Twelve Years Later: Afghan Humanitarian Aid Workers on War on Terror

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Twelve Years Later: Afghan Humanitarian Aid Workers on War on Terror

by

Emmanuel Chukwudi Ogwude

A Dissertation Presented to the
Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences of Nova Southeastern University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
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This dissertation was submitted by Emmanuel Chukwudi Ogwude under the direction of the chair of the dissertation committee listed below. It was submitted to the Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences and approved in partial fulfillment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Conflict Analysis and Resolution at Nova Southeastern University.

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<td>ACBAR</td>
<td>Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANSO</td>
<td>Afghan NGO Safety Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AOGs</td>
<td>Armed Opposition Groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AT&amp;T</td>
<td>American Telephone &amp; Telegraph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AWSD</td>
<td>Aid Worker Security Database</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSO</td>
<td>Civil Society Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DCAR</td>
<td>Department of Conflict Analysis and Resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DoD</td>
<td>Department of Defense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRC</td>
<td>Democratic Republic of Congo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICRC</td>
<td>International Committee of the Red Cross</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INGO</td>
<td>International Non-Governmental Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRB</td>
<td>Institutional Review Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LNGO</td>
<td>Local Non-Governmental Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSF</td>
<td>Médecin Sans Frontières</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>North Atlantic Treaty Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NMCG</td>
<td>NGO Military Contact Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSU</td>
<td>Nova Southeastern University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OCHA</td>
<td>UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ODA</td>
<td>Official Development Assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRTs</td>
<td>Provincial Reconstruction Teams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCS</td>
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UN  United Nations
UNAMA  United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
WHAM  Winning Hearts and Minds
Abstract

Using narrative research study founded in social constructionism, I explored the lived experiences of thirty Afghan humanitarian aid workers in Kabul, Afghanistan, to discover how they experienced the war on terror. Ten participants were individually interviewed and their stories, personal experiences, perceptions, and voices have been presented in this study. I also facilitated a focus group of twenty Afghan NGO directors, and their views are echoed in the study. The participants represented a diversity of different humanitarian service specialties that cater to Afghan individuals, communities, and government agencies in areas such as education, human rights and good governance, food and shelter, to building bridges and infrastructural development. Based on a critical review of existing literature, the interviews addressed significant issues that affect humanitarian aid workers in complex political emergencies. I investigated the sociocultural contexts and structural conditions that enable and inform the personal narratives. There were six main themes that emerged from the participants’ narratives and each main theme had an average of three sub-themes. The resulting themes were: Security/Insecurity; Funding; Trust; Abandonment; Achievement; and Interventionism.

From the analysis of the storied narratives of thirty Afghan humanitarian aid workers in Kabul, Afghanistan, this study was able to create better understanding of how conditions from the war on terror create high-risk environments that expose humanitarian aid workers to kidnappings and violent attacks.
Chapter 1: Introduction

Topic Overview

In 1998, a radical group known as the World Islamic Council co-authored a fatwa, declaring an ideology-based statement of terrorism translated into action on September 11, 2001. The fatwa called for the “killing of Americans and their allies—civilians and military” and to “launch the raid in Satan’s U.S. troops and Devil’s supporters allying with them” (Bodansky, 2001, pp. 226-227).

Terrorism has different meanings for some people—for many it is an offensive act, for others it is “an activity assigned by God,” for some “a distinctive act of maintaining power pride,” for many “a justified action against oppression,” still for others “an attack on the peace and security,” and for some “a quest for identity” (Lazare, 2002, pp. 216-219).

The act of terrorism that struck New York City, Arlington, Virginia, and Shanksville, Pennsylvania on September 11, 2001 has significantly and, many believe, has permanently affected the way Americans view themselves and the rest of the world. Since the attack of September 11, 2001, there have been several changes in the daily lives of ordinary Americans, largely due to many changes in the U.S. government’s domestic and foreign policies. Many of these changes have continued to affect aspects of American culture, both internal and external politics, and the media.

Shortly after the 9/11 attacks on the United States of America, the United Nations Security Council issued Resolution 1368 condemning the terrorist attacks, and called for other nations to “work together urgently to bring to justice the perpetrators, organizers and sponsors of these terrorist attacks and stressed that those responsible for aiding,
supporting or harbouring the perpetrators, organizers, and sponsors of these attacks will be held accountable” (as cited in Acharya, 2009, p. 667). Acharya posits that this attack created an opportunity for the UN Security Council to issue a clearer definition of terrorism as “an act of war,” instead the council chose to define terrorism as “a crime for which the perpetrator of such acts must be brought to justice” (2009, p. 667). Acharya argues that the war on terror is a “convenient and expedient” way for “powerful states to use against another state in self-defense” (2009, p. 670).

On September 20, 2001, former U.S. President George W. Bush addressed the Joint Session of Congress, declaring the war on terror:

We will direct every resource at our command -- every means of diplomacy, every tool of intelligence, every instrument of law enforcement, every financial influence, and every necessary weapon of war -- to the destruction and to the defeat of the global terror network.... We will starve terrorists of funding, turn them one against another, drive them from place to place, until there is no refuge or no rest. And we will pursue nations that provide aid or safe haven to terrorism. Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists. From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime. (Bush, 2001, para. 28, 30)

The United States and NATO allies invaded Afghanistan on October 7, 2001. Since the 9/11 attacks, the U.S. has been involved in two wars and several other conflicts as well as a lot of covert anti-terrorist activities around the world in pursuit of Al-Qaeda and other affiliated terrorist groups. The new Bush doctrine created a new world order
that has given rise to a new phenomenon in complex political emergencies, and created conditions that cause risks and insecurities for humanitarian aid workers in such insecure environments. In this study, I used narrative analysis of face-to-face interviews and focus group discussion to investigate the effects of the war on terror on Afghan humanitarian aid workers in Kabul, Afghanistan; to explore how they perceived and ascribed meaning to their lived experiences of the war on terror, their roles with different stakeholders in the conflict, and the conditions that exposed them to risks of insecurities; and to better understand the effects of military conflicts in the new post 9/11 world.

**The Present Study**

This study was focused on understanding how Afghan humanitarian aid workers experienced the war on terror through the narrative analysis of their stories from face-to-face interviews of ten Afghan humanitarian aid workers and a focus group discussion panel of twenty Afghan aid workers in Kabul, Afghanistan. Also, I set out to discover the effects of the war on terror on Afghan humanitarian aid workers, and how they ascribed meaning to the risks and challenges from the war on terror in the delivery of humanitarian aid. Consequently, one of my main objectives of this study was to give voice to Afghan humanitarian aid workers in Kabul—men and women who risk their lives in very insecure environments every day, and often under pressure to align and interact with different groups in the conflict, which exposed them to risks of danger and insecurities. This study helps to bring their storied narratives to the forefront and lead to real, effective change that will give rise to constructive processes to better protect humanitarian aid workers in insecure environments. Lastly, this study sought to develop
better understanding of Afghan readiness and the potential consequences of the U.S. and NATO drawdown of military forces from Afghanistan at the end of 2014.

As Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, Wardak, Zaman, and Taylor (2008) posit, the NGOs are now under pressure from the “communities to deliver without jeopardizing security”; they are under pressure from the host government to “implement national programmes”; under pressure from the “politician-donors and NATO representatives pressuring them to align with hearts and minds’ strategies”; and pressured by “criminal groups and armed opposition groups (AOGs) who threaten their safety” (2008, p. 4).

From the review of existing literature, research findings point to an alarming increase in violence against humanitarian aid workers in Afghanistan since 2002. Stoddard, Harmer, & DiDomenico, (2009) assert that criminal forces are in collusion with the political elites and conclude that such conditions in complex political emergencies like Afghanistan, create limited alternatives for humanitarian aid workers. In light of these and emerging themes from the literature reviews, I developed the following research questions to facilitate the face-to-face interview discussions and the focus group dialogue with humanitarian aid workers in Kabul, Afghanistan: What meaning do Afghan humanitarian aid workers in Kabul ascribe to the war on terror in Afghanistan? What roles expose Afghan humanitarian aid workers to insecurities as a result of their interactions in the war on terror? How do Afghan aid workers in Afghanistan perceive and describe their relationships with local Afghan communities? How do Afghan aid workers perceive and assess Afghan readiness for the withdrawal of U.S. and foreign troops in 2014? How do Afghan aid workers perceive and describe their interactions with
the international communities, the U.S. military forces, and the international military forces in Afghanistan?

With the escalation of uncertainties in many parts of the third world and developing nations, the war on terror has become the new framework for international conflicts. Since the start of the war on terror, the rise of civil unrest in many parts of the Middle East and Africa has been witnessed—the overthrow of Sadam Hussein in Iraq, the uprisings in Egypt and Libya, conflicts in North and South Sudan, Somalia, and the civil war in Syria. All of these conflicts allude to some form of terrorism, real or imagined. This narrative study of the experiences of Afghan humanitarian aid workers reveals that Afghan humanitarian aid workers in Kabul were exposed to great risks of danger as a result of their humanitarian and civil society roles in an insecure environment “where there is total or considerable breakdown of authority resulting from an internal or external conflict” (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 1999, p. 6). As a student of conflict resolution, I believe that this research study will enable scholars of conflict studies to begin to ask the right questions on the indirect costs and consequences of the war on terror, the shrinking humanitarian space, and the rise in security threats to men and women who risk their lives every day to provide desperately needed help and services to vulnerable children, women, and the old. Through their storied narratives, voice is given to many who had become voiceless.

Theoretical Perspectives

Narrative research methodology advanced by Riessman (1990a, 1990b, 1993, and 2000) was used as the theoretical framework for this research study of the lived experiences of Afghan humanitarian aid workers in Kabul and how they ascribe meaning
to their experiences. Narrative research is receptive to interviewees’ ways and manner of experiencing their world, as opposed to developing theories for generalizations or predicting phenomena (Crist & Tanner, 2003). It is holistic and inductive. Narrative analysis provided me with the techniques to investigate the intricacies and the complex nature of my participants’ lived experiences—grounded in their individuality, their social interactions, and cultural density.

A key subtext of this research study was to echo the voices of Afghan humanitarian aid workers—men and women who are pressured into high risk roles in their day to day interactions with different groups in the war on terror as they seek to provide humanitarian aid to very deprived beneficiaries and communities in insecure and violent environments. To this end, it was essential that their voices and points of view drive this study. Two other theoretical viewpoints were used to form this study: first by building foundational framework on social constructionism, and secondly by inductively advancing a fundamental theoretical model, grounded in the basic human needs theory (Burton, 1972, 1990, 1997).

Social constructionism has significant theoretical influences that guide and inform the basic human needs theory. Social constructionism theory is based on the idea that reality is a construct created through human activities and interactions as individuals seek to create meaning and understanding of their world by developing “subjective meanings of their experiences” (Creswell, 2007, p. 20). This process of meaning making is often negotiated through interactions with other individuals across historical, social, and cultural norms (Andrews, 2012; Creswell, 2007; Prawat & Floden, 1994). Social constructionism has a focus on what is considered prevailing narratives or objective truth,
which is formed through social interactions between individuals in society, and not
discovered from nature or based on ontological fact. Therefore, social constructionism
argues that prevailing narratives are not created without bias and cannot exist without
social interaction. The narratives become so dominant that they are perceived to be the
norm with cultural and historical realities as individuals in society accept them to be the
normal and customary truth (Espin & Gawełek, 1992). Therefore, my participants’
dominant narratives and ascribed meanings were negotiated and formed through
interactions grounded in the social, historical, cultural, and political context of Kabul,
Afghanistan. To better understand how the context (Kabul, Afghanistan) impacts on the
dominant narratives, I borrowed a contextual framework from Lawrence-Lightfoot and
Davis’s *The Art and Science of Portraiture* (1997) for setting up the physical location of
my study, giving authenticity to the context from which my participants’ storied
narratives and meaning emanate. Portraitists view human experiences as framed and
shaped by the setting such that the conditions and the context work together to shape the
experiences of individuals (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). According to Lawrence-
Lightfoot and Davis, “The context is not only a frame for the action, it is also a rich
resource for the researcher’s interpretations of the actor’s thoughts, feelings, and
behavior” (1997, p. 59), and allows the reader to conceive vivid contextual setting of my
participants’ environment that shaped their dominant narratives. I have used context in
this research to place my participants and their storied narratives in their time and space
to better understand the meanings they ascribe to their experiences. I began by describing
the physicality of my participants’ environment (Kabul) and then revealed the historical
background or “the origins and evolutions of the organization and the values that shape
its structure and purpose” (1997, p. 52). This idea of meaning making illuminates the core focus of social constructionism that dominant narratives are formed in contexts of historical, social, and cultural norms as individuals navigate and interact with each other (Creswell, 2007).

I used Burton’s human needs model (1972, 1990, 1997) to critically understand the structural conditions in my participants’ contextual environment that impact and shape their experiences and the meanings they ascribe to these experiences. Burton’s model postulates that innate human needs are at the core of most conflicts, and they must be addressed and satisfied if society is to find peaceful resolution satisfactory to all the parties (1972). In this research study, I developed an analytic understanding of how Afghan humanitarian aid workers have experienced the war on terror from the face-to-face interview conversations and focus group discussions with Afghan aid workers, and attended to their storied narratives to affirm that I fully captured their experiences in order to echo and give voice to their viewpoint.

In the existing literature, there are several dominant narratives about Kabul, Afghanistan and the people of Afghanistan that may not be situated in the social context of the nation from which the violent attacks of September 11, 2001 were launched. The prevailing portrait speaks to terrorism, insurgency, and jihadist doctrines; however, the dominant narratives from my participants contradict these notions. To give meaning and better understand these conflicting narratives, I use Burton’s basic human needs model with particular reference to his assertions on terrorism that “[t]he perception we have of ‘terrorists’ is that of persons who are abnormal and disturbed and who need to be removed from society” (1997, p. 27). Rather he argues that the appropriate policy “must
be to uproot the causes of terrorism by putting an end to oppression of classes, nations, and ethnic communities” (Rubenstein, 1987, as cited in Burton, 1997, p. 27).

**Method of Inquiry**

In conjunction with the political and historical analysis of existing literature on the war on terror and its impact on humanitarian space in complex political emergencies since September 11, 2001, I used a qualitative research method, specifically narrative inquiry and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013), to facilitate my interviews and discussions with Afghan humanitarian aid workers in Kabul, Afghanistan. According to Daiute and Lightfoot (2004),

Narrative [research] is a mode of inquiry based in narrative as a root metaphor, a genre, and discourse…narrative analysis relies on themes, mostly drawn from literary theory, to explain the vicissitudes in the drama of interpreted lives, including time, truth, beauty, character and conflict. Narratives are also…culturally developed ways of organizing experience and knowledge. (p. xi)

As Riessman (2005) purports, “investigators collect many stories and inductively create conceptual groupings from the data” and construct a “typology of narratives organized by theme” (p. 2). She argues that narratives allow “storytellers a way to re-imagine life”—that narratives do not accurately depict the past, however, they “forge among past, present, and future” (p. 6). Riessman (2000) asserts that narrative inquiry is “relevant for the study of disruptive life events…studies of social movements, political change, and macro-level phenomena” (p. 3), such as the core tenets of this study, to understand how the war on terror has impacted and been “disruptive” to Afghan humanitarian aid workers in Kabul, Afghanistan. Riessman argues that grounded theory
does not portray the stories of participants accurately; instead, it rips apart the data as presented by the interviewees, thereby impeding on deeper understanding of participants’ perceptions and points of view (1990a).

Narrative inquiry has allowed me to explore the lived experiences of Afghan humanitarian aid workers extensively in the social, cultural, political, and historical context of the war on terror. This is in line with the theoretical tenets of social constructionism and Burton’s basic human needs model. By contrasting the prevailing narratives from existing literature about the war on terror, Afghanistan, and terrorism with the storied narratives of Afghan humanitarian aid workers who participated in this research study, deep divergences and paradoxes emerged. This density was as a result of lived experiences grounded and presented through the narratives of Afghan humanitarian aid workers in Kabul. The themes that emerged from the narrative interviews and focus group with my participants are not represented in the existing literature, but they are important to my participants and became the driving force that compelled this study.

The meaning and significance that individuals ascribe to their experiences are dependent on their own interrelationships with the world, which in itself exists as a result of the meaning the individual assigns to it (Valle & King, 1978). According to Clandinin and Cornelly (2000), narrative investigation allows the interviewees’ stories to navigate the internal and external world across time and space. This process of telling the stories gives voice to how the individual constructs meaning from the system of identity, values, attitudes, and beliefs—this has relevance and is quite transforming for the interviewee and the researcher who together create knowledge (Etherington, 2009).
Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review is intended to situate my research study with the framework of current body of investigation. It is by no means exhaustive; however, my goal was to show the scope of knowledge and points of view that are in existing literature about the conflict in Afghanistan—particularly how the war on terror is seen from a humanitarian perspective. The literature review is structured around sub-headings that illustrate the topic of discussion.

Complex Political Emergency

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) defines Complex Political Emergency as:

A humanitarian crisis in a country, region or society where there is total or considerable breakdown of authority resulting from an internal or external conflict and which requires an international response that goes beyond the mandate or capacity of any single agency and/or the ongoing United Nations country programs. (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 1999, p. 6)

Stoddard et al. (2009), in their study of trends in providing aid in insecure environments, note that Afghanistan, Sudan, and Somalia were the most violent insecure contexts for local and international aid workers. At the same time, their study showed that most of the attacks were politically motivated. They argue that even though the findings point to a declining number of attacks and killings of aid workers from 2.7 victims per 10,000 to 2.4 from 2006 to 2008, they attribute this decline to better security consciousness amongst humanitarian aid workers. However, they assert that the numbers
in Afghanistan tell a different story—the attacks on civilian aid workers in Afghanistan increased as criminal forces have “colluded with political forces” (2009, p. 4). They conclude that aid workers in complex political emergencies have very limited alternatives: “It boils down to reducing or withdrawing essential aids from needy population, or running intolerable risks to the lives of staff and partners” (p. 10). And they concur with humanitarian aid workers who advocate for separation from the military and political players, and argue that by maintaining humanitarian principles of neutrality and independence, aid workers are able to improve their overall security and maintain the trust and good standing they have always enjoyed in the communities that they serve (p. 10).

**Humanitarian Principles**

Egeland, Hamer, and Stoddard (2011) believe that by actively promoting humanitarian principles, aid worker security was significantly improved. Their study showed that the “lack of respect for principles was the third-largest contributor to insecurity,” while the “lack of experience and cultural awareness” was seen to be the number one reason for aid worker insecurity, followed by “incompetence” and “taking unnecessary risk” (2011, p. 18). According to the authors, NGOs have conveniently “compromised a principled approach in their own conduct by closely aligning with political and military activities and actors” (2011, p. 19). They argue that many of the alignments were motivated by funding needs.

According to accounts presented in the Aid Worker Security Report by Stoddard, Harmer, and Haver (2011) in their study that interviewed international NGO staff, the respondents believed that local and national NGO employees lacked proper training and
expertise on conduct and humanitarian principles, and questioned their ability to handle difficult and often life threatening situations in complex political environments. Teuten’s (2009) address to the NGO Military Contact Group (NMCG) was significant as it echoed the 1994 Red Cross Code of Conduct:

We will never knowingly—or through negligence—allow ourselves, or our employees, to be used to gather information of a political, military or economically sensitive nature for government or other bodies that may serve purposes other than those which are strictly humanitarian. (Teuten, 2009, p. 5)

As noted in the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR) policy brief (Schirch, 2010), NGOs expressed concern that the use of military capacity to deliver aid and nation building assistance will “prematurely deflect attention from Afghanistan’s deteriorating security situation and also engage in a range of activities for which others are better suited” (p. 1). Comparing NGOs to the military, the report posits that NGOs are dedicated to the humanitarian principles of “humanity, impartiality, independence and neutrality” (p. 1). The report notes that aid decisions are solely based on need without prejudice or regard to political agenda or pressures from donors. Their main focus is to provide aid to the people who need it.

Civil-Military Collaboration

Azarbaijani-Moghaddam and colleagues (2008) posit that the military and the humanitarian aid communities have very divergent interests and objectives in the delivery of aid to people in need. They allege that the military is driven by the “Winning Hearts and Minds (WHAM) theory” which they (military) perceive as a “charity paradigm” and categorize those who need and receive aid as “deserving poor” (2008, p. 7). On the other
hand, they claim NGOs have spent several years building understanding and service dedicated to eradicating the “handout mentality” and working to bring “ownership, involvement, and empowerment” to the Afghan people (p. 7). They argue that the military should be cognizant of how their “charitable acts can undermine NGO activities” (p. 7).

Stoddard and associates (2009) affirm the belief that continued involvement with state officials and members of the military creates significant security problems for NGO employees and agents; however, they note that studies reveal that even NGOs who have taken significant measures to protect their employees and remain neutral have not completely escaped from these unfortunate attacks and killings of innocent men and women. They posit that “aid organizations are being attacked not just because they are perceived to be cooperating with Western political actors, but because they are perceived as wholly a part of the Western agendas” (2009, p. 6).

According to the Afghanistan NGO Safety Office (ANSO) Quarterly Data Report (2010), their recommendation was very firm in discouraging NGOs from engagement in any form of civil-military coordination, noting that:

NGO have nothing (sic) to gain and much to lose by interacting with the IMF who are only interested in leveraging advantage from your activities. Second, we recommend a policy driven engagement with all Afghan parties to the conflict where such can be concluded safely and legally. NGO (sic) must develop and apply deliberate communication strategies to ensure that all current and future powerbrokers understand the purpose, and independence, of your activities. (ANSO, 2010, p. 1).
According to a report exploring Afghan perceptions of civil-military relations by Azarbaiani-Moghaddam et al. (2008), one of the key issues from the *Winning Hearts and Minds* program is the frustration from local NGOs—that their input is not sought-out in the civil-military debate. They believe that there should be an “Afghanisation” of the civil-military process (Azarbaiani-Moghaddam et al., 2008, p. 5), and complain that often local Afghan NGOs are underfunded unlike the international NGOs. The authors compared the struggle between the NGOs and the military with being “engaged in a complex dance with shadowy partners whose moves are increasingly unpredictable and deadly” (p. 74). They call for a better, more cultural look at human security issues in Afghanistan, claiming that the Afghan government is seeking objectives that are likely to “jeopardize” humanitarian space (p. 74).

Several studies and reports have pointed to violent trends and sharp increases in attacks, kidnapping, and killings of humanitarian aid workers in complex political emergencies such as Afghanistan, Somalia, and Sudan (Darfur) since 2003. The number of attacks on international NGO staff rose from 48 in 2001 to 143 in 2010, and the number of attacks on Local NGO and RCS staff increased from two in 2001 to 45 in 2010 (Stoddard et al., 2011). As Stoddard et al. (2009) purport, since 2006, attacks on aid workers in the field increased by 61% and in the year 2008 alone, over 260 violent attacks against humanitarian aid workers were reported, making it the highest year of such report in their twelve year study (p. 1). In Afghanistan alone, there were 30 attacks on aid workers reported in 2008, 26 in 2009, and 59 in 2010—an increase of 97% (Stoddard et al., 2011).
Strand (2007) in his article on “Ways to Regain Afghan Trust” posed these questions:

Why have NGOs become military targets and why has their reputation declined compared to the situation in the 1980s and 1990s? Why were people not coming out to greet us when upon arrival in a village, as they always did in the past? (9, 11).

A recommendation was made regarding the desire by Afghans for local ownership in their nation building and they applaud NGOs for encouraging Afghans to own and become part of building their country, and condemned the PRT for what they referred to as “PRT ineptitude in awarding contracts” (Azarbaiani-Moghaddam et al., p. 75). The final recommendation asserts a very strong warning for NGOs for a better understanding of the dynamics and nuances of Afghan communities—they warn that “growing military presence will not compensate for this”—but a mutual understanding of Afghan and international communities and their “realities” (p. 77). The report exploring Afghan perceptions of civil-military relations stresses the need for humanitarian principles to be “understood and made relevant to Afghan social, cultural and religious norms” (p. 77).

According to Niland (2011), the Afghan people are now experiencing four decades of military conflict, “making it one of the most protracted conflicts in recent history” (p. 4). She noted that since the beginning of hostilities in 1979, “adequate measures to protect civilians” (p. 5) had not been taken. Referencing an ICRC survey from 2009, she stated that:
almost all Afghans - 96% - have been directly or indirectly affected as a result of the immediate or wider consequences of war; nearly half (45%) of those interviewed had seen a family member killed and a third (35%) have been wounded in fighting. (2011, p. 4)

According to Niland (2011), data from an Afghan electronic database shows over 40% of those killed in 2008 were civilians – of which 39% of the dead were attributed to the government and its foreign military allies (p. 5). The numbers from the 2010 Annual Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict in Afghanistan give a similar and horrific narrative:

Between 01 January and 31 December 2010, 5,446 civilian casualties were attributed to Anti-Government Elements (AGEs), representing 76 per cent of the total number of civilian casualties for the year. AGEs were linked to 2,080 civilian deaths and 3,366 civilian injuries, (75 per cent and 78 per cent respectively of the total number of civilians killed and injured in 2010). IEDs, suicide attacks, assassinations and executions, abductions, intimidation and harassment were the dominant tactics used by AGEs to wage conflict. These tactics appeared aimed at undermining support for the Government of Afghanistan and its international military allies, and at spreading terror and fear among the civilian population as a means of control. (UNAMA, 2011, p. i)

Remote Management Strategy

In Once Removed: Lessons and Challenges in Remote Management of Humanitarian Operations for Insecure Areas, Stoddard, Harmer, and Renouf (2010), assert that when humanitarian NGOs implement remote management strategies,
management is accepting that there is a problem with the core humanitarian principles of neutrality, independence, and impartiality. They are no longer able to rely on these humanitarian principles that have protected them for many years (2010, p. 7). They define remote management strategy as “adaptation to insecurity, and an aberration from normal programming practice” (p. 11), and assert that remote strategies are not meant to be a permanent or standard situation; however, several international NGOs rely on local and national aid workers to maintain their presence and continue their aid activities in local communities, while the international NGO staff oversee operations from a safer environment. They question the morality and effectiveness of how the remote management strategy is implemented, and wonder if the “levels of sophistication and quality of programme activities will slip, often dramatically, when an operation ‘goes remote’” (p. 8).

**Basic Human Needs Theory**

According to Burton (1997), “past compliance systems led to alienation and anti-social behaviours” because people would only tolerate so much, and “conform to elite-sponsored institutions and norms” (p. 19). He postulates that when people are unable to meet their basic needs as a result of conditions in the system referred to as structural violence (Galtung, 1964), that frustrates and denies individuals their basic human needs. The unmet fundamental basic needs “will be pursued in one way or another” (Burton, 1997, p. 19), and accordingly, these unmet needs would be perceived to be more fundamental to their survival than food and shelter (1997). Burton argues that individuals deprived and frustrated from attaining their fundamental basic needs are “prepared to go
to extreme lengths to defy systems in order to pursue their deeply felt needs, even death by suicide bombing or by hunger strikes” (p. 19).
Chapter 3: Methodology

In this chapter, I provide a step-by-step description of the research study design, covering the purpose and justification of the study, research procedure, face-to-face interview and focus group discussions, participant recruitment, research question, informed consent, transcription, data analysis, data validation, and ethics and reflexivity section, which focuses on authenticity, consistency, and faithfulness of my study.

Qualitative Narrative Research Study

The primary goal of this study is to better understand the lived experiences of Afghan humanitarian aid workers in Kabul, Afghanistan, and the conditions that give rise to perceived insecurities that expose them to risk of violence. I used open-ended, in-depth face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions to explore the dominant narratives about how Afghan aid workers in Kabul experience the war on terror. Six relevant research questions were used to investigate and understand the storied narratives and contextual conditions that framed and shaped the dominant narratives that emerged from this study.

With the narrative research method, “practical acts of living are accessed through “narrative” (interviews and observations) to reveal meaning” (Crist & Tanner, 2003, p. 202), with focus on ‘making meaning’ and this process occurred and continued all through the investigation instead of beginning after interviews and focus group discussions (Gehart, Tarragona, and Bava, 2007). I was able to make meaning through co-construction with my participants (2007) by listening attentively, asking follow-up questions, and using email communication for clarification (Riessman, 1993, 2008). The focus in this narrative analysis was on the cognitive and emotional situations of my
participants’ stories (Riessman, 1990a) and also paying particular attention to the context. I used a qualitative research method, specifically narrative inquiry and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013), to facilitate my interviews and discussions with Afghan humanitarian aid workers in Kabul, Afghanistan. The process of analysis comprised of six phases of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006): familiarization with data, coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up my findings.

The representations and boundaries that I chose to structure the narrative section of my analysis were strongly influenced by social constructionism theory and Burton’s basic human needs model, my disciplinary preferences, and my six research questions (Riessman, 2000). Recognizing my theoretical assumptions and predispositions, I used daily research journals and field notes that I made after each day of my interviews for bracketing and maintaining perspectives, so that the next day, I could listen to my participants’ narratives actively. Active listening allowed me to be fully immersed in the emotions and attentive to the nuances of my participants’ stories (Creswell, 2007; Holstein & Gubrium, 2012).

The research analysis has cultural (religious), historical, social, and political contexts with detailed descriptions of ten face-to-face interviews and a focus group discussion with twenty participants, with particular attention to the location of my fieldwork (Kabul, Afghanistan) (Polkinghorne, 1995). My goal was to provide “a palpable picture that allows the reader to see, feel, smell, and touch the scene” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 59). I borrowed a contextual framework from The Art and Science of Portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), so as to give
authenticity to the context from which my participants’ storied narratives and meanings emanated.

As part of reflexivity in qualitative research, I would like to acknowledge my beliefs and feelings regarding this research study. The research topic, the research design, the research objectives, and the research questions were developed by me, and I am quite cognizant of how my personal biases may have affected my participants in this research study. Even though I may not share much in common with my participants, we still share our common humanity. I am of Nigerian heritage from the Christian South. My political and religious ideologies are quite liberal. I do not share a lot with Islamic militancy; however, having grown up in post-colonial Africa and having lived in the U.S. for over 30 years as a minority class, I understand and sympathize with structural violence that denies individuals their basic human needs of identity, self-worth, and equal protection under the law (security). To that extent, I do share some solidarity with the people of Afghanistan and their struggle for national identity. Unlike most developing countries, I found during my earlier research that Afghanistan had many indigenously owned NGOs, which are referred to as National NGOs or Local NGOs. I believe that this was the beginning of my curiosity and the desire to investigate the lived experiences of this core group of humanitarian aid workers who provide services in their country to their own country’s men, women, and children. I became particularly interested in the fact that they were Afghan aid workers, providing services to Afghans (their people) and yet having to face the risk of violent attacks from Afghan communities. This paradox lead to my asking the following questions: Why are they being attacked? And who is responsible for the attacks?
As a narrative researcher, my goal was not to do away with my own researcher’s filters, experiences, values, preconceived notions, and biases that I bring to this study, but I was very cognizant of my presence and the influences that I had on my participants. It is my hope that my later section on ethics and reflexivity will address and bring to light how my experiences and beliefs have informed and given depth to my data analysis (Mauthner, Birch, Jessop, & Miller, 2002). I also wish to acknowledge that I have been quite enlightened and my perspectives have broadened as a result of my face-to-face interviews and focus group discussion experiences. The storied narratives that I share in this study have been co-constructed with my participants. Even though I have made significant efforts to seek higher levels of rigor and accuracy in interpreting my participants’ narratives in this study, I was not completely unfettered of my personal biases and prejudices. Narrative analysis asserts that objectivity does not exist, nor should a researcher strive to attain objectivity; rather, research should be “checked” in process with the participants. Hence, research is not neutral or objective, but verified through dialog (Riessman, 2005, pp. 1-7). Occasional check-ins with my participants were used to validate some of my values and thoughts. Over time, I have become personally attached and impacted by the emotions and distresses of this study as a consequence of being immersed in my research topic. The above noted acknowledgements may lead to presumptions of possible drawbacks with regard to this research study; nonetheless, I maintain that the purpose of this research is to give voice to the storied narratives of Afghan humanitarian aid workers in Kabul, Afghanistan.
**Research Questions**

The research questions that this investigation seeks to address are:

Research question 1: What meaning do Afghan humanitarian aid workers in Kabul ascribe to the war on terror in Afghanistan?

Research question 2: What roles expose Afghan humanitarian aid workers to insecurities as a result of the war on terror?

Research question 3: How do Afghan aid workers in Afghanistan perceive and describe their relationships with local Afghan communities?

Research question 4: How do Afghan aid workers perceive and assess Afghan readiness for the withdrawal of U.S. and foreign troops in 2014?

Research question 5: How do Afghan aid workers perceive and describe their interactions with the international communities, the U.S. military forces, and the international military forces in Afghanistan?

**Proposition:** Humanitarian aid workers in Kabul, Afghanistan, are exposed to conditions which give rise to risks of insecurities and violent attacks as a result of their interactions with different parties in the war on terror.

**Justification**

The primary goal of this study is to better understand through the narrative analysis of stories from face-to-face interviews of a group of humanitarian aid workers in Kabul, Afghanistan how they experience the ‘War on Terror’. A secondary goal of this study is to discover the effects of the ‘War on Terror’ on this group of humanitarian aid workers in Kabul, Afghanistan, and how they ascribe meaning to the risks and challenges that they face in the delivery of humanitarian aid to beneficiaries in insecure
communities. The third goal of this study is to give voice to the stories of humanitarian aid workers—young men and women who are often under pressure from different parties in the conflict, and many are attacked, abducted, raped, and killed—with the hope that the analysis of their stories will start a dialog to create real, effective change, and constructive processes to better protect humanitarian aid workers in insecure environments. It is the final goal of this study that through better understanding, more constructive interactions with the different actors from the military, political, international, and community will develop, allowing policymakers a bona fide understanding and assessment of Afghan readiness for the 2014 drawdown of U.S. and international forces.

According to Azarbaijani-Moghaddam et al. (2008), NGOs are now under pressure from the “communities to deliver without jeopardizing security”; they are under pressure from the host government to “implement national programmes”; under pressure from the “politician-donors and NATO representatives pressuring them to align with hearts and minds’ strategies”; and pressured by “criminal groups and armed opposition groups (AOGs) who threaten their safety” (p. 4).

Galtung (1964) asked the questions of who are the individuals responsible for structural violence, as he sought to discover the forces that cause and give rise to structural violence in society. Galtung’s search gave birth to the idea of “conflict resolution processes” (Burton, 1997). According to Burton, “Needs theory became a short-hand way of describing the problems created by structural violence and pointed more directly to ways in which they could be tackled” (1997, p. 35). It soon became evident that the responsibility for structural violence laid on those who controlled the
system, and that the people with power and influence have much to lose if structural violence were allowed to continue unchecked (1997). Today, with the war on terror and all the different ethnic, sectarian, and ideological conflicts around the world, the only “constructive option” is “problem-solving through conflict resolution processes in which all parties affected must play a part” (1997, p. 35).

Research findings point to an alarming increase in violence against humanitarian aid workers in Afghanistan since 2002. As noted earlier, “Criminality has colluded with political forces pursuing national (and in the case of Al-Qaeda, global) aims” (Stoddard et al., 2009, p. 4). In light of these, the following research questions were central to this investigation.

*How do Afghan humanitarian aid workers in Kabul, Afghanistan experience and assign meaning to the war on terror?*

For many of my participants, the war on terror is simply a war between the superpowers for the control of oil and resources, and for the control of central Asia. They claim that insecurities have increased since the war on terror (the arrival of the U.S. and NATO troops), and insist that Afghans are not terrorists, and that terrorism is brought into Afghanistan from outside its borders, and blamed on its neighbors, particularly Pakistan and Iran for funding Islamic fundamentalism and propagating jihadist propaganda.

*How do humanitarian aid workers in Kabul, Afghanistan perceive and describe their interactions with the U.S. military, and other international military forces in Afghanistan?*
Many of my participants described the Afghan humanitarian aid worker as a “bridge” between the local Afghan communities and the U.S. and the international military forces in Afghanistan. However, some participants argued that the role of “bridge” between the parties, exposed Afghan humanitarian aid workers to risks of suspicion, which gave rise to distrust and violent attacks.

*How do humanitarian aid workers in Kabul, Afghanistan describe their relationship with the local Afghan people, the Afghan authorities, the insurgents, and the Taliban?*

The dominant narrative is that the Afghan humanitarian aid workers have trusting relationships with the local Afghan communities. They believe that the Afghan people trust them as “implementer” of desperately needed humanitarian aid programs for the local communities, and because they enjoy such working relationships with the Afghan communities while providing rural communities with essential humanitarian needs, the Taliban allow them to provide services to the people.

*How do Afghan aid workers in Kabul, Afghanistan ascribe meaning and assess Afghan readiness for the withdrawal of U.S. and foreign troops from Afghanistan in 2014?*

The consensus is that the U.S. should not abandon Afghanistan like it did after the Soviets war in the 1990s. They maintain that such abandonment would lead to Afghanistan becoming a haven for terror as it was pre-September 11, 2001, and say that the U.S. should “put out the fire” before withdrawing troops from Afghanistan.

With the escalation of uncertainties in many parts of the third world and developing nations, the war on terror has become the new framework for international conflicts. As a student of conflict resolution, I believe that this study will enable scholars and practitioners of conflict resolution to seek deeper meanings and begin to ask
questions of this new phenomenon called war on terror and its tendencies to create insecure conditions, which give rise to structural violence that expose humanitarian aid workers to danger and violent attacks—men and women who risk their lives every day to bring desperately needed help to some of the world’s most vulnerable children, women, and the old. Since September 11, 2001, many nations have erupted into civil and political unrest, sectarian conflicts, and jihadist militancy fueled by Islamic fundamentalism as the rich and powerful nations dominate and impose their will on less powerful and vulnerable populations around the world. This phenomenon—the war on terror—has become a pretext for suppressing voices for change, insurrections, as well as social and political conflicts around the world. It is the hope of this narrative study that through the stories of Afghan humanitarian aid workers in Kabul, Afghanistan, voice will be given to many who have become voiceless and marginalized.

From among the research traditions, I have chosen a qualitative narrative research methodology advanced by Riessman (1990a, 1993, 2000). This narrative research methodology in collaboration with social constructionism provided a viable methodology to explore my participants’ ways and manners of experiencing their world by focusing on their voices and dominant narratives as opposed to developing theories for generalizations or predicting phenomena (Crist & Tanner, 2003). The methodology is holistic and allowed for themes grounded in participants’ stories to inductively emerge. Narrative analysis provided me with the techniques to investigate the intricacies and the complex nature of my participants’ lived experiences—grounded in their individuality, their social interactions, and cultural density.
I particularly found narrative inquiry most suitable for this research study to explore and understand the impacts of the war on terror on Afghan humanitarian aid workers in Kabul, Afghanistan, and how they assign meaning to the conditions that expose them to risks of insecurities. I used the narrative inquiry to develop the framework for this study and the narrative analysis method to encapsulate and understand the complexities of the dominant themes in the stories of the lived experiences of my participants (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004). The outcome of this study and its contribution to knowledge were founded on the lived experiences of my participants: Afghan humanitarian aid workers in Kabul, Afghanistan (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004). My goal is and always was to remain faithful to the core tenets of this research study by giving voice to the storied narratives of my participants.

**Research Procedure**

**Step 1: Data Collection**

I used three different forms of data collection methods: ten face-to-face interviews, a focus group discussion with twenty participants, and a collection of written entries by focus group participants prior to the start of the focus discussions. This data collection method allowed for data confirming and validation (Creswell, 2007; Willis, 2007).

**Step 2: Transcription**

I used a transcription service to transcribe all recorded interviews and focus group discussions using a verbatim transcription method with sighs, emotions, or force of speech included in the transcript (Riessman, 2005).
Step 3: Analyze and interpret data

My data analysis was done by analyzing data from two different sources, which were analyzed separately using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013). In my interpretation section I used quotations from participants to give voice to their narratives and provide deeper meaning and understanding of their experiences (Riessman, 2000, 2005).

Step 4: Member Checking

I sent interview transcripts via email to each interview participant that expressed interest in being contacted to review and provide any corrections or amendments as desired. Three participants returned amendments that were immediately made on the research transcript. Member checking is used in qualitative research as a form of validating the data (Creswell, 2007; Willis, 2007).

Research Sample

Participant Profile:

- Afghan humanitarian aid workers who are Afghan nationals
- Men and women over 18 years of age
- Have lived experiences of the war on terror in Kabul or anywhere in Afghanistan
- Able to travel to Kabul to participate in study
- Civilian humanitarian aid worker working in Kabul and other vicinities

I had two groups of participants in this study. The first group of participants was the face-to-face interview participants, and the second group of participants was the focus group discussion participants. Both participant groups were Afghan humanitarian aid
workers in Kabul, Afghanistan. All the participants were associated with local Afghan NGOs in Kabul.

**Interview participants.** My initial attempt at recruiting interview participants for this study was in June 2012, from a list of local Afghan NGOs published on the website of the Afghan NGOs Coordinating Bureau\(^1\) (ANCB). The site listed email and contact information for local Afghan NGOs. I sent email to 118 contacts and received 25 responses; however, four were located outside the city of Kabul so they were not able to participate due my decision to limit my interviews to participants in the city of Kabul. Of the 25 responses, 20 were interested in participating in the study. I informed them that I was in the process of an IRB review and would contact them upon receiving IRB approval.

In January of 2013, upon receiving IRB approval, I contacted my 20 potential participants to begin arrangements for my travel to Kabul Afghanistan in May 2013. Of the 20 contacts, 14 responded; 10 would participate, two did not respond, and two were no longer able to participate. Prior to leaving the U.S. for Kabul on May 17, 2013, I had ten Afghan humanitarian aid workers committed to participating in the study.

Before leaving for Kabul, Afghanistan, I sent my list of potential participants to my contact in Kabul, Mr. Anayattulla Niazi at WADAN (local Afghan NGO). Mr. Niazi contacted my prospects and scheduled interview dates, times, and locations for all ten participants of the study. According to Creswell (2007), snowball or chain sampling technique is a form of sampling technique used frequently in qualitative research to

\(^1\)http://www.ancb.org/
identify “people who know people” and allowing them to identify potential participants who are “information rich” for the study (p. 127).

Focus group participants. The focus group had twenty participants. All participants were employees of local Afghan NGOs in Kabul, Afghanistan. Most of the participants introduced themselves as NGO or Civil Society Organization (CSO) directors. The Afghan NGOs Coordinating Bureau (ANCB) sent out notices to its members informing them of my plans to hold the focus group, and those interested in participating were to contact Mr. Niazi at WADAN. Mr. Niazi coordinated the two-hour focus group, which was sponsored by WADAN and took place in a conference room at WADAN’s home office building in Kabul, Afghanistan.

A majority of the participants were men, four of the focus group participants were females, and three of the face-to-face interview participants were females.

Face-to-Face Interviews and Focus Group Discussions

Upon receiving approval from the Nova Southeastern University Institutional Review Board for research with human subjects in January of 2013, I made arrangements to travel to Kabul, Afghanistan, to conduct face-to-face interviews with Afghan humanitarian aid workers and facilitate a two-hour focus group of 20 Afghan humanitarian aid workers. Prior to traveling to Kabul, I was corresponding with several Afghan NGOs (humanitarian aid workers) via email in English; little did I know that most of the Afghans I was communicating with via email did not speak English. Upon arrival to Kabul, I discovered that the email communications in English were mostly written by staff members. Fortunately, my host had the wisdom to anticipate most of the problems I would encounter, so prior to my arrival, he had arranged for my interpreter, a
vehicle, and a driver that drove me and my interpreter to all my interviews. All the interviews took place at my participants’ offices, except for one interview with a female participant, which took place in a meeting room at WADAN, a national Afghan NGO with home offices in Kabul. The focus group session was arranged and hosted by WADAN in a company conference room.

The face-to-face interviews and focus group participants were contacted and scheduled by my contact at WADAN. He was responsible for organizing the two-hour session, which started with tea and Afghan pastries at about 10:00 AM and a traditional hot lunch for all participants and WADAN staff at about 1:00 PM. All interview and focus group participants were given time to review the consent forms (see Appendix D), and presented with a signed copy prior to commencing with the face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions.

The primary data collection for this research study was audio recordings of Afghan humanitarian aid workers in Kabul, Afghanistan: nine face-to-face interviews and a focus group of twenty participants. Please see a later section for discussion on the research sampling. All audio recordings were done using a Marantz professional audio recorder, which stored all data recordings on CompactFlash. The CompactFlash is a safe and durable method of storing audio and maintaining integrity of the original recording. The face-to-face interviews were approximately one hour to two hours long and the focus group lasted about two hours long.

I used the open-ended questions and pre-specified questions (Appendix A) to prompt participants for more narratives, using interviewing technique drawn from Søderberg (2006) which allowed me, the researcher, to become participant and co-author
during the interviews. This method of interviewing was found to be conducive to the theoretical framework of this study, the social constructionism theory, which is based on co-construction of narratives, between the participants and the researcher who together create knowledge (Etherington, 2009).

**Transcription**

All transcriptions were done by Synergy Transcription Services, Ltd., 1761 West Edger Road, Linden, NY 07036. The transcription service transcribed all recorded interviews and focus group discussions using verbatim a transcription method with sighs, emotions, or force of speech included in the transcripts (Riessman, 2005). Participants’ initials were used to denote the interview narrators, and MS (Male Speaker) and FS (Female Speaker) to denote focus group narrators so as to maintain anonymity and confidentiality of the narrators. This method used to denote my research participants is consistent with my Nova Southeastern University Institutional Research Board approval (January 2013). All audio recordings are stored in a securely locked cabinet in my home office. Transcripts are also stored in my home office and in my personal, password protected computer.

**Data Analysis**

I used Braun and Clarke’s (2006, 2013) thematic analysis to analyze the storied narrative from my face-to-face interviews and my focus group discussions. I paid particular attention to my participants’ spoken and unspoken communication, to my interpretation of the narrative being told, and the reader’s reconstruction (Riessman, 2008). This method thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013) allows for flexibility, clarity, and detail, with specific stages and guidelines for conducting rigorous
qualitative analysis. In addition to being a widely accessible and acceptable tool for data analysis, it also aligned properly with the guiding theoretical perspectives of this study: the narrative theoretical framework advanced by Riessman (2008) and social constructionism (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In this study, thematic analysis provided six phases for investigating and analyzing the patterns and themes that emerged from the storied narratives and focus group discussions of my participants. My literature review section highlighted themes from the experiences of Afghan humanitarian aid workers, and I used thematic analysis to compare, contrast, and understand the themes from existing literature with the themes that emerged from the storied narratives and the focus group discussions in this study. Using theoretical, thematic analysis, I was able to focus on exhaustive and nuanced accounts of particular themes, some of which overlapped and diverged from the themes noted in my literature review. Also using a social constructionist epistemology as noted in chapter one, I investigated the sociocultural contexts and structural conditions that give rise to the narratives and perceptions of my participants. I used Burton’s basic human needs theory to explore the structural violence endemic in the systems that influence my participants’ narratives. A great deal of attention was placed on the dominant themes, which were the fundamental presuppositions, ideas, and concepts that framed, shaped, and informed the semantic content of the data. To adequately understand my participants’ dominant narratives, the social, historical, and cultural contexts were given significant attention (Riessman, 2008; Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

The following are six phases of thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2013).
Familiarizing with the data. Since thematic analysis is an evolving process where ideas, descriptions, or figures of speech progressively form into themes (Riessman, 2008), the first phase of data analysis was very important. I immersed myself in the data that I collected from my face-to-face interviews and the focus group discussions. Prior to receiving the transcript from Synergy Transcription Services, Ltd. in New York, I listened to the audio recordings several times, and made notes of my impressions. Upon receiving the electronic transcripts, I made hard copies, and bound them in a three-hole binder in two sections: face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions. Each section was read about four times to become familiar with the data, and I noted any observations on the pages. I also used highlighters to note any comments that addressed research objectives or research questions.

Coding/themes. In phase two, I used open coding from Riessman (2005), but borrowed the “lean coding” method informed by Creswell (2007, p. 153) to begin the coding process. Lean coding allowed me to structure my coding process towards the objectives of my research, yet gave me the freedom of the open coding to seek and recognize new emerging themes from my data. I began coding with a short list developed from my research questions and guided by my literature review. However, I was very careful not to become restricted by the pre-determined code structure, rather than the open coding method, which is more fitting to narrative analysis (Riessman, 2005). I remained open to codes that emerged from my data during data analysis, and developed six themes from my interviews, and seven themes from the focus group discussions. Each theme has an average of four sub-themes.
**Review themes.** In phase four, I began to review the themes by looking for relevance and relationship with the data. I also looked to make sure that the themes related to and enhanced the meaning of the quotations from the transcripts. I continued to monitor the data to make sure that the themes were homogeneous and well developed. When they contradicted, I sought to determine the reason for the contradiction; if necessary, the contradiction was used to enhance the analysis and presented as a different point of view, or maybe there was need for adjustment. In some instances it was necessary to re-evaluate a theme or pattern, and possibly drop and begin the process again. My rule of thumb was not to exclude any contradictory data; however, I made sure that the contradiction had meaning, and not just a lone standing voice that did not add to the meaning making. To avoid over simplification, I documented inconsistencies or any points of diversion, and all are organized together with the narratives as themes (Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007).

**Name and define themes.** In phase five, I named and defined the themes by concentrating on the core tenet of each theme and paying particular attention to the ascribed meanings from my participants. This was where, I believe, my interpretation of the essences of my participants’ stories were crucial and needed to be faithful to their points of view and their voices. I framed and shaped this phase to reflect on my research questions and the voices of my participants—Afghan humanitarian aid workers in Kabul, Afghanistan.

**Discussions and interpretations.** In phase six, I completed the report with discussions and implications found in chapter five. I used my research questions to structure a thematic discussion that addressed the relevance and significance of my
dominant themes to the research questions, and sometimes used quotations from participants to give clarity and depth to the understanding and meaning.

**Member Checking**

I sent individual interview summaries to seven interview participants who expressed interest in being contacted for summary reviews via email attachments for validation and accuracy checks to make sure their thoughts were accurately represented on the transcript. As part of my IRB Protocol, face-to-face interview participants were given the option to complete a request for summary review form, and seven participants completed the form with contact information. Of the seven summaries sent for review, I received four responses from participants who expressed agreement with their summaries, and three responded with request for amendments.

AB noted three corrections: to change number of girls now attending school from 100,000 to 1,000,000; change *mind* to mine; change “The organization operates in sixteen Afghan provinces and provides bicycles for amputees, and has been active since the 1990s during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan” to “The organization operates in sixteen Afghan provinces and provides different services for people with disability and other vulnerable groups, and has been active since the 1990s during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.” Lastly AB changed “Otherwise, I think there will be another disaster in this country” to “Otherwise, I think there will be another disaster in this country.”

SP noted two corrections: to change “SP posits that during the Taliban regime, her organization and other women’s groups were forced underground, but they continued to work for the rights of women” to “our organization was working secretly during the Mujahedín and Taliban regime and we were forced underground but we could
successfully continue our fight which was for women rights, and after the fall of Taliban regime women got access to their relative rights and freedom from which one of them is women equality with men according to Afghanistan constitution and also positive discrimination in Parliamentary elections, women participation in election and different governmental section. Until 2005 women had good achievements in different area specially in reducing violence against women but after 2005 violence increased against women and currently also violence, insecurity and corruption is on its highest level which causes the women activity limited.” SP also changed “The Ibrahimi benefited the fundamentalist organizations who were working against women's rights. Majority of the international aid went to the war lords, and little was given to the women’s groups. International aid, infrastructure needs were neglected” to “Azhar Ibrahimi Special Representative of the UN Secretary General played positive role in the empowerment of Mujahedin (fundamentalist) and in their participation in power.”

RMD noted corrections to change MSP (used two instances) to NSP—National Solidarity Program. All stipulated changes were made to text as requested by the participants.

**Peer/Expert Review**

I recruited two distinguished scholars and practitioners with very strong backgrounds in peace building, conflict management, and social justice to review my themes and my data analysis. Dr. Alison Milofsky is Director of Curriculum and Training Design for International Conflict Management and Peace Building at the United States Institute of Peace in Washington, DC, and Dr. Mark G. Brimhall-Vargas is Deputy Chief Diversity Officer at the University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland. I met both of
them when I attended a United Stated Institute of Peace program on *Facilitation in Conflict Environment*; both were co-instructors for the one week long workshop. I left for Afghanistan a few months after the workshop. Upon completing my second draft, I sent to each of them via email, the complete dissertation draft and sections of the thematic analysis of my themes and sub-themes, plus the data analysis of all 10 face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions. They reviewed my data for approximately three weeks. Both were traveling outside the U.S. at the time of the review; Dr. Milofsky was on assignment in Rwanda and Jordan. They reviewed my data separately and provided me with excellent feedback and suggestions for improvement. There was a high degree of agreement with both reviews on the need for more interpretations in analyzing the sub-themes. Dr. Milofsky felt that the introduction chapter was “extremely engaging,” while Dr. Brimhall felt that my description of the context of Kabul was “excellent.” Other very valuable comments have been integrated into my analysis and several of their comments have been incorporated into the discussions of my themes and sub-themes.

**Trustworthiness, Credibility, Authenticity, Utility, and Faithfulness to Data**

Using a narrative qualitative research foundation grounded in social constructionism and basic human needs model, this study does not make any claims of truth, but strives to echo and give voice to Afghan humanitarian aid workers in Kabul who risk their lives daily to bring desperately needed help to vulnerable Afghan communities. Their storied narratives are retold in this study through their personal experiences of the war on terror. In this narrative qualitative research study, the notions of validity and reliability were not paramount; instead, my study is measured for its utility, authenticity, consistency, and faithfulness to the data. In order to be faithful to the
storied narratives of Afghan humanitarian aid workers in Kabul, and how they make meaning of their lived experience, I recruited two expert reviewers with expertise and backgrounds in international conflicts, facilitating in conflict environments, and dealing with issues of social justice to review and evaluate the transcripts and the themes that were generated from this study. They were asked to review the data for consistency and for perceived bias. Both experts were in agreement with my evaluation and assessment of the data. I also sought feedback from my participants for reviews of their summaries and assessments. Their suggestions, recommendations, and revisions have been incorporated into the findings of this study. According to Creswell (2009), the use of member checking in qualitative research, is a way to ensure that my interpretations are faithful to the storied narratives of my participants.

Throughout this study, I have maintained reflexivity and fairness in echoing the diverse voices from my participants’ interviews and focus group discussions. I followed specific guidelines espoused by Lincoln and Guba (2000), on the criteria for authenticity. In addition, the use of expert reviews and member checking allowed for a report that was true to my participants’ storied narratives.

One of my goals in this research study was to shed light on the conditions in my participants’ environment that exposed them to risk and harm. I believe that I was able to maintain this objective throughout this investigation by making sure that I brought attention to the conditions and experiences that have informed and framed my perspectives, my participants, and their context. To this end, my research design provided an active atmosphere that was conducive for learning. I have come out of this process a more educated person with better understanding of my participants’ experiences of the
war on terror, and the conditions that continue to give rise to insecurities and conflicts around the world. It is my hope that this research study is catalytic in its ability to shape future interventions in the war on terror, as nations seek ways to destroy cells which threaten and pose danger to their ways of life and national security.

As I have always maintained throughout this research study, the utility of this investigation emanates not from its universally significant results, but rather simply by giving voice to the storied narratives of my Afghan humanitarian aid participants—this utility is enriched by their individual experiences and the existing literature about their violent context, their history of invasions and political unrest and their role in launching the U.S. attacks of September 11, 2001. I hope that by echoing their voices, this study creates better understanding of the challenges and the conditions that give rise to insecurities, which continue to expose Afghan humanitarian aid workers to risks of violent attacks.

**Ethics and Reflexivity**

In this section I focus on my obligation to the men and women who chose to participate in my research study. I affirm that neither harm nor wrong was done to any participant of this study. This study adhered to ethical standards and did not involve any form of deception in content or to any participant of the study. Prior to recording the interviews and focus group discussions, all participants were provided with the informed consent indicating that their participation was voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw from the study or decline to answer any questions (see Appendix D). All face-to-face interview participants were also given the option to review their summaries and participate in data validation.
Participation in this research study was voluntary. My goal was always to be faithful to the personal narratives of my participants in my interpretations of their storied narratives and to give voice to their personal stories. As expected of all research studies, I am aware that my idiosyncrasies, my opinions, my personal experiences, and personal politics have influenced the outcome of this research study. However, my hope is that their stories will lead to better understanding of the conditions in insecure complex political environments that expose humanitarian aid workers to high risks of danger, harm, and violent attacks.

As Mauthner et al. (2002) purport that transparency in all aspects of research is the best way of building and maintaining ethical responsibility and reliability in research. They note that the researcher must decide how much of themselves, their pre-conceived biases must be revealed, such as “issues of honesty, transparency, and overall accountability in research” (p. 125).

For this study, I made sure that my personal values and beliefs do not impede on my participants’ voices, but help enrich my understanding and interpretations of their storied narratives. I was quite cognizant of how my personal values, beliefs, acquaintances, and interests influenced this research study. Therefore, I chose to reveal the following.

In a world where resources are becoming more scarce, the population is increasing exponentially, the balance of power is shifting, and religiosity is becoming the prism from which national leaders view their actions or lack thereof. We live in a very dangerous world; the wealthy nations continue to seek more, and waste more, while the poor nations get poorer as they fuel the needs and wants of the rich nations, whilst their
populations suffer and die in poverty and degradation. We live in a world where nations that attempt to express their nationhood or independence are silenced by violent overthrow or occupation, and in a world that is festering with anger and breeding hopelessness by destroying the voices of freedom, insurrection, insurgency and hope, and tagging and classifying them as terrorists.

I have often argued that neither a super-power, nor one known for their superiority over others, should ever use power or force against those considered to be inferior in the pursuit of conflict resolution. I argue that pompous power used is influence lost. Growing up in a small Ibo village in Nigeria, West Africa, I often sat under a big umbrella-like tree that formed a canopy over the village chief’s home, listening as I watched the elders of the village resolve disputes ranging from domestic to crimes against the clan. The village chief was emphatic and intolerant of the use of force by anyone perceived to be superior to their adversaries. He rebuked men for using force against their wives to resolve domestic quarrels. He would say that when a strong head of the family uses force in his home, he loses respect. A man who is truly superior and revered by his peers does not need to use force to be heard, he simply uses his advantage to mediate a resolution through mutual respect. By giving a little, one will gain more in return, he preached. He would say that a man with three heads does not need to be announced to get attention. Once he enters the room, all eyes will follow him. He demands attention. In the same token, a strong man does not need to flex his muscles to get respect. If he is truly strong, he would not need to flex his muscles because his strength comes not from his arrogant display of brute force, but from his humility. Once a man from a nearby village challenged the chief, saying, “Chief, sometimes we have no
choice; we have to use force so that they will know that we are serious, and we mean business!” The chief took a good look at the man who was a healthy, strong and muscular fellow, stoutly built with an unshaken center of gravity. The chief said to him, “If you unleash the weapons you have on a man and he survives, not only have you made a fool of yourself, but you have helped build up that man. Now you will have to fight many men waiting for their turns with you.”

Over the years, I have come to the realization that force can never be used to bring peace. One who possesses overwhelming force should never employ force to mediate peace. The chief often said that any time victory seemed guaranteed, force must never be used. He would say, “It is better to lose gracefully than to win arrogantly.” We must stand up for those who cannot defend themselves, not because they do not try hard enough, but because they are not capable of defending themselves against enemies who possess overwhelming force.

When I look at the world today, and all the conflicts around the globe, I wonder what the wise chief would have said about the Israeli/Palestinian situation that continues to question and prod our humanity, as well as the two Sudanese States, the Congo, the U.S. invasion of Iraq, Boko Haram in Nigeria, Afghanistan, Syria, and now Ukraine. Are we doing all that we can to achieve peace? Are we treating all people the same way we want to be treated? I believe that we can no longer afford not to be our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers.

As the world converges into a global citizenry, where national boundaries erode, and the information superhighway connects people around the globe and feeds images of war and destruction in unprecedented speed and proportion, the citizens of the world have
become more aware of the imbalances in the new world order, and in turn more ready to reject the first world order. War can no longer be the answer in the new world order. Power and influence must not continue to be measured by a nation’s military prowess, war machines, drones, and weapons of mass destruction. What is needed is a global citizenry that will redefine the role of the United Nations and its abilities to mediate between nations by utilizing comprehensive conflict analysis and resolution strategies. The recent United Nations report on climate change (2014) suggests the likelihood of violent conflicts over land and limited resources, as climate change might give rise to insecure conditions “by exacerbating well-established drivers of these conflicts such as poverty and economic shocks” (Gillis, 2014, para. 11). If we continue this trajectory, it won’t be long before the real SHOCK AND AWE!

In consideration for the above noted factors, since objectivity is not an ideal to strive for in narrative analysis research methodology, most significant was my ability to occasionally check in with my participants, by verifying and validating some of my past experiences, values, and thoughts during my face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions (Riessman, 2005). I maintained reflexivity by being conscious of these biases during all phases of this research study, so as not to misrepresent or misinterpret participants’ narratives, but to enhance understanding and deep appreciation of participants’ storied narratives. I made attempts to consult via email with my participants for clarification and to make any changes they desired to their interview summaries.

I recognize ethical issues with regards to relationships with all public parties in the research process—not only an obligation to the participants, but also the institution (NSU), DCAR, and the larger constituents who may read and interpret data and findings
from this study (Mauthner et al., 2002). The issues of transparency continue to be of great importance to me throughout this study. I made certain that every phase of this investigation was clearly defined and documented so it can be easily evaluated and replicated (2002).

I am quite cognizant of the need for confidentiality, particularly with using narrative analysis methodology, and of the intimate nature of the personal stories told during the interviews. As a result, it is important that all collected data are securely stored and that the identities of participants are not displayed but kept anonymous at all times. To maintain confidentiality, participants’ identities were not disclosed on the transcripts, or in any part of this research document. Interview participants were identified by initials, while the focus group participants by notes as FS (Female Speaker) or MS (Male Speaker). All ethical considerations for this study complied with the stipulations set forth by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Nova Southeastern University. Participants were provided with approved informed consent for their perusal and authorization. Since interviews and focus group discussions were recorded using digital audio, participants were required to sign consent forms allowing permission to be recorded, and copies of signed consents were presented to each participant (see Appendix D). To this effect, I upheld ethical standards in interviewing, gathering information, and audio recording. Creswell posits that researchers have a responsibility to make sure that their prejudices and pre-conceived beliefs and ideologies do not impede on the voices of participants (2007). He maintains that the researcher must challenge participants to seek deeper revelations and understanding of their lived experiences (2007). This research study was committed to maintaining and upholding the dignity and trust of participants and
contributors to the research, and the integrity of the DCAR and NSU. This research study was submitted for the Institutional Review Board of Nova Southeastern University, with the title: War on Terror – Experiences of Aid Workers in Afghanistan; Research Protocol No. 07111208 Exp., and received IRB approval on January 25, 2013.

During this research process, all notes and compact disc recordings were stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home office, to which only the researcher had access. All notes and compact disc recordings will be destroyed three months following the completion of this research study.

According to Riessman (1993) and Lieblich, Tuval-Mishiac, and Zilber (1998), one of the best ways for narrative validation is by the “sharing of one’s views and conclusions and making sense in the eyes of a community of researchers and interested, informed individuals” (Riessman, 1993, p. 173). I recruited two reviewers who reviewed most of the dissertation with particular attention to the data analysis and the analysis of my major themes and sub-themes (see section on Peer/Expert Review). Individual interview summaries were sent via email to participants for their review and amendments. Three amendments were returned and others concurred with my summary (see Participant Data Validation). The completed study will also be made available to students and faculty at West Virginia University at Parkersburg and other interested parties within the humanitarian community.
Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Presentation

In this chapter, I present the outcomes of 10 face-to-face interviews and a focus group panel of 20 participants I conducted with Afghan humanitarian aid workers in Kabul, Afghanistan. The goal of this chapter is to present a contextual analysis of the experiences of Afghan humanitarian aid workers in Kabul, Afghanistan through their voices and their storied narratives, with the hope that through the grounding of their complex storied narratives in the different corresponding interactions that affect them, such as interactions with the U.S. Military Forces, the International Military Forces, NATO forces, Taliban, non-military international communities, Afghan governments, and the Afghan communities. I used thematic analysis to explore the common themes and the contrasts among the experiences and perceptions of my participants. With an analytical framework informed by social constructivism and role theory, I investigated how my participants’ storied narratives are formed by their sociopolitical contexts, with focus on conditions, which affect their exposure to risk in complex political emergencies.

This chapter brings to focus the different sections that give meaning to the shared process of conducting this study. I listened to understand the experiences of my participants, and present the analysis of their storied narratives, using the themes that best represent their experiences. In the preceding chapter, I summarize the interpretation of this study, using the framework of Burton’s human needs theory to understand the conditions that enable and shape the themes. I use initials of participant’s names to denote the narrator for face-to-face interviews, and FS (Female Speaker) and MS (Male Speaker) to denote focus group participants to protect the privacy of the participants of this research study.
I begin this section by exploring the context where the storied narratives of my participants emanate. This step is borrowed from Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) about “framing the terrain” in portraiture research methodology:

Like all researchers working in the phenomenological framework, portraitists find context crucial to their documentation of human experience and organizational culture. By context, I mean the setting—physical, geographic, temporal, historical, cultural, aesthetic—within which the action takes place. Context becomes the framework, the reference point, the map, the ecological sphere; it is used to place people and action in time and space and as a resource for understanding what they say and do. The context is rich in clues for interpreting the experience of actors in the setting… Portraitists, then, view human experience as being framed and shaped by the setting. (p. 43)

Research Study Context

As my plane from Dubai hovered over Kabul and negotiated landing, I was reminded of the reason for traveling over nineteen flight hours to a place I may have little or nothing in common with except for our shared humanity. I was met at the airport by a male voice that called out my name: Imanuel, he said, welcoming me to Afghanistan as he took my luggage and led me out of the airport. I’m able to park close, he informed me, I know a lot of the police people that work here, so I didn’t park where everybody is expected to park their cars—pointing into the direction that we are heading, as he pushed the cart that secured my luggage…he was giving me my first lesson on how to navigate Kabul.
Kabul is the seat of power for Afghanistan, a Central Asian country, north and west of Pakistan, east of Iran, and with southern borders of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan—a nation with stories of wars, invasions, and civil unrest. It was invaded by the Soviet Union in 1979, but forced to withdraw after ten years of war with the Mujahedeen forces aided by the United States. After the collapse of the communist regime in Kabul in 1992, devastating civil war erupted among the different war lords and factions of the Mujahedeen, destroying most of Kabul and opening the path that ushered the Taliban to power in 1996.

We drove down a newly built modern highway from the airport. This road, he said, was built by the Americans, pointing out some of the new developments along the drive since the arrival of the Americans, also letting me know that “they” (the Americans) built big projects but left them no guide, no method or rule of law to navigate the unanticipated madness that now engulfs the streets of Kabul. I saw modern-day highways with no traffic signs or traffic lights, cars converging at different speeds from different directions, and drivers nudge their vehicles into traffic positions with no rules of engagement or anyone to enforce them. There is no traffic or driving rule apparent, just instincts and guesses of other drivers’ intentions. You just have the feeling for when the other car is going to stop...they told me… Even pedestrians have to joggle for their right of way as drivers dare them into traffic. Check points were manned by security officers carrying machine guns. Vehicles bounced and were thrown up and down by the depths of the pot holes that pave the dusty streets.

The hills of this ancient city stand as testament to its rugged history and the harsh realities of its destitute population. Impoverished communities were built on hills with no
electricity, no water, or basic sanitation. According to aid workers, one of these hillside communities known as Tapaye Zanabad was built by Afghan women. They were widows of war who came as a last resort and built their mud homes on the hill with their bare hands.

My Afghan escort brings me to a street—he grew up not far from here and remembers seeing bodies of men, women, and children on the streets—casualties of war, he said. He was just a little boy from the other side of town, but he knew most of the kids on this side of town. He said Kabul was totally destroyed during the Mujahedeen war. He said before the war between the warlords and the Mujahedeen was the Soviet invasion, and now, the Americans with the war on terror.

Alongside the ruins of war, new structures of development bring promise to a people whose hope will not die. The streets and markets buzzed with the hustle as people of all ages and gender strived to make an afghani (Afghan currency). Little beggar boys and girls beseeched me for their daily bread. Stores displayed their wares from huge metal structures that gate and secure the homes of the wealthy and powerful, to lavish furnishings and tailored clothing that comfort the privileged, to bread shops that bake daily bread, broken daily at meals served on plastic tablecloths spread on floors for families and friends to share their meals.

The men mostly wear lose traditional attire with a vest over, while the women mostly cover their bodies and wear head scarves. This is a culture of deep loyalty, where people trust each other and everyone knows their place. The women sit in designated areas of restaurants and public places. Married couples sit in designated areas reserved
for women to keep other men from gazing at their wives. Most interactions are within the sexes—there are very little to no cross-gender interactions outside the immediate family.

Young university men and women sit-out their grievances on the pavement of the Parliament building in hunger strike to remove a university administrator. Even with the appearance of normalcy, Kabul remains an insecure environment marred by frequent outbreaks of planned military strikes and attacks, which continue to take the lives of innocent civilians and humanitarian aid workers. The following was a warning (Figure 1).

**THREAT WARNING - ANSO CENTRAL - COMPLEX ATTACK (KABUL)**

As of 17:45 hours it has become evident that both the APPF and IO compounds in the area received elements of the attack, with AOG operatives still engaged in fire-fights with ANSF at the APPF compound at this time. While the IO compound was also directly hit with at least one grenade or RPG – and casualties are reported – at this point it remains unclear to what extent it was involved in the attack (collaterally, as a main objective, or as a means to attack the nearby APPF compound). ANSF has surrounded the area, and significant fighting is still ongoing. As such, the below advisory remains in effect, and ANSO Central will continue to monitor the situation and issue further updates as more information becomes available.

(Afghanistan NGO Safety Office, 2013, transmitted to me by WADAN)

*Figure 1. ANSO alert, 2013.*

I was reminded from time to time that Kabul was still an insecure environment. This terrorist attack took place two compounds from where I had interviewed a participant one day prior to the attack. The Taliban later took credit for these attacks. The purpose of this context description was to illustrate the structural conditions that informed and framed my participants’ storied narratives.

**Interview Participants**

**Participant SD:**

I met with SD in a colorful corporate building of WADAN—an Afghan NGO with over fifteen office locations around Afghanistan. This was my first visit to
WADAN’s home office, and I was quite impressed by the structure, a massive brightly colored building with columns that fortify ornate architectural design facing a beautiful landscape that separates the building from the high Iron Gate that secures the fenced compound. SD was casually dressed in slacks and blouse with a veil over her hair. Initially, she informed me of her time constraint through my interpreter, but as the interview progressed, she seemed less in a hurry, and when the interview ended, she stayed around in conversation with my interpreter.

SD is a young woman in her late thirties to mid-forties and has worked with clinics in very remote areas that she said were:

“Hard to go through the paths, and most of the time we need to supply these clinics through Tajikistan.”

The lack of funding was one key problem that SD stressed throughout the interview. She shared:

“I set up a kindergarten for children in Kabul on my own personal funds and I was able to run the kindergarten for one year through my own personal expenses. Most of the Afghan women who have children; kids, babies, they go to work so there is no one to take care of their children. But unfortunately no one helped, no organization assisted to fund this kindergarten and so I lost the kindergarten...”

When asked if there was any help from the U.S. and the Allied Forces, or the international communities in Afghanistan, SD’s response was critical:

“I’ve sent proposals to some organizations, but no reply, and they do not pay any attention to this pressing problem.”
On what she considers the most pressing challenge facing Afghanistan, insecurity ranked number one:

“The biggest challenge is the security, the suicide attacks. Because of this suicide attacks this has almost paralyzed the life, especially the life of the organizations that run projects in areas which are not secure. It is very, very hard to carry on our activities in remote areas of the country... This was kind of intensive education for women because we wanted the women to be educated as soon as possible, and this school was running very well. It was the first one in that area. The area was insecure; the Taliban presence was much more in that area. But unfortunately it was not only the Taliban but most of the parents were also not willing to send their girls and their sisters and daughters to the school, and for this reason the school was stopped which I’m very, very disappointed. Until now I still feel disappointed.”

When asked if she was hopeful that things would get better, she answered with a prayer for peace after the drawdown of U.S. and NATO forces in 2014:

“I pray to God that after 2014 Afghanistan will be peaceful and secure, and we pray for peace and security in the country. A number of people would want them to leave, but the majority of the people are not prepared and do not want the international troops to leave the country.”

Her message to U.S. President Obama is to keep U.S. troops in Afghanistan, but most importantly, to provide economic support to Afghans, especially to the women. She calls for the unity of all Afghans, and to be considerate of the Afghan people. She wants the opposition to:
“Stop violence and stop fighting and killing innocent people… You know most of the Afghan people are not afraid of terrorists because the people are innocent, they are a proud people, they are brave, and so they have no fear of terror.”

Participant AB:

I met AB, a 49-year-old medical doctor by training, in his office. He was quite hospitable and provided me and my interpreter with tea and refreshments. He was well dressed in Western attire: dress slacks and a long sleeve shirt. AB spoke English well—he said that he was educated in Pakistan and worked several years in Pakistan while in exile from Afghanistan during the Soviet occupation.

“For me being a doctor, I used to work in a busy trauma hospital in Pakistan, and every day many trauma cases were brought from Afghanistan to the hospital in Pakistan... many who lost their limbs and wondered if they will be able to move or walk again.”

His organization rehabilitates individuals who lost their limbs, polio victims, and cerebral palsy patients, and he shared:

“We treat them with physical rehabilitation education, mine awareness, AIDS awareness, and drug awareness...”

The organization operates in sixteen Afghan provinces and provides different services for people with disability and other vulnerable groups, and has been active since the 1990s during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. AB spoke proudly of the role his organization played in persuading the Afghan government to sign the Ottawa Treaty in 2003 to ban landmines. He said the first U.S. bomb was dropped on Afghanistan on
October 7, 2001, and the U.S. forces came to Afghanistan in 2002. He claimed that the war on terror brought many developments to Afghanistan:

“Our activities and opportunities increased and there was a difference in the funding after 9/11. During 2001, all the other organizations were in terrible situation like in 1999 and 2000 and most of the aid workers were facing financial challenges. After 2002, many actors entered into Afghanistan, new actors and old actors, so to some extents, the funding situation became very good. In terms of reconstruction of the country, many things had happened.”

AB told the story that he told to a group during a visit to the United States:

“We trained some disabled people in Jalalabad. The only paved road we had was three kilometers that they could run by bicycle. When I told the story in United States, the people did not believe it and said this is the 21st century and you have only three kilometers paved road? And I said, yeah. There was paved road, but it was potholes from Jalalabad to Torkham. It was paved road by name only. Potholes by dropping bomb or blowing mines and things like that. The only paved roads that the boys could practice were three kilometers. But nowadays, these are the positive changes - we have thousands, hundreds kilometers paved roads now.”

Asked if there has been any downside to the development since the war on terror, AB said the suicide attacks increased a lot:

“The terror increased day by day, the road side mines increased, there is a special word that the aid community uses BBIVED something like that those who want to explode themselves.”
AB expressed his frustration with having to wait hours, sometimes two or three hours, for military convoys to pass; he said that often meant missing important appointments. Referring to how military incursions into Afghan communities affect perception of aid workers in Afghan communities, AB stated,

“We are very close with the communities, we are working with the communities, and so the people that their houses are searched during nights, they’re not happy about that.”

AB recounted a personal experience with war:

“I lost almost sixteen of my relatives and even my brother who was a PhD holder from Oxford University of England and he got killed before 9/11; during the war with the Russians. You know he was an asset, not only for our family but for the whole country. PhD holder from Oxford University in Afghan, that’s really an asset, but he was assassinated because of this political... bullshits.”

He argued the evils of war, and purported the human cost of wars to Afghan families:

“I have very bad memories of war, it’s not only me, every family has lost two or three persons from their family. Especially those very important people that were breadwinner for the families - they lost them; so war is something that should be avoided and should be stopped.”

Asked what led him into humanitarian work, AB told the story of when he was on exile in Pakistan:

“I used to work in a hospital, very busy trauma hospital located in Pakistan, and every day there were many cases of trauma brought to the hospital. I was in exile...
during the Russian invasion. The family members used to just cry when they see their sons and brothers. One day they had eyes and the other day they lost it. One day they had limbs, but the other day they lost it. And they have arm and lost it. It’s really a difficult situation and when their relatives came to the hospital, they cried and were worried of what happened to him and how will his future be. And this was kind of igniting me that something should be done for these people. I talked to our director of the hospital at that time that there should be an orthopedic workshop for us to make artificial limbs and it was approved, I thank my director. And we had a very good orthopedic workshop there for making artificial limbs. Realizing that only limbs cannot solve all the problems and the fact that they sacrificed their limbs for their country and for their religion, so I thought why not bicycles? I remember when I was a kid and I got a bicycle, it felt as if I had the whole world with me. So finally I was satisfied that bicycle is the perfect thing. So just like you are doing your research, I brought my bicycle from home to the hospital and I was encouraging two of my patients. At first I made the bicycle stationary - so no legs; don’t need it, you don’t need legs, just come on the cycle and use the handle to turn the wheel around, and maintain your balance, and by the third week, they were able to keep their balance and run the cycle themselves. And then I presented this case to other orthopedic doctors and they liked the idea very much. Some friends from the United States used to come to Peshawar to help us and I shared the idea with them. They said, doctor, go ahead with this, this is the perfect idea and they encourage me a lot. And then I shared this with the Afghan aid communities and they said, go ahead with it. So the first
time we got funding was from Afghan Refugees Fund based in London and we got $40,000 from them to start in Jalalabad.”

Asked how this project has progressed, the doctor noted that:

“For the last 2 years, there has been no bicycle program because of funding. We could not raise fund to run the program - sometimes donors only want to fund their own initiatives...not that crazy Afghan idea, you know... I shared those ideas in Jalalabad; I presented a case and the impact of the program. There were ministers and people from foreign affairs, almost 160 countries present in Jalalabad. I don’t know why we never got funding, because we graduated thousands of people from this program - more than 5,000 people. They are freely mobile now and they can work, they can have a job, they can complete their schools and so I’m satisfied. I’m quite happy for them.”

On his experiences with the U.S. Military and the allied forces in Afghanistan, AB conveys his disagreement with the formation of the PRTs. He argued that the Afghan aid community has trusting relationship with the Afghan people:

“We are in this country, we expect that the military forces will leave one day, and then there will be a very bad image on the aid communities that we were with those people who were bombing the villages. That was our fear and we opposed it, we raised our voices when they started activities of the PRTs and I think they’re folding it now or they have stopped it in many provinces. I heard some news, which I liked; good news that there will be no PRTs anymore in the provinces, which is a very good idea.”
According to AB, the argument from the foreign military and international community was unacceptable. He said,

“We are building a bridge for you - and it means they will go to that village and do their work or their development or whatever... the aid communities were not happy, it was a matter of neutrality.”

He went on to assert that:

“In Afghanistan, people, ordinary people, I’m talking, not the politicians, the people are not in favour of the military people - not only the Americans, Russians were here in this country and before the Russians, the British were here. They invaded. The general image of these super powers is not so good in the minds of the people here in this country.”

On his feelings about the U.S. plan to drawdown military forces in 2014, AB asserted that he is not worried by the U.S. plan to withdraw forces due to Afghanistan’s past experiences with the transfer of power:

“I don’t have any fear because we have already past two such transfers of power and things like that; in 1992, we had Mujahidin come into power and in 1996, Taliban came. In 2001, this new government, so 2014, it’s not, I think a big issue.”

One area of concern according to AB is with Afghanistan’s neighbors and noted that:

“One thing that the people are afraid of is our neighbors, Afghanistan neighbors will definitely show themselves strong, and bring their puppets again in power. That’s one thing people are expecting to happen.”

When asked which Afghan neighbors he was referring to, his response was direct:
“Pakistan and Iran, they will increase their support to the groups in terms of money, in terms of weapon, in terms of everything.”

Asked if this would be a potential problem for Afghanistan—again, quite emphatically, he asserted:

“Of course, problems! Even right now, even though we are one year before 2014, there is a tremendous downfall in funding - funding has diminished ... decreased! In most of our projects right now, we have problems. The only hope is for funding to be kept in the same level like it was two or three years ago. The joblessness and unequal distribution of the revenues, these were the main things that caused past skirmishes and fighting. If I have a job and I can feed my children, I will not be going to join any group. Who would want to go at night and blow themselves up in roadside bombing? If they have a decent life, I think nobody will choose to do that. Besides, there is also some very strict training by some elements in our neighborhood; they’re explaining that this is like a holy war. If they kill themselves, they will be going to Janna. So those kinds of propagandas, joblessness and all these things together will create problems.”

AB’s advice to the United States of America is to channel the money that will be spent to drawdown the U.S. Military forces from Afghanistan into assisting local civilian projects in Afghanistan. He argued that:

“They are using a lot of money on the military drawdown. If they use it in civil affairs, there will be no fighting. I can guarantee this myself. Just, let us say, just 10% of the cost that they were using on militaries. If they use it on the civil, there will be no fighting.”
On his message to President Barack Obama, AB said,

“I just would like to thank him for his decision to withdraw the troops. That’s his good step, also not to cut off funding for Afghanistan. Otherwise, I think there will be another disaster in this country. That’s what we are expecting. In 1994 and ‘95, Kabul was destroyed. Why? Because the American government made a very big mistake. When Mujahidin came to Afghanistan, the Americans thought, Oh! We defeated the Russians so time to leave; however, Afghanistan still needed their support, but they left. I know money was coming from Saudi and the Gulf states and so that was a big mistake they did at that time. That is why Afghanistan turned to those kinds of things like a place to train terrorists.”

Asked if he thought that the mistakes of the 1990s could be repeated, he asserted that:

“They’re already doing the same. They’re already committing it like when they, you see, cut off the funding. Like, we are a small organization. I was in a meeting two weeks ago and about 3,560 de-miners are on standby positions. That is a clear indication of what could happen to those young de-miners when they cannot support their families. So definitely, there will be some groups out there waiting to recruit them in exchange for some bread for their children.”

His message to the American people is to help the people of Afghanistan develop their own economy and help them build their infrastructure:

“Not in terms of military force, we want their financial support, their technical supports, and to support the military of our country. If our national police and the military are supported, it will be much cheaper and it will be much easier, for the whole world.”
AB’s message to Afghan’s people is to:

“Stay calm so we do not lose all that was achieved. Like 1,000,000 girls who are now going to schools and more boys are going to schools and colleges. Now we have paved roads, keep it intact. Now we have schools. Do not ruin them. Keep it intact and maybe your future generation, a knowledgeable generation, not like the generation of our age. I grew up in this situation; I was 17 when the Russians invaded Afghanistan. Now I’m 49 and all I have known is war.”

On the source of terrorism, AB believes that America knows the true source of terrorism. He argued that:

“The main thing is to work close with those countries that have the seeds of terror. If they work with them, I think this problem will be solved. If they make it inactive, not to grow, once something is grown then the control is difficult. But if something is inactivated in the seed form of it, then I think there will be no problem. We will have all peaceful villages and this is the necessity of the time.”

When asked which countries he considers to have the seeds of terror, he hesitated, as if unsure if it was alright to say it, then reluctantly, he sighed:

“Everybody knows that the cow is black, but the milk is white...where Osama bin Laden got killed.”

After our interview ended, and I thanked him for the opportunity to talk with him, our conversation continued. He talked about the Durand Line as a factor in Afghan relationship with its neighbors:
“To me, that’s the basic reason why our neighbors are not good with us. More than 100 years ago, this Durand Line, some people called it Imaginary Durand Line. However, some Afghan scholars did not find any written documents about this Durand Line and even it was not signed by the Amir Abdur Rahman who was the king of Afghanistan that time. They did not find in any museum, in any caliphs. Since there is no written document or proof, no Afghan government has accepted this. This is the main reason why the neighbors are trying to make Afghanistan as weak as they can. Another issue is India. President Karzai was recently asked by a reporter why India was allowed to have a consulate in Afghanistan. My main point is that they should not make Afghanistan the base of war for their issues. If they have problems with India, there are many channels to deal with their problems. Diplomatic channels or military channels, whichever option they choose, just keep their conflict away from Afghanistan.”

Participant SP:

SP was the first participant I interviewed; we met in her heavily fortified home-office. After many failed attempts to operate my Marantz professional recorder, I had to make a decision to proceed with my first interview without a recorder and rely on only hand written notes for the interview.

SP is an interesting woman known for her strong political viewpoints. She has a reputation for being quite outspoken and unwavering on her points of view. We sat in her living room with my interpreter. She welcomed me to her office and to Afghanistan, saying.
“The war is very harsh; it’s been unfair to the people of this country. For the past thirty-five to forty years, wars in Afghanistan have been imposed on the people of this country. Our geography has made it easy for wars. Afghanistan has been a victim of wars between super powers. Our people’s backwardness has been due to the super powers not wanting this country to prosper. Rival groups have disrupted developments.”

She said that since 1965, she has been fighting for the rights of women—for democratic organizations to fight for the rights of Afghan women:

“Our efforts have allowed Afghan women to become members of Parliament – opposed by fundamentalists who have fought against equal rights for women. Due to our efforts, Parliament was forced to withdraw from past positions and allow women equal rights – equal protection under the law, and freedom of speech.”

SP posited that during the Taliban regime, her organization and other women’s groups were forced underground, but they continued to work for the rights of women.

“Our organization was working secretly during the Mujahedin and Taliban regime and we were forced underground but we could successfully continued to our fight for women’s rights. After the fall of Taliban regime, women got access to their relative rights and freedom for equality with men; according to Afghanistan constitution, and the rights of women to vote, participate in Parliamentary elections, and seek employment in different governmental sectors.

Until 2005, women had good achievements in different area; especially in reducing violence against women, but after 2005 violence increased against
women and currently, violence, insecurity and corruption are on their highest level, which has affected activities.

“The Taliban brought us catastrophe never witnessed anywhere in the world; cruelty, violence, barbarism, rape, group rape, kidnappings, cutting women’s breasts, and openly forcing women naked and killing their husbands in front of them. Total dehumanization of women and the women are forced to marry them.”

Asked how the war on terror affected her ability to continue to work for women’s rights, SP noted that:

“After 2002, opportunities for Afghan women to seek more rights; go to school, and get an education increased. Hope was created among women and all Afghans – liberation from the fundamentalists. We had new constitution, and good things started to happen, until 2005 when everything started to change. The U.S. and their allies changed their support for the fundamentalists. Azhar Ebrahimi, Special Representative of the UN Secretary Genera, played positive role in empowerment of Mujahedin (fundamentalist) and in their participation in power and benefited the fundamentalist organizations who were working against women’s rights. Majority of the international aid went to the war lords, and little was given to the women’s groups. International aid, infrastructure needs were neglected.”

When asked if she was hopeful, she responded by asserting that Afghanistan needs development, not war. She argued that:
“If people have no opportunities for their future, they turn to terror. From the beginning I called for more humanitarian aid. The source of terror was never in Afghanistan, but in Pakistan, but since Pakistan is an ally of the U.S.”

Her hope is that the borders are protected against terrorism after the U.S. drawdown in 2014.

On Afghan readiness for U.S. drawdown in 2014, SP asserted that Afghanistan can make the changes needed by:

“Dismantling human rights violators and bring fundamental change to government.”

She posited that the country has made several achievements since the U.S. invasion:

“For three years, law on violence against women.”

SP is hopeful that the drawdown could become a positive outcome for Afghanistan, if the U.S. and the international communities will:

“Repair economic lives, enforce laws, and eliminate war lords; this will give hope to the people – they must support the civilians – the Afghan people. Yes there is hope...”

Asked what she perceived to be the biggest challenge facing Afghanistan, she responded that:

“The biggest challenge is to completely leave us alone; we cannot establish peace militarily.”

Her message to President Obama is that the

“Amount of money being spent on removing U.S. troops, if spent on social services, security, and civil society could make the most to weaken and dismantle
the sources of terror, abuse of human rights and women’s rights and freedom, and not allow Afghanistan to become centre of terrorism again.”

SP’s message to the American people:

“Help Afghan people, especially Afghan women, but ask for accountability from Afghan government and any group receiving assistance. Afghan people are very grateful for the generous support – please don’t stop now…”

Her message to the people of Afghanistan was motherly and direct:

“Be vigilant; don’t be abused or deceived by fundamentalists and criminals against democracy who operate under the name of religion. The enemy of Afghanistan is Pakistan. Respect the women of Afghanistan, who are your mothers, sisters and daughters – they want to work shoulder to shoulder for the prosperity of Afghanistan.

She ended the interview with the words: “Just Peace!”

Participant AG:

When AG first came to Kabul in 1992, he had just been promoted to Company Representative in the Kabul branch office; however, sixteen days after his arrival to Kabul, he said that war started in Kabul City. This unforeseen situation forced him to change focus, and he started distributing food and providing shelter to people displaced by the war. Many Afghans had to be moved to shelters in mosques around Kabul:

“We distributed food to both sides; food to opposition and to government people. This was the civil war; argument between people and different organization. We completely lost our buildings…Kabul city was completely destroyed”
AG went on to assert that the civil war cleared the way for the Taliban to come to power, but in a rather peculiar way, he seemed to be arguing with himself that the Taliban were not terrorist, and went as far to say that their regime was very good:

“We did not say that the Taliban are not good people or terrorists, we do not say this. The Taliban also was very good, they performed their regime and the time of their government was very good. We didn’t say that these people are terrorists or something else.”

AG decided to define terrorist activities:

“Terrorist activities are activities that want to weaken or try to destroy the government of Afghanistan; the political system, the government system and other economic or social sectors of the country. They try to destroy and weaken the people’s spirit. This is called a terrorist activity. Terrorists took over Kabul and different big cities of Afghanistan and they spread fear among Afghans and this had a negative effect on our Afghan government and made Afghan government weak.”

AG asserted that a lot has been achieved since the U.S. and the international forces came to Afghanistan; however, he cautioned that a lot still needs to be done—he was one of the representatives that went to Japan to participate in the Afghan Reconstruction Program. This was an appeal to the international community; he shared:

“Donors pledged 41.5 billion dollars in funds for the reconstruction of Afghanistan. The terrorist attacks from different negative organizations tried to weaken the implementation of many programs, but we see positive evidence in different schools and rehabilitation sectors. A different change came to
Afghanistan, but we can’t say that’s enough because Afghanistan was completely destroyed and this kind of fund is much less for it.”

Asked what he considers the biggest challenge facing Afghanistan, his response was swift:

“The biggest challenge in Afghanistan is the security problem, there is no peace and the people are not safe.”

AG argued that terrorism is not in the culture of Afghan people:

“International sources bring their terrorists to participate and start activity in Afghanistan, this is not the culture of our people, and Afghan people were never terrorists. International terrorists come to Afghanistan and set-up offices and organizations. The terrorists and Taliban attacked many people who lived in cities and many people who spent their lives in rural areas and villages, they are uneducated, and so when the Taliban got in government, they took advantage of those people who were uneducated.”

He asserted that:

“Afghan people are honest Muslim people and kind people; terrorists take advantage of their kindness and they start different terrorism activities such as the one that destroyed the World Trade Center in America. These activities are international terrorism activities, not Afghan local terrorist activity.”
However, AG insisted that the Taliban is not a terrorist organization, emphatically noting:

“I’ll repeat again, Taliban are not terrorists, they are a good organization, good people and they are just opposite of the system, and we want peace in Afghanistan and also want Taliban to participate in the system. We hope that the Afghan government and the U.S. government will support and cooperate with them and try to bring peace - the Taliban should be allowed to participate in Afghan government and political system.”

AG is hopeful that after the U.S. troops leave Afghanistan, international communities should assist Afghanistan to rebuild and maintain a stable and peaceful nation:

“International community should support Afghanistan and its different sectors, and they should not leave Afghanistan alone so that the situation in 2001 is not repeated. We hope they will support us and the NGO sector will be able to assist those people where the government is not able to reach, mainly in rural and different border areas, and villages.”

AG expressed concern over problems with bordering countries; he asserted that:

“Afghanistan still has problems in the security sector with neighboring countries. It’s impossible that Afghanistan will be stabilized after 2014 when the troops will quit. We need security and a peaceful environment in Afghanistan. The international community should support and train Afghan security and military so they are able to enforce the laws in the country and control Afghan borders.”
AG wants President Obama to give the same attention to Afghanistan as he does the U.S. He argues that if the proper attention is not given to assist Afghanistan in maintaining internal security, securing its borders, and rebuilding its infrastructure, it is likely to fall back to a haven for breeding terror as the world witnessed in 2001. He asserted that:

“`Afghanistan will go back like before, the terrorists will come back – different international terrorist organizations will move into Afghanistan like before. If Afghanistan is allowed to become the center of international terror, it would mean the international terrorism beat America.”`

To the American people, AG expressed his gratitude:

“`As an Afghan citizen, I am much thankful for American nation, because the American people pay their own tax to the government and the government uses it to fund programs in Afghanistan. So we are much thankful to the American people and our wish from you is don’t leave Afghanistan alone.”`

To the Afghan people, he challenged his fellow country men and women to put their country first:

“`Think about your own country, positive not negative, and try to take part in the development of the country and help bring it to that level of other developed countries. Let’s stop the fighting and give attention to the education sector and help educate our people. Afghanistan is the center of Asia...”`
Participant RS:

I met RS in her office suite where she was working with some young Afghan women. They were very hospitable, providing me and my interpreter with Afghan pastries and green tea. As we arrived, one of the ladies ushered us into a sitting room where the interview was conducted. After the interview we were given a tour of the facility and introduced to the women. On the hallway wall hung two large, rectangular blue framed prints in Arabic: *STOP THE VIOLENCE* and a second: *EQUAL RIGHTS IN AFGHAN CONSTITUTION*.

RS is the founder of an organization that focuses on providing training and advocacy for human rights for Afghan women. Her organization was started in the 1990s during a time she described as,

“*A time that no woman, even men were free, and they were not allowed to breathe open air. At that time, the doors of all institutions were closed and no one had the opportunity to work, go to school, or to find a job to take care of their families. So being college educated and enlightened, I had to think of another alternative, how to serve the people...So that was what motivated me to establish this organization.*”

She argued that the love for her country and dedication to the people of Afghanistan kept her in Afghanistan during the Mujahidin and Taliban rules:

“*Despite all the atrocities, hardships, and suffocations, because of the love for my country and for my people, I did not migrate to another country.*”

Asked what sustained them during those years, RS replied,

“*Love; the love I have for my people, for my homeland, for my country.*”
RS asserted that during these periods women remained active; few women were elected to the Parliament, including RS, and she insists that the presence of women in Parliament brought healthy competition to the Parliamentary process. She claimed that:

“Because women did not want to show that they are less active, incapable than men. So this was a kind of positive competitive environment.”

She posited that:

“The members of the parliament at that time were very much integrated with the communities, with the people, with the society and they were involved with the people. For example when they were going from home to office, they were using the public transport. Except the chairman of the parliament and his deputy who had cars ... the rest of the members of the parliaments were behaving like ordinary people; like porters and shopkeepers - No special privileges and benefits like they enjoy today.

She argued that it would not be correct to assume that all the changes in women’s rights have occurred in the last ten to twelve years:

“Even before that, there were educated women who were involved in all types of social activities and they were very brave women.”

RS posited that over thirty years ago when she was a student at Kabul University, her professors were from West Germany, and they were very good professors. She argued that if the atmosphere in Afghanistan had been conducive to change, the condition of the people would have been different. She noted:

“I think the country, myself and all the people in the county will have developed much, much better in a natural manner, but as I said, unfortunately, this curtain
of terror spread all over the country and basically affected all people including women. At that time, according to constitution, both man and woman can equally participate in all electoral, political and all other types of activities.”

Asked what kind of hope she had for the future, she noted that a lot of work had been done in Afghanistan in almost all sectors within the last twelve years. She referred to this interview as a sign of progress:

“Your presence here and now sitting together with us in the interview, this is a good manifestation and a big achievement. During the Taliban, for example, you cannot come and sit with a woman like this and talk to a woman like this. Even radio, we couldn’t switch on radio to listen to news at that time. You will be arrested and no one knows what fate you will have to confront.”

Remembering how things were in Kabul before the arrival of NATO troops, RS asserted that:

“NATO forces in this country, I can say it’s a blessing. We had witnessed those times of war and hardships, almost in every street of this city, there was conventional war between rival groups and fortunately most of the people were so happy with the arrival of the NATO troops.”

However, she noted that the people’s expectations were high as they expected the U.S. and NATO troops to fix many of their problems:

“We expected a lot more and much better from the troops and from the inflow of so many resources into the country, but unfortunately, it didn’t happen as people had expected.
Asked about her feelings of Afghan readiness for the U.S. drawdown of forces in 2014, she replied by acknowledging that Afghanistan has seen many regime changes, and argued:

“Unfortunately, this is a vital fact that during most of the changes of these regimes, all the people mainly the women have suffered more as a result of the change of regime.”

She asserted that terrorism is:

“Imposed or brought from outside the country.”

And she argued that Afghans are like nationals of other countries. She maintained that:

“They enjoy the same kind of mentality and will power and decisions like other human beings do and they are good people. They’re all educated people, they are determined people. Our people and our youth can defend our country and women can also assist in the establishment of peace in this country. First, this is an imposed war by foreigners, by foreign countries especially as I mentioned before, Pakistan and other countries that would impose this war in our country and we have good sources, we have good manpower, we have very good talents to utilize the resources, but unfortunately, these people do not allow our people to live in peace. This country has the ability if the foreign countries allow us to help in the reconstruction of our country and restoration in peace and stability of our country, otherwise these people have the ability and they have the tolerance to help themselves. Although it is a small and poor country, we have strategic plans; this small country is well recognized and has signed a lot of strategic contracts with different countries who will help according to those agreements. So, there is
no ground to worry much if foreign intervention is seized and the U.S. and international communities countries help us to stop the intervention of foreign countries.

On what she felt was the biggest challenge facing Afghanistan, she stated that the election was number one:

“The first dire challenge of this country is the forthcoming elections. I can say that it will be one of the major challenges to the future of this country about which we can worry and so there will be consequences which we cannot think about. Another challenge is that those people who nominate themselves for presidential elections and also provincial elections, should be tolerant and respectful of their opponents; the losers should accept and cooperate wholeheartedly with the winners. If this does not happen and the losers do not help for the benefit and the interest of the entire nation, then this would be another conflict.”

A third challenge she saw regards the Afghan strategic plan, which she claimed was signed by Afghan government and other countries around the world:

“We hope that this will not remain on paper. We hope this agreement will be materialized. If this does not happen, then this will also be a challenge.”

RS’s message to President Obama is for the president to use his office and his leadership in the world to influence nations that are working against the progress and development of Afghanistan. She asserted that:

“President Obama is a leader of a strong country, and a leader of coalition of nations that should help stop intervention of those countries who oppose the
people of Afghanistan and who have imposed this war and instability on the
people of Afghanistan and stop their aggression and oppression – they should
look for the terrorists and those troops in other places especially in
neighborhoods of Afghanistan. Pakistan is a very aggressive country; intervenes
in affairs of Afghanistan, but most people now realize that Pakistan’s intervention
is aggressive to this country and most of the people... local people and also
people around the world now realize that this is the truth. This is a fact, not only
Pakistan, but other countries that also finance terrorist organization
organizations. We hope that President Obama will put pressure on them to stop
supporting the terrorists.”

Her message to the people of the United States was consoling with empathy and
appreciation for sacrifices made on behalf of Afghanistan:

“First of all, my condolences and my sympathy with the bereaved families who
have sent their sons and daughters here to serve and help in the security of this
country and those who have lost their sons and daughters in the war on terror,
our dear sympathy to them. And secondly, that we can say that those who sent
their sons and daughters as a result of very good will, pure will for a very pure
purpose and objectives, which is to help the innocent people, the defenseless
people of this country, this is very appreciated.

RS’s message to Afghan men and women is unyielding and speaks to the core
values of her people:

“We ourselves should build our country and make decisions for ourselves; other
people cannot build our country. The British people came here and we saw what
they did. They did not build our country. They came here and they left. Russians came with so much heavy power but then they left. Now we see that the troops of around 34 countries and also the civilians of 34 countries are here and they want to help, but we can see that with all these heavy military equipment, they still cannot annihilate terrorism. I call on my people at this point; our country of Afghanistan is once again engaged in a historic test. And the people of the world are looking at us wondering what we are doing. We hope that our people will leave behind all the differences, sociopolitical and cultural, and become united to help each other to restore peace, stability, and development... I think we have the ability.

At the end of the interview, I thanked her for the opportunity, and she graciously accepted and jokingly apologized, saying that she was sorry if she talked too much, “Because I am not diplomatic,” she joked.

Participant AA:

I met AA in his office with two of his male colleagues. All three spoke English and did not need an interpreter. AA asked if his colleagues could participate in the interview, which I agreed to. He is a middle aged man in his mid-to-late fifties and his colleagues were younger men in their mid-to-late thirties. They run an Afghan NGO that was established in the mid-1990s during the Soviet invasion. AA said the organization focuses on:

“Education and capacity building for vocational skill training for women and youth development, community development, rehabilitation, and humanitarian assistance, peace building and conflict resolution.”
AA asserts that during the Soviet war and the Afghan civil war, which lasted over two decades,

“The government was not able to assist people, therefore, we established to work with reliable people especially in the field of education, so the main objective was to help our poor people in Afghanistan.”

He further posited that his organization has developed good working relationship with donors,

“We have a good reputation among the donors, and we have projects and work in all Afghanistan, so it’s a good value for us that I think we have a good reputation.”

On the changes that have taken place since the arrival of the U.S. and Allied forces, AA argued that the times were different:

“During the times of Taliban and Mujahidin we didn’t have a stable government and there was a lot of fighting, a lot of discrimination, and everything was suspicious, and our infrastructure was destroyed. So if you compare then with this time, a big change has come to Afghanistan. We have government, everything is okay.”

Asked to name some of the things that made a difference, the main thing he said was support from the international community. He hopes that the international community remains in Afghanistan and continues to support the Afghan people:

“We hope that the international community does not leave, so that they continue to support our people, maybe we will have a good future. We need support of international community from security side and financial side.”
Responding to what has been some notable setbacks, AA asserted that a lot of developments have taken place since the U.S. and international forces arrived; however, he noted:

“If you look day by day, the security is bad. Bombarding the community with women, children, and poor people, this has created bad effects.”

Another issue that he sees as a setback for Afghanistan is the issue of brain drain. He posited that many Afghans leave the country for more secured environment. AA argues that:

“Nowadays, our business people and all other people are leaving Afghanistan, they cannot do business here. They cannot invest here, so this is very bad for the people of Afghanistan. We should try to remove this idea from the people. For example, we have salary for a soldier at $200, if you increase this salary to $400, maybe our army will be more motivated. If you give them good weapons, this will also have good effect to them.”

He shared an example of how the lack of funding is affecting Afghan NGOs:

“Actually last night I was meeting with NGO director at the Ministry of Economics. He said after two months, more than 200 NGOs will be closed due to no funding, because international community funding is now going directly to the Afghan Government. But the government cannot provide help to the rural areas, the remote area. NGOs have the capacity to work in the remote areas, and bring assistance directly to the people, so we requested from international humanitarian community to cease relations with Afghan government and support the local NGO sectors.”
Warning on consequences of not maintaining a strong Afghan economy, AA asserted that:

“If the person is jobless, especially young people, they will go to another direction. If they are not working in Afghanistan they will go to Pakistan and they will join with the Taliban or terrorism. So this is a big problem. Nowadays it’s very important for the government of Afghanistan and international community to create jobs for the people, so they are able to support themselves and their family.”

As asked what he considers the biggest challenge facing Afghanistan after the U.S. drawdown in 2014, he thought for a moment and said,

“If they go out, maybe Pakistan will directly attack Afghanistan, maybe terrorism will come back to Afghanistan and there will be no chance for Afghans to participate and get education or other opportunities; and they will kill a lot of people. They will destroy the buildings; destroy our businesses, and our infrastructure. Many people are now trying to leave Afghanistan because of this reason.”

After a moment of sigh, AA argued that the civil war is still going on, implying that Iran and Pakistan do not have good relations with Afghanistan:

“So maybe people think that it will be dangerous for us. If the Afghan army is equipped with modern weapons, maybe it is our job that we should defend our country, our people.”
Asked what message he had for President Obama, AA’s response was firm and direct:

“You should not leave Afghanistan.”

He called for a gradual withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan, arguing for:

“Step by step you’ll strengthen our army and then withdraw some of your forces, and then the Afghan defense will be strong. We should be 100% sure that Afghan people can defend themselves, and then you can finally withdraw all forces from Afghanistan. If it’s really what America wants, the first thing is to destroy the source of terrorism, strengthen our army and then the problem will be solved.”

AA’s plea to the American people was:

“You should help us to develop our infrastructure and to enable us to earn with our own hands. Not to make us like a human society that when you leave, then we will not be able to earn on our own. If you are a friend of Afghanistan, as we have committed that you are our friend, you will help and enable us to earn our living and build our infrastructure on our own.”

On his message to the Afghan people, AA made it very blunt and direct, appealing to their pride as Afghans:

“This is our country. It is our responsibility to defend our country, we are Muslims. We believe in Allah. They will create for us problem, they will solve our problem. We believe that everything is from Allah.”
At the end of the interview, I thanked AA and his colleagues for participating in the study, and asked if there was anything that they would like to add; one of the colleagues was quick to share his experience:

“I am working in the community as a project manager for different projects. Whenever I’m talking with people in the remote areas, all of them talk about the insecurity – that there is no security in their communities. They believe that all these things are created by the foreign people, by Americans, by British, and by Pakistanis. The foreigners are supporting the terrorists in the remote areas who are coming from the neighboring countries. All of them believe that if the foreign people leave Afghanistan, maybe the security will be better.”

Participant ABD:

I met ABD in his office with my interpreter. He immediately began the interview by informing me that there were two sides to the effects of the war on terror on the people of Afghanistan. He said,

“The positive aspect and the negative aspect - the positive answer is that the situation that prevailed during the Taliban regime, and before the Taliban regime, has fundamentally changed because the people have found a proper, and more suitable environment to breathe freely. For example the educational system was completely dysfunctional at that time, but now we can see that the educational system is running well, and Afghan boys and girls are going to schools. Also the Afghan population, which was taken hostage by a few people, now they have been rescued and have become free. We also witnessed that some changes have occurred in the economic life of the Afghan population.”
He posited that since the war on terror:

“Ethnic differences which existed during the previous regimes have been eliminated to some extent. For example, ethnic differences between Tajiks and Pashtuns, as well as linguistics and tribal differences have diminished. Now the people have been sensitized. Their awareness has been raised. They know now about the constitution, the laws of the country. For example they can now look forward to the next five years for new elections with the possibility to vote for someone different if the current leaders are not doing their job. During the Islamic emerge of Taliban; they were just a handful of people who came to power and they ruined the country. They governed the country, the entire nation, but a lot of the citizens of Afghanistan never saw them or knew what they looked like. He came to power and he disappeared just like others before him, they also came by force and reigned over these people by force. But now these people have this kind of mentality that this is a constitutional government and they have the right to elect their leaders, and the courage to vote.”

Asked how hopeful he was about the future of Afghanistan, he answered in the affirmative:

“I’m very much hopeful because I have witnessed the change of many of these regimes since the time of Soviet Union. I was a student when the Soviet troops occupied this country. After the Soviet withdrawal, I have also seen the conducts and misconducts of the other regimes. I can say this confidently that I’m really hopeful for the future because of the differences, the changes that have happened compared to previous regimes.”
Asked what he felt were the big challenges facing Afghanistan, he spoke of the fact that there were no retributions for crimes and atrocities committed during the Taliban and Mujahidin regimes. He argued that the oppressors from the past regimes are now in power:

“The people who have created negative image among the general public, among the population of the country, they came to power after 2001. The public mentality was that those people who were the oppressors, who have committed all sorts of crimes and done all sorts of cruelty to the people, will confront justice, but unfortunately that didn’t happen. They are the owners of the government. They are the powerful. Now the people’s only hope is that maybe these criminals will die by natural death or they get too old and unable to stay in government.”

ABD decried the ways in which the war lords and the people in power prior to 2001 used and manipulated humanitarian resources for their own benefits. He asserted that:

“Humanitarian aid which was intended for the grassroots; for the poor people and needy people, was looted by all these kind of criminal people, warlords and powerful people”

He argued that the corruption was fuelled by the Afghan government and the contractors:

“It’s because of all the contracts and all the things they took, and distributed all the funds and resources amongst themselves. If the general public are certain or assured that those people who betrayed their trust are not allowed to continue to benefit from government and international contracts, I can certainly say that the
situation will improve very well. The people hoped that the international community will help us to stand on our own feet. But unfortunately, what the people were expecting from the international community didn’t happen. So these people lost hope.”

Asked how he thought hope could be restored to the Afghan people, he said:

“Well, the rule of law is very clear in Afghanistan. Afghanistan as you know is a traditional and religious society, but traditional cannot suffice for the solution of all problems and neither can religion can address all the issues. So, how can we integrate both tradition and religion to the rule of law? For this purpose, we have promulgated a number of very good laws for the benefit and interest of the whole nation, the entire population of the country. Unfortunately, these laws for the welfare and well-being of the Afghan society cannot be implemented because the power still exists in the hands of those people who have already broken the law, who have been criminals; the warlords who continue to oppress the Afghan people. If the U.S. government and the international communities, through their influence, can oblige the Afghan government to bring these people to justice, then we can say this can be implemented and it would give hope to the people.”

On his feelings regarding Afghan readiness for the U.S. drawdown of forces from Afghanistan in 2014, ABD insisted that the international community cannot afford to make the same mistake that was made before 9/11/2001:

“In my personal opinion, the international community cannot repeat the mistake of former Soviet Union, who abandoned the country. Then surely Afghanistan will take the same path as they took before 2001. Key point that I would like to convey
is that this is not an Afghan war; it is not a war by Afghans. Also, it is not a religious Islamic war. Rather, this war is a war by the neighboring countries. If tomorrow, our neighboring countries make the decision to stop this war, then I can assure you that the next day, there will be no war in this country, no fighting. This is a regional issue, a regional conflict. There is a claim that if the international troops drawdown, Afghanistan can turn back to a safe haven for Al-Qaeda. No, it’s not the truth, Afghan mentality cannot accept any kind of external power, be it Russians or Al-Qaeda or Western powers. After the start of the war on terror, Afghans took their guns, their rifles and dismantled those Al-Qaeda troops and other hostile troops who live in their hideouts around the country, so by their own guns, Afghans eliminated them. They despise them.”

Asked what his message was to President Obama, ABD began by noting shortcomings with the President:

“One of the problems of President Obama is that he has ignited the fight in the region and he wants to abandon this region in flames. First, if I were in President Obama’s place, I would have given a very clear message to all the people that we will never leave this regime. Secondly, terrorism infiltrates from centres beyond the borders of Afghanistan. And I would have declared to these terrorist centres anywhere they are that we will come after them. If he would convey these two messages to the people of Afghanistan, we can hope that the situation will improve. Otherwise, the situation will be worse than the situation which existed in 1992. We have a proverb in Afghanistan, it says; when you lift a piece of stone, if you find out that you are powerless, you cannot lift it, kiss it and leave it in its
place. In the beginning, in 2001, they knew that they could not lift the stone, they should have kissed it, should not have come to Afghanistan. But now they have actively intervened in this situation, they have come to Afghanistan and they should not abandon it. The whole area is engulfed in the fire particularly Afghanistan and I think he has to put out this fire. I do not mean that the U.S. should never leave, there cannot be perfect peace until the foreign troops leave the boundaries of Afghanistan, but before leaving they should put off this fire.”

ABD recounted his observation on the first air strikes by American and coalition troops; he was on the way to a village outside of Kabul. He counted

“667 army trucks of Taliban loaded with weapons and armed personnel leaving the city of Kabul. So what happened to them? Where did they go? Later they came to my village and I asked them where they went, because they wanted to buy some drinking water. They said, ‘we went to Khost and from Khost, we will cross border to Waziristan and they will not chase us in Waziristan.’ The point is that the Taliban are not sure about the goodwill of the international community; whether they are really here to help the people. I know people who are benefiting from all types of services, able to go to school; they use internet and other facilities they enjoy. But the parents or elders, they are in the war season, the fighting season. They come and fight, you see. So the point here is that the public perception is that the international community is actually not here for the well-being, for the welfare, for the peace and prosperity of our people, but here for their own objectives.”
Asked what he meant when he said President Obama should not abandon the region in flame, he replied with:

“I mean the Durand Line, but I do not want to trust the Durand Line itself. I want to trust the centres, the training centres; terrorist training centres here, this area, that side of the border. From this area, the flames of war and fighting infiltrate to Afghanistan, but also to some parts of Pakistan as well. So this area, they should deal with. They should not leave this region inflamed.”

When asked who the enemies of Afghanistan are, his immediate response was:

“Intelligence. Intelligence services of neighboring countries.”

Then he said,

“I have a question for you. Where was Osama bin Laden killed? This area which is called federal area, tribal area where these training centres exist, but this area is not under the direct control of the federal government - these people are not controlled by the central government of Pakistan. The people who have control of this area also want that this area to be inflamed. The Pakistani policymakers have repeatedly declared this fighting between the Taliban and Afghanistan Jihad; a holy war. But the same Taliban, when they fight in Pakistan, this is a treachery. This is not a Jihad. This is treachery. This is betrayal.

Elaborating on what he meant by “intelligence war” as the enemy of Afghanistan, he argued that:

“If Mullah Omar, the leader of Taliban, Engineer Hekmatyar the leader of Hizb-i-Isslami and Haqqani die today, do you think that the war and these flames of
war would be extinguished and the war will end? No. Because Mullah Omar is one person, but behind him, there is 10 Mullah Omars. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar is one person, but behind him, there are 10 of Gulbuddin Hekmatyars. Haqqani is one person, he is quite old. They call it Haqqani Network, but he is one person, and not able physically to do something. That’s why this war will not end. That’s why I’m saying it is intelligence war. It’s not Afghan war.”

Asked what would be his message to the people of Afghanistan, he emphasized the condition that has existed in Afghanistan for decades:

“Afghanistan is a war-stricken country. So the law is the only source for hope. I want the Afghanistan people to act according to the law, to help in the implementation of the law of the country. For example, the attack which happened yesterday, what could the government do? The government cannot predict people. So the people themselves, they should be tolerant and they should not lose hope and help in the implementation of the law.”

Participant RMD:

RMD was the founder of an Afghan NGO in 1990, which was based in Pakistan, and worked with Afghan refugees who had been displaced during the Soviet invasion and the Afghan civil war. He shared:

“At the beginning we just voluntarily did some activity for Afghan refugees without the support of donors. And now this organization is a great mission organization, which is working in many other provinces of Afghanistan. Our headquarters is here in Kabul and we have eleven offices. Our main activities are
education, community peace building, community organization, advocacy, and community health programs.”

Asked what the challenges are now compared to the 1990s, he argued that:

“It was difficult time, but to be honest, it was not as difficult as this moment because during the communist regime, the Taliban, and the Mujahidin times, the process to provide help to needy Afghans was easier than now, because now the government bureaucracy is very difficult. Several projects are taking more time to get missions from the government and provide help to the people. The security situation is also not good for NGOs to work in Ghazni or Kandarhar, and other provinces. So every other day, some of the staff of the NGOs are kidnapped by the enemy, but by the help and support of the community, some are released. It’s not easy to work now as an aid worker in Afghanistan.”

Responding to the question of what he perceived to be the main challenge facing Afghanistan, RMD reiterated his earlier point:

“The main challenge is security because most areas are too insecure for the government to go in, but the NGOs are able to go there and service the people. For example, our organization is working in five districts of Kandahar and in Ghazni; these two provinces are very insecure. But fortunately, the NGOs have the support of the community. This is a very good sign for NGOs. In some areas, the government does not exist, but still the NGOs are working there especially for health programs or MSP program, which are the mission programs of Afghanistan. And to be honest, now Afghan civil society or NGOs are very supportive of the government. Unfortunately sometimes, the government does not
always support the Afghan NGOs, even though they are the main implementers of major government programs. For example the health salaries program, and the mission solidarity programs - Afghan NGOs are the implementation partners for both programs; covering secure and insecure areas of Afghanistan. This is the reality of the situation.”

He made the argument that NGOs and CSOs are the main implementers of government programs in rural insecure areas of Afghanistan, asserting that:

“NGOs have credibility in the communities - They are working for us…The people are very supportive of the NGOs, but they do not trust the Afghan government.”

Asked why the lack of trust with the government, RMD posited that:

“This is a big problem in Afghanistan. The first problem is that the government is not honest with the people. The main issue is corruption, because of their own interest, because of the interventions of war lords. The government employees are working for themselves, not to support the people. I give you an example, sometimes the people have conflict, maybe a land issue and they want to solve it through the government system, it takes months and years especially if the conflict is with someone powerful. Sometimes, the people are happy to go to the Taliban to solve their problem and the problem is solved in one or two days. But in the government system because of corruption, it takes years and a lot of money needed to pay bribes.”

He accuses the Afghan Government of being “inefficient and corrupt.”
Responding to why the Afghan NGOs have been able to gain and maintain trust with the people, RMD noted that:

“Afghan NGOs have been serving the communities for many decades during the different regimes. NGOs are independent bodies, and they are not at the side of the Taliban or at the side of the government; they are just there to assist the people in need. They share their plans with the community and involve the people in the decision making to solve the real needs of the people. For example, we have 28 clinics in Ghazni, and we have the health services for very poor people in the village. They know that they will lose these services if anything happens to our organization, so they are very protective and supportive of NGOs. If any of our staff is threatened or kidnapped, the community will come together to take action for their release.

Asked where the insecurity is coming from if the communities are trusting of the Afghan aid workers, he emphasized that:

“The enemy or the Taliban are still alive - the insecurity is not coming from the community, the insecurity is coming from the Taliban or from those who are involved in war. They want to make money. Kidnapping NGO workers is one source of making money for them.”

Asked if he was hopeful that things would get better in Afghanistan, he took a moment to ponder on his response, stating that no one could answer such a question because as he noted:

“The situation is very complicated.”
He argued that:

“The military strategy is not clear; we don’t know what they are doing in the future... Are they staying or are they leaving?”

The second issue is the Afghan government:

“The Afghan government system at the moment is very corrupted. They do not have any strong strategy to take action against the enemy. And unfortunately, we are not sure about the quality of the army and the police. They are not committed to helping the people and they are not committed to keeping peace in Afghanistan.”

The third issue has to do with the upcoming election in 2014:

“Will Karzai return to power? Are the same people also coming to power again, after the election?”

Finally, he raised the issue of neighboring Pakistan and Iran:

“These countries, they are supporting the Taliban” he said, “Is the international community taking action against these countries? If not, what will happen? To be honest, Pakistan is a more powerful country than Afghanistan, they have interventions and training areas for the enemy or the Taliban - for example, yesterday’s attack which happened in the middle of Kabul. These are questions that are causing uncertainty in Afghanistan. Since the last 12 years, the life of the people did not change; the poverty rate is still the same, and the social service is still the same. This makes the people afraid of what will happen if the international community pulls their support and leaves Afghanistan. When the
people have no hope, they cannot feed themselves and their families; the number of the Taliban is increasing because when the people are poor and cannot help themselves, the Taliban is active and recruiting. The people do not have any chance.”

RMD continued to argue his point that the government of Afghanistan is not prepared and not a match for the more prepared Taliban, even though the government has more resources and should be able to overpower the Taliban militarily. He argued that:

“In the surrounding district, there are big number of police and big number of armies, but it takes only 25 to 35 Taliban to cause damage and uncertainty in the districts. We have two types of Taliban. The first is the local Taliban, which is often made up of local gangs fighting against government. Their goal is to make money. The Afghan government knows that, yet they are not taking any actions against them or trying to arrest them. The other Taliban come from outside of Afghanistan and they want to destroy the bridges and cause major panic to bring mistrust between the people and the government. Unfortunately, the government is not fighting for the people.”

Asked what the international community can do to help the Afghan government maintain control of the rural areas, RMD jokingly replied with a question:

“What they can do in the future or now?”

The investigator retuned with the question: What can they do now? RMD claimed that the international community in Afghanistan is unable to properly assist the government because the communities are from different nations, so they are not working as one
cohesive force. He posited that the international communities have different agendas and different objectives:

“UK has their own agenda. America has its own agenda, and some of the European countries have their own agenda. They should have a strong and collective action and strategy to fight against terrorism, to fight against the Taliban and to bring pressure on neighboring countries of Afghanistan. Also, they should put pressure on the government of Afghanistan to bring an end to the corruption, to end poverty, and stop the continued influence of the war lords.”

He argued that the international communities have spent billions of dollars in Afghanistan, yet the people remain poor, their lives have not changed, and noted:

“Most of the people are poor and they don’t have any food or social services from their government or from the international community. The people of Afghanistan are angry and tied of the corruption and the mis-management of funds that should be used to assist the poor and needy Afghan families. A lot of money is used to pay foreign and Afghan contractors and government officials – very small percentage is used for the poor people’s needs. Afghans do not have trust on this government. The people are very afraid of what will happen to this society after 2014 when the international community will leave Afghanistan, because they do not trust the Afghan government.”

Asked if he was implying that the Afghan government and the Afghan securities were not ready to take over and maintain peace after the U.S. drawdown in 2014, RMD asserted that:
“If the situation continues like this, yeah, the people of Afghanistan will have no hope for peace. But we have a good sign from Italy, Germany, and Australia. They want to train our army and provide them with military equipment to fight against enemies of Afghanistan. But the big problem is the misunderstanding and mistrust between the government of Afghanistan and the government of America. For the last two years, they are talking about the strategy; agreement should be signed between Afghanistan and America.”

When asked if he had a message for the President Obama, his initial response was:

“I cannot talk with President Obama. He’s far away from here... But if I’m talking to him,” he said, “The first thing I will ask is for the troops to not leave Afghanistan, because if they leave Afghanistan, once again, this area will be the centre of terrorism, because it’s a complicated geographical land area, Iran, Pakistan, China, and many Asian and Arab countries will keep this area for Al-Qaeda and terrorism. Before they leave, they should invest here and help bring peace here. They should not forget the people of Afghanistan, these people are very poor and some of them do not have a piece of bread to eat, they need a lot of support, and the support should come through the right way. Unfortunately, the contractors from the U.S. are eating all the money and not serving the people. The local NGOs are committed to provide services to rural communities; we just need the help of the international community to provide us with the funding to meet our obligation to our Afghan people who need all your help.”
RMD’s message to the Afghan people is to work together and build Afghanistan. He is quite resolute on his claim that it is not up to the international community to build Afghanistan. He called for Afghans to take

“Strong action against all injustice and to bring pressure on Afghan government and the international community to have a fair election. Help each other and work together to build one strong Afghan society. Take part in the upcoming election. I know that the international communities are not building this country, we must build our country.”

Participant EIJ

I met EIJ in his office with my translator. We were well received with hot green tea and Afghan pastries. We were later invited to join him and his colleagues for lunch, but we were unable due to another interview engagement.

Responding to a question of how things have changed since the war on terror, EIJ shared:

“After 2002, a lot of improvement happened in the life of the Afghan people. After the formation of the government in 2001, humanitarian activities increased, a lot of construction companies were established in different parts of the country and a lot of people had work. PRTs - Provincial Reconstruction Teams were providing and funding projects and almost everybody in the provinces benefited. So these activities continued until about 2009 when the PRTs decreased their activities, which eventually forced many provinces to close their activities; causing many people especially the youths to become jobless.”
He posited that after the PRTs closed, the Afghan government ordered to close all the construction companies and blamed the PRTs and the donors for providing funds directly to Afghan NGOs, instructing them that:

“They should not give funds directly to Afghan NGOs, or CSOs; instead the funds should go through the Afghan Government.”

EIJ argued that the government policy contradicted humanitarian and donor principles, because he said that:

“Donor organization policy does not require NGO funding to be made through government institutions. So this created a lot of problems between the Afghan government, the donors, and the Afghan NGOs.”

EIJ continued to make the case against the new government policy of not funding Afghan NGOs directly, but through the Afghan central government. He insisted that:

“The NGOs are not working to make profit, it's on their mandates, but the government wanted to have the money for themselves. However, we know of all the issues with the Afghan government and corruption. They claim that they want to support the private sector, so they are creating more construction companies and the new projects are funding through government, but still the corruption level is very high. This is affecting many Afghan NGOs as activities continue to decrease.”

EIJ believed that Afghan NGOs have played very important roles in Afghanistan; he asserted that Afghan NGOs:

“Always have a good relationship with the people because they are from the people and they work for the people. They consult with the people, and they use a
participatory approach to address local issues, community issues and problems. I’ll give you an example; there was an irrigation project in a very insecure village that the government could not dare to step in. But this NGO went in to the village and carried out irrigation activities for the benefit of the people with the support and assistance of the people.”

Explaining how Afghan NGOs interact with the communities, he posited that:

“Before they start activities, they go to the area and make an assessment with the village people. So the people have so many needs. They collect the needs, they do the assessment and they prioritize the needs to determine which one is most pressing and begin to address the problem in that order. Through consultation with the people, they find out the problem and then they try to help resolving the issue together with the people. For example right now, we are constructing three clinics in the country, and each of these clinics is situated 100 to 150 kilometers from the center of the province. So we talked with the people because for the construction of the building we need a piece of land, and the people allocated us a piece of land in one of the old graveyards and now the work is continuing there and we hope that in the next two months, we’ll have the whole clinic ready for service. But if it were the government seeking a piece of land for the clinic, we will not have it - that would take much time. Because of the direct contact with the community, they name their needs in their province. So they were ready to give us that piece of land, and now we are in the process of providing their needs. There is no Afghan government in that village, but the Taliban is there, but because the community is directly working with the NGO, the Taliban does not say anything
because people in the village are working. They needed the project according to the work place need assessment we had done.”

Asked if this type of working relationship with the communities could be developed with the Afghan government, EIJ’s response was not optimistic; referring to the government he asserted that:

“We have them like enemies. They are very hostile to the NGO people. And we don’t know for what reason, they are not cooperating with the NGOs as necessary. Because of the prevailing corruption in the government, when we want to get something approved, we have to spend a lot of money to pay off the corrupt people. So this is one problem. But with the community, it’s no problem because the community is not corrupt. With the communities, they assist in the resolution of the problem, but with the government, they are very unprofessional. Unfortunately, nowadays every project has to go through the government; you have to meet the demands of these corrupt officials. They don’t care if it’s for the welfare, or the wellbeing of the country, or for the interests of the people. It doesn’t matter how your project is useful for the people, all they care about is feeding their own pockets.”

Asked why the insecurity against Afghan NGOs continues to increase in light of the good relationship developed between NGOs and the communities, EIJ posited that:

“Security is a big challenge; on the one hand it is caused by the Taliban and the terrorist, and on the other hand, the high rate of unemployment amongst the youth today. The youths are jobless, they cannot find work, and this is a very serious problem for Afghanistan. There are no opportunities for the youths; this is an
important factor of insecurity. If we are able to provide job for people so they won’t participate in any illegal actions, I suppose, they won’t go to the terrorists. When they have jobs, they have money for their consumptions and they can take care of their families.”

Responding to the question, who are the terrorists, EIJ was quite direct in his answer:

“Yes of course Taliban are the terrorists, and the people who are supporting the Taliban. But in the villages, where people have no work, no hope or opportunities to make a living, yet they must find means to provide for their families. If the government is not able to have access to the people in the villages, but suppose the terrorists or the Taliban have access to the people. The terrorist or Taliban are able to provide them with food and money to take care of their families, they are going to listen to the Taliban and do what the Taliban wants them to do.”

Asked what he thought of Afghan preparedness for the drawdown of troops in 2014, he said,

“People feel hopeless. People are disappointed when they hear that in 2014 the drawdown of the international troops will begin, because they have seen the situation in the 90s and they see that these powerful people, the commanders, will create the same situation again in Afghanistan, especially in Kabul. The general public mentality is that if the foreign troops leave the country and abandon Afghanistan like they did in the past, the situation will get worse and they will have no hope. But it is a transition, and we have to make ourselves ready for the transition. However, if the international community does not stop their assistance, there won’t be any big issue for us, because once again people will be engrossed,
will be involved in activities, they will have job, they will have money. We need the international community to continue their support because still we need it.”

Asked who the enemies of Afghanistan are, EIJ’s response was swift:

“Clearly I say that the enemies of Afghanistan are two neighboring countries; Pakistan and Iran. They do not want Afghan people to live in peace and prosperity, and they have spies and intelligence here to disturb the normal and peaceful life of the people. They want us to have unstable government so that they can find their benefits under such kind of government, because every day over 45,000 Afghans travel to neighboring countries for goods and services not available in Afghanistan. So a lot of Afghan businesses go to our neighboring countries.”

EIJ talks about business people and government officials whose families live outside Afghanistan; he argued that some have dual citizenships:

“They are dangerous because their families are living abroad comfortably, their children don’t know about suicide attacks, bomb blasts, the miseries of the people they cannot see. Their families live a good life and these people are not interested in the peace, development, and stability of this country. This is just my personal opinion.”

Asked who are the friends of Afghanistan, his response was that:

“Those people in governments who assist people of Afghanistan, who serve the people of Afghanistan, who help our people and who do not want to abandon and forget Afghanistan and try to help in different ways and different sectors. It is also
a reality that during the past recent history of this country, the Americans and the allies have been the best friends of the Afghan people. Despite making some mistakes, they have provided good services for the people of this country and the people consider them as friends. And I do not say this in front of you because this is from my heart. They helped us in the construction of the rules, and now we have rules in the country, now we have good health terms in the country, we have educational centers and schools and we have a very modern communication system, such as mobile phones and internet services. Before 2011, Afghan people did not know about internet.”

Regarding his message to President Obama, EIJ was diplomatic:

“First of all, I wish good health for President Obama and I want him not to forget Afghanistan, to assist our country, our army, our police, and our people, to strengthen our security and help our reconstruction and development. We need security, but most of all we need improvement in our education so we can improve ourselves and be able to stand on our own feet. We depend on the knowledge of foreigners who are coming in Afghanistan who are the advisors of the ministers or our president and so on and so forth.”

To the American people, he is thankful for the sacrifices made on behalf of Afghanistan and the Afghan people:

“To the people of United States of America who have helped us, who have sacrificed their services and the lives of their sons and daughters, for the service and peace and security of this country. You have sacrificed life and blood for the people of our country, for that we are very grateful.”
To the Afghan people, he calls on them to:

“Unite, and to join hands in the establishment of peace and security in Afghanistan, and also the reconstruction and development of the country. Become educated; do not to be misled by misinformation and provocations, and to distinguish between friends and enemies. If Afghans are educated, we are sure that the enemies of Afghanistan will not be able to take advantage of them.”

Focus Group Participants

At the beginning, focus group participants were given post-it notes and instructed to list their perceptions and feelings about the following issues: Insecurities and violence against Afghan aid workers, Challenges from U.S. drawdown of forces in 2014, and the Effects of War on Terror on Afghan aid workers. Participants were given fifteen minutes to write, and the post-it notes were collected and taped on walls outside the conference room. Participants were instructed to walk around and examine entries on the post-it notes and mark the number “1” next to any entry of their choosing. Most participants walked around and viewed the post-it notes on the wall; however, no markings were noted on any of the post-it notes. The following are the categories with the themes that participants listed on the post-it notes.

Category: Insecurity and Violence against Afghan Aid Workers

P. In insecure areas, people call aid workers spy of the Americans

P. Before the U.S. Forces arrived, Afghan aid workers were able to work among the people, but after the arrival of the U.S. Forces, the Afghan aid workers were perceived to be helpers of U.S. Forces.

P. The West pushed workers, people think
Category: Challenges from U.S. Drawdown of Forces in 2014

P. Security situation might worsen if the Afghan national forces are not fully equipped.

P. Interventions from neighboring countries will increase

P. Insecurities will increase

P. Resurgence of Al-Qaida in Afghanistan

P. Weak local security and governance capacity

P. Interventions from other nations, polycentricism, resurgence of insurgent and innocent killings

P. Funding opportunities may decrease

P. Cost of living may increase

P. Reduction in humanitarian aid funding

P. Rise in unemployment as job opportunities decrease

P. Economic, military, and political transition

P. Anarchy after withdrawal of foreign troops

P. Intervention from neighboring countries

P. Increase in security problems

P. Pull out will affect aid workers’ engagement in Afghanistan

P. Survival of present government, survival of the CSOs, and decrease in funding

P. Change in economic activities

P. Rise in insurgency

P. People lost hope due to perception of unrealized objectives
Category: Effects of War on Terror on Afghan Aid Workers

P. Created new opportunities

P. Insecurity spreads in Afghanistan by Western politicians

P. Security concerns increased for aid workers

P. International forces failed to bring security to Afghanistan, thus aid workers were negatively affected

P. NGO expectations on security were not met

P. Security has been major challenge for NGOs – aid workers kidnapped and killed

P. Civilian casualty high, and insecurity is major problem

P. Insecurity hampered aid service to needy communities

P. Security has been major challenge

P. Access to communities

P. Development programs designed by donors and international communities, not matched with actual needs of the Afghan people

Focus Group Discussion

1. Concerns Over U.S. Drawdown of Forces in 2014

Female Speaker

“In 2005 I was able to go to Kharwar district of Logar, but now I cannot work inside the cover. For me as an Afghan, if the Americans drawdown it will not change anything, they did not come here to support Afghans, they came for their own agenda, and they will go by their own agenda.”
Male Speaker

“With the withdrawal of American forces in 2014, there may be many complications, but the basic ones are unemployment and economic transition. Foreign aids will decline as foreign troops withdraw, and many international organizations will leave Afghanistan, causing a decline in economic activities. As the International Military forces withdraw, responsibility for Afghan security will shift to the Afghan National Forces. However, the insurgents are beginning to take on our forces, so how will the Afghan National Forces be able to secure the country without the ISAF?”

Male Speaker

“Political transitions - in April 2014 the Presidential elections will take place in Afghanistan during the same time the Americans are drawing down forces, this I believe will bring some sort of chaos and belligerence because there is always conflict in Afghan presidential election. There is no concern for people’s right; there is no concern for the widow who is walking outside the streets scavenging woods to cook some food for their child. There is no concern for an orphan whose father was killed in the corresponding conflict of radicalism and extremism.”

Male Speaker

“After the drawdown in 2014, what I think we need is the military transition from ISAF forces to Afghan Forces. However, we need a good political transition of the government; we want the International community to maintain impartiality during the elections in Afghanistan. Any interference from the International community in the election will highly affect humanitarian aid workers in the
villages and communities. Afghanistan needs technical support from the international community to have good governance, transparent, and fair election in Afghanistan.”

Female Speaker

“The Americans have implemented their own agenda in Afghanistan. For me as an Afghan, we are already here, we are leaving in insecurity; after 2014 we will still be living in insecurity because they did not have the agenda to support Afghanistan, they have their own agenda, to have their base. Finally they have their base in Afghanistan, now they want to go back home, but the problem is still here; lots of civilian causalities. We are victims.”

Male Speaker

“For me these are important issues that we will face, in general the drawdown may worsen the law and order situation and the security situation in Afghanistan. The capital flight component is a very important problem, economic decision has started, civil war definitely will be there; increase in interference from the neighbors; political instability, brain drain will also be there, downsizing in aid from the International community for the civil societies, so their survival would be at stake. Definitely, the number of civil society organizations will be decreased to a minimum level. Law and order situation will be severely devastated and also we will lose the achievements of the past years.

“The brain drain means the technocrats, the professional people, the academics, scientists and economists - they will all leave Afghanistan for safer places with greater opportunities. As we are the veteran or eye witnesses of the
last civil war in Afghanistan, during those 30 years, there were no intellectuals, no economists in Afghanistan. Many migrated to Pakistan or to the other countries. There are no investment opportunities anymore, the people are afraid of what could happen after 2014. Everyone in Afghanistan is of the opinion that the institutions will be devastated after 2014; this will definitely affect the whole system whether it is the security or the government.”

Male Speaker

“I believe that the civil society activists, the NGOs and the local communities have been in conflict with Afghan politicians, warlord and regional powers, even before the arrival of the U.S. and International forces. This conflict has continued since the occupation, and we expect it will continue after the U.S. and the international forces leave in 2014.”

Male Speaker

“After 2014, if the international communities will leave Afghanistan, I believe there will be restrictions in funding for aid programs. Many Afghan NGOs will close down their activities and engagement in Afghanistan. But who will be affected? I think the people, the beneficiaries; the poor people will be affected. My request is that the International community will continue their financial support of Afghan aid programs after 2014.”

Female Speaker

“Not a lot of money comes to the aid community in Afghanistan from the International Military Forces. Most of the aid comes from non-political aid agencies, not the military. If we continue to have funds from non-political
organizations who are honestly interested in the development of Afghanistan, the
drawdown of forces in 2014 will have little or no effect. So, if the military are
going, they can go.”

Female Speaker

“I believe that funding for Afghan NGOs will decrease if the International Forces
leave Afghanistan in 2014. During the past 12 years, we have developed many
programs and a lot has been achieved. Reductions in funding will create many
problems in Afghan economy; we could lose many of the things that have been
achieved as different people and different political and social ideologies of the
past begin to return to Kabul.”

Male Speaker

“Regarding the pull out of Western forces in 2014, I think it will not have any
particular effect on Afghan NGO’s, since there is no direct working relationship
with Western troops. NGOs design their own projects according to their own
constitution…”

Male Speaker

“President Obama’s plan to drawdown U.S. forces from Afghanistan in 2014 will
affect many things in Afghanistan. First of all, this drawdown will immediately
weaken Afghan forces readiness to be equipped to protect Afghan people because
the U.S. government is giving these arms and weapons to Pakistan. Such a move
will destabilize the security of Afghanistan. This is a very bad situation right now,
and it will become worse after the withdrawal of the international community and
their forces from Afghanistan. It will negatively affect Afghanistan.”
2. Role of Afghan NGOs since War on Terror

Male Speaker

“NGOs and CSOs have played very important roles during the last twelve years, but sadly enough, some have been involved in corrupt activities that have affected the trusting relationship NGOs and CSOs have enjoyed with the people. The people of Afghanistan depend on the aid community to be honest and not corrupt like the government officials. If the NGOs are not honest to provide better service for the people of Afghanistan to achieve goals and to do what the fund was given for, this will be a big blow for the hope of the Afghan people. This is their hope for a stable society. This is a big problem. Money is coming from the donors, but going to Dubai. There is no benefit for the people of Afghanistan. Only a few people benefit from aid fund to help the poor people; they put it in their pockets. For what reason? We need accountability from NGOs.”

Male Speaker

“When the Russians invaded Afghanistan, millions of Afghans took refuge in the neighboring countries, particularly in Pakistan. At that time, the international forces rushed to the ground for the assistance of the refugees and other needy Afghans inside Afghanistan. That was the beginning of aid activities in Afghanistan - they started to deliver services to the refugees in Pakistan as well as those inside Afghanistan.

“In 1988 the International community and the United Nations encouraged some qualified Afghans to establish Afghan NGOs to take the lead role in providing aid to needy Afghans. About 15 Afghani NGOs were established
including some Arab NGOs and together, they started their aid work in Afghanistan. Well, they were very active inside Afghanistan. Particularly the Afghan NGOs who are on the ground and delivering humanitarian services to the people of Afghanistan. But the situation changed after 1992 when the international community abandoned Afghanistan, paving the way for the Mujahidin to come to Afghanistan. That is why the terrorism, Al-Qaeda and Talibanism came to Afghanistan. That was, I think, the fault of the International communities led by the United State that they failed to fulfill their commitment when they abandoned Afghanistan. After the Mujahidin, the Taliban came to Afghanistan, believe me, this was the period of underground activities in Afghanistan. There were no International NGOs in Afghanistan due to the Taliban, only the UDP was allowed to operate here - I think the editor was Mr. Jordan; he was the only staff in Afghanistan. But the NGOs were very active, they were engaged in the entire aid activities - everywhere they can go. There was security, I think if they could upgrade their operation or their activities all over Afghanistan because there was security, there was no killing – aid workers felt secured. But the insecurity started in 2001 when the International Forces came to Afghanistan.”

Male Speaker

“To be very specific I think the role of the NGO in civil society is to make awareness and to create an environment that will foster change in society. If we look into the enrollment rate of education; we have 9 million children going to school. Many NGOs have played very important roles in promoting the awareness
and importance of education to the people and the communities to send their children to the school; both females and males, because they hadn’t been doing that during Taliban time. Many NGOs also played important roles in adult literacy. And now that we are practicing democracy, NGOs and CSOs play very important roles in building political awareness in the communities. 20,000 community development concepts at the village level and they established the CDCs and democratic process. We have elected government, we have parliament, and we have commission consultants. NGOs played a very important role in informing the people and motivating the people to participate in the elections by providing them access to polling stations.”

**Male Speaker**

“In my opinion, the very significant role of Afghan NGOs is the delivery of humanitarian aid services to needy Afghans in secure and insecure villages and communities around Afghanistan. Due to the present security situation, our government and other international supporters are not able to deliver services to the needy people in certain environments. Besides, I agree with my friend that some civil societies are acting like a bridge between communities and governmental authorities. But in my opinion, this is a very risky task that sometimes puts aid workers in danger.”

**Male Speaker**

“Generally, the CSOs play major roles in the field of education, health, access to justice, good governance, anti-corruption, peace and contribute to the solution, the elimination of violence against women, human rights, and the democratic
process. As a result of these efforts, we have some significant achievement, which have significantly improved the social condition and quality of life of our people. In fact, human capital has been developed as a result of work done by CSOs and NGOs with literacy rate, which has been increased because of the literacy intervention in different adult populations in the communities. As the Minister of Education mentioned, there are 63 million school-going children in total. Now the government is more transparent, the people are able to evaluate the performance of their leaders; we can see their policies, how they’re implemented, and whether the policies address the needs of the people. The civil society organizations and the NGOs play a vital role in this regard in the bridging between the community and the government.”

Male Speaker

“The Afghan NGO’s and the CSO’s have played key roles in the society because of their presence and persistence to work and continue to provide aid to needy Afghans in difficult parts of the country with high insecurity problems. They have helped a lot of people; five years back, NGO’s were weak, but now the country is really strong.”

Male Speaker

“I believe that the role of the construction companies have been very weak. One out of ten, 1/10th part of the funds will be spend in Afghanistan; most of the construction money will go out of the country. It doesn’t mean for the stability of Afghanistan. You build a road today and it will be destroyed within two or three months, even the cement or the concrete that they used; just one spill of water, it
starts to show its quality. So this is a main issue in Afghanistan and the role of the workers are so weak in the construction companies because of the corruption and the lack of quality control, no one cares about the future stability of the buildings in Afghanistan. Now the CSOs are working for the social accountability and providing information on anti-corruption.”

3. Insecurity is a big problem

Researcher: Some of you have also alluded to the idea that Afghans are not terrorists. Okay. The argument was made that Osama Bin Laden was not killed in Afghanistan. Alright! My question is, if that is true, which we know he was killed in Pakistan, but if it is true that there is no terrorism here in Afghanistan, the key question for me becomes what are the reasons, therefore, for the increased insecurities and violence against humanitarian aid workers in Afghanistan? Where is that coming from?

Male Speaker

“The big reason why people are thinking that terrorists are in Pakistan and increasing attack against the aid worker in Afghanistan in a short sentence, aid worker countries don't want Afghanistan and the people to have a stable country. If the question of terrorism in Afghanistan was asked two or three or four decades ago, this would be in fact true but there are reasons that terrorist are... terrorism is brought to Afghanistan. Before I mention in the last question radicalism and extremism was used as a tool by the western countries, U.S. and rest of its allies bring terrorism to Afghanistan through these tools and question that terrorists are not in Afghanistan, that is a fact. They are not actually pinpointing and finding the right country with terrorist activity. Actually, the hard house and the hard bed of terrorism is our neighboring country Pakistan. That has been interfering from a decade mostly from the last decade and targeting our many entities; governmental entities, political entities, educational entities but the reason for the
insecurities are not...from only this hard house and hard bed which is our neighboring country, many other countries are intervening in our country, they have their interests. Before... three decades or two decades ago, the world warriors and many great nations were suggesting and contemplating that their Constantinople conquer the western countries and the Asian countries but nowadays Afghanistan has been made an apogee for... in order to conquer other countries, actually it’s a war not on terrorism because if it would be a war on terrorism, their leader has been killed about a year ago but the main focus is on their empire.”

Male Speaker

“I think to be very specific... in fact it’s a reality that... I think before September 2001, the people of Afghanistan were not related to either Taliban or Al-Qaeda, but after that... this type of issues got to Afghanistan but if the situation would continue what could happen? Suppose the situation continues, definitely there would be insecurity, insecurity of Afghanistan. In insecure environmental situations the aid workers do not work properly, they cannot engage their work properly and they cannot deliver services... And from the other side if there is insecurity in Afghanistan so the aid will be decreased, the job employment for Afghans will be decreased and finally, the people of Afghanistan will be negatively affected. I think Pakistan has two main reasons for keeping terrorism in this country. First, they have an issue with ... Kashmir issue between Pakistan and India. Second one is Pakistan does not like to have a terrible country beside its side which is Afghanistan #1. I think very soon the water... the water level will
... because it is very important. We have a loss of water level... they are using our water for irrigation, for their land for these things. If we have a stable powerful government in Afghanistan and so we will do in this country. Very soon we will have lots of ... we will have control of the water; we can use our water for our own objectives. So Pakistan would not like it. Besides that, we have a good relation with India. Pakistan never wants another country beside it, to like India, something like this, because they’re afraid from that...If we have a stable Afghanistan and with a good relation with India, this will make the situation twice as bad.”

Researcher: Thank you. Where is the insecurity coming from? Why do we continue to see more violence against humanitarian aid workers? Where do you think it’s coming from?

Male Speaker

“From my point of view, this again has external factors, which get cozy in connection with our neighbors and perhaps to some other countries also. As was mentioned by our colleagues, in particular, a neighbor country cannot tolerate a stable, progressive, developed, and independent Afghanistan. The main issue covered in these phenomena is the durian line and the issue of Pashtunistan in addition to Pakistan’s control over the rulers in Afghanistan. That’s why we have witnessed the heavy coverage of the conflicts between Afghanistan and Pakistan in the media, and the clashes in the recent days on the durian line between Pakistan and Afghanistan. This was also stated in Hamid Karzai’s statement addressing the nation that Pakistan had repeatedly requested him to discuss the durian line issue and Mr. Karzai has clearly told them that this is not the time to
discuss it. This shows that there is mistrust between Kabul and Islamabad, which could possibly lead to fears from Pakistan that Afghanistan may be developed in the future, where border line issues continue to create conflict between the two countries. This situation is not ideal for Pakistan; hence it is important for Islamabad that the Taliban remains viable. Osama was targeted there; all the other terrorists are out there, the international community exists in Afghanistan. If the international community can finger point any terrorist based stations in Afghanistan, they have to come in front of the media and say that in this province or in that district, in this village, or that village. So, Pakistan with all those intentions in mind want to raise people there, brainwash people there, send them from there to here, tell the people that Afghans are non-Muslims, it's time for Jihad, you have to fight the foreigners, you have to fight the Afghan government... This is intended to keep the Afghan Government and the struggles of the international community weakened.”

Male Speaker

“Insecurities in Afghanistan started when America and the coalition forces came to Afghanistan. America did not want the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, why will Russia now allow America to be here in Afghanistan? All the nations in Afghanistan are here protecting their own national interests. Russia does not want America occupying Afghanistan or having influence over middle Asia. Also China as a major economic power does not want America in its border, and China thinks that if America remains here, the Muslim travelers in China will rise against Chinese Communist Government. Many countries want us to push back
on America; it’s not only Pakistan, not only Iran that are causing the insecurities in Afghanistan.”

Male Speaker

“Main point is insecurity, which is fueled by high unemployment, and culture of systemic corruption. Many nations are making Afghanistan an apogee for their conflicts, specially the neighboring countries. Whenever any Western country wants to intervene in a Muslim country, they use radicalism and extremism as a pretext; however, these ideologies have origins outside of Afghanistan. Since the arrival of the NATO led ISAF, the neighboring countries have been intervening in Afghan affairs. We have not created war or terrorism; Osama bin Laden was not an Afghan, he was an Arab.”

Male Speaker

“In recognition of the result of the Bonn Conference in 2001, many people including the aid workers hoped that there would be security in Afghanistan. That the International Forces will bring security to Afghanistan, but unfortunately this did not happen; they failed to bring security to Afghanistan and the aide works were affected negatively. For example, in 2005 or 2003 I could go to every part of Afghanistan, but now even you cannot go to the Maidan Shahr.”

Male Speaker

“Based on my point of view as an Afghan living in Afghanistan, the challenges that we have been faced with the problems that we have been witnessing for over 30 years were created for us from the top. Either development or international community or within the ordinary Afghan, the issues come from the top. Even
when we compare the Taliban era to this time, with the overwhelming support of
the international community, I think my colleagues who are sitting around the
table, will all agree with me that security situation in Taliban’s time was much
better than the security today in Afghanistan. They would agree with me even if
you would have bags of gold with you and go wherever you want to go and
nobody would dare to stop you or take something from you. Nobody would dare
to put you down. Nobody would dare to ask you where you work, what you do or
something like that. You would have been able to travel to different parts of
Afghanistan with full confidence. However, there were limitations as my
colleagues would agree, during the Taliban era, people were not free to pursue
their dreams and live independently. Unfortunately, the Taliban fighters were not
Afghans, most were born outside Afghanistan, and they were recruited and
controlled from foreign countries. They were not really from among the people of
Afghanistan. I would also say with confidence that at that time, the belief was that
there was no border between Islamic countries; there were even some people in
Pakistan who thought that Afghanistan was the 5th province of their country. We
have heard about conflicting issues in Afghanistan; between Afghans, but
instructions on how to resolve them were received from Islamabad. I have heard a
story of someone who was arrested in Kabul at that time by Taliban and he was
released by instruction from Islamabad. On the order hand, the existence of
international community in Afghanistan, under the theme of supporting Afghans
was really about the war against terror. Like you know, at first if we think there is
no proper definition even for terror. What do we mean by terror? Terror is a
person who terrifies people. A terrorist could be anybody. We do need to have a proper definition for terrorism. If terrorism means to keep an innocent person locked up, the definition could go much wider and much broader. For example during the era of communists in Afghanistan, even Dr. Najibullah was willing to have peace talks with Mujahidin at that time, but they did not accept it. He was surrounded from all sides and finally the government collapsed. Kabul was occupied by Mujahidin at that time with support from Pakistan, and from America, which provided Mujahidin with weapons and money. In my opinion, our biggest mistake as a people was that we did not support our leaders at that time...”

4. A Major Issue of Trust

Male Speaker

“Another thing which is affecting the aide work in Afghanistan is that the Afghan NGOs in the very beginning established good relations with the people of Afghanistan. Because they were working very closely with the people in the communities, they were able to design programs based on the needs of the people. But when the PRTs came to Afghanistan, this trusting relationship with the Afghan community was affected very badly; aid workers were confronted in villages and communities and asked if they had a gun, or weapons on them. This suspicion affected the relationship between Afghan aid workers and the Afghan communities.”
Male Speaker

“Since 1980, Afghan NGOs have been working in Afghan villages and communities. After the arrival of the international troops, Afghan NGOs were the only ones that could go into certain insecure communities that the International NGOs could not go. The main role of the Afghan NGOs on civil society has been the bridging between the people, communities, international communities as well as the local governments. Afghan NGOs have been the main implementers of aid programs and project in the villages and rural communities around Afghanistan, including those designed by the international communities and the Afghan government. They have established good relations with the people. The people trust them and they are able to work even in insecure areas. The challenge for the Afghan NGO is how to get more benefits to needy Afghan people.”

Female Speaker

“It is true that Afghan aid workers have established good and trusting relationships with the Afghan communities, but on the other hand, we lost our reputation in the community because some NGOs were receiving funds from organizations that did not have the best interest of the Afghan people. The people know which countries are supporting Afghanistan and in what manner they are providing their support. If the money is coming from U.S. Military or from PRTs, the people know their aims; why they came to Afghanistan, their objectives, and what they want to achieve. We’re losing our reputation day by day because of the objectives of some aid organizations. These organizations are operating on their own interest, and not in the interest of Afghan people.”
Researcher: Can you expand on that? How does that affect the reputation?

Female Speaker

“Some Afghan NGOs, who are receiving money through PRTs and implementing PRT projects, are looked at by the people as not being honest and trusting with the Afghan people. The people know that they are implementing PRT objectives. For example, PRTs sometimes give money to build mosque, but the people know that PRTs have no interest in expanding Islam, but for some particular reason they are giving money to build the mosque here.”

Male Speaker

“Before the U.S. and the NATO forces came to Afghanistan, the Afghan people believed that the International NGOs were working with us and were here to help us. They didn’t mind who was controlling the gun; whether it was the Talib or Mujahid. After the coalition forces came here, the International NGOs started aligning themselves to their different national interests. They started operating by their national policies and objectives; no longer focused on providing humanitarian aid to assist desperately needy Afghan people who have become victims of the war on terror. So the people lost their trust on the International NGOs. Many of the International NGO projects are now implemented through the strategies and stipulations of their home countries. This is a major issue of trust and accountability; there is no quality control, there is no follow-up of their projects, there is no impact assessment for the projects, and that’s why people have lost trust and no longer rely on the International NGOs. The question that most Afghan people are asking is that the Taliban was toppled within 48 hours by
the U.S. and International Forces, and they occupied the whole country in 2001, how come now, the Taliban have been very strong and powerful? American troops came within two nights and conquered the whole country, but now, more than 100,000 troops from NATO and other countries are here in Afghanistan and we still have insecurity. So the people are asking, how come now there is no security in Afghanistan? The Afghan people do not trust any troops even the aid workers. This is the biggest issue. So if you compare with 10 years ago, Afghanistan should be more stable and secure, but every day the security is getting worse.”

Male Speaker

“America thought that if Russia controlled Afghanistan then we will start up another scenario by the name of Pakistan. That’s a big problem between Afghanistan and Pakistan. America planned how to defeat Russia to prevent their progress. They made a lot of agendas, a lot of strategies. They supported the Mujahedeen for their mission. And also they provide money. They provided the military supply and the other countries who were involved in the business of fuel, Arab Countries; they all put their money to support of America. They have that big investment to protect, to save their business in Afghanistan. Yeah. So finally America become victor...they got the victory and then the next scenario was to create an unstable government under the leadership of Mujahedeen. But their plan was for the Mujahedeen government to fail because they have the next plan - first to give a bad name or a bad point of view from the Islamic Government for the people of Afghanistan throughout; this is Muslim leaders. What are they
doing? That was the…the keys, a bunch of keys for dispute. And second they had another plan to create a military force like Taliban, they named after by the suggestion of Saudi Arabia and MI-6 England and America CIA. Did provide this plan together to provide and later force to attack Mujahedeen government and to remove them from power. This was the second scenario. And after that Taliban came to…the push back of the Northern Alliance to North of Afghanistan people saw a lot of economy weakness, a lot of society problems. So they once again, the experience of such a government that was commonly played Muslim leaders. This all was how to bring a new idea for the people of Afghanistan for example democracy. People of Afghanistan were looking for a new sort of government that will provide a better life for them. The coalition force, the international community, so for example I can see how NATO and all those country who are members of NATO - how they came to Afghanistan. This was not only to bring democracy for our country. Not only to have a democratic government, to provide better life for the people. They are all big project. For example the pipeline of gas from Turkmenistan to India. This is a big project. All the agents working there have the agendas of their countries. Especially those NGOs, they’re foreign not…Afghans. For example, what Russia wants? What China wants? What does India want? And what American or Western countries want? The centre for Western country is from the Middle Asia to the East…the South of Asia. For example, we have to draw a pipeline from Turkmenistan to Afghanistan to Pakistan, India and Bangladesh to Indonesia. It’s a big economical project. They have their economy entrust in the world. The war against terror…”
5. Corruption and Mismanagement

Male Speaker

“If the United State gives funds to USAID, and USAID gives this money to United Nations. United Nations gives this money to International NGOs, and the international NGOs give some of the money to the Afghan NGOs. Then the Afghan NGOs will implement the project, but only a fraction of the original amount will reach the intended beneficiaries of the aid. This is because the Afghan NGOs do not have direct access to the funds. This is a big challenge for Afghan NGOs and CSOs.”

Male Speaker

“I believe that if we are to bring about real peace in Afghanistan, a real peace for humanity throughout the world, we must remain honest in our policies and our strategies. If we are spending money and if we are initiate developmental programs, but if they are not honest, I think it would be difficult to achieve our objectives. The positive side with the presence of the international community in Afghanistan was that a huge amount of money was poured into this country. Although obviously we see this as a positive point, but based on my experience, we also witnessed a lot of disadvantages with this. For example, we did not have high rates of corruption in Afghanistan in our history. A huge amount of money came, but it caused high levels of corruption throughout the country where the development is involved, where international community is involved – unfortunately, even some civil society organizations were also involved. My colleagues would argue with me that we did not have so many civil society
organizations in Taliban’s time. If you will investigate, you will find some donors who do not consult with the Afghan Government. They develop their programs unilaterally, and seek agencies to implement them. The government is not in the picture, the people are not in the picture. The problems of the people are not identified, and so, they are not met. For example, if someone gets sick and goes to the doctor, first of all, the doctor will diagnose the problem and then based on the problem, prescribe the medicine. In our case, it’s the other way around, there are no diagnostics, there is no effort at identification of the real problem of the people, but instead, they continued spending money on programs and projects, under the pretext of development for the people. If there is honesty, there would be success. If there is no honesty, there is not going to be success at any level. As far as the U.S. and the international forces drawing down in 2014, I think if there is honesty taken into consideration, the foreign troops leaving will have impact, and their staying will have impact. If there is no honesty considered, there will not be any impact, and their leaving will have no effect on the Afghan people.”

Male Speaker

“The other issue of why this corruption came into Afghanistan and why the Afghans are involved in it - the high ranking levels of the decision makers are all robbers and non-competent people. And as we see the commanders involved, they are just observing new participants when they are working in the authorities on the high levels. So that causes what? Increase of instability of Afghanistan, no security and then the high level of corruption in Afghanistan and the community is also not encouraging...”
Male Speaker

“I guess NGOs and CSOs played it good role, but they also played a deficit role - they were also involved in corruption, accounts, in addition to that, this deficit working of the services ...the society or Afghanistan. People are all involved in corruption, so the need for NGOs because government was corrupt. NGOs have to be created to apply and implement the services for the people. If they are not honest, as they are, most of the NGOs are not honest to provide better service for the people of Afghanistan to achieve goals and to do what the fund was given for them. We need honest NGOs. After 2014 and each year ahead, for a long time, and for a stable society, there is a need for accountability, which includes what and how it will be accounted. This is a big problem. Money is coming from the donors, and going to Dubai. There is no benefit for the people of Afghanistan. Only a few people printed this agenda, just do this and this, and finished, over, and they put it in the pocket, for the few guys, where is the reason, what was the reason? We need the NGOs with our honest impacts. We have to go to that accountability for each of the organization. Not only NGOs, governmental organization and NGOs have to support accountability.”

6. Human Rights and Rule of Law

Female Speaker

“If the Taliban are true Muslims - Islam does not stop girls from going to school, Islam does not stop girls from getting education, Islam does not stop girls from going to work, but this is the Islam that was created by America and Pakistan.
They create this vision of the violation of human rights, and the violation of women rights for the Taliban.”

Male Speaker

“Yeah just in argument to comments on the issues just to with the, to do with the specifics corresponding the withdrawal or after the 2014 this situation of Afghanistan I have noted down some, for me is important issues that we may face, you know, in general it may worsen the law and order situation and the security situation in Afghanistan. In capital flight this is very much important problem, economic decision has started, civil war definitely will be there; increase in interference from the neighbors; political instability, brain drain will also be there, downsizing in the aide from the International community for the civil societies so their survival would be at stake. There is definitely the number of the civil security will be decreased to the minimum level. Law and order situation will be severely devastated and also we will lose the achievements of…”

Themes

Themes were derived from in-depth face-to-face storied narrative interviews from ten Afghan humanitarian aid workers—three women and seven men—and from a two-hour focus group discussion panel of twenty Afghan humanitarian aid workers. The narrative face-to-face interviews generated six themes; each theme had four or more sub-themes. The dominant themes from the interviews are as follows: insecurity is the biggest challenge; international communities should increase funding to Afghans; do not abandon Afghanistan; building trust with Afghan communities; corruption and rule of law; human sacrifice, and the cost of conflict. The focus group discussion generated seven themes;
each theme also had four or more sub-themes. The dominant themes from the focus group are as follows: many changes came to Afghanistan; Afghans are not terrorists, war and insecurities are imported from other countries; drawdown in 2014 may lead to chaos, but orderly transition may help avoid chaos; the U.S. and international community abandoned Afghanistan in the 1990s; insecurity is a big problem; Afghan NGOs have credibility and trusting relationships with Afghan communities; and corruption and the rule of law.

Many of the themes and subthemes generated from the narrative face-to-face interviews and the focus group discussion overlapped and shared similar conceptions. Table 1 (Themes and Sub-Themes) shows the major themes and sub-themes for the face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions.

Table 1

Themes and Sub-Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTERVIEWS</th>
<th>FOCUS GROUP</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Insecurity is the biggest challenge</strong></td>
<td><strong>1. Insecurity is big problem</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Insecurity started in 2001 when the international forces came to Afghanistan</em></td>
<td><em>Before the U.S. and international forces came to Afghanistan in 2001, there was security</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Afghans are not terrorists; insecurities are not from Afghan communities, but from Afghan neighbors</em></td>
<td><em>Afghan aid workers negatively affected by the international communities’ inability to bring security to Afghanistan</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Other countries should not make Afghanistan the base for their conflicts</em></td>
<td><em>Every day the security is getting worse</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Youth joblessness and lack of opportunities lead to social unrest and insecurities</em></td>
<td><em>Key role of Afghan aid workers is to deliver services to insecure areas</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Security situation in Taliban’s time was much better than the security today in Afghanistan</em></td>
<td><em>Security situation in Taliban’s time was much better than the security today in Afghanistan</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. <strong>Do not abandon Afghanistan</strong></td>
<td>2. <strong>The U.S. and international community abandoned Afghanistan in the ’90s</strong></td>
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<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- We cannot lose what has been achieved</td>
<td>- When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan millions of Afghans took refuge in the neighboring countries, particularly in Pakistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Thankful to Americans for their sacrifice, do not abandon Afghanistan</td>
<td>- Terrorism, Al-Qaeda, and Taliban came to Afghanistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Help us develop our infrastructure with our own hands</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3. <strong>Building trust with Afghan communities</strong></th>
<th>3. <strong>Afghan NGOs have credibility and trusting relationships with communities</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Afghan NGOs have credibility and trusting relationships with Afghan communities</td>
<td>- Afghan NGOs established good relations with the people of Afghanistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Military incursions into Afghan communities cause mistrust</td>
<td>- Collaborations with PRTs affected trust with Afghan communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Military strategy is not clear – international community is not cohesive</td>
<td>- Afghan NGOs do not have direct access to funds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Mistrust between the government of Afghanistan and the U.S. Government</td>
<td>- Funding source may affect Afghan NGO credibility in local communities</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>4. <strong>Corruption and Rule of Law</strong></th>
<th>4. <strong>Corruption and Rule of Law</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Rule of law and equal rights for women and all Afghans</td>
<td>- Unemployment, cronyism, nepotism, and official malfeasance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Afghan government is corrupt and inefficient</td>
<td>- No quality control, no project follow-ups, and no impact assessment of projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Acceptance of election results and respect for political opponents</td>
<td>- High level of corruption in Afghan governments and institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- NGOs and CSOs must also be accountable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- The problems of the people are not identified; they are not met</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 cont.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5. <strong>International communities should increase funding to Afghans</strong></th>
<th>5. <strong>Drawdown in 2014 may lead to chaos, but orderly transition may help avoid chaos</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Increase funding to avoid disaster after drawdown of forces in 2014</td>
<td>- Economic, military, and political transition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- International donors not helping to fund Afghan aid programs</td>
<td>- Make peace not war with Taliban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Funding increased in 2001</td>
<td>- Reduction in aid funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Used personal funds to start humanitarian aid agency</td>
<td>- Increase in interference from neighboring countries may lead to political instability and brain drain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- May lose what has been achieved</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6. <strong>Human sacrifice and the cost of conflict</strong></th>
<th>6. <strong>Many changes came to Afghanistan</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Every Afghan family has lost someone to war</td>
<td>- Infrastructural development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Sacrifices on behalf of Afghanistan</td>
<td>- Development of human capital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Brain drain as professionals, experts, and intellectuals emigrate to other countries</td>
<td>- Social justice and equal rights for women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Good governance and rule of law</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>7. <strong>Afghans are not terrorists; war and insecurities are imported from other countries</strong></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- We have not created war or terrorism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- America and Pakistan created Taliban for Afghanistan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The base of terrorism is in Pakistan, not in Afghanistan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Osama bin Laden killed in Pakistan</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

For the efficacy of this study, I used the following themes to best represent and give meanings to the most significant aspects of all the face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions that yielded the thirteen themes noted above: Security/Insecurity; Funding; Trust; Abandonment; Achievement; and Interventionism. These six themes and their sub-themes will be discussed in the following section. As I discuss the themes and
the sub-themes, direct quotations from the participants are used to support the themes, and the participants’ voices from their stories are annotated in quotes and italics. To provide clarity and richness to the themes, occasional references are made to existing literature and research studies that validate the stories and experiences of Afghan aid workers in Kabul, Afghanistan. Also included are some instances where participant’s stories contradict other participant’s accounts, or contradict existing literature. In the following section, I analyze each theme with a fundamental objective of giving voice to the narrators of these dominant narratives. I believe that these themes are exhaustive and best represent the perceptions of the participants of this study.

**Security/Insecurity.** The words security and insecurity were used interchangeably by most of the participants in the study to convey the same feeling of concern for safety. They often spoke of security in the context of insecurity or feeling insecure, and vice versa. The issue of security or lack of security was always at the core of this research study and has framed the main issues that have guided this narrative study.

All interview participants, including the focus group participants, viewed the security situation in Afghanistan, particularly in the rural areas of the country, as one of the major issues facing the Afghan government and the people of Afghanistan. Much of what is said about the need for security is a manifestation of the insecurity that permeates all sectors of Afghan society.

**Sub-Theme: Insecurity is the biggest challenge.** The main underlining issue in Afghanistan is the lack of security; hence, the United Nations and other experts have termed the condition in Afghanistan a complex political emergency, where there is
“considerable breakdown of authority” such that government institutions no longer have the capacity to protect its citizens from insurgents who operate with impunity (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 1999, p. 6). The issue of insecurity extends beyond attacks on innocent civilians; it is systemic—a structural collapse of law and order with rampant corruption, indicative of an underdeveloped third world nation where the citizens yearn for change and structural development, but the leadership and the powerful lack the capacity and the will to create and enact meaningful change to protect and improve the lives of its citizens.

AB felt that the biggest challenge facing Afghanistan is that there has been no retribution for crimes and atrocities committed against Afghans during the Taliban and Mujahedeen regimes, and argued that the oppressors from the past regimes were now in power with no indications that they will relinquish governing power to a more forward thinking and progressive generation of leaders. According to AB, the former war lords who oppressed the Afghan people and “committed all sorts of crimes and done all sorts of cruelty to the people” are now the ones running the government. He believes that the people’s only hope of eventually governing their country with progressive leaders who are more interested in making a difference for all the people of Afghanistan is that these “criminal will die.”

SD saw the correlation between insecurities and the lack of law and order or the inability to enforce existing laws that are meant to protect the people and provide a pathway for the development of Afghanistan. She agreed that the major challenge facing Afghanistan is the insecurity and suicide attacks. Her organization’s focus was to educate Afghan women, so they were able to set up the first “intensive education” center in the
area, but they experienced difficulties due to insecurities in the area, not only as a result of the Taliban presence in the area. She was also disappointed to discover that most Afghans were not willing to send their daughters and their sisters to school for fear of reprisal from the Taliban or others in the communities.

“We wanted the women to be educated and this school was running very well. It was the first one in that area. The area was insecure; the Taliban presence was in that area, so the school was stopped.”

For RMD, the biggest issue facing Afghanistan is the kidnapping of humanitarian aid workers. He said that even though the communities rallied to their aid, nobody wants to be kidnapped, so in the end the poor and needy Afghans suffer from deprivation of their basic needs. According to RMD, the “security situation is not good for NGOs to work.” He said that Afghan humanitarian aid workers were kidnapped frequently, making it very difficult he said, “…to work now as an aid worker in Afghanistan.” This issue of violence against humanitarian aid workers in Afghanistan was one of the key factors that prompted this investigation into the lived experiences of Afghan humanitarian aid workers.

A focus group participant said that the lawlessness and the structural violence that undermines the Afghan society create an environment that is enticing to their neighbors whose goal is to create mayhem among the people and destabilize the political and economic sectors by interfering in Afghan affairs. However, he felt that much of the insecurities in Afghanistan are fueled by “high unemployment” and a “culture of systemic corruption.” He claimed that many nations are making Afghanistan an “apogee” for their conflicts, particularly referring to the neighboring countries of Pakistan and Iran.
AA sees the military incursions into Afghan communities by the U.S. military and NATO troops, as the major set-back since the war on terror. Even though the arrival of the U.S. and NATO troops brought investments, developments, and opportunities to Afghanistan, he argued that military incursions into Afghan homes affected relationships between Afghan aid workers and the local communities;

“Bombarding women, children, and poor people in communities has created bad feelings among Afghan communities.”

AA shared an experience during a visit to an Afghan community; he said the people blamed the foreign forces for the insecurities, including Pakistan, and claimed that the U.S. and NATO forces are encouraging and supporting the military interventions coming from neighboring countries. His hope is that when the U.S. and NATO forces leave Afghanistan, “maybe, the security will be better.” AA said that when he talks to Afghans in the rural communities, many of them are worried about the insecurities in their communities, and they blame “America and their allies” for bringing this condition to their country.

**Sub-Theme: Every day, the security is getting worse.** Several studies and reports have shown that the violence in Afghanistan has progressively worsened since the arrival of the U.S. and NATO forces, and pointed to the rise in violence perpetrated against humanitarian aid workers in complex political emergencies such as Afghanistan, Somalia, and Sudan. According to the recent Aid Worker Security Report (Harmer, Stoddard, & Toth, 2013), Afghanistan had the highest number of attacks on aid workers in 2012, with a number of 56 attacks compared to second place South Sudan with 21 attacks, with Syria coming in third with 18 attacks, and Somalia and Pakistan tied for
fourth place with 17 attacks. The report questions whether Syria is likely to “drop off the ‘most dangerous’ list, or become like Afghanistan, where aid workers are used as proxy targets” (2013, p. 3). A focus group participant articulated the point of view that security has worsened since the arrival of the U.S. and NATO forces, and argued that security was better in Afghanistan during the Taliban regime. He made a comparison between the Taliban era and the current period with the U.S. and NATO troops, indicating that in the Taliban era people felt safe walking around “with a bag of gold” without feeling threatened that someone might attempt a robbery. He said, “…nobody would dare to stop you or try to take it from you.” However, he also acknowledged the high cost of such security provided by the Taliban. With the heavy-handedness of the Taliban security enforcement and the loss of individual freedom and liberty, they created an atmosphere of fear and intimidation. He asserted:

“You would have been able to travel to different parts of Afghanistan with full confidence. However, there were limitations as my colleagues would agree, during the Taliban era, people were not free to pursue their dreams and live independently.”

He made the argument that the Western troops were in Afghanistan for the sole purpose of executing the war on terror and not for the progress of Afghans: “the existence of international community in Afghanistan, under the theme of supporting Afghans was really about the war against terror.”

Another participant from the focus group echoed this point of view—that the U.S. and NATO forces have not been able to bring security to Afghanistan—saying that people expected that their presence in Afghanistan would bring peace and security to the
Afghan people. He stated that during the early stages of the U.S. and NATO operations in Afghanistan, it was safe to travel to different parts of the country without fear of violence, but now, he said, “You cannot go to the Maidan Shahr.”

Another focus group participant saw the lack of security as a super power design, a certain belief that the first world purposely does not want peace in Afghanistan, so they (the U.S. and Russia) intentionally created these conflicts. He argued that:

“Insecurities in Afghanistan started when the coalition forces came to Afghanistan. America did not want the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, why will Russia now allow America to be here in Afghanistan? All the nations in Afghanistan are here protecting their own national interests. Russia does not want America occupying Afghanistan or having influence over middle Asia. Also China as a major economic power does not want America in its border, and China thinks that if America remains here, the Muslim travelers in China will rise against Chinese Communist Government. Many countries want us to push back on America; it’s not only Pakistan, not only Iran that is causing the insecurity and struggles against America.”

These are examples of narratives that are constructed from historical, social, and political conditions in environments. I am reminded of the many conspiracy theories that have often been used to explain phenomena in the American experience—such as the notion that the September 11 attacks were orchestrated by the U.S. government as a pretext to start wars in the Middle East, or that crack-cocaine and the AIDS virus were purposely developed to affect and destroy the African American communities, or even the more recent controversy of President Obama’s place of birth, which some continues
to argue that he was not born in the United States. In a University of Chicago research by Oliver and Wood (2014), they define conspiracy theory as:

Narratives about hidden, malevolent groups secretly perpetuating political and social plots and calamities to further their own nefarious goals. (Davis, 1971, as cited in Oliver & Wood, 2014, p. 1).

This University of Chicago study finds that “conspiracism” as they labeled it was not simply an “important form of public opinion, but expressive of some latent principles behind Americans’ political beliefs” (Oliver & Wood, 2014, p. 3). In other words, this is how some people express and construct meaning to explain phenomena that they experienced. Oliver and Wood conclude that conspiracy theories can help us understand how individuals perceive and ascribe meaning to events and phenomena that shape the world in which they live (2014).

A focus group participant wondered why Afghanistan continues to struggle with insecurities with all the efforts and military might of the U.S. and NATO troops. He had a sceptical view of the force presence in Afghanistan and questioned its commitment to maintaining security and protecting the Afghan people. He remembered when the Americans first came to Afghanistan; he said the Taliban was “toppled within 48 hours,” and asked why the Taliban have become “strong and powerful.” My participants wondered why the U.S. and NATO troops continue to have difficulties with a less equipped, and less sophisticated Taliban.

**Sub-Theme: Afghans are not terrorists; insecurities are coming from outside Afghanistan.** The belief that terrorism and insecurities that have been the main issues impacting lives in Afghanistan for many years, and even led to the war on terror, is not
home grown but foreign to Afghanistan. My participants claimed that the Taliban are not Afghans, after all, Osama bin Laden was not an Afghan, and that many of the Islamists and Jihadist come from outside of Afghanistan. Some have blamed the United States and its allies for not doing enough to stop the terrorists from entering Afghanistan. When I asked where the insecurity was coming from, RMD argued that the insecurity is not coming from Afghan communities, and blamed the Taliban saying that:

“The insecurity is coming from the Taliban or from those who are involved in war. They want to make money. Kidnapping NGO workers is one source of making money for them.”

AG argued that terrorism is not in the culture of Afghan people; he said that the terrorists and the Taliban focus on rural Afghans who are uneducated and take advantage of them. According to AG, the terrorists are foreign fighters from neighboring countries who come to Afghanistan and set up terror organizations. He said,

“They take advantage of the people’s kindness and start different terrorism activities; such as the one that destroyed the World Trade Center in America. These activities are international terrorism activities, not Afghan local terrorist activity.”

During my stay in Kabul, one of the attacks took place close to a compound where I had conducted an interview the previous day. RMD commented on the attack, asking how such attacks could still be happening in the middle of Kabul, the capital city of Afghanistan. According to RMD, the war on terror has been going on for about twelve years, but the life of the ordinary Afghan is not better; he said, “The poverty rate is still the same, and the social service is still the same.” Hence, he said the people are worried
of what will happen when the U.S. and NATO troops drawdown in 2014. He made the argument that:

“When the people have no hope, they cannot feed themselves and their families; the number of the Taliban is increasing because when the people are poor and cannot help themselves, the Taliban is active and recruiting. The people do not have any chance.”

For SP, her view is that Afghanistan needs development and not war, so people can find employment and be able to support their families. She argued that if people have no opportunities to earn a living and create better lives for their families, they are more likely to be seduced into terrorist acts. She insisted that the source of terrorism was never in Afghanistan and blames Pakistan for radicalizing Afghan youths. According to Burton’s basic human needs theory (1992, 1990, 1997), if people are frustrated from satisfying their basic need to provide for themselves and take care of their families, and if the structural violence denies them the ability to hope and diminishes their sense of identity, they will do whatever is necessary to fulfil their unmet needs, even if it means going against the social norms. Stern (2003) posits that such conditions lead to vulnerabilities that make individuals prime targets for jihadist and terror recruits.

SP called on the U.S. and the international communities to help Afghanistan to develop its own security, so that Afghan forces are able to secure Afghan borders with its neighbors. She called on the people of Afghanistan to “be vigilant” and not to be “deceived by fundamentalists and criminals against democracy who operate under the name of religion.”
According to Stern (2003), leaders of terrorist groups will often use religion to appeal to the hopes and sentiments of vulnerable young men and women they seek to recruit and radicalize.

On a hallway wall directly facing the entrance door into RS’s office hung a large framed writing in bold blue Arabic letters: “STOP THE VIOLENCE.” For RS, the violence is structural; it is not only against Afghan women, but against all Afghans.

Sub-Theme: Bridging roles endanger Afghan aid workers. The dominant narrative from my participants is that Afghan NGOs have played critical and significant roles in the war on terror. Afghan humanitarian aid workers are said to be the main ‘bridge’ between the local communities and the Afghan government, and between the local Afghan communities and the international NGOs. Several participants said that both the Afghan government and the international NGOs had difficulties building and maintaining good relationships with the Afghan communities. They claimed that in many instances, the Afghan aid worker is the only one who is able to go into certain rural Afghan communities where the Taliban has stronghold, but because the people desperately need the assistance from the aid workers, the Taliban is forced to look the other way and allow the relationship to flourish. RMD made the argument that NGOs and CSOs are the main implementers of government programs in rural insecure areas of Afghanistan. He made the argument that the people in the remote areas of the country do not trust the Afghan government, but they are very supportive of the Afghan aid workers. He said that the relationship between the Afghan aid workers and the communities dates back to past regimes.
“They know that they will lose these services if anything happens to our organization, so they are very protective and supportive. If any of our staff is threatened or kidnapped, the community will come together to take action for their release.”

However, RMD warned that the insecurity creates unsafe conditions for Afghan aid workers, particularly in the rural provinces of Ghazni and Kandahar where he said aid workers are kidnapped “every other day.” Even though most of the kidnapped aid workers are released with the help of the community leaders, RMD insisted that it is not safe to work as aid worker in Afghanistan. He believes that the kidnapping of aid workers is simply a strategy by terror groups to negotiate ransom payment for aid workers they hold captive; he insisted that aid workers are perceived to be good targets for ransom.

According to EII, Afghan NGOs have played very important roles in Afghanistan; he attributed this to the fact that the Afghan aid workers, unlike the Afghan government, have always maintained good relationships with the Afghan people. He argued that Afghan aid workers use a “participatory approach” to address and find resolution for community and individual issues. Most of all, he said, “they are from the community” and work for the benefit of the Afghan people.

“I’ll give you an example; there was an irrigation project in a very insecure village that the government could not dare to step in. But this NGO went in to the village and it’s carrying out irrigation activities for the benefit of the people with the support and assistance of the people. There is no Afghan government in that village, but the Taliban is there, but because the community is directly working
with the NGO, the Taliban does not say anything because people in the village are working.”

As I noted in an earlier section, NGOs are under pressure from the communities they serve to continue to provide aid services without risking their security, and pressured by the government to implement their programs; they are also under pressure from the military, donors, and different groups pressuring them to align with different strategies. In addition, they are pressured by “criminal groups and armed opposition groups (AOGs) who threaten their safety” (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam et al., 2008, p. 4). They compared the struggle between the NGOs and the military with being “engaged in a complex dance with shadowy partners whose moves are increasingly unpredictable and deadly” (2008, p. 74).

One of the things that AB pointed out during my interview was the nightly incursions by the U.S. military and NATO forces into Afghan communities. He felt that the military incursions affected perception of aid workers in Afghan communities and jeopardized the trusting relations the Afghan aid workers had developed with the communities over the years. AB feels that such incursions that cause the loss of life to Afghans in the communities could have significant consequences for Afghan aid workers after the pull out of U.S. and NATO forces. He argued that the people are not happy because the incursions or drone attacks cost them the loss of lives of their family members. He said that the talk in the communities now is that the Afghan aid workers are with “those people who were bombing the villages.”

AB argued that when the U.S. and NATO troops leave Afghanistan, the Afghan aid workers will be treated as the ones who worked with the enemies that raided their
homes at night. He warned that the Afghan aid workers cannot afford this type of image, noting that at first it was the collaboration with the PRTs, which he felt was a disaster and contradiction with the humanitarian principle of neutrality and independence and created more precarious conditions for aid workers in Afghanistan. For that reason he and other Afghan humanitarian aid workers opposed working with the PRTs, and they were very happy to learn that the PRT program was halted in Afghanistan.

A focus group participant agreed that the Afghan aid workers have played significant roles as ‘bridge’ for Afghan government and international NGOs to provide desperately needed aid in the Afghan communities; however, he pointed out that these roles might also be responsible for exposing Afghan aid workers in conditions of high risks that lead to violent attacks:

“Due to the present security situation, our government and other international supporters are not able to deliver services to the needy people in certain environments. Besides, I agree with my friend that some civil societies are acting like a bridge between communities and governmental authorities. But in my opinion, this is a very risky task that sometimes put aid workers at risk.”

Above all, the number one issue that the participants felt were responsible for the violent conditions is the issue of youth joblessness. They said that there are no job opportunities for the youths of Afghanistan; most of the youths are without jobs, and cannot find work to earn a living or support their families. They link the issue of joblessness to security—a key issue of basic human need—that if people’s abilities to fulfill their basic needs are frustrated, they will opt for other means to fulfill those basic needs, even if it means going against the social norm (Burton, 1990).
According to Stern’s (2003) interviews with Hamas leaders, they assert that conditions of joblessness and despair create favorable environments for recruiting jihadist, in their words, “Hardships always bring people back to God. It is like sickness” (p. 38). Stern posits that when people feel deprived and have no hope, but can see how others live in comfort and opulence, it is easy to understand why there is not a shortage of those who will volunteer for martyrdom (2003).

AB believes that there is a correlation between not having opportunities for youths and insecurities. He said that if there are opportunities in Afghanistan for young men and women to have hope—to have opportunities to earn a living and be able to provide for their families—they will not be the ideal candidates to be radicalized into terror groups or jihadist training camps.

**Funding.** Many of the participants saw funding as fundamental to maintaining stability in Afghanistan, and the lack of funding as a precursor to the violence and insecurities gripping their country. They argued that international funding is necessary and crucial for creating economic activities that will provide employment and opportunities for young Afghans, so they are able to earn a living and support their families. Such economic opportunities, AB believed, will deter young Afghans from fundamentalism and jihadist aspirations, which he said were preached to vulnerable young men and women by those he referred to as “some elements in our neighborhood” who are appealing to young Afghans about the holy war and martyrdom—that “if they kill themselves they will be going to Janna.” AB argued that “joblessness and unequal distribution of the revenues” were the main issues that caused past “skirmishes and fighting.” He maintains that if one has a job and he or she is able to feed themselves, and
provide for their family, they will not have the need to seek or join any jihadist or terrorist groups.

However, AB was quick to point out that the war on terror brought many developments to Afghanistan. Speaking about how the arrival of the U.S. forces in 2002 affected his organization, he noted that the arrival of the U.S. forces brought influx of economic activities to Afghanistan as many new businesses formed and old and dying businesses were revitalized.

**Sub-Theme: Afghan NGOs do not have direct access to funds.** This issue of lack of direct funding by donors to Afghan NGOs resonated with many participants. Particularly during the focus group discussions, one could feel the intensity and passion in the room. Voices were raised and everyone, including the participant who introduced the topic by challenging the dominant notion that Afghan aid workers were the main implementers of aid programs in the mostly insecure environments, agreed that the Afghan aid workers were able to go into insecure areas that the Afghan governments and the international NGOs could not go, because the Afghan aid workers “established good relations with the people and the people trust them,” but the participant said that the one challenge for Afghan NGO management is to determine the actual percentage of the initial aid given that ultimately reaches the final beneficiary. He gave an example to illustrate his point:

“*The United State gives some funds or money to USAID. USAID gives this money to United Nation. United Nation gives this money to International NGO. The international NGO gives some amount of that to the Afghan NGOs. Then the Afghan NGOs will implement the project and then a small amount will go to the*
direct beneficial of the product. So I mean the Afghan NGOs don’t have direct access to the funds.

The focus group participants agreed that this is a big challenge and a major problem for the Afghan CSOs and Afghan NGOs and their Afghan aid workers in the field. Azarbaiani-Moghaddam et al. (2008) alluded to the frustration and the dissatisfaction of local NGOs on several issues, particularly the debate on civil-military collaboration and NGO funding. The Afghan aid workers complained that often local Afghan NGOs were underfunded unlike the international NGOs.

Many participants talked about the lack of funding available for them to start their humanitarian aid organizations; most participants used their personal funds, quite often funds from family savings, while some had to discontinue certain programs due to inadequate funding. SD said that she sought funds to start up a kindergarten for children, in order to help Afghan women so they have a place to leave their young children and babies while they went to work. However, she was not able to get funding, so she used her own personal funds to start it, but she still needed money to keep it open. Unfortunately, she did not receive any responses from the proposals she sent to donors. When I interviewed her in Kabul, she was still upset about not being able to keep the kindergarten open. She said that most Afghan women who work have no one to take care of their young children while they are at work. That was why she felt the need to set up a day care for young mothers, but unfortunately, she said,

“No one helped, no organization assisted to fund this kindergarten and so I lost the kindergarten... they do not pay any attention to this pressing problem.”
RMD shared similar experience with donors not directly funding local Afghan programs. Unable to get funding, they started their aid organization in Pakistan, and now the agency has grown to several offices in Afghanistan. At the beginning, once he realized that the donors were not going to give him start-up money, they decided to start their organization by volunteering some services for Afghan refugees in Pakistan. The agency has since grown to eleven Afghan locations with its home office in Kabul.

“Our main activities are education, peace building, community peace building, community organization, advocacy, and community health program.”

For AB, he said that funding activities increased with the arrival of the U.S. and the international military forces. According to AB, prior to the arrival of the U.S. and NATO troops, many Afghan aid workers were having difficulties raising funds: “all the other organizations were in a terrible situation like in 1999 and 2000.” However, after 2002, with the arrival of the U.S., many projects saw a lot of growth. He said economic activities and opportunities increased for everyone:

“After 9/11; many actors entered into Afghanistan, and the funding situation became very good to frankly speaking. In terms of reconstruction of the country, many things had happened.”

AB feels that funding for Afghan projects has diminished since 2011, and this decrease in funding is impacting many local Afghan programs. In his bicycle program for the disabled, there has been no funding for the last two years. He said that it has been difficult trying to raise funds to run the bicycle program because “sometimes donors want their own kind of things and that was basically it.” AB recalled attending a conference in Jalalabad, Afghanistan; he said, “There were ministers and people from foreign affairs,
almost 160 countries.” He presented on the impact of the bicycle program for people with disabilities, but to his surprise, his program was never funded. He spoke proudly about the program accomplishments:

“We graduated thousands of people from this program - more than 5,000 people. They are freely mobile now and they can work, they can have a job, they can complete their schools and so I’m satisfied.”

AB postulated that the lack of funding has become a major problem as Afghanistan approaches the U.S. plan to drawdown forces in 2014. He feels that there is “tremendous downfall” in humanitarian funding and insisted that funding has diminished significantly. He shared:

“In most of our projects right now, we have problems. The only hope is for funding to be kept in the same level like it was two or three years ago.”

AA was quite optimistic, suggesting that his agency had “good reputation among the donors.” He said that his aid agency gets funding from donors, and they have been able to develop projects in different areas of Afghanistan.

“It’s a good value for us; I think we have a good reputation.”

When I asked him why he thought his agency has been able to get funds from donors, he attributed his success to maintaining a good reputation with donors.

AB remembered the first time his agency received funding from the Afghan Refugees Funds based in London, England. He said, “We got $40,000 from them to start in Jalalabad.”

According to AB, it all began when he presented his bicycle idea to other orthopedic doctors, and they liked the idea very much and encouraged him to implement
it. He also shared his idea with some friends from the U.S. who had come to Peshawar, Afghanistan, to bring medical help to the people. He said they all encouraged him, saying,

“Doctor, go ahead with this, this is the perfect idea and they encouraged me a lot. And then I shared this with the other aid communities and then they said, go ahead with it. So the first time we got funding was from Afghan Refugees Fund based in London”

Even though many participants agreed that funding for programs and projects increased with the arrival of the U.S. and the international forces, many of the participants who run their own NGOs said that they had to use their own personal funds to sustain some of their aid programs.

**Sub-Theme: Increase funding to avoid disaster after U.S. drawdown of forces in 2014.** AA warned about the consequences of not maintaining a strong Afghan economy, echoing the argument made by Burton on Sites’ control theory (1973), in which he argues that the satisfaction and deprivation of individual human needs are the key sources of societal order and change. He insists that people will fight and risk dying to protect values related to need gratification. They argue that the desire to satisfy basic needs is so strong that people are willing to “step out of the real world into a world of their own” in order to seek the satisfaction of their basic needs or simply to “escape their complete frustration” (Sites, 1973, p. 10). Burton and Sites agree that if individuals are not able to satisfy their needs through legal, morally or socially justifiable means, they will seek other means necessary, including causing harm to themselves or others (Burton, 1990, p. 96). According to Burton, basic human needs will be pursued without regard to
the consequences, even when it leads to conflict. Therefore, the desire for individuals to seek and satisfy their basic needs is a fundamental precondition for maintaining social order. He argues that any society’s ability to function is dependent on its individual citizen’s ability to fulfill their basic human needs (1990, 1997). AA argued that when people are jobless and have no means to provide for themselves, they will seek other alternative options. He said that “If they are not working in Afghanistan they will go to Pakistan and they will join with the Taliban or terrorism.” AA sees this as a major issue facing Afghanistan and the world. He believes that it is “very important for the government of Afghanistan and international community to create jobs for the people, so they are able to support themselves and their families” so they do not become prey for those who seek vulnerable men and women to recruit into terror groups.

RMD appeals to the international community not to decrease funding to the private sector in Afghanistan. He argued that the local NGOs need the help of the international community to fund programs that provide and sustain basic needs for many poor Afghans. He pleaded with the international community not to forget the people of Afghanistan, and blamed the contractors from the U.S. whom he said were “eating all the money and not serving the people.” RMD assured the international community that the Afghan NGOs are “committed to provide services to rural communities.” What they need most, he said, is help from the international community to provide them with the funds to meet their obligation to the Afghan people who desperately need their help. RMD pleaded to the international community:

“not to forget the people of Afghanistan, these people are very poor and some of them do not have a piece of bread to eat, they need a lot of support...”
AB warned that youth joblessness and the lack of opportunities were the main causes of past wars in Afghanistan. He said that “If I have a job and I can feed my children, I will not be going to join any group.” He argued that if one has opportunities to make a living and provide for their family, they will not be attracted to groups that “do roadside bombing or kill himself or blow himself or things like that.” AB feels that if these conditions of structural violence in Afghan society are addressed, it would be more difficult for “some elements in our neighborhood that are spreading propaganda about a holy war and going to Janna.”

AB believes that the U.S. and the West are spending a lot of money on military strategies to fight terrorism in Afghanistan. He challenged the Western leaders to spend “just 10% of those cost that they were using on militaries on civil affairs in Afghanistan,” and he is promising that such strategies will take away the incentives for terror. As a result, he said, “there will be no fighting.” AB’s message to President Obama is not to abandon Afghanistan; he insisted that Afghanistan still needs U.S. assistance and support in “building up the national police and the military,” financial support, and technical support to create opportunities for people to be able to earn a decent living.

SP appealed to the people of the U.S. to help Afghan people, “especially Afghan women,” but she insisted on “accountability” from any group that is receiving funding assistance. She said that Afghan people are very “grateful for the generous support – please don’t stop now.” She challenged the Afghan humanitarian aid community to insist on transparency and accountability.

**Sub-Theme: The influx of funds also created corruption and greed.** Many of the participants talked about the influx of money into Afghanistan with the arrival of U.S.
and NATO troops in 2001, and all sectors of the Afghan society experienced sharp increases in funding and business activities. This included the humanitarian aid agencies, which AB said were experiencing low to almost no funding activities in the late 1990s before the arrival of the U.S. and NATO troops. He said that many of the Afghan NGOs were closing their doors prior to the arrival of the U.S. and the foreign troops; however, after 2002, many business organizations and humanitarian agencies “new actors and old actors” come to Afghanistan. He said that a lot of developments have taken place since the arrival of U.S. troops to improve the lives of many Afghans.

A focus group participant talks about the influx of funds into Afghanistan after the arrival of the U.S. and NATO troops; however, he said that along with the increase in funding came widespread corruption in all sectors of society, including the humanitarian aid community. He insisted that Afghanistan did not have a history of corruption prior to the U.S. arrival and the influx of “A huge amount of money.” He blamed the international community for the current high rates of corruption and maleficence in the Afghan society, and he called on the Afghan humanitarian aid community to condemn those within the aid community that are misusing funds that were meant to benefit Afghans in desperate need.

My participant claimed that claimed that some donors were not consulting with the government:

“They develop their programs unilaterally, and seek agencies to implement them.”

He argued that the Afghan government and the Afghan people were taken out of the picture, and that made it difficult to focus on the people’s business. Instead, a lot of
money was spent on programs and projects “under the pretext of development for the people.” He said,

“If someone gets sick and goes to the doctor, first of all, the doctor will diagnose the problem and then based on the problem, prescribe the medicine. In our case, it’s the other way around, there are no diagnostics, and there is no effort at identification of the real problem of the people”

The Afghan government and the Afghan NGOs disagree on how the Afghan NGOs are to be funded by international donors. The government wants all international funding to be directed through a government agency; however, the Afghan NGOs disagree. They seek direct funding from the donors. The NGOs argue that the government is corrupt and its agencies are inefficient. They contend that such a policy will delay assistance to people who urgently need help, and would increase the cost of providing desperately needed services because local NGOs will have to pay bribes to government officials. AA shared information from a recent meeting local NGO heads and the Ministry of Economic Development: that 200 Local NGOs will be closing in a few months as a result of a new policy by the Afghan government that foreign donors must now fund Afghan NGOs through the Afghan government—that Afghan NGOs can no longer receive funds directly from international donors. This angered the Afghan NGOs who argue that the government does not have access to the rural communities. They say that:

“NGOs have the capacity to work in the remote areas, and bring assistance directly to the people, so we requested from international community to close relations with government and support the NGO sectors.”
Trust. The issue of trust is deep-rooted in the relationship between the participants of this study and the local Afghan communities who depend on them for most of their basic needs. Many of the participants’ narratives depicted insecure conditions that exposed aid workers to risk of violent attacks. Even when the aid workers were aware of the potential dangers and risk of attacks and kidnapping, they trusted the communities for their protection. Many participants described the relationship between the Afghan NGOs and the local Afghan communities as a “bridge”—referring to the Afghan aid workers as “implementers of aid programs” from the Afghan government and the international community. A dominant narrative used by most participants to express the theme of trust was: “We are Afghans and we are in the communities.”

Sub-Theme: Afghan NGOs are implementers of aid programs and the people trust them. According to a focus group participant, since the 1980s, Afghan NGOs have been working in local Afghan villages and communities, distributing and providing desperately needed humanitarian aid to the people. Since the arrival of the U.S. and the international military troops, Afghan NGOs were the only ones that could go into insecure communities where the International NGOs and the Afghan government could not go. The main roles of the Afghan humanitarian aid workers have been as a “bridge” and “implementers” of aid programs and services from the Afghan government and the international communities to the local Afghan communities and villages.

EIJ believes that Afghan NGOs have played very important roles in Afghanistan since the war on terror. He posited that Afghan aid workers have always had good relationships with the people of Afghanistan because he said, “they are from the people and they work for the people.” The dominant argument is that unlike the Afghan
government or the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), the Afghan humanitarian aid workers “consult with the people”; they use a “participatory approach,” which invites the community leaders to become part of the problem-solving, allowing the communities and the local Afghan NGOs to work together towards a common goal for the benefit of the people. He said that at the beginning of every project, they develop a needs assessment to determine the community’s priorities, so they have a road map on how to address specific problems.

“Through consultation with the people, they try to help resolving the issue together with the people. For example right now, we are constructing three clinics in the country, and each of these clinics is situated 100 to 150 kilometers from the center of the province. So we talked with the people because for the construction of the building we need a piece of land, and the people allocated us a piece of land in one of the old graveyards and now the work is continuing there and we hope that in the next two months, we’ll have the whole clinic ready for service.”

EIJ argued that unlike the “Afghan government bureaucracies, which take too long to complete projects, the Afghan NGOs are able to work directly with the communities, so they are more efficient and better at developing new within the communities.

“There is no Afghan government in that village, but the Taliban is there, but because the community is directly working with the NGO, the Taliban does not say anything because people in the village are working.”

RMD posited that Afghan humanitarian aid workers have been serving the local Afghan communities for several decades during the different regimes that have occupied
and ruled Afghanistan. He noted that Afghan NGOs are “independent bodies” and do not take sides in any conflicts. NGOs are guided by their humanitarian principles of neutrality to provide help to all individual in need. RMD argues that Afghan aid workers involve the communities as partners in the projects, so community leaders are part of the decision making process and take active roles in resolving potential conflicts and determining the needs of the people.

“We have 28 clinics in Ghazni, and we have the health services for very poor people in the village. They know that they will lose these services if anything happens to our organization, so they are very protective and supportive. If any of our staff is threatened or kidnapped, the community will come together to take action for their release.”

Likewise, the community leaders are invested in the projects and services provided by the Afghan aid workers, so they have a vested interest in making sure that the aid workers are protected from harm.

Sub-Theme: Afghan humanitarian aid workers’ roles cause distrust and expose them to risk. A focus group participant shared his opinion regarding the role of Afghan aid workers in the war on terror. He agreed with other participants that the Afghan aid worker is like a “bridge” connecting the communities with the Afghan governments and the international communities, most of whom are unable to reach aid beneficiaries in rural and insecure areas. However, he argued that the “bridge” roles might also be exposing aid workers to risks of violence.
“I agree with my friend that some civil societies are acting like a bridge between communities and governmental authorities. But in my opinion, this is a very risky task that sometimes puts aid workers at risk.”

EIJ agreed with the assertion that Afghan aid workers are able to go into rural communities where the Afghan government agencies are not able to go because of the presence of insurgents. He argued that such roles could lead to risks of danger since there is no Afghan security presence in the rural areas; should the aid workers need protection, he posited:

“There is no Afghan government in that village, but the Taliban is there, but because the community is directly working with the NGO, the Taliban does not say anything because people in the village are working.”

Another focus group participant shared the point of view that from the very beginning, Afghan aid workers established credibility and a good working relationship with the local Afghan communities. He argued that this relationship was developed from close collaborations with people in the communities by working closely with the community leaders and designing programs to fit their specific needs.

However, when the PRTs started the “Winning hearts and minds” program and Afghan aid workers began to collaborate with the PRTs on several projects, the people became suspicious of the aid workers’ allegiance to the communities, and the trusting relationship was affected. He said that aid workers were confronted in rural communities and asked if they had any weapons on them. The people became suspicious; and this began to affect the relationship with the Afghan communities.
AB further clarified this dilemma that the Afghan NGOs find themselves vis-à-vis their collaborative relationships with the U.S. military forces, which former U.S. Secretary of State, Retired General Colon Powell welcomed as “force multiplier” strategy for the U.S. (Ferris, 2010). On the other hand, this interaction with the military affects the long standing relationship that Afghan humanitarian aid workers had developed with their local communities. AB was quick to condemn any working relationships with the PRTs, arguing that such relationships created a “bad image” of aid workers in the communities. He said the people were associating the Afghan aid workers with the foreign military forces—“those people who were bombing the villages.” He warned that interactions with the PRTs or the foreign military forces could produce hostile responses from the communities when the U.S. and NATO troops pull out from Afghanistan in 2014.

AB was critical of the PRT’s approach in dealing with the local communities. He argued that PRTs needed to be more sensitive to the community’s needs instead of dismissing their points of view or any concerns the community might have, and simply insisting that community leaders should welcome them: “After all, we are building a bridge for you.” He accused the PRTs of indifference and not treating the Afghan communities with compassion.

From the review of current literature, Azarbaijani-Moghaddam et al. (2008) allege that the military is driven by “Winning Hearts and Minds (WHAM) theory”, which is seen as a “charity paradigm” for the “deserving poor” (p. 7). On the other hand, they claim NGOs have spent several years building understanding and service dedicated to eradicating the “handout mentality” and working to bring “ownership, involvement, and
empowerment” to the Afghan people (p. 7). They argue that the military should be cognizant of how their “charitable acts can undermine NGO activities” (p. 7) and relationships with the communities.

According to AB, the people are suspicious of foreign military forces; he argued that Afghans have had negative experiences with foreign military troops, particularly the “super-powers.” AB said the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, and before them were the British, who also invaded, and now the Americans. He said,

“The general image of these super powers is not so good in the minds of the Afghan people.”

A focus group participant noted on the post-it note that:

“Before the U.S. Forces arrived, Afghan aid workers were able to work among the people, but after the arrival of the U.S. Forces, the Afghan aid workers were perceived to be helpers of U.S. Forces.”

Another participant made this entry on a post-it note:

“People call aid workers spy of the Americans.”

The question that Strand (2007) posed in his article on “Ways to Regain Afghan Trust” is germane to this study:

Why have NGOs become military targets and why has their reputation declined compared to the situation in the 1980s and 1990s? Why were people not coming out to greet us when upon arrival in a village, as they always did in the past? (Strand, 2007, p. 9, 11)

Why? When I posed this question to my participants, the dominant narratives in response to the question centered on the conditions of despair—that “the people have lost
hope”—that what they expected is not what they got. They had expected that the “Americans” will solve all their problems, bring them new hope, get rid of the war lords and the foreign fighters, and stop the interventions from the neighboring countries, but instead they have insecurity, corruption, and “the people are not safe.” The people have lost hope.

Sub-Theme: Corruption and abuse cause distrust. The main issue at the center of this theme is linked to the questions that Strand (2007) posed on why the people are no longer welcoming and why are they no longer trusting. As noted in the previous sub-theme section, what the people were expecting from the “Americans” was not what they got, but in this sub-theme, it can be understood that maybe the people might have gotten more than they expected. EIJ asserted that after 2002, a lot of developments came to Afghanistan and created many opportunities for the people:

“humanitarian activities increased as a lot of construction companies were established in different parts of the country and a lot of people had work.”

Even the PRTs that my participants felt that were not working in the best interest of Afghans were providing and funding new projects and “almost everybody in the provinces benefited” from the influx of new economic activities.

SP felt that hope was created among women and all Afghans—the arrival of the U.S. and NATO troops was a liberation from the fundamentalists for all Afghans. She said,

“We had new constitution, and good things started to happen, until 2005 when everything started to change. The U.S. and their allies changed their support for the fundamentalists.”
According to my participants, the Afghans want to trust the U.S. government, but feel that the U.S. will always act in its best interest, even if it means abandoning Afghanistan like it did after the Soviet invasion. In this predicament, the Afghan aid workers enjoy the closest trusting relationship with the Afghan communities, but are under pressure from all sides of the conflict.

As stated in the literature review section, the NGOs are now under pressure from the communities to “deliver without jeopardizing security.” They are under pressure from the host government to “implement national programmes”; under pressure from the “politician-donors and NATO representatives pressuring them to align with ‘hearts and minds’ strategies”; and pressured by “criminal groups and armed opposition groups (AOGs) who threaten their safety” (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam et al., 2008, p. 4). According to Donini (2011), the UN and NGOs in Afghanistan have to make very difficult and decisive choices; the local Afghan perception is that NGOs are in collaboration with foreign military forces and the Afghan government, perceived by most Afghans to be hostile to the Afghan people (2011).

Another issue of trust has to do with the Afghan people’s lack of trust for the Afghan government because of the government’s inability to provide for the needs of the people and gain their trust. According to RMD, the Afghan government is corrupt and inefficient; the government does not work for the benefit of the Afghan people. He posited:

“I give you an example; sometimes the people have conflict, maybe a land issue and they want to solve it through the government system, and it takes months and years especially if the conflict is with someone powerful. So the people are happy
to go to the Taliban to solve their problem and the problem is solved in one or two days. But in the government system because of corruption, it takes years and a lot of money needed to pay bribes.”

The corruption and inefficiency of the Afghan government is perceived to be a major challenge by my participants. Not only is it wasteful, but as they acknowledged, it hinders development. This is an issue that many developing third world countries continue to deal with.

According to AB, there were no retributions for crimes and atrocities committed during the Taliban and Mujahedeen regimes. He argued that the oppressors from the past regimes are now in power; these were the same people who took advantage of the Afghan people, oppressed them, and committed different atrocities against the people. He insists that the “warlords” regained power in 2001 after the arrival of the U.S. and foreign forces, and argued that:

“*They are the owners of the government. They are the powerful. Now the people’s only hope is that maybe these criminals will die by natural death or they get too old and unable to stay in government.*”

AB described how the warlords misused their power and abused humanitarian aid funds and took advantage of vulnerable Afghans in need. He said that the warlords manipulated humanitarian resources for their own benefits, asserting that:

“*Humanitarian aid which was intended for the grassroots; for the poor people and needy people, was looted by all these kind of criminal people, warlords and powerful people*”
According to AB, the people were hoping that the international community will not allow the warlords to stay in power. He argued that the corruption was fuelled by the Afghan government and all the contractors:

“It’s because of all the contracts and all the things they took and they just distributed all the funds and resources. If the general public are certain or assured that those people who betrayed the assistance support are not allowed to continue to benefit from government and international contracts, I can certainly say that the situation will improve very well. The people hoped that the international community, over 40 nations, are here and they will help us, they will assist us to stand on our own feet. But unfortunately, what the people were expecting from the international community didn’t happen. So these people lost hope.”

Underneath the issues of trust is a deep suspicion of other nations, particularly the super powers or the first world nations. Most of the narratives have nuanced implications or suspicions of intent by the super power nations that have significant presence in Afghanistan that these first world nations are in Afghanistan for their own national interests, rather than for the benefit of the Afghan people. This sentiment is echoed by many participants. A focus group participant felt that the United Nations actually works for United States of America with the sole purpose of spreading “Americanism, and Americanization” around the world. However, he was quick to acknowledge all the achievements in Afghanistan. He said that since the arrival of the “Americans,” Afghanistan has seen many new developments, particularly in:
“Employment, economic changes, social relations between people, construction projects, educational exchanges like universities and colleges, schools were built, political organizations and elections, the governmental organizations were supported and aided by the CSOs and NGOs, medical rehabilitations. CSOs and NGOs have provided many medical facilities to different governmental hospitals in faraway and remote areas.”

Nonetheless, he insisted that even though the changes and developments benefited the people of Afghanistan, the U.S. was still operating from its own interest. He believed that everything done by the “Americans,” even though many Afghans benefited from them, had to advance or be in concert with the “American agenda.”

One of the things that my interpreter pointed out as we drove through the streets of Kabul was the different schools set up by different countries. He would point at secured compounds, and he would identify them as American school, British school, German school, French school, Russian school, Canadian school, Chinese school, or Turkish school. Why all the different national schools, I asked. Who is attending these schools? And how does training young Afghans in all the different national ideologies and national identities help develop young Afghans into good Afghan citizenship that will lead to a peaceful and united Afghanistan? Based on the lessons learned from colonization this method of fragmenting society only leads to further disintegration and conflict among member of the different ethnic factions of society.

A focus group participant had a different viewpoint on the relationship between the Afghan NGOs and the local communities. She argued that even though Afghan aid workers have established good and trusting relationships with the Afghan communities,
“we lost our reputation in the community because some NGOs were receiving funds from organizations that did not have the interest of the Afghan people.” She said that the Afghan people knew which countries were supporting Afghanistan and how they were providing their support. She cautioned Afghan NGOs to be mindful of their associations with the international military forces, insisting that “these organizations are operating on their own interest, and not in the interest of Afghan people.” She echoed the argument that the international communities were operating on their national interests, and not for the benefit of the Afghan people:

“If the money is coming from U.S. Military or from PRTs the people knows their aims; why they came to Afghanistan, their objectives, and what they want to achieve. We’re losing our reputation day by day because of the objectives of some aid organizations.

She said that some Afghan NGOs, which are receiving money through PRTs and implementing PRT projects, are perceived by the local communities as being dishonest and should not be trusted by the Afghan people. She insisted that the people know that they are implementing programs that support the PRT objective:

“For example, PRTs sometimes give money to build mosque, but the people know that PRTs have no interest in expanding Islam, but for some particular reason they are giving money to build the mosque there.”

She warned that the people are not fooled by such acts, and argued that collaborations with the military forces jeopardize well established trust between the Afghan aid workers and the local communities, and expose the aid workers to risk of violent reprisals.
A second focus group participant blamed the international NGOs for the breakdown of trust between the local communities and the humanitarian aid community. He asserted that before the U.S. and the NATO forces came to Afghanistan, the Afghan people believed that the International NGOs were working for the interest of the Afghan people. He said the Afghan people “*didn’t mind who was controlling the gun; whether it was the Taliban or Mujahedeen.*” But after the U.S. and NATO forces came to Afghanistan, the international NGOs started aligning themselves with their different national interests, and were no longer working for the benefit of the Afghan people. Therefore, he said that the Afghan people stopped trusting the international NGOs. Most international NGO programs are now implemented by local Afghan NGOs.

The Afghan people have been through many regimes, many invasions and occupations, and have seen too many wars. They do not trust the Afghan government. They claim that the people in power were the former warlords who abused and took advantage of the people, and that the foreign military forces have incursions into their communities, which endanger their families. They accused the international communities of being fragmented with different national interests; hence, there is no cohesion among the different parties providing help, and a lack of consistency in the efforts provided.

EIJ shared his thoughts about Afghan business executives and government officials whose families live outside Afghanistan. He claimed that some Afghans have dual citizenships, and argued that their dual citizenship makes them dangerous because:

> “*Their families are living abroad comfortably, their children don’t know about suicide bomb blasts; the miseries of the people they cannot see.*”
He argued that their families live well overseas and are shielded from the insecurities and the lack of opportunities in Afghanistan. He warned that these people are not interested in the development of Afghanistan; most he said are happy with the status quo. He said their children are born abroad and have no knowledge of the conditions in Afghanistan.

**Abandonment.** This theme of abandonment forms from a sense of disillusionment felt by many participants that their country was abandoned by the U.S. after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was defeated with help from the U.S. As Burton (1990, 1997) argues, when people begin to feel abandoned, their desire and need for identity and recognition are being frustrated and this leads to a sense of insecurity. Burton postulates that if these human needs for identity, recognition, and security are not satisfied, conflict will ensue (1990). He warns that the conflict will be so intense that “no suppressive means will contain it. Attempts to suppress it will lead, on the contrary, to exponential increases in conflict” (Burton, 1990, p. 231). This he warns could lead to total failure in society.

**Sub-Theme: Do not abandon Afghanistan like in the '90s.** A focus group participant shared that the situation changed in 1992 after the U.S. and the international community abandoned Afghanistan, paving the way for the Mujahedeen, Al-Qaeda, and Taliban to move in and take over Afghanistan. He said,

“This, I think was the fault of the International communities led by the United State; they failed to fulfill their commitment when they abandoned Afghanistan.”

Another focus group participant explained that after the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, millions of Afghans took refuge in the neighboring countries, particularly in
Pakistan. This was the beginning of the international humanitarian efforts in Afghanistan, as major international organizations rushed to assist refugees and needy Afghans. He said that in 1988 the international community and the United Nations encouraged Afghans to establish local Afghan owned NGOs to take the leading role in bringing desperately needed aid to rural Afghan communities. About fifteen locally owned Afghan NGOs and some Arab owned NGOs were established, and together they started providing aid in rural Afghan communities, where most of the international NGOs could not reach. These local Afghan aid agencies became successful in reaching Afghans in very rural areas of Afghanistan. However, he said that when the Mujahedeen and the Taliban came to power, the international NGOs left Afghanistan, and the local NGOs became very active.

“This was the period of underground activities in Afghanistan. There were no International NGOs in Afghanistan due to the Taliban, only the UDP was allowed to operate here - But the Afghan NGOs were very active, they were engaged in the entire aid activities - everywhere they can go. There was security...there was no killing, and aid workers felt secured. But the insecurity started in 2001 when America and International Forces came to Afghanistan.”

AB agreed with other participants that the U.S. and international communities abandoned Afghanistan, hence the foreign fighters, including Taliban and Al-Qaeda, were able to intervene in Afghanistan. AB remembered what it was like; he said that in 1994, Kabul was destroyed, and that the U.S. government made a big mistake:

“When Mujahedeen came to Afghanistan, Americans thought, Oh! We defeated the Russians so time to leave this mission... but Afghanistan still needed their support. That is why this country turned into a place to train terrorists.”
AB thinks that the U.S. and its NATO allies are about to make the same mistakes as in the 1990s. He feels that the first sign of such mistake was when they started to cut funds for services. He warned:

“Right now, 3560 de-miners are on standby positions to lose their jobs. Tell me, what will those de-miners be doing if they cannot support their families? You better believe that a group will show them other ways to find bread for their children.”

AB argued that if the proper attention is not given to assist Afghanistan in maintaining internal security, securing its borders, and rebuilding its infrastructure, it is likely to fall back to becoming a haven for breeding terror as the world witnessed in 2001. He insisted that different international terrorist organizations will return to Afghanistan as they did after the U.S. abandoned Afghanistan in the 1990s. AG pleaded with the international community not to repeat the mistakes of the past:

“Our wish from you is don’t leave Afghanistan alone; not to repeat 1992 mistakes and stay with us. Not in terms of military force. We want their financial support, their technical supports.”

He urges the international communities to help Afghanistan develop its infrastructure, so as to provide opportunities for its people. He said that Afghanistan needs the U.S. and its allies to train and support the Afghan military and the Afghan national security forces, so they can secure Afghan borders and maintain law and order.

**Sub-Theme: We cannot lose what has been achieved.** The key focus of this theme is the realization that much has been achieved since the arrival of the U.S. and the international forces in Afghanistan, but the sacrifice has been high on all sides of the
conflict, particularly among Afghans. The consensus is that they, the Afghans, have to do whatever is necessary to preserve what has been achieved for all Afghans. The achievements are in education, infrastructure, law and order, communication, civil society, health, governance, human rights, and the rights of women and minorities.

AB pleaded to fellow Afghans to stay focused on what they have achieved as a country; he said that over one million Afghan girls are now enrolled in school and a record number of boys are enrolled in colleges and universities. He pleaded to Afghans not to “ruin what has been achieved.” The roads are now paved, he said, and he hopes that maybe the next generation of Afghans will have better opportunities to build on what has been achieved. AB talked about growing up during the Soviet invasion: “I was 17 when the Russians invaded Afghanistan. Now I’m 49 and all I have known is war.”

AG challenged his fellow countrymen and women to put their country first, and make every effort to take part in the development of their country. He wants all Afghans to have a stake in the building of Afghanistan by working together towards their national goals:

“Let’s stop the fighting and give attention to the education sector and be educated and help bring Afghanistan to that level of other developed countries.”

RS referred to my interview with her and her female colleagues in her office, as a sign of major achievement in Afghanistan. She said that the fact that my interview was taking place is a “manifestation and a big achievement,” noting that during the Taliban regime, I would not have been allowed to interview her and her female colleagues. They were not even permitted to listen to radio broadcast. She said, “People were arrested and no one knew their fate or ever saw them again.”
RS remembered the way things were before the arrival of the U.S. and the NATO troops. She said people were “happy with the arrival of NATO troops.” However, she posited that the “people’s expectations were high” as they were expecting the U.S. and NATO troops to fix all their problems. According to RS, a lot of resources were brought to Afghanistan by the U.S. and NATO forces. She said,

“We had witnessed those times of war and hardships, almost in every street of this city; there was conventional war between rival groups”

AA said that during the Taliban and Mujahedeen regimes, Afghanistan did not have stable governments. There were civil unrests, and many Afghans faced discrimination because of their gender or their ethnicity. He said that Afghanistan has seen many changes and developments since the arrival of the U.S. and NATO troops; they now have a stable government and the system is working. He said Afghans now have a chance to build on what has been achieved.

Sub-Theme: Help us develop Afghanistan with our own hands. AA pleads to the American public to assist Afghans in the development of their infrastructure, so that Afghans play important roles in the development and learn how to do it for themselves. In his narrative, he pointed out that Americans are friends of Afghanistan; at the same time he makes it known that so far, what he is asking for, has not been achieved—to teach them how to build their own infrastructure:

“Not to make us like a human society so that when you leave, then we will not be able to earn on our own. If you are a friend of Afghanistan, as we have committed that you are our friend, you will help us to enable us to earn our living with our own sources. So you should help us in that, it hasn’t been done so far.”
AA argued that the civil war is still going on, implying that Iran and Pakistan do not have good relations with Afghanistan; however, he believes that if the Afghan army and security forces are trained and well equipped by the U.S. with modern weapons, Afghans will be able to secure their borders and improve security in their country. He called for a gradual withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan. The first step is to beef up Afghan security with training and equipment, and gradually pull out only when the Afghan forces are ready and able to take over:

“We should be 100 percent sure that Afghan people can defend themself, and that time you can finally withdraw all forces from Afghanistan. If it's really what America wants, the first thing is to destroy the place, the source of terrorism, strengthen our army and then the problem will be solved.”

This theme—to help Afghans develop Afghanistan with their own hands—is a sentiment that is heard frequently in developing or underdeveloped countries, what some call the ‘third world’. The dominant narrative is that the ‘first world’ with good intentions, builds technology and infrastructure known as ‘turnkey’: when a project is constructed and turned over to the recipient as a completed product (“Turnkey,” 2014). However, the problem with this approach is that the recipient is usually not well informed on the process, is not part of the construction, or has no knowledge of how it was constructed, so he or she will not have the skills to maintain or optimize the product. So, what was intended to help the recipient may become a burden. What this theme is suggesting is that the Afghans be brought into the early stages of development as partners, so they can learn from the builders and become familiar with the stages of the development, understand the process, and acquire the skills to maintain and enhance
product performance and process. Thus, instead of giving them turnkey development, teach them how to replicate the development for themselves.

**Achievement.** All ten interview participants and the majority of the focus group participants said that a lot of changes occurred after the arrival of the U.S. and international forces in 2001. Many participants spoke about achievements and transitions in the economy, politics, good governance, equal rights for women and all Afghans, education, employment, infrastructural development, and even social and cultural tolerance. However, many participants agreed that much still needed to be done. For many, the costs of the achievements have been high, both on Afghans and on the international communities. This section addresses the changes in Afghanistan since the war on terror, the significance of these changes to Afghanistan, and the impact they have on the lives of many Afghans.

**Sub-Theme: Many changes came to Afghanistan.** AB told the story of how his bicycle program for disabled Afghans, prior to the arrival of the U.S. forces in Afghanistan, only had three kilometers of what he called “pot-holes,” which were caused by bombs and mines, on which to practice their biking. Now he said they have many thousands of kilometers of paved roads to practice and ride their bikes. When AB told his story to a group of American doctors visiting Afghanistan, he said the Americans did not believe him. Their reaction was: “this is the 21st century and you have only three kilometers paved road?” And he answered, “Yeah, it was potholes from Jalalabad to Torkham.”

On the drive from Kabul International Airport, we drove down a newly built modern highway that runs from the airport in to town. This road, my escort said, was
built by the “Americans” (as he pointed to the new developments along the drive) since the arrival of the U.S. and NATO troops, also letting me know that “they” (the Americans) built big projects, but he said that they (Americans) left them no guide nor expertise on how to maintain and duplicate them for new local projects.

RS said this interview was a sign of major achievement in Afghanistan. She acknowledged that my ability to conduct this interview in her office, in the presence of her female colleagues, is a “good manifestation and a big achievement.” Contrasting this time with the Taliban regime, she said that I would not have been permitted to “come and sit and talk with a woman like this.” She said that I would have been arrested and “no one knows what fate you will have to confront.” RS maintained that people were not even allowed to listen to radio programs, but today, “people can breathe freely.” She said,

“I can say it’s a blessing. We had witnessed those times of war and hardships, almost in every street of this city, there was conventional war between rival groups and fortunately most of the people were so happy with the arrival of the NATO troops.”

According to RS, the people’s expectations were high. A lot of resources were brought into Afghanistan, and the people expected the U.S. and NATO troops to fix many of their problems, “but unfortunately, it didn’t happen as much as people expected.”

AA remembered the unstable and chaotic times during the Mujahedeen and the Taliban regimes. He said Kabul was devastated; the entire infrastructure was destroyed from wars and ethnic conflicts. But he said that things are much better now—“a big
change has come to Afghanistan”—and they have a stable government in Kabul. For AA, “Everything is okay.”

For ABD, the situation in Afghanistan during the Taliban regime had “fundamentally changed” after the arrival of the U.S. and the international military forces. He said that the Afghan people have “found a proper and more suitable environment to breathe freely.” He argued:

“The educational system was completely dysfunctional at that time, but now we can see that the educational system is running well, and Afghan boys and girls are going to schools. Also the Afghan population, which was taken hostage by a few people, now they have been rescued and have become free and some changes have occurred in the economic life of the Afghan population.”

ABD also claims that ethnic, tribal, and linguistic conflicts, such as between “Tajiks and Pashtuns,” which existed prior to the arrival of the U.S. and international troops were no longer major conflict issues. He insisted that the Afghan people have been “sensitized” and their awareness has been “raised.” He said Afghanistan now has a constitution, and the people “can now look forward to the next five years for new elections with the possibility to vote for someone different if the current leaders are not doing their job.”

The Afghan presidential election in April 2014 is perceived by many participants as a hopeful sign of what has been achieved. According to ABD, during the Taliban regime, the Afghan people did not see or get to know the men who were leading the country; they did not make themselves known to the people. Now he said the people have the right and the power to vote their leaders in and out of office. He asserted:
“They governed the country, the entire nation, but a lot of the citizens of Afghanistan never saw them or knew what they looked like. He came to power and he disappeared just like others before him, they also came by force and reigned over these people by force. But now these people have this kind of mentality that this is a constitutional government and they have the right to elect their leaders, and the courage to vote.”

ABD is hopeful about the future of Afghanistan; he said he was a student during the Soviet Union invasion, and experienced a lot of misconduct during the Taliban and Mujahedeen regimes. Now he is confident and “really hopeful for the future because of the changes that have happened compared to previous regimes.”

However, ABD feels that there were no retributions for crimes and atrocities committed during the Taliban and Mujahedeen regimes. He wants to see the oppressors from the past regimes punished for their actions and not be allowed to return to political power. He said that the Afghan public were expecting that these “oppressors, who have committed all sorts of crimes and done all sorts of cruelty to the people, will confront justice.” So the people are disappointed as most of these war lords are still in power. ABD claimed that these “oppressors” have political and economic powers, but he is hopeful that the “criminals will die by natural death or they get too old and unable to stay in government.”

EIJ shared that after 2002 many achievements were made in Afghanistan and a lot of jobs were produced through the PRT projects. He said that after the formation of the Afghan government in Kabul in 2001, funding and humanitarian activities increased; many construction companies were established in different parts of the country, and a lot
of Afghans were able to find employment. “PRTs - Provincial Reconstruction Teams were providing and funding projects and almost everybody in the provinces benefited.”

But EIJ noted that in 2006 when the PRT projects ended, many Afghans lost their jobs, “causing many people especially the youths to become jobless.”

According to a focus group participant, Afghan NGOs and CSOs have played major roles in the areas of education, health, social justice, good governance, anti-corruption, and peace building, as well as contributed to the elimination of violence against women, human rights, and the democratic process. As a result of these efforts, social conditions and the quality of life of the people have significantly improved. She posited that the literacy rates among women and the adult populations have increased, and the Afghan government has become more transparent. Now, he believes that the powers have shifted from the leaders to the people; the people he said are now able to evaluate the performances of their leaders and decide if to allow them another term by the power of the people’s vote. My participants warned that Afghan must remain vigilant and insist that their leaders abide by the “constitution; the laws of the country.”

Sub-Theme: We cannot afford to lose what has been achieved. AB echoed a dominant narrative amongst the participants of this study that a lot has been achieved since the arrival of the U.S. and international forces, and a lot still needs to be done, but they cannot afford to lose what has been accomplished. AB, educated in Pakistan, called on Afghans to “stay calm,” to be patient and tolerant, so they can hold on to what has been achieved. He pointed to achievements in all sectors of Afghan life, particularly in education, which he acknowledged that over one million girls are now attending school, unlike during the Taliban time when it was illegal to send girls to school. His hope is that
Afghanistan will be a much peaceful and prosperous place for future generations. AB has spent most of his life in wars. He imagines a more tolerant Afghanistan:

“Now we have paved roads, keep it intact. Now we have schools. Do not ruin them. Keep it intact and maybe your future generation, a knowledgeable generation, not like the generation of our age. I grew up in this situation; I was 17 when the Russians invaded Afghanistan. Now I’m 49 and all I have known is war.”

AB’s hope is that Afghanistan moves forward by learning from the past and not repeating the mistakes of the past generations. He echoed the fear of many participants, that if the U.S. repeats the mistake of the past and abandons Afghanistan, the “seeds of terror will return to Afghanistan.” AB warns that if the U.S. and its allies abandon Afghanistan, “surely Afghanistan will take the same path as they took before 2001.”

ABD has a different point of view, insisting that Afghans are capable of protecting their nation. He refuted the assertion that if the U.S. and NATO troops drawdown forces in 2014, Afghanistan will return to being a safe haven for Al-Qaeda and terror groups. Instead, he perceives a different scenario: that Afghans will not tolerate any foreign troops occupying Afghanistan, including Al-Qaeda. He insisted that:

“Afghan mentality cannot accept any kind of external power, be it Russians or Al-Qaeda or Western powers. After the start of the war on terror, Afghans took their guns, their rifles and dismantled those Al-Qaeda troops and other hostile troops who live in their hideouts around the country, so by their own guns, Afghans eliminated them. They despise them.”
ABD suggested that the U.S. has a responsibility to protect Afghanistan, citing an Afghan proverb similar to the famous words of former Secretary of State, Retired General Colin Powell that “If you break it, you’ll own it” (as cited in Samuels, 2007, para. 1). ABD uses an Afghan proverb to explain why the U.S. must not leave Afghanistan until the fire is put out. He inferred that President Obama has ignited the fight in the region, and now he wants to abandon this region in flames. “We have a proverb in Afghanistan,” he said, “when you lift a piece of stone, if you find out that you are powerless, you cannot lift it, kiss it and leave it in its place.” He insisted that “they knew they could not lift the stone, they should have kissed it, should not have come to Afghanistan.”

ABD said that President Obama should have given a “very clear message” that the U.S. “will never leave this regime” (the Karzai government). Secondly, he said that President Obama should have made it clear to any country that “harbors” terrorists, or is the “seed of terror,” that the U.S. will come after them, including putting an end to terrorism that “infiltrates from centers beyond the borders of Afghanistan.” ABD insisted that if the U.S. does not give proper attention to these concerns, the consequences could be worse than the “situation which existed in 1992.” He maintains that the whole area is “engulfed in the fire,” particularly Afghanistan and calls on the U.S. president to “put out this fire” before the U.S. and NATO troops pull out from Afghanistan. He insisted that “There cannot be perfect peace until the foreign troops leave the boundaries of Afghanistan, but before leaving they should put off this fire.”

A focus group participant recapitulated the achievements since the arrival of the U.S. and NATO forces: the advances in education, health, access to justice, good
governance, anti-corruption, peace, human rights, the elimination of violence against women, the rights of women to education, work, and equal justice, the democratic process, and the people’s right to vote and elect their leaders. He posited that these achievements have led to significant improvements in the social condition and quality of life of the Afghan people. “In fact,” he said, “human capital has been developed as a result of work done by CSOs and NGOs with literacy rate,” and the literacy rate among adults has increased due to “literacy interventions” in the local communities. Now, he said that the Afghan people have been “sensitized” and awakened to the new ‘normal’ state of affairs in Afghanistan, they know their “constitution and the laws of the country.” The Afghan people now know that they all have the right to have an education as boys and girls are going to school in record numbers. SP said that Afghans want equal justice.

**Sub-Theme: Human rights and the rights of Afghan women.** Even though the focus of this theme is on the fundamental rights of Afghan women for equal justice, still at the core, as one of the female participants pointed out, the rights of women in Afghanistan are intertwined with the rights and freedom of all Afghans. She explained that Afghan women will not be free until all Afghans are free to “lives of dignity.” The dominant narratives from the participants of this study, as they described the conditions that prevailed prior to the arrival of the U.S. and NATO troops, were of horror, anarchy, and degradation of Afghan men and women. According to SP, during the Mujahedeen and Taliban regimes, her organization was forced to work underground and successfully continued the fight for the rights of Afghan women. She said the Taliban regime was a
“total dehumanization of women” and the women were forced to marry “criminals.” She said they brought them:

“catastrophe never witnessed anywhere in the world: cruelty, violence, barbarism, rape, kidnappings, cutting women’s breasts, and openly forcing women naked and killing their husbands in front of them.”

SP posited that after the fall of the Taliban regime and the arrival of the U.S. and NATO troops, Afghan “Women got access to their relative rights and freedom, and equality with men according to Afghanistan constitution.” This also gave women the right to participate in elections and the right to seek opportunities within different government sectors.

The new freedom and rights of women created opportunities for Afghan women to go to school, seek higher education, and become educated, so they are able to compete with their male counterparts for opportunities. People became hopeful as they experienced the new freedoms, and the nation was rebuilding from many decades of war; however, in 2005 things started to change. According to SP, the U.S. and the NATO allies began to change their support for the fundamentalists. She said that Azhar Ibrahimi, Special Representative for the UN Secretary General, played a positive role in the empowerment of the Mujahedeen and in paving the way for their participation and return to political power.

RS argued that it would not be correct to assume that all the changes in women’s rights have occurred in the last ten to twelve years. She said that even before the arrival of the U.S. and NATO troops, there were educated Afghan women who were involved in all types of social activism: “they were very brave women.” She asserted that over thirty
years ago when she was a student at Kabul University, her professors were from Germany (then West Germany), and she maintained that they were very good professors and that if they had been allowed to continue to train and develop young Afghans, the country might have developed “much, much better in a natural manner, but unfortunately, this curtain of terror spread all over the country and basically affected all people including women.”

According to RS, prior to the arrival of the U.S. and NATO forces, both the Afghan women and Afghan men were not free, nor allowed to “breathe open air.” She said that during that Taliban regime, the “doors of all institutions were closed” and no one had the opportunity to work: the schools were closed, and no one had any type of social life.

RS considered this interview with her and her female colleagues as a testament of the freedom and the rights of women in Afghanistan. She referred to this interview as “a sign of progress, a sign of what has been achieved.” She said my interview would not have been permitted during the Taliban regime. RS alluded to the many gains Afghan women have made in the Afghan Parliament: “Our efforts have allowed women to become members of Parliament – opposed by fundamentalists who have fought against equal rights for women.” According to RS, the Afghan Parliament was forced to withdraw from their past positions, to finally granting women equal protection under the Afghan law.

**Interventionism.** One of the dominant themes in this study is that Afghans are not terrorists—that terrorism comes to Afghanistan from outside its borders. Many participants pointed to Afghan neighbors—Iran and Pakistan—as the two main sources of
terror, but also blamed other countries aiding this phenomenon. They believe that the terrorism and insecurity in Afghanistan are caused by interventions mainly from foreign fighters who come into Afghanistan with the help of Pakistan and Iran, and they blame the U.S. and the NATO troops for not stopping these infiltrations of foreign fighters into their country.

**Sub-Theme: Base of terror is in Pakistan where Osama bin Laden got killed.** They claim that the security situation in Afghanistan has deteriorated since the arrival of the U.S. and NATO forces in 2002. Almost all the participants who had something to say about the source of terrorism blamed Pakistan for the insecurities and terrorism in Afghanistan. AG echoed this belief that terrorism was never in the culture of the Afghan people, claiming that international sources bring terrorism to Afghanistan: “this is not the culture of our people, and Afghan people never were terrorists.” He argued that the foreign fighters come to Afghanistan and set up their offices and terror organizations. AG concluded that the Taliban and similar fundamentalist groups prey on vulnerable members of society. He said, “they took advantage of those people who were uneducated.” These are the people who are likely experiencing challenges and having difficulties fulfilling their basic needs. They are, therefore, prime target for jihadist recruiting (Burton, 1990, 1997; Stern, 2003).

Another dominant narrative amongst the participants of this study is that Pakistan and Iran have been acting with impunity, and without regard for the territorial integrity of Afghanistan. AB echoed this belief in his argument that America knows the true source of terrorism. When he was asked which countries he considers to be the source of terror, he hesitated, as if unsure if it was alright to say it… referring to the death of Osama bin
Laden in Pakistan: “Everybody knows that the cow is black, but the milk is white...where Osama bin Laden got killed.” I asked AB for clarification, and he responded with email: “This is a phrase or proverb that we use when we want to reiterate that something is proven and crystal clear to every person.” This Afghan proverb implies that the situation in Pakistan is so transparent; everybody knows that Osama bin Laden was killed in a compound at Abbottabad in Pakistan. Everybody, meaning the U.S. and NATO allied troops, knows where the jihadist training camps are in Pakistan, or what some have called the “seed of terror,” but my participants claimed that since Pakistan is an ally of the U.S., nothing gets done. Nonetheless, the U.S. and Pakistan share many similar interests. The U.S. can exert influence on Pakistan, but there is no willingness to do so—since 2001 Pakistan has received over $10 billion in Coalition Support Funds (CSF) from the U.S. (Brennan, 2013).

A participant from the focus group shared his point of view. He challenged the international community to “finger point any terrorist based stations in Afghanistan.” If they are able to find a terrorist base in Afghanistan, they should make it public—he was certain that the international community will not find a terror base in Afghanistan. He accused Pakistan of using propaganda tactics to lure young Afghans into jihadist training camps in Pakistan. He said young people are brainwashed to believe that Afghans are non-Muslims: “it’s time for Jihad, you have to fight the foreigners, you have to fight the Afghan government.” This is their way of maintaining disorder within Afghanistan and undermining the efforts of the international communities in developing Afghanistan. He argued that the goal is to disrupt all the attempts of rebuilding in order to have:
“Afghanistan in a situation where it is in need for all the time, particularly to its neighbors so that they further prolong the durian line issue between Afghanistan and Pakistan.”

Another focus group participant made a correlation between foreign interventions in Afghanistan and the insecurities that continue to threaten the lives of many Afghans. He argued that the issues of insecurities in Afghanistan pre-date the war on terror, implying that the powerful nations have interior motives in Afghanistan, that insecurities started when the U.S. and NATO troops arrived in Afghanistan. He said other nations currently in Afghanistan were there pursuing their own national interests, and made the argument that:

“America did not want the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, why will Russia now allow America to be here in Afghanistan? Russia does not want America occupying Afghanistan or having influence over middle Asia. Also China as a major economic power does not want America in its border, and China thinks that if America remains here, the Muslim travelers in China will rise against Chinese Communist Government. Many countries want us to push back on America; it’s not only Pakistan, not only Iran that is causing the insecurity and struggles against America.”

A participant of the focus group discussion blamed the U.S. and NATO for the continued interventions from Pakistan and Iran, insisting that Afghans never created terrorism. He argued that since the arrival of the U.S. and NATO troops, Afghan neighbors have been intervening in Afghan internal affairs. He said that Afghans did not create the war on terror—that “Osama bin Laden was not an Afghan, he was an Arab.”
“Many nations are making Afghanistan an apogee for their conflicts, especially the neighboring countries. Whenever any Western country wants to intervene in a Muslim country, they use radicalism and extremism as a pretext; however, these ideologies have origins outside of Afghanistan.”

RS’s message to President Obama is for the president to use his office and his leadership in the world to influence nations that are working against the progress and development of Afghanistan. She asserted that President Obama should lead a coalition of nations and do more to stop countries that are intervening in Afghanistan. She wants the U.S. to look more closely at Afghan border countries. She insisted that Pakistan is an aggressive nation that seeks motives that do not benefit Afghanistan, and wants President Obama to help keep Pakistan out of Afghanistan.

Sub-Theme: Need for strong Afghan borders. This sub-theme corresponds with most of the major issues that my participants believe are responsible for the problems facing Afghanistan. They believe that if Afghan borders were fully secured to deter foreign fighters from coming into Afghanistan, the problem of insecurities will be significantly reduced or become non-existent. But they argue that Afghanistan does not have the infrastructure or the capacity to provide such a level of border security without the help of the U.S. and the international community. They are frustrated, however, because they believe that the U.S. knows that well secured Afghan borders will stop ongoing activities from Pakistan that create insecurities in Afghanistan, but to their frustration, the U.S. is not willing to address the issue with Pakistan.

AA believes that the Afghan civil war is still going on, implying that Iran and Pakistan do not have good relations with Afghanistan. But he is convinced that if
Afghans were well equipped with modern weapons, they will be able to defend their country against their aggressive neighbors. AA’s biggest fear is that if the U.S. and NATO troops pull out of Afghanistan without properly helping Afghans to secure their borders, he believes that Pakistan is likely to mount a military attack on Afghan border, or the Taliban or other jihadist group looking for a safe haven will come to recruit and operate. AA feels that such conditions will roll back all the achievements that have been gained under the U.S. and NATO troops.

A focus group participant speculated on why he thought that Pakistan benefits from an unstable Afghanistan on its border. He suggested that Pakistan will not allow a good relationship between Afghanistan and India because of the conflict between Pakistan and India over Kashmir. “Any relationship between Afghanistan and India will threaten Pakistan and will not be acceptable to Islamabad.” He anticipates that soon Pakistan and Afghanistan will be in conflict over water supply. He said that Pakistan currently depends on water from Afghanistan for its land and soil irrigation. He warned that as Afghanistan becomes more independent from its neighbors, Afghan leaders may begin to seek better control of its resources, including water. AA believes that such prospects threaten Pakistan and force them to find ways to sabotage Afghan progress. He believes that a strong Afghan border is needed to repel potential aggression from Afghan neighbors. Other issues have to do with the conflict between Pakistan and India over Kashmir; AA posited:

“Pakistan does not want to have a viable country on its border. Besides, we are developing a good relationship with India.”
**Sub-Theme: They should not make Afghanistan a base for conflict.** AB talked about the Durand Line as a factor in Afghan relationship with its neighbors. Over 100 years ago, the Durand Line was a demarcation along the Afghan border with Pakistan that was drawn by the British and signed into a treaty in 1893 with the Afghan ruler Amir Abdur Rehman Khan. The treaty was for 100 years, and should have ended in 1993 with the territory turned over to Afghanistan; however, Pakistan has refused to do so, and the government in Kabul has refused to renew the treaty (Afghanistan’s Web Site, 2012).

According to AB, Pakistan has been trying to get Afghan warlords and Taliban to renew the treaty, but this effort from Pakistan has not been successful. The Durand Line issue has been one of the key issues between Kabul and Islamabad. AB posited that some people have referred to it as the “*Imaginary Durand Line.*” AB insisted that this is one of the issues of conflict between Kabul and Islamabad. He maintains that there is no written document found on the Durand Line agreement anywhere:

“*Since there is no written document or proof, no Afghan government has accepted this. This is the main reason why the neighbors are trying to make Afghanistan as weak as they can.*”

Another issue that AB raised had to do with Pakistan’s conflict with India. He noted that President Karzai was recently asked by a reporter why India was allowed to have a consulate in Afghanistan. He warned that other countries should not make Afghanistan the base for their conflicts.

“*If they have problems with India, there are many channels to deal with their problems. Diplomatic channels or military channels, whichever option they choose, just keep their conflict away from Afghanistan.*”
Dalrymple (2013) posits that when Pakistan thought that India was sending a military adviser to Afghanistan, Pakistan raised immediate objection to any sort of military aid or assistance from India to Afghanistan, calling it “unacceptable provocation” (2013, p. 3). He believes, however, that if Pakistan, India, and Afghanistan can find a way to mutually address the insecurities and uncertainty in Afghanistan, all three countries stand to benefit from a viable and stable Afghanistan (2013).

For AB, the war on terror is not an Afghan war, and he took issues with the suggestion that after the U.S. drawdown of forces in 2014, Al-Qaeda will return to make Afghanistan a base for terror as it did before September 11, 2001. He made the argument that Afghan will no longer allow Al-Qaeda or any other group to reign over Afghanistan as before. He insisted that the current Afghan mentality will not accept any form of external power to reign over its people as before. He said,

“After the start of the war on terror, Afghans took their guns, their rifles and dismantled those Al-Qaeda troops and other hostile troops who live in their hideouts around the country, so by their own guns, Afghans eliminated them. They despise them.”

A focus group participant felt that the issue of Afghanistan was “polycentric.” He claimed that the countries in Afghanistan have no interest in the prosperity of the Afghan people. He accuses the West of using “radicalism” as a pretext for invading Islamic countries, and blames the U.S. and the international troops for allowing interventions from neighboring countries to continue to destabilize Afghanistan. He argued that Afghans have not created the war on terror, and suggested that Osama bin Laden was not an Afghan. He said,
“If you see the identification card of Osama bin Laden, he is not an Afghan, and he is an Arab. And war is brought to us, we have not created war.”

Another focus group participant sees the war on terror as a conflict between Russia and the U.S. She accused the U.S. of helping to create the Taliban, insisting that if the U.S. goal was to fight terrorism, they should have started in Pakistan, which she referred to as “the root of terrorism.” She argued:

“America always had a plan to come to Afghanistan to have their bases here. The attack on September 11, 2001 gave them a good reason to come to Afghanistan. It was their plan and now they have succeeded, they are not here to support us and they are not here to fight against terrorism.”

Another focus group participant echoes the same point of view that the U.S. presence in Afghanistan was to make certain that Russia does not control Afghanistan. She argued that the “American” plan was to prevent the Soviet Union (Russia) from occupying and controlling Afghanistan. She said the U.S. supported the Mujahedeen with military equipment and money; hence, the Soviet Union was defeated. She claimed that, “Now they have come to Afghanistan to protect their investment.” However, according to my participants’ theory, Russia now wants to make sure that the U.S. does not succeed in Afghanistan. They perceive this conflict in Afghanistan as a conflict between the superpowers—between the East and the West—a struggle for who will be positioned to control Asia.
Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications

In this final chapter, I reflect on my experiences in conducting this investigation and present the research findings, summarizing the themes that best represent the experiences of my participants and using selected quotes to illustrate my research findings and echo their voices. I also analyze the key research findings of this study by using the theoretical framework of Burton’s basic human needs theory to identify and understand the conditions that give rise to the conflicts that cause and form the themes. I also discuss the limitations of the study, contributions made to the field of conflict analysis and resolution, and future direction for further research. Again, actual names of participants are not used in this study to protect their privacy and maintain confidentiality.

My face-to-face interviewees and focus group discussants have helped me to understand the lived experiences of my participants—the endemic and fundamental role of “structural violence” which gives rise to the conditions that create insecurities and expose Afghan humanitarian aid workers to violent attacks and experiences that frame their world views.

Meaning Making

Krauss (2005) posits that “The most fundamental aspect of a human social setting is that of meanings” (p. 762). That meaning is “transbehavioral”; hence, they do not only “describe behavior,” but they also “define, justify” and “interpret behavior” (Lofland & Lofland, 1996 as cited in Krauss, 2005, p. 762). The meaning making for this study was best informed through the theoretical framework of social constructionism—the idea that our reality is a construct of our own experiences, formed through interactions and
collaborations with other members of our communities through cultural, social, and historical contexts (Kukla, 2000; Pratwat & Folden, 1994). On several instances, I asked participants of this study how they felt about the war on terror, and almost always their responses seemed to beg the question of my definition of terror. Terror for them were the incursions by Western forces into their local communities; the drone attacks that killed and maimed their brothers, sister, sons, daughters, husbands, and wives; the Taliban and insurgent attacks that dared young men and women to go to school and seek Western education; and the fear of abandonment from the U.S. and NATO forces that can lead to the return of anarchy and destruction, which a female participant described as “Catastrophe never witnessed anywhere in the world.” She talked about the violence and cruelty of the Taliban—how the Taliban forced the women to take off their clothes, raped the women in front of their husbands, and forced them into marriages.

As I tried to align the context of the phenomenon from which my participants drew their inferences and attributed meanings to the events of their experiences, the better I was able to understand and engage in meaning making together with my participants (Krauss, 2005). The process of meaning making was formed in the context of culture and social interactions with my participants. According to Krauss, knowledge constructed by individuals in a particular culture and time can be perceived as ‘true’ reality as it becomes acceptable by individuals and society, and becoming the social norm (2005).

As the researcher, I was engaged in the context—being in Kabul, Afghanistan, and participating in the act of “being with” my participants in their lives to generate meanings of their experiences; developing themes and narratives that feature the words and experiences of my participants; and resulting in data analysis that is rich in findings
and meaning making (Krauss, 2005, p.767). When I asked a participant how he felt about the war on terror, he answered with an Afghan proverb that “When you try to lift a piece of stone, and you find that it is too heavy; you cannot lift it, you should kiss it and leave it in its place.” He went on to say that “In the beginning they knew that they could not lift the stone, they should have kissed it, and should not have come to Afghanistan.” The point and meaning my participant was making was not that the stone was too heavy for the U.S. and NATO troops to lift, but that the conditions in Afghanistan in 2001 should have alerted the U.S. and NATO of the fragile and inadequate state of the Afghan nation. Even former General Colin Powell warned: “if you break it, you will own it” (as cited in Samuels, 2007, para. 1). My participant went on to assert that “The whole area is engulfed in fire, particularly Afghanistan,” and warned that the U.S. and NATO troops have “actively intervened in this situation, they have come to Afghanistan; they cannot abandon it.” Even though many of my participants expressed the belief that the U.S. and foreign troops must leave Afghanistan in order for there to be peace in the country, they agreed that before leaving, the U.S. and NATO troops should put out the “fire,” which my participants saw as a consequence of U.S. and NATO intervention.

Another participant reflecting on his memories of war in Afghanistan’s decades of military interventions and civil unrests used an Afghan proverb that “Sweets are not distributed in war; but bullets are exchanged.” He said that there are no good outcomes from war; he lost very close relatives in the wars, and spoke painfully about the loss of his older brother who was a graduate of Oxford University and was killed during the Soviet invasion. He believed that every Afghan family had lost two or three family members to the wars; most of them, he said, were “breadwinners for the families.” As
another participant said, “*wars have been very harsh on our people.*” According to the former Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates (Gates, 2014), during his interview promoting his memoire *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War*, there are no military solutions to the Afghan conflict. This point of view has been echoed by several high ranking government officials and top ranking military strategists, including Retired General David Petraeus, former Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and former Commander of U.S. Forces in Afghanistan (2010-2011). They all agree that there has to be a political solution. Indeed, war cannot be the solution to the many conflicts around the world. As the Afghan proverb implies, bullets are exchanged in wars, not sweets; people die in wars, people’s lives are destroyed, and the memories of these destructions live through many generations and ferment odium, which give rise to future conflicts.

Participants point to the source of what they named as the *challenges* and the *problems* that the people of Afghanistan have *faced* and *witnessed* for over three decades. All of these they claimed have been “*witnessed from the top.*” One participant contrasted the eras of the Taliban and Mujahedeen, which he claimed were controlled from Islamabad, Pakistan, and the current Afghan government of Hamid Karzai, and which he claimed has been controlled by the U.S. and the international community. He cited a conflict situation that occurred in Afghanistan within the Afghan jurisdiction but was decided by orders received from Islamabad, Pakistan. He gave another example that occurred during the Taliban era: a man who was detained in Kabul, Afghanistan by the Taliban security forces, but was later released by orders from Islamabad, Pakistan, the implication being that the decisions to carry out atrocities or acts of terror are made by orders from non-Afghans who are outside the Afghan borders. When I asked my
participants where terrorism against humanitarian aid workers was coming from, they answered that Afghans are not terrorists, that terrorism is coming into Afghanistan from outside its borders—from Pakistan, Iran, or jihadist fighters who they claimed are foreign fighters. Several participants informed me that “Osama bin Laden was not an Afghan, he was an Arab,” they said. One participant used an Afghan proverb that “Everybody knows that the cow is black, but its milk is white; where Osama bin Laden got killed,” he said. This was a reference to Pakistan as the source of most of Afghanistan’s problems, “having the seeds of terror.” But since Pakistan is an ally of the U.S., they accuse the U.S. of ignoring the hard facts of terrorism and the radicalization of young men and women for jihad. One participant suggested that the U.S. and Pakistan got together and created Taliban for the purpose of causing chaos and destabilizing Afghanistan. In order words, my participants suggested that the U.S. is aware of Pakistan’s behavior and role in radicalizing young Muslims for jihad, yet the U.S. chooses to not address the issue with Pakistan, but instead continues to see Pakistan as a partner in the war on terror.

During the focus group discussion, one participant inquired from other participants in the group if they will agree that the security situation during Taliban regime was much better than the current security situation in Afghanistan now. He explained that during the Taliban regime, people felt safe to walk around the streets of Afghanistan with “bags of gold” without the fear of being attacked or robbed because nobody dared to steal from another person. However, he noted that such security from the Taliban came at a high price to the Afghan society. The implication is that the consequences of being caught stealing during the Taliban regime were catastrophic. As my participants noted, the punishment for stealing could mean death or the loss of body
parts. On the contrary, since the presence of the U.S. and NATO troops, the number of insecurities have been higher and have been the source of major problems, they said, but the Afghan people have freedom and they are independent.

One participant spoke of insecurities in the context of military incursions into Afghan villages and communities by the U.S. and NATO forces, calling it “Bombarding the community with women, children, and poor people.” These incursions, he said, have negative impacts on Afghan aid workers who are confronted with the aftermaths, and forced into positions of trying to explain such deadly attacks on the communities. Often aid workers are unable to provide adequate explanations for the attacks that caused the loss of family members; this led to mistrust and the belief that insecurities in their communities “are created by the foreign people, by American, by Britain, by Pakistanis, by these people.” The participants claimed that these incursions caused loss of lives and affected the trusting relationships that had been developed between the Afghan humanitarian aid workers and the local communities. They insisted that the interactions between the foreign military, the PRTs, and the Afghan humanitarian aid workers created perceptions that gave rise to mistrust of the Afghan aid workers by the local communities.

Three participants said that insecurities in Afghanistan began when the U.S. and the NATO troops came to Afghanistan. They argued that during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the U.S. did not want the Soviet Union occupying Afghanistan: “Why will Russia now allow America to be here in Afghanistan?” They insisted that the allied nations in Afghanistan were there to protect their national interests, and claimed that Russia does not want America occupying Afghanistan or having influence over middle
Asia. Also, they claimed that China does not want America in its border out of concern that the “Muslim travelers” in China will rise against the Chinese Communist Government.

Many explanations were offered throughout this study by participants in attempts to explain occurrences and why they believed certain things happened, or are happening to their country and the Afghan people. Some of these explanations fall within the scope of ‘conspiracy theories,’ which I address in detail later in this section.

In a complex political emergency like Afghanistan, the Afghan humanitarian aid workers are under pressure from all the parties, entities, and organizations with special interests (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 1999), involved in the war on terror in Afghanistan. According to Burton (1972), everyone enacts different roles as we carry out our different daily functions, and often my participants are forced into roles with different actors in the conflict. Making the analogy with actors on stage, Burton notes that the stage actors enact roles, and he argues that “they must deliberately act a part and not behave as they would in their own life” (1972, p. 72). In the same token, the Afghan humanitarian aid worker playing a role in a complex political emergency is deliberate and purposeful in being in the role.

When I asked the participants of the focus group about the different roles Afghan aid workers played in the war on terror, many of the participants described the key roles of the Afghan NGOs as “bridge” and “implementers” of aid programs in Afghan communities. Many of the participants spoke of the ‘roles’ as issues of trust between the Afghan humanitarian aid workers and the Afghan local communities. One of the focus group participants said that after the arrival of the U.S. and NATO troops, the Afghan aid
workers were the only ones who were welcomed in the local communities, noting that the security situations in most of the local communities posed great danger for international NGOs. As a result of the insecure environments, the Afghan NGOs and CSOs quickly assumed the roles of “bridge” and “implementers” of humanitarian aid programs for the international communities and the Afghan local and central governments, who did not also feel safe going into the local communities. As my participants noted, several rural communities were known to have Taliban members, while some were controlled by the Taliban.

The Afghan aid worker by virtue of his/her nationality and membership in the local Afghan community finds himself/herself at the center of this conflict known as the war on terror, playing different important ‘roles’ with several stakeholders who have competing interests. The goal of the Afghan aid worker is to provide humanitarian aid to needy and vulnerable Afghans in very difficult conditions. However, in order to meet this objective, the Afghan humanitarian aid workers must play required ‘roles’ to seek funds and develop new programs; however, funds and programs come from outside the Afghan communities. Quite often the funds come from the international communities, which are perceived by some local Afghans to be hostile to the Afghan people. As Burton (1972) posits, “Each person is many people. Some we like, some we may not like” (p. 110). And these roles, which the Afghan aid workers play, may not be perceived favorably by local Afghans, thereby giving rise to perceptions that lead to mistrust by local community members. Some participants felt that Afghan aid workers who were receiving funds from PRTs and implementing PRT programs were being dishonest and should not be trusted. One participant said that “PRTs sometimes give money to build mosque, but the people
know that PRTs have no interest in expanding Islam, but for some particular reason they are giving money to build the mosque there.”

As noted in my review of literature, the purpose of the PRT was for implementing the Winning Hearts and Minds campaign (WHAM). This was the U.S. military’s attempt at the use of softer and gentler approach to fighting terrorism. But the strategy quickly became a major fiasco, a very well-intended strategy that was poorly implemented. According to Azarbaiani-Moghaddam et al. (2008), one of the key problems with the WHAM program was the frustration from local Afghan NGOs who complained that their input was not sought out in the civil-military debate, and pressed for the “Afghanisation” of the civil-military process (Azarbaiani-Moghaddam et al., 2008, p. 5). They complained that often local Afghan NGOs were underfunded and undervalued unlike their counterparts with the international NGOs.

One participant felt that the association with PRTs and the foreign military forces affected trusting relationships between Afghan humanitarian aid workers and the Afghan communities, while another participant shared an experience when he was confronted by Afghans in the rural communities and asked if he had a gun. They were suspicious because of his association with the PRTs in the area. According to the participant, he was seen in the company of the foreign PRT agents, but the people did not know the reason and content of their association. It could have been to benefit the community, but they perceived him to be working with the enemy, so he was not to be trusted. This rush to judgment on the side of the Afghan community posed great danger of hostilities toward the Afghan humanitarian aid worker. A focus group participant echoed a similar sentiment, acknowledging that even though the Afghan aid worker had developed a
trusting relationship with the communities, the people’s perceptions of the new ‘role’ with the international community was suspect and can potentially lead to violence against the aid worker.

The participants agreed that their key role is the delivery of humanitarian aid services to needy Afghans no matter where they may be. Sometimes they have to go into very insecure environments to reach desperate aid beneficiaries. Due to the trusting relationships with the local communities, the Afghan humanitarian aid workers are the “bridge” and “implementers” of aid programs in insecure areas where the Afghan government agencies and the international NGOs are unable to reach. So they believe that maintaining the trusting relationship with the Afghan communities is crucial to making sure that critical services reach vulnerable individuals and families in local communities.

The issue of adherence to humanitarian principles was discussed in my review of literature. Egeland et al.’s (2011) study showed that the “lack of respect for principles was third-largest contributor to insecurity” and warned that NGOs have conveniently “compromised a principled approach in their own conduct by closely aligning with political and military activities and actors” (p. 19). Incidentally, Stoddard et al. (2011) in their study which interviewed international NGO staff, the respondents believed that local and national NGO employees lacked proper training and expertise on conduct and humanitarian principles, and questioned their ability to handle difficult and often life threatening situations in complex political environments. However, my participants believed that the main reason they have been able to maintain trusting relationships with the local communities has to do with the NGO principles of neutrality. One participant said that Afghan NGOs are independent, that they do not take side in any conflict. He
acknowledged that his agency had been serving the communities through different regimes. They are not on the Afghan government’s “side” or the Taliban “side” or the U.S. military “side,” and claimed that they simply “share their plans with the community and involve the people in the decision making to solve the real needs of the people.” And if any of their humanitarian aid staff is threatened or kidnapped, the community will come together to seek their release from the Taliban. Some participants shared stories of their close proximity with the Taliban in rural communities that they served. They said that the Taliban were aware of their presence, but as long as they were providing needed services to the community, the Taliban did not pose any danger or problem to them.

Due to the increasing risks of violence to their employees, international NGOs began to adopt the ‘remote management strategy’ which Stoddard et al. (2010) defined as “adaptation to insecurity, and an aberration from normal programming practice” (p. 11). They asserted that remote strategies were not meant to be a permanent or a standard situation; however, several international NGOs relied on local and national aid workers to maintain their presence and continued their aid activities in local communities, while the international NGO staffs oversaw operations from safer environment. Stoddard et al. (2010) questioned the morality and effectiveness of the remote management strategy, and wondered if the local Afghan NGOs were capable of maintaining high “levels of sophistication and quality” of aid programs when the remote management strategy was implemented (2010, p. 8). However, other studies showed that the local Afghan NGOs wanted more autonomy and sought comparable funding levels as the international NGOs. Several participants saw funding as a major challenge for the Afghan NGOs; they argued that the Afghan NGOs did not have direct access to funds and funding sources, and saw
this as a major challenge facing the Afghan humanitarian aid worker. One participant gave an example with a U.S. government funding for Afghanistan made available through the USAID. He said that instead of giving the money directly to the Afghan NGO, “USAID gives this money to the United Nations. United Nations gives this money to international NGOs, and the international NGOs gave some of the money to the Afghan NGOs.” He argued that the Afghan NGOs only end up with “a fraction of the original amount” to develop and implement aid programs to very needy local Afghan communities. My participants said that they were the ones in the communities who worked directly with the people and understood what their key needs were. They spoke about assessments that they developed in conjunction with the local community people, and how these assessments addressed the specific needs of the communities, yet funding the programs was not made directly to them; instead, it had to go through other sources which had no direct interest in the project. In the end, they claimed that this method of funding Afghan programs created waste and led to corruption and maleficence.

Nonetheless, many participants still hoped that the international community will remain in Afghanistan and continue to support the Afghan people. One participant said that “Despite making some mistakes, the Americans and their allies have been the best friends of the Afghan people.” He said that Afghanistan desperately needs the support of the international communities in maintaining security and developing the Afghan economy, which many participants believed to be the key to reducing terrorism in Afghanistan and the rural areas bordering Pakistan.

One of the criticisms against the international communities in Afghanistan was their inability to help the Afghan government become more sustainable. The participants
claimed that the international communities comprised of representatives from different nations who represent different national interests, and are not working as one cohesive force. Therefore, the participants argued that the international communities have different agendas and different objectives. One participant said that “They should have a strong and collective action and strategy to fight against terrorism, to fight against the Taliban and to bring pressure on neighboring countries of Afghanistan.” Another participant said that if the international community were working cohesively, they would have been able to “put pressure on the government of Afghanistan to bring an end to the corruption, to end poverty, and stop the continued influence of the war lords.”

The issue of corruption was of major concern to my participants. Many felt that the arrival of the international communities brought in a lot of money and economic activities in to Afghanistan; however, these activities also led to the current state of corruption. They decried the ways in which the war lords and the people in power prior to 2001 used and manipulated humanitarian resources for their own benefits. One participant said that “Humanitarian aid which was intended for the grassroots; for the poor people and needy people was looted by all these kind of criminal people, warlords and powerful people,” thus depriving help to the most vulnerable Afghans. He argued that the corruption was fuelled by the Afghan government and the independent contractors who they claimed were simply enriching themselves. The participants said that the Afghan people had hoped that the international communities in Afghanistan, which they claimed represented “over forty nations,” would have helped them, by empowering the Afghan people: “they will assist us to stand on our own feet. But unfortunately, what the people were expecting from the international community didn’t
happen. So these people lost hope.” Several participants also spoke of the PRTs and the presence of independent contractors among PRT personnel, whom they associated with corruption and misappropriations of funds.

**Conspiracy Theory**

As I listened to some of my participants and the meanings they ascribed to the conditions of their experiences, I am reminded of the many conspiracy theories that have often times been used to explain phenomena in the American experience—such as the notion that the September 11 attacks were orchestrated by the U.S. government as a pretext to start wars in the Middle East, or that crack-cocaine and the AIDS virus were purposely developed to affect and destroy the African American communities, or even the more recent controversy of President Obama’s place of birth, which some continue to argue that he was not born in the United States. In a University of Chicago research by Oliver and Wood (2014), they define conspiracy theory as:

Narratives about hidden, malevolent groups secretly perpetuating political and social plots and calamities to further their own nefarious goals. (Davis, 1971, as cited in Oliver & Wood, 2014, p. 1)

According to their study on conspiracy theories, 94 percent of the people sampled agreed to have heard that “President Obama was not born in the United States and does not have an authentic Hawaiian birth certificate,” and “22 percent of the sample” were in agreement with what is now known as the “Birther conspiracy” (Oliver & Wood, 2014, p. 13). The University of Chicago study (2012) finds that “conspiracism” as they labeled it, was not simply an “important form of public opinion, but expressive of some latent principles behind Americans’ political beliefs” (Oliver & Wood, 2014, p. 3). In other
words, this is how some people express and construct meaning to explain phenomena that they have experienced. Oliver and Wood conclude that conspiracy theories can help us understand how individuals perceive and ascribe meaning to events and phenomena those shape the world in which they live (2014).

Not unlike the American experience of interpreting events, my Afghan participants also interpreted events and phenomena that shaped their world in ways that they could best understand them, by using triggers from their own specific conditions that frame their own experiences, such as the historical, political, social, economic, and cultural conditions that have framed their experiences and perceptions of their world, and the world which they live. My participants referenced many narratives that some might dismiss as simply conspiracy theories without credible foundation—such as the notion that the U.S., Britain, and Pakistan got together to create Taliban to destabilize Afghanistan; that the war on terror is a war of the superpowers for who will control Afghanistan, and ultimately control the rest of Asia; that America made sure that the Soviet invasion did not succeed in Afghanistan, so Russia is making sure that the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan does not succeed; that the issue of the Durand line is the reason Pakistan will continue to make sure that Afghanistan does not become a viable nation on its border; that the war on terror is not about fighting terrorism, but about the control of oil; that Afghanistan is being used as a “proxy” for the Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan; that Afghans are not terrorists; that terrorism comes to Afghanistan from outside its borders; and others that show Afghans as victims of circumstances induced by other nations, which are beyond Afghan control. Often such assertions from developing and less developed “third world” countries are dismissed as mere conjectures and
innuendos not to be taken seriously. However, the University of Chicago study on conspiracy theories by Oliver and Wood (2014) reveals that conspiracy theories show how individuals interpret and make meaning of their individual experiences, and the “tendencies of all people for understanding their political world” (p. 31).

In a world with a long and violent history, Afghanistan is a South Asian country, “the size of France, Switzerland and Benelux combined” strategically located, and for the last thirty years has been “marked by appalling episodes of violence, war and genocide” (Khan, 2012, p. 201). It was first challenged by the British in the 19th century, but the British invasion was repelled by the Afghans in 1878 (2012, p. 210). In 1893 the Durand Line was used to create the border with India, allowing the carving out of Pakistan territory from Afghan land; the Durand Line is known as the “Imaginary Line” dispute between Pakistan and Afghanistan (p. 210). This dispute between Pakistan and Afghanistan is what my participants referred to as the Durand Line dispute. Another attempt was made by the British in 1921 but was again repelled by the Afghans. The country began to experience internal struggles and forceful changes of government and leadership. In 1978, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, causing the U.S. to side with the Afghans.

The U.S. found a “conduit” for arms and military supplies to Afghanistan, in Pakistan, and this relationship gave Pakistan its status of “Frontline State” (Khan, 2012, p. 210). This, according to Khan (2012), was the beginning of Afghan religious fundamentalism and jihadism, which was referred to by my participants as the creation of Taliban for Afghanistan by the U.S. and Pakistan, for the sole purpose of destabilizing Afghanistan. Afghanistan quickly became a battle ground for the cold-war between the
United States and the Soviet Union (Khan, 2012). This was also referenced by my participant who felt that the war on terror was simply a war of the superpowers. He said that with the help of the U.S., the Soviet Union was defeated in 1989, and after the Soviets withdrew their forces, the U.S. decided to leave Afghanistan, thus opening the door for insurgencies. Eventually the Afghan civil war broke out, which a female participant described as “anarchy, never witnessed anywhere in the world.” She said Kabul was completely destroyed. According to Khan (2012), the men were “arrested, humiliated, and killed, and women were molested, tortured, and raped” (2012, p. 211). This was the condition that ushered the Taliban to power and created a haven for Al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden, and a base to launch the September 11, 2001 attacks on the U.S. that killed over 3,000 people. Consequently, in October of 2001, the U.S. launched air strikes against Afghanistan and Osama bin Laden, declaring the war on terror, which is now the longest war in U.S. history (Dalrymple, 2013), lasting over twelve years and claiming the lives of over 2,144 U.S. military personnel who have so far paid the ultimate price (Crowley, 2013). Afghan civilian casualties of the war on terror are estimated over 21,000 men, women, and children (Watson Institute, 2011).

Civil-Military Collaboration

The impact of civil-military relationships in complex political emergencies like Afghanistan was a key motivator for this research study. One of the questions that drove this study was how the interactions between the Afghan humanitarian aid workers and the U.S. and international military troops in Afghanistan have exposed the Afghan humanitarian aid workers to suspicion and violent attacks in local Afghan communities. From the section on literature review, it was noted that the military and humanitarian
communities have divergent interests and objectives with regards to delivering humanitarian aid to people in desperate need (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam et al., 2008). The military perceived their WHAM program as a charitable program aimed at the “deserving poor” (2008, p. 7), while the humanitarian aid workers, by virtue of their years of building understanding and trusting relationships with communities in need, tried to bring feelings of “ownership, involvement, and empowerment” to the Afghan people (2008, p. 7). They argued that the military should be cognizant of how their “charitable acts can undermine NGO activities” (2008, p. 7).

According to the report exploring Afghan perceptions of civil-military relations by Azarbaiani-Moghaddam et al. (2008), one of the key issues from the Winning Hearts and Minds program was the dissatisfaction felt by local NGOs that the civil-military debate in Afghanistan did not include nor seek out the input of Afghan humanitarian aid workers. They believed that there should have been an “Afghanisation” of the civil-military process (Azarbaiani-Moghaddam et al., 2008, p. 5), a feeling among the local NGOs that their opinions should be included. In addition, they complained that often local Afghan NGOs were underfunded unlike the international NGOs (2008).

Referring to how the PRTs have impacted on the Afghan humanitarian aid workers, one participant shared that when the PRTs came to Afghanistan, the trusting relationships that had been built between the Afghan aid workers and the local communities were deeply affected, as the people became suspicious and accused aid workers of working with the foreign troops: “Oh you are the spies, you have a gun, you have a weapon.” Another participant felt that the nighttime military incursions into Afghan communities affect perceptions and the trusting relationships of Afghan
humanitarian aid workers in the communities. He said that after the incursions, it was difficult for Afghan aid workers to return to the communities and witness the aftermath and the grieving families who lost family members during the nightly military incursions by the U.S. and NATO troops as people mourned and buried their dead.

Another participant talked about the many issues he had with the PRTs and foreign military forces. He said that they often felt that because they were building roads and bridges for the Afghans communities, they had a license to do as they pleased. He said that “the people are not in favor of the military people. The general image of these super powers is not so good in the minds of the people here in this country.” They gave an example of PRTs giving Afghan NGOs funds to build mosques in Kabul. One participant said that the local people were not “fooled.” He accused Afghan NGOs of implementing PRT objectives that were not in the best interest of the Afghan people, and felt that the association with PRTs and the foreign military forces were affecting the trusting relationships that were built between Afghan humanitarian aid workers and the Afghan communities.

Focus group participants were given three categories and instructed to list their feelings and perceptions regarding each category. One of the categories was: Potential Challenges from 2014 Drawdown of U.S. Forces. The entries in this category were quite comprehensive, and they validated the following themes that were discussed in chapter four.

**Security/Insecurity**

Most of the interview and focus group participants felt that the drawdown would worsen the security situation after the U.S. and NATO troops leave Afghanistan. They
assert that “Afghan national forces are not fully equipped” to defend their country, so they believe that “insecurities will increase.” Some see a “rise in insurgency” and a weakening of “local security and governance capacity” as a result of the drawdown of forces in 2014. One participant predicted “anarchy after withdrawal of foreign troops.” The belief is that the enemies of Afghanistan are very motivated and capable of destabilizing Afghanistan by creating fear, disorder, and insecurities in all areas of the country with the presence of the U.S. and NATO troops. They believe that with the current strength and preparedness of the Afghan national security forces, without the backing of the U.S. and NATO troops, the Taliban and the foreign jihadists will easily overtake the current Afghan security forces and turn back all the achievements of the past twelve years under U.S. and NATO occupation. In other words, my participants fear that the Afghan security forces are not ready to take over securing their nation from the U.S. and NATO troops.

**Interventionism**

Participants expressed concern that “interventions from neighboring countries will increase” as a result of the U.S. and NATO drawdown in 2014, and they felt that the pull out of Western forces could lead to “polycentricism, resurgence of insurgent and innocent killings, and a possible resurgence of Al-Qaida in Afghanistan.”

This issue of interventions from the neighboring countries, namely Pakistan and Iran, is seen by the participants as one of the major causes of insecurities in Afghanistan. The belief is that these interventions bring in foreign jihadists that commit atrocities that destabilize their nation. Some of the participants stated that the terrorists are not Afghans, insisting that they are foreign fighters from outside Afghan borders.
Funding

Participants agreed that a U.S. and NATO drawdown of forces will lead to decrease in funding opportunities, and fear that the “cost of living may increase” thereby making life more demanding for Afghans who are already experiencing hard times—the thinking that such a drawdown will cause “reduction in humanitarian aid funding.” Still some participants believed that a force drawdown by U.S. and NATO will lead to “rise in unemployment as job opportunities decrease.” One participant expressed the belief that a decrease in funding will weaken the “survival of the present government” and the “survival of the CSOs.”

According to my literature review, the Afghan economy is heavily dependent on foreign aid, most of which is humanitarian aid, and the majority of the aid assistance comes from the USAID. My participants fear that a drawdown of U.S. forces may also reduce or completely eliminate humanitarian aid support from the United States. Funding of the Afghan economy is perceived as being critical for maintaining law and order, providing opportunities to Afghan youths, and fighting the rise of jihadist tendencies among Afghan youths. They argue that if Afghans have the opportunities to make a living and provide for their families, they will not become viable recruits for the Taliban or foreign jihadists.

Trust

A group of participants felt that a U.S. and NATO drawdown of forces in 2014 would affect aid workers’ “perception” and “engagement” in Afghan communities. They claim that “people lost hope” due to “unrealized objectives.”
The issue of trust with the Afghan people and communities continues to resonate in this research study. Strand (2007), in his article on “Ways to Regain Afghan Trust”, posed these questions: “Why have NGOs become military targets…? Why were people not coming out to greet us…, as they always did in the past?” (p. 9). One area that all my participants agreed on and spoke about passionately was the significance of the trust developed between the Afghan aid workers and the local communities. They were equally consistent on the role trust between the communities and the Afghan aid workers made them the “bridge” for the local communities and the Afghan government, and between the local communities and the international military and humanitarian communities. My participants claimed that even though the people lost hope due to their perception of what the arrival of the U.S. and its allied troops will mean for them, they still believed that their lives will get better because they trusted the Afghan humanitarian aid workers whom they referred to as the “bridge” and “implementers” of aid programs in local and insecure communities. With the drawdown of forces in 2014, my participants fear a backlash in the local communities; as the funds decrease and the living conditions become harder for the people, they are likely to blame and turn their frustrations to the Afghan humanitarian aid workers who they perceive as the agents or “bridge” between them and the international communities.

**Drawdown of U.S. and NATO Forces in 2014**

On June 22, 2011, U.S. President Barak Obama addressed the nation from the White House and highlighted his objectives for the surge: to send 30,000 more American troops into Afghanistan (Obama, 2011). The President told the American people that his objective was to “refocus on al Qaeda,” and to “reverse the Taliban’s momentum,” while
the U.S. military will focus on training Afghan forces so that they are ready to “defend their own country” (Obama, 2011, para. 3). He made it clear that the U.S. “commitment would not be open-ended” (2011, para. 3), stating that the U.S. drawdown of forces would begin in July 2013. “Our mission will change from combat to support. By 2014, this process of transition will be complete, and the Afghan people will be responsible for their own security” (Obama, 2011, para. 4).

On Tuesday night, February 13, 2013 during President Obama’s State of the Union speech before a joint session of Congress, the president announced to the nation that “another 34,000 American troops” (Jackson & Michaels, 2013, para. 3) will be coming home from Afghanistan. The drawdown, he said will continue into the following year; “and by the end of next year, our war in Afghanistan will be over (Jackson & Michaels, 2013, para. 3).

My participants shared their perceptions of how the drawdown of U.S. and NATO troops from Afghanistan by the end of 2014 will affect the people and institutions in Afghanistan with dire consequences. The following are the concerns and recommendations that they shared.

**Gradual force drawdown to strengthen Afghan security and borders.** They alluded to the danger of maintaining weak borders with Afghan neighbors, and asked for international forces to help strengthen Afghan securities forces, so that they are able to secure and protect the country from external interventions. Instead of a sudden pull out of forces, they asked for a gradual pull-out with intense training of Afghan military and security personnel before gradually pulling out and handing over security responsibilities, and eventually turning over all security enforcement when the Afghan forces are ready to
take control on their own and able to defend the country. One participant expressed the fears of most Afghans that “Afghanistan neighbors will definitely show themselves strong and just bring their puppets again in power.”

My participants insisted that terrorism and insecurities in Afghanistan originated from outside the country’s borders with its neighbors. They blamed Pakistan and Iran for the interventions and pointed to jihadist training grounds in Pakistan that are known to train and radicalize foreign fighters that end up in Afghanistan.

Invest and fund the civilian sectors. They asked for the international community to continue investing and funding the civilian sectors, particularly the humanitarian sectors, which they claimed has been the key engine of Afghan development. There is need to continue to provide uninterrupted basic needs for the most poor and vulnerable Afghans. They would like the international communities to continue providing advisory roles to the Afghan government so as to maintain good governance, law and order, and rid the government of corruption. Several participants talked about the Afghan government’s inability to care for its people. They claimed that the Afghan humanitarian aid workers created the “bridge” between the Afghan people and the Afghan governments, and argued that the people’s needs are met through the efforts of the humanitarian sector, not by the Afghan government. Hence, they advocated for direct funding of the humanitarian aid sector, to maximize services to the communities, and avoid dealing with what they claimed to be a corrupt Afghan government; they also accused the Afghan government of not having any programs that addressed the needs of the Afghan people, and gave examples of circumstances where the Taliban was able to provide help for people in rural areas where the government was not able to reach due to
insecurities. However, they insisted that Afghan humanitarian aid workers provided services in rural insecure areas, which sometimes expose aid workers to violence and physical dangers.

Many participants feared that a drawdown of U.S. and NATO forces may lead to the closing of Afghan NGOs and humanitarian aid services that provided desperately needed help to Afghan communities. One participant expressed his fears of things returning to the past and the potential of losing what had been achieved since the arrival of the U.S. and NATO troops.

In light of what has been witnessed in Iraq since the pull out of U.S. forces, it is very critical that these circumstances, that create conditions which lead to insecurities, are addressed so that systems are put in place to allow young Afghans to develop themselves and seek opportunities to provide for themselves and their families. One participant said that if a person has a job, and he or she is able to provide for their family, he or she will not be thinking of joining groups in Pakistan, or going to jihadist training camps in “Yemen” or “Kashmir, Pakistan” or “doing roadside bombing” or “blowing himself up.”

According to Burton (1990), if people have no means of providing for themselves and satisfying their basic human needs, they are likely to seek other means that are outside the social norms. If the conditions that exist after the U.S. and NATO pull out from Afghanistan create the sense of hopelessness and despair for young men and women in Afghan communities, they will become easy targets for recruit into terror and jihadist groups. As Hamas leaders assert, poverty and the feeling of hopelessness provide opportunities for recruiting young jihadists (Stern, 2003).
Broker agreement with the Taliban. My participants asked the U.S. and international communities to help broker an agreement between the Taliban, the Afghan government, and the Afghan people, which will allow the Taliban to participate in Afghan political process so as to avoid backlash upon the U.S. and NATO drawdown or any possibilities of sectarian war. My participants claimed that the Afghan government forces will not be able to defeat the well-funded Taliban who control most of the rural communities and the Afghan borders:

“If the government is not able to have access to the people in the village, but the Taliban provides them with food and money to take care of their families, they are going to listen to the Taliban and do what the Taliban is telling them to do.”

One participant, even though critical of some of the actions of the Taliban, noted that “their regime and the time of their government was very good.” Another participant said that security was much better during the Taliban regime than with the U.S. and NATO troops. He insisted that people did not dare to steal from other people for fear of getting caught and the consequence; however, he noted that now, Afghanistan is insecure, but the people are “independent.” He said Afghans now have the right to vote, go to school, work, and the rights of women and minorities.

A fundamental goal articulated by my participants is the need for “peace,” and some referred to it as “just peace” through education. They claimed that terrorism or the jihadist tendencies are not intrinsic to the Afghan culture, and argued that the sources of terror and jihad are foreign. However, the lack of education allowed terrorism to fester and grow, and so if they are “cut from their roots and not allowed to germinate,” he said, they can be controlled and eventually eradicated. One participant made the argument that
the Taliban preyed on people who were uneducated, alleging that during the Taliban regime, the Taliban took advantage of the people who were uneducated. Therefore, she said that education of men and women in Afghanistan is the key to attaining Afghan freedom and prosperity.

**Basic Human Needs Model**

I use the basic human needs theory advanced by Burton (1990, 1997, 1972) to frame and form a contextual analysis of the major themes developed from the study, and to understand the conditions that give rise to the destructive processes that lead to violent attacks and cause danger to Afghan humanitarian aid workers in Kabul, Afghanistan. In Burton’s work on structural violence and conflict causation, he warns that:

> if certain human needs are not satisfied, there will be conflict. The conflict will be of such a character that no suppressive means will contain it. Attempts to suppress it will lead, on the contrary, to exponential increases in conflict. One could go on to predict a total catastrophe. (Burton, 1990, p. 231)

Even though Burton did not invent human needs theory, he is regarded by many conflict and international relations scholars and political scientists as one of the pioneers of conflict resolution and dispute studies (Sandole, 1999). Burton’s basic human needs theory posits the existence of certain universal basic needs that must be attained in order to avoid destructive conflicts in societies. He argues very firmly that when the pursuit of these basic needs are frustrated, and people are deprived the opportunities or the means to attain them, individuals will go to extreme measures in order to fulfill their “deeply felt needs, even death by suicide bombing or by hunger strikes” (Burton, 1997, p. 19). Burton’s basic human needs theory has four components that are most significant to
understanding destructive social conflicts, and these are the needs for: identity, recognition, security, and personal development (Burton, 1990, 1997). However, according to Burton, no model is able to “depict deep-rooted human motivations” (1990, p. 75). He believes that such motivations require a “conceptualization that goes beyond the capacity of models to describe” (p. 75). He concludes that such uses of models are “misleading” (p. 75), because they only bring attention to certain interactions, hence not a “substitute for a full analytical exposition” (Burton, 1990, p. 75). Nonetheless, for the sake of empirical evidence and to avoid observations that merely lead to labeling aggression, frustration, violence, and anti-social behavior, Burton posits the following hypotheses:

If learning and social development require consistency in response, security, identity, and recognition, and if human behavior is characterized by learning and social development, then humans pursue consistency in response, security, identity, and recognition as a condition of their learning process. It is reasonable to argue, further, that organisms have a genetic drive to learn, for existence depends upon learning. These learning needs will be fulfilled. If recognition, identity of self, and some measure of control over the environment are human needs, then the absence of their fulfillment will lead to adaptations that restrict development and perhaps create abnormalities in behavior, or lead to anti-social behaviors. (Burton, 1990, p. 95)

Burton’s argument is supported by Sites’ control theory (1973), in which he argues that the satisfaction and deprivation of individual human needs are the key sources of societal order and change. He insists that people will fight and risk dying to protect
values related to need gratification. Sites maintains that the individuals’ desire to satisfy their basic needs is so strong that they are willing to “step out of the real world into a world of their own” in order to seek the satisfaction of their basic needs or simply to “escape their complete frustration” (Sites, 1973, p. 10). In the same token, Burton and Sites agree that if individuals are not able to satisfy their needs through legal, morally, or socially justifiable means, they will seek other means necessary, including causing harm to themselves and others (Burton, 1990, p. 96). According to Burton, basic human needs will be pursued without regard to the consequences, even when it leads to conflict. Therefore, the desire for individuals to seek and satisfy their basic needs is a fundamental precondition for maintaining social order. He argues that any society’s ability to function is dependent on its individual citizen’s ability to fulfill their basic human needs (1990, 1997).

My participants spoke of instances when the young men and women in Afghan communities had no hope. They cannot take care of themselves or feed their families, so they said, “When the people have no hope, the number of the Taliban is increasing.” My participants did not attempt to defend young Afghan men and women who struggle every day to have their basic needs met, but instead they provided an empathetic understanding of the consequences of structural violence, which created the conditions that continues to frustrate young Afghan men and women and deny them their basic human needs.

In an attempt to explain the conditions of structural violence as experienced by young Afghan men and women, one participant talked about the issues of “joblessness and unequal distribution of revenue.” These were the conditions that he said created “past skirmishes and fighting” that led to sectarian and civil conflicts in the Afghanistan.
Insisting that if he has a job and the ability to provide for his family, he would not be thinking of joining jihadist or terror groups, or doing harm to himself and other innocent people. He talked about the propaganda used to lure young men and women into jihadist terror training camps by what he called “*some elements in our neighborhood,*” referring to Pakistan—“*they’re explaining that this is like a holy war. If they kill themselves, they will be going to Janna.*”

In Jessica Stern’s work entitled *Terror in the Name of God* (2003), she affirms that “martyrdom operations are sacred acts, worthy of both earthly and heavenly rewards” (p. 33). From her interviews with Hamas leaders, they acknowledged that poverty and hopelessness increased support for them and made recruiting for jihad easier. During one of her interviews, she was asked to take a look at the living conditions of the Palestinian people, and then she would understand “why there are always volunteers for martyrdom” (p. 38). One of the Hamas leaders told her that “Hardship always brings people back to God” (p. 38). During one of my interviews with a participant, I asked him what he would say to the U.S. President Obama if he had the president’s attention, and he simply said he would ask the president to spend half the money it would cost the U.S. to pull out its military troops from Afghanistan on civil development that will provide opportunities for Afghan people. And he said, “*Just ten percent, and there will be no more fighting.*” He believed that the main issue driving insecurity and terrorism is the lack of opportunities—that people are fighting because “*they do not have hope*”—they cannot see the “endless enduring dream and a thousand points of light” that the former President George H. Bush (1988, para.107) spoke about during his speech accepting the Republican presidential nomination. So my participant will ask President Obama to shine
some light of hope for the Afghan people to see, just as the former President George H. Bush (1988) likened America to “a brilliant diversity spread like stars, like a thousand points of light in a broad and peaceful sky” (para. 62). My participant believed that Afghans will choose peace, prosperity, and long life, instead of blowing themselves up.

Identity. The issue of identity deals with how individuals navigate the pursuit of belonging and acceptance, sometimes sought through groups such as ethnic groups, religious groups, social groups, or work/professional groups (Burton, 1990). This need provides the feeling of belonging, which can translate to a sense of confidence and security knowing that one is not alone. The question of identity was never asked directly to my participants, and was not discussed during the interviews and the focus group discussions. However, one participant alluded to the fact that one of the achievements of the war on terror was the elimination of ethnic conflict and rivalry. He noted that prior to the arrival of the U.S. and NATO troops, ethnic rivalry between Tajiks and Pashtuns, as well as language and tribal differences used to be causes of conflict; now he said, Afghans have become less interested in such divisions, suggesting that the people have been “sensitized” as their “awareness has been raised.” They have new issues to dwell on that are much bigger than the individual: they worry about protecting the constitution, civil rights for all Afghans, and equal justice for all as they look ahead for the next election season to vote for someone they believe will be the best leader for all the people of Afghanistan.

A key element of identity has to do with the issue of joblessness—the inability of young Afghans to find employment and be able to provide for their families. Burton (1972) alluded to role behaviors and how they affect and define the individual’s sense of
self. The roles individuals play in society affect how they are perceived by the society and people that they interact with, thereby affecting their own self-esteem and how they self-identify.

The issues of jobs and employment are central to the ability of an individual to seek and attain their basic human need of identity. Having gainful employment provides the individual with a role in society that gives them the identity and self-worth, which leads to how they perceive themselves in society and how society perceives them. If they are not working, not able to provide for themselves or take care of their families, they may begin to look elsewhere for the diminished sense of pride in their identity. According to Burton (1990), they become vulnerable and susceptible to ideologies and propagandas in the environment because they will now do whatever it takes to fulfil those unmet needs, even if it means using terrorism or joining jihadist groups that promise them hope.

Finally, the issue of foreign interventions from Pakistan and neighboring countries, which my participants claim imposed their will on the people of Afghanistan, were voiced frequently by my participants. One participant talked about how orders to release a prisoner from an Afghan jail were given from Islamabad, Pakistan. He shared that people referred to Afghanistan as another province of Pakistan. This erosion and deprivation of national identity can affect one’s ability to perceive themselves as a member of an independent people, therefore affecting their self-esteem. This feeling can also be compounded by the fact that Afghanistan has been occupied by several powers in recent history: once by the British, then the Soviet Union, and now by the U.S. and NATO troops. As Stern (2003) states in her study of religious militancy, one of the
dominant issues that drives Islamic militancy is pride, the shame of humiliation by the West. This may be a self-defeating proposition, or as a result of the conditions from conflicting dynamics playing out in several Islamic environments such as the Israeli and Palestinian conflict, or the Western invasions and occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan. As a result of these structural conditions, young Islamic men and women seeking to redeem their identities are made vulnerable in their quest to fulfil this unmet human need (Burton, 1990, 1997). When the conditions in the environment frustrate their ability to attain their basic needs, they may begin to seek other means outside the social norm, including violent means to express their frustrations (Burton, 1990).

Security. Insecurity has been a critical area of vulnerability affecting the psychology of most Afghans for over thirty years. A nation that has seen many occupations, invasions, and internal civil conflicts, and has been classified by the UN as a complex political emergency is an environment with considerable breakdown of authority, requiring international response beyond the capacity of any single nation (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 1999). Its people are not safe, as insurgents and jihadist groups attempt to disrupt their fragile state of normalcy using fear and mayhem to subject its people to ideologies that will form and frame their existence.

Several participants talked about their lack of trust in the Afghan government and the Afghan national security’s inabilities to protect them and their families. One participant felt that the Afghan military was not capable of defending the country against military attack from Pakistan following the U.S. and NATO drawdown of forces in 2014. This sense of vulnerability affects not only the individual’s sense of security, but also
their sense of national identity. When the attainment of basic human need is obstructed and made unattainable, people will resort to dire measures to attain them (Burton, 1997).

According to Burton (1990, 1997), if people do not feel safe, and have no way of making sure that their loved ones will be safe, many will resort to vigilante justice; they will seek ways to protect and shelter their loved ones even if it leads them to breaking the law. Individuals will go to extreme measure in order to provide safety needs for their family (1997). A female participant shared that during the Taliban regime, many Afghan women risked their lives, operating underground to sustain the women’s movement against the Taliban rules and knowing fully well that they could be put to death, but they were not deterred from fulfilling the need for the pursuit of the rights of women and equal protection of all Afghans under the law. They were willing to risk their lives to get freedom from the Taliban.

**Recognition and Personal Development.** I am reminded of Burton’s assertion that behavior is a function of “learning and social development” (1990, p. 95). He argues that “if recognition, identity of self, and some measure of control over the environment are human needs, then the absence of their fulfillment will lead to adaptations that restrict development and perhaps create abnormalities in behavior, or lead to anti-social behaviors” (Burton, 1990, p. 95). With hope and the opportunity for self-development, individuals have a conducive atmosphere that nurtures and encourages the attainment of the basic human needs of recognition and personal development without fear of physical, psychological, mental, or social harm. Individuals and societies have the opportunity to develop environments that are free from structural violence, which frustrate the attainment of basic human needs, and give rise to conflicts that create insecurities.
**Structural Violence.** In earlier sections, I introduced ideas from John Burton (1972, 1990, 1997), Johan Galtung (1964, 1969, 1990), and Paul Sites (1973), on structural violence and the systematic conditions that frustrate individuals from attaining their basic human needs, and how the frustration and inability to attain basic human needs of security, identity, recognition, and personal development or self-actualization can push people and societies into conflicts, terrorism, and social disorder. Galtung (1969) defines violence as the reason for the “difference between the potential and the actual, between what could have been and what is” (p. 168). And cultural violence is defined as those attributes and characteristics that define our core essence “exemplified by religion, language and art, empirical science and formal science that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence” (Galtung, 1990, p. 291). To this end, my female participants were quite clear on the type of peace they seek in Afghanistan: just peace! They told me—the belief that all Afghans (men, women and children) need to be free with equal opportunities and peace for all Afghans.

**Theoretical Framework from Research Findings**

One main objective of this study was to explore the lived experiences of Afghan humanitarian aid workers in Kabul, Afghanistan, on the war on terror, and to better understand the conditions that expose them to risks and violent attacks. My investigation led to a better understanding of the conditions that continue to give rise to the increase in violence, kidnapping, and killings of humanitarian aid workers in complex political emergencies. Using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) my data analysis generated six dominant themes from the storied narratives of my 10 face-to-face interview participants, and seven dominant themes from my focus group discussions with twenty
Afghan NGO directors. Originating from my research data is a new theory of intervention, which I have named *Otubako Post 9-11 Conflict Theory*. The name Otubako is in memory of my late father who was assassinated during the Nigerian civil war in 1968. A family legend is that the original family name was Otubako, meaning that a woman’s vagina is wealth. Shamed from ridicule my father decided to change the family name from Otubako to Ogwude. The early Ibo custom believed that a woman that bore many children brought wealth to her husband’s home.

Emanating from this theory of intervention is a model for transforming environments from violent conflicts to sustainable, collaborative, co-existence of its entire people—an environment which provides individuals the ability to seek and attain their basic human needs of security, identity, recognition, and self-actualization.
Security:
People feel secure in their environment; secure borders; and the ability to make decisions for themselves and their families

Funding:
Increase funding for new businesses; create jobs and opportunities; build schools and infrastructure

Trust:
Establish good relationships with local people, communities, and governments; develop and communicate clear military and political goals/strategies

Conflict Environment:
Complex Political Emergency:
A humanitarian crisis in a country, region or society where there is total or considerable breakdown of authority resulting from an internal or external conflict and which requires an international response that goes beyond the mandate or capacity of any single agency and/or the ongoing United Nations country programs

Secure Environment:
Where people are able to provide basic needs for themselves and their families; have a strong sense of identity; ability to seek personal development; and feeling of recognition for their contributions

Improve efficacy and the rule of law
Create opportunities for all; improve national pride and identity
Develop human capacity; discourage brain drain
Improve collaboration with all parties and stakeholders - including insurgents
Just Peace – with equality for all
Eradicate hopelessness and the militarization of youths

Figure 2. Illustration of Otubako Post-9/11 Conflict Theory

Otubako Post-9/11 Conflict Theory

Otubako Post-9/11 Conflict Theory is a theory of interventions founded and derived from my data of storied narratives from ten face-to-face interviews and a focus group discussion with twenty Afghan humanitarian aid workers. The theory postulates
that the efficacy of interventions and their ability to transform conflict environments (Complex Political Emergencies) to more secure, supportive, and just environments can be determined by the conditions in the environments vis-à-vis the conditions that existed in the environments at the time of the interventions. A favorable intervention will produce positive conditions that are secure, supportive, and just for its inhabitants, so that they are able to provide basic human needs for themselves and their families. However, an unfavorable intervention will produce negative outcomes, which give rise to conditions that create chaos and insecurities in the environment—conditions of structural violence that deny and frustrate individuals from attaining basic fundamental human needs for themselves and their families. The nature of the intervention may be hostile as in the case of Afghanistan, or friendly as in the case of the plumber. In either case, Otubako Post-9/11 Conflict Theory postulates that for interventions to be successful, the interveners must leave the context in conditions similar to, or better than, the original conditions that existed at the time of the intervention, otherwise the resulting conditions will lead to chaos and insecurities.

When I asked my participants how they felt about the war on terror, in almost every instance the answer was: “Do not abandon Afghanistan like in the 1990s.” Many followed with the Afghan proverb: “When you try to lift a piece of stone, and you find that it is too heavy; you cannot lift it, you should kiss it and leave it in its place.” They said that in the beginning of the U.S. intervention, the U.S. and NATO troops knew that they could not lift the stone; they should have kissed it, and should not have come to Afghanistan. Just like the plumber who was invited into a home to repair a clogged kitchen sink, but creates conditions worse by damaging the garbage disposal. His
intervention will be deemed unsuccessful because the condition in the home as a result of the intervention is worse than the condition that existed prior to his intervention. In the same token, when the U.S. and NATO troops intervened in Afghanistan, they tried to fix a fragile state in disarray, but only to create conditions worse than the original state of disarray. Now my participants claim that the whole area of Afghanistan is “engulfed in fire.” They warned that since the U.S. and NATO troops have actively intervened in Afghanistan, they cannot abandon Afghanistan until they put out the “fire,” as former General Colin Powell warned that “if you break it, you own it” (as cited in Samuels, 2007, para. 1).

Otubako Post-9/11 Conflict Theory postulates three ingredients: security, funding, and trust, necessary for transforming complex political emergencies in a post-9/11 world. The model begins with building security infrastructure, adequate funding for all sectors of society, and building trust between all groups and stakeholders, including insurgents. These actions, correctly executed, have the ability to transform conflict environments (Complex Political Emergency) into secure environments where different groups collaborate and individuals are able to provide basic human needs for themselves and their families; individuals are recognized for their contributions to society and as a result have strong sense of self and national identity.

The model is configured in sections to illustrate the different components needed to create sustainable post-conflict environment; the top section depicts the conditions that must be initiated in order to begin the process of transformation. The next section is the context or environment that is acted upon to produce change; this change process is
depicted in the last section as it transforms from violent state into a more secure environment.

**Contribution of Study**

The primary contribution of this study of the lived experiences of Afghan humanitarian aid workers in Kabul, Afghanistan, is to create a better understanding of the conditions in Kabul as a result of the war on terror that give rise to the structural violence that leads to insecurities, terrorism, and Islamic militancy. I also expect that this study will make viable contributions to scholarly debates and lead to further investigations on how the conditions in complex political emergencies like Afghanistan lead to suspicion and mistrust that give rise to violence against humanitarian aid workers (Deutsch, 2011). With the escalation of conflicts in many parts of the third world, complex political emergencies involving several political, military, and insurgent groups which infringe on humanitarian space—as we have witnessed in the past twelve years, particularly in Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan, Liberia, Congo, Kosovo, Columbia, Palestine, and now Syria—have become the new framework for international conflict in the ‘War on Terror.’ As a student of conflict resolution, I believe that this research study will enable scholars of conflict and dispute studies to begin to investigate the conditions of structural violence that frustrate individuals from obtaining their basic human needs. For over thirty years, the world was warned that individuals frustrated from attaining their basic human needs will be willing to go to “extreme lengths to defy systems in order to pursue their deeply felt needs, even death by suicide bombing or by hunger strikes” (Burton, 1997, p. 19, 1990, 1972). Sites (1973) made the argument that the satisfaction and deprivation of individual human needs are the key sources of societal order and change. It is my hope that this
research study will further this dialog and lead to more investigations on structural violence and the frustration and deprivation of basic human needs, as foundational to addressing this violent phenomenon of terrorism and the radicalization of young men and women. To this end, I have developed a conflict model: Otubako Post-9/11 Conflict Theory—a theory of the efficacy of interventions with the ability to transform conflict environments (Complex Political Emergencies) into secure environments where people are able to provide basic human needs for themselves and their families, they are recognized for their contributions to society, and have a strong sense of self and national identity.

From the discussions I had with my participants in Kabul, a central desire expressed by my participants was the need to be heard. They hoped that this research study would provide them the opportunity to voice their opinions on issues relating to the war on terror, and their role as Afghan humanitarian aid workers in a conflict that some have referred to humanitarian aid workers as “force multipliers” (Ferris, 2010). The feeling was that their voices had been drowned from discussions on civil-military cooperation, as well as their frustration on how local Afghan NGOs are funded through the International NGOs. It is my hope, therefore, that the stories of these men and women will shed light on the dangerous and often life threatening conditions that Afghan aid workers endure as a result of the war on terror. It is my hope that through better understanding, more constructive interactions and relationships with Afghan aid workers will develop.

I am hopeful that this investigation will help us better understand the true meanings of the past twelve years of war on terror and its impact on humanity. September
11, 2001 was a ‘moment of change’ that changed the nature of conflicts as the world had known. Groups of young men of Islamic faith flew airplanes into the World Trade Center buildings in New York City, killing over 3,000 men and women; such acts of terrorism that struck New York City, Arlington, Virginia, and Shanksville, Pennsylvania have significantly and, as many believe, have permanently affected the way Americans view themselves and the rest of the world. These new conditions are changing the nature of conflicts and creating a power in-balance, tilting the power balance from the U.S. Department of State to the Department of Defense—a new phenomenon that has changed the dynamics of international conflicts by giving rise to conditions that some have coined the “militarization of aid” (Ferris, 2010). This investigation attempts to provide understanding of the consequences of this military violation of humanitarian space in complex political emergencies.

Using the stories of individual interviews and focus group discussions from humanitarian aid workers in Kabul, Afghanistan, I have sought to understand how the war on terror affects and impacts on aid workers and their ability to deliver and provide desperately needed and lifesaving aid to the young, women, and the old who are often victims of war and conflict. To this end, I have developed a theoretical model: Otubako Post-9/11 Conflict Theory—a conflict transformation model that addresses conditions characteristic of post-9/11 conflict environments with the aim of transitioning post-9/11 militarized contexts into stable, more secure, and sustainable environments. It is my hope that this study can be replicated in complex political emergencies around the world, and lead to better and deeper understanding of factors which give rise to destructive processes in conflict management and resolution (Deutsch, 2011). I invite scholars and practitioners
of conflict analysis and resolution to join me in implementing and tweaking this new theoretical framework that promises hope for many in highly undesirable conflict environments around the world.

Limitations of Study

One of the key factors that limited this research study was what I felt was a narrow sampling of participants for the study. First, the participation in the study was limited to Kabul, Afghanistan, for obvious reasons of limited funding and concern for security. Being an insecure environment, I did not plan to venture into other provinces of Afghanistan. Even though I received several requests from Afghan humanitarian aid workers in other provinces who were interested in participating in the study, the risks for such venture seemed very high to bear with the limited funding that I had for the project. Second, the study was restricted to Afghan humanitarian aid workers only. It did not include international NGOs and aid workers from different countries working in Afghanistan. Also it did not include members of the military, the Afghan government officials, Afghan communities, and other international communities. I believe that all these viewpoints would have enriched and broadened the scope of discussions and the final analysis. However, in this particular study, a central goal was to give voice to the Afghan humanitarian aid workers with a focus on Kabul. Again, the participation of Afghan humanitarian aid in other provinces of Afghanistan would have broadened the scope of the study.

Additionally, using a narrative inquiry, I would have liked to have spent more interview time with my participants. Possibly, a second or third interview would have allowed for follow-up questions and more time immersed in my participants’
environment. My interviews lasted approximately one hour each, and the focus group discussion lasted two hours.

Due to my limited time in Kabul, I was unable to attend events that my participants invited me to attend with them. These events would have exposed me to the different humanitarian services and activities they offered, leading possibly to the opportunity to meet some of the aid beneficiaries. This would have given me a deeper understanding of their roles and the different actors they interact with. During my visit to Kabul, one of the participants had inquired if I was interested in meeting other constituents. I believe he was referring to the possibility of interviewing Afghan government officials, local Afghan communities, and some insurgents. Unfortunately, the scope of my research was quite limited both in funding and in the capacity to execute a project of such magnitude in an insecure environment.

Another area of limitation was the fact that I did not video tape the interviews and the focus group. By not videotaping, I missed utilizing the body language and other nuances that give meanings to the dialog in my analysis. I also believe that the study would have been more revealing with a video component. However, I am often reminded that Afghanistan is an insecure environment; mobility and security of individuals involved in such projects must be of priority consideration.

I believe that I have attempted to faithfully represent and interpret my participants’ storied narratives. However, like most researchers, I am cognizant of my biases, points of view, political viewpoints, feelings, and personal experiences that influence my analysis and interpretation of the study. It is my hope that my research committee, peer/expert reviews, and participant validations have mitigated some of my
personal biases. I believe that some of my background experiences, such as growing up in Nigeria, helped me to understand some of the nuances and sensibilities of my participants, my hosts, and the context. Ultimately, the main focus of this study is to give voice to the storied narratives of the humanitarian aid workers who risk their lives every day to bring aid to needy Afghans in very insecure environments of the war on terror. In the end, I hope that with them I have been able to shed light for better understanding of the conditions in complex political environments that give rise to violence against innocuous humanitarian aid workers through the narratives that my participants and I have co-constructed together.

**Future Recommendations**

A key recommendation from this study is for scholars, researchers, and policymakers to pay particular attention to the frustration and deprivation of individual human needs as key drivers of social conflicts and the radicalization of young men and women around the world. I recommend that more studies be done to better understand these dynamics, rooted in structural violence that are denying and frustrating individuals around the world from their basic human needs. For this purpose, I highly recommend my newly developed theoretical framework: Otubako Post-9/11 Conflict Theory of interventions, which can transform complex political emergencies into secure environments that promise hope for individuals to obtain their basic human needs of security, identity, recognition, and self-actualization.

More research is also needed to explore the impacts of war on terror on complex political emergencies around the world, how the war on terror is impacting on local
humanitarian aid communities in complex political emergencies, and what can be done to mitigate risks of violence to aid workers in such insecure environments.

Additionally, I believe that a study on the interactions and relationships between local NGOs, national NGOs, and international NGOs will shed light on constructive and deconstructive processes that the humanitarian aid communities have to deal with in the new global war on terror and offer opportunities for future integration of services.

Lastly, for policymakers, certainly, it will not be a surprise to learn that the war on terror will not be won by how many bullets and bombs, or how many terrorists are killed by drones. This idea has been echoed on several occasions by military commanders, government officials, legislators, and news reporters. As one participant said, when we take out one terrorist leader, another person is waiting to take their place—maybe this time, one more brutal than the one that was taken out. The strength of terror was not in the leadership that was killed, but in the numbers of recruits who are radicalized and waiting to carry out the acts of terror. Another participant said that we have to find the “seed of terror” and stop it in its roots. The seeds of terror are the young men and women who are frustrated and deprived from their basic human needs. We must catch them before they are recruited and sowed for terror. If individuals are frustrated and denied of their basic human needs, they will go to “extreme lengths to defy systems in order to pursue their deeply felt needs, even death by suicide bombing or by hunger strikes” (Burton, 1997, p. 19).

Unlike Iraq, Afghanistan still offers windows of opportunities that are fast closing. The situation in Afghanistan is still hopeful and can still be rectified. I recommend the following:
1. Help and lead negotiations with the Taliban and other insurgent groups, so that all the parties are represented at the table.

2. Help and lead negotiations with Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan for peaceful and possible militarized border control. The goal is to stop interventions from Iran and Pakistan.

3. Equip and train Afghan military and the Afghan police to be effective and efficient, so they can defend Afghan borders and secure peace internally.

4. Work closely with Afghan government to improve governance and eradicate corruption in public offices.

5. Help develop Afghan national infrastructure with local Afghan participation to build skills and human capacity.

6. Negotiate a long term U.S. military presence to create room for stability and sustainable economic development.

If Afghanistan is given a five to 10 year buffer from interference from its neighbors to focus on developing its infrastructures and national economy, it will be able to develop into a viable and sustainable economy that will provide opportunities for its young population, so that everyone can contribute to the growth with shared opportunities for all. An Afghan society that provides opportunities for its young men and women will no longer be a place to sow the seeds of terror.

**Conclusion**

I started this research study simply wanting to understand how people with desperate needs to survive would want to inflict harm on the same people that risk their lives to bring them the help they desperately need to survive. I have since learned from
my study that there are fundamental factors that create the conditions which give rise to such violence and hostilities against Afghan men and women (humanitarian aid workers) who risk their lives every day to bring desperately needed help to local Afghan families in insecure environments. Some might argue that these factors go back many decades, and I believe they will be right to make that argument, but as violent and defunct as the foundation was, it had not crumbled. When a plumber is commissioned to one’s home to unclog the sink and mistakenly damages the garbage disposal, now the condition is worse than when the plumber came into the home. The plumber becomes agitated and apologetic, and works very hard to make the bad situation right. Now the plumber has to turn off the water supply to the kitchen to stop the flooding, and the dishwasher is no longer usable. This is not a sustainable situation for the plumber and the home owner. The plumber calls the office to report the incident, and the office instructs the plumber to initiate a service order for a next day replacement at no charge to the customer. It is that simple: If you break it, you own it (C. Powell as cited in Samuels, 2007, para. 1).

I reflect on an Afghan proverb shared by my participants that when one attempts to lift a piece of rock, and finds it too heavy to lift; one should just kiss it and leave it in its place. My participants were suggesting that in 2001, when the U.S. troops came to Afghanistan, they saw the rock that was heavy to lift, and instead of leaving it in its place, they decided to intervene and change the status quo. Now, according to my participants, Afghanistan is “engulfed in flame; they cannot leave until they put out the fire”—just like the plumber who could not leave the customer’s home without instituting proper measures to address the new condition in the customer’s home, which was created as a result of the plumber’s intervention, even though the plumber was commissioned.
Similarly, the burden of responsibility to correct and restore order in the environment still rested on the individual or group of individuals who intervened.

The question that Strand (2007) posed in 2007 is still relevant. He wondered why the local Afghans no longer came out of their homes, excited and happy to see the international humanitarian aid workers when they arrived at the villages, like they did in the past—a very simple question, but quite complicated in the reasons why. The question was simply about what had happened to the trusting relationship developed with the Afghan communities. What had come between them to cause the mistrust? In this study, my participants asked similar questions: *Why have they become suspicious and now wonder if we have guns? Why do they now see us as helpers of the foreign soldiers?* I have learned from this study that there were several factors that complicated the relationships and created mistrust for the humanitarian aid workers, particularly the Afghan aid worker. It was not simply because of the collaborations with foreign military forces that made nightly incursions into local Afghan communities and homes to arrest or maybe kill potential or suspected terrorists, or the collaborations with the PRTs who my participants claimed were perceived by most Afghans to be corrupt. I believe that over time, the context that Strand (2007) inquired about had become “harsh.” As a result, the inhabitants of the context became hardened. My participants said that the Taliban are the terrorists; however, in the villages where people have no jobs, no opportunities to make a living and be able to take care of their families, the Afghan government is not able to provide any services to assist Afghans who live in insecure villages due to the presence of the Taliban. Suppose the terrorists or the Taliban have access to the people, they provide them with food, money, and basic needs to take care of their families. My
participants argued that the people are going to listen and do whatever the Taliban tells them or wants them to do. And in some instances, they claim that mothers have been brainwashed to make the ultimate sacrifices of giving their own sons to jihad, in return for the help they were told that Allah provided for them. One participant described the war on terror as “a war of intelligence” and others have called it a propaganda war. Either way, it is about WHAM: Winning Hearts and Minds. The idea was a correct one, but the implementation was flawed and ill-informed. The WHAM strategy can be re-implemented with better focus. The jihadist and leaders of fundamentalist groups recruit young men and women who become radicalized through propaganda to give up their lives. They also convince good mothers and fathers to make the ultimate sacrifices of giving up their sons and daughters to blow up themselves and innocent people for the propaganda of a holy war and the reward in heaven (Stern, 2003). The jihadists and fundamentalists are currently winning this war of ‘intelligence’ or propaganda war because the rest of the world is fighting with drones and sophisticated military hardware. The little beggar boys I described in my research context are the jihadists of tomorrow. If systems in the context do not create conditions that will provide young men and women pathways to systematically transition from the streets to productive contributors of society, with opportunities to provide for themselves and take care of their families, this research study finds that innate human needs are at the core of most conflicts, and they must be addressed and satisfied if society is to find peaceful resolution satisfactory to all the parties (Burton, 1972; Sites, 1973). Further, the study finds that Afghan humanitarian aid workers in Kabul are exposed to risks of danger and violent attacks as a result of the conditions of structural violence that frustrate and deny young Afghans, as well as their

The only way to win this war on terror is to employ all means necessary, including “stopping the seed of terror in its root.” As one participant told me, we must catch them before they are recruited and radicalized into jihad. I believe it all comes down to the satisfaction of the core human needs. If the conditions in the environment are denying young men and women their basic needs, and frustrating them from seeking and attaining these essential basic needs, they are going to seek their basic human needs elsewhere, even if it leads them into extreme dangers, including death by suicide bombing (Burton, 1997).

As we ponder on the different conflicts around the world—the sectarian civil war in Syria; ISIS in Iraq (which are redefining the states of Iraq and Syria as we have known them); the struggle for national unity and identity in Ukraine; Israel’s and Palestine’s inability to reach a two-states solution with two nations co-existing side-by-side in peace, with dignity, and mutual respect for the Jewish State and the State of Palestine; Boko Haram in Nigeria, which continues to elude Africa’s richest and most populous nation with inability to provide security for its citizens and protection for young school girls who are abducted, abused, and sold into sex slavery; and many conflicts around the world, some just waiting to erupt—I am reminded of people who live in states of siege, which deny them of the most fundamental human needs, yet they must uphold standards indicative of the rich and wealthy nations whose basic needs are exceeded daily, yet they are judged and condemned for displaying feelings of anger and frustration. What this study reveals is that when people are held in conditions of structural violence that
frustrate and deny them of their basic, fundamental human needs of security, identity, and the sense of value and recognition, they will go to the extremes and employ violent means to satisfy their basic needs (Burton, 1997; Sites, 1973).

My findings from this study have exposed me to new understandings, which have resulted in a new theoretical framework that I call Otubako Post-9/11 Conflict Theory—a theory of intervention, which postulates that for interventions to be successful, the interveners must leave the context in conditions similar to, or better than, the original conditions that existed at the time of the intervention, otherwise the resulting conditions will lead to more chaos and insecurities. When the plumber came into a home to service a kitchen drain, and created conditions that were worse than the original condition, which existed before the plumber arrived in the home, the plumber could not leave the environment, which had become unsustainable until he/she was able to institute order and negotiate a favorable plan of correction. Likewise, when the U.S. and NATO troops intervened in Afghanistan, and created the insecure conditions of a complex political emergency, the interveners must not leave the context until the conditions in Afghanistan are the same or better than the conditions that existed at the time of the intervention.
References


Appendix A: Face-to-Face Interview Guide

Interview Questions to Guide the Study

1. Tell me about your experiences – what has it been like?

2. Where do you find the words to begin to describe this war – the impact it’s had on you, the Afghan community, your family, the aid community?

3. Tell me your story – how did it all begin?

4. Take me inside one of your typical days – you’re bringing aid to people in desperate need… What happens?

5. How satisfied are you with the work you’re doing now?

6. What is the biggest challenge?

7. As you look back to these experiences, what do you say? Do they have meaning? Any hope?

8. What is your assessment of your country’s readiness to take over military and political responsibilities from the U.S. and foreign forces in 2014?

9. How did you arrive at this assessment?

10. What are the challenges facing this country? How do you feel about it?

11. What would you like to say to President Obama?

12. What would you like to say to the American people?

13. What would you say to Afghan people – your country men and women?

Note: During the interviews, this researcher asked follow-up questions as needed for clarification in order to redirect or expand on topic.
Appendix B: Focus Group Discussion Guide

Discussion Questions for Focus Group

1. What roles do Afghan Humanitarian Aid Workers, National and Local NGOs and CSOs play in Afghanistan? Why should people care what they think?

2. The perception is that you are already biased – your whole industry has been built on the War on Terror, you have benefitted immensely from the presence of the U.S. and International Forces in Afghanistan – isn’t it understandable, therefore, why your members overwhelmingly oppose the drawdown of forces in 2014?

3. What are the consequences of a drawdown of U.S. and International Forces from Afghanistan in 2014?

4. The perception is that the terrorists are not in Afghanistan. Some have argued that Osama bin Laden was not found and killed in Afghanistan – therefore questioning the activities of the foreign forces in Afghanistan, if that is so, why maintain the presence of the U.S. and International Forces in Afghanistan? Why are they needed?
Appendix C: Institutional Review Board Approval for Study

MEMORANDUM

To: Emmanuel Ogwude, M.A.
Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences

From: Matthew Seamon, Pharm.D., J.D.
Vice-Chair, Institutional Review Board

Date: January 25, 2013

Re: War on Terror – Experiences of Aid Workers in Afghanistan
Research Protocol No. 07111208Exp.

I have reviewed the above-referenced research protocol by an expedited procedure. On behalf of the Institutional Review Board of Nova Southeastern University, War on Terror - Experiences of Aid Workers in Afghanistan is approved in keeping with expedited review categories #6 and #7. Your study is approved on January 25, 2013 and is approved until January 24, 2014. You are required to submit for continuing review by December 24, 2013. As principal investigator, you must adhere to the following requirements:

1) CONSENT: You must use the stamped (dated consent forms) attached when consenting subjects. The consent forms must indicate the approval and its date. The forms must be administered in such a manner that they are clearly understood by the subjects. The subjects must be given a copy of the signed consent document, and a copy must be placed with the subjects’ confidential chart/file.

2) ADVERSE EVENTS/UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS: The principal investigator is required to notify the IRB chair of any adverse reactions that may develop as a result of this study. Approval may be withdrawn if the problem is serious.

3) AMENDMENTS: Any changes in the study (e.g., procedures, consent forms, investigators, etc.) must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

4) CONTINUING REVIEWS: A continuing review (progress report) must be submitted by the continuing review date noted above. Please see the IRB website for continuing review information.

5) FINAL REPORT: You are required to notify the IRB Office within 30 days of the conclusion of the research that the study has ended via the IRB Closing Report form.


Cc: Dr. Ismail Mavingi
   Dr. Toran Hansen
   Ms. Jennifer Dillon
Appendix D: Invitation Letter and Consent Form

Hello:
My name is Emmanuel Ogwude. I live in Parkersburg, West Virginia and work for West
Virginia University at Parkersburg in the United States. I am currently working on my
dissertation for the PhD in Conflict Analysis and Resolution at Nova Southeastern University in
Fort Lauderdale, Florida.
This summer, I will be traveling to Kabul, Afghanistan to conduct a research study on the effects
and experiences of the ‘War on Terror’ on civilian aid workers in Kabul, Afghanistan. My study
will use the narrative research method and I will be interviewing 20 humanitarian aid workers in
Kabul, Afghanistan. I have attached a letter of invitation to participate in my research study, and
I humbly request to circulate my attached letter of invitation to humanitarian aid workers
employed and contracted with your agency who might be interested in participating in my study.
I will be conducting one hour interviews with each participant on their experiences of the ‘War
on Terror’ in Afghanistan. The focus of my narrative study will be based on the analysis of
participants’ individual stories of their experiences of the ‘War on Terror’ and how the war has
affected them in their day-to-day humanitarian activities as they bring aid to needy Afghans. I
am hoping to complete all interviews during a two week stay in Kabul this summer (2012).
Those interested in participating, should contact me by telephone or email. Also, please let me
know if the agency has further questions regarding my dissertation study. My dissertation chair
is Dr. Toran Hansen – his contact information is listed below.
Thank you for your consideration and your assistance in disseminating this information.

Dissertation Chair:
Dr. Toran Hansen, PhD
3301 College Avenue
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33314
(954) 262-3041
(800) 541-6682 X-3041
Email: Toran@nova.edu
www.nova.edu

Very Truly,
Emmanuel
Consent Form for Participation in the Research Study Entitled
'War on Terror': Experiences of Aid Workers in Afghanistan

Funding Source: None

IRB Protocol # 0711208 Exp.

Principal Investigator:
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(304) 699-0181
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Co-Investigator:
Toran Hansen, PhD
3301 College Avenue
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(800) 541-5682
Email: Toran@nova.edu

For questions/concerns about your research rights, contact:
Human Research Oversight Board (Institutional Review Board or IRB)
Nova Southeastern University
(954) 262-5369/Toll Free: 866-499-0790
IRE@nsu.nova.edu

Site Information
Kabul, Afghanistan

What is this study about?
You have been asked to participate in a research study. The goal of this study is to understand how aid workers in Afghanistan experience the current 'War on Terror'.

Why are you asking me?
You have been asked to participate in this study because you have been involved in humanitarian aid activities in Afghanistan for at least six months, and have had some experience with the 'War on Terror'. There will be 20 participants in this research study.
What will I be doing if I agree to be in the study?
If you agree to participate in this study, you will be interviewed by the researcher, Mr. Emmanuel Ogwude who is a PhD candidate from Nova Southeastern University at Fort Lauderdale, Florida, U.S.A. He will be asking you questions about your experiences with the 'War on Terror' and how it has affected your work as a humanitarian aid worker in Afghanistan. You will be asked to complete a short information form, asking if you would like to be contacted by Mr. Ogwude in May 2013 for further clarification and validation of your stories. If you agree to be contacted, Mr. Ogwude will provide you the opportunity to review the research findings and interpretations so you can discuss and suggest changes that best reflect your intentions. This is to make sure that information used in the research represents what you intended to say during your interview. If you wish to be contacted by Mr. Ogwude, you will be asked to provide your preferred contact information: email or telephone number. During the interview, Emmanuel will be interested in hearing stories of your experiences with the 'War on Terror' in Afghanistan. The face-to-face interview will last approximately one hour, and the interview will be conducted at various NGO offices in Kabul, or at Emmanuel’s hotel in Kabul, or at a safe and private location that is convenient for you and mutually agreed upon. If during the interview Emmanuel learns that you are unable to continue with the interview for whatever reason, he will end the interview.

Is there any audio or video recording?
This research project will include audio recording of the interview. This audio recording will be available to be heard by the researcher, personnel from the IRB, and the dissertation chair, Dr. Hansen. The recordings will be transcribed by Mr. Ogwude and he will use earphones during transcription to guard your privacy. The recording will be stored securely in Mr. Ogwude’s home in a secure cabinet. After 36 months from the end of the study, the interview recordings will be destroyed. Because you will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the recording, your confidentiality for things you say on the recording cannot be guaranteed, although the researcher will try to limit access to the recordings as described in this paragraph.

What are the dangers to me?
The risks to you by participating in this research are minimal, however, due to the fact that the interview will be recorded your confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Sharing your opinions about personal experiences from the ‘war on terror’ may evoke unpleasant memories that may cause anxiety or nervousness. If this happens, this researcher will make all efforts to be helpful and supportive. Should you need further help, he will assist you by providing referral sources for counseling, but you will have to pay for that yourself. Even though confidentiality for things you say on audio recording cannot be guaranteed, all documents and recordings from your interviews will be safely stored in a locked cabinet in Emmanuel’s home office - the recordings will be deleted and all documents will be shredded 36 months after the completion of the study.
If you have questions about this research, your research rights, or any issue you would like to discuss regarding the research, please contact Mr. Ogwude at (304) 210-3790. You may also contact the IRB at the numbers indicated above.

Are there any benefits to me for taking part in this research study?
There are no direct benefits from participating in this study; however, this researcher hopes that your stories will lead to better understanding of the conditions that aid workers in Kabul, Afghanistan must endure.

Initials: ______ Date: _______
Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?
There will be no cost to you or payments for participating in this study.

How will you keep my information private?
Your responses to the interview questions and the transcriptions of the recording will be kept secured in the researcher’s home office and strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. As noted, all recordings and information obtained in this study will be destroyed 36 months after the study ends. The IRB, regulatory agencies, and Dr. Hansen may review research records.

What if I do not want to participate or I want to leave the study?
You have the right to discontinue participation in this study at any time. If you decide to discontinue your participation, you will not experience any penalty or any negative consequences from the researcher or anyone associated with this project. If you chose to terminate participation, any information collected about you before the date you leave the study will be kept in the research records for 36 months from the conclusion of the study and may be used as part of the study.

Other Considerations:
If this researcher learns of any new information that may affect your decision to continue participation in this study, you will be notified of this information promptly.

Voluntary Consent by Participant:
By signing below, you indicate that
• this study has been explained to you
• you have read this document or it has been read to you
• your questions about this research study have been answered
• you have been told that you may ask the researcher any study related questions in the future or contact him in the event of a research-related injury
• you have been told that you may ask Institutional Review Board (IRB) personnel questions about your study rights
• you are entitled to a copy of this form after you have read and signed it
• you voluntarily agree to participate in the study entitled *War on Terror*: Experiences of Aid Workers in Afghanistan

Participant’s Signature: __________________________ Date: ____________

Participant’s Name: __________________________ Date: ____________

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent: __________________________

Date: __________________________

Initials: __________ Date: __________

Institutional Review Board
Approval Date: JAN 25 2013
Continuing Review Date: JAN 24 2014