Afghan Hearts, Afghan Minds

Exploring Afghan perceptions of civil-military relations

Executive Summary & Recommendations

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Exploring Afghan perceptions of civil-military relations

Research conducted for the European Network of NGOs in Afghanistan (ENNA) and the British and Irish Agencies Afghanistan Group (BAAG)

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Contents

Abbreviations

ACBAR	Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief
AIHRC	Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission
ANA	Afghan National Army
ANAP	Afghan National Auxiliary Police
ANDS	Afghan National Development Strategy
ANGO	Afghan non-government organisation
ANSO	Afghanistan NGO Safety Office
ANP	Afghan National Police
AOG	armed opposition groups
CDC	community development council
CF	coalition forces
CIMIC	civil-military cooperation
CIVMIL	civil-military
DIAG	disbandment of illegal armed groups
GoA	government of Afghanistan
HIG	Hizb-I Islami Gulbuddin
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDLG	independent directorate for local governance
IHL	international humanitarian law
INGO	international non-governmental organisation
IO	international organisation
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force (NATO)
ISAF X	tenth command of ISAF
MoI	Ministry of the Interior
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NSP	National Solidarity Programme
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OEF	Operation Enduring Freedom
PDC	provincial development committee
PRT	provincial reconstruction team
psyops	psychological operations
QIP	quick impact project
SSR	security sector reform
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
WHAM	winning hearts and minds

Executive Summary

Throughout Afghanistan, there are silent but chilling reminders of the constant loss of innocent lives in a conflict which has spanned three decades, and one that continues to claim innocent lives today: crowded graveyards; a gravelike structure in a provincial capital to remind passers-by of the children killed in a roadside bomb. The identities of the killers and the victims may change but the result for the majority Afghans remains the same – a lack of security against a stark backdrop of continuing poverty and underdevelopment.

Within donor-countries, politicians, media and the public are beginning to question the achievability of stability and reconstruction in Afghanistan. At the same time, donor governments have sought to integrate their aid, foreign policy and military agendas in an effort to find a 'comprehensive approach'. Pressure from donor governments and military actors to deliver 'instant' development and democracy is pushing NGOs into unexplored territory and promoting an uneasy marriage between 'the three Ds' – development, diplomacy and defence. Efforts by the international community and national actors to put appropriate and effective coordination mechanisms in place, design and implement joint strategies have proven difficult.

While significant efforts have been made to overcome the most obvious and avoidable clashes of interest and inconsistencies between military and civilian actors, fundamental challenges remain. Some international military contingents have sought to improve their coordination with government structures. Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) have also worked with some cash-strapped NGOs on short-term and project-level activities, but difficulties inevitably arise because of very different objectives. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are under pressure from all sides: from communities to deliver without jeopardising security; from government to implement national programmes; from criminal groups and armed opposition groups (AOGs) who threaten their safety; from politician-

donors and NATO representatives pressuring them to align with 'hearts and minds' strategies.

Civilian actors in the civil-military (civmil) debate, including NGOs, have also primarily engaged with specific elements of the military responsible for monitoring and interacting with civilian actors, framed as CIMIC in military jargon. However infringements into 'humanitarian space' have been carried out by other elements of the military, which are currently not engaged in the civmil debate. There is also a vast range of NGO positions on civmil relations, reflecting a complex history of NGO development, a complicated operational context and a certain level of incoherence in the positions and approaches of individual PRTs.

In light of this, civmil relations retains its importance for those individuals, whether military or civilian, working to bring sustainable peace and development to Afghanistan.

This research has tried primarily to address Afghan concerns and unpack some of the commonly held assumptions about Afghan engagement with and within the main areas of the civmil debate. In particluar, it aimed to:

- provide an evidence base for advocating to donors, policymakers and the military for assistance that can be appropriately, safely and effectively implemented in Afghanistan
- present NGOs with an analysis of the characteristics of insecurity and conflict in Afghanistan
- assess concerns regarding 'blurring the lines' or other impacts on the future of programmes and the safety of staff and beneficiaries
- explore and convey the perspectives of local populations on security and development issues.

A total of 140 people were interviewed in two provinces,[1] including aid agency staff, government employees, religious and local leaders, policymakers, military personnel, diplomats, donor

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1   Paktia and Uruzgan – sponsoring NGOs are operational in one, while the other has only a skeletal Afghan NGO (ANGO) presence. Both provinces represent different levels of security and civil-military relations experience.

agency staff and academics. The range of views, at times contradictory, demonstrates the complexity of the context and the need for regular, in-depth research of this kind which can help NGOs and others gain a better understanding of the environment within which they operate. Anonymity of interviewees was stressed at all times.

1. Afghans in the civmil debate

Despite the number of Afghan individuals and organisations who deal with civmil relations on a daily basis, there is little or no Afghan voice in debates on civmil. Discourse amongst policy-makers on 'stabilisation' through 'winning hearts and minds', 'civilianisation' of military operations or 'humanitarian space' can at times be disconnected from the realities and concerns of practitioners at field level and completely disconnected from those of ordinary Afghan people. There is a need for an 'Afghanisation' of civil-military relations processes, institutions and principles. At present a variety of political, practical and cultural obstacles militate against the participation of Afghan NGOs, government or community representatives in policy-making or debate on civmil. The responsibility to address this gap lies at all levels with the government, NGOs, the military, and donors. The responsibility also lies with Afghan agencies themselves and Afghan civil society, both too often over-stretched, under-resourced and, in the case of some, driven by short-term financial considerations.

NGOs

Humanitarian agencies need to invest more in translating concepts like humanitarian principles and 'humanitarian space' into terms that create a deeper understanding, acceptance and ownership of such concepts among Afghan staff, local populations, powerholders and parties to the conflict. There has been work at international level with Muslim scholars to interpret humanitarian principles within an Islamic framework, but results have not been widely disseminated in Afghanistan. It is important to disseminate such information using the Afghan media in order to familiarise people and generate discussion which may lead to a demystification of the jargon as well as a sense of ownership. Afghan NGOs need to be provided with sustained support to build their capacity to engage with some policy processes on an equal footing, and to implement programmes on the basis of a principled and effective approach to assistance, rather than short-term projectised and instrumentalised approach.

GoA

Although civmil interaction should include representatives of the Afghan security and defence forces, it rarely does. In fact, some individuals and groups within these sectors have no accurate notion of what PRTs do and, at times, no clear understanding of, or interest in, the civmil debate. Furthermore, they have little in-depth knowledge of international humanitarian law and how government activities or positions on issues related to humanitarian principles (eg. neutrality of humanitarian agencies) can impact on the ability of agencies to provide neutral, impartial and independent assistance to communities affected by conflict or humanitarian crisis. There is a need for wider understanding of the debate, its rationale and impact at policy and implementation levels within state and government structures. Relevant ministries and departments also need to increase their understanding of how government policy on military actors impacts on humanitarian and NGO operational space.

Civil society, communities and the media

Civil society and communities have very little input to the discussion on civmil relations. The media is not engaged either, and even if they had the opportunity to do so, journalists fear the reprisals they fear they may face if they took a perceived anti-military stance. In the current climate, it may be difficult to provide a secure, enabling and neutral environment in which Afghan people can engage in the civmil debate. NGOs and civil society must try to find ways to create such a safe space.

2. Imported and local principles

Military concepts, such as 'winning hearts and minds', or aid agency concerns regarding humanitarian principles are not the only ones at play in the arena where NGOs and the military currently operate. Afghaniyat and Islamiyat[2] may also underpin many interactions in certain areas, while respect for cultural forms and the ability to practice Islam are both fundamental parts of human security for some in Afghanistan. Aggressive house-to-house searches and forced entry by the international military can easily undermine the Afghaniyat principle of namus,[3] and seem to create more ill-will than civilian casualties. All stakeholders must learn to look at human security in Afghanistan through a more culturally appropriate lens.

3. Security for NGOs

The Afghan context is increasingly characterised by new trends in the nexus between the insurgency, economic criminality and weak, corrupt or absent rule of law. Distinctions between criminal elements, insurgents and 'government'-associated factions have become increasingly hard to discern and delineate. In some areas, state security forces have become increasingly predatory. Increasing military involvement in the delivery of assistance poses new challenges for NGOs' own assistance strategies and approaches to security management.

All interviewees seemed to have slightly different perspectives on what it means to be secure and different ways of providing security. NGOs tend to focus on acceptance and protection-based security management strategies, while using deterrence as a last resort. However, as the security situation deteriorates and impacts on social, political and conflict dynamics at the local level, the old methods of operating, which allowed NGOS to manoeuvre in insecure parts of Afghanistan in the past, are no longer entirely effective. No longer able to rely on communities to provide them with security in a consistent fashion, a pull-back in some areas has been inevitable. Yet in doing so, NGOs have lost touch with communities. As a consequence, NGOs face a number of challenges and dilemmas, including:

- Managing and juggling differing perceptions of their NGO's identity amongst key stakeholders and power-holders, including insurgent factions, local populations, local leaderships, and the government of Afghanistan
- Differences between military concepts of stabilising and securing an area, versus NGO approaches to aid agency security management based on 'acceptance' and negotiated access to communities in insecure areas
- Increasing challenges in negotiating access to beneficiaries with local power-holders as new generations of insurgent forces assume control of areas (without the same historic ties to NGOs operating in those locales)
- Negative consequences for NGO safety and security associated with real or perceived associations with the international military, which can result in the 'civilian' identity of the wider NGO sector, and not just individual agencies working with the military, being tainted by association
- NGO implementation of Government programmes constitutes a security risk, and has compromised the ability of agencies to claim 'humanitarian space'. Through shifts in donor funding, NGOs have been forced into an implicit alignment with a contested central government.

This research suggests that 'blurring' of identities between military and civilians appears less of a problem than the extent to which civilians are perceived to be engaging in activities or other forms of collaboration with the military. The 'blurring the lines' concept does not adequately capture the character of local populations' perceptions of external assistance, whether provided by NGOs, the military or other international actors. Such aid

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2 Afghaniyat is an unwritten code of conduct and honour that Afghans live by. The simplest translation would be a sense of Afghan-ness. Islamiyat refers to Islamic studies in school curricula, but was used by some interviewees to express a broad sense of being a devout Muslim.

3 Broadly, honour or 'face'.

relations with external actors are mediated by complex social and political dynamics; some of which can appear contradictory. These findings present challenges for those NGOs engaged with the military to re-assess implications for their own security management, but also for donors who are channelling resources through military and civil-military operations.

4. Expectations, effectiveness and impact

Many of the Afghans interviewed expressed clear distinctions and preferences between small and large-scale projects; developmental versus short-term approaches to programming; and methods of project design and implementation. There is no homogenous picture of Afghan perceptions of aid channelled through the military or civilian actors, such as NGOs. Some informants emphasised that assistance is welcome regardless of its provenance, whilst others underlined that aid from the military brought serious risks with it. Despite efforts to improve their coordination with civilian actors, such as the Afghan Government, the international military remains continuously challenged in delivering assistance. It persists in implementing aid largely on the basis of a 'charity' paradigm, which can be perceived as patronising, instrumentalist and unsustainable by local populations. Key issues raised included the following:

Sustainability

There is a preference for multi-year programmes with a long-term, sustainable impact, which often rules out PRTs as implementers or indeed fund providers. Interviewees indicated that NGO efforts to ensure that the impact of their work is sustainable are welcomed by communities.

Charity versus development paradigm

Military involvement in aid is driven in part by the 'winning hearts and minds' (WHAM) theory. This operates on the basis of a charity paradigm, which sees beneficiaries as the deserving poor, and provides handouts and services while ignoring the complexity of the local context, and the unintended consequences of injecting resources into conflict-affected communities. NGOs have been working for many years to erase the handout mentality, emphasising the importance of 'ownership', involvement and empowerment of beneficiaries. This research does not advocate the military moving to a more developmental mindset, but they should be aware of how charitable acts can undermine NGO activities.

Accountability and transparency

While many NGOs try to be accountable to beneficiaries, PRTs are often secretive. Cost-effectiveness and transparent spending are some of the most important considerations for local Afghan populations. Any indication that donor funding is going astray or being wasted is likely to lead to further cynicism and hostility. Transparent community-based monitoring and auditing structures help communities and their leaders control resource transfers, ensure that there is a good impact and that assistance does not become divisive.

Contacts and consultations

For a project to be effective, local consultation and involvement in the design, implementation and maintenance are vital. As military and civil-military operations, such as PRTs, are primarily directed according to military needs, their interaction and/or follow-up with communities varies considerably. Communities feel that most NGOs mostly take their opinions into consideration, with extensive consultations and follow-ups to projects. PRTs, on the other hand, may consult with people but are not perceived to be listening or taking lessons learnt on board.

Landscape of conflicts

All actors, including both international military and NGOs (local and international), must invest more seriously into greater contextual understanding, and conflict sensitivity (Do No Harm). As NGO security management strategies become overly preoccupied by overt trends in insecurity, they may become less attuned to the local-level conflicts in which assistance programmes can become implicated. In a different, although similar, trend, the international military tends to focus on high-level conflict dynamics and is inadequately attuned to local-level political, social and conflict dynamics which can ultimately feed the wider insecurity in a region.

Contractors: 'the face of greed'

PRT procurement, tenders and related activities can drive up local prices and wages, while their lack of transparency and perceived ineptitude in awarding contracts is eroding communities' goodwill. Afghans from all walks of life have set up contracting firms and compete for contracts and funding. Because many contractors are seen as siphoning off funds and providing low-quality work, their use often creates tense relations and can even lead to conflict. NGOs must find ways to differentiate and distance themselves from contractors, as well as advocate to the government, donors and military for greater accountability of such actors in future.

5. Governance and security

Emphasis by international policy-makers and the military on a simplistic 'security-development' linkage is misplaced and even counter-productive in the Afghan context. Afghan populations are sceptical about military intentions, and are not fooled by simplistic material incentives designed to 'win hearts and minds'. Crude and unsophisticated methods, such as badly designed and implemented projects to combat Taliban efforts on the non-kinetic front, to ensure force protection or to win support for the Afghan government are not currently helping build credibility or trust. There is considerable scepticism among civilians that an international military force can promote the outreach of the GoA, rather than marginalise it or make it seem subordinate to military imperatives.

While some analysts equate government 'presence' with infrastructure, projects and services, most interviewees disagreed, linking security to improved governance instead. Most Afghans see the international military presence almost as a 'necessary evil', due to Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP) inadequacy in tackling insurgency, terrorism, crime and outside interference. They see a clear role for PRTs in security sector reform, as long as it is thought through and executed correctly. However, the image of the international military may have suffered as a result of close contact with the GoA, which is increasingly seen as discredited.

Coordination

Coordinating humanitarian and development assistance has been a thorn in the side of the GoA, donors and others since the fall of the Taliban and before, with wastage and replication at various levels. Despite the creation of a number of mechanisms to help coordinate and monitor development assistance and projects, duplication is still taking place in some areas.

Governance

Establishing the government's legitimacy is essential to successful stabilisation, but while there is evidence of NGOs helping to extend the GoA outreach by implementing national health and education programmes, there is little clarity on how the PRT presence can help. Interviewees felt that the GoA lacks the human resources necessary to tackle the challenge of handling development, governance and security. GOA representatives are not always consistent in the recognition of humanitarian principles or provide political support for NGO operations, despite their importance for the delivery of national programmes in many areas.

Security

Security is a priority for ordinary Afghans who cannot even perform the basic functions of life in some areas due to current levels of insecurity, where criminality is rife and it is increasingly more difficult for locals to distinguish between the Taliban and criminal elements. The government has an important role in not only providing security, but in protecting people's 'namus' or honour, an important part of human security for Afghans and a critical aspect of Pashtun customary law. However it has so far failed to protect ordinary Afghans from corrupt government elements, criminals, the Taliban and the international military in different scenarios. Most interviewees felt that in these circumstances the closure of PRTs would symbolise overall military withdrawal and lead to a rapidly deteriorating security situation. However, Afghans interviewed often do not trust International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and coalition forces (CF) to protect them, and feel the security they provide is fallout from military activities in pursuit of international aims. In some areas, where tribal leaderships are contributing to security, PRT and GOA security roles need to be modified to ensure that they do not jeopardise such fragile efforts.

Private security companies

While impromptu checkpoints, banditry and a range of criminal activities have always taken place on various routes, road security has deteriorated since the fall of the Taliban. The actors that straddle the military and private sectors in relation to road building and security are perceived to benefit from lucrative deals and at times the protection of elements within the international military presence. Financial support for such organisations can erode transparency and accountability, and may even reverse the impact of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration. Their impact on NGO and PRT activities and the potential dissonance which they represent needs more attention and analysis.

6. Social transformation, intelligence gathering and cultural sensitivity

Various groups operating in Afghanistan wish to effect social change: the GoA in its pursuit of democracy; the military, through its WHAM efforts, psychological operations and counterinsurgency campaigns. Since every group's attempts at social transformation (including the Taliban's) aim for different and at times conflicting outcomes, it is an area which impacts on operational space and security and cannot be overlooked in the civmil debate.

Thirty years of sustained contact with communities has allowed NGOs, as well as members of the Taliban and other groups, to establish a unique set of relations and build up vast amounts of experience and information. The international military presence, in comparison, tries to apply positive pressure, partially through short-term handouts and infrastructure projects, to render communities more malleable. Military efforts in this arena, using what are at times crude and unsophisticated methods to win hearts and minds, to ensure force protection or to win support for the GoA, have led to clashes with humanitarians and development workers.

The military's insistence on working with NGOs or preparing the ground for them does not help NGOs in their struggle to project an independent and impartial identity and has led to the perceived and actual militarisation and instrumentalisation of assistance. NGOs should not be pressured to get involved with the military for their social transformation and related activities at any stage primarily because of implications related to intelligence gathering. At the same time, the activities of the military, the GoA and others are changing the operating environment for NGOs, who need to develop a heightened state of awareness of the shifting socio-political contexts within which they work.

7. Conclusion

'There is a common misperception that the issues in Afghanistan, and indeed elsewhere around the world, can be dealt with by military means [alone]....The military is a key, an essential element in dealing with those problems, but by and large these problems can only be resolved politically[4].'

UK's Chief of Defence Staff , 2007

Civmil relations, institutions and decision-making in Afghanistan need to be more inclusive and informed by Afghan perspectives. This responsibility falls to all actors, the GoA, the militiary, NGOs, Afghan civil society groups, and the media.

Based on the findings of this research in Uruzgan and Paktia, the following key recommendations are made: (A full list of the report's detailed recommendations is included on page 77)

Afghanisation

Afghanisation implies both greater contextual understanding by international actors, and greater participation of and accountability to and from Afghan actors themselves. Civil-military relations processes, institutions and decision-making need to be more inclusive and informed of Afghan perspectives. This responsibility falls to all actors, including NGOs, military, government, UN, and Afghan agencies themselves. Such efforts need to embedded in wider strategies to build the capacity and ownership of local actors in processes that affect them. Drawing on the international efforts of Muslim scholars and humanitarian agencies, donors and NGOs should also invest in cross-cultural translation and sensitisation to ensure that humanitarian principles are understood as relevant to the Afghan social, cultural and religious context.

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4   Air Chief Marshall Jock Stirrup, the UK Chief of Defence Staff, interview with Sky News television, October 2007.

Governance

The current emphasis by the international community and military forces on 'winning hearts and minds' through a rather simplistic 'development-security' sequence is misplaced. Greater emphasis should be placed on addressing the essentially political challenges related to good governance and sustainable conflict resolution at both national and local levels in Afghanistan. Afghan power-holders and communities are well-versed in the power dynamics implicated in short-term projects implemented to 'win hearts and minds'.

'Civilianisation'

Military engagement with civilian agencies through forums for civil-military relations dialogue continues to be pro-forma, with disappointing outcomes for some and inadequate follow-up based on concerns raised by NGOs and Afghan stakeholders.

Conflict Sensitivity

All actors need to invest more in the unintended impacts of their interventions for local-level political and conflict dynamics, which can have wider ramifications at regional and even national level. Both combat operations and CIMIC-type interventions by military forces have manifold implications for the security environment for both Afghan people and NGOs. NGOs are also challenged to increase investment in ensuring the 'conflict sensitivity' of their programmes.

Aid Effectiveness

Donors should recognise the intrinsic challenges of channelling aid through contested military operations, which are also engaged in combat operations. Both donors and the government should recognise the security risks inherent in government-aligned aid programmes in a situation of on-going insurgency, and make

provisions for implementing partners accordingly. This research indicates that Afghan people are not always convinced by short-term projects designed to meet tactical military objectives, but prefer long-term sustainable programming. Issues of effective transparency to and consultation of Afghan communities are also critical, and point to some intrinsic limitations to military-led assistance strategies.

Humanitarian Access and Security Management

The situation for humanitarian and development practitioners is continuously changing. Their operational space is shrinking as AOGs spread fear and expand their influence. In such contexts, NGOs face a number of challenges in relation to their security management and the implementation of acceptance and protection based approaches to humanitarian access. Operational learning, and inter-agency sharing are required to maintain contextual understanding. NGOs may need to invest in the conflict mitigation and resolution skills, so that frontline staff are adequately equipped to deal with the some of the social, political and conflict dynamics implicated in the implementation of programmes. A particular challenge resides in providing adequate funding and capacity-building for the Afghan NGO sector to enable effective safety management, and sustainable organisational and human resources development. NGOs also need to invest in the conflict mitigation and resolution skills, so that frontline staff are adequately equipped to deal with the some of the social, political and conflict dynamics implicated in the implementation of programmes.

Chapter 7: Conclusion and recommendations

'There is a common misperception that the issues in Afghanistan, and indeed elsewhere around the world, can be dealt with by military means [alone]....The military is a key, an essential element in dealing with those problems, but by and large these problems can only be resolved politically.'

UK's Chief of Defence Staff , 2007

As car bombs rip across quiet suburban streets and suicide bombers cause carnage at public events and celebrations, it becomes obvious that, although the war may be over, unrest and violence continue to smoulder and flare up unpredictably. This simply marks a new phase in the insecurity faced by NGOs in Afghanistan. While the actors, situations and challenges change, NGOs have to be more vigilant and juggle multiple identities and priorities just to survive in this ever-changing context. The vast and bewildering range of actors and personalities working in NGOs and the military, struggling to understand one another's dynamics, are engaged in a complex dance with shadowy partners whose moves are increasingly unpredictable and deadly.

The complicated interactions taking place on the ground; the cynicism of communities following three decades of violence and escalating disappointment and despair; the sophistication encountered – even in remote villages – in articulating what an accountable and transparent government means; and the presence of heavily armed foreign nationals intimidating leaderless communities has all been condensed into a simple matter of delivering often low-quality inputs and services while avoiding the painful introspection required to change the culture of governance and overturn the legacy of an imperfect past and protracted conflict.

Reducing the issue to this two-dimensional formula allows PRTs and others to believe that rapid and widespread aid delivery will lead to peace, stability,

development and good governance. This faulty analysis puts NGOs, who are involved in rolling out government and other programmes, in a difficult position. They are neither delivering fast enough nor covering enough ground, while the Taliban, HIG and their allies have very gradually consolidated their power and extended their reach over the last three decades by forming, influencing, mutating and dissolving political, social, religious and other interconnected networks.

In this scenario, the imperatives of humanitarians, development workers and the military frequently overlap and collide. Using small-scale and at times badly executed interventions as a 'carrot', the responsibility of making moral decisions about supporting good governance and rejecting terrorism is increasingly pressed on communities, who feel forced to tolerate an unpopular government and set of elites who have the support of a reluctant international community.

Afghans have been introduced to a great many foreign concepts, and have adopted those that suit local pragmatism. The terminology of the civmil debate is largely alien to them: they struggle to see the value of articulating their experiences, though they are dealing with the reality of interactions between civilians and military as best they can. The civmil debate has not surfaced in the Afghan policy environment; this means that the government is pursuing aims which may jeopardise not only NGO operational space but humanitarian space, too. The debate has not been sufficiently 'Afghanised'. Humanitarian principles are not the only ones at play in the Afghan context, where Afghaniyat and Islamiyat underpin interactions and reactions to specific stimuli. Actions and attitudes which disrespect these principles and lead to unpleasant incidents may upset or even traumatise communities. Notions of namus underpin human security for many people, and neither the GoA nor

the international military presence is paying them enough attention. This points to the need to look at human security through a more culturally appropriate lens.

The lack of Afghan perspective impacts on local and national lobbying and advocacy efforts, most critically in relation to the GoA. NGOs and civil society can contribute to an analysis which provides comparisons between various groupings of principles – such as Islamic/humanitarian and Afghan/Islamic – which will be essential to elicit the meaningful engagement of ordinary Afghans in the civmil debate. Afghanising the debate may also ultimately facilitate finding a common NGO position and avoiding dangerous territory where assistance becomes further instrumentalised and co-opted by the military and the GoA.

The Afghan context has become a maze of pathways that shift with alarming speed. The range of actors and at times conflicting perspectives on how to keep and provide security means that every situation has to be scrutinised through a multiplicity of lenses. Identity management increasingly becomes a conscious choice, while security and insecurity both provide lucrative business opportunities for a wide range of actors. It is clearly difficult for the military to keep a distinction between its various functions, and this has implications for organisations that choose to come in contact with it. While the military may be able to provide assistance in insecure circumstances, this is often tainted by their other activities. NGOs cannot soften or eliminate such perceptions by acting as conduits or proxies for assistance channelled through the military.

In this situation, Afghans and internationals approach security from different perspectives – either broadly reactive and short-term, or proactive and long-term. Changes in staffing, with younger, less experienced individuals, increase the level of risk, as does the constantly changing security terrain. Relying on community acceptance and 'local'

security involves revisiting many assumptions and ensuring that all stakeholders are working with the same understanding and expectations.

Cost-effectiveness and honest spending are some of the most important considerations in the war to win over the population. Afghans are looking for long-term, sustainable interventions, of good quality and delivered on time. They are well aware that the window of opportunity may be closing fast and that handouts and charity, as opposed to a development approach, will only lead to superficial change which will not serve them in the long run. Afghans are increasingly eager to own the development process and look for ways to consolidate that ownership – becoming involved in design, monitoring, auditing and downward accountability. A number of NGOs have been working hard with communities to deliver such interventions, so perceived PRT ineptitude in awarding contracts is an irritant for communities.

Most contractors – currently the major group of implementing partners for PRTs –create contested territory in a myriad of ways and generate conflict. Interactions with communities must involve a long-term and iterative process of building relationships and resolving conflict. The ability to control development and external networks is an important part of the leadership process and, provided the control is for wholesome reasons, can be of great benefit to communities. Outsiders have to ensure that they are not co-opted by the wrong networks and unwittingly have a negative impact on the existing landscapes of conflict and power differentials.

The underlying causes of the current situation in Afghanistan must be addressed. While underdevelopment is a major contributor, it is not necessarily a root cause of the lack of government credibility at subnational level. Government 'presence' is all too often simplistically equated with infrastructure and projects.

Rather than thinking that the Afghan people have to choose between the Taliban and the GoA, it may be wiser to understand that Afghans perceive themselves as stuck between the frying pan and the fire. The international community, including PRTs, try to make the frying pan look appealing. Afghans tolerate it as long as they can before jumping into the proverbial fire. Neither choice is particularly tempting at the moment: the government is present in communities but at times in a corrupt and aggressive manner which cannot be disguised by infrastructure and service delivery. Decisive measures from the Karzai regime to demonstrate wholesome leadership and power as well as a profound process of trust building are the only ways out of this crisis. Such measures may only come about as a result of diplomatic pressure from the international community in the short-term and social change initiated from the grassroots in the long-term. Both NGOs and the military have distinct roles to play in such a process.

Although there is little clarity and coherence on how the PRT presence helps the GoA, the military effectively face a choice in some areas: they can either resource, submit to and coordinate with an unpopular and negligible government presence, often in the form of unpopular local elites, or they can try to do their own thing and make the best of a bad job. The result is: disenchantment; a perception that they are winning hearts and minds on their own behalf; and accusations of undermining the GoA. The perception of local government that can only supplicate or make suggestions to the PRT has profound consequences in an area with a history of troubled relations with central government. A stronger role in SSR is one of the easiest ways for PRTs to steer their way out of supporting development and governance – particularly since governors, elites and their followers are at times only interested in the funding rather than in finding ways to serve ordinary Afghans or bolster the state.

Stakeholders become increasingly opportunistic in taking advantage of insecurity and impunity. Security is a daily preoccupation for most Afghans, who are falling prey to both internal and external aggressors. The government has neither been able to protect Afghans from predation by criminals - even those within government - nor from the violence inflicted on them by the Taliban, foreign insurgents and the international military. In a small number of cases communities have taken matters into their own hands, but they are often impeded by the GoA's and PRTs' lack of sensitivity to the fragility of such efforts. Afghans regard the security provided by ISAF and CF as fortuitous fallout from activities which have objectives far removed from the protection of ordinary Afghans.

Many Afghans see the development-security linkage as artificial and contrived and the governance-security linkage as a critical part of stabilisation. The development of a strong army and stable and capable police force is an important part of state building and most agree that an international military presence at provincial level is critical for security and stability for the time being. In general, Afghans feel that they are on a very uneven playing field in deciding the nature of military engagement in their sovereign territory.

The situation for humanitarians and development practitioners is continuously changing. Their operational space is continually shrinking as AOGs spread fear and expand their influence. NGOs face a number of challenges and are developing a range of strategies and practices to handle them. However, the question of whether humanitarian space can be 'mended' under these circumstances is difficult to answer. Success for a few organisations in negotiating access might raise hopes, but without the possibility of conducting such research with AOGs – some of whom have tolerated but not welcomed NGOs in the past – it would be unwise to suggest that organisations should risk rapprochement in order to broaden their area of operations at present.

Finally, it may be wise for NGOs to take some preparatory steps to learn how to handle an increasingly complex situation with shrinking room to manoeuvre. They need to find ways to strengthen relations with communities despite a shrinking field presence, particularly among internationals. A growing military presence will not compensate for this. The most important step is for NGOs and others to continuously challenge assumptions – particularly about their understanding of Afghan realities, and Afghan understanding of the realities the international community continuously imposes on them.

7.1 Summary of recommendations

Civmil relations, institutions and decision-making need to be more inclusive and informed of Afghan perspectives. This responsibility falls to all actors – the GoA, NGOs, the military, the UN and Afghan agencies. Such efforts need to be embedded in wider strategies to build the capacity and ownership of local actors in processes that affect them. NGOs, civil society groups and the media all have a significant role to play in promoting wider understanding of the debate and greater input from communities.

7.1.1 Key recommendations

Afghanisation

Afghanisation implies both greater contextual understanding by international actors, and greater participation of and accountability to Afghan actors themselves. Civil-military relations processes, institutions and decision-making need to be more inclusive and informed of Afghan perspectives. This responsibility falls to all actors, including NGOs, military, government, UN, and Afghan agencies themselves. Such efforts need to be embedded in wider strategies to build the capacity and ownership of local actors in processes that affect them. Drawing on the international efforts of Muslim scholars and humanitarian agencies, donors and NGOs should also invest in cross-cultural translation and sensitisation to ensure that humanitarian principles are understood and made relevant to Afghan social, cultural and religious norms.

Governance

The current emphasis by the international community and military forces on 'winning hearts and minds' through a simplistic 'development-security' linkage is misplaced. Greater emphasis should be placed on addressing the essentially political challenges related to governance and conflict resolution at both national and local levels in Afghanistan. Afghan power-holders and communities are well-versed in the power dynamics implicated in short-term projects implemented to 'win hearts and minds'.

'Civilianisation'

Despite the proclaimed efforts to 'civilianise' PRT operations, the research found little evidence that civilianisation is a priority or that changes on the ground are keeping pace with what is discussions at policy level. Military engagement with civilian agencies through forums for civil-military relations dialogue continues to be pro-forma, with disappointing outcomes and inadequate follow-up based on concerns raised by NGOs and Afghan stakeholders.

Conflict Sensitivity

All actors need to invest more in the unintended impacts of their interventions for local-level political and conflict dynamics, which can have wider ramifications at national level. Critical examples would include the importance of concepts of 'namus' (honour) and religious practice in defining Afghan notions of human security. NGOs are also challenged to increase investment in ensuring the 'conflict sensitivity' of their programmes.

Aid Effectiveness

Donors should place greater emphasis on civilian channels for assistance in Afghanistan. They should recognise the intrinsic challenges of channelling aid through contested military operations, parts of which are simultaneously engaged in combat

operations. Both donors and the government should recognise the serious security risks inherent in government-aligned aid programmes in a situation of on-going insurgency, and make provisions for implementing partners accordingly. This research raises serious challenges regarding the need for longer-term programming and sustainability, based on the finding that Afghan people are regularly unimpressed by short-term projects designed to meet tactical military objectives. Issues of effective transparency to and consultation of Afghan communities are also critical, and point to intrinsic limitations to military-led assistance strategies. CIMIC-type aid activities should be carefully circumscribed so that their negative impacts on activities of local authorities and civilian agencies are taken into consideration.

Humanitarian Access and Security Management

NGOs should review their security management and wider programme management strategies to reflect on the implications of the increasing shift from acceptance into protection- and deterrence-based approaches to humanitarian access. As security has deteriorated, NGOs have increasingly become distanced from beneficiary communities. Further operational learning, and inter-agency information sharing are required to identify means of sustaining and building relations with local communities and power-holders, as well as maintaining contextual understanding. A particular challenge resides in providing adequate funding and capacity-building for some in the ANGO sector, to enable effective safety mechanisms to be set up, and to ensure sustainable organisational and human resources development. NGOs also need to invest in the conflict mitigation and resolution skills, so that frontline staff are adequately equipped to deal with the social, political and conflict dynamics implicated in the implementation of programmes.

7.1.2 Detailed Recommendations:

To ANGOs and INGOs

- INGOs and ANGOs need to develop more sustained joint strategies to enable Afghan engagement in policy dialogue with relevant actors on civmil relations. Such policy engagement needs to happen at local, national, international levels in a joined-up fashion to ensure the sharing of up-to-date perspectives at operational and policy levels
- Drawing on the international efforts of Muslim scholars and humanitarian agencies, NGOs should invest in initiatives that promote cross-cultural interpretation of humanitarian principles, which are critical to eliciting meaningful engagement of Afghans in civmil relations
- NGOs need to constantly update and revise their knowledge and understanding of the workings of local power structures, which may have become fractured, disempowered, fundamentally altered or supplanted by new informal structures in the post-war era
- NGOs should also review their security management strategies to reflect on the implications of the shift from acceptance to protection- and deterrence-based approaches. This includes providing regular security training and drills for local staff and raising awareness of the risks to the safety of all staff, particularly younger ones with less field experience. They should also provide staff with conflict resolution awareness, training and tools., being prepared will help them work more effectively
- Inter-agency approaches to such learning initiatives need to place particular emphasis on the skills, experience and local knowledge of Afghan staff and partner ANGOs
- In advocating for humanitarian space and reflecting on their own practice, the NGO sector needs to place greater emphasis on the responsibilities of aid agencies to maintain appropriate interface with military actors. NGOs

that currently accept funding from military operations should reflect in a serious fashion on the risk of negative implications for the safety and security of their own staff, programmes and beneficiaries. They should also reflect on the negative implications for the wider NGO sector in Afghanistan. NGOs should not be pressured to get involved with the military's social transformation or intelligence gathering-related activities at any stage. However, because such activities are changing the operating environment for NGOs, they do need to develop their awareness of the shifting socio-political contexts within which they work, especially in areas of growing insecurity

- NGO and civilian actors engaged in the civmil debate need to have access to engage and influence all elements of the military, not just the designated CIMIC or civilian affairs elements. For both INGOs and local Afghan stakeholders, the most damaging behaviour in terms of both CIMIC and combat operations is pursued by elements of the international military which rarely engage in NGO-military civmil processes

- We also strongly recommend that NGOs:
  - find ways to differentiate and distance themselves from contractors, and advocate for appropriate accountability of such actors, in order to safeguard the reputation of NGOs operating on the basis of a principled and effective approach
  - fully explore community concepts of providing security for NGOs and the limitations of such indigenous systems
  - lobby the GoA to elicit more substantive support for NGO operations, particularly in the provision of security in view of incidents of predatory behaviour from local security forces
  - encourage and support their Afghan partner NGOs in shifting away from reactive and short-term approaches to security management in favour of proactive and long-term safety and security strategies.

To the military and integrated civil-military operations

- The military needs to review and re-assess the efficacy of its emphasis on assistance and aid-type interventions to WHAM

- Military and integrated civil-military operations, such as PRTs, should develop, expand and refine a stronger SSR role. Military and integrated civil-military operations need to develop more effective skills and procedures to improve their ability to consult with and listen to NGOs, local leaders and others and take any lessons learnt on board. Such procedures need to be developed in a way that does not jeopardise the security of those interlocutors. The military should also be aware that, like all outsiders, they are prone to expert manipulation and being sold specific information, which can facilitate the rise to power of gatekeepers

- Military and integrated civil-military operations should modify their security role to ensure that it does not jeopardise indigenous security systems which can be fragile and under threat. The military also needs to assess the wider, long-term implications of occasionally flirting with shadier militia elements in pursuit of its aims

- Some military and integrated civil-military operations still promote the handout mentality, which NGOs have been working for many years to erase among both beneficiaries and staff. While it is not recommended that they move to a developmental mindset, they must increase their awareness of how their CIMIC-related charitable acts can undermine NGO activities in their areas of operation

- Military and integrated civil-military operations should be more vigilant when investing in local partners. Spending money on low-quality local NGOs that flourish whenever funds are available does not constitute building local capacity in a sustainable fashion: instead it wastes money and creates resentment, tarnishing the reputation of the military and hampering WHAM efforts

- In order to reverse the diminishing of goodwill in communities, military and integrated civil-military operations need to reassess their relationship with contractors in one of the following ways: stop using inappropriate contractors that deliver ineffective projects, or have damaging consequences for local political, social or conflict dynamics; find better ways of controlling them and promoting their accountability; resolve the conflicts they generate; or set up mechanisms for community monitoring of contractors.

To the GoA

- Relevant government ministries and departments need to show a greater understanding of civmil relations, its rationale and impact, at policy and implementation levels
- There also needs to be increased understanding in government of how its policies – both formal and informal – on relations with PRTs and other military actors, impact on humanitarian access and NGO operations. The government has obligations under IHL to facilitate the provision of humanitarian assistance to populations in need. This responsibility is partly shaped through government engagement in civmil relations
- The government must recognise, acknowledge and support the role of NGOs in national programmes and service delivery. While this may have security implications where NGOs are seen as government partners, hostile remarks from government figures can also impact on NGO acceptance and security
- Policymakers must also move away from models which equate good governance with government 'presence', and by extension with infrastructure, projects and services, and place greater emphasis on addressing governance and political issues related to conflict resolution at local and national levels.

To donors

- Donors should limit the channelling of funding through military operations, due to concerns regarding their implications for safety of implementing agencies and beneficiaries and aid effectiveness, and emphasise civilian channels. In doing so, donors should note Afghan preference for multi-year programmes with a long-term, sustainable impact
- Donors should also review and carefully evaluate their use of private sector contractors, who often work in consortia with local contractors and private security companies, to address concerns about aid effectiveness and the perception amongst many Afghans that aid is diverted by corrupt contractors
- Donors should move away from policy models in which government 'presence' is equated with very basic infrastructure, projects and services. Instead, greater attention needs to be focused on addressing the political challenges related to governance and conflict resolution at local and national levels
- International donors should take more responsibility in fostering the sustainable development of national and local NGOs. In the push to implement 'quick win' development projects in insecure areas, current short-termist funding trends are instrumentalising local NGOs, without paying adequate attention to issues of organisational development, policy engagement, safety and security management, AND human resource development
- Donors should invest in initiatives which promote cross-cultural interpretation of humanitarian principles, which are critical to eliciting meaningful engagement of ordinary Afghans in civmil relations
- Donor conditions regarding the visibility of the donor's nationality for a given programme (e.g. having signs, stickers and logos) should be revised in insecure. These visibility requirements can create security incidents for INGOs and ANGOs alike

- Donor nations should be sensitive in their public diplomacy efforts regarding assistance 'success stories' in Afghanistan. There is anecdotal evidence that AOGs continuously monitor the international media and react to what they find. Such stipulations should be reviewed based on the local security context
- Transparent spending is crucial to avoid further cynicism and hostility from Afghans, who follow funding very closely. All actors should explore transparent, community-based monitoring and auditing structures, to help communities and their leaders control resource transfers. This will also help ensure good impact and prevent assistance from becoming divisive.

To Afghan civil society

- Afghan civil society should build on wider international efforts by humanitarian agencies to work with Muslim scholars and community representatives to interpret humanitarian principles within an Islamic framework
- The Afghan media should disseminate such information to engender greater understanding and ownership of these principles, which can then contribute to improved humanitarian access
- Civil society must work with others to create a safe space for ordinary people to voice complaints on issues such as civilian casualties and the misdemeanours of international military forces on the ground.

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