1. Introduction: Situation under Control?

The Taliban started out the year 2017 with a new offensive “Operation Mansouri” launching “the most devastating attacks on Afghan forces” (MacKenzie 2017) since the international intervention in 2001. The group announced to direct their offensive “on foreign forces, their military and intelligence infrastructure” (ibid.). The declared targets have been repeatedly under fire: In March 2017, a group of extremists disguised as doctors attacked the main military hospital in Kabul killing almost 50 people including medical staff and patients. Another grave attack was launched on April 21, 2017 when a group of at least 10 Taliban fighters attacked the Afghan army base in Masar-i-Sharif during the Friday Prayer. Disguised as soldiers, the invaders killed more than 140 Afghan soldiers (Webermann 2017). Since the termination of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) by the end of 2014, the resurged Taliban has managed to expand its activities throughout Afghanistan (International Crisis Group 2017a, 5). At the same time, other militant groups such as the Islamic State-Khorasan (IS-K), an affiliate organisation of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (IS), as well as Al-Qaeda contribute to the deterioration of the situation (Otłowski 2014, 4-5).

Government officials try to calm the people. During the battles of May 2017, they explained to the residents of Kunduz “they had the situation under control” (Harooni 2017). The overall assessment of the United States’ Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) indicates something different: In fact, by May 2017, the government controlled only 23.8 percent of the Afghan districts (SIGAR 2017, 88). After more than a decade of international engagement and state-building efforts in Afghanistan,

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1 The number of casualties varies depending on the source of information.
2 In addition, 35.9 percent of the districts were under government influence indicating a lack of authority in these districts while the central government is perceived as the dominating force (SIGAR 2017, 88).
the situation is far from being stabilized. Following the 9/11 attacks in 2001, the United States of America (USA) and the international coalition managed to overthrow the Taliban regime in Afghanistan within the first two months of the Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). Shortly thereafter, the Afghan Interim Administration under Hamid Karzai was installed as a result of the Bonn Conference in 2001 (Hammes 2015, 278). Since then, international civilian and military assistance forces seek to advise, to assist and to reconstruct the administration system, hence the Afghan state itself. The ISAF operation and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), founded in 2002, are only two elements of the manifold international state-building and reconstruction efforts in the country (Stütz 2008, 251-253). When ISAF was terminated in 2014, signalling an end to all combat activities of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in Afghanistan, this was oftentimes associated with an “end of war” (Otłowski 2014, 2). Quite the opposite seems to be true given the rising number of civilian casualties recorded by UNAMA since 2009.\(^3\) Last year, the numbers reached their current all-time high with 3,498 deaths and 7,920 injured (UNAMA 2017, 3-4).\(^4\) The latest violent attacks, the resurgence of the Taliban, as well as rising numbers of internally displaced people and refugees indicate a deterioration of the security situation in the country – which was already the case before the completion of ISAF (Ruttig 2015). In the light of these developments, the general effectiveness and conception of international activities in Afghanistan, and, in a broader sense, state-building practices in international politics, are called into question.

The completion of ISAF was accompanied by a remarkable decline in international commitment in the country starting with the official handover of security responsibility to the Afghan government and subsequent withdrawal of substantial international troops (ibid.). Nevertheless, international forces did not leave completely due to the worsening situation. Yet the NATO’s follow-up mission Resolute Support (RS) and the separate U.S.-led antiterrorism-campaign “Freedom’s Sentinel” are of much smaller size (ibid.). Still, the RS mission indicates a similar strategic thrust as the former ISAF in training and mentoring Afghan security forces (Otłowski 2014, 4). The focus on the empowerment of Afghan National Security and Defence Forces (ANDSF), including the army, national police, police, and village police programme, evolved as a central pillar of international state-building pursued under the heading of security sector reform (SSR) (Hammes 2015, 278).

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\(^3\) In 2009, UNAMA began documenting civilian casualties in Afghanistan making it difficult to compare and assess earlier figures and trends (UNAMA 2017, 3).

\(^4\) This reflects the latest data available as of October 2017.
In view of the ongoing violent conflict, the issue of (re-)building security in Afghanistan for the state and the people remains of central importance (Hänggi 2010, 97). Despite all research conducted in this field, the lacking capacity of the Afghan state and its institutions indicate the need for further assessments of national and international efforts to foster security and stability in the country. Therefore, this study aims to answer the question: What does security sector reconstruction contribute to state-building in Afghanistan?

Thinking beyond the regional dimension of the conflict, the concept of SSR within state-building has gained importance and recognition within the international community since the 1990s (Hänggi 2010, 77). Similar reform activities have been conducted in several countries, among them, Burundi, Liberia, and South Sudan (United Nations 2013, para. 30). Thus, investigating the contribution of security sector reform includes a global rationale, without implying to generalize Afghanistan-specific findings. As Sisk (2010, 72-73) points out, it is of central importance to understand the specific (local) context of transition efforts as there is no “one-size-fits-all”-concept to state-building (Debiel and Reinhardt 2004, 536). While the definitive actions are highly context-dependent, the overarching ideal of a participatory democratic state indicates the potential of comparable research (Debiel and Rinck, Statebuilding 2017, 411). At the same time, in the field of state-building and SSR, comparative research is lacking due to its complexity and missing applicable analytical frameworks (ibid., 412). Though this paper compiles a qualitative single case study of Afghanistan, it also aims to provide an analytical framework for SSR assessment in the context of state-building that can be applied to other settings in the future.

For a start, the impact evaluation of security reconstruction in state-building requires to define the concepts of state-building in general and, in particular, of security as a state function pursued under the banner of SSR. This requires a broad literature review that delineates conceptions of the state, state-building and SSR including their theoretical and practical foundations. As any state-building approach is based on an underlying idea(l) of the state, it is crucial to embark on fundamental theories of the state in order to assess their influence on specific practices and objectives. The development of theoretical foundations requires a revision and distinction of different but

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5 This ideal continues to be highly contentious. Constantini (2015, 22) emphasises that the focus on this “Weberian” model neglects the evolution of alternative forms of governance (see chapter 2).
related discourses such as state formation, peace building and nation building. Furthermore, critique to state-building and SSR has to be revealed and taken into account for the analysis.

For the purpose of feasibility, the study of SSR activities in the country is conducted two-part, focusing on two major security state actors, the police and the military. These two research objects narrow down the scope of analysis, but again come with certain constraints that are acknowledged in the theoretical and methodological chapters. First, the military and the police need to be considered as two distinct organisations based on different tasks, goals and organisational needs. These institutional differences reconsidered while analysing international efforts to re-build them. The juxtaposition of two security agencies enables a comparison between related reconstruction agendas in the same regional, historical and temporal context, but originally led by different international stakeholders. In Afghanistan, the United States headed the military reconstruction, whereas Germany took the lead for police reform (Hammes 2015, 279). The basis of different lead nations facilitates a comparison of strategies, priorities, programming and normative frameworks, which will be incorporated in the conceptual analysis.

Based on these theoretical considerations, the methodological section discusses the chosen qualitative research approach followed by the development of the analytical framework for the case study of Afghanistan that will be conducted in a next step. For the purpose of this study, Afghanistan offers a well-researched example which has been of scientific interest even before the 9/11 attacks. The very roots of the current conflict can be traced back to the colonial era or the Soviet-Afghan War from 1979 to 1989 (Hirschmann 2016, 104, Knopf 2004). While this study is devoted to the developments of the ongoing conflict since 2001, the historical and societal circumstances are included in the conflict analysis.

The study of security sector reconstruction in Afghanistan does not come without certain limitations. First, the ongoing conflict in the country hampers the documentation and verification of events, internal developments, and politics. (Giustozzi and Isaqzadeh 2013, 2). This adds to general constraints of conflict analysis facing country specific complexities like the aforementioned historical and societal peculiarities. On the other hand, the international attention concerning Afghanistan since (at least) the late 1970s has prompted various individual researchers, think tanks, governmental and non-governmental organisations to dedicate their work to this case. The Afghanistan Evaluation Unit (AREU), for example, is supporting the monitoring, evaluation and public debate about Afghanistan by providing analysis on different governance issues based upon the UN’s 1998 Strategic Framework
for Afghanistan (AREU 2017). As a result, there is comparably broadly available literature about Afghanistan including strategic policy analysis and first-hand field studies (e.g. by Wieker 2012 or Giustozzi and Isaqzadeh 2013). The case study thus enables to research the impact of international SSR efforts within the framework of state-building while incorporating the most recent findings. In this way, it derives a critical assessment of the international agenda and the policy implications for future engagement. The last two chapters of the thesis will be assigned to the discussion and conclusion of the findings in order to draw together the main results, difficulties and prospects of the study.

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6 This study was finalised in October 2017.