

## Research Article

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# Risk Management Responses to Armed Non-State Actor Risk in Afghanistan

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**Abstract:** The article considers responses by different categories of actor to the threat of armed non-state actors in the international intervention in Afghanistan 2001-2015. Concepts from the sociology of risk, in particular risk-management and the distinction between operational and reputational risk, are related to field research in Afghanistan during the intervention. The ‘risk society’ approach of Beck (2009) is critiqued as relatively inapplicable to a discussion of differences in risks to and responses by different categories of actor. The article identifies some convergences of practice across three categories of intervening actor, civil-developmental, counter-insurgent and counter-terrorist, in particular tendencies to risk-transfer and remote-management that draws together theorisation of civil practice by Duffield (2010) and military practice by Shaw (2002). This is problematised relative to difficulties in managing tensions between operational risks to intervening actors and reputational risks vis-à-vis local actors.

**Keywords:** Armed Non-state Actors, Risk, Risk-management, Afghanistan

## Introduction: armed non-state actors and risk

In this article I will be exploring the theme of armed non-state actors through the sociological concept of risk. ‘Risk’ here refers to conditions of uncertainty regarding

outcomes, especially potentially catastrophic outcomes, with the sociology of risk concerned with the effects of conditions of risk on social action and social institutions. This is in part a question of how risk is defined, or what is defined as a risk. This article engages with this question through the case of the international intervention in Afghanistan (2001-2015), and with the sociology of risk through a critique of the risk society approach of Ulrich Beck and the particular definition of ‘risk’ this approach represents. This critique will concern the extent to which Beck’s thesis of ‘individualisation’ and the global pervasiveness of risk (Beck 2009: 169-170) is borne out in the case of Afghanistan, asking whether risk is general or pervasive in this particular setting. Considering risk to be generally pervasive is essentially a thesis of an egalitarianism of risk, or that risk is equally distributed amongst individuals: this article argues against this in favour of the position that risk is not equally distributed amongst actors even in a high-risk setting such as Afghanistan. In providing some indications of how risk is distributed in Afghanistan, I will be making use of interview and observational data collected in late 2011 in Kabul and the immediately surrounding area. In presenting this data, I will be using the concept of risk-management as a means of considering convergences of practice across the civil-developmental, counter-insurgent and counter-terrorist fields of the international intervention in Afghanistan. I will also be making use of the distinction between ‘operational’ and ‘reputational’ risk (Powers, 2004: 34) in considering how international actors attempt to manage the risks represented by armed non-state actors in this setting.

Considering armed non-state actors as a risk follows from both the risk of violence to individuals they represent as armed actors, and the risk they represent as armed non-state actors to the stability of state monopolies of violence. The identification of the state with the monopoly of violence within a defined territory is foundational to conceptions of the state (Weber, 1978), and is interdependent with

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concepts of the legitimacy of state power, and the stability of that power, in turn interdependent with accounts of processes of state formation (Bourdieu, 1994). Afghanistan provides a paradigm case of a particular process of disrupted state formation culminating in an unstable and contested monopoly of violence (Saikal, 2012), hence also a paradigm case of armed non-state actors as contributors to a limited or unstable state monopoly (Bhatia, 2008). The international intervention 2001-2015 represented, on one level, an attempt to stabilise the state monopoly of violence, or at least ensure a stable distribution of the monopoly of violence amongst armed actors. Recognition of ‘stabilisation’ of state and society as the overall objective of intervention by agencies and institutions of the intervening states has led to a re-consideration of security-oriented or humanitarian interventions, previously considered readily conceptually and empirically distinguishable, as ‘stability operations’. This integrated approach to intervention brings together development aid and ‘state-building’ directed at state and society with counter-insurgency, and in parallel counter-terrorism, directed against armed non-state actors (Roxborough, 2012: 188 and 191-193).

Bringing stabilisation together with risk, and risk-management as responses to risk by institutions or organisations, enables stabilisation operations to be considered as risk-management of transnational terrorism (Heng, 2006 and Rasmussen, 2006). This risk management combines attempts at civil stabilisation of unstable states and societies where terrorism is seen to originate, instability being conducive to relative inability to effectively combat terroristic actors, with direct combatting of terroristic and insurgent actors. Stabilisation operations are therefore able to be considered as risk management of the risk of violence, whether local, or transnational, represented by armed non-state actors. A risk and risk-management approach also allows the particular practices of actors to be specifically considered as different risk management approaches to the risks imposed upon the actor by their particular role in stabilisation. Risk can provide a number of ways of considering the relation of armed non-state actors to other actors, whether armed or unarmed, state or non-state, local-national or international-transnational. Approaching armed non-state actors through risk directs attention to the pragmatics of dealing with the threat such actors pose to other actors, or how the threat of violence from such actors is managed in practice. As such this represents a different approach from attempting to establish typologies of armed non-state actors, for example in distinguishing ‘terrorist’, ‘insurgent’ and ‘warlord’ armed non-state actor groups (Henriksen and

Vinci, 2008: 92-93), or, specific to the Afghan setting, ‘political-military’, ‘community militia’ and ‘warlord and strongmen’ groups (Bhatia, 2008: 75-78). Typological or definitional approaches attempt to distinguish types of actor, relative to, for example, either processes of group formation (Schlichte, 2009) or combat motivation (Henriksen and Vinci, 2008), and distinguish the threat posed by different categories of group or actor on this basis. A risk and risk-management approach tends on the other hand to consider all such actors and the settings in which they operate as representing a potential risk, that is to say, a generalised condition of risk-of-violence, and focuses on the potential for catastrophic incidents, rather than on distinguishing actors and settings. This has particular effects on practice, and on the effectiveness of the risk-management practices in question.

## Armed non-state actor risk in the ‘risk society’

Before moving to a consideration of the specifics of risk and risk-management in the Afghan setting, some consideration of the risk society position, arguably the dominant position within the present sociology of risk (Mythen 2004), is indicated. I will confine myself in this article to briefly drawing some conclusions regarding Beck’s thesis of the general pervasiveness, by extension the individualisation and hence egalitarianism, of risk (Beck, 2009: 52-55), relative to a partial outline of conditions in Afghanistan. I am drawing on Beck’s most recent formulation of his thesis in *World at Risk* (2009), as it is in this work that Beck is most explicitly concerned with terroristic and conflict risk (Beck, 2009: 20), and as Beck considers this the definitive formulation of his thesis to date, superseding previous formulations (Beck, 2009: 9). Very briefly, Beck’s thesis is that a shift from a condition of modernity to one of late modernity and ‘risk society’ has resulted from an increasing and pervasive condition of artificially induced risk, for example pollution and other forms of environmental contamination, itself resulting from the proliferation of the institutions of modernity (Beck, 2009: 6-8). This pervasive condition of risk ‘disembeds’ late modern individuals from their prior traditional or modern relations of inequality, for example those of class (Beck, 2013; see also Atkinson, 2007 and Curran, 2013 for critique), a condition of ‘disembedding without embedding’ that individualises by leaving individuals in an essentially similar position vis-à-vis risks that are inescapable, pervasive and potentially catastrophic (Beck, 2009: 54). The paradigm case in the

earlier formulation of Beck's thesis is the Chernobyl reactor incident in the late 1980s (Beck, 1992); a 'risk society' is the result, a society pre-occupied with risks that are 'everywhere and nowhere' (Beck 2009: 149).

Individualisation vis-à-vis risk however creates difficulties for considering inequalities in the situations of individuals, whether material inequalities, inequalities in conditions of risk, or relations between the two (Atkinson, 2007 and Curran, 2013). While Beck acknowledges inequality, for example noting that 'pollution follows the poor' (2013: 68) or that there are 'victim regions' where the global distribution of risk is concerned (2009: 168), he does not resolve the tension between the parallel generalisations that risk is at once equally and unequally distributed, except by characterising risk as essentially 'ambivalent' (Beck, 2009: 48). Where the concern is with actual conditions of risk, such as are found in conflict-prone and unstable settings such as Afghanistan, and responses to these conditions on the part of given actors, this 'ambivalence' leaves the risk society approach difficult to apply. The difficulty is increased where the risk society approach also considers risk pervasive and general, leaving the researcher without the means to consider specific risks in specific situations, that is to say, situations where specific actors are more at risk of specific catastrophes than others, and without means of explaining this relative to differences in the distribution of risk. For example as regards Afghanistan, it is obviously the case that specific categories of actor suffer more casualties than others: were it the case that risk was general and pervasive and hence individualising, casualties would be equally distributed amongst categories of individual. While a case may be made that the risk society approach does acknowledge differences in the distribution of risk, by way of distinctions between 'regions' as above, this remains in tension with the central thesis of generally pervasive and individualising risk, and requires resolution through the study of actual conditions of risk. The risk society approach has been critiqued for a lack of grounding in empirical research, and a parallel tendency to argue from anecdotal evidence or isolated example (Mythen, 2004, Currie and Campbell, 2006, and Atkinson, 2007).

The re-formulation of the risk society position to incorporate terroristic risk takes the 2001 attack on the World Trade Centre (WTC) as the paradigm case (Beck 2009: 67-71). Again, a single extremely salient instance, potentially further substantiated by reference to several subsequent incidents e.g. Bali, Madrid and/or London (Beck 2009: 69) is the basis for considering risk as pervasive and general. The risk may be characterised, to use the terminology of risk analysis, as high consequence

and low probability: arguably, extremely low probability, or at the level of what may be considered residual, or close-to-non-existent, risk (Campbell and Currie 2006). However, the risk society approach argues that risk is characterised by 'non-knowing' (Beck 2009: 115-120), due to uncertainty and differing positions on what is to be considered a risk. As this cannot be resolved but only acknowledged as an irreconcilable 'clash of risk cultures' (Beck 2009: 73), it is difficult through the risk society approach to discuss knowledge, as opposed to non-knowledge, of risk. In this non-knowing approach, terroristic armed non-state actors are unknowable and un-located: like other risks they are again 'everywhere and nowhere' (Beck 2009: 149). However, it is arguable that while under conditions of globalisation armed non-state actors may have considerable mobility, they are still physically and socially located, i.e. predominately located in, or in relation to, some settings and not others. Returning to Beck's paradigm case of the WTC attack it is uncontroversial that the armed non-state actor in this case, Al-Qaeda, had a specific location in a particular setting, Afghanistan and the immediate region, and that the actual actors undertaking the attack were identifiably connected to that location and hence in this sense not 'everywhere and nowhere'. The problem remains one of knowledge but is arguably a question of the availability of information rather than a question of essential unknowability.

## Armed non-state actor risk in Afghanistan: risk analysis

Information on conditions of risk in Afghanistan does exist, as statistics on casualties and other incidents, and in the form of risk analysis based on this, supplemented by the more qualitative knowledge and analysis of risk-analysts and risk-managers tasked with managing the risk posed by armed non-state actors. That such knowledge may be partial, or characterised by varying levels of uncertainty, does not prevent it being a basis for risk-management responses to risk (Campbell and Currie, 2006), and a basis for discussion of conditions of risk in Afghanistan. As above, the problems with such knowledge may be methodological rather than epistemological, i.e. a question of difficulties of data collection and analysis. A parallel difficulty here concerns the extent to which casualty figures in particular also operate as a measure of the effectiveness, hence the legitimacy, of intervention, leading to contestation of figures, including contestation of the particular Afghanistan NGO Safety Office (ANSO)

figures referred to below, by the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and Coalition military forces. While this contestation renders risk assessment yet more uncertain, requiring triangulation where possible with other sources of data and methods of data collection, this also indicates that levels of risk may be used as a measure of the effectiveness of stabilisation. However, the existence of data on risk allows two preliminary conclusions to be drawn regarding conditions of risk in Afghanistan, following from either ANSO or ISAF/Coalition figures. First, that levels of risk to intervening international actors are in many cases close to residual, and, second, that the key determinant of level of risk is by location and the category of the actor.

While space precludes any extended discussion of the figures in question, or the attendant risk analysis, with reference to the first point, the risk to international civil actors not definitely associated with armed intervening state actors (e.g. not military and political actors) and operating in the capital, Kabul (the primary site for civil-international actors of all types), may be assessed at between 1 in 10 000 and 1 in 100 000 chance annually of being involved in an incident of any kind, where ‘incident’ refers to exposure to any threat of violence, and with probabilities of casualty or fatality considerably lower (ANSO 2007-12 and Brookings 2010-12 as the main sources for this assessment). The variability of this figure, acknowledged as approximate, derives from dependency on the category and behaviour of the actor, where behaviour is a question of locations avoided or not avoided, and association with or avoidance of higher-risk-category actors and locations likely to be targeted by armed non-state actors, such as state military or political actors whether local-national or intervening-international. The category of the actor or associated actors is a key determinant of risk, variable by the social location of the actor, here state or non-state, local-national or global-international, armed or unarmed. Risk is also variable by physical location, where this is again a question of the social location of the actors present in or associated with that area, whether, for example, the area is frequented by armed non-state actors, or by armed state actors, either local or intervening.

A risk analysis provides an initial critique of the risk society position, regarding both the pervasiveness and non-location of risk, and the unknowability of risk. This may be extended through a partial outline of conditions in Afghanistan based on interviews and observation in Kabul in 2011. As in many cases respondents only agreed to participate in the research under conditions of anonymity and declined to be quoted directly, the presentation is

impressionistic: where an assertion is made regarding conditions in Afghanistan and not otherwise supported by citation, it derives from one or more interview responses documented as interview notes or recordings, and/or observation documented as field notes. The presentation is divided by category of actor, into civil-developmental actors, counter-insurgent actors, and counter-terrorist actors. As the sample is limited, no conclusiveness or generality to other cases is claimed, the intention being only to indicate some convergences of practice across these three areas.

## Civil-developmental actors and private security

As I have dealt elsewhere (Simpson 2012) with the specifics of conditions as regards unarmed state and non-state actors in Afghanistan, I will here only summarise the salient points as pertaining to risk and risk-management more generally. Unarmed state and non-state actors here refer to humanitarian and civil-developmental actors, with humanitarian actors generally non-state, NGOs and INGOs, and civil-developmental actors generally agencies of intervening states, such as USAID, UKAID and (the former) AUSAID. Humanitarian actors tend to what may be referred to as minimal regimes of security and risk-management. Often pre-dating the present intervention i.e. having operated in Afghanistan before 2001, humanitarian actors tend to rely on local knowledge, embedded-ness in the local setting, and local perceptions of their neutrality and impartiality to avoid being targeted by armed non-state actors. This has led to a concern with avoiding contact or association with actors more closely associated with the present intervention, especially international military or security actors of any kind, a concern framed in terms of preserving a ‘humanitarian space’ (Shannon, 2009: 18) which is in parallel a concern to emphasise an unarmed non-state actor status.

Humanitarian actors are hence dependent upon perceptions of their legitimacy, i.e. their neutrality and impartiality and solely humanitarian focus (Shannon, 2009), for management of the risk posed by armed non-state actors. Perceived legitimacy may be considered a question of reputation, leading to a concern by humanitarian actors with management of risks to this reputation, as ‘reputational risk’, as well as with day-to-day ‘operational risk’ (Power, 2004: 34) of presence in a high-risk setting. Humanitarian actors manage reputational risk by disassociating themselves as much as is possible from the risk to their reputation represented by armed

intervening state actors in particular and armed actors and state actors in general, respondents disassociating themselves from Coalition, ISAF and Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (IRoA) military forces as much as possible to avoid being targeted by armed non-state actors. Civil-developmental actors such as (the former) AUSAID are less able to disassociate themselves from the IRoA, the local state, given their involvement in state- and nation-building (Roxborough, 2012), or from the Coalition and ISAF as armed intervening state actors, as state-building and developmental projects are part of the stabilisation effort, and often directly linked to counter-insurgency and carried out with military assistance (Kilcullen, 2009). Unable as a result to avoid the possibility of being targeted by armed non-state actors, civil-developmental actors tend to maximal regimes of security and risk management. These regimes combine extensive private-sector security provision with 'remote management' (Duffield, 2010: 470), the management of programs with either extremely limited or non-existent international presence at the actual sites of implementation of programs. A trend can also be noted towards securitisation and 'bunkering' of the delivery of humanitarian aid (Duffield, 2010: 455), indicating an increasing pre-occupation with risk and risk management on the part of intervening actors across both sectors (Montgomery, 2008, and Fotenot and Maiwandi, 2007, re Kabul specifically). However, in general civil-developmental actors remain considerably more securitised and bunkered than humanitarian actors.

The primary distinction between humanitarian and civil-developmental actors remains the extent of use by civil-developmental actors of armed non-state actors, i.e. private security companies (PSCs), as risk-managers of the operational risk posed by armed non-state actors. These security regimes are readily observable and frequently referred to by respondents, and recognised as risk-management by the companies and security personnel in referring to themselves as risk analysts or risk managers rather than as private military or security personnel. Use of private security companies results in a readily observable militarisation of risk-management of armed non-state actor violence: extensive use of armed guards, fortification of work and living spaces (often co-located in guarded compounds) and convoying of personnel under guard. This can be considered as generalisation of armed state actor practice to the civil-developmental sector by (ex-state military) PSC personnel, leading to civil-developmental actors being relatively indistinguishable from armed international state actors, e.g. political and/or security actors. This has implications for potential for targeting by armed non-state actors who may not

be able to distinguish civil-developmental actors from armed intervening actors. Private securitisation of risk management may hence act to increase risk to civil-developmental actors by potentially attracting armed non-state actor attention. While civil-developmental actor casualties have been limited to date, civil-international fatalities having been largely confined to humanitarian actors, private contractors and journalists active in areas of higher risk (ANSO 2007-12 and Brookings 2010-12), the question of the effectiveness of militarised risk-management remains open.

A relative lack of casualties does not necessarily demonstrate that such risk-management is effective, especially where the actual level of risk may be close to residual and where the occasional high-profile incident may be a result of the security regime attracting armed non-state actor attention. The contracting out of security provision is also a case of an 'actor-principal' problem (Hutter and Power 2005: 2), in that the interests of the civil-developmental and private security actors are not entirely aligned. The security contractor has an interest in an ongoing contractual relationship, leading to an interest in reinforcing the risk-aversion of the client, and emphasising the threat posed by armed non-state actors in particular, a tendency PSC personnel refer to as 'selling fear' (interview response). This reinforcement of risk-aversion may be largely unintentional, tending to follow from an occupational pre-occupation with risk on the part of PSC personnel, and from constant liaison with clients regarding risks or potential threats, an observable feature of everyday life in this setting, rather than any deliberate intention to mislead the client or over-state risks. However, the devolution of risk-management to a security provider whose only concern is risk tends to lead to the activities of the client being restricted as much as possible. This is the basis of the actor-principal problem in this case: for the security provider all risks are effectively costs, with the security provider relatively disinterested in the benefits, i.e. implementation of programs, where this represents the interest of the civil-developmental actor. Devolution in this case leads to disconnection of cost from benefit in risk assessment, resulting in a tendency to prioritise risk-avoidance over program implementation.

The most immediate result is a climate of restriction and threat observable under conditions of highly securitised risk-management, frequently referred to by respondents. Stress and a sense of isolation require frequent leave, increasing personnel costs and difficulties of program coordination, with this further increased by relatively high turnover of personnel. Civil-developmental actors are isolated from the local setting, and their contacts

with local actors are correspondingly limited, again creating difficulties for program implementation, and arguably for stabilisation efforts overall, as lack of contact limits understanding of the local context. The assessment of contact with local actors and settings in terms of risk, i.e. in terms of unacceptable risk, by security actors with relatively little interest in program implementation, increases tendencies to ‘remote management’ (Duffield 2010: 470), promoted as best practice in part relative to use of local proxies as implementing partners which, while increasing local ownership of programs, creates problems of oversight and again increases costs. It can be observed that international personnel and security provision represent a significant portion of the cost of program implementation even where remotely located, to which may be added the infrastructural costs of secured living and working spaces, the construction of fortified compounds, leaving corresponding less for actual programs and for delivery of stabilisation outcomes, that is to say, state-building and development of actual benefit to local populations.

There is a sense in which, in the pre-occupation with managing the operational risks of presence in an unstable conflictual setting, intervening actors are failing to manage the reputational risk, vis-à-vis local actors and populations, of failing to prioritise the resourcing of actual programs delivering tangible outcomes for those populations. This is especially the case where local populations observably perceive intervening actors as cultural others, and as armed actors in their national and cultural space, and as such only tolerable relative to their delivering tangible stabilisation outcomes, for example reducing the risk of armed non-state actor violence. Further, isolation and a sense of threat, combined with disconnection from local actors, and with security providers serving as a primary source of information on local conditions, may lead to a pre-occupation with risk and a tendency to construct local conditions in terms of threats of violence posed by armed non-state actors. This tendency may be seen for example in the similarity of reports on local conditions by consular personnel to briefings on risks provided by security contractors. Un-reflexive acceptance of private contractor threat assessments and security briefings as indicative of local conditions may pre-dispose representatives of intervening states to problematise local conditions as inherently violent, unstable and failing, i.e. as a condition of state failure vis-à-vis armed non-state actors, and may in turn lead to recommendations for more securitised or militarised policy responses.

Insofar as this risk management approach both

increases the costs and reduces the effectiveness of programs it may not facilitate stabilisation or risk-management of terroristic risk. This raises questions regarding the priority of achieving stabilisation outcomes over ensuring that the actor does not suffer due to the risks of the setting. These risks may again be considered as ‘operational’, e.g. as possibilities of harm to personnel, but also as ‘reputational’, where allowing harm to come to personnel represents a risk to the reputation of the institution and to individual actors within the institution. Devolution of risk-management to an external actor can hence be seen to operate as reputational risk-management for the institution: externalisation of risk-management is externalisation of the risk that would be otherwise attendant on risk-management decisions. This follows from Luhmann’s theorisation that actual ‘risk’ is inherent in the taking of decisions about ‘dangers’, that is to say, is attributable to actors taking decisions regarding risks, rather than being inherent in the danger or threat itself (Luhmann, 2002: 21-22). It is arguable that for given individual actors any decision regarding a danger is itself dangerous, in the sense of representing a risk to their reputation and position within the institution, if they are seen to have failed to adequately manage operational risk. This risk to the actor may be more salient than the actual threat or danger per se, and may lead to an institutional or organisational tendency to ‘blame avoidance’ (Hood, 2011: 14-15), which may be placed in the context of a general and increasing pre-occupation with liability within intervening societies (Power, 2004).

## **Military counter-insurgent actors and force protection**

Similar strategies of externalisation of risk are also used by intervening armed state actors, the international military forces in Afghanistan making use of private-sector armed non-state actors in roles such as securing installations, close protection of senior officers, and undertaking operations which may be considered to represent too great a risk for regular state military forces, or for which suitable regular forces may not be available. These last especially can again be seen as management of ‘reputational risk’ on the part of intervening state military forces, by trying to limit the potential for politically unpopular casualties, especially where casualties may also call into question the capacity of military decision-makers to effectively manage operational risk, that is to say, their professional military competence. This relative military risk-aversion is theorised by Shaw as ‘risk transfer

war', in which militaries seek to transfer risks to their materially and technically less advantaged opponents (Shaw, 2002: 344). This is motivated by a casualty-aversion which is less a question of military risk-aversion per se than of the political repercussions of casualties in the domestic polities to which state military actors are answerable (Shaw, 2002). Contracting out to private-sector armed non-state actors operates as a strategy for managing casualty-aversion related risk as so-called mercenary casualties are at once less visible and more acceptable to domestic polities. This is paralleled by a preference for co-optation or establishment of local proxy forces where possible (in Afghanistan the former Northern Alliance so-called, and the Afghan National Army and subsidiary local militias), as a further contracting out or externalisation of risk through the use of local armed state or non-state actors (Shaw, 2002). This may tend to militate against stabilisation as the establishment of a stable state monopoly of force where the number and capacities of armed non-state actors, i.e. militias, are increased (Bhatia, 2008), a potential tension between this shorter term risk-management strategy and longer-term stabilisation objectives.

However, it remains for state military actors to manage direct risk to their own forces, as there are limits to the extent this can be devolved or transferred. As casualties may reflect badly on the officer commanding, service in Afghanistan may represent a reputational risk for some military personnel. Equally, it may represent an opportunity to make one's reputation and hence advance one's career. However, the relatively short deployments involved (6-12 months is standard) may tend to militate against achievement of longer-term stabilisation objectives. There is a tendency on the part of commanders to only pursue counter-insurgent strategies or stabilisation projects liable to yield results within shorter timeframes, for which they may then receive credit. Combined with a preference for distinguishing themselves from predecessors by adopting different strategies, this can result in lack of continuity and hence progress over time, where stabilisation is arguably a longer term project (Chandrasekaran 2012). It is additionally arguable that contemporary military doctrines of force protection may militate against achievement of the military stabilisation objective of reducing the threat of insurgent and terrorist armed non-state actors. Military attempts to co-opt local civilian populations, through humanitarian and/or developmental assistance, and/or co-location and attempts at protection of local populations (Kilcullen, 2009), may operate more as a form of risk-transfer after Shaw (2002), especially where these efforts are intended to facilitate intelligence-gathering as a force-protection

strategy (Kilcullen, 2009). As it is in areas that are most contested that the risk to local populations of contact with either side is greatest (Kalyvas, 2006), local populations will tend to prefer to avoid contact with armed actors, managing risk in much the same way as other unarmed non-state actors, i.e. humanitarian NGOs and INGOs, by attempting to remain neutral. Attempts at close contact with local populations by intervening military actors may tend to increase risk to local civilian populations, as intervening military actors will tend to attract insurgent or terrorist attention, especially where military actors are known to be attempting to gather intelligence on armed non-state actors by this means. Where this results in civilian casualties this may alienate, in extreme cases radicalise, local populations, thereby potentially increasing the capabilities and numbers of armed non-state actors.

However, despite the claims made for the 'population-centric' so-called 'new COIN' (COunter INsurgency) (Kilcullen, 2009: 266; see also Hastings 2012 for this as the approach of a particular faction within the US military), it is arguable that the primary military task within an intervention or stabilisation operation remains counter-insurgent war-fighting. It is generally reported that the international military forces are successful at the tactical level, in part due to their obvious technical and material advantages. However, what is gained in protection and firepower by this means may be lost in mobility and relative visibility, hence initiative, at the tactical level, a disadvantage exacerbated by insurgent familiarity with local terrain and conditions. For example, as noted by respondents, while the use of body armour reduces casualties and is therefore obviously legitimate, it also slows soldiers and may reduce combat endurance. Doctrines of force protection, considered as casualty aversion and risk-management, enforce the wearing of body armour, reducing mobility. This potentially reduces tactical performance, which must then be compensated for by other means. Along with the superior training of international military actors, a means by which tactical predominance is maintained is by superiority of firepower, notably in indirect fire and airstrikes. But the greater the firepower brought to bear, especially indirect fire or airstrikes, the higher will be the incidence of non-combatant casualties, especially where insurgents deliberately exploit this possibility by co-locating with civilian populations, or using local civilians to screen their positions and movements.

Further, the use by international actors of highly visible static fortified positions, heavy logistical support, and heavy vehicles, as elements of force protection to offset the insurgent advantages in mobility and relative (in)visibility,

may again make tactical or operational initiative more difficult to achieve or maintain. This may again increase the tendency to compensate through use of firepower e.g. indirect fire or airstrike. These elements combine in contributing to potential difficulties in managing the tension between effective counter-insurgency, force protection i.e. relative casualty-aversion, and avoidance of local non-combatant casualties. Failure to manage any of these operational risks, or the relation between them, may result in a reputational crisis for either individual military actors or military actors as a group, requiring in turn reputational risk-management, especially on the part of those individual actors considered responsible for the effectiveness of the military contribution to stabilisation overall i.e. overall military commanders. The reputational risk of international military casualties, vis-à-vis the military actor's domestic polity, is also in tension with the reputational risk represented by local non-combatant casualties, vis-à-vis both international and local political or popular opinion. Difficulties in managing these risks may in part explain why tactically effective counter-insurgency may not have translated strategically into effective stabilisation, as failing to prioritise avoidance of risk to local civilians may, via radicalisation, increase armed non-state actor capabilities and numbers over time.

Being placed in this situation may lead to attempts by international state actors to manage reputational risk apart from operational risk, that is to say, to treat the tension between the operational risks as effectively unresolvable, and to concentrate on managing the reputational risk itself, rather than doing so by means of effective management of the operational risks. This may take the form of attempting to manage domestic or international public opinion directly, particularly through management of the media: a key strategy here is the embedding of journalists with military forces, in addition to general media and information strategies. Embedding has the dual advantages of allowing state military actors to control media access to information, and of ensuring journalists report an international military perspective, rather than, for example, that of local actors, and also allows media actors to devolve management of risks to their own personnel to the military. Embedding is paralleled in some cases by information operations directed towards managing domestic public opinion and policy making, notably by attempting to manipulate domestic political actors (Hastings, 2012). This raises a question regarding the extent to which international military actors can be seen to resemble non-state actors, insofar as they engage in reputational risk-management directed against the domestic political actors who are the executive of the

state, or attempt to subvert state political direction of stabilisation efforts where it pertains to military activities (Hastings 2012).

## Counter-terrorist actors and intelligence

Counter-terrorism may be seen as direct management of the terroristic risk represented by armed non-state actors, distinguishable from counter-insurgency as an indirect management of this risk through contributing to stabilisation of an otherwise terrorism-prone space, though counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism are continuous in practice. Here there is also potential for agent-principal problems as with military actors as above, in part due to the extent to which counter-terrorist security actors, generally answerable only to the higher executives of the state, operate with less transparency than military counter-insurgent actors. Primary forms of practice in counter-terrorism in Afghanistan are the so-called 'night raids', 'kill/capture operations' directed against Afghan households and taking place at night (OSF and TLO, 2011: 2), and the use of remote airstrike capability, i.e. drones, particularly in the Afghanistan-Pakistan borderlands (IHRCRC and GJC, 2012). Night raids and drone strikes are generally reported as an effective and necessary response to the threat of terroristic armed non-state actors, but transparency as regards actual outcomes is extremely limited (OSF and TLO, 2011 and IHRCRC and GJC, 2012).

Under these conditions a reputational risk-management approach to reporting of failures to manage operational risks such as non-combatant civilian casualties may be expected, for example reporting accidental non-combatant casualties as combatant i.e. terrorist/insurgent casualties, or attribution of such casualties to terrorist/insurgent actors, or a general practice of non-disclosure around counter-terrorist operations (OSF and TLO, 2011, and IHRCRC and GJC, 2012). In the case of night raids, the relatively few cases where reports of local civilian casualties can be substantiated in the face of denials by international state security actors potentially stand for a greater number of unreported or suppressed incidents (OSI and TLO, 2011). In the case of drone airstrikes, perhaps the paradigm case of casualty-averse risk-management of terroristic risk, and a literal case of military 'remote management', the images of drone strikes released by counter-terrorist actors to the media create an impression of precision, but non-combatant casualties are, in the rare cases when independent investigation of the aftermath of drone strikes has been possible,



significantly under-reported (IHRCRC and GJC, 2012). In both cases it is arguable that the result is a crisis of the legitimacy of the intervention from the perspective of local actors (OSF and TLO, 2011, and IHRCRC and GJC, 2012). This may again be seen as a failure to manage reputational risk vis-à-vis local actors, due to a pre-occupation with management of operational risk to intervening actors, as risk-transfer and casualty-aversion as previously (Shaw, 2002). It is also arguable that the result of both night raids and drone strikes has been an increase in radicalisation of affected local kinship groups and communities, raising the question whether these methods increase or decrease terroristic and insurgent armed non-state actor risk. Radicalisation can here be related to failures to manage reputational risk, and in particular failures to manage operational risks to non-combatant civilians, as a crisis of the reputation of intervening actors that has the potential to polarise local populations against intervening and local state actors, and so increase the capacity of armed non-state actors to contest and destabilise the local state monopoly of force.

Barring the literally accidental non-combatant casualties that may result from failures to manage operational risks, such as accidental shootings of civilian householders in night raids, both counter-terrorist risk-management strategies suffer from a basic difficulty: the possibility of faulty intelligence leading to targeting of unarmed or non-combatant local actors. Relative to this, the precision of targeting and the avoidance of accidental collateral casualties, whether in night raids or drone strikes, is in a sense beside the point if the target is a non-combatant, and contributes to intervening and local state actors being seen as operating arbitrarily and with impunity. Targeting of both drone strikes and night raids is at least in part dependent upon ‘denunciations’ i.e. the identification by one local actor of another local actor as associated with armed non-state actors. Kalyvas has shown that many, if not most, such ‘denunciations’ are ‘malicious’, that is to say, motivated by local social antipathies and rivalries amongst individuals and groups, rather than actually reflecting association with armed non-state actors (Kalyvas, 2006: 336-343 and 351-358). Under civil-war like conditions, the problem of faulty intelligence may follow from the relation of ‘denunciation’ to local social relations, and from the relation of this in turn to whether a given area is dominated by either terrorist/insurgent or counter-terrorist/counter-insurgent actors (Kalyvas, 2006). In an area dominated by armed non-state actors, the tendency of local actors is to denounce others as associated with armed state actors; in areas dominated by armed state actors the tendency is to denounce others

as associated with armed non-state actors (Kalyvas, 2006). This may be seen in Afghanistan-Pakistan in the case of border areas subjected to drone strikes, where local civilian actors denounce other local civilian actors as ‘informants’ who direct drones to targets in the service of local rivalries (IHRCRC and GJC, 2012: 99-101). Denunciation can be seen as risk-management by locals of the threat posed by armed actors, whether state or non-state, tending to result in faulty intelligence, as the intelligence follows from the threat posed by armed actors to unarmed actors, rather than whether given actors are actually associated with opposing armed actors. Intelligence gathered by these means then requires analysis and triangulation if it is not to result in operational risk failures and reputational crises. This may be difficult where, as a result of relative risk-aversion, intelligence-gathering is contracted out to local proxies, and where intervening security actors are remotely located and relatively unfamiliar with local conditions, in particular with local social groupings and attendant rivalries and antipathies, due to the tendency to bunkering and remote management referred to earlier.

## Conclusion: strategies of risk management

There are hence some convergences of practice to be identified across the three areas of stabilisation in Afghanistan discussed. These is a tendency to a risk management approach to the threat of armed non-state actors that has difficulty managing tensions between operational risks to intervening actors, reputational risks vis-à-vis domestic polities, and reputational risks vis-à-vis local actors and populations, where it is arguably successful management of the latter, in parallel with successful management of the risk armed actors represent to local populations, that is central to effective intervention to stabilise the local state monopoly of force. In identifying this convergence of practice, the concepts of the militarisation and bunkering of aid delivery (Duffield 2010) can be brought together with the concepts of military risk-transfer (Shaw 2002) and force protection, through the linkage of civil-developmental aid to population-centric counter-insurgency (Kilcullen, 2009), and a general trend to militarisation of civil risk-management through the use of private security (Duffield, 2010). Military risk-transfer may be generalised from counter-insurgency to counter-terrorism (Shaw, 2002), and linked to the common tendency to remote management (Duffield, 2010) across all three areas and categories of actor. Risk, in particular the distinction between operational and reputational

risk (Power, 2004), and the distinction of the risk to the decision-maker attendant on risk-management decisions from risk as actual danger or threat per se (Luhmann, 2002), provides a conceptual framework for considering this general convergence of practice, and the relation to the effectiveness of intervention and/or stabilisation operations.

However, the risk society approach of Beck may be seen to be relatively inapplicable to a discussion concerned with differences in risks and risk-management responses across categories of actor, rather than with any general condition of pervasive risk affecting all categories of actor alike. In parallel to this, the possibility of knowledge of risk, whether statistics on casualties or intelligence on armed non-state actors, can be identified as significant for understanding risk and the risk-management responses of actors, something precluded by the risk society position on the unknowability of risk. Beyond a diffuse normative concern for 'the poor' (Beck 2013: 68), generalisable to a category of a global poor via a concern with 'victim regions' (Beck 2009: 168), the risk society approach arguably has limited applications for considering inequalities in the distribution of risks in given settings, where risk and responses to risk in Afghanistan are arguably determined by the differences between actors i.e. differences in the social location of actors. Risk management strategies of militarised risk-management, bunkering, remote-management, risk-transfer, force-protection and contracting-out are only accessible to particular categories of actor, in general either armed actors or those able to contract out to armed actors, either state or non-state. This leaves other categories of unarmed and non-state actor, such as humanitarian actors or local civilian populations, exposed to the risks resulting from these risk-management strategies, and either restricted to strategies of avoidance of or disassociation from armed actors, or more-or-less coerced into strategies of association with or co-optation by armed actors, with potentially catastrophic outcomes in cases of association or co-option. For local unarmed civilian actors, the only other risk-management strategies are either re-location and displacement or becoming armed non-state actors themselves (Bhatia, 2008), indicating that attempts by intervening actors to manage the threat of armed non-state actors may not be effective where a risk-management approach of transferring risks from intervening actors to local populations is followed.

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