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## Golden Surrender?

### *The Risks, Challenges, and Implications of Reintegration in Afghanistan*

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Reintegration is more complex and difficult to accomplish than is commonly appreciated. There are significant obstacles, including lack of trust, insurgent cohesion, and revenge attacks on participants. There is also a dissonance between the economic incentives offered by reintegration and some of the powerful social, political, ideological, and personal factors that cause people to fight.

A well-executed reintegration scheme could have positive social, economic, and stabilisation benefits – and thus reduce the force of the insurgency – but if mishandled, it could do the reverse. Without intelligent design, effective delivery, and political resolve it has the potential to exacerbate local security conditions, undermine high-level talks, and even increase insurgent recruitment. It could also distract policy-makers from action to tackle the root causes of the conflict. Reintegration addresses the symptoms of the disease, and not the disease itself.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The growing strength and sway of the Taliban in recent years has prompted foreign powers to reshape their strategy in Afghanistan. One increasingly prominent element of the new approach is the 'reintegration' of insurgents, described by the US military as 'golden surrender'.<sup>1</sup> This paper aims to disentangle some of the issues involved in reintegration, and to highlight risks, challenges, and possible implications. It does not seek to present a comprehensive analysis of the issue or to make detailed recommendations.

The international community and Afghan government use the term 'reconciliation' to refer to strategic level outreach to, and possible political accommodation with, the insurgent leadership. While there are obvious and manifold links between reintegration and reconciliation, the focus of this paper is the former.

The paper is based on more than 50 in-depth interviews, mainly in or near Kabul and Kandahar, with officials, diplomats, politicians, analysts, civil society representatives, community, tribal, and religious leaders, 10 former senior Taliban officials (six former ministers and two ambassadors), seven insurgent field commanders (operating in Kandahar, Wardak, Ghazni, and Khost provinces), and one senior Taliban intermediary. It is part of a broader research project on reintegration and negotiations supported by the United States Institute for Peace and the Carr Center for Human Rights Policy at Harvard University.<sup>2</sup>

### 1.1 Who will be reintegrated and how?

In the context of Afghanistan, the term 'reintegration' refers to efforts to provide incentives to insurgent fighters to induce them to desist from fighting. As Robert Gates put it recently, 'this is really about getting the foot soldiers to decide that they don't want to be a part of the Taliban any more.'<sup>3</sup>

According to the US Army's Field Manual 3-07, *Stability Operations*, participants 'receive amnesty, re-enter civil society, gain sustainable employment, and become contributing members

of the populace'. It states that reintegration includes skills training, relocation and resettlement support, basic and vocational education, and assistance in finding employment.<sup>4</sup>

Correspondingly, last August General McChrystal argued for a reintegration programme for 'mid- to low-level insurgent fighters' that would 'offer eligible insurgents reasonable incentives to stop fighting and return to normalcy, possibly including the provision of employment or protection.'<sup>5</sup>

Much of the scope and specifics of reintegration are currently under consideration by the Afghan government, International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), and foreign powers. However, according to the 2010 London Conference Communiqué the programme will apply to foot soldiers and local leaders, and requires that they renounce violence and respect the Afghan Constitution.<sup>6</sup> In return, they will be reintegrated into their communities with 'dignity and honour', provided with education and vocational training, and afforded 'protection and security'. The programme will apparently include measures for amnesty, disarmament, deradicalisation, and monitoring. To some extent, it will target individual ex-combatants, but will also have a 'strong community dimension', which includes development initiatives as a 'peace dividend to communities'.<sup>7</sup> In addition, some diplomats envisage certain insurgent commanders being offered official positions at local or national level, or even exile for senior figures.

An international Peace and Reintegration Trust Fund is being established, managed by the United Nations Development Program and the Afghan Ministry of Finance, to fund both reintegration and 'reconciliation' activities. Despite the absence of an agreed reintegration plan, commitments of up to US\$160m have already been made and there is speculation that total funding could ultimately amount to US\$1.5 billion.<sup>8</sup>

### 1.2 Purpose

There is divergence between key Afghan and international actors about the fundamental

<sup>1</sup> US Military Joint Publication 3-24, *Counterinsurgency Operations*, October 2009, pp VI 20–21. In fact, the phrase 'golden surrender' is drawn from Sun Tzu's, *The Art of War*, in which, as the Joint Publication acknowledges, it bears a different meaning.

<sup>2</sup> The views expressed in this paper are the author's own, and do not represent those of any organisation or institution.

<sup>3</sup> Testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, 3 December 2009.

<sup>4</sup> FM 3-07, *Stability Operations*, October 2008, para 6–107.

<sup>5</sup> 'Commander's Initial Assessment', 30 August 2009, p 2–13.

<sup>6</sup> 'Communiqué,' London Conference on Afghanistan, 28 January 2010, pp 26–29.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Funders include Japan £31.2m; Australia £13.9m; Germany £43.4m over five years; and Spain £8.7m over three years. UK Government figures, correct as of 3 February 2010.

purpose of reintegration. Some believe its principal, legitimate role is to reduce violence, enhance community cohesion, and support a credible process of reconciliation. For General McChrystal, however, it is 'a normal component of counterinsurgency warfare',<sup>9</sup> in other words, its central utility is as an instrument to weaken and potentially divide the enemy. Indeed, the US Military's joint doctrine on *Counterinsurgency Operations* states that 'offering amnesty or a seemingly generous compromise can also cause divisions within an insurgency and present opportunities to split or weaken it.'<sup>10</sup>

This divergence of opinion gives rise to alternative conceptions of the appropriate shape, scope, and content of the programme. For present purposes, however, it is assumed that the core goal is to incentivise significant numbers of fighters to leave the insurgency. The first half of this paper asks what obstacles there may be to the accomplishment of this objective; the second part asks what wider consequences the initiative may have.

The nature and magnitude of the risks and possible implications necessarily correlate to the essential features of the scheme that is implemented. For example, there are separate risks associated with using insufficient or excessive resources. This paper seeks to highlight the range of risks associated with various approaches, even if those risks could not arise concurrently.

### 1.3 Previous attempts

The paper partly draws on lessons from recent reintegration efforts in Afghanistan, which are briefly outlined here.<sup>11</sup> The '*Proceay-e Tahkeem-e Solha*' (the Strengthening Peace Programme, or Peace and Reconciliation Commission, known as PTS), established in 2005, seeks to reintegrate former insurgents<sup>12</sup> but has suffered from weak

<sup>9</sup> 'Commander's Initial Assessment,' 30 August 2009, p 2–13.

<sup>10</sup> US Military Joint Publication (see FN 1).

<sup>11</sup> Reintegration is not only a post-2001 phenomenon. For example, Dr Najibullah's *ashti milli* (national reconciliation) programme, launched in 1986, had a reintegration component but consisted principally in localised non-aggression pacts secured through furnishing mujahedeen commanders with money and arms. As the resistance subsided with the Soviet withdrawal, the programme arguably contributed to a diminution in anti-government hostilities and prolonged the life of the regime. However, it did little to promote genuine reconciliation, contributed to the rise of the militias, and paved the way to the factionalisation and internecine conflict of the 1990s.

<sup>12</sup> PTS has been led by Sibghatullah Mujaddidi, leader of the Afghan National Liberation Front, and its principal

management, insufficient resources, and a lack of political will.<sup>13</sup> It claims to have reconciled over 5,000 former Taliban fighters but few if any are believed to have been high-ranking or influential,<sup>14</sup> and many were never genuine insurgents.<sup>15</sup>

A range of Afghan ministries, departments and Provincial Governors' offices has also been engaged in reintegration initiatives, but their efforts have been uncoordinated and unstructured, with limited results.<sup>16</sup> Local reconciliation initiatives, such as the tribally backed administration that was installed in Musa Qala in Helmand province in September 2006, appear to have been undermined by a lack of Afghan government and international support.<sup>17</sup>

Attempts have also been made to reintegrate individuals or groups from militia forces that do not form part of the Taliban, generally under more stable conditions. Reintegration was part of the 2003–2006 disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration process (DDR), implemented through the Afghan New Beginnings Program (ANBP), by which a purported 60,000 former combatants were disarmed and provided with agricultural,

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activities have consisted of political outreach and issuing certificates of reconciliation to insurgents who agree to renounce violence and respect the constitution.

<sup>13</sup> PTS has also suffered from a lack of monitoring and follow-through; and has not been administered in conjunction with disarmament or demobilisation programmes. It is perceived by many as a means through which its director, Hazrat Mujaddidi, provides patronage to his political or tribal followers, and there are credible allegations of corruption.

<sup>14</sup> One of the few examples was the defection of Mullah Salam, a low ranking commander in Musa Qala in Helmand province in late 2007; see: US Congressional Research Service, *Afghanistan: Post-War Governance, Security and US Policy*, 26 November 2008, p 28. It is notable that although some former high-ranking Taliban figures have been 'reconciled', such as Mullah Zaeef or Mawlawi Wakil Ahamad Mutawakel, this was a condition of release from US or Afghan custody. See also: Joanna Nathan, 'A Review of Reconciliation Efforts in Afghanistan', *CTC Sentinel*, Vol 2, Issue 8, August 2009.

<sup>15</sup> UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 'Information relating to British financial help to Afghan Government in negotiations with the Taliban' (released under Freedom of Information Act), 8 July 2008, p 1, available at: <http://foi.fco.gov.uk/content/en/foi-releases/2008a/1.1-digest>.

<sup>16</sup> See: Mohammad Masoom Staneksai, *Thwarting Afghanistan's Insurgency* (Washington, DC: United States Institute for Peace, 2008).

<sup>17</sup> Michael Semple, *Reconciliation in Afghanistan* (Washington, DC: United States Institute for Peace, 2009).

vocational, and business support.<sup>18</sup> However, the programme had minimal lasting impact,<sup>19</sup> was subverted by militia commanders or local strongmen, and many participants were not genuine ex-combatants.

The on-going Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups programme (DIAG) seeks to dismantle approximately 1,800 militias<sup>20</sup> by offering projects to communities, usually school or clinic construction, in exchange for facilitating the return of weapons and disbandment of armed groups.<sup>21</sup> However, the programme has lacked national and international resolve,<sup>22</sup> and community projects have been non-existent, ineffective or 'excruciatingly slow'.<sup>23</sup> DIAG claims to have disbanded over 500 groups, but many comprise only half a dozen men,<sup>24</sup> and by some estimates there are still over 3,000 armed groups nationwide.<sup>25</sup>

## 2. OBSTACLES TO REINTEGRATION

Many of the obstacles to accomplishing reintegration, outlined below, relate in some way

<sup>18</sup> United Nations Development Programme, Press Release on DDR – Reintegration completion, 1 July 2006; fewer than 2 per cent of participants were recruited into the Afghan National Army and National Police.

<sup>19</sup> The \$150m ANBP programme was fraught with difficulties: Training was of variable quality and relevance; employment depended largely on local economic conditions; and projects were not adequately coordinated with local government and communities, or other peace-building and reconstruction efforts.

<sup>20</sup> Apparently comprising some 120,000 men who are outside the ambit of DDR, although estimates vary.

<sup>21</sup> The projects are apparently worth \$150,000 or more.

<sup>22</sup> The US has been particularly unsupportive, reflecting its early predilection for alliances with warlords and local strongmen. See Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos. How the War against Islamic Extremism Is Being Lost in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Central Asia* (London: Allen Lane, Penguin, 2008).

<sup>23</sup> By April 2009 only five DIAG projects had been completed. See: Dr Robin-Edward Poulton, *DIAG Evaluation – Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups in Afghanistan, A Project of United Nations Development Programme and Afghanistan's New Beginnings Programme (ANBP)*, April 2009; and Barbara Stapleton, *Disarming the Militias – DDR and DIAG and the Implications for Peace Building*, Conference on Peacebuilding in Afghanistan: Local, regional and global perspectives, Stockholm 6–7 November 2008; available at: [www.sak.se/arkiv/artiklar/artiklar/2009/peace](http://www.sak.se/arkiv/artiklar/artiklar/2009/peace).

<sup>24</sup> Martine van Bijlert, 'London Conference (2): Peace, Reconciliation and Reintegration', Afghanistan Analysts Network Blog, 2 February 2010: <http://aan-afghanistan.com/index.asp?id=600>.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with a western diplomat; Kabul, 14 May 2009. The NDS believe that an even greater number of armed groups exist.

to the process itself, such as overcoming mistrust between insurgents and the government, or ensuring protection for participants. However, perhaps the most fundamental obstacle to successful reintegration is the divergence between what people are fighting for and what reintegration has to offer.

### 2.1 Motivation-incentive dissonance

The current reintegration discourse is largely driven by the conviction that many insurgents are fighting for economic reasons, that offering incentives will persuade them to lay down their arms, and that this will significantly affect the strength of the insurgency. Informed elders, tribal leaders, and three of the seven insurgent commanders interviewed did indeed believe that poverty and unemployment were principal motivating factors for up to half of those fighting. This may be linked to the social deprivation and stigma associated with poverty, as opposed to the sense of purpose, status, and comradeship offered by the insurgency.

However, it is hard to believe that social and economic reasons alone drive Afghans to fight, not least because it exposes them to considerable danger (for instance, a commander from Ghazni with 200–280 fighters in his district reported that some 50–60 were killed last year).<sup>26</sup> Fighting also involves a great deal of personal discomfort: insurgents are often forced to stay in different locations each night, and spend long periods away from family, friends, and relatives.

The interviews show that there are often more immediate or fundamental reasons that drive people to join the insurgency. In the briefest terms, some of these are tribal, community, and group exclusion or disempowerment; leverage in local rivalries, feuds, and conflicts; government predation, impunity, or corruption; criminality, disorder, and the perversion of justice; civilian casualties and abusive raids or detentions; resistance to perceived western occupation or suppression of Islam; the hedging of bets; and as a reaction to threats, intimidation, or coercion.<sup>27</sup>

A combination of these factors was often mentioned to explain why people fight, with some featuring more prominently than others depending on individual and local circumstances. As long as these causes persist, and as long as there is considerable mistrust of or antipathy towards the government and international forces, especially in

<sup>26</sup> Interview, 17 March 2010.

<sup>27</sup> Sarah Ludbury and Cooperation For Peace and Unity, *Testing hypotheses on Radicalisation in Afghanistan* (August 2009).

the south and southeast, the impact of reintegration is unlikely to be significant. As one Taliban commander from Kandahar put it, 'if we were fighting for money we would try to find work. At the moment our country is invaded, there is no true sharia, there is crime and corruption. Can we accept these for money? How then could I call myself a Muslim and an Afghan?'<sup>28</sup> Indeed, the former UN Special Representative Kai Eide has acknowledged that, 'while it may not be difficult to buy a young man out of unemployment – even if this could also be unsustainable – it is difficult to buy him out of his convictions, sense of humiliation or alienation from power.'<sup>29</sup>

It is therefore important to consider what exactly combatants are being invited to reintegrate into. If it is a society perceived to be dominated by exclusionary and abusive power-holders; corrupt, unjust, and self-serving officials; and a culture of patronage and impunity, we should not expect too many serious fighters to volunteer. Unsurprisingly, a US Government review concluded, 'DDR programs only succeed [when] coordinated with reform efforts in other key sectors including the security sector (reform of the military and police), rule of law, governance, and the economy.'<sup>30</sup> For example, attempts to reintegrate the Haitian military after the 1994 intervention were seriously undermined by widespread corruption, ineffective economic policies, and a flawed reconstruction process.

Moreover, if the principal causes of the conflict persist, any diminution in the size of the insurgency due to reintegration is likely to be offset by the insurgents' continuing capacity to recruit. ISAF believes there are up to 36,000 anti-government fighters<sup>31</sup> and that the insurgency 'can sustain itself indefinitely'.<sup>32</sup> The increasing number of insurgent attacks, some 7,400 in 2009,<sup>33</sup> is an indication of a high recruitment rate – especially given that ISAF claims to kill large numbers of insurgents each year.<sup>34</sup> The persistence of the

underlying causes of the conflict would crucially also provide the insurgents with the support or acquiescence of a significant segment of the population – to use Mao Tse-tung's analogy, the water in which the fish can swim.

Finally, for those insurgent commanders who are at least partly motivated by control over resources or economic gain, it is in most cases unlikely that a reintegration scheme could match the spoils or status offered by the insurgency. Indeed, many second-tier commanders who were reintegrated under DDR were deeply dissatisfied with the process and considering remobilisation.<sup>35</sup> They not only lost income, but also their former authority, status, and public respect derived from the resistance.<sup>36</sup>

## 2.2 Mistrust and dishonour

Mistrust between insurgents and the Afghan government poses a serious obstacle to the reintegration scheme's success: insurgents are unlikely to participate if they do not have confidence in the process. This will be hard to overcome given long-standing personal enmities and the perception among many groups that the government does not adequately serve their interests. For instance, the Afghan National Directorate of Security (NDS), which is likely to have a significant role in reintegration activities, is perceived as being dominated by the Northern Alliance and thus as potentially hostile to those who may wish to reintegrate.

After 2001, senior Talibs who approached the Afghan government were in many cases arrested, in contravention of informal or local amnesties, and detained in Afghan or American prisons such as Bagram or Guantanamo.<sup>37</sup> Many allege that they were mistreated or subjected to torture. Lower-level Talibs detained more recently also say that they were tortured while in Afghan custody,<sup>38</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Interview, 16 March 2010.

<sup>29</sup> Kai Eide, 'Commentary', *The Telegraph* (UK), 22 February 2010.

<sup>30</sup> US State Department, *Lessons Learned: DDR in Reconstruction and Stabilization Operations, A Guide for United States Government Planners*, April 2006, p 5.

<sup>31</sup> Jerome Starkey, 'Major-General Richard Barrons Puts Taleban Fighter Numbers at 36,000', *The Times* (London), 3 March 2010.

<sup>32</sup> General Michael Flynn, *The State of the Insurgency, Trends, Intentions and Objectives*, ISAF Director of Intelligence, December 2009.

<sup>33</sup> Afghanistan NGO Safety Office, *Fourth Quarter Data Report*, January 2010, p 10.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with ISAF official conducted in Kabul, March 2009.

<sup>35</sup> Steven A. Zyck, 'Former Combatant Reintegration and Fragmentation in Contemporary Afghanistan', *Conflict, Security & Development* 9, Issue 1 (April 2009): 111–131. The field research for the paper was undertaken in 2006.

<sup>36</sup> Even if commanders are given substantial support there is no guarantee that they will play a constructive role in society in the future. The ANBP's Commanders' Incentive Program, which offered \$500 a month for two years to high-ranking ex-combatants, had some success, but it is believed that many used their income to engage in drugs trafficking or other criminal activities.

<sup>37</sup> For example, Wakil Ahmad Mutawakil, Rahmatullah Sangaryar and Abdul Haq Wasiq; see Michael Semple, and Fotini Christia, 'Flipping the Taliban', *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2009.

<sup>38</sup> The UN has documented the use of torture and ill-treatment in Afghan prisons; see United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan Human Rights Unit,

and Canadian officials based in Kandahar have said that it was 'standard operating procedure' for Afghan interrogators.<sup>39</sup> Unsurprisingly, therefore, many current Taliban fighters are distrustful of purported amnesties, and fear incarceration and mistreatment.

Many also do not believe that the government will honour its promises of assistance or protection, which is partly attributable to the failure of PTS. For example, since 2007 the PTS programme for the southern region issued 'reconcilees' with certificates entitling them to a small plot of land, but this has never been honoured, and little or no effort has been made to provide them with jobs or protection. As the US military acknowledges, 'unprotected, poorly prepared, or poorly treated former insurgents will become powerful IO [information operations] opportunities for the insurgents.'<sup>40</sup>

Mistrust is reinforced by the experience of recent reconcilees. For instance, after the death of Herati insurgent commander Ghulam Yahya Akbari in October 2009, over 200 of his fighters surrendered to the Afghan government, incentivised by promises of jobs. Months later, the government has done little to help them find employment, they cannot return to their villages for fear of Taliban reprisals, and they survive on food rations and USAID winterisation kits. Likewise, the 80 fighters of Suleiman Amiri, another Herati militia commander who decided to back the government, have seen little or no benefit from relinquishing their insurgent activities.<sup>41</sup>

Concern for honour and status may also diminish the appeal of reintegration. Insurgents who have 'reconciled' under PTS have faced the humiliation of being received by a marginalised, under-funded, and perfunctory institution. The run-down PTS provincial offices, some with annual budgets of under \$7,000, have had barely sufficient funds to pay their staff. In 2008 the budget of the Helmand PTS office was just \$600 a month, and fighters who reconciled could expect to receive around 150 Afghanis (\$3) – scarcely enough to cover the cost

of travelling to the office.<sup>42</sup> The standard rate of \$30, which has generally been provided to reconcilees, is seen more as an insult than an inducement. Given the importance of *eftekhār* or *namus* (honour/dignity) and *sharm* (shame) in Pashtun culture, core insurgents are unlikely to reintegrate unless they can do so with a degree of honour and respectability.

### 2.3 Insurgent cohesion

Like many other insurgent groups, the Taliban, have a decentralised modus operandi, with loose command and control arrangements but reasonably high levels of cohesion.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, in many ways the insurgency is a social and cultural phenomenon that provides fighters with a sense of purpose and solidarity (known as *nang* in Pashtu). This is reinforced by norms of *Pashtunwali* (the Pashtun cultural code) of *ha-hot* (loyalty), *baiya* (pledged allegiance), and *qawm* (kinship or tribal bonds) between fighters and their commanders.

Thus, reintegration is unlikely to be effective unless commanders reintegrate and bring their fighters with them. As Michael Semple and Fotini Christia argue, commanders are most likely to shift allegiance if they believe that by doing so they will end up on the winning side and are able to live peacefully.<sup>44</sup> Yet the available evidence and interviews with insurgents suggest that while they may be tired, they are also confident: they believe they are winning and that time is on their side.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, the impact of reintegration measures will be constrained by the fact that many mid- to high-level insurgent commanders are based, or spend much of their time, in Pakistan.

The Taliban have displayed the capacity to adapt to changes in military or political conditions and in international strategy (such as their shift from using fixed positions to asymmetric tactics, or efforts to curb insurgent abuses against Afghan civilians). Thus, one paradoxical effect of a reintegration initiative is that insurgent

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*Arbitrary Detention in Afghanistan*, Vol II, January 2009, p 64; and United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, *Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict*, January 2010, p 5.

<sup>39</sup> 'All Afghan Detainees Likely Tortured: Diplomat', *Canadian Broadcasting Cooperation*, 18 November 2009; and Murray Brewster, 'Red Cross Repeatedly Warned Canada of Afghan Prison Abuse: Documents', *The Canadian Press*, 2 December 2009.

<sup>40</sup> US Military Joint Publication (see FN 1), p VI 20.

<sup>41</sup> Joshua Partlow, 'Taliban Defectors Accept U.S. Approach but Wait for Promises to Be Kept', *The Washington Post*, 26 February 2010.

<sup>42</sup> As reported by Haji Abdul Wahab Agha, head of the Helmand PTS office: UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (see FN 15).

<sup>43</sup> See: Thomas Ruttig, *The Other Side, Causes, Actors, and Approaches to Talks*, (Kabul: Afghanistan Analyst Network, 2009); accessible at: <http://aan-afghanistan.com/uploads/>. See also: Antonio Giustozzi (ed.), *Decoding the New Taliban: Insights from the Afghan Field* (London: Hurst, & Co., 2009).

<sup>44</sup> Michael Semple, and Fotini Christia (see FN 37).

<sup>45</sup> President Obama's announcement that the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan will commence in July 2011 may have contributed to confidence among the Taliban that they will outlast international forces.

commanders may take steps to strengthen and consolidate their ranks to counter its appeal and impact.

## 2.4 Insecurity and retribution

Most reintegration programmes are implemented in post-conflict conditions. Given that the Taliban and associated groups have control or influence in around half of the country, and that both ISAF and the insurgents are escalating their military activities, any reintegration programme will be fiendishly difficult to implement.<sup>46</sup>

Unsurprisingly, reintegration programmes in the midst of conflict tend to meet with a fierce response from the insurgents. One example is the *Chieu Hoi* (Open Arms) programme implemented in South Vietnam to attract fighters of the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army. The latter responded by imposing death-sentences on any Chieu Hoi participants and their relatives, offered incentives for such killings, and organised extensive counterpropaganda and re-indoctrination.<sup>47</sup>

Likewise, Taliban sources have confirmed that they intend to counter any reintegration strategy by exacting violent retribution against those who reintegrate, as well as their families. A number of reconciles (PTS or otherwise) and their family members have been subjected to deadly revenge attacks, threats, and intimidation by insurgents. For example, one former insurgent commander from Wardak Province reconciled in 2008 and became chief of police of Chak District. Reportedly, before the end of the year, two of his brothers and three of his sons had been executed by the Taliban.<sup>48</sup>

Yet insurgents are not the only potential spoilers. If reintegration is successful, there are others who may seek to disrupt it: criminal groups, narco-traffickers, and possibly even those officials who thrive on the conflict or who want to prevent rivals from participating.

It is apparent that unless participants can be protected, the programme is unlikely to be

successful. Yet, considering that government officials themselves are at risk in much of the country, and the Afghan National Police is chronically weak, it is unclear how this could be assured.

## 2.5 Combatant authenticity, significance, and duplicity

Given the covert, diffuse, and changing nature of the insurgency, it may be difficult to verify whether potential participants are genuine insurgents. Small-scale UN surveys have suggested that up to 80 per cent of participants in DDR were not regular combatants (had not served in a military unit for longer than eight months); and that in some areas up to 50 per cent of the PTS reconciles were not genuine fighters.<sup>49</sup>

There is no doubt that many Afghans living in difficult circumstances are attracted by the much-vaunted benefits of the new scheme, and may spuriously claim to be insurgents. Those running the programme may seek to inflate the number of participants or include friends or allies. At any rate, fighters that reintegrate for economic benefits are perhaps less likely to be core fighters, and the scheme may therefore have only limited impact on the insurgents' strength.

Many insurgent activities, such as threats or night letters, require minimal effort, allowing participants in a reintegration programme to continue to support the insurgency without fighting. Alternatively, they could reintegrate by day and fight by night. A small number of current insurgents and their supporters have innocuous day jobs; some have even been known to work for Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) contractors. (Last year the PRT in Kapisa discovered that the final sub-contractors on a project to repair IED damage to a provincial road were directly connected to the Taliban.)<sup>50</sup> Likewise, in Marja dozens of Taliban reportedly obtained compensation for property damage or family members killed, paid unwittingly by US Marines.<sup>51</sup> Some insurgents have gone through the reconciliation process purely to obtain their PTS certificates. This enables them to visit government-

<sup>46</sup> According to the Afghanistan NGO Security Organisation (ANSO), 'AOG [armed opposition groups] made significant gains this year. They now control or exert effective influence over nearly half of Afghanistan, maintain a substantial presence in 80% of the country, and consistently increase their attack rate by 40–50% every year (since 2006)' – ANSO (see FN 33), p 1.

<sup>47</sup> Anthony James Joes, *Resisting Rebellion: The History and Politics of Counterinsurgency* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2006), pp 167–169.

<sup>48</sup> Interview with political figure from Wardak, 11 March 2010.

<sup>49</sup> Simonetta Rossi and Antonio Giustozzi, *Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration of Ex-combatants (DDR) in Afghanistan: Constraints and Limited Capabilities* (London: Crisis States Research Centre Working Paper, June 2006); and Christian Dennys, *Disarmament, Demobilization and Rearmament? The Effect of Disarmament in Afghanistan* (Japan Afghan NGO Network, 2005).

<sup>50</sup> Interview with US official, 30 November 2009.

<sup>51</sup> Richard A. Opel, 'Violence Helps Taliban Undo Afghan Gains', *The New York Times*, 3 April 2010.

held cities or towns, for instance to conduct their affairs, see relatives, or receive medical treatment, with far lower risk.

## 2.6 Transient effect

It is likely that some insurgents will 'reintegrate' and later revert back to the insurgency. This a risk underscored by the failure of PTS to fulfil promises, and to record and monitor its reconciles. The PTS southern region claims to have 'reconciled' some 646 fighters over the last five years, including 33 commanders. Yet several of these have reportedly rejoined the insurgency, including a number of low- to mid-level commanders who are currently active in Helmand (including Marja), Uruzgan, and Kandahar.<sup>52</sup>

Most of these commanders were inactive for 6–18 months, waiting for the PTS to deliver on its promises (and some reportedly concealed their move from their comrades). Once it became apparent that no support would be forthcoming, they rejoined the fight. If these eight commanders took some of their former foot soldiers with them, they may have rejoined the insurgency with over 100 men. These are the commanders whose activities officials are aware of: many more of the 33 southern commanders who reconciled since 2005 may have done likewise.

There is also a risk that former fighters will remobilise into new armed or criminal groups, which is reported to have happened after DDR. The process intentionally sought to weaken links between combatants and their former commanders (without distinction) and tended to provide individualised and inappropriate livelihoods support. According to research involving interviews and discussions with over 500 DDR participants, this left many feeling stigmatised, socially dislocated, and having lost dignity or respect.<sup>53</sup> This in turn created a sense of

<sup>52</sup> Information provided anonymously to the author by an Afghan official on 24 March 2010. The commanders that are believed to have rejoined the insurgency are Mullah Mirza from Uruzgan, who has recently been fighting in Marja, in Helmand; Abdul Bari and Mullah Rahimullah, two of Mullah Dadullah's former commanders, who are now active in Uruzgan; Azizullah, formally a commander of Uruzgan's Shadow Governor 'Rohani', who is fighting mainly in Kajaki district, Helmand; Mullah Karam, one of Mullah Baradar's commanders who is now active in Khakrez district, Kandahar; Mahmoudullah, one of Mullah Obaidullah's commanders, who is now active in Maywand in Kandahar; Mullah Zahir, from Dand district in Kandahar, who is supporting/advising the Taliban in Kandahar; and Mullah Hamidullah, from Arghandab in Kandahar, who is fighting in Maywand district.

<sup>53</sup> Steven A. Zyck (see FN 35).

discontentment, especially among commanders, which left them vulnerable to remobilisation in support of criminal activities or the insurgency.

This risk is underscored by the experience of other conflict-affected countries where reintegration has been attempted with insufficient competence, resources or political will. In Nicaragua for instance, the failure of the reintegration programme meant that ex-combatants from both the 'Contras' and the Sandinista army reorganised themselves into armed groups, and contributed to a resumption of hostilities.<sup>54</sup>

## 2.7 Programme delivery

There are huge organisational and logistical challenges in implementing a large-scale reintegration programme, as is clear from DDR. In that programme ex-combatants experienced long delays, sometimes up to six months, between demobilisation and the initiation of reintegration activities, and there was considerable variation between projects, given that the Afghan New Beginnings Programme (ANBP) subcontracted about 30 different implementing partners.

ANBP's delineated sectoral approach to the DDR reintegration packages did not correspond to the Afghans' complex and diverse livelihood strategies, such as labour migration and access to credit; nor did it sufficiently take account of, or address, structural problems. Thus, agricultural assistance was hindered by poor training and support on matters such as animal husbandry, or by insufficient attention to pre-existing problems such as the lack of irrigation, limited rural infrastructure, and constraints on the ownership of, or access to, farmland. Vocational training was of low quality, limited scope, and questionable relevance to the labour market. Close to Jalalabad it was reported that the scheme had created some 15 new tailors per village. Small enterprises suffered from a lack of capital or inadequate or unsuitable business and marketing training.<sup>55</sup> Thus, in order to ensure effective and relevant assistance, any reintegration programme must take careful account of local conditions, and reflect the preferences of ex-combatants, their families, and communities.

Combatants are likely to be sceptical that the benefits will endure. Only one in four DDR participants found permanent sources of income; and around two-thirds of ANBP-backed small businesses are believed to have failed.<sup>56</sup> Given the

<sup>54</sup> Simonetta Rossi and Antonio Giustozzi (see FN 49).

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> Peter Dahl Thruelsen, *From Soldier to Civilian: Disarmament, Demobilisation, Reintegration in Afghanistan* (Copenhagen: Danish Institute for



weak job market in Afghanistan (unemployment varies seasonally but is reported to average over 40 per cent) and the record of short-lived assistance projects executed through PRTs, contractors, and a number of NGOs, it will be difficult to overcome scepticism about the duration of support.

There are merits to the community-based approach currently under consideration, which could help to avoid generating resentment among community members that did not turn to violence. If this approach is taken, it should avoid the assumptions made in DIAG about the value of a one-off construction project. On the other hand, if reintegration involves purely non-targeted assistance, it is questionable to what extent the programme differs from other local development initiatives that have an economic focus, and whether it may thereby dilute and diminish the appeal of incentives for combatants.

## 2.8 Context and conditions

Like so many initiatives in Afghanistan, the success or failure of reintegration will depend heavily upon local conditions. Relevant factors include local power dynamics; perceptions of military forces and the Afghan government, especially among elders, tribal leaders, and *ulema*; local causes of the conflict and contributory factors; the activities, motivations, and morale of insurgents and levels of local support.

Comparative studies show that reintegration is most successful where it is conducted in conjunction with disarmament and weapons management, as well as demobilisation measures, which could include orientation, vetting, psychological assessment, and counselling.<sup>57</sup> Yet there is little provision for disarmament and demobilisation in the current plans. The prospects for reintegration would also be improved if it were implemented in tandem with measures to promote peace-building and genuine reconciliation, yet the official Action Plan for Peace, Justice, and Reconciliation of 2005 was largely ignored by the Afghan Government.<sup>58</sup>

At the regional level, certain actors in Pakistan may seek to disrupt, vitiate or even sabotage any reintegration programme. Due to Pakistan's perceived threat from India, aspiration for western strategic depth, and historic ties with the Taliban, elements inside Pakistan are actively resourcing,

advising or even directing the Afghan insurgency. An effective geo-political strategy that achieves Pakistani cooperation – or at least desistance from adverse interference – will be essential.

Conflict conditions may also affect the reintegration process. Secretary Gates and other American officials believe that the more military pressure is applied to the insurgents, the more likely they are to reintegrate. He argues that the process requires international military forces to achieve a 'position of strength'.<sup>59</sup> Given the recent course of the conflict, it is perhaps unwise to assume that this is possible, and it may in fact undermine the very trust that a reintegration process needs to succeed. As one Taliban commander put it, 'Why are you pouring millions of dollars into peace and reconciliation and then trying to kill us with big operations?' – a point often made by Afghans in insurgency-affected areas.<sup>60</sup>

Moreover, while Gates' logic may well apply to some groups, greater military force is likely to invigorate others, especially those for whom religious and nationalist factors are more influential. To those at least partly inspired by notions of resistance against foreign aggression and jihad, the deployment of more American forces and increased military pressure will be perceived as proof of their cause and likely to intensify their resistance.

## 3. POSSIBLE WIDER CONSEQUENCES

### 3.1 Attacks on reintegration projects

The Taliban may target not only insurgents who reintegrate (as noted above) but also others that are involved in the process. Consider that in 2009 insurgents executed an average of two civilians every three days (reaching a peak of nine a week in summer), most likely due to their actual or perceived association with the government or international forces.<sup>61</sup> As the current reintegration programme is intended to have a strong community emphasis (and certain projects will involve ex-combatants and ordinary civilians alike), there is a possibility that communities will be better able to resist or deter attacks on

<sup>59</sup> 'Gates: Low Level Reconciliation Growing in Afghanistan', *VOA News*, 24 March 2010.

<sup>60</sup> Interview, 16 March 2010.

<sup>61</sup> United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, *Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict*, January 2010, p 8; and UN Secretary-General, *The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security*, 28 December 2009, p 6.

International Studies, July 2006); and United Nations Development Programme (see FN 18).

<sup>57</sup> US State Department (see FN 30).

<sup>58</sup> The 'Action Plan' expired in March 2009 and has not since been extended or renewed.

reintegration projects. However, there is also a significant risk that ordinary civilians will be caught up in such attacks.

Afghan government or NGO staff who directly or indirectly support the reintegration programme may also be targeted. The Afghan government and US military is currently considering the possibility of running reintegration activities through national programmes, such as the National Solidarity Programme (NSP), which involve NGOs as facilitating partners.<sup>62</sup> Yet, according to the Afghanistan NGO Safety Organisation (ANSO), 'targeting data shows that private and governmental development organisations supporting counter-insurgency or other political/military objectives are being increasingly targeted by armed opposition groups.'<sup>63</sup> If NGOs are used for reintegration purposes, and their staff are consequently targeted, they may reduce the scope of their activities or even withdraw from national programmes, with deleterious implications for development.

### 3.2 Exacerbates local rivalries and conflicts

Given that provincial governors and other local power-holders are likely to have a role in determining eligibility for the scheme, there is a risk that the funds will be used to reinforce existing patronage networks, and favour certain tribes or communities. If funding is substantial, this could in turn exacerbate local rivalries and conflicts, which tends to benefit the insurgents. In several parts of the country the Taliban have skilfully formed alliances with groups that feel aggrieved, excluded or victimised, as a tool of territorial advancement.<sup>64</sup>

Reintegration is likely to involve or connect with efforts to form pro-government militias or local defence groups (resembling the Afghan National Auxiliary Police and Afghan Public Protection Force). This inevitably carries the risk not only of abuses against the population due to inadequate training, discipline, and command and control arrangements but also of a magnification of factional fears, rivalries, and enmities. Even the partial resemblance to President Najibullah's

support to militias in the late 1980s should be sufficient to give rise to caution.<sup>65</sup>

Communities, tribes or individuals that have supported the government, perhaps at considerable risk, may become resentful, even hostile, if they see resources being channelled to anti-government groups. Such sentiments are likely to intensify if they believe that criminals, drugs mafia or 'bad Taliban' have gained amnesty, are benefitting from the programme, or are even awarded positions in local government.<sup>66</sup>

### 3.3 Sidelines genuine reconciliation

The US Military's Field Manual on *Counterinsurgency Operations* describes reintegration as a form of 'golden surrender' and 'a way out for insurgents who have lost the desire to continue the struggle'.<sup>67</sup> This implies a narrow interpretation of reintegration that does not attempt to address the feuds and rifts that divide so many communities, tribes, sub-tribes, and ethnic groups. As Thomas Ruttig has argued, there is a clear need for genuine reconciliation in Afghanistan and a risk that this will be overlooked in the reintegration and reconciliation process.<sup>68</sup>

Disputes often arise over resources such as land and water; families and women; or in the course of ethnic, tribal, and inter-community power struggles. In many cases these turn violent and feed into the wider conflict. Reintegration should thus be accompanied by local efforts to build trust, understanding, and constructive relations in place of suspicion or hostility. Notably, a number of Afghan peace-building organisations already working at the community level to promote reconciliation and the peaceful resolution of disputes, have had considerable success.<sup>69</sup>

### 3.4 Undermines high-level talks

In interviews, a number of Taliban commanders and insurgent sympathisers said they regard the channelling of significant resources towards reintegration initiatives (in addition to a surge in international forces) as an attempt to weaken and divide the movement. Though it may seem disingenuous, they say it is evidence that the government and international community are not serious about high-level talks. Given that the

<sup>62</sup> The US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates recently suggested that reintegration initiatives could be provided through, *inter alia*, 'international organisations' – testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, 3 December 2009.

<sup>63</sup> ANSO (see FN 33), p 1.

<sup>64</sup> Antonio Giustozzi (ed.) (see FN 43).

<sup>65</sup> See FN 12.

<sup>66</sup> Sarah Ludbury and Cooperation For Peace and Unity (see FN 27), p 5.

<sup>67</sup> US Military Joint Publication (see FN 1), p VI 20.

<sup>68</sup> Thomas Ruttig (see FN 43).

<sup>69</sup> Matt Waldman, *Community Peace-building in Afghanistan: The Case for a National Strategy*, (Oxford: Oxfam International, 2008).

principal, immediate obstacle to talks is lack of trust, there is therefore a risk that a large-scale reintegration programme could actually diminish the prospects of high-level political engagement.<sup>70</sup>

### 3.5 Exacerbates corruption

Given the existence of systemic corruption at all levels of government (and beyond) there is inevitably a risk that funds will be misappropriated, as has happened under PTS. Some of its offices have for instance inflated their '*tashkeel*' of employees in order to appropriate additional funding. Funds have also been used to give a false impression of successful activity. One example is from Zabul province in mid-2008 where the PTS provincial director paid \$2,000 to a Taliban group to take part in spurious reconciliation discussions during the visit of an official delegation.<sup>71</sup>

The newly proposed Peace and Reintegration Trust Fund will doubtless seek to ensure transparency and effective financial controls. However, this will be difficult given the involvement of a large number of actors, the sensitive and covert nature of certain activities, and the obstacles to monitoring and oversight in insecure areas.

### 3.6 Increases insurgent recruitment

Paradoxically, media reports of billions of dollars available for reintegration may actually cause Afghans to join the insurgency in the hope of one day reaping the rewards of switching sides. This risk may be greater if 'reinsertion' forms part of the programme, a process that involves the provision of rapid assistance (such as food, clothing or cash) to ex-combatants to meet their immediate needs. Some individuals may thus engage in limited, low-level or non-operational support to the insurgents, at little personal danger, so that they have the option of claiming future reintegration benefits if they prove to be substantial. While the scheme may be eligible to all members of a given community, there is a general perception that those who leave the insurgency will be entitled to greater benefits.

## POSTSCRIPT

As indicated above, this paper does not seek to reach firm conclusions about a policy that has not yet been clearly defined or implemented. It has sought to warn against assumptions about reintegration. A well-executed reintegration programme, linked to wider political outreach and reform of government, could have major social, economic, and stabilisation benefits, but there are considerable obstacles to its success and a range of possible unintended adverse implications. It is essential that any reintegration policy takes account of such risks, in both design and implementation, and effectively manages and mitigates them.

It is also essential that reintegration is seen in perspective. As with the *Chieu Hoi* programme in South Vietnam, it might well achieve 'tactical' successes, but do little to avert strategic failure. Perhaps the greatest risk is that the programme distracts policy-makers from addressing the root causes of the conflict, especially predatory, exclusionary politics, and the abuse of power. This would be treating the symptoms while ignoring the cancer.<sup>72</sup>

Into what kind of society are we asking insurgents to integrate? 'Golden surrender' holds little appeal for those who are not fighting for gold. Indeed, there would seem to be as much need for the social and political reintegration of government officials and other power-holders into society, as there is for insurgents. If this happens – through fairer politics, better government, and stronger development – it may well be that reintegration starts to happen quietly of its own accord.

<sup>70</sup> Kai Eide has acknowledged, 'a reintegration fund without a political process could easily harden the insurgency rather than weakening it' (see FN 29).

<sup>71</sup> Interview, 31 March 2010.

<sup>72</sup> The author is grateful to Joanna Nathan who suggested this analogy. A political leader from Wardak used a similar analogy for reintegration: 'We don't disturb the root of the tree, but work only on the branches' (interview, 9 March 2010).

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