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Winning Hearts and Minds? Examining the Relationship between Aid and Security in Afghanistan

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UNIVERSITY

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Cover photo

U.S. military and children at health center, Helmand

Photo by © Kate Holt/Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN)

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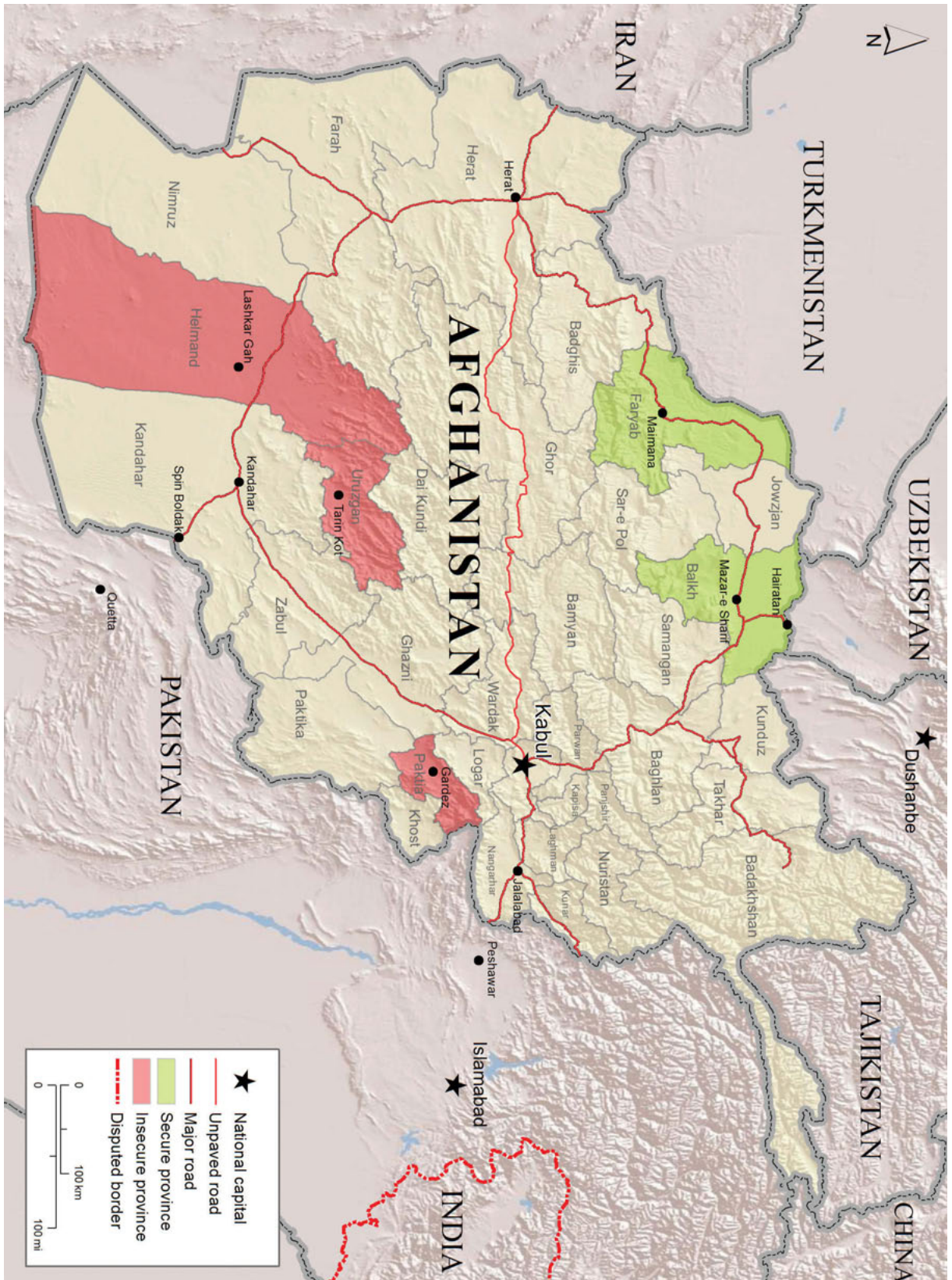
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MAP



Map credit: Hans C. Ege Wenger, Tufts University

GLOSSARY OF NON-ENGLISH WORDS AND EXPRESSIONS

<i>arbab/khan</i>	Head of community or tribe
<i>arbakai</i>	Tribal security forces indigenous to the Loya Paktia region. The term has been informally adopted to refer to irregular local security forces.
<i>bakhsheesh</i>	Financial gift, usually small, offered as a favor to accomplish a task
<i>jihad</i>	Holy war, usually referring to the 1979–92 war against the Soviet occupation
<i>jihadi</i>	Commander or political leader who gained his strength during the <i>jihad</i> years (1979–92)
<i>karez</i>	Traditional irrigation system that taps aquifers and brings water to the surface through often-lengthy underground canals
<i>komak</i>	Help, aid, or assistance
<i>kuchis</i>	Nomads
<i>kunjala</i>	Type of animal feed
<i>madrassa</i>	Religious school or training academy
<i>mahroum</i>	Deprived, left out, often with the implication of being discriminated against
<i>malek</i>	Local leader
<i>mujahidin</i>	Guerillas who fought in the 1979–92 war against the Soviet occupation (literally, those who fight <i>jihad</i> , or holy war)
<i>mullah</i>	Religious leader
<i>sharia</i>	Islamic law
<i>shura</i>	Council
<i>sudh</i>	Usury, excessive interest rates
<i>tak o took</i>	A bit of noise
<i>talib</i>	Islamic student (singular of <i>taliban</i>)
<i>tanzim</i>	Organization or political party
<i>tashkil</i>	Approved staffing pattern or list of sanctioned posts in a government office
<i>tekadar</i>	Contractor, one who does a piece of work for payment
<i>ulama</i>	Sunni religious scholars
<i>wasita</i>	Personal relationship or connection often used to obtain a favor such as employment or processing of paperwork
<i>woleswal</i>	District administrator or governor; i.e., one who administers a <i>woleswali</i>
<i>woleswali</i>	Administrative division within a province
<i>zulm</i>	Cruelty

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ADF	Australian Defense Force
ANA	Afghan National Army
ANP	Afghan National Police
ANSF	Afghan National Security Forces
AREU	Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
CDC	Community Development Council
CERP	Commanders Emergency Response Program
CFW	Cash-For-Work
CIMIC	Civil-Military Cooperation
COIN	Counterinsurgency
CSO	Central Statistics Organization
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
DOD	Department of Defense (U.S.)
DODD	Department of Defense Directive
EQUIP	Education Quality Improvement Program
EU	European Union
FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Areas
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office (UK)
FIC	Feinstein International Center
GAO	Government Accountability Office (U.S.)
GIRoA	Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
IDP	Internally displaced person
IED	Improvised explosive device
IMF	International military forces
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
MOD	Ministry of Defense (UK)
MRRD	Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NSP	National Solidarity Program
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PDC	Provincial Development Committee
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team

PsyOps	Psychological Operations
QDR	Quadrennial Defense Review
QIP	Quick Impact Project
S/CRS	Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (U.S.)
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SIGAR	Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (U.S.)
START	Stabilisation and Reconstruction Task Force (Canada)
UN OCHA	United Nations Office of Coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission for Afghanistan
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNTAG	United Nations Transition Assistance Group
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture
USG	United States Government

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Political and security objectives have always influenced U.S. foreign assistance policies and priorities. Since 9/11, however, development aid for countries like Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan has increasingly and explicitly been militarized and subsumed into the national security agenda. In the U.S. as well as in other western nations, the re-structuring of aid programs to reflect the prevailing foreign policy agenda of confronting global terrorism has had a major impact on development strategies, priorities, and structures. The widely held assumption in military and foreign policy circles that development assistance is an important “soft power” tool to win consent for the presence of foreign troops in potentially hostile areas, and to promote stabilization and security objectives, assumes a relationship between poverty and insecurity that is shared by many in the development and humanitarian community.

The assumption that aid projects improve security has had a number of implications for the U.S. and other western donors, including: 1) a sharp increase in development assistance; 2) an increasing percentage of assistance programmed based on strategic security considerations rather than on the basis of poverty and need; and, 3) a much greater role for the military or combined civil-military teams in activities that were traditionally the preserve of development and humanitarian organizations. At the same time, civilian agencies, including non-governmental organizations, have also been increasingly enlisted in aid and development projects that have explicit stabilization objectives.

Given how widespread the assumption is, and given its major impact on aid and counterinsurgency policies, there is little empirical evidence that supports the assumption that reconstruction assistance is an effective tool to “win hearts and minds,” and improve security or stabilization in counterinsurgency contexts. To help address this lack of evidence, the Feinstein International Center (FIC) at Tufts University conducted a comparative study in Afghanistan and the Horn of Africa to examine the effectiveness of aid projects in promoting

security objectives in stabilization and counterinsurgency contexts.

This paper presents a summary of the findings from the Afghanistan study. Research was conducted in five provinces, three in the south and east (Helmand, Paktia, and Uruzgan) which were considered insecure and two in the north (Balkh and Faryab) which were considered relatively secure, as well as in Kabul city. Through interviews and focus group discussions with a range of respondents in key institutions and in communities, views were elicited on the drivers of insecurity, characteristics of aid projects and aid implementers (including the military), and effects of aid projects on the popularity of aid actors and on security.

Drivers of insecurity

The study first tried to understand the drivers of insecurity in the five provinces in order to be able to assess whether aid projects were addressing them. The main reported drivers of conflict or insecurity were poor governance, corruption, and predatory officials; ethnic, tribal, or factional conflict; poverty and unemployment; behavior of foreign forces (including civilian casualties, night raids, and disrespect for Afghan culture); competition for scarce resources (e.g., water, land); criminality and narcotics (and counter-narcotics); ideology or religious extremism; and, the geopolitical policies of Pakistan and other regional neighbors. Many of these factors are complex, intertwined, and overlapping, so it was difficult to isolate the strength and influences of each. Respondents gave notably different weight to the various factors in the different provinces. In the southern and eastern provinces, poor governance and tribal and factional conflicts were given more weight, while in the northern provinces poverty and unemployment were given more weight. In the south and east, the actions of the international military were reported to be an important source of insecurity, whereas in the north international military forces were generally seen as more of a source of security. A common theme that cut across many thematic

and geographical areas was that of injustice, including the perceived injustice that a few corrupt officials and powerbrokers were benefiting disproportionately from international assistance at the expense of the majority of Afghans. Insurgents were described as adept at taking advantage of the opportunities offered by communities' grievances and perceptions of injustice.

Perceptions of aid projects

The study looked at whether and how aid projects addressed the drivers of insecurity identified by respondents and/or were effective at winning hearts and minds. The research found that development projects, rather than generating good will and positive perceptions, were consistently described negatively by Afghans. Responses suggested that not only were projects not winning people over to the government side, but perceptions of the misuse and abuse of aid resources were in many cases fueling the growing distrust of the government, creating enemies, or at least generating skepticism regarding the role of the government and aid agencies. The chief complaints were that projects were insufficient, both in terms of quantity and of quality; unevenly distributed geographically, politically, and socially; and, above all, associated with extensive corruption, especially those that involved multiple levels of subcontracting. Communities did provide positive views on the National Solidarity Program (NSP), some significant and highly visible infrastructure projects, and long-serving aid agencies that had established relationships with communities.

Stabilizing and destabilizing effects of aid

While the environments in the five provinces differed, a number of consistent observations emerged concerning the effectiveness of aid projects in promoting short- and long-term stabilization objectives. First, in some areas aid projects seemed to have had some short-term positive security effects at a tactical level, including reported intelligence gathering gains and some limited force protection benefits for international forces. In some cases aid projects

also helped to facilitate creating relationships, in part by providing a "platform" or context to legitimize interaction between international and local actors who would otherwise find it difficult to meet. However, despite these limited tactical benefits, there was little concrete evidence in any of the five provinces that aid projects were having more strategic level stabilization or security benefits such as winning populations away from insurgents, legitimizing the government, or reducing levels of violent conflict.

The research actually found more evidence of the destabilizing rather than the stabilizing effects of aid, especially in insecure areas where the pressures to spend large amounts of money quickly were greatest. The most destabilizing aspect of the war-aid economy was in fueling massive corruption that served to delegitimize the government. Other destabilizing effects included: generating competition and conflict over aid resources, often along factional, tribal or ethnic lines; creating perverse incentives to maintain an insecure environment, as was the case with security contractors who were reported to be "creating a problem to solve a problem"; fueling conflicts between communities over locations of roads and the hiring of laborers; and, causing resentment by reinforcing existing inequalities and further strengthening dominant groups, often allied with political leaders and regional strongmen, at the expense of others.

The research found that while the drivers of insecurity and conflict in Afghanistan are varied and complex, the root causes are often political in nature, especially in terms of competition for power and resources between and among ethnic, tribal, and factional groups. International stabilization projects, however, tended to lay more emphasis on socio-economic rather than political drivers of conflict, and therefore primarily focused on addressing issues such as unemployment, illiteracy, lack of social services, and inadequate infrastructure such as roads. As a result, aid projects were often not addressing the main sources of conflict, and in some cases fueled conflict by distributing resources that rival groups then fought over.

Conclusions and recommendations

The following section highlights the main conclusions and recommendations of this study, which are largely consistent with findings from several other evaluations and studies looking at the relationship between aid and security in Afghanistan. There is growing awareness by civilian and military actors of some of the issues raised here, and steps have been taken to address some of them. However, progress has often been slow because many of the institutional incentives for why aid funds are spent in ways that can be ineffective or destabilizing remain unchanged.

1. Primacy of political over economic drivers of conflict

In the more insecure areas the reasons identified by interviewees for insecurity and opposition to the government were related most frequently to political issues such as the corrupt and predatory behavior of government actors. Most stabilization initiatives, however, have emphasized economic drivers of conflict – focusing on poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, delivery of social services, and building of infrastructure. In the less insurgency-affected areas, where poverty and unemployment were given as more important drivers of conflict, well-delivered, conflict-sensitive aid interventions may have been more effective at helping to consolidate stability than aid in insecure areas was in reversing instability.

The population-centered counterinsurgency (COIN) approach of winning the population away from insurgents and over to the government struggled to gain traction in part because the government's leadership never seemed to share the objective of winning over the population, and instead often pursued a patronage-based approach to buy the support of local strongmen. Furthermore, the U.S. and many of its NATO/ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) allies had contradictory strategies of simultaneously wanting to provide services and good government to win over the population, but also supporting local strongmen whose predatory behavior alienated the local population. Aid delivered by or associated with

corrupt officials or strongmen who were in many cases responsible for alienating people in the first place has, not surprisingly, proven to be an ineffective way of winning people over to the government. Lack of progress on governance has not primarily been due to lack of money, but to a lack of political will or a shared strategy on the part of the government and the international community to push a consistent reform agenda.

Recommendations:

- Focus more on identifying the drivers of conflict and alienation, and if these are primarily political, governance, and rule-of-law related, do not assume they can effectively be addressed through primarily socio-economic interventions.
- The international community should take a better-coordinated and more forceful stand on certain key issues that would help promote better governance (e.g., merit-based appointments into key national and sub-national positions, more rigorous anti-corruption measures including better monitoring of donor expenditures, avoiding alliances with notorious strongmen known for corrupt and predatory behavior).

2. Spending too much too quickly can be counterproductive – less can be more

Pressure to spend too much money too quickly is not only wasteful, but undermines both security and development objectives, especially in insecure environments with weak institutions. However, powerful career and institutional incentives often contribute to quantity being prioritized and rewarded over quality. These incentives include the strong bureaucratic imperative to grow budgets as much as possible, and to then spend as much money as quickly as possible in order to justify further budget growth; for Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), to demonstrate performance during short-term rotations based on the quantity of funds expended rather than on the impact that the funded activities have had; for many contractors and NGOs, to generate overhead funding for headquarters based on program

budgets spent. The experience of the NSP and some other development projects suggests that, in terms of development, quality should not be sacrificed for the sake of quantity. The research suggests that in terms of potential stabilizing benefits as well as positive development outcomes, the process of development, especially in building and sustaining relationships, despite being time-consuming, is as if not more important than the product of development. Unfortunately, there are few incentives for spending less money more effectively over time. Discussions with individual field-level actors as well as senior officials confirm that the problem is often not that we do not know what needs to be done, but rather that institutional incentives reward getting and spending money. “Less is more” can never be a reality when “more is more” is rewarded.

Recommendations:

- Provide incentives for quality and impact of aid spending over quantity. Aid money should only be committed when it can be spent in an effective and accountable manner.
- Address the “use it or lose it” problem, whereby budgets are forfeited if not spent, by allowing unused budget amounts to be rolled over into following years, establishing multi-year predictable funding, and making more use of longer-term trust fund-type mechanisms that could be drawn down based on need rather than annual budget cycles. These approaches would reduce the current institutional incentives and negative effects of spending too much too fast, while also conveying a sense of long-term commitment to Afghanistan.

3. Insufficient attention has been paid to the political economy of aid in Afghanistan

An important consequence of the pressure to spend too quickly has been inadequate consideration of incentive structures facing policy makers, donors, implementers, and communities. Evidence from this as well as other studies indicates that the way in which aid

has been delivered has contributed to instability through reinforcing uneven and oppressive power relationships, favoring or being perceived to favor one community or individual over others, and providing a valuable resource for actors to fight over. The most destabilizing aspect of the war-aid economy in Afghanistan, however, has been its role in fueling corruption, which delegitimizes both the government and the international community. Under the current status quo of weak institutions and insecurity, some powerful actors are doing very well, and so have little incentive to push for change.

Recommendations:

- Invest more in understanding the political economy of aid, including local conflict dynamics, the impact of the war-aid economy on these dynamics, the perceived winners and losers of aid programs, and the role of these programs in legitimizing (or delegitimizing) the government.
- Give more attention to understanding the incentive structures of national and international civilian and military institutions in terms of aid delivery, and the impact of these incentive structures on the effective delivery of development assistance.

4. Insecurity rather than security is rewarded

Because the primary objective of post-2001 U.S. aid to Afghanistan has not been development for its own sake but rather the promotion of security objectives, funding for insecure areas has taken priority over secure areas. Therefore, the bulk of U.S. civilian and military development assistance funds in Afghanistan have been spent in insurgency-affected provinces in the south and east. The last several years have seen an even greater prioritization of the insecure areas despite the lack of evidence that the aid funds being spent are promoting stability or improving attitudes towards the Afghan government and the international community. The findings from this study and other research suggest that aid is more effectively spent in secure regions where good development practice and stronger

oversight is more feasible, and less money has to be spent on security. The research also suggests that in areas where insecurity remained chronic and governance structures broken, spending resources (e.g., for road building) risks fueling corruption (both perceived and real), inter-communal strife, and competition among local power-brokers. There is evidence that in insecure areas local strongmen with militias that were being paid to provide security recognized the need to perpetuate insecurity. The prioritization of insecure over secure areas is not surprisingly being bitterly criticized by Afghans living in more stable areas, who feel they are being penalized for being peaceful.

Recommendation:

- Reverse the current policy of rewarding insecure areas with extensive aid while effectively penalizing secure areas where aid money could be spent more effectively and accountably. Invest in secure areas and, except for humanitarian assistance, make aid in insecure areas more contingent on security. While this study did not specifically examine the demonstration effect this could have, it is quite possible that providing incentives for communities to be peaceful would be more effective than the current approach that is perceived by many Afghans to be rewarding insecurity.

5. Accountability and the measurement of impact have been undervalued

The political need for “quick impact” along with institutional imperatives to spend money have in many cases reduced the incentives for careful evaluation of project impact. Currently it is not even possible to get a complete list of the projects PRTs have implemented with the approximately \$2.64 billion in CERP funds appropriated between 2004 and 2010, let alone an indication of what the impact has been. The study’s findings have been reinforced by increasing media and U.S. agency reports (e.g., Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction [SIGAR], USAID Office of the Inspector General [OIG]) on funds that have been wastefully spent with no (or negative) impact.

In an environment with little reliable quantitative data, with numerous independent variables that make determining correlation (not to mention causality) virtually impossible, and where western-style public opinion polling methodologies may not be reliable, the determination of impact may often have to be more art than science. Nevertheless, much more focus should be given to trying to measure the impact and consequences of aid projects than has been done to date. Recent initiatives by SIGAR, OIG, and staff at the Senate Foreign Relations Committee are positive, but they come late in the game. In addition to the waste of taxpayer resources and negative consequences on the ground, the discrediting of *all* programs for Afghanistan may be collateral damage if aid resources are not spent in a more accountable and effective manner.

Recommendation:

- Reinforce at all levels the message and culture of accountability. This is not a recommendation to add several more bureaucratic levels of cumbersome national and international oversight mechanisms to oversee inputs, but rather to invest more in measuring outcomes. Establish incentive structures for quality work and careful assessments of effectiveness and not just for spending money.

6. Development is a good in and of itself

There is considerable evidence that development assistance in Afghanistan during the past decade has directly contributed to some very positive development benefits, including decreases in infant and maternal mortality, dramatic increases in school enrollment rates for boys and girls, a media revolution, major improvements in roads and infrastructure, and greater connectivity through telecommunication networks. One consequence of viewing aid resources first and foremost as a stabilization tool or “a weapons system” is that these major development gains have often been under-appreciated because they did not translate into tangible security gains. U.S. development assistance in Afghanistan has been justified on the grounds that it is promoting

COIN/stabilization objectives rather than development objectives. While in the short term this has led to much higher levels of development assistance in Afghanistan, the failure of these resources to improve the security situation is now leading many policymakers to question the value of development assistance despite some very real development gains.

Recommendation:

- Value development as a good in and of itself. Program development aid first and foremost to promote development objectives, where there is evidence of impact and effectiveness, rather than to promote stabilization and security objectives, where this research suggests there is little evidence of effectiveness.

1. INTRODUCTION



U.S. Marine Corps photo by Lance Cpl. John M. McCall

U.S. military on patrol, Helmand

1.1 Purpose, rationale, and description of study

Political and national-security considerations have always influenced U.S. foreign assistance policies and priorities. Since 9/11, however, this influence has grown greatly, as development aid for countries like Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan has been increasingly and explicitly subsumed under the national security agenda. The U.S. is not alone in viewing development through a security lens; other Western nations, including many of the U.S.'s NATO allies, have, to varying extents, restructured their aid programs to reflect the prevailing foreign policy agenda of confronting global terrorism. The major impact this has had on development assistance has been at the policy and practice levels. It is reflected in

changing aid strategies, priorities, and structures.

At the same time, a widely held assumption in military and foreign policy circles is that development assistance is an important “soft power”¹ tool to win consent and to promote stabilization and security objectives. Counterinsurgency doctrine in particular emphasizes the importance of humanitarian and reconstruction assistance, often in the form of “Quick Impact Projects” that are intended to “win hearts and minds.”

The assumption that aid projects improve security has had a number of implications, including the sharp increase since 9/11 in the absolute amount of funding available from both U.S. and other Western donors for humanitarian

¹ The term “soft power” was coined by Joseph Nye in the 1980s to refer to a nation’s ability to influence the preferences and behavior of other nations not through coercion (hard power), but through projection of attractive national values, levels of prosperity, and openness. See Joseph Nye, “The Benefits of Soft Power,” *Working Knowledge* (Harvard Business School, August 2, 2004), <http://hbswk.hbs.edu/archive/4290.html>.

and development purposes²; the increased percentage of assistance that is programmed based on strategic security considerations rather than on the basis of poverty and need; and the much greater role for the military or combined civil-military teams in activities that were traditionally the preserve of humanitarian and development organizations. This assumption is having a major policy impact on how development assistance is allocated and spent, and provides an important rationale for the growing “securitization” of development assistance.³ On the one hand, military forces have become increasingly involved in what would previously have been seen as the work of civilian humanitarian and development agencies. On the other hand, civilian agencies, including non-governmental organizations, have been increasingly enlisted in aid and development projects that are seen as having stabilization objectives. The assumption has been formalized in the “comprehensive,” “whole of government,” and “3D” (diplomacy, defense, development) approaches. (See Section 2 and Annex A.)

Despite how widespread the assumption is, and despite its major impact on aid and counterinsurgency policies, there is little empirical evidence that supports the assumption that reconstruction assistance is an effective tool to “win hearts and minds” and improve security or increase stability in counterinsurgency contexts. To help address this lack of evidence, the Feinstein International Center (FIC) at Tufts University conducted a comparative study in Afghanistan and the Horn of Africa to examine the effectiveness of aid projects in promoting

security objectives in stabilization and counterinsurgency contexts.⁴

Afghanistan provided an opportunity to examine one of the most concerted recent efforts to use “hearts and minds” projects to achieve security objectives, especially as it has been the testing ground for new approaches to using reconstruction assistance to promote stability, which in some cases (e.g., Provincial Reconstruction Teams) were then exported to Iraq. While other studies have looked at the effectiveness of aid in promoting humanitarian and development objectives as well as the ethical and philosophical issues related to merging humanitarian and security objectives, surprisingly little effort has been given to analyzing the effectiveness of aid in promoting political and security objectives. Given that a significant percentage of U.S. foreign aid is now programmed (both explicitly and implicitly) to achieve security objectives, the need to determine the effectiveness of this use of development assistance is real.⁵

While aid projects are not all designed with stabilization objectives in mind, the study did not distinguish between military and non-military aid, although in some cases it focused more on military-linked aid. While projects that had an explicit stabilization focus might have been of special interest, the broad point is that aid in general is assumed to promote stability. Also, while the U.S. is the largest donor and has increased its aid spending by the largest percentage post-2001, the study did not intend to be primarily U.S.-focused; therefore, it looked at all aid.

² According to Center for Global Development statistics, between 2001 and 2009 U.S. official development assistance more than doubled in real terms, while Donor Assistance Committee countries’ assistance increased by more than half. See Net Aid Transfers data set (1960–2009), <http://www.cgdev.org/content/publications/detail/5492>.

³ The terminology of the “securitization of aid” and much of its intellectual underpinning has been provided by Professor Mark Duffield, who uses it to describe the important role of development aid to support a new system of global governance that helps protect western security interests. Rather than being primarily about helping the poor through alleviating poverty and promoting development, Duffield argues that aid is increasingly being used as a governance and security tool to help stabilize and govern unstable and borderland regions so that they do not threaten the West’s way of life. See, for example, Mark Duffield, “Governing the Borderlands: Decoding the Power of Aid,” *Disasters*, Volume 25, Issue 4, (December 2001), pp. 308–320; Mark Duffield, *Global Governance and the New Wars: The Merging of Development and Security*, (London: Zed Books, 2001); and Mark Duffield, *Development, Security and Unending War: Governing the World of Peoples*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).

⁴ This paper focuses on the findings from Afghanistan. For information on findings from the Horn of Africa, see <https://wikis.uit.tufts.edu/confluence/pages/viewpage.action?pageId=34807224>. For information on the overall aid and security research program, see <https://wikis.uit.tufts.edu/confluence/pages/viewpage.action?pageId=19270958>.

⁵ A March 2010 conference co-sponsored by Feinstein International Center on the use of development aid in COIN operations in Afghanistan noted that “a key theme is the critical lack of monitoring, evaluation, and empirical data available to assess the impact of aid on stability in Afghanistan,” especially given the “otherwise strong traditions of robust after-action reviews” by the military. See Wilton Park, “Winning ‘Hearts and Minds’ In Afghanistan: Assessing the Effectiveness of Development Aid in COIN Operations,” Report on Wilton Park Conference 1022, held March 11–14, 2010 (July 22, 2010). <http://www.wiltonpark.org.uk/resources/en/pdf/22290903/22291297/wp1022-report>.

After presenting the study methodology below, the paper continues in Section 2 with a discussion of the evolution of security-driven aid and the effects on current practice. Section 3 describes the five provinces included in the study and how different models of securitized development have been used in each of them. Sections 4 and 5 present the views obtained in the field on the causes of insecurity and the characteristics of aid projects. Section 6 discusses the effectiveness of aid in stabilization in Afghanistan, and Section 7 summarizes the study's conclusions and policy implications. More detailed information on the research methodology and related issues is contained in Annex A.

1.2 Methodology

Research was conducted in the five provinces of Balkh, Faryab, Helmand, Paktia, and Uruzgan, as well as in Kabul city. In these provinces, as in nearly all of Afghanistan's thirty-four provinces, international civilian and military actors are using humanitarian, reconstruction, and development aid to promote greater stability and security. The notable differences among the five provinces provided the opportunity to examine the development-security nexus in very different contexts. Balkh and Faryab Provinces in the north were much more secure than Helmand, Uruzgan, and Paktia Provinces in the south and southeast where the Taliban-led insurgency was more active. In the two northern provinces, Pashtuns are a minority ethnic group, whereas in the south and southeast they make up the overwhelming majority. Another significant difference was the variations in approach, budgetary resources, and character of the different NATO/ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) nations heading the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in each province—with perhaps the major difference for the purposes of this study being the much greater financial resources available to U.S.-led PRTs.

The study teams used a relatively consistent methodology in four of the five provincial study areas (Helmand being the exception), bearing in mind that the varied security and other conditions allowed or required approaches tailored to different areas. Qualitative interviews

with Afghan and international respondents in the field provided the primary data source. Interviews were conducted during multiple visits to the provinces between June 2008 and February 2010. In the four provinces as well as in Kabul, a total of 574 respondents (340 Afghan, 234 international) were interviewed either individually or in focus groups at the provincial, district, and community levels. Separate semi-structured interview guides were used for key informant and community-level interviews. Respondents included current and former government officials, donors, diplomats, international military officials, PRT military and civilian staff, UN and aid agency staff, tribal and religious leaders, journalists, traders and businessmen, and community members. In Helmand, the methodology consisted of analyzing qualitative data from focus groups conducted in February–March 2008, quantitative data taken from polling data drawn from communities in November 2007 and provided by the PRT, and interviews with key informants (e.g., PRT staff, Afghan government officials). Most of the interviews with Afghans were conducted in Dari or Pashtu, although some with senior government and NGO officials were conducted in English. The two international researchers leading the field research in Balkh and Faryab Provinces were excellent Dari speakers and could directly interview Afghan respondents. Afghan research assistants helped in setting up and conducting interviews, as well as in note taking and analysis. Elsewhere, research assistants or translators assisted researchers in translating Dari and Pashtu. In all provinces, secondary sources were drawn upon for historical information and background to aid projects. The Balkh, Faryab, and Uruzgan case studies benefited from background historical and political overviews written by leading analysts of these provinces.

Any research in Afghanistan or other conflict areas requires caution because of the potential for respondent bias. This is particularly the case for research that looks at the types of sensitive issues raised in this study or includes questions that relate to deeply held social norms. To mitigate these potential biases, the methodology included repeat visits to allow follow-up to and

triangulation of responses, flexible interview guides that encouraged spontaneous responses within specific themes, and the fielding of teams with extensive local experience.

The study relied primarily on the stated perceptions of the wide range of respondents mentioned above. Where relevant, the discussion differentiates the perspectives of different types of actors. The researchers acknowledge the need for caution when basing findings on the stated perceptions of respondents, as respondents' statements may not always accurately reflect their perceptions and, in addition, may not match behavior. The study also did not aim to measure causality, as this was simply too ambitious in an environment with so many confounding variables. Still, because aid projects explicitly aim to change attitudes, perceptions (if captured accurately) are relevant. Moreover, however imperfect, the research team believed that in the Afghan context the qualitative data gathered in in-depth interviews provided a better data source and gauge of perceptions than most data collected using quantitative methodologies, such as public opinion polling.

Since the field research was completed in early 2010, a number of the issues raised by the findings have been acknowledged by the U.S. and by ISAF, and some measures have been taken to mitigate them, as discussed in the text. Security conditions have also changed somewhat. While Balkh and Faryab are still relatively secure, insecurity has widened in the north in general, and in the troubled districts in the provinces of Balkh and Faryab in particular. On the other hand, security in areas of Helmand has improved since the time of the research. Nevertheless, based on more recent visits and discussions as well as the analysis of others', the researchers feel that the broad conclusions and concerns remain valid and very policy-relevant.

Additional information on the research methodology and related issues is contained in Annex A.

1.3 Similar and related research in Afghanistan

A number of other studies and evaluations examining the effect of development activities on security have been conducted in Afghanistan at the same time or later than this one. One of the most comprehensive, conducted by Christof Zürcher, Jan Koehler, and Jan Böhnke in northeastern Takhar and Kunduz Provinces between 2005 and 2009, concluded that communities that already felt more secure were more likely to feel positively about aid, and that any positive effects of aid on the population's attitude towards the state are "short-term" and "non-cumulative."⁶ Similarly, research conducted in 2009 by Sarah Ladbury in Kandahar, Wardak, and Kabul Provinces found that young men joined the insurgency for a complex combination of reasons, some personal and some related to broader grievances against the government and foreign forces. Development projects were seen as being too small to have any impact, and as unemployment (or underemployment) was one factor leading to mobilization, respondents expressed the desire for projects that created employment. The poor quality of aid delivery suggested that more attention be paid to how services are delivered.⁷ A quantitative study done with the support of the U.S. Army using district-level data for the 2002–10 period found that while projects can affect the number of security incidents in a district, in most cases their influence is so small as to not justify using them as a conflict-mitigation tool.⁸ Finally, a report prepared in June 2011 for the use of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee concluded, after examining the evidence from several studies (including the present one and those mentioned above), that "the evidence that stabilization

⁶ J. Böhnke, J. Koehler and C. Zürcher, "Assessing the Impact of Development Cooperation in North East Afghanistan 2005–2009: Final Report," *Evaluation Reports 049* (Bonn: Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung, 2010).

⁷ Sarah Ladbury, in collaboration with Cooperation for Peace and Unity (CPAU), "Testing Hypotheses on Radicalisation in Afghanistan: Why Do Men Join the Taliban and Hizb-i Islami? How Much Do Local Communities Support Them?" Independent Report for the Department of International Development (August 2009).

⁸ Shaun Wheeler and Daniel Stolkowski, "Development as Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan," Unpublished manuscript (Draft dated June 17, 2011).



ISAF patrol passing through Mazar-e Sharif

programs promote stability in Afghanistan is limited . . . [The] unintended consequences of pumping large amounts of money into a war zone cannot be underestimated.”⁹ One study that did show some impact of development assistance on security perceptions was a World Bank-funded study of the National Solidarity Program (NSP) conducted in villages outside of the main conflict areas between 2007 and 2011 by Andrew Beath and his colleagues. The study found that the NSP had overall positive effects on communities’ perceptions of economic well-being, all levels of government (except the police), and non-governmental organizations

(NGOs), the security situation, and (weakly) international forces. This study did not, however, find measurable improvements in actual security, although it looked only at short-term outcomes.¹⁰ These studies are discussed further in Section 6 below.

⁹ Majority Staff, Foreign Relations Committee, United States Senate, “Evaluating U.S. Foreign Assistance to Afghanistan,” (June 8, 2011), p. 2, <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/congress/index.html>.

¹⁰ Andrew Beath, Fotini Christia, and Ruben Enikolopov, “Winning Hearts and Minds? Evidence from a Field Experiment in Afghanistan,” *Working Paper No. 2011-14* (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Political Science Department, undated).

2. EVOLUTION OF SECURITY-DRIVEN AID¹¹

Photo by Cpl. Jeff Drew



U.S. military inspecting school construction, Helmand

The role of militaries in delivering aid and reconstruction is not a new phenomenon. What has changed, especially since 2001, is the scale of the involvement and the purposes underpinning it. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), between 2002 and 2005, USAID's share of U.S. official development assistance (ODA) decreased from 50 to 39 percent, while the share of the Department of Defense (DOD) increased from 6 to 22 percent.¹² While more recent OECD data now show DOD's global share of U.S. ODA to be shrinking, it still plays a dominant role in Afghanistan. Between 2002 and 2010, nearly \$38 billion was appropriated to "stabilize and strengthen the Afghan economic, social,

political, and security environment so as to blunt popular support for extremist forces in the region."¹³ Roughly half of this has gone to training and equipping the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), while a little over one-third has gone to economic, social, political, and humanitarian efforts. Of the total amount, nearly two-thirds has been allocated to the DOD, with USAID and the Department of State receiving lesser amounts. One specific indicator of the importance of security-driven aid is the dramatic growth of the Commanders' Emergency Response Program (CERP)¹⁴ funding in Afghanistan, from zero in 2003 to \$1.2 billion in 2010 (Figure 1).

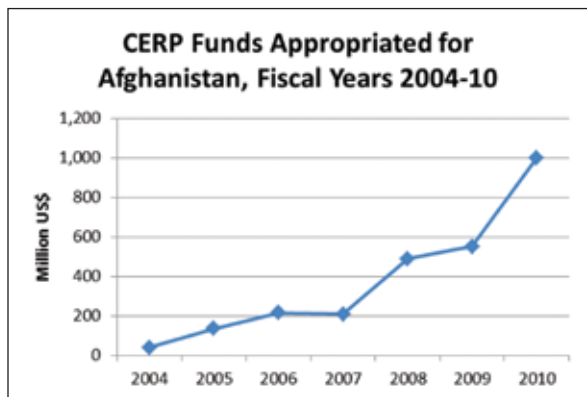
¹¹ The authors would like to acknowledge the very substantive contribution of Dr. Stuart Gordon to this section.

¹² OECD, "DAC Peer Review: Main Findings and Recommendations, Review of the Development Co-operation Policies and Programmes of United States" (2006), https://www.oecd.org/document/27/0,2340,en_2649_34603_37829787_1_1_1_1,00.html.

¹³ Curt Tarnoff, "Afghanistan: U.S. Foreign Assistance" (Congressional Research Service, August 12, 2010).

¹⁴ CERP is a U.S. military program which provides discretionary funds for PRT commanders to execute local small-scale relief and reconstruction projects. Projects are intended to build good will, trust, and confidence between the local population and the international military, thereby increasing the flow of intelligence and turning the population against the insurgents and other anti-government groups. CERP is discussed further below and in Box 2.

Figure 1



Source: *Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, "Quarterly Report to the U.S. Congress" (April 30, 2011), 142–3.*

The contemporary origins of military involvement in delivering assistance lie in the Allied preparations for the invasions of North Africa and Western Europe in the course of World War II. However, it is perhaps more strongly associated with the Cold War counterinsurgency campaigns of the 1950s through the 1970s, principally the British experiences in Malaya, Oman, and Aden (Yemen), and the U.S. experience in Vietnam. The phrase “hearts and minds” is usually associated with Field Marshal Sir Gerald Templer,¹⁵ and his ultimately successful conduct of the British-led counter insurgency campaign in Malaya (1948–60). Since the “Malayan Emergency,” the phrase has often been used as a form of shorthand for the overall British approach to counter-insurgency: emphasizing winning the “hearts and minds” of the population through securing the support of the people. The approach shaped British strategy both in Malaya and in dealing with the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya. In the 1970s, it was influential in Northern Ireland. The kernel of the strategy was to establish secure zones, use minimum force, apply development, and address political grievances that underlay the rebellions

— all in order to turn the population against the insurgents. At the same time, outside of the secure areas, the strategy was to implement military measures designed to inflict attrition on the military component of the insurgency. This approach has been contrasted with tactics that stress more conventional military means, are less focused on developing the support of the population, and are less concerned with avoiding civilian casualties.

The U.S. experience began as Civil Affairs in World War II but has echoed the British path in its association with counter-revolutionary warfare, particularly in programs such as the Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support Program (or CORDS) during the Vietnam War. These counter-insurgency approaches tended to bring together efforts to separate the population from the insurgents while providing a variety of reconstruction programs to win over the sympathy of the population. The phrase “hearts and minds” was also associated with the U.S. military and strategies adopted to contain the communist insurgency in Vietnam. President Lyndon B. Johnson is quoted in May 1965 when he argued that U.S. victory would be built on the “hearts and minds of the people who actually live out there. By helping to bring them hope and electricity you are also striking a very important blow for the cause of freedom throughout the world.”¹⁶ This approach shaped both U.S. strategy and rhetoric on the war in Indo-China and led to efforts to coordinate development and security approaches that would counter communist propaganda and isolate the insurgents from the people. Under Johnson the U.S. “committed itself to ‘pacification’ of South Vietnam by providing both security and development support. U.S. officials, both civilian and military, would provide ‘advice’ and resources for economic development projects, such as rebuilding roads and bridges, while the military would train and equip South Vietnam’s police and paramilitary groups to hunt down insurgents.”¹⁷

¹⁵ John Cloake, *Templer: Tiger of Malaya: The Life of Field Marshal Sir Gerald Templer* (London: Harrap, 1985). Footnote 1 states that Templer first used the term on April 26, 1952.

¹⁶ Lyndon B. Johnson quoted in Francis Njubi Nesbitt, “Hearts and Minds and Empire.” *Foreign Policy in Focus* (March 20, 2009), http://www.fpiif.org/articles/hearts_and_minds_and_empire.

¹⁷ Ibid.

2.1 Current approaches

Recognition that the causes of instability are complex has driven the formulation of the various models, such as the “comprehensive approach,” “3D” (defense, diplomacy, development), “whole of government,” and “integrated approach.” These trends are discernible in a range of international organizations (particularly the EU and NATO) as well as between and within ministries in individual states. For example, in 2004, the UK government established a Post-Conflict Reconstruction Unit (renamed the Stabilisation Unit in 2007), jointly owned by the Ministry of Defense (MOD), Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and Department for International Development (DFID); in 2004, the U.S. Congress appropriated funds for the U.S. State Department to establish the Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS); and in 2005, the Canadian government established the Stabilisation and Reconstruction Task Force (START) within its Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade.

The various models are all derived from the sense that the origins of conflict are largely socio-economic in nature, and that state failure is a consequence of the breakdown of public service delivery. Militaries have been attracted to comprehensive or integrative approaches for a variety of reasons related both to theories of conflict causation and resolution and to the necessity for “soft power” to contribute to “force protection.”¹⁸ In terms of theories about what causes conflicts and how they are resolved, conflict is frequently portrayed as a product of low levels of development as well as political and social marginalization. In the course of an international military intervention, it is often assumed that tactical military progress cannot be consolidated or translated into strategic success, and viable states cannot be built, without the host government constructing

legitimacy through the provision of public services. In terms of force protection, the theory is that when an international military force provides infrastructure and “facilities” (such as public health clinics, wells, and schools) the population will be encouraged into collaborative relationships with the international military—reducing opportunities for insurgents and providing intelligence to the counter-insurgent forces.

The U.S. DOD has made considerable efforts to develop the capacities for “stability operations”¹⁹ and to link these with the work of the Department of State and USAID—the result is an approach to security that makes a fundamental break with the past. The principal change has been a reorientation to meet a different perceived threat. The 2002 U.S. National Security Strategy stated that the U.S. “is now threatened less by conquering states than we are by failing ones.” Then Secretary of Defense, Robert M. Gates, argued that even the emphasis on regime change that dominated between 2001 and 2003 had changed:

Repeating an Afghanistan or an Iraq—forced regime change followed by nation-building under fire—probably is unlikely in the foreseeable future. What is likely though, even a certainty, is the need to work with and through local governments to avoid the next insurgency, to rescue the next failing state, or to head off the next humanitarian disaster.

*Correspondingly, the overall posture and thinking of the United States armed forces has shifted—away from solely focusing on direct American military action, and towards new capabilities to shape the security environment in ways that obviate the need for military intervention in the future.*²⁰

In 2005 the DOD issued “DOD Directive 3000.05” (2005), emphasizing the importance

¹⁸ Force protection consists of preventive measures intended to reduce hostile actions against military personnel, resources, facilities, and information.

¹⁹ DOD defines stability operations as “An overarching term encompassing various military missions, tasks, and activities conducted outside the United States in coordination with other instruments of national power to maintain or reestablish a safe and secure environment, provide essential governmental services, emergency infrastructure reconstruction, and humanitarian relief.” See Headquarters Department of the Army, “Stability Operations,” FM 3-07 (December 2008), Glossary, p. 9.

²⁰ Robert M. Gates. (U.S. Secretary of Defense) “U.S. Global Leadership Campaign.” Speech given on July 15, 2008 at the U.S. Global Leadership Campaign (Washington, DC). <http://www.defenselink.mil/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1262>.

of stability operations as

*a core U.S. military mission that the Department of Defense shall be prepared to conduct and support. They shall be given priority comparable to combat operations and be explicitly addressed and integrated across all DOD activities including doctrine, organizations, training, education, exercises, materiel, leadership, personnel, facilities, and planning.*²¹

The directive emphasized that “stability operations were likely to be more important to the lasting success of military operations than traditional combat operations” and “elevated stability operations to a status equal to that of the offense and defense.”²² This represented a significant reorientation of the U.S. military’s traditional focus on “warfighting.”

More recently, this emphasis on the identification of instability in other states as a threat to U.S. interests was reflected in both the 2008 National Defense Strategy and the 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), which noted that “preventing conflict, stabilizing crises, and building security sector capacity are essential elements of America’s national security approach.”²³ Understandably, this thinking has played an important role in driving force preparations within the DOD, strengthening the significance of stability operations and broadening the range of competencies that would be required in a future U.S. military.

The changing emphasis in the U.S. is also consistent with the changing nature of UN

peacekeeping missions, increasingly characterized by complex mandates spanning “immediate stabilization and protection of civilians to supporting humanitarian assistance, organizing elections, assisting the development of new political structures, engaging in security sector reform, disarming, demobilizing and reintegrating former combatants and laying the foundations of a lasting peace.”²⁴ This integration of diplomatic, human rights, military, and development responses has been driven primarily by the requirement to effectively consolidate fragile peace agreements and make the delicate transition from war to a lasting peace²⁵—the fragility of peace often being “ascribed to a lack of strategic, coordinated and sustained international efforts.”²⁶ A significant amount of literature documents the increasing size and complexity of, particularly, the civilian components of peace missions²⁷ (arguably beginning with the deployment of the UNTAG mission in Namibia in 1989²⁸) and the diversification and growing importance of non-military tasks within UN mandates. Even where the UN has deployed solely civilian missions, their proximity and relationship to military, peace-building, or state-building missions in support of a government authority has raised the same issue for some critics: the association of humanitarian and development responses with one of the belligerents undermines the UN’s independence and neutrality.

Despite the lack of evidence that “hearts and minds” activities can generate attitude or behavior change, these broader strategic trends

²¹ “DOD, Directive 3000.05: Military Support for Stability, Security, Transition, and Reconstruction (SSTR) Operations” (November 28, 2005), p.2. As noted on the next page, the directive also clarifies that DOD sees its role in U.S. government plans for SSTR as part of interagency partnerships.

²² FM 3-07, “Stability Operations,” p. vi.

²³ Lauren Ploch, “Africa Command: U.S. Strategic Interests and the Role of the U.S. Military in Africa” (Congressional Research Service, July 22, 2011), <http://openers.com/document/RL34003/>

²⁴ Espen Barth Eide, Anja Therese Kaspersen, Randolph Kent, and Karen von Hippel, “Report on Integrated Missions: Practical Perspectives and Recommendations,” Independent Study for the Expanded UN ECHA Core Group (May 2005), p. 3.

²⁵ “In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All,” A/59/2005 (March 21, 2005), paragraph 114.

²⁶ Eide et al., “Report on Integrated Missions,” p. 3.

²⁷ For more on the changing nature of peace operations, see Bruce Jones and Feryal Cherif, “Evolving Models of Peacekeeping: Policy Implications and Responses,” (Center on International Cooperation, NYU, September 2003), <http://www.peacekeepingbestpractices.unlb.org/>.

²⁸ The United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) was a UN peacekeeping force deployed in April 1989 with a very broad mission in the transition from then South-West Africa to an independent Namibia. See, United Nations, “Namibia – UNTAG Background” (undated), <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/past/untagFT.htm>.



U.S. military and construction, Helmand

and the hearts and minds approach have had a dramatic impact on doctrine and tactics related to stabilization and on the organization of the U.S. military. Department of Defense Directive (DODD) 3000.05 defined the broad objectives of stability operations, stating that their immediate goal was to “provide the local populace with security, restore essential services, and meet humanitarian needs. Long-term goals that reflect transformation and foster sustainability efforts include developing host-nation capacity for securing essential services, a viable market economy, rule of law, legitimate and effective institutions, and a robust civil society.”²⁹ The U.S. Army’s manual, *Tactics in Counterinsurgency*, states that “at its heart a counterinsurgency is an armed struggle for the support of the population.”³⁰ This population-centric view of conflict is rooted in the assumption that conditions such as poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, and unmet aspirations are the fuels that drive insurgencies and that the

remedy is humanitarian, reconstruction, and development assistance. The idea underpinning these perspectives is that project-based assistance, including small-scale “Quick Impact Projects,” can capture the “hearts and minds” of beneficiary populations and lead to both a change of attitude towards the government and increasing co-operation with the international military. The latter is most likely to be seen in terms of intelligence sharing—e.g., identifying improvised explosive devices (IEDs) or providing information on insurgents—a key component in protecting one’s own forces. The deteriorating security situation in parts of Afghanistan, which forced many traditional humanitarian and development organizations to suspend activities and withdraw staff, also contributed to the growing role of the military and PRTs in directly supporting reconstruction and development activities as they felt compelled to step into the void.³¹

²⁹ FM3-07, “Stability Operations,” p. 1-15

³⁰ U.S. Department of the Army, *Tactics in Counterinsurgency*, FM 3-24.2 (April 2009), p. ix.

³¹ Stewart Patrick and Kaysie Brown, “The Pentagon and Global Development: Making Sense of the DOD’s Expanding Role,” *Working Paper Number 131* (November 2007).

The need to develop interagency partnerships has been a recurring theme across recent U.S. security policy.³² In the preface to FM 3-07 “Stability Operations,” Lieutenant General Caldwell, argues that at the heart of the program to enhance stability operations is “a comprehensive approach . . . that integrates the tools of statecraft with our military forces, international partners, humanitarian organizations, and the private sector.”³³ The sum of these changes is an organizational reconfiguration around a military capable of intervening in fragile states and having the potential to assume responsibility for a range of tasks that had traditionally been delivered by government civilian agencies and development and humanitarian organizations. While this guidance recognized that “many stability operations tasks are best performed by indigenous, foreign, or U.S. civilian professionals,” it situated the military stabilization response within a broader “whole of government”³⁴ approach, but made clear that “U.S. military forces shall be prepared to perform all tasks necessary to establish or maintain order when civilians cannot do so.”

Officially, U.S. development agencies have embraced this relationship. According to USAID Administrator Rajiv Shah, “in the most volatile regions of Afghanistan, USAID works side-by-side with the military, playing a critical role in stabilizing districts, building responsive local governance, improving the lives of ordinary Afghans, and—ultimately—helping to pave the way for American troops to return home.”³⁵ While policy has referred to “partnerships” and integration of military and civilian agencies, the military’s relationship with the civilian branches of government and the external humanitarian

community is unlikely to be an equal one. A U.S. military with significantly more financial, personnel, and material resources, and far greater reach than either USAID or the State Department, inevitably makes the military’s role strong and potentially dominant.

While the Afghan and Iraqi funding surges are clearly only temporary, DOD’s approach to stabilization, and the significant role of the military in delivering ODA, is likely to endure.³⁶ Some argue that the DOD’s expanded assistance authorities” threaten to “displace or overshadow broader U.S. foreign policy and development objectives in target countries and exacerbate the longstanding imbalance between the military and civilian components of the U.S. approach to state-building.”³⁷

The focus on integrated and comprehensive approaches to secure the support of the population has led humanitarian and development actors to criticize both stabilization and counterinsurgency doctrines for leaving little room for the fundamental humanitarian principles of independence, impartiality, and neutrality. Assistance is increasingly instrumentalized behind security and political objectives. Patrick and Brown argue that these trends are potentially damaging and raise concerns that “U.S. foreign and development policies may become subordinated to a narrow, short-term security agenda at the expense of broader, longer-term diplomatic goals and institution-building efforts in the developing world.”³⁸

Many aid practitioners and agencies are concerned by the increased politicization and securitization of aid because this violates

³² As featured in the *National Military Strategy*, the *National Defense Strategy*, and the 2010 QDR: DOD, *The Quadrennial Defense Review Report* (February 2010), p. 73. The FY2011 Defense Budget Request is available at <http://www.defenselink.mil/comptroller/budget.html>.

³³ Lieutenant General and former Commander of the U.S. Army Combined Arms Center, William H. Caldwell, as quoted in the preface to FM 3-07 “Stability Operations.”

³⁴ DOD defines “whole of government” as “an approach that integrates the collaborative efforts of the departments and agencies of the United States Government to achieve unity of effort toward a shared goal.” See FM3-07, “Stability Operations,” Glossary, p. 10.

³⁵ Cited in Scott Dempsey, “Is Spending the Strategy?” *Small Wars Journal* (May 4, 2011), p. 2. <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/is-spending-the-strategy>.

³⁶ Some respondents for this study questioned whether this expanded role has been accepted wholeheartedly as being of equal status by the military, or whether there will be resistance and reconsideration in light of experience in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

³⁷ Scott Dempsey.

³⁸ Stewart Patrick and Kaysie Brown.



School, Balkh

fundamental humanitarian principles, and several interviewed for this study expressed concern about the negative consequences for civilian aid workers of the “blurring of lines” that resulted from the direct role of the military in the delivery of humanitarian and development assistance. However, few questioned the fundamental assumption of a causal relationship between aid and security. In fact, some aid workers seemed to believe more strongly in this relationship than military respondents, and were very supportive of using aid to promote conflict resolution, stabilization and peacebuilding objectives as long as this was done by civilian rather than military agencies and personnel. The objective of this study, however, was not to

examine whether humanitarian principles were being violated, or the impact of the securitization of aid on humanitarian actors, but rather to examine the fundamental question – is development assistance effective in promoting stabilization and security objectives?

3. AID AND SECURITY IN AFGHANISTAN



Photo by Geert Gompelman

National ring road in Faryab

3.1 Provincial background

The five study provinces (see map on page vii) were selected in part due to their varied characteristics, and in part due to more pragmatic considerations of local contacts, donor interest, and logistical support. The three southern and eastern provinces (Helmand, Uruzgan, Paktia) were selected due to their insecurity and because of the different aid approaches taken in each (see Section 3.2). The two northern provinces (Balkh, Faryab) were selected due to their relative security; they provide a counterpoint to the less-secure provinces by illustrating the response to aid in a more-secure environment. In 2007, the five provinces collectively accounted for 27 percent

of government and donor assistance. Unlike Helmand, Uruzgan, and Paktia, Balkh and Faryab are non-Pashtun-majority provinces. Beyond that, each of the five provinces has its own varied history, geography, economy, and politics.

Helmand Province lies in southwestern Afghanistan, bordering Pakistan's Balochistan Province to the south. Nearly 95 percent of the population is Pashtun, living alongside small numbers of the Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, Baluch, and Sikhs who were settled in the 1960's as part of the major Helmand-Arghandab Valley irrigation scheme. The dislocations of the last thirty years are seen as having resulted in many unsettling social and political changes. Helmand

produces a variety of field and horticultural crops, but has become synonymous with opium production and trade. The provincial center is Lashkar Gah.

Uruzgan Province lies in south-central Afghanistan, bordering Kandahar and Helmand Provinces to the south and southwest, respectively. Approximately 90 percent of the population is Pashtun, with much of the former Hazara population having been separated into the new province of Dai Kundi in 2004.³⁹ Uruzgan has historically been remote, poor, conservative, and violent, even by Afghan standards. Politically and tribally, Uruzgan is part of “greater Kandahar,” and is also the origin of many of the Taliban’s original leaders, including Mullah Mohammad Omar, who was born in Deh Rawood District. As in Helmand, tribal structure is generally considered much less cohesive and more fragmented than in the east and southeast of the country. The provincial center is Tarin Kot.

Paktia Province lies in southeastern Afghanistan, bordering Pakistan’s Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Kurram, North Waziristan, and South Waziristan. Ninety-one percent of the population is Pashtun, with most of the rest being Tajik. The Paktia tribes have historically had a “special relationship” with Kabul that provided dispensations such as exemption from military service, and tribal structures remain strong. Paktia has limited industry, and major livelihoods are cutting wood, smuggling, and labor migration to the Gulf states. The provincial center is Gardez.

Balkh Province lies in a strategic location in northern Afghanistan, bordering Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. It is a largely Tajik province, although with a mix of other ethnic groups, including Pashtun enclaves. The provincial center Mazar-e Sharif is the de facto political, economic, and administrative hub of northern Afghanistan. Emerging relatively unscathed from the war,

Balkh retains significant Soviet-era influence, including remnants of pre-war industrial development and commercial linkages with the central Asian states.

Faryab Province also lies in northern Afghanistan, bordering Turkmenistan to the north. Faryab is one of two Uzbek-majority provinces, with the remainder of the population made up of pockets of Tajik, Pashtun, Turkmen, and other smaller ethnic groups. Although located on the ring road, the province has historically been an economic backwater, with low-productivity agriculture, limited horticulture, and virtually no industry. The insecure, Pashtun-dominated district of Ghormach officially lies in Badghis Province, but is temporarily being administered from Faryab’s provincial center, Maimana, and was therefore included within the scope of this study.

Additional background information on the provinces is available in the individual provincial case studies.⁴⁰

3.2 Models used for employing aid in the five provinces

Stabilization through aid projects was an overall strategy of some donors, notably the U.S., and not just through the PRTs. The study therefore looked broadly at the effect of all types of aid on stabilization, with special focus on aid implemented by or through the PRTs. The models employed by PRTs in each of the five study provinces differed according to the lead nation with respect to strategies, objectives (e.g., consent-winning, force protection, development), aid presence, levels of resources, civilian-military relationships, relationship with local and Kabul administration, role of Quick Impact Projects (QIPs), the use of CERP funds, relation with a political strategy (e.g., “ink-spot”),⁴¹ and the extent to which they followed an integrated, comprehensive, or whole-of-government approach.

³⁹ As in other areas of Afghanistan, the assignment of certain districts to one province or another is not always clear. Gizab District contains a significant Hazara population, but may or may not be part of Dai Kundi. For some matters it appears to be in Uruzgan, for others in Dai Kundi.

⁴⁰ The case studies are accessible at <https://wikis.uit.tufts.edu/confluence/pages/viewpage.action?pageId=19270958>.

⁴¹ The “ink-spot” strategy is where military forces occupy a number of small, disconnected areas, and gradually extend their influence until pockets (“ink spots”) became connected, leaving only small and isolated pockets of resistance.

BOX 1: Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs)

Embodying the notion of civil-military collaboration, the first Afghanistan PRT was established in Paktia Province by the U.S. in late 2002, and by 2011, 26 more had been established throughout Afghanistan. Initially called “Joint Regional Teams” due to their joint civilian-military composition, they were intended to be an interim structure for facilitating improvements in security and reconstruction and for supporting the extension of central government authority to areas beyond Kabul. They were seen as a compromise between the expansion of ISAF proposed by President Karzai and the UN and the reluctance of the U.S. to go along with a major expansion.

The PRT terms of reference adopted in January 2005 identified a very general mission: “assist[ing] The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to extend its authority, in order to facilitate the development of a stable and secure environment in the identified areas of operations, and enable SSR [security sector reform] and reconstruction efforts.”⁴² Over time, the agenda of the PRTs has broadened; in addition to doing short-term Quick Impact Projects, PRTs have expanded their roles in governance and developmental initiatives, either because NGOs and other civilian agencies could not operate in the insecure contexts of the south and east or for overtly political reasons. These roles involve promoting the capacity of local administration through engagement with local stakeholders; promoting budget execution, business development, agriculture, public health initiatives, and governance; and supporting the delivery of basic social services. PRTs have also been used to strengthen troop-contributing nations’ interagency or interdepartmental efforts through harnessing all aspects of national power and leverage—diplomatic, economic, reconstruction, and counterinsurgency efforts.

Despite a common name and mission, the 27 PRTs have a varied structure and make-up reflecting the characteristics of the local area as well as the philosophies, legal restrictions, administrative arrangements, priorities, and available resources of the lead nation. There are currently 14 PRT lead nations, although most PRTs are shared by two or more nations. A number of PRTs cover more than one province. PRTs can also provide a base for non-ISAF personnel (e.g., Police Mentoring Teams, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, DFID, U.S. Department of State, USAID, SIDA).

PRTs have had strong political support in Washington, but have been controversial with both the humanitarian community and the Afghan government. Within the humanitarian community, PRTs have been viewed warily as representing the militarization of aid (with the risk that projects will be developed for short-term security rather than long-term development); potentially duplicating the work of humanitarian and development agencies; and, as putting at risk relationships with communities due to the “blurring of lines” between civilian and military actors, and the “shrinking of humanitarian space” for aid agencies to operate in an independent and impartial manner. Lobbying by humanitarian and development agencies has resulted in improved dialogue and recognition of the conflicting needs of these institutions, although fundamental issues remain.

The Afghan government has often seen PRTs as a parallel and in some senses competing structure that takes away legitimacy from the government and potentially prioritizes projects

Box 1 continued on next page

⁴² PRT Executive Steering Committee, January 2005. Cited in *ISAF PRT Handbook, Edition 4*.

and activities that are not in line with Afghan government priorities. As a conference report noted, PRTs' "experience as brokers of development has led to the formation of parallel governance and funding structures, which substitute government functions and form unintentional competition for legitimacy."⁴³ In February 2011, President Karzai publicly described PRTs as "structures parallel to the Afghan Government" that were "hindering the Afghan government's development and hindering the governance of Afghanistan."⁴⁴ Other critics have noted "the flexibility of the concept has developed into an incoherent network of lead-nation-driven units that could run counterproductive to Afghan ownership."⁴⁵ On the positive side, PRTs provided a useful mechanism for smaller NATO allies to take responsibility for relatively small geographic regions. They also resulted in much more attention and resources to sub-national levels, and, over time they contributed to a better understanding among international personnel of Afghanistan beyond Kabul city.⁴⁶

In Helmand, where due to insecurity the international military played a large role in supporting the Afghan government, UK government institutions were somewhat divided on the role of projects, especially QIPs, in promoting stability. While there was consensus that consolidation of Afghan state institutions was the key to ultimate "stability," it was recognized that this would take time and would need to be augmented by international support to provide security and "kick-start" at least some service delivery. Consequently QIPs were generally seen as rapidly implementable projects that might "serve as down payments on promises of political and economic progress."⁴⁷ Notwithstanding the areas of consensus on the role of projects in stabilization, each UK government department had a different view of the utility, underlying purpose, and benefits of the QIPs program. The FCO tended to view them more as instruments of political

engagement or strategic communication while the military tended to place great emphasis on the role of both development and QIPs in particular in consolidating tactical military successes. Most military interviewees argued that reconstruction projects would deliver a more cooperative civilian population that, among other things, would be more willing to share intelligence information such as the location of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and the movement of Taliban fighters. Aid projects were used to try to "win consent" from local populations to work in a given area,⁴⁸ and their principal benefits were often described in terms of short-term force protection. A particular implication of this view of QIPs was that it raised the military's expectations that civilian development and stabilization officials would rapidly follow the front-line troops and immediately begin highly visible reconstruction or infrastructure projects. The military's focus

⁴³ Wilton Park, "Winning 'Hearts and Minds,'" p. 14.

⁴⁴ BBC News, February 8, 2011 at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-12400045>.

⁴⁵ Oskari Eronen, "PRT Models in Afghanistan: Approaches to Civil-Military Integration". Crisis Management Center Finland, Civilian Crisis Management Studies, Volume 1: Number 5/2008. p. 1 (August 2008).

⁴⁶ For more on the positive views of PRTs, especially in insecure areas, see Carter Malkasian and Gerald Meyerle, "Provincial Reconstruction Teams: How Do We Know that They Work?" (March 2009). <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=911>.

⁴⁷ Bennett et al., *Country Programme Evaluation, Afghanistan*. Evaluation Report EV696. p. 15 (DFID, London, May 2009).

⁴⁸ According to the UK Ministry of Defense, consent winning activities are "simple projects that gain consent of the local populace . . . to create a permissive environment. . . . These activities are rarely a long term solution but must be part of the overall strategic development. They are intended to gain the goodwill of the community in order to initiate the engagement required to identify, plan and implement longer term programmes. Examples of consent winning activities include the provision of electricity and water, the removal of litter, the opening of markets and the repairing of roads." United Kingdom, Ministry of Defense, *British Army Field Manual: Countering Insurgency*, Vol. 1, Part 10 (January 2010).



Australian military on patrol, Uruzgan

was clearly on the quick delivery of *visible* projects in quantities sufficient to signal a commitment to a community by ISAF and the government of Afghanistan. The UK military pressed hard for existing restrictions on the use of money to be relaxed and for commanders to have the same levels of autonomy and delegated authority as their U.S. military colleagues.

For DFID, QIPs were frequently described as mechanisms for ensuring rapid delivery of community-based programs that could serve as a bridge to future and more sustainable development initiatives. As an aid instrument, QIP-type “projects” were generally recognized as having their place, potentially offering a range of benefits: enabling donors to target their efforts more specifically than they could using only

budgetary support measures; enabling work through a wider variety of implementing partners; enabling work in situations of poor government capacity; providing an opportunity to work outside of government institutions; and limiting elements of fiduciary risk.⁴⁹

In Uruzgan, until the fall of 2010, the PRT was led by the Netherlands but supported by Australian and U.S. military forces, diplomats, and aid officials. The Dutch supported some longer-term development efforts, but also invested much of their aid resources to influence conflict dynamics and promote stabilization objectives. By viewing their engagement in Uruzgan as a reconstruction rather than a fighting mission, in part because that was more palatable to the population at home, the Dutch approach to stabilization tended to focus on addressing local grievances that were

fueling conflict rather than on defeating the enemy or convincing insurgents to join the government. This approach was characterized by the employment of highly experienced political and cultural advisers who conducted detailed analyses of local conflict dynamics and sought to shape and support positive forces with the use of aid. The approach also relied somewhat on the notion of “plausible deniability”—that some aid funds for local influential persons or tribal groups who were disgruntled with the government or sympathetic with the Taliban were useful, but only if they were not visible. This meant that some aid was given discreetly, through small-scale “under the radar” projects with no branding or taking credit and with little oversight. The Dutch military also made small sums available for civil-military cooperation

⁴⁹ N. Leader and P. Colenso, “Working Effectively in Conflict-Affected and Fragile Situations,” *Briefing Paper E: Aligning with Local Priorities*, DFID Practice Paper (DFID, London, March 2010), p. 5.

(CIMIC) work, which focused on force protection by seeking to win local support for operations. As noted above, the Uruzgan PRT was shared with the U.S. and Australians, whose approaches were sometimes at odds with the Dutch. According to one interviewee, while the U.S. tended to think in terms of “high-value targets,” the Dutch thought in terms of “high-value facilitators.”⁵⁰ As a consequence, some Australian and U.S. military personnel expressed concern that the Dutch were too soft on the Taliban and were being politically naïve. Similarly, the Dutch had actively campaigned to get UNAMA to establish an office in Tarin Kot, in contrast to Gardez, where the (US) PRT interacted much less with UNAMA. The Australians tended to focus more directly on reconstructing or building new infrastructure.

The Australian Defense Force (ADF) and the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) were also active in Uruzgan implementing and supporting stabilization activities and capacity-building projects in the areas of health, education, agriculture, water, and roads. The geographic focus of their activities was on the areas north of Tarin Kot in the North Dorafshan-Baluchi Valley and in Chora District, as well as in the Mehrabad area east of Tarin Kot. The Australian stabilization projects, jointly planned by ADF and AusAID officials, were relatively small (less than \$10,000), short-term projects often directly implemented by the ADF and designed to legitimize initial interactions of the ADF with local community leaders in insecure areas. If the security situation permitted, AusAID would start playing more of a lead role in introducing more medium-term projects intended to increase the legitimacy of the Afghan government by strengthening the capacity of line departments such as the Ministries of Public Health, Education, and Rural Rehabilitation and Development to provide services. In more stable areas, ADF engineers continued to play a role in managing and overseeing infrastructure projects such as schools, clinics, and irrigation infrastructure. Some interviewees noted that this approach was a very expensive way to build infrastructure, but that the strong ADF oversight role resulted in better quality structures and fewer

allegations of corruption. A specific area of focus was vocational training and skills development for the construction sector provided through the Trade Training School operated by the ADF at the PRT.

In Paktia, the PRT, like other U.S.-led PRTs, relied on a mix of funding, including CERP (see Box 2), USAID, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and other military sources. Due to the insecure environment, and far-greater human resources and logistical capacity, the military played a much more central role than their U.S. government civilian counterparts in selecting, implementing, and managing the large and complex portfolio of aid projects that were planned or underway (approximately US\$90 million in 2009–10 alone). PRT-funded activities primarily focused on infrastructure projects such as roads, schools, clinics, district offices, and other government buildings. The central objective of these projects was to help strengthen connections between the government and the people in order to help build public confidence in the government at the expense of insurgents. PRT teams visiting the fourteen districts of Paktia would work with provincial and district officials to identify potential projects; the engineering team would then conduct a feasibility study, develop a scope of work, solicit proposals, review bids, award a contract, and monitor implementation. This posed many daunting challenges given the large amount of funds to be spent, insecure environment, limited capacity of contractors, language and cultural barriers, and the capacity constraints and logistical challenges of trying to monitor so many projects. With the objective of “extending the reach of the government,” PRT personnel went to considerable effort to involve provincial and district officials in identifying projects. They also involved the Provincial Development Committee (PDC), although this tended to result in long wish lists of activities largely focused in and around the provincial center, Gardez, where most PDC members lived. The PRT also prepared short lists of construction bids for projects and then involved the governor in the process of selecting and awarding the contracts. While intended to demonstrate that

⁵⁰ Interview with international analyst, Tarin Kot, Uruzgan Province, January 20, 2009.

the government was now in the driver's seat in decision-making, interviews indicated that this well-intentioned initiative may have backfired

and served to delegitimize the government, as the governor was widely viewed to be receiving kickbacks on the contracts being awarded.

BOX 2: CERP funding

First developed in Iraq, where the Coalition Provisional Authority used Iraqi funds and assets seized prior to the invasion to establish a development fund, the Commanders Emergency Response Program (CERP) was intended to enable military commanders in both Iraq and Afghanistan to respond to urgent, small-scale, humanitarian relief and reconstruction projects and services that immediately assist the indigenous population and that can be sustained by the local population or government. In Afghanistan, PRTs first received CERP funds in 2004, and during the period FY2004 to FY2010, the U.S. Congress allocated \$2.6 billion to CERP, with \$1 billion in 2010 alone.

CERP has enjoyed enormous support within the U.S. military. Robert Gates, former secretary of defense, reinforced this when testifying before the Senate Appropriations Committee by arguing that CERP funds “can be dispensed quickly and applied directly to local needs, [and] they have had a tremendous impact—far beyond the dollar value—on the ability of our troops to succeed in Iraq and Afghanistan. By building trust and confidence in coalition forces, these CERP projects increase the flow of intelligence to commanders in the field and help turn local Iraqis and Afghans against insurgents and terrorists.”⁵¹ According to the U.S. Army, “CERP provides a quick and effective method to institute an immediate positive impact on the Afghan people. The keys to project selection are: (1) quick executability; (2) local national employment; (3) benefit to the Afghan population; (4) high visibility to the local populace; and (5) sustainability by GIROA [Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan].”⁵²

Regulations governing the type of expenditure have been extremely flexible. The U.S. GAO records that the undersecretary of defense's (comptroller) guidance authorizes 19 different usages “including transportation, electricity, and condolence payments.” The funds could also be linked with other U.S. programs such as those funded by USAID. This flexibility is reflected in the delegated funding authority of PRT commanders, with authorization to spend up to \$25,000 per project before seeking approval from higher authority. The central commander in Afghanistan may authorize projects up to \$2 million. As overall funding has risen, so has the size of individual projects.

Most ISAF troop-contributing nations followed the U.S. lead and sought to develop quick impact funding of one sort or another, although with considerably less money. However, the approaches have tended to differ and often reflect national policy frameworks for using the military in development and disaster relief work. The Nordic states, for example, tend to have national policies that restrict the role of the military in these areas.

Development actors and policy makers have criticized CERP for the lack of controls on funding, for being donor-driven, and for being unsustainable. Sen. Claire McCaskill, chair

Box 2 continued on next page

⁵¹ Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates, Testimony to U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations, February 2007. See, <http://usacac.army.mil/cac2/call/docs/10-10/ch-8.asp>.

⁵² U.S. Forces-Afghanistan, *Money as a Weapon System-Afghanistan (MAAWS-A)*, USFOR-A J8 Publication 1-06 (15 May 2009), Appendix B-1.

of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee's contracting oversight panel, has been vocal in pressing for greater accountability and arguing that the program has evolved from the original concept of small-scale, rapidly implemented quick impact projects into a major infrastructure program. She argues in the *Military Times* that there is "a disconnect between what the commanders in the field want to have happen and what actually happens," and asserts that CERP is in danger of being substituted for long-term reconstruction programs, but without oversight and effective management.⁵³ The January 2011 report of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction notes that "27 of the 69 CERP projects it examined in Laghman province were at risk or have questionable outcomes."⁵⁴ The report warned that \$49.2 million was at risk of being wasted in that province alone.

In Balkh, the PRT, run jointly by Sweden and Finland, was responsible for the four northern provinces of Balkh, Jawzjan, Samangan, and Sar-e Pol. The PRT also functioned as a base for civilian representatives of the U.S. Department of State and USAID, and for SIDA Development Advisors. The Swedish approach differs from the counter-insurgency approaches pursued by several other troop-contributing states in the south. Virtually all of the \$60 million that

Sweden gives Afghanistan is channeled through the central government, although 20 percent of that is earmarked for Balkh, Jawzjan, Samangan, and Sar-e Pol through a specially designated "Northern Fund." As of 2009, Sweden also had a separate \$1.4 million annual allocation available for the north to support development projects, plus an additional \$1.4 million for private sector development. All this aid is aimed at two objectives: building the long-term capacity of

Photo by Paul Fishstein



Destroyed bazaar, Balkh

⁵³ Michelle M. Stein, "Lawmakers Question CERP Funds in Afghanistan," *Military Times* (August 8, 2011), <http://medilldc.net/2011/08/lawmakers-question-cerp-funds-in-afghanistan/>.

⁵⁴ Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, "Quarterly Report to the United States Congress" (January 2011).

the government while in the meantime helping to ensure services. Unlike most other PRTs, the Swedes separate development and military functions, and their funds are administered through civilian channels in Stockholm, Kabul, and Mazar. While the development and military functions are separate, collaboration across civilian and military institutional channels is encouraged. The overall budget for Finnish assistance to Afghanistan in 2009 was approximately \$15.2 million, of which \$695,000 (5 percent) was allocated to PRT projects. Like Sweden, Finland puts its funding largely through the central government, using various trust fund mechanisms. Separate from the PRT but operating in the same geographic area, U.S. forces located at the Deh Dadi airbase just west of Mazar and at other area bases were providing training for the ANSF, and were supporting activities with “humanitarian” funds and goods in-kind.

The Balkh PRT oversees three small-scale project funds, one funded by the Finns and largely focused on QIPs such as support to ANSF (e.g., for concertina wire), gravel roads, the Shrine of Hazrat Ali in Mazar, a micro-hydroelectric turbine in Sholgara, medical supplies, and school books. Another is funded by the Swedish military intended entirely for winning hearts and minds and creating goodwill for soldiers. A third, the “chaplain’s fund,” is supplied in part by money paid for refreshments in the PRT canteen and personal donations by soldiers. The chaplain’s fund is not explicitly for winning hearts and minds, but is used for vocational training and other activities in Dawlatabad and Khulm with a focus on women and children. However, because the fund supports activities in communities, which are similar to hearts and minds activities, it may affect communities’ perceptions of the military.

Unlike most PRTs, the Norwegians in Faryab do not have CIMIC projects or a CIMIC advisor. Norwegian development funding is

largely channeled through national programs such as the NSP and the Education Quality Improvement Program (EQUIP),⁵⁵ while assistance in Faryab itself is channeled mostly through international NGOs. The PRT therefore directly funds a very limited number of aid activities. The reluctance on the part of the Norwegian military to conduct quick impact projects partly reflects national policies on limiting the role of the military in aid work but also the negative experiences prior to June 2007. The event that led to this policy shift was the June 2007 visit by the deputy ministers of foreign affairs and defense to the hospital in Maimana, which had been refurbished by the PRT. This project had a number of problems stemming from the PRT’s lack of understanding of the local context and lack of experience in implementing development projects. The principal consequence has been that Norway contracts through NGOs. For example, an international NGO was contracted to rehabilitate a prison in the province through sub-contracts to private contractors.

In all of the provinces, in addition to the projects described above, other military units and civilian institutions undertook “hearts and minds” type projects. Military Psychological Operations, or “PsyOps,” had a small fund to use to change attitudes. Projects included painting mosques to encourage religious leaders to preach positive things about ISAF, giving pencils and other supplies to teachers to make them look good, or providing radios to village elders to enhance their status. PsyOps had also provided funds for loudspeakers at mosques, lights at Afghan National Police (ANP) check posts, and jackets for the Afghan National Army (ANA) and ANP. Respondents described the PsyOps perspective very much as transactional, i.e., “relationship building” activities for which “they owe us one.” As one military official put it, “all of this is bribes, so that they talk.”⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Begun in 2004 and expanded in 2009, the World Bank-funded EQUIP program aims to improve both access to and quality of basic education by providing grants directly to communities for the rehabilitation of school buildings and for obtaining teaching and learning materials.

⁵⁶ Interview with international military official, Mazar-e Sharif, Balkh Province, January 15, 2010.

4. DRIVERS OF CONFLICT AND INSECURITY

ISAF Photo by U.S. Navy Mass Communications Specialist 1st Class Eric S. Dehm



U.S. military and Afghan National Police, Faryab

Given the assumed link between lack of development and insecurity, the study first tried to understand the drivers of insecurity in the five provinces in order to assess whether aid projects were addressing them. When asked about the drivers of conflict or insecurity in their areas, while respondents identified mostly similar factors, a number of notable differences existed among provinces in the weight respondents gave to the various factors.⁵⁷ The main reported drivers of conflict or insecurity were poor governance, corruption, and predatory officials; ethnic, tribal, or factional conflict; poverty and unemployment; behavior of foreign forces (including civilian casualties, night raids, and disrespect for Afghan culture); competition for scarce resources (e.g., water, land); criminality and narcotics (and counter-narcotics); ideology or religious extremism; and, the geopolitical policies of Pakistan and other regional neighbors. As discussed below, many of these factors are

complex, intertwined, and overlapping, so isolating the strength and influences of each as separate analytical factors is difficult.

4.1 Corruption, poor governance, and predatory government

A widely reported cause of insecurity in all five provinces was the poor quality of governance, in particular the corrupt and predatory activities of local officials and police, as this was described as alienating the population and providing an opportunity for the Taliban. In the most insecure provinces of Helmand, Paktia, and Uruzgan it was reported as among the most important factors. The belief that the government (and its international supporters) had failed to deliver on governance took a number of different forms. Consistent accusations included obtaining positions and contracts through nepotism, favoritism, and bribery rather than through

⁵⁷ While the study focused on insurgency-related insecurity, during interviews a broad, flexible definition of “insecurity” was used. This was justified due to the unclear lines between political and criminal insecurity, and between insecurity that originated either with non-state actors or with the state itself.

merit; flagrant and extensive abuse of authority in extortion and in the illegal occupation and re-selling of land; arbitrary detention both as a source of revenue and as a way to neutralize one's rivals; distribution of patronage to reinforce one's own position and marginalize others; control and protection of narcotics production and trade as well as other illegal enterprises; and, maintenance of illegal checkpoints on the road to collect revenue. As one UN official in Uruzgan put it, "it's a business not a government."⁵⁸

Described as especially galling was that corrupt government officials were often the same unsavory individuals who played a deeply alienating role in previous eras (e.g., 1992–6)—and who, to widespread applause, were swept out by the Taliban regime. In some areas the current government is seen as largely composed of the same local strongmen (e.g., Sher Mohammad Akhundzada in Helmand, Jan Mohammad Khan in Uruzgan, Mohammad Atta in Balkh) who played a role in past corrupt regimes, and who were allowed to reinstate themselves post-2001. In Helmand and Uruzgan, for example, a small set of *jihadi* leaders who had been driven out by the Taliban regime had re-emerged as Karzai's allies in 2001 and promptly took advantage of their new political power and institutional positions to capture patronage positions and development funding and to systematically exclude and marginalize their rivals. This was done through their personal militias as well as government security institutions.

The free rein of corrupt local officials, especially within the ANP and the justice system, where most believe that favorable outcomes are only available if one is powerful or willing (and able) to pay large bribes, has reinforced the sense of impunity and lack of redress for ordinary citizens. As a group of tribal elders in Paktia noted, "today's laws are just for poor people."⁵⁹ The release of powerful commanders accused of

violent and other criminal acts was cited in Faryab as a source of frustration. In Paktia, as one elder put it,

*Paktia has lots of problems, but the issue of lack of clinics, schools and roads are not the problem. The main problem is we don't have a good government. . . Without a clean government, millions of dollars are stolen. If you increase the amount of money it will also be useless because the government will simply steal more. There's a growing distance between the people and the government, and this is the main cause of the deteriorating security situation.*⁶⁰

In Uruzgan, according to an international official, "the lack of accepted and effective government is the most important cause of insecurity. . . . If the local community has no trust in government then they will turn to the Taliban."⁶¹

In Faryab, the appointment process for official positions was described as having played a particularly destabilizing role. In large part this was because the dominant (Uzbek) political party, Jumbish, has often been at odds with a central government seen locally as Pashtun-dominated. As a result, appointments were often seen as intentionally undermining Jumbish's position and destabilizing the province. In addition, while the current governor, Abdul Haq Shafaq, an ethnic Hazara from Sar-e Pol Province, was described in more positive terms, the provincial administration was said to rely on "factional networks, *wasita* (connections), nepotism, cronyism, and bribery in making provincial and district appointments,"⁶² which meant that power and influence is mostly in the hands of Jumbish supporters.

As would be expected, in all five provinces corruption was said to take place according to the tribal and ethnic lines described below, underlining the overlapping nature of the drivers

⁵⁸ Interview with UN official, Tarin Kot, Uruzgan Province, February 2, 2010.

⁵⁹ Interview with tribal elders, Paktia Province, January 11, 2009.

⁶⁰ Interview with local community leader and former *mujihadin* commander, Paktia Province, January 10, 2008.

⁶¹ Interview with PRT civilian official, Tarin Kot, Uruzgan Province, January 31, 2010.

⁶² Geert Gompelman. *Winning Hearts and Minds? Examining the Relationship between Aid and Security in Afghanistan's Faryab Province* (Feinstein International Center, Tufts University, January 2011), p. 3.

of insecurity. A consistent theme in Helmand and Uruzgan was that a select group of tribally affiliated strongmen took advantage to secure government positions and gain access to government and development funds to consolidate political and economic power among their own people. In Faryab, given the correlation between ethnicity and political parties, the relations between ethnic groups is also intertwined with party politics, especially given the dominant role of the Jumbish party. In Balkh, perceived ethnic bias and bad governance sometimes came together as a source of grievance; cases were reported where Pashtun refugees or IDPs had returned to their home areas but due to bias were unable to get support for reclaiming their land, which has alienated them from the government.

While most emphasis was on “administrative corruption,” many respondents also drew attention to “moral corruption,” often in reference to how Western liberal values had seeped into a government and society that was not ready for them. Even “democracy” was cited as a source of conflict; in the words of Paktia

elders: “now we have ‘democracy.’ People do whatever they want—loot, steal, and only think about themselves,”⁶³ or “in the name of ‘democracy’ people wear jeans, eat kabobs, and drink, but the culture and traditions of this country don’t permit this kind of thing. People in government think that wearing jeans and drinking wine equals democracy.”⁶⁴

4.2 Ethnic, tribal, and factional issues

Ethnic and tribal issues were mentioned in all five provinces as a significant driver of insecurity, although this varied in form and intensity from place to place. In the insecure areas, much of the conflict is due to local tribal dynamics, which is then labeled “Taliban” versus “government.” In Helmand, tribal issues were given first place, due to the post-2001 “carve-up” of institutions and the consequent on-going concentration of political and economic power, including patronage and development resources, in the hands of a limited number of tribal groups. In particular, the Zirk tribes (including President Karzai’s Popalzai, as well as the Barakzai, Achakzai, and Alikozai) were the clear winners,

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Joint PRT/Afghan National Police patrol, Lashkar Gah

⁶³ Interview with tribal elders, Paktia Province, January 11, 2009.

⁶⁴ Interviews with Paktia elders, Paktia Province, January 12, 2009. See Anna Larson, “Toward an Afghan Democracy? Exploring Perceptions of Democratisation in Afghanistan,” Discussion Paper (Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, September 2009). Also, “Afghans Need to Find a New Model of Democracy” (October 28, 2009), *Financial Times*, www.ft.com/cms/s/0/32d3b638-c362-11de-8eca-00144feab49a.html.

and benefited at the expense of the smaller Panjpai tribes, which were the clear losers.⁶⁵ This imbalance created resentment and conflict and undermined prospects of an inter-tribal political settlement within the province. At the same time, the political cover offered by strongman Akhundzada's links with President Karzai and the U.S. military, which saw him as useful in the fight against the Taliban, made him untouchable, leaving those who suffered at his hands with no options for redress. All of this made the powerbrokers' rivals open to Taliban infiltration and offers of protection.⁶⁶

In Uruzgan, the key conflicts also revolved around inter- and intra-tribal power struggles. As in Helmand, many of those who had been deposed by the Taliban and then reinstated post-2001 resumed their predatory behavior and pursued their rivals in other tribes, in this case abetted at times by U.S. special forces in the guise of pursuing former Taliban officials as part of the "war on terror." Former governor Jan Mohammad Khan (killed in an attack on his residence in Kabul in July 2011), the main Popalzai representative in the province, took advantage of his *jihadi* commander networks, position as provincial governor, close personal relationship with President Karzai, and status as trusted partner of the U.S. in the "war on terror" to exert tight control over the province. He was adept at appointing his loyalists to serve in key positions such as district governors, police chiefs, other government officials, and as members of irregular armed groups. Much of this involved strengthening the Popalzai's position in the province. Many of his rivals were forced to leave the area after being targeted by local authorities or international forces (acting on the basis of "tips" received from local informants that they were either Taliban or involved in the narcotics trade). Or they simply became disgruntled that

they were marginalized and not brought into the government network or sought for advice, as people of their social standing would expect. Some groups (e.g., Ghilzai⁶⁷ elders) were in fact pro-government, until they were labeled as "Taliban." Often, targeted individuals were powerless to deal with their rivals, who were in positions of power. With no other avenue for redress, and in a culture that requires revenge to maintain personal honor, they considered joining the insurgency as their only option, both out of resentment and out of the need to defend themselves and their honor. According to one international official, "When JMK [Jan Mohammad Khan] was governor, he destabilized the Ghilzai to such an extent they had to go to the Taliban for security against the governor. There didn't use to be lots of Taliban—JMK is responsible for creating so many."⁶⁸

This illustrates the overlapping nature of the drivers of insecurity; while these abuses occurred along tribal lines, they were perpetrated by actors serving in government positions and thus are also examples of poor governance. As one respondent noted, "in the southern provinces the problem is between the tribes, not between the government and the Taliban. . . . The tribal problem was already there but the government turned it into a big problem."⁶⁹

In Paktia, both ethnic and tribal issues were cited as sources of insecurity. The perceived disempowerment of the Pashtuns in general and Paktia Province in particular in favor of other ethnic groups and areas, especially in the early days of the Karzai government, was given as a reason why people were not supporting the government. A similar grievance frequently expressed in interviews was the perceived lack of support for Paktia tribes such as the Zadran,

⁶⁵ Tribal Analysis Center, "The Quetta Shura: A Tribal Analysis" (Williamsburg, VA: Tribal Analysis Center, October 2009), p. 14. at <http://www.tribalanalysiscenter.com/PDF-TAC/Quetta%20Shura.pdf>. Cited in *Winning Hearts and Minds? Examining the Relationship between Aid and Security in Afghanistan's Helmand Province*, Stuart Gordon (Feinstein International Center, Tufts University, April 2011).

⁶⁶ The Helmand case study focused on the UK's stabilization program between 2006 and 2008, and therefore reflects the situation up to that time. Akhundzada served as governor from 2001 to 2005.

⁶⁷ Largest of the four Pashtun tribal confederations, the Ghilzai are primarily located in the east, and so are a minority in the south. Historically they been rivals of the Durrani confederation, of which Jan Mohammad Khan was a member.

⁶⁸ Interview with international civilian official, Tarin Kot, Uruzgan Province, January 31, 2010.

⁶⁹ Interview with Afghan employee of USAID contractor, Tarin Kot, Uruzgan Province, July 6, 2009.

which historically was the dominant local tribe and enjoyed a special relationship with Kabul. Another complaint in Paktia was about the lack of support for the *arbakai*,⁷⁰ which was considered emblematic of a broader marginalization of traditionally influential Pashtun tribes.

In Balkh, which is dominated by the predominantly Tajik Jamiat-i Islami political party, regionally headed by Governor Atta Mohammad Noor, ethnicity was cited as an issue, but in a very different way. The three insecure districts of the province are predominantly Pashtun, and while most respondents gave economic reasons for insecurity, the insurgency is still seen as essentially ethnic. Insurgents from southern Afghanistan are believed to be using ethnic, kinship, and smuggling networks to establish a presence in the north and win over sections of the population to their cause. Respondents also noted the perception that Pashtun communities, especially those that had returned from Pakistan, were generally more conservative and cited cases where they had become embroiled in disputes with their neighbors over social issues such as girls attending school. At the same time, many noted a widespread belief among Pashtuns as well as others that Pashtuns were being discriminated against both by other ethnic communities and by the authorities. Cases were cited where, due to ethnic bias, Pashtuns returning from Pakistan were obstructed by authorities in reclaiming their land. Such cases were seen to lead to alienation, with the dispossessed groups more open to anti-government activities. According to one international military official, “the Pashtun pockets—they feel somewhat left out of the government. They have ideological views, but mainly they are just frustrated with the government. They are often treated unfairly.”⁷¹

Some respondents attributed the relative lack of conflict in Balkh in part to the dominance exerted by Governor Atta,⁷² whose comprehensive control over the provincial administration and the security forces leaves little room for others to contest power—and hence less room for violence.⁷³

In Uzbek-majority Faryab, much of the history of conflict revolves around ethnicity. After 2001, many Pashtuns were forced out of the province, either to internally displaced person (IDP) camps or to Pakistan, in retaliation for harsh treatment towards Uzbeks and Tajiks during Taliban rule. Their return to their home areas in the province has caused tension, which is given added strength by asymmetric perceptions: Pashtuns claim that their areas are underserved, while non-Pashtuns believe that the Pashtuns are there due to a central government that is dominated by Pashtuns and therefore supports them. The Taliban are said to be exploiting these grievances, at least to get unhindered presence and mobility in the area, although sometimes bowing to the demand from locals that they not commit acts of violence there.

In Faryab, factional politics were also cited as an important driver of insecurity, although due to the high correlation between ethnicity and political parties, ethnicity and factional politics are intertwined and hard to separate. The dominant political party in Faryab is the predominantly Uzbek Jumbish-i Milli, led by General Abdul Rashid Dostum. The failure of the major post-2001 disarmament programs, Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) and Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG), to substantively weaken local commanders, as well as the perceived re-emerging threat of the Taliban, has resulted in militia leaders and commanders

⁷⁰ Tribal security forces. Although *arbakai* are indigenous to the southeastern Loya Paktia region (encompassing the provinces of Paktia, Paktika, and Khost), the term has been informally adopted to refer to irregular local militias in other parts of Afghanistan. The arming, organizing, and empowering of tribal groups as self-defense or counterinsurgency forces has been one of the more contentious policy issues in post-2001 Afghanistan, largely due to the negative experience of the early 1990s. The complaints heard in Paktia about the lack of support for the *arbakai* were in interviews conducted prior to the more recent policy of promoting the establishment of local militia forces, for the most part under the Afghan Local Police initiative.

⁷¹ Phone interview with international military official, Mazar-e Sharif, Balkh Province February 5, 2010.

⁷² See Dipali Mukhopadhyay, “Warlords as Bureaucrats: The Afghan Experience” (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, August 2009).

⁷³ In recent months, Mazar-e Sharif has experienced a number of violent events, including the April 1, 2011, demonstration and mob attack on the UNAMA compound in which at least twelve persons (seven foreigners and five Afghans) were killed, and the July 20, 2011, bicycle-mounted IED explosion in which four were killed.

having extensive caches of weapons. As a result, a local conflict over resources in Faryab can quickly escalate into a major security situation because protagonists are likely to be simultaneously tied in to overlapping ethnic and political networks supported by well-armed militias.

Perhaps ironically, the degrading of tribal cohesion has been a source of conflict, but also a limiting factor in resolving what might have previously been simple disputes. In Faryab, it was noted that elders can resolve local conflicts and limit Taliban incursions, but only if there is a robust, existent tribal structure and identity in the area, which is not always the case. Individuals competing for influence may exacerbate problems to serve their personal political agendas. In Helmand, the fragmentation of tribal power (which has historical roots in the settlement of different tribal and ethnic groups after Kajaki Dam was built and large swathes of new land irrigated in the Helmand Valley in the 1960s, and more recently due to factors such as the distortions caused by the narcotics industry) means that elders may compete for influence, with no clearly dominant person or group. In some cases, tribal groups can contain both pro- and anti-Taliban factions. In Ghormach District bordering Faryab and Badghis Provinces, lack of tribal cohesion was described as a driver of insecurity, some of which resulted from Taliban struggles for leadership or division of spoils. Both inter- and intra-tribal splits exist among both pro-government and pro-Taliban camps, many of which are based on personal or criminal competition.

4.3 Poverty and unemployment

In the two northern provinces of Balkh and Faryab, poverty and unemployment were overwhelmingly reported as the main causes of insecurity, with a dominant narrative being that the typical fighter joined the insurgency

primarily because of economic necessity. In Helmand, Paktia, and Uruzgan, poverty was not given as the most important driver of insecurity, although it was said to make people more vulnerable to other factors. Especially in the northern provinces, poverty and unemployment were typically described as being “an open door for the Taliban” in that unemployed men could be enlisted in insurgent groups. As one respondent stated, “Lack of jobs is the most important cause of insecurity. If young people don’t get jobs and can’t go to Iran [for work], what will they do?”⁷⁴ Another asserted, “those who can’t go—how can they survive? Some are tempted by bandits or insurgents and given \$100–500 to plant an IED [improvised explosive device]. They are not supporters of Taliban, but do it for the money.”⁷⁵ Many used the language of desperation, family responsibility, or honor, saying, “if a man has no other way to feed his family, then he will do anything.” As a tribal elder in Paktia put it, “if someone has six people at home to support and has no money, he has to support insurgents to get money. The motivation to join the Taliban is not religious or tribal or ethnic based but unemployment.”⁷⁶ In Balkh, the lack of compensation (in the form of development aid) anticipated as payment for eliminating opium poppy cultivation from 2007 was described as creating even more motivation for people to join the insurgency; “people are hungry and can either grow opium or join al Qaeda and the Taliban. We eliminated opium in Balkh, but we haven’t provided livelihoods support for the people.”⁷⁷

Even among those who didn’t completely accept the notion that poverty was the fundamental and direct driver of insecurity, many stated that it made people more susceptible to other factors. For instance, in Balkh, the migration of young men to the south to work on the poppy harvest was associated with turning towards anti-government groups. In Faryab, poor families in rural areas without schools were said to have no other option than to send their boys to

⁷⁴ Interview with NGO staff member, Maimana, Faryab Province, January 14, 2009.

⁷⁵ Interview with UN employee, Maimana, Faryab Province, January 14, 2009.

⁷⁶ Interview with tribal elder and district governor, Paktia Province, January 20, 2009.

⁷⁷ Interview with senior provincial official, Mazar-e Sharif, Balkh Province, January 2010. Balkh Province was declared “poppy-free” in 2007, a state that was attributed largely to the efforts of Governor Atta Mohammad Noor.

unregistered *madrassas* either within the province or in Pakistan, where they were at risk of becoming radicalized.

While poverty was frequently cited as an explanation for insecurity, some skepticism is warranted on the linear relationship given between poverty and joining the insurgency. While poverty is a widespread condition in Afghanistan, insurgency is less so. Also, that the role of unemployment was seen as much stronger in the north suggests that it may be more related to criminality in some areas. This issue is discussed further in Section 6 below.

4.4 International military forces

More than on any other factor, the insecure and secure provinces diverged in reported views on the role of the international military in creating insecurity. In the three insecure provinces, the behavior of the international military forces was reported to be an important source and driver of insecurity. The lists of objectionable behaviors were consistent: civilian casualties, night raids, house searches, population displacement, destruction of infrastructure, and aggressive behavior. Many of these were summed up, especially in Paktia, as a disrespect for Afghan culture, religion, and traditions. As a former Taliban commander and deputy of an Islamic party said, “the mistakes of the Coalition are why aid projects have no security benefit. When they bomb, kill innocent civilians, use dogs to search our houses and women, and even harm women and children, how can they expect people to support them?”⁷⁸ As a Western-educated businessman and former provincial governor noted, “people are slowly but surely coming to the conclusion that they are an occupied country. As a result of the bombings, house searches, being bitten by dogs, people are thinking that the U.S. is worse than the

Soviets.”⁷⁹ In Uruzgan, as noted above, the targeting of “Taliban” by international forces who were unknowingly manipulated by local elders into settling scores with tribal rivals was cited as contributing to the dissatisfaction with the international military; i.e., “people use international and national forces to pursue personal and tribal grievances.”⁸⁰ Arrests and raids have also resulted in the flight of influential elders, which has had the further negative effect of weakening the social fabric—and leading to further insecurity.

While in the two urban areas of Helmand, Lashkar Gah, and Gerishk, respondents were not quite as negative about the international forces as they were in areas of the province seeing much more military activity, the overwhelming majority of respondents reported that ISAF’s presence had made the security situation worse. In Uruzgan, in some cases even having contacts with Coalition forces reportedly caused insecurity. While the Dutch were given relatively high marks for their interactions, several Afghan interviewees noted that the more-aggressive operations of U.S. and Australian special forces, especially night raids, were considered problematic. In and around Tarin Kot, Afghans distinguished between the Dutch “soft-knock” approach and the Australian more aggressive one.

In the two more-secure provinces, Balkh and Faryab, the international military forces were not reported to be the de-stabilizing factor they were in the insecure ones. In Faryab, respondents were generally positive about the PRT, due to its culturally sensitive interactions with communities, the absence of civilian casualties, and resources that had been brought to the province.⁸¹ In Balkh, there was less of an “allergic reaction” towards military actors and more of a willingness to engage with them. No

⁷⁸ Interview with former Taliban commander and deputy of an Islamic political party, Paktia Province, January 5, 2009.

⁷⁹ Interview with former provincial governor, Kabul, January 5, 2009.

⁸⁰ Interview with Afghan UN official, Tarin Kot, Uruzgan Province, July 6, 2009.

⁸¹ According to research by Christian Michelsen Institute, trust in ISAF decreased significantly between 2006 and 2009, although this referred to ISAF in general and not just the local (Norwegian) forces. See Arne Strand and Organisation for Sustainable Development and Research (OSDR), “Faryab Survey: Comparison of Findings from Maymaneh 2006 and 2009” (Bergen, Norway: Christian Michelsen Institute, 2009), p. 4. Public opinion polls have consistently shown that the Afghan population supports the presence of international forces. This should, however, be put in the context of “compared with what,” as it may reflect not so much a fondness for international forces as the fear that their withdrawal will lead to a situation similar to the civil war of 1992–6. In general, polling data on the population’s view of the international military should be looked at carefully.

doubt this pragmatism about engaging with the military was conditioned by a context in which few insurgents and little armed conflict existed. As noted by a former Afghan military officer, “If the area is peaceful, then the people will welcome the PRTs. If the area is insecure, then people will be afraid.”⁸² Similarly, an Afghan NGO official noted that “north and south are different. In the north, people are not seen by the military as enemies. There have been no civilian casualties, so relations are better.”⁸³

Even in Balkh, however, while respondents generally did not ascribe insecurity to the international military forces, there were several exceptions. First, aggressive and uncoordinated activities of U.S. military and Special Forces were described as creating problems, an issue that was mentioned by (non-U.S.) military personnel as well as Afghan respondents.⁸⁴ CIMIC personnel described working with communities over a period of months to build confidence, only to have it undermined overnight by a military operation they had no prior information about. Second, payments made by the military to *maleks* (local leaders) were seen as de-stabilizing in the long term: while they might achieve a short-term aim, they could decrease stability by creating jealousy and providing perverse incentives for others to demand the same sort of payments. Third, road blockages and closures due to patrols and other movements of forces were reported as creating ill will. The influence of the effect of international military forces on community perceptions is discussed in greater detail below.

4.5 Religious extremism

The way in which respondents directly or indirectly connected religious and ideological issues with insecurity varied, and in many cases their responses seemed to conflate religious and

moral principles as well as the groups representing them.

First, religion and ideology were said to play a role in mobilizing young men to act against the government and international forces and therefore in legitimizing violence. In Helmand this was largely seen to be done indirectly because it legitimized other, existing grievances such as alienation from the corrupt government and anger at the actions of international forces. This is not surprising, as complaints about the administrative and moral corruption of the government and its supporters were often put in terms of religious principles. It was not always clear where the sense of injustice ended and the reference to religious issues began, as in Afghanistan the sense of justice is informed by and closely linked with religious principles. Many of these principles related to the notion of injustice. (See Box 3.)

Second, religion was connected with insecurity in that the Taliban were seen to be acting in the name of religion. Respondents varied in the degree to which they gave legitimacy to the Taliban’s connection with religion or instead saw it as simply being instrumentalized by them; many respondents accused the Taliban themselves of being un-Islamic, primarily because they embrace violence against civilians, and not necessarily due to their attacks on the state or the international forces.

Third, more extremist religious views were associated with insecurity in terms of conflict with neighbors. As noted above, a number of Pashtun communities had returned to Balkh and Faryab from Pakistan or from IDP camps in the south; these communities were generally viewed as more conservative and dogmatic, and conflicts would therefore arise with neighbors over social norms (e.g., girls’ education). This dimension of

⁸² Interview with former Afghan senior military official, Mazar-e Sharif, Balkh Province, March 19, 2009.

⁸³ Interview with Afghan provincial head of national NGO, Mazar-e Sharif, Balkh Province, April 8, 2009. Also, as noted in the methodology section, since the fieldwork was conducted, the security dynamics in the north have changed. For instance, there has been an increase in night raids, which have the potential to change perceptions of the international military to those more similar to the other study areas.

⁸⁴ The confounding of the U.S. with other Western forces by some Afghan respondents is problematic. As the Americans are perceived to be more aggressive, there may often be an assumption that any aggressive acts are done by the U.S. forces. On the other hand, the Americans are also perceived to have more money, so it may be assumed that any big spending is by the Americans.

insecurity obviously differs from attacks against the international military forces or the government. Government and international staff also expressed concern about the political influence that might be exerted by a new generation of religious leaders educated in Pakistan, as increasingly extreme sermons delivered by these leaders consistently stressed the corrupt (and un-Islamic) character of the government and were even anti-government.

It should be noted that if interviews had been held in less secure areas more weight would likely have been given to religious issues. Also, analogous to what was noted in the discussion of poverty above, one could cite religious objections to the state yet still not commit violent acts.

4.6 Conflict over scarce resources

In all provinces, local conflicts over scarce resources (land, water, etc.) were described as creating insecurity. Here again, however, the often-overlapping nature of factors meant that what might otherwise have been simple disputes could escalate into more complex and violent situations. For example, weak institutions and corrupt officials often alienated losing claimants, and rival claimants frequently stood on either side of ethnic and political divides. Numerous cases were cited of land being under dispute from people returning from Pakistan or IDP camps, and where rival claimants had competing (bogus) documents. As noted above, in Balkh, a number of ethnically-tinged cases were reported where Pashtun refugees or IDPs had returned to their home areas but were unable to reclaim their

BOX 3: Injustice

One theme that cut across numerous thematic areas was injustice and *zulm* (cruelty) perpetrated by people or groups with power, primarily those within or allied with the state. Respondents cited specific grievances such inequitable distribution of employment, contracts, and aid; illegal seizures of land and other property; increased economic inequality; and inequitable access to justice depending on one's *wasita* (connections) or ability to pay bribes. Yet, all of these were simply examples of the broader theme of injustice.

Generally, grievances included the strong sense that in post-2001 Afghanistan some people and groups had grown very wealthy at the expense of others, and that the nexus of corrupt government officials, powerful political leaders, and scheming businessmen (i.e., Kabul Bank, *jihadi* leaders) enjoyed apparent immunity. This was especially notable in discussions of the introduction of the market economy; it was described as contributing to injustice by allowing corrupt and powerful figures to control and manipulate the economy at the expense of common people. Officials were said to be directly implicated either through taking bribes or through their linkages with businessmen and traders. Notably, one of the few aid programs positively described by respondents was the NSP, which employs a specific formula for the equitable sharing of benefits across communities.

In Afghanistan, the notion of justice is informed by and closely linked with religious principles, and so the sense of a lack of justice was often framed in religious terms. While the concentration of political and economic power might be described in the West as "elite capture," Afghan respondents described it in terms of injustice. Therefore, many of the comments about corruption and poor governance was expressed in terms of an un-Islamic or unjust distribution of benefits, which is one of the main themes of Taliban propaganda

Box 3 continues on next page

emphasizing the illegitimacy of the state and its leaders. The accusation that the state had failed to play a positive role in social welfare or to at least temper the worst excesses of powerful groups and individuals reinforced this theme.

As discussed in Section 4.8 below, insurgents have been adept at taking advantage of this sense of injustice, in part because often people have nowhere else to turn but also because the Taliban were associated with sweeping out rapacious commanders and warlords in the 1990s.

land. At the same time, cases were reported of returning Pashtuns being given the land of others by government officials. In Uruzgan, conflicts over land and water were frequently cited as important sources of insecurity. These were typically set off by a land grab or the digging of new irrigation channels without going through traditional community consensus processes. As elsewhere, these conflicts could quickly escalate into ethnic or tribal conflict.⁸⁵

4.7 Pakistan and the other “neighbors”

The geopolitical policies of Pakistan and other “near neighbors” were cited as important drivers of conflict. As one government official noted, “although part of the problem is internal—tribes—the problem is also external—Pakistan. The closer you get to Pakistan the more insecurity there is. We will continue to have conflict as long as our neighbors continue to interfere.”⁸⁶ The interference was seen as taking different forms. The most commonly-cited was military, logistical, and political support (e.g., safe havens) being offered by elements in Pakistan and, to a lesser extent, by other regional neighbors in backing factions that were contesting political power. In Paktia, Iran was frequently cited in part due to the perception that it was supporting the Dari press at the expense of Pashtu, and was supporting Hazaras politically and economically. According to one respondent critical of both near neighbors,

*there are lots of publications, TV serials and dramas, music that all have Iranian influence. It is intended to create problems between Shias and Sunnis. Pakistan is the second problem. Pakistan is using illiterate people, and trains them and sends them here to implement their plans against the Afghan government and the international community. Pakistan doesn't want this country to develop and for people to become educated. What we want is for our government to have a foreign policy that encourages Iran and Pakistan that our development is their development, what is good for us is good for them.*⁸⁷

Both Pakistan and Iran were also accused of having a destructive economic agenda manifest primarily through predatory pricing of imports such as cement to undercut Afghan production, tariffs on Afghan products, and the establishment of “beachhead” economic activities within Afghanistan. The usurpation of Afghanistan’s water resources, the sending of unfinished carpets to Pakistan where they were finished and sent abroad as Pakistani products, and the smuggling of semi-precious stones to Pakistan for polishing and other value-adding processing activities were also seen as evidence of the destructive anti-Afghan economic agenda.

The radical religious agenda was also attributed to Pakistan, either due to *madrassas* imparting conservative, alien ideas and radicalization (e.g., “Pakistani-style preachers”) or due to the enlistment of religious ideas and personalities by the Pakistani security establishment.

⁸⁵ Elsewhere in Afghanistan the competition between sedentary farmers and *kochi* (nomad) pastoralists over use of rangeland and pastures results in annual outbreaks of violence that have to be quelled by Kabul. Because the farmers are Hazara and the *kochis* are Pashtun, the conflict has acquired a sharp ethnic edge. See Liz Alden Wily, “Rural Land Relations in Conflict: A Way Forward,” Briefing Paper (Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, August 2004). More recently, see Fabrizio Foschini, “The Kuchi-Hazara Conflict, Again” (Afghanistan Analysts Network, May 27, 2010), <http://aan-afghanistan.com/index.asp?id=764>.

⁸⁶ Interview with provincial head of line ministry, Uruzgan Province, July 5, 2009.

⁸⁷ Interview with former Taliban commander and deputy of an Islamic political party, Paktia Province, January 6, 2009.

The playing out of global politics within Afghanistan's borders (e.g., the conflict between the U.S. and Iran) was also seen as undermining security. All of this was described in the context of historical distrust, especially of Pakistan:

Most security problems are caused by groups backed by the ISI/Pakistan (e.g., Haqqani). They use the failures of the government and the international community to gain support—the mistakes they are making cause people to support Haqqani. . . . Afghanistan is at a very important and sensitive time in its history. For three decades neighboring countries have tried to destroy Afghanistan. Russia thinks the north should be under its influence. Iran wants influence in Dari speaking areas. Pakistan has the Durand line issue.⁸⁸

For those respondents who had either been sympathetic to the Afghan government during the *jihad* years or who had later come to regret the destruction visited on Afghanistan by the *jihadi* factions, Pakistan was seen as simply continuing its agenda of weakening Afghanistan for Pakistan's own political aims. As a group of tribal elders in Paktia put it, "it's not Afghans who don't want schools and roads. It's our main enemies—Pakistan is sending people to stop reconstruction from happening. What can we do?"⁸⁹

Additional drivers of insecurity identified by interviewees included narcotics and criminality. Many respondents described a symbiotic relationship between insurgents and criminals; while criminal elements used ethnic ties to further their enterprises, Taliban elements supported criminals in order to contribute to general instability. In addition, commanders' continued abusive criminal activities (e.g., illegal taxation, extortion) as well as the sometimes-violent spillover from rivalries between commanders has created resentment from communities. Again, these factors overlap and interact with the factors discussed previously.

4.8 Opportunities for insurgents to exploit grievances

With respect to many of the above drivers of insecurity (especially corruption and poor governance, tribal conflict, competition for scarce resources, and counter-narcotics), insurgents are said to have been adept at taking advantage of grievances to draw marginalized and already alienated groups away from supporting the government and its international backers and offering them support and protection against the abuses. A common theme among respondents was that the growing strength of the insurgency was due not so much to its appeal, but rather to the disillusionment and alienation resulting from government officials' cruelty and avariciousness; i.e., to "push" rather than "pull" factors. A common formulation was that it wasn't that the Taliban were winning, but that the government was losing. In all five provinces, respondents described how those who were oppressed by the powerful had to seek protection offered by the Taliban in the face of uneven poppy eradication, unjust court rulings, confiscation of contested land and other resources, and general harassment. For instance, in Helmand, the Taliban were able to appeal to those who had lost land with the message that only under a Taliban regime would they be able to reclaim their rights. Similarly, they were able to exploit dissatisfaction with the poppy eradication program that disproportionately targeted fields belonging to Noorzai and Ishakzai while largely ignoring those connected with Sher Mohammad Akhundzada. In Faryab, the speculation is that insurgent groups have strategically "branded" themselves as related to the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, an Uzbekistan-based militant organization, rather than Taliban so as to be acceptable to communities that would be unwilling to support a Pashtun-dominated movement. To some extent, the Taliban's ability to convince communities that they would be better off with them derives from their original role in the 1990s of sweeping out rapacious local

⁸⁸ Interview with head of tribal *shura*, Paktia Province, January 5, 2009.

⁸⁹ Interview with tribal elders, Gardez, Paktia Province, January 9, 2009.



Graves and houses, Balkh

commanders and warlords; in that sense, they may be seen as once again picking up the cause of justice. In Uruzgan, the resurgence of the Taliban was facilitated by the many important Taliban leaders who were from the province or had lived there—when the Taliban began to be targeted by the local administration and the international military forces, reviving a network of commanders in response was easy. Reflecting the complexity of the situation, in some cases, local strongmen would join the Taliban to keep other Taliban groups out.

In sum, respondents described a range of factors that contributed to insecurity, including corruption and poor governance; ethnic, tribal, and factional conflict; poverty and unemployment; behavior of international forces; extremist religious ideology; conflict over scarce resources; and regional neighbors. While similar

factors were cited in all five provinces, the weight given to each varied somewhat between the insecure and secure areas. The main differences were that economic issues were given more importance in secure areas, while corruption and bad governance and the behavior of international forces were given more importance in insecure areas. Due to the often-complex, interrelated, and overlapping nature of these factors, isolating the strength and influence of each in creating insecurity was difficult. This in turn suggested that stabilization projects that focused on only one or two drivers of conflict (e.g., unemployment) would find it difficult to play an effective role in mitigating or resolving most conflicts.

5. PERCEPTIONS OF AID PROJECTS

Photo by U.S. Air Force 1st Lt. Cale Reeves, Paktya Provincial Reconstruction Team



Construction of clinic, Paktya

One of the most powerful assumptions underpinning the belief in the stabilizing effects of aid projects is that these projects are popular and contribute to winning the support—or “hearts and minds”—of local communities. Initially, the intent in Afghanistan was to use aid projects for “force protection,” gaining the consent and support of local populations for the presence of foreign troops. As broader counterinsurgency objectives began to take hold, however, the objective shifted much more explicitly to using reconstruction and development aid to win the support of the population away from insurgents and for the government. The study therefore tried to look at whether and how aid projects addressed the drivers of insecurity identified by respondents, as discussed in the previous section.

The research found that, rather than generating good will and positive perceptions of international military forces, development actors, or the Afghan government, aid and development projects were consistently negatively described by Afghans. The nearly universal stated perception was that aid

projects, whether implemented by military forces, aid agencies, or the government, were performing poorly. Indeed, the consistently negative views voiced by Afghan interviewees about aid projects and implementers suggest that projects are not winning people over to the government side. Perceptions of the misuse and abuse of aid were fueling growing distrust of the government, creating enemies, or at least generating skepticism regarding the role of the government and aid agencies.

As noted in the methodology section above, given the natural human tendency to focus on what one did not get rather than what one did, a perceptions-based study is likely to paint a more negative picture of development assistance than may be warranted. But given the strong assumption that aid wins hearts and minds and leads to more positive perceptions, highlighting the overall extremely negative perceptions that Afghans expressed—fairly or not—about aid efforts is important.

While respondents' expressed perceptions varied somewhat, some clear patterns and areas of agreement emerged among aid agency staff, communities, and government officials, as well as between Afghan and international respondents. The chief complaints were that projects were insufficient, both in terms of quantity (not enough) and of quality (wrong kind or poorly implemented); unevenly distributed geographically, politically, and socially; and, above all, associated with extensive corruption, especially those with multiple levels of subcontracting.

5.1 “Nothing, or not enough, was done”

A consistent refrain in all five provinces was that “nothing had been done.” While many respondents acknowledged some accomplishments, most said that these were very small relative to the need. A typical response was, “Yes, people see that something has been done, but. . . .” Respondents often referred to the “large amounts” of international aid that had either been promised or was said to have been delivered, and said that they could not reconcile those large amounts with the limited evidence on the ground. There was overlap between the complaint that nothing had been done and the complaints about corruption and the wrong types of projects, as discussed below.

These complaints were often made while surrounded by evidence that much had in fact been done. One researcher related being told by Afghan colleagues that nothing had been done, as they traveled on a newly paved road, passing new clinics, schools, and district centers, all the while talking on a mobile phone. The aid community in Afghanistan generally agrees that, especially in the first few years after 2001, expectations were raised unrealistically high by the public relations and communications strategies of most national and international institutions. Their default position was to use international and national media outlets to highlight all the positive things being done, the generous donor contributions, the “success

stories,” the ribbon-cutting ceremonies, etc. This generated significant cognitive dissonance between what Afghans heard over the Dari and Pashtu airwaves about what was being given to them and done for them and the tangible results they actually saw on the ground. Few efforts were made to communicate to Afghans the enormous challenges and time needed to make significant progress in rebuilding a country that was among the poorest in the world, even before it was devastated by three decades of conflict. Challenges were underplayed and glossed over because they might undercut the “good news” narrative.⁹⁰ Communications strategies that raised rather than lowered expectations help explain why, despite newly paved roads, schools, and clinics, extensive cell phone networks, a vibrant media, etc.—none of which existed when the Taliban regime was removed from power in the fall of 2001—Afghans frequently express the view that “nothing has been done.” As one NSP Community Development Council (CDC) treasurer in Balkh put it, “a clinic is OK, but they don’t give much medicine. People in Afghanistan will always say that you didn’t give us anything.”⁹¹

5.2 Inequitable distribution: “They got more than we did”

Another consistent and related refrain was that aid had been inequitably distributed. Many Afghan respondents complained that other regions, ethnic groups, tribes, villages, or individuals had received more than their fair share of aid resources. This complaint was often expressed as a general statement, but often meant simply that others had received more. The only consistent allegation was that the respondent had not received a fair share.

Respondents in Balkh and Faryab complained that their relatively secure provinces had incurred a “peace penalty” by virtue of having little conflict, and therefore donor resources had been programmed in other, less-secure areas. In Faryab, respondents in communities close to the insecure areas receiving aid (e.g., Ghormach

⁹⁰ For discussion of the dysfunctional effects of the aid dynamic, see Astri Suhrke, “When More is Less: Aiding Statebuilding in Afghanistan,” FRIDE Working Paper (September 2006).

⁹¹ Interview with CDC treasurer, Khulm District, Balkh Province, June 10, 2009. See below for discussion of CDCs and the National Solidarity Program.

District, which was the focus of development initiatives with stabilization objectives) were especially vocal in complaining. Many in the north expressed dissatisfaction that violent places were getting the bulk of the assistance, and that this funding imbalance was setting up perverse incentives. As one group of elders in Balkh noted, “We see the situation in Khost, where there is lots of aid, and wonder if we should try to attract that with *tak o took* [a bit of noise].”⁹² An additional grievance was voiced in Balkh, where the cultivation of opium poppy had been suppressed⁹³ but promised compensation in the form of aid projects had not materialized.

Because most development funding is going to Pashtun areas in southern and eastern Afghanistan, the sense of regional deprivation overlapped with an ethnic one. Non-Pashtun respondents in the north attributed this to a pro-Pashtun bias of the central government, whereas in reality it had more to do with the prioritization of insurgency-affected areas by major donors like the U.S. Even in the three insecure provinces, respondents’ complaints about the inequitable allocation of aid were primarily on an ethnic or tribal basis. For instance, the ethnic Hazara areas of Uruzgan were essentially ignored, as they had fewer insurgents, which led a group of Hazara elders from Gizab District⁹⁴ to visit Tarin Kot to ask the provincial governor to pay more attention to their areas.

Of course, that a high percentage of aid was spent in the south and east did not keep people in those areas from complaining that they too had been left out. As one respondent in southeastern Paktia noted, “I’m happy that

there have been some projects in the north of the country, but nothing has been done in the south.”⁹⁵ Or, as one respondent noted in a factually incorrect statement, “the PRTs are there, but the amount of aid is less than in the north and west.”⁹⁶

Of course, an objective basis underlies some of the complaints that “they got more than we did.” While the variety of sources and differing levels of disclosure make measuring volumes of aid extremely difficult, according to USAID’s own figures, 77 percent of its resources in 2009–10 were spent in the insecure areas of the south, southwest, and east, with a planned increase to 81 percent in fiscal year 2011.⁹⁷ It should be noted that this does not include military funding. If military funding is also included, the imbalance is even more notable.⁹⁸

While in many cases, the complaint that an area has been neglected had a ring of truth, in many other cases, no matter how much had been done, other areas, communities, and households were inevitably perceived to have received more—even when it was not objectively true. This mentality is exacerbated by an environment in which resources are especially scarce (and contested) and misleading information abundant. Civilian and military agencies with development funds at their disposal “to win hearts and minds” often failed to adequately recognize that in a zero-sum political environment such as Afghanistan any one individual’s or group’s gain is often perceived to be at the expense of another; in such an environment, providing development aid in a way that is perceived to be equitable and just and that generates public support is very difficult.

⁹² Interview with village elders, Sholgara District, Balkh Province, June 3, 2009.

⁹³ As noted above, Balkh Province was declared “poppy-free” in 2007, attributed largely to the efforts of Governor Atta Mohammad Noor.

⁹⁴ Originally part of Uruzgan, mixed ethnicity Gizab District became part of Dai Kundi Province when it was created in 2004, then was re-attached to Uruzgan in 2007.

⁹⁵ Interview with head of tribal *shura*, Paktia Province, January 5, 2009.

⁹⁶ Interview with businessman from Paktia, Kabul, January 5, 2009.

⁹⁷ Majority Staff, Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, “Evaluating U.S. Foreign Assistance to Afghanistan,” (Washington, DC, June 8, 2011), <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/congress/index.html>.

⁹⁸ According to the Center for Global Development, only 18 percent of U.S. reconstruction funds have come through USAID, while more than 60 percent have come through DOD. As DOD efforts are more focused on the insecure areas, this would greatly increase the proportion of spending that takes place in those areas. See Gregory Johnson, Vijaya Ramachandram, and Julie Walz, “The Commanders Emergency Response Program in Afghanistan: Refining U.S. Military Capabilities in Stability and In-Conflict Development Activities,” *Working Paper 265* (Center for Global Development, September 2011), p. 7.



Cash for work project, Balkh

5.3 Corruption

Another persistent complaint, voiced by virtually all respondents, was of widespread and pervasive corruption in the implementation of aid projects. Responses on corruption were intimately linked with the narratives on insufficiency or on how others got more, as the misallocation of aid resources was seen to be largely the result of the capture of aid by powerful or elite groups, especially high government officials. Not surprisingly, corruption was also linked with expressed perceptions related to ethnic and tribal bias, as discussed above. The corruption in the aid system was described as part of a broader polluted political system, the same system that kept in power unresponsive and corrupt government officials and predatory police. It was also described as one reason why “nothing has been done.”

The narrative of elite capture of aid resources was strong in all five provinces. In Helmand, aid was seen as going to the grouping of tribes (Barakzai, Popalzai, Achakzai, and Alikozai) who had come out on top in the post-2001 carve-up of political power in the province. References were also made to the introduction of the market economy, which was seen as empowering those same individuals and groups holding the reins of power. What was presented by the international community as promoting free market dynamism was often perceived by Afghans as another unjust way in which the powerful and corrupt were strengthened at the expense of the public.

As noted above, respondents expressed difficulty in reconciling the rhetoric they heard in the media about levels of investment and international assistance with their own experiences. They saw people around them

getting rich on perceived ill-gotten gains, which encouraged cynicism about aid projects. A very typical response was,

For the last seven or eight years we've been hearing announcements on national television and radio from donors and government representatives promising more aid and quoting large sums of money to be spent in Afghanistan, but how much of this has actually reached the people? Most of it is lost through corruption in the government. What is left is too little to really improve our lives.⁹⁹

The construction sector was generally described as the most corrupt, and evidence exists that in some places it has become highly criminalized. In Uruzgan, construction and related security services were described as going overwhelmingly to the Popalzai tribe in general, and the late Jan Mohammad Khan and his nephew Matiullah Khan in particular. In Paktia, Governor Juma Khan Hamdard, a Pashtun from Balkh Province with links to Hezb-i Islami (Gulbuddin Hekmatayar), was widely viewed as benefiting from aid contracts, either directly through contracts to his personal or family members' firms, or by getting a percentage from the contracts awarded to other firms. In Balkh, there were fewer open complaints about specific groups, but the assumption was widespread that any significant project or development in the province had to be "coordinated" with the people in Governor Atta's office. In Faryab, aid was seen as going to those who were allied with General Dostum's political party, Jumbish. In Faryab, emergency distributions and cash-for-work or food-for-work projects were criticized for being the most prone to corruption, due to their nature (rural, quickly designed and delivered, and relying on middlemen), but perhaps also because there were fewer large-scale construction projects than in the southern and eastern provinces.

The most often-cited specific complaint was about multiple-level subcontracting, considered to be a corrupt practice that led to inflated costs, use of sub-standard materials, and low-quality work. Large, well-connected companies were

said to obtain large contracts, which were then progressively sold down the line to smaller, less well-connected firms, with a percentage skimmed off at each level. Organizations lower down the "food chain" had no choice but to do low-quality work or else to pass a project on to someone else, who would likely do even lower-quality work. The reduced financial resources left at the bottom of the chain forced the final contractors, even those with good intentions, to economize on materials and process; e.g., using less cement and more sand, rushing a process even when weather may not be appropriate, or using sub-standard components or material. Sub-contracting is a common and well-understood phenomenon among international organizations, but was described as a legalized form of corruption by virtually all Afghan respondents, which is consistent with the national-level narrative on the form that corruption takes in Afghanistan. In fact, the evidence is substantial that contract "flipping" has gone beyond what is considered acceptable.¹⁰⁰

While the overall international aid effort was described as corrupt, and a few respondents said that the international community and donors were the most corrupt, most specific accusations of corruption were leveled at Afghans. A number of Afghan respondents noted that the work directly done by PRTs tended to be of higher quality and with less corruption because PRTs had the personnel and logistical and security capacity to monitor the implementation of the projects they funded more carefully than many other donor-funded projects. Allegations of corruption were frequently aimed at the Afghan engineers at the PRT, or at Afghan PRT interpreters, who were accused of having their own construction companies to which they could steer PRT business as well as block access of their rivals in a process that was regarded as highly opaque. A number of former interpreters for the international military had formed their own "NGOs," which in reality were contracting firms, as they had good access to those at the bases who were managing contracts. In Helmand and Paktia, respondents made a much more extensive set of accusations revolving around the

⁹⁹ Interview with community member in Khwoja Sabz Posh, Faryab Province, June 9, 2009.

¹⁰⁰ Majority Staff, Foreign Relations Committee, United States Senate.

role of PRT interpreters, the existence of fake companies, collusion among construction companies to raise prices, and payments for security to militias linked with criminal groups.¹⁰¹ In Helmand, respondents were also more convinced of the complicity of foreigners within the PRT; as one Afghan line ministry respondent noted, “either they are stupid or they are part of the deal.”¹⁰² Likewise, in Paktia, a former high official said, “some PRT commanders were wonderful, but others were thieves. They made deals with contractors and got kickbacks.”¹⁰³ Regardless of who was seen as most compromised, the system itself was seen as highly corrupt. One possible factor contributing to respondents’ emphasis on Afghan corruption is that in insecure provinces, fewer foreigners were directly involved in implementing aid programs. Furthermore, the political and economic impact of corruption on local power dynamics was much more visible and was felt more directly when the perceived beneficiaries of corruption were Afghans.¹⁰⁴

In sum, the widespread expressed perception of respondents was that everything valuable (employment, contracts, legal judgments) was done on the basis of bribes or *wasita* rather than on merit. Other than some respondents in the aid agencies, very few distinguished between NGOs and contractors in this regard. As one Afghan UN official complained, “Employment is all done on the basis of who knows whom, *wasita*. Masters degree holders are selling [mobile phone] top-up cards by the side of the road, while illiterates have responsibilities in high positions.”¹⁰⁵ As an Afghan provincial head of a national NGO put it, “under the current conditions, people believe that the purpose of aid is personal enrichment.”¹⁰⁶ A

common complaint was about “briefcase” NGOs, formed solely to take advantage of aid money; they were described as lacking motivation, substance, and capacity, and as often disappearing at the end of a project (or before). As one Afghan contractor noted, “people in power don’t know how long they’ll be in power so they try to take as much as possible while they can.”¹⁰⁷

5.4 “Wrong kind” of projects

Most respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the kinds of projects that had been implemented, saying that they were not addressing Afghanistan’s fundamental problems such as unemployment. Respondents expressed the desire for large-scale, visible, infrastructure projects, largely for two sets of reasons. First, such substantial projects were seen as symbolic of development and the promise of a future, in part because historically this was what development was about in Afghanistan.¹⁰⁸ For many Afghans, the glaring lack of such projects signified that the international community was not investing to create sustainable economic growth for the future. Some respondents complained that too much money was going to small-scale projects that the Afghans could do themselves, but that projects in which the international community had a comparative advantage (large-scale infrastructure) were being neglected.

Second, because, as described in Section 4.1, unemployment was seen to cause insecurity, the lack of large and visible employment-creating projects (e.g., factories, major irrigation schemes) was seen as a major aid failure. In all five provinces, but especially in Balkh Province, respondents consistently expressed the need for

¹⁰¹ For a description of how this operates in other areas of Afghanistan, see Aram Roston, “How the U.S. funds the Taliban,” *The Nation*, November 11, 2009, www.thenation.com/doc/20091130/roston.

¹⁰² Gordon, *Winning Hearts and Minds?*, p. 45.

¹⁰³ Interview with former governor, Paktia Province, January 5, 2009.

¹⁰⁴ Since the time of the field research, a number of U.S. citizens have been prosecuted in U.S. courts for paying bribes to PRT staff to win contracts. See “Former U.S. Army Staff Sergeant Sentenced to 90 Months in Prison for Bribery in Afghanistan Fuel Theft Scheme,” U.S. Department of Justice press release, www.justice.gov/opa/pr/2011/January/11-crm-021.html.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Afghan official in UN agency, Mazar-e Sharif, Balkh Province, March 22, 2009.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Afghan provincial head of national NGO, Mazar-e Sharif, Balkh Province, April 8, 2009.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with head of Afghan contractor, Tarin Kot, Uruzgan Province, July 7, 2009.

¹⁰⁸ According to a review of USAID assistance during the cold war period, “for most Afghan officials ‘progress was construction,’ best measured by the level of foreign aid commitments for construction of physical facilities.” DEVRES, “Retrospective Review of U.S. Assistance to Afghanistan: 1950–1979,” (submitted to USAID, September 30, 1988).

“economic projects” that created jobs and built physical infrastructure (e.g., factories, hospitals, airports, large dams). In Balkh and Faryab, many respondents complained that local natural resources (e.g., natural gas, sulfur) had the potential to create jobs and wealth, but were not being developed. This was described as part of the “peace penalty” described above. As a tribal leader in Paktia said, “much of the work that is done is not appropriate. We need energy but agencies instead build a small road or canal. . . . We have gas and coal that aren’t used, we could build factories and employ people. Then there wouldn’t be a security problem.”¹⁰⁹ Respondents in Balkh drew comparisons between the raisin-cleaning factories of the old days¹¹⁰ and the wedding halls of the current era; the inference was that previously the society (and the government) did constructive things, while at present it was all about personal consumption.

One specific genre of complaint, especially in the north, was the perceived lack of attention paid to rehabilitating Afghanistan’s pre-1978 industrial infrastructure. Many Afghans believed that, post-2001, the government would resume where it had left off in 1978 as the major actor in the economy. This would include rehabilitating the previous symbols of modernization (e.g., the Kod-e Barq industrial complex, Helmand-Arghandab irrigation system, Spinzar cotton company) through which mass employment would be created. The lack of direct government involvement has been largely due to the introduction of the market economy and the lack of resources at the disposal of the government to take on such initiatives. However, some Afghan respondents went further and said that either the U.S. was intentionally neglecting Soviet-built projects so that Russia is not seen in a positive light, or else that the West is intentionally keeping Afghanistan poor and backward. In fact, respondents in all five provinces lamented the nature of current projects in contrast to the types of projects that the Soviets and Americans used to do:

*People don’t understand why current projects are so small. The Kajaki dam for example back then, as well as now, costs a lot of money, but these days the Americans are doing all these small projects. Have they become poor? There is a need for larger-scale infrastructure projects, such as dams that provide energy through hydro power. This electricity can then power machinery etc. and improve production and increase employment, but instead solar panels are distributed that provide just enough power for televisions, where people can see dancing and singing, but this isn’t going to fill their stomachs.*¹¹¹

Views of cash-for-work and food-for-work projects varied. In Balkh, cash-for-work projects were generally described in a positive way, as providing income and creating some sort of dignity. International aid workers noted the additional virtues of being flexible, relatively quickly achievable, and do-able at scale, even if not sustainable. In Faryab, however, such projects were seen as the most corrupt type of project, perhaps because the government had implemented most cash-for-work projects and had used them for political ends. Also, given the short timeframes in which these projects often had to be completed, donors relied heavily on middlemen to identify beneficiaries and distribute payments, which easily led to accusations of corruption. In Helmand and Uruzgan, cash for work was considered a short-term stopgap measure that was also very divisive, as some tribes were viewed as having benefited more than others.

5.5 Poorly implemented (low quality)

In all five provinces, aid was universally described as fragmented, lacking coherence, and generally poorly implemented. This was ascribed in part to elite capture and corruption described above, but also to the lack of local knowledge and to aid actors pursuing their own individual or institutional interests rather than what was programmatically sound.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with head of tribal *shura*, Paktia Province, January 5, 2009.

¹¹⁰ During the 1960s and 1970s, exports of raisins from Afghanistan made up 60 percent of the global market. For many Afghans, the dominance achieved by Afghan raisins symbolizes the economic potential of the country’s agriculture.

¹¹¹ Interview with Afghan official in Western aid agency, Tarin Kot, Uruzgan Province, January 2, 2010.

Poor project design and outcomes were attributed in part to donors' and implementers' lack of local knowledge, a broad category that included information on geography, the web of tribal and social networks, historical relationships, and any promises that had been made by members of a previous PRT rotation. This was especially so with military-led development. Unfamiliar with the environment, without knowledge of local languages, and limited in their ability to get "outside the wire," the military were especially vulnerable and dependent not only on their choice of interlocutors at the community level, but, more mundanely, on their interpreters. This lack of "penetration" of local communities and the inability to adequately understand social structures and politics allowed powerful individuals at provincial and district levels to mislead and manipulate ISAF in their disputes with other power brokers. The less secure the area, the less external actors were likely to know. In Helmand, the lack of knowledge within the PRT of who the significant players were or what the development needs were led to ad hoc programming of projects, with the military often choosing "targets of convenience," opportunistically developing projects based on CIMIC patrols, often mainly in the more permissive areas. Consequently, projects were often not informed by either development needs or strategic considerations. In addition, security restrictions placed on civilian staff led to a greater reliance on the military to identify and manage projects, but due to security conditions even the PRT military staff had chronic difficulties in identifying and effectively implementing aid projects. While some of these shortcomings have improved over time due to somewhat extended rotations and the increasing attention paid to cultural and other training in advance of deployment, making programmatic decisions with limited information on the environment is still a challenge for military aid personnel.

A recurrent complaint from Afghans, international development workers, and even military officials themselves in all five provinces was the military's lack of coordination with local

authorities. In many cases, the government was not consulted in the selection or location of projects. This resulted largely from onerous security restrictions and resulting lack of mobility, but also from lack of knowledge of Afghan institutions and, in some cases, wariness about working with what is considered to be a cumbersome and corrupt administration. Also, line ministry representatives at provincial and district levels are not always empowered to make decisions, so engaging the ministry in Kabul would sometimes become necessary, a process that was either virtually impossible or would delay the decision well beyond the timeframe of the officials at the PRT. Therefore, sometimes even when PRT personnel knew the system, they got frustrated and took short cuts. This could achieve immediate short-term aims, but worked against longer-term sustainable outcomes. As a CIMIC officer noted, "We often undermine the systems we say we're trying to set up."¹¹² CERP-funded projects were especially noted for their lack of transparency and for not being coordinated either with Afghan authorities or with other aid agencies or even with other military actors. This led to building schools and clinics without adequate groundwork (i.e., finding out whether another school was nearby) or ensuring the staff and material resources to maintain the facility after construction. In Balkh and Faryab, personnel at the PRT (including CIMIC) were unclear about what was being done under CERP and said that when communities cannot distinguish between different men in uniform, the PRT is blamed for any shortcomings in CERP implementation.

Lack of timeliness of aid activities, mostly attributed to cumbersome and bureaucratic procedures, was also a recurrent criticism. Examples included animal feed that was desperately needed during a drought but which arrived six months late, loans for agricultural activities that were offered during a drought year, and fruit tree saplings that came after the planting season. A number of respondents cited the Afghan proverb about "henna after the wedding" to describe inputs or activities that arrived too late to be useful.

¹¹² Interview with CIMIC officer, Mazar-e Sharif, June 3, 2009.



Donor plaque on school, Balkh

Time pressure also had a negative effect on the quality of aid projects in a number of different ways. First, pressure originating in Washington and other capitals for showing quick results produced unrealistic timeframes for implementation in the field.¹¹³ Agencies dependent on grants and contracts often agreed to more “aggressive” implementation schedules to gain and maintain funding. PRTs were under similar political pressure to deliver projects and spend money, both of which were key metrics. In all five provinces, field-level staff expressed concern about the excessive levels of funding, although in Balkh and Faryab this was more the case towards the end of the fieldwork period, when U.S. funds were anticipated as part of the “civilian surge.” In Uruzgan concerns were that new Special Forces personnel were pushing for a certain level of CERP projects to be implemented each week and month. As an aid contractor noted, “CERP gives something tangible to offer for those cooperating with foreign forces. But it’s not always optimally

implemented, partly because there is too much pressure to spend the money . . . we’re more assessed on numbers than impact.”¹¹⁴

The time pressures caused by short-term personnel rotations (some as short as six or even four months) encouraged a short-term orientation. Each PRT rotation wanted to report greater success in the mission than the previous rotation, and to leave the situation better than before, or at least not worse. This was partly due to individual career considerations, but also due to the heartfelt desire to make a difference. Therefore, personnel charged with stabilizing areas were tempted to take short-cuts that would “quiet down” the situation, despite being warned against “quick fixes.” As described above, aid agency staff expressed concerns that paying off *maleks* could in fact be de-stabilizing, as it would create perverse incentives (e.g., what happened when you stopped paying, and what about other *maleks* who wanted a share). However, institutional incentive structures as well as

¹¹³ For an account of the negative consequences of the pressure to spend money, see Rajiv Chandrasekaran, “U.S. Military Dismayed by Delays in 3 Key Development Projects in Afghanistan,” *Washington Post* (April 28, 2011), http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/us-military-dismayed-by-delays-in-3-key-development-projects-in-afghanistan/2011/04/22/AFD6jq8E_story.html.

¹¹⁴ Interview with international aid contractor, Tarin Kot, Uruzgan Province, January 2, 2010.

human nature often meant concern about long-term consequences was less if one was going to leave in only a few months' time.¹¹⁵

The rapid rotation of PRT teams contributed to projects' lack of continuity, a source of frustration among both Afghan officials and PRT personnel themselves. In Balkh, CIMIC officers and a former *woleswal* (who had served in another province) described their frustration at projects being lost at handover. Some international aid officials expressed frustration at the lack of monitoring and the general lack of institutional knowledge concerning projects that had previously been implemented. In some PRTs (e.g., Balkh, Paktia) personnel were unable to locate records of projects implemented by their predecessors, some as recently as six months before. Many Afghan respondents blamed the low quality of some construction projects on the lack of monitoring as, in the absence of oversight, contractors were under no pressure to do quality work. New teams either had no knowledge of, or felt no need to follow up on, the commitments of their predecessors (which in some cases were not

documented). Community perceptions of broken promises may have arisen due to a number of reasons related to both volition and competence: poor translation, differing cultural interpretations on what constitutes a promise, translators and patrols taking the path of least resistance during visits by holding out the promise of future assistance, and willful deception in order to achieve short-term objectives.

5.6 Non-sustainable

Not surprisingly, aid agency staff as well as some PRT personnel, raised concerns about sustainability and creating dependency. Many problems described above were directly attributed to institutional pressures to spend large sums of money quickly and to do large numbers of projects. While virtually all respondents said that projects of a long duration were better than short-term ones, many Afghans did not necessarily envision developmentally sound projects; rather, in many cases they were simply looking for projects with a long duration (e.g., cash-for-work projects that ran for a long time).

BOX 4: *Komak*: Aid versus charity

In the Dari-speaking areas, most respondents used the word *komak* (help) to refer to both development assistance (projects) and charity. Outside the circle of development practitioners and some government officials, not many Afghan respondents distinguished between development and charity.

Even when aid projects were designed to be sustainable and market-oriented, developmentally sound approaches were often viewed with resentment by local communities. For instance, respondents in one district in Balkh complained that the daily wage paid by a cash-for-work project was an inadequate \$4 (AFS200). Although the going local wage rate was half that, respondents apparently saw no inconsistency in believing that aid projects should pay more than twice the local wage rate, a notion that is at odds with generally accepted principles of development practice. In the same area, complaints were made that *kunjala* (a type of animal feed) had been sold to people at \$5.40 (AFS270) per bag; while this was described as a fair price in the market, it was seen as exorbitant in the context of an aid project. The fact that these transactions were related to aid projects resulted in their being viewed through a different lens.

Box 4 continues on next page

¹¹⁵ For an example of the dangerous conflict between short-term and long-term goals, see the discussion on the distribution of water pumps in Helmand in Dempsey, "Is Spending the Strategy?" p. 3. See also reports that the ten French troops killed in Sarobi in August 2008 had been ambushed due to the discontinuation of bribes previously paid to insurgents in the area: "French Opposition Demands Answers on Bribe Claim in Sarobi Ambush," *The Times* (London, October 16, 2009), <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/europe/article6876691.ece>.

In fact, NGO staff reported that some communities were reluctant to engage with NGOs that insisted on a community contribution (e.g., a 30 percent community contribution in the form of labor or paying for materials such as seed and fertilizer rather than receiving them free), instead holding out for one that would provide free assistance. In some cases, the insistence on community contribution created the suspicion that their NGO was corrupt, and was siphoning off money being paid by the community.

A surprisingly large number of respondents in Balkh province criticized micro-finance projects as un-Islamic because they allegedly collected excessive interest (*sudh*, or usury), did not help people out of poverty, and benefited only the implementers, who managed them as commercial enterprises rather than as a service for society. Some said that this sort of commercial approach on the part of micro-finance organizations simply reflected the government's new free-market strategy. A typical comment was that "these organizations are not here for development help, but for business. This reflects the new government strategy of the free market."¹¹⁶ Some of the resentment possibly comes from having to pay for something, especially when it has been delivered by an NGO. This area requires additional analysis.

The separate standard for aid may be encouraged by projects that, for whatever reason, pay in excess of the going rates for labor and materials. While often intended to curry favor with communities or individuals, they may lead to high expectations and dependency—and perhaps to alienation when the tap is turned off.

As noted above, a major complaint was that aid projects were not addressing Afghanistan's fundamental needs. Unfavorable comparisons were made with Soviet aid, which built factories and dams. Respondents in Helmand noted that they wanted projects like those that the Americans had built in the 1960s and 1970s, while in Balkh the call was for projects like those that the Soviets made. Also as noted above, this easily led to accusations that the West wished to keep Afghanistan poor or that it did not want to leave anything behind.

On a related note, a number of respondents mentioned good projects that had fallen apart when the implementing NGO lost funding, ceased work in the area, or was otherwise unable to follow through on planned activities. In Balkh, a district head of agriculture and community members complained that the good work done by one NGO in introducing new varieties of crops and developing test plots had

been wasted because the project fell apart when its short-term funding ended and no arrangement was made for handover or continuity. Also in Balkh, in two cases respondents mentioned that they had personally been left holding the bag when NGO activities had suddenly been terminated. In the first case, the head of an orchard owners' association was held responsible by his members when they were unable to sell their pomegranates at the advantageous price that had been negotiated through the good offices of an international NGO. In the second case, a district official was pressured to pay several days of wages to 500 workers who had been promised the opportunity to work planting pistachio trees that never arrived.¹¹⁷

5.7 Positive views: Some good news

Communities did provide some positive views on aid projects, mainly with respect to the

¹¹⁶ Interview with Afghan NGO staff worker, Khulm District, Balkh Province, June 7, 2009.

¹¹⁷ Paul Fishstein, *Winning Hearts and Minds? Examining the Relationship between Aid and Security in Afghanistan's Balkh Province* (Feinstein International Center, Tufts University, November 2010), p. 35.



Sign for National Solidarity Program, Balkh

National Solidarity Program (NSP),¹¹⁸ some significant and highly visible projects, and relationships with long-serving NGOs.

The most consistently positive views in all provinces except Uruzgan were on the NSP. The language respondents used to describe NSP was remarkably consistent; i.e., “responsive to the community,” “transparent,” “communities identify their own needs,” “solved problems,” “NSP is in our own hands,” and “people came to believe that their vote had meaning.” People also largely reported being pleased with the choice of projects, most commonly small-scale power generation (“allowed us to listen to the world news”), bridges, and communal guest houses. A typical comment was, “NSP has had a good impact because the priorities of the people are taken into account and we know what happens to our money.”¹¹⁹ Another factor, which ironically may have contributed to greater satisfaction, was the small amounts of money

involved. On average, \$27,000 was disbursed per community. This may have been too little to interest the large construction companies or powerful interests, which might have brought the competition and corruption described in other types of projects. Also, there was a standard and publicly understood formula for allocating funding (\$200 per household up to a maximum of \$60,000 per village), which may have mitigated the perceptions of injustice that were associated with other aid programs. Where complaints were heard, they were usually that the CDCs were influenced by political parties or composed of the same people (i.e., commanders) who had preyed on the community previously. In Uruzgan, the NSP was cancelled due to the poor performance of the implementing partner. Still, far fewer complaints were heard about NSP compared to other projects and programs, and CDCs appear to be less prone to corruption than individuals who would otherwise be the conduit for aid, such as commanders, *maleks*, and *arbabs*.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ The NSP is a national program that uses a community development approach to build minor infrastructure (e.g., roads, small irrigation structures, hydro and solar power, community buildings) and in the process promotes village-level governance. Communities elect councils that identify community needs, develop proposals, and oversee small grants under which work is done. The NSP is a collaboration between the international community, which provides funding and technical guidance, the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, which provides general oversight, and Afghan and international NGOs, which as the “facilitating partners” interact with communities.

¹¹⁹ Interview with CDC members, Qaisar, Faryab Province, April 11, 2009.

¹²⁰ For similar observations, see Beath, et al., “Winning Hearts and Minds?”



NSP irrigation project in Faryab

Respondents also offered positive comments on a few significant or highly visible projects. In Faryab, these included extending the paved portion of Afghanistan's ring road and bringing electricity from Turkmenistan to Maimana and Almar, both of which were described as having been transformative.

Although most respondents complained about "NGOs" in general, many were appreciative of the work that "their" NGO was doing. In most of these cases, the positively cited NGOs had worked in the area for a number of years. International aid workers noted that people tended to like the individual NGO they worked with, but complain about NGOs. General complaints about NGOs may reflect, in part, the drumbeat of criticism by President Karzai and other government officials, which may simply reflect, in part, competition over resources. As noted above, few Afghan respondents made distinctions between NGOs and contractors. Interestingly, while respondents were consistently critical of the government, donors, and NGOs, somehow NSP, a collaboration of those three entities, avoided the same criticism. In Paktia, the Germans were described relatively positively, although this was likely the result of a long pre-war history of German involvement in this area in small-scale vocational training.

Although the international community and the Afghan government have recognized the health sector as a success story, respondents did not describe it especially positively. Many people complained about the lack of 24/7 physician services, ambulances, or willingness on the part of clinics to provide enough pharmaceuticals. This may be a matter of rising expectations, as complaints were voiced in areas that most likely did not have even a health post until recent years. It may also indicate a limited understanding of the role of preventive care; respondents placed more importance on curative services than preventive ones, a near-universal phenomenon. Likewise, complaints about a lack of willingness to distribute pharmaceuticals are hard to interpret. In a society in which physicians massively over-prescribe medicine and often have financial interests in pharmacies, restraint in prescribing medicine may in fact be an indicator of a higher quality of care rather than a lower one.¹²¹

¹²¹ Research has shown that while a general correlation exists between a population's health status and a country's economic strength, which is in turn correlated with a lower level of conflict, there is scant evidence that health systems development contributes directly, either in the short- or medium-term, to reducing conflict. Rather, physical security, a functioning justice system, and employment are likely to be more important influences. Moreover, designing health interventions with security objectives in mind are likely to result in projects (i.e., high visibility, quick impact) which may be inconsistent with long-term health system development. See Leonard S. Rubenstein, "Post-Conflict Health Reconstruction: New Foundations for U.S. Policy," USIP Working Paper (September 2009).

6. THE STABILIZING AND DESTABILIZING EFFECTS OF AID



U.S. military overseeing drilling of water wells, Balkh

While the environments in the five provinces differed greatly, a number of consistent observations emerged concerning the effectiveness of aid projects in promoting stabilization objectives, both in the short term and long term. First, some military officials reported that in some areas military-administered aid projects may have had short-term security benefits, at least in the limited sense of force protection. Some CIMIC officers cautiously reported that projects, including those that hired from communities near military installations, were successful in providing some limited force-protection benefits. As one CIMIC officer put it, “in the short-term, this avoids

people throwing rocks at patrols, so that NGOs can operate, and in turn help with long-term security.”¹²² In Balkh and Uruzgan, military respondents reported that such projects save lives, and that community members were more willing to report IEDs or provide useful information after the implementation of small projects. In Balkh and Uruzgan, development advisors and military officials also reported improved access to villages after the implementation of small projects (e.g., “social projects” coordinated with police training). In Faryab, however, there was no indication that aid projects contributed to short-term stabilization.

¹²² Interview with civil-military advisor, Mazar-e Sharif, Balkh Province, April 11, 2009.



PRT personnel at community meeting, Paktia

Second, some evidence was found that aid projects did help to build relationships. Some felt that development projects gave the military access to the people and encouraged a positive, or at least pragmatic, view of the military. One political advisor in Balkh said that CIMIC was valuable for “opening doors” and legitimizing their presence. As a former *woleswal* and CDC chairman in Balkh put it, “Projects can also build relationships between government, NGOs, international community.” Similarly, in Paktia PRT staff felt that projects provided a “platform” or context for meeting with people whom they would not otherwise be able to engage, and legitimized their interaction. For instance, the Zadrans Arc Stabilization Initiative in Paktia appears to have developed relations between estranged Zadrans tribal elders, UNAMA, and the government. It also got local agreement to protect the workers of local construction companies and NGO partners working on a school and road-building project. However, no guarantees were given that NATO/ISAF convoys would not be attacked, and whether the

project had any substantial positive influence on security beyond its initial role in facilitating a dialogue led by UNAMA and some Zadrans tribal elders is unclear.¹²³

Being able to deliver a project may be useful in a society where one needs to offer or exchange something in order to develop relationships. As put by an international aid official in Uruzgan, “if we need help from local leaders we need a relationship—projects help to build relationships. They provide an incentive for local leaders to take a risk and work with us. Aid projects are very useful in building a relationship.”¹²⁴

According to another official, “if they say ‘we need a water pump,’ and we deliver, then they gain trust to do business with us.”¹²⁵ On the other hand, there is a danger that “delivering something” can have immediate positive effects but contribute in the longer term to corrupt, transactional relationships. According to one government official, taking bribes “is now normal and accepted in society, and is getting worse day-by-day. It started four to five years

¹²³ Formulated in 2005 with the assistance of UNAMA, the Zadrans Arc Stabilization Initiative in Paktia was intended to stabilize a very insecure area through providing employment, development activities, infrastructure, government outreach, activation of *arbakai*, additional security resources, oversight of *madrassas*, and empowering the tribes through a representative tribal *shura*.

¹²⁴ Interview with international aid official, Tarin Kot, Uruzgan Province, January 31, 2010.

¹²⁵ Interview with PRT official, Tarin Kot, Uruzgan Province, February 1, 2010.



U.S. military personnel and Afghan civilian, Pakhtia

ago with small gifts that then created obligations and the need for reciprocity.”¹²⁶ This dynamic may be reinforced by international officials’ short-term horizons and by the uncritical acceptance of an assumption about Afghan corruption (culture of *bakhshesh*) which suggests that foreign officials must pay to accomplish anything with government officials. The risk is that short-term transactional relationships that gave access to local communities in exchange for projects—“you scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours”—were confused with longer-term “winning hearts and minds” work.

Finally, beyond limited short-term force-protection objectives, facilitation of initial interactions between international actors and local leaders, and some reported cases of intelligence gathering benefits, there was little concrete evidence in any of the five provinces that aid projects were reducing unrest in the longer term. As noted above, this may be due to the difficulty of measuring effects and attributing

causality in an environment with so many confounding variables. Still, the dominant expressed view was that, at most, a very limited and short-term relationship existed between aid and security. Moreover, in southern and eastern Afghanistan, where the volume of aid resources to promote stabilization objectives was much greater, more evidence was found that aid projects and the entire aid architecture was doing more to undermine rather than promote security.¹²⁷

The following sections explore several related issues, starting with whether aid is focusing on the wrong drivers of insecurity and how aid efforts focused on stabilization are subverted by insurgents or other malign actors. The sections also discuss why many aid projects are de-stabilizing, due to corruption, the creation or exacerbation of competition over resources, the reinforcement of inequalities and the creation of winners and losers, and the aggravation of resentments due to regional disparities.

¹²⁶ Interview with senior provincial representative of a line ministry, Tarin Kot, Uruzgan Province, July 5, 2009.

¹²⁷ A number of the findings were similar to those from the Horn of Africa. There, in a non-kinetic environment, military-sponsored aid activities were successful in facilitating the U.S. military’s entry into regions of potential concern and in allowing the military to acquire local connections, networks, and knowledge. There was less evidence, however, that aid succeeded in changing overall attitudes towards the U.S. or, more important, in achieving the strategic objectives of countering terrorism, reducing conflict, or improving stability. As in the Afghanistan study, the Horn of Africa study found that attitudes and behavior are influenced by a complex of factors—many of which are not affected by aid projects. See <https://wikis.uit.tufts.edu/confluence/pages/viewpage.action?pageId=34807224>.

6.1 Addressing the wrong drivers of insecurity

Stabilization theory as practiced in Afghanistan places high importance on socio-economic drivers of conflict such as poverty, illiteracy, and lack of social services, and therefore emphasizes socio-economic solutions, including providing employment opportunities and building schools. The best-selling author, Greg Mortenson, helped popularize this theory by suggesting that his schools in Pakistan and Afghanistan were promoting peace “one school at a time.”¹²⁸ The current study and other research, however, has shown that the causes of insecurity are diverse and intertwined. Moreover, given the multitude of factors at play in a given environment, establishing causality or isolating the effects of one variable from the others is extremely difficult. What, for instance, is the influence of poverty, as opposed to political grievances, exclusion, or tribal solidarity? Respondents mentioned cases where “Taliban”-related insecurity in a certain area had abated when one of two feuding brothers returned to Pakistan or when a long-running land dispute was settled. Other than employment, most development assistance was not directly addressing the major drivers of conflict reported by respondents. While poverty was given as an important factor in creating unrest, many related grievances relate to political or identity issues that are not addressed by development.

As one military official observed, “a diverse group of people are creating problems for a variety of reasons (power, money, ideology, religion), and are not affected by development.... We can hold the area longer if we spend more money, but eventually insecurity will take hold. The things working against us are not affected by development.”¹²⁹ The conclusion drawn in Helmand was that the stabilization model used between 2006 and 2008 “focused on the wrong drivers of conflict—on the lack of development and government presence rather than on poor governance and insecurity.”¹³⁰

The centrality of poverty in the assumptions underlying aid projects aimed at stabilization as well as in the responses from Afghans on the drivers of insecurity suggests the need to critically examine to what extent and in what way poverty and unemployment affect security.

Poverty and unemployment are the major focus of security-related development, which posits a direct link between poverty and unemployment, and young men joining the insurgency. This is most starkly stated as the “ten dollar a day Talib,” a young man who is unemployed and therefore finds something to do to earn money and pass the time. While the military and development actors often hold divergent views, this view of the linkages between poverty and insecurity is shared by both.¹³¹ To some extent, this model relies on Western concepts of individual decision-making. Individual economic actors are often implicitly assumed, while ignoring the important roles of household, community, and tribe, in making what in the West would be seen as individual decisions. As part of a traditional society with strong family, tribal, and social bonds, most young Afghan males are unlikely to be completely free agents who can independently make a major decision to join the Taliban given the very direct impact this could have on one’s family, village, and tribe. Yet many Afghans interviewed for the study also stated the strong belief that unemployment was a major cause of violence and insecurity. In the north, but also elsewhere, respondents talked about the subsistence needs of the desperate. As a last resort to get money to satisfy physical needs (e.g., food, medicine), many were said to be willing to do anything—including acts that violated their own sense of right and wrong.

Drawing a distinction between attitudes and action may be useful in understanding why some and not others join the insurgency. Poverty is a widespread condition in Afghanistan, while the

¹²⁸ The titles of Mortenson’s two best-selling books are *Three Cups of Tea: One Man’s Mission to Promote Peace . . . One School At A Time*, and *Stones into Schools: Promoting Peace with Books, Not Bombs, in Afghanistan and Pakistan*.

¹²⁹ Interview with international military official, Mazar-e Sharif, Balkh Province, May 28, 2009.

¹³⁰ Gordon, *Winning Hearts and Minds?*, p. 51.

¹³¹ See Andrew Wilder, “Aid and Stability in Pakistan: Lessons from the 2005 Earthquake Response,” *Disasters*, v. 34 (2010): S406–S426.

insurgency is less so. While the majority of Afghans are very poor, and many would agree with the negative characterization of the

government and the international community offered by the Taliban, relatively few would actually join the insurgents.

BOX 5: *Mahroum*

While poverty may not be the single explanation for why young men join the insurgency, those without a job or hope for the future may be more susceptible to mobilization against the government. The Dari word *mahroum*, which translates as “deprived” or “left out,” but which also conveys a more profound sense of both alienation and being discriminated against, was used by respondents to reflect a broader definition of poverty. Unemployed but also lacking human and social capital—no livelihood, no bride, no prospects, and perhaps dispossessed from land or other property at the hands of a corrupt government official—the central issue is lack of hope for a decent future. Moreover, *mahroum* can also imply injustice, or being deliberately deprived at the hands of others. Thus, if one is already angry at the government and the international military, one may yield more easily to immediate economic necessity. Conversely, if one is already dispossessed, then one may also more easily become estranged in response to a specific event or grievance. In this sense, poverty is a contributing but not sufficient condition. Also, to the extent that the state and the international community are seen as not having the interests of the population in mind and therefore as unlikely to provide a livelihood or social services, one may be more willing to oppose them violently. This may also suggest in part why respondents focused on the lack of large, economic projects; the lack of large projects meant not only that people aren’t busy working, but also no longer have the positive sense of a trajectory of development and therefore hope for the future.

Another possible factor is the interplay between relative poverty and perceptions of injustice. If poverty is a generally shared experience, the condition may not generate much hostility. If, on the other hand, poverty is not shared and some elements of society are perceived to have grown wealthy at the expense of others, this may feed a sense of injustice, informed by Islamic notions of equity, that could motivate armed opposition to a state that tolerates and even encourages this un-Islamic behavior. In this scenario, anger is bred not so much by absolute poverty but by a strong sense of exclusion and injustice. (See Box 5.) This is consistent with the “zero-sum” outlook that seemed to pervade so many of the complaints about development, but it may also reflect a response to a perceived widening social and economic gap between poor and rich. At present, poverty is often experienced as a state of being excluded from resources, from economic and political power, and from justice. In this sense, the corrupt and unjust

system produces poverty. As noted above (see Box 3), a general sense of injustice pervaded many of the specific complaints.

Even if not a direct driver of insecurity, poverty increases vulnerability. Respondents in the north noted that poverty increased the need to migrate to the south for work or to enroll children in Pakistani *madrassas*—both of which were associated with radicalization or mobilization by the insurgents.¹³² Poverty was also associated with political vulnerability, in that it made one more vulnerable to being dispossessed of property by predatory actors, which in turn increased alienation.

Similarly, given the vested interests of criminals and others in fomenting conflict and insecurity, and the lack of a clear line between criminal and political violence, development projects are unlikely to reduce unrest related to criminality.

¹³² Ladbury, “Testing Hypotheses,” makes a distinction between mobilization and radicalization.

In the words of one UN official, “development projects will have no effect on criminal activity, as criminals seek to maintain the status quo [insecurity]. The source of this sort of instability is more due to poor governance and police; improving the police would help to improve this part of the situation.”¹³³

In addition, the weight given by respondents in insecure areas to the international military forces as a cause of insecurity would suggest an internal contradiction in COIN. In small rural communities where almost everyone is related through tribal or other networks, military actions taken against suspected Taliban actors or sympathizers, well-targeted or not, will almost by definition alienate parts of that community. In Paktia, in reference to the work done by the PRT, one respondent noted “120 kilometers of road constructed in Khost, 183 schools constructed in Khost, but whatever is done . . . then they kill two kids and everything is destroyed.”¹³⁴ Another respondent in Paktia added “the PRT’s aid efforts are not effective. How can it be when you have a gun in one hand and a piece of bread in the other?”¹³⁵

Similarly, if aid is delivered in association with a government that is distrusted for not being neutral or attentive to the welfare of the people, it is less likely to achieve the COIN objective of winning the population over to the side of the government. One respondent cited a Pashtu proverb, explaining, “you can milk a cow and get a bucket of delicious milk. But if the cow then kicks over the bucket is it a good or bad cow? PRTs are a good cow with lots of milk, but then the government appoints Juma Khan Hamdard [the governor of Paktia] and the bucket is kicked over.”¹³⁶ With high levels of antipathy towards the government, due largely to the corrupt and predatory actions of local officials, the narrative of government

corruption may easily overwhelm the attractions of engaging with the government and its actors. In most provinces channeling aid through the government had not evidently increased its legitimacy; on the contrary, the perceived corruption associated with aid had hurt or reinforced the bad reputation of the provincial administration. In Uruzgan, for example, officials explicitly questioned whether extending the reach of the government was stabilizing, as *shura* members did not wish to attend meetings in which government line ministries participated. According to international officials, “the reputation of the governor is so corrupt, and the reputation of the provincial government so bad, that good projects don’t improve the reputation of the government.”¹³⁷

Some analysts contend that in Afghanistan, legitimacy rests on national identity and Islam.¹³⁸ To the extent that this is correct, the attempt to create legitimacy through service delivery and governance is both alien and problematic, as they imply expectations for tangible action, whereas the traditional bases for legitimacy are ideational. Moreover, development agencies can only provide money, materials, and technical assistance, and have little ability to address issues connected with national identity or Islam.

One Afghan academic and former senior official noted the challenges against which development projects were working: “bad governance, the culturally insensitive work of human rights organizations, the work of fundamentalist groups, tribal elders who are maintaining different networks with different people, those who feel they have not benefitted from the new system and new government—all play a role in working against the good work of PRTs.”¹³⁹

¹³³ Interview with UN official, Mazar-e Sharif, Balkh Province, April 6, 2009.

¹³⁴ Interview with former Taliban commander and deputy of an Islamic political party, Paktia Province, January 6, 2009.

¹³⁵ Interview with local community leader, Paktia Province, January 10, 2008.

¹³⁶ Interview with academic and former Ministry of Education high official, Paktia Province, January 6, 2009.

¹³⁷ Interview with international development officials, Tarin Kot, Uruzgan Province, January 31, 2010.

¹³⁸ See Astri Suhrke, “Exogenous State-Building: The Contradictions of the International Project in Afghanistan,” in *The Rule of Law in Afghanistan: Missing in Inaction*, ed. Whit Mason (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 225–48.

¹³⁹ Interview with academic and former Ministry of Education high official, Paktia Province, January 6, 2009.

6.2 Subverted by insurgents

Another related factor limiting the positive effects of development assistance was that, mostly through physical threats and social intimidation, insurgents actively subverted overt expressions of commitment or engagement by communities. Here, fundamental differences in perceptions and attitudes were found between the secure and insecure areas. To some extent, in the north the international military was seen as on the side of security (or at least there was a pragmatic confluence of interest), whereas in the south and east it was seen by many as a dangerously threatening presence. Especially in Balkh, where levels of violence were low, the international military was seen as targeting a minority who threatened the well-being of the majority. In Helmand, Uruzgan, and Paktia, on the other hand, the population's experience of violence and conflict—both directly at the hands of the international military, and from the Taliban as a consequence of their presence—meant that communities were often too intimidated to actively cooperate. This was not a question of principle; rather, the lack of cooperation was driven by a very pragmatic sense of security. No doubt communities would have liked development money and projects, but feared the consequences of accepting it (or being seen to accept it). “A sense pervaded that the net benefits of ISAF were strongly outweighed by the perception that their presence exacerbated inter-communal conflict as well as with the Taliban.”¹⁴⁰ This was the case in Helmand, where the inability of ISAF and the government to provide security discouraged the population from cooperating with or even engaging with development activities. Communities were simply too frightened to participate in activities that could result in being attacked by insurgents. As an aid official noted, “development activities can contribute to stability, but if the community has no confidence in the government and in security, development cannot solve problems. People need to feel secure.”¹⁴¹ In the insecure areas, communities would only engage if they

could “buy” security from the Taliban or else were powerful enough to assure their own protection. In Balkh, on the other hand, without a context of conflict, most communities were quite willing to engage with the international military on development projects, as the risk that insurgents would later show up to ask questions was almost nil. This is in line with observations made by Zürcher and his colleagues, who found that attitudes towards foreign forces were driven by communities' perceptions of their own security rather than by aid projects, and that the ability of aid to influence attitudes depended on security and threat perceptions; in the relatively secure areas of the north, people largely felt that “foreign forces are still mainly seen as positively contributing to security.”¹⁴²

Some evidence exists in Helmand that the long-term presence of government or international forces, which signaled a likely longer-term security benefit, changed these perceptions somewhat. However, where operations were mainly “drive-through,” communities had no incentive to engage with people who were not going to be there a week from now to provide the protection that they were promising. As was noted in Uruzgan, people and communities might stand up to the Taliban, but they might not have anything to link to (e.g., government, security forces) once they stood up, especially in areas distant from the main population centers. As one Afghan NGO worker in Uruzgan noted, “in remote areas the Taliban are very strong, and where they are strong the people cooperate with them.”¹⁴³ Many respondents noted that unrest and intimidation may be created by small groups, although they may not represent the views and wishes of the larger community; two or three men with guns can control a village.

Moreover, some evidence exists that insurgents, perhaps for tactical reasons and to not alienate local communities, may tolerate development projects as long as they fall within certain boundaries. Military officials noted that

¹⁴⁰ Gordon, *Winning Hearts and Minds?*, p. 46.

¹⁴¹ Interview with international development official, Mazar-e Sharif, April 8, 2009.

¹⁴² Böhnke et al., “Assessing the Impact,” p. 12.

¹⁴³ Interview with official at Afghan NGO, Tarin Kot, Uruzgan Province, July 6, 2009.

communities could be willing to accept assistance that would make people's lives better, yet still work against the institutions providing that assistance; as one put it, "they could accept what we bring, and still be working against us."¹⁴⁴ Another military official noted that "the Taliban may allow you to build a well if they know that one is needed in the area, but this doesn't mean that you've won hearts and minds."¹⁴⁵

Even when not actively subverted by Taliban propaganda, the environment is fertile for conspiracy theories that undercut messages of good intentions that aid projects are intended to convey. It has been widely observed that many Afghans believe (or claim to believe) that the U.S. and NATO are actually supporting the Taliban to justify a continued presence in Afghanistan. This is inspired by disbelief that the most powerful military in the world has been unable to eliminate what was a defeated, rag-tag group of rebels. On the development side, the perceived lack of investment and exploitation of Afghanistan's natural resources created further doubt on exactly what the international community's intentions were. According to this line of reasoning, if the international community was serious about developing Afghanistan, then it would have invested more in large projects that made Afghans self-sufficient (and employed). This naturally leads to speculation on the alternative motives for the intervention and open-ended occupation in Afghanistan, which include revenge for British defeats in the nineteenth century or against Afghanistan for giving shelter to al Qaeda during the Taliban era, eyes on Afghanistan's mineral resources, or geo-strategic presence (e.g., proximity to Iran).

These suspicions are reinforced by the belief, among some, that foreign intervention has resulted in the moral pollution of Afghan society through conspicuous consumption (e.g., wedding halls) and the introduction of liberal habits. One respondent noted that small-scale power generation was enough to watch serials and singing and dancing on television, but it was not

enough to create jobs. Even one of the most significant gains of post-2001 Afghanistan, the explosion of media and connectivity, was often regarded with suspicion, especially due to the prevalence (and widespread popularity) of foreign imported or inspired content such as films, television serials, and other programs which were viewed by many as being inconsistent with and undermining of Afghan traditional culture and values.

6.3 Poor quality of implementation

Even discounting people's natural tendencies to complain, discussions with a range of respondents clearly indicated that aid delivery itself was a source of dissatisfaction. This suggests that even if the "hearts and minds" model is accepted as plausible, the poor quality of implementation would have further limited the ability of aid projects to produce stability. The factors that affect the international community's ability to effectively and accountably deliver aid (lack of local knowledge, time pressure, etc.) were discussed in Section 5.5.

6.4 Destabilizing influences of aid

The research findings from this study suggest that while the stabilizing effects of aid were at best modest, the destabilizing effects of large amounts of development assistance being spent rapidly in conflict zones could be considerable. Particularly destabilizing was the role of the war-aid economy in fueling corruption, which in turn reduced the government's legitimacy. The tensions and conflicts caused by aid projects and resources that were perceived to reinforce inequalities and create winners and losers are also destabilizing.

6.4.1 Corruption

The main way in which aid was found to be destabilizing was by fueling the corruption that had such a corrosive effect on the legitimacy of the government. The assumption that development aid had stabilizing effects meant

¹⁴⁴ Interview with international development official, Mazar-e Sharif, Balkh Province, April 8, 2009.

¹⁴⁵ Interview with military official, Mazar-e Sharif, Balkh Province, January 14, 2010.



Trucks along “K-G” Road, Paktia-Khost

that as security deteriorated, more and more aid resources were poured into the most insecure areas. Spending too much money too quickly in environments where there was very little implementation capacity, and even less capacity to provide oversight over the implementers, inevitably fueled corruption. While the corruption problem was widely recognized, and frequently condemned by international officials, many noted that institutional priorities and incentive structures resulted in amounts of aid that exceeded both the implementation and absorption capacities of aid agencies, the Afghan government, and local communities. Institutional incentive structures to get and spend money were generally not matched by incentives to spend money effectively and accountably. One tenet of the COIN model was to use money to deliver services that would help legitimize the government. However, a fundamental and perhaps fatal flaw of the COIN strategy was that Afghanistan’s leaders never seemed to actually share or buy into this legitimization strategy of winning the population away from the insurgents through services. Instead, the strategy adopted by the country’s leadership often seemed

to be to consolidate their power by using aid money to strengthen patronage networks—which had the effect of reducing the government’s legitimacy by fueling perceptions of corruption, inequality, and injustice.

6.4.2 Competition over resources: The war-aid economy and perverse incentives

Compelling evidence shows that competition over aid-related financial and material resources can lead to conflict and violence. This was observed most clearly in Paktia, where aid-project-related resources fuelled violent conflict among competitors. Violence attributed to the Taliban was in fact often due to contractor wars.¹⁴⁶ As noted by an informed Afghan in Paktia, “if an insurgent group comes and makes a deal with an engineer not to attack, then tomorrow someone else will come and make a deal. When that project ends, then another deal is necessary. Each construction company has its own security. If they lose out on a large bid, they try to make the environment insecure for their competitors.”¹⁴⁷ One respondent related a specific case where a Talib lost in the bidding for a road

¹⁴⁶ See also Aram Roston (op cit) .

¹⁴⁷ Interview with local community leader, Paktia Province, January 10, 2008.

project, then killed one of the winning bidder's engineers and burned vehicles belonging to a foreign construction company. The winning bidder subsequently gave up, and requested that the Talib do the work on the road instead."¹⁴⁸

Clearly, some political and economic actors directly benefit from the lack of security, and security providers have themselves created insecurity. As has been documented in the media, providing security has become a big business for both Taliban and local commanders. In Uruzgan, Matiullah (nephew and close associate of former governor Jan Mohammad) earns a steady and lucrative income for securing safe passage of convoys between Kandahar and Tarin Kot, and for providing security for road construction projects. Matiullah reportedly ensures that the road does not become safe enough to allow travel without his services. Similarly, in Paktia, those responsible for providing security on a road project staged attacks in order to elicit higher payments.¹⁴⁹ The dynamic was summed up succinctly by an Afghan UN official: "create a problem and then get paid to solve the problem."¹⁵⁰

This sort of conflict may be more likely in places and at times where no one force is dominant and where power, influence, and resources are contested. This may explain why apparently fewer of these types of conflicts occur in Balkh, where the political and security situation is more tightly controlled by one individual or group.

Even where contractors are not themselves competing over resources, projects can create conflict between communities, especially where the social structure is fragmented and power is contested. Road projects were notorious for creating tension over the distribution of benefits. In Uruzgan and Balkh, local communities forcibly stopped work on road projects when workers were brought from outside the area rather than hired locally. In another case, in Uruzgan, conflict arose when local tribal leaders claimed to have been told that they would get a

contract from Matiullah to provide security on eighteen miles of road but received a contract for only eight. In Helmand, while several groups of elders in Babaji (twenty-five kilometers north of Lashkar Gah) approved the route, design, and contracts to build a road in the area, several other communities contested all three and expressed discontent with the PRT and ISAF. Similarly, in Balkh, Helmand, and Uruzgan, communities opposed the construction of bridges, in part because property ownership issues had not been resolved. During the field research, cases were cited where new water projects led to antagonism between communities. Other sources have noted the longer-term conflict produced by irrigation projects due to the lack of confidence in institutions charged with managing them. In Chora District, Uruzgan, for example, a planned project to rehabilitate an irrigation canal built by NGOs in the 1990s exacerbated tribal animosity. In the last decade, 98 people have reportedly been killed.

Views were mixed on the role that development projects play in providing incentives (or disincentives) to communities to create an atmosphere conducive to security. While the dominant narrative in Balkh, for instance, is that the insecure areas of the south and east are being rewarded with development projects, some respondents observed that if an area is insecure, projects will not come, and that this provided communities with (positive) incentives to create security. Some officials said that some communities may intentionally be creating problems to prevent the monitoring of existing projects. Many respondents in Balkh and Faryab, including a district police chief, half-jokingly offered that a good strategy for attracting aid projects would be to create a little noise to suggest that insurgents were operating in the area and that a little "hearts and minds" activity was needed. Some international aid officials claimed that some communities are using the "mantra of 'bring us development'" as a threat. Many respondents, especially in the north, speculated that regional disparities might encourage

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. For a media report on this dynamic, see Alissa J. Rubin and James Risen, "Costly Afghanistan Road Project is Marred by Unsavory Alliances," *New York Times* (May 1, 2011).

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Interview with Afghan UN official, Tarin Kot, Uruzgan Province, February 2, 2010.

underserved areas to create insecurity to elicit aid, although no evidence was found that this had been done.

Finally, resources obtained in one area may create spillover effects in another. For instance, the governor of Paktia, Joma Khan Hamdard, was widely believed to be using money from his contracting business to de-stabilize his home area in northern Afghanistan.¹⁵¹

6.4.3 Reinforcing inequalities and creating perceived winners and losers

Aid can also be de-stabilizing if ethnic, tribal, or political groups (some of which can be highly correlated, viz. Jumbish and Uzbeks in Faryab) capture the bulk of the aid at local levels, as this can reinforce existing inequalities and lead to conflict. This may occur on two different but related levels. First, the winner-loser dynamics between powerful tribal and political elites at a local level can lead directly to instability and violence in the area. Second, the perceived injustice due to inequalities at the mass public level shapes pervasive national narratives that reduce the government's legitimacy. The main evidence for the destabilizing effects of aid came from the insecure provinces of Helmand, Paktia, and Uruzgan. In Helmand and Uruzgan, as discussed above, the capture of aid by one tribal group aligned with President Hamid Karzai's Popalzai tribe as a result of its political and economic power created resentment among the groups losing out. Also as discussed above, the international community's reliance on and support for local and regional strongmen has exacerbated rivalries.¹⁵² While aid did not itself create these historic rivalries, it often had the destabilizing effect of reinforcing and exacerbating existing grievances and tensions. According to an international official, "it is more

about tribal issues of haves and have-nots. We risk becoming a party to conflicts with our money."¹⁵³ Evidence shows that in some cases, such as in Uruzgan, the losers sought redress in part by aligning themselves with Taliban groups.

6.4.4 Regional disparities

As noted above, regional disparities in levels of aid have aggravated resentments in areas where the inhabitants feel underserved. This has largely been a north-south split (as noted above, during 2009–10, 77 percent of USAID resources were allocated to the insecure areas of the south, southwest, and east, with a planned increase to 81 percent in fiscal year 2011), but the disparities also exacerbate ethnic tensions, as the bulk of the aid has gone to Pashtun-majority areas.¹⁵⁴ Disparities also have the potential to undercut the perceived effectiveness and legitimacy of local officials if they are seen as not having been able to bring resources to their provinces or districts. In Balkh, this has led to tensions between the PRT and the governor, as the latter has, largely for political reasons, complained publicly about the lack of support from the PRT, noting the huge discrepancy between the \$89 million available to the U.S. PRT for Nangarhar Province and the \$495 thousand available to the Swedish-Finnish PRT for Balkh, Jawzjan, Samangan, and Sar-e Pol Provinces.¹⁵⁵ Dissatisfaction may be further fed by the Afghan official and private media, which often show the great developments happening in Nangarhar; respondents in Balkh referred to the U.S.-funded construction of parks, roads, and buildings that they had seen on television.

In sum, the study did not find evidence that aid projects were making a significant contribution to stability in Afghanistan. Similarly, given the

¹⁵¹ See Kate Clark, "Wikileaks and the Paktia Governor" (Afghanistan Analysts Network, June 12, 2010). <http://aan-afghanistan.com/index.asp?id=1367>.

¹⁵² For a discussion of how support for local leaders can ultimately be destabilizing, see Dempsey, "Is Spending the Strategy?" See also Matthieu Aikins, "Our Man in Kandahar," *Atlantic Magazine* (November 2011).

¹⁵³ Interview with international official, Tarin Kot, Uruzgan Province, January 31, 2010.

¹⁵⁴ This dynamic has become even more important in the last couple of years, when the government has put so much emphasis on reconciliation with insurgent groups. Aid can be perceived by some groups as another example of excessive accommodation of the population in the south and east.

¹⁵⁵ These are 2009 figures and for military-related projects only. Although they are only one part of the funding picture, they are seen as emblematic of the regional discrepancies.

largely negative perceptions of the aid effort by Afghans, there was little evidence that the large amount of money spent was helping to win hearts and minds. Several interviewees did suggest, however, that while Afghan hearts and minds were not being won, these projects did play an important role in helping to win the hearts and minds of both troops and the public in troop-contributing nations. While not the focus of this study, the morale of many troops was likely boosted by their efforts to improve the lot of Afghans through activities like building and supporting schools. Furthermore, the role of international military forces in directly implementing and supporting reconstruction activities to rebuild Afghanistan plausibly helped generate domestic support for the NATO/ISAF mission in troop-contributing nations. This was likely particularly true for many of the U.S.'s NATO allies who justified the deployment of troops to Afghanistan to their publics not as fighting a war on terror, but as supporting a peacebuilding operation. It was therefore important that their troops be perceived as focusing on primarily non-kinetic activities such as supporting reconstruction efforts.

The overall findings of this study are largely corroborated by other studies and evaluations mentioned in Section 1.3. As part of an on-going study of whether development cooperation positively influenced attitudes in northeastern Takhar and Kunduz Provinces, Christian Zürcher and his colleagues concluded that between 2005 and 2009, the ability of aid to influence attitudes depended on security and threat perceptions (i.e., communities that felt more secure were more likely to feel positive about aid); communities' attitudes towards foreign forces were driven by perceptions of security and not by aid projects; positive effects of aid on the population's attitudes towards the state were "short-term" and "non-cumulative" (e.g., based on an attitude of "what have you done for me lately"); and, acceptance of development actors by communities is not reduced by their collaboration with the military. The study also concluded that between 2007 and

2009, at a time when aid resources were increasing, Afghans in the two provinces had become more distrustful of development organizations; the proportion of community members who felt threatened by foreign forces increased; and, the perceived usefulness of foreign forces decreased.¹⁵⁶

Research conducted in 2009 by Sarah Ladbury in Kandahar, Wardak, and Kabul Provinces concluded that young men joined the insurgency for a complex combination of reasons, some personal and some related to broader grievances. Factors included resonance with religious enticements due to government corruption and presence of foreign forces; reaction to the state's failure to provide security and justice, and instead being corrupt and predatory; and as a means of earning an income. This research distinguished between being mobilized and being radicalized, with young men possibly being mobilized for various reasons without necessarily being radicalized.¹⁵⁷

In a study of the NSP conducted between 2007 and 2011 by Andrew Beath and his colleagues, research in villages outside of the main conflict areas found that overall, the NSP had positive effects on communities' perceptions of economic well-being, all levels of government (except the police), and of NGOs, the security situation, and (weakly) international forces. This study did not, however, find measurable improvements in actual security, although it looked only at short-term outcomes. The investigators leave open whether the more positive view of government in NSP communities might influence the extent of support for it, and eventually decrease levels of insurgent violence.¹⁵⁸

A quantitative study supported by the U.S. Army assessed the relationship between development projects and both security and public opinion. Using district-level database records on development projects and security incidents for January 2002 through December 2010, supplemented by ISAF-funded public opinion

¹⁵⁶ Böhnke, et al., "Assessing the Impact."

¹⁵⁷ Ladbury, "Testing Hypotheses."

¹⁵⁸ Beath, et al., "Winning Hearts and Minds?"

polling executed since 2008, it found that while projects can affect the number of security incidents in a district, in most cases their influence is so small as to not justify them as a conflict-mitigation tool. In the report's words, "development exerts too varied and weak an influence upon security in active conflict environments for it to deserve serious consideration as a means of countering or addressing insurgency."¹⁵⁹

Finally, a report prepared in June 2011 by the Majority Staff for the use of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee concluded, after examining the evidence from several studies

(including the present one and those mentioned above), that "the evidence that stabilization programs promote stability in Afghanistan is limited . . . the unintended consequences of pumping large amounts of money into a war zone cannot be underestimated."¹⁶⁰ This conclusion was supported by a March 2010 conference, co-sponsored by the Feinstein International Center and Wilton Park, on aid and stabilization, where a range of civilian and military actors concluded that "there was a consensus that imperatives such as pushing significant amounts of funding through the system over a short period of time is not a productive way to stabilize Afghanistan."¹⁶¹

Photo by Geert Gompelman



Bridge over Maimana River, Faryab

¹⁵⁹ Wheeler and Stolkowski, "Development as Counterinsurgency."

¹⁶⁰ Majority Staff, Foreign Relations Committee, United States Senate, "Evaluating U.S. Foreign Assistance to Afghanistan," (June 8, 2011), p. 2, <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/congress/index.html>.

¹⁶¹ Wilton Park, "Winning 'Hearts and Minds,'" p. 20.

7. SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Photo by © Kate Holt/IRIN



Afghan civilians and water pump, Helmand

The following is a summary of the conclusions drawn from the research, along with policy recommendations.

As noted above, since the field research was concluded, the international community, especially the U.S. and ISAF, has acknowledged a number of the issues described above, and have taken some policy and management steps to mitigate them. This includes, for USAID, several accountability initiatives, the devolution of authority closer to the field, and more attention to the assessment of local drivers of insecurity. For the U.S. government more broadly, it includes increased spending through the Afghan government and a policy that CERP projects must be signed off by local Afghan officials. Despite these policy changes, however, the researchers feel that the following recommendations remain valid and relevant, in large part because many of the institutional incentives for spending aid funds remain unchanged.

1. Primacy of political over economic drivers of conflict

The research findings from the more insurgency-affected provinces in southern and eastern Afghanistan suggest that many of the complex and overlapping factors that may have caused people to oppose the government and to support violence against it were related most frequently to political factors such as the corrupt and predatory behavior of government actors. Yet, most stabilization initiatives have placed importance on the economic drivers of conflict—focusing on poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, social services, and infrastructure. This suggests that aid and development, even if appreciated, may not be effective at addressing the fundamental issues and drivers of insecurity. The Taliban claim to legitimacy based on Islam, justice, and security may be more resonant in many unstable areas than the promises of development assistance by the government and its international partners. On the other hand, in areas not affected by insurgency where poverty

or conflict over land and water were named as more important drivers of conflict, well-delivered, conflict-sensitive aid interventions might have had a more stabilizing effect. An area for additional research would be to test the hypothesis that aid may be more effective in consolidating stability in relatively stable areas than in stabilizing insecure areas.

There was little concrete evidence from this or other studies that aid led to stability in Afghanistan. However, given the pervasive negative attitudes towards aid projects and actors, whether aid did not lead to stability due to ineffective delivery or because it simply did not adequately address the main drivers of conflict is difficult to definitively determine. If aid had been delivered more effectively, in smaller amounts, with more community participation, with more realistic timeframes, and with better knowledge of local political and tribal dynamics—it possibly would have had a more stabilizing effect.

On the other hand, one of the fundamental flaws of the population-centered COIN approach from the beginning was its reliance on winning the population away from insurgents and over to the government. This strategy struggled to gain traction in part because the government's leadership never seemed to accept it as their strategy and instead often pursued a patronage-based approach to buy the support of local strongmen over winning the population over. Another problem was that the U.S. and many of its NATO/ISAF allies actually had contradictory strategies, simultaneously wanting to provide services and good government to win over the population, but also supporting local strongmen whose predatory behavior alienated the local population. Aid delivered by or associated with corrupt officials or strongmen who were in many cases responsible for alienating people in the first place has not surprisingly proven to be an ineffective way of winning people over to the government. Much more acknowledgement is needed of the fact that lack of progress on governance has not primarily been due to lack of money, but to a lack of political will or a shared strategy on the part of the government and the international community to push a consistent reform agenda.

Recommendations:

- Focus more on identifying the drivers of conflict and alienation, and if these are primarily political in nature, do not assume they can effectively be addressed through primarily socio-economic activities. Given the strong perception amongst Afghans that bad governance and the lack of rule of law are major causes of alienation from the government and of insecurity, more attention should be given to addressing these issues.
- The international community should take a better-coordinated and more forceful stand on certain key issues that would help promote better governance (e.g., merit-based appointments to key national and sub-national positions, more rigorous anti-corruption measures including better monitoring of expenditures, avoiding alliances with notorious strongmen known for corrupt and predatory behavior).

2. Spending too much too quickly can be counterproductive—less can be more

Evidence from this study has shown that the pressure to spend too much money too quickly is wasteful and undermines both security and development objectives. Funding fewer projects that are better planned, implemented, and monitored will have more positive effects than spending more money in insecure areas that have already exceeded their absorptive capacity to effectively and accountably receive aid money.

A powerful institutional incentive is to spend as much money as quickly as possible, which rewards quantity over quality. This concept was captured in the pressure many international civilian and military officials noted to maintain high levels of expenditure (“burn rates”), in part so that their agencies are not penalized in the next budget cycle (the “use it or lose it” problem). Strikingly, one of the few programs that Afghans positively describe is the NSP, which on average disburses \$27,000 per community. The experience of the NSP and some other development projects suggests that, in terms of development, quality is more important than quantity, as is the sense that benefits are equitably shared. The research

suggests that in terms of potential stabilizing benefits, the process of development, especially in terms of building and sustaining relationships, is as important as the product of development. Taking more time and spending less money often translates into more effective programs with greater impact and better overall outcomes. The expressed concerns of field-level development workers appear at odds with the amount of money being programmed by those above them. There are few incentives for spending less money but spending it more effectively over time. “Less is more” can never be a reality when “more is more” is rewarded.

Also, in an uncertain, competitive, and highly resource-scarce environment with weak institutions, the attempt to spend too much money too quickly virtually guarantees failure in achieving development outcomes, and greatly increases the odds that aid will in fact fuel corruption and instability. With the increasing uncertainty about what will happen during and after the post-2014 transition, in some quarters the sharp increase in spending since 2009 may function almost as a “last call” at the pub.

Recommendations:

- Provide incentives for quality and impact of aid spending over quantity. Aid money should only be committed when it can be spent in an effective and accountable manner.
- Establish multi-year, predictable funding (as recommended by the Majority Committee staff report to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee) and/or a longer-term fund that could be drawn down (as recommended by the Wilton Park conference). These approaches would reduce the current institutional incentives and negative effects of spending too much too fast, while also conveying a sense of long-term international commitment to Afghanistan.

3. Insufficient attention has been paid to the political economy of aid in Afghanistan

An important consequence of the pressure to spend so quickly has been inadequate consideration of the incentive structures facing

policy makers, donors, implementers, and communities. Evidence from this as well as other studies indicates that the way in which aid has been delivered has contributed to instability through reinforcing uneven and oppressive power relationships, favoring or being perceived to favor one community or individual over others, and providing a valuable resource for actors to fight over. The most destabilizing aspect of the war-aid economy in Afghanistan, however, has been its role in fueling corruption, which reduces the legitimacy of both the government and the international community. Not only are foreign aid projects unlikely to make either the Afghan government or its international backers more popular, but reconstruction assistance seems to be losing—rather than winning—hearts and minds.

This study suggests that institutional incentive structures and the planning process work against the changes in the allocation of aid that would be suggested by research-based evidence. From local strongmen-aligned militias to aid agencies to military and international aid agency officials in Western capitals, personal and institutional interests play a significant role in continuing aid programs that the evidence suggests are inappropriate, too large, or otherwise dysfunctional. Under the current status quo of weak institutions and insecurity, some actors are doing quite well, and so have little incentive to push for change.

If improperly designed aid programs are creating instability, then the current structures and incentive systems of political-aid-military bureaucracies are themselves drivers of conflict. Discussions with individual field-level actors as well as senior officials confirm that the problem is often not that we do not know what needs to be done, but rather that institutional incentives generally reward getting and spending money quickly rather than carefully and effectively.

Recommendations:

- Invest more in understanding the political economy of aid, including local conflict dynamics, the impact of the war-aid economy on these dynamics, the perceived winners and losers of aid programs, and the role of these

programs in legitimizing (or delegitimizing) the government.

- Give more attention to understanding the incentive structures of national and international civilian and military institutions, and the impact of these incentive structures on the effective delivery of development assistance.

4. Insecurity rather than security is rewarded

The primary objective of U.S. aid to countries such as Afghanistan is not development for its own sake, but rather to promote security. As a result, funding for insecure areas takes priority over secure areas. Since 2001, the bulk of USAID's assistance program in Afghanistan has been spent in insurgency-affected provinces in the south and east. The last several years have seen an even greater prioritization of insecure areas despite the lack of evidence that the aid funds being spent are promoting stability or improving attitudes towards the Afghan government and the international community. The findings from this study and other research suggest that aid is more effectively spent in secure regions where good development practice and stronger oversight is more feasible, and less money has to be spent on security. The research also suggests that in areas where insecurity remained chronic and governance structures broken, resources (e.g., for road building) have tended to fuel corruption (both perceived and real), inter-communal strife, and competition among local powerbrokers. Not surprisingly, the prioritization of insecure over secure areas is bitterly criticized by Afghans living in more stable areas, who feel they are being penalized for being peaceful. While no evidence was found that relatively peaceful communities were actually creating "a little bit of noise" to attract more aid resources, there was evidence that in insecure areas local strongmen with militias that were being paid to provide security recognized the need to perpetuate insecurity—i.e., to "create a problem to solve a problem."

Recommendation:

- Reward security, not insecurity, by reversing the current policy of rewarding insecure areas with extensive aid while effectively penalizing secure areas where aid money could be spent more effectively and accountably. Invest in secure areas and, except for humanitarian assistance, make aid in insecure areas more contingent on security. While this study did not specifically examine this issue, this could have a demonstration effect and provide an incentive for communities to seek improved security—rather than the reverse.

5. Accountability and the measurement of impact have been undervalued

The political need for "quick impact" along with institutional imperatives to spend money have in many cases reduced the incentives for careful evaluation of project impact. Currently it is not even possible to get a complete list of the projects PRTs have implemented since they were formed, let alone an indication of what the impact has been of the approximately \$2.64 billion in CERP funds appropriated for Afghanistan between 2004 and 2010. The study's findings have been reinforced by the increasing number of media and U.S. agency reports noted above (e.g., Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction [SIGAR], Office of the Inspector General [OIG]) on funds that have been wastefully spent with no (or negative) impact.

While in an environment with little reliable quantitative data, with numerous independent variables that make determining correlation (not to mention causality) virtually impossible, and where Western-style public opinion polling methodologies may not be reliable, the determination of impact may have to be more art than science. Nevertheless, much more focus should be given to measuring the impact and consequences of aid projects than has been done to date. Recent initiatives by SIGAR, OIG, and staff at the Senate Foreign Relations Committee are positive, but they come late in the game. In addition to the waste of taxpayer resources and negative consequences on the ground, the discrediting of all programs for Afghanistan may be collateral damage if aid resources are not spent in a more accountable and effective manner.

Recommendation:

- Reinforce at all levels the message and culture of accountability and effectiveness. This is not a recommendation to add several more bureaucratic levels of cumbersome national and international oversight mechanisms to oversee inputs, but rather to invest more in measuring outcomes. Establish incentive structures for quality work and careful assessments of effectiveness and not just for spending money.

6. Development is a good in and of itself

There is considerable evidence that development assistance in Afghanistan during the past decade has directly contributed to some very positive development benefits, including decreases in infant and maternal mortality, dramatic increases in school enrollment for boys and girls, a media revolution, major improvements in roads and infrastructure, and greater connectivity through telecommunication networks. One consequence of viewing aid resources first and foremost as a stabilization tool or “a weapons system” is that these major development gains have often been under-appreciated because they did not translate into tangible security gains. U.S. development assistance in Afghanistan has been justified on the grounds that it is promoting COIN or stabilization objectives rather than development objectives. While in the short term this has led to much higher levels of development assistance in Afghanistan, the failure of these resources to improve the security situation is now leading many policymakers to question the value of development assistance.

Recommendation:

- Value development as a good in and of itself. Program development aid first and foremost to promote development objectives, where there is evidence of impact and effectiveness, rather than to promote stabilization and security objectives, where this research suggests there is little evidence of effectiveness.

The objective of the Afghanistan aid and security research project has been to better understand the effectiveness of aid in “winning hearts and minds” and promoting stabilization and security objectives. The following section describes the definitions and research methodology used to achieve this objective.

Definitions

This study has largely used U.S. military definitions for terms such as “stabilization,” “stability operations,” and “winning hearts and minds.” This was done because the U.S. is deploying most of the military and non-military aid intended to promote stability objectives in Afghanistan, and U.S. military doctrine (especially COIN doctrine) is driving the stabilization agenda in Afghanistan. Therefore, using the U.S. military’s own definitions to determine the effectiveness of efforts to use aid to promote stability objectives seemed most appropriate.

The foreword to the U.S. Army’s *Stability Operations* manual (FM 3-07) states that “the greatest threat to our national security comes not in the form of terrorism or ambitious powers, but from fragile states either unable or unwilling to provide for the most basic needs of their people.”¹ The manual, which resulted from DOD Directive 3000.05 (2005) that directed that stability operations “be given priority comparable to combat operations,”² defines “stability operations” and “stabilization” as follows:

Stability Operations—“Various military missions, tasks, and activities conducted outside the United States in coordination with other instruments of national power to maintain or reestablish a safe and secure environment, provide essential governmental services, emergency infrastructure reconstruction, and humanitarian relief.”³

Stabilization—“The process by which underlying tensions that might lead to resurgence in violence and a breakdown in law and order are managed and reduced, while efforts are made to support preconditions for successful long-term development.”⁴

Winning hearts and minds—The concept of “winning hearts and minds” is more difficult to define precisely as, even within the U.S. military, different actors use the term differently. Unlike “stability operations” or “stabilization,” no one precise definition of the term “hearts and minds” exists. Rather, it has been used as a sort of shorthand and, in the translation from doctrine to field-level vernacular, has been much abused. The U.S. Army’s *Counterinsurgency* manual (FM 3-24) explains the phrase as follows:

Once the unit settles into the AO [area of operations], its next task is to build trusted networks. This is the true meaning of the phrase ‘hearts and minds,’ which comprises two separate components. ‘Hearts’ means persuading people that their best interests are served by COIN success. ‘Minds’ means convincing them that the force can protect them and that resisting it is pointless. Note that neither concerns whether people like Soldiers and Marines. Calculated self-interest, not emotion, is what counts. Over time, successful trusted networks grow like roots into the populace. They displace enemy networks, which forces enemies into the open, letting military forces seize the initiative and destroy the insurgents.”⁵

Despite the cautionary note that winning hearts and minds is not about getting people to like military forces, many of the international military personnel interviewed

¹ Department of the Army, *Stability Operations*, FM 3-07 (October 2008), p. vi.

² DOD, Directive 3000.05: Military Support for Stability, Security, Transition, and Reconstruction (SSTR) Operations” (November 28, 2005), p. 2.

³ Department of the Army, *Stability Operations*, p. vi.

⁴ Ibid, Glossary-10.

⁵ Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency*, FM 3-24/MCWP (2006), p. A-5.

for this study did perceive this to be an important objective of their aid efforts.⁶ Even more common, however, was the view that the primary objective of aid projects was to make the population like and support the Afghan government. Not surprisingly, many of the military and civilian PRT officials who were interviewed had this view, given that the primary objective of NATO/ISAF PRTs is to “assist the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to extend its authority.”⁷ This study did not adopt any one definition for the phrase “winning hearts and minds,” but rather tried to explore how different actors understood and used the term, and to understand its effectiveness—whether in terms of building trusted networks, generating consent and support for the presence of foreign troops, or legitimizing the Afghan government.

Field Research Methodology

The research team conducted field research in Kabul and five provinces—Balkh, Faryab, Helmand, Paktia, and Uruzgan. In these provinces, as in nearly all of Afghanistan’s thirty-four provinces, international civilian and military actors are making efforts to use humanitarian, reconstruction, and development aid to promote greater stability and security. However, notable differences between the five provinces provided opportunities to examine the development–security nexus in very different contexts. For example, Balkh and Faryab Provinces in the north were much more secure than Helmand, Uruzgan, and Paktia Provinces in the south and southeast where the Taliban-led insurgency was much more active. In the two northern provinces, the Pashtun were a minority ethnic group, whereas in the south and southeast they comprised the overwhelming majority. Another significant difference was the variations

in approach, budgetary resources, and character of the different NATO/ISAF nations heading the PRTs in each province.

The study team used a relatively consistent methodology in four of the five provincial study areas (Helmand being the exception⁸), bearing in mind that the varied security and other conditions allowed or required somewhat different approaches in different areas. Field-based interviews with Afghan and international respondents provided the primary data source for this study. These were conducted between June 2008 and February 2010 during multiple visits to Balkh, Faryab, Paktia and Uruzgan Provinces. As detailed in Table 1 at the end of this annex, 574 people were interviewed, including 340 Afghan and 234 international respondents. These primary data were supplemented by information from secondary sources, including existing databases (e.g., the Central Statistics Office’s National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment, the NATO/ISAF Afghanistan Country Stability Picture, donor project lists), surveys, public opinion polls, media articles, and a wide variety of published and unpublished reports.

Approval from the Tufts University Institutional Review Board was obtained in advance of the community-level fieldwork. In accordance with standard procedures for informed consent, respondents were told orally that their participation was voluntary, that their responses would be confidential, and that they could terminate the interview at any point. In some cases (i.e., with staff of international agencies and aid contractors) this information, along with background material on the study, was provided by email in advance of the interview.

⁶ Press accounts from Afghanistan often quote military forces suggesting that their aid projects are intended to generate good will among local populations for their presence. For example, “If [soldiers] can spread the message that, ‘Hey, coalition forces built new toilets,’ it makes us seem that much more legitimate, and makes them more willing to work with us,” said Zambarda, of the 2-12 Infantry, Dagger Company, as quoted by Bradley Blackburn in, “‘Warrior-Diplomats’ on the Front Lines in Afghanistan: US Forces on a Dual Mission to Fight the Enemy and Reach Out to Him,” ABC News, May 12, 2010.

⁷ ISAF, *ISAF PRT Handbook*, Edition 3 (2007), p. 2.

⁸ The Helmand case study focused specifically on whether the UK government’s Quick Impact Projects in Helmand between 2006 and 2008 were demonstrating impact. The methodology consisted of analysis of qualitative data from focus groups, quantitative data taken from polling data drawn from communities and provided by the PRT, and interviews with key informants (e.g., PRT staff, Afghan government officials). These primary data were supplemented by extensive review of secondary sources.

The original plan had been to gather qualitative data through focus group discussions with community members and semi-structured key informant interviews with Afghan and international officials. However, during the first round of field research in Paktia and Balkh Provinces in June and July 2008, it became clear that semi-structured interviews with individuals (or on occasion small groups) at the community level generated more fine-grained and nuanced information than focus group discussions. Afghan social hierarchy may discourage willingness to talk openly or express ideas that violate social norms, or may encourage a sort of groupthink. This is likely to be especially true for sensitive topics such as the influence of local power holders or the characteristics of the government. At the same time, while the research teams tried to obtain individual interviews, social protocols (i.e., that it is considered rude to ask people to leave a room) sometimes required that interviews take place in a group setting.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted using two different questionnaires—one for Afghan and international officials and one for community-based respondents. The questionnaires were developed by the principal investigator (PI) and field tested during a June–July 2008 visit to Paktia and Balkh Provinces. The semi-structured nature of the interviews meant that not all questions were asked of all respondents, and issues were discussed in differing levels of detail depending on the backgrounds of the respondents and the time available for interviewing. The interviews with key informants included current and former government officials, donors, diplomats, military officials, PRT personnel, journalists, and UN and aid agency staff. The community-level research included interviews with tribal and religious leaders, local government officials, members of civil society organizations, traders and shopkeepers, beneficiaries of specific reconstruction and development projects, and community members more generally.

The semi-structured interviews followed a strategic structure of clusters linked to specific themes such as actors, aid effectiveness, and security. The order reflected the degree of

potential sensitivity, from an initial request for straightforward information and progressing to personal views. The structuring strategy was used to develop trust before potentially sensitive questions about security were asked. To initiate trust and rapport prior to each interview, a uniform method was employed to briefly and informally introduce the reasons for the research and how the information would be used while stressing and demonstrating confidentiality. Each interview concluded by asking for further comments and questions.

Most of the interviews with Afghans were conducted in Dari or Pashtu, although some interviews with senior government and NGO officials were conducted in English. In northern Afghanistan nearly all the interviews with Afghans were conducted in Dari. The two international researchers leading the field research in Balkh and Faryab Provinces were excellent Dari speakers, and could directly interview Afghan respondents. They were assisted in setting up and conducting interviews, as well as in note taking and analysis, by Afghan research assistants. In Faryab, a small number of interviews were conducted in Uzbeki, which was immediately translated orally to the researcher and research assistant. As respondents were able to understand Dari, they were able to intervene if their answers had been incorrectly translated. In Paktia Province most interviews were conducted in Pashtu, with the help of a research assistant translator, although some of the interviews with government and aid agency officials were conducted in Dari or English. In Uruzgan Province one of the international researchers could conduct some interviews directly in Dari, although a translator was used for interviews where respondents only spoke Pashto. The interviews varied in length depending on circumstances, but generally they lasted one to two hours (although some went on for more than four hours).

The field research initially was designed to be implemented in partnership with the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), an independent policy research organization based in Kabul, which would take primary responsibility for conducting the community-based field research. However,

following the deterioration in the security environment—which made conducting community-based research in the south and southeast increasingly difficult and dangerous for both researchers and research subjects—and the difficulty in finding and retaining qualified researchers to lead the community research, it was decided that the community research would be scaled back and that the Feinstein International Center (FIC) PI, research consultants, and research assistants would conduct all the field research. The most negative consequence of this decision was that without AREU’s male and female research teams, the ability to interview women in the culturally conservative and gender-segregated contexts at the community level was greatly constrained. While the FIC researchers were able to interview a number of women, these were mostly the Afghan staff of NGOs and international agencies and some government officials; they included very few women at the community level.

Caveats

Any research in Afghanistan, and particularly research that looks at the types of sensitive issues raised in this study, requires a number of caveats. Specific to the present study, the relationships between aid and security and the notion of “winning hearts and minds” are hard to define, much less measure. This difficulty is compounded by the insecure context in which much of the field research was conducted, which demands that special consideration be given to ensuring that both researchers and research subjects are not put at risk.

In general, field research benefits a great deal from establishing trust and understanding among respondents, especially before posing questions about the role of the international military and other powerful actors. While the concept of objective research is obscure in rural and even urban Afghanistan, the concept of the meddling outsider is not, and visitors asking sensitive questions may raise suspicions and inhibit responses. Likewise, the phenomenon of the “survey” has become common in recent years, and community members may interpret visits to ask questions about aid projects as yet another “survey.” This can both raise hopes and generate frustration, and respondents may try to outdo

each other (and nearby communities) in describing the devastation and neglect of their area in order to attract development projects. Aside from the hope of getting something out of the transaction, people like to highlight their problems and, given the opportunity to do so, may overstate negative attitudes. On the other hand, the Afghan notion of hospitality towards guests may inhibit some respondents from telling truths that they perceive will offend a (foreign) visitor, including those about what people really feel about the foreign military and the international community. Afghan social hierarchy, especially in a group setting, will often result in the voices of the elders and the powerful being heard, while others lower down on the social scale are expected to keep quiet and defer. Moreover, given the separation of home and public spaces, interactions with outsiders often occur in the public space, and the resulting lack of privacy means that even carefully organized and planned private interviews can easily become public focus groups. Finally, even in the relatively peaceful northern areas, security and mobility limitations constrain researchers from moving about at will, restricting their choice of fieldwork areas and even with whom they can interact. As respondents’ perceptions depend largely on their own situation, and on whether or not they have benefited from aid projects and processes, restrictions on mobility obviously affect the ability to triangulate information provided by respondents and to find the “truth” about what actually happened in certain projects.

The study relied primarily on the stated perceptions of the wide range of respondents mentioned above, and, where relevant, the discussion differentiates the perspectives of different types of actors. The researchers acknowledge the need for caution when basing findings on the stated perceptions of respondents, as respondents’ statements may not always accurately present their perceptions and in addition may not match behavior. The study did not aim to measure causality, as this was simply too ambitious in an environment with so many confounding variables. Still, because aid projects explicitly aim to change attitudes, perceptions (if captured accurately) are relevant. Moreover, however imperfect, the research team believed

that in the Afghan context the qualitative data gathered in in-depth interviews provided a better and more nuanced data source and gauge of perceptions than most data collected using quantitative methodologies, such as public opinion polling.

Despite the above caveats, the methodology offered a number of advantages: repeat visits to follow up on observations, flexible semi-structured interviews that allowed spontaneous responses, and triangulation of responses among experienced team members who had all spent significant amounts of time in the field. Confidence in the methodology was borne out by the remarkably consistent core findings across all five provinces as well as across informants.

Since the field research was completed in early 2010, a number of the issues raised in the findings have been acknowledged by the U.S. and by ISAF, and measures taken to mitigate them, as discussed in the text. Security conditions have also changed somewhat. While Balkh and Faryab are still relatively secure, insecurity in the north in has widened in general, and the troubled districts in the provinces of Balkh and Faryab have become much more so. On the other hand, security in areas of Helmand has improved since the time of the research. Nevertheless, based on more recent visits and discussions as well as the analysis of others, the researchers feel that the broad conclusions and concerns remain valid and very policy-relevant.

Table 1
Comprehensive List of Respondents by Province and Type

Respondent Category	Afghan	International	Total
Balkh			
Government (civilians)	15	24	39
Military	1	27	28
UN Agencies	2	13	15
Aid Agencies (NGOs, contractors)	15	14	29
Community Members	57	0	57
Others (journalists, analysts, etc.)	3	0	3
Balkh Sub-total	93	78	171
Faryab			
Government (civilians)	26	0	26
Military	0	7	7
UN Agencies	5	8	13
Aid Agencies (NGOs, contractors)	8	6	14
Community Members	79	0	79
Others (journalists, analysts, etc.)	0	0	0
Faryab Sub-total	118	21	139
Paktia			
Government (civilians)	21	6	27
Military	0	16	16
UN Agencies	3	8	11
Aid Agencies (NGOs, contractors)	5	4	9
Community Members	35	0	35
Others (journalists, analysts, etc.)	1	1	2
Paktia Sub-total	65	35	100
Uruzgan			
Government (civilians)	11	29	40
Military	11	26	37
UN Agencies	5	1	6
Aid Agencies (NGOs, contractors)	11	7	18
Community Members	14	0	14
Others (journalists, analysts, etc.)	2	3	5
Uruzgan Sub-total	54	66	120
Kabul			
Government (civilians)	1	7	8
Military	1	9	10
UN Agencies	1	5	6
Aid Agencies (NGOs, contractors)	5	10	15
Community Members	0	0	0
Others (journalists, analysts, etc.)	2	3	5
Kabul Sub-total	10	34	44
TOTAL			
Government (civilians)	74	66	140
Military	13	85	98
UN Agencies	16	35	51
Aid Agencies (NGOs, contractors)	44	41	85
Community Members	185	0	185
Others (journalists, analysts, etc.)	8	7	15
TOTAL	340	234	574

Notes: 1. Kabul interviews were conducted by research team members as input to all provincial case studies.
2. As the Helmand case study used a different methodology, the number of respondents is not given here.

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