Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction

REINTEGRATION OF EX-COMBATANTS:

LESSONS FROM THE U.S. EXPERIENCE IN AFGHANISTAN

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Special Inspector General
for Afghanistan Reconstruction

Reintegration of Ex-Combatants: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan is the seventh lessons learned report to be issued by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction. This report examines the five main post-2001 reintegration efforts in Afghanistan and assesses their effectiveness. Further, it examines several past local security agreements and whether they provided an opening for reintegration. The report also examines opportunities and constraints for reintegration efforts now and in the future, includes case studies of reintegration in Colombia and Somalia, and reviews the broader literature.

The report identifies lessons to inform U.S. policies and actions regarding the reintegration of ex-combatants. These lessons are relevant for Afghanistan, where the United States will likely remain engaged in the coming years, and for reintegration efforts in other conflict-affected countries. The report also provides recommendations to the Congress and executive branch agencies for improving such efforts, as well as matters for consideration for the Afghan government.

Our findings highlight the difficulty of reintegrating ex-combatants during an active insurgency in a fragile state. In Afghanistan, we found that the absence of a comprehensive political settlement or peace agreement was a key factor in the failure of prior reintegration programs targeting Taliban fighters. Other important factors were insecurity and threats facing program participants, a weak economy offering few legal economic opportunities, and limited government capacity to implement a program. None of the reintegration programs succeeded in enabling any significant number of ex-combatants to socially and economically rejoin civil society. Programs specifically targeting Taliban insurgents did not weaken the insurgency to any substantial degree or contribute meaningfully to parallel reconciliation efforts.

The United States and the Taliban have been engaged in talks to reach an agreement that could allow for a phased withdrawal of U.S. troops. Such a deal may set the stage for a viable intra-Afghan peace process, and possibly an Afghan political settlement to end decades of war. If peace efforts succeed, a critical challenge will be the reintegration of tens of thousands of former fighters into Afghan society. U.S. policymakers must consider under what conditions the United States should support reintegration efforts, and if so, determine the best approach. U.S. agencies would also need to take into account several risks to the execution of a reintegration program, including corruption, the difficulty of monitoring and evaluation, vetting challenges, and security issues. As this report lays out, these problems have plagued Afghan reintegration efforts since 2001.

SIGAR began its Lessons Learned Program in late 2014 at the urging of General John Allen, Ambassador Ryan Crocker, and other senior officials who had served in Afghanistan. Lessons learned reports such as this one comply with SIGAR's legislative mandate to provide recommendations to promote economy, efficiency, and effectiveness of U.S.-funded reconstruction programs and operations; prevent and detect waste, fraud, and abuse; and inform Congress and the Secretaries of State and Defense about reconstruction-related problems and the need for corrective action.

Congress created SIGAR as an independent agency focused solely on the Afghanistan mission and devoted exclusively to reconstruction issues. Unlike most inspectors general, which have jurisdiction only over the programs and operations of their respective departments or agencies, SIGAR has jurisdiction over all programs and operations supported with U.S. reconstruction dollars, regardless of the agency involved. Because SIGAR has the authority to look across the entire reconstruction effort, it is uniquely positioned to identify and address whole-of-government lessons.

Our lessons learned reports synthesize not only the body of work and expertise of SIGAR, but also that of other oversight agencies, government entities, current and former officials with on-the-ground experience, academic institutions, and independent scholars. The reports document what the U.S. government sought to accomplish, assess what it achieved, and evaluate the degree to which these efforts helped the United States reach its reconstruction goals in Afghanistan. They also provide recommendations to address the challenges stakeholders face in ensuring effective and sustainable reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan as well as in future contingency operations.

SIGAR's Lessons Learned Program comprises subject matter experts with considerable experience working and living in Afghanistan, aided by a team of seasoned research analysts. I want to express my deepest appreciation to the team members who produced this report. I thank the report team: Kate Bateman, project lead; Mariam Jalalzada and Matthew Rubin, senior analysts; and Jordan Schurter, student trainee. I also thank Nikolai Condee-Padunov, program manager; Tracy Content, editor; Vong Lim, visual information specialist; and Joseph Windrem, Lessons Learned Program Director. In producing its reports, the program also uses the significant skills and experience found in SIGAR's Audits, Investigations, and Research and Analysis directorates, and the Office of Special Projects. I thank all of the individuals who provided their time and effort to contribute to this report.

In addition, I am grateful to the many U.S. government officials at the Departments of Defense, State, and Treasury, and the U.S. Agency for International Development who

provided valuable insights and feedback. This report is truly a collaborative effort meant to not only identify problems, but also to learn from them and propose reasonable solutions to improve future reconstruction efforts.

I believe lessons learned reports such as this will be a key legacy of SIGAR. Through these reports, we hope to reach a diverse audience in the legislative and executive branches, at the strategic and programmatic levels, both in Washington and in the field. Using our unique interagency mandate, we intend to do everything we can to make sure the lessons from the most ambitious reconstruction effort in U.S. history are identified and applied—not just in Afghanistan, but in future conflicts and reconstruction efforts elsewhere in the world.

John F. Sopko
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FIGURES

TABLE

CALL OUT AND HIGHLIGHT BOXES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The United States and the Taliban have been engaged in talks to reach an agreement that could mark the beginning of the end of the longest war in U.S. history. The deal under discussion could allow for withdrawing U.S. troops in phases, with those phases conditioned on three other elements: a broad dialogue among the Taliban, Afghan government, political factions, and civil society to reach a settlement on the country's political future; Taliban cooperation in preventing terrorist groups from using Afghanistan as a base to launch attacks; and a permanent ceasefire. Ultimately, the U.S. goal is a sustainable political settlement that brings lasting peace and stability to Afghanistan. The Taliban's refusal to talk to the Afghan government without first negotiating with the United States has long been an obstacle to that goal. A U.S. deal with the Taliban, then, would set the stage for an intra-Afghan peace process, and possibly an Afghan political settlement.*

If peace efforts succeed, an estimated 60,000 full-time Taliban fighters may seek to return to civilian life.[1] The number of ex-combatants could be increased by efforts to demobilize other armed groups that have been engaged in fighting the Taliban, or by potential reform of Afghan security forces. After decades of war, the reintegration of former fighters and their families will be necessary for sustainable peace, and one of the most pressing challenges facing Afghan society, the government, and the economy. If ex-combatants are not accepted by their communities or are unable to find a new livelihood, they may be vulnerable to recruitment by criminal groups or terrorist organizations like the Islamic State Khorasan, the local branch of the Islamic State active in eastern Afghanistan.

As the United States explores a deal with the Taliban, and as it continues to encourage Afghan stakeholders toward a sustainable political settlement, U.S. officials—civilian and military alike—face immediate questions. Should the United States support any reintegration activities while the insurgency is still ongoing? In the event of an intra-Afghan peace agreement, what would the reintegration of ex-combatants look like, and how could U.S. agencies most effectively help? How would U.S. agencies need to revise policies to ensure they do not interfere with reintegration efforts?

In cooperation with the Afghan government and other international partners, U.S. agencies must begin now to anticipate the risks and challenges of a reintegration effort. The aim of this report, the seventh Lessons Learned Program report to be issued by SIGAR, is to help U.S. policymakers and agencies as they confront this daunting task. The report relies on 51 interviews, a review of thousands of pages of documents and academic material on this subject, and a rigorous peer review of our conclusions and recommendations.

* In the Afghan context, it is necessary to distinguish between the deal that has been the subject of recent talks between the United States and the Taliban, and an eventual intra-Afghan peace agreement that would presumably involve the Afghan government and the Taliban, as well as other political elites and Afghan civil society representatives. This report generally uses the term "deal" to refer to the objective of U.S.-Taliban negotiations, and the term "political settlement" or "intra-Afghan peace agreement" to refer to the objective of an intra-Afghan peace process.

Reintegration is hardly a new topic in Afghanistan. There have been four main reintegration programs in the country since 2001, targeting both the Taliban and state-aligned militias. Any renewed reintegration effort should not reinvent the wheel, nor repeat the mistakes of the past; it must build on the lessons from past programs and others around the world.

This report is the first and only U.S. government study to comprehensively examine all post-2001 Afghan reintegration programs and assess their effectiveness. In addition, the report draws on the broader literature on other countries' reintegration efforts, and includes case studies of Colombia and Somalia. Through this analysis, the report identifies lessons to apply to any future Afghan reintegration effort. The report also makes recommendations to the U.S. Congress and executive branch agencies for how the United States can best advance reintegration goals, both now and in the event of an intra-Afghan peace agreement.

Reintegration of fighters is as old as war itself. It is a complex, long-term process with social, economic, psychological, political, security, and humanitarian dimensions.[2] To facilitate this process in conflict-affected countries, many different actors have a role to play, including the host nation government, political parties and factions, civil society, and international partners—as well as leaders of the warring parties, ex-combatants and their families, and the communities accepting them.

After the defeat of the Taliban regime in 2001, some form of internationally supported reintegration program was in place from 2003 to 2016. Following the 2001 Bonn Agreement, two disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs sought to disband state-allied militias and illegal armed groups. These programs did not include defeated Taliban forces. After the Taliban regrouped and launched an insurgency against the newly established Afghan government and foreign military forces, the government responded in 2005 with a new reintegration program aimed at persuading the Taliban to stop fighting. Particularly from 2009 to 2012, reintegration was a core component of U.S. military strategy and of the Afghan government's peace efforts with the Taliban. Since 2002, the United States has spent roughly $65 million on programs with reintegration objectives, while total international DDR expenditures in Afghanistan were an estimated $359 million.[3]

None of these reintegration programs succeeded in enabling any significant number of ex-combatants to socially and economically rejoin civil society. Programs specifically targeting Taliban insurgents did not weaken the insurgency to any substantial degree or contribute meaningfully to parallel reconciliation efforts. The Afghan government reported that during implementation of Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP), the most expensive and ambitious program, "armed violence and insecurity in the country (as well as in APRP reintegration and community project areas) has largely increased and there has been no significant diminishment of the military capacity of armed opposition through the APRP reintegration process."[4] At the

time of this report's publication, there is no established formal reintegration program in Afghanistan.

Yet these prior reintegration activities are not necessarily analogous to reintegration efforts that may take place following a future Afghan political settlement. Past programs were usually implemented in a context of ongoing conflict, without a peace agreement.[5] Their implied objective was to help *end* the conflict. In a hypothetical post-settlement situation, efforts to facilitate the reintegration of ex-combatants would aim to help *sustain* an intra-Afghan peace agreement and *prevent* the reemergence of conflict. The latter fits the traditional concept of reintegration, which UN standards define as a post-conflict activity.[6]

An equitable and sustainable peace agreement could end much of the violence that presents the greatest threat to the reconstruction effort—and by extension, to a reintegration program. And yet, as highlighted by SIGAR's *2019 High-Risk List*, a peace agreement would not in itself end insecurity, corruption, or weak government capacity, nor would it magically produce the economic growth needed to create jobs for ex-combatants and thousands—if not millions—of Afghan refugees who are expected to return to the country.[7] In other words, many of the challenges that plagued earlier reintegration efforts would persist.

This report is laid out in six chapters:

- **Chapter 1** discusses what reintegration means and its place within DDR efforts. It also looks at how reintegration has been understood in Afghanistan, the relationship between reintegration and reconciliation, how reintegration relates to security sector reform, existing international guidelines for reintegration programs, and common challenges that these programs encounter around the world.
- **Chapter 2** examines in detail the five main reintegration efforts undertaken since 2001: the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration program (DDR, 2003–2005); the Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups program (DIAG, 2005–2011); Program Tahkim-e Sulh (PTS or Strengthening Peace Program, 2005–2011); the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP, 2010–2016); and reintegration commitments within the 2016 Hezb-i Islami Gulbuddin deal with the Afghan government (HIG, 2016–present). The chapter discusses the political and security context in which each program occurred, its structure and resourcing, challenges, and key findings.
- **Chapter 3** examines cases of local security agreements in Afghanistan, and whether these have provided an opening for reintegration.
- **Chapter 4** explores two reintegration case studies, in Colombia and Somalia, and includes insights that may apply to Afghanistan.
- **Chapter 5** looks at recent developments related to reconciliation and reintegration in Afghanistan, including Taliban perspectives, and assesses whether current conditions are conducive to a successful reintegration program.
- **Chapter 6** presents the report's main findings, and key lessons derived from

the Afghanistan experience since 2001 and the broader body of literature on reintegration. This chapter also provides the U.S. Congress, the Department of State, the Department of Defense (DOD), the Department of the Treasury, and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) with recommendations for how to best approach and advance reintegration goals in Afghanistan. These are divided into two groups: recommendations for the current environment of an ongoing insurgency without a peace agreement between the Afghan government and the Taliban, and recommendations in the event of a peace agreement.[8] Finally, this chapter provides a number of matters for consideration for the Afghan government, should it pursue a reintegration program.

While reintegration efforts are usually undertaken in the context of a wider DDR program, this report focuses on reintegration rather than disarmament and demobilization. There are several reasons for this. In the spring of 2018, General John W. Nicholson Jr., then commander of U.S. Forces – Afghanistan (USFOR-A), and U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan John R. Bass expressed interest in a SIGAR report on reintegration. Secondly, the body of literature on DDR efforts around the world deals much more extensively with disarmament and demobilization, while reintegration is comparatively poorly understood and documented. Another reason is that the two Afghan reintegration programs directed at Taliban insurgents, PTS and APRP, emphasized reintegration goals, and did not include large-scale disarmament or demobilization elements. Finally, discussions of post-settlement scenarios in Afghanistan have raised questions related to reintegration, but often assume that a large-scale disarmament effort would not be feasible in the near-term.[9]

At the same time, the three components of DDR are inherently interconnected. Therefore, this report focuses on the structures, resources, processes, and outcomes related to reintegration, while also discussing aspects of disarmament and demobilization necessary to the analysis of the programs.

We identify 14 major findings from our analysis of prior Afghan reintegration efforts, case studies of such efforts in Colombia and Somalia, and the broader literature on reintegration:

1. The absence of a comprehensive political settlement or peace agreement was a key factor in the failure of prior Afghan reintegration programs that targeted Taliban fighters.
2. Early Afghan government and international efforts to demobilize and reintegrate state-aligned militias failed in part because U.S. forces were simultaneously partnered with the militias for security and other services, empowering commanders and groups that were supposed to be disbanding.
3. Other important factors in the failure of Afghan reintegration programs were insecurity and threats facing program participants, a weak economy offering few legal economic opportunities, and limited government capacity for program implementation.

4. The U.S. government saw prior reintegration efforts targeting the Taliban primarily as a tool to fracture and weaken the insurgency, which undermined the potential for those efforts to promote peace and reconciliation.
5. Prior reintegration programs did not succeed in fracturing or weakening the Taliban to any substantial degree, and no firm evidence exists that the programs pressured Taliban leadership to pursue peace negotiations.
6. In the past, coalition and Afghan forces were unable to provide adequate security for former combatants and their families once the combatant had participated in a reintegration program. Ex-combatants and their families faced risks of retaliatory attacks from the Taliban, Afghan security forces, and individuals or groups in the communities into which they were reintegrating.
7. Prior monitoring and evaluation systems were inadequate for measuring the outcomes or effectiveness of reintegration programs in Afghanistan.
8. None of the four main reintegration programs entailed a long-term effort to assist former combatants to transition to a sustainable alternative livelihood. Benefits were mainly confined to short-term transition assistance packages and vocational training programs that did not match the former combatants' needs or local economic realities.
9. While local Afghan security agreements temporarily reduced violence, they did not create conditions conducive to reintegration.
10. The current environment of ongoing conflict is not conducive to a successful reintegration program.
11. Even today, the U.S. government has no lead agency or office for issues concerning the reintegration of ex-combatants. In Afghanistan, this has contributed to a lack of clarity about reintegration goals and their relation to reconciliation.
12. Globally, the factors that contribute to an individual ex-combatant's reintegration into society are poorly understood. There have been few attempts to gather and analyze the data needed to identify which interventions contribute to successful reintegration.
13. Even in Colombia, a country with greater economic resources and experience with reintegration programming than Afghanistan, reintegration has proved an elusive goal. Despite Colombia's years of experience and well-established administrative structures for reintegration, the Colombian government has struggled to reintegrate thousands of demobilized fighters from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).
14. Reintegration efforts in Somalia demonstrate the severe limitations—related to vetting, protection of former combatants, and monitoring and evaluation—of trying to implement a program in the midst of an insurgency.

LESSONS

The report identifies 10 lessons to inform any future reintegration efforts in Afghanistan:

1. A reintegration program runs a high risk of failure in the absence of a political settlement or peace agreement.

2. Reintegration programs may not succeed in weakening or fracturing an insurgency, and can be counterproductive to the goal of reaching a political settlement.
3. Partnering with militias to achieve short-term security objectives can seriously undermine wider peace-building goals, including demobilization and reintegration efforts.
4. Without adequate physical security guarantees, former combatants are unlikely to join reintegration programs.
5. Extensive monitoring and evaluation systems are necessary to assess the effectiveness and sustainability of reintegration activities, which should inform changes in a program's design and delivery of benefits.
6. Community participation is important to a successful reintegration effort.
7. A thorough needs assessment is important to ensure that assistance matches ex-combatants' needs and local economic realities.
8. In an environment of mistrust, the credibility of reintegration programs and implementers relies in large part on creating realistic expectations and delivering benefits to former combatants on time.
9. Grievance resolution is poorly understood and likely to be difficult to implement, which can lead to an overemphasis on economic incentives for ex-combatants.
10. Local security agreements are unlikely to serve as mechanisms for effective reintegration in the midst of an insurgency.

RECOMMENDATIONS

SIGAR found that the successful reintegration into society of tens of thousands of former Taliban combatants—as well as thousands more fighters from state-aligned militias and illegal armed groups—must happen if Afghanistan is to achieve peace and stability, a goal crucial to U.S., coalition, and Afghan interests. The following recommendations intend to help the U.S. Congress and executive branch agencies develop positions and policies on the reintegration of ex-combatants in Afghanistan—both in the current environment of an ongoing insurgency, and after an intra-Afghan peace agreement is reached.

Recommendations Regarding Reintegration without a Peace Agreement between the Afghan Government and the Taliban

1. In the current environment of an ongoing Taliban insurgency, the Congress may wish to consider not funding a program for the reintegration of ex-combatants because the Afghan government and the Taliban have not agreed to terms for reintegration.
2. Because of the difficulty in vetting, protecting, and tracking combatants who claim they want to stop fighting Afghan and coalition forces, DOD, State, and USAID should not implement a reintegration program amid the ongoing insurgency.
3. In the event of negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban, State should encourage negotiators on both sides to determine how former combatants will be reintegrated—socially, economically, militarily, and politically—into society.
4. State, USAID, and DOD should each designate an existing office to lead and advise on reintegration matters. These offices should develop in-house expertise on

international best practices on the socioeconomic, political, and military aspects of DDR processes.

Recommendations Regarding Reintegration after a Peace Agreement between the Afghan Government and the Taliban

5. Because a wider post-conflict recovery strategy is essential to successful reintegration of ex-combatants, the Congress may wish to consider funding broad post-settlement development programs in Afghanistan.
6. The Congress may wish to consider funding a reintegration program if: (a) the Afghan government and the Taliban sign a peace agreement that provides a framework for reintegration of ex-combatants; (b) a significant reduction in overall violence occurs; and (c) a strong monitoring and evaluation system is established for reintegration efforts.
7. Treasury should ensure that State, USAID, and DOD are in no way prohibited from providing assistance to areas where beneficiaries were or are affiliated with the Taliban. This may entail removing Taliban members from Treasury's Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons list, or providing licenses to enable assistance to those areas.
8. State and USAID should ensure that U.S.-funded development programs in Afghanistan take into account the circumstances and needs of former combatants and their families.
9. The U.S. government should encourage and support an Afghan-led transitional justice process, which will be critical to underpin successful long-term reintegration.

Matters for Consideration for the Afghan Government

10. Reintegration efforts should be directed at not only former Taliban fighters, but also members of state-aligned militias and illegal armed groups.
11. A monitoring and evaluation system should assess performance of a reintegration program, as well as the impact and outcomes of the program.
12. Any information gathered as part of a monitoring and evaluation system should be shared with third-party researchers working to better understand the impact that reintegration programs have on individual ex-combatants and the communities they live in.
13. Communities receiving ex-combatants and their families should participate in the design and execution of reintegration efforts, and should also receive benefits from those efforts.
14. Reintegration efforts, whether pursued through targeted programs or wider development assistance, should support a long-term transition to an alternative livelihood, not just provide short-term assistance.
15. During intra-Afghan peace negotiations, international DDR specialists should be consulted regarding any future reintegration effort.

United Nations photo

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS REINTEGRATION AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

This report defines "reintegration" as the long-term process of an ex-combatant gaining acceptance from his or her community and finding a sustainable livelihood. As highlighted in SIGAR's *2019 High-Risk List*, if the Afghan government and Taliban reach a peace agreement, an estimated 60,000 Taliban fighters—or possibly up to 150,000—will need to find a new livelihood. Any efforts to demobilize and reintegrate members of other armed groups who have been fighting the Taliban, or to reform the Afghan army and police, would further add to the pool of ex-combatants.[10] If ex-combatants are not able to reintegrate, they may be more vulnerable to recruitment by criminal groups or terrorist organizations like the Islamic State Khorasan (IS-K), the local branch of the Islamic State active in eastern Afghanistan.[11] Thus the reintegration of former fighters into society—a complex and long-term process with social, economic, political, security, and humanitarian dimensions—will be critical for Afghanistan to achieve lasting peace and stability, a goal crucial to U.S., coalition, and Afghan interests.[12]

The term "reintegration" is commonly used to refer to the final phase of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR). Over the past three decades, DDR has assumed a central role in the international community's approach to peacebuilding, reconstruction,

and stabilization efforts at war's end.[13] DDR is meant to set the conditions for durable peace, recovery, and development, and "aims to deal with the post-conflict security problem that arises when combatants are left without livelihoods and support networks."[14] Reintegration programs aim not only to ensure that individual ex-combatants do not revert to violence, but, at the macro level, to contribute to peacebuilding, prevent conflict recurrence, and reestablish the state's monopoly over the use of force.[15]

Defining Key Terms of DDR

The United Nations defines the elements of DDR as:

Disarmament is the collection, documentation, control and disposal of small arms, ammunition, explosives and light and heavy weapons of combatants and often also of the civilian population. Disarmament also includes the development of responsible arms management programs.

Demobilization is the formal and controlled discharge of active combatants from armed forces or other armed groups. The first stage of demobilization may extend from the processing of individual combatants in temporary centers to the massing of troops in camps designated for this purpose (cantonment sites, encampments, assembly areas or barracks). The second stage of demobilization encompasses the support package provided to the demobilized, which is called reinsertion.

Reinsertion is the assistance offered to ex-combatants during demobilization but prior to the longer-term process of reintegration. Reinsertion is a form of transitional assistance to help cover the basic needs of ex-combatants and their families and can include transitional safety allowances, food, clothes, shelter, medical services, short-term education, training, employment and tools. While reintegration is a long-term continuous social and economic process of development, reinsertion is short-term material and/or financial assistance to meet immediate needs, and can last up to one year.

Reintegration is the process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income. Reintegration is essentially a social and economic process with an open time frame primarily taking place in communities at the local level. It is part of the general development of a country and a national responsibility, and often necessitates long-term external assistance.[16]

The UN generally takes the lead international role in planning and implementing DDR programs. UN efforts are often on behalf of and in support to the host nation, which may not have the capacity or legitimacy to implement a reintegration program on its own.[17]

Within the U.S. government, there is little formal guidance on the roles and responsibilities of various agencies with regard to DDR activities. A major 2011 report on DDR and security sector reform by the National Defense University emphasized that "no one agency or bureau has the lead for all DDR-related issues, and the actual expertise is limited, scattered throughout the government, and unfortunately often not in the agency or bureau that appears to be the coordination lead." The report also stated

that "there is no commonly understood process for DDR planning."[18] In an interview with SIGAR, Steve Brooking, special advisor to the Special Representative of the Secretary General, UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), said that the United States has deferred to the UN on technical DDR issues in the past.[19]

In Afghanistan, "reintegration" has been used by the U.S. and Afghan governments in ways that depart from the formal UN definition of the term.[20] Under the two programs targeting insurgents, Program Tahkim-e Sulh (PTS) and the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP), reintegration activities could be more accurately understood as co-option or accommodation. This inconsistency arose mainly from the fact that PTS and APRP were undertaken in the midst of conflict, not in a post-conflict context where parties mutually agreed that their fighters would demobilize and transition to civilian life. Amid ongoing military operations, Afghan government and coalition efforts to reintegrate insurgents became de facto efforts to persuade Taliban fighters to abandon the insurgency.

For more than a decade, the Department of Defense (DOD) and other U.S. agencies primarily saw reintegration as a counterinsurgency tool to degrade and diminish the insurgency by "peeling away" fighters.[21] While the UN definition emphasized acquiring peacetime civilian status and a livelihood, U.S. officials have used the term reintegration to mean individuals or small groups of fighters either laying down arms or agreeing to work with the host government. This notion of reintegration can include efforts to ease former fighters' transition into civilian life, but it occurs without any peace settlement in place. More recently, statements by General John W. Nicholson Jr., then-U.S. Secretary of Defense James Mattis, and Lisa Curtis, the deputy assistant to the president and senior director for South and Central Asia at the National Security Council, echoed this counterinsurgency emphasis—but also reflected a shift toward an appreciation for the broader goals of reconciliation (see pp. 77–81).[22]

For more than a decade, DOD and other U.S. agencies primarily saw reintegration as a counterinsurgency tool to degrade and diminish the insurgency by "peeling away" fighters.

REINTEGRATION AND RECONCILIATION

A source of confusion has been the distinction between reintegration and reconciliation in the context of the insurgency. In theory, "reintegration" has generally referred to efforts to get Taliban foot soldiers, small groups, and local commanders to lay down arms, while "reconciliation" referred to strategic or political negotiations at leadership levels. In practice, the terms have been used more loosely: rank and file insurgents have been described as "reconciling" with the government; conversely, "reintegration" sometimes has been understood as any figure associated with the insurgency, from foot soldier to senior leader, coming to live peacefully in areas under government control.[23]

More broadly, the concepts of reconciliation and reintegration are closely related. At a societal level, reconciliation can be defined as a transformative, long-term process in which "relations among groups affected by conflict" are restored, and trust is rebuilt among citizens and between the state and citizens.[24] Dr. John Paul Lederach, a University of Notre Dame professor and practitioner in international peacebuilding, asserts that reconciliation includes "four essential components: truth (acknowledgment of wrong and validation of painful loss), mercy (the need for forgiveness and acceptance), justice (the search for individual and group rights for social restructuring and restitution), and peace (the need for interdependence, well-being, and security)."[25] In this sense, reconciliation is necessary to the successful reintegration of ex-combatants; both imply social healing and the community's acceptance of former combatants. The narrower concept of political reconciliation—in which formerly hostile parties establish a new working relationship—enables reintegration by specifying the conditions under which warring parties agree to abandon violence.[26]

This report's analysis interweaves these concepts by placing particular reintegration programs in the larger context of what was occurring in terms of political reconciliation.

LINKS BETWEEN DDR AND SECURITY SECTOR REFORM

Security sector reform can be defined as "the set of policies, plans, programs, and activities that a government undertakes to improve the way it provides safety, security, and justice."

Source: United States Institute of Peace and United States Army Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute, *Guiding Principles for Stabilization and Reconstruction*, 2009, p. 6-51.

In a post-conflict environment, security sector reform (SSR) often includes the rebuilding or restructuring and professionalization of the national army and police. Both SSR and DDR are critical elements of peacebuilding because if effective, they strengthen the state's monopoly on the use of force.[27]

According to a United States Institute of Peace (USIP) report, "The natural point of intersection for DDR and SSR is in the reintegration phase, as many ex-combatants find employment in the security apparatus that SSR creates."[28] Although recruitment or integration of ex-combatants into state security forces is not part of the UN definition of (civilian) reintegration, in practice there are benefits to linking these processes. A DDR process will produce demobilized fighters, some of whom may be absorbed into the state's security forces.[29]

Integration of ex-combatants into security forces relies on decisions about the size, composition, vetting, and training of security forces. Approaches to military integration in conflict-affected countries have varied. Some have merged demobilized insurgent fighters and state security forces into new armies. Another approach has been to absorb insurgent forces into existing government armed forces, which is more likely to occur after a military defeat of an insurgency, or in a negotiated settlement where government forces have the upper hand. Both approaches involve political challenges. As old rivalries and allegiances remain, warring parties may refuse to fully demobilize and the armed forces may remain polarized by ethnic and political tensions.[30]

Insurgents in Badghis Province surrender their weapons as part of the reintegration effort. (ISAF photo)

One comprehensive study on integrating former rebels into security forces stressed that external assistance was most effective when it prioritized helping the decision-making parties in their own process instead of attempting to impose template solutions.[31]

An eventual peace agreement between the Afghan government and the Taliban could provide for some number of Taliban fighters to be integrated into national security forces.[32] Negotiating the terms of such integration is likely to be highly contentious. While integration following a peace agreement would take place within an agreed framework, some prior reintegration efforts in Afghanistan also allowed former Taliban fighters to join Afghan local security forces. This report considers several issues and challenges related to those efforts.

STATE OF KNOWLEDGE ON DDR

According to its guidelines on DDR, the UN distinguishes between a reintegration *program* and the larger *process* of reintegration, noting that programs "attempt to facilitate the longer-term reintegration process by providing time-bound, targeted assistance."[33] In other words, successful reintegration means a former combatant has found a sustainable livelihood and been accepted by the community; a reintegration program aims to assist the combatant in achieving those goals.

Successful reintegration means a former combatant has found a sustainable livelihood and been accepted by the community; a reintegration program aims to assist the combatant in achieving those goals.

A local elder finalizes negotiations with U.S. Marines during the dedication of a new school at his compound near Nawa, Helmand Province. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Lance Cpl. Justin Williams)

Worldwide, more than 60 DDR programs have been launched since the late 1980s. They have been undertaken in many contexts, including after a peace agreement and amid counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations. Although DDR programs have been a pillar of international peacebuilding and stabilization efforts, results from those programs have been mixed—and reintegration in particular has been "castigated for being the weakest link in the DDR chain."[34] For example, while DDR processes in Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Afghanistan have been seen as failures, those in Colombia, Mozambique, and Sierra Leone have been considered relatively successful. However, "success" in these cases referred to the initial phases of disarmament and demobilization, measured by number of weapons collected and fighters handing over their weapons and committing to return to civilian life. The reintegration component, by contrast, was not viewed as a success; there is little or no evidence that DDR programs in these countries had an impact on ex-combatants' reintegration. Factors that inhibited reintegration included waning political support for the reintegration component of the DDR process (as in Colombia), the provision of only short-term reintegration packages (in Mozambique), a mismatch between skills training provided and labor market demand (in Sierra Leone), and overall limited economic opportunities in these countries. In some cases, some ex-combatants, frustrated by their lack of formal education and job skills, turned to criminal activity.[35]

Given the fragility and complexity of post-conflict and conflict situations, this uneven track record is not surprising. A DDR process can help set the conditions for peace, security, and development, but it cannot substitute for inadequate political commitment by the parties to demobilize and reintegrate, or for a lack of consensus on a policy framework for DDR.[36]

Despite the number of DDR programs to date, we know very little about what works to achieve reintegration. The factors that account for an individual ex-combatant's ability to reintegrate are poorly understood. There have been few attempts to systematically gather and analyze the individual, group, and community-level data needed to identify determinants to successful reintegration.[37] As one expert on reintegration put it, "There are some lessons learned about what doesn't work, but we don't know with confidence what works, under which conditions, and why."[38]

We know very little about what works to achieve reintegration. The factors that account for an individual ex-combatant's ability to reintegrate are poorly understood.

Partly, that is because the complex environments in which DDR is conducted—including those with ongoing military operations—pose serious barriers to collecting data and conducting monitoring and evaluation.[39] This means that even if a society or community has experienced a comparatively successful process of reintegrating former fighters, it is difficult to assess the extent to which a DDR program contributed to that outcome. One influential study on Sierra Leone found no evidence that the country's DDR program helped individual fighters demobilize and reintegrate. That study concluded that "a combatant's experience of the war—in particular, the extent to which he or she engaged in abusive practices—is the most important determinant of [his or her] acceptance" by the community once the conflict is over; and combatants who committed "widespread human rights abuses face significant difficulty" being accepted back into their family and community.[40] Donor countries and international organizations are trying to understand and assess the efficacy of reintegration programs.[41]

At the same time, there have been numerous efforts to draw lessons learned and establish best practice for reintegration programming. In 2006, the UN issued extensive guidelines for DDR, known as the Integrated DDR Standards (IDDRS). The IDDRS drew together knowledge based on decades of experience, and aimed to improve the planning, implementation, and coordination of DDR processes across UN offices and agencies.[42] Other key documents include the 2006 final report of the Stockholm Initiative on Disarmament Demobilisation Reintegration, and the 2014 UN Operational Guide to the IDDRS.[43]

The IDDRS, which assumes a post-conflict setting, identifies four preconditions for DDR to be effective:

- "the signing of a negotiated peace agreement that provides a legal framework for DDR;
- trust in the peace process;
- willingness of the parties to the conflict to engage in DDR;
- and a minimum guarantee of security."[44]

While Afghanistan's post-2001 reintegration efforts frequently took place in the absence of all these preconditions, it is possible that a comprehensive, intra-Afghan peace agreement could produce more favorable conditions.[45]

It is also instructive to examine the elements which the UN guidelines, the Stockholm Initiative report, and other academic and government papers present as best practices in DDR generally, and reintegration in particular. These form a basis for understanding various aspects of reintegration programs, as well as common risks and challenges associated with them.

The following is a condensed set of principles and best practices highlighted in the literature.

Best Practices in DDR

- **DDR processes should be understood as inherently political**, for "they directly affect a [warring] party's ability to pursue its interests via coercive means and its ability to defend itself."[46] DDR should be integrated into larger political processes to consolidate peace and be responsive to local political dynamics.[47]
- **Peace negotiations should determine the details of planned DDR processes as early as possible**. This helps to ensure that parties to the conflict are aware of their responsibilities and have a stake in the design and eventual implementation of DDR.[48]
- **Practitioners should work according to realistic goals and manage expectations** around what a reintegration program can achieve.[49]
- **Reintegration programs should be nationally and locally owned as far as possible, while taking into account problems—including corruption risks—associated with weak host government legitimacy and institutional capacity.** Due to such risks, international actors must take strong steps to ensure adequate transparency and accountability.[50]
- **External assistance should be in support of the nationally and locally responsible entities**, with "participatory, inclusive and transparent planning."[51] External actors can also help parties overcome problems of compliance by monitoring and in some cases enforcing observance of an agreement.[52]
- **Reintegration efforts should be closely linked to or embedded within other elements of the peace process**, including security sector reform, transitional justice, and wider development efforts. Reintegration therefore requires coordination among many different host nation and international entities.[53]
- **Community buy-in is critical**. The communities receiving ex-combatants should be involved in planning processes and should have access to program benefits, in order to avoid fueling resentment toward ex-combatants and their families.[54]
- **Program design and planning should include detailed analyses and assessments on a range of topics**, including the nature of the conflict and how it ended; the profiles of ex-combatants and communities that will receive them; their experiences during the conflict; the political, security, and economic situation; the capacity of actors carrying out DDR; and resources available.[55] This requires

Afghan Local Police recruits in a file formation in Farah Province. (DOD photo)

extensive data collection and analysis.

- **Clear eligibility criteria should be set for participation in a reintegration program, and a verification system put in place** to determine individuals' eligibility.[56]
- **A monitoring and evaluation system should be in place from the beginning**, to assess what kind of data is collected, how it is collected, program activities, what those programs produced, and what their outcomes and impacts were.[57]
- **International program managers should devise an exit strategy for how the host nation will eventually take over and sustain reintegration efforts,** given that the long-term process of reintegrating ex-combatants will extend beyond any one program.[58]
- **Consistent, multi-year funding for reintegration efforts should be established early**. Planning and implementation should take into account a realistic assessment of what donors will provide and when.[59]

While these principles and practices outline an ideal approach to reintegration, they must be considered alongside serious risks and challenges that may undermine reintegration programs. These are summarized below.

Key Risks and Challenges

- **Peace agreements may not adequately address DDR issues, or secure political commitment to a DDR process**. Negotiations between formerly hostile parties on a DDR process can be exceedingly difficult. Not only do they arouse strong emotions, they raise existential questions about the future of a group and its identity. Moreover, the information necessary to determine details of a DDR process will probably not be readily available. After an agreement has been signed,

Afghan construction workers help build the Kabul National Cricket Stadium. (USAID photo)

parties to the conflict may not trust each other to follow through on demobilization and reintegration.[60]

- **In post-conflict environments, host nation legitimacy and capacity are usually weak**. Government institutions will likely struggle to administer and deliver the benefits of a reintegration program, creating potential delays and rendering national and local ownership difficult.[61]
- **A reintegration program will be vulnerable to systemic corruption within weak institutions**. Particular factions may use program benefits as a source of patronage, which can undermine the program's credibility and further entrench the very command-and-control relationships that DDR seeks to break down.[62]
- **A weak licit economy is unlikely to offer many sustainable livelihood options to ex-combatants and their families**. Even after receiving vocational training or short-term reinsertion assistance, ex-combatants will probably face limited employment prospects.[63]
- **It is difficult to synchronize and balance the delivery of benefits to individual ex-combatants and receiving communities**. Yet failing to do so can inflame tensions between former fighters and communities.[64]
- **DDR programs can inadvertently encourage predatory and abusive behavior by ex-combatants**, who might assume program benefits will be directed toward the most violent or feared groups.[65]
- **It is extremely difficult to assess the impact of DDR programs**. Program evaluations often measure impact by looking at employment and income data for program participants. However, these have rarely compared that data to a control group of ex-combatants who did *not* participate in the program. Thus, there is little evidence for whether a DDR program was the causal factor in an ex-combatant's successful economic reintegration.[66] Since tracking participants over a long period is also difficult, it is hard

to assess whether outcomes hold over time. Further, assessing program impact on individuals' employment levels does not answer whether DDR is meeting other critical goals, such as preventing conflict recurrence, reducing crime and violence, increasing political participation, and healing the psychosocial wounds of war.[67]

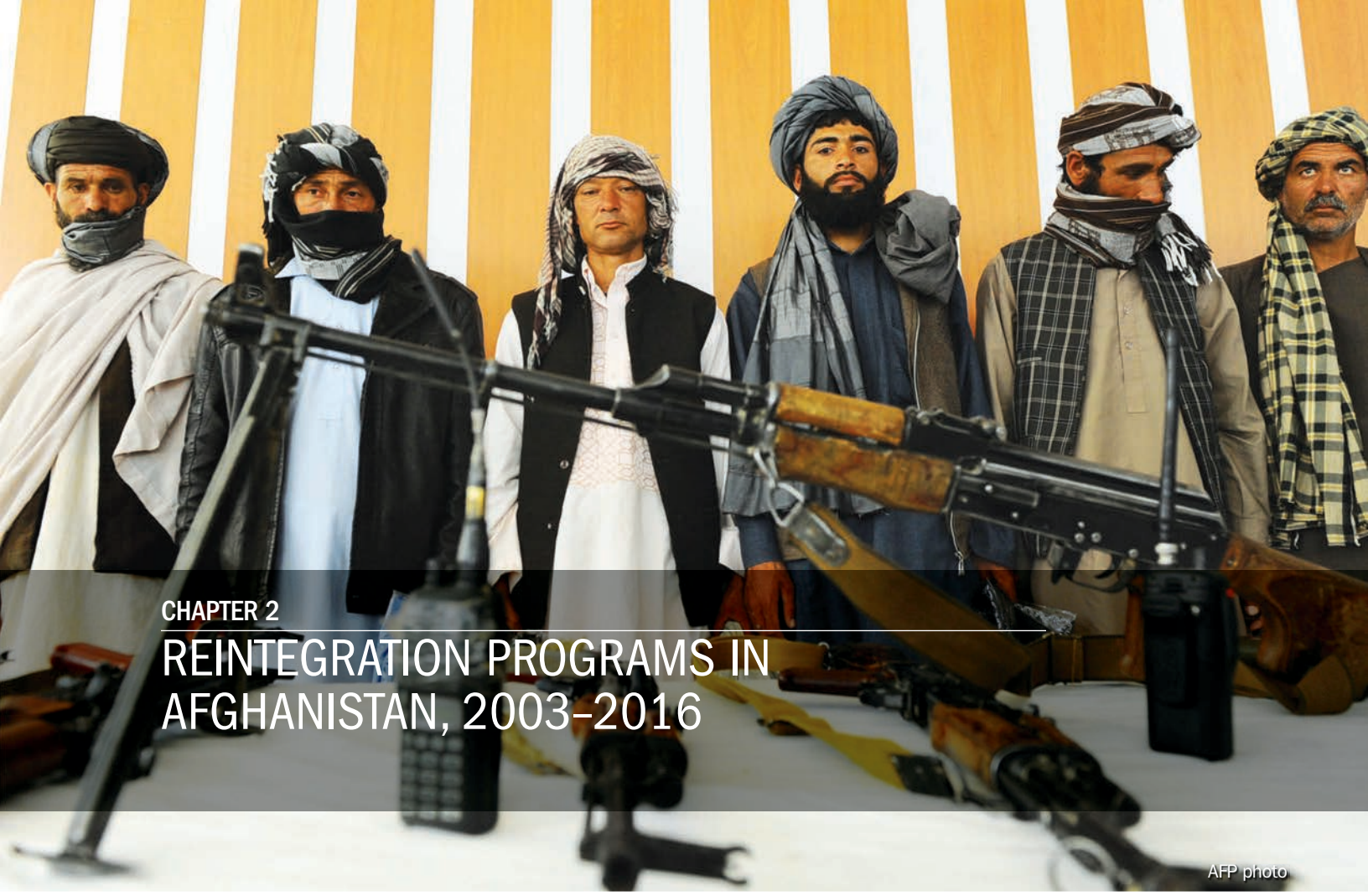
- **Monitoring and evaluation efforts are often dependent on access to data that is not easily available or willingly shared by parties to the conflict**, such as ex-combatants' backgrounds and experiences of the war, detailed local land and labor market analyses, and community perceptions of former fighters. That lack of data makes it difficult to design a program to fit local contexts and to determine whether a program is working or not.[68]
- **Serious funding problems often plague UN-led reintegration programming, which relies on voluntary contributions by donor states**.[69] DDR programs themselves usually face a funding gap period of 8 to 12 months between when pledges are made and delivered.[70] Further, the UN and World Bank routinely encounter challenges in effectively dispersing funds.

In a 2010 report, the UN acknowledged that DDR was being implemented in increasingly complex settings, in many cases where its four preconditions were not in place—as in Afghanistan, Côte d'Ivoire, Haiti, and Liberia.[71] Other analysts likewise noted the parameters of DDR often expanded in tandem with a widening scope of peacekeeping mandates.[72] Scholar Vanda Felbab-Brown identified serious challenges in places where DDR is pursued alongside military operations and counterterrorism activities. These challenges include preserving the neutrality of DDR implementers, obtaining the necessary local knowledge for effective implementation, and ensuring accountability.[73] The UN has not yet provided updated guidance more specifically tailored to contexts in which military operations are ongoing. However, the UN is currently revising the IDDRS and will present new standards in November 2019.[74]

There is evidence that reintegration activities are often neglected, with no entity empowered or funded to lead them. A 2018 UN peacekeeping report stated:

> The Special Committee also notes the need for committed investment by national actors in long-term reintegration programmes that extend beyond the peacekeeping cycle, the lack of which puts investment and gains in the disarmament and demobilization phases at risk. The Special Committee urges improved coordination and integration among United Nations entities to strengthen support, where necessary, to national governments in the reintegration phase.[75]

This evolution and reassessment of DDR practices form the backdrop against which Afghanistan might embark on renewed reintegration efforts after a peace agreement.



AFP photo

CHAPTER 2

REINTEGRATION PROGRAMS IN AFGHANISTAN, 2003–2016

From 2003 to 2016, some form of Afghan reintegration program was in place (see Figure 1 on the following page). The first two targeted state-aligned and non-state armed groups, while the second two programs were directed at Taliban insurgents (see Table 1). While the programs differed in their design, benefits offered to former fighters and communities, and level of international support, they shared many of the same challenges: the absence of a comprehensive peace agreement, insecurity, lack of political will, fraud and corruption, and poor monitoring and evaluation, among others. Reintegration programs failed to enable any significant number of ex-combatants to socially and economically rejoin civil society. They also did little to reduce levels of violence and the number of armed groups.

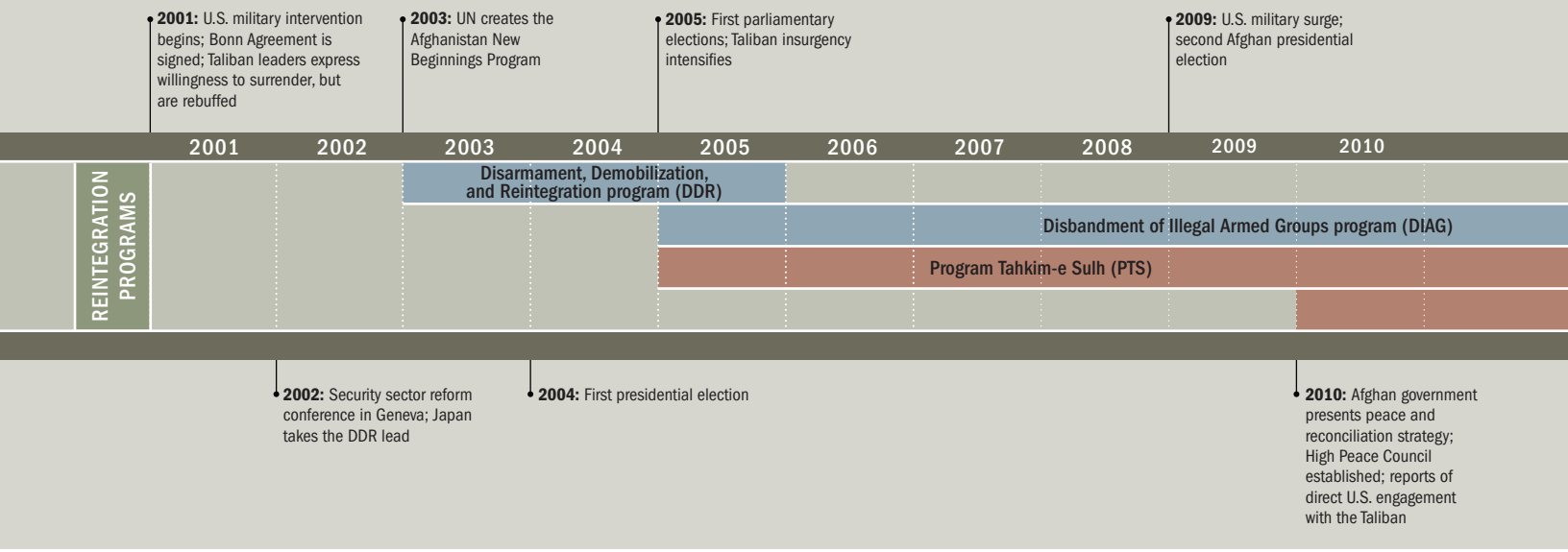
TABLE 1

REINTEGRATION PROGRAM BY TARGETED GROUP

Reintegration programs targeting state-aligned and non-state militias	Reintegration programs targeting insurgents
Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration program (DDR, 2003–2005)	Program Tahkim-e Sulh (PTS, 2005–2011)
Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups program (DIAG, 2005–2011)	Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP, 2010–2016)

FIGURE 1

A TIMELINE OF REINTEGRATION PROGRAMS AND MAJOR EVENTS



Source: Anand Gopal, *The Battle for Afghanistan: Militancy and Conflict in Kandahar*, New America Foundation, November 2010, p. 8; Bette Dam, *The Secret Life of Mullah Omar*, Zomia Center, 2019, p. 7; SIGAR, *Reconstructing the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan*, SIGAR-17-62-LL, September 2017, p. 14; Caroline A. Hartzell, *Missed Opportunities: The Impact of DDR on SSR in Afghanistan*, United States Institute of Peace, April 2011, p. 4; "A Guide to the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP)," *Pajhwok*, March 20, 2012; London Conference, "Afghanistan: The London Conference," communiqué, January 28, 2010, p. 4; James Dobbins and Carter Malkasian, "Time to Negotiate in Afghanistan: How to Talk to the Taliban," *Foreign Affairs*, June 16, 2015; Mona K. Sheikh and Maja T. J. Greenwood, *Taliban Talks Past, Present and Prospects For The US, Afghanistan and Pakistan*, Danish Institute for International Studies, June 2013, p. 15; Dan Roberts and Emma Graham, "Taliban peace talks: 'Peace and reconciliation' negotiations to take place in Qatar," *Guardian*, June 19, 2013; Marc Grossman, "Talking to the Taliban 2011–2012: A Reflection," *PRISM*, vol. 4, no. 4, (2015), pp. 22, 28, 34.

THE DISARMAMENT, DEMOBILIZATION, AND REINTEGRATION PROGRAM, 2003–2005

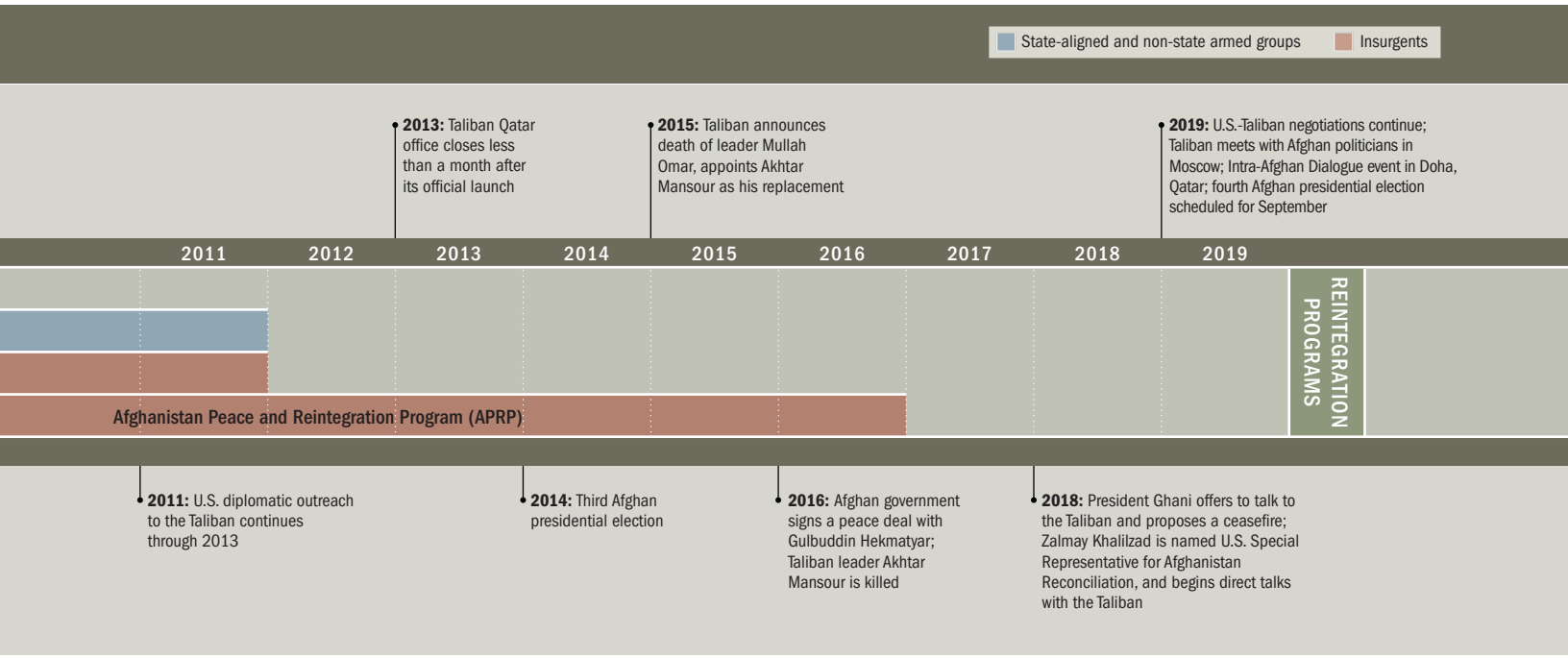
The Bonn Agreement, signed on December 5, 2001, established an interim Afghan administration and put in place a transitional roadmap to draft a new constitution and hold presidential and parliamentary elections.

The Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration program was Afghanistan's first attempt at reintegration in the wake of the Bonn Agreement.[76] Implementation of the DDR program, however, did not meet the demands of the thousands of Afghan Militia Forces (AMF) fighters who put down their guns in return for promises of integration into state security forces, political inclusion, and livelihood opportunities outside of fighting. In particular, the reintegration component of DDR was not as well planned or carried out as were the disarmament and demobilization phases. As a result, ex-combatants were not provided with the necessary tools to reintegrate into an economy that already had few opportunities to offer.

Genesis of the DDR Program

Following the Taliban's defeat in 2001, a number of armed groups that had fought against the Taliban attempted to translate their military success into economic and political influence. This scramble for power among competing local and regional militias posed a significant threat to the stability of the emergent Afghan state.[77]

The UN was keen to include a detailed DDR provision in the Bonn Agreement. Such a provision was strongly opposed, however, by representatives of the Northern



Source (continued): "Taliban close Qatar office in dispute with U.S., Afghan government over signage," *CBS News*, July 9, 2013; Sune Engel Rasmussen, "Taliban officially announce death of Mullah Omar," *Guardian*, July 30, 2015; Borhan Osman, *Peace with Hekmatyar: What does it mean for battlefield and politics?*, Afghanistan Analysts Network, September 29, 2016, pp. 2–3; "Taliban leader Mullah Akhtar Mansour killed, Afghans confirm," *BBC News*, May 22, 2016; The Embassy of Afghanistan, "President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani's Statement at the 2nd Kabul Process Conference," February 27, 2018, accessed September 2018; "Zalmay Khalilzad, Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Term of Appointment: 09/21/2018 to present," U.S. Department of State, accessed February 26, 2019; SIGAR, *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress*, January 30, 2019, p. 112; Andrew Higgins and Mujib Mashal, "In Moscow, Afghan Peace Talks Without the Afghan Government," *New York Times*, February 4, 2019; Mujib Mashal, "The U.S. and the Taliban Are Near a Deal. Here is What It Could Look Like," *New York Times*, August 13, 2019; Shereena Qazi, "Intra-Afghan talks with Taliban under way in Qatar," *Al Jazeera*, July 7, 2019.

Alliance, which stood to lose power if subjected to a DDR process.[78] Consequently, the Bonn Agreement included only an abstract reference to disarmament: "Upon the official transfer of power, all *mujahedeen*, Afghan armed forces and armed groups in the country shall come under the command and control of the Interim Authority, and be reorganized according to the requirements of the new Afghan security and armed forces."[79] The Bonn Agreement only mentioned reintegration once, in reference to the integration of mujahedeen fighters into the new Afghan security forces.[80]

After Bonn, the faction-based militias that helped U.S. forces topple the Taliban were formally recognized and designated as the Afghan Militia Forces, and placed under the nominal control of the Ministry of Defense (MOD). The AMF consisted primarily of individuals and groups loyal to the Northern Alliance and was intended to provide security until a formal Afghan National Army (ANA) could be created.[81] At the time, Northern Alliance leaders were appointed as ministers of defense and interior.[82]

In April 2002, the Group of Eight nations met in Geneva to decide on responsibilities for five pillars of security sector reform. Japan took the lead on DDR.[83] However, while Japan served as the principal funder for DDR, it deferred most of the design and implementation responsibility to the UN, and did not take an active role in steering the program. It was nearly a year before the DDR program was established. In February

Former Afghan President Hamid Karzai (U.S. Embassy Kabul photo by Dan Wilkinson)

2003 at a conference in Tokyo, donors announced the creation of the UN-administered Afghanistan New Beginnings Program (ANBP). This program aimed to disband the AMF and support the classification and destruction of weapons and ammunition. The DDR program, which was a component of ANBP, sought to break linkages between AMF commanders and their troops, help former combatants transition from military to civilian life, and collect, store, and deactivate AMF weapons.[84]

EARLY TALIBAN RECONCILIATION OVERTURES

Nearly two decades after the 9/11 attacks and U.S. forces' intervention in Afghanistan to pursue al-Qaeda and the Taliban, it is easy to lose sight of how the trauma of 9/11—and the national mood that prevailed at the time—affected early U.S. policy decisions on Afghanistan. In President George W. Bush's address to the nation on the evening of September 11, 2001, he warned, "We will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them."[85] In his October 7 address announcing the start of Operation Enduring Freedom, Bush signaled that the door for accommodation with the Taliban was closed:

> More than two weeks ago, I gave Taliban leaders a series of clear and specific demands: Close terrorist training camps; hand over leaders of the al-Qaeda network; and return all foreign nationals, including American citizens, unjustly detained in your country. None of these demands were met. And now the Taliban will pay a price.[86]

Amid a desire for retribution, fears of more terrorist attacks, and a belief that punishing regimes that harbored terrorists might deter others from doing the same, U.S. discourse and policies often failed to distinguish between al-Qaeda and the Taliban, when in fact the goals, ideology, and organizational structure of those two groups were fundamentally different. All of these factors prevented the inclusion of the Taliban in the international negotiations in Bonn, Germany, in December 2001 that shaped the political future of Afghanistan.

U.S. discourse and policies often failed to distinguish between al-Qaeda and the Taliban.

The Bonn process, managed by the UN, sought to achieve some semblance of a post-conflict political settlement, yet the Taliban were "never viewed as part of that national reconciliation."[87] Despite being rebuffed, Taliban leaders did not immediately oppose the post-2001 order. There was no call to arms by senior leaders. In fact, there was the opposite: a recognition of defeat and an attempt to broker a settlement.[88] In the early years of the U.S. intervention, several senior Taliban leaders attempted to surrender in exchange for amnesty and protection from persecution. The U.S. rejection of these reconciliation efforts provides insight into the context in which early DDR programs were designed and implemented, and why the Taliban were not included in the programs. These events also suggest why Taliban commanders and fighters might have been deeply skeptical of later U.S. attempts at reconciliation and reintegration.

Two episodes illustrate how these attitudes played out on the ground.

In December 2001, a group of senior Taliban leaders gathered in Kandahar to draft a letter of surrender. The group included the former Ambassador to Pakistan, the former Minister of the Interior, the former Minister of Defense, and other key political and military figures. Mullah Obaidullah Akhund, the former Taliban Defense Minister, met with interim Afghan President Hamid Karzai in the Shah Wali Kot District near Kandahar city to deliver the letter. The letter acknowledged that the Taliban's Islamic Emirate would not survive, accepted Karzai's appointment as leader of the interim government, and made clear that Taliban leader Mullah Mohammed Omar had sanctioned the overture.[89] As author Anand Gopal described, "the main request of the Taliban officials in this group was to be given immunity from arrest in exchange for agreeing to abstain from political life."[90]

Taliban ambassador to Pakistan Abdul Salam Zaeef (left) gets help from his press attaché Sohail Shaheen (right) during a crowded press conference inside the Afghan embassy in Islamabad on October 22, 2001. (AFP photo by Saeed Kahn)

The Taliban representatives agreed to turn over the three provinces—Kandahar, Zabul, and Helmand—that were still under their control. In announcing the agreement, Karzai said that "the Taliban would lay down their weapons and go to their homes with honor and dignity."[91] He urged that "there be no revenge and no vendetta" against the group.[92]

The Shah Wali Kot agreement, however, elicited a sharp response from the Bush administration. Ari Fleischer, then White House Press Secretary, said that Mullah Omar remained "a combatant against the United States and other nations."[93] Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld asserted that "our cooperation and assistance with [allied Afghan forces] would clearly take a turn south," if they allowed key Taliban to escape.[94] Karzai was forced to abandon the agreement and most of the senior Taliban involved fled to Pakistan.[95] Many of the Taliban who had signed the letter went on to assume prominent roles in the insurgency. Obaidullah, who delivered the letter to Karzai, became a key deputy to Mullah Omar and helped organize the ensuing insurgency.[96] Sayed Muhammad Haqqani, the former ambassador to Pakistan, became a prominent political figure in the Taliban.[97] Abdul Ghani Baradar became deputy to Mullah Omar and effectively led the Quetta Shura, a council of Taliban leaders based in Quetta, Pakistan.[98]

The same month that the letter was delivered to Karzai, Jalaluddin Haqqani, a former Taliban military commander and head of the Haqqani Network, also attempted to broker a deal with the newly formed interim government. According to one report, Haqqani sent "word to his subordinates and former sub-commanders advising them to surrender." On December 20, 2001, as a gesture to the interim government, Haqqani "sent family members, close friends, and political allies" to participate in a motorcade that was traveling from the region of Loya Paktia to Kabul to congratulate Karzai and declare loyalty. En route, the convoy was stopped by the U.S.-backed warlord and self-declared governor of Loya Paktia, Pacha Khan Zadran. Zadran and hundreds of his armed men allegedly demanded that elders and tribal leaders participating in the convoy swear allegiance and accept

him as leader of Loya Paktia. Representatives of the convoy told Zadran that they would discuss the matter with him after Karzai's inauguration, and changed their route to continue to Kabul. In response, Zadran reported to his American contacts that a "Haqqani-al-Qaeda" motorcade was making its way toward Kabul. A U.S. air assault ensued, and nearly 50 people in the motorcade and nearby villages were killed.[99]

Despite the U.S. bombardment of the convoy, Haqqani sent his brother Ibrahim Omari to pledge "allegiance to the new government," and issue "a call for Haqqani followers to return from Pakistan and work with the authorities."[100] Though CIA officials initially welcomed Omari's overture, he was soon detained by U.S. Special Operations Forces. Following his release, Omari fled to Pakistan and "swore he would never set foot on Afghan soil again until it was free of the infidels."[101]

Some senior and mid-level Taliban did successfully integrate into the post-2001 order. But in such cases, the term "reintegrate" is used to mean merely that former Taliban were able to live peacefully in territory controlled by the new Afghan government—a minimalist form of reconciliation. Afghanistan scholar Michael Semple notes that most of the senior and mid-level Taliban who reconciled with the government between 2001 and 2008 did so not through a formal reconciliation or reintegration program (like Program Tahkim-e Sulh), but through "political sponsorship," brokering informal deals with government figures.[102] Moreover, most of those reconciled Taliban leaders had "primarily a civilian rather than military role under the Taliban," and nearly all "played no role in the post-2001 insurgency."[103] According to Semple, reconciliation was not pursued with individuals who were "most directly significant for stabilization" and the reconciliation that did occur likely delivered no "strategically significant contribution to managing the conflict."[104]

Otherwise, most efforts by senior Taliban leaders to negotiate with the Afghan government were rebuffed by the United States.[105] By 2009, "only 12 out of the 142 Taliban figures" on the UN sanctions list had reconciled or reintegrated into public life.[106] According to a former senior official in the Office of the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan (SRAP), "key Taliban leaders were interested in giving the new system a chance, but [the U.S. government] didn't give them a chance."[107] Ultimately, the Bush administration signaled to former Taliban "that they faced war without compromise because of their alliance with al-Qaeda."[108]

> *"Key Taliban leaders were interested in giving the new system a chance, but [the U.S. government] didn't give them a chance."*
>
> —Former senior SRAP official

For the United States, an *idée fixe* of retribution, a heightened threat perception, and a failure to distinguish between al-Qaeda and the Taliban all impeded opportunities to engage Taliban leaders in pursuit of a settlement. As time passed, positions hardened. As the Taliban reconstituted their leadership in Pakistan, they also found support from Pashtun communities that were excluded from the transitional process and victimized by predatory U.S.-backed strongmen. As the insurgency gained momentum, U.S. dependence on militia groups and strongmen only deepened.

These events help to explain why a Taliban commander or fighter, learning of the opportunity to reintegrate through programs like PTS or APRP, would have had ample reason to distrust that the U.S. or Afghan governments would let him leave the fight and peacefully rejoin society.

DDR Program Structure and Funding

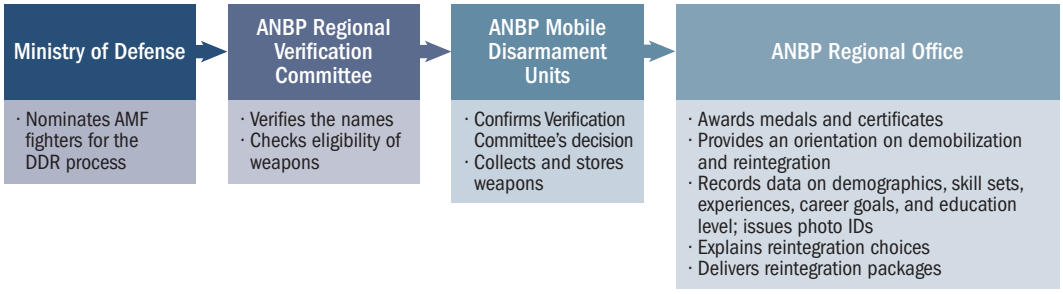
The UN Development Program (UNDP) implemented the DDR program on behalf of the Afghan government from 2003 to 2005.[109] The Afghan government formed two commissions in 2003 to administer and implement DDR: the National Disarmament Commission, chaired by Deputy Defense Minister General Atiqullah Baryalai, and the Demobilization and Reintegration Commission, chaired by Vice President Abdul Karim Khalili.[110] DDR had a budget of $141 million, delivered through a trust fund established by UNDP. Funding was provided by: Japan ($91 million), the United Kingdom ($19 million), Canada ($16 million), the United States ($9 million), the Netherlands ($4 million), Norway ($0.8 million), Switzerland ($0.5 million), and the European Commission ($0.1 million).[111]

The MOD nominated candidates from the AMF for DDR. Regional committees were charged with verifying that candidates were eligible to participate in the program (see Figure 2).[112] Following disarmament and demobilization, combatants would receive an introduction to reintegration packages being offered. ANBP subcontracted with around 30 implementing partners, including Afghan government institutions, international development agencies, international and national nongovernmental organizations (NGO), and private firms, to provide reintegration services.[113] Reintegration assistance was meant to include agricultural and livestock packages, vocational training courses, support to start small businesses, teacher training, opportunity to join the de-mining corps (to detect and remove landmines), opportunity to join the ANA and the Afghan National Police (ANP), and temporary public infrastructure jobs.[114]

By the time DDR ended in July 2005, approximately 70,000 weapons reportedly had been collected from 63,380 ex-combatants and 259 military units had been demobilized.[115] The program had provided 55,800 individuals with reintegration benefits.[116]

FIGURE 2

DDR PROCESS FOR THE AFGHAN MILITIA FORCES



Source: Patricia Grossman, *Transitional Justice and DDR: The Case of Afghanistan*, International Center for Transitional Justice, June 2009, p. 17.

Key Challenges

Competing Priorities

During the early years of the U.S. military effort to defeat al-Qaeda and hunt down remnants of the Taliban, the United States' light footprint led to a dependence on proxies, such as the AMF, to provide security and services. At the time, these warlord militias constituted the organized, friendly armed forces available.[117] The U.S. Special Forces and CIA teams' close collaboration with the AMF, however, conflicted with the DDR program's objective to disband the AMF. According to former DDR program director Peter Babbington, "The Americans refused to let us do DDR in southern Afghanistan in the first one and half years. That created suspicion among the Tajiks that the U.S. was supporting the Pashtuns."[118] Ultimately, U.S. reluctance to support DDR was perceived by some as "strengthening the hand of local commanders" and their capacity to manipulate the program in their favor.[119]

Through this process, the United States empowered armed commanders and established new systems of patronage that reinforced the very economic and social dependence between local commanders and ex-combatants that DDR aimed to break.[120] According to one estimate, in the months following the September 11 attacks, the United States funneled so much cash to militias "that the value of the dollar against the afghani was cut in half in three months."[121] While DDR managed to collect and destroy a significant amount of heavy weapons, the program failed to break the durable social and economic network of dependency between militia commanders and their fighters.[122]

The United States empowered armed commanders and established new systems of patronage that reinforced the very economic and social dependence that DDR aimed to break.

The United States pledged to give $10 million to DDR, but by late 2004 it had yet to deliver any financial support. ANBP officials warned U.S. officials that if the United States continued to withhold its pledge, the program would run out of funds for reintegration.[123] The United States ultimately provided $9 million to the program.[124]

Problems Persuading Commanders to Participate

Because their rivals remained armed, many AMF commanders actively resisted DDR efforts.[125] According to State Department reporting in 2004, AMF commanders expressed concern about personal safety and "their future in a post-DDR world."[126] In response, ANBP launched the Commanders Incentive Program (CIP).[127] The central component of the CIP was a financial package which provided senior commanders with a monthly cash stipend of $550 to $650 for two years in the hope that they would reintegrate.[128]

The CIP identified three categories of commanders eligible to participate in the program: (1) professional commanding/non-commanding, which included individuals in the

Heavy weapons on display after being handed over by Afghan militiamen as part of the DDR program. (AFP photo)

AMF with the rank of brigadier general and above; (2) non-professional commanding, which included AMF commanders who participated in the resistance against the Soviet occupation yet had no formal military training; and (3) independent *jihadi* commanders, which included individuals who were not formally part of the AMF yet who maintained command and control over armed groups in their area of influence.[129]

While CIP worked as a creative mechanism to address the needs of commanders, the project only partially achieved its desired results. A total of 809 commanders benefited from the program, yet CIP had no database to track the progress of each participant. As a result, the program failed to determine whether the benefits offered were actually used to support a commander's transition to civilian life. Disruptions in monthly payments and a failure to deliver on promised benefits frustrated commanders and prompted some to consider rearming.[130]

Poor Delivery of Reintegration Packages

Despite the broad array of implementing partners and reintegration packages being offered, the reintegration component for DDR was mostly limited to vocational training. According to one UN evaluation, these trainings were questionably designed and had inadequate timelines.[131] Few implementing partners offered vocational training that was relevant to the local job market.[132]

Reintegration packages were frequently presented in one brief information session, forcing most ex-combatants to choose quickly from a set of options that were often ill-suited to local economic conditions. Some DDR case workers were observed steering ex-combatants towards options based on administrative expediency, rather than the

needs of the combatant and the realities of the local labor market.[133] For example, some ex-combatants were provided with livestock which required expensive feed that their new owners could not afford. Many of the farm animals died or were sold; others were confiscated by commanders.[134] Many of the reintegration packages "required ex-combatants to adapt their livelihood strategies to the transitional reintegration package offered, rather than vice-versa."[135]

Mismanaged Expectations and Few Job Opportunities

DDR generated expectations amongst ex-combatants, but these were largely unmet. The promise of reintegration assistance was often misunderstood by ex-combatants as a guarantee of a future job.[136] However, by the end of the program only a fourth of DDR participants found sustainable livelihood opportunities outside of fighting, and an estimated two-thirds of DDR-backed small businesses failed.[137] Ex-combatants were supposed to start the reintegration process two weeks after disarmament and demobilization.[138] In reality, a former ANBP program advisor said, the average time gap in some regions was between two to three months.[139] Nearly 2,500 former combatants in the north had to wait six months for their reintegration packages.[140]

A 2004 State Department cable reported that community leaders and former commanders in the north were "increasingly worried that ex-combatants who [had] completed the reintegration phase of the [DDR] program [would] find themselves without viable employment opportunities." They warned U.S. officials that the agricultural and business sectors were unable to absorb thousands of ex-combatants, who could "resort to highway robbery and other criminal activities, or simply maintain a paramilitary militia posture."[141]

Many AMF fighters sought employment in the ANA, yet the United States mandated that only 15 percent of ANA recruits could come from the AMF, which was mostly non-Pashtun.[142] This 15 percent cap was an attempt to mitigate ethnic and political imbalances in the ANA, but the practical consequence was to sharply limit one of the most feasible livelihood options for former AMF fighters. According to two scholars, "DDR represented much more than a hope in the eyes of many Afghans, and its failure to even get close to expectations is likely to have cost the international community much credibility among Afghans."[143]

Ultimately, Afghanistan's weak economy, coupled with DDR's inability to develop viable and sustainable livelihoods for ex-combatants, likely drove many DDR participants back into militia groups.[144]

Key Findings

- The lack of U.S. political and financial support seriously undermined the DDR program.
- U.S. forces partnered with militias that were meant to be disbanded, which empowered those commanders and helped them avoid demobilization.
- Many Afghan militia commanders resisted participating in the DDR program, in part

because their rivals remained armed.
- The DDR program failed to dismantle the command and control structures of the AMF.
- The reintegration component of the DDR program was not as well planned or carried out as were the disarmament and demobilization phases.
- Reintegration packages were poorly designed and delivered. They were largely confined to vocational training, did not adequately respond to ex-combatants' needs, and were slow to deliver benefits.
- Insufficient monitoring and evaluation made it difficult to assess the outcome of DDR's reintegration efforts.
- Afghanistan's weak economy, coupled with the DDR program's inability to develop sustainable livelihoods for ex-combatants, likely drove many DDR participants back into militia groups.

THE DISBANDMENT OF ILLEGAL ARMED GROUPS PROGRAM, 2005–2011

The Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups program was designed as a follow-on to the DDR program.[145] DIAG aimed to disarm and disband some 1,800 illegal armed groups that were not part of the AMF and had not been dismantled through the DDR program. DIAG was also meant to be used to disqualify 2005 parliamentary election candidates with links to armed groups, though only a small number of candidates were ultimately barred from running for office. A major challenge for DIAG was the lack of consistent political support from the Afghan government and its coalition partners. The Afghan government avoided pursuing politically influential commanders, and U.S.-led coalition forces were reluctant to assist in coercing militias to disband because they relied on some militias for security and other services. DIAG offered development projects to communities that persuaded militias to disarm, but communities generally did not have such leverage over armed groups, and very few projects were completed. In districts that complied with DIAG, Afghan security forces were often unable to fill the ensuing security vacuum, resulting in many illegal armed groups staying armed or rearming for their own protection. Ultimately, the belief that illegal armed groups could be compelled to disband without adequate incentives or coercion reflected the "unrealistic nature" of DIAG's design.[146]

Genesis of DIAG

The Afghan presidential election in October 2004 and parliamentary elections in September 2005 were key priorities for the international community, the Afghan transitional government, and coalition forces—and successful elections would require some degree of security throughout the country. Yet the security situation was sharply deteriorating amid a growing Taliban insurgency.[147] The development of Afghan army and police forces was in a nascent stage; state security forces were largely absent in many areas.[148]

The DDR program (2003–2005) had been restricted to disarming, disbanding, and reintegrating only members of the AMF.[149] Following the conclusion of DDR, there were still up to 1,800 non-AMF armed and mobilized groups, comprising some

Provincial leaders hold a DIAG-sponsored weapons turn-in ceremony at the provincial government complex in Sharan, Paktika Province. (DOD photo by Sgt. Mark A. Moore II)

120,000 persons.[150] These groups filled the security void in the provinces, and were empowered or controlled by factional leaders inside and outside the national government.[151] These armed groups were generally seen as more dangerous than most of the AMF. They were accused of intimidating local government officials, perpetuating the drug trade, imposing illegal taxes on individuals and reconstruction projects, and impeding state expansion.[152] Yet in some communities, these militias were the only groups providing a modicum of security.[153]

In July 2004, President Karzai issued Presidential Decree 50, declaring illegal all armed groups outside the AMF and calling for their disbandment.[154] The DIAG program was established in July 2005.[155]

A UN employee formerly involved in the DDR program told SIGAR that Afghan officials designing DIAG wanted to include former Taliban fighters in the program. They saw that excluding Taliban from the prior DDR program had led to an imbalance. Anti-Taliban militias were supposed to disarm and disband (though many did not), but Taliban forces that remained on the ground were not included in those efforts—creating an incentive for anti-Taliban militias to remain armed. The UN employee recalled that "we tried to sell DIAG as a project to also integrate Taliban to [General Karl Eikenberry, then the head of Combined Forces Command – Afghanistan], who did not like the idea."[156]

DIAG Structure and Funding

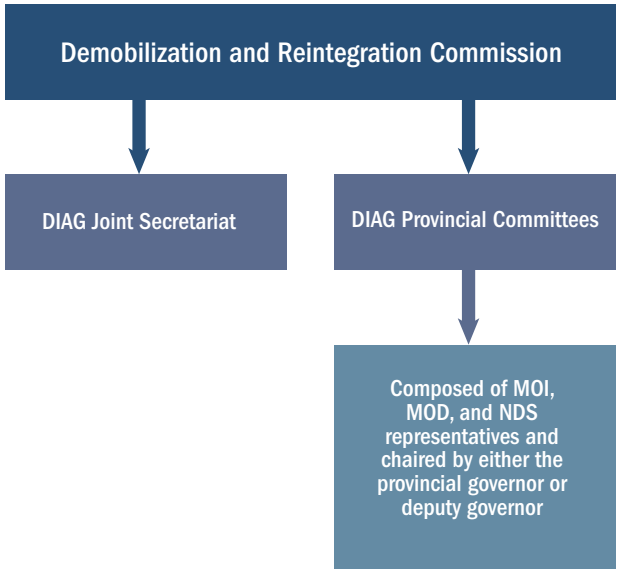
DIAG's objectives were to disarm and disband the illegal armed groups that had been excluded from the DDR program, and to offer community-based development assistance in exchange for compliance with DIAG.[157] This discussion focuses on the latter objective

because it represented the reintegration component of the program. UNDP administered the program under the ANBP. DIAG received more than $36 million in international funding, mostly from Japan.[158] The United States provided $200,000.[159]

While DIAG was a component of the UN-administered ANBP, it was more Afghan-led than its predecessor.[160] The Demobilization and Reintegration Commission, which was originally created for the DDR program, was tasked with overseeing DIAG implementation (see Figure 3). The commission was chaired by Vice President Khalili and managed by Vice-Chairman and Presidential Advisor Mohammad Masoom Stanekzai, and included representatives from ANBP, international military forces, and donor countries, as well as from Afghan government ministries: the Ministry of Interior (MOI), the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD), the Ministry of Defense, and the National Directorate of Security (NDS). The Demobilization and Reintegration Commission provided policy guidance for the program, coordinated weapons collection, and oversaw community development projects.[161]

FIGURE 3

DIAG ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE



Source: Robin-Edward Poulton, *DIAG Evaluation: Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups in Afghanistan,* EPES Mandala Consulting, April 22, 2009, p. 9; Barbara J. Stapleton, *Disarming the Militias: DDR and DIAG and the Implications for Peace Building,* Afghanistan Analysts Network, April 2013, p. 8.

The DIAG Joint Secretariat and DIAG Provincial Committees led a period of voluntary or negotiated compliance. The Provincial Committees were meant to be the front lines of the program. They were composed of MOI, MOD, and NDS representatives and chaired by either the provincial governor or deputy governor. The Provincial Committees had the lead on negotiating local compliance, assessing districts' readiness for DIAG, defining targets, monitoring implementation, and confirming the stability of areas that had been targeted by DIAG.[162]

Local police, government leaders, and villagers gather outside the Anaba District Center in Panjshir Province to view weapons turned in through the DIAG program. (DOD photo by Maj. Jillian Torango)

DIAG provided two kinds of development projects to districts compliant with the program. The first set, District Development Projects, were large-scale infrastructure projects such as construction of schools, clinics, and water wells. Funding and other implementation problems delayed the delivery of infrastructure projects, causing frustration among target community members. A supplemental initiative, known as DIAG Support Projects, was introduced in 2009 as an additional and immediate benefit to DIAG-compliant communities. The initiative consisted of small-scale alternative livelihood projects, such as poultry production and beekeeping.[163]

The cumulative total of illegal armed groups disbanded by DIAG reached 759, and 54,138 weapons were collected. The goal was to disband 809 illegal armed groups by the end of 2010, meaning that 94 percent of this original target was purportedly reached.[164] However, as with DDR, these numbers are highly misleading. According to UNDP, an illegal armed group consisted of "a group of five or more armed individuals operating outside the law."[165] This minimalistic definition likely inflated the numbers by including groups that posed a limited threat.

Key Challenges

Competing Political Objectives and Lack of Political Will

One of the first objectives of DIAG was to target commanders who had registered as candidates in the parliamentary elections in September 2005. The DIAG Joint Secretariat compiled a list of 1,108 candidates with potential links to armed groups and submitted it

to the independent Electoral Complaints Commission, which provisionally disqualified 207 candidates.[166] Though DIAG was an Afghan government program, government officials—including those directly involved in the program—impeded its objectives by pressuring the Joint Secretariat and the Electoral Complaints Commission not to pursue the disqualification of certain officials at the cabinet and provincial levels.[167]

Ultimately, under pressure from the Afghan government and the international community, the ECC excluded only 34 candidates from the ballot. The low number was the result of pressure to demonstrate progress through the elections, a lack of accurate evidence, insufficient vetting procedures, and concern that disqualified candidates could pose a security threat to the emerging government.[168] Following the election, the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission estimated that more than 80 percent of the winning candidates maintained ties to illegal armed groups.[169]

In other ways, Afghan government entities obstructed and subverted DIAG implementation. The executive branch was accused of providing protection for government officials targeted by DIAG, and the upper house of parliament attempted to push through a resolution calling for the temporary halt of the DIAG process.[170] In the provinces, DIAG Provincial Committees often included governors or chiefs of police who maintained connections to illegal armed groups.[171] According to one UN evaluation, "The DIAG project constantly feels this lack of political will, as commanders are protected by politicians and provincial governors ignore weakly stated government policies."[172]

Competing Security Objectives and U.S. Reluctance to Engage

On paper, DIAG included a secondary phase following voluntary compliance, during which Afghan security forces, with support from the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), could coerce militias to comply and disband.[173] However, ISAF and coalition forces were reluctant to support DIAG, in part because they were collaborating with the militias being targeted.[174] U.S.-led Provincial Reconstruction Teams were also reluctant to support DIAG.[175] Consequently, DIAG had little ability to forcibly disarm uncooperative militia groups. Many militias working with international troops also sidestepped DIAG by joining U.S.-supported militia programs or registering as private security companies. These militia programs included the Afghan National Auxiliary Police, the Afghan Public Protection Program, the Community Defense Initiative, the Local Defense Initiative, the Critical Infrastructure Program, and the Afghan Local Police (ALP).[176]

Flawed Assumptions and Problems Delivering Development Incentives

Whereas DDR offered benefits and incentives to individual combatants, DIAG offered development projects to communities where illegal armed groups had disbanded and disarmed. The underlying assumption of this approach was that communities could help persuade militias to comply with DIAG, and would be motivated to do so by the promise of development assistance.[177] In exchange for a district or area being deemed compliant with DIAG, a $150,000 project (or $300,000 under revised plans) was offered to a local

District Development Assembly.[178] The District Development Assembly, with support from MRRD and UNDP, would assess potential development projects and work with MRRD to implement them.[179]

However, DIAG's underlying assumption was flawed: Most local communities did not have the bargaining power to disarm these groups.[180] Armed militias continued to operate even in districts labeled DIAG-compliant, and incomplete monitoring and evaluation meant that it was difficult to determine whether districts that had previously complied with DIAG had lapsed into non-compliance.[181] In addition, Afghan security forces were often unable to fill the security vacuum left in DIAG-compliant districts, resulting in many illegal armed groups staying armed or rearming for their own protection.[182]

DIAG's underlying assumption was flawed: Most local communities did not have the bargaining power to disarm these groups.

Ultimately, as with DDR, DIAG's reintegration component proved challenging. Despite being a "weapons in exchange for development program," in the words of a UN evaluation, DIAG had no development strategy or in-house development capacity.[183] Although development aid was seen as "the only tangible benefit offered to individuals for compliance," relatively few community development projects were delivered through DIAG.[184] By the end of 2010, only 27 out of 112 DIAG development projects at the district level had been completed.[185] These projects suffered from long gaps between district compliance and the delivery or completion of projects, delays in transferring funds, unexpected increases in projected costs, and the use by partner construction companies of low-quality materials for infrastructure projects.[186]

Key Findings

- A lack of consistent political will from the Afghan government and coalition partners, including the United States, undermined DIAG objectives to disband and disarm illegal armed groups.
- U.S. forces and ISAF were reluctant to assist in coercing militias to disband because they relied on some for security and other services.
- DIAG focused delivery of benefits to communities that persuaded militias to disarm, but communities generally lacked such leverage over armed groups.
- Community development projects faced many implementation challenges and relatively few were completed.
- Insufficient monitoring and evaluation meant that it was difficult to evaluate program outcomes.

PROGRAM TAHKIM-E SULH, 2005–2011

Whereas DDR and DIAG targeted militias that had fought against the Taliban or were engaged in general criminality, Program Tahkim-e Sulh (PTS) was the first reintegration

U.S. and Afghan National Army soldiers conduct a key leader engagement near Makhtum, Wardak Province. (DOD photo by 2nd Lt. Jeff Hall)

program to be directed towards the Taliban and other insurgents. The Karzai administration created PTS as an element of its efforts to reconcile with Taliban leaders and stave off the growing insurgency. At the time, however, the U.S. government's position on reconciliation more closely resembled a willingness to accept a Taliban surrender, as opposed to a negotiated settlement. In addition, the U.S. military viewed PTS primarily as a counterinsurgency tool.

In some provinces, hundreds of alleged insurgents went through PTS, which entailed coordination among district, provincial, and Kabul-based entities. However, PTS was plagued by claims of widespread corruption, and was seen as ineffective. The number of actual insurgents who participated is difficult to assess because PTS had no monitoring and evaluation system. Ultimately, the program proved unsustainable and did not serve as a tool for wider reconciliation and reintegration.

Genesis of PTS

By 2005, Afghan and coalition forces faced a resurgent Taliban.[187] In March of that year, amid the escalation in insurgent attacks and military operations, President Karzai established Program Tahkim-e Sulh, or the Strengthening Peace Program, by presidential decree.[188] PTS was designed to enable insurgents to repatriate, reconcile with the Afghan government, and rejoin society, on the condition that they respect the new constitution, renounce violence, and obey the laws of Afghanistan.[189] According to State, PTS sought "a balance between forgiveness and justice," and was framed as "the first step down a longer path toward reintegration."[190]

The U.S. government maintained that it supported the possibility of Afghan government-led reconciliation talks with the Taliban and other insurgent groups. But the U.S. position on reconciliation at the time more closely resembled a willingness to accept surrender, as opposed to a negotiation in which all parties would make concessions.[191] A 2008 State cable providing messaging guidance was hopeful about the possibility of low- and mid-level insurgents reconciling, but predicted that political reconciliation with Taliban leaders was unlikely. The guidance stated that "Mullah Omar . . . has the blood of thousands of Americans on his hands" and that there was "no serious indication from the Taliban that they are willing to reconcile with the Afghan government."[192]

U.S. military leaders were far more optimistic that PTS and other reconciliation efforts could peel away a significant number of fighters from the insurgency. U.S. Lt. Gen. David Barno, then commander of coalition forces, predicted that the insurgency would fail in the span of a few months as more Taliban fighters agreed to reconcile.[193] Similarly, in early 2005 the *Boston Globe* reported that the chief of staff of Combined Forces Command – Afghanistan, U.S. Col. David Lamm, said "he expected most of the Taliban's rank and file, whom he estimated to number a few thousand, to take up the amnesty offer by summer."[194] The basis for such optimism was unclear. In a 2015 USIP report, Afghanistan scholar Deedee Derksen noted that in the absence of any structured peace process, "the UK and United States considered the PTS a national security instrument used to encourage insurgents to surrender and yield intelligence rather than to reconcile."[195]

PTS Structure and Funding

The first step in the PTS process was for insurgents to approach a local elder. This elder, acting as a sponsor, vetted the individual to confirm he was an insurgent and was sincere in his willingness to reconcile.[196] Sponsors also served as a point of contact during the process, and to ensure the candidate ceased all insurgent activity.[197] After the initial screening, the candidate was vetted by the local NDS officer and police chief, who determined his area of operation, whether his family had returned to Afghanistan from Pakistan, and how he intended to earn a living.[198] Afghan officials required that PTS participants hand over their weapons to the government, provide intelligence about the insurgency, and renounce violence.[199]

The Independent National Commission for Peace (INCP), headed by former Afghan president (1992) Sibghatullah Mojaddedi, was the administrative body of PTS. INCP certified that former insurgents were living peacefully and had accepted the constitution.[200] PTS had 12 offices, mostly located in the south and east. After a candidate was deemed qualified to participate, the elders vouching for him sent a letter to the INCP in Kabul asking forgiveness for the individual and requesting he be reconciled. While the candidate awaited the INCP's decision, he was given financial assistance ranging from $100 to $900.[201]

Once accepted into the program, candidates would meet with Mojaddedi, who provided a letter formalizing the participant's promise to reconcile.[202] Mojaddedi claimed that

participants were given a government identification card that would prevent their arrest on terrorism charges. The INCP might also ask the provincial governor to help the former fighter.[203] To complete the process, the participant handed in a weapon and swore allegiance to the Afghan government, both verbally and in writing, in a public ceremony before a provincial governor.[204] Reconciliation ceremonies, which generated significant media coverage, were the culmination of the PTS process.[205] There is no indication of continued monitoring of participants, or further financial assistance to them.

In addition to the reconciliation of active insurgents, the INCP also used the PTS process to facilitate the release of suspected insurgents from U.S. detention centers, including Bagram and Guantanamo Bay.[206]

The effectiveness of the PTS program was difficult to evaluate. In early 2006, a State memo stated that 650 insurgents had completed the program, though a State intelligence report acknowledged that the significance of that number was difficult to judge, due to uncertainties about the total number of active insurgents.[207] By the end of the program in mid-2011, PTS administrators claimed to have reconciled 8,700 combatants. They also claimed as of 2008 that the program had facilitated the release of 721 detainees from U.S. facilities.[208] DOD reported in 2009 that of 529 detainees released through PTS since 2005, only two had been "detained again for subsequent insurgent activities."[209]

There is evidence that PTS had some small-scale tactical successes. In Kunar and Nuristan Provinces, a declassified 2006 State intelligence report described former insurgents going through the full process and for some period renouncing violence against the government. The account attributed that success to "the implementation of all facets of the process," where there was close coordination between officials in Kabul and local leaders.[210]

However, PTS lacked a national structure to replicate whatever limited success it achieved, and it is not known whether those successes were sustained. A State report judged that if PTS was not "applied nationwide in a clear and coordinated manner," the program would not reach its full potential.[211]

Although PTS has been referred to as a reintegration program, in practice it focused more on reconciliation, repatriation, and disarmament of rank and file fighters than on assisting them in a process of long-term social and economic reintegration.[212] There is also little evidence that any active mid- or senior-level insurgents reconciled through PTS.[213] Between 2001 and 2008, 22 mid- and senior-level Taliban did reconcile with the Afghan government. But of these, only one made primary contact with the government through PTS structures—a testament to the relative ineffectiveness of the program. Further, of the 22 figures who reconciled, 19 had not been part of the post-2001 insurgency.[214]

Funding for PTS ended in 2008 and the program formally closed in 2011.[215] Despite its faults, the programmatic structure of PTS became the foundation for the Afghan government's next reintegration program, the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program.

A coalition forces service member collects biometric information from a man in the Nahr-e Saraj District of Helmand Province during a routine security operation. (DOD photo by Sgt. Benjamin Tuck)

Key Challenges

Without a political settlement in place, insurgents faced high costs to participating in PTS: potential retribution from other Taliban fighters, loss of employment, and loss of prestige. Although the Afghan government created PTS as a pillar of a wider reconciliation strategy, high-level reconciliation efforts did not bear fruit, undermining the program's ability to attract rank and file Taliban.

Ultimately, donors came to view PTS as "morally and financially bankrupt."[216] Some Afghan and international actors described Mojaddedi using PTS to direct resources to his political and tribal patronage network. By 2008, international donors discontinued their support in part due to concerns about corruption.[217]

One study examined reports of 4,634 program participants and found that very few were confirmed insurgents.

Since there is no evidence of any systematic monitoring and evaluation efforts to determine what happened to PTS participants after reconciliation ceremonies, claims about the numbers of insurgents reintegrated through PTS are difficult to substantiate.[218] One study examined reports of 4,634 program participants and found that very few were confirmed insurgents. The study concluded that only a "handful" of known insurgents had "'graduated'" from the program, and these had been referred by the Afghan National Security Council or had joined after being released from custody. In other words, none of those known insurgents had entered PTS through the program's own structures. Of the insurgents who reconciled through PTS, few were of strategic importance.[219]

Key Findings

- A primary obstacle to the success of PTS was that the program was implemented in the absence of a political settlement.
- PTS focused more on reconciliation and disarmament than on assisting program participants in a process of long-term social and economic reintegration.
- PTS failed to entice senior-level insurgents to reconcile through the program. There is evidence that the known insurgents who did reconcile through PTS entered the program through channels other than PTS structures—for instance, after release from detention or through ad hoc negotiations.
- The U.S. government viewed PTS primarily as a means to entice insurgents to surrender or defect, thereby weakening the Taliban insurgency.
- International donors withdrew support for the program largely because PTS was viewed as ineffective and corrupt.
- The U.S. military, in coordination with the Afghan government, used PTS to facilitate the release of Taliban detainees deemed not to be a threat.
- Despite anecdotal evidence of success in certain provinces, the absence of a monitoring and evaluation system meant that it was difficult to evaluate program outcomes or substantiate claims about the numbers of genuine insurgents who reintegrated through PTS.

THE AFGHANISTAN PEACE AND REINTEGRATION PROGRAM, 2010–2016

The Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program was an internationally supported program led by the Afghan government to promote reconciliation and security through outreach to the Taliban and other insurgents, reintegration of former insurgents, and community recovery. A primary obstacle to APRP's success was that the program was implemented in the absence of a political settlement, and in the midst of an intensifying insurgency. APRP failed to provide adequate security for former combatants and overemphasized economic incentives for their reintegration. APRP also faced numerous implementation challenges, such as problems tracking and expending money, measuring and reporting program results, promoting reintegration in areas controlled by insurgents, developing structural capacity, and gaining buy-in from provincial and district officials.

Genesis of APRP

President Karzai formally proposed APRP at the London Conference in January 2010. He declared: "We must reach out to all of our countrymen, especially our disenchanted brothers, who are not part of al-Qaeda, or other terrorist networks, who accept the Afghan constitution."[220] The conference communiqué highlighted the international community's support for a reinvigorated Afghan-led reintegration program, to which donors pledged over $140 million in funding for the first year alone.[221] As a "Peace and Reintegration" program, APRP was envisioned as a tool to pursue both reconciliation with senior Taliban and the reintegration of Taliban fighters into Afghan civil society.[222]

President Barack Obama meets with General Stanley McChrystal in the Oval Office. (White House photo by Pete Souza)

According to Karzai, what made APRP different from past DDR efforts was the support of the international community.[223] The United States provided some support to previous reintegration efforts, but up to this point had not made considerable financial or political commitments to reintegration.

In June 2010, the Afghan government held a National Consultative Peace Jirga. The jirga's 1,600 delegates issued a resolution endorsing a framework for national peace, providing President Karzai with a strong mandate to pursue the proposed reintegration program. That same month, Karzai issued a decree that detailed the APRP structure and directed its implementation. Representatives of the international community officially endorsed APRP at the July 2010 Kabul Conference.[224] Two months later, the Afghan government gave instructions to ministries and provincial governors on how to implement the program.[225]

Shuras (Arabic) and jirgas (Pashto) are gatherings of informal leaders to confer, make decisions on behalf of constituents, and resolve disputes. As evolving institutions with varying purposes, formats, and structures across the country, the terms are sometimes used interchangeably.

Initial U.S. Views on APRP: "Fight, Flee, or Reintegrate"

APRP was initiated at a time when counterinsurgency (COIN) doctrine informed most policies and programs being implemented in Afghanistan, so it is not surprising that many U.S. and international military actors viewed APRP primarily through that lens. In his 2009 assessment of the war, the commander of U.S. Forces – Afghanistan and ISAF General Stanley McChrystal described "reintegration [as] a normal component of counterinsurgency warfare," adding that insurgents would "have three choices: fight, flee, or reintegrate."[226] His successor, General David Petraeus, reportedly "sold [APRP] as the bedrock of the U.S. counterinsurgency campaign."[227] A reintegration guide published by ISAF in 2011 referred to reintegration as "an essential part of the COIN campaign, not an alternative to it."[228] General John Allen, who succeeded Petraeus as commander of ISAF in 2011, "made reintegration a priority line of effort."[229] In the view of a former senior Afghan official, APRP was "started more as a reaction to the

Members of the High Peace Council and provincial governors from southern Afghanistan answer questions about reconciliation and reintegration during a press conference in Kandahar City in 2010. (U.S. Army photo by SPC Edward A. Garibay)

international community's approach and policy" and the drive to stabilize the country before security responsibility was to be handed over to Afghan forces. For these reasons, the official said, "reintegration became one of the top priorities, a key element of COIN."[230]

The rollout of APRP also took place in the midst of an unprecedented high-level diplomatic outreach between the United States and the Taliban. The administration of President Barack Obama approved negotiations with the Taliban, and from 2010 to 2013 senior U.S. officials engaged directly, though intermittently and out of public view, with Taliban representatives in an attempt to negotiate an end to the conflict.[231] These negotiations, coupled with hopes that the 2009–2011 military surge would put significant pressure on the Taliban, led many to believe that peace was within reach. An ISAF document suggested that the Taliban were beginning to think their military victory was unlikely.[232]

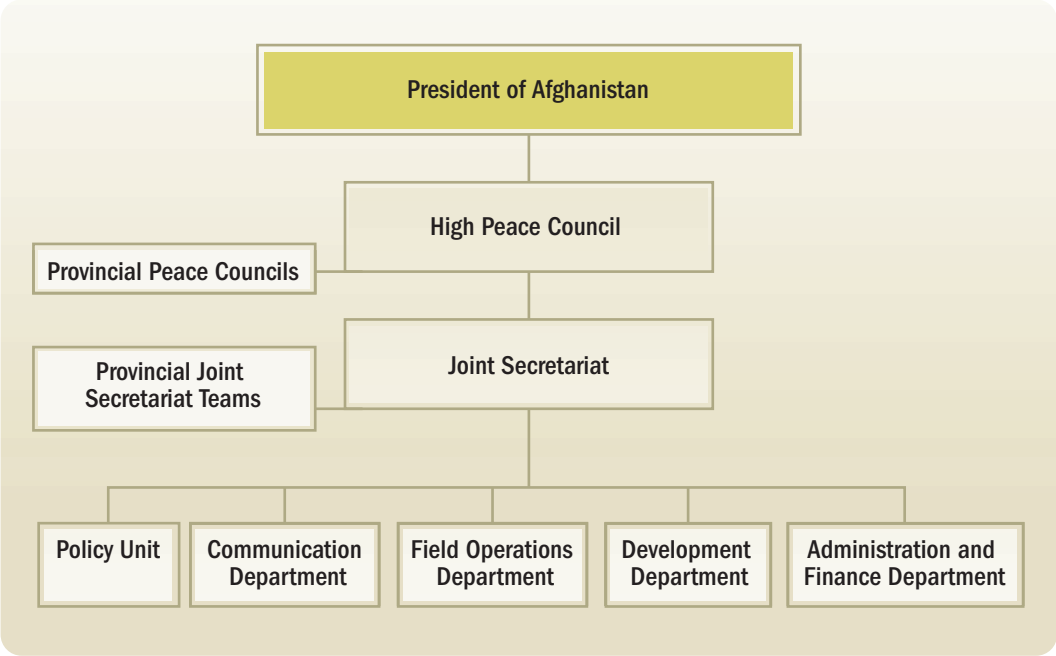
A DOD official who previously had responsibilities related to reintegration policy in Afghanistan told SIGAR that U.S. expectations for APRP were limited but optimistic. The thinking in Washington, according to this official, was that there ought to be an effort to preemptively develop some reintegration capacity within the Afghan government, in case a settlement was reached and the government had to deal with large-scale reintegration of ex-combatants. There was awareness of the huge challenges and risks, but a lot of hope that APRP could achieve something, perhaps in combination with the diplomatic outreach to the Taliban and the troop surge.[233]

APRP Structure and Design

APRP consisted of a number of Afghan institutions at various levels of government. At the highest level, the High Peace Council (HPC) was established to provide advice to the president, and to oversee APRP implementation (see Figure 4).[234] The HPC was supported by the Joint Secretariat, which was responsible for administering the program through five departments or units, to include a policy unit and field operations department. At the provincial level, provincial governors and Provincial Peace Councils (PPC) played a significant role in implementation of APRP. The PPCs acted as subnational branches of the HPC, and Provincial Joint Secretariat Teams served a similar role for the Joint Secretariat. These teams were responsible for coordinating the implementation of APRP in "partnership with district and community-level bodies, including Community Development Councils."[235]

FIGURE 4

APRP ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE



Source: "A Guide to the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP)," *Pajhwok*, March 20, 2012; Steven A. Zyck, *Peace & Reintegration: An Introduction*, Civil-Military Fusion Center, April 2012, p. 5.

APRP was meant to incorporate components of previous DDR efforts into its design and implementation.[236] Existing DIAG structures were supposed to support APRP in demobilization, with a specific focus on vetting candidates, disarmament, weapons management and registration, and data collection. Former PTS structures were meant to support Provincial Peace Councils.[237] However, incorporating elements of these programs also meant incorporating some of their technical shortcomings and design flaws.[238] APRP did incorporate some lessons from previous programs, including the decision to focus on reintegration prior to disarmament and to allow program

participants to remain armed for self-protection. The program design also recognized the importance of delivering benefits to both former fighters and the communities receiving them. Yet APRP struggled to deal with some of the same problems encountered by DDR and DIAG, including the failure to provide adequate security for ex-combatants and the lack of a clear plan for how the program would incorporate ex-combatants into government security forces.[239]

The Afghan institutions charged with implementing APRP were supported by several international bodies, including UNDP and ISAF. UNDP established a support program that "advised the APRP leadership on peacebuilding, reconciliation and reintegration, and assisted the Joint Secretariat in the areas of policy, planning, capacity development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation and the management" of donor funds for reintegration.[240] According to one former senior UN official, "Half the job of the UNDP support project was keeping everyone on the same sheet of music, explaining and re-explaining what APRP was all about."[241] ISAF created the Force Reintegration Cell (FRIC) to enable APRP implementation at the national and sub-national levels and to provide "funding, personnel, and logistics" support to the reintegration process.[242]

The structure of APRP was divided into two levels: the tactical and operational level, which focused on the reintegration of low- and mid-level commanders and foot soldiers, and the strategic and political level, which focused on outreach to and reconciliation with the leadership of the insurgency.[243] Activities at these two levels were to be carried out in three stages: social outreach and negotiation, demobilization, and consolidation of peace.[244] Social outreach involved district and provincial officials engaging with individuals and communities interested in the program. The officials would facilitate "confidence-building activities, negotiations, and grievance resolution" for "communities, victims, and ex-combatants."[245] Demobilization included vetting and registration of individuals, weapons management, providing security to former combatants, and transitional assistance to meet the basic needs of ex-combatants and their families.[246] Consolidation of peace, the last stage, aimed to ensure that reintegration was permanent and centered on the delivery of community recovery packages to benefit the entire community, not just the former insurgent.[247]

In terms of U.S. government support to APRP, the division of labor between State and DOD was that State, through the Office of the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan and U.S. Embassy Kabul, took the lead on matters relating to high-level reconciliation with the Taliban (the strategic level). State worked with the HPC and Joint Secretariat on these issues. State also embedded Foreign Service Officers in the FRIC to provide technical support and help coordinate reintegration project proposals that required approval by the Afghan government.[248] DOD took the functional lead on reintegration matters (the tactical and operational levels). DOD established the Afghanistan Reintegration Program (ARP), "a congressionally appropriated fund designed to enable local military commanders to support [APRP] within their respective areas of responsibility."[249]

Financing of APRP

APRP was financed by $182.3 million in contributions from 12 donor nations. Japan and Germany provided the bulk of operational funding, while U.S. funds supported community recovery projects administered by the World Bank.[250] International funds were disbursed through three funding windows: Window A managed by the World Bank's Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund, with donor commitments totaling over $64 million; Window B, managed by UNDP, with total commitments of nearly $145 million; and Window C, a bilateral aid agreement between the UK and Estonia and the Afghan government, with commitments totaling roughly $24 million.[251]

The bulk of U.S. financial support for APRP comprised $55 million, of which $50 million went to the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development via Window A, and $5 million went to UNDP's support program via Window B. The $50 million was supposed to support reintegration goals in insecure areas through the Community Recovery Intensification and Prioritization (CRIP) mechanism of MRRD's National Solidarity Program (NSP).[252] Under CRIP, NSP agreed to finance community projects within priority districts where ex-combatants who had joined APRP were present (see pp. 47–48 for further discussion).[253]

Within DOD, the ARP served as a fund to enable U.S. commanders to support Afghan-led reintegration efforts. The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year (FY) 2010 authorized DOD to use Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP) funding for reintegration activities.[254] In the FY 2011 NDAA, Congress authorized DOD spending of up to $50 million "to carry out a program designed to reintegrate low-level Taliban fighters."[255] Between FY 2010 and 2012, DOD spent $9.1 million of this amount.[256] DOD also developed procedures for implementing, managing, and monitoring ARP. These procedures authorized the use of funds for a variety of activities, including community projects supporting reintegration; outreach by APRP provincial and district offices; logistics for conferences and *shuras* (meetings of tribal leaders); job training, job placement support, and education for ex-combatants; relocation for ex-combatants and immediate family members; reintegration of detainees; security measures to protect former combatants and their communities; and costs associated with mediation and grievance resolution.[257] Funding support for several of these activities was explicitly limited to a 90-day period.[258] ARP was prohibited from providing any program funds "to support reconciliation requirements."[259]

Program Evaluation Metrics

State's metrics for assessing reintegration included: number and location of shuras designed to promote reintegration, number and location of reintegration events, number of former insurgents registered in the APRP, qualitative improvement of security in areas where reintegrees formerly operated, number and type of community recovery projects underway, staffing and effectiveness of APRP structures at the national and provincial levels, and quality and level of political and financial support for the APRP from the Afghan government and other governments.[260]

The final evaluation report of APRP assessed the program across a range of activities in five major areas: (1) the effective management of two windows of the Peace and Reintegration Trust Fund; (2) whether "APRP central structures effectively [delivered] planning, monitoring, coordination and reporting on key components of APRP"; (3) whether "subnational structures of APRP effectively [delivered] key components at the local level"; (4) whether "support to the line ministries' community recovery programs" contributed to sustainable peace and reintegration; and (5) whether "effective management of APRP delivery [was] ensured through UNDP technical and operational support."[261]

A line ministry is a ministry responsible for implementing programs or services specific to a given sector (such as public health, education, or agriculture) for which it is singularly responsible. Other staff or auxiliary ministries, such as a budget ministry, may have a more cross-cutting focus.

Key Challenges

Militarization of Reintegration Efforts

While the design of APRP included both reintegration and reconciliation goals, in practice little effort was made to link the two. This was in part due to the "considerable divergences between the various Afghan and international stakeholders" on what APRP was meant to achieve.[262] DOD and ISAF saw APRP primarily as part of a military effort aimed at weakening the insurgency, rather than as a key piece of a wider reconciliation process.[263] According to American University's Dr. Tazreena Sajjad, who conducted research on APRP in 2010, the U.S. military and ISAF were "looking at reintegration with blinders on" and the effort was "moving on its own path, not interacting with or confined by conversations about reconciliation."[264] In contrast, the Afghan government was more committed to the idea that reintegration and reconciliation should run in parallel, with the same people handling both efforts.[265] The government viewed reintegration as supporting a broader peace-building strategy focused on reconciliation.

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But APRP's association with ISAF, which "established partnering and mentoring relationships at every level of the APRP structure," undermined its goal of serving as an Afghan-led peace-building mechanism.[266] Sajjad's review of APRP conducted during the program's first year identified a "growing sentiment that the APRP is not an Afghan-owned and led strategy, but a component of the counter-insurgency strategy and is hence under the control of the international military forces."[267] Likewise, in a late 2011 Peace Research Institute Oslo report, Afghanistan scholar Derksen found that ISAF was "deeply involved in [APRP's] implementation . . . leading to the perception that the foreign military, whose presence and behaviour in Afghanistan is controversial, drives reintegration."[268] Or more bluntly, as Barnett Rubin, former senior advisor to SRAP Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, told SIGAR, reintegration was pushed as part of COIN, and "COIN was a way to win without dealing with political reconciliation."[269]

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and SRAP Richard Holbrooke attend a weekly meeting hosted by the Office of the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan at the U.S. State Department. (State photo)

In 2009, then-SRAP Holbrooke had called reintegration "the weakest part of our strategy" and framed it simply as bringing in low-level Taliban fighters. As Holbrooke's biographer, George Packer, put it in his recent book, "Talking to the enemy—the only way to end the war—was never part of the [2009] strategy review."[270] It took until 2010 for the Obama administration to decide to pursue talks with the Taliban.[271]

U.S. support for reintegration was shaped by a belief that, because the Taliban had a decentralized organizational structure, they were vulnerable to fragmentation. In a 2010 interview, Holbrooke suggested that because "there's no single address for the people we're fighting . . . perhaps the best way to do it is to look for ways to separate and fragment it, piece by piece."[272] If APRP could help persuade the rank and file of the Taliban to break away from the insurgency, the theory went, it would in turn put pressure on the leadership to negotiate.[273] As Johnny Walsh, senior expert on Afghanistan at USIP and former senior advisor to the SRAP, explained, "the theory [of APRP], however flimsy, was that reintegration advances reconciliation by weakening the insurgency through defections."[274]

But the U.S. approach may have been based on a flawed assumption: that the Taliban were vulnerable to fragmentation.[275] Derksen described Taliban fighters as "socially, financially, and ideologically integrated into the movement," with a strong interdependence between lower-level foot soldiers, commanders, and the Taliban leadership.[276] Derksen, who spoke with several Taliban commanders about APRP, concluded that "almost all active insurgent commanders interviewed argued they were not interested in reintegration unless their leaders were at the table with the Afghan government and the process addressed the core grievances of the international military presence and government corruption and predation."[277]

In short, the buy-in of high-level Taliban leaders was likely necessary before any significant number of low-level fighters could transition away from the insurgency.[278] Yet U.S.-supported reintegration efforts were mostly pursued as an independent military initiative that targeted low-level fighters and were poorly integrated with efforts to reconcile with high-level Taliban.[279] Former FRIC director UK Maj. Gen. David Hook recalled ISAF playing "no part in any of the reconciliation work that was being undertaken."[280] A State official who worked on APRP told SIGAR that "it was awkward to work on reintegration, but not be aware of or connected to the high-level reconciliation process. Afghans were often confused by U.S. and ISAF efforts to differentiate between the two."[281]

Inability to Provide Security

APRP's success depended in part on how well the Afghan government and coalition forces could provide security for former combatants and the communities that accepted them.[282] Program participants generally faced at least one of three threats: (1) being killed or arrested by the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) or ISAF; (2) retribution attacks from insurgent networks, and (3) "revenge from former victims."[283] DOD and State recognized that any of these security breaches could also undermine the legitimacy of the whole program.[284]

In response, the Afghan government and coalition forces took measures to protect program participants. Following their enrollment, former combatants were supposed to be provided with a card guaranteeing freedom of movement.[285] Safe houses were established in the provinces for short-term security, and former combatants were permitted to keep a rifle for self-defense.[286] ISAF sought to limit the targeting of insurgents involved in dialogue with APRP representatives.[287] This included downgrading individuals who were on ISAF's kill/capture list to a restricted targeting list.[288] The Afghan government also sought to "place the ex-combatants on a restricted target list for monitoring purposes and remove them from [ANDSF]/ISAF targeting lists."[289]

But protecting program participants proved to be a major challenge. With so many actors involved, including the UNDP, ANDSF, NATO, USFOR-A, MOI, and NDS, it was difficult to share information and keep the many targeting lists in sync. In the 2011 Peach Research Institute Oslo report, Derksen found that Afghan authorities often did "not inform ISAF whom they [were] negotiating with." For that report, Derksen interviewed an official about APRP, who said that, "For real insurgents who want to reintegrate, there are no guarantees that they'll not end up in U.S. custody or that their tribal rivals in the police will not misbehave. The deputy of the provincial peace council in Baghlan was arrested a month ago because he had contacts with the Taliban. Of course this man has contacts with the Taliban, that's his job! He is still in custody. How can you reintegrate insurgents if you can't even protect the deputy of the peace council?"[290] As one former member of the FRIC told SIGAR, "It was hard to keep the [target] list current . . . We had cases where people we were working with would get rolled up [detained]. [Mohammed Masoom Stanekzai, then head of the Joint Secretariat]

Burhanuddin Rabbani, former president of Afghanistan and chairman of the High Peace Council, speaks to leaders from southern Afghanistan during a peace and reintegration shura in Kandahar City. (ISAF photo)

was working with someone to do outreach to Quetta Shura, and that person was killed in an operation."[291]

One way of providing security for program participants was to admit them into the Afghan Local Police, a U.S.-supported auxiliary force designed to provide security within villages and rural areas.[292] Employment in the ALP allowed ex-combatants to keep their weapons, which not only helped them defend themselves and their families against retaliatory attacks but also provided readily available employment. However, in many areas the ALP's involvement with corruption, criminality, and human rights abuses exacerbated local conflicts and deepened insecurity.[293]

Despite efforts to provide security guarantees to APRP participants, by the end of the program an estimated 225 program participants had been killed.[294] Others who joined APRP experienced threats to their personal security and expressed frustration with the government's inability to protect them.[295] Ultimately, APRP failed to provide effective security guarantees. Some insurgents who reintegrated later "returned to fighting or joined illegal armed groups."[296]

Afghan government officials and APRP staff also faced threats to their personal safety. On September 20, 2011, Burhanuddin Rabbani, former president of Afghanistan and chairman of the High Peace Council, was killed by a suicide bomber. Stanekzai was also severely injured in the attack. The attack occurred at a pivotal moment in reconciliation efforts. The suicide bomber had previously met with Rabbani and brought with him a voice recording that Rabbani recognized as Mullah Omar. This led Rabbani, as well as President Karzai, to believe that they were getting close to establishing a dialogue with the central leadership of the Taliban. Rabbani's assassination delivered a decisive

setback to APRP and wider reconciliation efforts.[297] By 2016, 40 APRP staff had been killed.[298]

Overemphasis on Economic Incentives and Flawed Assumptions about the Insurgency

Despite the assertion that APRP "was not an economic package for fighters," economic incentives quickly became one of the few tangible benefits the program could provide to communities and former combatants.[299] Meanwhile, other objectives—grievance resolution, political amnesty, and local security guarantees—were neglected.

The assumption that the provision of economic and employment opportunities could persuade low- and mid-level insurgents to leave the insurgency discounted the complex and varied factors that created individual and communal support for the insurgency, as well as the ties of loyalty and patronage within it.[300] While poverty and other economic factors play a role in exacerbating the conflict in Afghanistan, other major factors include unresolved grievances with the Afghan government and international troops, foreign support for the insurgency, and tribal and local disputes.[301] APRP overlooked or did not sufficiently address many of these factors.

Unlike DDR and DIAG, APRP was designed to provide economic benefits to both former combatants *and* the communities where they were reintegrating. Following enrollment into APRP, each ex-combatant received a transitional assistance stipend of $120 per month for three months. According to ISAF, "This figure was worked out by the Afghan government to be enough for an individual to provide for his family while the member is going through demobilization training."[302] In 2013, the Joint Secretariat expanded the transitional assistance to six monthly payments of $170 for foot soldiers and $270 for commanders.[303]

Once the transitional assistance stopped, and without an established labor market to absorb them, many program participants were left no better prepared for civilian life than when they joined the program.

Former combatants became eligible to receive their transitional assistance following biometric processing, but it could take six months before transitional assistance began.[304] One State Department official who worked on APRP told SIGAR the stipend was "miniscule."[305] While the money had some positive humanitarian effect, it was unlikely to have had long-term impact on a former combatant's capacity to transition into a civilian livelihood.[306] Once the transitional assistance stopped, and without an established labor market to absorb them, many program participants were left no better prepared for civilian life than when they joined the program.

In theory, community recovery projects were meant to complement the three-month stipend, and to provide benefits for communities receiving ex-combatants, who

could also participate in these projects. According to the Afghan government's 2010 program document on APRP, the community development projects were intended to benefit entire villages and promote inclusion, to avoid creating resentment toward ex-combatants.[307] More than 2,000 community recovery projects were implemented under APRP.[308]

Yet line ministries implementing these projects struggled to account for program funds. It was also difficult to determine whether APRP money was being used in areas receiving former combatants, or for existing ministry plans unrelated to reintegration.[309] Derksen found that ministries would often "present old projects for which they originally could not find money and relabel them as reintegration projects without linking them to specific grievances or cases."[310] Projects were often delayed: State reported that by mid-2011, 1,850 individuals had registered in APRP, yet only 200 were involved in community recovery activities.[311] On average, it took six to nine months for projects to get approved and funded after the former fighters joined the program.[312] As a result, some communities lost faith in the reintegration process.[313] A final evaluation report of APRP concluded that the 2,000 community development projects implemented were small and unsustained, and had a meager impact on reintegration objectives.[314]

No Well-Defined Grievance Resolution Process

APRP also struggled to address politically sensitive issues such as local grievance resolution and a transitional amnesty policy.[315] Although grievance resolution was a foundational component of APRP on paper, and amnesties were an important incentive, program documents provided few details on how either effort could be implemented.

Grievance resolution was meant to be included in the first stage of APRP's social outreach, confidence building, and negotiation phase.[316] The intent was to focus on "grievances that are creating armed resistance and violence" and to "maintain the dignity and honor of everyone involved in the process."[317] International stakeholders also recognized the resolution of grievances as being critical to the program's success. The FRIC highlighted that addressing grievances was a key factor that differentiated APRP from past reintegration programs.[318] According to Maj. Gen. Hook, the resolution of grievances was a cornerstone of the program's local approach to negotiating with insurgents, and demobilizing and reintegrating them.[319]

Proposed measures to address grievances included surveys and focus groups to identify community and insurgent grievances, conflict resolution training for Afghan personnel, and the use of traditional conflict resolution means or the formal justice system.[320] Yet by 2013—three years after the start of APRP—grievance mapping was "still very much in the preliminary stages" and it was "unclear whether or how this will be leveraged in practice."[321] One FRIC official observed, "Grievance resolution is very important, but how do you formalize it? Grievance resolution is easy to say, hard to do."[322] A Grievance Resolution Strategy was completed in 2013 but there is no evidence of it being put into practice. The Joint Secretariat cited "political sensitivities" as the reason for not implementing the strategy.[323]

According to Wazhma Frogh, an Afghan civil society and human rights activist, the conversation on grievance resolution was largely confined to ISAF "inside their compounds" and did not include Afghans implementing APRP. To Frogh, this seemed problematic. "This should have been a national process engaging civil society and women's groups," she said, "tying with the calls for justice and accountability for the rule of law."[324]

The failure to follow through on implementing grievance resolution likely compounded the program's overemphasis on economic incentives, and left unresolved many of the underlying factors that provoked individuals to participate in or support the insurgency.

No Clear Definition of Amnesty

Acceptance into APRP was supposed to provide former combatants with amnesty for "political acts."[325] The Afghan government tasked a legal team at the Joint Secretariat to develop an amnesty policy that was aligned with the constitution and existing legislation.[326] The Afghan government was also responsible for ensuring that the policy fully conformed to "local law, international law, treaties and established agreements."[327] According to DOD, the "amnesty may be retroactive and probationary in nature. If the participant deviates from the program, the amnesty will be void."[328]

Yet by 2013 there was still no legal definition of "political acts," and thus no legal basis for APRP to grant pardons. The National Reconciliation, General Amnesty and National Stability Law, published in December 2009, possibly could have served as a basis for APRP's amnesty policy, but this was never clarified in any official program documentation.[329]

Amnesty can be a critical tool for transitional justice and peacebuilding efforts. However, the complexity and duration of the conflict in Afghanistan, as well as constraints on Afghan state capacity, made amnesty difficult to implement within APRP. Afghanistan's history of impunity for war criminals and those involved in torture and gross violations of human rights further complicated the provision of amnesties. Civil society organizations and human rights groups were concerned that amnesty provisions granted by APRP could "damage longer-term democratic prospects by sacrificing justice to transient political interests."[330]

Difficulty Disbursing Donor Funds

At various points in 2013, international donors cut off funds for APRP when the Joint Secretariat was unable to reconcile financial accounts.[331] UNDP, which managed most of APRP's operational funds, required the Joint Secretariat to be able to account for 80 percent of funds before it released donor money. The Joint Secretariat regularly struggled with this requirement.[332] According to a former State Department official, UNDP "sometimes acted like bookkeeping sticklers, and that sometimes slowed things down."[333] State reported in 2013 that the Joint Secretariat had implemented financial reforms "which were intended to streamline the financial reconciliation process each quarter and keep operational funding flowing to the provinces."[334] Nonetheless,

lapses in international funding and difficulty in disbursing funds continued to impede program implementation.[335]

Despite receiving congressional approval to provide up to $50 million to reintegration efforts (via the ARP) through FY 2012, DOD obligated a total of $9.1 million, citing "bureaucratic challenges in approving and delivering this type of funding."[336] A DOD official who had worked on reintegration policy in Afghanistan told SIGAR that DOD "wanted to be responsible in how we were spending money, which came from a fungible pot of money. If not spent on reintegration, the money could go to other legitimate needs. We never wanted to push the field to spend money."[337] The low rate of disbursement suggests that DOD determined these funds could not be spent well, and that DOD's interest in pursuing reintegration objectives waned. At the time, APRP as a whole was experiencing problems—particularly, a lack of implementation in the south and east, where the insurgency was strongest.

According to information provided to SIGAR by State, in 2014 USFOR-A removed the contracting officer's representative (COR) within the FRIC and did not approve the extension of the ARP-funded training of Joint Secretariat personnel. The elimination of the COR meant that it was no longer possible for reintegration projects to be funded by ARP. The FRIC and U.S. Embassy Kabul both requested that USFOR-A assume the role of COR, but the request was declined.[338]

Challenges Linking Reintegration Goals with Development Programming

The $50 million that the U.S. government provided in 2010 was supposed to support reintegration goals by prioritizing the National Solidarity Program's Community

The district governor hands supplies to a recently reintegrated Taliban commander in Khas Uruzgan District, Uruzgan Province, as part of the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program. (NATO photo by Petty Officer 1st Class Matthew Leistikow)

Recovery Intensification and Prioritization projects in communities receiving reintegrated fighters. Although the money was earmarked for insecure APRP priority districts, NSP had no legal obligation to direct the funds in this way.[339] Further, "due to fears of reprisal attacks," the ministry that implemented NSP was hesitant to link its NSP CRIP projects with the return of former combatants.[340] According to a 2012 State cable, the ministry, MRRD, provided "little tangible support to APRP and appears to be largely unsuccessful in implementing projects in priority/contested districts as intended in the original agreement."[341]

MRRD's reluctance to engage in reintegration activities reflected a wider concern regarding the linkage between development and reintegration. Some implementing partners were disinclined to link their development work with such explicit political objectives, as it could damage their reputation with communities.[342] In essence, embedding reintegration assistance within a larger development program risked distorting development aid by providing assistance "not on the basis of need, but on [communities'] ability to produce and turn in ex-combatants."[343] Further, NGOs and development practitioners faced security risks due to their involvement with projects or programs that were perceived to have a counterinsurgency objective.[344] In a positive sense, the attempt to use NSP CRIP projects as a vehicle for reintegration assistance reflected the international guideline of ensuring benefits reach both former combatants and communities. However, the reluctance on the part of development partners to implement this linkage with APRP—and the potential security risk it posed—showed how difficult it is in practice to link the two.

Incomplete Vetting Process Vulnerable to Manipulation

In theory, APRP had a robust set of mechanisms for vetting and monitoring former combatants. The vetting process was meant to begin after a prospective reintegration candidate submitted a form declaring his intent to reintegrate, cease violence, and obey the Afghan constitution and orders of Afghan officials throughout the process. The form also included some family history and an explanation of why he was fighting and why he wanted to stop. This application was then supposed to be reviewed at the provincial level by the provincial governor, NDS, ANP, ANA, and the Provincial Peace Council, after they had conducted their own background investigation on the candidate. The provincial vetting form would then be forwarded to the Joint Secretariat in Kabul, where the candidate would be vetted again jointly by the MOI, NDS, and Joint Secretariat to ensure the candidate was eligible for the program.[345] Biometric data and information from interviews were also to be sent to the Joint Secretariat. The information would then be entered into the Reintegration Tracking and Monitoring Database, which was supposed to be accessible to Afghan government agencies and ISAF to help monitor whether program participants registered in multiple locations.[346]

In practice, the vetting process was incomplete and vulnerable to manipulation.[347] Many potential program participants were not fully vetted; of those who were, their information was often not communicated to other stakeholders and implementing partners.[348] Johnny Walsh, senior expert on Afghanistan at USIP, noted that it

A former insurgent commander participating in APRP has his fingerprints taken during biometric enrollment in Khas Uruzgan District, Uruzgan Province. (NATO photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Jacob Dillon)

was "extremely difficult to vet the reintegrees. There was the risk of the same guy 'reintegrating' seven times, but who was never really a Talib."[349]

Accusations of Fraud, Corruption, and "Ghost" Taliban

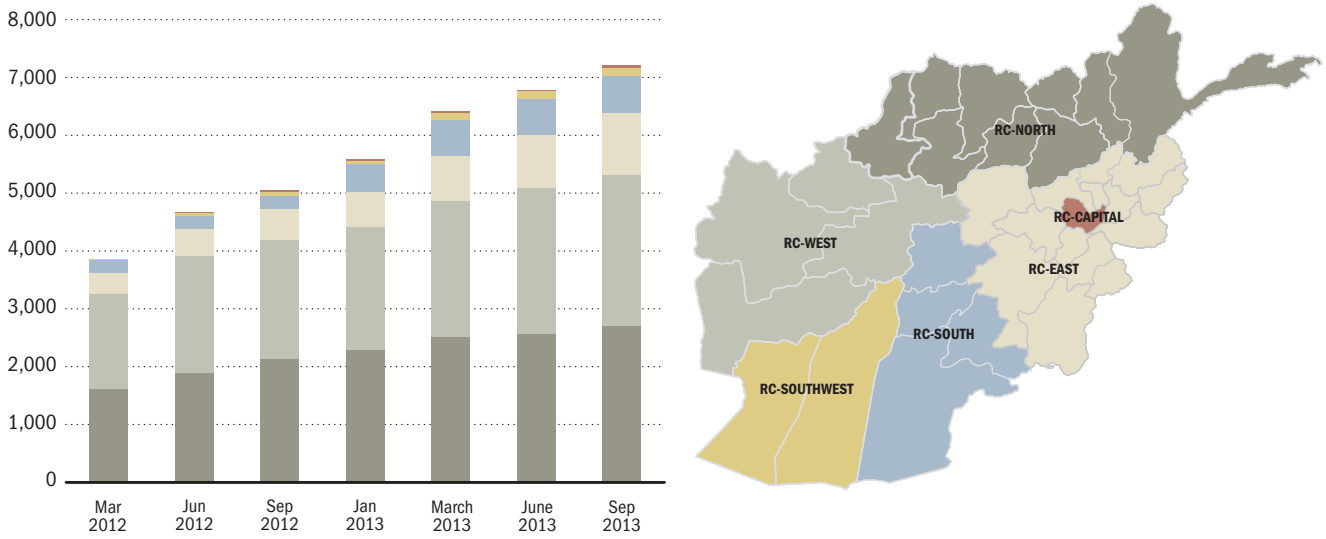
By the end of the program in 2016, APRP claimed to have reintegrated over 11,000 insurgents.[350] However, the number of program participants registered in northern and western provinces far surpassed the number of those registered in the southern and eastern regions, the insurgency's strongholds.[351] This uneven geographic distribution suggests that the Afghan government and coalition forces were unable to implement the program in areas where the insurgency was more active, and instead targeted militias with only a loose connection to the insurgency (see Figure 5 on the following page). Derksen, who interviewed APRP participants between 2011 and 2014, concluded that they "seemed to belong primarily to small militias, some of whom may have joined the insurgency only temporarily."[352]

The Afghan government and coalition forces were unable to implement the program in areas where the insurgency was more active.

Even the number of 11,000 is disputed. A Western official in Kabul asserted that "there were a lot of fake Taliban in APRP, particularly in the north and west."[353] Despite a 2013 ANDSF audit that found that only about 5 percent of reintegration program participants were unqualified to be in the program, one Western ambassador told a UNDP monitoring team that the correct number was closer to 80 percent. The 2013 UNDP midterm evaluation concluded that it was impossible to determine "which statistic is correct."[354]

FIGURE 5

REINTEGREES BY ISAF REGIONAL COMMAND (RC), MARCH 2012–SEPTEMBER 2013



Source: State, responses to SIGAR data call, October 4, 2013, July 1, 2013, April 2, 2013, January 2, 2013, October 2, 2012, July 5, 2012, March 30, 2012.

Gulab Mangal, the governor of Helmand from 2008 to 2012, "argued that no genuine insurgents joined the PTS or the APRP while he was in office."[355]

The 2013 UNDP evaluation, independent experts, and senior U.S. and UN officials have asserted that Afghan officials used APRP resources to support their own patronage networks. APRP's resource allocation was described as resembling a "political patronage system," with program benefits being directed toward armed groups associated with individuals connected to APRP.[356] This included placing relatives in positions in local APRP offices, pocketing money that was for community development projects, and fraudulently enrolling members of their own patronage networks in the program.[357] According to one peace council member, "No one knows most of these people [APRP participants]. APRP officials make lists of ghost Taliban and send them to Kabul to financially benefit from the program."[358]

Afghan activist Wazhma Frogh argued that a key factor in APRP's failure was that it was designed by experts, but implemented at the local level by politicians and officials with little to no knowledge about DDR, security sector reform, or even the program objectives. She said district officials spent money that was intended for community development projects on guest houses, food, and cash for people who were not vetted. The latter were not Taliban but criminals, she said, and this "created so much backlash by the community members."[359]

Ineffective Monitoring and Evaluation

APRP's monitoring and evaluation systems were inadequate for measuring and reporting on the effectiveness of the transitional assistance and community development

packages. A Joint Secretariat Monitoring and Evaluation Department was responsible for overall program monitoring and evaluation activities within APRP.[360] To begin with, APRP never obtained adequate baseline data that could be used to measure changes related to the program, and by 2013 there was still no uniform monitoring and evaluation system.[361] Frogh asserted that UNDP "had no access to the provincial capitals" to do effective monitoring.[362] The 2016 final evaluation report of APRP concluded that the project's monitoring and evaluation capacity was "inefficient, but even more ineffective."[363]

The line ministries implementing APRP projects used different reporting formats and submitted different types of data, making it impossible to aggregate the data.[364] This in turn exacerbated APRP's overreliance on reporting the number of program activities, rather than measuring how those activities may have contributed to specific results. For example, measuring how many individuals had registered with the program failed to capture key indicators that could be used to more accurately assess whether participants were successfully reintegrating—such as "the number of jobs, self-employment opportunities created, and satisfactory level of personal physical and economic security." Other problems included inadequate "means of verification for each indicator."[365]

The lack of any comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system also limited APRP's ability to determine whether program participants returned to the insurgency after joining the program. State claimed that by 2015 only 134 program participants, or 1.3 percent, were confirmed recidivists.[366] The final evaluation report cited a claim that after project funding stopped, as many as 18 percent, or 1,980, had "returned to the Taliban, or possibly moved on to [Islamic State Khorasan]," but the evaluation could not verify this, as no system existed to track program participants.[367]

Ultimately, APRP struggled to demonstrate how communities reacted to reintegration programs or what happened to former combatants over time.[368] Insufficient baseline data and program evaluation prevented APRP from adjusting program strategies mid-course, and weakened any chance to gauge long-term impact. According to a 2014 UNDP progress report, a "correlation between community development projects and the mitigation of local conflicts" was based on anecdotal evidence."[369]

Program Was Ineffective and Closed in 2016

In March 2016, APRP closed following a decision by donors, the Afghan government, and UNDP.[370] The absence of a political settlement, the continuing war, and problems with program design, implementation, and monitoring were the main obstacles to more successful program execution.[371] The U.S. and Afghan governments and the UN have all acknowledged that APRP was largely ineffective and possibly counterproductive. UNDP described APRP "as overly ambitious, assumption-laden and structurally unsustainable, lacking accountability, and producing no satisfactory results."[372] Lisa Curtis, senior director for South and Central Asia at the National Security Council, in 2018 stressed that the United States does not intend "to recreate earlier efforts that were largely

A reintegrated fighter from Badghis Province leading his men to surrender their weapons in 2012. (Resolute Support Media photo)

unsuccessful. One of these included the APRP, which serves as a cautionary tale about the dangers of graft."[373] Steve Brooking, special advisor to the Special Representative of the Secretary General, UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, concluded that the APRP had "zero effect on the actual insurgency and levels of violence."[374]

The Afghan government's 2016 draft peace and reconciliation strategy concluded that "armed violence and insecurity in the country (as well as in APRP reintegration and community project areas) has largely increased and there has been no significant diminishment of the military capacity of armed opposition through the APRP reintegration process."[375]

As the conflict worsened, insurgents continued to face high costs to join APRP, including retribution by the insurgency, targeting by the Afghan government and coalition forces, and loss of social and economic status. The Taliban accurately perceived that attempts to reintegrate fighters without any peace agreement in place were intended to destabilize and weaken them; in that sense, reintegration efforts may have undermined the trust needed to reach high-level peace talks.[376]

Ultimately, the experience of APRP suggests that large-scale programs to reintegrate foot soldiers are unlikely to be effective and can actually be counterproductive without a broader political settlement in place. Even after a political settlement is in place, many implementation challenges would likely continue to undermine formal reintegration efforts.

Key Findings

- A primary obstacle to APRP's success was that the program was implemented in the absence of a political settlement.
- At the same time, APRP suffered from numerous implementation challenges.
- There was greater U.S. political and financial support for APRP than for previous reintegration programs.
- U.S. agencies, particularly DOD, treated APRP mainly as a counterinsurgency tool to fracture and weaken the Taliban. This approach proved ineffective, and undermined wider U.S. and Afghan government efforts to get the Taliban to the negotiating table.
- Coalition and Afghan forces were unable to provide security guarantees for former combatants participating in APRP.
- APRP overemphasized economic incentives, and the grievance resolution component of the program was not effectively implemented.
- Though amnesty was promised to former combatants participating in APRP, a policy and legal framework for amnesty were never established.
- APRP suffered from poor budget execution and oversight. The $50 million that the U.S. government provided to Afghanistan's MRRD for reintegration objectives was mostly spent on projects unrelated to reintegration.
- In addition to the $50 million provided to MRRD, Congress authorized up to $50 million for a DOD support program for APRP. However, only about $9 million of this amount appears to have been spent.
- Processes to vet combatants for participation in APRP were incomplete and vulnerable to manipulation.
- A disproportionate number of program participants came from northern and western provinces, indicating problems with implementing the program in areas where the insurgency was most active.
- Insufficient monitoring and evaluation efforts meant that it was difficult to evaluate program outcomes or substantiate claims about the numbers of genuine insurgents who reintegrated through APRP.

POLITICAL SETTLEMENT WITH HEZB-E ISLAMI GULBUDDIN

The 2016 accord between the Afghan government and Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin (HIG), led by former mujahedeen warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, was hailed by the U.S. and Afghan governments and international donors as a breakthrough in peace negotiations over the last decade. A process that had started as early as 2008 concluded with the signing of an agreement on September 29, 2016. While progress has been made on provisions regarding the release of prisoners and the granting of political leadership positions to HIG members, integration of HIG fighters into security forces—a central HIG demand—has stalled. A combination of factors, such as changes in the recruitment and retirement of security forces and opposition from other factions, have stymied the process. Currently, the Afghan government is considering integrating HIG into the ALP or ANA Territorial Force. Given the possibility of a political settlement with the Taliban, which would likely entail a wider restructuring of Afghan security forces, the integration of HIG fighters is likely to take a back seat for the time being.

Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, founder and leader of the Hezb-e Islami political party. (Unaltered Tasnim News Agency photo covered under Creative Commons license 4.0)

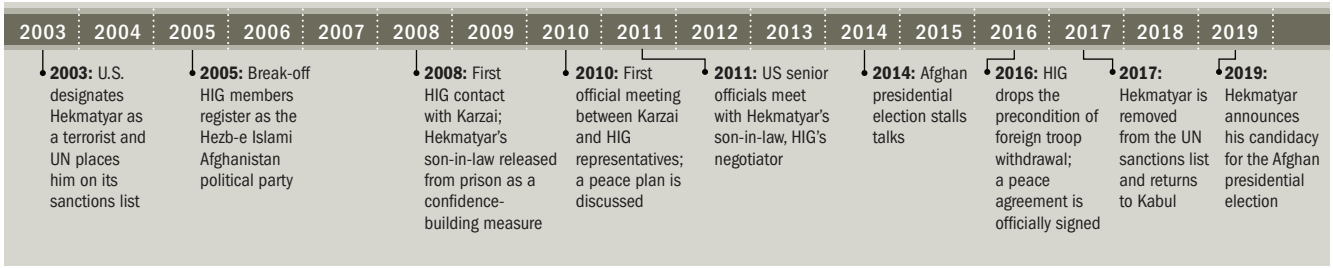
Background on HIG

Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin, now an Afghan political party, was formerly a militant group that originated in the 1970s. During the anti-Soviet jihad, Hezb-e Islami heavily relied on financial support from the United States and its allies, channeled through Pakistan.[377] When former Afghan President Mohammad Najibullah launched a process of reconciliation in the early 1990s, Hezb-e Islami did not participate for fear of losing access to Pakistan-administered funds.[378] In 1992, when Najibullah's government fell, Hekmatyar refused to recognize a power-sharing agreement proposed by the other mujahedeen parties. He then launched a bloody bombing assault on Kabul that killed almost 2,000 civilians in one month, and continued to shell Kabul throughout the civil war. When Kabul fell to the Taliban in 1996, Hekmatyar and other mujahedeen leaders were forced out of the city.[379] Hekmatyar fled the country and a few HIG commanders defected to the Taliban. However, the Taliban did not fully trust them and prohibited them from obtaining leadership positions.[380] During Taliban rule, Hekmatyar lived in exile in Iran, and HIG was inactive. Excluded from the 2001 Bonn Agreement and the post-2001 political order, Hekmatyar announced jihad against the U.S. and Afghan governments, and declared his allegiance to al-Qaeda a few years later.[381]

In 2003, the U.S. government designated Hekmatyar as a "Specially Designated Global Terrorist" and he was placed on the UN Security Council's sanctions list in the same year (see Figure 6 on the following page).[382] Although Pakistan offered safe havens—allowing HIG commanders to be active, recruit, and hide—the insurgent group constantly struggled for resources, shifting to hit-and-run tactics since they could not sustain operations.[383]

FIGURE 6

NEGOTIATING THE HIG DEAL: A TIMELINE



Source: U.S. Department of State Archive website, "Designation of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar as a Terrorist," February 19, 2003, accessed August 5, 2018; Borhan Osman, *Adding the Ballot to the Bullet? Hezb-e Islami in transition*, Afghanistan Analysts Network, May 6, 2013, p. 3; Casey Garett Johnson, *The Political Deal with Hezb-e Islami: What it means for talks with the Taliban and Peace in Afghanistan*, United States Institute of Peace, July 2018, pp. 13, 15–16; Ahmad Rashid, *Pakistan on the Brink: The Future of America, Pakistan, and Afghanistan* (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2012), p. 126; Rob Crilly, "US opens talks with Hizb-i-Islami insurgent group," *Telegraph*, January 23, 2012; Kathy Gannon, "AP Exclusive: US talks to Afghan insurgent group," *San Diego Union Tribune*, January 22, 2012; Borhan Osman, *Peace with Hekmatyar: What does it mean for battlefield and politics?*, Afghanistan Analysts Network, September 29, 2016, pp. 2–3; Franz Marty, "Afghan Peace Accord with Hezb-i Islami Unlikely to Have Effect on Negotiations with Taliban," *Diplomatic Courier*, February 24, 2017; Thomas Ruttig, *Hekmatyar taken off UN sanctions list: Paving the way for his return – and Hezb-e Islami's reunification?*, Afghanistan Analysts Network, February 11, 2017, p. 1; Deedee Derksen, *Hezb-e Islami, Peace, and Integration into the Afghan Security Forces*, United States Institute of Peace, July 2018, p 14; Pamela Constable, "Afghan president and 14 rivals launch race for July elections," *Washington Post*, January 20, 2019.

In 2005, some Hezb-e Islami members agreed to distance themselves from Hekmatyar, and were finally able to register as a political party—Hezb-e Islami Afghanistan—in time to participate in the parliamentary elections.[384] By 2012, some 50 Hezb-e Islami members held positions in the cabinet, parliament, ministries, and provincial and district government offices.[385] This included posts as Chief of Staff to President Karzai, Minister of Economy, Minister of Education, and multiple governorships.[386]

HIG's Negotiation Process

Although the U.S. government initially opposed negotiations with Hekmatyar, the Karzai administration initiated talks in 2008. As a confidence-building measure, Hekmatyar's imprisoned son-in-law, Ghairat Baheer, was released from a U.S.-run prison. Baheer then participated in talks with Karzai, UN officials, and other diplomats. American officials did not participate in these meetings, and it is unclear to what degree they supported the talks.[387] A series of official meetings between the Karzai administration and HIG representatives took place in 2010, with no conclusive agreement. There were press reports of direct meetings in 2011 between Baheer and senior U.S. officials, including General David Petraeus, General John Allen and U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan Ryan Crocker.[388] President Karzai, whose relationship with Washington had worsened significantly around that time, was further infuriated that U.S. officials had met with the HIG delegation without his involvement. With Karzai's second term coming to an end and the 2014 Afghan presidential election planning well underway, securing a deal seemed unlikely.[389]

Nevertheless, the head of HPC's Secretariat and HIG's chief negotiator continued to work on a "Fourteen-Point Action Plan for Peace" draft over eight or nine months. U.S. Embassy Kabul and the SRAP office provided limited feedback to the text of the plan.[390]

Finally, on September 29, 2016, after HIG dropped one of its main preconditions—the withdrawal of foreign forces—the agreement was signed.[391] Four months later, Hekmatyar was removed from the UN sanctions list and subsequently returned to Kabul in May 2017.[392] The U.S. government welcomed the signing of the deal, calling it "historic"; the Afghan government expressed hope that it would pave the way for future peace talks with the Taliban.[393] Among ordinary Afghans with memories of Hekmatyar's brutality during the civil war and his role in the destruction of Kabul, the reaction was mixed.[394]

According to the agreement, HIG committed to cease all military activities and disband its military structure, to cut ties to terrorist or illegal armed groups, and ensure that released HIG prisoners would not return to fighting or join such groups. HIG also agreed to adhere to the Afghan constitution and laws, and "act and work as an important political party in the country."[395] The Afghan government committed to make every effort to secure the removal of Hezb-e Islami leaders and members from UN and other countries' sanctions lists, to recognize Hezb-e Islami's right to full political activity, and allow its participation in government institutions. The government also committed to release HIG prisoners, repatriate some 20,000 Afghan refugee families based in Pakistan and Iran, and provide support to the families of dead and disabled HIG fighters. The agreement also granted a central HIG demand: the integration of eligible HIG commanders and individuals into Afghan security forces. A joint implementation commission was to be formed to manage implementation of several provisions in the agreement.[396]

Post-Agreement Progress and Key Challenges

Progress has been made on some of the provisions of the agreement, including the release of 160 HIG-affiliated prisoners, land allocation to HIG leadership and its affiliated returnees, and the granting of political leadership positions to HIG members. The latter involved a reshuffle of provincial governors that rewarded several of Hekmatyar's associates.[397]

But the integration of HIG fighters into Afghan security forces has been a key challenge—and without a guarantee of this, Hekmatyar has been reluctant to demobilize his men.[398] Some HIG commanders were active in several provinces in 2017, where they were accused of instigating violence, land-grabbing, and illegal mining.[399] The HIG agreement also left out many details, including identifying the specific security forces into which HIG fighters would integrate, the eligibility criteria, and the process. Options under consideration are integrating HIG senior commanders into the ALP or ANA Territorial Force, and younger members into the ANP.[400] HIG has demanded appointments in the security sector institutions, but ongoing security sector reforms—such as lowering the retirement age—have made older HIG leaders ineligible to enter the security forces. Further complicating the picture is the fact that some existing HIG-affiliated security personnel may also soon find themselves forced to retire.[401] Other political factions have slowed the integration of HIG leaders into the ANDSF as a way of forestalling HIG political gains. These factions may perceive HIG members

joining the ALP as less threatening than the integration of HIG members into the regular security forces.[402]

There are some indications that the Taliban may also seek positions within state security forces, in the event of a peace agreement with the Afghan government. If so, problems implementing those elements of the HIG deal may signal to the Taliban that the Afghan government cannot deliver on its promises, and that the support and guarantee of external stakeholders would be needed.[403] Nonetheless, HIG integration into security forces will likely continue to be stalled, given the Afghan and U.S. governments' preoccupation with negotiations with the Taliban. It is likely that the security sector will undergo significant reforms after any future political settlement between the Afghan government and the Taliban, which would create new opportunities and challenges to integration of ex-combatants, including HIG fighters.

Key Findings

- Despite the signing of the agreement in 2016, HIG ex-combatants have not been integrated into Afghan security forces and institutions. Ongoing reforms in security forces' recruitment and retirement policies, opposition from political factions, and lack of any details on implementation mechanisms in the agreement itself have hindered HIG's integration process.
- The U.S. government's willingness to not oppose a peace process with HIG was an important factor in the eventual conclusion of a deal. In turn, the peace process between the Afghan government and HIG provided the venue for discussions about the reintegration of HIG members.
- The United States' coordination with the UN on removing Hekmatyar from the UN sanctions list allowed for his return to Afghanistan and subsequent political participation.

CHAPTER 3

LOCAL SECURITY AGREEMENTS: CAN THEY CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR REINTEGRATION?

DOD photo

The United States encourages grassroots peace initiatives in Afghanistan, said Lisa Curtis, senior director for South and Central Asia at the National Security Council, in June 2018. The goal of reducing violence, providing opportunities for reintegration, and contributing to national-level reconciliation, she added, "means working closely with the Afghan government to ensure that there are ways for the Taliban fighters who are ready to stop fighting to return to civil society."[404]

This interest in bottom-up peace initiatives stems partly from awareness that local efforts to achieve reconciliation had occurred in many parts of the country throughout the post-2001 period. Entirely on their own, district and provincial government officials, local security forces, tribal leaders, and insurgents have made various attempts to reduce violence. One of these also aimed to integrate fighters into local security forces. Community leaders often sought to secure ceasefires so that residents could resume normal life, including opening schools and shops. While these agreements sometimes achieved meaningful reductions in violence, they were fragile and short-lived. Local tribal dynamics, interference by provincial and national government officials, and Afghan and coalition forces' emphasis on military objectives all undermined the durability of these local security agreements.

This section discusses two kinds of agreements. The first kind, illustrated by the Musa Qala and Sangin security agreements, involved extensive negotiations and engagement

A shura in Musa Qala District (USAID photo)

by local actors and resulted in signed agreements, one of which provided for the reintegration of fighters. The second kind, illustrated by the Kapisa and Baghlan security agreements, were non-aggression pacts that mainly entailed cessation of fighting. These cases shed light on what factors contributed to such agreements, what challenges they encountered, and whether they created conditions conducive to successful reintegration of former fighters.

THE 2006 MUSA QALA AGREEMENT WAS SHORT-LIVED AND LACKED OUTSIDE SUPPORT

By 2006, clashes between British forces and the Taliban had increased across Helmand Province, including in Musa Qala District.[405] The 5,000 British forces who were deployed to Helmand Province, including an 88-person unit at an isolated outpost in Musa Qala, were under repeated Taliban attacks.[406] Civilian casualties in the province had increased due to NATO airstrikes, and the increased violence prompted a strong civilian push for peace.[407]

In September 2006, a council of 15 district tribal elders negotiated an agreement with the Helmand provincial governor. The Musa Qala agreement stipulated that the tribal council would support "a district administration that would fly the Afghan flag," and that the council would guarantee that the "district would not be used for military operations against other areas."[408] The tribal council had met with local Taliban leaders separately, and had arrived at an unwritten understanding that Taliban fighters would stay outside a three-mile radius of the district center.[409]

The British unit in the district, though serving as part of ISAF, signed the deal without consulting ISAF headquarters.[410] Just as important, the agreement did not have full approval from President Karzai.[411] One month after signing the agreement, the British

forces withdrew from Musa Qala District center, handing it over to the council of tribal elders.[412]

An element of the agreement was that community elders would select 50 local men for a local auxiliary police unit to help provide security in the district center after the withdrawal of British forces.[413] Only that local police unit would be allowed to bear arms in the district center. Problems immediately arose. Local men were reluctant to join, given the risk of retribution from the Taliban—and when the 50 men eventually recruited were sent to central Helmand for training, delays in processing prevented all but 19 from actually completing the training.[414] Though elders anticipated being able to call on Afghan forces and ISAF if threats emerged that exceeded the ability of the local force, the priority for Afghan and international forces was to focus on the provincial capital of Lashkar Gah, not to support a quick reaction force for Musa Qala.[415]

Nevertheless, the agreement initially brought some positive changes. In the five-month period after the signing of the agreement, fighting was considerably reduced in the district center, where shops and schools reopened. The Taliban also respected the terms of the agreement by not entering the district center. The one time Taliban fighters tried to enter the district center while bearing arms, community elders successfully turned them away.[416]

However, controversy over the agreement's terms and motives soon began to undermine its implementation. While the provincial governor, Mohammad Daud, supported the agreement, some officials in Kabul were skeptical. One former Northern Alliance member thought it was a "recognition for the enemy" and "military defeat."[417] More importantly, the lack of President Karzai's full support made it highly unlikely that the local initiative would succeed.[418] Karzai removed Governor Daud in December 2006 and replaced him with Asadullah Wafa, who promptly announced that he would renegotiate the terms of the agreement to strengthen the role of the central government.[419] U.S. officials also criticized the deal. Then-U.S. Ambassador Ronald Neumann expressed concern that the town might turn into a sanctuary governed by the Taliban.[420] There were other problems as well: disagreements between provincial and central government officials, ongoing criticism by spoilers in Kabul, and failure to deliver development projects.[421] Meanwhile, clashes between Taliban and British forces had increased across Helmand Province, including on the outskirts of Musa Qala District center.[422]

The Musa Qala security agreement collapsed in February 2007, after an ISAF military strike in the district killed a prominent Taliban commander who had been involved in maintaining the deal. ISAF claimed the attack was outside the three-mile zone, while the Taliban claimed it was inside. The brother of the killed commander re-entered the district center in force and declared "resumption of the jihad against foreign forces." Soon after, the Taliban "disarmed the district security officials, placed the [tribal council] under house arrest, and occupied the district center."[423] Neither the ANP nor the local police force formed as part of the agreement could muster the force to keep them out.

A major ISAF and ANA operation expelled the Taliban 10 months later and retook the district. Since then, Afghan or coalition forces have only intermittently maintained control.[424]

THE 2011 SANGIN AGREEMENT PROMISED BENEFITS THAT NEVER MATERIALIZED

In May 2010, eight pro-Taliban commanders, members of the Alikozai tribe, sent a letter to the newly appointed district governor of Sangin in Helmand Province, who had expressed a willingness to negotiate with insurgents. The letter offered to let ISAF and Afghan national security forces move freely in the Upper Sangin Valley and to set up bases in exchange for small-scale development projects for local communities. After the first round of negotiations that followed this offer, insurgent attacks on ISAF and Afghan forces in the district center significantly decreased—dropping by June 2010 from 30 a day to half a dozen. The negotiations did not result in an agreement because U.S. forces and the British-led Provincial Reconstruction Team in Sangin were not supportive. Nonetheless, the district governor and his British advisor insisted on pursuing negotiations by cultivating a locally trusted interlocutor, who was a Sufi leader.[425]

At the same time, the U.S. troop surge in Helmand Province almost doubled ISAF's presence in Sangin District.[426] U.S. Marines intensified operations against the Taliban, killing hundreds of Taliban-aligned Alikozai tribe members. In December 2010, the pro-Taliban Alikozai commanders resumed negotiations with the Afghan government.[427] The Alikozai tribal members were reluctant to disassociate from the Taliban and support the Afghan government, partly because their uprising against the Taliban three years earlier had backfired due to lack of resources and support from ISAF. Moreover, the Alikozais were reluctant to give up their stake in the lucrative drug trade.[428]

Nevertheless, in January 2011, Alikozai commanders and provincial government officials, with ISAF support, signed a security agreement.[429] The agreement stipulated that the pro-Taliban commanders and coalition forces would stop fighting in Sangin's Upper Valley, and the commanders would acknowledge Afghan government authority. Coalition forces were to help communities in the area to resist outside Taliban intrusion. Afghan and coalition forces could establish joint patrol bases and the latter would have freedom of movement along the main road. Helmand's provincial government officials promised to deliver public services such as education and health, and to asphalt the main road leading to the Kajaki Dam, which was a U.S. and Afghan government priority at the time.[430] As part of the agreement, local Alikozai commanders also pledged to provide a list of their fighters willing to reintegrate and cease fighting.[431] As at Musa Qala, there was a government plan to create a local police force from the reconciled fighters, but the plan was never implemented.[432]

The Sangin agreement broke down by summer 2011, about seven months after its signing.[433] As with the Musa Qala agreement, this was due to a variety of factors. First, the deal did not include other tribes in the district. In fact, some Afghans called the

Afghan villagers ride by U.S. Marines as they conduct a security patrol in Sangin, Helmand Province. (DOD photo by Sgt. Logan Pierce)

agreement the "Alikozai accord in Sangin."[434] Even that was an overstatement: According to a U.S. commander based in Sangin, at least 25 percent of the Alikozai did not support the deal, and continued to launch attacks on the Marines.[435]

Second, the Afghan government failed to deliver small-scale, low-cost projects as promised, which made tribal commanders lose credibility. Even the Provincial Reconstruction Team stationed in the provincial center, whose mission was to provide public works to increase communities' support for the Afghan government, did not provide any support.[436] The Afghan government failed to deploy officials to form a local police force from the reconciled fighters. Communities were exposed to threats by Taliban from outside the district, who came to Sangin and intimidated community members of the negotiating team—including shooting and wounding the Sufi leader who was instrumental during the negotiations process.[437]

Third, the agreement was destabilized by outside Taliban offensives. While local pro-Taliban commanders signed the agreement, the Taliban Quetta leadership opposed the deal, vowing to kill local Alikozai commanders who were involved in the negotiations.[438] The outskirts of Sangin saw heavy fighting between ISAF and Taliban. Several local militia groups led by a Taliban commander acted as spoilers in the district by launching hit-and-run attacks in an attempt to provoke ISAF forces.[439]

Other contributing factors to the agreement's failure were two ISAF assaults—one of which happened even after the Afghan government had released a local Taliban commander as a confidence-building measure during the initial stages of negotiations.[440] The first ISAF attack was in November 2010 when a Taliban district shadow governor was killed. According to the Afghanistan Analysts Network, the Taliban governor had secretly communicated with Afghan and British officials over several months and was ready to hand over the district to the Afghan government. While the U.S. commander leading ISAF in the region hailed the killing of this shadow governor as a victory,

some members of the coalition working for ISAF were furious and saw it as a missed opportunity to stabilize the district.[441] (It is unclear whether the U.S. commander knew about the shadow governor's communications with British and Afghan officials.) The second military assault happened in August 2011, when U.S. Special Operations Forces arrested and imprisoned the local Sufi leader who had played a significant role in resuming the negotiations. The Sufi leader was jailed because of his access to high-ranking Taliban, the very reason that made him suitable to play the role of mediator.[442] (Again, it is unclear to what extent U.S. Special Forces were aware of the negotiations.)

Finally, despite signing and endorsing the agreement, the parties to the agreement remained distrustful of each other's intentions. Some elders and Afghan government officials feared the Taliban used the agreement mainly to release their commander and stall ISAF's impending military surge; the Taliban alleged that the Afghan government sought to take the district without a fight. Local Taliban and Alikozai elders were also skeptical of the government's capability to provide security and protection in the event of outside Taliban retribution.[443]

Despite the collapse of the agreement and the continued Taliban offensive, security improved significantly between 2010 and 2014, the year that U.S. troops withdrew from the district.[444] Taliban attacks in the district dropped by more than half from 2010 to 2011.[445] The Marines' de-mining of a strategically important highway reduced travel time between the district center and a U.S. military base from 8 hours to 18 minutes.[446] In 2009, only 177 Sangin residents voted in the presidential election; by 2014, that number had risen to roughly 5,000.[447] The number of Afghan police officers in the district center significantly increased, and more shops and medical facilities opened.[448]

Then, in the spring of 2017, the Taliban re-took the district center, where they remain active.[449]

KAPISA AND BAGHLAN: LOCAL TRUCES THAT FAILED FOR LACK OF OUTSIDE SUPPORT

In more recent years, as clashes between the Taliban and Afghan and coalition forces intensified and the government's control over districts declined, local government officials at times pursued deals with insurgents.[450] These local truces were mainly for the purpose of ending violence and resuming normal life, and did not culminate in written agreements. These deals did not include reintegration of Taliban fighters into either civilian life or security forces, and Taliban fighters involved in these deals remained active outside the district where an agreement was made.

In 2011, although Alasay District was one of the most insecure districts in the northern province of Kapisa, parts of the district remained relatively calm.[451] Some years earlier, district government officials had negotiated a verbal security agreement in which Taliban and Afghan security forces agreed not to fight in the district center and the Taliban had agreed not to launch any offensives against the Afghan security forces.[452]

The Alasay security agreement collapsed in 2013, when Taliban and Haqqani Network insurgents took over large swaths of the province, including Tagab and Alasay Districts. The Afghan government held on to its control in some parts of Alasay.[453]

A more controversial security agreement was made in September 2015, in the Dand-e Ghori locality of the northern province of Baghlan, strategically located along the highway that connects Kabul to other northern provinces.[454] That year, when the Taliban gained ground in Dand-e Ghori, clashes between Afghan government security forces and the Taliban intensified. To address the worsening insecurity in the district, a delegation of Afghan government officials from Kabul met with community leaders. An agreement was signed between the government and tribal leaders, who also spoke on the Taliban's behalf.[455] The government agreed to halt military operations against the Taliban in the area and stop arresting villagers they accused of being Taliban insurgents. In exchange, the Taliban agreed to stop attacking government checkpoints, vacate their fighting positions, and allow access to Dand-e Ghori.[456] The agreement was endorsed by local residents and officials as well as some government officials in Kabul, but the national media, as well as some parliamentarians and civil society activists in Kabul, saw it as surrendering to the Taliban—disputes that illustrate the divergent interests of central and provincial government officials.[457]

After the agreement was signed, the Taliban ceased fighting temporarily, and during that peaceful interim schools were reopened and displaced residents were able to return and harvest their crops.[458] The relative calm was short-lived: The Afghan government canceled the agreement a month later, after local Taliban attacked several military bases in the district. As of January 2019, the Taliban remained active in the district.[459]

Key Findings

- In the absence of a political settlement at the national level, local security agreements remained fragile and vulnerable to attacks by spoilers.
- Local security agreements reduced violence temporarily, but were not conducive to reintegration efforts because they broke down relatively early and there was little opportunity to implement a reintegration effort.
- Where local agreements included measures related to reintegration, the only path offered to insurgents was integration into the local police force, which did not materialize. None of the agreements offered an alternative path for reintegration, such as assistance for transitioning to a civilian trade.
- Local security agreements broke down for several reasons. These included a lack of political will and consensus among parties to the agreement, at the local, regional, and national levels; lack of political support from the United States; insufficient authority for district officials to enforce terms of an agreement; the inability of Afghan and coalition security forces to provide security in areas covered by an agreement; lack of coordination with ISAF; detention of local mediators by coalition forces; and the failure to deliver promised development projects.

African Union Mission in Somalia photo

CHAPTER 4

CASE STUDIES: COLOMBIA AND SOMALIA

REINTEGRATION IN COLOMBIA

Colombia's long struggle with a violent insurgency includes nearly 30 years of experience with reintegration efforts. These serve as an illustration of how long reintegration of ex-combatants into civil society can take, how complicated it is, and how even an extensive bureaucracy is not always equal to the challenges posed by shifting political winds, a weak legal economy, and the profits of criminal drug trafficking.

In comparison to Afghanistan, Colombia has a larger economy, a well-developed infrastructure, and relatively strong state institutions, including the security sector. It also has a well-established, mostly self-funded bureaucracy for DDR, which has been able to adapt flexibly to the needs of different types of armed groups.[460] All of these advantages made it possible for the Colombian government to demobilize thousands of combatants through what was largely a counterinsurgency strategy, as was the case in Afghanistan. Yet its reintegration efforts have been slowed by inconsistent political support, the lack of jobs in the legal economy, and the economic attractions of drug trafficking. The challenges to reintegration in Colombia are a preview of problems Afghanistan may encounter.

Colombian troops listen to U.S. Army General Martin E. Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, speak during a visit to Colombia. (Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff photo)

DDR of Individual Insurgents

Though the warring parties were far from a political settlement, in the early 1990s the Colombian government began a demobilization program to support fighters who defected from the insurgency.[461] This individual-combatant demobilization program was run by the military and became a key component of the government's counterinsurgency strategy under then-President Álvaro Uribe.[462] The program was officially known as the Humanitarian Care Program for the Demobilized (PAHD). The military used PAHD to tempt guerrilla fighters away from the insurgency with the prospect of reintegration into civilian life.[463] The military dropped leaflets on insurgent-controlled territory, produced television advertisements, and used special festivals to reach out and entice guerrilla fighters.[464]

In theory, PAHD comprised a sequence: voluntary demobilization (defined as when an individual decided to defect), disarmament, and reintegration. Individuals who defected first made contact with an official authority, generally the police, and would then surrender to the Ministry of Defense and lay down their weapons. The individual was then sent to a transitional shelter and given short-term reinsertion assistance in the form of food, clothing, and access to health services. Individuals were interviewed to prove their status as an insurgent and were paid to provide actionable intelligence. At this stage, the individual was certified as an ex-combatant by the Ministry of Defense and was considered to have completed the PAHD process.[465]

Individuals then had the option of entering a reintegration program called the Program for Reincorporation into Civilian Life (PRVC), run by the Ministry of Interior and Justice.[466] This program mainly consisted of short-term assistance that did not differ

significantly from the reinsertion assistance offered by PAHD. Therefore, while insurgents theoretically underwent a DDR process, there was little emphasis on long-term reintegration.

DDR of a Paramilitary Organization

In 2003, the Colombian government struck an agreement with the right-wing paramilitary front known as the United Self Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) to demobilize their forces.[467] Under the agreement, AUC combatants were provided amnesty for "political crimes" as long as they had not committed crimes considered heinous or crimes against humanity. Another law, passed in 2005, allowed more lenient sentencing for ex-combatants who were deemed to have made truthful confessions.[468] Relatively few AUC members confessed to their crimes, and many were not prosecuted, but the law did encourage international donors to provide more support to the process.[469]

The process started with AUC members going to a demobilization site, where their status as ex-combatants was verified. AUC members then became eligible for reinsertion and reintegration benefits provided by the PRVC. These benefits included education, health care, a monthly stipend, and startup capital for projects that required ex-combatants to work with local community members and victims. However, many of these collective projects were agricultural, which required more land and money than were available, and some communities were hostile to the idea of working with AUC ex-combatants.[470]

Before the demobilization process began, AUC had between 10,900 and 20,000 members—yet at the end of the process, in August 2006, the total number of demobilized ex-combatants was reported to be 31,638.[471] Some in the Colombian government argued that discrepancy was due to supporters and collaborators, in addition to combatants, being demobilized. But other analyses showed that the numbers were fraudulently inflated by drug traffickers purchasing entire AUC units as a way to gain legal protection, and by AUC units adding new members in order to access a greater share of program benefits.[472] (It is unclear whether drug traffickers made deals with the AUC, or directly paid corrupt government officials, to register their group as a paramilitary unit participating in demobilization.)

The peace agreement between the government and AUC was also criticized for not holding the AUC accountable for its members' crimes. The U.S. government designated the group a Foreign Terrorist Organization in 2001 and, despite the 2003 agreement, did not remove it from the list until 2014.[473] Nevertheless, the level of violence, including kidnappings and homicides, dramatically decreased after AUC demobilization. Between 2003 and 2006, homicide rates in four big cities reportedly dropped by 38 percent before a new wave of illegal armed groups and organized crime emerged several years later.[474]

While the promise of amnesty for their crimes may have been enough to appease AUC leadership, this did little for the thousands of low- and mid-ranking combatants.

According to one senior analyst on Colombia, "AUC commanders paid their militiamen well, sometimes as much as $300 per month, much higher than the minimum wage."[475] But an evaluation of the PRVC in 2006 found that 31 percent of those who demobilized did not receive financial support, almost 50 percent did not receive health care, psychosocial, or education support, and more than 50 percent remained unemployed.[476]

In 2006, in an effort to improve and reform reintegration processes and better respond to an increase in the number of demobilized AUC ex-combatants, the Colombian government replaced the Ministry of Interior and Justice's PRVC with the High Presidential Council for Reintegration.[477] This council decentralized reintegration efforts by establishing regional offices known as reference and opportunity centers (CRO).[478] Part of the CROs' function was to lobby mayors and governors to account for the demobilized ex-combatant population in their local policies and budgets, to help ensure ex-combatants' "access to subnational institutions and local services."[479] The CROs were built with support from USAID and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). These centers facilitated community engagement and acted as "one-stop-shopping" for reintegration assistance—a place for ex-combatants to connect with vocational and education programs and get small amounts of cash assistance for basic needs.[480] If they enrolled in additional programs through the CRO, they could receive even more assistance. Participants were required to meet a set criteria in order to graduate from the program and be considered reintegrated.[481]

USAID funded a system to track and monitor the progress of demobilized AUC fighters, which was developed by IOM. This advanced database became the primary tool for consolidating information about AUC ex-combatants. It contained extensive information on demobilized combatants, which was used to assess recidivism, track ex-combatants' participation in reintegration services, and monitor their activities over time. The database was run by a central office, eight regional field offices, and three mobile response teams.[482] This staff worked through the CROs to update the database, track ex-combatants' progress, and connect them to vocational, educational, and other forms of assistance.[483]

Yet government officials did not have full and free access to information in the system, since IOM considered it proprietary information. Many local officials were unaware the database even existed, which meant they did not know how many ex-combatants lived in their community or what type of programming would be best suited for the local demobilized population.[484] The Colombian government, with assistance from IOM, eventually developed its own database. According to IOM, 53,492 ex-combatants were registered in the system as of 2010.[485]

Additional reforms implemented by the High Presidential Council for Reintegration included removing limits on the amount of time ex-combatants could stay in the program, obligating ex-combatants to participate in reintegration activities, and providing economic and social support to communities where ex-combatants planned to live. Previously, the PRVC had capped the amount of time an ex-combatant could stay

Former Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos. (State photo)

in the program to 18 months, with no obligation to participate in reintegration activities such as education and vocational training workshops.[486]

However, analysis of the programs showed that the High Presidential Council for Reintegration failed to consider fundamental problems, such as unemployment and limited economic opportunities for ex-combatants. Moreover, international observers feared that the Council created a culture of dependency amongst the ex-combatants. It was often easier for ex-combatants to remain in the program and receive reintegration benefits than to look for jobs.[487]

In 2011, in an effort to further improve the reintegration process, the Colombian government transformed the High Presidential Council for Reintegration into the Colombian Agency for Reintegration (ACR). Government agency status gave this new body greater administrative, financial, and budget autonomy than the Council had.[488]

DDR of the FARC

In 2012, the Colombian government, under the administration of President Juan Manuel Santos, announced that it had begun exploratory peace talks with the FARC.[489] These eventually led to a 2016 peace deal in which the FARC agreed to lay down its arms in exchange for security guarantees for its fighters and the promise of reintegration into civilian life.[490] The United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia was asked to verify implementation of FARC's political, economic, and social reintegration, and their "personal and collective security guarantees."[491]

The FARC saw Colombia's reintegration institution, the ACR, as an Uribe-era counterinsurgency tool designed to undermine them. The FARC preferred to use

the words "reincorporation" and "remobilization" instead of "reintegration" or "demobilization," as "their understanding of giving up their weapons was neither to surrender nor to dismantle their organisational structure but to transform it into a new social, economic and political structure that would allow them to continue their struggle by peaceful and legal means."[492]

Both the government and the FARC took steps to address these concerns. The ACR was renamed the Reincorporation and Standardization Agency (ARN) and tasked with implementing programs for the "reincorporation and normalization" of FARC members.[493] A National Council for Reincorporation and territorial councils were also established, each with two representatives from FARC and two from the government.[494] The National Council for Reincorporation's job was to "define the activities, establish the timeline and monitor the reincorporation process, in accordance with the terms agreed with the Government."[495] The ARN and the National Council for Reincorporation later created a national policy on reintegration in 2018.[496]

Point three of the peace agreement required the National Council for Reincorporation to conduct a socioeconomic census that would identify what FARC members needed to transition into civilian life, and to base projects for FARC members on the results.[497] In addition, FARC members would receive a one-time normalization fee, a monthly stipend for 24 months, and social security and pension payments. The agreement also provided money for economic projects.[498]

With support from the UN Verification Mission, the Colombian government and FARC carried out the disarmament phase with relative success. Some 6,900 FARC combatants were relocated to one of 26 demobilization zones, where they disarmed.[499] By 2018, an estimated 11,049 FARC fighters had disarmed and demobilized.[500]

The reintegration process which was to follow, however, has reportedly been marred by an "overly complicated and extended bureaucracy."[501] The National Council for Reincorporation has struggled to deliver on its promises of economic assistance. Many FARC members have left the demobilization zones to rejoin their families, look for jobs elsewhere, or, in some cases, join other illegal armed groups.[502] FARC members were due to receive their final stipend in August 2019, when the lease for the demobilization zones would expire.[503]

The newly elected Colombian President Iván Duque, who did not support the peace deal with the FARC, has demonstrated limited commitment to its implementation. The Colombian Congress has denounced his National Development Plan for not committing enough resources for implementation, and in March 2019, President Duque reversed transitional justice provisions in the agreement that had waived prosecution of ex-combatants except for those "most responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity."[504]

FARC dissidents who had opposed the deal have already formed at least 13 dissident factions, comprising some 1,600 fighters, and some FARC commanders who had been supporters have recently joined dissident groups. A 2018 report by the International Crisis Group asserted that "the best way to stem the flow of defections [from the peace deal] would be to honor [its] promises to establish effective reintegration programs for former fighters."[505]

Key Findings

- During the conflict, the Colombian government used reintegration programs for individual insurgents mainly as a counterinsurgency tool, to attract defectors with the promise of security guarantees and economic opportunities.
- The 2016 peace deal between the Colombian government and the FARC included a framework for the reintegration of FARC fighters. Both the government and the FARC have collaborated to establish and reform structures to implement reintegration efforts.
- Despite Colombia's years of experience and administrative infrastructure for socioeconomic reintegration, the Colombian government has struggled to mount an effective reintegration effort for the thousands of demobilized FARC fighters. The government has found it difficult to track, monitor, and provide timely assistance to ex-combatants.
- The Colombian government's inability or unwillingness to follow through on reintegration commitments may have contributed to some demobilized FARC combatants joining other illegal armed groups.
- The Colombian government did not have full access to a USAID-funded system that tracked and monitored the progress of demobilized AUC fighters. Consequently, many local officials did not know how many ex-combatants lived in their community or what type of reintegration assistance would be best suited for the local demobilized population.

REINTEGRATION IN SOMALIA

As Afghanistan observers consider what might be possible in terms of reintegration efforts, particularly if the Taliban insurgency continues, some have pointed to Somalia as an instructive example: a violent insurgency at times has controlled large areas of the country, tribal rivalries contribute to conflict, the government is politically fractured and dependent on donor support, and corruption is endemic. Both governments have been unable to defeat insurgent forces, despite significant international and U.S. counterterrorism assistance.

Somalia's most recent attempts at reintegration programming began in 2012 following successful government efforts to reclaim large swaths of territory from al-Shabaab, the main insurgent group in the country.[506] As Somali and international forces reclaimed ground, thousands of al-Shabaab combatants either surrendered or were captured and detained by the Somali government. The Somali government established a reintegration program for the detained combatants called the National Program for the Treatment and

Handling of Disengaged Combatants.[507] It attempts to rehabilitate and reintegrate former al-Shabaab combatants who have disengaged from the organization, have denounced al-Shabaab's ideology, and who are not seen as a risk to public safety.[508]

As in Afghanistan, Somalia's counterinsurgency effort has shaped the country's reintegration objectives, activities, and the actors who manage and implement them. The National Program for the Treatment and Handling of Disengaged Combatants has been described as a "defectors program" with "DDR-like rehabilitation" efforts that include reintegration goals.[509] Those goals, however, are only one component of a wider military strategy aimed at weakening al-Shabaab.

The Somali government's National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA) and its subordinate local agencies control who participates in the reintegration program, who has access to the facilities, and whether or not someone is released from the program. After being captured or defecting, al-Shabaab affiliates are interrogated by NISA, which determines whether detainees are low risk or high risk. Low-risk defectors can opt to be sent to a facility for rehabilitation and reintegration, but those deemed high risk are sent to military tribunals, where they frequently are sentenced to death and executed. Since the criteria for low-risk and high-risk designations are unclear, decisions have seemed inconsistent and arbitrary.[510]

Three government-run "rehabilitation transition centers"—in Baidoa, Kismayo, and Mogadishu—house al-Shabaab ex-combatants deemed to be low risk. They receive such benefits as vocational training, education, and medical care.[511] Germany has funded the Baidoa and Kismayo facilities, which are run by IOM, while the UK funds the Mogadishu facility, which is managed by an implementing partner.[512] The United States has provided more than $1 million to IOM for technical assistance.[513]

The program has five pillars: outreach, reception, screening, rehabilitation, and reintegration.[514] Participants receive vocational training in trades such as carpentry, masonry, tailoring, and electrical engineering.[515] The design and implementation of the rehabilitation phase vary significantly across the three facilities, and include de-radicalization and religious re-education efforts, psychological treatment to address beneficiaries' trauma and grievances, literacy education, and visits with their families.[516]

Scholar Vanda Felbab-Brown, who has conducted at least two in-depth assessments of the Somali program, found several improvements between 2015 and 2018. She found that former combatants' exit from the facilities had become more predictable. In the past, some had been held at one facility for years, but as of 2018 two facilities discharged program participants after three months; the third facility had somewhat longer stays. Felbab-Brown also found in 2018 that "the quality of service and rehabilitation deliveries" had improved in all three facilities.[517]

Key Findings

SIGAR found that Somalia's experience with reintegration during an ongoing insurgency has demonstrated limitations and challenges similar to those in Afghanistan. Somalia's reintegration attempts have been constrained by ongoing conflict, risks of retribution to former combatants, a weak economy, and inadequate, disjointed program implementation.

- The Somali government's process for vetting and categorizing program participants as either low risk or high risk lacks transparency and remains vulnerable to arbitrary verdicts. Potential participants cannot be sure whether they will go to a rehabilitation facility or be sent to prison.
- Due to insecurity that limits any opportunity to monitor program participants after they leave the program, assessing the impact of the program is difficult.
- After ex-combatants leave the program facilities, they are vulnerable to attack by Somali security forces, retaliating al-Shabaab fighters, or communities who fear them or seek vengeance.
- Many of the vocational trainings offered by the program do not adequately prepare participants to find jobs, especially in a weak labor market already saturated with unskilled labor. Some businesses refrain from hiring al-Shabaab ex-combatants, especially in areas where al-Shabaab is present, to avoid retaliation by being associated with defectors.
- Many al-Shabaab ex-combatants end up working with militias, which can "perpetuate the militarisation of Somali society." There are relatively few opportunities for ex-combatants to join the small Somali army and police, for which funding is limited.[518]

Shutterstock photo by Jalil Rezayee

CHAPTER 5

OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS FOR REINTEGRATION IN AFGHANISTAN

The United States and the Taliban have been engaged in talks to reach an agreement that could mark the beginning of the end of the longest war in U.S. history. The deal under discussion could allow for withdrawing U.S. troops in phases, with those phases conditioned on three other elements: a broad dialogue among the Taliban, Afghan government, political factions, and civil society to reach a settlement on the country's political future; Taliban cooperation in preventing terrorist groups from using Afghanistan as a base to launch attacks; and a permanent ceasefire.[519] Ultimately, the U.S. goal is a sustainable political settlement that brings lasting peace and stability to Afghanistan. The Taliban's refusal to talk to the Afghan government without first negotiating with the United States has long been an obstacle to that goal. A U.S. deal with the Taliban, then, would set the stage for an intra-Afghan peace process, and possibly an Afghan political settlement.

If peace efforts succeed, an estimated 60,000 full-time Taliban fighters and some 90,000 seasonal fighters may seek to return to civilian life.[520] The number of ex-combatants could be increased by efforts to demobilize other armed groups that have been engaged in fighting the Taliban, or by potential reform of Afghan security forces. The reintegration of former fighters will be necessary for sustainable peace, and one of the most pressing challenges facing Afghan society, the government, and the economy. If ex-combatants are not accepted by their communities or are unable to find a new

livelihood, they may be vulnerable to recruitment by criminal groups or terrorist organizations like the Islamic State Khorasan.[521]

While the U.S. government appears to have little appetite for a large reintegration program, then-commander of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan General Nicholson and then-Secretary of Defense Mattis said in 2018 they wanted to find ways to accommodate those Taliban fighters who approach coalition and Afghan authorities expressing their desire to stop fighting. Lisa Curtis, NSC senior director for South and Central Asia, has also said that the United States supports grassroots peace initiatives as one mechanism of pursuing reintegration.

Afghanistan analysts—including RAND authors James Shinn and James Dobbins (SRAP from 2013 to 2014), International Crisis Group Senior Analyst Borhan Osman, and UNAMA Special Advisor Steve Brooking—observe that any eventual peace process between the Taliban and Afghan government will necessarily include some restructuring of Afghan civil and military institutions to incorporate the Taliban in ways that do not at the same time imply surrender. But it is unclear what role the Taliban seek in future government institutions. They have made contradictory statements about the potential integration of Taliban fighters into Afghan security forces. What any post-settlement reintegration effort looks like, then, depends largely on the terms of an intra-Afghan peace agreement.

This section examines opportunities and constraints for reintegration efforts now and in the future. We conclude that many factors that contributed to the failure of previous reintegration programs persist to this day, creating an environment that is not conducive to a renewed reintegration effort while the insurgency is ongoing.

DEVELOPMENTS TOWARD A PEACE AGREEMENT

Throughout 2018 and 2019, several developments created hope that a peace agreement between the Afghan government and the Taliban might be within reach. In late 2018, the UN Secretary General's Special Representative for Afghanistan Tadamichi Yamamoto told the Security Council that "the possibility of a negotiated end to the conflict has never been more real" since 2001.[522]

In February 2018, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani offered to talk to the Taliban without any preconditions and proposed a ceasefire as one element of reaching a peace agreement.[523] The Taliban did not respond to the offer and proceeded to launch their annual spring offensive.[524]

But the spring of 2018 also saw grassroots movements and religious clerics push for peace negotiations. In March 2018, eight activists from Helmand began a cross-country peace march of more than 300 miles to Kabul. As they passed through provinces, the group grew to more than 100 people. The peace marchers called on the Taliban, Afghan government, and foreign governments to negotiate an end to the war.[525]

At the same time, Afghan religious clerics met in a series of conferences to denounce violence and suicide killings, and encourage all sides to join peace talks. These meetings included *ulema* (Islamic scholars) conferences hosted by Indonesia and Saudi Arabia, with the participation of hundreds of delegates from mostly Muslim countries.[526] According to a former senior APRP official, the ulema's denunciation of jihad against the Afghan government as illegal and against Islamic principles was unprecedented, and put pressure on the Taliban to respond to the government's calls for a ceasefire.[527] Publicly, the Taliban denounced both conferences and urged religious clerics to boycott them.[528] In June 2018, the Afghan National Ulema Council, the largest religious body in the country, organized a large gathering in Kabul, where around 2,000 clerics from across the country issued a *fatwa* declaring suicide bombing forbidden.[529] The conference was violently interrupted by a suicide attack that was later claimed by the Islamic State Khorasan. Although the size and unified message of the ulema took the Taliban by surprise, they dismissed its declarations as foreign propaganda.[530]

Surprisingly, the Taliban reciprocated Ghani's offer of a ceasefire during the three days of Eid holidays, starting June 15, 2018. Some speculated that the Taliban made this move partly due to the Afghan ulema's appeal for peace, and partly because of pressure from the Qatari government. The ceasefire was honored by Afghan, U.S., and Taliban forces alike. It turned out to be a remarkable display of the desire for peace on all sides of the conflict. An estimated 30,000 Taliban fighters entered Afghan cities and town centers peacefully; national and international media showed Taliban fighters, civilians, and Afghan security forces all celebrating together.[531] The Afghan government sought Taliban agreement to a second ceasefire in August. The Taliban did not respond and continued with their offensive.[532]

The June ceasefire was seen as a remarkable display of the desire for peace on all sides of the conflict.

In early 2018, State and DOD agreed to coordinate peace and reconciliation efforts in Kabul. State created a Peace and Reconciliation Section (PARS) at U.S. Embassy Kabul to lead U.S. reconciliation efforts.[533] The PARS set up an action group to synchronize efforts across various agencies and provide Washington weekly updates on the peace efforts. State's plans to place civilian Peace and Reconciliation Officers in the field to support Resolute Support efforts were scrapped in late 2018, and staffing remained a challenge.[534] In September 2018, former U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad, an Afghan-American, was appointed as the U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, signaling the Trump administration's investment in a potential peace process.[535] U.S. Embassy Kabul's 2018 Integrated Country Strategy set as its first objective a "sustainable political settlement between the Afghan government and Taliban that reduces violence, respects Afghanistan's constitution, and upholds the rights of women and minorities."[536]

Taliban representatives attend the Intra-Afghan Dialogue in Doha, Qatar, in 2019. (AFP photo by Karim Jaafar)

The greatest indication of the United States' shift to more aggressively pursue a settlement has been Special Representative Khalilzad's series of meetings with Taliban representatives. According to press reports, these began in October 2018; the U.S. government first publicly acknowledged these meetings in late December 2018.[537] While the U.S. goal is a political settlement between the Afghan government and the Taliban, the Taliban have long refused to meet with the Afghan government, and insisted on first talking to U.S. representatives. The ongoing talks in Doha, Qatar between Khalilzad and Taliban representatives mark the most high-level, consistent, and direct engagement between U.S. officials and the Taliban to be reported in recent years.[538] In late 2018, six senior Taliban commanders—including Abdul Ghani Baradar, a co-founder of the Taliban and former deputy to Mullah Omar, who has long been considered a key participant in any peace talks—joined the Taliban political office in Qatar.[539] This indicated a significant boost in the authority of the Taliban negotiating side, and might signal a greater level of Taliban commitment to talks than in 2010 to 2013.

According to Special Representative Khalilzad, Taliban and U.S. representatives have agreed in principle to four issues deemed key to any final political settlement: assurances from the Taliban that Afghanistan will not become a safe haven for international terrorist groups, phased U.S. troop withdrawal, intra-Afghan dialogue, and a comprehensive ceasefire.[540]

While no official direct talks have yet occurred between the Taliban and Afghan government, the latter publicly acknowledged it is prepared to negotiate. President Ghani's vision of a road map for intra-Afghan negotiations is contained in two documents presented at the Kabul Conference in February 2018 and the Geneva Conference in November 2018. Key aspects include a ceasefire, integration of the Taliban into the Afghan political system, and a constitutional review.[541] A Grand Consultative

Jirga for Peace, convened by the government for four days in April 2019, brought together 3,200 delegates from across the country and called on the Afghan government and the Taliban to agree to an immediate ceasefire.[542] Many opposition figures and political parties, however, boycotted the jirga and downplayed its importance.[543]

The Afghan presidential election, originally set for April 2019 and now scheduled for September, further complicates the politically sensitive process of establishing negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban. The Taliban may be reluctant to invest in formal talks with the current government, knowing that the election could usher in a new administration. Continued government fragmentation along ethnic lines after the election could undercut the government's ability to implement the terms of any peace agreement.[544]

Afghanistan's neighbors are also exerting influence on an Afghan peace process. In November 2018, Russia hosted a meeting of officials from countries that included Pakistan, Iran, and China, as well as senior Taliban representatives and members of the High Peace Council in their personal capacity.[545] At a subsequent Moscow meeting in February 2019, prominent Afghan politicians—though none officially representing the Afghan government—met with the Taliban to discuss prospects for peace. It was the first significant public contact between the Taliban and senior Afghan political figures since 2001.[546]

In January 2019, Special Representative Khalilzad began touring the region and meeting with various stakeholders.[547] On April 26, the United States, Russia, and China released a joint statement that called for an "inclusive Afghan-led, Afghan-owned peace process" and a ceasefire, and affirmed their readiness to "provide necessary assistance."[548] According to Afghanistan expert Barnett Rubin, Russia, Iran, Pakistan, and China are keen to assist with peace efforts because they share strategic interests in reducing the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan, developing regional infrastructure, and addressing the Islamic State threat in their respective countries.[549] According to a former senior APRP official, building regional consensus on reconciliation efforts is one of the most important roles that the United States could play in Afghanistan.[550]

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS RELATED TO REINTEGRATION

While the U.S. government appears to have little appetite for a large, centrally led reintegration program, senior U.S. officials have stated that they want to find ways to accommodate Taliban fighters who approach coalition and Afghan authorities expressing their desire to stop fighting.

In March 2018, General Nicholson, then commander of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan, said the United States has a role to play in reintegration and "some things need to be put in place to enable this. [Taliban fighters] need to know they can move back securely, live in safety."[551] The same month, then-U.S. Secretary of Defense Mattis cited an interest in reconciliation across the country, and described small groups of fighters turning themselves in. He referred to an effort to reach "'those who are tired

of fighting,'" but it is unclear how the U.S. military is responding to those who wish to stop fighting.[552]

In June 2018, Lisa Curtis, the deputy assistant to the president and senior director for South and Central Asia at the National Security Council, said that the United States would be "working closely with the Afghan government to ensure that there are ways for the Taliban fighters who are ready to stop fighting to return to civil society." She emphasized that this does not mean recreating earlier failed efforts, such as the APRP, and said that "effective reintegration measures must not take a one-size-fits-all approach."[553] The U.S. Embassy's 2018 Integrated Country Strategy lists reintegration of Taliban members at the local level as one of its objectives. It states that key activities to achieve such reintegration include supporting and encouraging local ceasefires and community stabilization agreements at the district and provincial level.[554] The experience of past local security agreements indicates that not only U.S. and coalition support, but the support of political leaders in Kabul, would likely be required for an agreement to hold.

The Afghan government has also underscored the importance of efforts to reintegrate ex-combatants. The government's vision of a peace process, presented in February 2018, called for security for "reconcilable" Taliban who are reintegrating, economic and social reintegration of ex-combatants, support from the international community in removing combatants from sanctions lists, and for the Taliban to become a political party.[555]

In May 2018, the Afghan government produced a draft reintegration strategy proposing an expansive program of outreach to armed opposition groups, negotiations with them, their demobilization, restoration of political rights, livelihood programs, and integration of former combatants into local security forces.[556] According to State, progress on the strategy stopped when National Security Council Advisor Hanif Atmar resigned in August.[557] State has not responded to the strategy because the Afghan government has not yet approved it, though in December 2018 State noted "it was the priority of the Department of State and Resolute Support to encourage the Afghans to endorse these guidelines."[558]

Without a peace agreement in place, any proactive efforts to reintegrate Taliban fighters may backfire, since the Taliban leadership still view reintegration as surrender. But should a political agreement be negotiated between the Taliban and Afghan government, community-level peacebuilding will be crucial because a peace agreement alone will not end violence throughout the country.[559]

Joblessness is a huge problem that affects all Afghans, not only those in armed groups. Unemployment stands at 23.6 percent. Nearly 22 percent of Afghanistan's population is between age 15 and 24, and in that age group, unemployment is 31 percent.[560] According to USAID, "400,000 youth enter the job market every year."[561]

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani (State Department photo)

The United States is working with other donors and the Afghan government to develop a post-settlement economic plan for Afghanistan. A joint communiqué released at the end of a November 2018 donor conference on Afghanistan in Geneva stressed the importance of developing economic initiatives to advance the return of Afghan financial capital to the country, increase Afghan and foreign investment, create jobs, and enhance regional economic integration following a potential peace agreement.[562] A draft economic plan has been developed by the World Bank and its international and Afghan partners. The current draft does *not* suggest a program targeting benefits to specific groups "based on their political affiliation or previous participation in armed groups." It notes that "international experience and evidence from Afghanistan is clear that this type of targeting generates resentment and opportunities for corruption, potentially fueling further violence." The plan does propose that benefits from broad economic initiatives should be open to ex-combatants, along with other vulnerable groups.[563]

Another related issue is that after a peace agreement between the Afghan government and the Taliban, some portion of more than 2.7 million Afghan refugees, 91 percent of whom live in Pakistan and Iran, are expected to return to Afghanistan.[564] In 2018 alone, the World Bank reported that more than 800,000 Afghans returned from Pakistan and Iran, and more than 700,000 Afghans were internally displaced by drought or conflict. These vulnerable groups will increase pressure on a weak licit labor market, and on the capacity of the Afghan government and donors to provide social services, create jobs, and deliver humanitarian aid.[565] These demands will likely limit the resources available for addressing the needs of former combatants and their families.

THE POTENTIAL EX-COMBATANT POPULATION

In the event of an intra-Afghan peace agreement, the Taliban are not the only armed group that would need to be reintegrated into society. For lasting peace, various state-

aligned, non-state, and illegal armed groups—many of whom have been fighting the Taliban—must also demobilize and transition to civilian life. Thus a post-settlement reintegration effort may target Taliban combatants as well as fighters from those other groups. Not including those groups could deter the Taliban from demobilizing and reintegrating, as their former enemies would remain armed and mobilized.[566] Further, if a peace agreement entails a downsizing of the ANDSF, thousands of members of the Afghan army and police would need to reintegrate into civilian life as well. And given shifting loyalties and affiliations, not all combatants would fit neatly into one group.

A key component of a reintegration program would be determining the eligibility criteria and vetting process for program participants. These would need to be rigid enough to ensure that a program targeted the intended population of former combatants, yet flexible enough to accommodate the fluid roles that many Afghans have played in a long and complex conflict. Vetting would need to be sufficiently staffed, resourced, monitored, and evaluated across the country, given that past vetting processes were vulnerable to manipulation, and many participants did not meet eligibility requirements.

The financial and programmatic requirements of a program targeting such a large and diverse group might well exceed the political will and capacity of the Afghan government and its international partners. If a program were pursued, it would be important to maintain realistic expectations about what could be accomplished and how long implementation could take.

In 2017, Afghanistan scholar Antonio Giustozzi estimated there were 150,000 total Taliban fighters, of whom 60,000 are in full-time, mobile units. Most of these units are "based in Pakistan and Iran and deploy to Afghanistan during the fighting season." At any one time, however, the number of fighters in Afghanistan is closer to 40,000, due to leave policies and some forces being kept in reserve. The remaining 90,000 Taliban fighters are local militias, the majority of whom operate in or near their communities of origin. These communities have allegiance and relations to the Taliban.[567] Last year, DOD estimated that the Taliban have up to 60,000 active fighters.[568] A concern for any reintegration program would be how to repatriate and accommodate the Pakistan-based Taliban, who may face greater challenges being accepted by Afghan communities than fighters who have been living in Afghanistan.

Calling all Afghans who are part of the Taliban "combatants" would be inaccurate; many do not have fighting roles. Giustozzi's analysis implies that in addition to the 150,000 fighters, another 50,000 Taliban members are nonfighters who are recruited to serve on commissions or in shadow provincial and district governments. The Taliban have multiple commissions (such as justice, education, health, and NGO commissions) that manage and oversee a system of courts, *madrasas* (religious schools), health and education monitors, local communities' taxation, and pro-Taliban preaching and propaganda. Commissions also manage humanitarian and development organizations' access to communities under Taliban control or influence.[569]

These aspects of the Taliban organization raise a number of issues that the design of a reintegration program would need to consider. For instance, a program may be aimed at all the estimated 150,000 fighters or primarily at full-time units, and civilian members may require very different services or accommodations, if any. Identifying who is Taliban and who is not presents another challenge, and indicates that Taliban commanders would need to be involved in screening and vetting processes.

While the Taliban are the largest insurgent group in Afghanistan, IS-K has been active in the country since 2015. The estimated 1,000 IS-K fighters in Afghanistan are mainly active in some eastern and northern districts.[570] The U.S. military views IS-K as "not reconcilable" and aims to defeat the organization militarily.[571] IS-K has claimed attacks on the ANDSF and Shia minorities and other high-profile targets in Kabul. IS-K continues to recruit from Pakistan, Afghanistan, and disaffected Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) fighters.[572] Taliban, TTP, and Haqqani Network fighters have also defected to IS-K.[573]

It is uncertain whether any future Afghan-led reintegration program would seek to accommodate former IS-K combatants or those from other terrorist groups like al-Qaeda. Given the fluidity of the conflict, however, it is possible that some fighters could try to leave terrorist groups and participate in a reintegration program. The Afghan government and donors must be prepared for how to deal with such individuals.

In addition to insurgent fighters, the reintegration of state-aligned and non-state armed groups would need to be considered in the event of an intra-Afghan peace agreement. As one Western official in Kabul told SIGAR, "A lot of militias know that if there's a peace agreement, they would be the losers."[574] A range of local armed forces—including state-aligned, quasi-state, and non-state armed groups—have been created by Afghan and coalition partners to assist in fighting the insurgency. Some of these groups have already been disbanded; others, such as the Afghan Local Police, National Uprising Groups, and ANA Territorial Force, continue to be active.[575] The semi-formalized ALP, the largest of local armed groups, was 28,000 men strong as of November 2018 and comes under the Ministry of Interior.[576] In some areas, local strongmen have simply incorporated their militias into the ALP. While some reports have highlighted ALP's improved accountability and success in improving security, there are also numerous accounts of ALP abuses. Human Rights Watch has accused ALP units of "murderous tribal vendettas, targeted killings, smuggling, and extortion" as well as "rapes of women, girls, and boys."[577]

Another potential category of beneficiaries is the Afghan army and police. According to James Dobbins, former U.S. Special Representative to Afghanistan and Pakistan, demobilization and reintegration of Afghan security forces is "an essential element of any peace agreement," and potentially a more demanding and expensive undertaking.[578] Currently, the total number of ANDSF is 306,807, including 116,384 police.[579] If restructuring or downsizing of the security forces occurs as part of a peace agreement, there could be thousands of ANDSF members who will also face the challenges of reintegrating into civilian society.

POSSIBLE INTEGRATION OF EX-COMBATANTS INTO STATE SECURITY FORCES

There has been speculation that an eventual peace agreement between the Taliban and Afghan government would provide for some Taliban fighters to be absorbed into national security forces. This arrangement, and the future of Afghanistan's security forces in general, will likely be some of the most contentious issues to be negotiated. They are also some of the most important, as failed or incomplete integration of ex-combatants into the security forces increases the risk of failure of the peace process.

Any restructuring of Afghan security forces may include a roadmap for integrating ex-combatants. The framework and details of that roadmap will be largely determined by the nature of the agreement and the political structure it produces.

Negotiators will need to grapple with many divisive questions. What security sector reforms are necessary to accommodate fighters from all warring parties? What should be the size and composition of security forces, and how much funding will be available to support them? Should the size of security forces be based on the security needs of a post-settlement Afghanistan, or should they accept any ex-combatant who needs a job? What will be a realistic timeline for integration and reforms?[580]

The United States, as well as other international actors, will need to consider how to adjust security sector assistance in response to reforms and the integration of former insurgents.

TALIBAN PERSPECTIVES ON RECONCILIATION AND REINTEGRATION

The Taliban's designated lead negotiator in talks with the United States, Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanekzai, has stated the Taliban do not seek exclusive control of Afghanistan, but want to "build an intra-Afghan Islamic system of governance in consultation with all Afghans."[581] While the Taliban have long articulated the goal of an Islamic government and Sharia-based justice system, they have not detailed what that government would look like in practice.[582]

While the Taliban may not seek a monopoly on power, as of 2018, many Taliban disliked terms such as reconciliation, which they thought implies surrender. Since they view the current Afghan government system as illegitimate, joining it would in their eyes constitute a disavowal of the very reason they fight.[583] The Taliban view their insurgency as a "lawful jihadic struggle," and have repeatedly justified their fight against U.S. forces and the Afghan government as a "legal, religious, and national obligation."[584] More recent research based on roughly 45 interviews with Taliban fighters, commanders, and district officials indicated that the majority of Taliban members support talks with the United States "because they understood the objective of these talks as the full withdrawal of foreign forces."[585]

Any eventual peace process between the Taliban and Afghan government will necessarily include some restructuring of Afghan civil and military institutions to

incorporate the Taliban.[586] Since the beginning of direct talks between U.S. and Taliban representatives, Taliban officials have made multiple, sometimes contradictory, statements about any integration of Taliban fighters into security forces. In an interview in January 2019, Stanekzai stated that once foreign troops leave, there will be no need for Afghan security forces and those forces would need to be dissolved. He later backtracked by saying that he was misinterpreted and that he meant reformed, not dissolved.[587] The Taliban spokesperson, Suhail Shaheen, stated that once foreign forces withdraw, there would be "no need for military operations and war" and that there "would be sustainable peace in the country, and all the military people and our people, they will be included in a national army."[588]

Any eventual peace process between the Taliban and Afghan government will necessarily include some restructuring of Afghan civil and military institutions to incorporate the Taliban.

Little information is available about the views of the Taliban rank and file regarding reconciliation and reintegration. A 2018 USIP survey found that Taliban foot soldiers, some of whom have been fighting all their adult lives, have trouble imagining life without guns or, for some, seeking the rewards of jihad and martyrdom. To them, ideas of disarmament and reintegration seemed abstract and far into the future. Most survey respondents saw the Taliban's military power as the reason their agenda was "heard nationally and internationally," and thought that giving up their military power would strip them "of the very tool that guaranteed the people a strong voice."[589] This research suggests that pursuit of a political settlement by Taliban leadership, and any benefits made available to foot soldiers, would need to offer both tangible and intangible benefits that could outweigh those that foot soldiers believe they gain by continuing to fight.

Finally, the term "reintegration" implies one party to the conflict reintegrating into the status quo power structures and institutions of another party. Any future settlement in Afghanistan will likely entail all parties integrating into something new. Reintegration in Afghanistan will require new messaging, and Afghans will have to choose the terminology—whether in Dari, Pashto, or English.

EFFECTS OF SANCTIONS ON U.S. ASSISTANCE

U.S. agencies, including State, DOD, and USAID, have begun to consider how various sanctions regimes could affect future development and security assistance.[590] The Taliban as an entity, as well as some individual members, are on Treasury's Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons List (SDN). In addition, the Taliban as an entity is listed as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT) pursuant to Executive Order 13224. Yet the group is not on State's Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTO) list.[591] The Haqqani Network, which the U.S. government considers a Taliban-affiliated group and has been responsible for some of the deadliest attacks in Afghanistan, however, *is* designated as an FTO *and* an SDGT; it is also on the SDN list.[592] Both the Taliban and the

Executive Order 13224, signed on September 23, 2001, authorized individuals and entities to be listed as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist. Executive Order 13268, signed on July 2, 2002, amended Executive Order 13224 to include the Taliban as an SDGT.

Source: "Executive Order 13224," State, Bureau of Counterterrorism and Countering Violent Extremism, accessed July 19, 2019; Administration of President George W. Bush, *Executive Order 13268*, July 2, 2002.

Haqqani Network have several individual members listed on the UN Security Council's 1988 Committee list. The Haqqani Network is also included as an entity on the 1988 list.[593]

The **UN Security Council 1988 Committee list** includes individuals and entities associated with the Taliban that are subject to UN and member state sanctions measures. The 1988 list was created in 2011 to separate the listing of Taliban members from that of "individuals and entities of al-Qaida and its affiliates."

Source: UN, "United Nations Security Council Resolution 1988 (2011)," June 17, 2011.

Broadly speaking, these sanctions regimes entail asset freezes, travel bans, and arms embargoes. The UN and its member states are required to freeze the assets and economic resources of designated individuals and entities on the 1988 list, as well as to prohibit their travel and prevent the sale and transfer of weapons, or the provision of military training and technical assistance.[594] The legal ramifications of State's FTO designation likewise include asset freezes. It is also unlawful for an entity subject to U.S. jurisdiction to provide "material support or resources" to an FTO.[595] State and Treasury's SDGT designation results in an asset freeze and generally prohibits U.S. persons from engaging in any transactions with, or providing material support to, designated individuals or entities.[596]

A political settlement could call for the Taliban to be integrated into existing government and security institutions that rely on significant international assistance. U.S. agencies and international organizations could also be tasked with delivering assistance to areas under Taliban control. However, should the Taliban be integrated into the Afghan government, existing sanctions could complicate efforts to provide support.

Currently, USAID does not provide assistance to any areas under Taliban control due to broad concerns about programmatic risk, safety, security, and violating U.S. and UN sanctions regimes. To the extent that assistance programming could benefit the Taliban, a license from Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control would be required.[597] DOD has also sought to clarify how its security sector assistance could be affected if the Taliban are integrated into the ANDSF.[598]

The fact that the Haqqani Network is designated as an FTO while the Taliban are not presents an additional layer of complexity for a post-settlement scenario. Sirajuddin Haqqani, the leader of the Haqqani Network, has reportedly been deputy leader of the Taliban, and its functional head of military operations, since 2015.[599] In the event of a U.S. agreement with the Taliban or an agreement between the Afghan government and the Taliban (which would presumably involve members of the Haqqani Network), the U.S. government would need to clarify whether and how future U.S. engagement with the Taliban, or assistance to areas that may include Haqqani members, would be affected by the current status of the Haqqani Network as an FTO and a SDGT.

ARE CURRENT CONDITIONS CONDUCIVE TO REINTEGRATION?

As highlighted by SIGAR's *2019 High-Risk List*, many factors that contributed to the failure of previous reintegration programs persist to this day, creating an environment that is not conducive to a renewed reintegration program.[600] These risks will have a tremendous impact on the ultimate success of any attempt to obtain lasting peace in Afghanistan. These include:

- **No Afghan political settlement:** Although efforts towards an intra-Afghan political settlement have increased, formal negotiations between the Afghan government and

the Taliban have not begun, and there is no political settlement in place to provide a roadmap for the reintegration of ex-combatants.

- **Insecurity:** There is an ongoing violent conflict, increased overall insecurity, and significant Taliban control of territory—all of which means insurgents still face high costs to reintegrating, in the form of potential retribution by the Taliban or ANDSF, loss of income, and loss of status. As important, coalition and Afghan security forces are likely unable to provide security guarantees to Taliban fighters wishing to lay down their arms.
- **Political uncertainty:** Given the upcoming presidential election and disunity within the Afghan government, a fluid political environment provides little guarantee to potential ex-combatants that political commitments on reintegration benefits would be met.
- **Economic problems:** A slowdown in economic growth, high levels of unemployment, few employment opportunities in the legal economy, a decline in business confidence and activity as a result of political uncertainty, and the ongoing drought that has caused a humanitarian crisis—all of these pose serious obstacles to ex-combatants who may seek alternative livelihoods in the licit economy.
- **Corruption and weak institutional capacity:** Pervasive corruption in Afghan government institutions, paired with limited capacity, would undermine attempts to deliver tangible benefits and resources to former fighters.
- **Illicit economy:** Criminal and drug-trafficking networks continue to be widespread and could attract disgruntled Taliban ex-fighters.

KEY FINDINGS

- The current environment of ongoing conflict is not conducive to a successful reintegration program. Many unfavorable conditions still persist, including the lack of an intra-Afghan peace agreement, widespread insecurity, political uncertainty, limited economic opportunities, corruption risks, weak institutional capacity, and the diminished presence of international actors.
- The Afghan government does not currently have a publicly stated reintegration policy or strategy.
- In public statements about ongoing talks between U.S. officials and Taliban representatives, neither side has mentioned reintegration. However, Taliban officials have made statements indicating interest in the integration of Taliban fighters into security forces.
- The future of Afghanistan's security forces, including any arrangement to integrate former Taliban fighters and other combatants into those forces, will likely be one of the most contentious issues to be negotiated between the Afghan government and Taliban. Failure to adequately resolve these issues could threaten the implementation of a peace agreement.
- There is only limited information on the views of the Taliban rank and file regarding reintegration issues, but some research indicates they struggle to imagine a life outside the insurgency, and want to retain their movement's military power.

Canadian Government photo

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

The United States and the Taliban have been engaged in talks to reach an agreement that could allow for the phased withdrawal of U.S. troops, conditioned on counterterrorism assurances from the Taliban, an intra-Afghan dialogue, and a permanent ceasefire. Such a deal may set the stage for a viable intra-Afghan peace process, and possibly an Afghan political settlement to end four decades of war.

If peace efforts succeed, a critical challenge will be the reintegration of former fighters into Afghan society. For some Taliban fighters, particularly those who fight seasonally and are already part of the social fabric of their communities, some reintegration may occur naturally, as it did in 2001, when many Taliban returned to their villages.[601] But tens of thousands of other Taliban, as well as members of other militias and any demobilized Afghan soldiers or police, will face the obstacles of a weak economy, ongoing insecurity, and local conflicts driven by tribal disputes and unresolved grievances. Most troublingly, the Islamic State Khorasan could attempt to recruit disgruntled Taliban fighters who could find fault with a U.S.-Taliban deal.[602]

U.S. policymakers face several questions regarding reintegration. The immediate question is whether to support any reintegration activities amid the ongoing insurgency and without an intra-Afghan peace agreement in place. As discussed in more detail below, SIGAR concludes that the United States should not support a reintegration program unless the Afghan government and the Taliban have agreed to terms for the

reintegration of former fighters. For a reintegration effort to have a greater chance of success, formerly hostile parties must demonstrate high-level political commitment and mutual trust that they will allow their fighters to participate in a program. The Afghan government, political elites, civil society groups, and the Taliban must all have a say in how a reintegration effort—including socioeconomic, military, and political components, for both commanders and rank and file fighters—should proceed.

In a post-settlement scenario, U.S. policymakers must consider other questions. Under what conditions should the United States support or fund reintegration efforts—and if so, how? Should a targeted program exist for ex-combatants, or are reintegration objectives best pursued through wider development programming? How will U.S. agencies need to revise policies to ensure they do not interfere with potential reintegration efforts?

The lessons and recommendations in this chapter are intended to help guide the U.S. Congress and executive branch agencies in answering these questions. We also offer several matters for consideration for the Afghan government, should it pursue a renewed reintegration effort in the future.

If a peace settlement opens the door for development assistance to reach previously inaccessible populations, the donor community will face hard choices about how and where to direct assistance most efficiently. The logic justifying reintegration programs is that ex-combatants pose inherently greater security risks—due to their combat experience, training, and command-and-control relationships—than do other vulnerable populations, such as jobless youth. But in Afghanistan, it is reasonable to assume that millions of unemployed young men will remain at risk for recruitment by criminal groups and terrorist organizations like IS-K. Investments in a reintegration program, therefore, should be appropriately balanced against other development programs to address the enormous needs across the country.

U.S. agencies should also anticipate and plan for challenges to implementation. Even an Afghan political settlement would not in itself end insecurity, corruption, or weak government capacity. U.S. agencies would need to take into account several risks to the execution of a program, including corruption, the difficulty of monitoring and evaluation, vetting challenges, and security issues—challenges that have plagued Afghan reintegration efforts since 2001, as this report has laid out.

We identify 14 major findings from our analysis of prior reintegration efforts in Afghanistan, case studies of such efforts in Colombia and Somalia, and the broader literature on reintegration:

1. The absence of a comprehensive political settlement or peace agreement was a key factor in the failure of prior Afghan reintegration programs that targeted Taliban fighters.

2. Early Afghan government and international efforts to demobilize and reintegrate state-aligned militias failed in part because U.S. forces were simultaneously partnered with the militias for security and other services, empowering commanders and groups that were supposed to be disbanding.
3. Other important factors in the failure of Afghan reintegration programs were insecurity and threats facing program participants, a weak economy offering few legal economic opportunities, and limited government capacity for program implementation.
4. The U.S. government saw prior reintegration efforts targeting the Taliban primarily as a tool to fracture and weaken the insurgency, which undermined the potential for those efforts to promote peace and reconciliation.
5. Prior reintegration programs did not succeed in fracturing or weakening the Taliban to any substantial degree, and no firm evidence exists that the programs pressured Taliban leadership to pursue peace negotiations.
6. In the past, coalition and Afghan forces were unable to provide adequate security for former combatants and their families once the combatant had participated in a reintegration program. Ex-combatants and their families faced risks of retaliatory attacks from the Taliban, Afghan security forces, and individuals or groups in the communities into which they were reintegrating.
7. Prior monitoring and evaluation systems were inadequate for measuring the outcomes or effectiveness of reintegration programs in Afghanistan.
8. None of the four main reintegration programs entailed a long-term effort to assist former combatants to transition to a sustainable alternative livelihood. Benefits were mainly confined to short-term transition assistance packages and vocational training programs that did not match the former combatants' needs or local economic realities.
9. While local Afghan security agreements temporarily reduced violence, they did not create conditions conducive to reintegration.
10. The current environment of ongoing conflict is not conducive to a successful reintegration program.
11. Even today, the U.S. government has no lead agency or office for issues concerning the reintegration of ex-combatants. In Afghanistan, this has contributed to a lack of clarity about reintegration goals and their relation to reconciliation.
12. Globally, the factors that contribute to an individual ex-combatant's reintegration into society are poorly understood. There have been few attempts to gather and analyze the data needed to identify which interventions contribute to successful reintegration.
13. Even in Colombia, a country with greater economic resources and experience with reintegration programming than Afghanistan, reintegration has proved an elusive goal. Despite Colombia's years of experience and well-established administrative structures for reintegration, the Colombian government has struggled to reintegrate thousands of demobilized FARC fighters.
14. Reintegration efforts in Somalia demonstrate the severe limitations—related to vetting, protection of former combatants, and monitoring and evaluation—of trying to implement a program in the midst of an insurgency.

LESSONS

The report identifies 10 lessons to inform any future reintegration efforts in Afghanistan:

1. **A reintegration program runs a high risk of failure in the absence of a political settlement or peace agreement.**

   Implementing an effective reintegration program is difficult in any context. If pursued without a peace agreement, reintegration efforts face even greater obstacles.

   Afghanistan's two reintegration programs targeting insurgents were undertaken in an environment of ongoing conflict. Though nascent peace talks between U.S. and Taliban representatives took place during the period of APRP implementation, these talks proved abortive. There was no viable peace process that could establish political commitment by the warring parties to demobilize and reintegrate fighters. Activities described as reintegration efforts were more akin to efforts to encourage defections. Taliban foot soldiers and commanders who participated faced high costs: potential retribution against them or their families by fellow insurgents or by Afghan security forces (who themselves or whose families have been victims of Taliban violence), loss of employment, and loss of prestige. By the end of APRP, an estimated 225 program participants had been killed, likely deterring other insurgents from joining the program. There is no evidence that reintegration programs attracted a significant number of insurgents.[603]

   A political settlement can improve the chances of success for a reintegration program. A peace agreement could bring an ebbing of violence, reducing the need for guaranteeing ex-combatants' security. Without an agreement, those implementing reintegration efforts must provide security guarantees for ex-combatants, vet them to mitigate the risk of insider threats, and deliver timely assistance despite ongoing insecurity and lack of access to many areas.

2. **Reintegration programs may not succeed in weakening or fracturing an insurgency, and can be counterproductive to the goal of reaching a political settlement.**

   In Afghanistan, using reintegration programs as a counterinsurgency tool produced few benefits. The U.S. government, particularly the military, viewed PTS and APRP largely as a tool to fracture and weaken the Taliban. Although APRP "peeled away" an undetermined number of genuine Taliban fighters, that number was not significant, and it had no effect at the operational level. Taliban fighters have largely remained integrated into the movement and loyal to the leadership, despite some internal friction—a cohesiveness vividly displayed in the success with which the Taliban observed the 2018 ceasefire.

Attempts to use reintegration as a counterinsurgency tool also failed to bring Taliban leadership to the negotiating table. The Taliban perceived reintegration programs as seeking their surrender to an Afghan government they viewed as illegitimate and abusive. Taliban leaders claimed to see PTS and APRP as indicators that the United States was not serious about peace negotiations. There is no firm evidence that reintegration programs helped to pressure the Taliban leadership to pursue peace negotiations.

3. **Partnering with militias to achieve short-term security objectives can seriously undermine wider peace-building goals, including demobilization and reintegration efforts.**

The U.S. government provided only limited political and financial support to early demobilization and reintegration efforts, including the DDR and DIAG programs. The U.S. government was focused on its role of building the ANA, and demonstrated relatively little interest in the DDR program (funded mainly by Japan, which contributed $91 million). The United States withheld $9 million of its pledged funding for the DDR program for nearly two years, and contributed only $200,000 for DIAG.

Moreover, on the ground, the U.S. military opposed the demobilization of militia forces, especially those in the south, where U.S.-led coalition forces relied on these militias for intelligence, combat operations, and to secure military bases. Limited political support from the U.S. and Afghan governments and disagreements over which militias to demobilize and reintegrate created distrust and discouraged militia commanders from participating in the DDR process. In the absence of political will and an enforcement mechanism on the ground, reintegration programs could not stop local commanders from manipulating the programs in their favor or evading them altogether.

4. **Without adequate physical security guarantees, former combatants are unlikely to join reintegration programs.**

In Afghanistan, former combatants generally faced at least one of three threats: (1) being targeted or arrested by the ANDSF or ISAF; (2) retribution from former insurgent networks; and (3) revenge from former victims. Coordination and information-sharing among ISAF, ANDSF, and USFOR-A were difficult, making it a challenge to remove participants from targeting lists and prevent the targeting of former insurgents. There were also reports of insurgents reintegrating quietly, outside of formal programs, due to fears of being targeted if they affiliated with the formal reintegration program. The consequences of failing to provide former combatants with adequate protection from these risks undermined reintegration efforts and discouraged insurgents from seeking to reintegrate.

5. Extensive monitoring and evaluation systems are necessary to assess the effectiveness and sustainability of reintegration activities, which should inform changes in a program's design and delivery of benefits.

Reintegration programs in Afghanistan did not include monitoring and evaluation systems that could assess whether former insurgents gained acceptance from the communities to which they returned, or what happened to them over time. The lack of baseline data and program evaluation prevented programs from tailoring assistance to the specific needs of ex-combatants or adjusting strategies mid-course, and made it impossible to gauge long-term impact.

Claims regarding numbers of insurgents reintegrated through PTS and APRP are difficult to substantiate, as there was no effective system to vet and monitor individual participants. The lack of any comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system also limited PTS and APRP's ability to determine whether program participants returned to the insurgency after joining the program. In addition, the lack of adequate vetting systems meant that some people who were never insurgents in the first place were counted as participants in the reintegration programs.

6. Community participation is important to a successful reintegration effort.

Both Afghan and wider international experience illustrates the importance of ensuring that communities play a role in planning and executing a reintegration program, and that such programs deliver benefits to both former combatants *and* the communities that receive them. Failing to do this can create perceptions of favoritism, fueling community resentment and derailing the reintegration process.

The design of post-2001 Afghan reintegration programs demonstrated an awareness of this important principle. From the DDR program to APRP, programs evolved to place greater emphasis on attempting to ensure that benefits reached not only ex-combatants, but also the communities receiving them. In practice, however, it was difficult to develop community improvement projects linked to APRP, due to widespread perceptions that it existed only as a counterinsurgency tool. Policymakers and program implementers should remain sensitive to these challenges.

7. A thorough needs assessment is important to ensure that assistance matches ex-combatants' needs and local economic realities.

None of the four main Afghan reintegration programs entailed a long-term effort to assist ex-combatants. Benefits were mainly confined to short-term transitional assistance packages and vocational training programs that did not match the former combatants' needs or local economic realities. Stipends provided by PTS and APRP did not substantially improve former combatants' ability to transition

away from fighting and into a civilian livelihood. Once the transitional assistance stopped, and without an established labor market to absorb them, many program participants were left no better prepared for civilian life than when they joined the program.

Vocational training provided by the DDR program bore little relation to the local labor market's actual needs or capacity. For example, some ex-combatants were provided with livestock which required expensive feed that many participants could not afford. Many of the farm animals died or were sold.

8. In an environment of mistrust, the credibility of reintegration programs and implementers relies in large part on creating realistic expectations and delivering benefits to former combatants on time.

Past reintegration programs in Afghanistan were not able to deliver benefits in a timely or effective manner. This was due to insecurity, corruption, weak Afghan government capacity, and delayed and inconsistent funding from international donors. This led to a loss of credibility for the Afghan government and international community, and likely deterred other combatants from participating.

Policymakers and implementers should acknowledge the many barriers to implementation in a conflict-affected country. They must maintain realistic timelines and expectations, and convey those clearly to beneficiaries. Setting overly ambitious expectations risks fueling frustration and resentment among ex-combatants and the communities that receive them, and undermining trust in the program. For this reason, before a program is announced, it should be fully conceived, funded, and ready for implementation. A slow, clumsy program can do as much harm as none at all, as it erodes confidence in the effort.

9. Grievance resolution is poorly understood and likely to be difficult to implement, which can lead to an overemphasis on economic incentives for ex-combatants.

Grievance resolution was widely viewed as a foundational component of APRP—a means to learn about the factors driving support for the insurgency, and to help resolve those grievances. APRP listed a broad range of measures to address grievances. Yet program documents provided few details on how grievance resolution was meant to be implemented, and few steps were taken to see these initiatives through. The failure likely created an overemphasis on economic incentives, and left unresolved many of the underlying factors that provoked individuals to participate in or support the insurgency.

10. **Local security agreements are unlikely to serve as mechanisms for effective reintegration in the midst of an insurgency.**

    Though local security agreements temporarily reduced violence, they remained fragile amid an ongoing conflict and without a national-level political settlement. Four local security agreements in Helmand, Baghlan, and Kapisa Provinces were extensively negotiated, involving district and provincial government officials, local security forces, tribal leaders, local insurgent leaders, and in some cases, international military forces (see chapter 3).

    Each one broke down within months of their signing, for similar reasons. These included lack of political support from Kabul and international partners, including the United States; harassment and violence by insurgents who were not party to the agreements; lack of security for those involved in negotiations; ongoing violence and a wider atmosphere of distrust on all sides; and provincial and district officials' inability to deliver on development promises for the community. As these local agreements broke down relatively early, there was little opportunity to implement a reintegration effort.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were derived from the lessons of past Afghan reintegration efforts, but also significantly informed by the literature on DDR, other countries' experiences, and interviews for this report. They are intended to help the U.S. Congress and State, DOD, USAID, and Treasury develop positions and policies on the reintegration of ex-combatants in Afghanistan—both in the current environment of an ongoing insurgency, and after an intra-Afghan peace agreement is reached.

Recommendations Regarding Reintegration without a Peace Agreement between the Afghan Government and the Taliban

Recommendation to the Congress

1. **In the current environment of an ongoing Taliban insurgency, the Congress may wish to consider not funding a program for the reintegration of ex-combatants because the Afghan government and the Taliban have not agreed to terms for reintegration.**

    Past reintegration programs targeting the Taliban were fundamentally undercut by the absence of a peace agreement, and the risks and complexity involved in implementing a program amid an ongoing—and, at times, intensifying—insurgency. As explained in Lesson 1, there was no viable peace process that could establish political commitment by the warring parties to demobilize and reintegrate fighters. Further, neither the Afghan government nor coalition forces had the capacity to provide security guarantees to fighters who wanted to reintegrate. As

a result, participants in any reintegration program faced grave risks in the form of retribution against them and their families. Widespread insecurity exacerbated the lack of jobs, and made it difficult to vet participants, deliver benefits on time, or monitor and evaluate programs.

Any new reintegration program, including the provision of monetary or in-kind assistance to ex-combatants, would face the same risks and limitations, if not more. Nothing about current conditions in Afghanistan improves the odds of success: There is no peace agreement, insecurity has worsened, corruption remains endemic, the political environment is uncertain, economic growth has slowed, and Afghan government capacity remains weak. A new program would also face the added challenge of a significantly reduced international presence in the country. Finally, recent Taliban battlefield gains may further dampen individuals' willingness to leave the fight.

Moreover, there is a risk that a new reintegration program could undermine the United States' current top policy goal: a negotiated settlement between the Afghan government and the Taliban. Taliban leaders accurately perceived APRP as part of a counterinsurgency strategy to weaken them, and claimed to view the program as evidence that the United States was not serious about peace negotiations. Given this legacy, restarting a reintegration program today could damage the trust needed to sustain current peace talks.

Recommendations to DOD, State, and USAID

2. Because of the difficulty in vetting, protecting, and tracking combatants who claim they want to stop fighting Afghan and coalition forces, DOD, State, and USAID should not implement a reintegration program amid the ongoing insurgency.

Cases have been reported in which Taliban individuals or small groups approach U.S. or Resolute Support authorities, saying they wish to stop fighting. Given the limited U.S. presence in the country and the nature of the Train, Advise, and Assist mission, it may be difficult for U.S. forces to confirm that individuals and groups coming forward are in fact insurgents and are genuine in their desire to leave the insurgency. It would also likely be difficult to track them to confirm they do not become recidivists. Given past security failures, physically protecting former insurgents would require additional efforts by U.S., NATO, or Afghan forces. The risk remains that any former Taliban fighters participating in a program could be targeted by their former comrades.

Any decision to accommodate these individuals would need to acknowledge these severe limitations—and to be transparent about the United States' inability to offer security guarantees. DOD and State should also acknowledge that efforts to

accommodate fighters would be highly unlikely to have any strategic effect on the security or political situation, though efforts may achieve some tactical effects.

A U.S. policy toward these individuals might provide for accommodating them on a case-by-case basis. This might involve removing the individual from U.S. targeting lists, or downgrading him to a restricted targeting list.

Further, State and DOD should be as transparent as possible with Taliban interlocutors about how they respond to former insurgents who wish to stop fighting. So as not to undermine the larger U.S. policy objective of reaching a deal with the Taliban, State and DOD should make clear that there is no proactive U.S. effort to entice insurgents to defect.

3. **In the event of negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban, State should encourage negotiators on both sides to determine how former combatants will be reintegrated—socially, economically, militarily, and politically—into society.**

As early as possible, intra-Afghan peace negotiations should address the issue of reintegration. Details are often highly political and contentious, and may rely on information—like the number and profile of combatants—that is not readily available. Yet avoiding the difficult task of building a framework for reintegration can undermine implementation of the peace process later on, as parties to the conflict seek to maintain a credible threat of violence to retain leverage.

State can encourage Afghan negotiators to address these issues early on. But State's engagement with Afghan and international partners should be closely coordinated with DOD and USAID. A DDR working group could be formed to facilitate this U.S. interagency coordination. USAID could work with State to ensure that reintegration efforts are adequately linked to wider development strategies.

4. **State, USAID, and DOD should each designate an existing office to lead and advise on reintegration matters. These offices should develop in-house expertise on international best practices on the socioeconomic, political, and military aspects of DDR processes.**

No single U.S. agency or office has the lead role on matters related to reintegration. Nor is any particular office or agency responsible for developing and retaining institutional knowledge of reintegration processes, or of DDR issues generally. Partly for this reason, U.S. agencies' engagement on reintegration issues in Afghanistan has been inconsistent and ad hoc. In practice, DOD assumed many responsibilities during the period of APRP because the program was viewed as a counterinsurgency tool. The informal division of labor in which State had the lead for reconciliation, while DOD had the lead for reintegration, contributed to a failure to adequately link and integrate these two parallel efforts.

Given that reintegration is fundamentally a political, psychosocial, economic, and developmental process, and DDR frameworks are often the product of negotiations involving international and multilateral organizations and donor countries, State and USAID should establish in-house DDR expertise. DOD should do the same, as DDR efforts are increasingly being conducted amid ongoing military operations, and because DDR is connected to security sector reform. In State, USAID, and DOD, an office with ownership of DDR issues would help develop in-house expertise and improve communication with the international field of DDR practitioners and experts. These offices should work with their respective regional bureaus, policy and program offices, and missions and commands overseas, to determine how U.S. agencies can support reintegration objectives in conflict-affected countries.

Recommendations Regarding Reintegration after a Peace Agreement between the Afghan Government and the Taliban

Uncertainties cloud any attempt to prepare for a scenario in which the Afghan government and the Taliban have reached a comprehensive peace agreement. Important post-settlement unknowns include:

- the political power structure and the degree to which a peace agreement is accepted by Afghan political elites of all ethnic groups, the Taliban, and the wider population;
- the degree to which the Taliban and Afghan security forces remain cohesive, adhere to leaders' commitments in a peace process, and do not splinter into groups that pose new threats to the state;
- the level of trust among all parties that the agreement will be implemented and enforced;
- the inclusion of a framework for reintegration in the agreement, and the willingness of the parties to engage in socioeconomic, military, and political reintegration;
- what an interim security arrangement might look like, and how Afghan security forces might be restructured;
- the presence of a third-party observer or enforcer of a peace agreement;
- the level of continued international financial support for the Afghan government;
- local communities' level of acceptance of former combatants and their families; and
- the extent to which security and the economy improve, among other factors.

The above factors will shape the prospects for former combatants' reintegration into Afghan society. The uncertainty around these conditions renders it difficult to make precise recommendations for a post-settlement scenario.

Nevertheless, based on this report's findings and lessons, we *can* recommend parameters for future U.S. engagement on reintegration issues. We can also raise critical questions that Congress and executive branch agencies should consider with respect to reintegration efforts in a post-settlement environment.

Recommendations to the Congress

5. Because a wider post-conflict recovery strategy is essential to successful reintegration of ex-combatants, the Congress may wish to consider funding broad post-settlement development programs in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan remains one of the world's poorest countries, where 55 percent of people live on less than one U.S. dollar per day.[604] On average, just $8 per capita per year is spent on health care.[605] Four decades of war have brutally traumatized the population, with millions losing family members, homes, livelihoods, and access to health care and education. While reintegration programs may provide assistance more specific to ex-combatants' needs, there are limits to any program's ability to improve overall economic conditions.

As discussed in SIGAR's *2019 High-Risk List*, an equitable and sustainable peace agreement could end much of the violence that presents the greatest threat to reconstruction and development efforts.[606] In the wake of a peace agreement, there may be a significant opportunity to strengthen the gains made since 2001 in education, health care, and women's rights—and to expand development efforts to areas that have seen little investment since 2001.

The United States, other donors, and Afghan partners are already planning what economic initiatives should be prioritized after a peace agreement. The draft plan envisions directing benefits to people and areas on the basis of need. Broad development assistance programs—not targeting ex-combatants and not part of any formal reintegration program—can have a profound effect on an ex-combatant's ability to reintegrate into society. A rising tide lifts all ships: stimulating private sector growth and creating jobs in the legal economy means more jobs for ex-combatants, too.

6. The Congress may wish to consider funding a reintegration program if: (a) the Afghan government and the Taliban sign a peace agreement that provides a framework for reintegration of ex-combatants; (b) a significant reduction in overall violence occurs; and (c) a strong monitoring and evaluation system is established for reintegration efforts.

Attempts to reintegrate ex-combatants without the above conditions in place are unlikely to succeed, and may undermine other security and peace-building objectives. A peace agreement must establish high-level political commitment and trust on both sides to demobilize and reintegrate their fighters. Without that, fighters face greater risk of retribution for participating in a reintegration program. Further, a reduction in violence must occur in order for a program to realistically deliver benefits to former combatants and communities accepting them, and carry out adequate vetting, monitoring, and evaluation. Finally, a strong

monitoring and evaluation system is crucial to assess program outcomes and make ongoing adjustments.

The above conditions present a high bar for U.S. appropriations for a reintegration program. But a program done poorly and in adverse conditions may prove worse than none at all.

Recommendations to DOD, State, Treasury, and USAID

7. **Treasury should ensure that State, USAID, and DOD are in no way prohibited from providing assistance to areas where beneficiaries were or are affiliated with the Taliban. This may entail removing Taliban members from Treasury's Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons list, or providing licenses to enable assistance to those areas.**

   Current U.S. sanctions prohibit U.S. agencies from providing any assistance to areas under Taliban control. In a post-settlement scenario, many areas may remain under de facto Taliban control for some time—or an interim security arrangement may establish new but ambiguous lines of security responsibility among the Afghan state, state-aligned militias, and Taliban-affiliated forces. Yet the imperative will be to ensure development assistance can reach those areas, in part to demonstrate the tangible benefits of a peace agreement. State, USAID, and DOD should have full authority to provide development and security sector assistance to these areas.

8. **State and USAID should ensure that U.S.-funded development programs in Afghanistan take into account the circumstances and needs of former combatants and their families.**

   Since any reintegration program would occur alongside many other development projects, it is important to consider how these parallel efforts may be integrated. For example, if USAID is implementing a program in Helmand Province, the program design should take into account what effect it will have on former combatants, their families, and the communities accepting them. USAID and implementing partners should take steps to ensure that their projects do not inadvertently complicate ongoing or planned reintegration efforts.

   In addition, State and USAID should review all relevant ongoing and planned assistance—whether it includes specific reintegration objectives or not—to determine how it might be used to support the reintegration of former combatants into society. State and USAID should also ensure that implementing partners for development projects fully support reintegration goals.

   In sum, broad development programs should be designed, executed, and evaluated in a manner that accounts for ex-combatants as a vulnerable population.

9. **The U.S. government should encourage and support an Afghan-led transitional justice process, which will be critical to underpin successful long-term reintegration.**

   The international community's resistance to transitional justice in the wake of the U.S.-led intervention and Bonn Agreement was shortsighted. The lack of accountability mechanisms for past crimes and human rights violations denied Afghans an opportunity for broader societal reconciliation.[607] Since a fundamental part of reintegration is the community's forgiveness and acceptance of ex-combatants, a reintegration program should be integrated with transitional justice processes.

Matters for Consideration for the Afghan Government

If the Afghan government pursues a formal reintegration effort as part of an eventual political settlement, it may wish to consider the following actions. These include important elements of what a reintegration effort might look like, and are informed by this report's findings and lessons.

10. **Reintegration efforts should be directed at not only former Taliban fighters, but also members of state-aligned militias and illegal armed groups.**

    Afghanistan's DDR and DIAG programs focused on particular armed groups and neglected others. Many armed individuals and groups refused to participate, believing their rivals were not being demobilized and reintegrated. Some armed groups were allowed to bypass reintegration programs because they were politically connected to Afghan government officials or worked with U.S.-led coalition forces to provide services such as security, logistics, and intelligence. This lack of inclusive participation undermined reintegration goals.

    In a post-settlement context, major powerbrokers within and outside the Afghan government may agree to demobilize and reintegrate their private militias. A reintegration program should be designed to accommodate these groups. Failing to do so would give the Taliban a rationale for not participating, as they would likely seek to protect themselves against former rivals.

    Given the fluidity of the conflict and the difficulty of determining true allegiances, it is possible that an Afghan-led reintegration program may accept a certain number of former members of terrorist groups. U.S. agencies should be thinking now about what their legal response would be to this scenario.

11. A monitoring and evaluation system should assess performance of a reintegration program, as well as the impact and outcomes of the program.

Reintegration programs are often justified on the basis that they reduce the risk of war recurrence, encourage economic and livelihood development, mitigate post-war escalation in violence and crime, bolster political participation and civic engagement, and address the impact of wartime trauma on communities and individuals.

Given the range of factors a reintegration program seeks to influence, any reintegration program must include a strong monitoring and evaluation system that accounts for appropriate metrics of success. This system should include measurable indicators to determine how a program is actually supporting an ex-combatant's transition into the post-conflict political and economic order, as well as any potential adverse effects. Any data collected should strictly protect the identities of individual ex-combatants. In the wrong hands, information about ex-combatants' location and personal history could enable retribution attacks against them, their families, and communities.

A monitoring and evaluation system must also address vetting challenges. Several officials and experts interviewed for this report observed that the moment a program for former Taliban fighters exists, there will not be 60,000 Taliban anymore, but 200,000—including many thousands willing to call themselves former Taliban in order to access program benefits.

12. Any information gathered as part of a monitoring and evaluation system should be shared with third-party researchers working to better understand the impact that reintegration programs have on individual ex-combatants and the communities they live in.

The international community has only a limited understanding of what works in reintegration efforts, under what conditions, and why. There have been few systematic attempts to gather data on individual former combatants and follow them over time so as to identify the determinants of successful reintegration into society. Many best practices in reintegration are based largely on anecdotal evidence and common-sense observations, but contain untested assumptions. Those who fund, design, and implement reintegration programs face an urgent need for empirical data and analyses.

If a reintegration program is undertaken in Afghanistan following a peace settlement, it would offer a vital opportunity to help fill this gap in knowledge and improve subsequent reintegration efforts not just in Afghanistan but around the world.

13. Communities receiving ex-combatants and their families should participate in the design and execution of reintegration efforts, and should also receive benefits from those efforts.

Community buy-in and participation are important to a successful reintegration effort; communities should be part of the decision-making process on a reintegration effort. They are also the source of locally appropriate solutions. Any reintegration program must avoid the pitfall of unfairly benefiting the ex-combatant population. In northeast Nigeria, for example, former Boko Haram fighters have been provided with grants and equipment to start small businesses when they return to communities. This has provoked tensions among other community members who have not received equivalent support.[608] Some community members viewed reintegration efforts as forcing communities to accept former Boko Haram fighters.[609]

14. Reintegration efforts, whether pursued through targeted programs or wider development assistance, should support a long-term transition to an alternative livelihood, not just provide short-term assistance.

Past DDR processes have frequently included "reinsertion" packages that are one to two years long. These are intended to address the immediate needs of former combatants and their families. In practice, these often became the sum total of so-called reintegration efforts. Reinsertion packages should be the first step toward reintegration, not a poor alternative. Long-term support should connect former combatants with ongoing development projects implemented by various local, national, and international organizations.

15. During intra-Afghan peace negotiations, international DDR specialists should be consulted regarding any future reintegration effort.

Afghan government and Taliban negotiating teams are unlikely to be familiar with international DDR best practices. If both sides are educated about how DDR is conducted around the world, they may have greater trust that those standards will be applied to them and will protect crucial interests of both sides.

International DDR experts, ideally from organizations and countries seen as neutral in the Afghan conflict, may advise both Afghan government and Taliban representatives. These advisors could also include individuals from both sides of past conflicts in other countries—for instance, Colombia and Northern Ireland. These experts would serve as educators and advisers on DDR processes as implemented in other post-conflict environments, and help guide negotiators in agreeing to a framework for the socioeconomic, military, and political components of reintegration in Afghanistan.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APPENDICES AND ENDNOTES

UNAMA photo

APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

SIGAR conducts its Lessons Learned Program under the authority of Public Law 110-181 and the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended. This report was completed in accordance with the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency's Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation (commonly referred to as "the Blue Book"). These standards require that we carry out our work with integrity, objectivity, and independence, and provide information that is factually accurate and reliable. SIGAR's lessons learned reports are broad in scope and based on a wide range of source material. To achieve the goal of high quality and to help ensure our reports are factually accurate and reliable, the reports are subject to extensive review by subject matter experts and relevant U.S. government agencies.

The Reintegration research team drew upon a wide array of sources. Much of the team's documentary research focused on publicly available material, including reports by DOD, State, USAID, ISAF, the UN, and the World Bank. These official sources were complemented by hundreds of nongovernmental sources, including books, think tank reports, journal articles, press reports, and academic studies. The research team also benefited from SIGAR's access to material that is not publicly available, including

cables, internal memos and briefings, and planning and programmatic documents. Finally, the team also drew from SIGAR's own work, embodied in its quarterly reports to Congress and its investigations, audits, inspections, special projects, and prior lessons learned reports.

While the documentary evidence tells a story, it cannot substitute for the experience, knowledge, and wisdom of people who participated in the Afghanistan reconstruction effort. Therefore, the research team interviewed or held informal discussions with more than 50 individuals with direct and indirect knowledge of reintegration efforts by the United States and its Afghan and coalition partners, as well as reintegration efforts in Colombia and Somalia. Interviews and informal discussions were conducted with U.S., Afghan, and other international experts from universities, think tanks, international and nongovernmental organizations, and government entities; current and former U.S. civilian and military officials who have deployed to Afghanistan; and personnel from the Departments of Defense, State, Treasury, and USAID.

Interviews provided valuable insights into the rationale behind decisions, the debates within and between agencies, and the frustrations that span years but often remained formally unacknowledged. Due in part to the politically sensitive nature of reintegration efforts, a majority of interviewees wished to remain anonymous. For that reason, our interview citations often use a general attribution, such as "former senior Afghan official" or "academic expert on reintegration." We conducted interviews in Washington, New York City, and Kabul.

Reintegration of Ex-Combatants: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan reflects a careful, thorough consideration of a wide range of sources, but it is not an exhaustive review of the topic. Given the timeline and scale of U.S. engagement in Afghanistan and the divided responsibility of reintegration efforts among the U.S., Afghan, and coalition governments, the report does not aim to fully address how U.S. civilian and military personnel dealt with reintegration on a daily basis since 2001. Rather, the report focuses on key programs and challenges to their implementation, and provides context on the development of Afghan reintegration efforts, relevant U.S. policies and initiatives, and competing priorities. In addition, the report reflects a review of the broader literature on reintegration and DDR, as well as more in-depth case studies of reintegration programs in Colombia and Somalia. Synthesizing all these, the research team derived lessons and recommendations to inform reintegration efforts in current and future U.S. contingency operations.

The report underwent a peer review process. We received feedback on the draft report from seven subject matter experts. These experts included Afghans, Americans, and Europeans, each of whom had significant experience working on or in Afghanistan. These reviewers provided thoughtful, detailed comments on the report, which we incorporated to the best of our ability.

Over the course of this study, the team routinely engaged with many officials at DOD, State, Treasury, and USAID to improve our understanding of the key issues as viewed by each organization. DOD, State, and USAID also provided feedback on the draft report. In addition, we met with departmental representatives to receive their feedback on the report firsthand. Although we incorporated agencies' comments where possible, the analysis, conclusions, and recommendations of this report remain SIGAR's own.

APPENDIX B: ACRONYMS

ACRONYM	DEFINITION
ACR	Colombian Agency for Reintegration
ALP	Afghan Local Police
AMF	Afghan Militia Forces
ANA	Afghan National Army
ANBP	Afghanistan New Beginnings Program
ANDSF	Afghan National Defense and Security Forces
ANP	Afghan National Police
APRP	Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program
ARN	Reincorporation and Standardization Agency
ARP	Afghanistan Reintegration Program
AUC	United Self Defense Forces of Colombia
CERP	Commander's Emergency Response Program
CIP	Commanders Incentive Program
COIN	Counterinsurgency
COR	Contracting officer's representative
CRIP	Community Recovery Intensification and Prioritization
CRO	Reference and opportunity centers
DDR (process)	Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration
DDR (program)	Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration program
DIAG	Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups program
DOD	U.S. Department of Defense
FARC	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia
FRIC	Force Reintegration Cell
FTO	Foreign Terrorist Organizations
FY	Fiscal Year
HIG	Hezb-i Islami Gulbuddin
HPC	High Peace Council
IDDRS	Integrated DDR Standards
INCP	Independent National Commission for Peace
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
IS-K	Islamic State Khorasan
MOD	Afghan Ministry of Defense
MOI	Afghan Ministry of Interior
MRRD	Afghan Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development
NDAA	National Defense Authorization Act
NDS	Afghan National Directorate of Security
NGO	Nongovernmental organization

ACRONYM	DEFINITION
NISA	Somali National Intelligence and Security Agency
NSC	U.S. National Security Council
NSP	National Solidarity Program
PAHD	Humanitarian Care Program for the Demobilized
PARS	Peace and Reconciliation Section
PPC	Provincial Peace Council
PRVC	Program for Reincorporation into Civilian Life
PTS	Program Tahkim-e Sulh
SDN	Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons list
SIGAR	Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction
SRAP	U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan
SSR	Security sector reform
TTP	Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan
UNAMA	UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNDP	UN Development Program
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
USFOR-A	U.S. Forces – Afghanistan
USIP	U.S. Institute of Peace

ENDNOTES

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The National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2008 (P.L. 110-181) established the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR).

SIGAR's oversight mission, as defined by the legislation, is to provide for the independent and objective

- conduct and supervision of audits and investigations relating to the programs and operations funded with amounts appropriated or otherwise made available for the reconstruction of Afghanistan.
- leadership and coordination of, and recommendations on, policies designed to promote economy, efficiency, and effectiveness in the administration of the programs and operations, and to prevent and detect waste, fraud, and abuse in such programs and operations.
- means of keeping the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense fully and currently informed about problems and deficiencies relating to the administration of such programs and operation and the necessity for and progress on corrective action.

Afghanistan reconstruction includes any major contract, grant, agreement, or other funding mechanism entered into by any department or agency of the U.S. government that involves the use of amounts appropriated or otherwise made available for the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

Source: P.L. 110-181, "National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2008," 1/28/2008.

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