A BRITISH AGENCIES AFGHANISTAN GROUP

BRIEFING PAPER ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF

JOINT REGIONAL TEAMS IN AFGHANISTAN

Barbara J. Stapleton
January 2003
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper was researched in Afghanistan in November - December 2002 when information on the development of Joint Regional Teams was being made public. In addition to thanking the member agencies of the British Agencies Afghanistan Group and my colleagues at BAAG, who made the visit possible, the author would like to take the opportunity to thank the agencies who generously facilitated her visit, namely CARE Afghanistan in Kabul, Tearfund in Kandahar and Christian Aid in Herat.

Many individuals made time available in their busy schedules at short-notice to accommodate the research entailed in the production of this paper. As some of this information is sensitive I have left many sources un-named. These include members of the military in the International Security Assistance Force and the Coalition Forces, the diplomatic community, donors, representatives from UNAMA and other UN agencies, as well as the international and local staff of NGOs. All provided insights into the Afghan aid scene and responses to the JRT development as it was happening.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AACA</th>
<th>Afghan Assistance Co-ordination Authority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AIMS</td>
<td>Afghanistan Information Management Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AREU</td>
<td>Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATA</td>
<td>Afghan Transitional Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CATs</td>
<td>Civil Affairs Teams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CF</td>
<td>Coalition Forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMCC</td>
<td>Civil-Military Co-ordination Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMOC</td>
<td>Civil-Military Operations Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DDR</td>
<td>Demilitarisation, Demobilisation and Reintegration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECHO</td>
<td>European Commission Humanitarian Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DFID</td>
<td>Department for International Development (United Kingdom)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAC</td>
<td>Humanitarian Assistance Centre (US)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAWG</td>
<td>Humanitarian Assistance Working Group (US)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICRC</td>
<td>International Committee of the Red Cross</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IGO</td>
<td>International Government Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISAF</td>
<td>International Security Assistance Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JRT</td>
<td>Joint Regional Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OHDACA</td>
<td>Overseas Humanitarian Disaster Assistance And Civic Aid (US)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QIPs</td>
<td>Quick Impact Projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNAMA</td>
<td>United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USAID</td>
<td>US Agency for International Development</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

This briefing paper was written following a three week field trip to Afghanistan which was prompted by the US-led Coalition Forces’ plans to develop Joint Regional Teams (JRTs) to be deployed in eight locations beyond Kabul by Spring 2003. JRTs are planned to act as a mechanism to enable the central government to extend its authority beyond Kabul and to support the reconstruction process. This will entail a significant extension of the Coalition civil affairs presence throughout Afghanistan. The plan may be subject to modifications following the deployment of the initial pilot JRTs, the first of which was sent to Gardez in late December. The success of the pilots will determine whether further deployment of Joint Regional Teams takes place. The response of the central government, UN agencies, and donors as well as international and local NGOs, may also influence the development of JRTs. For these reasons, this paper does not constitute a final position on JRTs by the British Agencies Afghanistan Group (BAAG), since that is still a work in progress.

The international military’s involvement in civil affairs has been present from the outset in Afghanistan. However, the JRT development, as currently described, goes beyond previous civil-military practice there which, to date, has focused on Quick Impact Projects (QIPs). JRTs, in that they are planned to extend civil-military involvement in support of the international assistance effort towards the reconstruction of Afghanistan, will inevitably bring military forces into greater contact with other assistance actors. This is problematic for NGOs for a number of reasons, not least of which is the legal status of the Coalition Forces under whose auspices JRTs will be conducted, in that the Coalition continues actively to prosecute a war against terrorism in Afghanistan.

The possibility that the US military are intending to co-ordinate reconstruction in Afghanistan continues to be referred to in some US military and US government quarters. This would also be highly problematic both for NGOs and for the UN as under the Bonn Agreement the UN is clearly mandated to co-ordinate assistance to Afghanistan at both local and international levels.

Background

This paper sets these recent developments in Afghanistan against the emergence of the “new humanitarianism” which developed in the wake of the Cold War. As lethal “low intensity conflicts” broke out around the world and in the aftermath of the genocide in Rwanda, the Great Lakes crisis that followed and the civil war in the Former Yugoslavia, a new view of humanitarianism and how it should be used developed during the 1990s. This trend away from humanitarianism as a politically neutral “good” towards the merging of development and security was driven by the seemingly intractable nature of these conflicts and the international community’s failure “to respond urgently with prompt and decisive action to humanitarian crises entwined with armed conflict” (Boutros Boutros-Ghali, 1994)
Northern governments and the UN responded by moving more assertively into "humanitarian" action, often in the form of direct intervention. This has resulted in the increasing involvement of the military in various crises alongside the traditional assistance community. The resulting profusion of civil-military guidelines reflects attempts to adjust to the involvement of other actors in "humanitarian space". Guidelines are also an effort to prevent the further muddying of lines between the aid and military sectors, as the merging of divisions between these previously distinct sectors is altering perceptions of the humanitarian community amongst the recipients of aid. In the continuing debate over intervention, some humanitarian NGOs are more favourably disposed towards such policies than others. However, most NGOs are alarmed by the increasing politicisation of aid. This alarm is deepening as humanitarian space shrinks further and as the core principles of humanitarianism: independence, impartiality and neutrality, which have allowed humanitarian NGOs to operate across divides, is eroded. In Afghanistan the merging of development and security is at the heart of policies being engendered in support of the political project underway there and this is epitomised by the new JRT plan.

The reasons given by the military for this initiative include the insecurity and instability which brought the Coalition Forces into Afghanistan in the first place. Based on an assessment that they have brought organised terrorist activity under control, the Coalition Forces now believe they are at the point where they can address wider security considerations, including -
- the relationship between regional leaders
- the relationship between regional leaders and the centre
- crime
But while JRTs are tasked with delivering increased security regionally in the short-term, it is planned that this task will be achieved primarily through the use of negotiation. The military resources accompanying JRTs are limited to those providing force protection for the JRTs.

Structure of JRTs presented by the Coalition, Kabul, November 2002

The concept of JRTs was introduced on 21 November as consisting of:
- Mobile civil affairs teams (CATs). These pre-exist JRTs and were the primary mechanism for conducting QIPs
- Civil Military Operations Centres (CMOCs) to provide a static HQ for the mobile CATs and to gather and disseminate information relating to reconstruction needs
- Security forces provided by the Coalition

The JRTs will consist of fifty to one hundred people. The CATs will include US army reservists of varying skills: economists, doctors, lawyers, engineers, telecommunications experts and civil aviation professionals.

The functions of JRTs include the following:
- The co-ordination of the reconstruction process (this specific function was not referred to at the second briefing on JRTs that took place on 30 November)
- Identification of reconstruction projects
- Conducting village assessments
• Liasoning with regional commanders

A second function of JRTs is to facilitate co-ordination between those engaged in the provision of assistance including:
• National and international NGOs
• The Afghan Transitional Authority
• The military, i.e. Afghan and Coalition Forces
The Civil-Military Co-ordination Centre (CMCC) in Kabul will support the JRT process and, along with the regional CMOCs, will share information with all interested parties.

At the formal presentations of JRTs, it was suggested that their implementation would "galvanise" the Afghan situation by enabling the central government to extend its authority beyond Kabul. In that JRTs are being planned to allow the government to deliver tangible benefits from the Bonn process to the population at large - via jobs, road building and other major reconstruction projects - it is hoped that wider legitimacy will be conferred on the ATA as a result. The military's JRT plan is to be run alongside renewed attempts to get the reform process, as a whole, meaningfully underway in the eighteen months left until the elections scheduled for June 2004 in accordance with the Bonn process. This includes building up the Afghan National Army into a credible, defactionalised force, moving forward on the Demilitarisation: Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) process and building up local and central government capacity. The success of the reform process will be critical to the newly elected government's ability to rule the country. Thus, it can be argued that fears that time is running out for the nation-building project have driven the development of JRTs.

Concerns

All actors in Afghanistan, including NGOs, are concerned to ensure the future stability of the country and are doing what they can to support the Afghan Transitional Authority (ATA). However, NGOs, along with many other actors on the Afghan scene, are concerned that the international community's failure effectively to address the "security gap" in Afghanistan has, to date, obstructed and undermined the international assistance effort as a whole and security sector reform in particular. Actual threats to security and perceptions of security threats have held back the provision of aid and reconstruction from parts of the country. Furthermore, the international community's decision not to expand the International Security Assistance Force beyond Kabul has undermined the Afghan peoples' confidence in the future stability of Afghanistan.

JRTs have been summed up as an attempt to extend the "ISAF effect" (i.e., the establishment of stability) in lieu of extending ISAF itself. If this is the case, many in the assistance community view JRTs as a second-best option to the extension of ISAF's UN peacekeeping mandate. Though uncertainty continues to surround JRTs, official information, so far, on their structure and purpose brings into question their viability as a mechanism with which to address the complex security situation in Afghanistan. Yet if the international community continues to fail to grasp the nettle of "the security gap" in Afghanistan, security sector reform will continue to founder.
The question of how the Afghan people will respond to JRTs is critical. Will they be persuaded of the effectiveness of addressing the fundamental issue of security in this way? Or will they conclude that JRTs are merely a mechanism for information gathering in the interests of a wider War against Terrorism? The latter option is more than likely, given that JRTs will not possess the military resources to change facts on the ground, and will rely on "negotiating" with regional powerholders, many of whom have been recipients of Coalition resources in the interests of that wider war.

How JRTs will interact with, and work alongside, the central government, UNAMA, UN agencies, the ICRC and NGOs (both local and international) remains uncertain and NGOs will be examining the responses to JRTs from these quarters. NGOs with local partners are already warning that their Afghan partner agencies are voicing alarm at the prospect of JRTs operating in their areas. This is due to local NGOs' fears that association with the Coalition may endanger their security in the event of the Bonn process collapsing.

NGOs are in the process of developing their positions in response to JRTs and these will be modified as their exact shape and methods of implementation become clearer. But the fact that JRTs are governed by political considerations and therefore subject to short-termism will be central to NGOs' critiques of this plan. Unlike the Coalition, NGOs are not subject to these constraints and are in Afghanistan for the long haul - as their continued presence in Afghanistan testifies. The success of NGOs in maintaining an active presence through the Soviet, Mujahideen and Taliban periods cannot be de-linked from the core humanitarian principles they seek to uphold: independence, impartiality and neutrality. If these perceptions are undermined and the political project underway in Afghanistan fails, the neutral status of NGOs will have been compromised. This could have serious implications for the operational capacity of NGOs in a highly uncertain future, both in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

**Recommendations**

1. It remains the preferred option that the UN mandated International Security Assistance Force should be extended beyond Kabul. In the event of continuing failure to do so, an effective mechanism needs to be found, that is supported by the international community, to address the root causes of insecurity in order to facilitate the work of the central government, the UN, NGOs and their local partners, in the provision of aid and development to Afghanistan. JRTs as currently described are not an appropriate mechanism for creating a secure environment throughout Afghanistan or for enhancing the performance of the assistance community.

2. The military must not erode humanitarian space further by engaging in assistance work except in such rare and extreme circumstances as obtained, for example, in Iraqi Kurdistan in 1991, when the logistical capacities of NGOs were overwhelmed by circumstances on the ground and levels of insecurity prevented the UN and NGOs from accessing the civilian population in need. This is not the case in Afghanistan at present. The military need to
consult more widely and in more depth on the implications of any involvement in the selection and implementation of projects, which, given the military's lack of experience in participatory, community-led development may well be flawed.
INTRODUCTION

The period of "classical humanitarianism", in which aid was viewed both as a universal right and as a politically neutral "good" which dominated in the 1980s, gave way to what has become known as the "new humanitarianism" during the course of the 1990s. The ending of the Cold War had brought short-lived hope for a new world order which foundered on the eruptions of seemingly intractable conflicts around the world. A new view of humanitarianism and how it should be used emerged in the aftermath of the genocide in Rwanda, the Great Lakes crisis that followed and the civil war in the Former Yugoslavia -

"Humanitarian assistance, while still regarded as necessary, was increasingly seen as a substitute for the concerted political action that was the real requirement." (Higgins R, The New United Nations and the Former Yugoslavia, International Affairs, 1993)

The new humanitarianism reflects the merging of development and security. This process has been driven by the nature of contemporary wars in which people, army and governments have merged into a more amorphous complexity. (Duffield, M. Global Governance And The New Wars, Zed Books, 2001) The merging of divisions between these previously more distinct categories has given rise to often unfathomable, shifting affiliations of interests both internal and external. This in turn, has rendered threats to those intervening more unpredictable, making one nostalgic, from a security perspective, for the apparent clarities of the Cold War. A merging of distinctions between sectors is also apparent in the muddying of the lines between the aid and military sectors which may be being taken to a new threshold in Afghanistan.

In Afghanistan, the merging of development and security is at the heart of policies currently being engendered in support of the political project underway there, following the collapse of the Taliban. It is hoped that the internationally recognised central government will bring peace and stability to the country. All actors in Afghanistan, including NGOs, are concerned to ensure the future stability of Afghanistan and are doing what they can to support the Afghan Transitional Authority (ATA). What is remarkable, however, is that despite sustained lobbying on the part of the Afghan government at its highest levels and by members of the UN, many humanitarian NGOs, leading human rights organisations, experts and academics, the most fundamental issue in
Afghanistan with regard to the effectiveness of the international assistance effort - the euphemistically termed "security gap" - remains effectively unaddressed by the UN Security Council.

The failure of the international community to demonstrate the requisite degree of political will in this critical regard has undermined efforts to demobilise and rehabilitate militias, decommission weapons, particularly tanks and heavy artillery, and to build up a faction free Afghan National Army - a project which informed opinion claims remains some "years away". Actual threats to security and perceptions of security threats have held back the provision of aid and reconstruction from parts of the country. And, perhaps most worryingly, the international community's decision not to expand the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) beyond Kabul has undermined the Afghan peoples' confidence in the future stability of Afghanistan. No-one can predict how things will turn out in Afghanistan, but, for the required socio-political changes to occur that will lead to the development of long-term stability, the Afghan people, who have suffered years of traumatic political change, war and now a devastating drought, must be able to believe in the coherence and effectiveness of the processes which are being established, officially at least, on their behalf.

Fears that time is running out for the nation-building project in Afghanistan, with elections due by June 2004 at the latest, has driven the development of the civil-military initiative by the US-led Coalition Forces which is the subject of this paper. The Joint Regional Team plan (JRTs) was formally presented in Kabul on two occasions in November 2002. At these presentations, various outcomes were associated with the implementation of JRTs. JRTs would be the mechanism whereby, it was hoped that the Afghan situation would be "galvanised" as JRTs would enable the central government to extend its authority beyond Kabul. Via components included in JRTs, regional leaders and commanders were to be encouraged to buy in to the process. Wider legitimacy would be conferred on the central government in the eyes of Afghans as JRTs would assist the Afghan Transitional Authority to deliver tangible benefits from the Bonn Agreement.

The JRT plan is to be run alongside renewed attempts to get the wider reform process as a whole underway. Until now, the reform process has been facing enormous constraints. If the JRTs and attempts to kick-start the reform process as a whole, (which includes demilitarisation, demobilisation and reintegration, the creation of a national army of 70,000 troops, reform of the police, criminal justice
and penal systems as well as the building up of local and central government capacity), are successful, the newly elected government in 2004 should be in a position to govern nationally. There is a time-frame of 18 months leading to the elections, in which these various balls are to be set rolling in meaningful directions.

JRTs are being presented as a means of bringing greater security to the regions. However, it is stressed by the military that only limited military resources are on offer with regard to the creation of JRTs. Instead of including a credible military force with which to confront existing power relations on the ground, the plan is to use negotiation as the primary mechanism to persuade local power-holders to come inside the tent. This aspect of JRTs is unlikely to be altered. It would, therefore, be reasonable to assume that any gains in security established via JRTs are likely to be short-term.

JRTs are still at the conceptual phase and discussions on how JRTs should be modified are currently underway in a number of international fora at a senior level. The first of several pilot JRTs planned was sent to Gardez in the last two weeks of December and experiences gained via these pilots will be used to modify plans further. At the same time, agencies are increasingly questioning whether JRTs will result in a significant extension of the military’s intrusion into “humanitarian space” throughout the country and whether this development may constitute a turning point in the already highly politicised context surrounding aid and reconstruction in post-Taliban Afghanistan.

The JRTs will consist of up to one hundred people, to include a component of US military reservists under the aegis and protection of the Coalition Forces (CF). It is proposed that, following the deployment of the pilot JRTs, they will be "inter-agency and multinational" in composition. The CF remain on a war footing in Afghanistan in contrast to the multinational International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), limited to Kabul, which operates under a UN mandate and is a peace-keeping force. The JRTs are, in short, being shaped by the constraints of limited available means by which it is hoped that the "ISAF effect" i.e. stability, will be extended throughout Afghanistan in lieu of extending ISAF itself.

The response to JRTs is varied. Whereas the UN and some donors appear to be accommodating this development, some experts argue that the development of JRTs will either be looked back on as a bump in the gradual establishment of peace and stability throughout the country, or as marking the beginning of the end for the ambitious political project formalised by the Bonn Agreement which is supported by the
international community. The latter view is predicated on fears that the establishment of JRTs could provide radical elements in Afghanistan with the grounds to argue that the US is an occupying force. JRTs may then ultimately undermine the ATA's legitimacy, rather than extend it, by highlighting the central government's dependence on the presence of the US-led coalition forces.

The political forces underlying the development of JRTs, and the proposed timing of their deployment, are the subject of considerable debate in Afghanistan and beyond. However, uncertainty regarding the eventual scope of JRTs and questions on how JRTs will be co-ordinated with other actors in the assistance community, is obstructing agencies' abilities to formulate a coherent response to them. What is clear is that NGOs, both international and local, have to assert the humanitarian agenda and its core principles while keeping their critical faculties well honed, as, despite modifications, present plans are that JRTs will be established in eight regional locations by April 2003. The responses of the central government, the UN, other agencies, local and international, and, not least, of the Afghan people themselves, to the implementation of JRTs will be at the forefront of considerations when agencies are formulating their responses to this development.

**BACKGROUND**

The development of civil-military guidelines by humanitarian agencies and other actors has accompanied the development of a more robust interventionism by the Security Council and northern governments following the ending of the Cold War. Against the background of developments in the formulation of JRTs over the last three months, it is not surprising that, on arrival in Kabul in mid-November, I was informed that "everyone", including DfID and the UN, was in the process of re-writing existing civil-military guidelines.

This "more muscular" interventionism which is reflected in the development of "new humanitarianism" has led to numerous conferences on "the linking debate" between security and development. At a recent conference on this subject, (NGOs & The Military In Complex Emergencies, Wilton Park, April 2001), Mike Aaronson of Save the Children UK listed three phenomena inherent to the new humanitarianism in his paper:

- **i. The increased demand for 'coherence' in response to emergencies, implying 'integration' of international response to crises.**

- **ii. Increasing donor involvement in humanitarian intervention operationally, for specific
emergencies, as well as in terms of influencing decision-making of humanitarian agencies.

iii. An increased and more frequent military presence in what are termed ‘humanitarian activities,’ and lack of consistency in that involvement.

All these characteristics are apparent in the evolution of JRTs in Afghanistan.

Before turning to the specifics of JRTs, it may be useful to remind ourselves of some of the different forms of military intervention - all with the stated intent of protecting civilians from human rights abuses - which have occurred since the earlier turning point of the UN Security Council Resolution 668 in 1991. This UN Resolution was historic in that international concern for a sovereign state’s treatment of its people, in this case the Iraqi Kurds in the north and the Shia Arab population in the south of Iraq, overrode the hitherto sacrosanct principle of state sovereignty consistently upheld by UN member states.

Military interventions since the subsequent establishment of ‘safe havens’ in Iraq have ranged from those undertaken with UN Security Council approval, as in the aforementioned case of Iraq in 1991 and in Somalia in 1992, and without UN Security Council approval, as in the NATO intervention in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Kosovo in 1999. Foreign military interventions have occurred with the consent of the government concerned, as in the case of Indonesia regarding the Australian-led intervention in East Timor in 1999 and without consent, as in the case of the overthrow of the Taliban in Afghanistan 2001.

The signal failure of the international community to intervene in the genocide in Rwanda has proved to be axiomatic in changing perceptions regarding humanitarianism. This has been marked by the trend away from a perceived “neutral” humanitarianism to the increasingly politicised “new humanitarianism” which sees “humanitarian assistance as a means to political and security-oriented ends, rather than an urgent and inalienable right in itself”. (Aaronson, M. The New Realities - The NGO Perspective, Wilton Park, 2001) For human rights and humanitarian NGOs, intervention has been a highly controversial subject and there has been a divided response. Following the genocide in Rwanda however “few NGOs excluded [intervention] in principle.” (Human Rights Crises - NGO Responses to Military Interventions, International Council on Human Rights Policy, 2002).
Divisions are also apparent within NGOs responses to the increasing dominance of aspects of the new humanitarianism in relation to aid and development demonstrated by governments, the UN and other actors. As Stockton points out, "there are many development organisations that consider the political objectives of peace-building to be a perfectly legitimate purpose for aid, even though some may be reluctant to establish an explicitly partisan objective as the primary goal of their work." However, it bears repeating that JRTs, which, at least initially, will have their own force protection provided by US special forces, will be conducted under the aegis of a warring party, rendering active partnerships with local and international NGOs highly problematic. In other words, "the usual benign justifications of intervention – the spreading of democracy, the creation of markets, the building of stable institutions – are now being moulded to coexist with a quite different form of intervention: that of military action against terror." (John Lloyd, Financial Times, 27 December)

**THE JOINT REGIONAL TEAM PLAN - INITIAL INDICATIONS**

The first public briefing on Joint Regional Teams (JRTs) was given at the US embassy in Kabul on 21 November. This meeting was attended by invited members of the diplomatic community, donors, representatives from UN agencies and NGOs. For most of those attending, it was the first detailed presentation of the concept and context to JRTs.

A further presentation of the plan was given on 30 November at the Emergency Task Force (ETF) meeting held at the UNDP conference room in Kabul. This meeting was very well attended with many NGO representatives present, as well as members of the US and UK embassies, the UN, ICRC, and donors. The military representatives from ISAF and the CF who attended were in uniform. An outline of this second presentation of JRTs follows a few comments on the UN’s security briefing which preceded it.

This security briefing, given by Mr. Joe Gordon, the UN’s Field Security Co-ordination Officer in Kabul, contrasts with the subsequent briefing on JRTs given by the military, where any mention of existing power relations in Afghanistan was confined to vague generalities and the potential for the Taliban/Al Qaeda to act as a renewed threat was not referred to. Over the last 2 - 3 months, credible reports "substantiated from both sides of the border" allege that the Taliban were infiltrating across the entire southern region from Kandahar to Jalalabad, "everywhere." These reports can be interpreted as:

a). the Taliban have observed the continuing survival of small units of their own forces in the north, west and centre and believe its safe to return and/or
b). Al Qaeda remains active, with or without Osama bin Laden, and, following on from Mombasa, there may be a new campaign or attack afoot. People are being put into place during the winter months to start an attack in the Spring, or an attack/campaign could be triggered by events in Iraq.

Suspicion that things are going wrong and the potential for a terrorist campaign in Afghanistan are also fuelled by reports that Hizb-e-Islami and Al Qaeda may work together towards their common goal i.e., to get foreign forces and any Western presence out of Afghanistan and to destabilise the internationally recognised central government. If the target is the international community in Afghanistan, then the UN and NGOs provide a plethora of soft targets.

**COLONEL PURDEY’S BRIEFING 30/11**

Colonel Purdey is the British military assistant working with General McNeill under CJTF 180 in Bagram on JRTs. In his earlier briefing at the US embassy on 21 November, the concept of Joint Regional Teams was introduced as consisting of:

- mobile Civil Affairs Teams (CATs) note: these predate JRTs
- Civil Military Operation Centres (CMOCs) to provide a static HQ for the mobile CATs
- security forces provided by the CF

The functions of JRTs were then listed as including:

- the co-ordination of the reconstruction process
- identification of reconstruction projects
- conducting village assessments
- liaising with regional commanders

It was also announced at the earlier briefing that Afghanistan had now entered “Phase IV” i.e., the reconstruction phase. When questioned, Phases I and II were identified as referring to the period of removing the Taliban and Al Qaeda from power and Phase III referred to the stabilisation of the country.

At this second public briefing on JRTs by Colonel Purdey and Colonel Gudridge (see below) there was no mention of “Phase IV”, though Colonel Gudridge began by stating that “we believe the emergency is over and we are now in the reconstruction phase.”

Colonel Purdey began by stating that, over the past year, the military had been
examining options for the establishment of a secure environment "in its widest sense". JRTs are the result, "though they remain a concept."

Colonel Purdey then presented the military's thinking on JRTs so far:

- The context to JRTs are the causes of insecurity and instability which brought the Coalition Forces into Afghanistan in the first place. As the CF had got to the point where they had brought organised terrorist activity under control they believe they are now at the point whereby they can address wider security considerations, for example:
  - the relationship between regional leaders
  - the relationship between regional leaders and the centre
  - crime

- outcomes

The engagement of JRTs throughout the country is planned so as to increase the Afghan Transitional Authority's coherent direction by the elections of June 2004 "providing the elected government with the necessary structures enabling it to impose its authority country-wide".

Another major consideration underlying the development of JRTs is the extent of the economic devastation caused by 23 years of war.

There is a need to engage with:
  - regional leaders
  - militia forces
  - support the DDR process under UNAMA
  - support the ATA to extend its influence and authority

JRTs are the chosen mechanism for addressing these issues, they will:
  - act as eyes and ears regarding information collection which must be shared
  - monitor and assess the local and regional situation
  - assist in creating a secure environment through negotiation (my italics) to defuse local and inter-regional tensions
  - assist, as required, with the regional development of the ATA and local Afghan law enforcement authorities
  - facilitate strengthening and extending the central government's authority
  - remove instability by forming/ facilitating co-ordinating bodies (to include for example, leaders of factions) and will use influence rather than military force (my italics) to sort out problems.
A second function of JRTs will be to facilitate cooperation between and within:
- national and international NGOs
- the ATA
- the military, that is, Afghan and Coalition Forces. The CF want “a dialogue that talks to mutual sectors’ strengths”.

- JRTs will employ “reach-back” capabilities in their region via:
  - the CF’s Civil-Military Co-ordination Centre (CMCC) based in Kabul
  - the Afghan Transitional Authority (ATA)
and will pull assistance out to regions when appropriate e.g. Gardez - the site to be targeted by the first JRT which is considered insecure.

- **composition** of JRTs in due course will be:
  - multi-national and inter-agency in composition
  - each team will be tailored with the necessary capabilities to perform its mission in each unique region, e.g., in some regions security will be the major challenge; in others there will be different challenges.

- **Typical capabilities/functions** of JRTs to include:
  - HQ section
  - Security Sector Section
  - Civil-Military Operations Section
  - Linguists

- **Locations**
  - Gardez
  - Jalalabad
  - Kandahar
  - Khost
  - Herat
  - Bamiyan
  - Mazar
  - Kabul
At the first briefing on JRTs, Kunduz and Deh Raud (where the wedding party was bombed) were also mentioned as possible locations.

- **Timeline**
Provisional JRTs based on the resources the CF has in-country already are planned for December and January. [It is noteworthy that the deployment of the first JRT in Gardez was to have been prefaced by a field visit to the region by senior UNAMA staff and 6 donors on 3 December. This was cancelled when news came in on the evening of 2 December that 2 grenades had been thrown in to the UNAMA compound in Gardez.]

The second JRT, probably to Jalalabad, is planned for mid-January and proper multinational teams are planned for March-April 2003 in other sites.

- The role of the provisional JRTs is:
  - to provide lessons learned
  - to identify what works
  - to validate the concept
  - to allow a phased implementation which co-ordinates with and does not trample on others’ efforts.

Colonel Purdey concluded his presentation by re-iterating that the JRT process was to be conducted "in a way that builds the ATA’s legitimacy and authority as we move towards the elections."

Nicholas Stockton’s paper on Strategic Co-ordination in Afghanistan was published (AREU, August, 2002) just before the first reports of US military-led plans to extend operations into humanitarian space began to filter out of Afghanistan. In section 6.3 of his paper headed: ‘Transition from de jure to de facto government co-ordination’ he makes the following point,

"The migration of UN/NGO/donor authority to de facto AIA/ATA authority is a highly complex political process. Yet, despite the fact that this process is at the very heart of what the UN, donors and NGOs will do to deliver a key element in the strategy of lending legitimacy to the peace process, there appears to be no plan or process of negotiation to manage and monitor this."

JRTs would appear to provide the missing plan yet denial that the military is seeking a co-ordinating role was repeatedly stated in all the private and public meetings the author of this paper attended with the military. Reportedly, however, other US military personnel and members of the US government are still referring to the possibility of the military playing a co-ordinating role with regard to the reconstruction of Afghanistan.
Colonel Gudridge, the US military representative then summarised the role of the Civil-Military Co-ordination Centre (CMCC), which he belongs to, vis a vis JRTs.

The CMCC is based in Kabul and will include a ministerial team tasked with coordinating with the thirty-two ATA ministries now in existence, with IGOs and with NGOs. A functional approach is to be guided by engaging with the ministries via the Immediate and Transitional Assistance Programme for the Afghan People (ITAP) identified ten NGO project areas.

Working with the ATA’s National Development Framework and National Development Budget “ownership of the reconstruction process” will be grouped around 3 pillars:

- Pillar I
  Humanitarian Aid and Human Rights, (refugee return, education etc)
- Pillar II
  Physical reconstruction and Natural Resources
- Pillar III
  Trade, Governance and Security (to include the rule of law)

The JRTs will support these 3 Pillars. The JRTs will include US army reservists with the following skills: economists, doctors, lawyers, engineers, telecommunications experts and civil aviation professionals. The plan, according to Colonel Gudridge, “is to partner them with NGOs”. (It is possible that Col. Gudridge’s references to NGOs throughout his presentation also included IGOs)

The role of the Civil Military Co-ordination Centre will be to:
- share information with all interested parties
- participate in consultative groups established in each area
- develop an understanding of the capacities of the ATA’s ministries and their associated supporting partners i.e. NGOs
- assess progress of reconstruction efforts towards the accomplishment of the ATA’s priorities
- facilitate the development of projects to meet identified reconstruction programme shortfalls
FURTHER INFORMATION ON JRTs

The following observations and claims regarding JRTs are derived from meetings with members of the military during my visits to Kandahar and Kabul and are unsourced.

Civil Affairs Teams, which predate JRTs and have been utilised since the inception of the international intervention in Afghanistan, have to date focused on Quick Impact Projects (QIPs). Ninety per cent of these QIPs in the southern regions have been focused on rebuilding existing school buildings and drilling deep-water wells for drinking water (as opposed to irrigation). The remaining ten per cent of projects have been directed at winterisation - for example, supplying wool to a factory for the production of blankets.

To date, an estimated eighty per cent of QIPs have been located at the direction of the governor of Kandahar. Further criteria governing QIPs include the need for public benefit to outweigh private benefit and that only pre-existing facilities are rebuilt. Force protection to CATs has been provided by an Afghan local militia under the command of the governor. USAID and UNICEF are involved with sustaining the provision of educational resources for the rebuilt schools.

Any relationship between the CATs and the CF’s military mission is kept to a minimum. No one from intelligence is allowed to accompany the CATs and civil-affairs reservists are trained not to ask questions that could be construed as relating to intelligence. CATs have sought to distinguish themselves from Special Forces by travelling in civilian vehicles and by wearing uniform plus baseball hats, etc. The civil-military reservists in the CATs believe that local Afghans make a distinction between CATs and Coalition Forces. [It is noteworthy on this point, that according to consistent reports from Christian Aid’s local partner organisations, (which number over twenty Afghan NGOs), rural Afghans do not even distinguish between international aid agency staff and the military.]

CATs have sought to collaborate with UN agencies where possible. UNHCR, for example, provided information to the CATs on the siting of wells. CATs have started to develop relationships with other actors and have a better relationship privately with NGOs than in public. Significantly however, the establishment of direct links with local NGOs has been problematic as “they are more hesitant about being directly involved in CAT projects”. [This is due to Afghans’ fears that the Bonn process may not deliver stability in the long-term and that, in an unpredictable future, direct engagement with the international military could make them targets.]
Funding for the increase in costs relating to civil-military affairs as a consequence of the creation of JRTs would come from the new funding for Afghanistan recently voted through by the US Congress and Senate, which USAID will dispense, and from the Overseas Humanitarian Disaster Assistance and Civic Aid (OHDACA) fund. It is provisionally planned that assessment, nomination and submission of projects would be conducted by JRTs linked to the fixed point of the regionally established CMOCs and then, after approval by OHDACA, handed over to IGOs and NGOs for implementation. [No time scale was given for this process.]

The greater number of smaller civil-military affairs units in JRTs - "will include a UN contingency and will have a greater UN feel." [At time of writing it remains unclear in what ways the UN will interact with JRTs and the Secretary General's Special Representative, Ambassador Brahimi, is yet to give a clear indication on how the UN will function alongside JRTs.]

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

The following questions were put to informed military sources during my visit to Afghanistan on the background to and implementation of JRTs. The edited replies provide depth to the officially presented outline of the JRT plan during November 2002. It should be noted that these comments could be overridden by other decisions or dropped altogether as JRTs are still at the experimental phase.

1. Why is this plan being implemented now?

"No specific reason - winter may stall effects. General McNeil is discussing moving things forward with President Karzai. The stabilising effect of the total humanitarian effort is not occurring in a level way across the country. There is stability in Herat, perhaps for the wrong reasons but its stable. In the East (Paktia, Paktika, Khost) stability is undermined by 'the bad guys' JRTs will serve as a magnet to bring more humanitarian assistance, reconstruction and stability to these locations.

Unlike ISAF, the CF have a mandate to deal with inter-regional conflicts. The future success of the Afghan National Army (ANA) is critical.

Provincial authorities will only buy in to the centre if Kabul can confer benefits. So far, that process is not obvious. JRTs will facilitate delivery and can, therefore, tie the whole thing together."
2. Who will be the key informants in the provinces?

- local authorities
- UNAMA
- representatives of other organisations.

There is a desire to correct the previous criticism levelled at CATs by NGOs in the past.

- Projects identified by CATs will be funded by Congressional funds under USAID’s control using Afghan contractors and labour where possible.
- Hasty village assessments on the Bosnian model will be used.
- The intention is to work closely with AIMS and provide AIMS with more depth.
- Information gathered may also be fed into the central government’s census programme.

Knowledge gathered by mobile CATs will be collected, shared and distributed via CMOCs in each site and available to IGOs, NGOs and other actors.

The establishment of CMOCs pre-dates the planning of JRTs and they were going to be set up in any event, not to be co-located with regional UNAMA offices but in close geographical proximity. UNAMA is viewed as a principal partner of CMOCs.

The aim is to act as the glue holding IGO, NGO and other activities together and to reinforce ongoing efforts. It is envisaged that projects will be handed over as quickly as possible to be sustained by IGOs and NGOs."

3. How will the security of these civil-military teams be provided?

"Initially by Special Forces ‘quick reaction teams’ though the aim is to get multinational participation with significant coalition contribution as soon as possible. The latter may be led by one nation e.g. Britain, with a minimal contribution from other countries or there may be a simple mix of various national forces. The provisional JRTs will be primarily American in make up."

4. What is the relationship between JRTs and the UN given the fact that the UN is mandated to facilitate and coordinate assistance to Afghanistan?

"JRTs will act as a tool for UNAMA which can share the information collected by JRTs with their implementing partners. In offering an increase in capacity, as well as provision
of support and information, JRTs will reinforce UNAMA’s activities.”

4a. What is the relationship between JRTs and the Afghan Transitional Authority?

“This relationship will be guided by the National Development Framework (NDF). The aim is not to work at cross-purposes with the ATA but to reinforce their goals and priorities. The military do not intend to lead activities but expect to be a parallel activity with a variety of participants.”

4b. What is the relationship between JRTs and the local authorities?

“Consultative, objections to JRTs will be “situational dependent” and dialogue will be the key to resolving them. Success will depend on the ATA and the provincial leaders will have to develop an accommodation of their interests. There is nothing to suggest that the US will leave after 4-5 years. A well-informed General stated in the US recently that the US will be in Afghanistan for at least as long as in the Balkans.”

4c. How is the relationship between JRTs and the international NGOs viewed by the military, given the latter’s deepening concern regarding aspects of these plans?

“The US is wide open to discuss this plan and have depended on UNAMA and the Afghan Assistance Co-ordinating Authority (AACA) for this. The latter is not in a strong position to build capacity within and across the ministries. Though we are open to any organisation, the most appropriate would be:
- United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA)
- AACA
- USAID

The military also understands a distance must be maintained with NGOs: intermediaries may include ECHO. [When this possibility was brought up at a later meeting with the ECHO representative he informed me that this was “the first he had heard of this.”] The military is actively looking for alternative lines of communication and non-military locations for holding meetings as they seek to be co-participants in the process of reconstruction. Criticisms made by NGOs in the early stages of operations in Afghanistan regarding the uniforms issue have been listened to and responded to. [It is worth noting that the author saw one armed US soldier out of uniform in Kabul and NGO staff have recently reported seeing US soldiers out of uniform in Herat]
A public web-based information system will be established that will share information with AIMS. This may not work in the provinces so alternatives will be set up there via the CMOCs.

The aim is not to lead but to provide a complementary effort incorporating reservists from engineering, communications and medical fields to be used on the ground.

Funding and human resource mechanisms will be provided by two civil-military organisations based in Tampa, Florida:
- the Humanitarian Assistance Working Group (HAWG) and
- the Humanitarian Assistance Centre (HAC)
These will serve as brokers and will marry donor contributions with identified needs."

4d. How do you envisage the relationship between JRTs and local NGOs?

This question was posed on the back of referring to the fact that local NGOs in the south had been reluctant to be directly involved with Civil Affairs Teams projects. The officer being interviewed had "no idea" why this should be the case and went on to affirm that with regard to JRTs "the military were open to engagement with anyone who can provide information on the true conditions on the ground. JRTs will be tasked with developing a rapport with local and international NGOs as well as IGOs."

5. What is the scope of intervention envisaged?

"More, because it will be need determined, with an overall goal of establishing stability and security. The British model is to be followed i.e., negotiating and working with local actors [but note JRTs will not, with perhaps one exception, be a British-led operation]. The aim is not to enforce peace but to build peace. The CF lacks the resources for peace enforcement but might have the resources for peace building. This will require the military being flexible, adaptive and better informed."

6. What impact do you envisage this plan will have on NGOs’ security?

"A war against terrorism has not happened before, who do the US sign a peace treaty with to move from the active combat phase to peace building? The US has assisted in the restoration of an elected government within the Afghan context and is actively co-
operating with the ATA in the rebuilding of Afghanistan. This should be a sufficient mandate. Though further possibilities such as a proclamation by Karzai approving JRTs may be under consideration. If NGOs or IGOs think this is insufficient they must decide what they want as we think we are on firm ground.”

7. Could you provide more information on how implementation and sustainment of projects identified by the JRTs will be handed over to “willing” NGOs?

“OHDACA (set up in 2001) has provided a similar mechanism for the US military to that provided by the ODA to the British military in Bosnia. The expected funding of US$ 12million for FY-03 is likely to amount to only $ 6 million. However the HAWG and the HAC will be utilised and USAID has other resources.

USAID is the long-term principal player in the JRT process and the CF has an extremely close working relationship with USAID on this. USAID will also be the proponent for greater co-ordination with NGOs.

The US-led Coalition Forces have, in summary, come to a resolution on JRTs (i.e. they’re going to happen). Lack of consultation on the concept of JRTs with other actors has been due to a lack of resources”.

8. Does the JRT plan risk backfiring by affirming the view that President Karzai is a puppet of the US-led Coalition Forces?

“This is a major difficulty to which the architects of the plan are very sensitive. Possible parallels being drawn with similarities to the central government’s rationale for the Soviet invasion i.e., that the central government had invited them in, are also recognised.”

9. What is the Coalition Force’s perspective on the background to JRTs?

“JRTs were derived from a similar mechanism conceptualised during the period when the extension of ISAF had still not been rejected. The development of JRTs represent a genuine effort to look for ways to extend security across Afghanistan given the rejection of extending ISAF and the fact that negative military actions (i.e. the war against terror) could only take things so far. The time had come to redress the environment in which terrorists can operate and it was believed that long-term stabilisation would be derived from the delivery of tangible benefits. The linkage between the security situation and the need to be seen to be delivering benefits has driven the development of JRTs.”
Though JRTs may be interpreted as a way of reducing forces in Afghanistan for use in Iraq they were not - at any rate not yet - an attempt to do so.

An indication of US frustration with the lack of progress in Afghanistan across the reform sectors is exemplified by the fact that the US recently hosted a meeting with security sector reform leads in an attempt to see where the process was going. German training programmes for police are over a 5-year time period, the US considers this unrealistic given the election timetable of 2004 and is now engaging in 10-week long training courses for the police.

The criminal justice system and penal systems have to work in parallel with police reform for any of these components to be effective and this must be linked to the Constitutional Commission. In the absence of security there had been no real progress on DDR or on the reform process as a whole.

On the question of the Coalition Forces’ mandate for engaging directly in development and reconstruction, the US came into Afghanistan citing Art. 51 of the UN Charter (the right to self defence). The US is convinced that given international recognition of the Afghan Transitional Authority with which the US is co-operating, this confers sufficient authority on US actions regarding the use of JRTs. Other actors interested in contributing to JRTs want a clearer statement, i.e., a formal agreement between the ATA and the Coalition Forces.

In the final analysis JRTs represent the outcome of a simple choice between doing something or doing nothing with the available resources given the fact that nothing else is on offer.”

End of interviews with the military

A footnote to this section – it should be understood that there is a great difference in the physical resourcing of the US military in Afghanistan as opposed to in Bosnia. In Bosnia’s case, the US military could load equipment for major reconstruction projects on to trains or drive equipment into Bosnia at comparatively little cost. Everything in Afghanistan has to be flown in. For this reason the level of physical resources required for engaging in the sorts of reconstruction and logistics assistance the military provided to NGOs in Bosnia, (e.g., bridge building) is not available and will reportedly not be available in the future; instead, “other assets (i.e. JRTs), are what is on offer.”

THE WIDER POLITICAL CONTEXT
Given the timing of the implementation of JRTs, questions are being raised regarding linkage to possible US intervention in Iraq. Though indications were sought on whether the JRT project was linked to US force reduction in Afghanistan during the course of researching this paper there were no indications that this was the case. It is likely that anything that mattered in terms of resources for Iraq was removed from Afghanistan some time ago. A more productive line of enquiry may be found in US domestic politics. The Democrats are highly critical of a second front opening up in the war against terror. Should the situation in Afghanistan - the known locus of Al Qaeda and the Taliban - begin to unravel, at the same time as war on Iraq is underway, the Democrats have a rod to beat the Bush Administration with. This matters, as the US is beginning to gear into election mode for 2004.

**NGO’S RESPONSES TO JRTs**

NGOs are in the process of developing their positions on JRTs but are hampered by the general uncertainty surrounding the actual scope of the plan and the need to assess the ATA’s and UN’s responses, as well as those of their colleagues, (both international and local NGOs), and, not least, Afghan public opinion.

There is likely to be a spectrum of responses, with agencies which traditionally view their independence highly, such as Medecins sans Frontieres, at one end, with other NGOs, who may prove willing to take USAID funding to work alongside JRTs, at the other. Should JRTs develop in ways that arouse hostile responses, this could be damaging to the assistance community who are already portrayed negatively within Afghanistan for domestic political reasons. In addition, the international media tend to view the NGOs as complaining unnecessarily at times and may also favour other views over what may be presented by the media as narrower NGO concerns. The following quote from a recent article on JRTs in the Washington Post (8 December) forms an example:

“A coalition of private aid agencies operating in Afghanistan criticized the expansion of the US military civic action program this past week calling it "risky and premature" and suggesting that uniformed troops taking a major role in providing aid might undermine their efforts to bring about stability and development.

But as word of the Americans’ plans has spread, local officials and residents have welcomed the news, partly because the added foreign troops mean greater security and partly because the projects will provide work for hundreds of people in areas flooded with returning refugees and idle former combatants.”

28
It is essential that the assistance community challenge the implication from any quarter, that their concerns regarding JRTs are, in any way, rooted in a turf war regarding who has the right to dispense aid. The fact that JRTs are governed by political considerations rather than need *per se* is seminal to any agencies’ critique of JRTs.

NGOs, by contrast to the military, are not subject to political short-termism and are in Afghanistan for the long-term, as their continued presence in Afghanistan testifies. The success of agencies in maintaining a presence in Afghanistan throughout the Soviet, Mujahideen and Taliban periods cannot be de-linked from their association with the core humanitarian principles: impartiality and neutrality, which have been successfully established amongst the Afghan people. If these perceptions are undermined and the political project underway in Afghanistan fails, the hitherto neutral status of NGOs will have been compromised. Agencies’ future operational capacity in Afghanistan could, for these reasons, be at stake.

**THE DONOR’S PERSPECTIVE**

Not all donors are entirely happy about the JRT development, though reportedly many are proactively adjusting to them. Some donors have serious reservations about the implications of JRTs however which were summarised along the following lines:

• the potentially fatal damage JRT’s pose as a new watershed in the militarisation of aid to humanitarian assistance in the long-term
• technical concerns in terms of delivery capacity

Given that JRTs may partly absorb the recently increased US funds for Afghanistan, “there are serious concerns regarding the issue of delivery capacity which spans humanitarian aid, government reform and the development of a national military capacity. The new bill for increased funding for Afghanistan has passed Congress and the Senate. But, given the constraints, in terms of existing capacities - how will all that money be spent without making the situation worse? “

Despite the military’s assurances that the US military was merely trying to be a “facilitating agent” between local government and civilian bodies, adding humanitarian assistance where needed and was not trying to “direct anybody else’s efforts”. The head of the European Commission’s Humanitarian Aid Office, John Hayward, recently went on the record with his concerns, stating that while it was not yet clear what the US role would be, “our major concern is that humanitarian assistance is not confused with other things, whether it be political action or military action.
"We are particularly worried about the consequence were this to happen both in Afghanistan and in future areas," Hayward said. (AFP, December 10)

In the same report the EU's special representative for Afghanistan, Francesc Vendrell, said US engagement in civilian aid should not come at the expense of more pressing concerns, particularly the disarming of unruly warlords whom America helped fund during its military operations.

"I very much hope the Americans who had some role in supporting these warlords or self-appointed leaders, that they will also understand the need for them to do something, to bring these people under the authority of the central government."

THE AFGHAN PERSPECTIVE

It is early days to judge the Afghan response to the US change in strategy on reconstruction and security outside Kabul. However, in that it signifies an increase, rather than a reduction of US involvement in the country and will bring in more resources, it is to be expected that JRTs or other possible components of the military's involvement in civil affairs are unlikely to be criticised. Indeed they may be welcomed given the ATA's fears that the situation in Iraq may detract resources from Afghan needs.

In a recent interview on the subject President Karzai said that JRTs "are a good step because I see them as being part of the reconstruction process and to speed up economic activity around the country. The local administration has to be put in place so that the central government authority is everywhere and the struggles with local warlords and commanders is diminished." (Ahmed Rashid, The Nation, Lahore.) In the same article, General Fahim is also reported as supporting the US initiative.

However, some Afghan members of local NGOs have expressed fears to their international partner agencies that JRTs may be manipulated by local political agendas, particularly in the area of needs assessments. In addition, they anticipate that many Afghans will view the central purpose of JRTs as intelligence gathering. Afghans working in NGOs are alarmed however by the effect a wider presence of the international military in reconstruction will have on their security, particularly in the long-term. Unlike their international colleagues they will not be able to leave the country if the situation deteriorates and any involvement in JRTs will, they feel, place them in a very difficult position. International NGOs will take up local concerns in this regard at HQ.
level in their respective countries.

It is worth noting with regard to one hoped-for outcome of JRTs - an increase in the legitimacy of the central government throughout the country - that the Pushtuns will only recognise the legitimacy of the ATA once the perceived political imbalance in Kabul is rectified to Pushtun satisfaction. The elections, rather than JRTs, will deliver legitimacy to the central government in Pushtun eyes.

CONCLUSION

Despite a lack of clarity surrounding JRTs and how humanitarian assistance will be coordinated in relation to JRTs, the indications to date provide sufficient grounds for a number of concerns shared by the assistance community and others. It is hoped that these concerns will be taken on board, particularly as until recently, there has been little consultation on the development of the JRT plan.

If JRTs are part of an attempt to extend the "ISAF effect" in lieu of extending ISAF itself NGOs, with others in the assistance and diplomatic community, would view JRTs as a second-best option. Though JRTs mark a significant change in US strategy in Afghanistan, their viability, with regard to the establishment of stability throughout the country, remains questionable. Meanwhile aid agencies fear their lives will be made more difficult and placed at greater risk as the deployment of JRTs will further blur the distinction between soldiers and aid workers for Afghan people.

CONCERNS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- The establishment of security is fundamental to the future stability of Afghanistan which is also in the interests of the region and the wider world. Whether JRTs will facilitate the establishment of security beyond the short-term remains to be seen. The Bonn Process provides that the Afghan National Army will be a credible force in time for the elections of 2004 allowing the newly elected government to govern. This process is inevitably fraught with difficulties. Failure to ensure security will continue to undermine progress in the reform process and the development of Afghanistan as a whole while casting a shadow over peoples' hopes for the future. The extension of the United Nations Security Council mandated peacekeeping force beyond Kabul would expressly address security concerns and would indicate to the Afghan people that the international community remains fully engaged in their plight.
• The primary concern of NGOs continues to revolve around the needs of the Afghan people. In the long-term, Afghan interests may be adversely affected for short-term political and military gains. The future of Afghanistan remains an uncertain one. It is vital for NGOs, if they are to continue their work in the country over the long-term, that their neutrality and impartiality are not compromised in the eyes of the Afghan people.

• The extension of the legitimacy and authority of the central government beyond Kabul has been flagged up as a key outcome of the JRT initiative. This is vital if Karzai’s government is to be viewed by Afghans as having a viable future and not one that is totally dependent on US support. To this end, it is to be hoped that ensuring greater respect for human rights for all Afghans and the establishment of the rule of law will be prioritised as key dividends of the Bonn Agreement along with more tangible benefits such as road building and the provision of jobs.

• JRTs are tasked with information gathering at the local level. How that information is provided and by whom that information is interpreted will be critical to any objective assessment of needs. It is feared that local political agendas will dominate any information gathering process. The fact that Afghans are already voicing the suspicion that members of JRTs will be seen as spies deepens concern that the use of military personnel to identify and implement reconstruction work is likely to engender mistrust amongst local communities and between communities and NGOs. Experienced international NGOs and their Afghan local partners should be key informants in any information gathering process, yet in addition to NGO’s concerns above, Afghan staff of NGOs also have security fears linked to any direct involvement with the Coalition Forces. These fears are made more acute by their inability to leave the country in the event of any renewed outbreak of civil war. If the participation and trust of local communities is not ensured JRT operations will fall short of their purported objectives from the outset.

• There is a real danger that humanitarian space may be eroded by a military-led operation, with political and military aims, attempting to take part in and even co-ordinate aid. JRTs have no clear mandate or accountability mechanism and there is confusion as to how the Coalition Forces role in this regard conforms with the requirements of international humanitarian law.

• The precedent being set in Afghanistan with regard to the involvement of the US-led Coalition Forces in the wider provision of aid and development via JRTs has very
worrying implications for humanitarian assistance beyond Afghanistan. JRTs must not be implemented in ways that erode humanitarian space further either in Afghanistan or beyond.

Following on from these concerns the following recommendations are made:

1. It remains the preferred option that the UN mandated International Security Assistance Force should be extended beyond Kabul. In the event of continuing failure to do so, an effective mechanism needs to be found, that is supported by the international community, to address the root causes of insecurity in order to facilitate the work of the central government, the UN, NGOs and their local partners, in the provision of aid and development to Afghanistan. JRTs as currently described are not an appropriate mechanism for creating a secure environment throughout Afghanistan or for enhancing the performance of the assistance community.

2. The military must not erode humanitarian space further by engaging in assistance work except in such rare and extreme circumstances as obtained, for example, in Iraqi Kurdistan in 1991, when the logistical capacities of NGOs were overwhelmed by circumstances on the ground and levels of insecurity prevented the UN and NGOs from accessing the civilian population in need. This is not the case in Afghanistan at present. The military need to consult more widely and in more depth on the implications of any involvement in the selection and implementation of projects, which, given the military’s lack of experience in participatory, community-led development may well be flawed.