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20–20 Hindsight

Lessons from DDR

1. THE DDR PROGRAMME

Amidst the current focus on political solutions to the conflict in Afghanistan, there are valuable lessons to be learned from the previous Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) efforts that have sought to separate fighters from their guns.

The December 2001 Bonn Agreement¹ stipulated:

Upon the official transfer of power, all Mujahedin, Afghan armed forces and armed groups in the country shall come under the command and control of the Interim Authority, and be reorganized according to the requirements of the new Afghan security and armed forces.

There were no reliable figures, but some estimated the total number of armed men to be close to 300,000, of which approximately 100,000 comprised the Kabul central corps and nine regional corps of the Afghan Military Forces (AMF) that were on the Ministry of Defence payroll.

The DDR programme was administered by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) under the direction of the Ministry of Defence, with policy oversight from the Demobilization and

Reintegration Commission (DRC). Japan, as the largest contributor to the US\$150 million budget, chaired the donor group. Canada, strongly supported by the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), was instrumental in initiating the Heavy Weapons Cantonment (HWC) programme as an accompaniment to DDR. The Bonn participants had pledged 'to withdraw all military units from Kabul'.² Most units in and around Kabul were under the command of (Marshall) Qasim Fahim Khan, then first vice president and Minister of Defence whose direct authority was needed for compliance with DDR and HWC. Other units around the capital were identified mainly with Abdul Rasoul Sayyaf, a powerful jihadist who like other warlords was reluctant to relinquish control of his military might.

Early in 2003, reintegration was identified as the greatest challenge. The economy simply could not support the added work force of demobilised fighters. For many, reintegration resulted in vocational training for jobs that didn't exist. Registering AMF ex-combatants and identifying who would get assistance was challenged by fraudulent documentation and the biases of regional verifiers.

By mid-2005 approximately 63,000 men were disarmed, demobilised and removed from the payroll. Where were the rest? It turned out that thousands had never existed. Since salary was

¹ 'Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan Pending the Re-establishment of Permanent Government Institutions', Bonn, Germany, 5 December 2001.

² Ibid.

distributed through the command structure, based on the commanders' stated but inflated payroll needs, it seemed that various personalities benefited from the superfluous salary payments. Others remained with the Ministry; a good number became personal militia for former commanders and warlords in their new civilian lives; and many were hired by a growing number of private security companies.

Delays in initiating DDR tended to be attributed to the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan's (UNAMA) light footprint and the American preoccupation with rooting out elements of al-Qaeda. While Japan was the G-7's lead donor, it had no military presence and comparatively little political weight to drive the DDR process forward. The US was dependent on the cooperation of the very commanders whose militia were central to implementation of the disarmament portion. In addition, the US had taken the lead on establishing the Afghan National Army (ANA) and reforming the Defence Ministry, two prerequisites for DDR. An agreement on the separation of civil and military powers followed by a re-shuffling of commanders, governors and police chiefs had to settle before the political and security stalemate on DDR could break.

To maintain momentum on DDR, leave a balance of factional forces in key areas and partially acquiesce to recalcitrant commanders, the programme was divided into phases. Downsizing preceded the final stage of complete decommissioning. The Commanders Incentive Programme was added to entice senior commanders who required special incentives. The most powerful sought lucrative government positions: governors, chiefs of police for provinces, borders and highways. These rewards served to bolster their prestige and financial status; instead of being effectively demobilised they now had license to exercise excesses of power by the gun.

2. UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

The 'warlords' came to enjoy privilege 'in the big tent' while many of their commanders and subordinates continued to operate with impunity, leaving those Afghans 'outside the tent' equally disillusioned with their government and with the international community. Promises of 'rule of law' replacing 'rule of the gun' rang increasingly hollow.

Some examples: Ismael Khan, Fifth Corps Commander and governor of Herat, went to Kabul as the minister of Water and Energy; Eighth Corps Commander General Dostum became the

president's own Chief of General Staff; Seventh Corps Commander Mohammed Atta was rewarded with the governorship of Balkh; Sixth Corps Commander Daoud was appointed as the deputy minister responsible for counter-narcotics in the Ministry of Interior and then more recently as commander of the Northern Zone in the Afghan National Police (ANP) until his death in May 2011; Assadullah Khalid (Sayyaf member who retained a sizeable 'personal protection' force) became the governor of Ghazni, later replaced by former Central Corps Commander Sher Alam (Sayyaf's nephew) when Khalid left to be governor of Kandahar; Central Corps Eighth Division Commander Amanullah Gozar (Sayyaf member and reportedly a notorious thug) was given command of the highway police to the north of Kabul; First Corps Commander Hazrat Ali was appointed as the Nangarhar chief of police; Second Corps Commander Khan Mohammed Khan was made chief of police in Kandahar (he was appointed to the same position again in 2010, until his death in April 2011).

It became apparent during the early stages of DDR that something also had to be done about the irregular forces outside the AMF chain of command. The UN especially was concerned that continued factional fighting (mainly over resources, and some would say smuggling routes) could once again invite the Taliban to restore security. This led the Ministry of Defence to launch the Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG) programme in January 2005. DIAG continues, painfully slowly and fraught with problems, not least of which is reintegration and establishing long-term and sustainable livelihoods at the community level. By the end of June 2005 when demobilisation of the AMF was completed, it was estimated that up to 2,000 illegal armed groups with more than 100,000 men would need attention under DIAG.

Numbers have grown considerably since then; it is doubtful anyone really knows how many armed men are legal and how many illegal or to whom they owe loyalty. Uniforms and weapons are easily obtained. In reality, it is nearly impossible for an average Afghan in the countryside to distinguish between groups that are illegally armed and those that were legally formed over the past years to protect them from the insurgency including the Afghan Public Protection Police, Community Defence Forces, Local Police Initiative and experiments with tribal militia. Some say that 'every Afghan man has a gun and would be hard pressed to deny service to his former commander' should he be called up, legally or illegally. Drug

traffickers, weapons smugglers and even lesser peddlers of contraband need these forces to protect them from rivals or in the event that the ANP or ANA intervene in their operations. To these recently formed security forces, add private security companies, ANP, ANA and Counterterrorism Pursuit Teams (a 3,000 strong elite commando force, established and run by the CIA and US Special Forces.)³ One wonders how the Taliban could be gaining ground over the strongest military alliance in the world supported by this plethora of forces on the ground.

During the course of DDR, reintegration was not adequately addressed as a critical issue for success. Notwithstanding the Engineer and Public Works Corps and the Agriculture Corps in the planning for establishment under the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP), reintegration will continue to be a major challenge. How many ex-combatants from DIAG and from the insurgency are the reconstruction/development programmes and the private sector able to absorb? Short-term assistance may be readily available through the Peace and Reintegration Trust Fund; however, those who fail to secure a sustainable livelihood become easy targets for recruitment into private militia and criminal gangs or may re-enter the insurgency.

3. LESSONS RELEVANT FOR APRP

Experience from the DDR and DIAG programmes, cited above as weaknesses or challenges, should inform aspects of the APRP, not least of which is the necessity of broad support among the main political forces within the nation. The chance of securing a sustainable peace through reconciliation and reintegration is dependent on the good will of Pakistan. The insurgency includes Hekmatyar and Haqqani factions also headquartered in Pakistan, although their alliance with the Taliban seems tenuous. As with DDR and DIAG, the political and financial commitment of the US is a necessary condition for even a modicum of success; initially it did not appear to be there for either programme. The US appears committed to APRP, but will it join in cooperation with others of the international community or pursue a parallel agenda and fund reintegration efforts bi-laterally?

Given the role of Pakistan (and the interests of Iran and India) and the lack of wide national support,

³ Craig Whitlock and Greg Miller, 'US Covert Paramilitary Presence in Afghanistan Much Larger than Thought,' *The Washington Post* (22 September 2010).

one would assume that the domestic and regional political dimension should be addressed first to give the APRP any chance of success.

The High Council for Peace that was established in September 2010 included jihadi leaders, former Taliban, former members of the communist regime and representatives of women's and ethnic groups. The late president and warlord Burhanuddin Rabbani and warlords Abdul Rasoul Sayyaf and Haji Mohammad Mohaqiq were listed as members and were all known for their resistance of the Taliban from 1996–2001.⁴ This rather large and unwieldy group of strongly divergent views will have a tough time speaking with one voice.⁵

Initiating APRP without broad consensus of the Afghan people may appear to be the ideal exit strategy for NATO, but it will surely leave Afghans even further disillusioned and the taxpayers of the international community a billion dollars poorer. Unless there is a deep structural change in the Afghan government with transparent decision-making and unless rule of law is established to regain the confidence of the population, reintegrating the Taliban at this point may only create more anxiety and certainly no greater security for the population at large.⁶

Masoum Stanekzai, who ran the Demobilisation and Reintegration Commission of DDR and DIAG and who now heads APRP, outlined the following 'challenges and risks' in May 2010: human rights and women's rights; spoilers and criminals; inability to deliver on promises; weak strategic communication; difficult neighbourhoods; conflicting demands; complicated bureaucracy to deliver on time; and delicate balance of power. Surely the experiences of both Stanekzai and UNDP, which will administer APRP, will be

⁴ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 'Afghan Government Reveals Membership of New Peace Council', 28 September 2010.

⁵ Ashish Kumar Sen, 'Afghan "Peace Council" Draws Fire', *The Washington Times* (28 September 2010).

⁶ Several more-informed commentaries have been issued which better delineate past efforts at reconciliation and reintegration as well as prospects for success. See, for example, Thomas Ruttig, 'A GoA Reconciliation Policy in the Making', *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, 13 January 2010, available at www.aan-afghanistan.com/index.asp?id=565; Matt Waldman, 'Golden Surrender: The Risks, Challenges and Implications of Reintegration in Afghanistan', *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, April 2010; Kate Clark, 'How to Spend Three Quarters of a Billion Dollars', *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, 19 July 2010, available at www.aan-afghanistan.com/index.asp?id=911.

informed by at least some of the lessons from DDR – one of the main lessons being the necessity to address the major obstacles of the fear of retaliation and the paucity of sustainable livelihood possibilities.

DDR was extremely complex and political; APRP appears even more so. A much deeper understanding of Afghans and Afghanistan is required on the part of those funding and working

on the programme. The country's political climate hasn't changed much since 2002; it is still characterised by numerous factions and constantly shifting relationships between them. With so much at stake, the international community must be extremely vigilant in investigating spending and concessions made to solve political problems, and must certainly question progress as reported by the Afghan government and the UNDP.

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Eileen Olexiuk is a former diplomat with the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. She was the first Canadian diplomat assigned full-time to Afghanistan as Political Counsellor in 2002. When the Canadian Embassy was established in August 2003, she served as Deputy Head of Mission until August 2005. She was responsible for political themes, including good governance and democracy building, security sector reform and supporting Afghanistan's adherence to international human rights norms.

ABOUT THIS CHAPTER

This chapter is part of a larger volume called *Snapshots of an Intervention: The Unlearned Lessons of Afghanistan's Decade of Assistance (2001–2011)*, edited by Martine van Bijlert and Sari Kouvo. The volume is a collection of 26 short case studies by analysts and practitioners, each with long histories in the country, who were closely involved in the programmes they describe. The contributions present rare and detailed insights into the complexity of the intervention and, in many cases, the widely shared failure to learn necessary lessons and to adapt to realities as they were encountered.

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