinery had to be hired and wells drilled into the underground water supply in order to irrigate the land...generators, pumps and piping were also needed to draw the water. These were all extra costs that were not associated with farming in the main river valleys. And then of course there was the diesel required to run the pumps and generators”.

To recoup these fixed costs and pay off their debts, farmers had no choice but to monocrop opium poppy. As Mansfield (2015) writes, “without the premium associated with illicit opium production this land would not have been economically viable and the land would not have been settled”.

In spite of these obstacles, migrating to the *dasht* was initially a viable livelihood strategy that enabled previously land-poor farmers to accumulate assets and capital (Fishstein 2014; Mansfield 2013; Mansfield and Fishstein 2013). Even a sharecropper in the *dasht* could afford to eat meat and fruit three times a week, purchase medicine, and invest in motorbikes or solar panels (Mansfield 2015a).

Ever since 2012, however, the situation in the *dasht* has become increasingly grim, as farmers have been forced to endure multiple years of crop failure. Intensive monocropping has exhausted the land, resulted in widespread salinization and alkalinization, and rendered poppy crops increasingly susceptible to yield-crippling diseases (Mansfield 2015). At first, many migrants were willing to suffer through what they perceived to be a temporary inconvenience. Repeated

crop failures of increasing severity, however, have demonstrated to them that the situation in the *dasht* is untenable. A once hopeful community has now become increasingly angry and bitter, blaming the foreigners and the corrupt Afghan government for all their woes. Many believe that their crops were not actually diseased, but rather, had been sprayed by American planes. As one farmer put it to Mansfield (2015a, 12): “I fuck the mother of this government...they are just slaves of the Americans”. Regardless of whether residents of the *dasht* are victims of a political conspiracy or ecological circumstances, if such conditions persist, it is highly likely that they will once again find themselves “on the move” (Mansfield 2015a).

The story that I have told in this section provides a counterpoint to the narratives spun by academics such as Woods and Ballvé. The “stabilization” model of alternative development that was put to work in southern Afghanistan from 2009 to 2013 cannot be straightforwardly understood as a form of primitive accumulation. While programs like the HFZ or AVIPA PLUS SOUTH did dispossess land-poor Helmandis of their access to the means of subsistence, they were nonetheless able to resist proletarianization by fleeing to borderland spaces located beyond the reach of state, military, and capitalist actors. This livelihood strategy was enabled, to a large degree, by poppy cultivation, which once again provided a “stay of execution on an inexorable decline in the land based economy of poor households with restricted assets and limited access to resources” (Mansfield and Pain 2007, 18). But *dasht* living was highly precarious. As highlighted by the repeated crop failures, migrants were living on borrowed time. In this sense, their decision to migrate to the *dasht* might be productively understood as what Neferti Tadiar (2012, 795) calls a “fate playing action”. In the *dasht*, the “life-times of [land-poor Helmandis] serve[d] as ante and bet for the chance possibility of another fate in exchange for a better fortune”. As with the Filipina domestic migrant, the act of “changing land” – albeit, on a more local scale – involved a “recasting of the die with one’s bodily self as legal tender for the ante of a collective and individual wager; a hazarding of one’s present fate to create an opening for the immanent possibility – the unforeseeable yet inducible potential – of a radical change in fortune and destiny” (Tadiar 2012, 795). Unfortunately, this is a wager that the land-poor Helmandi appears, at this point in time, to have lost.

## 4.6 Making peace with poppies

In this chapter, I shone a spotlight on the “stabilization” model of alternative development that emerged in southern Afghanistan from between 2009 and 2013. This “stabilization” model was notable for number of reasons. One of its main consequences was to tether USAID’s alternative development programs more directly to the counterinsurgency campaign that was being conducted in the south. USAID’s enrollment in the US military’s “surge” to southern Afghanistan went hand in hand with a reconfiguration of how alternative development was practiced in the field. Whereas USAID had previously favoured a more long-term and market-oriented approach to poppy cultivation in the south – albeit one that problematically prioritized agri-business development over the needs of farming households – from 2009 to 2013, USAID’s alternative development portfolio was increasingly dominated by a number of quick-impact interventions that were designed to synergize with the US military’s new “clear-hold-build” modality of counterinsurgency. Instead of building up local agricultural economies by linking emerging agri-business clusters with global value chains, the purpose of alternative development was increasingly to stabilize districts that had been “cleared” of insurgents. This involved helping Afghan farmers transition away from poppy to wheat cultivation. While these “stabilization” forms of alternative development programming did reduce poppy cultivation in southern Afghanistan, they did so at enormous cost to land-poor households, dispossessing many of them of their access to the means of subsistence. As a result, many households were displaced to the more remote desert regions of Helmand and Kandahar, where they tried to eke out a living by monocropping poppy.

In recent years, the trend amongst military and civilian actors has been to distance themselves from the “stabilization” model of alternative development. As the “surge” in the south wound down, the US military’s approach to poppy cultivation shifted once again. In 2013, the US military adopted a whole new suite of poppy related constraints on kinetic operations. As David Axe (2013) reports, American forces and their Afghan proxies were no longer allowed to step foot in, damage, or destroy poppy fields. Soldiers were not even allowed to – gently or otherwise – discourage Afghan farmers from cultivating poppy. According to Axe (2013), these new rules suggest that the ground combat branch of the US military has “made peace with poppies,

viewing them as a potential good thing for Afghanistan and the Army”. Haunted by the looming “exit date” of 31 December, 2014, the US military once again decided to frame counternarcotics as “mission creep”.

No longer forced to work with either the military or Holbrooke – who had passed away on 13 December, 2010 – USAID seized its opportunity to re-orient alternative livelihoods programming in southern Afghanistan away from “stabilization” back towards the “rural development” model. This new direction was most clearly signalled by the launching of two new alternative development projects in the south. First, USAID was tapped to spearhead the expansion of the HFZ concept to Kandahar, and eventually, throughout Afghanistan. While SIGAR argues that the Kandahar Food Zone is emblematic of the “stabilization” model of alternative development, things are not so clear cut on the ground. USAID acknowledges that the Kandahar Food Zone was “partly modeled” on the HFZ, but nonetheless claims that it has taken a different approach this time around (SIGAR 2014a). In contrast with the HFZ – which was focused “on crop substitution and eradication, an input-driven and unsustainable approach” – the Kandahar Food Zone “engages with communities to identify the social, political, and economic drivers of poppy cultivation” and then “[tailors] appropriate projects to them” (SIGAR 2014a, 168). If USAID is to be believed, then one might argue that the Kandahar Food Zone draws more inspiration from Chemonics’ revised ALP/S than it does from the HFZ.

Second, USAID released pre-solicitation notices for four five-year “Regional Agricultural Development Programs”. The contract for the southern Regional Agricultural Development Program was awarded to Chemonics. Its ultimate objective is to transform southern Afghanistan into an environment conducive to market-oriented forms of agricultural production and exchange. Chemonics’ success will not be judged by the extent to which Regional Agricultural Development Program - South reduces poppy cultivation in southern Afghanistan, but by how many millions of dollars of agricultural products are sold by its beneficiaries on the open market. Under the aegis of Regional Agricultural Development Program - South, the market is once again being called upon to play a central role in the pacification of the countryside.

I suspect that the majority of my interviewees would herald these new alternative development programs as a welcome return to form for USAID: particularly those who were quick to characterize the swing towards the “stabilization” model of alternative development in southern Afghanistan as nothing short of an unmitigated disaster. During my interview with Amira Garner (19 October, 2012), a livelihoods specialist who worked for Development Alternatives Inc. in eastern Afghanistan, I was told that Holbrooke’s short tenure as Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan was marked by a “series of horrible cooperative agreements”. Garner (19 October, 2012) singled out AVIPA PLUS SOUTH for criticism, arguing that it “really regressed agricultural development” in southern Afghanistan. Instead of adopting a more “commercial approach” – which is “how DAI feels things need to be approached at this stage in Afghanistan and that’s the only way you really hopefully get sustainability” – Holbrooke and IRD “just completely distorted the market by flooding it with free inputs”. This, in turn, has “really been at the detriment of good development”: the implication being that alternative development was too important to *not* be left to experts such as herself and her colleagues (Garner 19 October, 2012)

But is a non-stabilization, civilian-led “commercial approach” really the only pathway to “good development” in rural Afghanistan? One recent SIGAR (2015, 125) report suggests that Regional Agricultural Development Program – South’s “results after two years are underwhelming in light of the funds spent”. A critique of the “commercial approach” to alternative development in Afghanistan, however, must do more than simply draw attention to its inability to meet arbitrary performance benchmarks. In the Afghan context, USAID’s consistent inability to fully marketize rural communities has historically animated, rather than foreclosed, further rounds of development intervention. Instead, the next chapter of this dissertation will challenge the tendency amongst my interviewees to hold up the “commercial approach” as the normative standard against which all other models of alternative development should be judged. To this end, I will argue that the “commercial approach” to alternative development has proved itself to be just as damaging to the life-chances of rural Afghans as the “stabilization” model. I will develop this argument through a reading of the two alternative development programs that are said to exemplify what my interviewee describes as the “commercial approach”. Both programs were implemented in eastern Afghanistan by Development Alternatives, Inc. The first

was the flagship “Alternative Development Program” for Afghanistan’s eastern region. The second was its successor project, “Ideas Driving Economic Alternatives – North, East, and West”. Instead of “growing hope” in eastern Afghanistan, both projects produced what Tania Li (2014, 38) calls “differentiated subjects of colonial rule”, exacerbating, in the process, already existing patterns and geographies of uneven rural development.

## 5 “The planet that rules our destiny”

“It was a single poppy seed: prising it out, she rolled it between her fingers and raised her eyes, past the straining sails, to the star-filled vault above. On any other night she would have scanned the sky for the planet she had always thought to be the arbiter of her fate – but tonight her eyes dropped instead to the tiny sphere she was holding between her thumb and forefinger. She looked at the seed as if she had never seen one before, and suddenly, she knew that it was not the planet above that governed her life: it was this miniscule orb – at once bountiful and all-devouring, merciful and destructive, sustaining and vengeful. This was her Shani, her Saturn.

When Kalua asked what she was looking at she raised her fingers to his lips and slipped the seed into his mouth.

Here, she said, taste it. It is the star that took us from our homes and put us on this ship. It is the planet that rules our destiny”.

- Amitav Ghosh, *Sea of Poppies*.

### 5.1 Growing hope

On 21 December, 2011, USAID uploaded a short video entitled “Growing Hope in Afghanistan” for public viewing on its YouTube channel. The two part video was meant to showcase the achievements of the “Alternative Development Program” (ADP/E) that Development Alternatives Inc. (DAI) – one of USAID’s contractors – had previously implemented in eastern Afghanistan. In “Growing Hope”, DAI summarizes the “value” of ADP/E through the testimony of one of its beneficiaries, a farmer named Mohammad Muslim. To quote his testimony:

“We used to grow poppy before. We were desperate. We knew it was illegal. Now I am *very happy* and *proud* that we have switched to growing vegetables...In the past, we could hardly cook meat once a week in our house. Now we eat meat every other day. All these kids you see go to school. Some go on foot to nearby schools. The others go to farther schools and I pay for their transportation. I pay for all the school expenses for these kids, buying them pens, notepads, clothing, backpacks, and other necessary things. Allah has enabled us to do so – through farming. I hope that they become engineers, agriculture experts, and doctors. It’s enough that I have grown up as illiterate. I hope they have bright futures and that they grow up literate and under the banner of Islamic teachings” (USAIDAfghanistan 2011, 2011a)



DAI shines a spotlight on Muslim's experiences in hopes of demonstrating how farming, under certain conditions, *can* serve as the primary motor of growth in the Afghan countryside. In his testimony, Muslim makes two key discursive maneuvers. First, he links poppy cultivation with a life of illegality, desperation, sadness, and shame. Second, he represents licit forms of commercial agriculture as the only legitimate pathway to what he calls a "brighter future". Commercial agriculture, in Muslim's eyes, has the potential to connect rural households to life possibilities never before contemplated. Like poppy, commercial agriculture helps rural households procure things that are necessary in the immediate here and now, such as meat, education, transportation, clothing, and school supplies. Unlike poppy, commercial agriculture also offers future generations a way escaping the constraining grip of eastern Afghanistan's land-based economy.

As I have shown throughout this dissertation, this is not a new idea. Historically, a thriving commercial agricultural sector has been the end-state goal of rural development in Afghanistan. DAI, in particular, has long been a champion of what it now calls the "commercial approach" to rural development. In February 1992, DAI provided a preview of things to come, when it gave Dr. Abdul Wakil – the "Johnny Appleseed" of Afghanistan who not only played a leading role in the Helmand Valley Project, but also later advised the Office of the AID Representative for Afghanistan Affairs' cross-border rural development efforts in the mid-1980s – a platform from which to promulgate his vision of how horticulture was going to lead Afghan farmers into a future of prosperity (Archiwal and Johnson 2015; DAI 1992c). A conjunction of factors – namely, the looming threat of food insecurity, and an intensifying civil war – initially prevented Dr. Wakil's vision from coming to fruition. But in 2005, DAI was once again presented with an opportunity to re-orient Afghans away from subsistence agriculture towards commercial farming. What followed was a decade long alternative development effort, designed to convince farmers inhabiting the northern, eastern, and western regions of rural Afghanistan – such as Mohammad Muslim – to place their faith in licit horticulture, rather than the poppy.

In this chapter, I focus my attention on two case studies: DAI's ADP/E, and its successor project, "Incentives Driving Economic Alternatives – North, East, and West" (IDEA-NEW). ADP/E and

IDEA-NEW are generally distinguished from the model of alternative livelihoods that emerged in Afghanistan's unstable south from 2009 to 2013. Whereas initiatives like the Helmand Food Zone and Afghanistan Vouchers for Increased Production in Agriculture were designed to help stabilize and secure newly "cleared" areas, ADP/E and IDEA-NEW instead prioritized "rural development" objectives (SIGAR 2010, 2014). This has led certain commentators to hold up ADP/E and IDEA-NEW as the "ideal type" against which other alternative development programs are to be evaluated (Garner 19 October, 2012; Rubin 2010). ADP/E and IDEA-NEW, to be sure, did not inadvertently dispossess whole swathes of land-poor Afghans of their access to the means of subsistence (see Chapter 4). Nonetheless, it would be problematic to accept representations of ADP/E and IDEA-NEW as productive, humanitarian, and therapeutic at face value. These alternative development programs may have been traversed by what Tania Li (2007) calls a "will to improve", but they were also marked by a tendency to exacerbate already existing patterns of uneven development. As "noninnocent" forms of biopower, they both "made live" and "let die" (Foucault 2003; Murphy 2011).

My argument proceeds as follows. First, I will place the "rural development" model of alternative livelihoods in conversation with Foucault's lectures on neoliberalism. My aim is to theorize ADP/E and IDEA-NEW as examples of what Foucault (2008, 260) calls "environmental-type interventions". Second, I will put these theoretical arguments to work through readings of ADP/E and IDEA-NEW. More specifically, I will show how DAI's alternative development programming evolved over time. Initially, DAI's ADP/E was focused on improving the productivity of farmers. DAI carved spaces out of the Afghan countryside where farmers learned how to use modern agricultural inputs and technologies. As ADP/E transitioned into IDEA-NEW, DAI's rural development goal shifted from improving production to promoting exchange. Having spent numerous years helping farmers transition from subsistence agriculture to commercial farming, DAI eventually decided that the time was ripe to "drag" them up the value chain. DAI claims that no farmers were left behind by this shift in strategy. In practice, however, this was not the case. I argue that DAI's marketization efforts effectively parsed rural populations along lines of geography and gender. In so doing, IDEA-NEW served as a catalyst of uneven development in the Afghan countryside.

In spite of DAI's willingness to "let" certain segments of the rural populations "die", IDEA-NEW was often represented by its proponents in the mainstream media as productive, benevolent, humane, and therapeutic. This is a framing that DAI tried to promote by actively distancing itself from both counternarcotics and "counterinsurgency-stabilization" operations. I argue, however, that IDEA-NEW cannot be understood in isolation from a context of increasing insecurity. IDEA-NEW was undergirded by – and provided a legitimating armature for – necropolitical techniques of population management that were destructive of life, such as crop eradication and nexus targeting. Not only did crop eradication continue – albeit under tightly controlled conditions – interdiction operations were intensified in ways that harken back to the controversial Phung Hoang program of the Vietnam War (Attewell 2015). In this sense, the "rural development" model of alternative livelihoods served as a "point of articulation" between the sovereign imperative to "take life and make live" and the environmental injunction to (indirectly) "make live and let die" (Anderson 2010, 24).

Finally, I conclude this chapter by reflecting on the current state of counternarcotics operations in northern, eastern, and western Afghanistan. Following James Ferguson (1990), I offer some critical evaluations of DAI's alternative development programs that attempt to move beyond simple notions of "success" or "failure".

## **5.2 The biopolitics of alternative development**

ADP/E and IDEA-NEW are often held up as examples of what SIGAR (2010, 2014) calls the "rural development" model of alternative livelihoods. To recap, this model of alternative livelihoods is less concerned with reducing poppy cultivation as it is with achieving rural development objectives. According to SIGAR, its aim is to extend the remit of the Afghan government into the countryside by strengthening its relationship with farming communities. To put it in more theoretical terms, the rural development model of alternative livelihoods seeks to enmesh farming communities within a matrix of governmental power.

While programs like ADP/E and IDEA/NEW were not explicitly required to synchronize with stability operations, they were nonetheless often justified on the grounds that they indirectly

contributed to achieving the primary objective of counterinsurgency, which was often described in terms of cutting “links” or “associations” (Anderson 2010, 10). Anderson (2010, 10) argues that under the sign of counterinsurgency, “the population is to be ‘separated’ or ‘severed’ from ‘isolated’ insurgents, subsequently ‘protected’ from insurgents and then ‘mobilised’ to become part of the logistics of the counterinsurgent”. As envisioned by SIGAR, the “rural development” model of alternative livelihoods can fulfill many of the same functions. First, by promoting licit economic growth and job creation in the countryside, the “rural development” model promises to sever the chains of dependency that bind rural Afghans to local, regional, and national war economies. Second, the “rural development” model aims to help the Afghan government distribute itself throughout the countryside, and in so doing, multiply its points of contact with farming communities. These efforts, it is assumed, will feed forward into positive changes in popular support (Anderson 2010).

SIGAR’s “rural development” model is seductive in its simplicity. However, it cannot speak to the central role that the market plays in alternative development programs such as ADP/E and IDEA-NEW. I argue that these programs were equally – if not primarily – concerned with strengthening the relationships linking farming communities to markets. Through its alternative development programming, DAI aimed to transform the market – and not necessarily the state – into the primary source of subsistence and improvement in the Afghan countryside. This is not to suggest that DAI deemed the state to be unimportant. Rather, for DAI, it was imperative that the state be encouraged to establish an enabling environment for commercial agriculture.

In order to help Afghan farmers prepare themselves to participate in market-based forms of production, accumulation, and exchange, the “rural development” model of alternative livelihoods took on increasingly “environmental” characteristics. My use of the term “environmental” is inspired by Foucault’s (2008) exploration of how biopower is exercised under conditions of market rule. According to Foucault, nineteenth-century liberals held up the market as a space where nominally rational economic subjects came together in pursuit of their own self-interest. Liberals argued that, given the complexity of such encounters, market spaces were “naturally opaque and non-totalizable” (Foucault 2008, 282). It was therefore imperative that the state no longer be allowed to superintend the “totality of the economic process, ‘for the

proper performance of which no human knowledge could ever be sufficient” (Foucault 2008, 282). In Foucault’s analysis, liberals understood *homo oeconomicus* as an ungovernable figure whose existence stripped the state of its power to manage the market.

Although liberals initially called on the state to respect the market as a space structured by the principle of “laissez-faire”, they also accepted government intervention as an evil necessary to curb the excesses of economic activity. This uneasy compromise was overturned in the wake of World War II, when “neoliberals” began to hold socialist and Keynesian models of government practice responsible for the political ascendancy of fascism. Their “visceral distaste” for welfare-statism propelled an attempt to restore and maintain some form of market rule (Peck 2008, 16). Like the 19th-century champions of laissez-faire who preceded them, neoliberals shared a belief in the importance of free trade, labour market flexibility, and social state retrenchment. Neoliberals, however, “expressly sought to transcend the ‘naïve ideology’ of laissez-faire in favour of a ‘positive’ conception of the state as the guarantor of a competitive order” (Peck 2008, 7). They recognized that in a context such as war-torn Europe, “the restoration and maintenance of market rule would call for some form of state engagement” (Peck 2008, 14-5). The challenge facing neoliberals, therefore, was not how to “cut out” a “free space of the market within an already given political society” (Foucault 2008, 131). Rather, it was to “determine a set of tightly constrained, yet positive, functions for the state, as the foundation for a designed market order” (Peck 2008, 14-15). Neoliberals, in other words, decided that government would have to be defined in relation to the market economy. Instead of responding to the excesses of the market, government must be made to serve its interests.

In order to achieve these political goals, neoliberals sought to “extend the rationality of the market to domains hitherto considered to be non-economic” (Foucault 2008, 329). Market relations were seen as the key to deciphering individual behaviours. It was precisely this desire to intervene economically in domains that previously escaped the logic of the economic that distinguished neoliberals from both their intellectual forbears, as well as their avowed enemies (Anderson 2012). For neoliberals, this new logic of government was to be “rendered actionable through ‘environmental technologies’ orientated to the actions of a specific ‘object-target’ – *Homo oeconomicus*” (Anderson 2012, 38). No longer was *homo oeconomicus* to be understood

as that “intangible element with regard to the exercise of power” (Foucault 2008, 270). Instead, neoliberal theorists rendered *homo oeconomicus* as an “eminently governable” subject whose conduct was assumed to respond “systematically to modifications in the variables of the environment” (Foucault 2008, 269-70). This, in turn, meant that the behaviour of *homo oeconomicus* could be indirectly governed through “environmental-type interventions” (Foucault 2008, 260). While Foucault never explicitly outlines what he means by the term, Ben Anderson (2012, 39) argues that “environmental-type interventions” can usefully be understood as “attempts to manage and manipulate the contingent ‘environments’ in which action occurs in order to indirectly act on the investments that the subject of interest makes”. Through such interventions, action is brought to bear on the “rules of the game”, rather than on the bodies of the players (Foucault 2008, 260).

Building on Foucault, I theorize ADP/E and IDEA-NEW as “environmental-type interventions” that sought to transform the countryside of northern, eastern, and western Afghanistan into an “enabling environment” for commercial agriculture. To this end, USAID and DAI distributed themselves territorially in hopes of establishing ongoing relations with farmers. Through these channels, USAID and DAI unleashed a “multiplicity of forces to reassemble matter in space and summon particular sorts of ‘conducts’” from poppy cultivators (Gidwani 2008, 129). Their ultimate goal was to help poppy cultivators transform themselves from subsistence farmers who “needed to be protected from the full force of market discipline” into entrepreneurial subjects “deemed fit to be governed in a neoliberal manner” (Li 2014, 38)

DAI recognized that this was not a transformation that could take place overnight. As I show in my subsequent analysis of ADP/E, DAI initially adopted a more gradual approach that built on the rural development foundations that it had previously laid down in the early 1990s (see Chapter 3). In order to wean farmers off poppy cultivation, DAI intervened on the environment – or ecosystem – of agricultural production in two ways. Much like the Agricultural Sector Support Project that preceded it, ADP/E emphasized the importance of improving agricultural production practices through extension, demonstration, and training activities. As part of these efforts, DAI produced a diversity of new spaces, such as agricultural training centres and demonstration farms. In these spaces, USAID and DAI introduced poppy cultivators to modern

agricultural inputs, technologies, and best practices. In conjunction with these more traditional forms of rural development, ADP/E also sought to (re)familiarize its beneficiaries with the concept of the private sector. For DAI, it was imperative that its Afghan beneficiaries begin to understand the market not merely as a source of agricultural inputs, but also as an engine of growth, accumulation, and investment. ADP/E, accordingly, encouraged its beneficiaries to hone their entrepreneurial capabilities through private sector development activities. Whereas DAI's prior market development efforts had been focused almost exclusively on merchants and traders, the launch of the ADP/E signalled its growing interest in entrepreneurializing farmers. As part of this process, farmers were encouraged to gradually abandon their survival mindset in favour of more forward-thinking and future-oriented perspectives. With the advent of DAI's "commercial approach" to alternative development, a different vision of the future began to enter into the government of rural Afghanistan (Mitchell 2014).

### **5.3 "The Pride of the Eastern Region"**

USAID awarded the ADP/E contract to DAI on 15 February, 2005. The contract was valued at \$108.386 million, and was scheduled to terminate on 15 February, 2009 (DAI 2005). Its basic objectives were to "accelerate regional economic growth and provide alternative income sources for those who currently depend on growing and harvesting poppy in Nangarhar, Laghman, Kunar, and Nuristan provinces" (USAIDAfghanistan 2011, 2011a; see Figure 17).

ADP/E was rolled out just as Nangarhar was becoming one of the focal points for counternarcotics operations in Afghanistan (Mansfield 2015b). In 2004, the provincial government committed itself to enforcing an ambitious counternarcotics strategy that called on local authorities to prevent farmers from planting poppy (Mansfield 2008). Those who failed to deliver reductions in poppy cultivation were faced with the possibility of being dismissed from their jobs (Mansfield 2008). In order to encourage farming communities to comply with the ban, local authorities promised that development assistance would be forthcoming (Mansfield 2008).





(Mansfield 2008). In the more remote regions of the province, the ban on poppy cultivation precipitated a shock to household reproduction so intense that families had no choice but to relapse (Mansfield 2008). Unsurprisingly, these households became increasingly alienated from both provincial and national authorities (Rubin and Sherman 2008).

ADP/E was launched to stop these farmers from sliding back into poppy cultivation. Along the way, it was also hoped that ADP/E might restore their faith in the Afghan government. According to Bruce Brown (15 October, 2012), a USAID official linked with ADP/E, DAI was not focused on conjuring a *new* licit economy out of thin air, but rather, on “resurrecting, or supporting, or enhancing what had been going on already”. To quote Brown (15 October, 2012), ADP/E simply introduced:

“some new concepts and approaches and...skills, as a way...of...enticing people into making choices that would support them and their families in a way that would ensure that they didn’t have to rely on poppy cultivation”

Brown’s description of ADP/E as a form of “enticement” foregrounds “setting conditions” – rather than “manipulating outcomes” – as the crux of the “rural development” model of alternative livelihoods (Li 2014, 44). As Brown makes clear, ADP/E could not coerce poppy cultivators into doing “as they ought” (Scott 1995, 202-3). Instead, they had to be free to make their own choices. The trick for DAI was to present project beneficiaries with a constellation of dis/incentives that made poppy cultivation *unthinkable* for rational, self-interested, and utility-maximizing economic subjects.

DAI intervened on the environment of poppy cultivation in two ways. First, farmers who had replaced poppy with wheat had to be convinced of the need to move towards higher value forms of agricultural production. DAI pushed this line of argument in “Growing Hope”. According to the narrator, when the Karzai regime banned poppy cultivation in Afghanistan, farmers in the eastern region were forced to “return to ancient agriculture techniques” because “30 years of war had destroyed all basic infrastructure” (USAIDAfghanistan 2011). This claim is problematic, because it represents Afghanistan as a land untouched by modernity up until the American invasion of 2001. As I have detailed previously, eastern Afghanistan has long served as a

“contact zone” between foreign modernizers and Afghan farmers (Cullather 2002; Dupree 1973). It is this history of contact that is elided by “Growing Hope”: a curious omission, given DAI’s involvement in the effort to develop post-Soviet, pre-Taliban Afghanistan from afar.

This raises a question: why did DAI represent farmers in eastern Afghanistan as occupying a space beyond the modern? I argue that this discursive maneuver helped DAI explain the persistence of a “survival mindset” in eastern Afghanistan as the consequence of a lack of modern agricultural techniques, services, and inputs. Farmers replaced poppy with wheat because they did not possess the knowledge and the expertise required to grow high value alternative crops. As “Growing Hope” argues”, farmers could not generate enough income when they cultivated high value alternative crops in the “old ways” (USAIDAfghanistan 2011). In order to rectify this state of affairs, DAI tasked its agricultural experts with fostering the infrastructural and technical “conditions” necessary to encourage Afghan farmers to grow high value alternative crops (CCC 2010a, 10).

For the purposes of this chapter, it is enough to note that ADP/E’s infrastructure activities were focused on either constructing or rehabilitating the physical structures – such as farm-to-market roads and irrigation systems – necessary to make alternative crops commercially viable. Most of these infrastructure activities were targeted at areas “transitioning” from insurgent to coalition control. Initially, the neo-Taliban resurgence in eastern Afghanistan was not as marked as in the south. According to Antonio Giustozzi (2008), this was due to a combination of factors. While the neo-Taliban tried to capitalize on its weak historical linkages to eastern Afghanistan, these recruitment efforts were largely undercut by highly coherent tribal structures, strong nationalist sentiments, and the presence of a relatively strong intelligentsia. From 2002 to 2003, the central government’s presence and influence in Kunar, Nuristan, and northern Laghman remained “extremely weak”, enabling neo-Taliban insurgents to operate with relative ease (Giustozzi 2008, 64). Nangarhar, however, was a “[tougher] nut to crack” (Giustozzi 2008, 62). Although the insurgency had made some inroads in Nangarhar by October 2003, it did not generate any substantive impacts until 2006, when security began to degrade in some of the province’s outlying districts (Giustozzi 2008).

In these “transitional” areas, infrastructure activities often served as the “entry point” for longer-term forms of rural development (DAI 2009, 69). Labour-intensive cash-for-work activities not only created a multitude of local employment opportunities – ostensibly removing potential recruits for the insurgency from the battlefield – they also encouraged ADP/E staff to venture “beyond the wire” and enter into relations with farming communities. In theory, cash-for-work activities helped DAI secure the baseline levels of trust required to launch longer-term rural development services – such as extension and demonstration – in an increasingly restless rural landscape. ADP/E’s “Infrastructure Unit” therefore played an important role in helping DAI establish an enabling environment for licit economic activities in eastern Afghanistan.

In order to “expose” Afghan farmers to modern agricultural practices, inputs, and technologies, DAI set about constructing an interconnected network of demonstration farms and plots in eastern Afghanistan (USAIDAfghanistan 2011, 2011a). In collaboration with extension workers employed by the Afghan government’s Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock, DAI developed 16 large commercial demonstration farms. The reach of these larger facilities was extended through the establishment of numerous smaller, satellite demonstration plots throughout eastern Afghanistan.

One of ADP/E’s field technicians, Noor Mohammad, details some of the techniques, inputs, and technologies that were demonstrated in these spaces. From time to time, Noor asked local farmers to get together for training. At the time of his interview, Noor was leading a practical training on how to properly plant, take care of, and fertilize improved seeds. This training was essential, for if farmers planted improved seeds in traditional ways, they risked burying them too far under the earth, or worse, covering them with excessive amounts of water, resulting in crop failure. According to Mohammad, farmers used to grow 3000 to 4000 heads of cauliflower per jerib. Armed with improved seed varieties and modern agricultural techniques, they could harvest around 9000 (USAIDAfghanistan 2011, 2011a)

Mohammad also provided training in selecting and producing improved seed varieties, arranging fields, spacing crops, and finally, staggering planting times. According to Mohammad, this last innovation significantly improved the vegetable cultivation process. In the past, farmers planted

their vegetables all at once. As a result of their training, however, they grew them in phases. Every two weeks, they planted vegetables on an additional two jeribs of land, repeating this process until they ran out of room. This planting technique ostensibly helped ease beneficiary farmers into the cutthroat world of market exchange. By supplying vegetables to local markets at intervals, farmers were able to avoid creating commodity gluts and price drops, maximizing their profitability in the process (USAIDAfghanistan 2011, 2011a)

According to data collected and analyzed by DAI, ADP/E's demonstration program provided extension training to a total of 145,994 farmers (DAI 2009). Of this total: 99% reported increased productivity at harvest time; 94% reported growing better quality products; and 93% received better prices in the market (DAI 2009). These statistics were corroborated by glowing farmer testimonials that represented demonstration training as a guaranteed pathway to higher income. Farmers not only praised demonstration for improving the yield, quality, variety, and prices of harvested agricultural commodities, but also for extended the growing season. Before ADP/E, vegetable production was governed by the rhythm of the seasons. "Now", one farmer gushed, "we can grow vegetables year round" (USAIDAfghanistan 2011, 2011a).

As DAI recognized, ADP/E would have to do more than simply provide farmers with the knowledge and the expertise required to grow high value crops. DAI would also have to find some way of inserting Afghan farmers into broader circuits of agricultural commodities and capital. For high value agricultural production to become sustainable, farmers in eastern Afghanistan required two things: 1) access to a steady and sustainable supply of modern inputs and technologies; and 2) some means of realizing the value congealed in the fruits of their labour. DAI believed that both of the needs could be fulfilled by private-sector actors.

DAI argues that when ADP/E was inaugurated in 2005, farmers in eastern Afghanistan remained generally unfamiliar with the concept of the private sector. Although eastern Afghanistan had long been home to a vibrant merchant class (see Marsden 2012, 2016), a "long legacy of Communist era policies of business practices based on trade rather than investment" meant that the local agribusiness sector remained largely underdeveloped. In order to transform the private sector into an engine of long-term economic growth in eastern Afghanistan, DAI decided to

revitalize many of the very same trade facilitation and market development activities that it had undertaken in the early 1990s under the auspices of the ASSP (see chapter 3). Whereas these prior efforts had largely been centered on merchants and traders operating out of Pakistan, DAI's second attempt at restoring eastern Afghanistan to its pre-Communist "open market" situation would now be extended to include local farmers as well.

Under DAI's watch, farmers in eastern Afghanistan were "re-familiarized" with the private sector in two ways. In order to supply farmers with the inputs and technologies required to engage in high value agricultural production, DAI established the "Technology Innovations for Market-Led Economic Rehabilitation" (TIMER) program in the summer of 2007. Designed to "systematically" address many of the agricultural challenges facing more remote and small-scale farmers, TIMER, over the course of the five consecutive crop seasons, provided its beneficiaries with a subsidized package of improved vegetable seeds, fertilizer, and extension advice in order to help them grow marketable surpluses (DAI 2007, 2009). According to DAI, TIMER was novel in the sense that it "broke the traditional input programme model" (DAI 2009, 74). Prior to TIMER, inputs were traditionally channeled through local authorities – community development councils, shuras, etc. – that maintained strict control over the entire distribution process. With TIMER, DAI chose to institute a more "transparent" process that allowed farmers to bypass these traditional distribution mechanisms and customize their input package for a small fee. DAI's own data purports to show that the higher input costs associated with buying into TIMER were more than offset by substantive increases in production, revenue, and profits (DAI 2009).

Alongside TIMER, ADP/E introduced a number of other initiatives that were designed to entrepreneurialize local farmers. DAI established a "Private Sector Development Technical Unit" that helped local entrepreneurs create bankable business plans, access technical and financial management training, link themselves to financial resources, as well as potential buyers, and finally, establish business associations in the region (DAI 2009). One major achievement of this unit was the organization of a Regional Agricultural Trade Fair, which was held in Jalalabad in late June 2006. This fair facilitated trade linkages by bringing together local and foreign actors working on different value chains (DAI 2006). Drawing inspiration from its own slogan – 'Navigating the Value Chain' – the fair encouraged visitors to walk through a

series of 140 stalls and booths, all of which had been set up by local research centers, input suppliers, farmers and their associations, traders, processors, and service providers in order to demonstrate their products (DAI 2006). This fair was judged to be so successful that it became an annual event. In 2007, its focus was on “Linking Eastern Afghanistan with the World”, while in 2008, it called on participants and delegates to “Discover the Possibilities” of local agricultural production. Like TIMER, these fairs served as a catalyst of arbitrage. One ADP/E program participant who had been sent by DAI to exhibit fruits and vegetables at an “AgFair” in Kabul returned to the Chaparhar district of Nangarhar province with a contract to supply the famous Serena Hotel with 100 kilograms of strawberries on a daily basis (DAI 2009; USAIDAfghanistan 2011, 2011a).

The Private Sector Development Technical Unit also collected, analyzed, and disseminated crucial price data for common agricultural commodities in major market hubs, such as Kabul, Asadabad, Jalalabad, Mehterlam, and Peshawar (DAI 2006, 2006a, 2006b, 2009). Every morning, this information was updated and relayed to farmers through mass media technologies such as the radio or mobile phones. In “Growing Hope”, one farmer sends a SMS to this “market information system” asking for an update on the prices that loquats are trading for in nearby markets (USAIDAfghanistan 2011, 2011a). He then uses this information to determine where he can sell his loquat crates to maximize his profit.

Taken together, all of these different alternative development interventions speak to the ways in which DAI understood poppy cultivation in eastern Afghanistan as an “environmental” problem. As Brown (15 October, 2012) informed me, the “underlying motivation” of ADP/E was “more than just to grow...more food” or “begin to...weave carpets”. In order to “strengthen” or “incite” or “improve” alternative value chains, ADP/E had to “look at” and “target” all of the different “elements” – “the related stakeholders, policies, private sector dynamics, motivations, impediments”, etc. – of its “ecosystem”: I asked Brown if such an “ecosystem” approach was geared towards inducing desired behavioural changes in Afghan farmers. Brown (15 October, 2012) agreed, suggesting that a project like ADP/E demonstrates to beneficiaries that there is a better “alternative”, changing the ways in which they behave, prioritize, and make choices.

But to what extent did ADP/E actually change the behaviour of poppy cultivators? According to one evaluation report produced by Checchi and Company Consulting (CCC) (2010a, 23, 29), ADP/E eschewed “complete development packages” in favour of shorter-term initiatives that are best considered as “demonstration events”, rather than “sustainable practices”. Checchi (2010a, 31) accused ADP/E’s managers and technicians of having “exceedingly optimistic expectations” vis-à-vis the “potential behavioural change of the rural population”. While DAI assumed that ADP/E would benefit all segments of rural society, all of its various components actually exacerbated already existing patterns of uneven development in eastern Afghanistan. While the project worked for the region’s “larger and more commercial oriented farms” that were already prone towards innovation, it proved incapable of accounting for the many technical, social, and cultural constraints facing smaller landholders who were “less open to bet on change” (CCC 2010a, 36). DAI’s demonstration and extension activities, in particular, strongly favoured the “best endowed farmers and entrepreneurs” (CCC 2010a, 30). All of ADP/E’s demonstration plots were managed by “progressive” or “lead” farmers (CCC 2010a; DAI 2006, 2006a, 2006b). In the alternative development literature, “progressive” farmers are often defined as “early adopters” who are not only “just far enough ahead” of their neighbours to be recognized as local opinion leaders, but also display a willingness to serve as positive examples for their communities (Woods 2003). While the specific criteria used to identify “progressive” farmers differs from contractor to contractor, the end results of this selection process were generally consistent: namely, a concentration of technical assistance and subsidized inputs in the hands of the most entrepreneurial, the most well-endowed (in terms of access to both land and resources) and ultimately, the most capitalist members of farming communities. By establishing such a network of volunteer extension workers in eastern Afghanistan, DAI reinforced – and in some cases, intensified – existing geographies of uneven development. It also reactivated a strategy of proxy governmentality whose origins can be traced back to the earliest moments of the colonial encounter (see Owens 2015). Similarly, while TIMER was ostensibly designed with remote districts and small-scale farmers in mind, its stringent preconditions – participants had to have irrigation and access to markets – automatically disqualified many households from accessing assistance (DAI 2009). Furthermore, TIMER’s tiered nature ensured that farmers with the economic wherewithal to eschew subsidies would improve their socio-economic standing relative to their less well-off peers.

DAI's ambitious agribusiness efforts were also plagued by a tendency to disproportionately benefit the better-off. DAI's (2009, 71) final report echoes this criticism, acknowledging that "thinking 'too big' in the private sector did not work in the Eastern Region". Many private sector projects requiring an investment of over \$1 million, for instance, proved difficult to implement successfully, while sincere business partners not looking for a "free lunch" were apparently in short supply (DAI 2009, 71). Consequently, DAI vowed to channel any future market development dollars exclusively to small and medium-scale enterprises, which, when compared with large mega-projects, often required less initial investment, were able to start quickly, and often showed positive signs of growth within the first year of operations. For the time being, however, DAI's dream of "introducing" farmers in eastern Afghanistan to the private sector remained somewhat elusive.

Finally, it is also important to note that ADP/E's "agricultural interventions quite exclusively targeted male farmers" (CCC 2010a, 17-8). DAI did try to empower rural women – described in "Growing Hope" as the most vulnerable and impoverished "class" of Afghan society – by combining micro-enterprise with gender programming. As part of this effort, appropriate activities, such as plug seedling greenhouses and poultry farms, were established. These efforts, however, were evaluated as weak and poorly designed. DAI assumed that the vulnerability and precariousness of Afghan women stemmed directly from their poverty. If Afghan women could be provided with a means of acquiring money, they would find it easier to garner the respect of their neighbours and family members (USAIDAfghanistan 2011). This was a "simplistic approach to women empowerment" that did nothing to address the socio-cultural norms that effectively limited the ability of Afghan women to engage in work outside of domestic spaces, or to access and participate in heavily gendered market spaces. Nor did it offer any realistic solution to the problem of the double – or even triple – shift. By reducing the "complexities of Afghan gender roles and relations" to a question of money, DAI revealed its failure to understand how the "domestic spaces of family life provide several spatially and socially distinct challenges and opportunities for women" (Fluri 2011, 521; see also Fluri 2009, 2012). This is an issue that I will return to later on in this chapter.



By the time that ADP/E was shut down on 30 June, 2009, eastern Afghanistan – and in particular, Nangarhar – was being celebrated as the “national standard for successful counter-narcotics efforts” (“Nangarhar, Inc.” 2008, 3). The precise role that ADP/E played in helping Nangarhar authorities achieve these counternarcotics “successes” remains unclear. The steps that ADP/E took to alleviate the economic distress caused by the 2004 ban were clearly insufficient to prevent poppy cultivation from resurging with a vengeance. UNODC (2009) data shows that poppy cultivation in Nangarhar spiked from 4,872 hectares in 2006 to 18,739 hectares in 2007. While Nangarhar did achieve “poppy free” status in 2008, this counternarcotics “success” was not credited to DAI, but rather, to the aggressive eradication campaign that was mounted by the province’s governor, Gul Agha Sherzai. Sherzai shouldered most of the blame for the 2007 resurgence of poppy cultivation in Nangarhar, even though its roots can be traced back to the economic fallout from the 2004 ban (Corcoran 2009). According to Lt. Col. Phillips, then a member of the Jalalabad Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT), Sherzai was “feeling much pressure after his failed attempts at eradication and deterrence from cultivation [in 2006]” (Phillips 2007). As Phillips (2007) reported, “he needs to show significant improvement and he knows it”.

Sherzai subsequently championed a hard line approach to poppy cultivation involving punishments for poppy cultivators and the aerial spraying of crops (Phillips 2007, Wood 2007b). According to Wood (2007b), Sherzai shared his future counternarcotics plans with members of the Jalalabad Provincial Reconstruction Team on 18 April, 2007, where he apparently “indicated he will fire officials who do not support his eradication campaign and complained that even members of the Provincial Shura and Parliament had themselves planted poppy”. In addition to threatening farmers with eradication and imprisonment, he bought off a number of influential tribal elders by promising to support alternative livelihoods (Felbab-Brown 2012).

Sherzai, however, failed to deliver on these promises, and as a result, farmers living in rural Nangarhar suffered extraordinary economic deprivation (Felbab-Brown 2012). Unsurprisingly, farmers became increasingly hostile to the government and in some cases, assaulted eradication teams. On 1 April, 2007, for instance, a number of Afghans protested poppy eradication efforts at the Bati Kot District Center. In the ensuing scuffle, 15 protestors were arrested, while 5 locals

and 2 police officers were wounded (Task Force Spartan 2007). Another such incident occurred in the Khogyani district, where a suicide bomber killed 20 policemen and a UNODC surveyor collecting data for a report (UNODC 2008).

It was against this backdrop of mounting insecurity in the more remote districts of Nangarhar that DAI began the difficult work of transitioning the ADP/E into its successor project, IDEA-NEW. As I argued in the concluding section of the previous chapter, IDEA-NEW was held up by its implementers as an embodiment of what a good alternative development project should look like. In contrast with the “stabilization” model of alternative livelihoods – which “really regressed agricultural development” in southern Afghanistan – IDEA-NEW built on and extended the more “commercial” approach to poppy cultivation that was first put to work in eastern Afghanistan under the auspices of ADP/E. Whereas ADP/E was about familiarizing farmers in eastern Afghanistan with the concept of the private sector, IDEA-NEW planned to drag them even further up the value chain. IDEA-NEW was not so much concerned with improving agricultural production in eastern Afghanistan as with promoting arbitrage and exchange. In addition to gearing the “rural development” model of alternative livelihoods towards “agricultural value chain enhancement”, DAI was also keen to shed all of its associations with counternarcotics. For precisely these reasons, the next section of this chapter will argue that IDEA-NEW must be understood as a significant departure from its predecessor. Through a close reading of IDEA-NEW, I will highlight the malleability of the alternative development concept. Specifically, I will argue that the kind of alternative development promulgated by DAI had the effect of parsing IDEA-NEW’s beneficiary population into those who were ready to be governed through market mechanisms and those who were not.

#### **5.4 “We’re here to help, not for the money”**

IDEA-NEW was a five-year alternative development program that ran from 3 March, 2009, to 2 March, 2014. Like ADP/E before it, IDEA-NEW was meant to discourage Afghan farmers from cultivating poppies by providing them with access to licit and economically viable sources of income (OIG 2012). Funded by USAID to the tune of \$150 million, IDEA-NEW was implemented by a consortium led by DAI, and rounded out by Mercy Corps and ACDI/VOCA.

As Figure 18 shows, each implementer was assigned its own area of operations. DAI was based in eastern and western Afghanistan, while ACDI/VOCA and Mercy Corps operated in the north and north-east, respectively.

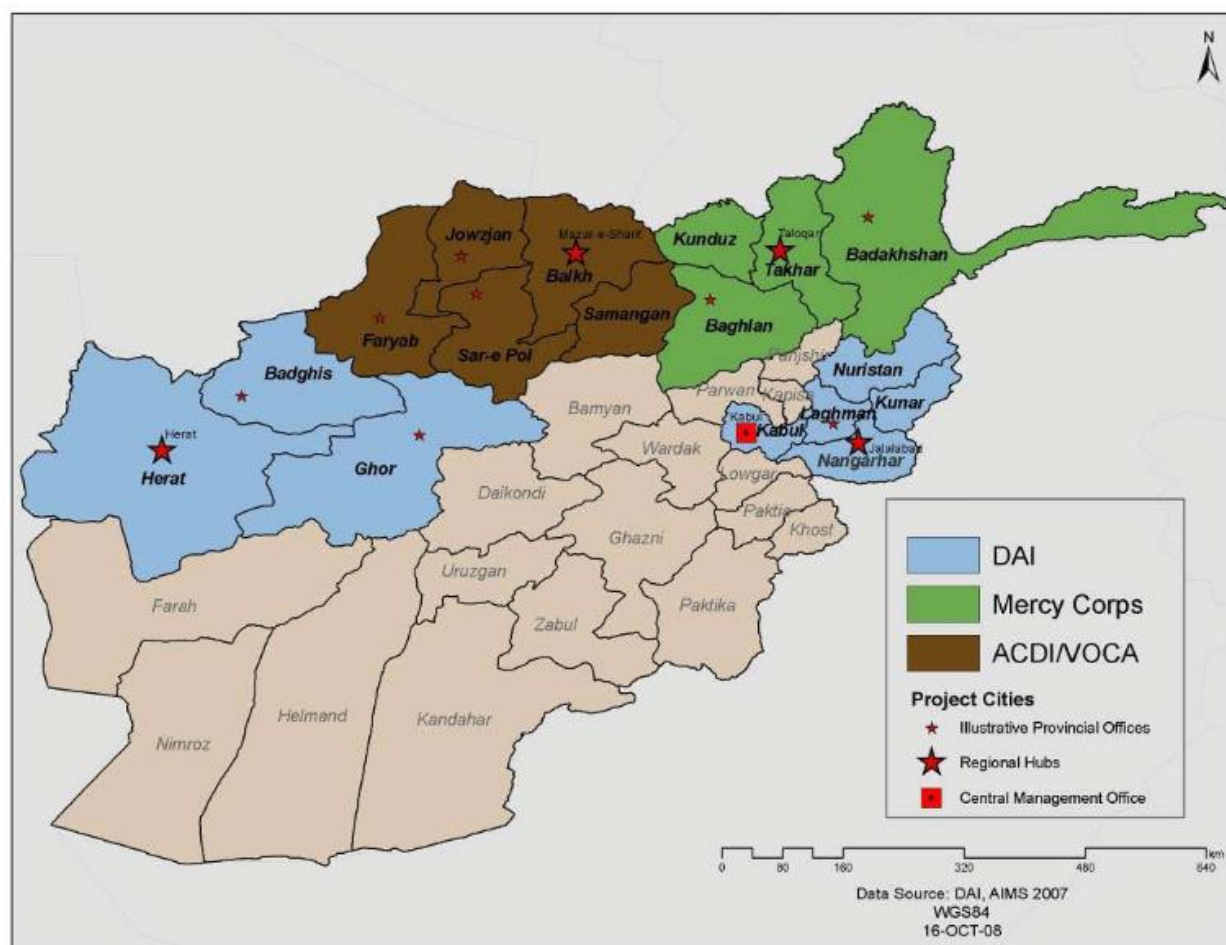


Figure 18: IDEA-NEW's area of operations (OIG 2012)

Although DAI (2009, 6) was highly critical of “stabilization” programs such as Afghanistan Vouchers for Increased Production in Agriculture, it nonetheless recognized the importance of shining a spotlight on the various ways in which IDEA-NEW could provide “support and linkages to overall US government counter-insurgency priorities”. DAI, accordingly, promised that IDEA-NEW would reduce poppy cultivation in “targeted instability/insurgency locales and buffer zones” by promoting local-level agricultural and private-sector development (DAI 2009, 6). Eastern Afghanistan may not have been the “cradle” of the neo-Taliban insurgency, but

neither was it a bastion of security. As I noted in the previous section of this chapter, the remote districts of southern Nangarhar were becoming increasingly insecure and hostile to the government. A similar story can be told about Kunar. By 2008, Kunar's Korengal Valley had acquired the dubious distinction of being one of the most dangerous regions in Afghanistan (Hetherington and Junger 2010). Throughout the 2007 fighting season, "16% of all combat [in Afghanistan] was taking place in that six-mile long valley". These operations accounted for 70% of all the ordinance that was expended in Afghanistan over the same time period. They were also characterized by an average casualty rate of approximately 25% killed or wounded (VICE 2010).

Fighting in eastern Afghanistan intensified in response to the 2009 "surge" of US soldiers to the south. As Major General John Campbell, the senior American commander in eastern Afghanistan, put it, "the Taliban know we are bringing our surge of forces, and they realize they can't just let that happen, so they are pursuing their own surge" (Jaffe 2010). Through this "counter-surge", the neo-Taliban attempted to open a second front in the "N2KL" – Nangarhar, Nuristan, Kunar, and Laghman – region of Afghanistan (Jaffe 2010). Upon infiltrating these provinces, the neo-Taliban distributed night letters, established shadow government structures, and harassed coalition and government forces. To make matters worse, the neo-Taliban presence was tolerated – and in some instances, even welcomed – by the local population, who saw the Karzai administration as corrupt, ineffective, and morally weak (Ackerman 2010). In order to forestall this neo-Taliban resurgence in eastern Afghanistan, US forces launched a major offensive on 27 June, 2010 that targeted insurgent leadership in the area (Roggio 2010).

It was in such a context of intensifying violence that IDEA-NEW was established. Despite the risks associated with working amongst the population<sup>29</sup>, DAI believed that market-driven alternative development could support overall counterinsurgency objectives by intervening on – and modulating – the environment of poppy cultivation. IDEA-NEW's initial plan was to

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<sup>29</sup> While "civilian security tactics" – traveling in older model cars with locals, or camouflaging gendered bodies in the *chadori*, etc. – helped DAI employees "cope" with their life on the battleground, "fool-proof security from violence" remained elusive (Fluri 2011a). Over the course of IDEA-NEW, DAI staff were threatened, shot at, bombed, and kidnapped. According to Hoffman (23 October, 2012), women were more likely to be targets of violence than men. This was particularly the case if you "have women working for you in a region where women shouldn't be working for you". In one high profile incident, IDEA-NEW's Linda Norgrove was abducted by neo-Taliban forces on 26 September, 2010, and subsequently killed in the course of a rescue attempt (Garner 19 October, 2012; Nordland 2010).

balance quick-impact projects with longer-term interventions. Cash-for-work activities were once again mobilized to inject cash into local economies, deprive the insurgency of a source of recruits, and build the rapport to launch longer-term agricultural initiatives (DAI 2009a).

From the outset, DAI employees such as Anthony Hoffman (23 October, 2012) found it challenging to “motivate” farmers to “come up with what [IDEA-NEW was] doing”. In DAI’s eyes, Afghan farmers remained the biggest constraint to their own development. According to Hoffman (23 October, 2012), most of IDEA-NEW’s beneficiaries were subsistence farmers who only cared about growing just enough crops on their plots of land to get their family by. Helping these farmers develop a new “mind-set”, however, proved more challenging than expected. As Hoffman (23 October, 2012) lamented:

“When you are saying, ‘you know what, you’re doing this and that’s fine, it gets you by and your family’s ok, but if you do this, in five years, your family is going to be awesome’, they...don’t care...the neo-Taliban could be back in five years and they might not have a farm, like it’s just day by day, get through the day...we’re trying to bring people from...1300s up to 2012, and that takes a really long time”

In this passage, DAI frames Afghan farmers as subjects “occupying a space beyond the pale of the modern” (Gregory 2004, 28). There is, of course, nothing new about this discursive maneuver. DAI’s alternative development programming in eastern Afghanistan has historically been guided by such Orientalist assumptions. What is unique to IDEA-NEW is the fact that it was explicitly designed to address two of the main criticisms that had been leveled at ADP/E by evaluators and auditors: namely, its lack of sustainability and focus.

First, DAI made sustainability one of the guiding leitmotifs of IDEA-NEW. As a way of motivating beneficiaries to adopt new materials or techniques, DAI championed “one-time” interventions that did not “cover on-going costs” (DAI 2010, 19). Further support would only be provided on a “diminishing basis, calculated to engender responsibility on the part of project participants” (DAI 2010, 19). Drawing inspiration from USAID’s long history of doing development under conditions of counterinsurgency warfare, IDEA-NEW aimed to help Afghan farmers help themselves (Attewell 2015).

On the surface, DAI's obsession with sustainability speaks to Duffield's (2007) theorizations of development as a biopolitics of self-reliance. Contra Duffield (2007), however, IDEA-NEW was not encouraging Afghan farmers to cocoon themselves in a "homeostatic" state of resilient self-reliance. Instead, farmers were being asked to assume primary responsibility for their own self-improvement. If farmers could be convinced to wholeheartedly embrace such a neoliberal biopolitics of self-help, they could then be governed as subjects who "respond systematically to modifications in the variables of the environment" (Foucault 2008, 269).

IDEA-NEW's obsession with sustainability also encouraged it to take a "wide view of each value-chain it supports" (DAI 2011, 4). Again, this was hardly a new idea. Recall, for instance, Brown's (15 October, 2012) usage of an "ecosystem" metaphor to describe ADP/E's approach to poppy cultivation in eastern Afghanistan. But whereas ADP/E had attempted to "target" *all* of the different elements of each alternative value chains' "ecosystem", IDEA-NEW's approach was more selective. DAI married a "wide" approach to alternative value chains with more "targeted" forms of development programming. This is nicely captured by my conversation with Hoffman. In addition to helping farmers "produce more produce" so that they can "have more profits", DAI began to focus its attention on all of the different actors that make up each value chain, such as suppliers, companies, middlemen, and transporters. The challenge facing DAI was to identify the specific "areas" and "people" that could be intervened on to generate the biggest impacts and benefits for the whole value chain. As Hoffman (23 October, 2012) put it, if one value chain has six nodes in it, "we'll work at two of those nodes, but we're not just trying to improve those two, but rather, to have an improvement for everyone".

IDEA-NEW identified two forms of technical assistance that could be mobilized to support the long-term development of alternative value chains. The first of these carried forward ADP/E's prior concerns with improving the agricultural productivity of Afghan farmers. According to one of DAI's senior livelihoods specialists, Amira Garner (19 October, 2012), Afghan farmers had not "changed any way of doing things for 30-40 years" and consequently, were being held back by their use of "antiquated methods". In response to this problem, IDEA-NEW dispatched extension agents out into the field to establish demonstration farms. In these spaces, farmers were provided with technical assistance in the form of subsidized access to modern technologies

and inputs, as well as training in agricultural “best practices” (DAI 2011, 30). In Garner’s (19 October, 2012) words: “we say, ‘look, apply this fertilizer this way and you are going to get a 30% yield in your crop at harvest time’, and you show them slowly, and it builds trust: ‘ok, wow, alright, it’s worth that investment in the fertilizer and seeds and so forth’”.

Although demonstration farms trained farmers as individuals, they were ultimately designed to benefit rural communities as a whole. According to Garner (19 October, 2012), IDEA-NEW used community land for demonstration plots in order to prevent one person from reaping all the rewards. Subsequently, capable community members were designated as “lead farmers” tasked with helping IDEA-NEW organize demonstration efforts. Participants committed themselves to 30 or 90 day training sessions and were reimbursed not with cash, but rather, with in-kind support in the form of tools, seeds, or fertilizers. They were then expected to go back to their farms and apply all of the techniques that they learned.

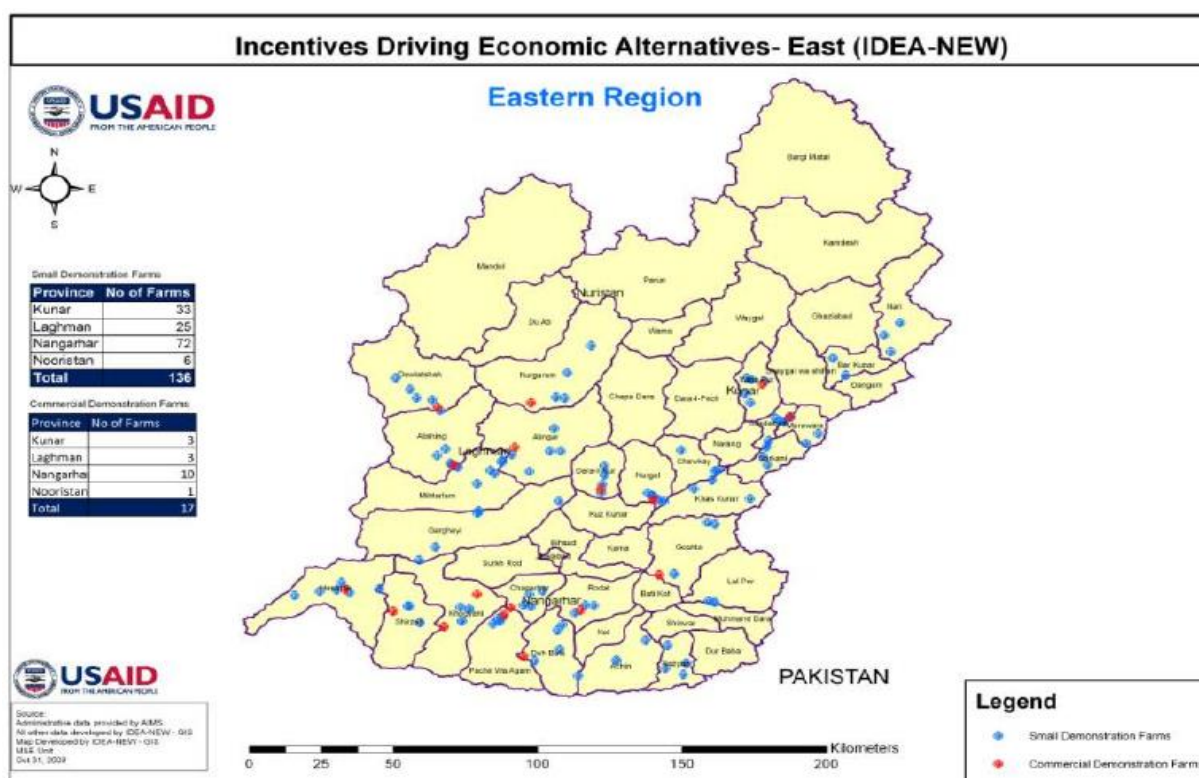


Figure 19: Demonstration farm locations in the eastern region (DAI 2009, 27)

Like ADP/E before it, IDEA-NEW’s extension and demonstration programming was also multi-scalar in nature. At the regional scale, IDEA-NEW established a number of “Commercial

Production Farms”. These were 1.5 acre demonstration plots that were rented by DAI for one year, and cultivated in accordance with “modern techniques” such as raised beds, staggered planting, and fertilizer usage. (DAI 2011, 32). To supplement these Commercial Production Farms, DAI also established a number of smaller plots in remote villages that trained local farmers in land preparation and lay out, direct seeding, transplanting, pest and disease management, and (post)harvesting. In theory, this would help ensure that farmers living in some of the more remote regions of eastern Afghanistan would be able to access demonstration and extension services. However, Figure 19 reveals that in actuality, these demonstration farms were unevenly distributed throughout the region. According to the statistics provided on the left hand side of the map, approximately 53% (72 out of 136) of all satellite plots and 59% (10 out of 17) of all CPFs were located in Nangarhar. In contrast, a total of 7 demonstration farms were established in Nuristan, all of which were located in the province’s southern districts.

In general, demonstration plots outperformed those being farmed in traditional ways. In the northern region, wheat demonstration plots achieved yields that were approximately 60% higher than average (DAI 2011). Commercial Production Farms, furthermore, did not merely train farmers, but also prepared government workers to take over extension responsibilities from IDEA-NEW staff. This capacity building work effectively boosted the “rate of adoption” – a metric that measures the extent to which “neighbouring farmers are keen to learn from IDEA-NEW beneficiaries” – of extension and demonstration activities (DAI 2012, 25). One survey compiled by DAI found that “88% of trainees had shared the skills they learned from the project with other farmers, with each participant teaching an average of 11 other people” (DAI 2012, 25). For DAI, this metric was a promising indicator of farmer responsabilization.

As IDEA-NEW ran its course, it gradually began to move away from the initial production-centric focus that it had carried forward from ADP/E. Hoffman neatly captures this shift in trajectory. For the first few years, IDEA-NEW spent a lot of time working with farmers out in the fields. In 2012, however, IDEA-NEW “stopped doing seed subsidies and stuff like that” (Hoffman 23 October, 2012). As Hoffman put it, “we feel like we’ve shown [farmers] for the last x amount of years...’here’s how to grow crops’”. “Now”, Hoffman (23 October, 2012) proclaimed, “we’re trying to help them move their crops down the value chain”. Alongside this



shift in strategy, DAI began to distance itself from both counternarcotics and counterinsurgency. IDEA-NEW, Hoffman (23 October, 2012) insisted, had “never really specifically been anti-poppy”. Rather, it had “been an agricultural project that works in areas where there are also poppy growers”.

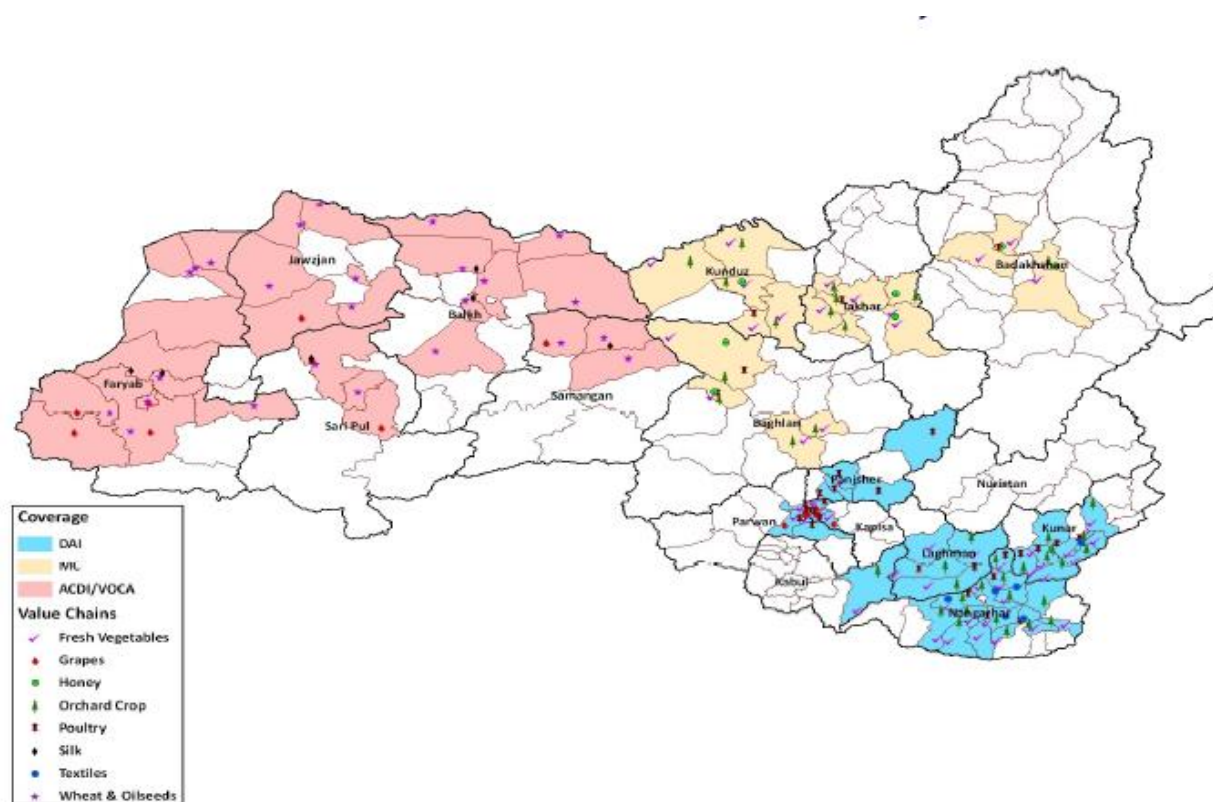


Figure 20: Map of IDEA-NEW value chains as of September 2012 (DAI 2012, 30)

Thus, when auditors recommended in 2012 that DAI re-orient IDEA-NEW away from counternarcotics towards “agricultural value chain enhancement”, officials like Hoffman were happy to oblige. In May 2012, IDEA-NEW phased out all forms of extraneous alternative development work to focus its attention on “enhancing” eight different value chains - vegetables, grapes, honey, livestock, orchard crops, poultry, silk, and wheat – which are ostensibly mapped by Figure 20<sup>30</sup>. The purpose of this shift was to “enable [IDEA-NEW’s] beneficiaries to move

<sup>30</sup> Figure 20 is a strange map in the sense that it only depicts the agribusinesses that are benefitting from DAI’s largesse. It does not show how – or whether – these agribusinesses are actually linking up with global value chains. Like Figure 19, however, it does reveal that IDEA-NEW was concentrating the vast majority of its rural development assistance in Nangarhar.

beyond improved production and begin engaging in higher stages of the value chain, such as marketing, to add value to their efforts” (DAI 2012, 7). To this end, IDEA-NEW ramped up its rural enterprise development efforts. As Garner (19 October, 2012) informed me, Afghans are “entrepreneurial people by nature”. If they were provided with the right skills and tools, “they could do a lot”.

In order to meet these needs, IDEA-NEW put together a team tasked with helping small agro-entrepreneurs “get...the private sector going in Jalalabad” (Garner 19 October, 2012). According to Garner (19 October, 2012), the proximity of Pakistan meant that beneficiaries had all of these “great opportunities for trade”. Unfortunately, foreign merchants were “just crushing the local markets” with cheaper and better quality goods. In response, IDEA-NEW’s “private sector development team” focused its attention on helping beneficiaries upgrade the quality of their goods, register their enterprises, strengthen their business plans, and secure financing. In order to sustain this “enabling environment” for private-sector investment and employment, however, IDEA-NEW had to do more than hook eastern Afghanistan into broader circuits of transnational capitalism. Team members also aimed to nurture a local culture of entrepreneurialism amongst local Afghans by supporting community business associations, producing radio programs on agro-capitalism, and creating an on-demand SMS service designed to send individual farmers up-to-date market prices for licit crops (DAI 2011).

DAI also re-evaluated its decision to maintain a close relationship with the Afghan government. Worried that government workers would not be able to “support” farmers after the termination of IDEA-NEW’s contract, DAI gradually downloaded many of its key training and logistics responsibilities onto “private sector partners” (OIG 2012, 13). DAI (2012, 12) encouraged beneficiaries to “develop links” with private sector partners “as sources of inputs and information on best practices”. Private sector partners, in turn, “received training in business development, as well as agricultural techniques, and were tasked with raising the technical and business capacity of district farmers and retailers” (DAI 2012, 12). In one extension and demonstration program that was implemented by DAI in 2012, private sector partners not only provided prepared land and inputs, they also trained beneficiaries in transplanting seedlings, installing irrigation, controlling pests, weeding, and processing harvested crops (DAI 2012).

IDEA-NEW's insistence on downloading governmental responsibilities onto private-sector actors highlights the extent to which its implementers continued to distance themselves from the "counterinsurgency-stabilization" model of alternative development programming.

Thus far, I have explored how alternative development practice in eastern Afghanistan has changed over time. As ADP/E transitioned into IDEA-NEW, the "rural development" model of alternative livelihoods became increasingly commercialized. What began as a tentative effort to familiarize Afghan farmers with the private sector gradually escalated into a full blown attempt to "drag" them down the value chain. If DAI is to be believed, no farming household was left behind by this shift in strategy. Instead of making good on its promise to bring about "improvement for everyone", however, DAI's decision to intensify its marketization schemes disproportionately benefited certain segments of rural Afghan populations over others. As I will show in the next section of this chapter, some Afghans – particularly those already disadvantaged by virtue of their geography and/or by their gender – were, in fact, increasingly left by the wayside: or, to use more Foucauldian (2003) terminology, were "let die".

## **5.5 Letting die in eastern Afghanistan**

In her engagement with Foucault's lectures on neoliberalism, Li (2014, 47) writes that all governmental assemblages are "guided by rationalities with distinct understanding of society, human nature, and the proper way of intervening in them". Part of her project is to show that these "distinct understandings" matter. In Li's (2014, 47) estimation, it makes a difference whether "rural people are understood as vulnerable children who need to be protected, as potential entrepreneurs waiting to be activated by incentives and the provision of micro-credit, or as nature-loving tribes who would never sacrifice mother earth and future generations for short term gain" (Li 2014, 47).

It is precisely on such grounds that Li distinguishes the neoliberal art of government from its liberal equivalent. At its core, the liberal art of government aspired to govern rural populations "in accordance with the grain of things" (Li 2014, 35-6). It emphasized the importance of acquiring detailed knowledge of the diverse capacities and characteristics of rural populations.

This expert knowledge, in turn, could be mobilized to identify those sub-groups who could be governed in a “liberal manner”: that is, “through their intrinsic capacity for autonomous, self-regulating conduct” (Li 2014, 36). In contrast, other groups – such as women, the poor, and colonial subjects – were to be governed “differently” in “idioms of trusteeship, wardship, benevolent protection, paternalism, and often in an authoritarian or despotic manner” (Li 2014, 36). To put it differently, they were subjected to a form of *oikonomia*: or, in plainer language, household governance (Owens 2015).

In her recent monograph that explores the linkages between counterinsurgency and the social, Patricia Owens (2015) describes *oikonomia* as a form of domestic governance that expects inhabitants of household spaces to submit to the disciplinary authority of a benevolent and enlightened patriarch. While the emergence of *oikonomia* as an art of government is often traced back to ancient Greece, it is commonly believed that the ascendancy of liberalism in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries was accompanied by a transition from household governance to contracts as the dominant mode of social regulation. As Owens (2015, 6) argues, however, the “rise and transformation of liberal ‘contract societies’ did not destroy household governance; it only transformed it”. Contrary to popular belief, the liberal nation-state was not the antithesis of the household, but rather, its most modern and bureaucratic iteration. For Owens (2015, 6), the upshot of all this is that under the aegis of liberalism, the “ontology of the social realm and distinctly social regulation are best understood in terms of household governance in which the life processes of populations are managed and domesticated”.

While the neoliberals also seek to “govern in accordance with the grain of things”, they do so in a slightly different manner. As sketched out in *The Birth of Biopolitics*, the neoliberal rationality of government advances a view of human nature that is explicitly universal. All humans have the capacity to act – and be governed – as *homo oeconomicus* (Li 2014). In contrast with liberal forms of *oikonomia*, neoliberal governing involves “setting conditions and devising incentives so that prudent, calculating individuals and communities choosing ‘freely’ and pursuing their own interests will contribute to the general interest as well” (Li 2014, 37).

In the interviews that I conducted, as well as the project documents that I collected, IDEA-NEW is represented as an “environmental-type intervention” that successfully produced, for the most part, a significant population of autonomous and self-regulating beneficiaries “capable of making rational choices and taking responsibility for their own lives” (Li 2014, 48). They were “acting as they ought”, and thus, were ready to be exposed to the risks of the market. These claims, however, should not be taken at face value, for a closer examination reveals that IDEA-NEW was also animated by – at least to a certain degree – the logics of *oikonomia*.

In the previous chapter, I suggested that alternative livelihoods professionals operating in the more permissive security environments of northern, eastern, and western Afghanistan were given greater latitude to tackle poppy cultivation as a problem of development, not stabilization. This being the case, it is worth remembering that IDEA-NEW was still implemented under conditions of counterinsurgency, particularly from 2010 onwards. This is important because counterinsurgency, to quote Jairus Grove’s (2016) reading of Owens’ work, is what liberalism looks like when it “goes on the road”. As Owens (2015, 9) argues, counterinsurgency played a central role in disseminating the liberal model of household governance to colonial contexts. This continued to hold true in contemporary Afghanistan, where counterinsurgents tried to neutralize – or perhaps more appropriately, domesticate – civilian populations by indirectly enabling certain decentralized forms of despotic household rule. Counterinsurgents conceived of civilian populations in Afghanistan as “fundamentally social, malleable beings” who would acquiesce to the “violent control of their homes and their movement” so long as such measures worked through existing household structures (Owens 2015, 248).

In the specific context of Afghanistan, the infrastructures of indirect and decentralized household despotism were reinforced at a multiplicity of scales. Counterinsurgents, for example, worked hard to co-opt the leaders of so-called “tribal households” to their cause. As part of this effort, a large amount of military and financial assistance was directed towards the figure of the “tribal warlord” (Owens 2015). This assistance was commonly channeled through special forces brigades operating out of “Village Stability Platforms” (VSPs), who often used it to help allied tribal warlords consolidate a regional monopoly over the means of violence by establishing and maintaining an *arbakai*, or community militia (Belcher 2014; Goodhand and Akimi 2014;

Kienscherf 2016; Shreckengast 2012). Counterinsurgents in Afghanistan complemented these meso-scale efforts by also engaging in *oikonomia* at the more intimate scale of the individual household (Owens 2015). Owens (2015, 267) notes that “family homes [were] incorporated into the wider household of counterinsurgency in a highly gendered and sexualized process”.

Counterinsurgents assumed that Afghan populations could be controlled through the (re)production of particular kinds of domestic spaces, governed by a native *paterfamilias* in accordance with the traditional logics of cishetero patriarchy. To this end, counterinsurgent forces decided to respect the authority of household heads by leaving them in charge of surveilling, controlling, and disciplining both close and extended family members (Owens 2015). As I will show shortly, this counterinsurgency politics of deferral and indirect rule had particular consequences for the broader civilian effort to mainstream progressive gender norms and relations amongst Afghan communities.

Although Owens’ work on Afghanistan is important, it is largely focused on the counterinsurgency efforts undertaken by military actors. This raises a crucial question: what role do civilians play in the narrative that has been sketched out by Owens so far? Do civilians further the processes of domestication that Owens identifies as being constitutive of counterinsurgency? Or do they motion towards a different model of counterinsurgency governance that moves beyond the logic of the domestic? One obvious starting point for engaging with these questions is the concept of interagency operations. Arguably, civilians come the closest to participating in the kinds of counterinsurgency operations singled out by Owens when they are embedded in PRTs or VSPs. Owens’ neglect of these interagency efforts seems surprising at first blush, given the importance that are accorded to them in stability operations and counterinsurgency doctrine. In practice, however, the extent to which civilian participation in PRTs and VSPs has substantively shaped the conduct of stability operations in Afghanistan remains decidedly unclear. As we saw previously, the institutions and infrastructures that have been established to facilitate interagency coordination have either, like the PRTs, been overwhelmingly dominated by military priorities and interests, or, as exemplified by the Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization, have so far failed to live up to the lofty expectations that have been set for them (Morrissey 2015; Taw 2012). This ambivalent record of interagency operations in Afghanistan has not helped ameliorate the US military’s historically dim view of what civilian

agencies are actually capable of achieving in conflict situations. Taw (2012, 95) notes that the US armed forces “have been repeatedly surprised and frustrated by civilian agencies’ inability to contribute” to stability and counterinsurgency operations in (post)conflict situations. This is because the military has come to expect a certain level of interagency support that civilian agencies such as USAID have simply never been designed, manned, or equipped to provide.

Given these obvious inadequacies, why does interagency cooperation still figure prominently in US military doctrine as a goal to be worked towards? Even if the concept is never adequately translated into practice, it still remains useful to the US military as a justification for maintaining high levels of funding during a period of intensifying austerity politics. As John Morrissey (2015, 619) writes, “one of the underlying reasons for the US military’s reimagining of its interventionary remit to explicitly include ‘stability operations’ appears to be the budgetary pressures of post-crisis austerity”. Recently, the Department of Defense has found itself under increasing pressure to reduce the amount that it spends on maintaining the US military’s enormous conventional warfare capacity. In response, the Department of Defense has tried to claw back resources by promoting the US military as an appropriate tool for fulfilling a wider set of national security needs (Morrissey 2015).

Civilian institutions are similarly ambivalent about interagency operations. On the one hand, USAID (2010a) has acknowledged that it is generally ill equipped to implement development programmes in insecure and nonpermissive environments. In response to this “urgent need for new tools and techniques”, USAID (2008, 2010a) drafted a number of policies and guides that are meant to instruct its employees on how to conduct civil-military operations in the field. On the other hand, these very same documents also reproduce a traditional division of interagency labour that assigns lead responsibility for development to civilian actors, while relegating military contributions to the arena of security. According to USAID’s (2008, 4) policy on civil-military cooperation, the most significant contribution that the Department of Defense can make to the “achievement of development goals is through long-term, strategic military-to-military management”. While USAID recognized that “coordination with the DoD is one aspect of our vital role in US national security”, its policy paper reiterated that military actors “should not substitute for civilian capabilities” (USAID 2008, 4). From this passage, it is clear that USAID

envisioned the US military playing a more subordinate and separate role when it comes to the implementation of development programs under prolonged conditions of conflict and insurgency.

It is therefore unsurprising that civilian actors – particularly those who were employed by USAID – were quick to distinguish interventions such as IDEA-NEW from both interagency and stability operations. While it was recognized that civilian actors would be operating under the umbrella of broader efforts to establish a more “authoritarian national household” in Afghanistan, it was nonetheless widely believed that interventions like IDEA-NEW were undergirded by a more neoliberal model of governance which was primarily concerned with steering rural populations toward more market-oriented forms of subjectivity and labour (Owens 2015, 250). Like military counterinsurgents, civilian development professionals emphasized the centrality of households to the reproduction of rural Afghan life. Given that Afghan livelihood strategies are, more often than not, enacted at the scale of the household, the aim of rural development programs like IDEA-NEW was not necessarily to stabilize existing configurations of domestic processes and relationships, but rather, to transform them. More specifically, the end-state goal of these development interventions was to transition Afghan households away from subsistence farming towards commercial agribusiness. Afghan households, in other words, were to be made entrepreneurial.

But as DAI rapidly discovered, the figure of *homo oeconomicus* is hardly universal. Some populations are deliberately barred from acting – and being governed – as *homo oeconomicus*. Grove (2016) points out that Foucault’s reflections on the emergence of neoliberalism in the US “leaves out entirely the anti-black racism that animated the war on the welfare state”. Other populations are interpellated in highly ineffective ways. Li (2014, 47) argues that given the complexities of different “environments”, it is “all too easy to get the incentives wrong, creating outcomes quite different from the ones desired”. In order for “environmental-type interventions” to work, they must account for the diversity of contextual factors that influence the decision-making processes of rational actors. Such forms of knowledge can be furnished through quantitative and qualitative techniques designed to capture how actors in the real world evaluate costs and benefits.



Over the course of IDEA-NEW, DAI devoted a great deal of effort to collecting precisely this kind of information. While eastern Afghanistan was not *terra nullius* to DAI, its pre-existing knowledge base was rapidly made obsolete by the volatility of IDEA-NEW's operating environment. In response, DAI dispatched data collection teams to local communities, which gathered up-to-date information on various aspects of the life of the population: the number of families, yearly incomes, the size of local economies, etc. (DAI 2010). These metrics were used to evaluate current – and plan future – alternative development activities. This constant need to (re)assess rural Afghan life once again speaks to the biopolitical nature of IDEA-NEW. In this particular context, the Afghan population was rendered legible not through its biological markers, but rather, through its political-economic characteristics (Foucault 2003). In order to modify the variables of the environment, DAI first had to know what they might be.

These efforts highlighted the geographical, agricultural, and economic diversity of the 15 provinces encompassed by IDEA-NEW, inspiring DAI to set its performance targets on a regional basis. Unfortunately, they also failed to disabuse DAI of the interrelated notions that: a) markets throughout eastern Afghanistan were free, competitive, and accessible to all; and b) that the benefits of marketization would be distributed equally amongst rural populations. In contrast, scholars who research Afghan livelihood strategies have long cautioned against adopting market-centric approaches to developing rural Afghanistan. Since the occupation of Afghanistan began in late 2001, policy makers have championed the notion that economic growth will be catalyzed by the restoration of “free” markets in the Afghan countryside (Lister and Pain 2004). “The private sector”, as Paterson (2006, 2) writes, was “expected to help fill the gap left by the opium sector by delivering sustained high levels of [pro-poor growth] in an extremely difficult investment environment”. As early as June 2004, Lister and Pain (2004) were calling on policy makers and development professionals to recognize that markets in rural Afghanistan function in ways that are neither free nor equitable. They argued that representations of markets in Afghanistan as neutral arenas regulated fairly and efficiently by the laws of supply and demand effectively abstracts them from their material context. Such framings gloss over the many extra-economic dimensions of market exchange – including class, race, ethnicity, gender, and geography – that conspire to prevent many Afghans from taking part in, or benefitting from, such

activities. Instead, it is the elite who benefit disproportionately from market-driven economic growth (Kandiyoti 2007).

IDEA-NEW is not immune to such criticism. As IDEA-NEW ran its course, it produced “differentiated subjects of colonial rule” (Li 2014, 38). Those farmers who were not ready to “move their crops down the value chain” dropped out of the picture. Two sub-sections of the rural population, in particular, fell by the wayside. First, IDEA-NEW’s turn towards “agricultural value chain enhancement” disproportionately benefited farmers who lived in districts that were already well serviced by markets. This was most clearly demonstrated in Mansfield’s (2015b) analysis of the impact that IDEA-NEW had on poppy cultivation in Nangarhar. To impose a measure of coherence on his research findings, Mansfield divided Nangarhar into two broad geographical zones. The first zone encompasses many of the most fertile and well-irrigated districts straddling the Kabul River, such as lower Surkhud, Kama, and Behsud. The second zone, in contrast, comprises the more remote districts located at Nangarhar’s southern extremities, such as Shinwar and Khogiani.

Mansfield’s findings suggest that the better off farmers of zone 1 benefitted disproportionately from IDEA-NEW. According to Mansfield (2015b), zone 1 was characterized by higher rates of crop diversification, a greater uptake in commercial horticulture, and increased opportunities for off-farm employment in urban economies (see also Fishstein 2014). This is hardly surprising, given that IDEA-NEW was “particularly active” in zone 1, “engaging in a wide range of development projects aimed at improving productive infrastructure, as well as directly increasing and diversifying incomes” (Mansfield 2015b, 66). Zone 2, in contrast, did not benefit to the same extent. Initially, DAI committed itself to engaging with farming communities in the more remote and insecure areas of Nangarhar, where poppy cultivation was most prevalent. As Mansfield (2015b, 66) points out, however, “increasing levels of violence, including the killing of IDEA-NEW staff, in the southern districts of Nangarhar led to the curtailment of project activity in the very districts in which opium poppy was beginning to reappear”. This decision was taken around the same time that DAI shifted IDEA-NEW’s focus from teaching farmers “how to grow crops” to helping them “move their [produce] down the value chain” (Hoffman 23 October, 2012). DAI, in other words, abandoned farmers living in zone 2 to their fate. As a result of this decision,

households in zone 2 were thrown deeper into economic distress. In response, farmers attempted to stem this decline by turning once again to a proven coping strategy: poppy cultivation. This relapse suggests that the impact of IDEA-NEW in these districts, while transformative, was ultimately insufficient to “generate the incomes required for households to meet their basic needs in the absence of opium poppy” (Mansfield 2015b, 65). It also failed to catalyze the “kind of diversification into high value horticultural crops and non-farm income that can be seen in the lower lying districts in the Kabul river valley” (Mansfield 2015b, 65).

In addition to entrenching Nangarhar’s existing geographical fault lines, IDEA-NEW also found it difficult to overcome long-standing gender inequalities. This is not to suggest that IDEA-NEW ignored gender. Mindful of ADP/E’s gender bias, DAI tried to ensure that “women’s economic activities” were integrated into – rather than marginalized from – IDEA-NEW’s emerging value chains (DAI 2010, 9). This time around, DAI complemented existing micro-enterprise efforts with a new focus on nurturing “domestic” or “courtyard” economies. These efforts are characterized by many of the same problems that plague the concept of “gender mainstreaming” in Afghanistan. Lina Abirafeh (2009) succinctly summarizes some of the common critiques of “gender mainstreaming” efforts in Afghanistan. She argues that the aid apparatus in Afghanistan has so far failed to arrive at a clear understanding of how best to define and operationalize the concept of gender. In lieu of conceptual clarity, the default maneuver has been to “import an agenda of social change” that not only reduces “gender interventions” to “women’s programs”, but also champions “technical solutions” as the key to solving “political problems” (Abirafeh 2009, 68). This lack of contextualized analysis and programming, in turn, has the effect of denying agency to both women and men.

Despite these problems, the impact of “gender mainstreaming” in Afghanistan has been mixed. While significant advances have been secured in the realms of law and policy (Bauer and Wakefield 2005), and the outlook for women in the health and education sectors ranges from “moderate” to “good”, Afghan women continue to experience significant discrimination in the economic sphere (AREU 2013). According to AREU (2013, 29), most of the work done by Afghan women both inside and outside of the home is “invisible, undervalued, and unpaid, providing few benefits” (see also Grace 2004, 17; Kandiyoti 2007, 192). Those women who are

able to find work are subsequently burdened by what Linda Ganesh and her collaborators (2013, 4) describe as the “triple shift” of paid, reproductive, and emotional labour. There are, of course, exceptions to this rule. Nomadic and sedentary women have historically played an outsized role in caring for and managing livestock herds (Davis 2005). But by and large, there has been “little or no change in the gendered division of labour over the last decade”, as “women continue to face considerable social and economic barriers to entering the labor market and accessing economic opportunities” (AREU 2013, 30). These include: “resistance to their economic participation; limited employment choices; lack of education and skills; limited mobility outside of the home due to insecurity, cultural barriers, and responsibility for domestic and care-giving tasks; and limited access to and control over assets” (AREU 2013, 30).

Women, in particular, find it difficult – if not impossible – to access market spaces. This has proven to be one of the hardest barriers for Afghan women to overcome. Women have little contact with markets on a day-to-day basis, as the purchasing or selling of items in public spaces is predominantly seen as a “man’s task” (Kandiyoti 2007; Echavez 2012, 24). Given that socio-cultural norms continue to restrict women from accessing the public sphere without a *mahram* – or, a male relative to act as a chaperone – it remains difficult for them to participate in markets as self-regulating and autonomous subjects (Echavez 2012).

This has serious implications for the approximately 32.1 percent of economically active women who, as of 2010, specifically earned a living through the agriculture sector (Ganesh et al. 2013). According to Ganesh et al. (2013, 24), women farmers are major contributors to Afghanistan’s rural economies. Through their labour, they make integral, yet unrecognized, contributions to agricultural value chains. Although their “involvement is equal to that of men”, women in agriculture face numerous constraints – mainly, poor access to land, credit, markets, and inputs – that prevent them from capitalizing upon opportunities to move beyond the “micro-scale of production” (Ganesh et al. 2013, 25). Unfortunately, rural development aid has a poor track record when it comes to helping women farmers address these concerns. As Ganesh et al. (2013, 26) point out, extension training is often provided on the basis of land ownership, which automatically excludes most women farmers. Similarly, trade facilitation activities do nothing to help women farmers break into the highly gendered networks of intermediaries, traders,

suppliers, processors, and marketers that determine which commodities move up the value chain. This “prevents the woman as worker from realizing the full benefit of her labour”: from becoming an entrepreneur of herself (Ganesh et al. 2013, 25).

Ultimately, Ganesh et al. (2013, 28) argues that until a “critical mass” of women farmer-entrepreneurs is reached in the Afghan countryside, contractors such as DAI have little incentive to create an “enabling environment conducive to the emergence of a level playing field for all actors in the value chains, regardless of gender”. Indeed, IDEA-NEW’s “gender mainstreaming” efforts have done little to help potential women “farmer-entrepreneurs” better participate in local, regional, national, and international markets. IDEA-NEW’s turn towards “agricultural value chain enhancement”, in fact, effectively exacerbated gendered divisions of labour. According to Garner (19 October, 2012), IDEA-NEW’s “gender and micro-enterprise” unit promoted “mainly home based activities” that were “actually kosher” – i.e., that “men would allow to happen” – such as cheese-making, enterprise weaving, tailoring, and egg production, to name only a few examples. As Garner (19 October, 2012) lamented, it was not an “easy process” to “identify different opportunities to engage women”, just “given how strict the culture is in the east”. Many of Garner’s colleagues were even more pessimistic, arguing that women in rural Afghanistan could not do a lot (Hoffman 23 October, 2012). This was reflected in IDEA-NEW’s metrics, which show that alternative development activities disproportionately benefitted men (OIG 2012). DAI’s failure to “maintain a gender balance in its activities as required by the cooperative agreement” meant that women, once again, fell by the wayside (OIG 2012).

Patricia Owens (2015) argues that counterinsurgency, in contrast with its claims of empowering women, actually bolsters patriarchal family units. Helen Kinsella (qtd. in Owens 2015, 272) concurs, suggesting that one of the primary aims of counterinsurgency is to re-inscribe women’s position within household spaces. IDEA-NEW was no different. Instead of encouraging Afghan women to access markets and work, it steered them towards “courtyard” or “domestic” industries in which their “labour [was] (made) cheap” (Owens 2015, 271). As women were fixed within the space of the *domus*, they went from being autonomous political subjects with their own ideas of what justice and freedom might entail in the context of rural Afghanistan to an “object of social administration” (Owens 2015, 271). To paraphrase Laleh Khalili (2014a, 1479; 2014), they were

massified into an “undifferentiated ‘womenandchildren’” that was managed simultaneously as a “malleable mass, a docile subject, and a yielding terrain of domination”.

Although IDEA-NEW exacerbated existing patterns of uneven development in eastern Afghanistan, it was still represented as a humane form of counternarcotics. Under DAI’s watch, it is argued, farmers went from being victims to beneficiaries (Reuters 2009). It was also praised by the mainstream media as a “successful model for foreign aid” that actually “offers Afghans the help they need to improve their lives” (Rubin 2010). As Weizman (2012) reminds us, however, we must always be aware of the stick that hides behind any carrot. Following Anderson’s (2012) assertion that Foucault’s theorization of environmental power is a “little too benign and risks hiding some of the connections with contemporary ways of abandoning, damaging, or destroying life”, the next section explores how IDEA-NEW was undergirded by – and provided a legitimating armature for – more destructive counternarcotics techniques, such as eradication and nexus targeting.

## **5.6 “All ends with beginnings”**

For many commentators, Holbrooke’s June 2009 promise to phase out American support for counterproductive eradication operations signalled a turn towards kinder and gentler counternarcotics techniques and technologies. However, in Nangarhar – as in Helmand – things were very much business as usual.

As I noted previously, although Gul Agha Sherzai successfully banned poppy cultivation in 2007, it resurged once again in 2010. While DAI had disbursed alternative development assistance throughout the region between 2007 and 2010, it proved insufficient to fully mitigate the economic strain had been imposed on local farmers by three consecutive years of eradication (Fishstein 2014). Farmers, as a result, began to cultivate poppy out of necessity. Initially, this resurgence was confined to particular areas in the zone 2 district of Sherzad. Buoyed by the success of his 2007 counternarcotics campaign, Sherzai dispatched his eradication units to Sherzad in April 2010. It is now widely acknowledged that the Sherzai administration botched these efforts. They were conducted late in the growing season, and as such, they became bogged

down in a protracted and difficult negotiation process. Sherzai himself was alleged to have insulted and threatened local elders and authority figures. Sherzad residents responded to these provocations by inviting anti-government elements into the district to “protect” poppy fields, and in the ensuing clashes, members of the Afghan National Police were killed (Mansfield 2011).

Sherzai’s failure to re-impose a total ban on poppy cultivation in Nangarhar’s southern districts proved to be the first of many decisive moments in a broader struggle for control over the countryside. Over the course of the 2010-11 growing season, the collapse of the 2007 ban accelerated. Poppy cultivation expanded further down the valleys of Sherzad, as well as into the southern districts of Khogiani, Achin, Pachir Wa Agam, and Hesarak (Mansfield 2011).

According to Mansfield (2014), these dramatic increases in poppy cultivation can be explained in large part by tracking the shifting political fortunes of Gul Agha Sherzai. While Sherzai’s endorsement of the botched eradication campaign in April 2010 damaged his reputation as a “bulldozer” who “gets things done”, Mansfield (2014) argues that it was his involvement in the infamous Achin conflict of 2010 that made it nigh impossible for him to project political power in the more remote districts of Nangarhar (Corcoran 2009).

The origins of the Achin conflict can be traced back to a dispute between two Shinwari sub-tribes – the Sepai and the Alisherkhel – over the ownership of a tract of desert land, approximately 10 to 15 square kilometers in size (Foschini 2011). In early 2010, a group of Sepai erected a building on the border of the contested plot of land, which was subsequently demolished by the Alisherkhel. Undaunted, the Sepai retaliated by establishing a small settlement. Again, they were chased off by armed Alisherkhel in March 2010.

Around this point in time, foreign interference effectively escalated what had previously been a local land dispute into a full blown conflict. As the Sepai were being evicted from their squatter settlement, they were also attacked by a local neo-Taliban group. Although the Sepai were able to fend off the insurgents, they realized that the situation was beginning to spiral out of control, and approached US Special Forces for support. US Special Forces signed a pact with the Sepai, offering them weapons, munitions, and cash in exchange for the establishment of an *arbaki* militia unit that would be tasked with keeping neo-Taliban forces out of the district (Foschini

2011). While this Shinwari Pact was “highly publicized as a significant development for the country’s security”, it backfired spectacularly, as the Sepai turned its newly acquired weapons on their Alisherkhel rivals instead (Foschini 2011). In response, the Alisherkhel requested – and received – support from Pakistani insurgents. After a number of false starts, an agreement to disarm both sub-tribes was finally brokered by Gul Agha Sherzai on 26 October, 2010. Although the Alisherkhel complied with the terms of the agreement, the Sepai did not. On 28 October, 2010, a Sepai *lashkar* not only attacked a meeting of provincial authorities – which included Sherzai – but also shot at a US helicopter: an act which triggered a number of retaliatory strikes (Foschini 2011).

Sherzai’s failure to peacefully resolve this dispute had a number of far-reaching consequences. According to Mansfield (2014, 15), the reputations of both the Sherzai administration and local authority figures were “irrevocably damaged” amongst local farmers. Given that the state itself was increasingly seen as powerless and ineffective, district elites were no longer required to act as brokers with Jalalabad, rendering their presence superfluous (Mansfield 2014, 15-16). As anti-government elements stepped into this vacuum of authority, there was an increasing sense amongst farming communities that the state no longer possessed the coercive power necessary to mount an effective eradication campaign (Mansfield 2014). Emboldened, local farmers decided that they were not only going to cultivate increasing amounts of poppy, but that they were going to resist eradication efforts by any means necessary. Throughout the 2012 growing season, eradication operations resulted in the death of 48 people, yet only succeeded in destroying 748 hectares of poppy (Mansfield 2015b, 25). In an effort to stem this violence, provincial authorities and the Afghan security apparatus all but abandoned eradication, opting instead for a more “negotiated” approach to poppy cultivation (Mansfield 2015b). These efforts were largely ineffective, and by 2013, Nangahar had once again become a “poppy paradise” (Mansfield 2015b).

Alongside these eradication efforts, the US military also intensified its interdiction campaign in Regional Command – East (RC-East). In 2009, the Pentagon authorized US forces to “remove” drug traffickers from the battlefield through “kill/capture” operations. According to two US generals stationed in Afghanistan, Operation Enduring Freedom’s “Rules of Engagement”, as



well as the internationally recognized “Laws of War”, permitted the placement of “drug traffickers with proven links to the insurgency” on a “Joint Integrated Prioritized Target List” (CFR 2009, 15).

According to Gregory (2011a), the “Joint Integrated Prioritized Target List” is a heuristic used by the US military to identify targets for interdiction and execution. In the Afghan theatre, the US military “maintains a subsidiary Joint Prioritized Effects List (JPEL) that identifies ‘insurgent leaders’ and ‘nexus targets’...who may be killed or captured” (Gregory 2011a). Once a week, the US military’s Joint Targeting Working Group works with military lawyers and other civilian representatives to vet “target nomination packs” (Gregory 2011a). By October 2009, reports were suggesting that hundreds – if not thousands – of names had been added to the JPEL. At least 50 of these names were “nexus targets” (CFR 2009). Upon identification, targets are neutralized via “fix-and-finish missions” that are generally carried out by either Joint Special Operations Command or the US Air Force. According to Gregory (2011a), these “kill-capture” operations “have (too) much in common with the infamous Phoenix program that targeted the shadow political leaders of the Viet Cong between 1967 and 1976” (Attewell 2015).

In 2009, ISAF also established a civil-military “Combined Joint Interagency Task Force” code-named “Nexus” (CJIATF-Nexus) that played a central role in the nexus targeting process. “Nexus” was one of three CJIATF’s fielded by CENTCOM as part of its broader “interagency unity of effort” (Pope 2014, 16). In the Afghan context, it brought military actors together with representatives from the international law enforcement community to break the “narcotics-corruption-insurgent nexus” (DoD 2013). According to the Pentagon (2013, 150), CJIATF-Nexus “specifically targets network functions (e.g., safe havens, movement, communications, and finance), rather than individual traffickers in order to disrupt network resiliency”.

There is a dearth of publicly available information on the nexus targeting process and thus, it remains difficult to verify these claims empirically. An analysis of job ads and LinkedIn profiles, however, suggests that CJIATF-Nexus is more directly involved in the nexus-targeting process than the Pentagon lets on. CJIATF-Nexus Intelligence Analysts, for example, supported “lethal and non-lethal operations against insurgents, narco-traffickers, malign influencers within GIRoA

and Afghan National Security Force (ANSF) to include JPEL targeting, law enforcement, and key leader engagements” (steak 2011). In his capacity as a CJIATF-Nexus “Targeting Officer”, Eric Camehl (2012) supported the counternarcotics targeting mission by conducting “network analysis and development, named area of interest, development, high value persons pattern of life analysis and illicit ratline studies”. Taken together, these sources call into question the Pentagon’s claim that CJIATF-Nexus does not target individuals for neutralization

It would also be a mistake to assume that “nexus targeting” operations were only being executed in Afghanistan’s unstable south. A search of *WikiLeaks*’ “ICWATCH” website reveals that CJIATF-Nexus’ domain of operations also encompassed RC-East. Consider, for instance, the profile of senior intelligence analyst, Jerod Harness. According to *WikiLeaks* (2015):

“Mr. Harness was assigned to CJIATF – Nexus was a Counter Corruption Analyst and Counter Narcotics Target Developer. He worked in the RC-East HQ at Bagram [Air Base], Afghanistan, supporting DEA and Task Force Counter Narcotics Teams with target packages for their daily operations.

These findings are further corroborated by the profile of Earl Owens, a “HUMINT Intelligence Analyst” who worked for a US military contractor, BAE Systems. Owens reportedly “directed and assisted in over 50 capture/kill missions of high value targets”. He “worked closely with CJIATF-Nexus/counter-corruption/counter-narcotics cells for RC-East to coordinate action against drug labs and key leaders located in Nangarhar and Helmand Province”. Over the course of his deployment, he produced “170 Story Boards that led to the capture of 54 [High Value Targets]”, including “two of the largest drug kingpins in Afghanistan” (*WikiLeaks* 2015a).

Another civil-military institution imbricated in the nexus targeting process is the Interagency Operations and Coordination Center (IOCC). Established by the Drug Enforcement Administration and the United Kingdom’s Serious Organized Crime Agency, the IOCC works alongside ISAF and CJIATF-Nexus to “conduct an effective civil-military campaign to counter the narcotics-corruption-insurgent nexus” (DoD 2012, 100). Much like the District Intelligence and Operations Coordinating Centres established during the Vietnam War, the intelligence collated by the IOCC was used to create “target packs” for institutions like CJIATF-Nexus

(Jenzen-Jones 2011). CJIAF-Nexus, in turn, vetted these “target packs” in order to determine which “high value” individuals needed to be added to the JPEL.

Unsurprisingly, “nexus targeting” proved controversial. Afghan officials such as General Mohammad Daud worried that foreign troops would neutralize nexus targets on the basis of secret evidence, rather than handing them over to Afghan forces for trial (Whitlock 2009). Others, such as Nur al-Haq Ulumi, a politician from Kandahar, argued that the situation in the countryside would deteriorate rapidly if ISAF started to neutralize drug dealers. According to Ulumi, Afghans already “feel that foreigners didn’t really come here to reconstruct our country”, but rather, “just came here to kill us” (Whitlock 2009). Similarly, Jean-Luc Lemahieu cautioned the military against escalating interdiction operations “a step too far” (Whitlock 2009).

Although I am sympathetic with Ulumi’s concerns, I argue that “extrajudicial killing” and “reconstruction” are not mutually exclusive processes, but rather, often occur in tandem in the Afghan countryside. The Afghan counternarcotics campaign, like the “other” war for Vietnamese “hearts and minds” before it, is marked by an interplay between “catastrophic techniques that damage and destroy life” and “providential techniques that repair and improve life” (Anderson 2010, 1). While alternative development programs like IDEA-NEW are not directly implicated in either eradication or nexus targeting, they are hardly innocent. As I have shown over the course of this chapter, they are at once a “domain of life creation” and a “processional exercise of power that is as necropolitical as it is biopolitical” (Murphy 2011, 35). It is precisely this dialectical tension between life and death, violence and care, creation and destruction, anger and mercy that IDEA-NEW has inherited from its forebears.

## **5.7 From poppy free to poppy paradise**

Almost 25 years ago, James Ferguson (1990) compellingly argued that we should not evaluate the success or failure of a development project in conventional terms. As Ferguson (1990, 20-21) writes, “outcomes that at first appear as mere ‘side effects’ of an unsuccessful attempt to engineer an economic transformation become legible in another perspective as unintended, yet

instrumental elements in a resultant constellation that has the effect of expanding the exercise of a particular sort of state power, while simultaneously exerting a powerful depoliticizing effect”.

What were the “unintended consequences” of IDEA-NEW? Viewed from a counternarcotics perspective, IDEA-NEW was a colossal failure. Nangarhar may have been “poppy-free” when IDEA-NEW was launched, but by 2013, it had become a “poppy paradise” (Fishstein 2014). This should hardly come as a surprise. According to SIGAR (2014, 14), the “rural development” model of alternative livelihoods has historically been “less intimately tied to reductions in poppy cultivation”. Programs like IDEA-NEW prioritize the achievement of rural development goals. Any reductions in poppy cultivation that do occur are, as SIGAR (2014, 14) puts it, “externalities” or “side effects” of these interventions. Hence Hoffman’s (23 October, 2012) claim that IDEA-NEW was never meant to be “anti-poppy” in the first place.

In Mansfield’s (2015b) eyes, this is not in and of itself a problem. All available evidence, in fact, challenges the notion that alternative development programs need to directly target poppy growing areas to reduce overall levels of cultivation. This does not mean, however, that DAI was justified in narrowly focusing IDEA-NEW on expanding the licit economy. DAI assumed that this strategy would automatically lead to reductions in poppy cultivation. This assumption was not borne out. To compound matters, Mansfield (2015b, 12) suggests that DAI’s refusal to monitor “counter-narcotics relevant indicators” made it difficult to determine whether IDEA-NEW was actually reducing or encouraging poppy cultivation. There is, for instance, reason to believe that when zone 2 farmers returned to poppy cultivation in 2010, they were able to devote greater amounts of land to the crop – and by extension, harvest more opium resin – in large part due to the improvements that IDEA-NEW had made to local irrigation infrastructures. What DAI lacked, in other words, was a nuanced understanding of how particular alternative development interventions would impact the life chances of different population groups that dot the countryside of north-eastern Afghanistan. Instead of seeing alternative development as a “more dynamic process designed to build livelihood resilience and improve the overall welfare of the different population groups within a given geographic area”, IDEA-NEW focused its attention on simply “replacing the income from opium poppy” (Mansfield 2015b, 75)

It would also be a stretch to claim that IDEA-NEW successfully supported counterinsurgency objectives in north-eastern Afghanistan. One might argue that DAI's tenure as the lead implementer of IDEA-NEW in eastern Afghanistan was marked by an overall deterioration in the relationship between the state and local farming communities. From 2009 onwards, the southern districts of Nangarhar became increasingly insecure, as inter-tribal conflicts over land created a power vacuum that was eventually filled by anti-government elements, such as the Pakistani Taliban and the Haqqani Network. More recently, there have been signs that Daesh militants are beginning to set up shop in eastern Afghanistan. Daesh first announced its presence in the region on 22 April, 2015, when it claimed responsibility for a deadly blast that killed more than 40 people in Jalalabad (Khaleej Times 2015). Since then, it has reportedly seized control over most of Nangarhar (Ahmadzai 2015).

While DAI's alternative development programming may have failed to reduce both poppy cultivation and violence in north-eastern Afghanistan, it nonetheless had the effect of expanding the exercise of a particular sort of environmental power: one that sought to help the market economy become the general, defining index of governmental action. As alternative development programs like ADP/E and IDEA-NEW ran their course, DAI's "commercial" approach to the problem of poppy cultivation gradually acquired the force of common sense amongst practitioners and beneficiaries alike, who increasingly saw market participation as the only viable pathway to a brighter future, and a better life.

USAID seemingly endorsed DAI's "commercial approach" by soliciting bids for four five-year "Regional Agricultural Development Programs" (RADP). According to Hoffman (23 October, 2012), these "hard-core value chain ag-production projects" are going to be "very challenging". In Hoffman's (23 October, 2012) words: "even five years is impossible to get a lot of results in ag stuff...it says you've got to have 60 million dollars in created revenue through sales of ag products...and I honestly don't know...how anyone's going to do that". DAI, however, felt that it was up to the challenge, and eventually secured the right to implement RADP North (DAI 2014).

USAID's RADPs, in many ways, are the logical extension of approaches first test-driven by DAI'S IDEA-NEW project. They propose to drag successful farmer-entrepreneurs even further down the value chain, and in so doing, consolidate the emergence of an agro-capitalist class in rural Afghanistan. They are emboldened by the fact that households in some areas of Afghanistan have transitioned over to the licit economy, "suggesting that under the right conditions, opium poppy in Afghanistan can be – if not eliminated – at least reduced, and that some of the problems associated with the narco-economy can be better managed" (Mansfield and Fishstein 2014). Although work has only just begun on the RADPs, I argue that they highlight USAID's whole-hearted embrace of market-based approaches to development. Whereas USAID once struggled to think and act "as if they were a private-sector company", now, they are pushing the envelope of marketization (De Boer et al. 1992, 59). In a reversal of sorts, it is USAID's implementing partners who are lamenting the fact that they are expected to generate \$60 million in agricultural sales as part of these new RADPs.

All things considered, the very existence of these four RADPs is suggestive of how USAID and its implementing partners are increasingly trying to distance themselves from the central role that they played in operationalizing the "stabilization" model of alternative development in southern Afghanistan from 2009 onwards. This raises a crucial question: is it still possible to identify a nexus of development and security at work in the countryside of post-drawdown Afghanistan? In the concluding chapter of this dissertation, I offer some tentative reflections on this question. I argue that what we may be currently witnessing is not necessarily the end of the development-security nexus, as some have claimed, but rather, its transformation.

## 6 Things fall apart

“Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.”

...

And what rough beast, its hour come at last,  
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

- William Butler Yeats, *The Second Coming*.

### 6.1 “\$7.6 billion and counting”

In the introduction of this dissertation, I argued that 9/11 saved USAID from geostrategic irrelevance by opening a floodgate of resources for the agency. These increased levels of political and financial support allowed USAID to assemble a heterogeneous group of trustees – composed of private sector implementing partners, government bureaucrats, local counterparts, and military actors – tasked with securing post-9/11 Afghanistan through development. However, as the occupation of Afghanistan entered its twilight, signs emerged suggesting that this nexus of development and security was about to buckle.

By the time that American forces began “drawing down” from Afghanistan in the summer of 2011, USAID found itself confronting a full-blown siege on its very institutional existence. This assault was driven in part by the urgent need in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis to slash the ballooning US federal deficit through austerity measures. The first salvo in this budget war was launched on 20 January, 2011, when the so-called “Republican Study Committee”, a loose conglomeration of 165 self-identified House Republicans, unveiled a plan designed to slash federal spending by \$2.5 trillion over ten years (Rogin 2011). This proposal involved passing legislation that would cull \$1.39 billion from USAID’s total operating budget, which, for fiscal year 2010, was only \$1.65 billion (RSC 2011). The Republican Study Committee plan would have essentially eliminated all federal funding for USAID.

The Republican Study Committee plan was ridiculed by a number of commentators, including Andrew “Abu Muquwama” Exum (2011) – the current Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Middle East Policy – who panned it as “embarrassing” and “ignorant”. Given its drastic and far-reaching implications, its chances for implementation were “slim to none” (Rogin 2011). This did not stop the Republican-controlled House of Representatives from passing a \$1.2 trillion appropriations bill on 19 February, 2011, that imposed severe spending cuts on both domestic programs and foreign aid (Taylor 2011). In response, USAID pulled no punches. USAID Administrator Rajiv Shah “ruffled feathers” when he estimated that new austerity measures would “lead to 70,000 kids dying” from preventable health conditions (Aizenman 2015; Rogin 2011a). Shah was equally critical of the House’s decision to reduce appropriations for the International Disaster Assistance account, describing the cut as “the most dramatic stepping back away from our humanitarian responsibilities around the world in decades” (Rogin 2011a).

The last time that USAID found itself under such intense levels of domestic scrutiny, it was given a new lease on life by the global War on Terror. The War on Terror, however, is a moving target. Owing in large part to the less than stellar record of counterinsurgency in Afghanistan, both the US military and the Obama administration are becoming increasingly wary of getting bogged down in long-term occupations and peace-building campaigns: precisely the kinds of operational environments in which USAID thrives. It is well beyond the scope of this conclusion to explore these sea-changes to US military strategy in detail (see Goepner 2012; Mazaar 2012; West 2012). At the risk of over-simplifying things, I do want to note that this evolution in warfighting was catalyzed at least in part by a more general crisis in counterinsurgency thinking (Ucko 2014). As David Ucko (2014, 161) writes: “The NATO campaign in Afghanistan, where ‘counterinsurgency’ (in reality, expeditionary counterinsurgency) was advanced as a quick fix to achieve security, has irrevocably dampened the enthusiasm that surrounded this term following its implementation in Iraq”. These arguments have been advanced most forcefully by long-time critics of counterinsurgency thinking, Gian Gentile and Douglas Porch. Gentile and Porch, in particular, have directed most of their ire towards the mantra of “clear-hold-build”. Both Gentile and Porch represent “clear-hold-build” as “little short of a dangerous myth” that “promises a template to make foreign interventions easy, but ends up a poor substitute for any real strategy,



resulting in one quagmire after another” (Ucko 2014, 162). For Porch and Gentile (2013), the US military’s decision to embrace counterinsurgency thinking was a “wrong turn” that needs to be undone and corrected at every available opportunity.

Other critics have adopted a more conciliatory approach. Ucko (2013a, b), for instance, seeks to “move beyond” the key fallacies of the “clear-hold-build” concept so that it can be refined for use in future military operations. According to Ucko (2013), while the idea of “clear-hold-build” is both sound and self-evident on an abstract level, it proved difficult to implement in Afghanistan. Over the course of Operation Enduring Freedom, the US military demonstrated its prowess at “clearing” areas, but found it challenging to “hold” and “build” them. Ucko (2013b) – much like Gentile and Porch – argues that this problem stems from a fundamental tension that is inherent to counterinsurgency doctrine. Counterinsurgency doctrine “[emphasizes] the uniqueness of each insurgency”, yet “also proposes a generic model that is to apply across time and space” (Ucko 2013b, 547). “Clear-hold-build” became popular amongst military commanders because it promised a simple, linear path to achieving a “new ‘normal’”, accepted by local population and government alike” (Ucko 2013b, 547). Where Ucko diverges from Gentile and Porch, however, is in his injunction that more attention should be paid to the “build” phase of counterinsurgency campaigns. All too often, he argues, counterinsurgents are led to believe that the process of “building” should proceed in a manner that is both technical and apolitical. As Ucko (2013b) points out, however, “building” is political in two key ways. First, “building” is a form of intervention that is inextricably entangled with a politics of resource distribution. Because builders determine “who gets what, when”, their interventions – no matter how well intentioned – will invariably produce both winners and losers. Second, the objective of the build phase is not necessarily to repair infrastructure or construct schools. Rather, building is undertaken to achieve a desired political effect: specifically, “to alter the behaviour of the local population, improve perceptions of the central government, or bring the two into a compact that is enduring rather than just transactional” (Ucko 2013b, 537). Here, the conclusion drawn by Ucko (2013b) is more or less the same as the one that Christian Denny (2013) advances in his defense of stabilization as a viable and effective concept of intervention. In both Ucko and Denny’s (2013, 5) opinion, the lesson that the US military needs to learn from the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan is that any stability or counterinsurgency operation that “does not

engage with the local political system is simply hot air blowing over an area while local political actors wait out the interveners to continue their own way of life”. Instead of helping preserve an “unjust status quo”, stability and counterinsurgency operations should use “all available tools, which may be civilian or military or a combination of both, to maintain space for social, economic, and political evolution” (Dennys 2013, 6).

Writing in 2012, Jennifer Morrison Taw hailed the publication of the Department of Defense’s Directive 3000.05 as a key moment in the US military’s longstanding “mission revolution”. By “adding stability operations as a legitimate and primary mission – and reconfiguring the spectrum of conflict to include phases Zero and Five”, Directive 3000.05 had, in Taw’s (2012, 187) estimation, created “a new way of thinking that, once accepted and institutionalized, [would be] incredibly difficult to reverse”. While traditionalist critics such as Porch and Gentile valiantly tried to keep the debate over stability operations and counterinsurgency going as long as possible, their efforts were constantly undermined by what Taw describes as a new “political reality”: namely, that “embracing stability operations broadens the military’s purview and provides the armed forces with a new *raison d’être*, just as it appears to have maxed out its old one, at least politically” (Taw 2012, 187).

In the years since the publication of Taw’s book, however, the US military’s “mission revolution” seems to have run its course. It has become increasingly obvious to many commentators that the rate of doctrinal innovation in the fields of stability operations and counterinsurgency over the last 10 years or so has outpaced the US military’s ability to develop the capacity necessary to carry out these new responsibilities. According to Ucko (2013a), Western military commands continue to display a “deep rooted unwillingness” to reconfigure the structures and the capabilities in the radical ways demanded by stability operations and counterinsurgency doctrine. As evidence, he points to the fact that “despite ten years of intense engagement with counterinsurgency, neither the US nor the UK military has made the fundamental realignments necessary – in force structure, budget allocation, and education – to prepare for irregular war or for the ‘full spectrum operations’ or ‘hybrid threats’ spoken of in doctrine” (Ucko 2013a, 58). Indeed, recent developments in the Afghan theater suggest that the US military might actually be rethinking its prior elevation of stability operations to the status of

offense and defense. Some of the very first signs that this process was underway were observed during General David Petraeus' 16-month tenure as Obama's top general in Afghanistan. While serving as the commanding general of Multi-National Force – Iraq, Petraeus built a reputation for himself as a champion of kinder and gentler forms of counterinsurgency. As one of the most well-known “COINdinistas”, Petraeus is generally credited for playing an instrumental role in mainstreaming population-centric counterinsurgency thinking throughout the US military. Once Petraeus arrived in Afghanistan on 23 June, 2010, however, he adopted a more “gloves-off approach” than his predecessor, General Stanley McChrystal. According to Schachtman (2011), Petraeus not only doubled the intensity of the air war, but also unleashed special operations forces and authorized the use of more destructive ordinances, such as surface-to-surface missiles and mine clearing machines.

Petraeus' amplification of the “kinetic” or “enemy-centric” dimensions of the Afghan counterinsurgency campaign meshed well with Obama's personal preference for surgical counter-terrorism operations (Chandrasekaran 2012). In recent years, Obama himself has increasingly shied away from drawn out peace-building endeavours and instead, has ratcheted up the use of drones and special operations forces in contemporary theaters of the Global War on Terror, such as Pakistan's “Federally Administered Tribal Areas”, Libya, Syria, and Iraq. These theater specific changes in war-fighting tactics and practices eventually served as the inspiration for a broader evolution in military strategy. In the concluding paragraph of her book, Taw (2012, 187) prophesied that the “militarization of US foreign policy” would only “decline when budgets or circumstances force hard decisions about military priorities”. This is precisely what happened in January 2012, when the Department of Defense (2012) published a new strategic guidance, entitled *Sustaining US Global Leadership: Priorities for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Defense*. The aim of *Sustaining US Global Leadership* was to draw up a blueprint that would allow the US military to meet the security challenges of a “changing geopolitical environment” in a manner that would not only preserve America's global leadership and military superiority, but would also help alleviate the mounting fiscal crisis confronting its government (Department of Defense 2012, 1). In order to achieve this balancing act, the US military would have to be restructured into a smaller, leaner, agile, flexible, and techno-centric “Joint Force for the Future” (Department of Defense 2012, 5). This transformed US military, as *Sustaining US Global Leadership*

acknowledged, would “no longer be sized” to carry out the kinds of “large-scale, prolonged stability operations” that were central focus of Directive 3000.05 and Field Manual 3-07 (Department of Defense 2012, 6). *Sustaining US Global Leadership* stressed that all of the experience and expertise that had been accumulated while waging unconventional warfare in Iraq and Afghanistan would not go to waste, as the US military would remain ready to “conduct limited counterinsurgency and other stability operations if required” (Department of Defense 2012, 6). In order to “reduce the demand for significant US force commitments to stability operations”, however, the Department of Defense planned on emphasizing “non-military means and military-to-military cooperation” as the only fiscally responsible ways of securitizing instability in the present conjuncture (Department of Defense 2012, 6); Morrissey 2015).

The implications of the US military’s turn away from stability operations and counterinsurgency are somewhat ambivalent for USAID. On the one hand, the Pentagon’s decision to stop encroaching on civilian national security responsibilities ostensibly benefits USAID. Although USAID’s understanding of the civil-military division of labour has been vindicated by *Sustaining US Global Leadership*, this does not actually mean that any of the problems currently bedeviling the institution will be solved. As we saw above, USAID and the State Department have been subjected to similar austerity measures as the Department of Defense, making it difficult, if not impossible, for them to enhance their ability to directly conduct operations in the field. Furthermore, the US military’s movement towards a smaller, leaner, and more agile Joint Force will also constrain the extent to which USAID can implement development programming under conditions of war and conflict. Over the course of Operation Enduring Freedom, USAID remained reliant upon US and coalition forces to provide the security bubbles necessary to implement development programming in the field. Now that the US military is no longer sized to conduct large-scale and prolonged stability operations, USAID will either have to find another source of security – such as private contractors – or it will have to rethink how it plans to go about intervening in future theaters of conflict and emergency. It therefore remains to be seen whether the US military’s new strategic direction will either dampen or heighten USAID’s enthusiasm for taking on more of an outsized role in interagency stability operations in the future.

All of this uncertainty is compounded by the fact that USAID's performance in Afghanistan has been less than confidence-inspiring. In recent years, it has faced mounting criticism from the Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction (SIGAR). SIGAR was created by Congress in 2008 to conduct "independent" and "objective" audits of all reconstruction projects and activities being implemented in Afghanistan. The purpose of these audits was to detect and prevent foreign aid from being wasted or abused. Although USAID was never really on the best of terms with SIGAR, their relationship took a turn for the worse in July 2012. This was the month that John Sopko was sworn in as the "chief watchdog for US reconstruction spending in Afghanistan" (Londono 2013). Much like Holbrooke before him, Sopko inspired terror amongst the members of the USAID complex. SIGAR, as Sopko saw it, had "little time to correct the course of a massive, wayward ship and to spotlight a flawed wartime appropriations system" (Londono 2013). In order to achieve these goals, he was more than willing to wage war with much of the Beltway by naming names, bruising egos and chasing headlines (Londono 2013). In his own words, Sopko did not become the "umpire" of the Afghan reconstruction effort to make friends. His job, instead, was to "call strikes". This, in turn, effectively placed him on a direct collision course with USAID.

In SIGAR's eyes, USAID grossly mismanaged the Afghan reconstruction effort. To name only some of the most egregious examples, it had: "constructed" buildings that subsequently disappeared into thin air; awarded foreign assistance to local sub-contractors later revealed to be affiliated with insurgent groups; and actively conspired to hide vital information from both auditors and domestic lawmakers (Clark 2013; Donati and Harooni 2013; Igoe 2013; White 2013). USAID responded to these criticisms in "hit pieces" that sought to discredit SIGAR's auditing methodologies (White 2013). The empirical situation on the ground, however, is damning. It is becoming increasingly difficult to claim that under USAID's watchful eye, development and security have marched lockstep in the Afghan countryside. (Para)military violence has only intensified in post-"withdrawal" Afghanistan, with the 2015 fighting season promising to be the most deadly since the US-led coalition invaded in 2001 (Rasmussen 2015). Furthermore, the development-security nexus assembled by USAID never encompassed the entirety of the Afghan countryside, and as a result, its impacts on the life-chances of rural populations have remained fleeting and ephemeral. No statistic better exemplifies the partiality

of USAID's attempts to "conduct the conduct" of rural populations better than the UNODC's measurement of Afghan poppy cultivation in 2014. At 224,000 hectares, poppy cultivation was more widespread than ever.

This figure led many commentators to represent the Afghan counternarcotics campaign as a colossal failure (The Editorial Board 2014; Ingraham 2014; Mir 2014). During a talk held at Georgetown University on 12 September, 2014, Sopko (2014) offered a particularly grim assessment of the counternarcotics situation in Afghanistan. To quote Sopko:

"The US has already spent nearly \$7.6 billion to combat the opium industry. Yet, by every conceivable metric, we've failed. Production and cultivation are up, interdiction and eradication are down, financial support to the insurgency is up and addiction and abuse are at unprecedented levels in Afghanistan. During my trips to Afghanistan, I've met with US, Afghan, and International officials involved in implementing and evaluating counternarcotics programs. In the opinion of almost everyone I've met, the counternarcotics situation in Afghanistan is dire, with little prospect for improvement"

Sopko, in particular, was astonished to find that counternarcotics programming, given its importance to the Afghan reconstruction effort, had not been prioritized by the Department of Justice, State Department, or Pentagon officials during – as well as after – the transition period. "Without an effective counternarcotics strategy and Afghan political will to tackle this problem", Sopko prophesied, "Afghanistan could well become a narco-criminal state in the near future"<sup>31</sup>.

All available evidence therefore suggests that the precarious ligatures linking development and security in the Afghan countryside are on the verge of coming undone. Given that USAID is being presented with fewer opportunities to mount comprehensive and extended foreign assistance missions in the vein of USAID/Afghanistan, how will this affect the "world's premier

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<sup>31</sup> As of March 2016, Sopko's predictions have not yet come to pass. Poppy cultivation levels in Afghanistan, in fact, reportedly decreased by approximately 19% over the course of 2015 to 183,000 hectares. While the total number of hectares eradicated by local security forces did increase from 2,692 to 3,760, these efforts only accounted for approximately 9% of overall reductions. These reductions, in other words, were primarily the result of factors other than a minor intensification of local counternarcotics operations (UNODC 2015a). Indeed, the UNODC (2015a, 6) acknowledges that major improvements in the methodologies used to estimate levels of poppy cultivation in Afghanistan may have made the "extent of changes appear greater than it actually was". It therefore remains to be seen whether these reductions are actually indicative of a longer-term trend.

development agency” as it moves forward into the future? And what implications do these sea-changes have for how we understand the development-security nexus more generally? In what remains of this dissertation, I offer a series of tentative reflections on these questions.

## **6.2 Dis-assembling the development-security nexus**

In April 2012, *Development Dialogue* published a special issue that “explores the paradigm shifts and practical modifications of a humanitarian-development-security nexus from a variety of different but similarly critical perspectives” (Melber 2012, 5). Entitled “The end of the development-security nexus? The rise of global disaster management”, its contributors included a number of luminaries – such as Mark Duffield, David Chandler, and Vanessa Pupavac – who have made significant contributions to the field of development-security studies.

In the introductory paper of the special issue, Jens Sørensen and Fredrik Söderbaum (2012) argue that “international development has reached an impasse”. Critical of an “increasingly totalized securitization of development” and a “growing track record of failure in terms of delivering politically stated norms and goals”, Sørensen and Söderbaum (2012, 13) identify a “paradigmatic shift” in concepts and discourses that promises to move us beyond the “nexus” altogether. They situate this “paradigmatic shift” within a longer history of Western interventions in the “global borderlands”. One of their central claims is that “the way the West has dealt with the South has moved in a cycle during the past century” (Sørensen and Söderbaum 2012, 9). They detail four different paradigms of “development-security”. In chronological order, these are:

- 1) Colonialism, which they theorize as the most radical form of Western interventionary culture;
- 2) The liberal project of development as conceptualized under modernism, which was focused primarily on building functioning nation-states out of former colonies;
- 3) The neoliberal philosophy of non-material sustainable development, which was critical of the grand industrialization schemes that were popularized by the Cold War;
- 4) The post-Cold War nexus of development and security that takes human life as its reference, rather than states.

In Sørensen and Söderbaum's (2012) estimation, the current development-security paradigm is once again undergoing a dramatic recalibration. The Western ambition of ensuring security and protection through material development is being eclipsed by a more neoliberal politics that seeks to promote resilience through the normalization of global disaster management practices. The aim of this new configuration of power is not to improve the life chances of the world's poorest majority, but rather, to build them into resilient subjects, capable of surviving in and adapting to their dangerous and catastrophic environments.

There is much to be admired about the imaginative and thought-provoking essays that have been collated into this special issue. In recent years, ecological metaphors and concepts such as resilience have undoubtedly become the new buzzwords of the professional development industry (see Grove 2013; Webber 2015). While a critical engagement with the development-security nexus concept is long overdue, I nonetheless remain suspicious of the broader theoretical claims that are advanced by Sørensen and Söderbaum (2012). In their eagerness to herald the emergence of a new global nexus of disaster management practices and resilience thinking, they make two problematic assumptions: first, that development and humanitarian interventions can easily be reduced one to the other, and second, that they do the same kind of work in different historical and geographical contexts. As a result, Sørensen and Söderbaum (2012) end up merely replacing one "dazzling, all-encompassing, and totalizing spatial form" of biopower with another (Coleman and Grove 2009, 491).

In many ways, Sørensen and Söderbaum's (2012) introductory essay is exemplary of a broader tendency amongst social scientists to gravitate towards novel theoretical abstractions that make the otherwise chaotic geographies of warfare, development, and humanitarianism conform to a tidy and coherent explanatory narrative. As social scientists, we are always so quick to marvel at the centripetal forces that help form –and sustain – nexuses of development and security in the global borderlands. What Sørensen and Söderbaum (2012) offer is not so much a genealogy of the development-security nexus as a teleology: a linear and sequential account, an "inadvertent affirmation of inevitabilist succession stories" that emphasizes "pristine moment[s] of mountaintop clarity" over those of doubt and dispute (Peck 2008, 3). To paraphrase Gregory (2004, 45), what is occluded from "grand narratives of this sort" – whereby each iteration of the



development-security nexus dissolves cleanly and inexorably into its successor – is the messiness, the precarity, and the partiality of such transitional moments.

As my dissertation has demonstrated, the development-security nexus in Afghanistan is best understood not as a fully-formed and coherent project, but rather, as a “relationally constituted” and polyvalent process that unfolds across “multiple sites and spaces of co-formation” (Peck et al. 2010, 106). Instead of undergoing “processes of gradual change that lead to a fundamentally redefined imaginary, a sudden new reality”, it has been reshaped through a process of grafting that has proceeded unevenly over both space and time (Ferguson 2010; Li 2014; Sørensen and Söderbaum 2012, 7). What has resulted is a veritable palimpsest of techniques, approaches, frameworks, and practices, many of which are being stress-tested in the field simultaneously. Under such conditions, newer forms of governmentality often coexist uneasily with older ones.

What is also obscured by Sørensen and Söderbaum’s (2012, 7) narrow focus on “paradigm shifts” are the centrifugal forces – including (para)military violence, bureaucratic in-fighting, external crises of legitimacy, and local forms of resistance – that constantly threaten to disassemble the Afghan development-security nexus into its constitutive “multiplicity of poorly articulated – even contradictory – projects and spaces” (Coleman and Grove 2009, 499). While a state of relative equilibrium between these centripetal and centrifugal forces was achieved and sustained in post-9/11 Afghanistan for a finite period of time, the fluid dynamics of Operation Enduring Freedom prevented this situation from persisting indefinitely. As my genealogy of the Afghan development-security nexus demonstrates, there invariably came a time when the centre, to paraphrase William Butler Yeats (1997), could no longer hold, and things begin to fall apart.

My dissertation makes an important contribution to the study of the development-security nexus by lingering on this dialectic of assembly and dis-assembly. It complicates taken-for-granted narratives about how biopower and governmentality are exercised in the “global borderlands” by bringing into sharper focus the tensions and the anxieties that animate USAID’s 70-year history of working with the US military and the State Department to make development and security congeal in the Afghan countryside. As my dissertation shows, these efforts have rarely resulted in any clear-cut success stories. This is hardly surprising, for if there is a leitmotif that threads

through my interview transcripts, it is that the US military, the State Department, and USAID all have different ideas of how best to go about securing rural Afghanistan through development. In previous chapters, I have shown how the Afghan development-security nexus is rife with dissensus. While such debates may have run their course in the field, USAID as an institution remains unsure of what broader operational lessons it should draw from its time in Afghanistan.

In particular, the tensions surrounding civil-military relations – which came to a head in southern Afghanistan from between 2009 and 2013 – remain unresolved. In the run up to the “withdrawal” of international and coalition forces from Afghanistan, some USAID officials called on the agency to align itself even more closely with counterinsurgency doctrine and the US military. Consider the example of Judy Patton (18 July, 2013), the current director of a major division within USAID. When I interviewed Patton in July 2013, she described her 11 years of working with the US military as a “love-fest”. When Patton first heard in the fall of 2001 that the US military would be providing security for USAID in Afghanistan, she apparently “had a fit”. She was like: “HUMANITARIAN NEUTRALITY, I CAN’T BE SEEN WITH A UNIFORM”. She was “totally allergic” to the US military. Now, she informs me,

“I look and I go, ‘whither you go, I will go. I will always be there for you. I will back you up’. I love them, and they love us, and we really have a deep respect and appreciation for each other now. So, it’s funny, ‘cause like...if you would have told me 10 years ago that you would follow these guys through hell...and it ends up becoming personal for us, you know, we see what they do and what they go through”.

As a roundabout way of explaining her decision to accept and adapt to the militarization of USAID activities in the field, Patton told me a story about a “heartbreaking call” that she once received from a “Captain Rob” who was in the process of being deployed to Taji at the height of the Iraq insurgency. “Captain Rob” had heard great things about the stabilization programs that Patton had been running in Iraq, and wanted to know if they would be available in Taji. While Patton had established a stabilization program in Taji, at the time of the call, it had been temporarily deactivated because all of its funding had been “burned” (or spent) and nobody knew when more would be forthcoming. Upon receiving this news, “Captain Rob”:

“...kind of paused and he’s like... ‘you know, I’m going into Taji’...and, you know, it was, like really heartfelt, he was like

‘you’ve gotta have my back. I’m putting my life on the line. Are you going to have my back?’ And that’s when I just burst into tears, because I couldn’t promise him that I could have his back”.

The point that Patton was trying to convey with this anecdote was that any USAID employee dispatched to the field invariably develops a strong appreciation for the dangerous work that is undertaken on a daily basis by military actors. “You wanna be there for them”, Patton (18 July, 2013) concludes:

“You do not want to leave them...in the hell in Afghanistan. It’s an incredibly dangerous area, its fraught with security problems. Its overpriced...the security costs have been driven sky-high...the military needs that support. And its like, ‘I’m going to leave [‘Captain Rob’] in a broken down post?’ So what do you do...?”

Patton’s claim in this passage is that the US military is reliant upon USAID’s support to operate in an “incredibly dangerous area” such as Afghanistan. USAID, therefore, has a moral obligation to rise above petty bureaucratic turf squabbles, lest “Captain Rob” be left to fend off an insurgency all by his lonesome in a “broken down post”. This is a curious position for a USAID employee like Patton to take, especially given the US military’s somewhat ambivalent view of the need for an interagency effort (see Chapters 1, 4, and 5). As we have seen throughout this dissertation, the truth of the matter is that, in practical terms, USAID is perhaps more dependent upon the military’s support than the other way around. But perhaps this is the unspoken subtext of Patton’s anecdote. USAID needs to support “Captain Rob” in his “broken down post” so that the military, in turn, is less likely to abandon their civilian colleagues in the “hell” that is Afghanistan. From this more critical perspective, then, Patton’s anecdote can – and I think, should – be read less like a confident proclamation of USAID’s importance to military operations in the field (which is clearly the intended interpretation) and more like an anxious projection of the agency’s very real fears of operating without support in dangerous and insecure environments on to the figure of “Captain Rob”.

Patton’s opinions are not shared by all of her colleagues. USAID lifer Elaine Kingsley has long been suspicious of the US military. Kingsley (2 December, 2012a) was personally involved in the revision of FM 3-24, and she described her experience in the following terms:

“We just gave everything to [Conrad Crane]<sup>32</sup>, it wasn’t difficult to work with Conrad at all. He took whatever we gave, and then he determined where it was best placed. But again, we helped craft the language around the...analysis and the implementation...the idea is...that development is part of a counterinsurgency strategy...but AID does not do counterinsurgency. We’re not counterinsurgents, that’s...not what we are. We are assistance providers and if assistance is part of the broader counterinsurgency, well ok. But our end state is...not thinking about Afghanistan, but just in general a more developed, free-market economy with democratic principles. That in essence was not necessarily what [counterinsurgency] is about. Their end-state was end of hostilities and if we’ve got a government...great! But it was end of hostilities. War is won. That wasn’t necessarily...what we were moving towards as civilians”

As Kingsley put it even more bluntly later on in the interview, USAID simply does not “do counterinsurgency”. USAID assistance, whether short- or long-term, “can be used to help address some of the problems in a counterinsurgency operation but...we’re not the end all be all”. While Kingsley believes that USAID has a responsibility to implement its development programs in a conflict-sensitive manner, she nonetheless cautions against reducing such activities and interventions to instances of counterinsurgency by other means.

The claims that Kingsley advances in this excerpt from my transcripts should give us pause for thought. Her insistence that “we’re not counterinsurgents” is troubled on a number of fronts not only by empirical research that is presented in this dissertation, but also in the writings of a growing number of academics and journalists. USAID’s historical and ongoing linkages with counterinsurgency doctrine and practice are by now well-documented. Even if USAID is no longer doing the “dirty work of Empire” with its own two hands – as was the case in Cold War Vietnam – it nonetheless continues to play a central, if indirect, role in the ongoing counterinsurgencies that are being waged in various theatres of the global War on Terror, including, but not limited to, Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine, Colombia, and the Philippines. Kingsley is not ignorant of this history. Rather, given that she has either participated in, helped plan, or criticized many of the programs and initiatives that have been analyzed in this dissertation, it is safe to assume that she is acutely aware of it. What Kingsley is articulating in

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<sup>32</sup> Then the director of the US Military History Institute and the lead author of FM 3-24.

this passage, therefore, should perhaps be interpreted less as a precise and accurate diagnosis of the current state of play and more as a somewhat nebulous, ambivalent, and reactionary vision of how things ought to be moving forward. Nor is Kingsley alone in her uneasiness with the ways in which development and USAID have become conflated with counterinsurgency. As the empirical research that I conducted for this dissertation suggests, her opinions on such matters are shared by other members of the professional development community. It is precisely this intangible sense of malaise and uncertainty that I have tried to signal by making Kingsley's defensive rebuttal – “we're not counterinsurgents!” – the title of this dissertation.

Patton and Kingsley fundamentally disagree over how USAID should relate to the US military in this post-Operation Enduring Freedom world. What links their divergent perspectives, however, is a shared recognition that contemporary forms of development theory and practice must remain sensitive to issues of conflict and insecurity. The fact that USAID heavyweights such as Kingsley and Patton still think in such terms is, contra Sørensen and Söderbaum (2012), a testament to how development and security continue to serve the agency as crucial conceptual touchstones for its operations in the field. This is not to imply that USAID has been unreceptive to resilience thinking. Rather, it is merely to suggest that any future attempt on the part of USAID to put Humpty Dumpty back together again will be wracked by tension *ab initio*. If the genealogical analysis presented in this dissertation is any indication, the next iteration of the development-security nexus will not arise fully-formed like a phoenix out of the ashes of its predecessor, as Sørensen and Söderbaum (2012) seem to imply. Instead, it will come into the world as a stunted hybridization of different governmental technologies (Ferguson 2010; Li 2014).

There are signs that this process of grafting is already underway. As exemplified by Rajiv Shah's response to the Obama administration's latest National Security Strategy (NSS), USAID is starting to entangle resilience thinking with more traditional approaches to development and security. According to Shah, the 2015 NSS demonstrates that development remains a key pillar of America's national security and prosperity (Shah 2015). To quote the text of the 2015 NSS: “The United States is safer and stronger when fewer people face destitution, when our trading partners are flourishing, and when societies are free”. However, the 2015 NSS also highlights the

important role that USAID can play in enhancing the resilience of vulnerable populations worldwide. Indeed, the Strategy calls on institutions such as USAID to build up the resilience of “fragile states” so that they can fulfill the basic needs of their citizens and, by extension, “avoid being vulnerable hosts for extremism and terrorism” (The White House 2015, 10-11).

It is much too early to say if this quadrangulation of development, security, disaster management, and resilience signals the shape of things to come. Nor is it clear which of the above approaches to development theory and practice will become hegemonic within USAID. Will USAID increasingly align itself with the US military? Or will it continue to distance itself from counterinsurgency doctrine and practice? Will the development-security nexus persist? Or will it be eclipsed by the disaster management-resilience nexus? On the surface, at least, these different approaches seem incommensurable. But inherent within them are competing visions of how USAID will operate in this post-Operation Enduring Freedom world; of what it will mean to be a civilian working – or living – in future theatres of counterinsurgency warfare. Unfortunately, it is well beyond the scope of this dissertation to unpack the operational, political-economic, and socio-cultural consequences of these new civil-military dynamics. Such is but one of the many tasks facing an emerging political geography of the colonial present.

### **6.3 “From the American people”**

In this thesis, I explored how USAID has long championed rural development as the key to securing the Afghan people from the threats posed by the forces of Cold War communism and contemporary Islamic extremism. Through an extended consideration of three case studies – the Helmand Valley Project, Soviet-occupied Afghanistan, and the ongoing assault on the Afghan narco-economy – I traced the evolution of this development-security nexus over time and space. In each of these diagnostic moments of development-security in action, USAID reassembled the geographies of rural Afghanistan through a variety of space- and scale-making practices and techniques. What resulted was a diverse constellation of spaces – model villages, demonstration farms, training centres, rural bazaars, agricultural zones, etc. – that were designed to solicit particular sorts of conducts from rural Afghans. Over the course of this long history, USAID has both improved and hampered the life-chances of rural Afghans in equal measure.

In the final section of Kamila Shamsie's (2009) ambitious, wonderful, and haunting novel, *Burnt Shadows*, a pivotal conversation takes place between two characters, one Afghan, the other American. Over the course of this tense conversation, the Afghan, Abdullah (a former gun-runner for the *mujahideen*) admonishes his American interlocutor, Kim Burton (the daughter of a former member of the Central Intelligence Agency turned private mercenary). He says:

“Countries like yours, they always fight wars, but always somewhere else. The disease always happens somewhere else. It's why you fight more wars than anyone else; because you understand war least of all. You need to understand it better” (Shamsie 2009, 344).

I have had to heed Abdullah's plea for a better understanding of modern war. I do so by exposing the war-making practices of civilian – as opposed to military – actors. Increasingly waged over the very modalities of life itself, modern war is now, more than ever, a fundamentally civil-military affair. Politically, the aim of this dissertation has been to expose how USAID's development programming has historically provided a legitimating armature for the waging of war and the prosecution of violence. Alongside the US military, USAID has served as one of the key pillars of the colonial present. In its hands, development has become a means of both “exercising contemporary violence and for governing the displaced, the enemy, and the unwanted” (Weizman 2012, 4)

This is not to reduce USAID to a mere smoke-screen for discipline, domination, and destruction, for such a framing problematically suppresses the “interactive, improvisational dimensions” of development encounters (Pratt 2008). I have instead attempted to move beyond easy negations of the multiple ways in which development is “handled” in the world by foregrounding how USAID's attempts to “conduct the conduct” of the Afghan people have always been partial and contested (Gidwani 2008). As Li (2007) reminds us, “powers that are multiple cannot be totalizing and seamless”, but rather, produce “gaps and contradictions”. Subjects formed in the matrices of power that traverse “contact zones” necessarily “encounter inconsistencies that provide grist for critical insights” (Li 2007, 26). As I have tried to show in each of my empirical chapters, USAID's rural development programming in Afghanistan has not only been informed by, but also actively solicited these “critical insights”. One of its effects has been to “produce

social groups capable of identifying common interests and mobilizing to change their situation” (Li 2007, 26). Sometimes, these groups of Afghans have been made to share in USAID’s “will to improve” through self-help programs or capacity building efforts. On other occasions, they have mounted political challenges that effectively derailed rural development initiatives.

Ultimately, it is precisely their “encounter with attempts to improve them” that informs their “political ideas and actions” (Li 2007, 26). As social scientists, we must take this politics of encounter very seriously. For only then will we be able to produce what Derek Gregory (1994, 414) might describe as a “genuinely human geography” of development and improvement: one that reaches out to Afghans, not in a “mood of arrogance, aggression, and conquest, but in a spirit of humility, understanding, and care”. It is my hope that this dissertation has made a substantive contribution – however small – to this critical project.



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