

Enemies, Irregular Adversaries, Spoilers, Non-compliant Actors

How the Definition of Actors Influences
Afghanistan Strategies

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How the Definition of Actors Influences Afghanistan Strategies

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[Abstract] Current descriptions and explanations of the situation in Afghanistan include the use of a wide range of terms; however the true meaning of these terms is often unclear. In planning and outlining effective strategy clear and useful definitions will be required to ensure worthwhile and successful results. This study examines how definitions may significantly affect strategy by focusing on the example of non-violent or low level violent actors in Afghanistan that are perceived as negatively affecting international peace and stability operations. It highlights that the situation is inherently more complex than at first glance. Our definitions may carry entrenched meanings that negatively affect our perceptions of certain actors. At the same time the situation on the ground is extremely complex with numerous factors influencing this perceived negative behaviour. The study outlines a number of dilemmas involved in developing these definitions, as well as highlighting how these play out on the ground. The study draws on a number of interviews with NGO workers, researchers, Western government officials and NATO/ISAF troops.

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Introduction

“in a war where perception creates reality, we all suffer the consequences”¹

Enemies, irregular adversaries, spoilers, opposing sides and non-compliant actors are all terms used in defining “opposing others”. These terms are often used interchangeably, or according to resistance levels. They are often referred to as catch-all terms for actors objecting to “our” strategy, but one should be cautious not to use these terms too lightly. One should think about the entrenched meaning of the terms as well as their subjective nature. For the way we define these “others” will have significant consequences in practice. It will inform “our” strategy and how and who “we” interact with. Indeed, Non-compliant with who? Spoiling what?

Equally important is how “we” define ourselves. When we refer to any of these terms we often pay far too little attention to the “we”, and focus rather on “them”. For example, who are we, what are we trying to achieve? Moreover, there are a range of entrenched meanings connected with the use of these terms, which possibly lead to the creation of an “us” and “them” dichotomy. For these terms are far more ambiguous than at first glance. In the search for a clearly defined mandate (reasoning and end-strategy) we will constantly come up against the pressure of formulating clear definitions.

With these thoughts in mind, this study aims to undertake a more nuanced view of how we define “opposing others” and the consequences this has for “coalition strategy” in Afghanistan. Furthermore, it will highlight the problematic nature of defining actors in a complex real-world environment. In doing so the study will focus on mostly non-violent groups and actors rather than violent insurgent groups. This is due to these mostly non-violent groups being situated in a grey zone between violent insurgents and non-violent civilians, which makes them an effective case study for examining how Western definitions and categorisations play out in practice.

Can these actors legitimately be defined as “opposing sides”? Indeed, to what extent do they fit into an easily defined category, or does their miscategorisation actively undermine the formation of strategy and its success? There are many dilemmas involved, including the role of

¹ Fick & Nagl, 2009:4.

spoiling or non-compliance is a pluralistic society – for some level of resistance is to be expected. Additionally, many of the actors we perceive to be most compliant may actually be some of the greatest spoilers. Indeed, definition and perception have the potential to play significant roles. As such, the study will examine how and why we define these actors, and the results of this in practice. For the sake of clarity these relatively non-violent groups will be defined as non-compliant actors.

The study will be grounded in the case of Afghanistan, which makes an effective case due to its vast complexity and multitude of actors on all different levels – be it local, national, regional or international.

In terms of methodology the study will primarily use secondary literature to examine non-compliant actors in Afghanistan and reasons for their non-compliance, but will supplement this with a range of interviews with individuals from governments, research institutions, the military and NGOs in order to hear their perceptions of non-compliance. These will be semi-structured interviews with individuals that have been in the field, and thus have first hand experience of dealing with non-compliant actors in Afghanistan.

The study will look at the following issues to highlight the consequences of definitions and the roles they play in practice:

- What level of resistance is required to be classified as a non-compliant actor?
- To what extent has the coalition itself been responsible for creating “non-compliant” actors through ineffective strategies i.e. alienating farmers by destroying their property, crops or through bursting into their dwellings?

In answering these questions the study aims to make actors aware of the key issues in dealing with non-compliant actors in Afghanistan. Although this study will be limited to non-compliance in an Afghani context, the scope and complexity of the Afghanistan conflict and the wealth of actors make it an effective case study to examine the concept, and highlight issues that may be important in a more general discussion of the term. Furthermore, as the conflict is on-going the results of this study may help to inform further policies.

The study will begin with a theoretical discussion of important elements to consider when defining “us” and “them” seen through the lenses of the term non-compliance. It will then ground this discussion

in the case of Afghanistan, highlighting how this discussion plays out in practice.

Who are we?

In situations like Afghanistan “we” seem to be particularly adept at defining our perceived enemies, utilising a range of terms. However, there is often little discussion about the inherent meaning of these terms; their meanings are often taken for granted with little further discussion of what they actually entail. When thinking about terms such as non-compliance two questions immediately arise; compliance with who and compliance with what? Indeed this study has chosen to use the term non-compliance for the sake of clarity, but these questions are just as relevant for the other terms in use: spoiling what? Who’s adversary? Who’s enemy? The terms are quite interchangeable.

Indeed, non-compliance is taken to mean non-conformity; that an actor is failing to adhere to a prescribed set of rules or behaviour. But who is prescribing these rules or behaviour? In the case of Afghanistan there are numerous actors involved on numerous levels, do we mean non-compliance with UN strategy, or NATO/ISAF strategy? What about the strategies of other actors involved in bringing peace and development to Afghanistan? Indeed, what do we mean by the “coalition” in light of current discussions of a comprehensive approach and the need for integrated political, military and developmental aid and support?

The multitude of actors with various aims and missions severely complicates the development of a clear overall strategy. Current strategies differ significantly depending on the actor:

“UNAMA’s [United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan’s] overall function is to promote peace and stability in Afghanistan by leading efforts of the international community in conjunction with the Government of Afghanistan in rebuilding the country and strengthening the foundations of peace and constitutional democracy.”²

The NATO International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission is to

² UNAMA website, Accessed 04/03/2009.

“assist the Afghan government in exercising and extending its authority and influence across the country, paving the way for reconstruction and development.”³

At the same time President Barack Obama stated that the US central mission is

“making sure that that al-Qaeda cannot attack the US homeland and US interests and our allies. That’s our number one priority.”⁴

While the NGO CARE Afghanistan’s mission is to

“address the underlying causes of poverty, human suffering and social injustice. This is done through strengthening capacity for self-reliance; promoting basic human rights, social economic and gender equity, sustainable and effective use of resources, good governance, vibrant civil society and provision of economic opportunities.”⁵

Note that while the UN mission is focused on creating peace, the NATO mission aims to assist the Afghan government in extending its *authority* and *influence* across the country. The examples from CARE and President Obama highlight different priorities entirely, focusing respectively on the basic human needs of Afghans and defeating al-Qaeda. This highlights the uncertainty about what “we” are actually trying to achieve in Afghanistan. How can we effectively define “them” when “we” ourselves don’t have a clearly defined aim of what we want to accomplish and how to go about it. This is a key issue, and will be essential in effectively defining actors involved in the conflict.

The range of different strategies by different actors is further complicated by the perceived need to integrate these under a comprehensive approach. The formulation of a comprehensive approach has been seen as increasingly important in recent years – this draws on the need to effectively integrate political, military and developmental aid and support. As such, do we see compliance as conforming to the aims and strategies of actors involved in this comprehensive approach? How do the “coalition” and the comprehensive approach fit together? One could further ask if this comprehensive approach actually leads to the formulation of a clear overall strategy, and if so, how do we relate this to the issue of compliance?

For to simply state a comprehensive approach is also to ignore the multiplicity of various actors with varying interests. Indeed, Cornish and Glad highlight how many aid workers and NGOs have come to

3 NATO website, Accessed 04/03/2009.

4 BBC News 23/03/2009.

5 CARE Afghanistan website, Accessed 04/03/2009.

resist the wider interventionist agenda, evident in comprehensive approaches. They state that this has changed the nature of aid, negatively affecting NGO security. As a result many are now being perceived as obstructionist by the other whole of government players.⁶

Furthermore, how does this overall strategy relate to individual UN or NATO strategies or to governmental bilateral strategies, or to those of international financial institutions? Simply stating non-compliance is insufficient in explaining the nature of the term, and the supposed infringement. There is a clear need to delineate who and what the supposed non-compliant actor is being non-compliant with. For although the answer to this question may be quite clear when talking of armed insurgent groups, it becomes much more complex when we discuss the activities of low level or non-violent actors. Indeed, if we are unable to effectively define perceived infringements and infringing actors that undermine “our” strategy how can “we” develop instruments or policies to mitigate this.

Other complicating issues include the role of the Afghani government; the NATO/ISAF force is an assistance force, while UNAMA is meant to work in conjunction with the Afghan government. But where does the Afghan government fit into the definition “coalition”? This is unclear. Furthermore what about the distinction between NATO/ISAF forces, and US troops engaged in Operation Enduring Freedom – where do these Operating Enduring Freedom troops fit in, are they part of the “coalition” or something separate?

Indeed even if we take non-compliance to refer to overall NATO/ISAF strategy it appears there is significant internal debate about what this necessitates. A Spiegel article highlights how top NATO commander John Craddock wants the alliance to use deadly force against opium dealers, without proof of connection to the insurgency.⁷ Many NATO commanders did not want to follow the order and it aroused significant disagreement before being retracted. This episode clearly shows that even NATO can’t effectively agree on what an end-strategy means in practice, and what this covers.

Words matter

The nature of the terms and definitions used has some important ontological implications; compliance would seem to imply the “proper” thing to do, the “right” strategy. By using the term non-compliance we are referring to simple right/wrong dichotomy or discourse. Following

6 Cornish & Glad, 2008:3.

7 Koelbl, 28/01/2009.

this, non-compliance is both “morally” and “ethically” wrong. This can be problematic in complex conflict situations, where there are many actors and many grey zones. Additionally, some actors may have legitimate reasons for non-compliant behaviour.

Indeed, a key issue is where this strategy or prescribed set of rules comes from, and whether these rules have the moral and ethical pre-eminence associated with the entrenched meaning of compliance.

Newman and Richmond raise some of these issues in their discussion of spoilers, setting this within the context of the liberal peace thesis. They highlight how contemporary peace processes are envisaged within the so-called liberal peace framework, where settlements include constitutional agreements, democratisation, human rights safeguards, the rule of law and the free market.⁸ However in practice not all cultures and societies adhere to these norms and values;

“By labelling as spoilers every group that does not conform to such a peace process, we may be making a value judgement about the nature of that society and trying to apply ‘universal values’. Thus the concept of ‘spoiling’ can be subjective and alludes to broader normative debates about the ‘best’ way to organise (post-conflict) societies.⁹

Indeed, this further reinforces the point that was made earlier, that different actors have their own interests, as well as norms and values. These will not always correspond to those perceived by us, and inherent in, for example, NATO/ISAF policy. As a result we should be aware of not simply placing non-compliant behaviour within a right/wrong dichotomy.

Thus, we should think more about the semantic and ontological meaning of the term and whether it is worthwhile or should be replaced with another less normative term. Much of this debate will depend on the situational context, and whether non-compliance refers to a clearly defined mandate such as the Dayton Accords in Bosnia where both “we” and “them” are clearly defined.

The preceding sections have clearly highlighted the problematic nature of defining non-compliant behaviour and the necessity of sufficiently defining non-compliance with whom, and non-compliance with what. This entails a clear understanding of what “we” are and what “we” are aiming to achieve so that we can begin to effectively define other actors involved. It is thus important to highlight what

8 Newman & Richmond, 2006:3-4.

9 Newman & Richmond, 2006a:6.

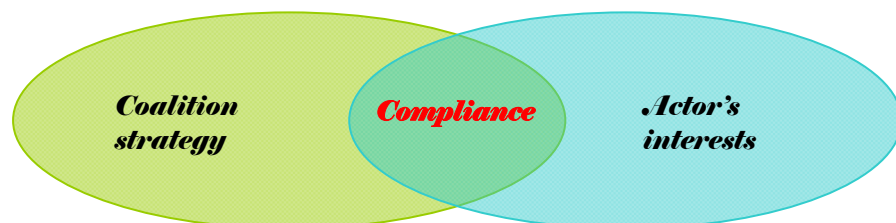
strategy means in the case of Afghanistan, as well as which actors are covered by this definition. The role of the national government also crucially needs to be outlined.

It is beyond the scope of this study to answer this question or spend significant time making recommendations. The aim here is to highlight the problematic nature of defining perceived enemies and current definitions thus far, and to highlight key issues which should be addressed and taken into consideration. As such, we will interpret non-compliance in this study as referring to behaviour negatively affecting peace, stability and reconstruction and development operations in Afghanistan. This will cover NATO/ISAF, EU and UN operations, and include the role of the Afghani government at national, provincial and local levels in ensuring security, reconstruction and development. Although this is a somewhat broad arena, we must reiterate that we don't attempt to define non-compliance or non-compliant actors or other terms noted previously. This study merely aims to highlight important issues that should be taken into account when trying to effectively define actors in complex situations such as Afghanistan.

Clear strategy?

Using the term non-compliant would seem to infer that non-compliant actors have a clearly defined strategy. This perception may be linked to traditional military approaches whereby actors/enemies/opponents have clear aims/goals/intentions and motivations.

Although this may be true of some actors, it is not be characteristic of all. It would maybe be more effective to perceive non-compliance in terms of interests, or from an economic perspective, in terms of incentives. As such, "coalition strategy" and an actor's interests do not necessarily correspond all the time, but overlap in some instances.



However even this maybe too simplistic, as it misses key issues such as fear and coercion. Here it maybe useful to draw upon Bhatia and

Sedra's typology of different motives for combatant mobilisation in Afghanistan, as they are just as relevant in a discussion of non-compliance in a general sense:

- Ideology
- Material entitlements and incentives
- Grievance and revenge
- Primary group belonging and affiliation
- Authority and obedience
- Coercion and enforcement
- Protection and defence
- Adventure
- Habit¹⁰

This typology effectively highlights the vast array of factors that could possibly be influencing non-compliant behaviour. In this sense it is too simplistic to think of non-compliant actors in conventional military terms, due to the vast number of factors at play. This is relevant for both individuals and groups. Indeed, if we refer to groups it is also uncertain to which extent they have broadly definable aims and goals. Command structures are also of importance, as it not clear whether non-compliant groups will have a clear hierarchical command structure with all individuals following the same behaviour. Thus it is somewhat problematic to think of non-compliant actors within a traditional military framework.

Additionally, non-compliant behaviour is not always intended to undermine international peace and stability operations, but may be reflective of actors trying to influence power structures, and their interests within them. Alternatively non-compliant behaviour may be a by-product of an everyday activity such as a labourer on a poppy plantation, while many non-compliant actors are not non-compliant all of the time.

Level of resistance?

Compliance with who and compliance with what are vital questions, but a key issue remains in defining non-compliance. Namely: What in itself constitutes non-compliant behaviour?

What level of resistance is required to be defined as a non-compliant actor?

¹⁰ Bhatia & Sedra, 2008:94.

As Newman and Richmond ask, what is the difference between ‘politics’ – including the rational objection to terms and conditions that are perceived to be ‘unfair’ or unduly detrimental to one’s cause – and ‘spoiling’?¹¹ Indeed it is often difficult to draw the line when spoiling appears to have an inherently subjective component: one side’s “reasonable demands” may be nothing more than spoiling from the other side’s perspective.¹² This point is just as pertinent in a discussion of non-compliance and other terms. What is the distinction between politics and non-compliance?

The level of violence is often a sticking point in discussing non-compliant behaviour. In some discussions of non-compliant actors a clear line of delineation has been introduced at the first use of violence. This use of violence leads to definitions of being an irregular adversary or other terms that signify use of high level violence. However this definition may be too simplistic; low level violence has often characterised politics in various societies. By simply categorising an actor as an irregular adversary at the first use of violence we also avoid the crucial *why* question? *Why* are these particular actors using violence? Is this part of traditional political structures and behaviour or are their alternative answers? Do these actors have specific aims or goals? Are they following a specific ideology? Have they been coerced? Avoiding the *why* question neglects real-life realities and nuances, thereby reinforcing the simple us/them dichotomy. It is useful here to once again look at Bhatia and Sedra’s typology (listed above) of different motives for combatant mobilisation in Afghanistan and be aware of the various factors at play.

One issue could be how we define political protests that escalate and where demonstrators begin to throw rocks at police or create other kinds of low level damage? For the most part these are actors involved in peaceful everyday politics, but in some cases limited levels of violence may arise.

In light of this it may be effective to define the scale and target of violence when defining non-compliant actors. Is it aimed specifically at NATO/ISAF forces or at other international peace and stability operations? Or do NATO/ISAF forces find themselves affected by, or in the middle of local conflicts? What level of violence leads to a certain categorisation?

As has been highlighted consistently thus far, definitions matter; there is a distinct need for accurate and concrete specifications of the activities they refer to do, as well as an awareness of who “we” are and

¹¹ Newman & Richmond, 2006:2.

¹² *ibid.*

“our” goals. Ultimately, the abstract nature of certain terms and the lack of specifics often make them unsuitable, overly generalising and far too broad. There is a need to be careful of developing catch-all definitions, for by trying to categorise too generally we oversee vital features and dynamics that are essential in formulating worthwhile policy.

Non-compliance in Afghanistan

In light of this theoretical discussion it is interesting to see how these issues play out in Afghanistan. In the following section we will discuss non-compliance in Afghanistan in two distinct ways. Firstly, we will contextualise the theoretical debate of the term non-compliance in an Afghani setting, highlighting key methodological issues to be aware of when trying to use or define the term non-compliance in an Afghani context. Secondly we will outline important factors that contribute to non-compliant behaviour in Afghanistan and which highlight the complexity of effectively defining actors and the insufficiency of utilising a simple us/them dichotomy. In doing so the study will draw on a range of secondary literature as well as interviews with researchers, NGO workers, government personnel and military personnel that have significant personal experience working with Afghanistan.

Defining non-compliance in Afghanistan

Contemporary definitions of non-compliance and other such terms are relatively abstract and broad as was highlighted earlier in the theoretical discussion. These definitions were rather vague in specifying compliance with what, whom and how. These methodological weaknesses became clearly evident during interviews about non-compliance in Afghanistan.

As was highlighted earlier, the vast array of actors and multiplicity of interests and activities make it extremely difficult to define various actors in Afghanistan. To effectively use certain terms will require significant refinement. We must clearly specify what non-compliance entails, and which actors it covers, i.e. NATO/ISAF, EU, UN, NGOS, private security companies, the Afghan government etc. This vagueness about terms seems to be reflective of an overall confusion about what we are trying to achieve in Afghanistan. Before we have clearly stated goals and awareness of what we want to achieve, and how to achieve this, it will be difficult to effectively define non-compliance. This point also came clearly across in the interviews and highlights the need for much greater thinking on the strategic rather than the tactical level. Indeed, the lack of a clearly defined mandate with no clearly delineated definition of what constitutes non-compliant behaviour means that the number of potential infringers is enormous. Any actor active or with interests in Afghanistan has the potential to exhibit non-compliant behaviour, including actors or “partners” involved in establishing peace and security in Afghanistan. Thus, potential non-compliant actors could include:

- Poppy farmers and day labourers
- Lorry drivers and taxi drivers helping with logistics
- Unemployed civilians helping with logistics or other activities
- Civilians passing on information about the presence and movements of international forces (including children)
- Smugglers of weapons and other equipment for insurgent groups
- Pashtun civilians offering help to insurgents due to Pashtunwali, the Pashtun tribal code
- Warlords
- Journalists

- NGOs
- Donors
- Interest groups
- External governments
- NATO/ISAF and US Enduring Freedom troops
- Human Rights groups
- Afghan National Army
- Afghan National Police
- Politicians/opposition MPs
- Local businessmen
- Private Security Companies
- Drug barons
- The UN
- Foreign intelligence agencies
- Religious leaders
- Community leaders

This list is not exhaustive but clearly highlights the vast number of potential non-compliant actors. Furthermore, it highlights the complexity of defining non-compliant behaviour; actors that we usually think as compliant can often exhibit significant non-compliant behaviour due to the vast number of interests and issues at play. This study however, for the sake of scope, will largely concentrate on local Afghani actors and civilians.

Methodologically, there is also a significant need to contextualise terms according to their application. In Afghanistan this requires looking at the level of resistance required for non-compliant behaviour as well as being aware of the root causes and contributing factors to non-compliant behaviour. It also requires the need to look at nuances, such as actors not being aware of their committing non-compliant behaviour, and that non-compliant actors are not necessarily non-compliant all of the time.

This section will firstly look at the level of resistance necessary to be defined as a non-compliant actor, before highlighting some of these more nuanced issues in an Afghani context. The study will then outline some of the key contributing factors to be aware of when discussing non-compliance in Afghanistan. These will do not seek to be all encompassing, but aim to highlight key issues to be aware of and which will hopefully help in refining a more specific definition.

Non compliant how?

Some aspects of non-compliance are obvious, such as the passing on of information that leads to an ambush on NATO/ISAF soldiers. However, other cases are much more complex. One critical question here is what level of resistance constitutes non-compliant behaviour?

As was highlighted in the theoretical section, it is often difficult to distinguish between politics and non-compliant behaviour. The point also resonates in an Afghani context, as violence has historically been a common facet of Afghan politics. Indeed, Afghanistan as a state has been characterised by violent conflict, both internally and with external forces. Furthermore, in post-conflict states or states experiencing conflict transformation some level of tension or resistance is often to be expected. Newman and Richmond note that “in some ways spoiling is part of peace processes, as much as conflict is a function of social and political change”.¹³

In this context is it realistic to define non-compliant actors as non-violent entities? As was mentioned earlier, it may be necessary to accept a certain amount of low-level violence when defining non-compliant behaviour. The following example effectively highlights the complex nature of this discussion: A Junbish youth group was implicated in protests in Faryab and Samagan and actively engaged in rock throwing, agitation and propaganda, partly with the goal of inducing a harsh response from the government security services. Although Junbish’s youth groups were not provided with small arms training, they are utilised to perform political duties and undertake political action.¹⁴ Although a political entity for the most part, should this level of violence lead to these groups being defined as non-compliant actors or irregular adversaries, as some definitions would suggest? In an Afghani context the debate is far more complex than a simple violence/no violence dichotomy, again reinforcing the need to contextualise the term.

The distinction between politics and non-compliance also highlights the discussion of whether some non-compliant behaviour is legitimate within certain contexts. For example, an individual who seeks justice through government courts, but achieves nothing due to government corruption and nepotism. Thus, disenchanted and disappointed he turns to the Taliban in order to seek justice. We can also utilise the example of an Afghani poppy farmer. His key interest may be having a stable life, with enough material goods to sustain himself and his family. In other words – basic human needs. Poppy farming is the

¹³ Newman & Richmond, 2006a:4.

¹⁴ Bhatia & Sedra, 2008:84.

easiest, most productive, and most profitable crop available so it is a natural choice. However the revenues from poppy farming inevitably help sustain the Taleban, and enable them to continue their insurgency. Thus, poppy farmers may be non-compliant due to this implicit support of insurgent groups.

As a response to this the crops of many poppy farmers may have been sprayed with chemicals to destroy them. This may create further non-compliance as the poor farmer now has had his only livelihood destroyed, and is thus unsure how to feed his family. This feeling may be further reinforced by the fact that a larger, wealthier farmer was able to avoid having his crops sprayed as he was able to pay off government officials.

This example also highlights the need to effectively define what lies within the confine of non-compliant behaviour, or how far the chain of non-compliant behaviour extends. For example the behaviour of poppy farmers or labourers is non-compliant to the extent that a proportion of the profit derived from opium exports eventually finds itself in the hands of insurgents groups. However, the chain of people profiting from the drug trade is lengthy and numerous, stretching from day labourers in the fields, to drug laboratory workers and going all the way up to police stations, provincial governments and high-level government circles.¹⁵ Thus, when poppy farmers and day labourers are so far down the value chain is it still fitting to define their behaviour as non-compliant? This point has also been pertinent in internal NATO discussions with top NATO commander wanting the alliance to target opium deals with deadly force, while other commanders have refused to implement this order.¹⁶ Spiegel notes that if Craddock's order were to take effect it would result in the addition of thousands of Afghans to the description of so-called "legitimate military targets" and also land them on so called targeting lists.¹⁷

This again brings up the issue that it is hard to define actors when we still can't decide what our overall mission is and what we are trying to achieve. This lack of clarity becomes evident in the actions on the ground, and the disputes that arise. For by hastily categorising certain actors as hostile we may inadvertently propagate or even exacerbate non-compliant behaviour. This will also be highlighted in the remained of this study about contributing factors to non-compliance. A further issue is whether we should distinguish between non-compliant activity and non-compliant intent.

15 Koelbl, 28/01/2009.

16 *ibid.*

17 *ibid.*

Nuances

As has previously been noted non-compliant behaviour is not necessarily performed by actors with clearly defined aims, motivations and goals. Nor will non-compliant actors necessarily be non-compliant all of the time. Thus it may be worthwhile to consider this disparity between activity and intent.

Many actors may be unaware of their non-compliant behaviour, for example poppy farmers or day labourers. This may also be appropriate for taxi drivers, lorry drivers or other civilian actors that may implicitly help insurgents through securing their logistics or other assistance. This is not to neglect that many of these actors may be aware of their non-compliant behaviour, but the point is that many will not. The undertaking of these activities may also be due to other factors that will be elucidated later such as fear or economic opportunism. Moreover non-compliant behaviour may differ according to timing and situational context; it may rise and fall according to events such as crop harvesting or the Ramadan.

Indeed, these actors are not necessarily non-compliant all of the time. This is true for both actors that are both aware and unaware of their non-compliance – they may only be carrying out non-compliant activities as part of their everyday livelihoods, or due to fear and coercion. An interesting example from the interviews was of an insurgent group that supported the voting registration process by providing security so they themselves could register. Again this highlights the wealth of factors influencing non-compliant behaviour as well as the importance of asking the *why* question. Although this is a violent group and otherwise outside the scope of this study, why do they revert to violence – is it part of a quest to achieve political power? The use of an us/them dichotomy often neglects many of the root causes of non-compliance. It focuses on the behaviour itself rather than the root cause – such as political marginalisation, for example – that ultimately leads to non-compliant behaviour.

Afghan perceptions of the national government and international peace and stability operations

A number of issues have been raised as to defining non-compliance with whom and what, and that certain actors are not always aware of their “non-compliant” behaviour. However an important element is how perceived non-compliant actors view national and local government as opposed to international actors involved in peace, stability and development? This point highlights the crucial need to effectively

define what we mean by non-compliance, defining what we mean by coalition end strategy, and what this entails. By failing to specify and focus it becomes much harder to define the root causes of non-compliant behaviour.

Although certain non-compliant actors will perceive the Afghani government and Afghani troops as Western puppets the interviews undertaken for this study suggest that most Afghans perceive them as separate entities. Foreign troops look truly different in their modern kit and for the most part remain in their bases when not undertaking operations. Moreover, when they do it is often in heavily fortified convoys. Afghans also tend to regard foreign troops as a single entity, not distinguishing between country of origin. As regards civilian NGO workers, the comprehensive approach has led to a blurring of lines between military operations and politics on the one hand and developmental aid on the other. In the eyes of Afghans they are thus more and more associated with foreign troops and foreign governments. This can also be seen in the growing numbers of NGO worker deaths; as NGOs become growing targets for insurgent groups.

Indeed, this again raises the *who are "we" question* regarding the role of international peace and stability actors. For as Fick and Nagl highlight: "in a war where perception creates reality, we all suffer the consequences".¹⁸ Thus, one should be aware of how perceptions of "us" may lead to certain consequences, especially in light of the comprehensive approach and the combination of diplomacy, aid and security.

18 Fick & Nagl, 2009:4.

Contributing factors to non-compliant behaviour

This section will highlight important issues affecting non-compliance in Afghanistan, including how the theoretical discussion plays out in practice. Critically, it will draw attention to key issues that could be exacerbating non-compliance, and that are inherently linked to how non-compliant behaviour is defined.

The issue of fear

According to the interviews conducted for the study the single clearest definable factor contributing to non-compliant behaviour in Afghanistan is fear. Local civilians or actors may be loathe to comply with international peace and stability operations due to the active presence and threats of the Taliban or other anti-government forces. Thus, they may be forced into behaviour which is then classified as non-compliant – not through any choice of their own – but due to fear. As Bhatia and Sedra highlight: “the availability and import of small arms, combined with the small size of both government security forces and of the NATO/Coalition presence allows the anti-government forces to maintain a ‘balance of fear over districts and villages’.¹⁹ In a BBC/ABC/ARD poll conducted in 2009 49% of respondents reported that security from the Taliban and other armed groups was either *somewhat bad* or *very bad*.²⁰

This ‘balance of fear’ has possibly been exacerbated by two key factors. Firstly, the assassination of prominent Pashtun tribal and religious leaders who cooperated with the government incites fear, and encourages non-compliance. Secondly, the perception of NATO/ISAF and US troops as casualty averse may potentially worsen non-compliance as local actors don’t believe they are prepared to do all that is needed to defeat insurgent groups. Furthermore, they may doubt that the “Coalition” has the political will to maintain its fight against the Taliban and other anti-government forces. Local actors may fear that international peace and stability forces will be pressured out like the Russians, thus if they are seen to be compliant they may be unduly punished by insurgent groups.

¹⁹ Bhatia & Sedra, 2008:58.

²⁰ BBC/ABC/ARD poll, 2009:5.

There has already been significant targeting of local populations or of civilians working with international peace and stability actors. Afghans may even be killed due to insurgents finding a “suspicious” phone number and accusing them of spying. Cornish and Glad highlight how NGO offices and staff have been searched for links to the military and threatened with repercussions if such links are found. They note how some projects have had to close down after visits of PRTs or donors in heavily armed escorts, as communities have communicated that they can no longer provide security to the project staff.²¹ A frequent occurrence is the posting of “night letters” by insurgents during the night which threaten local civilians, and warn them of cooperating with international peace and stability actors.

In this environment many civilians may be extremely loathe to be compliant with international peace and stability operations. They may also pass on information to insurgent groups due to threats, or fear of repercussions if they are thought to be collaborating with these international actors. Indeed, Jalali notes that: “Incidents of violent expression of communal tension and a spread of violent protests hint at growing public frustration and intolerance that often stem from human insecurity”.²² This effectively shows the significant propensity for non-compliance that fear causes.

Corruption

One crucial facet undermining the legitimacy of the “coalition” strategy is the rampant corruption throughout all levels of Afghani government. One American commander states that instead of seeking to “serve and protect”, the Afghan police works to “exploit and extort”.²³ Other interviews undertaken for this study have reinforced this, highlighting that the Afghani police are highly predatory. This is alarming when the police are civilians’ first point of security, thus if they aren’t providing security who is?²⁴

In the aforementioned BBC/ABC/ARD survey 63% of respondents reported that corruption was a big problem, and 21% that it was a moderate problem.²⁵ At the same time 50% of respondents said the level of corruption had increased in the past year.²⁶ The disenchantment caused by this rampant corruption undermines the legitimacy of the government and can thus contribute to non-compliant behaviour.

21 Cornish & Glad, 2008:20.

22 Jalali, 2007:40.

23 Economist, 12/02/2009.

24 Interview with aid worker.

25 BBC/ABC/ARD, 2009:9.

26 *ibid.*

Bhatia and Sedra note that banditry and criminal activity may be reflective of revolt and state resistance, particularly if the state is considered compromised.²⁷

Government corruption may also contribute to directly maintaining the status quo and growing instability. Many government officials are involved in the drug trade, which is easier to sustain in a situation characterised by a high level of conflict and insecurity. Mark Sempler, a former British and EU representative notes that talks with moderate elements of the Taliban were opposed by groups with vested interests in continued conflict and bad governance – powerful networks that controlled much of the provincial administration and its lucrative opium trade and had ties in Kabul to the president as well as the National Intelligence Agency (NDS).²⁸ This situation is further exacerbated by the excessive drug use amongst police. There are claims that 60% of police in Helmand province are using drugs.²⁹

Anti-government forces are again seeking to portray themselves as an “alternative to corruption and incompetence”, attempting to attract support due to dissatisfaction with the speed of recovery and the penetration of the security forces by commanders and corrupt officials.³⁰ This point again highlights the difficulty of the term non-compliance – for certain actors will behave in a ‘non-compliant’ manner at the perceived corruption and illegitimacy of the government. In a country where corruption is extremely pervasive these may be legitimate complaints. It also highlights the need for more effective strategies if local actors may possibly prefer Taliban rule due to a lack of corruption and greater stability. Finally, a Danish Major also made the point that we should distinguish between corruption for survival, and corruption to get rich.

The role of NATO/ISAF and US military operations

Together with fear and corruption, the role of NATO/ISAF and US military forces has been significant in exacerbating non-compliance. At the core of this is civilian casualties caused by military operations. Indeed, civilian casualties have risen markedly in recent years; as fighting has intensified and spread, so have the amount of civilian casualties – insurgent attacks were up by a third and civilian casualties increased by 40% in 2008 compared to 2007.³¹ These cause widespread anger and disenchantment, perpetuate negative perceptions of

27 Bhatia & Sedra, 2008:75.

28 Suhrke et al. 2009:7.

29 Patience, 18/02/2009.

30 Franco, 2007 in Bhatia & Sedra, 2008:59.

31 Economist, 12/02/2009.

foreign troops and undermine support for the presence of international peace and stability operations. Here it is necessary to note that disenchantment will eventually lead to non-compliance. If it is allowed to grow and not stymied, it will eventually reach a tipping point. Upon this tipping point non-compliant behaviour will become more and more common.

Some level of civilian casualties will be unavoidable in any modern conflict; however US and NATO/ISAF strategy may be actively worsening this in many situations. There are numerous reports of airstrikes having killed insurgents, but where it has later emerged that there were significant numbers of civilian casualties. Afghanis react extremely strongly to this; in a BBC/ABC/ARD poll of 1,500 people spread throughout all 34 provinces were asked the question “Do you think the use of airstrikes by the US and NATO/ISAF forces is acceptable because it helps defeat the Taliban and other anti-government fighters, or unacceptable because it endangers too many innocent civilians?” In reply, 77% of respondents stated that this was unacceptable.³² Furthermore, 34% of respondents replied knowledge of civilians being killed or seriously hurt by US, or NATO/ISAF forces in their area.³³ These statistics are telling and highlight that airstrikes can significantly affect non-compliant behaviour – indeed their benefits may even be overshadowed by the blowback they cause.

They are also notable in light of the growing number of airstrikes. Fick and Nagl highlight that in 2005, US and NATO/ISAF forces conducted 176 close air support missions (in which aircraft conduct bombing or strafing in support of ground troops) in Afghanistan. In 2007, it completed 3,572 such missions.³⁴ They also note how bombs, even ‘smart’ bombs are blunt instruments, and they inevitably kill people other than their intended targets. Resulting civilian deaths will undermine the finite amount of goodwill towards US and NATO/ISAF forces and help reinforce the Taliban propaganda narrative.³⁵ It should also be noted that insurgent groups will sometimes strike with the aim of causing civilian casualties, for example, an ambush in a heavily populated area. NATO/ISAF responses and possible supporting airstrikes will thus cause large amounts of unintended civilian casualties. Thus, it is important to convey to the Afghan people that many of these high levels of civilian casualties are often part of insurgent group strategy. These strategies should also be taken into account when formulating guidelines for ambush reaction so as to mitigate civilian casualties.

32 BBC/ABC/ARD poll, 2009:19.

33 *ibid.*

34 Fick & Nagl, 2009:3.

35 Fick & Nagl, 2009:3-4.

In addition to the civilian deaths and injuries, the collateral damage caused by airstrikes can be extremely provocative to local civilians. The Danish commander of Hold 6 noted that it was one of the greatest destabilising factors. Related to this is the issue of compensation; although there are a number of mechanisms in place for giving compensation there is a lack of coordination or common policy. Gaston, in a recent report about the costs and consequences of civilian suffering in Afghanistan highlights that there “was no substitute for a direct apology and a gesture (often monetary) of condolence from those forces”.³⁶ Many civilians are unfortunately not getting the compensation they are entitled to. This definitely needs to be improved to mitigate non-compliance. Additionally, it is crucial that Afghans receive an apology from the forces responsible, as well as being aware that compensation also comes from the forces responsible.

Convoys play a major role in creating negative perceptions of foreign forces, and thus, contribute to non-compliance. This point was mentioned consistently in the interviews undertaken. A Danish Major highlights this as a major issue; he explained how convoys drive through urban areas at speeds of up to 100-120km an hour, and frequently cause civilian casualties (around once or twice a month in Kabul alone). These casualties arise from civilians being run over, or from vehicles or civilians coming too close and being shot. Warning shots are also frequently fired. These activities cause significant disenchantment and fear within the population, and are reinforced when convoys simply keep driving after causing civilian casualties. The Danish Major noted that progress about rectifying this was quite slow due to internal discussions about security measures (i.e. avoiding IEDs) and priorities.

Compound searches are also a massive affront to Afghan civilians, imposing on their private lives and cultural traditions. An aid worker interviewed spoke of the protest marches that had occurred in response to a growing number of compound and house searches. She highlighted how many men had stated that “we would rather kill our women than let you see them”. The home is of great importance to Afghans, and as such great sensitivity needs to be shown in this area. The Danish troops seemed very aware of this; in the final debriefing for Hold 6, the latest batch of Danish troops, it was stated compound searches were extremely provocative and offensive. Furthermore, they were only to be undertaken in special circumstances: in hot pursuit of insurgents, or as part of a call-out or as part of an Afghan National Security Forces search. In these instances they emphasised the need for dialogue with local leaders, and the need to explain the reason for the search to its occupants. The Danes also emphasised the need for an

³⁶ Gaston, 2009:iii-iv.

“Afghani face” in conducting these searches and for Afghans to be in the lead. However a District Commander interviewed stated there were different approaches depending on the contingent, and that some international forces had been, and continued to be, much less sensitive in dealing with compound searches. The Danes also underlined the need to be sensitive when searching civilians.

Other issues causing non-compliance may be connected to neglecting the interests of civilians in certain circumstances in the interests of security. For example, the Danish major highlighted the case of night flights into Kabul airport. These are extremely noisy and cause significant irritation to the residents of Kabul. Additionally, the closure of roads due to security operations or concerns causes major frustration to local drivers. The placement of international bases in the centre of Kabul also leads to significant civilian disruptions due to various security measures and traffic.³⁷ A NGO worker interview also highlighted the negative role of civilians being detained without trial, and without access to a lawyer. This is seen as hypocrisy with the application of the law.

The role of private security companies (PSCs) is also significant, for in the wake of the Blackwater debacle in Iraq it will be important to keep strict discipline and control of private security companies operating in Afghanistan. Inappropriate behaviour or excessive use of force can result in increased levels of non-compliance. As Fick and Nagl state Afghan civilians do not distinguish between excessive force used by soldier and excessive force used by contractors.³⁸

Ultimately, many of these issues about the role of NATO/ISAF and US forces in exacerbating non-compliance are largely related to the question of what is to be achieved in Afghanistan: what is the main focus and how should this be brought about? Until recently foreign military forces were largely concentrated on mitigating casualty levels of their own troops, which has been reflected in tactical choices, i.e. focus on bombing campaigns, troops largely staying in heavily fortified bases and travelling quickly in heavily armed convoys. As Fick and Nagl note “The US military, designed to inflict overwhelming and disproportionate losses on the enemy, tends to equate victory with very few body bags. So does the American public”.³⁹

Rules of engagement regarding civilian casualties have also been watered down in some areas, despite the new US counter-insurgency field manual highlighting the need to focus on protecting civilians

37 Interview with Helge Lurås, 02/03/2009.

38 Fick & Nagl, 2009:4.

39 Fick & Nagl, 2009:3.

over killing the enemy. A Spiegel article from January 2009 notes that Central Command in Florida, which is responsible for the US Armed Forces deployment in Afghanistan has yet again watered down provisions in the rules of engagement for the Afghanistan deployment pertaining to the protection of civilians. According to the new rules, US forces can now bomb drug labs if they have previous analysis that the operation would not kill “more than 10 civilians”.⁴⁰ However, it is unclear to what extent these rules will remain in place in light of the continuing internal NATO/ISAF debate about the role of drug trafficking in sustaining the insurgency.

Indeed, there has been, and still is insufficient discussion about the role of the Afghani people and the need to effectively protect them. This has resulted in deteriorating perceptions of foreign forces as well as other developmental actors involved in peace and stability organisations. The focus on force protection leads to Afghans asking what foreign forces are really trying to achieve in Afghanistan. Are they really trying to help the Afghan people, or what are their true aims and intentions? A NGO worker highlighted the growing cynicism about this in recent years, a cynicism that is only reinforced by President Obama announcing that the number one priority is protecting the US homeland and US interests rather than protecting Afghan civilians and establishing stability.⁴¹

Part of this cynicism is also related to the comprehensive approach and the use of development as a political tool. In order to win “hearts and minds” projects are implemented that do not necessarily focus on long term development, but rather on gaining goodwill and support within a short space of time. However, as a number of interviewees have noted, Afghans are often aware that they are being paid off or “bribed” for this short term support. Awareness of these issues and defining strategy more specifically will make it much easier to identify and mitigate non-compliant behaviour. In this sense it will be interesting to see to what extent General David Petraeus’s counterinsurgency strategy with an overwhelming focus on protecting civilians is implemented.

Cultural awareness

A number of issues that can lead to non-compliant behaviour are directly linked to a lack of cultural awareness on the part of international military personnel operating in Afghanistan. The interviews conducted highlighted that although some soldiers really make an effort to learn

40 Koelbl, 28/01/2009.

41 BBC News 23/03/2009.

about the local culture, this is complicated by a number of factors. Firstly, the constant rotations of troops; it is often the case that by the time troops have developed considerable cultural awareness and understanding it is time to return home. Secondly, it is hard to develop cultural understanding when soldiers are so segregated from the civilian population, and largely confined to their bases. Finally, some soldiers are simply disinterested in learning about the local culture. Many of these issues are also pertinent for other staff serving in international peace and stability operations.

Effective cultural understanding is critical, as cultural misunderstanding or provocation can provoke fierce reactions; note the reactions to compound searches highlighted in the previous section. Ammitzboell highlights how the international presence in Afghanistan has led to an unprecedented rise in the level of prostitution – a profession that is strongly condemned in traditional and conservative religious societies.⁴² This is extremely provocative for Afghans and is perceived as undermining the social and cultural fabric of society, which thus reinforces already deteriorating perceptions of foreign personnel. The need for cultural sensitivity when searching civilians or compounds as mentioned in the preceding section is also essential.

Another source of disenchantment is international actors hiring female staff. Afghanistan is very traditional and conservative society characterised by high unemployment. In this environment the practice of hiring women and positive gender discrimination can have significant unintended consequences and implications for the local power structure and the hierarchy in social-cultural institutions such as the family.⁴³ Women may become the new breadwinners, or the only breadwinners, while the husbands remain unemployed. This issue is particularly linked to attempts to implement a Western liberal peace embowered with Western norms and values in Afghanistan. In the case of Afghanistan it is difficult to graft these sets of ideals onto a culture and society with a very different and distinct set of norms and values. As Newman and Richmond note liberal peace is sometimes problematic: democracy (at least polyarchy), human rights (especially civil and political rights), market values, globalisation, self-determination and the idea of the state are not always equitable or “fair”.⁴⁴ As such, mitigating non-compliance will require an effective awareness of these issues and their possible limits or applicability in an Afghan context.

42 Ammitzboell, 2007;82.

43 Ammitzboell, 2007;86.

44 Newman & Richmond, 2006a:5.

Better cultural awareness will help to inform more effective strategy, reduce disenchantment and thereby reduce non-compliance. A key issue in Pashtun areas will be to understand the Pashtun tribal code, Pashtunwali, and how this informs many of the actions and activities of local actors. Understanding tribal codes may illustrate reasons for non-compliance as local actors adhere to local customs or laws and exhibit behaviour that could be classified as non-compliant. For example, a Pashtun is required under Pashtunwali to offer help if asked for it, thus he may assist an insurgent if he is called upon to do so, despite his dislike of the insurgent group and its cause. Effective cultural understanding may also help to prevent international forces from becoming embroiled in local conflicts; however this will often also require understanding of local politics.

The Danish District Commander noted how Afghans will sometimes lie about information because they want to be able to please, even in situations where it is obvious they are lying. He also noted that there was disagreement about some cultural issues; corruption for example was regarded as a strategic issue at HQ level, but as a cultural issue at tactical level. Having clear guidelines on these sorts of issues would improve strategy, and thus help to reduce non-compliance.

Political targeting of aid

In Afghanistan, the disbursement of international aid is overwhelmingly focused on the most insecure and troubled areas in an attempt to promote development, at the same time as ensuring security. Helmand province alone is the third largest recipient of USAID funding in the world, receiving more money than many of the world's poorest countries.⁴⁵ Indeed USAID has concentrated more than half its budget on Helmand and three other southern provinces (out of 34 in total).⁴⁶ Likewise the British Department for International Development (DFiD) has also allocated a fifth of its budget until 2010 to Helmand province.⁴⁷

Kandahar has also received significant attention with Canada previously allocating more than 30% of its total aid disbursement to the province,⁴⁸ and now having undertaken to spend 50% of its overseas development aid in the province.⁴⁹

45 Cornish & Glad, 2008:10.

46 Financial Times, 16/03/2007.

47 *ibid.*

48 PakTribune: 04/01/2008.

49 Cornish & Glad, 2008:10.

These allocations are reflective of the comprehensive approach which sees the military, political and development efforts as equally essential in attaining peace and stability. Thus, large development spending will help to mitigate non-compliance and counter-insurgency by helping to fulfil economic, infrastructural and development needs. This will then lead to community acceptance and force protection.⁵⁰

Many in the NGO and aid community have objected to this tendency and the politicisation of aid as part of foreign policy objectives. Furthermore, as Cornish and Glad highlight, these strategies could exacerbate to non-compliance: “focus on troubled areas could create a perverse incentive to misbehave as secure areas receive less assistance in respective to more troubled regions”.⁵¹ A number of the interviews conducted have also reiterated this last point.

Economic opportunism

In a country characterised by 40-60% unemployment and widespread poverty it is unsurprising that civilians will do whatever they can to support themselves and increase their standard of living.⁵² Indeed, the BBC/ABC/ARD survey indicated that economy/poverty/jobs were regarded as the biggest problem facing Afghanistan, ahead of security and violence.⁵³ As a result one could also classify many farmers, taxi drivers, lorry drivers or other civilian actors as non-compliant to the extent that they may directly or indirectly help insurgent groups – whether this be part of their everyday livelihoods, jobs, economic opportunities, or due to fear and coercion. The question of whether they are aware of this non-compliance is also relevant, and has been noted earlier. Certainly, it is a complicated and issue and can be hard to define. For example a Danish district commander highlighted the example of children that help inform insurgent groups of coalition movements for the reward of a few sweets. When discussing actors like children it is hard to know their level of awareness.

Probably the most widespread example of this type of economic opportunistic non-compliant actor is that of the Afghani poppy farmer or day labourer. As noted in the non-compliant how section there are a number questions surrounding whether it is worthwhile defining a poppy farmer or labourer as a non-compliant actor. They are at the very bottom of the drug chain and are often growing poppies in order to meet their basic human needs. Indeed this was reflected in the

50 *ibid.*

51 *ibid.*

52 Waldman, 2008:10.

53 BBC/ABC/ARD poll, 2009:2.

BBC/ABC/ARD poll; 28% of those surveyed thought cultivation of poppies was acceptable if there was no other way to earn a living.⁵⁴

Thus, economic opportunism is a difficult issue as it is reflective of the poor economic situation of many Afghans. Nor are these actors non-compliant all of the time. Their non-compliance is not necessarily due to ideological reasons, but instead due to the need to survive and have an income. These root causes will be of critical importance when trying to define non-compliance as these reasons for non-compliance are highly understandable. They do not fit into a “right/wrong” dichotomy, but instead represent the widespread poverty and want that is the reality of today’s Afghanistan.

Mismanagement

The above section effectively highlights the need for economic development and job creation in mitigating non-compliant behaviour. Unfortunately, development programmes thus far have been plagued by mismanagement and ineffective strategies. Researcher Stina Torjesen highlights that the issue is not whether we should be there or not, the issue is managing it properly.⁵⁵ A Danish major reinforced this, stating that the issue was not losing the war to the Taliban, but to bad governance.

The interviews undertaken highlighted that there was widespread perceptions that funds are being wasted. One example was of donors paying USD \$20,000 for drilling a well, when the true cost is \$3,000. This has led to civilian perceptions that many Afghans in the right positions and foreigners are getting rich out of aid and development provision. This reinforces perceptions of corruption, and thus leads to further disenchantment and possible non-compliance.

A World Bank official noted that “In Afghanistan, the transaction costs of international assistance are very high. They are in the order of 40%, compared to around 10% in Burkina Faso for example. The additional costs for staff security are also enormous”.⁵⁶ The BBC/ABC/ARD poll highlighted that 44% of respondents thought that foreign aid organisations were making little or no progress in providing a better life for Afghans in the future.⁵⁷ There also widespread perception of funds being mistargeted, i.e. a Danish Major highlights the example of a schools and hospitals being built when there are nobody to staff them. This should also be put into context, as Afghani-

54 BBC/ABC/ARD poll, 2009:20..

55 Interview with Stina Torjesen, 23/02/2009

56 Donini, 2007:165.

57 BBC/ABC/ARD poll, 2009:6.

stan is one of the poorest countries in the world with a per capita GDP of USD \$350, just one tenth of Iraq's. Life expectancy is 44 years and nearly three quarters of the population is illiterate. Moreover, Afghanistan is 50% larger than Iraq, but has a fifth of the paved roads.⁵⁸

Researcher Helge Lurås, highlights that in terms of development there are no clear goals of what international peace and stability operations are trying to achieve, or what is realistic. There is no comprehensive plan about how the different elements will fit together, which is further complicated by the immense number of actors involved. He also notes that we should be aware of how development and development projects can shift power between groups, and may thus lead to non-compliant behaviour.⁵⁹

Ultimately, mismanagement is a major issue that needs to be rectified; much better coordination is needed as well as greater understanding of local priorities and culture. Indeed it has been stated insurgencies are managed to death, they are not "won".⁶⁰ However, many of the problems emerge from the lack of clear overall strategy of what to achieve in Afghanistan and how to achieve it. This is a thread that draws together many of the issues linked to non-compliance, and is consistent throughout this study. Moreover it highlights the problematic non-compliance with what question, and the lack of clarity over who "we" are and what "we" are trying to achieve in Afghanistan.

Propaganda war

The Taliban has proved adept and resilient at developing alternative and dynamic strategies to maintain support and turn local civilians against international forces and development actors. Whilst extremely strict about the use of digital media whilst in power, the Taliban have changed with the times, recognising the propaganda wealth that can be exploited. Foxley highlights how Taliban tends to focus on four key areas: (a) victories on the battlefield, (b) values and beliefs, (c) information and instructions to the Afghan population and (d) refuting the claims of ISAF and the Afghan government.⁶¹ In communicating these messages they have been making use of a wide range of communication and media resources: (a) fax, telephone, mobile phone and satellite telephone, (b) radio and TV, (c) newspapers, (d) "night letters" posted on walls or doors of local civilians, (e) direct contact with the

58 Fick & Nagl, 2009:2.

59 Interview with Helge Lurås, 02/03/2009.

60 Terriff et al, 2008:93.

61 Foxley, 2007:6.

population, (f) CDs/DVDs/videotapes, and (g) websites on the internet.⁶²

These propaganda efforts help to create non-compliance in a number of key ways. Firstly, Taliban messages are simple and often underpinned by threats and violence.⁶³ The local population are thus deterred from interacting or helping international forces and development actors. Secondly, these messages create non-compliance by showing insurgents groups are winning the war, thus any collaboration or compliance with these internal forces and development actors would be foolish and provoke severe consequences. Finally, they can appeal to ideological values and tribal norms, as well as highlighting issues of justice, and corruption – which are some of the major draw cards of the insurgents. The first two points again reiterate the crucial importance of fear in creating non-complaint behaviour, underlining that human security is of the utmost importance when trying to mitigate non-compliant behaviour.

A Danish Major working at NATO/ISAF HQ highlighted one area where the Taliban were particularly adept at using propaganda, which was the use of story-telling or narratives. He highlighted that this was an extremely important cultural element and that Afghans were very adept at remembering these stories.

Through story-telling the Taliban are able to effectively and quickly communicate messages, whilst creating propaganda that appeals to local civilians, or draws on fear and the other issues referred to above. Storytelling in Pashtun areas effectively exploits the Pashtunwali code, and draws on narratives of xenophobia; of Afghans fiercely resisting foreign colonialism. These narratives often resonate with local Pakistani and Afghani audiences, particularly those in the Pashtun tribal belt. As Hodes and Sedra state:

“The Afghan, or rather Pashtun, nationalist narrative plays on the strong sense of resistance built upon the collective myth of combating foreign forces since the time of Alexander the Great. The British presence in Helmand has revived images of the Anglo-Afghan war, from the Gandamak massacre in 1842 to tales of Malalai, the Afghan heroine, raising the Afghan flag at the battle Maiwand in 1880.”⁶⁴

Many of these locals are either poorly educated, sympathetic to the Taliban or have limited access to public information sources, preventing confirmation of the claims made. Furthermore, much of this audience is prepared to believe Taliban claims more or less regardless of

62 *ibid.*

63 Foxley, 2007:1.

64 Hodes & Sedra, 2007:26.

their plausibility.⁶⁵ A Danish district commander reinforced this, stating that perceptions and attitudes often depend on education levels, with the least educated regularly perceiving NATO/ISAF troops as occupying forces.

NATO/ISAF forces have clearly recognised the critical importance of propaganda and have thus undertaken a number of initiatives to counter Taliban and insurgent propaganda and effectively communicate information with local Afghans. One example is the distribution of wind-up radios to local civilians in rural areas. However much more needs to be accomplished in this area to counter non-compliance. As Foxley highlights, the Afghan government needs to develop an integrated media campaign with a strong Afghan 'face' that challenges and exploits the often confused and uncoordinated Taliban communiqués. Thus, the campaign must challenge the Taliban to explain their intent and tactics (suicide bombings, attacks on civilians and schools, attitudes to poppy cultivation), and to "more actively question the Taliban's legitimacy, their interpretation of Islam, what constitutes a jihad and the morality of killing civilians".⁶⁶ Lurås further highlights the need for the Afghan government to effectively communicate what distinguishes them from the Taliban. Many Taliban groups have a strong ideology and a range of structured principles, but what about the government? In contrast to the Taliban they provide a range of material goods, although the extent to which these reach different areas of the population differs significantly.⁶⁷ Thus, the government needs to be much better at distinguishing itself and the ideals it stands for.

Local competition and external actors

Non-compliant behaviour may additionally be a result of competition between local actors over limited resources. There are vast numbers of groups competing for political power and influence in Afghanistan, thus these local rivalries may lead to non-compliant behaviour. This is especially relevant as some groups may be partnered with the government or NATO/ISAF forces while others feel excluded and marginalised from the formal political process. These power struggles may also lead to low level violence between competing groups which although not directly targeting international peace and stability operations, may negatively affect them. At the same time this dissatisfaction may lead to direct targeting of international peace and stability operations and a clear strategy of non-compliant behaviour. Additionally,

⁶⁵ Foxley, 2007:9.

⁶⁶ Foxley, 2007, 2-18.

⁶⁷ Interview with Helge Lurås 02/03/2009.

political marginalisation and exclusion may lead certain groups to partner with more powerful and violent insurgent groups, thus further propagating non-compliant behaviour.

There is also growing awareness that Afghanistan needs to be looked at in a regional context, that the commitment and help of Afghan's neighbours, particularly Pakistan but also India, Iran and China will be essential in achieving success. There are many issues at play here, but it is important to be aware of the role of external actors and non-compliant behaviour. How do we talk about non-compliance and external actors? To what extent and how do they contribute to non-compliant behaviour? This again highlights the need to effectively distinguish between politics and non-compliant behaviour, and will be an important point to keep in mind when defining non-compliant behaviour.

Interdisciplinary contributions

Looking at interdisciplinary approaches towards the same definition can often be beneficial as they can offer new perspectives on existing issues. In the field of medicine there has been a discussion of non-compliance as a communication problem, a point that would seem to resonate with non-compliance in Afghanistan. Non-compliance on the part of various actors could be due to poor communication of how compliance will ultimately benefit them.

Aruffo and Grey make the pertinent point about the need for self-reflection and self-criticism:

“Defining the problem as compliance, something lacking in the patient prevents professionals from seeking or seeing solutions in their own actions”⁶⁸

They further highlight that compliance presumes that a flawless standard has been offered and all a patient must do is follow instructions, the patient is at fault rather than the prescription. Crucially this often fails to draw scrutiny to the original plan to search for key flaws or weaknesses.⁶⁹ As well as outlining the need for self-reflection, this point also highlights the ontological effects of using the term non-compliance, and the right/wrong discourse that equates from this. Indeed, Aruffo and Grey note that defining the problem as compliance allows professionals to judge their own performance as satisfactory,

⁶⁸ Aruffo & Grey, 2005:43.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*

even in the face of overwhelming evidence. Thus, it is necessary to delve into much greater depth when thinking about the term.

This is also closely linked to the issue of understanding. Here, Mullahy offers some interesting food for thought:

“If we really understood our patients’ lives and appreciated what a particular diagnosis meant to them, its effect on their day-to-day lives, and their feelings about themselves, their so-called noncompliance would be more understandable, if not completely acceptable”⁷⁰

This understanding also includes taking note of historical and cultural differences, education levels, language issues and cognitive aptitudes.⁷¹ Thus, it is essential to understand the environment in which non-compliance behaviour is being undertaken, this is of critical importance in Afghanistan where the conflict is so complex and characterised by such a vast array of actors with conflicting interests. Another worthy point Mullahy makes is: “it is human nature, especially in our current culture to do what we want and to be in control of our own lives”. This is an interesting point, and maybe one we often forget when thinking about non-compliant behaviour.

Mullahy recommends a pragmatic approach to non-compliance rather than an ideological one. She notes that before plans and goals are established planners are well advised to identify the possible problems that would impede or prevent success. The process should be problem orientated; if we identify the problem and remove the barriers, successful outcome will be achieved.⁷² This first point is extremely relevant in the case of Afghanistan, highlighting that we need to clearly define why we are there and what we want to achieve rather than invoking the Western liberal peace thesis. Furthermore, Mullahy notes that we should be careful not to make too many assumptions due to time pressure or because our actions become routine, performed more as a checklist, instead of an individualised interaction specific to patient needs.⁷³

These points offer some interesting food for thought, and highlight how some of the lessons learned in dealing with non-compliance in the field of medicine may be useful in mitigating it in Afghanistan. Indeed it seems there is a significant need for greater self-reflection/self criticism and greater understanding in Afghanistan, points which have been highlighted throughout the preceding section on non-compliance in Afghanistan.

70 Mullahy, 2005:53.

71 *ibid*

72 *ibid*.

73 *ibid*.

Conclusion

Defining non-compliant behaviour has been shown to be a somewhat problematic, involving many questions and dilemmas. This stems largely from uncertainty about who “we” are, why “we” are in Afghanistan and what “we” are trying to achieve. Before we can effectively define ourselves and “our” mission it is almost impossible to define our “opposing others”. Indeed pertinent questions such as non-compliance with what, non-compliance with whom, and what level of resistance constitutes non-compliant behaviour will remain unanswered until these issues can be clarified. Without a clear mandate in place and unity about aims and goals, how can “we” effectively define behaviour negatively affecting peace, stability and reconstruction and development operations in Afghanistan? With so many actors in Afghanistan with varying aims yet at the same time often working together under the comprehensive approach, this topic requires much more discussion and critical analysis on the part of actors involved.

Furthermore, the use of terms such as non-compliant leads to the creation of an us/them, right/wrong dichotomy. With no clear mandate to relate to plus the complex realities of Afghanistan this approach is highly problematic. It may have significant negative consequences for strategy in Afghanistan by targeting the wrong actors or causing further civilian disenchantment. The study has clearly showed the complicated nature of trying to define relatively non-violent actors, and how certain activities and strategies undermine “coalition” strategy in Afghanistan. The real life reality is far more complex than a simple label would suggest and highlights the need to contextualise definitions. For actors are not non-compliant all of the time, nor are they always aware of their non-compliance. Moreover, one can ask what distinguishes politics from non-compliant behaviour. Additionally, of the range of factors contributing to non-compliant behaviour, some appear quite legitimate or have complex root causes.

Fear is a fundamental cause of non-compliance in Afghanistan. Mitigating fear means a much greater focus on human security and protecting the needs of civilians rather than force protection. The role of fear also needs to be taken into account when defining non-compliant behaviour, especially in light of the normative meaning of non-compliance. Non-compliant behaviour doesn't always refer to “right” or “wrong” behaviour, but is instead often a by-product of complex circumstances such as fear, poverty, alienation, disenchantment and varying interests of different actors. It is necessary to define the root

causes of non-compliant behaviour; for although some cases of non-compliance will be clear cut, others will be reflective of this complexity. Thus, it will not always be easy to define non-compliant actors along traditional conventional military lines, defining their set goals, motivations and capabilities, as in many cases this will be too simplistic.

Awareness of the historical background and cultural differences will need to be taken into account, as understanding will be critical in effectively defining non-compliance. Additionally, many of the issues that can contribute to non-compliance are not just related to the military forces and security services, but to the role of developmental aid, and the actions of local and national government authorities. This reflects the multiplicity of actors involved in Afghanistan and the complexity of distinguishing the actions of each entity. Indeed, this is one result of the comprehensive approach that has been undertaken in Afghanistan.

It might be worthwhile to consider alternative value free definitions, if indeed this is possible – and maybe in situations where there is no clearly defined mandate to enforce. One possible option might be third party actors, which could also be specified further as *local* third party actors, or *external* third party actors. This term is value neutral, and does not ignore the issue that these parties also use limited violence in some circumstances. Nor does the term third party actor assume that all these individuals or groups have clearly defined goals and strategies. Furthermore it also avoids the difficult non-compliance questions; non compliance with who, what and how.

Second party actors or irregular adversaries could be differentiated from third party actors to the extent that these actors have broadly defined aims and goals of countering the achievement of multidimensional peace and development efforts, and use significant amounts of violence in achieving their aims. Further research may be required to more closely examine military perceptions of “opposing others”

Ultimately, many actors involved are acutely aware of the challenges facing Afghanistan, and issues that exacerbate non-compliance. They also aware of key strategies that will help mitigate this such as focusing on protection of civilians, long term sustainable development, cultural awareness, Afghan ownership, better governance and coordination, and the need to clearly delineate what is to be achieved in Afghanistan and how to go about it. There is a need for these issues to be more effectively incorporated into international peace and stability operations, to be clearly delineated on a strategic level in a manner that they can be integrated in the day to day operations.

As lessons from non-compliance in medicine show, effective communication of how compliance will ultimately benefit Afghans will also be essential, as well as constant self-reflection and a critical perspective. Currently the BBC/ABC/ARD poll shows that 25% of respondents (up from 17% in 2007) thinks that attacks against US and NATO/ISAF forces can be justified.⁷⁴ This shows the massive potential for non-compliance. It also underlines that we must think long and hard about both theoretical and contextual issues related to defining non-compliance, as these may have important consequences on the ground.

⁷⁴ BBC/ABC/ARD poll, 2009:12.

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