

Fight Poverty to End Insecurity

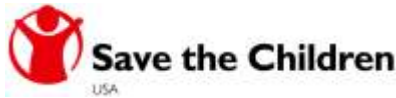
Afghan perceptions of insecurity



March 2009



Consortium Members



Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (CHA)



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About the Consortium



The Human Rights Research and Advocacy Consortium is a group of fourteen organizations committed to promoting peace and human rights in Afghanistan. Our members include some of the most experienced and respected agencies working in Afghanistan today in the fields of humanitarian relief, reconstruction, human rights, peace promotion, basic education, research and advocacy.

Aim

To influence policy changes that will promote human rights and peace in Afghanistan through ongoing research and advocacy.

Method

The Consortium raises the voices of Afghans, based on conversations with them during community-focused field research, which is the foundation of our advocacy campaigns. Through such campaigns, we seek to ensure that policymakers and leaders hear the concerns and hopes of Afghans and work harder to protect their basic human rights.

Themes

The Consortium focuses its efforts on four key human rights concerns: the right of all Afghans to peace and physical security, the right to education, to participate politically and to share in economic resources and development.

This survey was funded by Stichting Oxfam Novib and Consortium members.

This report is based on independent research and does not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the member agencies.

Executive Summary

This report presents follow-up research to that conducted by the Human Rights Research and Advocacy Consortium (HRRAC) in 2004. Our 2004 report, "Take the Guns Away", focused on Afghans' perceptions of the security situation in the country prior to the 2005 presidential elections. In 2004, after surveying 684 Afghans in six provinces, HRRAC reported the people's assertion that the rule of law was effectively non-existent countrywide. Consortium analysis found low levels of confidence in the police and army and widespread reports of a litany of crimes committed by commanders, supported by a culture of impunity in which criminals were rarely held accountable. Survey participants called, above all, for disarmament and a strong central government to bring an end to insecurity. Yet in 2004 the mood was optimistic. Those surveyed were on the whole overwhelmingly enthusiastic about the prospect of a new administration and had high hopes for the change free and fair elections would bring.

This year HRRAC researchers returned to the same provinces surveyed in 2004, but conducted more than twice as many surveys and in-depth interviews in order to capture a broader range of perceptions of the security situation today in Afghanistan.¹

HRRAC staff were not able to go back to all the communities visited in 2004 due to the deteriorating security situation and concerns for researchers' safety. However, in spite of choosing villages in the more secure areas of these provinces, the picture painted today is bleak.

Rising Crime

As in 2004, HRRAC reports accounts of crimes committed by commanders, who are widely believed to have hidden their weapons to avoid disarmament. In contrast to the 2004 findings, in 2008, Afghans report a rise in crime in every area of crime investigated in the study. A majority of those surveyed state that gun violence, Taliban related violence, suicide

attacks and criminal gang activity have each increased in their local area. Most say that warlords in their area have retained or increased their weapons caches relative to four years ago, meaning government disarmament initiatives, Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration (DDR) and Disarmament of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG), are at best considered a partial success. This is despite official claims to the contrary.

Lack of confidence in law enforcement bodies

Confidence in law enforcement bodies remains low. Moreover, deep distrust of police integrity and abilities considerably increases when issues such as ethnicity and socioeconomic class are considered. While most Afghans see foreign military personnel as helping secure Afghanistan, their air strikes are universally condemned. In fact, although most call on security forces to patrol far more frequently to improve security, in some areas, respondents see their security actively worsened by international military patrols.

Root Causes of Insecurity

When it comes to identifying the root causes of insecurity, respondents recognise the dangers of insurgent activity, condemn corruption within the security forces, fear the power of commanders and resent neighbouring states exerting a negative influence. Yet those surveyed consistently identify poverty and unemployment as the driving forces behind insecurity and call for these issues to be addressed as a priority.



¹ In 2008, HRRAC conducted 1391 surveys.

Introduction

This report is intended to reflect the views of Afghans. HRRAC deliberately restricts its analysis to focus on Afghan opinion in an effort to redirect attention where it is needed. In a country where the debate on security is all too often centred around the safety of internationals - whether they be military or civilian - our research is intended as a counterweight. Security in Afghanistan should be first and foremost for Afghans.

We first explore what the concept of 'security' means to Afghans and why it matters. Our findings regarding crime, disarmament, law enforcement and the international community are then presented. Finally, we report what Afghans identify as the causes of insecurity and what they think should be done. In our recommendations we try to follow these opinions as closely as possible.

HRRAC's stated aim of presenting the views of Afghans clearly has implications for our research. In presenting study results, HRRAC does not claim to assert fully representative and authoritative facts. Our research is based primarily on interviewee opinion. Furthermore, since data was collected in only six provinces



of Afghanistan's 34 - Kabul, Badakhshan, Nangarhar, Balkh, Kandahar and Herat - researchers' ability to draw conclusions about the country as a whole is limited. Security constraints, particularly in Kandahar, also affected work, for example, survey questions about the Taliban had to be posed in indirect

ways in Kandahar. However, attempts were made to keep the research pool as representative as possible- gender balance was always maintained and we sought to balance the number of illiterate and literate respondents where possible. By using quantitative data from over 1300 surveys alongside qualitative findings from 32 in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, we attempt to provide an insight into how Afghans perceive the security situation today.



Security in Afghans' eyes

Security is the much vaunted goal of the international forces in Afghanistan and the government's stated first priority. Described by the Human Security Report as 'the protection of individuals and communities from war and other forms of violence'², this definition is woefully inadequate to many Afghans. In fact, the definitions offered by Afghan citizens interviewed by HRRAC are universally more comprehensive; they expect much more. The views of one civil servant interviewed are representative: "when a country does not have problems from economic, social or political perspectives, that is called security."³

The crucial importance of security to Afghans is clear when they relate the issue to their own lives. When a Kandahari nurse explains that security for her would be, "life without any sort of danger, creating peace, unity, justice and being able to maintain a normal life in a city or

² Human Security Report Project, Issue 80, 8-12th October 2007, accessed at <http://www.hsrproject.org/index2.php?option=content&task=view&id=306&pop=1&page=0> on 7/09/08 at 0928

³ HRRAC in depth interview with a civil servant

country", it is hard to deny the reasonableness of her request.⁴

This contrast in definitions of security may seem to be an academic question, but it is in fact reflective of the high expectations, so often disappointed, that Afghans have of the current administration and international community, especially the military forces. These groups' failure to guarantee security, even by the much narrower definition of protecting Afghan civilians from violence, is creating a wave of disappointment and anger that goes largely unacknowledged by the international community.

This report traces a disintegration in the security situation in Afghanistan over the past four years, as perceived by ordinary citizens and confirmed by most available information. However, it also seeks to highlight and promote the views of those most affected by continuing insecurity. Afghan forbearance is not infinite, and the Afghan government and its international allies must now take serious note of the unambiguous messages emerging from public opinion research such as HRRAC's.

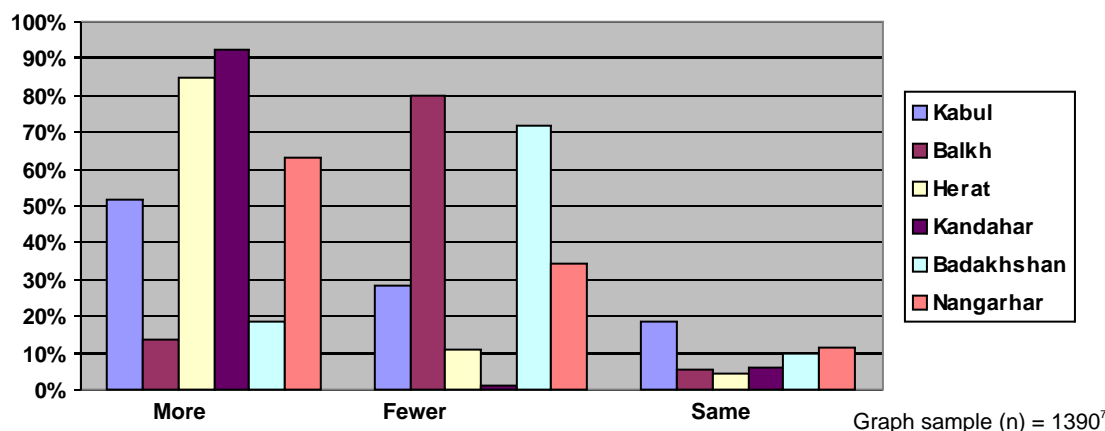
Rising Crime

The reversal in security in respondents' home areas is stark. In 2008, 63% of respondents said they believe security has worsened in their home area over the past four years; whereas, in 2004, three quarters believed it had improved.⁵ This applies to every area of crime discussed. Over half of respondents (55%) believe gun violence, Taliban related violence (56%), suicide attacks (60%) and the activities of criminal gangs (58%) have increased in their area over the past four years.

"The main reasons for insecurity are the presence of warlords, the ... failed DDR [Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration], the government's support from war criminals, and the appointment of incompetent individuals."
-Human Rights activist, Faizabad

However, there is strong regional variation in this data. People perceived crime in Kandahar to have increased much more than in any other area, followed by Herat and Nangarhar. In contrast, areas such as Badakhshan and Balkh reported generally falling perceived rates of crime.⁶

Are there more or fewer crimes happening in your city, town or village, compared to four years ago?



⁴ In emphasizing the vital importance of security to Afghans, we concur with the findings of the Asia Foundation Report, 'Afghanistan in 2008: A Survey of the Afghan People' accessed at <http://www.asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/Afghanistanin2008.pdf> on 3/11/08 at 0956, p. 12

⁵ HRRAC, 'Take the Guns Away' (Pakistan, The Army Press, 2004)

⁶ For more detailed information, please contact HRRAC

⁷ Total percentages here do not add to 100%. A tiny proportion of interviewees responded, 'I don't know' or 'No opinion' and to improve the readability of the graph these have been omitted. For further information please contact HRRAC.

"[Crime] has increased in and around this city. The central government and the incompetent officials of this city are responsible."
 -Tailoring teacher, Jalalabad city

It is perhaps unsurprising that the southern and eastern areas bordering Pakistan report increasing insecurity as this tallies with the general perception that southern Afghan provinces suffer the brunt of Taliban related violence, while the

North remains relatively insulated. However the statistics from Herat add another dimension to the situation. Given that the districts surveyed are among those considered safest for research, the statistics are depressing.⁸

Herat respondents are the most pessimistic of all about gun violence and criminal gang activity - perhaps the consequences of the widely reported violent crime wave.⁹

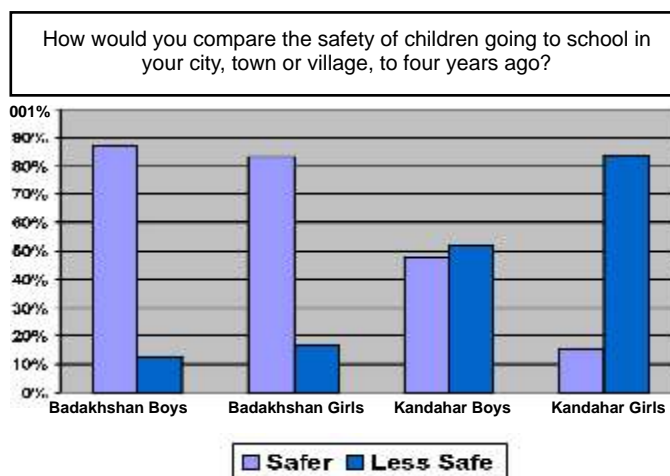
Worryingly, Herat citizens also report a rise in Taliban activity in their area, with 67% of Herat residents claiming it has increased. This spread in crime is also reflected in views from Kabul.¹⁰

It is already clear how important personal security is to Afghans' and how broad their individual definitions of it are. However, they also see security as the prerequisite for a viable new order: "Security is the spinal cord of a society. The stronger the spinal cord, the stronger the body (society) will be."¹¹

In other words, maintaining security is the standard by which any government will be tested and, in this case, found wanting. Perceived increasing crime and insecurity is a matter of prime concern and the government is often singled out as to blame for the situation. Even where other culprits such as warlords are identified, errors of government policy and practice, including inaction, are usually named as the underlying causes of insecurity.

The Security of Children

The safety of children, particularly when they are walking to school, was a regionally diverse issue. Respondents were asked separately about the safety of boys, then that of girls. Predictably, children are perceived to be more at risk in traditionally insecure areas and girls are perceived to be more at risk than boys. This issue reflects perceptions of security; girls' safety in particular was said to have improved in Northern areas and worsened in the South.



However, these statistics do not reflect the depth of feeling behind parents' concern. The security of their children is an emotive issue and tends to be a yardstick by which Afghans measure their quality of life. It is often the example given by interviewees of how security has improved or worsened. It is also used to judge the effectiveness of the government's efforts to keep them safe. For instance, in the South, there were reports of the police refusing to protect girls on their way to school from the Taliban - this being an indicator of their ineffectiveness. In the North, the example of

"The security situation has worsened over the past four years, kidnapping, murder and suicide bombings are only a few of the dangers that the students face".
 - Human Rights activist, Jalalabad city

⁸ The districts surveyed in Herat were Injil, Kohsan and Karokh.

⁹ "Deteriorating security in Herat has led to businesses shutting down and left residents wondering who is behind a recent wave of kidnappings, murders and armed robberies", 'Afghan Recovery Report: Herat Reeling From Violent Crime Wave', accessed at http://www.iwpr.net/?p=arr&s=f&o=340084&apc_state=henh on 21/09/08 at 1155

¹⁰ Pamela Constable, *As Crime Increases, So Does Nostalgia For The Taliban*, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/09/24/AR2008092403339.html> accessed 30/09/08 at 1155

¹¹ HRRAC in depth interview with a resident of Faizabad city

girls going to school was used to show how security had improved. All this presents a strong case for the government to pay education, and particularly the education of girls, more attention.

Lack of Confidence in Government Disarmament Initiatives

A telling sign that disarmament initiatives have not worked include the fact that over half of respondents (53%) believe that ex-commanders in their area have the same amount or more weapons in their possession than four years ago. This is a clear reversal of

"The main factor for insecurity is the presence of warlords as they are more powerful than the police and army."

- Female Police Officer, Badakhshan

the situation in 2004, when 59% of survey participants believed that warlords had fewer weapons compared to 2003. Many see the fact that ex-commanders still own weapons as one of the key reasons behind the current insecurity.

However, some

interviewees, who did not necessarily see it as a problem that the warlords own weapons, still argued that their continuing power divides loyalties between the state and non-state actors.

The fact that three-quarters of respondents claim disarmament programmes¹² were carried

"Many of those who used to serve the commanders are now either with the government, police or army...in time they may serve the commanders again."

- Faizabad resident

out in their area - where they are also reporting increased weapons in warlords' and others' hands - points to a failure within the existing programmes, not a lack of penetration in the areas surveyed.

This is confirmed by views expressed by 30% of respondents that the programmes failed and by a further 42% that they were only partially successful. Less than a quarter of respondents considered the disarmament and reintegration process an unqualified success.

Interviewees clearly identified the problems with disarmament, and reported the consequences of this failure. The direct link between the presence of arms in society and insecurity was emphasized, as was the relation between lack of reintegration of ex-combatants and continued insecurity. As a woman from Faizabad city explained: "some people consented to submit their weapons, but the government did not pave the way for employment opportunities. As a result they lost their trust towards the government and rejoined the armed groups."

Official opinions of the disarmament process contrast with such a pessimistic view, as this statement from a 2006 conference on the issue shows, by: "congratulat[ing] all stakeholders on the completion of DDR... [which] disarmed 63,380 ex-combatants, demobilized 62,044 and provided reintegration programs for 55,804."¹³ However, independent studies seem to support interviewees' suspicions.¹⁴

The pessimism about DDR may have been engendered by high expectations initially created around the process. Giustozzi argues, "the negative impact was amplified by the great hype which initially surrounded the process, raising great expectations among the Afghan population".¹⁵

"[Armed groups] have not submitted all their weapons to the government because they do not trust in the government's ability to maintain security"
- Engineer, Faizabad

¹² These are: DDR, standing for 'Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration' and DIAG, standing for 'Disarmament of Illegal Armed Groups'

¹³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 'Press statement of the Second Tokyo Conference on Consolidation of Peace in Afghanistan (DDR/DIAG)', accessed at http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/middle_e/afghanistan/summary0607.html on 9/10/ 2008 at 1436

¹⁴ Giustozzi examines these official statistics and suggests only 56% of weapons previously registered were collected and of those collected, many were old and unserviceable. Although reintegration programmes were provided, often the usefulness of the training provided was not questioned (e.g. in one village 55 tailors were trained). He, like the Afghans we interviewed, argues DDR is a failure. Of the several reasons he cites for this failure, the underlying cause was a lack of political will behind DDR, symbolised by the election of many ex-commanders to parliament in 2005 despite an election law forbidding it. Giustozzi, Antonio, 'Bureaucratic façade and political realities of disarmament and demobilisation in Afghanistan', Conflict, Security & Development, 2008, 8:2, 169- 192, p. 173

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 190

In 2004, HRRAC documented these expectations and called on the Afghan government and international partners to pay attention to the people's trust in their new government to carry out Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration (DDR) and Disarmament of illegal Armed Groups (DIAG) effectively and so improve their lives.¹⁶

The 2008 survey shows that these expectations have not been met. Today, some Afghans are so pessimistic about the amount of power ceded to non-government actors that they see no possible solution to the problem: "weapons were not collected properly and now the police do not have the power to disarm people."¹⁷

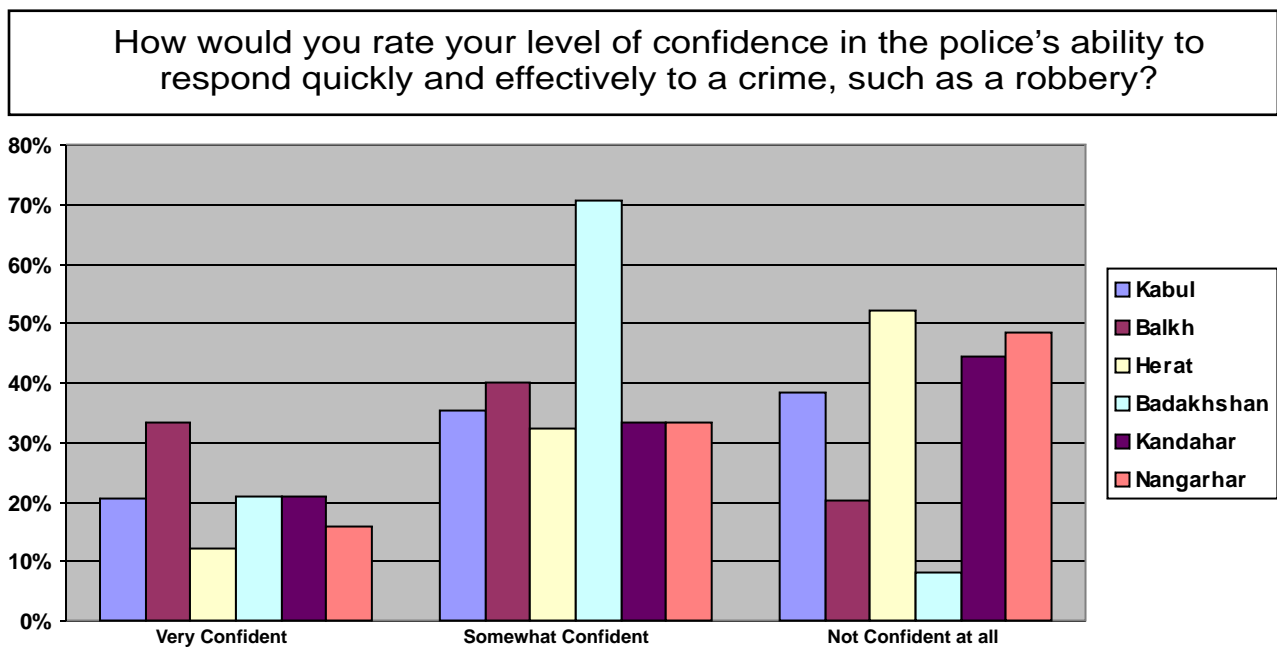
Lack of Confidence in Law Enforcement Bodies

Almost two-thirds of respondents stated that, if victim of a crime, they would first go to the police. This is up from 56% four years ago¹⁸ and suggests confidence in police ability to fight crime has increased over this period. Most respondents (58%) identified the governor as the most powerful person in their district, up from 38% in 2004, with a further 30% identifying the chief of police, up from

20% in 2004. This perhaps indicates a perception that some power remains in official hands. Only 6% of respondents identified warlords as the most powerful people in their district, down from almost a third (32%) in 2004 - even as many respondents assert that these men are rearming.

Yet 36% of respondents were not confident at all in the police's ability to respond quickly and effectively to a crime, and only 21% were very confident of this. As shown below, levels of confidence are lowest in insecure areas like Kandahar or where there is a known problem with crime as in Herat.

The fact that HRRAC had to choose rural research areas from a list of the safest districts is likely to have influenced these numbers because these are generally the same areas where the government's presence is stronger. Within these areas, a clear majority of respondents (62%) felt that security in their area was improved with police or national/international military patrols. But, worryingly, 14% felt security was actively worsened¹⁹ and 4% claimed there were no patrols at all in their area. An overwhelming majority however, 87%, called for police/military to patrol far more frequently.



¹⁶ HRRAC, 'Take the Guns Away' (Pakistan, The Army Press, 2004), p. 19

¹⁷ Interview with an Afghan policewoman.

¹⁸ HRRAC, 'Take the Guns Away' (Pakistan, The Army Press, 2004), p. 18

¹⁹ In focus groups and interviews, we gained the impression this was due to the fact that patrols are a target for insurgents, endangering the local population.

A Nangarhar Province resident summarises: "Of course the movement and patrol of the police and the army has positive effect on the security, the enemy cannot operate openly."

There are obviously problems with the insufficient number of police, according to interviewees. Further questions about the quality of police work reveal other key problems.

For instance, interviewees were very negative when asked about issues such as ethnicity and class. Over half of respondents were not confident at all in the police's ability to treat people of different ethnicity fairly, even arguing bias was endemic. "Afghan society is formed of different groups and tribes and is a traditional society....it is obvious that the police prefer to serve those members of the public belonging to their own group or tribe. Whether overtly or covertly, the police help out their own people", said a health educator in Kabul city.

"Due to the fact that the police salaries are low, some crimes are overlooked as the police are involved in them."
-High school student, Balkh Province

A depressing sign of corruption was that 65% were not confident at all in the police's ability to treat people of different socio-economic classes fairly. This is something that came out more clearly in qualitative research, where Afghans show mixed feelings about

the police. There is certainly an element of sympathy that the police's lack of training and experience, low numbers and poor equipment lead to them being at risk, especially when fighting the Taliban.²⁰ However this is usually outweighed by frustration with their general

incompetence and corruption.²¹ The conclusion from this seems to be that while Afghans see the police as increasingly powerful, their power is not necessarily perceived to be used in a positive way.

These concerns mirror the findings of several Western investigative reports into the Afghan security forces, whose findings similarly claim they are,

"underfunded, underequipped, and poorly organized".²²

"The police patrol the main road of the district but do not enter the villages due to their insufficient numbers, they also don't have enough equipment, so their operations are not very effective."

- Shopkeeper, Nangarhar Province

A June 2008 report on Afghan security by the US Government Accountability Office, the investigative arm of Congress, found that, "despite \$10 billion in US aid, only two of 105 Afghan National Army (ANA) units are judged 'fully capable'. None of the 433 units of Afghanistan's National Police (ANP) are capable of conducting independent patrols, and only twelve -3 percent- are capable of leading operations with coalition support."²³

A recent report to the Canadian parliament also questions the correlation between increased salaries and drop in corruption: "it is difficult to find observers who believe that bribery will be drastically reduced with larger salaries".²⁴

Furthermore, in our interviews with members of the police, police officers claimed that corruption was institutionalized and that otherwise honest police were often compelled

²⁰ Phillip Alston comments that the ANP are almost five times more at risk of being killed in combat than the ANA (source unacknowledged), Press Statement: Professor Phillip Alston, Special Rapporteur of the United Nations Human Right Council on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Kabul, 15 May 2008. This is one of the more conservative estimates.

²¹ These mixed findings again concur with those of the recent Asia Foundation Report, 'Afghanistan in 2008: A Survey of the Afghan People' accessed at <http://www.asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/Afghanistanin2008.pdf> on 3/11/08 at 0956, p. 33-34

²² http://www.cfr.org/publication/16691/afghanistans_security_services.html accessed on 13/08/08 at 1031. These findings are confirmed by reports such as Col. Ricky Adams, "Police Reform Directorate: Overview-Current Operations and Strategic Initiatives" (Kabul: Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan, 2006) and Inspectors General, U.S. Department of State and U.S. Department of Defense, Interagency Assessment of Afghanistan Police Training and Readiness (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State and U.S. Department of Defense, 2006)

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ 'How are we doing in Afghanistan? Canadians need to know', Report of the Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Development for the 2nd session, 39th Parliament, June 2008, p.60

to act according to their supervisors' corrupt orders.

It is the combination of high and low level corruption, ethnic bias and old loyalties to ex-commanders among the police that cause such

"The police themselves are the reason for some of the insecurity."
- Badakhshan resident

concern. The current discussions in Afghanistan on arming new militias to help fight crime and insurgency could lead to projects that will make the problem worse.

According to the British Agencies Afghanistan Group (BAAG), which analyzed similar experiments from other countries, such initiatives, "are likely to undermine state authority, fuel the proliferation of small arms, and thus undermine effective attempts at disarmament and reintegration, as well as increasing arbitrary killings and other human rights violations."²⁵

In Afghanistan itself, past initiatives such as President Najibullah's support for and funding of militias and the creation of the Afghanistan National Auxiliary Police, did not achieve the intended results either as security deteriorated. Afghanistan might learn from its own and others' past lessons in this regard.

ISAF and the International Community

During the survey, the international military forces (IMF) garnered a generally positive response with 86% of respondents claiming they have improved security in Afghanistan. Similarly, in focus groups and qualitative interviews alike, there was almost universal support for the international military forces' presence in Afghanistan.

However this support is not unconditional. HRRAC research findings concur with the country-wide consultations carried out in preparation for the 2007 Afghanistan Protection

of Civilians Conference; house searches, particularly at night, cause great resentment. At the Protection of Civilians Conference, night searches were identified as the number one problem communities had with international military forces - even before civilian casualties. The importance of respecting cultural norms related to the private sphere, and particularly when dealing with the female members of the household, should thus not be underestimated.

Often, the solution proposed to improve the way house searches are conducted, in accordance with the recommendations of the Protection of Civilians Conference, was that international military forces should devote more time and resources to the training of Afghan forces. National forces already have the cultural awareness required to carry out key activities such as household searches.

Due to the noted security concerns for HRRAC researchers, the Consortium was unable to collect much information about more insecure provinces directly. However there are indicators that suggest public opinion about international military forces has hardened in these areas. Some respondents argued that by patrolling areas where they have not fully

"People are not happy with [ISAF] ... they enter houses to search them and kill innocent people, against all national and international norms. My request for the international forces is that they should not act contrary to the will of the people and should respect their customs and traditions."

- Jalalabad city resident

"If their objective is to help the people of Afghanistan, they must decrease their numbers and support and train the Afghan forces instead"
- Engineer, Faizabad

²⁵ BAAG, 'Community Defence Initiatives in Afghanistan - Implications to Consider', Briefing paper, April 2008, p1.

"In the beginning, people thought that ISAF would maintain good security in the country. Gradually people saw that they not only could not maintain security, but also they caused its deterioration."

- Nangarhar

insurgents to make life easier".²⁶

As a student of Balkh university puts it: "There are elements among the international military forces who have contacts with the Taliban. My request for them is to cut their relations with the Taliban." It must be emphasised that these

"It would be better if the foreign forces were confined to bases and did not leave their bases. If they do so, suicide bombings will occur and there will be civilian casualties"

- Resident of Jalalabad city

are putting their own safety before that of the Afghan population. As one Kabuli schoolgirl summarised, "If the international troops think primarily about their own safety, security will not be maintained..."

A further important finding of this research is that Afghans are confused about the role of international military forces in Afghanistan. In many people's minds, all foreigners should be asked to contribute more to the reconstruction of the country. International military forces are

established control, international forces put ordinary citizens at risk. Worryingly, there was the suspicion that international forces may be doing precisely that which a Canadian Brigadier General recently identified as unacceptable behaviour from the tribal militias, "they enter into an agreement with

insurgents to make life easier".²⁶ are remarks from a minority of respondents. Most respondents thought the international military forces a helpful if sometimes ineffective presence, many argued that they are having a positive effect. However, the issues raised by this minority highlight a concern that the international forces

also identified as important actors in the reconstruction of the country and are blamed for the slow reconstruction process. At the same time, respondents clearly do refer back to the core tasks of the international military forces, in terms of providers of security, and challenge the presence of military forces and Provincial

"ISAF forces are not needed in provinces such as Badakhshan where there is good security. They could be used in insurgency-hit provinces. They are just sitting like innocent pigeons in a corner of the city and do not make contact with the public."

- Faizabad city resident



The Debate about the Securitization of Aid

The interpretation by some IMF related Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) that their mandate to "enable" reconstruction²⁷ is to actually carry out reconstruction directly could be backfiring on the international military; our research shows they are expected to show results that largely exceed their mandate and are beyond their capacity.

Many professional development agencies argue that development and reconstruction is a complicated business. Through decades of experience, development agencies have learned the hard way that an ill-conceived or

²⁶ Jessica Leeder, 31 October 2008, accessed at

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/LAC.20081031.AFGHAN31/TPStory/TPInternational/Asia/> on 3/11/08 at 1133

²⁷ The PRT mandate is to support the Afghan government to 'extend its authority, in order to facilitate the development of a stable and secure environment ... and enable Security Sector Reform and reconstruction efforts'. PRT Executive Steering Committee, 27 January 2005, cited in Overview of Priorities: Submission to the House of Commons International Development Committee Inquiry 'Development Assistance in Insecure Environments: Afghanistan', Oxfam, November 2007.

badly implemented project could be worse than no project at all.

Aid agencies are thus of the opinion that reconstruction should be carried out by civilian professionals, not military actors. Military forces are not trained to work in a participatory manner with communities and the sustainability of their projects has been a constant problem. The international military forces are therefore frequently called on to provide the security that 'enables' reconstruction by professional civilians.

Recent research may also indicate that Afghans, were they in a position to choose the actors undertaking reconstruction and development activities, would not prefer the military. If military forces were to carry out reconstruction activities, Afghans would doubt the results and feel there are strings attached.²⁸

Causes of insecurity

*"Security has deteriorated during the last few years, the root cause of which is poverty."
- Kabul city resident*

by those surveyed. The most emphasized reasons were unemployment and poverty; 34%

*"Lack of employment opportunities has resulted in lack of security. When there is no work for people to do, they resort to crime."
- Student at Kabul Polytechnic University*

In 2008, 83% of Afghans felt security in the country as a whole had worsened over the past four years, and 99% felt it needed to be improved. Several reasons were identified by those surveyed. The most emphasized reasons were unemployment and poverty; 34% of interviewees identified these issues as the underlying causes of insecurity in their home areas.²⁹

When asked about the worsening security in the country as a whole, more diverse responses were given. Again, unemployment



and poverty was the most frequent response (21%) followed by the belief that the central government was too weak (17%) and that neighboring states were exerting a negative influence (15%). The resurgence of the Taliban (9%), corrupt government officials (9%) and fear of powerful warlords (6%) also scored strongly. Suicide bombings were named the cause of insecurity by 14% and insurgent activity by a further 9%. Corrupt police were identified by 10% and corrupt military personnel by 7%. Criminal gangs and warlords were each mentioned by 10% of respondents.

*"Poppy cultivation has brought poverty and misery to the public in this province. All the profits gained from the business are used by the insurgents and armed groups who in turn are those responsible for the insecurity and instability in the province."
- Female resident, Kandahar*



²⁸ "Afghan Hearts, Afghan minds: Afghan perceptions of civil military relations", BAAG/ENNA, 2008.BIB.

²⁹ The emphasis we found on unemployment and poverty as the major problems facing Afghanistan echo the findings of the Asia Foundation Report, 'Afghanistan in 2008: A Survey of the Afghan People' accessed at <http://www.asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/Afghanistanin2008.pdf> on 3/11/08 at 0956, p.

The survey also explored people's thoughts on the role of drugs in insecurity. In both focus groups and in-depth interviews, respondents tended to automatically link drug cultivation and trafficking to increased insecurity and criminality. There is therefore a great deal of anger with the government's perceived lack of action against, or even complicity with, large drug producers and an impatience for a transparent long term process to fight the drug economy, targeted against the main people behind the trade.

Routes of action to reduce insecurity- as chosen by respondents

The most popular choice for how the government should act to reduce insecurity was, as might be expected, to reduce unemployment and poverty (19%). The vast majority of those interviewed wanted to see tangible signs of economic investment and called for concrete economic, infrastructure and development projects (such as bridges, dams, factories).

Interviewees also called on their government and the international community to empower the national army (18%) and police (17%).

“The increase in poverty and unemployment has resulted in people resorting to drug cultivation and trafficking and destabilizing security in this province. Criminal groups do not want the security situation to improve, so they can protect their own interests.”
- A Kandahari Woman

Concerns identified by fewer but significant numbers of respondents included effective disarmament (9%). It is worth noting that this was by far the most popular choice in 2004 (65%), but has since been eclipsed by other concerns. Four years on, people see the disparity between their day to day experience and the overly optimistic

government evaluation of DDR/DIAG - they have perhaps concluded that even effective

disarmament will not address their more pressing concerns (as cited above).

Eight percent of respondents called for the elimination of the drug economy to improve security, showing clear concern about the effect of such social problems on security. Increased efforts are necessary on this front, in terms of the development of a long term, coordinated strategy of rural development which provides alternatives to poppy cultivation beyond substitute crops; this integrated approach must be implemented with a public information campaign to make explicit the time it will take to bring about sustained change. The government and international community must also be aware of the time it will take to bring about a sustainable reduction in poppy cultivation and trafficking, and not limit their strategies to top down bans on cultivation or eradication.

Finally, seven percent of respondents called for the number of international troops in the country to be increased to improve security.



Recommendations

HRRAC calls for:

■ **Increased donor focus on poverty reduction and creation of income opportunities.** Poverty and unemployment have been identified by Afghans as the most significant underlying cause of insecurity in Afghanistan. HRRAC calls on donors to substantially strengthen measures to alleviate poverty, to promote civilian, rather than military, efforts to achieve this and to ensure that this is widely communicated both within Afghanistan and in donor countries.

■ **Increased focus and resources allocated to improve the functioning of the Afghan National Police.** Afghans identify the police as of variable quality and in some cases adversely affecting security conditions. Particular attention must therefore be given to improve the ANP's capacity and functioning. Corruption must be combatted, including breaking links with local militias and criminals. The recommendations of the Special Rapporteur of the United Nations Human Rights Council on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions regarding the Afghan National Police should be followed.³⁰

■ **An independent review of disarmament programmes, tougher implementation of reformed disarmament initiatives and the rejection of initiatives that aim to re-arm communities.** Afghans identify the failure of the disarmament process as one of the reasons for the deteriorating security situation. Thus, the Government of Afghanistan and the international community should increase their focus on removing arms from Afghanistan, not adding them.

■ **Long-term, coordinated and pro-poor counter narcotics approaches must be supported.** To realise this, the only viable option is a gradual, comprehensive and pro-poor approach, mainstreamed within rural development initiatives, combined with stronger law-enforcement measures against traffickers - not small poppy farmers. Quick-fix strategies, such as crop eradication, may yield short term gains but can lead to great hardship for the poorest and weakest in the process - small scale farmers and their families.³¹

■ **ISAF should focus on its security mandate and on insecure areas.** Afghans recognize the role that international military forces play in providing security in Afghanistan. Consequently, they assert that international military forces should concentrate their efforts in insecure areas and on activities relevant to their mandate. The International Forces must put Afghan security first. HRRAC also stresses the need to decrease civilian casualties in international military operations and to ensure greater respect for local traditions and culture, particularly in night raids.

³⁰ These include: (1) all links between the police and any particular tribe, commanders and politicians should be broken to ensure an impartial police force; (2) the government should cease attempting to build up police capabilities by recognising local militias; (3) the police should be trained, equipped and structured to play a constructive and efficient law enforcement role to improve security; (4) both a national police investigative force and a strengthening of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission's role is required to stamp out corruption. 'Press Statement: Professor Phillip Alston, Special Rapporteur of the United Nations Human Right Council on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions', Kabul, 15 May 2008

³¹ For more on poppy eradication strategies, see David Mansfield and Adam Pain, 'Opium Poppy Eradication: How to Raise Risk When There is Nothing to Lose?' Kabul, Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, August 2006 and CARE International, 'No quick fix: Curbing Opium Poppy Cultivation in Afghanistan', CARE Policy Brief, December 2006.

Annex A: Methodology

The test research for this report began in Kabul and the surrounding areas on 7th April 2008. Following its success, research began in earnest on 13th April and ended on 15th July 2008.

Although this was not strictly intended to be a comparative study with our 2004 report "Take the Guns Away", we were nevertheless attempting to gain an idea of how perceptions of security had changed over the past four years, building on our previous research. To this end, research was carried out in the same six provinces where security research was conducted in 2004, namely: Kabul, Kandahar, Herat, Balkh, Badakhshan and Nangarhar. Research was carried out in both rural and urban areas with the exception of Kandahar where, as in 2004, the rural areas were judged too dangerous for research.

Both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies were used. The quantitative questionnaire included some 28 questions on security, sometimes with the option of selecting more than one answer, to gain the fullest understanding possible of peoples' perceptions. In total, 1391 randomly selected participants answered this questionnaire. Incomplete questionnaires were not included. Half of the questionnaires were answered in urban and half in rural areas. This divided according to province as roughly 200 surveys per province (with all 200 in Kandahar being answered in the city) however in Kabul we doubled this to around 400 to account for its greater population. In all areas we attempted to question equal numbers of men and women, despite some difficulty in the provinces where women sometimes did not wish to participate.

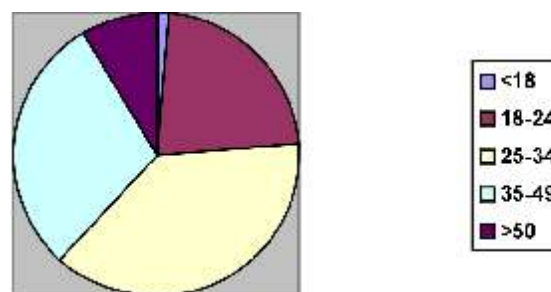
17 qualitative interviews were also held. Each interview was relatively open ended, lasting from 40-90 minutes. Again, efforts were made to interview an equal number of men and women. Whereas the Afghans who answered the quantitative questionnaire were selected at random, those who participated in the in-depth

interviews were sometimes chosen on the basis of their responses to the quantitative questionnaires in the interests of diversity. Others were identified through local contacts and efforts were made to contact those we interviewed in 2004 to preserve comparative links to the 2004 report.

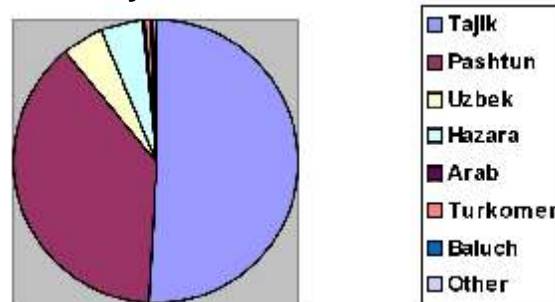
Focus groups constituted the third method of investigation. 15 focus groups each lasting over an hour (and sometimes up to 2 hours) were held. When selecting the participants, we tried to maintain a balance of 1/3 illiterate to 2/3 literate despite the difficulties this sometimes posed.³² Researchers also attempted to include key stakeholders in the makeup of each group, e.g. NGO workers, civil servants, teachers, police.

The sample population questioned in the course of our research should not be taken as representative, nevertheless a wide spectrum of the population was included in the final research. The following charts show the breakdown of participants into ethnicity, age, gender, education and location.

Age

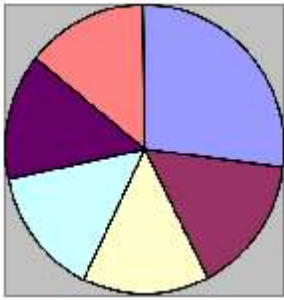


Ethnicity

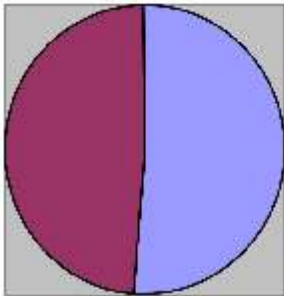


³² Clearly the fact that we surveyed a majority of literate respondents contradicts the national literacy rate of 28.1% (Source: CIA CIA World Factbook: Afghanistan accessed at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html> on 12/08/08 at 1123) Again, this can perhaps best be explained by the fact that we researched in urban areas or districts close to urban areas where access to schools is best.

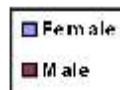
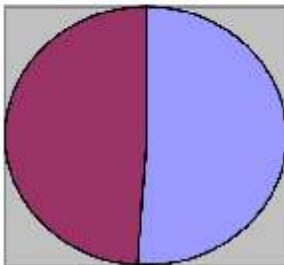
Location



Literacy



Gender



Some restrictions to our research due to security problems were unavoidable. These included choosing rural districts from those safest for research rather than randomly, and posing questions indirectly in insecure areas. For example, direct questions about the Taliban were avoided in Kandahar to protect the safety of researchers, however many people independently linked insecurity to the Taliban.

Throughout our research, HRRAC tried to respect the ethical principles of research. It was made clear at the beginning of every group that HRRAC is a non-political organisation and separate from the government. No names were asked for in the quantitative survey. Participants in all interviews were informed their identity would be protected and where participants offered the names of individuals alleged to commit crimes these have also been omitted from the report.

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