DDR in Afghanistan
WHEN STATE-BUILDING AND INSECURITY COLLIDE

This chapter reviews the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) of Afghan Military Forces (AMF) and the disbandment of illegal armed groups in post-Taliban Afghanistan. While the programmes have achieved much under extremely adverse conditions, they have only partially succeeded in their primary objective: to break apart the historic bonds tying local commanders—whether former AMF or others—to militiamen. In 2009, commanders continue to retain local authority in many areas, as they have for generations.

Afghanistan presents one of the most challenging environments in which DDR has ever been attempted, due partly to the circumstances of the 2001 war that brought the new government to power and the enormity of the challenges it faced in building a new state apparatus. The war pitted an international coalition and local Afghan commanders and their militiamen—banded together under the banner of the Northern Alliance—against the Taliban government. The Northern Alliance was a heterogeneous mix of Mujaheddin factions, warlords, and commanders with their own constituents and interests. Many militia leaders came to power in the wake of the Taliban's defeat, bringing their self-interests with them; their forces formed the basis of the AMF, an interim body set up prior to the establishment of the Afghan National Army.

When the new transitional government was formed in 2002, militia commanders occupied top cabinet positions and controlled key ministries. Problematically, they would be responsible for designing and directing the demobilization their own former militiamen. Eventually, commanders with positions in the national government would be forced to choose between maintaining their militia bases and remaining in their government posts. But this process of 'de-militarizing' the government was slow, hindered at each step from within.

Afghan militiamen show their DDR cards after handing in their weapons during a disarmament ceremony in Herat, July 2004. © Marcelo Salinas/WPN

Table 9.4 DDR phases in Afghanistan and selected outcomes				
Phase	**Start date**	**End date**	**Total disarmed**	**Total demobilized**
Pilot phase	1 October 2003	31 May 2004	6,271	7,550
Main phase 1	1 June 2004	30 August 2004	8,551	7,257
Main phase 2	1 September 2004	30 October 2004	7,169	3,733
Main phase 3	1 November 2004	31 March 2005	22,440	20,375
Main phase 4	1 April 2005	31 July 2005	18,949	23,461
Totals			**63,380**	**62,376**

Source: UNDDR (2008)

The Afghan New Beginnings Programme, as DDR was called, began in October 2003 and ended in July 2005. Targeting AMF militias alone and voluntary in nature, it consisted of a pilot phase and four main phases implemented by the UN Development Programme on behalf of the government (see Table 9.4). Reintegration training was provided but with no guarantee of employment for graduates of the programme.

DDR led to the demobilization of 62,376 AMF members and the collection of 57,629 weapons. By the end of the reintegration phase, 88 per cent of demobilized soldiers had received benefits in the form of agricultural, small business, and other vocational training. Disbanding AMF units had an undeniably positive effect on security. Security checkpoints and AMF units belonging to rival ethnic or militia groups stationed in communities were closed, removing security threats. Many AMF soldiers were released from service to their commanders, and the government coffers benefited when soldier salaries were ended. However, carrot-and-stick efforts to engage AMF commanders were not able to fully overcome the obstruction, manipulation, and fraud they used to benefit from the process.

It was soon recognized that despite its successes, DDR had not broken the ties between commanders and militiamen and that further demobilization efforts were needed. Furthermore, DDR targeted only AMF groups, and non-AMF groups abounded. The Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG) programme was designed to follow DDR and to target AMF groups that had not complied with DDR or fallen through the cracks, as well as other illegal armed groups. It began in late 2005 and is ongoing.

DIAG tactics differ from those employed in DDR. Here, disarmament and law enforcement mechanisms are used to weaken commander–militiamen linkages, with special emphasis on breaking ties between elected government officials and their associated militias. Whereas DDR provided individual benefits, DIAG uses community development projects as incentives. DIAG includes the threat of forcible compliance, though it has rarely been applied, if ever.

As of December 2008 the programme had reportedly disbanded 382 illegal armed groups and collected 42,369 weapons. Most of the demobilized groups turned out to be retargeted AMF forces rather than other illegal groups—and most of the newly demo-bilized came from Northern Alliance areas. Development rewards for compliance have been very slow in coming. To date, only five DIAG development projects have been completed.

Since DDR and DIAG were implemented, ex-AMF and illegal armed group influence has waned from its peak four to six years ago. While commanders continue to pose a threat to security and the rule of law, their military and political capabilities have been reduced, especially at the cabinet level. In the lower government, however, a significant number of members remain tied to ex-AMF or illegal armed groups.

The mounting multi-party insurgency is posing new problems for the DIAG programme. Given the spreading violence and the state's inability to guarantee security through the national army and police, commanders are increasingly unwilling to cooperate with disarmament and demobilization. There is evidence that some who previously complied are re-arming. Commanders will undoubtedly retain their authority and support until effective, non-factionalized security institutions are a reality in their areas—and this is likely to remain unrealized for some time. ◾