

Reintegration Briefing Note

May 2010¹



Following the London Conference on Afghanistan in January 2010, there has been a greater acknowledgement that military means alone cannot resolve the conflict and a renewed focus on reintegration and negotiations with insurgents as a key element of the strategy to end the war.² Broadly, this entails two parallel processes: negotiations with high level insurgent commanders and reintegration programs targeting low to mid level fighters. This briefing note focuses on proposed reintegration plans, with reference negotiations where relevant.

Reintegration can have positive social, political, economic and security outcomes. But if it is poorly planned or not implemented within the framework of a larger peace process, it is likely to be ineffective and could even exacerbate the security situation over the long term. While many Afghans long for peace and stability, the current plan for reintegration, Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP), appears to misapprehend the specific role that reintegration can play in securing peace and thus outlines several activities that are likely to pose a significant risk to those who participate. It also attempts to provide context to the current discourse around reintegration as well as some broader policy recommendations.

Past Approaches to Reintegration

Three major national programs have been put in place since 2002 that have either focused on reintegration or have had significant reintegration components:

- *The Peace and Reconciliation Commission (Program Tahkim e Solh, PTS)*: Established in 2005, PTS was meant to be the centerpiece of national reconciliation efforts. While it claimed to have reintegrated 6,000 fighters by 2008, many are believed to have been non-combatants and it was largely unsuccessful in producing intelligence on insurgent factions.³ Additionally, PTS was poorly managed, with allegations of corruption, and has been all but abandoned by donors, many of whom have come to see it as “morally bankrupt.”⁴
- *Afghan New Beginnings Program (ANBP)*: ANBP, implemented from 2003 until 2006, was a national disarmament, demobilization and reintegration initiative run by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) with \$150 million in funding from international donors. An estimated 60,000 former combatants were disarmed and provided with agricultural, vocational and business support.⁵ However, the program had minimal lasting impact, was often obstructed or co-opted by warlords or criminal elements and few participants are believed to have been genuine ex-combatants.⁶
- *Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups Program (DIAG)*: DIAG is an ongoing \$36 million program managed by UNDP that aims to disband up to 1,800 militias by offering community projects, worth upwards of \$150,000 each, in exchange for the handover of weapons and a pledge to demobilize. However, DIAG lacks donor support and community projects have proved to be an insufficient incentive, with reportedly only five projects completed.⁷ DIAG claims to have disbanded several hundred groups but these groups were often comprised of five people or less and it is questionable whether many genuinely represented “organized armed groups” at all.

A range of Afghan ministries, departments and provincial governor’s offices have also been engaged in reintegration initiatives and ad hoc peace jirgas, but their efforts have been ad hoc and uncoordinated, and have generally failed to create lasting stability.

The Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP)

While previous approaches to reintegration have been largely unsuccessful in meeting their own objectives or achieving greater stability, reintegration and political solutions to the conflict were a central focus of the January 2010 London Conference. At the close of the conference, the creation of the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Trust Fund (APTRF),⁸ to be managed by UNDP and the Afghan Ministry of Finance, was announced and the Afghan government subsequently began developing a new national strategy. A draft executive summary of the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Plan (APRP) was recently circulated to donors. On the assumption that the overall plan is reflective of the draft executive summary and that there is still a window to influence the final APRP, the following section outlines several concerns regarding the proposals put forth in the draft APRP.

Table 1: Donor pledges to the APTRF, as of February 2010

| <i>Donor</i> | <i>Amount pledged (USD)</i> |
|--------------|-----------------------------|
| Australia | 25,000,000 |
| Germany | 65,000,000 |
| Japan | 50,000,000 |
| Spain | 13,000,000 |
| UK | 10,000,000* |
| <i>Total</i> | <i>163,000,000</i> |

The main focus of APRP on offering mid- to low-level fighters incentives to rejoin society is similar to many previous reintegration programs in Afghanistan and reintegration initiatives in other countries such as Sierra Leone and Aceh province in Indonesia. Where it fundamentally differs from these other country contexts is that it will be implemented in the absence of a peace agreement or a disarmament process agreed upon by major parties to the conflict. While APRP presents a comprehensive plan for reintegration that could have significant positive impacts in a post-conflict setting, the fact that Afghanistan is in the midst of an escalating conflict renders many of these activities extremely risky.

If the aim is to “peel” fighters away from the insurgency, there is a danger that APRP overlooks or does not sufficiently address some of the factors driving the insurgency. The underlying premise of APRP appears to be that poverty and exclusion are the main drivers of the insurgency. While the majority of insurgents are believed not to be hard line ideologues, many are nonetheless motivated by a complex mix of reasons, including anger towards the government and the presence of international forces.⁹ Additionally, APRP discusses combatants as if they need to “return home” but the insurgency is homegrown in many areas. APRP also fails to sufficiently address the fact that many strands of the insurgency receive significant support from foreign fighters or have links with criminal networks.

According to the draft APRP, provincial and district leaders will conduct “outreach to upset brothers and communities” under the supervision of a High Level Peace Council and Joint Secretariat.¹⁰ Combatants who surrender will either be transferred to demobilization centers for a period of up to 90 days or directly back to their communities. APRP includes one reference to disarmament, as a guiding principle, but does not outline the process by which disarmament will be conducted. The strategy states that ex-combatants’ weapons will be registered according to Afghan law, implying that ex-combatants may retain their weapons.

Once a community agrees to “reintegrate,” it will receive “humanitarian” aid or other forms of immediate assistance. Following this, “community, district and provincial negotiations and grievance resolution will be undertaken, with the participation of communities and victims of the conflict.”¹¹ In this process, “communities, districts and provinces should select from a menu of options for communities and ex-combatants following negotiations, and funds from the Trust Fund will be released to support local negotiated settlements.”¹²

Several elements of this strategy are likely to expose communities to heightened security risks. If community level reintegration activities are seen as a threat to insurgent operations, insurgents are likely to attack anything or anyone perceived to be associated with it. They are also likely to create perverse incentives or a “peace penalty,” whereby some communities, districts or provinces may feel that they are receiving less aid and support simply because they enjoy greater security. Finally, APRP could exacerbate corruption unless there is stringent oversight of reintegration funds.

Coming to terms with the legacy of conflict

Afghans desperately want peace and stability, but there are several elements of APRP that risk exacerbating conflict at the local level through a failure to sufficiently address the legacy of the conflict. APRP states that all “upset brothers who accept the Constitution and a cessation of violence will be given amnesty.” APRP states that the “most serious” grievances will be referred to the formal justice system, but does not appear to outline the criteria by which these cases will be judged or address the fact that the formal justice system does not properly criminalize many war crimes.

This recourse to justice, through a district governor’s referral to a provincial governor, on to a flawed national court system seems unlikely to provide the opportunity to come to terms with the past that most Afghans long for. For less serious crimes and abuses, the APRP makes reference to local peace jirgas and victims rights groups, under the coordination of the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG), but APRP does not provide further detail on how a process of healing will be pursued at the local level.

Some may argue that since the government has already in effect granted itself amnesty for past abuses, the same should be extended to the Taliban. But anger towards this de facto amnesty – or, more precisely, the unresolved grievances that have been exacerbated by the resultant impunity – is helping to fuel instability in many areas. Addressing grievances at the community level is critical to achieving stability; yet APRP does not sufficiently describe how such grievances will be dealt with.

“Humanitarian” aid

The provision of humanitarian assistance in the initial stage of reintegration is a gross distortion of the underlying purpose of humanitarian aid, which is meant to be based on need, guided by the principle of “do no harm” and should be distributed independent of political or military concerns. Further, in a country where an average of 14 children die of every half hour of largely preventable causes, offering impoverished communities aid premised on their ability to produce “ex-combatants” is dangerous and unethical.

Community Development Councils and the National Solidarity Program

Proposals for community assistance focus largely on Community Development Councils (CDCs) and appear to be based on the National Solidarity Program (NSP) model. CDCs or shuras will work with ex-combatants and other villagers to create a “community recovery plan,” which may include a wide array of activities from school repair to road rehabilitation.

While utilizing pre-existing community decision-making structures can be seen as positive in that it seeks to avoid duplication, it will expose these relatively new and fragile structures to significant risk, particularly in recently “turned” areas. This approach risks further politicizing CDCs in a way that may pose security risks to CDC members or undermine future community support. While it may be argued that CDCs cannot be sheltered from politics forever, the fragility of CDCs and their varying capacity and local legitimacy must at

least be acknowledged.

NSP is also directly referenced in these plans as a key implementer of community level reintegration processes. APRP states that NSP will amend its current operations manual to accommodate APRP programming, which indicates that the APRP imagines merging community-level initiatives with NSP in many locations.

Within this model, APRP also envisions using NSP in recently “turned” areas or areas of active conflict through its “Special Program for High Risk Conflict Areas.” It references a “stripped down” version of NSP that will be implemented in areas where security is precarious. This would not only further challenge the quality and long-term institution-building elements of NSP, but is also likely to be dangerous and ultimately unfeasible.

In Helmand, a similarly stripped down version of NSP is already being implemented in Nad Ali district. However, CDCs have reportedly been unable to proceed with community projects due to threats and harassment from insurgents. In Kandahar, several communities have reportedly requested that NSP be put on hold until security improves because they feel that they cannot travel to the bank to withdraw funds for community projects without the fear of being harassed, robbed or beaten by criminals or insurgents.

APRP also proposes holding new CDC elections. It states that in cases where a CDC already exists, either “membership could be expanded (through re-elections) to include ex-combatants” or “the community priorities that are identified could also reflect the needs of ex-combatants whether elections take place or not.” Of course, CDCs should represent *all* community members, regardless of whether they are ex-combatants or not. But if re-elections are held, particularly in the absence of an effective disarmament process, this could easily enable local commanders to strong arm their way on CDCs and co-opt community development and decision-making processes for to serve their own interests.

APRP will also provide bonus block grants of up to \$150,000 to NSP communities that participate in reintegration. Awarding bonus block grants only to communities accepting ex-combatants is a significant shift away from the principle of equality that has guided NSP. It is yet another element of APRP that is likely to create perverse incentives for communities to “produce” combatants to be registered and then “reintegrated.” Finally, it is unclear how this will address the challenges faced by DIAG, where similar activities have been an insufficient incentive to motivate genuine ex-combatants to demobilize.

Many facilitating partners of the NSP are national and international non-governmental organizations that are likely to refuse to participate in APRP and may discontinue their participation in NSP altogether if it comes to be viewed as an extension of APRP. This could jeopardize the effectiveness of what is widely considered a highly successful national development program.

At a minimum, lessons learned from DIAG, NSP and the modified NSP being implemented in recently “turned” areas should be better incorporated into APRP. Facilitating partners and participating communities should also be consulted about the potential risks of and their concerns about in participating in such activities, and these issues should be addressed in the final APRP.

Target areas

While it is positive that whole districts will be covered rather than communities, it is unclear what measures will be put in place to prevent some communities being favored over others in this process and to ensure that this does not inflame tensions at the local level.

APRP states that program participation is available to all communities that “are willing to renounce violence, live in peace, accept the constitution, and return home” and that it will ultimately target 220 districts. However, it lists several priority provinces for immediate roll out in the first phase: Helmand, Kandahar, Nangarhar, Baghlan, Baghdis, Balkh and Herat. This focus on largely insecure areas is likely to further distort the regional balance of aid, which already overwhelmingly favors conflict areas over more peaceful areas. It also underscores that potentially billions of dollars will be spent on “reintegration” activities predominantly in conflict areas, despite the fact that all Afghans have suffered from the conflict (as APRP acknowledges) and Afghans throughout the country are in desperate need of humanitarian and development assistance.

Oversight

APRP fails to sufficiently discuss oversight at all levels and there are strong concerns about the mechanisms that may be put in place to release and oversee funding. Other areas where oversight remains a concern include the role of district and provincial governors, who are key decision makers at the sub-national level but who may have significant biases. APRP must better address concerns about oversight to ensure that the program is sufficiently accountable and puts in place appropriate safeguards against corruption.

Other reintegration processes

In addition to the national plan, many troop contributing countries will maintain separate funding streams for reintegration and “reconciliation” activities, which also include support for community militias or local defense forces.¹³ The lack of accountability for such forces is of great concern and, in the words of one analyst, this is likely to result in “gather[ing] of armed thugs...who as long as they do not attack the international military or the symbols of central government will be left alone to act as they please.”¹⁴ Such initiatives are likely to expand in the coming months as part of broader military-led reintegration activities.¹⁵

Of course, reintegration is unlikely to be effective unless it is part of a broader political process and program for reform that seeks to address some of the underlying causes of the conflict. While the apparent aim of the national Peace Jirga is to jump-start this process and consolidate opinion among pro-government factions on the need for “reconciliation” and negotiations as well as determining the parameters of negotiations, it has been met with deep skepticism by Afghans and internationals alike.

Recommendations

Some key recommendations the Afghan government and international stakeholders, rooted in Oxfam’s experience in Afghanistan and other conflict and post-conflict environments, include:

- **APRP and other reintegration initiatives should acknowledge and seek to mitigate the security risks to those who participate.** Reintegration is likely to be viewed as a threat by insurgents, who may target communities and organizations that participate. But as such initiatives are likely to move ahead regardless, all possible measures should be taken to reduce the risks faced by those who participate. It is imperative that successful national programs are not put into jeopardy. While it may make sense to roll out NSP over the long term to post-conflict areas once those areas have sufficiently stabilized, it is inappropriate and dangerous to expand the program to recently “turned” areas.

- **Reintegration and “reconciliation” initiatives should be rooted in a program of reform that addresses the underlying drivers of the insurgency.** Trying to buy off insurgents or to win the loyalty of communities with aid projects ignores the reasons why many people fight and why many Afghans are angry with and distrustful of the government. While poverty is helping to fuel the conflict, it is critical to acknowledge that unresolved grievances, foreign support for the insurgency and other local tensions also contribute to instability. Without addressing these issues, reintegration efforts will be superficial and unsustainable.
- **Address grievances and past abuses through peacebuilding efforts at the local level and re-evaluate amnesty, at least over the longer term.** Experiences over the past nine years have shown that amnesty often leads to impunity and corruption, which in turn fuels anger towards the government. Further, the Afghan people don’t want blanket amnesty.¹⁶ Regardless of whether legal amnesty is granted, a national program for community peacebuilding should go hand in hand with a national plan for reintegration to enable Afghans to come to terms with the past and move on.¹⁷ At a minimum, this would include capacity building work at the community level to improve dispute resolution and rule of law through traditional structures, such as shuras and jirgas.
- **Reconsider the use of local militias or “local defense” forces.** Militias are expected to be a central pillar of reintegration activities, at least at the local level. Accountability is currently all but non-existent and experience has demonstrated that without this, militias are likely to engage in criminal behavior, fuel local instability, be co-opted by insurgent factions and/or exert their control over communities through coercion and terror.¹⁸
- **Ensure that Afghans have a voice in political processes and don’t trade away the rights of Afghans in the political process of “reconciliation.”** Many diplomats and donors insist that these processes will be “Afghan led,” ignoring the critical question of which particular Afghans will be leading it. Many Afghans are concerned that those who have committed war crimes and/or perpetuated instability will be the very Afghans leading these efforts. Mechanisms must be established to ensure that this is a genuinely participatory process, at all levels, and the voices of ordinary Afghans are heard. The Afghan people overwhelmingly want peace, but not at any cost. The “red lines” on what will be traded in negotiations are unclear, creating anxiety among many Afghans that the freedoms gained over the past nine years will be quickly traded away. Any peace process must ensure that constitutional rights of Afghans, both men and women, are respected.

Notes

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² For the purposes of this brief, “reintegration” refers to efforts to reintegrate low to mid level fighters and incentive them to lay down their arms. “Negotiations” refers to higher level political processes aimed at securing the support of senior commander and leaders of insurgent factions to support the government.

³ Nick Meo, “British Cash to Buy off Taliban Goes to Farmers,” Telegraph, August 9, 2008, online at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/afghanistan/2529278/British-cash-to-buy-off-Taliban-goes-to-farmers.html>.

⁴ Astri Suhrke, Torunn Wimpelmann Chaudhary, Aziz Hakimi, Kristian Berg Harpviken, Akbar Sarwari and Arne Strand, “Conciliatory Approaches to the Insurgency in Afghanistan,” PRIO/CMI, 2009, online at: <http://www.cmi.no/publications/publication/?3266=conciliatory-approaches-to-the-insurgency-in>; Thomas Ruttig, “The Other Side – Dimensions of the Afghan Insurgency: Cause Actors and Approaches to ‘Talks,’” Afghanistan Analysts Network, July 2009, online at: <http://www.aan-afghanistan.org/index.asp?id=114>.

⁵ Afghan New Beginnings Program website, <http://www.undpanbp.org>.

⁶ International Crisis Group, "A Force in Fragments: Reconstructing the Afghan National Army," Asia Report N°190, May 2010, online at: <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/south-asia/afghanistan.aspx>.

⁷ Dr. Robin-Edward Poulton, "DIAG Evaluation: Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups in Afghanistan, A Project of United Nations Development Program and Afghanistan's New Beginnings Program (ANBP)," April 2009.

⁸ At the London Conference, several countries made financial pledges to the APTRF. Other countries, such as France and US, have pledged political support but have not (yet) made any financial commitments. The Afghan government believes that up to \$1 billion a year will be required to fund APRP so it is likely that some of these donors will make financial commitments after APRP is finalized. In addition, it is likely that the unused funds from the PTS program will be channeled to the trust fund and that PTS will be subsequently dissolved.

⁹ A 2009 Oxfam survey found that nearly half of all Afghans consulted saw the ineffectiveness and corruption of the government as a major driver of the current conflict. See Ashley Jackson, "The Cost of War: Afghan Experiences of Conflict, 1978 – 2009," A Joint Report by 9 National and International Organizations Working in Afghanistan, November 2009, online at: <http://www.oxfam.org/policy/cost-war-afghanistan-experiences>.

¹⁰ Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP), Islamic Republic of Afghanistan National Security Council and D&R Commission, Draft April 2010.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid. The menu of options includes: community security run through Ministry of Interior (Moi); district and community led-reintegration projects, run by the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development and Independent Directorate of Local Governance; integration to the Afghan National Security Forces, run by Moi and Ministry of Defense; vocational and literacy training, run by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MOLSA) and Ministry of Education; and transfer to the Engineering and Construction and Agriculture Conservation Corps, run by the Ministry of Agriculture, Infrastructure and Livestock, Ministry of Public Works and MOLSA.

¹³ According to conversations with UN officials and diplomats, at least five different actors are devising local or national plans for reintegration. Reportedly, CERP funding will be used for a wide range of reintegration activities; the British forces in Helmand are developing a localized plan for reintegration and reconciliation; the Canadian forces in Kandahar are devising their own plans and ISAF has created a dedicated Force Reintegration Cell.

¹⁴ Martine van Bijlert, "London Conference (2): Peace, Reconciliation and Reintegration," Afghanistan Analysts Network, February 2, 2010, online at: <http://aan-afghanistan.com/index.asp?id=600>.

¹⁵ Jason Motlagh, "A Sunni Awakening: Not So Easy in Afghanistan," Time, May 18, 2010, online at: <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1989686,00.html?xid=rss-topstories>.

¹⁶ A 2005 survey conducted by the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission found that 70% of Afghans wanted those who have committed atrocities to be brought to justice "now" or "in the next two years" and 76% felt that this "would increase security and stability." For more information, see Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, "A Call for Justice: A National Consultation on Past Human Rights Violations in Afghanistan," 2005, online at: www.aihrc.org.af/Rep_29_Eng/rep29_1_05call4justice.pdf.

¹⁷ Matt Waldman, "Golden Surrender: An Outline of the Risks and Challenges of Reintegration in Afghanistan," Afghanistan Analysts Network, April 2010.

¹⁸ "Two Women Raped in Kunduz," Afghanistan Times, January 27, 2010, online at: http://www.afghanistan-times.af/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3041:two-women-raped-in-kunduz&catid=39:provinces&Itemid=64; Susanne Koelbl, "'Every Man for Himself:' Afghan Militias Take on the Taliban," Spiegel, February 3, 2010, online at: <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,680965,00.html>.