



Samaryana: Revitalizing Afghanistan through Convergence?

Looking at today's situation in Afghanistan, it is one of great uncertainty and rapid unexpected unpredictable change. Upon withdrawal of all foreign troops and the takeover of power by the [Taliban](#), there emerged a governing vacuum which, due to a lack of alternatives, has to be filled by the Taliban together with other Afghan forces. Without this, the society cannot move forward. Still, currently there is a moment of relative lee of transition, and a potential chance to stabilize the country. It could possibly lead to a united Afghanistan or as I personally name this scenario: [Sama Aryana](#), short: [Samaryana](#).

I have to make an important disclaimer here. I neither have any in-depth knowledge about the extremely complex situation in the country, nor do I pretend to offer a "foreign based" solution. It is exclusively, the "Afghan" people, who are ethnically very much [divided](#) and possess a strong [local tribal identity](#), which will have to grab the moment and create "their" common future together. Further, the scene also shows great instability and the information of today may be outdated tomorrow. The reason to nevertheless write this Refival newsletter is the [European attitude](#) towards the situation. The European Council's [policy](#) on the one hand allows brain drain to happen and (rather unwillingly) welcomes those — mostly educated ones — who have worked in relation to the armed forces or assisted consultants/NGOs of their member states. On the other hand it wants to keep its borders strictly closed for all other refugees and instead only wants to financially support the Afghan people who fled and are now based in the neighboring countries.

These policies are closely related to my [Refival](#) initiative, which I started back in 2015, and its [proposed alternative practical solutions](#) for European refugee integration. Therefore, I decided to write down my personal opinion. I indeed foresee great difficulty with the adaptation of completely [uneducated](#) Afghan refugees, who might arrive irregularly to the EU. European member states may be incapable of properly educating this group and achieving integration. Trying to support this uneducated group in neighboring countries may therefore truly form a better solution instead. It keeps people closer to their own cultural background and provides a more cost-effective shelter to them. This way, additional refugees can be helped within the same budget, since offering shelter in Europe is much more expensive. However, for those who found refuge in the neighboring countries and possess no employment future there, while they are at the same time educated enough to be (re)skilled and find a future in Europe, we should consider (mutually beneficial) organized resettlement. This is what I [propose](#) with my Refival initiative. Still, it is clear that Afghanistan and all of its inhabitants, in any case, will need urgent support and not only the [estimated](#) 0.3-0.6% privileged (mostly educated) already [evacuated](#) or “officially entitled to leave and be resettled” people. All Afghan people deserve safety and peace; this is why I will sketch Samaryana as a potential narrative for an additional European role and a way to offer more direct help to the entire Afghan population.

Afghanistan is at the moment dominantly a “country” of [68%](#) poor and uneducated ([57%](#) illiterate) people. Being a long-term and rather complicated process, targeting to establish democracy may therefore, from an Afghan development point of view, not be the optimal attempt to realize a working governance model for the area. Religious guidance may at the moment offer a more appropriate alternative path to a peaceful and a more prosperous future for its ethnically very fragmented but almost [unanimously](#) Islamic population. Although there are variations found in adhering to Islam in Afghanistan, religion may as such still offer a more homogeneous common denominator for reciprocal understanding and harmony than any current democratic political representation of ethnicities. This, of course, for as long as such religious guidance is not misused by a government for repression or fear-based forced obedience. Such need for compliance is something that can easily develop and become extreme if one needs unity and clear rules to fight an enemy, but it is normally less needed and can therefore be more moderate in times of peace.

What is left behind, after 20 years of foreign military and other investment, is still an [underdeveloped](#) country with lots of [potential](#). However, looking at the speed of the recent military developments, the foreign forces [failed](#) in these decades clearly to create sufficient coherence and [influence](#) on a majority of the population in adopting their “western” way of life. Nevertheless, if those who are educated — often with foreign help — are now evacuated or seek refuge, the result will be an enormous brain drain and the area will suffer, and surely will travel back in time and progress possibilities. Although people rightly possess substantial skepticism from past “[Emirate](#)” experiences of 20 years ago, and therefore have extremely good and fully legitimate reasons to fear revenge and to flee for their lives, this will in the end leave a large, less “fortunate”, majority behind. Thus, there remains a strong need for a more united “Afghan” solution and consensus, in order to move peacefully forward and together.

A related argument is that the currently leaving Afghan migrants will over time assimilate elsewhere and thus become dissimilated from their original background. It means that they will have no longer much incentive to voluntary return or will lose their ability to readapt, so their brain drain will become permanent. However, if the Afghan situation could stabilize more quickly and trust could be restored sooner, there may be encouragement (and many refugees may be better-off) to return home.

What is needed is to get the country stably organized, and (lacking an alternative) a general respect from the fragmented population for the rule of the Taliban government and their alliance. Thus enabling them, for as long as such alliance is inclusive, to slowly build trust and create an overarching identity and establish a peaceful common “Afghan” way of life without any foreign dominance or lead. A way, which faces also no longer the need to rule by fear in order to keep people disciplined. The first signs of the newly established government are unfortunately [not very hopeful](#), but there still may be alliances to be built that include others. This requires an internal orientation or inward focus for the country and does, on the other hand, therefore not allow facilitation of any externally oriented religious fundamentalism, or expansion of influence based on terrorism. Neither does it allow any internally directed repression or [revenge](#). If the Taliban is able to form such an inclusive alliance, gaining or keeping sufficient central control over the country, and if they sustainably subscribe to this vision, there is a slim but in my opinion not completely unrealistic chance that such an inward looking society can be achieved by them.

Of course this remains a very serious personal problem for those people who accommodated to foreign “western” cultural standards, [especially women](#), who would like to continue living their now considered “non-Islamic” life style. Basically, they have two options: –a– to flee or leave the country and ask for political asylum elsewhere or –b– to stay and readjust to the changes and follow the now dominant becoming norms and values. Staying does not automatically imply any disrespect for women though; it means accepting a change from a focus on democratic individual personal space and freedom towards looking at men and women through a religious Islamic lens. However, nothing justifies atrocities or a breach of universal fundamental rights. Furthermore, the interpretation of the enforced rules widely varies in the Islamic world and is not static. There are for example no religious reasons to introduce measures against women beyond respecting Islamic norms. For example, in many modern [Sharia ruled](#) Islamic [countries](#) women can equally participate in work or can follow higher education, which are such universal fundamental rights. Also, in many Islamic countries, for example [Saudi Arabia](#), there is a starting point to be seen for a broad general emancipation of women. Therefore, the question is currently more how to avoid a return to the extreme level of restrictions for women as of 20 years ago, for which, looking at the current developments, the outlook is unfortunately still dim.

Nobody can predict what to expect from the Taliban. Even the Taliban itself can likely not foresee its future. Sure is that 20 years have passed since they ruled and that the current circumstances are quite different. Also, partially, a new generation of Taliban leadership is in place, which is more educated and uses other communication methods and messages.

Yet, at the moment, there is a polarizing media propaganda war going on, in which from the one side the Taliban is [pictured](#) as totally evil, not to be trusted, and to be strongly feared. Whereas oppositely, according to the Taliban themselves, they will be [fully moderate](#) and form an [inclusive government](#) and have learned from their mistakes in the past and strive to obtain general trust instead. Independently of all of this, the country/environment to govern has strongly changed. With a [double](#) the population compared to 20 years ago — [now averagely aged 18](#) — and with a widespread use and acceptance of social media, there is much more transparency and possible protest is much more difficult to oppress. I further do not expect the Taliban to be able to close down all electronic media long-term. Finally, social media can also be used to religiously educate people, as this is for example done in Indonesia with the [Islami](#) app.

The biggest risk for the situation turning sour and remaining permanently violent is a potential fragmentation in which Taliban or other military fractions start fighting with each other. This would mean a new source of conflict and a new cycle of suffering for the Afghan population. To avoid this, Taliban's central leadership, who are currently clearly expressing non-revenge, and use a moderate voice, should in my opinion get a fair chance to govern the country and receive the world's "benefits of the doubt" by financially enabling them to show their uniting power. As a result, they would obtain the opportunity to build trust. Afghanistan, being very poor and dependent, will need external help to realize such a scenario though. Internationally isolating the new leadership politically and financially, painting the Taliban as to be feared like in the past, is fully counterproductive in this case. Understandably, withdrawing one's — foreign — forces can be felt as a kind of defeat, but to fight a kind of new war of political and [financial isolation](#) from outside of Afghanistan is certainly not in the interest of the Afghan people.

The above scenario of fragmentation can also easily turn out to become a self-fulfilling prophecy. If the international community waits or hesitates, and the Taliban does not rapidly obtain the [financial means](#) to govern the country, it will face difficulties to keep its troops disciplined and to transform them from an active military combat organization into a coordinated civil one. Furthermore, if the organization gets split and remains military in character, the method of controlling Afghanistan's strongly fragmented population will likely continue to be violence and fear based, and definitely not founded in inclusion. A fragmented army, without central control, unfortunately often does not have any other alternative but to violently enforce obedience, this unless they have the genuine support of the local population. This is [far from sure](#) in this case. Such fragmentation scenario would mean a missed chance. The potential alternative is namely, with external support, to centrally run the country peacefully in a broadly supported Islamic manner and to establish a starting point for (re)building trust and for developing an inward looking convergent attitude.

To achieve such convergence, the withdrawal of western troops should therefore not lead to the withdrawal of development-aid and foreign investment in the country. Afghanistan is fundamentally a [rich country](#) with abundant natural resources. Still, it will need to find a way to invest it in its society and not exclusively fill the pockets of a happy few through [corruption](#), something the Taliban government may, with its fresh start and primarily being religiously driven, be able to accomplish if they want.

What does convergence look like? Refival proposes for its European refugee initiative to use a practical integration framework, which is also adaptable to other situations and which is based on my cultural communication models. [Convergence](#) comes here at three levels: Individual, Group and Society level. The framework has a collective as well as a resulting personal impact on all participants. Furthermore, **it also generates the possibility to support cohesion in a population without recognizing a political system or ideology**, and can be used as a more or less neutral condition for supplying aid. A very short summary of it will be elaborated now.

On an individual level, it means to support a convergent “live and let live” attitude instead of a “winner takes it all” mentality in relation to others (the latter produces inequality and divergence). This means to move away from struggle to co-existence. Such shift leads to a personal identity change from a focus on optimizing one’s individual space, maximally discriminating oneself from others, towards integrity and being a resource to others. Practically, it means striving for inclusion and equality.

On a group level, it means to stimulate a change from clan based patriotism towards belonging to Afghanistan and to other Afghans rather than to limit this to one’s own ethnic group or background. Personally, this implies to reduce rivalry and to increase empathy. Practically, it means creating or widening solidarity.

On a society level, it means to replace repression and the related forced duties/obedience/discipline by voluntary contribution. For personal leadership, it means that this will no longer be based on power, but that it originates in excellence, which leads to a mentorship type of leadership. Practically, it means stimulating consensus.

Foreign assistance — although its allocation must be primarily based on the Taliban’s government self-determined inclusive “Afghan” values — will need safeguards attached to it. What must be avoided is that funds are used by an elite for financing fragmented interests or that these funds facilitate outward oriented and internationally unwished political activities. The purpose of aid should be exclusively to support or enable a focus on governing the country by itself, and on creating the necessary convergence needed to establish political stability within its entire population; this way achieving a starting point for realizing peace and durable economic progress and development.

For the EU, being reluctant to accept Afghan refugees, and having ample experience in funding [cohesion](#) between its culturally very different member states, there is in my opinion an exquisite chance to potentially contribute to this alternative narrative. With the above safeguard condition that the money will be properly spent on convergence, it has the opportunity to research working together with the Taliban government and to invest in preventing [further displacement](#) of people and to assist the Taliban in achieving inclusion.

Samaryana stands for a united convergent Afghanistan through an increase of equality, solidarity and consensus by initiating development projects by Afghans for Afghans in which foreigners will play no more than an assisting technical expertise role. After decades of war, Afghanistan deserves to be enabled to build its own overarching identity and to find a starting point for a peaceful future. Please contact [me](#) if you think you can contribute to this and have ideas for matching projects.

Kind Regards,

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