SPECIAL REPORT

Options for Reintegrating Taliban Fighters in an Afghan Peace Process

By Deedee Derksen

A group of former Taliban members and Islamic State militants laid down their arms in Jalalabad and joined the peace process in February 2019. (Photo by Ghulamullah Habibi/EPA-EFE/Shutterstock)

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- The success of any peace agreement with the Taliban will depend in large part on whether its commanders and fighters can assume roles in Afghan politics, the security forces, or civilian life.

- Among the lessons from earlier reintegration processes are that patronage is the primary vehicle, pointing to the importance of political reintegration; that special attention should be paid to low- to mid-level commanders, who could lose out from peace; and that international support is critical.

- Taliban leaders are likely to ask for jobs and influence in the security sector, and other factions will seek to retain their influence in that sector, likely making the division of power in the security forces especially fraught.

- Experiences with military integration elsewhere suggest that options include merging the Taliban into a reconstituted security force, integrating entire insurgent units into the existing security forces without breaking their command structures (factional integration), and reintegrating insurgents as individuals into the existing forces.

- Leaving the Taliban outside the security forces would probably not lead to peace, given that the movement would continue to vie with those forces for territory and associated profit.

- Any interim security arrangement, presumably involving some form of military coexistence or cooperation, could affect long-term military integration as commanders entrench

themselves in whatever temporary arrangements are established.

- The socioeconomic reintegration of Taliban in civilian life will depend not only on an effective reintegration program—management of which would need to involve Taliban representatives—but also on addressing underlying issues such as land disputes, Afghanistan's economic prospects, and disarming other factions.

- Many commanders may envisage turning to politics. How they could do so as civilians would depend in large part on what agreement their leaders reach with other factions regarding Afghanistan's political and electoral systems.

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ABOUT THE REPORT

Based on an analysis undertaken by the author in 2018, this report reviews options for how Taliban commanders and fighters might be reintegrated into Afghan politics, security forces, and civilian life after a peace agreement with the government. The report draws on the author's previous research and publications on reintegration, as well as interviews conducted on demobilization and reintegration efforts in Burundi, Nepal, Tajikistan, and elsewhere.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Deedee Derksen has written extensively on the impact of programs to demobilize and reintegrate nonstate armed groups in Afghanistan. She was a visiting scholar at Columbia University and a doctoral fellow at the Geneva Centre for Security Policy and has worked on Afghanistan at the United Nations Department for Political Affairs.

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Members of the Taliban celebrate the June 2018 cease-fire in Nangarhar Province. (Photo by Parwiz Parwiz/Reuters)

Introduction

The success of any peace agreement with the Taliban will depend in large part on whether its commanders and fighters can assume new roles in Afghan politics, the security forces, or civilian life. These roles will hinge in turn on the parameters of whatever peace deal with the Taliban emerges; the nature of the Afghan government and power sharing that follows such a deal; the structure of the state, particularly as it relates to the devolution of power and the authorities of different branches of governments; and the potential reorganization of the state security forces and state-aligned irregulars. Thus far, negotiations have focused mostly on international force levels and security guarantees. As discussions more toward issues of intra-Afghan power sharing, the complex balance of force among Afghan security forces, the Taliban, and other armed factions will require more consideration of options for reintegration and interim security arrangements.

This report explores what such arrangements and options might look like, drawing on previous research on reintegration in Afghanistan as well as studies of the reintegration (or lack of reintegration) of former rebels in Burundi, Tajikistan, and Nepal.[1] It offers preliminary thinking on options for demobilization to the conflict parties, potential mediators, or others supporting a potential settlement between the Taliban, the government and other factions. Its emphasis is on military integration because the security forces will presumably be a major destination for integrating Taliban commanders and fighters.

Interim Security Solutions

Any peace agreement will take time to negotiate and implement. This is especially true for provisions related to the demobilization of ex-combatants, which takes away the main bargaining chip of armed groups. Parties will need to discuss local security measures and establish what happens to combatants in the interim.

In many of the peace deals negotiated in the 1990s in Central America and Africa, former combatants were meant to demobilize as soon as possible. In the second half of the 2000s, however, analysts and practitioners—including UN peacekeepers involved in implementing several disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs—proposed so-called interim stabilization measures, which allow more flexibility in cases when conditions for conventional DDR are lacking. In a 2010 report, the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations suggested that in the absence of a minimum degree of security, the command structures of rebel forces should be left intact, and disarmament and demobilization should follow reintegration rather than precede it, as per the traditional sequence.[2]

An influential report by Nat Colletta and Robert Muggah describes interim stabilization measures as a holding pattern, keeping former combatant units intact while buying time for negotiations to facilitate political reintegration. Such measures can include establishing a civilian peace corps, making military or security sector integration arrangements, creating transitional security forces (militias), developing dialogue and sensitization programs, making related halfway-house arrangements, and planning various forms of transitional autonomy.[3]

For example, Sudan's 2005 peace agreement stipulated that members of the Sudan People's Liberation Army, the principal rebel movement fighting Khartoum, would enter Joint Integrated Units, together with Sudanese security forces, and deploy to specific regions across the country. The joint units were meant to fill postwar security vacuums as well as build confidence between the former warring parties. In Kosovo, too, the 1999 peace accord envisaged the creation of the Kosovo Protection Corps, which transformed the main rebel force, the Kosovo Liberation Army, into a smaller civilian security entity as an interim step.[4]

Interim security measures would likely be required in Afghanistan, especially considering that the Taliban contest or control a large territory and they are unlikely to want to demobilize immediately. These circumstances would militate against a scenario in which the state's security forces attempt to assume security provision. Interim security provision by the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) would probably rely on the police and on local militias, and predation by both forces has been a major driver of the insurgency. Moreover, the Taliban's economic activities, notably its involvement in the drug trade and "taxation" of locals, would also militate against such an option; were the ANDSF and pro-government militias to assume control over security, they presumably would also appropriate these important sources of income. Dividing the provinces between the warring parties until they agree on a more durable solution, formalized in a peace agreement—a scenario that international observers and officials have sometimes floated—does not appear to have gained traction among Afghans. Nor is it clear what would happen to combatants and noncombatants from factions opposing those dominant in each prov-

ince. Such arrangements could lead to even more people being internally displaced.

More likely, therefore, would be an interim security arrangement that includes some form of military coexistence or cooperation. The Taliban, which does not control

provincial capitals, may demand a military presence and access to those centers as part of an interim agreement. It could also demand a presence in Kabul or along legal border crossings and other key trade routes. One scenario would be parallel interim security structures; another would be fully integrated interim security units in parts of the country. As in other postconflict situations, these scenarios could have several advantages: they could help prevent a security vacuum, they could build confidence among the parties and serve as a first step toward integration into new security forces, and they could offer a "parking place" for commanders and fighters who might otherwise act as spoilers.

INTEGRATED UNITS

Mali's 2015 Bamako Agreement introduced the concept of mixed patrols, composed of the state's security forces, pro-government forces, and rebels (le Mécanisme Opérationnel de Coordination, or MOC). These combined forces in principle should provide local security around cantonment sites in the northern towns of Gao, Kidal, and Timbuktu (the DDR process includes the signatory armed groups) and improve trust among the parties while the other provisions of the Bamako deal—including DDR and the integration of signatory groups into the state security forces—are implemented. The UN peacekeeping mission provides materials and vehicles for the patrols.

Thus far implementation has been difficult, which appears to relate as much to the ongoing conflict and the reluctance of parties to implement the Bamako deal as it does to the idea of joint patrols per se. Problems have included the refusal of participants to provide heavy weapons for patrols because they were still fighting for control over parts of the north; attacks on the joint patrols; one suicide attack that destroyed an MOC camp and was assumed to have been perpetrated by a militant group outside the peace agreement; and the resistance of communities to the presence of some of the patrols' members, who they still perceive as enemies.[5]

Afghanistan could face similar problems. Even if all factions were represented at the negotiating table and (potentially) international troops were present across the country and accepted by all parties as a guarantor, conflicts over territorial control—especially areas or routes that offer opportunities for profit—would likely continue, if less overtly. Areas that provide opportunities for taxation of locals, smuggling, poppy production, timber logging, mining of precious stones, or the extortion of customs revenues are likely to be especially contested. These areas already tend to generate the fiercest conflicts. Other difficulties could arise from the Islamic State's playing a spoiler role and attacking units or facilities, communities rejecting either a Taliban or ANDSF presence if they had not experienced one before, and security forces' fears of "insider attacks." Some Taliban might fear arrests; two-and-a-half years after the 2016 Hezb-e Islami peace deal, the National Directorate of Security still arrests some of its commanders.

On the other hand, as described, functioning integrated units would build confidence among the parties and provide a stepping stone to integrated regular security forces. Foreign donors could contribute supplies, training, and security guarantees. In principle, the UN plays this role in Mali, though in reality militant attacks have left UN peacekeepers largely confined to their bases. More capable forces would be a prerequisite in Afghanistan. Were NATO countries to foot the bill for integrated forces or Western countries to provide troops, clearly the relationship between the United States and the Taliban would have to dramatically change. Overall, if an international stabilization force follows a peace process, its composition would almost certainly be part of negotiations.

Integrated interim security forces—even just temporary mixed patrols—would likely require negotiations to be in a fairly advanced stage. The US and other countries' legislation would also likely have to be modified to permit funds going to the Taliban.

PARALLEL STRUCTURES

Currently the Taliban's governance and security structures, which include Taliban governors and military commissions, shadow the government's provincial administrations. Taliban provincial and district authorities coexist with networks centered around key Taliban commanders that can span several provinces. These parallel security structures, with some adaptations, could be formally recognized as an interim measure.

Such an agreement would allow the Taliban to both operate openly and enter areas not currently contested, such as provincial centers. Negotiations would need to arrive at a strict agreement on the mandate of all armed factions (Taliban, army, police, and both semi-formal and informal militias), which would presumably be limited to law enforcement. Talks would also need to specify in which local areas each would operate, and how coordination and possible collaboration among the different forces would work.

An example of parallel security sectors in the official sphere is provided by Baghlan. Beginning in 2010, US special operations forces and the Karzai administration have supported the integration of Hezb-e Islami commanders, who had been fighting an insurgency, into the Afghan Local Police (ALP). The Ministry of Interior, however, traditionally supported control by the Jamiat-e Islami party of Afghan National Police (ANP) units in Baghlan.[6] The Hezb local police units thus created a parallel provincial security sector.[7] The division of labor appears to have been mostly geographic—the Hezb providing security in Pashtun-populated areas where the government previously had little influence, and the Jamiat units elsewhere. But both the Hezb-dominated local police and the Jamiat national police were headquartered in Pul-e Khumri, meaning a parallel presence in the provincial capital. Collaboration between the two forces mainly took place during operations against the Taliban. This arrangement was relatively stable until the 2016 Hezb-e Islami peace agreement, when Jamiat, anticipating the military integration of Hezb commanders and fighters, successfully forced Hezb members out of the ALP. Key elements in the stability were the patronage of Hezb-e Islami by US special operations forces and President Hamid Karzai and that of Jamiat by the Ministry of Interior and Vice President Qasim Fahim. In essence, the local security arrangement mirrored national-level power sharing.

Hezb-e Islami prisoners line up after being released from the Afghan National Detention Facility, near Kabul, under a peace and rehabilitation program. (Photo by Omar Sobhani/Reuters)

Some version of this Baghlan arrangement will probably be replicated if military reintegration of Hezb-e Islami commanders and fighters proceeds. Given that integration on a large scale in the regular security forces looks unlikely, they will probably end up in government-sponsored militia programs. This means that in areas already under their control, the government will provide them with resources and a mandate for security provision. Thus, they would have an official presence in provincial capitals without being fully integrated into the regular security forces. Ideally, this would be an interim solution that included longer-term provisions for either their demobilization or their integration into regular forces. In the absence of full integration, Hezb commanders and fighters will remain on the margins of the security sector and—if militia programs lose funding—could return to the insurgency.

In reality, a close examination of the official security sector reveals that, given the factionalization of the security forces, parallel security structures already exist in various forms in every province. Dividing lines exist not only between former insurgents and pro-government groups but also among various pro-government groups, whereby each have their own effective security sector in provinces. In some cases, one faction more or less controls the ANP in a particular province, whereas another is more prominent in the ALP or illegal militias. In other areas, particular factions control most of the ANP and ALP, but the Afghan National Army (ANA) is outside their influence. In yet others, factions control ANP, ALP, and various militias in particular districts or parts of districts. They usually all have some kind of presence or representation in provincial capitals. In each case, these arrangements reflect some form of informal power sharing. These understandings are accepted by the main factions and enabled by support for different factions from foreign troops or power brokers in Kabul (or both), with the presence of foreign troops (and funds) functioning as a guarantor against open warfare.

Beyond the challenge of whether the Taliban will accept foreign forces, another question is whether the movement would establish a political presence in Kabul, for example in an interim or transitional government. Unlike Hezb-e Islami, parallel security arrangements involving the Taliban would not necessarily entail the movement joining existing state or government-allied forces and coming under the oversight of the Interior or Defense Ministry. Because the Taliban

is much stronger than Hezb-e Islami and would probably view joining the existing state as surrender, it more likely would keep its own structure for the interim period until such time as its forces would be merged formally with the military, almost certainly alongside other reforms of the security sector, or demobilized.

LONG-TERM IMPACT

Any interim security arrangements that bridge the time between initial negotiations and the implementation of a peace agreement will have a long-term impact on Afghanistan's security-sector landscape. This will be all the more true if negotiations or the implementation of a peace agreement last for years, which is a real possibility. Assuming that negotiators envisage power sharing within state institutions, a challenge will be designing interim local security solutions that favor eventual military integration. In the early years after 2001, the entrenchment of warlords and strongmen in local politics and interim security arrangements resulted in a handful of factions dominating the new security forces. The complications already evident in integrating Hezb-e Islami commanders and fighters into the security sector illustrate how difficult it is to create more inclusive security forces once factions have consolidated their control.

In some countries, major armed groups have remained outside the regular security forces altogether even after the conflict has ended. In Lebanon, Hezbollah was not included in the military integration process after the 1990s civil war. As a result, Hezbollah and the new Lebanese army coexist and seem to occasionally even collaborate informally (for example, when it comes to ousting Sunni jihadis entering Lebanon from Syria). Hezbollah, however, enjoys considerable support from Iran—meaning it may be less dependent than Taliban commanders and fighters on local taxation and smuggling (even if the Taliban's income from drugs taxes is often overstated, according to one expert)—and does not compete with regular security forces for local territorial control.[8] Without an institutionalized power-sharing agreement, which would provide a disincentive to rock the boat, commanders from all sides could continue fighting over who controls which area.[9]

Getting the Politics Right

Interim security arrangements are important, but experience with peace processes elsewhere suggests that ultimately a longer-term arrangement to reintegrate fighters and commanders is necessary. Several paths for reintegration usually exist, including into the security forces or civilian life, potentially including politics. This type of reintegration would significantly differ from the way the term has been used in Afghanistan since 2001 to refer largely to defections of Taliban under reintegration programs and short-term assistance to commanders and fighters of the former Northern Alliance. Informally, however, long-term military, political, and socioeconomic reintegration of former commanders and fighters, especially those from the former Northern Alliance, has been ongoing since 2001.

From that process, three key lessons can be drawn for a process of reintegration involving the long-term military, political, and socioeconomic reintegration of the Taliban.

1. Support political reintegration of Taliban leaders.

Over the past decade and a half, any reintegration of former combatants—or the failure of such efforts—in Afghanistan has played out along patronage lines. Patrons in key positions (such as in the presidential palace, the security sector, other ministries, provincial administrations, or reintegration programs) integrate commanders and fighters loyal to them.

This pattern could very likely repeat itself after a peace agreement with the Taliban. After the first DDR program in 2003–5, top Afghan Military Force commanders integrated into high-ranking civilian government positions, and their most loyal commanders into the ANA and the ANP.[10] Commanders whose political connections were weaker found other jobs, became unemployed, or started operating as illegal militias or joined the Taliban. Some were later integrated in the ALP. So, unless Taliban leaders secure top political or military positions, it is unlikely they will be able to guarantee their commanders' and fighters' futures. These positions could be in an interim or transitional administration in which they gain a share of power (and thus a percentage of national and subnational government positions) or, subsequently, in an elected government.

2. Pay attention to lower-level commanders.

The reintegration of commanders operating at the provincial level and below poses particular challenges. Even if Taliban leaders win top positions, they may no longer see the value of their subordinate military commanders in peacetime. This was the experience of many Junbish-e Milli commanders when the party tried to transition into a regular political party and was more serious than other parties about demobilizing its commanders. Some of these commanders later joined the Taliban and the Islamic State in the northwest, likely for profit, protection, and prestige. Frictions between "political" and "military" factions in the Taliban may complicate the reintegration of the military base. Such commanders might then try to find alternative sources of patronage, joining dissident factions still on the battlefield, other existing militant groups such as the Islamic State, or new incarnations of an armed opposition. Many would be able to take their fighters with them.

International support is important overall but particularly critical for the reintegration of commanders, as is the provision of adequate reintegration opportunities (in which continued foreign funding to Afghanistan will play a crucial role).

3. Understand the political impact of international support.

International organizations and foreign governments can assist in all phases and elements of Taliban reintegration. Support for DDR and security sector reform (SSR) by international organizations, such as the UN and the World Bank, and governments is well established. Foreign donors have funded various programs and provided technical guidance or even run them. Building up the security sector has seen strong international involvement since 2001. Supporting the transitioning of rebel groups to peaceful political actors—including diplomatic support, political and institutional capacity building, and support for inclusive dialogue mechanisms and guarantees and monitoring—has also been a popular cause with international actors.[11] These could all be potential ways that international actors can support the Taliban in their potential transition. It is hard to envisage Afghanistan managing such a process without international assistance in

the political, economic, and military spheres; indeed, since 1990 few countries have, even those enjoying substantially more financial resources than Afghanistan.

Perhaps the most important dimension of international support would be how international actors position themselves politically. High levels of foreign government funding, technical support, and troops until now have arguably incentivized greater levels of violence, given the vested interest Afghan factions have in perpetuating the military campaign against the Taliban and thus securing continued foreign funding. During peace negotiations, the international role would ideally push in the opposite direction: foreign powers would create incentives for power sharing and demilitarization, most importantly by abandoning the narrative of the Taliban as the enemy, and by offering to politically and fiscally support an inclusive government and security forces. The posture of the United States and other countries toward the Taliban clearly would need to change. In turn, the Taliban would need to accept US assistance and perhaps even its troops on Afghan soil, though the United States might need to put withdrawal on the table during negotiations.

Military Integration

Military integration—integrating rebels in the army or police or merging both forces—is a common way to integrate former anti-government forces after a peace agreement. Katherine Glassmyer and Nicholas Sambanis assert that military integration implies that the peace agreement, rather than being guaranteed by third parties, is "self-enforcing" because "each party retains some self-defense capability to discourage unilateral defections from the agreement," even if an external guarantor can still provide key support.[12] Several authors on military integration emphasize the symbolic value of politically inclusive security structures: the integrated security institutions become a symbol of national unity.[13]

As discussed above, the current political settlement in Afghanistan is already underpinned by an informal power-sharing arrangement between non-Taliban factions in the security sector. Influence in the security sector allows those factions to dispense patronage to followers, deter rivals, and often contributes to their election campaigns. Thus, a peace agreement with the Taliban would almost certainly include some provision on military integration, which could be a top Taliban demand. A share in the security sector would be key for their future political power. It would also address a root cause of the conflict: their leaders and commanders' original exclusion from the army and police, and the harassment (or worse) that many subsequently suffered at the hands of current security-sector officials. Last but not least, in view of the weak economy and the relatively high numbers of unemployed or underemployed young, the security sector is by far the largest employer (at least while international funding holds up) in a country that offers few other job opportunities.

The security sector's importance for all factions means it will probably be one of the most contested issues during peace negotiations: every faction will try to include loyalists even while resisting plans to demobilize those already inside. If the security forces stay the same size, integrating Taliban commanders and fighters will mean that others lose their jobs. This pattern would be even more stark in the likely event that funding shortages and donor lobbying lead the

RECENT EXAMPLES OF MILITARY REINTEGRATION

Country and Agreement	Type of Reintegration	In the Afghan context, this would imply ...
Burundi Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement (2000)	Full military reintegration	Merging the Taliban into a reconstituted Afghan National Defense and Security Force
Tajikistan General Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and National Accord in Tajikistan (1997)	Reintegration of intact military groups	Integrating entire Taliban units into existing state security forces without breaking their command structures
Nepal Comprehensive Peace Agreement (2006)	Reintegration of individual fighters	Reintegrating insurgents as individual Taliban commanders and fighters into existing state security forces

force to shrink after the war. The Taliban is unlikely to demobilize its men as long as demands regarding the security sector—their integration in it and possibly other reforms—are not met.

Main points of contestation are likely to include: the sequencing of agreements on security-sector reform and demobilization initiatives, whether the Taliban movement and the ANDSF will merge into new security forces or Taliban commanders and fighters will join a reformed ANDSF, the organization of the new or reformed security forces, whether Taliban units integrate wholesale or individually, numbers and specific identities of commanders and fighters to be integrated, territorial assignments, how ranks will be determined, and how vetting will happen. Clearly these negotiations will be strongly shaped by decisions regarding the size of and funding for the future security forces.

Afghanistan's history provides no examples of organized military integration after a peace agreement. Other cases that might be relevant include Nepal's 2006 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, Burundi's 2000 Arusha agreement, and Tajikistan's 1997 agreement between President Emomali Rahmon and opposition leader Said Abdullo Nuri, though of course any lessons would have to be adapted for Afghanistan.

BURUNDI: COMPREHENSIVE REFORM OF THE FORCE

Burundi offers a relatively successful case study, at least until the 2014 crisis. The 2000 Arusha agreement included provisions on SSR, including the principle of ethnic parity in the security forces. The civil war pitted a minority Tutsi-dominated security sector against rebel groups dominated by the majority Hutus; the principle of ethnic parity helped resolve—at least temporarily—

a root cause of the conflict. Although not all rebel parties had signed the 2000 agreement, the SSR provisions in the Arusha deal, together with pressure from foreign mediators, appear to have encouraged those rebels who did not sign to enter into later agreements with the government. With international assistance, rebels integrated into reconstituted national security forces—the National Defence Force and a new police force, the National Police. This process included leaders from all sides.

In sum, Burundi is an example of a rebel army merging with the state's security forces on the basis of ethnic quotas (in sharp contrast to neighboring Rwanda after its civil war in the 1990s, where reference to ethnic identity was forbidden) and joint management of that process, ensuring buy-in from previously warring parties. One of the dangers of the current political crisis is that President Pierre Nkurunziza, having changed the constitution to extend his term in office, seeks to undo the Arusha power-sharing balance. Since the crisis, there are signs that the ethnic contract underpinning the security forces is fraying.[14]

Full integration into a reconstituted security force with new chains of command outside factional influence—such as in Burundi—is more invasive for all sides because new, integrated structures would need to be established. In Afghanistan, this would be politically and technically challenging. That said, full integration would likely be more sustainable than other paths. It remains to be seen, however, how the political allegiance of fighters and commanders—which clearly would not disappear—would be managed. In Burundi, the Arusha agreement put forward the principle of security force members not being politically engaged, yet "slots have in fact been allocated on the basis of past political affiliation. . . . When speaking with soldiers [in 2011] one gets the sense that such affiliations remain highly relevant."[15] In Afghanistan, posts would probably be allocated on the basis of past political affiliation, in which ethnic and tribal dimensions can play a major role alongside a shared background on the battlefield or other ties, and the various factions would presumably strive to keep these allegiances alive.

TAJIKISTAN: REINTEGRATION BY INTACT MILITANT GROUPS

Tajikistan provides an example of successful *illiberal* military integration (successful in that there has been no return to civil war since). Instead of calling for the demobilization of anti-government forces and the dismantling of command-and-control structures, the 1997 peace accord between President Emomali Rahmon and opposition leader Said Abdullo Nuri provided for the collective integration of opposition forces into the army and police, along with a modest DDR program. High-level commanders were awarded attractive positions in security and other ministries, and under the agreement, combatants would follow their commanders into the security forces. These measures, together with economic benefits, created trust among former fighters and commanders in the peace process as well as a sense of security. President Rahmon overlooked corruption and criminal activities of the integrating former combatants and suspended transitional justice. In later years, he reestablished the state's monopoly over use of force through co-option and coercion, concentrating political power in the president's office, weakening the political influence of former opposition commanders, and gradually ridding himself of rivals. Opponents did emerge initially, but were later suppressed.

Although the anti-government forces and the state's security forces did not merge in Tajikistan as they did in Burundi, the anti-government forces nevertheless initially trusted the peace process because their units were integrated wholesale into the security forces, offering them a guarantee of influence in the postwar security sector. This approach, however, has institutionalized a

> Nepal exemplifies a military integration that the Taliban would likely wish to avoid. Negotiations were drawn out over six years and encountered numerous obstacles. The Maoist leadership had wanted to integrate its units wholesale into a new army, but those demands were rejected by senior officials within the Nepalese Army.

"system of corruption, patronage networks and shadow business activities," jeopardizing the fundament of the state.[16]

This option has several downsides for Afghanistan. First, the gap in professionalism between the foreign-trained ANDSF and the Taliban is much larger than that between the Tajik army in the 1990s and its opponents at the time. Without considerable additional training, respective units would operate in vastly different ways, complicating the new forces' ability to work as a coherent unit. Second, many existing local conflicts would not be resolved: Taliban commanders and fighters are often fighting against rivals who control the local security sectors. If units are integrated wholesale into the police, as units of the Afghan Military Forces were after the earlier DDR process, this could again mean that local security sectors would remain dominated by a limited number of factions—a recipe for more conflict. Third, this approach could, as in Tajikistan, lead to further institutionalization of corruption, patronage, and illegal business activities. Fourth, existing chains of command would remain intact, making the army more vulnerable to fracturing and the state to collapse in the event of hostilities among factions.

NEPAL: REINTEGRATION ONLY BY INDIVIDUALS

Nepal exemplifies a military integration that the Taliban would likely wish to avoid. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed in 2006 by the Maoist and seven other major political parties included a provision on the integration and rehabilitation of the 19,602 UN-verified Maoist fighters. Former combatants were offered several reintegration tracks, including, if they were eligible, into the Nepalese Army. Initially most Maoists intended to join the army, but only 1,441 (7 percent) were eventually integrated into the security forces.

Negotiations were drawn out over six years and encountered numerous obstacles. The Maoist leadership had wanted to integrate its units wholesale into a new army, but those demands were rejected by senior officials within the Nepalese Army, among them then Chief of Army Staff Rukmangud Katwal and the Nepali Congress. In November 2011, after long negotiations—over the number of combatants to be integrated, the standards for their integration, the determination of rank and prospects for promotion, and the role of the former combatants in the army—it was agreed that a maximum of 6,500 former combatants could be integrated individually. They would enter a specially created general directorate under the Nepalese Army tasked primarily with infrastructure development and rescue and relief operations. They would constitute 35 percent of that force.

The years of difficult negotiations, however, had instilled fear among the former fighters that they would be discriminated against within the army. They also felt let down by their leaders' acceptance of educational criteria for entry, leading to them being evaluated on the basis of their performance in a system that they had fought against. Eventually, among some hard-line Maoist factions, the option to integrate in the security forces came to be viewed as surrender. These factors help explain the low numbers that eventually chose this option.

In short, demands from rebel leaders (merging of the armies, integrating units wholesale, not having to meet Nepalese Army standards) were rejected; negotiations took a long time; the Maoists were cantoned and lost military leverage; and eventually only a small group of commanders and fighters were integrated individually into a mostly nonkinetic part of the army, which remains largely unreformed. Such a model—integrating Taliban commanders and fighters individually into the ANDSF—is unlikely to hold much appeal for a movement of the Taliban's strength. The Taliban would almost certainly reject such a path because it would, in effect, leave the movement powerless after the peace deal, squander any potential influence in the postwar security sector, and leave control in the hands of anti-Taliban factions.[17]

KEY QUESTIONS

The experiences with military integration in Burundi, Tajikistan, and Nepal, despite very different settings than in Afghanistan, clarify what military integration could potentially look like: the merging of Taliban into a reconstituted security force to achieve an integrated force down to the individual level (Burundi), factional integration into the ANDSF via wholesale integration of units and appointments to top positions in the security sector (Tajikistan), or reintegration by individuals in a largely unreformed army (Nepal). These examples show some of the key issues that would determine whether a military integration program succeeds: whether former enemies will want to work together, whether the peace agreement offers clarity on SSR, whether the Taliban can obtain local influence, how integration is managed, and what the size of the security sector would be.

Former Enemies Working Together

In all three examples, former enemies ended up working alongside each other, though with varying levels of success.

Will the Taliban and current ANDSF personnel want to work together? On the one hand, years of fighting and enormous animosity between the parties suggest not. On the other, Afghanistan's history suggests that commanders tend to be fairly pragmatic in this regard. The 1987 National Reconciliation Programme under the Najibullah government saw no fewer than sixty thousand former mujahideen becoming pro-government militias by 1990.[18] In 1992, when Najibullah's government collapsed, many commanders in the security forces joined the mujahideen. The Taliban gained ground in the 1990s by co-opting and accommodating enemy militias.[19] Similarly, in 2001 Taliban commanders joined the US-funded anti-Taliban militias en masse.

This history suggests that even should many Taliban commanders and fighters currently reject working in security forces that include current ANDSF members, under the right conditions their stance could change. The same applies to ANDSF members who now assert the Taliban is their mortal foe.[20] Most important, various factions will want to obtain or keep a share in the security sector if others do, and no one will want to demobilize if their rivals do not. If, therefore, in the context of a reorganization of the security sector, some commanders and fighters will need to be demobilized (for example, because they are not eligible or there are not enough positions), the timing and sequencing of any initiatives would be crucial—armed rivals often would have to demobilize simultaneously.

Clarity on SSR in the Peace Agreement

A key difference between the military integration cases in Nepal and Burundi—similar strategic settings at the outset in the sense that rebel forces had fought government armies to a draw on the battlefield—was that the Nepalese 2006 agreement was vague on military integration and the Arusha accords established a clear rule of ethnic parity.[21]

The Nepalese Army used the vagueness of the peace accord on military integration to relinquish as little power as possible to the Maoists. Much the same has happened with the also vague 2016 Hezb-e Islami peace deal, in that two-and-a-half years later the military integration of former Hezb insurgents has still not advanced. The vagueness of the peace deal has enabled government factions, for different reasons, to successfully resist the integration of former insurgents that would lead to those insurgents' gaining factional influence (which would be the only way to level the playing field given that other factions retain the influence they had). In contrast, in Burundi clarity on ethnic quotas in the Arusha agreement facilitated military integration and helped mediators persuade factions remaining outside the agreement to come to the table. Clarity on military integration in a peace agreement, including on quotas (in Afghanistan factional rather than ethnic), is therefore important.

Local Taliban Influence

The Taliban would presumably seek influence in all parts of the security sector. Its leaders and commanders are likely to regard influence in local security sectors as key, both because many Taliban and many of the communities that have lent the movement support have experienced the predation of local security officials firsthand, and because the local security forces offer opportunities for profit. The movement is thus unlikely to be satisfied with integration into a newly created static division, as the Maoists in Nepal were. The Taliban would instead likely seek a presence in the police force and in any government-supported militias. Such a presence would have to be carefully balanced with that of other factions. Power sharing in local security sectors will provide important guarantees for the sustainability of local political settlements.

Managing Military Integration

The management of any military integration process would have to include representatives from the Taliban as well as other affected factions. Other peace processes have established joint management mechanisms. The Burundian peace process saw the creation of a Joint Ceasefire Commission and an Implementation Monitoring Committee to, respectively, oversee compliance with cease-fire accords and implement peace agreement provisions, including on DDR and SSR. (The Joint Ceasefire Commission was a subsidiary of the Implementation Monitoring Committee.)[22]

In Afghanistan, the Hezb-e Islami peace process saw the establishment of a Joint Implementation Commission, which included Hezb-e Islami members, as a section within the Afghan High Peace Council. This commission oversees implementation of the peace deal and carries out decisions taken among the National Unity Government and Hekmatyar's faction of Hezb-e Islami through eight subcommissions, including one on military integration. Such joint management mechanisms can be a confidence-building measure, a first platform for the different parties to learn how to work together.

It is likely that the Taliban would retain control over those parts of the integration process internal to the movement. Its leaders are likely to be responsible for pre-selecting commanders and fighters to integrate into the security forces. As part of the implementation of the 2016 peace agreement, Hezb-e Islami similarly has drawn up a list of commanders and fighters that it wants to see integrated.

Previous DDR programs in Afghanistan have not involved cantonment because of the country's geography (and a relatively small population spread out over a large and mountainous country). It would also not be advisable for future programs. Many, especially low-level, commanders and fighters operate part time and within their communities. Cantonment would inhibit self-demobilization and cut them off from their communities and homes. It would also raise the question of who to canton. Including only the Taliban would likely be unacceptable to them—it would be too similar to a surrender and would quickly mean they would lose military leverage and potentially expose themselves to reprisals. Cantoning all armed groups would be practically impossible and probably also dangerous. Last, cantonment sites can create dependency, leaving ex-combatants then reluctant to return home, as in Nepal.

Size of the Security Sector

A major factor in negotiations would be the size of the security sector. In many instances peace agreements have led to the downsizing of armies—in South Africa and El Salvador, for example. In Uganda, however, the state army, into which former rebels integrated, expanded. Some observers view this as a factor in preventing a return to war.[23] In addition, an examination of case studies and literature on military integration suggests that states with a relatively high capacity for accommodation are more likely to accede to a military merger in the first place.[24] In Afghanistan, keeping a large army and police force, or even enlarging them to incorporate parts of the insurgency, is probably a prerequisite for political factions to allow the Taliban a share of the security forces. Of course, such a force would pose challenges in terms of sustainability, particularly of funding.

International Support

The role of international actors in military integration is also pivotal, especially in Afghanistan. In general, international mediation positively affects decisions for military integration.[25] Certainly, in all the relatively successful cases of military integration in Mozambique, Sierra Leone, and Burundi, international support played a major role—whether mediation, technical assistance, military, or (in all cases) financial involvement. By contrast, the "half-baked" military integration in the Democratic Republic of the Congo after the 2002 Pretoria accord is partly attributable to a lack of coordinated international assistance and inadequate funding. The outcome—a military with "several unintegrated units and separate spheres of influence intermingled with the integrated command and brigades"— could easily be replicated in Afghanistan if foreign donors do not support the process effectively.[26]

Given that the Afghan state security forces are already mostly externally funded, the United States, as principal donor, would ultimately take the main decisions regarding military integration, which would also depend on Taliban acceptance of American funding. Put simply, the success of military integration likely hinges on the Taliban agreeing to join the group of American-supported factions in Afghanistan. The only alternative would be for another comparatively rich and willing international backer to be found. There may, however, be significant tension

between the US desire for a peace dividend (namely, less money spent in Afghanistan when the war is over) and the need for significant funding for security forces to make a peace deal stick.

Civilian Reintegration

Next to a military integration program, a parallel program could assist commanders and fighters who are not interested in or ineligible for joining the security forces to reintegrate into civilian life. This is also what happened, to varying degrees, in Burundi, Tajikistan, and Nepal as well as many other postconflict countries.

SOCIOECONOMIC REINTEGRATION

Traditional DDR programs generally emphasize socioeconomic reintegration. The UN Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS), for example, define reintegration as

> the process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income. Reintegration is essentially a social and economic process with an open time-frame, primarily taking place in communities at the local level. It is part of the general development of a country and a national responsibility and often necessitates long-term external assistance.[27]

The IDDRS offers three broad approaches, which can be rolled out flexibly with respect to case-specific conditions. The first is short-term stabilization (reinsertion), which can include short-term employment. The second is ex-combatant reintegration focused on the long term through training and micro-project development. The third is community-based reintegration, which can include reconciliation activities and measures to increase local security.

A variety of reintegration programs exist (and have existed) in Afghanistan and elsewhere. The extent of reintegration support will partly depend on the resources available. Moreover, whether civilian reintegration is successful will largely depend on structural solutions to issues such as unemployment, land, other disputes, and rivals remaining armed. The health of Afghanistan's economy, which currently depends heavily on foreign funding, will also have a large role in available opportunities.

One previous program aimed at the civilian reintegration of ex-combatants was the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP). Launched in 2010, it was designed to combine reintegration efforts focusing on the rank and file (these activities ceased in 2016 when donors stopped funding due to concerns about corruption) and engagement with the Taliban's leadership (these activities are still ongoing). It took years to build the APRP's reintegration infrastructure, and it could presumably be easily revived (preventing the loss of valuable time to reinvent the wheel). Another argument in favor of building on the APRP is that the main problem is not its design, but that reintegration of the Taliban was attempted without a political settlement that included the movement's leadership to sustain it. A peace agreement with the Taliban would address this fundamental flaw. Taliban representatives would need to be included in the High Peace Council and its Joint Secretariat and its revived provincial counterparts. The patronage system—with patrons in key positions providing for their followers—could thus work to the advantage of reintegrating Taliban commanders and fighters and their communities rather than against it, as the APRP did in the past.

On the other hand, any association with the APRP—which was essentially a surrender mechanism for the Taliban—may be unacceptable to Taliban representatives. The term DDR more generally has a bad name in Afghanistan, as in many other countries. It also may not accurately reflect the transition process that ex-combatants will go through. Disarmament is unlikely, certainly not before other phases are addressed. Demobilization may happen only in name: usually commanders and fighters go home soon after hostilities are over, but men can be quickly remobilized because they remain part of the same patronage networks. In other places, different names have been used, including decommissioning (Northern Ireland), management of arms and armies (Nepal), and demilitarization (El Salvador).[28] Whichever format and name are chosen, it is crucial that the Taliban and any other affected factions are part of the management of the process.

Limits of Reintegration

After many years on the battlefield, laying down weapons and returning to civilian life could be a daunting prospect for Taliban commanders and fighters. Some might seek opportunities to return home, but many may try to stay armed, especially if rivals do. This pattern was one factor undermining previous DDR programs in Afghanistan. Jobs in the formal or irregular security forces are likely to offer the easiest transition from insurgency and the best prospects for regular incomes, given that the state remains the best-funded part of the legal economy. But commanders without good political connections may see little advantage to taking the civilian reintegration route. If their reintegration into civilian society fails, these men may return to insurgency, depending on whether options to do so in their area exist. Alternatively, they may turn to criminality to make ends meet.

The Hezb-e Islami example is instructive. Many low-level Hezb commanders have been waiting for better times at home. Because Hezb-e Islami was low on resources and because many of its former commanders grew old, many did not return to the battlefield. Others, however, joined the Taliban—as did many of their sons.

If, after a peace agreement, Afghanistan experiences some years of relative stability, interest among war-weary commanders and fighters to integrate in civilian life may grow, particularly as they age. Taliban and other commanders often indicate that they are tired of fighting, which was also clear during the Eid al-Fitr cease-fire in June 2018, when violence decreased significantly and many Taliban commanders came into cities and provincial capitals. International support for longer-term socioeconomic reintegration is therefore crucial.

POLITICAL REINTEGRATION

Politics may offer an avenue for reintegrating not only Taliban leaders but also commanders operating in the provinces and districts. How mid-level and local commanders and fighters could enter civilian politics would depend in large part on what their leaders agree on with other factions regarding the political and electoral systems. Exploring the potential positions on such issues and the potential scenarios of the political reintegration of the Taliban movement as a whole is beyond the scope of this report.[29] It is likely, though, that the relevant issues for the Taliban's ranks will relate to, first, whether Taliban leaders gain top positions in a new government and how that government would come to power; second, how the Taliban would organize for and fare in elections; and, third, the degree to which further power would be devolved to the provinces.

A Taliban militant shakes hands with an Afghan Army soldier in Herat during the Eid al-Fitr cease-fire in June 2018. (Photo by Jalil Rezayee/ EPA-EFE/Shutterstock)

Key Positions

Whether Taliban leaders gain key positions in the national government will be the most important question for the integration of mid-level commanders and their fighters. As described, patronage will likely be the main reintegration vehicle for the Taliban across society. If a presidential system is retained—as opposed to a parliamentary system that many non-Pashtun factions demand—the president's personality and politics will likely be critical to the decision. Whereas President Karzai adopted a so-called big tent policy, President Ashraf Ghani has found it harder to accommodate other factions and power brokers, especially those with a military past. Whether the Taliban would itself field a presidential candidate in elections and who that candidate might be are unclear—assuming that the president is still directly elected, which seems probable if the presidential system remains.

Unlike other Afghan parties and politicians against whom they would compete, the Taliban have had no previous experience with elections. Any vote would test its cohesion and social legitimacy. But if it retains the strong internal discipline seen during the Eid al-Fitr cease-fire in June, the movement could have a significant edge over other power brokers, political parties, and coalitions. The movement has an organized presence in most provinces through a shadow government, and Taliban commanders at the provincial level and below could benefit from their current entrenchment in local life in the districts they control or contest to win votes either by popularity or intimidation. Relative to current members of parliament, many of whom cannot travel to their provinces, Taliban commanders have the advantage of having been operating in rural villages for many years, in close proximity to potential voters.

Devolved Power

Another question for mid-level commanders is the degree to which power would be devolved from Kabul to the provinces. Pashtun parties and leaders have traditionally favored a strongly centralized system. But for insurgent commanders in the field, many of whom already enjoy considerable autonomy, the devolution of power to the provinces could be attractive. It could somewhat reduce their dependency on their leaders' patronage. Many commanders also have experience working as shadow provincial or district governors, and although their activities

may have been more military than civilian in nature, Taliban shadow officials already also play a role in the provision of nonsecurity services, such as justice, education, and health care.[30] They could benefit from this experience, and, as mentioned, from their entrenchment in local life, while campaigning for positions in local administrations. Devolution to provinces and districts might also favor local security arrangements that could also enable the entry of Taliban fighters into local police or other security forces.

Conclusion

If the parties to the Afghan conflict initiate talks and a peace process, a key question will be how to manage local security between that time and the moment that an agreement is fully implemented—which can take years. Some form of shared security model appears to be the most feasible interim arrangement for Afghanistan—either through parallel security structures with an overlapping presence in provincial and district centers, or fully integrated units, involving Taliban and anti-Taliban factions, providing security.

Decisions about such provisions will shape opportunities for the longer-term reintegration of ex-combatants. If military integration is part of a final peace agreement, then it is important that interim arrangements help create space for it, or at least not erect obstacles. In this sense, the creation of fully integrated local units would be an ideal interim solution. However, such an arrangement would likely depend on US funding going to the Taliban and the insurgents accepting that funding—a potentially significant political and legal hurdle even in the context of a peace deal.

Although in a classic postconflict scenario, ex-combatants and former fighters are demobilized and reintegrated into civilian life, it seems unlikely that the Taliban—nor any other armed faction—would give up their weapons and return home defenseless, at least not anytime soon. As a result, and in view of ex-combatant skill sets, a substantial reliance on military integration seems a logical option after a peace agreement. The continued existence of the Taliban as a separate armed force next to the regular security forces—à la Hezbollah—would presumably not lead to stability because various groups would continue to vie for control over territory.

Other postconflict countries, or experts with knowledge of those countries, could offer their experiences on military integration that either the government factions or the Taliban would want to pursue or avoid. Common topics of contention include quotas for the ex-combatants to be integrated, whether the anti-government armed group integrates into the existing security forces or a new army and new police force is created, and options for retaining old command-and-control structures after insurgents transition. The scope for military integration would—as things stand today—likely depend on US willingness to keep funding inflated Afghan security forces. This, again, would be possible only if the United States and the Taliban turn a page and arrive at some form of accommodation during the peace process.

Notes

1. Unless otherwise indicated, this report is based on the author's previous work on the reintegration of nonstate armed groups. See Deedee Derksen, "Peace from the Bottom-Up? The Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program," Peace Research Institute Oslo, September 2011, www.prio.org/Publications/Publication/?x=7308; "Impact or Illusion? Reintegration Under the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program," Peace Brief no. 106 (Washington, DC: US Institute of Peace, September 2011), www.usip.org/publications/impact-or-illusion-reintegration-under-the-afghanistan-peace-and-reintegration-program; "The Politics of Disarmament and Rearmament in Afghanistan," Peaceworks no. 110 (Washington, DC: US Institute of Peace, May 2015), www.usip.org/publications/2015/05/20/the-politics-of-disarmament-and-rearmament-in-afghanistan; "Commanders in Control, Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration under the Karzai Administration," PhD diss., King's College London, February 2017; "In Afghanistan, Today's Pro-Government Militias Could End Up as Tomorrow's Insurgents," *War on the Rocks*, December 11, 2017, www.warontherocks.com/2017/12/afghanistan-todays-pro-government-militias-tomorrows-insurgents; "Hezb-e Islami, Peace and Integration into the Afghan Forces," Peaceworks no. 138 (Washington, DC: US Institute of Peace, June 2018), www.usip.org/publications/2018/07/hezb-e-islami-peace-and-integration-afghan-security-forces.

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6. Although most Interior ministers were pro-Jamiat, some, such as Ali Jalali (January 2003–September 2005) and Hanif Atmar (October 2008–July 2010), were not. Even under them, however, Jamiat retained much influence in the ministry.

7. Jonathan Goodhand and Aziz Hakimi, "Counterinsurgency, Local Militias, and Statebuilding in Afghanistan," Peaceworks no. 90 (Washington, DC: US Institute of Peace, January 2014), www.usip.org/publications/2013/12/counterinsurgency-local-militias-and-statebuilding-afghanistan.

8. David Mansfield, "Understanding Control and Influence," Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2017.

9. Skype interview with International Crisis Group (ICG) project director Heiko Wimmen.

10. The Afghan Military Forces was an eight-corps structure under the Ministry of Defense that was superimposed on the militias of the Northern Alliance and was disbanded under the first DDR program (2003–5).

11. Veronque Dudouet, Hans J. Giessmann, and Katrin Planta, "The Political Transformation of Armed and Banned Groups," Berghof Foundation, 2016.

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25. Ibid.

26. Judith Verweijen, "Half-Brewed," in *New Armies from Old*.

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28. Dudouet, Giessmann, and Planta, "From Combatants to Peacebuilders."

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