

# Afghan Hearts, Afghan Minds

Exploring Afghan perceptions  
of civil-military relations



Research conducted for the European  
Network of NGOs in Afghanistan  
(ENNA) and the British and Irish  
Agencies Afghanistan Group (BAAG)

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2008

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# Abbreviations

ACBAR	Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief
AIHRC	Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission
ANA	Afghan National Army
ANAP	Afghan National Auxiliary Police
ANDS	Afghan National Development Strategy
ANGO	Afghan non-government organisation
ANSO	Afghanistan NGO Safety Office
ANP	Afghan National Police
AOG	armed opposition groups
CDC	community development council
CF	coalition forces
CIMIC	civil-military cooperation
CIVMIL	civil-military
DIAG	disbandment of illegal armed groups
GoA	government of Afghanistan
HIG	Hizb-I Islami Gulbuddin
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDLG	independent directorate for local governance
IHL	international humanitarian law
INGO	international non-governmental organisation
IO	international organisation
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force (NATO)
ISAF X	tenth command of ISAF
MoI	Ministry of the Interior
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NSP	National Solidarity Programme
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OEF	Operation Enduring Freedom
PDC	provincial development committee
PRT	provincial reconstruction team
psyops	psychological operations
QIP	quick impact project
SSR	security sector reform
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
WHAM	winning hearts and minds

## Executive Summary

Throughout Afghanistan, there are silent but chilling reminders of the constant loss of innocent lives in a conflict which has spanned three decades, and one that continues to claim innocent lives today: crowded graveyards; a gravelike structure in a provincial capital to remind passers-by of the children killed in a roadside bomb. The identities of the killers and the victims may change but the result for the majority Afghans remains the same – a lack of security against a stark backdrop of continuing poverty and underdevelopment.

Within donor-countries, politicians, media and the public are beginning to question the achievability of stability and reconstruction in Afghanistan. At the same time, donor governments have sought to integrate their aid, foreign policy and military agendas in an effort to find a 'comprehensive approach'. Pressure from donor governments and military actors to deliver 'instant' development and democracy is pushing NGOs into unexplored territory and promoting an uneasy marriage between 'the three Ds' – development, diplomacy and defence. Efforts by the international community and national actors to put appropriate and effective coordination mechanisms in place, design and implement joint strategies have proven difficult.

While significant efforts have been made to overcome the most obvious and avoidable clashes of interest and inconsistencies between military and civilian actors, fundamental challenges remain. Some international military contingents have sought to improve their coordination with government structures. Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) have also worked with some cash-strapped NGOs on short-term and project-level activities, but difficulties inevitably arise because of very different objectives. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are under pressure from all sides: from communities to deliver without jeopardising security; from government to implement national programmes; from criminal groups and armed opposition groups (AOGs) who threaten their safety; from politician-

donors and NATO representatives pressuring them to align with 'hearts and minds' strategies.

Civilian actors in the civil-military (civmil) debate, including NGOs, have also primarily engaged with specific elements of the military responsible for monitoring and interacting with civilian actors, framed as CIMIC in military jargon. However infringements into 'humanitarian space' have been carried out by other elements of the military, which are currently not engaged in the civmil debate. There is also a vast range of NGO positions on civmil relations, reflecting a complex history of NGO development, a complicated operational context and a certain level of incoherence in the positions and approaches of individual PRTs.

In light of this, civmil relations retains its importance for those individuals, whether military or civilian, working to bring sustainable peace and development to Afghanistan.

This research has tried primarily to address Afghan concerns and unpack some of the commonly held assumptions about Afghan engagement with and within the main areas of the civmil debate. In particular, it aimed to:

- provide an evidence base for advocating to donors, policymakers and the military for assistance that can be appropriately, safely and effectively implemented in Afghanistan
- present NGOs with an analysis of the characteristics of insecurity and conflict in Afghanistan
- assess concerns regarding 'blurring the lines' or other impacts on the future of programmes and the safety of staff and beneficiaries
- explore and convey the perspectives of local populations on security and development issues.

A total of 140 people were interviewed in two provinces,<sup>1</sup> including aid agency staff, government employees, religious and local leaders, policymakers, military personnel, diplomats, donor

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1 Paktia and Uruzgan – sponsoring NGOs are operational in one, while the other has only a skeletal Afghan NGO (ANGO) presence. Both provinces represent different levels of security and civil-military relations experience.

agency staff and academics. The range of views, at times contradictory, demonstrates the complexity of the context and the need for regular, in-depth research of this kind which can help NGOs and others gain a better understanding of the environment within which they operate. Anonymity of interviewees was stressed at all times.

## 1. Afghans in the civmil debate

Despite the number of Afghan individuals and organisations who deal with civmil relations on a daily basis, there is little or no Afghan voice in debates on civmil. Discourse amongst policy-makers on 'stabilisation' through 'winning hearts and minds', 'civilianisation' of military operations or 'humanitarian space' can at times be disconnected from the realities and concerns of practitioners at field level and completely disconnected from those of ordinary Afghan people. There is a need for an 'Afghanisation' of civil-military relations processes, institutions and principles. At present a variety of political, practical and cultural obstacles militate against the participation of Afghan NGOs, government or community representatives in policy-making or debate on civmil. The responsibility to address this gap lies at all levels with the government, NGOs, the military, and donors. The responsibility also lies with Afghan agencies themselves and Afghan civil society, both too often over-stretched, under-resourced and, in the case of some, driven by short-term financial considerations.

### NGOs

Humanitarian agencies need to invest more in translating concepts like humanitarian principles and 'humanitarian space' into terms that create a deeper understanding, acceptance and ownership of such concepts among Afghan staff, local populations, powerholders and parties to the conflict. There has been work at international level with Muslim scholars to interpret humanitarian principles within an Islamic framework, but results have not been widely disseminated in Afghanistan. It is important to disseminate such information using the Afghan

media in order to familiarise people and generate discussion which may lead to a demystification of the jargon as well as a sense of ownership. Afghan NGOs need to be provided with sustained support to build their capacity to engage with some policy processes on an equal footing, and to implement programmes on the basis of a principled and effective approach to assistance, rather than short-term projectised and instrumentalised approach.

### GoA

Although civmil interaction should include representatives of the Afghan security and defence forces, it rarely does. In fact, some individuals and groups within these sectors have no accurate notion of what PRTs do and, at times, no clear understanding of, or interest in, the civmil debate. Furthermore, they have little in-depth knowledge of international humanitarian law and how government activities or positions on issues related to humanitarian principles (eg. neutrality of humanitarian agencies) can impact on the ability of agencies to provide neutral, impartial and independent assistance to communities affected by conflict or humanitarian crisis. There is a need for wider understanding of the debate, its rationale and impact at policy and implementation levels within state and government structures. Relevant ministries and departments also need to increase their understanding of how government policy on military actors impacts on humanitarian and NGO operational space.

### Civil society, communities and the media

Civil society and communities have very little input to the discussion on civmil relations. The media is not engaged either, and even if they had the opportunity to do so, journalists fear the reprisals they fear they may face if they took a perceived anti-military stance. In the current climate, it may be difficult to provide a secure, enabling and neutral environment in which Afghan people can engage in the civmil debate. NGOs and civil society must try to find ways to create such a safe space.

### 2. Imported and local principles

Military concepts, such as 'winning hearts and minds', or aid agency concerns regarding humanitarian principles are not the only ones at play in the arena where NGOs and the military currently operate. Afghaniyat and Islamiyat<sup>2</sup> may also underpin many interactions in certain areas, while respect for cultural forms and the ability to practice Islam are both fundamental parts of human security for some in Afghanistan. Aggressive house-to-house searches and forced entry by the international military can easily undermine the Afghaniyat principle of namus,<sup>3</sup> and seem to create more ill-will than civilian casualties. All stakeholders must learn to look at human security in Afghanistan through a more culturally appropriate lens.

### 3. Security for NGOs

The Afghan context is increasingly characterised by new trends in the nexus between the insurgency, economic criminality and weak, corrupt or absent rule of law. Distinctions between criminal elements, insurgents and 'government'-associated factions have become increasingly hard to discern and delineate. In some areas, state security forces have become increasingly predatory. Increasing military involvement in the delivery of assistance poses new challenges for NGOs' own assistance strategies and approaches to security management.

All interviewees seemed to have slightly different perspectives on what it means to be secure and different ways of providing security. NGOs tend to focus on acceptance and protection-based security management strategies, while using deterrence as a last resort. However, as the security situation deteriorates and impacts on social, political and conflict dynamics at the local level, the old methods of operating, which allowed NGOs to manoeuvre in insecure parts of Afghanistan in the past, are no longer entirely effective. No longer able to rely on communities to provide them with security in a

consistent fashion, a pull-back in some areas has been inevitable. Yet in doing so, NGOs have lost touch with communities. As a consequence, NGOs face a number of challenges and dilemmas, including:

- Managing and juggling differing perceptions of their NGO's identity amongst key stakeholders and power-holders, including insurgent factions, local populations, local leaderships, and the government of Afghanistan
- Differences between military concepts of stabilising and securing an area, versus NGO approaches to aid agency security management based on 'acceptance' and negotiated access to communities in insecure areas
- Increasing challenges in negotiating access to beneficiaries with local power-holders as new generations of insurgent forces assume control of areas (without the same historic ties to NGOs operating in those locales)
- Negative consequences for NGO safety and security associated with real or perceived associations with the international military, which can result in the 'civilian' identity of the wider NGO sector, and not just individual agencies working with the military, being tainted by association
- NGO implementation of Government programmes constitutes a security risk, and has compromised the ability of agencies to claim 'humanitarian space'. Through shifts in donor funding, NGOs have been forced into an implicit alignment with a contested central government.

This research suggests that 'blurring' of identities between military and civilians appears less of a problem than the extent to which civilians are perceived to be engaging in activities or other forms of collaboration with the military. The 'blurring the lines' concept does not adequately capture the character of local populations' perceptions of external assistance, whether provided by NGOs, the military or other international actors. Such aid

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2 Afghaniyat is an unwritten code of conduct and honour that Afghans live by. The simplest translation would be a sense of Afghan-ness. Islamiyat refers to Islamic studies in school curricula, but was used by some interviewees to express a broad sense of being a devout Muslim.

3 Broadly, honour or 'face'.

relations with external actors are mediated by complex social and political dynamics; some of which can appear contradictory. These findings present challenges for those NGOs engaged with the military to re-assess implications for their own security management, but also for donors who are channelling resources through military and civil-military operations.

#### **4. Expectations, effectiveness and impact**

Many of the Afghans interviewed expressed clear distinctions and preferences between small and large-scale projects; developmental versus short-term approaches to programming; and methods of project design and implementation. There is no homogenous picture of Afghan perceptions of aid channelled through the military or civilian actors, such as NGOs. Some informants emphasised that assistance is welcome regardless of its provenance, whilst others underlined that aid from the military brought serious risks with it. Despite efforts to improve their coordination with civilian actors, such as the Afghan Government, the international military remains continuously challenged in delivering assistance. It persists in implementing aid largely on the basis of a 'charity' paradigm, which can be perceived as patronising, instrumentalist and unsustainable by local populations. Key issues raised included the following:

##### **Sustainability**

There is a preference for multi-year programmes with a long-term, sustainable impact, which often rules out PRTs as implementers or indeed fund providers. Interviewees indicated that NGO efforts to ensure that the impact of their work is sustainable are welcomed by communities.

##### **Charity versus development paradigm**

Military involvement in aid is driven in part by the

'winning hearts and minds' (WHAM) theory. This operates on the basis of a charity paradigm, which sees beneficiaries as the deserving poor, and provides handouts and services while ignoring the complexity of the local context, and the unintended consequences of injecting resources into conflict-affected communities. NGOs have been working for many years to erase the handout mentality, emphasising the importance of 'ownership', involvement and empowerment of beneficiaries. This research does not advocate the military moving to a more developmental mindset, but they should be aware of how charitable acts can undermine NGO activities.

##### **Accountability and transparency**

While many NGOs try to be accountable to beneficiaries, PRTs are often secretive. Cost-effectiveness and transparent spending are some of the most important considerations for local Afghan populations. Any indication that donor funding is going astray or being wasted is likely to lead to further cynicism and hostility. Transparent community-based monitoring and auditing structures help communities and their leaders control resource transfers, ensure that there is a good impact and that assistance does not become divisive.

##### **Contacts and consultations**

For a project to be effective, local consultation and involvement in the design, implementation and maintenance are vital. As military and civil-military operations, such as PRTs, are primarily directed according to military needs, their interaction and/or follow-up with communities varies considerably. Communities feel that most NGOs mostly take their opinions into consideration, with extensive consultations and follow-ups to projects. PRTs, on the other hand, may consult with people but are not perceived to be listening or taking lessons learnt on board.

### Landscape of conflicts

All actors, including both international military and NGOs (local and international), must invest more seriously into greater contextual understanding, and conflict sensitivity (Do No Harm). As NGO security management strategies become overly preoccupied by overt trends in insecurity, they may become less attuned to the local-level conflicts in which assistance programmes can become implicated. In a different, although similar, trend, the international military tends to focus on high-level conflict dynamics and is inadequately attuned to local-level political, social and conflict dynamics which can ultimately feed the wider insecurity in a region.

### Contractors: 'the face of greed'

PRT procurement, tenders and related activities can drive up local prices and wages, while their lack of transparency and perceived ineptitude in awarding contracts is eroding communities' goodwill. Afghans from all walks of life have set up contracting firms and compete for contracts and funding. Because many contractors are seen as siphoning off funds and providing low-quality work, their use often creates tense relations and can even lead to conflict. NGOs must find ways to differentiate and distance themselves from contractors, as well as advocate to the government, donors and military for greater accountability of such actors in future.

## 5. Governance and security

Emphasis by international policy-makers and the military on a simplistic 'security-development' linkage is misplaced and even counter-productive in the Afghan context. Afghan populations are sceptical about military intentions, and are not fooled by simplistic material incentives designed to 'win hearts and minds'. Crude and unsophisticated methods, such as badly designed and implemented projects to combat Taliban efforts on the non-kinetic front, to ensure force protection or to win support for the Afghan government are not currently helping build credibility or trust. There is considerable

scepticism among civilians that an international military force can promote the outreach of the GoA, rather than marginalise it or make it seem subordinate to military imperatives.

While some analysts equate government 'presence' with infrastructure, projects and services, most interviewees disagreed, linking security to improved governance instead. Most Afghans see the international military presence almost as a 'necessary evil', due to Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP) inadequacy in tackling insurgency, terrorism, crime and outside interference. They see a clear role for PRTs in security sector reform, as long as it is thought through and executed correctly. However, the image of the international military may have suffered as a result of close contact with the GoA, which is increasingly seen as discredited.

### Coordination

Coordinating humanitarian and development assistance has been a thorn in the side of the GoA, donors and others since the fall of the Taliban and before, with wastage and replication at various levels. Despite the creation of a number of mechanisms to help coordinate and monitor development assistance and projects, duplication is still taking place in some areas.

### Governance

Establishing the government's legitimacy is essential to successful stabilisation, but while there is evidence of NGOs helping to extend the GoA outreach by implementing national health and education programmes, there is little clarity on how the PRT presence can help. Interviewees felt that the GoA lacks the human resources necessary to tackle the challenge of handling development, governance and security. GOA representatives are not always consistent in the recognition of humanitarian principles or provide political support for NGO operations, despite their importance for the delivery of national programmes in many areas.

## Security

Security is a priority for ordinary Afghans who cannot even perform the basic functions of life in some areas due to current levels of insecurity, where criminality is rife and it is increasingly more difficult for locals to distinguish between the Taliban and criminal elements. The government has an important role in not only providing security, but in protecting people's 'namus' or honour, an important part of human security for Afghans and a critical aspect of Pashtun customary law. However it has so far failed to protect ordinary Afghans from corrupt government elements, criminals, the Taliban and the international military in different scenarios. Most interviewees felt that in these circumstances the closure of PRTs would symbolise overall military withdrawal and lead to a rapidly deteriorating security situation. However, Afghans interviewed often do not trust International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and coalition forces (CF) to protect them, and feel the security they provide is fallout from military activities in pursuit of international aims. In some areas, where tribal leaderships are contributing to security, PRT and GOA security roles need to be modified to ensure that they do not jeopardise such fragile efforts.

### Private security companies

While impromptu checkpoints, banditry and a range of criminal activities have always taken place on various routes, road security has deteriorated since the fall of the Taliban. The actors that straddle the military and private sectors in relation to road building and security are perceived to benefit from lucrative deals and at times the protection of elements within the international military presence. Financial support for such organisations can erode transparency and accountability, and may even reverse the impact of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration. Their impact on NGO and PRT activities and the potential dissonance which they represent needs more attention and analysis.

## 6. Social transformation, intelligence gathering and cultural sensitivity

Various groups operating in Afghanistan wish to effect social change: the GoA in its pursuit of democracy; the military, through its WHAM efforts, psychological operations and counterinsurgency campaigns. Since every group's attempts at social transformation (including the Taliban's) aim for different and at times conflicting outcomes, it is an area which impacts on operational space and security and cannot be overlooked in the civmil debate.

Thirty years of sustained contact with communities has allowed NGOs, as well as members of the Taliban and other groups, to establish a unique set of relations and build up vast amounts of experience and information. The international military presence, in comparison, tries to apply positive pressure, partially through short-term handouts and infrastructure projects, to render communities more malleable. Military efforts in this arena, using what are at times crude and unsophisticated methods to win hearts and minds, to ensure force protection or to win support for the GoA, have led to clashes with humanitarians and development workers.

The military's insistence on working with NGOs or preparing the ground for them does not help NGOs in their struggle to project an independent and impartial identity and has led to the perceived and actual militarisation and instrumentalisation of assistance. NGOs should not be pressured to get involved with the military for their social transformation and related activities at any stage primarily because of implications related to intelligence gathering. At the same time, the activities of the military, the GoA and others are changing the operating environment for NGOs, who need to develop a heightened state of awareness of the shifting socio-political contexts within which they work.

## 7. Conclusion

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*'There is a common misperception that the issues in Afghanistan, and indeed elsewhere around the world, can be dealt with by military means [alone]....The military is a key, an essential element in dealing with those problems, but by and large these problems can only be resolved politically.'*

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UK's Chief of Defence Staff , 2007

Civmil relations, institutions and decision-making in Afghanistan need to be more inclusive and informed by Afghan perspectives. This responsibility falls to all actors, the GoA, the military, NGOs, Afghan civil society groups, and the media.

Based on the findings of this research in Uruzgan and Paktia, the following key recommendations are made: (A full list of the report's detailed recommendations is included on page 77)

### Afghanisation

Afghanisation implies both greater contextual understanding by international actors, and greater participation of and accountability to and from Afghan actors themselves. Civil-military relations processes, institutions and decision-making need to be more inclusive and informed of Afghan perspectives. This responsibility falls to all actors, including NGOs, military, government, UN, and Afghan agencies themselves. Such efforts need to be embedded in wider strategies to build the capacity and ownership of local actors in processes that affect them. Drawing on the international efforts of Muslim scholars and humanitarian agencies, donors and NGOs should also invest in cross-cultural translation and sensitisation to ensure that humanitarian principles are understood as relevant to the Afghan social, cultural and religious context.

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4 Air Chief Marshall Jock Stirrup, the UK Chief of Defence Staff, interview with Sky News television, October 2007.

## Governance

The current emphasis by the international community and military forces on 'winning hearts and minds' through a rather simplistic 'development-security' sequence is misplaced. Greater emphasis should be placed on addressing the essentially political challenges related to good governance and sustainable conflict resolution at both national and local levels in Afghanistan. Afghan power-holders and communities are well-versed in the power dynamics implicated in short-term projects implemented to 'win hearts and minds'.

## 'Civilianisation'

Military engagement with civilian agencies through forums for civil-military relations dialogue continues to be pro-forma, with disappointing outcomes for some and inadequate follow-up based on concerns raised by NGOs and Afghan stakeholders.

## Conflict Sensitivity

All actors need to invest more in the unintended impacts of their interventions for local-level political and conflict dynamics, which can have wider ramifications at regional and even national level. Both combat operations and CIMIC-type interventions by military forces have manifold implications for the security environment for both Afghan people and NGOs. NGOs are also challenged to increase investment in ensuring the 'conflict sensitivity' of their programmes.

## Aid Effectiveness

Donors should recognise the intrinsic challenges of channelling aid through contested military operations, which are also engaged in combat operations. Both donors and the government should recognise the security risks inherent in government-aligned aid programmes in a situation of on-going insurgency, and make

provisions for implementing partners accordingly. This research indicates that Afghan people are not always convinced by short-term projects designed to meet tactical military objectives, but prefer long-term sustainable programming. Issues of effective transparency to and consultation of Afghan communities are also critical, and point to some intrinsic limitations to military-led assistance strategies.

## Humanitarian Access and Security Management

The situation for humanitarian and development practitioners is continuously changing. Their operational space is shrinking as AOGs spread fear and expand their influence. In such contexts, NGOs face a number of challenges in relation to their security management and the implementation of acceptance and protection based approaches to humanitarian access. Operational learning, and inter-agency sharing are required to maintain contextual understanding. NGOs may need to invest in the conflict mitigation and resolution skills, so that frontline staff are adequately equipped to deal with the some of the social, political and conflict dynamics implicated in the implementation of programmes. A particular challenge resides in providing adequate funding and capacity-building for the Afghan NGO sector to enable effective safety management, and sustainable organisational and human resources development. NGOs also need to invest in the conflict mitigation and resolution skills, so that frontline staff are adequately equipped to deal with the some of the social, political and conflict dynamics implicated in the implementation of programmes.

# Introduction

As one flies into Tarinkot a graveyard comes into view – a grave of martyrs. Tall poplar poles bearing green flags stand out against the rugged landscape as a reminder that innocent blood was shed. Here rests an unfortunate group of Afghan men, women and children who were massacred in the early days of the jihad: civil servants and their families sent by a communist government to serve the people of remote Uruzgan. It was decided that these civil servants should be killed as a hostile act against the government they represented. The decision was made to kill their families in cold blood as well. In Tarinkot, the provincial capital, a pitifully small grave-like structure decked out in shiny scraps of cloth stands on a street corner to remind passers-by of the children killed when, decades later, a suicide bomber tried to attack a stationary US convoy.

These are both silent but chilling reminders of the constant loss of innocent lives in a conflict that has spanned three decades and mutates from one lethal form to another, always with the loss of innocent lives. The identities of the killers and the victims may change, but the result is the same – death, destruction and delayed development. In the light of this, the civil debate retains its importance for those Afghans and internationals, both military and civilian, who work to bring sustainable peace and development to Afghanistan in the face of increasingly depressing odds and a government that is beset by problems.

Donor-country politicians, media and the public are currently questioning the achievability of both stability and reconstruction in Afghanistan. Influential voices are calling for an expedited exit strategy for international forces if visible progress is not achieved and high levels of violence persist.<sup>5</sup> The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) is not seen as being in control of the situation. The shocking attack on Kabul's Serena Hotel in January 2008 and the devastating bomb blast in Baghlan in November 2007 are further evidence to many that the security situation is out of control, political

violence is rampant and civilians are unsafe. Furthermore, there are signs that counter-narcotics and counter-insurgency are increasingly being seen as two sides of the same coin.

In the midst of this, non-government organisations (NGOs) are under pressure from all sides: from communities to deliver without jeopardising their security; from government to implement their national programmes; from criminal groups who threaten their safety; from armed opposition groups (AOGs) who put them into the same basket as their opponents; from politician-donors and NATO representatives who pressure them to operate in strategically prioritised provinces in order to align with 'hearts and minds' (WHAM) strategies.

Work on the UN integration of missions has been concurrent with the growth of interest in civil relations, mixing political mandates with humanitarian relief and development. The United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA) is the first attempt at such integration and has received a mixed response from different quarters. At the same time, national governments have been grappling with the need to unite their aid, foreign policy and security agencies in an effort to find a sound comprehensive approach.

The history and main points of the civil relationship in Afghanistan has been amply covered elsewhere, with good analysis and recommendations for NGOs and others.<sup>6</sup> There are currently approximately 41,000 ISAF troops in Afghanistan and 11,000 American troops under the Coalition. It is clear, however, that the civil debate is overwhelmingly focused on a small percentage of the overall force capability – namely the provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs). In brief, PRTs were a US-Coalition attempt at addressing a multi-agency requirement at provincial level, introduced by the US ambassador as a means to winning hearts and minds in the context of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). According to Mark Sedra, 'It was a response to growing

5 See, for example, 'Afghanistan death toll rising' Al-Jazeera.net (October 2007); or Annabella Bulacan, 'Death toll in Afghan clashes reaches 5,600 in first 10 months of 2007' (November 2007) AHN News.

6 See, for example, Humanitarian Policy Group (March 2006); Donini et al (2006); Uesugi (2006); Save the Children UK (2004); Sedra (2004); Gordon (2005); Stapleton (2007); World Bank (2007).

resentment toward the Coalition among the majority Pashtun community in the south and east of the country, where the bulk of military operations have been undertaken, and to international criticism of the apparent disconnect between OEF and the wider reconstruction and stabilisation process.<sup>7</sup>

Some NATO spokespeople argue that the coexistence of pragmatic NGO involvement in civil dialogues at country level and NGO advocacy on policy at international levels represent an inconsistency in NGO positions. In the Afghan context, there is a vast range of NGO positions, reflecting a complex history of NGO development and a complicated operational context.

At the same time, there is increasing acknowledgement within ISAF of the incoherence in positions and approaches of individual PRTs. A further cause of difference and inconsistency between military forces is 'the presence of two separate military operations and commands in Afghanistan, and different approaches to civil-military activities.'<sup>8</sup> It is admitted that even the personalities of PRT commanders change the way civil relations are handled – for example, while one commander may support the civilian component, the next could see only military solutions to problems. PRTs also have very different resource levels: the Lithuanian PRT in Ghor is underresourced in one of the poorest and most marginalised provinces, while American and British PRTs in Helmand are well-funded.

This research, in critically interrogating both the military concepts of 'hearts and minds' and aid agency concepts of 'aid effectiveness', has tried primarily to address Afghan concerns and to unpack some of the commonly held assumptions about Afghan engagement with and within the main areas of the debate. Many of these assumptions are inherent in the argument that integrated civil operations – particularly quick impact projects (QIPs) – facilitate reconstruction. Such projects are seen as

essential and effective strategies to winning hearts and minds among local populations, that build consent for the government of Afghanistan (GoA) international military operations and the process of transition associated with reconstruction and political reform at provincial and national levels. The impact of opium production and drug trafficking, as well as counterinsurgency efforts are not covered in this research.

Both NGOs and the military are at times being asked to perform roles for which they are inexperienced and ill-equipped. Both are in many ways suffering from the unwillingness to find diplomatic solutions to the crises in the Middle East and South and Central Asia. During this research, interviewees on all sides commented on the lack of real political will or leadership to make the challenging decisions about political issues in Afghanistan and to take responsibility to see them through.

## Synopsis

Chapter 1 considers Afghan involvement in the civil debate, a subject that has been neglected thus far, but has long-term implications for NGO operations in the country. It discusses why Afghans have been reluctant to engage in the debate, and the overall implications of this reluctance. It also touches briefly on the understanding and engagement of the Afghan government, media and civil society in the debate. Chapter 2 examines some of the principles at play in the humanitarian space in the light of occidental and oriental approaches. Chapter 3 details some of the threats facing NGOs and their response to these. Chapter 4 explores some of the issues surrounding the quality of military assistance, including the negative impact of contractors used as implementing partners by PRTs. Chapter 5 considers the impact of PRT activities on governance and security, and how much the presence of the international military is helping GoA outreach. Chapter 6 examines the problems social engineering and intelligence gathering pose for

7 Sedra (2006).

8 World Bank (2007). The Americans are the exception in that General Rodriguez, based in Bagram, has direct command and authority.

PRTs, which are not best designed to access and use such information, and how the current set-ups and lack of cultural sensitivity risk putting perceived intelligence providers in danger.

## Research methodology

### Research

A total of 140 people were interviewed for this research: 90 aid agency staff, policymakers, military personnel, diplomats, donor agency staff and academics in Europe, North America and Afghanistan; and 50 Afghan NGO staff, government personnel, local leaders, and individuals in a range of sectors, from media to private construction.

The research team consisted of two Afghan<sup>9</sup> and two non-Afghan individuals; two male and two female. Three team members conducted fieldwork in Afghanistan. The research team has:

- in-depth knowledge of Afghan provincial/local-level politics and development processes
- expertise in aid effectiveness (development and humanitarian) – specifically the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of aid programmes in contexts of chronic insecurity and conflict
- expertise in civmil relations in the context of international military operations
- Afghan language skills (both Dari and Pashto) and knowledge of relevant cultural, ethnic and historical factors in the geographic areas prioritised for research
- experience in field-based data collection, interviewing and report-writing.

This research further benefited from the findings of research interviews conducted by the team leader on similar issues in other parts of Afghanistan prior to the field research for this report.

The purpose of the research was threefold:

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<sup>9</sup> Afghan colleagues from the Cooperation for Peace and Unity (CPAU).

### Box 1:

#### *Notes on language and terminology*

- ‘Taliban’ is used as an umbrella term for all the various groups which currently compose the Taliban movement in the different regions of Afghanistan
- The term ‘military’ is used generically, unless there is deliberate specification – in many cases, it was evident that interviewees were not discussing PRT personnel when they referred to the military, and they could rarely differentiate between Coalition and NATO-ISAF personnel
- NGO is also used as a broad umbrella term covering a vast range of international and Afghan organisations of varying sizes, some with a long history of service in Afghanistan, others newly arrived or established
- It is sometimes difficult to differentiate between humanitarian and development organisations, as many tend to multi-task, especially smaller Afghan organisations. The Red Cross is one of the few agencies strictly adhering to humanitarian activities in Afghanistan at present. In the report, the terms NGO or agency refer to these multi-mandating organisations. By and large, Afghans did not differentiate between organisations
- PRTs generally consist of a manoeuvre element, special forces, civil-military cooperation (CIMIC) teams, multiple donor possibilities and other elements. Thus PRT is often used as a generic term covering some or all of these elements.

- to provide an evidence base for advocating to donors, policymakers and the military for assistance that can be appropriately, safely and effectively implemented in Afghanistan in view of policy debates on aid effectiveness, civmil and WHAM

- to present NGOs with an analysis of the characteristics of insecurity and conflict in Afghanistan that impact on programmes and assess concerns regarding ‘blurring the lines’ or other trends with relevance to the future of programmes and the safety of staff and beneficiaries
- to explore and convey the perspectives of local populations on security and development issues which are frequently assumed, but rarely researched in a rigorous fashion or given voice.

Although it was initially envisaged that the research methodology would consist of both a quantitative and qualitative approach, time, budget and security issues related to travelling with paperwork such as questionnaires, which could be linked to NGOs in some areas, restricted us to a qualitative approach.

The views of local populations – policymakers, civil servants, NGO staff, aid agency beneficiaries, media and civil society actors – were placed centre-stage. Our contextual understanding arising from a long-term operational presence and fluency in local languages also meant that communications were direct and interviewees less anxious about misinterpretation. We tried as far as possible to articulate the perspectives of local populations on a number of issues: similar views and phrases repeated by different subjects indicated that interviewees are communicating what is regularly being expressed in their community and society. We tried to unpack issues and triangulate data, to ensure that the comments reported represented trends and issues rather than being one-off statements. The range of views, at times contradictory, represented in this report demonstrates the complexity of the context and the need for regular in-depth research of this kind which can help NGOs and others gain a better understanding of the environment in which they operate. The inconsistencies and contradictions that become evident during such research highlight the difficulty of agreeing on common positions.

### Box 2:

#### *Sample research questions:*

- What are the different factors of insecurity and conflict that impact on NGO programmes, staff, beneficiary communities and development/humanitarian objectives? What are their consequences?
- How significant are international military operations, including combat, peacekeeping and civmil activities (especially QIPs), in this context?
- Can evidence be found to substantiate, refute or nuance the ‘blurring the lines’ argument regarding the consequences of military involvement in aid?
- On what basis can NGOs work effectively, safely and appropriately at the local level?
- What policies, strategies and behaviours should the host government, donors and the military implement in order to support, rather than constrain or erode the NGO ability to programme safely, effectively and appropriately?

## Geography

The research focused on two provinces which represent different levels of NGO activity, security and civmil relations:

- Paktia: some of the NGOs sponsoring the research are operational here and the province, which has a US PRT, is largely secure except for two districts. Being close to Kabul, the province has an educated elite which has taken an important role in Afghan political life, such as President Najibullah
- Uruzgan: remote and mountainous, this is a volatile province which at one stage produced one cadre of the Taliban leadership. The PRT is Dutch, and there is just a skeletal Afghan NGO (ANGO) presence.

Although it would have been interesting to include a North-South and/or a Pashtun-non-Pashtun perspective, time constraints meant that this was not possible.

### **Interviewees**

Interviews with Afghans were conducted on an individual basis or in groups of three to avoid the tendency of some people to 'perform' for an audience of peers. It also meant that less people would have to spend time and effort coming to an interview in which they may have chosen not to participate. We stressed anonymity for interviewees in both provinces at all times. In Uruzgan, our host ANGO facilitated interviewee selection based on our criteria, which included tribe and community development council (CDC) membership, position in government, etc. In Paktia, we sought out interviewees ourselves, selecting on a more sectoral basis – such as media or tribal groups.

In cases where people complained of low-quality projects or particular incidents, we recorded those that were mentioned by more than one interviewee, since this indicated that what was being described was an established part of local gossip or that reports were being collected from a number of eyewitnesses. We started off with a table of points for semi-structured interview which would allow triangulation. After a first set of interviews in Uruzgan, the table had to be modified due to interviewees' hesitation to answer certain questions. The table focused primarily on eliciting views related to the roles of the GoA, NGOs and PRTs in governance, development and assistance projects, and security provision.

Interviews with internationals were also conducted on an individual or small group basis. Primary interviewees – such as foreign affairs, development and defence ministry officials; representatives from academic and other research institutes; NGO staff; and other relevant stakeholders both in donor

countries and in Afghanistan – were selected according to their perceived involvement and or interest in the civmil debate. Secondary interviewees were recommended by primary interviewees. We interviewed both civilian and military staff in Uruzgan PRT; whereas in Paktia only civilian staff were available for interviewing. Interviews were based on broad checklists related to development and assistance projects, governance and security, which were altered according to the person being interviewed.

It was almost impossible to interview women in Uruzgan due to their restricted mobility and the fact they rarely interact with strangers. In Paktia, the women we wanted to interview – staff from NGOs and the Ministry of Women's Affairs – were consistently unavailable. In Kabul, there was a mix of male and female interviewees, but the Afghans were predominantly male. While it is evidently important to have a mixed perspective, certain categories of women do tend to withhold opinion on issues which are considered 'public' and therefore beyond their sphere of influence or concern. In this sense, even though it would have been possible to find ways to interview more women, it would have proved time-consuming without necessarily yielding results.<sup>10</sup>

### **Security issues**

Security in the provinces selected meant that project sites could not be visited, as even local NGO staff currently restrict their movements to essential visits only. Time and budget limitations, together with a tense security environment, meant that in-depth analysis of the causes of specific acts of violence against NGOs – as well as wider surveys of public perceptions – could not be carried out. In both provinces, our host ANGOs did not want us to draw attention to ourselves by moving around. The visit to Uruzgan was hampered by unrest in Chora district, close to Tarinkot.

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10 The team leader has spent over a decade in Afghanistan, is an expert on gender issues in Afghanistan and has explored a range of issues with Afghan women. As a result of this experience, she was aware of Pashtun women's hesitation to express opinion on anything to do with the military.

The Afghan male team members changed their appearance, growing beards and wearing more traditional clothing. The female team leader observed hejab<sup>11</sup> and covered her face when travelling in public. In Uruzgan, we presented ourselves as all-Afghan, doing research for Kabul University. This was to ensure security and to put interviewee minds at ease in a pervasive atmosphere of suspicion and the tangible feeling that ‘walls have ears’.

Transport also created problems – we were stranded for some days in Uruzgan due to the lack of flights and insecure roads. We used an old local vehicle for our trip to Paktia to avoid drawing the attention of AOGs. Not using a vehicle that clearly indicated ‘international organisation’ or ‘commander’ made us look like ordinary Afghans. We discussed what we should say to police at checkpoints to ensure they would not ‘alert’ their ‘friends’ down the road to rob or kidnap team members. The police seem to pose as much if not more of a tangible threat than the Taliban in some areas – for example, we were strongly advised to avoid revealing our presence to the local police in Uruzgan, who it was reported to us “create security problems if they are not bribed.

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11 Attire which includes head cover and is appropriately modest in an Islamic context.

# Chapter 1:

## Afghans in the civmil debate

From the outset of the research, it was clearly evident that Afghans are not vocal in the civmil debate at a national or international level. This is in stark contrast with the number of individuals and organisations that are heavily engaged in civmil relations in their day-to-day work in the field.

Interviews with Afghan policymakers and NGO staff brought up a wide and contradictory range of perspectives regarding issues raised in the civmil debate. For example, one interviewee from a Kabul ANGO hoped to 'be able to convince the military and PRT to use NGOs as a bridge to work with', while another saw the military as wilfully creating problems wherever they went.

Interviewees offered a number of reasons or obstacles for the noticeable lack of Afghans in the civmil debate. These fall broadly into two categories:

### 1. Political reasons, such as:

- ANGO fear of losing funding from PRTs and donors pushing for collaboration with PRTs
- frequent disappointment in trying to influence the military, leading to dismay
- the perception that policy engagement on civmil has less practical application compared to thematic debates on health or agriculture
- perceived weakness of the GoA to tackle and influence international military strategy and operations
- perceived NGO failure to come up with common stance or position
- the lack of effective influencers within the GoA
- rigid doctrine and modus operandi of ISAF troop-contributing nations
- the lack of direct communication links with CF
- the lack of a common strategy between different PRTs, which makes influencing a labour-intensive and repetitive task

- the perception of military interaction with civilians as motivated by unidirectional intelligence-gathering imperatives
- a lack of clarity on the desired outcomes of the civmil debate.

### 2. Practical and cultural obstacles, such as:

- ANGOs being understaffed and overstretched
- the lack of a real Afghan culture of advocacy in general, and of dedicated advocacy units in most ANGOs, unless they are donor driven
- language barriers: Meetings are conducted in English, which means that some Afghans can not participate effectively; there is also a lack of agreed vocabulary for common terms of debate in Dari or Pashto
- the perceived low level of Afghan expertise on the issue
- a perceived patronising attitude towards Afghans, with meetings often dominated by expatriate staff
- a lack of trusted, professional and politically or ethnically 'impartial' interpreters
- low-level staff attending meetings, partly reflecting the low priority ANGOs give to the civmil debate, and partly the fact that ANGO directors are often tied up chasing funding and meeting reporting requirements
- low participation of Afghans in the debate, leading to a low invitation rate
- the perception that civmil meetings are a waste of time, with no direct result of impact and the NGO community slow to react to stimuli
- an overall perception that the civmil working group is suffering from apathy and a lack of participation.

The above challenges raise an interesting set of questions about Afghan voice and empowerment, which have clear parallels with the wider challenges in promoting local ownership of aid, security and political processes in Afghanistan. Such efforts in

relation to civmil are rendered more complex by ANGO attitudes to security, which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

Most fundamentally, however, Afghans observing the ebb and flow of the civmil debate have been frustrated by their experience that, although the military frequently appear to listen intently, there is rarely a corresponding change in policy or practice. This signals insincerity to some and indicates to interviewees that ISAF and the PRTs are an unresponsive alien force on the Afghan socio-political landscape.

## 1.1 Afghan NGOs

Just as it is among international non-governmental organisation (INGOs), civmil is a contested territory for ANGOs. Many ANGOs do currently work with PRTs. The current research highlights a number of issues in relation to ANGO engagement with PRTs and the wider civmil debate:

### 1.1.1 Capacity and funding constraints

The obstacles to Afghan participation in the civmil debate listed in the previous section point to serious weaknesses in organisational capacity and political strategy within the ANGO sector. More fundamentally, these weaknesses point to the responsibility of donors to foster more effective and sustainable civil society development and NGO capacity building in Afghanistan. Donors currently offload increasing amounts of project funding on ANGOs simply because they appear willing and able. This stretches many organisations to their limits, and pays little heed to considerations of organisational safety and security, capacity building or human resource development. In some cases, local management models are either non-existent or inappropriate, with a tendency to concentrate authority in one or two people who are frequently overstretched. ANGOs rarely get core funding that would enable them to survive between projects and develop strategic visions or policy issues.

Human resources too are an important part of this dilemma for all stakeholders and not solely NGOs. The relatively small pool of qualified and experienced Afghans with the prerequisite level of English or European language skills in Afghanistan is currently being pulled between donors, diplomatic community, aid agencies, the military and the private sector. This has naturally had a profound impact on staffing and capacity for INGOs and ANGOs.

### 1.1.2 Cultural gaps and challenges

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*'Afghan NGOs know very little about humanitarian principles. They are money-driven. They have blindly started working with PRTs and don't even know what the main objectives of the military-implementing development projects are.'*

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Afghan analyst, Kabul

This quote is one of several demonstrating a perceived lack of knowledge about humanitarianism among ANGOs. Many ANGO interviewees and Afghan INGO interviewees could not list humanitarian principles or were unclear as to what they meant in an applied sense: some confused humanitarian principles with human rights conventions. They were also unclear on the stated objectives of PRTs in implementing assistance and development projects and how this could affect NGO operational space and humanitarian space.

In general, the research suggested that there is no specific humanitarian terminology in Dari or Pashto, which might facilitate discussion of civmil issues. Those Afghan NGO staff with an awareness of civmil debates explained that most of the discussion focuses on two issues: the military's objectives in pursuing development activities, and technical debates on aid effectiveness which contrast NGO expertise with the weaknesses in PRT approaches to assistance. There is also extensive discussion of civilian casualties, but the relevance of civmil processes to such issues is not understood or acted

upon. In other words, the political and principled underpinning of the civmil debate is missing for many Afghans.

### 1.1.3 Limitations in impact of engagement

Some Afghans mentioned the fact that the occupation of Afghanistan's office in Nuristan by the US forces and the unsatisfactory outcome of that case has led to disillusionment for a number of members of the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR).<sup>12</sup> Interviewees viewed the incident as a failure of NGOs and civil society to influence the military that epitomises a wider sense of inevitability and powerlessness in the face of the international military presence. A number of NGO interviewees in Kabul felt a sense of unavoidability around military encroachment on humanitarian space.

### 1.1.4 Pragmatism and following the money

One key outcome of the above trends is that Afghans generally display pragmatism and a number of different approaches to civmil relations. Pragmatism has led a number of smaller and/or local NGOs to follow the money – one rationale for them turning to PRTs for projects was the lack of funds directly available for NGOs as donor money is increasingly channelled through national programmes and trust funds. Evidently, PRT funding is easier to handle than standard donor funding because their reporting and monitoring procedures are lighter.

With NGOs facing increasing security threats and many INGOs implementing more stringent safety and security management approaches, ANGOs have also found that their funding opportunities have increased. As a consequence, ANGOs (as is the case among INGOs) pursue a wide spectrum of positions from cooperation to all-out opposition. Such trends have dangerous implications in terms of the perceived instrumentalisation of humanitarian assistance, with NGOs generally being seen as

aligning themselves with ISAF, CF and the GoA. In turn this has a divisive knock-on effect as NGOs become more suspicious of each other, claiming there is little or no openness among NGOs receiving PRT funding.

The consequences of direct funding from military and integrated civmil operations has also been felt in ANGOs with severely limited staff capacity. ANGO directors have to juggle and prioritise a number of concerns in deploying staff, which directly impacts on the range of issues with which they choose to deal. Because they have to balance the decision to jeopardise staff security against survival of the NGO and their livelihoods, unilateral decisions to accept PRT funding can create resentment. Such decisions are rarely based on an informed analysis of the implications of working with PRTs or on NGO positions in the civmil debate.

Some of the ANGOs receiving or looking to receive funding from PRTs feel that no organisation – not even NGO coordination bodies – have the right to decide for the entire NGO community on a position vis-a-vis PRTs. Other ANGOs use the humanitarian imperative to argue that community vulnerability in the face of urgent needs has forced them to collaborate with PRTs in some areas. ANGOs also feel that INGOs come from a more secure funding position and can afford to be more critical of PRTs in general.

In such a climate, it is difficult for ACBAR and other bodies to do more than communicate on salient issues and share best practice. ACBAR, a key network of national and international NGOs in Afghanistan, has tried to brief and train Dari- and Pashto-speaking NGO staff on different components of the civmil debate, such as humanitarian principles. However, ACBAR itself is severely overstretched and underfunded at times, so its efforts to build local capacity are constrained. With such a broad membership and corresponding range of positions,

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<sup>12</sup> On 20 February 2007, US troops forced entry into Afghanistan's offices with blindfolded captives, whom they proceeded to interrogate there. Afghanistan staff were forced to vacate the premises. There has been no satisfactory resolution of the incident

it is also difficult for networks to come up with a common stance. INGOs are challenged to work with ANGO partners to feed information and policy recommendations to international-level policy processes which may help address these obstacles.

## 1.2 Government

Recommendations have been made that the GoA be given a key role in coordinating the civmil relationship, for the following reasons:

- the GoA's request for US\$20 billion of external assistance over the next five years obliges it to demonstrate its leadership credentials
- the need for an enforcement mechanism to ensure NGO-military coordination is systematic and rigorous – the GoA could submit legislation to Parliament covering NGO-military coordination as a condition for operating in Afghanistan; penalties for failing to coordinate could include official censure and deregistration
- GoA coordination of the NGO civmil relationship could help build government capacity to implement state building.<sup>13</sup>

However, against the backdrop of general low levels of information and/or interest in the civmil debate or commitment to humanitarian principles, the above prospect seems unworkable.

Civmil interaction should include representatives of ANA, ANP and Afghan National Auxiliary Police (ANAP), but rarely does. In fact, one draft version of Afghanistan Civil Military Working Group's civmil guidelines left the Afghan armed forces out altogether.

The ANA is divided roughly between the mostly US-trained officers left from the Zahir Shah era and Communist-era personnel trained and mentored by the Soviets. There are also groups from the Mujahideen and post-Taliban eras – mostly representing scattered Northern Alliance interests –

who are focused on defeating the Taliban and struggle against perceived attempts to re-establish Pashtun domination. These groups are further fragmented between those who favour NGOs over PRTs for providing humanitarian assistance and implementing development, and those who see all NGOs as corrupt. Each group has its own narrow set of interests and pursues different strategies in its interaction with the various parts of the international military presence. Some of them have no accurate notion of what PRTs do and, at times, no clear understanding of, or interest in, the civmil debate. Furthermore, none of the groups have in-depth knowledge of international humanitarian law (IHL) and how their activities can impact on humanitarian space. For example, although the Ministry of the Interior's (MoI) executive steering committee is in charge of coordination between the MoI and ISAF, interviewees tended to conflate the concept of a civmil debate and relations with one-on-one contacts, liaison, coordination and interaction with PRTs.

Many interviewees from government and policy-making levels felt that PRTs were undermining the GoA (see Chapter 5 for in-depth discussion of governance issues). There was little or no concern about how PRT activities were impacting on humanitarian space or NGO operations, as shown in the examples below:

- The head of the newly formed Independent Directorate for Local Governance (IDLG) initially seemed unclear on the role of PRTs and unaware of the civmil debate, although the IDLG has subsequently called for PRTs to build the capacity of provincial development committees (PDCs) and phase out their own presence in the provinces

<sup>13</sup> Karp (2005).

- Since some Community Development Councils which are part of the National Solidarity Programme (NSP) already seem to receive PRT funding or are apparently encouraged by NSP facilitating partners to apply for it,<sup>14</sup> the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development should also be taking an interest in and positioning itself in the civmil debate. However, the ministry has no clear, official position on the matter
- There has been some bilateral development of government-PRT relations – for example, the Ministry of Education has entered into discussions with PRTs over PRT school-building projects, while individual parliamentarians are lobbying PRTs to provide assistance for their personal NGOs and causes. However, there has still been no major debate on the issue in Parliament.

There is a general need within state and government structures for wider understanding of and engagement in the civmil debate, its rationale and impact at policy and implementation levels. There is also a need to increase understanding of how formal and informal government policies on PRTs and other military actors impact on humanitarian and NGO operational space.

### 1.3 Civil society, communities and the media

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*'We have not covered the civil-military debate in the media mainly for two reasons. First we think it will not be an interesting subject for the readers and second we cannot write things that can irritate the government and the PRTs. Freedom of speech is something on paper. Here in Paktia if I write that three districts are practically under Taliban control I believe I will be in jail the next day. In some districts not only the elders but the district administrators have made their alliances with the Taliban.'*

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Journalist, Paktia

Civil society groups and communities are almost completely left out of the discussion on civmil relations. While these groups often have very specific or narrow interests, they are most often at the civmil interface. As a result, they are affected most profoundly by it and often develop creative means of handling both sets of actors. The Afghan media is not directly engaged in the debate either: they are not currently included in meetings or informed of the technicalities and details. Even if they were, journalists and media groups may avoid getting close to the issues, in fear of reprisals from the international military if they take a perceived anti-military stance. Some interviewees stated this clearly while others indicated it indirectly. The Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission's (AIHRC) interaction with ISAF and CF is most frequently tied to monitoring human rights violations related to prisoner transfer and increasingly to civilian casualties, not the civmil debate. It could be that they fear that involvement in the civmil debate may lead to loss of access to prisoners.

It is important for civil society, communities and the media to be more informed and involved to ensure that the Afghan voice is heard in the civmil debate. However, it may be difficult to provide a secure,

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14 This observation is based on the team leader's field research in various provinces of Afghanistan in 2006.

enabling and neutral environment to elicit a contribution from Afghan nationals in the current human rights climate. It is therefore crucial that NGOs and civil society groups try to find ways to create such a safe space.

### 1.3.1 Media relations and freedom of speech

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*'The Americans are polite and respect journalists. The government is very rude. But we think that the PRT is using the government to intimidate journalists and control the media. There is an Afghan employed by the PRT who constantly monitors the media. The governor is very biased and only supports and praises the journalists that are in his favour.'*

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Journalist, Paktia

The establishment of an independent Afghan media sector is one of the achievements of the 2001 Bonn Agreement, but its progress is being scaled back in the face of attacks from radical elements and those opposed to freedom of speech. Like the ANGO sector, the Afghan media is facing a funding crisis, which could see the international military and opposition groups funded by Afghanistan's neighbours battling for influence in the sector, threatening the independence of the media.

PRTs are already entering this sector in a variety of ways which could damage nascent media independence. Some Afghan journalists interviewed in the current research said that PRTs were establishing local radio stations and broadcasting programmes which they felt were for propaganda purposes rather than providing useful information. This approach to radio programming is damaging the credibility of independent media. A small number of PRT-run programmes to train journalists are also causing concern.

The Afghan media or civil society groups have made no coordinated effort to approach those PRTs that are active in the media sector to voice such concerns. This is due to three reasons:

- a belief that lobbying would have no impact
- the fact that they may need to apply for PRT funding at some point
- the dearth of open criticism from Afghans because they either feel co-opted or intimidated in different ways – those who feel able to voice dissent in a 'safe' interview context such as that provided by the current research would not necessarily feel able to complain in other fora.

Comments indicated that the military, in its various forms, was not trusted as genuinely supportive of democratic principles such as freedom of speech. The NGO sector needs to pay greater attention to how this situation is impacting on the space for broader human rights and civil society work in Afghanistan as it frames the wider political and social climate for NGO activism.

## Chapter 2: Imported and local principles

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*'These defenceless people burn to nothing silently. All we can do is to deeply regret this loss of life.'*

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Government employee, Uruzgan

Military and humanitarian actors alike use principles and concepts that are informed by wider international experience – such as 'humanitarian space' and 'stabilisation' – to describe their mandate, objectives and experience in Afghanistan. However, ensuring that such terms are understood and translated in the context of prevailing Afghan social, cultural or religious norms remains a challenge.

While the principles of humanitarian space may have equivalents in Islamic social history, the type of debates which bring such concepts to the fore have not yet taken place in the Afghan context. There has been work at international level with Muslim scholars to interpret humanitarian principles within an Islamic framework, but the results have not been widely disseminated in Afghanistan. It is important, therefore, that civil society (Afghan and International) and Afghan media disseminate such information to familiarise people with the concepts, generate discussion around them, demystify the jargon and allow them to develop a deeper understanding and sense of ownership of the issues.

### Unfamiliar concepts

The research team could not, for example, find an adequate phrase in Dari or Pashto which covered the full meaning of 'humanitarian space'<sup>15</sup>, instead using the term, 'NGO operational space', which is quite different. The very fact that the rights of those in need and the vulnerable are regularly disregarded by elites shows that humanitarianism does not sit easily in Afghan society, with its recent history of violence, bloodshed and social upheaval. Other occidental concepts – such as 'blurring the lines',

'hearts and minds', force protection, – are rarely unpacked for local interlocutors. These are not issues that the GoA, Afghan leaderships and people seem to fully grasp and/or necessarily care about. They have their own theories regarding what activities related to these concepts actually mean – for example, in the Afghan worldview, WHAM activities would not be one-off events but a constant negotiation and renegotiation of a subtle balance of power in a relationship which matures as a result of going through the trials and tribulations of alternating conflict and cooperation.

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*'Those who are neutral can live in areas where the Taliban are in control. Those who work with the government and NGOs cannot live there.'*

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Journalist, Paktia

Interviewees found it difficult to imagine the concept of neutrality – where elders or community members deal with both the Taliban and the GoA while maintaining their distance, or refuse to cooperate with either. Nobody knew of any cases where a group or individual had maintained 'neutrality'. Discussions with interviewees indicated that neutrality was considered as not getting involved in political or military skirmishing. Neutral was somehow interpreted as 'harmless' and implied a sense of 'not knowing' or innocence. They found the concept of impartiality – not taking sides – easier to understand: with a history of making and breaking alliances, Afghans were more comfortable with concepts involving decisions on whether to take one side or another.

Some organisations attempt to negotiate humanitarian access by getting combatants to understand the principles which guide their operations. Most recently UNICEF and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) have been able to negotiate ceasefires with the Taliban to conduct vaccination days – which have

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15 Linguistic and semantic obstacles work in both directions – for example, English does not have all the specific terms which Pashto has for different orders of conflict and rivalry.

been reportedly disrupted on two occasions by the activities of the international military rather than the Taliban. Vaccination days were not unusual before 2001 – they were seen by warring parties as an opportunity to boost local popularity and legitimacy; fulfil part of their moral obligation as Muslims to assist vulnerable children; and most importantly to take the moral high ground against the other side. Nowadays, some of the motivation remains the same, and in areas with local Taliban fighters, such moves probably keep fighters motivated. The World Food Programme, on the other hand, cannot always negotiate safe passage for convoys – partly because they will not negotiate with all parties, but also because the food aid being transported could be sold or diverted to feed troops.

It is, of course, difficult to comment on levels of understanding and respect for humanitarian principles and space without interviewing representatives from the Taliban and AOGs. For example, it is difficult to ascertain how often the Taliban respect IHL in their dealings with prisoners (especially ANA) and how much they respect the rights of wounded war enemies to medical attention. Yet if reports of beheadings and summary executions of captives are correct, this would indicate a lack of adherence to IHL, and captives kept alive may be solely of strategic value in prisoner exchanges.

## 2.1 Civilian casualties

*'Initially we supposed [the foreign forces] to be our guests, but they turned out to be very short-sighted. They opened fire on everyone indiscriminately and made most of us think otherwise. Only a few days back they opened fire on a young newly wed guy in the nearby bazaar. The poor victim was putting fuel in his car by the roadside. At the same time a PRT convoy was passing and they thought he was trying to detonate something. So they showered him with bullets. He died on the spot. He has brothers, and cousins and a tribe. Can they all forget what happened to their young relative?'*

Shura member, Uruzgan

*'We report the civilian deaths of the civilians in attacks because it is our moral responsibility and at the same time there is pressure from communities and relatives of victims. They call and threaten us, saying that if we do not report them then it means we are part of the coalition forces. We try to confirm the casualties from independent sources.'*

Journalist, Paktia

*'We received a number of complaints from people in Jalalabad and Kandahar. Last year there were also complaints from Khost, but not this year. We therefore asked for a conference where UNAMA, civil society representatives, religious leaders, elders, ISAF, coalition forces and the GoA all participated. The aim was to examine ways to reduce civilian casualties. It is not just we who are concerned about it, but also the government and NATO forces that want to do something because it has badly damaged the image of international forces. The number of civilian casualties unexpectedly went up and has overwhelmed the international community and the Afghan government.'*

Civil society representative, Kabul

*'People are generally afraid of expressing their views. They are deeply influenced by the propaganda of anti-government elements. Those who at one point considered [CF] as guests...have changed their opinion due to the heavy-handedness of the foreigners.'*

Religious leader, Uruzgan

The Dutch have pressed UNAMA to recruit a human rights officer to monitor the transfer of detainees from Uruzgan. Yet despite such moves, there is no real attempt to engage with Afghan audiences on Human Rights, who need a different type of response and reassurance to Western publics. Many people mentioned the death of the young mechanic, described in the comments above, but they did so with regret and resignation rather than overt hostility. The general feeling was that people have no choice but to put up with such deaths. On the other hand, in Tarinkot, every time the research team heard machine gun fire in the bazaar, staff from the

NGO the team were staying with would rush out to find out whether American special forces had killed or injured anyone while passing through. It is unclear how such deaths are viewed in Afghan cultural frameworks, whether further nuanced by Pashtunwali<sup>16</sup> or other customary law codes. It is also uncertain whether people view community infrastructure as a suitable way of compensating 'blood crimes' committed in this way. What is clear is that trust between internationals and locals is constantly eroded by such deaths.

There is a broad neglect of a history of militarisation in Afghanistan and the brutality of the past three decades which has left people exhausted and traumatised. This is a society which sees violence, corporal punishment and humiliation as a part of family and to a certain extent community life.<sup>17</sup> The concept that anyone would care about protecting civilians, which the AIHRC is beginning to tackle, is alien to Afghans. Warlords such as Abdul Rashid Dostum, for instance, frequently used human shields in the 1990s without any outcry from either locals or internationals. Today, like many other warlords who committed human rights abuses, he still constitutes a force to be reckoned with in Afghan politics. In the years prior to 9/11, people were tortured and executed with impunity while the international community effectively stood by. The brutalised population now mistrusts the international community's motives and fears the warlords who have been rehabilitated into government: they feel that any outcry will result in reprisals or inaction. It is therefore vital for civil society and others to feel supported in creating a safe space and strong presence where ordinary people feel they can safely voice complaints on issues such as civilian casualties.

## 2.2 Principles of Afghaniyat and Islamiyat<sup>18</sup>

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*'Foreign forces always employ bullying tactics. They humiliate elders in front of their relatives; put a bag on their heads and body-search their female family members. It obviously benefits the Taliban [who] have photographs of such incidents and now send them via mobile to each and everyone.'*

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Shura member, Uruzgan

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*'We prefer NGOs as they know our cultural values. Americans only bully their way and insult our elders.'*

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Religious leader, Uruzgan

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*'We live in a remote and inaccessible area. People are very conservative and ideological. Whatever work is within the frameworks of Islam is acceptable to them.'*

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Shura member, Uruzgan

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*'It would be a bit difficult for the PRT or the military to achieve winning hearts and minds because people still look at them suspiciously as foreigners. It would be good if Islamic countries replaced them and started talking to the Taliban.'*

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Tribal leader, Paktia

Humanitarian principles are not the only ones at play in the arena where NGOs and the military currently operate – there is also Afghaniyat and Islamiyat, which underpin many interactions and reactions to specific stimuli for most Afghans. These may lead to acts of violence and contribute to insecurity. For Afghans, respect for certain cultural forms and the ability to practice Islam are fundamental parts of human security. Actions which disrespect the

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16 The Pashtun code of conduct.

17 See, for example, Smith (2008).

18 It is difficult to define Afghaniyat. It is an unwritten code of conduct and honour that Afghans live by. The simplest translation would be a sense of Afghan-ness. Islamiyat is a term used to refer to Islamic studies in school curricula, but some interviewees used it to express a broad sense of being a devout Muslim.

principles of Afghaniyat upset them – for example, house-to-house searches and special forces kicking doors down can undermine the principle of *namus*<sup>19</sup> and Afghaniyat. Because such acts put the integrity of a man's honour and manliness at stake, he has to retaliate, and such incidents are easily manipulated by opposition groups to force people to act. Many Afghans – including NGO staff – are fundamentally opposed to house-to-house searches, because they are familiar with and understand that the principles involved are so strongly socialised in some communities that they become second nature and can only be expressed in culturally appropriate forms. In some cases, *namus* incidents seem to create more ill-will than civilian casualties.

It may be possible to use Afghaniyat or Islamiyat principles – such as *melmastia* (hospitality); *zakat* (alms); or invoking protection for women, children and the sick – to draw parallels with aspects of humanitarianism. The difficulty is where to draw the line in terms of what to accept and respect – for example, Afghaniyat accepts blood feuds, which include the exchange of women in lieu of blood money, and Islamic practice in some countries accepts the stoning of adulterous women.

The Taliban are keen to interpret the actions of the international military presence in a light which will mobilise people to support them and join their ranks. The advent of better communications has greatly assisted them in this. In communities underpinned by Islamiyat, the Taliban often try to mobilise people through invoking the need for jihad.

NGOs have also used aspects of Islam to argue for change – for example, by using the literacy of the Prophet's wives, Khadija and Ayesha, to push for girls' education. However, in the past few years, NGOs have tended to rely less on such tools. It may be time they started revisiting such practices. Analysis of these various principles and initiatives which attempt cross-cultural interpretation of humanitarian and other principles into such

frameworks are currently lacking in the Afghan context. However, they are crucial in order to elicit meaningful engagement of ordinary Afghans in the civil debate.

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19 Broadly, honour or 'face'.

## Chapter 3: Security for NGOs

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*'NGOs have suffered in the last five years. We are blamed for spying, which is worse than the earlier accusations of corruption. And now people are confusing NGOs and private contractors, so we have to take the blame for what they are doing. PRTs should be careful when selecting partners and go through NGO coordination bodies.'*

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ANGO representative, Kabul

*'Most of the people we have contact with know and welcome our efforts. But there are also some who consider us as American spies. Some consider us missionaries working to convert people to Christianity.'* ANGO representative, Paktia

Research indicates that shifts towards integrated civil relations along with the military's increasing role in assistance work are having manifold implications for the security management strategies of humanitarian agencies.<sup>20</sup> This was also borne out by the findings in the current research in Uruzgan and Paktia, which highlighted how the implications of civil relations, policies and approaches for NGO security are framed by wider trends that affect NGO operations and the dynamics of conflict and security. Thus the impact of civil relations is compounded by wider trends in donor assistance and government policy, which are forcing NGOs to align themselves with government strategies.

Multiple factors shape the security risks and threats confronting NGOs, including criminality; random violence and disorder; and targeted violence against international agencies, irrespective of their association with the military. The Afghan context is increasingly characterised by new trends in the criminalisation of the formal and informal security sector, which encompasses the national police, militias and bandits. Police and military checkpoints create security issues for many Afghans, who can be asked for bribes, intimidated or even abducted.

Afghan NGO staff feel strongly that local government can be predatory in some areas. In many cases, staying in touch is not so much to guarantee security but to ensure that staff are not made insecure by suspicions or accusations of having Taliban or anti-government sympathies.<sup>21</sup> Although it is the GoA's responsibility to prevent and deal with incidents in an appropriate manner, in some areas with little rule of law and where government figures are connected to criminal networks, agencies just have to avoid giving them the opportunity to intimidate, extort, rob or worse. This highlights issues around the GoA not meeting its security obligations while aid agencies in general take more responsibility.<sup>22</sup> NGOs must lobby the Afghan government to take note of such incidents with local security forces.

As the situation evolves, it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish criminals and AOGs, when the lines get blurred, at times deliberately, as part of both criminal and insurgent tactics. The recent increase in the lucrative abduction of Afghans and internationals is striking. The research suggests that Afghan society is not necessarily more violent than before; rather the increased numbers of new expatriate and NGO staff has led to a higher probability of encounters with criminal elements.

In the course of this research, military interviewees often implied that NGOs cannot operate in areas until such areas are militarily secured and 'completely safe' as defined by the military. This contrasts with the reality that some NGOs have been manoeuvring in insecure regions of Afghanistan for many years, operating on the basis of long-term relationships and negotiated access with local communities and powerholders. It is important to note that they were doing this on their own terms in a time and space largely uncomplicated by the overt presence of a foreign military.

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20 Humanitarian Policy Group (March 2006).

21 Similar accusations are sometimes levelled at peaceful protestors and groups of youth or students in southern Afghanistan.

22 Humanitarian Policy Group (March 2006).

### 3.1 NGO perceptions of insecurity

Most NGOs cited the safety and security of their staff, programmes and beneficiaries as an overriding concern. However, every stakeholder interviewed seemed to have a slightly different perspective on what it means to be secure, and different ways of providing security. For example, some perceived ISAF's provision of patrols as increasing safety; others believed they attract suicide bombers and roadside bombs.

NGO interviewees identified a wide range of sources of insecurity – both local and foreign – which included ordinary people, Afghan armed forces, criminal elements, AOGs; and CF. For example:

- **Ordinary people** can pose a security threat if local or international staff become embroiled in a local conflict which leads to violence or death – for adultery, revenge, losing face, unpaid debt, etc
- **Foreign fighters** may look to drive out local Taliban in areas where the latter are willing to work out a modus vivendi with NGO staff
- **Criminal gangs** are aware of the lucrative deals which NGO-sector hostages represent. In this context, aid worker casualties do not necessarily indicate a shrinking of humanitarian space, but the overlay of humanitarian space with a multiplicity of other 'spaces' based on different sets of principles and desired outcomes.

#### 3.1.1 The nexus between government alignment, military strategy and NGO security

As a result of donor emphasis on state building and development approaches which channel funding through central government, NGOs have been gently coerced into joining national, government-aligned aid programmes. One example is the NSP, which provides small-scale project funding to local communities within a national framework. Just as NGOs were coerced into joining the NSP – and by extension, in the eyes of some, declaring solidarity

with the government – INGOs also feel under pressure from their respective governments and militaries to move into insecure areas where the different national PRTs operate. Indeed, several PRTs have sought to align themselves with and support the NSP and other national development programmes. Such trends have manifold implications for NGO security, as it is not always clear how local populations and parties to the conflict view NGOs working with the government.

However, the GoA still struggles to exert its authority over NGOs and other groups. NGO resistance to aligning with the government perhaps reflects a mix of legitimate concerns about agency independence and safety implications for staff, programme and beneficiaries with institutional foot-dragging over the issue of re-aligning with government plans and budgets. The latter is compounded by NGO nostalgia for earlier periods when they were not subject to the current levels of state bureaucracy, regulations and corruption and NGO staff dealt directly with local commanders.

Some of the national programmes are instrumental in providing basic health and education services. While ordinary people appreciate the provision of such services, they may also suspect all groups of siphoning off assistance meant for their communities, regardless of who is allied with whom. AOGs might take umbrage at alliances with the government, but will appreciate that denying service provision in areas under their control is unpopular. For multi-mandate organisations implementing development projects and providing humanitarian assistance, programmes such as NSP present a serious challenge in a context of on-going insurgency and violence. As one commentator stated:

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*'The fundamental issue is a definitional one. Once you have declared victory, legitimized Karzai and agreed to support his government, you cannot all of a sudden decide that you want to work in*

*humanitarian mode. You have obviously taken sides and are seen as such by the Taliban, etc... But the system does not learn. Basically, NGOs need to decide: do they want to be Wilsonians and part of the foreign policy of their governments or Dunantists and go by established humanitarian principles. I would argue that trying to do both at the same time is a recipe for being shot at.'*<sup>23</sup>

### 3.1.3 Shift from acceptance to protection and withdrawal

The seminal NGO security management typology developed by Konrad Van Brabant describes three main categories for NGO security management or posture:

- acceptance, negotiated on the basis of principles and based on community acceptance
- protection, involving more emphasis on protective measures, such as operating with low visibility, or varying routes to avoid planned attacks, etc
- deterrence, which involves suspension of operations or withdrawal, the use of armed protection, etc.

As the security situation in Afghanistan has deteriorated, NGOs have increasingly shifted towards so-called 'remote management' models of programme implementation, management and monitoring and evaluation. This also reflects a shift away from acceptance-based strategies towards protection- and deterrence-based approaches, and even withdrawal in areas that become too insecure for operations. This shift represents a genuine dilemma for NGOs, as it has inevitably contributed to reduced contextual understanding and distancing from beneficiary communities.

Taken as a whole, this research uncovered a dynamic situation in which using certain strategies and activities can create insecurity in some situations but not others – with no clear parameters or logic as to why certain events unfold. This makes the task of

situation analysis and strategic planning much more complicated. The following sections outline the challenges and dilemmas confronting those INGOs and ANGOs that are still attempting to use acceptance and protection-based security management strategies in an increasingly insecure context.

## 3.2 Perception and Identity management

*'We do not have anything written about security rules and so on, but we are always careful. When travelling between different districts, we don't even trust our drivers and tell them one day before that we are going to location B while on the day we go to location C due to security concerns.'*

ANGO representative, Paktia

In order to survive in any conflict or post-conflict environment, every organisation and individual has to manage their own identities, either by presenting slightly different faces to different stakeholders or by taking on one monolithic identity and only interacting with groups that react appropriately to it. The accepted (and largely unarticulated) Afghan view is that the more skilled one becomes in juggling identities, the wider the range of contexts in which one can operate. The complicated nature of the picture in Afghanistan can be exemplified by the case of NGOs who become involved in conflict resolution and/or local-level political and social processes associated with development programmes while maintaining their identities as impartial arbiters and facilitators. It would appear that the clean theoretical concepts and mandates that characterise Western aid discourse are not consistently relevant in the Afghan context. This issue is explored in more detail in sections on the relevance of Afghan cultural and social norms to concepts of humanitarian space.

<sup>23</sup> Personal communication with ex-UN official with many years of Afghan experience.

However, it would appear that Taliban intelligence is at a level where they generally know who is coming and going in an area and what strategies they use. It has generally been the practice of Afghan intelligence services under any regime to plant people within foreign organisations, and many political and other groups can have their people within an organisation at any one time. It is unclear, however, why the Taliban and AOGs choose to target particular individuals and organisations at specific times.

Key elements in NGO efforts to manage the perception of their identity by different stakeholders include the following:

- Distancing from military forces in both a physical and a political sense, and making public statements which underline this position, are obvious and important parts of identity management for NGOs operating in a conflict situation, signalling a non-combatant identity
- Some INGOs ensure security by presenting a neutral, humanitarian face, distancing themselves from their government's foreign policies and military presence in Afghanistan
- Perception and identity management for some NGOs is importantly shaped by funding streams and modalities. Those agencies which have secured longer-term funding have the timeframe and organisational capacity to develop more thoughtful strategies on identity management. As a consequence, they are under less pressure to juggle identities in a less strategic fashion or to face possible security risks by, for example, approaching PRTs for funding
- Acceptance is also determined by staff actions and behaviour as well as the type and quality of projects and coverage. These are all important determinants of goodwill and acceptance, and by extension of security, albeit with limitations
- A long-term presence is important as the identity, motives, services and calibre of an organization are clear to communities. Some INGOs and ANGOs have links with communities from their time in the refugee camps which makes the interaction with the organisation, if not with particular staff members, more than two decades old. NGOs and staff with a long term presence i.e. from the jihad or before the fall of the Taliban, command a great deal of respect, based on having shared the 'years of suffering'. This brings with it a certain level of security, although this has limitations which must be recognised
- Part of identity management currently includes carrying no vestige of NGO, government or 'international' paraphernalia while travelling certain routes. One NGO, for example, faces problems transferring documentation from the field to head office, especially on GoA-led programmes. There have been reports of individuals who were summarily executed for merely carrying documentation which links them to government and even international business interests<sup>24</sup>
- Many NGOs keep a low profile by minimising evidence of an international link. This is hampered by donor visibility dictates, since signs and logos often have to be removed from project sites and NGO offices. Even media coverage of 'success stories' abroad can threaten NGO security: there is anecdotal evidence that some AOGs continuously monitor the international media and react to what they find. There are, however, a number of ways to reduce visibility. For example, when the Taliban started asking a community about Afghan engineers working for a certain INGO, the INGO immediately removed the engineers and appointed a local person to supervise the work. The engineers then visited only sporadically by taxi
- Other ways of managing identity include altering dress and appearance in different contexts. Blending in has become increasingly important of late, so many INGOs are now working through ANGOs. However, this can create a situation in which access supersedes the capacity to implement effective projects<sup>25</sup>

24 Personal communication with an individual whose family member was executed for carrying a Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG) identity card, but wishes to remain anonymous.

25 Humanitarian Policy Group (March 2006).

- Staff identity and behaviour is of great importance. The reputation of some NGOs is centred in the identity of specific staff members who have extensive relations or a high-profile in a given community, and happen to work in the NGO. In the current research, the identity of one ANGO had become entirely associated with one staff member, who had worked there for thirteen years. Nobody referred to the NGO by its name, but rather as his organisation
- During the jihad era for instance, organisations would unwittingly be co-opted by one ethnic group and/or political party, giving them a specific identity. They would then work in areas controlled by that party or ethnicity, providing limited security in specific areas. Some NGOs mobilise specific staff members to forge links with certain groups because of their background – for example, employing staff with Hizb-I Islami Gulbuddin (HIG) affiliations to work in HIG-controlled areas. If they are prevented from doing this – for example, when CF target their staff assuming they are combatants – the scope of operations decreases
- Local staff from the area can still become casualties of local blood feuds because being part of an NGO does not automatically give them immunity from their identity within the clan ‘honour’ system into which they were born. Conflicts within that system may override other prerogatives, and in the worst cases, may endanger the NGO as a whole
- Unless an NGO has been around for many years and has a specific range of identity parameters, communities tend not to remember names or know who is delivering the assistance. As a consequence, NGOs may be judged by the actions of other NGOs, who are grouped under a broad umbrella; which further complicates managing their identity. This has evident or follow-on implications for their security.

### 3.3 Military and civilian approaches to NGO security

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*‘Sometimes the military make very grave mistakes that put the life of others in danger. In Shamali some military personnel had distributed blankets to the disabled and on the blankets there were phone numbers and a request asking them to call if they have any information about Al Qaeda. That really put those who had received the blankets in danger. We are still trying to find which particular PRT or military unit did this, but we have failed to identify them. A similar mistake was made when an airplane dropped footballs coloured with the flags of a number of Islamic countries and that included Saudi Arabia. Saudi has the kalima on its flag and the disrespect really irritated the public.’*

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Civil society representative, Kabul.

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*‘We are not saying that PRTs should not help people, and sometimes they may need to do so for getting information or winning hearts and minds but they should not have a negative impact on the personal security of others. That is our main concern.’*

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Civil society representative, Kabul

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*‘We try to keep PRTs away from our offices and do not interact with them because it brings threats from insurgents and suspicion from our target communities.’*

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ANGO representative, Kabul

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*‘The military is shameless. They are pushing NGOs into a corner.’*

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ANGO representative, Kabul

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*'We know about the civil-military debate. We also know that the PRT is trying to show that their role in reconstruction is important and that NGOs cannot work where the PRT is able to go. They also claim that they are more cost-effective than NGOs. They are sharing these views in private and informal meetings.'*

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International NGO Staff, Paktia

Because military concepts of security-development linkage take priority, the military can only understand NGO security constraints within their own paradigms. INGOs, ANGOs, the ICRC, different arms of the government and private sector companies all have different systems for handling security procedures and incidents, based on their individual mandates, goals and operational methods. When these different systems overlap, problems can often appear. This section examines examples of some of these.

### 3.3.1 PRTs, NGO security and development

Interviewees reported that PRT personnel visited an NGO compound shortly after it was raided by armed people looking for evidence of contact with the nearby PRT. Visiting the compound to ask what happened would seem normal to the military, who were compiling an incident report, but it completely went against the NGO's security needs in the context – having survived the incident unscathed, they needed further distancing from the PRT.

The above incident shows that the military can be ill-informed in its approach to the security of non-military actors or can create unwelcome security fallout in the resolute pursuit of their own aims. Some PRTs see an NGO presence as an indicator of security or 'success' and want to see NGOs operating in their areas at any cost. They see NGOs as part of WHAM and believe that they benefit from their work. They believe that offering protection and security monitoring will encourage NGOs to work in

areas with a PRT presence. Donors who accept the notion that PRTs can provide security for NGOs are not taking the complexity of ground realities into consideration. In some places, NGOs are being gently coerced to take PRT money. At times this can be seen to 'legitimise' the PRT role and foothold in humanitarian and development space. There is also an attitude among some PRT personnel that NGOs are already at risk because of Taliban intelligence systems and that PRT contact will not put them at any further risk. This is a dangerous assumption.

However, it is also clear that some (generally British and northern European) PRTs try to show sensitivity to the fact that NGO staff do not wish to be associated with them for security reasons and tend to stay away from their projects even in the reasonably stable north. Most PRTs have also realised that they should not drop in on NGOs unannounced. In some provinces – including the volatile southern ones – NGOs meet with PRT personnel through coordination meetings in public venues rather than private regular meetings, which can lead to accusations that they are providing intelligence.

There is also a big difference in how PRTs handle NGOs working in insurgency areas, where they are effectively engaged in 'guerrilla humanitarianism' – a small low-key presence opportunistically implementing projects when the occasion presents itself.

There are also cases where the military has bypassed consultation altogether, drawing up plans, expecting NGOs to fit in with and implement them. In the cases described here, and others like them, the military did not consult with NGOs on what the implications for NGO identities, mandates, modes of operation and security might be

- In Uruzgan, the Dutch PRT uses the concept of creating or supporting 'permissive areas', where there is no continuous fighting. The idea is to fan

out from these areas, rolling out blanket security and development. Some ANGOs have accepted this concept, with a great deal of risk to their staff

- The British and some others use the 'Afghan development zone' concept – a mechanism which focuses kinetic, development and reconstruction resources and is designed to maximise the use of constrained ISAF, GoA and international resources in insurgency-stricken areas. This concept built on what international forces were already doing within troubled areas, and was approved by the Policy Action Group in mid-2006. However, it was not supported by sufficient strategic consultation and communication activities. As a result, parts of the international community were unconvinced by the concept and the GoA ignored it to a certain extent. Nevertheless, the British follow this principle as appropriate in Helmand, through QIPs and support for the GoA's National Programmes, as reflected in the Joint (UK) Plan for Helmand, which seeks to establish a secure 'lozenge' around Lashkargah. The concept seems to have been stretched to its very limits, due mainly to a lack of sufficient buy-in from the GoA<sup>26</sup>

Not discussing such plans prior to implementation in the relevant coordination fora, is a serious oversight on the part of the military. It has at best made life difficult for some NGOs and at worst put people's lives and projects at risk.

### 3.3.2 Negotiating with militants

Negotiating with commanders and militia leaders for access and safe conduct to enable NGOs to implement assistance programmes is a long-standing tradition in Afghanistan, as in other conflict settings. For such leaders, these negotiations are part of a complex process of legitimisation, financial gain and coercion of the population.

Some organisations, including UN agencies and the ICRC, can be open about their occasional negotiations with AOGs because they have the requisite political back-up and can protect their staff from the Afghan and international military. A number of factors have helped the ICRC maintain a somewhat neutral and impartial identity, including: its mandate; its well-known emblem; an established presence in the Afghan and cross-border context; and its ability to maintain its independence from the armed forces and the GoA.

For other agencies, personal relations with the Taliban or HIG or having staff with current or previous links with these groups may offer opportunities to negotiate access. In many instances, this is not organised or led at a central agency level, but, in a very limited number of cases, delegated to or clandestinely attempted by field staff and as such reflects relationships forged at the frontline of implementation. Staff may be embedded within the beneficiary communities, encouraging them to make the necessary connections to enable the continuation of much-needed livelihoods assistance.

A range of approaches to negotiating access currently exists within the NGO sector and beyond, each with different practical considerations and consequences. The following are just a few of the many challenges NGOs face in pursuing such strategies.

- There is a lack of documentation of good and bad practice in negotiating access, of how to overcome challenges and the risks inherent in such negotiations. This means that the lessons learned tend to remain a part of the informal institutional memory of agencies, and are subject to the vagaries of institutional change and staff turnover

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26 Personal communication with DFID staff member, 15 October 2007.

- These strategies face uncertain understanding or support from the GoA and international military presence, notwithstanding their obligations under IHL to facilitate the provision of neutral, independent and impartial humanitarian assistance. Some agencies interviewed during this research cited instances of access negotiations leading to targeting by and/or hostile behaviour from the CF
- Opportunities to negotiate access are being eroded and challenged by the rise of a new generation of Taliban and HIG figures, who do not have historical connections to aid agencies. As the conflict situation evolves, with its impact on community politics and social dynamics, so the scope for humanitarian access is also affected.

During the Taliban period, there was no honeymoon period of goodwill between Taliban and aid agencies or the international community. There were raids on NGO offices and homes to seize material of an un-Islamic nature, alcohol and evidence of proselytising. Local and international staff were at times imprisoned, beaten and/or deported. Frequent edicts and decrees attempted to exert control over agencies and their staff. In the eyes of many Taliban, events post-2001 have confirmed their suspicions about foreigners being opponents and/or spies. According to Donini et al (2006), a large number of aid agencies arrived in numbers when the military did, in response to 9/11, leading the Taliban to conclude that aid agencies are a tool of the US government. No agencies tried to approach the Taliban at that early stage. Discussions with interviewees reaffirm Donini et al's conclusion that 'a social contract of acceptability will be difficult to renegotiate'.<sup>27</sup>

### Box 3:

#### **Security: one International Contractor's story**

Afghan and international staff from one particular international contractor working in an area that is generally deemed insecure face problems getting to and from insecure districts and travelling around within them. The international contractor uses deterrence to ensure staff security. The organisation used to hire security guards from the relative of a local government figure whose very lucrative private security business (reportedly charging US\$300 per month per guard) caters for contractors and suppliers dealing with the PRT. The contractor now has an informal arrangement with the local police. When hired privately, the police wear no uniform and come heavily armed. This does not seem to upset local people. The contractor also gets guarantees of security from local communities and ensures that it has good, reliable local staff. The staff try to make sure that all the various groups in the area benefit from their work without getting too deep into local, tribal politics. As the organisation spends more time on the ground (roughly three years) interactions are leading to better understanding, trust is growing and people are more open and less hesitant to be seen with staff.

<sup>27</sup> Donini et al (2006).

**Box 4:****Security: one ANGO's story**

One ANGO that works in many districts of one province has its security policy and instructions provided by the government ministry that runs the particular sector within which they are working. They mainly rely on community acceptance and asserting the right of communities to humanitarian assistance. With an 11-year presence in the province, the NGO is well-known to the Taliban and stresses its impartiality. Despite this, staff are under suspicion and under threat from all sides – the Taliban, the GoA, ISAF and CF – none of which seem to fully accept or respect the NGO's impartial status. Their staff have been imprisoned, beaten and even killed. The main threats to their security come from the Taliban, who think they are spies. Getting embroiled in conflicts arising from tribal rifts has constituted another major source of insecurity.

The NGO staff use military air support to travel to some districts and receive infrastructure support from internationals. They try to remain anonymous and blend in as much as possible – by using local

transport, dressing like local people, and carrying nothing that would implicate them as NGO staff. However, their line ministry insists on signs or logos being displayed wherever activities are taking place.

In their community health meetings with tribal elders, maleks<sup>28</sup> and mullahs,<sup>29</sup> the ANGO staff also discuss security. During such meetings and in their day-to-day work they try to demonstrate their policy of impartial humanitarianism to everyone, and generally have confidence in the goodwill and acceptance of communities. However, this strategy is not always effective, particularly in communities that cannot control the Taliban presence. In general, the Taliban can only establish a presence in areas with weak leadership and tribal disunity, though the NGO also finds it easier to work in areas where the Taliban have families in the community who benefit from the NGO's services. In contrast, it is almost impossible to work in places where the Taliban originate from other provinces or include foreign nationals.

### 3.4 Military impact on civilian identity

*'In some ways the presence of PRTs and the military has constrained the NGOs and created security problems. Before, people were suspicious of NGOs and thought that they share information with the military but now that suspicion is over and people have slowly started to understand that NGOs are here not to support the military but to bring assistance.'*

Local leader, Paktia

*'People can tell the difference between NGOs, UNAMA, PRT and coalition forces. I would not accept that the lines are still blurred. They even can name the NGOs that have worked for a long time in Paktia such as Care, ICRC and others. People are more suspicious about the role of UNAMA.'*

Journalist, Paktia

*'If any NGO wants to show that they are here for development and reconstruction, and are not part of the political game, they must work closely with communities. They should also be sensitive to local customs and culture. We are not saying that all foreigners are our enemies. We have Sikhs, and they are certainly not Muslims and we know that they do not have hidden agendas. We live peacefully with*

28 Traditional local leaders.

29 Religious leader.

*them. But in the case of Americans and their army, you cannot trust them.'*

Tribal leader, Paktia

*'We can distinguish who is NGO and who is PRT and we also know that there are civilians in the PRT. They seem to be dangerous and have hidden agendas. This makes us suspicious.'*

Tribal leader, Paktia

Some Afghan interviewees obviously still see contact between PRTs, NGOs and civilians as a security risk, and indicated that the problem may be one of being tainted by association rather than 'blurring of identities'. One interviewee told us that his relatives in a distant village in Uruzgan have told him not to visit them because he worked at the PRT. One INGO was forced to leave the province, accused of spying for the CF after some Taliban positions they were close to were hit. ANGO interviewees, based in Uruzgan, were worried that recent staff kidnappings have been the result of their cooperation with the PRT, which they try to keep low-key. Although the hostages were recovered through the mediation of elders, staff in the Kabul HQ felt they would not be so lucky next time when the Taliban got wind of their contact with the PRT. In spite of this they still use PRT logistical solutions to get around – for example, to visit flood-stricken areas in mountainous terrain.

At the time of this research, the Afghanistan NGO Security Office (ANSO) reported a rise in recent months of NGO staff being abused by those (identified as 'Taliban') looking for proof to link them with PRTs. There have been reports of raids on NGOs in the province of Ghazni, with intruders looking for evidence of contact with PRTs. Similarly in the east, HIG and Taliban elements are reportedly raiding NGO offices in search of evidence of contact with PRTs and the military, primarily Americans.

*'The risks have increased for our staff in the province. There are two reasons: one is that the local Taliban are not in control anymore and the second is that we*

*lost face because people know that we are cooperating with the PRT.'*

ANGO representative, Kabul

However, notwithstanding the situations described above, it is difficult to identify any consistency in why or when AOGs consider that individuals or agencies have 'crossed the line' in their contact with the international military or civil operations. For example, some interviewees from Paktia asserted that PRTs can travel anywhere and contact anyone without jeopardising the latter's security. PRTs that have been in place for a number of years also employ community members to do menial, clerical, construction and other types of work. They and their families also get incomplete ideas about the life and people inside the PRT, which contributes to a certain normalisation of relations with the PRT as a foreign presence.<sup>30</sup> Such families are not uniformly threatened.

*'The government, PRT, NGOs, they all look exactly the same – they are foreigners to us, even if there are local staff among them.'*

Shura member, Uruzgan

*'We know that the PRT is being commanded by the Netherlands. But the Taliban term everyone involved in aid circles as "Americans". It is the Taliban's policy not to make a distinction between NGOs and American forces or PRTs.'*

Shura member, Uruzgan

The current research also raises the question of whether certain troop-contributing nations are more problematic than others. In Uruzgan, 'American' was a catch-all term used for all military, even the ANA. Even groups who knew that the Dutch had taken over in the province still referred to the military as 'Americans' – in common parlance this now denotes a foreign or non-local (in the case of the ANA) military presence. This lack of distinction in speech was unusual since locals tended to like the Dutch for being respectful, while they disliked the Americans

30 Based on discussions with Afghan families in Lashkargah, with relatives working in the PRT.

for being aggressive. In addition, the clean-shaven ANA donning wrap-around sunglasses and dressed in uniforms which resemble those of the Americans are probably an alien sight for rural Afghans used to seeing Mujahideen and Taliban fighters in local clothes.

Although most interviewees said that they and their communities can distinguish between NGOs, PRT and other military personnel, some said that there was no differentiation between 'outsiders', including local staff of foreign institutions. Similarly, it has been reported by a number of interlocutors that certain members of the Taliban refer to non-Muslims as kafir or infidels. As far as they are concerned, everyone who is not wholeheartedly on their side is a kafir. In contexts in which such elements of the insurgency hold sway, principles of neutrality and impartiality have limited efficacy.

### 3.5 Provenance of assistance

Research in Paktia and Uruzgan suggests that local people do identify differences in assistance channelled through different providers, including military and civilian. Interviewees had a range of views on whether the provenance of aid is important in terms of impact on security. It was clear that under the current circumstances, low-key contact was preferable to visible engagement. The research revealed that communities are desperate for assistance from whichever quarter; however, they are also sensitive to the political and consequent security implications of accepting aid associated with contested military, international, or government agendas.

Following a long history of international assistance, many of the Afghans interviewed were aware who the main aid actors are and what they can deliver. For the most part, those interviewed had clear ideas and perspectives on the different roles of government, NGOs and military. Interviewees generally felt that NGOs should implement development projects and provide humanitarian assistance. In some cases, for example large-scale infrastructure projects beyond the capacity of the

NGOs that they were familiar with, they would say the PRTs should implement such projects. When asked whether they had experience of such projects being implemented by PRTs, they would reply in the negative but that they could not think of anyone else who implements projects apart from NGOs and PRTs. In fact, people are at a loss as to what sort of organisations can implement projects of the type and scale which they now want. Evidently, as part of clarifying NGO identities and handling expectations, communities must be engaged in discussions on what the current range of actors in the Afghan context can provide and what the limitations and implications are for them.

#### 3.5.1 Assistance from the military

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*'We know that there are complaints about what the PRT is doing and we have received complaints about the way they search houses, the lack of transparency in the bidding processes and ultimately the low quality of the reconstruction work.'*

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GoA representative, Kabul

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*'I do not believe [PRTs] are very successful with winning hearts and minds. People still see them as invaders in the south and sometimes stop using the infrastructure they build. Neither do I believe that doing development work or distributing gifts will help them gather intelligence. For example, the PRT built a bridge in Mohammad Agha district, Logar province and people refrained from using it until a group of religious elders were organised to go and preach to the community that using the bridge built by the PRT is not a sin.'*

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Journalist, Kabul

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*'In the first days of the Karzai regime, people had a bad taste in their mouths because of the coalition forces' bombardment. So when they came later on to distribute wheat, people threw that wheat on the fire after they left. But now it is not a problem where the aid comes from.'*

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Religious leader, Paktia

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*'We know the PRT people from their uniforms. If they come and visit a project it means that the project is funded by the PRT. Now people can also recognize PRT people from the emblems on their uniform. For example Australians have the sign of a dog (kangaroo) on their uniforms.'*

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Shura member, Uruzgan

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*'The PRT people come with uniforms and big security and people hate that.'*

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Government employee, Uruzgan

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*'People hate the military and call them Americans. We have examples where people destroyed what the Americans built in Shawak district and let the NGOs work instead.'*

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Journalist, Paktia

Some interviewees stated a clear preference for assistance from people in civilian clothes rather than a military uniform because they know that the responsibilities are different. The presence of uniformed soldiers monitoring or visiting a project indicates that the military are somehow involved; people are keen to distance themselves from the military and do not always wish to receive assistance that can be linked to them. They also indicated that consultation with PRTs had been made difficult because people felt that their lives would be at risk if they were seen to become too familiar with PRT personnel – sustained contact with a PRT would lead to accusations of providing intelligence and therefore decreased security.

Some interviewees indicated discomfort with PRT assistance: they felt that it had 'strings attached' and that people's dire need was being used to force them to provide intelligence. This is against 'Do No Harm' principles: humanitarian assistance is no longer neutral and becomes a part of the conflict context. Assistance linked to the military will often be accepted. However, it is not always welcomed; and is viewed as provided with ulterior motives which can lead to insecurity.

The comments highlight how the international military is not able to draw a line between its military operations and assistance-related activities designed to win consent. Perceptions of the international military amongst local populations do not separate out the international forces 'quasi-developmental' face as embodied by civil-military operations and its aggressive combat operations. As a consequence the assistance provided by PRTs is tainted by the impact of the other activities of the military.

### 3.5.2 Assistance from international donors

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*'It does not matter to the poor where the money comes from. It is only due to provocations and the fears of communities that they sometimes decline assistance from foreigners.'*

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Government employee, Uruzgan

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*'It does not matter where money or aid comes from. Islam does not place any restrictions on this issue.'*

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Religious leader, Uruzgan

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*'Though we understand that international assistance to Afghanistan also has a political dimension based on the vested interests of some Western countries, in general, we don't mind their assistance as long as it is not practically harmful to our Islamic beliefs.'*

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Religious leader, Paktia

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*'Where aid comes from matters. Under the present circumstances and with the mood that communities are in, even if Saudi sends money, people will look at it with mistrust and decline taking it.'*

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Religious leader, Uruzgan

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*'People do not know about the source of the money. Whoever does the assistance, they say it is from a "mowasesa" or organisation.'*

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Shura member, Uruzgan

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*'For pro-government people, who have a certain level of education, it does not matter where funding comes from. They welcome the product and value it. Those who are against the government are looking for an excuse to condemn aid even if it comes from Saudi Arabia.'*

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Shura member, Uruzgan

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*"The country has been badly destroyed. We need reconstruction, it does not matter who is doing it as long as the aid doesn't have strings attached."*

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Paktia, tribal leader

Interviews surfaced a range of views on the provenance of aid. In Paktia interviewees claimed that people value assistance regardless of where it comes from and that they will even end disputes or put tribal conflicts to one side, albeit temporarily, in order to receive development assistance. They stated that 'smart' people would consider it as international assistance to Afghans, while 'idiots' would want to know exactly where it came from and reject assistance from some quarters. Such assertions are laden with a complex web of interest in financial and material gain: tempered by implicit recognition of political and security concerns associated with aid aligned to different political interests. For example, NGOs that engage in programming activities with a political character, such as peace-building, will be asked about their funding sources. This was explained in terms of the belief amongst many Afghan communities that they can discern which Afghan political interests are aligned with different international donor countries and institutions. Rightly or wrongly, many ordinary Afghans believe that specific donor nations back individual Afghan powerholders, national political parties and factions.

Some groups also felt that communities had been bullied into refusing assistance from certain quarters – for example, in areas which are effectively under Taliban control people are wary of receiving assistance from America and Europe. In one area, INGO staff explained that USAID signs were smashed in the night while ECHO signs were left

untouched. The question of Muslim donors was raised, but interviewees felt that there would still be suspicion in some quarters. These discussions made clear that the visibility issue pushed by donors and government – signs, stickers, logos, etc. – can create security incidents for INGOs and ANGOs alike, but do not always do so.

According to ANGO interviewees in Kabul, NGO offices are being attacked for several reasons: general insecurity and growing criminalisation; collaboration with PRTs or the GoA; and receiving funding from the international community which is also supporting the GoA. However, explanations about security are much more nuanced at field level.

### 3.6 Afghan NGO staff

There are major differences between the way ANGOs and INGOs handle security, and within these two broad categories there are further variances.

A serious concern uncovered by the research in Paktia and Uruzgan was the role of 'new-comer' NGOs in Afghanistan, who appear sometimes oblivious to the potential security risks which could arise as a result of contact with PRTs (as highlighted in section 3.2.1). This is placing the safety of those agencies' staff at risk, as well as affecting the security of other NGOs.

Another serious concern is the apparent 'inshallah' culture in ANGO security management. This is compounded by a wider lack of support system for ANGOs on safety and security matters. For example, ANSO does not have many ANGO members. This may be related to the costs of security provision and establishing related systems, such as buying equipment to set up a communication system. There is also a general belief among Afghans that they know the situation better by virtue of being local, that they have access to local networks and can negotiate their way out of a disturbance.

The gaps and weaknesses in Afghan NGO security management approaches appear even more acute at field level. The research in Paktia and Uruzgan

suggests that there is a lack of an open or in-depth interagency discussion on security issues and precautions among Afghans at many levels. Informal one-on-one discussions may occur but these do not always filter back up to Kabul or beyond to affect NGO operations. Mechanisms should be set up to improve communication in this respect.

### 3.6.1 Understanding of risks by Afghan staff

Some interviewees commented on the much higher number of fatalities among Afghans, and wondered whether they were more at risk, being in the field, or were taking more risks in order to access the funding available for work in insecure areas. Afghans working for INGOs appear to be most at risk<sup>31</sup>.

Afghans are on the frontline of NGO implementation and, although they adapt to situations as they have to and tend to opt for a low-profile approach that accommodates existing circumstances, their concept of security appears fraught with risk. This is, in part, the legacy of three decades of war, where people's approach to security has become reactive and short-term rather than proactive and long-term.

It is difficult to say how the growing insecurity in certain areas is affecting the morale of NGO staff. While some international staff may see withdrawal as the only option, for Afghan staff, a salary can mean the survival of immediate and extended family members, and security risks are met with stoicism. All Afghans face many of the same risks in their everyday lives, and thus Afghan NGO staff would not see agency withdrawal as a logical move to reduce insecurity faced by Afghan staff.

It was also evident that taking precautions and planning for certain eventualities among some Afghan staff was highly unusual. For example, ANGO interviewees were reluctant to discuss the steps they would take if an expatriate team member were kidnapped, and often insisted: 'Don't worry. Nothing will happen to you. You are safe here.' Such responses came from risk-averse staff who were

visibly scared for their own safety in other situations, indicating that this may have been a standard response arising in a culture where hospitality rather than security planning is of enormous importance. Alongside many other observations over the past decade, this reaction strongly indicates that foreseeing events and making contingency plans are seen as unnecessary: it is more normal to come up against a security incident and, in the absence of other obvious options, panic. For example, ANGO interviewees had no plans for staff evacuation or a lockdown scenario in case full-scale warfare broke out in their area. Afghans in INGOs often have to attend security meetings with UN agencies, international and Afghan security forces and tribal elders and also consult a great deal with communities. However, there does not appear to be open and in-depth interagency discussion on security issues and precautions among Afghans at provincial level. Informal one-on-one discussions may occur but these do not filter back up to Kabul or beyond to affect NGO implementation and security policies.

### 3.6.2 Profile of Afghan NGO staff in terms of age and experience

Many of those Afghans who currently work for NGOs are young people with English and computer skills. Some of these did not grow up in Afghanistan during the war; some often have little or no direct implementation or field experience; and they tend to have little sense of the institutional and security challenges NGOs have faced during the last three decades – indeed, institutional memory is steadily being lost. They often lack the knowledge to safeguard their own security and negotiate with rural and/or conservative communities, and may display a certain amount of bravado, which is inadvisable. The challenges these ill-prepared younger staff face are also very different from those faced by older staff in previous decades, but there is no acknowledgement of this. An expatriate presence – particularly a highly visible one – generally constitutes a security risk for Afghan staff, while internationals may be put at risk

31 Figures available from Afghan NGO Safety Office

by the lack of preparation and know-how, and the overconfident attitude of younger, less experienced staff or older staff who have 'seen it all'. There is a need for regular security training and drills for local staff to raise awareness of the risks to their own and their charges' safety. Such training can and should incorporate useful indigenous knowledge and practice.

Afghan staff can also be put at risk when there is tribal and community rivalry to get projects. Humanitarian assistance and development is at times linked to namus (already discussed in Section 2.2). Those denied may feel they have to exact a price for perceived 'losses' from local NGO staff.

One final point to consider is that throughout the 1980s and 1990s many organisations operated on a cross-border basis, and both local and international staff had a temporary existence in communities which were not theirs. Afghan staff had much more invested in local acceptance and had to be vigilant about the security environment. Their international colleagues benefited from this, while the presence of internationals provided safety for Afghans to a certain extent. Staff shared the same accommodation and office space, forging close links with each other and allowing internationals to get closer to the Afghan way of thinking and the daily life of a predominantly educated, urban and often Pashtun minority. This is no longer the case: in most offices Afghan staff go home at night, which distances internationals from Afghan daily life. It also leads to a certain 'them-and-us' attitude among Afghan staff, who prefer not to have the added security headache of international colleagues in field offices. The growth of positions based in major urban centres has also resulted in weaker links between urban-based staff and their rural counterparts, as they spend less time in field offices and have less direct dealings with beneficiaries and local counterparts. This naturally impacts on their assumptions about local knowledge, implementation and security.

### Box 5:

#### The power of local elites: a double-edged sword

Local elites have the power to provide or withdraw security. Although neither community concepts of providing security, nor the limitations of such indigenous systems have been fully explored, many NGOs ask local elders for a security guarantee before starting work in their districts. It is a point of pride for leaders to be able to guarantee safety for NGOs and other visitors: it shows the extent of their power, which is increasingly limited by AOGs. Leaders will warn NGO staff of the presence of fighters and advise them when to stay away.

However, this does not always work in NGOs' favour, as illustrated by the following example:

ANGO A explained that ANGO B was given materials to distribute. ANGO B allowed government employees, local leaders and security personnel to 'divert' the material because they were under pressure. As a result, only 5-10 per cent of the material reached its target group. When ANGO A was given materials to distribute, the same elite groups demanded their share, threatening staff. ANGO A staff decided to ignore them and distributed to the target group. As a result ANGO A 'lost the relationships' with the people they turned away and subsequently lost a certain amount of goodwill and security in those communities. They described the local elite as 'addicted' to bullying their way into distributions and taking what they believe is their rightful due. Both kinds of resource transfer produce negative impacts: one for the beneficiaries; the other for the implementers.

## Chapter 4: Expectations, effectiveness and impact

Afghanistan is still paying the price for the rather short-sighted and almost wholesale disengagement which took place in the region at the end of the Cold War. As a result, Afghans do not feel that the international community is there for the long haul and are anxious to see reconstruction and development take place while prospects are still good.

Our research found that the level of exposure to development projects, NGOs and governance processes determined the level of sophistication interviewees demonstrated in expressing their expectations and thoughts about the effectiveness of implementation. In general, Afghans are making trade-offs between small and large-scale projects; short-term and long-term inputs; and development and security needs. Some prefer to hold out for sustainable development and want high-quality results delivered on time, as promised by most implementers. Afghans are wary of being abandoned after experiencing the anarchic forces of civil war which tore apart the lives of consecutive generations.

Following the fall of the Taliban, people had high expectations of modernity and joining the international community after long years of isolation, often with unrealistic timeframes and desired outcomes. Although this has at times led to disappointment, it is generally acknowledged by interviewees that both NGOs and PRTs have implemented some good projects across Afghanistan. Increasing calls for enquiries into the effectiveness, quality and impact of military-funded projects, however, have led the UK's Stabilisation Unit (formerly known as the Post-Conflict Reconstruction Unit), for instance, to commission a review of the effectiveness of PRT QIPS and NATO to carry out an Afghanistan-wide study into the issues.<sup>32</sup>

This chapter explores the quality of military-funded assistance in Afghanistan. The research leads us to agree with the World Bank that, while PRTs still have a role to play in Afghanistan for the time being, 'definite measures should be taken both to manage the risks that they present and to move steadily onto an institutional track which makes them increasingly redundant.'<sup>33</sup>

### 4.1 Sustainability

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*'Development projects are beyond their [PRT] capacity and do not help them in winning hearts and minds either. They have only succeeded in creating publicity for themselves. Now many people know who they are and how much resources they have.'*

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Local leader, Paktia

It was noted during interviews that older, more mature local leaders tended to opt for long-term sustainable development projects, whereas younger interviewees were happy with short-term humanitarian interventions. There is definitely a preference among communities for multi-year programmes with a long-term, sustainable impact, which often rules out PRTs as implementers or fund-providers, as 'national and international actors...cannot predict from one PRT to the next what to expect in terms of expertise, level or sustainability of engagement, or focus (with activities ranging from building schools, wells and clinics, vaccinating children and goats, to handing out humanitarian aid). The different interpretations of the initial PRT concept by PRT commanders has only been magnified as more nations have established PRTs.'<sup>34</sup>

Interviewees showed a preference for skills training and livelihood projects, as well as education, electricity and large-scale infrastructure provision,

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32 The results of this study were not available at the time of writing.

33 World Bank (2007).

34 Hendrickson et al (2005).

such as bridges and extensive roads, which reflects published findings.<sup>35</sup> The World Bank has also recommended that PRTs ‘move away from small-scale community-level projects and initiatives, where the conflicts between local prioritisation and governance and top-down PRT processes are likely to be most pronounced... and focus instead on ‘larger-scale, bulk and link infrastructure, where the need is obvious and process-conflicts are likely to be much fewer.’<sup>36</sup>

Getting people to change agricultural techniques and to use new crops varieties, for instance, cannot be achieved in a matter of months or through simple distributions. It is clearly impossible to have a significant impact in some sectors, such as agriculture in a short timeframe without regular interactions between professionals in the field and communities. However, this does not seem to deter some PRTs from getting involved..

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*‘We cannot say that we need one or another kind of assistance. We need both long-term and short-term projects. It depends on the needs of the people.’*

Local leader, Paktia

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*‘Those who know something prefer long-term projects over short ones. Those who are illiterate obviously prefer getting a few kilos of flour over long-term projects. Take for example the NSP. They dug deep wells for us but if instead they had distributed money, we would have already spent it and we would still be drinking unhealthy water.’*

Shura member, Uruzgan

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*‘Those working for the welfare of communities should place their activities within the frameworks of Islam and the Sharia... I would state that Islam values those who have a skill or earn money through hard work. The Prophet Mohammad, PBUH, says that he who earns bread through hard work is a friend of Allah. Those eating free bread will never feel satisfied. So in accordance with the teachings of*

*Islam, we also support long-term projects which could provide a better livelihood for poor men.’*

Religious leader, Uruzgan

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*‘We have a common saying that “It is better to have less from a sustainable source than having a great deal just once”... We really do not need somebody to distribute biscuits to us and we do not need construction projects that fall down after a year. Most of the projects here in Paktia are of a very low quality. We would really prefer our roads to be built and electricity to be supplied.’*

Tribal leader, Paktia

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*‘We know that the PRT might leave at any time, but NGOs are here to stay with us. They have already demonstrated this.’*

Shura member, Uruzgan

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*‘Though we prefer longer term projects, in view of widespread poverty, we cannot deny the effectiveness of short-term projects.’*

Tribal leader, Paktia

These comments indicate that the sustainability of projects is an important consideration for the local community interviewees in this research.

The issue of sustainability is complicated by the fact that some PRT personnel make promises which they cannot keep in the time they are on the ground and which the next rotation may not want to fulfil, as happened with a hydro-electric power project in Logar; wherein a PRT took over the project after the implementing INGO dropped it due to conflicts within the community, however the next rotation to the PRT did not follow the project through. Such broken promises without adequate explanations do not help build strong relations with communities and lead to reversals in assumed ‘heart and mind’ gains. PRTs also often use contractors who produce substandard work. This impacts on a project’s

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35 See, for example, Donini et al (2006) and World Bank (2007).

36 World Bank (2007).

sustainability, as the work needs to be redone within a short space of time (See section 4.7 )

In contrast, many NGOs work hard to ensure that the impact of their work is sustainable and they put systems in place to include local people – for example, training maintenance personnel for infrastructure and setting up community systems to ensure they are paid. Communities welcome such efforts, as it means they have organisations and individuals to go to if things go wrong or when new problems appear.

## 4.2 Charity versus development

Some PRTs continue to promote the ‘handout mentality’ which NGOs have been working for many years to erase among both beneficiaries and staff. Some INGOs are still struggling to bring some of their Afghan staff away from the charity paradigm and towards the development paradigm, which focuses on the poorest and most vulnerable groups who have been marginalised by the elites that have benefited from almost all assistance for decades. The developmental approach has to address many complexities and it has taken NGOs more than a decade to bring their staff up to speed. Development activities and processes are socially embedded and owned by beneficiaries wherever feasible, and NGO staff are trained to plan for change. The developmental approach involves relatively long periods of staff training and consultations, forming relationships of trust with communities and dealing with conflict as it arises and its attendant headaches.

The charity paradigm, on the other hand, sees everybody as deserving and poor. Unlike the concept of humanitarian assistance, of which rights are an intrinsic part, a charity paradigm is based on a power differential: it is patronising and sees beneficiaries as disempowered victims who should be grateful and beholden for assistance. It makes it ‘worthwhile’ to hand things out and provide services

while ignoring the complexity and consequences of actions. This paradigm has been difficult to shift in the Afghan context. The WHAM mindset is largely premised on a charity approach, which ignores the complexity of any given situation and can create conflict. The PRT learning curve on these issues has been relatively flat in spite of the money and efforts spent briefing personnel and consulting experts.

Some PRTs, with no commitment to the type of institutional development involved in such a charity-to-development paradigm shift, believe they may be in a good place to rapidly move from relief to development mode. This ignores the competencies of assistance agencies – particularly in the empowerment of local communities – as well as the need for seasoned professionals.<sup>37</sup> While it is neither necessary nor advisable for the military to move to a more developmental mindset, there is a need to raise awareness of how charitable acts can undermine NGO activities.

## 4.3 Accountability and transparency

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*‘People can get their rights from NGOs and make them listen to their grievances. We cannot even reach the gates of the PRT, let alone demand something from them.’*

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Shura member, Uruzgan

Many NGOs, especially the more established ones, try to be accountable to their beneficiaries – as a tribal elder from Paktia observed: ‘They cannot simply leave after they mess up.’ As their relations with local counterparts evolve over time, the NGOs are increasingly transparent about programming and contracts. PRTs, on the other hand, have to be secretive about their military aims, and are also accused of not coordinating or cooperating and keeping the details of contracts to themselves.

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37 DANIDA (2006).

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*'It is difficult to say what kind of assistance will help. We had long-term projects but everything has turned to be more like business and has not helped the poor very much. We do not care who is helping us, but it should be without any conditions attached. We would like the government to take the lead in development and reconstruction. The important thing is that we save the funds from corruption and misuse. It does not make any difference whether it is long-term or short-term. What we are concerned with is corruption and the bad quality of work.'*

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Tribal leader, Paktia

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*'The main problem with the PRT is that they keep the cost of the projects secret and we do not know how much money they allocate to their projects.'*

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Government employee, Paktia

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*'PRT forces are here for a short time following their own national policies.'*

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Government employee, Uruzgan

The Commanders' Emergency Response Programme in some PRTs involves resources implemented by civil affairs units. These funds can be substantial and it is difficult to say how much ordinary civilians can influence how they are spent. Decision making is likely to be heavily influenced by interpreters and local interlocutors who also act as impromptu analysts and cultural advisers. It is generally accepted that one has to give a 'percentage' to some interpreters to access resources and get contracts from the PRT. Research has uncovered frequent accusations of corruption among the foreigners in the PRTs, but these were beyond the scope of this research.

ISAF and PRT funding is perceived as being easy to access for those with contacts on the inside, particularly by ANGOs and contractors, because it is thought to involve little or no monitoring, short of ticking a box once the final product is delivered. This sort of money encourages the quick growth of low-

quality local NGOs which rather like weeds thrive while funds rain down and die off as soon as the funding drought approaches. Such organisations do not necessarily have in-roads into the community, programme experience, analysis skills or innovation. Spending money on such organisations does not build local capacity, but tends to waste money and create resentment. Nevertheless, there can be an uneasy compromise if these 'NGOs' are truly local and if the money is indirectly going into the local economy. When some local NGOs and contractors are seen to be 'milking PRTs' for all their worth, this can both tarnish a PRT's reputation and hamper the success of WHAM efforts.

Local populations are canny and have a good idea of how much funding PRTs have available: Afghans currently follow the funding very closely since cost-effectiveness and honest spending are some of the most important considerations for winning over the population. Any indication that donor funding earmarked for Afghanistan is going astray or being wasted is likely to upset people and lead to further cynicism and hostility. Afghans suspect that PRTs' transaction costs are high, so it is important that they produce some kind of acceptable result. Some community leaders also consider transparent, community-based monitoring and auditing structures to be critical, as they mostly want to control resource transfers, ensure that there is good impact and that assistance does not become divisive.

#### 4.4 Contacts and consultations

Communities want direct face-to-face relations and links with outsiders claiming to work for their benefit. Interviewees stressed that consultation and local involvement were very important factors in a project's success. This is less easy in the case of PRTs, where the levels of interaction and follow-up with a community can vary wildly. People feel more confident working with NGOs because of the extensive consultations and follow-ups which usually take place, and because they usually provide evidence that their opinion has been taken into

consideration. As a result, NGOs can negotiate delays in projects and make promises which people know they will keep. Interviewees frequently held up the NSP as a good example of community consultation. Some have had no contact with PRTs, while they have been exposed to NGO work for a number of years. It must be noted that people who had not seen direct benefit from a PRT complained vociferously about the lack of contact, especially if a neighbouring community had received benefits.

Even those PRTs that try to consult NGOs, local leaders and others regularly do not seem to be good at listening or taking lessons learnt on board – possibly because of the formality and brevity of interactions, or because the interaction is just part of the WHAM strategy. Among interviewees who had been consulted by a PRT, many complained of having to provide the same information to an endless line of new people who often repeat the same mistakes their predecessors made. Interviewees felt that new rotations repeat the same questions due to a lack of follow-up on their suggestions, a lack of sincerity, or a ritualistic process which does not yield results. Handover procedures, ensuring that there is institutional memory and passing on lessons learnt differ from PRT to PRT. The best practice seems to be to ensure that PRT commanders and key staff have a decent overlap period and that they are properly briefed in their home country, in Kabul and in the field. Although there are now a number of institutions briefing military personnel before they are sent to the field, their material will need constant revision to keep up-to-date with realities on the ground.

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*'The problem that we face with the PRT is that they don't consult us when selecting a project. They shun our priority projects – for example, they build a road leading to a village while avoid building one which joins one part of a district to another or a road connecting the provincial centre with a district.'*

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Government employee, Uruzgan

PRTs were persistently criticised for having little or no consultation with people beyond short, formal meetings. One shura leader from Uruzgan pointed out that PRT work is not well-known because they do not employ people from the local community for important roles. Even civilian PRT personnel often spend very short periods of time in any locale because they tend to be accompanied by heavily armed escorts who get nervous about drawing fire. As a result PRTs try as much as possible to work through proxies who sometimes turn out to be inappropriate choices. Sedra suggested one way of involving Afghan stakeholders is that a 'government representative should be embedded in all PRTs and the government, along with local community leaders, should participate in the process to determine what projects the PRT undertakes. Providing the government with ownership over the PRT planning process, both during the pre-deployment and main phase, will ensure the legitimacy of the structure.'<sup>38</sup>

Indeed, there was a plan for MoI officials to be embedded in PRTs – officers were recruited and trained, but there was initial confusion over their role, authority over local police chiefs, reporting chains, security clearance, salary, travel arrangements, living conditions in the PRT and access to information. At the time of research there was no evidence of such individuals in the PRTs we visited. However, even if there had been, communities and their leaders have increasingly little trust in the government at present and would not have been satisfied with such an arrangement.

Evidently NGOs are often seen by the military as sources of information on communities and a suitable bridging mechanism, but this can have implications for their security (i.e. being accused of supplying intelligence).

## 4.5 Management of actors

Local Afghan leaders manage their community's relations with the outside world in accordance with a complex web of political, social and economic interests. This is equally true in terms of their relations with NGOs, the military, the GoA, the Taliban and others. The more skilled they are at juggling these relations, the better their own and their communities' chances of survival. In pursuit of these aims, it would seem that Afghan leaders do not always express a general preference for NGOs over PRTs, or vice versa, they pragmatically welcome all comers, observe the outcomes and decide how to manage relations. Resources and risks for themselves and their constituents are balanced depending on a range of factors. Disappointment and mistrust from ordinary people does not necessarily lead to communities shifting wholesale to the Taliban. However, if the leadership becomes disenchanting, or if trust in the leadership is seriously taxed, this creates entry points for the Taliban and other factions.

## 4.6 Landscape of conflicts

Understanding the implications of ongoing low- and medium-level conflicts for NGO programmes; as well as their linkages to broader conflict in the country remains a challenge in Afghanistan. At times, various power-holders, including subnational GoA actors, sometimes manipulate these same conflicts to their own ends. Given the importance of staff safety and security, the primary emphasis in NGO conflict analysis tends to be of high-level armed conflict. The lack of effective rule of law has rendered this landscape of conflicts even more complex – in some cases creating a security minefield for NGOs. The fact that a growing number of conflict resolution organisations are registering with the Ministry of Justice<sup>39</sup> shows that people are seeking out informal conflict resolution services. Those involved have to have acumen in the field, a long-standing reputation, keen insight into the individuals and communities involved and a reputation for impartial judgement.

It is important that NGOs involve local people and institutions in a sensitive fashion to understand these dynamics on the basis of which they can analyse power relations within communities and conduct conflict mappings prior to implementation. NGO staff are, sometimes, shy of stepping into such roles, but it is increasingly difficult to send staff into the field and expect them to work effectively without having some form of conflict resolution awareness, training and tools. However there are also serious risks for newcomers, whether military or civilian, and inexperienced agencies to get involved in conflict resolution without good analysis, skills and tools appropriate to the context.

If the aid sector has spent the last ten years grappling with concepts of 'Do No Harm' and conflict sensitivity, the military also deal with the most obvious armed conflicts and do not always analyse the low-level, long-term disputes that their projects may exacerbate. For example, one PRT built a dam in one district in Paktia following minimal consultation with a limited number of families, resulting in exacerbated conflict between subtribes.

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*'In some cases, [the PRTs] act as conflict resolution bodies because they are thought to be more neutral than the local government structures. These are mostly conflicts between tribes or rival commanders.'*

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GoA representative, Kabul

In some cases PRTs are asked to arbitrate in disputes, but examining the conditions under which this occurs were beyond the scope of this research.

It would seem, however that engaging in conflict mitigation and conflict resolution is a protracted affair, and not an easy task for a military or civil-military operation to engage in: For example, if communities agree in a short time that the conflict has been resolved, indications are that it is quite likely that they have agreed on a ceasefire to receive whatever they think the PRT may be offering.

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<sup>39</sup> The Norwegian Refugee Council is one of the few organisations that focus on resolving local conflicts, especially land disputes, in Afghanistan.

## 4.7 Contractors – ‘the face of greed’

Some NGO and local community interviewees claimed that PRTs can distort the local economy, driving up prices and wages through procurement, tenders, salaries, creating a certain amount of resentment within communities. Their use of contractors also has a negative impact, as the lack of transparency in awarding contracts and the perceived ineptitude in hiring the right people is eroding communities’ goodwill towards PRTs.

Contractors come in many shapes and sizes, some international and many local. In our research, the focus was on local contractors, as interviewees were not aware of, or knowledgeable about, international contractors, particularly those who deal exclusively with the military. Civil servants, warlords, tribal leaders and Afghan NGO staff among others have set up contracting firms and all compete for contracts and funding. Since contractors producing substandard work continue to find projects, it is seen as an avenue for siphoning off funding, and the number of firms is mushrooming. NGO staff accused GoA and UN staff of giving contracts to their own or their friends’ firms which, forewarned, are able to undercut other bids, get the contracts and produce inferior quality work. NGOs and ordinary people felt that much funding was being wasted in this way.

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*‘It is easy to deal with NGOs. We can criticise them and persuade them to be accountable. With contractors we cannot do this because they are all linked to government employees and are not even ready to talk to us.’*

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Tribal leader, Paktia

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*‘Contractors are identified by the low quality of their work.’*

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Shura member, Uruzgan

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*‘In Chamkani we built a girls’ school and it stood there for years. The PRT hired contractors who built a school next door and when a group was brought by helicopter for the opening ceremony, the wind from the blades blew the roof away.’*

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INGO staff Paktia

Contractors were unanimously disliked and despised by the majority of interviewees, even though there are some respectable firms trying to do good quality work. Interviewees complained that contractors:

- misappropriate money and ‘skim’ funds
- do low-quality work at high cost
- can only work honestly if heavily supervised by foreigners
- are generally outsiders in the areas where they work, and so invest and spend their wages outside the target area
- create conflict but are accountable to nobody
- work on contracts that are drawn up in Kabul, making it difficult to hold them to account
- come from outside, do the work and leave, so communities are often unaware of who has done the work
- neither build relations with communities nor work for sustainable impact.

Rather than bringing people and government together and reducing tension, projects implemented by contractors seemed to create tense relations or even generate conflict.

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*‘If the construction companies want to get a good reputation then those who get projects through a transparent bidding process should not contract them out to others. Sometimes the contracts are sold four or five times. It is then the fourth or fifth construction company who actually implement the project and in that case all the others get their share and that affects the quality of the project.’*

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Tribal leader, Paktia

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*'Private companies are notoriously corrupt and people in the PRT seem to be corrupt because they know that the quality of their work is worse and still they continue to give contracts to those private companies. We complained many times, but they come with unreliable excuses or simply ignore us.'*

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Local leader, Paktia

Interviewees gave examples of low-quality of work carried out by contractors at inflated cost, including:

- government buildings in Uruzgan with large cracks in the walls and doors that could not be opened or closed without the application of force on the building's inauguration day
- a number of schools in Paktia districts with badly cracked walls.

Concerns were also expressed during interviews about the lack of accountability for poor quality work, including:

- PRTs ignoring complaints from the governor and communities about the quality of work and inaugurating the infrastructure anyway.
- VIP visitors at opening ceremonies who try to laugh at or shrug off the low quality of the work.

Community leaders explained that, although it is easy to hold NGOs accountable, contractors – especially those with powerful owners or patrons – refuse to answer for their mistakes and crimes. Even governors do not have any power over contractors, and without government buy-in there is no way of regulating this aspect of the construction industry in Afghanistan.

Local contractors often do not get as much work as contractors from Kabul and other locations. The local people interviewed in this research and participants in previous research conducted by the research team are incensed by what they see as daylight robbery committed by contractors. This is particularly the case when contracts, generally

drawn up in Kabul, change hands several times: wherein it is felt that funds are skimmed off at each exchange, leading to a trickle-down effect until reaching a low-quality contractor left with a small amount of money to implement a substandard project. A large part of people's frustration is based on not knowing the amount of funds being allocated for a project in the first place and feeling short-changed as a result. The general lack of consultation with community leaders or community monitoring systems to control contracted-out projects generates a great deal of mistrust, resentment and eventually conflict.

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*'People consider all of those involved in the aid sector as PRT people, and since the PRT implements projects through dubious and corrupt contractors, people consider all aid actors as corrupt spies.'*

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Religious leader, Uruzgan

Bad contractors spoil the reputation not only of the PRTs who employ them, but also of the NGO sector in general because the two have been conflated. Many interviewees used the terms contractor and NGO interchangeably and had to be asked further questions before they would differentiate between the two. Blurring the lines between NGOs' and contractors' identities has created as much 'bad blood' as confusion between military and humanitarian personnel did some years ago. The use of contractors is generally diminishing goodwill in communities, firstly towards PRTs who are seen to be wasting money by contracting them and secondly towards NGOs, whether they are contracted by PRTs or not. It is therefore important for NGOs to find ways to differentiate and distance themselves from contractors as far as possible.

## Chapter 5: Governance and security

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*'Without the government you cannot think of development and a peaceful life but I do not mean this government. We have to change it and make it transparent.'*

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Tribal elder, Paktia

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*'There are different views about the PRTs. Sometimes communities ask for PRTs to go to their provinces and believe that it will bring funding and projects. This happens particularly in the provinces of the north while in the south people want them to leave.'*

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Civil society representative, Kabul

ISAF's mission statement defines its tasks as: 'assisting the Afghan government in extending its authority across the country, conducting stability and security operations in co-ordination with the Afghan national security forces; mentoring and supporting the Afghan national army; and supporting Afghan government programmes to disarm illegally armed groups.'<sup>40</sup> This is reinforced by the PRT mission statement 'to assist the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to extend its authority, in order to facilitate the development of a stable and secure environment in the identified area of operations, and enable Security Sector Reform and reconstruction efforts.'<sup>41</sup>

There remains a considerable amount of scepticism on the part of non-military actors that an international military force can promote the outreach of the GoA, rather than marginalise or make it seem subordinate to military wishes. There is also a question mark over the military's ability to show true alignment with GoA objectives, which may compete or clash with the foreign policies of the nations involved. This was echoed in interviews with Afghans, who seem to have less faith in the ability of their own government.

There is no doubt that the Afghan government is still weak, especially at subnational level, where the effectiveness of their provincial presence is debatable. However, the perception that the Taliban fill the vacuum where government presence is weak or contested is a simplistic one that ignores the sophistication of Taliban social engineering and psychological operations (psyops), as well as the length of time it takes for cumulative factors, mostly the misdemeanours of GOA personnel, to lead to districts falling to the Taliban and other AOGs. The fact that some analysts generally equate GOA 'presence' with infrastructure, projects and services, signals a belief that a quick gesture can eliminate long term resentment. This, in turn, leads to the argument that PRTs should urgently implement where NGOs cannot. This view also suggests that NGOs benefit from the impact of the military's presence, as they can roll out development in the wake of AOG clearance and/or WHAM activities.

It is evident that the government loses credibility every time a promise is not kept, but how much do PRT implementation and WHAM attempts help the GoA to establish a credible presence? In Uruzgan, where the security situation was dire, many interviewees felt that projects and development work, although welcome, were pointless and would remain so until the security situation is previously established. According to most Afghan interviewees, the idea that development leads to stability and security is contrived. In fact more interviewees linked security to improved governance and the removal of unsavoury characters from positions of power rather than the roll-out of small infrastructure projects.

It has been argued that governance reform should preferably be led by civilian actors, particularly the central government and UNAMA. The military have argued that the 'civilian-only' position is difficult to apply in areas that are as insecure as Helmand, where UNAMA does not have an operational presence and civilian agencies are severely restricted in their ability to operate openly and in support of

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40 [www.nato.int/issues/isaf/index.html](http://www.nato.int/issues/isaf/index.html)

41 Statement by Mitchell Everett Shivers, US Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Central Asia: testimony to the House Armed Services Committee Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan, 4 October 2007.

central or provincial government. However, there are cases where PRTs have increased their civilian capacity in order to facilitate provincial government reform and linkages to central government development strategies. Examples include:

- the Dutch PRT in Uruzgan province, where governance issues are dealt with by civilians and CIMIC people accompany any civilian-led delegations to visit GoA officials
- the Canadian PRT in Kandahar province, which facilitates outreach by central government to local communities under its 'Confidence in Governance' programme – for example, by providing secure escorts for visits
- cooperation with PDCs and other coordination mechanisms at local level
- the PRT in Helmand province, where civilian governance advisors are deployed.

In all these cases, the ability of civilians to implement programmes has been hampered by access and security issues. Activities and approaches are still basic and superficial, leading to critiques of window dressing from a variety of commentators: 'PRT activities enabled the promotion of an appearance of progress, which distracted from the dire state of governance in many provinces, but about which there was little if any political will, either nationally or internationally, to take more effective action.'<sup>42</sup>

There seems to be a growing disenchantment with the foreign military presence among Afghans. PRTs may soon find themselves under similar scrutiny as NGOs, which suddenly found themselves put under the microscope, and subject to constant harassment in the press and which were eventually 'regulated' under the NGO law. For the time being, the international military presence is seen as a 'necessary evil' because of the inadequacy of the ANA and ANP to tackle insurgency, terrorism and crime as well as interference from Afghanistan's neighbours. Afghans generally see a clear role for PRTs in security sector reform (SSR), so long as it is thought through and executed correctly.

Meanwhile, the international military is suffering from close contact with a government that is viewed by many Afghans as discredited and corrupt – indeed, some ISAF advisors confided that PRTs feel that getting rid of the most egregious cases of government dysfunctionality will improve government credibility. Although the government-PRT relationship is outside the scope of this report, our research did raise questions about the logic of implementing projects to boost support for the present government when it is so unpopular in these communities.

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*'Actually it is the PRT and UNAMA who are governing. The government is very weak and looks to the PRT. That is really bad for the government. It is against our constitution.'*

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Tribal leader, Paktia

In addition, PRTs are increasingly seen by some communities as vying for power with local government, a development which has contributed to the MoI directive that prevents local government officials and chiefs of police from visiting PRTs (see Annex 2). Local government officials also complain of difficult interactions in some provinces – particularly when it comes to coordination, discussed in Section 5.1.

According to the World Bank, the most recent edition of the PRT handbook emphasises that PRTs play a crucial role in occupying the vacuum created by a weak government presence, thus deterring agents of instability.<sup>43</sup> The handbook stresses that the PRT is 'neither a combat nor a development institution...[but] a civil-military institution that is able to penetrate the more unstable and insecure areas because of its military component and is able to stabilize these areas because of the combined capabilities of its diplomacy, military and economic components.' The World Bank defines this as providing 'substantial latitude for the PRTs to pursue a wide range of activities in the areas in which they operate.'<sup>44</sup> It is precisely this ambiguity created by

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42 Stapleton (2007).

43 World Bank (2007).

44 World Bank (2007).

the definitions that leads to tensions, misunderstandings and, at times, superficial approaches.

## 5.1 Civilianising PRTs

The debate on civilianising PRTs is on a backburner. There has been little conclusive research on the impact of a civilian presence in PRTs. Although some PRTs are still civilian-run, it was felt by interviewees, some military and some NGO, that since the launch of ISAF X the policy has been one of progressive militarisation, with civilians increasingly excluded from ISAF processes, with the military showing less civilian points of reference and less interest in NGO contribution. Candid exchanges in formal and informal settings have been replaced by statements which are read out to NGOs and other non-military groups at public events while extolling the virtues of civilianisation. The NGO observer position on the Executive Steering Committee, assisting coordination between COM ISAF and the MoI, has been removed. An ISAF interviewee admitted that the civil interface is currently a low priority for the military – there are even claims that the military is deliberately pushing out civilian actors in some areas to get a monopoly on service provision and more direct contact with those who may harbour armed opposition elements. Rigby (2006) describes the danger of this creeping culture of militarism as a ‘belief that reliance on military force and violence is a legitimate means of pursuing interests. This is one of the paradoxes at the heart of military involvement in peace building. As such it is perhaps important to be reminded that the threats to human security stem not so much from conflict but from the violence involved in the pursuance of conflict.’<sup>45</sup>

Yet there are signs that some PRTs are civilianising: in Uruzgan, the PRT is putting policy, content and functional specialists under the civilian representative, while reconstruction goals are determined by the Dutch Ministry of Development Cooperation and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in collaboration with the GoA. Small funds are available

for CIMIC activities under the military. Despite such changes, all PRTs remain overwhelmingly manned by military personnel.

## 5.2 Coordination

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*‘We have also noticed that the PRTs dominate in the provinces, which undermines the legitimacy of the subnational governance structures in provincial capitals. The PRTs are not coordinating with line ministries and therefore the ANDS [Afghan National Development Strategy] secretariat and some ministries complain about duplication of projects.’*

GoA representative, Kabul

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*‘Previously we had coordination problems. They would build a school anywhere they liked based on the request of a certain community. After a lot of work, we have finally convinced the PRT to build school buildings in accordance with our master plan. They have also accepted that they will build schools according to our technical plans and specifications and that they will give us a role in monitoring the construction work... The 50 schools that the PRT is constructing are rated as “low-cost” schools, which means they will use wooden beams for the roofs. Since Paktia has metres of snow in winter, those schools will not last long.’*

Government employee, Paktia

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*‘We have always raised the point that there should be some coordination and that has still not been achieved. The PRT says that is going to cooperate. [Their representatives] come to meetings and talk generally about their projects but do not want to go into details. We do not know how much they spend and who is actually going to implement them. In some cases they are giving contracts to private construction firms at unbelievably high costs – for example, they contracted out a tube-well for US\$8,000 while we can do it for US\$2,000.’*

Government employee, Paktia

45 Rigby (2006).

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*'Now we hope that [the PRT] will gradually start spending their funds within the framework of the ANDS. They seem inclined to do so and have promised to but have not put it in practice. We have asked them to work through the CDCs. In some cases they have started to help CDCs, but are not consulting them on major projects.'*

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Government employee, Paktia

'The main problem with the PRTs is that they keep the cost of projects secret and we do not know how much funds are allocated to their projects. The [local coordination] meetings have already started and we hope we will be able to tackle some problems. It is going well for the time being.' Local leader, Paktia

Coordinating humanitarian and development assistance has been a thorn in the side of the GoA, donors and others since the fall of the Taliban. The lack of a strong Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) presence – specifically for civil coordination – has not helped the situation, while the endless parade of coordination mechanisms and blueprint guidance documents have not prevented wastage and replication at ground level. One of the latest additions to coordination mechanisms is the Policy Action Group set up in July 2006. All line ministries, PRTs, NATO, National Security Council and donors participate in the group's weekly and monthly meetings. Zalmay Rasool, the head of the National Security Council, chairs the weekly meetings and President Karzai chairs the monthly ones. It works to improve the quality of reconstruction and procurement procedures and to coordinate development and security efforts. However, the research found that the impact of such bodies is not always felt beyond Kabul.

Some ISAF interviewees suggested that the accusations of lack of coordination by PRTs could partly be explained by the fact that some had not yet learnt to say 'no'. Regarding coordination with GoA

programmes, the World Bank adds that: 'Insofar as PRTs continue to provide resources outside the government budget, they need to ensure maximum alignment with it. This involves producing accurate and timely information on project costs and details and ensuring that government inputs are accurately costed, particularly salary and operating costs once the project is completed.'<sup>46</sup>

PDCs have been created to facilitate the work of provincial-level government in coordinating and monitoring development assistance and projects. Interviewees in Paktia complained that, in spite of participation in PDC meetings and pressure from the Ministry of Economics to coordinate activities to fit with national programmes such as ANDS, there are still transparency and coordination issues on the ground with PRTs. For example, the governor of Paktia complained that there are no staff for five PRT-built clinics because they were not in Ministry of Public Health plans. He is now under pressure from the PRTs to convince the ministry to send personnel and from the communities to pay for guards for the buildings.

It is clear that PRTs are not the only problem – some participating Afghans already regard the PDCs as venues where people go, talk and posture, but that do not actually change anything. People also believe that some provincial governors and other government figures only attend the meetings to get contracts for their own firms and to get their hands on the money.

Coordination processes consistently suffer from glitches and breakdowns, as PRTs, government and NGOs continue to duplicate work in some areas. There are also issues related to different interests in and approaches to coordination – for example, with PRTs gathering intelligence, NGOs aiming to reduce replication, GoA representatives wishing to follow the money and different groups pushing personal contracting firms.

Internationally, UN OCHA has a natural and accepted lead in facilitating the civmil relationship. In Afghanistan, INGOs look for UNAMA humanitarian coordinators and civmil officers to carry out that function, but this complicates issues further, given UNAMA's integrated mission for political purposes and reconstruction. As a result, UNAMA is not always seen as a neutral and impartial player able to prioritise humanitarian principles, act on human rights violations, or be in a position to criticise the international military or government if called on to do so.

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*'The military and UNAMA are apparently not showing that they interfere in governance issues, but we know that it is they who are governing. They decide what should happen. Some people contact them, but it is normally the governor who represents us and is in direct contact with them. We have tried to contact them and no one can stop us but we know that they are just nodding and do not take us seriously.'*

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Tribal leader, Paktia

OCHA and UNAMA together are tasked with strengthening the civmil capacity in Afghanistan, with the assistance of the Norwegians to fund more coordination posts in the provinces. Nevertheless, OCHA is overstretched at the international level and therefore unable to answer all calls to assist in civmil training, coordination, communication and doctrine development. Yet it remains the most natural home for this function and should therefore be strengthened rather than replicated within another body. Donors would do well to fund additional civmil posts within NGOs to facilitate national debate, and within OCHA for international progression. Ironically, the UK's Department for International Development has recently decided to cease funding a dedicated civmil position.

### 5.3 Governance

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*'People are like a mirror and reflect the activities and behaviour of the PRT. If people are not happy with the PRT, it means the PRT is not doing a good job. People from Gardez still bring up the example of a former governor, Faiz Mohammad Khan. He served this province in an exemplary way... [solely funded by] the duties collected on firewood taken to Kabul. Now people ask why today's rulers can't provide a better service with all the money they get from the international community. That is something that PRTs should think deeply about.'*

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Tribal leader, Paktia

In a research interview with the head of the newly formed IDLG, Jelani Popal reiterated the message of wanting to strengthen government at subnational level. He asked why, for instance, people do not stop the Taliban from entering a village. He saw the problem as a lack of credibility for (at times) corrupt local administrations and as a perception among local communities that the Taliban can stand by their word and deliver. It is such logic – that sees simple delivery of infrastructure and services as the solution to win respect – that drives PRT incursions into humanitarian space and assistance activities: if the government and its proxies can deliver what they promise, then communities would presumably support the former and reject hostile incomers. However, this view fails to take account of a range of other dynamics at ground level: the complicated interactions which take place on the ground; the cynicism of communities after three decades of violence; the sophistication shown by ordinary Afghans when articulating what accountable and transparent government means; and the presence of heavily armed foreign nationals. Instead it reduces these elements to a simple matter of delivering inputs and services, sometimes of dubious quality, arguing that someone has to implement such projects, and if it is not NGOs, then the task should presumably be taken up by PRTs.

It is painfully clear that establishing the legitimacy of the government is essential to successful stabilisation. While some NGOs have helped improve the image and extend the reach of the GoA in a number of ways – for example, through service delivery in health, education and the NSP, there is little clarity and coherence on how the PRT presence helps the GoA. The US military's track record in filling state institutional and security vacuums following conflict – in Haiti, Somalia, Kosovo or Iraq, for example – is not good, and NATO nations under ISAF are not faring much better. Overall, the military's role in nation building and the patchy approach to assisting state building is running into difficulty in Afghanistan. ISAF is not in full command of the PRTs, which also vary from one iteration to another, making it difficult to pinpoint coherent strategies on how they will assist the GoA. Additionally, each nation has a different interpretation of how they should support the GoA. It is unclear what the general PRT strategy for supporting the GoA is, and the PRT's role in extending GoA outreach is increasingly contested by locals.

### 5.3.1 Consultation and transparency

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*'We are very satisfied with the NSP project and that is a real example of consultation.'*

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Tribal leader, Paktia

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*'If we let the elders work and have full authority, they can even talk to the Taliban and rehabilitate them, provided our decisions are binding and the international forces and the government respect them. We see governors coming in and being corrupt. But when the elders want to reveal this, nobody listens.'*

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Tribal leader, Paktia

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*'Corruption is rampant and government posts are up for sale. When somebody pays for a government*

*post, he certainly tries to make the money back from all these projects. Governance is all a business now.'*

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Tribal leader, Paktia

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*'The government has failed miserably in maintaining rule of law...because government people are in a hurry to fill their pockets and go on to loot another province. They look at everything in the short term.'*

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Tribal leader, Paktia

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*'The government should listen to the grievances of people. It should control price hikes, corruption and vulgarity.'*

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Religious leader, Paktia

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*'As a matter of fact all [PRT-related] contracts are being awarded in the centre. We only know through other sources that a contractor has come to implement a project.'*

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Government employee, Uruzgan

Community consultation, transparency over budgets, improving work quality and transparent bidding processes all improve relations with the public. Interviewees held up a transparent and accountable government that consults closely with local leadership as the ideal model for governance, but felt that the current government falls far short of that ideal, lacking the necessary human resources to tackle the challenge of handling development, governance and security, while the culture of governance is marred by corruption. They also felt that elements within the government continue to prey on the population. For example, a district governor imprisoned all the maleks (local leaders) in Khash Uruzgan, asking them each to provide a sheep or 8,000 Afghanis (US\$160) because he wanted to present a gift to the provincial governor who had recently returned from the Hajj. In a similar tale the governor of Charchinu district jailed people for fighting, and extorted a bribe from each in addition to 1,500 Afghanis (US\$30) per night for their stay in jail. Such stories were common.

It is hard for ordinary people to report such cases to the PRTs, whose incumbents are around for such a short time, surrounded by high security, on patrol and shielded by interpreters. Even if they do gain access, the PRT may not be able to react to end such behaviour. PRTs are better at winning the hearts and minds of Afghan elites and tend to deal with the more dominant tribal and social groupings who control the local political and security apparatus, thus often reinforcing the status quo. Additionally, where PRTs pander to elite desires, NGOs are often under pressure to follow suit. This plays into the hands of those opposition groups who are skilled at using grievances as a way to destabilise the political status quo.

### 5.3.2 GoA-NGO relationship

Humanitarian relief and protection have been handed over to a government which often appears unprepared or unwilling to deal with natural disasters and other emergencies. GoA staff seem to barely understand humanitarian space and do not always recognise humanitarian principles. At the same time, however, they continue to keep NGOs largely out of that space and can even impede their activities. The former Minister of Planning, Ramazan Bashardost's highly publicised campaign against NGOs made an impression on the Afghan public, who started voicing concerns about NGO corruption and costs. Bashardost became an advocate for a government which was hostile to NGOs and saw them as rivals in credible service delivery and for international donor funding.

Although many high-level GoA staff come from NGO backgrounds and the assistance sector continues to act as a major capacity builder in the Afghan context, the GoA has issued no statements or strategies either in support for NGOs and assistance organisations or recognising their past and present contributions. If NGOs are going to continue rolling out national programmes, it is vital they lobby to elicit more substantive government support for NGO operations, and that the GoA is more active in ensuring that a generally secure environment exists for their work.

### 5.3.3 GoA-PRT relationship

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*'What kind of guests are these people? Guests are not like these foreigners. They have all the authority that a host should have. They now perform the duties of the host and treat us, the people of Afghanistan, like guests!'*

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Religious leader, Paktia

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*'We cannot criticise the PRT people because they are the masters and hold the power. The governor is supporting them. The governor is doing this because he sees his future in the existence of the PRT.'*

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Government employee, Paktia

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*'We do not have capable people in the government. The PRT has more control while the government seems to be very weak and subordinate to the PRT. Sometimes the governor tries to be gatekeeper to the PRT and does not seem happy if the elders go and meet PRT people.'*

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Tribal leader, Paktia

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*'Whenever we need funding for doing something here we ask the governor and he then asks the PRT to help instead of asking our central government or finance ministry.'*

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Local leader, Paktia

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*'The commander of the PRT is actually the governor. Most of the complaints go to the PRT and UNAMA and they interfere in governance. They even have a strong hand in hiring and firing directors of line ministries. The governor is quite scared of those who are believed to have close relations with the UNAMA or the PRT.'*

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Journalist, Paktia

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*'In a nutshell, PRTs create a provincial government presence and increase popular support.'*

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ISAF personnel

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*'On the surface it is the government who is showing off, but in fact it is the PRT and UNAMA who are involved in the governance.'*

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Tribal leader, Paktia

Where PRTs are seen to have large amounts of money, the provincial government often complains that they are having a destabilising effect by becoming more influential than the governor and his staff. Where PRTs are not spending money, governors complain that they have been burdened with a poor PRT. In Paktia, the provincial government was felt by interviewees to have no control over UNAMA and the PRT, but was still seen to jealously guard access to them because of the resources they commanded. Seeing funding controlled by others is a sore point for many in subnational government, since it highlights their lack of power, influence and effectiveness as leaders. Decentralising a certain amount of donor funds to PRTs has not improved relations, however: those holding the purse strings have legitimacy and the inability of subnational governance structures to command such funds underlines the lack of faith donors and central government have in them. GoA interviewees in Kabul suggested that PRTs are approached by people to implement projects because they are seen as having much more resources at their disposal.

People do not see the relationship between the local government and PRTs as one of equals. There have been rumours of some PRTs meddling in governance, removing or appointing governors and supporting factions rather than acting in an advisory role. The ability to control projects funds (rather than implementation and final outcome) underlines a group or individual's status, power and influence. Some governors wield power by mobilising their patron-client networks, based on tribal or other relations, while those who are seen as too close to PRTs appear to wield no real influence. It is rumoured that even President Karzai has complained that some police chiefs are influenced and guided by PRTs, while their relations with governors are strained. The government has been worried enough

about this to issue the directive preventing local government officials and chiefs of police from visiting PRTs (see Annex 2). Interestingly, this image of PRTs as the dispensers of funding and projects in some areas has also sidelined NGOs. However, it has not necessarily reduced government criticism and competitiveness with NGOs at subnational level.

Some interviewees complained that PRTs do not consult the GoA when selecting or monitoring projects – a fact that does not lend credence to the notion that PRTs empower government and promote its role or visibility. Interviewees also felt that PRT activities had no impact on government popularity and did not address the real needs of the people. It was interesting to note that people are impressed when they see that PRTs do good works. However, they do not always make the connection that they are there on behalf of the GoA, and when this is spelled out, the association seems artificial to them.

The general perception of an emasculated local government which can only supplicate or make suggestions to the PRT has profound consequences in a country with a history of troubled relations between subnational and central government. The World Bank quite correctly recommends that 'each PRT commander should develop a condition-based plan for phasing his/her PRT out... [with] their own demise as their core objective'.<sup>47</sup> These should include key indicators, concrete conditions and a plan for how they are to be achieved. It should also be noted, however, that the current crisis in subnational governance institutions in some areas and the growing security threats means that such a phasing out would probably take longer.

## 5.4 Security

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*'May god forgives my sins; but there will be security complications if the PRT leaves.'*

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Religious leader, Paktia,

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47 World Bank (2007).

As early as 2002, Kofi Annan stated that ‘the most serious challenge today facing Afghanistan remains the lack of security.’ In the same year President Karzai asked the UN Security Council for assistance to support the strategy ‘for the creation of a national army and a national system for security by translating international pledges into concrete contributions.’<sup>48</sup> By January 2003, CARE International was warning of a ‘security vacuum in Afghanistan’, a situation that has since that time steadily deteriorated: recent events in particular tend to indicate that the GoA is not in control of security issues.

Although it is widely agreed that Afghans should decide the nature of military engagement in their sovereign territory, interviewees indicated that the general feeling is that they are on a very uneven playing field with the international military presence. Some claimed that back in 2001/02, Afghan military interlocutors – who were predominantly from the north and therefore preoccupied with the ethnic balance of power and the return of the Taliban – agreed to everything that was proposed by incoming international counterparts. The GoA is now trying to renegotiate the terms of engagement, but it is difficult to claw back ground which they feel they lost during that period.

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*‘If children could go to school with freedom, and traders move between places easily, that would be an indicator of good security.’*

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Government employee, Uruzgan

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*‘When I was a child we ate very ordinary food like yogurt and corn bread, but had no worries about our safety or whatever might happen the day after. Now we have a variety of good food, but never enjoy it and always worry about what will happen next. I want those times back. I want to move around freely. I want to sleep serenely without the anxiety that comes with hearing gunfire.’*

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Shura member, Uruzgan<sup>49</sup>

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*‘If I could move around freely and not be bothered by the Taliban anymore at night and by the government during the day, that would be security.’*

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Shura member, Uruzgan

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*‘Leaders who care will provide security for their people.’*

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Shura member, Uruzgan

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*‘If you build schools or clinics, it doesn’t bring security. What’s the use of spending all this money?’*

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Shura member, Uruzgan

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*‘In my humble opinion, people prefer the PRT since its work is very positive and involves a lot of money which NGOs don’t have. People therefore prefer the PRT over the government and NGOs. But still, those schools built by the PRT are being burnt by spoilers so people ask that instead of spending so much funding on schools which will be burnt later, why doesn’t the PRT spend that money to improve the security situation?’*

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Religious leader, Uruzgan

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*‘Security will not come by force alone. Having the right people in government is the way forward.’*

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Shura member, Uruzgan

#### 5.4.1 National police and army

The development of a strong army and a stable and capable police force is an important part of establishing rule of law, which is key to state building. A recent report on reforming the police in Afghanistan stated that ‘a trusted law enforcement institution would assist nearly everything that needs to be achieved in the country from security, through gender rights and minority rights, to building investor confidence and development goals.’<sup>50</sup>

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48 Statement by President Hamid Karzai at the 57th Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, 12 September 2002, New York.

49 This interviewee was in his 60s or 70s.

50 International Crisis Group (August 2007).

Yet disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration in post-Taliban Afghanistan have largely been fraught with difficulties. The disbandment of illegal armed groups (DIAG) is struggling and, though SSR is making ground, progress is not fast enough. Also, the 'lead nation' approach – with Germans and Americans spearheading the training of armed forces – 'has not served Afghanistan well, resulting in the absence of a comprehensive strategy to reform and rebuild the army, police and judiciary, within the framework of disarmament.'<sup>51</sup> The GoA has failed to protect people against internal threats to their safety and the ANA, effectively a 'national contingent of the international effort',<sup>52</sup> is perceived as being unable to protect them from external threats. Security is a priority for people and many interviewees felt that they and their families cannot even perform the basic functions of life due to current levels of insecurity in some parts of the country.

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*'This province is a breeding ground for Taliban recruits. It is the root of the problem. If the government wants to address this issue, they should support our own armed forces. Right now we have only one district under our control (Dehrawod) and we [have to send them] supplies via helicopters as the roads are controlled by the Taliban. The problem is that our forces are armed only with light weapons while the enemies possess 82mm long-range guns.'*

Government employee, Uruzgan

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*'Frankly speaking, people hate the government presence, in particular the ANP, more than the international forces.'*

Journalist, Paktia

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*'The police are a big headache. The ANA is quite good and we do not have any cases where people have complained about them. People in Paktia prefer 'arbakis'<sup>53</sup> because they are our own people and the whole tribe is behind them. It is not the*

*arbaki but the whole tribe [who is] responsible for misconduct and any other crimes committed by their arbakis.'*

Local leader, Paktia

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*'Generally, security is good. People do not have such a bad perception of the ANA –they are much better than the police. Still, we are a bit worried about the way they use their resources. You can see pickups going and coming to Kabul with one or two soldiers. That is a waste of resources and I think they should control it.'*

Tribal leader, Paktia

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*'The ANP is an entirely corrupt force. They are involved in extortion, bribery, smuggling and kidnappings. The ANA is good, but the people prefer arbakis. They are from the same area as the people and will not dare to do anything wrong. If they get involved in any crimes, then it becomes a personal vendetta and none of them would take such risks.'*

Journalist, Paktia

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*'The ANP is a problem itself and people hate it. The national army can be trusted and have treated the public well. The ANP smuggle and are involved in robberies and then they simply blame the Taliban. People are fed up with both the government and the Taliban. We dislike both of them. I believe that if we get honest people in government they will receive a great deal of support from people.'*

Tribal leader, Paktia

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*'People like the arbakis but we lost a very good opportunity. The central government did not support arbakis at the beginning and now it is difficult to get them ready to fight against the Taliban.'*

Tribal elder, Paktia

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51 International Crisis Group (August 2007).

52 Interview with security sector organisation director, Kabul.

53 Local tribal militias mostly used in southeast Afghanistan.

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*'The police are not doing their job. They loot houses and are involved in other criminal cases. The ANA is relatively good but still you can not trust it as a sustainable force because they are paid and if the government is unable to pay them they may disappear immediately. The arbaki is the most reliable security force here in Paktia.'*

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Tribal leader, Paktia

In a 2007 study, the International Crisis Group found that 'Afghanistan's citizens more often view the police more as a source of fear than of security,'<sup>54</sup> reflecting the sentiments expressed in the quotes above. It is clear that local security forces still have a long way to go in gaining popularity and that the government is seen to be doing little to improve security. People have much more interaction with the ANP than the ANA, and yet the police, if present and effective, are most often local, sometimes using their power to settle old scores and predate on the local population. To further compound problems, police recruits are often uneducated, do not always receive their salaries and are given only light arms considering the task they have to perform and the opponents they face. The ANA have also been known to engage in taking advantage of their power but much less than the ANP. Some interviewees complained that the choice of tribes sent as police and soldiers to Uruzgan was creating problems. It was also emphasized that the character of forces is determined by the choice of commander.

Overall, criminality is rife and it is increasingly difficult for locals to distinguish between the Taliban, criminal elements and GoA security forces posing as the Taliban. All seem to engage in the destruction of state property and attack members of the business, assistance and other communities, not only as soft targets in the struggle to destabilize government but simply because they know they can.

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*'Paktia is said to be a land of 'jirgas',<sup>55</sup> and this system has helped us a great deal in maintaining the security of schools. Tribes have deployed their own arbakis to make sure schools buildings are safe. They do it voluntarily, though, [and] we do not make any financial contribution to them. We have also formed community-based committees to ensure the security and safety of the schools in all areas where we work.'*

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Government employee, Paktia

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*'We have 104,000 students in the province – both girls and boys. Paktia is the first province in Afghanistan to have an all-girls madrasa, with 250 girl pupils in the Rahmat Khail area. Ironically, even very conservative people in the area encourage girls' schooling. Fortunately we have not had any school-burning cases so far.'*

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Government employee, Paktia

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*'It is the people and tribes who have helped build security. I see very little role for the government and the PRT... We need the government to help, but we also know that this government is extremely weak.'*

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Tribal leader, Paktia

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*'I think [that] if the PRT leaves, security will improve. Wherever they go, you see insurgency activity and bomb blasts.'*

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Tribal leader, Paktia

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*'The PRT does not help promote security – I would say it is doing the opposite. It is the tribes that have maintained the security of the province.'*

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Tribal leader, Paktia

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*'In some areas the Americans themselves create insecurity and some would say they are also supporting the Taliban indirectly to maintain the status quo.'*

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Local leader, Paktia

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54 International Crisis Group (August 2007).

55 Tribal gathering to resolve disputes or make decisions.

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*'Generally, security is good in Paktia. We have just got problems in two districts – Garda Serrai and Zormat. Here in Gardez we are more scared of suicide bombers and the subsequent reaction of the Americans.'*

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Tribal leader, Paktia

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*'Instead of thinking about pulling out, foreign troops should think about improving their performance. They should fill the gaps, where due to their own mistakes, insurgents are finding a place to breed.'*

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Religious leader, Paktia

The government has an important role, not only in providing security, but in protecting people's namus or honour – an important part of human security for Afghans and a critical aspect of Pashtunwali or Pashtun customary law. Part of the problem is that the government has been unable to protect Afghans from being preyed on not only by those within its own ranks but by criminals and from the violence of the Taliban and the international military as well. It has also failed to preserve the integrity of people's namus in a number of cases.

#### 5.4.2 Tribal security

Interestingly, security in some areas of Paktia was being taken care of to some extent by tribal leaderships. When tribes have a coherent and strong leadership they can protect their territorial integrity. In communities, feeling strengthened and served by a strong sense of identity, leaders and people engage in processes which help them mutually reinforce each other's power. The result is that every individual feels the responsibility to ask any stranger what their business is in their area and security improves. This stops Taliban and other types of infiltration while providing an enabling environment for others such as NGOs.

In areas where this is the case, the PRT's security role needs to be modified to ensure that it does not

jeopardise such systems which can be fragile and under threat. Where people have been taking a proactive role in maintaining security, claims that the PRT movements and actions are creating insecurity in their wake should be taken seriously.

#### 5.4.3 Role of the PRT

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*'I believe that the presence of international forces is crucial in terms of providing security and building the capacity of the ANA and ANP... the ANA and ANP are still not trustworthy, however, and the presence of international forces is a must for the overall security and stability of the state.'*

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GoA representative, Kabul

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*'The GoA cannot guarantee the security of civil servants and needs PRT assistance to fly them to some locations. Gisab district, for instance, has been under Taliban control for three years and they have training camps there.'*

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Government employee, Uruzgan

There is an overall recognition that there has not been enough investment in the Afghan security forces, with perceptions that the GoA has no means for guaranteeing any type of security. As such, many interviewees – including GoA representatives in Kabul – see a vital role for PRTs in improving security and ensuring that the situation does not slide back into one of the internecine war with which people are so familiar. Most people felt that the closure of PRTs would symbolise overall military withdrawal and lead to a rapidly deteriorating security situation in some provinces, and that the ANA and ANP are far from ready to handle the Taliban without the support of foreign forces. Even PRT detractors agreed that they have a role in supporting indigenous forces. Interviewees also thought that the government, bolstered by PRTs, should handle security and welfare, while NGOs should be left to deal with projects.

**Box 6:****Training the Afghan police**

PRTs play a variety of roles in SSR, with many PRT trainers from different countries forming part of the overall police training effort in many areas:

- The Norwegians are undertaking some police training in Faryab
- The Canadians are working with the ANA.
- Canadian Gendarmerie staff are embedded with the ANP
- Military personnel also monitor and assist the ANP at checkpoints throughout the country.
- The New Zealand PRT did some police mentoring in Bamian, with a positive impact
- The Dutch provide military liaison teams to mentor ANA on the ground in Uruzgan, actively engage with ANAP, and are looking into the construction of a police training centre
- The Americans are also involved in police mentoring and training in a number of locations, including Gardez, where the US PRT is helping to train the Afghan uniformed police.

Although civilian police should not technically be trained by the military, this distinction is blurred in areas where the police are fighting heavily armed, cross-border 'insurgents'. The governance dimensions of SSR, however, have largely been overshadowed by concerns that there is enough reasonably trained and equipped manpower to deal with counterinsurgency activities and the global war on terror. The governor of Paktia, however, stated that the PRTs play no role in training the police because they are too busy with development work. Like so many comments, this indicated the perception that PRTs and the military pursue their own plans, irrespective of perceived needs in the context context.

Where PRTs have dealt even-handedly with unsavoury armed elements, people take note and endorse their actions. This is more common in the north, which has had a slightly more colourful history of warlordism and where community relations are less informed by a rigid culture of honour and similar considerations. In the south, however, people ask why no Afghan forces are generally involved in house searches and why the authorities seem to be informed about such raids only after the event. Such actions undermine the legitimacy of the GoA and cast them in the role of powerless bystander.

Overall, Afghan interviewees stated that they do not trust ISAF and CF to protect them, but rather fear them, and feel that if they are perceived to say or do the wrong things, they will be imprisoned or killed. They also regard the security provided by both bodies as the beneficial fallout of military activities in pursuit of international aims which are not always clear to them. As Stapleton (2007) states however:

"Though it was claimed that security in the PRT area of operation would improve by virtue of the PRTs' presence, PRTs were never mandated, constructed or intended to afford direct protection to Afghan civilians or, for that matter, other development actors."

**5.5 Private security companies**

Although there is no data which shows how many NGO security incidents happen on roads<sup>56</sup>, anecdotal evidence would suggest that the percentage out of all security incidents for this group may be significant. After the fall of the Taliban, road security in particular has deteriorated and the presence of a number of different groups is creating further complications. The governor of Paktia complained at length about the private security company protecting construction on the road to Khost. He asked why construction companies were being allowed to approach non-government security contractors to provide security and blamed many

<sup>56</sup> ANSO for example does not disaggregate data by incidents on and off road. Illegal checkpoints, for instance, have over the past three decades resulted in many security incidents.

security incidents on the existence of such companies.

Roads are still effectively a no-man's land in some parts of Afghanistan. They are not controlled by local communities and where governance is weak or non-existent, it is generally a case of appropriation of control by the 'fittest'. Impromptu checkpoints, banditry and a range of criminal activities have always taken place on various routes. The situation on the roads also determines the price of goods. The road from Uruzgan to Kandahar, for instance, is an arterial route with many checkpoints, police and other. When the road is blocked prices in Uruzgan go up, giving those in control of the road tremendous negotiating power.

It is interesting to look at the actors straddling the military and private sectors in relation to road building and security. These are Afghan private security firms – the militias of old commanders and warlords in another guise, or as the Afghan saying goes, 'the same donkeys disguised with different saddles'. They work independently or as partners of international private security firms. With a history as militias, often owned by jihadi elements, these firms are evidently used to playing one side off against another for profit, and are happy to alter the power dynamics for whoever pays them. They are therefore perceived as benefiting greatly from the effective privatisation of road construction and security in volatile areas. As road building currently relies on private company security, the commanders and their ex-militias effectively determine where roads go, how quickly they are built and how much of the budget winds up in their own pockets. The commanders involved are very well-placed to act as political and development gate-keepers, even changing local power dynamics and distorting the local context. Throughout the decades of war and insecurity, many of the larger trucking interests in Afghanistan – often operated by powerful families with extensive political and military networks – have continued to operate without serious incident,

paying for safe passage. Interviewees also claimed that when trucks linked directly or indirectly to the international military presence are involved in security incidents, there are insurance and a number of other 'scams' involving the groups providing their security. In other words, private security firms are at times perceived as holding development to ransom and impacting on the security of all stakeholders. Their impact on NGO and PRT activities and the potential dissonance which they represent needs a great deal more attention and analysis.

This may be an area where military and NGO interests collide. Since road construction and security are both of tremendous strategic interest, the private security firms benefit from lucrative deals and at times from the protection of various elements within the international military presence. Providing security for fuel and building material convoys serving military installations and contracting firms often working for the latter tie in to a neat nexus where all sorts of deals are being made.

Financial and other types of support for such firms erodes transparency and accountability, and may even reverse the impact of Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) and DIAG. It also supports perceived state predation where those running such outfits are relatives of individuals in power. It also creates a conundrum for NGOs, who may be asked for protection money by such groups and left at the mercy of bandits and insurgents if they refuse to pay. Regulation of the private security industry has started on a modest scale, but these companies will most certainly prove resilient as they continue to benefit from the patronage of powerful national and international backers.

## Chapter 6: Social transformation, intelligence gathering and cultural sensitivity

The institutional memory of 30 years of sustained contact with communities all over Afghanistan generates vast amounts of experience and information for some members of the Taliban, HIG and others. Some NGOs have also established a unique set of relations with their contacts from the refugee camps of the 1980s through to the present, and also have staff with individual and personal links to local people and networks. Although such NGOs have developed a *modus operandi* with tribes in the areas where they work, most (with some notable exceptions) have not paid as much attention to tribal politics as they should, which is increasingly inadvisable. Tribal elements are struggling to find a similar *modus operandi* with PRTs too, which change so quickly in command, nationality, and so on.

All development organisations are engaged in social transformation when they address gender issues, human rights, poverty, empowerment of specific groups and other types of change. Similarly, the government is transforming society in its pursuit of democracy. In certain areas, programmes such as the NSP have ably demonstrated how social transformation can set in motion processes of profound change. PRT WHAM efforts, together with the military's psyops and counterinsurgency efforts, also aim to bring about change in community beliefs and behaviours.

Every group operating in Afghanistan – including the Taliban – wishes to effect change, accompanied by social transformation. Because the target outcomes of each group are different and at times conflicting, this is an area which impacts operational space and security for many and cannot be overlooked in the civmil debate.

### Box 7:

#### A view from the military

*'Merely establishing good relations might be enough to deny the same advantages to hostile or potentially hostile forces. In many situations, commanders have a moral and legal responsibility towards the civilian populations in their area that can only be met by co-operating with the civil government and international bodies. The aim of CIMIC is to establish and maintain the full co-operation of the civilian population and institutions within a commander's joint operating agreement in order to create civil-military conditions that offer him the greatest possible moral, material, environmental and tactical advantages. Implicit in this aim is the denial of such advantages to an actual or potential adversary. The long term purpose of CIMIC is to create and sustain conditions that will support the achievement of a lasting solution to the crisis.'*

Allied Joint Operations <sup>57</sup>

*'Insurgents are difficult to identify from the local population. They are clever combatants skilled in the art of information warfare. Victory against insurgency, while achievable at the military tactical level, may never be truly decisive since the root causes of insurgency are typically political, social, and economic – not purely military. Thus, success against an insurgency requires the synchronized application of all elements of national power: Diplomatic, Information, Military, and Economic (D-I-M-E).'*  
Brigadier General Jasan, Operation Enduring Freedom <sup>58</sup>

57 Allied Joint Operations (2002).

58 Kamiya (2005).

## 6.1 Social transformation

Social transformation efforts to control communities move the war from the frontlines deeper into communities, as every individual becomes a potential supporter or combatant of AOGs. In such a situation, the imperatives of humanitarians, development workers and the military frequently overlap and clash. The identity of any individual – fighter, victim, patient, source of intelligence – becomes contested territory, with varying outcomes and consequences depending on whom (s)he comes into contact with.

### 6.1.1 Taliban and other opposition groups

In spite of claims that the Taliban and others are disorganised bands of illiterate gunmen, they seem to work well on ideologies, belief systems and superstitions. For example, interviewees in Uruzgan described how, after the bodies of some Taliban were dumped in the centre of Tarinkot as a humiliation, young men kept sneaking up and cutting pieces off their clothes, in the belief that the men were martyrs and the pieces of cloth would be powerful talismans. Such a reaction arises from the Taliban's effective psyops campaigns, which lean on local belief systems to give the Taliban an almost otherworldly quality.

The Taliban, HIG and their allies have, for a number of years formed, influenced, mutated and dissolved political, social, religious and other interconnected networks by creating, infiltrating, supporting or decapitating them in order to consolidate their power and extend their reach. HIG in particular counts on professionals in its ranks and has historically focused on organising service delivery to communities, whether in refugee camps or in Afghanistan. Reports indicate that these groups may even have infiltrated the GoA at every level and freely operate within its frameworks.

Similarly, regional actors who support the Taliban and other AOGs are mobilising links forged with Islamist networks and other groups over three decades of jihad, operating through networks based on shared languages, cultures, religion and military as well as financial support and mentoring.

### 6.1.2 The international military

The international military presence, in comparison, tries to apply positive pressure, partly through handouts and infrastructure projects. This strategy will not work in isolation and needs to be followed up with long-term, intensive social transformation efforts. However, the processes of social transformation are far too delicate and complex for the 'can do' logic of the military and many external aid organisations.

Crude and unsophisticated methods, such as badly designed and implemented projects to combat Taliban efforts on the non-kinetic front, to win hearts and minds, to ensure force protection, or to win support for the Afghan government, are not currently helping build credibility or trust. Fundamentally, this is because underlying analysis is simplistic and based on 'snapshot' data collection, together with the need to get things done within a short timeframe. Despite force protection being one of the top priorities of commanders and a key factor inherent within the operational planning process, the military cannot establish relationships that put them in touch with the knowledge and experience that can yield in-depth insight into communities and their workings. Efforts such as patrols 'engaging' with the population – by exchanging niceties with children, for example, although necessary and palliative for soldiers on the ground, are manifestly not in the same league. Meetings with tribal elders are often performance events rather than fora for sincere information exchange. On the other hand, opposition groups benefit from relations that span years and even generations, absorbing information

through social systems, then socialising and presenting it in ways that are culturally assimilated

### 6.1.3 The Afghan reality

The chemistry of Afghan communities has in many respects irreversibly altered as a result of long years of war and displacement. Any old structures and processes that are still being used have undergone modifications. Thus, it is not possible for the GoA, PRTs and others to return to a district after a long disengagement and simply reinstate the malek or arbaki systems, or transplant systems from one place to another without having a deep understanding of community sensibilities and the changes that have taken place. Having traditional systems patronised by foreign elements also mutates them – in some areas, for instance, people are becoming increasingly resentful of PRTs meddling in governance issues, since they frequently make basic mistakes. There are cases where the PRTs successfully clear elements fostering insurgency or engaging in criminal acts, only to replace them with others who upset the beneficial balance of power. For example, after one PRT removed hard-line, pro-Taliban, Islamist elements from one area, the local tribes were secure and happy; the PRT then built a police station, which brought undesirable elements into the area and irritated the same tribes. Such considerations colour perceptions of PRT and military ‘good deeds’, and people’s subsequent interactions with them.

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*‘People do not have any power or authority over their own lives.’*

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Shura member, Uruzgan

Many actors in the Afghan context including PRTs, insist on viewing Afghanistan as an egalitarian society when designing WHAM or similar interventions, assuming that a project implemented for ordinary people will convince them to oppose the Taliban and other AOGs, or participate in efforts to change the balance of power in their

communities. What such analysis fails to appreciate is that ordinary people who fear for their lives or are locked in a feudal system are often powerless to act or influence, and are afraid of repercussions from local (often armed) elites, the GoA, the international military, criminals and many others.

Programmes such as NSP have demonstrated that the transfer of power to ordinary people is a slow and at times painful process which requires a great deal of thought, trial and error and oversight. If people get power, they usually challenge local elites first. It is not necessarily ‘ordinary people’ who support the Taliban, though they may sympathise with their cause or turn a blind eye to their presence. Power plays between leaders at various levels are extremely complex, and the Taliban are often able to take advantage of weak spots and contested leadership to find ways to enter and forge links with the elites, who then invite them into a community for good or for ill. Calculations on whether or not to do this take in many more factors than the implementation of QIPs and the provision of services in their areas. After all, the Taliban do not try to provide any of these.

It should also be noted that, despite this insistence on wooing ‘ordinary’ Afghans through projects and other means, there was a strong perception among interviewees that PRTs and the military only connect to warlords and corrupt officials. This kind of discrepancy does not go unnoticed, and interviewees also raised concerns about ISAF and CF interacting with power-holders within and outside the GoA who have poor human rights records and/or involvement in corruption. This is seen as contradicting the work of providing assistance and often alienates and distances the very people they are trying to win over. It also muddies the water for others trying to provide assistance. The Taliban, though not necessarily popular, are opportunistic and can easily take advantage of such mistakes, in addition to exploiting local power vacuums and fractures.

The head of the international non-governmental organisation (IDLG) is concerned that people should discuss government positively in village life. While providing development assistance and services will help encourage this, demonstrating wholesome leadership and power and building long-term trust will do much more. If communities – or more precisely, their leaders – have been able to reject the Taliban, they have done so through particular strengths and strategies. The focus should be on ensuring that these are not jeopardised, either by government or by the international military. Such communities protect themselves to a certain extent, but still need various types of assistance, sensitively provided, to enable the leadership to continue to resist. For this to be successful, there must be in-depth knowledge of the workings of local power structures and how best to handle them, particularly understanding that post-war, these will be fractured, disempowered, fundamentally altered or supplanted. This sort of knowledge and understanding cannot easily be gleaned in a short time by heavily armed or escorted outsiders, nor can it be done through hastily executed development projects.

#### 6.1.4 NGOs

Insistence on the part of the military to control social transformation processes by working with NGOs or preparing the ground for them with security in specific areas does not help NGOs project an independent and impartial identity, and in fact leads to the militarisation and instrumentalisation of assistance. NGOs have rarely been involved in the political manoeuvrings which lead to leadership change or support for specific factions, nor have they knowingly collected information to facilitate the military's analysis of processes leading to such changes. There are, however, some 'medial' organisations that call themselves NGOs who covertly sell or provide the military and diplomatic communities with maps and in-depth information on certain districts. Such organisations may also facilitate access to certain elements within

communities to help facilitate political or military as well as social transformation. Such organisations are not perceived as acting in a neutral and impartial manner and should not be labelling themselves as NGOs.

NGOs should not be pressured to get involved with the military's social transformation and related activities, primarily because of implications related to intelligence gathering. On the other hand, such activities – whether led by the military, the GoA or others – are changing the operating environment for NGOs, at times with negative consequences. As such, NGOs need to develop a heightened state of awareness of the shifting socio-political contexts within which they work, particularly in areas of growing insecurity.

## 6.2 Information and intelligence

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*'We know that NGOs are civilians and PRTs are military, and we also know that there are civilians inside PRTs. People are a bit suspicious about the NGOs and believe that they are helping the military by providing intelligence and information.'*

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Tribal leader, Paktia

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*'People are a bit suspicious about NGOs and think that they are spying for the Americans. I think they may do so, but still we have not found solid proof. They seem to be clever so they won't leave behind something that can implicate them.'*

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Tribal elder, Paktia

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*'We have been lucky with the presence of UNAMA. People go to UNAMA and UNAMA comes straight to us.'*

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International staff, Paktia

In any type of war, intelligence and information that assists the military, either directly or indirectly, is at a

premium, and boundaries for accessing it are constantly being redrawn as discussions on the ethics of intelligence-gathering ebb and flow. For the GoA, ethical issues tied to intelligence gathering, interrogation and torture exist on paper, and the intelligence services have worked efficiently throughout the decades of war. However, when information gathering systems overlap, there is a clash for NGOs, the military and insurgents. For example, data collection – particularly mapping exercises to aid the design of development projects – can be seen as a suspicious activity by an AOG or even the military.

Having disengaged with Afghanistan following the Cold War, CF and ISAF have had to catch up since the fall of the Taliban in 2001. They are severely disadvantaged in many ways and rely on any sources available to extract knowledge. The latest strategy – ostensibly to improve US military efficiency in delivering services and providing force protection – is the use of anthropologists or ‘human terrain teams’. This is a controversial move which can only lead to impartiality and security problems for NGO data collection and future social science research in some areas. It also alienates educated Afghans who find this latest move by the military both patronising and offensive.

Many interviewees felt that the Taliban and their spies were suspicious of people who were in regular contact with PRTs and that such informants develop an ambiguous identity as a result. This notion was stronger among people based further away from PRTs in the provinces, and strongest in Kabul. In a bid to understand local communities, the military constantly collect information during all forms of contact with non-military groups. They are therefore perceived as seeking ‘intelligence’ from communities, NGOs and others – whether the data is on the number of projects in a village or sensitive information about enemy tactics. Organisations that have close contact with PRTs for ‘damage control’ risk jeopardising their own reputations and security –

for example, UNAMA is currently being defamed through night letters in some districts where they are accused of spying for the Gardez PRT.

The military appear to absorb all sorts of information when there is any sustained contact, but it is a repetitive process as new PRT personnel often seek the same information. Their means of retaining and transferring institutional memory are not always efficient: hence the need for regular information downloads, putting more informants at risk. Because opposition groups punish those who are perceived as supplying intelligence, a pervasive military presence and regular efforts to gather data place more people at risk of being punished for supplying intelligence. This creates an uncomfortable nexus where the farther the military extends its influence and outreach, the more it can endanger the activities of those who come into contact and need to coordinate with them. It naturally has a profound impact on perceptions of neutrality and impartiality which NGOs may try to maintain, especially where information gathering is required.

NGO criticism that PRTs do not take local sensitivities and ground reality into account is true to a certain extent, however, some PRTs use experts who provide sophisticated information and analysis on local political dynamics, tribal issues, at a level that is at times beyond NGO capacities. While the US military is currently hiring anthropologists, the Dutch PRT in Uruzgan has experts and holds regular meetings with groups of mullahs as well as local leaders and tries to be informed on and sensitive to tribal issues. It is clear that some sections of the military are aware that they constantly have to educate themselves. However, there was also a sense that this information collection can to a certain extent mean ticking boxes on categories of contacts rather than understanding the complex mosaic within which numerous actors are pursuing multiple, and at times conflicting, objectives. Military training does not prepare individuals to handle such situations – and certainly not in such a short time

period or when under duress to deliver development, state building and military 'victories'.

### 6.2.1 Obstacles to intelligence gathering

Although some interviewees understood that PRTs are responsive to those they perceive as 'supplying good information', they also mentioned many reasons why the military cannot access such information easily. These included:

- security systems at PRTs and military bases acting as deterrents for would-be informants
- people feeling that it may be risky to approach heavily armed people
- fear of exposure – people may worry they will be seen if they have to wait for long periods at the PRT gate
- fears that it may be a one-sided exploitative relationship where people take risks, provide information and do not necessarily get any results in return.

Such obstacles distort information provision to the military, and mean that any attempts by Afghans to follow common cultural practice and establish networks of influence and information exchange with PRTs are limited, except for those locals who have armed influence in an area and come and go without fear of repercussions.

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*'The PRT and ISAF mostly rely on local spies and get wrong and misleading information because of the internal rivalries.'*

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Tribal leader, Paktia

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*'They are the ones who conduct search operations and give the wrong impression about individuals to the PRT people and the Americans. They deny us access to the right people.'*

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Shura member, Uruzgan

Internationals in both NGOs and military institutions can be prone to expert manipulation and being sold specific information, which has facilitated the rise to power of gatekeepers – a major problem in Afghanistan today. Gate-keeping can involve deliberate misinterpretation of speech, preventing access to a PRT or NGO. Gatekeepers hold tremendous power in relation to ordinary Afghans – they set up their own patron-client networks, altering the chemistry of communities and power structures in which such new networks become embedded and limiting the information channels. Getting rivals and enemies imprisoned, interrogated, or worse, by CF and ISAF has become the latest tool in the arsenal of Pashtun badal (revenge) power plays. It is well known that the military can unwittingly become embroiled in tribal and extended family conflicts in this way.

Knowing this, and with only a small pool of English speakers available, it is also easy for elements within the GoA to ensure that only interpreters with a specific ideology are allowed to interpret for the military. This allows specific information to be fed to PRTs and CF, except in the cases where personnel speak local languages fluently. This is a constant source of worry to people trying to present the 'ground reality' to PRT personnel.

International NGO staff may face similar problems – less as a result of government interference, and more because human resource departments have historically been co-opted by one ethnic group or extended family (especially in hiring and firing) which often tries to maintain its hold over the organisation or department by controlling the flow of staff. Selective use of information is also used for a number of different reasons, providing internationals with an incomplete and manipulated picture of what is happening on the ground. The result is that information is translated in a way that reflects the interpreter's worldview and can serve the intentions of specific individuals. NGOs staff – especially the

more established ones – tend to have more awareness of such practices and try to find ways to offset the negative outcomes of such practices within their own institutions.

During the reign of Zahir Shah (1933-73) experts on different tribes would advise the government on how to handle them. The past year has seen a resurgence of interest in tribes and tribal issues in military and diplomatic circles, but not within most NGOs. It is not so much anthropological knowledge of tribes that is important for the purposes of winning the current struggle in Afghanistan, but knowledge of their vast, intricate and at times global networks and the rifts within them which AOGs currently manipulate and exploit. However, it is difficult for PRTs or NGOs to access such knowledge in an integral manner, because it is often ‘lived’ or absorbed via socialisation and cannot easily be transferred to people who did not grow up in a similar environment or culture. To be able to create relations with such networks that enable an individual or group to exert anything other than superficial influence, it is vital to enter or attach oneself to such networks in an organic relationship, which is neither neutral nor impartial and is within accepted cultural norms of reciprocity. Implementing small infrastructure projects at a frenetic rate does not win respect or build the trust needed to influence such networks, while establishing more influential relations can threaten impartiality.

### 6.3 Cultural sensitivity

*‘If [foreigners] abide by our cultural values and codes they will be considered as guests. People are happy with Dutch troops but extremely angry with the Americans and Australians because of their behaviour.’*

Shura member, Uruzgan

*‘We are going to have a meeting in a couple of days to discuss the PRT workshop for university students. The military have started to have meetings with the students and we do not know for what their purpose is. We believe it will have a very bad impact on students and [that they] might become targets in their communities if they continue to interact with the military.’*

ANGO representative, Kabul

*‘People will be happy if the PRT leaves. People are not happy with some of the actions of the PRT even if it continues building bridges and schools.’*

Shura member, Uruzgan

Implicit within the PRT Manoeuvre Elements’ and other military units’ provision of a broad umbrella of security are various levels of interaction with communities. Projects, handouts and ‘favours’ are seen as a ‘carrot’ that counteracts the ‘stick’ of other operations. This demonstrates a certain lack of sophisticated analysis of motivating factors and a slightly patronising attitude towards Afghans, as already discussed in Section 4.2. In addition, being embedded in and operating within the Afghan community for any purpose requires behaviour that will not harm relations or create future mistrust and hostility towards foreigners.

Some military contingents in Afghanistan still lack the basics of cultural sensitivity despite attending courses and briefings. Interactions in some areas – usually intelligence-gathering raids – are leading to namus incidents and resentment of the type that can intensify community hostility and improve Taliban recruitment figures. At the same time, security issues are increasingly keeping NGO staff out of the field, weakening relationships and networks built up over decades to facilitate development work. Establishing new relationships will be far more difficult if current circumstances prevail.

Afghans have always been slightly wary of outsiders, but at the same time emphatically hospitable as a matter of honour. Many NGOs, having suffered the consequences of past mistakes, have learnt to negotiate such contradictions by adopting a go-slow approach. Afghans do not appreciate outsiders touching on honour issues and trying to contact groups perceived as vulnerable to outside influence, such as women or youth. This is a highly sensitive issue. Afghanistan's long history of invasion, the Great Game and more recent history have left a fear of external interference, on many levels, which colours all interactions with outsiders. The insensitive manner typical of some sections of the military in their efforts to extract information from and win over more vulnerable segments of the community will therefore always be perceived negatively. Outsiders must always be aware of the invisible boundaries that exist in Afghanistan – crossing them is seen as discourteous and can change people's perception of outsiders from guest to invader or spy.

Most of the anecdotes interviewees recounted as failures within civmil relations – such as food aid drops that were the same colour as cluster bombs; raids on aid agency compounds; females being searched by men; leaflets linking aid to intelligence; and children being killed in bombing raids – are not carried out by those same troops who are responsible for establishing and maintaining relations with civilians. The operational troops in charge of fighting, force protection, searches, intelligence gathering and bombing have the least structured civilian contact and least exposure to the civmil dimension. However, their actions are most likely to be featured in international and national media and remembered by NGOs and civilians for negative reasons. So, although the force commander may spend the majority of his meetings with civilian leaders and have the support of civilian political, development or stabilisation advisors, the main effort – or the most potentially damaging activities – may well be kinetic. It is important that NGO and civilian actors engaged in the civmil debate have access to and are able to influence all

elements of the military – not just the designated CIMIC/civil affairs elements.

### 6.3.1 Radicalisation of communities, islamicisation of landscapes

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*'We generally do not preach about worldly affairs during Friday prayers. It may jeopardise our safety.'*

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Religious leader, Uruzgan

Cultural sensitivity is a double-edged sword when it is not clear where the line should be drawn and what the consequences will be. At present, religious leaders are increasingly worried for their own security – especially in the south – and prefer to keep a very low profile rather than give messages that can be viewed as partisan in any way. Attempts by PRTs to woo them as allies in WHAM may not always be profitable for either side. Outsiders meddling in areas of ordinary life of which they have no in-depth knowledge or real lived experience – such as the Islam practiced in Afghanistan – can lead to superficial interventions with potentially serious unpredictable and unintended consequences.

For example, the enthusiastic construction of mosques and madrasas to win over religious communities and those thought to be religious assumes that the rapid Islamicisation of the local terrain cannot be anything but positive. The logic behind such projects seems to be that the Taliban are Muslim, so to combat them one needs Islamic credentials. It assumes that building infrastructure for 'Islamic' uses will keep local religious figures happy; there is no question of transforming the local landscape to symbolise the advent of good governance, democracy and development within the framework of moderate Islam. This is an area which needs to be explored with local communities – especially where people are presenting a religious façade to pre-empt the Taliban and other Islamist groups out of fear rather than genuine religious sentiment.

During the jihad, when Islamic countries poured money into Afghanistan for the construction of mosques and madrasas, each group tried to push its own doctrine via the infrastructure and preachers they installed to incite people to certain acts – both negative and positive. How much this contributed to the radicalisation of some communities in the long term and irreversibly changed the dynamics within them – for example, giving more power to religious figures backed by radical groups abroad while decreasing the power of traditional leaders or socialist or even democratic elements – is not known because there have been no impact assessments. While conducting such assessments retrospectively is not easy, it is wrong to assume that building lots of mosques and madrasas is automatically a good thing – in fact, the NSP has largely avoided requests for building mosques by building community halls instead. Not everyone considers a mosque to be a benevolent community gathering place, and the development benefits are not always obvious – for example, mosques are not necessarily suitable or relevant for women or young people, while secular or moderate-minded community members may not regard a new mosque as a step towards progress. Both military and civilian actors should be aware of this.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion and recommendations

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*'There is a common misperception that the issues in Afghanistan, and indeed elsewhere around the world, can be dealt with by military means [alone]...The military is a key, an essential element in dealing with those problems, but by and large these problems can only be resolved politically.'*

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UK's Chief of Defence Staff , 2007

As car bombs rip across quiet suburban streets and suicide bombers cause carnage at public events and celebrations, it becomes obvious that, although the war may be over, unrest and violence continue to smoulder and flare up unpredictably. This simply marks a new phase in the insecurity faced by NGOs in Afghanistan. While the actors, situations and challenges change, NGOs have to be more vigilant and juggle multiple identities and priorities just to survive in this ever-changing context. The vast and bewildering range of actors and personalities working in NGOs and the military, struggling to understand one another's dynamics, are engaged in a complex dance with shadowy partners whose moves are increasingly unpredictable and deadly.

The complicated interactions taking place on the ground; the cynicism of communities following three decades of violence and escalating disappointment and despair; the sophistication encountered – even in remote villages – in articulating what an accountable and transparent government means; and the presence of heavily armed foreign nationals intimidating leaderless communities has all been condensed into a simple matter of delivering often low-quality inputs and services while avoiding the painful introspection required to change the culture of governance and overturn the legacy of an imperfect past and protracted conflict.

Reducing the issue to this two-dimensional formula allows PRTs and others to believe that rapid and widespread aid delivery will lead to peace, stability,

development and good governance. This faulty analysis puts NGOs, who are involved in rolling out government and other programmes, in a difficult position. They are neither delivering fast enough nor covering enough ground, while the Taliban, HIG and their allies have very gradually consolidated their power and extended their reach over the last three decades by forming, influencing, mutating and dissolving political, social, religious and other interconnected networks.

In this scenario, the imperatives of humanitarians, development workers and the military frequently overlap and collide. Using small-scale and at times badly executed interventions as a 'carrot', the responsibility of making moral decisions about supporting good governance and rejecting terrorism is increasingly pressed on communities, who feel forced to tolerate an unpopular government and set of elites who have the support of a reluctant international community.

Afghans have been introduced to a great many foreign concepts, and have adopted those that suit local pragmatism. The terminology of the civil debate is largely alien to them: they struggle to see the value of articulating their experiences, though they are dealing with the reality of interactions between civilians and military as best they can. The civil debate has not surfaced in the Afghan policy environment; this means that the government is pursuing aims which may jeopardise not only NGO operational space but humanitarian space, too. The debate has not been sufficiently 'Afghanised'. Humanitarian principles are not the only ones at play in the Afghan context, where Afghaniyat and Islamiyat underpin interactions and reactions to specific stimuli. Actions and attitudes which disrespect these principles and lead to unpleasant incidents may upset or even traumatise communities. Notions of namus underpin human security for many people, and neither the GoA nor

the international military presence is paying them enough attention. This points to the need to look at human security through a more culturally appropriate lens.

The lack of Afghan perspective impacts on local and national lobbying and advocacy efforts, most critically in relation to the GoA. NGOs and civil society can contribute to an analysis which provides comparisons between various groupings of principles – such as Islamic/humanitarian and Afghan/Islamic – which will be essential to elicit the meaningful engagement of ordinary Afghans in the civil debate. Afghanising the debate may also ultimately facilitate finding a common NGO position and avoiding dangerous territory where assistance becomes further instrumentalised and co-opted by the military and the GoA.

The Afghan context has become a maze of pathways that shift with alarming speed. The range of actors and at times conflicting perspectives on how to keep and provide security means that every situation has to be scrutinised through a multiplicity of lenses. Identity management increasingly becomes a conscious choice, while security and insecurity both provide lucrative business opportunities for a wide range of actors. It is clearly difficult for the military to keep a distinction between its various functions, and this has implications for organisations that choose to come in contact with it. While the military may be able to provide assistance in insecure circumstances, this is often tainted by their other activities. NGOs cannot soften or eliminate such perceptions by acting as conduits or proxies for assistance channelled through the military.

In this situation, Afghans and internationals approach security from different perspectives – either broadly reactive and short-term, or proactive and long-term. Changes in staffing, with younger, less experienced individuals, increase the level of risk, as does the constantly changing security terrain. Relying on community acceptance and ‘local’

security involves revisiting many assumptions and ensuring that all stakeholders are working with the same understanding and expectations.

Cost-effectiveness and honest spending are some of the most important considerations in the war to win over the population. Afghans are looking for long-term, sustainable interventions, of good quality and delivered on time. They are well aware that the window of opportunity may be closing fast and that handouts and charity, as opposed to a development approach, will only lead to superficial change which will not serve them in the long run. Afghans are increasingly eager to own the development process and look for ways to consolidate that ownership – becoming involved in design, monitoring, auditing and downward accountability. A number of NGOs have been working hard with communities to deliver such interventions, so perceived PRT ineptitude in awarding contracts is an irritant for communities.

Most contractors – currently the major group of implementing partners for PRTs – create contested territory in a myriad of ways and generate conflict. Interactions with communities must involve a long-term and iterative process of building relationships and resolving conflict. The ability to control development and external networks is an important part of the leadership process and, provided the control is for wholesome reasons, can be of great benefit to communities. Outsiders have to ensure that they are not co-opted by the wrong networks and unwittingly have a negative impact on the existing landscapes of conflict and power differentials.

The underlying causes of the current situation in Afghanistan must be addressed. While underdevelopment is a major contributor, it is not necessarily a root cause of the lack of government credibility at subnational level. Government ‘presence’ is all too often simplistically equated with infrastructure and projects.

Rather than thinking that the Afghan people have to choose between the Taliban and the GoA, it may be wiser to understand that Afghans perceive themselves as stuck between the frying pan and the fire. The international community, including PRTs, try to make the frying pan look appealing. Afghans tolerate it as long as they can before jumping into the proverbial fire. Neither choice is particularly tempting at the moment: the government is present in communities but at times in a corrupt and aggressive manner which cannot be disguised by infrastructure and service delivery. Decisive measures from the Karzai regime to demonstrate wholesome leadership and power as well as a profound process of trust building are the only ways out of this crisis. Such measures may only come about as a result of diplomatic pressure from the international community in the short-term and social change initiated from the grassroots in the long-term. Both NGOs and the military have distinct roles to play in such a process.

Although there is little clarity and coherence on how the PRT presence helps the GoA, the military effectively face a choice in some areas: they can either resource, submit to and coordinate with an unpopular and negligible government presence, often in the form of unpopular local elites, or they can try to do their own thing and make the best of a bad job. The result is: disenchantment; a perception that they are winning hearts and minds on their own behalf; and accusations of undermining the GoA. The perception of local government that can only supplicate or make suggestions to the PRT has profound consequences in an area with a history of troubled relations with central government. A stronger role in SSR is one of the easiest ways for PRTs to steer their way out of supporting development and governance – particularly since governors, elites and their followers are at times only interested in the funding rather than in finding ways to serve ordinary Afghans or bolster the state.

Stakeholders become increasingly opportunistic in taking advantage of insecurity and impunity. Security is a daily preoccupation for most Afghans, who are falling prey to both internal and external aggressors. The government has neither been able to protect Afghans from predation by criminals - even those within government - nor from the violence inflicted on them by the Taliban, foreign insurgents and the international military. In a small number of cases communities have taken matters into their own hands, but they are often impeded by the GoA's and PRTs' lack of sensitivity to the fragility of such efforts. Afghans regard the security provided by ISAF and CF as fortuitous fallout from activities which have objectives far removed from the protection of ordinary Afghans.

Many Afghans see the development-security linkage as artificial and contrived and the governance-security linkage as a critical part of stabilisation. The development of a strong army and stable and capable police force is an important part of state building and most agree that an international military presence at provincial level is critical for security and stability for the time being. In general, Afghans feel that they are on a very uneven playing field in deciding the nature of military engagement in their sovereign territory.

The situation for humanitarians and development practitioners is continuously changing. Their operational space is continually shrinking as AOGs spread fear and expand their influence. NGOs face a number of challenges and are developing a range of strategies and practices to handle them. However, the question of whether humanitarian space can be 'mended' under these circumstances is difficult to answer. Success for a few organisations in negotiating access might raise hopes, but without the possibility of conducting such research with AOGs – some of whom have tolerated but not welcomed NGOs in the past – it would be unwise to suggest that organisations should risk rapprochement in order to broaden their area of operations at present.

Finally, it may be wise for NGOs to take some preparatory steps to learn how to handle an increasingly complex situation with shrinking room to manoeuvre. They need to find ways to strengthen relations with communities despite a shrinking field presence, particularly among internationals. A growing military presence will not compensate for this. The most important step is for NGOs and others to continuously challenge assumptions – particularly about their understanding of Afghan realities, and Afghan understanding of the realities the international community continuously imposes on them.

## 7.1 Summary of recommendations

Civil relations, institutions and decision-making need to be more inclusive and informed of Afghan perspectives. This responsibility falls to all actors – the GoA, NGOs, the military, the UN and Afghan agencies. Such efforts need to be embedded in wider strategies to build the capacity and ownership of local actors in processes that affect them. NGOs, civil society groups and the media all have a significant role to play in promoting wider understanding of the debate and greater input from communities.

### 7.1.1 Key recommendations

#### Afghanisation

Afghanisation implies both greater contextual understanding by international actors, and greater participation of and accountability to Afghan actors themselves. Civil-military relations processes, institutions and decision-making need to be more inclusive and informed of Afghan perspectives. This responsibility falls to all actors, including NGOs, military, government, UN, and Afghan agencies themselves. Such efforts need to be embedded in wider strategies to build the capacity and ownership of local actors in processes that affect them. Drawing on the international efforts of Muslim scholars and humanitarian agencies, donors and NGOs should also invest in cross-cultural translation and sensitisation to ensure that humanitarian principles

are understood and made relevant to Afghan social, cultural and religious norms.

#### Governance

The current emphasis by the international community and military forces on ‘winning hearts and minds’ through a simplistic ‘development-security’ linkage is misplaced. Greater emphasis should be placed on addressing the essentially political challenges related to governance and conflict resolution at both national and local levels in Afghanistan. Afghan power-holders and communities are well-versed in the power dynamics implicated in short-term projects implemented to ‘win hearts and minds’.

#### ‘Civilianisation’

Despite the proclaimed efforts to ‘civilianise’ PRT operations, the research found little evidence that civilianisation is a priority or that changes on the ground are keeping pace with what is discussions at policy level. Military engagement with civilian agencies through forums for civil-military relations dialogue continues to be pro-forma, with disappointing outcomes and inadequate follow-up based on concerns raised by NGOs and Afghan stakeholders.

#### Conflict Sensitivity

All actors need to invest more in the unintended impacts of their interventions for local-level political and conflict dynamics, which can have wider ramifications at national level. Critical examples would include the importance of concepts of ‘namus’ (honour) and religious practice in defining Afghan notions of human security. NGOs are also challenged to increase investment in ensuring the ‘conflict sensitivity’ of their programmes.

#### Aid Effectiveness

Donors should place greater emphasis on civilian channels for assistance in Afghanistan. They should recognise the intrinsic challenges of channelling aid through contested military operations, parts of which are simultaneously engaged in combat

operations. Both donors and the government should recognise the serious security risks inherent in government-aligned aid programmes in a situation of on-going insurgency, and make provisions for implementing partners accordingly. This research raises serious challenges regarding the need for longer-term programming and sustainability, based on the finding that Afghan people are regularly unimpressed by short-term projects designed to meet tactical military objectives. Issues of effective transparency to and consultation of Afghan communities are also critical, and point to intrinsic limitations to military-led assistance strategies. CIMIC-type aid activities should be carefully circumscribed so that their negative impacts on activities of local authorities and civilian agencies are taken into consideration.

### Humanitarian Access and Security Management

NGOs should review their security management and wider programme management strategies to reflect on the implications of the increasing shift from acceptance into protection- and deterrence-based approaches to humanitarian access. As security has deteriorated, NGOs have increasingly become distanced from beneficiary communities. Further operational learning, and inter-agency information sharing are required to identify means of sustaining and building relations with local communities and power-holders, as well as maintaining contextual understanding. A particular challenge resides in providing adequate funding and capacity-building for some in the ANGO sector, to enable effective safety mechanisms to be set up, and to ensure sustainable organisational and human resources development. NGOs also need to invest in the conflict mitigation and resolution skills, so that frontline staff are adequately equipped to deal with the social, political and conflict dynamics implicated in the implementation of programmes.

### 7.1.2 Detailed Recommendations:

#### To ANGOs and INGOs

- INGOs and ANGOs need to develop more sustained joint strategies to enable Afghan engagement in policy dialogue with relevant actors on civil relations. Such policy engagement needs to happen at local, national, international levels in a joined-up fashion to ensure the sharing of up-to-date perspectives at operational and policy levels
- Drawing on the international efforts of Muslim scholars and humanitarian agencies, NGOs should invest in initiatives that promote cross-cultural interpretation of humanitarian principles, which are critical to eliciting meaningful engagement of Afghans in civil relations
- NGOs need to constantly update and revise their knowledge and understanding of the workings of local power structures, which may have become fractured, disempowered, fundamentally altered or supplanted by new informal structures in the post-war era
- NGOs should also review their security management strategies to reflect on the implications of the shift from acceptance to protection- and deterrence-based approaches. This includes providing regular security training and drills for local staff and raising awareness of the risks to the safety of all staff, particularly younger ones with less field experience. They should also provide staff with conflict resolution awareness, training and tools., being prepared will help them work more effectively
- Inter-agency approaches to such learning initiatives need to place particular emphasis on the skills, experience and local knowledge of Afghan staff and partner ANGOs
- In advocating for humanitarian space and reflecting on their own practice, the NGO sector needs to place greater emphasis on the responsibilities of aid agencies to maintain appropriate interface with military actors. NGOs

that currently accept funding from military operations should reflect in a serious fashion on the risk of negative implications for the safety and security of their own staff, programmes and beneficiaries. They should also reflect on the negative implications for the wider NGO sector in Afghanistan. NGOs should not be pressured to get involved with the military's social transformation or intelligence gathering-related activities at any stage. However, because such activities are changing the operating environment for NGOs, they do need to develop their awareness of the shifting socio-political contexts within which they work, especially in areas of growing insecurity

- NGO and civilian actors engaged in the civil debate need to have access to engage and influence all elements of the military, not just the designated CIMIC or civilian affairs elements. For both INGOs and local Afghan stakeholders, the most damaging behaviour in terms of both CIMIC and combat operations is pursued by elements of the international military which rarely engage in NGO-military civil processes
- We also strongly recommend that NGOs:
  - find ways to differentiate and distance themselves from contractors, and advocate for appropriate accountability of such actors, in order to safeguard the reputation of NGOs operating on the basis of a principled and effective approach
  - fully explore community concepts of providing security for NGOs and the limitations of such indigenous systems
  - lobby the GoA to elicit more substantive support for NGO operations, particularly in the provision of security in view of incidents of predatory behaviour from local security forces
  - encourage and support their Afghan partner NGOs in shifting away from reactive and short-term approaches to security management in favour of proactive and long-term safety and security strategies.

### To the military and integrated civil-military operations

- The military needs to review and re-assess the efficacy of its emphasis on assistance and aid-type interventions to WHAM
- Military and integrated civil-military operations, such as PRTs, should develop, expand and refine a stronger SSR role. Military and integrated civil-military operations need to develop more effective skills and procedures to improve their ability to consult with and listen to NGOs, local leaders and others and take any lessons learnt on board. Such procedures need to be developed in a way that does not jeopardise the security of those interlocutors. The military should also be aware that, like all outsiders, they are prone to expert manipulation and being sold specific information, which can facilitate the rise to power of gatekeepers
- Military and integrated civil-military operations should modify their security role to ensure that it does not jeopardise indigenous security systems which can be fragile and under threat. The military also needs to assess the wider, long-term implications of occasionally flirting with shadier militia elements in pursuit of its aims
- Some military and integrated civil-military operations still promote the handout mentality, which NGOs have been working for many years to erase among both beneficiaries and staff. While it is not recommended that they move to a developmental mindset, they must increase their awareness of how their CIMIC-related charitable acts can undermine NGO activities in their areas of operation
- Military and integrated civil-military operations should be more vigilant when investing in local partners. Spending money on low-quality local NGOs that flourish whenever funds are available does not constitute building local capacity in a sustainable fashion: instead it wastes money and creates resentment, tarnishing the reputation of the military and hampering WHAM efforts

- In order to reverse the diminishing of goodwill in communities, military and integrated civil-military operations need to reassess their relationship with contractors in one of the following ways: stop using inappropriate contractors that deliver ineffective projects, or have damaging consequences for local political, social or conflict dynamics; find better ways of controlling them and promoting their accountability; resolve the conflicts they generate; or set up mechanisms for community monitoring of contractors.

### To the GoA

- Relevant government ministries and departments need to show a greater understanding of civil relations, its rationale and impact, at policy and implementation levels
- There also needs to be increased understanding in government of how its policies – both formal and informal – on relations with PRTs and other military actors, impact on humanitarian access and NGO operations. The government has obligations under IHL to facilitate the provision of humanitarian assistance to populations in need. This responsibility is partly shaped through government engagement in civil relations
- The government must recognise, acknowledge and support the role of NGOs in national programmes and service delivery. While this may have security implications where NGOs are seen as government partners, hostile remarks from government figures can also impact on NGO acceptance and security
- Policymakers must also move away from models which equate good governance with government 'presence', and by extension with infrastructure, projects and services, and place greater emphasis on addressing governance and political issues related to conflict resolution at local and national levels.

### To donors

- Donors should limit the channelling of funding through military operations, due to concerns regarding their implications for safety of implementing agencies and beneficiaries and aid effectiveness, and emphasise civilian channels. In doing so, donors should note Afghan preference for multi-year programmes with a long-term, sustainable impact
- Donors should also review and carefully evaluate their use of private sector contractors, who often work in consortia with local contractors and private security companies, to address concerns about aid effectiveness and the perception amongst many Afghans that aid is diverted by corrupt contractors
- Donors should move away from policy models in which government 'presence' is equated with very basic infrastructure, projects and services. Instead, greater attention needs to be focused on addressing the political challenges related to governance and conflict resolution at local and national levels
- International donors should take more responsibility in fostering the sustainable development of national and local NGOs. In the push to implement 'quick win' development projects in insecure areas, current short-termist funding trends are instrumentalising local NGOs, without paying adequate attention to issues of organisational development, policy engagement, safety and security management, AND human resource development
- Donors should invest in initiatives which promote cross-cultural interpretation of humanitarian principles, which are critical to eliciting meaningful engagement of ordinary Afghans in civil relations
- Donor conditions regarding the visibility of the donor's nationality for a given programme (e.g. having signs, stickers and logos) should be revised in insecure. These visibility requirements can create security incidents for INGOs and ANGOs alike

- Donor nations should be sensitive in their public diplomacy efforts regarding assistance 'success stories' in Afghanistan. There is anecdotal evidence that AOGs continuously monitor the international media and react to what they find. Such stipulations should be reviewed based on the local security context
- Transparent spending is crucial to avoid further cynicism and hostility from Afghans, who follow funding very closely. All actors should explore transparent, community-based monitoring and auditing structures, to help communities and their leaders control resource transfers. This will also help ensure good impact and prevent assistance from becoming divisive.

#### To Afghan civil society

- Afghan civil society should build on wider international efforts by humanitarian agencies to work with Muslim scholars and community representatives to interpret humanitarian principles within an Islamic framework
- The Afghan media should disseminate such information to engender greater understanding and ownership of these principles, which can then contribute to improved humanitarian access
- Civil society must work with others to create a safe space for ordinary people to voice complaints on issues such as civilian casualties and the misdemeanours of international military forces on the ground.

# Annex 1 – Interviewees

A full list of international interviewees is available from BAAG. A list of Afghan interviewees is not available as for the most part they requested anonymity.

## International Interviewees

- INGO staff, Kabul
- INGO staff, national offices and networks
- ISAF HQ civilian staff
- ISAF HQ military staff
- ISAF PRT military staff
- Members of diplomatic community, Kabul and UK
- International research institution staff
- British Red Cross staff
- ICRC staff
- UN staff, Afghanistan and HQ
- International donor agency staff, field-based
- International donor agency staff Kabul
- Staff, international research and academic institutions
- Ministry of Defence staff, various European countries
- Staff, CIMIC Centre of Excellence
- Staff, UK Stabilisation Unit
- NATO staff
- Individuals encountered at variety of civil courses and workshops

## Afghan Interviewees

- ANGO staff Gardez
- ANGO staff Uruzgan
- Afghan INGO staff Gardez
- ANGO directors Kabul
- GoA civil servants, Kabul
- GoA civil servants, Uruzgan
- GoA civil servants, Paktia
- ISAF PRT civilian staff
- Tribal leaders, Uruzgan
- Tribal leaders, Paktia
- Religious leaders, Uruzgan
- Religious leaders, Paktia
- Media groups, Paktia
- Media groups, Kabul
- IO staff, Uruzgan
- CDC heads, Uruzgan
- Contractors, Uruzgan
- AIHRC staff, Kabul
- Parliamentary staff, Kabul

# Annex 2 - Ministry of Interior Directive Related to PRTs

Ministry of Interior Affairs  
General Directorate of (ص)

To all provinces governors, Regional commanders  
and provincial police chiefs:

Based on His Excellency the President of the Islamic  
republic of Afghanistan, all the governors, provincial  
police chiefs and regional commanders are ordered  
to prevent from going to the PRTs and other  
international agencies. If it is a requirement, they  
need to schedule an appointment and invite them to  
the governmental office and coordinate the  
solutions of the interested issues.

Formal invitations and special occasions are  
considered as exceptions in this order.

Zarar Ahmad

Minister of Interior

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