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## Introduction

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The broad international humanitarian assistance effort in Afghanistan during the initial stages of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), from October 2001 to June 2002, was generally successful. A major—and anticipated—catastrophe was averted by the hard work of many actors, governmental and nongovernmental, civilian and military. Refugee flows were handled effectively, food was delivered to the hungry, and the first steps were taken toward stabilizing a country that had endured decades of war. But the overall success does not mean that the process could not have been improved or that there were not difficulties along the way. The perennial questions of what groups and what individuals should play which roles in providing humanitarian and humanitarian-type assistance, particularly the appropriate roles for military personnel, came into stark relief in Afghanistan. Coordination and cooperation between various assistance providers, while sometimes immensely successful, at other times was marked by tension over respective roles and lack of mutual understanding of each actor's perceived role.

In some ways, assistance provision in Afghanistan was unlike that in past operations. The most prominent differences resulted from the fact that military operations began on very short notice, providing little opportunity to plan for the role of assistance in achieving military and political goals. Other unprecedented elements included a lack of provision for humanitarian and humanitarian-type assistance in the mandates that authorized the coalition military force's deployment, the restriction of the International Security Assistance Force

(ISAF)—which did, in its mandate, incorporate such provisions—to the area immediately around Kabul, and security restrictions on movement of U.S. government (USG) civilians. While these circumstances may or may not be repeated in the future, they should not be seen as a shift in the paradigm for humanitarian and humanitarian-type assistance provision.

There were some parallels with past operations. The presence of multiple external military forces with different mandates and missions was not unprecedented. The absence of a local central government with the capacity to impose security and the rule of law was typical of past operations, as was confusion about the chain of command within the USG and between various in-theater agencies. The evident tension between assistance providers (and not only between civilians and military personnel) also was typical, stemming from the different cultures of organizations involved in assistance provision, their disparate mandates and paradigms for assistance provision, and their perceived competition for the scarce resources of funds, media attention, local professional staff, and so forth.

There were challenges that arose in Afghanistan that military and civilian planners and policymakers should regard as likely to occur in the future. The temporal coincidence of combat operations and assistance (including that provided by military forces) may become a new paradigm. The highly selective structure of U.S. military involvement and the bifurcation between a predominantly U.S. combat force and a predominantly international reconstruction, stabilization, and assistance effort may also be repeated. U.S. and military coalition forces were considered belligerents by international organizations (IOs) and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), which hampered coordination. The ISAF, which operates under an international peacekeeping mandate, did not face this challenge. The proactive U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) involvement in assistance, including significant and early DoD budgetary commitments, is unlikely to end with Afghanistan. Future conflicts will likely require the military to maintain public order and security immediately after combat operations end, or perhaps while they are still ongoing.

Some things done for the first time in Afghanistan worked tremendously well and are likely to be repeated in the future. The unprecedented effort to involve civilian government agencies, IOs, and NGOs in aspects of planning, particularly inviting liaisons with U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) headquarters, proved an effective way to better coordinate efforts and to increase mutual understanding. In fact, the success of this approach highlighted the inability to establish similar liaisons in the field, where they could have been equally helpful.

A consistent and far-reaching problem was the absence of clear, overarching policy guidance. This was a problem among U.S. agencies, within the U.S. military, and in the nongovernmental sphere. The *ad hoc* and improvised nature of the campaign resulted from the unique circumstances of this conflict. This situation led, however, to the absence of both adequate planning and clearly articulated guidance in a number of areas. The problem was exacerbated by the absence of a recognized process by which the U.S. administration could provide such guidance to its own government agencies—old mechanisms had lapsed, but new ones had not yet been put in place. Thus, planning followed implementation, and when a concrete plan was developed, awareness of it was insufficient.

Afghanistan has the potential to teach the USG (both its civilian and military personnel and organizations) and all those who interact with it a good deal about what is and what is not effective in a complex contingency operation (CCO). How inclusive should preintervention planning be, and how can effective liaison arrangements be created in difficult situations? How can military and civilian assistance providers find a *modus vivendi* in an environment of continuing combat operations? Tension about what humanitarian-type assistance the military should provide or even whether the military should provide, as opposed to facilitate, humanitarian-type assistance (and how it terms and defines its assistance efforts) reflects a real conflict between civilian (NGO and IO) and military planners. Overarching all of this is the question of public security: Whose responsibility is it, and under what circumstances? All of these factors had, and continue to have, a major effect in Afghanistan. The extent to which all the

actors involved are willing and able to learn from the experience will help determine the success of future missions.

This report considers these questions, looking at the military, civilian USG, IO, and NGO actors' experiences in providing assistance in Afghanistan between September 2001 and June 2002. Based on the findings of this analysis, key issues are identified and recommendations for future operations are offered. It is hoped that this study will provide some guidelines that will enable a broad range of organizations to more effectively learn from Afghanistan.