

AFGHANISTAN

LESSONS IDENTIFIED 2001-2014



PART I

**International Lessons from
Integrated Approaches in Afghanistan**

Louise Riis Andersen

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International Lessons from Integrated Approaches in Afghanistan



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At the end of 2014 the international involvement in Afghanistan entered a new phase. Responsibility for maintaining peace and security was formally handed over to the Afghan security forces and the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) as well as the US-led Operation Enduring Freedom – Afghanistan (OEF-A) were brought to a close. Against this backdrop, the political parties behind the Danish engagement in Afghanistan agreed to compile lessons concerning Denmark’s integrated approach in Afghanistan with a view to informing future interventions in fragile states. As part of this exercise DIIS was requested to clarify:

...the international experiences with integrating the political, development and military efforts in Afghanistan from 2001–2014, including how the military actions have influenced the efforts to win the hearts and minds of the civilian population.

The present study is based on existing publicly available material, especially evaluation reports and ‘lessons learned’ studies from troop-contributing ISAF countries including in particular the United States – the principal actor in Afghanistan – and European countries such as the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Germany and Norway. The main impression from this material is that despite an ever-increasing focus on ensuring coherence it remained incredibly difficult to find a common approach and bring the different political, development and military efforts together in a constructive manner. The basic tone of most reports – and of this study – is that of a quest to learn why the good intentions were so hard to translate into effective cooperation in the field.

Over the years the ISAF countries developed different national approaches to what is generally referred to in this study as *the integrated approach*. Other labels include 3D (diplomacy, development, defence), whole of government and comprehensive/joined-up approaches. Led by the United Kingdom, the ambition for a number of countries, including Canada and the Netherlands, was to establish permanent coherence structures that could provide close civil–military coordination, both at headquarters level and in the field in Afghanistan (and other fragile states). In contrast, other countries strove to establish general coherence at the policy level while maintaining a strict separation of the civil and military efforts at the tactical level in Afghanistan. Examples include Norway and Germany who tied their distribution of aid geographically to their deployment of troops, and primarily supported development projects in provinces where ‘their’ soldiers operated, but without establishing links between aid workers and soldiers on the ground; the dots were to be joined in Berlin and Oslo, not in Feyzabad and Meymaneh.

Regardless of the overarching vision, it took considerable time for all countries to find an organisational form of inter-agency cooperation that could guide the national efforts in Afghanistan. Moreover, it seems that the various forms that did eventually emerge did not significantly challenge or dismiss existing administrative boundaries. While developments in the different countries followed different trajectories, the overall trend in terms of bringing together civil–military efforts was largely similar: off to a weak start, a certain rapprochement along the way, but with only a few lasting institutional changes.

Experiences from Afghanistan suggest that if the bureaucratic barriers and institutional boundaries that continue to promote silo mentality rather than an integrated approach are to be overcome, the pursuit of coherence must:

- Be established and managed at the highest possible level, both internally – and especially between the relevant organisations.
- Create frameworks for joint planning and decision making, as well as joint learning and analysis.
- Be based on the different competences of the respective actors.

When trying to understand and learn from the challenges of ensuring coherence between the diplomatic, development and military instruments in Afghanistan 2001–2014, it is insufficient to focus only on the distinct national approaches. One must also include and understand how coherence was pursued – and constrained – by the dynamics between the different international actors engaged in Afghanistan, and between the international actors and the Afghan authorities.

From the outset in 2001, tensions were inbuilt in the relation between the two military missions that were carried out in Afghanistan simultaneously: the American-led anti-terror efforts (OEF-A) and the multinational, later NATO-led, stabilisation efforts (ISAF). Although a certain rapprochement was achieved between OEF and ISAF over time, the basic incompatibilities between ISAF’s focus on convincing the population to support the government (and its international partners), and OEF-A’s focus on eliminating an enemy that is part of the same population, were never overcome.

Similarly, the international coalition was affected by political disagreement about the political goal of the engagement. The US initially aimed for a quick regime shift, while the UN – and many of the European partners – wanted to support a much more comprehensive transformation of Afghanistan. Over time, this also transpired in divergent views of the nature of ISAF: was it a peacekeeping force with a robust mandate? Or was it a

combat force that was actively involved in counterinsurgency? These basic divisions impeded efforts to establish and maintain overall coherence among the international actors.

In addition, it is increasingly understood that the international approach to creating effective and legitimate Afghan state structures was beset by a number of contradictions. The study especially points to the incompatibilities between: 1) the very centralised state model, expressed in the new Afghan constitution adopted by the Loya Yirga in 2004; 2) the parallel and fragmented structures that were established to undertake both civilian and military reconstruction; and 3) the limited Afghan tradition for having a strong centralised state.

These incompatibilities reflected as well as contributed to ongoing difficulties in aligning the international activities to the plans of the Afghan authorities. In 2001 considerations for Afghan self-determination and sovereignty – and the desire to stay clear of a long-lasting statebuilding quagmire – weighed strongly. The transition process was to be Afghan-led and have only a ‘light’ international footprint. A large part of the problem in Afghanistan was, however, that there was no Afghan leadership that was able to speak on behalf of the entire nation. The state had collapsed and the state structures that were gradually being established after 2001 were not trusted by the population at large. At the same time international efforts – not least in the war against terror – actively contributed to strengthening armed groups and warlords that had no interest in building an efficient and legitimate Kabul-based state. These dilemmas were known in 2001. Clear solutions are still hard to see.

Based on the wide range of experiences from Afghanistan, the study identifies a number of recommendations for future integrated approaches to stabilisation efforts in other fragile states, including the need for:

- **Much stronger international emphasis and focus on creating political solutions.** Lasting peace is created through political processes, not by using various combinations of development aid and military means.
- **Knowing the context** and taking all of its complexity into consideration in order to avoid simplistic and overambitious ideas about what can be achieved by international intervention.
- **Lowering the level of ambition and exercising strategic patience.** If the efforts are to make a positive difference, a significantly longer time horizon is needed than the two to three years that are typically considered to be ‘long term’ in the context of stabilisation.

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- Prioritising, focusing and determining a meaningful **sequence** for the different efforts rather than attempting to address all issues simultaneously.
 - Understanding how **resources from external actors** – civil as well as military – affect the host country’s political and financial systems. Sudden and massive injections of resources in countries with weak or collapsed institutions can increase corruption and create a conflict economy in which powerful actors are neither interested in, nor have incentives to change the status quo.

These experiences are not unique to Afghanistan and resemble experiences in other fragile states. In various ways, they emphasise the need for both better and more dynamic analyses of fragile and unsettled situations. Joint analyses – and thus a common basis for discussing what can be done – can be a step in the direction of overcoming fragmentation and promoting prioritisation. But the inherent tensions between long-term development needs and short-term security requirements cannot simply be analysed away.

The notion that it is possible to establish meaningful coherence among a number of contradictory goals may unintentionally enable those who are politically responsible to refrain from making clear strategic choices. Instead of having to prioritise and choose between different goals – and resources and methods – the coherence agenda promises that – if only we get our act together – it is possible to pursue many goals at the same time. Perhaps, it was this form of ‘strategy’ that failed in Afghanistan? The study points out that an integrated approach is not and cannot be a goal per se. It is a method that may – perhaps – be used to achieve a given goal. But in itself, a desire to be coherent can neither identify the goal, nor detail how this goal is to be pursued in a given intervention. Based on the experience of Afghanistan this study suggests that future stabilisation interventions should take their starting point in the local context and from there seek to outline a possible political process that can lead the country away from fragility and towards stability. Only on the basis of such an analysis can meaningful decisions be made about the specific combination of international instruments and the degree to which these instruments need to go hand-in-hand in the field in order to succeed. The nexus between security and development does not only imply that lasting peace cannot be achieved without development; it also indicates that sustainable development cannot be pursued in the midst of ongoing war.

ABBREVIATIONS

3D	Diplomacy, Development, Defence
ACAP	Afghan Civilian Assistance Program
AfPak	Afghanistan–Pakistan
AIFA	Afghan Infrastructure Fund
ANA	Afghan National Army
ANDS	Afghan National Development Strategy
ANP	Afghan National Police
ANSF	Afghan National Security Forces
ARTF	Afghan Reconstruction Trust Fund
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
CERP	Commander’s Emergency Response Program
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CIMIC	Civil–Military Cooperation
CMWG	Civil–Military Working Group
COIN	Counter-insurgency
CPP	Conflict Prevention Pool
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration
ESC	Executive Steering Committee
EU	European Union
EUPOL	European Union Police Mission in Afghanistan
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
JCMB	Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board
LOFTA	Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NPP	National Priority Programs
NSP	National Solidarity Program
NTM-A	NATO Training Mission Afghanistan
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OEF-A	Operation Enduring Freedom Afghanistan
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Teams
PSYOPS	Psychological Operations
QIP	Quick Impact Projects
SIGAR	Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction
SMAF	Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework
SRAP	Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan
SSR	Security Sector Reforms
TMAF	Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework

UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission Afghanistan
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WB	World Bank

INTRODUCTION

At the end of 2014, the international involvement in Afghanistan entered a new phase. Responsibility for maintaining peace and security was formally handed over to the Afghan security forces and the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) as well as the US-led Operation Enduring Freedom – Afghanistan (OEF-A) were both brought to a close. Against this backdrop, the political parties behind the Danish engagement in Afghanistan agreed to compile lessons concerning Denmark’s integrated approach in Afghanistan with a view to informing future interventions in fragile states. As part of this exercise, DIIS was requested to clarify:

...the international experiences with integrating the political, development and military efforts in Afghanistan from 2001–2014, including how the military actions have influenced the efforts to win the hearts and minds of the civilian population.

This study is DIIS’ response to the request. In keeping with the request from Parliament, the study draws on and extends the analysis of concerted civil–military planning and action that DIIS carried out in 2008–9 at the request of the government at that time (Stepputat 2009).

At the time of writing, the security situation in Afghanistan is worsening with the Taliban estimated to control more terrain than at any other time since 2001. The Afghan security forces remain unable to fight the insurgents alone, and the international military engagement in the country is, as a result, gradually re-escalating. Yet, it also seems clear to most observers that on many counts, Afghanistan is in a better position than was the case in 2001: average life expectancy has increased from 55 to 60 years, GDP per capita has more than doubled, access to health and education – especially for girls – is also significantly better. Free media have gained considerable ground, a number of elections have been held, and the physical and institutional infrastructure has been expanded. Discussion of what has been achieved in Afghanistan during 2001–2014 is obviously both relevant and necessary. With regard to this study, however, it is of secondary importance. The task here is not to assess to what extent the efforts in Afghanistan have worked as intended, or whether the results were worth the effort. The task is another; namely to clarify the experiences the international community – for better or worse – has had in Afghanistan in terms of bringing civil and military instruments together in a constructive manner. This moves the focus away from the actual accomplishments in Afghanistan and towards the underlying political discussions and decisions about the strategic goals and the relations between the various instruments and resources that were set aside to achieve those goals.

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The more than 100 reports upon which this study is based leave the impression that it was extremely difficult to bring together the many civil and military efforts and ensure that they worked effectively and constructively together. Nearly all of the reports identify persistent problems with overlaps, lack of coordination and sometimes directly conflicting efforts. There is thus a striking and massive predominance of examples of poor or even counterproductive relations between different civil and military actors, and the basic tenor in most of the reports is a quest for answering why it remained so difficult to translate the steadily growing policy focus on coherence into effective cooperation in practice. This tenor is evidently replicated in this study and its summarization of the key lessons that emerge from the multiple and diverse ways in which coherence has been pursued in Afghanistan 2001–2014.

METHOD AND STRUCTURE

The political agreement that commissioned this study asks for a *‘realistic and applicable compilation of experiences with a view to future integrated approach engagement in fragile states’*. To accommodate this request, it has been necessary to balance the retrospective description of the distinct experiences from Afghanistan and the forward-looking interpretation of generic insights that may be extracted from them. At the same time, it has been important to delimit the two very broad concepts entailed in the task: the integrated approach and international experiences, respectively.

The study sees the **integrated approach** as part of the broadening of the peace and security agenda that dates back to the end of the Cold War. At the core of the integrated approach is the notion that security and development are inseparable and that one cannot be pursued without the other: no security without development; and no development without security. The terrorist attacks on the United States of September 11th, 2001 have had a decisive significance for the understanding of the security–development nexus, but the pursuit of coherence – in Afghanistan and other places – does not arise from the war against terror as such, but on the contrary, from a broader and longer discussion of how the international community should address the multifaceted threats against human, regional and global security that are associated with weak, fragile and collapsed states.

In order to examine these aspects, the study applies the analytical framework that was developed in connection with DIIS’ analysis of concerted civil–military planning and action in 2008/9. In practice, this means that it distinguishes between three different forms of coherence that play out at different intersections:

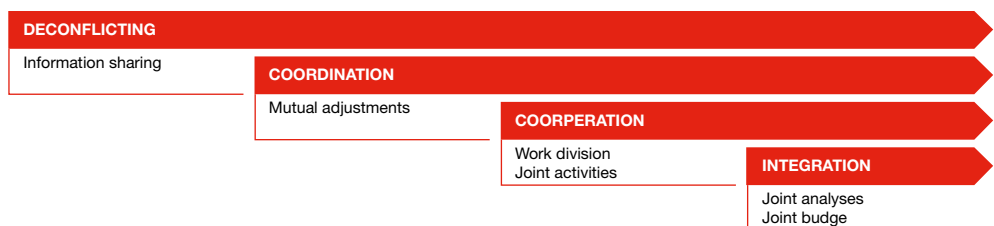
- **The integrated approach:** inter-agency efforts to bring together different parts of a country or an organisation (for example, between ministries of defence, development and foreign affairs).
- **Coordination:** efforts to bring together the distinct members of the international community (e.g. the United States, the UK, the Netherlands, Norway, Canada, NATO, the EU and the UN).
- **Alignment:** efforts to bring together the international engagement and the host country’s agendas and priorities.

The distinction between the three different forms of coherence rests on the relationship between the different types of actors whose efforts should cohere: are they subject to a joint political leadership (integrated approach)? Are they members of an international coalition (coordination)? Or do they represent local and international interests (alignment)?

Within each of these forms coherence can be pursued at different levels and to different degrees. A key methodological challenge with regard to compiling and summing up experiences from so many different actors is that there is no agreement on how these different analytical categories are to be understood.

In terms of different **degrees** of coherence, this study applies a continuum that ranges from deconflicting to integration (de Coning and Friis 2011). The lowest level of ambition aims merely at deconflicting the efforts; that is, roughly speaking, to simply avoid getting in the way of each other or unintentionally damaging each other’s activities. At the opposite end, the ambition is to integrate the distinct efforts into one concerted whole that is bigger than its parts. Ideally, the aim of integration is to dissolve the distinction between the actors. Between these two extremes, coherence can be pursued with the aim of either (less ambitiously) coordinating the efforts so that the actors mutually adjust their activities, but continue to carry them out independently, or (more ambitiously) with the aim of cooperating, so that activities are planned and carried out jointly, while each actor remains institutionally distinct.

Figure 1: Degrees of coherence



In terms of different **levels** for the pursuit of coherence, the study distinguishes between headquarters and the field. Behind this very basic distinction lurk the primarily military distinctions between strategic, operative and tactical levels, and the primarily civil differentiation between policy and practice. These concepts – and others similar to them – are applied in many different ways in the various reports upon which the study is based. They are therefore also included in the analysis, but no attempt is made to standardise or interpret the use of language for this area.

In the policy discussion focus tends to be on the form of coherence referred to in this study as ‘the integrated approach’; that is, the various institutional conditions and solutions that different countries have brought into play in the efforts to create coherence within and across their own national bureaucratic boundaries. This aspect is dealt with throughout this study, but the starting point for the analysis is that coherence cannot be meaningfully reduced to a matter of ‘fixing’ the internal organisation of political, military and development efforts in the individual contributing countries. The relationships between the different countries’ contributions and between the international engagement and the host country’s priorities must be taken into account.

This obviously expands the field of experiences dramatically. To delimit the scope of **international experiences** in a way that is meaningful to the wider Danish compilation of lessons of which this study is part, the study focuses on three groups of countries:

- **United States** – as the dominant and most important of all of the international actors.
- **United Kingdom, Canada and the Netherlands** – as like-minded countries that have followed similar thinking on the integrated approach as Denmark has.
- **Norway, Sweden and Germany** – as countries that have worked with distinct understandings of an integrated approach.

Experiences from the most important multilateral actors: **NATO, the UN and the EU**, are also included in the analysis as part of the broader context and as important actors and forums for international coordination.

According to the terms of reference from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, the analysis should be based on existing, publicly accessible material. The basis for the study is primarily provided by three types of documents:

- **Official reports** that have been prepared by or for state authorities in the countries and organisations mentioned above including, for example, independent supervisory bodies such as the American Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR).
- Studies and analyses prepared by leading **research institutes, think tanks and similar institutions** in the countries in question, such as ODI in United Kingdom, RAND in the United States and NUPI in Norway.
- **Academic studies** that have been published in recognised peer-reviewed journals and books.

The study understands ‘experiences’ to be subjective phenomena that, similar to all other observations, depend on one’s point of view and then, naturally, can provide only a partial picture of reality. At the same time, the study is well aware that the preparation of ‘lessons learned studies’, and evaluation reports can often be used as instruments in the ongoing power struggles between different political and institutional interests. To counterbalance this, emphasis has especially been placed on observations and points that appear reflective and self-critical and do not (simply) reinforce narrow institutional interests by promoting one’s own results and/or contributions. Furthermore, points and lessons that are supported by a number of different sources, especially those including sources with opposing interests, have been assigned stronger relevance than points that have only been found in reports originating from one side of the political–developmental–military divides. In order to gain insight into some of the more generic lessons that the various actors have identified, the study draws primarily on documents that cover trends over a longer period of time and/or across specific programmes/efforts.

Academic studies have primarily been included in the analysis to provide perspective and give a basis for a discussion that goes beyond the experiences, insights and realisations of practitioners directly involved in the efforts in Afghanistan. The study further draws on contributions from a number of international experts who participated in a public seminar that was held at DIIS on 23 April 2015, as well as a number of interviews with American experts and civil servants, conducted in Washington DC in October 2015.

Never Again

Alongside the war in Iraq, Afghanistan often appears as part of a ‘never again argument’: Never again shall Western countries become engaged in the lengthy and costly efforts of stabilising and reconstructing a fragile state. In 2011 the then US Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates, went as far as to say that any secretary of defence who recommended to the American president to send ground forces to Asia, the Middle East or Africa should ‘have his head examined’. The current inclination on the part of the West to intervene indirectly – through support to either groups of insurgents (as in Syria) or government

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troops (as in Iraq) – contributes to depicting the engagement in Afghanistan as a unique form of intervention, unlikely to be repeated any time soon. The basis for this study is, however, that experiences from Afghanistan are interesting and relevant, both in their own right and with regard to future interventions –even if they do not involve large numbers of Western land forces to the same degree as in Afghanistan.

While the Afghan model may not be replicated, multidimensionality and complexity are likely to be permanent features of interventions in fragile states. For better or worse, the coherence agenda will remain an essential part of that discussion. Moreover, it is worth noting that experiences from Afghanistan point to many of the same principled and institutional constraints as have been found in other much smaller and non-NATO/Western-led interventions in fragile states. In many ways, there is nothing exceptional or unique about the experiences from Afghanistan with regard to the discussion about how to ensure coherence between the diplomatic, security and development efforts in fragile and conflict-ridden states. Experiences from Afghanistan are thus relevant to a number of broader ongoing discussions including, for example, the UN's peace operations and the new Sustainable Development Goals, including in particular Goal 16 on promoting peaceful and inclusive societies with access to justice for all and strong, responsible and inclusive institutions at all levels.

To provide a sufficiently comprehensive discussion of the multiple and diverse experiences from Afghanistan in a somewhat digestible manner, the study focuses on six major topics, each dealt with in a separate chapter:

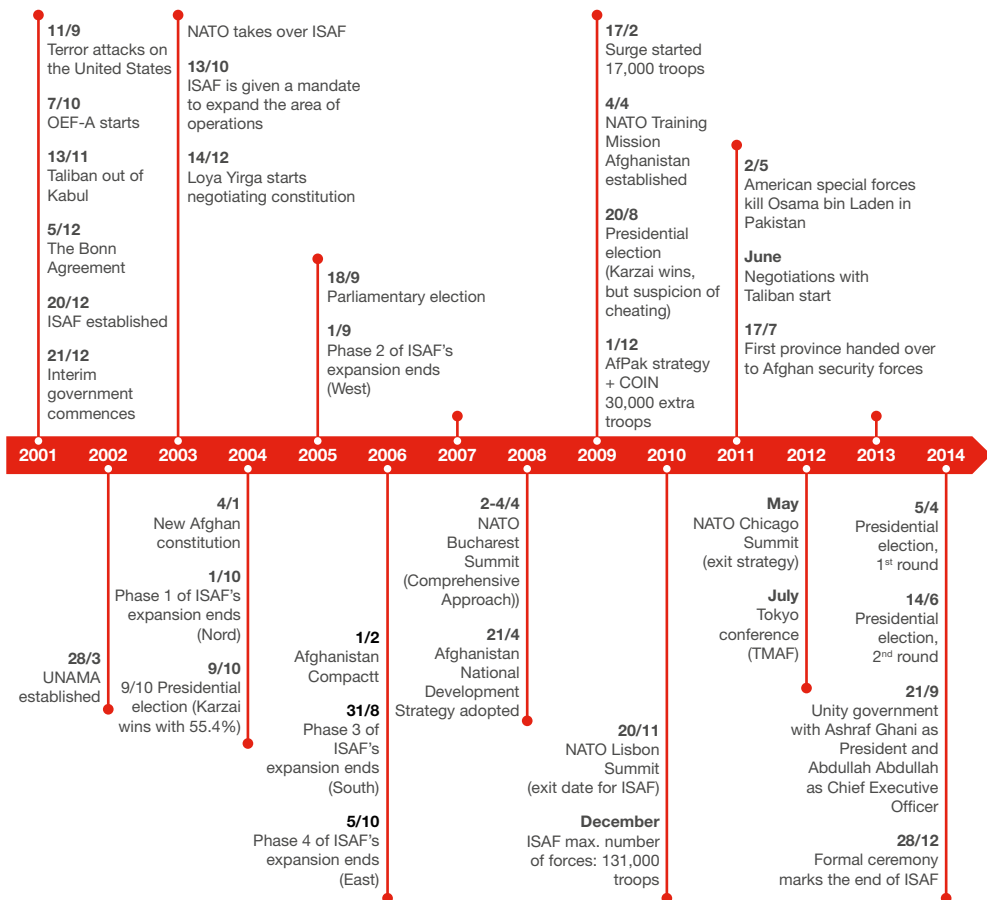
- 1 Strategic experiences and adjustments
- 2 Afghan ownership
- 3 Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs)
- 4 Working across bureaucratic silos
- 5 Impact of military efforts on wider efforts to win *hearts and minds*, and last, but certainly not least
- 6 Statebuilding lessons.

The study concludes with a chapter that seeks to open up for the wider discussion of the most important questions that experiences from Afghanistan raise in regard to the planning of future efforts in fragile and conflict-affected states.

STRATEGIC EXPERIENCES OVER TIME

Throughout the period 2001–2014, the international engagement in Afghanistan has been held together by one common thread: the aim of establishing an efficient and legitimate government in Kabul that could prevent al-Qaeda and other international terror groups from operating from bases in Afghanistan while at the same time improve the living conditions for the Afghan population. From the outset, it was widely agreed that this could not be achieved by military means alone; it required a multidimensional engagement. However, it became clear quite quickly that this broad consensus did not translate into a common strategy – i.e. a shared understanding of the relationship between goals, means and methods. The distinct members of the ‘international community’ were engaged in Afghanistan for a variety of reasons, many of which shifted over time – either in response to changes on the ground or due to domestic political changes. As a result, the international engagement 2001–2014 was marked by a surplus of objectives and a deficit of strategic guidance.

Figure 2



This chapter discusses the key circumstances that shaped the collective planning of the international engagement in Afghanistan. The first factor that comes to mind is the predominant role of the United States with regard to determining and adjusting the overall framework for the various international efforts in Afghanistan from 2001–2014. The role of the US is thus briefly outlined in the section below. The following sections provide a chronological discussion of the strategic development and shifts that happened concurrently with changes in the situation on the ground, and a growing understanding of the complexity of the Afghan context. Figure 2 provides a brief overview of the key events during the period.

THE ROLE OF THE UNITED STATES

Since 2001 the international discussions about objectives of and means for the engagement in Afghanistan have taken place in a number of capitals, including Bonn, London, Brussels, Berlin, Tokyo and Kabul. However, the key discussion took place in Washington between the White House, the CIA, the State Department and USAID. The United States was and is the decisive member of the international coalition. Throughout the entire period, the main responsibility for setting the course in Afghanistan lay on the shoulders of the United States. Other members of the coalition each had their own strategic considerations and also each of them had their own sovereign space within which to manoeuvre with regard to arranging their respective contributions, including the balance and the relationship between civilian and military engagements. But in the end they all had to find a way to make their individual contributions fit into a wider framework that was overwhelmingly defined by the United States, whose political, financial and military engagement exceeded those of the other coalition partners combined (see Tables 1 and 2). Working together thus meant different things on each side of the Atlantic. For the United States, cooperating with the partner countries was a matter of weighing advantages and disadvantages of establishing and maintaining a multinational coalition behind a long-term and multi-pronged engagement. For the European countries, being a member of the coalition was a matter of defining and fulfilling their role as junior partners; that is, clarifying how they, as small countries, could be able to or should be able to contribute to a major operation, the framework of which they had only very limited influence over.

Table 1: Troop level in Afghanistan 2001-2014¹

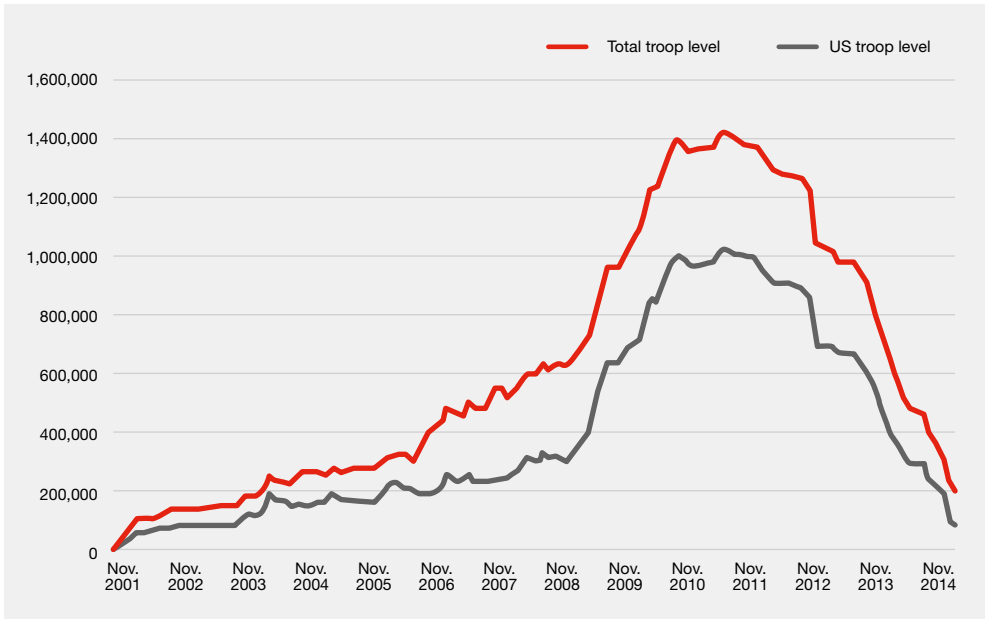
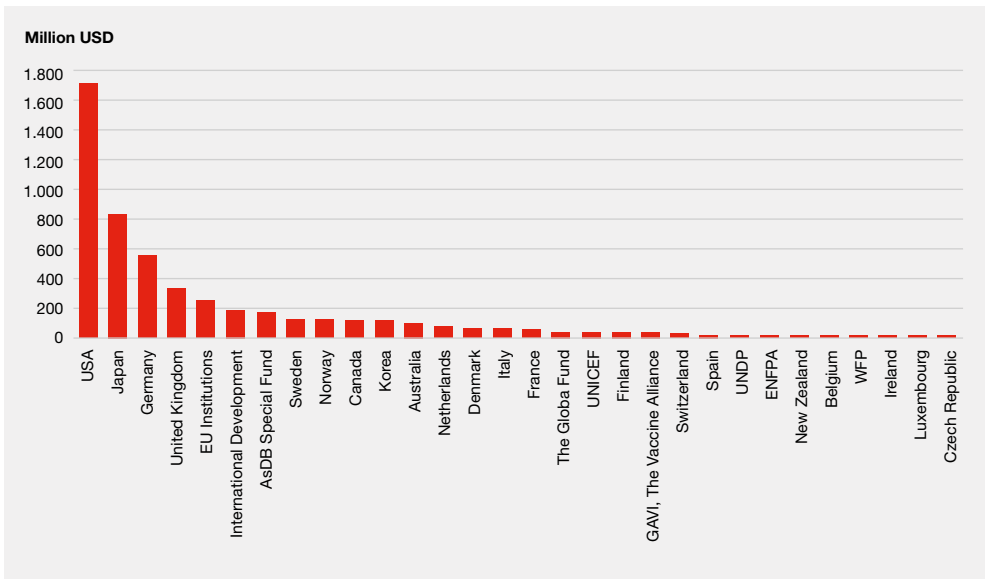


Table 2: Donors to Afghanistan 2013²



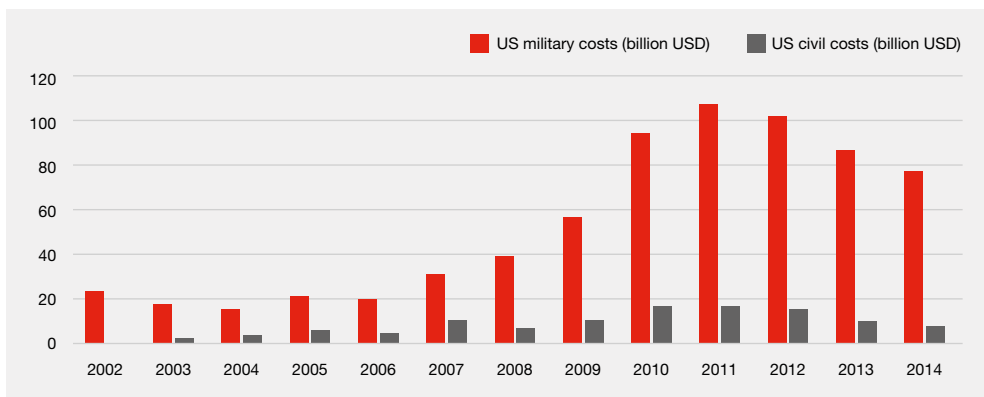
1 Livingston, Ian S. and O'Hanlon, Michael (2015).

2 Compare Your Country (2015).

The importance of the terrorist attacks on the United States of 11 September 2001 cannot be underestimated when trying to understand the extensive engagement of the United States in Afghanistan. *Operation Enduring Freedom Afghanistan* (OEF-A) began only a few weeks after the attacks as a US-led military intervention to root out al-Qaeda and the Taliban regime which gave them shelter. Throughout the entire period, ‘the war against terror’ remained the most important political motivation behind the American presence in the country. All other objectives – counter-insurgency, reconstruction, stabilisation, statebuilding, democratisation etc. – were not seen as independent goals in and of themselves, but, rather, as means to achieve the greater goal: fighting international terrorism. This was especially pronounced in Congress, which sets the financial frameworks for the civil and military engagements of the United States.

The very direct linkage between the United States’ national security interests and engagement in Afghanistan left an imprint on the distribution of resources between the civil and military efforts. There is no publicly available information on how much the United States’ military engagement in Afghanistan amounted to in 2001–2014, but it is well known that substantially more funds were allocated to the Pentagon than to the State Department and USAID (see Table 3, which is based on Congress’ estimates, which, among other things, do not include expenses for new purchases of military equipment). The militarized impression of the American engagement is further strengthened by the fact that the Pentagon controlled more than half of the ‘civil’ funds. Of the USD 109.7 billion that Congress allocated to the reconstruction of Afghanistan from 2002 and onward, approximately 60% was used by defence on efforts to strengthen the Afghan security forces.

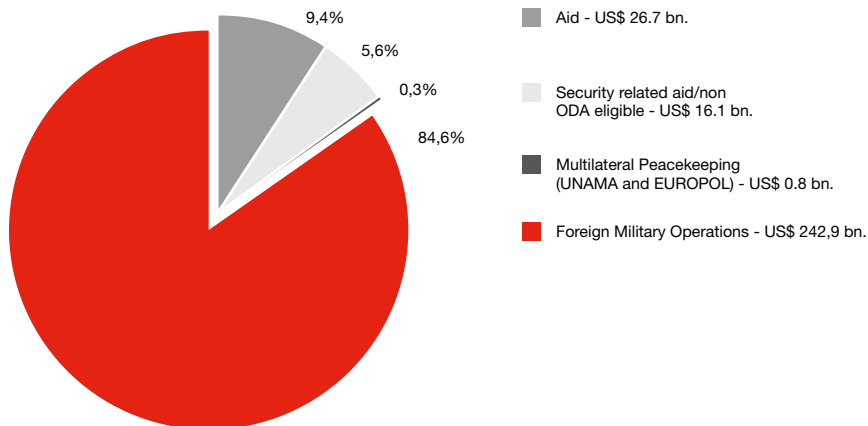
Table 3: The US civil and military costs in Afghanistan 2002–2014³



³ SIGAR (2015b); Belasco (2014)

The pronounced imbalance between the civil and military efforts was not exceptional – the United Kingdom, for example, had a similar distribution. In the other countries that are included in this study, the proportion was more equal, although all of the countries used most funds on the military engagement. There is no combined overview of the distribution between the different civil and military efforts in Afghanistan, but according to calculations from the period 2002–2009, nearly 85% of the international expenses went to OEF and ISAF.

Figure 3: International aid, security and military expenditure, 2002–2009⁴



The disparity in resources, including, not least, in terms of personnel, did not mean that military considerations and desires always ‘won’ in the sense that the military were able to dictate what the civilian actors were to do. The continuing problems with ensuring, if not *unity of command*, at least *unity of effort* highlights the fact that the civilian actors often had their own objectives and agendas, which often conflicted with what the military wanted. Neither does it imply that more resources should have been allocated to civil development projects to provide for a more balanced intervention. It is, however, widely acknowledged, including at the Pentagon, that in order to provide for a coherent engagement it was unhelpful that the political and financial strengths of the civil and military branches of the ‘partnership’ were as unbalanced as they were.

4 Poole (2011).

In hindsight, it is frequently argued that the engagement in Afghanistan got off to a wrong start because both the scope and the nature of the tasks at hand were grossly underestimated. It was mistakenly believed that once the Taliban had been replaced by a friendly regime, Afghanistan would relatively quickly transition from a ‘failed state’ to a well-functioning and responsible member of the international community. The discussion focuses especially on 1) the ‘light footprint’ and 2) the Bonn Agreement of December 2001. Underpinning the criticism of all three decisions is **the importance of knowing the concrete context of intervention and taking all of its complexity into consideration in order to avoid simplistic and overambitious ideas about what can be achieved by international intervention.**

Paradoxically, the decision to have a ‘light footprint’ was made with explicit reference to Afghanistan’s history. Afghanistan was known as the ‘graveyard of empires’ and as a country with a marked ability to defy and fight any form of foreign intervention. In light of the Soviet and British experiences with long-term, failed engagement in Afghanistan, the United States decided that the ground war should be carried out primarily by troops from the Northern Alliance rather than US soldiers. Accordingly, the early US engagement, first and foremost consisted of massive money transfers from the CIA to the Northern Alliance, supplemented by support from special forces and CIA agents on the ground, as well as extensive air raids. Politically, the alliance with the Northern Alliance proved to be one of the major obstacles to the efforts to establish a legitimate and efficient government in Kabul, but from a military point of view it was a very effective strategy. As early as November 2001, the war against the Taliban regime seemed to have been won.

Based on the same understanding of Afghans as a people who would oppose foreign intervention, the UN’s Special Representative, Lakhmar Brahimi argued that reconstruction efforts should be formally led by the Afghans, and not – for example, as in Kosovo or East Timor/Timor-Leste – under a temporary UN protectorate. The light military footprint was to be extended on the civilian side: Afghanistan was not to be inundated by foreign experts and international control mechanisms. Only if the processes of change were locally anchored and run by the Afghans themselves would they have a chance to attain lasting results. Brahimi’s analysis corresponded completely to the reluctance of the American president at the time, George W. Bush, to carry out long-term *nation-building* projects.

The light footprint was cemented in the general framework for Afghanistan’s political transition, which was determined at the Bonn conference in December 2001. The Bonn Agreement contained several elements. Firstly, the establishment of an interim government under the leadership of the Pashtun Hamid Karzai and with the participation of representatives of the Northern Alliance and a number of other rival groups in

Afghanistan. Secondly, the schedule for the formulation of a new Afghan constitution and the holding of democratic elections. Thirdly, a request on the part of the UN Security Council to establish two international peace missions in Afghanistan: a military security force under the leadership of a member country with a mandate to maintain security in and around Kabul (ISAF), and a political UN mission (UNAMA) with a mandate to, among other things, assist the interim government with the implementation of the Bonn Agreement, and ensure that all UN efforts aligned behind this goal.

At the time, the Bonn Agreement was regarded as good diplomatic craftsmanship, especially on the part of the ambassador of the United States to Afghanistan, James Dobbins and the UN's Lakhmar Brahimi. Today, critics hold that while the agreement did succeed in distributing political power between the leaders of a number of the ethnic and geographically rival groups in Afghanistan, it failed to provide for a general process of political reconciliation in the country. In particular, the wisdom of not inviting representatives from the deposed Taliban regime to the conference in Bonn has been questioned (see Box 1). The problem is symptomatic of the question which unavoidably and persistently has to be raised in the pursuit of coherence, namely, **is it possible to get what works in the short term to also work in the long run?**

Today, it seems obvious that political stability in Afghanistan cannot be achieved without an agreement of one kind or another with the Taliban. Back in December 2001, however, it seemed just as obvious to the American planners that there was no reason to include the Taliban in the Bonn negotiations. Firstly, the Taliban had been overtaken so quickly on the battlefield that it was mistakenly believed that the movement had essentially been defeated. Secondly, there was no desire to legitimise an enemy through negotiations; an enemy that the American political establishment regarded as being intimately related to al-Qaeda. In addition, it should be noted that none of the Afghan groups that were invited to Bonn argued in favour of also inviting the Taliban. Today, it is widely regarded as a strategic misjudgement not to distinguish between the Taliban and al-Qaeda, but simply regard them as one and the same enemy. This illustrates that the international community as a whole has had a hard time figuring out the nature of the Taliban and what role the movement plays in Afghan politics, especially including the relationships between the various ethnic groups in Afghanistan. The Taliban is a Pashtun movement, and even though President Karzai is a Pashtun, it is currently the assessment that the Pashtuns, who comprise about 40% of the population, got a relatively small role in the political division of power after Bonn. The preferential treatment of the Northern Alliance's warlords (primarily Tajiks and Uzbeks) gave the Taliban an opportunity to grow in popularity by positioning itself as the Pashtuns' only real representative.

BOX 1: NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE TALIBAN

A number of studies indicate that it was a mistake not to involve the Taliban in the political negotiations in Bonn after the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. Some reports believe that they can prove that there was already an important window for negotiation up to and after the coalition attack in 2001, in which prominent people in the top of the Taliban had presumably been ready to surrender. There is no agreement about the accuracy of these reports.

After the capture of Kabul in November 2001, the Americans believed that the Taliban was defeated to such a degree that negotiations were both unnecessary and unwise. In 2002, when the Taliban showed signs of willingness to negotiate, the United States advised President Karzai to ignore the offer. At that time, the Taliban was not regarded by the Americans as being a power factor. In connection with the Afghan presidential election in 2004, Karzai attempted to differentiate between ordinary Taliban and insurgent Taliban. It was, at the same time, a helping hand for negotiation, but when a high-ranking Taliban announced violence against the government in 2005, this helping hand became unpopular. In 2005, the Afghan government, with the support of the United States, established an exit programme, which made it possible for Taliban fighters to surrender (*Program for Strengthening the Peace*). This resulted, however, only in a small amount of amnesty for low-ranking Taliban and had very little political backing in Afghanistan. The programme was followed up by an official statement by Karzai in 2006 that two high-ranking Taliban, Mullah Omar and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, could return to Afghanistan and live in peace. For the Taliban, however, this was not considered as constituting genuine negotiation and no results came from it.

In 2008 President Karzai, on his own initiative, started negotiations with the Taliban because he, to an increasing degree, viewed the movement as an unavoidable power factor in Afghan politics. These negotiations were, however, without American participation because the United States would not negotiate with a terror organisation. The United Kingdom and Canada took turns pressuring the United States and researchers increasingly pointed out the necessity of political inclusion of the Taliban. Concurrently with the increased focus on ending the war, the Americans eventually changed their position.

In June 2011 American-supported negotiations were started with the Taliban. The negotiations have not yet led to peace, but the vast majority of observers state that it would have been an advantage if these negotiations had started earlier. The disagreement about when and how negotiations should take place with the Taliban – and the fact that the discussions were made openly – contributed to a high degree to souring the relationship between the United States and President Karzai, just as it has also led to internal divisions in the coalition.

Along the same lines, it is now regarded as a strategic misjudgement that the regional aspects of the conflict in Afghanistan were ignored for so long. In particular, the failure to see the relationship between Pakistan and the Taliban, including Taliban's access to refuge in Pakistan's Pashtun-dominated tribal areas, turned out to be decisive. Already in 2001, the Taliban's top leader, Mullah Omar, had fled to the mountains between Pakistan and Afghanistan. In the course of 2002–2003 a number of former Taliban leaders, who, according to many sources, had unsuccessfully sought some kind of reconciliation with the interim government, joined him. It was this group that later led the armed resistance that slowly spread and became extremely intense around 2005–2006. It was, however, only with President Obama's 'AfPak strategy' from 2009 on that the role of the neighbouring countries gained political attention.

A third factor that turned out to have a very long-term negative significance was the fact that the new government was built on a foundation of warlords, who enjoyed less or just as little popular support as the Taliban. The Afghan population had no illusions that these rulers would change overnight just because they now enjoyed international recognition and support. The idea that an efficient and legitimate Afghan state centred around the office of the president in Kabul could be established through the Bonn process, while everyday responsibility for security and law and order in the provinces was upheld by local militias with the support of the CIA and American special forces, proved untenable. Instead of strengthening the Afghan state's ability to maintain law and order within the territory, the process contributed to further fragmentation of the Afghan security sector (see more about this in the chapter on statebuilding).

This approach was criticised from the start. In the beginning of 2002, the then general secretary of the UN, Kofi Annan, asked the US Secretary of Defense at the time, Donald Rumsfeld, whether the United States was not merely creating new warlords. To this, Rumsfeld allegedly replied: 'No, we are not creating new ones, we are giving guns to the old ones!' (Guehenno 2015: 19). The anecdote shows that the disconnect between the American desire for a quick regime change and the UN's – and many of the European partners' – ambitions to support a much more comprehensive transformation of Afghanistan was present from the outset. The source of many of the tensions that later came to characterise ISAF was thus not a matter that was only gradually recognized; it was a politically understood reality that was well known from the start of the intervention.

NATO IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT 2003–2008

Already during the Bonn negotiations, the British and others argued that a large peacekeeping force should be established with a mandate to maintain peace and security throughout all of Afghanistan. In part because of resistance from the American government, in part due to the fact that no countries offered to contribute with the necessary number of troops, such a mission was not established. On the contrary, ISAF's

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mandate was explicitly limited to Kabul and its surroundings during the first years. In retrospect, this has been identified as an error. Counter-factually, it is suggested that the situation in Afghanistan may have looked very different today, if ISAF had not been limited to Kabul and its surroundings while OEF-A's war on terror continued with increasing intensity in a number of the provinces.

Concurrently with the desire of the United States to disengage from Afghanistan and move military resources to Iraq instead, pressure was growing on the United States' allies to take over responsibility for 'the good war' in Afghanistan. At the same time, there was a desire in NATO circles to revitalise the alliance and show that the transatlantic cooperation provided a strong framework for addressing the new threats facing the West (Rynning 2012). On this basis, in August 2003 NATO took over the leadership of ISAF. A few months later it was decided to expand ISAF's area of operations gradually until, in 2006, NATO had taken over command of the four regional headquarters that were established under OEF-A. The expansion of ISAF can be seen as a strategic recognition of the fact that **the civil reconstruction of Afghanistan required a country-wide military engagement focused on maintaining peace and security, rather than fighting terror.** However, the expectation was – to draw a slight caricature – that through a robust peacekeeping presence NATO's soldiers would create a secure area for the civil reconstruction and development efforts. The notion that the civil and military efforts should be parallel, but mutually supportive, was still dominant. It was not until later that the focus shifted to a more instrumental use of civil engagement as part of the population-centred military battle against insurgent groups.

ISAF was, in many ways, a remarkable construction. It was a broadly based coalition of more than 50 countries that was led by a multilateral organisation with no previous experience in conducting such a large-scale operation. NATO's organisational abilities and the relationship between ISAF and OEF-A developed over time, but as stated in the chapter about the PRTs, below, it remained a persistent problem for NATO to ensure *unity of command* – a quality that is highly valued in military circles and is often regarded as being a prerequisite for carrying out effective activities on the ground. As is typically the case in coalitions, the contributing countries did not give full control of the forces to ISAF's leadership. On the contrary, more than half of all of the countries had a number of national caveats that resulted in various limitations on what 'their' soldiers could and could not do. The distinct caveats often reflected military traditions and political objectives in the individual countries. They were difficult for NATO to dismiss because, nationally, they were seen as prerequisites for contributing to the effort at all. Nevertheless, throughout the entire period, they remained a source of frustration in Brussels, in NATO's central headquarters in Kabul, in the regional headquarters and in the individual PRTs.

As noted, national caveats are a regular feature of multinational missions. However, in Afghanistan, many of the caveats reflected deeper political disagreement within the alliance about ISAF's objectives and the nature of NATO's engagement in Afghanistan. ISAF was originally established as a peacekeeping force and a number of the European coalition partners wanted NATO's role in Afghanistan to remain that of a peacekeeping mission with a mandate to use force only in self-defence. Concurrently with the expansion of ISAF's area of operations – and the growing insurgency – the ISAF forces that were stationed in the southern part of Afghanistan were particularly involved in fighting insurgents, including direct combat with the insurgents to an increasing degree. But this happened in the absence of a clear political decision in NATO, and without NATO having developed the necessary military concepts and operational plans for how ISAF should confront and fight the armed resistance in the long run. The individual operations and campaigns remained, therefore, separate tactical actions.

The strategic narrative behind NATO's engagement envisaged stabilisation a three-step process: *clear, hold, build*. But instead of 'clearing' the areas of insurgent forces and 'holding' them long enough for civil efforts to be able to 'build' legitimate and efficient formal governmental structures, the increasingly frustrated soldiers experienced that most of all, they were 'mowing the lawn' or playing whack-a-mole. The same areas had to be cleared of insurgents repeatedly, while the strength and intensity of the insurgency steadily increased. It became increasingly obvious that even though ISAF won all of the battles, NATO was not winning the war.

At the NATO summit in Bucharest in the spring of 2008, a strategic vision for ISAF was formulated for the first time. The vision identified four themes based on experiences since 2001:

- The engagement had to be long-term and include the necessary number of troops.
- Afghan leadership was important. Therefore, ISAF was to focus more on training the Afghan national security forces.
- The international coordination was to be strengthened, especially between NATO and the UN.
- Pakistan's role and the relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan were to be addressed systematically.

On the basis of this vision NATO formulated a confidential 'comprehensive strategic policy military plan', which remained in place until the end of 2014 and the closure of ISAF. The plan indicated 17 'desirable outcomes' related to security, development and governance. What was new was that NATO saw itself play a role in all three areas, and

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not just security. The intention was not that NATO should replace the Afghan government or the UN, but rather that NATO should push for creating an overarching strategic framework for the joint activities. This demanded greater attention to – and knowledge about – political and development problems, and thus also a need for NATO’s military structure to be better able to cooperate with civil organisations and incorporate civil problems in the planning and execution of operations.

An integrated approach – or in NATO terminology, a *comprehensive approach* – became the tool, which from around 2008 and onwards managed to unite the alliance on a joint plan for Afghanistan. By emphasising the interaction between the civil and military tasks as being key to ISAF’s effort, it was possible to identify a compromise, which could be accepted by all of the NATO countries. The 2008 plan set the frame for how ISAF should contribute to both fighting insurgents and long-term stabilisation up to the end of 2014. However, it was not until the newly elected President Obama, in 2009, put a focus on ending the war in Afghanistan that the international engagement and efforts to create coherence made a serious shift.

FIGHTING INSURGENTS WITH THE POPULATION AT THE CENTRE OF FOCUS – AND EXIT: 2009–2014

Today there is widespread agreement that **it took much too long before it was politically recognised that Afghanistan was not a post-conflict country but on the contrary, a country in the midst of armed rebellion.** As one of his first acts in office, President Obama launched a strategic re-assessment of the situation in Afghanistan. Two new, partially conflicting elements guided US strategy, which hung on the one hand on emphasising the narrow connection between Afghanistan and the war against terror and, on the other hand, a massive expansion of the military and civil engagement focusing on three areas:

- The regional dynamics, including in particular the relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan (AfPak).
- Population-centric approach to counterinsurgency (COIN).
- Building up the capacity of the Afghan security forces.

When launching the new strategy, Obama declared that the war in Afghanistan was not a *war of choice* but a necessary war directly linked to Afghanistan’s status as a ‘free haven’ for international terrorism: The ‘clear and focused’ goal was *‘to disrupt, dismantle and defeat al Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and to prevent their return to either*

country in the future'. In order to reach this goal, the strategy set the stage for a surge similar to that of the year before, which paved the way for the American withdrawal from Iraq; that is, an extensive increase in the numbers of American ground troops (see Table 1).

The experience of supporting the Afghan security sector is discussed in the chapter below on statebuilding. Experiences with ensuring Pakistan's support for the engagement in Afghanistan are considered beyond the remit of this report. Therefore, the focus here is only on the transition from enemy-centric to population-centric counterinsurgency, and on how this shift in the strategic thinking significantly increased the emphasis on ensuring that civilian efforts contributed to furthering the military goals.

Population-centric counterinsurgency in an Afghan context is especially related to General McChrystal who, in the summer of 2009, took over as commander of both ISAF and the American troops in Afghanistan. Upon commencing his duties, McChrystal summarised the experiences thus far in three points:

- The military effort had not worked as intended. While the international forces won all individual battles against the Taliban, the general security situation in the country was getting worse.
- The insurgent groups in Afghanistan were now well organised and worked in a goal-oriented manner to drive the international forces out of the country, undermine the Afghan government and take control of the population.
- The population had no trust in the government and state institutions due to the extensive corruption, misuse of power and lack of economic progress.

General McChrystal came from a post as chief of the US Special Forces and was known as a 'tough guy'. The version of population-centric counterinsurgency that he put on the agenda in Afghanistan included extensive use of special forces and targeted attacks on suspected insurgents. The main idea, though, was that these more conventional, enemy-centric efforts could not stand alone, but had to be backed up by military efforts aimed at undermining the insurgents' support in the population. The idea was that the Afghan population, instead of the government, should be at the centre and that attempts should be made to protect the population from both the Taliban and corrupt officials. In parallel and alongside the ongoing special operations and combat, efforts to build the capacity of the Afghan security forces to conduct and eventually take over the military operations against the insurgents should be strengthened.

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COIN thus had a **built-in tension between fighting a corrupt government on the one hand and training and equipping the same government security forces on the other hand**. The handling of this challenge not only required more ground troops, but also significant political flair and understanding of development. At the same time, the weight of the engagement was to be moved further out in the rural areas, so that the Afghan population would be able to notice genuine improvement in their living conditions, especially in strategically important areas. Both the civil and the military efforts were to move all the way out to district and village level hand in hand. The military surge was supported by a civil surge that mobilised American civil servants with technical knowledge about everything from agriculture to tax collection and energy supply. At the same time the PRTs established a large number of Forward Operating Bases (FOBs) tasked with securing larger areas and improving governance at a sub-national level (see chapter below on the PRT). With this surge the illusion of a light footprint was definitively shattered. The international presence in Afghanistan grew almost explosively in 2009–2011, and throughout most of the withdrawal period that began in 2012 the international engagement in the form of soldiers and aid funds remained higher than at any time before 2009.

When assessing COIN lessons from Afghanistan, the decision to withdraw remains a key point of contestation. Could COIN have worked (better) if only it had been given more time? Or was it based on an inherently flawed assumption that the problems in Afghanistan could be solved by using more soldiers, advisers, time and money? In those years, the US strategic community, and with it the rest of the alliance, saw a split between the so-called *COIN-danistas*, who wholeheartedly believed that population-centric counterinsurgency would work, provided politicians had the strategic patience to let it work, and the *COIN-tras*, a mixed group of critics favouring either more targeted and/or conventional use of military instruments. The question of whether or not COIN can be used by external actors as part of a successful exit strategy remains unresolved; as do to some extent the question of whether setting a precise date for ISAF's withdrawal did inadvertently undermine the credibility of the population-centric method.

When NATO declared at the Lisbon summit in 2010 that ISAF would conclude its mission by the end of 2014, the audience was primarily the populations and the parliaments at home. The costly and long-lasting war in Afghanistan was increasingly unpopular and critics in both the US and Europe were pointing to ISAF and OEF-A as part of the problem rather than part of the solution. At the same time, the Afghan government, under the leadership of Harmid Karzai, was also becoming more and more loudly dissatisfied with the American presence in particular and ISAF in general. And finally, the international frustration with political developments in Afghanistan, including the lack of progress with regard to democratisation, human rights and good governance, was increasingly apparent. The extensive electoral fraud in the Afghan presidential election in August

2009 had eliminated any remaining illusions about the democratic mindset of Karzai. In light of this, it was not surprising that the question ‘what’s the use?’ appeared frequently in discussions on Afghanistan and prompted the announcing of not just an exit strategy, but also an exit date. Then and now, the argument against was that by openly declaring when the international forces would leave Afghanistan, the Taliban could simply abandon the battlefield temporarily only to resurface once the weak Afghan security forces were to take over the fight themselves. If the theory behind COIN was to have a chance to work, both the Taliban and the Afghan population had to believe that the international troops would remain in the country until ‘the job was done’.

The key question in the discussion is what it means – in an Afghan context – to say that the ‘job is done’. Does this mean that Afghanistan has become a functioning democracy or – less ambitiously – that a stable Afghan government able to maintain security, law and order within the Afghan territory has been established or – even less ambitiously – that a sufficient number of Afghan soldiers have been trained and equipped to take over the ongoing military fight against the Taliban? Questions such as these point to unresolved tensions in the relationship between the international coalition and the Afghan authorities.

The population-centric approach was explicitly conceding that the threat against Afghanistan’s long-term stability comes not only from the armed insurgents, but also from the Afghan government in the form of ongoing – and increasing – problems with corruption and abuse of power. Acknowledging that took a long time; it was not until about 2009 that corruption entered the political–strategic discussion seriously. Soon, however, the focus on corruption gained a lot of traction. In 2013 the departing chief of ISAF described corruption as being ‘*the existential, strategic threat to Afghanistan*’. From having been regarded as a more or less basic condition in weak states in general and an integrated part of *the Afghan way* in particular, the discussion about the causes and effects of corruption were dramatically expanded. Firstly, focus was on the importance of fighting corruption in order to increase the trust of the Afghan people in the state and its representatives. Secondly – and only near the end of the period – the co-responsibility of the international community for the scope and character of corruption in Afghanistan came into focus. A US military study in 2014 concluded, among other things, that the ‘US’ initial support of warlords, reliance on logistics contracting, and the deluge of military and aid spending which overwhelmed the absorptive capacity of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) created an environment that fostered corruption and impeded later [counter- and anti-corruption] efforts’. (JCOA 2014: 1).

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That **corruption can undermine trust in governments and that massive introduction of external resources can further destabilise an already fragile state** is nothing new. However, the extent of the problem seems extraordinary in Afghanistan. SIGAR has identified the lack of joint strategic focus on fighting corruption as a significant problem for the efficiency of the efforts, while others have pointed out the problems of legitimacy, which it gave both on location and at home when the international coalition – intentionally or unintentionally – supported or cooperated with corrupt partners (SIGAR 2013).

The late acknowledgement of the scope and character of Afghan corruption is, to a certain extent, a reflection of the distinct goals that drove the international engagement in Afghanistan from 2001–14: In the fight against terror, corruption was, roughly speaking, not a problem, but rather a means. The CIA and other military actors intentionally paid different armed groups and Afghan civil servants to ensure cooperation and/or information. For long-term development and reconstruction considerations however, corruption was regarded as a source of inefficiency and a misuse of aid funds. Corruption was a risk that had to be controlled – also in order to maintain domestic support for development assistance. Among other things, this led to an extensive delivery of aid outside of the government channels and to the formulation of detailed tender procedures, but not necessarily to less corruption. Finally, for purposes of stabilisation, corruption was just one among a number of problems and not necessarily the most important. Considerations regarding corruption were not systematically or consistently part of the ongoing deliberations on how to stabilise a particular district or province, but the general tendency was to cooperate with the local governor – the formal representative of the regime in Kabul – regardless of how corrupt he may have been. Excessive examples of corruption were regarded as individual problems that could be solved by pressuring the government in Kabul to appoint a new governor, if the old one was ‘too’ corrupt.

The absence of an overall strategic analysis of the roles of corruption and the unconditional support of the government in Kabul is increasingly regarded as one of the decisive deficiencies related to the long-term goal to establish an efficient and legitimate Afghan state. At the same time, the finger is pointing towards the international actors and their lack of will, especially on the part of the Americans, to confront the political-financial system in which the corruption thrived (Chayes 2015). This was, among other things, evident in the willingness to turn a blind eye to President Karzai and his family’s role in the extensive corruption scandals that gradually came to light. Political considerations to maintain a tolerable relationship to the Afghan president apparently trumped considerations regarding effectively fighting corruption. The problem of corruption thus points to one of the very key strategic dilemmas of intervening in fragile

states, namely **the need to clarify how to deal with local ‘partners’ who do not share your values and/or interests.** In 2001 considerations for Afghan self-determination and sovereignty – and the desire to stay clear of a long-lasting statebuilding quagmire – weighed strongly. The transition process was to be Afghan-led and have only a ‘light’ international footprint. A large part of the problem in Afghanistan was, however, that there was no Afghan leadership that was able to speak on behalf of the entire nation. The state had collapsed and the state structures that were gradually being established after 2001 were not trusted by the population at large. At the same time, international efforts – not least in the war against terror – actively contributed to strengthening armed groups and warlords that had no interest in building an efficient and legitimate Kabul-based state. These dilemmas were known in 2001. Clear solutions are still hard to see.

AFGHAN OWNERSHIP AND DONOR HARMONISATION

The ‘light footprint’ rested on the assumption that the Afghan government was able and willing to ‘occupy the driver’s seat’ and exercise ‘ownership’ of the transition and reconstruction process. This assumption did not last, in part because of internal contradictions in the statebuilding projects that are discussed in a separate chapter below. In this chapter focus is on the formal frameworks that were established to ensure that international efforts were aligned with the Afghan authorities’ plans and priorities. The experiences in this field are mixed. The Afghan government has, with varying success and with support, especially from the World Bank, formulated a number of long-term development strategies, which could set some clear priorities, and the donor community has, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, supported these.

Especially in the early years there were a number of Afghan attempts to determine a focused agenda and point the donors’ contributions in the direction of the government’s priorities. These actions were led by the current President Ashraf Ghani, who at the time was minister of finance. Although he was quite popular among the donors due to his great willingness to make reforms, he did not get all the support he asked for. At the first major donor conference after Bonn 2001, together with the World Bank, he prepared a strategy document entitled: Securing Afghanistan’s Future. The strategy aimed at limiting the deficit in the public finances and creating conditions for a sustainable state that could finance its own activities itself. The calculations in the strategy document show that it would require USD 27 billion. The donors pledged 8.2 billion.

One of the main ideas in Ghani’s 2004 strategy was to commit donors to provide long-term contributions to the government’s development agenda and thus move beyond the short-term emergency modalities that had dominated since 2001. As part of this, Ghani attempted to place conditions on donors by, for example, demanding that each donor country could support no more than three sectors at a time. At the same time, he was loudly critical of the donors’ (especially the United States’) widespread tendency to provide aid outside of the government’s budgets. In many Afghan circles Ghani was, nevertheless, considered too Western-minded, and his tenure as finance minister was in the end cut short. In December 2004 he was unseated and, with him, a number of other reformers who otherwise had tried to set a clear direction for the Afghan transition and statebuilding process also disappeared from the scene.

The story of Ashraf Ghani’s tenure as finance minister illustrates two circumstances that consistently made it difficult to formulate an Afghan-owned development plan that the donors could fully align with. Firstly, the concept of ‘national ownership’ makes little sense in a country that is characterised by fundamental conflicts about the direction of

the country's future development. Ghani's strategy may have been visionary but it was not widely anchored in either Afghan society or the Afghan government. Secondly, many donor countries are split between the desire to support the host country's priorities and the desire to determine how 'their' aid is being used, for example, by identifying their own focus areas. The dilemma is known in all developing countries, but experiences from Afghanistan indicate that it becomes particularly pronounced when aid is explicitly provided to further national security interests rather than 'merely' promote development and combat poverty.

The general discussion about 'aid effectiveness' spurred a growing focus on the need to harmonise donor approaches in Afghanistan and establish effective coordination mechanisms. In principle, both harmonisation and coordination should be based on the host country's development plans and as part of the alignment to the priorities of the national government. The two sections below outline firstly the experiences with coordination of the many different donor efforts and subsequently experiences with embedding this in the Afghan government's development plans and priorities.

AID EFFECTIVENESS AND DONOR COORDINATION

In 2001–14 more than 50 countries and organisations contributed to development cooperation in Afghanistan. Throughout the entire period, the United States was clearly the largest donor, providing 42% of all aid to Afghanistan. The next nine largest donors combined contributed about the same amount (43%). Despite this concentration on ten donors, the donor field in Afghanistan was large and, from the outset, quite fragmented (Hogg et al. 2013). Despite the short period of time in which a strong Afghan finance minister tried to manage the flow of aid to Afghanistan, it became clear quite early on that the responsible ministries in Afghanistan were neither politically nor technically able to carry out the coordination of the many humanitarian, reconstruction and stabilisation-related programmes that were implemented around the country.

In the absence of a strong national government, all eyes typically turn towards the UN when it comes to donor coordination. This happened, in a way, also in Afghanistan. UNAMA was mandated to support the Afghan government in clarifying the priorities of the country's humanitarian and reconstruction-related needs, as well as in mobilising international support for addressing these needs. In principle, this mandate included the task of coordinating all aspects of the civil efforts. In reality, however, it was never interpreted in this way, neither by the UN nor the United States, nor by the other donors. The combination of the UN's own light footprint – and therefore a very small staff of employees – and **the close connection between the donor's security and development engagement made it nearly impossible for the UN to coordinate the many aid actors** that operated in Afghanistan from 2001–2014. The decision in Geneva in 2002 to appoint

five *lead nations*, each with its own key area of responsibility within the central arena of security sector reform, emphasised this: the UN was not intended to play a decisive role as leader of the international community's reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. The problem turned out to be that others were not either.

Especially during the first years it was widely accepted that the civilian efforts were fragmented and incoherent. As the needs were so many and varied, this was not necessarily seen as a problem: there were plenty of areas to address, and often the donors found ways of working together anyway in various thematic or sector-limited workgroups; sometimes with the participation of the government, at other times as forums only for donors. In this way, a multitude of more or less institutionalised coordination forums emerged with the aim of ensuring information sharing, planning and cooperation on concrete areas of effort and/or special programmes. Both inside and outside Kabul, plenty of donor coordination meetings were held, but none of them focused on ensuring the overall coherence of the efforts. This was increasingly understood to be a problem both by the donors and the Afghan government, which especially wanted to have a better overview of and more influence on the many projects and programmes that were financed and established by the donors outside of the government (Sud 2013).

The so-called *Afghanistan Compact* of 2006 was the first attempt at formulating a number of joint goals and deadlines for the development work. The compact further established a joint mechanism for monitoring the implementation: the *Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board* (see Box 2). With the establishment of the JCMB and the anchoring of it in UNAMA, the UN was formally given a larger role with regard to creating coherence in the international support to Afghanistan.

The gradual acknowledgement of the need for better and more thorough coordination, however, did not only lead to (minor) strengthening of the UN's role. Other multilateral organisations also strengthened their efforts over time to ensure better coordination and planning. The coordination challenge in Afghanistan must therefore be seen in light of not just the UN's limitations, but also the other – and partly overlapping – forms of civil coordination efforts that took place. In addition to UNAMA, the EU's Special Representative also had a mandate to coordinate the efforts of the EU countries in Afghanistan while NATO, through its *Senior Civilian Representative*, tried to strengthen the coordination of the PRTs' civil efforts. In addition, the so-called SRAP group, under the leadership of the American *Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan*, functioned as an informal International Contact Group for sharing information and possibly harmonising points of views prior to the major donor conferences that were held outside Afghanistan and which often included a different set of actors than those engaged in formal coordination forums in Kabul.

BOX 2: JOINT COORDINATION AND MONITORING BOARD

The JCMB was established to ensure the implementation of the Afghan government's plan for the country's development, the Afghanistan Compact, which was adopted at the London conference in 2006. The JCMB has performed the same function for subsequent development plans, including the Afghanistan Development Strategy from 2008, and the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework of 2012.

From the start, the chairmanship of the JCMB has been equally divided between the Afghan government, represented by the finance minister, and the international community, represented by the leader of UNAMA, the UN Secretary-General's special representative for Afghanistan. The members of JCMB are relevant ministers from the Afghan government, representatives for the international coalition (NATO, ISAF, CSTC-A, UNAMA, the World Bank, the EU and the largest donor countries) as well as representatives from Afghanistan's neighbouring countries and other regional actors (Pakistan, Iran, China, Turkey, Russia and Saudi Arabia).

Cooperation in the JCMB is institutionalised in the form of a standing secretariat, regular publication of biannual reports and regular meeting times. The limitation of the work of the JCMB is that it is based on unanimity, which can limit coordination topics to the lowest common denominator which everyone can agree upon.

Ensuring effective donor coordination is problematic even in developing countries that are not in the midst of an armed conflict. Experiences from Afghanistan emphasise that **it is difficult, or nearly impossible, to achieve efficient coordination of the development efforts in a situation in which the most important donor countries' engagement is so closely related to their military presence.** As with so many other of the major questions that arise in light of experiences from Afghanistan, there is no unambiguous answer in the literature – neither policy-related nor practitioner-based or academic – to how or whether these difficulties can be overcome. However, it is widely agreed that the fact that so many donors earmarked a very large part of their engagement for the provinces where they themselves had troops stationed, and provided most of the aid through different non-governmental channels, including the PRTs, was costly in terms of limiting Afghan ownership and aid effectiveness. In 2010 the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) found that the donors' use of their own principles for good engagement in fragile states was 'relatively poor' and left 'significant room for improvement' (OECD 2010).

A certain disregard for good donorship is unavoidable in stabilisation interventions, where *aid effectiveness* must necessarily be balanced with other political considerations. The experiences from Afghanistan do, however, indicate that a stronger institutional framework for donor cooperation might have helped establish a greater joint understanding of the long-term goals for Afghanistan's development at an earlier point. However, the fact that the United States by itself provided close to half of the development aid to Afghanistan and was the largest single donor within just about all areas and sectors does suggest that donor coordination – and the adjustment to Afghan plans – would have functioned much better if the United States had placed more emphasis on ensuring this.

NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS

The Afghanistan Compact of 2006 was the first document that attempted to formulate a total vision for the future of Afghanistan. The document was based on an interim national development strategy prepared in cooperation by the Afghan government, the World Bank and the UN. *The Afghanistan Compact* included three pillars:

- 1 Security
- 2 Good governance and human rights
- 3 Economic and social development

At the time, the explicit inclusion of security considerations in a development strategy was an innovation. It was, however, a limited part of the international support in the security area that was covered. *The Compact* did not really succeed at connecting the dots between the civil and the military efforts. In 2008 *the Compact* was replaced by *the Afghanistan National Development Strategy* (ANDS), which fulfilled the World Bank's and the International Monetary Fund's requirements for debt relief and other forms of long-term aid cooperation. In addition to having an explicit focus on fighting poverty, ANDS expanded the three pillars that were introduced in the Compact, and, within each of these, tried to set up some clear prioritisation methods for the Afghan transition process. This came through the *National Priority Programs* (NPP), which covered 22 thematic plans divided into six different 'clusters': governance, agriculture and rural development, the private sector, infrastructure, human resources and security. This did not provide for much prioritisation. NPP was seen by many as just a long list of things that different Afghan ministries wanted money for. Paradoxically, though, at the same time the overarching document, the ANDS, was criticised for reflecting only what the donors had on their shelves and wanted to supply instead of what was really needed – it was *supply-driven* rather than a needs-based approach.

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The result, however, was the same: **most areas were highlighted as being important and crucial to the future of Afghanistan and therefore there was no clear identification of priorities to use as guidance.** In a sense, the Afghan development plans reflected the similar surplus of objectives and deficit of strategic direction that characterised the international community.

Despite the very broad identification of Afghan ‘priorities’, it was an ongoing problem for the Afghan government to get the donors to align their aid to the Afghan plans. The massive use of *off-budget* aid throughout all of the years was a particular stumbling block in the relationship between the Afghan government and the donors. The vast majority of the aid was given outside of the government’s budget. According to the World Bank, in 2010/11 only 12%, was given *on budget*, while a total of 88% of the aid funds were channelled outside of the government’s budget. In 2010 the donors committed themselves to aligning their aid to the Afghan development strategy so that 80% of their activities were to fall within one of the 22 national priority programmes, while 50% of the aid was to be provided through the state budget. This could take place either directly to one of the responsible ministries or indirectly through a multi-donor trust fund (see Box 3). The goal figures remained unchanged in the cooperation framework, the *Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework* (TMAF) of 2012, and they were repeated in December 2014 when TMAF was linked to the newly appointed national unity government’s reform programme and renamed as the *Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework* (SMAF).

BOX 3: MULTI-DONOR TRUST FUNDS IN AFGHANISTAN – ARTF/NSP AND LOFTA

Throughout the entire period, the multi-donor trust funds were regarded as a suitable way to ensure coordinated financing of the Afghan government’s national development plans. Multi-donor trust funds are especially connected with low transaction costs and better possibilities for creating transparency and responsibility regarding the use of the aid funds.

It was, among other things, for promoting this that the interim government and the largest donor countries in 2002 established the *Afghan Reconstruction Trust Fund* (ARTF), which since then has functioned as the largest mechanism for *pooled funding* for Afghanistan. ARTF is based on contributions from 34 donors and is administered by the World Bank, which regards the fund as being an efficient arena for policy debate and consensus-building.

ARTF was originally intended to be a temporary mechanism that was to ensure the financing of the non-security-related state expenses until the government itself was able to cover these expenses using the income from, among other sources, taxes and duties. The original expiry date for the fund was set as 30 June 2006, but the government and the donors have decided to continue ARTF twice; first until 2010 and later until 2020.

In addition to focusing on the general financing of the state budget, from the beginning ARTF has been involved in specific development projects. One of the most prominent frameworks for this was what was called the *National Solidarity Program* (NSP), which was established by the Afghan government in 2003. The programme focused on development in the rural areas and is generally regarded as one of the most efficient and effective development efforts in the country. The success of NSP is related to the fact that there is a high degree of government ownership of the programme and the special, locally-anchored approach, which is characteristic of the projects that are carried out through the programme. There is a high degree of citizen participation in development and the execution of the projects through local community development councils.

Experiences with multi-donor funds in Afghanistan are, however, not only positive. Among other things, the *Law and Order Trust Fund Afghanistan* (LOFTA) has been connected with fraud and inefficiency. LOFTA was founded in 2002 as a mechanism through which the donors could ensure that there were funds in the Afghan Treasury for paying expenses for wages and equipment (not weapons) for the growing Afghan national police force. The UN's development organisation administers LOFTA. In addition to problems with poor daily management, LOFTA's efforts have suffered from lack of ownership on the part of the Afghan Ministry of Interior Affairs and lack of strategic management on the part of the donors.

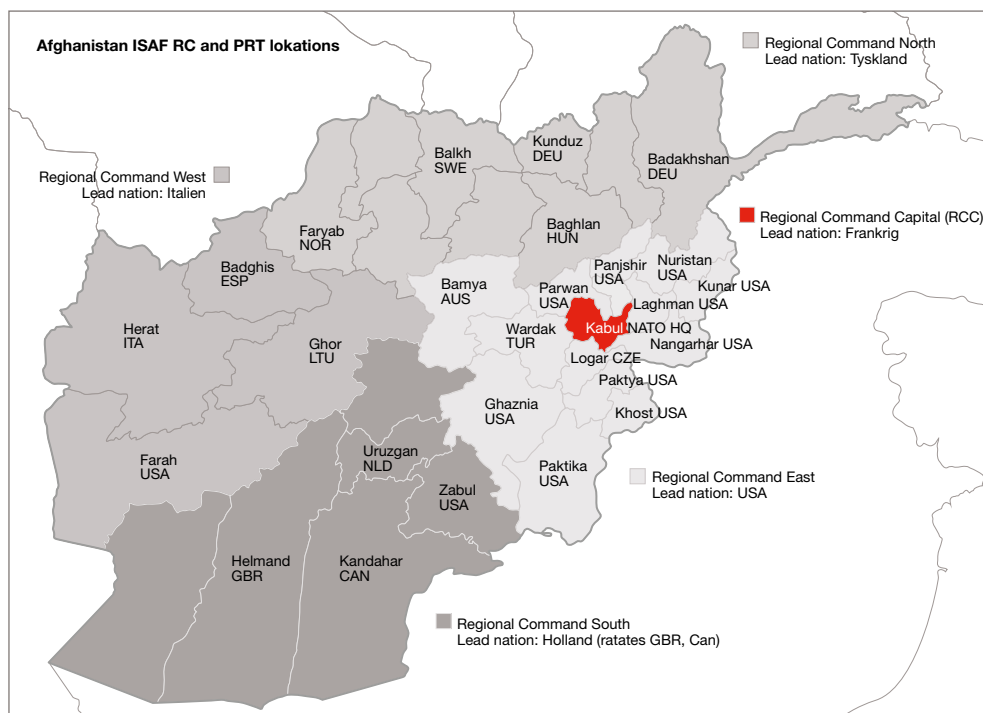
In the discussion on aid modalities, the focus has been especially on the American unwillingness to provide half of its aid through the Afghan governmental system, but also European donors often chose to work outside the formal system and provide aid through private consulting companies or NGOs. Arguments against providing budget support to Afghanistan were based on a number of things, including the fear of contributing to corruption and the sense that work with and through the Afghan government would delay things. These were legitimate and understandable concerns that in different ways reflected the desire to ensure that tangible improvements were provided to the Afghan population here and now. **But seen in relation to the stated objective of establishing an efficient central state in Kabul, the massive flow of aid outside of the government – and the resulting establishment of parallel structures – was problematic.**

Lack of sustainability is just one of the problems that occur when the donors and host country do not agree on the process for and direction of the national development process. The mutual lack of trust that grew over the years between the Karzai government and the members of the international coalition, was at least as big a problem. In order to overcome this and create a basis for a constructive, forward-looking partnership – also after the withdrawal of ISAF – there was increasing focus on **the need for an overall joint framework that committed both parties to a long-term cooperation**: the donor countries needed to be assured that the government would carry out reforms – also those that hurt – and the government needed to be assured that international assistance

would remain available – also when the domestic political awareness in donor states has shifted towards new or other crises. The *Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework* mentioned above was an attempt to establish such a framework. In principle the agreement covers the entire transition decade from 2014–2024, where Afghanistan, according to the plan, is to carry out a number of extensive reforms to consolidate the reconstruction of the country’s political and economic infrastructure. In return for the government’s promise of such reforms, the donors have committed themselves to continue the support to Afghanistan, also after the end of ISAF. This promise can be seen as an attempt to pursue coherence over time: retaining high levels of civil engagement is a prerequisite for scaling down and in time phasing out the military engagement. This acknowledgment is based on experiences from similar processes in other countries where analyses have shown how difficult it is for a conflict-ridden country to sustain any progress that has been made if the engagement of the donor community decreases dramatically once some form of stabilisation has been achieved and/or if other crises and conflicts demand the political attention of the donor governments.

PROVINCIAL RECONSTRUCTION TEAMS

The PRTs are key to the discussion about civil–military cooperation in Afghanistan. This chapter first describes the internal organisational aspects of the PRTs before discussing the relations between the PRTs and the Afghan authorities on the one hand and the emergency and development organisations on the other.



Land	No of Troops	Land	No of Troops	Land	No of Troops	Land	No of Troops	Land	No of Troops	Land	No of Troops	Land	No of Troops
ALB	140	BGR	820	FIN	110	ISL	8	LUX	9	ROU	860	MKD	170
AUS	1090	CAN	2830	FRA	2780	IRL	7	NLD	1770	SGP	20	TUR	660
AUT	2	HRV	280	GEO	1	ITA	2350	NZL	150	SVK	230	UKR	10
AZE	90	CZE	580	DEU	3465	JOR	7	NOR	490	SVN	70	ARE	25
BEL	450	DNK	700	GRC	140	LVA	160	POL	1590	ESP	780	GBR	8300
BIH	2	EST	140	HUN	370	LTU	200	PRT	30	SWE	290	USA	26215

The figures next to each country are based on the global contributions to the entire ISAF mission and do not reflect exact numbers of troops on the ground at any one time. The figures are compiled by NATO on 3 April 2009.

Source: http://nato.int/isaf/docu/epub/maps/graphics/afghanistan_prt_rc.jpg

Among the many observations on PRT, one stands out: **while most individual PRTs functioned well and achieved results at the tactical level, translating these into strategic results remained extremely difficult** – at times, local-level PRT activities even turned out to be working against national ISAF goals. A clear schism existed between the highly centralised statebuilding process defined in the Bonn process and the decentralised and fragmented approach to service provision of the PRTs. Incoherence was further underlined by the often unclear relations between the PRTs and the other branches of the international military engagement. As a rule of thumb, ISAF combat troops were not part of the PRT structures, but rather assigned to a joint regional headquarters. In parallel with these ISAF structures, a number of American-led combat and special troops were also present in the provinces, yet being deployed as part of OEF-A, they were not subject to any form of ISAF leadership.

ONE FORM – MANY MODELS

The first PRTs were established in Afghanistan in 2002 as part of OEF-A with the quite narrowly defined purpose of reaching out to the local Afghan population to ensure access to local intelligence and force protection. As the PRTs were transferred to ISAF and became the key mechanism for expanding ISAF's area of operations (see Box 4), their role was expanded to include wider stabilisation tasks such as maintaining local security, ensuring basic reconstruction and supporting the expansion of the Afghan government's control of its own territory. These three goals were shared by all PRTs, but apart from that each PRT was unique. Staffing and tasks reflected not only the local context, including in particular the security situation, but also to a large degree the respective *lead nations'* own deliberations, considerations and civil/military cultures.

BOX 4: PRTS FROM OEF-A TO ISAF

Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) comprised the largest and most concrete framework for a civil–military integrated approach in Afghanistan and were thus also one of the significant mechanisms for the limited approach to statebuilding, which was the logical consequence of the desire for a ‘light’ international footprint.

The PRTs originated within the framework of Operation Enduring Freedom – Afghanistan (OEF-A) as part of the fight against terror. In the American system, the PRTs primarily remained militarised structures, but in the context of ISAF and for most European countries the PRTs were intended to be a civil-oriented instrument that was to facilitate stabilisation and reconstruction.

The expansion of ISAF’s area of operations from 2003–2006 took place first and foremost through the PRTs, which were all moved from OEF-A to become part of the ISAF structure. The expansion involved both establishing new PRTs and having some of them move from American leadership to another lead nation. In September 2003 New Zealand took over the first responsibility for a PRT (Bamyan). In December 2003 Germany took over responsibility for another one (Kunduz).

In all, 28 PRTs were established under the leadership of 18 different ISAF partners: over time, the United States had responsibility for fourteen PRTs, the United Kingdom three and Germany/Turkey two, while Norway, Sweden, Hungary, Lithuania, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, Australia, Romania, Canada, New Zealand, the Czech Republic, South Korea, Poland and France were each responsible for one PRT, alone or jointly with another ISAF partner. In addition to the lead nation, other countries also participated in most PRTs. At total of more than 30 nations were involved in the PRTs.

Regardless of the lead nation, however, all PRTs were supported logistically by one of the four (later six) regional headquarters that divided Afghanistan into four more or less equally large land areas with extremely varying security challenges. Both the PRTs and the regional headquarters were attached to the ISAF headquarters in Kabul, but the headquarters only controlled the military activities, and this only to a limited extent. Each PRT thus had significant room to manoeuvre. All reconstruction activities were individually run by the PRTs. Table 4 provides an overview of some of the different PRT models that were developed in Afghanistan:

Table 4: PRT models in Afghanistan 2003–2014⁵

LEAD NATION	THE UNITED STATES	UK	GERMANY	NORWAY-SWEDEN	TURKEY
Leadership	Military	Civil	Separate civil and military leadership	Military	Civil
Troops	<100 soldiers	<400 soldiers	< 1000 soldiers	<400 soldiers	<70 soldiers
Civilians	2-3 civilians	<30 civile	10-20 civile	10-20 civile	?
Combat	Yes	Yes	No, only information operations	Yes, but primarily patrolling	No, only logistical support + protection
QIP	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Civilian focus	Infrastructure Education Health	Infrastructure Education Governance Narcotics	Support to local government Long-term development projects	Police training	Governance Education, Health Agriculture Police training
Multinational	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Regional headquarters	South, North, East, West	South	North	North	East

Expanding ISAF’s presence outside Kabul, primarily through individual national contributions to the PRTs, maximised the national freedom of troop-contributing countries while still providing a somewhat coherent military framework. This ‘solution’ was a reflection of the fact that NATO had no prior experience in moving into unstable areas gradually and with limited means. In the Balkans NATO had gone massively into a peace-enforcing operation. But the conditions and tasks in Afghanistan were completely different. Against this backdrop it initially seemed most feasible to simply ask individual NATO members to take over responsibility for already existing PRTs. The disadvantages in the form of a fragmentation of ISAF’s efforts in Afghanistan only appeared later.

THE PRTS AND THE AFGHAN STATE

Helping the central government in Kabul extend its authority throughout the country was a key PRT task. Nevertheless, the relationship between President Karzai and the province-based PRTs was strained. Due to the diversity of the PRTs, the Afghan government found it difficult to communicate with the PRTs and access their activities, both nationally and locally. In an attempt to accommodate the criticism about lack of coordination and overview of the PRTs, in 2004 NATO established an *Executive Steering Committee* (ESC), tasked with formulating joint goals for the PRTs and ensuring better coordination of the activities. However, the ESC did not function as a central coordinating

⁵ The table draws in particular upon the five basic PRT models outlined in Dreist (2014)

authority, but rather as a forum for exchanging information between the Afghan government, the donor countries, ISAF, UNAMA and the US. The committee only met a few times before it ceased to exist around 2007.

The limited engagement of the Afghan authorities in the planning and implementation of stabilisation and reconstruction projects led to a very limited Afghan ownership of these projects (Huber 2013). As ISAF was drawing to a close and military responsibility for security was transferred from ISAF to the Afghan security forces, civil activities at province level also had to be transferred to the proper Afghan authorities. This process often proved to be more difficult than expected, in part because of a lack of a) technical capacity, b) financial room to manoeuvre and/or c) political will of the Afghan authorities to take over the investments and maintain their operations. At times, however, projects were of such poor quality that it did not make sense for anyone to sustain them. UN agencies have allegedly declined to take over a number of PRT projects on this account. The problem of not being able to hand over projects does not apply only to the PRT projects but has turned out to be a more general problem. This indicates the need to also incorporate sustainability concerns, including considerations regarding the ongoing financing and operation, into all projects and investments, including those with a short-term stabilisation objective.

The disconnect between the central government in Kabul and the PRTs relates to the basic contradiction between the highly centralised state model that was expressed in the new Afghan constitution of 2004 and the historically fragmented nature of political power in Afghanistan (Suhrke 2013). Although the individual provincial governors were all designated by the government in Kabul, this did not provide them with a shared interest in establishing a strong central government able to successfully project power from the capital city evenly throughout the entire territory of the state. For many governors it was more important to build and secure their own local power base. The resources from the PRTs were very useful in this regard.

The increased focus on the local level that was put explicitly on the agenda with *the surge*, was underpinned by the notion that an efficient and legitimate state could not be built in Afghanistan from the top-down and through formal institutions only: broad-based efforts also had to be made to strengthen the relationship between the state and the citizens from the bottom-up. In the years around 2009–11, PRT activities moved all the way out to the district and village level with the aim of ensuring that ordinary Afghans saw direct improvements of the daily local governance. This was often quite effective in terms of providing immediate access to health clinics, schools, electricity etc. At the same, such projects did also – in some places – help in establishing the formal representative of the state, the provincial and district governors, as the local ‘strong men’ who, by virtue of their access to international resources, were able to distribute contracts and projects to the various areas of ‘their’ territory.

Especially during the first years of engagement a certain enthusiasm surrounded the PRT concept, although it was acknowledged that the model could not in and of itself lead to sustainable stabilisation: the PRTs could probably provide tactical results and progress, but not strategic victory. In the later years, and especially as ISAF was withdrawing, increased awareness was raised about the more problematic aspects of the way in which the PRTs worked in Afghanistan. Today, particular attention is paid to **the lack of knowledge about and understanding of local political power dynamics, including the views of the local population vis-à-vis the 'state' as the supplier of 'public services'**. The further out into the rural areas the PRTs and the wider international engagement went, the more divorced from local Afghan realities seemed ISAF's focus on 're-establishing' and 'rebuilding' the local authorities' ability to provide education, health, electricity, water and other forms of socio-economic infrastructure, good governance and law and order. Most of the public services that international actors focused on were largely unknown to the locals or seen as entirely unrelated to 'the state'. Often, the very concept of *services* was difficult to translate in a way that made sense to the Afghans who were involved in the formulation and identification of projects (Brown 2012).

The approach relied on the flawed assumption that international support provided to or through the provincial and district governors would translate into popular support for the state and that this in turn would undermine support to the insurgents. This overlooked that in many places the government-appointed governors were perceived as representatives of a repressive, corrupt and illegitimate rule, and that the international community – by siding unambiguously with the governors – indirectly added to feelings of frustration and resistance. Not just against the government, but also against international presence.

THE PRTs AND THE NGOS

From the start, the PRTs' mixed civil/military approach was controversial among development and emergency aid organisations. Criticism was raised over the militarisation and politicisation of the engagement which was seen to distort aid, limit humanitarian space and expose civilian aid workers needlessly to danger as they unintentionally were seen as part of the military campaign (Jackson and Haysom 2013). These issues were not only directed at the PRTs but alluded to the entire military engagement. The criticism grew as the armed insurgency grew stronger and the military forces were increasingly unable to establish and maintain a security situation in which civilian actors were able to operate without military protection. As the PRTs at the same time became increasingly involved in areas that traditionally were regarded as purely civilian, it sparked strong objections from many NGOs.

The relationships between the PRTs and the international development and emergency aid organisations were tense throughout the entire period. Especially in the early years, UNAMA tried to establish different forms of cooperation and coordination forums where, among other things, they succeeded in formulating a number of policy guidelines in Afghanistan (see Box 5). The guidelines, however, had only limited effect on the PRTs' way of working. This illustrates that while the formulation of guidelines and the associated consensus-building process that happens along the way can be useful, merely having guidelines is not enough. In order to have an effect, formulating such guidelines must signal the start of a process, not the end.

BOX 5: CIVIL–MILITARY WORKING GROUP

The Civil–Military Working Group (CMWG) comprised NGOs, the UN and military representatives, and had the task of facilitating communication and coordination between humanitarian actors, international military forces and other Afghan stakeholders. In addition to the central CMWG in Kabul, regional CMWGs were established.

The formulation of Afghanistan-specific civil–military guidelines started in a subcommittee in the summer of 2007. The guidelines reiterated internationally-recognised principles and practices, but adjusted them to the special operational environment in Afghanistan including, especially, the PRTs. Among other things, emphasis was placed on limiting military behaviour that could cause confusion and make it difficult to distinguish between civil and military actors. This applied, for example, to the colour of the cars and the desire to maintain 'white cars' as a civil characteristic feature and the importance that soldiers – cf. the law of war – wear uniforms and are, therefore, easily identifiable.

Part of the criticism from the NGOs also related to the geographical distribution of aid. The insecure southern provinces received much more aid per capita than the more stable northern provinces. This imbalance was further strengthened during *the surge*, when the aid funds were even more closely tied to military goals. Instead of taking advantage of a 'peace dividend', some provinces experienced a 'peace punishment' because the large investments in physical infrastructure went to provinces that were regarded as critical to ISAF's military goals and/or where the PRT had lots of funds available. Especially the American PRTs could implement many more and larger projects than the European-led PRTs. From the point of view of the NGOs, the PRTs' short-term and security-focused approach was inappropriate. To ensure constructive engagement, a much deeper and broader understanding of the local power situation was needed. The validity of this criticism is now being acknowledged in official accounts, including studies carried out by military agencies. This is particularly true in analyses of the American *Commanders Emergency Response Program* (see Box 6), but the mechanism seems to be known in all countries.

BOX 6: COMMANDERS EMERGENCY RESPONSE PROGRAM AND 'SPENDING PROBLEMS'

A common point of criticism targets the short-term projects of the PRTs. All PRTs carried out different kinds of Quick Impact Projects (QIPs); that is, projects intended to provide an immediate positive effect for the population and – hopefully – in turn increase support for the Afghan government and the international coalition. The biggest pool for financing QIP was the American Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP). CERP was founded by the American Department of Defense in 2004 in order to finance small humanitarian and development projects with immediate large and visible results for the Afghans. A significant criterion for selecting CERP projects was that they could be implemented quickly. To support the bureaucratic side of things, the CERP funds were not subject to ordinary American legislation regarding tenders and reporting. The American Department of Defense had control of the CERP funds and used a total of \$2.3 billion between 2004 and 2014 (SIGAR 2015a).

A special problem with CERP was that the individual PRT managers were assessed on how many projects they had started and how many of their funds they had used, but not on the quality or effect of these activities. This resulted in an inappropriate focus on spending – that is, how quickly the budgeted money was used. The spending problem was not just relevant for the American-led PRTs or only for QIPs. Many studies report that the spending of money was something many actors strove to do. For politicians, using a large amount of money was a signal that Afghanistan had a high priority, while for both military and civil organisations maintaining a high spending rate was attractive, in part to satisfy the politicians and in part to allocate more resources to their own organisation.

Critique of the PRTs and of the tying of aid to national military engagement was also continuously brought up by representatives from the stable parts of Afghanistan. The counter-argument and the political and military reason for tying aid to the presence of the soldiers was that stabilisation of the unstable provinces was a prerequisite for national progress and that the PRTs, as a rule, only worked in areas where the NGOs were not able to provide aid themselves due to the security situation. This argument is, however, not without thorns. In the insecure areas, the security situation did not only limit the NGOs' possibilities to work, in many cases it also made it difficult for the PRTs themselves to work effectively, including following the actual implementation of stabilisation projects. SIGAR refers to areas in which monitoring is possible as 'oversight bubbles'. SIGAR has often argued that these bubbles are too small (and shrinking), when the security situation prevents civilian personnel's possibilities to move around in the province and, among other things, carry out supervision to ensure that schools or other things they had financed were actually built (SIGAR and USIP 2014).

The discussion about the geographic tying of aid funds to areas with deployed soldiers and thus the question of the extent to which preferential treatment should be given to the insecure or the secure areas has obvious relevance to the planning of future stabilisation efforts. Experiences from Afghanistan point towards a number of problems that relate closely to the emphasis placed on working in insecure areas. This raises – but does not answer – the question of whether the situation in Afghanistan would have been better today *if* a much bigger portion of the aid had been given to more secure areas where, all things being equal, it would have been easier to apply a long-term perspective.

THE PRTs AS BRIDGE BUILDERS BETWEEN BUREAUCRATIC CULTURES

The PRT experience extends far beyond the provinces of Afghanistan. They reach all the way into the heart of the governing structures of many NATO countries. The PRTs played a central role as a motor for breaking down bureaucratic boundaries between security and development and for ensuring coherence between the various national efforts. Over the years, distinct countries developed their own national approaches to what is generally referred to in this study as *the integrated approach*. Other labels include *3D (diplomacy, development, defence)*, *Whole of Government and Comprehensive or Joined-up approaches*. The differences tend to revolve around issues such as these:

- Whether it involved formulating generic policies or occurred as an Afghanistan-specific undertaking.
- How high up the administrative and political hierarchy, leadership was placed (heads of government, ministers, heads of department or lower levels).
- How broadly the approach was defined in terms of both number and types of ministries and agencies involved (ministries of foreign affairs, development cooperation and defence often constituted the core actors, with ministries of justice, finance and commerce often engaged in a second tier or more peripherally).
- The degree of institutionalisation. Some countries established special, permanent units charged with undertaking ‘shared’ tasks, such as developing joint analyses and strategies, mobilising the required (civil) resource persons, providing overall coordination of the efforts and experience compilation. Others worked through looser, more ad hoc structures.
- The extent to which special pools or funds were created for supporting the integrated approach at an operational and tactical level (conflict and stabilisation funds, which, for example, support cooperation with regard to reform of the security sector or training at local level, or funds that can be used directly by the head of a PRT for, for example, reconstruction or humanitarian activities, such as the American *Commander’s Emergency Response Program*).

Spearheaded by the United Kingdom, the ambition for a number of countries, including Canada and the Netherlands, was to establish permanent civil–military structures, both at headquarters level and in the field in Afghanistan (and other fragile states). In contrast, some countries, including Germany and Norway, strove to establish overall coherence

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of their Afghanistan policies while maintaining a strict separation of the civil and military efforts at a tactical level. Although both Norway and Germany did tie national development assistance and the deployment of troops in the sense that they for the most part supported projects only in those provinces where ‘their’ soldiers operated, there was no relationship between them in the field. The dots were to be connected in Berlin and Oslo; not in Feyzabad and Meymaneh.

Common to the pursuit of coherence was that all countries spent a long time finding an organisational form of inter-agency cooperation to guide their national efforts in Afghanistan. A study prepared by an American military research institution candidly describes the first years’ attempts at an American integrated approach (*interagency collaboration*) in Afghanistan (and Iraq) as a ‘resounding failure’ because of persistent inability to ‘harness the strengths and resources of the respective organisations’ (JCOA 2012: 25). In time, things got better simply as a result of mutual exposure. Gradually a form of common understanding was reached between the employees and those who were deployed by the Pentagon, the State Department and USAID. The report concludes, however, that this understanding was superficial and not necessarily long-lasting because it was primarily based on ‘experiences and personalities and not on any institutional imperative for integration derived from US law or policy’ (JCOA 2012: 26). Developments in other countries followed other paths, but over time the general trend seemed similar: **Off to a weak start, a certain rapprochement along the way, but with only a few lasting institutional changes.**

DIFFERENT APPROACHES – COMMON PROBLEMS

Several explanations offer themselves as to why finding common ground and working together remained difficult throughout. A trivial, but still important experience is the significance of different time horizons and different perceptions of key concepts, including what it means that something is long-term. It has been said – and only half in jest – that the soldier’s watch went too fast, while the diplomat’s watch went too slow, and the development worker’s watch went decidedly backwards. According to a Dutch study, there was, however, much more at stake than just different time horizons. Across the board, the perspectives of military personnel and the development workers differed significantly (van der Lijn 2011: 71). Table 5 shows them in summary, and therefore quite indiscriminating, form. Obviously, there was large variation within each group and from person to person.

Table 5: A spectrum of tendencies among military personnel and development workers⁶

MILITARY PERSONNEL	DEVELOPMENT WORKERS
Main focus on counterinsurgency, security and stability (consequences)	Main focus on development (causes)
Attention on insecure areas and 'bad guys'	Attention on less insecure areas and 'good guys'
Shorter term (six months to two years)	Long-term (20 to 50 years)
Detailed planning	Embracing uncertainty
Bottom up (shape, clear, hold, build)	Top down (national programmes)
Aiming for effects	Aiming for processes
Greater belief in a 'makeable' society	Aiming to improving chaotic situations
Projects	Programmes
Initial ownership with intervening actor	Ownership with local population
Dependent on short-term political will	Long-term commitments

It remains an open question whether these differences/prejudices disappear, the closer to the field one gets. It seems a widespread observation that civilians and military personnel on the ground often perceived the same reality, and therefore came to the same conclusions more easily. Such grounded cohesion, however, could often not be maintained all the way up through the systems as different bureaucratic rules, processes and dynamics increasingly came into play. Even the British system, which is otherwise regarded as being the best integrated both in the field and at headquarters level, was familiar with this problem:

Gains in tactical and operational effectiveness were offset by lack of ownership at the Embassy level or in Whitehall and the HPRT staff felt frustrated that debates resolved within their increasingly joined-up team in Lashkar Gar were then reopened and rehashed in Whitehall. Successive leaders of the HPRT felt they spent disproportionate amounts of time lobbying the UK Embassy and Whitehall. From the UK Embassy perspective, on the other hand, the HPRT reported directly to Whitehall, so that the Embassy felt cut out of Helmand operations. (Vincent 2015: 15).

6 van der Lijn (2011: 71)

Notwithstanding such frustration, national reports show that most countries were quite satisfied with their own distinct approach and modus operandi. A Dutch study emphasises, however, that even though the Dutch model was definitely good, there was no reason to prefer it over other models:

Arrogance with regard to a 'Dutch approach' should be avoided. The Dutch operate in an international setting in which everybody struggles with similar problems and their solutions are not drastically different. In such a context, a feeling of superiority is not appreciated. (Van der Lijn 2011: 74).

Underpinning the quote, is the sense that regardless of which institutional form the inter-agency work took, the rationale was the same: to build bridges between ministries and cultures and ensure a common direction for all actors. Furthermore, the most important tools tended to be the same as well: coordination, information exchange and a certain degree of planning. These are relatively soft instruments that do not establish unified lines of command to replace the existing, separate decision-making processes and internal hierarchies. What they do instead, is to allow for balancing numerous different political considerations and create a coherent narrative about the national engagement in Afghanistan. The flipside of that coin was that joint decisions often tended to reflect the results of domestic power struggles between ministries rather than actual needs and possibilities in Afghanistan.

Unclear or separate reporting lines and communications channels were a recurring problem that made it more difficult to ensure cooperation in the field and provide consistent reporting between the field and the headquarters. On the ground this often caused confusion and frustration among soldiers, diplomats and development workers alike, as it seemed to each group that 'the others' had misunderstood their task and were to some extent working against the joint mission. The ways in which such mutual distrust was dealt with on the ground, point to another trivial, yet significant tactical experience, namely the importance of personal relationships. Often it seemed that personalities mattered more than formalities when it came to finding practical ways of working together. The significance of personal 'chemistry', especially between civilian and military leaders, is underlined by the fact that cooperation and relations in the field very often changed from team to team when new leaders were allocated to either civil or military posts.

This does not imply that the institutional frameworks did not matter. On the contrary, the general experience across countries seems to be that cooperation must be established and driven at the highest level possible in the relevant organisations in order to function in practice at lower levels in the field. A good management process demands

clear leadership and direction. It must be clear who plays which roles, including who is responsible and has the overall authority to ensure the required coordination. If these conditions are not in place, the inherent tendency to remain fragmented and stay within organisational silos cannot be overcome. This is further supported by a widely shared call for increasing the respective ‘flexibility’ of the distinct actors, so that distinct internal rules and procedures do not stand in the way of sound cooperation. Calls for flexibility relate in particular to options for financing different types of projects, increased decentralisation, especially with regard to the civil decision-making processes, and to joint reporting from the field.

While the inter-agency cooperation forums may have enabled some degree of joint planning and decision-making, there was seldom focus on also ensuring joint learning and creating a joint basis for decision-making in the form of joint analyses and feedback from the field. Compiling, processing and analysing the information about the trends on the ground, as well as evaluating and monitoring the activities remained overwhelmingly confined within the hierarchical silos. Rarely was such ‘learning’ undertaken jointly. This is also reflected in the very limited number of jointly conducted civil-military studies upon which this study is based.

This relates to the fact that the integrated approach activities typically did not lead to the establishment of new joint administrative structures that cut across existing divisions of responsibility. Money and staff, the two most important resources available for integrated activities and inter-agency steering groups, both remained divided between the existing, separate structures. In practice, this meant that seemingly technical rules and procedures overruled strategic aims and inadvertently facilitated a short-term and/or fragmented approach. The vast majority of the engagement in all countries remained divided by separate budget channels that ‘belonged’ to different ministries and thus each had its own political and administrative leadership (typically defence, foreign affairs and development ministries), each retaining personnel responsibility for their respective stationed employees. Career paths and incentive structures for stationed personnel therefore remained separate with the obvious consequence that loyalty lay with the respective employing and stationing authority, rather than towards an (in this respect non-existing) inter-agency entity.

A number of countries did succeed in establishing ‘shared’ money in the form of inter-agency stabilisation pools. This made it possible to finance activities that would otherwise risk falling through the cracks between existing sets of rules. The United Kingdom was the pioneering country for this practice. Already at the start of the engagement in Afghanistan, the UK could draw on its existing Conflict Prevention Pool (CPP), which made it possible to finance activities that went across defence’s core budget and the rules for development aid. The British approach to flexible funds – also in addition to CPP – was generally considered to be cutting edge, and a number of the other coalition members, including the United States and Norway, made use of British

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funds on a number of occasions, while other countries in various ways copied the idea of funds that did not ‘belong to’ a given ministry beforehand and created similar inter-agency pools that were subject to their own appropriation sets of rules that could be used jointly.

The American Afghan Infrastructure Fund (AIF) that was established in 2011 and remained in existence through 2014 is another example of pushing for integration through a joint budget line. Money from this fund was earmarked for extensive investments in high-priority physical infrastructure, such as energy supply and roads, and was to be administered jointly by the Pentagon and State Department/USAID. The State Department and the Pentagon were to provide detailed joint reports to Congress on the projects, including plans for maintenance and contribution to counterinsurgency in Afghanistan. AIF was an attempt on the political side to force different responsible ministries to work together. SIGAR’s reports to Congress, however, have persistently pointed out that even though the fund forced Pentagon and USAID to agree on the use of the funds, this did not automatically lead to better projects or results in the field (see Box 7).

BOX 7: KANDAHAR BRIDGING SOLUTION

One of the most contested AIF investments is the Kandahar Bridging Solution that began in 2011. The purpose of the project was to secure the city’s electricity supply by buying two diesel-driven generators. The generators were intended to be a temporary patch that could function until the more long-term supply was in place through the Kajaki Dam project, which, among other things, involved the extensive renovation of a hydroelectric generator at Kajaki Lake and massive expansion of the electricity grid to Kandahar. However, the Kajaki Dam project proved to be impossible to complete – among other reasons because the planned expansion of the electricity grid went through Taliban territory. Kandahar’s electricity supply is, therefore, still dependent on expensive, imported diesel, which would be impossible for the Afghans to finance themselves, and the United States has openly declared that it neither can nor will take responsibility for running it for all eternity. While the generators succeeded in achieving short-term stability in the central city of Kandahar, the USD 141 million the project cost has not led to sustainable development in the form of stable electricity supply in Kandahar (SIGAR 2015b).

Thus, experience suggests that:

- 1 It is problematic if the money for implementing an integrated approach plan is given to separate organisational structures and that it therefore, all things being equal, makes sense to find ways to have an integrated approach to budgets.
- 2 Nothing indicates that the integrated approach to budgets in itself leads to better activities in the field.

The contradictions between short-term security considerations and long-term development considerations probably cannot be solved through technical budget actions. This raises the question of whether the contradictions can be addressed in the field by skilled, dedicated personnel.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PERSONNEL POLICY

As mentioned above, it is often pointed out that when civil-military cooperation succeeded in Afghanistan, it did so because of personal relationships and despite bureaucratic barriers. A key lesson that can be learned from Afghanistan from 2001-14 is, therefore, that **people matter and it is thus vital to be able to assign the right people at the right times and in the right places**. The British stabilisation unit determined this in 2010, when they emphasised 'experienced and expert staff with a range of political, technical, and interpersonal skills willing to deploy to hardship locations' as one of the most important prerequisites for success (Stabilisation Unit 2010: 3).

The military experience compilations in particular indicate recurring problems with both the quantity and quality of the civilian stationed personnel: Not only did they encounter too few civilians in the field; those who were deployed were too inexperienced. Moreover, it was seen as a problem that the civilians were subject to such strict security instructions that they were not really able to move around in the field without resource-demanding military escorts. Seen through the eyes of the military, this all meant that they did not get the necessary civil support and backing and that they therefore often found it necessary to work on issues related to development and governance themselves – knowing full well that they did not have the required insight. Thus, one of the experiences that also appears in a number of military reports and studies is the need – through increased civil presence – for putting a damper on the military's *can do* attitude.

The problems with recruiting civil personnel are widely acknowledged. Both diplomatic and civilian advisor posts in Kabul and the provinces were often unfilled. The different countries found various solutions to the problem, which typically involved higher hardship allowances and/or promises of promotions or better choices with regard to later stationing. In time, all of the posts were successfully filled. However, the limited civilian

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bullets

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capacity for engaging in stabilisation missions is a key experience that stands out from the Afghanistan intervention. Identifying enough civilian consultants with the right combination of professional and personal competences and the ability to leave their regular jobs and be stationed in Afghanistan remained a problem throughout. Around 2010, this realisation led to a generally increased international focus on the possibilities for strengthening civil preparedness and ability to quickly deploy civilian personnel to crises and conflicts by, among other things, establishing rosters, permanent preparedness and increased internal focus in the allocating organisations on willingness to take risks. The latter question is particularly critical.

Both in diplomatic circles and among the development organisations it is widely acknowledged that physical presence is crucial for influencing the situation – and necessary if one does not wish to leave the entire area to defence and intelligence agencies alone. But how far can one go in situations where there is a risk that diplomats and civilian advisors can lose their lives? Should civil personnel be sent to work in dangerous areas or should they remain behind the secure walls of the embassy or base? Experiences in Afghanistan raise but do not answer this fundamental question.

On the ground it was often difficult for the civilian individuals to compete with the typically older and more experienced officers with whom they were to cooperate on a daily basis. This imbalance reflects a number of things that go beyond age/experience. Even when civil–military relations involved people with the same rank, the military system often had the upper hand simply because of their size. In addition, the military decision procedures were typically more decentralised than the civilian ones, where even small decisions often had to be checked with the embassy in Kabul or with the ministry at home. There were thus structural reasons why the relationship between civil and military personnel was imbalanced in the field. However, it is also emphasised that part of the military frustration over the lack of civilian support stemmed from a misunderstood notion of ‘development’. The idea that the civilian development organisations could somehow be flown in to *build* and *hold* areas that the military had *cleared* was fundamentally flawed and disregarded the fact that aid organisations work in a process-related manner with local ownership and capacity building. Civilian aid workers did not regard their task as one of ‘delivering’ development in the form that the military actors wanted. Not because they did not want to, but because they could not. They knew that even though it might only take two or three weeks to clear an area, it takes a number of years, or maybe even decades, to *build* a stable foundation for democratic governance, economic growth and stable provision of public services. This was something the military actors only gradually understood.

A common method for increasing mutual understanding was to conduct joint training prior to deploying mixed civil/military teams to the PRTs. There is widespread agreement that training and meeting outside the field was useful. But at the same time it was generally recognised that the civil and military organisations had very different possibilities for entering into such systematic training programmes. Training is included as a natural and integrated part of military personnel structures. Therefore it was not a problem to add an

extra programme. It is different in the civilian organisations, which typically rely on on-the-job training and do not have extra man-months side aside for education and training prior to taking up new positions.

Finally, analyses repeatedly indicate that the short, non-synchronised deployments hampered the possibilities for having an integrated approach in the field. Both civilians and military personnel were posted for short periods. This is generally considered problematic in terms of knowing and understanding the complexity of both the local Afghan context and the international engagement. Diplomats and civilian advisors were typically stationed for a year with frequent access to leaves for travelling out of the country. Military personnel were deployed for shorter periods – typically six months – and with fewer, or maybe no leaves at all for travel out of the country. The civilian leaves contributed to the impression on the part of the military personnel that the civilians were not really available when they were needed; every six weeks they were out of the country for two weeks and during this time, their posts remained vacant.

As a general rule, the civil and military stationing periods were not synchronised, and for this reason it was very common that one's counterpart changed one or more times during the stationing. This, of course, gave rise to practical problems in day-to-day life, when relationships and cooperation frequently had to start from scratch with new people. At the institutional level, the high replacement cycle on both sides was a problem with regard to compiling institutional memory and knowledge. It is widely recognised that people often arrived at their place of service without knowing much about it, and as they were gradually beginning to understand where they were, they left the country, either to go home again or to move on to their next posting. In this connection it is also widely acknowledged that the transfer between the different teams both on the military side and the civil side was often superficial and lacking.

HOW DID MILITARY ACTIONS IMPACT THE EFFORTS TO WIN HEARTS AND MINDS?

Winning hearts and minds was an element of the military engagement from the start. On the very same day the war started in October 2001, the American defence initiated airdrops of humanitarian daily rations in the areas where land operations and air strikes were carried out. The purpose of these drops of food packages was to convince the local population that the international forces were in the country to help. The programme was highly criticised, however, also internally in the American forces and by the State Department and USAID, for being both an expensive and an inefficient way to deliver emergency help (Oliker et al. 2004). Over the years, the approach to winning hearts and minds shifted significantly. In the early days, it was conceived as a narrow tactical military matter. Being on good terms with the local population was a way of ensuring force protection and access to intelligence. This was called CIMIC – civil–military cooperation – and even though there are clear similarities between CIMIC and an integrated approach, there is also a difference of principle. In principle, CIMIC activities are based only on the military’s need to be able to operate in the local area, whereas the integrated approach or civil/military stabilisation projects have a broader focus that includes the needs of the local population to a greater degree. When the overall strategy shifted towards the people-centric COIN approach, emphasis was placed explicitly on the political–strategic aspects of the military’s civil activities and, through these, on the possibility of undermining the local anchoring of the insurgents and ensuring the support of the population to the Afghan state. To an increasing degree, this also meant that it was acknowledged that all aspects of the behaviour of the foreign troops influenced the Afghan population’s opinion about both the international presence and the Afghan authorities. Not just their civilian activities.

Military actions such as civilian casualties, night-time raids, house searches, forced removals, destruction of infrastructure and aggressive behaviour turned out to be undermining the trust in and acceptance of international forces among ordinary Afghans. In addition there was a general impression that the international forces did not have an understanding of, or knowledge about, the local religious and cultural customs, and therefore did not exhibit ‘proper’ behaviour, for example with regard to Afghan women (see Box 8).

BOX 8: THE UN'S RESOLUTION 1325 ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY AND THE MILITARY EFFORTS IN AFGHANISTAN

In 2000 the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1325. The resolution underlines the importance of the equal participation and full involvement of women in all efforts to secure peace and security. In Afghanistan, Resolution 1325 has been incorporated into NATO's work since 2007. Specifically, Resolution 1325 has been a component of the PRTs' work and of the training of the Afghan security forces.

- The PRTs were to incorporate the resolution into both the internal gender composition of the staff and externally, regarding carrying out their work, where threats against women and women's special needs were to be addressed. The coherence between the internal and external dimensions of the implementation proved to be significant because in Afghanistan, only women may contact other women. Thus, it was only the PRTs that had female employees that could contact Afghan women. In practice, however, Resolution 1325 was only implemented in the work of the PRTs to a limited extent, just as there was little focus on the resolution at ISAF's headquarters (Tejpar and Tejpar 2009).
- In the training of the Afghan security forces (ANSF), NATO's training mission was made responsible for implementing Resolution 1325 in the following way: to support the recruitment of women, to assist with education and training of ANSF about Resolution 1325, to provide guidance on Resolution 1325, and to ensure that there were guidance teams with both men and women. In practice, there has been focus on recruiting women to ANSF, while the other elements have not been executed at all. The recruitment of women is also made extremely difficult because Afghan women are not expected to be in these types of positions, because there is a high degree of illiteracy among Afghan women, and because there is a lack of support among the officers in the Afghan army. The poor security situation further impacts the recruitment of women because it is difficult to recruit women for dangerous posts and women in ANSF are subjected to sexual and gender-based violence by their male colleagues (Lackenbauer and Jonsson 2014)

In the overall picture, nothing was more damaging to the reputation of ISAF than civilian casualties. Part of the war in Afghanistan was an information war, which, among other things, was about assigning blame for the civilian casualties and suffering. An American assessment of the psychological operations (PSYOPS) in Afghanistan concluded that the most remarkable breach in the effort was the lack of ability to refute Taliban's propaganda about the civilian deaths (Munoz 2012). At the tactical level radio, leaflets and posters, social networks and the Internet, billboards and face-to-face communication were used to influence the population's opinions and combat the propaganda of the insurgent groups. The most efficient means were radio and face-to-face communication, especially

meetings with yirgas (local councils of elders) and other important leaders. Communication in writing, on the other hand, was problematic because, among other reasons, of the very limited access to the Internet and the high level of illiteracy. The most efficient messages were those that resonated with the Afghans' desire for peace and progress. In general, the experience with PSYOPS in Afghanistan is, however, that the population's opinion of the international coalition was first and foremost shaped by what the coalition did, not what it said.

Most troop-contributing countries developed a practice of giving compensation to the civilian victims that their soldiers might have been responsible for. This typically took the form of cash payments to the next of kin, who in return gave up the possibility of taking legal action against the country in question. It is not known how or whether this practice influenced the activities directly intended to win hearts and minds. In addition to the individual compensations, the United States did, however, attempt to also carry out a more systematic programme aimed at providing for the civilian victims and, by doing so, improve the reputation of the coalition (see Box 9).

BOX 9: AFGHAN CIVILIAN ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The purpose of ACAP is to support civilian Afghans who in one way or another are affected by acts of war. ACAP does not distinguish between civilian victims who were hit by the coalition or the Taliban. ACAP is financed and led by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). From 2003–2005 ACAP provided support to the amount of \$2.3 million, which in 2011 grew to the limit of \$63.5 million. Originally, the ACAP programme was to end in 2011, but it was extended with ACAP II in 2011–2014, and again in 2015 as ACAP III.

First and foremost, the purpose of ACAP has been to ensure rapid and sufficient support to civilian victims of acts of war so that they can continue their lives as quickly as possible. Another purpose of the ACAP is to establish and maintain a network between the stakeholders internationally, nationally and at province level, as well as to gather and disseminate information regarding the ACAP programme in this network. In practice ensuring a network has not been successful, and the Afghan government has felt that it did not receive enough information about the programme. According to an assessment of the programme from 2011, ACAP has had problems with identifying and verifying recipients, the quality of the assistance has not been very good and in many cases the support was not appropriate for the target group (for example, food packages with pork for devout Muslims). In addition, it has not been possible to provide support in areas with many military operations (USAID 2011).

It proved to be difficult to confront the perception that the international coalition valued the lives of its own soldiers more than the lives of civilian Afghans. Today it is generally accepted that it took too long to acknowledge this connection. It was only around 2008/9 that **attention was paid to the importance of avoiding civilian losses – not just for complying with the law of war, but also to avoid undermining the mission.** In 2009 this resulted in new rules of engagement for ISAF and new tactical directives for the use of force, which, based on the concept of courageous restraint, paved the way for a much more restrictive use of force. Instead of opening fire immediately or calling in air support, the soldiers on the ground were to exhibit maximum restraint if they had the slightest doubts about the extent to which there could be civilians in the area.

According to an estimate by Brown University, air strikes led to two-thirds of all civilian deaths caused by ISAF in 2008 (Crawford 2015). After the issuing of the new tactical directives, the number of air strikes was reduced dramatically, and in 2014 they were only responsible for 2% of the civilian losses that were attributed to the international forces. Another controversial tactic were the night-time attacks by special forces directed at insurgent groups. These did not cause civilian losses to the same extent, but spread uncertainty among the population and were very unpopular. In 2011–12, the use of night-time attacks was one of the most heated topics in the increasing political battle between President Karzai and the United States. For this reason, the negotiations about the presence of the international forces in Afghanistan after 2014 were often stalled. President Karzai wanted a total prohibition against night-time attacks, whereas the United States found them to remain very useful in the battle against both terrorists and insurgent groups. The solution was a compromise, in which night-time raids could still be used, but only under the leadership of the Afghan security forces.

The use of night-time attacks by the special forces was not just unpopular in the Afghan population and government, they were also a source of frustration among the PRTs as they undermined the PRT efforts to develop good relationships with the local population. More often than not, PRTs were not provided with prior information about the special forces' targeted attacks in the local area. There is no publicly available data about how frequently this took place, but it is well known that many PRTs saw the trust they had spent months developing in a local area disappear in the course of a single night. Ordinary Afghans did not differentiate between OEF-A and ISAF. For most people, all international soldiers were part of the same force. In a very basic way, this illustrates the tensions between population-centred counterinsurgency and fighting terror. Whereas one military operation aims at convincing the population that it should support the government (and its international partners), the purpose of the other operation is to eliminate an enemy that is part of the very same population. Attempting to form a coherent international engagement in areas where different international forces operate on the basis of such significantly different forms of logic proved, not surprisingly, to be very difficult.

As the armed insurgency grew alongside the people-centric focus on COIN, critical voices were increasingly asking how the different stabilisation initiatives that were carried out by, or with the support of, the ISAF forces, were actually considered locally: were they popular and well-liked, or were they, on the contrary, seen as a magnet for hostilities? There are many methodological difficulties connected with answering this question unambiguously, and studies do also show that the answer varies both over time and from place to place. In the northern and more stable provinces studies indicated that the PRTs and their stabilisation activities generally enjoyed a lot of support in the population. In contrast, in the southern provinces there was a widespread perception that the stabilisation initiatives actually attracted the attention of the insurgent groups and therefore contributed to conflict, instability and armed battles rather than the opposite. A new and very comprehensive study carried out by USAID tries to measure the effect of the stabilisation engagement in 5,100 villages, distributed over 130 districts in 23 provinces (MISTI 2015). According to the study, during some periods stabilisation activities directly caused instability and violence. When the projects were being carried out the villages that received different forms of American stabilisation assistance often experienced more violent attacks from the insurgent groups than the villages that did not receive that type of 'assistance'.

The study generally concludes that stabilisation initiatives *can* work as intended if a large number of conditions are ensured along the way, including that the activities are only carried out in areas where the Afghan government (or the international forces) have sufficient control on the ground to be able to provide the local population with efficient protection against the insurgent groups. Thus, the study points out one of the very general paradoxes that characterise COIN and the stabilisation discussion, namely the question about how – and whether – the population can be reached with aid projects that undermine the enemy in areas where activities to maintain military control are not successful.

Experiences from Afghanistan have had a decisive influence on both the academic and the policy-oriented discussions about statebuilding after the terror attacks on the United States of 11 September 2001. In the early years, the discussion was characterised by a great deal of optimism and the belief that failed or fragile states, after a regime change, could relatively quickly be turned into well-functioning democracies. Today, statebuilding is considered to be a process that takes quite a long time and over which external actors hold only limited sway.

Since 2011 part of the discussion about these questions has taken place within the framework of ‘the international dialogue on peace and statebuilding’ – a cooperation between a number of self-appointed fragile states, including Afghanistan (the so-called ‘g7+ countries’) and the donor countries in the OECD. The aim of dialogue is to ensure that the transition processes are run by the countries themselves and not by the international actors. From the start Afghanistan has functioned as a pilot country for the new form of cooperation, and both the Afghan government and the country’s donors have, on this basis, obligated themselves to a *New Deal* for Afghanistan, in order to achieve five peace and statebuilding goals: 1) inclusive political processes, 2) security, 3) justice, 4) economic foundation and income, and 5) services. In practise, Afghanistan’s *New Deal* has only had very limited influence on the donors’ and the government’s behaviour, but the agreement is interesting because it both identifies the two conditions that have been subject to massive focus – and the three conditions that to a higher extent have been overlooked: inclusive political processes, justice and the economic foundation of the state.

THE FIVE PILLARS AND REFORMS OF THE SECURITY SECTOR

Regardless of how statebuilding is defined, security sector reforms (SSRs) play a key, perhaps even the most important, role in building a well-functioning state. The modern state is defined precisely through the monopoly on legitimate use of power, which it exercises through its security institutions, including – especially – the armed forces and the police. On this basis it is not surprising that very early in the process there was a focus on formulating an overall plan for the international support to the Afghan security sector. This took place at a donor conference held under the auspices of the G8 in Geneva in the spring of 2002. The Afghan participation in the G8 meeting was limited, but nonetheless, the plan that was adopted for the SSR process at the meeting had decisive importance for the next many years of engagement in the area. Unfortunately, not for the better. Today, it is widely acknowledged that **for the first many years there was too**

little focus on, and not enough coherence in, efforts aimed at building of an efficient and legitimate Afghan security sector. This missed opportunity is closely connected to the G8 countries' decision in 2002 to divide the SSR process into five pillars, each with its own lead nation (see Table 6).

Table 6: The five pillars in the support for the security sector

GERMANY	JAPAN	ITALY	UNITED KINGDOM	THE UNITED STATES
Police (Afghan National Police)	Disarming, demilitarisation and reintegration (DDR)	Justice	Counter-narcotics	Army (Afghan National Army)

The idea behind the pillar structure was that it would be easier to generate resources and establish political will for the different parts of the reform if one single country were responsible for coordinating a specific part of the overall security sector reform efforts. In practice, however, the pillar structure led to a very uneven approach to SSR with regard to the interpretation of the tasks and addition of resources. There was a particularly distinct difference in the German approach to police reforms – focusing on establishing a national police training academy in Kabul and developing a curriculum, etc. for ‘training the trainers’ – and the United States’ more direct focus on *train-and-equip* with regard to the *Afghan National Army*. Thus, the fragmented international support in the early years made it very difficult to ensure a holistic approach to building the Afghan state’s security apparatus. When viewed against recommendations in generic SSR policy guidelines, **the armed forces received overly much support, compared to the limited focus on the civil control of the armed forces and the development of the legal system and police.** The pillar structure also made it difficult to work across the pillars and ensure synergy between, for example, the legal system and police reform, or between DDR programmes and support to the army.

In partial recognition of this, the concept of *lead nations* was replaced with the somewhat softer designation of key countries at the London conference in 2006, and the pillar structure gradually softened up. In 2007 the EU, through EUPOL Afghanistan, took over the responsibility for the police training task from Germany, while the United States took over responsibility for the overall police reforms. Later, the training of Afghan security forces was changed from being a purely American matter to being an affair for the entire alliance with the establishment of NATO *Training Mission Afghanistan* in 2009. Most of the military training, however, was still provided by the United States, which also kept responsibility for the civil support for building up the Afghan Ministry of Defense.

While experiences with the pillar-divided SSR approach are overwhelmingly regarded as negative, experiences from building up the Afghan security forces raised a number of other questions that have not provided for a clear consensual answer.

On the one hand it took too long before serious efforts were made to build the capacity of Afghan security forces and enable them to tackle the armed insurgents themselves. For much too long, the international forces fought on behalf of the Afghan government, and according to the criticism this contributed to undermining the population's trust in the Afghan government, which very easily could be presented as a lackey for the Western world. At the same time, the hostilities and the civilian victims contributed to the population's resistance to the international forces. If the massive capacity-building effort of the ANSF that began in 2009 and was intensified as ISAF was drawing to a close, had started much earlier, this situation would have been avoided, the argument goes.

On the other hand, from the outset support to the Afghan security sector was overwhelmingly provided with a narrow 'train-and-equip' focus on increasing the efficiency of the security forces. Emphasis was on enhancing the efficiency, rather than the legitimacy of the security forces. As a result only limited attention was paid to e.g. questions related to civilian control of the armed forces, which is regarded as a basic prerequisite for a functioning democracy. Such efforts typically involve supporting control and oversight mechanisms in civil society and parliaments, as well as providing different forms of governance assistance to the responsible ministries. As a rule, these are activities that take a long time and have only very limited immediate effect on combat abilities vis-à-vis armed insurgents, but which nonetheless are regarded as critical for the long-term establishment of a stable, legitimate security sector.

In addition to these contrasting views on whether more or less emphasis should have been placed on building the capacity of Afghan security forces, it is argued that **too much attention was paid to the kind of security that was meaningful to the United States and NATO and not enough to the daily security that was meaningful to ordinary Afghans.** For example, instead of involving the local population in the establishment of local police, there was a focus on building up police forces of a paramilitary nature and training them in counterinsurgency, rather than in protecting the citizens against criminality and other forms of assault. The trust of the Afghan people in the Afghan security forces is, therefore, limited. Some studies even indicate that trust in the police has been decreasing over a number of years because, among other reasons, of widespread corruption and violations of human rights within the police.

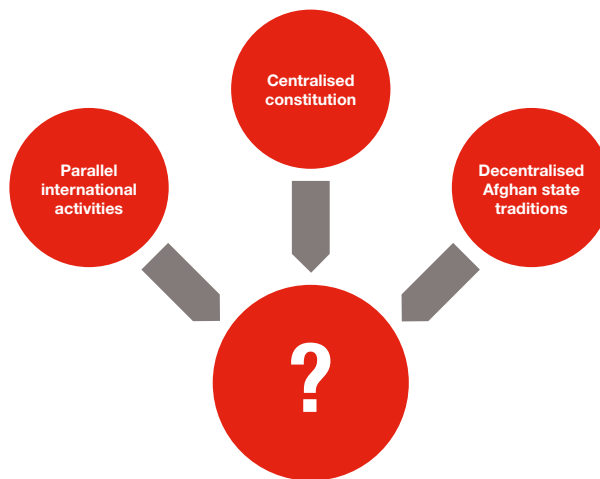
Another significant criticism that was raised along the way, and which became increasingly crucial in connection with the withdrawal of ISAF, was the question of the Afghan state's possibility – in the long run – to pay for new security structures itself. While exact estimates of the scope of the problem differ, it is widely acknowledged that the Afghan state will remain dependent on foreign support to finance the Afghan security forces for a long time to come (SIGAR 2014). Were international financing to stop or be significantly reduced, there is a looming risk that both the Afghan army and the police would fall to pieces. This underlines that even though that there is no agreement on how SSR should have been designed to fit the Afghan context, experience clearly shows that

too little focus was placed on sustainability and on finding a long-term model that the Afghan state itself would be able to carry forward. This finding also points to the lack of focus placed on ensuring the Afghan state's economic foundation and possibilities for raising revenue to finance its own activities.

HORIZONTAL AND VERTICAL STATEBUILDING

The problems of ensuring a coherent statebuilding process that dates back to the early years extends beyond the security sector. More fundamentally, it turned out that the process contained incompatibilities between 1) the very centralised state model, which was formally intended to be implemented, and which, among other things, was expressed in the Afghan constitution that was adopted by the Loya Yirga in 2004, 2) the many civilian and military activities, which in practice were carried by international actors rather than by the state, and 3) the fact that there is no tradition for a centralised power in Afghanistan (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Contradictions in the Afghan statebuilding process 2001–2014



Neither among practitioners nor academics is there agreement on how these three elements should be weighed against each other or how (or whether) the contradictions between them can be overcome. There is, however, a remarkably **widespread consensus that between 2001–2014 efforts did not succeed in getting the statebuilding process in Afghanistan to cohere either horizontally or vertically.**

Horizontal statebuilding is about the relationship between the centre and the periphery – that is, the division of power between Kabul and the provinces – while vertical statebuilding is about the relationship between state and citizen. One observation that emerges, but about which there is little agreement, is that the international actors

focused overwhelmingly on improving the Afghan state's direct relationship with its citizens and paid too little attention to the division of power and resources between different ethnic groups and geographic areas in the country. To ISAF and other international actors, statebuilding was first and foremost approached as a matter of building the central state's capacity to maintain security, law and order and provide public services in the form of education and health. A more nuanced approach, which could have included alternative – federal or mixed – state models, might have suited Afghanistan better.

With regard to the discussion on coherence, three factors stand out. The first relates to the Afghan context and suggests that even though the international community did not have an eye for the importance of horizontal statebuilding, the Afghan actors did very much so. The central government, which was established in Kabul with the Bonn Agreement and continued by the Loya Yirga in 2004 and the presidential election in 2009, expressed a fragile balance of power between different interests and rulers. It did not constitute a unified national centre that worked for a diffuse entity known by the name of 'Afghanistan'. In order to maintain the balance and keep his place in the presidency (and his own life), President Karzai had to continually enter into political compromises with rivals and enemies. In such games, the control over various state institutions and resources is typically one of the most important elements and this was no less the case in Afghanistan. As a result, the central government in Kabul never materialised as a coherent unit with a shared interest in building an efficient and legitimate Afghan state. The fragmentation on the Afghan side was at least as great as on the international side.

Another criticism or lesson relates to the way in which the international support for statebuilding was provided. The core of the criticism is that although rhetorical emphasis was placed on strengthening the Afghan government, the donors overwhelmingly chose to do things themselves and/or in other ways work in a way that put obstacles in the path of the declared goal of developing the central power in Kabul. Instead of focusing on the long-term building of Afghan institutions and capacity, including the state's ability to ensure its own economic foundation, the donors were preoccupied with ensuring the provision of services here and now. A very large part of the aid throughout the period was given as short-term aid instead of as long-term development assistance and support for revitalising a sustainable Afghan economy.

A third, and related, factor is the underlying assumption that access to public services will increase the legitimacy of the state in the eyes of the population. Intuitively it seems self-evident that people become less dissatisfied with a government, and thus less liable to rebel, if the state institutions provide basic services in the form of security, health, education and infrastructure. Not least on the basis of experiences from Afghanistan, however, it is increasingly argued that no one takes up arms because the closest health clinic is too far away. Moreover, it is suggested that strengthening the state does not

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necessarily make sense to most ordinary Afghans, who have primarily known the state as a repressive power apparatus. Political and economic interests, including fights for recognition, resources and self-determination are at stake not only for the elites but for the wider population as such. The international approach to statebuilding and stabilisation has, however, been depoliticising and technical, and has – as a result – missed the mark, the argument goes.

Individually, all three factors make sense. The problem is, however, that they do not point in the same direction when it comes to how to move forward in Afghanistan, or engage in other countries in a manner that ensures that there is inner coherence between the international actors' way of working and the political and historical reality of the host country.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In a way, experiences from Afghanistan reflect the international engagement in the country: They point in many directions and cannot simply be summarised in a single meaningful and all-encompassing doctrine. What is the key lesson from Afghanistan 2001–2014? What is the most important thing that the international community as such – or an individual troop-contributing country – can take with it and learn from with regard to future planning of coherent engagement in fragile and conflict-ridden states? As stated in the discussions above, there is still disagreement on a number of key questions – among political decision makers, practitioners and academics: Was it, for example, a mistake that ISAF was not mandated to maintain peace and security throughout all of Afghanistan from the outset? Or was it, on the contrary, a mistake to leave the narrow focus on fighting terror and a regime change and embark upon an ambitious statebuilding project? The answers to these key questions may not exactly be blowing in the wind, but they are constantly being reconsidered in light of developments *on the ground* in Afghanistan and changing tendencies in the thinking of the time, and it will probably take quite some time before some kind of historic ‘truth’ is established on the international engagement in Afghanistan 2001–2014.

The focus of this study has persistently been on the coherence of the engagement rather on the effects of the activities. For this reason alone, the study does not attempt to give clear answers about what would have been the right thing to do in Afghanistan. Or, for that sake, what would be the right approach in a given future intervention in another fragile situation. Nevertheless, the study does point to a number of observations that emerge as key experiences in Afghanistan and which will probably also be significant for the planning of future engagements. Several of these relate specifically to the narrow inter-agency challenge of ensuring coherence between the national activities of the diplomats, the soldiers and the development workers. The Afghan experience in particular suggests that:

- The cooperation must be established and driven at the highest level possible in the relevant organisations in order to function in practice at lower levels in the field.
- The inter-agency cooperation forums cannot make do with focusing on joint planning and decision-making, but must also make room for joint learning and analysis.
- Bureaucratic barriers can be overcome by dedicated personnel, but flexibility, decentralisation and joint working procedures, including joint reporting to the headquarters, promote cooperation in the field.

Important as these are, experiences from Afghanistan also underline that in order to bring together political, military and developmental efforts in a constructive manner, it is insufficient to focus only on the inter-agency relationships and bureaucratic procedures. There is a need for a more fundamental discussion about how – and whether – coherence can be created between what is required and possible in the short term, and what is necessary and desired in the long term.

Experiences from Afghanistan especially indicate **the need for much stronger international emphasis and focus on the work of creating political solutions**. The one observation that is increasingly brought home from Afghanistan as well as numerous other interventions in fragile and conflict-ridden states is that lasting peace is not established through different combinations of development aid and military means. It can only be made through political processes. At the current juncture, the international discussion about peace and stability pays much more attention to the need for ensuring ‘inclusive political pacts’ than was the case in 2001. The Afghan experience, including the course of events surrounding the Bonn Agreement and negotiations with the Taliban, have played a large part in shaping this trend. At the same time, albeit perhaps less acknowledged, the Afghan case underlines the importance of not pretending that an inclusive and legitimate political system has been established if, in reality, only a fragile division of power has been achieved between selected elite groups.

A prerequisite for being able to place politics at the centre of the engagement is that one understands the political realities of intervention. Another general point that must be pointed out from Afghanistan is, thus, the importance of **taking the concrete context as the starting point** and not basing efforts on a standardised understanding of policy concepts of fragility and stabilisation. It is crucial for the planning – and implementation – of future interventions that the plans are based on thorough and dynamic analyses of the specific conflict, the country’s history and the relations with neighbouring countries and other powers. At the same time (cf. experiences with corruption in Afghanistan) it is important that these analyses incorporate conditions regarding the political economy of the conflict, including how resources from outside affect the conflict’s parties and their respective interests and incentives. In this connection, experiences from Afghanistan show that it is pivotal that the international personnel has **background knowledge and understanding of cultural, religious and political traditions in the country to which they are sent**. Contextual knowledge is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for being able to understand one’s own role in the local power play, including resources and influence, which all forms of external intervention inevitably enter into.

A third general lesson from Afghanistan is the **lowering of the level of ambitions**. The lofty declarations of bringing peace, democracy and human rights for all, not least Afghan girls and women, have nearly disappeared from the political toasts and given way to more realistic/pragmatic formulations on creating opportunities for stability and law and order. Back in 2001, it was widely believed that 1) liberal democracy could be

made to work in all settings and 2) military power was useful in terms of enforcing political change. To a large extent, experiences from Afghanistan have contributed to questioning both ideas, and paved the way for a more nuanced, but also more disillusioned, discussion of how external actors can influence political development in fragile states. As part of this debate, it is frequently stated in reports from Afghanistan and other interventions that transforming fragile states and situations takes a very long time. If international activities are to make a positive difference, they must apply a significantly **longer time horizon and exert a much higher degree of strategic patience** than the two to three years that are typically considered to be ‘long term’ in the international context. In the vast majority of countries, the building of a legitimate and efficient state structure has taken generations. Seen in this perspective, the period of 2001–2014 is incredibly short.

In different ways, these points and messages highlight the need for better analysis and for ‘keeping your finger on the pulse’ and adjusting the effort to the situation that is being intervened in. This statement makes intuitive sense to most people and is difficult to disagree with. The problem is, however, that the context does not speak for itself. Even the very best analyses cannot determine what would be the best thing to do or how the various activities should be prioritised. Neither can analyses themselves ensure that all relevant actors follow the same course. Joint analyses – and thus a joint basis for discussing what must and can be done – can be a step on the way to overcoming fragmentation. But the obvious incompatibilities which, for example, existed between ISAF’s stabilisation goal and OEF-A’s fight against terror, cannot be analysed away.

The prerequisite for better – and joint – analyses leading to more coherent interventions and not just to more qualified disagreement about what the main problem is in Country X, is that it is **clear what the overall goal of the international engagement is**. What is it – from a political point of view – that a given intervention wants to achieve? Experiences from Afghanistan show how difficult it is to create coherence across bureaucratic boundaries and cultures when there is a lack of political clarity and agreement about the goal, both internally in the contributing countries and in the international coalition as such. The surplus of goals and deficit of strategic leadership that characterised the activities to create coherence at headquarters level were reproduced all the way down through all systems and continually put obstacles in the way of a focused and coherent prioritisation of the activities. The problems caused by the lack of strategic leadership were increased further by the tendency, to a very large extent, to base the activities on existing bureaucratic systems and structures. Although at the rhetorical level there was a focus on coherence understood as integration, in practice there were much less ambitious activities, which at the most were intended for coordination and cooperation, and sometimes just on *deconflicting* the activities, so that one agency did not, for example, unintentionally equip the same militias that had just been demobilised by another agency.

The kaleidoscope of Afghanistan experiences that are the basis for this study do not provide solutions to these dilemmas. On the contrary, experiences from Afghanistan suggest that even a not very ambitious deconflicting desire to avoid getting in each other's way can, in practice, be very difficult to achieve within the existing fragmented frameworks for international intervention: in all countries and organisations silo thinking is, all things being equal, easier than an integrated approach. At the national level, troop-contributing countries remained concerned with putting their own national fingerprint on things. Within nations, it further seemed that the politicised nature of the Afghanistan intervention made many agencies even more preoccupied with showing that their particular activities were relatively successful compared to those of other actors. In addition to such bureaucratic politics come the inherent paradoxes and contradictions between the different goals and mandates of the different actors. In Afghanistan, these were expressed, for example, in the COIN strategy's attempt to protect the population against a corrupt government while at the same time spending most of the funds on strengthening the security apparatus of precisely that government.

Against this backdrop it is not surprising that intervention fatigue has characterised the debate in recent years. The obstacles that have to be cleared away in order for a coherent international engagement to materialise seem almost insurmountable. But maybe less is more? The tensions between security and development, between the short term and the long term, as well as between civil and military means are the result of real differences. They are not just expressions of an antiquated approach to understanding war and peace. It is a paradoxical but interesting question whether the pursuit of coherence may in fact have hindered, rather than aided, an efficient engagement in Afghanistan. Perhaps the very notion that it was possible to establish a meaningful form of coherence between objectives that were inherently contradictory inadvertently enabled those who were politically responsible to avoid weighing the advantages and disadvantages of the various goals, means and methods? Instead of prioritising – and thus choosing – openly among the different objectives, attempts were made to take all – or most of them – into account at the same time. Perhaps, it is this kind of 'strategy' that has turned out not to work well in Afghanistan? Arguably, one of the most important conclusions that can be drawn from experiences in Afghanistan is that an **integrated approach is not, and cannot be, an objective in itself**. It is a method that – maybe – can be used to achieve a given goal. But in itself the wish to have coherence can neither identify the objective of the engagement nor show how it concretely is to be pursued or implemented in a given intervention. This also means that the activities to ensure that the diplomatic, development policy and security instruments combine constructively cannot be put in a formula or be standardised. On the contrary, in order to work *on the ground* they must be based precisely on the country, the conflict and the actors in play – including the neighbouring countries and the non-Western major powers that play an increasingly large role in international conflict management, but that typically are not included in the traditional donor coordination forums.

In discussions about how to ensure coherence in fragile states, there is a tendency to start from the distinct national contribution and open the analysis by asking how integration can be achieved across the different ministries and agencies involved. Subsequently focus moves outwards towards the other international actors and the question of how to coordinate activities with them. It is only then that questions are raised on how the engagement is to be adjusted to the local context and the host country's priorities and needs. Based on the experiences from Afghanistan, it seems obvious to ask, whether it is time to turn the approach upside down? The analysis must be based on the local context and outline a possible political process that can lead the country away from fragility and towards stability. Only after this can a meaningful decision be made on the best combination of international instruments and the degree to which these instruments need to go hand-in-hand in the field in order to work. The intimate connection between security and development does not only imply that lasting peace cannot be sustained without development, but also that development cannot be pursued in the midst of an open war.

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LESSONS FROM THE DANISH INTEGRATED APPROACH IN AFGHANISTAN 2001 – 2014

At the end of 2014, the NATO-led ISAF-mission was brought to a close and the Danish combat troops withdrawn. Against this backdrop, the political parties behind the Danish engagement in Afghanistan agreed to compile experiences from the past thirteen years of Danish civil and military efforts in Afghanistan. The compilation should focus on lessons regarding the Danish integration of political, military and developmental instruments, which has taken place under very challenging security conditions.

The study consists of three parts, of which this report is part I. The three parts are:

- Part I** International Lessons from Integrated Approaches in Afghanistan, prepared by DIIS, Danish Institute for International Studies.
- Part II** Development Cooperation in Afghanistan, prepared by development consultants Landell Mills.
- Part III** Danish Lessons from Stabilisation & CIMIC Projects, prepared by The Royal Danish Defence College.