

3.5 Mission Reviews

Afghanistan

With the 2014 deadline for a complete withdrawal of international forces looming, the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) confronts perhaps the most urgent test of its relevance in assisting Afghanistan to achieve stability and sustainable peace. The first handover of security operations from NATO to Afghan forces took place in July 2011, despite escalating violence and increasingly divisive national politics. The military drawdown has renewed focus on the need for a political solution to the conflict, including reconciliation talks with the Taliban.

The deteriorating security situation across Afghanistan has presented the most significant challenge to the mission, illustrated by the brutal attack on April 2011 of the UNAMA offices in Mazar-i-Sharif, previously one of the more stable cities in the country.

Strains are evident on the domestic political front, as parliament discussed the possible impeachment of President Hamid Karzai in July 2011, following the ongoing dispute over the results of the 2010 parliamentary elections. This breakdown signals severe problems with the country's political institutions. Meanwhile, a wave of high-profile assassinations in the south of the country has shaken the existing power structure, threatening tenuous security gains.

Just as the need to fulfill UNAMA's political role appears most critical, declining stability across the country and the growing Afghan discontent with the international presence has severely hampered the ability of UNAMA staff to monitor and participate in national affairs.



Fardin Waez/UNAMA

Staffan de Mistura (centre), Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), speaks to members of the press following Afghanistan's parliamentary inauguration ceremony, the second to be held since 2001.

BACKGROUND

In December 2001, following the fall of the Taliban regime, a number of prominent Afghan leaders convened in Bonn, Germany under UN auspices. With the goal of establishing a nationally agreed upon government in Afghanistan, the subsequent Bonn Agreement established a transitional authority led by Hamid Karzai, who was democratically elected as the president of Afghanistan in 2004. Parliamentary and provincial council elections in September 2005 marked the formal end of the Bonn process.

UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA)

Authorization and Start Date	28 March 2002 (UNSC Res. 1401)
SRSRG	Staffan de Mistura (Sweden)
Deputy SRSRGs	Political Affairs: Vacant Relief, Recovery and Reconstruction: Michael Keating (UK)
First SRSRG	Lakhdar Brahimi (Algeria)
Budget	\$270.0 million (1 January 2011-31 December 2011)
Strength as of 30 April 2011	International Civilian: 421 National Civilian: 1,667 Military Experts on Mission: 13 Police: 2 UN Volunteers: 60

For detailed mission information see p. 190

EUSR for Afghanistan (EUSRA)

Latest Key Resolution	18 July 2011 (date of issue); 1 September 2011 (date of effect) (Council Decision 2011/427/CFSP)
Authorization and Start Date	10 December 2001 (date of issue) (Council Joint Action 2001/875/CFSP)
Special Representative	Vygaudas Ušackas (Lithuania) (Appointed by Council Decision 22 March 2010; Entry on duty 1 April 2010)
First EUSR	Klaus Peter Klaiber (Germany)
Budget	\$5.1 million (1 September 2011-30 June 2012)

The UN Security Council (UNSC) authorized UNAMA in March 2002 to support the Bonn Agreement and provided the mission with a political mandate that was agreed upon by the transitional Afghan authority. Since the initial authorization, the UNSC has reauthorized UNAMA for the past nine years, with the current mandate set to expire on 31 March 2012. UNAMA's mandated priorities include the facilitation of political processes for peace and reconciliation; protection and promotion of human rights; support of accountable governance; advocacy and promotion of coherent efforts in support of the transition process, and socio-economic development to further stability; cooperation with International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF); and chairing of the Joint

Coordination and Monitoring Board (JCMB). The mandate emphasizes the full implementation of commitments made at the London Conference in January 2010 and the subsequent Kabul Conference in July 2010.

Under the leadership of the SRSRG, Staffan de Mistura, UNAMA is an integrated mission comprised of two substantive pillars. Pillar I focuses on political activities and was headed by Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General (DSRSG) Martin Kobler, who was appointed the SRSRG for UNAMI in August 2011. As of September the position is vacant. Pillar II is responsible for relief, recovery and reconstruction (RRR). In July 2011 Michael Keating was named the new DSRSG responsible for RRR. In this capacity he also functions as the Resident Coordinator and Resident Humanitarian Coordinator.

UNAMA's headquarters are located at three main locations in Kabul. In addition, UNAMA has eight regional offices in Kandahar, Paktia, Nangahar, Herat, Mazar-i Sharif, Kunduz, Kabul, and Bamiyan, and 15 provincial offices. Liaison offices are also located in Tehran, Islamabad and Ashgabat. An administrative support office in Kuwait was operational in the latter part of 2010.

SECURITY SITUATION

The security situation in Afghanistan deteriorated markedly in 2010-2011. The number of attacks initiated by armed opposition groups in 2010 increased by 64 percent over the previous year, marking the highest annual growth in the last five years.¹ In the first half of 2011, UNAMA reported 1,462 civilian deaths, a 15 percent increase from the same period in 2010.² May 2011 was the deadliest month since 2007, with 368 civilian deaths and 593 civilian injuries.³ A growing number of civilians have been killed in regions once considered stable, including the central, northern and western parts of Afghanistan.⁴

UNAMA was not immune to the deteriorating security condition. In October 2010, four suicide bombers attempted to attack the mission's office in Herat. Six months later, during a demonstration in Mazar-i-Sharif, protestors swarmed the UNAMA compound, killing seven international staff and guards. Not only was the assault the deadliest

Safety and Security

Staff of political missions routinely work in highly insecure environments, where they are at risk from abductions, hostage-taking, banditry, armed conflicts, terrorism, intimidation, harassment, and safety incidents. These risks exist, to varying extents, in all mission environments, but are most prevalent in high-threat contexts, including Afghanistan, Iraq, and Somalia. There, the presence of peace operations have helped defray the costs of security measures, but UNAMA and UNAMI have had to increase their own measures at significant cost as such operations begin to draw down. For 2011, for instance, 24 percent of UNAMA's proposed net operating budget is for security needs.¹

The UN continues to improve its security management system to better mitigate the risks of violence to its personnel, property, and activities. The UN's approach to security management is based on "how to stay" – i.e., on finding ways to keep required personnel where they need to be and as safe as possible.² On 1 January 2011, the UN replaced the previous security phase system with a new system based on objective threat assessment that helps missions to identify the threats they face, which are most acute, and what specific mitigation measures may be required. The UN has also developed guidelines for acceptable risk, establishing an Executive Group on Security, extended security training to nationally recruited personnel, and introduced a new Security Policy Manual.

Primary responsibility for the security and protection of UN personnel rests with the host government. Yet, to date, 89 of the UN's 193 member states are parties to the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel; only 25 are parties to the Option Protocol, which specifically covers the delivery of policy assistance in peacebuilding and which has yet to enter into force.

1 United Nations, *Report of the Secretary-General on Estimates in Respect of Special Political Missions, Good Offices and Other Political Initiatives Authorized by the General Assembly and/or the Security Council, United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, A/65/328/Add.4* (19 October 2010).

2 United Nations, *Report of the Secretary-General on Safety and Security of United Nations and Associated Personnel, A/65/344* (10 September 2010).

attack ever on UN staff members in Afghanistan, it fundamentally compromised UNAMA's capacity to maintain the national presence essential to the mission. Due to security restrictions, the United Nations now has access to only 39 out of 111 districts in the central region, and to only five of 55 districts in and around Kandahar.⁵ UN agencies activities, meanwhile, are restricted to provincial headquarters and their immediate surroundings.⁶

The Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and ISAF have continued counter-insurgency operations, which at times result in civilian casualties and destruction of property. In response, there has been an increase in large-scale protests criticizing ISAF activities and expressing dismay with the international community at large, raising fears about the possibility of orchestrated violence against the international community.⁷

TRANSITION

The UN's curtailed access in the country comes at a particularly decisive period in the international

community's state-building efforts in Afghanistan. Following the Lisbon Summit in November 2010, NATO and the Afghan government have continued to prepare for Afghan forces to assume responsibility for security operation by 2014, under the *Inteqal* framework,⁸ with the aim to strengthen Afghan ownership and leadership across all functions of government and throughout the territory of Afghanistan.⁹

As part of the transition, US President Barack Obama on 22 June announced the reduction of 33,000 US troops in Afghanistan over the next 12 months and withdrawal of all 97,000 US troops by mid-2014. France subsequently announced that it too would draw down its military presence. The first step of a security handover to Afghan forces occurred in mid-July 2011, when the first US troops began their withdrawal and ANSF assumed primary responsibility for security operations in seven provinces.

SRSG de Mistura has repeatedly called for the *de facto* NATO-led transition to include plans for the Afghan government's assumption of greater social, political and economic responsibilities.

EUSR Afghanistan

The EU is permanently represented in Afghanistan through its EU Special Representative (EUSR), who also serves as the head of the EU delegation in Kabul – a post held since April 2010 by Vygaudas Ušackas of Lithuania.

The EUSR is mandated to support the development of Afghan institutions and maintain close contact with the government, the parliament and other relevant local Afghan authorities as well as other international stakeholders including the Senior Civilian Representative of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the UN – the latter with a particular emphasis on contributing to better coordinated international assistance.

He also monitors and advises on progress on a broad set of issues, including security sector reform, civilian capacity building, humanitarian rights, good governance and the establishment of institutions of the rule of law, in particular an independent judiciary and electoral reform. The EUSR further provides political guidance to the head of the EU Policing Mission in Afghanistan (EUPOL), on efforts aiming to counter organized crime and trafficking as well as on anti-corruptions measures and border control issues.

While the mission is well placed to contribute to a non-military transition, the overwhelming political imperative to hand over military operations to Afghan forces has limited UNAMA's involvement to an observer role.

Nevertheless, UNAMA promotes dialogue between development partners and ISAF to ensure that development issues are part of transition planning and design, and advocates for joint decision-making between ISAF and ANSF. UNAMA also plays a role in assuring the Afghan population that the transition process does not mean that the international community will abandon Afghanistan and that there will be continuing support for the country's development. As part of this effort, UNAMA has taken steps to enhance coherence and coordination among provincial development councils, the UN Country Team and donors to assure a sustainable transition process.

Still, UNAMA's circumscribed role somewhat curtails its ability to support a comprehensive transfer of authority to the Afghan government and limits the mission's ability to address lingering concerns among Afghans about the international community's commitment to Afghanistan.

ELECTORAL POLITICS, 2010-2011

In September 2010, UNAMA, along with UNDP, helped coordinate international support for the parliamentary elections. Coming one year after the controversial August 2009 presidential election – which set in motion a bitter public dispute between

former UNAMA officials – the parliamentary election again plunged the mission into turbulent Afghan electoral politics. Following an investigation into widespread allegations of corruption and fraud, the Independent Elections Commission and Election Complaints Commission certified the results on 24 November after invalidating nearly 25 percent of the ballots for irregularities.

In January 2011, Karzai announced his plans to delay inauguration of the parliament to allow for more time for investigation of the results, and established a controversial special court for this task. Following the announcement, UNAMA, backed by the EU, the US and Canada released a strong press statement expressing “deep concern and surprise” at the planned delay and urged the government for a timely inauguration of the parliament.¹⁰ A few days later, a reportedly reluctant President Karzai swore in the parliament, but not without criticizing the international community's involvement in the election.¹¹

In June, the special court called for the replacement of 62 members of the lower house on charges of fraud – a ruling that Afghan officials and international observers have criticized as unconstitutional and illegal.¹² The parliamentarians have repeatedly called for the UN to intervene, while President Karzai says the disagreement is an internal Afghan affair. SRS de Mistura has called on the parties to resolve the dispute in accordance with the Afghan Constitution, but has restrained from further public involvement in the issue.

The standoff between the parliament and the president illustrates some of the difficulties inherent to UNAMA's mandate. After years of cultivating

close relationships with Afghan political leaders, particularly President Karzai, the SRSG seems well placed to help resolve the crisis. However, such an outside intervention would risk undermining UNAMA's impartial role.

RECONCILIATION AND REINTEGRATION

Over the past 12 months there has been growing consensus in the international community that a political settlement is necessary to secure a sustainable peace in Afghanistan. While key members of the international community have yet to define their positions, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced in February 2011 the US's intention to establish a framework for a negotiated settlement with the Taliban. The statement was followed by the June 2011 announcement by (former) Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates, that the US was involved in "preliminary" talks with the Taliban. Marking an important turning point in the reconciliation efforts, the statements helped foster a wider international consensus that, amid the early withdrawal of international troops, a reconciliation process is a priority.

In support of the reconciliation efforts, the UN Security Council in June 2011 split the Taliban and Al-Qaida sanctions regime into two separate regimes – resolution 1988 and resolution 1989, respectively. The division gives both the Council and the Afghan government greater flexibility in their implementation. In mid-July, at the request of Afghan authorities, the Security Council removed 14 former Taliban members from its sanctions list to encourage them to enter into peace negotiations with Kabul.

UNAMA assists the reconciliation process through SRSG de Mistura's ongoing confidence building efforts to facilitate an Afghan-led dialogue with the insurgency. The Salaam Support Group, which UNAMA established in October 2010, provides logistical and technical help to the Afghan government-appointed High Peace Council, the main forum for reconciliation talks. UNAMA also offered to help open and maintain a venue for the Taliban to provide them with a safe space for talks on reconciliation.

The United Nations also indirectly support government efforts to reintegrate insurgents, by helping administer funds for the Afghan government's primary reintegration program, the Afghan

Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP), which helps negotiate the return of former fighters to their communities. In March and April 2011, two integration events were held in Kandahar, where progress in reintegration has been limited. By May 2011 the program helped 1,809 individuals reintegrate into 17 provinces, and negotiations are underway with dozens more armed groups to disband across the country.¹³ However, in the absence of sufficient vetting and oversight, the background of individuals who joined the APRP often remains unverified, and there is little assurance that program participants have not returned to insurgent forces. Some critics fear that the UN-supported program may serve more as a way for international forces to justify their drawdown than as a decisive step towards bringing greater stability to the region.¹⁴

AID COHERENCE

At the July 2010 Kabul conference, the Afghan government presented an Afghan-led plan for improving development, governance and security, including 22 national priority programs in various areas such as human resource development, infrastructure, public administration reform, sub-national governance and justice. Donors are expected to align their programs behind the priorities of the so-called "Kabul Process" of transition to full Afghan leadership and responsibility. As Co-Chair of the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board (JCMB), UNAMA facilitates dialogue between line ministries and development partners to promote increased coordination among donors and the government.

With the aim of bringing greater coherence, coordination and efficiency to the UN's development assistance efforts in support of the Kabul process, UNAMA and the UN Country Team (UNCT) have completed an integrated strategic framework. UNCT coordination has been challenging because UN entities, some of which have been in the country for decades, operate on different funding streams attached to various priority projects and have developed their own relationships with ministries.

The continued absence of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) from Afghanistan hampers efforts to enhance the Afghan government's development agenda. Some donors regard the IMF's

absence as a sign of Afghanistan's macroeconomic weakness, and withhold crucial funds.¹⁵ The IMF's lack of involvement is likely to have a negative impact on the commitments made at the London and Kabul conferences to transfer aid to the government budget.

CONCLUSION

UNAMA occupies an important function in Afghanistan as one of the few non-military international bodies with the expertise, logistical capacity and political mandate to maintain a truly national presence and network. However, increasing insecurity hampers the mission's ability to maintain an active and visible operation across Afghanistan and the mission's lack of involvement

in ongoing planning for the handover of greater security responsibility to Afghan authorities raises doubts about UNAMA's role in shaping the future of Afghanistan. Meanwhile, the mission's advisory function for the Afghan government and ISAF members on a range of issues has at times entangled the UNAMA leadership in divisive national political issues and undermined the mission's credibility as an impartial actor.

While the long-term effectiveness of UNAMA depends on addressing these difficult issues, UNAMA's future political role in Afghanistan will depend on the outcome of a comprehensive review of its mandate, requested by the Afghan government and scheduled for the end of 2011. As the government asserts greater authority through the Kabul process, it is likely to favor a limited political role for UNAMA.

NOTES

- 1 Afghan NGO Safety Office, *ANSO Quarterly Data Report Q.4 2010*, January 2011, available at [http://www.afgnso.org/2010Q/ANSO%20Quarterly%20Data%20Report%20\(Q4%202010\).pdf](http://www.afgnso.org/2010Q/ANSO%20Quarterly%20Data%20Report%20(Q4%202010).pdf).
- 2 UNAMA, *Afghanistan Midyear Report 2011: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict*, July 2011, available at <http://unama.unmissions.org/Portals/UNAMA/Documents/2011%20Midyear%20POC.pdf>.
- 3 UNAMA, "UN urges greater protection of Afghans after bloodiest month on record," 11 June 2011, available at <http://unama.unmissions.org/Default.aspx?tabid=1741&ctl=Details&mid=1882&ItemID=13987>.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 United Nations, *Report of the Secretary General on the Situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security*, A/65/873-S/2011/381 (23 June 2011), para. 45.
- 6 Ibid, para 45.
- 7 Ibid, para. 7.
- 8 Inteqal is the Dari and Pashtu word for "transition."
- 9 Kabul International Conference on Afghanistan *Kabul Conference Communiqué*, 20 July 2010, available at <http://www.mfa.gov.af/FINAL%20Kabul%20Conference%20%20%20Communique.pdf>.
- 10 UNAMA, "UNAMA concerned about delay of Wolesi Jirga inauguration", 21 January 2011, available at <http://unama.unmissions.org/Default.aspx?tabid=1741&ctl=Details&mid=1882&ItemID=12068>.
- 11 Heidi Vogt "Karzai swears in Afghan Parliament," *Boston.com*, 27 January 2011, available at http://articles.boston.com/2011-01-27/news/29336853_1_afghan-parliament-president-hamid-karzai-afghan-people.
- 12 United Nations "Top UN envoy urges peaceful resolution of Afghan legislative crisis," *UN News Centre*, 28 June 2011, available at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=38867&Cr=Afghan&Cr1=>.
- 13 United Nations, *Report of the Secretary General on the Situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security*, A/65/873-S/2011/381 (23 June 2011), para. 13.
- 14 International Crisis Group, "Afghanistan: Exit vs Engagement," Asia Briefing No. 115, 28 November 2010, available at [http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/south-asia/afghanistan/B115%20Afghanistan%20--%20Exit%20vs%20Engagement.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/asia/south-asia/afghanistan/B115%20Afghanistan%20--%20Exit%20vs%20Engagement.pdf).
- 15 For example, the World Bank-administered Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund.