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WATCHING WHILE THE FROG BOILS: STRATEGIC FOLLY IN THE AFGHAN SECURITY SECTOR

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SUMMARY

International approaches to the Afghan security sector over the last nine years have exhibited the tendencies of security sector reform (SSR), counterinsurgency (COIN) and stabilization, and exposed the inherent tensions between them. This paper argues that while an SSR, COIN or stabilization approach may have been appropriate at the beginning of the post-Taliban period or currently, actual practice has been to attempt all three simultaneously. This leads to confusion, and the combined approaches tend to undermine one another as they attempt to address the security issues facing Afghanistan. The paper concludes that, ultimately, the lack of strategic direction and focus in the international intervention — as demonstrated by the evolution of United Nations (UN) Security Council resolutions, the plethora of international missions and interventions in the security sector, and the realities on the ground — has served both Afghanistan and its international partners poorly.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ALP	Afghan Local Police
ANA	Afghan National Army
ANCOP	Afghan National Civil Order Police
ANDS	Afghanistan National Development Strategy
ANP	Afghan National Police
ANSF	Afghan National Security Forces
COIN	counterinsurgency
CTPT	Counter-Terrorism Pursuit Teams
CSTC-A	Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan
DDR	disarmament, demobilization and reintegration
EGF	European Gendarmerie Force
EUPOL	European Policing Mission
FDD	Focused District Development
IDLG	Independent Directorate of Local Governance
IED	improvised explosive devices
ISAF	International Security Assistance Mission
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDS	National Directorate of Security
NTM-A	NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan
OEF	Operation Enduring Freedom
OMLT	Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams
ONSC	Office of National Security Council
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
UNAMA	United Nations Mission to Afghanistan
UNSCR	UN Security Council Resolution

INTRODUCTION¹

This paper assesses the paradoxical nature of actions undertaken as part of international interventions in Afghanistan’s security sector over the last nine years. In investigating these issues, it is important to be clear about what types of activities constitute SSR, COIN and stabilization. The definitions below should be kept in mind throughout the discussion; however, it is clear from the analysis that some activities initially designed as SSR could be identified as being focused on stabilization, while COIN activities may have direct implications for SSR in the long term. These are not hermetically sealed concepts and activities can shift between the categories over time or as the spatial dynamics of where they are implemented change.²

SSR has been variously defined, but one useful definition might be that it attempts “to create armed, uniformed forces which are functionally differentiated, professional forces under objective and subjective political control, at the lowest functional level of resource use” (Brzoska, 2000: 9–11). Added to this could be that the security forces should be under

1 The information for this paper was collected by the author over the period from 2004 to 2010 and includes interviews in Kabul and London in October 2010. Part of the title, “watching while the frog boils,” is taken from a conversation about a leading Afghan civil society activist’s view of the deterioration in Afghanistan in 2006.

2 The COIN definition relates to COIN as originally conceived of by General Petraeus in 2006, for dealing with the insurgency in Iraq and now being applied to Afghanistan. The stabilization definition(s) is taken from work informed by experience in Afghanistan (specifically Helmand) and ongoing doctoral research. The SSR definition is also a work in progress as there continues to be an exceptional lack of clarity about what constitutes SSR, though the range of actors involved is possibly less problematic (Chuter, 2008).

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some form of democratic oversight (Cole, Eppert and Kinzelbach, 2008). Examples from Afghanistan in the last nine years include the national programs to reform the Afghan National Army (2002–2007) or the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) program (2003–2006). Some observers also include the justice sector as a component in SSR, and while this may have been intended in Afghanistan, it has not been accomplished.

COIN has been defined as “those military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government to defeat insurgency” (Petreus and Amos, 2006). The new US COIN doctrine continues, “[This is] a good starting point, but they do not properly highlight a key paradox: though insurgency and COIN are two sides of a phenomenon that has been called revolutionary war or internal war, they are distinctly different types of operations” (Petreus and Amos, 2006). Police and army reforms since 2008 have largely been focused on delivering COIN that is qualitatively distinct from the kinds of police and army reform that occurred from 2002 to 2007, though elements of SSR have continued until the present, highlighted by some of the activities of the European Policing Mission (EUPOL).

Stabilization “is essentially a process that is ultimately rooted in local perceptions of the legitimacy and, crucially, the sustainability of their political authorities. As such, ‘stabilization’ involves the construction of a complex political discourse rather than the imposition of any particular political model” (Jackson and Gordon, 2007: 653).

Further, stabilization activities are those undertaken across a number of sectors (not just security related) with proscribed strategic intent, and while the size of the intervention varies from highly localized to national they have the potential for both positive and negative strategic impact on stability. This includes “national” stabilization programs such as the Afghanistan Stability Program, which supported the construction

of governor’s and police offices in districts.³ For the most part, though, stabilization projects are small-scale, locally focused activities with varying degrees of connection to central planning and support. This includes support to armed groups (formal and informal) through, for example, the ongoing Village Stability Operations⁴ or the implementation of quick impact projects along more humanitarian or developmental lines. While this may improve stability in the immediate villages, although even this is contested, it can also generate instability in surrounding villages and can serve to attract armed attacks.⁵ Stabilization activities fall in two basic categories: on the one hand, technical inputs such as building infrastructure or promoting small scale development, which often have no proven link to stability; and on the other hand, those that try to enforce a new “stability,” often using security or governance approaches that are cognizant of political reality that may cause instability in the short term.

CONFUSION BETWEEN SSR, COIN AND STABILIZATION

The central assertion of this paper is that the three forms of international intervention in the Afghan security sector, namely SSR, COIN and stabilization, are not necessarily compatible. This is in part because of their varied aims and the ends they use to achieve these aims, but also lies in the tendency for each type of intervention to occur in slightly different, but at times overlapping physical and contextual spaces. Physically,

3 The existing program from 2010 to 2014 aims to:

- “Increas[e] the central government authority to the districts and provinces by construction of infrastructures for sub-national governance institutions.
- Enhanc[e] the capacity of sub-national institutions to deliver quality services for the public.
- Coordinat[e] development activities for sustainability of deliverables and eradication of poppy cultivation.”

This will be achieved through “[c]onstruct(ing) six provincial governor and 49 district governor complexes” (Independent Directorate of Local Governance [IDLG], 2010).

4 This is sometimes referred to as the Village Stability Program (IDLG, 2010).

5 One example has been the establishment of Afghan Local Police units in the Shabuddin area north of Pul-I Khumri, Baghlan province. The armed group is seen by some in the local area as predatory and some nearby villages have called for the removal of the commander (Partlow, 2011). At the same time, it has been the target of several armed attacks by other armed groups (with varied affiliations) since its establishment in 2010 (Demmer, 2010).

SSR tends to be focused at the central, potentially strategic levels; COIN sits somewhere below SSR, but the resources committed to the COIN effort are dwarfing the ability of SSR approaches to maintain coherence in the Afghan security sector. Stabilization tends to occur locally, perhaps only tactically, and sits alongside COIN. This results in a fragmentation that stymies strategic planning and coherence in general, allowing activities that are more operational — COIN and stabilization — to have a strong and not necessarily positive strategic impact on the Afghan security sector.

Not only do these concepts sit alongside one another uneasily when articulating the strategic, operational and tactical issues in intervention, they also compete for space, focus and resources across components of the Afghan context in the security, political and social spheres. Using the political sphere as an example, while both COIN and SSR focus on political issues,⁶ COIN's political calculations are very clearly in support of the state, whereas stabilization's focus on local political legitimacy takes it much closer to socially organized, and possibly even autonomous, local political arrangements in the search for stability.

There are significant and underlying tensions between the three approaches. This relationship is derived partially from the definitions outlined above, but is also a reflection of the ongoing debates with the International Security Assistance Mission (ISAF), North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and troop-contributing countries about the relative importance of each element. For example, some international actors see stabilization as a subset of COIN, while others see the two concepts as slightly distinct in Afghanistan. NATO actors in Brussels, however, tend not to use the term stabilization, instead referring to development and governance. This lack of coherence contributes to the growing dissonance in Afghanistan, and may have contributed to the perception that the creation of the three-star command of International Joint Command in Kabul, which gave the ISAF commander the responsibility to oversee the day-to-day operations of Coalition Forces in Afghanistan, was a way of buffering the COIN fighting elements from the strategic confusion among the international actors.⁷

The following sections will use examples from the field to demonstrate how and why the dissonance between

the three interventions manifests itself in Afghanistan, highlighting in particular why this serves both the international community and Afghanistan poorly.

MANDATING “STABILITY”

The strategic landscape, as the Taliban government fell in December 2001, presented a number of serious issues. What would the international community do now that it had successfully and quickly routed the Taliban?⁸ What did Afghans both within and outside the country want? What were the views of neighbouring states to the regime change in their backyard? And what were the intentions of the newly resurgent Mujahideen leaders whose forces, backed by American and British Special Forces, had led the charge?

A review of the UN Security Council resolutions from November 2001 to October 2010 provides a useful backdrop to the strategic choices made during the last nine years and their impact on the Afghan security sector. The initial mandates from the UN Security Council, first for Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and later the ISAF, focused on the broad approach of the international community towards Afghanistan (UN Security Council Resolution [UNSCR] 1378, 1386 and 1413 in 2001 and 2002). In November 2001 (UNSCR 1378), there was talk of using “quick impact projects,” and “ensuring Afghanistan’s stability” (UNSCR 1419) as well as a focus on specific issues in the near term, for example, the holding of the emergency *loya jirga* in 2002 (UNSCR 1419). These mandates laid the framework within which the international community would seek to “stabilize,” Afghanistan, including the international community’s “strong commitment to the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and national unity of Afghanistan” (UNSCR 1386, 2001).

However, the structure and aim of the interventions in both the UN Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA) mandates (normally in March every year) and ISAF (normally in October) also demonstrate that the overall approach to Afghanistan has waxed and waned between stability (stabilization) approaches,

6 Many observers and practitioners point out that for SSR to be effective it must be recognized that it is inherently political (Jackson, 2009).

7 Interview with NATO official, November 29, 2010.

8 While there are debates about what constituted the “international community” at the initial stages, after the attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, there was a very broad consensus of international community action. The fact that this has changed over time, as has the usage of international community, which itself entails political implications, is important and is a corollary to the hardening lines of who Afghanistan’s international partners are (predominantly NATO plus several allied countries). Several others, including Iran, are excluded, and are no longer seen as “partners” in Afghanistan (by NATO). For more on the discussion of international community, see Guevara and Kühn, 2011.

SSR and COIN. Following the early mandates, a more conventional SSR approach dominated from 2004 to 2006, where SSR was confined to the five security pillars. In this context, both the ISAF deployment and the UNAMA mission were focused on the reform of the Afghan National Police (ANP), establishment of the Afghan National Army (ANA), the implementation of the DDR program, controlling opium production and reforming the justice sector.

As the attention of the international community shifted from Afghanistan to Iraq, activities in the security sector between 2002 and 2006 can, at best, be described as underfunded and ad hoc, with the possible exception of support to the National Directorate of Security (NDS) (Sedra, 2003). In the often repeated description, the United States took the lead on building up the army, Germany on police, the United Kingdom on counternarcotics, Japan on disarmament and Italy on justice. The balkanization of the security sector between different countries, where each nation exercised its own comparative (dis)advantage and acted in an uncoordinated fashion with the rest of the international community, was unable to reconstitute the security sector. The recognized failure of these approaches across all five areas has been well documented and is beyond the scope of discussion here.⁹ What has happened since then, however, is of critical significance.

SEARCH FOR SOLUTIONS

The period from 2007 to 2010 can be characterized as a greater manifestation of the previously failing SSR agenda alongside a (somewhat desperate) search for solutions in the Afghan security sector. Not only does the scope shift, but the actual length of documents increases substantially, as if the issuing of more verbose texts will lead to better engagement on all sides. In March 2007, the “comprehensive approach” made its first appearance (UNSCR 1746), as well as text conflating security issues across terrorism (al-Qaeda), insurgency (Taliban) and drugs, with the logic being that to tackle a comprehensive problem, a comprehensive approach must be applied, which incidentally must include “capacity building” and “administrative reform,” with seemingly little reference to whether the Afghan government actually wanted its capacity built in this form (UNSCR 1746). There are many reasons why recipient countries agree to or accept internationally

9 On policing, see Wilder, 2005; on DDR see Dennys, 2005 and Rossi and Giustozzi, 2006; on counternarcotics see Mansfield, 2007; on ANA reform see ICG, 2010; and on justice reform see Suhrke and Borchgrevink, 2009.

funded programs, and many are accepted, as in parts of the capacity-building regime in Afghanistan, because the recipient government feels it must “play its part,” even if it sees the reforms as superfluous and even threatening in some areas. This also belies the fact that there are some exceptional capacities within the Afghan state that have demonstrated an ability to maintain and protect the power of the current Afghan ruling elite.¹⁰

By September 2007, the ISAF was charged not only with the comprehensive approach, but also to focus on stabilization.¹¹ Irrespective of possible confusion by 2008 (UNSCR 1806 and 1833), there was a new focus on ensuring “self-sufficient” and “ethnically balanced” Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) through the reform processes. It seems that the “expansion of the Afghan National Army” (UNSCR 1833), while traditionally an SSR activity, should perhaps be characterized as COIN because in its current form, the ANA expansion is dislocated from the remainder of the ANSF expansion¹² and for ISAF troops on the ground, the need to increase the ANSF footprint is primarily to support the priorities of both COIN and stabilization, as well as the overriding priority of securing the future transition.¹³

In 2009, UNAMA was tasked with supporting “an Afghan-led development and stabilization process” (strikingly similar to the ISAF mandate from 2007), while the ISAF was looking to ensure that it was “increasing...the functionality, professionalism and accountability of the Afghan security sector” (UNSCR 1868). This list of attributes was expanded in the 2010 UNAMA mandate, which called for “appropriate vetting procedures, training, mentoring, equipping and empowerment efforts, for both women and men, in order to accelerate the programs towards the goal of self-sufficient and ethnically balanced security forces...” (UNSCR 1917).

THREE NEW ELEMENTS

During this evolution, as the internationals’ urge for withdrawal increased, three new elements emerge: new

10 Interview with NATO official, Kabul, October 16, 2010.

11 It does not seem clear that the comprehensive approach is focused on SSR or stabilization, but UNAMA’s taskings in March 2007 were focused on SSR and ISAF’s in September 2007 were spread across both SSR and stabilization.

12 ANA expansion is also substantially larger than any other security sector activity. Planned ANA levels increased by 399 percent between 2005 and 2010; for the police the increase was 216 percent.

13 Interview with NATO Official, Kabul, October 29, 2010.

issues, new programs and new international missions. In 2007, civilian casualties are mentioned for the first time (UNSCR 1776) — these have become a major political issue over the last four years. While civilian casualties is a generic issue with many technical components, other purely technical issues, such as restricting the flow of ammonium nitrate¹⁴ into Afghanistan, were introduced in 2010 (UNSCR 1917). New programs also emerged, including the Afghan National Auxiliary Police (ANAP) (UNSCR 1746, 2007), Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams (OMLTs) and Focused District Development (FDD) (UNSCR 1917, 2010), which indicate a broadening of activities across the Afghan security sector. OMLTs are small ISAF units that live and work with ANSF (primarily the ANA) in the field and FDD became the flagship training program for the ANP, where units would be trained at specialized centres for eight weeks. The third new element was the plethora of new actors: EUPOL in 2007 (UNSCR 1776), the European Gendarmerie Force (EGF) and NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan (NTM-A) (both 2009) (UNSCR 1890). Interestingly the expansion of missions has not led to clarity, but rather some confusion, whereby some missions have overlapping responsibilities. For example, FDD, which is under the purview of NTM-A/US-led Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A), is also run in Kunduz by the EGF, which uses different modus operandi for their activities.¹⁵ This is one small example of a phenomenon where a multitude of short-term requirements (normally at the behest of international interveners) have undermined the emergence of a coherent national framework. It is not clear how Afghan security forces will overcome differences in training and mentoring in the long term, nor how these short-term fixes will be addressed and absorbed by Afghan institutions.¹⁶

The focus on civilian casualties and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) indicates that the international community was responding to the conflict's toll on Afghan civilians. The new programs highlight the expanded and deepening engagement by the international community in the Afghan security sector. However, the additional missions that are mentioned

point to increasingly fragmented international programming, whereby various international bodies staked out their position to participate in the transformation of the Afghan security sector.¹⁷

TRENDS IN AFGHANISTAN'S SECURITY SECTOR

This review highlights a number of trends visible in Afghanistan's security sector in 2011. First, almost all of the interventions have fallen substantially short of the international community's desired outcomes. The repetition of the benchmarks throughout the resolutions and the increasing detail in which they are expressed, seemingly in an attempt to close down loopholes that are being exploited on the ground, are testament to this. This also points to the reality that there was a substantial disconnect between political and strategic aims and practice on the ground (discussed in further detail below). Second, not only were the failing benchmarks repeated, they were also often substantially increased or expanded, the logic apparently being that if you are underachieving, aim for even more — an approach that has also seemingly failed. Third, as the number of actors and interveners increased, repeated calls for comprehensive frameworks, approaches and synergies seem to have been unsuccessful. Fourth, the initial goals of "stability" using the tools of SSR have been overtaken by ambitious, transformative and conflictual COIN and stabilization approaches.¹⁸

In addition, there were smaller initiatives that attempted to fill the gaps in the security sector, such as corrections reform and support to the Office of National Security Council (ONSC). Corrections reform became linked to the international military forces requirement to ensure that Afghans detained by ISAF and handed over to the Afghan security services (often the NDS) were not mistreated. Individual states attempted to provide legal authority for the transfers and established memoranda with the Afghan government accordingly. Without going into the legal issues involved,¹⁹ the most striking element about the prisoner transfer issue is the inability of NATO, the ISAF or individual troop-contributing countries to come to anything close to a coherent agreement about how to approach the reform

14 Ammonium nitrate is used in the production of some IEDs, but is also an agricultural fertilizer.

15 Interviews with EUPOL and NTM-A officials, October 11, 2010.

16 In other contexts such as Zimbabwe, one donor nation (the UK until 2001 in this example) had taken the lead on harmonization training within the military structures to make sure that the units trained by different countries' armies are able to work together. It is not clear if this is considered in the Afghan context, in particular with reference to coordination between the main security bodies (Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Defence and NDS).

17 Interview with EUPOL official, October 11, 2010.

18 Inherent in the issues, programs and actors that have emerged is the notion that local security by local Afghan forces is key to ensuring a stable environment.

19 For coverage of this topic, see Amnesty International, 2007.

of the prison sector, let alone their own legal obligations under International Humanitarian Law.

This inability may be the result of torture scandals in Iraq and the persistent allegations of torture and mistreatment within the Afghan prison system, which have led donor states to view any hint of torture as a political hot potato that should be avoided rather than addressed. However, when one of the perceived motivations for resistance among opposition groups has been abuse by government forces (ranging from petty bribery through to institutional corruption and ultimately torture), it would seem strategically prudent to attempt to ensure that the detention system does not become a breeding ground for more resentment and resistance (Ladbury, 2009). The inability to strategically assess what issues within the Afghan security sector might be of relevance to the ultimate goal of ensuring a relatively stable government that is able to function independently is striking.

At a strategic level, the original international support to the ONSC was to provide advice and support the national security adviser who led the ONSC and was tasked with providing national security advice to the president. The UK's interest was to ensure that counternarcotics (which the UK led on) was at the heart of the Afghan government's security focus.²⁰ The support continued in a largely technical manner, with some links into the intelligence community, until 2006. UK support was stopped at this point and the US became the lead donor to the ONSC, largely focusing on administrative support and the functioning of committees that supported the ONSC. There was an attempt at a national security strategy in 2006, but it was not widely adopted by either the other Afghan government departments and ministries or the international community, and was largely the work of an international adviser.

From 2006 to 2009, the ONSC ossified and became administratively large, but its ability to do anything other than provide a good place for "good people" remains in question. It did, however, play a role in improving the linkages between the presidential palace and the NDS, although it is not clear this was used in a strategic manner, as it seems to have been devoid of any contact with other departments. By the end of this period, the broader security context in Afghanistan meant it was clear that not only was there a need for a SSR strategy, but that it would need to be a comprehensive strategy encompassing the

war, governance and transition and subsuming SSR if both the coalition and the Afghan government were to survive the insurgency raging throughout the country.

It was at this stage that the ISAF and the US and UK embassies realized that a more coherent level of senior, strategic engagement was required between the Afghan government and its international partners. To this end, a whole range of activities were planned, aimed at the ONSC, including: to support the level and quality of information provided to the president about operations, improve joint communications about incidents involving civilian casualties and produce an Afghan-owned strategy for how they were going to manage and maintain their security sector. It remains to be seen what the impact of this activity will be, but it seems that had there been a consistency of approaches to Afghan national security thinking over a decade, then Afghanistan would be in a stronger position to define its own strategy.²¹

LACK OF STRATEGIC DIRECTION

The lack of willingness to consistently engage in the Afghan security sectors has bedevilled the emergence of a coherent plan or even an end-state for what Afghanistan's security sector could or should look like. Instead, donor states in Afghanistan have cherry-picked projects, programs and sectors to support those that are either in their own interests or close to their perceived core competencies, rather than what might be in their own broader strategic interests or that of the Afghan state. Corporately, the smaller activities, which may blend across two or more major areas of interest (such as corrections, which straddles hard security functions and judicial propriety) have tended to add confusion rather than coherence to the more "substantial" activities, in terms of funding and personnel, of expanding the ANSF.

In summary, many activities within the Afghan security sector have lacked strategic direction. This is in part because of the short rotations of ISAF and OEF commands and the inability of political leaders across the intervening states to demand a strategic engagement, which limited the scope of strategic thinking becoming part of the narrative of intervention and led to the reinvention of many wheels (such as the debates around local defence units, discussed below).

²¹A forthcoming paper, *Strategic Support to Security Sector Reform in Afghanistan, 2001–2010* by Christian Dennys and Tom Hamilton-Baillie (SSR Issue Paper No. 4) will describe attempts at producing the National Security Policy and the implications for Afghan leadership within the Afghan security sector.

²⁰ Interview with former adviser to the ONSC, UK, October 2010.

In many respects, the activities of the individual states amounted to attempts at “stabilizing” their particular sector, be it disarmament, police or army reform, rather than a coherent approach based on long-term thinking about the needs of the Afghan state, and this also precluded effective engagement with Afghan actors about how they could meaningfully contribute, leading to the existence of almost parallel worlds between what the intervening states understood to be the problem, what the Afghan state identified as the issues and what the majority of the Afghan population saw as the problem. The noise of activity has failed to materialize into strategic direction.

NEW MISSIONS AND CHALLENGED COORDINATION

Despite the greater emphasis on comprehensive approaches, synergies and coordination since 2006, it is not obvious that the strategic direction of the Afghan security sector has become much clearer in Kabul. There has been an explosion in new missions, predominately focusing on training, such as EUPOL, the EGF and the NTM-A, which superseded the CSTC-A. This is despite the fact that the posture of the ISAF in particular has been to transform itself into a counterinsurgency force. Even with the preponderance of US activities, the large number of international interveners has led to overlapping mandates, with smaller missions often supporting regional- or provincial-level programs, rather than national ones, and often following ISAF troop-contributing country interests. For example, the EGF’s activities are mainly funded by Germany and their activities are focused on Regional Command North, which the German military leads.

On the Afghan side, the number of actors increased because it was recognized that Afghanistan was unable to cope with the security challenges it faced from the resurgent groups of Taliban, Hizb-I Islami and the Haqqani network. As a result of US and Afghan pressure, the *tashkeel*, or staffing document, for the ANA increased from 43,000 in 2005 to 80,000 in 2008 to 171,600 in 2010. For the ANP, the number increased from 62,000 in 2005 to 134,000 by the Joint Coordination Monitoring Board in January 2010 (Afghanistan: The London Conference, 2010) and was augmented by

another 10,000 approved for Afghan Local Police (ALP) in 2010, which may be further increased to 20,000 (Cloud, 2010).²²

The additional resources and manpower have not led to a greater overall corporate impact by the international intervention, despite increasing its breadth and depth. The scale of the US response has been to effectively take over, re-orientate the ISAF’s activities to COIN and significantly expand its support to the ANA and ANP, thereby dwarfing the relative importance of non-US support, which is in any case fragmented across several international missions. As result, the remaining individual missions seem to spend substantial time and resources justifying their presence or implementing programs similar to those of the US, such as police training, but using different methods, approaches and materials.²³

In one example from July 2010, EU ambassadors decided that it would be beneficial to train 35,000 ANP in election policing techniques for the forthcoming parliamentary election. This was beyond the scope of EUPOL’s activities and had to be done in addition to their other training activities, without any extra manpower. Worse, the decision to provide training to half of the police force was made only three months before the actual election, and the training was forced on a reluctant Ministry of the Interior. This program also ignored the fact that similar election training in 2009 was deemed to be unsuccessful.²⁴ The training was designed in 10 days and 40,000 manuals were produced, but the first wave of training was given to just 350 police officers from August 5 to 7, 2010, with the idea that they would train the next 3,500 officers, who would each, in turn, train 10 additional police officers, meaning that 35,350 would eventually receive training. However, the training was delivered during Ramadan and without sufficient time before the election and ultimately “the whole thing was a waste of time.”²⁵

EUPOL has also taken “responsibility” for the Afghan Uniform Police training because the Europeans feel they should have a strong voice and lead on policing. This is despite the fact that the majority of the money and personnel that are actually providing the training

²² The inclusion and later expansion of the ALP was not broadly supported by all government actors (see below).

²³ Interviews with EUPOL and NTM-A officials, Kabul, October 11 and 12, 2010.

²⁴ In 2009, EUPOL trained 10,000 officers for the presidential elections, and though there was more time to plan, the program had little effect.

²⁵ Interview with EUPOL official, October 11, 2010.

for the Afghan Uniformed Police are in fact from the NTM-A paid for by US money.²⁶ The Afghan National Policing Strategy has its strengths and weaknesses, but once the programs are actually implemented they are overseen by organizations whose strategic purpose is not to deliver the program but to justify their existence and importance in Afghanistan.²⁷ Therefore, some of the smaller (but not insubstantial programs) are unable to engage effectively with the massive train and equip program for the ANA and ANP that is practically driven by the NTM-A/CSTC-A. Some programs, such as EUPOL, seem to feel they must justify their existence through accepting large responsibilities that they cannot possibly perform.

The increased attention on the Afghan security sector has not led to more coherent programming. The single-minded focus on increasing the number of boots on the ground²⁸ has led to training for the police being cut from eight to six weeks, and programs such as FDD being abandoned in favour of wider deployment of OMLTs and in-district mentoring, even though no known reviews have been carried out.²⁹ Tensions remain between the largely US focus on paramilitary training for the ANP and the greater emphasis on civilian policing by the European states and EUPOL, though this has begun to change with the deployment of the EGF, which is training police, including Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP), at a training centre in Mazar-i Sharif (NTM-A, 2010). ANCOP are specifically trained in paramilitary techniques, which brings the European support to police training closer to the COIN approach advocated by the US military.

According to those involved, coordination between these missions continues to be very challenging.³⁰ This

26 Interview with EUPOL and NTM-A Officials, October 11 and 12, 2010.

27 Interview with EUPOL official, in Kabul, October 11, 2010.

28 While not often acknowledged, the current force projection figures for ANSF and International Military Forces push Afghanistan's security force heavily to a COIN posture, but are not entirely consistent with the theory about the levels of security personnel required to quell any insurgency being in the region of 20 security personnel per 1,000 population. Projected sizes of the ANA and ANP total 305,600, plus the NDS estimated at 30,000, plus approximately 132,000 ISAF forces (ISAF, 2011), providing 467,600 security personnel for an estimated Afghan population of around 26 million. This gives a force ratio of one security personnel to approximately 1120 of the population. Even in relatively low intensity areas, such as Kapisa, where fighting is continuing and the ISAF and the ANSF have struggled to put enough boots on the ground to fulfil another criterion of COIN theory, which is that for every insurgent there should be 10 counterinsurgents (Eikenberry, 2010).

29 Interview with NTM-A official, Kabul, October 12, 2010.

30 Interview with NTM-A and EUPOL officials, Kabul, October 11 and 12, 2010.

is in part because some missions, such as EUPOL, have a credibility gap within the international community given their general inability to deliver programs. The perception is not helped by the relatively small amount of programmatic budget that EUPOL has at its disposal — €30 million, excluding salary and operational costs. Over the next three years, EUPOL is likely to focus its spending on two activities, a new Police Staff College³¹ and a new police training centre in Bamyan, which will promote training of female police officers.³² Training of female police officers is an important topic in SSR, but is perhaps not of great strategic relevance in the current discussions about how to ensure that Afghanistan is not faced with an ongoing, bloody and persistent civil war once international military forces withdraw over the next few years. This has led to other actors, notably NTM-A/CSTC-A to ignore EUPOL's activities and advice at times.³³

DISORGANIZED INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

The confusion between the actors also overshadows the impacts that the choice to pursue COIN by the largest intervener, the US, is having on the Afghan security sector. The substantial support to the ANSF is altering these institutions and the broader Afghan state. The bilateral nature of the relationships with donors in particular suggests a fragmenting of the state, which is grappling to bring coherence to international intervention and means that much of the funding for COIN initiatives is outside of the Afghan state's direct purview.³⁴

Within the confused international engagement, the Afghan perspective of the priorities for support to the Afghan security sector has often been lost. This was not helped by heavy foreign influence over, and

31 This is to be run alongside the existing Police Academy and Border Police Academy. It is not immediately clear what the new EUPOL Police Staff College will bring that utilization of existing resources could not achieve. In addition to the lack of strategic choices in the current period, earlier choices about re-establishing the police academy in 2002 were not necessarily believed to be strategically cogent (Murray, 2007).

32 Interview with EUPOL official, Kabul, October 11, 2010.

33 Interview with NTM-A official, Kabul, October 12, 2010.

34 The author notes that there is little academic literature that discusses the way in which states have addressed the security sector after the conclusion of an insurgency (either in favour of the insurgents or the counterinsurgents). It is not clear, for example, what would happen to the nature of the army should the insurgency be defeated — it would be the largest, most capable element of the Afghan state and could itself become a threat to the state without strong civilian leadership, a quality that has seemingly been missing to date.

at times drafting of, significant Afghan security sector documents.³⁵ As a result, it is often difficult to discern the Afghan perspective. It does seem clear that there is an understanding among the senior levels of the Afghan security services that the type, level and focus of support from 2002 to 2008 was misguided and based on an inappropriate understanding of Afghanistan's security environment and the context of its "defensive doctrine."³⁶

What is also clear is that the Afghan approach to its own security sector has been in marked contrast to the approaches of the international community. This is in part cultural, as some of the institutions revived after 2001 still had a strong Soviet dynamic, but it is also due to the coalition of interests that underpin the current Afghan state. The current political elite in control of the armed forces consist of a cross-section of former Mujahideen leaders from Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara and Uzbek communities, where each individual constituency is fragmented. This is most serious in the Pashtun community, whose military-political leadership is split between those supporting the government of President Hamid Karzai and those backing the various insurgent groups, but is also prevalent to a lesser degree within the other constituencies.³⁷

While action on "reform" may seem tortuously slow to those involved, with some talking of the need for "strategic patience," when the Afghan state believes an action is in its interests (or an element of the state's interests) action can be executed with what could be described as exceptional alacrity. The establishment of militias to protect the presidential election in 2009 by Minister Noorzai of the Independent Directorate for the Protection of Public Spaces and Highways by Tribal Support is a case in point. Leaving aside for the moment the impact of the militias, they were apparently established in at least 18 provinces, comprising some 12,500 participants in 18 days (Gopal and Dreazen, 2009 and Ruttig, 2009). That is no small achievement. At the time, there were clear concerns regarding vetting and professionalism, and concerns remain that militias

affiliated to that program may actually be promoting recruitment for the opposition in areas where they have remained functioning, for example, in parts of Kunduz, such as Imam Sahib (CPAU, 2010 and 2011).

TWO TENSIONS

There are then two very difficult tensions at the central level of reform — what programs can be feasibly and coherently delivered by the international community, and is there enough of an overlap between these actions and the actual desires of the Afghan state to see them through? Even if those two tensions could be adequately resolved, and given the discussion above this seems unlikely, there still remains a lack of focus and direction.

This has been, in part, because despite the increased international focus there has not been, until very recently, an articulation of the Afghan perspective of how their security sector should or could function. The National Security Policy (2010) is in fact the third time one has been produced; however the 2006 version was largely written by a foreign adviser and the 2008 version was essentially a copy of the 2006 policy. This has been augmented by the production of new Afghan policing and military strategies (the police one is new, the military one is a revision of the 2004 National Military Strategy). The production of these documents has helped to provide some clarity, but given the resource restrictions and the constraints of the Afghan bureaucracy to deliver essentially Western bureaucratic outputs, it will be impossible to deliver on all of the policies — particularly with regard to the police. The policies also vastly distort the size of the ANSF, so that the Afghan state will not be able to pay for them until the 2020s. As a result, new policies do not in and of themselves resolve the problem that has plagued international support to the Afghan security sector, which is hugely over ambitious and demonstrates a substantial inability among the intervening states to coordinate in a realistic manner that actually leads to coherent activities.

SHIFTING SANDS ON THE GROUND

Despite a growing consensus that a coherent strategic direction needs to be established in the Afghan security sector, many facts on the ground, including the support to informal militia groups and the shifting dynamic of the insurgency, prompted a rash of localized, fragmented approaches to stabilization, and later COIN. These activities, highlighted in the support to informal militias and more formalized, but often pilot,

35 Interview with Afghan official in Kabul, October 7, 2010.

36 Interview with Afghan official in Kabul, October 13, 2010.

37 The Taliban have, to date, largely failed to recruit large numbers of non-Pashtuns, though approximately five percent of their members are believed to be non-Pashtun (information from independent presentation to Department for International Development, February 23, 2009), held by author. Perhaps more importantly, the Taliban have been able to open up more and more cleavages within the Pashtun constituency, thereby increasing their influence in the west and north of the country.

local defence activities, have refracted security sector policies, making it exceptionally hard to determine what works and what does not.

INFORMAL MILITIAS

An ongoing issue is that what is agreed upon on paper in Kabul often has very little bearing on what actions by the provincial and district levels of the Afghan government in the field are actually supported by various elements of the international community.

Between 2002 and 2006, stabilization activities — whether it was the hiring of a local warlord for protection of ISAF and OEF bases, or the delivery of Commander’s Emergency Response Program projects — generally ignored the local political dynamics upon which the stability of the state and broader security sector depended. These activities would seem to be at odds with the theoretical underpinning of stability, which is to support “complex political discourse rather than the imposition of any particular political model” (Jackson and Gordon, 2007: 653). The use of informal militias has taken various forms and has included localized agreements for force protection (Badakhshan), larger contracts for protection of convoys or larger installations (Kandahar), as well as the establishment of secret but fully structured armed groups such as the Counter-Terrorism Pursuit Teams (CTPT) supported by the Central Intelligence Agency.³⁸

In the case in Badakhshan, the German-run Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) used approximately 50 locally hired armed men affiliated to a local commander to provide the outer ring of security for the main PRT base from at least 2004. Providing an outer layer of security is logical, but it is the method of the group’s selection and who they represent that is critical. The group was associated with Commander Nazir Mohammad, who was locally considered to be a warlord and a drug smuggler.³⁹ Nazir commanded the 338th brigade as part of the Afghan Militia Forces, which was on the Ministry of Defence payroll from 2002 to 2006. Nazir has subsequently been accused of turning the guarding of the NATO base and NGOs into a “protection racket” (Baker, 2009). Irrespective of the quality of the groups’ work in protecting the PRT, the loss in confidence among the local population was important as it demonstrated two salient lessons: first,

that the international community is not interested in systemic reform that could actually provide a modicum of security for the local people, which is not provided by reviled local leaders; and second, that the international community seems incapable of engaging the central Afghan government to codify the presence of a local militia by at least bringing them under a formal Afghan government contract or placing the group under the command of an Afghan ministry. Problems of this nature are not isolated and have had grave consequences for the authority of the Afghan government, with President Karzai claiming: “there are also many other countries who contract the Afghan militias and their leaders. So I can only work where I can act, and I must always calculate what will happen before doing anything” (Koelbl and Fichtner, 2008).

The second example is in Kandahar, where US forces initially contracted Commander Raziq⁴⁰ and Gul Ali Barakzai⁴¹ to provide the inner and outer rings of security for Kandahar Airfield. While this has some similarities with the Badakhshan case, the contract was of a much more significant scale, and the key dynamic in the contract was that the US was effectively supporting one political faction. These commanders were part of the patronage and commander network of Gul Agha Sherzai, who was the governor of Kandahar prior to the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan and again after they fell in 2001. This meant that the US had effectively promoted and supported commanders who would have little perceived interest in sharing power with the Taliban. The commanders were also involved in providing protection to convoys to Zabul (Gul Ali) and Uruzgan (Raziq). Until 2010, Commander Raziq continued to operate his own militia, before merging them into the Afghan Border Police units he now commands in Spin Boldak on the Afghan/Pakistan border (CPAU, 2011).

In 2005 and 2006, advisers raised the issue of support to militias by OEF and the ISAF and the contradiction this implied with attempts at disarmament, which was duly noted by international military forces, but ignored as a necessity. This lack of foresight about how to engage local security forces in a way that did not undermine strategic objectives (disarmament, in this case) meant that the policy made in Kabul and international capitals was largely undermined by the reality of Afghanistan’s security landscape. It has only been since 2010 that

38 The CTPT are a 3,000-strong armed structure that reports directly to the CIA, but is staffed predominately by Afghans and has been used to support the counter-terrorism agenda of the US in Afghanistan.

39 Interviews in Faizabad, 2005 and 2006.

40 The brother of Gul Agha Sherzai, governor of Kandahar from 1992 to 1994 and 2001 to 2003 before being moved to the Governorship of Nangarhar.

41 The brother of Mullah Sayed Mohd, who organized the bodyguard for Gul Agha Sherzai.

General Petraeus issued orders regarding contracting by military forces in Afghanistan that the issue is now being partially addressed. However, this is at a point where the Afghan security sector has already been radically altered by previous actions (ISAF, 2010).

These examples were the result of decisions by military forces on the ground and tended to be ad hoc, and the agreements, though not often quick to change, were not a permanent feature of the Afghan security landscape. There have been attempts by PRTs to move their contracting from local armed groups to subcontracting from Ministry of the Interior structures, which at least ensure some form of state oversight (initially by the New Zealand-led PRT in Bamyan). Other actions, however, such as the establishment of the Counterterrorism Pursuit Teams (CTPT), which number some 3,000 personnel, have been a relatively constant feature of Afghanistan's security architecture, despite being largely in the shadows (Woodward, 2010).

Similarly, a militia known as the Kandahar Strike Force has been closely associated with President Karzai's brother, Ahmad Wali Karzai, who was allegedly in the CIA's pay.⁴² The force may have also received direct US training and was allegedly involved in the killing of the Kandahar police chief in June 2010. The senior Afghan Army Prosecutor sought to indict a US Special Forces commander on allegations of supporting the force (Grey, 2010). In a similar vein, the US-supported Khost Provincial Force was dogged by allegations in 2005 that it was passing bogus intelligence to US forces to sanction raids on political and military competitors or settle vendettas with people who were not necessarily connected to the insurgency (Hartill, 2005).

These processes have often been completely outside of the central approach aimed at SSR. This means that substantial numbers of armed actors, contracted by other states, have created a security sector that is in disarray. The lack of consistency between military deployments and PRTs across the country and their inability to resolve inconsistencies rapidly has allowed some distorting facets of Afghanistan's security sector to become facts on the ground.

FORMALIZING MILITIAS

Irrespective of the disconnect between strategy and practice outlined in the cases above, there are other issues that reflect persistent attempts by international

actors to mould the Afghan security sector in certain directions, often without significant buy-in from the central government. The most emblematic of these have been the recurrent attempts since 2006 to promote some form of locally organized armed defence group. These groups have been variously called the Community Defence Volunteer Units, a UK-backed idea in 2006; the Afghan Public Protection Program and/or Force (the Ministry of the Interior sponsored terms); Local Defence Initiatives or Community Defence Initiatives (favoured seemingly by the Special Forces community); and in the most recent official language, the Village Stability Operations, sponsored by International Special Forces and the ALP, which forms part of the ANSF under the Ministry of Interior.⁴³ This is the result of the analysis among some parts of the international community, often promoted by the military, that given the inability of the current formal security structures (ANP in various forms, ANA and NDS) to provide the manpower to deal with the security challenges, the only way to do so is through local defence activities.

This consistency of pressure on the Afghan government from the international community demonstrates two clear issues. First, that a consistent campaign to get President Karzai to accept some form of local defence activity against many and various points of concern, many of which are known to be of concern to the president himself (Lefevre, 2010), has ended up with the acceptance of a program that the Afghan government does not necessarily support. Second, in order to get presidential approval, trials of a number of small-scale initiatives from Kandahar to Wardak to Kunduz were carried out in order to see if a workable solution could be found. The outcome of all this activity has been to significantly complicate the Afghan security sector in a way that may not be strategically relevant to Afghanistan, because many within the government do not actually support it. In addition, in this area and others within the security sector (such as police or justice reform), there are effectively "50 or more pilot projects,"⁴⁴ which are impossible to monitor and evaluate coherently, meaning that it has become increasingly difficult to discern what is actually happening within the Afghan security sector. This permits Afghan actors, both within the state and outside, to at times work in counter-productive ways to undermine activities.⁴⁵

43 For analysis, see Ruttig, 2009 and Lefevre, 2010. The ALP policy was finally approved by President Karzai after direct pressure from General Petraeus in July 2010.

44 Interview with US-based consultant, Kabul, October 25, 2010.

45 Interview with diplomat in Kabul, December 3, 2010.

42 Ahmad Wali Karzai was killed by his own chief of security on July 12, 2011 (Partlow and Sieff, 2011).

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST BETWEEN SSR AND THE COIN FIGHT USING STABILIZATION APPROACHES

The previous sections suggest that the initial “stabilization” agenda of the international community, which involved relatively small politically orientated interventions, was also characterized by a number of ad hoc, uncoordinated and ultimately damaging security innovations, which have complicated attempts to bring coherence to the Afghan security sector. While at a central level the period from 2002 to 2006 was characterized by a focus on SSR, the actual activities that were promoted were uncoordinated and collectively ineffective in moulding the Afghan security sector into a coherent whole.

This section will argue that the confusion of implementing the three interventions in one country, or space,⁴⁶ promotes different factors that are not necessarily compatible. Looking at the supposed end points of each intervention, those tensions become clearer. The tension between SSR, COIN and stabilization is in many ways inevitable. However, the range of interventions still does not resolve the ultimate question for the Afghan security sector — what are its primary aims collectively and how should they be attained over the long term?

COIN approaches predicate themselves on supporting and expanding the writ of the state in an overt show of political as well as military support. To this end, COIN’s focus in the security sector has been on the expansion of armed structures, which are increasingly flexible (primarily because of ISAF, particularly Special Forces, enablers) in order to execute COIN and bring more territory under state authority. The initial decisions in 2002 to limit Afghanistan’s army to less than 50,000, while possibly including regional considerations,⁴⁷ was also a reflection of the fact that even at that level it would be years before Afghanistan

could pay for its own forces. The current end point for the ANSF is unclear, other than the force numbers are to be substantially increased. The context in Afghanistan, with a low (but improving) tax-GDP ratio, means that the COIN approach is almost certainly creating a force that is fiscally unsustainable.

The SSR focus of much of 2002 to 2006 was unsuccessful, due as much to the inability to move beyond policy in Kabul to action in the provinces, as to the lack of coordination between the lead nations during that period. SSR has effectively been subsumed by the United States as it has picked up areas of activity that other states were unwilling to invest in heavily enough (with the possible exception of counternarcotics, whose activities failed for other reasons (see, for example, Mansfield, 2007)). The attempt to bring security and judicial functions together in a more holistic manner, largely in a more formal structure, was also unsuccessful and has been overtaken by the myriad of localized attempts to try and bring coherence to the interface between judicial and security functions. The Prisoner Review Shuras⁴⁸ supported by the UK government in Helmand are a good example of this — reasonably successful locally within their limited aims, but not of sufficient weight to bring about systemic change.

Stabilization’s focus on local political arrangements to support stability may potentially be at the expense of the state-building agenda inherent in SSR. Stabilization has in many senses become a de facto method of operation for much of the last nine years, in part for its “good-enough” standard, but also due to the fact that the direction in the initial SSR phase had limited effects on actions on the ground by OEF and ISAF, which have altered the security landscape (as outlined above). More recently better structured stabilization activities have been implemented across a broad range of lines (security, governance and development). However, activities on the ground often bear little connection to broader, agreed, Afghan government strategies and policies.

The crux of the problem is that until recently, there hasn’t been an Afghan articulation of the higher security

46 Implicit in this argument is the reality that the “spaces” in which the interventions occur each have their own specific dynamics, and in particular the nature of the informal politics of governance shapes the interventions themselves (Heathershaw and Lambach, 2008: 270-1). This is beyond the scope of this paper, but local dynamics have had an enduring and substantial impact on the SSR, COIN and stabilization as conceived of by the interveners.

47 There was apparent US concern about supporting a large Afghan army because of fears that a large Afghan army would threaten Pakistani strategic interests, in particular the doctrine of strategic depth (interview with Afghan government official, October 13, 2010).

48 The Prisoner Review Shuras have been established in several districts in Helmand to review and adjudicate on prisoners captured by Afghan or international forces. The boards provide recommendations on whether further prosecution should be sought (often relating to terrorist offences) or, where appropriate, arrange for local elders to vouch for the behaviour of the defendants. The Shuras consist of the senior Afghan government officials, commonly the district governor, district chiefs of police and intelligence and the local ANA commander, where appropriate, as well as up to two international advisers, one from the UK military, the other a stabilization adviser.

sector aims against which the disparate activities of the numerous international programs and their various approaches can be aligned. The most recent iteration of Afghanistan's National Security Policy could provide some much needed clarity about its stance from the Afghan government. But, as with many policies in Afghanistan, getting a policy approved is one thing, actually getting the international community, its military deployments and the various parts of the Afghan state to implement it is another thing altogether. There have been many examples of policies, such as the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS), failing to be brought to coherence. Therefore, while having a national security framework may seem laudable, it is not clear if there is the political will or capability to bring it to fruition in the near term.

Stabilization practice that occurs on the ground in Afghanistan seems to have suffered from a lack of strategic clarity and direction from the top, as well as the overarching distortion of a 40-country coalition each operating to their own agendas, procedures and mores.⁴⁹ The strategic drift has allowed potentially strategic activities, such as the formulation of Afghan national policies, to be handed over to international advisers. This has included the ANDS (2008, the ANDS serves as Afghanistan's poverty reduction strategy paper), as well as the earlier versions of Afghanistan's National Military Strategy (2004) and National Security Policy (2006 and 2008). There was no National Policing Strategy until March 2010. It has taken nearly a decade for international advisers to begin to learn that foreign drafting of national sovereign policy is a shortcut to poor buy-in and support within the government, which contributes to growing perceptions of the ineffectiveness and lack of legitimacy of the national government. This strategic malaise at the top of the Afghan government has been characterized by ongoing revisions to the strategic intent of the international community in Afghanistan, which has crippled the emergence of a strategic direction.

Within the exceptionally poor strategic environment, individual troop-contributing nations and diplomatic missions, such as EUPOL, have fallen back on constructing their own strategic narrative to justify their presence and activities in Afghanistan.⁵⁰ In addition, the adoption of specific geographic areas by troop-contributing nations who led in stabilizing

specific provinces (for example, the United Kingdom in Helmand, Italy in Herat, and Germany in Kunduz, Takhar and Badakhshan) contributed to the balkanisation of Afghanistan between troop-contributing countries as well as between military command structures (OEF and the ISAF) (Lamb and Cinnamond, 2009). The joint command of the ISAF and USFOR/A under General McKiernan in October 2008, was a step in rectifying this issue, but only became solidified under the commands of General McChrystal and General Petraus.

CURRENT FRAGMENTATION

The current danger is that while the Afghan government has become more capable over the last nine years, it still lacks strategic direction vis-à-vis its own security sector. The triumvirate of approaches to the security sector in Afghanistan by donor nations has not promoted any form of coherence — the Afghan security sector today is possibly more fragmented than at any time during the last nine years or even the last 250 years since the Afghan state emerged. This is not because of a lack of desire to see coordination, but that individual deployments, PRTs and headquarters staff rotations have each attempted to leave their mark, often with time horizons that are exceptionally short in reform terms.

One interview subject described an Afghan political faction as having multiple heads, but even more legs, and in many respects the Afghan security sector is structured in a similar manner.⁵¹ Support has been "stovepiped" through ministries with little or no strategic direction and coherence, and often no fiscal oversight by the Ministry of Finance. This has allowed "pet" projects to emerge that promote particular activities in the army, police and intelligence services. The individual activities in themselves may not be bad — many may be positive — but as a coherent whole, they are lacking.

As well as the disparate central level programs, the localized stabilization agenda, coupled with COIN, seems to be leading to a further fragmentation of Afghanistan's security sector in the face of continued central Afghan pressure to attempt to hold power at the centre. There continues to be little consideration about what the aggregate Afghan security sector — beyond the ANA and ANP — could or should look like in the medium term. Just as the military mission in Afghanistan finally addressed the issue of unity of

49 Interviews with NTM-A and NATO officials, Kabul, October 11 and 29, 2010.

50 Interview with EUPOL and NTM-A officials, Kabul, October 11 and 12, 2010.

51 Interview with NATO official, October 16, 2010.

command with the combining of OEF and ISAF forces under one US general, the lack of unified effort both centrally and locally across security sector activities demonstrates the same crippling attributes as the competing OEF and ISAF missions did previously (Lamb and Cinnamon, 2009). Action in the security sector remains uncoordinated, with little strategic direction other than to build up the ANSF to the point where the ability for Afghanistan to pay for its own forces drifts into the 2020s. The argument that this is because of the need to address the existential threat to the state is difficult to maintain when the only way to reach that point has been to massively increase foreign troop deployments, which in and of itself has attracted and contributed to insecurity.

CONCLUSION: STRATEGIC DIRECTION OR DRIFT?

The cumulative impact of implementing SSR, COIN and stabilization in the same country simultaneously has resulted in an unsatisfactory outcome for donor countries, the Afghan government and the Afghan people. Donors have assumed that the various programs designed to support the Afghan security sector are complementary, but as argued at the beginning of this paper, the three forms of intervention occupy different physical spaces: SSR largely operates at a strategic level, COIN tends to focus on the operational with tactical activities and stabilization focuses primarily on the tactical. This spacing of the interventions may seem positive, but the interventions have a range of effects on the Afghan context, because they place their emphases on different elements. Therefore, the interventions support and mould different aspects of the Afghan context, across the security, political and social landscapes. This means that the strategic level has been unable to shape the operational and, instead, the operational activities in COIN and stabilization have led to strategic changes that are less than desirable. This distortion threatens the sustainability of the intervention and the coherence of the Afghan security sector.

These trends help explain the changing nature of the UN Security Council resolutions relating to UNAMA and ISAF since 2002. However, the interweaving of the differing approaches supported in the mandates, the multiplying missions and programmatic innovations do not add up to strategic clarity about the nature and form of the Afghan security sector. Instead, a vision emerges of increasingly verbose texts being issued

from New York that are increasingly detached from the context in Kabul and beyond.

In Kabul, the different interventions and missions in the security sector have been coloured by their donor nations' concepts of what is required and the need for some institutions to be seen to be at the table in Afghanistan, despite the fact that they are unable to deliver. The lack of rigorous and even ruthless rationalization of where international effort should be focused means there are multiple missions carrying out the same types of activities, but in different ways — a dynamic most clearly evident in police reform and training. Outside of Kabul, both of these levels of confusion have been overtaken, reshaped and ultimately foiled by the realities on the ground. The widespread use of, and support to, non-state and quasi-state militias by the international community, and the competing and differing implementation of stabilization by various actors in different provinces militates against any central strategy becoming realized.

It is not simply a case of arguing that a new mandate, policy or strategy would resolve these issues and bring clarity. There are simply so many interests related to the ISAF deployment in Afghanistan that it would be almost impossible to bring absolute clarity to the intervention. The conclusion from this can only be that the fragmented approach to intervention is structurally unable to produce any of the results the interveners claim to be working towards. Instead, it seems that the politics *within and between* the interveners trump strategic clarity and operational effectiveness, leading not only to a massive waste of resources, but a strategic folly on a grand scale.

It is likely that as transition continues, the reality and depth of these issues will emerge as the protection of the ISAF is withdrawn from the Afghan government. This will undoubtedly allow conflicts that have lain dormant, or had been subsumed into the "insurgency," to come to the fore. The interveners must recognize that they have spent a decade perpetuating an unfinished civil war, at times with the knowing collusion of the current Afghan government. Reducing, restraining and refocusing interventions on a much smaller number of strategically critical priorities, of which the central theme should be protecting civilians from the renewed civil war, may be the only way of reasserting a constructive role for Western states in Afghanistan in the years to come.

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