Afghanistan, Arms and Conflict

Armed groups, disarmament and security in a post-war society

Michael Bhatia and Mark Sedra

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Afghanistan, Arms and Conflict

This is the first book to provide a comprehensive assessment of small arms and security-related issues in post-9/11 Afghanistan. It includes case studies that reveal the findings of in-depth field research on hitherto neglected regions of the country, and provides a distinctive balance of thematic analysis, conceptual models and empirical research.

Exploring various facets of armed violence and measures to tackle it, the volume provides significant insight into broader issues such as the efficacy of international assistance, the 'shadow' economy, warlordism and the Taliban-led insurgency. In an effort to deconstruct and demystify Afghanistan's alleged 'gun culture,' it also explores some of the prevailing obstacles and opportunities facing the country in its transition period. In so doing, the book offers valuable lessons to the state-builders of Afghanistan as well as those of other countries and regions struggling to emerge from periods of transition.

This book will be of much interest to all students of Afghanistan, small arms, insurgency, Asian Studies and conflict studies in general.

Michael Bhatia was previously a visiting fellow at the Thomas J. Watson Institute for International Studies at Brown University, and is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Politics and International Relations at the University of Oxford. **Mark Sedra** is a Research Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science of the University of Waterloo and a Senior Fellow at the Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI), also based in Waterloo, Canada.

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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

small arms survey

First published 2008
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
270 Madison Ave, New York, NY 10016

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2008.

"To purchase your own copy of this or any of Taylor & Francis or Routledge's collection of thousands of eBooks please go to www.eBookstore.tandf.co.uk."

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
A catalog record for this book has been requested

ISBN 0-203-92843-1 Master e-book ISBN

ISBN10: 0-415-45308-9 (hbk)
ISBN10: 0-203-92843-1 (ebk)

ISBN13: 978-0-415-45308-0 (hbk)
ISBN13: 978-0-203-92843-1 (ebk)

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Michael is the author of *War and Intervention: Issues for Contemporary Peace Operations* (Kumarian Press, 2003) and editor of *Terrorism and the Politics of Naming* (Routledge, 2007). He received his MSc in International Relations Research from the Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Oxford, and his BA, magna cum laude and honours, in International Relations from Brown University.

Mark Sedra is a Research Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science of the University of Waterloo and a Senior Fellow at the Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI), also based in Waterloo, Canada. His research focuses on the topic of post-conflict state-building with an emphasis on the security sector. He has conducted research on a number of countries and regions, including Northern Ireland, the Middle East and the Balkans. The bulk of his research over the past five years has centred on Afghanistan, and he has published widely on security issues in Afghanistan and the Middle East. He has served as a consultant to various governments, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on issues pertaining to the security and political situation in Afghanistan.

Mark received an Honours BA in Political Science and History from the University of Toronto and an MSc in International History from the London School of Economics (LSE). He is currently a PhD candidate in the Political Studies Department at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in the University of London. His dissertation focuses on the challenges of rebuilding security structures in post-conflict societies, with Afghanistan and Iraq serving as his principal case studies.

Foreword

The United Nations-brokered peace process at the Bonn Conference in 2002 sketched a path to a stable future for a country buffeted by a quarter century of internecine war, foreign occupation and interference. Yet, after a successful initial phase during which ambitious goals were met, including the first presidential and parliamentary elections in decades, Afghanistan is again struggling with its old demons of internal strife. The Taliban are back and seriously threaten the fragile state being built in Kabul.

This book usefully focuses attention on one of the main reasons for the backsliding: the failure by the international community and the Afghan authorities to deal meaningfully with the proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

It is difficult to overestimate the influence guns have over people's lives in Afghanistan. Conflicts – be they disputes between families over marriage, intra-village battles over resources or the continued fight between insurgents and the now NATO-led Coalition – become all the more violent owing to ready stockpiles of guns and ammunition. In the political arena, warlords and local officials with guns impose their will with apparent impunity.

There have been missed opportunities to tackle this problem. The Kabul authorities were discouraged by most of their foreign supporters to engage in any meaningful reconciliation efforts. The international community ignored pressing appeals from President Hamid Karzai and the United Nations to send enough troops in 2002 to start rebuilding and disarming across the country, at a time when the Taliban had yet to regroup and the country's warlords had been decoupled from their supporters. Now the challenges are greater. International funds and attention have been diverted to Iraq, rampant corruption has cost the government support and the burgeoning opium trade is fuelling crime.

But thankfully one constant represents a source of hope to Afghan authorities as they begin to implement a legal framework to control arms proliferation: ordinary Afghans remain determined to move beyond conflict.

Containing the findings of in-depth field research, the Small Arms Survey's new book, *Afghanistan, Arms and Conflict*, provides a comprehensive and much needed assessment of small arms- and security-related issues in post-9/11 Afghanistan. It offers crucial insight for stakeholders working in Afghanistan or in other post-conflict environments where the rule of law has yet to replace the rule of the gun.

Ambassador Lakhdar Brahimi, former Special Adviser to the Secretary-General of the United Nations (2004–2005), UN Special Representative for Afghanistan (2001–2004), UN Special Envoy for Afghanistan (1997–1999), Foreign Minister of Algeria (1991–1993).

Acknowledgements

The authors of this volume recognize that any new research on Afghanistan builds on the considerable efforts of both international and Afghan scholars who have researched both the country's conflict and its people over the past 50 years. They are also grateful to numerous local and international NGOs whose representatives generously provide their insight and hospitality with visiting researchers.

Michael Bhatia would like to thank the Afghan New Beginnings Programme (ANBP), who permitted him to accompany their disarmament and demobilization teams and observe reintegration programmes throughout Afghanistan. Peter Babbington, Basil Massey, Paul Cruickshank, Steven Feller, Reuben Stewart, Samantha Perera, Sandra Langenbach and Annemarie Brolsma were particularly helpful.

Gurpawan Singh and Vikram Bhatia were especially generous during Bhatia's stay in the Hazarajat and Ghor Province. Masood Karokhel, Susanne Shmeidl and Ehsan Zahine, as well as all of the staff of the Tribal Liaison Office, facilitated his research in Paktya, Kabul and Kunduz Province. Alexander Thier, Andrew Wilder, Peter Bergen, Julie Sirrs, Haneef Atmar and Suleiman Mohammed generously introduced him to Afghanistan in August 2001. Special thanks go to Lucy Jones, Nick Downie, Christopher Freeman, Scott Braunschweig, Kate Clark, Liz Alden Wiley, Hamish Nixon, Brandy Bauer and Phil Wilkinson, who all raised Bhatia's spirits during his stays in Kabul.

Interpretation was provided by two Afghan citizens, who endured long hours and harsh living conditions. A number of other Afghan citizens graciously supported this project, most particularly those serving with the ANBP. Unfortunately, all must remain regrettably anonymous due to the sensitivity of the information provided.

Field research grants for projects that related to this book were provided by the Marshall Aid Commemoration Commission and the British Committee on Central and Inner Asia. The Watson Institute was an ideal location for the finalization of the manuscript.

The generous staff at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC, pointed out available resources and brought Bhatia's attention to books

and other publications. Reference librarians Hirad Dinavari and Thomas Mann eagerly provided source material during his stay in the main reading room. The National Security Archives at George Washington University allowed him to go through boxes of uncatalogued Afghan documents. Particular thanks are owed to Mary Curry and Barbara Elias, as well as to David Corn and Steve Galster, who decades ago submitted Freedom of Information Act requests that brought these documents to public light. The Afghanistan Research and Information Center generously sent documents from their collection in Peshawar to Kabul.

This book owes its greatest debt, however, to the more than 345 Afghans who patiently allowed Michael Bhatia to interview them as to the nature of their lives, decisions and past actions. To do so, many had to overcome a range of emotions, from fear to sorrow.

Mark Sedra is grateful to the numerous officials, NGO representatives and scholars – both Afghan and international – who shared their knowledge on the small arms issue in Afghanistan. Most of these individuals were extremely open and forthcoming, providing vital information, including, in some cases, internal documents and data. As many spoke on condition of anonymity, they are not listed by name in the text, but their contributions were invaluable. Lisa Pinsley, formerly a staff member of the ANBP, deserves special mention for her generous assistance and encouragement for my research on this and other projects.

Sedra is also extremely grateful to Charles Tripp of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), his PhD supervisor, for his patience in allowing him to diverge from his PhD research to complete work on this book. Finally, Sedra extends thanks to his family for their unfailing support and encouragement.

This project benefited from an in-depth peer-review process. The authors appreciate the comments and constructive criticism offered by Antonio Giustozzi, Jonathan Goodhand, Michael Griffin, Nicolas Marsh, Dean Piedmont, Lisa Pinsley, Conrad Schetter, Chris Smith and Edwina Thompson, all of whom provided helpful comments on the original drafts. Barnett Rubin provided support and advice.

The production of this book would not have been possible without the generous financial support of the Small Arms Survey project by the governments of Switzerland, Belgium, Canada, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

The Geneva-based Small Arms Survey initiated, funded and supported the research project that culminated in this publication. At the Small Arms Survey, numerous staff members helped patiently to shepherd this project through its long gestation. Particular thanks go to Christina Wille, who gave the project shape in its beginning; Diana Rodriguez, who provided invaluable support in its final stages, in particular by writing the Introduction; Jillie Luff, who produced user-friendly maps from often incongruous topographical data; and Tania Inowlocki, who supervised the

publication process. Barbara Gimelli Sulashvili contributed substantially to the final form of the book by editing the manuscript. Carole Touraine provided valuable administrative support. Special thanks go to Sarah M. Hoban for her meticulous and energetic assistance in fact-checking the entire manuscript and to Tanin Bashir for his thorough look at the spelling of Afghan terms. The Small Arms Survey also extends thanks to Andrew Humphrys of Routledge for his interest in and support for the project.

About the Small Arms Survey

The Small Arms Survey is an independent research project located at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva, Switzerland. Established in 1999, the project is supported by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, and by sustained contributions from the governments of Belgium, Canada, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom. The Survey is also grateful for past and current project support received from the governments of Australia, Denmark, France, Germany, New Zealand and the United States, as well as from different United Nations agencies, programmes and institutes.

The objectives of the Small Arms Survey are: to be the principal source of public information on all aspects of small arms and armed violence; to serve as a resource centre for governments, policy-makers, researchers and activists; to monitor national and international initiatives (governmental and non-governmental) on small arms; to support efforts to address the effects of small arms proliferation and misuse; and to act as a clearing house for the sharing of information and the dissemination of best practices. The Survey also sponsors field research and information-gathering efforts, especially in affected states and regions. The project has an international staff with expertise in security studies, political science, law, economics, development studies and sociology, and collaborates with a network of researchers, partner institutions, non-governmental organizations and governments in more than 50 countries.

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Abbreviations

ABP	Afghan Border Police
AGF/ACF	Anti-government forces/anti-Coalition forces
AIHRC	Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission
AMF	Afghan Military Force
ANA	Afghan National Army
ANBP	Afghan New Beginnings Programme
ANLF	Afghan National Liberation Front (Mullah Mohammed Nabi)
ANP	Afghan National Police
ANSO	Afghanistan NGO Security Office
APMASD	Anti-Personnel Mines and Ammunition Stockpile Destruction
AST	Ammunition Survey Team
AT&L	Acquisitions, Technology and Logistics
ATA	Afghan Transitional Authority
ATO	Ammunition Technical Officer
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency (US)
CIP	Commander Incentive Programme
CSTC-A	Combined Security Transition Command – Afghanistan
D&R	Demobilization and Reintegration Commission
DDR	Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration
DIAG	Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups
DRA	Democratic Republic of Afghanistan
ECC	Electoral Complaints Commission
G8	Group of eight major industrial democracies
GOLIAG	Government Officials with Links to Illegal Armed Groups
HIG/HIH	*Hezb-e-Islami* Gulbuddin Hekmatyar
HIK	*Hezb-e-Islami* Khalis
HRRAC	Human Rights Research and Advocacy Consortium
HWC	Heavy Weapons Cantonment
IED	Improvised explosive devices
IOG	International Observer Group
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force

ISI	Inter-Services Intelligence (Pakistan)
JEMB	Joint Electoral Management Body
KhAD	Khadamat-e Etela'at-e Dawlati (State Information Agency) 1980–1992
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MDU	Mobile disarmament unit
MoD	Ministry of Defence
MoI	Ministry of Interior
NAPCE	National Assembly and Provincial Council Elections
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDC	National Disarmament Commission
NDS	National Directorate of Security (Amaniyat)
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NIFA	National Islamic Front of Afghanistan (Pir Gailani)
NSA	National Security Archive
NWFP	Northwest Frontier Province (Pakistan)
OMC-A	Office of Military Cooperation – Afghanistan
OSC-A	Office of Security Cooperation – Afghanistan
PRD	Police Reform Directorate
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
PSC	Private security company
RTC	Recruitment Training Centre
SAM	Surface-to-air missile
SCN	Supervisory Council of the North
SSR	Security sector reform
UF/NA	United Front/Northern Alliance/Council for the Defence of Afghanistan; alliance between Rabbani, Dostum and Karim Khalili
UN	United Nations
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission for Afghanistan
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNMACA	United Nations Mine Action Centre for Afghanistan
UNOPS	United Nations Office of Project Services
UNPU	United Nations Protection Unit
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USPI	US Protection and Investigation
VBIED	Vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices
WCP	Weapons collection point
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

Glossary of local terms

Arbakai, sg. (Arbakian, pl.) Tribal police, in Pashtoon communities utilized to enforce internal rules and decisions of Jirga, and to protect the community from external forces. Depending on tribe, also pronounced and spelled as *arbakee*, *robakee*, *harbakai*.

Beg/mir Local landlord, *khan* and leader.

Fedayee A term utilized in Ghazni among Shi'a militias denoting a unit of dedicated combatants, who is willing to sacrafice him/herself for the cause of religion.

Jirga 'A tribal council that has legislative and juridical authority in the name of the tribal community.' (Adamec, 2003, pp. 197–198)

Khan An honorific provided to a locally influential individual, who acquires support and power through the distribution of patronage and largesse to followers, and who ultimately serves both to influence local decisions and to arbitrate in local disputes.

Kheil Tribal sub-grouping.

Kuchi Nomad.

Loya Jirga Grand/National Council, 'highest organ of state power that Afghan rulers convened to decide matters of national importance.' (Adamec, 2003, p. 236)

Malek A centrally appointed tribal chieftain, utilized by a tribe for all engagements/interactions with the government, he is a provincial or district liaison person, not necessarily as powerful as local *khans* or other prominent individuals.

Manteqa An area of spatial cognition of various size; can refer both to the whole of Afghanistan or to a village.

Maulavi (pl. *ulama*) 'Graduate of a madrassa, college of Islamic studies;' religious cleric or teacher. The plural form more generally also designates the top class of Muslim religious officials.

Mesher Elder.

Meshrano Jirga The 102-delegate upper house of National Assembly of Afghanistan.

Mullah '[A] preacher and spiritual adviser.' (Adamec, 2003, p. 267)

Nafar-e-khas Refers to a commander's 'special envoy,' common in strongman militias, and utilized to recruit and enforce.

Nazm-e-khas Means 'Special Order' and refers to either a special police unit established by former Kandahar governor Gul Agha Sherzai or (more commonly) as a commander's 'special group.'

Qawm A unit of social cognition, denoting a group of affiliated individuals. It can refer to community, tribe, nation, sub-tribe or non-tribal solidarity or professional groups.

Qawmi mesher The leader of a *qawm*, can be linked to performance, specific skills (military training, education) and to lineage.

Qawmi meshran The pl. of qawmi mesher, community elders of a *qawm*, which serves as a consultative body and limits the power of *qawmi mesher*.

Sardar Term of Persian origin referring to centrally appointed local chieftain, similar to *malek*.

Sardar-e-qawm A less-utilized term for the leader, 'big man,' of a *qawm*.

Sayyed Esteemed families and their descendants.

Shura Community decision-making body constituted by elders.

Takia khana Equivalent of the Mosque for Shi'a Muslims.

Tanzim A political–military organization.

Wolesi Jirga The 249-delegate lower house of the National Assembly of Afghanistan.

Woleswali A district.

Zakat One of the five pillars of Islam. An annual donation of 2.5–5% of some assets, income, harvest or other earning to poor people or a charity organization.

Introduction

Diana Rodriguez

The problem of small arms proliferation and misuse is not new to Afghanistan: for decades, a ready supply of arms and ammunition has allowed even the most minor of disagreements to escalate into armed conflict. Neither is the influence of guns over society unique to Afghanistan among post-conflict countries. What is striking in Afghanistan's post-Taliban era, however, is the magnitude of weapons holdings and the level of their penetration into political and economic life.

Efforts to implement a nationwide disarmament programme were introduced late and implemented slowly; they were subsequently hindered by the absence of a holistic approach to security sector reform. Long-term commitment from the government and the international community is now needed either to expand disarmament programmes or create new successor programmes. Future disarmament efforts will be complicated by the resurgence of the Taliban and other anti-government armed groups.

Afghanistan, Arms and Conflict: Armed groups, disarmament and security in a post-conflict society unpicks these specific characteristics of post-9/11 Afghanistan, providing an indispensable and comprehensive analysis of the security situation in the country. It hones in on hitherto neglected provinces to show how the motivations for acquiring and using weapons vary among regions. It also reveals that the effects of interventions aimed at demilitarizing the country are concomitantly varied.

The book looks at how power and the possession of weapons are often intertwined, though it makes clear that availability of weapons and victimization are only two determinants of influence and power. It is not only active violence, but also structural violence that underpins the so-called 'rule of the gun' in post-conflict Afghanistan. Through the threat of force, commanders and militias with weapons have insulated themselves from the checks and balances of governmental and traditional institutions; they have acquired or influenced political appointments at the district, provincial and even central government levels, and many local militias have been legalized and funded by the government, the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), Coalition forces and private security companies.

Estimates as to how many uncontrolled small arms and light weapons are held in Afghanistan vary from a few million to more than ten million, or up to one gun for every three men, women and children in the country. For three decades, vast weapon supplies flooded the country from opponents on either side of the Cold War, from neighbouring countries and from regional powers. While the supply of weapons in northern Pakistan and Afghanistan outstripped demand in 2005, the growth of the insurgency has increased the demand for weapons.

This widespread availability of guns is a driver of insecurity and political instability. For ordinary Afghans, security remains the number one concern, a fear that has not been dislodged by the advances made since the Bonn Agreement in 2002. These advances include the inauguration of Parliament and the initiation of the Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups programme.

The government and international actors based in Kabul are acutely aware of security threats. But there are various interpretations of where sources of insecurity lie. In Kabul, the ISAF, Coalition forces and former members of the Northern Alliance define security in relation to the threats posed by the Taliban and other anti-government insurgents, or, more recently, by the drug trade. For the broader population, however, local security is more commonly compromised by the factional feuds, human rights abuses and predatory behaviour of commanders and former warlords. In the absence of effective national law enforcement, these combatants act with impunity.

These different viewpoints partly explain why efforts by the government and the international donor community have failed to stem small arms and light weapons proliferation.

A second explanation for the reluctance to tackle rigorously the small arms problem is the accommodationist stance taken by the Afghan authorities and external governments towards local commanders, not only in the post-conflict period, but during decades of war when weapons supplied by external governments were distributed directly or channelled through the Afghan government to local commanders. There are parallels today, since certain militias are utilizing private security company contracts, US funds and their integration into the Afghan Military Forces to consolidate local power, as illustrated in the case studies on Paktya, Kandahar and Ghor provinces. Numerous government officials are former commanders who have yet to sever their links to armed groups, a situation that both erodes the popular legitimacy of the government and stymies attempts to achieve political consensus for initiatives to reduce and control small arms.

A third explanation for failing to reduce the availability of small arms is the belief that disarming the population would lead to more, not less, insecurity, at least until the government could guarantee stability. Significant efforts have been made to restructure and arm the security forces, in

particular the army, while disarmament has so far featured only as a secondary goal in the demilitarization process. Little attention was paid to weapons licensing until 2005, and progress in reforming the judicial and law enforcement bodies – vital for enforcing the new licensing regime – has been poor. Prioritizing security sector reform without parallel steps to reduce the firepower of insurgent groups and the civilian population has proved misguided. Easy access to weapons has fuelled the resurgence of warlord power, facilitated the expanding drug trade and heightened the probability of a return to civil conflict, posing one of the biggest obstacles to the ongoing security sector reform process.

The book is based on a combination of field research and reviews of existing literature, press accounts, archival material and surveys. Chapter 3 and the case studies in Part III are based on semi-structured interviews with 345 combatants in Afghanistan. The majority of interviews were conducted in 2005 and most of the interviewees were contacted through the Afghan New Beginnings Programme (ANBP). Additional interviews were conducted with the United Nations Assistance Mission for Afghanistan (UNAMA), ANBP, Afghanistan NGO Security Office, NGOs and the Coalition. Part II is primarily based on interviews conducted during three visits to Afghanistan in April and May 2005, November 2005 and June 2006. Interviews were held with more than 80 representatives of international donor missions, UN agencies, the Afghan government, international NGOs, civil society groups and private contractors.

With its meticulous retracing of the dynamics relating to small arms and light weapons, *Afghanistan, Arms and Conflict* draws valuable lessons that can be applied in Afghanistan and in other post-conflict societies. In addition to examining the role of small arms in Afghan society, it provides a theoretical model for analysing armed groups and their members, while revealing distinctions in the relationships between the state, external actors, communities, commanders and combatants. The volume also sheds light on the local impact of and responses to counter-terror and counter-narcotics initiatives. It evaluates ongoing disarmament, demilitarization, reintegration and other arms reduction efforts within the state-building process, challenging donors' assurances about the success of such programmes. The main conclusions include:

- A comprehensive disarmament process should be prioritized in the early stages of the post-conflict period. Disarmament in Afghanistan has become more difficult following the resurgence of the Taliban and other anti-government forces.
- Illegal armed groups need to be provided with realistic incentives to disarm, in particular when the government's coercive capacity is limited.
- Any effective programme to control and reduce small arms needs to be underpinned by empirical data on the extent and nature of the problem.

- The success of security sector reform (SSR) projects is directly correlated to the efficacy of disarmament activities. If there is no successful disarmament, the SSR model cannot achieve one of its main goals, namely to invest the state with a monopoly over the use of force.
- Small arms reduction and control initiatives will only be feasible with political support from the national government and the international donor community.
- Engagement by private security companies, aid agencies, the Afghan government, and Coalition and NATO forces can have the unintended consequence of increasing the political and economic influence of local armed groups and undermining community-level checks and balances.

Chapter summaries

Afghanistan, Arms and Conflict has a three-part structure, comprising a thematic part on security concerns (security, arms flows and armed groups), a second thematic part on interventions (demilitarization programmes and security sector reform) and a case study part covering six localities.

Part I: Mapping insecurity: weapons flows and armed groups in Afghanistan

Chapter 1 – Violence in Afghanistan: an overview

This chapter provides an introduction to the consequences of three decades of armed conflict and arms transfers. It reveals how the Coalition forces' concern with counter-insurgency and the reduction of poppy production stands in sharp contrast to the local population's continuing perception of insecurity. The presence of readily available small arms and ammunition, coupled with the detrimental influence of armed groups on society, threatens to render existing conflicts more violent. This chapter also provides a framework for understanding types of violence in Afghanistan, including local security concerns and the role of the state.

Chapter 2 – Small arms flows into and within Afghanistan

In analysing the historical and contemporary small arms flows into and within Afghanistan, this chapter covers the consequences of external interventions, current procurement strategies of armed groups and government forces, as well as the scale and types of weapons currently available in Afghanistan. It shows how external governments have played a critical role in sponsoring and supporting armed groups.

Chapter 3 – Armed groups in Afghanistan

Contemporary Afghanistan is home to a wide variety of armed groups, ranging from political–military parties to warlords and community militias. Recruitment motives, strategies, internal structure and the relationships between commanders and combatants differ markedly among these groups. International and national assistance to armed groups can have negative consequences unless the complex, varied and evolving nature of these groups is considered.

Part II: Addressing the small arms issue: demilitarization and security sector reform in Afghanistan

Chapter 4 – The four pillars of demilitarization in Afghanistan

This chapter explores the implications of the failure of the cornerstone programmes of demilitarization – disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) of former combatants, heavy weapons cantonment, disbandment of illegal armed groups and the anti-personnel mines and ammunition stockpile programme – to identify disarmament and small arms and light weapons reduction as a priority. The impact of demilitarization on the local security situation remains limited.

Chapter 5 – Small arms and security sector reform

This chapter examines efforts to create a legal framework to underpin small arms reduction and control efforts. It also analyses a number of laws and presidential decrees aimed at regulating firearm ownership and possession among both Afghans and international non-state actors. In the absence of far-reaching disarmament, security sector reform (SSR) – namely the transformation of the Afghan army, police and judical apparatus – has not yet led to a significant improvement of the security situation on the ground. Armed groups remain highly influential at all levels of society.

Part III: Case studies[1]

Chapter 6 – Ghor Province: all against all?

In Ghor, one of the most under-researched Afghan provinces, the authority and the legitimacy of community elders is crucial for the mobilization process. The creation of a provincial division of the Afghan Military Forces has increased the supply of weapons to the province and led to the mobilization of a new generation of combatants. This enabled commanders to increase their power to such an extent that they overpowered the elders

for their own purposes, specifically to acquire combatants, prey on opposing villages and consolidate economic and political power in the province.

Chapter 7 – Paktya Province: sources of order and disorder

In Paktya Province, the influence of community elders is restricted to the mobilization of tribal police. In periods of political transition, when the elders' authority is weakened, the intervention by extra-provincial actors may produce a climate that can facilitate predation and rights abuses. In and around the capital, Gardez, for example, initial mobilization for the purpose of securing the city during a period of political transition evolved into the use of this standing force for predatory purposes. The creation of the Afghan Military Forces contributed to the legitimization of predatory commanders.

Chapter 8 – Kandahar City: the political economy of Coalition deployment

In Kandahar, where the tribes are dominated by prominent families and individuals who have been strengthened further by their commercial relationship with the Coalition, the function of tribal militias can turn quickly from self-protection into predation. The fact that private security companies hire militias is problematic, as it fortifies the commander–combatant link, prevents soldiers from going through reintegration and job retraining, and provides incentives for racketeering. Inhabitants of Kandahar City face three interwoven sources of insecurity: Taliban insurgents, intra-commander fighting or predation, and criminality.

Chapter 9 – Kunduz, Takhar and Baghlan: parties, strongmen and shifting alliances

In the three northern regions of Kunduz, Takhar and Baghlan, individuals acquire military power independently, with community elders having little influence in comparison to other areas. Mobilization takes place either by force, or for the protection of the family or village, even though economic incentives may also play a role. The creation of the Afghan Military Forces invested commanders with official status. Since the Bonn Agreement, the north has been one of the more secure areas of Afghanistan, but the predatory behaviour of commanders (many of whom acquired district and provincial government positions) has produced local vulnerabilities, including skirmishes between commanders and allegations of abuse by local commanders.

Chapter 10 – Jalalabad: the consequences of Coalition support

In the Jalalabad region, commanders embody the ideal of a strongman. They are able to utilize both elder and religious authority to mobilize

combatants, and they structure their forces to ensure internal discipline. They acquire conscripts by force, though the economic incentive of a small salary in the absence of other livelihood opportunities is by far the predominant motive for combatants in this region. The newly established security institutions serve as a hiding place for commanders' militias and as a theatre for inter-factional disputes.

Chapter 11 – Hazarajat: Daykundi, Shahristan, Panjab and Syahkhak

The case of the Hazarajat shows that a broad shared ethnicity does not guarantee political unity. Locals are subject to threats from opposing commanders and to extortion and land disputes, although not to the degree common in other regions of Afghanistan, such as Baghlan, Jalalabad and Kandahar. Nevertheless, despite the high costs of infighting, the Hazara emerged from the conflict with an elite ready to play a role at the national level.

Note

1 Information on prominent individual commanders and their political affiliations in each region to be online, available at: http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/files/sas/publications/b_series5.html.