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Humanitarian  
Policy Group

# Humanitarian action in the new security environment: policy and operational implications in Afghanistan

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## Executive summary

This joint research project by the Humanitarian Policy Group of the Overseas Development Institute (UK) and the Center on International Cooperation of New York University (US) seeks to provide firmer empirical data and clear analysis on the extent, causes and implications of the security risk to humanitarian work. The research project explores six case studies of high-risk environments around the world. This background paper presents findings from Afghanistan. The country research team was led by a Project Manager who conducted some 25 interviews in Kabul across a range of aid, governmental and private actors. Three field researchers conducted another 25 interviews in three cities in Afghanistan: Mazar-e-Sharif, Kandahar and Jalalabad.<sup>1</sup>

The research findings are as follows:

- The accuracy and comparability of security-related data over the last decade in Afghanistan is limited. The data collection efforts by independent institutions, including the Afghanistan NGO Security Office (ANSO) and the UN, are characterised by a lack of systematic analysis, weak understanding of the causes of incidents and a lack of agreement on the purpose and usage of incident data and collection systems, exacerbated by a lack of data integration and/or cross-checking with governmental authorities. As a result, current data on incidents affecting aid worker is often misused by policy-makers and practitioners, without the necessary contextualisation that should emanate from a more refined analysis of data.
- In general, aid workers are not the first choice target of belligerents. In fact, it is widely acknowledged that they are only one among several other targets of choice, and may even be the least attractive, after the military, the police, government officials and sympathisers, private contractors and civilians.
- Some aid agencies believe that, during the Taliban period, security responsibility clearly rested in the hands of the state, both in terms of ‘ambient security’, that is general order and law enforcement across the country, and in terms of ‘proximate security’,<sup>2</sup> that is direct protection and follow-up of security incidents affecting humanitarian and aid agencies. Since the fall of the

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<sup>1</sup> Interviews were unsuccessful in Herat as a result of security issues at the time of the research.

<sup>2</sup> This is not to say that aid agencies did not have their own security rules, procedures and staff at that time, but there was overall greater clarity about how to investigate, prevent and resolve incidents with and through authorities. While this important point was highlighted in particular in reference to the Taliban regime, it may also be applicable to security management under the Northern Alliance.

Taliban, responsibility for security has become diffuse: security seems to be handled individually and exclusively by each aid agency, in some cases with the remunerated support of the military and/or private contractors. The responsibility of the state in ensuring the security of aid agencies has been weakened by the political challenges of building a viable security apparatus, and by this plethora of organisational responses from aid agencies.

- Today, attacking aid workers is one of many means of discrediting the government open to local power seekers and Taliban and Al-Qaeda elements. Such attacks illustrate that the government is not in control of security and order. Another political motive for attacking aid workers may be attributable in part to the poor reputation of the international aid community among Afghans, including government officials.
- A closer analysis of the data also reveals that the targeting of aid workers is not necessarily politically motivated, but simply the result of criminality, tribal score-settling or cultural insensitivity.<sup>3</sup> This opens up new avenues for thinking about organisational responses to the security challenge. In this context, it should be noted that the overwhelming number of incidents affect Afghan workers or national staff, while many aid agency responses seem focused on the protection of expatriates.
- Within the spectrum of security responses by aid workers in Afghanistan, two non-traditional versions of the protective approach stand out: an ultra-low visibility or ‘clandestine approach’ to aid operations, characterised by the exclusive use of local staff and unmarked vehicles or taxis, and at the other extreme a hard protective approach relying heavily on armed escorts - and consequently highly visible.
- The localization of aid response with indigenous entities, while seen as desirable by many, remains limited by donor rules and procedures and weak capacity of local entities. Capacity building of local actors and staff remains a fundamental challenge in Afghanistan.

## Methodology

The Afghanistan case study research was led by Project Manager Farahnaz Karim, assisted by a team of three Afghan field researchers covering Mazar-e-Sharif, Herat, Kandahar and Jalalabad, supervised by Dr. Omar Sharifi, Head of Research and Publications at the Foundation for Culture and Civil Society.

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<sup>3</sup> This finding correlates closely with findings of an *ECHO Security Review* conducted in 2004: ‘Although there is evidence of emerging threats related to terrorism, the experience of humanitarian agencies is that the predominant security risks faced by humanitarian workers continue to be criminal and accidental in nature, rather than relating to deliberate aggression’.

The research project was conducted during January–March 2006, with the bulk of field research conducted in February 2006.

Sources of data included:

- Interviews with key stakeholders, including security agencies, the government, the military, and the UN and donors; international, local and umbrella NGO agencies; private companies; and local media and personalities/‘veterans’ of Afghanistan (see Annex 1 for a list of interviewees and Annex 2 for a sample questionnaire).
- Security incident data from the Afghanistan NGO Security Office (ANSO), the UN Security Office Afghanistan and other sources. It should be noted that an attempt was made to obtain data from the Ministry of Interior, without success.<sup>4</sup>
- Other studies or papers on security and/or key documents on Afghanistan (see Annex 3).

Interviews can be summarised as follows:

City	Team members	Security agencies	Govt/ military	UN, donors and others	Local and int'l NGOs	Private /media	Personalities	Total
Kabul	F. Karim	5	3	6	7	2	3	26
Mazar	Z. Assadi	1			3			4
Herat	O. Afghan	Security impediments						
Kandahar	J. Sapand	1	2	2	3	1		9
Jalalabad		2	2	2	3	2		11

### Field research challenges

The field research team encountered the following challenges:

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<sup>4</sup> In effect, as Ministry of Interior data seems not to have been requested before by the UN or any other security entity, the Minister would not authorise the release of data without an official request from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General's Office at the United Nations Mission in Afghanistan. The researcher attempted to launch and speed up this formal *démarche* and follow-up on results, but no feedback was received by the UN at the time of writing.

- Lack of access to key agencies in Herat following demonstrations against the Governor, as well as riots between Shi'ites and Sunnis during Ashura.
- Lack of access to governmental and other official offices in Mazar-e-Sharif following an assassination attempt against the Provincial Governor of Balkh, carried out under the cover of aid work.
- Tensions in Kandahar following a series of suicide bombings targeting civilians.
- The lack of response from some UN agencies to research questionnaires.

### **Box 1: Scope of the research work**

- 1) Incident data was cross-checked at field level through individual discussions and (if possible) by examining security incident reports. In addition, researchers identified what common reporting/security information-sharing systems were in place, the degree to which they were used and their perceived efficacy.
- 2) The risk management and security strategies used by the different members of the humanitarian community were analysed, including coordinated efforts in security planning, assessments and protective measures. The extent to which these have changed from previous practices, dating back to late 1990s if possible, was compared.
- 3) Operational tactics for service delivery across the humanitarian community were mapped.
- 4) The role local aid actors played in service delivery strategies, and whether and how this has changed, was analysed.
- 5) Field-level perceptions of the security environment, and the risk to humanitarian workers in particular, were assessed.
- 6) The nature of the link between the field and headquarters was explored, for example, whether and how operational challenges and decision-making fed into headquarters analysis.

### **Definitions**

For the purposes of this report, the term 'aid worker' refers to personnel engaged in aid operations, as they relate to life-saving, basic welfare and protection activities, and/or more transitional or developmental programmes, including community-based development, education, agricultural and microfinance activities and advocacy programmes.

Security incident data on aid workers encompasses personnel engaged in such activities whether they are affiliated to UN agencies, the World Bank, the ICRC, local NGOs and international NGOs. When relevant and

worth highlighting specifically, the first type of aid operations, that is, life saving, basic welfare and protection, will be referred to as ‘humanitarian’. When relevant, the category of ‘private contractors’ will be highlighted separately and will refer to private entities, local or international, which are involved in reconstruction activities, such as infrastructure development and agricultural revitalisation, funded by private, bilateral and/or multilateral aid donors.

### *Perspectives on the term ‘security’*

‘Security is jobs and electricity’ according to local communities in Afghanistan.<sup>5</sup> Human security approaches have recently emerged as part of the security discourse in relation to other notions of security, including military, economic or cultural security. In reality, physical security is closely intertwined with the ability of people or local communities to perceive progress in development and a basic quality of life. As the Afghanistan Human Development Report 2004 points out:

*Insecurity in Afghanistan is not only a problem of physical safety, but also of deprivation and restricted access to health and education facilities, legal and political rights, and social opportunities. Dealing with insecurity should not be sought (solely) through short-term military solutions, but through a long-term comprehensive strategy that abides by promises of development and the promotion of human rights.*

As such, while this report uses the term ‘security’ in the military or physical sense, in terms of safety from violence, it does so in order to understand how the lack of security in Afghanistan in turn impedes aid work, reconstruction and a higher level of human security for all Afghans.

### **Structure and aims of the paper**

The following analysis attempts to provide perspectives on overall security, from the viewpoint of aid practitioners and others. It aims to offer a more refined understanding of data on aid worker security, and presents an analysis of the various organisational responses to the security challenge.

The report begins with an assessment of data systems and an analysis of available security incident data. It then moves into a discussion of perspectives on the security situation and its causes, presents responses from operational entities, including aid agencies, donors and the government, and explores

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<sup>5</sup> Antonio Donini, Larry Minear, Ian Smillie, Ted van Baarda and Anthony C. Welch, *Mapping the Security Environment: Understanding the perceptions of local communities, peace support aspirations, and assistance agencies*, Feinstein International Famine Center, June 2005.

changing approaches to aid delivery, including localisation. Key findings and conclusions are summarised at the end of each section.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Annex 4 contains interviewees' perspectives on the future and general recommendations. They have been placed in an Annex as they overlap with many of the points made throughout the report. They nevertheless provide a short overview of the overall outlook on the challenges ahead.



## 1. Introduction

Security for Afghans and the aid workers assisting them is high on the international agenda. On the one hand, insecurity is being used to explain why aid funds have not been spent at the expected level or used effectively.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, the ‘war on terror’ has called for a close follow-up of security incidents to assess how the international community’s presence is affecting security.

These statements illustrate this dual concern:

*True, security is a major worry for aid agencies, who saw 30 of their workers die last year. But in some cases, the agencies' wasteful bureaucracies are also holding back efforts to rebuild this war ravaged country, according to Ashraf Ghani, who has written a report on international development and post-war reconstruction, sponsored by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI).<sup>8</sup>*

*Appearing with Director of National Intelligence John D. Negroponte, Lt. Gen. Michael D. Maples said in a statement presented to the Senate Armed Services Committee at its annual hearing on national security threats, that attacks within Afghanistan were up 20 percent between 2004 and 2005, suicide bombings increased ‘almost fourfold’ and use of makeshift bombs, similar to those used in Iraq, had ‘more than doubled.’*

*Negroponte, in his prepared remarks, acknowledged that ‘the volume and geographic scope of attacks increased last year,’ but he added, ‘the Taliban and other militants have not been able to stop the democratic process’ being undertaken by the central government of President Hamid Karzai.<sup>9</sup>*

The Bonn agreement signed on 5 December 2001 provided a roadmap for the evolution of the Afghan state, following the fall of the Taliban regime. Addressing the issue of security of aid workers requires first

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<sup>7</sup> Other factors alluded to in the discussion on aid ineffectiveness include overall low level of funding (estimated at some \$10 billion since Bonn) and/or disbursements, poor aid coordination mechanisms, waste, layers of sub-contracting and politicised donor agendas.

<sup>8</sup> Toby Poston, *The Battle to Rebuild Afghanistan*, BBC, 27 February 2006.

<sup>9</sup> Walter Pincus, *Growing Threat Seen In Afghan Insurgency, DIA Chief Cites Surging Violence in Homeland*, Washington Post Staff Writer, 1 March 2006.

exploring the tension between the dual security imperative that has shaped the post-Bonn context, and taking stock of both progress and persisting challenges in the Afghan security landscape.

### 1.1 Security in Afghanistan: competing goals and actors

Since 2002 there have been two international military presences in Afghanistan. One is the US-led Coalition force, which focuses on protecting US civilians from Al-Qaeda and supporting the Afghan government against the insurgency. As such, the US presence in Afghanistan is a component of the broader US strategic agenda to prevent and/or contain further terrorist threats. The second is the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), which is attempting to promote an improved security environment, as defined in the Bonn agreement.<sup>10</sup> Lack of coordination<sup>11</sup> between these two forces has thwarted efforts to improve overall security. As the former Minister of Interior, Ali. A. Jalali, puts it: 'The United States has long hesitated to support removal of defiant warlords ... However, failure to hold [militia leaders] accountable ... continues to undermine the establishment of the rule of law'.<sup>12</sup> Post-Bonn Afghanistan is a striking example of the contradictions between the US counter-terrorist and counter-insurgency agenda, under the auspices of Operation Enduring Freedom, and the stabilisation: 'The rapid convergence of US and UN priorities in Afghanistan after September 11 must be seen as a temporary aberration. ... Thus, though there was a shared sense of the country being a priority, there were very different priorities in the country'.<sup>13</sup>

Under the Bonn agreement, responsibility for security sector reform (SSR) was shared between the US (military reform), Germany (police reform), Italy (judicial reform), Japan (disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration) and the UK (counter-narcotics).

Achievements over the last five years include:<sup>14</sup>

- Over 60,000 soldiers demobilised.
- Some 28,000 soldiers of the Afghan National Army (ANA) trained – out of a target of 70,000.
- Some 50,000 police of the Afghan National Police (ANP) trained – out of a target of 62,000.
- Some 600 judges trained.

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<sup>10</sup> There are an estimated 11,000 ISAF soldiers and some 20,000 Coalition troops in Afghanistan.

<sup>11</sup> See Barnett R. Rubin, *Afghanistan's Uncertain Transition from Turmoil to Normalcy*, CSR, no. 12, Council on Foreign Relations.

<sup>12</sup> Ali A. Jalali, *The Future of Afghanistan*. Parameters, Spring 2006, p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 223.

<sup>14</sup> Middlebrook, P. and Sedra, M, *Beyond Bonn, Revising the International Compact for Afghanistan*, November 2005, www.fpipf.org.

- A reduction in the area of land under poppy cultivation (although largely offset by gains in productivity).

Despite progress in these areas, the institutional challenges remain daunting

#### *Afghan National Army (ANA)*

The ANA has a mixed record.<sup>15</sup> Some suggest that the size and type of army need to be re-assessed:<sup>16</sup> the share of the Afghan budget spent on security, estimated at 39%, is unlikely to be sustainable.<sup>17</sup>

#### *Afghan National Police (ANP)*

The safety of aid workers in Afghanistan should in theory be the responsibility of the Ministry of Interior and Police. However, 'the Afghan National Police service continues to be poorly trained, predominantly illiterate, endemically corrupt and highly factionalized'.<sup>18</sup> Training courses seem to be too short, and low salaries provide a strong incentive for corruption. Again, for reasons of fiscal sustainability it has been suggested that the deployment of police forces should be more focused, concentrated and organised in smaller units.<sup>19</sup> Meanwhile, reform of the judicial system has lagged far behind the development of the ANA. The lack of law enforcement and accountability reinforces the general perception of lawlessness and impunity.

Slow progress with the ANA and ANP has meant that Coalition forces continue to rely on local militias to fight the insurgency.<sup>20</sup> This strategy is likely to be detrimental to overall security, and undermines reforms of the security sector.

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Barnett R. Rubin, *Afghanistan's Uncertain Transition from Turmoil to Normalcy*, CSR, no. 12, Council on Foreign Relations.

<sup>17</sup> World Bank, *Managing Public Finances for Development*, Main Report (Volume 1), 22 December 2005.

<sup>18</sup> Middlebrook and Sedra, *Beyond Bonn*, p. 14.

<sup>19</sup> Rubin, *Afghanistan's Uncertain Transition*.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

## 2. The security of aid workers in Afghanistan in the last decade: what does the data demonstrate?

### 2.1 Data collection, systems and analysis

#### 2.1.1 Summary

There are three sources of security data in Afghanistan relating to aid staff: the Afghanistan NGO Security Office (ANSO), the UN and the Afghan Ministry of Interior.

- Security incident data is not available prior to 2002 from any of the local security-related agencies – the UN Security Office,<sup>21</sup> ANSO or the Ministry of Interior – as these institutions were either not set up until after the fall of the Taliban or lost data from the previous regime.
- As a result, for incident data prior to 2002, one has to rely on other, secondary sources of information,<sup>22</sup> with the clear risk that these existing data sets may be incomplete or not comparable to the current post-2002 data sets. In sum, analysis of security trends over a decade will be approximate.
- The regular dissemination of incident data since 2002 may itself shape perceptions of insecurity in Afghanistan. Incident information, documentation and dissemination prior to 2002 were all much less developed.<sup>23</sup>

#### 2.1.2 Data sources

The Afghanistan NGO Security Office (ANSO) was created in 2002 with the aim of providing NGOs (both national and international) with security data, training and advice to enable the safe and effective delivery of aid. ANSO is hosted by the International Rescue Committee (IRC), and is funded by the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO) and Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC). Discussions are under way to secure continuation of funding through the European Commission (EC) as ECHO is scaling down, and a new host organisation is being sought.

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<sup>21</sup> In the case of the UN, data has not been archived in New York either.

<sup>22</sup> Chronology of Humanitarian Aid Workers Killed, 1997 – 2003, compiled by Dennis King (15 January 2004), available at <http://vranet.com/Govt1027/Docs/chron1997-2003.html>; data collected by the Center on International Cooperation (CIC), New York University.

<sup>23</sup> Some aid agencies have decided to refrain from going to security briefings or reading incident lists in order to avoid being exposed to this overdose of information. Instead, they rely on local newspapers and Afghan staff, who are better able to point out trends and local power shifts – more useful information for conducting programmes and dealing with communities.

ANSO's weekly reports, regular incident reports and *ad hoc* alerts provide NGOs and other stakeholders with a comprehensive overview of key security incidents in the country. Most NGOs contribute to the reports, which are found to be generally useful.

The limitations of ANSO data include:

- No data was collected prior to 2002.
- Data collected since 2002 exists in a narrative format. Weekly reports tend to be long (between 30 and 40 pages), and incidents are not necessarily ranked by importance, seriousness or significance.
- Only in the past year has an attempt been made to build an incident database, but the current software and configuration of the database does not allow for the processing, sorting or printing of data sets.
- The data collected includes all incidents affecting NGOs, regardless of type (e.g. humanitarian vs. development or local vs. international), cause (e.g. incidental vs. political) or target (national vs. international).
- ANSO has been constrained by limited resources, technology and manpower.

### *2.1.3 The UN*

Although the UN has had a long-standing presence in Afghanistan, dating back to the mujahadeen and Taliban years, it seems that all UN security data from this period was lost or destroyed in 2001.<sup>24</sup>

Since 2002, the UN has increased its security-related staff in Kabul and at the field level, primarily as a result of the UN mission's expansion following the Bonn process and its consequent obligation to ensure the protection of UN staff. Reporting mechanisms include Senior Management Team meetings at the regional level and in Kabul, to enable the heads of all UN agencies to interact with security staff, to review security information and make programming decisions.

UN security data is characterised by:

- An incident database with data from 2002 onwards.

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<sup>24</sup> Incident data was certainly collected during this period, and was often backed by a variety of Taliban edicts, such as women's employment in aid work or the relocation of NGOs in Kabul, but this has not been saved or backed up either in Islamabad or New York.

- The database (which is Excel-based) enables the collection and sorting of incident data by type of agency, type of incident, cause or date.
- However, while the data attempts to track all security incidents, including election-related incidents or incidents involving corporate entities, the probable cause of incidents or investigation findings are not always reported accurately.

#### *2.1.4 The Ministry of Interior*

The Ministry of Interior reputedly has a security incident database, but neither the UN nor any other security entity has requested access to it. No data was released to the researchers.

The need for closer coordination with the Ministry of Interior, and the potential role that could be played by the Ministry in incident data collection, analysis and investigation, as well as more effective preventive measures, needs to be further explored. This issue is linked to the broader question of the state's responsibility for ensuring security in Afghanistan – a responsibility that many feel has been outsourced to individual agencies.

#### *2.1.5 Conclusions*

While security data is being collected by some agencies for specific organisational purposes, such as the protection of UN staff, a fundamental question needs to be addressed: what is the overall collective purpose of current data collection by various agencies? Are the current data systems being maximised? Is the information collected creating an accurate statistical or analytical foundation to inform policy makers or policy formulation in Afghanistan in general? Is the information being used for advocacy? How usable and useful is the information? There is clear need for collective agreement on the purpose, framework, system, methodology and analytical capacity behind data collection. One has to recognise that some aid organisations may still need to maintain individual incident data collection and dissemination systems to advise their own staff on security measures. However, a commonly agreed system and mechanisms would rationalise security resources, enable a better division of labour between agencies and establish a more analytical linkage between the security measures taken by organisations and the state of the general security environment.

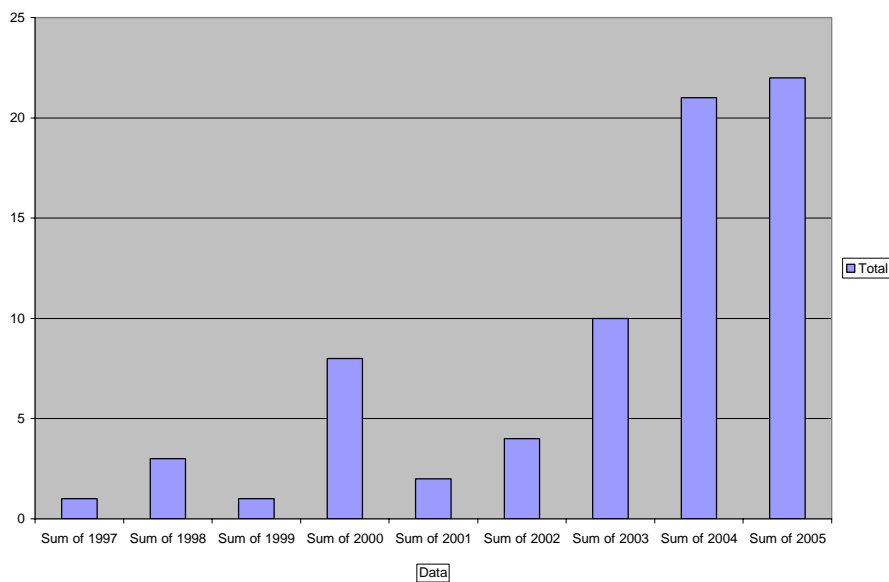
Both ANSO and the UN seem to have failed at institutional memory-building, hence the newness of existing data and the lack of cross-checking with governmental data being collected. This raises another key question: who should be housing/hosting security incident data? The UN, NGOs or the Ministry of Interior? One could argue that it would make most sense for the Ministry of Interior to take on this analytical

function. While aid actors continue to focus resources on a diverse menu of security measures, there is a risk that governmental authorities remain observers of this process, rather than active players.<sup>25</sup>

## 2.2 What the data shows

In the last couple of years, it has become commonplace in Afghanistan to quote statistics on the number of aid workers killed since 2002, and to deduce from these numbers that the situation for aid workers is getting worse. This is an over-simplification.

**Figure 1: Afghan aid workers killed in Afghanistan (1997–2005)<sup>26</sup>**



<sup>25</sup> One could argue that the Ministry of Interior, as a key political symbol of governance choices in post-Taliban Afghanistan, has had its own political and transparency challenges since the Bonn agreement, and that, despite international efforts to build up the Afghan National Police (ANP) by Germany, much work remains to be done to enable a fully ‘Afghanised’ process. While this may be true, it can also be argued that gradually but clearly placing the onus of security data collection, dissemination and follow-up in the hands of the Ministry may also catalyse change.

<sup>26</sup> The data from 1997–2002 originates from Dennis King and the Center on International Cooperation. It should be noted that the high figure of 2000 was caused by a single ambush which caused the death of seven national staff from Omar, a partner de-mining agency of the UN.

The data from 2003 to 2005 has been cross-checked among three sources: ANSO, the UN Security Office and data collected by the Center on International Cooperation. When in doubt about certain incidents (as there are discrepancies between agencies) or original sources of data, the conservative figure has been selected. While there is general consensus on the data of NGO and UN aid workers killed in 2005 (estimated at 18 staff), there is less clarity as to the detail of aid contractors killed in 2005, estimated by some at 12 or 13. The figure used above is a conservative estimate, as a breakdown of contractors killed has not been made available.

speaking, insecurity has not necessarily increased: the absolute number of incidents has grown, but this does not imply a relative increase in insecurity.

### *2.2.1 Key findings from the data*

Analysis of the data reveals the following:

1. Many more Afghan or national staff, as opposed to expatriate staff, have been victims of security incidents. Most security data do not distinguish between national and international staff, and most protection measures adopted by aid agencies tend to focus on expatriate staff. One could argue that national staff are more commonly targeted simply because there are more Afghan aid workers than expatriate ones. It could also be argued that the kind of security incidents to which expatriate workers are exposed, like kidnapping, call for special measures. While these points may be valid, the level of security resources invested in protecting expatriate staff has been disproportionately higher, and may have been misplaced.
2. An increase in the number of aid workers killed does not necessarily imply that aid workers are being specifically targeted.<sup>28</sup> As the Minister of Interior puts it: ‘the increase in insecurity for aid workers is linked to two main causes: terrorism and criminality in general’.
3. Most security incidents affecting aid workers do not seem to discriminate between national and international agencies or NGOs. As such, national staff across the board have been more or less equally targeted, regardless of whether they are affiliated to a local or an international NGO or agency.
4. Aside from the number of aid staff killed or kidnapped, there are a number of other serious incidents affecting aid workers which are not always analysed for policy purposes but merit equal consideration given their frequency. These include robberies and theft, landmines, road traffic accidents and armed attacks. UN and international agencies have, for example, been particularly prone to robbery and theft.
5. A quick survey of existing incident data reveals that incidents occur throughout the country, though terrorism-related incidents seem to be more common in the south and east.

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<sup>28</sup> A number of documents suggest that the trend is alarming, and rightly so, but do not provide an analysis of causes of incidents to enable any truly informative conclusion, analysis or prescription. See Care/ANSO report on NGO insecurity, ANSO 2005.



### 3. Perspectives on the security environment: a deterioration for all, or just for aid workers?

To supplement findings from the data, some 50 interviews were conducted in Kabul, Jalalabad, Kandahar and Mazar-e-Sharif. Interviewees included government officials, the UN, international and local NGOs, the Ministry of Interior, ISAF/NATO, PRTs, private actors, the Afghan media and Afghan ‘veterans’ and personalities.

#### 3.1 Data vs. perspectives: key findings from interviews

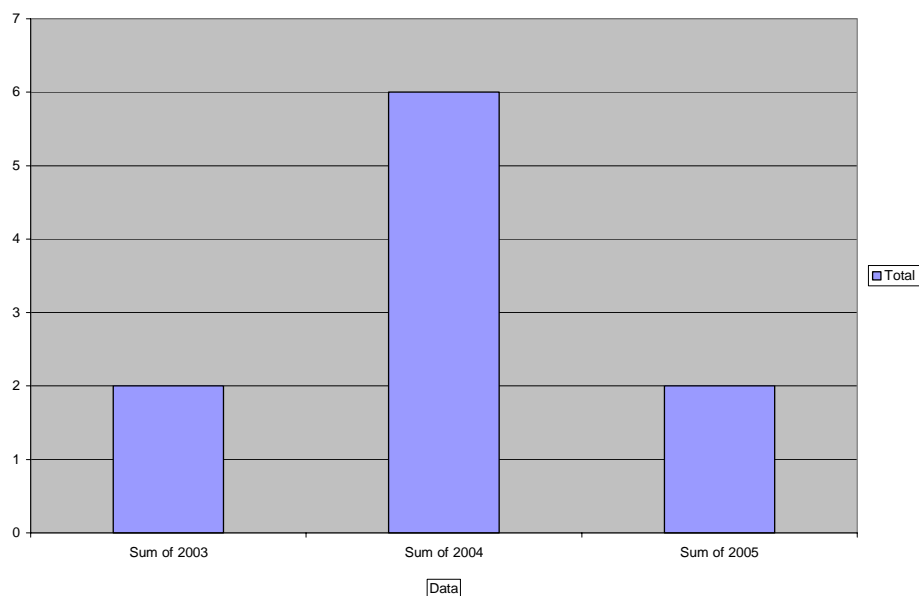
Interviewees’ perspectives closely match and confirm findings from the data:

- There seems to be an overall consensus that the general security situation in Afghanistan has deteriorated since 2003.
- The security of aid workers has deteriorated during this period. Aid workers are one of many groups being targeted by increased and/or more refined or successful attacks.
- The issue of aid worker security cannot be analysed in isolation from wider environment in which aid agencies operate: it is part and parcel of the general degradation of security.
- In this context, there was general agreement that aid workers are not the first targets of choice by the insurgency or Taliban or Al-Qaeda. Several interviewees felt that, if target preferences were ranked, they would be in this order: 1) Coalition/ISAF, 2) Afghan National Army, 3) Afghan National Police, 4) shura leaders/government staff/civilians, 5) private contractors and 6) NGOs and aid agencies – local and international.
- Most interviewees highlighted the need to look at incidents on a case-by-case basis to reveal the multiplicity of factors at play.
- A few interviewees felt that there is still an underlying problem in the way aid agencies are perceived by Afghans, and this could explain why aid workers are being increasingly targeted and/or are at greater risk.

#### 3.2 A historical perspective

For some actors, their prior experiences in Afghanistan are important in understanding contemporary concerns with security.

**Figure 2: Expatriate aid workers kidnapped or killed in Afghanistan (2003–2005)<sup>27</sup>**



As Figure 1 shows, the number of incidents affecting local aid workers has increased in recent years. Figure 2 shows an increase in incidents affecting foreign aid workers in 2004, followed by a decline in 2005. (Data on private contractors kidnapped or killed is unclear because it is not specifically reported and/or thoroughly analyzed by either ANSO or the UN, though the number of incidents affecting this group has also increased since 2003.)

The question of proportionality arises here: have incidents increased because the aid population has increased? Our research suggests that staffing levels for strictly humanitarian agencies have fallen since 2002, for reasons of mandate, changing context (i.e. chronic problems rather than emergencies) and security concerns. The humanitarian presence today may be half or a third of what it was in 2002. For other aid actors, whose mandate involves both relief and development, staffing are probably still two to three times higher; some local NGOs are operating with four or five times the number of staff compared with pre-2002 levels. The 22 UN agencies in the country have expanded massively in the last few years, and are estimated to have at least five times the staffing level of the Taliban period. Overall, we conclude that the current number of aid workers in Afghanistan, both expatriate and national staff, is roughly ten times higher today than it was during the Taliban period, and is estimated between 25,000 and 35,000 people. Although comparing the aid population today with that a decade ago is problematic, it is reasonable to assume a ten-fold increase over the Taliban period. If that is correct, then we can argue that, relatively

<sup>27</sup> The incidents in 2003 refer to the ICRC and UNHCR. Those in 2004 refer to the ICRC and the kidnapping of three UN staff (who were later released). The data for 2005 refers to the World Bank/MISFA and the kidnapping of Care staff (later released). Expatriates are relatively new targets in Afghanistan (post-2002), and victims of new tactics such as kidnappings.

### *3.2.1 The Taliban period*

Aid work was difficult and access to beneficiaries was often constrained during the Taliban period, as the regime sought to enforce oppressive edicts on behaviour and work rules, particularly among Afghan staff. Nonetheless, interviewees pointed out that the rules of engagement with the regime seemed clear and straightforward. Space for communication and negotiation existed. The Taliban were also credited with bringing a degree of security to the country, with the exception of periods of fighting with the Northern Alliance, and as a result banditry and criminality were kept at low levels. Most importantly, during this period it was clear that the regime was ultimately in charge of ensuring the security of the entire population, including aid workers. Security incidents were immediately reported to the authorities, and generally followed through in a satisfactory manner. This is not to say that agencies did not have their own protective measures in place, as they do today, but the ultimate responsibility for security provision seemed to be more centralised.

### *3.2.2 The fall of the Taliban*

The fall of the Taliban and the Bonn agreement prompted an exponential growth in the donor presence and in funding. In turn, the number of agencies operating in the country increased, and the expatriate population grew. Little emphasis was initially placed on security. There was nonetheless apprehension that the fall of the Taliban could be accompanied by a return of the general lawlessness characteristic of the period between 1992 and 1996. Both Afghans and internationals felt that the warlords had the potential to destabilise the new and fragile regime.

### *3.2.3 The current picture*

Between 2003 and 2005, all interviewees agreed that there was a steady deterioration in security. Few saw any prospect of improvement in 2006, though the more optimistic (mainly interviewees from ISAF/NATO) felt that the dispatch of troops to the south, and the next phase of expansion planned in the east, were likely to mark a turning point. Interviewees from the Ministry of Interior were confident that the structural measures being undertaken to reinforce the ANA and ANP were likely to yield results as training and dispatch of troops progressed.

## **3.3 Turning points**

Several incidents seem to have marked the collective consciousness of the international and national aid community. While these turning points are inevitably subjective, it is nonetheless important to highlight them as important events that have shaped collective perceptions of security.

**Table 1: Turning points of insecurity**

Date	Event	Why a turning point?	Common interpretation or perception of cause	Actual cause based on investigation and/or accepted wisdom <sup>29</sup>
27 May 2003	ICRC expatriate aid worker killed	Targeted assassination National driver was freed Perpetrator was treated by the ICRC	Taliban killing Fear of 'Iraqisation' of Afghanistan <sup>30</sup>	Claimed by Taliban (probably true)
16 November 2003	UNHCR expatriate aid worker killed	Second expatriate killed from recognised agency Deliberate targeting	Taliban killing Fear of 'Iraqisation' of Afghanistan	Cultural insensitivity Political
2 June 2004	5 MSF workers killed (3 expatriate and 2 Afghans)	Space for 'humanitarian' neutrality seen as compromised	Acceptance no longer works in Afghanistan	Factionalism/political (governors/police chiefs settling scores)
20 October 2004	Kidnapping of 3 UN staff	Tactic new to Afghanistan	Fear of 'Iraqisation' of Afghanistan	Crime (may be linked to political elements)
7 March 2005	Killing of World Bank/MISFA staff	Unambiguous targeting of	Much speculation as	Cultural insensitivity Organised crime

<sup>29</sup> Real causes identified are based on discussions with the UN Security Office, the Ministry of Interior and/or agencies concerned directly with the incident. 'Crime' as a cause refers to incidents by common criminals (not terrorists). 'Political' refers to shifts in local power structures.

<sup>30</sup> The term 'Iraqisation of Afghanistan', which is increasingly used by the media and experts to explain the change in the Afghan security landscape, is discussed in the next section.

Date	Event	Why a turning point?	Common interpretation or perception of cause	Actual cause based on investigation and/or accepted wisdom <sup>29</sup>
	member	expatriate in Kabul	to cause	(still under investigation)
16 May 2005	Kidnapping of Care staff member	Tactic new to Afghanistan	Fear of 'Iraqisation' of Afghanistan	Crime

The table highlights the discrepancy between the perceived causes and the actual causes of security incidents. This highlights once more the need for careful analysis and contextualisation of incident data.

### *3.3.1 Change in frequency, tactics and targets: the 'Iraqisation' of Afghanistan?*

Most interviewees pointed out that Afghanistan is a complex country, and no generalisation can be made as to why aid workers have been increasingly targeted. However, there seems to be clear agreement that the frequency, tactics and targets of attacks have changed. The following changes, similar to those in Iraq, have been noted since 2002–2003:

- Increase in intensity, sophistication and level of technology (i.e. increased use of remote control bombs/IEDs) by terrorist/insurgent groups.
- Increase in warnings and threats of attacks (many raised the question whether some of these were fabricated by the authorities).
- Kidnapping of expatriates.
- New trend of suicide attacks mainly against military and civilians: over 20 attacks in the last couple of years.<sup>31</sup>

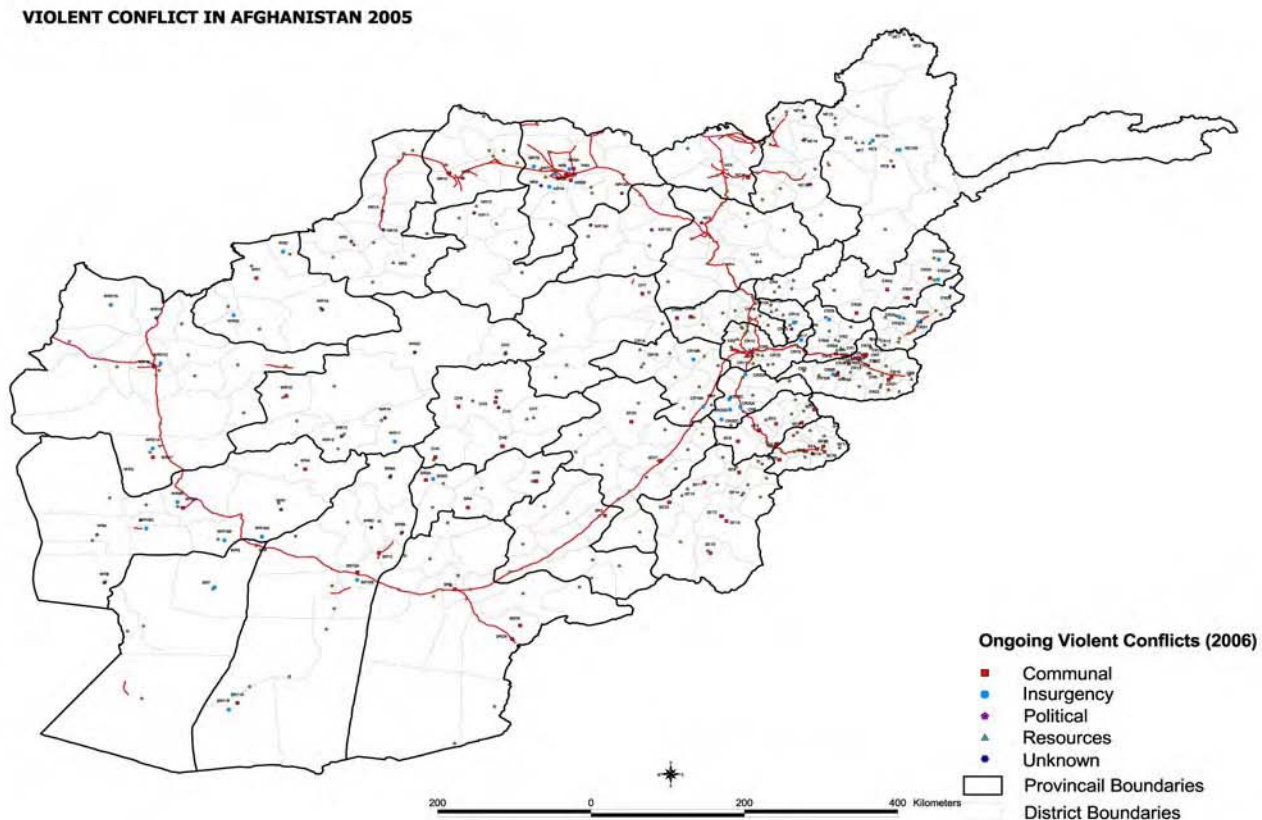
Despite these changes, many interviewees pointed out that aid staff have not been primary targets and could easily have become so, despite protection measures, if this was the objective of attackers.

Map 1, conceived and used by the UN Security Office, attempts to summarise the variety of factors affecting security in Afghanistan, on a district level. While emphasis is generally placed on instability in the south and some eastern provinces, particularly with regard to the rise in insurgency, it is important to

<sup>31</sup> This figure seems to be increasing by the day.

remember that security incidents affecting aid workers occur throughout the country. Security dynamics differ by district, and often require an in-depth analysis of local power structures and changes.

### Map 1: Main factors of violence by district



As highlighted in Table 2, a number of factors have been put forward to explain the growing insecurity of aid workers. These can best be analyzed as follows:<sup>32</sup>

#### *Sphere 1: The macro environment*

As explained by the Ministry of Interior,<sup>33</sup> several fundamental factors have created high levels of insecurity within the country. First and foremost, the degradation in security can be attributed to the DDR process, which disadvantaged certain groups, while creating a security gap that was not filled by the police, the ANA or international forces. This law enforcement gap was exacerbated by a failure to create adequate

<sup>32</sup> This classification is inspired by an interview with Christopher Alexander, DSRSG/Political, UNAMA Afghanistan, Kabul, February 2006.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Interim Minister of Interior and Deputy Minister of Interior Eng. Zarar, Kabul, February 2006.

governance structures at the provincial level. Discontent with provincial authorities and general lawlessness grew as a result of major reforms initiated in a void. In sum, the post-Bonn transition was fraught with its own set of political challenges, training challenges and time lags providing a growing opportunity for insecurity. A second fundamental point raised by many interviewees is the fact that insecurity is focused primarily along the Pakistan border, highlighting Pakistan's role in the destabilisation of Afghan security.

How does this macro environment affect the security of aid workers?

The following key points were highlighted:

- Aid agencies have increasingly been perceived as 'agents' or 'partners' of the government, and as such targeting them is as effective as any other destabilisation measure. While the government's anti-NGO rhetoric would suggest a clear dissociation from these entities, the reality of reconstruction calls for close collaboration between the government and NGOs and the UN, as exemplified by many rural development programmes.
- Many UN agencies and donors now travel with armed escorts. This sends a signal to insurgents that humanitarian and aid agencies and the military cooperate closely. The role of Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in blurring the civil–military space has also been pointed out as creating further confusion and/or tarnishing what was once clearly humanitarian space. While some differentiate between the impact of various types of PRTs, the UK led-one in Mazar, for instance, being perceived as more effective, it has been argued that 'PRTs in general are the least common denominator of an international military presence', and as such are neither strikingly effective at ensuring security, nor successful at reconstruction.
- An additional complication concerns what seem to be more explicit linkages between the Taliban, terrorist groups and narco-trafficking interests – both outside and within the government. Conducting alternative livelihoods programmes under such circumstances is likely to create a backlash against agencies present at the grassroots level, which may often include aid actors.

### *Sphere 2: Community/beneficiaries*

The receptiveness of communities or beneficiaries seems to have decreased from 2003 onwards, in view of the perceived slow delivery of assistance, following the initial period of euphoria and high expectations.

Interviewees point to the following:

- While NGOs or humanitarian actors established a much-needed lifeline during the Taliban period, in contrast today there are a plethora of aid actors, including a recognised government. As such, the usefulness of NGOs and many aid actors is no longer apparent to the average Afghan;<sup>34</sup>
- The sheer number of actors has created confusion among beneficiaries. The clarity of visibility and understanding of actors at the village level have changed dramatically.
- The lack of perceived and visible results by beneficiaries and communities has been exacerbated by a governmental discourse that has tended to reinforce this perspective rather than highlight the achievements of NGOs and aid actors, who have taken high risks to assist Afghan populations.

### *Sphere 3: Interveners*

In thinking about security, the role of interveners – aid agencies, donors, policy-makers – also needs to be analysed.

The following key points merit consideration:

- The response of most humanitarian, aid and political actors in Afghanistan has been to stay the course by increasing funding for security. For instance, the cost of parliamentary elections has been \$160 million, 15% of which was spent on ensuring security, compared to an average of 5% in most other post-conflict elections.<sup>35</sup> The World Bank estimates that 39% of governmental resources, largely provided by donors, is being spent on security.<sup>36</sup> While no data is available on aid agencies' and national programmes' separate and additional security budgets, donors have been generous in their funding of security measures (from guards and vehicles to armed escorts) to enable programming to continue. The cost-effectiveness and general effectiveness of the international presence under these conditions have been questioned.
- Under the Taliban, it was clearly understood and assumed by the international community that it was the state's responsibility to ensure the protection of all actors or people under its

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<sup>34</sup> In fact many documents, including from the World Bank, speak of the need to channel more funding through the government rather than through NGOs.

<sup>35</sup> Approximate figure cited by Christopher Alexander, DSRSG/Political, UNAMA, Kabul, February 2006.

<sup>36</sup> World Bank, *Managing Public Finances for Development*.



jurisdiction, and to enable a safe operational environment for agencies assisting Afghans. This assumption no longer holds. Security has been entrusted to a plethora of actors, such as private firms, the military (including Coalition forces) and individual agencies.

- Traditional humanitarian actors are left as ‘softer targets’ without the arsenal of protection used by some UN agencies. To what extent are such policies responsible for creating or perpetuating an atmosphere of militarisation and increased insecurity in the long run?
- Finally, the issue of visibility has been raised as problematic and as potentially reinforcing insecurity: the visibility of resources, cars, symbols and expatriates, as well as some expatriates’ culturally insensitive behaviour. In contrast, many advocate for lower visibility and the greater use of local staff in more cost-effective, ‘politically’ appropriate and potentially more effective operations in all parts of the country, including areas considered insecure.

The discussion above raises some important policy questions relating to the causes of security incidents and the general evolution of the security landscape in landscape.

### 3.4 Conclusion

1. NGOs and aid agencies should be playing a more active role in making their contribution to Afghan communities clearer, preferably through Afghan staff, and in explaining some of the concrete results and achievements of their operations, in order to gain further acceptance and clarify any confusion at the community level.
2. An institutionalised and effective mechanism may need to be set up by aid agencies, potentially funded by donors, to regularly engage with government officials to heighten their own sense of the results of aid operations, and to address the inflammatory statements and simplified discourses which have contributed to perceptions of the ineffectiveness of NGOs and aid actors in general.
3. The lack of a centralised responsibility for security in Afghanistan raises some important questions. To what extent is the diffusion of security responsibility across a wide range of actors, while justifiable in the absence of functioning state institutions immediately after Bonn, weakening or delaying the strengthening of these very same institutions five years on? To what extent are the individual security responses selected by aid agencies, to ensure protection of their own staff or premises, contributing to a climate of heightened threat? To what extent are aid agencies contributing through their individual security responses to diminishing state accountability for both ambient security and the security of aid staff (through for instance follow-up of incidents or preventive measures such as more effective police deployment)?

4. Does the short-term cost of security justify the end, which is presumably to stay the course? Is the very high financial cost of security across agencies, as well as the increased militarisation of the aid space and monetisation of security services, with its own risk of corruption, increasing security in the long run?

## **4. Responses to the new security climate: protection and deterrence at the cost of acceptance?**

### **4.1 Organisational responses**

In responding to the new security climate in Afghanistan, the vast majority of organisations, with the exception of local NGOs, have reinforced the presence of security officers both in Kabul and at all levels of their field operations, post-2002. The case of local NGOs is an interesting one because, in all field interviews in Mazar, Jalalabad and Kandahar, local NGOs felt that they had no need for security officers or any special measures because they are Afghan. Interviews with large local NGOs in Kabul were more nuanced on this issue. The general low level of awareness of security incidents affecting Afghan aid workers, coupled with the limited knowledge base of Afghan staff in security agencies at the regional level, highlights the stark contrast in awareness and understanding between Kabul and regional centres.

In contrast, most international aid agencies have dedicated expatriate security officers, who in some cases also take on other responsibilities such as logistics, both in Kabul and at the field level.

In the case of some international NGOs, it was thought that the security function was best handled by national staff given that the level of rotation of expatriate security officers and the military background that they tend to bring with them is seen as incompatible with the objectives and organisational cultures of humanitarian agencies and NGOs.

UNAMA and private contractors seem to place a particularly heavy emphasis on security, with a consequential security staff presence, both expatriate and national.

ICRC stands out as a management model by placing security enforcement and decision-making in the hands of the Deputy Chief of Mission, as opposed to a security officer. ICRC's protection mandate requires staff security to be an integral part of programme implementation.

Security policies and procedures for all agencies seem to be generically designed at the headquarters level and adapted, reviewed and enforced locally, based on the national and regional context, with a fair degree of decentralisation and responsibility in the hands of management.

#### 4.1.1 Low visibility vs. armed escorts

While the great majority of security incidents tend to affect national staff in Afghanistan, it seems that virtually all security rules are geared towards the protection of expatriate staff.

Expatriates tend to have special security precautions, including:

- curfews;
- the number of vehicles to be used (convoy requirements);
- radio checks;
- lower visibility or the use of unmarked cars;
- evacuation plans;
- security around accommodation; and
- insurance coverage as a rationale (particularly important for the UN).

Extreme measures taken by some NGOs and the UN include:

- Some NGOs: no travelling or posting of expatriates outside Kabul – operations implemented only by Afghans (in international NGOs) and local NGOs, who are thereby able to access virtually all areas of the country.<sup>37</sup>
- Some UN agencies:<sup>38</sup> encourage expatriate staff to travel in unsafe areas in convoys of six vehicles and armed escorts, as opposed to one additional police vehicle for national staff.

These two radically different policies raise important policy questions, which will be addressed below. What seems to be clear, however, is that both of these policies seem to impact upon the security of actors across the board. As an international NGO Director pointed out: ‘If the UN protects itself more with armed escorts or armed guards, then we will feel vulnerable if we don’t’. Likewise, if some actors choose a policy of low visibility by using taxis and unmarked cars, and others display their logos and use white-painted vehicles, will the latter not be at greater risk?

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<sup>37</sup> This low-key, low-visibility approach, while increasingly used by some aid actors, is not new, and was used also during the mujahideen period and to a certain extent during the Taliban period.

<sup>38</sup> Some agencies such as WHO have found ways to operate with a low visibility policy through various human resource contracting mechanisms, while others such as UNAMA do not operate without armed escorts in unsafe areas, a policy that UNHCR would not contemplate.

As such, there seems to be a polarisation of responses, involving either intense protection and the militarisation of the humanitarian and reconstruction effort by some UN agencies, donors and private actors; or the extreme localisation of the effort by ‘blending into’ Afghan society through the use of a low-key approach, i.e. using more or only national staff and/or low- or non-visibility policies for all expatriate staff, by some NGOs and UN agencies.

#### *4.1.2 Protection and deterrence vs. acceptance*

The responses identified above fall into ideal-type security strategies identified by Van Brabant<sup>39</sup> as ‘deterrence’ and ‘protection’.

While aid agencies seem most commonly to employ protection measures, Van Brabant reminds us that an emphasis on acceptance strategies, or a combination of protection, deterrence and acceptance strategies,<sup>40</sup> may be required, depending on the nature or multiplicity of threats. For instance, acceptance may be needed at the community level, while protection measures may be necessary against criminals. The challenge, as the Afghanistan case demonstrates, is to find the right mix and balance between strategies and options.

**Acceptance strategies try to reduce or remove threats** by focusing on acceptance (political or social consent) for the aid agencies’ presence and work.

Acceptance is usually achieved by paying attention to the following:

- relationship-building (through formal agreements, socialising or interaction/negotiating styles);
- conducting meetings and delivering clear messages (public statements, messages from meetings, staff communications);
- conveying the right implicit messages (appearance, behaviour, male–female interactions);
- focusing on staff composition; and
- focusing on programme methodology.

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<sup>39</sup> Koenraad Van Brabant, *Operational Security Management in Violent Environments*, Humanitarian Practice Network, Good Practice Review 8, June 2000, p. 57.

<sup>40</sup> The following discussion of definitions and examples of these strategies is based on Van Brabant’s Chapter 5 on Security Strategies.

**Protection strategies use protective devices and procedures to reduce the vulnerability of agencies, but do not address the threats.**

Protection can include the following measures:

- reduce exposure;
- reduce or increase visibility;
- convoys;
- protection devices;
- protective procedures;
- protection money; and
- protection of life (through non-resistance).

Finally, **deterrence strategies involve deterring a threat via a counter-threat.**

Deterrence can include:

- political or economic sanctions;
- the suspension of operations or withdrawal; and
- armed protection.

Reducing visibility is a type of protection strategy. It has mainly been used in cases where aid agencies have suffered a low degree of acceptance from communities or specific groups which may have been opposed to an aid presence. For instance, this policy was used in Macedonia at the time of the NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999. Aid agencies left their logos in place in Albanian enclaves, but removed them elsewhere for fear of reprisals against internationals.<sup>41</sup> The situation in Afghanistan is different, in the sense that those who have adopted extreme reduced visibility strategies have done so throughout the country.<sup>42</sup> Armed protection is the strongest form of deterrence, and ‘profoundly affects the image and perception of aid agencies in general’. Both of these strategies emanate from a lack of or low acceptance from communities. The core challenge in Afghanistan seems to be to tackle this ‘acceptance deficit’.

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

While security actors such ANSO try to emphasise acceptance as the best mode of ensuring the security of staff, most interviewees recognise that there has been a greater shift towards protection measures from 2003 onwards, as a result of the security climate.

Protection measures, accompanied in some cases by deterrence through armed protection, are seen by UN security experts as the best way of enabling the continuation of programming in unsafe areas. From this viewpoint, and given their own organisational constraints (e.g. the UN's visibility policy or insurance coverage) the alternative would be to suspend or withdraw from unsafe areas, which would have greater humanitarian and/or political consequences.

The multiplicity of threats in Afghanistan, as discussed in Table 2, calls for a mix of strategies. What seems to have emerged in Afghanistan in the last three years or so is a shift towards protection, perhaps justified by the increase in criminality. Aside from the resource implications of deterrence and protection choices, it is important to remember the following points highlighted by Van Brabant, which Afghan practitioners also seem to echo:

- Protection as a response tends to focus on the targets and not on those who pose a threat. Protection can lead to a bunker mentality, putting further distance between the aid actor and local communities.
- Acceptance cannot be assumed: it has to be won and actively maintained.
- While deterrence can facilitate the provision of aid in the short or medium term, it can profoundly impair operations in the longer run.

Similarly, it may be concluded that the low-visibility or clandestine approach, while affording lower-risk aid deliveries in the short-term, may ultimately breed suspicion, misunderstanding, and mistrust of aid programming in general.

#### *4.1.3 Key findings*

The following points were highlighted by interviewees:

- Some protection measures are indispensable to enable the continuation of programming.
- Those who do not follow minimal protection measures, as laid down by some UN agencies and large international NGOs, feel that they will be at greater risk of vulnerability.

- The increase in protection measures and deterrence via armed protection has a cost: it increases the distance between agencies and communities, and creates more confusion and less understanding.
- Many, particularly ‘veterans’ of Afghanistan, question whether the increase in protection really deters or prevents attacks. If some groups want to carry out an attack, will it occur no matter what measures are in place.
- Many NGOs and long-standing agencies agree that acceptance, i.e. relationship-building with communities and authorities, remains the best form of protection. As one interviewee remarked: ‘In Afghanistan, the best form of protection is knowledge. It has to be clear to people why we are here’.
- Similarly, some believe that protection from local hosts, cultural sensitivity and the use of local staff are the best ways of operating in Afghanistan, not resorting to an arsenal of defensive assets.
- Local NGOs seem to believe that an element of risk is part of life in Afghanistan, and as such local knowledge and relationships are the only way to maintain a presence and continue programming. Recent threats or attacks by terrorists or insurgent groups show that those who are targeted directly or indirectly may not be chosen because of any particular rationale in terms of visibility or results achieved at the field level, or any protection measure. A longstanding and fruitful presence in the south is no longer a guarantee of not being attacked by the Taliban or the drug mafia. There is an element of randomness and irrationality in the new security environment that has to be accepted.

#### *4.1.4 Conclusion*

The discussion above raises some important policy questions relating to organisational responses to the new security climate.

1. Some NGOs and agencies assume that lower/no visibility (i.e. using standard/second-hand cars, displaying no logos) should translate into lesser security risks and more access to vulnerable populations and areas. While this reasoning may be justifiable, it could potentially be faulty if one remembers that the overall feeling is that expatriate aid workers do not appear to be primary targets, and that the vast majority of incidents affect national staff and/or local NGOs who are not particularly ‘visible’, do not feel the need for security staff or special measures and rely perhaps too much on optimistic assumptions of acceptance. Moreover, one has to question whether the policy of low or non-visibility on the part of some actors is not endangering the ‘humanitarian/aid’ demarcation that was prevalent before. We would argue that aid agencies should be focusing on addressing the acceptance deficit with communities and governmental authorities as a priority.



2. The response at the other extreme – using armed escorts and paying the government for security – raises the following question: while it may be effective in the short run in order to continue operations, is the use of domestic, international and private military forces for aid delivery not further blurring the distinction between civil and military roles, creating confusion at the community level and further diminishing the state’s role in providing security? Can aid agencies afford deterrence in the long run?
3. As many interviewees pointed out, it is not clear that the shift towards increased protection and deterrence measures, at very high financial cost, is justified. What would happen if all actors decided to reduce their reliance on protection and deterrence measures and invest further in potentially more adequate measures, such as contributing to better local police forces;<sup>43</sup> investing further in cultural sensitivity training; exploring and supporting specific measures for the greater security of national staff; or improving communication and acceptance strategies, as suggested earlier? Such measures may well improve the overall security of aid actors.
4. Finally, rather than focusing exclusively on aid workers as potential targets, donor agencies should focus on addressing the multiplicity of threats directly through more focused investment and institutional support to the Ministry of Interior and the ANP. They should also closely monitor the performance of these institutions.

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<sup>43</sup> The need to consider localised police forces and concentrated deployments has been argued by others. See Rubin, *Afghanistan’s Uncertain Transition*.

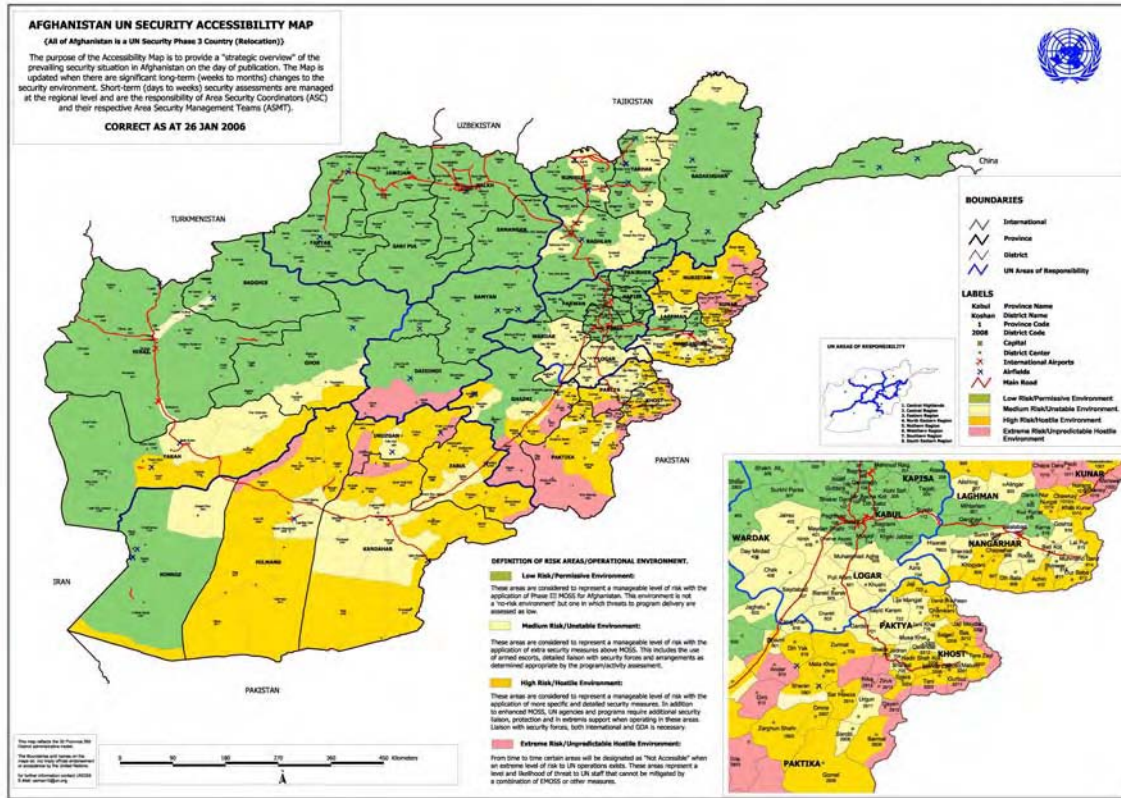
## 5. Changing approaches to aid delivery: the challenge ahead

### 5.1 Impact on the delivery of humanitarian aid

As discussed above, increased protection and deterrence measures seem to have facilitated continued aid delivery since 2003. However aid strategies have had to adapt to the complex security dynamics. The overall response to the new security dynamic, particularly in the south and east, has featured the following:

- The suspension or reduction of humanitarian/aid programmes by international NGOs.
- Donors such as USAID point out that despite their attempts to encourage NGOs to operate in ‘unsafe’ parts of the country, with promises of high security budgets, they have not succeeded in attracting the level of activity or programming hoped for.
- The lack of expatriate presence in some of these isolated districts has in turn also limited efforts to build local capacity.
- All interviewees agree that security conditions in these ‘unsafe areas’ have affected humanitarian and aid programmes in Afghanistan. If some have found creative ways to continue operating, all agree programming has not expanded to meet the level of need.
- The provinces that seem to have suffered most include Uruzgan, Nuristan, Zabul, Kandahar, Helmand, Paktia, Paktika, Nangahar.
- Other areas where temporary suspensions have taken place include Badghis, Ghor, Farah.

## Map 2: Accessibility: 'unsafe areas' suffering from limited assistance



## 5.2 Institutional responses to the humanitarian/aid delivery challenge

### 5.2.1 Donor response

Regarding security, in assessing whether budgets were sufficient to enable humanitarian agencies to operate in unsafe areas, both grant recipients and donors recognised that resources for security are generous. Donors such as USAID have greatly increased the level of their support for security. ECHO, a key humanitarian donor, has invested heavily in: funding security research;<sup>44</sup> supporting security reporting and logistical entities such as ANSO and PACTEC (a local airline for NGOs, to ensure secure transport); and developing new procedures to enable NGOs to temporarily suspend operations, and then resume them without financial penalty.

On the service delivery issue, the bulk of the effort on the donor side has been to enable aid delivery to continue. While an expansion of programmes may be needed in Afghanistan, this has failed to occur because of the deterioration in the security climate and the reluctance of grantees to take on further security risks. Many point out that the failure to expand efforts creates a vicious circle: areas that are

<sup>44</sup> See ECHO, *ECHO Security Review: Generic Security Guide, Security Training Directory and Security Report*, 2004.

under-served do not feel the benefits of assistance, and communities in these areas are further distanced from the overall stabilisation process. Finally, donors are increasingly under pressure to channel resources to the government, whose outreach capacity to some of these remote areas may not yet be established, and whose overall level of institutional development may not yet meet donor criteria. In this context, donors are under-using funding available to meet needs and/or limiting their operations until the security climate enables the expansion of service delivery.<sup>45</sup>

### *5.2.2 Governmental response*

The Ministry of Interior in particular maintains that it has taken an active role in investigating all security incidents (particularly those affecting expatriate staff) and arresting and incarcerating culprits. As such, the state is gradually increasing its ability to control the situation and follow up on events, while the capacity of some of its key institutions – the army, police and intelligence services – is being gradually built up. While the challenges remain enormous, governmental capacity has begun to expand. It also maintains that, for security, cost-effectiveness and sustainability reasons, more donor funding for basic welfare service should be channelled through the government.<sup>46</sup>

The discussion above raises some important policy questions relating to changes of approach in aid delivery in general.

### *Localisation*

A specific programming approach to coping with the insecurity has been termed ‘localisation’. It is important to note that, while some of elements of localisation appear to be new or more prevalent, others have been used in the past. Low visibility and increased reliance on local staff or partnering with local agencies were widespread in Afghanistan both during the mujahadeen and the Taliban periods. As such, the following discussion focuses on what seem to be more recent incarnations of the localisation phenomenon.

#### *What is localisation?*

According to interviewees, localisation includes:

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<sup>45</sup> ECHO’s budget has gone from euros 76 million in 2002 to euros 20 million in 2006, based on a reduced outreach ability to ‘unsafe areas’ and the temporary suspension of many of its grantees’ programmes.

<sup>46</sup> This conclusion is increasingly shared by influential individuals such as Ashraf Ghani, and by multilateral donors such as the World Bank. In practice, however, a number of donors are simply not able to fund governments directly due to legal or bureaucratic rules, or are unwilling to do so for fears of corruption or low accountability.

- Programming exclusively through national staff.
- Recruiting more national staff locally, i.e. from ‘unsafe’ districts, for greater relationship building, buy-in and local protection.
- Monitoring only by expatriates, if necessary.
- Partnering with local NGOs (for instance, in the case of PRTs) or companies (in the case of private entities); the rationale for this does not, however, seem to be security related, but rather policy-related (for increased sustainability).
- Greater involvement in programmes by the local authorities and local shuras.

### *Is localisation really prevalent?*

While the localisation of responses seems to have increased in the last couple of years, as a result of the security climate, localisation as a widespread response still seems to be limited by the mandates of donor agencies, and seems to occur more as a matter of overall policy than as a response to the security environment.

- While some donors, such as Ministries or the World Bank, seem to be very interested in working with local NGOs that are audited, transparent and have a successful track record, others, such as ECHO and USAID, are not mandated to finance local actors directly. However, sub-contracting seems to be a way of involving local partners, albeit at the cost of creating another layer of overhead expenses and monitoring.
- For agencies such as ICRC, which works with a local affiliate, the Afghan Red Crescent Society, the bulk of the humanitarian protection mandate cannot be carried out by national staff: access to prisoners is limited to expatriate staff (including the use of expatriate translators) for reasons of mandate and security. Likewise, the UN’s DDR programme cannot be carried out by national staff.

In sum, while localisation is in theory a logical option for reasons of sustainability and buy-in and security, there are still many policy and procedural obstacles limiting its use.

### *Is localisation a good thing?*

The Afghanistan Compact,<sup>47</sup> among others, emphasises the need for greater ‘Afghanisation’ of the reconstruction effort.

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<sup>47</sup> See Principles of Cooperation in The Afghanistan Compact, The London Conference on Afghanistan, 31 January–1 February 2006.

In principle, localisation could have the following beneficial effects:

- Greater sustainability of initiatives via the greater capacity-building of national staff and the ‘de-expatriating’ of programmes.
- Greater cost-effectiveness (particularly if localisation occurs directly, rather than via a plethora of international agencies, each with overhead expenses).
- Greater access to ‘unsafe areas’, buy-in and relationship-building, which ultimately improves communities’ perceptions of the humanitarian/aid effort.
- A potential decrease in the number of security incidents, as localisation implies less visible expatriate targets – although the adverse may be the case, since national aid workers are more frequently targeted, and more vulnerable.
- The potential to develop very local and small civil society actors, who understand, for instance, tribal dynamics and can operate by consensus, in line with local norms.

In practice, however, interviewees, including from international NGOs, who are trying to ‘localise’ point out that:

- There are many examples of sub-contracting to local actors which have failed to deliver adequate results – both in terms of financial transparency and programmatic quality.
- If the process of localisation is controlled, then it is a positive development. This implies the need to build capacity gradually, to develop adequate auditing and monitoring skills and to engage in an overall training strategy with local actors which is sustained, gradual and rational – a significant challenge in Afghanistan.

## 6. Overall conclusions

The overall finding of this report can be summarised as follows: interveners – aid agencies, donors and policy-makers – have a crucial role to play in shaping the Afghan security environment through their operational responses, and financing choices. While some of the security systems and policies set up by aid agencies were justified in the absence of a functioning state, the aid community's approach to security needs to be revisited.

Continuing to build up parallel security databases, systems, procedures and responses that are increasingly protection- or deterrence-oriented will increase the alienation of the aid community, both from the government and from beneficiary communities (who are relegated to the role of 'observers' of what often appears to be an external process). The aid delivery process cannot risk being further distanced from those it is aiming to assist – particularly as insurgents are gaining ground.

Collective reflection is needed on the part of aid agencies: to think of new strategies to address the acceptance deficit; to understand and minimise the risks and costs of increased protection and deterrence; to create more direct links between threats and aid agency responses; and to address the root causes of overall insecurity by supporting and investing in state institutions and their ability to improve ambient security.

Rather than spreading security responsibility across a wide range of actors, donors and policy-makers need to support and closely monitor the institutional performance of accountable security entities, such as the Ministry of Interior and Police. Embedding aid worker security within the overall security approach in Afghanistan is key to preventing further incidents and ensuring an alignment between aid actors' responses to security and the broader security apparatus. This would be an important step towards greater 'acceptance' from the government and communities, as well as offering a more cost-effective and 'aid effective' solution to the human security challenges in Afghanistan.

## Annex 1: List of interviewees

*Kabul, February 2006*

Date	Agency	Name	Title
<b>Security agencies</b>			
1 February 2006	ANSO – Afghanistan NGO Safety Office	Christian Willach	Operations Coordinator & Head of Office
1 February 2006	UNDSS	Gert Keulder	Area Field Security Coordinator Kabul, Central Region
2 February 2006		Jean Lausberg	UN Field Security Coordinator, Afghanistan
2 February 2006- 5 February 2006		Craig Harrisson	Senior Data Analyst
5 February 2006		Rashid Osman	Database Officer
<b>Government</b>			
4 February 2006	Ministry of Interior	H.E. Eng. Zarar	Acting Minister of Interior Deputy Minister of Interior
4 February 2006	MRRD/GTZ: NSP – National Solidarity Programme	Andreas Schild	Team Leader Oversight Consultant NSP
<b>Military</b>			
8 February 2006	NATO/ISAF	Fatih Ulusoy	Political Advisor to NATO Senior Civilian Representative
<b>UN, donors and others</b>			
8 February 2006	UNAMA	Christopher Alexander	DSRSG Pillar 1 – Political Affairs
8 February 2006	UNHCR	Jacques Mouchet	Country Director
5 February 2006	USAID	Nick Marinacci	Director of Civil Military Affairs
6 February 2006	ECHO	John Myers	Head of Office
6 February 2006	ICRC	Jean Nicolas Marti	Deputy Head of Delegation
5 February 2006	UNAMA (Gardez)	Anne Falher	Relief, Recovery and Reconstruction / Civil Affairs Officer



<b>International, local and umbrella NGO agencies</b>			
1 February 2006	Care	Paul Barker	Country Director
6 February 2006	Mercy Corps	Syed Muzaffar	Operations Manager
5 February 2006	ACF – Action Contre la Faim	Thomas Loreaux	Head of Mission
8 February 2006	CHA – Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance	Eng. Bahadur Khapalwak	Program Coordinator
8 February 2006	ARCS – Afghan Red Crescent Society	Abdul Ghani Kazimi	Secretary General
4 February 2006	FCCS – Foundation for Culture and Civil Society	Robert Kluver	Director
1 February 2006	ACBAR – Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief	Anja de Beer	Director
<b>Private entities</b>			
2 February 2006	Cukurova – Turkish contractor	Gazi Darici	CEO
<b>Local media</b>			
4 February 2006	The Killid Group	Najiba Ayubi	Manager
<b>Personalities and/or Afghan veterans</b>			
2 February 2006	AREU	Paul Fishstein	Director
7 February 2006	AKTC – Aga Khan Trust for Culture	Jolyon Leslie	CEO
2 February 2006	Ex UNAMA Kandahar	Robert Kluver	Director

*Kandahar, Jalalabad, Mazar-e-Sharif, February 2006*

<b>Kandahar (Field Researcher: Jabar Sapand)</b>			
Date	Agency	Name	Title
<b>Security agencies</b>			
19 February 2006	UNDSS	Rodney D. Cocks	Area Field Security Coordinator Kandahar, Afghanistan

<b>Government</b>			
19 February 2006	Kandahar Governorate	Dr. Humayon	Deputy Governor of Kandahar
<b>Military</b>			
18 February 2006	PRT (Kandahar)	Captain Dave Mcallister	PRT Operation Officer, Kandahar
<b>UN, Donors and others</b>			
19 February 2006	UNHCR	Sultan Muhammad	Security Assistant
19 February 2006	COOPI	Pashtun Atef	Administrator
<b>International, Local and Umbrella NGO agency</b>			
19 February 2006	Mercy Corps	Rahmatullah Kakar	Head of Office
18 February 2006	VARA	Abdul Salam Siddiqi	Deputy Head of Office
18 February 2006	ADA	Dr. Ghulam Sakhi	Head of Office
<b>Private</b>			
11 February 2006	MCC	Muhammad Omar	Director
<b>Jalalabad (Field Researcher: Jabar Sapand)</b>			
Date	Agency	Name	Title
<b>Security agencies</b>			
08 February 2006	ANSO – Afghanistan NGO Safety Office	Khisorw	Deputy of Regional Office, Jalalabad
07 February 2006	UNDSS	Christian Friedrichs	Area Field Security Coordinator Jalalabad, Eastern Region
<b>Government</b>			
07 February 2006	Nangarhar Governorate	Dr. Muhammad Asif Qazizada	Deputy Governor of Eastern Region
<b>Military</b>			
12 February 2006	PRT (Jalalabad)	Sgt. Steven Kling	Head of PRT Jalalabad

<b>UN, Donors and others</b>			
12 February 2006	GTZ	Muhammad Naim	Security Officer
12 February 2006	UNHCR	Haris Wahidi	Assistant Field Security Advisor
<b>International, Local and Umbrella NGO agency</b>			
11 February 2006	MADERA	Eng. Ajab Khan	Field officer
10 February 2006	MSSAA	Eng. Razi Sha	Director
09 February 2006	SHARQ	Dr. Abdul Salam Talib	Director
<b>Private</b>			
11 February 2006	DEGRA	Eng. Khan Muhammad	Director
<b>Local media</b>			
13 February 2006	Spin Ghar Radio	Shir Bahadur Hemat	Manager

<b>Mazar (Field Researcher: Zabiullah Assadi)</b>			
<b>Date</b>	<b>Agency</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Title</b>
13 February 2006	ACBAR	Mir Emadudine	Coordination officer
15 February 2006	NDI (National Democratic Institute)	Dr. Khalilullah Hikmati	Head of office
16 February 2006	RASA	Nelofar	Head of office
13 February 2006	ANSO	Ammo Wais	National Safety Advisor

## Annex 2: Sample questionnaire

### Humanitarian and aid actors

Agency name:

Funded by:

Person interviewed:

Title:

Date:

### Definition and contextualization

1. How long has your agency been operating in Afghanistan?
2. Would you say that the number of humanitarian staff within your agency has increased or decreased in the last decade? Do you have data year by year since 1997, disaggregating national and international staff?
3. How many foreigners vs. local staff work in your agency today?
4. Would you qualify the bulk of your work as 'humanitarian'? (share brochure)
5. Has the nature of your activities changed in the last decade?
6. Turnover rate – length of missions for nationals vs. expatriates?

### Organisational security management

7. Do you have a security officer in-house?
8. Why?
9. Since when?
10. Does your organization have global security policies and protocols?
11. Does this mission have a country-specific security plan? How often is it updated? How closely is it adhered to by staff? (Can you share these?)
12. Does this mission have an institutionalized risk assessment process or are decisions based on individual judgments?
13. What types of briefings are offered to new staff?
14. How do security rules differ for national vs. expatriate staff in your agency?
15. In your agency, is the security policy formulation done at the field level or HQ level?

16. What are the reporting and flow of communication channels used for decision making?  
 17. Do you collect this data? Can you share this data with us, in full confidentiality?

### Reporting and coordination

18. Do you attend security meetings? Which ones?  
 19. Do you find them valuable for your organization? For all participants?  
 20. Does your organization have a security MOU with the UN in place?  
 21. How do you report your agency's security incidents – both in house and externally?  
 22. Have some of the stances adopted by some members of the community affected others? Have UN security protocols affected international or local NGOs?

### Perception

23. In your opinion and based on your data set, in the last 10 years in Afghanistan, has security for humanitarian workers improved, decreased or is stagnant? Why?  
 24. In the last five years? Why?  
 25. In the last year? Why?  
 26. In the last six months? Why?

### Response

27. In incidents affecting humanitarian workers, do you believe that there has been a change in frequency, tactics and targets?  
 28. Has your agency been victim of security incidents in the last decade? (Check with list, fill in gaps)  
 29. Has your agency taken specific measures to address security as a result of the general assessment and/or specific incident?

Acceptance Strategy		Protection strategy		Deterrence strategy	
1. Broad based relationships		Reduce exposure		Political or economic sanctions	
Formal agreements		Reduce or increase visibility		Suspension of operations or withdrawal	

Socializing		Convoys		Armed protection	
Interaction and negotiating styles		Protection devices			
<b>2. Meetings and stated messages</b>		Protective procedures			
Public statements		Protection money			
Messages from meetings		Protection of life			
Staff communications					
<b>3. Implicit messages</b>					
Appearance					
Behaviour					
Female behaviour					
<b>4. Staff composition</b>					
Division					
Programming					

30. Has there been a general shift from acceptance to protection or deterrence strategies in your organization?
31. Have any of the following measures been taken: a) hiring (subcontracting/partnering) of local NGOs instead to implement work in 'unsafe' areas, b) delegating more work to national staff, c) reducing the number of expatriates?
32. Has there been a shift to localization in response to security changes? Is this permanent or interim?
33. How have these measures impacted the access and/or effectiveness of humanitarian aid delivery?
34. Are there any other implicit rules followed? Example: limiting female staff (foreign or national), limiting Pakistani staff etc.
35. Has your agency limited its geographic presence and/or level of programming within country?
36. How do you think this affects access to certain populations in humanitarian need?
37. Do you believe that donor agencies are demanding new responses from you or looking for alternative ways to implement programs?
38. Have donors supported increased costs for security provisions? Has this been explicit?
39. Have you encountered financial and management dilemmas with regard to taking adequate security measures?
40. How does this impact your policy and field approach?
41. Do you believe that security responses or enabling programming or restricting it?

## **The Future**

42. What is your opinion on how the security situation is likely to evolve in the future?

## **Recommendation**

43. What would be your key suggestion for improving the security of aid workers?

## Annex 3: Key documents

### *Security-related*

Feinstein International Famine Center. Antonio Donini, Larry Minear, Ian Smillie, Ted van Baarda, and Anthony C. Welch. *Mapping the Security Environment: Understanding the perceptions of local communities, peace support aspirations, and assistance agencies*. June 2005

*Chronology of Humanitarian Aid Workers Killed, 1997 – 2003*, compiled by Dennis King (15 January 2004), available at <http://vranet.com/Govt1027/Docs/chron1997-2003.html>

*NGO Insecurity in Afghanistan*. ANSO/Care Briefing paper, No. 8, May 2005.

Robert M. Perito. United States Institute of Peace. *The US Experience with Provincial Construction Teams in Afghanistan*. October 2005.

Christian Willach. ANSO. *Aid Worker Fatalities: 2003-2005*. December 2005.

UNAMA. *Principles guiding the civil-military interface in Afghanistan*. 2004.

ODI. Humanitarian Practice Network/Good Practice Review. *Operational Security Management in Violent Environments*. By Koenraad Van Brabant. June 2000.

ECHO. *ECHO Security Review: Generic Security Guide, Security Training Directory and Security Report*. 2004.

### *Afghanistan-specific*

UNDP and Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. *Afghanistan National Human Development Report*. Security with a Human Face: Challenges and Responsibilities. 2004.

“Building On Success”, *The Afghanistan Compact*, The London Conference On Afghanistan, 31 January – 1 February 2006.

Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. *Afghanistan National Development Strategy: An Interim Strategy for Security, Governance, Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction*. 24 January 2006.

The Center for Preventive Action. Barnett R. Rubin, *Afghanistan’s Uncertain Transition from Turmoil to Normalcy*. CSR, no. 12, Council on Foreign Relations.

Ali A. Jalali. *The Future of Afghanistan*. Parameters, Spring 2006, p.6.

Bruce D. Jones, ‘Aid, Peace, and Justice in a Reordered World’ in Donini. A, Niland. N and Wermester K. *Nation-building Unraveled: Aid, Peace and Justice in Afghanistan*. 2004.

Middlebrook. P and Sedra M. *Beyond Bonn, Revisioning the International Compact for Afghanistan*. November 2005. ([www.fpif.org](http://www.fpif.org)).



World Bank report. *Managing Public Finances for Development*, Main Report (Volume 1). 22 December 2005.

## Annex 4: Outlook for the future and recommendations from interviewees

### Outlook for the future

Virtually all interviewees, including security experts, agreed that prospects do not look hopeful in the short run, for the following reasons.

#### *Community, general population perception*

- Government vs. NGO/resources controversy: there is a growing debate on Afghanisation fuelled not only by some ‘extremist’ ministers but also by respectable institutions and officials on the utility of expatriate resources and funding through international actors. While this debate (or, rather, campaign) may have a long-term positive effect on cost-effectiveness and aid delivery efficiency, in the short run it may prompt further deteriorations in community perceptions.
- The next 2–3 years will be a resting period for the Afghan government, which will come under pressure to show concrete benefits for the Afghan people. During this consolidation period, more instability will be inevitable.
- Others point out that the results of the assistance effort are bound to be disappointing given the level of resources committed. Unless a Marshall Plan-level of assistance is put in place, the situation is likely to stagnate, if not deteriorate.
- Protection measures may bring further insecurity and further distancing from communities.

#### *Macro-security landscape*

- There is increasing evidence that Iraqi-style tactics are being imported, such as the bombing of markets, in addition to a growth in supplies of money and arms to insurgency, linked to the drug trade. Meanwhile, the Afghan government’s ability to exert its authority in the provinces remains weak, and some of its officials may have a vested interest in drug-trafficking.

Optimists point out that:

- Once NATO/ISAF expands to the south, and hopefully to the east, the insurgency situation should come under greater control.

- The Ministry of Interior believes that the situation will improve as training of the police (ANP) and the army (ANA), border controls, judicial reform and economic security increase.
- Finally, others point out that attacks on civilians may backfire and rally support for the Afghan government.

## Recommendations

What would it take to improve the security situation of aid workers, according to interviewees?

### *Sphere 1: Macro environment*

- Dismantling the Taliban – mostly in Pakistan.
- Developing a real counter-insurgency policy based on the tribal specificities of southern and eastern districts.
- Institutional strengthening (police/ANP, army/ANA/Ministry of Defence, Intelligence/Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Justice).
- Political and governance strengthening (possible inclusion of insurgent elements within the government and reconciliation strategies).
- Accept a level of risk to bring development (and governance) in order to improve security; improving security to enable a stronger developmental presence.

### *Spheres 2 and 3: Community/interveners*

- The aid community needs to be better at understanding community perceptions and addressing them in a transparent manner, and with an eye to rendering their operations more effective.
- Better communication and advocacy are needed on the part of aid actors on their work and its results, both with the government and with the general population.
- Need to localise, i.e. operate with more Afghan staff and Afghan actors.
- In ‘unsafe areas’, find innovative approaches to work with tribal elders and other local leaders and adapt programming to local circumstances to demonstrate results, meet expectations and reduce the appeal of the insurgents’ message.
- Need for greater reflection on appropriateness and cost of increased protection measures on the part of interveners.

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