AID IN A CONFLICT ZONE

CAN MILITARY AND DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVES WORK TOGETHER?

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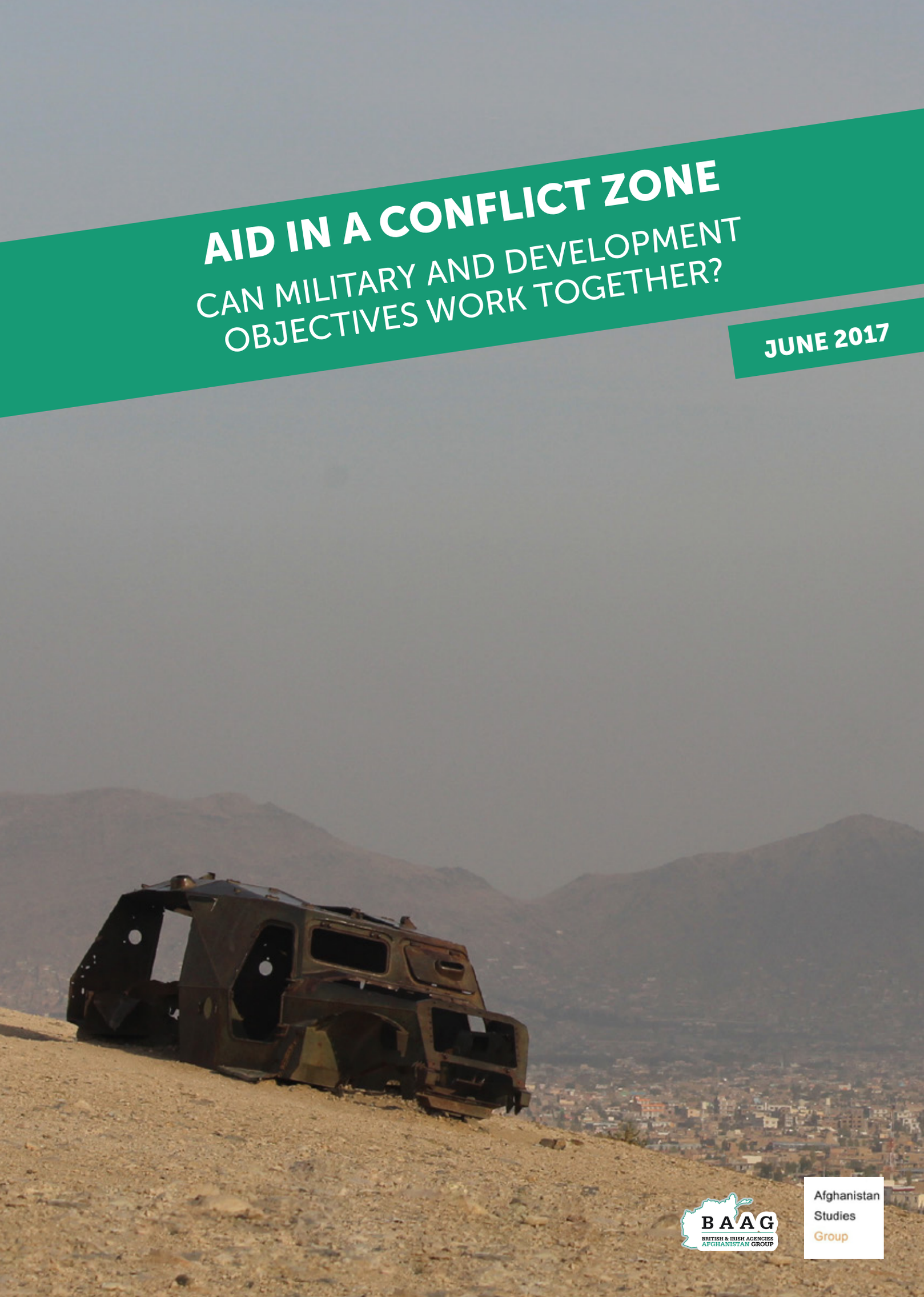

BAAG
BRITISH & IRISH AGENCIES AFGHANISTAN GROUP

Afghanistan Studies Group

ABOUT BAAG (WWW.BAAG.ORG.UK)

The British and Irish Agencies Afghanistan Group (BAAG) is a unique advocacy network organisation with 29 current members. BAAG's vision is to contribute to an environment where Afghans can take control of their own development and bring about a just and peaceful society. We seek to put our vision into practice by:

- Bringing member agencies and the wider relief and development community together to advocate for continued international commitment to the development of Afghanistan;
- Sharing information and knowledge to improve policy debate and decision-making processes with a particular emphasis on ensuring that those processes reflect the views, needs and aspirations of the Afghan people; and
- Enhancing the abilities of Afghan civil society in influencing national and international policies on Afghanistan.

ABOUT THE MEDIA4DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME:

Funded by the European Commission, Media4Development is a three year programme delivered by a consortium of eight non-government and media organisations: Mondo (Estonia), Estonian Public Broadcasting Company, People in Need (Czech Republic), MVRO (Slovakia), Green Liberty (Latvia), House of Europe (Lithuania), VIKES (Finland) and BAAG (UK/Ireland). The programme's overall objective is to inform and raise the awareness of EU citizens about global interdependencies and aid challenges. Specifically it engages the national media and policy makers in EU member states so that they may better inform their citizens about global interdependencies and challenges of the post-2015 development framework.

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INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of last year, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)'s Development Assistance Committee (DAC) convened a high-level meeting in Paris, France where members agreed to new rules that allow for a broader set of peace and security activities to be considered as official development assistance (ODA). As a result the definition of overseas aid was expanded to include the following:

- Training for partner military forces, for example on human rights and the prevention of sexual violence;
- Development activities focusing on preventing violent extremism; and
- Financing to civil policing activities that seek to prevent criminal activities and promote public safety and the provision of non-lethal equipment.[1]

The push to redefine ODA was led by the UK and France and the decision made in Paris reflected the shift in the UK's aid budget towards scaling up its cross-government strategy.[2] However, it was met with resistance by the Swedish government and caused an enormous amount of concern amongst aid workers who fear the militarisation of aid which has come to be known as the 'blurring of lines' debate and an issue that is prevalent in large parts of Afghanistan. It also called into question the traditional value of humanitarian assistance. It is within this context that the event 'Aid in a conflict zone – can military and development objectives work together?' organised by BAAG and the Afghan Studies Group of King's College London (KCL) on 16th February 2017, tried to address the question.

The panel comprised of Lena Lindberg, Policy Officer at the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan and Maiwand Rahyab, Executive Director of the Afghanistan Institute for Civil Society and was moderated by Elizabeth Winter, Senior Policy Adviser of BAAG. The discussion took place in front of an audience of policy-makers, development practitioners, academics, researchers and students. They were given the opportunity to ask questions and, where relevant, these have been incorporated into this report.

The objective of this report is to present the main points raised in the panel discussion and provide policy-makers with an understanding of civil-military relations in Afghanistan. Although the focus of the event and this report is largely on Afghanistan, many of the discussion points have wider application for civil-military approaches to dealing with fragile and conflict-affected states.

1 Development Initiatives/Sarah Dalrymple. 2016. New aid rules allow for the inclusion of a wider set of peace and security activities. http://devinit.org/post/new-aid-rules-allow-for-the-inclusion-of-a-wider-set-of-peace-and-security-activities/.
2 Department for International Development, HM Treasury, and the Rt Hon Justine Greening MP. 2015. Department for International Development's settlement at the Spending Review 2015. https://www.gov.uk/government/news/department-for-international-developments-settlement-at-the-spending-review-2015.

BACKGROUND: CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS IN AFGHANISTAN

Civil-military relations in fragile and conflict-affected states has long been a highly contentious issue, perhaps nowhere more so than in Afghanistan where it has reshaped development and development co-operation. In 2013, BAAG published a report on a closed roundtable discussion it co-hosted with the Humanitarian Policy Group on civil-military relations in Afghanistan. In this report, it was acknowledged that *"Whilst at times the relationship between civilian and military actors has been productive, the pursuit of 'hearts and minds', counter-insurgency and stabilisation strategies has often created tension and strained relations."*[3] Over the years, the humanitarian and development communities have repeatedly expressed their concern about the increasing involvement of foreign militaries in the delivery of humanitarian and development assistance under the guise of stabilisation activities and comprehensive/integrated strategies. These activities and approaches assumed greater prominence in the post-9/11 period becoming central to Western interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya. They have prompted debate about the appropriateness of the existing, internationally recognised guidelines and current approaches to civil-military coordination.

In Afghanistan, the debate on civil-military relations has centred on Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) which evolved from the Coalition Humanitarian Liaison Cells established by the US. The makeup of PRTs included military officers, diplomats and technical experts who worked together to support the reconstruction efforts being undertaken in conflict-affected states. However, they were heavily comprised of military personnel. In the beginning, PRTs were envisaged as complementing the work carried out by aid agencies. However, aid agencies were against PRTs from the outset and expressed several concerns that included the following:

- The mandate of PRTs was unclear as were their command, structure, and function;
- Dialogue with aid agencies was often fraught with difficulty;
- Potential dangers to aid workers were posed by military engagement in reconstruction and development activities;
- PRTs lacked capacity to implement development projects;
- Inadequate monitoring and evaluation of PRTs affected their ability to be sustainable;
- PRTs lacked understanding about local context and of good aid practices; and
- The participation of the local population in PRT-run projects were not ensured.

Interestingly, PRTs were welcomed by many Afghans in the early years but this perception changed as the security situation within the country deteriorated and PRTs failed to ensure the inclusion of Afghan civil society in the planning and involvement of development activities. A large proportion of funding started to be directed to PRTs situated in insecure areas and this led many

3 BAAG. 2013. HPG and BAAG dialogue: Civil–military relations in Afghanistan, 2001 to transition. Unpublished.

Afghans to believe that they were more concerned with insecurity rather than the promotion of democracy and human rights. It is important to note that the worsening security context played an important part in altering the perception of PRTs and further straining civil-military relations. This was evident when both aid agencies and military officials stopped attending meetings of the Civil Military Working Group.

Although the civil-military approach has on the whole faced a lot of criticism it achieved limited success when it focused on civilian protection, a concern shared by both civilian and military actors. In 2006, the security situation in Afghanistan began to deteriorate rapidly and the number of casualties caused by ISAF increased. In an effort to reduce civilian casualties, extensive dialogue rooted in International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and strategic augmentation took place between civilian and military actors alongside advocacy efforts by human rights Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs). The subsequent adoption of the counter-insurgency (COIN) strategy for Afghanistan provided an opportunity for aid agencies to engage with the military and positive results were seen in the reduction of civilian deaths - in 2008, ISAF was responsible for 828 civilian deaths but by 2016 this had gone down to 316.[4]

4 Haysom, S and Jackson, A 2013 'You don't need to love us': Civil Military Relations in Afghanistan, 2002–13. Stability: International Journal of Security & Development, 2(2): 38, pp.1-16, DOI: http:// dx.doi.org/10.5334/sta.by

PRESENTATIONS FROM THE PANELLISTS

In the discussion that took place in February, several important points were made by the panellists in answer to the question 'Can military and development objectives work together?'.

Lena Lindberg, Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA)

Lindberg of the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan presented her views on the issues of security and development in Afghanistan. These views related to the SCA international conference[5] (Stockholm, December 2016) and the SCA report 'An SCA Perspective – on Afghanistan 2001-2014.'[6] The SCA has experience of working in Afghanistan for 35 years and currently has activities running in 14 provinces, mainly in the North and North East of the country.

She began by referring to the COIN/PRT [7] concept for 'winning hearts and minds.' This concept was introduced in Afghanistan by NATO and the US military to win the support of Afghan communities living in strategically important locations to help defeat the armed opposition groups by combining military combat with civilian projects. Lindberg described it as a naïve and counterproductive approach for tackling the challenges faced by the country, and she outlined why this was the case.

Military and development actors have different and often contradictory objectives and approaches. By default, military strategy focuses on defeating the enemy and not on the development of a country. Consequently, the military's attempt at development activities in Afghanistan lacked the necessary medium- to long-term planning in close consultation with the Afghan government and local target groups on plans and priorities. The general lack of contextual knowledge of the NATO-led forces was exacerbated by frequent rotation in the ISAF leadership and troops, some with as short as intervals of six months. Huge amounts of funding were allocated to PRTs in some areas. Funds were also used by the military to secure the cooperation of local leaders for quick results, and this fed corruption at various levels. The infusion in local community areas of vast amounts of money to be spent quickly for PRT projects further distorted the local economy and infrastructure, all of which hindered development objectives and sustainability.

Fragmented approaches adopted by NATO undermined the crucial role of the Afghan State in peacebuilding. Foreign military and their associated agencies were delivering services inconsistently and without the involvement of the State which was detrimental to effective peacebuilding. Instead, this played into the hands of extremist groups. Lindberg reasoned that if the Afghan people did not see the State play an active role in the delivery of services this would result in a lack of trust between the people and the State, and people might be tempted to turn to extremist groups for security and basic needs. These fragmented approaches squandered funds and opportunities for development.

The military's involvement in development increased the risk to aid workers and target groups. This is a real problem experienced by the SCA. It is not only aid workers that have been affected but also people in target communities whose mere association with foreign organisations makes them highly exposed to risks. Development actors are resistant to working alongside military actors who have further failed to uphold IHL. Development agencies have registered numerous incidents of violations of IHL with the involvement of NATO-led forces, including the bombing of a hospital and storming into clinics where the Taliban had gone to seek medical care for injuries. Military also intrude in schools and use them for combat purposes. These violations, in addition to the casualties they cause, also entail disruption of social services for months and even years, and make communities lose trust in the military and the State.

5 Swedish Committee for Afghanistan. 2016. Afghanistan's Road to Self-Reliance: What has been done and what can be done better? https://daif2gzpdpb6l.cloudfront.net/sites/default/files/media/sca2016internationalconference_finalversion_1.pdf
6 https://daif2gzpdpb6l.cloudfront.net/sites/default/files/media/slutgiltig_oversattning_-_utvardering_av_sv_insatser_i_afghanistan_sak_2016-03-11.pdf
7 Haysom, S and Jackson, A 2013 'You don't need to love us': Civil Military Relations in Afghanistan, 2002–13. Stability: International Journal of Security & Development, 2(2): 38, pp.1-16, DOI: http:// dx.doi.org/10.5334/sta.by
8 UN-OCHA. 2017 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Afghanistan. http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/afg_2017_hno_english.pdf.
9 OECD. 2007. ODA Casebook on Conflict, Peace and Security Activities. https://www.oecd.org/dac/conflict-fragility-resilience/docs/ODA_casebook%20on%20conflict.pdf

Conclusion

The needs of the Afghan people are increasing. Displacement of local populations and disruption of social services are happening on a growing scale. When combined with hundreds of thousands of returnees from Pakistan and Iran, this has resulted in enormous human suffering. The UN has estimated that nearly one third of the population needs humanitarian aid.[8] It is therefore crucial that there are strong development initiatives which are uncompromised by military objectives.

Ultimately, the NATO-led strategy with counter-insurgency and PRTs failed and Lindberg argued that the introduction of PRTs, as from 2003, was applied in different ways by different ISAF contingents, fed corruption, put aid workers and target groups at risk, wasted resources and opportunities, distorted development efforts, and lost people's trust rather than gained it. Lindberg described the goals of military versus development actors as profoundly contradictory. She raised the issue of the recent redefinition of ODA which she believes risks burdening development budgets with security costs, thus undermining the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which aims to eradicate extreme poverty and promote peacebuilding and state building. For those who would be interested in looking closer at the new OECD/DAC definition of ODA, she referred to the 'ODA Casebook on Conflict, Peace and Security Activities'[9] which details the security costs that can be charged against development budgets.

Lindberg pointed to the 15 years of massive civil and military interventions which a dominating but unclear military strategy has distorted state building. She called for more recognition of Afghan ownership which many pay lip service to but have not shown in practice. The challenges being faced by Afghanistan require a strong and healthy Afghan civil society which is also critical to state building in the country. She said the SCA had never asked for, and never needed, protection by international military forces in Afghanistan. She called on the international community to focus on poverty reduction and Agenda 2030, in support of peacebuilding by long-term development cooperation and through learning from the people of the country.

Maiwand Rahyab, Afghanistan Institute for Civil Society (AICS)

Maiwand Rahyab said as an Afghan living in Afghanistan, the civil-military agenda has affected his work and personal life. In his work as a development and civil society practitioner he has to make additional effort to minimize the negative impacts of the civil-military approaches e.g. addressing perceptions about the civil society promoting westerns agendas, advocating for the allocation of development funding based on needs vs. military objectives, and promoting the neutrality and impartiality of civil society institutions. His presentation focused on civil society organisations (CSOs) in Afghanistan and how they and their work have been impacted by the blurring of development objectives and security objectives.

Traditionally, civil society has included NGOs and other institutions of civil society, including membership associations, unions, and grassroots institutions at the community level. In Afghanistan, CSOs have played a key role in the development of the country by delivering key services and providing humanitarian assistance particularly in times of crisis, conflict, and natural disasters. In the last 15 years they have become very active in ensuring that they advocate on behalf of the Afghan people and engage in development reform, good governance and human rights promotion and protection, emerging as key actors in development and reform in Afghanistan. This would not have been possible without development aid and the support that CSOs have received from the international community. Whilst support from the international community has been instrumental in making sure that civil society reaches the Afghan people, there have been some issues and unintended consequences. Rahyab identified five areas where the linking of development aid with security objectives has negatively affected civil society in Afghanistan:

Allowing links between military and civil society challenges the identity of civil society as independent. How is civil society perceived in Afghanistan? The textbook definition of CSOs is that they are organisations that exist to represent the people, deliver services and advocate on their behalf. Following the fall of the Taliban, a considerable amount of funding was made available for CSOs in Afghanistan and as expected there was a lot of interest in obtaining this funding. Because the work of CSOs entails advocating for values such as human rights which are associated with the West, one perception that has been created is that Afghan CSOs are promoting the Western way of life. The identity of civil society is threatened further by the political support it receives from the international community and the linking of development and military objectives, particularly when they implement projects that are designed and funded to also contribute to military objectives.

The civil-military approach has led to a lack of community support and community buy-in to programmes, which sets them up for failure. Civil society should represent the people but when CSOs are fully dependent on, and influenced by international funding this becomes questionable. Often, CSOs are more accountable to donors and the countries that fund them and therefore the link which should connect them with their constituency ceases to exist. When funding is tied or linked to military objectives, CSO representation and accountability raises even more questions. As a result, CSOs can't genuinely represent the people, leading to a lack of community support and ultimately, failure.

Military objectives often dictate that funds go to the most insecure areas and this leads to unbalanced development in Afghanistan. Some parts of the country have been excluded from development funding. A large proportion of funding has been directed towards activities in the South of Afghanistan where there is more insurgency and more Taliban presence because these areas are deemed to be strategically more important. This approach can even fuel and incentivize conflict as it creates perceptions that more insurgency brings more money.

Fuelled conflict among CSOs and development actors in general. Funding has targeted insecure areas where not a lot of actors can work thus creating a monopoly and tension between NGOs for access. Rahyab argued that if there is a need for the military then it should be separated from the work of development actors but acknowledged that in reality this is hard to achieve. Most countries have their own political and military agendas and they do use development aid as a tool to achieve their goals therefore the question is how we can find ways to serve the people within this sad reality.

The neutrality and impartiality of development actors, particularly CSOs, is challenged. When the lines between military and aid objectives are blurred this compromises the role of civil society as the community begins to no longer trust development agencies as purely development and delivering services. The perception of CSOs is altered as they are seen to promote and work for different countries and their military objectives. It also affects the safety of development actors. There is currently a debate taking place in Afghanistan with some people saying that we civil society organisations should be neutral, provide the same service to all, treat everyone equally, and not differentiate between the government and the insurgents/Taliban. This raises questions about whether civil society should protect the values of the Afghan constitution, ensure rule of law and not allow different groups to take control of security or remain neutral.

Q&A/Comments

Following the discussion, participants raised a number of pertinent points and questions. A former US Marine asked the panellists how they thought civil-military coordination should evolve in order to accommodate the lessons learned, and which comes first, development or security? Rahyab responded that a dichotomy exists: if development programmes are working well you presumably won't have security issues or without security you won't be able to carry out development programmes effectively and efficiently. Both should be implemented simultaneously but there does need to be more clarity about who provides security and who provides development. It is imperative that the national government is recognised as the key provider of security with the international community acting in a supporting role. In Helmand, international security forces undermined the Afghan government's authority to make security decisions. More support needs to be channelled towards strengthening national institutions. Another point raised by the panel members was that the military intervention in Afghanistan had been ill-informed and therefore it is important that any further involvement in the country relies on the knowledge of the Afghan people.

Conclusions

The general sentiment expressed by those present at the event was that the civil-military approach has exacerbated existing impediments in Afghanistan and has been detrimental to the environment in which civil society works. In order to operate effectively, civil society requires a secure, supportive environment for CSOs and actors to conduct their activities. In Afghanistan, corruption, limited engagement with the government, deficiencies in the rule of law and a lack of protection as well as donor-driven policies which are tied to funding mechanisms all act as obstacles to the effectiveness of civil society. Military developmental interventions have further undermined the ability for civil society to perform its role effectively. The experience of aid agencies in relation to military actors has been largely negative.

Whilst there is no doubt that development cannot take place without some level of security in the country, the interlinking of military and development objectives has been met with resistance by many civil society actors. The growing involvement of the military in the delivery of development assistance under the guise of stabilisation or comprehensive approaches has become a major concern for aid agencies many of whom are guided by the principles of impartiality and independence. In addition, the blurring of military and development objectives has fostered a perception amongst many Afghans that the international community is more preoccupied with security rather than the protection and promotion of their human rights, which the panellists felt leads to short-term and unbalanced distribution of development aid.

The military's preoccupation with stabilisation activities in Afghanistan has undermined state-building which Lindberg attributed to the divergent and even contradictory interests and objectives of aid agencies and the military. As a result of the civil-military approach, civilian assistance to Afghanistan is heavily influenced by military objectives. Rahyab explained how this leads to lack of community trust and buy-in to development programmes.

The blurring of military and development objectives has resulted in substantial debate and disagreement between military and aid actors in Afghanistan. Going forward, Rahyab acknowledged the reality that the civil-military approach would most likely continue and therefore cautioned against undermining the Afghan State which embraces the approach as essential to achieving peace in Afghanistan. On the other hand, Lindberg called for the separation of military and development activities because the military lacks a working knowledge and understanding of development principles and this, coupled with violations of IHL, has seriously impeded the work of civil society in Afghanistan.

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