

# POST-MODERNIZING AFGHANISTAN

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## **Abstract**

*This paper presents a qualitative study of the so-called “warlord democracy” in Afghanistan, a formally democratic regime where violence predominantly serves as a trump in economic, political and social contracts. A definition and typology of Afghan warlords as military entrepreneurs is developed. The case-specific socio-historical and economic enabling conditions of militant entrepreneurship are outlined, to trace down the third, general condition of “post-modern” warfare. Four models of interaction between society, state, economy and militancy are pictured to propose a framework for understanding different theoretical paradigms in which state-building programmes, military and non-military interventionism, and the global economic network function in observable discrepancy.*

## **Introduction**

This paper describes the creation of a warlord democracy in Afghanistan, a formally democratic system dominated by local warlords and their proxies. In my thesis *Afghanistan: Creation of a Warlord Democracy*, I argue that five enabling conditions supported the creation of such system: (1) the specific socio-historical conditions and events in the country, (2) the economic situation of harsh poverty and high demand for

security and income, (3) the US-led military intervention in Afghanistan, (4) the institutional paradigm of transition to democracy, and (5) the global pattern of emergence and sustenance of “new” wars (Kaldor 1999)<sup>1</sup> with a distinctive gain-maximizing feature. This paper dwells of the first, the second and the fifth conditions.

All conditions are connected by a common micro-pattern of blending of violence and profit. I use this pattern to define warlords as “militant entrepreneurs.” The concept of militant entrepreneurship developed by Thomas Gallant<sup>2</sup> describes a category of societal entrepreneurs whose differentiating feature is provision of the commodity of violence and its counterpart, security. I analyze three contexts of occurrence of militant entrepreneurship in Afghanistan, where the ability to deliver or withhold violence appears cross-contextually as a commodity in societal contracts.

The final part of this paper describes the emerging pattern of militarizing entrepreneurship in the context of globalization and post-modernization.

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Kaldor, “New and Old Wars: Organized violence in a global era” (Cambridge: Polity 1999).

<sup>2</sup> Thomas W. Gallant, “Brigandage, Piracy, Capitalism, and State-Formation: Transnational crime from a historical world-systems perspective,” in “States and Illegal Practices,” eds. Josiah Heyman and Alan Smart (Oxford International Publishers Ltd. 1999).

The process of globalization includes major de-differentiation between economy, politics and militancy: the society, the state and the militants become commodified, while economy militarizes. The system of violence becomes disembedded from the society and embedded in the global economic system. Violence and profit blend, state and society are subjected to them, with pre-modern and modern values and motives for communal action subordinated to the goal of gain maximization.

The military and economic predominance of Afghan warlords nourished by global market forces enforces their position to a degree that renders them virtually invincible for the instruments of the modern state and for modernist international models of post-conflict intervention. Warlords utilize state-building and democratization processes to legitimize their positions within the local and international political system, which leads to creation of a warlord democracy.

I argue that post-conflict strategies are in deficit of appropriate theoretical concepts and, consequently, in deficit of functional policies and practices for approaching warlordism. As John Mackinlay observes: “The international community has not yet developed a language and an approach to tackle the warlords... [They] fall beyond the language of Clausewitzian writers and communicators whose only concept of violence is as an instrument of

policy.”<sup>3</sup> The oxymoron “warlord democracy” is a symptom of this linguistic and theoretical deficit. This paper attempts to contribute to the development of a theoretical language which approximates the phenomenon of warlordism.

### *1. Afghan Warlords*

Much of the world media attention was directed to the Afghan Presidential and Parliamentary Elections in 2004 and 2005. These events were to be indicators of success of the post-9/11 democratization of Afghanistan and, consequently, justification for the military intervention by the U.S in the country. The Elections took place in a relatively non-violent atmosphere, and were proclaimed a victory for the Afghan people and for democracy worldwide, for taking place at all in this continuously volatile region.

However, an Afghanistan's Independent Human Rights Commission post-elections survey (AIHRC 2005)<sup>4</sup> voices popular anger amongst Afghan citizens against warlords and militia commanders in the new political decision-making body of the country. The AIHRC survey pictures the elected Afghan Parliament dominated by warlords, commanders, their proxies, and various authority figures linked to them.

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<sup>3</sup> John Mackinlay, in Sasha Lezhnev's “Crafting Peace: Strategies to deal with warlords in collapsing states,” (Lexington Books, 2005):1-2.

<sup>4</sup> Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission – AIHRC, “A Call for Justice” (2005).

Who and what are the Afghan warlords? How did popular elections produce a warlord Parliament? This chapter will offer a definition of warlords and a typology based on warlords' distinguishing features. The history of formation and consolidation of warlordism in Afghanistan will be given, starting from the Cold War to the contemporary period.

We shall find the following: warlords at present act as military security guarantors, cooperating with the two main international actors in the country, the U.S. and the UN. Warlords, although acting as security guarantors, use violence to increase insecurity and thus increase the demand for their services. Violence, or the threat of it, was used to shape the results of the Afghan Elections of 2004 and 2005. The result was the creation of a legitimate and dysfunctional warlord democracy, a phenomenon with its roots in much earlier times.

### ***1.1. Defining Warlords***

The term “warlord,” although frequent in use, lacks a precise definition in political entrepreneurs”<sup>5</sup> conceives a category of societal entrepreneurs, whose main commodity is violence: “By ‘military entrepreneur’ I refer to a category of men who take up arms and who wield

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<sup>5</sup> Other definitions which describe warlords in a blend of economic and military terms are offered by Volkov’s “violent entrepreneurs” (Vadim Volkov, “Violent Entrepreneurs: The use of force in the making of Russian capitalism,” Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002) and by Lezhnev’s typology of “ethnic entrepreneurs,” “absolute warlords” and “freedom fighters.”

science, mainly due to warlords’ largely informal modes of operation. The word is used to refer to a wide range of meanings: from traditional local headmen, legitimate in their respective communities, to regional militant leaders of private armed forces, drug barons, war criminals and mass-abusers of human rights. The Western popular perception connotes this word with generally negative associations. However, this is an all-too-quick evaluation of authority figures that may be perceived as ethnic representatives and defenders within their own communities. I will henceforth use the term “warlord” as a value-neutral term, to refer to authoritative militants who fulfil a range of societal roles within the local communities, and who develop specific modes of economic, military and political operations and exchange under extreme circumstances.

The existing definitions of warlords typically describe a symptomatic blending of economic and military terms, which refers to warlords as to service-providers incorporated in the local and global economic system. Thomas Gallant’s notion of warlords as “military violence or the threat of violence as their stock in trade. I use ‘military’ here not in its contemporary common connotation of a national army, but in an older, more ambiguous form referring only to the use of arms and weapons. They are entrepreneurs in the sense that they are purveyors of a commodity – violence,” (Gallant 1999:26-27).

I expand Gallant’s notion of violent commodity, emphasizing that it is used

as a trump in each societal contract, with the fundamental function to divide the discourse of interaction into two zones: one of security, and the other one of threat. Ultimately, these zones can correspond to a zone of survival, and a zone of death, each one for rental.

An Afghan officer of the international NGO Human Rights Watch describes the local use of the term warlord: “Warlord is not a technical word. In Afghanistan, it is a literal translation of the local phrase ‘jang salar,’ and it has simply come to refer to any leader of men under arms. The country has thousands of such men, some deriving their power from a single roadblock, others controlling a town or small area, and still others reigning over large districts. At the apex of this chaotic system are some six or seven major warlords, each with a significant geographic, ethnic, and political base of support,” (Human Rights Watch, 2004). We shall see in the next section that warlords and armed leaders do not make a homogeneous group. Militant entrepreneurship elicits features, motives, behaviour and interrelations different from those specific to local commanders.

## ***1.2. Categories of Warlords***

I shall propose here categorization of Afghan warlords based on several features that connect and distinguish warlords from other types of military commanders and traditional headmen.

- 1) they command private, or privatized<sup>6</sup>, military forces;
- 2) their rule is connected to a specific territory, usually to their ethnic community;
- 3) they possess some legitimacy among the local population;
- 4) they have a more or less symbiotic economic and military relationship with at least a part of the local community;
- 5) they participate in the global economic system, engaging in one or more forms of illicit or informal economy; and
- 6) they challenge, privatize or supplement the state functions, resources and instruments on their territories.

Warlords, among themselves, may differ in several dimensions:

- 1) type and size of military forces in formal or informal allegiance to them;
- 2) type of legitimacy among the local community: based on security-provision, economic welfare, tribe, ethnicity, tradition, religion, etc.;
- 3) sources of economic sustainability: ranging from black and grey economy, to legal entrepreneurship (from extortion, abduction, plunder, to extraction, security provision, licit activities, etc.);
- 4) type and degree of economic relationships with the local supporting community: ranging from social services and redistribution of resources, to extortion, coercion, abuses, mass displacements and mass murders;

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6 “Privatized” military force refers to state police or army forces loyal, ethnically or economically, to warlords. Warlords themselves can hold governmental offices.

5) extension of their cooperative networks and links to other global networks: ranging from local to international level, and

6) relationship with the government: ranging from cooption, cooperation, competition and tolerance of independent equals, to criminalization, persecution and extinction. The hostile relationship can go both ways: state forces can criminalize and be criminalized by the warlords in areas where different laws and authorities of the state and the local culture overlap and compete with each other.

None of the listed features are mutually exclusive. Each combination of relationships, in any degree, is possible and observable in Afghan reality. Moreover, these relational constellations are continually shifting, in type and in intensity, so that permanent categorization of individual warlords within static types will not show fruitful.

### ***1.3. Warlordism***

“Warlordism” describes a state of predominance of one or more militant entrepreneurs over internationally recognized territories (one or several states), embedded in the system of economic transactions, parallel to, challenging, cooperating with, or participating in the formal state government and the legal economy of the country.

Warlords, as military entrepreneurs - purveyors of the violent stock in trade, commonly are a danger to and guarantors

of security. As security-guarantors, they often supplement state functions. The government itself may be warlord-ruled. In other scenarios, the government may be weaker than the warlords, and may operate as long as it serves warlords’ purposes. Due to their territory-based legitimacy, warlords may tend to tolerate each other’s existence, so long as their informal territories are unchallenged, and so long as struggle for central state control is outside their interest or power. The latter is the case of Afghanistan and is the ground for the development of present warlordism.

The history of Afghanistan describes a permanently weak state which has never ruled its territories and the population outside the regional capitals. All attempts to modernize the country have failed due to violent upheavals of the rooted traditionalism of the independent rural areas. Afghan warlords have been present on the country’s political scene for decades, as major military actors during the Cold War period and the subsequent civil war.

### ***2. Traditional Origins of Warlords***

The origins of Afghan combatants lie in a complex network of societal organization and peaceful regulation of violence. The end of traditional militants, in service of their communities and tamed by them, began with the Cold War and has still not ended. Contemporary militant entrepreneurs retain some links with their communities and maintain a large degree of informal contractual exchanges with them. Some warlords move toward

minimizing this exchange and establishing their dominance, while others move toward re-establishing reciprocative relations with societal groups. The military and economic predominance of warlords and the poverty of the population render unequal exchange relations between them.

Present day warlords stem from the traditional relation-oriented culture of Afghanistan. A warlord is typically a person who has distinguished himself as a military leader, has a record of a number of victories, and has shared satisfactory spoils of war with the network of followers, which support the families of the combatants and in some cases, whole villages. The community of followers is typically from the same ethnic group, and it is commonly more or less intolerant of other ethnic groups.

An Afghan warlord is typically a person coming from a powerful, well-known family. The family supports him by unremitting loyalty, a network of cooperatives and combatants, the family name giving him legitimacy, authority and community respect, as well as the loyalty of other, minor families from the same tribe or ethnic community. As Whitney Azoy (2003) illustrates, the dynamics of interaction between a warlord and his followers is as follows: a “good” warlord provides spoils, gains victories and obtains a “good name”. The “good name” attracts more supporters, acquires more combatants and a larger potential for military and economic activities.

Azoy finely explains the informal institutional pattern of Afghan authority: “The Afghan form of authority resides neither in permanent corporations nor in formal statuses, but in individual men who relate to each other in transient patterns of cooperation and competition... Unregulated, however, by any system of universally recognized authority, this cooperation readily gives way to competition,” (Azoy 2003:24). Power in Afghan culture, Azoy accentuates, essentially designates power over people. Traditionally, not the economic resources, but the number (quantity) and the “names” (quality) of supporters measure the power and the authority of the person in the Afghan cultural model.

### ***2.1. De-regulation of Violence***

The institutions of shura (council), jirga (peace mission) and arbakai (traditional local police), as well as the code of honour within the warrior culture, are of primary importance in the organization of the Afghan community. However, in the last two decades, the international factor caused corruption of the shura system and emergence of military figures as autonomous and predominant decision-makers on their respective territories.

This process can be traced down to the period of the Russian and American proxy-wars in Afghanistan, and is parallel (if not identical) to the rise of warlordism. Ever since the Cold War, foreign powers have been supporting different tribes and militant factions, by

providing them with arms, funds and military training. The uncontrolled influx of advanced military technology tipped the historical balance of power in favour of those who have more effective arms against those who have traditionally born the legitimacy and authority in community governance. The asymmetry in cash and arms enabled militant figures to buy off or coerce shuras in their favour. By complying with militant figures, some shuras have lost their reputation in their respective communities. At present, local commanders often resolve disputes previously delegated to shuras.

Once local protectors of their communities, today warlords vary in their relation to their original qawm-s (traditional systems of relations based on ethnicity, tribe and family). Warlords still have positive incentives to maintain the loyalty of the traditional local authorities. This is usually done by positive coercion: local councils face the choice of accepting incentives from a warlord (property, territory, gifts, arms, etc) or renouncing his protection.

Warlords provide income to their supporters in form of payment and gifts, and thus sustain, directly or indirectly, a part of the population. Furthermore, they may provide a sense of ethnic pride and unity to their respective communities. Although most contemporary warlords distribute high incentives to a small group of supporters, some may widen their scope of redistribution to the general population of their territories.

The more intense the exchange between a warlord and his ethnic community, the

stronger the popular legitimacy of the warlord. However, to have legitimacy within one community does not mean legitimacy within another community. Due to the history of inter-ethnic violence in the civil war, the more legitimacy a warlord has within his own community, the less legitimacy he is likely to have in other communities.

Most warlords do not engage in projects of public interest; they limit their activities to distributing cash, gifts, property and arms to the community of supporters. Moreover, almost all warlords, ever since the Russian involvement in Afghanistan, have been accused for war crimes against each other's ethnic communities. Popularly, many Afghans consider that the warlords have lost their "honour" because what they did to civilians during the civil war.

### ***3. Addictive Economy***

Afghan warlords draw most of their income from controlling the opium trade in the world's largest opium-producing region. The opium business provides a relatively stable source of profit, which is used to sustain warlords' patronage networks and to maintain their military power. This income gives them economic predominance incomparably higher than any licit entrepreneurship can offer. Violence is used as a means to sustain illicit economic networks, to compete for control of trade routes, and to guarantee fulfilment of transaction contracts within the opium network.

However, the opium network provides major employment opportunities to a

society continually on the verge of famine. The economy of this country is largely dependent on its opium sector. Entire impoverished areas enter warlords' opium networks and become dependent on militant figures who secure their sources of income.

### ***3.1. Resource Dependence***

The economic explanation of the symbiosis between violence and profit is as follows: during the Cold War, the external financial and military aid (advanced military technology) significantly raised the costs of war: Afghan factions had to compete with each other's military competence and seek external sources of income to buy weapons. The sponsored factions became dependent on stable sources of high-level income.

After the end of the Cold War, the two super-powers withdrew their financial and military aid. The formerly sponsored factions needed to maintain the level of internal military competition and hence had to find an alternative source of income. The lucrative opium trade provided sufficient funds. An exclusive relation between violence and profit was formed. The economic self-sufficiency based on control of the opium market rendered warlords relatively independent from their traditional communities and from alternative sources of income.

Barnett Rubin points to the Taliban period (1995-2001) as the time of "consolidation of a number of phenomena that had been developing previously, namely the emergence of

transnational trade networks of the Afghan regional diaspora, linked to smuggling and drug trading groups in the surrounding countries as well as to political parties, religious groups, and elements of the administration..." The economic independence based on control of the opium market distinguished a historically new<sup>7</sup> type of commanders emerging in the post-Cold War period. "Within Afghanistan itself, the main economic actors were the commanders. Contrary to some stereotypes, these commanders were by and large not the 'traditional' (i.e. tribal or landowning) elites... but a group of new elites that benefited from U.S., Pakistani, and Saudi policies of supporting only Islamist parties rather than the nationalist former elite." (Rubin n.d.).

According to Rubin, these commanders sought to gain economic independence from their political-religious parties, and subsequently loosened their traditional reciprocal bonds with the local communities. Nonetheless, as late as 2004 this author (Rubin 2004b:1) discerns indubitable symptoms of integration (permanent economic relations and vertical hierarchical organization) in the global market.

### ***3.2. Nexus***

The UN Office of Drugs and Crime (ODC), in the "Afghanistan Opium Survey 2005," estimates that Afghan

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<sup>7</sup> The novelty of this type of militant figures lies in their previous historical dependence on the indigenous communities and their full observance of customary laws, absent in the "new" type.



production supplies more than three-quarters of the heroin sold in Europe, and all heroin in Russia. The ODC Report confirms that “there is a clear nexus between drug trafficking and warlordism,” where provinces controlled by warlords are especially suitable for trafficking, who tax it in exchange for protection and free flow of licit and illicit goods and people. The link between warlordism and drug cultivation is apparent, the Report affirms. The Head of UNODC concludes that “traffickers, warlords and insurgents in Afghanistan control quasi-military operations and run military-type operations” (ODC 2005).

Warlords derive income from growing poppy on their land, from private “security” taxation of farmers and traffickers, and from their own trafficking networks which export opium and import arms. This income serves military entrepreneurs to maintain their networks, pay their armed forces (if not already paid by the government), purchase technologically advanced weapons, buy peace with other such entrepreneurs, buy tolerance from public officers, and form zones of impunity around their persons, networks and activities.

Opium sale and poppy growing are a response to relentless circumstances of pending poverty and hunger. There is a clear relation between (non-military) civilian population and the opium trade, with militant entrepreneurs playing a mediatory role in this relationship. The aforementioned ODH report observes that Afghan farmers grow opium poppy for several reasons: it was not strictly

illegal until the official bans in 2000 and in 2002. It is produced with cheap labour (women, children, old people, landless returnees and refugees). The desert soil and climate are benevolent for poppy growing. Poppy yields up to three harvests per year, and the income from opium poppy is abundant. As a commodity, opium is a low-maintenance product: light, easy to pack and store, it lasts long without decaying or losing in quality, it does not need marketing and, of course, the demand is high. In absence of banks, stable currencies and creditors, opium has become “a form of saving, a source of liquidity and a collateral for credit,” (ODC 2005).

The ODC survey shows the specific way of cooperation between farmers and warlords, a symbiotic interdependence on unequal terms, offered or imposed on the population<sup>8</sup>, where extreme poverty and extreme profit may virtually be indistinguishable. Moreover, the Report observes that, “in some regions, traffickers gain respect from the local community when they recycle part of their income for the benefit of poor villages.” However, the main beneficiaries from opium production in Afghanistan are the traffickers, who collect about 79% of the total income

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<sup>8</sup> “Cultivators don't create traffickers, traffickers create cultivators. Many peasants who grow opium are bound to the cycle of opium production by debt bondage. [...]Eradicating part of the crop ... would drive up the price, creating incentives to grow opium in more inaccessible areas. The deeply indebted farmers... will face a grim choice: give their daughters to the traffickers, flee the country or grow more opium. That was what they did when the Taliban banned the crop without alternative livelihoods.” (Rubin 2004a)

from the opium economy, distribute a part of it through the informal security and mediatory network, while 21% goes to the farmers, according to the same ODC Report. A part from the overall drug income is invested into the licit economy.

By controlling poppy-growing, opium production and trade, militant entrepreneurs command much higher resources than the state can provide, and simultaneously they offer an alternative exit from poverty to a significant part of the population. Warlords may thus be perceived locally as legitimate community leaders due to their provision of economic networks for opium sale.

The present day warlords in the Afghan government are economically independent commanders. They gained economic predominance in the post-Taliban phase, consolidating opium networks by means of military and, later, political predominance. With the opium economic trump added to the warlords' military trump, we shall complete the definition of militant entrepreneurship.

#### ***4. The Afghan Syndrome***

Thus far, I examined the socio-historical and the military-economic context of emergence of warlords. To approach the phenomenon of warlordism from a wider perspective, I shall summarize the symptoms of warlord democracy discerned so far in a temporal sequence.

The Afghan communities have been historically ruled not by royalties and

states, but by traditional and customary laws. Afghan warlords emerged from a locally regulated social function of controlled violence. During the Cold War, local warlords were sponsored by the two super-powers. The Cold War on Afghan territory was fought as an inter-ethnic war, with massive casualties on all sides. Ethnic cleavages deepened and poverty increased. With foreign financial aid and advanced military technology, they formed extensive and expensive militant networks. They became dependent on external high-income sources.

After the Cold War, in its continuation in a civil war, foreign aid ceased and warlords started becoming increasingly dependent on the opium market as their main source of income. They started gaining economic predominance and independence, based on their ability to control the opium production and market by military means. The traditional forms of self-rule were damaged and rendered open to military and economic rule. Military conquest of territory was frequently substituted with large-scale payments to traditional and military rulers. Alliances were often bought, and allies shifted sides to the highest bidder. Warlords become militant entrepreneurs, with their ability to deliver or withhold violence put forward for rental to the highest bidder.

The present post-Taliban phase reflects the power relations of the pre-Taliban phase. Warlords are key power-brokers in the democratizing state. They have consolidated their positions in the state instruments of coercion (army and

police), and they have consolidated their opium networks, drawing in them an increasing part of the impoverished population. At present, warlords cooperate with the U.S. as local military allies in exchange for financial incentives, and with the UN as security guarantors in exchange for political power. Warlords and their proxies dominated the electoral ballots in the Presidential and Parliamentary Elections 2004 and 2005. They obtained formalized political predominance, in addition to their previously established military and economic predominance. They use their political power to legitimize themselves and obtain impunity for their war crimes, their networks and illicit operations.

Much of the present-day security and informal employment opportunities are derived from warlords' activities. Much of the insecurity and the paralysis of legal economy is due to their activities as well. Democracy and state-building reflect the same dual relation: these processes are supported by warlords up to a point to which state instruments can be utilized in their personal agendas. A warlord democracy has been consolidated: a regime where formal democratic institutions are manipulated to mask a non-democratic rule by poly-centric power-holders, who dominate the military, economic and political life of the country.

These symptoms and conditions are not specific only to Afghanistan. They belong to a larger pattern of change in power-relations enfolding in a number of countries worldwide. This pattern is

connected to the emergence of the so-called "new wars" (Kaldor 1999) and the notions of "globalization," "dedifferentiation" and "commodification," which will be developed next. Four network models of mutual embeddedness of economy, militancy, society and state will be drafted, in order to explain "post-modernization" of warlordism. The introduced terminology and concepts will delineate another pattern which enabled the creation of a warlord democracy, the recent global transformations. I shall describe the transit of warlordism from pre/modern to post-modern stage, marked by the establishment of a symbiotic relation between warlords and the global systems of politics and economy.

This relation is two-pronged: (a) the first prong is based on the commodified ability to deliver or withhold violence, put forward for rental to the highest bidder on the market (formal and informal, licit and illicit) in societal, political, military and economic contracts; (b) the second prong is based on the militarily-maintained economic predominance over opium trade, which far outweighs optional licit income. With these two prongs, Afghan militant entrepreneurs gain relative independence<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> This relative independence is the independence of the service/goods provider who can choose to which bidder to offer his goods/services. The wide array of alternative interdependence links provides this relative independency. For example, Afghan warlords can choose whether to accept "security fees" from the U.S., the UN, Pakistan, India, Iran, the Afghan state, private security firms, foreign corporations, local drug traffickers, local

from sole demand-sources, such as states and society, and transfer their dependence onto the global market. From their economically and militarily independent position, they can enter inclusive contracts and parallel alliances with multiple local and international, state and non-state, licit and illicit actors. They can break these contracts and alliances if they do not support their military, economic and political predominance.

#### ***4.1. Models of Societal Interrelations***

Prior to entering into an analysis of the influence the globalizing market has exerted on Afghanistan, I shall elaborate the pre-modern, modern and post-modern models of societal organization. These models are derived on Karl Polanyi's conceptualization of the modernizing world,<sup>10</sup> and Mittelman and Johnston's appropriation of Polanyi's theory in the globalizing world.<sup>11</sup> The models belong to Weberian "ideal types": "conceptual patterns which bring together certain relationships and events of historical life into a complex which is conceived of as an internally consistent system."<sup>12</sup> They will serve to differentiate between specific modes of behaviour

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communities, or from any combination of these bidders, even when bidders are hostile to each other.

<sup>10</sup> Karl Polanyi: "The Great Transformation" (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957).

<sup>11</sup> James H. Mittelman and Robert Johnston: "The Globalization of Organized Crime: The courtesan state, and the corruption of civil society" (*Global Governance*, 5:1, 1999: 103-127).

<sup>12</sup> Max Weber, in Ken Morrison: "Marx, Weber, Durkheim: Formations of modern social thought" (London: Sage Publications, 2003):270.

characteristic to separate historical and organizational phases.

It will be obvious however that no real-world phenomenon at any point of history fully embodies any of the model-stages; instead, any phenomenon can combine features from each stage,<sup>13</sup> where the difference between stages can be seen as a more and/or less movement toward different stage-specific modes of operation. Hence, modern phenomena will tend toward full actualization of the modern model, never fully reaching it, while simultaneously exhibiting some features of pre-modern and post-modern models; correspondently, post-modern phenomena will have their trajectory of development toward the post-modern model(s), while exhibiting features of pre-modern and modern models to a lesser degree.

The four models will show variations of relations between society, economy, militancy, and the state. They should be understood in terms of networks: they depict types of mutual embeddedness of social, economic, militant and state networks, where the size of the circle expresses its power to influence the enfolded circles, or the power to form asymmetric relations of interdependence with them.

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<sup>13</sup> For example, pre-modern societies may relate to features of post-modern global economy via the Silk Road; post-modern actors may link to the pre-modern model via their link to state-free communities, ethnic identity, tradition, customary laws, etc.

Figure 1. Pre-modern model

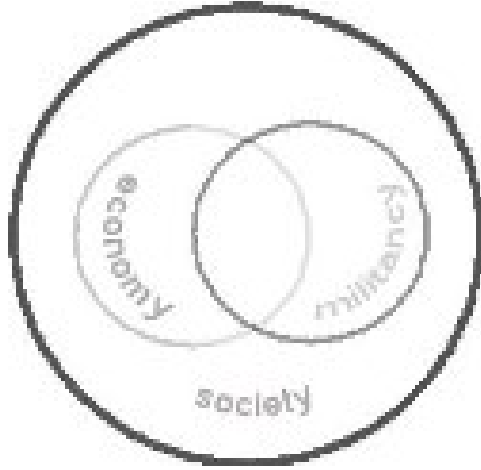


Figure 2. Modern model

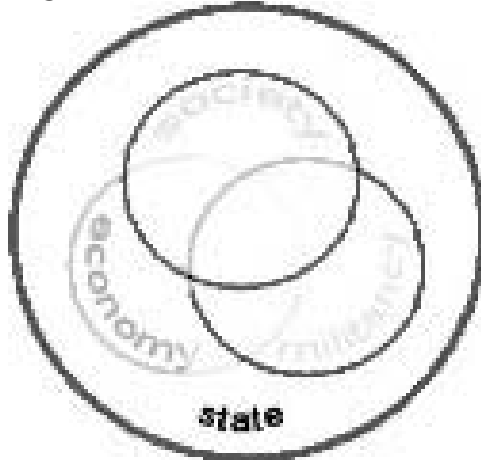
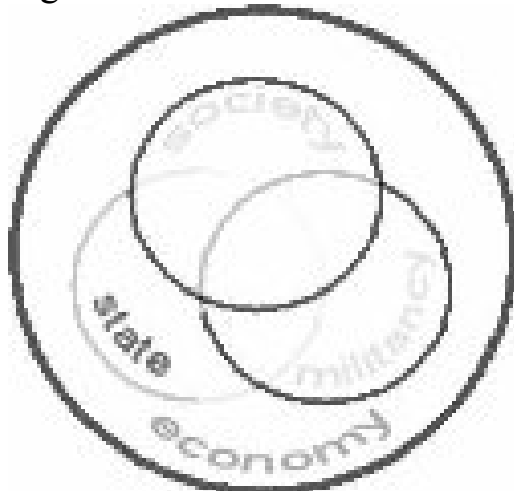


Figure 3. Post-modern model



Optionally, it would be challenging to examine whether the following model (Fig. 4) expresses a further extreme of the overall societal relations in post-modern stage. This model depicts the

most approximate framework for understanding warlord states:



Figure 4. Optional post-modern model – Warlordism

#### 4.1.1. Pre-modernity

In the pre-modern model (Fig. 1), the economic system, according to Polanyi,<sup>14</sup> is submerged in general social relations. I conjoin the military system, which was not examined by Polanyi, but is relevant to this thesis. Violent and economic networks are embedded in and subordinated to the social network.<sup>15</sup> Violence and economy are put into service of the community, which

<sup>14</sup> “The [pre-modern, *note added*] economic system is... a mere function of social organization,” (Polanyi 1957:67).

<sup>15</sup> “[In pre-modern stage] man’s economy, as a rule, is submerged in his social relationships. He does not act so as to safeguard his individual interest in the possession of material goods; he acts so as to safeguard his social standing, his social claim, his social assets. He values material goods only in so far as they serve this end... the economic system will be run on non-economic motives,” (Polanyi 1957:46).

manages, directs and tames them. In the pre-modern world, societal functions are diffuse, lacking sharp differentiation. This model corresponds to the pre-state societal organization. The goals of pre-modern wars are limited to territory and control over natural resources.

#### **4.1.2. Modernity**

In the modern model (Fig. 2), a new actor is created, the state, which functions as an all-embedding network in relation to economy, militancy and society. The state and the society are differentiated; functions are clearly separated between the four actors. In the modern stage, economic and militant systems are put into the service of the state. The wars of the modern phase are characterized by the following goals: control of a specific territory, formation of an independent state, central authority, and acquisition of internationally recognized sovereignty.

This model approximates the Weberian state model, where the state holds monopoly over legitimate use of violence, it regulates the national economic system and it responds to social needs. According to Weber (Morrison 2003:300), the novelties of the modern state system include: contractual impersonal relations bound by legal norms, separation between the administrative and the private sphere, and specialization of functions. Emile Durkheim (Morrison 2003:141-142) adds the following features: contractual links instead of social links, separate and specialized administrative functions, a centralized authority in the form of legal

and political organs, and separate and autonomous economic function. The state-building and democratization paradigm, as practiced in post-conflict settings, aims at actualization of the modern model.

#### **4.1.3. Post-modernity**

According to Polanyi it is in this modernizing stage where economy begins to gain in power, by “commodifying” (1957:69-72) three non-commodities: people are commodified into labour force, nature is commodified into property, and wealth into money. However, the worldwide modernization, according to Polanyi (1957:71), begins to reverse the modern-model relations of systemic embeddedness: the social system becomes embedded in the economic system, and it is the world economic system that manages, directs and tames the society henceforth.<sup>16</sup> In the post-modern stage (Fig. 3), the rise of the economic system to the most powerful position in the model is consolidated. State, society and militancy are embedded in the economic system. Contractual impersonal relations are bound not by legal but by economic norms, formerly differentiated functions blend, there is a return to a polycentric sources of authority, followed by de-institutionalization and de-formalization.

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<sup>16</sup> “Instead of economy being embedded in social relations, social relations are embedded in the economic system.”(Polany 1957:57). “All along the line, human society had become an accessory of the economic system,” (*ibid.*, 75).

Weak and violence-ridden state systems are pictured in the optional post-modern model (Fig. 4): state and society are embedded into the militant network, which in turn is embedded into the economic system. The system of violence becomes disembedded from the social system, it exits its service, and within the economic system it becomes a commodity in service of the world market forces. The global economic system henceforth manages, directs and tames violence.

The optional post-modern relational constellation is highly illustrative of Afghanistan, a case where the system of militant entrepreneurs tends away from embeddedness in the social system and toward embeddedness in the global economic system. This model (Fig. 4) more accurately expresses “warlordisation,” where militancy and economy establish a direct link, without the state or the society to influence their exchange. Further on in this text, the term “post-modern” will be used on the background of figures 3 and 4, and the term “globalisation” as process of movement from pre-modern to post-modern model. The post-modern stage can be examined as consolidation of symptoms developed in the modern stage. The processes of globalization, elaborated in the following sections, can thus refer both to an amplified, but previously present historical phenomenon, and to a new stage, where the effects of this amplification enable new types of relations and elicit new forms of behaviour.

## ***4.2. Post-modern Wars***

In the post-modern phase, the modern territory-oriented goals of war become redundant, as competition is limited to control over the economic system, instead of control over a territory and society. Establishing economic predominance is less costly and sufficient. Post-modern wars are about stable sources of profit, as we saw in chapter 1: Afghan warlords begin contesting over sources of profit and trade routes and disconnect from the local communities.

Although Kaldor (1999:3) names identity and population as goals of the new wars, I would, however, argue that these goals are flashbacks of pre- or early modern wars and war-making motives; the new wars are recognizable by their primarily economic character, where other types of goals are subordinated, or even commodified, under the cardinal goal of gain maximization at the global market.<sup>17</sup> It is important to note that the post-modern phase does not eradicate or exclude modern and pre-modern features and motives, but it selectively incorporates and adjusts some of them to become acceptable for the global market and/or for the international community.

## ***4.3. Globalization and Dedifferentiation***

The symbiotic relationship of the market and violence, the main point of interest for this thesis, must be understood in terms of globalising “dedifferentiation”

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<sup>17</sup> Thus, nationalistic leaders can be for rental, religious or ethnic loyalties can be given up, and set against their communities for a proper price.

(Mittelman/Johnston 1999:114), where previously (in the modern model) sharply differentiated functions, roles, institutions, areas, ends, laws and means, lose their distinction, overlap, multiply and exchange roles. I argue that this effects a triangular de-differentiation between politics, economy and militancy, where one can observe “post-modern” forms of global re-militarization and commodification of politics, commodified militancy and militant economies. Moreover, the difference between formal and informal politics, between licit and illicit economy, and between legitimate and illegitimate violence, is blurred. Therefore, I use these key terms (militancy, politics, and economy) to refer to both their licit and illicit, formal and informal sides.

The notion of globalization will draw on Mary Kaldor’s (1999:3) definition, as “intensification of global connectedness [...] a contradictory process involving both integration and fragmentation, homogenization and diversification, globalization and localization.” This process, according to Kaldor, takes place in each society, regardless of the stage of development and position in the global economic system. However, in developing countries, a globalizing economy tends to arrive before political processes of state-building and development. Typically, developing states are characterized by a lack of physical, economic and legal security, so that profit-driven interests create a demand for protection guarantors. This demand couples foreign firms with security providers, which can be

international private security companies, authoritarian rulers and state security forces, or local warlords in weak or collapsed states. In another scenario, it is the local militants who reach for the globalizing market and integrate with it by becoming providers of security and/or of (illicit) commodities. In both cases, economy and militancy establish a close unmediated relation, which in turn affects the mode of operation of each of the actors: corporations accommodate means and modes of operation of organized irregular violence, and militants accommodate corporate means and modes of operation.

#### *4.3.1. Commodification of Violence*

Post-modern wars borrow from pre-modern and modern types of wars, and yet their economic and corporate features make them distinguishable from both predecessors. The stepping stone between the modern and post-modern phase of warfare, I shall claim, is the commodification of violence for the global market: when the ability to deliver or withhold violence gains a price as a service, and is offered as a commodity to the highest bidder on the market. In this phase, the service-provider is liberated from a single demand-source (one or other party) and from societal loyalties. Violence as service is offered to multiple actors simultaneously, and it can get contracted by various actors, sometimes simultaneously by opposing parties.

The global market can accept violence as service; as in the process of commodification, the motive of the



violent service-provider is divorced from the ability to deliver the service.<sup>18</sup> Hence, the questions of ethical dimensions, consequences for the social network and political legitimacy – all issues based on motives and consequences – become redundant or inapplicable questions: violent agents and contracts can be legitimized as rational actors with rational behaviour within economic theories. Within economic practice, militant entrepreneurs are treated as licit entrepreneurs; illicit militants and licit security organizations can be equally rented by legitimate or illegitimate actors. Hence, local warlords as militant entrepreneurs, regardless of their motives, enter the global economic market as service providers for parties who can rent them, regardless of the latter's motives.

The ability to deliver violence or to deliver from it can be used to gain an upper hand in economic, societal and political contracts, locally and globally. The unique feature of this commodity is to provide division between safety and threat; hence, security and violence can be regarded as two sides of the same coin,

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<sup>18</sup> The question of legitimacy, a pillar of the Weberian state as bearer of monopoly over *legitimate* use of force on a delineated territory, is a question which defines itself on the *motive* of the militant actors (including the state) and the *consequences for the environment* of action. By commodifying violence the question of motive and environment is neutralized: it does not enter the rational economic calculations of choice of partners and outsourcing agents. A corporation does not have to inquire about the motives of a service provider or the wider consequences of their actions, but about their ability to deliver the good.

where the tosser is for rental.<sup>19</sup> However, although the modernist motivation for violence (such as liberation, ethnic identity, or resistance to oppression) is de-coupled from the commodified service of violence, pre-modern, modern and post-modern features may coexist together, and the motives for gain or for modernist or pre-modern values can compete with each other in the violent entrepreneur as well.

#### ***4.3.2. Warfare, Welfare and Levelling of the State***

The post-modern characteristics of the contemporary wars led by commodified violence-providers, according to Kaldor (1999:5), are discernable as processes of dedifferentiation between war actors, organized crime, civilian, economic and state actors, dedifferentiation between combatants and non-combatants (civilians), between internal and external wars, between aggression and repression, between local and global<sup>20</sup>, private and public, state and non-state, formal and

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<sup>19</sup> It is important to note that the tosser is not for *sale*: self-sacrificing loyalty of a “sold” actor belongs to the modern and pre-modern periods, while the loyalty of commodified violence is subject to economic rules and market competition. “You cannot buy an Afghan, you can only rent him,” so goes a saying in Afghanistan. An interesting consequence of the differentiation between rental and sale refers to the responsibility of the demand-party: while “bought” commodities entail full responsibility over the item, “rented” commodities dissolve this responsibility and render the demand-party relatively freer from responsibility over the effects of the rented item deployment.

<sup>20</sup> See Kaldor 1999:2.

informal spheres, between economically and politically motivated actors and wars.

The new post-modern wars, including recent Afghan wars, mimic and adjust the following corporate features: a high level of decentralization, with small-sized units connected in loose networks in a mixed relation of confrontation, competition and cooperation, sometimes simultaneously, and even when on opposed sides (Kaldor 1999:8); shifting ad hoc alliances, with alignment based on a common gain-maximizing goal and broken for the lack of it; a light-step approach (without heavy investments or territorialization) with high mobility and indiscernability from the surrounding.

Organizationally, corporations and new-warlord structures are polycentric, rarely vertically structured hierarchies; they may engage in multiple services, some licit and some illicit; operations are performed through networks of highly autonomous units, where actors can be state offices, firms, local gangs, mercenaries, entrepreneurs, criminals and so on. The organizational map of post-modern operators corresponds to the contemporary mode of military and economic organization of Afghan actors.

### ***4.3.3. The Post-modern State***

Both transnational corporations and transnational (and, equally, local-and-globally-embedded) criminal or violent groups can function above, below and beside the state,<sup>21</sup> capitalizing on economic deregulation, social

fragmentation, state building, state withdrawal or state collapse. In the previously depicted figures 3 and 4, the economy commodifies the systems of militancy, society and state, but militancy, in its turn, militarizes the society and the state. The state becomes a minor co-actor in this network, and yet it does not disappear. However, it has stepped down from its modern (Fig. 2) predominant position in regard to economy, militancy and society, to become a potential winner or loser in the global power competition, alongside the wide array of “non-state” actors. The state, its instruments and resources can also be commodified, and hence they enter the market offered to the highest bidder. In order to survive the intense competition in violence, shifting economic orders and polycentric norm-setting, the state in this way is driven to replicate and adjust modes of operation of its new competitors: the differentiation between state and non-state actors is blurred. The state can be drawn into using violent means borrowed from the post-modern type of wars, and it can accommodate the corporate mode of organization of its units and instruments.

The three classical tenets of the European state model are challenged by the relationship between local militancy and global economy: the state does not hold monopoly over violence, its territorial delimitation does not play a significant role, and it is not the sole provider of legal and economic order and norms of regulation of behaviour.

Why do warlords, through electoral competition, show indubitable signs of

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<sup>21</sup> Mittelman/Johnsten 1999:105

willingness to enter state-building processes at all? Why don't they wage a war against a state which aims to prevent illicit rule and trade? Why does not any one of them challenge the other warlords to expand his influence and establish an autarchy? The answer refers back to the character of the post-modern wars: control of state territory can but does not have to be on the personal agenda of a new warlord. Economic control suffices, so long as the service of violence is in high demand, as external parties are interested to pay for it, by military, economic or political goods as exchange items. In addition, criminalization of opium and permanent demand for security, their two key commodities, increase the prices of the services warlords offer.

Between the poles of war and peace, there is a state of permanent, resurgent low-intensity violence of manageable scope and target. It seems that neither war nor peace is a desirable state for continuing warlordism. Atmar and Goodhand<sup>22</sup> explain the undesirability of peace: "the war is sustained by the availability of lootable or taxable resources and the low cost of recruiting fighters. Peace would disrupt the systems of production and exchange that provide warlords and their followers with

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<sup>22</sup> Mohammed Haneef Atmar and Jonathan Goodhand: "Afghanistan: The Challenge of 'Winning the Peace'." Monique Mekenkamp, Paul van Tongeren and Hans van de Veen, eds.: "Searching for Peace in Central and South Asia: An overview of conflict prevention and peacebuilding activities." Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002:114.

livelihoods." Their military and societal power puts warlords in position to influence, appropriate and profit on international aid during war or in early post-war years, by taxing it or by providing a secure environment for operations of international organizations. As their power is based on military commodity, peace, strong central government and the rule of law do not serve their interest, unless they are the ones who guarantee peace, participate in the government and enforce rule of their own law.

Paradoxically, civil war, no government and no rule of any law are not in their interest either: civil war means continuous and expensive fighting; it costs lives and resources; it disturbs agricultural (licit and illicit) production and breaks off transport routes for licit and illicit commodities.

In terms of power-struggle, "no government" literally puts all warlords in position to fight against each other for domination of the central government: in this scenario, they may be pitched against each other over a single goal, the whole state, and driven to abandon their traditional ethnic realms where they draw their support from the local community, and to which they traditionally have been limiting their ambitions. No rule of any law (state or customary law) means a disorganized community of potential followers unaccountable to any standard.

For a weak government, low levels of manageable violence and a local/manageable rule of law are

favourable conditions for “warlordisation.” Moreover, in the post-modern phase, the state and related international efforts can be commodified and privatized. Stephen Watts claims that warlord democracies can coexist with a central state-like power<sup>23</sup> and maintain a manageably instable economic system of an illegal, informal or illegally appropriated economy. Incentives are distributed through the patronage networks, and protection is offered through informal, illegal or illegally appropriated state resources.

#### ***4.4. Afghanistan Revised***

Afghanistan presents a special case of a globalizing illicit economy, militant politics and commodified violence, paralleled at present with Western-led (modernist) state-building. Let us use the globalizing terminology to re-state the Afghan symptoms:

Historically, Afghanistan has never approximated the modern model of state formation, centralized authority, differentiation of political, economic and military functions, or separation of the public and private sphere. Instead, it has been ruled by polycentric traditional forms of authority. The previous state regimes have been regularly checked by

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<sup>23</sup> “Rather than seeking to monopolize control of the government, warlords frequently choose to co-exist with other political groupings so long as the illicit economies from which they benefit are not challenged political exclusion,” in Stephen Watts, “Democracy by Force: Norms, resource constraints, and coalition-building.” Paper presented on the annual meeting of the International Studies Association. Honolulu, HI (1-5 March 2005).

its pre-modern communities, fiercely autonomous and resistant to centralization. The systems of violence and profit have been embedded into the social system, regulated by customary laws. Without passing through a modernization phase, Afghan warlords have reached the post-modern stage by means of commodifying their ability to deliver or withhold violence and by becoming major players in the global opium trade.

The dedifferentiation between violence, profit and politics has submerged not only warlords, but the traditional social system of rule as well. Violence, and hence profit, has whirled away from the control of the customary laws of the indigenous communities, which become embedded in the militant networks; through them, they become embedded in the economic network as well. The militant network serves as a mediator between communities and their economic sustenance. Ethnic violence is used as an instrument in military and political competition. Ethnicity is thus commodified and instrumentalized. Actors pledge loyalty to the highest bidder. Loyalty is commodified.

Afghan warlords post-modernize when they become financially independent from single parties, by means of transferring their dependence onto the opium market. Their economic predominance, secured by military potential, enables them to intermittently switch between military and economic strife, as the context requires. Warlords consolidate as militant entrepreneurs

when their ability to deliver or withhold violence is put forward for rental to the highest bidder, regardless to traditional social loyalties (ethnicity, religion, etc.) and regardless to the bidder's motivation and agenda.

### ***Conclusion***

At present, as violent service providers, warlords cooperate with the U.S. as local military allies in exchange for financial incentives, and with the UN as security guarantors in exchange for political power. Warlords have commodified the newly built state and its democratic institutions: offices, state instruments, state resources, candidacies, political support and individual votes. Differentiated are politics, economy and militancy; state and non-state actors, licit and illicit activities, local and global actors and operations.

Much of the present-day security and informal employment opportunities in Afghanistan are derived from warlords' activities. Much of the insecurity and paralysis of legal economy is due to their activities as well. Democracy and state-building reflect the same dual relation: these processes are supported by warlords up to a point to which state instruments can be utilized in their personal agendas. A warlord democracy has been consolidated: a regime where formal democratic institutions are manipulated to mask a non-democratic rule by poly-centric power-holders, who dominate the military, economic and political life of the country.

Afghanistan is a case where, with a high degree of certainty, it can be predicted that low-intensity conflicts will continue, for two reasons: (a) the embeddedness of the militant entrepreneurs in the global opium trade, and (b) the commodification of violence as an informal service (as clients in the U.S. military patronage network, as political partners in the UN-led state-building process, and as local guarantors of security of property, personhood and contract).

Afghanistan is also a case which shows how modernist ideas of state-building cannot successfully compete with the flexible strategies of post-modern profit-fare and warfare, within a constellation of post-modern actors which combine and utilize pre-modern and modern features to maximize their personal gain. The local warlords sustained by the global market of opium appear to be more fitted for survival than the state dependent on international aid and foreign military support.

However, as long as local warlords can commodify the state institutions, its instruments and resources, no state destruction should be expected. Instead, a continually weak state and violent conditions are likely to be maintained, an environment where the ability to deliver or withhold violence remains a commodity in high demand, a trump for each party and game, nourishing and being nourished by the symbiosis between the warlords and the global market.

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