

- 1. Natural resources and conflict in Sudan**
- 2. Addressing environmental issues in a post-conflict situation: The case of Afghanistan**

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## Declaration

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this assignment is my own original work and that I have not previously in the entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

Signature.....

Date.....



## **ABSTRACT:**

Both Afghanistan and Sudan have experienced extended periods of war and violent conflict. Sudan has been engulfed in a nearly continuous and bitter civil war since independence in 1956. Afghanistan has been in a state of conflict since the Soviet invasion in 1979. Both nations are also among the poorest and least developed in the world. The article on Sudan addresses the interlinkages that exist between conflict and natural resources and how access to and unequal distribution of natural resources have triggered and fuelled violent conflict. In the case of Afghanistan, the article looks at the reasons for US military intervention in 2001 and analyses the reconstruction and development programmes devised by the international community in order to rebuild the country. Based on these, the article looks at the potential for creating a sustainable society in Afghanistan and putting in place an effective system of environmental governance.

Although it is recognised that both countries have managed to address some of the causes of conflict, the articles also state that in both cases, the agreements that were signed between the warring parties are far from being comprehensive. This is illustrated by the fact that in Afghanistan, conflict with the Taliban has increased dramatically in recent months, and in Sudan, by the still ongoing conflict in Darfur. It is argued that in both countries the potential for promoting long-term sustainable development is limited not unrelated, in large measure, to the nature of the development agendas being imposed by external decision-makers. Financial institutions and other international development actors have played an instrumental role in devising these agendas. They are promoting development strategies mostly based on neo-liberal policies and reliant on market forces, despite the fact that these policies have, in the past, often failed to trigger economic growth and alleviate poverty. Finally, while issues relating to the management of natural resources, particularly those of global and strategic importance, receive a fair amount of attention in the development plans, environmental protection as such, is often lacking political and financial commitment.

## **OPSOMMING:**

Afghanistan en Soedan het albei uitgebreide tydperke van gewelddadige konflik en oorlog beleef. Soedan is sedert onafhanklikwording in 1956 verswelg deur 'n feitlik voortdurende en bittere burgeroorlog. In Afghanistan heers daar sedert die Sowjet-inval in 1979 grootskaalse konflik. Albei lande word onder die armste en swakste ontwikkelde lande ter wêreld gereken. Die artikel oor Soedan spreek die interskakeling aan wat daar tussen konflik en natuurlike hulpbronne bestaan en ook hoe toegang tot en ongelyke verspreiding van natuurlike hulpbronne gewelddadige konflik laat ontstaan en bevorder het. In die geval van Afghanistan bekyk die artikel die redes vir militêre ingryping deur die VSA in 2001 en analiseer die rekonstruksie en ontwikkelingsprogramme wat deur die internasionale gemeenskap opgestel is om dié land te herbou. Met hierdie as basis, bekyk die artikel vervolgens die potensiaal vir die vestiging van 'n volhoubare gemeenskap in Afghanistan en die instelling van 'n doeltreffende stelsel vir omgewingsbestuur.

Hoewel daar toegegee word dat albei lande daarin geslaag het om sommige van die oorsake vir die konflik aan te spreek, word in die artikels gemeld dat in albei gevalle die ooreenkomste wat deur die strydende partye onderteken is geensins volledig is nie. Dié word geïllustreer deur die feit dat die konflik met die Taliban in Afghanistan die afgelope maande drasties toegeneem het en in Soedan is daar die voortslepende geweld in Darfoer. Daar word geredeneer dat in albei lande die potensiaal vir die bevordering van langtermyn volhoubare ontwikkeling beperk is. Dit is deels weens die aard van die agendas vir ontwikkeling, wat deur eksterne besluitnemers afgedwing word. Finansiële instellings en ander internasionale ontwikkeling-rolspelers het 'n verneme aandeel gehad aan die opstel van dié agendas. Hulle bevorder ontwikkelingstrategieë, wat meesal gerig is op neo-liberale beleide en wat op markkragte steun, ondanks die feit dat dié beleide in die verlede dikwels ondoeltreffend was om ekonomiese groei aan die gang te kry en armoede te verlig. Ten slotte, onderwyl sake met betrekking tot die bestuur van natuurlike hulpbronne – veral daardie wat van globale en strategiese belang is – 'n taamlike mate van aandag in die ontwikkelingsplanne geniet, is daar dikwels 'n gebrek aan politieke en finansiële toegewydheid wat omgewingsbewaring betref.

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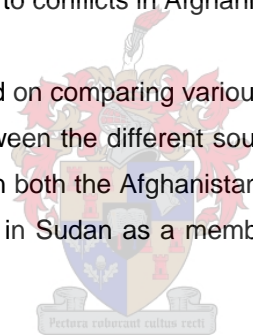


## Research methodology

My research process has mainly been based on the analysis and interpretation of a large body of written documents including: newspaper articles, academic journal papers, books, conference outcomes or official governmental and inter-governmental reports. The research methodology used to write this thesis is thus mainly qualitative in nature.

The research process has also mostly followed an inductive logic and reasoning based on facts. This process has helped to introduce certain theories and explanations (e.g. 'resource curse', potential role of Islam, 'rational bad behaviour') regarding the interlinkages that exist between natural resources and the occurrence of conflicts in the case of the Sudan article; and the potential for addressing environmental issues in a post-conflict country in the case of the article on Afghanistan. The research methodology has largely been interpretive relying on the exploration of relevant documents and their understanding so as to build an overall picture and representation of the events that lead to conflicts in Afghanistan and Sudan.

The research method has been based on comparing various written sources and the identification of gaps, contradictions and links between the different sources. This method had enabled me to derive a general and holistic picture in both the Afghanistan and Sudan cases. Part of this overall picture is also derived from my work in Sudan as a member of the United Nations' assessment team and is thus empirical in nature.



Overall, the literature read covers most aspects of the issues being discussed in both articles, and comes from a variety of reliable sources. It also moves from general aspects to specific case studies, from the global to the local level, and from an international to a national perspective, thus ensuring an adequate level of objectivity. The main shortcoming stems from the unreliability and paucity of statistics and data with regard to the environment and natural resources, particularly in the case of Afghanistan.

## Summary of requirements for publication in Third World Quarterly:

### Manuscript Preparation

**Word Count:** Articles should normally be no more than 8,000 words, including footnotes and abstract. It is the author's responsibility to ensure length limits.

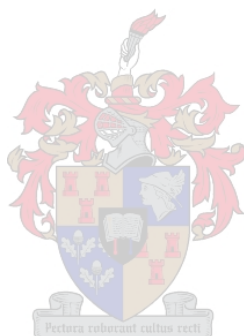
**Abstract:** Articles must include an abstract of approximately 150 words outlining the aims, scope and conclusions (but not containing sentences from the article).

### Presentation:

- **Spelling:** British rather than American spelling should be used.  
Use the s-suffix: for example, civilise, civilisation rather than civilize, civilization.  
Foreign words absorbed into English do not take a diacritical mark. Other foreign words are italicised.
- **Acronyms and abbreviations:** All acronyms for national agencies, examinations, etc., should be spelled out the first time they are introduced in text or references. Thereafter the acronym can be used if appropriate - set in small caps. No need to spell out GNP, GDP, IMF.  
The following should use full caps, not small caps: USA, PRC, FRG, PRK, DK and G7, EU, UN.  
All periods to be deleted from contractions and abbreviations: PhD, BSc, Dr, St, Ltd, km, BC, am, pm. Try to edit ie and eg out of the text as far as possible.
- **Punctuation:** Punctuation should follow the British style, e.g. 'quotes precede punctuation'.  
Single 'quotes' are used for quotations not double "quotes", unless "within" another quote'.  
Em-dashes are used for parenthetical statements and should be clearly indicated in manuscripts by way of either a clear dash ( - ) or a triple hyphen (---).  
En-dashes are used for number ranges and the word pairings such as Iran-Iraq war and North-South relations (but not Anglo-Boer war or Sino-Soviet relations). They should be indicated in manuscripts by a double hyphen (--).
- **Dates:** Dates should be as follows: 5 August 1966. For decades write 1980s, no apostrophe.  
Centuries are written in full in lower case: sixteenth century, nineteenth-century novel.
- **Numbers:** Numbers from one to nine should be written out in full: figures should be used for numbers above 10.  
Percentages and decimals are written in figures; per cent is two words. Ages are written in words. Fractions are written out: one-half, three-quarters. Label lists as 1., 2., etc.  
Money: follow the same guidelines, using currency symbol with figures. eg, one pound, \$3.50, two Australian dollars, £245, DM20, Rs1 million, five Japanese yen.
- **Endnotes:** Notes should be marked clearly in the text at a point of punctuation, and listed consecutively at the end of the article. They should **not** be listed at the bottom of each relevant page. Avoid over-numbering references: if one source is being cited for several references within a paragraph, number this only once at the end of the paragraph. The use of notes in general should be kept to a minimum. Authors' names should be abbreviated to initials and surname in the footnotes. (Bibliographical references should always be given as notes: separate bibliographies are not published.)  
*Books:* author, title, place of publication, publisher, date, page numbers, Eg: J S Kirk, Middle East on Trial, London: Bodley Head, 1977, pp. 3-9.  
*Journal articles:* author, title of article, name of journal, volume number, issue number in brackets, year, page numbers, Eg: B Rubin, 'Drowning in the Gulf', Foreign Policy, 69(4), 1987-88, pp 120-134; **Chapters within books:** J Birks, 'Middle East Labour' in Middle East Today, S Sinclair (ed), London, Frank Cass, 1987, pp 28-36.

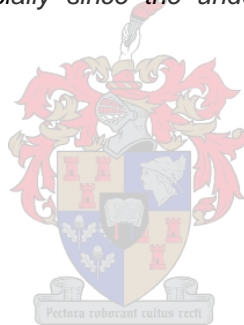
*Unpublished theses and Mimeographs* also receive full references including the name of the appropriate institution. For newspaper references, give the author, title, name or paper, town in brackets, date of issue and page numbers.

- **Titles and Subheadings:** Titles should be kept short. Brief sub-headings are encouraged and should be used at suitable points throughout the text to indicate major divisions in the argument. Third World Quarterly reserves the right to alter titles in consultation with the author.



# Natural resources and conflict in Sudan

**ABSTRACT:** *Sudan has been at war for most of its modern history. The conflict has often been presented as one between an Arab/Muslim north and an African/Christian south. While ethnicity and religion have played a role, the conflict has mainly been fought over natural resources. The politico-economic framework in which natural resources are being exploited and distributed is mostly responsible for triggering and fuelling Sudan's numerous conflicts. The successive Sudanese governments and the rebel movements have been unable and frequently unwilling to find sustainable solutions to the conflict, and to address its underlying causes. After five decades of nearly uninterrupted conflict, a Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed in early 2005. This peace accord is however far from comprehensive, and fighting still continues in various parts of the country. Consequently, it is rather hazardous at this point in time to predict a peaceful and sustainable future for Sudan, especially since the underlying causes of conflict still prevail throughout the country.*





## Dar al Harb: Land of War

Mention Sudan and images of war, famine and drought will come to mind. For most people, Sudan is associated with human misery and suffering. In fact the word 'Sudan' stems from the Arabic *bilad as-Sudan* or land of the blacks. The term originally applied to the broad belt of sub-Saharan Africa stretching from the Red Sea to the Atlantic Ocean. Nowadays, the name refers solely to the Republic of Sudan, the largest state in Africa and one of its most troubled and conflict-ridden countries.<sup>1</sup>

For most of its modern history, and in particular, since independence in 1956, Sudan has been plagued by conflict and has become a 'perfect' example of a 'seemingly intractable and endless civil war'.<sup>2</sup> Although, a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed in January 2005, between the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), ending a 21-year civil war between North and South, this agreement is far from comprehensive. So far, the CPA has brought no peace dividend to either the Darfur region in western Sudan or to the eastern parts of the country where conflict and unrest continue unabated.<sup>3</sup> Even in the South, most people 'remain deeply distrustful of the central government, and many are sceptical about the real prospects for long term peace in a united Sudan'.<sup>4</sup> In short, and despite the signing of the CPA, if the dividends of peace do not rapidly become tangible for a majority of Sudanese people, the situation might well revert to civil war as has been the case before.

The various Sudanese conflicts have over the last five decades claimed the lives of an estimated two million people as a result of fighting and related starvation and disease. Some four million people have also been displaced either internally or to neighbouring countries. Although the entire country has been affected by this violence, the South has been the primary target and has suffered most in terms of loss of human lives and destruction of infrastructure and resources. This state of affairs partly explains the northern 'Arab' characterisation and perception of the 'African' south as *dar al harb* or land of war.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, northern Sudanese call their homeland, *dar es islam* or land of peace. This dual perception is nonetheless rather misleading and while it is true that the southern part of the country has in the past borne the brunt of the conflict, the north has also been severely impacted, although possibly in a more indirect way. The economic, social and environmental costs of the civil war, while unevenly distributed, have adversely affected the country as a whole and have been a source of suffering for the vast majority of the population. The Darfur region, which is administratively part of the North, has since 2003 become the latest victim in the country's long history of civil wars. The conflict in Darfur has claimed the lives of at least 200,000 people and an estimated two million Darfurians have been displaced.<sup>6</sup>

## **Division, diversity and marginalisation**

Sudan's civil war between North and South has been the longest conflict in Africa. The first phase started in 1955 just before formal independence and was settled in 1972. This was followed by ten years of tentative peace until the second phase was triggered in 1983 and eventually came to an end in early 2005. During the 50 years of independence, both the democratically elected politicians and the military dictators who have alternatively ruled the country from Khartoum have been 'equally inept at resolving Sudan's basic problems' <sup>7</sup> and establishing a long lasting peace.

Civil war in Sudan has often been characterised as a battle opposing an Arab Muslim north to an African Christian south. While some of the sources of conflict can be traced back to the religious and ethnic differences between north and south, one needs to look beyond these obvious dualities to understand the various causes that triggered and sustained the conflict for such a long period.<sup>8</sup> I will argue throughout this paper that the way in which natural resources are managed, controlled and distributed within the Sudanese society, has played and continues to play a crucial role in triggering and fuelling Sudan's many conflicts. I will also make it clear that it is not the natural environment or ecological changes as such that make people resort to violence, but that it is the way in which the relationship between people and their environment is managed - by definition a social process, often manipulated by the political sphere - that explains why conflicts occur and are sustained.<sup>9</sup>

As mentioned above, war in Sudan cannot solely be blamed on the Muslim/Arab, Christian/African divide that partially characterises Sudan. This split, while certainly relevant, particularly in the early stages of the conflict, has over the last few decades become more and more of a stereotype popularised by the media and those in a position to gain from this crude distinction. The reality is much more complex. About 65 per cent of Sudanese are Africans, while 35 per cent are Arabs. Over 70 per cent of the population is Muslim, of whom a large percentage is of African descent. The remaining people follow traditional religions, with nearly 10 per cent being Christian. Up to two million originally southern Sudanese live in the north, further diversifying the picture.<sup>10</sup> Adding to this ethnic and religious diversity, Sudan comprises about 700 tribes speaking more than 300 languages and dialects.<sup>11</sup> As with most African countries, Sudan is a colonial creation that amalgamates people and territories that have never previously been a coherent entity.

One division, which is relevant to the Sudanese conflict, is that which exists between a powerful and relatively wealthy centre based in and around the capital and a rather impoverished and marginalised periphery. With independence, and already in the decades that preceded self-

rule in 1956, Sudan saw the emergence and establishment of the so-called 'riverain Arabs', a mercantile class that managed to assume control of the centralised state and to successfully expand large-scale agriculture, while at the same time capturing southern and other peripheral resources.<sup>12</sup> The Arab/Islamic rulers based in Khartoum and in the central provinces exert, according to Deng, 'a political and economic hegemony over the marginalised social and cultural groups living in rural and outlying regions of the country'.<sup>13</sup> Since the signing of the 2005 peace agreement, members of the SPLM have been co-opted into this elite group, particularly from a political viewpoint. It should thus be clear that the conflict fault lines are not just running along a North/South divide but are present throughout the Sudanese society, separating a powerful core from a marginalised periphery. The southern part of the country is however, a particularly extreme case of marginalisation, lack of development and deep-rooted poverty, even in a country like Sudan where human development indicators are already among the lowest in the world.<sup>14</sup>

### **A tale of two rivers**

With an area covering approximately 2.5 million km<sup>2</sup>, Sudan is Africa's largest country, almost the size of India but with a population of only 35 to 40 million people.<sup>15</sup> Sudan's most prominent or best-known natural and geographical feature is the Nile River. It is through this legendary waterway that, since the times of ancient Egypt, external influence has reached Sudan, in particular its most isolated southern regions.<sup>16</sup> It is also along the Nile that the majority of the country's population and urban centres are concentrated, and where most of its uneven economic development is taking place. The capital Khartoum is located where the waters of the Blue and White Nile join each other, a sort of 'permanent way-station between the Arab world and tropical Africa'.<sup>17</sup> The Nile River, which could have acted as a unifying factor, has mainly been used by successive northern invaders - the Egyptians Pharaohs, the Mameluks, the Ottomans, and, in the nineteenth century, the British - to gain access to the South's vast natural resources, mainly timber, gold and ivory, as well as slaves. During British rule, the South, despite improved river navigation still remained largely inaccessible, and 'the [British] government was able only slowly to bring the vast region and its heterogeneous, non-Arab, non-Muslim population under control'.<sup>18</sup>

While there were certainly geographical and natural barriers to expanding colonial authority to the whole of Sudan, the major reason for keeping north and south Sudan separated was political in nature. The colonial government after having gained control of the south through military action imposed a different system of administration, known as the 'Southern Policy'. The main purpose of this policy was to try and eradicate all Muslim influence in the area. Christian missionary activities were encouraged and English became the lingua franca in the region. There were even suggestions of federating the south of Sudan with Uganda.<sup>19</sup> This policy of orchestrated division

lasted until 1947 'when London suddenly decided that Sudan's territorial integrity was more important than the separate development which they had so long encouraged'.<sup>20</sup> Consequently, the British fused the separately ruled regions and started slowly to devolve most decision-making powers to the northern Arab and Muslim elite. For the people in the south this meant that at the time of independence in 1956, political authority had merely been transferred from one master, the British, to another one, the Khartoum-based northern elite. The lingering and simmering animosity that existed between north and south soon caught fire and by 1963, there was fully-fledged civil war.<sup>21</sup> As already mentioned, Sudan's low and high intensity conflicts are still nowadays depicted as an ethnic and religious struggle despite the fact that most of the recent fighting has been over natural resources. As Suliman points out:

Few wars are ever fought in the name of their real causes: instead they are fought under old banners and old slogans, based on memories of past conflicts. Most fighters on both sides remain convinced that the war is all about ethnicity.<sup>22</sup>

Although some might assume that in such a vast country with a comparatively small population, resources would be sufficient to provide a livelihood to all the Sudanese people, this is not the case for various reasons. First, natural resources are unevenly distributed in geographical terms, with most of them being concentrated in the South. Second, inefficient and unsustainable natural resource management, combined with greed and ruthless profit-making, means that the country's resources are also unequally distributed in socio-economic terms.<sup>23</sup> In other words, a minority of Sudanese controls most of the resources and often exploits these on an unsustainable short-term basis, while the majority has only access to a limited and largely insufficient amount of resources. During the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium and following Sudan's independence, those inequalities and divisions became especially entrenched and glaring. During the colonial period, the country was largely shielded from outside economic influence and large parts of the population, particularly those living on the geographical fringes of the country, lived isolated from the outside world. While the north had witnessed some limited and embryonic form of modernisation during British rule, the south was left 'truly underdeveloped'.<sup>24</sup> Little has changed since independence and South Sudan is still today 'almost devoid of schools, hospitals and modern infrastructure'.<sup>25</sup>

At independence, Sudan lacked the major prerequisites for industrialisation, namely capital, technical and scientific expertise, as well as access to markets.<sup>26</sup> As a result, the Sudanese national bourgeoisie, now freed from colonial control, and after several failed attempts at industrialisation, shifted its focus to the extraction of natural resources. This exploitation of accessible natural resources was conducted 'in a manner so thoughtless and unscrupulous that it

soon endangered the peasant and pastoralist societies of northern Sudan'.<sup>27</sup> With the deepening of the international financial crisis in the late 1970s and the imposition of structural adjustment programmes upon Sudan in the early 1980s, the country found itself in an ever-worsening economic downward spiral. Pressure mounted on those in charge and in control of the country's main economic assets. Eventually, 'this meant a new expansion drive to exploit hitherto less accessible resources, mainly in southern Sudan'.<sup>28</sup> The armed struggle between north and south was rapidly becoming a competition for 'scarce' resources, a struggle to control natural resources with surplus value, of which oil became the latest addition when it was first discovered in 1978 in Bentiu in southern Sudan. This discovery triggered an attempt by the authorities in Khartoum to redraw the administrative boundaries so as to make the oilfields part of the north.<sup>29</sup> In 1983, civil war resumed between the SPLM and governmental forces, following the unilateral cancellation by the Sudanese government of the Addis Ababa peace agreement signed in 1972 with the SPLM.<sup>30</sup> From that point on it became even clearer that this was a conflict for resources control.

### **A harvest of dust**

An estimated 75 per cent of the Sudanese population is engaged in crop production and animal husbandry. Thus Sudan has the unenviable record of having the largest number of traditional farmers and pastoralist population in the world.<sup>31</sup> Despite the discovery of oil deposits and their large-scale exploitation in the early 1990s, the standard of living of the average Sudanese has yet to improve<sup>32</sup>, and agriculture remains the basis of Sudan's economy.

Already during the pre-independence period, the colonial administration promoted the development of large-scale mechanised agricultural schemes mainly in the country's mid-regions. The intensive exploitation of these areas resulted in extensive soil degradation and the expropriation of traditional farmers who historically inhabited the central regions of Sudan. Agricultural intensification and 'modernisation' was further developed and expanded following independence.<sup>33</sup> This move towards large-scale mechanised farming mainly benefited an established elite of large landowners. The rapid extension of cash crop agriculture dealt a severe blow to small-scale agro-pastoralism. It created a new category of landless and impoverished farmers. In the mid-1990s, the area under mechanised cultivation in the hands of largely absentee farmer-landlords comprised more than four million hectares and exceeded the 3.8 million hectares under traditional rainfed cultivation that supported the livelihoods of nearly three million small-scale farmers and their families.<sup>34</sup>

The type of commercial agriculture developed in Sudan's central regions has also been detrimental to the natural environment. The replacement of relatively benign small-scale methods

of exploitation by aggressive and intensive techniques, based on the assumption that natural resources are limitless, has gravely deteriorated the quality of the soils and their ability to sustain adequate agricultural production in the future.<sup>35</sup> One example is the Gezira Agricultural Scheme, a large-scale irrigation project started after World War I and officially opened in 1926. This massive agricultural scheme involved building numerous dams and around 10,000 kilometres of canalisation.<sup>36</sup> It was initially supposed to be limited to the irrigation of 300,000 feddans\*, but was steadily increased over the years, both by the British colonial rulers and the Sudanese government, to eventually cover 2.5 million feddans. The project has had major environmental and societal impacts over the years, including population displacement, deforestation, salinisation and the spread of water-borne diseases.<sup>37</sup> The Gezira scheme, although situated in the north of Sudan, also had right from its commencement, a negative effect on the South in that its massive financial costs hardly left any resources available for the development of the south and its people.<sup>38</sup> The Gezira Scheme and other similar agricultural projects not only proved disastrous from an environmental viewpoint, they also repeatedly failed to fulfil their economic and social development objectives. Gezira since its inception concentrated mainly on growing cotton for export purposes. But in the late 1950s repeated poor cotton harvests and declining world market prices meant that Sudan was unable to sell most of its cotton stocks particularly since it insisted on maintaining a fixed minimum price. This resulted in a serious depletion of the country's currency reserves, which were largely dependent on income from cotton sales.<sup>39</sup>

Until oil was discovered and exported in the late 1980s, Sudan remained essentially dependent on agricultural products for surplus revenue. Agricultural output and revenue varied greatly from year to year according to external demand and prices, as well as local climatic conditions. In the mid-1970s, the government of Sudan designed and launched a series of ambitious agricultural projects aimed at transforming Sudan into the 'breadbasket' of the Middle East.<sup>40</sup> Development projects similar to the Gezira Scheme were embarked upon. Among them was the Rahad Scheme wherein cotton, groundnuts and other crops were cultivated on 300,000 acres of irrigated land, and the Kenana sugar project designed to satisfy Sudanese demand and supply the Middle East region. Construction delays, inattention to existing works, poor maintenance, cost overruns and mismanagement meant that results were mixed. Throughout this period, Sudan's agricultural production declined despite the fact that the area under cultivation had been expanded by four million acres, and at Kenana, sugar cost more to produce than to import. In the early 1980s, the country's external debt stood at over \$3 billion.<sup>41</sup> As a result, the World Bank stopped providing financial assistance and the International Monetary Fund made emergency loans dependent on the adoption of strict structural adjustment measures. Successive devaluations, the end of subsidies on basic foodstuff, and a sharp decline in government funding

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\* 1 feddan equals 4200m<sup>2</sup> or 0.42 hectare

for education and health care, meant that most of the burden of economic decline fell on the poor, particularly in rural areas.<sup>42</sup>

All considered, Sudan's massive agricultural development projects created more problems than they solved. They triggered large-scale population movements and environmental deterioration. 'Modernisation' of the agricultural sector basically meant the horizontal expansion of mechanised agricultural practices, largely dependent on pesticides and chemical fertilisers, into marginal farming lands, pastures, forests, rangelands and other wildlife areas. Despite vast sums of money invested, agricultural output remained mostly stagnant and the breadbasket dream turned into a nightmare of cyclical droughts and recurring famines. In the end, Sudan only achieved a harvest of dust. None of the major agricultural projects started between 1975 and 1985 succeeded. During that decade, Sudan's agricultural productivity stagnated and its export earnings actually declined.<sup>43</sup>

### **The creation of scarcity**

It should be clear from the above that those Sudanese people most affected by decades of war, political instability, disastrous and unsustainable agricultural policies, and natural resources mismanagement, are the pastoral and farming communities scattered throughout the country. These communities have had little opportunity to participate in the decision-making process and are completely under-represented in most federal and local institutions despite the fact that they form three-quarters of the total population.<sup>44</sup> The rapid and disorganised expansion of mechanised agriculture, particularly from the 1960s onwards, from Sudan's central areas towards its peripheral regions, has disrupted traditional land tenure arrangements, curtailed transhumance routes, increased tensions between pastoralists and farmers, and created a large group of landless people. This expansion, combined with increasingly erratic rainfalls and the doubling of the population in less than 25 years, has ultimately heightened competition and conflict over structurally created scarce resources.<sup>45</sup> While the conflict between north and south Sudan has mostly captured the headlines, low and high intensity conflicts over resources continue to take place all over Sudan. The Darfur region and the western areas of Sudan in general have been particularly affected by disruptive agricultural practices which, in turn, have led to enhanced competition over natural resources and eventually to conflict

In western Sudan, which comprises the Darfur and Kordofan regions, 'the population is made up of a multitude of different ethnic groups, often associated with different economic activities and integrated in different ways into the wider systems of exchange'.<sup>46</sup> Simply put, some groups specialise in cultivation whereas others make a living from cattle rearing or work as camel

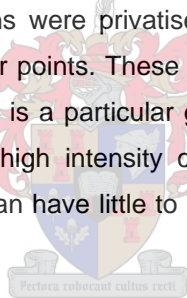
herders. However, this division of labour is far from being clear-cut or rigid. Pastoralists often combine their main activity with farming activities during certain periods of the year. Farmers and herders will often have urban-based occupations and cultivators will regularly engage in cattle farming using hired herders. These different rural activities form part of the various survival strategies implemented by the people of western Sudan. Some observers have claimed that prior to the arrival of external agents and outside influence, interactions between the many ethnic groups and between pastoralists and farmers were solved rapidly and that conflicts were managed efficiently.<sup>47</sup> This claim however borders on romanticism. Clashes over grazing grounds, cattle raiding, trespassing and the burning of crops, are practices that have existed for centuries, both in Darfur and Kordofan as well as in many other parts of the country. However, it is equally true that colonial authorities and the subsequent independent governments in Khartoum have intervened in local production systems with profound and often negative consequences.<sup>48</sup>

In the 1970s, a series of human and natural interventions combined to heighten tensions and trigger conflicts in western Sudan, of which the war in Darfur is the latest illustration. In 1970, the Sudanese government introduced new legislation: the Unregistered Land Act. This Act declared that all land, occupied or unoccupied, belonged to the state and entitlement could no longer be acquired by long use.<sup>49</sup> In effect, the Act placed all unregistered land as of 1970, including what was perceived as tribal and communal land, under the ownership of the Sudanese government.<sup>50</sup> A leasehold tenure system was also instituted through which the government could make land available for development projects and other agricultural schemes. The Act enabled the distribution by the government of 'state land' to its cronies and supporters. In terms of the Act, the government was supposed to be a neutral actor, but instead it became a player in its own right. According to Manger, politicians, leading bureaucrats, army officers and traders obtained access to land resources and schemes by bribing corrupt officials in charge on managing the lease system.<sup>51</sup> In short, the Act further facilitated an already well-established tendency for land grabbing by the elite. In western Sudan it promoted the rapid expansion of mechanised farming throughout the central plains. This affected the traditional north-south migration routes of pastoralist and herders who travel between their dry season pastures and their rainy season grazing lands each year. It also pushed traditional farmers onto marginal lands and created a situation of relative over-population in these areas. As a result, more people live in conditions of extreme poverty. This is particularly the case in Darfur, a desolate and marginalised place where most people eke out a living on arid land.<sup>52</sup>

Adding to the human-created hardship, nature also played havoc on local communities. During the 1970s and 1980s, repeated severe droughts plagued most of the Sahelian regions of

Sudan. On the whole, most of the last 30 years have been extremely dry. As a result, more and more pastoralists and farmers moved to urban centres or to those rural areas where agricultural activities could still be practiced. The concentration of both people and animals in these areas had many negative environmental consequences, including over-cultivation, over-grazing and deforestation.<sup>53</sup> Small-scale farmers degraded and over-used their land in order to survive, while large-scale landowners mainly over-exploited their resources to maximise profit. The latter in fact had very little incentives to use their land sustainably, since thanks to widespread corruption and the biased land lease system, they could always acquire additional lands to compensate for declining productivity. The same is true for small-scale farmers, who in poorly governed and conflict-vulnerable countries have little incentive to conserve the fertility of their soils or improve long-term productivity. Due to pervasive insecurity, they operate on a short-term basis and more often than not they prefer to simply pack and flee.<sup>54</sup>

With dwindling resources, competition over the remaining resources increased dramatically. Those tribes, groups or communities with positive links to local or national decision-makers were able to gain access to land assets and resources still worth exploiting. Areas that had previously been regarded as part of the commons were privatised through, for instance, the creation of enclosures or the monopolising of water points. These localised pressure points often ended up generating and fuelling conflicts. Darfur is a particular good example of simmering low intensity conflicts that eventually erupted in a high intensity conflict in 2003. Interesting to note and reinforcing the fact that conflicts in Sudan have little to do with the Muslim/Christian divide, most people in Darfur are Muslims.



While certain natural occurrences, such as drought, locusts and other pests, impacted negatively on natural resources and those dependent on them, the repressive, ill-constructed and inefficient development policies created large-scale resource scarcity; further exacerbating and intensifying the ensuing competition over dwindling resources.<sup>55</sup> Governmental decisions and policies were by and large fragmented, unsystematic and often contradictory. They lacked long-term vision and relied on institutions that were, and still are, generally weak, corrupt and ineffective. In addition, local and State<sup>\*</sup> governments lack adequate financial means and rely mostly on the over-exploitation of natural resources to supplement their meagre revenue sources.<sup>56</sup> In short, one ends up with a rather unsustainable situation where all the actors, from the small-scale farmer to the highest echelon of government, rely on natural resources for either their survival and/or to make a profit. Scarcity and environmental degradation is thus more the result of political mismanagement and outright thievery than the outcome of natural changes. It is the political economy of unequal access to and control over resources, or in other words 'who

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<sup>\*</sup> In 1994, Sudan was administratively divided into 26 Federal States

performs the labor, who bears the burdens, and how its benefit are claimed, distributed, and contested' that sows the seeds of conflicts and creates violence-prone environments.<sup>57</sup> In Sudan as in many other African countries, it is the arbitrary, unaccountable and often illegal way in which agents of the state manage land issues, and the resulting lack of access to land for large sections of the population that has mostly contributed to poverty and triggered conflict.<sup>58</sup>

### **Same actors, similar story**

The situation prevailing in Gedarif and Blue Nile States, in eastern Sudan, is somewhat a mirror image, with local differences, of what is happening in the western parts of the country. In the decades following independence, Gedarif also witnessed the horizontal expansion of irrigation-based and rainfed mechanised agriculture. This form of agricultural development was expanded to the detriment of forests and natural rangelands. It has been a major cause of land degradation through continuous mono-cropping, leading to a decline in soil fertility and productivity. Alongside mechanised farming, small-scale farm holdings are scattered throughout the State, cultivating millet and sorghum combined with sedentary animal husbandry. Pastoralism is also widely practised in all parts of the State and has increased in recent years beyond the carrying capacity of the rangelands thus adding pressure on the ecosystems. Overgrazing is a major issue, which leads to soil degradation and a decrease in the density of grass and the disappearance of many grass species.<sup>59</sup> Deforestation is also taking place at an alarming rate. Trees are cut for wood and charcoal making by most people in the State, including the police and the armed forces, both as a means of survival and to supplement low and irregular incomes. Although authorities have stipulated in a directive that 10 per cent of the land exploited by agricultural schemes should be planted with trees to enrich vegetation and combat the loss of biological diversity, most scheme owners do not adhere to this directive.<sup>60</sup>

Even though population density is relatively low in Gedarif, the State receives many immigrants from other parts of Sudan, as well as a large number of returning refugees from neighbouring Ethiopia and Eritrea.<sup>61</sup> Consequently, Gedarif faces a situation of increasing population pressure combined with rapid environmental degradation and declining agricultural productivity, comparable to that prevailing in Darfur. Similarly to the west, conflicts have erupted between pastoralists and farmers over pastoral corridors used by nomads to move their herds around. Although, local government has been instrumental in re-opening some of these routes, they are often not properly designed and do not provide adequate services, such as resting places, water sources and sufficient grazing grounds. They also tend to be too narrow, and as a result herds often venture into the fields and end up destroying the crops. Ineffective governance and weak implementation have further exacerbated or failed to resolve some of the issues

confronting farmers and pastoralists. In 1994, the central government issued a presidential decree that set aside a large area in the south for the sole use of nomads and their cattle. However, the decision has never actually been implemented, the reason being that some powerful landowners had already illegally grabbed the land and refused to relinquish it. The influential Farmer's Union, mainly representing large landowners and whose members dominate the State Legislative Assembly, has also managed to divert some pastoral routes from their original path so that they instead pass through the farmlands belonging to small-scale cultivators.<sup>62</sup>

Water is also a major source of tension, particularly during the dry season. Farmers often refuse to let herders use the water available in their villages or schemes. They tend to fence off water points, which herders believe are communal. Nomads in turn use force to gain access, which often results in violent confrontations with loss of life. At government-controlled water points, corruption is another major issue. Government water clerks are infamous all over the country for their corruption in handling revenues stemming from fees on water use. According to Babiker, the embezzlement of public funds was so widespread 'that nothing was left even for undertaking the routine maintenance of water facilities'.<sup>63</sup>

In Blue Nile State, environmental degradation and decreasing agricultural productivity are also generalised, despite the fact that the area receives adequate rainfalls and has highly fertile clay soils.<sup>64</sup> Blue Nile has been negatively affected by the civil war in the South and has received waves of displaced refugees from Southern Sudan. Hence, with increasing overall population pressure on available resources, food insecurity is rampant throughout the State. This situation is mainly caused by the fact that 'land distribution...is characterised by a clear bias in favour of national and foreign companies at the expense of local communities and the pastoralists'.<sup>65</sup> Again, it is political interference combined with weak governance and overall mismanagement that hinders the development of a potentially viable agricultural sector and inflicts damages on the environment. Most of the conflicts that have occurred in Blue Nile have been triggered by multiple ownership claims over the same lands. These conflicting claims have grown exponentially over the years because of a dramatic reduction in available arable lands and pasture grounds.<sup>66</sup> Most pastoralists and small-scale farmers are repeatedly squeezed into smaller and smaller areas. Not only are the areas decreasing in size but their productivity is also dwindling due to unsustainable agricultural methods. In recent years, competition and conflicts over resources have become fiercer throughout eastern Sudan and while still isolated and limited in scale, some observers predict that if the present chaotic and biased land use policy continues, conflict might escalate to the levels already experienced in Darfur.<sup>67</sup>

## Natural resources and politics

The conflict scenario played out in Darfur and eastern Sudan repeats itself in other parts of the country. While the various conflicts are often influenced by local conditions (e.g. type of resources, climatic conditions, ethnic make-up), a number of shared circumstances are associated with the eruption of violence throughout Sudan. First, there is competition over the same land between land-hungry peasants and profit-hungry landlords, as well as within each of these two groups. Second, the migration of populations into regions already settled by groups with a distinct ethnic, religious and/or political identity also triggers and fuels conflicts.<sup>68</sup> However, many countries around the world have large and diverse populations that rely on natural resources for their livelihoods, but not all of them have experienced the kind of extensive and protracted conflicts that have been associated with Sudan. Here, two additional elements have been conducive to violence. Firstly, poverty is widespread and deeply entrenched. As Ross points out, 'it is not surprising that people are more likely to rise up against their government when their economic predicament is bad and getting worse'.<sup>69</sup> Secondly, Sudan is characterised by an authoritarian and non-participatory regime. In general, this type of regime finds it more difficult to address the grievances of their citizens and hence may be prone to outbreaks of violence.<sup>70</sup>

In the case of Sudan, most present and past conflicts are closely linked to land issues. The conflict unfolding in the Darfur region is a typical example of land-based conflicts. Access to productive agricultural land is often restricted through political manoeuvring, and when accessible, its agricultural potential has often declined because of unsustainable practices, leading to environmental and soil degradation. Thus land scarcity, is mainly the result of human activities and decisions, and acts as a catalyst for conflicts. Ultimately, conflicts, even so-called environmental or resource conflicts, are a societal phenomenon. They cannot be blamed on nature or on environmental degradation, but on society's response to these changes. As Libiszewski states, 'environmental effects do not lead directly to conflicts. They produce and will increasingly produce several causally interrelated social effects'.<sup>71</sup> Thus it is more the socio-economic and political framework in which these environmental changes occur that determines the likelihood of conflict than environmental change or degradation itself.<sup>72</sup> This is particularly true in Sudan, where rapacious governing elites have managed, over the last few decades, to substantially misuse and misappropriate natural resources. This in turn has created the conditions for further environmental deterioration and renewed cycles of pauperisation, food insecurity and conflict over decreasing resources. While many countries in Africa experience endemic poverty without entering a war cycle, in Sudan it is the loss of livelihood, or as Clover writes, 'the rapid process of change resulting in a sudden fall into poverty – which, in turn are

often caused or exacerbated by environmental degradation that [has created] the potential for conflict'.<sup>73</sup>

While Sudan's internal policies have greatly contributed to the ensuing conflicts, the prevailing international policy, which promoted the development of export-oriented commercial agriculture and forced structural adjustment plans with socially disruptive consequences on Sudan, also bears a level of responsibility. Many observers consider that changes in the global economic environment in the last 25 years are causally connected to the salience of economic agendas in contemporary wars.<sup>74</sup> To a certain extent, one can argue, that the widening gap between rich and poor at the global level, combined with economic globalisation, western tastes and demands, as well as unsustainable consumption patterns, are the main drivers behind the over-exploitation of natural resources by the rural poor.<sup>75</sup> How much political leeway the Sudanese authorities had left in the face of international circumstances, pressures and demands is difficult to assess, particularly in view of the opaque and undemocratic nature of the regime in place in Khartoum. Looking at the often catastrophic developments that took place since independence, one could argue that decision-makers and those with power in Sudan, mostly chose to ensure their own enrichment and to discriminate in favour of those whose support they needed, such as the military, wealthy traders and landowners, members of the state apparatus and so on. Very little energy or politico-economic means were dedicated to the peaceful resolution of problems that eventually degenerated into conflicts. For instance, in the case of natural resources management, Sudanese authorities mostly failed to involve affected communities in resource management decisions, and in the end, also repeatedly failed to deliver the promised benefits to these communities.<sup>76</sup>

Environmental protection and natural resource management are among those sectors that have received little or insufficient attention from both authorities in Khartoum and rebel movements alike. For instance, in Southern Sudan where the SPLM controlled most of the territory for a long period of time, the environment has been heavily degraded, not only as a result of war, but also because of a complete disregard for and ignorance of natural resource management'.<sup>77</sup> Although the fighting has ceased since the signing of the CPA between North and South in early 2005, a study conducted in the Didinga Hills of Eastern Equatoria State, in the south-eastern corner of Sudan, found that most communities still continue to rely on wartime coping mechanisms. These strategies involve shifting cultivation and relocating to other areas whenever they become degraded.<sup>78</sup> As shown above, this type of strategy often means coming into contact with other communities who also tend to face the same problems linked to land degradation and declining productivity, thus heightening the potential for conflict.

The demographic prediction for Southern Sudan based on the projected return of a large number of refugees from neighbouring countries and the north means that most probably the demand for land will increase in the coming years, thus putting more pressure on marginal areas and rangelands.<sup>79</sup> It is clear that proper natural resource management strategies will need to be put in place in order to replace the present coping mechanisms, which tend to simply shift the problem from one area to the other. However, for local communities to start thinking in terms of permanent and long-term solutions, a certain level of security needs to be achieved. This is not yet the case, and most people in the south are far from convinced that peace will hold and that law and order will return for good.<sup>80</sup>

### **Alien gods: controlling water resources**

As the examples of Gedarif, Kordofan, Blue Nile and Darfur have shown, land in Sudan holds a very high material value for the very simple reason that most people depend on it for their livelihood. As in many other parts of Africa, land also has a symbolic and often emotional value. Therefore, unscrupulous and profit-seeking political entrepreneurs can easily turn it into a 'tangible object of dispute potentially leading to violent conflict'.<sup>81</sup> Until the mid-1980s, most conflicts in Sudan revolved around access to and the distribution of land and water resources. One of the reasons why Khartoum has always resisted southern separatism is the presence of prime agricultural land and vast water resources in that region.<sup>82</sup>

The resurgence of conflict in 1983 is partly due to the North's attempt to capture some of the water resources of the Sudd wetlands located in the South. These wetlands are the largest in Africa. They fulfil a crucial ecological role and are instrumental in regulating the flow of the Nile River.<sup>83</sup> However, almost 50 per cent of the White Nile's water passing through the Sudd is lost due to evapo-transpiration.<sup>84</sup> By 1973, Sudan exhausted its share of the Nile waters and was unable to irrigate its large agricultural schemes further north\*. The government of Sudan subsequently decided to launch the Jonglei Canal scheme, a project to dig a massive canal through the Sudd and thereby increase the flow of the Nile to northern Sudan and Egypt. The Jonglei project was mooted and initiated without sufficient consultation and sharing of information with those rural communities, the Dinka, Nuer and Shilluk, whose livelihoods it would most affect if completed.<sup>85</sup> Jonglei means 'alien god' in Dinka, and to most southerners, the canal was basically a foreign enterprise that would mainly benefit north Sudan and Egypt while leaving them with reduced and degraded water resources. People in the south feared, with good reason, that this 'alien god' would greatly change their way of life, particularly that of pastoralists whose

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\* In 1959, Sudan and Egypt had signed the Second Nile Agreement, which increased Sudan's share of the Nile waters following the construction of the Aswan High Dam by Egypt.

migrations and grazing system would be disrupted by the canal.<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, southerners also worried that once drained the Sudd would be utilised to expand mechanised agricultural schemes in the south. While certain promises were made at the beginning of the project to address the needs and concerns of local rural communities, mounting financial costs resulted in the government shelving all development projects<sup>\*\*</sup>.

In 1983-84 the SPLM army brought construction to a halt by sabotaging construction works and kidnapping foreign engineers working on the canal.<sup>87</sup> The failed Jonglei Canal project is one among many examples of failed or flawed development projects initiated by Khartoum. As a result, economic decline continued in the south and dissatisfaction with Khartoum's policies grew in inverse proportion to the pace of economic development, until it erupted again into a fully-fledged civil war in 1983.<sup>88</sup>

While there have been thus far no attempts to restart work on the Jonglei Canal, the Government of Sudan has embarked on another potentially disruptive major 'development' project. Work is currently underway on the Merowe/Hamadab Dam located on the Nile River in north Sudan. This dam is presently the largest hydropower project being developed in Africa. It is expected to be completed between 2007 and 2009 and will cost an estimated \$1.2 billion, mainly financed by Sudan, the China Export and Import Bank and various Arab development funds.<sup>89</sup> Most similar dam constructions on the Nile have caused serious environmental damage in the past. There is little reason to believe that this project will be any different. The environmental impact assessments performed so far by companies involved in the project 'have never been properly assessed, and the project has never been certified by the competent Sudanese authorities. On this last score, the project violates Sudanese law'.<sup>90</sup>

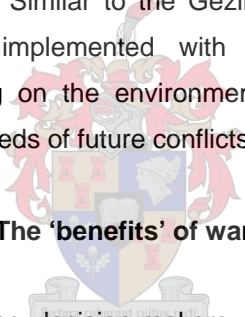
According to a preliminary analysis by the International Rivers Network, the Merowe/Hamadab Dam is in breach of the OECD Guidelines on Multinational Enterprises, violates five of the seven Strategic Priorities of the World Commission on Dams (WCD) and contravenes most of the World Bank safeguard policies on natural resources, involuntary resettlements and cultural property.<sup>91</sup> An estimated 50,000 people will or have already been displaced by the project, and more rural communities will be affected downstream of the dam.<sup>92</sup> Furthermore, some Sudanese opposition parties have alleged that the government in Khartoum has simply seized land around the dam without compensation and has handed such land to its supporters in the area.<sup>93</sup> Thus far, displaced people have mostly been resettled in inadequate and crowded settlements and have received insufficient compensation for the land and houses lost. According to observers, 'affected

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<sup>\*\*</sup> Development projects included the establishment of irrigation farming, cattle centres, social services, as well as the building of bridges across the canal and flood embankments along the canal

people are extremely frustrated about the ongoing process of deception and betrayal', and Government authorities have on several occasions used violence to quell protests, resulting in loss of life.<sup>94</sup> Some of the displaced communities are said to be seeking redress through armed insurrection.<sup>95</sup>

Apart from the obvious social effects, the dam will also most likely have serious environmental impacts. These include, sedimentation of the reservoir, invasion by water hyacinths, increased evaporation rates, spread of waterborne diseases, and massive fluctuation of water levels downstream.<sup>96</sup> While nobody is denying the fact that Sudan is in dire need of increased electricity generating capacity (only 700,000 people have access to the national power grid) most of the investments will go towards large, often unsustainable projects. Out of the \$506 million donor money set aside for the electricity sector, only \$25 million will be dedicated to the development of mini and micro hydropower plants and for solar and wind energy.<sup>97</sup> As has been the case before with large export-oriented agricultural schemes, most of the electricity produced in Sudan is geared towards urban centres or exported, with little benefit trickling down to the rural poor.<sup>98</sup> History seems to be repeating itself. Similar to the Gezira Scheme or the Jonglei Canal, the Merowe/Hamadab Dam is being implemented with minimal consultation with affected communities, is negatively impacting on the environment, and will mainly benefit the usual suspects, thus probably sowing the seeds of future conflicts.



### The 'benefits' of war

One has to wonder why Sudanese decision-makers and their foreign supporters keep on promoting projects and policies that have negative and often devastating impacts on the majority of the population, and are largely responsible for creating a situation where insecurity is pervasive and conflicts keep on flaring up. Maybe they initially failed to anticipate or perceive the problems and dangers of their actions and policies. In the long run, and after repeated failures, this explanation however, becomes more and more doubtful. It is far more likely that most of the decision-making was based on what Diamond terms, 'rational bad behaviour'. Faced with economic decline, negative terms of trade, decreasing agricultural productivity, environmental degradation and civil strife, it seems very probable that those with decision-making powers, 'correctly' reasoned that they could still advance their own interests by behaviour harmful to the majority. This kind of behaviour is 'rational' even if morally reprehensible.<sup>99</sup>

The situation prevailing in Sudan between rich and poor somehow reflects the one we witness at the global level, where the kind of economic development and standard of living enjoyed by developed nations is putting enormous pressure on the global commons and is bringing the

natural environment ever closer to its ecological limits while simultaneously creating social inequalities. There is little doubt that for economic development to be sustainable in developing nations, it will need to be compensated by some kind of economic contraction in industrialised countries.<sup>100</sup> The same is true for Sudan where the living standards of the elite are based on development initiatives that are at best inefficient or at worse have devastating effects on both people and nature. Similarly to developed nations that will most probably not agree to curb their pursuit of wealth, let alone transfer considerable wealth to poorer nations, Sudan's wealthy will not start implementing anytime soon policies that might entail distributing resources more equitably and consequently reducing their share of the profits. As long as the elite's interests clash with the interests of the rest of the population, and as long as the elite can insulate themselves from the consequences of their actions, they are, as Diamond points out, 'likely to do things that profit themselves, regardless of whether those actions hurt everybody else'.<sup>101</sup> In other words, conflicts and wars can be highly lucrative for individuals and groups within society while at the same being catastrophic for society as a whole.<sup>102</sup>

This has largely been the case in Sudan, where those with power have been able (until recently) to avoid the negative consequences of war while at same time reaping its benefits. As will be discussed below, the discovery of oil and its subsequent financial windfall somehow changed this pattern and contributed towards the signing of a wealth-sharing agreement between North and South. This development was however more the result of greed and fear than of a genuine desire for building a more equitable society. As Salopek puts it, 'the rebels control much of the oil country. The government has access to the sea. They need each other to get rich'.<sup>103</sup>



### **Oil and turmoil**

The discovery of oil in the late 1970s profoundly altered the politico-economic and military outlook in Sudan. It initially led to renewed hostilities and eventually to peace between North and South in 2005. With neither side being able to gain complete military victory and thus unable to fully enjoy the benefits of oil - due to rampant insecurity and instability - peace and the sharing of oil revenues suddenly became more attractive. It took both parties over 25 years to realise this, and in the meantime, ordinary Sudanese paid the price in lost lives, income and opportunities.

Although the presence of large oil deposits would usually be considered a blessing for the development prospects of a country, it often turns out to be a curse. This is particularly the case in countries where ethnic and religious grievances have been exacerbated, poverty is widespread and governments unstable. In these circumstances, the presence of valuable natural resources such as oil often heightens the danger that civil war will break out and once it has, conflict is more

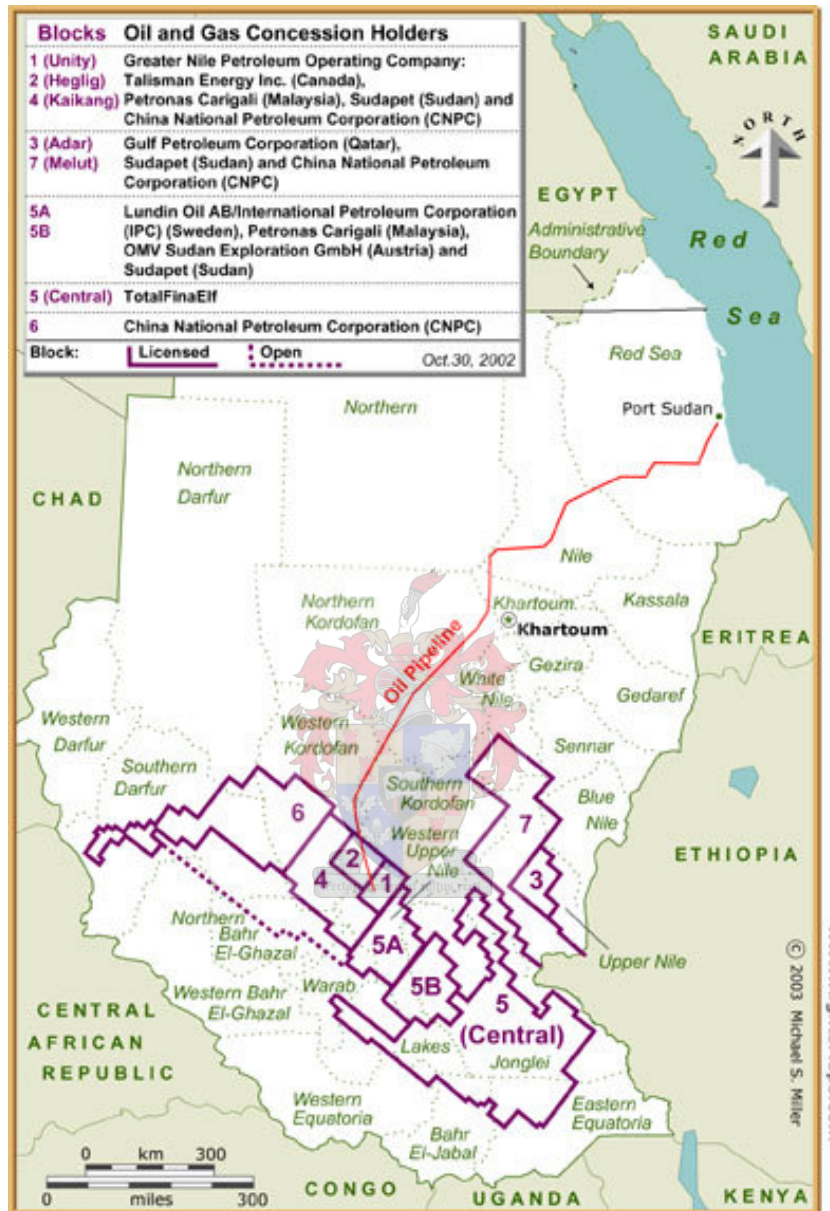
difficult to resolve. Furthermore, dependence on natural resources makes countries more susceptible to civil war through a combined decline in overall growth and an increase in poverty.<sup>104</sup> It is paradoxical that a 'gift' from nature, such as oil, tends to cause economic distress, but various studies have found that generally-speaking, resource-dependent economies grow more slowly than resource-poor ones.<sup>105</sup> Although this might seem peculiar at first, there are several rational explanations for what is termed the 'resource curse'.<sup>\*</sup> Generally, resource abundance will inhibit the kind of economic diversification that is vital for long-term growth. Resource abundance, such as oil, also creates or reinforces the rentier state, which according to Kahl tends 'to be narrowly based, predatory authoritarian or quasi-democratic and characterised by high degrees of patronage and corruption as well as low degrees of popular legitimacy'.<sup>106</sup> All these aspects were already present in Sudan before oil was discovered and were merely strengthened. However, oil, a highly sought-after and globalised resource, puts Sudan into a different league of resource-dependent developing nations. Oil and other strategic minerals are essential to the world economy, and thus 'they are worth controlling and fighting over precisely because they are valued in the global economy'.<sup>107</sup> Consequently, oil's international relevance meant that the Sudanese conflict would eventually acquire a more global dimension with foreign players assuming an increasing role in trying to broker relative stability, if not durable peace.

One of the earliest players in Sudan's oil exploration and exploitation business was the US company Chevron. However, with the resumption of civil war its operations became increasingly difficult to sustain. SPLM combatants repeatedly attacked the company's installations and staff. Three oil workers were killed in one of such attacks, and in 1983 Chevron decided to abandon its oil operations in Sudan,<sup>108</sup> as did the Canadian company Talisman and most other western oil companies. They were later replaced by Chinese, Indian and Malaysian oil businesses.<sup>109</sup> As mentioned earlier, the redrawing of Sudan's administrative boundaries in order to exclude oil reserves from southern jurisdiction triggered the second phase of the civil war in 1983. The military regime in Khartoum annexed the oil-rich lands of the south by carving out a new State, ironically called Unity, and by building a refinery in the north instead of the south (see map on page 21). Whatever fragile peace there was came to an abrupt end with the creation of Unity State. Oil infrastructure, such as pipelines, pumping stations, wellheads, and other key elements, 'became targets for the rebels from the South, who wanted a share in the country's new mineral wealth, much of which was on lands they had long occupied'.<sup>110</sup> The SPLM considered oil installations as legitimate targets and oil resources as belonging to the South, while the regime in Khartoum considered them as a national resource. The Sudanese Government also quickly realised that the degree of stability and control it enjoyed in the north depended, at least partially,

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<sup>\*</sup> Further interrogation of 'resource curse' thesis is precluded by length.

on its ability to continue exploiting southern resources.<sup>111</sup> Among these, oil soon became its most prized asset and worth waging war for.



The discovery of oil reserves also re-ignited the South's push for secession and independence from Sudan. This is a rather familiar occurrence and similar developments have taken place in other parts of Africa, such as in the Biafra region in Nigeria, or the Cabinda enclave in Angola. As Bannon and Collier explain:

Where an ethnically different region sees what it considers its resources stolen by a corrupt national elite comfortably ensconced in the capital, the prospect of gaining control

over the natural resource revenues...can be a powerful drive for a secessionist movement.<sup>112</sup>

The re-emergence of a secessionist movement in the South was also due to its leaders' desire to assert their rights over this territory, improve their bargaining power with the northern government, and profit from the oil business. Here too, oil was considered worthy of a war. Or as a southern fighter put it: 'Now that we know the oil is there, we will fight much longer, if necessary'.<sup>113</sup> Sudanese farmers and rural communities, on the other hand, were far more concerned with the social and environmental impacts of oil exploitation on their daily lives and livelihoods. In its drive to gain complete control of the oil fields, the Khartoum government adopted a scorched earth and starvation policy. Government troops and militias were sent in to appropriate oil rich lands and clear them of their occupants. Some 55,000 people were forced to flee the oil zone and became refugees in their own country.<sup>114</sup> For peasants and pastoralists in the region, it meant being squeezed into smaller areas and having to compete for decreasing resources. The same cycle of environmental degradation, poverty and conflict was again being set into motion as had happened during the expansion of mechanised agriculture. What happened in the South in the 1980s and 1990s was basically a rehearsal for similar events a decade later in Darfur a region also rich in oil as well as other natural resources such as, uranium and gold.<sup>115</sup>

Not surprisingly, the revenues generated by Sudan's new oil wealth are mainly benefiting the same Khartoum-based elites. Even if Sudan's macroeconomic situation has improved, 'its people remain impoverished, primarily because oil profits flow to a limited few and are used to fund the war'.<sup>116</sup> In 2001, the Government of Sudan was spending about \$1million per day on the war effort, an amount approximately equivalent to its daily export earnings from oil.<sup>117</sup> After having financed the war against the South, oil revenues are nowadays paying for the conflict being waged in Darfur. Since the first barrel was produced, oil exploitation has had negative social and environmental consequences, sustained the central government's appetite for weaponry and generated financial benefits for the usual suspects. It is doubtful that things have dramatically changed since the SPLM joined the Government of National Unity in early 2005.

### **'When peace breaks out'**

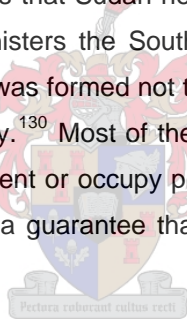
One would be forgiven for thinking that Sudan is a desperate cause and a doomed country. Its people have been killed, displaced, starved and impoverished for so many decades that the chances of building a stable, prosperous and peaceful society seem rather remote. Despite a multitude of so-called development initiatives, whose declared objectives were to trigger

economic growth, it is mostly the opposite that has happened. The majority of people in Sudan are not better off today than they were at independence. Sudan's primary reliance on natural resources and its lack of economic diversification puts it in this unenviable category of poor developing and resource-dependent nations that tend to have lower social indicators; are more corrupt, ineffective and authoritarian; and, prioritise military spending over social investments.<sup>118</sup> Over the last five decades, Sudan's decision-makers have massively invested in large-scale and often wasteful development projects while repeatedly ignoring the country's most important resource, namely its people. Not only have they completely failed to address the needs of the vast majority, they have actively and systematically dispossessed, marginalised and deliberately starved most of Sudan's population.<sup>119</sup> Genocide, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity are terms, not unsurprisingly and not infrequently, routinely associated with Sudan.<sup>120</sup> Southern leaders have also their fair share of responsibility in this sad state of affairs. As Salopek puts it '[t]raditionally, the SPLA has mistreated as much as defended Sudan's long marginalised southern people'.<sup>121</sup> In short, most actors in the various Sudanese conflicts bear responsibility for the resulting human suffering, recurring humanitarian disasters, lack of social progress, and widespread environmental degradation.<sup>122</sup>

In many ways, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) is what Ballentine and Nitzschke term 'a negative peace, where justice and sustainability are deeply compromised and the threat of renewed conflicts remains high'.<sup>123</sup> Not only is the peace 'negative', it is also far from being comprehensive. Fighting continues in Darfur, where presently the largest and most expensive humanitarian relief operation in the world is taking place. As many as 300,000 Darfurians may have died in the conflict so far and some two million have been displaced.<sup>124</sup> Peace in the South is still fragile and in eastern Sudan, conflict, albeit localised, is still simmering. Thus, it is rather hazardous to predict a bright, peaceful and sustainable future for Sudan and its people, especially since the underlying causes of most of these conflicts – poverty and under-development, unrepresentative and weak governance structures, environmental degradation and unequal land tenure policies – are still very prevalent throughout Sudan. Urgently addressing these issues is crucial in order to ensure lasting stability and peace. However, one could argue that the CPA is mainly the result of a stalemate between the warring parties and a realisation that military victory was becoming increasingly elusive for both sides. Greed also certainly played a major role in bringing about the CPA. Both sides eventually realised that stability is definitely more conducive to efficient oil exploitation and the reaping of benefits. The Khartoum elite and its local and foreign business partners have already positioned themselves to take advantage of the newfound economic wealth and have created dozens of companies to dominate the oil industry and other key sectors.<sup>125</sup> If the manner in which Sudan and outsiders have dealt with natural resources in the past is anything to go by, the outlook for oil to contribute positively to the country's sustainable

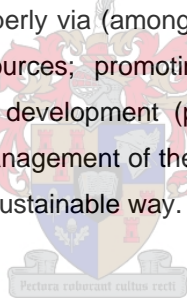
development is extremely slim. Foreign governments and companies competing for Sudan's lucrative oil concessions have and continue to play a central role in triggering violence and conflict.<sup>126</sup> Recently, the tug of war for Sudan's oil resources has intensified between western companies and their Asian counterparts. China and the US have been especially active in trying to secure further access to the country's oil deposits. In more ways than one, the strategic interest of outside powers has deterred the conclusion of a comprehensive peace deal in Sudan.<sup>127</sup>

Adding to the uncertainty is the fact that the government of national unity in place in Khartoum is transitional in nature and has a limited lifespan pending elections in 2008 and a referendum on the status of Southern Sudan in 2011, when the South will vote whether to remain part of Sudan or opt for independence.<sup>128</sup> With the signing of the CPA, southern leaders agreed to give unity a last chance. The Government of National Unity is tasked with making a united Sudan attractive for southerners. But with hardly five years left until the referendum, there are few signs of national reconciliation initiatives.<sup>129</sup> It might be difficult for a government of that nature to devise the necessary long-term sustainable policies that Sudan needs in order to secure lasting peace and development. The SPLM which, administers the South, is also rather ill equipped to promote stable and sustainable development. It was formed not to govern but to wage war. The main goal was not development but military victory.<sup>130</sup> Most of the SPLM's commanders and leaders have been co-opted into the central government or occupy political and administrative positions in the South. This however is far from being a guarantee that people in the South will soon see any long-term peace dividends.



Despite all these shortcomings and hurdles, or possibly because of them, the international community has decided to come to Sudan's help and rescue. No doubt Sudan's potential oil wealth played a major role in this decision. Three months after the signing of the CPA, the international donors pledged \$4.5 billion over three years to support peace and the reconstruction process in Sudan, supplemented by private investments sources.<sup>131</sup> In fact, the whole country is once again open for business. The donor trust fund will be managed and coordinated by the World Bank, which after 10 years of absence has opened new offices in Khartoum. While representing the United Nations Environment Programme during the World Bank/United Nations Joint Assessment Mission (JAM) in Sudan, I asked the World Bank country director for Sudan why so little emphasis was being put on environmental issues in the reconstruction plans. His reply was that right now, Sudan needed development and that environmental problems could be dealt with at later stage! He also added that Sudan needed to pay back its foreign debt as soon as possible.<sup>132</sup>

Promoting sustainable development is about ensuring that its three components (economic growth, social development and environmental protection) receive adequate and timely attention, while at the same time reinforcing each other.<sup>133</sup> At this point in time, it is doubtful that Sudan will be able to achieve this objective because of the ongoing conflicts still prevailing in various parts of the country and the resulting instability and insecurity. The reasons for this situation are manifold. Firstly, several opposition parties as well as rebel groups such as the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) in Darfur are still fighting for a more equitable and just distribution of the country's wealth.\* Secondly, marginalised groups and political parties throughout Sudan feel disenchanted with the CPA, which they say is being implemented on a selective basis. According to them the CPA only addresses the problems of the South without adequately addressing the concerns of other parts of the country.<sup>134</sup> Even in the South, many people feel that Khartoum is not faithfully implementing the CPA and is using the Darfur crisis to deflect attention from this fact.<sup>135</sup> Finally, issues of democracy, economic injustice, religion, and political under-representation, which lie at the core of the Sudanese political crisis, are not being adequately addressed. The regime in Khartoum is still seen by many as predatory and corrupt.<sup>136</sup> In a sense, most of the issues that have plunged the country into turmoil in the past are still present. As long as these issues are not addressed properly via (amongst others) opening up the political arena; ensuring a fairer distribution of resources; promoting economic growth that benefits the population at large; supporting social development (particularly in the health and education sectors); and, ensuring an adequate management of the environment, it is highly improbable that the country will be able to develop in a sustainable way.



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\* There are numerous rebel movements and opposition parties in Sudan apart from the SPLM and JEM, such as, the Beja Congress, the SLA, the NDF or the Umma Party. Providing an overview of their respective objectives and constituencies goes beyond the scope of this article.

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<sup>131</sup> F H Caas, *Environment and the Joint Assessment Mission (JAM) in Sudan: Streamlining environmental concerns into the JAM report and Sudan's reconstruction and development phase*. Geneva: United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), 2004, p. 1.

<sup>132</sup> Discussion conducted during the Sudan Joint Assessment Mission conference, jointly organised by the World Bank and the United Nations in Nairobi in September 2004.

<sup>133</sup> Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development, adopted at the 17<sup>th</sup> plenary meeting of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, 2002, para. 5.

<sup>134</sup> C Ajulu, T Othieno & N Samasuwa, *Sudan: the state of transition, prospects and challenges*. Global Insight 56, February 2006, pp. 3-6.

<sup>135</sup> S Crawford-Browne, *African leaders lean on Sudan*, Cape Times, 8 February 2007, p. 11.

<sup>136</sup> C Ajulu, T Othieno & N Samasuwa, *Sudan: the state of transition, prospects and challenges*. Global Insight 56, February 2006, p. 6.



# Addressing environmental issues in a post-conflict situation: The case of Afghanistan

*ABSTRACT: The Taliban regime was toppled by US military intervention a month after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. This paved the way for the signing of a United Nations sponsored agreement between the various Afghan factions later that year. Since then the international community has pledged billions of dollars for Afghanistan's reconstruction. While the stated objective is to transform Afghanistan into a democratic, stable and peaceful country, much remains to be done. The international actors and the Afghan authorities face many challenges in their endeavour to transform this fragmented country into a unified nation, where peace and stability prevail. It is furthermore doubtful that the neo-liberal economic agenda being imposed on Afghanistan, will on its own promote long-term sustainable development. Most observers predict that inequalities and poverty will remain entrenched for the foreseeable future, and that effective governance will be elusive as long as insecurity persists and state authority remains weak.*





## **A highway of conquest**

Every great European or Asian conqueror seems to have marched their armies through the valleys, deserts and mountains that today form part of modern Afghanistan. Due to its pivotal and strategic position in Asia, at the junction of the Indian, Persian Turkish and Mongol worlds, Afghanistan has often been referred to as a 'highway of conquest', and its territory and people have fallen victim to waves of conquerors and been integrated into much larger empires.<sup>1</sup> Afghans still nowadays speak of Genghis Khan, Alexander the Great, and Tamerlane, as well as various Moghul, Sikh and Persian rulers as if they had just passed through'.<sup>2</sup> As a result, Afghanistan has always been a melting pot of races and cultures with little unifying factors and subjected to powerful external influence.<sup>3</sup>

Contemporary Afghanistan only came into existence as the direct result of the 'Great Game'. This cat and mouse game played out in the nineteenth century between competing and expansionist Imperial Russia and British India, was responsible for the demarcation of Afghanistan's present borders.<sup>4</sup> Neither power was able to completely subdue the various Afghan tribes and eventually agreed to the creation of a buffer state separating their respective empires.<sup>5</sup> In 1919, the country attained international recognition, following the third and last so-called Afghan War with Britain, and gained complete independence that same year.<sup>6</sup> However, the drawing of borders and international status does not make a nation. In many ways, Afghanistan was an artificial and foreign creation whose frontiers brought together diverse and often antagonistic people and tribes. Afghanistan had never been, according to Elliot, a united nation but 'a historically improbable amalgam of races and cultures, each with its own treasuries of custom, languages and visions of the world...an impossible place to understand as a whole'.<sup>7</sup>

The name Afghanistan simply means 'land of the Afghans'. For a long time, outsiders used the word Afghan to refer to the Pashtuns, the ethnic group comprising roughly one-third of the country's population. The Pashtuns themselves say that Allah after having created the world had a pile of rocks left from which he made Afghanistan.<sup>8</sup> This local legend about the country's creation still rings strangely true nowadays. Indeed, Afghanistan's very existence seems slightly arbitrary and owing much to after-thought. Officials of the British Raj called Afghanistan a purely accidental territory. One of these officials, Sir Mortimer Durand, was tasked, in the late nineteenth century, with drawing the border that today separates Afghanistan from Pakistan - the infamous Durand Line. He drew it 'with a cavalier flourish' that sliced through tribes and villages and ended up cutting the Pashtuns' ancestral territory in two.<sup>9</sup>

During the same period, the king of the Afghans, Abdur Rahman Khan simply called his country Yaghistan, or 'Land of the Rebellious'.<sup>10</sup> This rather appropriate description has proven repeatedly true as witnessed by many recent would-be invaders. Similarly to other colonial creations, Afghanistan ended up trying to build a nation from a highly diverse and complex mix of people with deeply established ethnic rivalries and loyalties. While trying to build a nation, the country also had to contend with the geopolitics of the Cold War, culminating in the 1979 Soviet invasion. Almost 25 years of internal conflict followed, resulting in over a million Afghan deaths and many more refugees.<sup>11</sup>

### **Renewed fighting and instability**

Following the withdrawal of the Soviet army in 1989, America and western powers in general lost interest in Afghanistan.<sup>12</sup> Confident that the balance of power had been restored, the US withdrew its involvement and Afghanistan fell off the map.<sup>13</sup> Despite earlier promises made to the Afghans who fought against the Soviet occupation, there was no concerted effort to rebuild the country's ravaged society or economy.<sup>14</sup> As Misra points out, 'self-serving external powers who had used Afghanistan for their own designs conveniently forgot about its needs'.<sup>15</sup> Soon after the Soviet retreat, a bitter and devastating civil war engulfed the country. Afghanistan turned yet again into a battleground where those same mujahideen who had fought against the Soviet army, under the command of various warlords, competed for power and territorial control. The carving up of Afghanistan resulted in complete anarchy with no central governing structure. The country basically disintegrated into a multitude of fiefdoms with ordinary Afghans bearing the brunt of the country's decline.<sup>16</sup> The overall instability prevailing in the country triggered some level of renewed interest among international and regional powers.

The United States, western powers and regional players, especially Pakistan, were deeply concerned with Afghanistan's instability and, in particular, by the potentially destabilising impact it could have on the wider region. The Afghan chaos was also seen as a major obstacle to the development of trade routes and the export of natural resources from Central Asia's newly independent republics to western markets via Pakistan's harbours. Central Asian states are believed to have some of the last large unexploited oil and gas reserves in the world. By the mid-1990s, the scramble for a share in this bounty was well underway.<sup>17</sup> A US company, UNOCAL was looking into the feasibility of constructing a pipeline through Afghanistan. This would have offered an alternative to exporting oil resources via the former Soviet Republics. Both Zalmay Khalilzad, who later became the US Ambassador in Kabul, and Afghanistan's President, Hamid

Karzai, played a significant role in the negotiations between UNOCAL and the Taliban in the mid-1990s.<sup>18</sup>

However, none of these projects could be implemented as long as the country was in the grip of warring and divided feudal-like warlords. Pakistan was particularly eager to stabilise its unruly neighbour and to install a friendly regime in Kabul. To this effect it provided support to the Taliban, which Islamabad had in any case been nurturing for quite some time. Pakistan had been host to millions of Afghan refugees since 1979, and 'it provided them with succour, and indoctrinated them with radicalism'.<sup>19</sup> The young and alienated Afghan men stranded in the refugee camps were literally children of the jihad who had known nothing but war. They were basically rootless and receptive to the radical version of Islam they were taught in the network of madrasas (Quranic schools) set up for their benefit along the border with their home country.<sup>20</sup> They were later sent back to Afghanistan where they formed the core of the Taliban movement. The soon-to-be new rulers of Afghanistan 'brought with them an Islamicist fervour previously unknown in Afghanistan, traditionally a place of religious moderation'.<sup>21</sup>

### **The rise of the Taliban**

Right from the beginning, the relationship between the Taliban leadership and the Pakistani authorities was one of mutual benefit, and would continue to be so until the dramatic events in New York. According to Human Rights Watch, Pakistan solicited funds for the Taliban; bankrolled their operations; provided diplomatic support; trained Taliban fighters; planned and directed offensives; facilitated shipments of arms and fuel; and, on several occasions, apparently provided direct combat support.<sup>22</sup> Benazir Bhutto, the former President of Pakistan, publicly referred to the Taliban as 'our boys'.<sup>23</sup> In an effective military campaign, the Taliban movement headed by Mullah Omar, managed to take control of most of Afghanistan and brought some semblance of security and order.<sup>24</sup> It is however, doubtful that the Taliban, 'a bunch of illiterate small-town mullahs and religious students' would have been able to capture 90 percent of the country within four years, without the military, intelligence and logistical support of Pakistan, and the financial backing of Saudi Arabia and the United States.<sup>25</sup> Afghanistan's strategic position between Central Asia and international markets meant that the Taliban's tight control over most of the country and the return of stability and security, even if imposed through harsh and brutal means, was greeted with relief and cautious optimism. They were seen as useful and the US State Department indicated that it saw 'nothing objectionable' in the Taliban's version of Islamic law.<sup>26</sup> Another American diplomat asserted that: 'The Taliban will probably develop like the Saudis did. There will be Aramco, pipelines, an emir, no parliament and lots of Sharia law. We can live with that'.<sup>27</sup>

The arrival of the Taliban on the Afghan scene, their constant brandishing of the Quran, and their restrictive interpretation of Islam, should hardly have come as a surprise to informed observers. The introduction of a fundamentalist version of Islam began as a CIA-initiated move to unite Afghans against the occupying Soviet armed forces.<sup>28</sup> Following the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union in 1979, the US National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, was seen posing for photographers with mujahideen fighters and shouting: 'Allah is on your side'.<sup>29</sup> At the same time, fundamentalist Afghan 'freedom fighters' were being feted at the White House and other western capitals.<sup>30</sup> While America never officially recognised the new Afghan regime, it continued to provide vital support through its traditional allies in the region, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. This ambivalent relationship dictated by the laws of realpolitik lasted until the first major terrorist attack by al-Qaeda on US interests in Africa and the Middle East in the late 1990s. Al-Qaeda had settled in Afghanistan in the wake of the Taliban's rise to power and provided its leaders with both military support and financial backing. The Taliban movement and bin-Laden's group had established a relationship that was useful to both, although it was also most probably unbalanced and ambiguous. After 9/11, the US government requested the extradition of bin Laden and his acolytes. An ex-Taliban interviewed by Christina Lamb, remembers:

We laughed when we heard the Americans asking Mullah Omar to hand over Osama bin Laden. The Americans are crazy. Afghanistan is not a state sponsoring terrorism but a terrorist-sponsored state. It is only Osama bin Laden that can hand over Mullah Omar not vice versa.<sup>31</sup>



### **The Taliban's demise**

While the Taliban's climb to power in the late 1990s was swift, so was their demise. On 11 September 2001, the twin towers of the World Trade Centre in New York came crumbling down following the most devastating terrorist attack on the United States. These events would quickly prompt a new wave of conflict and turmoil for the people of Afghanistan, a country that had already experienced 23 years of war.<sup>32</sup> The clouds of dust had hardly settled in New York that US warplanes were dropping tons of bombs over Afghanistan with a view to annihilate the Taliban regime and flush out Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda operatives from their mountainous lair in the south of the country. It was the events of September 2001 rather than developments inside Afghanistan 'that finally sealed the fate of the Taliban and ushered in a new phase of the war'.<sup>33</sup> After the terrorist attacks on the United States, the Bush administration and its allies were quick to demonise the Taliban regime. The military intervention in Afghanistan could not just be seen as simple retaliation. It had to be scripted as a humanitarian war aimed at liberating the Afghan people from ruthless and brutal rulers.<sup>34</sup> A different scenario simply never was an option.

Politicians, the military establishment and most of the media in the West sold the intervention to their public opinions as a just and moral war. The Taliban were portrayed as the personification of evil, and the Afghan population as its victims in need of liberation.<sup>35</sup> In the aftermath of 9/11, 'the war on terror conveniently also became a war for the liberation of a people, its morality so hard to challenge that scarcely a voice was raised against it'.<sup>36</sup> Even fewer observers bothered to remind their western audiences that the Taliban had in the past enjoyed the active support of America and its regional allies, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

Events unfolded quickly. On 7 October 2001, a US-led coalition commenced military action in Afghanistan. Its stated aim was to eliminate the al-Qaeda terrorist network and topple the Taliban regime that harboured Osama bin Laden and his supporters. The Taliban rule collapsed just two months after September 11. A 'peace' conference, sponsored by the United Nations, was held in Bonn, Germany, on 5 December 2001, and approved a broad agreement for the establishment of an Interim Administration under the authority of Hamid Karzai. The Taliban did not take part in the Bonn talks. While some observers interpreted the rapid crumbling of the Taliban as a sign that peace would soon follow, others rapidly realised that even in those early stages the seeds of future conflicts were already being sown.<sup>37</sup> They predicted that the lack of attention to the need for peace and reconciliation between the warring parties, and the imbalance between the participants, would lead to further and renewed conflict and insecurity.<sup>38</sup> Five years later, the Taliban fighters are still active in the country and recently fighting has resumed with new vigour, particularly in the south-western provinces of Afghanistan.<sup>39</sup> The country is still at war, and, lately, peace has become seemingly even more distant. As Sir Olaf Caroe wrote in 1958: 'Unlike other wars, Afghan wars become serious only when they are over'.<sup>40</sup>

### **Improvising Afghanistan's reconstruction**

Clearly, ordinary Afghans have had little say in the dramatic events that have repeatedly engulfed their country and shaped their destinies. Today, their country is one of the poorest in the world with one of the lowest human development indexes,<sup>41</sup> and faces a delicate process of political normalisation and national reconciliation, together with serious reconstruction and development challenges.<sup>42</sup> Depending on whom you speak to, the likelihood of rebuilding the country in a way that is consistent with the principles of sustainable development ranges from extremely slim to potentially feasible under the right circumstances.

The circumstances that prompted the 2001 military intervention and the way it has been conducted will to a certain degree influence the chances of building a sustainable Afghan society. Despite promoting the military campaign as a humanitarian intervention and a 'just war', it seems

rather obvious that the intervention was mainly triggered by a desire for retaliation and as an act of punishment.<sup>43</sup> Its main objectives were to destroy the Taliban regime and capture bin Laden and its al-Qaeda fighters. There was no agreement or consensus among the coalition partners and the international community as to what should happen once the Taliban regime had disintegrated.<sup>44</sup> As a UN senior official put it: 'The Americans had a clearly limited agenda, a military agenda, which was to topple the Taliban, but they had not put enough thought into the more difficult task of what would come after'.<sup>45</sup> Improvisation seemed to be the rule and in the ensuing post-Taliban power vacuum, warlords from various factions were able to re-establish control over territories they had previously occupied.<sup>46</sup> The US relied on these allies to help it hunt down remnants of the Taliban and provided them with arms and financial support.<sup>47</sup> As one observer wrote:

America's new allies, however, included some of the same men who had wreaked havoc in Afghanistan before the Taliban came to power, and many of them were almost as radical in their ideology as the Taliban themselves.<sup>48</sup>

It is in this unsettled context that a United Nations-sponsored conference on Afghanistan was held in Bonn in late 2001. Various anti-Taliban groups met in the German city under extreme political pressure from the US and other interested parties.<sup>49</sup> The outcome was the creation of an Interim Authority but without any agreement among the warring parties to lay down their arms. A decision was also made to set up an International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) whose presence would however, be limited to Kabul and its vicinity.<sup>50</sup> Finally, the stipulation in the Bonn Agreement that militia troops present in Kabul should leave the city upon the arrival of the international force was never enforced.<sup>51</sup> No meaningful disarmament process took place either. Consequently, the security situation in most parts of the country remains volatile to this day. According to most observers, this is partly the result of the over-reliance of the US army on local warlords and its unwillingness to commit sufficient ground troops in the early stages of the campaign. Five years later, this attempt at nation building on the cheap still reverberates negatively. In a country like Afghanistan, scarred by decades of conflict, reconstruction challenges were always going to be daunting and complex. Nevertheless, it seems fair to state that due to the lack of a long-term and coherent plan, 'opportunities have been lost, goodwill squandered, and lessons of history ignored'<sup>52</sup>, particularly in the field of natural resources management and the closely linked issue of building sustainable livelihoods. Generally speaking, war and conflict are not compatible with establishing sustainable development or promoting environmental protection.<sup>53</sup> In the case of Afghanistan, the ongoing insecurity combined with weak governance structures and the lack of resources and capacity means that effective sustainable development strategies and environmental policies will be particularly difficult to

implement. This will have long-term negative consequences in a country where the vast majority of the population relies on natural resources for its survival. The failure to effectively address issues pertaining to natural resources management is thus of particular concern and will require urgent attention and more efficient planning by both donors and national authorities.

Despite a rather inauspicious start regarding Afghanistan's reconstruction process and the many challenges that still remain, various features/qualities/attributes of Afghan society could potentially contribute quite positively to the country's recovery process. Explored below is the strong sense of common identity shared by the Afghans and unifying force of Islam.

### **Afghan diversity and identity**

Afghanistan is about the size of France, with an estimated population of only 25 million people. Afghans can be divided into eight major ethnic groups. In the east and southeast are the Pashtuns who make up an estimated 38 per cent of the population. In the north, we find the Tajiks, who constitute about 25 per cent of Afghanistan's people. West of the Tajiks, live the Uzbeks, comprising 10 per cent of the population. The mountainous centre of the country is home to the Hazaras, representing more or less 20 per cent of the country's inhabitants. The balance consists of Turkmen, Aimaks, Baluch and Kirghiz (see map on page 41).<sup>54</sup> These major groups are often further divided into sub-ethnic and sub-tribal groupings. Each of the major groups, except for the Hazaras, also has ethnic links to neighbouring countries. Indeed, there are more Pashtuns in Pakistan than in Afghanistan.<sup>55</sup> Afghans are famous for their fiercely autonomous and independent character, which is partly the result of their country's geography. Its terrain is spectacularly varied, ranging from mountains with peaks culminating above 7,000 metres, interspersed with fertile valleys, to inhospitable deserts. The country's landscape, combined with a lack of infrastructure and communications, makes it difficult and arduous to travel around and many areas can only be reached by foot, horse or donkey. As a result, 'individuals often live and die in their home valleys unaware of others around them'.<sup>56</sup>

Afghanistan is often described as a 'combustible ethnic mix'<sup>57</sup> and has throughout its history witnessed repeated patterns of fission and fusion, when allegiances have shifted and power relations between the various ethnic groups have been altered, often resulting in conflicts. Ethnic diversity and antagonisms, as well as the country's ethnic links with neighbouring nations, have frequently been used by outside powers to trigger conflict inside Afghanistan. In fact, 'divisions among the Afghans virtually invited competitive foreign interference'.<sup>58</sup> In spite of the current emphasis on ethnicity, fuelled in large part by outsiders and local political leaders for economic and military purposes, a sense of national identity, of belonging, of being Afghan does exist.<sup>59</sup>

Most Afghans' primary loyalty, though, lies at the local level. According to Oliver Roy, while ethnic identities are important, they never prevail over this primordial identity, nor do they undermine a sense of common Afghan identity.<sup>60</sup>

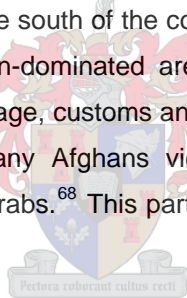


In spite of the obvious manipulation of ethnicity by internal and external players, no similar ethnicisation of the Afghan masses has taken place.<sup>61</sup> Although at times acrimonious in their interaction, Afghanistan's various groups and sub-groups have traditionally managed to reach some form of accommodation in resolving conflicts, through an informal balance of power. This was made possible by a high degree of local and regional autonomy. But almost 25 years of uninterrupted conflict, the country's increased exposure to the outside world and foreign influence have put strains on these traditional arrangements. Unsurprisingly, Afghans often found themselves in opposite camps at times of external threats or national crisis, and ended up fighting each other.<sup>62</sup> In the words of a young Afghan, 'there were tribal differences, ethnic differences,

yes – but they were secondary. We were all Afghans, and that was the important thing. The war has changed all that'.<sup>63</sup>

### **The centrality of Islam**

Another element of cohesion among Afghans is Islam. Almost all Afghans are Muslims - Islam is an integral part of the society's identity and value system. Eighty per cent of the people are Sunnis and belong to the Hanafi School, the most tolerant of the four schools of Sunni Islam. Most of the remaining 20 per cent are Shia Muslims. Despite the fundamentalist interpretation of Islam by both the Taliban and some conservative elements within Afghan society, tolerance underlies the practice of Islam in Afghanistan.<sup>64</sup> For most Afghans, religion is a private affair conducted at home or within their community or village, not something to be dictated by the state. To many Afghans, the Taliban religious decrees smacked of an alien and uncommonly zealous mentality. Afghans in general 'do not make an issue of being Muslims...and abhor any tendencies toward fanaticism'.<sup>65</sup> The brutality of the Taliban and their narrow interpretation of Islam can be explained through the socio-economic context in which they grew up and from the harsh realities of civil war.<sup>66</sup> The Taliban came from the south of the country or from refugee camps in Pakistan. Nearly all of them came from Pashtun-dominated areas. Outside these areas, the Taliban's 'appearance, dress, tribal origins, language, customs and interpretation of religion' were regarded as strange and foreign.<sup>67</sup> In fact, many Afghans viewed the Taliban as a puppet regime dominated by Pakistan and al-Qaeda Arabs.<sup>68</sup> This partly explains why their regime was toppled so easily.



Due to its centrality and the way it infuses many aspect of Afghan society, Islam could play a major role in securing peace and stability for Afghanistan. It will also be pivotal in determining the country's governance structure and in defining the functioning of its political system. Some argue that Islamism is the only social force 'pervasive and powerful enough' to forge an Afghan state.<sup>69</sup> Historically, Islam has been a crucial unifying factor and a major political tool for decision makers in Kabul and in the provinces.<sup>70</sup> As Norchi points out, 'Islam has been the expression of Afghans' common interest in the context of historically distant and weak central governments'.<sup>71</sup> Those who support the reconstruction process in Afghanistan will need to take this into account and be careful not to impose solutions and systems, which are solely the product of Western tradition and ideology. Western powers might also need to reconsider their often-superficial understanding and negative view of Islam.<sup>72</sup> If the objective is to build a democratic society in Afghanistan, neither ethnic diversity nor Islam should be considered as insurmountable obstacles. Islam's tradition of consensual decision-making and strong civic institutions suggest that democracy is not quite the alien transplant its detractors make it out to be.<sup>73</sup> It is more the West's insistence on

a single version of democracy that seems to be the problem. Many observers also consider that ethnic pluralism, if properly managed, can be seen as a safeguard from the worst abuses of tyranny and majority rule.<sup>74</sup> As explained later, Islam's relationship to nature and its holistic approach to the environment<sup>75</sup> could potentially play a useful role in establishing some degree of environmental governance and protection in Afghanistan.

### **Reconstructing Afghanistan: challenges ahead**

Rebuilding Afghanistan and transforming a war-torn country into a stable and functioning state that provides basic and adequate services, as well as justice and security to its citizens, is a daunting and complex task. Although interdependent, political and institutional reconstruction is certainly more complex and time consuming than hard infrastructure delivery. As Heffron puts it: 'political and economic relations and the fabric of lives are not as easily rebuilt or replaced as roads'.<sup>76</sup> Establishing strong, efficient and legitimate state institutions that are able to deliver and provide a modicum of support to fragile livelihoods will be far less easy and will require more than just donor funding and support. The task is made even more difficult by the fact that international aid is notoriously supply-driven rather than triggered by demand.<sup>77</sup> Many projects and programmes funded through development aid tend to fulfil objectives deemed necessary by donors, rather than respond to the actual needs of those directly affected by them. Very often, expatriate experts lack the interest or understanding of the social, cultural and political situation prevailing in the country, and care more about implementing the development policies of their donor country.<sup>78</sup>

Also problematic is the fact that most of the funds allocated for Afghanistan end up being channelled through international agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), with Afghan authorities having little say over how these funds will be disbursed and for what purposes they will be used.<sup>79</sup> Compounding these problems is the added confusion of actually knowing who is going to fund what, where and when. Many donor agencies in the beginning refused to pool their money into a joint trust fund for the whole of the country.<sup>80</sup> Donor countries seem to have their respective pet projects, and while all of them want 'to send children back to school; no one wants to pay military salaries'.<sup>81</sup>

Finally, international personnel tend to dominate policy development and decision-making processes. This is partly due to the lack of capacity, real or perceived, within the Afghan administration. According to the World Bank, the Afghan state, after more than 20 years of war, 'had become virtually non-functional in terms of policymaking and service delivery, although the structures and many staff remained'.<sup>82</sup> Consequently, donor agencies had to figure out how to

channel large amounts of foreign aid into a country where the national government had little authority, while at the same time preventing 'the dissipation of aid through corruption, favouritism, or incompetence'.<sup>83</sup> Some progress has been achieved, and the institutional vacuum has been filled to a certain degree.<sup>84</sup> The donor community has also lately demonstrated a greater willingness to provide Afghan authorities with easier access to and control over international financial resources. This is partly due to the Afghan government's success in developing the right systems to manage international funds.<sup>85</sup> For instance, an internal coordinating body, the Afghan Assistance Coordination Authority (AACA), has been established and is responsible for approving, coordinating, and monitoring all programme support to Afghanistan.<sup>86</sup> By mid-2003, the Afghan government was able to oversee the coordination of international aid.<sup>87</sup>

Considering the volatile environment in which the reconstruction effort is taking place, the fact that the country has so far not reverted to full-scale civil war, is cause for guarded optimism.<sup>88</sup> However, it is doubtful that this state of affairs will last if the benefits of even partial peace do not outweigh the 'benefits' – at least for some - of renewed war. Many have made huge profits during the past decades of unrest, both in terms of political power and territorial control, as well as financial gains. Thus the international community and the Afghan government need to fulfil the dual objective of providing better livelihoods for the majority of Afghans while also keeping potential spoilers at bay and/or incorporating them into the new power structure. Reconstruction and development activities need to be kept on track in the hope that they will promote the resolution of still simmering conflicts, and sow the seed of long-term and sustainable recovery.<sup>89</sup> Without a rapid and broad-based improvement in the appalling living conditions of most Afghans, peace and stability will remain elusive.<sup>90</sup>

### **Afghanistan and a strong state**

While the situation is certainly complex and fluid, the UN and other international agencies, in their haste to restore visible normality in Afghanistan, are doing a bit of everything in an often fragmented and contradictory fashion. For instance, elections have been held and institutions, albeit fragile, have been created, but disarmament and demobilisation activities are not taken place at the same pace.<sup>91</sup> This situation could spark renewed violence if the institutions put in place are not sufficiently strong or considered legitimate enough to take action and enforce decisions.<sup>92</sup> Reconstruction and development projects are also being implemented without having in place a proper and comprehensive strategy that will promote long-term sustainable development and not just the restoration of the status quo.<sup>93</sup> United Nations agencies and international donors have stated in a series of official documents that the end objective is to promote sustainable development. Assuming that the international community is serious and fully

dedicated to this objective, the policies and strategies devised for Afghanistan will need to promote long-term economic growth; support social development (particularly in the fields of poverty alleviation, health and education); and, ensure the protection of the environment and the proper management of natural resources.

When analysing the various development plans and strategies tabled by the international development agencies and donors, it seems that the emphasis is squarely on triggering economic growth and supporting the private sector, while hoping that the expected benefits will eventually trickle down.<sup>94</sup> For sure, issues of poverty reduction and social development feature prominently in the various strategies. Environmental protection and natural conservation also receive the odd mention. All considered however, the development agenda being promoted (as elaborated below) is mainly based on neo-liberal policies and includes, the accelerated privatisation of state assets and industries, the elimination of subsidies, and a reduced role for state institutions. This agenda is being pushed through despite the fact that similar economic policies have often failed in other developing countries.<sup>95</sup>

The strategies developed by the International Financial Institutions (IFIs), supposedly in close collaboration with national authorities, repeatedly state that market forces and the private sector should be the central engine for delivering sustained growth, not the state.<sup>96</sup> The development framework entitled: 'Securing Afghanistan's Future', drafted in partnership between the Government of Afghanistan, the UN, World Bank, IMF and Asian Development Bank, states that: 'The private sector must be the driver of economic growth, so removing obstacles to private sector development is an urgent priority'.<sup>97</sup> The State is only seen as playing a facilitating and supporting role. The National Development Framework (NDF) for Afghanistan drafted in 2002, even positions the private sector as a provider of basic services such as health and education.<sup>98</sup> In a country like Afghanistan where state institutions far from having too much control, have in fact too little influence, one could argue that what the country needs at the moment 'is not less state but more'.<sup>99</sup> For many observers, a stronger state is a pre-requisite for ensuring that some of the potential benefits of economic growth are more broadly and equally redistributed.<sup>100</sup> In order to achieve this goal, strong, well-staffed and properly funded state institutions are necessary. While the NDF does refer to the regulatory role of the state, little attention has been given to this aspect so far.

Privatisation is also heavily promoted by the IFIs, and is seen as a vital component of Afghanistan's economic recovery. Afghanistan is expected to support the rehabilitation of key state-owned enterprises, particularly in the energy and mining sectors, with the help of international firms and development funds, before selling them to private companies.<sup>101</sup> In parallel

to this process, the Afghan government is also required to lift trade barriers and liberalise its capital and financial markets. The NDF promises not to screen foreign investment companies, to apply low company tax rates, and to establish a free trade regime with low and predictable tariffs.

The development of a strong and vibrant private sector, able to trade freely and with a minimum of red tape, could arguably have a positive impact on a country's development potential. But hasty reforms without an adequate regulatory framework in place might spell disaster, particularly for the most vulnerable elements of the population. At present, it is doubtful that selling off the country's assets cheaply will lead to growth.<sup>102</sup> Removing trade barriers will open up the country to foreign competition and most probably be disastrous for local companies unable to compete with cheaper foreign imports. While free trade might be beneficial to rich countries, dismantling all barriers in the early stages of development is not the way to encourage growth. Most countries that have been successful in developing their economy 'have done so behind barriers of protection', and have only lifted these gradually as development progressed.<sup>103</sup> Finally, the premature liberalisation of financial markets before the country has a stable economy will most likely attract 'hot money' and speculation from foreign banks with possibly only marginal long-term social (and development) benefits.<sup>104</sup>

In sum, Afghans have had little influence over the economic policies being elaborated for their country. Right from the start, even before the Bonn Agreement was signed, external advisers from the IMF, the US Treasury and other financial institutions moved in to promote their own brand of economic policies. No real debate has taken place among stakeholders as to what type of economic model should be adopted. Hardly any thought was given to the possibility of developing alternative models that might be better adapted to the Afghan context and deliver greater returns for ordinary Afghans.<sup>105</sup> The same neo-liberal policies, applied elsewhere in developing countries, have simply been copied and pasted onto the Afghan canvas. The fact that such a strategy might not serve Afghanistan's long-term interests was not taken into account, not unrelated, as some point out, to the 'extent to which policy was set by people who knew nothing about Afghanistan'.<sup>106</sup> Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world. It has a rudimentary economy<sup>107</sup> and, in many ways, still lingers in a pre-industrial age.<sup>108</sup> Nevertheless, it is being force-fed an economic recipe that sometimes barely works in highly industrialised nations.

### **Building a sustainable future**

International Financial Institutions are not the only actors providing advice on development strategies. Various UN agencies and NGOs promote plans and projects more in line with the

objectives of equitable and sustainable development. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for instance, states that: 'Afghanistan is not a normal underdeveloped country that needs fast recovery growth based on market forces' and highlights the need to address deeply entrenched inequalities.<sup>109</sup> It seems however, that the pro-poor strategies promoted by development agencies, as well as the policies tabled by environmental organisations, end up being watered down and receive inadequate funding once the implementation phase starts.<sup>110</sup> This is possibly due to the fact that most foreign donor countries see the economic and financial sectors as being central to any development strategy. The social and environmental aspects are often deemed to be peripheral or secondary. At this point in time no model exist to challenge liberal capitalism at the global level.<sup>111</sup> Consequently the strategies being applied in Afghanistan follow that same pattern and tend to dedicate less attention and support to the environmental and social dimensions of development.

One of the sectors likely to be negatively affected by this trend is the natural resources sector, particularly with regard to the exploitation of timber, gems and natural gas. These sectors are already mostly under the control of criminal elements, traffickers and warlords. The same people also tend to occupy official posts within the central or provincial administrations, or are able to influence policies and decisions. They are thus ideally placed to take advantage of the new rules of the game.<sup>112</sup> Their activities are likely to mutate from a criminalized war economy into a cosmetically altered peace economy. The current forms of exploitation of valuable natural resources allow those with power and influence to become rich without investing much in return.<sup>113</sup> Consequently their activities do little to foster long-term economic growth, or for that matter sustainable development.

Decades of violent conflict have left Afghanistan's natural resources base heavily degraded, caused widespread environmental damage, and profoundly reduced the country's institutional and human capacity to address these issues. Given that 80% of the population lives in rural areas and is directly dependent on natural resources for livelihoods,<sup>114</sup> the restoration of ecosystems and the sustainable management thereof are crucial and will require long-term commitment and financial support from the international community.<sup>115</sup> Addressing environmental problems will need to go hand in hand with humanitarian aid and development efforts, so as to avoid further or renewed instability and upheaval.<sup>116</sup> Efficient and equitable water resources management is of particular importance in a country with low and erratic rainfalls and where large areas qualify as arid or semi-arid. Marsden describes the country as being 'effectively a mountainous desert in which river valleys and the occasional oasis permit a limited degree of cultivation'.<sup>117</sup> Water is crucial for the agricultural sector, which is either rainfed or irrigated through modern or traditional systems. Large 'modern' irrigation schemes, such as those of the Helmand and Nangahar River

valleys, have in particular been adversely affected by the conflict. Government agencies in charge of maintaining these systems have been unable to do so, due to lack of staff, equipment and finances.<sup>118</sup>

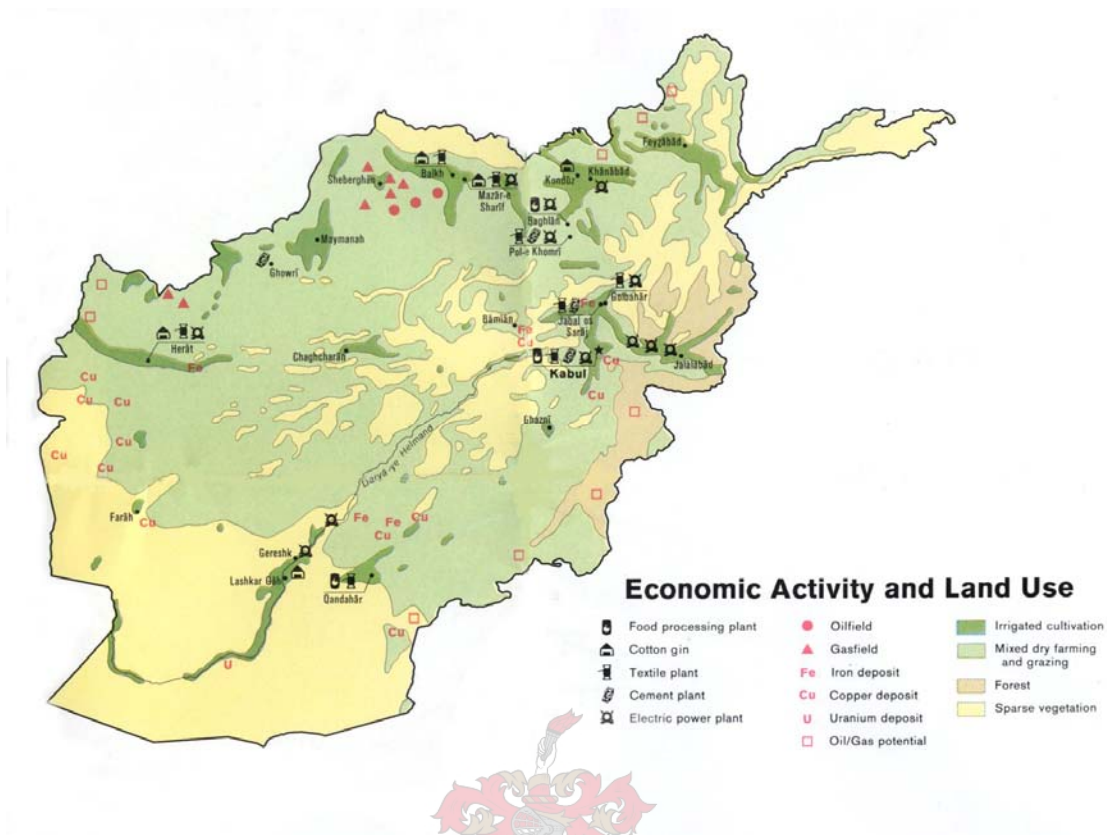
The war has also had negative effects on traditional canal irrigation systems. Typically, a *mirab* or water master manages these systems at the village or local level. Usually elected by farmers, the *mirab* makes key decisions concerning water distribution, operations and overall management, and acts as the link with government authorities.<sup>119</sup> Many rural areas have witnessed a complete breakdown of this traditional management system. *Mirabs* have stopped operating and have been replaced by local warlords who have imposed their own management system and frequently do not respect established water rights.<sup>120</sup> The severe drought of 1999-2001, the worst in the last 50 years, has accelerated the collapse of already fragile water management systems. The drought has affected most of the country and about half the population, either directly or indirectly. The Helmand River, in the south of the country, dried up for the first time in living memory and the water table sank to an all time low. Food insecurity rose dramatically, livestock was decimated and land productivity was seriously reduced.<sup>121</sup>

### **The central role of natural resources**

With 80 per cent of the population dependent on agriculture, but with only 12 per cent of the total land area being arable<sup>122</sup>, it is vital that efficient and sustainable agricultural and natural resources management methods be put in place. At present, irrigation systems only operate at efficiency rates of about 25 per cent.<sup>123</sup> Consequently, considerable scope exists for reducing water wastage and increasing the size of the irrigated areas. Productivity levels in both the rainfed and irrigated farmlands are also low compared to regional averages, indicating substantial scope for improvement.<sup>124</sup> While the recent drought and the war have negatively impacted on Afghanistan's agricultural sector, unsustainable practices and management techniques have created even further problems. Most Afghan farmers are unaware of the improved water management techniques that would help them to optimise crop production while saving water resources.<sup>125</sup> In addition, they also tend to grow water intensive crops in water poor regions.<sup>126</sup> Finally, according to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), water extraction is taking place in a totally uncoordinated and unmanaged manner. Millions of dollars are being wasted to fulfil immediate humanitarian needs without considering regional impacts or long-term hydrological consequences. For instance, in Farah province, the construction of deep wells, has caused the drying up of hundreds of *karez*, the traditional underground irrigation canals, leading to serious disruption of local livelihoods and triggering disputes over water rights.<sup>127</sup>

Farming activities and the agricultural sector, including livestock, are closely connected to natural resources management and the various ecosystems that make up Afghanistan (see map on page 50 for land use patterns). They are directly impacted by and influence other areas of the natural environment. Agriculture is dependent on water, but in turn also influences the quality and quantity of water available, through for instance, the use of pesticides or fertilisers, or the way water resources are harvested. The quality of soils also has a determining effect on crop yields. In turn, land usage techniques and the types of crops being planted will have an impact on the soil quality. Considering the centrality of water and land resources for Afghans and the country's development, it is urgent that these be addressed in a comprehensive and coordinated manner. Among the many issues hampering the development of a productive and healthy agricultural sector, we find: unsustainable water resource management and usage, limited access to credit, lack of access to improved farming technologies, limited private sector involvement in input and service delivery, and lack of land security and tenure.<sup>128</sup>

Forests and woodlands are another natural resource that has been negatively affected by the war and the lack of environmental control and management (see map on page 50 for forest cover). In certain provinces between 50 and 70 per cent of forest cover has been lost.<sup>129</sup> At the present rate of deforestation, it is estimated that no forests will be left in the next 25 years.<sup>130</sup> Trees are being cut to provide fuelwood and building material, but large tracks are also being cut to generate immediate profits for a small minority of warlords, timber barons and foreign traders.<sup>131</sup> The central government, despite issuing a ban on uncontrolled logging, does not have the means to enforce this. Local communities who used to manage their forests have also mostly lost control over these resources, often to local commanders. The forestry sector could become a major source of revenue for the country if properly managed. Trees, such as pistachio and fruit trees, are also valuable to local communities, both as a source of food and income. In addition, woodlands fulfil an important ecological role. They help maintain biological diversity, are critical to the survival of wildlife, and play an important role in stabilising soils, reducing erosion and maintaining riverbank stability.<sup>132</sup> Again, as with water and agriculture, a concerted effort is needed in order to protect the remaining Afghan forests.



Although the majority of Afghans live in rural areas, the urban population has increased dramatically in recent years. In 1970 Kabul had a population of 400,000 inhabitants. In 2003 the population in the city is estimated at 2.8 million people.<sup>133</sup> Most other cities in the country have experienced similar growth rates. Despite low levels of consumption and production, waste management has become a glaring environmental and human health issue. Afghanistan has no proper sanitary landfills, and most of the waste is simply disposed off at unmanaged dumpsites or along the roads.<sup>134</sup> Reliable water supply is also virtually non-existent and often polluted in Afghanistan's urban centres.<sup>135</sup> In 2000, according to UNICEF, only 17 per cent of Afghans had access to safe water and only 10 per cent had adequate sanitation.<sup>136</sup> Throughout the country, sewerage and waste water systems, when they exist, end up discharging their untreated effluents in rivers. The journalist and traveller Christina Lamb on a visit to Kabul a few years ago remembers how she and an Afghan friend suddenly stopped talking and covered their noses and mouths as they crossed the Kabul River.

I tried not to breathe in the nauseating odour from the almost dry riverbed into which people had evidently dumped their waste. Once the river was shining blue, there had been gardens all along the side...but the grass had died, the trees been cut down and the banks had become a sprawling bazaar of the old and rotten.<sup>137</sup>

Urban dwellers are also exposed to numerous toxic and carcinogenic air pollutants.<sup>138</sup> These pollutants stem mainly from an estimated fleet of around 600,000 vehicles, most of them concentrated in the cities and operating on low-grade diesel.<sup>139</sup> Most of the growth in urban population is due to rural-urban migration. Most migrants hope to find better living conditions in cities and escape rural hardships and insecurity arising from environmental degradation. Unfortunately for them, the situation in cities is hardly any better if not worse than in the countryside. As elsewhere in the world, urban centres will also be responsible for most of the economic output and activity. Providing a safe and healthy environment for city dwellers is thus matter of urgency.

### **Promoting environmental education and governance**

The challenges facing Afghanistan's reconstruction process are multiple and complex. Ensuring that natural resources are properly managed for the benefit of all and halting environmental degradation, are just two aspects of the multi-faceted reconstruction agenda. They are however, central and crucial for the country's development and the future survival of its people. Education and the dissemination of information pertaining to natural resources and environmental management will be an important element in bringing about a greater awareness and understanding of these issues among the population. Local and traditional decision-making structures and institutions should be made use of or rehabilitated when they no longer function properly. As mentioned earlier, Islam is fundamental to Afghan society, and in a country where most people live in rural areas and where as many as two-thirds are illiterate,<sup>140</sup> the village mullah and other religious structures, might well be an effective way of disseminating information.

Islam could also be instrumental in promoting environmental protection and respect for the natural environment. The Quran mentions the environment and the natural world in many of its verses.<sup>141</sup> Several verses are very specific and address particular environmental issues. For instance, the Quran deals with the hydrological cycle and the fundamental role water plays in sustaining life on Earth. It also states that pastures, woodlands, forests and wildlife cannot be privately owned or monopolised. In Islam, all species have a right to live and flourish, not because of their potential use to humans, but in their own right. The Quran points out the absurdity of the anthropocentric worldview by stressing that man is only a small part of the universe.<sup>142</sup> Although, according to Islam, God granted humans stewardship of the Earth, this does not entail ownership. Humans do not have the right to exploit or use nature unwisely, and according to the Quran 'each generation is entitled to benefit from them but is not entitled to own them in an absolute sense'.<sup>143</sup> Ensuring a greater dissemination and understanding of the Quran's teaching with regard to

environmental issues by for instance, training religious institutions and leaders, could have a positive impact on how ordinary Afghans deal with environment-related issues. In many ways the teachings of the Quran are infused with the principles of sustainable development and modern Islamic scholars, it is suggested, could interpret the ecological principles of the Quran so as to adapt them to contemporary environmental issues.<sup>144</sup>

Crucial to promoting environmental protection and laying the foundations for effective environmental governance will be to establish governmental authority over the whole country. In order to achieve this objective, government authorities in Kabul and their administrative extensions at the provincial and local levels, will need to deliver services and safety to their citizens in order to establish some level of legitimacy.<sup>145</sup> In a country like Afghanistan, war-torn and fragmented, the task is particularly difficult and far from successful. International insistence on rolling back the state is not a very encouraging sign. At this point in time, further downsizing the public sector could be politically risky, as this sector represents an important source of employment and is key in implementing recovery programmes.<sup>146</sup> Maintaining an adequate state apparatus should however not be equated with building up a bloated and ineffective bureaucracy. Getting the balance right will partly determine the relevance and level of legitimacy that the state enjoys among the Afghan population. There is an urgent need to reconnect individuals and institutions.<sup>147</sup>

In order to achieve this, the state needs to be seen as a reliable partner that has the ability to deliver on the ground. This is particularly vital in the field of natural resources management and environmental restoration. Many environmental problems and solutions are local in nature, but need effective coordination, both financial and technical, at the central level. The Afghan government needs to be seen as delivering to its people. Most of the work cannot just be left for NGOs and international development agencies to do. Afghan capacity needs to be urgently increased so that it can gradually take over from the international community, or at the very least, contribute in a meaningful way to the development effort.

### **Re-uniting the centre and the periphery**

Afghanistan has a strong tradition of localised and personalised rule. Over time, powerful regional interests have developed that have prevented the creation of effective national institutions.<sup>148</sup> Due to the difficult terrain, the lack of reliable communication systems and infrastructure, and repeated conflicts, many areas have long been used to operate beyond the reach of authorities based in Kabul. For many observers, all politics are local in Afghanistan.<sup>149</sup> Various leaders, in the recent past, have tried to either centralise or modernise the state apparatus. Until now,

centralisation has often meant the concentration of power in the hands of a narrow minority, and subjugation of opposition by force. Modernisation, on the other hand, was mainly based on co-opting autonomous local authorities through patronage.<sup>150</sup> Both moves eventually failed. Throughout its history, Afghanistan has witnessed an ongoing struggle between centre and periphery, between a modernising state and local communities attempting to remain beyond the central government's sphere of influence.<sup>151</sup> The last 23 years of turmoil and conflict have created an even stronger degree of regional autonomy. The regional character of Afghan politics cannot be ignored neither can the need for a more effective central government.<sup>152</sup> The difficult task facing both Afghans and the international community is to launch a dual and simultaneous process of centralisation and regionalisation, where participation at the local level can flourish and an adequate level of central coordination exists and is accepted. Achieving this objective in the field of natural resources management could have a potentially long-lasting positive effect in winning over a majority of Afghans and re-instilling a sense of confidence in national authorities. The sustainable management of natural resources and the implementation of environmentally sensitive policies are central to Afghanistan's recovery. They will have a direct and positive impact on issues such as, food security, water availability and quality, rural livelihoods, human health, agricultural productivity and others. All of these are crucial to reducing poverty and bringing about a minimum level of development.<sup>153</sup>

In this context, it is worrying that Afghanistan has had little latitude to chart its own development path or formulate policies for managing its economy. The fact that the country is heavily dependent on international financial and technical assistance should not mean that the process of policy-making should be taken over by outsiders.<sup>154</sup> However, this is exactly what has happened. Also worrying is the lack of imagination when it comes to policies dealing with the environment and the promotion of sustainable development. Many of the recommendations made in the various strategy papers and policy documents are often simply quick fixes that mainly promote rebuilding what has been destroyed. These policies will most probably only bring about short-term changes with little prospect for long-term sustainable development.

For instance, in the transport sector heavy emphasis is put on rehabilitating and building new airports. By 2015, the country should have 30 airports among them five international airports.<sup>155</sup> But in a country where few people can afford air travel, repairing damaged airports will have little positive impacts for the majority of poor Afghans.<sup>156</sup> On the other hand, developing the public railway system could be beneficial to the population at large. But so far, railways are only seen as a means to support the exploitation of ore and coal deposits. The development plans devised by the Government of Afghanistan and its international backers do not consider a rail passenger service<sup>157</sup> despite the fact that it would be of greater benefit to ordinary Afghans and have less of

an environmental impact than the present fleet of battered and polluting buses that commute between the various urban centres. According to the World Food Programme, railways in Afghanistan could move 10 times faster and transport 50 times more cargo than roads.<sup>158</sup> While mass-transit and environmentally friendly modes of transport, such as electric trolleys in cities, are mentioned in some of the development plans, their feasibility rests on continued economic growth. While economic growth has been high over the last years, albeit starting from a very low level, Afghanistan will still be a very poor country for many years to come.<sup>159</sup> Consequently, it seems very unlikely that the Afghan Government will be able to finance an efficient public transport network in the near future without financial support of the international community. Taking into account the economic agenda being imposed on Afghanistan, it is highly improbable that a comprehensive public transport network will be developed despite its many advantages in terms of human health, social development and environmental protection.

The same logic seems to prevail in the energy sector. While the various development strategies mention that energy resources should be developed on a sustainable and environmentally friendly basis, they also clearly mention that, 'the Government has assigned high priority to developing the oil and gas sector as significant sources of the country's energy'.<sup>160</sup> It also highlights the need to rehabilitate some coalmines. No mention is made, except in documents produced by specialised agencies such as UNEP and various NGOs, about the need to develop renewable energies.<sup>161</sup> The Government also envisions major hydroelectric developments that are completely outdated, fail to take into account potential damage to the environment, and ignore the needs of downstream users. No mention is made of small-scale hydroelectric dams.<sup>162</sup> One wonders why large, expensive and polluting projects always seem to attract the necessary financing, while small-scale, more affordable, greener projects that bring benefits to those with the greatest needs mostly fail to attract the necessary funding. The usual criteria of quick return, profit making and business as usual may be offered as an explanation.

The development of proper and effective environmental governance in Afghanistan still remains somehow distant. Although a National Agency for the Protection of the Environment (NEPA)<sup>163</sup> has been set up and various Ministries, dealing with issues ranging from water management to agricultural development, exist and operate at the provincial level with various degrees of success, the country is still far from having a fully operational system in place. Also, while environmental laws have been enacted<sup>164</sup>, the means to implement these are extremely deficient. Before environmental governance can really become a reality, basic good governance and rule of law will have to become the norm. This is particularly difficult in a country where neither the army nor the police exert much control over the most of the territory.<sup>165</sup> The security situation is still very tenuous and in recent months the Taliban have increased their military

activities. Much will depend on the willingness of coalition forces to remain in the country and on the international community's long-term commitment to provide assistance.

In conclusion, Afghans as well as international agencies and governments face a difficult task and a rather delicate balancing act. Foreign armed forces need to provide an adequate level of security and safety but without coming across as an army of occupation. Democratic values need to be promoted but without being seen as purely western imports and without clashing with traditional Afghan and Islamic values. The central government needs to be strengthened while at the same time allowing regional and local voices to be heard. The reconstruction agenda should not be hijacked or dictated by external experts. All these challenges will require dedication, long-term commitment, flexibility and a high degree of ingenuity and adaptability. As mentioned throughout this article, it is unlikely that the one-size-fits-all, neo-liberal development model being imposed on Afghanistan at this point in time, will achieve stable, long-term sustainable development. Then again, this might never have been the prime objective.



## Notes

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- <sup>3</sup> C Kremmer, *The Carpet Wars*. London: Flamingo, 2003, p. 44.
- <sup>4</sup> K Meyer & S Brysac, *Tournament of Shadows, The Great Game and the Race for Empire in Asia*. London: Abacus, 1999, pp. 77-110; and M Bearden, *Afghanistan, Graveyard of Empires*. Foreign Affairs, 80(6), 2001, pp. 17-19.
- <sup>5</sup> S Barakat, *Setting the scene for Afghanistan's reconstruction: the challenges and critical dilemmas*. Third World Quarterly, 23(5), 2002, p. 803.
- <sup>6</sup> A Misra, *Afghanistan: The Labyrinth of Violence*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004, pp. 16-19.
- <sup>7</sup> J Elliot, *An Unexpected Light: Travels in Afghanistan*. London: Picador, 2000, p. 27.
- <sup>8</sup> C Lamb, *The Sewing Circles of Herat: A Memoir of Afghanistan*. London: Flamingo, 2003, p. 2.
- <sup>9</sup> D Gregory, *The Colonial Present*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004, p. 30.
- <sup>10</sup> J Elliot, *An Unexpected Light: Travels in Afghanistan*. London: Picador, 2000, p. 40.
- <sup>11</sup> B R Rubin, *Transitional justice and human rights in Afghanistan*. International Affairs, 79(3), 2003, p. 568; and P Marsden, *Afghanistan: the reconstruction process*. International Affairs, 79(1), 2003, p. 92.
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- <sup>14</sup> D Gregory, *The Colonial Present*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004, p. 37.
- <sup>15</sup> A Misra, *Afghanistan: The Labyrinth of Violence*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004, p. 1.
- <sup>16</sup> S Barakat, *Setting the scene for Afghanistan's reconstruction: the challenges and critical dilemmas*. Third World Quarterly, 23(5), 2002, p. 806; and B R Rubin, *Transitional justice and human rights in Afghanistan*. International Affairs, 79(3), 2003, pp. 568-569.
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- <sup>18</sup> R Fisk, *The Great War for Civilisation, The Conquest of the Middle East*. London: Fourth Estate, 2005, p. 32.
- <sup>19</sup> A Misra, *Afghanistan: The Labyrinth of Violence*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004, p. 29.
- <sup>20</sup> A Rasanayagam, *Afghanistan: A Modern History*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2005, p. 143.
- <sup>21</sup> J Elliot, *An Unexpected Light: Travels in Afghanistan*. London: Picador, 2000, p. 22.
- <sup>22</sup> Cited in D Gregory, *The Colonial Present*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004, pp. 41-42.
- <sup>23</sup> Cited in C Lamb, *The Sewing Circles of Herat: A Memoir of Afghanistan*. London: Flamingo, 2003, p. 14.
- <sup>24</sup> S Barakat, *Setting the scene for Afghanistan's reconstruction: the challenges and critical dilemmas*. Third World Quarterly, 23(5), 2002, p. 807.
- <sup>25</sup> C Lamb, *The Sewing Circles of Herat: A Memoir of Afghanistan*. London: Flamingo, 2003, p. 14.
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- <sup>28</sup> A Misra, *Afghanistan: The Labyrinth of Violence*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004, p. 66.
- <sup>29</sup> T Ali, *Afghanistan: Between Hammer and Anvil*, New Left Review, 2, 2000, p. 134.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>31</sup> C Lamb, *The Sewing Circles of Herat: A Memoir of Afghanistan*. London: Flamingo, 2003, p. 27.
- <sup>32</sup> S Barakat, *Setting the scene for Afghanistan's reconstruction: the challenges and critical dilemmas*. Third World Quarterly, 23(5), 2002, p. 801.
- <sup>33</sup> C Johnson & J Leslie, *Afghanistan: The Mirage of Peace*. London: Zed Books, 2004, p. 11.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 84.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid.

- <sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 86.
- <sup>37</sup> A Suhrke, K B Harpviken & A Strand, *After Bonn: conflictual peace building*. Third World Quarterly, 23(5), 2002, p. 875.
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