

# SSR ISSUE PAPERS

No. 6 — January 2012

## Strategic Support to Security Sector Reform in Afghanistan, 2001–2010

Christian Dennys and Tom Hamilton-Baillie



## ABOUT THE SSR ISSUE PAPERS

The *Security Sector Reform (SSR) Issue Papers*, produced by The Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI), are a product of CIGI's Security Sector Governance project. Authored by prominent practitioners in the field, policy makers, academics and informed observers, the papers in this series will contribute to ongoing debates and influence policy on issues related to SSR. Combining analysis of current problems and challenges, they will examine thematic and geographic topics relating to the most pressing SSR issues.

Series Editor: Mark Sedra

Series Coordinator: Geoff Burt

## SUMMARY

This paper argues that security sector reform (SSR) in Afghanistan suffers from a lack of strategic direction and political agreement. It focuses on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR), and police and army reform in two case studies — Baghlan province and Nahr-I Sarraj district in Helmand province — in order to demonstrate the pitfalls of an SSR process driven by operational activities in the absence of an overarching strategy. The paper then examines the role of the Office of the National Security Council (ONSC) within the Afghan government in order to account for the lack of strategic direction in SSR before providing recommendations on how to avoid such problems in the future.

A successful SSR program must include a central strategy to guide its operational initiatives. The application of a set of SSR principles and their acceptance by local stakeholders is not enough. The two case studies show that local operational initiatives, although highly worthwhile and promising activities, must be pinned to a strategic SSR approach. At the strategic level, both donors and the Afghan government have consistently failed to articulate and abide by a coherent plan while the conditions necessary for strategic coherence (the ONSC) have not been successfully established. As a result of strategic management failures on the part of both donors and the Afghan government, nearly 10 years of SSR programming in Afghanistan has failed to achieve its objectives.

While SSR may be benign in some areas, the case studies reveal it can have some significantly destabilizing effects in others. The ensuing analysis of the ONSC demonstrates that the politics of the Afghan state have allowed interveners to move far ahead in some areas, leaving the host nation behind, but also that the central government has tried to undermine elements of SSR.

Copyright © 2012 by The Centre for International Governance Innovation

The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Centre for International Governance Innovation or its Operating Board of Directors or International Board of Governors.



Copyright © 2012. This work was carried out with the support of The Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI), Waterloo, Ontario, Canada ([www.cigionline.org](http://www.cigionline.org)). This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution — Non-commercial — No Derivatives License. To view this license, visit ([www.creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/](http://www.creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/)). For re-use or distribution, please include this copyright notice.

## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AMF	Afghan Militia Force
ANA	Afghan National Army
ANP	Afghan National Police
ANSF	Afghan National Security Forces
APRP	Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program
COIN	counterinsurgency
DDR	disarmament, demobilization and reintegration
EU	European Union
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
JCMB	Joint Coordinating Management Board
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
MoD	Ministry of Defence
MoF	Ministry of Finance
NDS	National Directorate of Security
NSA	National Security Adviser
NSC	National Security Council
NSP	National Security Policy
NSS	National Security Strategy
ONSC	Office of the National Security Council
SSR	security sector reform
UN	United Nations

## INTRODUCTION: WHY IS THE STRATEGIC VIEW IMPORTANT TO THE OPERATIONAL IN SSR?

Since the overthrow of the Taliban government in 2001, the international community and the Afghan government have made numerous attempts to address the strategic and operational issues surrounding the country's security sector. The 2001 Bonn Conference, the most significant of these initiatives, dealt almost exclusively with strategic issues, particularly with establishing a new Afghan state and political process. By the time of the next major international conference in Berlin in 2004,<sup>1</sup> the focus of international attention had shifted to operational issues,<sup>2</sup> as had many of the United Nations (UN) mandates.<sup>3</sup> The change was driven (in part) by the recognition that efforts to reconstitute the Afghan state were stagnating, and led to ever more intrusive intervention by the international community.

Berlin and subsequent conferences<sup>4</sup> focused on *operational* concerns, but without addressing the underlying *strategic* failure of the Bonn Agreement: it does not represent a peace process, but rather the continuation of a civil war by other means, and it does not represent a vision that is shared strongly enough by the Afghan state and the main international actors. Instead of addressing the deep-seated strategic issues, the conferences focused on achieving reforms in areas such as disarmament and development. Such operational activities represent discrete practical programs of action that are carried out on the ground, but lacking strategic planning, may be

1 There was a donor conference in Tokyo in 2002, although it was not as significant as the subsequent Berlin Conference.

2 See Berlin Declaration (2004).

3 For more on this evolution see Denny (2011).

4 There have been major international conferences on Afghanistan in London (2006 and 2010), Paris (2008) and Kabul (2010).

completed without supporting the overarching goals of peace, security and stability in Afghanistan. The divergent aims of Bonn and Berlin highlight the main argument of this paper: the operational programming of the latter will fail in the absence of the coherent strategic vision that the former aspired to, but ultimately did not produce.

An overarching SSR strategy must address four key issues if it is to contribute to the success of operational SSR activities, as well as other interventions:

- **Unity of effort in a time of austerity:** It is critical that the broad range of SSR activities all move in the same direction and are phased and sequenced to achieve their desired impact without conflicting with one another. Few SSR programs in conflict-affected and developing countries have received resources to match their ambitions, and the present global financial crisis only augments the imperative of unity of effort amidst this disparity.<sup>5</sup>
- **Increased and more sustained impact with fewer unintended consequences:** Most programs have short horizons and limited aims, but without a guiding strategy, what starts as a multi-year program becomes a multi-year drift with the original aims lost in the welter of events.
- **Coordinating multinational interests:** Among the donor community, which is almost exclusively the Western-aligned states, there is a significant amount of dissonance, lack of coordination and

willingness to let others fail. Even when programs are multilateral and undertaken in the name of an international organization or a coalition of the willing, “the minnows” want their say at the table and “the whales” share the space with suspicion and reluctance. It is impossible for donors to coordinate their diverse interests in the absence of a broad consensus on strategy.

- **Managing the politics of strategic choices:** Strategic choices about how fast to disarm a faction or what form the army or intelligence service should take are ultimately political, both in terms of host nation politics and donor politics. Host nations and donors must, therefore, carefully manage the political implications of their activities and invest political capital for SSR to succeed.

The points above draw from the range of disciplines involved in SSR. On the one hand, there is the importance of unity of effort, which is a military term closely associated with unity of command; on the other hand, those from a development background observing the Paris Principles and Accra Accords (with which their military counterparts are unlikely to be familiar) will recognize the link between “fewer unintended consequences” and the principle of “do no harm.” This multidisciplinary is strategically important; while SSR is often recognized as a cross-sectoral, cross-disciplinary activity, this fundamental characteristic is often lost in its operational planning as the “lead nations” carve up responsibilities along sectoral lines. Indeed, early reform in Afghanistan was divided into five disconnected programs of action (pillars), each with its particular lead nation implementing a unique approach: military reform (United States), police reform (Germany), justice reform (Italy), DDR (Japan) and counternarcotics (United Kingdom).

<sup>5</sup> Alongside the broader retrenchment of state spending across much of the West, and the setting aside of vast funds to cope with potential and perceived risks in the global economy, some authors have also pointed to the fact that the exchange rate fluctuations caused by the crisis have substantially reduced the overall value of aid (Bakrania and Lucas, 2009). At the same time, the crisis also caused three-quarters of low-income countries to increase their deficits as revenues fell (Kyrili and Martin, 2010). Afghanistan may currently be allocated substantial funds, but there are growing concerns in the US Administration about the costs of continued support to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) (Weisgerber, 2011).

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Christian Dennys is a researcher at the UK Defence Academy / Cranfield University on stabilization in Nepal and Afghanistan. He has worked in Afghanistan for much of the last seven years, after completing his first degree in Arabic and Persian. Since his first foray into Afghanistan, researching the impact of the DDR program in 2004-05, he has continued to research the functions, structures and support mechanisms of a range of armed groups in Afghanistan. He was formerly an adviser to the ONSC in Kabul and has worked on reintegration policy for the British Embassy in Kabul. Previously, he worked for Oxfam and Amnesty International as their leads on research and policy work in Afghanistan.

Tom Hamilton-Baillie is a member of the Centre for Security Sector Management in the Department of Management and Security at the Cranfield University campus in Shrivenham, Oxfordshire, United Kingdom. With a background in defence and security strategic planning, he has spent most of the last 10 years on the ground in transitional and conflict-affected countries, working chiefly in the area of security development, governance, public administration and policy making in post-conflict transitions. The work has taken him to West, Central and Southern Africa; Indonesia; Iraq; Jamaica; Guyana and Afghanistan.

Strategy is also important because the objectives listed above are not only hard to achieve, but can come into conflict with each other. For example, the second (sustained engagement) and fourth (political choices) elements will almost certainly be at loggerheads at some point if donors and the host nation lack the political will to do what comprehensive SSR entails. The four functions of strategy listed above require a detailed process to translate strategy into action. In this vein, a process of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) at all levels of programming is essential. The strategic level of the process is particularly important as it sets the rules for the lower levels.<sup>6</sup> The authors' experiences working at the strategic level have only reinforced their belief that, "boring" though the M&E process may be, it is important because it drives the way ideas, principles, initiatives and intentions are converted into long-term actionable policy.

## CASE STUDIES: NAHR-I SARRAJ AND BAGHLAN

The case studies, Nahr-I Sarraj district in Helmand province and Baghlan province, serve as evidence from the field that reveals the ways in which the absence of a strategic approach to SSR in Afghanistan has hindered operational activities and generated perverse effects. In both cases, DDR programs carried out without a strategy to provide proper sequencing and planning amid a conflictual security terrain contributed to growing instability and insecurity. The subsequent discussion of the ONSC explains why there was no strategic plan to guide the efforts examined in these case studies.

<sup>6</sup> Too often, people assume that the strategic level is solely about vision and high-level statements of intent and, therefore, does not require an implementation plan or much in the way of M&E. This view is mistaken; it leads people to dismiss the strategic level as irrelevant or mere window dressing, overlooking its essential function in the operational implementation of SSR, which this paper elucidates.

## NAHR-I SARRAJ, HELMAND

The fall of the Taliban in Helmand precipitated a return of Mujahideen commanders who had either been ousted by the Taliban in the 1990s (such as Sher Mohammad Akhunzada's father from the Alizai tribe) or who had flip-flopped between being pro- and anti-Taliban (such as Mualem Mir Wali of the Barakzai tribe). These commanders, affiliated to a mixture of tribal and *tanzim*-based (party-based) networks, sought to capture district and provincial posts in governance and security to bolster their positions amid an ongoing conflict between opposing tribal and party leaders.<sup>7</sup> The classic formulation of this phenomenon in Helmand included Sher Mohammad Akhunzada (the provincial governor, from the Alizai tribe), Dad Mohammed (head of the National Directorate of Security [NDS], from the Alokozai tribe), Abdur Rahman Jan (Chief of Police, from the Noorzai tribe) and Mir Wali (Commander of Firqa 93, an Afghan Militia Force [AMF] unit on the Ministry of Defence [MoD] payroll, from the Barakzai tribe).<sup>8</sup> They then set about attacking each other, former tribal and party opponents outside their patronage networks, and known Taliban supporters.

In order to consolidate power, the Mujahideen leaders, such as Mir Wali, reformed militias under their direct command. These militias were incorporated into the AMF, which was on the MoD payroll, and targeted by the DDR program.<sup>9</sup> The US provincial reconstruction team in the area also engaged with the militia leaders, almost to the exclusion of all other actors, in an attempt to impose some form of authority on Helmand. Because of the exclusive nature of this relationship, they also

7 Interviews with elders from Nahr-I Sarraj, November and December 2010.

8 See Gopal, 2010.

9 Interview with former government official and Helmandi elder, December 8, 2010.

contracted these same commanders to provide men to protect their bases, which has had some destabilizing effects. In western Nahr-I Sarraj, for example, US Special Forces were allegedly paying for a militia commanded by Mir Wali's second-in-command, Haji Qadoos. When the funding was cut off in 2007-08, the Barakzai-dominated area "fell to the Taliban" shortly thereafter. Haji Qadoos' brother, Mullah Daud, was also paid by the United States to guard forward operating base Price, and when the British attempted to cancel the contract, the base came under sustained attack. In this way, commanders used the international presence to gain advantage vis-à-vis their opponents in a way that jeopardized peace and security, and the international community was largely oblivious to the abuses of the conflict.<sup>10</sup>

As the DDR program advanced and deadlines for leaders to sever links with their militias came into effect,<sup>11</sup> there was a drawdown of official government militias under the MoD and a change in the local political architecture. As the Mujahideen leaders were removed from government,<sup>12</sup> there was an increase in actions by the "Taliban" and the Taliban to undermine the government in Helmand.<sup>13</sup> As the Parliament began to sit in Kabul, outlying districts were coming under sustained attack and the subsequent calls on the Commander of UK Forces that had deployed in June 2006 to come to the rescue of the Afghan government in Helmand in "key"

10 Interview with former government official and Helmandi elder, December 8, 2010.

11 A pre-condition (though not fully enforced) for standing as a candidate in the Parliamentary elections in 2005 and 2010 was that a candidate must not have any links to armed groups (Presidential Decree, 2004: Articles 13 (2), 16 (3), 20 (2)).

12 Mir Wali was disarmed in 2005 and successfully ran for Parliament in 2005 only to be disqualified in 2010; Governor Sher Mohammad Akhunzada was removed under British pressure only to be appointed to the Meshrano Jirga (the Senate) by President Karzai; Dad Mohammad was removed as intelligence chief, but ran in the 2005 elections and was killed in Sangin in 2009.

13 It seems that the removal of the governor led to him announcing that his 3,000-strong militia should fight alongside the real Taliban in opposition to the government, hence "Taliban" (McElroy, 2009).

districts (Nahr-I Sarraj, Musa Qala, Sangin, Now Zad and Kajaki), radically altered the facts on the ground for central planners and strategists.

Despite radical changes on the ground in Helmand in the structure and composition of the range of state forces<sup>14</sup> and non-state militias (noted above), there was no central-level agreement about the form and nature of the police and army, and programs that had been agreed upon were faltering. Initial estimates in 2002 that Afghanistan would require an army of 50,000 soldiers were massively expanded and the US took the lead in training the police after German-funded efforts were seen to be too slow to increase force levels. The *tashkil* (payroll or “establishment table” in military terms) for the Afghan National Army (ANA) increased from 43,000 in 2005 to 80,000 in 2008, and to 171,600 in 2010. Target force levels for the Afghan National Police (ANP) increased from 62,000 in 2005 to 134,000, approved by the Joint Coordinating Management Board (JCMB)<sup>15</sup> in January 2010 (Afghanistan: The London Conference, 2010) and was augmented by another 10,000 through the creation of the Afghan Local Police in 2010, which may be further increased to 20,000 (Cloud, 2010).

As a result of the delays in the expansion of forces, ANSF faced — and still faces — an uphill struggle against a well-entrenched insurgency in Helmand that capitalized on the paucity of state forces in the province from 2004 to 2009. Despite the current deployment of 30,000 international forces and the majority of the 12,000-strong ANA 215th Corps in the province, the outlying villages in districts such as Nahr-I Sarraj (Gereshk) remain effectively

14 The ANSF, including at this stage only the ANP, NDS and ANA deployment.

15 The JCMB, established in 2006, is meant to provide the “overall strategic coordination of the implementation of the Afghanistan Compact after the endorsement of the Afghanistan Compact and the Interim Afghanistan National Development Strategy at the London Conference and the ensuing Security Council Resolution No. 1659” (JCMB, 2006).

outside of government control. While civilian access is improving, the level and effectiveness of pressure and control exerted by the Taliban is extensive.<sup>16</sup>

On the one hand, SSR activities in Nahr-I Sarraj altered the local security and political architecture through DDR and the associated requirements for candidates in the parliamentary elections to cut ties with armed groups.<sup>17</sup> The demobilized forces, however, were not replaced in time to deal with a burgeoning insurgency, whose forces may have been bolstered by militias with commanders whose ties to the government were cut. This meant that subsequent ANSF deployments have occurred in the context of continuous conflict and the expansion of government control has been exceptionally hard fought. Here the implementation of operational SSR programming (DDR) in the absence of a strategy to provide proper planning and sequencing amidst a conflictual security environment ultimately intensified the challenges of peace and security in Helmand. By exposing the state to an existential threat before its own forces were capable of providing security, the international community has forced the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to take the leading role — a role that it has struggled to develop into and that it did not necessarily want in the first place.

The story indicates that the growth of the ANSF (ANA and ANP) from 2005 to date, a three-fold increase in

16 Several interview respondents with a range of allegiances identified this trend, including elders from Nahr-I Sarraj, interviewed in November and December 2010; an Afghan civilian formerly deployed with international forces in Nahr-I Sarraj, interviewed in December 3, 2010; an Afghan civilian working in a service sector in Nahr-I Sarraj, interviewed December 12, 2011; and a Taliban representative from Nahr-I Sarraj, interviewed December 13, 2010.

17 SSR in Afghanistan, as noted above, consists of five pillars: establishing the ANA; reforming the ANP; counternarcotics; justice reform; and DDR. Some pillars had recognized political linkages, such as in the connection between DDR and the condition that parliamentary candidates cut ties with former militias (who did not necessarily have to have participated in the DDR program). Some academics (such as Downes and Muggah, 2010) do not necessarily agree with the conflation of SSR and DDR.

what was thought appropriate and necessary at the start of the period, was driven not by strategic assessment of the medium- to long-term needs, but by events in Nahr-I Sarraj and many places like it. Current efforts to surge forces of the province do not constitute SSR, but rather counterinsurgency (COIN).<sup>18</sup> “Surge” is hardly a word to describe a calculated strategic assessment — whether applied to local forces or intervention forces — and tends, as the analogy suggests, to wash away the subtler, more developmental, longer-term, “slow burn” SSR effort. It also fatally undermines strategic, civilian control of the armed forces because the civilian leadership at the highest levels in Afghanistan is not equipped to exert authority over an Afghan security sector that is driven by the imperatives of COIN.

## BAGHLAN

Baghlan province lies to the north of Kabul just beyond the Salang pass, which provides year-round access from the capital to northern Afghanistan. The province is majority Tajik, but has a substantial minority Pashtun community (approximately 30 percent) as well as Hazaras, who make up another approximately 15 percent of the population. Similar to other areas of the country, the post-2001 environment allowed the newly emboldened local elite to take power. In this case, they were primarily ethnic Tajiks linked to the Jamiat-I Islami and Shura-I Nazar, which were led by Ahmad Shah Massoud until his assassination in 2001.<sup>19</sup>

The DDR process, as outlined in the Nahr-I Sarraj case study, did affect the security balance in northern

18 For more on this discussion see Dennys, 2011.

19 Jamiat-I Islami (Islamic Society) was headed politically by former President Rabbani and militarily by Ahmad Shah Massoud. During the civil war, as the Islamist parties fought for control, Massoud formed Shura-I Nazar (Supervisory Council) to oversee all resistance action against the Najibullah government, which effectively gave control of northeastern Afghanistan, including Baghlan, to Massoud (Clements, 2003: 165–156).

Afghanistan, although it was primarily a contest between Atta Mohammad Noor, current governor of Balkh, and General Abdul Rashid Dostum, based in Jowzjan in the northwest. Baghlan was at the periphery of this competition, despite tensions in nearby Takhar and Kunduz. A local commander named Amir Gul Baghlani formed a militia that was also considered part of the AMF and was subsequently disarmed. His incorporation into the military forces of the Afghan government was described by one account as having kept “the fox in the henhouse” (Bhatia and Sedra, 2008: 256). For the most part, the province was peaceful and, therefore, somewhat neglected, until incidents began to increase in 2007.

Taliban from outside Baghlan mounted a long-term process of pressure and infiltration that capitalized on the abuses suffered by (mainly Pashtun) communities in parts of the province.<sup>20</sup> As a result of security incidents, ISAF and Afghan government forces started carrying out operations that created another round of grievances because, inevitably, civilians and combatants from the local area were killed. This contributed to the expanded influence of local Taliban commanders in several districts (Abdul-Ahad, 2010).<sup>21</sup>

By 2008, it was clear that the political balance in Baghlan had been severely skewed by the years of Tajik control, coming at the expense of the Pashtun minority. Governor Munshi Majid, however, has proven unable or unwilling to address Tajik dominance in the province.<sup>22</sup>

20 Communities in Baghlan mentioned that Taliban combatants and commanders had travelled from Kunduz and Takhar (to the north of Baghlan), but also as far afield as Helmand in southern Afghanistan, to spread the insurgency into Baghlan (Correspondence with Lawrence Devlin, Peace Training and Research Organisation, May 31, 2011).

21 These include Baghlan-I Jadid, Dand-e Ghori, Pul-I Khumri (the district name of the provincial capital, though incidents in the city are relatively rare) and Nahrin.

22 Governor Majid’s background is unclear; he is Pashai speaking, and while a member of Hizb-I Islami with purported Pashtun sympathies, he has been the governor of two Tajik-dominated provinces, Badakhshan and Baghlan — possibly chosen to demonstrate that President Karzai is able to appoint non-Tajiks in areas dominated by Tajiks.

This omission manifests itself in the positions of key individuals from the Andarab district, including a former police chief<sup>23</sup> and the head of the provincial council.<sup>24</sup> Baghlan had been a relatively peaceful province — there was not a large ANA presence and the 1,335-strong police were massively dominated by personnel from Andarab. The police expansion planned for 2009-10 did not address this inequality; in fact, the proportions worsened as new personnel continued to be hired from Andarab. As a result, a provincial *tashkil* of 2,800 personnel was dominated by 2,400 Andarabi Tajiks and included a paltry 56 police officers with a Pashtun background among the 400 non-Andarabi officers.<sup>25</sup>

In this context, reintegration efforts, embodied in the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP),<sup>26</sup> were initiated. The program initially focused on groups immediately north of Pul-I Khumri whose relationship with the Taliban was purportedly very poor.<sup>27</sup> In one village, a group claiming to be part of Hizb-I Islami were eventually accepted into the program and rearmed and mentored by ISAF, only to be attacked by Taliban forces from neighbouring villages in what has been described as the battle of Shahbuddin.<sup>28</sup> Even between groups

23 Now in Logar, but still retains significant influence in Baghlan.

24 Information held by authors and correspondence with Lawrence Devlin, Peace Training and Research Organisation, May 31, 2011.

25 Information from US official, Kabul, December 2010 and Chilton, Schiewek and Bremmers, 2009.

26 The APRP is an Afghan government-led, internationally supported effort to reintegrate combatants from the Taliban, Hizb-I Islami or other armed factions back into their communities. The program is not necessarily concerned with disarmament, though some weapons have been collected to date (National Security Council D & R Commission, July 2010; and information held by authors).

27 A complete account is not feasible, as there are many layers of conflict in Helmand and some Pashtun communities in Baghlan do not seem to be particularly welcoming to Taliban encroachment. This may be because some traditionally support Hizb-I Islami, it also may simply be that Pashtun communities have been running militias to protect their own villages and do not want competition for local taxation from the Taliban (information held by authors).

28 Demmer (2010) provides one account of the relationship between ISAF and the units in Shahbuddin.

that have entered the program there are conflicts, with allegations that one commander attacked another in March 2010, complicating the security environment for the local population.<sup>29</sup>

Communities with armed groups willing to participate in the APRP were often offered developmental inputs and, possibly more importantly, the possibility of having their force folded into the local security architecture, primarily as Afghan Local Police. As a result, there were members of both “Hizb-I Islami” and “Taliban”<sup>30</sup> in close proximity to each other who had either become part of the ANSF or were provided guarantees that they would be so incorporated. The numbers may have been relatively small, about 100 personnel in total, but these initiatives, while piecemeal and slow, represent a way in which the international community can attempt to restore the balance within the local security architecture.<sup>31</sup>

Central Afghan government actors from other ministries and provincial actors in Baghlan, however, had serious concerns about any programs that would affect the political balance in the province, or, put another way, undermine the Andarabi Tajik dominance. There have been allegations that senior officials in key security ministries have sponsored the creation of rival “militias” in other districts in Baghlan, which are not necessarily Tajik, but are at least not led by Pashtuns. The creation of these militias demonstrates the willingness and ability of Afghan officials to undermine central government

29 Correspondence with Lawrence Devlin, Peace Training and Research Organisation, May 31, 2011.

30 The labels are in quotation marks because the authors doubt that the commanders and communities have a strong conviction of belonging to one group or another, as shown by their willingness to undermine the state, attack each other, and also reintegrate.

31 Correspondence with Lawrence Devlin, Peace Training and Research Organisation, May 31, 2011.

programs because they may threaten their power base in the provinces.<sup>32</sup>

Baghlan is thus a case in which international pressure to proceed with reintegration in a way that could shift the local political balance belies the political will of key officials within the Afghan government. Without broader strategic planning, local and international actors lack the means to address the broader political implications of operational SSR initiatives, to the detriment of peace and security in Baghlan. Donors likely failed to fully understand the political countercurrents stirred by their work in Baghlan, and lacked a strategy for pressuring the Afghan government to proceed with reintegration in Baghlan in a way that responded to the ethnic politics of Afghanistan.

The site for such pressure could, and should, have been the ONSC, which had a direct reporting line to the senior Afghan leadership, including the president, vice-presidents and key ministers who should have been informed of the purported attempts to undermine the program in Baghlan. Instead, support was focused on the understaffed APRP, and both the Afghans and donor community avoided using the ONSC, a body that does, on paper at least, have the authority to address these issues. Ultimately, this regrettable situation reveals the deficit of overarching strategy as a detriment to effective SSR programming.

## THE ONSC

While the case studies demonstrate the negative impacts arising from the absence of an overarching SSR strategy to guide operational activities, the history and development of the ONSC elucidate some of the reasons behind the lack of strategic direction. As a coordinating body, the ONSC would have provided an ideal locus of strategic

<sup>32</sup> Information from European Union (EU) official, Kabul, December 2010.

planning for SSR and was indeed intended as the de facto SSR agency of the Afghan government. Its institutional development, however, has been largely stagnant, feeble and impaired, preventing it from fulfilling key strategic functions.

Work on the ONSC started shortly after the Bonn Conference in December 2001. The Afghanistan Transitional Authority included the appointment of Dr. Zalmay Rassoul as the National Security Adviser (NSA).<sup>33</sup> The UK government provided advisory support and helped the NSA set up a small staff. The UK interest was to ensure that counternarcotics, the UK-led reform pillar, was at the heart of the Afghan government's security focus.<sup>34</sup>

The intention in the president's circle at the time was that the NSA staff should be close to the president's staff not only physically, but organizationally, even though there was initially no working National Security Council (NSC). The NSA ranked as a cabinet minister and most of his work concerned inputs to cabinet agendas in which security was at issue. He was frequently called upon to give informal, largely unrecorded advice to the president and other senior cabinet members and to accompany the head of state on international visits. His staff, originally four officials appointed by the president and one British adviser, struggled to set up a proper institutional structure with clear terms of reference and links to other security institutions as well as to the Office of the President.

The core idea that emerged from this work during 2002-03 was that the NSA should head a secretariat called the ONSC; the name was actually agreed before the NSC itself was constituted. This has led to an abiding anomaly: to many in government in Kabul, the ONSC

<sup>33</sup> Rassoul remained the NSA until early 2010, when he was replaced by Dr. Rangin Dadfar Spanta, who until then served as minister of foreign affairs.

<sup>34</sup> Former adviser to the ONSC, UK, interviewed in October 2010.

was the “National Security Council,” and in the senior levels of the ONSC there were some who believed it did have executive powers and was more than the secretariat it had originally been intended to be. The advisers at the time failed to stop, and may indeed have on occasion encouraged, the development of disparate ideas concerning the purpose of the ONSC. It had no future as an executive arm of government, because there were much more powerful, well-funded and well-supported rival actors in the security sector, chiefly the MoD and Interior and the NDS.

As a result, the ONSC stagnated without any clear role, experienced diminished influence in policy work, and comprised an extravagantly staffed, but widely underused and undervalued part of the institutional surroundings of the president’s office. Between 2004 and 2009, the ONSC grew in size, but it was hardly effective and its (UK) advisers were withdrawn in 2005. It had no useful product or coordinating function to offer a political process in which security issues were of the greatest importance. It provided some niche services within the presidential entourage, such as speech writing and some back-channel communication, but it was powerless to manage the divergent and growing strength of the main security ministries, the NDS, or even single issue agencies such as the Ministry of Counter Narcotics. It had no reach downwards into the provinces, no nationwide network of its own and no easy access to information from the ground by any other source. It was, thus, unable to serve as a strategic centre for SSR activities that were then carried out by a variety of government agencies in a largely fragmented and uncoordinated manner.

In 2009, there was a big change in the ONSC. Largely under a US-led initiative, with personnel based in both the Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan and NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan and later ISAF headquarters, a hierarchical structure of

committees was established in an attempt to coordinate increasingly important Afghan government input to the main issues of security policy. It did not, however, link to the rather hazy range of councils, such as the Council of Ministers or the Supreme National Security Council, where the president and a changeable attendance list met more or less weekly, sometimes with and sometimes without the presence of the Commander of ISAF, NATO’s senior civilian representative and other international community representatives. Much of the work was bogged down in trivial issues and often failed to reach agreement or properly represent some of the key Afghan security players such as the NDS. There were still no links to provincial or local bodies. The new arrangements did, however, have a galvanizing effect on the ONSC.

The meetings were conducted with Dari as the lead language and often convened in the ONSC office building. At last, the ONSC had found its proper, originally intended role as a secretariat. Although some parts of the ONSC continued to be moribund, the proposal to set up a situational awareness centre close to the ONSC offices was another new role that helped revive the institution. The tasks set out in the dimly remembered start of the ONSC were resurrected in 2010 and given general, though not actual constitutional, acceptance. These tasks were:

- provide the president with security advice;
- provide advice to the secretariat supporting the NSC and its subordinate committees, subcommittees and working groups;
- produce draft papers on National Security Policy (NSP) and National Security Strategy (NSS), National Threat Assessments and other topics of cross-government security interest; and

- coordinate where necessary the intergovernmental activities in implementing all these policies and strategies between Afghan government agencies, international contributors and civil society.

All these administrative arrangements and structures quickly revealed the glaring absence of an agreed and useable NSP and its accompanying NSS — basically the one being the “what?” the other the “how?”<sup>35</sup> In 2008, the ONSC produced a new NSP, although it was described as a copy of the 2007 version. It is important to remember that at this stage there was generally little strategic-level engagement with Afghanistan by Western capitals, whose attention was only slowly shifting from the situation in Iraq.

The newly appointed advisers to the ONSC set out the purpose of the NSP in a report to the Deputy NSA along the following lines:

- The NSP sets out some significant changes in the ways in which the Government of Afghanistan will formulate and conduct security policy in future; and
- Security cannot be brought by anything other than the combined efforts of institutions and people — the state and citizens — working towards common goals and national interests.

The starting point of this process, and it should be a continuous one, was producing a capstone document called the NSP. The NSP would form the foundation of the NSS, which would outline the policies, action plans

<sup>35</sup> At first there was deep confusion as to the difference between policy and strategy. The Dari language does not allow a clear differentiation between the two. The United States and United Kingdom had historically used the terms interchangeably. The subtlety was rather lost on the Afghans, and only resolved by the United States agreeing to “policy” being what they like to call the “capstone” document. The metaphor allowed everybody to agree.

and operations of the different contributors<sup>36</sup> to national security at various levels, down, eventually, to the local. The latter aspiration would be, as can be seen, very difficult to achieve.

In its coordinating function, the principal duties of the ONSC were fourfold: first, the coordination of security provision so that gaps and overlaps could be eliminated in the interests of efficiency and good governance; second, the reconciliation of policy and strategy with resources available from national and international sources; third, the monitoring and evaluation of the results of all these efforts by means of periodic review and revision supported by the collection and analysis of programmatic outputs and impacts down to the local level (outcomes); and fourth, providing a coherent communication strategy to support this work. The ONSC was finally granted (at least in principle) the functional roles that would compensate for the deficit of strategy to guide the range of operational security sector activities already underway. The special circumstances in Afghanistan and its region, the close and vital contribution of the international community, and operational requirements, gave even more point to the need for effective management of the security sector in cooperation and coordination with international partners, especially as the partnership moves into transition.

In 2010, the ONSC set about not to revise, but to radically rewrite the NSP. The London Conference held in January 2010 obligated the Afghan government to table a policy at the follow-up conference in Kabul, which was slated for June, but eventually held in July that year. The well-intentioned Afghan officials tasked with this work set about it in a way that many SSR theorists might have strongly approved of. They organized a long series of

<sup>36</sup> While the security sector is variously defined, the ONSC took a particularly broad definition, including almost all state institutions, though the NSP itself deals with the three core security offices (defence, police and intelligence), plus relevant judicial bodies.

meetings with almost every agency and ministry inside and outside the security sector to explain what they proposed to do.

The process, however, got off to a bad start. Insisting that the international advisers should attend these meetings gave an incorrect impression to the wider Afghan government community. The advisers quickly decided to withdraw. Moreover, this “socialization” program, intended to make the rest of the Afghan government aware of security policy and how it was being developed, had the unintended consequence of raising fears in some line ministries (such as social affairs or services) that their programs were being brought into security policy in a way that could be harmful. The “securitization” of civil government activity is a recognized danger of extended SSR, which strengthened resistance to the entire process. It was as if “anti-socialization” occurred, rather than the intended socialization. Some key ministries evidently took exception to the idea of a comprehensive security policy, among them the Ministry of Finance (MoF) and parts of the justice community. Further, the process unfolded solely in Kabul and made no attempt to expand the socialization of security policy making by taking it to the provincial and district levels.

Despite these problems in the production of the NSP, no senior Afghan officials disputed the general strategic intention to have an Afghan-owned national security policy when it was suggested to them. Nevertheless, it failed to gain traction. In many respects, the process was like tacking a strategy onto the back of a horse that had bolted. Along with the myriad processes, programs and initiatives of the preceding decade, there had been significant confusion and collusion about the nature of provincial- and district-level security architectures as different parts of the Afghan state either tried to lobby for reform or add components (often with foreign insistence) while others resisted. The lack of Afghan

political agreement on these issues stymied any hope of direct change, which contributed to fragmentation as provincial and district activities moved ahead of a centrally driven approach. Bringing order and coherence would not only require serious work, but would entail the investment of substantial political will and capital by both the international community and, critically, the Afghan government.

## POSSIBLE REASONS FOR LACK OF SUCCESS

The ONSC only assumed its strategic and coordinating functions almost a decade after divergent operational activities commenced under the fragmented management of multiple government agencies. Its belated attempt to integrate these activities under a coherent and comprehensive NSP (which has been drafted), has, so far, proven unsuccessful in bringing coherence to the Afghan security sector. To be effective, a strategy must be drawn up before long-term programming is agreed to with line ministries. Even then, the body managing the strategy must also have the legal and political power to ensure that the security bodies adhere to that strategy. Otherwise the line ministries will attempt to expand their power base at the expense of the wider government and successful SSR. The experience of the ONSC has highlighted the tensions that can result from promoting a national security body. Despite avowed agreement for the role of the ONSC among the civil service cadre, many nonetheless complained that they feel constrained by bigger political players.

In one sense, the ONSC was set up to be the de facto SSR agency of government. This has been attempted in other settings — that is to say, an “office of SSR” or something similar has been set up in other governments. The weakness of this effort is that an “office of SSR” is clearly a tool of the donors. The ONSC was to be the Afghan

government's tool for its own security policy. Building it into the government machinery involved some power shifting, with typical corollary resistance from those who feared they would lose power and influence in the shuffle. In order to be accepted elsewhere in government and eventually in the provinces, the ONSC needed the following:

- strong and consistent support from the president and firm control of places like the presidential chief of staff's office, where the ONSC was seen as another hungry chick in the same nest;
- a strong legal framework, initially through presidential decree and, later, through legislation; and
- a sufficient number of capable and dedicated staff members to produce a quality product and to draft security policy and security strategy, thereby earning the ONSC acceptance elsewhere in government and eventually in the provinces.

These are highly demanding requirements. After nearly 10 years, only slight progress has been made in these areas. The international community's patience is also not inexhaustible. Judgment may be reserved at present, but it does not look as though the ONSC will find its place among the top level of Afghan governance in the foreseeable future. This is not helped by the fact that when there have been serious and, at times, existential issues (such as allegations of officials undermining state policy in Baghlan and international military forces and SSR policy forcing some groups to join the insurgency in Helmand), the ONSC has been a bystander, unable to energize political leaders to intervene and maintain strong Afghan leadership on the security sector of their own country. Management of the security sector has instead fallen to a myriad of backroom deals, informal councils and one-on-one deals, which have contributed to the malaise seen today.

## ADVISORY SUPPORT AT THE CENTRE OF GOVERNMENT

The following section brings together lessons learned from the authors' experience working with the ONSC, and will draw on the implications of the case studies to explore the positioning of operations within the strategic framework and some of the constraints on strategic-level work itself. The lessons presented below draw upon the four key principles presented at the beginning of the paper:

- unity of effort in a time of austerity;
- increased and more sustained impact with fewer unintended consequences;
- coordinating multinational interests; and
- strategic choices are political choices.

## CAUTIONARY NOTES

There are a number of critical challenges that will affect any advisory support aimed at bringing coherence to the SSR process. The first and most obvious is that in actual fact, strategy is often an afterthought or by-product and the sum-of-all activities, and yet it is inherently political. This is in part because strategy can take time to emerge. At the beginning of an advisory mission, the limited information available may lead to a strategic vision that later must be altered, a task that can be extremely difficult in cases of multinational intervention. It is emphatically *not* plausible, however, to hope that a range of actions will combine into a coherent strategy.

Strategic planning and advice, however, cannot sit above the facts on the ground. In the two case studies presented above, it is clear that the groups that were disarmed in Helmand, and those that are engaged in disarmament in Baghlan, are there as the result of ongoing political

and military disputes between the ruling elites of those provinces. That is a fact — and is significantly shaped by the presence, size and scope of the two international deployments, which have been very different to date,<sup>37</sup> as well as attempts by the central government to attain a modicum of control. Therefore, strategic advice must engage with real issues, many of which may be very difficult for the host nation, as well as the interveners.

Finally, there are the myriad reasons why a host nation agrees to an SSR process, and why donor nations choose to fund specific interventions, leading to substantial challenges in donor coordination and agreement to submit to an overarching plan. The European Union, for example, attempted to take a major role in policing simply to ensure that it had a place at the table and a stake in the future of Afghanistan, although it recognized that it lacked the resources to deliver on its commitments.<sup>38</sup> Additionally, a host nation may agree to support an SSR initiative, such as the NSP work discussed earlier, because it was pressured by the international community to take it on. The NSP was a mandated outcome of the London Conference, which the Afghan government was obligated to deliver, but it was never clear that they really wanted it. As it turned out, when the Afghan government did not present the promised NSP at the Kabul Conference in July 2010, the conference accepted the situation without comment. It was as if the international community members themselves were not entirely convinced of the value of the strategic framework for security being set out by a competent Afghan government authority.

<sup>37</sup> In January 2011, there were an estimated 30,000 international forces (mainly American and British) in Helmand province alone, part of Regional Command South West. Baghlan forms part of Regional Command North East, which is commanded by the German military and covers four provinces (Kunduz, Takhar, Badakhshan and Baghlan).

<sup>38</sup> Interview with EU Police Mission in Afghanistan official, October 11, 2011.

## FEARS AND SUSPICIONS

The authors' role was quite specific within the wide range of purported activities of the ONSC, namely to provide technical advice and support to one of its directorates, the Strategic and Policy Issues Department, which was charged with producing the NSP, to be followed by the NSS. Despite this fairly tight remit, it was clear that on the one hand, national security requires some fairly considerable attention be given to political dynamics, and on the other hand, there is a high level of suspicion and doubt concerning the presence of foreign advisers among the Afghan government.

The British nationality of the advisers was both a blessing and a burden. It allowed the UK embassy and the Afghan government to engage in high-level strategic discussions in which the advisory team could play a supporting function by disseminating the views of the ONSC on various issues to interested international actors. It was also a hindrance insofar as Anglo-Afghan relations over the last 200 years, and the experience of UK involvement in the ONSC over the last decade have not always been smooth.

It was perhaps partly because of these fears that the ONSC's position shifted towards the end of the engagement, reducing the number of foreign advisers present in the palace lest they be accused of spying or making the president's office seem dependent on foreign powers. This cut short the advisory work, which is always a risk in advising in general, but also meant that short-term gains in the form of new policies or strategies written by Afghan officials were often not followed through with action and implementation. Less activity overall by the international community may have fostered a more accepting Afghan disposition to advice because the remaining interventions would not overwhelm Afghan capacity or political will.

## ELEPHANTS IN THE ROOM

The Afghan government's unwillingness to deal with complex and potentially dangerous issues was the most obvious challenge that stifled discussions of its strategic view of the world. There were three major "elephants in the room," loudly stomping around while the conversation avoided their implications:

- transition;
- financing for the security sector; and
- reintegration.

Interestingly, all three represent priorities of the international community rather than the national government because of the ONSC's strategic view that Afghanistan requires a security guarantee similar to that extended to Japan and Germany after World War II (that is to say, a security guarantee in perpetuity). Thus, neither transition nor financing could be discussed, because to do so might encourage the international community (and the United States in particular) to leave, which could ultimately lead to the fall of the government and a renewed civil war (a higher-scale instance of what occurred in the Helmand case study).<sup>39</sup> The third issue, reintegration, was a strategy employed by the ISAF to encourage combatants to leave the fight, a process that, if it is to be effective, must deeply alter the provincial political fabric of substantial parts of the country (as in the Baghlan case).

These issues presented a fundamental challenge: technically, an NSP cannot be seen to be complete if it avoided difficult choices and issues; however, if the host nation department is not ready for them to be addressed

<sup>39</sup> Transition has been taken out of the hands of the ONSC, although some ONSC staff continue to work on it. The Joint Afghan NATO Inteqal Board deals with transition issues, but on the Afghan side it is headed by former presidential candidate Dr. Ashraf Ghani rather than the NSA.

— even when other parts of the host nation government are addressing them, such as the MoF looking at financing — then the output may represent the best that can be achieved politically, although it will always be technically flawed and confront serious problems in the future.

## BALANCING TECHNICAL ADVICE WITH POLITICAL FORESIGHT

It is necessary to balance what can be achieved centrally at a technical level with what can be achieved politically. By implication, this would seem to flow down the chain to provinces and districts. The case studies seem to highlight the reverse, which is that provincial- and district-level processes move much more quickly than central ones and implementation gets ahead of political will in the capital.

For example, the phasing of DDR meant that forces that were nominally protecting the state were reduced while there were not enough formal forces to backfill their positions. In the example of Nahr-I Sarraj when the militias were disbanded in 2004 to 2006, the Taliban were able to re-infiltrate back to their communities and expand their support base. This is not to suggest delaying DDR would have stopped the insurgency, but what did seem to occur was that the state fell back on relying on the informal militias of those forces that had undergone DDR to try and hold on to power. Formal forces would have been more likely to receive both central government and international support than a reconstituted militia force made up of Mujahideen commanders and fighters. This may have stemmed some of the losses in Helmand more broadly, where the number of districts controlled by the Taliban was more than those controlled by the government until at least 2009.

The strategic choices about when to increase the size of the ANA or ANP and when to implement DDR were simply not considered. International military forces were left to rely on what allies they could find at a local level, some of whom may have been affiliated in an informal or formal way to the ruling clique, but whose accountability, professionalism and human rights background remained unknown and were often lacking. This has led to ANA forces being minor partners to ISAF forces, even before the surge of US forces in Helmand, when international military forces in the province increased from approximately 10,000 to 30,000. Given that one of the major grievances among the general population has been the international lead taken in raids on houses, the low levels of Afghan forces mean that there have simply not been enough Afghan military forces to partner with international ones (although there are also deficiencies in the supply side of trainers).

## LESSONS LEARNED AND POTENTIAL IMPROVEMENTS

This section outlines what the authors believe are the three environmental prerequisites for successful SSR and national security support, followed by both strategic and operational improvements necessary to enhance the impact and coherence of SSR. In order for international support for coherent national security to work, the following conditions, which can be applied at both the strategic and operational levels, must be in place:

- **The right distribution of political power in the recipient government:** In Afghanistan, the strained, collusive and hidden links within and between central and local politics militates against a unified vision identifying strategic aims or what choices could be made to implement those aims. Recalling what was stated at the beginning of the paper, strategic choices are essentially political choices,

and SSR delivery requires both technical skill and political art.

- **A minimal and consistent level of strategic management capacity in the recipient government:** There are few strategists in the Afghan government who are able to articulate their views across a spectrum of like-minded leaders, generally at the director/departmental head level, where much of the hard work is carried out. The donors themselves often do not prioritize long-term support to those individuals, and for the United Kingdom, cutting the Chevening Programme that sponsors higher education in the United Kingdom for Afghans is potentially detrimental to what minimal support was given.
- **Rigorous unanimity among the donor community in order to maintain the unity of effort and reduce unintended consequences:** This condition has been chequered over the last 10 years, leading to an organization that has evolved in fits and starts. Strategic-level choices require significant patience; but so far, there has been scant effort to create a body that can provide strategic insights and expertise on the security environment on a long-term time scale. Improvements in coordination have recently been made, but may be dominated by the short-term horizons of military officers deployed one year at a time.

## POSSIBLE IMPROVEMENTS FOR STRATEGIC SSR PLANNING

This paper, thus far, demonstrates some of the problems created when SSR activities are conducted in the absence of a guiding strategy, and some of the challenges of developing such a strategy on a post-hoc basis. The paper will conclude with some potential avenues, both political

and technical, and at the strategic and operational levels of SSR, which might provide some guidance so that future interventions may avoid these problems.

### Link Financing of the Security Sector with a Coherent Strategic Assessment and Turn It into an Actionable Strategy

While Afghanistan is almost unique in the world in having a security sector so vastly out of proportion with its ability to pay for it, this situation does not mean the long-term fiscal implications of SSR should be avoided, even if the fiscal outlook remains bleak.<sup>40</sup> The stronger and more assured the host government, the more open this debate is likely to be, but the unwillingness to debate it speaks volumes about the political will to buy in to an SSR process.

In addition, SSR programs, such as those outlined in the two case studies, should only be approved if they can be linked directly back to both the overarching SSR strategy of the donors *and* the NSP/NSS of the host nation. In the interests of impact and collaboration, programs may need to be halted or redesigned to ensure they are coherent with the strategic framework in which they are implemented.

### Address Strategic Issues at the Beginning of an Intervention

Strategic planning and preparation are essential and must be done at the beginning of an intervention, before

<sup>40</sup> While there are improvements in Afghan government revenue collection with a projected 32 percent increase in fiscal year (FY) 2010-11 (International Monetary Fund, 2011), the tax to GDP ratio in FY2010 is still only 9.1 percent — among the lowest in the world — and the MoF, whose basic operating budget is only two-thirds met by national resources (excluding all development assistance), has itself warned of the increasing gap between domestic revenues and external financing (MoF, 2011a and 2011b). US estimates of the costs for the training mission and funding support for the ANSF in FY2012 is \$12.8 billion (Weisgerber, 2011). The MoF predicted that revenue for year 1390 (FY2011/12) will reach \$1.5 billion and for recurrent costs (salaries, hazard pay and food), Afghan revenues would pay for a fifth of the costs of the ANP and a third of the costs of the ANA (MoF, 2011b: 17, 41-42).

facts on the ground make a draft strategy obsolete. It takes time and can be exceptionally sensitive, especially for a government that perceives its position to be weak. Despite this limitation, strategic partnering that builds towards an achievable goal for the host nation is critical if the state and the security of the population are to be preserved.

Without action and communication, however, nice strategies don't make for good programs. The fact that the Afghan government, now on its third NSP, has not been able to coherently explain this to its own civil servants, let alone the population, speaks volumes for the way in which strategy without action is irrelevant at best, and destabilizing at worst. Further, the inability of the senior security bodies to direct and, where necessary, rein in security ministries within the Afghan government, as well as related international SSR activities as outlined in the case studies, reduces the ONSC to a second-rate administrative body rather than the final arbiter of the national security interests of Afghanistan.

### Be Realistic about Timelines and Resist Strategic Distraction

SSR, like many political and economic development processes, takes a substantial amount of time. Time frames for strategic inputs and subsequent programmatic funding should be in the order of five years for any intervention. This not only allows programs to be phased in gradually (easing their attendant fiscal burdens), but also facilitates monitoring and evaluation of the consequences and impacts of activities, both intended and unintended, so that remedial action can be taken where required. The short-term activities in the cases of the DDR program (which ran from 2004 to 2006) and the ongoing APRP do not necessarily lend themselves to integration within a coherent, gradualist, Afghan security policy.

Finally, while it is difficult for donor nations to escape their own political considerations and the varying cycles of elections, national security reviews and public opinion, this is not necessarily an excuse for not attempting to present a more rigorously united front. Strategic patience measured in decades is required for SSR to be effective, and it is often in the donor nations' own strategic security interests to promote stable governments and lasting governance through SSR.

## POSSIBLE IMPROVEMENTS FOR OPERATIONAL SSR PROGRAMS

Controversially, it may be by constraining SSR operations that more coherence could be reached. This is, in part, because of the diversity and spread of the SSR industry, but also the result of divergent interests of the donor nations, who at times pick “pet projects” without fully considering the implications of what their involvement may mean. The noise of activities across justice, security — both hard and soft — military, corrections and other areas of reform is all consuming and distracting. The following conditions may grant greater coherence to SSR operations by binding them to a central strategic plan:

- **Willingness to submit to an overarching plan:** There must be a willingness to submit to an overarching plan. Even when the strategic-level vision is clear, its various activities can easily undermine one another if implemented in an uncoordinated and poorly sequenced manner. The experience of setting national development strategies, owned by the host nation, has been mixed, but presents one way out of this, as do donor compacts that hold them accountable for their actions.
- **Penalties for deviating from a strategic plan:** If there is an agreed plan for SSR, which should ideally be subsumed under the NSS of the host nation, then

deviation from that plan or an inability to deliver on the output should be addressed. For the most part, however, there are no more than UN, NATO or EU mandates, which are not detailed enough to operationalize coherent plans across a multinational intervention. As a result, a single body representing the international community should monitor the implementation of a coordinated SSR process under civilian leadership.

- **Host nation buy-in:** Understanding host nation buy-in at an operational level is exceptionally difficult, because the potential for winners and losers may seem more immediate. There is normally no high state office to protect smaller armed commanders who may see SSR as a direct threat. Additionally, provincial-level actors may use SSR to further their own ends by fashioning the political landscape to their favour. Understanding and reporting these tensions is critical to ensure that the political elite of the central host nation understand what is changing, but also so that donors know when they are changing things in a way that may catalyze instability at a later date.

## CONCLUSION

Afghanistan's security sector is, and will remain for many years to come, opaque, arbitrary and violent, irrespective of the outcomes of the war. The security sector is potentially destabilizing to the state and a risk to the population. There are many examples (Baghlan and Helmand, as examined in this paper, provide just two) where international security interventions have exposed the Afghan state to existential threats it is unprepared to meet. Additionally, there are parts of the Afghan state that resist security reform because it is an inherently political process that would alter the current political settlement were it to produce an effective result. In this context, the

prospects for reining in the security sector in a coherent manner that serves both the state and the population remain dim.

Despite this gloomy assessment, consistency and clarity on the part of the international community may help. This may mean closing off some SSR initiatives until larger pieces of the puzzle can be completed — for example, by resisting the temptation to increase an already large ANSF, which vastly exceeds the force level the Afghan state can afford over the next two decades; scaling back attempts at comprehensive reform in the security-justice overlaps, recognizing that future political changes are likely to undermine any progress made now; and focusing efforts on achieving a political settlement, which would allow ISAF to move to a non-combatant role in monitoring and supporting the end of the ongoing conflict.

The level of noise, activity and distraction in the Afghan security sector is bewildering, even for seasoned observers and practitioners. Had the international community been content to do less, but do it better and with greater clarity, a more holistic, even-handed Afghan national security sector may have emerged. As noted above, maintaining unity of effort among the donors can be a complex issue, given their varying motivations for intervention, but is critical to assist the Afghan government in implementing reform.

More widely, outside of Afghanistan, the authors' experience points to the need for carefully considered international agreement about the pace, scale and aims of SSR interventions, which are lacking in general and not just in Afghanistan. There remain significant issues regarding the political will of a government as distorted as Afghanistan's to meet the challenges of securing their populations, even without the existential threat of an armed insurgency. As a result, efforts should be made to institutionalize one international lead for SSR

processes, which, in consultation with the international community, would broker agreements about programs that can be extended to recipient countries. Without such an institution, the incoherent approach of donors will continue to the detriment of the recipient states and peoples, and will undermine the strategic interests of the international community.

## WORKS CITED

Abdul-Ahad, G. (2010). "The Taliban troop with an east London cab driver in its ranks." *The Guardian*. November 24. Available at: [www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/nov/24/the-taliban-troop-london-jihadists](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/nov/24/the-taliban-troop-london-jihadists).

Afghanistan: The London Conference (2010). "Communiqué of Afghanistan: The London Conference: Afghan Leadership, Regional Cooperation, International Partnership." Available at: [www.isaf.nato.int/images/stories/File/factsheets/Documents\\_Communique%20of%20London%20Conference%20on%20Afghanistan.pdf](http://www.isaf.nato.int/images/stories/File/factsheets/Documents_Communique%20of%20London%20Conference%20on%20Afghanistan.pdf).

Bakrania, S. and B. Lucas (2009). "The Impact of the Financial Crisis on Conflict and State Fragility in Sub-Saharan Africa." Governance and Social Development Resource Centre. Available at: [www.gsdrc.org/docs/open/EIRS6.pdf](http://www.gsdrc.org/docs/open/EIRS6.pdf).

Berlin Declaration (2004). "Communiqué of International Afghanistan Conference in Berlin, 31 March – 01 April, 2004." Available at: [www.ag-afghanistan.de/berlindeclaration.pdf](http://www.ag-afghanistan.de/berlindeclaration.pdf).

Bhatia, M., and M. Sedra (2008). *Afghanistan, Arms and Conflict: Armed Groups, Disarmament and Security in a Post-War Society*. New York: Routledge.

Chilton, S., E. Schiewek and T. Bremmers (2009). "Evaluation of the Appropriate Size of the Afghan National Police Force Manning List (Tashkil)." Kabul: IBF International Consulting.

Clements, F. A. (2003). *Conflict in Afghanistan: An Encyclopedia*. Santa Barbara: ABC-Clío.

- Cloud, D. (2010). "U.S. seeks a larger village police force in Afghanistan." *Los Angeles Times*. October 19. Available at: <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/oct/19/world/la-fg-afghan-police-20101019>.
- Demmer, U. (2010). "Under Fire in Afghanistan's Baghlan Province: The Battle of Shahabuddin." *Spiegel Online*. October 13. Available at: [www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,722605,00.html](http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,722605,00.html).
- Dennys, C. (2011). *Watching While the Frog Boils: Strategic Folly in the Afghan Security Sector*. Afghanistan Paper No. 9. Waterloo: CIGI.
- Downes, R. and R. Muggah (2010). "Breathing Room: Interim Stabilization and Security Sector Reform in the Post-war Period." In *The Future of Security Sector Reform*, edited by Mark Sedra. Pages 134–151. Waterloo: CIGI.
- Gopal, A. (2010). "The Battle for Marjah," Anand Gopal Blog. March 8. Available at: <http://anandgopal.com/the-battle-for-marjah/>.
- International Monetary Fund (2011). "Statement by an IMF Staff Visit to the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan." February 15. Available at: [www.imf.org/external/np/sec/pr/2011/pr1146.htm](http://www.imf.org/external/np/sec/pr/2011/pr1146.htm).
- JCMB (2006). Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board (JCMB) Terms of Reference. Kabul: JCMB.
- Kyrili, K., and M. Martin (2010). "The Impact of the Global Economic Crisis on the Budgets of Low-Income Countries Development." Research Report for Oxfam. July. Available at: [www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/impact-global-economic-crisis-lic-budgets-0710.pdf](http://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/impact-global-economic-crisis-lic-budgets-0710.pdf).
- McElroy, D. (2009). "Afghan governor turned 3,000 men over to Taliban." *The Telegraph*. November 20. Available at: [www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/afghanistan/6615329/Afghan-governor-turned-3000-men-over-to-Taliban.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/afghanistan/6615329/Afghan-governor-turned-3000-men-over-to-Taliban.html).
- MoF, Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (2011a). "Deputy Minister for Finance Presents 1390 National Budget to the Media." February 22. Available at: <http://mof.gov.af/en/News/532MoF>.
- (2011b). "1390 National Budget Statement Draft." Kabul: Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Ministry of Finance.
- National Security Council D & R Commission (2010). "Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP) Programme Document." July. Kabul: Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.
- Presidential Decree (2004). "Decree of the President of the Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan on the the Adoption of Electoral Law." No. 28. May 27. Available at: <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/APCITY/UNPAN018178.pdf>.
- Weisgerber, M. (2011). "No Permanent Hike in Size of Afghan Forces: Gates." *Defense News*. February 17. Available at: [www.defensenews.com/story.php?i=5737284](http://www.defensenews.com/story.php?i=5737284).

## ABOUT CIGI

The Centre for International Governance Innovation is an independent, non-partisan think tank on international governance. Led by experienced practitioners and distinguished academics, CIGI supports research, forms networks, advances policy debate and generates ideas for multilateral governance improvements. Conducting an active agenda of research, events and publications, CIGI's interdisciplinary work includes collaboration with policy, business and academic communities around the world.

CIGI's current research programs focus on four themes: the global economy; the environment and energy; global development; and global security.

CIGI was founded in 2001 by Jim Balsillie, then co-CEO of Research In Motion, and collaborates with and gratefully acknowledges support from a number of strategic partners, in particular the Government of Canada and the Government of Ontario.

Le CIGI a été fondé en 2001 par Jim Balsillie, qui était alors co-chef de la direction de Research In Motion. Il collabore avec de nombreux partenaires stratégiques et exprime sa reconnaissance du soutien reçu de ceux-ci, notamment de l'appui reçu du gouvernement du Canada et de celui du gouvernement de l'Ontario.

For more information, please visit [www.cigionline.org](http://www.cigionline.org).

## CIGI MASTHEAD

<b>Managing Editor, Publications</b>	Carol Bonnett
<b>Senior Publications Adviser</b>	Max Brem
<b>Publications Editor</b>	Jennifer Goyder
<b>Publications Coordinator</b>	Matthew Bunch
<b>Media Designer</b>	Steve Cross

## COMMUNICATIONS

<b>Communications Specialist</b>	Kevin Dias	<a href="mailto:kdias@cigionline.org">kdias@cigionline.org</a> (1 519 885 2444 x 238)
----------------------------------	------------	---

## EXECUTIVE

<b>Executive Director</b>	Thomas A. Bernes
<b>Vice President of Programs</b>	David Dewitt
<b>Vice President of Government Affairs</b>	Mohamed Hamoodi
<b>Vice President of Public Affairs</b>	Fred Kuntz

## CIGI SSR RESOURCES

### PAPER SERIES

#### SSR Issue Papers

**No. 1:** *Security Sector Reform in Haiti One Year After the Earthquake*, Isabelle Fortin (March 2011).

**No. 2:** *Sudan's Aspirational Army — A History of the Joint Integrated Units*, Aly Verjee (May 2011).

**No. 3:** *Military Justice and Impunity in Mexico's Drug War*, Kristen Bricker (September 2011).

**No. 4:** *Financing Security Sector Reform: A Review of Official Development Assistance Data*, Alejandro Pachon (January 2012).

**No. 5:** *Security Sector Governance in Pakistan: Progress, but Many Challenges Persist*, C. Christine Fair (January 2012).

#### The Afghanistan Papers

The papers in this series seek to challenge existing ideas, contribute to ongoing debates and influence international policy on issues related to Afghanistan's transition. The latest papers in the series are:

**No. 8:** *The Triple Compact: Improving Accountability in Statebuilding*, Ben Rowsell (August 2011).

**No. 9:** *Watching While the Frog Boils: Strategic Folly in the Afghan Security Sector*, Christian Dennys (October 2011).

The full series is available at: [www.cigionline.org/publications/paper-series/234](http://www.cigionline.org/publications/paper-series/234).

#### Security Sector Reform Monitor

This series tracked developments and trends in the ongoing SSR processes of five countries: Afghanistan, Burundi, Haiti, Southern Sudan and Timor-Leste.

### REPORTS

*eDialogue Summary Report: Security Sector Transformation in North Africa and the Middle East*, Mark Sedra and Geoff Burt, Special Report (August 2011).

*Security Sector Reform and the Domestic-International Security Nexus: The Role of Public Safety Canada*, Mark Sedra and Geoff Burt, Special Report (May 2011).

### THE FUTURE OF SECURITY SECTOR REFORM

*The Future of Security Sector Reform*

Edited by Mark Sedra, Waterloo: CIGI (2010).



In November 2010, CIGI released its first ebook, *The Future of Security Sector Reform*. Written by leading international practitioners in the field, it offers valuable insight into what has worked, what has not and lessons that can be drawn in development, security and state building for the future. The ebook is available on the CIGI website as a free PDF download and can also be purchased in ebook format.

### ONLINE RESOURCES

The SSR Resource Centre is a website that serves as a hub and meeting place for SSR practitioners, analysts, policy makers and interested observers from across the world. It features a blog, frequently updated events and jobs sections, country profiles, special reports and our SSR publications. In 2012, the SSR Resource Centre will launch an open-source, searchable experts directory and a collaborative SSR Research Community. The site can be found at: [www.ssrresourcecentre.org](http://www.ssrresourcecentre.org).

Security Sector Governance project page can be found at: [www.cigionline.org/project/security-sector-governance](http://www.cigionline.org/project/security-sector-governance).