Meeting on 8 July 2010, the JCMB agreed to ambitious targets for expanding the size of the Afghan army by 30% and the police by 20% by the end of October 2011. It also touched on job creation, boosting government service delivery and regional economic ties. On 20 July, the UN co-chaired a conference in Kabul addressed by Ban Ki-moon, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and other foreign dignitaries. The government laid out an economic plan that reflected the JCMB’s previous discussions of development needs.

CONCLUSION

While UNAMA receives more public attention than most political missions, its performance has been overshadowed by debates within NATO – and, to an even greater degree, in the US – about the future strategy for Afghanistan. At the time of writing, the US “surge” in the country is ongoing – its implications for UNAMA remain uncertain.

External factors aside, recruitment and retention remain possibly the largest obstacle in terms of UNAMA’s ability to implement its mandate. In July 2008, as part of a vision for an expanded role of the mission and its broader field presence, a near doubling of the mission’s budget and staffing was approved. However, in light of the security environment, especially the targeting of the UN Guesthouse in Kabul and the killing of 5 employees, recruiting and retaining staff has been a constant challenge and the mission has a current vacancy rate of 40%. Most dramatically, the staffing difficulties were demonstrated by the vacated Deputy SRSG political affairs post that was only filled with a permanent candidate in mid March 2010, leaving UNAMA’s political section without leadership for six months. Aside from quantity, the availability of qualified staff is also an issue. Although UNAMA is mandated to lead donor coordination efforts, there is a lack of sufficiently qualified staff. The mission also competes for candidates with the UN Development Programme, which is sometimes perceived as a more attractive option.

The most important factor in deciding UNAMA’s future will, however, be whether the Afghan government, the US and other powers concerned with Afghanistan settle on a durable political strategy for stabilizing the country – something force cannot achieve alone – and whether UNAMA is permitted to play a lead role in implementing such a plan. Without such a strategy, a decade of support to Afghanistan will go to waste.

The EU

In 2001, the European Union created the post of Special Representative (EUSR) for Afghanistan. The EUSR is based in Kabul, with a broad focus on monitoring and reporting on human rights, political, constitutional and security developments. At first, coordination between the EUSR and the European Commission’s office in Kabul (responsible for aid) was very low, although it gradually increased over time. The EUSR in 2009 was a former Italian Ambassador to Afghanistan, Ettore Francesco Sequi.

Sequi was replaced in April 2010 by Vygaudas Ušackas of Lithuania, who is double-hatted, functioning as the head of the Delegation of the European Union and as well as EUSR. Given that the European Commission is one of the largest donors providing official development and humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan, it is likely that the position of EUSR will become considerably more influential in the future than it has been hitherto.

In addition to its civilian presence, the EU also has a Police Mission in Afghanistan (EUPOL). Launched in 2007, the mission has suffered from poor staffing and has failed to play a serious role in the security sector reform process. The EUSR is only responsible for giving the mission political guidance, as it has its own reporting line to Brussels.