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# **New Beginning or Return to Arms? The Disarmament, Demobilization & Reintegration Process in Afghanistan**

*To be discussed at the ZEF-LSE Workshop on  
“State Reconstruction and International Engagement in Afghanistan”  
Bonn, 30 May – 1 June 2003*

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There is a broad consensus among Afghans and international stakeholders that the paramount issue facing Afghanistan, 18 months after the fall of the Taliban, continues to be security. The deterioration of security conditions across the country in 2002 and early 2003 – a trend that threatens to derail the entire reconstruction process – has highlighted the lack of progress made in the reform of Afghanistan’s security sector. Security sector reform was acknowledged to be a priority of the reconstruction enterprise at the Tokyo donors conference of January 2002 and the subsequent Geneva security donors conference of April 2002, which established a formal agenda for the process. The disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants (DDR), identified as a central pillar of this agenda, has also been one of its most conspicuous failures.

Over the past decade, DDR has come to be viewed as a vital and indispensable component of post-war rehabilitation and reconstruction projects. A February 2000 report of the United Nations Secretary General titled, *The Role of United Nations Peacekeeping in Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration*, recognized that DDR “has repeatedly proved to be vital to stabilizing a post-conflict situation; to reducing the likelihood of renewed violence, either because of relapse into war or outbreaks of banditry; and to facilitating a society’s transition from conflict to normalcy and development” (United Nations, 2000a, p.1). In August 2000, a UN committee of experts headed by Lakhdar Brahimi described DDR as “key to immediate post-conflict stability and reduced likelihood of conflict recurrence” and advised that DDR structures be incorporated into the first phase of UN peace-keeping operations (United Nations, 2000b, pp.7, 54). The Secretary General’s 2001 report on the *Prevention of Armed Conflict* was even more explicit, recommending that the Security Council “include, as appropriate, a disarmament, demobilization and reintegration component in the mandates of United Nations peacekeeping and peace building operations” (United Nations, 2001, p.23). In the past two decades, DDR has been a salient feature of post-war reconstruction

programs in a wide range of countries including Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cambodia, El Salvador, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Liberia, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Sierra Leone and Uganda. However, the scope and complexity of the challenge facing a prospective DDR program in Afghanistan may exceed that which existed in the bulk of previous cases.

After 23 years of civil war, Afghan society is highly militarized and deeply scarred, both physically and psychologically. The country is awash with weaponry. Estimates affirm that there may be as many as 8 million guns in Afghanistan, a remarkable figure for a country of 27 million. Between 1986 and 1990, the U.S. and its allies funneled \$5 billion worth of weapons to the Mujahidin in support of their resistance struggle against the occupation of the Soviet Union (BBC, 22 February 2003). In 2001, after an 11-year hiatus during which a brutal civil war brought the Taliban to power, the U.S. aid pipeline to Afghanistan was reopened. After 11 September 2001, the U.S. funneled mass amounts of money to the United Front (UF) (Northern Alliance) to rearm it and secure its allegiance for Operation Enduring Freedom, the U.S.-led war against the Taliban and al Qaeda.

Guns are pervasive in Afghanistan; they are both inexpensive and easy to acquire. Trade in guns, particularly along the border with Pakistan is brisk. A genuine Kalashnikov assault rifle can be bought for anywhere between \$150 and \$200, while copies, constructed in small workshops that dot the region, can be bought for as little as \$60 (Sedra, 2002, 37; Reuters, 6 March 2003).

Determining the number of combatants in Afghanistan is a difficult undertaking, as it is far from a homogeneous group and the definition of a combatant in the Afghan context is problematic. Nevertheless, it is believed that between 150,000 and 250,000 Afghans are currently integrated into organized military groups and thus can be categorized as combatants. Designing a demobilization program to confront a problem of this magnitude is an imposing challenge for the Afghan government officials, donor government representatives, and UN experts given this task. However, a major factor in their favor is that the majority of the Afghan people are ardently in favor of this enterprise. It must be remembered that Taliban efforts to disarm militia groups and assert a monopoly over the use of force was their most popular policy.

*My constituents didn't ask me for schools or clinics. They wanted the weapons collected. They wanted the warlords disarmed.*

**Unnamed Delegate to the Loya Jirga**  
International Herald Tribune, 19 March 2003

In spite of tremendous public support for DDR, the process has yet to be implemented. It has remained stalled in the planning stage since its inception in April 2002. Adverse security conditions, the lack of a political consensus among Afghanistan's main power brokers, inadequate donor support, and a lack of progress on other aspects of security sector reform have hindered the process. Understanding the far-reaching ramifications of continued delays to DDR, the major stakeholders in the process have introduced a new DDR program titled, the Afghanistan New Beginnings Program (ANBP). To contain

rising insecurity and restore the public's faith in the viability of the post-war political order, it is critical that this initiative succeeds.

## Rising Insecurity

Under current security conditions, referring to Afghanistan as a post-conflict society is problematic. Possessing little authority outside Kabul, the Afghan Transitional Administration (ATA) lacks the wherewithal to quell growing unrest and establish the rule of law. Warlords hold sway across much of the country. Maintaining private armies and generating resources through illegitimate taxation, extortion, the narcotics trade, and other illegal activities, these figures have established mini-fiefdoms and defy the central government at will. Clashes between rival warlords and factions have been commonplace since the fall of the Taliban, killing scores of combatants and civilians. Among the most volatile factional rivalries in the country can be found in northern Afghanistan around the city of Mazar-I-Sharif, where two powerful UF commanders, the Uzbek Deputy Defense Minister, General Rashid Dostum, and the Tajik Military Commander, General Atta Mohammad, have been embroiled in a bitter turf war that has killed hundreds of people in the past 18 months.

*We are happy the Taliban are gone; we have no choice but to be happy. But the problem today is that our areas are not safe. If you rebuild a school, but it's not safe, then the children can't go and what's the use of the school? If you build a road, but there is no security, then what's the use of the road?*

**Hajj Mohmand**  
Mangal Tribal Elder (Pashtun),  
Christian Science Monitor, 24 April 2003

In addition to the challenge posed by warlords, spoiler groups such as the Taliban, Al Qaeda and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hizb-I-Islami faction have been resurgent in late 2002 and early 2003 in the south and east of the country. Attacks on coalition military forces in these areas – there are approximately 11,000 coalition troops in Afghanistan, 8,000 of which are American – have increased dramatically since the onset of the Iraq war. In the past four weeks, four U.S. servicemen and two foreign civilians – a Red Cross worker and an Italian tourist – have been killed in violence attributed to spoiler groups.

In response to the escalation of spoiler military activity, coalition forces launched two parallel military operations in the south and east of the country dubbed Valiant Strike and Desert Lion. Although these operations failed to stem the rising wave of attacks against coalition forces and international interests, they resulted in the discovery of several arms caches, one of which was described by a U.S. spokesman as the largest found by coalition forces in Afghanistan. These revealing finds, coupled with the increased level of coordination in guerrilla activities, denotes a new level of organization and sophistication among the spoiler groups. It lends credence to the view that the Taliban, al Qaeda, and Hizb-I-Islami, have formed a loose alliance to resist coalition forces and the Karzai government (Sedra, 2003b, p. 2). According to

Western Intelligence sources cited by the Associated Press, the Taliban have divided the country among fugitive leaders who are ordered to organize and carry out attacks (AP, 2 May 2003).

Perhaps the most debilitating effect of the rise of insecurity is the curtailment of reconstruction and relief operations in some of the most impoverished parts of the country. UN relief agencies and NGOs have scaled down their activities in various parts of Afghanistan due to the augmented level of risk posed to their personnel.

The U.S. military presence increasingly appears to be the only barrier preventing the country's degeneration into anarchy. Despite the recent upsurge in violence, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld announced, during a visit to Afghanistan in May 2003, that most of the country was "permissive" and "secure" (AP, 2 May 2003). He went on to declare that combat operations were over and the U.S. Military was moving into "Phase Four" of its mission, focusing on stabilization and reconstruction. The announcement, which clearly contradicts the facts on the ground, corresponds to the original blueprint for the U.S. military mission in Afghanistan, which called for an incremental reduction of U.S. military personnel beginning in 2004. Rumsfeld repeatedly reaffirmed the U.S.'s long-term commitment to Afghanistan; however, this provides little solace to Afghans who recall all too clearly similar unfulfilled promises made prior to the withdrawal of Soviet troops in 1989. The prospect of even a partial withdrawal of U.S. forces places more onus on the ongoing security sector reform process. The window of opportunity to implement these difficult reforms while a U.S. military umbrella remains over the country is rapidly closing.

### **The Evolution of DDR Planning**

DDR was not explicitly mentioned in the Bonn Agreement. The UN and donor states were keen on incorporating a clause on DDR but UF delegates were fiercely opposed to the suggestion. They would not countenance the idea of stripping the Mujahidin of their arms and were suspicious of Western motivations for emasculating Afghanistan's vaunted resistance fighters. They reached a compromise in the form of a vague provision stipulating that "upon the transfer of power, all mujahidin, 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" (Bonn Agreement, par V.1.). It was not until the April 2002 Geneva security donors conference that the issue was formally addressed. The conference established a security sector reform agenda, consisting of five pillars, and appointed a donor country to oversee each. The five pillars delineated were: Military Reform (U.S.), Police Reform (Germany), Judicial Reform (Italy), Counter-Narcotics (UK), and DDR (Japan). Some Afghan policy makers expressed dismay that the Japanese government was allocated the difficult and politically sensitive responsibility of overseeing DDR. They maintained that the U.S., in addition to its responsibility to supervise the creation of the national army, was best suited to undertake this crucial task (Rubin, pp.7-8).

From the outset, Japanese efforts in regard to DDR have been characterized by poor planning and a lack of vision and initiative. In May 2002, the Japanese government introduced a proposal to establish a military demobilization agency in Kabul. The structure was intended to serve as a coordinating body for the implementation of demobilization and reintegration initiatives by NGOs, international organizations, and the ATA. This program was slated to begin by the end of 2002, but the proposal was stillborn. Following the breakdown of this plan, the Japanese government gradually devolved all responsibility for overseeing the process to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

Elements of the Japanese demobilization agency proposal were subsequently taken up in a proposal for a UNAMA-designed DDR pilot program titled, “The Afghan Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Program” (ADDRP). The program was designed to last for a period of 12 months at a cost of \$20 million. Its aim was to demobilize 20,000 ex-combatants and former soldiers in six areas: Kabul, Kandahar, Herat, Mazar, Hazarajat and Nangarhar. A National Commission on Demobilization and Disarmament was to be established to supervise and coordinate the program. The results of the pilot phase were to be used as a basis to devise a long-term DDR strategy for Afghanistan (UNAMA, 2002). Despite the fact that the program was fully funded through financial commitments from five donor countries, Japan, U.S., UK, Canada, and Sweden, it was never implemented.

The Afghan government has created two commissions to oversee planning and implementation for DDR, the National Disarmament Commission (NDC), chaired by Deputy Defense Minister, General Atiqullah Baryalai and the Demobilization and Reintegration Commission, chaired by Vice President Kahlili and vice-chaired by Urban Development and Housing Minister, Yousef Pashtun. Although the NDC was originally formed in July 2002, it was reestablished along with three other commissions, the demobilization and reintegration commission, the military recruitment commission, and the military training commission, in January 2003. These bodies, inaugurated to jumpstart the flagging DDR and military reform processes, have made little headway since their formation.

The NDC set for itself an ambitious goal: to collect “a million weapons and pieces of military equipment” (Sedra, 2002, 37). The body coordinated collection programs in five northern provinces, including Badakhshan, Takhar, Kunduz, Parwan and Kapeesa, collecting, according to Afghan government sources, 50,000 pieces of military equipment, including 100 mortars, 13 armored vehicles, and 40 tanks (Sedra, 2002, 37). Yet, problems regarding transparency and promised compensation for the arms have cast a pall of suspicion over the process. Despite optimistic pledges from members of the commission that the program would be expanded to the rest of the country, little has been built upon its initial achievements.

During the past year there have been a number of ad-hoc, area-based disarmament initiatives, primarily spearheaded by local military commanders with support from the UN. These initiatives, often characterized by warlords disarming their less powerful competitors, have had mixed levels of success. The most notable of these ad hoc initiatives continues in the north, in and around Mazar-I-Sharif. In an effort to diffuse factional tension in the area, the UN brokered an agreement between the commanders of the three main factions in the region, Jamiat, Jumbesh, and Hizb-e-Wahdat, to establish a local disarmament

commission called the UN Security Commission. Roughly 2,000 weapons, including Kalashnikov assault rifles, mortars and RPG-7 rocket launchers have been collected by the commission since its establishment in May 2002 (AFP, 19 January 2003). Although the weapons are collected and stored by each faction in warehouses under their own control, UN monitoring teams regularly verify compliance (Sedra, 2002, p. 38). The commission has also successfully negotiated the dismantling of 140 roadblocks and checkpoints in Mazar-I-Sharif and the withdrawal of 2,000 armed militiamen from the city (AFP, 19 January 2003). In spite of these accomplishments, factional violence has continued unabated, a clear illustration of the limitations of the process in its present form. With arms plentiful in the region, factions have been able to rearm quickly. More importantly, as Vikram Parekh, a senior analyst with the International Crisis Group (ICG), states, “so long as the political competition there is not resolved, there is not going to be any incentive for a fair disarmament, demobilization and demilitarization process” (IRIN, 1 March 2003).

With DDR stalled and insecurity intensifying, the U.S. has exerted sustained pressure on the Japanese government to reenergize the process. The Japanese responded by convening a one-day conference titled the “Consolidation of Peace in Afghanistan – Change of Orders ‘from Guns to Hoes’”, held on 22 February 2003. More than 30 donor countries, the European Union and 10 international organizations took part in the conference. The meeting resulted in pledges of \$50.7 million, from four donor countries, for a renewed DDR initiative (see table 1.). These fresh financial commitments paved the way for the announcement of an ambitious new DDR initiative called the Afghan New Beginnings Programme (ANBP).

**Table 1. Donor Commitments to ANBP**

Donor Country	Contribution (in millions of US dollars)
Japan	35.0
United States	10.0
United Kingdom	3.5
Canada	2.2

### The Afghanistan New Beginnings Programme (ANBP)

*Achieving DDR answers the deepest aspirations of the Afghan people, who are eager to move away from war and violence toward a peaceful, safe and civil society.*

**President Hamid Karzai**

Opening Speech of the Tokyo “Consolidation of Peace” Conference  
23 February 2003

On 6 April 2003, the ATA and the UN Development Programme (UNDP) signed an agreement inaugurating the Afghanistan New Beginnings Programme (ANBP), an initiative that aims to demobilize 100,000 combatants over a three-year period at a cost of \$127 million. UNDP and the ATA’s DDR

commissions will administer the process. According to the plan, disarmament and demobilization will be implemented through Mobile Disarmament and Demobilization Units (MDDUs). The MDDUs are designed to coordinate arms collection and register combatants. To register, ex-combatants will be required to submit their firearms and provide fingerprints and personal data for verification purposes. The MDDUs will issue photo identification cards to each registered combatant, entitling them to reintegration support. When all combatants within a 40 km radius of where the MDDU was operating have been demobilized, it will move on to another location. Roughly 20 percent of the ex-combatants will be permitted to join the national army – U.S. military planners want the majority of the ANA to be composed of newly trained forces – while the rest will receive reintegration support. The Afghan Ministry of Defense (MoD) has also indicated that some factional fighters would be retained and trained as reservist “resistance forces” who could be called upon to supplement the national army if needed (Reuters, 22 April 2003).

Reintegration will be implemented by the ANBP headquarters in Kabul and eight regional offices located across the country. Soldiers who registered with the MDDU will receive a one-time cash and food benefit in the form of vouchers and will be directed to report to a regional ANBP office within a 1-2 month period for reintegration support. The type of reintegration packages offered will include: short-term labor-intensive employment, vocational training, teacher training, apprenticeships, literacy and educational opportunities, work in de-mining, access to micro-credit and business support, and agriculture and agro-business support. The programme is slated to begin on 10 July 2003. The order of the regions in which the MDDUs will be deployed has yet to be finalized but it is expected that the first three will be Gardez, Baimayan and Kunduz, closely followed by Marzar-I-Sharif and Kandahar.

Security will pose the most pronounced threat to the process. A security force will be needed to safeguard and facilitate the work of the MDDUs and fill the security vacuum in the areas where they will be operating. The architects of the plan hope that a combination of the fledgling Afghan National Army (ANA), local police, and the U.S. Military’s Provisional Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) will be able to fill this role. Reliance on these forces is questionable for several reasons: the fledgling ANA, at its present troop strength of 4,000, lacks the capability to carry out such an operation; the U.S. government has yet to confirm that PRTs can be utilized for purposes other than small scale reconstruction projects; and there is no professional Afghan police force to draw upon, only paramilitary police who will be a main target-group of the DDR process.

## **Challenges to the Implementation of DDR**

The following section will, on the basis of an assessment of current DDR planning, detail potential problems and impediments to the process. Many of the factors that undermined previous DDR initiatives remain unresolved and threaten to undermine the ANBP. This section will examine why previous initiatives failed and offer recommendations on how to overcome these obstacles and restructure the present program to maximize its effectiveness.



## **Security**

The security vacuum present in much of Afghanistan is the most pressing obstacle to the implementation of a DDR program. A minimum level of security is required as a starting point for DDR. Yet currently there is no viable security force present in Afghanistan capable of achieving this starting level of security. The ANA and national police force are in an embryonic stage in their development and at the current rate that the training process is proceeding, they will not have the capacity to enforce the authority of the central government on a countrywide level for another 5-10 years. The U.S. and its coalition partners have expressed a reluctance to extend the mandate of coalition military forces from pursuing the remnants of Al Qaeda and the Taliban, to peacekeeping and peace building activities. With the exception of the establishment of eight Provisional Reconstruction Teams (PRT), formed to advance the reconstruction process and 'win hearts and minds', there are few signs that the U.S. will deviate from its present strategy.

Perhaps the most hopeful candidate to provide a security buffer for DDR, and perhaps spearhead an expanded peacekeeping effort, is the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), the UN peacekeeping mission based in Kabul. Established on 20 December 2001 by UN Security Council Resolution 1386, ISAF comprises 5,000 troops drawn from more than 20 countries. Currently commanded by Germany and the Netherlands, the mandate of the force is limited to providing security for Kabul and its immediate environs; an expansion of this mission would require the authorization of the UN Security Council. Despite emphatic pleas to expand the force from ATA President Hamid Karzai, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and scores of international NGOs working in Afghanistan, the proposition has received tepid support from donor states. While the U.S. has indicated that it would support an expansion of ISAF on a political level, it has ruled out contributing its own forces to such a mission.

The decision of NATO in April 2003 to assume operational command over ISAF may provide an opening to expand the force. The Cold War-era alliance has the military capability to implement a peacekeeping operation of the magnitude demanded and would share the burden for the operation amongst its 26 member-states. However, considering that France and Belgium initially objected to the German plan to assume control over the current operation limited to Kabul, the first deployment of NATO troops outside of Europe, it is doubtful that they will endorse a massive expansion of the force.

Establishing a DDR process without the presence of a capable security force in the country will be difficult, if not impossible. A DDR program has never been successfully implemented without the support of a state or external security force to assist its work. In Mozambique, the state provided this force, while in Kosovo, NATO filled this role. To implement the ANBP, one of three steps, or a combination of them, must be taken. First, the military and police training program must undergo a massive expansion that will considerably shorten the period required to form effective military and police forces capable of projecting the government's authority beyond Kabul. Second, coalition forces, in the form of expanded PRTs, must be directly engaged in the DDR process. Third, ISAF, under the auspices of NATO, should expand its peacekeeping mission to major regional hubs throughout the country.

## Research and Analysis

According to Kingma, “successful post-war demobilization and resettlement require good data for planning purposes, effective logistics and management, and substantial resources for shelter, registration, transport, and the provision of basic needs” (Kingma, 2002, p.3). The Afghan DDR process has been endowed with sufficient funding, but lacks “good data” and “effective logistics and management” structures. Accordingly, DDR planners lack a precise picture of the problem facing the ANBP. Estimates regarding the number of people to be demobilized vary widely. UNAMA planners have worked under the assumption that there are approximately 75,000 men under clear command and control structures whose livelihoods are tied to the military establishment, and about 100,000 irregular militia combatants and war veterans. In contrast, General Bismillah Khan, a Deputy Defense Minister, claims that there are approximately 500,000 people under arms, and about 800,000 people – from all phases of the conflict – that would like to be integrated into the new armed forces (Kingma and Sedra, p. 13). It is clear that the very definition of a combatant is problematic in the Afghan context. More research into the extent of the problem to be confronted and the specific needs and demands of the combatants to be demobilized is needed.

Another area that requires more consideration and research is the militia command structures. As Dr. Barnett Rubin points out in his paper titled, *Identifying Options and Entry Points for Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration in Afghanistan*, one of the most difficult obstacles facing the demobilization process will be the mid-level commanders (Rubin, p. 6). Perhaps the greatest beneficiaries of the war economy, these individuals have grown wealthy from extortion, the drug trade and other forms of criminal activity. As Rubin points out, they are not suitable to join the national army and their unpopularity among the people, whom they have brutalized, precludes the prospect of a political career. Far from homogeneous, this group should be addressed on a piecemeal basis using a combination of force and incentives; some will likely be jailed for past crimes and human rights offenses while others will have to be bought-off. This problem has not been adequately addressed in DDR planning. While the number of top commanders or warlords is not difficult to determine – there are perhaps 10-15 warlords of significant power in Afghanistan – the country’s sub-commanders form a much more amorphous group. As Dr. Rubin suggests, it is necessary to list and profile these figures in order to devise strategies on how to deal with them during demobilization (Rubin, pp. 6-7).

Japan, as the lead donor country for DDR, was responsible for overseeing data collection and research. In a reflection of the Japanese government’s apathetic approach to the process, they did not establish a DDR unit until February 2003, almost 11 months after the Geneva conference.<sup>1</sup> Japan has almost completely deferred all responsibility for Afghan DDR to UN agencies. It is essential that more detailed research on the scale and extent of the DDR problem be carried out prior to and concurrently with

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<sup>1</sup> On 22 February 2003, Japanese Foreign Minister Yoriko Kawaguchi announced the appointment of DDR expert Prof. Kenji Isezaki to lead a DDR unit based at the Japanese Embassy in Kabul.

the implementation of the ANBP. Such research and analysis is acutely necessary to develop strategies on how to overcome potential obstacles as they arise and assess existing approaches and structures.

### **Donor Leadership**

The security sector reform process established at Geneva assigned a donor state the responsibility of overseeing each pillar of the process. This role entails more than serving as the principal funder for a specific area; it requires the donor to take an active role in steering the process. The purpose of instituting this framework was to infuse the endeavor with leadership and initiative. In this regard, Japan's efforts as the lead donor country for DDR have been disappointing. Less than a lack of funds, DDR has been delayed due to a lack of initiative on the part of the Japanese government. In contrast to the approach adopted by Germany and the U.S., which has stressed direct involvement in their spheres of responsibility, military reform and police reform respectively, the Japanese government has remained detached, contributing little in terms of personnel and expertise. Japanese plans to establish a demobilization agency in Kabul and a community based money-for-guns program never materialized. They did not undertake the necessary feasibility studies for the process and have never articulated a clear policy or approach to the issue. The DDR process in Afghanistan requires a strong donor presence, not to dominate the process, but to assist its implementation and provide it with a boost when it falters. It would be beneficial if Japan or another donor state, such as the U.S., asserts a leadership role in the process.

### **Forging a Political Consensus**

A political agreement or consensus among key power brokers is a precondition for the success of DDR in post conflict situations. Kingma states that "demobilization has little chances to succeed if one of the major parties and its leadership are not fully committed to the process." Before demobilization can take place, "a real political solution to the conflict" is required (Kingma, 2002, p.12). Although Afghanistan's principal military commanders supported the formation of the new Afghan central government at the Bonn conference and the subsequent Loya Jirga, in practice few if any have shown a willingness to submit to its authority. While the Bonn Agreement inaugurated a new government and political order, it has failed to bind all of the country's power brokers to that order. Factional clashes over territory and resources between the signatories of the Bonn Agreement persist in many parts of the country. A number of Afghan warlords have publicly stated that they would support the demobilization of their forces, but this rhetoric has yet to be put to the test.

In late April 2003, the Afghan government convened a two-day conference, assembling Afghanistan's senior military commanders, to forge a consensus regarding the ongoing security sector reform process. This was the first military meeting of its type since the fall of the Taliban in November 2001 and represents a watershed in ongoing peace building efforts. A statement issued at the end of the conference stated that the participants agreed to work with the central government for the good of the country's security and to build a multi-ethnic national army.

The UN-mediated disarmament process in the north of the country provides a superb illustration of the necessity for DDR to be preceded by a political agreement. The UN Security Commission has continually broken down due to factional clashes in and around Mazar-I-Sharif. DDR will not be successful in the north until the tension between the rival factions is ameliorated and a political settlement reached. Vikram Parekh aptly states that “for disarmament to begin in the north or anywhere in Afghanistan, a peace agreement between the various militias is the starting point” (IRIN, 10 March 2003). The UN, as it has done on the local level in the north, should take a more pronounced role in consensus-building and reconciliation activities at the national level. Third-party involvement, as seen in other disarmament and peace-building processes such as that in Northern Ireland, is vital to the success of the enterprise. To find a “real political solution to the conflict” in Afghanistan and establish a viable foundation for DDR, peace building and reconciliation activities must be pursued at all levels of Afghan society.

### **Reform of the Afghan Ministry of Defense**

Much of Afghanistan’s defense establishment is controlled by the Panshiri Tajik faction of the UF, led by the Defense Minister, General Mohammad Fahim. The nascent ANA, for instance, is almost exclusively controlled by Panjshiri Tajiks; of the 100 generals appointed by Fahim during the interim administration, 90 were Panshiri Tajiks (Sedra, 2002, 30). The Foreign Ministry and the powerful intelligence agency, the *Amaniyat* or National Security Directorate (NSD), are also headed by Panjshiri Tajiks, Dr. Abdallah and Mohammad Arif respectively. The disproportionate influence held by this narrow faction in the government has aroused suspicion across the country, particularly among the majority Pashtun population, that President Karzai is a puppet of Fahim and the Tajiks.

Fahim is viewed not as a non-partisan representative of the government, but as a faction leader. The Afghan MoD, by extension, is perceived to be an instrument of Tajik political aspirations. The reluctance of Fahim to incorporate his 18,000-troop private army into the ANA has only fueled such perceptions. Militia groups will not submit their arms to what they view as a rival faction, especially since there is no independent security force to guarantee their safety and security. The Afghan MoD must be reformed to make it non-partisan and broadly representative of Afghanistan’s ethnic composition.

In August 2002, under pressure from the U.S. and President Karzai, Fahim offered to replace 30 of the top 38 officials in the MoD with Karzai appointees. Karzai delegated the responsibility of composing the list to his Interior Minister Taj Mohammed Wadrak , who has since been replaced by Minister Ali Jahlali. It took six months, until February 2003, for the Defence Ministry to announce the changes, and only three of the new appointees came from Wadrak’s list, hardly the purge of Fahim loyalists that was expected (Rubin, p.5). For DDR to be feasible, public confidence in the central government and its ability to act in the national interest must be strengthened. Only comprehensive reform of the MoD will build that confidence and assuage the legitimate concerns of the populace.

### **‘It All Comes Down to Jobs’**

In previous DDR processes there has been a tendency to place more emphasis on aspects of disarmament and demobilization than reintegration. This is a mistake for if combatants cannot be offered alternative livelihoods, a means to care for themselves and their families, there will be no impetus to reenter civilian life. The demilitarization of Afghan society cannot be achieved unless suitable reintegration opportunities are available to former combatants.

To a certain degree, “it all comes down to jobs” (Kingma and Sedra, p.110). Even if the international community provides ex-combatants with vocational training, tool kits or micro-credit for small business creation, if the economy remains in shambles and no employment is forthcoming, the process will collapse. Haj Shir Alam, the ex-mujahid commander who leads the 22,000-troop, Kabul-based central military division, has stated that his soldiers would welcome demobilization as long as it can provide them with opportunities for a new future. “Everyone is too exhausted and will welcome a sustainable alternative” he avers (IRIN, 22 April 2003).

Job creation is the key to demilitarizing Afghan society and removing the dependence of Afghans on the warlords. Serving in a militia has, in the case of many Afghans, been the only option for employment. An increase in donor-supported investment projects would have an enormous impact in creating employment for the multitudes of unemployed Afghans, among them ex-combatants. However, the delivery of major investment projects, such as road construction and agricultural rehabilitation, has, thus far, been slow. Major labour-intensive infrastructure projects, such as the repair of the Kabul-Kandahar highway, a \$180 million U.S.-led initiative that was expected to generate thousands of jobs, has barely begun. Increased economic opportunities will make it difficult for warlords to keep their forces together. Therefore it is imperative that the international community promote the establishment of large-scale labor-intensive reconstruction projects to create these opportunities. Deputy Defense Minister Baryalai is adamant that the “mujahidin will not be demobilized until job opportunities are created for them” (IRIN, 26 February 2003).

*Without this gun I am nothing and have no skills. I would certainly prefer a respectable way of supporting my family if I could afford it and were offered something better.*

**Turab Shah Qalandari**  
28-year old former combatant  
IRIN, 26 February 2003

The Rapid Employment in Afghanistan Program (REAP), a UNDP-run program that recruits men and women for Afghan contractors to assist in development and reconstruction initiatives, exemplifies the type of initiatives that are required to stimulate employment. By April 2002, this program had given work to over 9,600 Afghans in Kabul alone (Sedra, 2002, p.42). The World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) have attempted to build on the success of REAP, establishing parallel employment generation schemes. In mid-April 2003, the ATA signed a \$25 million agreement with the World Bank to establish a

National Emergency Employment Program (UN Wire, 25 April 2003). Similarly, the ADB will provide \$150 million in support for an Emergency Infrastructure Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Project that will create thousands of jobs (ADB, 22 February 2003). Such initiatives represent important steps, however, donor states must do more to encourage large-scale investment in Afghanistan.

Of course, even with jobs readily available, it will be difficult to compete with the lure of the lucrative opium trade. Afghanistan has regained its position as the world's foremost producer of heroin; opium is currently selling for \$500-600/kg, a powerful incentive to resist demobilization (UNODC, p.57). Only expanded counter-narcotics efforts within the larger framework of security sector reform can mitigate this threat to the DDR process.

### **Security Sector Reform**

Delays, inefficiency, and a lack of resources and initiative have marred the entire security sector reform process. The effectiveness of DDR is dependent on progress made in the other pillars of the security sector reform agenda, most notably police reform, military reform and counter-narcotics. The five elements of the security sector reform agenda are intricately entwined and must be pursued on a parallel basis.

#### Military and Police Reform

By May 2003, the Afghan National Army (ANA) numbered 3,000-4,000. At the current rate of graduation, it will take up to 25 years for the ANA to meet its agreed force size of 70,000 (CARE, p. 3). Further complicating the process is the high rate of desertion, which is running at approximately 40 percent. Low pay, poor food and living conditions, and confusion regarding the length and terms of service have impelled many graduates to return home following basic training. Deputy Minister of Defense Atiqullah Baryalai, has attributed the delays in the creation of the ANA to the lack of progress on a parallel DDR program (IRIN, 24 April 2003).

A professional and effective national army is an essential element of efforts to legitimize the central government and facilitate the DDR process. The ATA and U.S. estimate that under favorable conditions, it will take at least five years to establish a capable and functioning force. It is advisable that this period be shortened considerably. Accordingly, the U.S.-coordinated training program to build the ANA should be revised and expanded. The expansion is also acutely necessary to absorb the thousands of demobilized combatants that will be directed to the ANA training program. The U.S. has indicated that the Kabul Military Training Center (KMTC), which it operates, will maximize intake capacity while DDR is underway. However, with approximately 20,000 ex-combatants expected to join the training program, additional measures will likely be necessary .

Police reform has similarly been slow to develop. The Kabul student riots of November 2002, which resulted in the deaths of several students at the hands of overzealous police officers, illustrates the need to expand the police training scheme currently being implemented. Karzai partially attributed this incident to the police's lack of training and professionalism (Sedra, 2003a, p.3). Endeavoring to stimulate

reform, the German government has rehabilitated the national police academy in Kabul, donated equipment, and contributed police instructors. The academy, whose lecturers have received training overseas, has a capacity of 1,500 full-time students and has set the length of its standard training program at three years. With the ATA setting a goal of providing training for 9,000 officers in Kabul and 75,000 nationwide, it will take decades to professionalize the entire force. Enlarging the program could expedite this process (Sedra, 2003a, p.3).

### Counter-Narcotics

In 2002, Afghanistan returned to its position as the world's foremost producer of heroin. The 2002 crop reached an estimated 3,400 mt., a 540 percent increase on the yield for 2001 and significantly higher than the 1,900-2,700 mt. earlier predicted for 2002 (IRIN, 21 January 2003). According to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), 50 heroin refineries began operation in eastern Afghanistan alone in 2002 (Davis, 28-29). This lucrative trade is a major source of income for warlords and spoiler groups and is a disincentive for DDR.

On 17 January 2002, in an attempt to arrest control of drug production, the Afghan Interim Administration (AIA) banned poppy cultivation and the consumption of heroin and introduced an aggressive poppy eradication program. From the outset, the program has been plagued by inefficiency and mismanagement. It offers US\$350 for each jirib (one fifth of a hectare) of poppies destroyed; however, poppy growers can make double that from growing their produce and selling it on the open market (Davis, 28-29). Compounding the problem, many farmers have claimed that they have not been duly compensated for the destruction of their crops.

It will be difficult for the ATA to lower production if they cannot provide alternative livelihoods for farmers. In drought-ridden areas of the country this is one of the only crops that farmers can afford to produce – it is attractive because it is drought resistant, easy to store, and extremely profitable. A farmer can make between 60 and 65 times more money growing poppies than wheat (IRIN, 21 January 2003). Therefore, the key to counter-narcotics efforts will be the provision of subsidies to farmers to grow alternative crops.

In terms of international support, the UK government has implemented a pilot program to train a drug enforcement unit of the Afghan police. Four experienced British law enforcement officers have begun training an initial batch of 16 recruits on advanced drug enforcement techniques. The trainees will form the core of a new drug law enforcement department of the Afghan national police (IRIN, 12 December 2002). While this program is beneficial, it fails to address the underlying cause of drug production in Afghanistan, a lack of viable alternative livelihoods for farmers. Resources and energy must be invested in the design and implementation of alternative-crop and rural infrastructure development programs, to run parallel to eradication programs. The government does not have the capacity, particularly in remote drug-producing areas, to forcefully uphold the poppy ban. It requires incentives to build public trust. Reforming and

expanding the counter-narcotics campaign is urgently needed to remove the heroin trade as an incentive for membership in armed groups.

### **U.S. Engagement**

The U.S. must expand its current level of engagement in the DDR process and the wider security sector reform agenda. By committing U.S. troops to DDR, the U.S. could make a major contribution to the beleaguered security sector reform process. Specifically, the PRTs could be used to facilitate DDR rather than implement community level reconstruction projects.

The PRTs are units of 80-100 U.S. personnel consisting of special operations soldiers, army civil affairs officers, conventional ground troops, officials from USAID, and representatives from the U.S. State Department. In addition to initiating and assisting development projects, such as the construction of bridges and schools, these teams are supposed to provide safe enclaves for the ATA, international NGOs and the UN to operate. The first three PRT bases, called Civil-Military Operations Centers (CMOC), were opened in Gardez, Kunduz and Baimayan in early 2003; an additional six centers will be established in other areas across the country in the coming months. With Donald Rumsfeld having declared an end to “major combat activity” and a shift to “stabilization and reconstruction activities”, increased emphasis has been placed on these teams (AP, 2 May 2003).

A great deal of criticism, primarily from relief agencies in the field, has been leveled at the new policy. Critics affirm that the PRTs will be dependent on the warlords for security, strengthening these figures; their presence will blur the distinction between military and humanitarian operations, thereby endangering humanitarian workers in the field; they will politicize the development process by gravitating to pro-government communities as opposed to areas believed to harbor pro-Al Qaeda sympathies; and their lack of female staff will render them unable to address the unique needs of Afghan women. “They are undermanned, under-resourced, and are focusing on the wrong areas”, according to Paul O’Brien of CARE International, an aid organization working in Afghanistan (New York Times, 26 April 2003). The PRTs would most effectively be used to assist in DDR rather than implement minor reconstruction projects. The U.S. Military should leave the coordination of reconstruction to the Afghan government, the UN and other civilian aid agencies and focus on what they know best, security.

*I was talking to one civil affairs guy, and we were looking at a kindergarten the American military was building, and the soldier turned to me and said, ‘Why aren’t you guys doing anything about disarmament?’ I could not believe it. The military is building kindergartens, and they are asking me, a civilian worker, to do disarmament! The world is upside down.*

**Rafael Robillard**  
Director, Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR)  
New York Times, 26 April 2003



## **Vulnerable Groups**

The DDR process in Afghanistan must take into account vulnerable groups such as the disabled, child soldiers, and the dependents of ex-combatants. If the process ignores these groups it will engender disaffection and resentment among the populace. DDR programs in post-war societies often arouse debate over whether combatants, who a large segment of the population view as partially responsible for the country's plight, should be accorded special treatment over groups such as refugees and internally displaced peoples. Research on post-conflict societies has shown that it is important to target ex-combatants in order to break the cycle of violence and advance peace-building and reconciliation; if ex-combatants are not successfully reintegrated into civilian society they are extremely likely to once again take up arms. However, as Kingma notes, "any support provided to ex-combatants has to strike a balance between dealing with their specific needs and not upsetting the wider communities or others" (Kingma, 2002, p. 8). Therefore, reintegration support should be coordinated other development activities and made available to as ubiquitous a group as possible.

### Child Soldiers

It is widely accepted that during the civil war thousands of child soldiers were recruited, often forcibly, into the country's various militias. After the fall of the Taliban, most of these underage combatants returned to their home communities. Although the majority of these children have been reabsorbed into their communities, many having reached adulthood in the meantime, they have specific problems and needs that must be addressed. Most are likely suffering from psychological traumas and have been deprived of opportunities to education and civilian work. They require targeted treatment and support to help them overcome the unique obstacles to reintegration that they face. Deprived of support, a large proportion of this group will reenter militias, as this is the only lifestyle to which they are accustomed. As the June 2001 Report of the UNSG states, experiences "in the social and economic reintegration of demobilized child soldiers, such as in the Sudan, Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, demonstrates that such activities are critical for preventing the recurrence of conflicts" (United Nations, 2001, p.29).

In May 2002, UNICEF developed a "programme for the demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers/minors associated with the fighting forces of Afghanistan and prevention of recruitment" (UNICEF, p.1). The stated goals of the program were to ensure that all child soldiers are demobilized and successfully reintegrated into their communities and to "establish legal and normative measures to prevent their future involvement with armed groups" (UNICEF, p.1). The program was to be subsumed into the larger national demobilization process and supported by child protection agencies and reintegration and reconstructing implementing partners.

The architects of the ANBP have indicated that child soldiers will be given special attention within the larger framework of the program, but it is not clear exactly what form this will take. It is difficult to determine the scale of the problem due to the fact that most child soldiers have returned to their home

communities. Yet it is clear that this is a vital target group for the ANBP, thus it should be allocated significant attention and resources.

### The Disabled

With 800,000-1 million disabled out of a population of 27 million, Afghanistan has the highest percentage of disabled people in the world. A Ministry for Disabled and Martyred was created to care for this large constituency; however, their needs have not been adequately addressed. In the past, the disabled have received 100,000 afghanis or \$2 dollars a month, but these payments have ceased in recent months due to government funding shortages (Reuters, 9 December 2003). In spite of ATA promises of increased support and donor pledges of equipment and aid – including specially adapted bicycles from China and machinery fitted for the disabled from Germany – none have materialized. Perhaps more adversely affected by the war than any other group, the disabled are entitled to reintegration support. It will build public confidence in the process and contribute to the country's overall economic recovery.

There are some programs for the disabled already in place that could be emulated on a larger scale within the framework of the ANBP. Last year, the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC) established a micro-credit program for the disabled that has since had 1,600 beneficiaries. The scheme provides interest-free loans as small as \$40 up to a maximum of \$150 to disabled Afghans keen to start their own small-sized businesses. The loans are repayable over 18 months (Reuters, 26 February 2003). The plan instills initiative and contributes to the country's economic recovery. The program has been remarkably successful. Almost 80 percent of those who had taken loans have paid them back, and half are on to their second loans. The ICRC plans to expand its micro-credit program to other parts of the country, especially in the six cities where it runs orthopedic centers (Reuters, 26 February 2003). The ANBP would act as a superb vehicle to expand this well-designed program.

### Dependents of Ex-Combatants

The degree to which dependents of ex-combatants are able to adapt to their new situations will have a major bearing on the outcome of the reintegration process. Social roles are inevitably altered during conflict, creating potential difficulties during the reintegration process. For example, women in war-affected communities, face specific problems once the conflict has ended. War frequently compels women to acquire new societal roles; however, men and the wider community are often reluctant to accept these roles in peacetime, creating tension within families and the wider community. Also, it is common for men to continue to identify themselves as combatants long after their return to civilian life, creating a host of domestic and societal problems. Such issues must be addressed during the reintegration process through counseling and other forms of support.

### **Donor Funding**

It is important that donor states and organizations make long-term commitments to the DDR process. Currently, financial support is not an issue of concern as \$50.7 million has been committed to the

process, an amount sufficient to cover the costs of the ANBP for its first year of operation. However, with the cost of the entire process estimated to be \$127 million, and this figure is sure to increase as the process develops, more money will have to be raised in the coming months. The ATA lacks the resources to fund this process, thus the entire burden will inevitably fall on the international community.

The task of mobilizing funds for a DDR process while it is underway has proven to be problematic. The DDR experience in Rwanda illustrates this fact. An evaluation of the UNDP program to support demobilization and reintegration in Rwanda that started in the late 1990s pointed out that the inability to increase funding for the program during implementation “caused a snowball effect on the content and management of the program” (Kingma, 2002, p. 11). As a result, the level of reintegration support offered to Rwandan ex-combatants was highly circumscribed and generally insufficient. The burden of having to engage in fund raising during the implementation phase of such a complex program places undue stress on the program and will subsequently diminish its effectiveness. This eventuality can be avoided in Afghanistan if a donor state such as Japan publicly pledges to underwrite the process in its entirety.

### **Community-Based Approaches**

Previous DDR experiences show that the outcome of reintegration depends, to a certain degree, on the support ex-combatants receive from the communities to which they are returning. Accordingly, increasing the absorptive capacity of communities will greatly advance DDR in Afghanistan. The return of 1.8 million refugees in 2002 and an estimated 1.5 million in 2003 has seriously strained community level support structures and has created tension between returnees and existing residents in communities across the country (AFP, 24 February 2003). It is necessary, through the reintegration process, to bolster these structures and promote community level development.

Community based approaches provide an effective means to promote DDR and development in a sustainable fashion. Local government has always been the core level of decision making in Afghanistan. International reconstruction and peace-building processes must recognize this fundamental reality by coordinating their activities with local institutions and structures such as the village *Shura*. Literally translated from Dari as ‘council’ or ‘committee’, the *Shura* is an *ad hoc*, nominally democratic and representative body, composed of influential community figures such as tribal elders and religious authorities, whose purpose is to resolve disputes and deliberate on issues affecting the community. It is important that the ATA, international NGOs, and intergovernmental institutions engage local communities and civil society in the DDR process through local structures such as the *Shura*.

A community-based approach has achieved a great deal of success in neighboring Tajikistan where an International Organization of Migration (IOM) project, funded by the Canadian and Norwegian governments, has partnered with local *Shuras* to implement a reintegration program for ex-combatants. With the dual objective of peace building on the country-level, and the promotion of small businesses in rural areas, the 18-month US\$250,000 “Entrepreneurship for Peace” program has reintegrated 414 ex-

combatants and created 227 small businesses since its inauguration in 2001 (IRIN, 6 January 2003). Similar programs, implemented on a larger scale could be beneficial for Afghanistan.

The international community, however, must be cautious when identifying local cooperation partners. The underlying goal of such endeavors should be to encourage local initiative and foster the establishment of sustainable structures. There have been instances in Afghanistan where ad hoc, unsustainable entities have been cobbled together in response to international demand. The creation of such transitive, artificial structures is counterproductive and should be discouraged.

### **The ‘Numbers Game’**

All DDR processes face the danger of becoming overly fixated on disarmament, particularly the ‘numbers game’, regarding the number of arms collected. Removing all small arms from Afghan society is as implausible as banning arms in the United States. “Guns have become an inalienable part of Afghan culture, a sign of manhood that are fired in the air at celebrations such as weddings or to mark the birth of a child” (Sedra, 2002, 37). This ‘gun culture’ will be virtually impossible diffuse in the short-term, especially with insecurity rampant. The goal of DDR is to demilitarize Afghanistan by demobilizing and disarming organized militia groups and to ensure that the ATA has a monopoly on the use of force. As Kingma and Sedra state, “special measures to collect and control small arms and light weapons could bolster the momentum for demobilization but it is not a precondition for it” (Kingma and Sedra, p. 101). In spite of its attractive simplicity, the numbers of arms collected is a not an adequate measure of the success of DDR and confuses the real purpose of the program.

### **Conclusion**

*The Afghan people are the biggest demanders, the biggest supporters of the DDR project because that is one of the keys to continued stability and prosperity in Afghanistan.*

**President Hamid Karzai**  
22 February 2003

A process of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants is a vital component of the peace-building and reconstruction process in any post-conflict society. Highly militarized after 23 years of civil war, the outcome of this process will likely determine the fate of the ATA. Rising levels of insecurity in the country, highlighted by a number of brazen attacks on international interests, has illustrated the urgency with which a comprehensive DDR process is needed. Stalled in the planning stage since its inception, the process requires renewed leadership and direction, which donor states such as Japan and/or the U.S. should provide. Continued delays to this project will only increase the likelihood of a return to armed conflict. Prominent Afghan military commanders such as Haj Shir Alam, have publicly warned that if the government wishes to prevent a possible regrouping of local armies across the country, DDR should be launched immediately (IRIN, 22 April 2003).

To instill confidence in ex-combatants that the government is sensitive to their situation and determined to address it, a DDR program should be implemented as soon as possible. It will allow ex-combatants to visualize their civilian future and abandon the destructive identity of an 'eternal soldier.' If the high expectations of ex-combatants for sustainable alternative livelihoods are not met, their frustration may impel them to reenter military life.

The ANBP is well designed and marks a breakthrough in the security sector reform process. While it is important that the program is implemented promptly, the cost of failure, a possible return to arms, exceeds the benefits of hasty implementation. Accordingly, a number of preconditions should be met prior to initiating the process. These preconditions include: a political agreement amongst the country's major power-brokers, an expansion and acceleration of the entire security sector reform process, stringent reform of the Afghan MoD, and the establishment of a viable security force to facilitate DDR and fill the concomitant security vacuum.

While the disarmament and demobilization of Afghanistan's militias can be achieved in the short-term, the reintegration of these ex-combatants will take many years. The success of reintegration will determine whether the entire DDR endeavor is sustainable or merely transitory. This process must be pursued at various levels of Afghan society from the individual family and community, to the regional and central government. It will require a prolonged and durable commitment by the international community and should address the needs of as wide a group of war-affected peoples as possible. How the government addresses the needs of these groups will bolster or shatter their faith in the new political dispensation. The people of Afghanistan genuinely want an end to war and a new beginning; however, to make the tenuous transition from military to civilian life they require the resolute and unwavering support of the ATA and the international community.

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