1. INTRODUCTION

When donors convened in Bonn in December 2011, ten years after the start of the international intervention in Afghanistan, the question of aid impact was central to their discussions. With the imminent draw down of troops and the corresponding reduction in bilateral aid flows to the country over the short, medium and long terms, in looking to the future international and Afghan stakeholders are pressed to do more with less. Simultaneously, in looking back over the last decade, there is an intense political imperative to demonstrate progress not only on the battlefield but also with regards to Official Development Assistance (ODA).

Yet, following a decade of international assistance, questions still remain as to whether it would be reasonable to claim objectively that ‘progress’ has been made. First, the question of whether the Afghan state is any less fragile, unstable or incapable now than it was in 2001 does not have a straightforward answer. Whether donors’ chosen definition of state weakness emphasises fragility, stability, capacity or legitimacy, these are different sides of a similar coin and indicators point to no determinable or consistent upward trend. Second, whether international reconstruction efforts provided ‘value for money’ over the decade of intervention is another question with no obvious response.

This paper briefly explores these two questions in mapping levels of fragility over the course of the ten-year intervention. It first assesses different measures and definitions of fragility, before applying one quantitative model (USAID, 2006) to the Afghan case.

Findings demonstrate that the exponential increase in aid inflows over the decade (Zyck, 2010b: 2; Livingston and O’Hanlon, 2001: 32) is mirrored by upward trends in key socio-economic fields, such as real GDP per capita, Afghanistan’s Human Development Index score, school enrollment and improvement in access to water.
supplies. These factors promote a move away from fragility. Progress has not been as rapid as expected, however (UNDP, 2007: 4), and has been accompanied by worrying downward trends in political and security indicators. These trajectories also coincide with the views of many Afghans on the effects of international aid, which have become increasingly negative over the decade (Wilder, 2009: 145). While the gathering and heeding of these perceptions appear not to be high priorities on the international agenda at this critical point of imminent departure, this paper argues that they are fundamental to the sustainable securing of Afghanistan’s future.

Following a discussion of these findings, the paper addresses three critical but often overlooked problems with the approach to assistance in Afghanistan – the international pursuit of a liberal agenda; the reliance on private contractors for aid, development and security delivery; and the lack of capacity building that has taken place over the decade. It concludes with considerations for ways forward, beyond 2011.

Figure 1: Total ODA disbursed in Afghanistan (all donors), USD millions

2. AFGHANISTAN: A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE INTERVENTION DECADE

The similarities between the Soviet invasion of and intervention in Afghanistan (1979-1989) and that of the international community two decades later have been highlighted by a number of political analysts working in the region (Wilder, 2009: 143; ICG, 2011: 3). To this extent, they have become something of an old adage, but there are nonetheless poignant truths to be gleaned from the comparison. The Soviets concentrated development efforts in urban centres, due to their inability to access rural communities as a result of insurgent-controlled roads, and in doing so

emphasized the urban-rural divide (Rubin, 2002: 122); they invested more in their own military efforts than they did in building the strength of the Afghan army (ICG, 2011: 3); they increased the extent to which the national income was comprised of foreign aid (Rubin, 2002: 130) and in spite of attempts to signify the contrary, the government’s reliance on the Soviet regime increased perceptions that it was attempting to impose secular ideological agendas (Rubin, 2002: 136). These among other features of a previous international invasion pervaded the post-9/11 intervention also, scaled up as a result of even greater amounts of foreign aid, the many more countries involved and the media spotlight which would become increasingly intense as the decade drew on.

Beginning in Bonn in 2001, the plan to rebuild Afghanistan in the aftermath of the US-led NATO intervention was planned to be short-lived and somewhat minimalist, with a (now infamous) ‘light footprint’ approach that avoided the appearance of nation-building (Rashid, 2008: xlv). But as the Bonn Process concluded, with parliamentary elections in 2005, it was becoming increasingly clear that Afghanistan had not progressed into the realm of stability and still retained many of the characteristics of a fragile state. Elections had seen the re-establishment of the old order in power, this time legitimized with the badge of democracy. The insurgency in the south was gaining ground again – a worrying development following the seeming military victory of 2001. Funds to support the military cause in Afghanistan had been diverted to Iraq two years earlier, with the assumption that the war against the Taliban and its allies had been won.

From 2005 to 2010, Afghanistan saw a rapid deterioration in levels of security, accompanied by increasing military spending and the greater tendency for donors to blend aid with military objectives (Larson, 2011a: 8). As a counter-terrorism strategy evolved into counter-insurgency, winning hearts and minds through quick impact development projects became the order of the day, but without long-lasting effects these programmes contributed to the greater alienation of their Afghan beneficiaries (Wilder, 2009; Barakat and Zyck, 2010; Gordon, 2011). Accompanying a great influx of aid with the Obama administration’s ‘civilian surge’ have been soaring levels of corruption, reflected in (and intertwined with) the collapse of Kabul Bank in 2010. As Goodhand and Sedra noted, by this time the distribution of aid had become a complex bargaining system in which local elites, societal groups and international actors were increasingly enmeshed (Goodhand and Sedra, 2010: 78)

This condensed summary of events over the decade of intervention indicates a bleak outlook for Afghanistan, and perhaps a foregone conclusion of its continuing fragility. It would suggest that Afghanistan is not showing signs of being able to move into a more stable future on its own once donor attention decreases. But this picture still leaves questions unanswered, such as whether or not there have been achievements that counterbalance the failures, and whether international donor funds have contributed to these. In applying fragility frameworks to the Afghan case, this paper attempts to explore possible answers to these questions, anticipating similar queries on the agenda at Bonn in December.
3. FRAGILITY FRAMEWORKS: AN OVERVIEW

The term ‘fragile state’ has come into common currency over the last ten years, but has evaded concrete definition to the extent that different international actors place emphasis on different aspects of fragility in their own respective documentation. While DFID and the OECD emphasise states’ (lack of) willingness and/or ability to address service delivery to the majority of their populations, and specifically to combat poverty, Canadian foreign policy focuses on a lack of authority, capacity and legitimacy – and USAID focuses on a missing legitimacy alongside the inability of states to provide security to citizens (DFID, 2005: 7; Stewart and Brown et al., 2009: 2; CIFP, 2006; USAID, 2005: 1). The application of the term ‘fragile state’ is also highly political, particularly in terms of its (negative) effect on an identified regime’s status in the international arena, and in terms of its classification of states according to the foreign policy objectives of OECD countries. The use of the term also risks developing a negative attitude amongst the regime who often sees itself as legitimate and would therefore resist being labeled ‘fragile’. Indeed, some analysts have suggested that the definition of fragility is intentionally vague in order that the list of states categorised as fragile may be subject to strategic change (Keen, 2011).

Another point of differentiation is the way in which different donors and development actors link fragility to conflict. According to USAID, the two are strongly connected: “[a]lthough conflict, or susceptibility to conflict, is not identical to state fragility or failure, there is a strong conceptual link between these phenomena.” (2006: 3). DFID maintains a greater emphasis on states’ inability to address poverty than on conflict per se, but notes that one of the reasons for working in fragile states is that “they can destabilise regional and global security” (DFID 2005: 9). In their broader conceptualization of fragility from a human rights perspective, Stewart and Brown conclude that conflict results in economic underdevelopment, which in itself exacerbates fragility. They find that while some countries manage to achieve growth under conflict circumstances (e.g., Lebanon and Somalia), these are exceptional cases, and for the most part,

“...econometric evidence suggests an annual loss of per capita income of over 2 per cent p.a. from the ‘average’ conflict. Conflict also leads to lower expenditure on the social sectors as incomes and tax revenue fall and expenditure on the military rises. On average, it is estimated that military expenditure rises from 2.8 per cent of GDP (average for developing countries in peace time, 1995) to 5.0 per cent of GDP (Collier et al. 2003). Moreover the conflict causes trained manpower to flee, undermines transport links and is often associated with direct destruction of facilities.” (2009: 17)

This finding is supported by evidence presented in the 2011 World Development Report, which indicates that violent conflict functions as the principal hindrance to

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4 Cited from a lecture given by Professor David Keen at the PRDU, University of York, 23 July 2011.
countries meeting MDG targets (Figure 1). In this sense, according to these sources an innate connection between fragility and conflict is demonstrable according to economic, infrastructure and obvious security indicators.

This considered, it is nevertheless helpful to explore and draw on existing methods of assessing fragility as a means through which to analyse Afghanistan’s current context – and to compare this, when possible, with its position in 2001. Two different approaches are explored here: those of a poverty/developmental approach to fragility; and USAID’s security/legitimacy emphasis.

**DFID and the Millennium Development Goals**

DFID’s approach to fragility is very much intertwined with its focus on governmental legitimacy and poverty reduction, and as such carries a heavy emphasis on states’ progress toward meeting MDG targets. According to a recent report,

“Fragile and conflict affected states are furthest behind on the MDGs with only 10% of them on track to halve poverty and hunger by 2015… Making progress in fragile states to improve stability and advance MDG achievements is imperative to transform the lives of the world’s poor.” (DFID, 2011: 3).

The relationship between poverty and fragility is also supported by the World Bank’s 2011 World Development Report, which states that countries which have experienced conflict or are fragile remain on average 21 percentage points behind countries which have not experienced conflict, for socio-economic indicators (World Bank, 2011:5). DFID’s emphasis on this relationship lends itself to a measurement of fragility based on states’ ability and willingness to provide for the basic needs of their citizens. Accordingly, DFID’s identification of fragile states is based on a qualitative analysis in which the capacity and willingness of states is assessed within four categories: authority for security, effective political power, economic management and administrative capacity to deliver services (figure 2). ‘Indicative features’ of fragile states in terms of their performance in these four categories are given.
This then leads to an identification of four sub-types of fragile states – ‘good performers’, with both the capacity and political will “to sustain a development partnership with the international community”, ‘weak but willing’ states, which have political will but lack capacity; ‘strong but unresponsive’ states that demonstrate a propensity toward repression, and ‘weak-weak’ states where a lack of political will and capacity threaten to seriously hinder development (2005: 8).
One problem with a focus on MDG performance as a key component of measuring fragility, however, is the way in which some fragile states can in fact perform reasonably well in terms of meeting basic MDG goals but at the same time limit service provision to particular groups in society (Stewart and Brown et al., 2009). Stewart and Brown suggest a more holistic measure which includes a human rights (HR) approach also and adopts a distinction between absolute failure and progressive failure, allowing for deterioration in the case of the latter (2009: 5). As the authors themselves acknowledge, however, although extreme cases of failure may be determined, there is nevertheless still the problem of defining thresholds, which can be arbitrary (Stewart and Brown et al, 2009: 4).

**USAID**

In comparison to DFID’s largely qualitative analysis, the model for assessing fragility put forward by USAID (2006) is perhaps the most comprehensive of available quantitative methods, based around four key pillars of stability: security, economic conditions, politics and social wellbeing. According to USAID, “…state fragility occurs when, to some degree, the state: (1) is unable to provide basic services, and (2) has lost its ability to provide domestic security and maintain the integrity of its borders” (USAID, 2006: 4). The USAID model divides indicators into three key categories – those of economic effectiveness, economic legitimacy, and social effectiveness and legitimacy – and in doing so explicitly emphasises socio-economic factors over those of political stability and security. Measures for the key indicators within these categories are taken from a variety of quantitative sources, most notably the World Bank’s World Development Indicators, the IMF’s World Economic Outlook database, and a combination of other indices that are considered relevant to the model.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic Effectiveness</th>
<th>Economic Legitimacy</th>
<th>Social Effectiveness and Legitimacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Macro-economic performance and stability:</td>
<td>Poverty:</td>
<td>Education:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. <strong>Growth in real DGP (PPP) per capita</strong></td>
<td>1. <strong>Poverty rate</strong></td>
<td>1. <strong>Youth Literacy rate</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. <strong>Level of real GDP per capita</strong></td>
<td>2. <strong>Arable land per person</strong></td>
<td>2. <strong>Primary school persistence to grade 5</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Share of gross fixed investment in GDP, in current prices</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>External Stability:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. <strong>Foreign direct investment, net</strong></td>
<td>1. <strong>Share of government revenues in GDP</strong></td>
<td>1. Your population bulge</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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5 Broader political and social indicators are developed in more detail in USAID’s Conflict and Fragility Alert, Consultation, and Tracking System (C/FACTS), drawn up by USAID/CMM. The Fragile States Indicator framework, discussed here, was designed to complement C/FACTS, and focuses more heavily on economic indicators (USAID, 2006:1).
Certain features lend credence to this model. First, variant data sources are drawn to provide the required statistics, in order that reliance on a single source is avoided. Second, indicators have been chosen in order that false or unhelpful proxies are largely avoided also. Under education, for example, primary school persistence to grade 5 has been selected as a more accurate measure than enrollment, reflecting its greater capacity to measure the more meaningful data of whether children stay in school once formally registered in grade one. This is also the measure used to measure progress according to the Millennium Development Goals, one of the primary reasons for its selection in this model (USAID, 2006: 12). Youth literacy rate is preferred over literacy rates in general, allowing a focus on recent historical developments in education rather than the effects of earlier education policies and programmes. In these and other ways, the model creates a “medium-term overview of state fragility rather than an up-to-the-minute prediction of possible state failure.” (2006: 6). This leads to far less emphasis being placed on gaining highly accurate and recent statistics, and more focus on trends for strategic planning in the medium term.

Significant gaps exist, nevertheless, with this model. A key problem lies with the general paucity of data available on fragile states. While efforts are made to select indicators that are already used widely by international institutions, there are nevertheless considerable gaps in the available statistics given the difficulties in collecting reliable quantitative data in countries often afflicted by conflict, for example. This presents a significant problem in the application of the model to the

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6 *Italic and bold* here indicates where information is available on Afghanistan, *Regular* where no statistics at all are available and *Italic* where incomplete or partial data are available.
Afghan case, for which, as demonstrated in figure 4, data is available only for half of the required fields (16 out of 32), and even these with some amendment and concession. It would also suggest that, in spite of the normative judgments needed for a more qualitative assessment of fragility, these are perhaps better suited to the context-specific and complex dynamics of fragile states that simply cannot be collected as statistical data.

Further, as implied earlier, the focus is primarily centred around social and economic factors, leaving largely aside the political and security indicators which themselves form part of USAID’s fragile state definition. There is little mention of the performance of government institutions, or the kinds of institutions likely to promote moves away from fragility. This is possibly an advantage as it takes into account the ways in which stability does not necessarily coincide with the existence of a democratic politics. As many have argued, the presence of fledgling democratic institutions can in fact lead to greater and not less civil strife and or conflict (Mansfield and Snyder, 2002; Stewart and O’Sullivan, 1998). Nevertheless, indicators such as Freedom House’s indices of political rights and civil liberties are notable for their absence in this framework. Security, also, is not explicitly measured – while domestic military spending is included, and an indication of security levels may be gained from the analysis of economic performance, there is no indicator for levels of insurgent activity, for example, or the presence, prevalence and duration of international military operations. These factors, arguably, are too complex for inclusion – but this in itself highlights the limitations of the model in being able to capture the levels of fragility in a given context.

In the next section, the USAID model will be applied to the Afghan case, demonstrating its capacity but also its limitations as a means through which to assess fragility.

3. THE USAID MODEL AS APPLIED TO AFGHANISTAN

Economic Effectiveness Indicators

Of the five indicators put forward under the category of macro-economic performance and stability, full data covering a span of five or more years within the given timeframe are available for Afghanistan for the first three, with some adaptations. Instead of growth in real GDP (PPP) per capita, growth in GDP per capita is given as an annual percentage. The share of gross fixed investment in GDP in current prices (indicator 5) was not available for Afghanistan, and the level of fiscal deficit only available for four years. Indicators 1-3 are shown here:
A clear upward trend is visible in levels of real GDP indicating here that, over the last ten years, Afghanistan has indeed made progress away from fragility in terms of its macro-economic performance, internal to the country. Growth, inflation rates and fiscal deficit levels have fluctuated somewhat and do not represent clear trends, however. Assuming for the time being that the data is relatively reliable, this could be explained by a fledgling economy, by the impact of conflict and other shocks, increasing levels of aid and a burgeoning opium economy.

Comparing this to figures available for indicators of external stability, a similar story is clear, although again, data are missing. For total debt service to exports, only four figures from 2006-2009 are available, and signify no clear trend. According to the World Development Index, Foreign Direct Investment largely

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7 Source: WDI 2011 and IMF World Economic Outlook Database
8 Source: IMF World Economic Outlook Database
increases until 2008, when a significant drop from USD 300 million to USD 185 million appears to indicate a recent decrease in foreign investor confidence. This downward trend is reflected also in FDI figures collected by the Afghanistan Investment Support Agency (AISA), although the statistics recorded by this organization – based on actual registered capital invested, differ significantly from those collated by the WDI (Figure 7). The considerable discrepancy between these sets of statistics may reflect the way in which wealth deals may be signed, for example in the extractive industries, the outcome of these deals is rarely reflected in actual capital registered. The difference also demonstrates the weakness of data reliability more generally in Afghanistan, as will be discussed below – a factor which should be taken into account when considering any statistical analyses on the country.

Figure 8: Foreign Direct Investment (USD millions)

9 Source: World Development Indicators and AISA, 2008.
Current account balance wavers over the ten years and perhaps provides a more accurate picture of Afghanistan’s fluctuating levels of external stability. Very few if any data are available on primary commodity exports and trade openness to GDP, hence their lack of inclusion here.

**Economic legitimacy indicators**

Of the three indicators listed under the ‘poverty’ subsection, for only two are data available for Afghanistan and again some amendment is necessary. The amount of arable land per person is taken from WDI statistics, and covers the ten-year period from 2001-2011. For poverty rates, UNDP’s Human Development Index (HDI) scores are substituted here given that data cover a greater period of time and also present a more holistic view of poverty levels than economic indicators of percentages of populations living below a given poverty line. The HDI covers education, health and economic prosperity, and as such provides a more accurate picture of the experience of poverty in a given country. Proportions of the population experiencing economic discrimination are not available for more than two years during the decade being observed here, and thus are not included as they cannot point to trends over time.

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**Figure 9: Current Account Balance (US billions)**

**Figure 10: HDI scores, 2003-2010**

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10 Source: IMF World Economic Outlook Database, 2011.
As is clear from the graph, these two indicators move in opposite directions, with arable land per person decreasing over time, and poverty rates improving. The former is perhaps consistent with increasing levels of urbanization in Afghanistan, as a result of which many have sold arable land and have moved toward the cities for potentially better work opportunities and standards of education. Incremental but steady improvements on Afghanistan’s HDI score demonstrate a positive trend which does not seem to have been affected by decreasing levels of security since 2006.

As pointed out in the Human Development Report for Afghanistan in 2007, however, Afghanistan’s HDI scores – while improving steadily – are well below those of neighbouring countries (UNDP, 2007: 19), and do not reflect a rate of change that will allow MDG goals to be met by 2020. Thus, while the trajectory itself is heading in an upwards direction, the pace of development remains lethargic and lagging behind other countries in the region – neither of which point to its likely emergence from a state of fragility in the near future.

In terms of government legitimacy and effectiveness – indicators 14-17 – three of the four are available for Afghanistan for the period of 2001-2010. While no reliable trend exists across the ten years for the share of government revenues in GDP, the IMF has stated that, over the last two years, there has been significant improvement in this field:

“For the three fiscal years prior to 2009, government revenues remained stagnant at around 8 percent of GDP, among the lowest in the world. In 2009/10 it improved to more than 10 percent of GDP, and rose further to just under 11 percent of GDP in 2010/11. Still, with total spending in excess of

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12 Source: WDI Indicators
20 percent of GDP, the fiscal gap is being covered by donors—a situation that must be redressed as the country aims to become self-sustaining.” (IMF, 2011).

This demonstrates the extent to which, in spite of some improvement in this field, Afghanistan’s aid-dependence currently undermines the sustainability of improvement, a fact which in itself emphasizes the fragile nature of its current fiscal position.

Both the Corruption Perception Index and the Ease of Doing Business scores are available for the latter half of the decade. These examples of more qualitative indicators show a generally negative trend. Lowest scores for Corruption perceptions – where higher scores indicate perceptions of less corruption - coincide with the highly fraudulent elections of 2009, with a generally negative trajectory possibly reflecting an inversely proportional relationship to increasing amounts of aid to the country and the ways in which it is perceived by many Afghans to be fuelling corrupt practices within government (Wilder and Gordon, 2009). In 2011, the Ease of doing business index – measuring factors such as number of procedures required to start businesses, and the average time taken to establish small enterprise – ranked Afghanistan at 167, globally, out of a possible 183 positions. In 2006, it ranked at 122 out of a possible 155 positions\(^\text{13}\).

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{corruption_index.png}
\caption{Corruption Perceptions Index\(^\text{14}\)}
\end{figure}

\(^\text{14}\) Source: Transparency International. No data were available for 2006.
The World Bank Institute lists a series of scores for the country in its worldwide governance indicators, one of which is for rule of law. Allocating scores from -2.5 (worst) to + 2.5 (best), this data set marks fairly steady negative trend for Afghanistan since 2000. This is unsurprising: in comparison to the installation of an executive and the forming of elected legislative bodies, for example – and in comparison to security sector reform – very little attention was paid to rule of law in the early years of the decade of intervention (USIP, 2004: 1-2). It has belatedly found place on the international agenda but arguably only as a result of knee-jerk reactions to corruption in elections in 2009. It is an important indicator of fragility, however, and will be revisited later in the paper.

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Figure 13: Ease of Doing Business Index\textsuperscript{15}

Social effectiveness and legitimacy indicators

Under the third and final category of indicators in the USAID model – those of social effectiveness and legitimacy – a significant proportion of statistics are unavailable for Afghanistan, and many of those that are used here are amended due to the paucity of data listed. Of all the educational variables suggested in the USAID model, none of the exact indicators suggested are listed by either UNESCO or the WDI for the 2011-2010 decade. Even using net primary school enrollment as a flawed proxy provides little information – UNICEF statistics estimate that figures currently stand at 74 per cent for boys and 46 per cent for girls, based on the latest available data from between 2005-2009 (UNICEF, 2011). While it is not possible to identify trends over five years due to a paucity of data, one graph compiled by UNICEF does indicate an upward trajectory over three years since the international intervention began:
The lack of data here is unfortunate, particularly given the way in which persistence to grade 5 provides a much more meaningful measure. It is also important to consider alongside the way in which education statistics are used frequently by politicians and policy makers as measures of progress in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, of the data available, the net primary school enrollment does present an upward movement, as does the mean years of schooling for adults over 25 and the expected years of schooling, compiled in the Global Development Index (GDI). In 2011, 6.2 million Afghan children were attending school – the highest level of students recorded in Afghanistan’s history (ICG, 2011: 1).

Available statistics for the indicators in the demography and labour markets are scarce, with the only figures available being for youth population in 2010, and for urbanization across the ten years. According to the UNFPA, 68 per cent of Afghans in 2010 are under 25 – a considerable youth bulge typical in fragile states (UNFPA, 2007: 19). Alongside high population growth and improved healthcare services, with more children now surviving past aged five, this figure is an early indicator of an even greater youth bulge to come in fifteen to twenty years’ time. If economic growth stagnates, however, this will present a heavy burden on an already struggling and aid-dependent economy. Urbanization trends are steadily increasing, as demonstrated below – again, a common feature in developing and/or fragile states, and one supported by the data available on the increasing size of the population in Kabul, and complemented also by increase mobile phone usage and internet users (WDI).
In health, more information is available – up to now with the exception of HIV prevalence. This is a highly sensitive subject in Afghanistan about which little is publically stated, although some recent studies have been conducted by the Afghan government in collaboration with Johns Hopkins University. These show areas of high risk and HIV prevalence among them, and until very recently have not been able to provide statistics for the country as a whole (National Aids Control Program, Johns Hopkins et al, 2008:2). In other fields, a positive trajectory can be noted in all areas – in life expectancy (although this represents a slower increase than other indicators, and statistics are not available for a male/female ratio), in declining infant mortality, in an increase in child immunization and the percentage of the population with access to improved water supplies and sanitation. Although full statistics are not available for improved access to water supplies and sanitation, the percentage of population with this access rose from 21 per cent in 2000, to 41 percent in 2005, to 48 per cent in 2009 (WDI, 2011). Combined, this figures no doubt represents a signifier of socio-economic improvement over the ten-year period.

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16 Source: WDI
17 A new study from Johns Hopkins and the NACP indicates very high levels of HIV in Afghanistan, but results have not yet been released in public. According to another study conducted by Johns Hopkins on high-risk groups, 18% of Injecting Drug Users in Herat, 3% in Kabul and 1% in Mazar-e-Sharif are infected with HIV; and 0.6% of prisoners in Kabul and 1.6% prisoners in Herat are also infected. (Integrated Bio Behavioural Surveillance (IBBS), Johns Hopkins University/National AIDS Control Programme (NACP), 2010 (cited in UNODC, 2010: 1).
18 Also, figures for life expectancy are different in the HDR 2007 report, which indicates a decrease in life expectancy in 2005 (43.1) as compared to 2003 (44.5). (UNDP, 2007: 19).
Figure 17: Life expectancy\textsuperscript{19}

Figure 18: Infant mortality per 1000 live births\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{19} Source: UN World Population Prospectus, 2010.
\textsuperscript{20} Source: WDI
As the final indicator in the USAID model, military spending is included as a way in which to judge the priorities of a given state, with the assumption that the higher the military spending as a proportion of GDP, the less secure the state and the less it is able to spend on public services. As the authors of the USAID model concede, however, this assumption is not always correct, leading to the use of a potentially false proxy in the measurement of fragility:

“Care must be taken in interpreting this variable because high military spending may also be a sign of a state facing substantial current external threats (regional instability) or a legacy of external threats. Moreover, because state fragility is defined partly as the loss of a monopoly of violence, high military spending may correlate with a state’s ability to provide for internal and external security and stability, though not necessarily legitimacy derived from popular support, and a state’s ability to provide social services and a business-enabling environment.” (USAID, 2006: 30)

This indicator, then, is perhaps one of the weakest in the model, given the way in which levels of military spending can in fact point to its capacity to protect citizens from regional threats rather than its inability to provide goods and service. Furthermore, for Afghanistan, as for a number of other states, statistics for this indicator are simply not available.

A related point, highlighted by a recent report, draws attention instead to the amount spent by international actors in fragile states on security sector reform, police training and the increase in the size of national military forces. This cannot be used as an indicator of fragility for similar reasons – it could point to the potential decrease in fragility but could also reflect international security concerns increasing,
depending on how and when funds are spent. But it is poignant to note nonetheless that in spite of concerted increases in international donor spending on recruiting, training and equipping security services since 2002, capacity building and professionalization of these forces has been slow. According to the ICG, “the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP), despite receiving more than half of total international aid – about $29 billion between 2002 and 2010 – have thus far proved unable to enforce the law, counter the insurgency or even secure the seven regions identified for full Afghan control by mid-year.” (ICG, 2011: 1). This correlates with the way in which statistics demonstrating the exponential increase in ANA and ANP forces, from 6000 on duty in 2003 to 266,389 in 2010, do not indicate a corresponding increase in levels of security.

In summary, the application of the USAID model to Afghanistan highlights two principal issues. First, the lack of data available renders the measurement exercise tenuous at best, although some indicators can demonstrate visible trends. Second, judging by the data that is available, there is a mixed story to be told, with financial indicators demonstrating considerable fluctuation, socio-economic indicators largely pointing to incremental positive trends (HDR, 2007: 4), and governance or ‘economic legitimacy’ as it is termed here demonstrating negative trajectories. This points to the way in which, coming from an exceptionally low baseline, Afghanistan’s fledgling economy has not yet established a path of steady progress, but that there has been considerable improvement in the provision of basic services for citizens, with the contribution of considerable international assistance. It highlights however the tendency toward decline in key areas, namely, those in corruption perceptions and rule of law – all of which affect significantly the long term prospects for sustainable development and a move away from political fragility. These indicators also represent the qualitative perceptions and experiences of Afghans, rather than macro-economic statistics or aggregate estimates. The following section explores this in more depth, drawing on other indices which can highlight more effectively the current situation in Afghanistan, 10 years after the military invasion.

4. OTHER VARIABLES: A DIFFERENT STORY

In comparison to the way in which socio-economic indicators generally present an upwards trend between 2001-2010, other variables – primarily in the fields of governance and security – suggest a different narrative, and one that must be taken into account alongside the more positive trajectories of education and health, for example. These, it could be argued, hold more significance in their ability to indicate Afghanistan’s future trajectory as international intervention decreases in intensity.

 Governance indicators

A number of indices excluded from the USAID fragility framework exist and provide data on Afghanistan over the last decade, and thus, as a means to supplement the statistics compiled in the model, it is pertinent to consider these and
see whether any trends coincide. Perhaps the most well-known of global governance indicators are the Freedom House data, measuring political rights and civil liberties on a scale of 1-7, where 1 is the highest potential score.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Political Rights</th>
<th>Civil Liberties</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Not Free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
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Figure 20: Annual Scores for Afghanistan, post-intervention (Freedom House 2011)

As demonstrated here, while a progression towards lower scores for both political rights and civil liberties is notable in 2005-2006, reflecting generally what was considered free and fair parliamentary and provincial council elections held in 2005,

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22 Compiled by Anna Larson, PhD thesis
scores have increased again since this time and appear to be continuing in an upward trajectory. Contributing factors to the increase include increasing executive (and/or Presidential) interference in legislative affairs, the passing of laws restricting the rights of Shia women, and fraudulent elections in 2009-2010, for example.

Freedom House measures are not the only governance indicators to represent a trend toward increasing fragility. According to the World Bank Institute’s global governance indicators, ‘voice and accountability’ follows the same bell curve as the Freedom House pattern, starting with a low score, peaking slightly in 2006-07 and then declining rapidly. In the same index, ‘political stability’ scores fluctuate initially after a low starting point, but have been declining steadily since 2005. ‘Government effectiveness’ and ‘regulatory quality’ also register downwards trends. These coincide with the indicators of rule of law and also of corruption perceptions scores discussed above – the trajectory for all is a negative slope. Journalists Without Borders also reports a curtailing of press freedoms since 2001 with a slight improvement in the last two years. Still, this is the exception to the rule in the available data on governance.

The concern for rule of law and its related indicators was noted at length in the 2007 HDR for Afghanistan. Interestingly, however – and related very much to wider international priorities at the time, the earlier 2004 HDR for the country was focused on security and made little reference to the need to establish a functioning, independent judiciary. This clearly reflects the way in which international attention to rule of law was lacking at the time (USIP, 2004) and was very much an afterthought, essentially entering the realm of international consciousness (or political will) too late in the game.

![Figure 22: World Bank governance indicators](image)

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Security

Levels of security are difficult to measure given the number of contributing factors in an insecure environment. Clearly, however, security cannot be measured by military spending alone – and neither is it adequately qualified by the numbers of Afghan security forces, although this has increased exponentially from 6,000 in 2003 to 266,389 in 2010 (Livingston and O’Hanlon, 2011). The number of civilian casualties can indicate to some extent the decrease in security over time – as compiled by Livingston and O’Hanlon, these have escalated significantly since 2006 in a linear upward trend – figures which are backed up by UNAMA statistics (figure 23), and also mirrored by the number of humanitarian aid workers affected by security incidents in Afghanistan since 2001 (figure 24).

![Figure 23: Civilian Casualties, 2006-2010](image)

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24 This figure is for Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Defense forces combined.
Another approach is to look at the ways in which Afghan lives are affected on a day to day basis as a result of increasing security incidents, and the heightened difficulty of administering humanitarian aid distribution. The number of Internally Displaced Persons, for example, has more than doubled over the last three years, from 150,000 in 2008 to 352,000 in 2010 (Livingston, Messera and O’Hanlon, 2010). Perhaps even more significantly is the increasing number of Afghans seeking asylum abroad in recent years, which follows the bell curve of governance indicators – decreasing in 2005, but increasing rapidly since this time, albeit with a slight decline in 2010.

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26 Source: The Aid Worker Security Database (aidworkersecurity.org), cited in Poole, 2011.
Considering the ways in which Afghans perceive the opportunities and obstacles facing them on a daily basis – even superficially, as demonstrated here through the use of statistical analysis of behavioural patterns, provides a different picture to the one indicated by socio-economic indicators. In 2011, trends in governance and security indicate negative regressions, judging by the significant factors of corruption perceptions, rule of law, voice and accountability, civil liberties, and the numbers of Afghans displaced within the country and those seeking to leave. These indicators provide more of an insight into fragility than macro-economics, education levels or health data – because they epitomize instability, and the increasing uncertainty underlying the ways in which decisions are made from the household level to the legislature. If the ability to pay for medicine for sick family members depends on the amount paid in bribes at police checkpoints on the way to the local clinic, it makes no difference that that clinic is now two miles closer to home than it was in 2004 – unless there are fewer checkpoints along the route. These are the kinds of issues that cannot be fully portrayed in quantitative analyses, but which are suggested through indicators such as the corruption perceptions and rule of law indices.

5. KEY PROBLEMS WITH ENGAGEMENT

From the above analyses, then, it becomes clear that the state of governance and security in Afghanistan today have not improved in a manner directly proportional to the increasing amount of aid that has been delivered over the last ten years. While basic socio-economic conditions have improved, there is a clear governance and security deficit. What, then, have been the faults with the intervention as a whole? Where did things go wrong? There exist numerous detailed accounts of the pitfalls of international assistance in Afghanistan, from the problems with combining military and development agendas (Barakat et al., 2008; Wilder and Gordon, 2009; Barakat and Zyck, 2010); to the salaries of international contractors and the waste of aid (Waldman, 2008); to perceptions of corruption within the international community (Gardizi, Hussmann and Torabi, 2010); to democratization efforts (Larson, 2009; 2011). Due to limitations of space and time, only three are discussed briefly here: the effects of imposing liberal values and ideas; the extraordinary reliance on for-profit development agencies and private contractors; and the simple lack of capacity building that has resulted from the sidelining of government institutions in fiscal and other decision-making processes (Barakat and Larson, 2010). These factors are often left out of typical evaluations of international assistance to Afghanistan – and where they are debated, often within civil society circles, meaning and relevance can become separated from concrete policy agendas.

A liberal agenda

Afghans have a history of having agendas thrust upon them – and a corresponding counter-history of shrugging them off when they become too intrusive or threaten to challenge cultural or religious identity. In recent years, this has been the case with
the Communists, and with the Taliban – and has been occurring visibly over the last three to four years with the liberalist agendas imposed by the international intervention. This is not to say that Afghans as a nation are not open to change – but it demonstrates a sense of pride in a national identity that overrides ethnic and regional divisions (Barfield, 2010: 278). This is also fuelled by the general opposition to modern state-building voiced by religious clergy, whose interests remain in the maintenance of a perceived status quo ante that would privilege madrassas over the state school system and would limit the accessibility of the mass media (Barakat et al., 2008: 15).

In common development parlance a liberal democratic and economic agenda has become the norm, following the ‘end of history’ and the spread of internationally-promoted democratisation. While there are no doubt positive qualities within liberal democratic systems that are arguably applicable globally and which citizens of any country should be able to enjoy, the values on which these systems are constructed nonetheless contain highly normative judgments about how life should be lived which are not universally shared or perceived in the same way across different contexts. For many Afghans, democracy is ‘unlimited freedom’ in which social boundaries are broken and as a result of which anarchy and dissent are likely (Larson, 2009; 2011b). The focus on the rationally-thinking individual in liberal thought is starkly juxtaposed against the no-less-rationally-thinking community member in Afghanistan, whose incentives and interests may be wholly different from those of a western counterpart. The role of women is a contentious issue, evidently: whereas freedom to choose a career, a lifestyle and a partner are fundamental to western women’s individual rights, their subjection to sexual objectification is scorned by many Afghan women, some of whom hold entirely different views of the meaning of liberation. Evidently other women in Afghanistan are subject to abuse, torture, rape – with no recourse for state intervention. This cannot be downplayed. But the issue is complex, and is not aided (indeed, is often made worse) by perceptions that the intentions of the West are to impose a liberal agenda entailing the enforced removal of the veil (as happened in the past) and a fundamental change in social structure overnight.

The issue is complicated further by differences between attitudes and perceptions at the centre and periphery, but also among different groups in both urban and rural communities. While a stark urban-rural divide exists, the division is simplistic in many senses, with the influx of urbanization heightening the conservative principles of some urban migrants determined to maintain community cohesion amongst the disorder and perceived threat of city liberalism. There is also a widespread perception of the spread of liberal values by international actors, often propagated as part of a religious anti-West rhetoric, that far exceeds the actual demands for liberalization made in the process of post-conflict reconstruction.

Nevertheless, finding a balance between the promotion of basic human rights and the imposition of a liberal agenda is fundamentally important. While difficult, it must involve dialogue between internationals and Afghans, not only at the central level but across the country, through the media. Whether this dialogue will be taken
seriously by Afghans, however, given the mixed messages already received, is another matter. Indeed, just as Babrak Karmal’s attempts to court the nation with Islamic references were scorned by a public conscious of his financial and military dependence on Moscow (Rubin, 2002: 136), so attempt of the current government and international community to do likewise may be received by Afghan citizens.

Reliance on for-profit development agencies and private contractors

Financial accountability is one of the most basic requirements of international financial institutions in their loaning of funds to highly-indebted poor countries – and yet bilateral donors themselves are often guilty of turning a blind eye to the wastage of funds spent by for-profit development agencies and contractors. Companies such as Checchi, DAI, Chemonics and Counterpart International operate in a manner plagued with perverse incentives. In bidding for grants, they must prove their ability to spend funds within a given (short) timeframe (their ‘burn-rate’) in order to be eligible to reapply in subsequent years, and yet they are not held to account for the medium to long-term impact of projects or indeed the outcome at all of money spent. This leads to the distribution of funds on security provisions for their operations, on highly-paid international consultants and on short-term projects which have no sustainable impact on the communities they are intended to serve (Wilder and Gordon, 2009). Bridges that collapse, roads that need repaving every six months and schools with no roofs or toilets are just some of the examples that serve to render skeptical and incredulous the Afghan public about the intentions of international actors. Furthermore, some international donors and their aid agencies appear to favour supporting agencies such as these above and beyond NGOs and the non-profit sector. As one recent report details, approximately two thirds of USAID aid spending between 2007 and 2009 was allocated to for-profit agencies, and the remaining third to the non-profit sector (Zyck, 2010a: 4).

A more sinister variant on this theme has been the employment of many hundreds of private security companies across Afghanistan, whose accountability is not tied to any government or authority. These organizations are lucrative business schemes for those who run them, and are often connected to insurgent groups who are paid either for information or for temporary (in)activity to justify the existence of the companies in question (ICG, 2011: 19). Evidently, there are some agencies with very few connections of this sort and a more professional code of conduct, but it must be acknowledged that these groups can be as much party to the continuing conflict as the commanders and warlords who also benefit from the war economy. Connections between these different actors are common and produce lucrative business deals on both sides. As such, while is it hard to see how the activities of donor aid agencies, such as USAID, could function in country without the assistance of private security firms, the role these agencies can play in extending conflict are underestimated at present.
A lack of capacity building

‘Capacity building’ is a buzzword of choice in Kabul and has been over the last decade: often seen as a critical component (at least on paper) of any project proposal. And yet, all too often, the ‘buzz’ becomes ‘fuzz’ (Cornwall and Brock, 2005) – void of meaning and operational clout. Furthermore, the time needed to undertake substantive capacity building is often sacrificed in the rush to gain information or produce paperwork rapidly to meet international deadlines. This was the case in the preparation of successive documents in Afghanistan, including the Afghan National Development Strategy (ANDS) – Afghanistan’s PRSP – and the National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan, both of which were fast-tracked, avoiding parliament, to executive approval.27 Two rounds of elections have taken place in Afghanistan with no funding commitments for the capacity building of the staff of Independent Electoral Commission in between. According to one report, the macro-level failings of the international interventions to build the capacity of the State as a whole has led to a general inability to function as a state: “to provide services, to ensure security and to operate autonomously” (Barakat et al., 2008: 53). There is a certain disjunction, it appears, between international expectations and a realistic picture of what it would take to meet them.

This is also the case in the example of negotiations between the government/international community and insurgent groups. While the pace of position-change on the part of international actors has been considerable, in the move from excluding to black-listing to attempting to negotiate with the Taliban, for example, there has been little consideration of the need to facilitate the building of these groups’ own capacity in negotiation skills in order to move away from the language of unrealistic demands and toward more sophisticated, plausible discussion. Also evident, however, is the jump that is quickly made from a (stated) focus on capacity-building to an insistence on processes being ‘Afghan-led’. In terms of the most talked-of process at present – that of the peace process – recent research shows that Afghans themselves recognize the centrality of an international presence negotiations and are very wary of the prospect of taking a leading role themselves. Indeed, according to one study, “Afghans across different groups see the United States as a key party to the conflict whose direct participation in a peace process is crucial to its success, and therefore question the effectiveness of U.S. emphasis on an “Afghan-led” reconciliation strategy” (Nixon, 2011: 1). While the principle of facilitating and supporting a local peace process remains a desirable goal, in order than any agreement made be sustainable and considered legitimate,28 there is still a determining and potential lengthy role to be played by the United States in generating the incentives for a peaceful settlement.

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27Indeed, the practice of avoiding National Assembly ratification of development plans and projects has been generally widespread among international actors, who not only see the parliament (with good reason) as a source of delay but also as a potential hindrance to the conducting of development as and how they themselves see fit. (Barakat et al., 2008: vi).

28 See Stewart and Brown et al., 2009: 22 for more on this.
The data presented in this paper suggest two alternative narratives in the trajectory of post-conflict development in Afghanistan since 2001. On the one hand, they signify positive trajectories in the direction of socio-economic improvement. On the other, they point to negative shifts in governance and security which threaten to undermine the achievements made in other sectors.

It should be stated clearly, however, that most of the data drawn upon here have been collected, compiled and analysed by international actors whose incentives and means of attributing value to post-conflict development may be fundamentally different from those of Afghans themselves. Indeed, there exists a general tendency for aid evaluation to assume itself objective in measuring achievement or success, as has been documented elsewhere (Barakat, Chard and Jones, 2005: 833). Furthermore, data on post-conflict reconstruction are invariably collected according to a given political purpose, from which they should not be disassociated. As has been noted elsewhere, “it is important to remember the partial nature of documentary evidence: it is both fragmentary and created for particular administrative and personal purposes, mostly by the privileged and powerful. This applies equally to the collection of social statistics.” (Ibid: 848-9). As this paper has demonstrated, some of the most useful and indicative data come from the perspectives of Afghans themselves and from an analysis of social behaviour, and thus, one of the key findings for emphasis here is the need to include qualitative assessments of this kind into analyses of fragility. The concerns of ordinary people provide the greatest insight into how fragile a state has become, or how valuable interventions have been.

In the forthcoming “Bonn 2” conference, there will be a temptation for donors to congratulate one another on the significant progress made, socio-economically, in a difficult environment – and for incremental decreases in the incidences of insurgent activity. But it is imperative that the failings of this ten-year intervention are also highlighted, and lessons potentially learnt for future operations of this kind. International actors should take heed not only of the words of Afghan statesmen and women, but of the voices, behaviour and experiences of ‘real’ Afghans – those whose daily lives are affected most significantly by fragility and failure. These voices have been documented, to some extent, and need to be drawn upon more readily and systematically in the retrospective analysis of post-conflict development. Only in this case might the data be to some extent removed from the political purposes it tends to serve.
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