Barbara J. Stapleton

Disarming the Militias

DDR and DIAG and the Implications for Peace Building

FOREWORD

The Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups: Why AAN is republishing a 2008 Report

Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG) was the name of a crucial programme in the post-Taleban years in Afghanistan that ran from 2006 to 2011. As the successor to the Demobilisation, Disarmament and Reintegration (DDR) programme, it was designed to disband those remaining armed groups in the areas of the country not covered by DDR and outside the control of the central government in Kabul. In 2011, with the end of the UNDP-run 'Afghanistan's New Beginnings Programme' that had supported, and reported about, the disbandment progress, it became part of the Afghanistan Peace and Reconciliation Programme (APRP). According to information AAN recently received from APRP officials, DIAG no longer deals with 'criminal' groups, only with armed insurgent groups. (All illegal armed groups remaining after the DDR programme have been outlawed by the Afghan government.) In effect, DIAG has become the implementer of the reintegration programme.

But this does not mean that all non-Taleban illegal armed groups had disappeared. By 2011, 759 of the 1,496 illegal armed groups that survived the

DDR programme had been disarmed, as the conclusive Afghanistan New Beginnings Programme (ANBP) report states.[1] This means that 737 such groups continued to exist – but no programme exists anymore to tackle them.

Given this paradoxical situation, Barbara Stapleton's 2008 paper, 'Disarming the Militias – DDR and DIAG and Their Impact on Peace Building', remains highly relevant because it deals with another part of the post-2001 international intervention that remains unfinished work. Already then, Stapleton had concluded that 'the international community's failure to demonstrate sufficient intent with regard to reaching DDR and DIAG objectives rendered DIAG a self-fulfilling

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[1] United Nations Development Programme, Afghanistan Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG), *Annual Project Report 2006*, http://www.undp.org.af/whoweare/undpinafghanistan/Projects/Reports/DIAG/2006_Annual_Project_Report_UNDP_DIAG.pdf; United Nations Development Programme Afghanistan, *Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG), Annual Project Report 2010*, http://www.undp.org.af/Projects/Report2011/diag/2011-03-21-%20Annual%20Progress%20Report%20of%20DIAG.pdf. See also: Thomas Ruttig, *Afghanistan: Institutionen ohne Demokratie: Strukturelle Schwächen des Staatsaufbaus und Ansätze für eine politische Stabilisierung*, SWP Studie S 17, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Berlin, June 2008, p 21–22.

prophecy in regard to its limited and weak outcomes to date.' But this last significant contribution to a discussion of DIAG, published in 2010 by the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA) in conference proceedings, with a relatively low circulation, cannot be found on the internet anymore. For these reasons, AAN has decided to republish it in its Occasional Paper series and has obtained the agreement to do so by both the author and the original publisher, the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, to whom we express our deepest gratitude.

DIAG remains a timely and extremely relevant topic both because illegal armed groups still pose a primary obstacle to improving governance and ending impunity in Afghanistan and because a process of re-arming and establishing paramilitary, semi-irregular groups is underway. A process that is intensifying as international forces draw down and leave Afghanistan. In effect, the militia programmes can only erode the limited results achieved by both DDR and DIAG and contradict the objective of demilitarising Afghan society to enable sustainable stability. Again. Barbara Stapleton had warned in her paper that, and her sentences fully stand in the current situation:

> The discourse that has surfaced recently on 'community defence' which is believed to include the possibility of creating additional militias, has consistently provoked negative reactions in the local media. Not surprisingly given historic resonances and growing fears that a return to civil war cannot be discounted. . . .
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> Perceptions that the south is being re-armed have become more prevalent in non-Pashtun areas of the country while demands for re-armament in the face of a strengthening insurgency have become more strident. Ambivalence towards disarmament has increased amongst all ethnic groups. . . .

Referred to as *arbaki* by Afghans in general, many of the new armed groups are under the government's control on paper only. Some were initially created by the Afghan intelligence service (NDS), others by an under-reported institution that was never fully established but managed to do some work nevertheless, the Independent Directorate for the Protection of Public Spaces and Highways by Tribal Support[2] in the context of the last electoral cycle in 2009–10. The idea to

establish a new militia force parallel to the regular Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) comprising of the Afghan National Army, the Afghan National Police and the forces of the National Directorate for Security has been picked up and developed, on a growing scale, by NATO since 2010 to push back on the insurgency at local levels and to compensate for the much-lamented weaknesses of the ANSF.[3]

While Afghanistan's National Security Council recently has 'instructed relevant security institutions to impede operations by all the armed groups and units established in some provinces by the coalition forces outside the Afghan armed forces' structures',[4] the Afghan Local Police (ALP) programme, in particular, grows unabated. (There are also the Critical Infrastructure Protection Programme, CIPP; and other types of militias.) From the original target figure of 10,000 ALP members, it has expanded to some 20,550 by now, according to Afghanistan's Ministry of the Interior (MoI). Reportedly, discussions are continuing between the MoI and the head of the US Special Operations Command (SOCOM) in Afghanistan to expand ALP numbers further to 45,000.[5] So far, the MoI's command and control over the ALP, has been weakly structured, with only a small office to manage the ALP, although it has now been decided to establish seven regional command centres.[6]

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[2] Thomas Ruttig, 'Militias – The Sorcerer's Apprentice's Genies (2): A Look Forward', *Afghanistan Analysts Network blog*, 20 November 2009, http://www.aan-afghanistan.org/index.asp?id=467.

[3] Gran Hewad, 'For a Handful of Bolani: Kunduz's New Problem with Illegal Militias', *Afghanistan Analysts Network blog*, 10 November 2012, http://www.aan-afghanistan.org/index.asp?id=3036; 'Torture, Illegal Armed Groups: Signs of Possible Afghan Government Action?', *Afghanistan Analysts Network blog*, 22 February 2013, http://www.aan-afghanistan.org/index.asp?id=3264.
[4] Office of the President, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 'National Security Council's Meeting Discusses Security of the Country', 17 February 2013, http://president.gov.af/en/news/17522.
[5] Karim Amini, 'Ahmadzai Claims Spy Agencies Oppose Afghan Local Police', *ToloNews*, Kabul, 7 February 2013, http://tolonews.com/en/afghanistan/9363-ahmadzai-claims-spy-agencies-oppose-afghan-local-police; Otto Kreisher, 'Despite Losing $1B Under the CR, McRaven Sees Bright Future for Special Forces', *Sea Power*, 29 January 2013, http://www.seapowermagazine.org/stories/20130129-mcraven.html. The SIGAR report for the last quarter of 2012 gives 18,435 as the number of trained and equipped Afghan Local Police'. See: 'Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction', *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress*, 30 January 2013, p 87, http://www.sigar.mil/pdf/quarterlyreports/2013-01-30qr.pdf#page=111.
[6] Azim Arash, 'MOI to Form ALP "Coordination Centres"', *ToloNews*, 17 January 2013, http://tolonews.com/en/afghanistan/9113.

The DDR programme had demobilised and disarmed the so-called Afghan Militia Forces (AMF), the military units of the mujahedin-governed Islamic State of Afghanistan that existed from the collapse of the communist regime under President Najibullah until the take-over of the Taleban (in its last years reduced to some enclaves of control in north-eastern Afghanistan and rump government commuting between Faizabad, the centre of Badakhshan, the only Afghan province it held completely, and the Tajik capital Dushanbe). The objective was to reintegrate AMF fighters into Afghanistan's civilian economy. In 2006, it had officially been completed and labelled a success.

When it concluded, though, 1,496 illegal armed groups (IAGs) had not yet been 'engaged in the DIAG process', according to the first annual report of the ANBP, the UN entity technically supporting and reporting about the programme. It remains unclear whether 'engaged groups' include all groups existing at that point or whether some categories were tacitly exempted – for instance those operating closely with the CIA or foreign special forces.

Unlike DDR, DIAG was to be a fully Afghan owned and managed process, managed by the internationally supported Joint Secretariat and the Afghan owned Disarmament and Reintegration Committee, headed by Second Vice President Muhammad Karim Khalili. In 2011, it was integrated into the 'reconciliation' programme, APRP.[7] Upon the start of the programme in 2006, President Hamed Karzai had vowed that[8]:

> Backed by Afghan people's strong desire to get rid of all the illegal armed groups in Afghanistan and to make this country safe and prosperous, the government of Afghanistan has committed itself to accomplishing Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG) at any cost. . . . While many obstacles lie ahead, I am fully committed to achieving the benchmark of DIAG as stipulated in the Afghanistan Compact. The government of Afghanistan will not allow any disruptions to the implementation of DIAG program.

In late 2012, when AAN started researching a blog about ALP units in Kunduz province and their

origins,[9] it turned out that no major report had been published since 2008 on the results of the DIAG programme. Additionally, AAN found it virtually impossible to obtain figures or even general information about the progress of DIAG in, for example, Kunduz from the officials responsible for the programme there.

Muhammad Rauf Qazizada, the head of the DIAG unit for the north-eastern region that includes Kunduz, told AAN that, 'from June 2005 to April 2010 DIAG has collected around 2,600 weapons and disarmed 450 to 500 illegal armed groups'. He was not able, though, to give any figures for Kunduz specifically and for the time after 2010. Qazizada added that 'in the DIAG process there were lots of obstacles. . . . Government officials were backing the armed militias, even the then governor and the police commander.'

According to Qazizada's figures, an average illegal armed group in north-eastern Afghanistan that disbanded possessed five weapons only. Two conclusions are possible: first, DIAG has continued a strategy that, in its early days, was described as collecting the 'low hanging fruit',[10] i.e., groups who are weak and easy to tackle. (This author has even seen an official list of IAGs to be disbanded in 2006 that included groups with 'zero' weapons.) Or, second, many IAGs handed over some of their weapons and remained largely intact. The 2009 annual report by ANBP confirms that 'many IAGs turned in old and unserviceable weapons under the DIAG process instead of the more modern and functional weapons'.[11] The report, however, does not include statistics that specify how many collected weapons were functional or not.

The last ANBP/DIAG report (2010)[12] shows that not a single IAG had been disbanded in the north-eastern region, including Kunduz. (It only gives regional data, not for provinces let alone districts, although – as the report also mentions – there were so-called District Analysis documents. These however, have not been published. Earlier reports only gave very brief and combined – i.e., country-

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[7] Kate Clark, 'New Bureaucracies to Welcome "Upset Brothers"', *Afghanistan Analysts Network blog*, 14 May 2010, http://www.aan-afghanistan.org/index.asp?id=751.

[8] 'Afghanistan to eradicate illegal armed groups at any cost: president', *Xinhua*, 1 July 2006, http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200607/02/eng20060702_279129.html.

[9] Hewad, 'For a Handful of Bolani' (see FN 3).

[10] For use of this term, see: United Nations Development Programme Afghanistan, 'Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG)', *Quarterly Project Report [First Quarter, 2007]*, http://www.undp.org.af/whoweare/undpinafghanistan/Projects/Reports/DIAG/Q1%202007%20DIAG%20Report.pdf.

[11] United Nations Development Programme Afghanistan, *Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG), Annual Project Report 2009*, http://www.undp.org.af/Projects/2009AnnualReports/DIAG_APR09.pdf.

[12] See FN 1.

wide – figures.) The report also mentions that 'DIAG activity was limited in some areas due to the prevailing security conditions', but does not become more specific. This might be an explanation for the 'zero disbandment' result.

When DIAG officially ended in March 2011 as an independent programme, ANBP's final annual report, covering 2010 and the first months of 2011, said that 71 illegal armed groups disbanded in this reporting period. That is, the total number disbanded since the beginning of DIAG went up to 759, i.e., a bit over 50 per cent of the original 1,496 illegal armed groups. Although DIAG was made mandatory by law by the Afghan government, there possibly were IAGs that simply rejected being 'engaged' in DIAG, so that the total number of IAGs could even have been higher than 1,496. On the other hand, IAGs could have disbanded (fully or temporarily) on their own, without any DIAG/ANBP involvement.

The last DIAG/ANBP report also mentions Kunduz only once, but with an enlightening fact: Qala-ye Zal was one of the six 'districts that had been declared DIAG compliant [earlier and] have relapsed *into insurgency* [sic!] during 2010'. The report further concludes that the 'resurgence of IAGs in compliant districts occurs due to a dearth of national or international security forces, which creates a power vacuum'. Here, IAGs stands for Taleban groups only, but the report fails to mention that non-Taleban IAGs (i.e., militias) also reappeared – if they ever were gone.[13]

All figures above indicate that the DIAG process is extremely shallow, as Barbara Stapleton highlights in her 2008 paper. The institutional blurring after the original DIAG programme was integrated into the APRP might just have resulted in DIAG petering out altogether. One thing is clear, however: all new militia programmes, even before the ALP and CIPP programmes, used the pool of the non-disbanded IAGs for recruitment.[14]

—Thomas Ruttig, AAN Co-director

At the time she wrote this paper, Barbara J. Stapleton was deputy to the EU Special Representative for Afghanistan. This paper was written in her personal capacity.

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[13] Reports about new militias emerging in Qala-ye Zal district: Muhammad Tahir, 'Afghan Village Fights To Keep Taliban At Bay', *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 30 September 2010, http://www.rferl.org/content/Afghan_Village_Fights_To_Keep_Taliban_At_Bay/2172831.html; Yaroslav Trofimov, 'Afghan Militia Wins Uneasy Peace', *Wall Street Journal*, 29 May 2012, http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702303674004577434483872773586.html (last accessed 30 May 2012).

[14] Mathieu Lefèvre, *Local Defence in Afghanistan: A Review of Government-backed Initiatives*, Afghanistan Analysts Network, Thematic Report, 03/2010 (May 2010), http://www.aan-afghanistan.org/index.asp?id=763.

INTRODUCTION

"Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration is the de facto peace process in Afghanistan. Without DDR there will be no security and hence no environment for sustainable democracy in the country."(Preface to the Recommendations from the 'Civil Society Participation in Afghan Peacebuilding and Reconstruction Conference', Berlin, 30 March 2004)

"What you have said about DDR is what is in our hearts but how will this be made to happen?"(Many of the civil society networks linked to the forty civil society representatives from all over Afghanistan who attended the above conference, in responded to the Civil Society statement made in Berlin on their behalf along these lines.)

I arrived in Kabul as ACBAR's (the Kabul-based NGO coordinating body) policy and advocacy coordinator in January 2003. In an effort to distinguish reality on the ground from the spin being spun even then, the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) process provided a lifeline. My interest in DDR and its successor programme: the Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG) remained part of my work with the Office of the EU Special Representative. I would like to thank those who have shared insights and have helped shape my thinking on this most critical of areas for peacebuilding in Afghanistan - Professor Kenji Izesaki, who headed the Japanese embassy's DDR unit, Christian Willach and Christian Lamarre in the DIAG Joint Secretariat and Dr. Antonio Giustozzi, at the London School of Economic's 'Crisis States Programme'.

Popular support for the development of a centralised state that had control over the means of violence was palpable at the outset of the international engagement following the dismantlement of Taliban rule. The profound challenges involved in overcoming Afghanistan's historic legacy of a limited government and strong society[1] were underestimated by all sides however. This situation was compounded by an ongoing failure to understand how pre-existing socio-economic structures had been affected by the violence and destruction that had erupted over the previous thirty years. The phenomenon of 'warlordism', itself an outcome of this most recent

period of Afghanistan's history,[2] was conflated with a tendency by outsiders to view Afghan history stereotypically, in short that things had always been that way.

The radically altered mechanisms through which relations between the centre and the periphery had been conducted prior to the decades of intermittent, devastating conflict, the weakening of community leaders and consequently the increased vulnerability of local communities, was barely taken into account let alone understood by policy planners. Instead assumptions have ruled the day. Afghan expectations that concrete steps would be swiftly taken to end impunity, create access to justice and establish law and order, went unmet, while the security gap continued to widen from 2002 onwards. The international community did not commit the capacity and resources required to deliver in these key regards in the critical early years of the engagement. Instead, the implementation of security sector reform processes was overshadowed and overtaken by the political objectives that punctuated the Bonn Agreement and towards which international efforts were primarily directed.

While not underestimating the regional dimensions of the insurgency, the outcomes of failing to prioritise SSR during the early 'window of opportunity' and the seeming inability to take a coordinated approach across the closely inter-related security sector processes, are now staring us in the face: this year (2008) has been the worst in terms of security since 2001[3] with most worryingly an increasing trend towards the merging of interests between organised criminal syndicates, illegal armed groups and armed opposition groups, all opposed to the establishment of a strong central state and the rule of law. The ability of what has been termed 'the shadow state' to co-opt key elements of formal state structures – is exemplified by the trade in opium and weapons, with opium being traded north and weapons and ammunition traded south.

Effective steps to address the core issue of impunity and thereby start to close the gap between the Afghan government and people have

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[1] Amin Saikal, 'Modern Afghanistan: A History of Struggle and Survival', I.B. Tauris, November 2006.

[2] Antonio Giustozzi, 'Respectable Warlords? The Politics of Statebuilding in Post-Taleban Afghanistan', Crisis States Programme, Working Paper No: 33, (series 1), London School of Economics, September 2003.
[3] The 23 September 2008 Report of the Secretary General to the UN General Assembly Security Council para 22 stated 'the deteriorating security situation has hampered the implementation by UNAMA of its mandate.'

yet to be taken, while international will to tackle the underlying and linked causes of violence in a coherent and sequenced way - appears to be diminishing.[4] The international community's failure to demonstrate sufficient intent with regard to reaching DDR and DIAG objectives rendered DIAG a self-fulfilling prophecy in regard to its limited and weak outcomes to date. Meanwhile, Afghans observed both processes being manipulated by the powerful, towards their own ends.

FACTORS OPPOSING DISARMAMENT

The discourse that has surfaced recently on 'community defence' which is believed to include the possibility of creating additional militias, has consistently provoked negative reactions in the local media. Not surprisingly given historic resonances and growing fears that a return to civil war cannot be discounted. On the other hand some human rights activists see the hardening of ethnic positions and the fact that Pakistan will not be an option to flee to, should the worst come to pass, as boosting renewed support for leaders perceived as capable of providing some level of protection.

Perceptions that the south is being re-armed have become more prevalent in non-Pashtun areas of the country while demands for re-armament in the face of a strengthening insurgency have become more strident. Ambivalence towards disarmament has increased amongst all ethnic groups including the Shias whose political leaders have exploited the Hazara Kuchi clashes which the government has, so far, failed to resolve.

The growing demand for weapons from insurgent groups has added to these complexities. Military operations by Afghan and international forces have caused heavy losses in weaponry as well as men amongst armed insurgent groups over the last two years. This has stimulated a weapons and ammunition trade which is being supplied from the north including from areas historically opposed to the Taliban. This amounts to a 'win win' situation allowing commanders of illegal armed groups to claim more government support on the grounds that they are combating the insurgency while further securing their own power bases. By accessing resources available in Afghanistan through illegal armed groups, insurgent groups can at least partially re-supply in an easier way than bringing in resources over the border. According to

reports, a significant number of the IAGs that kept their weapons, legitimising their stance with the 'we have to fight the insurgents' argument, are now in various stages of supporting the insurgency. This development has reportedly contributed to the expansion of the insurgency over the last few years. This, coupled with the groups that have not disarmed because they are engaging the insurgents for a number of reasons has created an environment where disarmament is at a distinct disadvantage because all parties involved see no incentive to hand in their stockpiles of weapons and ammunition.

DISARMAMENT, DEMOBILISATION AND REINTEGRATION (DDR) 2003–2005

A six-month delay to the planned start of DDR, (which finally began in October 2003) followed the implementation of reforms to the Ministry of Defence (rightly) insisted upon by the Japanese government before it would release funding.[5] The urgent need for MOD reform was related amongst other factors to the disputed numbers of Afghan Militia Forces (AMF) under the nominal command and control of the MOD. They and they alone were the primary target of the DDR process, along with the cantonment of heavy weapons. Unofficial or private militias (termed illegal armed groups following the formal end of DDR) lay outside the DDR mandate.

The initial DDR plan for the demobilization and reintegration of 100,000 'active security personnel' represented less than half of the 250,000 militiamen that the MOD claimed were on their books. The MOD figure was known to be inflated in the interests of pocketing the salaries of substantial numbers of ghost soldiers, paid into MOD coffers from the internal budget administered by the Ministry of Finance. The question was how many registered militia members actually existed?

Logically DDR should also have included the Afghan militia forces registered by the Ministry of Interior who continued their activities from within the Afghan national police. Hence Isezaki's insistence at the time of using the term 'active security personnel' to describe those being targeted under

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[4] See Richard Norton-Taylor, 'Nato chief attacks lack of will on Afghanistan', *The Guardian*, 21 October 2008.

[5] Author's interview with Professor Kenji Isezaki, Kabul, October 2003.
Each of the five security sector pillars had a specific country lead – Japan on DDR; Germany on police reform, US on the army, Italy on judicial reform and the UK on counter narcotics.

DDR. According to Isezaki who pushed for this more comprehensive approach to ending the militia problem, MOI registered AMF units were kept off limits, to facilitate the need for large numbers of police required for holding the 2004 (Afghan) Presidential elections. In addition, a significant number of AMF were also later transferred to the national police force. This recycling of militias into the police underlies the ongoing challenge of police reform that is proving so hard to tackle effectively today. The holding of Presidential elections in Afghanistan narrowly preceded the holding of US Presidential elections in the same year. The two sets of elections were connected in a number of respects and as DDR/DIAG had to be completed prior to the Afghan presidential elections the process came under powerful external pressures.

The need for the Bush Administration's re-election campaign to be able to publicise successful Presidential elections in Afghanistan was widely commented on by the international media at the time. It will be recalled that the situation in Iraq during this period was widely perceived as verging on the catastrophic. According to Isezaki who with the Afghan New Beginnings Programme (funded by the Japanese and administered by UNDP) led on DDR at this time, the verification process of the initial DDR plan was distorted in order to expedite the disarmament and demobilisation process which had become *the* benchmark for the holding of Afghan elections. An example given was the comparison between the pilot phase of DDR verification, which itself was not flawless, in which it had taken one month to check whether a soldier was genuine or not. Under the accelerated main phase of DDR this process was reduced to a three-day 'fast track' process. In any event the chances of DDR delivering more meaningful outcomes was fundamentally constrained by the absence of a credible, neutral force. No serious DDR effort had even been attempted in post-conflict countries elsewhere, without one.

Internally, the opaque outcomes of DDR (and later of DIAG) served to distract from the underlying political compromises over processes which had the potential to threaten the maintenance of the fragile status quo established as a result of the Bonn Agreement. According to Giustozzi, behind the façade of disarmament 'non-state armed groups of various types would be allowed to continue to exist and sometimes prosper, as long as they were willing to pay at least lip service to the bureaucratic process and abstained from actively working against the government in

charge.'[6] Although the internationally backed plan for a new Afghan army that contained only ten per cent of the demobilised was finally accepted by the MOD, 'the Jam'iatis in the MOD, and by extension the militia leaders, maintained control over key aspects of the DDR process' including the order in which units were to be demobilised.[7]

In February 2005 as DDR came to a formal end, UNAMA went on record over the inflated claims made by Afghan militia leaders over the size of their forces in order to collect salaries. An estimated 50,000 militiamen did not exist except on the Ministry of Defense payroll. It had taken the decommissioning of 130 AMF military units 'one-by-one' to establish genuine numbers of soldiers.[8] During the same period the International Crisis Group published a briefing on where things stood with DDR concluding that it had failed to 'keep pace with the evolving nature of Afghanistan's militia structures'. The recycling of militia structures into the police force and the private militias that lay outside the remit of DDR as well as the rapid increase in the number of Afghan private security companies, led ICG to warn that unless those realities were addressed the legacy of the DDR process was 'likely to prove more cosmetic than substantive and militia networks will remain a central and destructive element in Afghanistan's politics and economy.'[9] Ultimately, the cantonment of heavy weapons represented DDR's main achievement, along with meeting the DDR benchmark that allowed the electoral process to proceed. But its failure to break the link between mid-level commanders and their men constituted DDR's primary legacy.

DISBANDMENT OF ILLEGAL ARMED GROUPS (DIAG)

Like DDR, DIAG continued under the jointly run Afghan New Beginnings Programme administered by UNDP. Afghan lead institutions were also created as unlike DDR, DIAG was to be a fully Afghan-owned and managed process. The internationally supported Joint Secretariat and the Afghan-owned Disarmament & Reintegration Committee (D&RC), headed by the second Vice

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[6] Giustozzi, Antonio (2008), 'Bureaucratic façade and political realities of disarmament and demobilization in Afg' Conflict, Security & Development, 8:2, 169–192.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Paul Tighe, 'Afghan Militia Leaders Inflated Troop Numbers to Get Salaries', *Bloomberg*, 6 February 2005.
[9] See 'Afghanistan: Getting Disarmament Back on Track' ICG Update Briefing, Asia Briefing No 35, 23 February 2005.

President, Mohammad Karim Khalili, formally managed DIAG.

It was hoped that DIAG would be kick-started by the powerful incentive provided by the chance to convert *de facto* power into *de jure* power presented by the 2005 parliamentary elections and indeed in the run up to the elections compliance increased significantly. The success of the Afghan Presidential elections led to claims that DDR (which ended in February 2005) and DIAG had proved a political success, but those who had been closely involved in the implementation of DDR remained convinced that where it counted nothing much had changed.

When it came to parliamentary elections in 2005 – the outcomes of which are seen by many analysts as a turning point in the decline in Afghan confidence in the political process – the obvious failure of an under-resourced vetting process linked to DIAG increased Afghan cynicism and disappointment.[10] The vetting process was based on criteria outlined in the 2005 electoral law which included disqualification of any parliamentary candidate linked to an armed group outside government control. It officially began with candidate nominations in April 2005. Following the end of the nominations period '557 candidates (out of a total of 6,102 Wolesi Jirga and Provincial Council candidates) had challenges filed against their nominations, with 11 disqualified for having links to illegal armed groups.'[11] The district commanders disqualified were all low-level. The big commanders remained untouched and where necessary proffered promises of future compliance and surrendered weapons, but only some of them. Officials involved in the process knew this at the time but in a situation where resources, time and more than anything else, political will was lacking, they were left with little choice.

HOW DIAG WORKS

A period of voluntary DIAG compliance is led by the DIAG Joint Secretariat (JS) and DIAG Provincial Committees (DPCs). The DPCs are composed of representatives of the three national security agencies including the provincial chief of police and are chaired by the provincial governor or his deputy. Both ISAF and UNAMA are technically represented in the DPCs which are pivotal to the process. The DPCs not only lead on the process of

negotiated compliance locally, they also assess districts' readiness for DIAG, define targets, monitor progress during implementation and confirm post-DIAG stability, according to official documentation. However the composition of DPCs can, and too often does, include governors and/or chiefs of police who are themselves known to be closely linked to IAGs, distorting the process and making international involvement in the process of critical importance in terms of ensuring accurate information and oversight. In the event that attempts at a negotiated compliance fail, the only recourse to date has been the sending of a letter to the recalcitrant commander and instructions by letter to the governor to act. Subsequent negotiations are led by D&RC staff. The DIAG process was theoretically given teeth by a secondary enforcement phase using national security forces with ISAF support available *in extremis*. This was agreed in principle in 2006 via the PRT Executive Steering Committee's Policy Note No 2 'PRT engagement in DIAG' (endorsed by the PRT ESC on Dec. 7th, 2006 at HQ ISAF) which outlined how stronger support could be contributed by ISAF in support of DIAG objectives provincially. In practice the Note has had no discernable impact in terms of increasing PRTs' involvement in DIAG. At central and provincial levels neither ISAF nor international staff working within DIAG mechanisms appeared to even be aware of the Note's existence a year and a half after its creation. As the enforcement phase has never been implemented, DIAG was effectively reduced to all carrot and no stick.

THE NUMBERS GAME AGAIN

Unlike DDR, direct incentives were not to be offered to individual commanders or members of IAGs in a process which was supposed to depend on enforcement of the law. The prosecution of IAG leaders and members by the government was also envisaged and was to incorporate the use of fines, custodial sentences, and seizure of assets. However enforcement of the law has been effectively non-existent. At the end of 2006 - early 2007, the D&RC and ANBP sought to inject fresh momentum into DIAG by targeting low profile, marginal IAGs, (in other words not the IAGs capable of exerting a significant destabilising effect), where voluntary compliance was deemed viable with recourse to enforcement a possibility. The concept, termed 'low hanging fruit', once having exhausted available marginal IAGs, lost ground to the District Development Initiative which offered Japanese funded development projects in return for district compliance. DDI started in mid-

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[10] Grant Kippen, 'Elections in 2009 and 2010: Technical and Contextual Challenges to Building Democracy in Afghanistan', *Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit*, November 2008.
[11] Ibid.

2007. The publicised mirage of forward momentum was maintained via apparent success in totally, but in fact only partially, disbanding hundreds of IAGs. As of October 18 this year 375 IAGs had been 'disbanded'. Of critical importance in understanding the ongoing circumvention of DIAG objectives is the little publicised fact that the minimum official criterion for an IAG: 'a group of five or more armed individuals operating outside the law' has been regularly invoked in the lists of IAGs drawn up by the DIAG Provincial Committees (DPCs) for 'disbandment'.

Thus the Joint Secretariat receives lists dominated by IAGs uniformly composed of five to six armed men. These lists of five -member IAGs are signed off by the three national security agencies, ISAF and UNAMA who are all part of the process provincially and centrally. The DIAG Joint Secretariat (JS) has no vote as technically it only supports the DIAG process. The final decision in judging a district 'DIAG-compliant' lies with the D&RC headed by Khalili which 95% of the time follows the recommendations of the JS. The three national security agencies play a game in which they are willingly, or unwillingly, co-opted and 'virtually always comply' with the DPC compiled IAG lists. Reportedly, ISAF is more often absent than not during the compilation processes at the provincial level. UNAMA was credited by DIAG interlocutors as being the only international actor to regularly raise objections about DIAG processes at central levels.

DISARMAMENT OR DISBANDMENT?

Internationals as well as nationals often confuse DIAG with the disarmament rather than the disbandment of IAGs. In fact the collection of small arms and ammunition was supposed to be merely a 'by-product' of the DIAG process. As with DDR, former Jihadi commanders exert pressure on Afghans prosecuting DIAG objectives. Afghan officials involved in DIAG are also vulnerable to pressure exerted from within the government as the powerful vested interests potentially affected, penetrate government security institutions. A recent example illustrates how quickly meaningful actions can be reversed or neutralised. Some months ago the Joint Secretariat tightened up the weapon collection criteria to put an end to the practice of commanders handing in old, useless weapons. Because of external pressure on the D&RC these criteria were recently relaxed to re-allow inclusion of the types of obsolete weaponry no longer used by criminal armed groups,

insurgents or Afghan security forces. The problem is that the Lee Enfield rifle and other weapons dating from WWII or before are precisely the type of weapons retained by Afghan households.[12] The commanders of IAGs would confiscate these household weapons, informing the local population that DIAG meant the disarming of the district, which it does not – it is about disbanding IAGs. The old weapons 'collected' from communities were then handed in by commanders as their own. This outcome left the commander and his IAG in possession of its (modern) weaponry while communities were left even more exposed to armed groups having lost their only means of defence. An appreciation of this had driven the JS to tighten up weapons criteria in the first place. Its reversal amounts to another depressing indicator of how little headway is actually being made.

'PEACE DISTRICTS'

An incentive driving weapon collection, (and delivery to the relevant DIAG authorities), is partly derived from the benefits delivered in terms of reconstruction and development projects which compliance with minimal DIAG criteria allows under the DDI process. Districts have been passed off as 'DIAG-compliant' and relabelled 'peace districts' despite, in some cases, commanders retaining much larger numbers of armed men. Bagram is a case in point, where the presence of one commander known to have hundreds of armed men under his command did not avert it being relabelled a peace district. Peace districts are then eligible for DIAG development projects (funded by Japan) and are brought higher up the agenda of relevant line ministries such as the Ministry for Rural Reconstruction & Development (MRRD). In 2007 there were significant delays to development projects under DDI but these had been largely resolved by mid-2008. However, there still appears to be little, if any, monitoring and evaluation of 'peace districts' subsequently to interfere with the apparently successful disarmament process underway. One can only imagine peoples' feelings when known IAG commanders still in control of large numbers of men are seen being feted at televised DIAG compliance ceremonies. Such experiences inevitably lead Afghans to blame the DIAG process for further complicating an already unenviable situation. They not only cause a loss of faith in the government but also in the international community, as well as a loss of credibility in the DIAG process as a whole.

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[12] In recognition of this, Afghan Gun Law allows every household to possess one weapon.

AFGHAN OWNERSHIP

Of all the previous pillars making up the security sector reform process it is interesting to note that DIAG is the only one that is Afghan owned under the direct control of the Disarmament and Reconciliation Committee headed by the second Vice President, Mohammed Karim Khalili. The movement of DIAG into the Ministry of Interior (MOI) which will now be completed by March 2010 instead of March 2009 (as previously planned) will mean that the government will control DIAG implementation as well. Material support for this will be derived from the lucrative Private Security Company and weapon registration programmes and financial support from UNDP will then end. But, apart from the Presidential decree establishing DIAG there has been virtually no government-led documented way forward. Those working towards DIAG objectives have instead had to utilise political opportunities where possible.

Reportedly, it has been a constant struggle to get the relevant government representatives to sign off on DIAG initiatives with a marked tendency by the government to stall wherever possible. The five month delay in the official signing off on the re-mapping process, of critical importance to chances of an effective vetting process, provides a case in point. Consequently, the remapping process which aims to conduct a complete remapping of IAGs simultaneously across the country lost five precious months and has had to conduct a complex process on a very tight timeline (completion was planned by the end of November 2008). Given that the Provincial DIAG Committees, (where revisions to the list will be agreed), can be composed of district or provincial police chiefs and district or provincial governors who may themselves be closely linked to IAGs, the role of UNAMA and ISAF is essential in cross-checking the accuracy of revisions made. Cooperation over such endeavours would give some substance to the much lauded goal of an 'integrated approach' but according to DIAG analysts the response from ISAF has been less than robust, so far. Yet the remapping process is an important one for a number of reasons, not least because it defines insurgent groups as IAGs and brings them into the DIAG process for the first time thus providing a means of converging (rather than separating) security sector, state building and counter insurgency objectives. Remapping is also a pre-condition (amongst others) for the establishment of an effective vetting process for the 2009/2010 elections which in turn would confer badly needed credibility on the electoral processes and outcomes.

BACK TO THE FUTURE?

There is a continuing discourse in Kabul and beyond on 'community defence' in which the creation or strengthening of new or existing militias respectively is a possible component. Indeed some observers believe funding through complex Afghan channels is already underway to this end. Should this become policy it would not only signal the death knell for any chances of making DIAG an enabling factor in support of the state building process, it could further destabilise the situation as many Afghans fear. It is remarkable that despite the negative and very recent experience of the Afghan National Auxiliary Police (ANAP) officially disbanded by the end of 2007, there appear to be no available ANAP 'lessons learned' informing ongoing discussions on this aspect of what is variously referred to as 'community defence', 'community outreach' or 'tribal engagement'.

The ANAP did not really come under the Ministry of Interior chain of command (which remains flimsy at best) but as for the most part they were dressed in Afghan National Police (ANP) uniforms, they were perceived by the population as ANP. In fact the ANAP were basically tribal / personal militias with an official stamp and were used mostly in a counter insurgency role. Due to their affiliations, the ANAP were even less impartial towards other ethnic / tribal groups than the regular ANP. Current problems in Badghis province, for example, were fuelled (if not started) by two ANAP units which harassed the Pashtun population there, which then turned to various actors for help, which was ultimately provided by the Taliban. Most of these ANAP formations were outside any control mechanism and functioned basically on personal loyalty. When they were disbanded only (a roughly estimated) forty per cent of them were included into the ANP / ANCOP. Where the rest (and their weapons) went is still unclear. Despite this, there appears to be considerable Afghan government and international support for community defence mechanisms to push back the insurgency at local levels.[13] The central question that has to be answered however, is under whose effective control these militias would operate, given that the government cannot even control the police?

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[13] See Associated Press, Fiznik Abrashi, 'Petreaus: Afghan tribes need to fight militants', 6 November, 2008; The Globe and Mail, 'Kabul Wants Local Militias To Bolster Security', *Press Association*, Tribal militias 'could aid fight', 27 October 2008.

CONCLUSION

Both DDR and DIAG sought not just to 'disarm the militias' but to end the connections between mid-level commanders and their men. To the extent that these processes were actively supported they brought the government and its international partners face-to-face with Afghan power realities which were restored, essentially unopposed, following the fall of the Taliban regime. Ultimately, there have been very limited outcomes and an apparent toleration for the manipulation of processes which to succeed must alter the status quo. To the extent to which a strategy towards establishing state control over the means of violence has existed, it has been one of accommodation rather than confrontation. The result of this is that many policy discussions in Kabul and beyond take place virtually in a state of denial over the key question of who actually wields authority on the ground which in turn obscures how planned-for outcomes can and are subverted by such actors and their networks.

Should the political process fail in Afghanistan, the collective failure to prioritise security sector reform from the outset and the continued ambivalence towards DDR and DIAG where it counts, will be seen to have been significant factors. But whereas it is possible to understand the constraints surrounding national security agencies that are directly caught up in patronage networks that have strengthened over the last six years, it is rather harder to understand international reluctance to take DIAG seriously and support it more effectively. Those actively engaged in DIAG believe that DIAG mechanisms are adequate for the task and are convinced that with the necessary international support the process can be made an effective one. If not, DIAG essentially remains a propaganda exercise, despite its fundamental connections to achieving more meaningful impact on both organised crime and the drivers of support for the insurgency, on chances of improving governance and establishing the rule of law and on effective counter narcotics operations. No wonder conspiracy theories flourish and confidence and hope are virtually exhausted.

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