



# Playing with principles in an era of securitized aid: negotiating humanitarian space in post-9/11 Afghanistan

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**Abstract:** The international community's response to reconstructing Afghanistan, following the US-led regime change invasion post-11 September 2001 (9/11), brought actors such as the military and private corporations more fully into the humanitarian sphere. As a result, the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), traditionally charged with taking humanitarian action, face a number of challenges and dilemmas. Their legitimacy and their ability to act impartially, be perceived as neutral and to maintain their independence have become increasingly constrained. How the NGOs adapt when their humanitarian space is constrained affects who, where and what aid gets delivered and on what principles. However, little is known about the dynamics of humanitarian space or how the NGOs have adapted in practice. Filling the gap in empirical knowledge might enable the NGOs to deal better with the constrained environments they are likely to encounter as the 'war on terror' continues to unfold.

This research, based on field work in Afghanistan during mid-2006, suggests the politicization, developmentalization and securitization of aid, often referred to as 'new humanitarianism', has triumphed in the post-9/11 environment. The role of the NGOs as neutral actors has been seriously undermined, not least by the NGOs themselves. Having legitimized regime change intervention, they find themselves prevented from negotiating their space with any group not approved by the architects of the new political dispensation. As the country slips towards a serious humanitarian crisis, there may be no way back from their lost neutrality. The best use that can be made of these findings is to identify what the Afghanistan experience can teach NGOs for operating under constrained humanitarianism.

**Key words:** Afghanistan, humanitarian principles, humanitarian space, NGO neutrality, relief and development, securitization of aid

## I The new 'great game'

Afghanistan (Figure 1) was used as a pawn in the strategic rivalry and conflict between the British and Russian Empire during most of the

nineteenth century. The British called this 'the Great Game'. Before this, the Persians and Mongols and, since, the Russians (again) and the Pakistanis have played similar games



**Figure 1** Afghanistan in Central Asia

Source: <http://www.irinnews.org/audiovisual/asiemap/Asia.asp>

with Afghanistan. Yet none has ever truly conquered the Afghans (Rashid, 2001).

With the launch of the 'war on terror' in October 2001, Afghanistan became once again the testing ground for a new 'great game'. The enemy in this war is not an army or a state but an abstract concept and is being fought simultaneously with military attack and, in Afghanistan, a strategy of 'aid induced pacification' (Stockton, 2002). The 'war on terror' makes the integration of large parts of the humanitarian system into the development agenda, begun in the post-Cold War period, achievable. The use of aid as an instrument of foreign policy becomes fully explicit and new tools, such as Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), are developed to manage the merged mission.

The NGOs that are traditionally charged with acting in the interests of the victims of humanitarian crisis cannot avoid being caught up in the new 'great game'. However, recent changes in development policy, practice and aid modalities, as well as bringing the military and humanitarians into the same sphere, bring in additional players such as private security companies. The result is a blurring of boundaries between different actors. This poses a number of challenges and dilemmas for the legitimacy of the NGOs and their ability to act impartially, be perceived as neutral and to maintain their independence. In Afghanistan, the NGOs express concern that their humanitarian space, which has depended on these principles being upheld, is shrinking. Who, where and what aid gets delivered is

increasingly constrained by conditions on the ground. This has serious implications for the whole humanitarian enterprise and for all those in need of assistance in the regime change interventions which have marked the post-9/11 era.

So far we know little about how the NGOs have adapted to this new paradigm, yet the understanding they acquire, decisions they make and strategies they develop on the ground will be important if the NGOs are to remain significant players in responding to human suffering in conflict and post-conflict situations. This article seeks to address this gap in empirical knowledge by investigating how the NGOs have adapted to constrained humanitarian space in Afghanistan. It asks what lessons can be learned from the experience of the past few years to help NGOs better ensure access to those in need in an era of securitized aid.

## II Understanding the new ‘great game’

The end of the Cold War ushered in a world of new and emerging paradigms which have challenged the essence of the humanitarian enterprise. In responding to the protracted violent conflicts which have characterized the post-Cold War period (Goodhand and Hulme, 1999), international interventions have typically featured both a security and a humanitarian dimension, ‘[...] a means to simultaneously contain the threat posed by state failure to the outside world and mitigate the dangers of internecine strife for a vulnerable population’ (Sedra, 2005: 2). Such interventions reflect post-Cold War policy-thinking about the relationship between humanitarian and development aid and wider political responses to conflict. It is argued that this ‘coherence agenda’ (Duffield, 2001; Macrae, 2004) which politicized and instrumentalized humanitarian aid by merging it with development and security implies, ‘the principles of impartiality, neutrality, and independence that have typically characterized

humanitarian action should be set aside in order to harness aid to the “higher” goals of peace, security, and development’ (de Torrenté, 2004).

The 2005 Human Development Report (UNDP, 2005) illustrates the extent to which the danger posed by contemporary armed conflict, and now terrorism, to international peace, stability, the rule of law, freedom, and democracy has been given new emphasis since 9/11. The 2001 Bonn Conference set out the international community’s vision for a peaceful, prosperous and rights-compliant Afghanistan. This ‘aid induced pacification’ strategy as Stockton (2002) has labelled it, conflates humanitarian and social development and makes aid policies more overtly and directly determined by Western foreign policy goals, rather than by humanitarian principles.

Operation Enduring Freedom, the US-led invasion to oust the Taliban regime, saw international military involvement in internal conflicts for regime change purposes. It moved the military from ‘supporting ally’ to ‘full partner’ in the humanitarian effort. In doing so, it continued the post-Cold War encroachment of the military into the space previously considered the responsibility of the NGOs (Barry and Jeffreys, 2002; Slim, 2003; Lister, 2004). In Afghanistan, the military, through PRTs – joint teams of international civilian and military personnel operating at the provincial level – has become engaged not only in security but also in reconstruction, support to central governance and limited relief operations. All the signs are that a PRT-type tool is a preferred option of international policy and military strategists in dealing with post-conflict situations and security and reconstruction operations beyond Afghanistan (Borders, 2004; McNearney, 2005; Perito, 2005).

Military encroachment into the space previously considered the responsibility of the NGOs has generated intense debate and much concern, particularly in the Afghan

context (see Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance [ALNAP], 2002; Barry and Jeffreys, 2002; Slim, 2003; Lister, 2004; Dziedzic and Seidl, 2005; Phelan and Woods, 2005; Sedra, 2005; Stapleton, 2005). The literature indicates that the NGOs have engaged with PRTs as an advocacy issue but fails to provide any insights into how the process has evolved or been implemented in practice. Only one study presents concrete options for NGO engagement with PRTs (McHugh and Gostelow, 2004). It is therefore difficult to understand how the NGOs have adapted to an important post-9/11 policy tool.

One of the main concerns of the NGOs is that PRTs blur the lines between civilian and military action and in so doing, compromise NGO neutrality and thus, their ability to access communities in need of aid. This is said to reduce humanitarian space. A contested and ill-defined concept (von Pilar, 1999), humanitarian space is used to convey the extent to which an environment is conducive to humanitarian operations and the principles of neutrality and impartiality (Leader, 2000; Ignatieff, 2003; Patel *et al.*, 2005; Phelan and Woods, 2005). Subject to expansion and constraint, humanitarian space has to be negotiated, agreed and achieved in 'competition' with other actors and factors which determine respect for applicable norms of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and International Human Rights Law (IHRL) (Leader, 2000; Slim, 2003). No studies were found which address the humanitarian space issue in Afghanistan in a comprehensive way.

Central to the humanitarian space concept, humanitarian principles are generating a seemingly intractable debate among practitioners and observers of post-Cold War, and now post-9/11, humanitarianism, and about the extent to which they have been discredited, redefined and remain fit for dealing with twenty-first century conflicts (Pasquier, 2001; Slim, 2002; Terry, 2002; Minear, 2003; Macrae, 2004;

Rieff, 2004; Vaux, 2004). Fox (2001: 275) argues that the post-Cold War 'coherence agenda', in which aid is linked to military and diplomatic tools in a coherent conflict-resolution strategy, creates a humanitarianism which sees apolitical, neutral, humanitarian relief as both naive and morally questionable. The greatest risks posed by this thinking, in her view, is the loss of neutrality of aid workers and hence, their access to victims; loss of independence from Western governments, seeking first to serve their own interests; as well as the emergence of a 'hierarchy of victims'. The debate between those who would have a return to old humanitarianism and those who favour the new has been brought into sharper focus in the post-9/11 'with us or against us' environment.

If the changing nature and intensity of conflict in the post-Cold War period, the erosion of sovereignty that accompanied globalization and the privatization philosophy of the time, created opportunities for aid agencies to expand dramatically their role in conflict (Leader, 2000), it has also led to a questioning of the role of the NGOs in a more complex and complicated world (Fowler, 2002; Collingwood and Logister, 2005; Sassen, 2005; Mitlin *et al.*, 2006). The UK NGOs recognize that they are at a critical point when they will have to make some strategic choices about the directions in which they will go (BOND is a network of British NGOs working in international development. The initiative is called NGOs Future Programme (see BOND's NGOs Future Programme launched April 2004). It is important that NGO policy and strategy is shaped by practice and experiences in the field, especially in conflict situations where human life is so vulnerable.

In the post-9/11 era, Afghanistan has become a testing ground for changes in development theory, humanitarian policy, aid modalities, global governance and responses to the 'war on terror'. Yet, aside from a focus on PRTs and the military, it is difficult to find published studies on how NGOs

operating in Afghanistan have adapted to the new post-9/11 security paradigm. A more comprehensive understanding of the constraints to humanitarian space, in post-9/11 regime change intervention scenarios, could provide the wider NGO community with insights into dealing with constrained environments. In an era of securitized aid, when the boundaries between civilian, military and commercial actors, war and peace, relief and development have become increasingly blurred, the NGOs have to find ways to engage with new sets of actors and conditions. The aim of this research is to fill this current gap in understanding how the NGOs adapt to constrained humanitarian space.

### III Methodology and fieldwork

Based on Leader's (2000) 'framework of respect',<sup>1</sup> this study defines humanitarian space as: 'the operating environment in which NGOs can access and deliver services to those in need based on humanitarian principles of impartiality, neutrality and independence'. The term 'humanitarian' is understood in the broadest sense to encompass both disaster and development assistance. The fundamental principles referred to in this study are: impartiality, neutrality and independence.<sup>2</sup> An NGO refers to any national or international organization constituted separate from the government and which aims to provide relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and/or development assistance.

A deteriorating security situation throughout the country during the research visit in 2006 placed considerable restrictions on physical movement and contact with possible participants. All interviews were therefore conducted in Kabul. Given the large number of NGOs with a variety of mandates, organizational structures and approaches, a sample frame for semi-structured interviews was drawn. This was based on recent in-depth research (McHugh and Gostelow, 2004) suggesting that the NGOs might adopt four possible approaches to engaging with PRTs:

- Principled non-engagement.
- Arms-length engagement.
- Proactive, pragmatic, principled engagement.
- Active, direct engagement and co-operation.

In addition to face-to-face interviews with the NGOs, at least eight key stakeholders outside the NGO sector were identified for inclusion in the study. As Table 1 indicates, 16 individuals in 12 NGOs were interviewed. Interviewees included 11 Directors/Heads of Mission, one Deputy Director, two Advocacy/Policy Co-ordinators and two Programme Managers. The Department for International Development (DfID) initially agreed to participate in the research but later cancelled the interview. Efforts to include national NGOs were unsuccessful, though the national NGO umbrella group did agree to take part in the study.

**Table 1** NGOs and individuals interviewed in Kabul, 6th–27th May 2006

Number of NGOs	12
NGO Umbrella/Representative Groups	2
Other Registered NGOs	1
UN Agencies	2
Donors	1
Total Number of Agencies Interviewed	<b>18</b>
Number of NGO Individuals Interviewed	16
Number of UN Staff Interviewed	4
Number of Donor Staff Interviewed	2
Military Personnel	2
Individuals Stakeholders	2
<b>Total Number of Individuals Interviewed</b>	<b>26</b>

Approach to PRT engagement was ascertained at interview stage when the NGOs were asked to position themselves against one of four approaches to PRTs. Table 2 indicates the types of approach adopted by head office origin of NGO. A number of rounds of purposive and snowball sampling failed to meet

**Table 2** Number of NGO participants by engagement with PRTs

<i>Engagement with PRTs</i>	<i>NGO head office location</i>			
	<i>Europe</i>	<i>North America</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Afghanistan</i>
Principled Non-engagement	4	1	–	–
Arms-length Engagement	1	–	–	1
Proactive, Pragmatic, Principled Engagement	3	–	1	–
Active, Direct Engagement and Co-operation	–	1	–	–
<b>Total Number of NGOs</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>

the target sample of two NGOs in each of four possible approaches to PRT engagement. Irrespective of stated approach, none of the NGOs interviewed are proactively co-operating with PRTs. As a result, the research cannot make any reference to motivation or experience of agencies which opt to fully engage with the military.

Interestingly, there were slight differences in how the NGOs interpreted the four categories of engagement. For example, 'arms-length' engagement included co-ordination and attendance at civil–military co-operation (CIMIC) meetings for some, for others this was considered to be 'principled non-engagement'. Only three NGOs indicated their approach to engagement has changed over time from the second to third approach. One NGO adopts the first approach for advocacy purposes and the second in the field for programme work, as a way of countering security concerns. This situation suggests that the NGOs have not, or have not had to, make significant adjustments at a practical level to the PRT tool. This is discussed later in the article.

A number of NGOs made available internal policy documents as well as published and unpublished research reports. The Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR) made available the minutes of its co-ordination meetings for the period from January 2004. The Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) was most helpful in locating relevant documents and papers held there.

Suicide bombs in Kabul, the killing of aid workers close to Kabul and intensive fighting between the coalition and Afghan National

Army and anti-government forces in the south of the country during the field visit, as well as requests from some NGOs and key stakeholders not to be identified, emphasize the currently volatile and dangerous working environment in Afghanistan. For this reason, and to adhere to the confidentiality offered to the interviewees, identification of participants is limited and some information which is deemed to carry a security risk has been excluded from the article.

#### **IV Principles under pressure**

This section presents the main findings of the research. It describes the key factors currently constraining humanitarian space in Afghanistan; examines the ways in which these undermine the humanitarian principles of impartiality, neutrality and independence; and explores how the NGOs have responded since the introduction of PRTs at the end of 2002.

##### *1 Spatial awareness under reconstruction*

There was a surprising degree of consensus among all those interviewed that humanitarian space can be defined as the operating environment in which the NGOs, irrespective of mandate, deliver aid to those in need, based on humanitarian principles. Likewise, there was agreement that humanitarian space expands and contracts. A number of possible indicators which might also be applied in other contexts and which would signify how expansive or confined humanitarian space is at any one time were identified from the research. These include:

- a) The level of understanding of what constitutes the function and motivation of an NGO among the local population/communities, local leaders and authorities, and national level leaders.
- b) Perceptions of NGO neutrality, impartiality and independence among the local population/communities, local leaders and authorities, and national level leaders.
- c) The number of actors and their mandates.
- d) The extent to which foreign policy determines aid practices.
- e) The degree of freedom of NGOs to negotiate access to vulnerable communities.
- f) The degree of freedom of NGOs to focus on victims and pro-poor programmes.
- g) The degree of freedom of NGOs to go where they wish, with whom they wish.
- h) The degree of freedom of NGOs to decide what profile they wish to adopt.

All 26 individuals interviewed, except two, both from NGOs, were of the view that humanitarian space had shrunk over the previous year with all signs pointing to a further restriction as the security situation worsens. One dissenting individual insisted that humanitarian principles are only applicable in emergency response situations but not when the NGOs are engaged in development activities. The argument ran that Afghanistan has moved to the development phase and development activities are inherently political. Donors too have switched funding away from humanitarian activities and towards development work. Interestingly, a senior member of the military establishment also insisted that the military no longer engages in humanitarian activities and chose to define humanitarian space narrowly as being specifically related to the activities undertaken during humanitarian disasters. Despite these views, the statistical and anecdotal evidence

suggests that the country still faces a serious humanitarian challenge. The ongoing and intensifying counterinsurgency and counter-narcotics campaigns were also adding to the humanitarian situation. Exasperated by the ongoing humanitarian crisis and the position of donors, one interviewee remarked:

I don't quite understand how the donors think. If you look at the Human Development Indicators for the last two years Afghanistan is something like 5th or 4th worst in world. Now, how ECHO can then say there is no humanitarian need, I don't understand....  
(NGO Respondent)

Whether or not there is agreement on the current phase – humanitarian or development – as the following quote indicates, there was a feeling among the NGOs that the concept of humanitarian space will be needed for some time.

As the situation moves into development we're looking at a wider range of activities... one of the arguments we hear is that it's no longer humanitarian. I respect that as far as humanitarian space goes it's a difficult concept but...I don't know if it becomes development space or something but I still see it as critically important for those of us who do development. (NGO Respondent)

## 2 Security constraints

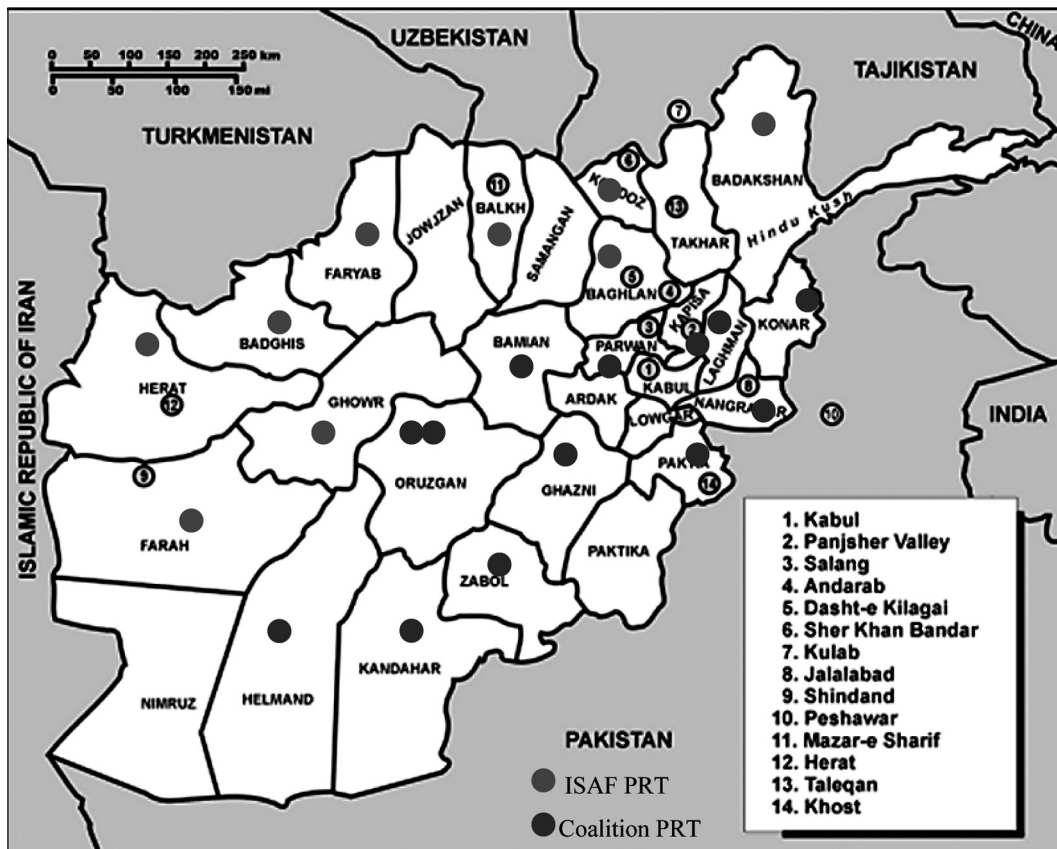
Without exception, all participants in this study identified 'security' as the greatest constraint to NGO operations. In May 2006, the NGO fatality rate in Afghanistan was believed to be higher than in almost any other conflict or post-conflict setting (Afghanistan NGO Security Office/ Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere [ANSO/CARE], 2005). All interviewees agreed that the security situation had worsened during the past year and there is no doubt that it has worsened further since this research was conducted in May 2006. Insecurity in Afghanistan has complex dynamics and comes from a number of sources as follows:

*Anti-US/anti-Afghan government elements* Anti-US/anti-Afghan government attacks are generally focused on military targets. However, it is not easy to demarcate the roles and identities between the various foreign forces in Afghanistan, including the PRTs who are involved in NGO type activities. In May 2006, a US-led coalition combat operation was waging anti-insurgency and anti-narcotics campaigns. Some North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) countries contributed troops to this mission. A 10,000 strong International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), a United Nations (UN) authorized multinational force but not a UN peacekeeping force, led by NATO since August 2003 was also operational. There were also 23 PRTs,

some under coalition command and some under NATO command, although eventually, all PRTs will be under the ISAF banner (see Figure 2). Recently, when trying to explain the differences between the coalition forces and the ISAF mission, a researcher was met with the following retort from a village leader:

You cannot tell the difference between our tribes, so how can you expect us to tell the difference between yours. As far as we are concerned they are all foreign soldiers who are Christians and they are in our country. (Sengupta and Montes, 2006)

*Hostility and fighting between warlords* Warlordism has been fuelled by the international community's post-9/11 failure to adequately



**Figure 2** Location of PRTs in March 2006

Source: [www.afghanzone.com](http://www.afghanzone.com)



and quickly disarm illegally armed groups as well as the availability of reconstruction-related contracts and associated corruption. Associated with ethnic divisions and historical power structures, warlords continue to be cultivated by foreign backers, including Pakistan and Russia (Rashid, 2006). Although President Karzai managed to sideline some influential warlords prior to the presidential election in 2004, several entered the Parliament in the 2005 elections. As late as May 2006, a number of former warlords were put forward for ministerial posts but lost when they were refused parliamentary endorsement of their nominations.

*Violence associated with narcotics production* Warlords have become businessmen, corrupt and heavily involved in the drugs trade. The narcotics trade is big business in Afghanistan and contributes between 35 per cent and 60 per cent to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (DfID, 2005). As much as 90 per cent of all economic activity in Afghanistan is in the informal sector and agriculture but these sectors have been neglected in the post-9/11 strategy for reconstruction. The effect of the narcotics industry cannot be underestimated. As an ex-senior government member stated:

The coalition and international donors made the mistake of ignoring these [warlords]. This led to money flowing from drugs and corrupting the whole system. Drugs money is a problem, it has corrupted the whole system from top to bottom, almost everyone is linked to it. The President is weak and the government has no credibility where narcotics are concerned. (UN Informant)

The narcotics problem has so far been dealt with not as a regional issue but as an Afghan problem being handled by the US and the British. Recent anti-narcotics and counter-insurgency tactics of the US and NATO have opened a rift with President Karzai and driven many ordinary people into the arms of the Taliban (Albone *et al.*, 2006; Coghlan, 2006).

During interviews, a high ranking military informant indicated that the intention is to move towards an integrated Afghan/Pakistan approach for dealing with the eastern border region. The relationship with Pakistan is most fragile with potentially the greatest impact on the future of the country. The Pakistan border region has become radicalized and the Taliban has grown more popular in recent years.

*Increased general lawlessness and banditry* The lack of the rule of law is driven by a poorly functioning and corrupt government with an ever increasing credibility gap. There has been little progress since 2001 on security sector reform. This is largely due to the wide range of actors involved in the security sector, including private security companies; the limited reach of the central government; and the ability of those with different agendas to resist reform. Observations and comments from several interviewees confirm and supplement this view on the law and order situation:

To have good governance you need to have a vision, you need good policies, made at the top. To do this you need to bring policy-makers together but they all have different mandates and can't agree....The political structure of the country is not right, there is no one monitoring the constitution or various elements of the executive, legislature and judiciary. Everyone just wants more power, everyone is suspicious of the other. Planning is weak and linkages between the local and national levels is weak. (UN Informant)

Insecurity affects the operational environment so badly in some places that the NGOs cannot work, travel, move supplies, do assessments and monitoring, and reach populations who need help. The situation had worsened throughout the country, with fatal attacks on NGOs in the north and west of Afghanistan and a greater geographic spread of attacks. The NGOs responded by trying to stay out of trouble, keep away physically from locations of violent outbreaks and keep out of the line of fire. The NGOs interviewed reported

curtailing, closing or not starting planned programmes because of insecurity concerns.

In response to the growing levels of insecurity – in the first half of 2006, 24 aid workers had been killed; 31 aid workers, including one international staff, died in 2005, up from 24 in 2004 and 12 in 2003 – the NGOs have put in place guidelines and internal and external security protocols. These include using unmarked vehicles, not signposting offices, 24-hour monitoring of staff movements, no international staff working on programmes outside Kabul, no local staff carrying identification, use of public transport for local staff, checking vehicles entering and leaving premises for explosive devices and so on.

It is absolutely understandable that the NGOs must protect their staff, their beneficiaries and their assets, but at the same time having to do so creates a sense of unease and has affected costs and turnover with associated capacity implications. More importantly, insecurity and the measures adopted to deal with it drives aid workers out of communities, reducing contact, at best, and preventing aid reaching many, at worst.

### *3 PRTs: an economy of force mission*

None of the NGOs interviewed were actively co-operating with PRTs, operating in areas where PRTs (Figure 2 indicates the location of PRTs in March 2006) were active or had accepted funding from PRTs. A number of those interviewed limited contact to an engagement with civil–military affairs at the national level through the Civil–Military Working Group and to advocacy efforts directed through Head Offices and umbrella groups in Europe and North America. This was a matter of principle as well as for security reasons. It also helps explain why none of the NGOs interviewed have had to adjust their programmes or face difficulties in accessing communities due to a PRT presence. While there was no outright refusal to engage indirectly, the attitude was

one of reluctant acceptance of the PRTs as part of the Afghan operating environment. There were indications that as the operating environment has changed – when PRTs were first introduced, foreign militaries were still belligerent forces but since elections in 2005, foreign militaries are now in the country at the request of the elected government – it may be time to reconsider the NGO approach to PRT engagement.

The debate about PRTs is also about carving out humanitarian space...I think it's not good enough to say we just have a policy that says don't work with PRTs. Maybe the outcome of the debate is that we clarify that's true or maybe there's another way, an imperative that says in some situations you need to accept that you can't do the work that's required unless you work with the PRT.  
(NGO Respondent)

It was also suggested that too much emphasis has been placed on PRTs, given that they are small players in terms of coverage and financial clout – there are 23 PRTs but 34 provinces – with staffing levels of no more than 300 military and civilian personnel per province. Research, unpublished in May 2006, suggested they take about 3 per cent of aid funds and about 10 per cent of United States Agency for International Development (USAID) finance (Pounds, 2006). As one NGO put it: 'This argument about everybody being up in arms about PRTs is over-reactionary. There are more important things for NGOs to think about...as long as PRTs are not directly impacting on programmes they're not an issue' (NGO Respondent).

However, while PRTs may not have been directly impacting on the programmes of the NGOs interviewed for the study, they are impacting on the relationships the NGOs have enjoyed with local communities. The NGOs working in areas where PRTs are active report that local officials do not understand why the NGOs do not want to work with the PRTs.

As far as local officials are concerned, everyone is working for the reconstruction of the country. Also, the NGOs reported that they find themselves having to take more and more time explaining themselves and re-gaining the confidence of local leaders and communities when PRTs are active in the same localities. They felt this was reducing their humanitarian space and in combination with the physical constraints imposed by insecurity, they found, as one NGO put it, ‘...our world is getting smaller and smaller’ (NGO Respondent).

The problem for NGOs is that the PRTs and the USAID Quick Impact Project (QIP) mechanism, which selects projects in consultation with the military in PRTs and with local leadership, look very much like NGO development activities. The military has been unsympathetic to NGO concerns that their activities look very much like NGO work, as they have been to accusations that the main purpose of PRTs is about winning ‘hearts and minds’ and, thus, making aid conditional. As one high ranking civil military affairs officer explained it:

But that’s where the line gets blurred because we’re not building roads for humanitarian purposes, we’re building roads so we have access to the area for security, it happens to have a humanitarian effect because it allows people to get around easier. So, our focus is not humanitarian, our focus is primarily security so where what we do positively affects the humanitarian sector that’s good, but it’s not what we’re here to do. (Senior Ranking Military Respondent)

At the same time, the military insists the PRTs are not doing humanitarian work but they are doing what they call development work:

I think when they [NGOs] talk about reconstruction and development they’re looking long term, 10, 20 year impact, which we stay away from....The long term development people will tell you it’s gotta be 10, 20 years, I don’t agree with that

definition, that’s not how we’re operating, you can do short term development I think but the long term developers don’t like to call it development. (High Ranking Military Informant)

The long-term aim is to move PRTs to a ‘civilian centre of gravity’, that is, to move the staff make-up from predominantly military personnel to civilian personnel who are better trained and experienced in the field of development. This removes the focus from security (although they have been heavily criticized for failing to provide security, particularly ISAF PRTs) but creates another actor with whom NGOs will have to engage.

A PRT’s presence did seem to affect how the NGOs were perceived by local communities. The NGOs have for a long time expressed concern that any association with PRTs carries the risk that aid workers will become targets for anti-government forces. There was considerable agreement that while aid workers were still not considered ‘legitimate’ targets by anti-government forces, they had moved closer to the target group. A growing resentment at the presence of foreign soldiers has started to extend to a growing resentment of all foreigners.

A number of NGOs expressed concerns that donor development agencies, embassies and PRTs themselves are approaching the NGOs asking them to open operations in areas where PRTs were due to be established. The concern for NGOs is that:

Development money will go where PRTs are – that’s not impartial or neutral, you know a lot of British money will go to Helmand, you know they have a PRT, so that already is not motivated by need, there might be other provinces that need more or as much. (Key Informant)

#### 4 Solidarity and sub-contracting

Stockton (2002) argues that the international community’s roadmap for the development

and reconstruction of Afghanistan post-9/11 is best seen as a UN-led, donor-backed 'aid induced pacification plan, which has integrated large parts of the humanitarian system into an explicitly partisan political project. Originally comprising 12 National Priority Programmes (NPP), it is now restructured into the Afghan National Development Strategy (ANDS). The National Solidarity Programme (NSP), one of only two NPPs still functioning as an autonomous programme, remains a key element of the ANDS. However, the NSP conflates humanitarian and social development. Many NGOs are supporting the implementation of the NSP. Those interviewed, who argued in favour of the NSP, said:

We see it as a good project, as a good thing, good for the communities and we share the idea with the government so then we work with them....here there's an emerging democracy and this is long term what's best for the country so we're going to work with that if we can. (NGO Respondent)

By supporting the NSP, the NGOs are legitimizing regime change, yet, this endorsement is having serious consequences for NGOs' perceived impartiality and neutrality. Several NGOs interviewed were prepared to admit to the loss of neutrality associated with their involvement with NSP, yet, none were prepared to accept that it also impinges on the principle of independence. As the earlier quote indicates, they resorted to justifications based on supporting a democratically elected government, the development needs of the country and/or coincidence with their own existing policies.

Other interviewees suggested the price for this partisan position is being paid in aid workers lives and a reduced ability to access communities, including for monitoring and the closure of programmes. 'NGOs are being identified either with government or with parties who are involved in one way or the next with either resolving conflict or in dealing with it' (NGO Respondent).

There may be no way back from this lost neutral, non-partisan status for those NGOs associated with it, if indeed not the whole NGO community. In a seemingly prescient comment on the loss of humanitarian space, one NGO observed:

Because we're now being seen as co-opted in the current political process....in 90 per cent of the north [of Afghanistan] I'm sure we'd have no problems going where we wanted to go if there was an earthquake, that's not so in the south because of insecurity and the perception that we are linked to the government. (NGO Respondent)

### *5 Show me the money, show me the NGO*

Through the NSP and the broader reconstruction efforts, the NGOs, including those with substantial private funds, have become reliant on funding from contracts linked to the Development Budget. Recent research, commissioned by ACBAR (Pounds 2006) in response to a campaign against the NGOs, played out in the media and driven by elements within the government, estimates that in the 2005–06 financial year, 1,384 NGOs received between \$400–450 million in grants and contracts, including contracts from big US companies funded by USAID and multi-lateral institutions – for example, 60 per cent (\$42 million) of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) budget was disbursed through the NGOs. Of the \$796 million spent on human capital projects, under which most NGO activities fall, \$200 million was handled by the NGOs. Under the remaining programmes in the development budget, 40 per cent (\$50 million) was handled by the NGOs. The research also suggests that 80 per cent (\$100 million) of education expenditure was disbursed through the NGOs. This kind of evidence confirms the perception expressed by one NGO that 'NGOs have actually become contracting agents for services that should be provided by government. That role is increasingly overshadowing our poverty

eradication and taking a strong stance on poverty in Afghanistan' (NGO Respondent).

Understandably, the Afghan government's strong perception is that not enough of external aid money goes through them, thus, reducing their ownership over the development process. Ironically, it seems that the Government of Afghanistan is now using a recently constituted NGO law and the re-registration process, initially supported and pressed for by the NGOs, to impede the NGOs whom they clearly perceive as getting too big a share of the aid 'pie' and having too much influence over the reconstruction process. The NGOs have complained about a lack of consistency in applying the re-registration process. Under the new law, aid workers but not contractors, are to be subject to new tax rules and the NGOs report delays in releasing funds and bureaucratic shenanigans by ministries in their dealings with them. The NGOs argue that government constrains the operating environment through these behaviours:

What's clear to me is that there is not very much humanitarian space here at the moment because the government is putting up so many rules and restrictions on the way that NGOs function...if they are wanting to control NGOs then they're reducing humanitarian space... (NGO Respondent)

#### 6 *Are we all 'mosisas'*<sup>3</sup> now?

Post-9/11 interventions in Afghanistan are characterized by the contracting of all aspects of security to a number of very large, mainly American, British, Australian and South African private security companies and reconstruction, including education and health, to private contractors, primarily large US corporations, many with close links to the Bush administration. The international community has donated US\$ 10 billion through these channels, which are overshadowed by scandal, mismanagement and corruption charges related to the awards process, the quality and value of work and lack of monitoring and

oversight (Fariba, 2006). Fariba (2006) claims they have contributed to the distortion of local markets; negatively impacted livelihoods and power relations; built useless facilities; and left little that is sustainable or self-sufficient.

Engaged in NGO-like activities, these actors have had a detrimental effect on the perception of the NGOs. A number of the NGOs interviewed felt that they have been confused with these contractors, who add to the more general confusion between the various foreign actors currently reconstructing Afghanistan: 'People don't distinguish between NGOs, donors, the UN and so forth, every organization is a 'mosisa', that is, 'an organization giving service' (UN Respondent).

The local resentment and tension generated by the extravagant lifestyles, large houses, expensive cars and huge pay awards of international, privately contracted staff, in comparison to local employees, has contributed to thefts of NGO equipment and monies, ransacking of NGO offices and even kidnappings of aid workers who are confused with contract workers. To help avoid this confusion, many NGOs have adopted a low profile, maintained simple lifestyles and resorted to use of downmarket vehicles. The impact of operating under such circumstances has contributed to increased levels of insecurity and the result has been to drive the NGOs away from close contact with communities, making it more difficult to counter the confusion and rebuild trust. As one interviewee noted: 'If NGOs have a bad image and rumours spread about you then people can't differentiate between you and others – that impacts on your neutrality. Without a field presence you can't counter it' (UN Respondent).

Nevertheless, at the same time as acknowledging this situation, most NGOs interviewed maintained that where the NGOs have been working with communities for some time, beneficiaries are clear about who is and who is not an NGO.

### 7 *New humanitarian's triumph*

The post-9/11 regime change intervention in Afghanistan and the subsequent reconstruction strategies such as the NSP, in which relief and development objectives have been collapsed, illustrate the new international policy framework, described by Duffield (2001), Macrae (2004) and others, within which international policy is defined and implemented. Fox (2001) warned of the risks posed by this new humanitarianism – loss of neutrality of aid workers and as a result, their access to victims; loss of independence from Western governments; and the emergence of a hierarchy of victims – are all evident in post-9/11 Afghanistan.

In implementing the NSP, the NGOs operating in Afghanistan are legitimizing and promoting one type of regime change over another. The war on terror's 'with us or against us' mentality means that the NGOs, having bought into the partisan project, find themselves on the side of powerful actors who, having turned into belligerents (at least temporarily), rather than underpinning humanitarian space as charged in IHL, constrain it. When USAID and the Afghan government make it clear that the NGOs ought not to negotiate access to victims with any party considered to be an enemy of the state or of international terrorism, nor provide aid where it might encourage communities to support enemies of the state or international terrorism (and by implication enemies of the US and other Western powers), they constrain traditional humanitarianism.

The difficulty the NGOs face when humanitarian relief is merged with development and a security agenda is that the ideology of development is not the same as the ideology of relief. The latter is based on the need to provide a solution in the here and now and to safeguard vital needs without necessarily considering what will happen. The former is a global moral engagement (Ufford and Giri, 2003) which

sets a purposeful, meaningful direction for the whole of humanity. As such, it shares elements in common with US political principles and its current imperialistic tendencies much debated in recent years (see, for example, Colley, 2005).

The NGOs are finding it difficult to convince belligerents and those groups and communities antagonistic and resentful of central government of their impartiality, neutrality and independence from government. As a result, access to communities in need becomes reduced, where and to whom aid is delivered is no longer based on need or on humanitarian principles and NGO legitimacy is undermined. In embracing regime change legitimization in Afghanistan, the NGOs now find themselves in a quagmire, partly of their own making, caught between those opposed to the current political dispensation and the architects of it.

Ironically, some might say hypocritically, in post-9/11 interventions when relief has become absorbed into development, it is to the humanitarian principle of neutrality that the NGOs turn for legitimacy. However, the danger for the NGOs, as can now be seen in Afghanistan is that there may be no way back from the neutrality lost through explicitly endorsing regime change. If the endeavour fails and they cannot distance themselves from the sentiment that the 'war on terror' is nothing more than the 'defence of Western interests as the basis of world security and on the proclamation of the superiority of Western values over other kinds of states and regime' (Remacle, 2004: 61), they risk not just moving closer to the target group, as in Afghanistan, but becoming it. While most NGOs interviewed for this study admit to being used as instruments of foreign policy, few acknowledged the role NGOs have themselves played in eroding humanitarian principles. Few, if any, have grappled in meaningful ways with the challenges and dilemmas posed by new humanitarianism to their humanitarian

principles and the long-term implications of this for the nature and role of their organizations.

#### 8 *What does aid funding really buy?*

The financial structure of the aid system has been critical in merging relief and development and shaping the coherence agenda (Macrae, 2004). Under new humanitarianism, aid is more politically defined and in subtler ways than previously. This is illustrated by the way in which donors in Afghanistan are making funds available for development activities but not humanitarian activities, when clearly there is an ongoing and worsening humanitarian situation in large swaths of the country. Defining the post-9/11 intervention as being at the development phase is politically important to deliver a success story to voting populations, and help sell a US-led invasion on the promise of creating a prosperous, peaceful, rights-based democratic Afghanistan.

In Afghanistan, we are seeing the effects of securitized aid and the ways in which it can exacerbate the differences between the NGOs and contribute to them arguing amongst themselves, constantly being on the defensive and less focussed on the victims who they are mandated to serve. Some NGOs refused to accept the NSP funding on the basis that it compromises the principle of independence and makes them direct implementers of Western foreign policy, which in the current context may endanger aid workers' lives. Others interviewed for this study have developed arguments that seem to allow them to accept NSP without having to acknowledge it compromises their independence. They offer two rationalizations: NSP is development money, development is inherently political, so no need for humanitarian principles which apply only in humanitarian crises; and by maintaining some balance between donor funding and other 'own' or publicly raised and hence, untied funds, they maintain independence from their donor's foreign policy objectives. What balance of funds between different sources is

required to preserve an NGO's independence is unclear.

A number of NGOs interviewed for the study indicated that the NGOs are being asked to go where PRTs are located, and some expressed concern that donor funding will follow donor PRTs rather than humanitarian or development needs identified by the NGOs. The NGOs in the study often expressed opposing views on the impact of aid funding closely aligned with the regime change intervention, in particular the NSP.

As the NGO sector has expanded in response to conflict and new aid modalities, NGO legitimacy and integrity have been challenged. Post-9/11 interventions in Afghanistan have been characterized by the entry of private corporations into sectors traditionally the preserve of government and/or NGOs, namely, health and education. These actors have blurred the boundaries between the NGOs and non-NGOs, they have contributed to corruption and failed to deliver appropriate and sustainable aid based on need (Pounds, 2006). This has had serious consequences for NGOs' security, legitimacy and integrity. The blurring of boundaries also contributes to tensions between the NGOs and the Afghan government over the way aid is channelled. The NGOs have found themselves on the defensive and have responded by developing a Code of Practice and commissioning research on aid flows. In some senses the NGOs, less powerful and more fractious than private corporations but with more kudos as a reputable aid delivery mechanism, have become the 'fall guys' in Afghanistan and their space has been further undermined by government rules and regulations.

#### 9 *Military might and PRTs*

'British soldiers are here, today they get the order to build, tomorrow they get the order to shoot' (Key Informant). This comment captures the fundamental paradox of mixing arms and aid. To dismiss PRTs simply as a new version of an old phenomenon;<sup>4</sup> a minor

player in terms of personnel (between 50–300 personnel); coverage (mid-2006, in 23 out of 34 provinces); and a conduit for funds (3 per cent of aid funds and 10 per cent of USAID finance<sup>5</sup>), as some interviewees did, misses the evolution CIMIC has undergone in the post-Cold War period and its metamorphosis into a tool of strategic importance in international regime change interventions in Afghanistan post-9/11. Allowing them to take the policy centre-stage underplays the way in which both humanitarian and now development aid have become militarized in the post-9/11 environment.

However, their effectiveness as a policy tool remains in question. When the focus of the ‘war on terror’ shifted to Iraq in 2003, PRTs appeared a logical, cost-effective answer to a post-conflict scenario that demanded interrelated actors and responses. The PRTs were left inadequately resourced, inexperienced in nation building and with a constantly changing and arguably confused mandate. This allowed lots of the marginal players – Pakistan, China, India, Iran, Russia – to play a side game of geo-politics in Afghanistan. The results can be witnessed in the ongoing and growing humanitarian and conflict situation in Afghanistan today, with knock-on effects on NGOs and aid delivery.

The pressure, highlighted by several interviewees, for the NGOs to go where PRTs are locating, indicates the way in which aid can become subject to donor funding priorities and in this case, military decisions. However, it is also important to remember the PRTs are not the only military presence in Afghanistan. Becoming a full partner to the humanitarian endeavour in Afghanistan has moved the military right into the heart of governance and development, with serious implications for where, when and to whom aid gets delivered and on what principles.

The security agenda dominates not only through the PRTs but also through the ongoing counterinsurgency campaign alongside a counter-narcotics campaign and an

unconventional peacekeeping reconstruction and governance mission involving a number of foreign militaries. This wider military campaign also has effects on the ability of the NGOs to operate on the basis of humanitarian principles and in some cases, to operate at all because it blurs the boundaries between military actors trying to take on differing roles, which in turn causes confusion between militaries engaged in NGO-type activities and the NGOs themselves. Either way, the securitization of aid has a damaging effect on the role of the NGOs as impartial, neutral, independent humanitarians.

#### *10 A game of words*

In the Afghanistan context, different stakeholders took the same concepts and expropriated them for their own interests. For example, the Dziedzic and Seidl (2005) study exposes the very different perspectives taken by the military and the NGOs on the PRT process. Some NGOs interviewed for this study took different perspectives on the application of humanitarian principles, depending on whether they defined activities as humanitarian or development. Likewise, the military interviewees insisted they are not doing humanitarian work but ‘development’ work but not defined as the long-term sustainable, process-oriented endeavour understood by NGOs. This is an important point because playing with terms, labels and definitions can have direct practical and political outcomes and can be configured in the service of particular ideologies.

Arguing that it is not appropriate to speak about humanitarian work in Afghanistan because not many actors are engaged in strictly humanitarian activities is absurd in a country with an ongoing and intensifying insurgency and an appalling positioning on human development indicators. But it does fit with the donors’ political definitions of humanitarian and development aid and the conflation of humanitarian and development objectives in the ‘aid induced pacification’ strategy adopted



by the international community. It allows the NGOs to avoid confronting the thorny subject of their application and interpretation of humanitarian principles and the failure to address the aid needs of many of the most vulnerable communities. It suggests they are seeking to find their own comfort zone in the uncomfortable space of constricted humanitarianism.

Likewise, the military interviewees insist they are not doing humanitarian work but 'development' work, defined not as the long-term sustainable, process-oriented endeavour understood by NGOs but as anything that positively impacts the community. This allows them to counter the criticisms they face for blurring the lines between humanitarian and military actors and at the same time, present themselves as doing something constructive, positive and helpful for the poor people of Afghanistan because that is what development is perceived as by wider audiences. They see no contradiction or hypocrisy in achieving military aims of security and stability dressed up as NGO-type activities and use concepts and terms from the humanitarian lexicon to help them feel comfortable about doing so.

## V Factors and actors

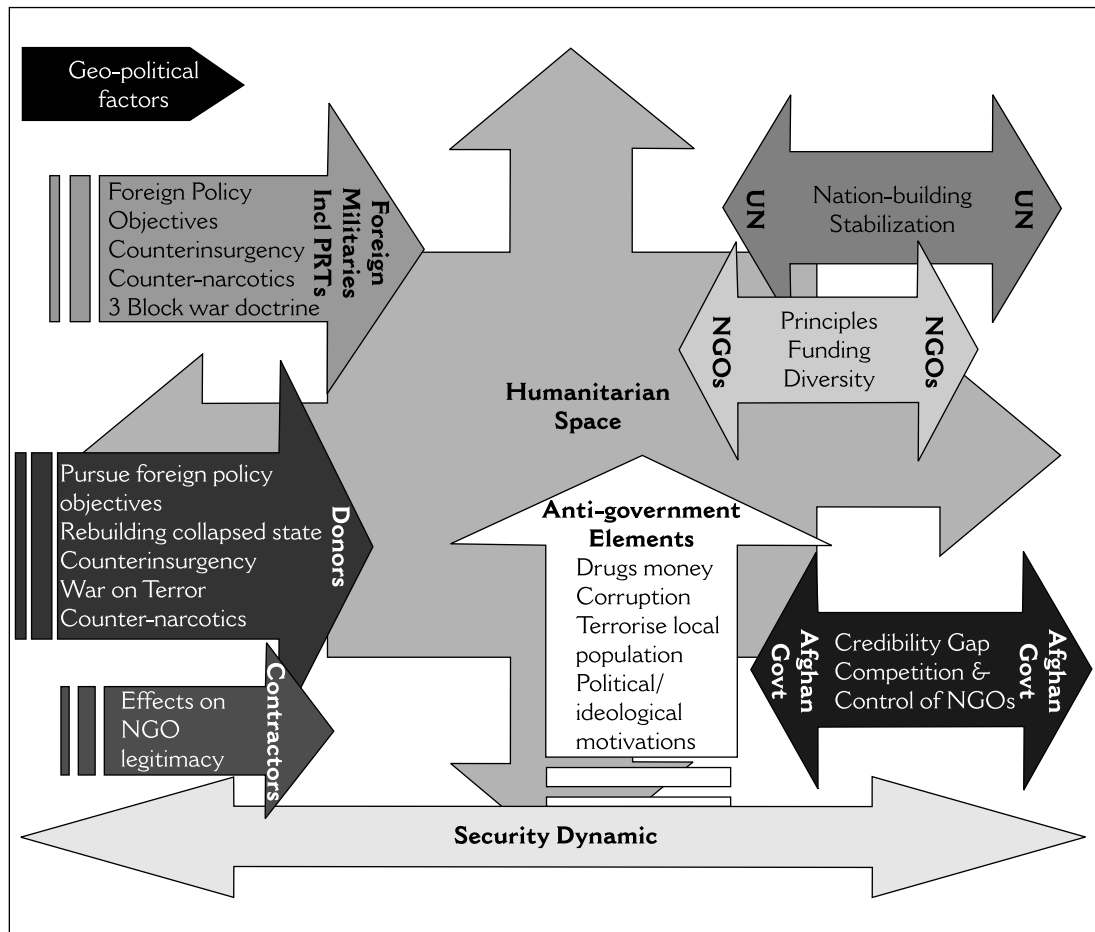
The actors and factors constraining humanitarian space in post-9/11 Afghanistan are depicted diagrammatically in Figure 3. Geopolitical factors, namely, neighbouring countries and other regional actors with commercial, resource and political interests indirectly affect the operating environment for the NGOs in ways that constrain humanitarian space. There is little that the NGOs can do to 'push back' the pressures of such forces. At the international policy level, the coherence agenda in which aid is politicized, developmentalized and securitized continues to directly affect the operating environment for the NGOs, also in ways that constrain humanitarian space. It will continue to do so as the major donors shift funding from relief to development and push what

Stockton (2002) has called an 'aid induced pacification' strategy. The phenomenon of 'mosisas' has contributed to reducing NGO legitimacy with an impact on respect for humanitarian principles. However, the single most obvious constraint on humanitarian space in Afghanistan is the lack of security.

The military, particularly in the form of PRTs, continues to contract rather than help expand humanitarian space. Anti-government forces directly constrain the ability to reach communities in need. The entry of new actors, primarily commercial contractors, have, in the Afghanistan context, contributed to a loss of respect for humanitarian principles. They are often confused with the NGOs and their behaviours negatively impact on the perception of the NGOs as impartial, neutral, independent and pro-poor actors. Other actors, both the government and the UN, charged under IHL with enabling, supporting and protecting humanitarian action, appear in the Afghanistan context either unable or unwilling to do so.

### *1 Game plan*

Traditionally, the responsibility for humanitarian action rests with aid agencies. As holders of that responsibility, they play a part in determining the extent of respect for applicable norms of IHL. In negotiating their humanitarian space under the post-9/11 constraints, the NGOs have adopted strategies that might be characterized as avoidance, co-option and differentiation. The security situation means there are many areas of Afghanistan where the NGOs simply cannot be present and can therefore avoid negotiating humanitarian space at the local level. Unfortunately, the NGOs can exert little influence on the forces and actors who might have greatest influence on expanding humanitarian space at a national level. Where NGOs work in areas with a PRT presence, they have, if they wish, been able to avoid direct contact with them. This position may be difficult to maintain if plans to expand the PRTs succeed. Experience to



**Figure 3** Depicting actors and pressures on humanitarian space in Afghanistan

Note: Double pointed arrows represent actors who through IHL or their own mandates are charged with protecting or increasing humanitarian space but who have been unable or unwilling to so in Afghanistan. Single headed arrows indicate actors who in Afghanistan have constrained humanitarian space by their policies, behaviours and/or actions.

date suggests that the military is disinclined to adjust its strategies in response to the NGO concerns about the impact on humanitarian principles.

By acting as willing partners in the implementation of the international community's post-9/11 'aid induced pacification strategy', the NGOs have been used as instruments of foreign policy and have called into question their own principle of independence. Those

that recognize this refuse to accept aid from donors associated with it but many others refuse to accept they have compromised their independence, choosing instead to play with definitions of 'humanitarian' and 'development'. While the NGOs may be relatively powerless to influence international policy, they will have to think about what role they play in the current financial framework. This study suggests that effects of the current

financial architecture of aid on NGO agendas is an area which would benefit from further research.

Where NGOs have made most effort in negotiating greater humanitarian space is through differentiating themselves. They pushed for a new NGO law and re-registration of NGOs, the development of a Code of Practice, dissemination of the Code and commissioned research on aid funds. At the local level, in response to insecurity and to help ensure access, they have resorted to travelling in public transport, not carrying identity (ID) cards, not marking their premises and so forth. Few of these efforts, however, could be said to have eased a constrained operating environment or challenged the forces and actors with the greatest ability to determine the extent of respect for IHL.

Based on the findings, it is possible to conclude that under the post-9/11 security framework, the NGOs will continue to be challenged by increasingly blurred boundaries between relief and development, war and peace, military, commercial and humanitarian actors. However, the concept of humanitarian space will only be useful to the NGOs if it helps them secure access to those in vulnerable communities on the basis of humanitarian principles. In the face of so many powerful forces and actors shaping the operating environment for the NGOs in the post-9/11 era, it is important to draw lessons from the Afghan 'experiment' for how the NGOs might deal with constrained humanitarianism elsewhere as the 'war on terror' turns to the 'long war'.

First though, a word of warning on the importance of putting learning into practice. In 2002, the ALNAP (ALNAP, 2002) published a list of nine lessons with direct or potential relevance to Afghanistan. These lessons were distilled from more than 50 formal evaluation reports plus key evaluative studies. Even a cursory review of the post-9/11 reconstruction of Afghanistan reveals few of these lessons have yet been heeded. Some of the lessons are given as follows:

### ***Lesson 1 Address analytic capacity issues***

The nature of the 'war on terror' means that the potential effects are far-reaching and pervasive and the activities related to it may compromise NGO programmes in ways that are subtle and hard to identify. In short, the world for humanitarians is increasingly complex and complicated. If they are to remain significant players, they must learn to better analyze and understand it. This will depend, above all else, on the capabilities and quality of staff employed in the field as well as finding ways to address staff turnover.

### ***Lesson 2 Differentiate and restore legitimacy***

Increasingly, the NGOs must answer why they are legitimate participants in policy processes. It is important that local populations understand who and what the NGOs are about. The Afghan experience suggests that this needs to be based on an ethical framework if the NGOs are to maximize their ability to deliver aid based on need, maintain the trust of communities and negotiate access to victims. Leader (2000) argues that any such framework must be an explicit part of decision-making for all agencies if institutional interest is not to dominate and that managers need to be held accountable for implementing the principles. However, before the NGOs can adequately define themselves, they must make progress on old debates about accountability, transparency, the influence of funding on their agendas and the more intractable issue of appropriate principles. It is interesting but worrying that the British Overseas NGOs for Development, *NGO Futures Programme* launch paper (Lister, 2004) barely touches on the principles debate.

### ***Lesson 3 Recognize the importance of local staff and use their expertise***

Human resource capacities have been a serious constraint for most actors in Afghanistan and the problems associated with the UN and bigger agencies 'poaching' staff from local agencies and governments is well known. At the same time, there is a tendency in the aftermath of

humanitarian crises for NGOs to rapidly expand their programmes, often without much planning, and for local and long serving aid workers to be bypassed by the appointment of expatriate staff who staff in post for relatively short periods. This is short sighted, generates resentment and ignores the knowledge, insight and commitment of local staff, who are more likely than expatriates to pay the price of conflict.

#### ***Lesson 4 Re-focus efforts on influencing the military***

As the NGOs become more dependent on donor funds and if they wrap themselves around regime change legitimization, they lose the ability to speak with authority against the policies and practices of Western powers. The NGOs in Afghanistan have learnt the hard way that, when trying to influence the military, it is necessary to focus advocacy efforts on those who are in a position to make policy decisions and they are not necessarily the military commanders on the ground. A better understanding of how military structures operate, who the key players are and how military doctrine is shaped would place the NGOs in a stronger position to challenge the changing role of the military in the post-9/11 era, as would finding a common position and speaking with one mind.

#### ***Lesson 5 Always make the victims the focus***

Ultimately, without the trust of those who are most in need of their services and without the ability to access them, the NGOs, as presently understood, are redundant. Development policy, practice and aid modalities make aid based on meeting needs less possible than previously. When the NGOs are caught up in trying to agree with common positions, defend their legitimacy, secure funds, engage with new actors, and protect their organizational interests and investments, the danger is they make decisions and expend energies without prioritizing victims or accountability to them. Keeping focussed on their mandate and the

victims of conflict and poverty will help ensure that the NGOs do not put organizational and selfish interests over the delivery of aid based on need.

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#### ***Notes***

1. Leader (2000: 8) denotes humanitarian space as: '[...] all those factors in a given context that determine the extent and respect for applicable norms of international and humanitarian law.'
2. Adopted from Guttieri (2005), the principles are defined as: Impartiality – requires humanitarian action respond according to need and without discrimination; Neutrality – requires outside actors to avoid giving military or political advantage to any side over another; Independence – implies independence from political as well as military actors.
3. The growth of the NGO sector worldwide during the 1980s, combined with inconsistent registration processes, advantages to businesses by registering as an NGO during the Taliban period and the phenomenon of 'brief case' NGOs since the fall of the Taliban has resulted in an incredible number of registered 'NGOs'. In 2004, there were 2,555 NGOs registered with the Afghan government. In February 2006, the Minister of Economy said that he had withdrawn the licence

of 1,620 national and international NGOs as they had failed to re-register. Afghans refer to all these organizations which say they are 'giving service' as 'mosisas'.

4. The 'hearts and minds' operations used by the British in Malaysia in the 1950s and by the French in Algeria from 1952–64.
5. Pounds (2006).

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