

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Short-term Consultancy - Study on “Drivers of Conflict”



The Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) is an independent research organisation based in Kabul. AREU’s mission is to inform and influence policy and practice through conducting high-quality, policy-relevant research and actively disseminating the results, and to promote a culture of research and learning. To achieve its mission AREU engages with policymakers, civil society, researchers and students to promote their use of AREU’s research and its library, to strengthen their research capacity, and to create opportunities for analysis, reflection and debate. For additional information please see www.areu.org.af.

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY PURPOSE

AREU has a mandate to produce high-quality research to inform and influence policy and programming in Afghanistan. While AREU’s focus has historically been on policy related to development and reconstruction, the rapidly changing political and security context of Afghanistan means that the most pressing policy discourses are now about drivers of conflict, the results of conflict, and conflict management or resolution. At this time, AREU seeks to commission a broad desk study on the issue of “drivers of conflict”:

- to identify and examine some of the key drivers of conflict in Afghanistan, as according to current policy discourses,
- to identify key assumptions within these discourses,
- to compare these assumptions with the existing evidence base in Afghanistan and, to the degree possible, through the comparative study of this current conflict with similar conflicts previously in Afghan history and in other countries.

This study is expected to result in a substantial paper that will provide an important orientation and framework to key issues for policymakers and others in Afghanistan, and help to inform and direct future empirical research for AREU.

FRAMING QUESTIONS FOR THE STUDY

1. How do dominant policy discourses (especially of: the USA, the UK, the EU/NATO, the Government of Afghanistan, and key anti-government elements, particularly the Taliban) describe the current nature of the conflict? What are the key concepts, claims and assumptions made within each of these discourses as to the reasons behind the conflict and the means of addressing the conflict?
2. How have these discourses changed since the US-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001? How does this reflect changes in the key actors in the conflict and their relative understanding, power, interests or ideology?
3. How do key claims and assumptions selected by the analyst as most important relate to the existing evidence base?
4. Are there important ways of viewing the conflict and its drivers that are absent from these discourses? Here the author may want to explore different lenses or approaches to viewing the conflict (economic interest/political economy of war; the politics of identity; the playing out of various international political motivations; political weakness and the ‘power vacuum’ due to weak or dysfunctional institutions, or others according to the author’s own analysis, and based on broader literature).

5. The author may focus on one particularly important driver of conflict and further explore the ways in which it is functioning in the current Afghan context, and ramifications for future scenarios for the various actors involved.

METHODOLOGY

Methodology will proceed as set out in the consultant's concept note, although modifications may be made as the research design is finalised, in communication with AREU. This research is envisaged as a desk study. There is the potential that documentary evidence may be augmented by key informant interviews and other methods, based on the consultant's concept note.

OUTPUTS

1. Issues paper (with a length of 25,000-35,000 words) that documents the research, including the background, methodology, findings and analysis. This paper needs to be of a professional quality and in adherence to AREU's Minimal Publishable Standards and research quality standards. The paper must be understandable to a general audience.
2. Internal briefing/discussion at AREU, for AREU's research staff
3. Possible public lecture

PERSON SPECIFICATION

- Strong publications record and proven ability to analyse complex qualitative data and draw together data from various sources;
- a strong familiarity with Afghanistan, and particularly with issues related to the history of conflict in Afghanistan, and how divergent powerful interests act to defend the status quo;
- Knowledge of other conflict situations for the purposes of comparative analysis is an advantage;
- Familiarity with the literature related to political economy of war;
- Strong spoken and written communication skills.

The consultancy is expected to begin in March 2010. It would require approximately 31 days of work, depending on the final agreed methodology.

RATE

The consultancy rate will be determined according to the candidate's qualifications and experience, in line with AREU's overall rate structure.

APPLICATION PROCESS

Please apply by sending a CV and a short concept note by February 28th. In your concept note, please outline what modifications, if any, you would suggest to the framing questions, the methodology you would use to gather and analysis data appropriate to answering these questions, a proposed timeline, and your specific suitability for this work. Please send your application package to applications@areu.org.af, putting your name and 'drivers of conflict consultant' in the subject line. Only short listed candidates will be contacted.