

The Networked State: the post-2001 Afghanistan

Timor Sharan, University of Exeter, UK

Paper abstract submitted to the first annual international conference “*Twenty Years of Central Asian Independence: Shared Past, Separate Paths?*” at the AUCA, Bishkek, 14-16 October 2011.

The state has long been taken for granted as a cohesive entity, exhibiting an unproblematic and uniform organisational structure, and possessing territorial integrity. This paper is an attempt to problematise these assumptions by employing an ethnographic approach, taking the post-2001 Afghanistan state as its case study. I propose a view of the Afghan state as a ‘contested field’ between different elite networks inside and outside the government who have come to constitute the state, each network seeking to expand its influence through the structural and strategic positions it occupies within the Afghan state and society. As such, I argue that the state in post-2001 Afghanistan is a *networked state*. I propose the following three levels of analysis to conceptualise the state in Afghanistan: 1) *spatialisation of the state*, to go beyond the boundedness of territorial analysis to frame the state within a space; 2) *state effect*, to analyse the state in its everyday practices; and 3) *complex institutional assemblage* of objectives, knowledge, techniques and practices, to examine how the state came about as the result of strategic bargains made among international, national and local forces since 2001. In conclusion, I consider how such a conceptualisation can be applicable to the five main Central Asian countries.