

## Executive Summary

Afghanistan is at war. The rising insurgency, the war-weariness of the international community and the mounting pressure on the Government of Afghanistan (GoA) to respond to the current turbulent climate has stakeholders scrambling for effective answers to an increasingly complex and escalating conflict. In recent times, there has been an increasing awareness of the need for a military-aligned and civilian-resourced strategy that would, through a two-pronged approach, reintegrate rank and file Taliban fighters while seeking a political solution to the current situation through reconciling with the top leaders of the insurgency. The Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP) that has been developed to address the rising insurgency was signed by Afghan President Hamid Karzai in June 2010 and is being presented as an Afghan-owned, Afghan-led process, with the most comprehensive reach of any reintegration and reconciliation program that has been implemented in Afghanistan since 2001.

The current APRP is an ambitious strategy that responds to some of the criticisms of the previously implemented and not highly successful reintegration and reconciliation programmes, such as the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR), the Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG) and the Strengthening the Peace Programme (PTS). It awards greater leadership roles to Afghan institutions, subnational governance structures, local actors and communities. It also devotes significant attention to the communication and coordination between different implementing partners, includes concerns about individual and community security and grievance resolution, and makes an effort to understand and address the reasons behind why men join the insurgency.

This research focused on capturing the current reflections and concerns in Afghanistan about the strategy as well as key stakeholders' perspectives on the prospects and challenges for reintegration and reconciliation processes in the country. The data was gathered from semi-structured interviews and unofficial conversations with various Afghan and

international stakeholders in Kabul and Washington DC from April-May 2010 and existing documents and media reports on the strategy until July 2010.

This research reveals several concerns. The APRP strategy is based on the assumption that reintegration will lead to a de-escalation of conflict, will take place within the context of good faith between the parties involved and will, because of disarming insurgents, result in better security conditions and a corresponding strengthening of the rule of law. Simultaneously, it is also based on the premise that insurgent leaders will be interested in "reconciling" with the GoA because of the incentives being offered, such as amnesties and third-country settlement. These assumptions are flawed. Reintegration and reconciliation may not be mutually reinforcing (i.e. a campaign to disarm soldiers is not necessarily conducive to the building of trust required to engage the political leadership at the negotiating-table, nor are political negotiations alone likely to result in rank and file soldiers disarming in large numbers, given the complexity of the conflict). Unless adequate support for the reintegrating combatants is provided, and the need to transform highly antagonistic relations between the insurgency leadership and the GoA to a more civic one through generating trust and confidence on both sides (as required for political reconciliation) is properly addressed, neither reintegration nor reconciliation will be achieved.

Further, offers of economic opportunities and political dialogue in the current APRP fall notably short of adequately addressing the complex range of factors that have caused the current insurgency, including failure of the GoA to deliver on its promises, resentment toward the international military forces, the radicalisation of insurgent recruits, the patron-client relationships that develop within the ranks of the insurgency, and the involvement of external actors in funding, planning and participating in the insurgency. While the GoA and the major international stakeholders, including the United States, appear to have arrived at a shared understanding of the terms "reintegration"

and “reconciliation,” there remains disagreement among them regarding the sequencing of the two processes. The GoA is operating from the belief that both disarming the insurgents and initiating political dialogue with the insurgency need to take place simultaneously to bring the conflict to an end. In contrast, international stakeholders, particularly the United States, appear willing to support disarmament of rank and file soldiers but are far more cautious about supporting political dialogue with the senior leadership of the insurgency, mainly because of political sensitivities on the domestic front about negotiating with what they have defined as “the enemy” since 2001. There is also the belief, stemming from a military point of view, that political negotiations can and should take place only when the insurgency has been weakened significantly. For the APRP to be nominally successful given the current volatile climate, there is a critical need to reconcile the two positions regarding the sequencing of the processes.

On an operational level, interviewees expressed a significant degree of scepticism about the capacity, mobilising power and political commitment of the current Afghan administration to implement this type of comprehensive and complex operation. The level of secrecy and hesitancy around the strategy among respondents to this research further underscores not only the absence of a unified approach but also a lack of trust and confidence among and between the different stakeholders, many of whom will be directly involved in funding and/or implementing the project.

This research also unveiled a common perception among both national and international actors that the APRP is a desperate bid by the international community to support any quick “winning strategy” that will get their troops home. This is combined with a growing sentiment that the APRP is not an Afghan-owned and led strategy, but a component of the counter-insurgency (COIN) strategy and is hence under the control of the international military forces. Consequently, research respondents expressed that while the strategy would sell well with the donor communities, it was inadequate in addressing specific contextual factors and thus might not yield the anticipated results on the ground.

Finally, this report recognises that the current political situation creates numerous pragmatic constraints. Indeed, with the implementation of the APRP, one can foresee different factions and individuals continuing to hedge bets, forge alliances and attempt to undermine government authority. It also observes that an overt focus on “making peace” and “reconciling” with insurgents has meant that the strategy falls short of effectively addressing demands of the victims of the conflict. Without sufficient attention to the multidimensional aspects of justice, which the Afghan people demand and attention to which is required for a “true” process of reconciliation, the APRP strategy may be perceived as yet another act of political expedience.

Based on the findings of this research, the following seven broad recommendations are offered to those engaged in proceeding with the APRP and with the broader issues of peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan:

#### 1. Increase transparency and ensure coordination

A concerted effort must be made to make the processes around the strategy transparent and to develop a more coordinated approach between the different stakeholders. The international community must refrain from sending mixed signals about what is possible and what they are willing to support. The US Military and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) as a whole also need to fall in line with the different actors of the strategy and stop functioning independently of the civilian administration.

#### 2. Establish stringent standards for the GoA to implement the APRP

Donors need to set specific conditions for the financial commitments they will be making to support the Peace and Reintegration Fund, and the GoA needs to establish specific and strict benchmarks to ensure that the different bodies involved in the process meet their strategic objectives as effectively as possible. Greater uniformity among the donors would go a long way to ensuring that the APRP’s implementation and output is more effective and sustainable.

### 3. Recognise local realities and manage expectations

The demands being placed on the Afghan government to deliver are enormous, but the reality is that the state is far too weak to respond to the laundry list of expectations in a context of ongoing conflict. It is critical for stakeholders to mitigate the anticipated potential of the APRP and political reconciliation in general and manage expectations accordingly.

### 4. Develop a strong, inclusive negotiation strategy, strengthen the GoA's negotiating capacity, and consider a role for an effective mediator

The international community has to continue to perform a tenuous and sensitive balancing act that recognises the GoA's weakness in potential negotiations without overshadowing its course of action. An overt insistence from the international community about the setting of preconditions could mean that the insurgent leadership will refuse to negotiate with the GoA. Perhaps a more effective line of engagement would be to help define the parameters of a strong negotiating strategy, identify a timeline with specific indicators for political negotiations, and begin immediate concerted work to strengthen the GoA's negotiating capacity. The international community can also insist that an inclusive, clear strategy must include the participation and consensus of human rights and women's rights organisations. These organisations are deeply concerned that, in their absence, their recent achievements will be compromised.

The UN should appoint an envoy or a team of experts to work together with the GoA and the international community to develop options and a framework for effective negotiations and assist in identifying a reliable and effective mediator who can deliver on the political front, both in the dialogues between the insurgents and the GoA and, when necessary, between the GoA and external state actors

The international community needs to continue to act as a watch-dog over these critical developments, put sustained pressure on the negotiation process and continue to support civil society actors to strengthen their position within the emerging context.

### 5. Articulate the regional strategy and address the role of external actors

The lack of a clearly articulated regional strategy is generating speculation, anxiety and suspicions about Afghanistan's role and position in US foreign policy. For the US, navigating the treacherous political waters could mean developing a diplomatic relationship with Iran, paying attention to India's and Pakistan's concerns about each other's involvement in Afghanistan and putting pressure on them to curtail their proxy war about Kashmir on Afghan soil.

### 6. Consider the demands of conflict victims

The international community needs to step up its pressure on the GoA to address questions of justice in a transparent, inclusive manner; take necessary steps to avoid exploitation of conflict survivors and abuse of power in the implementation of the APRP program; and remove from positions of authority those who continue to exploit the system to serve the interests of the powerful. The existing Action Plan on Peace, Reconciliation and Justice in Afghanistan is a substantive document that captures many of the demands of victims while focusing on how effective institution-building can take place. The GoA needs to revisit its commitments to this document and deliberate on how it can deliver on the promises made. Efforts need to be made for a truth and accountability mechanism. This would both reflect the commitments of the National Action Plan as well as the widespread demands for such a mechanism among the Afghan population.

### 7. Prepare for a long-term commitment to Afghanistan

Despite pressure to "bring the troops home" and an eagerness to bring an end to the conflict, there needs to be a proper evaluation of the extent to which the international community can afford to—and afford not to—continue its commitment to the country. A strong Afghan state cannot be built in one or two years and expectations need to be tempered. Further, rather than a complete withdrawal, there needs to be a long-term commitment to the country to assist it to advance politically, economically, legally and socially.