IV. Development and human security in Afghanistan

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Despite the improvements in human security since the international community's intervention in late 2001, the Afghan population continued to be subject to severe physical and psychological insecurity in 2015. Within Asia, Afghanistan has the lowest GDP per capita and is the lowest scoring member in the Human Development Index (HDI).[1] Since the modern Afghan state was founded, it has consistently struggled to improve the human security of its population. This has largely been the result of a congenitally weak social contract, recurrent political infighting and often destructive foreign meddling in the country. This pattern continued in 2015, which makes achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) a particularly complex challenge for the Afghan Government and people, as well as for the international aid community. Many within the Afghan National Unity Government (NUG) have pinned their hopes on the ongoing Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG)—Afghanistan, China, Pakistan and USA—peace process, which commenced informally in 2015. The engagement of the Pakistan-backed Taliban in this process and its outcome could possibly make or break the NUG. Subsequently, it could affect Afghanistan's short to medium term political stability and thus its development trajectory. This section examines Afghanistan's current development challenges, the principal development priorities set out by the NUG, and the country's human security status.

The Afghan canvas

Understanding Afghanistan's development challenges requires a brief study of the Afghan canvas. Instability in Afghanistan has frequently been the result of foreign interference and regional rivalry, itself partly a consequence of being a landlocked state with significant ethnic spillover from neighbours. Since the modern Afghan state was founded, it has been subject to some level of both internally and externally driven conflict approximately every two decades, resulting in near perpetual insecurity for the Afghan people. This has also contributed to the creation of a fragmented society in which for many a 'survival mindset' prevails over national interests.

Development efforts by the US-led international intervention in 2001 had to commence from near scratch in a country rife with socio-political heterogeneity, strongly conflicting geostrategic agendas within the region and little regional economic connectivity. Since the intervention, the inter-

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[1] World Bank, 'World Bank Data: GDP per capita', [n.d.]; and UNDP, *Human Development Report*, '2015:statistical annex', [n.d.].

national community has had to work on an Afghan canvas embedded with traditional notions of sub-central governance, strong ethnic and tribal affinity and deeply ingrained and complex religious belief systems that are interwoven with local customs, as well as the limited role of women. These notions largely prevail in the country's rural areas where some 75 per cent of the population reside.[2]

However, it was not merely the Afghans who failed to seize this 'golden progress opportunity' of access to the international community's monetary, technical and military support. The international community has made many missteps in the state building and development support processes—partly as a result of misunderstanding the Afghan canvas and partly by underestimating the 'double standards' of a number of extra-regional actors in promoting Afghanistan's stability and progress.[3] Afghanistan, therefore, remains a fragile and dangerous place.

Widespread conflict continued to affect the lives of at least 6.3 million Afghans in 2015. As of September 2015, there were 197 000 internally displaced people—a 64 per cent increase on 2014—some of whom were resettled domestically, but many headed overseas.[4] Despite a number of security setbacks and continued economic stagnation, 2015 witnessed some tentative positive developments that might offer a break from the past: (*a*) another attempt to begin the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (gas) pipeline (TAPI); (*b*) Afghanistan's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO), expected to be ratified by the Afghan Parliament in mid-2016; and (*c*) increased outreach and dialogue between the NUG and extra-regional actors on addressing common security threats and supporting an Afghan-led 'peace process that aims to preserve Afghanistan's unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity'.[5]

NUG development priorities

While the international community has been able to build Afghan governance institutions from near scratch, a deficiency in human capital, and a ubiquitous kleptocratic mindset at all levels of central, regional and local governance have undermined the country's development.[6] Afghanistan's

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[2] World Bank, 'World Bank Data: rural population', [n.d.].

[3] Del Castillo, G., *Guilty Party: The International Community in Afghanistan*, (Xlibris: Bloomington, IN, 2014).

[4] Humanitarian Response, *Humanitarian Needs Overview: Afghanistan, 2016* (UNOCHA: Afghanistan, Nov. 2015).

[5] According to the QCG's joint statement, see 'Four-nation meeting calls for immediate talks between Afghan govt, Taliban', Xinhua, 12 Jan. 2016.

[6] In 2015 Afghanistan was again ranked near the bottom (166 out of 168 countries) of Transparency International's National Integrity System Assessment. Transparency International, *National Integrity System Assessment: Afghanistan 2015*; see also Asia Foundation, *Afghanistan in 2015: A*

development 'to do list' remained extensive in 2015, and for many items on this list their prospects for success and sustainability are interdependent. This begs the question of what to prioritize. Clearly, the entity that should be the fundamental organizing unit, guarantor of the legal system, monopolist of the legitimate use of force and the principal determiner of foreign policy is the NUG, led by President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Officer Abdullah Abdullah. In 2015, the NUG's governance and state building journey did not always run smoothly. The NUG's cohesion and devotion to the country's reconstruction in 2016 and beyond will be a decisive factor in the country's stability, development and human security.

International humanitarian support cannot resolve the root causes of Afghan human insecurity: the nature of humanitarian support is to relieve symptoms, and not address root causes. Direct financial assistance to the Afghan Government has been and remains low. This is mainly a result of the previous tainted administration of former president Karzai, but also due to the failure of the NUG to put its own house in order. While there is little doubt about the sincerity of the senior NUG leadership towards reform, the vast majority of the government apparatus continues its kleptocratic modus operandi. The NUG is consequently limited in its capacity to address development and persistent humanitarian challenges.[7]

Since September 2014, the NUG has prioritized three elements, with varying degrees of success. First, it has sought to increase human capital in the government apparatus by making more merit-based appointments of officials at the senior level to improve governance administration processes and combat rampant corruption. Second, it has tried to improve the security situation through better intelligence sharing and coordination, by going on the offensive in dealing with the insurgency, and by initiating a peace process in the hope of reducing the armed conflict with the Taliban. Third, it is attempting to bring in more government revenue, mostly through tapping the potential for regional energy, trade and transportation.

Improving the government apparatus

Improving the quality of human capital in the government apparatus has proved a difficult task for two reasons. First, the campaign funders and power brokers who supported Ashraf Ghani and particularly Abdullah Abdullah expected to be given high level government posts in return for their support, but the power-sharing agreement between Ghani and Abdullah forced them to 'share' the appointments to such posts. Second, in the Afghan

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Survey of the Afghan People, 2015, in which 89.9% of the population surveyed stated that corruption was a daily reality of life in 2015, the highest percentage since 2004. Corruption perceptions have grown steadily since 2013.

[7] Chayes, S., *Thieves of State: Why Corruption Threatens Global Security* (W.W. Norton & Co.: New York, 2015).

context a political culture of appointing ethnic and tribal patrons prevails over merit. Both these factors delayed the formation of a cabinet, which had still not been completed by the end of 2015, despite a NUG commitment to do so within 45 days of the inauguration. At least the 'usual suspects'—the ministers the Karzai Administration permitted to rotate from one ministry to another—have largely been ousted. A number of younger and more promising officials have been introduced, but at the provincial government level the majority of the posts have not yet been filled.

In seeking to gradually transform the Afghan rentier state of the Karzai years—not the first in modern Afghan political history—President Ghani took a strong stance against corruption. In practice, however, only limited measures have been taken, including the removal of several incompetent officials from key leadership positions, and some cost-cutting and increased transparency and oversight in a number of procurement processes. A clear anti-corruption strategy has not been developed and the NUG will need to do more to reward performance, improve loyalty and punish corrupt practices. Parliament in particular is considered to be a hotbed of corruption.[8] Hence, even if the peace talks are successful, political (dis)interests, corruption and inefficiency would remain major obstacles to sustainable development in the country.

Security and peace talks

The conflict in Afghanistan represents a complex clash between the interests and ideologies held by the Afghan Government supported by the international community, and various non-state armed groups such as the Taliban, its subsidiary the Haqqani network, the emerging Islamic State of Khorasan (IS-K) and various other organized and often violent groups.[9] The conflict between the Afghan Government and the Taliban has become a zero-sum game that fails to deliver victory for either side. This dynamic, if left as it is, could continue for many years to come. While the Taliban does not have the means to topple the government or repeat the successes of the 1990s, it consumes much of the government's focus and revenue, and is a drag on socio-economic progress.

State security and human security are interlinked. A government that actively pursues sustainable socio-economic development and works to increase the transparency and efficiency of the government apparatus is likely to receive strong support, and in turn can demand taxes with which

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[8] Kolenda, C. D., 'Dismantling the world's top kleptocracy is a key challenge for Afghanistan', *Foreign Policy*, 20 Oct. 2014.

[9] IS-K is a branch of the militant Islamic State (IS) group active in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The IS-K announced its formation in January 2015 with the intention of expanding the IS caliphate by the creation of a 'Khorasan Province', a historical region incorporating parts of modern-day Afghanistan and Pakistan. On IS, also see chapter 2, section II, in this volume.

to invest in public goods. President Ghani wasted no time in his efforts to rebuild the country and sustain political stability. He visited China, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the UAE shortly after he was inaugurated to seek support for the peace process, and took several bold steps to normalize the historically tense relationship with Pakistan, which had deteriorated under President Karzai.

Nonetheless, clashes between the government and the Taliban escalated in 2015. The Taliban made substantial gains in 2014–15: nearly half of the country's districts were rated by the United Nations as 'high risk' or 'extreme risk' in October 2015—the most at any point of the conflict since 2001.[10] From its traditional stronghold in the south of the country the Taliban has now again expanded in nearly all directions from Kabul.

Attacks have increased and several hundred Taliban were able to capture the northern city of Kunduz in September 2015, the country's fifth largest, for some 15 days.[11] This showed that the fighting had moved closer to civilians in cities and dealt a serious psychological blow to the NUG—it was the first time that the Taliban had been able to capture a large city since the international intervention in 2001. It also proved that the Taliban was stronger in the north than was previously assumed. The capture of Kunduz indicated the need for international forces to remain in Afghanistan to provide tactical and air support. The offensive also revealed the Taliban's true colours: rather than seeking order and sharia as it claims, residents of Kunduz were subject to violence, torture, killing, rape, looting and expulsion during the few days that the Taliban controlled the city.[12]

Official peace talks—preceded by a run of unofficial exchanges between the Afghan Government and Taliban representatives in China, Norway and Qatar—commenced in early July 2015 when Pakistan hosted the first round in Murree, near Islamabad.[13] Representatives from both the Afghan Government and the Taliban attended. A second round of talks stalled when it was announced that Taliban spiritual leader Mullah Mohammed Omar had died, albeit two years earlier. While Mullah Omar's right hand, Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansour, is believed to have led the Taliban ever since, there is considerable doubt about the degree of control he has over their rank and file.[14] There appears to be serious factional infighting among the Taliban, and not all factions support Mullah Mansour or his apparent openness to

[10] Nordland, R. and Goldstein, J., 'Afghan Taliban's reach is widest since 2001, UN says', *New York Times*, 11 Oct. 2015.

[11] 'Poor leadership blamed for Kunduz fall: report', Al Jazeera, 21 Nov. 2015.

[12] Amnesty International, 'Afghanistan: harrowing accounts emerge of the Taliban's reign of terror in Kunduz', 1 Oct. 2015.

[13] 'The one-eyed man who was king', *The Economist*, 1 Aug. 2015.

[14] Miller, M. E., 'The new Taliban leader whose shadow hangs over Afghan peace talks', *Washington Post*, 10 Jan. 2016.

peace talks.[15] A number of disgruntled members are believed to have opted for IS-K, which is gaining a foothold in the eastern province of Nangarhar. It is currently unclear if, and if so, which factions of the Taliban will be represented in the upcoming peace talks.

It was the continuing violence and worries over possible increased insecurity throughout the region that led to the formation of the QCG. The peace process envisages three major components: pre-negotiation, direct peace talks and implementation. The NUG hopes for a swift process, but it is difficult to make any estimate at this stage.

Improving the economy

Doubts about the effectiveness and sustainability of the NUG, and the outcome of the peace process, as well as disappointment in the pace of economic reform created a dismal business climate in 2015. The departure of the vast majority of international troops and the downscaling of the diplomatic and international development community hit the economy hard. Economic growth in 2015 was forecast to be 1.9 per cent, not enough to maintain current income levels when set against the population's 2.7 per cent growth rate.[16] About half a million new entrants join the labour market each year.[17]

Unemployment has contributed to an erosion of NUG legitimacy, a situation exacerbated by the NUG's poor track record on economic reform, particularly of the private sector. Indeed, the World Bank's *Ease of Doing Business* ranking for Afghanistan in 2015 was 175 out of 189 economies.[18] Access to economic resources remains highly unequal, and achieving SDG 1, 'to ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources by 2030', will require a tremendous effort.[19]

The NUG will need to address the ailing private sector in parallel with the peace process—putting all its eggs in the peace process basket would be too risky if it does not provide the anticipated outcome.[20] To date, however, the NUG has focused on large regional connectivity and pipeline projects, such as TAPI, in order to boost the wider region's stake in a stable Afghanistan and to generate government revenue. Whether this strategy will work remains to be seen.

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[15] Miller (note 14).

[16] Ghiasy, R., Zhou, J. and Hallgren, H., *Afghanistan's Private Sector: Status and Ways Forward* (SIPRI and International Council of Swedish Industry: Stockholm, Oct. 2015), p. 27.

[17] Afghan Central Statistics Office, National Risk and Vulnerability Survey, 2011–12 (CSO: Kabul, 2014).

[18] World Bank, Ease of Doing Business in Afghanistan, 2015–16, [n.d.].

[19] See the discussion on the SDGs in section I of this chapter.

[20] Ghiasy, Zhou and Hallgren (note 16).

The human security situation

Human security and insecurity have relative connotations: to the average Afghan insecurity prevails as manifest in terrorist attacks, organized crime, domestic violence and chronic unemployment. What is common among all Afghan people regardless of context is the intrinsic desire for security and predictability, but 8.1 million of them remain in need of acute humanitarian assistance.[21]

Social division and poverty have taken on a more sophisticated expression since 2001. Perpetual insecurity, extremism and poverty have exposed social, ethnic, political and economic vulnerabilities, and broken traditional safety nets and coping mechanisms. Gender-related discrimination and violence are rife, as both a direct means and an indirect result of conflict. Human insecurity is also a direct consequence of protracted conflict, particularly by improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and suicide attacks, as well as targeted and unlawful killings, and sexual violence. Challenges remain plentiful in the broadest terms of human security: freedom from fear, freedom from want and freedom to live in dignity.[22] At the UN General Assembly on 25 September 2015, Abdullah Abdullah correctly pointed out that Afghanistan first needs to work on the remainder of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), but stated nonetheless that there is strong political will within the NUG to attempt to achieve the SDGs by 2030.[23] As concluded in section I, however, Afghanistan belongs to a select list of states where fragility, emergencies and violence coincide, and which have furthest to go to deliver peace and the SDG agenda.

Next, this section looks in more detail at Afghanistan's human security status, based on seven core components: economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security and political security.[24]

Economic security

Economic security requires an assured basic income—usually from productive and remunerative work, or in the last resort from some publicly financed safety net, neither of which is a reality in Afghanistan.[25] Against a backdrop of protracted conflict, Afghanistan's economy has suffered a systemic crash, making the country one of the poorest in the world—despite more money

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[21] Humanitarian Response (note 4).

[22] Mack, A., 'A Signifier of Shared Values', *Security Dialogue,* vol. 35, no. 3 (Sep. 2004); and United Nations, General Assembly, *2005 World Summit Outcome,* A/RES/60/1, 24 Oct. 2005.

[23] Afghan Government, Office of the Chief Executive, Transcript of His Excellency Dr Abdullah Abdullah, Statement at the United Nations General Assembly, 28 Sep. 2015.

[24] As defined by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Human Development Report* (Oxford University Press: New York, 1994).

[25] UNDP (note 24), p. 25.

being spent on the country by the USA than was provided after World War II to the whole of Europe under the Marshall Plan.[26] Economic insecurity remains widespread in Afghanistan and the reach of the country's young formal economic institutions is limited.[27] An estimated 80–90 per cent of all economic activity is still informal.[28] The inflated international contracts of the 2002–14 period are largely gone, and unemployment is rampant. Only one-third of the working age population was considered economically active in 2015 according to surveys conducted by the Afghan Central Statistics Office.[29]

Some 36 per cent of the population is living below the poverty line.[30] Investment protection and labour rights are hardly enforced, and thus the dependency culture on immediate family members for survival remains in place. The vast majority of the labour force, 60 per cent in urban Afghanistan and nearly 70 per cent in rural Afghanistan, is employed in the agricultural sector—and many of these entities are family-run and operate at subsistence level.[31] In the absence of advanced technological tools, many of these entities remain vulnerable to the weather and have been becoming gradually less productive.[32] The NUG will need to come up with ingenious and bold economic measures to improve economic security and work towards eradication of extreme poverty as defined in the SDGs in the next 15 years.

Food security

Since the international community's intervention in 2001, the influx of returning Afghans, mostly from Iran and Pakistan, and rapid population growth have led to food insecurity in many parts of the country. About one in four, or 7.3 million Afghans currently experience moderate food insecurity (consuming less than 2100 kilocalories per day) with the problem particularly acute among rural and nomadic populations.[33] At the peak of the lean season, a period of little or no harvest, the number of Afghans facing severe food insecurity is 1.5 million, or some 5.9 per cent of the population.[34]

[26] $103.4 bn to the Marshall plan's recipients over the course of four years vs. $104 bn to Afghanistan from late 2001 to mid-July 2014 (both figures in real dollar terms and corrected for inflation), Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress*, (SIGAR: Arlington, VA, 30 July 2014), p. 5.

[27] SIGAR (note 26).

[28] Ghiasy, Zhou and Hallgren (note 16), p. 11.

[29] Afghan Government, *Kabul Province: Socio-demographic and Economic Survey Highlights* (Afghan Central Statistics Office (CSO): Kabul, 2015), p. 6.

[30] Afghan Government, *National Risk and Vulnerability Survey, 2011–12* (Afghan CSO: Kabul, 2014).

[31] See Afghan Ministry of Economy, 'Afghanistan's job challenge', [n.d.].

[32] Afghan National Environmental Protection Agency, 'Afghanistan initial national communication to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change', 2012.

[33] United Nations, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), 'Seasonal food insecurity on the rise in Afghanistan', 10 Sep. 2015.

[34] FAO (note 33).

One million children and one in ten pregnant and lactating women are malnourished.[35] Thus, meeting SDG 2, to 'end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture', will be highly demanding.

In the absence of sufficient domestic produce to supply markets, demand continues to be predominantly met through imports of staple crops, mostly from China, Iran, Kazakhstan and Pakistan, or by international humanitarian aid. Food imports are primarily restricted to distribution in urban centres. Agricultural sector reform has had a slow start, and many international aid programmes have been uncoordinated, short-sighted or too scattered to have any demonstrable sustainable impact. There has been too little investment in cold storage, greenhouses and improved post-harvest processing facilities, which would make a significant difference to the country's domestic contribution to food security.[36] Moreover, for the most vulnerable Afghans, producing for markets is much less appealing when they are unable to guarantee basic sustenance for themselves.[37]

Health security

Health security aims to guarantee minimum protection from disease and unhealthy lifestyles. Afghanistan's health status is one of the worst in the world; it is one of only two countries (the other is Pakistan) that remains polio-endemic.[38] The Afghan population is also still prone to a range of other vaccine-preventable diseases such as tuberculosis.[39] According to the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), 55 per cent of Afghan children under the age of five cannot develop to their physical and mental potential because of chronic nutritional deficiency.[40] Estimates in 2013 indicated that there are 1.3–1.6 million illicit drug users in Afghanistan, and that 2.65 per cent of the population uses opiates.[41] One nationwide toxicological survey suggests that these figures could have nearly doubled in 2015.[42]

Decades of conflict, neglect and underfunding have seriously affected the country's health care infrastructure. Despite some progress, heath-related developmental efforts by the international community have been uncoor-

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[35] Humanitarian Response (note 4).

[36] Ghiasy, Zhou and Hallgren (note 16).

[37] Kantor, P. and Pain, A., 'Rethinking poverty reduction in Afghanistan', *Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU)*, Policy Note Series (Oct. 2011).

[38] World Health Organization (WHO), Poliomyelitis, Fact sheet no. 114 (Oct. 2015).

[39] WHO, Afghanistan [n.d.], <http://www.who.int/countries/afg/en/>.

[40] UNICEF, Afghanistan: Health and nutrition, [n.d.], <http://www.unicef.org/afghanistan/health_nutrition.html>.

[41] Afghan Ministry of Counter Narcotics, Afghanistan Drug Report 2013.

[42] Rasmussen, S. E., 'Cold turkey and shackles: How Afghan "clinic" helps drug addicts', *The Guardian*, 1 June 2015.

dinated and sometimes completely detached from national institutes and policies.[43] More than 80 per cent of the population lives in underdeveloped rural areas, and health care provision in rural Afghanistan remains limited. For example, only 27 per cent of rural Afghans have access to clean drinking water and even fewer to safe sanitation.[44] While statistics tend to differ, health care facilities are unequally distributed across the country, with approximately 40 per cent of the population living in areas where there is no public health service coverage.[45] According to USAID, some 57 per cent of the population lives within one hour's walk of a medical facility, but the quality of these facilities and the availability of medical staff and medicines varies considerably.[46] Furthermore, lack of infrastructure, poor information systems, risk of organized crime and the insurgency make travel to health facilities difficult, and chronic shortages of skilled health providers, especially midwives and female nurses, pose huge problems.[47]

Environmental security

Afghanistan is prone to earthquakes, flooding, drought, landslides and avalanches. Protracted conflict in Afghanistan and poor governance of natural resources have considerably degraded the country's environmental resource base. Unrestrained grazing and illegal logging have worsened drought conditions and reduced agricultural productivity. Vulnerability to natural disasters, especially prolonged drought, has also limited access to water and irrigation. This has exacted a heavy toll on the economy and development in Afghanistan, given its predominantly rural population and the dominance of agriculture and livestock-based livelihoods. The earthquake of 26 October 2015 left more than 127 000 people in need of some form of humanitarian assistance, in addition to the 200 000 people affected by natural disasters on average each year.[48] Given the country's current governance capacity and the prioritization of other more pressing challenges, it is highly unlikely that the targets in SDG 15 (Sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, halt biodiversity loss) will be met by 2030.

Personal security

Personal insecurity in Afghanistan derives from organized crime and local inter-group conflict among militias, as well as the anti-government insurgency by the Taliban and the relatively new IS-K. The United Nations Assis-

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[43] Ghiasy, Zhou and Hallgren (note 16).
[44] United States Agency for International Development (USAID), 'Afghanistan: rural water, sanitation and hygiene', Fact sheet, Mar. 2016.
[45] Humanitarian Response (note 4).
[46] USAID, 'Afghanistan: health', 28 Mar. 2016, <https://www.usaid.gov/afghanistan/health>.
[47] FAO (note 33).
[48] Humanitarian Response (note 4).

tance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) recorded 11 002 civilian casualties (3545 deaths and 7457 injured) in 2015. This exceeded by 4 per cent the previous record level of civilian casualties in 2014.[49]

Violence is compounded by the widespread availability of arms in the country, with an estimated 2 million weapons in circulation.[50] Non-organized crime, such as disputes over land or business partnerships, is also pervasive, as is household-level violence. Civilian deaths since the 2001 intervention as a result of conflict are estimated at over 26 000, sustaining the country's classification as a dangerous place.[51] In 2013–14, about one in four people had either experienced violence or knew a family member or friend who had done so, much of which involved fatalities.[52] As the NUG struggles to reduce violence emanating from terrorism and organized crime, and security and economic growth prospects remain uncertain, Afghans continue to attempt to leave the country. Nearly 10 per cent of the Afghan population, 2.59 million, had become refugees by the end of 2014.[53] Moreover, as a result largely of conflict and natural disasters, Afghanistan hosted at least 847 872 internally displaced persons as of July 2015.[54]

Community security

Afghanistan's Shia Hazara minority has long suffered ill-treatment and persecution. A number of kidnappings and murders of Hazaras in 2015 raised fears that this minority is being deliberately targeted. There is evidence that IS-K was behind a number of the attacks, which seems likely given its track record of targeting Shia in other territories.[55] There is also a belief that regional and extra-regional powers, especially Iran, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, are involved in fermenting community unrest in the country.[56] Afghanistan is an arena for the enduring rivalry between India and Pakistan, the latter also providing sanctuary for the Taliban. Although

[49] UNAMA and United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR), *Afghanistan Annual Report 2015: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict*, Feb. 2016.

[50] United Nations, Security Council, 'First report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Implementation Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) concerning the Taliban and associated individuals and entities', S/2012/683, 30 May 2012, para. 19.

[51] Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs of Brown University, 'Costs of war: Afghan civilians', <http://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/costs/human/civilians/afghan>, accessed 28 Aug. 2015.

[52] Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), *Between rhetoric and reality: The ongoing struggle to access healthcare in Afghanistan* (MSF: Brussels, Feb. 2014).

[53] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 'Worldwide displacement hits all-time high as war and persecution increase', 18 June 2015.

[54] Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, Afghanistan Data Site, [n.d.].

[55] Jacinto, L., 'Has the caliphate come to Kabul?', *Foreign Policy*, 23 Mar. 2015.

[56] See e.g. Steinberg, G. and Woermer, N., *Sources of Tension in Afghanistan and Pakistan: A Regional Perspective Exploring Iran & Saudi Arabia's Interests in Afghanistan & Pakistan, Stakeholders or Spoilers—A Zero Sum Game? Part 1: Saudi Arabia*, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), Apr. 2013.

evidence is unclear, it is believed that both Iran and Saudi Arabia continue to interfere in Afghanistan through semi-governmental organizations and other entities.[57] It remains to be seen how the peace process and the lifting of economic sanctions on Iran might affect this dynamic.

Political security

While human rights have been drafted into the Afghan Constitution, even the most basic human rights are still not guaranteed. Uncertainty surrounding the country's triple political, military and economic transition in 2014, along with growing pressure from Taliban insurgents and the emergence of IS-K contributed to a further decline in overall respect for human rights throughout the country. This was embodied in indiscriminate attacks that killed civilians, impunity for abuses of civilians, including journalists, by Afghan security forces, and systemic threats to women's rights, which is in direct contradiction of the targets in SDG 5 'to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls'. While the NUG reaffirmed its commitment to human rights it failed to protect either of these two constituencies. The situation is particularly ominous for women as corruption, impunity and weak law enforcement continue to undermine their rights. Abductions, torture and extrajudicial executions by Afghan military and police forces continued in 2015.[58]

Conclusions

Despite a number of security setbacks and economic stagnation, 2015 witnessed some tentative, NUG-initiated progress in security and regional economic connectivity that, in theory, have the potential to become constructive drivers for change. However, Afghanistan has a long way to go to offer sustainable security in any of the seven domains of human security or to come even close to achieving many of the SDGs by 2030. Human security in Afghanistan is not just about ending war and conflict, but facilitating options for the Afghan populace to, at the broadest level, mitigate insecurity and increase predictability. This means that even if the ongoing peace process results in an end to conflict with Afghanistan's principal violent non-state entity, the Taliban, the current government apparatus will still have to 'cleanse', reorganize and introduce merit at all levels. Furthermore, clear strategies for economic growth with measurable objectives will be required. The government apparatus will need to increase its commitment, efficiency and pace towards a wide-ranging reform agenda as lingering human insecu-

[57] Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (note 56).
[58] Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2016* (Human Rights Watch: New York, 2016).

rity is likely to affect political stability. In short, the NUG needs demonstrable evidence of progress.

To aid this process, international humanitarian support will be welcomed by the Afghans, provided that it is coordinated among all international and national stakeholders. It will need to respect Afghan sovereignty and not bypass the NUG. It should be remembered, however, that international humanitarian relief and development cannot resolve the fundamental threats to state and human security in Afghanistan. Development ultimately comes from within the state. An effective and increasingly clean and inclusive NUG, working with national stakeholders and international supporters, is the key to national development and stability, including attempts to address the SDG agenda.