CEID Seminar Series 2018/19 - Seminar 8

Violent extremism and political economy of education in Afghanistan

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1. Impact of conflict on education

- Civil wars have a debilitating impact on a country's education system both in terms of decimating educational infrastructure and teaching workforce as well as cuts in educational spending as the military budget increases (Lai and Thyne, 2007).

- In Afghanistan, 11,000 civilian deaths were recorded in 2015, and one in four of these have been children (United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, 2015).

- As educational institutions represent state authority, rebels often target schools as defiance to state control and more so as a propaganda tool

- Teachers and students are not only caught in the middle of the conflict but also become tactical targets during civil wars (GCPEA, 2014; van Wessel and van Hirtum, 2013). More notably, the most profound effect of civil wars on education 'is on quality [of] rather than access to' education, which poses serious challenges for post-war educational reconstruction (Buckland, 2005).

2. Violent extremism

- … the use of violence in line with an ideological commitment to achieve political, religious, or social goals (Atran, 2015)

- **"Violent extremism is a diverse phenomenon, without clear definition. It is neither new nor exclusive to any region, nationality or system of belief. Nevertheless, in recent years, terrorist groups such as Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Al-Qaida and Boko Haram have shaped our image of violent extremism and the debate on how to address this threat. These groups' message of intolerance — religious, cultural, social — has had drastic consequences for many regions of the world. Holding territory and using social media for the global and real-time communication of their ideas and exploits, they seek to challenge our shared values of peace, justice and human dignity."**

(UN Secretary General, United Nations Office of Counter Terrorism – Counter Terrorism Implementation Task Force: Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, 15 January 2016)

3. Changing definitions of concepts

- **Radical views**

- **Radicalisation**

- **Extremism**

- **Resistance**

- **Rebellion**

- "Extremism is no crime. But there is a tendency to equate protest, rebellion, and radicalism as somehow related to the problem of "violent extremism". (Anyadike, 2016. n.p.)

4. Extremism and violent attacks

- The kidnapping of 329 girls by Boko Haram **in Chibok, Nigeria,** in April 2014

- The killing of 145 students by Al-Shabaab in **Garissa**, Kenya, in April 2015

- The attack by *Tehrik-i-Taliban* on the **Army Public School** in Peshawar, Pakistan, in December 2014 killing 149 people including 132 children

- **Systematic attacks by the IS** on religious communities, women, children, political activists, journalists, human rights defenders and members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex community

5. What leads to violent extremism?

- **Three main categories of drivers** *(Vergani et al, 2018)*:

Push factors: the conditions conducive to violent extremism and the structural context from which it emerges; *e.g. lack of opportunities, ethnic and regional marginalisation, absence or weak governance of legitimate state, protracted conflict, collective sense of persecution, loss of legitimacy, violence*

Pull factors: the individual motivations and processes, which play a key role in transforming ideas and grievances into violent extremist action. *e.g. social networks and peer pressures, sense of identity/ purpose, ideological attraction, emotional and material incentives, promise of justice, search for adventures*

Personal factors: the individual psychological vulnerabilities independent of push and pull factors. *e.g. mental health conditions, depression, trauma; personality traits (e.g. narcissism and impulsivity) specific demographic characteristics (e.g. age, gender and country of birth)*

- **Cognitive and behavioural radicalisation**

- **Lack of solid evidence base that establishes motivations for joining extremist groups and committing violent acts**

6. Impact of violent extremism

- **Over 30,000 foreign terrorist fighters recruited from over 100 countries to travel to Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and Yemen.**

- **Adverse impacts on**
  - **peace and security,**
  - **sustainable development,**
  - **protecting human rights, promoting the rule of law and**
  - **humanitarian action. (UN, 2015: p.4)**

- **The focus has been primarily on security-based counter-terrorism which is counter-productive**

7. Problem with 'modern education'

- **Education failing to mitigate the 'push factors' ? – *inequity, cultural repression, marginalisation of certain communities, socioeconomic inequalities***

- **Global approach is largely 'neo-classical' and fails to acknowledge perceived threats of heavily economics-focused educational models in religiously and culturally diverse societies**

- **Prevention of extremism is viewed not by making education culturally and religiously relevant but by protecting 'modern education' implemented by central governments supported by international agencies**

8. Mitigating violent extremism through educational (re)programming

- **Curriculum**: pluralistic view points and critical thinking skills.

- **Teachers, schools and educational institutions**: Inclusive/ representative teacher recruitment: promoting tolerance and harmony – engaging with the community, religious and political institutions

- **Children and Young People**: the voices of children and young people to empowering children to shape their opinions, needs, and aspirations.

- **Safe Places**: schools as safe place to discuss diverse opinions and learn new ideas and skills.

- **Access**: equitable access to all (INEE, 2017)

9. Why political economy analysis?

- A political economy analysis plays a critical role in agenda setting: *development planning and reforms in education*

- *'… the interaction of political and economic processes in a society: the distribution of power and wealth between different groups and individuals, and the processes that create, sustain and transform these relationships over time'. (Collinson, 2003: 3)*

- A PEA can help us locate education within the debates about economic agenda/ policies, power dynamics (control and manipulation), governance and influences of geopolitics

10. Why political economy analysis matters in Afghanistan?

- **State fragility**

- **Growing conflict among security forces, the Taliban, Islamic State (IS) and various ethnic groups**

- **Competition for political dominance and control over resources**

- **Competing interests and values held by international and local actors that focus around:**
  - **the agenda of free market economy,**
  - **national identity in cultural and political terms**
  - **geopolitical interests of donor countries in the process of war-to-peace transitions**

11. Methodology

- Work in progress

- Qualitative approach

- Interviews with education officers/ NGOs/ teachers and parents in Kabul and Nangarhar – (October - November 2017)

- Thematic analysis
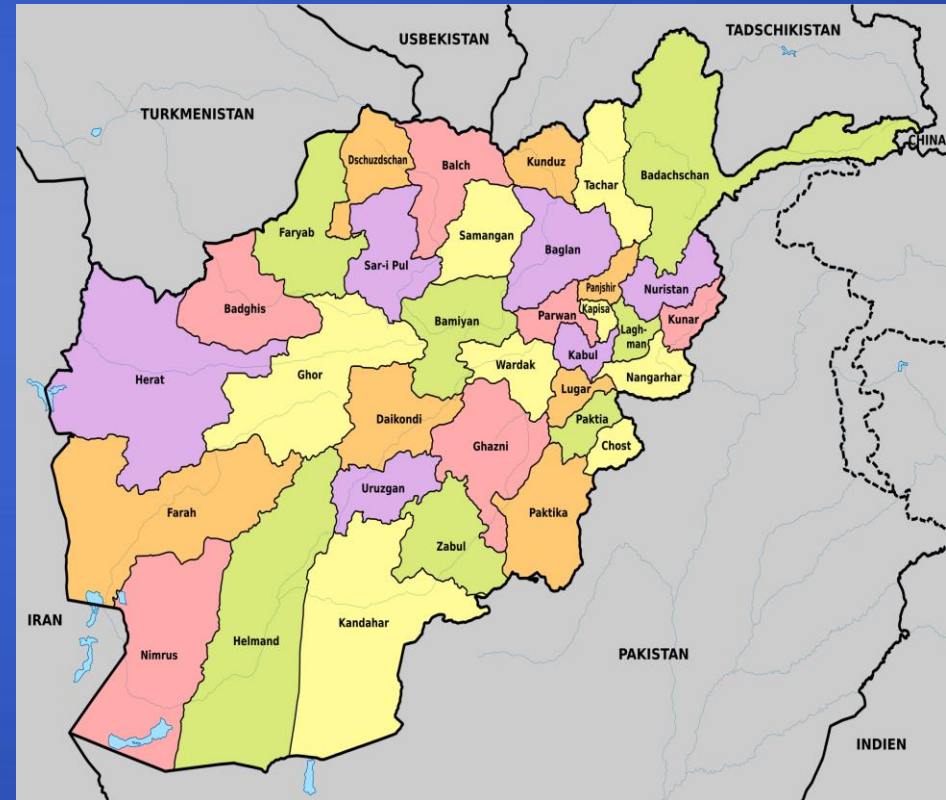
12. Background: Afghanistan's educational progress

- **Manipulation and exploitation of education** for ideological purposes and ideologies - ranging from communism to religious fanaticism.

- **Progress in enrolment**: 900,000 boys attended school in 2002 – now, Currently, more than 9.1 million students, including more than 2.5 million girls are enrolled in school.

- In the last 15 years, 16,000 schools have been built or reinstated and nearly 200,000 teachers trained and enrolment rates for school-aged children past 56% (Ministry of Education, 2015).

- Yet, **54.5% of the total 30 million Afghans have had no formal or home schooling,** with a significant gender gap of 37.8% of men with no formal schooling as compared to **69.3% of the Afghan women** (The Asia Foundation, 2015).

- Over 50% of populations is under the age of 15 and around **13% (1.2 millions) of children in Afghanistan can be classified as child labourers.**

- **1.5 million** school-aged children still **out of school** because of violent conflict, lack of adequate educational infrastructures, and severe poverty (Ministry of Education, 2015).

13. Emergence of ISIS and and impact on education

- Absence of government in Afg-Pak bordering areas – creating a power vacuum

- Defeat of IS in the Middle East pushing them into the Afg-Pak ungoverned border areas to seek revenge

- *"After IS announced its presence and establishment in the region, capturing, closing and occupying the school buildings was the first action to create and disseminate a fear among the public and to demonstrate their brutality." (Provincial Education Communication Officer)*

- *"Now, IS has influence over 20 and controls firmly 15 schools – half of which are high schools – in three districts they control, these schools are completely closed to educational activities except for the activities that IS conducts in providing military training and ideological teaching to young children. IS is imposing a jihadi curriculum in schools and religious seminaries it controls and teaches the young people the fundamentals of Sharia, hatred towards US and its allies and everyone who supports the Afghan government and how to commit suicide bombings." (Provincial Education Communication Officer)*

- **Schools are either controlled by IS or closed down**

- ***"We were active in Achin district before it fell to IS. But IS closed down all schools in that district and this caused a significant turbulence to the provision of education." (UNICEF Education officer)***

- ***'IS does not negotiate with anyone'*** **(Save the Children Education Officer)**

- **NGOs and MOE officials negotiate with Talibans to operate schools but NOT possible with ISIS**

15. Why does IS attack schools?

- **Easy targets**

- **Schools represent physical and permanent presence of state authority**

- **Schools seen as promoting un-Islamic values/Western culture and life style**

- **Schools as means to influence the local community**

- **Schools provide legitimacy to the central government**

- **Cause harms on communities that support 'Western' actors**

- **A fertile space for disseminating radical ideology**

- **Children are the easiest groups to manipulate and mobilise**

16. Educational impacts

- **Displacement of populations to towns –**
  - overcrowded classrooms,
  - loss of parental involvement,
  - loss in children's and teachers' motivation to education,
  - centralisation of school decision-making

- **Increased localisation** of educational programme implementation – a pragmatic approach to operate in unsafe areas

- *"… these INGOs have become more flexible and the practice of decision-making has been made more "local" to respond more quickly to the emergency situation."* (Provincial education communication officer)

17. Partnering with Taliban to govern education

- *"The WB was supporting the construction of two high school buildings – one for boys and one for girls – in that town. Upon the capture of the town by the Taliban, the construction work had to stop for a long time. On the other hand, according to the terms and conditions of the contract, either the work had to be completed or the money returned to the central office in Kabul. The local office came under immense pressure. The MoE staff together with the NGO staff reached out to the local community and asked them to negotiate with the Taliban on their behalf. The negotiation did not succeed, however, this move was bold and unprecedented." (MOE provincial education spokesperson)*

- *"Sometimes, when a contract needs to be signed between an INGO and an implementer and the INGO staff cannot travel to the local areas or the local people or the Taliban do not approve of a particular implementer, many approved implementers, local people and Taliban approved person(s) are called to the provincial capital. They negotiate there with the INGO in question and the delegation of responsibilities and authority and contracts are awarded." (MOE officer in Nangarhar province)*

- *"In a recent time, we recruited 40 new teachers in two districts which are controlled by the Taliban. The recruitment process was closely monitored by the Taliban and they appointed a local person to the recruitment board as their representatives. Out of these new recruits, 20 of them were from the Taliban and their affiliates. These recruits had just graduated from local schools and are at the same studying in a teachers' training institution to develop their capacity."*

18. Broader impacts

- **Attacks on NGOs**
  - *Security is an increasing challenge and concern for all INGOs and aid workers. In recent times, aid workers and INGOs are being treated as enemy militants by Taliban and other insurgent groups –whereas in the past – they supported the work of INGOs in providing education and health services. (Save the Children Education officer)*

- **Increased child labour due to displacement**

- **Loss of social capital and support networks**

- **Psychological impacts on children**

- **Changing locations of schools**

19. Radicalisation

- IS occupied schools in my district – Deh Bala – and converted them to their military bases. They have also accommodated their families that they have shifted from overseas in the school buildings. I stayed in the region for some months. IS would continue harassing me as a spy of the government, the US and its supporters. My children attended IS schools – they had to really, as IS made a rule that all kids of school age had to attend – for some months. I began witnessing changes in their [children's] behaviours. They went from normal and good-performing children to radical ideologues, gradually, losing interest in education. My oldest son (17) one day brought a revolver with him and took pride in having been trusted by his IS teachers to carry the revolver around. I monitored his movements and realised that he had been trained as a "preacher" and was endowed with a duty to encourage other children of his age to join the IS troops. I approached him and tried to stop him carrying on the revolver on him and encouraging others around him to join IS military men. My son went violent, lost conscience and blamed me for promoting the Western values and supporting the Afghan government that was un-Islamic. This event captured me by surprise and I was shocked that my own son had turned into something else. If IS can turn my son against me and family, they can turn anyone against anyone else. This is dangerous. (School Principal)

20. Widespread processes of radicalisation

- Educational institutions including mosques and madrassas, schools, colleges, and universities are becoming breeding grounds of hatred towards the West.

- **Use social media** as part of their broader campaign against the Afghan government and its allies – primarily targeting young students

- **Islamist groups active in university campuses** which are dominated by the Pashtun ethnic group. (Zaman and Mohammadi, 2014)

21. Key challenges

- **Security:**– growing influence of Taliban and Islamic State

- **Weak governance**: shrinking state presence in rural areas and 'informal governance', dominance of traditional power structures and patronage outside the formal government institutions

- **Declining public trust on** state institutions: security, health, justice, and education

- Local authorities survive through negotiations with non-state actors and corrupt practices

22. Conclusions

- **Insecurity, corruption and weak governance** are the three most prevalent challenges for educational change in Afghanistan.

Insecurity ⟶ loss of accountability ⟶ corruption

weak governance ⟵ public trust on state institutions
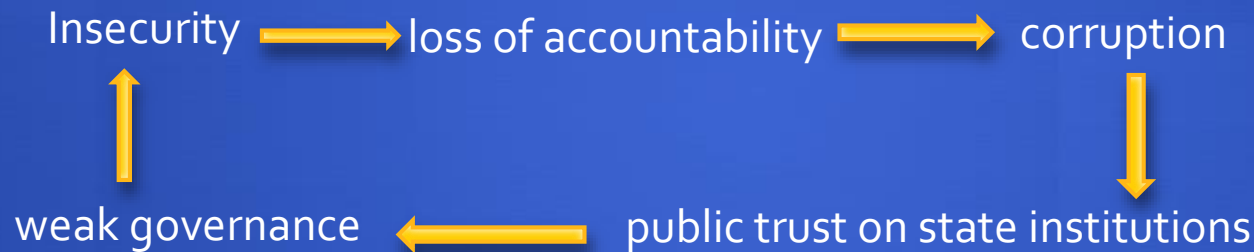
- fundamentalism
- violent tactics ⟶ Radicalisation for violent extremism
- state fragility

- **International promises of education BUT lack of delivery => public frustration**

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