

UNAMA in Afghanistan

Challenges and Opportunities in Peacemaking,
State-building and Coordination

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Executive Summary

The United Nations has been engaged in Afghanistan in various capacities ever since 1946. It has provided humanitarian and development aid, as well as playing a specific political role during the many wars in the country. In the 1980s the UN led a multi-party mediation effort that concluded the Geneva Accords, and in the 1990s it oversaw a series of agreements between the Afghan government and Mujahedin leaders. After the events of '9/11', the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) was mandated by the Security Council to take on a range of responsibilities – managing relief, recovery and reconstruction activities, holding elections, in addition to providing political and strategic advice for the peace process.

At a time when policy and strategic reviews are being conducted in major Western capitals it is important to examine the role of UNAMA as well. This report focuses on its role in peacemaking, state-building and coordination. Some of the main findings are the following:

- UNAMA played a critical role in facilitating the Bonn process that set the roadmap for re-establishing territorial sovereignty to Afghanistan in 2001. Although it has been hailed as a diplomatic miracle, both the UN and the USA failed to include many Pashtun groups and the Taliban in the process. This exclusion in 2001 and the continued unwillingness of the USA to engage these groups have resulted in many groups in the South opposing the Afghan government (among other things). The situation has also provided a challenging environment for the UN to facilitate a political process. This has shown that, for a peace deal to be sustainable, all conflicting parties need to be signatories to an agreement such as the one in Bonn.
- The USA and the UN have on some occasions worked at cross-purposes. Activities undertaken in the name of the 'war on terror' and short-term successes have undermined the UN's focus on peacemaking and peacebuilding. Backing and funding Mujahedin leaders and warlords as well as recruiting militiamen to fight against the Taliban have undermined the UN's Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programme and its work on transitional justice. This is symptomatic of the lack of common purpose and strategy in Afghanistan.

- A major comparative advantage of UNAMA is its in-country expertise and institutional memory that builds on the UN family's decades-long engagement. UNAMA is the closest one gets to an impartial actor with no other interest but to serve the Afghan people. Nevertheless, its credibility has been put into question on occasion – particularly in 2002, when stability was chosen over justice.
- UNAMA's set-up has hampered its ability to be successful in many spheres. The 'light footprint' approach was understood by UN Headquarters to mean having a limited presence with a small group of professional staff. That has hindered UNAMA in being an effective coordinator of donor assistance and international political engagement.
- In recent years when UNAMA has sought to expand, it has been severely limited by the bureaucratic recruitment procedures at its headquarters in New York. Despite having the funds, the recruitment process takes about a year. This is not unique to the UN mission in Afghanistan: the need for reform in this area is critical for setting up quick and flexible UN missions in the future.
- UNAMA's ability to coordinate the international community¹ has also been limited by the general way in which the international community has organized itself. There is no single chain of command, as the military forces are not peacekeepers under a UN Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG). Having two separate structures for the post-conflict operation is problematic, resulting in several plans for the same province or region. Moreover it is problematic that the military command is not subordinated to a civilian head given that the security line of operation is only the supporting one, not the lead. The frequent rotations within the military mean a lack of the continuity that could have been expected if the UN had been the lead.
- The organizational set-up is problematic also because there are three supranational structures seeking to coordinate civilian efforts: UNAMA, the European Union and the NATO Senior Civilian Representative (SCR). Coordination of donor funds is difficult for any institution because power over the purse sits in the capitals and philosophies differ as to how aid should be

¹ The term 'international community' will be used to refer to the (primarily Western) donors and troop-contributing countries and major actors, like the World Bank and UN agencies, that are present in Afghanistan.

spent to be most effective. Today there are three such organizations – surely a waste of resources and time.

- With regard to the internal organization of UNAMA, the integrated mission concept seems to have worked, to a considerable degree. It has provided broader awareness within the mission about the cross-cutting and overlapping challenges. However, the potential of such an organizational set-up seems under-utilized. This may be because UNAMA lacks its own strategic plan for how it wants to implement the Security Council mandate.

1. Introduction

At a time when policy and strategic reviews are being conducted in major Western capitals, it is important to examine the role the UN has played in Afghanistan, particularly the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).² The world organization has been engaged in Afghanistan in various capacities since 1946. It has provided humanitarian and development aid as well as being politically involved during the many wars that have wracked the country. In the 1980s, the UN played a special role in leading a multi-party mediation effort involving Afghanistan, Pakistan, the USSR and the USA that concluded the Geneva Accords. In the 1990s, it oversaw a series of agreements between the Afghan government and Mujahedin leaders and engaged regional powers in the ‘Six plus Two’ group.³

After the events of 9/11, UNAMA was mandated by the Security Council to take on a range of responsibilities, from managing relief, recovery and reconstruction activities, to holding elections as well as providing political and strategic advice for the peace process. Despite quite an extensive mandate, it was the explicit wish of the Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) Lakhdar Brahimi that this UN operation should be small. The lessons that he, like many others in the UN Secretariat and the Security Council,⁴ drew from the UN operation in Kosovo and East Timor was that the international footprint had been too big. The term ‘light footprint’ in Afghanistan was therefore used to describe one thing seen from a UN perspective: Afghan sovereignty. It was a deliberate desire of the UN that Afghans – not international bureaucrats – would take charge of the destiny of the country.⁵ In practice, the UN translated this desire into having a small presence on the ground with few UN bureaucrats. A second association with the term ‘light footprint’ has therefore been to a small-scale UN operation.

Initially, this approach suited the USA and European states quite well, as their main objective was to go after al-Qaeda. While these states

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² This paper is largely based on off-the-record interviews conducted in August/September 2009 with current and former officials from UNAMA, UN agencies, ISAF and several key embassies in Kabul as well as the research community in Afghanistan.

³ The 6+2 forum consisted of China, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan plus the United States and Russia.

⁴ It is the Security Council that ultimately decides on the mandate of UN peace operations; the 5th committee determines the resources provided to operations.

⁵ Report of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly and Security Council, *A/56/875-S/2002/278*.

were engaged in reconstruction activities, few resources were spent compared to other post-conflict operations.⁶ Some have therefore termed this approach ‘nation-building light’ or ‘nation-building on the cheap’, and many today feel that its shortcomings sowed the seeds of the Taliban resurgence.⁷ ‘The international community had a golden opportunity to help Afghans build an effective government capable of providing its population with the most basic public services’.⁸ Some have therefore concluded that low input equals low output. With the current calls for a ‘political surge’, a ‘civilian surge’ and a ‘military surge’, it is timely to revisit the light vs. heavy footprint discussion.

The conclusions drawn from Afghanistan will also form the basis for how future operations in ‘weak states’ are organized, which makes it important to get right the lessons to be learned. If the United Nations had taken a ‘heavy footprint’ approach, what would that have entailed in terms of resources and activities? Should the United Nations have served as a caretaker government for a certain period, for example? Should thousands of peacekeepers have been deployed? Should billions have been spent upfront on basic services? If that had been the case, would Afghanistan have been peaceful by now? And can we draw any generalizations from the Afghanistan experience to future endeavours? These are big questions, and this report will attempt to shed some light on them.

The report examines the evolution of the role of UNAMA and its Security Council mandates in the post- 9/11 era.⁹ It begins by discussing UNAMA’s role in peacemaking, covering both the facilitation of the Bonn Agreement in 2001 and its current ‘good office’ support.¹⁰ We then turn to the ‘light footprint approach’ and examine UNAMA as a supporting agency in state-building as well as its role regarding the lead-construct and the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) construct. Thirdly, its coordination role in terms of internal coordination, coordination of the international community and coordination between the international community and the Afghan government, is analysed. Lastly, the organizational make-up of UNAMA as an integrated mission is evaluated. The report focuses primarily on UNAMA and does not discuss in depth the contributions of each UN agency.

⁶ Compared to the initial deployments of 60,000 in Bosnia in 1995 and 9,000 to East Timor (with a population less than 1 million) in 1999/2000, the 4500 soldiers deployed initially were very few (Dobbins 2005).

⁷ Kilcullen 2009; Dobbins 2007a; Giustozzi 2008b.

⁸ Dobbins 2007a.

⁹ The mandate under scrutiny is United Nations Security Council Resolution 1806 (2008) and 1868 (2009), both with the same text.

¹⁰ The term ‘good offices’ is used to explain the series of activities that the Secretary-General himself or his envoys can undertake to mediate an end to a conflict or prevent conflict from erupting. It refers to the go-between function and transmitting messages and information between protagonists in a conflict. As the UN does not have any carrots or sticks, its role is confined to acting as an impartial facilitator, informal or formal, that enjoys the prestige and backing of the world community.

2. UNAMA and Peacemaking

UNAMA's overall goal is to promote peace and stability in Afghanistan and it is mandated by the Security Council to promote national reconciliation¹¹. UNAMA have been involved in peacemaking in various ways. It played a critical role in facilitating the Bonn process in 2001 which set out the roadmap for political transition and re-establishing Afghan territorial integrity and sovereignty. Since then, the UN has been actively engaged in low-profile conflict resolution and outreach, and has cautiously pressed for a reconciliation process. However, there are many interpretations of 'reconciliation'. To some, it means giving amnesty to militia leaders or warlords; others see it as an internal healing process between the victims and perpetrators of grave crimes. Others again see it as involving the regional and international actors with the insurgent groups in a peace-process format. As yet, the Afghan government has not defined their understanding of the term, and the various international actors still have differing ideas about what it means.

In outlining UNAMA's role in peacemaking, various challenges, shortcomings and lessons learned will be discussed here. The main obstacle to peacemaking has been the Afghan government as well as resistance on the part of the USA and NATO to engage in a peace process.

2.1 Facilitating the Bonn Process

The UN was praised early on for the successful conclusion of the 10-day negotiations that led to the Bonn Agreement in December 2001.¹² With only a few weeks to prepare, the UN brought together the Northern Alliance and three émigré groups to discuss how to re-establish permanent government institutions in Afghanistan.¹³ Also in attendance were representatives of several members of the international community, including the USA. The participants agreed to set up an interim government to arrange an Emergency *Loya Jirga* (grand council) that would indirectly elect a transitional administration and subsequently hold general elections, as well as undertake the process of drafting a new constitution by holding a constitutional *Loya Jirga*.

¹¹ The Security Council mandate has nevertheless become narrower since UNAMA was first established in 2002.

¹² The Bonn Agreement is formally called *Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan Pending the Re-establishment of Permanent Government Institutions*.

¹³ These émigré groups were the Cyprus Group of former Mujahedin, the Peshawar group and the Rome group composed of the royal family of Afghanistan.

Although the Bonn Agreement has been hailed as a ‘diplomatic miracle’, it had several shortcomings. The main one was that major Pashtun tribes as well as key warring parties like the Taliban, Hezb-e-Islami Gulbuddin and the Haqqani Network were not represented. As such, the Bonn Agreement cannot be referred to as a peace deal, since the major warring parties were not signatories. In fact, it was only SRSB Brahimi who signed the deal. The exclusion of these groups set the stage for many in the Pashtun South to oppose the government in Kabul, which, they say, is run by Northern leaders.

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, it would have been unthinkable to include individuals or groups that Washington saw as ‘terrorists’. The UN did little to include them either. The reason seems to be partly a result of US pressure and partly based on the belief that the post-Bonn process would manage to reach out to those in the Taliban movement who might be willing to join the political process.¹⁴ However, the UN did not systematically try to include the excluded groups in the political process or deal. Indeed, in July 2002, Lakhdar Brahimi maintained that the Taliban and al-Qaeda remained a threat to security in Afghanistan – thereby taking the same line as the US administration.¹⁵

The most important political process where the Taliban could legitimize itself was the Loya Jirga and the elections to parliament and the provincial council. In the first half of 2002, Karzai also publicly left the door open to the possibility of the Taliban playing a role in government.¹⁶ A small number of prominent Taliban officials joined the new institutions as individuals, but the Taliban movement was not asked to take part in a deal. In some ways, this exclusion sowed the seeds of the subsequent insurgency. Alienation from the post-2001 political process and exclusion from access to power and resources have been a key motivating factor for most insurgent foot soldiers.¹⁷

A key explanatory factor in this inadequate process was the difference between UN and US objectives and the special environment after 9/11. In many ways, the US objectives and *modus operandi* were at odds with UN objectives. Washington’s policy on Afghanistan was framed in terms of counterterrorism objectives: the ‘war on terror’. The objective was to destroy the safe haven from which al-Qaeda had planned and directed the 9/11 attacks. The Taliban movement was lumped into the same enemy-category. As a result, the US authorities chose to work with neighbouring governments and local Afghan war-

¹⁴ Brahimi, Lakhdar, ‘A New Path for Afghanistan’, *New York Times*, 7 December 2008, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/12/05/AR2008120503191.html>

¹⁵ Semple 2009: 27.

¹⁶ Semple 2009: 29.

¹⁷ Rutting 2009: 2.

lords to oust the Taliban and chase down al-Qaeda.¹⁸ That made it unthinkable to include ‘terrorists’ in a peace process.

The objectives of the UN were very different, in that they focused on peacemaking and peacebuilding, through sustainable processes and long-lasting development. More specifically, the overall objective in 2002 was to support the implementation of the Bonn Agreement processes as well as to promote national reconciliation and rapprochement across the country.¹⁹ Without support from the USA to further the reconciliation agenda, the UN faced major challenges, as it is difficult to have one group chasing the Taliban and another inviting them for talks.

Furthermore, hoping that the operation in Afghanistan would be short-lived, Washington was not focused on the sustainability of the political process or the recurrence and exacerbation of underlying problems.²⁰ This was particularly evident when the UN was trying to disarm militiamen as part of the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programme established after the Bonn process. The USA counteracted the DDR programme by recruiting the militiamen as a way of establishing security without having to use its own US forces.²¹ This undermined a key role given to the UN in the war to peace transition, as well as efforts to establish a credible transitional justice mechanism. Only gradually did Washington become more engaged in democracy-building initiatives and, to a limited degree, in dialogue. However, a key window of opportunity was missed in the early stages.

One specific lesson for the UN is that sustainable peace cannot be achieved without a proper peace deal that heeds both the conflicting parties and the causes of war. In particular, serious efforts need to be made to include the warring parties. Further, in order to fulfil its mandate, the UN depends on the support, in words and action, of other members of the international community – the USA not least.

2.2 Conflict resolution, outreach and reconciliation

UNAMA enjoyed high status among the Afghan people after the Bonn Agreement, and people were confident that the world organization would bring peace to their country. People were also willing to stop fighting, and many agreed to the UN serving as a third party in resolving their conflicts. UNAMA headquarters in Kabul and its field of-

¹⁸ Dobbins 1999: 5.

¹⁹ UNAMA’s original mandate was established in the Secretary-General’s Report A/56/875-S/2002/278.

²⁰ Asia Society 2009:11.

²¹ Rashid 2008: 128.

fices came to play an active role in mediating communal disputes like control over resources, perceived injustices suffered by certain groups, and conflicts among political groups. In the north, queues were often observed outside UNAMA offices, with people bringing their complaints and disputes to be resolved.²² UNAMA shuttled between the factions to quell outbreaks of fighting in the centre and west as well. Nonetheless, without a peacekeeping force, the United Nations was left to play a minimally effective role in terms of its good offices.²³

As the insurgency and insecurity deepened, people came to UNAMA less frequently. Sometimes they would choose UNAMA as an intermediary and sometimes other groups or bodies with authority. UNAMA's direct role in low-key conflict resolution lessened with time, but its officials continued to reach out and engage in dialogue with all levels of society, including those indirectly associated with the insurgency. Such work was termed 'political outreach'. The initial idea was that UNAMA would use its role as an impartial third party to engage with figures related to the insurgency as a first step, before linking them with the administration and official reconciliation apparatus.²⁴ However, UNAMA was hindered in doing this, for many reasons.

UNAMA's limited role in both outreach and reconciliation has primarily been a result of the indecisiveness and lack of will shown by the Afghan government, the USA and NATO to engage in a reconciliation or peace process. This has meant lack of clarity on what role the international community wants UNAMA to play. This confusion is particularly evident in the mandates provided by the Security Council since 2008. On the one hand, UNAMA is mandated to strengthen its field presence and conduct political outreach, but it is restricted to engaging in reconciliation issues on its own. In fact, UNAMA is to provide good offices only 'if requested by the Afghan Government' and to support 'the implementation of an Afghan-led reconciliation programme, within the framework of the Afghan constitution'.²⁵

The problem is that there is a fine line between 'political outreach' and reconciliation. Both entail reaching out to the insurgent groups. The scope of outreach ranges from talking to ordinary individuals and government officials, to elders, tribal and community leaders and others who may or may not be in contact with insurgent groups. Some hold that talking to Taliban members is part of outreach, while others argue that it marks the first step in reconciliation. This lack of clarity was experienced when the Afghan government expelled a UNAMA

²² Interview with UNAMA officials.

²³ Thier 2006: 523.

²⁴ Semple 2009: 73.

²⁵ UN Security Council Resolution 1806/2008, article 4.d.

and EU official in 2007 for having contact with Taliban members in Helmand.²⁶ While few details are publicly available concerning this case, it shows that UNAMA is caught in a bind. On the one hand, the international community wants it to do more with regard to political outreach; but the Afghan government wants UNAMA to do less. As a result, UNAMA officials have exerted particular caution in doing outreach and taken on the role as the ‘local shrink’, but with limited success in actual conflict resolution.

All current local efforts at outreach are limited by the absence of a national reconciliation process. And as UNAMA is supposed to act only when requested by the Afghan government, its activities have been few, since the government has been indecisive with regard to reconciliation. It fears ‘international meddling’, and such a process is not seen as being in the government’s interest. The government abandoned both the 2005 Action Plan on Peace, Reconciliation and Justice²⁷ and the 2008 Reconciliation Principles²⁸ that had been developed in cooperation with UNAMA. While UNAMA is able to support the government, it has no leverage over it. Only the USA and NATO, and perhaps neighbouring countries,²⁹ would be in a position to use carrots and sticks to get the Kabul government engaged in a process. While the USA and NATO have expressed the will to talk with the Taliban, they are concerned only with lower-ranking Taliban members, in an Iraq-type ‘Awakening Council’ style – not the top leadership.³⁰ Both the USA and NATO are parties to a conflict where they are supporting one side in a civil war. When the warring parties have no interest in a process, the role of UNAMA becomes limited.

Besides UNAMA, the UN Security Council itself is a player in the reconciliation process, having set up the 1267 sanctions list over the members of the Taliban and al-Qaeda. Considerable debate has taken place about whether this ‘blacklist’ serves to enable or limit the reconciliation process. Some within the Afghan government have argued that the near-impossible process of getting individuals removed from the list acts as a disincentive to Taliban commanders to join a reconciliation process.³¹ Others argue that this is merely an excuse for the government to sit on the fence, since the fact that already 12 out of 142 names have been taken off the list proves that it is not impossi-

²⁶ Arab News, ‘Kabul Orders UN, EU Officials Out’, 26 December 2007:

<http://www.arabnews.com/?page=4§ion=0&article=104981&d=26&m=12&y=2007>

²⁷ ‘Peace, Reconciliation and Justice in Afghanistan. Action Plan of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan’, 6-7 June 2005, http://www.aihrc.org.af/tj_actionplan_19_dec_05.htm

²⁸ Semple 2009: 64.

²⁹ Saudi Arabia was engaged by the Afghan National Security Council in 2008, but with limited success (Christia and Semple 2009).

³⁰ Al-Jazeera, ‘US open to Afghan Taliban Talks’, 8 March 2009, <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/asia/2009/03/20093885411963197.html>

³¹ Interview, Kabul, September 2009.

ble.³² It seems that de-listing could be part of a wider reconciliation process as a bargaining tool. However, UNAMA has no authority over the Security Council, and it is they who ultimately decide who is to be de-listed. Such a process would have to be done in parallel with a reconciliation process.

2.3 UNAMA in a future peace/ political process

When discussing what role UNAMA could play in a political process it is important to be clear as to what such a process would entail. As noted, any involvement in a national reconciliation process between the Afghan government and the insurgent groups is dependent on invitation by the Afghan government. Without the will on the part of the warring parties and without a more flexible mandate from the Security Council, UNAMA can play only a minor role in this area.

However, the conflict is not limited to the Afghan government and the insurgent groups: it includes the USA, NATO and the other countries of the region as well. Mullah Omar and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar have reportedly announced that they would agree to talks only when the US troops leave Afghanistan.³³ The USA, as a party to the conflict, needs to agree to talks. While Mullah Omar's call for US withdrawal can be understood as a way of raising the stakes before a bargaining process begins,³⁴ a timeline for troop withdrawal would need to be part of the process. Such was the case when the UN facilitated the Geneva negotiations in the 1980s which led to the Soviet drawdown. The Obama administration has been preoccupied with whether to support a troop surge and is paying less attention to the underlying causes and drivers of the conflict, which in part is linked to international military presence in Afghanistan.

As many have argued, peace in Afghanistan is dependent on support from the neighbouring countries.³⁵ The UN might perhaps revive the 'Six plus Two' group established in 1996 and used in 2001 in preparation for the Bonn process, to pursue a political process. In addition, given the UN's history in engaging with the Taliban directly or indirectly, it might play a role in facilitating multi-party talks through various channels, including Pakistan.

³² Semple 2009.

³³ Interview with former Pakistani Ambassador to Afghanistan, Rustom Shah Mohmand. S. Koster, 'Talking to the Taliban is pointless', *Radio Nederland*, 31 March 2009. <http://static.rnw.nl/migratie/www.radionetherlands.nl/afghanistanconference/090331-taliban-pakistan-redirected>

³⁴ This has for example been the position of the former prime minister of Afghanistan, Ahmed Shah Ahmedzai. See Al-Jazeera, 'US Open to Afghan Taliban Talks', 8 March 2009, <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/asia/2009/03/20093885411963197.html>

³⁵ The Obama administration has paid particular attention to the regional dimension (Rubin and Rashid 2008).

This complex conflict therefore needs a complex multi-party peace process. Whether such efforts can succeed depends largely on the will of the US administration and NATO. As long as the warring parties are unwilling to give up the fight, no process will be possible. The time may not be 'ripe' for negotiations at the moment, as there is an unequal balance of power. Nevertheless, a case could be made for mandating the UN to act as a neutral arbiter to facilitate such a process once the parties are ready. Although some have argued that the UN no longer enjoys the status of being neutral and impartial because of its close relationship with the Afghan government and the USA, there are few others who could play such a role but the UN.

The third possible role for UNAMA in the future would be to lead a Bonn-2 process. While the Kabul government may not be ready to undertake major changes of the political system in a state of war, there is a need to revise the highly centralized system. The president has very extensive powers vis-à-vis the parliament and the sub-national level. A key issue of debate between the two leading presidential candidates was the current political system. Dr. Abdullah Abdullah proposed changing the system to a parliamentary system to enable better representation of the various tribes and ethnic groups. Such a system would also encourage the formation of political parties which currently do not play a major role under the Single Non-Transferable Voting (SNTV) system. UNAMA, with its experience and lessons learned from the Bonn-1 process, would be a suitable organization for facilitating this effort.

3. UNAMA and State-building?

After the events of 9/11, the UN took the initiative to develop a highly ambitious state-building process³⁶ in Afghanistan, aiming to reform and rebuild one of the world's poorest and most conflict-ridden countries. The approach was different from previous peace operations. Instead of running a civilian transitional administration as in East Timor and Kosovo, the UN decided on a 'light footprint' approach. The idea was that Afghanistan should develop itself by taking charge from the beginning. That would ensure that a more sustainable and non-international dependent governance structure would be established.³⁷

Some have argued that this light footprint approach was far from sufficient to meet the ambitious state-building agenda set by the Bonn Agreement.³⁸ This view holds that the lack of progress in developing a capable state and responding to social needs largely explains the resultant political crisis, with a population disconnected and disillusioned by the corrupt government. It is even argued that the Taliban resurgence was due just as much to inadequate resourcing from the international community as to the talents of the insurgents.³⁹

Others, however, have argued that a light footprint was indeed right and that the subsequent failures and insecurity stem from the international actors being misled by their own ambitions.⁴⁰ The latter view partly stems from a belief that it is impossible for the international community to build an Afghan state.⁴¹ One point that both sides seem to have ignored is how and by what means the light footprint was implemented.

3.1 Building central governing institutions from the sideline

The focus for UNAMA from 2002 to 2005 was on overseeing the implementation of the Bonn Agreement, and raising funds accordingly. It also sought to coordinate the humanitarian and reconstruction ef-

³⁶ State-building is defined as 'the attempt to reform, build and support government institutions, with the aim of making them more effective in generating public goods. State-building also seeks to increase the strength and centrality of the state in the governance of development assistance' (Nixon 2007).

³⁷ This view was partly founded on the anti-colonialist sentiments of SRSR Lakhdar Brahim, who was born in Algeria, but also on the *Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations* that he chaired in 2000.

³⁸ Nixon and Ponzio 2007.

³⁹ Kilcullen 2009; Giustozio 2008b.

⁴⁰ See Stewart 2007.

⁴¹ Stewart 2009b.

forts undertaken by the over 20 UN agencies in the country. For UNAMA this meant facilitating the establishment of the emergency Loya Jirga and the constitutional Loya Jirga, supporting the drafting of the new constitution, setting up government offices and key functions, establishing various commissions (like the human rights and civil service commission) as well as holding the presidential elections (October 2004), the National Assembly elections and the Provincial Council elections (September and November 2005).

UNAMA played a key role in implementing the Bonn Agreement, and used experienced political affairs officers with in-depth knowledge of the country and language to ensure that the process was done the Afghan way. The overarching view of UNAMA was that Afghans would never enjoy enduring peace and public security without open and accountable governing institutions. The main focus was therefore on the constitution, the presidency, a few select ministries and the parliament.

While the UN has been hailed for the assistance it provided in the implementation of the Bonn Agreement, there were some significant negative aspects. The first was that SRSB Brahimi and UNAMA largely equated the 'light footprint' approach with a 'hands-off' approach, fielding only a small number of UN staff to the mission. In 2002, the UN as a whole only had 300 international staff in Afghanistan.⁴² The dismal state of affairs with regard to the Afghan government institutions, its ruined buildings and lack of (capable) staff as a result of over 20 years of war called for significant assistance. 'Many of those employed in the administration during 2002–2004, especially at the higher level, had no previous professional experience and often lacked basic educational skills.'⁴³ It was not uncommon to find semi-illiterate Afghans heading key departments. Considerable technical assistance was needed to these officials, but also to human resource management.

While UN technical advisers were fielded to the ministries, most UN agencies poured in assistance the traditional non-consultative way, sidelining the government.⁴⁴ Building the capacity of government institutions at the same time as delivering humanitarian and development is time-consuming, so UN agencies and NGOs simply chose to deliver the assistance themselves.

Thus, instead of limiting UNAMA's professional capacity, it might have been more appropriate to have a big footprint, but subordinated

⁴² UN Secretary-General, Report to the Security Council (S/2002/278).

⁴³ Giustozzi 2004: 6.

⁴⁴ Ghani and Lockhart 2008.

to Afghan decision-makers.⁴⁵ What ensued was a weak UN and a weak Afghan government – and that certainly did not do much for building strong and accountable governing institutions capable of responding effectively to the basic needs of the population. Nevertheless, even without significant resources, the UN was able, through its regional offices, to do fund-raising, help Kabul communicate with the provinces and establish provincial coordination bodies chaired by the provincial governors.

The second drawback about the UN assistance to the new political project was the considerable influence that SRSB Lakhdar Brahimi had on the political architecture and his decisions concerning ‘peace before justice’. In 2001, Brahimi had aligned himself with the USA and brought several warlords – among them Mohammad Fahim, Ismail Khan and Rashid Dostum – to the front row of the Emergency Loya Jirga, as well as accepting their participation in the Transitional Government. The USA, which had relied on precisely these individuals to oust the Taliban regime, had little choice but to accept their claim to power. The UN, on the other hand, could have argued against – but SRSB Brahimi was afraid of upsetting the fragile peace process and argued that ‘security is more important than justice.’⁴⁶

Afghan civil society groups argued that human rights abuses were themselves a source of the conflict. They held that without justice there could be no peace.⁴⁷ Therefore, taking this line compromised the credibility of the UN in the eyes of the Afghan public, who – like Karzai – demanded that the warlords be removed. It also contributed significantly to the rampant corruption, the ineffectiveness of the ministries ‘awarded’ to the warlords, and the impunity that prevailed in the following years. In many ways, Brahimi compensated for the light footprint by playing a major political role. This meant a retreat from the original idea of UNAMA’s approach, which was to let the political process and decisions be driven by Afghans. Of course, the consolidation of warlord power in the regions was due to other security decisions as well. Still, the question for future operations remains whether to include potential ‘spoilers’ in the political process despite their dismal human rights record.

3.2 Security and working at cross-purposes

One of the most serious consequences of the ‘light (security) footprint’, as adopted by the USA, was the resultant security vacuum and the subsequent revival of warlord militias in the first years. The UN

⁴⁵ Thier 2006: 528.

⁴⁶ Interviews, Kabul, September 2009.

⁴⁷ Thier 2006: 524.

and the USA were working at cross-purposes. The US-led military coalition focused on 'rooting out the terrorist networks' of al-Qaeda and the Taliban. Instead of deploying ground troops, Washington funded Northern Alliance groups and recruited local militias to fight. While this made sense militarily, it meant significant political obstacles for the UN in carrying out the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programme, as well as in doing conflict resolution, since factional infighting was being fuelled. Little attention was paid to securing the country as a whole through a broader peacekeeping operation, as the UN had called for.⁴⁸ While the UN had mandated the establishment of a peacekeeping force – the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) – the USA actively opposed its existence and particularly its expansion beyond Kabul.

While the light footprint approach had early on been hailed in Washington as a quick fix to Afghanistan, the unintended consequences were many and devastating. As Alexander Thier explains: 'the return of warlord militias brought internecine fighting, ethnic tensions, clients for outside interference, and a booming narcotics trade. These regional power brokers were able to consolidate their power faster than the internationally supported Bonn process could consolidate the state.'⁴⁹ The financial resources these warlord commanders received from the USA were spent on investing in drug production and engaging in land grabs, predation, political intimidation, and ethnic cleansing – a major source of insecurity for Afghans.⁵⁰

A UN role in peacekeeping became sidelined in favour of the initially UK-commanded multinational International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) approved by the Security Council in 2001. In view of the slow bureaucratic processes at the UN, this was the quickest way to get adequately equipped troops on the ground. Nevertheless, the force amounted to only 4,500 soldiers in 2002 and remained in Kabul. Instead of being handed over to the UN, the command was given to NATO, as it was believed that NATO would be able to mobilize more forces. Regardless, the force was not able to carry out its peacekeeping functions outside Kabul until October 2003 because of US resistance. This might not have been the case if the force had been under UN command. A UN force might, as it often does in these operations, also have focused on sending police, since much of the instability involves criminality.

The meagre results of the light security footprint can be understood as a contributing factor to the insurgency resurgence. As James Dobbins

⁴⁸ Vaishnav 2004: 249.

⁴⁹ Thier 2006: 552.

⁵⁰ Rubin 2006: 5.

has concluded, 'The insurgency came after we got there. It came as a result of U.S policy decisions, largely negative ones, such as the failure to establish peacekeeping forces. The U.S. left a huge security vacuum. It did this as a matter of policy because it was against nation building. But that allowed spoiler elements to employ violent resistance.'⁵¹

The set-up of ISAF with a separate chain of command to the UN defied the recommendations of the 2000 Brahimi Report to have integrated missions and unity of effort.⁵² The evolution of ISAF into Provincial Reconstruction Teams with lead-countries deploying civilians to do reconstruction further sidelined the role of the UN in relief and reconstruction. However, the most critical aspect of the growing instability was the autonomous US-led Operation Enduring Freedom, with 'kill and capture' tactics, insensitive and culturally inappropriate 'raid strategies' and use of air power (causing significant civilian casualties) that gradually turned Afghans against the international military, making them hostile toward the international community.

The UN was left to monitor the security situation and to push forward the state-building agenda of the Afghan security forces, but without any contributions of its own. Due to the limited deployment of UN civilian police there was little technical advice that could be provided to Kabul's largely dysfunctional Ministry of the Interior. Again, with the interpretation of 'light footprint' as meaning a light and limited capacity, UNAMA had difficulties in promoting various agendas and acting as the coordinator, because of lack of knowledge and capacity.

It is becoming increasingly clear that never again should an international intervention be organized in such a way. For one thing, as was underlined in the Brahimi Report of 2002, 'the key conditions for the success of complex operations are political support, rapid deployment with a robust force posture and a sound peace-building strategy.' A strong peacekeeping mission is of crucial importance, particularly when there has been no peace deal between the warring factions. Secondly, having separate chains of command undermines the development of a common strategy and effort; and third, working at cross-purposes, with one partner focusing on short-term gains and another on long-term development, severely hampers any progress. Serious efforts need to be made to develop a coherent post-conflict reconstruction strategy before intervening in any country.

⁵¹ James Dobbins in Scoble interview 2009.

⁵² United Nations (2000) Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations.

3.3 Reconstruction and Development⁵³

State-building is largely about building stable and legitimate institutions that can respond effectively to citizen needs. The Bonn Agreement was the framework for establishing central governing institutions, but considerable work was needed in assisting the institutions to function. The international community chose to organize itself with regard to financial assistance by having UNAMA as the body that would assist the Afghan government in defining humanitarian and reconstruction priorities as well as mobilizing funds for these priorities. Individual states took on considerable responsibility in terms of the 'lead-nation' concept and by managing specific Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs). However, because of the lack of state capacity, most of the aid was – and still is – delivered through NGOs, contractors and UN agencies.

Instead of a strong role for UNAMA, 'lead nations' were made responsible for building specific sectors of the state.⁵⁴ Germany was given responsibility for police reform, Italy for justice reform, the UK for counter-narcotics, Japan for disarmament and the USA for security.

The advantage of organizing the reconstruction effort in this way was to make a particular country have ownership of one sector and feel publicly accountable for doing its part. However, the major drawback was that differences in commitment resulted in unbalanced progress. For example the USA first spent \$155 million on training the army, then spent \$797 million in 2004 and \$788 million in 2005, whereas Germany spent a total of only \$89 million between 2002 and 2006 on police reform.⁵⁵ The dismal progress in police and justice reform were the two weakest links in the state-building exercise, according to Rashid.⁵⁶

A second disadvantage of having sector-leads, as opposed to one overall lead, lay in overseeing the areas where the sectors overlap, for example to ensure the proper distinction of roles and responsibilities between the police and army. Had UNAMA been more heavily resourced with significant professional capacity in all sectors, it would have been able to 'connect the dots' and coordinate efforts better. While that is what the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board (JCMB) forum could address in practice, it never materialized.

⁵³ The term is here used to cover technical assistance provided to government institutions as well as assistance in terms of social and economic development.

⁵⁴ Ayub and Kouvo 2008: 652.

⁵⁵ Rashid 2008: 204–205.

⁵⁶ Rashid 2008: 204.

In addition to the sector-leads, lead-nations were also established for setting up PRTs. This was the way ISAF was able to persuade Washington to deploy more troops outside Kabul. PRTs are meant to ‘assist the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to extend its authority, to facilitate the development of a stable and secure environment in the identified area of operation, and enable Security Sector Reform and reconstruction efforts’.⁵⁷ The question today remains *how* to fulfil this mandate. Many PRTs have taken it to mean providing transport for provincial governors, provincial council members and district commissioners to peripheral places. In the long run, this is largely unhelpful. Many problems arise when outside actors disturb the traditional power structures by assisting one group and not others. Internationals are fooled every day.

For the most part, each PRT-nation has drawn up its own plans for how to develop ‘its province’ – and the result has been a highly conflicting policy process. For example, it took the international community and the government several years to agree on a vision for the police, because of deep-rooted conflicts between the Americans and Europeans on the type of police force appropriate for Afghanistan.⁵⁸

As the PRTs expanded, the UN as a whole always lagged behind, becoming a minor player towards the development and military footprint of the PRT. In some cases, UNAMA’s in-country expertise has been utilized, particularly its institutional memory, since PRTs have rotations every 4 to 18 months. On the other hand, because all PRTs want to stabilize their province within their rotation periods, they end up not having time to wait for Afghans to acquire additional capacity, and instead decide on projects or for them to draw up plans. Thus, PRT personnel have found themselves doing much of the reconstruction work themselves, or have sub-contracted it to other organizations, sidelining the government. Moreover, the main focus has been on quick-impact projects that would ‘win hearts and minds’⁵⁹ – an approach that has very much defeated the light footprint spirit of having the Afghans at the helm. A particular problem in this regard is that ‘local ownership’ has come to mean ‘their’ ownership of ‘our’ ideas, exemplified by cutting ribbons at openings of schools and health clinics.

A central question is whether the UN should have taken on the lead-nation and PRT role in a UN provincial team set-up. That would have meant a clearer unity of purpose and command, ensuring that particular sectors would be implemented the same way and with equal distri-

⁵⁷ Islamic Government of Afghanistan, ‘Terms of Reference for the Combined Force Command and ISAF PRTs in Afghanistan,’ 27 January 2005.

⁵⁸ International Crisis Group 2008.

⁵⁹ See Waldman 2009 for insights on the ‘hearts and minds’ projects.

bution across the country. However, the UN is not automatically better equipped to undertake large nation-building projects. Issues of policy disputes, local ownership, aid-dependency and ‘how’ to stabilize a province would also have faced the UN. While the UN system as a whole has considerable experience with this type of work, the ‘how’ question is still fundamental, and the risk of building parallel structures would not necessarily have disappeared.⁶⁰

An approach employed in many countries is to use the national budget as a coordinating mechanism in funding national programmes, rather than earmarking particular programmes within a particular province. While international actors have been reluctant to provide budget support, mechanisms should have been sought in the form of international watchdogs over the money flow, which would have helped in promoting financial transparency.

It is often forgotten that all earlier modernizing regimes in Afghanistan were violently deposed, and their leaders killed or forced into exile.⁶¹ Slow change is therefore essential, but that does not fit well with the civilian or military sense of urgency. By pursuing a modernization process like state-building, the international community is rocking the boat of many established norms and practices. The process is essentially one of social engineering. The Western-backed modernization project have encountered two types of resistance. One is tactical, reflecting the fear of being excluded from the benefits of change. The other is a more principled opposition related to an understanding of what constitutes a just and good society.⁶² These are realities that often get ignored, but may return to haunt the international community unless they are taken seriously. The increasing outcries of ‘foreign intervention’ in Afghan processes are evidence of this.

A last point related to reconstruction is reform of the justice sector. In 2001 the people welcomed the new order. They wanted the government to save them from the abuse of local warlords, to secure the peace and provide prosperity.⁶³ Thus far, however, the UN, the international community and, not surprisingly, the Afghan government have only tiptoed around the issue of setting up a credible justice mechanism for dealing coherently with the atrocities committed by the Western-empowered warlords. Nothing has been done to ensure that these individuals would not be able to hold public office again and be in a position to commit the same crimes – as the 2009 elections have shown. It is becoming increasingly more difficult to deal with these individuals, now that they are in government and have become en-

⁶⁰ Lockhart 2008.

⁶¹ Suhrke 2007: 1296.

⁶² Surkhe 2007: 1304.

⁶³ Malikyar and Rubin 2002.

trenched in the formal and informal economy. Most interviewees held that these warlords would have to be neutralized in one way or another, whether by putting them on trial in Afghanistan or The Hague or by the international community threatening to use force. The call for justice continues. This is one area where the UN could build up a considerable role for itself, since its rule of law unit has been strengthened.

The idea that the international actors should take a backseat to an Afghan-led political and development process is still a principle that should be adhered to. UNAMA nevertheless understood its 'light footprint' to mean almost no footprint, or a very thin one in terms of professional capacity. Given the weakness of institutional capacity in the government, UNAMA should have been supplied with more assistance in the form of expatriate Afghan professionals and others to assist the government, but also to provide strategic advice and to have the systems to coordinate international assistance. The most sustainable way of coordinating efforts and building up state capacity is to channel assistance through the Afghan government. That would have made the government more sovereign than it is today.

4. UNAMA and Coordination

UNAMA has been mandated to coordinate the international community (including the assistance provided by them) in order to bring more coherent support to the Afghan government.⁶⁴ As with any UN mission, a coordination mandate involves a triple challenge: (i) facilitating its own internal coherence, (ii) supporting and encouraging coherence among all the international or external actors, and (iii) facilitating and supporting coherence between the external and internal actors.⁶⁵

Coordination means different things to different actors. It can mean sharing of information, ensuring that programmes and activities do not overlap, having a joint strategy or framework to ensure complementary activities. The UN has understood coordination in all these senses, and has tried to influence and mobilize donors around underfunded and under-prioritized issues. Complete coordination can never be achieved without a single chain of command, so the most useful discussion pertains to how to optimize coordination and coherence, while minimizing overlap and resources being wasted. How has UNAMA sought to meet the challenges in these three areas?

4.1 Internal coherence

As to internal coherence, this is discussed in greater detail in section 5, on integrated missions. ‘Internal’ has a dual meaning to the UN: internal within UNAMA, and the internal UN system. Concerning the former, a Joint Mission Analysis Centre (JMAC) was initially established to facilitate a common understanding on which to base decision-making. This Centre was subsequently replaced with the Analysis and Planning Unit (APU), and planning was added. So far most planning has focused on facilitating coherence between the international actors and the government, and less on UNAMA coherence. Views differ widely as to what UNAMA is and should be doing. As we shall see, internal coherence has been limited by the lack of a strategy or vision post-Bonn.

For the internal UN system, coherence has been challenging because the UN agencies are autonomous actors. Although the agencies have pledged to work as ‘One UN’, each agency has a separate board of

⁶⁴ UNSCR 1868 article 4.a, March 2009.

⁶⁵ de Coning 2007a: 9.

directors with its own mandates and visions. With a current total of 23 UN agencies in country, ensuring coherence is difficult. Nevertheless, by employing a common planning platform and the increasing use of joint programmes and funds, coherence is better today than even before. The tool for driving this coherence has been the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF).

4.2 External coherence: civilian side

As per UNAMA's mandate, the mission is expected to coordinate and ensure coherence among the international community, civilian and military. Such a mandate is to a large degree 'mission impossible'. First of all, everyone wants to coordinate, and no one wants to be coordinated: few states are willing to accept being told what to do by other actors. The willingness to be coordinated also seems to run parallel with the stakes involved. When troops and significant resources are involved, countries are even less willing to be told what to do.⁶⁶ It is fine to be coordinated if one can continue with one's activities, but not when behaviour or policy must be changed.

With regard to coordination of civilian activities, some countries have stated that they are willing to be coordinated while others, among them the USA, do not accept taking orders from the UN in most cases. For one thing, US government spending is enormous and there are challenges related to delivering coherently among its own government agencies. But Washington also has its own national strategy for Afghanistan, a strategy defined according to the US national interest – and the UN does not have the power to challenge that. Nevertheless, from certain embassies have come complaints that UNAMA does not have the systems to do coordination. As noted earlier, as a result of the light footprint approach, UNAMA has lacked capacity and professional expertise in all areas needed for coordination. For example, there is no 'who does what where' spreadsheet or database from which to make specific recommendations. Nor is there clearly stipulated what works and what does not.

Nevertheless, UNAMA has used its agenda-setting power and position as coordinator to mobilize support for certain programmes and policy areas, among them agriculture, private-sector development and capacity building.⁶⁷ By organizing coordination fora in Kabul and abroad it has been able to draw attention to these policy areas. In addition it has used its position to mobilize resources to under-funded regions like the north and the central highlands of Afghanistan. This process has

⁶⁶ Interview, Kabul, September 2009.

⁶⁷ These were priority areas decided in June 2008 at the Paris Conference by the Government and the International Community, with UNAMA assisting in putting them on the policy agenda.

been very time-consuming, since decisions related to priority-setting and funding are often taken in capitals and not at the embassy or PRT level.⁶⁸ As UNAMA does not have extensive capacity to determine across the board where the gaps are, it can play only a modest role, focusing on the big-picture policy areas. Given the many constraints, it is not realistic to expect coordination in every area. Moreover, UNAMA has no sanctioning power, so states can choose whether or not to be coordinated.

Coordination is also challenging when there are multiple coordinating bodies. In addition to UNAMA, there is the EU Special Representative, charged with coordinating the EU members in Afghanistan. Every six months there is a new EU presidency, whose embassy takes the initiative to coordinate various sectors. The NATO Senior Civilian Representative was recently set up with the aim of coordinating the Provincial Reconstruction Teams, even though the mandate is clearly to support the UN SRSG. There is also the ‘SRAP’ group (Special Representatives for Afghanistan-Pakistan group) chaired by Richard Holbrooke. While these fora and bodies are not necessarily in competition with each other, they waste time and resources. As one interviewee noted, ‘there is an abundance of coordination on useless issues and too little on things that actually matter.’

Given UNAMA’s limited capacity, and in the interest of long-term institution-building, coordination is best done through channelling funds through the national budget. That would put the Kabul government in a position to decide what to prioritize and where. In parallel there needs to be a capacity building element in the handling of funds to avoid corruption. There is certainly only so much money the government can absorb, but presently most of international assistance sidelines the government. Second comes the funding of national programmes. This way of coordination can help to ensure that there is no overlap and waste. Although donors have tried to align their funding according to the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS), considerable earmarking and funding take place outside the government realm.

4.3 External coherence: civilian–military

With regard to civilian–military coordination, UNAMA’s mandate is to coordinate its activities with ISAF. Coordination in this sphere has been particularly challenging, due to the different understandings of the purpose of coordination, and to disagreements concerning the ingredients of a successful stabilization strategy.

⁶⁸ Only the USA has put a clear priority for decentralizing joint planning to the provincial and district level.

ISAF has argued for a closer relationship with UNAMA, since counterinsurgency work depends on both military and civilian effects. However, UNAMA has hesitated to be too close to the military and has kept its distance, which makes it difficult to be coordinating activities. The main reason is that UNAMA is reluctant to be too closely associated with a body that inflicts casualties on the Afghan civilian population.⁶⁹ In addition to being mandated to work with ISAF, UNAMA is also mandated to speak out and be independent when civilian casualties occur. It is important to maintain some distance to the military, as close cooperation risks compromising the security of staff as well as bringing into question UNAMA as impartial and independent of the military.

UNAMA staff have held that it is impossible to change or influence the mindset of the military. Not only has ISAF been reluctant to take UN advice, they argue, but because of the high turnover it is difficult to establish a longer-term relationship based on mutual trust and understanding. One example is the continuous push from the military to 'build stuff' so as to win the hearts and minds of Afghans. Some UNAMA staff would argue that the focus should be on outreach, governance and the rule of law, as there has been no clear evidence that spending more money on development produces more stability.⁷⁰ On the ground, the conflicting aims of counterterrorism and counterinsurgency between Operation Enduring Freedom and ISAF have taken a particular toll on ISAF's relationship with UNAMA, as there has been no single military voice.⁷¹

While a formal relationship exists and input from UNAMA on military planning has increased, ISAF has complained that UNAMA is too weak to deliver on the civilian side of counterinsurgency. UNAMA has pushed back and argued that the military is misunderstanding the role of UNAMA, as well as ignoring mandate and resource constraints, particularly at the sub-national level. First, it is not an implementing body; second, it has limited experience in working in insurgency-type situations like Afghanistan.

And third, UNAMA's ability to reach out to Afghans and coordinate in the volatile areas, particularly the South and East, has become limited due to the deteriorating security situation. Also UN agencies have

⁶⁹ Furthermore, the US-led Operation Enduring Freedom and ISAF have had separate agendas, counterterrorism and counterinsurgency/ peacekeeping respectively, without a single chain of command.

⁷⁰ The billions of dollars spent in the South in recent years indicate that there is not a positive correlation between development money spent and stability given the deterioration in the security situation.

⁷¹ For a discussion on counterterrorism vs. counterinsurgency, see Kilcullen 2009.

become increasingly unable to have a substantial presence in the South and East. This has led to a minimal presence of UNAMA in precisely those areas where, it is held, the military need UNAMA the most. The UN has thus become caught up in the military blame-game, where civilian weakness in implementation is seen as the reason why the military strategy is failing. In very few wars have civilian organizations been able to carry out large scale development projects.

Development practitioners, including UN implementing agencies, have a different outlook as to what aid should and can be used for. Traditionally they have channelled their assistance to needs-based and poverty-reducing projects, rather than programmes aimed at stabilization.⁷² Development planning has operated with long-term horizons rather than the short-term ones preferred by the military. Coordination, or rather creating synergies, has therefore been difficult. Nevertheless, the UN agencies have made ‘governance, peace and stability’ their principal priority for the next four years, with specific programmes that aim to assist in stabilization. While perhaps not closer to the military, there is now an acknowledgement that a minimum level of stability is needed before one can engage in traditional development activities.

Also on the humanitarian side there has been almost complete reluctance to engage with the military. The military, on the other hand, have wanted to engage with the NGOs and have also themselves claimed to be providing ‘humanitarian relief’ to communities. This has proven particularly contentious, as the NGOs argue that, by definition, anything called ‘humanitarian’ must be based on the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality – and that the military’s intentions do not fulfil those standards. Civilian–military guidelines have therefore been adopted to set out in explicit terms what is expected of each side.

The more fundamental challenge to UNAMA-ISAF coordination is that the set-up and early prioritizations have resulted in ISAF becoming the dominant force, with a heavy military footprint. Even though both the UN SRSG and the ISAF Commander have argued that the solution to Afghanistan must be political rather than military, the actual strategy and planning has been military-led, with minimal input and lead from UNAMA. In 2008 there was an exchange of letters between the NATO Secretary-General and the UN Secretary-General to formally establish a closer relationship. Many had hoped that the agreement would involve having the Commander of ISAF consult the

⁷² While needs-based development activities may have a stabilizing effect, UN agencies do not aim for their activities to be stabilizing as such. The military, however, would often like civilian bodies, like the UN agencies, to do more quick-impact projects – or ‘CIMIC’ in military-speak.

SRSG on a weekly basis and using the UN for its political insight and advice, rather than the political advisors and the NATO Senior Civilian Representative who currently perform this job for ISAF. That would have been the closest one could get to better coordination between the two organizations. However, both UN HQ in New York and the incoming SRSG were reluctant to set up such a mechanism, for many of the reasons outlined above. Significant coordination between ISAF and UNAMA has thus been highly limited; and, given the increased influence of Washington, the role of UNAMA vis-à-vis ISAF will only become weaker.

4.4 Coherence between external and internal actors

Facilitating and supporting coherence between the external and internal actors is the most challenging coordination task because of the sheer number of actors to be coordinated.

Two complementing mechanisms have been sought to deal with this challenge. The first is the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS). UNAMA and the government have urged the international community to align their programmes and funds according to the Afghan government's strategy. The underlying reasoning is that such coordination is done most practically when actors use a joint overarching plan, as no individual actor has the capacity to coordinate at the activity level.

This is a type of invisible, self-coordinating mechanism that ensures minimum coherence. While some have argued that it is a good coordinating mechanism, it also has its limitations. The first is that most programmes and activities can be justified as being aligned to ANDS, as the strategy covers a vast list of diverse aims and objectives. Secondly, self-coordination is no guarantee for equal funding for each sector of a strategy, or for the even distribution of funds across the country.⁷³

Another limitation to using ANDS as a coordinating tool is that it is not viewed as a common strategy. Whilst some programmes and funds may be aligned to ANDS, there are competing strategies that take precedence. For example, there is the five-year ISAF Campaign Plan, as well as individual country strategies such as the new US strategy, the UK's Helmand Roadmap and Norway's Faryab strategy. In addition,

⁷³ A significant challenge involved in having Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) is that countries earmark funding for 'their' province rather than for national programmes. For example, the UK sees Helmand province as being 'Afghanistan' and the USA have long seen Regional Command East as being 'Afghanistan'. This has meant considerable differences in funding for the various provinces. As Afghans in the North often have questioned 'do we need to start an insurgency in the North to receive development assistance?'

these strategies keep on changing and undergoing independent review. There is the general attitude that nothing in the past has worked and that one needs to start afresh every year, or every time a new military commander or new ambassador arrives in country. This high turnover of individuals and strategies presents a significant challenge to coordination.

The second coordination mechanism that seeks to bring coherence between the government and the international community is the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Body (JCMB). Originally set up to monitor implementation of the London Compact, it used to meet quarterly in various world capitals. As of 2008, the body has become a Kabul-based, high-level forum co-chaired by the Afghan government and UNAMA. While having ANDS as its principle document, the JCMB forum seeks to discuss and agree on priority areas for funding and raise certain policy areas to the attention of the principals.

Many international actors see it as a useful forum for formally adopting agreed policy decisions, such as raising the ceiling on the number of troops in the Afghan National Army or agreeing to a plan for capacity building. It is also known as a forum where principals can be updated and discuss progress in certain areas, such as police reform. The chief limitation to this coordination mechanism is that it depends on unanimous vote, which in turn limits agenda items to the ‘lowest common denominator’ – those areas on which all agree. The main criticism of such coordination fora is therefore that there is too much coordination of things that do not matter and too little focus on difficult questions like reconciliation and justice. However, given the autonomy and differing interests of the various representatives around the table, this mechanism seems the most realistic way to ensure some degree of internal/ external coherence.

The mandate of coordination is a thankless task and close to ‘mission impossible’. Nevertheless, in several areas UNAMA has set up mechanisms for coordination that have made some progress in ensuring coherence – internal to the UN, within the international community, and between the international community and the government. Focusing on coordination at the policy level, UNAMA has primarily undertaken its role by mobilizing support and funds for certain policy areas and programmes.

There are numerous challenges to coordination, including individual agendas and interests as well as the internal capacity and systems of UNAMA to act as lead coordinator. Expectations should be realistic as to what coordination can achieve, and one should not undertake coordination simply for the sake of coordination. In order for UNAMA

to undertake effective coordination, despite the limitations, better capacity and systems are needed. That, however, brings us back to the UN's inadequate bureaucratic procedures in New York, whereby missions do not receive the resources for implementing their mandates until one year after the Security Council resolution has been passed.

5. UNAMA Organization: An Integrated Mission

Since early 2000, the UN DPA and DPKO have re-organized several missions to become ‘integrated missions’. This concept is still being developed, but the basic principle, as outlined in the Secretary-General’s *Note of Guidance on Integrated Missions*, is to organize the UN mission around a common strategic plan that assists a country in its war-to-peace transition in a multi-dimensional manner.⁷⁴ Instead of understanding peacekeeping as a matter of monitoring a ceasefire or peace agreement, the integrated mission approach is based on the understanding that progress is needed in security (and security sector reform), governance (and institution-(re)building), development, human rights and rule of law in order to for there to be a successful transition from war to peace.

Many countries have adopted a similar approach to peacebuilding, often called ‘whole-of-government approach’ based on the ‘3Ds’ (Diplomacy, Development and Defence) or ‘comprehensive approach’. The integrated mission concept is therefore a way of organizing a mission. It assumes that by having staff with expertise from various fields, the mission will be able to develop a common strategic plan that can tackle the various aspects of transition and peacebuilding.⁷⁵ It also assumes that the leadership and employees in the mission will have a more comprehensive understanding of the situation in the country as a result of the variety of expertise.

The integrated process can also include the UN system as a whole, to help the UN agencies which make up the UN Country Team to deliver as ‘One UN’.

5.1 UNAMA as an integrated mission

UNAMA was set up as a political mission in 2002 by the UN Security Council, but with an integrated structure whereby the political and relief, recovery and reconstruction pillars of activity would answer to the Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG).⁷⁶ The background for this type of organization was the 2000 Brahimi Report

⁷⁴ United Nations, *Note of Guidance on Integrated Missions*, 9 December 2005.

⁷⁵ For a more thorough background on the integrated mission concept and the challenges attached to it see de Coning 2007b.

⁷⁶ UNAMA’s original set-up is explained in detail in the Security Council report 2002/278.

which argued that, with the UN increasingly deployed to *create* post-conflict situations, peacekeepers and peacebuilders have become inseparable partners.⁷⁷

The main difference from other peacekeeping and peacebuilding missions is that UNAMA does not have implementing powers. It has no resources to carry out programmes or projects, as only the UN agencies can actually implement programmes. For example, the military and police units are advisory units as the UN has no Blue Helmets on the ground. Therefore UNAMA's work focuses mainly on the strategic policy level, pushing certain neglected policies onto the agenda in coordination meetings that it facilitates, and trying to get the Kabul government and the international community to agree on the content of specific policies.

Working at the policy level links into UNAMA's coordination role. Most units have a coordination function – as with the rule of law unit, which runs the Provincial Justice Coordination Mechanism (PJCM). Under the PJCM, UNAMA has been able to scope out who does what and where in terms of the justice programmes, and can thus make recommendations on what is needed, and where. Ideally, all units should be able to do the same; however, some units – such as the governance unit – have focused on advising, liaising and monitoring governance policies and assisting the Independent Directorate for Local Governance (IDLG).

Under an integrated mission, the staff is intended to have a wide range of skills and expertise that can be drawn on to fully understand the situation and thereby provide policy advice as well as draw up a common strategic plan for the mission that sees the country as a whole. That is the goal; however, there are several challenges involved in meeting this goal.

First, in order for each unit to give policy advice in their respective areas, a certain degree of expertise is required. In the early days, UNAMA focused on having a core team of experts, but today the recruitment system set up at UN Headquarters in New York sends people without any knowledge or experience of Afghanistan, or any policy knowledge or specific qualifications for the portfolio to be covered. Being able to provide policy advice to the government as well as the UN and international community as well as coordinate other actors requires specific competency, and it is an absolute necessity for effectiveness. It is also the basis for being seen as a credible coordinator. Very few commentators have focused on UN human resource man-

⁷⁷ S/2000/809, pp 8–9.

agement, even though it is of key importance for any UN mission to be effective and provide any value added.⁷⁸

This relates to the second challenge: UNAMA needs its own strategic plan in order to be an effective coordinator. Aside from the SC mandate, there is no single document that resembles a strategic plan outlining the ‘ends, ways and means’ of what the various units in UNAMA should do. From 2002 to 2005 the Bonn Agreement determined the strategic plan, but there has been no post-Bonn vision or plan. There is currently no mission statement that clarifies for the staff what the aim of the mission is, besides ‘promoting peace and stability’.⁷⁹ The SRSG has repeatedly argued that the solution in Afghanistan is not military, but political. However, what the political solution is and how UNAMA should organize its activities to work towards this solution remain untold.

Moreover, opinion differs as to whether UNAMA should have its own strategy. Some argue that UNAMA’s strategy is to promote the government’s Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) and that, as such, the job of UNAMA is to ensure that the various UN agencies and donors are aligned with ANDS. While this is an important role for UNAMA, others argue that ANDS cannot be UNAMA’s political strategy/ solution. The ANDS is a development strategy, not a strategy for how to stabilize the country. While joint planning and strategizing with the government is important, it should not hinder UNAMA in developing its own strategic plan that includes what is expected of each unit to achieve the mission’s overarching goal of stability and, second to that, coordination.

With the establishment of the Analysis and Planning Unit (and the abolition of the Joint Mission Analysis Centre (JMAC)) there have been attempts to use the competencies within the mission to develop common stances on various policies; however, this has not yet amounted to a common strategic plan for the mission. The consequence of not having such a plan is that the over 20 field offices lack direction from headquarters and operate very differently across the country. But what donors want is more field offices, particularly in provinces where they have PRTs and where UNAMA is not present.

The third challenge is that not all units want to have a common plan, particularly not the humanitarian actors. They argue that their work should not be used to achieve an overarching political objective, as that would compromise their standing as independent, neutral and im-

⁷⁸ Interview, Kabul, September 2009.

⁷⁹ United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, Fact Sheet, 28 March 2008, <http://unama.unmissions.org>

partial, with the humanitarian principle as the ultimate objective. This challenge to the integrated mission concept led OCHA to establish a separate office in Afghanistan in late 2008. This was a result of the humanitarian community feeling that UNAMA had become 'too political' and close to the government and the military, and that, by being closely associated with UNAMA, they would put themselves at risk.⁸⁰ However, OCHA is dependent on UNAMA for offices in the field (it is expensive to have separate offices in insecure areas) and for their established relationships for negotiating humanitarian access. It is still questionable whether one can conclude that the humanitarian actors cannot be part of an integrated mission, as part of the struggle seems to involve a turf battle between leaderships and the inability of the Secretary-General to make some tough calls.

Nevertheless, there are several ways that the integrated mission approach has benefited the work of each unit. For one thing, there is a deeper understanding of the political dimension to the conflict as well as the cross-section of issues affecting the conflict and development. This aspect is particularly evident in the field offices, where there is generally only one staff member per unit and thus much more cross-fertilization. Secondly, logistically and in terms of service and security, being in an integrated mission means sharing compounds, security personnel, transport such as helicopters, and services, such as having the same press office and spokesperson. Third, it represents the UN's best attempt at being coherent and presenting one face to the outside world.

5.2 Integrated Mission and the UN Country Team

UNAMA has been provided with a clear mandate to coordinate all UN activities in Afghanistan. Until recently, the over 20 UN agencies operating there have been implementing programmes in a free-for-all style with little coherence and coordination. While 'delivering as one' has been the mantra, each agency is answerable to a separate Board of Directors that have different agendas for their agencies. Ensuring internal UN coordination has therefore been a challenge, even though the UN organizations are ultimately answerable to the UNAMA SRSG.

UNAMA, through its DSRSG for the Relief, Recovery & Reconstruction pillar (who also is the UN Resident Coordinator), has nevertheless been able to make progress in developing a common strategic framework together with the UN agencies. Almost one year of work went into a process that produced the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), which has three priority areas: 1) Good Gov-

⁸⁰ Niland 2004: 62.

ernance, Peace & Stability, 2) Sustainable Livelihoods: Agriculture, Food Security and Income Opportunities and 3) Basic Social Services: Education, Health and Sanitation. The UNDAF is in line with ANDS and has an emphasis on building the institutional capacity of the government at the sub-national level as well as being more coordinated. The UNDAF process has resulted in the UN agencies having various joint programmes as well as having agreed to deliver ‘provincial packages’ that should bring visible change to hitherto under-served provinces.

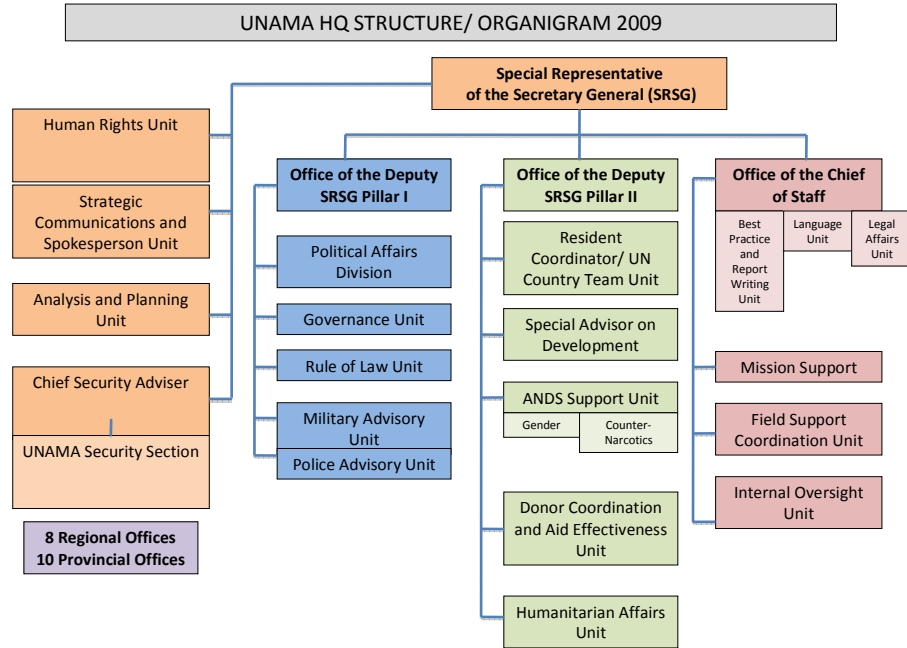
The new UNDAF for 2010–2014 marks a substantial change from the previous framework, in that the UN agencies appear to be more coordinated and that the programmes are based on the current realities of state-building needs as well as the status of the conflict. While the work of UNDAF has been carried out under the direction of the office of the DSRSG/RC, it is still somewhat de-linked from the rest of UNAMA’s work, but this seems to be because UNAMA has no strategic framework of its own.

6. Conclusion

Various lessons can be learned from the UN venture in Afghanistan. The most prominent ones are:

- A clear and independent mandate is needed for the UN to carry out its 'good offices' mandate properly when deployed to a conflict or post-conflict zone.
- The work of the UN will be largely futile if individual states are working at cross-purposes with the UN's peacebuilding efforts. Short-term military gains may have devastating long-term political consequences, as was the case with supporting local militias and warlords in Afghanistan.
- Future operations should be based on the light footprint spirit (local sovereignty and ownership), but should resource the mission with considerable professional expertise – in order to assist government institutions carry out their functions, but also to coordinate the international community more effectively. The UN should also set up provincial teams to support provincial authorities.
- The international community should have only one body that is responsible for coordinating civilian and military efforts. The body should also delineate an overarching strategy for all parties, in agreement with the host government.
- The UN needs to have mechanisms, technical knowledge and capacity in order to be an effective coordinator. Nevertheless, the best way to ensure coordination while also building strong institutions is to channel financial assistance through the country's national budget.
- The integrated mission way of organization should be promoted, but it is also important for the management to learn to draw on a wide range of resources and devise a common operational plan.

ANNEX A



Source: UNAMA

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