Aid Coordination in Afghanistan

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Executive Summary

Aid coordination is expected to ensure the more efficient and effective delivery of humanitarian assistance. Presently, a large number of humanitarian actors are operating in Afghanistan, and different groups have established their separate coordination arrangements. However, while the Afghan Transitional Authority (ATA) has assumed the main responsibility for aid coordination, it is constrained by the political context in which it operates and the limited influence it holds over aid disbursement outside the capital Kabul.

There is no doubt that there is a need for humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan, and that it needs to move away from emergency relief towards rehabilitation and development support. A limited vulnerability assessment indicates that people in almost all parts of Afghanistan are in need of assistance, and figures for aid disbursement show that Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) are the main implementers of aid programmes. The NGO sector has undergone enormous changes over the last year. Most of the new NGOs appear to have established themselves in the main cities and in the northern and central parts of Afghanistan. This rather uneven aid distribution might in turn undermine the peace process, as people might see aid allocations as politically motivated rather than based on actual need.

The ATA has established an elaborate coordination mechanism at the Kabul level, while donors, United Nations agencies and NGOs all have their own coordination mechanisms with only a limited degree of interaction. A newcomer on the coordination scene is the allied forces through their Joint Regional Teams, an attempt to win 'the hearts and minds' of the Afghans. Coordination efforts at the provincial and district level, where the actual implementation takes place, are rather fragmented as neither the local governmental structure nor the UN's area approach provides the necessary guidance for these processes.

Among the major challenges for aid coordination in Afghanistan is the lack of baseline data and a proper information exchange between the ATA and the humanitarian agencies, essential if the present fragmentation of coordination efforts is to be overcome. The evident weakness of the coordination structure outside Kabul needs to be addressed, as do the threats posed to the humanitarian aid system by the imposition of a new military-led coordination framework.

A number of suggestions can be made for improving the present aid coordination system, although it needs to be kept in mind that attempts to force coordination on NGOs, especially by military forces, has a high likelihood of failure. Thus facilitation and efforts to strengthen professionalism and an enhanced governance role for the ATA seem to be what are most in demand.

A starting point to improving aid coordination would be to encourage and support necessary reforms within the ATA at a national, provincial and district

level, enabling it to assume a more instructive role in rehabilitation and development processes. Further priorities are to ensure that more accurate data are made available on actual needs and present aid disbursement, and that such information is widely disseminated.

The NGO sector, as the largest aid provider, urgently needs to define what roles NGOs wish to perform in Afghanistan in the future and how they can best relate to, support and correct the ATA. On their part, the donors need to acknowledge that coordination comes at a cost, and that improved coordination can be combined with the development of the NGO sector in Afghanistan in both its international and national components.

Introduction[1]

While many positive changes have occurred in Afghanistan over the last year, the country has not yet moved beyond the conflict stage as allied forces are still pursuing a military campaign and internal military conflicts continue to emerge.

A major change, however, is that there now is an Afghan Transitional Authority (ATA) in place which, despite its weaknesses and shortcomings, is recognised by the international community and has assumed overall aid coordination responsibility for Afghanistan. Its authority does not reach far beyond Kabul, outside which provincial and district authorities have established their own management structures and styles.

Whatever changes have taken place, Afghanistan remains one of the least developed, disaster-prone and assistance-needing countries of the world. In such a fragile environment, massive assistance provision and many new humanitarian actors might in themselves be destabilizing factors, especially if competing for turf and influence or if they are unaware or negligent of local culture and tradition.

Aid coordination has thus become increasingly important in Afghanistan as the number of aid donors, funding levels, channels and implementers has multiplied and the danger of overlapping and duplication has increased. While the intention of the ATA is for aid provision to be gradually moved from emergency relief into rehabilitation and development mode, such a transition will place increased demands on the knowledge and skills of both the ATA and the humanitarian agencies.

 This report takes as a starting point a discussion of what aid coordination entails, and provides a brief overview of the present political and humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, the humanitarian structures and the present coordination arrangements. Certain major challenges are then discussed before the report concludes with more general remarks on what might actually be achievable in this field, and what changes might be warranted to improve the overall aid provision.

1. Defining aid coordination

The term coordination has become a household name in humanitarian circles, and is applied to a range of more formalised forms of collaboration between different organisations and entities. Coordination practice ranges from practical programme collaboration in the field via more policy-oriented coordination at the regional or national level to strategic coordination between Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Inter-Governmental Organisations

(IGOs), agencies of the United Nations (UN) and aid donors at the international level. More recently, military entities have engaged themselves in providing humanitarian assistance and in aid coordination.[2]

Larry Minear has defined coordination in the UN system as

> *...the systematic utilization of policy instruments to deliver humanitarian assistance in a cohesive and effective manner. Such instruments include: (1)strategic planning; (2) gathering data and managing information; (3) mobilizing resources and assuring accountability; (4) orchestrating a functional division of labour in the field; (5) negotiating and maintaining a serviceable framework with host political authorities; and (6) providing leadership. Sensibly and sensitively employed, such instruments inject an element of discipline without unduly constraining action.[3]*

History has shown that establishing more formalised coordination arrangements has proven difficult, not least when different types of humanitarian agency are represented in a common coordination body or the humanitarian situation is highly politically charged. One reason for meeting such difficulties is that from the outset there is a fundamental difference between coordination arrangements established by United Nations and their humanitarian agencies and nation states, and those of NGOs and international donors.[4] Both the UN and a nation state will typically establish a more hierarchical coordination framework with a degree of authority vested in the management structures. Specialised UN agencies and line ministries are then expected to adjust their programmes and projects in accordance with an overall set direction, strategy or policy. By contrast, for NGOs and donors there is no superstructure in place, and at least the NGOs in general strive for the highest possible degree of independence within a vertical coordination structure. The difference between such hierarchical and vertically oriented coordination arrangements is often described as coordination by command or by consensus, or forced and facilitated coordination. Donini, however, with his background from the UN Office of Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), has added a third typology defined as coordination by default, which, ¨...in the absence of a formal coordination entity, involves only the most rudimentary exchange of information and division of labour among the actors".[5] Others might not define such an informal arrangement as coordination, but rather describe it as collaboration between humanitarian actors, or simply information exchange.

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[2] In Afghanistan this includes the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), Coalition Joint Civil-Military Operations Task Force (CJCMOTF) and, planned for, Joint Regional Teams backing US Aid and a civilian reservist regional presence.

[3] Minear, L., U. Chellia, J. Crisp, J. Macinlay and T. Weiss (1992). UN Coordination of the International Humanitarian Response to the Gulf Crisis 1990-1992., Thomas J. Watson Institute for International Studies.

[4] The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) will generally avoid being drafted into any formalised coordination entity to ensure that their total independence, as required by the Geneva Convention, is maintained.

[5] Donini, A. (1996). *The Policies of Mercy: UN Coordination in Afghanistan, Mozambique and Rwanda*. Providence, The Thomas J. Watson Jr. Institute for International Studies.

The main point to be established here is that when attempts are made to involve a large number of different humanitarian actors within the same coordination structure, such an attempt is rather difficult to facilitate as it triggers a number of 'built in' resistance mechanisms against enforced coordination. Such resistance may persist even if the coordination structure is established and led by a nation state, and the resistance level is likely to be higher when the national authority is seen as weak or non-representative and/or the humanitarian agencies have a history of working independently of or even in opposition to the nation state. The latter is certainly the case in Afghanistan, where the ATA is struggling to establish its authority, and where international donors, UN agencies and NGOs have opposed different Afghan governments and regimes for more than 20 years.

2. The Afghan political context

There are currently a number of factors influencing the stability of the ongoing Afghan peace-building and development process. Most notable, and with influence on the humanitarian situation, is the continued international military engagement, tensions within the ATA Cabinet, the relationship (or lack of it) between the ATA and the provincial authorities, underlying ethnic and religious tensions, and the interference of both state and non-state external forces.

The Loya Jirga process brought about the formation of the Afghan Transitional Administration, with President Karzai as head of a large 33-member Cabinet. Given its broad-based composition and partly party/group-based assignment of Ministers, there are a number of inherited conflicts which may limit the Cabinet's ability to move forward on a range of issues deemed important for the formation of a more democratic and development-oriented state.[6] Most notable is the presence of previous warlords in the Cabinet, of whom some have a reputation for human rights violations and involvement in drug trafficking. The large majority of Ministers have no formal experience of governmental positions or more regular political or administrative work, and only a few have held any Ministerial position. The lack of a clear division of responsibility between ministries, not least within the field of rehabilitation and development, and the large number of politically imposed employees in all ministries, hampers the streamlining of the administration.[7] With the possibility of humanitarian issues being addressed less from a needs-based approach than as a strategy geared to the 'need to satisfy' political groups and interests.

However, while struggling to balance the internal differences, the ATA has taken a rather tough stance towards UN agencies and NGOs and their assistance programmes. Especially the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of

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[6] A frequently overheard comment in political circles is that the Cabinet might be broad-based, but it is not as broadminded as hoped for.
[7] A large number of staff from the political/military groups were assigned for the various ministries during the period of the Afghan Interim Administration, bloating the administration and placing the responsibility of paying for these ex-soldiers on the Afghan Government and the International community.

Planning have repeatedly accused the humanitarian agencies of excessive administrative and operational expense, leaving the ATA without the necessary funding to undertake their own activities, and implicitly with reduced control over prioritisation and aid allocations.[8]

But while the ATA might hold limited control over the external actors, the Cabinet and the ministries have apparently even less influence over the Governors and local authorities set up to administer the provinces. The traditional Afghan governance system, also adhered to by the Taliban, was based on appointing officials from outside the province or district to which they were assigned. The aim was to ensure that they remained loyal to the central government and to limit the influence of local power brokers. This practice was, however, not adhered to by the ATA. On the one hand, it assigned to provincial and district positions local warlords and military commanders who had either been part of the military campaign to oust the Taliban or belonged to the parties forming the ATA. It thereby rewarded their loyalty and at the same time ensured continued influence for such groups and parties. The large majority of these local officials depend on financial support from the ATA, their political/military backers or humanitarian agencies to maintain their position and run their administration. On the other hand, as in Herat, Mazar-e-Sharif and Jalalabad, the ATA was not in a position to oppose the self-appointment of strong warlords who had been brought back with the support of the Allied forces. These are able to generate such a high income locally that they are assured total independence from the ATA. Most notable here are those controlling the transit trade, or who are involved in smuggling of consumer goods, weapons and drugs. In both cases, the officials' willingness to follow orders from the ATA, if not to their own advantage, is questionable. The end result has been a mixed political/military and administrative structure that not only poses a challenge to the authority of the ATA as such, but is also opposed by the local population. Many of the local Governors and *Woluswals* (District Administrators) are associated with oppression and extortion rather than with good governance practice.

Moreover, and alarming for aid implementation and coordination, is the fact that these local officials then preside over a very weak local administration, which has been eroded by years of war, by the recruitment of staff by NGOs and UN agencies, and by the warlords/commanders putting their own staff in those positions that would be eligible for financial support from the ATA.[9] Which, in sum, this leaves Afghanistan with a very vulnerable and fragile governmental structure, in which the state is at the same time a patron of some of its Governors and a client of others.

The humanitarian agencies and their donors are left with a dilemma as to whom to interact with, since humanitarian assistance might be regarded as not only serving humanitarian purposes but also strengthening repressive officials

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[8] A report of the Afghan Assistance Coordination Authority (AACA) of 11 October 2002 state that as little as 10 % of external aid is bilateral aid.

[9] The Woluswal of one district of Ghazni could not provide an exact number of employees or Departments in their administration.

and providing them with a degree of legitimacy. It might be argued, nonetheless, that such an engagement, if well considered and following a clear strategy, might bring about change and transform the practice and intention of such warlords. That, however, would require a coherent and coordinated effort on the part of the humanitarian agencies and the ATA.

3. Humanitarian assistance and aid actors

Before presenting the various humanitarian coordination structures, the present need for humanitarian assistance and the range of humanitarian actors now present in Afghanistan must be examined.

3.1. Humanitarian needs

There appear to be two contradictory trends in analyses of the present humanitarian situation. One is characterised by an emphasis on the need for rehabilitation and poverty reduction, rather than a continuation of the massive emergency relief provision of recent years. The argument here is that the most acute emergency situation has been mitigated as the drought has declined in Northern and Central parts of the country, employment opportunities have increased (especially in the cities) and distribution of humanitarian assistance to all parts of the country can now be more easily facilitated. Those propagating this view consequently argue that the demand for food aid and more rapid aid distribution is reduced, and should be replaced altogether by provision of cash once the need of the population has been determined through more participatory and development-oriented approaches.

The other view, however, emphasises that 4.2 million of the rural population remain critically insecure and in need of humanitarian assistance over the winter, and that the situation is still too fragile for major development investments. They note the fact that large parts of the Southern and South-Western parts of Afghanistan are still affected by the drought, from which it will take years to recover even with large snowfall and heavy rains through this winter. They also point to the fact that many of those who have returned to Afghanistan have settled in Kabul or have returned or sent the young men of the household to labour in Pakistan and Iran. The plight of the *koochies* (the nomads), who have not been allowed to use their traditional migration routes into central Afghanistan, is frequently mentioned, as is the large number of IDPs that have not returned to their home areas.[10] Many would also argue that a continuation of food assistance is needed, not least as Afghanistan is more likely to receive surplus wheat than increased cash support from donors for the rehabilitation programmes.

What neither of these two camps addresses in earnest are the questions whether all parts of Afghanistan are equally in need of assistance, and what type of assistance is most required. Arguably, this relates to the fact that there is still no

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[10] The *koochies* are *pashtuns* while *hazaras* inhabit the central areas, and a long history of repression by *pashtun* rulers, lately the Taliban, has now led to a ban on *koochies* entering their area.

proper national needs and vulnerability assessment to guide aid prioritisation and allocation. Some data collection on national vulnerability has, though, taken place, combining some variables (landmines/UXO, health, food and accessibility) which are regarded as fairly adequate. While this certainly does not present a complete picture of the present situation, the map generated (see below) indicates that except for the Eastern areas the various vulnerability levels are almost equally distributed throughout the country. This suggests that people in almost all parts of Afghanistan are in need of assistance, though without specifying which type of assistance each district might be more in need of. There is thus a need to provide assistance fairly evenly to all regions, but with special attention to areas ranged at the upper end of the vulnerability scale.
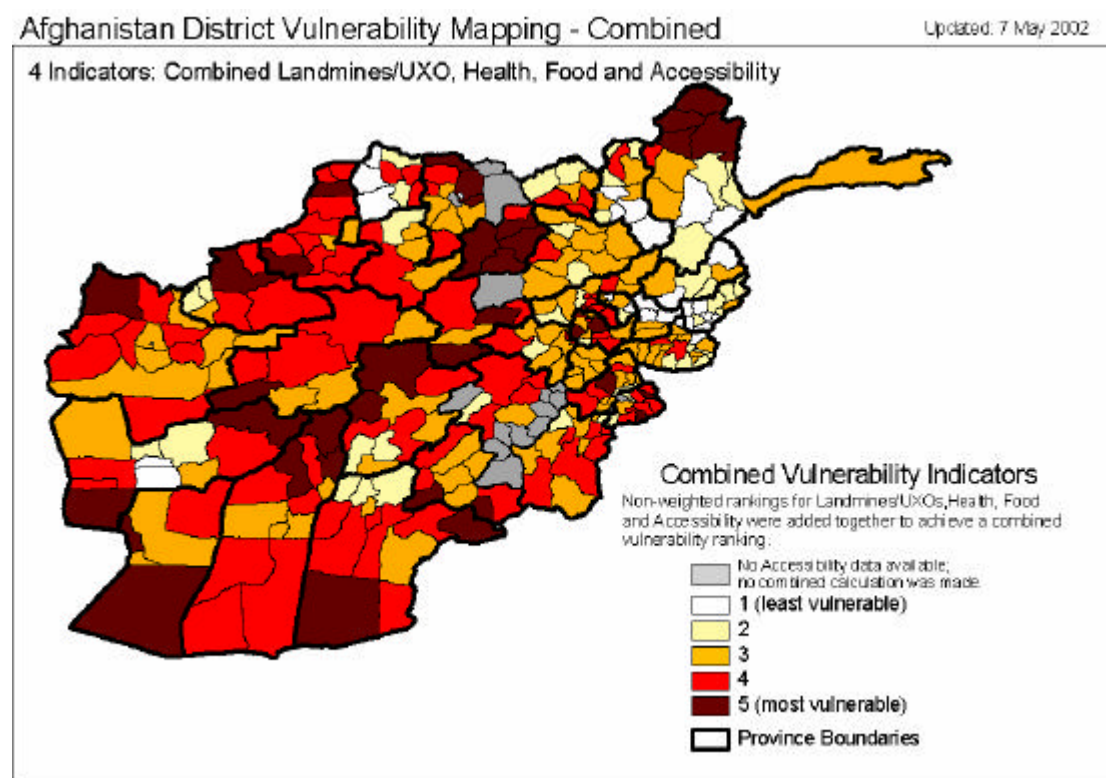

Illustration 1: Afghanistan District Vulnerability Mapping
Source: Afghan Management Information System, 7 May 2002

3.2. Aid distribution

It is, however, presently assumed that humanitarian assistance is rather unevenly distributed, with activities predominantly confined to urban and to Northern and Central areas.[11] This perception is based on the fact that a majority of NGOs are working out of the largest cities and with a concentration of assistance providers in the Northern, North-Western and Central parts of the country. This pattern seems to have emerged over recent years as more of the assistance was channelled in through the North. The worst

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[11] Several ATA officials and NGO staff members claimed that as much as 80-90% of the humanitarian assistance went towards the Central and Northern areas of Afghanistan.

hit drought areas were allegedly in these parts of Afghanistan and most of the new NGOs have not yet moved their activities outside the cities.

If we look at the overall picture of distribution of the 1.5 billion US dollars pledged for Afghanistan at the Tokyo conference, the UN agencies emerge as the single largest recipient. International NGOs come in second place, while only 2 % of the aid is channelled through Afghan NGOs. These figures from the Afghan Assistance Coordination Authority (AACA) are, however, not fully reliable as they only reflect what donors report having contributed to these different implementers, not what has actually been implemented. More interestingly, though, with a few exceptions the UN agencies do all implement their programmes through NGOs, as do now increasingly various ATA ministries. That consequently makes the NGO sector the single largest implementer of humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan today, with an estimated total disbursement close to the 60 % that the UN agencies are reportedly implementing.[12]
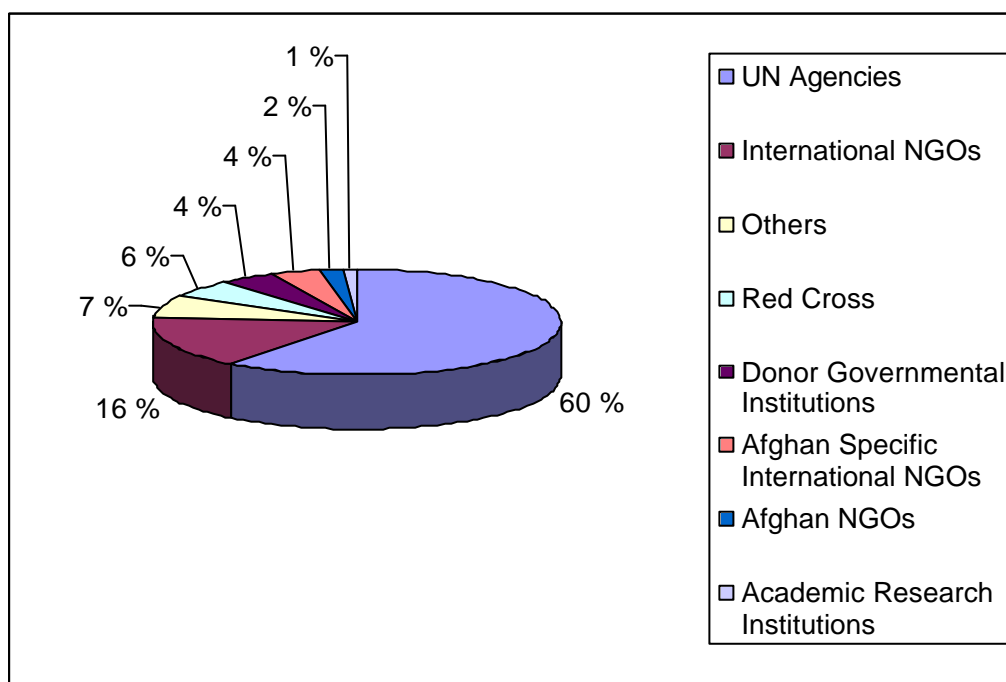

Illustration 2: Aid Disbursement per Implementing Agency.
Source: AACA, November 2002

The UN's Afghanistan Information Management Service (AIMS), the agency responsible for compiling data on aid flows, had by late November only received information from 118 out of 1020 registered NGOs. This leaves the ATA, donors and humanitarian agencies with no overall picture of how much assistance had actually been disbursed, in which areas and for what purposes. So while an uneven distribution of humanitarian assistance cannot presently be documented, nor is there anyone who can deny, correct or adjust that assumption.

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[12] The fact that the UN figures include an unknown level of administrative and programme support makes it impossible to provide exact estimates of actual aid disbursement.

3.3. Humanitarian actors

Making matters even more complicated are the changes the NGO sector has undergone over the last year. While in mid 2001 there were around 250 NGOs registered with four NGO coordination bodies, by November 2002 there were 1020 NGOs registered with the Ministry of Planning in Kabul. Of these, approximately 350 were international. Out of all these NGOs only about 300 are now registered as members with a coordination body, and possibly as few as 60 of these are international NGOs.[13] This low degree of registration with NGO coordinating bodies limits the ability of the latter to monitor the activities of the NGO sector. Moreover, it hampers information exchange and sharply increases the likelihood of duplication, unhealthy competition and corruption, and limits the ability to analyse and direct the aid flow into Afghanistan. Those that remain committed to coordinating and sharing information are NGOs which have remained active in Afghanistan over recent decades, have a professional organisation in place and stronger links to the local community. It is the newcomers on the Afghan scene, arguably those most in need of information on the situation and for guidance, that have kept themselves outside the coordination structures. Such an observation in itself raises doubts about the ability to establish a better-coordinated or at least informed NGO system.

Although not documented, anecdotal evidence indicates that the majority of the new NGOs have established themselves in Kabul, and in cities such as Herat, Mazar-e-Sharif, Faizabad and Bamyan. What might further be expected, taking previous experience into account, is that a large number of the newcomers are relief and emergency oriented. They may be inclined to seek cooperation with local power-holders in order to get their programmes up and running, both because they will be in a hurry to demonstrate that they are able to implement and because they lack the local networks accessible to the more experienced NGOs. Of concern is that this may result in quick fixes with limited impact, possibly strengthening the local warlords or lining their pockets. The prospect has led a seasoned Afghan NGO worker to state that 'these newcomers are No-Good Organisation'.[14]

4. Aid coordination mechanisms

Real coordination is not an academic exercise, but rather requires agencies to show a large degree of willingness to contribute towards a common goal. In the end it may largely depend on the ability of individuals to build the necessary trust to be allowed to facilitate such a fragile process. Successful coordination is also about the allocation of the necessary time and resources for coordination

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[13] These figures are based on previous research conducted by the author, compared with numbers provided by ACBAR and ANCB and as listed by the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit.

[14] There are unconfirmed reports of continued direct support for warlords from different nations, disguised as humanitarian projects. There is, however, work underway to prepare new NGO legislation to regulate the sector, although it is not yet clear what criteria might be applied or if local authorities will adapt such a legislation.

activities, and that agency staff with the necessary authority within their organisation participate in meetings and common strategy development.

It is frequently argued that proper aid coordination will increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the provision of humanitarian assistance by reducing the overlapping and duplication of aid efforts. Agencies would be expected to be aware of activities undertaken by other humanitarian actors, and if possible, agree on common strategies and adhere to common standards and codes of conduct.[15] A government or a lead agency might provide a framework for the humanitarian or rehabilitation operation, through a national plan, consolidated appeal or similar UN-initiated strategy, by which agencies included in such a process would be expected to abide.[16]

The basic requirements for aid coordination are knowledge and information sharing, so as to enable a degree of common understanding of any given situation and a common meeting ground where the information exchange can take place. Often, agencies organise themselves in thematic or geographical groups, or establish ad hoc committees to deal with specific challenges, such as a security threat.

In this report we will not dwell on the coordination structures erected by donors, or groups of donors, which are generally regarded as useful for the overall direction of aid.[17] Instead, we will focus on how practical coordination arrangements are being set up at the national level and in the regions, provinces and districts by the ATA, the UN, NGOs and military actors. The aim here is to review how the different humanitarian actors interact, include and relate to each other in a coordinated manner, and what strengths and weaknesses each of the many coordination arrangements might hold.

4.1. Coordination structures of the ATA

Starting with the ATA, there is little doubt that there has been a very strong will within the present Administration to take a lead and coordinate the recovery process. Serious concerns have been raised by senior ATA officials about what they see as donor attempts to bypass the authorities in their reluctance to channel resources through the ATA, but rather favour direct support to the various humanitarian actors.[18]

Already in February 2002 a special unit was establish within the then Interim Administration, the Afghan Assistance Coordination Authority (AACA), to '...attract, guide, facilitate and coordinate the flow of international

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[15] The IFRC and a number of NGOs have developed a 'Code of Conduct' for humanitarian operations and the SPHERE project has developed minimum standards for the provision of various types of humanitarian assistance.

[16] The UN OCHA prepared until last year a Consolidated Appeal (CAP) for Afghanistan, including the NGOs but without input from the Afghan authorities.

[17] Among the most influential have been the Afghan Support Group (ASG), now proposed to be converted into a more loosely organised 'Friends of Afghanistan' donor group.

[18] See for instance Burnett, V. (2002). Afghanistan: Friction Reported Between Government, U.N. Agencies. *Financial Times*. New York. 18 November

humanitarian, reconstruction and economic assistance to Afghanistan'. This entity had a wide remit to lead, coordinate, control, audit and track the various assistance activities. The unit has become less visible since the Director Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai was appointed as Minister of Finance in the ATA, but has assumed a lead role for a number of important coordination initiatives. One central mechanism of AACA is the Donor Assistance Database for Afghanistan, searchable through the Internet.[19]

Probably the most important initiative of the ATA and AACA has been the formulation of the National Development Framework (NDF), presented in April 2002. The NDF set the direction for the National Development Budget (NDB), which was presented in October and followed by the presentation of the ATA's six priority areas of engagement. The NDF divides the proposed ATA activities into three pillars, being 1) Human Capital and Social Protection; 2) Physical Infrastructure; 3) Trade and Investment, Public Administration and Rule of Law/Security.[20] While these documents proved important for establishing donors' confidence in the ATA, they also provided a framework and a rehabilitation strategy towards which UN agencies and NGOs could adjust their activities. As stated in the NDF, '...we expect donors to fund and implement only those projects consistent with the goals and strategies outlined in this document, to respect the priorities decided in the budget process, and to ensure that all interventions have clear outcomes, and are properly monitored.'[21] The NDF furthermore expressed strong concern about the fragmented approach of the UN agencies and their dependency on international staff, which, according to the NDF, reduced opportunities for building national capacities. While questioning their performance and accountability, the tone was more positive towards the NGO sector and underlined their contribution to both the humanitarian and social sector service delivery, as well as their advocacy role.

It was thus not warmly received by the ATA when the UN initiated its own planning and budgeting process, the Transitional Assistance Programme for Afghanistan (TAPA) for 2003, for which NGOs were also invited to submit proposals.[22] This was an expansion of the Immediate and Transitional Assistance Programme for Afghanistan (ITAP), presented in January 2002. While many NGOs declined to participate, the Ministry of Finance demanded a 'business' plan of the UN agencies, to see how they would be able to support the Government, and furthermore requested details of their administrative overheads. At the time of this heightened tension UNAMA proved instrumental in defusing tension and setting UN agencies on a more informative and less protective course.

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[19] Available at http://aacadad.undp.org/

[20] Pillar 1 includes: Refugee & IDP Return, Education & Vocational Training, Health & Nutrition, Livelihood & Social Protection, Cultural Heritage, Media & Sports; pillar 2 includes Transport, Energy, Mining & Telecommunications, Natural Resource Management and Urban Management; Pillar 3 includes Trade and Investment, Public Administration and Security and Rule of Law

[21] Afghan Transitional Authority (2002). National Development Framework; Draft - For Consultation. Kabul, Afghan Transitional Authority: 50.

[22] UNAMA (2002). Transitional Assistance Programme fro Afghanistan 2003, OCHA. **2002**.

However, the ATA had also throughout the year established a more formal programme coordination structure. Different UN agencies and NGOs specialising in certain fields were drawn in to provide technical assistance to the various ministries through Programme Groups. As this structure was not deemed to be functioning properly, an initiative was taken to merge these groups with the Implementation Group structure. The outcome was the establishment of a set of 13 Consultative Groups.[23] These were to cover the various National Development Programmes, while a Standing Committee would conduct an annual Afghanistan Development Forum.[24] This structure seems to draw on the setup of the previous Afghan Programming Body in the sense that donors, UN agencies and NGOs are all included, although now under the direction of a 'Chair Ministry'. While too early to judge the effectiveness of such a coordination arrangement, its structure indicates a consultative arrangement where the different actors are brought on board to form a consensus, rather than being able to make decisions in support of each of the programme areas.

While there are numerous coordination activities at the Kabul level, the ATA has a much weaker grip, if any, on coordination activities in the provinces and districts. Plans have been drawn up for ministries to strengthen their presence and capacity in the provinces, although there seems to be more in the way of inter-ministerial competition here than a coherent and national development plan. Such a task is certainly made even more challenging by the relatively large independence each Governor enjoys, and by a rigid administrative structure that has remained unchanged since the 1970s.

4.2. UN coordination structures

The United Nations has, under the leadership of Lakhdar Brahimi as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) and head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), established a more coherent coordination structure for the UN system. The UN mission constitutes two pillars, where pillar I is to assist with the political transition while pillar II is responsible for the coordination of UN assistance programmes for Afghanistan and capacity development in the public sector. In the establishment process lessons were drawn from recent UN peacebuilding missions as well as experiences generated through the UN Strategic Framework Approach and the latter's Principled Common Programming, where inclusion of donors and NGOs had been sought.[25]

[23] For background on this process see Standing Committee of the Implementation Group (2002). Building Upon Existing Structures: A Government Led Consultative Group in Afghanistan. Kabul, Implementation Group: 7.
[24] Government of Afghanistan (2002). The Establishment of Consultative Groups for Furtherance of National Development Programme(Draft). Kabul, ATA: 5.
[25] For a critical review of the SFA see Duffield, M., P. Gossman and N. Leader (2001). A Review of the Strategic Framework for Afghanistan. Kabul/London, AREU.

As indicated above, there has been a close interrelationship between the UN and the ATA on establishing a unified coordination mechanism at the national level. While the UN has not held any direct command over NGOs, it has, through the mandate provided by the UN Security Council, been assigned an overall humanitarian coordination role. Here, it appears that UNAMA has had a preference for interacting with and involving international NGOs and the Agency Coordination Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR) rather than national NGOs.[26] But in general the impression is that UNAMA has mainly focused on intra-UN coordination, and on ensuring a workable relationship between the UN and the ATA. A major challenge has been to secure a recognition that ATA actually is 'in the driving seat', despite its obvious shortcomings, and to facilitate an overall capacity development process.

In contrast to the ATA, UNAMA has established a coordination structure outside Kabul, divided into 8 areas (see below), to work closely with Afghan local authorities and the NGOs. An Area Coordinator leads these offices, drawing support from a Field Coordination Unit within UNAMA. Still, these establishments have not been without friction, as single UN agencies have maintained their own structures and thus reduced the possible synergy (and reduced presence and expenses) that a closer collaboration and sharing of tasks could have generated.
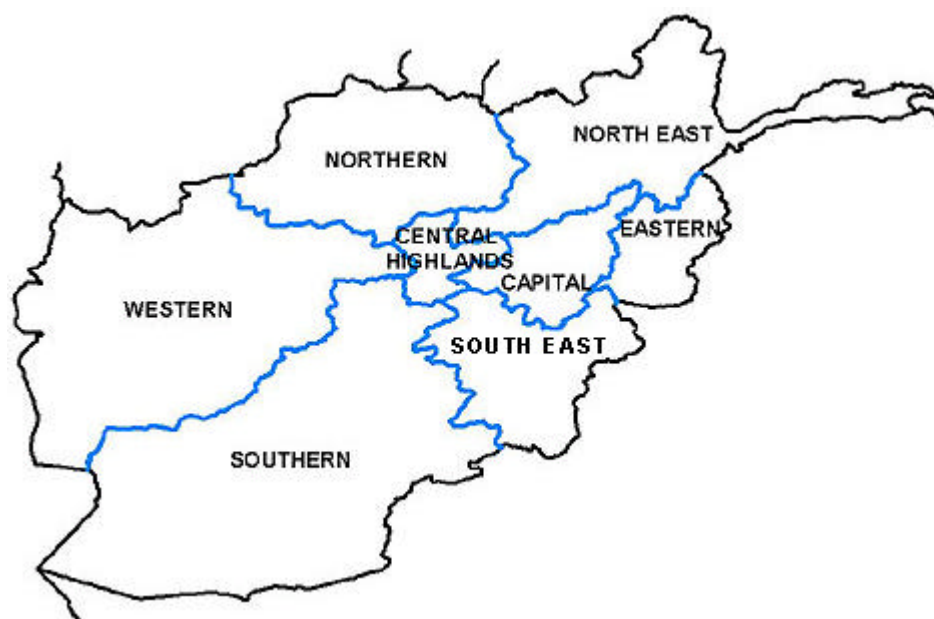

Illustration 3: UNAMA Area Coordination Bodies
Source: Afghanistan Information Management Service, 2002

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[26] According to the Executive Director of the Afghan NGOs' Coordination Bureau (ANCB), UNAMA had not consulted or involved this coordination body to the same degree that they had ACBAR.

Another concern is that the areas covered by the UNAMA structure are large, with no equivalent and matching ATA structure. Thus most attention, and subsequent funding, may be drawn towards provinces and cities where the UNAMA offices are located. Apparently, certain coordination efforts are undertaken at a province and district level as well, though then supported by a single UN agency or NGO and at times in collaboration with local authorities.[27]

When it comes to tracking aid resources and aid flows by the UN agencies, the Afghan Information Management Service (AIMS) and its Activities Tracking Information Management System (ATIMS) are central, as is its database for tracking agencies and activities throughout Afghanistan.

4.3. NGO coordination

In contrast with the ATA and the UN, there is no overall NGO coordination structure, but rather a range of separate coordination mechanisms set up to support specific groups of NGOs. At the national level there is the Agency Coordination Body of Afghan Relief (ACBAR) with 70 international and national NGOs as members; the Afghan NGO Coordination Bureau (ANCB) with 170 national NGO members; and the Islamic Coordination Council (ICC) with 10 Islamic NGO members, the latter being the least active one. Of these, ACBAR is the only one with representation outside Kabul, with offices in Herat, Jalalabad, Mazar-e-Sharif as well as Peshawar.[28] The only regional coordination arrangement is the Kandahar-based South Western Afghanistan & Balochistan Association for Coordination (SWABAC) with approximately 50 members, predominantly national NGOs.

While the NGO structure to a certain degree overlaps with the UNAMA one, there is no matching overall NGO coordination system or formalised information sharing and collaboration between the various NGO coordination bodies. Given the fact that the vast majority of NGOs are still not registered with any of the coordination bodies, any attempt to establish an overall picture of aid activities, required for more thorough aid coordination, is not likely to materialise.

While there are differing views amongst the ATA ministries as how to relate to the NGOs, there seems to be an agreement that NGOs are to be regarded as part of the private sector, and an acknowledgement that NGO services are central for aid provision and rehabilitation efforts. Consequently, NGOs have not been subject to the same rigid control attempts as the UN system, although they are also accused of having high overhead costs and of excessive spending on offices and cars.'[29]

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[27] The Ghor Province is a case in point where Christian Aid has assumed a coordination role, and where local authorities were not included as the Governor was not present and the Vice Governor was not regarded as properly representative of the communities.

[28] For further details on their activities see http://www.acbar.org

[29] The NDF acknowledges the need for a separate and robust coordination mechanism for the NGO sector, to '...avoid duplication, harmful competition, pursuit of conflicting agendas, tension between Afghan and international NGOs and among the established and new entrants,

4.4. The military and aid coordination

Beside the more traditional humanitarian actors, various military entities have over the last year engaged themselves in the provision of humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan to 'win the hearts and minds' of the Afghans. The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) has had Civil-Military Operation (CIMIC) teams in operation in Kabul, working closely with NGOs and the ministries. Likewise the Coalition Joint Civil-Military Operations Task Force (CJCMOTF) has identified and implemented projects in other parts of Afghanistan. Several NGOs have questioned the wisdom of having humanitarian projects implemented by armed and at times civilian-dressed military personnel.

But while the initial humanitarian activities undertaken by the military were an 'add on' to their other activities, recent events are about to change the military engagement drastically. Acknowledging the limited success of their military campaign, the Coalition Forces decided by late November to move into a new campaign phase emphasising preventive actions through involvement in reconstruction activities. The idea expressed by the US Special Envoy to Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, is that 'the expansion of reconstruction in turn will have a positive effect on security.' The plan is to deploy 200 to 300 civil affairs officers, together with officials of the State Department and USAID, in different Afghan cities under the protection of US and British troops.[30] Termed a Joint Regional Team (JRT) concept when presented to NGOs by Coalition Forces in Kabul on 21 November 2002, it was described as a 'national level coordination mechanism' with 'no command and control role but coordination through facilitation'.[31]

At the national level a Ministerial Team would liaison with the ministries and participate in the Consultative Groups. However, a more politically sensitive element of this plan is the aim of bringing provincial authorities 'in line'. The Commander of JRT, U.S. Army Colonel Phil Maughan, recently explained that '...what we envision with these regional teams, is getting the central government out to the regions, giving them the legitimacy they need to support Kabul'. In such a strategy the ability to direct humanitarian assistance is obviously an important element, as he underlines that '...we are also trying to get the NGOs and IOs [international organizations] and the U.N. to start working together. Once they start doing that, there will no longer be a need for the U.S. military and we can go home.'[32]

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and geographic concentration of operation.' Afghan Transitional Authority (2002). National Development Framework; Draft - For Consultation. Kabul, Afghan Transitional Authority: 50.
[30] SANA (2002). US Officials Prepare New Campaign for Afghan Security. *The Frontier Post*. Peshawar.
[31] According to notes from the meeting distributed through ACBAR, the concept included six activities, to 1) Monitor and assess the local and regional situation; 2) Coordinate to remove causes of instability; 3) Facilitate coordination between agencies and central and regional government; 4) Guidance and help to government; 5) Pull forward reconstruction support to where needed; 6) Assist in creating secure environment through negotiation and support.
[32] Teeple, J. (2002). US Military Shift Afghan Operation Towards Reconstruction Efforts. Gardez, VOA.

Naturally, donors, NGOs and NGO coordination bodies are cautious about these plans, arguing that a purely humanitarian approach is their best protection. [33] This view is not shared by the US military. The US military spokesman, Robert King, insisted upon not keeping the roles apart when civilian relief workers appear '...to be putting themselves in danger in Afghanistan.'[34] The spokesman further explained that the US military defined themselves as a 'facilitating agent' between local government and civilian bodies, with the role of aiding humanitarian assistance through presenting a framework where '...nothing we do should negate what the UN is doing.'

While the US military might not hold a very clear view of how this new structure is going to function, it is relatively clear that they have a rather limited experience of working through a facilitated aid coordination structure. In any case, if facilitation were important there would actually be no need to establish a separate new coordination structure, as in the locations where they are initially striving to establish themselves there is presently either a UNAMA, Government-led or NGO-led humanitarian coordination structure already in place. While these need strengthening, it is questionable whether another outside agent, with a military vision for their engagement, will be able to establish a humanitarian coordination arrangement acceptable to the other humanitarian actors or the ATA.

5. Coordination challenges and dilemmas

While there certainly is a large number of issues that could be discussed when it comes to improving the coordination and delivery of humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan, some appear to hold a larger importance in the present fragile and demanding humanitarian situation. Provision of humanitarian assistance and rehabilitation and development assistance to the Afghan population is seen as a test of the ability and will of the Interim Administration to provide for its citizens in accordance with their needs. This is a task for which it is presently totally dependent on international donors for funding and on the UN and NGO sector for implementation.

5.1. Baseline data and information exchange

The starting point for any coordinated efforts is, besides a functional coordination structure, knowledge of available resources, of the assistance needs of the population and an overview of ongoing activities.

Here both the ATA and the international community are presently at a loss, as there is not one entity able to provide an overview of aid needs and disbursements. According to the Minister of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, neither the ATA nor the UN had been able to provide him with any information relating to the geographical distribution of aid.

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[33] ACBAR (2002). ACBAR Policy Brief: NGOs Concerns and Recommendations on Civil-Military Relations. Kabul, Agency Coordinated Body for Afghan Relief.

[34] Agency French Press (2002). Row Brews Over US Military Role In Afghanistan. AFP. Kabul.

While the AACA does hold an overview of donor contributions towards the initial pledges made in Tokyo in early 2002, it does not hold verified information on aid disbursement. By end of November it was in the process of reconciling its information to weed out double reporting and overlapping, and expected to have a more consolidated report by February 2003.

However, the basic foundations for compiling such figures are actually lacking. A review of information on humanitarian activities available from the AIMS, which may be assumed to be similar to information AACA has access to, reveals that beside project information from UN agencies it has only recorded the activities of 118 of more than 1020 registered NGOs. Knowing that most UN agencies implement their programmes through NGOs, and that several international NGOs utilise national NGOs for project implementation, the AIMS has not even attempted to produce a reconciled list, but has rather presented the activities of particular groups of agencies (such as national NGOs) or programme activities (such as health) at a provincial level.

NGO coordinating bodies are in the process of preparing databases of member activities, but, again, they will depend on what their members report to them, which will exclude all non-member activities. A further concern is that according to ANCB its members are not willing to provide budget figures, and thus the total volume of aid allocation cannot be determined.

As such, both the ATA and the humanitarian actors presently lack a central planning tool that could enable them to perform a better coordination task, reducing geographical and sectoral overlapping and ensuring that assistance is provided in accordance with needs. There is an urgent need to establish such a joint and commonly shared baseline data system, and an overview how resources presently are allocated.

5.2. A fragmented coordination system

A further concern is that presently Afghanistan has several distinct aid coordination mechanisms, largely operating on their own and without an overarching coordination structure. We have seen that there are several NGO coordination bodies, each representing distinct member groups, although only ACBAR and SWABAC have representation outside Kabul. While there are a number of intra-agency coordination entities in Kabul, allowing a degree of formalisation, the ATA has not attempted to impose a more rigid coordination mechanism, but has rather ensured that the different humanitarian groups are included in the consultative groups and thus kept informed about each other's activities. A major problem, though, is that the vast majority of implementing NGOs are not included in these coordination efforts, and seem uninformed about the policy directions given by the ATA.

Coordination arrangements at the provincial, district and village level might prove to be more important for securing effective aid distribution. Here, however, coordination arrangements are more scarce and less structured. While

UNAMA provides area based coordination facilities, coordination at the provincial level is limited to a rather defunct governmental system and at the district and village level to the efforts of single NGOs. While one might expect that the local Governors and *woluswals* might wish to draw on the resources made available by the NGOs, the NGOs are likely to be far less inclined to enter into collaboration with governmental structures. A frequently heard complaint from the NGOs is that the administrative staff do not hold the necessary technical competence to act as a counterpart for rehabilitation and development projects. What is certain is that many of the NGOs (and UN agencies) have recruited the most competent governmental staff, that the remaining staff have hardly received any form of competence building over the last decade and that few of them now receive any regular salaries.

With the present stand-off between the Kabul-based Transitional Authority and the rather independent and at times opposing provincial authorities, one might not expect any improvements to eventuate before a more coherent administrative reform process falls into place. What is desperately needed is a sharp reduction in the number of ministries and of administrative and service staff at all levels, together with a new governance structure defining authority and command lines between the national and local authorities. And, certainly, followed by intensive capacity building of such a streamlined administrative structure. Furthermore, a clearer understanding is required between the authorities and the NGOs on what roles each of them is to assume in the future, and what planning and coordination arrangements should come into place to ensure the establishment of at least a basic information exchange and more effective coordination.

5.3. The military challenge

The recent change of focus for the military campaign, entering into the humanitarian field, might actually be seen as a further threat to the establishment of a more coherent aid coordination mechanism. There are several reasons for drawing such a conclusion, the most important being that one further coordination mechanism is added onto what already exists at the national and provincial levels. And despite the emphasis on introducing a facilitated coordination arrangement, the JRTs seem inclined to force their structure onto both the Afghan authorities and the humanitarian actors. Taking all accumulated experiences of aid coordination into account and the expressed NGO reluctance to work inside a military framework, such an approach is doomed to fail, although one might expect that USAID will channel its funding in this direction and apply a pressure on funded agencies to 'fall in line'.

It is far more worrying that a military entity is attempting simultaneously to combine political, military and so-called humanitarian roles, devaluing and bypassing the ATA and UN attempts to establish a civilian and more humanitarian oriented management and coordination structure. The impartiality of aid and the principle of allocating aid resources in accordance with the needs and vulnerability of the intended beneficiaries are certainly under threat. It is in the nature of a 'hearts and mind' strategy to direct

assistance to areas and persons perceived to be in opposition to the military campaign. These will not be the poorest, most deprived and needy segments of the Afghan population, but rather the warlords the allied forces have depended on in their campaign against terrorism. While such a 'humanitarian' strategy might draw less fire from human rights organisations as the support for the warlords will be less visible, the end result is likely to be just the same.

The statement made by the military spokesman that the humanitarian coordination system has failed seems to indicate that the military establishment has no real understanding of the complexity of the aid scene, and of the high degree of independence the system is built upon. Trying to force coordination upon an organisation such as the ICRC will certainly not be accepted, with the likely result that it might withdraw its staff and projects and thus leave the civilian population even more vulnerable.

And finally, while the NGOs have been represented in Afghanistan for many years with staff that know and understand Afghan culture and customs, the JRTs will recruit former military personnel with limited knowledge of the complex Afghan situation. That presents, in itself, a danger both to the security of NGO and UN staff and for the possibility of establishing a functional coordination arrangement.

What there is, rather, a need for in Afghanistan today, and requested both by the ATA and the population, is an increased military presence outside Kabul to improve the security situation for common Afghans. Afghans do not need to see US citizens physically involved in the rebuilding of their school or hospital to win their hearts and minds. An improvement in the security situation and notorious warlords being taken to court would convince larger numbers of Afghans of the sincerity of the military forces in taking a firm stand against terrorism.

In the end, a joint military/civilian presence also sends a strong signal of the failure of a more peaceful and civilian approach towards peacebuilding. It might even remove the scant authority President Karzai still holds among common Afghans as a civilian leader, which could be catastrophic for the entire democratisation process.

6. Concluding remarks

The whole notion of aid coordination as an important tool for improving the effectiveness and efficiency of aid provision still holds merit for Afghanistan, not least as new and inexperienced humanitarian actors now flood the country. However, a call for increased coordination should be paired with a more realistic view of what is actually achievable in the given Afghan context. And certainly a clearer understanding needs to be developed of what types of collaboration and coordination arrangement might be needed, including of situations where there is not, actually, a need for a new coordination layer but rather a clearer managerial and directive role for the ATA.

Recalling Minear's definition of what constitutes a UN coordination effort, it is evident that all present coordination arrangements fall short on a number of points, not least those related to information management, ensuring accountability and orchestrating a field division of labour. The maintenance of a framework with the host political authorities could certainly be improved, although that might imply that the UN would have to tone down its own leadership role.

However, to enable a more directive role for the ATA two prerequisites for documentation need to be established that would benefit all humanitarian agencies. Firstly, a better documentation is required of actual needs by type of beneficiary and by region so as to establish a needs-driven allocation process rather than a policy-driven one likely to cause further tensions within the ATA Cabinet. This needs then to be accompanied by an accurate overview of aid disbursement per sector and by geographical area, to ensure that actual needs are covered. Of equal importance, it should be followed by a much better system for information sharing and dissemination, not least towards the Afghan population to ensure that they have sufficient information to judge if aid is misappropriated or unjustly distributed.

Donors can play an important role in pressurising the ATA to undertake necessary reforms, supporting more extensive needs and resource assessments processes, and funding the various coordination arrangements and attempts to strengthen the professional capacity of the members of the coordinating bodies. NGO coordination cannot be enforced, but it can be made attractive through the provision of improved services and benefits for the NGO sector. The same would be the situation for the UN agencies, where concerted ATA pressure to reduce overheads and administrative costs could bring about a more cooperative and less 'turf'-defending UN system.

In the end one cannot avoid addressing the overall questions as to whether provision of humanitarian assistance supports the wider peacebuilding efforts or undermines or weakens them. Given the lack of actual knowledge of the present aid distribution, neither the ATA nor the UN is in a position where they can document that it actually is fair and balanced, and not utilised for military or political purposes. That in itself generates a threat, as assumptions and rumours of a misbalance in aid disbursement are more than likely to be used in political campaigns and to divide the population again along ethnic and religious lines. There is an urgent need to address this question, not least by the UNAMA if they are to meet their dual political and humanitarian coordination mandate.

The demands for accountability and the development of a sound rehabilitation and development process are equal for all humanitarian groups. Not least is the NGO sector in urgent need of defining its future role, and of deciding if it wishes to limit itself to being only a service provider for the ATA and the UN agencies, or alternatively to take on a more proactive role as community mobilisers and to enter into an advocacy role on behalf of the communities in which they engage. Being able and willing to defend humanitarian principles

and imperatives is an important starting point in an environment where these have so often been violated for political, military or purely financial reasons.

In the end, aid coordination is more about willingness to find workable solutions than about ways of establishing rigid management structures, about willingness to seek innovative and multiple ways of assisting Afghans, and about making agencies and authorities accountable to the Afghans rather than focusing solely on credibility with donors. Only when there is a shared goal and a strong commitment to the intended beneficiaries are aid coordination entities likely to meet the high expectations their presence generates.

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