

# **Afghanistan: Current Humanitarian Challenges**

Arne Strand  
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**R 2001:5**

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Chr. Michelsen Institute *Development Studies and Human Rights*

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# 1 Introduction

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The political and humanitarian situation in Afghanistan continues to be of serious concern to the international community. Whereas international media coverage and debate indicates little change, this report establishes fundamental developments in three areas: the humanitarian situation; the Taliban administrative system, and the approach taken by international aid agencies, the UN in particular.

This report is commissioned by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), and builds on interviews, document reviews, and previous fieldwork. Over a period of 10 days, we have conducted semistructured and focus group interviews in Afghanistan (Kabul; Wardak, and Nangarhar provinces), and Pakistan (Islamabad and Peshawar). The researchers have had access to a number of reports and papers that have been prepared for the forthcoming meeting of the Afghan Support Group (ASG) in Switzerland, as well as various newsreports. The focus of the research has been on the influence of the political and military situation upon the humanitarian conditions for Afghanistan's citizens, as well as upon the working conditions for agencies providing humanitarian assistance. The reports takes as reference points a short review of the history to the conflict, the specific 'aid practice' that has developed for Afghanistan, as well as the present political and military context, nationally and internationally, that assistance is provided in.

The CMI wishes to thank all those that on a short notice made themselves available for interviews. We also would like to express our gratitude to those who facilitated our visits, especially the Director and staff of Coordination of Afghan Relief (CoAR) who organised our travel inside Afghanistan. The researchers are solely responsible for the views expressed in the report, which should not be seen as a representation of the policy of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

## 2 Abstract

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Twenty years of war and civil war in Afghanistan has increased the vulnerability of the population, now faced with ongoing military confrontation between the Taliban and the Northern Alliance, with a low concern for people living in areas under their control, and a severe draught. A continued need for emergency relief projects, increased rehabilitation efforts and more development oriented programmes seems well documented.

The two parties to the conflict have showed unfortunate similarities in their practise of relating to drug production and trafficking, violation of human rights and support to international terrorism. Hence, a solution to the current stalemate is not likely to be found in escalating support to or sanction of one of the present parties. One could thus argue that continued dialogue between the International community and the warring fractions and stronger emphasis on a longer-term strategy of building civilian structures would be beneficial for the humanitarian intervention in Afghanistan.

The Taliban have over the last years strengthened their administrative structure and now demands to be recognised as an authority within Afghanistan, although not recognised by the United Nations. The various humanitarian actors, however, have found their own ways of engaging with the Taliban, despite the introduction of a Strategic Framework and agreement on Principled Common Programming. There is a difference in opinion between the political and humanitarian wings of the United Nations on effects and implications of the sanctions imposed on the Taliban, where humanitarian actors now argue for increased contact with the Taliban administration and a policy of “scaling-up” and “principled negotiations”.

This report provides a more in-depth review of the Taliban governance structure and discusses the possibility of a decrease in drug production following an edict issued by the Taliban leader. It looks into the possibility of increased migration and long term decrease of agricultural production if the draught is not properly mitigated. It furthermore notices that the effects of the UN sanctions does not seem to have any significant impact on the Taliban but that the common Afghan is increasingly blaming the international community for their worsened living conditions.

Finally, a conclusion is drawn recommending the United Nations, donors and humanitarian agencies to make a clear distinction between their humanitarian and political efforts, and to ensure that the dual process of peace-negotiations and peace-building is continued. It is argued that the prolonged conflict requires a longer time horizon for the humanitarian intervention, with more emphasis on “software” and strengthening of national capacities. This, again, requires a better understanding of the current situation, a need to include Afghans in study processes and ability to operationalise study findings.

### 3 Background to the present humanitarian disaster

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Afghanistan is situated in Central Asia with Pakistan, Iran, China, Tadjikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan as its neighbours. It is a mountainous country divided by the Hindu Kush range and inhabited by several ethnic groups: Pashtuns, which form the single largest group, but with large population of Tajik, Hazara and Uzbek origin, in addition to a variety of other groups. The main religion is *Sunni* Islam, but an estimated 15% of the population are *Shi'ia* Muslims. Human settlements in Afghanistan are primarily rural. More than three-quarters of the pre-war population of 15 million lived in villages, commonly sited on irrigated valley floors or near natural sources of water.

Even before the Soviet invasion in 1979 the country was among the least developed in the world, with large social differences between the countryside and the cities, notably the capital Kabul. The nepotism of the ruling royal family and a small political elite led to growing resentment, particularly within an emerging middle-class of educated people. The protest was channelled into communist parties of both Maoist and Soviet orientation, as well as radical Islamic groups linked to the Muslim Brotherhood. The latter took up arms in the mid-1970s, receiving substantial military training and equipment from Pakistan. Following the 1978 Afghan communist coup and the 1979 Soviet invasion, Pakistan favoured these groups as the chief conduits for international military and humanitarian assistance.

The war caused tremendous suffering and destruction. It has been estimated that five million Afghans took refuge in Pakistan and Iran, more than one million Afghans lost their lives, and 700,000 Afghans were left physically and mentally disabled.<sup>1</sup> Whereas it was the countryside that was hardest hit in the period from 1979 to 1992, the city populations were the chief victims of the infighting between various *mujahedin* groups from 1993 to 1996. Large parts of Kabul were destroyed, an estimated 25,000 were killed, and at least half a million were internally displaced.

The war made the population of Afghanistan increasingly dependent on outside assistance, most of which has been implemented by international and national NGOs. In the 1980s, the assistance was heavily politicised, with support to the just cause of the *mujahedin* overshadowed any concerns with issues such as drugs production, gender, or human rights. The particular "aid practice" that took shape in this context was characterised by free handouts, no monitoring, and full trust in the military commanders that were seen as the people's representatives. At the same time, aid agencies had considerable freedom to manoeuvre, given that there was no functioning authority beyond

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<sup>1</sup> Sliwinsky, M. (1989), Afghanistan: The Decimation of a People, in *Orbis: A Journal of World Affairs*, Winter 1989: 39-56.

the local level. Aid organisations were built up in Peshawar. Most national employees came from Kabul, were men of Pashtun ethnic origin, and had strong relations to the radical Islamic parties. This has led to considerable inertia in terms of adapting to the post 1992 situation, with a preference for Peshawar-near projects, distance between agency staff and Afghanistan's rural population, and poor relations as Taliban's leadership replaced that of the *mujahedin*. Many of the NGOs continued to advocate for their freedom to work independently from any government structure.

The needs for continued humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan is not disputed. However, it is a paradox that large parts of the country has been at peace for up to ten years, yet much of the assistance is provided in the form of short-term emergency relief or rebuilding projects. A further problem is that many of the key providers of assistance, particularly international NGOs, appears to possess limited capacity to analyse and adapt to fundamental changes in the country, neither at the local nor at the central level.



## 4 Present military and political situation

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The current humanitarian situation can only be understood against the background of the military conflict between the Taliban and the Northern Alliance, and, furthermore, the political conflict between the Taliban and the larger international community, represented by the United Nations.

The Taliban, under the leadership of (Emir) Mullah Mohammad Omar, have established the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA), which they perceive as the legitimate government of the country. Although the Taliban now control about 90% of the territory including all major cities, it is only recognised by three states.<sup>2</sup> The Northern Alliance includes the majority of the political parties and militia groups that fought each other for control of Kabul from 1993 to 1996. The alliance still controls Afghanistan's chair at the UN. It is somewhat confusingly referred to as both the government and the opposition. The alliance is led by Burhanuddin Rabbani, whose presidential period has since long expired, with commander Ahmad Shah Massoud being a key force. Fraught with internal conflict, most of the leaders of the alliance now live in exile.

Both sides receive military assistance from outside, the Taliban mainly from Pakistan, the Northern Alliance from Iran, Russia and India. In Pakistan, a variety of actors have direct relations to the Taliban, and the country has proved unable to develop a consistent policy. Iran's role is increasingly ambiguous, as it continues to provide military support to the alliance, but has opened up for extensive trade with the Taliban, and is gradually re-establishing diplomatic ties. Russia argues that their support for the Northern Alliance aims at stemming Islamic insurgence in Central Asia, but their tough line now meets opposition. Amongst the Central Asian states, Turkmenistan has had a formalised relationship with the Taliban for several years, and more recently, both Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan have taken up diplomatic contact. The leading interpretation of this new development is that these states now see a dialogue with the Taliban as more likely to produce positive results in terms of stemming their own radical Islamists, but also that this signals increasing opposition to Russia's attempts at dominating foreign policy in the region.

The conflict between the Taliban and the international community originates in a number of issues, with key issues being support to international terrorism (particularly the Bin Laden issue); human rights (particularly the rights of women); drug production and export, as well as restrictions placed on humanitarian agencies.<sup>3</sup> Many observers see the 1998 US missile attack on alleged terrorist training camps as a fatal blow to a dialogue process that was

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<sup>2</sup> For more on the emergence of the Taliban, see Arne Strand and Kristian Berg Harpviken, *Afghanistan: Humanitære utfordringer og moglegheter*, Memo presented for the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 15. juli, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> Other issues include the the unresolved murder of several UN staff members in Afghanistan and the continuation of war against the Northern Alliance government.

slowly taking form at the time. The conflict potential is large, and both sides tend to be represented with their respective “hardliners”. A key issue is the sanctions imposed on the Taliban regime due to their rejection of UN Security Council resolution demanding extradition of Osama bin Laden. It is interesting to note that UN agencies are increasingly pointing out that their role is an explicitly humanitarian one, criticising the UN sanctions for their humanitarian impact. Whereas this has been noticed by the Taliban as a significant gesture, it is being strongly opposed by the Northern alliance, and also by a number of countries who see no alternative to sanctions.

In terms of international diplomacy and media relations, the groups that constitute the Northern Alliance have been able to draw on an apparatus developed in the 1980s. The Taliban has proven less capable in this regard, but interestingly, it seems now to be much more consistent in how it presents its policy, as recently demonstrated in statements on Osama bin Laden, on drugs, and on UN recognition. A more proactive role can be expected. However, as we have argued before, the principal differences between the Taliban and the Northern alliance when it comes to key issues of dispute with the international community, such as drugs, gender, or support to international terrorism, are largely negligible.<sup>4</sup>

*Drugs:* Afghanistan has a long history of production of various forms of narcotic substance, but production has exploded since the early 1980s. During the *mujahideen* period central commanders were involved in opium cultivation and heroin processing, but only token efforts were made to curb the production. Presently, the bulk of the production is in Taliban-controlled areas, but there is also significant production in areas controlled by the Northern Alliance. In early August, Mullah Omar issued an edict banning poppy cultivation, and current indications are that the edict is being implemented in key poppy-producing areas, including Nangarhar and Kandahar.

*Human rights:* The Taliban has been the subject of massive international criticism for its human rights violations, in terms of discrimination of women and targeting of non-Pashtuns, including forced expulsion and outright massacres. Ethnically motivated killings also took place during the Rabbani-government, with the large-scale killings of Hazara in Kabul in 1994 being the best documented, still referred to as the “Afshahr massacre”. Turning to the gender dimension, Heike Bill, at a recent conference in Germany, pointed out that “restrictions imposed on women do not reflect a specific Taliban ideology but have rather had the effect of institutionalizing and legitimizing patterns of oppression already prevailing in Afghanistan before its assumption of power.”<sup>5</sup> Another issue is the use of *Sharia* punishments for crime, a practice

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<sup>4</sup> Strand & Harpviken, 2000

<sup>5</sup> *Afghanistan- Country Without State?*, Munich 15-18 June 2000, conference report by C. Schetter & C. Noelle-Karimi in ISIM Newsletter 6/00. A similar point is made by Cammack: “the Taliban’s social and gender policies are not that much different from those established by other mujahedeen parties at home and in exile during the last fifteen years. Indeed, in many respects the changes in policy evident in 1995 to 1996 were not so much a matter of substance than of degree.” (Cammack, 1999: 94-95)

that was in use by various *mujahedin* groups including those of the Northern Alliance, but which has been much more systematically applied by the Taliban regime. Applying this penal code is in itself a violation of all international codes, and the fact that the judicial system has few or no safeguards makes the situation even more critical.

*Support to international terrorism:* From the early 1980s, Peshawar was developed into a centre for the training international fighters to join the Afghan *mujahedin*. The recruits were mainly from Islamic countries, but Western countries also supported their training. Around 1990, the number of international volunteers was at its peak, with several thousands joining in the fight over cities as Jalalabad and Khost. Whereas many returned after the fall of the communist government in 1992, a large number remained, and the contacts between a variety of radical Islamic organisations and *mujahedin* groups were maintained. Kashmiri, Pakistani and Chinese militants trained in Afghanistan, the *mujahedin* parties recruited Afghans to fight in Chechnya and Azadbajan, and hosted training camps for the Islamic opposition from Tajikistan during its civil war. In May 1996, the Rabbani government airlifted Usama bin Laden and his associates from Sudan. Later, Bin Laden has become a highly contentious issue between Taliban and the United States, the latter claiming he is responsible for several terrorists attacks on US citizens. The Taliban claims that the evidence presented by the US is not satisfactory, and refuses to hand him over with further reference to the services he had rendered to the Afghan people during *jihād*.

This discussion establishes unfortunate similarities between the practices of the Taliban and their foes, the Northern Alliance, and fundamentally questions the assumption that a government based on the latter would satisfy the requirements of the international community. Hence, one could argue that solutions to the current stalemate are not to be found in escalating support to any present party but, rather, to adapt a wider time horizon allowing for either a gradual negotiated change of the current actors or for a civilian alternative to build up to gradually replace military rulers. As to the usefulness and impact of sanctions, we will return to that below.

## 5 Present humanitarian situation

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Both humanitarian actors and the Afghan population agree that the situation in Afghanistan has deteriorated further over the last couple of years, not least due to drought that has hit large parts of the country. The drought has set in at a time when large number of refugees have returned, some by force, to areas where agricultural production has been the only income. In many areas, the drought comes on top of the obstacles caused by the war, and this year a combination of military activities and drought are forcing a large number of Afghans to leave their homes. For many this is the second or third time they become displaced. Both Tajikistan and Pakistan have been reluctant to allow refugees enter, and the latter has argued that UNCHR should care for the refugees on Afghan territory. Figures from the United Nations indicate that 120 000 are internally displaced in Afghanistan in 2000, adding to the 60 000 registered in 1999, and that a further 30 000 have entered into Pakistan.<sup>6</sup>

When it comes to the capacity to implement aid, there has been a clear improvement both when it comes to coordination and management of the assistance process. Agencies are increasingly supporting the Principled Common Programming (PCP), and Regional Coordinators are now in place inside Afghanistan. NGOs have become more actively involved in the Afghan Programming Board and the Consolidated Appeal process.<sup>7</sup>

However, neither improvements in implementation mechanisms, nor the general worsening of the humanitarian situation, have been reflected in levels of funding. In 1999, only 44 % of the requirements listed in the appeal were met, in 2000 there was a slight increase to 46 %, on top of which comes responses to the drought appeal. The funding shortfall probably stems from several issues, most prominent being the general dissatisfaction with Taliban's neglect of international sanctions, the ongoing war and the fact that there are few short-term prospects for improvement.

The drought has initiated a discussion within the aid community about the appropriateness of the assistance provided in Afghanistan. It has been questioned why humanitarian agencies have been unable to prevent or mitigate the effects at an earlier stage. It has been argued that the existing mode of assistance can undermine rather than strengthens existing coping mechanisms, and hence the effects of the drought have become much more serious than it would otherwise have been. One example is that substantial parts of international assistance come in the form of wheat, the distribution of which could serve as a disincentive to domestic production if done in widespread manner in the countryside.

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<sup>6</sup> UNOCHA (2000), *Afghanistan 2001 Appeal*. Islamabad, UNOCHA.

<sup>7</sup> The number of humanitarian agencies has been relatively stable over the last few years. The Ministry of Planning in Kabul has registered 70 International NGOs and 270 National, in addition comes the ICRC, the IFRC, IOM and the various UN agencies.

Most of the assistance is still short-term and emergency-oriented, although some programmes, as UNDP's PEACE programme, and some larger NGOs, including the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan and DACAAR have secured longer term funding. As serious is the fact that there is still minimal investment in developing Afghan capacities within aid organisations. In the words of one director of a large international NGO " ...we have underestimated the capacity and professionalism of Afghan NGOs". Investing in national capacities is directly linked to the funding arrangements - without long term funding, capacity building is difficult.

A related question concerns the knowledge basis possessed by humanitarian agencies. One problem is that of the international organisations have staff on short-term contracts, or have expatriates only in decision making positions. At a presentation in for expatriate staff in Herat last year we focused on the *maharram* institution, which regulates the accompaniment of women by closely related men in travel and work, and which is the key reference for the Taliban in their approach to female staff in aid organisations. In spite of the fact that most of those present were dealing with gender issues in assistance, and several had frequent negotiations with the Taliban over such issues, there was nobody who were aware that an institution like *maharram* existed.

During the last months there have been a wider debate over directions and policies within the assistance community, with several important studies being prepared in front of the forthcoming ASG meeting. Most attention has been given to the study on the impact of UN Security Council Sanctions in Afghanistan, prepared by the UN Humanitarian Co-ordinator, which has also provoked a debate at the Security Council about the relationship between humanitarian and political efforts in relation to Afghanistan. A second study is named "The UN and Capacity-building in Afghanistan", and correctly points out that despite the restrictions imposed in the PCP,<sup>8</sup> most UN agencies have entered into a very close cooperation with the IAE in the field, some even implementing projects through ministries or IEA established organisations.<sup>9</sup> A third study, by a UN inter-agency task force, is a review of the impact of Decree # 8, concerning the employment of women in assistance organisations.

The two latter studies are both taking a more critical view on the role and practice of UN agencies and NGOs in dealing with what many like to call "presumptive authorities". This is certainly in line with what we earlier described as the Afghanistan "aid practice", but as the author of the capacity study observes: "a more systematic approach to government structures, which arguably can moderate Taliban excesses, is not acceptable as it is seen to 'legitimise' their rule." Furthermore, the report opposes the notion that there is no interest within the ranks of the Taliban for welfare and development:

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<sup>8</sup> Which through para. 4 and 5 restricts institution and capacity- building activity building activities and programmes that might be seen to give direct political or military advantage to the parties of the conflict

<sup>9</sup> Leader, N. (2000), *Negotiating the "governance gap": The UN and Capacity-building in Afghanistan*. Islamabad, UNCHS Habitat, UN Capacity-building Task Force

more pragmatic elements within the Taliban are now beginning to take such matters more seriously. Consequently the report argues that time is due for increasing contact and cooperation: “scaling-up” and “principled negotiations” are suggested as guiding principles for the UN in bridging the “policy gap”. His recommendation is “that it is recognised, by staff and donors, that it is legitimate for the UN to work with or through the authorities, *as long as certain criteria are met and that all payment and protocols are consistent between agencies.*” The report further emphasises the need to develop a longer-term human resource strategy, aided by a process of discussion and research to inform the actors involved in the process.

The introduction of Principled Common Programming (PCP) means that one has established an appropriate institutional frame for the planning and implementation of assistance. The challenge now is to improve the content of that frame. Firstly, there is a need to strengthen both the development and dissemination of knowledge for providers of aid. Secondly, there is a need to move from short-term to long-term commitments, project-wise as well as funding-wise, and to shift more of processes and management inside Afghanistan. Thirdly, one has to develop constructive and more unified modes of engagement with the Taliban administration and then review if the current Principles for Assistance Provision need to be altered.

## 6 Four thematic issues

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Here we will provide a more in-depth review of four issues that influences the provision of humanitarian assistance, and that provides further arguments for our observation on the major changes that have taken place over the last year. These are firstly, the governance structure of the Taliban; secondly, drug eradication; thirdly, the drought and relevant responses; fourthly, the UN sanctions.

### 6.1 Taliban governance structure

Since their inception in 1994 there have been very few empirical studies aimed at understanding the structure and governance capacity of, firstly, the Taliban movement, and later on, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA). Many reports from both the UN and NGOs question their governance capacity, with the exception of enforcement of *Sharia* law and tax collection. When it comes to administrative capacities beyond Kabul, the documentation is minimal.<sup>10</sup>

However, what one find in the field is a system being built up by the Taliban, modelled on the governance structure that was in place in Afghanistan before the *coup d'état* in 1978, including many of the former bureaucrats having maintained their positions during successive regimes. Two distinct religious features are added to the old set-up, an old “middleman” function is re-established and a new community body has emerged at the district level (see Annex II for sketch of the system):

- a. The introduction of a Ministry for Vice and Virtue, which is also represented at district and village levels. The Ministry is independent from other Ministries, with direct links to the Emir Mullah Omar, and is set to ensure that both people and the administration are following the Islamic law and regulations of the Emirate. The Ministry has been in place since the establishment of the Taliban government.
- b. A permanent *ulema shura* at district and provincial levels, where mullahs from the district settle cases referred to them from the administration, as well as cases presented to them from citizens. Furthermore, these *shuras* are set to control the performance of the district and province administration and there are reports from Wardak of a Taliban official being replaced following complaints from the local population to the *ulema shura*.
- c. At the local level, there was traditionally an *arbar*, *malik* or *mir*<sup>11</sup> (for rural villages) or a *wakil e gozar* (for municipality in urban areas). The *arbab* is a middleman between authorities and locals, a local resident who has basic

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<sup>10</sup> This paper does not aim to give a comprehensive review of the present structure, but we would like to present a sketch of a system. This has been developed following field-research in Herat in 1999, interviews with a number of NGO employees both in 1999 and this year and a recent visit to Kabul and Wardak.

<sup>11</sup> This person/function has different titles in different parts of Afghanistan.

local support, but who is formally appointed by the government. On behalf of the government, the *arbab* collects taxes, selects recruits for the military etc. The *arbab* is also the people's contact in relation to authorities, and may forward complaints to the administration, or assist his people in court cases.

- d. In addition comes a system of a '*peoples shura*' where selected representatives from the villages meet at the district level and handles issues of importance for that district in consultation with the District Administrator. This system has reportedly come in place over the six last months, and can for example be found in several districts of Hazarajat. It must be regarded as a significant development, since it implies that there is now representative systems at the village level that is empowered to make decisions about that particular area and possibly influence the administrative structure of the IEA.

This is an administrative structure with certain checks and balances where the new *ulema shuras* introduces a degree of accountability over local administrations. Although the system as a whole suffers dramatically from the lack of skilled personnel, it appears that administrative routines have gradually improved, and consequently the Taliban perception of itself as the legitimate rulers of Afghanistan is strengthened.

For humanitarian agencies the IEA governance structure might be particularly important at the village and district level, and this seems to be where it is functioning best and where it is most flexible. Much of the motivation is that the Taliban should not become engaged in the numerous conflicts and disputes at the village level, thus one need to create a local system to cope with such events. One leading Taliban official argued that this system is developed on the basis of a careful analysis of Afghanistan's history and culture, rather than being a copy of an administrative system that may function in a different context. While there are variations from area to area the below-described structure seems to gradually be introduced in many parts of the country.

This opens up possibilities for a more direct relationship between village representatives and humanitarian agencies. Interestingly, this is a system that resembles the *district shura* that have been promoted by several humanitarian organisations, including UNDPs PEACE programme. The main risk now is that humanitarian agencies may bypass this institution and rather favour their own particular *shura* or community representatives, as many of them have done in the past.

## 6.2 Drugs

Over the last months the United Nations Drug Control Program (UNDCP) has indicated significant reductions in the opium production in Afghanistan, reports that have been challenged by the US officials. However, NGOs working in South Eastern Afghanistan confirm the UNDCP findings, but remain uncertain as to whether this is a consequence of the drought, or the result of systematic reductions in cultivation.



Observers are also divided over the August edict from Mullah Omar, which is banning all production of narcotic substance in Afghanistan. Some see it only as another superficial attempt of meeting international demands, whereas others argue that the Taliban has proven their will to enforce the edict in many of the major poppy-growing areas. Reports from people who have travelled in poppy growing areas show that there have been a number of actions from the Taliban side, and that they have proven willing to use substantial force to implement the edict.

Meetings and informal discussions with IEA officials in Kabul gave reasons to believe that there is will within the Taliban ranks to stop production of drugs. Implementing the ban involves significant risk to the Taliban. It can lead to protest and even armed uprisings from affected populations, the Shinwari tribe of Nangarhar has been seen as especially prone to revolt. The argument used at the Foreign Ministry was that the IEA now had the control necessary to enforce the rule, as it had clear justification in the *Sharia* law. With the planting season coming up, one will soon have much stronger indications as to the effectiveness of the edict.

Given both the current situation regarding funding for Afghanistan, and the sanctions that aims at further isolation of the Taliban leadership, there is a risk that a unique opportunity to curb one of the largest drug production operations in the world is being missed. It is difficult to find arguments against supporting the IEA in its efforts, although one would be advised to keep a critical eye on how effective their operation is, given the knowledge that they have benefited from tax imposed on the farmers.

The aid community and donors are presented to a dilemma, given that both UNDCP and general rehabilitation programmes have announced that funding for alternative agricultural production would be forthcoming if drug production was reduced. If the ban on production is effective and this pledge is not fully honoured, the international community will be loosing credibility, and future efforts at dealing with the drug problem may have been undermined.

### 6.3 The drought

A United Nations preliminary estimate suggests that at least half of the population of Afghanistan may be affected by the drought, three to four million severely and another eight to twelve million moderately, in the period up to June 2001.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> UNOCHA (2000), *Strategy of the Assistance Community in Response to the Drought in Afghanistan. 1 June 2000 - 31 May 2001*. Islamabad, UNOCHA: 15.

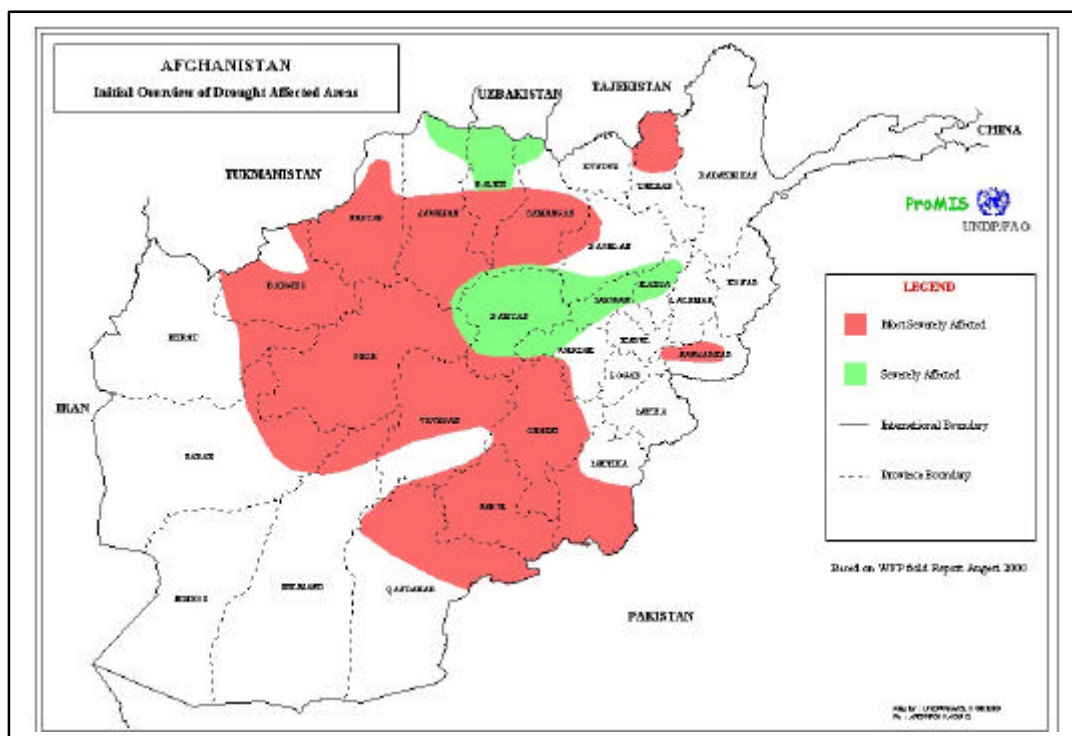


Figure 1: Drought Map, August 2000  
Source: ProMis, UNDP/FAO

It is further noted that the “latest drought comes when much of the Afghan population is highly vulnerable and ill placed to cope with the additional hardship.” Drought is not a new phenomenon in Afghanistan. The last major drought occurred 30 years ago, but it affected far less areas than what is the case this year. Given that 80% of the population live from farming, a drought will have enormous consequences. For the two last years there have not been any rain or snowfall, thus the rivers have dried up and the groundwater level has gone down. This has sharply reduced the flow of water in the traditional underground irrigation channels, the *karez*, and dried out wells for both drinking and irrigation purposes. Even if not all areas are equally hit, there are a number of indicators in the data collected by the UN and by NGOs which suggest that the situation may become worse and have longer term implications than most people expect.<sup>13</sup> FAO has recently issued a special alert on the crisis, and presented figures on the production and import of cereals that illustrates how this years drought comes on top of a consistent reduction in production after 1998. See FAO figure below.<sup>14</sup>

The gravity of the drought relates to how many Afghans over the past few years have gradually used all reserves, and stand with very little capacity to cope with the problem.

<sup>13</sup> The UN drought officer in Kabul gave us access to surveys conducted in May and June this year, and we visited drought affected villages in Wardak province.

<sup>14</sup> FAO (2000). *Special Alert no. 313: A Grave Food Situation in Afghanistan*, FAO Global Information and Early Warning System on Food and Agriculture: 3.

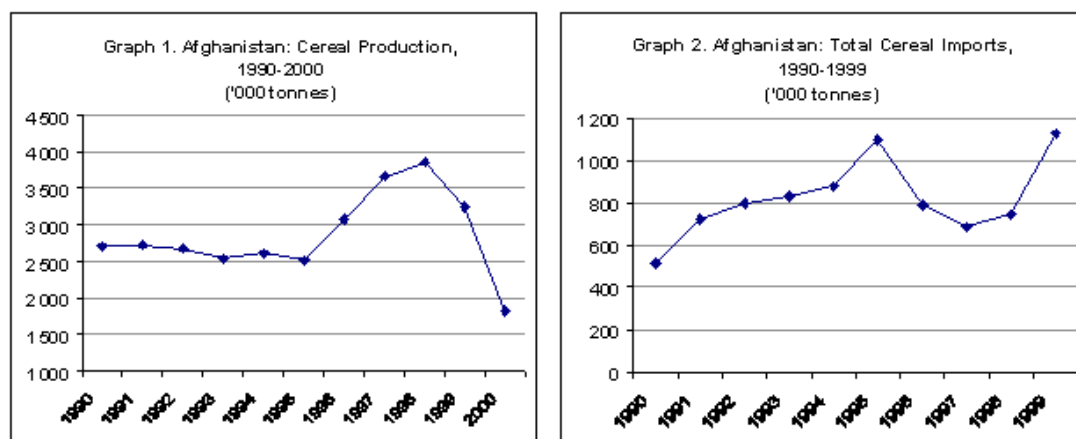


Figure 2: Afghanistan, Cereal Production and Imports  
Source: FAO, 2000

We know that many people have already slaughtered or sold their household animals, forced by the scarcity of water and fodder. In an overflowed market, prices have been correspondingly low but is expected to be increased tenfold when people gets in a position to purchase animals again. Similarly, there have been reports about consumption of wheat seed set aside for planting. If this is widespread, then people will not be in a position to restart their agricultural production at full force even if the winter should bring both rain and snow. This is an area where a systematic survey is needed, in order to establish the necessary preparedness for the coming season.

The drought leads not only to the depletion of household resources, but also natural resources more generally. In Wardak, we witnessed how people had been cutting all trees and vegetation in a wide area surrounding their villages. The wood was used for cooking and heating in the household, but also made available for sale. Another example of how natural resources are affected is the drilling of deep wells and the use of water pumps for irrigation purposes, which easily leads to the further lowering of the groundwater table in many areas. The results may be a permanent drying up of *karez*s and other traditional water sources. Reports from many areas indicate that the water-table has been dramatically lowered, so that at best it will take several seasons with normal rain and snowfall to restore.

The gravity of the drought is also evident from the sharp increase in migration, especially among able-bodied men, from villages to the cities, as well as to Pakistan, Iran and the Gulf. The movement to far away job markets is often a costly and risky investment for the family, and may mean the establishment of debt. It also contributes to a negative spiral: with little manpower left in the village there is no capacity to engage in activities that are necessary for a longer-term improvement of the situation. An alternative to labour migration is to join one of the fighting fractions, which given both salary and coverage of basic necessities. In one valley with 42 villages in Wardak province more than 100 men had reportedly joined the Taliban to

secure income. In this way, drought is potentially contributing to prolong the conflict.

As a consequence, the drought issue can not be constructively addressed within an emergency framework. In fact many emergency-oriented responses, such as drilling of waterholes or the free distribution of wheat may further aggravate the situation. Given the complexity of the situation one need rather to compose a “toolbox”, containing a range of different activities adjusted to the severity of drought and the specific context in a given area. The ultimate aim should be to restore adequate water-supplies, to train people in water-management, and to prevent further soil erosion. Based on the understanding that the present crisis could have been considerably less if it had been addressed at an earlier stage, one should now attempt design a more comprehensive response with a longer-term horizon.

The alternative, at least as it looks in Kabul and Wardak, may be massive migration, of a scale not seen since the war-driven exodus of the mid-1980s. We know from other situations that a population which has a broad migration experience is much more likely to again resort to migration as a coping mechanism.

## 6.4 Sanctions

The UN Security Council imposed sanctions on the Taliban in November 1999, as they did not honour a resolution to hand over terrorist accused Osama bin Laden to the United States or a third country. The UN sanctions are related to finance and aviation matters. Presently there is an ongoing debate on imposing new and more far reaching sanctions as the Taliban has rejected to comply with the UN demands. The Taliban have, in what may be interpreted as opening up for a sensitive resolution of the dispute, suggested three alternative solutions, none of which have been welcomed by the US.

Meanwhile there have been a number of general studies on the effects of sanctions, and two looking particularly at the use of sanctions in Afghanistan. A key question in the wider sanctions literature is whether the formulation of 'smart sanctions' is viable. It is widely recognised that sanctions in many instances fail to reach their intended goals, there are those who argue that these have failed as the right measures have not been applied – the sanctions have not been 'smart' enough. A recent review of experiences from applying sanctions to promote human right, however, concludes that:

Ultimately, it may very well turn out that smart sanctions are simply not smart enough to achieve the stated objectives, and remain a blunt instrument which will continue to cause violation of economic and social rights on a large scale. It is probably an

inappropriate instrument for the purpose of bolstering human rights.<sup>15</sup>

Another study that focused specifically on Afghanistan was conducted for the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) in 1999, as part of a larger assessment termed *The limits and scope for the use of development assistance incentives and disincentives for influencing conflict situations*.<sup>16</sup> The overall conclusion of this study is that "attempts to use aid incentives and disincentives to influence policies in Afghanistan has not been effective".<sup>17</sup> The authors recommend continued assistance to Afghanistan: "Withholding aid would only aggravate the violations by the 'presumptive authorities' of the social and economic rights of ordinary people." Further: "...a more active pursuit of strategies of persuasion through pragmatic examples, to complement the strategies of denunciation and substitution actions that bypasses the Taliban authorities that have dominated so far."<sup>18</sup>

In a synthesis report for the OECD - DAC study, Uvin questions the politicisation of humanitarian assistance, with reference to practice in Afghanistan and Rwanda:

This is clearly dangerous: a continued political use of this decision may impede humanitarian access in the future. The decision to use humanitarian assistance should be made in function of people's needs, and not of political messages to be sent to governments - there are other ways to do the latter.<sup>19</sup>

These above arguments gain importance in light of a recent study prepared for the Office of the UN Humanitarian Co-ordinator for Afghanistan.<sup>20</sup> This study concludes "The current U.N. measures have had a tangible negative effect on the Afghan economy and on the ability of the aid agencies to render effective assistance." The study admits that these effects may be less significant than other factors in the current context. However, it argues that "Afghans have little capacity to cope with further economic shocks."<sup>21</sup> (p. 45). The assumption that sanctions may have an effect in terms of altering Taliban policy is fundamentally put in doubt. Furthermore there is "almost no support

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<sup>15</sup> Bull, B. & Tostensen, A. (2001), Bolstering Human Rights by Means of 'Smart' Sanctions?, in *Human rights in development. Yearbook 1999/2000. The millennium edition*, Kluwer Law International/Nordic Human Rights Publications

<sup>16</sup> K. Van Brabant and T. Killick. (1999), *Case Study: Afghanistan*, Paris, OECD, DAC, Informal Task Force on Conflict, Peace and Development Co-operation

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, p. 6

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, p. 8

<sup>19</sup> Uvin, P. (1999). *The Influence of Aid in Situations in Violent Conflict*. A Synthesis and Commentary on the Lessons Learned from Case Studies on the Limit and Scope of the use of Development Assistance Incentives and Disincentives for Influencing Conflict Situations. Paris, OECD, DAC, Informal Task Force on Conflict, Peace and Development Co-Operation.

<sup>20</sup> UNOCHA (2000). *Vulnerability and Humanitarian Impact of UN Security Council Sanctions in Afghanistan*. Islamabad, Prepared by the UN Humanitarian Co-ordinator for Afghanistan: 50.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, p. 45

within Afghanistan for further economic sanctions.”<sup>22</sup> On a more positive note, the study argues that there is a very strong consensus “that the United Nations political engagement on Afghanistan should be intensified”, and that there is widespread support for an arms blockade.

Our own interviews with Afghans both in Afghanistan and Pakistan are in accordance with the conclusions in the UNOCHA report. The issue has been particularly relevant during our visit, in the build-up to a Security Council discussion on further sanctions. It is clear from interviews with Taliban officials that they see themselves as open for a settlement with the US on the Bin Laden extradition issue, having presented what they regard as concrete and viable alternative solutions. Most NGO employees did not believe that further sanctions would lead to positive change within the Taliban, but rather allow for more radical elements to increase their influence. Villagers interviewed claimed that sanctions had negatively influenced their life situation, referring to higher food prices and devaluation of the Afghani as two examples. The blame for this was put squarely on the international community, and specifically the US, for punishing them as Muslims and for forgetting their sacrifices during the war against the Soviet Union.

Other concerns raised in the interviews and in media were:

- Missing opportunities through termination of the UN peace process following increase in sanctions, at a time when the parties have showed will to enter into negotiation for a peaceful settlement
- New sanctions could be seen to have grave humanitarian effects at a time when the population of Afghanistan faces massive problems, such as the drought
- Isolation of the Taliban implies that their external contact is with Pakistan only, closing of any opportunities for a dialog with the wider international community
- On what the Taliban see as their core Islamic values, the Taliban is unlikely to be receptive to international pressure. New modes of dialogue is necessary.

The only sanction that has widespread domestic legitimacy is an arms embargo. Unfortunately, its effectiveness, however, can be questioned when it comes to the aims of negotiating peace in Afghanistan. Firstly, it can be perceived as if the whole blame is placed on the Taliban for the continuation of the war. An arms embargo should rather be imposed on arms supplies to all parties to the war in Afghanistan if the aim is to promote a peaceful settlement. Secondly, it is virtually impossible to control an embargo. Not only will it be almost impossible to seal off the boundary with Pakistan, but the Taliban has also proven capable of purchasing arms in the larger international market.

With the exception of a full arms embargo, there is every reason to question the feasibility of sanctions in the context of Afghanistan. It is also worth taking note of the fact that Afghan civilians are already exposed to multiple

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 46

vulnerabilities including this years serious drought: the effect of sanctions comes on top of this, and is seen as a clear indication that the international community has no sensitivity to their needs.

## 7 Conclusion

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We argue that there is a severe humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, that continued dialogue seems more feasible than sanctions when it comes to altering of negative aspects of the political/military groups and that the humanitarian agencies have initiated an important review process that needs to be taken further. In concluding this report we would like to highlight three issues we feel are particularly important for the provision of humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan in the present situation.

### 7.1 Distinguish humanitarian and political efforts

The sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council, but also limitations implicit in the Principles for Assistance Provision,<sup>23</sup> have had negative effects on the provision of humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan. However, a part of the problem is that, in line with traditional 'aid practice' in Afghanistan, the dilemmas that humanitarian actors face have not been openly discussed. Hence, there has been no concerted attempt to develop policies that do not violate basic humanitarian principles. Agencies have, by necessity, entered into various arrangements and engagements with the Taliban, while attempting to downplay their importance. The result is that relations between humanitarian actors and the de facto state function in Afghanistan has become extremely unclear. This is also confusing to the Taliban, who relate to a UN that is simultaneously a provider of humanitarian assistance, a peace negotiator, and a sanctions enforcement body.

Credit should be given to the Humanitarian Coordinator for lifting the humanitarian values up above the political discourse, and pointing out where the two processes are incompatible. The logical next step is to accept the realities on the ground, and transparently establish relations with the Taliban authorities, rather than undermining any future opportunities to do so through so-called flexible arrangements. The need for a transparent approach is further underlined by issues discussed above, including the pressing humanitarian needs, as well as the potential ability of the Taliban to seriously address drug production.

Such an approach stand in opposition to those who would argue that one should not by any means contribute to the legitimisation of the Taliban, unless it complies with existing international demands concerning terrorism and the extradition of Bin Laden, and on human rights. Whereas these are important concerns, their resolution through increased international sanctions does not seem likely although international pressure on the Taliban is a necessity. It may be an alternative to let the sanction issue rest, while concentrating on developing constructive dialogue and responses to the pressing humanitarian

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<sup>23</sup> For details refer to chapter 3.5 in UNOCHA (2000), *Afghanistan 2001 Appeal*. Islamabad, UNOCHA.



needs. If further Security Council sanctions are imposed, one should clearly distinguish between the political and humanitarian roles of the UN.

Following the arguments above we would recommend that the humanitarian agencies accept that the Taliban is a “fact of life” in Afghanistan, rooted in a traditional village based “outlook on life”. The challenge, whatever authority structure exists, is to find ways to ensure that administrative and governance structures are transparent and receptive to needs of the citizens, and to encourage a shift in focus from a military and war-focused mentality to taking on responsibility for the country's citizens. At the district and province levels there appears to be ample opportunities for engaging with and further encourage the establishment of village-based bodies, which could be ideal for both grassroots oriented rehabilitation, development and peace-building work. This again rests on the willingness of aid agencies to give up sovereignty, and to respect the influence that such bodies may wish to have on priority settings. Coordination at this level might prove more helpful than numerous meetings and arrangements at the national level.

## **7.2 Long-term assistance**

The lessons learned from the drought point in two directions. Firstly, it appears that the effects of the drought could have been mitigated if the assistance community had applied a less emergency relief oriented approach over the last years. Secondly, the problem is potentially of such a magnitude that it will shape survival strategies, migration patterns and agricultural production in Afghanistan for years to come. The implication is that there is a need both for short-term measures to meet the present demand, as well as long term strategic planning. As things stand, access to long-term funding is a serious obstacle, but the current situation carries strong arguments as to why funding and implementation arrangements needs to be changed.

A reorientation to work with a longer time horizon has many implications. Existing projects are often “hardware” oriented, expensive, and expatriate-intensive. More adequate responses would be “software” oriented, and build on Afghan national capacities. What we have called the Afghan “aid practice” carries with it a number of dysfunctional inertias. One of them being that most aid agencies have the headquarters in Pakistan. While implementation and day to day management is done in Afghanistan, decision-making is based in Pakistan. Although security remains a concern, it is clear that operations will be both more cost/effective and more responsive to people's needs if headquarters were shifted to Afghanistan.

## **7.3 Knowledge-building and operationalisation**

The United Nations humanitarian agencies deserve credit for recently having initialised several critical studies of aspects of the humanitarian aid system. This has stimulated necessary debate over key issues, such as the impact of sanctions, and how to relate to the Taliban administration. The challenge is to maintain the drive created by these studies, and particularly to address much

more systematically the changes to Afghan society that has been caused by the war.

It is critical that the competence to conduct such studies is also built up within Afghanistan. Future studies and assessments should institutionalise a counterpart system, in which the Afghan researchers are working in tandem with experienced international analysts. To reach a critical mass in terms of required research competence is only going to be possible if developing indigenous capacities.

A key to the United Nations, and to the national and international NGOs, will be to develop means of disseminating and operationalising study findings. That test is here and now, as some of the studies that are brought into the public at the moment present very concrete suggestions as to how to modify aid practice in Afghanistan.

## ANNEX I

### List of people interviewed and met with

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#### ISLAMABAD

Embassy of Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan	H. Fouzi,	First Secretary
Embassy of Norway, Islamabad	T. Toreng, B. Johannessen, S. Bleken,	Ambassador Dep. Head of Mission First Secretary
UNDP, Islamabad	Knut Østby,	Acting Res. Rep.

#### PESHAWAR

ANCB	Eng. H. Gul Eng. M. Shah Barez
ARIC	N. H. Dupree
CARE, International	Eng. Rahimi
CCA	Eng. Hussini
CoAR	Eng. Naeem
CPAU	Eng. Fahim M. Suleman M. Ehsan
DACAAR	T. Thomsen
HAFO	Eng. Jawed
PRB	Eng. Kabir
SCA	A. Fange
UN CDAP	Dr. F. Wardak

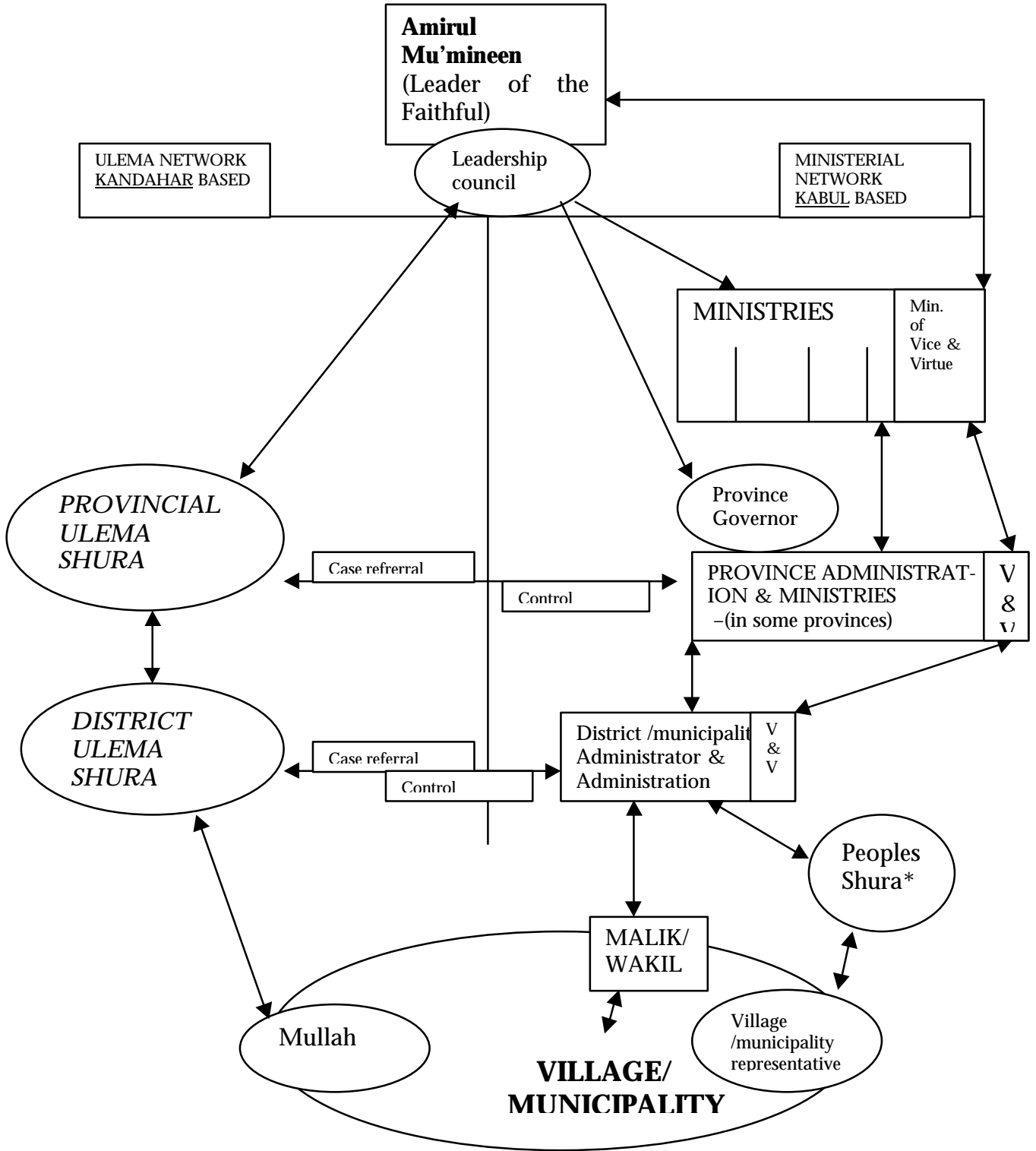
#### KABUL

CoAR	National staff
IAM	Information Officer
Ministry of Planning	Eng. Zalmy
Ministry of Planning	Mullah Izatullah, Deputy Minister
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Mr. Afghani, Protocol Department
NCA	National staff
UNDP, Drought department	Eng. Salimi

#### SAIDABAD – WARDAK

CoAR	Staff at Regional Office
Village Nazeer Khel	Villagers
Village Nazeer Khel	Shura representative

**ANNEX II**  
**TALIBAN/ IEA GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE**



\*Note: These Peoples Shuras are not operational in all districts, but have been established over the last 6 month where the Taliban might not be in full command (as in Hazarajat) or where an aid agency (as CDAP) have established a shura structure. In both cases they relate to the District Administrator, and the villagers select their representatives for the District Shura. Neither is the malik title used on this function in all parts of Afghanistan, nor is this function present in all villages and areas.

# Summary

More than twenty years of war and civil war and a severe drought has increased the vulnerability of the Afghan population. The warring fractions, the Taliban and the Northern Alliance, show low concern for the population and unfortunate similarities in their practise of relating to drug production and trafficking, violation of human rights and support to international terrorism. Hence, a solution to the current political stalemate and humanitarian challenges is not likely to be found in escalating support to or sanction of one of these parties. Though rather in increased contact and dialogue with the parties to the conflict and civil society groups, establishing a longer-term strategy to build civilian structures.

The report provides a review of the Taliban governance structure, discusses the possible impacts of a Taliban ban on drug production and how the drought influences migration. It is pointed out that the present UN sanctions does not seem to have any significant impact on the Taliban, but are perceived as unjust by a majority of the population.

United Nations, donors and humanitarian agencies are recommended to make a clear distinction between their humanitarian and political efforts. The humanitarian intervention requires a longer time horizon and more emphasis on “software” and strengthening of national capacities.

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