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Diva Patang Wardak

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Correspondence:
Diva Patang Wardak: diva_patang@hotmail.com

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Why the NDS matters: The emergence of the Afghan intelligence agency after 9/11

Diva Patang Wardak

University of Buckingham, Centre for Security and Intelligence Studies (BUCSIS), Buckingham MK18 1EG, United Kingdom

Abstract

Governments in Afghanistan paid little attention to the basic function and importance of intelligence during the last four decades. Immediately after the United States drawdown at the end of 2014, the National Directorate of Security (NDS) faced numerous challenges in tackling certain issues, which will be outlined in detail throughout this article, since the Pakistan Inter-Services Intelligence trained and funded the Taliban on its soil and continues to provide military and financial support to the Taliban and other terrorist groups carrying out attacks against the Afghan Security Forces across the country. The NDS continues to suffer from key intelligence capabilities, especially in gathering intelligence information from remote areas in order to prevent Pakistan’s interference in Afghanistan affairs. The failure of major powers to come to the aid of Afghanistan and strengthen its intelligence agency not only created more extremism, radicalisation, and terrorism but also created insecurity and instability. Consequently, to thoroughly analyse the intelligence operations of the NDS, detailed interviews were conducted with senior political figures. This article argues that the reform of the intelligence agencies is imperative, and the depoliticisation of the intelligence process is as much an element of national reconciliation as consolidation of power. Reforming the intelligence agencies therefore requires not only a change in the state, but also a change in the state of mind of the players involved.

Introduction

It is unarguable that the intelligence in Afghanistan consistently fails to obtain and gather information of significant worth which could otherwise prove to be in the best interest of its national security. Poor information gathering is due to undertrained intelligence personnel with limited access to advanced technology. As a result, their ability to gather information is limited and of low quality. Such information gathered from major cities and government departments can lead policymakers and military commanders to wrong conclusions. The basic process to support policymaking is the intelligence cycle, but the National Directorate of Security (NDS) is not well-trained to follow this cycle. For instance, the Taliban’s capture of Kunduz in 2015 was the worst kind of intelligence failure where intelligence cooperation among the NDS, National Security Agency of Afghanistan (NSA), Ministry of Defence (MoD), and Interior Ministry (MoI) was weak. This failure was because the security alerts and intelligence reports regarding the Taliban’s plan of capturing the city were not taken seriously, but were simply overlooked by the MoD and MoI. Kunduz’ capture should not have come as a surprise given the amount of territory the Taliban was
already controlling. However, Kunduz’ rapid fall and slow recapture was an intelligence failure: intelligence gathering, processing, and analysis has been a complicated problem ever since the establishment of the NDS with the assistance of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

In addition, another issue that created misunderstanding among the Pentagon, the NDS, and their North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies was the conceptualisation of war in Afghanistan where several states viewed the ongoing war against terrorism through different glasses. Because of these different concepts of war, the Afghan National Army (ANA) and NDS faced numerous challenges immediately after the United States (US) drawdown in the end of 2014. Since 2014, the Taliban conducted high-profile attacks, which threatened the control of the Afghan government over its territory. These attacks were planned and launched from safe havens in Pakistan. The NDS continues to suffer from the lack of key intelligence capabilities, especially in gathering intelligence from remote areas to prevent these surprise attacks.

Afghanistan’s civil war prompted many national security challenges. The political and military involvement of neighbouring states, warlordism, and the growing power of the Taliban and Islamic State of Iraq and Syria are security challenges that stubbornly prolong the civil war in the country. However, after each terrorist attack, the only statement we hear from responsible security institutions is that attacks are constituted and planned from across the borders. It is very well known that Pakistan is a safe haven for terrorism, but Afghanistan’s intelligence institutions never took responsibility either for their intelligence failures or for the incompetency within the NDS and ANA infrastructures which caused misunderstanding between the government and the state institutions in the country. The lack of intelligence and continued intelligence failures in remote areas of Afghanistan stem from the drawdown of the US forces and the shutting of the US and NATO bases since 2012.

Former President General Musharraf admitted that the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) supported and trained terrorist groups inside Pakistan and then sent them back to Afghanistan for terrorist attacks. On 13 February 2015, in an interview with The Guardian newspaper, General Musharraf admitted that when he was in power Pakistan sought to create problems for Karzai to undermine his government and that the ISI actively cultivated the Taliban to counter India’s action against Pakistan. As stated in a book by Mr Raje, “Pakistan is a terrorist state, and ISI is its instrument of terror. Both were created virtually simultaneously.” In the 20th century, the ISI exclusively trained over 150,000 mujahideen fighters, while the CIA funded the ISI to train them, as well as training the Pakistani army and ISI personnel. General Musharraf confirmed his country’s involvement in terrorism, that the Pakistani ISI trained and funded the Taliban on its soil, and that it continues to provide military and financial support to the Taliban and other terrorist groups in carrying out attacks against the Afghan National Security Force (ANSF) across the country. Additionally, Ex-Pakistan Ambassador to the US Husain Haqqani confirmed that his country is sponsoring and supporting terrorism. On 14 July 2016, the former chief of the NDS Rahmatullah Nabil leaked documents which show that the money provided by the US government to Pakistani

6 Sudhakar Rajee, Pakistan’s Intelligence (New Delhi, India: Manas Publications, 2012), 8.
military for fighting terrorism is in fact spent by Pakistan’s ISI for promoting and supporting terrorism. For instance, the ISI has been accused of playing a role in major terrorist attacks across Afghanistan and the world, including the 9/11, Mumbai train bombings, Indian Parliament attack, Mumbai terror attacks, and Kabul International Airport attack, as well as giving shelter to most of the terrorist leaders such as bin Laden, Mullah Umar, and many more. Because of the involvement of Pakistan and other neighbouring countries in the internal affairs of Afghanistan, the security agencies, including the NDS, are fighting on various fronts.

Unfortunately, all Afghans are paying the price for the failure of intelligence and for fighting the war for others. It is clear that Afghanistan became a failed state, and Afghans suffered a humanitarian emergency. Afghanistan became an object of charity and neglect for the US and other major powers. Regional powers, particularly Pakistan, as well as private networks, smugglers, drug dealers, and terrorists, treated it as an open field for manipulation and exploitation. The failure of major powers to come to the aid of Afghanistan and strengthen its intelligence agency not only created more extremism, radicalisation, and terrorism but also created insecurity. The Russians were intensely involved in Afghan internal politics until 1978, seeking to overthrow the local ruling leaders in order to further their regional interests. Both the Russians (Soviet Union) and Americans had very similar objectives; however, it is difficult to compare the CIA with the KGB (Russian Committee for State Security) as they used completely different intelligence methodology and approach.

In contemporary international politics, intelligence plays the most important role in the protection of state security. Experts view intelligence as more than classified and organised information; it can include technical issues such as the transcription of intercepted conversation and verification of the reliability of information. In modern studies, experts view intelligence as a real struggle with human opponents to gain some advantages. Another thing that prompted confusion among security experts is the basic task of an intelligence agency during war and peace. In the Western world, governments view intelligence not only as advance warning about looming threats but also as an umbrella — a range of activities from planning and information to analysis, all conducted in secret. However, it is important to emphasise that the achievement of a reformed security sector of Afghanistan is very much a function of the extent to which the national unity government can broadly be perceived as legitimate.

To deeply analyse the intelligence operations of the NDS, the author conducted detailed discussions with former Afghan President Hamid Karzai in London, former Army Chief General Sher Muhammad Karimi in Kabul, government officials, and Afghan intelligence experts and researchers and consulted classified documents. Because of very limited academic literature and secrecy, very little is written about the NDS. In its normative dimensions, this article tries to answer questions related not to the technicalities of intelligence and cover operations, but to the political ways which they could be made accountable and why the NDS matters after the 9/11 attacks. Afghan intelligence agencies relied on human intelligence because of the lack of intelligence equipments and funds. The information they are collecting about the insurgent threat in remote districts through farmers, teachers, shopkeepers, and village elders is of low quality and unauthentic. Similarly, the literature on the Afghanistan intelligence agencies is scarce and is often of poor quality; therefore, writing on Afghan intelligence is not an easy task as there is very limited information available to writers and researchers in libraries. There is not much scholarly research

on Afghanistan intelligence and not much is spoken about it. Hopefully, this article will greatly benefit the academy of intelligence and future research.

Afghanistan Security Services during the communist regime (1978–1992)

Afghanistan is a mountainous, landlocked state of about 652,230 km² bordered by China, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. In 2015, the population of Afghanistan was about 32.5 million. The largest ethnic group among the population is the Pashtuns, followed by Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks and others. The main languages spoken are Pashto and Dari. Afghanistan has a lot of natural resources such as gas, petroleum, coal, copper, chrome, talc, barites, sulphur, lead, zinc, iron ore, salt, precious and semiprecious stones and arable land. As Afghanistan is a landlocked state with lots of national resources, the NDS is continuously facing challenges from the neighbouring countries. The biggest factors affecting the NDS were the almost complete absence of international forces on the battlefield and the Pakistan-sponsored terrorism. Furthermore, Daesh, another new actor in the war, also presented a dangerous and new, though geographically limited, threat to the population. The mass migration from Pakistan, the intelligence source of information shrieked, the working methods changed from civilian intelligence to the militarised way of operation.

The governments in Afghanistan paid little attention to the basic function and importance of intelligence during the last four decades. Various intelligence agencies were established with the technical support of the KGB and GRU (Russian Military Intelligence Directorate) to make effective the war against the mujahideen. However, Wazarat-e-Amniat-e-Daulati (WAD) and Khadam-e Aetela’at-e Dawlati (KhAD) had established friendly relation with the KGB and GRU, because they had deep influence on Afghan intelligence operations. From 1980 to 1992, these secret agencies played a vital role in countering insurgency in Afghanistan, but after the fall of Dr Najibullah’s government in 1992 and the collapse of the whole infrastructure of the state, Afghanistan lost its state intelligence agencies.17

The 1980s saw much upheaval and fictionalisation in Afghan politics and bureaucracy. The successful governments in Afghanistan established four intelligence agencies (Da Kargarano Amniyat Mu’asasa [KAM; Workers Intelligence Service], Da Afghanistan da Gato de SataloAdara [AGSA; Safeguarding Agency of Afghan Interests], WAD, and KhAD) to ensure the stability of the country.18 President Noor Muhammad Tarakai was in power for a limited time, while Hafizullah Amin’s politics forced a division between the communist party and intelligence agencies into two factions (Khalq and Parcham). However, the AGSA, which was established by Mr Tarakai, was dissolved because of his differences with Hafizullah Amin. In 1979, President Amin established another secret agency named “Da Kargarano Amniyat Mu’asasa”.19 Hafizullah Amin used KAM against its opponents and the change of name did not mean that the terror exercised by the AGSA was stopped. The agency continued to torture and killed thousands of Afghan civilians. The AGSA and KAM received direct assistance from East Germany and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) but never established the degree of sophistication shown by KhAD.20

16 Ibid, 4.
20 Security Services in Communist Afghanistan (1978–1992): AGSA, KAM, KhAD and WAD, Council of European Union, Brussels, 2001. Before 1978 the Afghan police have been aided by West Germany. KhAD was organized and assisted by the KGB and, apparently, the East German Stasi. The GRU may have been more closely involved with AGSA and KAM.
The Council of European Relations (2001) reviewed Afghan intelligence KhAD from a historical perspective, in its well-researched report, which gives us some fresh information about the function of secret services. On 11 January 1980, the government announced that KhAD would replace KAM. KhAD was removed from the Khalqi-dominated MoI and made a department of the Office of the Prime Minister and later transformed into the Ministry of State Security, WAD, in 1986. Its director general, Dr Najibullah, reported directly to the KGB. Additionally, according to one estimate, by 1987 WAD employed 15,000 to 30,000 professionals and about 100,000 paid informers and each KhAD official had one or more KGB advisers. On the other hand, the ISI trained about 83,000 mujahideen between 1983 and 1993 with the support of the CIA and sent them to Afghanistan to fight against the Soviet Union.

KhAD was responsible for the security of the state and most importantly to ensure the continued existence of the communist regime and was working on uniting all tribes and ethnic minorities in collaboration with the Ministry of Nationalities and Tribal Affairs. However, KhAD was also known as the KGB secret police, imposing pervasive terror on urban areas as the government tried to impose a totalitarian system in those areas under its control. The agency also funded religious leaders and established a separate directorate named the Directorate of Religious Affairs. The political role of KhAD was of great importance, as Afghan President Dr Najibullah as the head of the political directorate sought to convince all political factions that the Soviet war in Afghanistan was a just war. For all its efforts, the Soviets and the Afghan government made remarkably little progress towards re-establishing state control or even state presence in most of the countryside.

During the KhAD years (1980s), torture was introduced under the instruction of East German and Soviet KGB officers, who reportedly provided modern electrical torture devices. Mass secret executions without trial began and thousands started to disappear. The treatment of prisoners changed since the establishment of the KGB-controlled KhAD and it became part of a scientific system of intelligence rather than just a form of sadistic punishment. Lots of training centres were established for orphaned children under the control and direction of the secret police, KhAD (WAD), since the children did not have any relatives to object.

According to Rosanne Klass, more than 60,000 Afghans were sent to the Soviet Union between 1980 and 1984. By the end of 1985, more than 10,000 members of KhAD had received special training by the KGB. As the NDS was lacking experienced intelligence officers since the CIA was not producing the huge number of qualified intelligence officers that the KGB did, the NDS had no option but to use the KGB-trained officers or inexperienced officers. This is an issue that needs to be addressed and reform is needed. The reform of the intelligence agencies is imperative and the depoliticisation of the intelligence process is as much an element of national reconciliation as consolidation of power.

Furthermore, KhAD formed widespread networks of spies and informers, and established militia and tribal units close to the border to observe activities, to interdict resistance lines of supply and movement, and to guard regime personnel. Tactically, the KGB developed tribes to penetrate resistance groups, sabotage resistance operations, spread rumours and disinformation, and create suspicions and enmity both within and among the various resistance groups and between the residence and local tribes and communities. These agents set one tribe against another, encouraging and bribing powerful tribal chiefs, leaders, and dissidents of all sorts to exploit their personal oppositions, and they also persuaded or bribed them to restrain their respective tribes.

21 Ibid, 4.
22 Barnett, The Fragmentation of Afghanistan, 133.
23 Rajee, Pakistan’s Intelligence, 25.
25 Klass, Afghanistan: The Great Game Revisited, 147.
27 Klass, Afghanistan: The Great Game Revisited, 323.
28 Ibid, 330.
and communities from anti-communist activities. The Soviets’ intention was to deprive the Afghans of their cultural heritage and identity and to transform the country into a passive future instrument of Soviet policy.

Where did America go wrong?

In the 19th century, America viewed Afghanistan as strategically unimportant, but in 1922, Cornelius Van H. Engert, the first American diplomat to visit Afghanistan, wrote a detailed report in which he strongly recommended recognition of the country’s importance. However, his report was filed away and ignored. The US refused to recognise Afghanistan as an important country until 1934 as a diplomat, Wallace Murray, assured the American Congress that the US could not extend recognition to Afghanistan because it was probably the most fanatic hostile country in the world. This attitude prevented the US government from opening a diplomatic mission in Kabul until 1942. When in 1953 Daud Khan, the Prime Minister, asked Washington’s aid to modernise Afghanistan’s army, the Eisenhower Administration refused his request. This is where America went wrong again. If it had agreed to offer military assistance, Afghanistan would not have turned to Moscow.

However, the US Agency for International Development, and its predecessor the Technical Cooperation Agency, in 1960 provided assistance to fund the Helmand and Arghandab Valley Authority following up on the work done by an American company on Helmand River on contract to the Afghanistan government. Helmand River meanders through southern Afghanistan, representing 40% of the country’s water resources. The US assistance of approximately $80 million continued and they were officially involved in this project from 1949 until the Soviet invasion in 1979. The main reason for the development was to settle new farmers on land reclaimed through irrigation. This was a good opportunity for the US to make its relationship strong with Afghanistan.

The successful Soviet penetration of Afghanistan started when America failed to respond to the real economic and security needs of a friendly and pro-western Afghanistan and to understand the internal Afghan politics of the Pashtunistan problem. The US for the next two decades watched with remarkable calmness as the Soviets gradually increased their armed forces in Afghanistan, dictating to KhAD, training their own army, getting a foothold in the educational system, building a strategic highway system, gaining control of resource development and ultimately achieving an economic hammerlock on the country.

Between 1953 and 1963 the Soviet economic, military, and cultural programmes were set up as if to satisfy the needs of Afghans themselves, but were in fact mainly set up to serve the Soviet political, economic and strategic interests. By 1978 the Soviets had completed 71 separate projects, working on 52, and had agreed on 60 more. The Soviet Union had invested more than three billion dollars in Afghanistan. They had also trained 5000 students in Soviet academic institutions and 1600 in technical schools, plus 3725 Afghan military personnel. Daud Khan’s regime made all this possible, and the inadequate American diplomatic response failed to prevent it time and again.
The CIA gave birth to the NDS

After two decades of consecutive wars, in 2002, the NDS was established by the CIA and Pentagon to help them in countering the Taliban insurgency and collect intelligence in cities and remote districts. This new agency was the successor to KhAD. During USSR presence in Afghanistan, KhAD was the strongest intelligence organisation, resourceful, trained and operated as a professional intelligence in the battlefield; however, KhAD subjected many to prolonged incommunicado detention without charge or trial for interrogation and torture, whereas the present NDS is a strong, capable organisation but lacks professional and skilled staff, as well as has limited funds. Since the establishment of the NDS, no reforms were introduced to make it a professional intelligence agency or to adopt the CIA structures. The country is in need of a well-organised intelligence agency to provide important information on the activities of insurgents. The NDS is not a new intelligence agency but an agency with a different name and funder. In May 2016, in an interview during his visit to London, the former President Hamid Karzai stated: “NDS’ job is to gather, analyse and share intelligence, and to give advice in support of policy. Intelligence must not be a repressive tool in the country but a national security tool.” In Afghanistan, the main source for intelligence collection is interaction with tribal elders and villagers through local commanders. Sometimes, because of its demonstration of ineffective intelligence, the NDS faces criticism from parliamentarians and media.

The NDS does not fall under the MoD or MoI command, but liaises closely with the ANSF at every level and is overseen by the NSA but reports directly to the President. The NDS as an organisation is accused of not sharing all its information with the police department and defence ministry and of not providing reliable information to policymakers. There were also instances of policymakers not taking intelligence seriously, acting late or not trusting the intelligence. The other major weakness of the agency is the lack of modern ways of intelligence analysis. Historical records suggest that the areas where the intelligence cycle most frequently fails are in the assessment process and the policy interface rather than in collection. For the conceptual framework of intelligence studies to advance further, it is essential to make a clearer distinction than is usually made at present between the roles of intelligence communities in authoritarian and democratic regimes. Afghanistan intelligence is in need of modern intelligence systems to change the nature of authoritarianism within the organisation.

On the function of the NDS in war zones, in an interview, the former Chief of Army Staff of Afghanistan General Sher Mohammad Karimi stated: “NDS is presently fighting against terrorists and provides information to the army and police, and working closely with intelligence department of the army and police. The agency is using special forces against terrorist networks directly, depending on the situation. The strength of NDS is based on limited funds provided by the US and NATO member states. The nature of the enemy in the region demands covert and unconventional special operations in response. Today countries are using intelligence extensively and it needs special operations to deny their access to the homeland.” Because of the flawed intelligence operations, distrust between the government and the NDS is exacerbated when agency officials refuse to hear the Commander in Chief (President). The controversial nature of the NDS emerged in debates in national and international forums, when chiefs of the agency started acting like politicians criticising the President, neighbouring states, and the parliament. This kind of
behaviour raised many questions as to whether the NDS is an intelligence agency or a political party.

Amidst these controversies, former President Hamid Karzai changed three NDS chiefs, but no change occurred in the mindset of the agency officers. In fact, according to Mr Musa Khan Jalalzai, the NDS was divided between the Presidential office and the Northern Alliance. Therefore, it can be argued that the NDS operations in 2015 lost the confidence of the Afghan government and international community when the Taliban captured most of Kunduz province, a big intelligence failure by the NDS. To prevent intelligence failure, intercourse between the three levels of intelligence — strategic, operational, and tactical — is necessary. Intelligence failure can be broadly defined as misunderstanding the prevailing situation or the developing law and order scenario. To fix the machine, the government needs to introduce a reforms package.

On the oversight and legal aspect of intelligence operations, General Karimi stated: “NDS must obtain permission from the court for any of the actions they need to take. It is important to note, anyone in the intelligence field must understand power, responsibility and commitment (Mokalafiyat, Masuliyat and Selahiyat).” When intelligence planning and operations fail, it means something is not working in the machine properly. Normally, intelligence failure occurs due to preventable conditions, such as lack of understanding, capabilities, coordination, cooperation, and poor distribution of intelligence among the intelligence agencies.

Additionally, General Karimi stated: “Every country small or big, strong or weak has security forces (army, air force, navy, police, intelligence and many other related auxiliary organisations). One of the elements of security is the intelligence organisation. Intelligence organisation is usually called Department of Security or National Security or State Security. It functions in accordance with national policies. It is both offensive and defensive. Our state security agency, the NDS, is mainly defensive. When the Taliban were defeated in 2001, the reform of the security sector was one of the key issues. The US was directly responsible for the reorganisation of the army and NDS and later for the police as well.” The Afghan government and the ANSF will need an integrated approach to both internal security and human intelligence (HUMINT), as Afghan intelligence plays a critical role in supplementing International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and US collection and analysis capabilities, mainly at the local level where HUMINT is critical.

Also, the NDS mainly deals with national security cases and kidnapping and the NDS detainees do not follow the requirements of the Interim Criminal Procedure Code. As the primary intelligence organisation of Afghanistan, the NDS shares information with ministries of Afghanistan and with provincial authorities. Like most ANA officers, the NDS personnel are mainly either ex-Soviet trained or ex-mujahideen. Testifying before the US Senate Armed Services Committee in February 2016, General Campbell said the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) still suffers from capability gaps in aviation, combined-arms operations, and military intelligence, and added, “those capability gaps notwithstanding, I still assess that at least 70% of the problems facing the Afghan security forces result from poor leadership.” General Campbell further noted that dozens of poor performing officers have been replaced. But even the best of leaders cannot do their jobs without a clear understanding each day of how many personnel, and with what skills, are present for duty. Afghan author and journalist Musa Khan Jalalzai in his article in 2014 has pointed to the failure and incompetency of the NDS to deliver: “Intelligence failure in several

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45 Interview with the former Afghan Army Chief, Sher Muhammad Karimi, March 2016.
46 Interview with the former Afghan Army Chief, Sher Muhammad Karimi, March 2016.
49 Ibid, 6–7.
districts of the country occurs when an attack happens without warning. A majority of the Afghan intelligence agencies have never been in schools, colleges and universities, while their appointments have been made on a political and ethnic basis. They happened to be more like politicians and less like secret agents.”

Notably, the NDS is one of the most capable branches of the ANSF; however, it is clear that the NDS activities do need to be fully integrated with those of the ANSF and ISAF, and that there have been coordination problems in the past. The role of the NDS in intelligence operations nowadays is very important as its agents belong to various tribes, sects, ethnicities, and regions. The NDS has managed sources in every district, tribe, and region. The NDS fights in the front line and against subversions as it protects military and civilian installations.

Even 15 years after the US and its allies routed most al-Qaeda militants and other terrorist groups, the country is again becoming a haven for extremist groups. As stated by the former President Karzai in an interview with Russian television (RT): “there is no security, no end to extremism and radicalism rather we see more insecurity, extremism and radicalism.” Likewise, General Campbell informed the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) in February 2016 that Afghanistan had not achieved an enduring level of security and stability that would allow for a reduction in US support. Also that month National Intelligence Director James R. Clapper told the SASC that the intelligence community believes “fighting in 2016 will be more intense than 2015, continuing a decade-long trend of deteriorating security.”

Since the majority of the US troops left Afghanistan, the drones and surveillance balloons to monitor remote areas of the vast and rugged country are all gone. According to The Wall Street Journal report, as of September 2015, all but about 20 of the installations that anchored the extensive intelligence-gathering network have been closed, bulldozed or handed off to the Afghan government. Furthermore, Mr Karzai stated: “The fight against terrorism will not succeed unless we fight it in their sanctuaries, their training grounds, their motivation and their financial resources.” Besides, the US Department of State’s publication Country Reports on Terrorism 2015 stated: “the Afghan government does not have a comprehensive formal countering violent extremism (CVE) strategy, but has begun the process to develop one. The Office of the National Security Council has designated a team to take the lead in coordinating the government’s CVE engagement. Various ministries and offices have CVE issues incorporated in their portfolios. The government continues to support activities designed to prevent radicalization.”

Radicalised terrorists from various groups use different terrorist tactics to pursue their goals. Methods used included suicide bombers, vehicle-born improvised explosive devices, ambushes, kidnappings, beheadings, and targeted assassinations.

Although the Congressional Research Service noted that the US spent about $1.6 trillion in Iraq and Afghanistan to win the war against terrorism, the result has not been very positive. According to the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) quarterly report published in April 2016, as of 31 March 2016 the US Congress had appropriated more than $68.4 billion to support the ANSF. This accounts for 60% of all US reconstruction funding for Afghanistan since fiscal year 2002. The total Afghanistan Security Forces Fund request for fiscal year 2017 is $3.45 billion, which is less than the previous year’s appropriation of $3.65 billion.

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51 Hamid Karzai interview, RT, 27 April 2016.
54 Hamid Karzai interview, RT, 27 April 2016.
56 Ibid, 230.
Although so much money is spent to improve security and bring peace, the challenges of the security forces are multiplying. There are many factors as to why so many NATO countries and the CIA failed to accomplish a change of intelligence culture and professionalise the NDS in the last 15 years. The resources invested by the CIA to bring a change were not used in the right approach as well as CIA specialist and special forces units alike were being reassigned to the Iraq theatre. Not many of the CIA personnel knew the Afghan Intelligence culture and the US analysts increasingly believed that support for religious militancy within Pakistan’s military and ISI was one of the key obstacles to formulating a sound approach towards Afghanistan. As President Obadam remarked in his December 2009 West Point address, “success in Afghanistan is inextricably linked to our partnership with Pakistan.”

The US and NATO response has always been behind the curve and ignoring it to wage war in Iraq. It was a fatal error to allow the insurgency to grow so strong that defeating it would be brought into question and cost so many lives.

There are other terrorist groups expanding such as al-Qaeda in the Indian subcontinent and ISIL/Daesh. As Afghanistan is largely unmonitored and the NDS is failing to monitor all the doors to the country, it is highly likely that extremists from Islamic states, al-Qaeda, Daesh, and other militant groups can find safe haven inside the country’s borders. As long as the Afghan government faces obstacles such as complex organisational structures, weak interministerial coordination, corruption, lack of territorial control, and safe havens for terrorist groups operating on its soil, the ongoing challenges will continue to remain. Terrorist attacks are always unexpected and dramatic.

Both Afghanistan and the US have long acknowledged the importance of developing air power. However, despite the fact that this was pointed out as a critical capability gap, the Afghan Air Force is still far from fully capable, let alone self-sustaining. According to the SIGAR quarterly report published in 30 April 2016, the impact of the lack of a well-equipped and capable Afghan Air Force became all too clear in the aftermath of the fall of Kunduz on 28 September 2015 to the Taliban. Despite the end of the US combat operations and a transition to a mission focused on training, advising, and assisting, the US forces were once again called upon to provide air support to the Afghan forces. The Afghan forces were able to clear the city of Kunduz from insurgents, but required the US air power and other intelligence support in the operation. This was a capability gap, which needs to be addressed to prevent similar attacks in the future.

**Conclusion**

Historical records suggest that the areas where the intelligence cycle most frequently fails are in the assessment process and the policy interface rather than in collection. It is essential that the NDS, and the CIA that is funding it, more clearly differentiates between the role of intelligence communities in authoritarian and democratic regimes. It is, of course, impossible to change the history of the AGSA, KAM, KhAD, and WAD; the Afghanistan regimes at the time were heavily dependent on those intelligence services. The successful Soviet penetration of Afghanistan started when America failed to respond to the real economic and security needs of a friendly and pro-western Afghanistan and failed to understand the internal Afghan political requirements.

With the establishment of the unity government in Afghanistan, relations between the government and intelligence agencies remained under strain. Pakistani intelligence discussing with the NDS authorities about intelligence sharing and cooperation was the cause of many controversies. Furthermore, the fight between the Indian intelligence (Research and Analysis Wing) and the ISI is a bigger challenge for the NDS and CIA who want to stabilise the country. Abuse of intelligence is another challenge in Afghanistan with intelligence agencies behind the political opponents of the government.

60 President Barack Obama, “Remarks by the President in Address to the National on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan,” West Point, N.Y., 1 December 2009.

With the NDS lacking experienced intelligence officers and the CIA unable to produce the numbers required, the NDS had no option but to use the KGB-trained officers or inexperienced officers who may also have criminal background. This is an issue that needs to be addressed and reform is needed. Moreover, Afghanistan is still at the very beginning of a process whose success is still uncertain. Change is never easy, and redirecting intelligence agencies to uphold a democratic process is a real challenge. While change is possible, it will be slow, frustrating, and painful. The reform of the intelligence agencies is therefore imperative, and the depoliticisation of the intelligence process is as much an element of national reconciliation as consolidation of power. Reforming the intelligence agencies requires not only a change in the state, but also a change in the state of mind of the actors involved, and it must be understood in the larger context of civil–military relations. In the case of Afghanistan, this requires building trust – particularly difficult not only because of past relationships between civilians and intelligence agencies but also because of the structural contradictions it presents. The lack of trust is precisely why the agencies need to be controlled.

The Taliban and al-Qaeda are not the only militant groups that appear to be exploiting the intelligence gap. Thousands of central and south Asian Islamic militants have crossed into Afghanistan undetected this year after their havens in Pakistan were attacked. Significant reductions in counterterrorism capabilities aided the expansion of extremist groups. The lack of intelligence about militant activities in remote areas of Afghanistan stems from the drawdown of the US forces and the shutting of the US and NATO bases that began in 2012. Afghanistan became an object of charity and neglect for the US and other major powers. Regional powers, particularly Pakistan, as well as private networks, smugglers, drug dealers, and terrorists, treated it as an open field for manipulation and exploitation.

Pakistan’s interests might not have changed much as it had hoped that the Taliban would provide it with strategic depth, a secure neighbourhood, and, potentially, oil resources from the north of the country, so as to be able to conclude the Kashmir question with India. In addition, Pakistan, as a principle supplier of weapons and fuel to the Taliban, is not in an awkward position.

The failure of major powers to come to the aid of Afghanistan and strengthen its intelligence agency not only created more extremism, radicalisation, and terrorism but also created insecurity beyond the Middle East. The Kunduz attack laid bare capability gaps within the ANSF. The government forces were able to clear the city of insurgents but despite the end of US combat operations and a transition, the US forces were once again called upon to provide air support to the Afghan forces.62

In spite all these failures in Afghan intelligence, the government never tried to introduce intelligence reforms or fix the broken window. While there are more heart breaking stories about the intelligence failure that cannot be accommodated in this article due to limited space, it does provide evidence of the need to professionalise the NDS and its agencies.

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None.

**Declaration of interest**

Diva Patang Wardak declares that she has no conflict of interest.

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