

Open Sources in Diagnosing and Predicting Significant Evolutions in Afghanistan

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Abstract

The study is aiming to explore how a detailed and skilful use of various open sources can strongly enhance both individual and institutional capabilities in the area of accurately analyzing / evaluating / diagnosing, and predicting significant evolution in Afghanistan. Extensive and sound use of open sources is to be regarded as being a significant for both purely academic research in the fields of International Relations and Strategic Studies, and also in shaping solid, flexible and accurate policy-oriented texts. Another aim of this very study is to list and evaluate some already present trends in Afghanistan, trends which might significantly influence both local and regional geo-strategic realities after 2014.

Keywords: Afghanistan; ISAF; NATO; ANSF; insurgency; OSINT; trends; exploring and predicting future evolutions

Afghanistan is quite clearly a significant (or, more accurately, a vastly significant) element of the complex and highly dynamic set of geo-strategic contemporary realities. And this happens as a direct result of several reasons: a. *Afghanistan is definitely what Zbigniew Brzezinski calls a 'geopolitical pivot'*; b. *Afghanistan is definitely an area where the U.S. preeminent global status is, at this very moment, severely challenged and seriously tested*; c. *Afghanistan is definitely an element of the global geo-strategic landscape where the global relevance and perennial nature of NATO is also severely challenged and tested*; d. *Afghanistan is a country which, if and when it will become properly stabilized, might significantly boost stability, security and strategic predictability across a really vast region. On the contrary, an Afghanistan lacking stability and security might,*

almost certainly, severely harm both the stability and the security of a very large region – from Iran to China and from Southern regions of the Russian Federation to India; e. For my country, Romania, Afghanistan and its general present – and future – evolutions are important as well. First of all, because, along several years, Romania deployed there an important number of military personnel (and, more than this, in some, clearly indicated by ISAF public documents, Romania had in Afghanistan more soldiers than some great European powers, a fact to be regarded as a very clear sign showing how strong is my country's commitment to both NATO and the strategic partnership with the USA).

In order to better understand the ongoing evolutions in Afghanistan and, together with them, some *possible* (or even *probable*) future evolutions in the same region, it is important to *properly use open sources*. In many occasions, *open sources offer a very detailed picture of significant realities*. More than this, the professional approach of the journalist is, in many occasions, not the same as the professional approach of a governmental official. That is why *it might be useful to try to understand complex realities simply by mixing different pictures of the same reality: both official reports, and media reports* (in many occasions less concentrated than official reports on slow and long-term evolutions, less concentrated on very intricate connections of different layers of reality but, in the same time, significantly less influenced by what we usually call *wishful thinking* or *bureaucratic attitudes*).

I also feel the need to express here, from the very beginning, a *very firm belief* (it is true, one belonging to an individual whose professional skills, extensive professional experience and present jobs are not directly connected to active intelligence activities, so that – theoretically, at least – I might be wrong in the following evaluation): the ability of the average person (or institution) to significantly influence *real-time* evolutions in Afghanistan is severely limited. *Even with the best possible SIGINT, ELINT, HUMINT and OSINT sources and products we might imagine, a complete and easy-to-handle real-time picture of ongoing realities in Afghanistan is, in most occasions, something we simply cannot accomplish*. And that, mainly because getting, interpreting and transforming valuable pieces of *raw intelligence* into coherent, clear and brief policy-oriented texts is, many times, a too large and, above all, an exceedingly time-consuming burden. But the same time-consuming nature of the process of dealing with a vast

array of various pieces of intelligence is suddenly acceptable, at least in its broad lines, when (or if) we target not the next minute or the next morning, but, let us say, a slightly more distant future. *How is, for example, Afghanistan going to evolve after the end of 2014*, when authorities in Kabul will be confronted with the *complete* responsibility for security, anywhere in the country, with a severely diminished Western military presence? This text does *not* aim to offer a *complete* answer to such a difficult question. Our aim is less ambitious (but *more realistic*, I think): to explore, with some details, what *some* open sources (mostly *media* ones) say about two facets of reality, *both* of them *potentially* important in shaping the *not so distant future* we were speaking about above.

Brief introductive elements: on method and topics

For this presentation I deliberately selected two topics, each of them allowing us *to commensurate* some ongoing realities, and also *to predict* some *possible* (or *probable*) elements in *the future* of Afghanistan. Each of these two topics is clearly present, in several occasions along the past few years, in *open sources* of all sorts. The method I am using is made up by several layers or steps: first of all, I quote *significant* parts of media reports published along the past few years, dealing with the topics I have selected. Extensive quotations are allowing *any* of the readers, and also *any* of the members of the very distinguished audience I will be speaking to, *to directly verify if the conclusions I have reached in the end are solid*. At the end of each text fragment I will put all major elements which are really important for our debate in a *compact table*. *Any* of these tables will tell the reader several things at once: *how reliable the open source is*; which are the *main facts and trends presented in the text*, which are important for a better understanding of the topic we are speaking about (with some significant details for any major fact or idea). At the end of each chapter, along a very few lines, some conclusions will be listed.

The first such topic is *the role of women in the daily life of Afghanistan*. I am not speaking here about an issue studied with the average tools of gender studies, simply because I am *not at all* a gender studies specialist. I am simply dealing here with a mental framework extensively used by both *Strategic Studies* and by *International Relations*: the ability to *properly* commensurate the way in which *national power* of a certain

country evolves. According to Hans J. Morgenthau, the founding father of the Realist School in International Relations, national power – usually defined as the general ability of an actor to strongly influence the behavior of other actors on the international arena – is founded on (or generated by) several constitutive elements. Morgenthau lists, in his well known work *Politics among nations: The struggle for power and peace*, nine such elements of national power. One of them is *population* (the demographic dimension of national power). Another one is what Morgenthau calls *industrial capacity* (or, in slightly larger or more general terms, the general state of economy, both at national and at local level). A third factor of national power is, according to the same author, *quality of government* (meaning, above all, the ability of authorities to identify priorities, to elaborate policies and to implement them in order to get significant and lasting results). Women in Afghanistan are – exactly like in any other country – *immensely* important for *any* (and for *all*) of these three elements of the national power: firstly, they represent, not only in Afghanistan, but anytime and anywhere, roughly 50 % of the total population; secondly, *if and when* they are offered real opportunities, they can sharply increase both the productive capability of a nation, and the general levels of economic demand, and of public and private consumption; thirdly, *the way in which Afghan central, provincial and local authorities can design and implement equal opportunities policies of all sorts is a tool accurately indicating the real level of governmental and administrative effectiveness, and also an accurate tool indicating how much Afghan authorities are able (or are not able) – and are willing (or are not willing) – to accept and to boost complete emancipation of women (emancipation we regard, here, as a major element of modernity).*

A second topic I have selected for a more detailed presentation is that of *insurgent attacks against airfields in Afghanistan*. In a way or another, it is a tactic aiming *several results at once* (or *several* results with to be accomplished with limited means): to harm the manpower of the opponents (both ISAF and ANSF are, from the perspective of Afghan insurgents of all sorts, the enemy), to test and – if possible – to harm (or even to break, in special circumstances) the political will of the opponents; to harm the public image of the opponents; *and, above all, to harm, as much as possible, skillfully using very limited resources, the airlift capabilities and the air mobility of both ISAF forces, and of the ANSF.*

Women in Afghanistan: some significant evolutions, problems, concerns

For a better understanding of the positive evolutions, but also of really major (and sharply increasing) problems and challenges in the field of *emancipation of women in Afghanistan* I decided to use a *limited* number of media reports (only five), some of them published a few years ago. Most of them are recent or even *very* recent pieces of *OSINT-heavy* media reports. Here are the texts, each of them accompanied by a brief *analytical table*:

On January 26, 2010, Public Affairs of the ISAF Joint Command published a media report called “Afghan Business Women Find Help, Hope”¹ (see brief evaluation in *Table 1*). The article states that “the AWBF is a non-profit, non-political, private sector organization providing technical training and business assistance to Afghan women business owners... The federation can be a helping hand for the Afghan business woman,” said Aziza Mohmmad, business owner and AWBF chairperson. “[AWBF] provides a good market for their products.” Founded in 2005 with help from USAID, AWBF has now 30,000 members....” Some of the figures quoted by the text can support both optimistic and pessimistic evaluation of the situation in Afghanistan (see *Table 1*).

Table 1: Elements of OSINT in an ISAF media report published on January 26, 2010, dealing with evolution and results of the Afghan Women’s Business Federation (AWBF)

	<i>Items to be taken into account</i>	<i>Significant details illustrating the listed items</i>
1.	How reliable is the source?	Very reliable, we think. Media service of the ISAF
2.	What does the text say?	a. With significant Western support, an Afghan NGO grouping almost 30,000 businesswomen operates with some success; b. Five years were necessary to build an NGO with 30,000 members (the figure itself is impressive, but let us not forget that Afghanistan has more than 20,000,000 people); c. 25 women selling their products in the same place, at the same moment is something to be regarded as important
3.	Trends depicted:	a. Western help and western direct involvement are clearly a must in starting and going on with initiatives concerning women in Afghanistan; b. Attempts of businesswomen in Afghanistan to reach foreign markets in order to sell their products

¹ For fragments quoted in this paragraph see Mary Hinson, Master Sgt., ISAF Joint Command, Public Affairs, “Afghan Business Women Find Help, Hope”, January 26, 2010, at <http://www.isaf.nato.int/article/isaf-releases/afghan-business-women-find-help-hope.html>

4.	Direct predictions:	None. Anyhow, even an author directly connected to a high official body has to recognize, almost directly, that local initiatives cannot start and cannot develop, in Afghanistan, without significant Western help. But this help is going, <i>most probably</i> , to diminish after 2014
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On July 22, 2013, *Spirit of America* (SoA) published an article depicting some positive results in some parts of the Kandahar province. The article, called “SoA Supports Spin Boldak Women's NGO”² (see brief evaluation of the text in *Table 2*), tells us that “Spin Boldak is a district in Kandahar province where progress on women's initiatives occurred over the past year. This happened because the villagers in Spin Boldak enjoy a relatively higher degree of security and they are supportive of women's initiatives”. The article also tells that “female soldiers, working closely with the Kandahar Department of Women's Affairs minister, helped set up an umbrella organization for all of the women's NGOs in the district. A tribe named the Achekzai set up the first women's NGO within this organization... Because of the success of the Achekzai women's NGO, women from another tribe, the Noorzai, were encouraged to form their own NGO....; during the Afghan-only shura, the women discussed economic development projects, health care and education. For example, the women discussed a plan to purchase a cow and chickens for the women's center, they discussed herbal medicine...”.

Table 2: Elements of OSINT in article published by *Spirit of America*, July 22, 2013, dealing with situation of women in some districts of the Kandahar province

	<i>Items to be taken into account</i>	<i>Significant details illustrating the listed items</i>
1.	How reliable is the source?	Can not answer, because I lack adequate amount of information about SoA
2.	What does the text say?	Limited progress is possible, even in a province notorious for being both conservative and non-secure
3.	Trends depicted:	a. Tribal structures influence one another, this time in improving general status of women; b. When women are present within state institutions, they can boost the chances of women-oriented initiatives and activities; c. Local initiatives aiming to improve general status of women can not survive without foreign help
4.	Direct predictions:	None. Anyhow, we can easily imagine consequences of severely diminished foreign help, after the end of 2014

² Jim Misencik, Afghanistan Field Reporter, “SoA Supports Spin Boldak Women's NGO”, in *Spirit of America*, July 22, 2013, at <http://www.spiritofamerica.net/recent-blog-posts/1480-soa-supports-spin-boldak-women-s-ngo.html>

On August 4, 2013, *Reuters* published an article called “Uncertain future for Afghan businesswomen as West leaves”³ (see brief evaluation in *Table 3*). It concentrates the attention on the deeds and thoughts of a very successful Afghan businesswoman, Liza Ghausi Nooristani, chief executive of Mutaharek Construction Company. “The United States and its allies have put promoting women's rights at the core of their 12-year mission in Afghanistan and Liza Ghausi Nooristani has profited nicely from their intervention”, *Reuters* says. “Nooristani is one of the few women in conservative, male-dominated Afghanistan to set up and run a relatively big company. And she has done it in the mountainous eastern warzone. She has been undaunted by the danger and the death threats and her construction company has been building schools, roads and government offices, largely paid for by a flood of aid money that followed the arrival of U.S. troops.... She won her first contract in 2007, to build a village school worth \$10,000.... But now Nooristani faces the prospect of the withdrawal of Western troops. For Afghan women in general, the exit of most foreign troops by the end of next year could mean a slip back in the rights they have managed to secure over the past decade...” Liza Nooristani *clearly states – and proves, with details and figures – that windows of opportunity for Afghan women grow narrower and narrower, even if Western political influence and military presence is still strong in Afghanistan.*

Table 3: Elements of OSINT, in a *Reuters* report on Liza Ghausi Nooristani, August 4, 2013

	<i>Items to be taken into account</i>	<i>Significant details illustrating the listed items</i>
1.	How reliable is the source?	Very reliable. <i>Reuters</i> is known to be serious, and Liza Ghausi Nooristani is well known (and very present in international media)
2.	What does the text say?	a. At governmental level, after more than 10 years of continuous state building, modernization and massive Western influence, in Afghanistan there still is the sincere belief that “women are just for the home to wash clothes”; b. When direct Western presence comes to an end, chances for women simply collapse; c. Hard-line conservative attitudes made more potent by corruption and lack of effectiveness of authorities, at central or local levels

³For fragments quoted in this paragraph see “Uncertain future for Afghan businesswomen as West leaves”, *Reuters*, August 4, 2013, and *English.Alarabiya.net*, August 2013, at <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/perspective/features/2013/08/04/Uncertain-future-for-Afghan-businesswomen-as-West-leaves.html>

3.	Trends depicted:	a. General level of social and economic chances for women in Afghanistan grow narrower and narrower; b. Success of Afghan women in business <i>continuously</i> generates a lot of criticism, and even death threats and terrorist attacks
4.	Direct predictions:	None. Anyhow, with severely diminished chances for women in economy, an important percentage of production and consumption in Afghanistan <i>will</i> be negatively affected

On August 13, 2013, *Reuters* published a report about the kidnapping of a female parliamentarian in Afghanistan. The article states, starting from the very title, that “high profile attacks on women in Afghanistan undermine rights campaign”⁴ (see brief evaluation in *Table 4*). Let us see what happened, with more details: “Taliban fighters have kidnapped a female parliamentarian who was travelling by car through Afghanistan's central Ghazni province with her children, a local police commander said... the latest in a string of high-profile, violent attacks on women.... Kakar, a member of the lower house, was the second female parliamentarian to be attacked in Ghazni in less than a week.... In such a situation, states *Reuters*, “survivors of attacks often say their only hope is to leave Afghanistan, still one of the worst places in the world to be born female. “I need to go outside the country for my treatment and for my security,” said Muzhgan Masoomi, a former government worker stabbed 14 times last year.... Kakar's abduction follows the shooting last week of female senator Rooh Gul, police said.... Last month, the most senior policewoman in southern Helmand province, Lieutenant Islam Bibi, was shot dead on her way to work in the provincial capital Lashkar Gah. Bibi, touted as a rising star of the Afghan National Police, said she received death threats even from within her own family. While the Taliban have often targeted senior female government officials, honor killings by conservative male relatives remain commonplace... Concerns have also been raised about a rise in Taliban-style edicts in some regions not overturned by the government. In June, clerics in a region of Baghlan province, north of Kabul, barred women from leaving home without a male chaperone and shut down beauty parlors”, the article also states.

⁴For fragments quoted in this paragraph see Jessica Donati and Mustafa Andalib “High profile attacks on women in Afghanistan undermine rights campaign”, *Reuters*, August 13, 2013, at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/08/13/us-afghanistan-women-idUSBRE97C08220130813>

Table 4: Elements of OSINT in a Reuters report on an Afghan female official kidnapped, August 13, 2013

	<i>Items to be taken into account</i>	<i>Significant details illustrating the listed items</i>
1.	How reliable is the source?	Very reliable,: <i>Reuters</i> is notoriously serious; several native Afghans were involved in writing the text; the female officials listed are both well known, and their number indicates that we are speaking about a growing trend
2.	What does the text say?	a. Female Afghan officials kidnapped, attacked, stabbed or even killed in several provinces (some of them almost secure a few years ago)
3.	Trends depicted:	a. Increasing number of violent incidents targeting Afghan appointed or elected female officials; b. Increasing terror pushes more and more Afghans to wish to leave the country; c. Taliban-style edicts not any more overturned by central government.
4.	Direct predictions:	None. Anyhow, simply thinking that the three trends listed above might go on, and might become deeper and deeper realities can naturally generate a lot of legitimate worries

On August 19, 2013, a notorious social and political activist in Afghanistan published a text directly stating that the general fate of women in the country might quickly become as difficult as in the era of the Taliban regime. The text is called *Karzai: a legacy of failure on Afghan women's rights?*⁵ (see a brief evaluation of the text in *Table 5*). Its author is dr. Massouda Jalal, a notorious political activist, former Minister of Women in Afghanistan, and founding President of Jalal Foundation, an NGO that brings together 50 women's councils and organizations to promote women's advancement through advocacy, service delivery, capacity building and ground breaking projects. Jalal stated that "With more fundamentalists predicted to win seats in the forthcoming election, the future is likely to see once again the use of religion as an instrument of extreme gender based oppression in Afghanistan...." She went on, saying that "as the departure of the international security forces approaches, each day turns every bit of hope into desperation for advocates of Afghan women's rights.... The bottom line of women's agenda is that the rights of women should never be a subject of negotiation before, during and after the peace process. More importantly, women of Afghanistan expected a strong commitment to their protection from violence, State support to the victims and their families, and prosecution of all perpetrators of violence against women". Jalal also states that "unfortunately, women have been marginalized in the decision making

⁵ For elements quoted along this paragraph see Dr. Massouda Jalal, *Karzai: a legacy of failure on Afghan women's rights?*, at <http://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/massouda-jalal/karzai-legacy-of-failure-on-afghan-womens-rights>

for the peace process and their petitions have been ignored by national leaders. Except for a general statement that women's rights will not be sacrificed in the name of peace, nothing concrete was taken to guard against the reversion of women's status to the pre-2001 era. President Hamid Karzai has been turning a deaf ear to the pleadings of women's rights activists, claiming that he had already faced a lot of embarrassment in defending women's rights would no longer do anything in this regard. He now dances to the music of fundamentalism, drinks from the cups of people who are known butchers of women's rights, and appoints them to positions where they could tear down the foundations of women's rights that were painstakingly built a dozen of years ago. He has now elevated the practice of 'baad' to the level of national policy and law making - selling the daughters of his nation to appease the fundamentalists that he had brought to his administration". But the most troubling part of Jalal's statements is dealing with the fact that "the list of worrisome developments that betray the government's submission to fundamentalist dictates is growing: 1. President Hamid Karzai endorsed the Ulema Council's declaration that mandates women to fully comply with the hijab, respect polygamy, refrain from travelling without mohram, and avoid mingling with stranger men in social situations such as education, shopping, office and public life...." 2. the President of Afghanistan "marginalized women's voice in the development of the peace and transition framework and blatantly ignored the fact that the women of Afghanistan never acceded to the idea of making peace with the Taliban.... 3. Third, President Karzai never made good of his promises to implement the national policies and programs for the promotion of Afghan women's empowerment and gender equality 4. Fourth, the government remained silent amidst Parliamentary debates on the legality of his decree on the Elimination of Violence against Women. It allowed Parliamentarians to foment false interpretation of the law as being un-Islamic and derided the provisions that guarantee protection of women against abuse by their husband and relatives.... 5. Fifth, the government continues to fail in preventing violence against women and in providing services and access to justice to survivors. The latest report of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission indicated that 4,010 cases for VAW⁶ were recorded from March 21 to October 21 of 2012 which is 57 percent higher than the 2,299 figure of the same period for 2011". Jalal

⁶ VAW means, in this text, violence against women

also states that “just recently, the President signed the National Election Law that removed the provision on the 25 percent quota for women in the provincial and district councils. This means that the forthcoming national election could bring more fundamentalists in government, both at the national and local levels. With their presence in positions of power, it means that a rights-sensitive law on the elimination of violence against women could not stand a chance of getting enacted. Worse, all the gains on women’s rights during the past twelve years are in danger of being challenged and overturned by policy makers who are un-enlightened about international standards of human rights. The future is likely to see once again the use of religion as an instrument of extreme gender based oppression in Afghanistan”. And, in the end, Jalal’s conclusions are, frankly speaking, clearly grim: “There are less and less reasons to be optimistic”, even if “the government could still choose to do good for the daughters of this country, especially in the remaining months of President Karzai’s incumbency...”.

Table 5: Elements of open source intelligence in Massouda Jalal’s text, August 2013

	<i>Items to be taken into account</i>	<i>Significant details illustrating the listed items</i>
1.	How reliable is the source?	Very reliable. Dr. Jalal had (and still holds) an institutional position allowing her to accurately know a lot about social, political and gender issues of all sorts
2.	What does she say?	a. That at this very moment, future of women in Afghanistan is not at all a reason to be optimistic; b. The author lists five really major reasons making her think that the Karzai regime is, in political terms, severely pushed back by hard-line conservatives
3.	Trends depicted:	a. Failure in going on with reforms and modernization; fears that fundamentalists are on the verge of becoming dominant again; b. Women have lost one of the most important safety-checks they could use in previous years: the 25 % quota in elected bodies, at provincial and district levels; c. Sharp increase of the number of cases with violence against women (more than 50 % in only one year)
4.	Direct predictions:	Fundamentalists are going to win more seats in the next general elections (an element of future political realities already very clear, even if Western presence is still very strong in Afghanistan)

The final conclusion of evaluating the elements of *open source intelligence* (OSINT) present in the texts presented above are: 1. within the past years, the complete emancipation of women in Afghanistan was an aim not at all completely fulfilled, even if some positive results are obvious; 2.

recently, many reliable sources have a more and more obvious common denominator: that of depicting a clear decrease of the general level of freedom available for women in Afghanistan; 3. central government in Kabul is not able – or not willing – to preserve an adequate status for women in all areas of public life. *Put together, these elements shape a clearly negative trend, potentially able to influence a lot not only the future of the Afghan women, but – more generally – the fate of modernity and reforms in that country, and also the long-term stability and predictability of the entire region (mainly if we accept that severely diminished rights for women might be a sign that hard-line conservatives can become, again, very influential in Afghanistan, potentially able even to massively alter the national security agenda, and the foreign policy agenda of the decision makers in Kabul).*

Insurgent attacks on airfields: harming and eroding operational mobility of both ISAF and ANSF

For a better understanding of the (clearly limited) positive evolutions and results, but also of really major problems and challenges in the field of *properly and successfully facing insurgent attacks against airfields in Afghanistan*, I decided to use a total number of three media reports (slightly less than the total number of media reports used in the previous chapter), also published along the past few years.

On June 21, 2009, *Fox News* published an article dealing with a Taliban attack against the massive Bagram airbase, the largest and most important controlled and used by NATO in Afghanistan. The title of the article is “Rocket attack on Bagram Airbase - Afghanistan kills 2 US troops”⁷ (see a brief evaluation of the article in *Table 6*). According to “a top Afghan official ... several rockets were fired at Base. A spokesperson for ISAF said three of the rockets landed inside the Base and one landed outside.... Zabiullah Mujahid, a Taliban spokesman, claimed responsibility for the attack. Bagram Airbase lies about 25 miles northeast of Kabul. The Base is surrounded by mountains and endless stretches of desert. This provides insurgents with perfect conditions to fire rockets from concealed and secure positions. Tactically, they can move quickly, using the cover of

⁷ For the fragments quoted along this paragraph see “Rocket attack on Bagram Airbase - Afghanistan kills 2 US troops”, *Fox News* and *NowPublic*, June 21, 2009, at <http://www.nowpublic.com/world/rocket-attack-bagram-airbase-afghanistan-kills-2-us-troops>

the mountains and relocate. Attacks on Bagram Air Base have been rare. Although the terrain provides good concealment it is also difficult to negotiate and navigate”. The article goes on, telling that “Two U.S. troops died and four Americans were wounded, including four military personnel and two civilians, said Lt. Cmdr. Christine Sidenstricker, a U.S. military spokeswoman (...) A spokesman with NATO's International Security Assistance Force said that three rounds landed inside Bagram and one landed outside. ISAF said it wasn't known if any Afghan civilians living near the base were harmed in the attack”. The article can be regarded as being a really interesting one, *mainly* because it depicts a *successful Taliban attack* on Bagram, the largest and a heavily fortified NATO / ISAF position, placed in a region which had had been *almost* completely pacified from the very beginning of the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan.

Table 6: Elements of OSINT, in a Fox News media report, June 21, 2009, presenting details about a Taliban attack against Bagram airbase

	<i>Items to be taken into account</i>	<i>Significant details illustrating the listed items</i>
1.	How reliable is the source?	Very reliable. In practically all occasions, Fox News is accurate when dealing with events taking place abroad
2.	What does the text say?	a. Several rockets launched by Taliban fighters hit Bagram airbase, killing two and wounding four U.S. soldiers; b. Taliban able to get tactical surprise, skillfully using natural cover offered by mountains; c. NATO forces not able to say if civilians residing outside the defensive perimeter have been hit; d. No element indicating that ISAF could strike back
3.	Trends depicted:	a. Taliban attacks against high-value targets; b. Taliban carefully selecting certain moments to attack with maximum results and minimal risks (early Sunday morning, in our case)
4.	Direct predictions:	None

On August 21, 2012, *New York Times* published a clearly shocking article, speaking about a daring Taliban attack, also at Bagram airbase, against the airplane of highest ranking U.S. military official, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS). The title of the article is “Rocket Fire Damages Plane Used by Joint Chiefs Chairman”⁸ (see a brief evaluation of

⁸For fragments quoted along this paragraph see Richard A. Oppel, Jr, and Graham Bowley, *New York Times*, August 21, 2012, at http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/22/world/asia/top-us-commanders-plane-damaged-in-afghan-attack.html?_r=0

the text in *Table 7*). “Insurgents hiding outside the heavily fortified Bagram Air Base fired a pair of rockets early Tuesday that damaged the parked C-17 transport plane used by Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, American and Afghan officials said. “General Dempsey was in quarters asleep when the rockets hit the airfield,” which is 35 miles north of Kabul, said Col. David Lapan, the general’s spokesman... The airplane was not directly hit, but flying shrapnel struck the crew door, the fuselage to the left of the door and one engine cowling, said Colonel Lapan, who was on the trip. A helicopter at the base was also damaged. A Taliban spokesman, Zabiullah Mujahid, said militants planned Tuesday’s rocket attack with “precise intelligence” provided by someone inside the air base. But Jamie Graybeal, a spokesman for the American-led NATO coalition, said there was no indication that General Dempsey was the target or that militants knew the C-17 was his plane... The attack underscored what some officials describe as deterioration in security in the Shomali Plain, where Bagram sits. The plain has been a continually fought-over strategic link between the north of the country and Kabul during decades of war, dominated by different Afghan factions at various stages”. The article published by *New York Times* also states that “just a few years ago, the region experienced surprising gains in prosperity and security, driven in part by commerce around the massive air base and by NATO’s desire to keep the region stable. The area is important because of the airfield and because the main road that passes north through Bagram and the Salang Tunnel, and eventually into Uzbekistan, is an indispensable resupply corridor. But in the past few years some gains have deteriorated, with the Taliban and the militant group Hezb-i-Islami gaining strength in Parwan, the province where the base is.... The Afghan police chief for Bagram district, Alhaj Ezmarai Nasiri, said the rockets were most likely from a BM-12 launcher or similar model, which has a 12-tube array and can fire 107-millimeter rockets five miles. Insurgents have been known to strip off and use just one rocket tube, which can be carried in a car trunk...”. The article clearly indicates that *the general level of security was quickly eroding, at the end of August 2012, in an Afghan province which had had been stable and almost completely pacified some years ago*. Mainly this element of the entire story is really worrying, together with the fact that the Taliban used for the attack massive weapons, practically impossible to hide or to conceal (a fact which places under a large question mark the real effectiveness of check points on major roads).

Table 7: Elements of OSINT, in a *New York Times* article, August 21, 2012, presenting an attack launched by the Taliban against the airplane used by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

	<i>Items to be taken into account</i>	<i>Significant details illustrating the listed items</i>
1.	How reliable is the source?	Very reliable. <i>New York Times</i> is a notoriously serious source. More that this, the article extensively quotes both U.S. and Afghan officials
2.	What does the text say?	a. Rocket attack at Bagram air base, slightly damaging the airplane used by General Dempsey; b. Most probably, insurgents used a very large type of weapon which can be carried only by truck; c. Not very clear if the Taliban had an inside source, even if a Taliban spokesman said they knew exactly what target to attack; d. Anyhow, the episode badly harms the public image of the way in which the largest ISAF base is protected and / or defended
3.	Trends depicted:	a. Increasing ability of the Taliban to expand insurgency in previously pacified regions; b. Ability of the Taliban to freely operate along major land routes, allowing them to transport large caliber rockets by truck; c. General level of stability and security seems to be quickly eroded in Afghanistan by increasing Taliban actions
4.	Direct predictions	None. Anyhow, if we take into account the increasing audacity of Taliban attack, we might easily predict even more increased levels of Taliban political and military activism after the end of 2014

On June 9, 2013, a media report published by *AP* described an insurgent attack against several targets on the Kabul airport. The title of the article is “7 insurgents die during attack on Afghanistan airport”⁹ (see brief evaluation of the article in *Table 8*). *AP* reported that Afghan police responded after reports of gunfire near Afghanistan's main international airport in the capital, Kabul, early on Monday. Afghan police responded after reports of gunfire near Afghanistan's main international airport in the capital, Kabul, early on Monday”. The article also states that the “seven Taliban fighters with rocket-propelled grenades and machine guns launched a rare assault on NATO's operational headquarters at the military section of Kabul's international airport on Monday. All seven militants were killed. Their failed attack showed that despite an asphyxiating security blanket around the capital, Afghanistan's insurgency is far from defeated after nearly 12 years of war, and militants can still menace the capital”. The opinion of

⁹ “7 insurgents die during attack on Afghanistan airport”, *AP* piece of news, published by *CBC News*, June 9, 2013, at the <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/story/2013/06/09/explosions-nato-kabul-airport.html>

the journalists is that such “spectacular attacks are aimed at demoralizing the population and sowing mistrust in the Afghan security forces' ability to protect their citizens — rather than military gains.... The attack was one of three against state facilities on Monday morning by insurgents around the country. In addition to the airport attack, six militants wearing suicide bomb vests tried to storm the provincial council building in the capital of southern Zabul province, while three attempted to attack a district police headquarters near the capital.... ”. The article also reports that “at the airport, the insurgents did not get close enough to attack aircraft and were not near the runway's flight path... But they did manage to sneak in a minivan full of explosives, rocket-propelled grenades, heavy machine guns and assault rifles along with their suicide vests...”.

Table 8: Elements of OSINT in an AP report, June 9, 2013, describing insurgents attacking the main international airport near Kabul

	<i>Items to be taken into account</i>	<i>Significant details illustrating the listed items</i>
1.	How reliable is the source?	Very reliable. AP, together with other news agencies quoted by the article (Reuters, for example) are notoriously serious and accurate
2.	What does the text say?	a. Seven insurgents, heavily armed, attack a major civilian airport near Kabul and are defeated mainly by Afghan forces; b. Insurgents able to penetrate security perimeter, together with a van full of explosives and weapons
3.	Trends depicted:	a. Afghan and U.S. officials say that Afghan insurgent not yet defeated, in spite of a 12 years long fight against them; b. According to ISAF and to Western journalists, Afghan insurgents are aiming mainly to demoralize population, to harm the credibility of both ISAF and ANSF; c. Coordinated attacks targeting, at the same moment, several targets in different regions of the country
4.	Direct predictions:	None.

General conclusions of the second (and very brief) chapter of this are the next ones: a. OSINT shows that insurgents attack airports (both civilian and military) in Afghanistan in order to obtain *as many results as possible per unit of effort* (they harm, if possible, elements of infrastructure vital for both ISAF and ANSF; they also try to hit, if possible, high-value targets; they also try to kill or wound ISAF or ANSF military personnel; they also try to damage or destroy expensive airships); b. Afghan insurgents try – sometimes successfully – to transform such attacks into *potent propaganda tools*, deliberately trying to harm or erode credibility of defensive systems, tactics and general capabilities of both ISAF and ANSF; c. The resources used to stage attacks against airfields

might commensurate *the desire of the Afghan insurgents to cripple or to bloc both airlift capabilities and air mobility of ISAF and mainly of the ANSF*; and d. one of the common features of clearly more pieces of news than those directly presented here is that these media reports, together, describe *a resilient enemy, able to operate, in recent years, even in provinces and regions which had had been pacified many years ago* (such episodes might designate an effort of the insurgents to come back, in force, in territories they had lost 5 or even 10 years ago; and these attempts are really worrying, as long as we do not forget that, at the end of 2014, Western military presence will be severely diminished in Afghanistan, allowing the insurgents to become *even more active*).

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