

Peace From the Bottom-Up?

The Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program

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Design: Studio 7 www.studio7.no
ISBN: 978-82-7288-391-0 (e-version)



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This paper is part of an ongoing project by the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), and the Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI) to identify issues and options to help Afghanistan move toward sustainable peace, funded by the Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The first paper in this series was published in May 2011 by project coordinator Hamish Nixon: *Achieving Durable Peace: Afghan Perspectives on a Peace Process* (Bergen/Oslo/Washington, DC: Chr. Michelsen Institute, Peace Research Institute Oslo and United States Institute of Peace).

Acknowledgements: The author would like to thank project coordinator Hamish Nixon for invaluable reviews and revisions of earlier drafts. The report is in great part the result of the excellent work of a number of Afghan researchers, who can't be named, but who deserve special thanks. Andrew Wilder, Scott Worden and Kristian Berg Harpviken gave helpful comments and Halvor Berggrav has supported editing and production. Several UNAMA officials were extremely helpful with practical matters related to the field trips, as was Gran Hewad from Afghanistan Analysts Network. Any errors are of course entirely the responsibility of the author.

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ISBN 978-82-7288-391-0 (e-version)

Cover design: www.studiosju.no

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Abbreviations

AIHRC	Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission
ALP	Afghan Local Police
ANBP	Afghan New Beginnings Program
ANP	Afghan National Police
ANSF	Afghan National Security Forces
APRP	Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program
COIN	Counterinsurgency
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration
DIAG	Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups
F-RIC	Force Reintegration Cell, ISAF
HPC	High Peace Council
ISAF	International Security Assistance For
JS	Joint Secretariat of the Afghanistan Peace and Reconciliation Program
NDS	National Directorate of Security, Afghanistan
PTS	<i>Program Takhim-e Solh</i> , Afghanistan National Independent Peace and Reconciliation Commission
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

Executive Summary

Since late 2010 the Afghan government, supported by its international partners, has tried to reintegrate insurgents under the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP). The APRP aims to entice fighters from the battlefield with **security, jobs and other incentives** – provided they renounce violence, respect the Afghan constitution and cut ties with al-Qaeda.

The APRP proposes **parallel processes of reintegrating lower-level fighters and higher-level political dialogue**. But while the Afghan government envisaged reintegration accompanied by talks with insurgent leaders, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) saw it as **part of a military strategy** to force them to the table, and pressed for quick implementation of the reintegration component. Divisions remain between the government and different international actors over the reintegration “package”, the sequencing of reintegration and reconciliation, and who the program targets. These divisions, rushed implementation, and the absence of a comprehensive political approach, have led to **limited results in the first ten months**.

Implementation has been messy up to now. Coordination among Afghan and international partners in the reintegration structure, and between central and local officials has been problematic, and a lack of trust is undermining the commitment of some to the process. Although reintegration was already taking place, the establishment of the local infrastructure (bank accounts, provincial peace councils, support teams) has taken longer than the ambitious schedule demanded. By the end of May 2011 the Afghan government had received \$133.4 million of the committed funds for reintegration, but spent only \$7.7 million. Divergent and unclear outreach, vetting, and amnesty policies are being pursued by different actors, and there are concerns about corruption.

Although reintegrees are supposed to be vetted and registered, there are **doubts about their numbers and backgrounds**. Some 85 per cent of reintegration has occurred in northern and western provinces where the insurgency is less intense, and many of those reintegrated appear peripheral to the insurgency, or are unrelated groups seeking influence in local struggles. The little official reintegration in the South and the East may reflect serious **problems in the provision of security** for the reintegrees, which leave them vulnerable to revenge attacks by Taliban, but also may reflect a degree of cohesion among the Taliban movement. As a result, the total number of reintegrees as of August 2011 (2,385) was still well below the numbers needed for the program to have a strategic impact.

Although on paper **APRP is a more comprehensive program** than earlier efforts at reintegration in Afghanistan, in reality the incentives for reintegrees and their communities have largely been limited to **enrolment in the Afghan Local Police**, which might intensify local rivalries instead of bringing peace by maintaining armed groups in the country. Reintegrees show a unanimous interest in enrolment in the ALP, although in the near future the implementers will prioritise the provision of civilian jobs and other economic incentives.

The major limitation in the APRP may prove to be the **lack of a coherent political approach**. Reintegration is not embedded in a wider peace process, entailing talks with high-level insurgents and addressing the grievances of large parts of the population vis-à-vis the ruling national and local elite. In part this is the result of the haste with which the program was rolled out, which didn't allow for addressing politically sensitive issues like local grievance resolution and the formulation of an amnesty policy. Second, the lack of a political approach is the consequence of the division between and within the international community and the Afghan government over

the sequencing of reintegration and reconciliation (with high level insurgents). Finally, it has to do with the **lack of political will on the part of international actors and the Afghan government to address their own behaviour**, which is part of the conflict. Insurgent commanders consistently point to the **tactics of the international forces and to the corruption and predation within the Afghan government** as reasons to join the insurgency.

Afghanistan will need a robust and effective reintegration infrastructure to support the achievement of a durable peace. It is therefore essential for the Afghan government, ISAF, the United Nations and donor countries to consider how to **situate reintegration of low and mid-level commanders in a broader process of reconciliation**. Second, there should be **more emphasis on quality instead of on the numbers of reintegrees and the speed of reintegration**. Third, in order to achieve the grassroot dynamic necessary for successful reintegration it is important to **support local processes**, while making sure the use of resources is thoroughly monitored.

1. Introduction

Since late 2010 the Afghan government, supported by its international partners, has tried to reintegrate low-level insurgents under the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP). Drawing on lessons from previous reintegration efforts and in principle embedded in a wider political strategy that includes talks with insurgent leaders, the APRP aims to entice insurgents away from the battlefield with promises of security, jobs and other incentives – provided they pledge to renounce violence, respect the Afghan constitution and cut ties with al-Qaeda. The program, however, is operating in a hugely challenging context. Progress on high-level dialogue among the parties is fitful at best; the government is perceived as corrupt, weak and illegitimate; there are interests in maintaining the conflict; NATO tactics are heightening tensions; and commitments to withdraw international troops are public knowledge.

As a result of both implementation problems and its political context, the program has shown limited results to date: numbers are low and the role of many of those reintegrated in the insurgency is contested. This paper examines the effectiveness and impact of the APRP, discusses challenges, and concludes with some recommendations. It focuses on overall patterns and trends in two provinces, Helmand and Baghlan. It is based on research including documentary and press sources, and about 65 primary interviews conducted in those two provinces as well as in Kabul, with Afghan and Western officials, insurgent commanders and other Afghans.¹

1.1. Background and design of the APRP

Afghan President Hamid Karzai signed the APRP in June 2010, after about six months of program development carried out with much international involvement and little open consultation. In principle it aimed to initiate simultaneous processes of reintegration and high-level “reconciliation”.² Thus, at the “strategic and political levels” efforts would “focus on the leadership of the insurgency”, while at the “operational level” it would be geared towards the reintegration of “foot soldiers, small groups and local leaders”.³ Behind this two track approach there were considerable differences between stakeholder’s views on the program’s intent.

Western governments, motivated by deteriorating security and hopes to cut troop numbers, have increasingly favoured a political end to the war. At the London Conference in January 2011, donors pledged \$140 million for a plan to reintegrate operational “reconcilable” insurgent commanders and their foot soldiers.⁴ The Afghan Government envisaged reintegration as accompanied by high-level talks – or reconciliation – with insurgent leaders. The United Nations

¹ The Afghan government did not allow access to the general reintegration database, so numbers and details of those reintegrated are drawn from other unclassified and classified sources, in addition to interviews. Helmand and Baghlan are two of eight provinces where APRP was to be rolled out first: Helmand, Kandahar, Nangarhar, Khost, Baghlan, Badghis, Kunduz, and Herat. In Helmand, interviewees were from Nad-e-Ali, Sangin and Lashkargah districts; in Baghlan, from Baghlan-i-Jadid, Dahan-e-Ghori and Pul-i-Khumri districts.

² Mohammad Masoom Stanekzai, a key figure in the program design process and the current head of the Joint Secretariat of the APRP, developed arguments for “a comprehensive and coordinated political reconciliation process” during 2007-8: Mohammad Masoom Stanekzai (2008), *Thwarting Afghanistan’s Insurgency: a Pragmatic Approach toward Peace and Reconciliation*, United States Institute of Peace Special Report No. 212, Washington DC: USIP (September). For a brief discussion of varying uses of the term reconciliation in the current Afghan context, see for example Thomas Ruttig (2011), *Negotiations with the Taliban: History and Prospects for the Future*, New America Foundation (May), p 5.

³ Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, *Afghanistan Peace and Reconciliation Program (APRP): Final Program Document*, National Security Council Disarmament and Reintegration Commission (12 July 2010), p 1, 14.

⁴ BBC, “Afghanistan: Security transition ‘by end of 2010’” (28 January 2011) http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/8485861.stm (accessed 9 August 2011).

was also in favour of negotiations.⁵ Despite U.S. emphasis that negotiations with the Taliban leadership should be Afghan-led, Afghans widely view U.S. participation as key to successful negotiations.⁶ The U.S. was reluctant to engage with the Taliban leadership, however, and instead saw the reintegration of low-level Taliban fighters as part of a military strategy that, combined with intensified military operations, would force their leaders to the table.⁷ After a National Consultative Peace Jirga in early June 2010 that preceded Karzai's signing of the APRP, the President's international partners pressed for quick implementation of the reintegration component.⁸ The APRP thus evolved based on quite different conceptions of the role of reintegration in relation to military and political processes, both among international supporters and between them and the Afghan government.

The APRP aimed to incorporate lessons from previous programs dealing with the reintegration of insurgents, like the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) component of the Afghan New Beginnings Program (ANBP), and reintegration through the Afghanistan National Independent Peace and Reconciliation Commission, or *Program Takhim-e Solh* (PTS). Both those programs have shown limited strategic impact on the conflict and peacebuilding process.⁹ APRP would offer not only employment to reintegrees – as in earlier programs – but also do more to protect them, provide opportunities for grievance resolution for them and the communities into which they would reintegrate, and include a 90-day period of “deradicalisation”.¹⁰ Compared to previous efforts, on paper APRP gives considerably “more scope for Afghan institutions, subnational governance structures, local actors and communities” to play a role in reintegration.¹¹

The APRP is formally led by the 70-member High Peace Council (HPC), the public face of negotiation with insurgents and diplomacy to win the support of neighbouring countries, headed by Professor Burhanuddin Rabbani. It is implemented by the Joint Secretariat (JS), in which the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) are participants, under the direction of the Chief Executive Officer (currently Minister Mohammad Masoom Stanekzai).¹² Both the HPC and the JS were established in the autumn 2010. Since their establishment, concerns have been raised about the membership of the High Peace Council centring on the prominence of former *mujahedin* factional leaders and the lack of neutral figures, and the continuity between the sluggish administration for these past initiatives and the current Joint Secretariat.¹³

Provincial peace councils and technical teams to support provincial and district governors should replicate this national set up in the provinces. The governors play a central role “in coordinating

⁵ Gary Thomas, “US, Afghanistan at Odds over Reconciliation and Reintegration”, *Voice of America* (4 February 2010) <http://www.voanews.com/english/news/US-Afghanistan-at-Odds-Over-Reconciliation-and-Reintegration-83571572.html> (accessed 9 August 2011).

⁶ Nixon: *Achieving Durable Peace*, p 8-10.

⁷ Tony Karon, “Karzai and Obama: Whose Strategy for Afghan Endgame?” *Time Magazine* (12 May 2010); Susanne Koebl and Sohail Nasir, “A Road Map to Peace in Afghanistan”, *Spiegel Online* (17 May 2010) <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,695135,00.html> (accessed 9 August 2011); Thomas, “US, Afghanistan at Odds...” op. cit.; Interviews: UN official Kabul (May 30 2011); western officials Kabul (10 April 2011).

⁸ “If we don't get it going soon we will start missing the boat...We have to catch this moment here in every sense” said Maj. Gen. Philip Jones, who ran the NATO unit working on the plan and now heads the Force Reintegration Cell (F-RIC); Carlotta Gall, “Karzai pressed to move on Taliban reintegration”, *New York Times* (26 June 2010).

⁹ For a brief review of the DDR process see Caroline Hartzell, *Missed Opportunities: the Impact of DDR on SSR in Afghanistan*, United States Institute of Peace Special Report No. 270, Washington DC: USIP (April 2011); for a review of several past reconciliation efforts including PTS see Michael Semple (2010), *Reconciliation in Afghanistan*, United States Institute of Peace Perspectives Series, Washington DC: USIP Press.

¹⁰ Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, APRP: Final Program Document, op. cit., p 4 and 5.

¹¹ Tazreena Sajjad (2010), *Peace at all Costs? Reintegration and Reconciliation in Afghanistan*, Issues Paper Series, Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (October), p vii.

¹² On 20 September 2011, Professor Burhanuddin Rabbani was killed by a bomb attack at his residence in Kabul. Minister Mohammad Masoom Stanekzai, who was also present, was injured. Jon Boone, “Burhanuddin Rabbani killing plunges Afghanistan peace effort into crisis”, *Guardian*, (20 September 2011).

¹³ See for example, Patricia Gossman, *Afghan High Peace Council Fails to Reflect Afghan Civil Society*, United States Institute of Peace Peacebrief No. 74, Washington, DC: USIP (10 January 2011).

the support of line ministries with local peace and reintegration processes”.¹⁴ The UN and ISAF (through its Force Reintegration Cell, F-RIC) are responsible for coordinating the support of the international community for the APRP.

The reintegration process as described in the APRP documentation consists of three phases:

1. ***Social outreach, confidence building and negotiation:*** District and provincial officials and peace council members reach out to interested insurgents and mediate between them and the communities in which they will reintegrate to resolve grievances that may generate violence. The APRP recognises that violence can stem from local conflicts, between commanders, elders or villagers, but also from grievances against the local government.
2. ***Demobilization:*** This phase should include vetting (a review of both identity and past actions), registration (including the collection of biometric data), assessment of the individual and community, weapons management, protection from targeting by government or international forces, and the provision of security and transition assistance to meet basic needs (120 dollars monthly for a “transition” period of three months). If the individual agrees to respect the Afghan Constitution and renounces violence and terrorism he becomes eligible for political amnesty.
3. ***Consolidation of peace:*** This should include presenting demobilised combatants and communities with “community recovery packages based on a standard needs assessment”.¹⁵ In principle options include integration into the Afghan National Security Forces; vocational and literacy training; religious mentoring; education and enrolment in a public works or agriculture conservation corps; and the provision of assistance for local projects at community level.

¹⁴ Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, *APRP: Final Program Document*, op. cit., unnumbered first page.

¹⁵ The APRP program document calls for community recovery components implemented through the National Solidarity Program, and jobs and vocational training for infrastructure construction through the National Rural Access Program: Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, *APRP: Final Program Document*, op. cit. p 5, 6.

2. Issues with implementation

In reality, the reintegration program has been hastily implemented and until now is a messy process that has showed limited results.¹⁶ Establishing the reintegration program infrastructure has taken far longer than anticipated. As late as May 2011, the Joint Secretariat was still opening provincial bank accounts and setting up provincial peace councils, though this process was planned to have been finished within the first hundred days.¹⁷ Training of local staff, scheduled in priority provinces for the first three months, took place only in June 2011. In Kabul it took longer than anticipated for the ministries involved in APRP to recruit dedicated staff and set up “cells” to process project proposals from the provinces. By the end of May 2011, the Afghan government had received \$133.4 million of the funds committed to reintegration, but had been able to spend only \$7.7 million: “The program started very slowly and is still not up and running. The money flow is not established, money is not going from Kabul to the districts and local communities”, said one official in March.¹⁸

2.1. Poor internal coordination

Coordination within the APRP structure appears to be a problem. According to one researcher, “there is a lack of communication from the district to the provincial government, from the provincial government to the centre, from the Afghan government to ISAF, and from ISAF to the embassies. There is a total lack of transparency. Until roles are clearer, it will be a mess.”¹⁹ Similarly, a Western official says:

[Joint Secretariat Chairman] Stanekzai is good with ISAF and with UNDP but they are not good together. Stanekzai does a lot in parallel: meeting with ISAF and then with UNDP, but not with them together.²⁰

These delays and coordination problems reduce the buy-in of local partners, some of whom are already discontented. The governor of Kandahar, Tooryalai Weesa, after being approached by emissaries for mid-level insurgent commanders, told reporters that

We are not prepared the way we should be. We are telling them to wait a little bit. They are looking at how we are treating them, what services we’re offering them, how they are being protected. If we don’t treat them well, that will leave a bad impression on other groups.”²¹

According to a Western official involved in APRP in a northern province, the local governor is not actively engaged in the reintegration program, and without his participation the police chief and the chief of NDS are also reluctant to engage.²² Instead, in many places government officials

¹⁶ The first reintegrees under APRP joined the government as early as March 2010, but President Karzai signed the APRP document only in June, and established the HPC and the JS in September.

¹⁷ Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, *APRP: Final Program Document*, op. cit. As of May 2011 29 provincial bank accounts and 28 provincial peace councils had been established (of 34).

¹⁸ Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, *APRP Review Conference: Conclusions Paper*, Kabul: APRP Reintegration Review Conference, 10-11 May 2011; Telephone interview: western official (30 March 2011).

¹⁹ Interview: international researcher, Kabul (15 May 2011).

²⁰ Interview: western official, Kabul (9 April 2011).

²¹ Rajiv Chandrasekaran “Afghan government’s delays hinder recruitment of Taliban defectors”, *Washington Post* (May 19 2011).

²² Interview: western official (May 2011).

pursue their own methods of reintegrating insurgents, often very differently from what is defined by APRP and without registration.²³ The National Directorate of Security (NDS) also pays some former insurgent commanders and their soldiers to fight as government militias, although officially reintegrees should only be recruited into formal ANSF structures.²⁴

Furthermore, although the participation of civil society organisations is supposed to be a fundamental element of the reintegration program, especially concerning vetting of candidates and grievance resolution with communities, there is no structure in place to enable this.²⁵ Within the UN, another core partner in the APRP effort, there are considerable doubts about how much it should be involved in reintegration, due to a conviction that reintegration will not be successful in the absence of broader reconciliation: “From the very beginning when the APRP was emerging, the UN was against it”, said one UN official.²⁶

2.2. Partial implementation of outreach and demobilization provisions

The first wave of reintegration, mostly in northern and western provinces, thus took place before a functioning national infrastructure – especially provincial peace councils and technical support teams – were in place. In this absence, ISAF assumed many reintegration responsibilities, using an American National Defence Authorization Act fund of \$50 million to fund activities such as short-term employment. This close involvement of ISAF regular and special operations forces in early phases of the program reinforced perceptions that the program is driven by international military imperatives.

In this situation, each of the three phases of reintegration outlined above has only been partially implemented. Members of the JS and the HPC have been visiting several provinces, but without provincial peace councils or guidelines for governors, there has been little outreach at the local level. Officially there should be a grievance resolution committee in the HPC, but it is not up and running at time of writing, and thus grievance resolution is ad hoc. “The strategy is based around grievance resolution, but we haven’t seen much of it yet”, says a senior F-RIC official.²⁷

One reintegrated Taliban commander from the South explains his difficulties in approaching government officials:

I kidnapped four police and told them I would free them on the condition that they give my telephone number to a government official. I didn’t hear anything after their release. Then I kidnapped two police and told them the same. Again I didn’t hear anything. Then I kidnapped one police, but this time I told him that if he didn’t give my telephone number to a government official I would kill his family. A few weeks later I got a call.²⁸

²³ Interviews: government officials in Kunduz and Helmand (April and May 2011), JS member (21 May 2011), NDS official, Kabul (16 May 2011), senior F-RIC official, Kabul (20 May 2011).

²⁴ Commanders receive up to \$1,200 and their men \$200 a month. Interview: NDS official, Kabul (16 May 2011).

²⁵ While some civil society organisations have been reluctant, there have been at least two conferences organised by civil society groups, and some, as yet unrealized, proposals for civil society organizations to get involved in monitoring the reintegration process: interview with western official on 7 April 2011; Wazhma Frogh, *Monitoring women’s participation in the implementation of Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP)*, Afghanistan Women’s Network pilot initiative, unpublished proposal (April 2011).

²⁶ Interview: UN official (30 May 2011).

²⁷ The APRP program document recommends resolving local grievances through the Community Councils of the Afghan Social Outreach Program implemented by the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG). For grievances against the government or local officials, villages can nominate a mediator. The government also promises to establish an independent Ombudsman, but to date the office had not been established, and no village mediators were encountered during research. One of the activities that had been carried out in the sphere of grievance resolution were 5-day workshops for commanders, government officials and elders in three provinces, organised by the Afghan Peace Training and Research Organisation (PTRO).

²⁸ Interview: reintegrated commander, Kabul (21 May 2011).

Once identified as “reintegration opportunities”, potential reintegrees are often not vetted, or if they are, the conclusions of the vetting are often not communicated to other implementing partners.²⁹ Registration of reintegrees has also been limited. After completing a standard questionnaire and having biometric data collected, reintegrees should be registered in the central Reintegration Tracking and Monitoring Database. The database should be managed by the JS but as of August it was still being constructed by ISAF.

Groups of reintegrees were initially given ID documents as stipulated in the APRP program, but this has been now abandoned, according to one Western official, because “that became wrapped up in the issue of national ID cards, so it’s now political”.³⁰ Another official lists several difficulties with registration:

People who come over are afraid to use their real names; people disappear; there are a number of lists; more than one set of biometrics is taken and paperwork disappears because the Afghan government takes it and holds onto it. It is an extremely messy situation.³¹

Local government officials report that many commanders feel uncomfortable giving biometric data, in some cases because they feel it is not honourable and in other cases because they fear retaliation by the Taliban.³² The governor of one northern province said,

Taliban like to come informally and I support that because taking their biometrics and fingerprints, and registering their weapons is not an honourable process for Taliban. We should have a traditional *jirga* and ask elders if the Taliban can return. You don’t need to register them.³³

As a result, estimates as to how many have reintegrated vary. In April, Western officials involved in APRP said they thought around 900 people had reintegrated, while an Afghan official also involved put the number between 1,000 and 1,500; similarly an unclassified ISAF overview from May 2011 (1,680 reintegrees) was inconsistent with a classified overview from the Afghan government from the same month (1,809 reintegrees). In any case, the number of reintegrees as of August was still well below the 12-15,000 the senior International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) officer in the F-RIC thinks necessary for “strategic impact”.³⁴

2.3. Poor security provision and unclear amnesty policy

According to a range of sources the provision of security for reintegrees is also failing.³⁵ All reintegrated commanders interviewed feared for their safety, with many receiving threats from the Taliban that were inadequately addressed by local officials. Some commanders are accommodated in safe houses while others return to their villages, but the program includes no systematic solution for their personal or their family’s security. By time of writing, three

²⁹ Interview: international analyst, Kabul (4 April 2011) and telephone interview: western official involved in APRP in the north (30 March 2011).

³⁰ Interview: senior F-RIC official, Kabul (20 May 2011).

³¹ Interview: western official, Pul-i-Khumri (24 May 2011).

³² Interviews: government officials, Helmand province (May 2011).

³³ Telephone interview: governor of northern province (28 May 2011).

³⁴ Spencer Ackerman, “Taliban Not Exactly Heeding NATO’s Call To Give Up”, *Wired* (12 May 2011). In August 2011, ISAF announced 2,385 Taliban fighters had joined the reintegration program, mostly from northern and western Afghanistan; “Over 2,385 Taliban insurgents join Afghan peace process: NATO”, *Xinhua* (29 August 2011).

³⁵ Interviews: western officials, Kabul (19 and 30 May 2011); HPC member, Kabul (16 April 2011); international analyst, Kabul (16 May 2011); Ministry of Interior official, Kabul (16 April 2011); government officials and reintegrees, Baghlan (22-26 May 2011); telephone interviews: government officials, Taliban commanders, village elders in Helmand.

reintegrated commanders had been killed in Kunduz and sources requesting anonymity have reported an overall spike in assassinations of reintegrees.³⁶ Insecurity is a particular barrier to reintegration in the south and east.³⁷ One active Taliban commander in Helmand said:

The peace process is good but we don't trust the Afghan government. I would like to join the government, but who guarantees our life, who guarantees our family's life? Many Taliban have joined the Afghan government but some of them were killed by Taliban again. It means that Afghan government doesn't have enough power to protect us.³⁸

Insurgent commanders wishing to reintegrate are not only at risk from insurgents. Theoretically, ISAF can put commanders on a restricted target list so that international and Afghan forces do not attack them. But in reality this rarely happens, as the National Directorate of Security (NDS) and other Afghan authorities often do not inform ISAF of whom they are negotiating with. ISAF raids can disturb reintegration and have triggered complaints from all sides about the lack of communication.³⁹ Mistakes have also occurred with "de-targeting" because insurgents operate under different aliases.⁴⁰ According to some international officials, arrest is also a threat:

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?⁴¹

Because of these security concerns, many reintegrees indicate they are more interested in keeping their weapons and enrolling in the Afghan Local Police (ALP) than in working as civilians, as detailed below.⁴²

If the reintegrating commander and his men agree to respect the Afghan Constitution and renounce violence and terrorism, they are in theory eligible for political amnesty, but to date there is no detailed amnesty policy to define the parameters of this status.⁴³ Western and Afghan officials have been reluctant to tackle this politically sensitive issue, which one describes as an "800 pound gorilla sitting in the room", and another refers to as a "Pandora's box which can kill the program".⁴⁴ Referring to the controversy surrounding the 2007 Amnesty Law, which provides blanket amnesties for human rights violations during recent conflicts, in contradiction with international treaties which Afghanistan has ratified, the western official argues: "If we want to have an amnesty policy ready before we begin with reintegration, it can be a long time before it

³⁶ Wahidullah, "Taliban kill ex-comrade in Kunduz" *Pajhwok Afghan News* (9 May 2011), <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2011/05/09/taliban-kill-ex-comrade-kunduz> (accessed 10 August 2011); Habib Rahman Sherzai, "Militant group joins peace process in Baghlan", *Pajhwok Afghan News* (21 May 2011), <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2011/05/21/militant-group-joins-peace-process-baghlan> (accessed 10 August 2011).

³⁷ Interview: HPC member, Kabul (16 April 2011); UN official (30 May 2011); JS official (16 April 2011).

³⁸ Interview: Taliban commander (6 June 2011).

³⁹ Interview: western official, Kabul (31 May 2011); Jon Boone (2010) "Raids on former Taliban leaders hinder Afghan peace talks" *The Guardian* (7 April 2010).

⁴⁰ Interview: senior F-RIC official, Kabul, (20 May 2011).

⁴¹ Interview: western official, Kabul (30 May 2011).

⁴² Interviews: five reintegrated commanders, Baghlan (22-26 May 2011); reintegrated commander from southern province, Kabul (21 May 2011); western official, Kabul (14 May 2011).

⁴³ The APRP document mentions "political amnesty", but also specifies there is no blanket amnesty for all crimes. Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, *APRP: Final Program Document*, op. cit., p 1, 9. According to a JS official, there can be amnesty for armed actions against the government, but not for crimes against individuals. If an individual successfully presses charges against a potential reintegree, that reintegree cannot be given amnesty and will be detained – though the official did not know of any cases of this. (Telephone interview: JS official (3 September 2011)).

⁴⁴ Interviews: western officials, Kabul (10 April 2011 and 20 May).

will start”.⁴⁵ In May 2011, the JS hired a legal adviser to help formulate a suitable amnesty policy, but no such policy had been officially circulated at time of writing.

2.4. Slow funds flow and concerns over corruption and patronage

The disbursement of funds for the reintegration program, including those for peace consolidation projects, has also been very slow and a review conference in May aimed to identify ways to accelerate disbursement. Ministries presented irrigation, road building, and fruit and livestock production projects. However, “the projects the ministries devised are often old wine in new bottles”, says one western official involved in the implementation of APRP: “it is a lot of money for them”.⁴⁶ Another Western official confirmed that ministries present old projects for which they originally could not find money and re-label them as reintegration projects without linking them to specific grievances or cases.⁴⁷ In reality, little has been on offer because of a lack of capacity and infrastructure at the local level and in the main line ministries involved.⁴⁸ Similarly, reintegrees have been offered jobs, but on a very limited scale and mostly in mine action, and most have shown a preference for joining the security sector over civilian employment.

In addition to capacity problems, government corruption causes widespread concern that resources will not reach reintegrees, or that the program represents a further opportunity to distribute patronage: “the government is slow, cumbersome and there is worry about corruption”, says one western official involved in APRP implementation.⁴⁹ In the view of one international official,

ISAF has imposed reintegration on the Afghan government. Karzai didn’t want to have it. Now people think: let’s do it, maybe we can get some money out of it.⁵⁰

National level Afghan officials complain about their provincial colleagues, who in turn complain about them. One HPC member says:

We heard reports about governors purchasing guns and showing off with fake Taliban. This is just a new kind of business. It is a waste of our time, like DIAG (Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups), when old weapons were replaced with new weapons and millions of dollars were wasted.⁵¹

In some places provincial and district peace councils are regarded as vehicles of patronage for local authorities rather than instruments of genuine outreach.⁵² The role of the provincial governor in choosing the councils has been a prominent one, and several councils were disbanded and reformed after review by central authorities. According to the head of a peace council in a northern province:

⁴⁵ Interview: western official (20 May 2011).

⁴⁶ Interview: western official, Kabul (14 May 2011).

⁴⁷ Interview: western official, Kabul (9 April 2011).

⁴⁸ Interviews: researcher, Kabul (5 April 2011); western official, Kabul (7 April 2011); local government officials in several northern provinces (May 2011).

⁴⁹ Interviews: western official, Kabul (7 April 2011); HPC member, Kabul (16 April 2011); telephone interview: Michael Semple (10 May 2011).

⁵⁰ Interview: UN official, Kabul (30 May 2011).

⁵¹ Interview: HPC member, Kabul (16 April 2011).

⁵² Interviews: government official, Baghlan (25 April 2011); western official (7 April 2011); tribal elder in Nad-e-Ali, Helmand (24 May 2011).

Our peace council has no-one who can talk with the Taliban. Most of its members have always opposed the Taliban. They are not professionals. There are some Pashtuns on the council, like me. But we are there just for show; we can't talk with the Taliban.⁵³

Beyond concerns about corruption there are also significant doubts among Afghan and western officials about the commitment of parts of the Afghan government to the peace process in general, and to the reintegration component in particular, especially in the national security institutions and the local security apparatuses in the north and west.⁵⁴ According to a Western consultant involved in the APRP, “the police disrupted part of the reintegration process. They recognized it was a political program.”⁵⁵

⁵³ Interview: government official (25 April 2011).

⁵⁴ Interviews: western official, Kabul (10 April 2011); JS official, Kabul (16 April 2011); Afghan government official, Kabul (17 April 2011); Chandrasekaran, “Afghan Government’s delays...”, op.cit. See also Nixon, *Achieving Durable Peace*, op. cit. p 11-12.

⁵⁵ Telephone interview: Christian Dennys (27 June 2011). Attempts to contact with the “cell” working on APRP in the Ministry of Interior were unsuccessful.

3. Ambiguity over the roles of reintegrees

In addition to the relatively low numbers of reintegrees thus far, the roles in the conflict of many of those reintegrated are contested, in part as a result of the lack of consistent vetting. According to the Joint Secretariat, the NDS and Ministries of Interior and Defence screen candidates at provincial and national level, under the coordination of the JS.⁵⁶ However, in May 2011 it was unclear if there was a finalised standard operating procedure.⁵⁷ The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) has engaged in extensive mapping of historical and recent conflicts across the country, and participates in a high-level appointments panel making it ideally placed to contribute to vetting of candidates, but has no formal role in the program.

Though the leadership of the program claims all reintegrees are “real Taliban”, many Western and Afghan officials and analysts suspect that the majority never fought with the insurgency.⁵⁸ One JS official claimed that “we can’t rule out attempts to reintegrate fake Taliban, and we’ve seen some people try, but it is almost impossible to succeed. Everyone who reconciled was real Taliban”.⁵⁹ In contrast, one HPC member claimed that

Until now I haven’t heard of real Taliban coming and reintegrating in any provinces. Most of the people who joined the Afghan government are people who were unhappy with the government and misused the name of Taliban to steal from people’s houses.⁶⁰

A western official argued that as most reintegration has occurred in the west, northeast and central regions, rather than the south and east where the insurgency is fiercest, “the majority of reintegrees there are not real insurgents: they’re criminals returning from the mountains, and local villagers. Only a minority are related to the insurgency”.⁶¹ Patchy vetting of reintegrees was also illustrated by the news that one of the reintegrated commanders in Badghis had committed a crime by ordering, in the summer of 2010, the well-publicized stoning of a couple who had eloped.⁶² Three reintegrees also appear to have been involved in the attack on the UN compound in Mazar-i-Sharif in April 2011.⁶³

Underlying these differing points of view may be differences over the intended target groups for integration. Whereas officially, reintegration under the APRP “focuses on local peace processes

⁵⁶ The NDS, the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Defense are supposed to vet the potential reintegrees at the provincial level, and then share their findings with their headquarters in Kabul, under the coordination of the JS. Eventually all have to sign a statement confirming that the vetted individuals are free from criminal charges and that they are insurgents. (Telephone interview: JS official (3 September 2011)).

⁵⁷ According to an official from the JS there was a standard operating procedure (interview in Kabul, 16 April 2011), but according to the Action Plan of the APRP Review Conference there was only a draft which still needed to be finalised. Data from different official sources seem to indicate that potential reintegrees should be vetted for past crimes and for past actions against the government (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, *APRP: Final Program Document*; Force Reintegration Cell HQ ISAF, *ISAF Reintegration Guide* (22 November 2010); interview with JS official, Kabul (16 April 2011); telephone interview with JS official (3 September 2011)). Amnesty can then be given only for ‘past armed actions against the Government’ (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, *APRP: Final Program Document*, op. cit., p. 6; interview with JS official, Kabul (16 April 2011)). However, there is little clarity on the issues of vetting and amnesty in the official documents and they can therefore be open to multiple interpretations.

⁵⁸ Interviews: international analyst, Kabul (4 April 2011); western officials, Kabul (19 and 30 May 2011) and Pul-i-Khumri (23-24 May 2011).

⁵⁹ Interview: JS official, Kabul (16 April 2011).

⁶⁰ Interview: HPC member, Kabul (16 April 2011).

⁶¹ Interview: western official, Kabul (30 May 2011).

⁶² Chandrasekaran, “Afghan government’s delays...”, op. cit.

⁶³ Carlotta Gall, “Attacks force new look at Taliban’s influence; U.S.-financed program to reintegrate insurgents falling short of its goals”, *New York Times*, (11 April 2011); interview: western official, Kabul (19 May 2011).

with the foot soldiers, small groups and local leaders who form the bulk of the insurgency”, ISAF appears willing to include non-insurgents, with one senior F-RIC official arguing that

The program is for all Afghans, not only the Taliban. It is a peace program for Afghanistan. Uzbek groups are just as legitimate. It is not just about Pashtuns and Taliban.⁶⁴

3.1. The roles of reintegrees: the North and West

Around 85 percent of the reintegrees are from northern and western provinces. The picture of their background is mixed.⁶⁵ In Baghlan some officials say it is unclear even to those involved: “we don’t know who these people are”.⁶⁶ Some groups went to the police, some to the NDS and again others knocked on the door of provincial councillors. It appears that in each case the “hosts” took care of vetting but neglected to share their findings with other parties involved in implementing APRP.⁶⁷

In Baghlan, it appears that Taliban commanders who did not join the government are ideological, entrenched in the movement, receive help from southern Afghanistan and sometimes fight in areas outside their own locality.⁶⁸ In contrast, most reintegrated commanders present themselves as leaders of small village defence forces who sided with Taliban or Hizb-i-Islami in the absence of government forces able to guarantee their security. When the government established a presence in their area, they simply switched sides again, hoping they would be provided security and employment.⁶⁹ In Baghlan it therefore seems that the program is reaching groups which at best are peripheral to the insurgency and have changeable loyalties in any case.

The first group of reintegrees in Baghlan (70-100 men) joined in March 2010 after losing a battle against the Taliban, and presented themselves at the time as Hizb-i-Islami. Analysts, military officers and officials, however, disagree about their credentials – some knowledgeable observers claim they were pro-government forces, others believe their claims.⁷⁰ One of the group’s commanders said that Hizb-i-Islami was just a name they picked when they started operating north of Pul-i-Khumri, and one review found that they appeared to be concerned mainly with extorting the local population.⁷¹

One major group of reintegrees (100-160 individuals) was a pro-government unit fighting against the Taliban and Hizb-i-Islami. Their leader was a former police commander in Kunduz, and loyal to a recently deceased high-ranking government official. The commander says the official pressed him to join the program, promising him he could enlist in the Afghan Local Police (ALP) through the APRP (see section on the APRP and ALP below).⁷²

⁶⁴ Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, *APRP: Final Program Document*, op. cit. p 9-10; Interview: senior F-RIC official, Kabul (12 April 2011).

⁶⁵ The northern and western provinces account for 1,571 of the total of 1,809 reintegrees, according to a classified Afghan government document seen in May.

⁶⁶ Interview: western official (24 April 2011).

⁶⁷ Interviews: Afghan and western officials, Pul-i-Khumri (22-26 May 2011).

⁶⁸ Telephone interviews: four mid-level Taliban commanders, Baghlan (March-April 2011).

⁶⁹ Interviews: reintegrated commanders, Pul-i-Khumri (24-25 May 2011).

⁷⁰ Peace Training and Research Organization (PTRO), *Afghan Local Police, An analysis of current experience in connection to the APRP* (April/May 2011); telephone interview: military officer deployed in Pul-i-Khumri (27 May 2011); interview: journalist Christoph Reuter, Kabul (16 April 2011); interview: Gran Hewad, Afghanistan Analysts Network, Kabul (9 April 2011).

⁷¹ Interview: reintegrated commander, Pul-i-Khumri (24 May 2011); PTRO, *Afghan Local Police, An analysis of current experience*, op. cit.

⁷² Telephone interview: reintegrated commander (30 April 2011). His account was confirmed by Afghan and western officials in Pul-i-Khumri. However, it is unclear if the group remained in the APRP program after the reintegration ceremony. It is not counted anymore in the official numbers, but according to some local authorities and to the commander they are still part of the program. (22-26 May 2011). The office of the high-ranking government official mentioned wasn’t available for comment.

Badghis and Kunduz are usually cited as the most successful examples of provinces where reintegration happened. However, also there the picture is mixed. In Badghis from the summer of 2010, between 8 and 10 commanders and their men joined the government. Some were “soft” Taliban – in the insurgency for their own personal gain – others were commanders of criminal networks.⁷³ The NDS chief negotiated deals with them, usually agreeing that the police would not raid their villages, that no-one would accuse them of being Taliban, that they would get their own checkpoint or a position in the police, and promising them aid packages and development projects.⁷⁴

In Kunduz, armed groups joined the government in Imam Sahib and Char Dara districts. In Imam Sahib, between nine and twelve commanders with a total of around 100 men reintegrated over the winter of 2010-11. At least one-third were pro-government *arbakai*, or village militias.⁷⁵ The Taliban commanders in Imam Sahib joined the reintegration program after village support for them fell away when the local population sided with Haqqani-linked insurgents. In Char Dara, an intense military campaign by foreign and Afghan troops appears to have persuaded commanders to join the government.

3.2. Vetting and the role of reintegrees: the South and East

In the East and the South, where the insurgency is fiercest, there has been little official reintegration: as of June 2011, the leading provinces were Kandahar with around 75 reintegrees (two groups) and Uruzgan with 54 (also two groups). Several ISAF officials and the JS claim that there is more *informal* reintegration, either because insurgents fear for their lives if they reintegrate publicly, or because their relatives do not want to have their connections to the Taliban made public.⁷⁶ Insurgents that reintegrate informally agree with a governor to stop fighting and go home, but they are not registered or eligible for the benefits of APRP.

One of the two groups who joined the government in Kandahar under the official APRP program was under the command of Maulawi Nur-ul Aziz, who claimed to have been the Taliban’s district chief of Nad-e-Ali in Helmand until applying for reintegration – a claim the JS believes true. However, he was not on ISAF’s target list and other Taliban commanders and government officials in Nad-e-Ali did not recognise his name or aliases as those of a former district chief, but rather as those of a small commander.⁷⁷

In Helmand, reintegrees were not Taliban commanders but low level fighters and they were not registered, according to the governor’s spokesperson, though others claimed that commanders did come over and were registered.⁷⁸ Neither is there consensus as to how many reintegrated in Helmand: estimates range between 50 and 100. But as none were registered centrally or monitored, it is impossible to ascertain whether reintegrees still live peacefully. All but one of seven active Taliban commanders interviewed in Helmand said they had no interest in reintegration.⁷⁹

⁷³ Interview: international researcher, Kabul (5 April 2011); see also Abdul Latif Ayubi, “95 join reintegration initiative in Badghis”, *Pajhwok Afghan News* (9 November 2010).

⁷⁴ Telephone interview: Christian Denny (27 June 2011). Denny is the author of *Drivers of Reintegration*, a DFID-funded survey among 450 people which came out in April/May 2010 and organised workshops on grievance resolution for the PTRO.

⁷⁵ Interview: international researcher, Kabul (5 April 2011); telephone interview: western official (30 March 2011).

⁷⁶ Transcript of DOD News Briefing with Major General Campbell, Commander of Regional Command East, via Teleconference from Afghanistan (10 May 2011); interviews: senior F-RIC official, Kabul (20 May 2011); government official, Helmand (28 May 2011).

⁷⁷ Telephone interviews: Taliban commanders and government officials, Nad-e-Ali, Helmand (April and May 2011).

⁷⁸ Telephone interview: Afghan official, Helmand (18 April 2011); interview: western official, London (10 June 2011).

⁷⁹ Interviews: Taliban commanders, Helmand (May 2011).

In general, then, there seems to be a mixture of groups being reintegrated to the program; some ideologically motivated Taliban groups, but more often small groups of non-ideological or temporary insurgents, local criminal armed groups, and armed pro-government groups.

The evolution of conflicts among groups appears to play an important role in decisions to explore reintegration, especially encouraged by the promised, but as yet largely undelivered, provisions of the program. In addition, the terms under which such deals are taking place seem to emphasize the continuation of an armed role for these individuals and their followers, as seen in the next section.

4. Reintegration, retaining arms, and the Afghan Local Police (ALP)

In a situation without civilian jobs on offer or adequate security, many reintegrees wish to remain armed and wield security responsibilities in order to have leverage in local power struggles and (if they were connected with the Taliban) because they are afraid of revenge attacks by insurgents. One reintegrated commander in Baghlan argued: “It is impossible to go back without weapons: the Taliban will kill us. We need support; we need support from the police”.⁸⁰ Beyond incorporation in militias mentioned earlier, a quick fix in many provinces has been to enrol reintegrated fighters into the ALP, a program to train and pay local fighters to defend their communities under Ministry of Interior direction currently aimed at covering up to 77 districts, even though the two programs are not formally linked.⁸¹ All reintegrees interviewed expressed their hope to join the ALP; indeed for some the chance of enrolling appears to be a major motive in joining the government.

This desire to retain arms is also linked to economic factors. All the reintegrees interviewed complained about limited benefits given to them and their communities by the government. One reintegrated commander from Baghlan, who now has no source of income, says:

Since we joined the government we received some support but it is not enough. They gave us a [temporary] safe house and some pocket money but we are still waiting for work. They gave us two Kalashnikovs to secure our houses. We used to receive support from the Taliban and we collected *ushr* [tax] from the people. Now that we don’t have any weapons the villagers don’t let us collect *ushr*.⁸²

In light of the unclear vetting detailed above, this linkage between the APRP and the ALP, or between reintegration and the security forces in general, can have negative consequences. First, enrolment of reintegrees as local police has led to abuses of authority. Multiple reports from northern Afghanistan suggest that reintegrees in local police uniform continue to extort and harass the local population – a dangerous pattern when police harassment is consistently given as a principle driver of support for the insurgency.⁸³

Second, recruiting reintegrees into the ALP can perpetuate and intensify rivalries. In Baghlan, after one group of reintegrees joined the ALP, a former rival commander entered the reintegration program with the aim of also enrolling. He says that as long as he is not armed his life is at risk from his rival, and enlisting in the ALP will protect him.⁸⁴ In Badghis, a reintegrating

⁸⁰ Interview: reintegrated commander, Pul-i-Khumri (25 May 2011).

⁸¹ PTRC, *Afghan Local Police, An analysis of current experience in connection to the APRP*, op. cit.; telephone interviews: government officials in Kunduz, Helmand, Faryab; interviews: western and Afghan officials, Baghlan (22-26 May 2011). For a brief discussion of issues with ALP and the recent history of “neo-militias” in Afghanistan see Thomas Ruttig, “ALP program might create a rude Afghan awakening”, blog post on Afghanistan Analysts Network (8 August 2011), <http://www.aan-afghanistan.org/index.asp?id=1980> (accessed 10 August 2011).

⁸² Interview: reintegrated commander, Pul-i-Khumri (25 May 2011).

⁸³ Ray Rivera “Afghanistan Seeks to Disband Some Armed Militias”, *New York Times* (2 August 2011); Gran Hewad, “When the police goes local; more on the Baghlan ALP”, blog on Afghanistan Analyst Network <http://aan-afghanistan.com> (4 March 2011); Rod Nordland, “Some Police Recruits Impose ‘Islamic Tax’ on Afghans”, *New York Times* (12 June 2011).

⁸⁴ Interview: reintegrated commander, Pul-i-Khumri (25 May 2011).

commander facing a power struggle against a local elder also demanded to be allowed to join the ALP, presumably to bolster his own strength.⁸⁵

Third, the perception that APRP will lead to employment in the ALP can encourage local powerbrokers to force their own allies into the APRP, because they feel their interests in the local security apparatus are under threat. A local official involved with APRP in Baghlan argued:

Now there is a big problem between Tajiks and Pashtuns because of reintegration. Tajiks see Pashtuns joining the government, receiving weapons and becoming powerful locally, and they want to increase their own strength. A man called me and said he had a hundred insurgents in Andarab and Nahrin, but in fact in these two districts there are no Taliban.⁸⁶

These *de facto* linkages between the APRP and the proliferation of local defence initiatives – especially the ALP – mean that thus far the program has not had the effect of reducing the number of armed groups. Instead, the process of reintegration has probably maintained or even increased the number of armed groups, while arguably also creating dynamics among them and local populations or other groups that may contribute to deepening local conflict or worsening the insurgency.

⁸⁵ PTRO, *Afghan Local Police*, op. cit.

⁸⁶ Telephone interview: government official from Baghlan (25 April 2011).

5. Reintegration without a political approach

As noted above, APRP is – on paper – a two-track program in which low and mid-level Taliban fighters would be reintegrated while a political solution was sought nationally and regionally. In reality however, international actors have disagreed among themselves and with the Afghan government on the sequencing of reintegration and reconciliation. The U.S. wanted to move forward quickly with reintegration, but was initially wary – at least publicly – of talks with the insurgent leadership. ISAF and the APRP donors hoped that the reintegration of low and mid-level fighters would help convince insurgent leaders to negotiate, in combination with an increase in the number of Afghan and international troops and an intensified kill-capture campaign designed to “sow distrust and discontent inside the ranks of insurgent groups, ultimately persuading them they have no chance of succeeding militarily”.⁸⁷

This view understands reintegration as “a COIN (counterinsurgency) instrument, a military driven surrender mechanism, but not a serious mechanism to make peace”.⁸⁸ The ISAF Reintegration Guide from the Force Reintegration Cell goes as far as stating: “Reintegration is an essential part of the counterinsurgency campaign”.⁸⁹ Only in June 2011, eight months after the APRP’s start, outgoing Defence Secretary Robert Gates admitted “preliminary” talks with Taliban interlocutors were underway, while Secretary Clinton had spoken of a “diplomatic surge” in February 2011.⁹⁰ In contrast, many UN and Afghan officials, including some in the HPC, believed from the start that the two tracks should run in parallel.⁹¹ “It is very difficult to have reintegration without a peace process”, says one UN official.⁹²

5.1. Insurgency cohesion and sequencing of reintegration and reconciliation

Although there is no consensus among analysts on the degree of the cohesiveness of the Taliban movement (and allied insurgency groups like the Haqqani network and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar’s Hizb-e-Islami), all say any reintegration approach should take ties of patronage and loyalty within the Taliban movement into account, with some arguing it is essential to engage with the leadership while or even before trying to reintegrate lower level commanders.⁹³

⁸⁷ Pentagon adviser Lt Col John Nagle (ret.) in PBS documentary *Kill/Capture*, aired 11 May 2011; Interviews: western officials, Kabul (10 April 2011); Mark Landler and Helene Cooper, “U.S. Wrestling With Olive Branch for Taliban”, *New York Times* (27 January 2011); Jon Boone, “Taliban claim success against Nato’s night raids”, *The Guardian* (31 October 2010); Joshua Partlow, “Karzai wants U.S. to reduce military operations in Afghanistan”, *Washington Post* (14 November 2010).

⁸⁸ Interview: western official, Kabul (19 May 2011). The same point was made by others in interviews: western official, Kabul (30 May 2011); members of HPC, Kabul (16 April 2011) and by telephone (18 April 2011).

⁸⁹ Issued on 20 November 2010.

⁹⁰ “Robert Gates confirms US-Taliban talks in Afghanistan”, *BBC News* (19 June 2011), <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-13830750> (accessed 10 August 2011); US Department of State, transcript of remarks, “Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, Launch of the Asia Society’s Series of Richard C. Holbrooke Memorial Addresses” (18 February 2011).

⁹¹ Sajjad, *Peace at all Costs?* Op. cit. p viii; interviews: Afghan analyst, Kabul (April 12); HPC member, Kabul (16 April 2011).

⁹² Interview: UN official, Kabul (30 May 2011).

⁹³ Thomas Ruttig writes “(...) There has been the debate between ‘splittists’ (those who wanted to break away Taleban groups and make separate deals with them, basically the ‘reintegration’ approach) and the ‘centralists’ - those who have argued, like this author, that it makes more sense to talk to the Quetta shura directly because the Taleban are still maintaining a remarkable degree command-and-control in their movement and have avoided significant splits, a remarkable difference to all other Afghan political groups”: blog, Afghanistan Analysts Network (18 May 2011). Antonio Giustozzi also contrasts two points of view: one in which “The Taliban operate as a ‘franchiser’, allowing disparate groups of insurgents to display the Taliban brand while retaining complete autonomy on the ground”; and another where “The Taliban ... have a discernible organizational structure (decentralized)”. Giustozzi follows the second line of thinking: Antonio Giustozzi (2010), *Negotiating with the Taliban, Issues and Prospects*, Washington: The Century Foundation. Michael Semple believes reintegration of

Though men join the insurgency for a variety of reasons, including sometimes a range of local disputes, over time they are socially, financially and ideologically integrated into the movement.⁹⁴ The result is a combination of horizontal and vertical ties that bind segments of the insurgency in a flexible but resilient way:

Horizontal ties connect a commander and his men, they stick together and they like each other. The commander is the strongest among equals. Vertically, the defence of Islam and loyalty to Mullah Omar are important.⁹⁵

Active insurgent commanders in Helmand and Baghlan almost all argued they were uninterested in reintegration unless their leaders were at the table with the Afghan government. By contrast, as noted above, many of those who had reintegrated, who led a total of around 250 fighters, appear either not to be genuine Taliban or at least only loosely tied to the insurgency.

For real Taliban, linked to the Quetta Shura, we need to talk with high-level Taliban in Pakistan; otherwise they will never join a peace process in our province. But the other Taliban, who are thieves, robbers and misuse the name of Taliban, and those who were forced to join with Taliban because they were poor, they will come over to the Afghan government. But unfortunately once they realised the Afghan government has nothing to give them, they also stopped coming over.⁹⁶

These findings coincide with earlier research and suggest that strong ties between commanders in the field and their leadership will hamper significant reintegration before higher-level reconciliation begins.⁹⁷

5.2. Focus on economic incentives

Many analysts and officials stress that accurate analysis of the insurgency must underlie reintegration, and that this is not the case with APRP.⁹⁸ Many say the current approach still underplays important drivers, like the behaviour of foreign forces, dissatisfaction with a corrupt and predatory government, Pakistan's influence, ties of loyalty and patronage within the Taliban movement, status, self-protection or local disputes.⁹⁹ In the words of one experienced analyst of the insurgency,

You have the cafeteria-style reintegration and the analysis-driven reintegration. The cafeteria-style is to service anybody claiming to be an insurgent. The alternative is to start off with an analysis of the important networks and assess who has a good reason to get out of the fight. My impression is that this is the cafeteria-style reintegration.¹⁰⁰

Some interviewees regard APRP as too focused on jobs and economic opportunities and as wrongly operating on the assumption that economic motives are paramount in driving support

mid-level commanders before reconciliation on a national level is possible, though "of course the ideal sequence is reintegration when there is a proper cessation of hostilities, but I don't think you can bank on that." Telephone interview: Michael Semple (10 May 2011).

⁹⁴ Interviews: Taliban commanders from Baghlan and Helmand (March, April and May 2011); Ladbury, *Testing Hypotheses on Radicalisation in Afghanistan*, op. cit. p 4-5, 7.

⁹⁵ Interview: Thomas Ruttig, Kabul (19 April 2011).

⁹⁶ Interview: telephone interview with governor of northern province (not Baghlan), Kabul (8 June 2011).

⁹⁷ Interview: international analyst, Kabul (5 April 2011).

⁹⁸ Interviews: western officials, Kabul (19 and 30 May 2011); international analysts (5 and 19 April 2011); HPC member (16 April 2011).

⁹⁹ Sarah Ladbury and Center for Peace and Unity (2009) *Testing Hypotheses on Radicalisation in Afghanistan*, Kabul: CPAU, p 4, 5, 18-25, 46.

¹⁰⁰ Telephone interview: Michael Semple (10 May 2011).

for the insurgency, while others note that the program recognizes a range of motivations through its proposed grievance resolution mechanisms.¹⁰¹

During an APRP review conference held in May 2011, donors, ISAF and the UN, members of the JS and the HPC, officials from ministries involved in APRP implementation, governors, and several civil society groups gathered to assess progress and tackle slow implementation. The conference “conclusions” list “priority actions and conclusions: measures to expedite community recovery programs, streamline APRP administration, speed up procurement, and measures for inclusive social and political processes”, and an “action plan” with deadlines for each component operationalizes these goals.¹⁰² The plan appears geared to getting the APRP infrastructure in place as speedily as possible, and the focus on technical issues is understandable given obstacles in APRP’s implementation.

However, politically sensitive issues like amnesties, grievance resolution and the lack of a political approach to reconciliation, received little attention. Interviewees who had participated in the conference criticised it for being too focused on providing jobs and other economic incentives.¹⁰³ One international analyst called the conference a “simplistic and one-sided view of the causes of insurgency”.¹⁰⁴ A Western official agrees: “For insurgents who reintegrate you have to find political solutions. Do they fight because of a lack of development? No, they fight because of a sense of injustice. Development is not going to solve that.”¹⁰⁵

In addition to not addressing all drivers of the insurgency, a focus on jobs and economic development could be problematic for three main reasons. Until now, the majority of reintegrees seem more interested in enrolling in the ANSF than in civilian jobs (see sections above). Enlisting them in the security forces may not favour peace, but creating civilian jobs which reintegrees are apparently not interested in because they wish to retain arms will not help either. Rather, the concerns underlying insurgents’ desire to stay armed should be identified and addressed. “It is about power, not economics”, says an international consultant.¹⁰⁶

The impact of development projects on stabilization is also unclear. A recent review of American nation building efforts in Afghanistan by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee advocated prioritising small grants, implemented through community based mechanisms in secure areas.¹⁰⁷ This scepticism about the impact of development funding on stabilization or reintegration is also supported by broader research evidence.¹⁰⁸ Both reports conclude that development projects are best run in peaceful areas. The JS and F-RIC are keen to kick start reintegration in the volatile South and East.¹⁰⁹ But extra development in those areas could fuel the insurgency instead of offering an attractive alternative. In unstable areas, construction companies reportedly pay

¹⁰¹ Sajjad, *Peace at all Costs?* Op.cit. p 11, 16; “‘Flawed’ peace strategy in Afghanistan”, IRIN News (31 May 2011); Interviews: western officials, Kabul (19 and 30 May 2011). Consultant Christian Denny, whose research was used in the design of the APRP program, and who worked on a pilot program on grievance resolution, says that despite the emphasis on development projects, jobs and vocational training, among implementing partners there was a recognition that insurgents are not driven only by economic motives, and this was also recognized in the APRP plan: Telephone interview: Denny (27 June 2011).

¹⁰² Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, *Conclusions Paper* op. cit.; Islamic Republic of Afghanistan *APRP Action Plan May-December 2011* (Annex I to Conclusions Paper) Kabul: APRP Reintegration Review Conference, 10-11 May 2011.

¹⁰³ Interview with western official in Kabul on 30 May 2011.

¹⁰⁴ Notes of international analyst present at APRP Review Conference, Kabul (10-11 May 2011).

¹⁰⁵ Interview with western official in Kabul on 19 May 2011.

¹⁰⁶ Telephone interview with Denny on 27 June 2011.

¹⁰⁷ *Evaluating U.S. Foreign Assistance to Afghanistan* (8 June 2011) A Majority Staff Report Prepared for the Use of the Committee on Foreign Relations United States Senate, Washington D.C. page 31.

¹⁰⁸ One of the conclusions of a two year research project at Feinstein International Center at Tufts University, led by Andrew Wilder, was that there is little evidence for a link between aid and stability, since a lack of social services or infrastructure are not perceived to be the main factors in fuelling insecurity. “Unemployment came up as well, but the short-term “cash for work” jobs offered on road-building or other reconstruction projects were not having any significant or sustainable stabilizing effect.” Andrew Wilder and Stuart Gordon (2009) “Money Can’t Buy America Love”, *Foreign Policy* (1 December).

¹⁰⁹ Interview with member of the JS in Kabul on 16 April 2011 and with a senior F-RIC official in Kabul on 12 April 2011.

Taliban for safe passage.¹¹⁰ The flood of aid money to Helmand strengthens a new generation of insurgents there.¹¹¹ Finally, such an approach, by providing aid only to insecure areas and generating resentment elsewhere, could create a system of perverse incentives.

The lack of a truly comprehensive approach to reintegration and the fact that it is not implemented in the context of a broader peace process reflects, according to many, the reluctance of the international community and Afghan government to tackle drivers of the insurgency linked with their own behaviour – especially government ineptness, corruption and predation, and the tactics of foreign troops.¹¹²

An international analyst says:

You don't hear so much any more about the 10 dollar-a-day Talib but the idea that you can get them over with money and jobs still exists. They're fighting for many different motives, among them honour and respect. But the longer they stay in the insurgency the more politicized they get. Many Taliban are driven by political and religious motives, but that's difficult for a large part of the international community and for the Afghan government.¹¹³

Many elders and some government officials interviewed in Helmand and Baghlan said they thought the Afghan government and the international community were unlikely to address politically sensitive issues during reintegration. Far from being neutral, the main implementers of reintegration are seen as parties to the conflict, and many insurgents therefore regard reintegration as surrender.¹¹⁴ As one Taliban commander from Nad-e-Ali argues:

This is not a reintegration process; this is an American process. With whom should we join? With this corrupt and unjust government? I will never join this process and won't let any of my friends.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ Interviews with Taliban commanders operating in Nad-e-Ali district in Helmand in May, interview with international analyst in London on 26 April 2011; *Warlord, Inc.: Extortion and Corruption Along the U.S. Supply Chain in Afghanistan* (June 2010) report of the Majority Staff, Subcommittee of National Security and Foreign Affairs, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, page 35. (It did not uncover direct evidence.)

¹¹¹ "Last year, the United States spent nearly \$1.3 billion on military and civilian reconstruction operations in one district of Helmand province": Rajiv Chandrasekaran, "Cost of war in Afghanistan will be major factor in troop reduction-talks", *Washington Post* (31 May 2011). Interviews with Taliban commanders operating in Nad-e-Ali district in Helmand in May, interview with international analyst in London on 26 April 2011: "They're becoming financially independent from the Quetta Shura, but their weakened ties with the leadership will not lead them to join the government because of fears of retaliation".

¹¹² Interviews: western officials, Kabul (19 and 30 May 2011); notes of international analyst.

¹¹³ Interview: Thomas Ruttig, Kabul (19 April 2011).

¹¹⁴ Nixon, *Achieving Durable Peace*; op. cit. p 7-14; interviews: western official, Kabul (19 May 2011); insurgents and non-insurgent commanders in Baghlan and Helmand.

¹¹⁵ Telephone interview: Taliban commander from Nad-e-Ali (21 May 2011).

6. Conclusions and recommendations

There appears to be broad support among Afghans and foreigners in Afghanistan for a peace process. Furthermore, reintegration of mid-level and low-level insurgent commanders and their men under the APRP program forms part of a comprehensive strategy that tries to incorporate lessons from former programs like DDR and PTS, and is intended to be linked with parallel talks with high level insurgents. However, during its first ten months of operation, the APRP has shown limited results. To respond quickly to donor imperatives, it was hastily implemented: insurgents and non-insurgents were reintegrating without being thoroughly vetted and before the infrastructure to provide security, grievance resolution and community rehabilitation packages existed. The Afghan government appears to remain too weak, divided or corrupt to run reintegration effectively without considerable international assistance. Many western officials in Kabul and the provinces complain that the Joint Secretariat is inefficient and ineffective.¹¹⁶ They, as well as the Joint Secretariat itself, also point to a lack of capacity in the provinces.¹¹⁷

There is a lack of communication and distrust between the different APRP implementing partners.¹¹⁸ This problem has affected almost every aspect of APRP, from de-targeting of reintegrating insurgents, to the registration of reintegrees, and the disbursement of funds to the provinces. Divisions persist between and within the international community and Afghan government around how money flows to the program, the breadth of the reintegration “package” (just economic opportunities or a broader deal addressing their grievances); the sequencing of reintegration and reconciliation; who the program aims to reintegrate; and how they should reintegrate (in particular, whether they must register reintegrees).¹¹⁹

The lack of security is another major obstacle to generating more reintegration. The resistance of elements in the Afghan security apparatus to reintegration, combined with the minimal presence of the Afghan government outside district centres in volatile areas, and the lack of communication between and within the Afghan government and international actors, makes it hard for reintegrees to take the promise of security seriously.¹²⁰ In addition, they are wary about what will happen when the international troops leave Afghanistan.¹²¹ Enrolment in the Afghan Local Police appeared to be a quick solution for problems of personal security and lack of employment, but this development is unlikely to favour peace in the long run, and may exacerbate conflicts at local levels or even deepen support for the insurgency.

However, beyond these implementation problems, many of which can be addressed with time and effort, it seems clear that the lack of a coherent political approach may prove to be the major limitation in the APRP. In the attempt to roll out the program quickly, difficult political issues were ignored – such as grievances of insurgents and communities that support them against local

¹¹⁶ Interviews: western officials, Kabul (7 April and 20 May 2011).

¹¹⁷ Interviews: JS official, Kabul (21 May 2011); western official, Pul-i-Khumri (24 May 2011); telephone interview with elder in Nad-e-Ali (27 May 2011).

¹¹⁸ Interviews: HPC member (16 April 2011); western official, Kabul (9 April 2011); international analyst, Kabul (15 May 2011).

¹¹⁹ Donor money flows through three separate “windows” to the Peace and Reintegration Trust Fund (window A: contributions through a special account to the Ministry of Finance or through the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund; window B: managed by UNDP; window C: managed by Standard Chartered Bank). A Financial Oversight Committee, consisting of representatives of the Afghan government and donor, oversees the financing. See APRP: Final Program Document, op. cit. p 1, 5 and 6. Sajjad, *Peace at all Costs?* op. cit. p 143.

¹²⁰ Interviews: reintegrated and active Taliban commanders (April and May 2011).

¹²¹ Telephone interview: Christian Denny (27 June 2011).

and national government and against international military forces. APRP has thus far been driven by the foreign military. Though in name APRP is Afghan-led, international donors foot the bill, and as ISAF regards it as part of a military strategy, it has been deeply involved in its implementation.¹²² During the first wave of reintegration, it assumed many responsibilities, leading to the perception that the foreign military, whose presence and behaviour in Afghanistan is controversial, drives reintegration.¹²³ Grievance resolution mechanisms that were outlined on paper were not operationalized, and in the near future the focus seems to be on the provision of jobs and other economic incentives.

Divisions between and within the international community and the Afghan government over the sequencing of reintegration and reconciliation have hung over the program, but many mid-level commanders are not interested in reintegration unless there are visible negotiations with their leaders. The Afghan government and the international community are avoiding issues relating to their own behaviour, especially towards disenfranchised groups, thereby undermining a genuine political approach to reintegration. Without such a political approach embedded in a broad process of reconciliation, major drivers of the insurgency – the behaviour of foreign forces, a predatory and corrupt government, support from neighbouring countries and ties of loyalty and patronage within the Taliban – will not be addressed.

The context in which the reintegration program is implemented will change significantly over the next three years, creating new challenges but also opportunities. Reintegration started during an American military troop surge and was aimed at weakening the Taliban before inviting them to the negotiating table. In the near future, some NATO troops will withdraw, the Afghan government will assume security responsibilities, and there may be an expansion of talks with the Taliban leadership. When the international troops leave, violent power struggles at both local and national level may intensify. However, at the same time, the behaviour of the international troops is a major driver of the insurgency, and their withdrawal will decrease violence directed against them. This process of “transition”, including further engagement with the Taliban leadership, provides possibilities to embed reintegration in a broader political process.

6.1. Recommendations

Reintegration should not be abandoned: Afghanistan will need a robust and effective reintegration infrastructure to support the achievement of a durable peace. In order to have this, the Joint Secretariat, High Peace Council, ISAF and the international community led by the United Nations should consider the following recommendations:

Link reintegration with reconciliation. Reintegration of low and mid-level commanders must be situated in a broader process of reconciliation aimed not only at talks with high level insurgents, but also at reconciling the many dissatisfied groups among the population and government in both areas hit hard by the insurgency and those less affected.

- Increase the role of diverse social groups and non-combatants in vetting, grievance resolution, and development planning, including structured roles for civil society and religious leaders as well as the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission;
- Pursue a broad-based peace process that engages leaders of groups across the society on difficult political issues driving the conflict, and link reintegration negotiations with this process as it develops;

¹²² Interviews: western officials, Kabul (April-May 2011).

¹²³ Interview: western official, Pul-i-Khumri (24 May 2011).

- Prepare for scenarios under which reintegration must support the implementation of a peace settlement, potentially including a broader based Afghan management mechanism acceptable to settlement parties, or management by a third party implementer.

Focus on quality, not on speed. Afghanistan will require a robust reintegration infrastructure able to handle large numbers to secure a sustainable peace.

- Instead of aiming at quickly reintegrating the highest numbers possible, concentrate on establishing effective institutions, including addressing political and judicial aspects that take time;
- Reconsider the use of ALP and other security institutions as safety valves to provide employment or security to reintegrating commanders and their followers;
- Manage expectations through clear communication of program goals and limitations;
- If there is a cease fire, localized cease fires, or potential cease fires, be prepared to offer comprehensive packages to midlevel commanders that include genuine local reconciliation and non-economic grievance resolution, clear amnesty and transitional justice policies, and which help distance fighters from dependence on commander relationships.

Support local processes. Expand administrative, financial and moral support for local officials involved in implementing APRP.

- Concentrate less on drawing up major development projects in Kabul and allow more flexibility to distribute resources and support locally – continue current training efforts with provincial staff;
- Introduce effective independent local monitoring of the use of resources and introduce a thorough procedure for vetting of the reintegrees, which includes the involvement of the communities.

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Peace From the Bottom-Up?

Deedee Derksen

Since late 2010 the Afghan government, supported by its international partners, has tried to reintegrate low-level insurgents under the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP). Drawing on lessons from previous reintegration efforts and in principle embedded in a wider political strategy that includes talks with insurgent leaders, the APRP aims to entice insurgents away from the battlefield with promises of security, jobs and other incentives – provided they pledge to renounce violence, respect the Afghan constitution and cut ties with al-Qaeda. The program, how-

ever, is operating in a hugely challenging context. Progress on high-level dialogue among the parties is fitful at best; the government is perceived as corrupt, weak and illegitimate; there are interests in maintaining the conflict; NATO tactics are heightening tensions; and commitments to withdraw international troops are public knowledge.

As a result of both implementation problems and its political context, the program has shown limited results to date: numbers are low and the role of many of those reintegrated in the insurgency is contested.

This paper examines the effectiveness and impact of the APRP, discusses challenges, and concludes with some recommendations. It focuses on overall patterns and trends in two provinces, Helmand and Baghlan. It is based on research including documentary and press sources, and about 65 primary interviews conducted in those two provinces as well as in Kabul, with Afghan and Western officials, insurgent commanders and other Afghans.