



Top UN Envoy warns Defence Ministers against over-militarization in Afghanistan

5 February 2010 - The Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Kai Eide, today warned against the dangers of a “development where the military – out of impatience with the civilian components of Afghan institutions and international structures – takes on more of the civilian tasks.”

The Special Representative of the Secretary-General was speaking at the NATO Defence Ministers Conference in Istanbul where he urged caution with such an approach.

Excerpts: “We had a successful London Conference last week – more so than was expected in light of the very limited time for preparations. It marked the opening of a new phase in our relationship; a transition to greater Afghan responsibilities, which is what the Afghan government wants and what the international community wants.

I believe that 2010 will be the most challenging year since 2001– both in military and political terms. We are in the middle of a military surge and we have the most intensive military campaign ahead of us. President Karzai has announced a Peace Jirga sometime this spring, there will be a Kabul conference to follow-up on the conference in London, and there will be the Parliamentary elections in September.

This is, indeed, a crowded agenda – overcrowded, some may say. To manage these events in a way that makes them support and complement each other and not contradict and undermine each other will be extremely challenging. There is a real chance of making this year a turning point, but it will require an extraordinary orchestration of political and military efforts. Let me outline a few basic ones.

The overall strategy must become more politically driven and not more militarily driven. That, in itself, is a huge challenge with an intensive military campaign just around the corner. This campaign will take much of the attention and much of the energy of both the Afghan authorities and the international community. But we must also keep our eyes and attention firmly on the wider London agenda, with civilian institutions-building, sustainable economic growth and reconciliation/reintegration as the major components.

I am worried about a situation where our overall approach becomes even more militarily concentrated, more short-term focused, and does not give sufficient space for strengthening the political strategy and the longer-term perspective.

First, today, over 80 per cent of the projects carried out by Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) have a value of under US\$ 100,000. They are mostly quick-impact projects aimed at demonstrating quick results. We have to draw the focus more towards longer-term sustainable projects and resist the temptation of accelerating further the quick-impact impulse. Second, I am skeptical about a development where the military – out of impatience, sometimes justifiable, with the civilian components of Afghan institutions and international structures – takes on even more of the civilian tasks. That could, in my view, lead to a strengthening of parallel international structures instead of empowering Afghan institutions. It would contradict our transition strategy and make the international community even more entrenched instead of the opposite.

And third, I would warn against further narrowing down the geographic focus of our efforts. The military campaign will focus on a small number of provinces. However, more than ever, we need a nation-wide focus if we are to implement the London strategy. The challenge will be to find the balance between the shorter-term requirements of a military campaign and the longer-term requirements of a transition strategy. We could – if we do not get this balance right – end up in greater dependency instead of less dependency, which is the basic goal of a transition strategy.

Finally, the transition strategy must not be seen as an exit strategy. That would undermine the sustainability of the process.

So what do I see as the most pressing requirements: First, to provide the enabling and training capacity needed for the growth of the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police. Previous speakers have outlined these requirements. It is a challenge that all countries around this table can contribute to.

There is a dramatic shortfall in training capacity. Nations should, in my view, review the composition of their military engagement and see if they can redirect resources from current PRT activities into greater training capacity. Without a rapid and substantial increase in this capacity, one basic component of the transition strategy will fail. I would hope that the Europeans can play a greater role in this.

Second, the civilian institution-building programme has to be developed before the Kabul conference and must be provided with the necessary resources. Many of the tools are already in place, but such a programme will require serious funding, in the order of several hundred millions of dollars. Third, we must – as I have already mentioned – put a brake on the quick-impact thinking. International assistance will go down. If, when it does, we have not moved forward in developing institutions that can deliver services and an economy that can fund them, then many of the projects we have implemented could collapse. That will affect education, health, and infrastructure, which are some of our success stories so far. Fourth, it means developing nationwide programmes and looking beyond the conflict provinces, since the potential for economic growth are primarily to be found in other parts of the country.

Altogether, this will require a change of mindset, where all our efforts are focused on Afghan capacity-building, instead of capacity substitution, and on real economic growth, instead of unsustainable quick-impact, quick-collapse projects.

All these basic civilian challenges will require years of investments. It means moving away from a thinking focused on the “low hanging fruit” to an approach centred on more ambitious long-term development. This is the fundamental requirement of a transition strategy. I am convinced that a failure to adjust the way we think and operate will only lead us to another assessment one year from now, where we will conclude that the situation has deteriorated further, and negative trends may have become unmanageable.

I emphasize the need for a nation-wide thinking also for another reason. We have seen the insurgency spreading to other parts of the country.”

We have seen the insurgency spreading to other parts of the country. There are several causes. However, one is the unequal distribution of financial resources, which leads to frustration and contributes to a fertile breeding ground for the insurgency in previously stable areas.

I have said before that if this trend continues, we will be faced with a situation where additional troops will be required, troops that are simply not available.

Over the last weeks, we have also seen an increased attention on reconciliation and reintegration. The reintegration fund announced in London will now be developed further and hopefully well-funded by donors. However, in my opinion, it will not work without a parallel reconciliation effort. The reintegration fund has been characterized as a "game changer."

I believe that this could prove to be a very simplistic approach. Probably, many of the young men recruited to the insurgency are motivated by the attraction of money in the absence of employment. But many are also motivated by a combination of what they see as a weak government with a high level of corruption and a weak justice system combined with what is seen as a humiliating foreign invasion – not in the military sense, but in the sense of lack of respect for their values, culture and religion.

You can buy young men out of unemployment – at least to a certain extent. But you cannot buy young men out of the sense of humiliation, disrespect and frustration that many in Afghan society feel.

That challenge can only be met by a combination of respectful behaviour on the ground – and here I compliment General McChrystal – and a political reconciliation process.

For me, reconciliation and reintegration have to be two integral components of a wider political process. One without the other will not succeed.

Reintegration with foot soldiers alone is not sufficient. A political process is required. If not, I believe that what can be portrayed as an attempt to buy insurgents will harden other parts of the insurgency.

The Peace Jirga that President Karzai has proposed could be an important stepping stone in a reconciliation process. But it needs a broad national consensus. Is it possible? Yes, I believe so. But it requires the right signals – that we are prepared to stay as long as it takes and that we are ready for a political process.

Therefore, I also believe that in the military campaign that will soon begin, two other elements are critically important: First, the Afghans must really be seen to be in the lead on the ground, not only symbolically but in reality.

And second – related to this – a very significant effort must be made to mobilize the local societies. Without such effective mobilisation, any "clear-hold-build" strategy will not have the necessary impact.

Finally, to come back to where I started. The calendar of events over the next eight months is the most challenging we have faced over the last nine years. It will be a decisive year. If we mobilise our resources and energy correctly, then it could be a turning point. We have to believe – as General McChrystal said – and be sober and realistic in our analysis.

I trust that there is sufficient collective wisdom in the international community and among Afghan leaders to seize the opportunity we have."

More than 600 vulnerable families in Maidan Wardak district receive food aid

8 February 2010 - Throughout December and January, more than 600 families of the Jalriz district in the province of Maidan Wardak received food packages funded by the Italian Government and distributed by UNOPS.

With an average of seven members per family, over 4,000 people directly benefitted from the recent distribution of food packages to vulnerable families in the Jalriz district.

Each family received a food package containing 100kg wheat flour, 50kg rice, and 18 liters of cooking oil. The families come from the seven villages of Zawalat, Jalriz, Sangalakh, Takana, Sayakhak, Salmanfars and Kotiashro.

The food distribution is part of the community development efforts of the Italian Government and UNOPS in connection with the rehabilitation of the highway from Maidan Shar to Bamyán.

The food distribution is implemented directly by the District Development Assembly. The primary focus is to ensure the poorest and most vulnerable households in the district receive the much needed food assistance, while at the same time promoting the role of the District Development Assembly in providing social services through a transparent and participatory process.

The Ministry of Public Works is presently rehabilitating 136 km of highway under this project with Italian funding. Rehabilitation of the stretch from Maidan Shar to Onai Pass is halfway completed. The tender process for the rehabilitation of the stretch from Onai Pass to Bamyán city is under process. Additional small scale community works are also planned for the next months.





Livestock Development: The peaceful Afghan rural livelihood

7 February 2010 - Being primarily driven by an agro-economy, Afghanistan has a lot of livestock that are the main and, in some places, the only income-generation machine for thousands of families whose cattle are their livelihood.

The main challenges for domestic dairy producers in Afghanistan have been a weak market and unprofessional animal health care. They normally take care of their animals in traditional ways that increase the chances of high animal mortality rate and the outbreak of infectious diseases.

The United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) started the German government-funded 'Integrated Dairy Development Scheme in Afghanistan' in Dehdadi district of Balkh province in 2002. This program hopes to improve food security by raising the productive capacity of the national dairy sector through the development of integrated model dairy schemes in the country.

Dehdadi, SW of Mazar-i-Sharif, is famous for dairy products, with farmers keeping a lot of cows and producing thousands of liters of milk to supply the markets in Mazar-i-Sharif, the population center of Balkh province.

After the opening of the project, FAO started its 'Improved Cattle Management Training' project where 720 women were trained on the best methods of cattle rearing. FAO's technical support and assistance have resulted in doubling milk productivity. The daily milk production per house has since risen from three liters to 6.5 liters per day.

FAO's initiative of forming the Balkh Livestock Development Union (BLDU) was followed by an excellent contribution in 2007 from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) which built a dairy-products pasteurizing factory in the center of this district. The factory cost US\$ 650,000 and the USAID later handed it over to BLDU.

"It is Dehdadi's milk that sufficiently supplies the market in Mazar. It is clean, healthy, well-packed and stays longer," said Abdul Rasool, a customer who bought packed milk from one of Balkh's 27 dairy shops in Mazar.

Now, everyday, over 2,000 liters of milk are collected by milk collection centers which bring the milk for pasteurizing to the factory where the best dairy products – such as packed milk, yogurt, cheese and butter – are produced.

By Sayed Barez, UNAMA

UNODC predicts stable opium crop in Afghanistan

10 February 2010 - In a report issued today, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) projects a stable opium crop in Afghanistan in 2010.

The UNODC Winter Rapid Assessment 2010 is based on farmers' intentions at the time of planting in a total of 536 villages over 188 districts nation-wide. While most of the poppy is still under the ground, this assessment gives the first indication of what Afghanistan's opium harvest may look like in 2010.

The assessment reports that this is the year to consolidate gains made in the struggle against Afghan opium. Opium cultivation in Afghanistan has decreased by one third (36%) over the past two years, from a record high of 193,000 ha in 2007 to 123,000 ha in 2009. In 2010 cultivation will stabilise, sending a clear message that "in order to further reduce the biggest source of the world's deadliest drug, there must be better security, development and governance in Afghanistan" said UNODC Executive Director Antonio Maria Costa.

While cultivation remains static across Afghanistan, the number of opium-free provinces is projected to rise, from 20 in 2009 to as high as 25 this year with effective intervention and assistance. Of the 20 provinces that were poppy-free last year, 17 are expected to remain so. Three provinces in the north (Baghlan, Faryab and Saripul) show signs of losing that status, due to a small increase in cultivation in districts prone to high insecurity. Conversely, 5 provinces that cultivated opium last year may attain poppy-free status in 2010 (Kunar, Nangarhar, Kabul, Laghman and Badakhshan).

"I urge the Afghan government and the international community to focus special attention on the eight provinces where opium cultivation is negligible, though not poppy-free," said Mr Costa.

Since 2007, market forces have played a major role in influencing farmers' decisions against opium cultivation. In the south-west of the country, where most of the opium is grown, a quarter of farmers cited low prices and low yields as the main reasons for not growing opium this year. However, price trends are starting to reverse. The price of licit crops, like wheat (down 43%) is falling faster than the price of opium (down 6%) which makes poppy a more attractive crop to poor farmers.

At the same time almost two thirds of the villages which are expected to cultivate opium in 2010 had not received agricultural assistance in 2009. "Development assistance is badly needed to help Afghan farmers find income alternatives to opium," said Mr Costa.



Former militants looking for an incentive package

9 February 2010 - **Five days into their journey on a completely different path, former members of the Taliban who renounced violence last week to join a peace initiative of the Government said they are looking forward to an incentive package.**

"It's obviously a very different environment," said Qari Fazal Rahaman Faruqi, 32, a Taliban commander until last week. Seated with five of his former Taliban comrades in the office of the director of the Government's peace and reconciliation programme for Nangarhar and Laghman provinces in Jalalabad, Mr. Faruqi said they joined the Government initiative thinking that it would lead to peace.

The Government of Afghanistan has been using Takhim-E-Solh -or the "Strengthening Peace Programme" (PTS) - for the past six years as a tool to encourage members of various militant groups to renounce violence.

The former commander, who originally hails from Batikot district of eastern Nangarhar province, seemed optimistic that the reconciliation process would work. But he urged the Government and the international community to demonstrate "honesty."

"The most important thing is honesty. If the Government and the international community are honest, and if their actions and promises are consistent, the process can advance well," said Mr. Faruqi.

His colleague, Qari Mohibullah, chipped in: "For this process to work, the Government should maintain good relations with Islamic Ulemas and real mullahs practicing in the mosques."

Haji Sana Gul, PTS director for Nangarhar and Laghman provinces, said that about 1,100 members of anti-government elements (AGEs) have joined the social reintegration programme since its Jalalabad office was set up in 2005. Another PTS office in Assadabad city leads similar efforts in two other provinces of the eastern Afghanistan – Kunar and Nuristan.

The Assadabad office has reintegrated about 850 AGEs (750 from Kunar and 100 from Nuristan) and collected 90 weapons since 2005, according to Haji Rozi Khan, 52, deputy Governor of Kunar, who also served in the past as the deputy minister of tribal affairs.

A PTS message to AGEs, written on a poster hanging on the wall of Mr Sana Gul, reads: "Dear Talib brothers, the Islamic scholars from all parts of the country would like to invite you to join the reconciliation programme and stop fighting against brothers. Don't lose the chance, and contact PTS offices in your provinces."

Mr Sana Gul, himself a former Talib and a Jihadi commander during the Soviet occupation, said the Government should come up with a social reintegration package for those members of militant groups who are willing to lead a normal life.

"At the beginning, we asked for financial support (for those opting for social reintegration). Later on, they needed other support too. So, now we are asking for a rehabilitation package that also includes economic incentives," he said.

The 56-year-old father of 22 children claimed that he is capable of bringing more AGEs into the social mainstream, if they are supported well.

Officials said that about 13 members of the Taliban in Shigal district and another group of about 50 in the Sarkano district of Kunar Province were ready to join PTS soon. All together, 19 AGEs under the command of Mr Faruqi joined PTS as of last week. They also handed over 11 weapons, including an RPG, before being issued ID cards from the PTS.

One of the former Talibs reintegrated through PTS is Mohamad Kashmir Shariyatyar, 28, from Daulat Shah district, Laghman Province. Now a teacher of geography, history and Islamic sciences at a high school in Laghman, Mr Shariyatyar approached PTS three years ago and soon found himself home.

"This process (social reintegration) should work, and PTS is doing a good job," said Mr. Shariyatyar, adding however that the Government has been "weak" in responding to needs of those coming into the mainstream.

"The Taliban joining this process need security, as well as economic incentives, like a plot of land," he said.

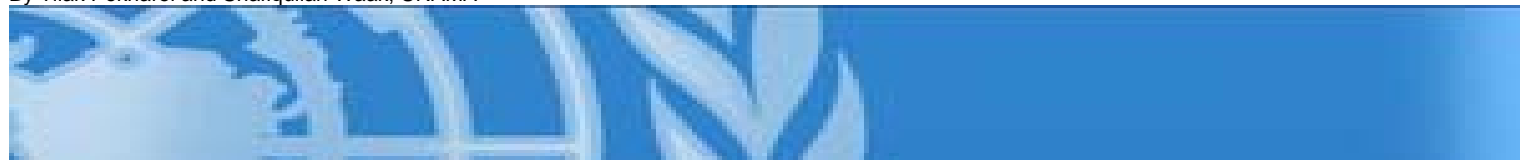
Mr Faruqi, however, said he is looking for a "high-level" Government appointment.

Usually, PTS contacts members of AGEs and proposes reintegration. The PTS had contacted the group of Mr. Faruqi about six months ago, Mr. Sana Gul said, adding that "they also showed some interest, and this became possible."

He feels that the social reintegration process should work given the success of the London Conference and the Government announcement that it would consider negotiating with moderate militants.

Asked what would be the next step should this process fail, Mr Sana Gul said, "There is no other way that's workable. This (social reintegration) is the only way."

By Tilak Pokharel and Shafiqullah Waak, UNAMA





Helmand IDPs tired of leaving their homes time and again

9 February 2010 - Thousands of families in Helmand have been forced to abandon their homes due to the ongoing conflict and war in the area. These internally displaced people (IDPs) have since been living in abject conditions as a result of leaving behind their homes, livestock, farms and belongings.

Most of these families move to Lashkargah, the capital, to live in temporary camps. Some stay with relatives, others search for shelter in neighbouring districts, while some continue their painful journey to Kandahar or move as far as Kabul.

Gul Mohammad, who has been forced to abandon his home and village in Helmand's Nadali district for the fifth time in less than a year, told UNAMA that life hasn't changed for his family even after several clean-up operations. He regrets that each time the government promises to bring security, it fails to do so.

"The government and NATO forces started fresh offensives. We are forced to leave our homes to safeguard our families. More than 200 families left Nadali and are currently living in Lashkargah. Some are staying with their relatives and some others have rented houses which they can't afford for too long. They don't have food, tents and heating material. Neither the government nor aid agencies have provided any assistance to us as yet," he said.

"The government and NATO forces started fresh offensives in Nadali and Marja. We are forced to leave our homes to safeguard our families. More than 200 families left Nadali and are currently living in Lashkargah. Some are staying with their relatives and some others have rented houses which they can't afford for too long. They don't have food, tents and heating material. Neither the government nor aid agencies have provided any assistance to us as yet," he said.

"We are sick of operations in our area every day. We leave our homes. Our children have no future and those who can't move are stranded due to IEDs (improvised explosive devices) and blocked roads. People are trying to move to safer areas in order to protect themselves. We appeal to the government and NATO forces to... provide us (with) security and better living conditions," said Ahmad Wali, an IDP from Marja district, who currently lives in a rented house in Lashkargah.

The head of the government's refugees and returnees department for Helmand, Ghulam Farooq Noorzai, admits a large number of families are coming to Lashkargah from the districts of Marja and Nadali.

"We are in contact with UN agencies and have shared our concerns with them," said Mr Noorzai. "The UN has promised to release assistance to the new IDPs from Nadali and Marja," he added.

According to him, the United Nations has provided assistance to over 8,000 IDP families in Helmand province in the last six months.

Lucio Milardo, head of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Kandahar, says the UN is helping the IDPs to build food capacity.

"First, the United Nations is providing humanitarian assistance to the IDPs based on their needs. Second, the humanitarian assistance from the UN agencies should not be aligned with military. Our aim is only to assist people in need and has nothing to do with the military," he said.

"We are glad that UN agencies are helping the IDPs who have been forced to leave their homes and villages due to military operations. We have a good coordination mechanism in place with all UN agencies, including UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF, WHO, UNAMA and others and we really appreciate their assistance", said Mr Noorzai.

Mr Noorzai expects a fresh influx of IDPs from Nadali district, after the recent announcement by the military to launch fresh offensives. He, however, said they are prepared to meet the requirements of up to 15,000 IDPs with the assistance of UN agencies.

The United Nations is up to the task and as part of the UN's Interagency Contingency Plan for natural and man-made disasters, the UN has pre-positioned sufficient food and non-food items at the provincial level.

United Nations agencies in the regions have always played a vital role in providing assistance to IDPs in Helmand and other provinces.

In 2009 alone, UN agencies assisted more than 30,000 families in the south with humanitarian aid – almost double when compared to 2008 – as displacement continued from areas most affected by the conflict.

By Mujeeb Rahman, UNAMA

UN completes winterization programme in Paktya and Khost

8 February 2010 - The United Nations has completed its "winterization" programme in two provinces of the southeast region benefiting 5,000 families in all.

The programme targeted nine districts in Paktya province, and four districts in Khost province. The beneficiaries were the extremely vulnerable individuals/families, vulnerable returnees, returned internally displaced persons and the poorest families among the local communities.

Before launching this programme, local non-government organisation Afghanistan Planning Agency (APA) conducted a general survey in November and December last year to select the beneficiaries.

The beneficiary selection committee comprised representatives from the Afghan National Disaster Management Authority, the Afghan Red Crescent Society, government departments, Provincial Council members and district authorities.

"On behalf of the Governor's office, I want to thank UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), IOM (International Organization for Migration), GTZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit or German Technical Cooperation) and other agencies that helped our poor people in these rainy days. I would also like to thank APA for conducting a survey with the government of Afghanistan and executing this programme," said Qazi Sahibzada Tariq, executive director of the Governor's office.

In all, UNHCR contributed 3,000 kits for 1,500 families in Paktya and 1,500 families in Khost. Each kit contained blankets, plastic sheets, shoes, socks and sweaters for the entire family, and 220 kilos of firewood.

The other actors involved in this programme were IOM and GTZ-DETA which, besides contributing non-food items, essentially funded the field level operations of the winterization programme.

IOM also contributed family kits for 500 families in Paktya and 1,000 families in Khost.

UNHCR has been distributing winterization assistance since 2002 in the southeastern region and keeps improving this programme to meet the needs of extremely vulnerable people.

By Dilawar Khan Dilawar, UNAMA



UNICEF appeals for US\$ 28 million to assist Afghan children and women affected by emergency

4 February 2010 - UNICEF launched its Humanitarian Action Report [HAR] 2010 today, calling on donors to provide US\$ 1.16 billion dollars to assist children and women who are victims of emergencies in 28 different countries and territories around the world, with Haiti on top of the agenda. US\$ 28 million are requested for Afghanistan, also a priority of the report.

When launching the report in Geneva, UNICEF Deputy Executive Director, Hilde Johnson, stressed: "As we maximize our efforts to speed up delivery of humanitarian assistance and protection for every child in Haiti, UNICEF also needs to engage in changing the lives of children all over the world."

The report emphasizes factors which cumulatively constitute the main underlying causes of vulnerability, faced by children and women, including climate change, global financial crises and unstable food prices. These factors threaten the survival and respect to fundamental rights of children and favor an environment prone to violence, including sexual abuse.

The report highlights the range of humanitarian action that UNICEF is undertaking worldwide, from preparedness to response to recovery and transition. Countries recently affected by natural and political crisis, such as Haiti and Somalia are featured, as are locations where no immediate disaster has stricken but where children continue to suffer, like Afghanistan.

"Funds requested for Afghanistan will facilitate the provision of emergency assistance for those who are the most vulnerable," said UNICEF Country Representative Catherine Mbengue. "No matter if it is violence, floods or drought, children and women bear the brunt in each humanitarian crisis, here in Afghanistan and all over the world."

The effects of insecurity, drought and high food prices are putting an estimated 1.2 million children under five and 550,000 pregnant and lactating women across Afghanistan at high risk of undernutrition, infectious diseases and livelihood vulnerability. Their situation is exacerbated by little or no access to essential health care, safe water, education and child protection services.

The level of funding received determines UNICEF's capacity to respond rapidly to emergencies. In 2009 funding through the Humanitarian Action mechanism and collaboration with line ministries, UN-agencies, such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and civil society, partners allowed UNICEF Afghanistan to treat 5,000 undernourished children under age five in outpatient clinics and centers across the eight provinces most affected by drought and high food prices.

UNICEF contributed to the preparation of the Humanitarian Appeal Process 2010, a joint appeal of humanitarian partners for \$87.6 million, targeting over seven million Afghan people. "We must make sure that children and women are protected to the utmost extent and have their rights respected," Ms Mbengue emphasized. "UNICEF looks forward to continue working with all donors and partners to increase the efficiency of disaster preparedness and response for Afghanistan."