

The potential 'roadmaps' for return to constitutional government in Afghanistan

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This assessment of six roadmaps by top political currents opposing the Taliban, presented at the Cambridge Afghanistan Series (CAS-III), is carried out by David Loyn, Senior Visiting Research Fellow at King's College London. David chaired the roundtable where the roadmaps were presented and critically assessed by Dr Nasir Ahmad Andisha, Afghanistan Permanent Representative and Ambassador in Switzerland and Professor Michael Semple of Queen's University Belfast

INTRODUCTION

The non-Taliban political and civil society opposition in Afghanistan is fragmented and has failed to find the right mechanisms to assure international actors that there is a credible *alternative* to the current tyranny. Agreeing on a unified path to return to constitutional government has become urgent for two reasons:

1. The Taliban administration is looking more fragile by the day. If fighting breaks out without a clear political *alternative* available, Afghanistan could once again slip into civil war as in the early 1990s. Non-Taliban parties are united only in opposition to the Taliban, but not in reaching a common platform, either to

mobilise effective action against the current administration, or to offer a clear alternative leading to a peaceful country. Political actors outside Afghanistan owe it to the people living inside to put aside their differences and unite behind one plan.

2. The international community is no longer united in opposing recognition of the Taliban, and it is essential that non-Taliban Afghanistan has a voice which cannot be ignored at the highest level, in order to prevent the Taliban being normalised in diplomatic circles. Several countries, notably Pakistan, China, Turkey, and Russia have already granted *de facto* recognition of the regime, with an exchange of officials who look like ambassadors. The continued Taliban rule is distorting the region, as Iran is putting pressure on Tajikistan to recognise the Taliban. In contrast, many western countries are wedded to the idea of negotiating with the Taliban, as outlined in the UN plan put forward by Feridun Sinirlioğlu. This charts a path towards an inclusive dialogue with non-Taliban parties, but none of the UN plan's supporters has been willing to help shape that opposition, and the failure of opposition groups to unite means it is harder to press the case for support.

Despite the clear failure of the Sinirlioğlu plan, there is no other international strategy. Even when the UN agreed to the Taliban's agenda, for talks including only the low-hanging fruit of economic reform and counter-narcotics, the Taliban treated the process with contempt. The more contentious issues of women's rights and inclusive government need to be forced onto the agenda, but that can only come from a united opposition. Early indications from President Trump's national security team suggest that they would be more open to engaging with Afghanistan's opposition groups than the Biden administration, but they have made it clear that they want the opposition to be united. (And as has been seen in other significant foreign policy areas, the current US president has his own strong views. At the time of writing, his only comments on Afghanistan were to warn that the Biden deal left Bagram air base open to China, and that the Taliban should hand back US weapons).

An effective joint roadmap would lead to something that would not be a 'government in exile,' but should be identifiable as the 'go-to' alternative to the Taliban, probably with a physical address, which made a significant difference to the Taliban after they opened their political office in Doha in 2014. The non-Taliban opposition need to unite to ensure that they have the right to be able to say that they represents that alternative, (while knowing that perfect agreement is impossible). If a credible alternative to the Taliban emerged, it would provide hope for people inside the country as well as forcing international actors to take notice. But there has also been a lack of willingness to compromise and work together. There is a danger of becoming obsessed with constitutional detail, rather than working to find the things that could unite all the opposition (beyond being anti-Taliban). For example, while nearly everyone agrees that the 2004 constitution was too centralised, and put too much patronage in the hands of the president, the exact shape of a new constitutional settlement is not going to be agreed outside Afghanistan. Indeed it would be arrogant to presume that any grouping outside the country had the legitimacy to speak for the whole nation. While arguments over the exact shape of a future constitution will feed into a final settlement, that settlement cannot be made outside the country.

There was a lot of discussion at the Cambridge meeting about the preferred type of decentralisation: should it be 'federalist' or 'polycentric?' Polycentrism has a lot of attraction in Afghanistan, given the history of the country. Much of the progress made in

forging accountable democratic institutions since 2001, flawed though they were, has been undone since 2021, so traditional local administration has been more prominent in the Taliban years. It could well be that all parties could agree to unite behind a roadmap with that as its goal. But while there are so many different groups pushing their version of the perfect country, the result is deadlock.

Obstacles to reaching that unity are partly based on historical rivalries, and disunity is understandable given the instability of the last fifty years. Divisions by tribe, background and allegiance during the various stages of the long wars all play a part. But for the good of the whole nation, now is the time to put these differences aside and try to find common cause for the future.

All of the roadmaps have advantages, but as Michael Semple has written, ‘Any one would be immeasurably better than the current situation. While they are all on the table none will be implemented.’ I am grateful to him for providing the framework for the analysis which follows. Each roadmap is considered against three different criteria, although some of Michael’s specific proposed tests are not considered, as they are not present in any of the documents. One of the missing metrics is ‘constructive ambiguity,’ which could not be found in any of the roadmaps. This can be a useful quality in political and diplomatic documents as it permits more than one construction of the same sentence, avoiding confrontation, and allowing for the widest possible unity to be built. The roadmaps have not been written with the complex flexibility to make space for this kind of nuance. And while all are called ‘roadmaps,’ **none has the directions for the route, the stages needed to reach the goal, or technical work on the modalities needed to chart the route.** All of the documents propose a new constitution, but **none has an implementation mechanism to achieve it, or clear plan for who should approve it.** There is though much overlap between the membership of all these groups, which should make a wider agreement more possible.

The roadmaps that are considered are:

Vienna Process for a Democratic Afghanistan.

National Resistance Council for the Salvation of Afghanistan (NRCSA)

National Trust Movement (NAM)

Jabha Azadi, or Afghanistan Freedom Front (AFF)

Federalist Assembly of Afghanistan (FAA)

Afghanistan Citizens’ Party (CP)

The one-line conclusion of this analysis is that there are valuable elements in all of the roadmaps, which might feed into a wider constitutional settlement. It would be fairly easy to construct a joint approach from the plans of the AFF, CP, NAM and the FAA. All want sovereignty of the people within agreed borders, equality for all ethnicities, decentralisation with more power for parliament, and some element of federalism. And each has a distinctive element that could be a ‘superpower’ in a joint agreement. NAM would provide the intellectual framing, with an emphasis on localism: the AFF offer strength in defining borders; the CP respect for individual citizens; and the FAA a plan for promoting a new political settlement.

But these groups have no plan for *how to get to the time when a new constitutional and political settlement would be possible*. Only the NRC and Vienna Process have a sense of the complexities of moving forward so that there might be some political space

in Afghanistan not occupied by the Taliban. And even these groups do not have the technical details worked out.

There are other significant actors in Afghanistan's recent past who also have articulated plans for the future, and they will need to be considered in mapping the Afghanistan's opposition, in order to build the widest possible tent. In what is not a comprehensive list these include:

- The *Afghanistan National Movement for Peace and Justice*, led by two former senior ministers in both administrations of the republic, Hanif Atmar and Muhammad Masoom Stanekzai. This plan proposes a return to Doha for talks with the Taliban, although there is a lack of clarity over who should be on the non-Taliban side.
- The *Herat Security Dialogue*, led by Davood Moradian's Afghanistan Institute for Strategic Studies, has convening power, and has been a valuable meeting place for networking and developing ideas; it currently lacks a detailed political track.
- *Women for Afghanistan Association*, headed by Fawzia Koofi, a former senior MP, and member of the Afghanistan former republic's negotiating team with the Taliban in Doha in 2020. This has now held two meetings, and has an ambition to bring together a wider group of opposition players to chart a women-led approach to finding a way out of the current crisis. (Fawzia is also a participant in the Vienna Process).
- *National Dialogue for Afghanistan*, led by former senior figures in Afghanistan former republic, Hekmat Karzai, Idrees Zaman, and Mustafa Mastoor. This has held two meetings in Istanbul, focused on building dialogue with the Taliban, who have not responded positively. This initiative has not reached out to other groups to build a wider network beyond elite players.
- *Center for Dialogue and Process-Geneva (CDP-G)*. Led by the republic's ambassador to Geneva, Nasir Andisha, CDP-G brings together civil society and technocrats from the emerging generation. Many of the leaders played key roles in the Ghani administration, although then young. Mobilising the energy and skill of this network through the CDP-G and other gatherings will be an important tool in building a peaceful future for Afghanistan.
- *New Afghanistan Democratic Forum (NAD-Forum)*. Led by Mosaic Global Foundation, NAD-Forum aspire to create an inclusive, diverse and democratic civil society forum, which was born of the dialogue of the civil society of Afghanistan in overlapping work with CDP-G.

CRITERIA ADOPTED FOR ANALYSIS

I Roadmap as a tool for change

THE 'VEHICLE' BEHIND THE ROADMAP

- Political associations – which tendency within politics of Afghanistan is the document associated with
- What political, economic and military resources have been committed to deliver the plan?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the document in the task of convening Afghan democratic forces?

CHANGE MECHANISM

- Role for UN and international actors
- Proposed dealings with the Taliban
- Constructive ambiguity—have you cleverly deferred or ‘fudged’ contentious issues
- Transitional mechanism
- Leadership – collective, individual, rotating
- Legitimacy of armed struggle
- Vision of political struggle

II Summoning of Citizens of Afghanistan

NARRATIVE

- Is there a compelling appeal to action?
- Story of the current crisis
- Explanation of the Taliban
- Poetry – is it inspiring?
- Statement of grievances

III Vision of the Future

APPROACHES TO GOVERNMENT

- Approach to structure of government – centralisation versus decentralization
- Approach to the problems of governance – lessons learned – corruption, nepotism – clannishness

EXTERNAL RELATIONS

- Approach to Afghanistan’s international relations
- Foreign fighters – what is the promise?
- Security – relationship between Afghan, regional and international

PLURALISM AND INCLUSIVITY

- Ethnic pluralism – how it appeals to the ethnicities
- Religious pluralism – the sects, non-Muslims
- The language question
- Gender & women’s role, rights
- Elite issues

RELIGION AND SOCIETY

- Role of Islam
- Role of the ulema
- Social liberalism versus conservatism
- Education – modern vs religious

DEMOCRACY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

- Approach to democracy
- Holding state actors accountable
- Approach to structure of government – centralisation versus decentralisation
- Approach to the problems of governance – lessons learned – corruption - nepotism – clannishness

ECONOMY

- Economic model – market versus state control
- Redistribution
- Taxation
- Climate

OTHER CONTESTED POLITICAL ISSUES

- Idea of Afghanistan
- Symbols of nationhood
- Justice and reconciliation
- Role of the political elders
- Security
- Peace – as a goal, how it is understood
- Freedom – freedom from arbitrary rule, from authoritarianism, the idea of tyranny, religious freedom

Vienna Process for a Democratic Afghanistan

I Roadmap as a tool for change?

This is the most dynamic and well developed of the available roadmaps. Although the Vienna Process began with Ahmad Massud's National Resistance Front in the most prominent position, it has since broadened its membership, and can legitimately claim to have the broadest base of any group, including several leading women activists. The process is driven by a prominent retired Austrian diplomat, Wolfgang Petritsch, and the leading citizen of Afghanistan in the process is the republic's ambassador to Austria, Manizha Bakhtari. The roadmap developed over five meetings in Vienna. At the third meeting four working groups met to consider plans in more detail—political, international, human rights, and economic. Their papers have fed into the Vienna process roadmap, which is now developing a more practical plan of action, with the proposal for a 19-person Commission to develop an engagement strategy with the Taliban. To quote:

‘The implementation mechanism of the roadmap includes coordination among anti-Taliban forces, the establishment of consultative commissions, the organization of nationwide meetings, and securing international support.’ However this is not yet a plan to mobilise in an agile way. Vienna has a large executive committee, which is useful to promote the sense that this is a wide tent, but not to deliver an effective coordinating function. This roadmap is full of good ideas but short on mechanisms to make real change. There are some younger technocrats in the room, although they are very much in the minority, and the actual ethnic make-up of the participants does not fulfil the inclusive pluralist ambition.

II Summoning the People of Afghanistan?

The Vienna Process roadmap tells a compelling story about the challenges faced by Afghanistan, particularly for women. And this document is strong on mentioning crimes against minorities, particularly Hazaras.

There is a clear analysis of the Taliban, particularly mentioning their terrorist links. To quote: ‘For many Afghans, the Taliban’s rule symbolizes the loss of personal freedom, self-determination, and autonomy. They view the Taliban not only as a violent group that seized power through force but also as a threat to national interests.’

III Vision of the Future?

Approaches to government: The Vienna political plan is a highly theoretical analysis of a perfect state with separation of powers between executive, judiciary, and legislative. In a radical change for Afghanistan, it proposes a non-executive president, with a prime minister accountable to a vote of confidence in parliament.

External relations: The Vienna Process has kept a number of different international players informed of its work, including EU, UN, US and UK. The international working group have a comprehensive plan of engagement, including with regional neighbours and the wider Islamic world. In engaging Islamic countries this plan questions the legitimacy of the Taliban’s Islamic credentials.

Pluralism and Inclusivity: During the time of the republic, there was a lot of talk about the need to engage ‘women, youth, and minorities,’ and that rhetoric is reflected in this roadmap. There are more references to women in this roadmap than any other, and there are many references to inclusivity.

Religion and Society: This roadmap mentions the name of several religious minorities, while framing tolerance in Islamic terms. ‘Islam, as the religion of the majority in Afghanistan, itself emphasizes human values such as justice, equality, human dignity, and peaceful coexistence.’ This is an implicit critique of the Taliban’s harsh interpretation of Islam.

Democracy and Accountability: There are more references to democracy than in any other roadmaps, and a strong sense that the people ultimately have sovereignty. This would mark an important shift. The ultimate authority under the previous Islamic Republic of Afghanistan was sharia law. Vienna is framed in far more secular terms. However, in the highly theoretical definition of democratic institutions there is no analysis of how to make them more accountable. Lack of accountability was one of the

reasons the former republic failed. And **while there is a strong sense of the need for political parties, there is no plan to change the electoral system.** Both of the presidents of the republic, Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani were opposed to the creation of functioning political parties, and the electoral system itself, with multi-candidate constituencies, adopted after the 2004 constitution, and used in no other functioning democracy in the world, tended to operate against the successful creation of parties.

Economy: The Vienna roadmap sees economic progress as deriving from political stability. It proposed public/private partnerships as the best approach to build a thriving economy, with the state creating the conditions for private sector development, and having urban and rural development plans, as well as improving the country's infrastructure to enhance regional connectivity. The plan anticipates high levels of international development funding. The country would adhere to international rules regarding climate change mitigation.

Other issues: The Vienna roadmap embraces the need to end corruption. This would come through the separation of powers, ensuring better judicial oversight, and more e-government to reduce direct payments. There is no consideration of how to manage the expectations of different generations of citizens, or how to limit the power of elites. War crimes are considered only in reference to the Taliban. And in **a roadmap which is all about what a post-Taliban Afghanistan would look like, and with no plan for how to get there, it is not surprising that there is no discussion of negotiation or reconciliation.**

The Vienna Process includes representatives from groups who have an armed wing. However the language of the roadmap is expressed purely in political terms, with awareness of the strongly-expressed position of the major western players—the EU, UK, and US, (although President Trump has not yet spoken on this), who all oppose a military solution.

National Resistance Council for the Salvation of Afghanistan

I Roadmap as a tool for change?

The National Resistance Council (NRC)—also known as the ‘Ankara Shura’ since this is where they meet. This body is mainly gathering of the leaders of *Tanzim*, parties that were prominent in the war against the Soviet invasion in the 1980s. Some of the leaders played prominent roles in the republic, notably Salahuddin Rabbani, Foreign Minister, Muhammad Yonus Qanooni, Vice-President and Speaker of the Parliament, Muhammad Atta Nur, Governor of Balkh, and General Abdul Rashid Dostam, First Vice President. The NRC plan is for ‘a new era in which Afghanistan will be stable, democratic, war and violence-free, pluralistic and tolerant.’ This roadmap proposes a clear path towards talks the Taliban.

Firstly, there should be a five-point sequenced plan to create a functioning negotiating platform:

1. Create a single umbrella group for all opposition groups of Afghanistan
2. Agree a joint framework
3. Agree a roadmap to move forward

4. Agree on the parameters of a future political system
5. Establish a physical address to enable communication.

The plan calls on ‘all political parties, organisations and influential personalities, including academics, ulema, women, elders and youths, to unite under a single political umbrella and engage in a collective, coordinated struggle to save the country.’

Secondly, the UN needs to create a talk process, probably in a third country, and facilitate an office for the non-Taliban opposition.

This is an ambitious proposal, but with no modalities to build the wide network that is envisaged or build the international network needed to make it happen.

II Summoning the People of Afghanistan?

Of all the different political groups, the NRC face the biggest challenge in securing wide legitimacy. While the leaders have a hallowed role in the history of the nation for their resistance against Soviet occupation, and there is no doubt of their continued power and influence and ability to mobilise millions of people, the overwhelming majority of citizens of Afghanistan have no desire to empower figures from this generation who have a background in 1980s militias. The younger generation of leaders in the NRC, often sons of former legendary figures, have not successfully changed the dial on this. And the shura have done nothing since proposing this roadmap to make it a reality. There are crossovers between this group and the Vienna Process. Senior figures in the NRC, Ahmad Massoud and Muhammad Mohaqiq both attend Vienna meetings. But there has been no formal dialogue for building a bigger tent between these two groups.

III Vision of the Future?

Approaches to government: This plan envisages a two-year transitional government which appears to be a pre-condition for the Taliban entering talks, which sounds like an unrealistic expectation. Why should the Taliban agree to share power ahead of talks?. This transitional government would then draw up a new constitution for a ‘decentralized parliamentary democracy with elected governors, mayors and district governors.’

External relations: As seen above the NRC propose a role for the UN in facilitating talks with the Taliban, and request that international pressure is put on the Taliban, including more sanctions, to force them to the negotiating table. A post-Taliban Afghanistan should adopt a position of ‘active neutrality.’

Pluralism and Inclusivity: This roadmap is clear on the need for sound and efficient government institutions which respect the country’s ethnic, religious and gender diversity.’ Any future settlement should respect ‘the fundamental rights of citizens, especially women.’ The leadership of the NRC is made up of a wide representation from diverse communities of Afghanistan.

Religion and Society: The NRC propose a ‘true and moderate interpretation of Islamic values,’ so changing course from the Taliban. The ulema are among the groups who should be consulted in any solution to the crisis.

Democracy and Accountability: This roadmap talks about both democracy and justice. But there is no clarity on accountability mechanisms, and how the democratic, non-corrupt society should be governed.

Economy: There is no mention of the economy in the roadmap. However, economic issues are tackled in the founding manifesto of the NRC. ‘With a deep understanding of the country’s God-gifted natural wealth and huge human capacity whose optimal and fair utilization can provide for self-reliance, economic growth, and welfare of the people.’ There is also the desire for the state to provide social security benefits to less well-off people.

Other issues: There is very little reference to justice, other than the hope that the new Afghanistan will be ‘justice-oriented.’

This roadmap is more focused on the terrorist threat posed by Taliban-held Afghanistan than any other, and it threatens force if the Taliban do not negotiate, with a graduated series of moves including mass civil disobedience, encouraging splits in the Taliban by recruiting disaffected figures, as well as military action.

National Trust Movement of Afghanistan (NAM)

I Roadmap as a tool for change?

This is the most comprehensive analysis of many elements of a functioning state of all of the roadmaps. NAM are proud of not being focused on a particular leader, focusing on principles, not personalities. This should be an advantage, in particular because it means they are not attached to an ethnic identity. They define themselves not as a political party, but a ‘current.’ However, delivering change requires strong leadership drive it through, in particular in Afghanistan. And it may be hard for NAM to have the traction to deliver the change they want to see. The main energy in producing the roadmap has come from the anthropologist Professor Nazif Shahrani, who is a member of the Vienna Process.

This roadmap charts a course towards elected government, beginning with an international Peace Commission, facilitated by the UN, that would appoint a peace committee to negotiate with the Taliban, leading to a transitional government, which considers whether to retain or amend the 2004 constitution. In common with almost all other roadmaps, it is weak in charting the precise mechanism to deliver agreement from the Taliban in handing over power to a transitional government.

While less specific in threatening force than the NRC, this roadmap is clear that in the current Afghanistan situation, armed resistance is legitimate, but this is not specifically connected to the peace apparatus. ‘While we abhor endless wars, we recognize the necessity to defend the rights of our citizens by all legitimate means possible when the fundamental principle of political legitimacy through free and transparent elections is disregarded and social justice is violated.’

II Summoning the People of Afghanistan?

There is a paradox at the heart of the NAM project, which is that it defines itself as a ‘response by intellectuals’ but at the same time provides a ‘voice for the silenced masses.’ There is no mechanism in the roadmap to provide the link between the two in order for this project to provide such a voice. NAM rejects the elites who have governed recently, blaming them for corruption and rent-seeking, and making a clear appeal for new leaders

to emerge from among ‘experienced, honest individuals’ who have borne the brunt of the challenges of the past four decades.

III Vision of the Future?

Approaches to government: NAM propose that government should be decentralised down to community level to empower local institutions in a polycentric system, diffusing power. This is designed to build trust between the government and the people.

External relations: There is a constant thread running through this document that blames international actors for Afghanistan’s problems. In prioritising a centralised constitution, external actors are said to have neglected ‘the promotion-oriented, decentralized governance structure.’ Society is said to have been ‘Westoxified,’ i.e. moulded to follow western ways, rather than finding more culturally appropriate solutions. NAM want to see a neutral Afghanistan that is at peace with its neighbours. And this improvement in external relations would be significantly informed by improvements inside the country. This is the only roadmap with a reference to the Durand Line, the disputed boundary between Afghanistan and Pakistan. It proposes a negotiated settlement to revolve the dispute.

Pluralism and Inclusivity: NAM are strong in adhering to principles of inclusivity, and respecting the needs of a multi-ethnic society.

Religion and Society: NAM plan for an Islamic Studies Institute to improve religious learning, and local democratic control of mosques—both measures designed to improve religious literacy, and limit the influence of extremists. The roadmap also states that *Fatwas* issued by an individual should have no effect in a democratic society.

Democracy and Accountability: This roadmap is distinctive in demanding democratic decision-making at all levels of government. Polycentrism is here defined as providing for ‘the election of political officers and the hiring of professional staff by peer committees within government offices across all levels, replacing the practice of appointments dictated from Kabul.’ All government appointments should be meritocratic. There is an emphasis on the need for free speech, and independent media to hold the system to account.

Economy: There is a far more detailed analysis of Afghanistan’s economic challenges than in any other roadmaps and clarity over how to mitigate them, with remedies including better education, improving water management, and improving regional connectivity. There is criticism of the distorting effect of international aid.

Other issues: There is a danger that hostility to western thought and influence might cut Afghanistan off from social and political currents that could benefit it. A new technocratic generation will be needed to deliver the change that is needed after the Taliban, and many of the most talented individuals who are available have western training and education. The repeated theme in this roadmap emphasising Afghanistани traditional solutions may run counter to finding the most innovative paths out of the crisis.

Afghanistan Freedom Front (AFF)

I Roadmap as a tool for change?

This is the political programme of what is principally a military organisation. It is based around four pillars, two of them endorsing violence to achieve a just end—Resistance, Struggle, Faith and Freedom. The AFF see their armed resistance as justified because of the illegitimate nature of the Taliban administration. The roadmap lays out a series of principles, which include **steps towards a transitional government**, but **there is no implementation mechanism**, and this feels like a provisional set of proposals, rather than a finished roadmap. This sense is accentuated with the concluding thought that ‘the principles outlined in this manifesto can be amended and revised in accordance with the evolving circumstances.’ There is a shopping list of desired outcomes—eg, a comprehensive peace settlement, separation of powers of the three branches of the state, reform of the judiciary, reform of the electoral commission—but there is no discussion of the modalities needed to reach this post-Taliban state. It reads as a declaration of principles, but with few details.

II Summoning the People of Afghanistan?

The leader of this process Dr Yasin Zia had a distinguished career as a general, heading the army in Afghanistan, and serving as deputy defence minister. Beyond Zia’s own personal following, the AFF use social media with effect to amplify the effect of their military actions, which have been small-scale attacks rather than an attempt to gain ground.

III Vision of the Future?

Approaches to government: There is not much detail of the preferred nature of government, beyond some statements of principle. There is desire for a new constitution to be approved by referendum.

External relations: There are a number of appeals in this document for the international community to cut off links with the Taliban, and not to recognise their control of Afghanistan. A post-Taliban state should adhere to ‘basic and common norms’ of international relations, and not harbour terrorists.

Pluralism and Inclusivity: In what is quite a brief document compared to some of the others, there is compelling language on the need to respect ethnic minorities and build a united nation, drawing on diverse language and tribal backgrounds. There is a strong emphasis on inclusivity and the need to engage all of the people living in the borders of Afghanistan, who should all be seen as equal citizens. This roadmap is distinctive in specifically addressing the language question, proposing that people should be educated in their mother tongue, and all prevalent languages should be recognised by the constitution.

Religion and Society: There is no mention of Islam. The ‘faith’ that is one of the four pillars of this project is described as ‘faith in freedom,’ ‘faith in the liberation of our land.’

Democracy and Accountability: There is clarity about the need to ensure that power relies on a democratic process.

Economy: Afghanistan should have a mixed economy, with state involvement. In contrast to the NAM roadmap, foreign experts should play a role in advising on this.

Other issues: This roadmap is distinctive in proposing transitional justice. This has not been attempted in the past, because it may ask uncomfortable questions of elite actors who are not in the Taliban. The AFF's desire to put this into a settlement shows a bracing desire to confront challenges and genuinely put the past behind them.

Federalist Assembly of Afghanistan (FAA)

I Roadmap as a tool for change?

This roadmap sees centralism as the most destructive force in Afghanistan, preventing reform of any kind until it is changed. While most other roadmaps restrict their analysis of the past to the republic and the Taliban years, the FAA go back to the nineteenth century. And in contrast to other roadmaps that avoid language of ethnic division, this narrative lays the nation's ills at one door: 'This system, dominated by a single ethnic group Afghan/Pashtuns, has consistently failed to represent the country's diverse needs, pluralism, and various communities effectively.' The failure of the post-2001 republic to change the centralised system meant it was ready-made for the Taliban to take over and transfer the powers of the president to their Emir. In contrast, a system of federalism, would 'empower local governance, promote public participation, and support human rights advocacy at both national and local levels.'

The plan allows for no compromise, stating: 'The Federalist Assembly's roadmap is non-negotiable.' But for peace to be practically implemented, everything has to be negotiable. The extreme nature of this position will make this plan hard to implement, however worthy the idea. The FAA propose that the UN should facilitate a peace process, empowering the FAA as the 'legitimate political framework representing Afghanistan's diverse populations.' Given the strong emphasis against Pashtun control of government, this does not feel like a realistic aim.

The plan claims that India and Pakistan are countries where counterterrorism is successful because it is managed at provincial rather than national level. (This is a highly contested view for Pakistan at least.)

II Summoning the People of Afghanistan?

This roadmap has the most well-developed plan of engagement of all of them. Indeed the plan to promote the idea—which includes social media, cultural programmes and workshops, and international engagement—takes most of the space of the document. But much of the work requires a more permissive environment on the ground inside Afghanistan than currently exists.

III Vision of the Future?

This roadmap has a clear vision of the future of Afghanistan, it should be federal.

Approaches to government: Government should be federal, with devolved authority.

External relations: There are elements of international engagement throughout the document, in terms of facilitating a peace process, ensuring international legal compliance for any federal constitutional change, and sharing counterterrorism information, but not joined together into a plan. Perhaps most surprising is the idea of an international peacekeeping force to ‘protect the implementation process and prevent destabilizing actions by anti-federalist groups.’ After the experience of the failed twenty-year military campaign, there is no chance of western boots on the ground in Afghanistan, and it is hard to think who else might be willing, certainly not the UN. Perhaps a coalition of willing Islamic countries might be possible, but there is no practical consideration of this.

Pluralism and Inclusivity: The plan calls for a inclusive society, but the strong opposition to Pashtun-dominated government would make this a challenge.

Religion and Society: The plan recognises the need for religious involvement in government at a local level, as that is the appropriate way to move forward in the Afghan context, through shuras and other approved community decision-making mechanisms. However, this roadmap is unique in drawing on Taliban practice to put it into effect. Other roadmaps, in particular NAM, see it as a significant need to promote a different Islamic path from the Taliban, seeing theirs as corrupt and tyrannical. However the FAA believe that they can draw on Taliban experience at a local level, and they can ‘frame federalism in a way that aligns with the Taliban’s focus on Islamic governance.’

Democracy and Accountability: The FAA plan requires a new federalist constitution to be implemented. This would be based on principles of ‘human dignity, citizen empowerment, democracy, and human rights.’ The roadmap states that this constitution is currently being developed, but the plan does not address the question of how such a constitution would be legitimate or how it would be introduced to Afghanistan.

Economy: There is no specific mention of the economy in this plan, although federalism is said to ‘ensure the long-term stability, development, and prosperity of Afghanistan.’

Other issues: This roadmap is an outlier in a number of ways, in endorsing Taliban local government, and in particular in the certainty of its analysis of the best kind of system for Afghanistan. It does not read as if it addresses the predicament facing Afghanistan. The proposals are best left for the period when the Taliban have been defeated, or persuaded to allow some space for constitutional reform. The FAA do not have the details of the roadmap needed to reach that point.

Afghanistan Citizens’ Party (CP)

I Roadmap as a tool for change?

Like the FAA, the CP blame Pashtuns for monopolising power, and this analysis goes back to the mid-eighteenth century. ‘For the last two and a half centuries, a minority group has wielded political power in Afghanistan, while the majority of society has been marginalized and excluded from political participation, relegated to the status of outsiders.’ The roadmap states that this ‘oppression’ continued under the post-2001 republic, leading to its collapse. This is a contested analysis, especially given the uneven outcome of the Bonn settlement, empowering a number of non-Pashtun actors from the

mujahidin period along with a powerful Pashtun president. There were many reasons for the collapse of the republic, and focusing on Pashtun domination ignores these other factors. The focus of the CP on this will make it harder for them to build the wide tent needed for success.

The CP roadmap calls for a second Bonn summit, bringing political parties and individuals together to chart a way forward, leading to an interim government, although like most other roadmaps, there is no consideration of how to bring the Taliban to this process, or whether that would be useful. There were no functioning political parties with any connection to the democratic process during the republic, and without significant support for reform of the civil society sector it is hard to see how it would be possible to bring together enough genuinely representative parties for a second Bonn, especially given the challenges of mobilising opinion inside Taliban-dominated Afghanistan.

II Summoning Afghans?

This plan calls for the mobilisation of a ‘new generation of pro-democracy political activists and leaders’ to take Afghanistan forward. There is attractive language around the moral need to create the conditions of a non-corrupt fairer state. But the strong rhetoric against Pashtun rule will make this offer harder to sell.

III Vision of the Future?

Approaches to government: The CP plan has many similarities to the federalism planned by the FAA, although less dogmatic. They want a decentralised system, with enhanced powers for parliament, to dilute the role of the president. This roadmap is distinctive in several references to the rule of law. In the new Afghanistan there should be political parties, which did not emerge for a variety of reasons during the twenty years of the republic. However there are no modalities to create space for new political parties, Like the FAA, the CP are already developing a new constitution, which they want to put to the people of Afghanistan in a referendum. This ‘take it or leave it’ approach is unlikely to deliver the kind of consent that will be needed for a major change to the constitution.

External relations: The CP want better relations with neighbouring countries, and believe that Afghanistan’s cultural variety will be a valuable soft power asset internationally. Improving regional relations is seen as a step along the road towards independence. The roadmap emphasises the need to prevent the ‘harmful interference’ of outside forces.

Pluralism and Inclusivity: While all the roadmaps promote pluralism and inclusivity, the citizen-centred approach envisaged here has the clearest language in this area.

Religion and Society: Religious reform will be needed to ‘promote a moderate and rational interpretation of religion.’ The CP roadmap is second in length only to the NAM roadmap in outlining the kind of society it wants to see, with several pages of uncontentious material about equality, education, managing the armed forces, disarmament, enhancing Afghan culture, etc.

Democracy and Accountability: This roadmap is strong on democracy, and emphasising the rule of law would improve accountability.

Economy: There is an emphasis on the private sector as the engine of economic development.

Other issues: The CP are distinctive in addressing the highly contested issue of citizenship head-on. It is contested because of the historical idea that ‘Afghan’ means ‘Pashtun,’ turning people of all other ethnicities into second-class citizens. Some other roadmaps mention the issue in passing, in particular the AFF, who define citizens of Afghanistan as being all people inside its borders, but only the CP address it at length.

But like most of the others, this roadmap has no plan to bring the Taliban to the negotiating table, with nearly all of the document presuming that they have been replaced.

THE END