Women at the Peace Table: Rhetoric or Reality?

Women's participation and influence in the peace and reintegration process in Afghanistan

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Bild/Cover: Pakistan Prime Minister Raja Pervez Ashraf talks to members of the Afghan High Peace Council, chaired by Salahuddin Rabbani, in Islamabad on November 12, 2012. (Scanpix/Aamir Qureshi)

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Sammanfattning

Efter att talibanerna avsattes har de afghanska kvinnornas situation varit i fokus för det internationella samfundets insats i landet. Efter många år av väpnad konflikt och förbud mot att delta i det offentliga livet, har kvinnor börjat engagera sig inom de sociala, politiska och ekonomiska sektorerna. Under press från det internationella samfundet och kvinnors påtryckningar har afghansk lagstiftning och policy reformerats. Diskriminerande lagstiftning har upphävts. Den afghanska staten har antagit en konstitution som garanterar kvinnors och mäns jämlika rättigheter och som ger kvinnor rösträtt och rätt att kandidera i demokratiska val. Kvinnors valdeltagande har också stärkts genom utbildning, t.ex. i medborgarrätt..

Målsättningen med denna studie är att undersöka om utvecklingen till förmån för kvinnors rättigheter har lett till hållbara förändringar och framgång. Detta är särskilt viktigt avseende afghanska kvinnors möjlighet att delta i och påverka den pågående freds- och reintegrationsprocessen.

De intervjuer som genomförts i Afghanistan, på den politisk-strategiska nivån, visar att de framtida fredsförhandlingarna mellan den afghanska regeringen, USA och talibanerna upplevs som ett hot mot kvinnors rättigheter. Detta beror på att ingen vet om regeringen eller USA är beredd att säkerställa att kvinnors rättigheter inte förhandlas bort. De samtal som förs inkluderar bara en liten elit och ingen information är offentlig. Kvinnor finns representerade i Höga fredsrådet och i provinsfredsråden men inte i det inflytelserika nationella säkerhetsrådet, som ger råd till presidenten i frågor rörande säkerhet och fred. Kvinnor upplever sig inte i första hand vara rädda för att talibanerna skall återkomma till makten, utan för män som har beväpnats av de internationella militära styrkorna. De är också oroliga över den sittande regeringen som vid flera tillfällen har varit beredd att stödja förslag som begränsar kvinnors fri- och rättigheter. Både de kvinnliga parlamentariker och de civilsamhällesrepresentanter som intervjuats för studien, upplever att ett bibehållet stöd från det internationella samfundet är centralt för att bevara kvinnors rättigheter och säkerställa deltagande.

Studien visar att det finns en diskrepans mellan kvinnliga parlamentarikers och civilsamhällesrepresentanters förväntningar på vad ett framtida fredsavtal bör omfatta, och den afghanska regeringens mål. Medan kvinnliga parlamentariker och civilsamhällesrepresentanter eftersträvar en positiv fred, förefaller regeringen – och den internationella militära koalitionen – primärt vara intresserade av att försvaga det väpnade motståndet och få till ett maktdelningsavtal med dessa grupperingar. Detta kan leda till olösta konflikter och missförhållanden bland befolkningen, vilket utgör ett hot mot möjligheterna att uppnå en hållbar fred.

En faktor som ytterligare komplicerar situationen är kopplingen mellan den militära upprorsbekämpningsstrategin (COIN) och det afghanska freds- och reintegrationsprogrammet (APRP). Det faktum att militära mål vävs samman med fredsförsök skapar inkonsekvenser i processen och kan äventyra det väpnade motståndets förtroende för APRP.

Nyckelord: Afghanistan, UNSCR 1325, UNSCR 1889, kvinnors deltagande, kvinnors rättigheter, fredsprocess, fredsförhandlingar, fredsfördrag, Höga fredsrådet, Afghanska freds- och reintegrationsprogrammet, APRP, provinsfredsråd, kvinnliga fredsförhandlare, Taliban, Nationella konsultativa fredsjirgan, NPCJ.

Summary

The situation of women in Afghanistan has been a prominent area of rhetorical focus of the international community in the post-Taliban era. After years of armed conflict and forced exclusion from the public sphere, women have gradually emerged as social, political and economic actors. Some of the most widely recognized achievements have been in the legal and policy sectors. Under the pressure of the international community and the Afghan women's lobby, the Afghan government has removed discriminatory laws against women, ratified a constitution that promotes non-discrimination; and facilitated women's participation in national elections through civic education, voting and candidacy.

This study seeks to examine whether these developments actually represent the significant change and progress for women that has been claimed. This is especially important in the context of Afghan women's participation and influence in the ongoing peace and reintegration process.

Interviews, conducted in Afghanistan with representatives at the political-strategic level, showed that the future peace negotiations between the government and the Taliban pose a threat to women's rights, since the government and international actors have not disclosed the concessions they are prepared to make. The process is non-inclusive and non-transparent, and it is unclear what is being discussed in the pre-negotiations talks. Women participate to a limited extent in the High Peace Council and Province Peace Councils, but are excluded from the National Security Council, which is a highly influential body that advises the President on peace and security matters. In general, women are not afraid of the return of the Taliban, but of men who have been armed by the international military coalition. The international community is perceived, both by the female parliamentarians and the civil society representatives interviewed for this study, as an important protector of women's rights and for ensuring women's participation.

The study found that there is a discrepancy between the civil society's and female parliamentarians' expectation on what a future peace agreement should entail, and the objectives of the government. While the civil society and the female parliamentarians strive for 'positive peace', the government – together with the international military coalition – is, seemingly, interested in weakening the insurgency and closing a power-sharing deal with the armed opposition. This may result in unsolved conflicts and grievances among the population, which is detrimental to achieving sustainable peace.

Furthermore, a complicating factor is the relationship between the military Counter-Insurgency (COIN) strategy and the Afghan Peace and reintegration program (APRP). The fact that military goals are interwoven with peace efforts creates inconsistency in the process and may compromise the armed opposition's confidence in the APRP.

Keywords: Afghanistan, UNSCR 1325, women's participation, women's rights, peace process, peace negotiation, peace agreement, High Peace Council, Afghan Peace and Reintegration Program, APRP, Provincial Peace Council, women mediators, women negotiators, Taliban, armed opposition, National Security Council, National Consultative Peace Jirga, NCPJ.

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Preface

"We can no longer afford to minimize or ignore the contributions of women and girls to all stages of conflict resolution, peacemaking, peace building and reconstruction processes. Sustainable peace will not be achieved without the full and equal participation of women and men."

-Kofi Annan[1]

The Swedish Defense Research Agency (FOI), and its Platform for Gender, Peace and Security, has a longstanding engagement with studies of Afghanistan. After the Taliban was ousted in 2001, the situation of women and women's rights has become a focus for scholarly work and international policy debates. Women's role in Afghan society has always had a dominant position in the political discourse; it has been an essential factor in the periphery's struggle against the central government and state policies.

Scholarly work has proven that societies with a high degree of equality between men and women are less likely to engage in civil unrest or intra-state armed conflict. There is also a correlation between harsh stratification of men and women and marginalization of minorities and ethnic groups. In this context, peace processes and agreements are critical, since they determine post-conflict reconstruction and governance. Inequalities of the past can be rectified and thereby grant women and marginalized groups rights and opportunities that they previously where denied, which in the long term will contribute to sustainable peace.

The international community has acknowledged that women's rights have to be protected, codified and safeguarded in order for Afghanistan to achieve sustainable peace and development. An important tool is the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) – Women, Peace and Security.

Sweden is one of the countries that have made UNSCR 1325 a priority, which is reflected in both policies and financial aid. This study was commissioned by and implemented with the generous support of the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and is informed by the provisions in UNSCR 1325. The overall purpose is to inform the policy debate and to contribute to improved implementation of UNSCR 1325.

In combination with the support of the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, FOI has enjoyed assistance from many Afghan friends. We extend our heartfelt thanks to all of them and to all the interviewees who contributed both their time and opinions about the peace process in Afghanistan.

Stockholm, April, 2013

Helené Lackenbauer
FOI – Platform for Gender, Peace and Security

[1] United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations, *Gender and UN Peacekeeping operations*, October 2005, p. 1.

1 Introduction

The situation of women in Afghanistan has been one of the international community's most prominent areas of rhetorical focus in the post-Taliban era. After years of armed conflict and forced exclusion from the public sphere, women have gradually emerged back as social, political and economic actors.

Some of the most widely-recognized achievements have been in the legal and policy sectors. Under the pressure of the international community and the Afghan women's rights lobby, the Afghan government has removed discriminatory laws against women, ratified a constitution that promotes non-discrimination, and facilitated women's participation in national elections through civic education, voting and candidacy. However, it is worth examining whether these developments actually represent significant change, or if achievements mainly have been marginal. This is particularly important in the context of the ongoing peace dialogue, or, more correctly, 'the talks about peace talks'. According to UNWOMEN, the underrepresentation of women in peace negotiations is much more striking than in other public decision-making positions and roles, where women are still under-represented, but where the gap is slowly shrinking.[2]

In addition, research has underlined the negative relationship between exclusion and fragility in post-conflict societies.[3] It has also highlighted the relation between severe economic and social, horizontal inequalities – including gender inequalities – and conflict.[4] Consequently, it is possible to assume that there is a relation between inclusive models of peace negotiations and durability of peace.

Peace processes and agreements are critical to societies, since they determine post-conflict reconstruction and governance. For example, inequalities of the past can be rectified and as a result grant women and marginalized groups rights and opportunities that they previously were denied. At the same time, peace negotiations, if dealt with in a non-transparent way, can bolster inequalities, preserve injustices and marginalize part of the population, and in so doing lay the foundation for a fragile state with less opportunity for sustainable peace. Peace processes should be regarded as opportunities to renovate and renew the legitimacy of social and institutional structures.[5]

Adding a gender perspective to peace negotiations could be a method for removing the kind of injustice, inequality and exclusion that drive conflict. Women's participation at the peace table is thus not only an opportunity to voice women's concerns and priorities and ensure their rights after the conflict.

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[2] United Nations Development Fund for Women, *Women's participation in peace negotiations*, August 2010, http://www.unifem.org/attachments/products/0302_WomensParticipationInPeaceNegotiations_en.pdf (retrieved 11 December 2012).

[3] See e.g. Melander, E., "Gender equality and intrastate armed conflict", *International studies quarterly*, 2005, 49, p. 696.

[4] Caprioli, M. "Gender equality and state aggression: the impact of domestic gender equality on state first use of force", *International interaction*, 2003, 29, p. 205.

[5] Hellsten, S., *Ethics, rhetoric and politics of post-conflict reconstruction: How can the concept of social contract help us in understanding how to make peace work?* Research Paper, UNU-WIDER, United Nations University (UNU), No. 2006/148.

It is also a plausible model for achieving sustainable peace and development for the entire society.

1.1 UNSCR 1325 – Women Peace and Security

An important instrument for increasing women's participation in peace processes is United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) – Women, Peace and Security. UNSCR 1325 emphasizes the role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peace-building, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction. It stresses the importance of women's participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security.[6]

More than a decade has passed since UNSCR 1325 was unanimously adopted, and yet the absence of women from formal peace negations reveals a major gap between the aspirations expressed in countless international and national commitments and the reality of peace processes.[7] In a review of 24 major peace processes between 1992 and 2008, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) found that female participation in negotiation delegations averaged less than 8 per cent[8] and that only 2.5 per cent of peace agreement signatories were women.[9]

In 2009, the UN Security Council adopted a new resolution – UNSCR 1889 – that sought to strengthen resolution 1325 by reaffirming the need for full and equal participation of women in all stages of peace processes. Resolution 1889 expressed deep concern about the under-representation of women in these processes and urged the member states and the international community to take further measures to improve women's participation in them.[10] The resolution itself is further evidence of the limited progress that has occurred since 2000, when UNSCR 1325 was adopted, and of the substantial gap that exists between policy and reality on the ground. In fact, UNIFEM's review showed that the most noteworthy examples of women's participation in these processes occurred before the adoption of Resolution 1325, e.g., in El Salvador, Guatemala, Northern Ireland and South Africa.[11]

1.2 The Afghan Context

The 2001 Bonn Agreement on Afghanistan excluded both the Taliban and other stakeholders, such as the civil society. The process legitimized the warlords from the Northern Alliance and gave them political power and impunity for crimes committed during the civil war. Analysts have concluded

[6] UN Security Council, *Security Council resolution1325*, 31 October 2000.
[7] UNWOMEN, Women's participation in peace negotiations: connections between presence and influence, 2012, pp. 1-5.
[8] This figure is based on a review of the 14 cases for which such information was available.
[9] United Nations Development Fund for Women, *Women's participation in peace negotiations*, August 2010, http://www.unifem.org/attachments/products/030 2_WomensParticipationInPeaceNegotiations_en.pdf (retrieved 11 December 2012).
[10] UN Security Council, *Security Council resolution 1889*, 5 October 2009.
[11] United Nations Development Fund for Women, *Women's participation in peace negotiations*, August 2010, http://www.unifem.org/attachments/products/0302_WomensParticipationInPeaceNegotiations_en.pdf (retrieved 11 December 2012).

that the exclusion of the Taliban impeded the process of finding a peaceful political solution to the conflict.[12]

It took the ensuing decade of fighting the insurgency for the Afghan government and the USA to realize that a political dialogue with the Taliban and Hezb-e Islami is the only viable solution for ending the conflict.

Currently, no peace negotiations – with an agreed agenda and a proposed framework – are underway between the parties to the armed conflict. There is an on-going dialogue, which is focusing on reaching an agreement about future peace negotiations, the 'talks about talks' mentioned above. In parallel, the Afghan government has initiated a demobilization and reintegration process for members of the armed opposition who desire to lay down weapons and reintegrate with their communities. This is a non-traditional approach in the context of peace and conflict resolution. It is a revised process, since demobilization and reintegration 'normally' take place only after peace negotiations and when an agreement has been reached.

The incumbent government, led by President Hamid Karzai, has made three fundamental demands of the Taliban; stop fighting, cut ties with Al-Qaeda and accept the Constitution. Although the Constitution protects the rights of women, there is a significant risk that the Afghan government will compromise women's rights in order to reach a settlement with the Taliban and satisfy their own vested interests. Coercive subjugation of women has been a distinguishing mark of the Taliban and at the very core of their view of society.[13] President Karzai has proven to be an unreliable promoter of women's freedom and rights. He has, on several occasions, endorsed conservative political initiatives aimed at circumventing the Constitution's guarantee of the equal rights of men and women.[14]

Given the strong symbolic value attached to the role of women in Afghan society and the general exclusion of females in public life, the crucial question is: Will women and women's rights be sacrificed in the pursuit of peace in Afghanistan?

1.3 Starting point

This study is informed by the provisions laid down in UNSCR 1325, and thus has a normative, rights-based, approach. It is based on the assumptions that: women have rights by virtue of their humanity; they have the right to participate in policy-making; they have the right to cooperate with men on equal terms in discussions and agreements on peace and development. It is also informed by three assumptions based in contemporary research on peace processes: that there is a positive correlation between equality, peace and security; that transparent and inclusive peace processes are a protection against

[12] Schirch, L., *Designing a Comprehensive Peace Process for Afghanistan*, Peaceworks, United States Institute of Peace no 78, Washington D.C., 2001, p.10.
[13] Griffin, M., *Reaping the Whirlwind: The Taliban movement in Afghanistan*, 2001, London, Pluto Press; Marsden, P., *The Taliban: War, religion and the new order in Afghanistan*, 1998, London, Zed Books Ltd.
[14] Lackenbauer, H., "Will women's rights be sacrificed for peace in Afghanistan?", in Skeppström, E., Olsson, S., & Wiss, Å. (eds.), *Strategic outlook 2012*, FOI-R--3449--SE, Stockholm, Swedish Defence Research Agency, 2012, p. 64.

frail peace agreements and relapse to armed conflict; and that peace offers an opportunity to renovate and renew the legitimacy of social and institutional structures.[15]

1.4 Aim and research questions

The overarching aim of this study is to analyze the participation and influence of women in the Afghan peace and reintegration process; and through this contribute to Sweden's efforts to implement Resolution 1325. The focus is on the political-strategic level.

The study focuses both on the peace talks between the Afghan government and the armed opposition and on the peace and reintegration process of insurgents. These processes will crucially impact on the situation for women after the withdrawal of international military combat troops in 2014, and will contribute to shape the post-conflict setting in Afghanistan.

The research questions addressed by this study are:

- What role do Afghan women have in the peace dialogue between the government and the Taliban/armed opposition and how are they able to influence the process?

- What role do Afghan women have in the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP) and how are they able to influence the process?

- What are the prevailing conditions for ensuring that women's rights are safeguarded in a peace deal between the Afghan government and the Taliban/armed opposition?

1.5 Method

This study is based on research conducted in Kabul, Afghanistan; it seeks to explore the perceptions and considerations that political actors and stakeholders have about the peace and reintegration process. A field trip was carried out during two weeks in January 2013.

Qualitative methods have been used to generate data, including semi-structured interviews, focus-group discussions and informal conversations. The interviews reflect individual perceptions and narratives. The focus group, conducted with Pashtun civil society representatives, helped explore the civil society perspective on female participation and the peace process, particularly considerations and priorities for achieving sustainable peace. The majority of

[15] Caprioli, M. "Gender equality and state aggression: the impact of domestic gender equality on state first use of force", *International interaction*, 2003, 29; Melander, E., "Gender equality and intrastate armed conflict", *International studies quarterly*, 2005, 49.

the interviewees hold high-level positions in the Afghan government, parliament, High Peace Council (HPC) and/or civil society. As far as was possible, women and men are equally represented among the interviewees selected. See annex 1 for a list of the questions posed and annex 2 for a list of the interviewees.

The interviewees were selected based on their expertise and extensive knowledge regarding women's participation and influence in the peace dialogue and APRP. It should be noted that the security situation in Kabul has had an impact, to some extent, on the selection of interviewees. Influential political actors and stakeholders are sometimes subject to strict security regimes; this may make them both difficult to reach, or interview. The aim of the sampling method for this study is not to produce generalizable results, but to identify key aspects, narratives and perceptions that relate to the research topic.

Due to the sensitive nature of the study's topic, some of the interviewees wished to remain anonymous. In those cases, only position and affiliation have been documented. The other interviewees have been referred to by name, affiliation and position.

1.6 Limitations

There are numerous ongoing 'talks about talks' between the Afghan government and groups that oppose it, as is the case with the unofficial talks that are being facilitated by different nations. This is not a study of any specific initiatives; instead, its focus is on the content of the dialogue between the government and the Taliban/armed opposition, as a whole, and with regard to the role and influence of women.

This study nevertheless considers two of the initiatives led by the HPC, 'the Peace Process Road Map to 2015', and the 'talks about talks' process, conducted in Chantilly, France, in December 2012. This is due to their significance as two major undertakings within the peace process. They were raised by all the individuals interviewed for this study. The dialogue in France was unprecedented, since for the first time representatives from the Taliban participated and expressed their standpoints and demands. In their statement, they presented the Taliban position on women's role and rights in the Afghan society and public life as being within the framework of Islam.

The ongoing transition of responsibility for security, from the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to the Afghan National Security Force (ANSF), is an important factor that impacts on the peace and reintegration process. The transition is particularly pertinent when it comes to women's security and possibilities for participating in public life. Given the limited scope and timeline of this study, the transition process itself is not addressed. The transition process, however, calls for further research, since NATO and its member states have adopted action plans for the implementation of UNSCR 1325.

Previous research has identified a long list of obstacles to women's participation, which could be addressed in order to reflect this complex field.

The scope of this study is limited to the perceptions and narratives obtained through the interviews and in the focus group and informal discussions.

1.7 Disposition

This report has the following outline:

Chapter 2 provides a brief background to the role of women in Afghanistan before the Taliban era and post-2001.Women's rights and women's role in Afghanistan occupy a prominent position in the history of the country and is closely interlinked with the struggle between the central government and the tribes in the periphery.

Chapter 3 describes the overall framework of the ongoing Afghan peace and reintegration process.

Chapter 4 and 5 provide the analysis of the interview data collected during the field trip to Kabul. Chapter 4 analyzes perceptions and narratives connected to the notion of peace and conflict. It examines perceptions about the Taliban and the perceived position they have on women as well as obstacles to peace identified by the respondents. Chapter 5 analyzes women's participation and influence in main institutions within the peace and reintegration process. It also addresses the APRP Gender Policy, the role that women can play in conflict and grievance resolution, and the inclusion of women from insurgent groups in the reintegration process.

Chapter 6 highlights the main findings of the study. It presents a number of recommendations that aim to contribute to Sweden's efforts to implement UNSCR 1325 in the Afghan context.

2 Women's rights and the role of women in Afghanistan

Women's rights and women's role in Afghanistan occupy a prominent position in the history of the country. These issues assign directly to the social contract between the Afghan state and its citizens and lie at the very core of the Afghan society. This overall context is important to understand when discussing Afghan women's participation and influence in the peace and reintegration process. Hence, this chapter provides a brief background to the role of women in Afghanistan before the Taliban era and post-2001.

2.1 Historical times – before the Taliban

The history of Afghan women is a tale of marginalization and subordination. The position of women in the family has been shaped by many factors and there are strong cultural, religious and historical roots causing gender discrimination.[16]

The 'woman quest' has always assumed a dominant position in the political discourse in struggle against the central government and in state policies, in Afghanistan. Opposition has risen to governmental reforms on girls' education, reduction of the bride price and increase of legal age for marriage, and has on numerous occasions led to rebellion against the state.[17]

Two important elements in the understanding of gender relations in Afghanistan are the division between the urban and rural population and the one between the central government and the tribes in the periphery. The role of women in public life has historically been a source of contention and conflict and several reforms to strengthen women's rights have been met with violent resistance from communities outside Kabul.[18]

Two radical attempts to modernize the Afghan government and improve women's equality were made during the 1900s. Both of them were followed by violent protests and resulted in less freedom and decreased social participation for women.[19]

The first reform attempt was led by King Amanullah in the 1920s. The king banned child marriage, started girls' schools and gave freedom to the widows who were coerced by their deceased husband's families.[20] Amanullah's reforms were pushed back by clerics and the Loya Jirga[21]; he was overthrown and forced into exile. The changes to the status of women in combination with

[16] Mann, C., *Models and Realities of Afghan Womanhood*: *A Retrospective and Prospects*, paper prepared for the Gender Equality and Development Section, Social and Human Sciences Sector, UNESCO, 2005, pp. 1-2
[17] Moghadam, V.,"Patriarchy and the Politics of Gender in Modernizin Societies: Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan", *South Asia Bullentine*, Vol XIII Nos. 1&2, 1993, p 122.
[18] Ibid
[19] Mann, C., *Models and Realities of Afghan Womanhood*: *A Retrospective and Prospects*, paper prepared for the Gender Equality and Development Section, Social and Human Sciences Sector, UNESCO, 2005, pp. 6.
[20] Lackenbauer, H., "Will women's rights be sacrificed for peace in Afghanistan?", in Skeppström, E., Olsson, S., & Wiss, Å. (eds.), *Strategic outlook 2012*, FOI-R--3449--SE, Stockholm, Swedish Defence Research Agency, 2012, p. 64
[21] A traditional Grand Council for discussing important national political or emergency matters.

attempts to restrict tribal and religious leaders' power resulted in the tribes' reassertion of their autonomy from the state.[22] However, the rulers of Afghanistan continued to increase the freedom of women, although in a less progressive manner than Amanullah had. Throughout the 20th century, women were encouraged to get an education and to take up employment. In 1964, women were granted the right to vote and enter politics.[23] By the 1970s, this resulted in a high number of female professionals, e.g. 40 percent of the physicians, 70 percent of the teachers and 30 percent of the civil servants were women. These numbers were truer for the urban areas however, than for the rural periphery.[24]

The second radical attempt to modernize Afghanistan followed the coup in 1978, when the Marxist-Leninist Party, People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), seized power. PDPA implemented a series of progressive reforms – often through coercion and violence – which especially benefited women.[25] The reforms aimed at rapid change of the political and social structure of the Afghan society. This also included land tenure and gender relations. The government introduced legislation to improve women's status through new family laws and policies to encourage female education and employment. Women's emancipation was an important part of PDPA's political-cultural agenda. In fact it was a major objective of the party's 'national democratic revolution'.[26]

The PDPA also pushed land reforms; they included redistribution of land and the cancellation of peasant's debts, with the aim of limiting the power of the traditional leaders. This, in combination with the change in marital laws and an aggressive literacy program for women in the rural areas, resulted in strong opposition from rural tribal men and traditional leaders across Afghanistan. Believing that women should not appear in public places, people in the rural areas often refused to send their girls to school. The population's resistance and the violent methods of the PDPA cadres resulted in violent conflicts at the local level. In 1978, Afghan refugees started entering into neighboring countries; as the main reason for their exile, they cited the forceful implementation of literacy programs for women.[27]

Following the Soviet withdrawal, in 1989, and the PDPA's fall in 1992, a brutal era of civil war erupted between the different Mujahedeen fractions, which previously had fought against the Soviet presences. The Mujahedeen had a conservative position on the role of women in the community; they legislated against women's freedom of movement and participation in society. The civil war between the Mujahedeen factions was marked by extreme cruelty and

[22] Polluda, L., *Reform and Rebellion in Afghanistan, 1919-29, King Amanullah's Faillure to Modernize a Tribal Society*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1973, p 146.
[23] Mann, C., *Models and Realities of Afghan Womanhood: A retrospective and Prospects*, paper presented at UNESCO, July 2005, p.6.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Lackenbauer, H., "Will women's rights be sacrificed for peace in Afghanistan?", in Skeppström, E., Olsson, S., & Wiss, Å. (eds.), *Strategic outlook 2012*, FOI-R--3449--SE, Stockholm, Swedish Defence Research Agency, 2012, p. 60
[26] Moghadam, V., "Patriarchy and the Politics of Gender in Modernizing Societies: Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan", South Asia Bulletin, Vol XIII Nos. 1&2, 1993, p 130.
[27] Ibid.

gross violations of human rights. This paved the way for the Taliban to seize power; and a majority of the population, including women, welcomed them as a moral alternative that would establish law and order.[28]

The Taliban is an Islamic movement with a specific program for social order.[29] The program focuses on women's status and private moral issues. Their view of women, as subordinated and separate from society, is a noticeable feature in their interpretation of good governance. During their regime, 1996–2001, they directed substantial resources to controlling women's behavior and limiting their participation in society and social life, which not only affected women, but also their children. Women were forced into seclusion in their homes and were only allowed to go out if completely covered and escorted by a male relative.[30]

2.2 Post-2001

After the Taliban regime was ousted in 2001, the process of transforming Afghanistan to a democratic nation-state was jump-started. As in any fragile state emerging from decades of civil war, this has proven to be a complex and difficult undertaking. The government is fragile, inexperienced and governs an aid-dependent country that is reliant on internationally-based security. Expectations pertaining to a modern state, e.g., democracy, human rights and delivery of services, are intertwined with traditional governance structures and warlordism. Ethnic and tribal allegiances and patronage systems shape the political landscape. Women's rights continue to be a contagious issue on the political agenda, and are challenged and debated in different sectors of the society, especially among religious clerics.[31]

Nevertheless, women's rights and participation in the society have improved since 2001. This is due to pressure from the international community and human rights activists. A policy framework for the welfare of women has been put in place by the government. Most noteworthy are the core strategic documents that guide the development process; i.e. the Afghanistan Compact, Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS), and National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA). Similar progress has been made in other sectors, e.g., health and education, including increased life expectancy, reduced child mortality and increased school enrollment of girls.[32] These developments have mostly affected the urban female population and, to a lesser extent, women and girls in rural Afghanistan.

Since 2001, there has been notable progress in the participation of women in public life. That success includes the reservation of 25% of the seats in both the National Assembly and the Provincial Councils for women. The Afghan

[28] Lackenbauer, H., "Will women's rights be sacrificed for peace in Afghanistan?", in Skeppström, E., Olsson, S., & Wiss, Å. (eds.), *Strategic outlook 2012*, FOI-R--3449--SE, Stockholm, Swedish Defence Research Agency, 2012, p. 60.
[29] Ibid. p. 61
[30] Ibid, p. 64
[31] Ibid. pp. 61-65.
[32] UNDP *Human Development Report 2013*, http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR2013_EN_Statistics.pdf, (retrieved 1 March 2013).

Parliament has one of the highest percentages of female parliamentarians in the region. This is due to the quotas that promote women's representation in the Afghan legislatures.

At the same time, in today's Afghanistan, these institutions are weak. The elected representatives of the people, e.g., the Parliament, have limited power and are effectively being marginalized by the president and his government.[33] The political power rests in the hands of the president – who rules through the patron-client system – and a small political elite, made up of warlords and former Mujahedeen leaders. They are linked through patronage, and divide power and resources between themselves and their supporters.

It is a major achievement that the constitution mandates that 25% of women should have a place in the Parliament; nonetheless, they have a limited presence in the government, which is where decisions on distribution of resources and power are made.

The current government has proven to be an unreliable supporter of women's freedom and rights. Recent years have been marked by a number of disturbing developments, such as the passage, in 2009, of the Shia Personal Status Law[34], with the support of President Hamid Karzai, the unpunished assassinations of women leaders; and the consolidation of power by fundamentalist factions in government, parliament, and the courts. President Karzai has sought to issue a decree that would have decreased the number of seats reserved for women in parliament. President Karzai often prioritizes the demands of conservative factions at the expense of women, in order to maintain support and gain votes.[35]

In spite of the developments after 2001, Afghanistan stands almost at the very bottom of the UNDP gender index, ranking 178 out of 179 countries.[36] The index shows that Afghan women continue to be amongst the worst-off in the world, especially in the areas of education, health, employment, human rights and domestic violence.

[33] Olsson, S., et al, *Afghanistan after 2014: Five scenarios*, FOI-R--3424--SE, Stockholm, Swedish Defence Research Agency, 2012, p. 58.
[34] A portion of the law pertaining to sexual relations between husband and wife, take away many of women's rights in a marital relationship.
[35] UNAMA, *Still a Long Way to Go: Implementation of the Law on Elimination of Violence against Women in Afghanistan*, Kabul, December 2012, p. 9.
[36] UNDP *Human Development Report 2013*, http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR2013_EN_Statistics.pdf, (retrieved 1 March 2013).

3 The Afghan peace and reintegration framework

The Afghan peace and reintegration framework includes several different initiatives and processes that intersect with each other. This chapter describes these initiatives and processes as well as the background to them, in order to provide a basic understanding of the efforts that are currently made to end the armed conflict in Afghanistan.

3.1 National Consultative Peace Jirga 2010 – the peace and reintegration process is established

After a decade of fighting the insurgency the Afghan government and the USA realized that a political dialogue with the armed opposition was necessary in order to end the armed conflict.

In June, 2010, a National Consultative Peace Jirga (NCPJ) was held in Kabul. It assembled 1 600 members, representing all levels of the Afghan society, i.e. government, parliament, provincial councils, religious scholars, tribal leaders, civil society organizations, and the Afghan diaspora. Nearly 300 of the participants were women, who made up approximately 20% of the attendance.[37]

The NCPJ was a result of the London International Conference in January, 2010, where a plan for Afghanistan was adopted. The plan included transitioning security responsibility to Afghan control, institutional enhancement of Afghanistan's national security capacity, and supporting the Afghan government's national reconciliation plan. The aim of the Jirga was to agree on a national reconciliation plan in order to resolve the ongoing conflict with the armed opposition through negotiations.

The NCPJ agreement demanded a peace that can guarantee the rights of all of its citizens including women and children. For the purpose of social justice, the Jirga urged that the laws apply equally to all Afghan citizens.[38]

The NCPJ agreement defined elements for the peace and reconciliation strategy and included a framework for talks with disaffected Afghan nationals. The strategy clearly excluded foreign insurgents fighting in Afghanistan. It also encouraged the Afghan government and the international actors to free detainees who were imprisoned based on inaccurate information or unsubstantiated allegations; to remove members of the armed opposition from the consolidated blacklist; and, to provide a safe return for those in the armed opposition who join the peace process. The NCPJ called on the armed

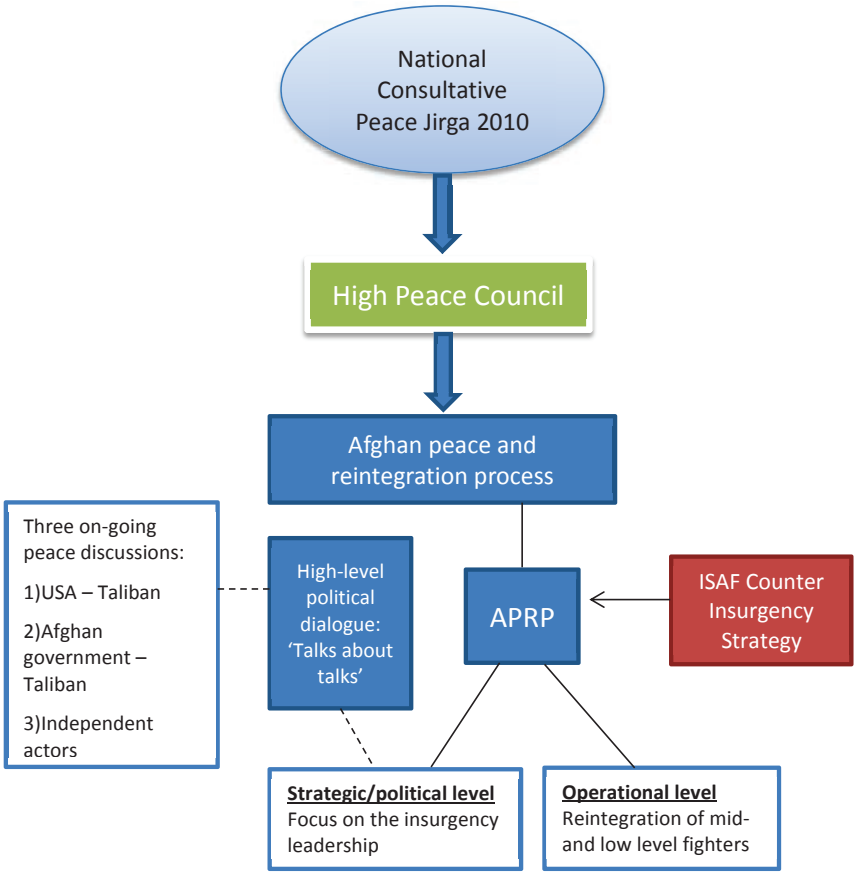
[37] United Nations, "Top UN envoy calls for sustaining momentum of recent Afghan peace forum", *.UN News Centre*, 12 June 2010, http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=35008&Cr=Afghan&Cr1#.UW6MN75vlFo (retrieved 17 April 2013).

[38] National Consultative Peace Jirga, *The Resolution Adopted at the Conclusion of the National Consultative Peace Jirga*, 2010.

opposition to renounce violence; to dissociate themselves from Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups; and, to accept the Afghan Constitution.[39]

Based on the outcome of the NCPJ a peace and reintegration process for Afghanistan was established. The key elements of this process are depicted in figure 1 and are described in the following sections.

Figure 1. The Afghan peace and reintegration process



[39] Ibid.

3.2 The High Peace Council

The High Peace Council (HPC) is the highest body within the Afghan peace and reintegration process. It was created as a result of NCPJ to follow up on the recommendations made by the Jirga.

The HPC consists of 70 members that have been appointed by President Karzai. Nine of the members are female; one of them has a past as Deputy Minister of Refugee Affairs, in the former Taliban government. The members of the HPC represent the different sectors of the society, although high-level members of the formerly armed Mujahedeen fractions are disproportionally represented.[40]

The HPC is divided into six committees and includes an Executive Board. The female members also meet separately in the women's committee, also known as the Seventh Committee.[41]

The HPC is set to lead peace, reconciliation and reintegration efforts, through local, national and regional dialogues and processes. It is responsible for providing advice to the President; for guiding, overseeing, and ensuring APRP implementation, and devising a framework for talks with the Taliban. Its primary focus is on negotiations with the armed opposition and regional actors, e.g. Pakistan.

One of the most notable efforts of the HPC is the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP), which aims to disarm the insurgents and reintegrate them into the Afghan society. The HPC oversees and guides the APRP and the Provincial Peace Councils[42] – see further in section 3.4.

The HPC has developed a Peace Process Roadmap towards 2015, which Pakistan agreed to in late 2012. The Roadmap consists of five steps. First, termination of cross-border shelling; transfer by Pakistan of Taliban prisoners to Afghanistan, or a third country; and severance of ties with Al-Qaeda by the Taliban. Second, safe passage for Taliban negotiators to unspecified countries; contact with Taliban negotiators; an agreement on the terms of the peace process; and de-listing of the Taliban by the US and the UN. Third, establishment of a ceasefire; Taliban prisoners would be released in exchange for renouncing violence; non-elected governmental appointments of Taliban could also be offered as an incentive for peace. The Roadmap proposes that the Taliban transform into a political fraction, and take part in the elections. Fourth, consolidation of agreements between the Afghan government, the Taliban and other armed opposition groups, with the assistance of regional countries and the US. Fifth, and final step, expand regional cooperation to ensure safe return of Afghan refugees residing in Pakistan, and fight Al Qaeda. The Roadmap only mentions women in the final paragraph, in terms of upholding the rights and freedoms of Afghan men and women in accordance

[40] Ruttig, T., "The Ex-Taleban on the High Peace Council: A renewed role for the Khuddam ul-Furqan?" *Afghan Analysts Network*, http://aan-afghanistan.com/index.asp?id=1248 (retrieved 14 April 2013).
[41] Zyck, S., "Peace and reintegration: an introduction", in *Peace and reintegration in Afghanistan*, Civil-military fusion centre, May 2012, p. 10ff.
[42] Zyck, S., "Peace and reintegration: an introduction", in *Peace and reintegration in Afghanistan*, Civil-military fusion centre May 2012, p. 10ff.

with the Constitution. There are no demands on the Taliban to actively reform their position on women's position in the society and public life.[43]

Following the assassination of the High Peace Council president, Burhanuddin Rabbani, in 2011, in combination with critique of the HPC's lack of effectiveness – and its inability to include the concerns of the Afghan population – a traditional Loya Jirga was called, in 2011, by president Karzai. The objective was to reaffirm the commitment to peace and restore the faith in the HPC. The Loya Jirga reaffirmed the findings of the NCPJ and the APRP, recommending that more must be done to implement the peace and reintegration process in the provinces. The Loya Jirga recommended that the government took action to remove the gap between the population and the State, since it contributed to the recruitment of insurgents. It also called on the neighboring countries to seize activities undermining stability in Afghanistan. The government was advised to hold serious negotiations with Pakistan, with the aim to remove security challenges and ensure stability in the entire region.[44]

Although the HPC is the responsible body for the peace process, according to a UN political affairs officer interviewed for this study, the National Security Council is much more influential than the peace council. The crucial question is whether the HPC has the power to lead a peace process. The UN official assessed that, the HPC at best can facilitate a peace agreement; it cannot agree on the conditions. This can only be reached as an agreement between the government and the armed opposition. Only the government can guarantee the implementation of a peace agreement.

3.3 'Talks about talks'

Currently, there are no peace negotiations, with an agreed agenda and a proposed framework, between the parties to the armed conflict. But, there are three kinds of peace discussions, or, more correctly, 'talks about talks,' that are ongoing. First, there is the dialogue between the Taliban and US officials on a variety of issues, including the release of prisoners from Guantanamo and a US soldier in Taliban captivity. These talks have included the establishment of an office for the Taliban in Qatar, and have subsequently been named the 'Qatar Process'. In early 2012, the Taliban withdraw from this process, accusing the US for acting in bad faith and not upholding their pledges. Second, there are talks between representatives of the Afghan government and the Taliban. Third, there are meetings that have been initiated by Afghan political figures, not necessarily part of the government, and Taliban representatives.[45]

There is little information on what is being discussed in the 'talks about the talks'. The media are following developments, but no information has leaked on the conditions and subjects addressed. The Taliban have previously accused

[43] High Peace Council, Peace Process Roadmap to 2015, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/files/121213_Peace_Process_Roadmap_to_2015.pdf (retrieved 30 March 2013).
[44] High Peace Council, *Traditional Loya Jerga Declaration*, 2011, Kabul.
[45] Imtiaz, S., "The Outcomes of the 'Taliban/Paris Meeting on Afghanistan", *Al-Jazeera*, http://studies.aljazeera.net/en/reports/2013/01/2013124111354190395.htm (retrieved 16 April 2013).

the Kabul administration of being powerless and illegitimate, and prevented them from opening an office in Qatar.[46]

In December, 2012, a French think tank arranged a meeting outside Paris, in Chantilly, with representatives of the Taliban, the High Peace Council, Hezb-e-Islami, members of Afghanistan's parliament, civil society, the political opposition, i.e. the former Northern Alliance, and figures who are associated with the government.[47] Two women participated in the Afghan delegation; even if one of the women had not been formally invited, she was there in the place of her father.[48]

This was the first time that key members of the Taliban and key leaders of the political opposition met. The meeting contributed to the rejection by the Afghan government of the 'Qatar Process'. President Karzai was reluctant to acknowledge the Qatar process, because it had been established for the purpose of direct contacts between the US and the Taliban. In late April, 2013, an agreement with Qatar was in the making, and was to be finalized; it will become the main channel between the Afghan government and the Taliban.[49]

In Chantilly, the Taliban was recognized as a party to the conflict, which they also stressed in their official statement.[50] They rejected the possibility of any talks with the Afghan Government, as long as foreign troops remained in the country. In a five-point outline, they stated that the current "[. . .] *constitution is illegitimate because it is written under the shadows of B-52 aircrafts."* They demanded that a new constitution should be written by Afghans, in *"a free atmosphere,"* which was a reference to the full withdrawal of foreign troops. The constitution, they declared, should be based on *"principles of noble Islam, national interest and historical achievements"*. They rejected the holding of elections prior to the full withdrawal of ISAF's troops, in 2014. They stated that they *"[…] are not looking to monopolize power. We want an all-Afghan inclusive government"*.[51]

3.4 The Afghanistan peace and reintegration program (APRP)

The Afghan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP) was officially launched by President Karzai in mid-2010, following the endorsement of the program by the NCPJ. The goal of APRP, as expressed in the official declaration, is to:

> *"Promote peace through a political approach. It will encourage regional and international cooperation, will create the political and judicial conditions for peace and reconciliation, and will encourage combatant foot soldiers and commanders,*

[46] Ruttig, T., "Qatar, Islamabad, Chantilly, Ashgabad: Taleban Season Again?", *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, http://aan-afghanistan.com/index.asp?id=3169 (retrieved 1April 2013).
[47] Ibid.
[48] Personal communication, Kabul. 2013.
[49] Personal communication with HPC member, Kabul, 2013.
[50] Ruttig, T., "Qatar, Islamabad, Chantilly, Ashgabad: Taleban Season Again?", *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, http://aan-afghanistan.com/index.asp?id=3169 (retrieved 1April 2013).
[51] Text of speech enunciated by Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan at research conference in France, http://shahamat-english.com/index.php/paighamoona/28777-text-of-speech-enunciated-by-islamic-emirate-of-afghanistan-at-research-conference-in-france, (retrieved 1 March 2013).

> *who previously sided with armed opposition and extremist groups to renounce violence and terrorism, to live within the laws of Afghanistan, and to join a constructive process of reintegration and peace"*.[52]

The program is built on the premise that reintegration and reconciliation can be pursued simultaneously and that providing economic incentives for mid- to low level soldiers while engaging the insurgency leadership in dialogue will pave the way for long-term stability.[53] The idea of the program is to create incentives for the Taliban to come to the peace table; it is based on the assumption that as the number of fighters decrease, Taliban leaders will become more inclined to negotiate as they gradually lose control over the population.[54] In this regard, APRP is a reversed process since reintegration takes place before a peace agreement is in place.

The APRP is divided in two broad categories that are applied simultaneously to promote reconciliation and reintegration.[55] The first category concerns efforts at the political-strategic level and focuses on the leadership of the insurgency. This includes, for example, addressing the problem of sanctuaries; de-listing individuals on the UN 1267 sanction list; ensuring the severance of links with Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups; and securing political accommodation and potential exile to a third country. The second category concerns efforts at the operational level to reintegrate foot soldiers, small groups, local leaders and mid-level leaders, who form the bulk of the insurgency.[56]

The APRP is not just an Afghan-led peace effort, it is also an integral part of the Counter Insurgency (COIN) strategy to weaken the insurgency and is accompanied by military operations conducted by the USA, ISAF and the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF).[57] It is part of the ISAF line of operation to 'neutralize insurgent networks', whereby insurgents are neutralized to a level within the ANSF's capability to deal with them, while extremist sanctuaries are denied.[58] As such, the APRP is closely linked to the transition process, whereby ISAF assigns responsibility for security to the ANSF.

The de facto connection between the APRP and the COIN strategy is noticeable since the risk analysis in the APRP Program Document explicitly mentions the need to keep a clear, non-aligned, distinction between the APRP and the COIN campaign.[59]

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[52] Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, *Afghanistan peace and reintegration program (APRP) – Programme document*, July 2010, p. 3.
[53] Ibid. pp. 1-4
[54] ISAF Force Reintegration Cell, *Afghanistan peace and reintegration program (APRP)*, 22 June 2011.
[55] Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, *Afghanistan peace and reintegration program (APRP) – Programme document*, July 2010, p. 1.
[56] Ibid.
[57] ISAF Force Reintegration Cell, *Afghanistan peace and reintegration program (APRP)*, 22 June 2011, p. 5.
[58] Ibid. p. 16.
[59] Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, *Afghanistan peace and reintegration program (APRP) – Programme document*, July 2010, Annex XI.

3.4.1 The APRP Gender Policy

The Gender Policy for the APRP was issued by the Joint Secretariat[60] in September, 2011, and is set to guide the implementation of the program. It was developed to ensure a comprehensive outreach to men and women at the national and sub-national levels, and to address a number of gender gaps that obstruct women from participating in the peace and reintegration process.[61] These gaps include, for example, limited understanding of the APRP among Afghans, especially among women; the need for demand-driven and location-specific programs to address women's interests and needs; and limited opportunities for developing the capacity of men and women to build skills and knowledge for participating in different initiatives of the APRP.[62]

The Gender policy has two priority areas on two different levels. At the strategic and political level, the policy is to: *"ensure women's participation in the decisions taken regarding the planning of measures for outreach and advancement of peace initiatives."*[63] At the operational level, it is to*: "focus on mainstreaming gender in the local peace processes with foot soldiers, small groups and local leaders at the provincial and district levels..[.]"*.[64]

3.4.2 The three stages of the APRP

The framework of the reintegration process consists of three stages: 1) social outreach, confidence-building and negotiation, 2) demobilization, and 3) consolidation of peace/community recovery. Stage 1 involves social outreach activities for individuals and communities that demonstrate intent to reintegrate, and strategic communication in order to target insurgents and communities with encouragement to reintegrate.[65] A key activity in this regard is confidence-building, at the national, provincial, district and community levels, to promote an understanding of the APRP and the reintegration process.[66] Negotiation and grievance resolution activities are other key measures, and involve mobilizing civil society groups, religious and community leaders and members of the Ulema Council[67] so as to manage existing grievances.[68] Provincial and other sub-national stakeholders work with civil society groups, insurgent elements and others to identify the grievances that impelled the insurgents to fight. Once the grievances have been identified, a process of responding to them is initiated and continues throughout the reintegration process.[69]

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[60] For a description of the Joint Secretariat see section 3.4.3.
[61] APRP Joint Secretariat, *Gender policy for Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP)*, September 2011, pp. 7-8; 10.
[62] Ibid. pp. 10-11.
[63] Ibid. p. 16.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, *Afghanistan peace and reintegration program (APRP) – Programme document*, July 2010, pp. 5-6.
[66] Zyck, S., "Peace and reintegration: an introduction", in *Peace and reintegration in Afghanistan*, Civil-military fusion centre, May 2012, p. 12.
[67] The Ulema Council is the largest religious body of Islamic clergy and scholars, appointed by the president of Afghanistan.
[68] Sajjad, T. *Peace at all costs? Reintegration and reconciliation in Afghanistan*, Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, October 2010, p. 11.
[69] Zyck, S., "Peace and reintegration: an introduction", in *Peace and reintegration in Afghanistan*, Civil-military fusion centre, May 2012, p. 12.

In stage 2, fighters are demobilized, through a process that starts with biometrics collection and vetting. This involves confirming the identity of the fighter, their role in the insurgency and in past actions that they are accused of committing. The demobilization process also includes assessing the needs of the re-integree and of the community into which the fighter will reintegrate, and ensuring that the re-integree will not be targeted by the ANSF or international forces.[70] Demobilized fighters receive a Transition Assistance package of USD 160, for six months, to ease the negative economic impacts that leaving the insurgency might incur. It serves as an alternative livelihood, until the re-integree acquires a job.[71]

The final stage of the process, stage 3, includes consolidation of peace and conflict recovery whereby communities that receive reintegrated fighters are subject to training and development programs. This includes small grants projects worth up to USD 200 000, projects initiated by implementing partners to UNDP, and projects linked to the national programs of different Afghan line ministries, for example, the Ministry of Education's vocational and literacy training. The projects and programs are intended to benefit the entire community and not just the re-integree.[72]

In stage 3, the reintegrated fighters are to receive disengagement training.[73] As of January, 2013, this training had not been implemented, but the curriculum was finalized. The training is to include a focus on grievance resolution, human rights, civil rights and a religious perspective on peace.[74]

According to the ISAF Force Reintegration Cell (F-RIC), around 6000 insurgents have laid down their weapons and joined the APRP thus far.[75]

3.4.3 Organizational structure

The HPC oversees the APRP and is supported by a Joint Secretariat (JS) that executes the program under the auspices of the HPC. The Joint Secretariat includes a number of departments and units and among these is a Gender Unit, comprised of two Gender Advisors.[76]

The main part of the implementation of the APRP takes place at the sub-national level, in provinces and districts, and is executed by provincial governors and Provincial Peace Councils (PPCs) – see figure 2. The members of the PPCs are appointed by the provincial governor; each council is made up of 25 to 30 members, e.g. elders, religious leaders, provincial council members, and Ulema council representatives. The PPC guidelines stipulate a minimum of

[70] Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, *Afghanistan peace and reintegration program (APRP) – Programme document*, July 2010, p. 6; Zyck, S., "Peace and reintegration: an introduction", in *Peace and reintegration in Afghanistan*, Civil-military fusion centre, May 2012, p. 13.
[71] The amount and duration of the TA was recently changed by the HPC and the donors from USD120 and three months to USD160 and six months.
[72] Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, *Afghanistan peace and reintegration program (APRP) – Programme document*, July 2010, p. 6.
[73] Previously this training was called de-radicalization training.
[74] High Peace Council, *Afghanistan peace and reintegration program – annual report 1390*, 2012, p. 13.
[75] Interview with Andrew Mann, Deputy Director ISAF F-RIC.
[76] Interview with Mezghan Temory, Governance and Civil Society Outreach Advisor, ISAF F-RIC.

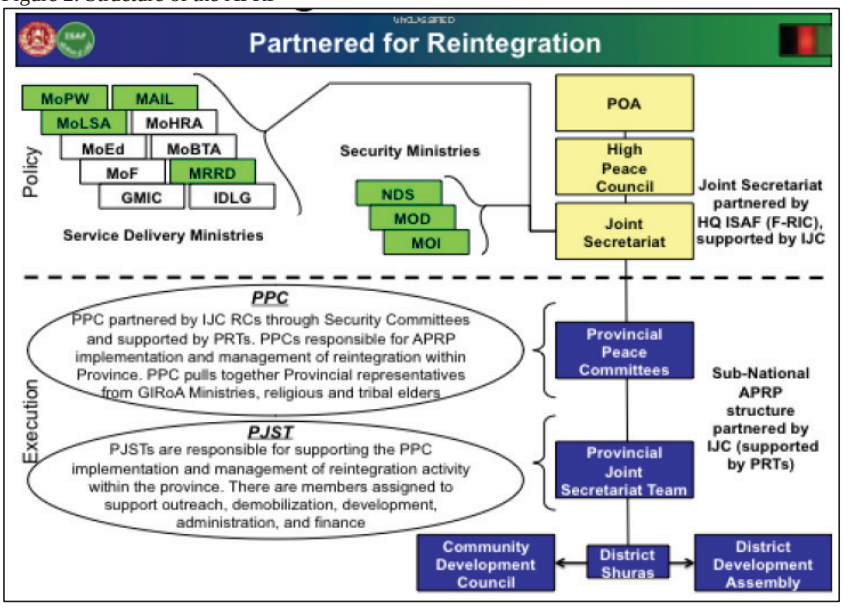
three female members.[77] They are the main oversight bodies that serve to ensure that the APRP benefits men and women equally; they function as mechanisms for local outreach and conflict prevention.[78] The PPCs are supported by Provincial Joint Secretariat Teams (PJSTs), which work to implement the program at the provincial level, together with district and community-level bodies.[79]

The numerous line ministries that serve to support the reintegration efforts at the national and sub-national level by leveraging their activities, for example, the Ministries of the Interior, Defense, Rehabilitation and Rural Development, and Public Works, are important in the APRP.[80]

ISAF has a supporting role in the APRP as, for example, an interlocutor with the Afghan security agencies, in ensuring the security of re-integrees.[81] UNDP provides programmatic and operational assistance to the APRP Joint Secretariat and other APRP partners at the national and sub-national level.[82] In addition, numerous non-governmental organizations and civil society groups are involved in the program.

[77] Interview with Farhadullah Farhad, APRP Deputy Chief Director; Zyck, S., "Peace and reintegration: an introduction", in *Peace and reintegration in Afghanistan*, Civil-military fusion centre, May 2012, p. 11.
[78] Research Institute for Women Peace & Security – Afghanistan, *Beyond numbers: ensuring meaningful inclusion of women on the provincial peace councils in local and national reconciliation efforts*, December 2012, Forum report, p. 11.
[79] ISAF Force Reintegration Cell, *A guide to the Afghanistan peace and reintegration program (APRP)*, March 2012, p. 7.
[80] Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, *Afghanistan peace and reintegration program (APRP) – Programme document*, July 2010, pp. 7-14.
[81] Ibid. p. 10
[82] Ibid. p. 2-5.

Figure 2. Structure of the APRP[83]



[83] ISAF Force Reintegration Cell, *A guide to the Afghanistan peace and reintegration program (APRP)*, March 2012, p. 7.

4 Afghan perceptions and opinions about peace and reintegration

Perceptions and narratives about peace and conflict are closely tied to people's expectations on peace and reintegration processes, and what they consider essential to solve in order to achieve sustainable peace. This chapter explores perceptions and narratives regarding the meaning of peace in Afghanistan and looks into perceived drivers of conflict and obstacles to peace. It also explores perceptions about the Taliban and their position on women.

This chapter is mainly based on data generated from interviews conducted during the field trip to Kabul in January 2013.

4.1 The foundation of peace and conflict in Afghanistan

4.1.1 The concept of peace – what does it refer to?

Peace is a concept with many definitions and interpretations across cultures, religions, nations and political groups. In peace and conflict research an important distinction has been made between 'negative' versus 'positive' peace. Negative peace usually denotes the absence of armed violence. Positive peace, on the other hand, often denotes the absence of armed conflict in combination with justice, equality and development, or what is defined as human security.[84]

This study found that there are primarily two major definitions of peace expressed by the respondents. It was also clear that the individual members of the HPC define peace differently. The concepts of justice and equal rights were also closely interlinked with peace.

Firstly, a former high level civil servant in the previous Taliban government held it as true that peace is defined differently depending on the context. In Afghanistan peace should be defined as the provision of justice to both the armed factions that are participating in the conflict and to the Afghan population in general. If the armed conflict comes to an end without justice having been served, there will be no sustainable peace. An important element is to accommodate the armed opposition's needs in a peace agreement. The respondent believed that satisfying those needs in a peace deal is vital to sustainable peace.

Secondly, the female parliamentarians and the civil society representatives pointed out that peace is not only the absence of war, but also the presence of justice, equal rights and addressing and meeting the people's concerns. This definition denotes the conditions for 'positive peace'.

The respondents' definition of justice, with the exception of the ex-Taliban, was defined as equal rights between people and equal access to resources and

[84] Höglund, K, et al, "Beyond the absence of war: the diversity of peace in post-settlement societies", *Review of International Studies*, 2010, 36, p.370.

services. According to the female parliamentarians, it also entails women's right to choose a marriage partner.

One male respondent defined justice as the protection of the Constitution of Afghanistan.

The respondents' perception of President Karzai's peace definition was that of power-sharing with the armed opposition and the Taliban.

The different understandings of peace indicate that there are several expectations to be accommodated in future peace negotiations. There is a discrepancy between the notion of positive peace, expressed by the civil society and female parliamentarians, and the Afghan government's ambition to reach a power-sharing deal with the armed opposition.

4.1.2 The narrative of the Afghan conflict – a conflict about what?

Many analyses of the conflict in Afghanistan have been performed, and it is not obvious that the same actors, drivers and dynamic have been identified, or ascribed importance; sometimes they are contradictory.

The respondents in this study were asked about their perceptions on the conflict, with a focus on the drivers and actors of the conflicts. The purpose was to identify the elements they perceived to be important to address in a peace agreement.

The interviewees described the Afghan conflict as both multi-faceted and multi-layered. It is multi-faceted because it has roots in previous decades of conflict, is shaped by ethnic, tribal, regional and economic factors, and includes a myriad of local and national power struggles. It is multi-layered because it occurs on different levels that intersect each other.

On the macro level, the main driver of conflict is perceived to be the influence of Pakistan and Iran. Obviously, this is a well-known source of conflict and is a narrative unanimously shared by the interviewees, regardless of gender, ethnicity, or position. The narrative outlines how Pakistan and Iran fuel internal conflict and political instability by using Afghanistan as a playing field and by providing support to different groups. Pakistan is perceived to be a key actor for advancing the peace process, due to its close relationship to the Taliban. Iran is involved in water conflicts along the Afghan-Iranian border. At the same time, Iran's interests are perceived to include support for the Shia minority population and keeping the USA engaged in Afghanistan by fuelling internal conflict and instability.

On the micro level the main drivers of conflict are perceived to be: land and water disputes, clan/tribal fights, honor conflicts, lack of good governance, irresponsible arming of men, and show of force by armed men and local militias committing abuses. These drivers of conflict have also been identified in a conflict assessment commissioned by the HPC.[85]

[85] High Peace Council, *HPC Conflict Assessment*, forthcoming.

In addition, there is a contradictory perception as to the role of ISAF and its effects on the conflict. ISAF is seen as both a key enabler for the advancement of women's rights and as a driver of conflict.

With regards to local militias and the irresponsible arming of men, female respondents from parliament and the rest of Afghan civil society identified the Afghan Local Police (ALP) as a key driver of conflict. ALP forces are currently being used on a grand scale in Afghanistan to facilitate the transition process and extend the Afghan government's reach to remote and inaccessible areas.[86] The respondents unanimously stated that they have no faith in ALP and that women have suffered severely from violations, in particular sexual violence and harassment, committed by ALP members. In support of this perception, reports from UNAMA and Human Rights Watch bear witness to repeated violations committed by ALP forces[87], including, but not limited to, sexual abuse, abductions, unauthorized raids, illegal taxation, land-grabbing and extra-judicial killings.[88]

In contrast, ALP is often hailed by ISAF and the US military as a success factor in dismantling the insurgency, protecting the local population and expanding the influence of the Afghan government to remote districts and villages. For example, according to an ISAF news article:

> *"The ALP are well trained and very dedicated to defending their own villages. They are protecting their families and way of life," said Maj. Marius Williams, TF Balkh operations officer.*
>
> *[…]Who knows how many lives were saved, how many women and children spared serious injury because the ALP recovered these IEDs, before the insurgents could emplace them, said a coalition SOF adviser".*[89]

Recurrent reporting from United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) supports this positive effect of ALP with regard to improving security by denying insurgents access to communities in several areas.[90]

However, the international military's view on ALP mirrors a rather narrow interpretation of security and stability, as a reduction in the capability of the insurgency and in the number of security-related incidents. It stands in stark contrast to HPC's conflict assessment and overlooks the fact that the main

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[86] Hulslander, R. & Spivey, J. "Village stability operations and Afghan local police", *Prism 3*, No. 3, June 2012, p. 126, http://www.ndu.edu/press/lib/pdf/prism3-3/prism125-138_hulslander-spivey.pdf (retrieved 22 February 2013); UNAMA, *Afghanistan: Annual report 2011 – Protection of civilians in armed conflict*, 2011, p. 6.

[87] It is possible that abuses reported to be committed by ALP members have been committed by other groups that use the ALP brand either to discredit it or to escape with impunity.

[88] Human Rights Watch, *Just don't call it a militia – impunity , militias and the Afghan Local Police*, September 2011, pp. 57-58; UNAMA, *Afghanistan: Annual report 2011 – Protection of civilians in armed conflict*, February 2012, pp. 35-36; UNAMA, *Afghanistan: Annual report 2012 – Protection of civilians in armed conflict*, February 2013, p. 9.

[89] ISAF, http://www.isaf.nato.int/article/news/across-northern-afghanistan-alp-provide-increased-security-to-populace.html, (retrieved 18 April 2013). See also US Department of Defence, *Report on progress towards security and stability in Afghanistan*, December 2012, p. 77, http://www.defense.gov/news/1230_Report_final.pdf (retrieved 22 February 2013).

[90] UNAMA, *Afghanistan: Annual report 2010 – Protection of civilians in armed conflict*, March 2011, pp.44-45; UNAMA, *Afghanistan: Annual report 2011 – Protection of civilians in armed conflict*, February 2012, p. 6; UNAMA, *Afghanistan: Annual report 2012 – Protection of civilians in armed conflict*, February 2013, pp. 42-43.

driver of conflict is not perceived to be the armed conflict between the government and the insurgency. This means that essential drivers of conflict are not being addressed. In a worst-case scenario it means that conflicts and grievances are even being fuelled, which may undermine current and future peace efforts.

4.2 Perceptions about the Taliban

Perceptions about the Taliban lie at the very core of the peace and reintegration process. It concerns the actors with whom peace is negotiated, their position regarding women and what will happen if they return to power.

4.2.1 Who are the Taliban?

The general perception among respondents is that the Taliban is a fragmented organization, led by Mullah Omar, with disparate branches and groups that are scattered in different places, for example in Pakistan – in Quetta, Peshawar and Karachi, inside Afghanistan and in the Gulf countries. The respondents commonly perceived the Taliban to be a tool of foreign intelligence and supported by Pakistan, in particular the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI).

Several respondents maintained that the Taliban are not a purely Pashtun movement, but includes other ethnic groups as well. The Taliban foot soldiers mostly consist of disenfranchised, illiterate and poor men. The respondents further stated that, many armed groups in Afghanistan falsely operate under the banner of the Taliban, for example, drug dealers and criminal networks.

According to a former Taliban representative, now a member of the HPC, the real Taliban are an Islamic movement that brought peace, security and stability to Afghanistan and eradicated poppy cultivation. Currently, they are the only armed opposition in Afghanistan. Even though Hezb-e Islami has an armed wing that fights the Afghan government, it is still not an opposition group, according to respondent. Hezb-e Islami is represented in the government and holds powerful positions as ministers. Therefore, according to the ex-Taliban, the government should only negotiate with the Taliban.

Several respondents stressed that one of the key challenges in the peace process so far has been to identify who the Taliban are and to identify intermediaries who represent the top Taliban leadership. The Taliban's lack of an address has further obstructed the work of the HPC and kept the Afghan government from approaching the top Taliban leadership. According to the respondents, the establishment of a Taliban office in Qatar would bring clarity to this problem.

4.2.2 The Taliban and women's rights

The general perception among the respondents is that the situation in Afghanistan has changed and that conditions are not the same as in 1996, when the Taliban came into power, or in 2001, when they were ousted. In accordance with this, the Taliban has changed its rhetoric when it comes to women's rights. Several female parliamentarians and civil society representatives stated

that the Taliban has removed their anti-women rhetoric and nowadays exhibit a more moderate position towards women.

The perception about the real intentions and reasons behind the Taliban's changed rhetoric differed among the female respondents. Some respondents stated that the Taliban's reformed view on women was honest and real, whereas others stated that it was merely a cosmetic change, part of a political game to gain access to power. According to the latter position, the Taliban's changed rhetoric is the result of a strategic calculation to increase their possibilities to gain seats in a future coalition government and to pay lip service to the international community. Consequently, there is a fear that women's rights could be compromised and used as a bargaining tool and as a political instrument in the peace dialogue.

Both government and civil society representatives maintain, however, that a complete breakdown of women's rights is not likely if the Taliban returns to power, since Afghanistan has gone through significant changes since 2001. One female parliamentarian and a member of the HPC maintained that, if the Taliban lay down their weapons, accept the Constitution, enter into peace negotiations and become a political actor, then it is up to the Afghan population to decide on whether they should be in the government or not. It would be no problem if they were elected in fair and free elections.

Furthermore, several female respondents claimed that, they do not fear the return of the Taliban; rather they are afraid of armed men, in particular local security forces.

The perceptions of the interviewees reflect a disparate view of the Taliban, about whether they can be trusted, or not, and what will happen if they come back into power. The responses clarify two things; first, that the Taliban is not perceived to be the main threat to women, and second, that a complete breakdown of women's rights post-2014 is perceived as unlikely.

4.2.3 Women in the Taliban movement

An important, but seldom addressed issue, was highlighted by one of the female representatives at the Chantilly meeting; this was the participation of Taliban women in the peace process. The respondent had approached the Taliban delegation at Chantilly and asked about the participation of their women. She specifically referred to their statement on accepting women's rights. Her question was never answered.

In the spirit of UNSCR 1325, Taliban women, just as all other Afghan women, should have the right to voice their concerns and priorities in future peace negotiations.

4.3 Obstacles to peace

4.3.1 Lack of transparency

Many of the female parliamentarians and civil society representatives emphasized that the current 'talks about talks' process is highly detached from

the public and mainly concerns the warring elites. Their impression is that they themselves do not know what is going on in the process. Deals are perceived to be made behind the scenes and issues are discussed in a non-transparent manner; who talks to whom and about what is highly unclear. Consequently, they have a hard time knowing if human rights and women's rights issues are being compromised in the process.

The respondents attributed this to the non-transparent process, where the government does not publicly disclose the progress of their talks, or the concessions and demands that they consider negotiable. The same was held to be true for the US-led process. The parliamentarian and the HPC had limited information about the contacts that the USA has made with the Taliban. The Qatar process is still cloaked in uncertainty about the compromises that the USA is willing to make in order to reach agreement with the armed opposition in Afghanistan.

The parliamentarians and the civil society representatives also criticized the High Peace Council for performing limited public outreach. An example that was provided, of how detached the process is from the population, was the adoption of the 'Peace Process Roadmap to 2015', which was made in secrecy in Pakistan, in November, 2012. In January, 2013, the road map only existed in an English version; there was no Dari or Pashto translation. The perception that women and the Afghan population at large are not aware of the government's terms for the peace process indicates a high degree of alienation and lack of public support.

The respondents were concerned that a future peace agreement will result in a power-sharing deal between the Taliban and the power elite, i.e., the government and former armed factions, including warlords. They were further worried that the current discussions on reconciliation are not inclusive of the diverse Afghan interests and that both the government and international representatives are ignoring their concerns.

4.3.2 A non-inclusive process

The respondents shared the analysis that the conflict in Afghanistan is complex and has roots in previous decades of war and includes a myriad of local and national power struggles. Given this, they argued that in order to handle the complexity and achieve sustainable peace, the peace process needs to be inclusive.

The interviews revealed that the respondents had different understandings of the concept of 'inclusion', in the Afghan peace context. There are two main definitions.

Firstly, inclusion means that all warring parties and the various ethnic groups should be part of the peace negotiation.

Secondly, the civil society representatives and some female parliamentarians had a broader understanding of inclusion. For them, it meant the inclusion of the Afghan population, all political parties, all warring parties, ethnic groups and the civil society, i.e. the non-warring parties. This understanding was deemed crucial, if the interests of the Afghan society, e.g. women's rights and

human rights, are to be protected. Their belief is that a power-sharing agreement that excludes the concerns of the Afghan people will not have no legitimacy or lead to sustainable peace. The same is held to be true in the event that a peace deal only includes an agreement between the parties to the armed conflict.

According to the Pashtun civil society association, there is a strong need for a national peace dialogue that is complementary to peace talks and anchored with the population. Such a dialogue should entail a community-based consultation process that provides space for Afghans to define peace in different areas of the country and outline the limits of what they are willing to compromise on in a national-level negotiation. This would give the Afghans, including women around the country, a possibility to contribute towards the preconditions of the peace negotiations between the armed parties. It would also create national consensus on how to approach the peace process and manage grievances.

4.3.3 Lack of trust – reconciliation with the government

According to a high-level UN official, one of the main obstacles to peace is the lack of trust between the parties. Many people do not trust that the Taliban/armed opposition will honor a deal. Just getting the parties to the table and gaining their consent to negotiate is a difficult undertaking.

The interviews revealed distrust on several levels and between many segments in the Afghan society. Women distrust the Taliban's statements in favor of women's rights; the Taliban distrust the incumbent government of Afghanistan; the population in general distrusts the government's commitment in addressing their needs; the political opposition distrusts the government's intentions concerning a future power-sharing deal; and the civil society advocates distrust the government's commitment to sustainable peace and justice.

A commonly held opinion among the respondents is that the HPC is made up of people who know how to fight a war, but they do not know how to negotiate sustainable peace. This is a fair analysis, given that warlords and faction leaders who were previously involved in the armed conflict are disproportionally represented in the HPC.[91] Several respondents doubted that they are honest and committed to working towards sustainable peace. This assumption was based on the position of the former warlords and Mujahedeen leaders in the society. They hold powerful positions at national, provincial and district levels, control the national security forces and receive money from the international community. These people benefit from the current situation and could have much to lose from a negotiated peace agreement. It is noteworthy that even the ex-Taliban on the HPC concurred with this assumption.

The interviewes revealed that women and the rest of civil society in particular had limited trust in the current government and the peace process. According to the responses, the government is perceived as a corrupt entity, isolated from the

[91] Ruttig, T., "Qatar, Islamabad, Chantilly, Ashgabad: Taleban Season Again?", *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, http://aan-afghanistan.com/index.asp?id=3169, (retrieved 1 April 2013).

general population, which preys on the state's resources and is indifferent to the population's needs. The civil society groups and female parliamentarians stressed that the government does not listen to the proposals of the people. Instead, the members of the government exploit their positions for their own benefit. These perceptions expose the gap and mistrust that exist between the government, the parliamentarians and the population. In the context of the peace process, this top-down approach constitutes an impediment; a peace agreement detached from the people may be difficult to sustain. It is obvious that there is a need to build a bridge between the population and the government, and include the bottom-up approach proposed by the civil society.

The trust in the international community was contradictory. On the one hand, women and the civil society organizations acknowledge that the international community, its presence and support, is imperative to the protection of women's rights and freedom. On the other hand, they acknowledge that although the rhetoric is high in support of women's participation, it is not being implemented in reality, which is particularly true in relation to the peace process. Women are effectively excluded from the peace table. The international actors involved in the peace dialogue have not actively invited women. This is also true for states that have adopted UNSCR 1325, and that have repeatedly highlighted its importance in policy documents and high-level statements.

4.3.4 The need for protection

Female politicians highlighted the lack of security for women who hold public office. Participating in political processes or being a civil servant in Afghanistan signifies a major security risk for individuals, women and men alike. Anyone appearing in public can be subject to threats and violence. Women, however, are more exposed to security risk since they have limited access to close protection. The government should provide such protection, e.g. security guards and secure vehicles, to those who hold public office. Women politicians disclosed that the government's approach to women's and men's security needs differs. This was also noted by the researchers during the field study. Male members of the HPC had significantly more armed guards than the female members who had no armed guards at all.

Women who hold public office have the same right to close protection from the government. However, according to one female respondent, their appeals for enhanced security are often denied, with the comment, *"Your family should protect you."* This attitude is detrimental to women's participation in political processes and public life. If their protection needs are not taken seriously, they may refrain from engaging in public life and politics. They may not be willing to risk their own and their family's safety and security.

4.3.5 Religion – a challenge

Religion cannot be ignored in political discussion about Afghanistan. It has a central role both in society and individual citizens' lives. All the interviewees – both men and women – commented on the role of religion in Afghan society. The majority stated that they strive for an equal and just society within the

framework of Islam. This was also true for female members of the Afghan Women's Network and the HPC.

The ex-Taliban, member of the HPC and the National Ulema Council, believed that women, according to the Quran, have a very strong position in the society.[92] He attributed harmful traditional practices to culture, misinterpreted as faith. He referred to the example of Prophet Muhammad, whose wives were accomplished in business and public life. His position on the importance of assisting women at home is noteworthy. He clearly stated, *"A faithful Muslim has to follow the example of the Prophet and help his wife to clean the house."* Further, he believed that there is no need to include a clerical council in the government. He claimed that the Supreme Court has sufficient authority to handle legal matters in accordance with Islam. It is notable that the respondent did not disregard women's rights as a Western concept, without importance to the Afghan context, which is a position held by some clerics.

Opinions on women's rights and role in the Afghan society differ significantly among religious leaders and clerics, according to a female HPC member. She believed that it is important to reach out to those in favor of women's rights and participation. She held that it is true that equality between men and women are supported by Islamic teaching. She proposed that women engage in theological studies to enhance women's agenda within religion. Afghanistan has a limited number of women religious leaders or scholars, who can assist in the reading of the Quran from a women's perspective. However, in other Muslim countries, e.g., Indonesia and Morocco, there are female clergy.

The Taliban's current position on women and their role in the society is unclear. The speech in Chantilly revealed that they do not understand the rights of women in accordance with international human rights law or the Afghan constitution, but in accordance with their interpretation of Islam. As expressed in the following quote:

> *"The policy of Islamic Emirate…[w]ill abide by all those rights given to women in the noble religion of Islam. Women in Islam have the right to choose husbands, own property, right to inheritance and right to education and work. The Islamic Emirate will safeguard the rights of women such that their legitimate rights are not violated and neither is their human dignity and Islamic requirements endangered under the guise of education and work".*[93]

With the exception of the female HPC member, the responses given by the interviewees do not clarify their interpretation of women's rights within the framework of Islam. Given that the understanding of religion and theology is based on exegesis and interpretation, it is possible to assume that the Taliban, the female civil society representatives and the female parliamentarians do not share the same interpretation, not even among themselves.

[92] The National Ulema Council is a clerical council appointed by the President of Afghanistan.
[93] Text of speech enunciated by Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan at research conference in France, http://shahamat-english.com/index.php/paighamoona/28777-text-of-speech-enunciated-by-islamic-emirate-of-afghanistan-at-research-conference-in-france, (retrieved 1 March 2013).

5 Women in the peace and reintegration process

The participation and influence of Afghan women in the peace dialogue and the APRP are directly tied to the provisions laid down in UNSCR 1325 and lie at the core of this study. This chapter explores women's participation and influence in the HPC and the Provincial Peace Committees. It also explores the APRP Gender Policy and the role that women can play in conflict and grievance resolution with regards to negotiations, mediation and vetting. Lastly, it looks into women in the armed opposition in connection to the reintegration process.

Just like Chapter 4, this chapter is mainly based on data generated from interviews conducted during the field trip to Kabul.

5.1 Women's participation and influence in the peace dialogue

During the last decade women's participation in political processes and political institutions in Afghanistan has improved due to pressure from the international community, advocacy work by women's rights activists and legislated quotas. Approximately 20% of the participants at the National Consultative Peace Jirga in 2010 were women[94]; nine women out of 70 members are currently members of the High Peace Council[95]; and two women were in the High Peace Council-delegation that went to Pakistan to draft the Peace Process Roadmap to 2015.[96]

According to one of the HPC members, the mere inclusion of women in the HPC was an important step forward. It enables women to be represented in the dialogue between the warring parties. At the same time, the female parliamentarians and civil society representatives maintained that this figure is too low.

The majority of the female respondents – including the HPC members – perceived women's participation in the HPC as merely symbolic. They listed several reasons for this. The main factor was the low number of female HPC members. Another commonly held perception is that women are not given importance and are not invited to the table where the real conditions for the peace agreement are being negotiated. This was also confirmed by the female HPC members. One female respondent stressed that the HPC and the government – through the exclusion of women – are sending a message to the Taliban that women's concerns are not vital in the peace process.

[94] United Nations, "Top UN envoy calls for sustaining momentum of recent Afghan peace forum", *.UN News Centre*, 12 June 2010, http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=35008&Cr=Afghan&Cr1#.UW6MN75vlFo (retrieved 17 April 2013).

[95] Lackenbauer, H., "Will women's rights be sacrificed for peace in Afghanistan?", in Skeppström, E., Olsson, S., & Wiss, Å. (eds.), *Strategic outlook 2012*, FOI-R--3449--SE, Stockholm, Swedish Defence Research Agency, 2012, p. 64.

[96] Interview with Najia Zewari, Member and Deputy Secretary of the High Peace Council.

However, one of the female HPC members opposed this perception. She claimed that she had a position that enabled her to participate in major decisions, and that the male HPC members listened to her proposals. Male members had initially opposed women in the HPC, but they have, over time, changed their attitude and now listen to female co-members. The statement is somewhat contradictory, since she also stated that the perception of women as being the property of men lingers among many male HPC members, even among the more liberal ones. She also spoke about the male HPC members that questioned the role of women in the peace process. According to her, an often heard argument is: *"Women did not participate in the war, so why should they be party to the peace?"*.

The HPC has established a women's committee to ensure the inclusion of women in the peace process. An important part of the work of the committee has been to travel to provinces around Afghanistan as a show of presence and to hold discussions with women on the peace process.[97] The committee has established a large network that links women activists in the government, Afghan parliament, civil society and youth, in the center and in the provinces, to strengthen women's participation in the peace process. The committee's efforts also include holding discussions with political parties and internal and external political leaders.[98] According to the female HPC representative, the establishment of the committee has enabled the female HPC members to unite their efforts and work more closely together.

The women interviewed for this study emphasized a wide span of factors that commonly obstruct women from participating in the peace process at the national and sub-national level, the main ones being: insecurity; a non-permissive culture; lack of political will to include women; lack of education and capabilities; lack of self-confidence; and few female role models. Many of these factors are consistent with obstacles to women's participation that have previously been reported and emphasized in the Afghan government's National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan 2008-2018 (NAPWA).[99]

According to one of the UN representatives with extensive experience of Afghanistan, in order to be influential in the Afghan society, it is crucial to have a base of support, which does not necessarily come from being in the government or in the parliament. The individual needs connections nested within the patron-client system. In this regard, Afghan men are more powerful than women, because women have traditionally been, and still are, tied to the private sphere – the family – and are not able to acquire connections in public life to the same extent. This has further impact on their ability to participate in the peace process.

It was also pointed out, by a female respondent, that President Karzai is an unreliable supporter of women's rights and participation. In his inauguration

[97] Gutcher, L., "How women are leading Taliban sons and fathers to peace", *The Global Mail*, 15 August 2012, http://www.theglobalmail.org/feature/how-women-are-leading-taliban-sons-and-fathers-to-peace/340/ (retrieved 14 February 2013).
[98] United Nations, *List of issues and questions with regard to the consideration of periodic reports: Afghanistan*, January 2013, Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against women, pp. 2-3.
[99] Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, *National action plan for the women of Afghanistan (NAPWA) 2008-2018*, 2008, pp. 54-55.

speech, he promised to appoint more female ministers, a vow which he never delivered on. It was stressed by many women that the international community's support, in combination with an unchanged Constitution, was the best guarantee for protection of women's rights. Many of them were concerned that the international organizations would withdraw their support and presence after 2014.

5.2 Women in the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Program

5.2.1 APRP Gender policy

The gender policy for the APRP, issued in 2011, is set to ensure a gender-sensitive and inclusive program. Interestingly enough, none of the interviewees, except for the former Gender Advisor to the HPC, mentioned the policy, despite being specifically asked about gender aspects of APRP.

According to the former HPC Gender Advisor, the policy has been an important tool for creating a structure for the line ministries on how to include gender aspects in their work within the APRP. Before the policy was launched, there were a lot of discussions and negotiations about it. At the mid- and lower level there was substantial resistance against it and convincing people about the need for a gender policy was difficult.

This resistance indicates the barriers that exist when it comes to addressing gender issues within the Afghan peace and reintegration process. The Gender Policy's seemingly peripheral role in the implementation of the APRP also indicates the limited importance it has for informing outreach activities and demobilization/consolidation efforts within the program.

5.2.2 Women in the Provincial Peace Committees (PPCs)

According to HPC's 2012 annual report, 31 PPCs have been established, which means that only three provinces lack a Provincial Peace Committee.[100] In total there are 70 female PPC members.[101] In most provinces, the composition of the PPC is determined by the provincial governor. According to a recently launched review of the APRP, no PPC has exceeded the target of three women representatives, or ensured that three women candidates are proposed for inclusion. The Director of Women's Affairs is a mandated member. Only one woman holds a program responsibility, in one PJST out of 31 provinces.[102]

[100] High Peace Council, *Afghanistan peace and reintegration program – annual report 1390*, 2012, p. 7.
[101] Interview with Mezghan Temory, Governance and Civil Society Outreach Advisor, ISAF F-RIC.
[102] APRP Midterm Evaluation Report, 19 February, 2013.

The interviews indicate that the mere inclusion of women in the PPCs is perceived as significant progress. This result has not come without effort and is much due to intense advocacy campaigns by women's organizations and the Afghan civil society. Nevertheless, the perception is that the current numbers of women in the PPCs are not sufficient. Women constitute a negligible and marginalized minority. Their small number discourages them from giving voice to their thoughts and sharing them during meetings.

A women, peace and security forum was held in Kabul, in December 2012. The forum was convened by the Research Institute for Women, Peace and Security (RIWPS – Afghanistan) and brought together 32 female PPC members from 25 provinces. Prior to the forum RIWPS conducted an assessment of the participation and influence of female PPC members in the committees. The assessment showed that the women:

- often were unaware of why they were in the PPCs, and of what their responsibilities and opportunities were;
- lacked mediation and negotiation skills for talking to insurgent commanders;
- lacked political support; and
- lacked self-confidence.[103]

The assessment indicates that the purpose of the PPCs and the role of women in the committees have not been anchored with women at the provincial level. The assessment indicates the need for increased political support to enhance women's position in the committees and for capacity-building to increase women's capability for negotiating with insurgent commanders. The potential and opportunity for developing women's role and influence in the PPCs is largely dependent on this.

The above information indicates that women mainly have a symbolic role in the PPCs, and that they have difficulties to influence the implementation of APRP at the provincial and district level.

5.2.3 Women as negotiators and mediators

The interviews indicate that the prevailing perception of the conflict and fighting in Afghanistan is that of a male-dominated business; men fight whereas women support through the family and community. This image is not unique to Afghanistan and mirrors a stereotypical view of gender roles in armed conflicts that is recurrent in many parts of the world.[104]

Because Afghan women are not perceived to be fighters and parties to the conflict they are seen by men as less threatening; they are neither opponents nor competitors. According to one civil society representative and one female

[103]Research Institute for Women Peace & Security – Afghanistan, *Beyond numbers: ensuring meaningful inclusion of women on the provincial peace councils in local and national reconciliation efforts*, December 2012, Forum report.
[104]Stern, M. & Nystrand, M., *Gender and armed conflict*, April 2006, Stockholm: Swedish International Development Agency, pp. 12; 41-42.

HPC representative, this gives women a competitive advantage as mediators and negotiators in outreach and grievance resolution efforts. They can acquire a level of trust from men that is out of reach of male mediators and negotiators.

According to one of the female HPC representatives, female members of the HPC have successfully been involved in negotiations with insurgent commanders, both higher- and lower-level ones, across Afghanistan. Likewise, at the provincial level, e.g., in Kandahar and Helmand, women have been negotiating with local commanders and their insurgents groups to lay down their weapons and join the reintegration process.

Historically, women had an important role as mediators in local conflicts. Under the norm of *Nanawati* – a concept in the Pashtunwali code; a normative ethical code guiding the Pashtun tribes – women could go to the home of her family's enemy and request the dissolution of the conflict; the host was then obliged to comply. This is part of a cultural practice where women can intervene in disputes at the local level. However, a key problem emphasized by one of the female HPC members and one of the civil society representatives, is that such traditional structures have been destroyed during decades of war and are no longer in place. Afghan civil society organizations currently work to revive them as part of the peace and reintegration process.

5.2.4 Vetting and women

The APRP substantially impacts on women, especially in the long-term, since the program works to define the relationship between the local population and former fighters, especially in the reintegration phase. A key process in this regard is the vetting process whereby the identity and background of the re-integree is checked. This process regulates who is allowed to re-integrate and involves outreach activities designed to obtain the communities' acceptance of re-integratees.[105]

According to a high level female civil society representative there is a need to include more women in the vetting of insurgents to ensure that women's interests and needs are addressed.[106] This is particularly important since several respondents maintained that women often are reluctant to accept former fighters into their communities due previous conflicts and violence. Increased inclusion of women in the vetting process can thus reduce the risk that the reintegration of fighters feeds new conflicts and grievances in communities. This is particularly pertinent in cases where re-integrees, with a poor human rights record, join the ALP after reintegration and assume responsibility for providing village security.

5.2.5 Women in the reintegration process

The APRP Gender Policy stands in stark contrast to the reality of the program. According to records held by ISAF F-RIC and APRP Joint Secretariat, no

[105] Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, *Afghanistan peace and reintegration program (APRP) – Programme document*, July 2010, p. 6

[106] This need is also expressed in the APRP Gender Policy, see APRP Joint Secretariat, *Gender policy for Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP)*, September 2011, p. 17.

women have entered APRP. Female armed combatants are rare in Afghanistan, and the APRP does not recognize the indirect support women provide to the armed opposition.[107] According to ISAF F-RIC, the APRP Joint Secretariat and UNDP, women only benefit from the APRP as a member of the family unit. This is noteworthy, since women have an active role in the insurgency, although indirect. A British researcher, based in Afghanistan, has found that women are not the ones pulling the trigger, but they play a role through logistic and moral support.[108]

An additional aspect is that women and children may have been isolated and ostracized in their communities, due to the membership of their husbands or sons in the insurgency. This may have created grievances and had a serious impact on their livelihoods, health and education.

Women's potential grievances are not addressed by the APRP process. Women are assumed to be reintegrated and reconciled through the acceptance of men by the community; in this context, women have no entitlements based on their own rights. According to APRP Joint Secretariat, women's needs are addressed by community-recovery projects. The recent mid-term review of the APRP found that the number of female re-integree beneficiaries included in these projects was so low that it could not be registered in the graphics over the APRP's beneficiaries.[109]

The limited actions taken to include women who belong to families in the armed opposition is a troublesome dilemma, which might have an impact on the level of violence in the local community. The APRP disengagement training is a second example that substantiates this conclusion. UNDP representatives related that the disengagement training does not address women's rights and domestic violence. It is a well-researched fact that domestic violence and violence in the local community increase when fighters return home, after demobilization and reintegration.[110] It is, therefore, of great importance to prepare both men and women for positive household and family relations and lay the foundation for a non-violent mechanism for resolving differences. Demobilization and reintegration processes provide an opportunity for establishing the base for more positive household and family relations, and peaceful communities.[111] This stands in stark contrast to the APRP's focus on the individual male fighter and his grievances, without also addressing the situation of the women and children in his household. It also contradicts the gender policy of the APRP.

[107] Interview with Andrew Mann, Deputy Director ISAF F-RIC.
[108] Personal communication, anonymous researcher, Kabul, April 2013.
[109] APRP Midterm Evaluation Report, 19 February, 2013
[110] UNFPA, *State of World Population 2010*, http://unfpa.org/swp/2010/web/en/ch8.shtml
[111] Greenberg, M & Zuckerman, E., "The Gender Dimensions of Post-Conflict Reconstruction, in "Making Peace Work: The Challenges of Social and Economic Reconstruction", United Nations University, 2009, chapter 6, p 16.

6 Conclusions and Recommendations

This study has examined the peace dialogue between the Afghan government and the armed opposition, and the Afghan peace and reintegration program (APRP), through the lens of the provisions laid down in UNSCR 1325. The Peace dialogue and the APRP will crucially impact on the situation for women in Afghanistan, following the withdrawal of international military combat troops in 2014, and will contribute to shape the post-conflict setting in the country.

This study has analyzed the participation and influence of women in the peace and reintegration process. It has also analyzed current perceptions in Afghanistan e.g. on peace, conflict and the Taliban's position on women, and looked into the role that Afghan women can play in peace and reintegration efforts.

This concluding chapter highlights the main findings of the study. It presents a number of recommendations that aim to contribute to Sweden's efforts to implement UNSCR 1325 in ongoing and future conflicts, by increasing the knowledge of possibilities and constraints that exist with regards to the resolution in the Afghan context.

6.1 Conclusions

Through advocacy and pressure from the international community, women are represented in the High Peace Council and the Provincial Peace Councils. This study found that the general perception is that, women have limited influence in the ongoing 'talks about talks'. At the provincial and local level they constitute a negligible and marginalized minority. Nevertheless, it is an important achievement that women have gained seats in the HPC and the PPCs, although, the numbers remain low. Having a critical mass of women in positions of power can help ensure that women have a strong voice and that their concerns, priorities and rights will be respected and addressed. At the same time, even though women may be present at the table this might not be where decisions really are made. In Afghanistan this is an important conclusion since women have no seat in the powerful National Security Council, which advises the President on peace and security. Afghan women may not have the authority to challenge decision-making in influential institutions; this is particularly true in the peace process.

The peace process and 'talks about talks' reflect the political landscape of today's Afghanistan, where a small political elite, made up of warlords and former Mujahedeen leaders, linked through patronage, divide power and resources between themselves and their supporters. It is a major achievement that the constitution mandates that 25% of women should have a place in the Parliament. Nonetheless, they have a limited influence and power over political processes since the *de facto* power rests in the hands of the president, who governs through a patron-client system. Women have no seats in the inner circle of the government, where decisions on distribution of resources and power are made.

For the protection and advancement of women's rights, the international community's support, and their pressure on the government, is regarded as imperative. Without that support, women would have less power and influence. At the same time, in the context of the peace process, the international community has a poor track record. The international actors, especially the USA, have not taken any noticeable steps to include women in the peace dialogue and the potential peace negotiations. At present, those actors concentrate mainly on the warring parties and the armed opposition's grievances.

The presence of women in the HPC is also under the scrutiny of some male actors. They express opinions such as *"…You were not part of the war, why should you be part of the peace?"*. This reflects a limited understanding of the impact of armed conflict on the population, the society, and women in particular. It is a perception that limits the parties to the conflict to those who took part in armed violence. It excludes and disregards the impact of the armed conflict on women and their contribution to the society during times of social upheaval. It also excludes those who contributed through indirect actions. This argument is worrying since it reflects a lack of understanding of the provisions in UNSCR 1325, and the underpinnings in the UN Security Council's approval. There is a serious risk that the male members of the HPC marginalize and fail to protect the rights of women.

This study found that both men and women, including representatives of the government, the Parliament and civil society, are critical of the lack of transparency in the peace process. They express concern that they are excluded from providing inputs to an agenda that directs the decisions that could have negative impacts on them and be detrimental to sustainable peace. This is substantiated by the fact that the peace dialogue is mainly being held between the warring parties, and is perceived to focus only on peace, defined as absence of armed conflict. There is a feeling that deals are being made behind the scenes, without accountability, and that women's rights are being compromised together with the needs and concerns of the population. If agreements are being made behind closed doors, in combination with a focus on the warring parties, and particularly on their leaders, peace may be difficult to maintain.

There is thus a need to build a bridge between a bottom-up grassroots approach and formal, top-down peace negotiations, in a manner that provides the people more ownership of the process and a possibility of being able to air their concerns, needs, grievances and priorities. Such a process would recognize the impact of the armed conflict on the population, and the provisions laid down in UNSCR 1325 on women's and girls' participation.

Many women are worried by a potential power-sharing agreement between warring parties, which would bring back the Taliban without the approval of the Afghan population. They are equally concerned about the political elite governing Afghanistan and leading the peace talks. There is the possibility that they will compromise on women's rights in a future peace agreement, in order to protect their own interests. During the last decade, the government, and the President, has proven to be unreliable supporters of women's rights.

The potential for a sustainable peace is being endangered by the short-term objectives of the COIN strategy, which is interlinked with the APRP. COIN mainly focuses on weakening the insurgency, without recognizing that the strategy creates impediments to women's security, both long- and short-term. Afghan women express fear about the arming of local security forces with a poor human rights record. It is also a complicating factor that the peace process is interwoven with military goals; at the same time as the APRP invites insurgents to negotiate about their reintegration, ISAF and the ANSF continue to conduct military operations against the insurgency. This may compromise the armed opposition's confidence in the APRP.

A complicating factor is the discrepancy between the civil society's and female parliamentarians' expectation on what a future peace agreement should entail, and the objectives of the government. While the civil society and the female parliamentarians strive for 'positive peace', the government – together with the international military coalition – is, seemingly, interested in weakening the insurgency and closing a power-sharing deal with the armed opposition. This may result in unsolved conflicts and grievances among the population, which is detrimental to achieving sustainable peace.

Religion is an unprecedented factor in the Afghan society. All interviewees mentioned its importance for any discussion on citizens' rights and the State. Religion is subject to interpretation and hermeneutics. There is no major religion without a complexity of theological schools and practices. This is also true for Afghanistan, where a variety of moderate and conservative clerics teach in the mosques. Religion has the potential to be a spoiler of women's rights, but it can also be a force that contributes to its advancement, depending on theological interpretation. Debates about women's rights and position are an integral part of the theological debate in Afghanistan. Women need encouragement and support in setting their own agendas, and based on their own religious beliefs. Already today, some women have taken the initiative and formulated their faith based on the principle of the equal value and rights of women and men.

6.2 Recommendations

When this study was being conceived, its commissioner, the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, encouraged the researcher to 'think outside of the box'. The formulation of the recommendations below was also guided by some unorthodox thinking and the commitment to contribute to women's participation in the peace process in Afghanistan.

The findings of this study reveal that women are, to a large extent, absent from the formal peace and reintegration process in Afghanistan. Women are rarely at the peace table, even though the Afghan government and the international actors expressly support women's participation through their adoption of UNSCR 1325. This confirms UNWOMEN's finding that there is a major gap between the aspirations of countless international and national commitments

and the reality of peace processes.[112] In order to advance the implementation of UNSCR 1325, there is a need to hold both Afghan and international actors accountable.

We recommend;

- That all relevant leverage, including diplomatic tools and channels, is used to promote women's inclusion in the current 'talks about talks'. Especially Afghanistan, Pakistan and the USA should be approached about this.
- The promotion of the establishment of an international mechanism that monitors and audits the Afghan peace process with regard to women's participation, and holds the parties accountable under UNSCR 1325. Progress should be based on indicators, and reports should be made public, in order to put pressure on parties sensitive to public opinion;
- The earmarking of financial support for the advancement of women's participation in political processes, especially the peace process.

Today, the peace process is detached from both Afghan women and men, and agreements by the warring parties are perceived to be made behind closed doors. Thus, there is a need to build a bridge between bottom-up, grassroots approaches and the formal, top-down peace negotiations in a manner that gives the people more ownership of the process. This would be a contribution to an inclusive and sustainable peace.

We recommend;

- The facilitation and support of an inclusive process, at all levels in Afghanistan, which addresses the concerns, grievances, needs and priorities of the Afghan population currently excluded from the process. The process should have conditions that guarantee the participation of women. The process could include representative participation through civil society representatives, consultations with different sectors in the society, and direct participation by local population in direct negotiations at the provincial and district level.

Religion cannot be ignored in political discussions about Afghanistan. It has a central role both in society and in individual citizens' lives. Women argue that they strive for an equal and just society within the framework of Islam. They need support in developing a discourse that promotes democracy and women's rights in Afghanistan.

[112] UN Development Fund for Women, *Women's participation in peace negotiations*, August 2010, http://www.unifem.org/attachments/products/0302_WomensParticipationInPeaceNegotiations_en.pdf (retrieved 11 December 2012).

We recommend;

- The support of exchange, between Afghan women leaders and scholars, and women in Muslim countries with a democratic form of government, influential women leaders and clergywomen, for example, Indonesia and Lebanon.
- The support of dialogue between Afghan women and Afghan Muslim clergy supporting a theological interpretation supportive of women's rights and participation.

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Annex 1. Interview guide

Bloc 1: Understanding of concepts

- Peace – How would you define peace?
- Justice – How would you define justice?
- Equality – What does equality between men and women in the Afghan society mean?
- Women's rights – What does women's rights mean to you? Which rights should women

Bloc 2: Peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban/armed opposition

- Between which parties should a peace deal be made?
    - Is there a difference between the national and local level?
- What is the current relationship between the Afghan government and the Taliban/armed opposition?
- Who are the Taliban?
- Why does the Afghan government want to talk?

  What makes the Taliban want to talk?
- What issues should be discussed in the peace talks?
- What incentives do the government and the Taliban/armed opposition have to initiate formal peace negotiations?
- What are the key factors that divide the different parties?
- What are the main obstacles to reach a settlement?
- What needs to be agreed upon to reach a settlement?
- What role can women play in the dialogue?
- What do you see as the role and influence of President Karzai up to 2014?

Bloc 3: The peace and reintegration program (APRP)

- What are the objectives of the APRP?
- What are the incentives for insurgents to reintegrate?

- What role do women play in the insurgency?
- What kind of assessments has been made to identify the needs of those who wish to integrate? Do men and women respectively have different needs?
- What have been the main successes and challenges with regards to sub-national governance and outreach as well as negotiation and grievance resolution?
- Are women participating in the sub-national structures? Do they have power and influence?
- To what extent has the APRP been anchored with Afghan women?
- How has the program been communicated to local communities?
- What have been the main successes and challenges with regards to the demobilization process?
- Are women subject to demobilization? If so, who? Why?
- What have been the main successes and challenges with regards to the reintegration process?
- Are women subject to the de-radicalization/disengagement process?
- Are women's needs taken into account in reconstruction effort in the reintegration process?
- What programs, initiatives or mechanisms are needed to ensure a gender-sensitive approach to reintegration?
- What efforts have been made to implement the APRP gender policy into the program?

Annex 2. List of interviewees

Name	Position	Organization/body
Abdul Hakim Mujahed	1st Deputy Chairman, formerly Taliban representative to the United Nations, member of the Ulema Council	High Peace Council
Amirzai Sangin	Minister	Ministry of Communications & IT
Andrew Mann	Deputy Director	ISAF Force Reintegration Cell
Elisabeth Hårleman		Swedish International Development Agency (Sida)
Farhadullah Farhad	Deputy Chief Director	Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP)
Mahbouba Seraj	Director, Member of the Afghan Women Network board	Organization for Research in Peace and Solidarity
Mezhgan Temory	Governance and Civil Society Outreach Advisor	ISAF Force Reintegration Cell
Najia Zewari	Member, Deputy Secretary	High Peace Council and Parliament
Nilofar Ibrahimi	Member of Parliament	Parliament
Quhramaana Kakar	Former Gender Advisor	High Peace Council
Sayeda Mojgan Mostafavi	Deputy Minister	Ministry of Women's Affairs
Shah Mahmood	Deputy Country Director	Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA) Kabul Office
Shinkai Karokhail	Member of Parliament	Parliament
Shukra Barakzai	Member of Parliament	Parliament
Sima Samar	Head, formerly Minister of Women's Affairs	Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission
Torbjörn Pettersson	Former Ambassador to Afghanistan	
Torvald Åkesson	Former Secretary General	Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA)
Vadim Nazarov	Chief Political Affairs Officer	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, Political Affairs Office
Wazhma Frogh	Co-founder, Executive Director	Women, Peace & Security Research Institute
Wazir Ahmad Khorami	Deputy Director	Civil Society & Human Rights Organization

Yvette Langhuizen	Political advisor	Office of the NATO Senior Civilian Representative in Afghanistan
Anonymous		Representative of United Nations Development Programme
Anonymous		Representative of United Nations Development Programme
Anonymous		Representative of United Nations Development Programme
Anonymous		High-level representative of Child Fund Afghanistan
Anonymous	High-level members	Pashtun civil society association
Anonymous	High-level members	Civil Society Coordination Centre
Anonymous	High-level members	Afghan Cultural Associations Jarga
Anonymous	High-level member	Afghanistan Independent Journalist Association
Anonymous	High-level member	Support Afghan Women Organization
Anonymous		Representatives of the Swedish Embassy in Kabul
Anonymous		Female Member of Parliament and High Peace Council
Anonymous	Analyst	Swedish Armed Forces
Anonymous	Analyst	Swedish Armed Forces

This study explores the position of women in the peace and reintegration process in Afghanistan. The results reveal that women, to a large extent, are absence from the process.

This discloses a major gap between the aspirations expressed in countless international and national commitments, e.g. UNSCR 1325, and the reality. It also a threat to Afghan women's rights, since the government and international actors have not disclosed the concessions they are prepared to make in the peace talks with the Taliban. Women fear that their rights can be compromised, since the government has proven to be an unreliable supporter of women's rights.

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