

The Evolution of Conflict and Assistance in Afghanistan

September 2007—February 2010

Project Overview

America’s “longest war” in Afghanistan is drawing to a close, with NATO combat troops projected to withdraw by the end of 2014. On May 2, 2012, President Barack Obama signaled a new chapter in the conflict by signing a strategic partnership agreement with President Hamid Karzai, committing ten years of development aid for Afghanistan after US military involvement effectively ends.

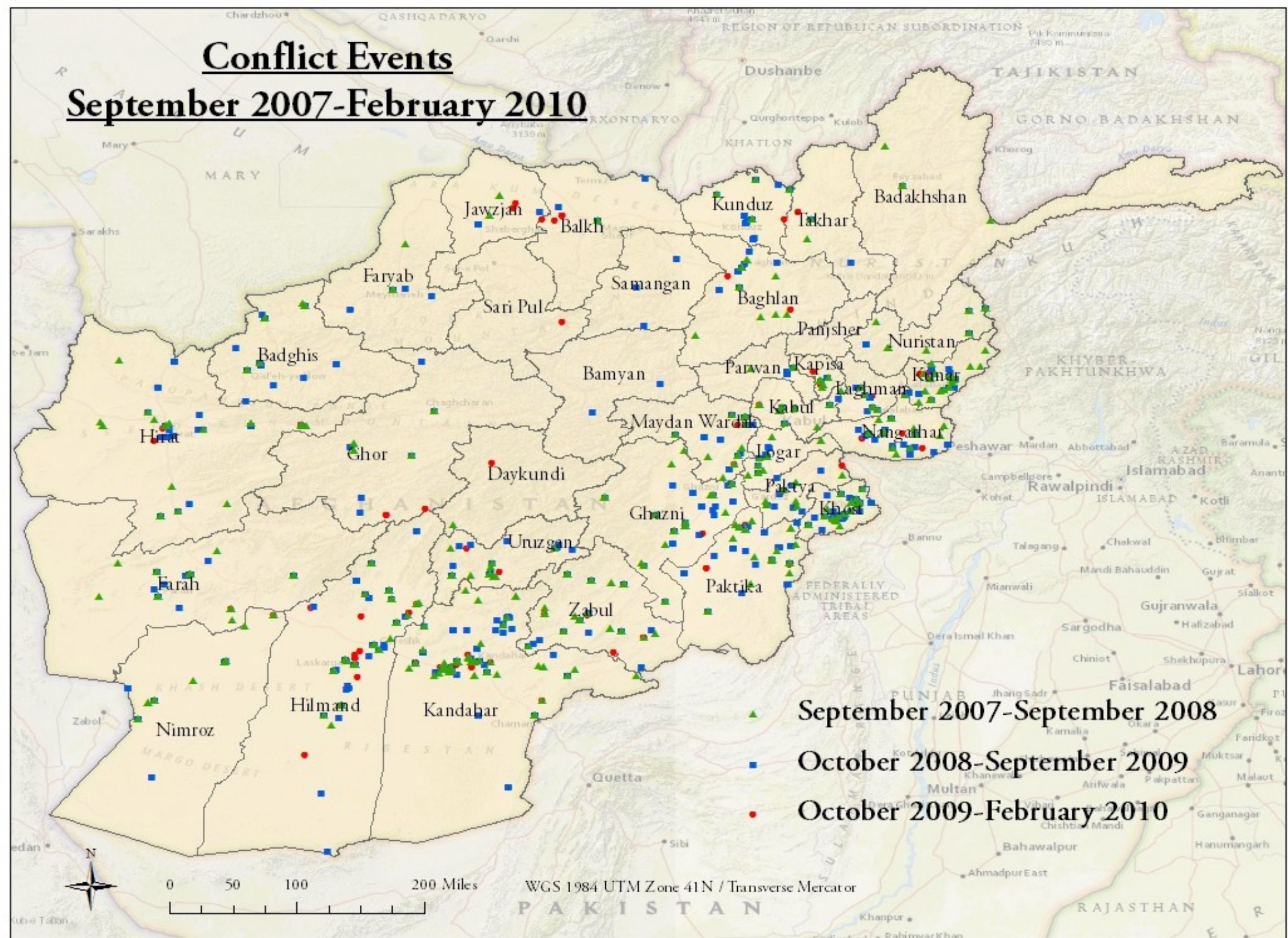
Development aid in Afghanistan is largely predicated on the assumption that more development leads to more security. To critique this assumption, this project employs geographic and temporal analysis to contrast the evolution of conflict with the evolution of development assistance in Afghanistan.

Methodology

Data: Conflict event data was acquired from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) project, which provides information on the time, location, and character of events gathered by international media sources. Data on USAID assistance to Afghanistan was taken from a US Senate Report entitled “Evaluating US Foreign Assistance to Afghanistan.”

Timeframe: Conflict events from September 2007 to February 2010 were selected to overlap with available USAID figures for Fiscal Year 2009 (10/1/2008 to 9/30/2009) and Fiscal Year 2010 (10/1/2009 to 9/30/2010). The period of September 2007 to February 2010 was further divided into three-month increments to allow for a more granular analysis of change over time. In total, ten snapshots of the conflict environment, taken every quarter-year over the time period, formed the basis for analysis.

Ten Snapshots of the Conflict Environment	
Fiscal Year 2008, Quarter 1	9/21/2007 to 12/31/2008
FY08Q2	1/1/2009 to 3/31/2009
FY08Q3	4/1/2009 to 6/30/2009
FY08Q4	7/1/2009 to 9/30/2009
FY09Q1	10/1/2008 to 12/31/2008
FY09Q2	1/1/2009 to 3/31/2009
FY09Q3	4/1/2009 to 6/30/2009
FY09Q4	7/1/2009 to 9/30/2009
FY10Q1	10/1/2009 to 12/31/2009
FY10Q2	1/1/2010 to 2/20/2010



Summary of Conflict	
Total Number of Attacks	3120
Minimum Number of Attacks	0 (Punjsher)
Maximum Number of Attacks	654 (Hilmand)
Mean Number of Attacks	91
Standard Deviation	126.317

Analysis:

Evolution of Conflict—Conflict events were aggregated per province, per quarter-year, to create a layer for each of the ten snapshots. These “event count” layers were then subtracted from each other to create nine layers, each representing the difference in conflict events per province from one time snapshot to the next time snapshot. These “difference” layers were then averaged to determine which provinces experienced the most consistent decrease or increase in conflict events over the time period.

Evolution of Aid—USAID funding amounts for FY09 and FY10 were tabulated into ArcGIS to create two layers depicting the amount of aid per province. These layers were then subtracted from each other to create a “difference” layer depicting the decrease or increase in aid over the time period.

Results

This analysis suggests that conflict across provinces has exhibited little consistent change, with the majority of provinces experiencing no mean change in the number of events from September 2007 to February 2010. Furthermore, the evolution that has occurred is uneven, with two of the most violent (and neighboring) provinces—Hilmand and Kandahar—experiencing a respective mean increase and mean decrease in conflict over the time period.

In contrast, USAID funding consistently increased from FY09 to FY10 in 31 out of 34 provinces, with the most money going towards the most insecure provinces. Whether there is any causal relationship between aid and conflict is beyond the scope of this analysis; however, it is apparent that more aid does not definitively correlate with more security.

In conclusion, given both the persistence of violence and the continued commitment by the US government to allocate resources to the country, this project highlights a clear need to question development aid as a strategy for improving security in Afghanistan.

Natalie Chang
The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy
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Data Sources:

US Senate. Committee on Foreign Relations. *Evaluating US Foreign Assistance to Afghanistan*. (S. Rep. No. 112-21). Washington: Government Printing Office, 2011. Available at <<http://www.gpoaccess.gov/congress/index.html>>.

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