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Katariina Mustasilta, Tyyne Karjalainen, Timo R. Stewart & Mathilda Salo

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This report is the outcome of an independent research project by the Finnish Institute of International Affairs that examined Finland's participation in the stabilization and reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. The research was commissioned by the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Parliament of Finland (UaVP 61/2021).

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ABBREVIATIONS

APF:	Afghanistan Partnership Framework
AIHRC:	Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission
ALC:	Appropriations for local cooperation
ANA:	Afghan National Army
ANP:	Afghan National Police
ANPDF:	Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework
ANSF:	Afghan National Security Forces
ARTF:	Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund
CDC:	Community Development Council
CIMIC:	Civil–Military Cooperation
EUPOL:	European Union Police Mission in Afghanistan
GMAF:	Geneva Mutual Accountability Framework
HOA:	Heart of Asia
IPCC:	International Police Coordination Committee
ISAF:	International Security Assistance Force
ISIS:	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
LOTFA:	Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan
MAF:	Mutual Accountability Framework
MIGRI:	Finnish Immigration Service
MOT:	Military Observation Team
MPCC:	Military Planning and Conduct Capability
MSI:	Marie Stopes International
NATO:	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NSP:	National Solidarity Programme
OCHA:	United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
ODA:	Official development assistance
OECD:	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OEF:	Operation Enduring Freedom
OLMT:	Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team
PRT:	Provincial Reconstruction Team
ROE:	Rules of Engagement
RSM:	Resolute Support Mission
SMAF:	Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework

TMAF:	Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework
UNICEF:	United Nations Children's Emergency Fund
UNAMA:	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNHCR:	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNODC:	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

FOREWORD

This is an English translation of the FIIA Report *Suomi Afganistanissa 2001–2021: Vakauttamisesta ulko- ja turvallisuuspoliittisten suhteiden vaalimiseen*, published originally in Finnish in December 2022. The research was conducted over the course of November 2021–December 2022. Since the publication of the report, Finland has joined NATO. The very minor updates included in this English translation relate to acknowledging Finland's current membership in the alliance, as well as a reference to a recent change in immigration policy pertaining to Afghanistan.

Finland in Afghanistan 2001–2021 is a response to the Foreign Affairs Committee's mandate (UaVP 61/2021) to carry out an independent investigation into Finland's participation in the stabilization and reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. The responsible researchers at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs (FIIA) have conducted the research independently without external guidance, as required by the mandate, under the leadership of Katariina Mustasilta. The research team also included Tyyne Karjalainen, Timo R. Stewart, Mathilda Salo, Olli Ruohomäki, Aziza Hossaini, Matti Pesu and Mariette Hägglund.

The research team would like to express its gratitude to the management of FIIA for the resources and support that made the research possible. The support and confidence the research team received from Director Mika Aaltola and Deputy Director Samu Paukkunen made execution of this methodologically ambitious project possible. The methodology was key in generating perspectives other than those generated by traditional data and sources. The research team had the opportunity to focus intently on the research and was guaranteed freedom of research right from the setting of the research questions. We would also like to express our appreciation to the Foreign Affairs Committee for also guaranteeing freedom of research and for offering the opportunity to be involved in this interesting and challenging assignment.

Our research team is particularly grateful to the research advisory group for the discussions at the different stages in the research process. The discussions contributed significantly to advancing the research scope. FIIA researchers Charly Salonius-Pasternak, Katja Creutz and Kristiina

Silvan have contributed to the research process as members of the advisory group. Oskari Eronen, Ilona Kuusi, Johanna Ketola and Eoin McNamara have also played a key role in the advisory group as external experts. Programme Director Juha Jokela's keen perception in the report's editing process was of great help, and he supported the research team throughout the entire research process.

Suvi Nousiainen propelled the editing process in a high-quality, flexible manner. Esa Salminen and Lotta-Marie Lemiläinen conduced to the excellent finalization of the report, helping with proofreading, graphics and layout. Kirsi Mertala, Kukka-Maria Kovsky, Mar-Leena Kolehmainen and Emma Koponen helped with the project's practical arrangements and communication. We would also like to thank Ville Sinkkonen and Veera Laine for organizing a research seminar in the early stages of the project to discuss the research plan with colleagues at FIIA. The constructive feedback and ideas provided important encouragement for the early part of the project.

Employees from several ministries and other government representatives involved in Finland's efforts in Afghanistan facilitated the research by providing additional information on the efforts upon request. Government officials in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, the Ministry of Defence, the Finnish Defence Forces, the Ministry of the Interior and the Crisis Management Centre Finland have responded positively to our contacts and helped compile the information for the report. We would also like to thank the research team of the Afghanistan project commissioned by the Government's analysis, assessment and research team (VN TEAS), and in particular Anisa Doty, Jyrki Ruohomäki, Erkki Pekonen and Juha Pyykönen, as well as Katri Merikallio, author of a report depicting the perspectives of Afghan women on Finland's development cooperation and civilian crisis management with Afghanistan, commissioned by the National Council of Women of Finland, for engaging in fruitful discussion and consultation. The members of our research team are also grateful to the Finnish Immigration Service and to the asylum and human rights experts whose views and additional information have broadened our understanding.

Our research would not have been possible without the more than 100 people who contributed their time and insights to our study. The responses to our inquiries about interviewing or participating in workshops were largely positive, and the participants' genuine desire to be involved and reflect on the questions we asked in the light of their own experiences was strongly conveyed through the interviews and workshop discussions. We are extremely grateful for the time and participation in the interviews and workshops conducted in Helsinki, Brussels and remotely, which have

enabled us to collect extensive primary data. The respondents' openness, self-reflection and patience provided us with high-quality data and significantly added to the value of the discussions about the lessons learned from Afghanistan and Finland's efforts there.

We would especially like to thank all the participants in the workshops bringing together Finland's Afghan diaspora. Both full-day workshops were a great success, thanks to the participants' enthusiasm and Aziza Hossaini's skilful facilitation. The workshops created a polyphonic sounding board for examining Finland's operating logic and foundations. The constructive discussions during the workshops broadened the research team's understanding of the historical structure of the Afghan conflict and the challenges related to intervention. We are grateful for and moved by the participants' trust in our research team and their willingness to share their thoughts even on topics that are difficult, both socially and personally.

The findings presented in this research report are based on a careful analysis of primary and secondary data. They do not represent any official policy or the views of an individual researcher. In addition to Leading Researcher Katariina Mustasilta, the report's authors include Tyyne Karjalainen (sections on military participation and civilian crisis management), Timo R. Stewart (sections on development cooperation and humanitarian aid) and Mathilda Salo. Olli Ruohomäki's expertise significantly supported the various stages of the research process and helped, in particular, to structure the overview. Aziza Hossaini's work ranged from organizing workshops to conducting background research, as well as offering perceptive observations during the report's editing phase. Additionally, Matti Pesu and Mariette Hägglund participated in planning, background research and data collection.

SUMMARY

Finland participated in the international stabilization and reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan for nearly 20 years, contributing around 2,500 soldiers and 140 civilian crisis management experts. During this period, Finland's development cooperation funds and humanitarian assistance allocated to Afghanistan amounted to around EUR 398 million.

When Finland made the decision to join the operations in Afghanistan at the turn of 2001 and 2002, the country was living in uncertain yet optimistic times. The Taliban regime had collapsed quickly after the US-led military intervention, and the international community was broadly committed to supporting the interim administration in changing the country's course. Finland sent a CIMIC unit to Afghanistan to participate in the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and support the stabilization and reconstruction efforts. It also began to channel development cooperation funds to Afghanistan, notably through UN and World Bank programmes, and soon allocated most of its civilian crisis management resources to the European Union Police Mission (EUPOL) in Afghanistan.

In the second half of the 2000s, however, Afghanistan slid further into a devastating civil war. A decade into the international intervention, the early optimism had given way to Afghans' growing distrust of their government and the international actors. The Finnish troops, now comprising around 200 soldiers, repeatedly engaged in combat as part of the military operation that was now led by NATO and had become a party in the conflict. While the security arrangements for the international actors required increasing resources, their room for manoeuvre became significantly more limited.

After the ISAF mission ended, Finland continued to participate in the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission (RSM), which supported the Afghan security forces until the summer of 2021. Finland also remained one of the most important actors to support EUPOL until the end of the mission and took responsibility for co-hosting the 2020 Afghanistan pledging conference to support the country. Afghanistan was the biggest recipient of Finland's development cooperation funds throughout the second half of the 2010s. In August 2021, Finland suspended its extensive activities in Afghanistan in chaotic circumstances as the international community

left the country following the US decision to withdraw its forces and the Taliban's seize of power.

This research examines Finland's activities in Afghanistan by focusing on why Finland decided to engage in Afghanistan, on what its activities were based, and what can be learned from them for future crises and conflicts. The research is based on the analysis of a broad set of qualitative data consisting of interviews with 64 people who were involved in the intervention in Afghanistan or employed in related activities. Workshop discussions were also held to hear the views of the Afghan diaspora in Finland and experts. In addition, the researchers analysed public documents and previous research literature and held background discussions with experts. This research report broadly examines the consequences of Finland's objectives, the logic behind its activities and the key challenges from the perspectives of military crisis management, civilian crisis management, and development cooperation and humanitarian assistance.

Our research findings suggest that Finland's activities in Afghanistan were motivated by multiple objectives that were partly unclear and at times conflicting. Based on government reports and other public documents, Finland's primary aim was to stabilize and support Afghanistan to enhance international peace and security. The proclaimed objectives highlighted Finland's responsibility as part of the UN-led international community and its efforts to support the development of good governance and the rule of law and promote the rights of women and girls in particular. In our research, these objectives comprise a framework we call "Finland as a benefactor".

On the other hand, our analysis suggests that alongside – and over – these proclaimed objectives, Finland's participation was primarily guided by its desire to maintain and strengthen its foreign and security policy relations with the US and other international partners, as well as its effort to deepen its collaboration with NATO. Within the limits of this "Finland as a partner" framework, Finland sought to position itself as a reliable benefactor but also to gain advantage by improving its national capacities.

Finland's multiple objectives in Afghanistan might not necessarily have posed a problem in terms of the appropriateness of Finland's involvement. Indeed, at the beginning they worked in harmony as the operating environment allowed Finland to show solidarity with the US and support it in the fight against terrorism while also appearing as a humanitarian actor that promoted stability and development in Afghanistan.

However, tensions emerged between the different rationales when the situation in Afghanistan deteriorated, and the nature and outcomes of the intervention became more conflicted. In the absence of clearly and

transparently set objectives, it was challenging to build an action plan and assess the activities. One particular factor that made the planning and monitoring of Finland's participation difficult was the effort to disguise the fact that it was motivated by a desire to foster transatlantic relations and more broadly international partnerships. From the perspective of the international partnerships, it was enough that Finland participated in the intervention. In terms of Afghanistan and its development, the objectives of the various activities remained vague, unrealistic and unclear, and they received insufficient attention. Instead of critical analysis and strategic monitoring, both international and Finnish actors attempted to meet the stated objectives by highlighting the progress made in Afghanistan and keeping silent about the combats and difficulties.

It is almost impossible to assess to what extent Finland achieved its objectives in Afghanistan, because no clear and transparent objectives had been set. Based on our interviews, Finland's involvement benefitted its transatlantic relations, Nordic cooperation and position in the international community. Besides defence cooperation, Finland developed its national capacities and raised its profile within the EU's civilian crisis management framework. It is however difficult to assess in retrospect how the different forms of participation deepened Finland's relations with the US, for example, and whether Finland's activities were cost-efficient in terms of its partnership goals and national capacities, because no expectations had been explicitly stated.

While temporary successes were achieved in improving security and the conditions for education in some areas, for example, issues such as a lack of understanding of the context of the conflict, challenges related to local ownership and the absence of a coherent long-term strategy became stumbling blocks in the international intervention in Afghanistan. Previous research has already called attention to the negative impacts of the intervention: the civilian victims of the military operations, the changes in local power structures, the displacement of local activities and increased corruption are only some of the examples of the impacts for which Finland has also been partly responsible.

During, and partly as a result of, the intervention in Afghanistan, Finland's policy came to be underpinned by a comprehensive crisis management strategy. In Afghanistan, this meant that Finland participated in multiple sectors and placed emphasis on the interdependence between the development and civilian crisis management efforts and military crisis management. Overall, our interviewees assessed that the activities of Finland and Finnish actors in Afghanistan were of high quality and appreciated. Our research suggests that the comprehensive strategy

adopted by Finland served to justify its participation in different areas of the intervention and especially its military participation. However, Finland failed to fulfil the strategy in terms of coordinating its various activities in Afghanistan.

Finland's experiences in Afghanistan provide lessons learned that can be used to guide its activities in future crisis and conflict situations. First, it is necessary to set clearer and more transparent objectives to enable the effective planning and strategic monitoring of activities. In the context of partnership and capacity goals, clear objectives would help to develop the resourcing and targeting of activities. As regards supporting peace and stability, clearer, context-specific objectives would make it possible to monitor the appropriateness and comprehensiveness of activities.

However, adopting a comprehensive approach does not mean that Finland should engage in all activities or areas of assistance in the target country; rather, its activities should be targeted to support the overall international aid effort. It is also important to develop Finland's advocacy and impact efforts in multilateral interventions, in particular in situations in which Finland contributes significant resources. While Finland is in principle a small player, playing an active role in issues such as drawing attention to the possible negative impacts of interventions is consistent with its value-based foreign policy. By collaborating with like-minded actors, Finland has the opportunity to promote its interests through interventions (as far as these interests have been identified).

However, sufficient resources are required for effective outcomes: development cooperation funds and inputs from seconded experts will be wasted if the human resources allocated to the comprehensive planning, implementation and monitoring of Finland's participation are insufficient. The setting and implementation of realistic objectives appropriate to the context require a continuously updated conflict analysis, which in the case of small players such as Finland must also include an analysis of the context of international aid and operations. After interventions, it is also important to effectively put to use the expertise of the people who return to Finland after working in crisis areas so as not to waste the cultural and linguistic knowledge they have acquired.

The lessons identified in this research are also relevant for the future of Afghanistan and Afghan people. The international community, including Finland, has been involved in shaping the structures of Afghan society, as well as its conflict dynamics, for nearly 20 years. This means that it also continues to assume its responsibility after withdrawing from the country – all the more so because the decisions to start and terminate the intervention were primarily driven by interests other than those of Afghans themselves.

In terms of Finland's credibility as a foreign policy actor, it is particularly important that it continues to abide by its long-standing commitment to promote the rights of women and girls. In the present difficult circumstances, the cooperation and assistance efforts should be based on placing the needs and priorities of Afghans at the centre. This can be achieved by conducting a careful conflict analysis, listening to and discussing with Afghans, and promoting a strategically coordinated approach to setting the objectives and framework conditions of the cooperation at the level of the international community

چکیده

فنلند در افغانستان ۲۰۰۱ – ۲۰۲۱: از ثبات تا تقویت روابط سیاست خارجی و امنیتی

فنلند تقریباً ۲۰ سال به طور مداوم در تلاش های بین المللی ثبات و بازسازی افغانستان با حدود ۲۵۰۰ سرباز و ۱۴۰ متخصص و کارشناس غیرنظامی در مدیریت بحران شرکت کرد. در طول این سال ها، حدود ۳۹۸ میلیون یورو از کمک های مالی همکاری های انکشافی و کمک های بشردوستانه کشور فنلند به افغانستان اختصاص داده شد.

هنگامیکه فنلند در سال ۲۰۰۱-۲۰۰۲ تصمیم گرفت به افغانستان برود، افغانستان در دوران نامعلوم اما امیدوارکننده ای قرار داشت. رژیم طالبان پس از مداخله نظامی جامعه بین المللی به رهبری ایالات متحده آمریکا به سرعت سقوط کرده بود و جبهه گسترده ای از جامعه بین المللی متعهد شده بودند که از دولت موقت افغانستان برای تغییر این کشور حمایت کنند. فنلند بخش همکاری غیرنظامی و نظامی Cimic را به عملیات چند ملیتی مدیریت بحران آیساف فرستاد تا از فعالیت های ثبات و بازسازی در افغانستان حمایت کند، شروع به انتقال کمک ها و همکاری های مالی توسعه ای به افغانستان از طریق برنامه های سازمان ملل و بانک جهانی کرد و بیشتر منابع مدیریت بحران غیرنظامی خود را به عملیات پلیس اتحادیه اروپا Eupol در افغانستان اختصاص داد.

با این حال در دهه ۲۰۰۰ میلادی افغانستان بیشتر و بیشتر به سمت یک جنگ داخلی ویرانگر فرو رفت. با ورود مداخله جامعه بین المللی به دهه دوم خود، خوش بینی اولیه مردم افغانستان به بی اعتمادی فزاینده نسبت به دولت موجود در افغانستان و بازیگران و فعالین جامعه بین المللی در کشور تبدیل شد. تعداد نیروهای کشور فنلند در افغانستان به حدود ۲۰۰ سرباز افزایش یافت. این سربازان فنلندی به عنوان بخشی از عملیات نظامی انتقال یافته تحت ناتو، که به یکی از طرفین درگیری تبدیل شده بود، مکرراً در درگیری های مسلحانه شرکت می کردند. منابع مالی بیشتری برای ترتیبات امنیتی کارمندان و فعالان جامعه بین المللی هزینه می شد، اما در همان زمان شرایط عملیاتی آنها به طور قابل توجهی محدود شده بود.

پس از پایان یافتن دوره آیساف در افغانستان، فنلند به مشارکت خود در عملیات حمایت قاطع-Resolute Support به رهبری ناتو که تا تابستان ۲۰۲۱ از نیروهای امنیتی افغانستان پشتیبانی می کرد، ادامه داد. فنلند تا آخر یکی از حامیان مهم Eupol در افغانستان بود و در سال ۲۰۲۰ مسئولیت سازماندهی یک کنفرانس بین المللی تعهد کمک برای حمایت از افغانستان را بر عهده گرفت. افغانستان در نیمه دوم دهه ۲۰۱۰ میلادی بزرگترین دریافت کننده کمک های مالی همکاری های انکشافی کشور فنلند بود. عملیات گسترده فنلند در افغانستان در ماه اوت در سال ۲۰۲۱ میلادی، زمانی که جامعه بین‌المللی در نتیجه تصمیم آمریکا برای خروج از افغانستان و به قدرت رسیدن طالبان، این کشور را ترک کرد، در شرایط آشفته پایان یافت.

این تحقیق به تحلیل فعالیت های فنلند در افغانستان می پردازد و بر این موضوع تمرکز می کند که چرا فنلندی ها به افغانستان رفتند، فعالیت های فنلند در این

کشور بر چه اساس بوده و چه درس ها و آموخته های مفیدی باید از ۲۰ سال فعالیت در افغانستان برای شرایط بحران و درگیری آینده آموخت. این تحقیق بر اساس تجزیه و تحلیل مواد کیفی گسترده انجام شده است که در آن با ۶۴ نفر که در افغانستان کار می کردند یا در مورد مداخله در افغانستان فعالیت و همکاری داشتند، مصاحبه شده است. برای این تحقیق، بحث های در ورکشاپ ها نیز برای مشورت با دیاسپورای مردم افغانستان مقیم فنلند و دیگر کارشناسان و متخصصا سازماندهی شد. علاوه بر این، مطالب مکتوب عمومی و تحقیقات قبلی مورد تجزیه و تحلیل قرار گرفت و بحث‌های پیشینه با کارشناسان انجام شده است. گزارش پژوهشی پیامدهای هدف گذاری فنلند، منطق عملیات و محوری ترین چالش ها را از منظر مدیریت بحران نظامی، مدیریت بحران غیرنظامی و همکاری توسعه و همچنین کمک های بشردوستانه بررسی می کند.

بر اساس یافته های تحقیق ما، فعالیت های فنلند در افغانستان با انگیزه های متعدد، تا حدی نامشخص و گاه متناقض صورت گرفته است. بر اساس گزارش های روابط بین الملل و سایر اسناد عمومی، هدف از فعالیت های فنلند بیش از هر چیز ایجاد ثبات و حمایت از افغانستان به منظور تقویت صلح و امنیت بین المللی بود. اهداف اعلام شده بر مسئولیت به عنوان بخشی از جامعه بین المللی به رهبری سازمان ملل متحد و فعالیت های فنلند برای توسعه حکمرانی خوب و حاکمیت قانون و ارتقای حقوق بشر، به ویژه حقوق زنان و دختران تأکید می کند. ما در این تحقیق به آنها به عنوان چارچوب "فنلند به عنوان یک نیکوکار" اشاره می کنیم.

از سوی دیگر، بر اساس تحلیل ما، در کنار این اهداف اعلام شده - و بیش از آنها - مشارکت فنلند ناشی از اراده برای حفظ و تقویت روابط سیاست خارجی و امنیتی با ایالات متحده آمریکا و سایر همتایان و شرکای بین المللی و نیز تمایل برای تعمیق همکاری با ناتو بوده است. در چارچوب «فنلند به عنوان یک شریک»، فنلند تلاش کرد تا خود را به عنوان یک نیکوکار قابل اعتماد معرفی کند، اما همچنین از طریق بهبود قابلیت‌های ملی خود، از آن بهره برد.

اهداف متنوع فنلند در افغانستان از نظر مصلحت مشارکت کردن لزوماً مشکل ساز نبوده است. در ابتدا، زمانی که محیط عملیاتی واقع در آن زمان افغانستان به فنلند اجازه می داد، این اهداف فعالیت های فنلند در افغانستان را بطور هماهنگ هدایت می کرد. در آن زمان فنلند همزمان با ایالات متحده آمریکا همبستگی نشان می داد و از آن در مبارزه با تروریسم حمایت می کرد، و در عین زمان خود را به عنوان نیکوکار خوبی در حمایت از ثبات و توسعه افغانستان نشان می داد.

با این حال، زمانی که وضعیت در افغانستان بدتر شد و ماهیت و نتایج مداخله متناقض‌تر شد، بین توجیه فعالیت ها تنش به وجود آمد. ساخت برنامه اقدام و ارزیابی عملیات زمانی به چالش تبدیل شد، که هدف گذاری آنها نه شفاف بود و نه واضح. به ویژه، پوشاندن روابط و مشارکت های فراآتلانتیک به عنوان انگیزه های مشارکت، برنامه ریزی و نظارت بر مشارکت را دشوار می کرد. از منظر مشارکت با مداخله جامعه بین المللی در افغانستان، همین که فنلند در مداخله شرکت کرده بود، کافی بود. در مورد افغانستان نیز اهداف اقدامات مختلف جامعه بین المللی سطحی، غیر واقعی و مبهم باقی ماند و توجه کافی به آن نشد. به جای تحلیل انتقادی و نظارت راهبردی، تلاش شد تا با تاکید بر پیشرفت اهداف اعلام شده هم در سطح بین المللی و هم در فنلند پاسخ داده شود و در عین حال در برابر مبارزات و مشکلات سکوت شد.

ارزیابی میزان دستیابی فنلند به اهداف خود در افغانستان تقریباً غیرممکن است، زیرا این اهداف به وضوح و شفاف تعیین نشده بودند. بر اساس مصاحبه ها انجام شده در این تحقیق، مشارکت فنلند به روابط فراآتلانتیک، همکاری میان کشورهای شمال اروپا و موقعیت در جامعه بین المللی خدمت کرد. علاوه بر همکاری دفاعی، قابلیت های ملی فنلند توسعه یافت و فنلند جایگاه خود را در چارچوب مدیریت بحران غیرنظامی اتحادیه اروپا ارتقا داد. با این حال، ارزیابی اینکه، اشکال مختلف مشارکت فنلند چگونه به روابط این کشور با ایالات متحده آمریکا کمک کرده و اینکه آیا فنلند از منظر اهداف مشارکت و توانایی‌های خود به طور مقرون به صرفه عمل کرده است یا خیر، دشوار است، زیرا در این موارد انتظارات از قبل تعیین شده به وضوح وجود نداشت.

امنیت و مثلاً شرایط تحصیل در افغانستان به طور موقت و در جاهایی افزایش یافت، اما عدم درک زمینه کشمکش و کنفلیکت موجود در افغانستان، چالش های مالکیت محلی و فقدان یک استراتژی بلند مدت و یکپارچه مشکلی بزرگی سر راه مداخله بین المللی شد. تحقیقاتی قبلی توجه را به پیامدهای منفی ناشی از مداخله جلب کرده است: قربانیان غیرنظامی عملیات های نظامی، تغییر در ساختارهای قدرت محلی، جابجایی فعالیت‌های محلی و افزایش فساد تنها نمونه‌هایی از اثراتی هستند که فنلند نیز مسئولیت جزئی آنها را بر عهده دارد.

استراتژی جامع مدیریت بحران به عنوان یک دستورالعمل برای عملیات فنلند در طول مداخله در افغانستان و به عنوان بخشی از تأثیر آن توسعه یافت. در افغانستان، این به معنای مشارکت چند رشته‌ای فنلند و تأکید بر وابستگی متقابل تلاش‌های توسعه غیرنظامی و مدیریت بحران و مدیریت بحران نظامی بود. به طور کلی، فعالیت های فنلند و فنلندی ها در افغانستان با کیفیت بالا و با ارزش ارزیابی می شود. بر اساس تحقیقات ما، جامعیت به عنوان یک استراتژی توجیهی برای مشارکت فنلند در ابعاد مختلف مداخله به ویژه مشارکت نظامی بوده است، اما در افغانستان در سطح هماهنگی و هماهنگی اقدامات مختلف محقق نشده است.

تجارب به دست آمده از افغانستان می تواند به عنوان درس ها و آموخته های مفید برای بالا بردن توانایی اقدامات کشور فنلند و جامعه بین المللی در شرایط درگیری و بحران های آینده استفاده شود. اول از همه، برای برنامه ریزی موثر و نظارت استراتژیک عملیات، یک طرح واضح تر و شفاف تر از اهداف ضروری است. از نقطه نظر اهداف مشارکت و آمادگی، وضوح اهداف به توسعه منابع و هدف گذاری عملیات کمک می کند. از نقطه نظر حمایت از صلح و ثبات، شفاف سازی اهداف خاص، زمینه امکان نظارت بر تناسب و جامعیت عملیات را فراهم می کند.

با این حال، یک رویکرد جامع به این معنا نیست که فنلند باید در تمام فعالیت‌ها یا حوزه‌های حمایتی در کشور مقصد شرکت کند، بلکه هدف قرار دادن فعالیت به گونه‌ای است که به مجموعه شکل‌گرفته شده توسط فعالیت‌های حمایتی بین‌المللی کمک کند. همچنین توسعه نفوذ فنلند در مداخلات چند جانبه مهم است، به ویژه زمانی که فنلند نسبت به اندازه ای خود منابع زیادی را ارائه می دهد. با اینکه فنلند اساساً یک بازیگر کوچک است، برای مثال، فعال بودن در برجسته کردن اثرات منفی احتمالی مداخله، در راستای سیاست ارزشی فنلند است. تأثیرگذاری همراه با فعالان همفکر فرصتی برای ترویج منافع خود فنلند از طریق مداخله است (در صورتی که ابتدا منافع شناسایی شده باشد).

با این حال، اثربخشی مستلزم منابع کافی است: در صورت عدم تخصیص منابع انسانی کافی به برنامه ریزی، اجرا و نظارت بر مشارکت، پول همکاری توسعه و مشارکت کارشناسان و متخصصا اعزامی به هدر خواهد رفت. هدف گذاری و اجرای واقع بینانه و متناسب، نیاز به تجزیه و تحلیل دائماً به روز شده دارد، که برای کشور کوچکی مانند فنلند همچنین شامل تجزیه و تحلیل زمینه عملیات و حمایت بین المللی است. پس از مداخله، هنوز دلیلی برای سرمایه گذاری در استفاده مؤثر از افرادی که در مناطق بحرانی کار کرده اند و به فنلند در کشور خود بازگشته اند، وجود دارد تا مهارت های فرهنگی و زبانی انباشته شده هدر نرود.

آموزه های شناخته شده در این تحقیق برای آینده افغانستان و مردم افغانستان نیز قابل توجه است. تقریباً بیست سال مشارکت در شکل‌دهی ساختارهای جامعه و پویایی‌های درگیری به این معنی است که مسئولیت جامعه بین‌المللی و همچنین فنلند حتی پس از خروج از کشور ادامه خواهد یافت - به‌ویژه زمانی که تصمیم‌گیری برای شروع و پایان اقدامات مداخله‌ای عمدتاً بر اساس منافعی غیر از منافع مردم افغانستان است.

به خصوص از منظر اعتبار فعالیت های سیاست خارجی فنلند، مهم است که تعهد بلند مدت به ارتقای حقوق بشر زنان و دختران رعایت شود. نقطه شروع همکاری و کمک در شرایط دشوار کنونی، قرار دادن نیازها و اولویت های مردم افغانستان در مرکز فعالیت هاست. این باید از طریق تجزیه و تحلیل دقیق درگیری ها، گوش دادن به مردم افغانستان و گفتگو با آنها، و حمایت از یک رویکرد هماهنگ استراتژیک به اهداف و شرایط مرزی کمک و همکاری در سطح جامعه بین المللی انجام شود.

INTRODUCTION

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan collapsed on 15 August 2021. The Taliban seized control of the capital, Kabul, while the US and NATO forces were still withdrawing from the country. The rapid rise of the Taliban and collapse of the government like a house of cards, marking the end of a war that killed more than 200,000 people, surprised most observers – and the Taliban themselves.[1] Then again, the rebels' expanding territorial control in the preceding months, the stalemate of the internal peace negotiations and the deterioration of the security situation had foreboded considerable difficulties for the government to maintain its power without international military forces.[2] The government only had an estimated thirty per cent of the country clearly in its control at the beginning of 2021, and this amount dwindled quickly during the spring and early summer of 2021.[3]

The collapse of the central government in Kabul also marked the end of nearly twenty years of international intervention in Afghanistan. The international intervention transpired from the military intervention in Afghanistan by the United States and its allies to eradicate al-Qaeda and its leader Osama bin Laden, responsible for the 9/11 attacks, and to oust the Taliban who protected them. The intervention soon expanded, however, to include international military and civilian crisis management, substantial development cooperation and international diplomatic efforts to stabilize and reconstruct Afghanistan and thus guarantee international security.

The United States alone spent an estimated USD 2.2 trillion on trying to achieve its many goals between late 2001 and August 2021, and more than USD 81 billion in international development investments were made

1 According to the Costs of War project of the Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs at Brown University, by August 2021, approximately 243,000 people had been killed in the conflict zone of Afghanistan and Pakistan in the post-9/11 war period. An estimated 176,000 of them were killed in Afghanistan, and more than 70,000 were civilians. According to the University of Uppsala Conflict Data Program, more than 248,000 people died in Afghanistan as a result of organized political violence. Estimates of casualties are based on confirmed news reports and other written reports. The number of civilians and Afghan fighters killed in the war over the last twenty years is likely to be significantly higher in reality. See Crawford & Lutz 2021; Davies, Pettersson & Öberg 2022; Ruohomäki 2021.

2 See, e.g., Worden et al., 2021; Adili 2021; Liebing 2021.

3 Murtazashvili 2022, 50. See also Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) 2021a and 2021b.

between 2001 and 2020.[4] The intervention ended when the United States made a decision to withdraw from Afghanistan as per its agreement with the Taliban in spring 2021. This also led to the closure of NATO's Resolute Support Mission (RSM). The subsequent Taliban takeover also brought about an end to civilian-led efforts to support the former administration.

Finland's involvement in the international military and civilian-led operations in Afghanistan thus came to an end in August 2021. Finland's extensive involvement in the international intervention began in early 2002 and constituted involvement in UN-mandated military crisis management, civilian crisis management, development cooperation and humanitarian aid efforts. Finland's total investment in Afghanistan amounted to approximately EUR 321 million in military crisis management, EUR 281 million in programmed development cooperation, EUR 51 million in humanitarian aid and EUR 29 million in civilian crisis management.[5] Since the Taliban came to power, international support for the Afghan people has been largely limited to humanitarian aid and support for basic needs.[6]

The Taliban's rise to power has sparked lively debate on the effectiveness of the international community's massive efforts to support the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. Why did the internationally supported government collapse so quickly? What did twenty years of intervention aim to achieve and what was actually achieved? What lessons can and should be learned for today's conflict and crisis situations? Discussions on involvement in international interventions and what can be gained from them have also taken place in Finland.

Against this backdrop, the Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee issued a mandate[7] to the Finnish Institute of International Affairs (FIIA)

4 According to the Costs of War project, by August 2021, the United States had spent USD 2.26 trillion on the conflict in Afghanistan, most of which went to warfare. SIGAR reported that the largest target of US aid for the reconstruction of Afghanistan was the Afghan security forces, which received about USD 89 billion. This means that, in the case of the United States, only a fraction of the total costs was spent on reconstruction of civilian-led governance structures, with the estimated total reconstruction investment amounting to about USD 146 billion. See Helman & Tucker 2021; Costs of War 2022; SIGAR 2021b. As regards international development investments, the World Bank has provided the estimates and they include ODA-eligible aid. World Bank 2022.

5 The information was received from the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in autumn 2022. The total amount of Finland's development cooperation appropriations was approximately EUR 398 million, which in addition to development cooperation and humanitarian aid, comprises approximately EUR 23 million for humanitarian mine clearance and approximately EUR 43 million in total for operations and security for the Embassy of Finland in Kabul. The exact total costs for civilian crisis management were not available. The figure is based on an estimate of the costs of EUPOL (approximately EUR 29 million) provided by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and other public sources (see, e.g., Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2021). Altogether, Finland's total investment was approximately EUR 749 million.

6 As of December 2022, no other country has recognized the Taliban regime as a legitimate state actor. However, several countries, including Russia and China, have established diplomatic relations with the Taliban. The economic and humanitarian situation in Afghanistan has further deteriorated during the first year of the Taliban regime. The underlying reason for the economic crisis is the fallen regime's reliance on international aid, which was estimated to account for as much as 45% of the country's GDP. See Mustasilta, Ruohomäki & Stewart 2022.

7 Foreign Affairs Committee UaVP 61/2021.

on 10 November 2021 to conduct an independent inquiry on Finland's involvement in stabilization, reconstruction and development operations, as well as in humanitarian support efforts in Afghanistan during 2001–2021. This FIIA report provides insight into and presents the main findings of the research conducted in 2022, as mandated by the Foreign Affairs Committee. The term 'international intervention' in this report is a generic term to denote the above-mentioned large-scale and diverse measures, which took place in the period under review and in which Finland participated.

The aim of our study in the context of the mandate is, on the one hand, to elucidate an overall picture of Finland's efforts and the grounds for them, broadly covering diplomacy, military involvement, civilian crisis management, development cooperation and humanitarian aid. On the other hand, the aim is to create useful knowledge about Finland's ability to act in complex conflict and crisis situations in the future.

Our inquiry was guided by four interlinked research questions: (1) What goals and priorities governed Finland's efforts in general and in particular sectors in Afghanistan; (2) How did Finland's efforts and the changes in them reflect different contexts, especially the context of the conflict and the Afghan society, the Afghan people's perspectives, as well as the frameworks of international partners; (3) what theories of change and strategy guided Finland's efforts; and (4) how did practical implementation (including resources) correlate with the goals and action plans? These questions can be summarized in two main research questions: 1) *What were Finland's goals in participating in the international intervention in Afghanistan (why did Finland participate), and 2) what was the basis for Finland's efforts (what did the efforts respond to and how did Finland take action)?*

The research results presented in the report are mainly based on extensive primary data collected and analysed by the research team and consisting of confidential semi-structured interviews and group discussions in the form of workshops. In 2022, the research team interviewed 64 people and organized three workshops to gain insight into Finland's efforts and the bases of them, as well as the logic behind the efforts from different perspectives. To support the primary data, existing articles, public documents, research reports, news sources and other documentation were used to map and track Finland's efforts hand in hand with the scope of the international intervention and the development of the conflict in Afghanistan.

Based on the analysis of our research data, the report identifies three separate main frameworks that encapsulate the foundations and nature of Finland's efforts in Afghanistan: *Finland as a Partner*, *Finland as a*

Benefactor and *Finland as a Learner*. Finland's involvement in the international intervention was propelled in particular by its international partnerships and the desire to be seen as a reliable and favourable partner, especially with respect to the United States, but also in respect to our Nordic and European partners. This "Finland as a Partner" framework provided strong political motivation for Finland's involvement throughout the period and guided Finland's decision-making and actions in different spheres. It was therefore possible that Finland's political objectives in Afghanistan materialized largely through involvement in and commitment to the international intervention, despite the negative developments in Afghanistan. This had consequences, however, on the extent to which Finland's efforts and the advancement of them reflected the conflict in Afghanistan and the Afghan people's needs and priorities.

The goal to do good in Afghanistan also enframed Finland's involvement in the international intervention. This "Finland as a Benefactor" interpretation is prevalent in the official policy documents and public statements, alongside the objective to eradicate international terrorism.

Although Finland's political objectives in relation to Afghanistan were primarily associated with its international partnerships, efforts were made to focus on supporting Afghanistan's social stability and development within their limits. Human rights, and the rights of women and girls, in particular, were highlighted as general justifications for Finland's multifarious efforts, and they have provided considerable motivation for action at the individual level. Finland's involvement as a partner and benefactor seems to have largely propelled decision-making related to the types of efforts to participate in and the modes of involvement. Finland's extensive involvement in the European Union Police Mission (EUPOL Afghanistan) is a good example: the operation served as both a demonstration of Finland's commitment as a partner on the international level and of its self-identification as a benefactor (a promoter of security rather than a force fighting against something).

As the operating environment became increasingly difficult and the outcome of the intervention began to appear more and more ambiguous as regards stabilization, the objectives related to international partnerships and those associated with Finland's role as benefactor appear to have imposed increasingly conflicting pressures on Finland's priorities for involvement. The emphasis on a comprehensive approach seems to have become, at least in part, an attempt to reconcile increasingly conflicting goals for involvement in the face of increasingly difficult circumstances. There are also conflicting indications as to the importance of the role of the benefactor in steering concrete actions in Afghanistan: for example,

the qualitative imbalance in monitoring and analysing the development of actions and the situation suggests that reaching (or clearly moving towards) the objectives set for Afghanistan did not systematically guide decisions on directing actions or allocating resources.

In general, the lack of unified and contextual objectives and strategic actions that challenged broader international intervention also encumbered Finland's objectives and efforts in relation to Afghanistan. Contributions to the development of Afghanistan were measured by the level of involvement in the international intervention and additional investments, rather than by the actual changes in the circumstances in Afghanistan.

The third framework, 'Finland as a Learner', embodies the perspective of skills and capabilities gained from the international intervention in Afghanistan and Finland's involvement in it. Development of military-tactical, operational and defence partnership readiness seems to have provided significant motivation for continuing to participate in the intervention and invest in Afghanistan, particularly from the perspective of the defence administration. Escalation of the armed conflict and its spread to the area in which the Finnish International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) contingent was operating catalysed tangible lessons on an operational and tactical level and forced Finland to strengthen its operating capabilities in a new kind of crisis management environment. In the context of 2022, the experiences in Afghanistan are also seen as a project strongly tied to Finland's road to NATO partnership and to supporting the membership process. Beyond this, Afghanistan is also recognized as relevant for broader learning opportunities, for example in relation to multilateral aid and operating in a fragile state.

Based on the analysis, this research report identifies several lessons for operating in future crises and conflict situations. The challenges of international intervention in Afghanistan invoke the significance of careful conflict analysis to understand the context of the operations, its societal dynamics and the population's needs. For a small player like Finland, this also includes an analysis of the context of international support and operations.

Relatedly, our analysis emphasizes the importance of local actors' commitment as a prerequisite for the sustainability of operations and, on the other hand, a more inclusive examination of local ownership. As regards coordination between international actors, there is a recognized need to separate the distribution of knowledge and allocation of tasks from strategic coordination, which should be developed.

The lessons for Finland to learn from the experiences in Afghanistan include setting clearer and more transparent objectives, which is essential

for effective planning and monitoring of operations. The need to improve influence in multilateral interventions also surfaces, especially when Finland provides substantial resources in proportion to its size.

Although Finland is in principle a small actor, actively calling attention to the possible negative impacts of the intervention, for example, is in line with its value-based policy. Finland has the opportunity to promote its interests through interventions by collaborating with like-minded actors, provided these interests have been identified. To be effective, however, sufficient resources are needed: inadequate allocation of human resources to the overall planning, implementation and monitoring of involvement is a waste of development cooperation funds and the contribution of seconded experts.

STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

Section 1, Research background, elucidates the research objectives, background and chosen methodology. The section discusses the research questions and focus of the present report based on the previous literature on Afghanistan and the international intervention. The section is important for contextualizing the research report and understanding the basis of the analysis.

Sections 2 and 3 focus on the analysis of Finland's efforts and the bases of them in the context of Afghanistan between 2001 and 2021. In Section 2, Finland's efforts in Afghanistan: overview of 2001–2021, the period under review is divided into five significant time periods. The time periods derived from both primary and secondary data provide insight into the course of the main events and developments in the situation, building an overall picture of the context of the Afghanistan conflict and the trajectory of international intervention, as well as the shaping of Finland's efforts alongside these contexts.

Section 3, Finland as an actor in Afghanistan: why and on what grounds, focuses on a detailed analysis of Finland as an actor, encapsulating an impression through reports and public policy, and examines the relationship between this impression and the interpretation derived from our primary data. We use this as a basis to rationalize the main frameworks of Finland's role as an actor and discuss the significance and consequences of the frameworks as regards Finland's role, as well as the opportunities and challenges associated with its role in Afghanistan.

Finland's actions in Afghanistan largely reflected the rationales and objectives of international partnerships, Finland's benefactor identity, and enhancing capabilities. Identifying and analysing Finland's efforts

through these three frameworks are necessary to understand Finland's decision-making and concrete efforts. Following a presentation of these main frameworks, the report focuses on the main areas of Finland's efforts and their objectives, foundations, forms, as well as their strengths and challenges, taking into account the context.

Section 4, Lessons learned for the future, presents the main lessons learned to consider in future crisis and conflict situations. The lessons are categorized and discussed in three subsections: general lessons learned for international actors and their collective efforts; learning needs of Finnish actors in future crises and conflicts; and lessons learned to support Afghanistan and the Afghan people in the current situation. The discussion of the lessons considers the main factors and trends in Finland's foreign and security policy environment. In the conclusion, we summarize the main research findings, delineate the limitations of the research and discuss the study's overall contribution.

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1. RESEARCH BACKGROUND: OBJECTIVES, LITERATURE AND METHODOLOGY

1.1 OBJECTIVES AND CONTRIBUTIONS

The aim of our research is 1) to produce a more detailed and comprehensive understanding of Finland's efforts and the bases thereof in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2021, and 2) to thereby identify lessons based on systematic analysis that inform and can strengthen Finland's efforts in responding to future crisis and conflict situations.

Our mandate is to broadly examine Finland's involvement in international intervention and consider its efforts in military crisis management, which has received relatively high attention, as well as civilian-led support in areas such as development cooperation and civilian crisis management, and in the area of political influence in general. Our research does not evaluate individual operations or projects but seeks to shed light on the foundations and priorities of Finland's efforts in Afghanistan, analyse them in relation to Afghanistan's context of conflict and international intervention, and identify lessons learned to consider in future.

The broader goal of the study, against the background of our research mandate and focus, is to create added value primarily in Finnish public and expert discussions concerning Finland's involvement in various crisis management, development and peace-building efforts as a member of the international community. Our focus on the foundations and structuring of Finland's efforts in major affairs, such as in Afghanistan, contributes to understanding the significance, challenges and limitations of a small country's involvement, as in the case with Finland, as well as to the ways in which such countries can wield influence in international arenas.

Our study also contributes to research on Finland's comprehensive crisis management and investigations pertaining to international intervention in Afghanistan. To begin, our contribution in terms of research focusing on Finland's efforts constitutes analysis of extensive primary data. This makes it possible to examine Finland's efforts from different perspectives, including those of the diaspora and international partners. Thematically, our research offers new perspectives, for example, on the study of comprehensive crisis management by shedding light on the use of comprehensive approaches as a framework for justifying involvement.

Our research forms part of a growing array of studies and evaluations on international intervention in Afghanistan. Our contribution in this

realm of research includes attention to strategic-level questions on the objectives and motivations of the efforts and the consequences thereof for shaping of tangible efforts. Until now, many studies investigating experiences in Afghanistan have focused more on the efforts' operational and institutional perspectives, rather than on forming a holistic picture of the strategic foundations underpinning them. [8]

This chapter lays the foundation for our research by unfolding our approach to the study and research methods. To understand Finland's efforts and identify useful lessons, however, it is first necessary to place our analysis in a broader context, i.e., in the context of the conflict in Afghanistan, international intervention and Finland's crisis management.

1.2 RESEARCH BACKGROUND: AFGHANISTAN, INTERNATIONAL INTERVENTION AND FINLAND'S CRISIS MANAGEMENT EFFORTS

> "*The problems started when the Soviet Union entered Afghanistan. Then the West tried to drive the Soviet Union out, and everyone was told to fight the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union was driven out, and then came the mujahedin, then the Taliban, who coalesced during the war against the Soviet Union. The United States came to Afghanistan; in 2001 the country of Afghanistan was completely destroyed. The Soviet Union no longer existed, but there were other challenges. People could not read or write, yet suddenly democracy was introduced.*"[9]

When *Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF)*, led by the United States, began in 2001, Afghanistan had been waging a multi-level and variably intense civil war since the 1970s, preceding the Soviet intervention[10] and continuing thereafter. Finland also has a role in this history of conflict: subsequent to the Soviet Union's withdrawal from Afghanistan, Major-General Rauli Helminen and his successor Lieutenant Heikki Happonen led UN-mandated peacekeepers in Afghanistan and Pakistan in 1988–1990.[11]

This historically structured conflict consists of at least four overlapping cleavages, which foreign interventions have further modified: (1) politicized ethnic cleavages between Pashtun groups inhabiting southern and

8 See ISSAT 2022.

9 Participant in a diaspora workshop in May 2022. The workshop discussions centred around the need to understand the historically constructed boundaries of the conflict in Afghanistan and the factors contributing to it to be able to understand the country's contemporary society. This section very briefly highlights some of the key elements for understanding the context. Readers interested in the background of Afghanistan's conflict may refer to the References for sources on the topic.

10 See, e.g., Väyrynen 2010a for the role of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan.

11 Pykälä 2011; UN 2002.

eastern Afghanistan and the Persian-speaking (Dari) and Turkmen ethnic groups in the more northern parts of Afghanistan; (2) an ideological conflict dominated by traditionalist and (extreme) Islamist political forces on one side and Marxist and Soviet-backed forces on the other side, which has been accompanied by sectarian, i.e., religious, political conflict and the violent jihad; (3) resource conflicts between numerous armed groups; and (4) inter-ethnic tribal conflicts.[12]

The Soviet Union occupied Afghanistan from 1979 to 1989 and waged war against militias unified by Islamism that had risen up against the communist regime. The United States supported and trained these mujahedin groups to overthrow the Soviet occupation. US support for non-state armed groups continued after 2001 in the context of suppressing the Taliban and al-Qaeda.[13]

In addition to intervention by major powers, regional powers, especially neighbouring Pakistan, have supported various political and military forces in Afghanistan in pursuit of their own interests. The history of conflict has left immense scars on the population and society. An estimated 870,000 Afghans died in the war during the Soviet occupation and tens of thousands during the civil war in the 1990s.[14]

Alongside the aforementioned conflict cleavages, Afghanistan's political history has been marked by tensions between central governments and the large country's regional and local political forces and armed groups. Historically, efforts to centralize power have catalysed resistance in the provinces, which hold tightly onto their autonomy, against the central government. On the other hand, the weak central government has invoked challenges to uniform development of the state and the implementation of basic services and needs outside the cities.[15]

The extreme Islamist Taliban movement, which emerged in the early 1990s from Kandahar and Pakistani refugee camps and mobilized Sunni Pashtuns from southern and eastern Afghanistan, is a parcel in this complex conflict and political landscape and a thread in the social tapestry of Afghanistan.[16] Like many other armed groups, the Taliban should be seen as a grouping composed of several factions, rather than as a homogeneous group with unified priorities and ways of operating.[17] The Taliban movement emerged in the context of a brutal civil war after the Soviet retreat

12 Mason 2015, 57–67; Ghufran 2001; Nojumi 2002. See Brown & Blankenship 2013 for Afghanistan's rich natural resources and the significance of them in the conflict dynamics.

13 De Lauri & Suhrke 2021.

14 Khalidi 1991; Maley 2002.

15 Murtazashvili 2016, 2022; Nojumi 2002.

16 Rashid 2022.

17 See, e.g., Mustasilta, Ruohomäki and Salo 2022.

and grew in popularity by appearing as a force that would stabilize and create order in an intensely violent situation.

Overthrowing the Taliban and driving them out of the country at the turn of 2001–2002 did not eliminate the deep divides of conflict and tensions that built up over time between the various social groups and the other armed groups. Nor did the momentary military victory over the Taliban regime eliminate the root causes on which the Taliban's strength, and genuine popularity within some communities, rested. On the other hand, the same can be said of the current context of the new Taliban regime: the rise to power has created the dilemma of how to control the various political and armed groups for the Taliban to solve.

1.2.1 Challenges in international intervention

> "*This is the main problem: let's send soldiers and overthrow the government, and then we'll think about what to do next.*"[18]

Two decades of civil war in Afghanistan and the collapse of the republic upon the withdrawal of the international intervention have prompted many to ask what went wrong, what was left of international support for the Afghans on the one hand and international actors on the other, and what could have been done differently. It is worth elucidating the main aspects of the discussion and broader observations on the effectiveness and expedience of international stabilization and reconstruction measures, as they contextualize our research on Finland's efforts and help us understand the difficulties Finland also faced.

Views have emerged in the debate on both over-ambitious goals in state- and nation-building (when considering the challenges of the environment) and excessive focus on countering insurgency, rather than on long-term reinforcement of the government's political capacity and willingness to bear responsibility.[19]

The corruption of the Afghan decision-making bodies and (partly because of this) the security forces' substantive weakness have also been seen as reasons for the outcome.[20] On the other hand, the discussion in Finland has stressed that there were also positive developments in Afghanistan, such as the improvement of children and young people's access to education over the years, especially in cities.[21] Many have pointed out

18 Interview H40.

19 Aydintasbas et al. 2021; Murtazashvili 2022.

20 See, e.g., Schroden 2021; Crocker 2021.

21 Haavisto 2022.

the ambiguity of the international intervention objectives and the lack of a uniform strategy to guide the multilateral efforts.[22]

As an indication of this, US President Joe Biden's administration claimed that the United States had achieved its goals in Afghanistan, because the purpose of the United States' presence in Afghanistan was never to build a nation, but to eradicate international terrorism and the support of it in Afghanistan.[23] This deviates significantly from Finland's publicly set goals and emphasis on a holistic approach, whereby stabilization of the country also meant fruition of human rights.

Many of the perspectives emerging from recent discussions reflect the broader literature on Afghanistan's international intervention. One of the more general observations in this literature and central to our study pertains to the challenges (or unwillingness) of the United States and wider international intervention to take into account the historically structured, diverse political dynamics and social context of Afghanistan as the basis for intervention.[24]

Both US policy and the wider international intervention architecture are considered to have been built on a rather narrow understanding of the situation and operations resting on planning by outside actors, making it difficult to achieve sustainable change and to anticipate its impacts.[25] This is considered to have been a challenge to early intervention, in particular, for example, the United States becoming a tool of local power struggles, or the decisions to exclude the Taliban from the Bonn Conference and create a presidential system, both of which were influenced by international actors and both are seen retrospectively as strategic mistakes.[26]

On the other hand, the fact that international intervention was a poor fit for the social context in Afghanistan is also recognized as a more general challenge that prevailed throughout the intervention. This was followed by, for example, disarmament processes inappropriate for local economic structures and the weakening of existing local governance structures and practices.[27] This is generally deemed as having led to unintended consequences, such as the empowerment of warlords and local commanders and the escalation of tensions within local communities.[28]

22 Whitlock 2021; SIGAR 2021a.

23 Biden 2022.

24 See, e.g., Murtazashvili 2016; Gopal 2014; Jackson 2021; Mason 2015.

25 Malejacj & Sandor 2020; Giustozzi & Ibrahimi 2013.

26 Murtazashvili 2022; Suhrke 2018; Gopal 2014; Mustasilta, Ruohomäki & Salo 2022. In the discussions in Finland, e.g., Väyrynen 2010b warned of the inappropriateness of a centralized form of government.

27 Giustozzi 2008; Murtazashvili 2016.

28 Murtazashvili 2016; Gopal 2014; Amiri & Jackson 2022.

Another widely recognized dimension of international intervention in Afghanistan concerns the diversity of international actors, objectives and practices and the absence of a common strategy.[29] More than 60 countries and 20 international organizations supported the resolution of the Bonn Conference in 2001, and more than 70 countries and 30 international organizations attended the Geneva Conference in 2020, co-hosted by Finland. Coordinating and strategically leading so many actors in the same direction is difficult under any circumstances, not to mention dealing with an environment marked by a fragile state and armed conflict.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) was given responsibility for coordinating aid already at the Bonn Conference, but the reports which have examined its operations have been critical in terms of coordination and consistency of aid, especially during the first decade of the intervention.[30] In 2007, the first report evaluating Finland's development cooperation in Afghanistan mentioned that the challenges of strategic coordination between international actors weakened the effectiveness of stabilization and reconstruction measures: although coordination transpired technically at the level of information sharing, it did not extend to the level of strategic coordination of measures.[31] Similar challenges in international actors' mutual understanding of the direction, grounds and measures for supporting Afghanistan have also been identified in reports assessing support measures by Norway and Sweden.[32]

Challenges in coordination also stemmed from unclear roles. For example, international humanitarian organizations considered *provincial reconstruction teams* to be partly problematic, because instead of focusing solely on securing areas, they carried out reconstruction projects, also. According to humanitarian actors, this blurred the interface between military and humanitarian efforts and actors.[33]

Support measures in the security sector are an example of strategic challenges. Leading the interconnected constituents in the same direction was difficult from the outset, because they were led by different countries who managed their responsibilities in very different ways: the US led the army, Germany the police, Italy the judicial system and the UK the anti-drug policy.[34]

29 SIGAR 2021a; ICG 2007; Giustozzi & Ibhrahimi 2013.

30 Margesson 2010.

31 Davies et al. 2007.

32 The Norwegian Commission on Afghanistan 2016; Pain 2021.

33 Rashid 2008, 199; Farrell 2017. See also Gross 2009 for coordination challenges.

34 ICG 2007; Jalali 2006, 10. The respondents in this study also raised questions pertaining to strategic coordination challenges in the lead nation model and the suitability of the models introduced by individual lead nations. For example, Italy's leading role in the judicial system is questioned, as its judicial system is perceived to be almost incompatible with Afghanistan's system.

Coordination among international actors was also marked by the United States' hegemony in terms of investments and capacities, as well as its focus on counter-insurgency efforts in the security sector. The fact that the United States was disappointed by Germany's limited and dilatory efforts as the lead nation for Afghanistan's national police reform and decided to begin police training itself (because it reportedly did not want to publicly criticize Germany) is expressive of the challenges in coordination.[35] Then again, the judicial sector and law enforcement development received on the whole relatively little attention and resources from international actors in the early days of the intervention, which is considered to be one of the biggest stumbling blocks in the state reconstruction efforts.[36] Another acknowledged factor explaining the coordination challenges relates to the desire of various international actors and foreign powers to appear among the top supporters and thus gain recognition and "points" as an international actor and partner.[37]

The strategic coordination challenges among the international actors also couple with the question of whether the objectives set for Afghanistan were realistic. For example, the 2006 *Afghanistan Compact* between the government and international actors set the goal of a competent and functioning Afghan national police by the end of 2010. Considering the very poor state of the Afghan national police, the objective could have already been considered unrealistic at the time the Compact was made.[38] Unrealistic timelines for achieving the objectives and the pressure to achieve quick results are the main observations the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) made in its assessment of the US's reconstruction efforts.[39] The ambitious goals were also in conflict with the initial emphasis on the *light footprint* approach, which placed the responsibility for implementing change on the Afghan partners.

Studies reveal that the strategic incongruity and lack of consistency among the international actors made it difficult attribute liability to the local authorities and decision-makers for the appropriate and fair use of aid. Since the aid came from different sources, the authorities were able to seek out tenders they preferred from competing international operators.[40]

Inconsistencies have also been identified between the declared goals and values of international state reconstruction actors and their tangible actions. On the one hand, the ambitions to build the Afghan state

35 SIGAR 2022.

36 Rashid 2008, 204.

37 The Norwegian Commission on Afghanistan 2016.

38 ICG 2007.

39 SIGAR 2021a.

40 Giustozzi & Ibrahimi 2013.

administration and democratically stabilize the society were high; on the other hand, actors and armed groups associated with egregious human rights violations were tolerated for as long as they were deemed necessary in the fight against the rebels.[41] According to a study focusing on Afghan perspectives, the objectives of stabilization and reconstruction efforts were often unclear to the locals, poorly aligned with the priorities of the local population and seemed contradictory: one day a village could be bombed or locals killed in the fight against the Taliban, and soon afterwards aid was offered (without compensation for the damage done).[42]

A good number of other factors have, indeed, been identified as contributing to the Afghan conflict and the challenges of international intervention. For example, the role of Pakistan and the influence of the global drug industry and market underlying the escalation and continuation of the conflict should not be underestimated.[43] Pakistan's role in supporting the Taliban and providing of a safe haven for them was not recognized, especially in the early days of the intervention. The Afghanistan–Pakistan border region in general provided a platform for groups supporting the jihadist ideology, and the United States and its allies were unable to eradicate the phenomenon in the region.[44]

The country's geopolitically significant location and immense challenges in development, such as illiteracy and food insecurity, have also been recognized as having a more general impact on the conflict in Afghanistan. The again, the deterioration of the security situation shaped international intervention by restricting the mobility of international actors and thus further distancing them from the Afghan population.

Bypassing the political, economic and cultural context and the strategic challenges that faced international actors is eminent in the sense that they can be regarded as having contributed to many other identified issues in the intervention, such as the aforementioned concentration of power on the diminishing elite, the challenges of reforming the Afghan security forces and administration, and, for example, the deepening of corruption. Our study's primary data also repeatedly highlight the challenges in addressing Afghanistan's social context and the strategic management of international intervention.

41 Ibid. See also Rashid 2008; Gopal 2014.

42 Amiri & Jackson 2022.

43 Gall 2014; Peters 2009. For example, Laari 2007 has written about the significance of opium in Finland.

44 Ruohomäki 2020. See Gall 2014 on the role of Pakistan in general. The title of Gall's book, *The Wrong Enemy*, refers to a comment by Richard C. Holbrooke, President Obama's special representative, to Britain's foreign secretary in 2009. Holbrooke stated, "Maybe we're fighting the wrong enemy in the wrong country," referring to Pakistan's role in the war in Afghanistan. See also Rubin & Rashid 2008.

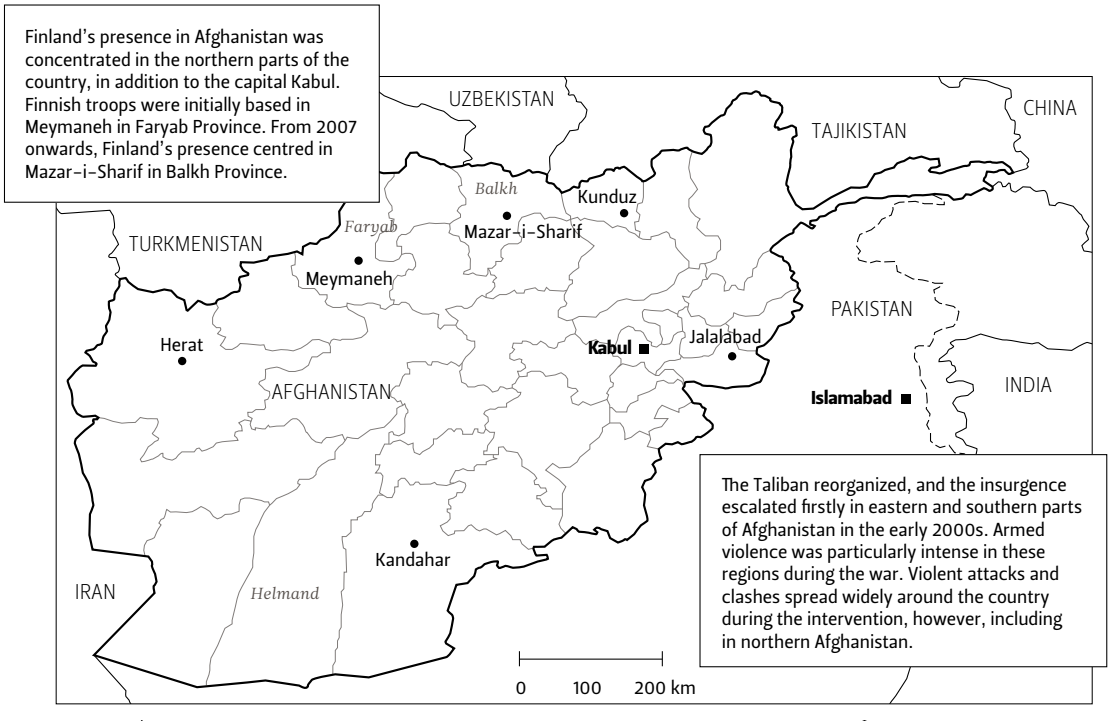


Figure 1. Finland's key areas of activity in Afghanistan

1.2.2 Finland's (comprehensive) crisis management

Reviewing the underlying observations behind Finland's crisis management system, in addition to the elements concerning international intervention, is important. Our research mandate gives rise to a special interest in examining the comprehensive approach in the context of Finland's crisis management. Comprehensive crisis management usually refers to collaboration between international actors involved in crisis management, with the aim of increasing the effectiveness and consistency of the intervention by attuning the actors' different roles.45 The notion of comprehensiveness is, on the one hand, the line of strategy46 guiding Finland's involvement in crisis management and, on the other hand, a targeted approach, the fundamentals and implementation of which can be critically analysed.[47]

Very little scientific research on what the comprehensive approach means as regards Finland's efforts in crisis and conflict areas has been

45 See Finland's comprehensive crisis management strategy 2009.

46 Ibid.

47 E.g., de Coning & Friis 2011 or de Coning 2009 in the Crisis Management Centre publication series; also, Fescharek 2015 and Williams 2011 for the Afghanistan context.

published, even though the literature deems the approach essential. The comprehensive approach has been examined primarily as collaboration between civilian crisis management experts and soldiers or peacekeepers. In the older literature, especially, it has been examined essentially as the integration of civilian elements into existing military crisis management structures, reflecting the development of international crisis management operations. In addition to collaboration between civilian and military crisis management, the literature also refers to (but rarely goes deeper into) collaboration with development cooperation and humanitarian aid actors.[48]

With regard to development studies, the more commonly used concept of triple nexus largely refers to the same objective and phenomenon: increasing the complementarity of collaboration and efforts between humanitarian aid, development cooperation and peacebuilding, albeit without the military element.[49] Improving comprehensiveness has been discussed in the literature, particularly in the context of improving allocation of tasks, coordination and collaboration between international actors, such as the EU and NATO.[50] The comprehensive approach has, on the one hand, been specifically linked to EU interventions, while in Finland, it has been presented as a strategy defining Finland's approach to crises, which the country could offer as an export product to international partners.[51] In 2009, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs published Finland's comprehensive crisis management strategy.[52]

One of the key observations made in earlier literature is that the comprehensive approach is highlighted in strategies, but it does not, however, reach the level of implementation.[53] Although the concept of comprehensive crisis management has broad support in Finland, administratively its different parts operate separately.[54] Recommendations for developing comprehensive approaches suggest changing attitudes, offering training, optimizing communication and making collaboration more consistent.[55] The differences between civilians and soldiers have also been highlighted in the literature. Differences between Finnish soldiers and civilian crisis

48 See Siirtola 2018 and others in the same publication (Siirtola & Palm 2018); Dumur-Laanila & Karjalainen 2017; Anttila 2011; Crisis Management Centre 2010; Ylitalo et al. 2009; Mero 2009; Pyykönen 2008.

49 Development Policy Committee 2021.

50 Pyykönen 2008.

51 See, e.g., Furness & Olsen 2016; Smith 2013; Major & Mölling 2013; Pyykönen 2008 and Anttila 2011 for the EU's application of the comprehensive approach and e.g., Siirtola 2018 and Suonio 2018 for how it manifests in Finland's operations.

52 See Ministry for Foreign Affairs: Finland's comprehensive crisis management strategy 2009.

53 See, e.g., Furness & Olsen 2016; Major & Mölling 2013; in Finland, Launiala & Viikki 2011.

54 Liesinen 2018, 26–27.

55 In the order Ylitalo et al. 2009, 19; Dumur-Laanila & Karjalainen 2017.

management experts have been suggested to be smaller or less clear than between US soldiers and civilians.[56]

Afghanistan has been regarded as a demanding test for combining Finland's military and civilian crisis management.[57] Divergent interpretations and objectives of the international actors, in particular the United States' perception of the mission as a war and the EU's interpretation of it as crisis management or peacebuilding, have been recognized as challenges to the comprehensive approach in Afghanistan.[58] The fact that a plethora of interdisciplinary theses has delved into Finland's comprehensive approach to crisis management in the Afghan context is noteworthy. Teemu Hassi considers in his thesis related to field officer training that comprehensive crisis management in Afghanistan supported Finland's foreign and security policy objectives, whereas Jari Hyvönen's study found that it was evident mainly on the political-strategic level, but on the tactical level it has been left to the discretion of individual sectors.[59]

This research report considers the concept of comprehensive crisis management, recognizing its role as a strategic tool framing Finnish policy, but does not assume that it has been implemented in practice or in the decisions that have guided it.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The history of conflict in Afghanistan and the scale of the international intervention make analysing Finland's efforts a challenging task. Assessing individual actors or areas of intervention in terms of success or failure is methodologically challenging, as distinguishing between and controlling for actors and actions and their consequences from the vast number of actors and actions and the impacts thereof to arrive at a certain outcome is difficult.[60]

These challenges are particularly significant for the efforts of a small country like Finland. To determine the results and impacts of Finland's

56 Ylitalo et al. 2009, 18.

57 Limnéll & Salonius-Pasternak 2009.

58 Eronen 2008, 37; see also Fescharek 2015.

59 Hassi 2014; Hyvönen 2012.

60 For example, the claim that the US-led military intervention in Afghanistan had significantly reduced international terrorism is methodologically difficult to verify in the absence of *counterfactual* events and with so many known factors influencing the level of international terrorism. Although al-Qaeda was defeated in Afghanistan, violent jihadism on a global scale has grown and expanded to influence more and more societies and regions in the twenty years under review. Then again, the fact that the United States has been able to prevent 9/11-type attacks is a function of many factors. For example, the significant improvement in US homeland security and intelligence capabilities should not be underestimated. See Pettersson & Öberg 2020; Napolitano 2019.

efforts, it would have to be possible to separate them from the wider international support and its impact.[61] Although Afghanistan was the most significant international support target for Finland, its support in various areas accounted for a very small portion of the total support Afghanistan received.[62]

The challenge of collecting reliable information, i.e., data, particularly in fragile states, makes it difficult to measure the impact of development cooperation, for example. With these challenges in mind, various impact assessment models and indicators have been developed, such as the OECD's evaluation criteria for impact – *relevant*, *coherent*, *effective*, *efficient*, *sustainable* and *impact* – which have also been applied in Finland's crisis management evaluation.[63] Reference is made to these criteria in the present study, in particular, when analysing how the results of the actions in Afghanistan and their wider impacts were monitored and when addressing the challenges associated with the sustainability of the actions.

Using different evaluation criteria would, however, require a common understanding of the phenomena against which the relevance or effectiveness of the efforts are to be evaluated, for example. The diversity of objectives is a fundamental challenge in evaluating the effectiveness of international efforts and learning from them. Before examining how something was successful or what results and sustainable impacts were achieved in relation to the objectives, there must be an understanding of what the efforts were based on and what they set out to achieve.

In view of the challenges already identified regarding the consistency and congruity of the objectives and strategies of Afghanistan's international intervention, it is first necessary to ascertain the basis of Finland's efforts and what they set out to achieve in order to analyse the expedience of them. In other words, before we can try to evaluate how successful they were, we first have to find out what they aimed for and how.

Our inquiry was guided by four interlinked research questions: (1) what goals and priorities governed Finland's efforts in general and in particular sectors; (2) How did Finland's efforts and the changes in them

61 See, e.g., Pyykönen & Kivinen 2020, 13, 24.

62 One alternative would be to compare the development of the Balkh province, which was important to Finland, and its capital Mazar-i-Sharif with another similar region. Another alternative would be to compare Finland's image to the other Nordic countries from the Afghans' point of view. However, even these research approaches would involve significant challenges: first, separating the impacts of Finland's efforts in more narrowly defined research areas would be problematic methodologically, especially due to the lack of reliable material. Then again, the majority of Finland's development cooperation work gravitated towards multilateral financing systems and support projects which covered the entire country (such as the Afghanistan Reconstruction Fund, ARTF). Therefore, focusing attention on Mazar-i-Sharif, for example, would exclude much of Finland's realized aid. The latter option would be limited by the obstacles to collect the necessary primary data and pose challenges on the assumption that the local partners and civilians would be interested in and able to distinguish between the contributions of different international actors.

63 See Pyykönen & Kivinen 2020, 13; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) 2021.

reflect different contexts, especially the context of the conflict and the Afghan society, the Afghan people's perspectives, as well as the frameworks of international partners?; (3) what theories of change and strategy guided Finland's efforts; and (4) how did practical implementation (including resources) correlate with the goals and action plans?

Question 1: What goals and priorities governed Finland's efforts in general and in particular sectors?

The first research question focuses on the goals and priorities that motivated Finland's efforts and involvement in cross-sectoral support measures in Afghanistan in general and in their various subdivisions in particular. The question is why Finland was actually in Afghanistan and what its efforts there aimed to achieve. Clarifying the goals that guided the decision-making and operations is a priority, because this is the only way the effectiveness and impact of the efforts can be assessed. Understanding the goals and prioritization of them is also important in itself for constructing knowledge for the future.

On the basis of the existing reviews, surveys and inspection reports, we anticipated that Finland had a wide range of goals set for its efforts in Afghanistan. They were related to both Finland's national interests (strengthening international partnerships and strengthening defence capabilities) and the situation in Afghanistan (contributing to international peace and promoting human rights and equality).[64]

Previous reports on Finland's comprehensive crisis management have also called for improving the transparency and clarity of the goals for impact.[65] Understanding how the different goals were prioritized, i.e., to what extent they guided decision-making about participation in certain operations and about the continuation and development of efforts, can help to analyse the various difficulties or apparent contradictions.

One of our key observations concerns the emphasis on international partnership goals (fostering transatlantic relations, solidarity with international partners), not only in terms of decisions about involvement, but also in terms of the development and continuation of operations and involvement. An important lesson for the future is the transparent prioritization of goals and the setting of tangible, realistic and context-specific goals alongside political partnership goals as guiding factors for the substance and continuation of operations.

64 See, e.g., Government report VNS 3/2018 Finland's support to Afghanistan and increasing Finland's involvement in the Resolute Support crisis management operation; National Audit Office of Finland 2013; Parliamentary Committee on Crisis Management 2021.

65 Kokonaisvaltaisen kriisinhallintatoiminnan vaikuttavuuden arvioinnin kehittäminen 2012; Pyykönen & Kivinen 2020.

In addition to the prioritization of political goals and the objectives of the different sectors, we examine the goals at different levels and as factors that may change over time. For example, the stabilization of Afghanistan and the achievement of peace are so-called high-level political goals. To progress towards these high-level goals and achieve them, however, more specific objectives at the operational and programme level must be defined in order to guide tangible actions. How the objectives and priorities for the different sectors were set in different periods of time, as well as how, when and why the objectives were changed are also worth analysing. We also focused on how clear and realistic the goals were with regard to the operating environment in the context of the conflict and other contextual factors.

Question 2: How did Finland's efforts and the changes in them reflect different contexts, especially the context of the conflict and the Afghan society, the Afghan people's perspectives, as well as the frameworks of international partners?

Our second research question examines Finland's efforts, changes in them and the goals that have guided them in relation to the main contexts of the Afghanistan crisis. To summarize, it is a question of what Finland's goals and efforts were actually based on and to what context they responded. By main contexts, we refer on the one hand, to the conflict and social context of Afghanistan and, on the other hand, to the context of the international intervention architecture.

The first and the most important context from the perspective of conflict research is the conflict in Afghanistan. Research over the past decade on international state reconstruction, crisis management and peacebuilding efforts has increasingly highlighted the importance of understanding the local context and needs, as well as the priorities, in terms of the effectiveness and sustainable impact of various interventions.[66]

The main argument in the research literature is that a deep understanding of the conflict context (conflict analysis) is essential for international operations to succeed, and that not only should the state actors be taken into consideration, but also the locally significant institutions and actors and their roles in society.[67] It is therefore justified to examine the extent to which Finland's goals and efforts were consistent in terms of the conflict in Afghanistan, overall development and local perspectives. Did Finland's efforts respond to the changes in the conflict or to the societal needs and the related challenges and changes over time?

66 See, e.g., Grävingholt et al. 2012; Autessere 2021.

67 See, e.g., de Coning 2018; Stepputat 2018; Raineri et al. 2020; Kazemi 2019. Notably, the international stabilization and reconstruction efforts and the headwinds they faced in Afghanistan have contributed to the pressure to rethink the international community's state and peacebuilding paradigms.

In addition to Afghanistan's own conflict context, international multilateral operations and the countries and international organizations heading them set an important context for Finland's efforts. Finland's crisis management efforts in Afghanistan and most of its development cooperation and humanitarian aid were established as part of international intervention operations. The objectives, strategies and measures in these operations were not in the hands of individual small state actors, like Finland, but were established largely under the influence of the actors who led the interventions, most notably the United States. These international frameworks offered certain opportunities and set certain boundary conditions for Finland's efforts. This forms reasonable grounds to consider how Finland's own objectives, approaches and tangible measures responded to the frameworks of international operations and multilateral efforts, as well as to the evolution and changes that took place in them.

One of the most valuable lessons to bear in mind regarding future crisis management, stabilization and peacebuilding operations is Finland's role, opportunities and challenges as a small state actor with limited resources when partaking in international alliances of different types and levels. Our research provides insight into the extent to which, and in which contexts, Finland can pursue its own independent goals and implement, for example, a comprehensive approach in situations where an explicit leader or partner significantly determines the nature of the operations.

Questions 3 and 4: What analyses and theories of change guided the different subdivisions of Finland's efforts, and how did practical implementation (including resources) correlate with the goals and logic of operations?

Questions 3 and 4 help to examine how the set objectives and targets were achieved and what path was taken in achieving them. While elucidating objectives answers the question of *why* something was done, these questions focus *how* this was attempted and by what means. These questions therefore form the core of the analysis of the intervention logic[68], or operation logic, (in addition to the elucidation of objectives).

The first question focuses on investigating the theory of change and the strategy guiding operations. Theory of change refers to an analytical roadmap of steps taken to influence a situation in such a way that the goal

68 Intervention logic refers simply to the aims, strategies/plans (ways) and instruments (means) that guide diplomatic efforts, crisis management, development or humanitarian efforts, i.e., the logic that drives the action. See Bennett 2014.

is eventually achieved (or approached).[69] It forms a logical continuum from the starting point through the steps to the end.[70]

On the practical political level and in diplomatic, crisis management, development cooperation and humanitarian aid interventions, theories of change are often referred to as strategies, or more simply as action plans. Theories of change or strategies that take account of the political and socio-economic dynamics of the context are seen as important for the effectiveness and results of actions; their absence and lack of clarity make it difficult to monitor the effectiveness of the actions.[71]

Clarification of the strategies and action plans that guided Finland's efforts is at the heart of our review in order to understand the logic of the interventions: What paths were thought to lead to the set goals? Was there a clear strategy or plan guiding the efforts and goal achievement, and what type of situational analysis was it based on? Did the overall plans or strategies for the different subdivisions change, and if so, when and why?

The second part of the "how" question focuses on clarifying practical actions and resources. What measures and resources were used to implement the objectives and plans? What constituted Finland's efforts on the whole, and what about the different subdivisions? Comparing the concrete actions and their contributions to the level and nature of the ambition regarding the objectives and plans is essential. To what extent did the measures taken and the resources deployed meet the objectives and plans for achieving them?

These four questions that guide our research can be summarized into two: What goals did Finland have when participating in the international intervention in Afghanistan and in relation to the intervention's subdivisions, i.e., why did Finland participate, and what were the grounds for Finland's efforts (in response to what, and how did Finland respond)? It should be stressed that these questions do not directly lead to an assessment of the effectiveness of Finland's efforts. As we described above, this is primarily due to the fact that in order to evaluate Finland's efforts, creating an understanding of why and what the efforts constituted is necessary. Analysing the reasons underlying Finland's efforts helps to understand the expedience of the efforts and the possibilities to make an impact in view of the different objectives. Identifying the goals and the actual logic that guided Finland's efforts is also a starting point for understanding the many challenges and seemingly modest impacts of the efforts, as our report shows.

69 Mayne 2018.

70 For example, in situation *A*, if you perform *x1* and *x2* and eliminate *x3*, you get the desired result *y* (assuming $y=a+x1+x2-x3+e$).

71 Pain 2021.

1.4 METHODOLOGY

Methodologically, we approach analysis of Finland's efforts in Afghanistan using intervention logic analysis and process tracing. Intervention logic analysis helps to examine Finland's efforts using *how* and *why* questions, as mentioned above.[72] Our aim is to understand the logic of the intervention, i.e., to analyse what goals, theories and resources guided and shaped Finland's efforts. Our aim is not to assess whether the logic was successful or unsuccessful, good or bad, as such.

In addition, we loosely use elements of process tracing to analyse how Finland's efforts reflected different contexts and how these contexts shaped Finland's Afghanistan policy-making over the past 20 years.[73] Here, different dimensions – the conflict in Afghanistan and the societal situation, as well as the contexts of international partnerships and actors – can be considered as competing hypotheses in the steering of Finland's efforts. Finland's efforts are placed on a timeline and analysed by comparing them to the events and developments in the main contexts. It should be noted that different hypotheses are not automatically considered as mutually exclusive or opposing. The development of the conflict and local needs, as well as the contexts of international partnerships may have simultaneously guided and influenced Finland's efforts in Afghanistan.

Our research data consist of primary and secondary sources that have been systematically collated and analysed. The primary data comprise 64 semi-structured interviews held between February and October 2022. The respondents were involved in the decision-making, planning and implementation of Finland's efforts in Afghanistan or they closely followed them. The purpose of the interviews was to gather a wide range of data on the respondents' perspectives and experiences pertaining to how Finland's efforts were structured in the different sectors during each time period and to the types of goals and strategies the efforts were considered to respond to.[74]

72 Bennett 2014.

73 Process tracing is a methodology used primarily for qualitative testing of causal theories, which allows competing theories to be tested against each other and against empirical data through the description and systematic analysis of the process. We utilize the process tracing components loosely in our study; the goal is not to explain a specific outcome but to understand the motivators and structuring of Finland's efforts. However, building timelines and analysing the different decisions or options are also useful in this study. See Ricks & Liu 2018.

74 To ensure the data reflected the experiences and perspectives the respondents had during the intervention and not the current moment, they were reminded about the purpose of the interviews at the beginning of the interview. They were encouraged to tell about the structure of the efforts and the reasons thereof as they experienced and perceived it during the period in question. The questions were also formulated so as to situate the interview in context. The first question in the interview prompted the respondent to look back on Afghanistan as an operating environment and to describe their assignment in relation to the country at the time. It should be noted, however, that interview data are always collected at a certain moment in time. As stated in the Finland as a Partner section (3.1.1) and in the Conclusion (Section 5), this may have influenced, for example, the evaluation and emphasis of the success of the partnership targets in our study.

Purposeful selection and snowball sampling were used to select the respondents in order to obtain a broad picture of Finland's efforts in Afghanistan. The respondents comprised people involved in the diplomatic corps, political decision-making, military crisis management, civilian crisis management and development cooperation, and humanitarian aid. Each respondent provided their written informed consent to the confidential collection, use and archiving of their interview data and personal data. The interviews lasted an average of one and a half hours and were guided by a battery of 18–20 questions.

The standardized battery of questions, which is in the appendix, directed each interview. Some questions were adapted to the respondent's situation, individual questions were omitted, and possible follow-up questions were asked based on the respondent's job and profile in Afghanistan. The battery of open-ended questions covered the objectives that piloted Finland's efforts during the intervention, the plans piloting the intervention logic and efforts, the concrete actions and the operating environment and the monitoring of them, the assessment of the consequences and impacts of the efforts, and discernment of the lessons learned. The discussions were documented in detail during the interviews, for which reason two researchers were present during most of the interviews. The interviews were not recorded, and because they are confidential, they are referred to anonymously in this report. In addition to Finnish actors, interviews were held with individual Afghans who had worked with Finland, as well as representatives of partner countries and international organizations and experts on Afghanistan. A description of the interview data is in the appendix.

In addition to the interviews, primary data were collected in workshops that brought together experts and key stakeholders. In May 2022, two all-day workshops were organized for people of Afghan origin living in Finland. The workshops focused on the perspectives of Afghans living in Finland regarding the expedience, challenges and lessons learned in Afghanistan, international intervention and Finland's efforts. The workshop participants represented different backgrounds in terms of ethnicity, gender and length of residence in Finland. There were separate workshops for the younger and older participants.[75]

In addition, a workshop was organized in late spring 2022 to bring together Finnish experts who had worked in Afghanistan. It focused on

75 Methodologically, it is important to note that Afghans living in Finland do not form a representative sample of the Afghan society. It cannot, therefore, be – and is not – our intention to identify societally representative views. However, Afghans and families and individuals with an Afghan background living in Finland constitute an important resource for understanding and reflecting on different perspectives and experiences in relation to what Finland, as part of the international community, sought to achieve and implemented in Afghanistan.

the future of crisis management, peacebuilding, development cooperation and humanitarian efforts in conflict situations and fragile states, in light of the lessons learned from the experiences in Afghanistan. Our research group also held several discussions with both the project advisory group and other experts to help in contextualization.

Owing to the interviews and workshop discussions, our findings are based on exceptionally broad primary data on Finland's involvement in the international intervention in Afghanistan. The study unfurls the views of Finnish actors, in particular, on the constructs of the stabilization and reconstruction measures, but also includes voices of people with Afghan backgrounds and the perspectives of our partners.

Using a standardized interview battery enables a systematic data analysis and thereby an interpretation of the frequency and occurrence of salient and interesting observations pertaining to the different sectors, time periods and actors. The main findings of our analysis related to Finland's agency consist of observations that were repeated throughout the data and interview profiles. Similarly, systematically collected data make it possible to identify differences that depend on the actor profiles, for example, associated with problems identified in the international intervention and Finland's efforts.

The data are cited mainly in two ways. General views, arising from the primary data, are referred to within the text without a specific footnote and by using terms indicating the frequency and nature of the observations, such as 'many', 'development cooperation experts', 'across the sectors' and so on. Descriptive quantitative analysis was applied to the primary data to ascertain the key findings on the main objectives and motivations behind Finland's efforts.

Furthermore, we pseudonymised direct quotations (e.g., H1) from our interview notes in addition to the general observations and to elaborate on them. This means that the reader is not able to identify the respondent, but the researchers can return to a certain interview if needed. Citing the respondents' responses in this way also allows the reader to distinguish between the origin of the direct quotations. Observations that disclose actual courses of events and individual observations (which differ from the majority) were also pseudonymised. We highlight different parts of the primary data in different sections. The analysis of Finland's agency frameworks (Sections 3.1.1–3.1.3) is based on the overall picture that emerged from the entire set of primary data and repeated observations regarding the nature of Finland's agency. Sections 3.2–3.4, which discuss the intervention sectors separately, expand on Sections 3.1.1–3.1.3 and focus on the interviews and discussions directly related to the subdivision

in question. The primary data were used in the overview to portray the atmosphere and trajectories in the different time periods.

The primary data are used anonymously in the report, in accordance with the respondents' consent to the collection and use of the data, preserving their anonymity outside the research group. The interview data were collected confidentially to ensure high quality and prevent influence from outside pressures. Obtaining the most honest and subjective views possible was a priority in answering the research questions. The interview topic is politically sensitive, and the respondents may have experienced pressure to form their responses in a certain way due to their current work, had the responses been made public.

Confidentiality also means that even anonymous primary data cannot be disclosed as such for public use, especially when considering Finland's small size and the difficulties it poses in maintaining anonymity. As researchers, we understand the problematic nature of confidentiality, especially in terms of the further use of the research data. Therefore, we have endeavoured to refer broadly to the data, deriving our references from systematic analysis and adhering to research integrity. Involving several researchers and the numerous discussions among the members of the research team on the interpretation of the qualitative data have contributed a careful and balanced analysis. The research team is grateful to all those who voluntarily shared their time and views in the study. They have made it possible for us to compile and analyse comprehensive, high-quality and credible data.

In addition to primary data, the report utilizes secondary data comprising studies, evaluations, reports, research literature and scientifically collected material on conflict dynamics and development trends. The literature review on the conflict in Afghanistan and international intervention has helped to build an overall picture of the course of events and made it possible to analyse Finland's efforts in tandem with these events.

The review of the Government's reports and other reports on Afghanistan, the reports of the Foreign Affairs Committee, the ministries' reports and reviews, and other documents enables us to understand public motives, justifications, use of resources and the narrative. Analysing such documents is important, for example, when ascertaining the lucidity and consistency of goal setting. Comparing the findings from primary and secondary data helps in considering the relative weight given to the different goals, intervention logic and actions contained in official documents and observed in empirical experiences.

/ 2

2. FINLAND'S EFFORTS IN AFGHANISTAN: OVERVIEW OF 2001–2021

The period under review is both (too) long and (too) short. It excludes the historical developments mentioned in the background section in response to which international intervention was formed and which influenced its course. Understanding and taking into account the historical context in all its complexity is one of the most important lessons for international actors to learn in any crisis situation.

Twenty years of international intervention and Finland's participation in it, on the other hand, cover a long period of review, during which many aspects have changed in Finland, in international relations and in Afghanistan's political dynamics. This temporal framework helps to compare the objectives and principles of Finland's efforts at different times and in relation to different events. However, it also increases the risk of making generalizations about the entire twenty years on the basis of a certain time. For this reason, dividing the twenty-year period into more easily digestible parts facilitates understanding.

In this overview, we categorize and structure the era under study into five relevant time periods based on the previous research literature and our primary data:

1. 2001–2005: Window of Opportunity: optimism and unexpected challenges
2. 2006–2011: Downward Spiral: insurrection intensifies, and reconstruction and crisis management efforts accelerate
3. 2012–2014: Transition: responsibility shifts in a fragile situation
4. 2015–2018: Stagnation: Taliban regional control strengthens, withdrawal of military crisis management postponed
5. 2019–2021: Beginning of the End: negotiations and foreboding

These periods have been identified in consonance with the conflict and the evolution of the international intervention dynamics. The purpose of the overview is to provide the reader with an overall understanding of the development of the conflict environment and international intervention and to help construe Finland's efforts.

Our overview identifies a tragic development where the initial optimism and even a climate described as euphoric – both among international actors and the Afghan people – were gradually replaced by increased security concerns, pessimism and the erosion of mutual trust.

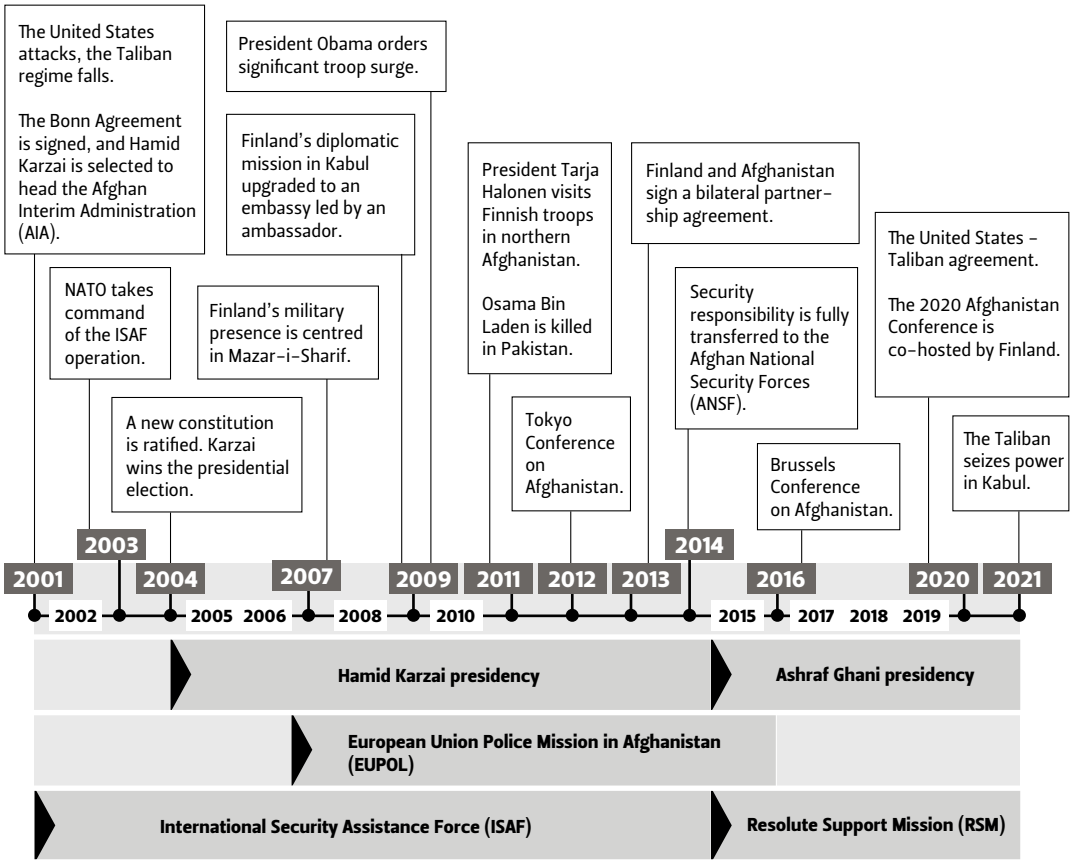


Figure 2. Key events in Afghanistan during the international intervention

At the beginning of 2002, Afghanistan was a country gradually emerging from conflict. There was a fragile peace, and it was possible to describe the international forces as peacekeepers. However, the gradual escalation and spread of armed insurrection and the actions taken against it turned the situation into an increasingly active and widespread asymmetrical conflict, in which peacekeeping gradually transformed into combating and countering the rebels.

Several of our respondents described how this change in the operating environment translated concretely into, for example, the type of equipment Finnish soldiers used — from light weapons and self-protection during the early years of the ISAF mission to heavy combat equipment in the 2010s. As the level of equipment and financial investments in Afghanistan increased, Finnish diplomats and other actors had less room to work and the gap between ordinary Afghans and international actors widened. This deterioration in the security situation, the narrowing of

aid providers' operating space and the stress on self-protection, i.e., the "bunkerization" of aid, made it difficult to instil the positive changes that had taken place over time and to monitor the results and impacts of the efforts.[76]

Focusing on the culmination points of the international intervention and their rationale, one of the participants in the workshops with the Afghans living in Finland summed up their thoughts on the trajectory of the intervention as follows: "*In 2001, the international community entered Afghanistan without asking the Afghans, and in 2021, you left without asking us.*"[77] To understand Finland's efforts in between these culmination points, the discussion now turns to the main trajectories of the conflict, international intervention and Finland's participation.

2.1 2001–2005: WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY: OPTIMISM AND UNEXPECTED CHALLENGES

> "*There were very high hopes and expectations that things would start to get better.*"[78]

The international intervention in Afghanistan began when the United States and Great Britain launched Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) against al-Qaeda, which was responsible for the 9/11 attacks, and the Taliban regime protecting al-Qaeda. The exceptionally devastating terrorist attacks, with their high number of casualties, shocked the world and were quickly condemned by the UN Security Council.[79] After the attacks, the United States declared war on al-Qaeda and affiliated groups, and Congress gave President Bush extensive powers to use military force against international terrorism.[80]

The United States had broad international support for its actions. Military support for the *Northern Alliance* quickly reversed Afghanistan's internal struggle for power in favour of the anti-Taliban movement, which had been struggling in its fight against the Taliban regime. In December

76 For bunkerization of aid, see Duffield 2012.

77 Participant in a diaspora workshop in May 2022.

78 Interview H13.

79 United Nations Security Council Resolution 1368, September 2001. The Resolution recognized the right to collective self-protection as a means of combating international terrorism.

80 See International Crisis Group (ICG) 2021 on the legal basis of the United States' war on terrorism the evolution of it.

2001, the Taliban lost their last major regional stronghold, Kandahar in southern Afghanistan.[81]

When the Taliban withdrew from Afghanistan, the other major political and military forces, with the exception of the Taliban, met with the support of the international community in Bonn, Germany in December 2001. The aim of the Bonn Conference was to draw up a roadmap for the new government after the overthrow of the Taliban regime. The conference set the framework for Afghanistan's new constitution, which saw the light of day in 2004. Virtually all of the West, including Japan and South Korea, supported the formation of Afghanistan's new government.[82] The Bonn Agreement focused on building a strong central government and put Hamid Karzai in charge of the interim government.[83] Following the decisions made at the conference, the UN Security Council authorized a multinational security force, the ISAF mission, in Kabul and its environs to support the interim administration and maintain security.[84] The mission was separate from the OEF in the beginning, nor was it associated with NATO.

Finland decided to participate in ISAF in early 2002, and in so doing agreed to Great Britain's, ISAF's lead nation at the time, inquiries and the United Nations' calls on its member states to support the mission.[85] The President of Finland made the decision, in accordance with the Peacekeeping Act, to participate in the mission upon the Government's proposal.[86] Before making the proposal, the Government consulted Parliament concerning a report submitted to it, as the right to use force in the ISAF mission would be more extensive than in traditional peacekeeping.[87] The report of 4 January stressed the importance of supporting Afghanistan and

81 Gopal 2014; the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) has compiled a useful timeline of the war in Afghanistan from a US perspective. See CFR 2021.

82 The countries that contributed troops to ISAF were Albania, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, El Salvador, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Jordan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Mongolia, Montenegro, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, North Macedonia, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Tonga, Turkey, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, and the United States.

83 Fields and Ahmed 2011.

84 United Nations Security Council Resolution 1386, December 2001.

85 Planning for participation began in 2001. The Government's Ministerial Committee on Foreign and Security Policy addressed the matter on 21 December 2001, when it was also initially presented to Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee. See Government report VNS 5/2001.

86 Act on Peace Support Operations (514/1984).

87 In accordance with Section 2, Paragraph 2 of the Act on Peace Support Operations (514/1984), the Government made a decision on 4 January 2002 to submit a report (VNS 5/2001) to Parliament concerning Finland's participation in a military crisis management operation (ISAF) in Afghanistan. This report was the first step in Finland's twenty-year participation in the war in Afghanistan.

seizing a 'unique opportunity' to return order and ensure international security by participating in a UN-mandated mission.[88]

Military intervention in Afghanistan was generally considered justified in the context following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and Finland's entry into the operation was considered almost obvious.[89] All parliamentary parties supported Finland's participation in the operation.[90] However, many MPs considered it important that the division of tasks and command relationships between the UN-mandated ISAF mission and the United States' OEF mission be clear (and separate).[91]

Finland's ISAF contribution began with the deployment of a Civil-Military Co-operation (CIMIC) unit of fifty soldiers. CIMIC efforts focused on building trusting relationships with local partners, with the aim of improving the unit's protection. In practice, the efforts initially involved surveillance-type patrols, acquiring information and extensive communication with the Afghans both at the level of the administration and the local population. There were also small-scale aid operations and projects.[92]

The number of Finnish troops in the first few years was less than one hundred, and from the very beginning the Finnish unit included not only professional soldiers but also reservists.[93] With the experience Finland gained in the Balkan operations, it was deemed that it had something to offer the CIMIC efforts.[94] Indeed, the Finns were involved in establishing a *CIMIC Coordination Centre (CCC)* in Kabul to strengthen the coordination between the different actors.[95] In addition to the soldiers, Finland sent civilian crisis management experts, such as political advisers and police experts, to work with ISAF. Civilian experts were also seconded to work in the EU Special Representative (EUSR) office in Afghanistan.

At the beginning of the first decade of the 21st century, the operating environment in Afghanistan was considered extremely challenging: educated Afghans had either been deported or killed, poverty was

88 Government report, VNS 5/2001.

89 Several respondents from the different sub-sectors highlighted the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the context that followed them (the US-initiated war on terror and seeing Afghanistan as a platform for international terrorism) as key and grounds for the solid foreign and security policy will to participate, especially with regard to the initial decision to participate. See Finland as a Partner, Section 3.1.1.

90 Minutes of the Parliament plenary session, PTK 159/2001.

91 Ibid.

92 Based on interviews with CIMIC participants and experts. Small-scale projects were called Quick Impact projects.

93 The initial strength of fifty soldiers was increased to sixty already in the summer of 2002. See Ministry of Defence 2022.

94 For example, interview H42; see also Parliamentary plenary discussion on Finland's ISAF participation on 9 January 2002.

95 Interview H39; closed in 2004.

widespread, and infrastructure was non-existent.[96] However, people seemed to trust in and have hope for the future.[97]

From 2002 onward, international reconstruction and development investments in Afghanistan rose to significant levels alongside military intervention. At first, the United States focused its attention on tangible reconstruction projects that rendered quick results and strengthening the security forces (especially the army). The state and reform of the police and judicial system, for example, was not given similar attention.[98] The division of responsibilities between the various lead nations, with their varying amounts of investment, and the strategies in different sectors were underlying factors which impacted the efforts. Germany embarked on training the Afghan national police with a civilian-led contingent, but the slow progression of its efforts frustrated the United States, who then began its own training programme.[99]

Afghanistan also quickly became a significant development cooperation target for Finland from 2002 onward. Finland opened a liaison office in Kabul in autumn 2002 and appointed a travelling ambassador from Helsinki to represent Finland in issues related to Afghanistan. The ambassador travelled regularly to Kabul to carry out the duties; however, establishing permanent in-office positions were only on the level of deliberation at that time. In 2005, a temporary chargé d'affaires was stationed in Kabul whose role was to represent Finland in situ. Finland was closely involved in shaping the European Union's stance and operations.

From the outset, Finland's support was strongly channelled through multi-donor trust funds overseen by the World Bank and the UN, such as the *Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF)*, the *Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan (LOTFA)* and the *UN Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC)*. Finland provided unearmarked general financial support for central government salaries and to bolster basic services, as well as targeted support for building democratic institutions, supporting the security sector, strengthening (rural) administration and developing rural livelihoods. Finland soon became the third largest donor in the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC). Finland also began early on to support the *Marie Stopes International (MSI)* organization for reproductive health.[100] Likewise, Finland used funds for local cooperation

96 In 2001, Afghanistan's estimated population was 19.7 million, according to the World Population Review (2022). It should be noted, however, that there has not been a comprehensive population census since 1979.

97 This emerged both in the interviews with those who worked in Afghanistan in the first decade of the 2000s and those in the diaspora workshop discussions.

98 SIGAR 2021a; Rashid 2008, 204.

99 SIGAR 2022.

100 Davies et al. 2007.

distributed by the liaison office in Kabul and later by the embassy. Local cooperation fund projects are small-budget projects aimed at supporting civil society through which the embassy is in direct contact with local organizations and actors. On the one hand, these projects were associated with risks of corruption and administrative burdens, but on the other hand, they were also seen as useful bridges for local non-state actors.[101]

The fall of the Taliban regime and the end of the armed conflict were met with hope in Afghanistan. Armed violence was remarkably low in 2002, and a feeling of relief, at least in Kabul, was in the air after the change of government.[102] The Taliban quickly fell, many militants fled to Pakistan. The foot soldiers dispersed and returned to civilian life in Afghanistan. Views towards the transitional administration were generally positive between 2002 and 2005, and expectations regarding the country's new direction were high.

The number of international actors in Kabul increased rapidly and they were able to move around quite freely and make excursions across the country.[103] Afghanistan's economic growth was strong during the Window of Opportunity era, and millions of refugees were reported to return to the country.[104] The first presidential elections in 2004 were optimistic. Hamid Karzai, a member of the Popalzai Pashtun clan who led the interim government and had served as deputy foreign minister during the civil war, was elected president. The 2005 parliamentary and regional elections marked the end of the transitional period in Afghanistan.

While the United States, in particular, focused on the destruction of al-Qaeda and the suppression of the Taliban who protected it, interest in the backgrounds and power relations of several other armed political groups and their leaders was initially neglected. The understanding in general of the dividing lines within the country and in the different political forces was poor. The U.S. alliance with the leaders of local armed groups, the so-called *strongmen*, and intelligence's reliance on them, made the war on terrorism a tool for local power struggles and mutual disputes. This resulted in the ousting and even killing of anti-Taliban operatives who supported the Karzai administration but who were falsely believed to be linked to the Taliban and al-Qaeda.[105] This, in turn, began to arouse suspicion against the interim government and the international

101 Interviews H03, H16 and H04.

102 Interviews H19 and H20; see also Gopal 2014.

103 For example, interview H13.

104 See Davies et al. 2007, 17.

105 Gopal 2014.

intervention that supported it. Alternately, the situation empowered certain local armed actors at the expense of others.[106]

The Taliban was already reorganizing itself in Pakistan in 2002, and in 2003 resistance to the international coalition and the Karzai administration began to emerge more clearly, albeit fragmented at first. A group of local leaders from the Kandahar province supporting the interim government shared their concerns with the President about the security and reconstruction of Kandahar during their visit to Kabul.[107]

It quickly became clear that the security force operations should be expanded outside Kabul.[108] In 2003, NATO took command of ISAF, and its mandate expanded from the immediate vicinity of Kabul to the entire country to assist the government in maintaining security and securing reconstruction and humanitarian work. The deployment of the mission throughout the country took place in four phases between late 2003 and the end of 2006. During this time, ISAF gradually assumed regional responsibilities, including from the US-led special forces, OEF.[109]

As the mission's operating environment expanded, ISAF also became responsible for establishing *Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT)* across the country.[110] The PRTs reinforced the stabilization of the security situation in their areas of responsibility together with the Afghan security forces, supporting the Afghan operations and carrying out tangible reconstruction projects. The purpose was to build trust in the central government and the ISAF forces.

Finland's military involvement spread with ISAF's expansion and PRT activities to northern Afghanistan where the PRT-Meymaneh, led by Norway, was established in late 2004. Thereafter, it operated under Regional Command North (RC-N) led by Germany.[111] When the Finnish troops joined PRT-Meymaneh, their numbers increased to eighty soldiers. From the beginning, the PRTs differed from each other in different

106 Gopal 2014; Jackson 2021.

107 Anîs 2003.

108 Interviews H09, H19 and H39.

109 See, e.g., Rashid (2008, 349–354) on ISAF's transfer to NATO and the expansion of responsibilities. It should be noted that initially many European countries were reluctant to transfer ISAF to NATO and thus to become more involved in the mission. According to Rashid (2008, 350), however, the discord between the United States and many European countries brought about by the Iraq war facilitated NATO allies' and partners' commitment to Afghanistan in order to maintain United States' sympathy.

110 NATO 2022; see Farrell 2017; Rynning 2012 and Eronen 2008 for information on the background and nature of PRTs.

111 Finland's decision to participate in the PRTs is outlined in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs memorandum UTP 13/2004. Finland's decision to concentrate its PRT involvement in the relatively stable northern Afghanistan surfaced in several interviews. Many respondents highlighted the Nordic dimension in the northern region. Some associated the preference to go north with a reluctance to operate in higher risk areas. For example, interviews H44, H36 and H38.

regions, depending on the country they were led by, nor was there a clear, uniform PRT model.[112]

Violent attacks increased between 2004 and 2005. The year 2005 was the first year since 2001 that the conflict had reached the milestone of more than 1,000 casualties, which is the number of battle-related deaths per year in a common definition of war.[113] As rebellion smouldered, United States-led support for security sector reform shifted more and more to strengthen counter-insurgency efforts. The resource and competence issues of the United States' government agencies were evident in these operations. For example, the US Department of State was initially responsible for police training, but due to frustration with its performance, the US Department of Defense took responsibility for it in 2005, which contributed to the militarization of the police training.[114] The police were seen more as front-line combatants than as a force for maintaining order and fighting crime.

The Afghan government remained fragile, and its receptiveness was tested from the outset. This created a breeding ground for corruption and stunted the effectiveness and sustainability of aid. Aid was also heavily concentrated in the Kabul area and, in line with the Bonn Agreement, allotted to the centralized government.[115] The lack of international aid coordination and disagreements between the international actors due to their national priorities also complicated the situation.[116]

On the other hand, at the beginning of the intervention the role of the United States in particular, and therefore of the wider international community, in supporting Afghanistan's interim government and the country's reconstruction was to take the 'light footprint' approach. Emphasis was placed on Afghanistan's own control and responsibility for the process. The role of the international partners was to support the Afghan government rather than be responsible for the country's development. Afghanistan was treated as a post-conflict country, and the Taliban were considered defeated. US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, in particular, opposed the state-building agenda and wanted to limit the United States' presence.[117] Initially, this limited investments in Afghanistan, and they were short-term. Many said they were insufficient to meet Afghanistan's needs and the posed expectations for Afghanistan at the time. Then

112 Interviews H38 and H02; see also Rashid (2008, 199).

113 UCDP Afghanistan; Government.

114 SIGAR 2022, 89–90.

115 Murtazashvili 2022. The diaspora workshop participants pinpointed in their discussions that reconstruction aid was concentrated in Kabul and other cities, and in general was unevenly allocated in the regions and between the different ethnic groups.

116 See, e.g., Davies et al. 2007.

117 Salt 2018. From 2003 onwards, the United States focused its attention and resources on Iraq, which fundamentally influenced its policies.

again, the light footprint approach was not further specified given the extremely fragile administrative conditions and context.[118] Despite this approach, real action was built largely on the decision-making and planning processes of the international actors, especially the United States.[119]

2.2 2006–2011: DOWNWARD SPIRAL: INSURRECTION INTENSIFIES, AND RECONSTRUCTION AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT EFFORTS ACCELERATE

> "*At the same time the mentality changed. The word from Mazar was that the time for drinking tea was over, the time for war had begun.*"[120]

The security situation deteriorated markedly as the armed insurgency intensified, especially in the south and east of the country from 2005 onward. The wider the ISAF spread out, the more it was attacked. The rebels also aimed their offensive at the 'soft', international support operations, which were partly led by PRT teams at this point. The Finnish Parliament was informed of ISAF's determined action — in September 2006 alone, 500 Taliban and other members of armed groups were killed in Operation Medusa.[121] In the same year, more than 3,000 people died in armed clashes in total.[122]

Finnish soldiers were also exposed to unprecedented danger in 2006, when armed rioters demonstrating against Prophet Muhammad cartoon scandal attacked the Norway-led base in Meymaneh. Finnish troops were also stationed at the base. The attack, which lasted several hours, killed three Afghans and wounded two Norwegian soldiers. No Finns were injured in the attack.[123] Finnish soldiers were awarded the Cross of Liberty for the incident.[124] Jyri Häkämies, Minister of Defence at the time, visited Afghanistan in the summer of 2007 and said that he was taken by the way the Finns operated in difficult conditions.[125]

118 For example, interviews H14 and H13.

119 See SIGAR 2021a; e.g., interviews H3 and H13.

120 Interview H38.

121 Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2006.

122 UCDP Afghanistan; Government.

123 Yle 2006.

124 Kainulainen 2006.

125 Häkämies 2006.

Between 2007 and 2011, the number of civilian casualties increased every year.[126] Armed clashes and attacks occurred unevenly in the country. The security situation deteriorated significantly in some parts of the country, while Kabul and the north were much calmer and international actors moved about quite freely, especially in the early part of the period.[127]

In 2006, the *Afghanistan Compact* was adopted, which served as a basis for cooperation and development between Afghanistan and the international community. President Karzai also approved Afghanistan's National Development Strategy in spring 2008.

For the first time since early 2002, Finland's efforts in Afghanistan were discussed at the end of 2007 in association with a Government report to Parliament. The lengthy period between the Government reports setting out the Government's public position triggered some discussion, as the circumstances had changed significantly in five years.[128] During that time, Finland's military participation had shifted from CIMIC operations and activities centred around Kabul with NATO and in northern Afghanistan to participation in PRTs led by Norway (Meymaneh) and Sweden (Mazar-i-Sharif). Finland was in the Meymaneh PRT until 2007. In the summer of 2007, Finland's PRT efforts were concentrated in Mazar-i-Sharif in northern Afghanistan. Improvement of effectiveness and maintenance were the reasons used to substantiate the decision. Taking or rotating PRT leadership was discussed as an alternative, but eventually it was decided to make the troops a part of the Sweden-led PRT.[129]

Finland's Afghanistan policy stressed the need to strengthen Afghanistan's state administration and security sector in the long term, to be able to transfer responsibility for maintaining security entirely to the Afghans themselves in the future.[130] The documents guiding Afghanistan policy also stressed the comprehensive approach described in the comprehensive crisis management strategy to be published in 2009, whereby Finland's participation (and the need for it) should be coordinated in the different stabilization and reconstruction sectors.[131]

In February 2008, Finland appointed ten operational mentors to support the Afghan Armed Forces' development (*Operational Mentoring*

126 UNAMA 2021.

127 This is evident from the interviews with diplomats and the respondents who worked in the organizations and crisis management. Then again, the respondents identified this period as a time of change: the security situation began to deteriorate significantly in both Kabul and northern Afghanistan.

128 The *Suomen Kuvalehti* current issues magazine published an article, "Ajopuuna Afganistaniin", ("drifting to Afghanistan", Lindholm 2007) in the summer of 2007. The article takes a critical perspective on the debate in Finland, or the lack thereof, concerning the grounds for Finland's military involvement in Afghanistan.

129 See, e.g., Government report VNS 2/2007 and Foreign Affairs Committee statement UaVL 1/2008.

130 Ibid.; Foreign and security policy UTP 19/2007.

131 See Government report VNS 1/2010; Finland's comprehensive crisis management strategy 2009.

and Liaison Teams, OMLT), which was seen as key in the forces' ability to take responsibility for their own operations in the future. Civilian experts participated in the implementation of various small projects, as part of the PRT activities, during 2004–2007. Projects included construction of police stations and other administrative buildings. The Afghan police and civilian administration were also provided with equipment and training. In 2007, allocation of EUR 2 million was granted for PRT projects over the following three years.[132]

President Obama's new military strategy in 2009 raised the United States military efforts to record levels between 2010 and 2011 (before the planned transfer of security responsibilities to the Afghan security forces). Referred to as the *surge* policy, it was driven by the Taliban's increased regional influence and violence. The Taliban almost seized Kandahar in late summer 2010 before reinforcements arrived to strengthen the military presence.[133] The increase in United States PRT project funding from about $200 million in 2007 to 1 billion in 2010 is expressive of the impact of the *surge* policy.[134] This period was also marked by an escalation in counter-insurgency efforts. In 2009, ISAF's tasks were broadened to include counter-insurgency efforts.[135]

The security situation in northern Afghanistan began to gradually deteriorate, also. According to conflict statistics armed violence spread to the north in 2009 in particular.[136] Two Finnish soldiers were killed during this period: Sergeant Petri Immonen in May 2007 and First Lieutenant Jukka Kansonen in February 2011.[137] The rights of Finnish troops to use force (*Rules of Engagement, RoE*) and the level of equipment changed significantly between 2009 and 2011 as the war escalated and the operating environment became a stage for an active conflict.[138]

Finland, too, strengthened its military presence in northern Afghanistan in 2009 to safeguard the presidential and provincial council elections.

132 Foreign and security policy UTP 19/2007.

133 Gall 2014, 223.

134 SIGAR 2012; Amiri & Jackson 2022, 22.

135 E.g., Ministry of Defence 2022. Until this time, Finland had in its public documents disassociated itself from the efforts in the United States' war on terrorism and emphasized stabilization as ISAF's main task (Limnéll & Salonius-Pasternak 2009, 10). Still in 2010, a study on the perspectives of Finnish MPs revealed that more than eighty per cent of them were of the opinion that Finland should not "actively participate in the suppression of extremist groups through military force" (Salonius-Pasternak 2010a, 7).

136 UCDP Afghanistan: Government.

137 Both victims were killed by roadside bombs. In addition to these fatalities, which were the only fatalities in the Finnish military forces in Afghanistan, at least fifteen soldiers were seriously wounded in their duties during the ISAF operation.

138 In the summer of 2009, several countries, which were sending troops to Afghanistan, discussed the increasing losses. Finland's national debate on the operation in Afghanistan was characterized as fragmented in comparison to other European countries. After all, the country lacked an annual parliamentary debate on the matter. Vuorisalo 2009; Archer 2009.

This was in response to the United States' aspirations, publicly discussed in Finland, for Finland to increase its number of troops there.[139] The election reinforcement unit, comprising CIMIC groups, security troops and a national support team increased Finland's military strength momentarily to 216 soldiers.[140]

Finnish troops were frequently attacked in the run-up to the elections, and some of the Finnish election reinforcement units were in combat situations almost daily.[141] The election reinforcement unit was repatriated at the end of 2009. The divergent messages from the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the President of Finland concerning the schedule for repatriating the election reinforcement troops caused confusion, which was also noted at the Unites States Embassy in Finland.[142]

The situation remained difficult even after the elections due to the armed violence. Finland also strengthened its military presence and support to concur with the *surge* policy and to enable the transfer of responsibility for Afghanistan's security to Afghanistan. More OMLT mentors were sent to Afghanistan, as well as infantry troops to focus on patrolling, guarding and escorting tasks. The total strength of Finland's crisis management force increased from 145 to 195 soldiers between August 2010 and March 2011.

To enable the transfer of security responsibilities in military crisis management to the Afghans, transitions from small-scale *military observation teams (MOT)* to international combat forces were made to facilitate joint operations with the local security forces.[143]

International development cooperation also increased sharply during these years, especially as a result of the *surge* policy. Between 2006 and 2011, Finland participated in several international conferences pertaining to Afghanistan, including Paris in 2008, The Hague in 2009 and Bonn in 2011. The conferences addressed Afghanistan's political situation, and the international community affirmed its support for Afghanistan. At the same time, the Kabul government was called upon to make reforms, such as commitment to fight corruption and respect for human rights.

At the International Conference in London in 2006, Finland pledged EUR 50 million in aid for the following five-year term.[144] Finland's official

139 See Yle 2011.

140 Ministry of Defence 2022.

141 Memorandum on a meeting with an expert pertaining to the nature of Finland's military crisis management in Afghanistan. Interviews with respondents in the military crisis management revealed that this period was marked by repeated combat engagement.

142 Interview H31. See also Yle 2011.

143 Government report, VNS 1/2010.

144 Foreign and security policy UTP 19/2007.

liaison office in Kabul was upgraded to an embassy in 2006 and headed by an interim chargé d'affaires. The Finnish Embassy has been led by an ambassador since 2009. Specialists in development cooperation were hired to implement and monitor Finland's development cooperation. In proportion to Finland's total development cooperation support, its support to Afghanistan was higher than Afghanistan's share of the EU member state' development aid on average. In absolute terms, however, Finland's support to Afghanistan was lower than, for example, Sweden, Norway and Denmark.[145]

With the significant increase in Finland's development cooperation, efforts were made to streamline and target it so that the supported projects would better serve ordinary citizens.[146] Development cooperation in the Foreign and Security Policy Report 2007 targeted two main sectors: 1) good governance, rule of law and human rights, with a special focus on the development of the security sector; and 2) rural development, with a special focus on supporting livelihoods which would replace drug production.[147] In the 2011 report to Parliament, the priorities were divided into three sectors instead of two: 1) good governance, rule of law, local government; 2) human rights and education; and 3) livelihoods.[148]

Approximately half of Finland's development cooperation aid was channelled through the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF). From 2006 onwards, a significant part of the ARTF aid was earmarked for Afghanistan's *National Solidarity Programme* (NSP), which funded *Community Development Councils, (CDCs)* in rural areas. Established in 2003, the NSP is considered one of the most effective and successful development and reconstruction programmes. The NSP covered most of Afghanistan's counties and builds infrastructure, such as small hydroelectric plants, roads, schools and clinics. The CDCs decided where the available funds are to be channelled. They have, however, received significant criticism for disregarding pre-existing local institutions.[149]

The Embassy continued small-scale projects with local cooperation funds, ranging from EUR 276,000 to EUR 500,000 per year, alongside multilateral aid.[150] Finland sought to allocate part of its development cooperation funding to the Mazar-i-Sharif region towards the end of

145 Ibid.

146 E.g., interview H27. See Section 3.4.2.

147 Foreign and security policy UTP 19/2007.

148 Government report, VNS 2/2011.

149 See, e.g., Murtazashvili 2016.

150 Davies et al. 2007; Embassy of Finland, Kabul, 2011.

the period.[151] The Ministry for Foreign Affairs also supported a few NGO projects in Afghanistan. The Women Journalists in Finland project to train women journalists in Afghanistan, for example, was launched in 2009.[152]

Finland allocated humanitarian aid through the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the UN children's fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme.[153] A tripartite cooperation protocol between Finland, Afghanistan and the UN Refugee Agency on the voluntary return and repatriation of Afghan citizens to Afghanistan was prepared. In 2007, 2008 and 2009, Afghans did not form a quota refugee group compared to previous years.[154]

Finland participated in the activities of several coordination groups and fora dealing with Afghanistan. Finland was part of Nordic Plus, which included all the Nordic countries and the Netherlands. The group operated in the capitals of the involved countries and in Kabul and sought to invoke a common voice in the discussion about Afghanistan and aid coordination in the country. Finland's particular emphasis as a member of the group was on human rights and issues related to vulnerable groups.[155]

The Nordic Plus rotating chairman represented the group in what was called the 5+3+3 group. This group consisted of the largest supporters, i.e., the United States, the EU, Germany, the United Kingdom, Japan (5), Australia, Canada and the Nordic Plus representative (3), as well as the World Bank, the UN and the Asian Development Bank (3).

The *International Contact Group (ICG)* comprised all the countries that supported Afghanistan's reconstruction and was key in coordinating support. The *Heart of Asia (HoA)* events offered a platform for regular discussions on issues related to Afghanistan and its neighbouring countries. The events aimed at building understanding of the region's dynamics and committing the neighbouring countries to stabilizing Afghanistan.[156]

The European Union's civil crisis management operation *EU Police Mission in Afghanistan (EUPOL)* began in June 2007 with the purpose to support police reform and development of rule of law in Afghanistan. Particular focus was on strengthening the role of the civilian police

151 Government report VNS 1/2010.

152 Government report VNS 2/2011; Interview H26.

153 Foreign and security policy UTP 19/2007.

154 Finnish Immigration Service 2022a.

155 Interview H27.

156 Finland contributed to HoA's war on drugs, in particular, by channelling aid to the UNODC regional action programme to combat drugs. Background discussion with an expert.

functions.[157] Finland actively supported the establishment of the operation in the EU and joined it with a significant contribution.[158]

At the start of the operation, EUPOL had only four staff in Kabul and was not sufficiently equipped to cope with the already very demanding conditions. The number of personnel needed for full operational capacity was not reached until February 2009.[159]

EUPOL's operations concentrated on three sectors: reform of the Ministry of the Interior, professionalization of the Afghan National Police (ANP) force and connecting the police to the wider justice system. Human rights and gender equality were meant to be cross-cutting elements in the operation. EUPOL operated in Kabul as well as in eleven provinces in 2008 and sixteen provinces in 2009.[160]

In reality, especially at the beginning, EUPOL was strictly a police mission, not a comprehensive operation to develop rule of law.[161] In addition to the EU member states at the time, Canada, Norway, New Zealand and Croatia participated in the operation. Coexistence with other international actors, in particular with the United States and ISAF, developed on a more positive level after the initial difficulties.[162]

Afghanistan and EUPOL became Finland's civilian crisis management priorities, and the number of deployed experts grew quickly. A total of thirty-four Finnish civilian crisis management experts served in Afghanistan in 2009.[163] Finland was one of the largest contributors to the operation. Jukka Savolainen, a Finn, led the operation between 2010 and 2012.

Finland wanted to increase the number of its experts in northern Afghanistan, also.[164] In addition to EUPOL, Finnish civilian experts worked in the office of the EU Special Representative, office of the NATO Civilian Representative in Kabul and the office of the German Civilian

157 See the goal and task descriptions in more detail: Council of the European Union 2007.

158 Finland was a significant contributor to the entire operation in terms of the number of secondments. See, e.g., Government report VNS 3/2018; Ministry for Foreign Affairs (n.d.). According to some sources, momentarily, Finland was even the country with the most secondments in the operation (UK Parliament 2001). On the whole, the EU's contribution to the Afghanistan's stabilization efforts was considered important in Finland. See Foreign Affairs Committee UaVM 3/2009.

159 European Court of Auditors 2015. For more information on the personnel shortage, see, e.g., Larivé 2012; Chivvis 2010; Gross 2009; House of Lords 2011.

160 European External Action Service (EEAS) 2016b; European Court of Auditors 2015, 17.

161 ICG 2007.

162 For more information on the challenges related to the EU and NATO cooperation in the literature, see, e.g., Fescharek 2015; Chivvis 2010.

163 Crisis Management Centre 2022. An average of twenty of them worked in the country at a time.

164 Foreign Affairs Committee UaVM 3/2010.

Representative in northern Afghanistan.[165] The annual cost of Finnish civilian crisis management in Afghanistan in 2010 was approximately EUR 4 million.[166]

A police and prosecutor cooperation project was launched in Afghanistan in 2009 at Finland's initiative. Funded by Finland, it was carried out within the framework of the EUPOL mission. Twenty Afghans, both women and men, participated in training in Afghanistan and Finland.[167] Some of the Afghans who travelled to Finland for the training applied for asylum.[168] One outcome of the project was the *Police–Prosecutor Coordination Manual*, which was adopted by the Afghan authorities. The manual received recognition from both the participants and the wider EUPOL mission.[169]

Evaluation reports and other studies began to accumulate as insecurity increased and the intervention efforts accelerated. For example, an evaluation of Finland's development aid and humanitarian aid efforts was conducted in 2007.[170] Finland's aid was generally considered necessary and consistent with its political priorities, but concerns were raised about the aid's possible negative consequences, its effectiveness and sustainability as well as about the unrealistic time horizons. The evaluation criticized the allocation of aid to rural areas as not occurring early enough. The evaluation also stated that the international community's work to combat drug production through UNODC, which Finland had supported, had failed significantly.[171]

The existence of corruption, the possible negative consequences of aid and the transience of the aid was increasingly acknowledged. The Obama administration's *surge* policy churned out money beyond Afghanistan's absorption capacity. The effectiveness, sustainability, cultural suitability and corruption implications of many projects often raised questions.[172] Afghanistan was completely dependent on international aid in 2011. There have been some positive developments, however, particularly in the areas of education and health services.

165 Government report, VNS 2/2011.

166 Government report, VNS 1/2010.

167 See Foreign Affairs Committee UaVL 1/2008 and foreign and security policy UTP 19/2007 for more details on the preparations.

168 Official source.

169 Interviews H50 and H51; Government report VNS 3/2018; background material received by FIIA related to the training.

170 Davies et al. 2007.

171 Davies et al. 2008, 61. The foreign and security policy report UTP 19/2007 published after the evaluation depicts the findings on UNODC's work in clearly lighter terms: "As regards UNODC, the anti-drug work supported by the international community was not completely successful."

172 See, e.g., Whitlock 2021.

The Foreign Affairs Committee and the Defence Committee in Finland drew attention to the changed nature of the crisis management environment in Afghanistan and prolonged duration of the military operation. The Foreign Affairs Committee regarded NATO and ISAF as having become parties to the conflict and called for more realistic and explicit reports from the Government in terms of effectiveness and efficiency of the efforts.[173]

Afghanistan came up in public debate from time to time, especially in connection with the deaths of Finnish soldiers. In early 2011, for example, the justifications for Finland's military involvement in the changed operating environment were under discussion when First Lieutenant Jukka Kansonen was killed and discussions on the withdrawal of international troops had started.[174] President Tarja Halonen visited Afghanistan in January 2011 and met with Finnish soldiers, civilian crisis management experts and General David Petraeus of the ISAF operation.[175]

The Taliban's intensifying influence and degree of organization posed an increasingly challenging threat to the reconstruction endeavours and the holding of democratic elections. The climate was much more hostile at the time of the presidential elections in 2009 and the parliamentary elections in 2010 than it was in 2004. The escalation of violence was, however, disguised in official documents as a phenomenon of insurgent weakness in the face of a growing international military presence.[176]

The escalation of counter-insurgency efforts between 2009 and 2011 destabilized the Taliban's strengthened regional dominance in many places, although the loss of regional control did not mean the collapse of the insurgents' influence and did not seem to deprive them of their ability to carry out increasingly premeditated attacks. The increase in civilian casualties also had a negative impact on the reputation of the ISAF operation.[177] According to a 2006 opinion poll, only 10% of Afghans felt protected by international forces, compared to 30% for the Afghan authorities.[178] The Afghan national police, in particular, had little credibility and the Afghan people had little confidence in it: the police were considered extremely corrupt and as a force fuelling insecurity.[179]

173 Foreign Affairs Committee memorandum UaVM 3/2010; Defence Committee statement PuVL 1/2010. See also Salonius-Pasternak 2010b, especially pp. 15–16.

174 See, e.g., Turun Sanomat newspaper 2011; Kaleva newspaper 2011.

175 Finnish News Agency STT 2011.

176 See, e.g., Government report VNS 8/2008.

177 Lyall et al. 2013; see also Foreign Affairs Committee Memorandum UaVM 11/2007.

178 See Schmeidl and Karokhail 2009 who cited a study by the Afghan Civil Society Forum, 'Strengthening Civil Society in Afghanistan', Afghan Civil Society Forum, Kabul 2006.

179 ICG 2007.

Alongside the escalation of the conflict and the *surge* policy, Afghanistan took its first steps internally towards peace negotiations. President Karzai, whose relations with the US and the international community were strained by, on the one hand, the civilian casualties caused by the international troops and the US's inertness in relation to Pakistan and, on the other hand, by Karzai's weak and corrupt government, wanted to keep the door open to peace-building with the Taliban rebels.[180] In 2010, the *High Peace Council*, which comprised influential Afghans, was established. Burhanuddin Rabbani, the country's president during the civil war years, was the chairperson. However, he was assassinated in late 2011, which undermined the already low expectations towards the High Peace Council. Many warlords, for example, had been appointed as members of the Council.[181]

2.3 2012–2014: TRANSITION: RESPONSIBILITY SHIFTS IN A FRAGILE SITUATION

> "*The President of the United States promised that this would end in 2014, and that's when it ended. They said that the local authorities were independent, even though they weren't really.*"[182]

The decision to transfer full security responsibility from ISAF to the Afghan security forces was made in the NATO Summit in Lisbon, Portugal in November 2010. The transfer was carried out in phases from late 2011 to the end of 2014.[183] After the 2009–2011 increases in military forces, the United States began to significantly reduce the number of soldiers in Afghanistan as of 2012.

Although the Afghan security forces, i.e., the *Afghan National Army (ANA)* and the *Afghan National Police (ANP)*, had strengthened significantly and, at least on paper, were competent, there were concerns about their true robustness. Although the transfer was conditional on the strengthening of the Afghan security forces' operational capacity, provinces and districts were actually relinquished to the Afghan forces

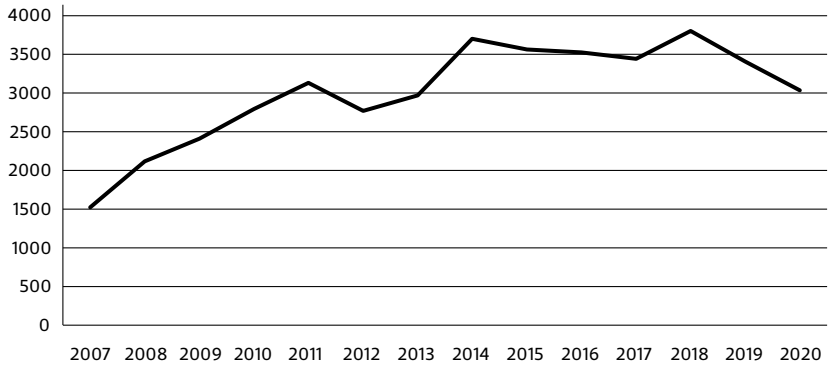
180 Gall 2014.

181 BBC 2011.

182 Interview H43.

183 Lisbon Summit Declaration 2010.

Civilian casualties in Afghanistan
UNAMA's assessment of civilians killed in violent attacks, 2007–2020



UNAMA has been reporting on civilian casualties systematically since 2007. The number of civilian casualties in the first half of 2021 was considerably higher than during the first half of 2020. UNAMA has not published a report for the whole of 2021, however.

Figure 3. UNAMA's reporting on civilian casualties in 2007–2020
Source: UNAMA

on other grounds, even when a jurisdiction may have needed additional investments before it could be handed over to the Afghans.[184]

The number of civilian casualties decreased slightly in 2012, but soon increased again (see Figure 3). Since 2013, the level of violence increased significantly.[185] The Taliban's control and influence in the country broadened, despite the increased pressure placed on them, especially in 2012. The Taliban also grew stronger in the northern areas where it had not traditionally been as active.

Finland had 195 soldiers in ISAF at the beginning of 2012.[186] The number of civilian crisis management experts sent by Finland was also at its peak: more than fifty Finnish police officers, lawyers and other civilian experts worked in Afghanistan in 2012.[187] In the same year, Finland began downsizing its ISAF forces, first by repatriating the reinforcements which were sent in 2010. In 2013, ISAF took a more backseat role in supporting the Afghan security forces, and in 2012 PRTs, for example, had already

184 Interviews H43 and H40. One respondent recalled a situation where a decision to transfer the responsibility for security to the Afghans was made in complete contradiction to the advice from the field, whereby Samangan, which was considered stable enough for the transfer to occur, but it failed to take place. Instead, transfers were made in three provinces which were less stable than Samangan (H40).

185 UNAMA 2021; Davies et al. 2022. UCDP Afghanistan; Government.

186 Foreign Affairs Committee Memorandum UaVM 1/2012 vp.

187 Crisis Management Centre 2022. On average, 35 people worked in the country at a time.

been made security transfer support teams in Mazar-i-Sharif where Finns served as ISAF forces until May 2014.[188]

ISAF's withdrawal and the ebb in international financial flows were estimated to worsen Afghanistan's economic situation after 2014, and the need to prepare for this was recognized.[189] International summits and bilateral negotiations, which focused on ensuring international support for the period after 2014, had been held since 2011.

Finland participated in perhaps the most important conference on the development of Afghanistan in Tokyo in summer of 2012. The Afghan government and the international community agreed on a decade of change, i.e., *Transformation Decade*, and for the first time systematic political planning of Afghanistan's development was accomplished.[190] A number of consultation processes between Afghanistan and the International Community preceded the conference.

In April 2013, President Hamid Karzai made a working visit to Helsinki. Finland's President Sauli Niinistö hosted the visit, during which Finland and Afghanistan concluded a partnership agreement, covering political cooperation, security cooperation and development cooperation until 2024.[191] This state treaty covers the years 2013–2024. Finland committed to supporting Afghanistan with EUR 30 million annually.

The transfer of responsibility for security from the international forces to the Afghan forces and the reduction of the international troops, and the losses it caused to the Afghan economy, were compensated for with increased allocations to development cooperation and civilian crisis management. Finland also turned up its tap for development cooperation aid. In 2014, development cooperation and humanitarian aid amounted to approximately EUR 26 million, compared to approximately EUR 20 million in 2011. The target in the Transition period of increasing aid to EUR 30 million was achieved in 2016.[192]

Aid continued to be channelled through the UN and the World Bank. Finland became part of ARTF's main donor Strategy Group at the beginning of 2014, because the annual limit of ten million dollars in aid was exceeded. Finland began cooperation with Afghanistan's Ministry of Mines and Petroleum to strengthen the mining sector. Finland had also begun cooperation with UN Women and the Afghan authorities to promote

188 Government report, VNS 8/2014.

189 Government report, VNS 2/2011.

190 Interview H14.

191 Office of the President of the Republic of Finland 2013. News of the agreement was widely reported in Afghanistan, for example in the English-language Kabul Times and the Dari-language newspaper Anis.

192 Information from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in autumn 2022; see also Bennett (2014, 109–110) on the joint costs of development cooperation and civilian crisis management.

the objectives of UN Resolution 1325, addressing women's rights, peace and security, although it progressed sluggishly. Human rights, women's rights, equality, good governance and the eradication of corruption remained cross-cutting themes.

The number of posted employees at the Finnish Embassy increased: in addition to the ambassador, deputy ambassador and the consul, the mission employed four development cooperation experts. This was the highest number of employees in the Embassy during entire period under consideration. However, the Embassy's visibility outside Kabul narrowed as restrictions on movement increased. The development cooperation advisor's post in Mazar-i-Sharif was terminated in 2013.[193] From the perspective of the comprehensive approach, the period was seen as a shift towards a greater focus on development cooperation and support for the civilian sector and civilian crisis management, while investments in military crisis management began to decrease.

Finland also wanted to further a Memorandum of Understanding on the deportation of people illegally residing in the country. Finland took in slightly more than two hundred Afghan quota refugees from Iran and Turkey each year. In addition, Afghans submitted approximately two hundred asylum applications a year, considerably fewer than in the previous four years. Approximately two thirds of the asylum applications processed between 2012 and 2014 were approved.[194]

Finland's aid was essentially allocated to the central government, according to an evaluation of Finland's development cooperation in 2014, and the traversal priorities, such as women's human rights, were tied to more general support for the security sector, administration and the development of livelihoods. Development cooperation was generally state-centred, and the Afghan civil society received little attention.[195] The underlying reason for this was the strong commitment to the building the Afghan state, which was considered central in the international debate on development of fragile states.[196] The evaluation found that Finland's aid was well aligned with development policy objectives and priorities and met the needs approved by the Afghan government. The sustainability and effectiveness of the aid, especially at the grassroots level, posed questions.[197] The security measures at the Embassy in Kabul were intensified

193 Bennett 2014, 120, 136.

194 Finnish Immigration Service 2022a; Finnish Immigration Service 2022b.

195 Bennett 2014.

196 Ruohomäki 2012.

197 Bennett 2014.

as the security situation deteriorated, and a private security company was hired for protection.

ISAF's mission ended in 2014 and was replaced by NATO's *Resolute Support Mission (RSM)*. RSM had a mandate to support and train Afghans and did not participate in operations. Finland was involved in the RSM at the beginning with a strength of eighty soldiers.[198] President Obama announced a new roadmap for the United States' military withdrawal, whereby most of the troops were scheduled to be withdrawn from the country by the end of 2016.[199]

EUPOL was the EU's second largest civilian crisis management operation. Its mandate was due to expire at the end of 2014. It was expected to be extended by two years, but the final decision would depend on how the military crisis management continued. Finland supported the renewal of the mandate.[200]

Approximately 235 international and 200 Afghan experts worked for EUPOL.[201] The work in EUPOL began to concentrate on preparation for the transition, i.e., the transfer of responsibilities to the local partners.[202] Afghanistan continued to be one of the priorities for Finland in crisis management: a quarter of the Finns deployed for civilian crisis management operations worked for EUPOL. In 2014, Pia Stjernvall, a Finn, was the Deputy Head of EUPOL. The number of experts on secondment in civilian crisis management was at its peak, but after 2014 reductions began to be made in the level of participation.[203]

Finland placed particular emphasis on gender issues and the role of women in society in its communication related to civilian crisis management measures. Together with Finland, Germany, Romania, Sweden and the Netherlands had sent the most experts to work in EUPOL. Finland had also sent civilian experts to the office of the EU Special Representative and the NATO Civilian Representative in Kabul, as well as to the office of the Civilian Representative in the Regional Command North. [204]

The 2014 presidential election was controversial and fraught with accusations of fraud. The former Foreign Minister Abdullah Abdullah accused the other front-runner, former Finance Minister Ashraf Ghani's supporters of electoral fraud. With the assistance of United States Secretary of

198 Government report, VNS 8/2014.

199 This differs somewhat from the United States' government's previous announcements, which stated that the troops would be withdrawn at the end of ISAF's mission in 2014. See Ackerman 2014.

200 Government report, VNS 8/2014.

201 European Court of Auditors 2014.

202 Government report, VNS 8/2014.

203 Crisis Management Centre 2022.

204 Government report, VNS 8/2014.

State John Kerry and agreement was eventually reached to form a coalition government with Ghani as president. Abdullah received a position similar to a prime minister when he was appointed *Chief Executive Officer*.[205]

The relationship between Ghani and Abdullah was tense and cooperation between them was difficult. This situation paralyzed political decision-making for years to come. Ghani was described as a reformer, a powerful but also a difficult person. Compared to Karzai, Ghani placed more emphasis on local ownership and self-determination.[206] President Ghani's and President Karzai's attitudes towards the Taliban differed. Karzai spoke of the Taliban as 'Afghan brothers' and pondered the possibility of a political solution. Ghani, on the other hand, saw the Taliban only as enemies to be defeated.[207]

2.4 2015–2018: STAGNATION: TALIBAN REGIONAL CONTROL STRENGTHENS, WITHDRAWAL OF MILITARY CRISIS MANAGEMENT POSTPONED

> "*The security situation continued to deteriorate. The Taliban gained control of more and more areas. The deterioration of the security situation continued to be a prominent issue throughout the period.*"[208]

The conflict escalated significantly after the dissolution of ISAF, and the Taliban's regional influence grew. The conflict reached its most violent level so far in 2018 when nearly 30,000 people lost their lives in the war. This made the conflict the bloodiest in the world that year, and it remained so until 2021.[209]

The RSM was supposed to end in 2016, but the withdrawal was postponed, and military efforts were reinforced momentarily. During the Trump administration, however, Finland was somewhat prepared for the withdrawal.[210]

The United States also asked the Allies to increase their level of participation, and in 2018 the Finnish Government proposed raising its RSM contribution from forty soldiers to a maximum of sixty soldiers, which

205 Ruohomäki 2016.

206 Interview H64.

207 Background discussion with an expert.

208 Interview H16.

209 Davies et al. 2022; Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) Afghanistan: Government.

210 Interview H32.

was carried out in early 2019.[211] There were competing interpretations in the Finnish media as to whether the increased attacks were due to the Taliban's growing or weakening dominance.[212]

The summer of 2017 was particularly difficult in Kabul: a terrorist attack in the city centre in May killed about 150 people and injured hundreds.[213] As a result of the attack, for example, the German embassy was destroyed, and several countries reduced their diplomatic presence to a minimum. The security situation had, in general, collapsed to such an extent that the diplomats working in Kabul no longer travelled outside the capital, except under very exceptional security arrangements, which were very expensive. As a result, few trips into the field were made. Difficulties in travelling and moving around due to the security situation increasingly affected Finnish operators within Kabul, also.

A Finnish aid worker was kidnapped in a violent attack on the home of aid workers in May 2017, underscoring the insecurity in Kabul. Efforts were made to release the aid worker through international cooperation and included working with the United States and Great Britain.[214] The aid worker was finally released in September 2017 after four months of being held hostage.

The international debate began to reflect frustration with the situation in Afghanistan, which was also perceptible in the general atmosphere in Kabul's diplomatic circles. In previous years, all ISAF countries had appointed special representatives to address issues related to Afghanistan. Finland, too, had addressed the matter at the director general level, but now the actual implementation was delegated to the deputy director generals.[215] The Finnish Embassy's human resources were also reduced towards the end of the period: the number of development cooperation experts was restored to two people instead of four in the peak years.[216]

Although the number of experts Finland deployed to civilian crisis management tasks was on the decline, thirty-two Finnish civilian crisis management experts were still working in Afghanistan in 2015.[217] The EUPOL mission was coming to an end, and in its last years (2015–2016) the mission management was once again led by a Finn: Pia Stjernvall,

211 See, e.g., Palojärvi 2017.

212 Huusko & Palojärvi 2018.

213 The attack has been linked to the Haqqani network which has joined forces with the Taliban. Westcott 2017.

214 Interview H34.

215 Background interview with an expert.

216 Interviews H21 and H22.

217 Crisis Management Centre 2022. On average, 23 experts worked in the country at a time.

who had previously been deputy head, took over as the head of mission.[218] Geographically, operations were down-scaled to Kabul and two local offices in Herat and Mazar-i-Sharif already in 2013 .[219] Finland also kept one civilian crisis management expert in NATO's RSM.

By 2015, EUPOL had achieved varied results. Systemic deficiencies persisted in the Afghan police and judicial sector. The European Court of Auditors (ECA) assessed that there were risks to the sustainability of EUPOL's results and the Afghan police in general, such as uncertainty about the commitment of the Afghan authorities and the financial aid provided by international actors.[220] EUPOL's work was to be continued in a project under the European Commission and through the Special Representative office and an EU delegation, but the continuity of support to the civilian security sector suffered, as monitoring did not begin quickly enough.[221]

Development cooperation efforts remained substantial despite the challenges posed by mobility (such as the possibility to monitor projects) and reduced human resources. Afghanistan was Finland's largest recipient of aid continuously throughout 2016–2021.[222] The support was at the absolute highest level in 2016 and 2021. Development cooperation continued to focus on strengthening the judicial and security sector, education and health services and the economy. The aim was seen to be linked to strengthening the position of women and girls, improving human rights in general and fostering the democratic nature of society.[223] Preparations for a national programme for Afghanistan began to replace the prior report-based policy. The last local cooperation funds for Afghanistan were paid in 2017. This form of support was discontinued as the supported projects ended. [224]

The European migrant crisis made asylum policy an even more important part of Finland's Afghanistan policy from 2015 onwards. In summer of 2015, the number of asylum seekers arriving in Finland began to rise sharply and continued at a high level until the end of the year. By the end of the year, more than 32,000 applications had been submitted, which is ten times more than in the previous year. The number of Afghan asylum seekers rose from just over two hundred in 2014 to more than 5,000 in

218 Finnish Government 2014.

219 European Court of Auditors 2015.

220 Ibid.

221 Interviews H56 and H57.

222 Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2022b.

223 Government report, VNS 3/2018.

224 Information received by e-mail from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in 2022.

Number of asylum seekers arriving in Finland from Afghanistan, 2003–2021

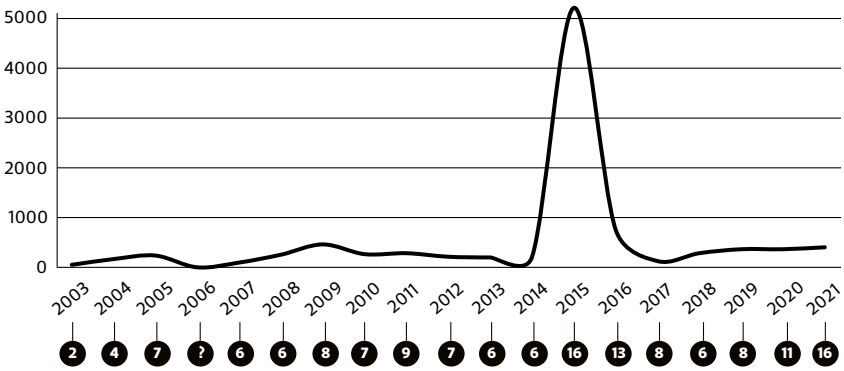


Figure 4. Asylum seekers of Afghan origin in Finland
Source: Finnish Immigration Service, statistics 2022

2015.[225] The number of applications returned to its previous level already in the spring of 2016; Afghan quota refugees were no longer accepted after 2015. In May 2016, the Finnish Immigration Service revised its assessment of the situation in Afghanistan and deemed the country safer than previously. Only just over one third of the asylum applications were approved in 2015–2017, which is a significant drop from previous years. [226]

Refugee issues were incorporated in development cooperation, and aid to the refugees' and asylum seekers' countries of origin was increased. Aid to these countries was seen as a way to improve living conditions, abating people's need to flee and seek refuge elsewhere and increasing the likelihood they would return to their countries.

Finland and Afghanistan signed a Memorandum of Understanding at the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan in 2016 where the countries agreed on the return of asylum seekers, including forced returns.[227] In addition to the framework agreed with Finland on returns, Afghanistan also signed a joint cooperation agreement with the EU, as well as bilateral agreements with Germany and Sweden.[228] Concluding the agreement on

225 Finnish Immigration Service 2022b.

226 Finnish Immigration Service 2022a, 2022b and 2022c.

227 Finnish Government 2016.

228 Government report VNS 3/2018; see also Valtonen 2016.

forced returns was an important milestone in terms of the fate of asylum seekers who, according to the Finnish Immigration Service, were not entitled to asylum. The forced returns sparked public criticism, and the Finnish Immigration Service was criticized for failing to take into account the significant deterioration of the security situation throughout Afghanistan.[229]

Despite the difficult conflict situation, humanitarian and personal development also occurred. In its 2018 report, the Government drew attention to, for example, the rise in the level of health care and education during international intervention.[230] Opportunities for freedom of media and expression had also improved dramatically. Technology had advanced and transformed society: in 2017, almost 90% of households reported owning at least one mobile phone, a significant increase from around 50% in 2009.[231]

The Taliban controlled an area which was steadily growing, more or less, and the movement's violence became more predictable and less erratic in the areas it controlled.[232] The BBC reported in early 2018, for example, that the Taliban had a significant foothold in up to 70% of the country's districts.[233]

By 2017, the Taliban's shadow government had developed significantly, and for this reason they no longer deemed violence as absolutely 'necessary' in the areas they controlled. The districts had Taliban shadow governors, and the Taliban also had their own courts and military committees. Committees for education and culture had also been formed. However, the Taliban's judicial system, which rested expressly on Sharia law and customary law, was its strongest governance practice. The order imposed by the Taliban shadow government was considered relatively free of corruption, unlike the state's judicial and other systems.[234] This helped the Taliban to prop up their position.[235]

At the same time, airstrikes were used more and more to fight against the insurgents, killing an increasingly higher number of civilians.

229 Hakkarainen et al. 2017.

230 Government report VNS 3/2018.

231 Thomas 2019.

232 See, for example, Jackson 2021; UNAMA's reports on Afghanistan.

233 Sharifi & Adamou 2018.

234 Ruohomäki 2020.

235 Major international aid organizations and NGOs negotiated to a greater degree with, or were in contact with, the Taliban to gain access to many areas and provide health care, education, and other services. In fear of being associated with the insurgents, these negotiations and contacts were referred to as "getting approval from the community" for carrying out projects. This was often a matter of negotiating with the Taliban, however, because its shadow government was significantly integrated in the local government in many parts of the country. See Jackson 2021.

According to UN estimates, the number of civilians killed in airstrikes in 2018 was twice as many as in 2016.[236] Although the Taliban were still responsible for most of the violence against civilians (it carried out terrorist attacks in cities, in particular), the government's legitimacy eroded due to the negative and deadly consequences the operations to combat the insurgents had on civilians.

Around this time, the local fief of the ISIS group Wilayat Khorasan (ISIS-K) had also appeared in Afghanistan, carrying out accelerated attacks on the Hazara population in the country's major cities, including Kabul, Herat and Jalalabad. The Taliban condemned the attacks. ISIS-K and the Taliban engaged in bloody confrontation. The Taliban viewed ISIS-K as an imported product from the Middle East and did not look favourably upon an organization that challenged its position.[237]

In addition to the Taliban, the real power in the districts was still held by the so-called strongmen. They still had their own paramilitary forces, for the most part, which maintained order and were responsible for ensuring that their group interests were enforced. The strongmen also had close ties with both the legal and illegal business through their networks in their regions. In many ways, they had their own fiefs where, in practice, they functioned as supreme governors even though there was no legal basis for their rule.[238]

Politically, the possibility of peace talks began to change the situation. President Ghani announced a roadmap for peace talks with the Taliban in 2018. In June, on Ghani's initiative, the Taliban adhered to a brief ceasefire and troops from the two main parties even celebrated Eid al-Fitr, the closing festival of Ramadan, together in many parts of the country.[239] However, the start of internal negotiations was hampered by the reluctance of both the Ghani government and the Taliban in particular to move forward. The Taliban wanted to negotiate directly with the United States and continued strikes against the government after the ceasefire. Negotiations between the Taliban and the United States soon stole the show in the peace process.[240]

236 Jackson 2021.

237 Ruohomäki 2020.

238 Ibid. 2020.

239 Semple et al. 2021, 11.

240 Semple et al. 2021.

2.5 2019–2021: BEGINNING OF THE END – NEGOTIATIONS AND FOREBODING

> "*After the February agreement, an atmosphere of 'the beginning of the end' and a foreboding of when the West would leave emerged.*"[241]

The progress of negotiations between the United States and the Taliban in 2019 and the signing of the agreement under President Trump in February 2020, as well as the subsequent internal negotiation process in Afghanistan, imbued the times. Major violence marred the presidential election in 2019. President Ghani remained in power but was very unpopular in domestic politics.

Finland's RSM contribution increased once more from forty soldiers to sixty soldiers in early 2019 until the repatriation of the force protection contingent, among other processes, reduced the level of participation to about 20 soldiers. In the last years, the Finnish troops were concentrated in the German command area of Mazar-i-Sharif.[242] When the responsibility for security in Afghanistan was transferred to the Afghan security forces, participation in combat ended and access to information about the dynamics of the conflict and the Afghan army's performance was based more and more on the evaluations and information provided by the Afghan partners.[243]

According to the agreement between the United States and the Taliban, the United States was to withdraw its military forces from Afghanistan by May 2021, and in return, the Taliban would guarantee efforts to combat terrorism and the start of peace negotiations with the Afghan government. The agreement was interpreted in many areas controlled by the Taliban as a continuation and consolidation of the Taliban regime in the future. The level of violence declined in the first half of 2020 but picked up in the autumn of 2020, coinciding with the launch of delayed talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban in Doha. Armed violence accelerated in the first half of 2021 and reached a record high during the year.[244]

The negotiations in Doha were jammed at the turn of the year and during the first part of the year. The Taliban refused to resume negotiations until the administration of the newly elected US President Joe Biden elucidated its military withdrawal policy. Trump had pulled some of the remaining US troops out of Afghanistan just days before President

241 Interview H40.

242 Ministry of Defence 2022; Palojärvi 2017.

243 Interview H40.

244 Davies et al. 2022; see also UNAMA 2021, which reports a clear increase in civilian casualties in the first half of the year.

Biden's inauguration. The international community was concerned about the United States' hasty withdrawal and the consequences it may have.

President Biden announced a schedule for the military withdrawal in April 2021. The United States would withdraw its troops by September 11th. As a result, a decision was made to dismantle NATO's RSM operations in April 2021, also. The last Finnish soldiers left Mazar-i-Sharif in June 2021. By 2020, Finland's detachment in Afghanistan had already been downsized and only 20 soldiers remained. Although RSM was considered to have sufficient resources, the advisory nature of the operation and the consequent difficulty in monitoring had lowered expectations in Finland's defence administration, also.[245] One expert worked in the Finnish civilian crisis management efforts in 2019–2020: the tasks were part of the RSM mission.[246]

The Embassy's staff was reduced, and the COVID-19 pandemic made cooperation significantly more difficult. The security situation was also so poor that Embassy staff were only able to move within Kabul to a very limited extent: travelling outside the capital was almost impossible. This also negatively affected the understanding the diplomatic community in Kabul had of the situation in the country. On the initiative of the Embassy in Kabul, preliminary discussions on evacuation began at the end of 2020 and the beginning of 2021. Preparations at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs proceeded slowly, however, and still in summer of 2021, Finland's evacuation planning was considered as having a backward stride.[247] Finland wanted to keep in line with the approach emphasizing coordination with others and thereby did not want to be among the countries who evacuated first. Rather, Finland preferred to follow the path of the EU countries and other close partner countries.

Together with Afghanistan and UNAMA Finland organized an international donor conference in Geneva in the autumn of 2020. Commitments were made to continue supporting Afghanistan with USD 3.3 billion. Afghanistan was the top recipient of Finland's development cooperation efforts until 2021. There was no great desire among the international community to host the conference, and Finland's willingness to take on the organizational responsibilities was greatly appreciated. The conference was originally planned to be held in Helsinki, but the Government felt that Geneva would be a more appropriate location, as the UN Secretariat, which helped with the practical arrangements, is located there.

245 Interview H40.

246 Crisis Management Centre 2022.

247 Interviews H12 and H29.

On August 15, 2021, the Taliban seized power in Kabul after rapidly advancing and conquering the Afghan troops like dominoes. Taliban forces seized many cities almost without a fight, and the Afghan security forces trying to block their advance suffered from significant logistical problems.[248] An international evacuation crisis ensued, during which Finland, like many other countries, sent experts from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs to Afghanistan, as well as a military security force to secure the evacuations. The operation was the first of its kind for Finland, and sending the security forces was based on the act on providing and requesting international assistance. The decision was based on the consideration that force may need to be used and that it would be significant for Finland's international relations.[249] The evacuation conditions were difficult: masses of people packed into the airport to get out of the country, and at least 150 Afghans and fifteen US soldiers were killed in an ISIS-K attack outside the airport[250]. In addition, ten Afghan civilians were killed in a US drone strike that mistakenly targeted civilians.[251] The United States coordinated the evacuation operation and also provided the logistics and security support. The Finnish evacuation operation ended on 27 August 2021.[252]

The rise of the Taliban led to the departure of the Western countries from the country. President Biden declared that the United States had achieved its goals in Afghanistan, emphasizing that the purpose was not to reconstruct the state but to capture the 9/11 terrorists and get justice for what Osama bin Laden had devised[253]. The West has not recognized the new rulers in Afghanistan. The large-scale development cooperation with Afghanistan came to an abrupt end and only the necessary humanitarian aid continued. The humanitarian situation in the country, which had already been bad due to a period of severe drought, deteriorated rapidly.[254]

248 Schroden 2021, 53.

249 Ministry of Defence 2022. According to information received from the Ministry of Defence, the total cost of the evacuation was EUR 690,000 of which the Defence Forces' operating expenses accounted for EUR 380,000.

250 The Ministry of Defence estimated 150 civilians and 15 soldiers, while Politico estimated 13 soldiers and 170 civilians. See Thompson & Tani 2022.

251 The strike was carried out under the assumption that two ISIS-K members were preparing a new strike against United States troops at the airport. Immediately after the attack, however, it became clear that civilians had been targeted. Seven children were killed in the attack. Macias 2021.

252 Ministry of Defence 2022.

253 Biden 2021.

254 At the beginning of 2022, Afghanistan's population was estimated at 41 million according to the World Population Review 2022. More than half of the population (24.4 million) was in need of humanitarian aid. See United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) 2022.

Intensification of the war in Afghanistan during the intervention
Battle-related deaths in 2001–2021

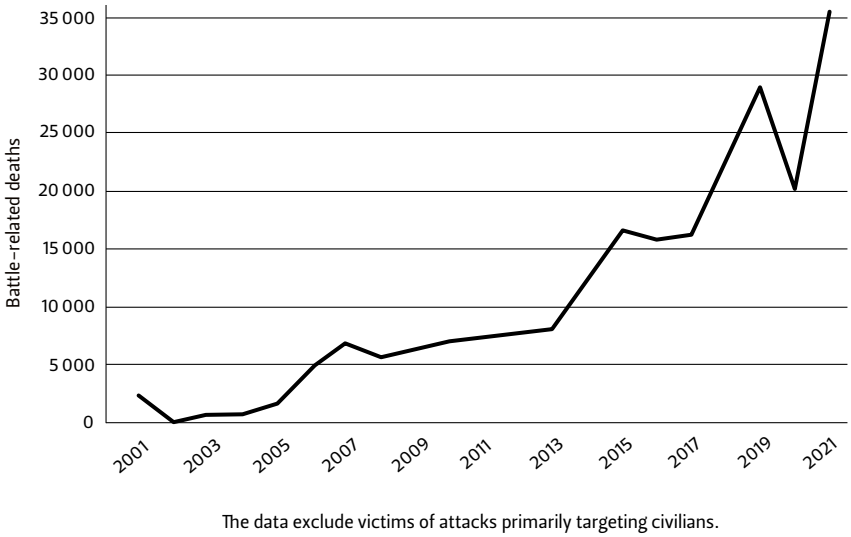


Figure 5. Battle-related deaths during the conflict, 2001–2021
Source: Davies et al. 2022 (UCDP)

Finland, too, suspended its bilateral development cooperation in Afghanistan in August 2021 after the Taliban came to power. However, Finland made a decision in December 2021 to continue it on a limited basis through the UN, international organizations and NGOs. Development cooperation aid was repurposed as humanitarian aid, which quadrupled to EUR 12.5 million. Aid for the humanitarian mine efforts (UNMAS and HALO Trust) will continue until 2024.

In 2019–2021, approximately 350–400 asylum applications from Afghans were received per year.[255] Finland has not accepted quota refugees from Afghanistan since 2015. However, in the autumn of 2021, the Government decided to increase the refugee quota precisely because of the situation in Afghanistan. The total refugee quota for 2022 was 1,500 people, and a few hundred Afghans were expected to arrive.[256]

255 Finnish Immigration Service 2022c.

256 Finnish Immigration Service 2022a; Kervinen 2021.

/ 3

3. FINLAND AS AN ACTOR IN AFGHANISTAN: WHY AND ON WHAT GROUNDS?

As stated in the overview, Finland participated extensively in a multi-phased international intervention in a disparate operating environment in Afghanistan throughout the period under review. Afghanistan can rightly be called one of the most significant crisis management missions in which Finland has been involved. Approximately 2,500 soldiers and 140 civilian crisis management professionals sent by Finland served in Afghanistan during the nearly twenty years of crisis management.

Not only does the duration of the mission make Afghanistan significant, but also its demanding operating environment. As regards military involvement, participation after the Window of Opportunity period required capacity and modes of operation to engage in active conflict as one of the warring parties. Afghanistan was also Finland's largest development cooperation target country, offering new challenges in terms of the scale of aid, multilateralism and fragility of the situation. Moreover, Afghanistan has undoubtedly played a significant role in Finland's agency in foreign and security policy and, in particular, the development of the comprehensive crisis management approach.

Although Afghanistan was a major investment for Finland, Finland's role was rather limited when considering Afghanistan and the international intervention as a whole. Finland's civilian-led development cooperation and other aid accounted for approximately 0.5% of the total aid allocated to Afghanistan during the period under review.[257] The maximum number of soldiers in the ISAF mission was about 130,000, of which Finland's largest force (216) accounted for 0.17%. Considering Finland's relatively minor investments and few personnel resources, it is clear that even with active efforts to make a large impact, Finland would not have been able to exert a decisive influence on the outcome of the intervention.

Then again, Afghanistan's impact on Finland's security environment and economy has historically also been relatively small. Trade relations between the two countries are limited, and Afghanistan's threats to

257 According to the total aid of USD 81 billion as estimated by the OECD (n.d.). Finland's development cooperation (including humanitarian aid and humanitarian mine clearance) amounted to EUR 398 million, and ODA countable civilian crisis management aid amounted to approximately EUR 29 million, making a total of EUR 427 million (approximately USD 440 million).

international security – terrorism and drugs – have not targeted Finland in particular, although they do pose cross-border threats.[258]

The number of asylum seekers from Afghanistan was also moderate in Finland, especially before 2015, and less than those arriving from Iraq or Somalia. Given Finland's relatively minor influence in Afghanistan and Afghanistan's remoteness as a crisis management target, it is particularly important to analyse why Finland continuously invested so much in the country. The type of agency Finland strived to build in Afghanistan through its nationally significant contributions also deserves analysis. We now turn to discussion of Finland's agency and the foundations for it.

3.1 FOUNDATIONS OF FINLAND'S EFFORTS: FROM REPORTS TO REALITY

Government reports were official documents guiding Finland's policy on Afghanistan throughout the international intervention. The first report was submitted to Parliament at the beginning of January 2002 in connection with the decision to participate in the ISAF mission.[259]

At the time, the report and the discussion of it in the Foreign Affairs Committee highlighted the suitability of the UN mission for Finland's foreign and security policy, Afghanistan's key role concerning international terrorism, and the prevailing understanding of Finland's special expertise in CIMIC activities.[260] On 9 January 2002, several MPs took the floor in Parliament to express their approval of a UN-led intervention, especially one promoting human rights, and many emphasized Finland's CIMIC expertise and the added value it would offer to the intervention.[261]

Throughout the whole time period, the reports on Afghanistan emphasized, in general, the need for steadfast, UN-led international support in Afghanistan and Finland's responsibility as per its foreign and security policy in a(n) (international) peace-threatening situation.[262] The reports and accounts emphasize the need for a comprehensive approach to achieving reconstruction and stabilization. For this reason, Finland's

258 The threat of international terrorism in Finland can be more significantly attributed to the conflicts in Iraq and Syria, the birth of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and the attacks motivated by the organization, as well as the foreign terrorist fighter movement. See Rönkä & Markkula 2020; Kelola 2021 for details on the Finnish drug situation and countries of origin.

259 This section discusses Government reports VNS 5/2001, VNS 2/2007, VNS 8/2008, VNS 1/2010, VNS 2/2011, VNS 8/2014, and VNS 3/2018.

260 See government report VNS 5/2001 and Foreign Affairs Committee Memorandum UaVM 19/2001.

261 Minutes of the Parliament plenary session, PTK 159/2001.

262 Moreover, involvement in international military crisis management is by law one of the four main tasks of the Finnish Defence Forces. Finnish Defence Forces 2022. Limnéll & Salonius-Pasternak (2009) have also written about responsibility and solidarity as grounds for participating in the Afghanistan intervention.

involvement in multiple sectors, i.e., development cooperation, civilian crisis management and military crisis management was deemed salient.[263] The interpretation of the concept of the comprehensive approach, primarily meaning that Finland should operate in several different sectors of support in Afghanistan, is evident, e.g., in the 2014 report and plenary debate concerning Finland's involvement in the RSM following the ISAF mission.[264]

It should be noted that, in addition to the general objectives for stabilization and reconstruction and the need for a comprehensive approach, the reports do not clearly specify what was to be achieved and the measures to be taken during a given time, nor how the different forms of involvement, together and separately, supported specific objectives. An exceptionally clear objective up until the Transition period was for the Afghan government to assume responsibility for the country's security and for the authorities to receive adequate support to achieve this, e.g., by reinforcing training and involving ISAF in stabilizing the country (see Downward Spiral 2006–2011 in the overview).

After the transfer of responsibility for security to the Afghans, policy documents emphasized the importance of continuing Finland's military crisis management to preserve the development and humanitarian progress already achieved. This progress, in turn, would be actively promoted through development cooperation and civilian crisis management.[265]

The documents in general, however, emphasized Finland's priorities and key cross-cutting themes, such as good governance, rule of law, livelihood and human rights, as well as the objectives related to the level of support rather than setting clear targets and monitoring their progress. The documents contain little mention of how the chosen aid channels, sums and targets would be linked to the priorities and key cross-cutting themes and the progress of them.

In terms of the impact and sustainability of aid, emphasis was placed on the need for long-term support and the benefits of multilateral efforts. Although the impact and sustainability of aid were repeatedly identified as key challenges in evaluations pertaining to the various efforts, the results, impacts and sustainability of the aid in relation to how the efforts were to meet the stabilization and reconstruction objectives were discussed very

263 See, e.g., Foreign and Security Policy UTP 18/2007, Government reports VNS 1/2010, VNS 2/2011 and VNS 8/2014.

264 Government report VNS 8/2014; Minutes of the Plenary Session PTK 128/2014; see also Government report VNS 3/2018.

265 Government reports VNS 8/2014 and VNS 3/2018.

little.[266] The reports described monitoring of the efforts primarily in the light of their purposes and the investments made in them.

Also worth noting is the continuity of Finland's Afghanistan policy, outlined in the reports, in a radically changing operating environment. Despite the significant deterioration of the security situation from the Downward Spiral period (2006–2011) onwards and the erosion of confidence in both the central government and the international actors, in general, the reports' evaluation of the general direction of international intervention and Finland's involvement and the purposefulness of it is remarkably constant.

Increase in support was generally seen as a response to security-related and other challenges, first through reinforcing military crisis management measures (Window of Opportunity period 2001–2005 and Downward Spiral period 2006–2011) and later through strengthening development cooperation and civilian crisis management (beyond the Transition period 2012–2021).[267] The justification for participating in the efforts, i.e., stabilization, reconstruction and promotion of human rights and equality in Afghanistan, remained the same throughout the period — and across the governments charge during the period. Over time, however, the rationale for military crisis management in particular changed slightly. The further the intervention progressed, the more the reports and other documents and discussion on Finland's crisis management policy in general emphasized the importance of military crisis management in Afghanistan from the point of view of Finland's defence and crisis management capabilities, its role in international efforts and NATO partnership.[268]

The Government reports form an overview of the priorities and progress of Finland's efforts in Afghanistan, but they do not provide answers to our research questions concerning why and on what basis Finland operated as it did there. The Foreign Affairs Committee, for example, repeatedly pointed out the general nature and optimism of the reports as regards the situation and the relationship between Finland's objectives, multilateral measures and their impact.[269] Finland's crisis management policy is generally recognized as being vague and unsystematic in setting targets.[270]

266 The 2014 and 2018 reports have separate headings for impact assessment and risk management. The 2018 report also presents the results of the largest aid targets. The ARTF, managed by the World Bank was given as an example of the benefits and effectiveness of multilateral aid channels, while other primary aid targets were given less attention. Then again, the ways in which the rural development programme, for example, affected the fragility of the administration and the level of dependence on aid is not mentioned. See Government reports VNS 8/2014 and VNS 3/2018; Davies et al. 2007; Bennett 2014.

267 See, e.g., Government report VNS 2/2011.

268 See, e.g., Government reports VNS 6/2012, VNS 6/2016 and VNS 3/2018.

269 Foreign Affairs Committee Memoranda UaVM 3/2010; UaVM 1/2012;Government reports VNS 1/2010;2/2011.

270 National Audit Office of Finland 2013. With the exception of the number of experts to be deployed, goals for specific types of efforts were not openly set in civilian crisis management. See Ketola and Karjalainen 2022.

The operational context the Government reports delineate seems rather flimsy compared to the observations emerging form our primary data, at least in terms of the leading role of the United States and the challenges with the international intervention. The leading role of the United States in guiding the direction of the international intervention was highlighted throughout our primary data. Instead of being a UN-led intervention, the reality on the ground was clearly seen as being led by and dependent on the US.

The reports referred to the significant investments the US made but the impacts of the superpower's decision-making on the entire stabilization and reconstruction process and the consequences thereof on the expediency of Finland's support measures were mentioned only briefly.[271] Likewise, the overall challenges of international intervention in areas such as aid sustainability, corruption and monitoring (especially when the security situation worsened) are mentioned only briefly in terms of their consequences and possible efforts to ameliorate the situation. For example, the connection between international aid and state corruption and the consequences thereof for the state's legitimacy received little attention before the 2018 report, which discusses corruption as a risk to aid somewhat more discernibly.[272]

The reports and the analysis of the interviews and workshop discussions also give a different picture of Finland's goals and the grounds for involvement in the intervention. The reports give the impression that the reasons behind Finland's involvement were, above all, to help Afghanistan and the Afghan people, which were seen to best guarantee international security. In this analysis, we refer to involvement based on these objectives as the 'Finland as a Benefactor' interpretation framework. Within this framework, Finland's efforts were rationalized by virtue of the objectives pertaining to stabilizing and developing Afghanistan and improving human rights. Finland's role is seen above all as a contributor to these objectives in the UN-led international community.

As we will discuss below, this role of Finland as a benefactor did, of course, guide Finland's profiling as a member of the international intervention. More than that, however, Finland's foreign and security policy objectives in terms of partnerships, which we refer to as the 'Finland as a Partner' interpretation framework, seems to have motivated Finland's involvement in the international intervention and its many phases, as our primary data reveals. Finland's decision to participate in the international intervention and to continue it derived, in particular, from the will to

271 See Government reports VNS 5/2001, VNS 2/2007, VNS 8/2008, VNS 1/2010, VNS 2/2011, VNS 8/2014 and VNS 3/2018.

272 See Government reports VNS 2/2011 and VNS 3/2018.

foster transatlantic foreign and security relations — first bilaterally with the United States and then increasingly within the NATO framework, also. These objectives, which have provided a strong political basis for involvement throughout the period, were not explicitly mentioned in the reports until 2018.

The significance of the skills and capabilities Finland acquired in its defence and crisis management efforts, as well as other lessons, and their practical value in terms of national preparedness, also emerge in our primary data as salient factors in Finland's efforts and their continuation. We refer to this rationale for participation in the report as the 'Finland as a Learner' framework.

The 2018 report is clearly more detailed than its predecessors in terms of the various objectives of Finland's involvement. It states as follows:

"*The aim of Finland's support measures is to promote stability in Afghanistan, which is also important for regional stability. This is also a crucial component in the international efforts to combat terrorism. By continuing and expanding its efforts, Finland also promotes cooperation with its partner countries, including the US, which leads the coalition, and Germany, with which Finland works in close cooperation in northern Afghanistan. Participating in the crisis management will help Finland develop its national defence.*"[273]

The above-mentioned objectives emerged from our primary data as three separate, albeit non-opposing, main frameworks for Finnish agency in Afghanistan.

Our analysis indicates that Finland first and foremost built partnerships with its international partner countries and networks throughout the period, and its involvement in a diverse range of support measures in Afghanistan demonstrated its reliability cooperation skills to its partners. Finland's identity in foreign policy as promoter of peace, equality and human rights guided the role Finland took in the international context and provided a widely accepted justification for involvement. The skills and capabilities Finland acquired in Afghanistan, especially in crisis management, but also in the wider context of the international intervention, made it easier to justify involvement in the intervention, despite the modest results.

The frameworks of Finland's agency had a significant impact on how Finland participated, what Finland responded to in Afghanistan, what was given attention, and how investments were made. The different agency frameworks served different purposes, although in some areas their objectives and logic were in conflict with each other. It should also

273 Government report, VNS 3/2018.

be noted, as one of our respondents stated "*Finland is not one and the same monolithic actor,*"[274] and the goals and priorities of Finnish actors in relation to Afghanistan varied both over time and between different actors (and individuals).

This diversity of objectives and interests, and to some extent implicitness, made achieving a comprehensive approach in Afghanistan very difficult, both at the level of Finland's intervention and at the level of international intervention in general. Before moving on to the observations related to each sector of participation separately, we discuss below the significance and impacts of the three general frameworks on Finland's intervention logic and efforts in Afghanistan in general based on the primary data.[275]

3.1.1 Finland as a Partner: pursuing foreign and security policy capital

> "*I think our involvement in Afghanistan showed support for the United States and NATO. We participated in a politically very unpopular operation for twenty years, and this spring it has had an impact on how Finland's NATO application goes through. After 9/11, the United States said, 'You're either with us or against us.' […] Objectives were camouflaged with CIMIC, defending the rights of women and children, and so on. These goals were not visible in any way during my time. If these are the goals, Finland should be involved all over the world.*"[276]

> "*But we were part of the core group, after all. There were more [participants] at these NATO meetings for security reasons. We were part of the core, not the ultimate core, but the Finnish flag was flying there.*"[277]

According to our primary data, Finland's decision-making on participation in the international intervention in Afghanistan and continuing it until the evacuation in August 2021 was guided particularly by Finland's international partnership goals.[278] These mainly included not only main-

274 Interview H31.

275 The observations in sections 3.1.1–3.1.3 are derived from an analysis of the entire primary data. They include the generally shared or identified observations pertaining to the foundations and structuring of Finland's efforts. Sections 3.2–3.4 further elaborate and illustrate these observations, focusing on specific areas of activity.

276 Interview H43.

277 Interview H12.

278 E.g., Vuorisalo (2009, 13) has also identified foreign and security policy reasons as motivating factors for Finland's involvement. International partnerships have also emerged in professional and non-fiction literature (see, e.g., Ilmonen 2014).

taining good relations, and broadening these relations, with the United States and NATO but also engaging in close cooperation and partnership with our European partners, such as Germany and Sweden.

Our analysis indicates that the Finland as a Partner framework, and especially its transatlantic dimension, was the primary and necessary reason for Finland's efforts and continuing them in Afghanistan: a majority (over 60%) of all our respondents specified this as the primary motive for Finland's involvement, and less than one fifth did not recognize it as a guiding objective for Finland's efforts.[279]

Showing commitment to partnership with the United States and bearing burden of the Afghanistan intervention emerged in the interviews in all sectors – from diplomacy to military crisis management, civilian crisis management and development cooperation. The partnership objectives guided Finland's involvement, however, and gave it a solid foundation from behind the scenes without clearly and transparently setting the goals in relation to what was to be achieved in Afghanistan.

The Finland as a Partner framework manifested slightly differently in different periods. At the beginning of the intervention, Finland's decision to participate was strongly guided by solidarity towards the United States due to the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Our primary data revealed that the terrorist attacks against the United States and the desire to show support for the United States was a necessary factor, without which Finland would not have been interested in the Afghanistan crisis. The argument is supported by the fact that Finland, like the rest of the international community, had not shown any significant contribution to the situation of Afghan women before the terrorist attacks and the United States' reaction to them.

However, the support for the United States alone was not a sufficient reason for the largely unanimous decision to participate that was hardly questioned. The UN mandate and approval of military intervention and the deployment of security forces created for Finland's foreign and security policy a legal and political justification and underlying factor for participation.

Solidarity towards the United States and a willingness to demonstrate commitment to a UN mandated intervention, together, seem to have been necessary and sufficient reasons for the initial decision to participate, according to our analysis. From the perspective of Finland's foreign and security policy, it was natural and almost self-evident to join

279 When asked about the ultimate objectives of Finland's efforts, 37 of the 60 respondents who worked for Finland or closely accompanied it (out of the total 64 interviewees, four respondents representing partner countries were unable to provide grounds for Finland's efforts) mentioned foreign and security policy partnership as the primary objective for participating, either in general or specifically regarding the relationship with the United States and NATO. Forty-eight respondents mentioned the objectives under the Finnish as a Partner framework as one of the grounds for participation.

the stabilization and reconstruction efforts, because the operation had a UN mandate and President George W. Bush had made it clear that it was important to be on the United States' side. The appalling human rights situation in Afghanistan further supported the decision.

It can therefore be justifiably argued that, in the context at the time, the decision not to participate would have been strange from Finland's foreign policy point of view and involved considerable risks compared to the risks of involvement. In line with other respondents, one respondent stated,

"*The main reason was 9/11. [..] If we had not gone along with it, we would have had to face the question of either being with the United States or against it, as Bush said. War on Terrorism. If Finland had not joined, it would have been quite a disappointment. It was a sign of solidarity towards the United States. I think it had less to do with whether (Finland) had any goals in relation to Afghanistan.*"[280]

During the Window of Opportunity period (2001–2005, Section 2.1), Finland's partnership objectives were quite harmonious with the Finland as a Benefactor framework, analysed below (Section 3.1.2). Finland's CIMIC efforts allowed it, on the one hand, to demonstrate its potential added value as an international partner in a way that was appropriate to the operating environment at the time and, on the other hand, to participate in stabilization and reconstruction efforts in a manner that was well suited to its benefactor role in the country, which was seen as a post-conflict operating environment. At the beginning of the Window of Opportunity period, Finland was thus able to present itself as a good international partner and maintain its distance from (the United States') inappropriate activities, especially the OEF mission, which may have harmed its role as a benefactor.

Our primary data indicated that the Finland as a Partner framework became an increasingly important motivation for expanding and continuing Finland's efforts during the intervention and as the conflict in Afghanistan became increasingly difficult. International intervention became increasingly expensive, risky and generally unpopular as it progressed into the Downward Spiral and Transition periods.[281] Remaining in the intervention and investing in it, despite the risks, showed the United States and the wider (Western) international community more clearly that Finland was committed to the cause.

280 Interview H01.

281 In 2010, e.g., half of Finns would have withdrawn Finnish soldiers from Afghanistan either immediately or gradually (Yle Broadcasting Company 2010). In 2011, a majority of Americans wanted for the first time to repatriate US troops as soon as possible (PEW 2010). Most Germans opposed the operation in Afghanistan (Finnish News Agency STT 2010).

The NATO partnership also came into play: The transition of the ISAF mission into a NATO mission opened a new avenue for Finland to maintain and deepen its political, strategic and operational partnership with the alliance. Many of the respondents pointed out that keeping a military presence in Afghanistan offered Finland limited access to the NATO table, which would not otherwise have been granted to Finland as a non-member country. Finland's involvement in the RSM further reflected the importance of the Finland as a Partner framework, as at this point Finland's own defence capabilities were no longer perceived to gain significant added value from participation (see Section 3.1.3: Finland as a Learner). Finland remained engaged and showed its commitment to the difficult situation in Afghanistan to increase its foreign policy credibility and capital and to avoid the potential blows to its reputation had it withdrawn from Afghanistan prematurely or changed direction on its own initiative.

The salience of the Finland as a Partner framework had several significant consequences for Finland's agency and efforts in Afghanistan. First, it guaranteed a long-term and, for Finland, a significant military and civilian-led contribution to Afghanistan's international intervention. As regards Finland's military efforts, the operating environment's shift into active armed conflict and Finland's involvement in it could have called into question how appropriate participating was, considering the stabilization and development objectives set for the efforts in Afghanistan and the Finland as a Benefactor framework. In these circumstances, Finland's foreign and security policy partnership objectives, together with the desire to develop its defence capabilities, provided a solid basis and motivation for continued involvement.

As our primary data revealed, the partnership objectives not only led to the continuation of Finland's military involvement but also contributed to the channelling of Finland's development cooperation efforts to Afghanistan and increased Finland's eagerness to participate in the European Union's civilian crisis management.[282] Development cooperation and civilian crisis management were significantly easier ways for Finland in its role as benefactor to demonstrate partnership in the Afghanistan efforts than military involvement, which became increasingly difficult as the war intensified (see Sections 3.3.1 and 3.4.1).

Finland's partnership objectives were also seen to have contributed to the emphasis on the comprehensive approach, which helped to justify military involvement in particular (see Section 3.2.1). The continued military involvement – albeit with politically limited resources – was central

282 One development expert stated with regard to development cooperation, e.g., "*Providing development cooperation aid also rendered leverage in the relationship with the USA. Yes, they noticed that [in relation to the GDP] Finland gave more money than the USA, a large contribution by us.*" Interview H19.

to international partnerships, but increasingly difficult to justify at home due to the nature and context of the activities and the costs involved. Highlighting the need for comprehensive efforts and understanding comprehensiveness first and foremost as multi-sectoral participation in the international intervention justified and mitigated the military operation and the delicacy of the issue. Then again, it showed Finland's commitment to international intervention in general. Comprehensive efforts made it possible for Finland to demonstrate its benefactor role and at the same time strengthen the basis for involvement from the perspective of partnerships.

Moreover, the Finland as a Partner framework also had an impact on the nature of Finnish agency. It highlighted the importance of stable involvement, the emphasis on cooperation and coordination and the response to requests. As is customary in Finland's foreign policy, Finland was reliable and cooperative – also from an international perspective – as we discovered from our interviews and discussions and endeavoured to respond systematically to the needs of the international intervention and partner countries. This also extended beyond the United States and transatlantic relations. Being actively involved in the joint efforts of the international community and multilateral actors was important and purposeful with regard to Finland's foreign policy, as the Government reports foregrounded. Afghanistan provided a very suitable framework for this: a difficult context and a very multilateral and competitive environment which called for significant investments in order to succeed as an international partner and to be able to fly the Finnish flag.

In some situations, Finland's willingness to bear the burden and its ability to cooperate were also reflected in its active approach to the substance of the intervention. In addition to keeping women's and girls' human rights on the international agenda, Finland's active role in organizing the 2020 Geneva Convention and smaller-scale facilitation of events to bring together international actors are worth mentioning, as our primary data indicated.[283]

Then again, our primary data gives the impression that Finland's active contribution and involvement did not manifest into a particularly strong role or impact within the international intervention, for example as an elicitor of grievances. Respondents considered this to be a question of capacity: Finland's meagre resources did not allow for more significant influence, and mistakes were made somewhere other than on Finland's end. In addition to limited capacity, however, many respondents also

283 These were initiatives by individual diplomats, but Finland's facilitation potential was more widely recognized in the interviews. Finnish efforts, in general, were regarded as high standard (see Section 3.1.2 Finland as a Benefactor).

raised the interpretation that Finland did not particularly seek to influence the direction and overall picture of the intervention measures, with the exception of keeping the human rights of women and girls on the international agenda (see Section 3.1.2). According to the interviews, Finland was liked actually because the country was a problem-free partner and did not question the operations.[284] One respondent stated that Finland does not always have to be the "nicest girl in the class".[285] Another respondent associated the nature of Finland's efforts with the desire to keep its reputation as a good partner:

"*Finland always tried to be everyone's friend. Being nice and humbly doing its business. Small countries were always well willing to coordinate. Finland was a kind advocate of coordination all along"… "We want to be accepted in the group. That's how Finland usually functions as a nation in the Western community. And in so doing we harm ourselves. And that is not kindness, that is fear. We do not want to lose good relations or be criticized by the major Western powers, that is the important actors.*"[286]

In general, Finland's efforts seem to have been characterized by the absence of its own national objectives and strategies specific to the context, or at least limited promotion of them with regard to Afghanistan and international intervention. Indeed efforts were made in development cooperation and military crisis management (in CIMIC), in particular, to ensure Finland's key priorities were considered (see Sections 3.2.1 and 3.4.1). According to individual respondents, Finland's clear goal setting piloted its efforts.[287] These voices were clearly a minority, however. The ambiguity of the national objectives is understandable from the point of view of the command structures and the nature of the operations: after all, Finland was not a part of EUPOL and ISAF to pursue its national priorities. However, obscurity of national priorities and the lack of strategy is considered to be a relatively strong characteristic of Finland's way to operate, for example in civilian crisis management (see Section 3.3.3).[288]

This raises questions at least about Finland's ability and endeavour to promote the comprehensive approach in the different sectors of participation, when it is understood as engaging in efforts towards the same

284 Respondent H7 summed up the essence of Finland's role as follows: "We were humble and didn't question anything."

285 Interview H31. This was stated in Swedish in the interview: "*Den snällaste tjejen i klassen*" ("the nicest girl in the class.").

286 Interview H27.

287 An interview with a diplomatic representative (H9) highlighted how important it is for Finland to set its own goals.

288 This issue was identified in the development cooperation, as well (see Section 3.4.1).

strategic direction. Especially since the partners did not seem to have had a clear shared goal and strategy in Afghanistan, either.[289] As one international respondent said, "*We didn't have a strategy. We walked into one situation, and then to the next. We were perhaps not entirely sleepwalking but walking straight into different situations and reacting to them.*"[290]

The salience of the Finland as a Partner framework can be interpreted as having reduced the pressure to critically analyse and monitor the impact of the efforts and how well the goals in Afghanistan were achieved. It is essential to note that, from the perspective of Finland's partnership goals, the key overarching goals were already met in many respects by the fact that Finland was involved and showed commitment in the intervention, regardless of how it went and of the impact that Finland's efforts had in Afghanistan.

Finland's decision-making seemed to be motivated primarily by the needs and commitments of the international intervention and partnership frameworks, not by the development of the situation in Afghanistan and the analysis of the effects of international intervention or the Afghans' needs and priorities. Our primary data broadly supports this argument of the weaknesses in monitoring the results and impacts of the efforts as well as shortcomings in political and strategic direction, which emerge from a wide range of the participation sectors.

According to those who worked in the field, reports were indeed compiled on how resources were used and how different projects were implemented. There was even mention of an overflow of technical reporting. However, regular reporting concentrated on describing, "*what we did and not what the consequences of the efforts were*".[291] Glossing over reports and situation overviews the higher up the operational and administrative ladder one went was also an issue noticed throughout the sectors of participation (see Sections 3.2.3, 3.3.3 and 3.4.4)[292] A number of factors were associated with the challenges of strategically and critically monitoring efforts and the situation, such as the sufficiency of human resources (see Section 3.4.3) and the broader logic of operations and the

289 See, e.g., European Court of Auditors 2015, 9 and SIGAR 2021a for more information on the lack of a broader strategy in developing the security sector.

290 Interview H14.

291 Interview H10.

292 In our primary data, this emerged at the level of operations and programmes, both in terms of the operation commanders' willingness to disclose progress during their post and in terms of the qualitative differences in monitoring multilateral projects, whereby explaining things in a favourable light and a lack of understanding of the local context were evident. Then again, this was also directly linked to reporting to Finland, the ministries and committees.

aid architecture where disclosing progress is important for securing further funding.

Many of the respondents who worked in Afghanistan – both civilian and military – stated that they had encountered little strategic-level interest on the part of the state administration, also, regarding the direction and consequences of the efforts. From the point of view of partnerships, this did not need special attention and, for example, talking too much about the challenges of international intervention could have been detrimental to the partnerships. At the same time, the nature of the partnership objectives as non-disclosable motives for Finland's efforts may have encouraged an optimistic and selective depiction of the situation in Afghanistan (see Section 3.2.3).

Since there was reluctance to communicate that Finland would stay in Afghanistan in the interest of the partnerships, despite the deteriorating situation and the challenges of international intervention (and, e.g., try to unilaterally correct the course with regard to the objectives set for Afghanistan), the situation had to be described as moving in the right direction and needing further support from the perspective of Finland as a Benefactor framework.[293]

The salience of the Finland as a Partner framework as a basis for Finland's efforts (note the difference: it was not intended as a justification) raises the question of how its objectives were achieved. The primary data reveals that, in general, Finland's involvement was deemed successful with regard to the partnership objectives. Finland is perceived to have increased its foreign policy credibility as a partner. The interview responses, conversely, underlined the negative foreign-policy consequences that withdrawing from the intervention before the United States' decision and the example set by the other partners would have had for Finland. Several respondents in the spring of 2022 strongly associated the United States' solidarity towards Finland with the experiences in Afghanistan and long-term partnership in a difficult crisis environment (see Section 3.2.5).

In addition to strategic and operational compatibility, the partnership with NATO in Afghanistan is also seen to have contributed to the political capital available to Finland now (during and after the NATO membership process). Some experts, however, refrain from placing too much

293 The respondents in diplomacy and in military both touched upon the connection between political objectives and building an understanding of the situation. One diplomat stated they tried to be critical when reporting, but "there were things that couldn't be discussed" because the situation was "so politically hush-hush" (Interview H5). Another respondent from the military stated that the challenge in more substantive reports on governance is often that nothing has really changed in the field, but the reports should depict progress. When asked a direct follow-up question concerning whether the depiction of progress was linked to the partnership objectives, the respondent answered affirmatively and continued on to describe the importance of the United States' and national interests as follows: "But you couldn't say this out loud because of the prevailing national atmosphere. No individual official is going to complain about this because 'it's none of my business.'" (Interview H47).

significance on Finland's involvement in Afghanistan and its impact on the NATO membership process. The general point of view, however, is that Finland succeeded politically in relation to its partnerships, despite the failure to stabilize Afghanistan.

Then again, an essential question is how can, or should, impact and success be measured in terms of partnerships and the goals and interests associated with them in the aftermath of the intervention. How much involvement was needed and were all the forms of involvement necessary to demonstrate Finland's viable partnership? Would a lower development cooperation budget for Afghanistan, for example, have been enough to demonstrate to the United States our commitment to partnership, or would a stronger military contribution and greater risk-taking ability have been even more useful with respect to the bilateral relationship between Finland and the United States?

A key problem in answering these questions is that the partnership objectives were not set transparently when planning the intervention efforts, priorities and, for example, exit strategies at any stage of the intervention. Therefore, an ex post facto evaluation of them is tenuous. In 2022, especially as the NATO membership process progressed, it was easy to link Finland's involvement in the Afghanistan operations to the support Finland received in the membership process.[294] Lessons are always learned in time and place, however, and considering how significantly the partnerships and their contributions would have been emphasized without the current security policy situation is relevant. How would success in relation to Afghanistan and partnerships have been evaluated if Russia had not attacked Ukraine and catalysed the NATO membership application process?

Furthermore, the partnership objectives were not clearly and transparently aligned with the other objectives to make clear their mutual prioritization and direction with regard to specific efforts. Not only does this cloud the understanding of the reasons behind Finland's efforts in a changing context, but it also makes it difficult to evaluate the contribution the different forms of involvement made in achieving the goals and how well they succeeded. The discrepancy between the official objectives and the actual objectives blurs the picture of Finland's strategic efforts (what Finland sought to achieve through each of the efforts), and now retroactively makes it possible, for example, to connect the partnership objectives to efforts with which they were not initially transparently connected, while at the same time ignoring the publicly set objectives and the detailed review of their success.

294 A report by the Ministry of Defence also underlines this interpretation (2022).

3.1.2 Finland as a Benefactor: framework for justifying Finland's efforts and identity

> "*The improvement of girls' and women's position was well suited for the government programmes at the time, was related to our foreign policy goals. […] The Finns and the Nordic countries are good at ensuring pertinent issues are dealt with.*"[295]

As the Government reports highlight, the objectives of Finland's efforts as communicated to the public were strongly tied to stabilizing Afghanistan and helping the Afghan people. Finland's objectives also underlined the situation of women, girls and other vulnerable groups and support for their human rights as part of the UN-led international intervention. This Finland as a Benefactor framework, which is well aligned with the values and principles of Finland's foreign and security policy, guided Finland's assumed role as part of the international group of actors and provided the necessary reasons and justification for political consensus for Finland's involvement in the intervention in general.

The primary data revealed that more than eighty per cent of all respondents identified helping Afghans as one of the reasons for Finland's efforts. Finland's objectives for stability, peace and human rights in Afghanistan appeared to be the primary reasons for the efforts, especially for those who worked in development cooperation and for some of the diplomats and political decision-makers. However, according to our analysis, these objectives did not serve as primary motives for making decisions to participate and develop efforts throughout the time period as the Finland as a Partner framework we identified: 33% of the respondents specified objectives suitable for the Finland as a Beneficiary framework as the primary reasons for the efforts.[296]

As regards the Finland as a Benefactor framework, it is important to distinguish between its significance as a justification and rationalisation for Finland's efforts on the one hand and its significance and impact on Finland's actual efforts on the other hand. The former was firmly prominent throughout the period under review. From the Window of Opportunity period to the Beginning of the End period, the justifications for Finland's involvement in Afghanistan's international intervention were stabilization, improvement of Afghanistan's societal situation,

295 Interview H6.

296 A total of 62% identified the objectives of international partnerships as the primary reasons to participate.

strengthening the Afghans' welfare and development prospects, while the human rights of women and girls were often mentioned separately.[297]

Afghanistan's intervention and the starting points for Finland's efforts were not justified solely as a means to combat international terrorism, although this was emphasized especially in the Window of Opportunity and Downward Spiral periods, 2001–2005 and 2006–2011, respectively. Rather, there was a strong rhetorical focus right from the beginning on building 'positive peace', i.e., stabilization of a state where human rights would prevail, and the administration would guarantee well-being.[298] This is also evident in our primary data: "*Accomplishing good governance was a central issue for Finland.*"[299] Notably, this framework for efforts to build a strong, stable and feasible administration, rather than fighting against something, seems to have been particularly prominent for Finland compared to some of the other countries involved. In the case of Norway, for example, the war on terror seems to be an accentuated justification for participation and a central objective more than in Finland.[300]

It should be noted that the Finland as a Benefactor framework was an overall justification in all Finland's efforts, not only in development cooperation. Using the framework to justify Finland's contribution to civilian crisis management was natural, as its mandate and high-level objectives were directly related to strengthening good governance and rule of law, regardless of how Finland actually responded to them (see Section 3.3).

Military involvement was also justified as an enabler of stability, the common good and the rights of women and children, for example (see Section 3.2). As mentioned above, the nature of Finland's CIMIC involvement in ISAF suited Finland's efforts, as the country considered itself a benefactor. Part of the political sphere, especially, considered Finland's involvement in CIMIC as a very traditional peacekeeping activity, which in Finland is accompanied by strong, even romantic images of the neutral

297 See, e.g., Government report 5/2001, foreign and security policy UTP 19/2007 and Government report VNS 1/2010. At an event celebrating the 90th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Finland and the United States in May 2009, President Halonen (2009), for example, stated the following about the work being done in Afghanistan: "Finland is committed to international efforts to improve the situation in Afghanistan through participation in military and civilian crisis management and development funding. We are doing this for the democratic future of Afghanistan. Women and girls are part of that future. The human rights of Afghan women and girls are an urgent challenge. Practices that violate their rights are not acceptable. Equal access to education for women is crucial for the development of society, and Finland is ready to help with this as well." President Niinistö (2015) explicitly highlighted the themes of Finland's motivation – women, peace and security – at a peacekeeping summit in New York in September 2015 and linked this to Afghanistan.

298 See Galtung 1969 for positive peace.

299 Interview H02.

300 See the Norwegian Commission on Afghanistan 2016.

country's altruistic efforts in faraway lands. PRT efforts were also initially portrayed as traditional peacekeeping activities.[301]

Later, as the conflict intensified and the nature of military crisis management shifted to include combat and security force training, justification of the efforts was grounded in the comprehensive approach and, in particular the interdependence of security and development; military involvement was needed to maintain the progress already achieved in bettering the status of women and girls and developing society in general. Our interviews revealed that improving girls' access to education, for example, was a source of motivation and justification also at the individual level in military crisis management.[302]

The Finland as a Benefactor framework was also reflected in how Finland constructed its profile and involvement as part of an international intervention. Our primary data presents a two-tier picture of the two main operational frameworks: Finland's efforts responded primarily to the intervention decisions of our international partners and the willingness to show support and commitment to them. Circumscribed by this, Finland sought to profile itself (as a reliable partner), especially as an actor advocating for rule of law, human rights and comprehensive security.

The Finland as a Benefactor framework was perhaps most clearly visible in its rhetorical emphases on the international agenda and the themes included therein, especially the emphasis regarding women's and girls' human rights. Although some of the respondents considered the emphasis on the concerns related to women and girls to be mainly a rhetorical justification for Finland's involvement in military efforts, in particular, our data generally supports the notion that Finland systematically highlighted the human rights perspective at the international level.

Discussions with both Finns and partners highlight Finland's relatively active focus on women's and girls' rights on the intervention agenda. Many also thought that Finland had genuinely profiled itself in this area: "*When it came to women and peace, we were almost the only actor there and we gained visibility [...] We had a strong profile in women's equality issues.*"[303]

The Nordic Plus group was considered a natural and institutionalized channel of coordination and influence for Finland during the intervention. It supported profiling and also provided a key channel for influencing

301 See, e.g., Minutes of the Parliament plenary session 159/2001 and section five of the foreign and security policy UTP 40/2005.

302 E.g., interview H48.

303 Interview H23.

the international intervention's agenda.[304] The rhetorical emphasis on women's equality and human rights is seen as important but not easy, because at the level of international intervention, these themes were generally perceived as subordinate to the themes of high security and, for example, reproductive health issues were also difficult for some key partner countries, such as the United States.

The impact of the Finland as a Benefactor framework is also evident in the broad policies of Finland's concrete efforts, notably the relatively large and increasing financial contributions to civilian-led development cooperation and civilian crisis management, alongside its military involvement (see Sections 3.3.2, 3.4.2). The Finland as a Benefactor framework embodied Finland's development cooperation aid priorities in relation to rule of law, education and livelihoods, and the traversal themes related to human rights. Furthermore, the Finland as a Benefactor framework also helps to understand individual support objectives and highlighting of their significance. These include, in particular, support for the *Marie Stopes International* reproductive health organization, Finland's relatively large role in funding the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) and the police-prosecutor cooperation project, which is part of the EUPOL civilian crisis management mission. The descriptions of Finland's efforts and agency in our primary data highlighted these projects quite considerably. Since Finland wanted to promote a stable and feasible society, its desire to extensively support the various sub-sectors in the Afghan society and to further the comprehensive approach was logical.

At the same time, the Finland as a Benefactor framework can be considered to have acted at least partially as an obstacle to more robust military involvement. Although military involvement was central to Finland's foreign and security policy partnership objectives, a strongly military-oriented involvement would not have been suitable for Finland's benefactor framework. Moreover, it would have been politically difficult to accept, especially for those who had adopted the framework. Finland did not want to appear as a party to the war or as part of the forces fighting the rebels, especially to the Finnish public. Rather, it wanted to be seen as an actor in building a safe society.[305]

In our view, a compromise emerged as a result of this tension, whereby military involvement was continued, the reasons resting particularly on partnerships and responding to the needs of the efforts as well as possible, within the involvement limitations of the Finland as a Benefactor

304 Then again, differences in emphasis among the members of this group were also identified. For example, Denmark, which concentrated much more on military efforts and experienced more losses, did not seem to underline gender issues so clearly. Interview with an experienced diplomat, H6.

305 For previous discussion, see, e.g., Salonius-Pasternak 2010b.

framework and justified principally therein (see Section 3.2.3). The military respondents pointed out that the politically set maximum number of soldiers did not correspond to the Finnish Defence Forces' estimates of the number required to carry out the mission in the field. As a result, the investments made in the military involvement were not always sufficient from the military's perspective but were enough that the prerequisites for involvement were fulfilled.

In addition to influencing the levels of involvement, the Finland as a Benefactor framework can be considered to have shaped the nature of the involvement — and at least the delineation of it. In addition to the CIMIC mission, Finland's military involvement was generally moderate in terms of its operating modes, compared to many other ISAF partners.

As per our primary data, the Finnish actors were viewed as especially high standard and well-mannered, and as clearly different from, for example, the United States' operations. Finland's operations are described as starting with "*building bridges*", both figuratively and literally, and exhibiting a respectful attitude towards the locals.[306] Finnish soldiers are said to have treated villagers differently, especially during the Window of Opportunity period (2001–2005): "*There it was, can you imagine, an American commander did not dare to go anywhere, but then the Finns came without a helmet, so we took them to the village chief. They were amazed at how this was possible. We got good feedback for that.*"[307] The quality of Finland's and the Finns' efforts was also recognized in the civilian-led sectors – Finland's way of doing things was appreciated internationally.[308]

Finland's willingness to cooperate and sense of responsibility in the international intervention was also seen as a positive expression of its benefactor role. However, it was also sometimes viewed as lacking critical consideration. Finland was like a workhorse that did not complain or question but performed its work with quality.

Although the Finland as a Benefactor framework was visible in major policies and rhetoric, its credibility and salience as a guide for Finland's efforts is highly questionable. First, the evidence of how Finland's rhetorical emphasis on human rights (women's and girls') materialized in its efforts and resource allocation is unclear. Most of Finland's aid to Afghanistan was paid through multilateral funding channels and was used to strengthen the technical capacity of the central government (see Section 3.4.2). This was justified by its coordination and capacity benefits compared to

306 Interview H35.

307 Interview H48.

308 Interview H22.

Finland acting on its own. It was also motivated by the notion of helping the state help the citizens.

However, both our primary data and the evaluations of Finland's aid highlight the fact that civil society as a target of Finland's efforts was relatively minor.[309] A development cooperation expert summed it up as follows: "*But at the same time, in a country where efforts are being made to reduce corruption and increase responsibility, it would be really important to strengthen civil society and the dialogue between the people and the elite to be able to engage in non-armed dialogue. This didn't really happen, though. Finland's funds for local cooperation could have been used for this purpose, but they were discontinued long before my time. This is one of the challenges in these environments that rely on large funds. Significantly more aid should have been given to the civil society than to the government.*"[310] Then again, it was expressly the small local cooperation projects that faced challenges in terms of efficiency and risks of corruption (see Section 3.4.2).

Foreign policy pressures also affected the targeting of aid and adjusting of Finland's priorities in practice. In the end, the amount of Finland's aid that tangibly helped women and girls, as the rhetoric implies, for example, is uncertain. The lack of independent evaluations focused on this makes the analysis difficult. However, when looking at the OECD's indicators for aid allocated to gender sensitivity and equality, the picture is two-fold as regards Finland's emphasis on women and girls. The proportion of projects which addressed equality issues at some level increased during the intervention, especially from the Transition period onwards, but the proportion of projects which focused especially on gender equality were rather modest.[311] The indicator's credibility is somewhat questionable due to unsystematic use.[312] The variability of monitoring Finland's equality and human rights priorities is significant as such, considering Finland's rhetoric emphasizing them.

Then again, Finland does not seem to have made any clamour about the civilian casualties caused by the international troops, for example, which directly affected and was extremely harmful to women and girls.[313] In Finland, peacebuilding was a central theme already in the first half of the intervention, and the importance of achieving peace to advance

309 Bennett 2014.

310 Interview H21.

311 Kuusi 2022. Only 18% of Finland's development cooperation aid to Afghanistan in 2006–2020, for which the OECD indicator was used, was directly allocated to projects promoting gender equality. A total of 34% of the projects did not include the gender promotion dimension at all.

312 Ibid; background discussion with doctoral researcher Ilona Kuusi.

313 Estimates of civilian casualties: UNAMA 2021 and UNAMA 2018; see also Shortland et al. 2017.

development was emphasized especially in the second half of the 2010s.[314] However, the United States was considered to dominate other actors, and the opportunities to have influence were meagre. It seemed pointless to talk about peace mediation in a situation where a reluctant leader state dominated the agenda. One respondent compared the situation to the Vietnam War and the absurdity of mediation initiatives in such a context.[315] Nevertheless, the diplomat respondents also raised the idea that Finland could have invested more in facilitating efforts between different actors.[316]

More generally, as highlighted in the Finland as a Partner section above, experiences of modest influence within the international intervention denote the limitations of the Finland as a Benefactor framework. On the one hand, Finland's desire to sit at the decision-making tables, where it would be able to have an influence, was a catalyst for its significant financial aid. On the other hand, Finland did not seem to exercise maximum effort to do this, as our data suggests.

The respondents felt that, for example, the expertise and human resources invested for influencing in civilian crisis management were insufficient. One diplomat referred to the dilemma and its background as follows: "*If we really wanted to make a difference, we should have had more people in the diplomatic, political efforts and clear targets from Helsinki. That was missing. Maybe it was a kind of frustration, but I felt that it was like a post box. That we were there because there were troops in Mazar. That when money was given, we had a place at the tables, but how could we influence that? When there was something that you wanted to concentrate on, there weren't any resources.*"[317]

Finland's ability to be active was compared to, for example, Sweden, which had a stronger presence and more human resources in Afghanistan. One development cooperation expert felt that with stronger human resources, Finland could have advocated its interests better with Sweden, for example: "*More personnel could have rendered higher quality involvement in, for example the World Bank's or United Nations' programmes. Could have invested more in the fact that if Finland advocated for a certain issue, it could have had an impact on it. It's always about advocating in the beginning — if you want to emphasize a certain*

314 E.g., H64 and H12. Specifically speaking, only a very small portion of Finland's aid was allocated explicitly to peacebuilding at the national or local level. In the second half of the intervention, Finland funded a few such projects, such as UNAMA's *Salam Support Group*, dialogue-related projects with the *Crisis Management Initiative: Martti Ahtisaari Foundation* and *Intermediate's* peace and reconciliation process projects. This is evident in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' data on funded projects.

315 Interview H64.

316 Interview H05.

317 Interview H12.

under-represented issue, you have to get the international forces behind you."[318] Maximizing influence is also about strategic monitoring and the interest the high officials have in it, which we referred to in the Finland as a Partner section. The fact that this lack of interest in strategic monitoring was evident across the sub-divisions of involvement is significant.

Moreover, Finland's efforts outside the policy documents do not seem to have progressed comprehensively towards the objectives set for the situation in Afghanistan. Based on our primary data, it seems that the comprehensive efforts progressed on paper but were not systematically evident in the field, so to speak. Despite efforts to better target support and make it more suitable for Afghans (see the section on Downward Spiral, 2005–2006), Finland's efforts were perceived as siloed and dispersed: "*Our help was like a patchwork quilt,*" stated one respondent referring to the mid-2010s.[319] Another respondent who worked with Afghanistan towards the end of the intervention also referred to the inexact nature of the objectives at the end of the intervention: "*I thought we had few goals, too few goals. […] Now it was more about us giving money; it was the country receiving the most development cooperation aid.*"[320]

In a workshop focusing on the lessons Finland learned in crisis management, the participants emphasized the need to separate the coordination of Helsinki's administrative efforts, which went reasonably well, from the comprehensive nature of the efforts in Afghanistan. This was hampered, in principle, by the strategic fragmentation of the international intervention and thus by the different directions in which Finland's efforts were directed. Then again, Finland's own efforts and objectives also seemed to have strategic weaknesses: "*Things were planned but fragmented in the sense that there were no qualitative objectives for what we wanted here and now. Rather, it was like 'let's do this and that project and see what happens later'. There was a lack of deeper strategic thinking and poor knowledge of the culture in Afghanistan. The understanding the higher officials had, was too narrow compared to how challenging the operating environment was.*"[321]

The lack of conflict analysis and critical review of operations management in general invoked challenges in the Finland as a Benefactor agency and strategic implementation of it. To be able to contribute to stabilization and reconstruction, it is first necessary to understand the environment

318 Interview H21.

319 Interview H16.

320 Interview H12.

321 Interview H27.

in which the interventions are to take place and the background and probable impacts they will have.

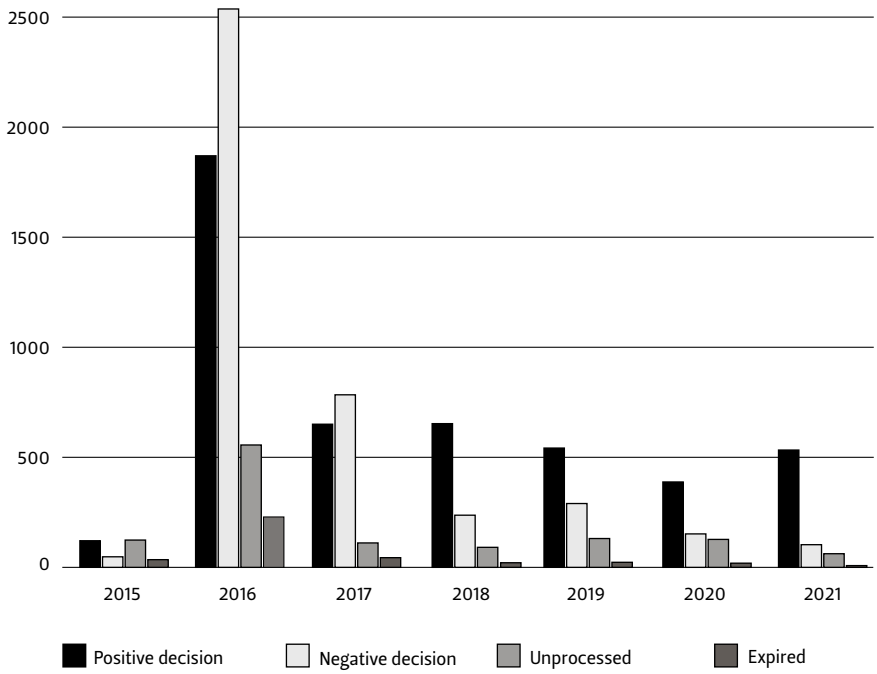
Respondents from the different sectors underlined this lack of understanding of the context as a major challenge, both in terms of Finland's efforts and in general. Finland's efforts do not seem to have been systematically guided by analyses of the operating environment, conflict and political dynamics, or the effectiveness of the international intervention.[322] Some decisions followed up on the lessons learned, e.g., the NSP's positive evaluations and results spoke on behalf of its support. Conversely, unfavourable evaluations and recognized serious shortcomings in general did not lead to eliminating aid targets or making significant changes to them if there was a desire to continue for foreign policy reasons. When examining critical points in time, such as transferring the responsibility for security to the Afghans, the interests of the international intervention, and the United States in particular, were centre stage, instead of the needs of the conflict environment (see Section 3.2.3). Respondents also criticized the weaknesses in monitoring the *do no harm* principle. For example, EUPOL's training programme for female police officers was perceived as even being unethical because it exposed the trained women to security threats without adequate risk minimization and ensuring safety (see Section 3.3.2).

Remarkably, even those who above all viewed Finland's efforts through the Finland as a Benefactor lens were aware that the progress of the efforts and development of the situation were not particularly well monitored or analysed. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that after 2002 decisions to continue the efforts and the forms the involvement should take were not based on adequate and, above all, critical debate. Good intentions formed the primary foundation for the benevolent nature of the efforts, as opposed to basing it on conflict analysis and, for example, monitoring the *do no harm* tenet. "*It was based on that trust. There hasn't been a single major decision-making process since the initial decision [decision to participate in ISAF in early 2002]. Everything since then has been an almost semi-automatic continuation of that decision. Only the evacuation operation was decided separately.*"[323]

322 In this regard, it should be noted that according to the respondents who followed the reporting of multilateral projects, such as ARTF's projects, there were clear shortcomings in understanding the operational environment also in the monitoring reports of the World Bank and other multilateral organisations. E.g., interview H29.

323 Interview H35.

Asylum decisions for Afghan asylum seekers in Finland, 2015–2021



Positive decisions include approval of asylum, subsidiary protection status, and residence permit granted on other grounds. The unprocessed decisions include, inter alia, cases transferred to other countries based on the Dublin procedure and cases granted asylum in other EU member states. During 2010–2014, positive decisions (including subsidiary protection status and residence permit granted on other grounds) accounted for approximately 57% of all decisions.

Figure 6. Asylum decisions for Afghan asylum seekers in Finland, 2015–2021
Source: Finnish Immigration Service, statistics 2022

Similar to the Finland as a Partner framework, the Finland as a Benefactor framework did not seem to have primarily responded to or followed the needs and interests of the Afghans. The interview respondents and workshop participants who were involved in Finland's efforts and those from the Afghan diaspora widely recognized the Afghans' weak role in planning and targeting aid.

The Afghans' role was generally considered as having to follow the international actors' agenda (especially during the Window of Opportunity period 2001–2005 and the Downward Spiral period 2006–2011) and playing the part of a pawn in their game. This was despite the launch of official national development programmes in Afghanistan and compilation of national documents guiding the intervention. Afghan decision-makers

and authorities needed and wanted support. Therefore, they assented to the agenda and forms of aid, although they did not necessarily consider them priorities.

Many respondents also pointed out that the Finnish actors were in contact with a very small group of 'our' Afghan authorities and rulers, and ascertaining their real motives and ideas regarding state formation and creating an equal civil society was difficult. The perspective of the targeted aid recipients, i.e., women, girls, communities and citizens, on what the central government and Finnish aid had built on the local and national levels and how the state was formed was narrow. Our data show that during the intervention, the local beneficiaries' weak ownership was indeed noticed, but it was difficult to rectify the situation anymore. Furthermore, Finland's aid became increasingly bunkerized, and being able to relate to the everyday life of the Afghans (see Section 3.4.3) was difficult, especially from the Transition period (2012–2014) onwards.

Also noteworthy is Finland's deportation and migration policy as of 2015. This added one more priority to the list of Finland's priorities regarding Afghanistan which did not automatically converge with the interests of the Afghan people. "*Let me remind you that the migration policy was not yet in play when I went there. It emerged as a new factor then, in 2015. It became a new thread in the embroidery of Finland's original agencies. I wouldn't forget the emphasis of it.*"[324]

In practice, the 2016 policy on the improved security situation in Afghanistan made it more difficult for Afghans to obtain asylum in Finland. Moreover, the agreement between the two countries in the same year allowed forced deportation for those whose asylum application was rejected (see Section 2.4). Finland, who had been working for the stability of Afghanistan for more than a decade, conveyed the message that returning to Afghanistan was safe under certain conditions. A different evaluation would have called into question the direction of the entire international intervention and Finland's success from the perspective of the Finland as a Benefactor framework. At the same time, large areas of Afghanistan were actually controlled by the Taliban. There was a war in the country and attacks were made even in Kabul, as our overview indicates. People were aware of this situation, and it led to strong public criticism of the deportation flights in 2017.[325]

Overall, the Finland as a Benefactor framework has guided investment in certain sectors and certainly motivated the actions of many actors and

324 Interview H16.

325 For example, Hakkarainen et al. 2017 in Helsingin Sanomat. In the summer of 2018, a special advisor at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs stated in an interview with YLE that, "There are no safe spots left in Afghanistan." Yle 2018.

individuals. However, the framework did not seem to be a decisive factor in the practical action plans of projects and operations and their progress: "*Our goals were not complicated to follow. They were to fulfil the utilization rate for these projects during the year — to make payments and use up the money.*"[326]

The Finland as a Benefactor agency is clearly evident in Finland's Afghanistan policy, whereas the Finland as a Partner agency is only somewhat noticeable in official documents, although it is a strong theme in our data. Then again, the Finland as a Benefactor agency is not as systematically evident in decisions and actions. It should be noted that from the point of view of the Afghans in Finland, this framework would have been most suitable for Finland. Using human rights and education as the building blocks for Finland's agency was considered extremely suitable for Finland, and people would have wanted to see Finland focus on them.[327]

How, then, can the success of Finland's efforts be assessed from the perspective of the Finland as a Benefactor framework? In general, our respondents and workshop participants felt that Finland did not achieve the objectives it set for Afghanistan. Many of those who worked in Afghanistan or in the intervention were shocked, sad and even felt guilty about the outcome of the intervention and stressed the importance of learning something from it. As explained above, many experts and those involved in the operations also pointed out several failures in Finland's efforts, e.g. as regards critical monitoring of the efforts and steering the intervention from the outside in particular.

The primary data also strongly reflected that responsibility was placed on both the international intervention and its leaders and on the Afghan people. The respondents highlighted Finland's small size and thereby its non-involvement as an actor in relation to the United States' strategic mistakes, for example. It should be noted that although the high quality of Finland's efforts, both as an international partner and as a supporter of Afghanistan, as well as its role as bearer of an agenda of good things were highlighted, respondents simultaneously felt that Finland could not have had any influence on the mistakes made at the international level.

Respondents also pinpointed the Afghan decision-makers' and actors' responsibility and the role of the culture in Afghanistan in the failure of the mission. However, the twenty years of positive changes in the Afghan society, such as the education of girls and the improvement of women's

326 Interview H27.

327 This issue was raised in both diaspora workshops.

status, were associated with Finland's efforts and involvement.[328] The problem with the impact analysis is that the objectives were very broad and undefined, for example in terms of time and exit strategies: which of Finland's efforts was the most salient in improving the situation of girls and women, and how is their current situation an indicator of the sustainability of support and the success achieved?

3.1.3 Finland as a Learner: collaboration in a war zone as an opportunity to develop capabilities

> "*We learned to understand how the United States works. But we did not understand how the Afghan society works.*"[329]

In addition to the Finland as a Partner and Finland as a Benefactor frameworks, examining Finland's efforts in Afghanistan as a learning and skill-building process is worthwhile. We call this the Finland as a Learner framework. This third framework endorsed and motivated the continuation of Finland's involvement in a difficult context, especially in the area of military crisis management. The Finland as a Learner framework was considered more as a benefit and consequence of the efforts in Afghanistan than as a basis for the efforts. Thirty per cent of the respondents referred to it as an objective of action; only a few respondents considered it as the primary criterion.[330] The importance of learning in guiding efforts increased as the intervention expanded during the Downward Spiral and Transition periods, as the situation in Afghanistan became more demanding. Then again, the lessons were not seen to have offered additional advantage to the involvement from the mid-2010s, the Stagnation period, (2015–2018) onwards. A look at the perceived learning benefits reveals that the lessons were in certain sectors and instances. Moreover, the lessons were applied variably.

For Finland, at the start of the international intervention Afghanistan was an environment where lessons learned from the past could be applied. Finland had acquired CIMIC experience in the Balkans, and since CIMIC operations were considered suitable for supporting the Afghan interim government, it became Finland's role. The notion of Afghanistan as a post-conflict country where, in addition to peacekeeping, UN-led support

328 The phenomenon is not new: an op-ed article in *Helsingin Sanomat* in 2010 addressed the attitudes towards international crisis management, saying, "The crisis management actors take credit for the things that are successful, while difficulties are attributed to local problems" (Häikiö 2010).

329 Interview H32.

330 The respondents involved in the military crisis management, in particular, mentioned skill-building and learning as objectives. See Section 3.2.1.

would help the society to get on its feet, is not alien to Finland's foreign policy. As one respondent noted when describing the original motivations, "*[one of the reasons for Finland's involvement was] the fact that it was such a clear circumstance that it was easy to get involved in.*"[331]

Afghanistan became an increasingly demanding environment for Finland when the conflict and international intervention changed, especially during the Downward Spiral period. However, the consensus was that operating there, Finland would not only gain political partnership but also develop interoperability and national defence capabilities by gaining experience from joint operations.

The expectation that the military involvement in Afghanistan would develop Finland's capabilities in crisis management and national defence rises from both the official rhetoric and the interview data, albeit with slightly different emphasis. The benefits for Finland's defence capabilities were increasingly foregrounded in public statements and documents as the intervention progressed and became more challenging.[332] Skill-building was also depicted above all as a benefit rather than a primary criterion for involvement. In its report on Afghanistan in connection with a Government report in 2007, the Foreign Affairs Committee, for example, highlighted benefits military crisis management offered for national defence: "*The Foreign Affairs Committee emphasizes that involvement in military crisis management supports the development of the Finnish Defence Forces' interoperability and the credibility of national defence. Military crisis management uses primarily the same resources that have been reserved for national defence. Military crisis management and maintaining national defence capabilities are mutually supportive activities in the Defence Forces.*"[333]

Significantly, in later years, especially now that the intervention has ended, development of crisis management capabilities has been substantiated more directly as a key objective and justification for involvement. According to a report by the Ministry of Defence, "*[d]evelopment of the Finnish Defence Forces' skills and performance, taking into account the needs of national defence*" was one of Finland's key objectives in Afghanistan.[334]

Capability development and learning experiences were recognized in the interview data as useful outcomes of the military involvement, but they were also found to have served as motivators for the involvement:

331 Interview H02.

332 See, e.g., Haglund 2014, Kaikkonen 2020, Government report VNS 3/2018, and Ministry of Defence 2022.

333 Foreign Affairs Committee UaVM 11/2007.

334 Ministry of Defence 2022.

"*One of the reasons was clearly the desire to work together with the United States and be 'NATO compatible'. I've asked the people in the Defence Forces, and according to them, Finland reached a NATO level that did not exist at the end of the 1990s. We got our Defence Forces and troops to operate at the NATO level. […] This [motivation] was not expressed so directly at the time, but it was a hidden goal where we could show we were a credible actor in crisis management, that Finland is together with the other NATO countries, and we were able to take our national defence to a new level there.*"[335]

The Downward Spiral (2006–2011) and Transition (2012–2014) periods, especially, were considered to have offered Finland a new kind of crisis management environment, which called more for war-time crisis management capabilities than peacekeeping capabilities. In addition to learning various operational and tactical lessons, involvement in a large-scale military operation accumulated experience in how other countries operate and taught how to exchange intelligence and the importance of it (see Section 3.2.5).

Then again, our primary data indicates that the benefits arising from developing interoperability and improving national defence capabilities could not be further increased by participating in the RSM, because Finland had already learned these lessons in the ISAF mission. One defence policy and administrative expert referred to the RSM as follows: "*Yes, yeah, that's it. The military objectives were lowered, if I may put it that way. At one point, we had trouble getting people to go. Many of those in the reserve joined the efforts, but if we needed specialized expertise, we couldn't get anyone to go. There was nothing to gain from it. It was very frustrating because the culture is so different.*"[336]

In other words, the lessons for developing defence capabilities seem to have been learned already by the Stagnation and Beginning of the End periods, which puts to question using capability development to justify involvement during these periods. By contrast, participation in the RSM was again considered as being more about partnerships and solidarity: "*Sure, yeah, the military level had been reached at that point, but we were committed to it, so decisions were made to stay and offer support.*"[337]

The Finland as a Learner framework becomes prominent when examining the objectives and benefits of military involvement. However, the framework is also useful when examining the other sectors of participation. Afghanistan presented a new context for aid, particularly in the field

335 Interview H06.

336 Interview H44.

337 Interview H06.

of development cooperation; most of the aid went through multilateral funds, such as the ARTF administrated by the World Bank. One respondent stated that Finland was "*married to the World Bank*".[338]

Learning to operate in an aid architecture scattered with multilateral channels and a large number of international actors was considered beneficial for Finland beyond Afghanistan. The exchange of information and coordination with the other Nordic countries, in particular, were considered extremely useful in Afghanistan, in both military and civilian crisis management. Finland not only learned about working multilaterally and managing such work, but it also learned how to operate in fragile states: "*Of course, we gained more experience of how to operate in fragile states in general. […] all but two of our main partner countries have slipped into a state of fragility. The status of Afghanistan has become the norm in partner countries on all continents.*"[339]

From the point of view of the European Union's civilian crisis management operation, the Finland as a Learner framework is feasible for placing Finland's efforts among the plethora of actors. Afghanistan was also identified as a key learning environment for the development of the European Union's civilian crisis management processes and institutions with regard to point in time.[340]

The question of how the accumulated experience, learning and skills gained in Afghanistan have been applied and how successful Finland's involvement can be considered from this point of view is, of course, a particularly interesting one from the Finland as a Learner perspective. The interview responses from people involved in the military crisis management abounded with the notion that not only did Finland benefit from political partnerships, but the development of practical cooperation and interoperability in Afghanistan cleared its path to NATO membership. Looking beyond NATO, the experiences in Afghanistan were considered to be a catalyst for cooperation in defence and training with partners, in particular Sweden (see Section 3.2.5).

Then again, the value of the operational and tactical benefits was contemplated earlier, especially. One respondent referred to the differing perspectives on the topic during the Transition period, and at the same time summarized the considerations that emerged from the primary data in general: "*It's like in any business, opinions differ — some will say there are no benefits, that it is just a waste of resources. I disagree. If you just plod around here in the southeast corner of Finland, things*

338 Interview H5.

339 Interview H25.

340 Interview H57.

might stay on the hypothetical level. […] The crisis management environment in Afghanistan is very different from that of our neighbour. It was interesting to see at the grassroots level how everyone brings their toys to the sandbox, the types of HQ structures there are, how people act in real situations, and how the superpower competition manifests there. You can learn some tactical lessons, but we don't have to apply them if they don't work."[341]

Among the civilian crisis management respondents, in particular, there was more consideration of how useful involvement in the operation was and how well the accumulated skills of individuals can be applied, for example in terms of career development, as well as how well the expertise gained in the operation can be used in Finland's system in the future (see Section 3.3.3). Although the respondents felt that Finland has police officers who have received staunch experience in Afghanistan, their ability to apply this experience is seen as a duality: "*I don't know how much of it can be applied sensibly. Every time you deploy someone on secondment, you should already be thinking about what to do after that to be able to apply what was learned. That certainly doesn't happen. There are no solutions on how to apply the lessons learned there to Finland.*"[342]

It is legitimate to ask what the emphasis on the development of national capabilities and learning opportunities in Finland's Afghanistan agency has meant for the purposefulness and comprehensiveness of the operations from Afghanistan's perspective. Learning and acquiring necessary skills are indeed key to improving the quality of operations, but the emphasis on seeking experience or building skills, for example in resource management, does not necessarily support ideal agency in terms of the needs of the crisis context.

In principle, the goal of national learning does not rest efforts on the conflict itself and its dynamics, although it is not necessarily in opposition to them. Military involvement in particular appears to have been motivated, at least in part, by the objectives of training and developing interoperability. How have these objectives aligned with Finland's and the international intervention's other objectives from the perspective of comprehensiveness, if this is understood as traversing in the same strategic direction? As the fourth section of this report, 'Lessons for the future', highlights, it is ultimately a question of balancing and prioritizing the different objectives.

With regard to the Finland as a Learner framework, questions such as what and how well Finland learned would be good to ask. One general

341 Interview H49.

342 Interview H56.

challenge that arises widely throughout our primary data, and which is also relevant for learning, is the effect of short deployments, i.e., frequent rotation, on internalizing the context and the quality of operations in terms of strategy and sustainability. In the case of the United States, frequent rotation seems to have led to the re-invention of the wheel over and over, instead of strategic action. Moreover, the commanders and officers were under pressure to recount about progress and results during their short deployments to safeguard their careers after Afghanistan.[343]

Finland's personnel, in contrast, were deployed for somewhat longer than those of some of its partners, which slowed down the turnover slightly. Still, several respondents mentioned that the short deployments made understanding and assuming responsibility for the situation more difficult, also for Finland.[344] Furthermore, those who were deployed in Afghanistan did not feel that the experiences and lessons learned were systematically garnered for use refining Finland's Afghanistan policy after their repatriation to Finland. Thus, the lessons learned seem to have become silent knowledge, or it has been distributed in returnees' immediate networks and connections.

This is closely related to Finland's ability to understand the social context of Afghanistan and to learn from it over time. Remarkably, we cannot make interpretations from our data, beyond a few individual respondents, that Finland, as a collective actor, had systematically learned to understand Afghanistan or even focused on understanding it during the intervention. As the quote in the beginning of this section sums up, twenty years seem to have taught Finland more about the United States than Afghanistan. Also noteworthy is that in recent decades, a significant Afghan diaspora has settled in Finland, and consulting with them could have rendered valuable additional understanding from different perspectives to advance international intervention and Finland's efforts.

Ethical considerations regarding the Finland as a Learner framework, as well as the other two frameworks, are important. The efforts in Afghanistan may have been a valuable learning experience for Finland, but for Afghanistan they were a part of decades of war. The forces that Finland was a part of and learned from also caused much suffering for the civilians. Addressing the outcome of the international intervention, with evaluation focusing on the development of national and cooperative capabilities without critical reflection on how the related priorities were promoted in relation to the needs of the society they targeted, may justifiably seem irrelevant to the Afghans.

343 SIGAR 2021a.

344 This issue was raised in the various subdivisions of the efforts.

2001–2005

WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY:
optimism and unexpected challenges

- Involvement motivated by solidarity towards the United States and by the will to be seen as a reliable partner.
- In a relatively calm situation, Finland was able to pursue its benefactor objectives, for example through the CIMIC focus.
- Partnership and benefactor goals were compatible.

2006–2011

DOWNWARD SPIRAL: insurrection intensifies, and reconstruction and crisis management efforts accelerate

- The escalation of conflict made military participation politically more sensitive, yet partnership goals kept Finland involved.
- Capability development in the challenging operational environment started to favour participation as well.
- Comprehensive approach justified multidimensional participation.

2012–2014

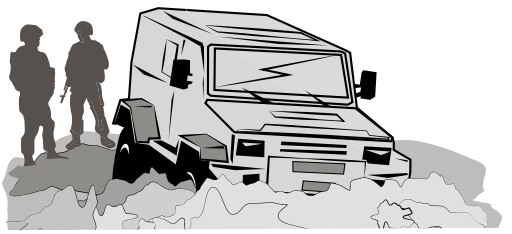
TRANSITION:
transferring responsibility in a fragile situation

- The significance of development cooperation and civilian crisis management was emphasized as security responsibility was transitioned to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF).
- The continuation of involvement was determined according to partners' plans.

2015–2018

STAGNATION:
Taliban regional control strengthens, withdrawal of military crisis management postponed

- International partnerships kept Finland involved in multidimensional efforts.
- The military lessons had largely been learned.
- Participation was difficult to justify with the benefactor role when the situation in Afghanistan continued to deteriorate.



2019–2021

BEGINNING OF THE END:
negotiations and foreboding

- Solidarity towards international partners was salient.
- The limited national agency was evident during the decision to withdraw.
- The evacuation process re-emphasized learning as an aspect of involvement.

Figure 7. Finland's agency in Afghanistan during different time periods

The Afghans living in Finland, who participated in the workshops, widely considered the responsibility of the Afghans, and especially the ruling elite, as a reason for the downfall of the internationally supported government. However, there was also much discussion about issues related to the international actors' lack of understanding of Afghanistan and the difference between the international actors' needs and the needs of the Afghans:

"*The international community had no knowledge of the society's sensitive issues, even though it did perhaps have geopolitical knowledge. Projects were carried out in places where other types of projects were needed. Afghanistan's needs therefore did not coincide with the international community's needs. For example, a women's clinic would have been needed, but instead projects were implemented which were not necessary at all. That's why the projects crashed, the money was spent, but they crashed. It caused mistrust among the people.*"[345]

The Finland as a Learner framework does not seem to have been the key framework when considering the intervention as a whole, but it helped to justify involvement from the point of view of national interest. It can also be seen as mitigating disappointment due to the intervention's contradictory impacts and undesirable outcome: Finland not only boosted its partnership relations in Afghanistan but also gained an abundance of useful experience and knowledge.

Then again, to what extent should the acquisition of knowledge be appreciated, what was not learned, what could still be learned and how can the lessons from Afghanistan be implemented? We will return to this in the Lessons section. We will now move on to a more detailed analysis of the main forms of Finland's involvement in terms of military involvement, civilian crisis management, development cooperation and humanitarian aid.

3.2 MILITARY INVOLVEMENT

The number of Finnish soldiers serving in the military operations in Afghanistan (ISAF, RSM) was 2,466, of which 52 were women. At first, the Finnish detachment's name was changed to Finnish Peacekeeping Force and later the troops were called Finnish Crisis Management Force in Afghanistan.[346] In this report, Finnish soldiers in Afghanistan are generally referred to as the Finnish troops.

345 Diaspora workshop in May 2022.

346 Ministry of Defence 2022.

The following analysis examines the grounds for the deployment of the Finnish troops and the objectives that guided their operations in Afghanistan, with reference to their development during the nearly twenty years of involvement. In light of the interview data, we also examine the key challenges and consequences related to the Finnish troops' efforts.[347]

3.2.1 Objectives of the military involvement

"We were vulnerable to the proposition that Finnish troops would be sent to Afghanistan in the name of NATO cooperation alone. When explaining the matter, it was easier to emphasize what we wanted to achieve in Afghanistan. It was a fact, however, and everyone was certainly aware that NATO partnership was behind it."[348]

According to the interview data, Finland's military involvement in Afghanistan was primarily part of Finland's transatlantic relations and motivated by international partnerships (see 3.1.1 the Finland as a Partner framework of interpretation), i.e., the Finland as a Partner framework of interpretation.

Nearly all the Finns interviewed who worked in the military intervention highlighted the partnership objectives as the grounds for Finland's involvement in the intervention. Nearly 80% of them stated that the partnership goals were the primary justification for Finland's involvement. The interviews revealed that the decision to participate in the military intervention was made out of solidarity towards the United States in its war on terrorism.

Against the backdrop of the extensive interview data pointing in this direction, it should be noted that the official documents did not highlight the importance of relations with the United States and NATO before the beginning of the RSM. Furthermore, some actors in Finland's political arena even denied the significance of transatlantic relations as a guiding force behind Finland's involvement.[349]

According to the interview data, it was believed that taking international responsibility and demonstrating military capability in the coalition

347 The following analysis is based on interviews with twelve people who participated in ISAF or RS missions in Afghanistan and two people who worked on the military intervention in Helsinki. In addition, reference is made to interviews with five Finnish politicians and fourteen diplomats or officials who participated in the planning, monitoring or implementation of the efforts in Afghanistan. Further, the analysis comprises interview data provided by international and Afghan partners who followed the Finnish troops' efforts in Afghanistan, as well as data from discussions in the workshops which were held during the research process.

348 Interview H01.

349 See Section 3.1 Foundations of Finland's efforts: from reports to reality. In 2009, Erkki Tuomioja, Finland's then former and future Minister for Foreign Affairs, who was in the opposition during the preliminary debate of election support activities in the ISAF mission, stated, among other things, that "participation in combat forces is not, of course, Finland's task. "I say this also because the justification for participating cannot be solidarity towards NATO or the wish of third parties, but our very own justification and consideration of what will support stability in Afghanistan" (Parliament 2009).

would improve Finland's foreign and security policy status. The need to advance Finland's national defence also endorsed its involvement, i.e., the interpretation that being a part of the international intervention would provide an opportunity to get military training and gain knowledge, as well as to develop interoperability and practice cooperation with NATO countries. In addition, crisis management in Afghanistan presented itself as an opportunity to test the armaments in use and the troops' performance.

Half of the respondents mentioned development of military capabilities as a basis for Finland's involvement in the military intervention. In addition, some of the respondents mentioned advancing Finland's internal security and international security through the prevention terrorism as a reason to get involved.[350]

The objectives for the involvement varied over the course of twenty years. Roughly speaking, Finland's objectives as a partner guided the fundamental decision to participate, i.e., the deployment of the troops was primarily due to obligations related to international relations. As the operation became more like warfare, the Finland as a Learner interpretation provided the basis for continued involvement: the opportunity to develop interoperability and improve national military capabilities were key justifications for remaining in ISAF, especially during the period when participation included involvement in the operations of local security actors. The Finnish troops gained the most skills and experience when the security situation deteriorated.

As regards NATO partnership as a motive for involvement, it was emphasized only when the ISAF mission became a NATO operation. A return to partnership-based involvement can be identified as a third phase: foreign policy once again was the reason for staying in the RSM, as the focus was more on consultation and training and less on military practice. Then again, Finland's goals for advancing its defence capabilities and cooperation had already been largely achieved. At the same time, capability development continued to be the key justification for involvement to the public.[351]

Compared to the partnership rationales, which dominated the interview data, the Finland as a Benefactor framework cannot be said to have primarily motivated Finland's decision to send troops to Afghanistan,

350 Similar evaluations of the reasons for Finland's involvement in Afghanistan have been made in earlier literature, albeit with different phrasing and emphases. Cf., e.g., Limnéll & Salonius-Pasternak 2009: Transatlantic relations as an absent or unspoken reason for Finland's involvement.

351 Memorandum of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs on Finland's involvement in the RSM: "Further participation would also strengthen Finland's position as a NATO partner country and provide the Finnish Defence Forces with demanding international headquarter experience and expertise in training and advisory activities in challenging conditions" (2015: 2).

but it should be seen as an argument in favour of involvement.[352] Taking responsibility for stabilizing Afghanistan was a continuation of Finland's traditions in peacekeeping, and the narrative which united Finland's political field.[353] As the nature of the intervention shifted towards coercion and military action, there was little room for the Finland as a Benefactor interpretation. CIMIC was also stealthily side-lined with the transition to the PRT model.[354]

The United States' Afghanistan policy was the primary pilot in setting the goals for the international intervention, meaning it also piloted Finland's troops' activities. However, Finland was able to formulate some national priorities within the framework of the intervention's common objectives, the most important example being its investment at the beginning of involvement in CIMIC.

Helping Afghan women and girls also became a priority for Finland, as was evident, for example, in the news coverage of the meeting between Finland's President Halonen and Commander Petraeus in Afghanistan (see Section 2.2 Downward Spiral).[355] While these priorities tangibly guided Finland's efforts, the interviews pointed out that they stemmed from Finland's political needs, in addition to the needs of the operating environment: emphasizing women and girls and the CIMIC mission served decision-making by softening the edge related to military involvement and the relationship with the United States.

Some of the respondents also felt that Finland's contribution to the intervention reflected the comprehensive approach and that its military-civilian cooperation was appreciated in the coalition. The respondents noted, however, that CIMIC should not be confused with the comprehensive approach, as it was above all the military commander's tool in protecting the troops. Many of the respondents deemed the comprehensive approach as having been weak and haphazard in both Finland's and the mission's efforts. This inadequacy translated into an overemphasis on security, while the intervention as a whole did not work. Some of the respondents perceived the comprehensive approach as a political concept aimed at justifying in Finland the need for military involvement in Afghanistan (see the previous Section 3 Finland as an actor and subsections 3.1.1 Finland as a partner and 3.3 Civilian crisis management).

352 Nine military respondents mentioned well-doing or assistance as a reason for involvement, but only three of them considered it a primary reason (diplomats and politicians were excluded).

353 See Salonius-Pasternak & Visuri 2006; Kronlund & Valla 1996 for peacekeeping traditions.

354 In previous literature, e.g., Lindholm 2015.

355 Koskinen 2016.

3.2.2 From peacekeeping to military operations: Afghanistan and the mission change

> "*There was insufficient discussion about these and the changed situation. Towards the end, the fact that Finland was in a war was spoken of more directly. But during the intervention, not enough was said.*"[356]

The Finnish troops' tasks changed as the situation in Afghanistan evolved and, in particular, as the goals of the US-led coalition changed. The respondents generally attributed the changes to the responsibility for the common goals of the international intervention and, at times, to the desire to play a greater role in achieving them.

Then again, the Finnish troops focused on northern Afghanistan for security reasons and political reluctance to take risks in more uneasy areas. In addition, cooperation with Germany, head of the northern region, and Sweden, head of the Mazar-i-Sharif regional reconstruction team, was seen as politically and militarily expedient.

The difficult and constantly deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan was a key factor in the course of the intervention. Early in the first decade of the 2000s, it was believed that the security situation would continue to improve, but as the Taliban resurfaced in the middle of the decade, the international troops increasingly became the target of attacks. As clashes intensified, the number of Afghan casualties also increased, and the atmosphere turned against the international troops. The fall of the first Finnish soldier in 2007 was a turning point for the Finnish troops.

Warlike conditions and military operations began to determine the coalition's actions, especially in the most restless provinces in the last years of the decade. At that time, the situation in Finland's operating area, Mazar-i-Sharif, was relatively calm, but the training of the Finnish troops was also preparing them for being the target of increasing attack. According to the respondents, the Finnish troops had been instructed not to respond to the fire, but as the security situation weakened, this was abandoned. At the beginning of the 2010s, the Finnish troops were constantly involved in combat.[357]

As the security situation deteriorated and the security arrangements were bolstered, the effectiveness of the intervention dwindled: more resources were spent on self-protection and the operating conditions

356 Interview H35.

357 See Section 2.1 Downward Spiral 2006–2011.

became narrow. At the same time, the connection between the international troops and the local population gradually disappeared: while in the early 2010s Finns still shopped in the Samangan market during their provincial tours, by the 2020s contacts were limited to the base's personnel. From the very beginning, the local actors made little distinction between the international operations, such as between the United States' OEF mission and ISAF, which Finns found difficult because it hindered the establishment of trust with the locals, due to OEF's more active use of force.[358] In addition to changes in the operating environment, Finland's involvement reflected political pressures to continue and increase involvement. Some of the respondents felt that the national decision-making bodies sometimes had challenges controlling and keeping up to date with tasking the Finnish troops, for example when the election reinforcement troops were needed longer than anticipated. The respondents' views differ slightly on how strategically Finland developed its involvement, and whether, for example, the opportunities offered by the PRT model to increase the national role could have been better utilized. Finland's own PRT was discussed: the defence administration had an interest in the project, but it did not receive wider support.[359]

Cooperation between the Finnish troops and Helsinki in plotting the situational picture and planning involvement was considered effective: decisions on changes in the rules of engagement and updates to equipment to correspond with changes in the security situation proceeded smoothly. The respondents also reported that the cooperation between the Government actors in Helsinki was largely functional.

The greatest dissonance stemmed from the strength of the troops: from a military point of view, more troops would have improved their protection, but the political stance for most of the time was a limit of 200 soldiers. According to one respondent, on the one hand there was the Ministry of Defence, which deemed the size of the infantry troops as serving its purpose, while the Ministry for Foreign Affairs considered there were political grounds for increasing the size of the troops.[360] According to some interviews, increasing the number of troops would have gained Finland headquarter positions and thereby advanced its impact in the operation.

The deterioration of the security situation and the changing nature of the operation became a politically sensitive issue in Finland. In 2009, Charly Salonius-Pasternak, researcher at the Finnish Institute

358 See Pyykönen 2008, 120–122 for earlier literature on the subject.

359 See also Government report VNS 2/2007 and Foreign Affairs Committee statement UaVL 1/2008.

360 Interview H32.

The maximum strength of Finnish soldiers in Afghanistan, 2002–2020

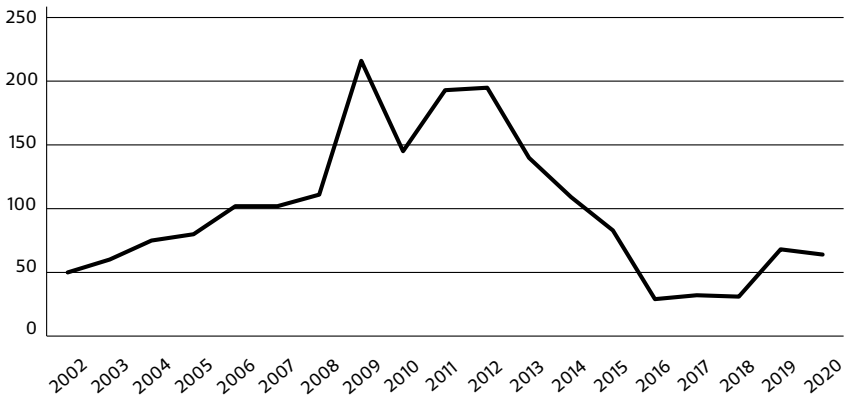


Figure 8. The annual maximum strength of Finnish troops in Afghanistan, 2002–2020
Source: Finnish Ministry of Defence 2022

of International Affairs, wrote a piece in the *Helsingin Sanomat* titled "Suomi on paraikaa sotaa käyvä maa" (Finland is currently a country at war)[361]. The article sparked a heated debate because it did not correspond to the previous public image of Finland's involvement in the intervention in Afghanistan. The Ministry of Defence commented that the article had no basis in reality and emphasized that Finland was participating in a UN-mandated peacekeeping operation.[362]

While the justification for involvement as per the objectives in the Finland as a Benefactor framework became more challenging, withdrawal did not appear to be a real option due to the less publicly highlighted partnership reasons. According to a respondent who was a commander of the Finnish troops, reports of war-like circumstances were few and battles were not emphasized due to political protocol. The comments of another respondent supported this.[363]

361 Salonius-Pasternak 2009; see also Salonius-Pasternak 2010b for the response to the debate.

362 MTV 2009.

363 Cf., e.g., Salonius-Pasternak (2010b, 16) notes that the Swedish Armed Forces openly communicated about armed clashes, such as the use of heavy firearms and (Sweden's and Finland's) involvement in operations to reclaim territories in Afghanistan.

3.2.3 Key challenges and assessment of the causes of failure

> "*Local competence was cultivated so that at the end of 2014 it was announced that it had been developed, but that was not the truth. Political expediency drove the operation, not what happened in the field.*"[364]

According to the respondents who participated in the mission in Afghanistan or in Helsinki, the lack of a long-term, broad strategy was the main factor hampering the effectiveness of the military intervention. On the tactical level, the planning of operations was effective, but with regard to the entire military intervention, it was not based on an adequate analysis of how the mission would achieve the objectives.

Development of the intervention only partly reflected the changes in the operating environment. According to the respondents, large-scale strategic changes were more often based on events on the 'home front' than in Afghanistan. For example, the timing of the transfer of security responsibilities to the Afghans was based on the situation in the United States, not in Afghanistan. Moreover, ISAF was changed to the RSM before its goals were actually achieved.[365]

The respondents stated that the lack of strategic planning was manifested, for example, in the fact that large-scale objectives were pursued in too short a time frame. The activities were also short-sighted: the shortcomings in the functions of the Afghan security sector were noticed only when they were needed, for example in connection with elections. Several of the respondents who worked in the military intervention considered that its main shortcoming was insufficient attention to development of legitimate and good governance to back the security sector. Conversely, the background discussions conducted by the research team highlighted that one of the intervention's challenges was precisely to incorporate broad objectives, such as state-building, into the soldiers' job profile, which is not a good fit.

The lack of strategic operational planning resulted in the fact that the Finnish CIMIC teams planned their operations largely without top-down strategic guidance. Several respondents estimated that CIMIC operations were based on poor analysis of project sustainability, resulting in varying degrees of short-term success in gaining local trust, despite the fact that data collection and *Quick Impact* projects produced good results in the short term.

364 Interview H43.

365 See previous literature on the lack of a plan and strategy in Section 1.2.1.

Impact assessment during the operation was difficult, which further weakened operation planning, despite the availability of many tools for reporting and monitoring, and with new ones constantly being introduced. Developments in the security situation, in particular, were systematically reported. According to the experience of some of the respondents, the reported information was not used or taken into account in the operation planning. Reporting good results was important, which undermined the veracity of the reporting. In the words of one of the respondents, "*pervasive dishonesty about the situation, which was conveyed to the homeland*," was one of the intervention's key challenges, although it did not concern only or primarily Finland.[366]

For example, a traffic light model, which was deemed burdensome, was used for reporting, but according to the respondents, the questions were answered randomly because they did not suit the context. The reports produced with the model did not reflect the reality of Afghanistan. After the focus of international efforts shifted to an advisory role, evaluation was hampered by reliance on the Afghans' own reporting of operations, which the international actors were no longer involved in.

The respondents also highlighted the overemphasis on progress in mapping the situation, which led to the failure to anticipate the government's collapse. The monitoring of Finland's involvement culminated in reports to Parliament. The respondents reported that the need to report positive results posed a challenge because there were rarely significant developments to report, for example, in the six-month reports. At the operational level, reports from the field were made to the Pori Brigade, the Ministry of Defence and the Army Command, as needed. Monitoring and analysing the troops' operations this way was considered to be effective.

The interview data highlights a third key stumbling block in the intervention: the models used for building capacity, providing consultation and training were inappropriate for the local context. The consultation and training were largely based on the Western understanding of the security sector's operations, rather than on the Afghan's understanding of them, which undermined the achievable results. Additionally, the respondents reported that the central government type of approach, which guided capacity building did not fit into the context of Afghanistan, either, but created a setting that facilitated the Taliban's rise to power later on.[367] Responding to the Afghans' needs and views was easier in individual operations and projects.

366 Interview H38. See e.g., SIGAR 2021a on the problems of evaluating international actions in Afghanistan.

367 The view derived from the interview data is in line with previous research literature: e.g., Murtazashvili 2022; Giustozzi & Ibhrahimi 2013. There was also public discussion in Finland about placing too much emphasis on a central government approach (see Väyrynen 2010b).

The fragmentation of the international coalition and the challenges related to its cooperation and continuity posed their own challenges to the effectiveness of the intervention. The PRTs reflected the national and administrative traditions of the lead nations and the participating countries. Prior to ISAF's transfer to NATO, the change in the lead nation of the entire operation every six months disrupted the continuity and predictability of the operations. National caveats concerning the use of national troops and their varying rules of engagement also posed a challenge to the interoperability and effectiveness of the coalition troops. Furthermore, the coalition did not coordinate its activities sufficiently. It coordinated activities on the tactical level or exchanged information, but coordination lacked a strategic perspective.

The frequent rotation of soldiers also weakened situation analysis, cultural competence, institutional memory and long-term strategy. The rotation of the leaders led to a see-sawing of priorities and bringing in new ones. The Afghan partners became frustrated but also sought to benefit from the staff rotations. Finland's rotation practices, in which only half of the troops were rotated at once, was considered good for the continuity of operations, although the possible differences in the understanding of the situation between the new commander and the old troops were considered a challenge.

The main challenge in decision-making at Finland's end was the lack of transparency: for a long time, open discussion of the objectives or the nature of the operations was absent, and there was little or no communication about the partnership objectives, the changing nature of the operation or combat situations. For example, the *Suomen Kuvalehti* magazine drew attention to the fact that the prolonging of the operation and the change in its nature were not discussed and voted on in Parliament.[368] For comparison, the Swedish Riksdag (parliament) voted each year on whether to continue Sweden's efforts in Afghanistan.[369] Ignoring the changes in the circumstances in war-like conditions and tasks cost the Finns proper recognition for their efforts.

Some of the respondents also highlighted the challenges related to internal communication of objectives: Finland's troops did not receive uninterrupted information about the grounds for and goals of its involvement. The respondents revealed that the soldiers' training did not sufficiently address the goals of the operations at a strategic level. The understanding of why Finland was participating in the intervention and

368 Lindholm 2015.

369 Vuorisalo 2009, 14.

operating in northern Afghanistan was left to conjecture even at the level of the highest officers in the Finnish crisis management force.[370]

3.2.4 Self-assessment: consequences of the intervention in Afghanistan

> "*We thought we were doing good, important work, but in retrospect it was just a lot of tactical fun, but a terrible strategic mistake.*"[371]

According to the respondents' assessments, Afghanistan's military intervention was, in principle, well resourced: at the tactical level, the operation's objectives and resources were in balance, and the objectives could be achieved in the specified time frames and with the specified tasks.

The international forces managed to provide security by reducing the Taliban's presence locally and in the short term. For example, in Meymaneh, where the Finnish troops were stationed, ISAF was seen as a deterrent to violence and as a safety factor for the local population, also, especially in the early years. For the Finnish soldiers, girls' access to school was seen as an immediate positive effect of the efforts. In Helsinki, officials estimated that by providing temporary security, migration could also be prevented.

However, the effects were short-lived and some of them were also negative. The respondents were critical of the outcomes of the RSM, in particular. Long-term objectives, such as the transition of security responsibility to the Afghan forces, seemed difficult to achieve from the outset. All in all, the military intervention failed to stabilize Afghanistan. The Taliban was not defeated, and the struggle against their influence turned against itself. Some of the respondents felt that the military intervention caused Afghanistan to fall into an even more chaotic state.[372]

Several respondents estimated that the intervention caused harm to the Afghan society and the Afghans. The harm was largely unintentional, due to changes in the local power structures and the established artificial security order during the intervention, for example. The coalition's measures to maintain stability and security overrode local measures. In the PRT, for example, much was done on behalf of the Afghans when the purpose was to support their activities. The maintenance and wages of the Afghan security sector were relied too heavily on the Western coalition.

370 Previous literature supports this observation: Limnéll and Salonius-Pasternak (2009) have drawn attention to the fact that the political reasons for Finland's involvement in Afghanistan's intervention were not clear to MPs, either.

371 Interview H37.

372 See Section 1.2.2 for earlier literature on the causes of failure.

The CIMIC mission was also considered to have supported illegitimate power structures when for example, the construction of a police station supported the position of a local warlord.

The respondents drew attention to the fact that the Afghans were left alone to bear the consequences of the failure of the intervention after the international troops left the country. The most concrete manifestation of this was the fact that the Afghans who had worked for the international forces were subjected to danger after the fall of the government.

The military intervention also had a negative impact on the security of the local population, especially in high combat areas. The respondents noted Finland's partial responsibility for the international coalition's actions, which caused civilian losses and damage to the locals' property.[373]

Casualties caused a ripple effect, as the status and livelihood of local families typically depended on the man of the family and possible male children. According to the respondents, not all the coalition's activities, especially those related to the war on terrorism, seemed acceptable from the point of view of international law. Most of the respondents viewed the Finnish troops' operations in a positive light, for the most part, and emphasized that there were no civilian losses in their operations.

3.2.5 Self-assessment: Consequences of the intervention in Finland

> "*We participated in a politically very unpopular operation for twenty years, and this spring it has had an impact on how Finland's NATO application goes through.*"[374]

The interview data indicated that Finland's involvement in the military crisis management efforts in Afghanistan served its transatlantic relations and status in the international community, thus meeting the objectives of the Finland as a Partner framework described above. Military partnership with Great Britain, Germany and Sweden, in addition to the United States, developed. As regards Finland's relationship with NATO, the country's involvement was significant both politically and in terms of developing interoperability. During the intervention, Finland was able to participate in NATO meetings concerning the ISAF and RSM and gained access to systems and materials to which it would not otherwise have had access as a non-NATO country.

Many of the respondents compared the defence policy benefits Finland received during its involvement to the situation if Finland had opted out

373 See Diagram 1. In Finland, Vesa 2010, e.g., has prompted discussion about civilian casualties (from the point of view of the legitimacy of the international intervention). See also Anttila (2011).

374 Interview H43.

Development of the costs of military participation, 2002–2021
Costs of participation in ISAF and RSM

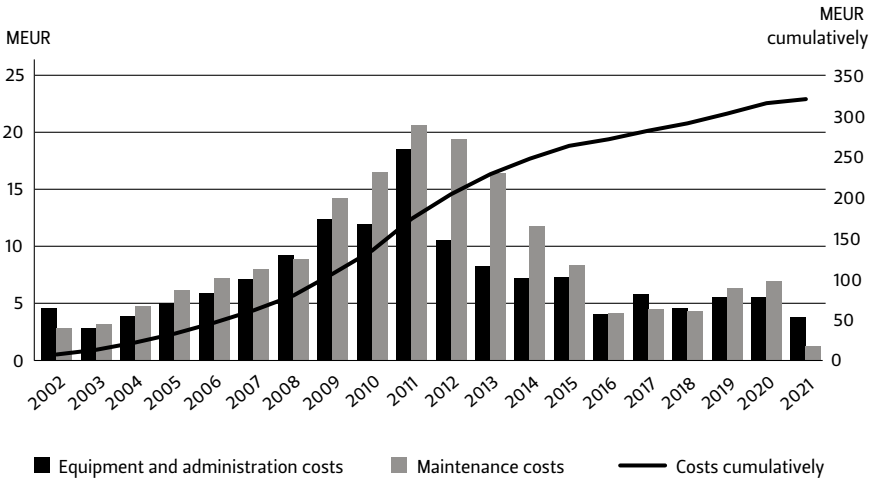


Figure 9. Costs of Finland's military presence in Afghanistan 2002–2021
Source: Finnish Ministry of Defence 2022

of the intervention. With consideration to the process of joining NATO, particularly, the benefits of participating in the intervention seemed crucial. Not only did Finland acquire experience in working with NATO countries while in Afghanistan, but the NATO countries gained an understanding of Finland as a military actor. According to the respondents, the Finnish troops gave a good impression of Finland's reservists' competence in particular. The Finns' strengths were considered their versatile skills, such as those needed to engage with the locals. The respondents also considered the availability of the Finnish troops for various tasks (minor national caveats) as a positive factor.[375]

The lack of transparency and clarity in setting the objectives for defence cooperation and international partnerships from the start makes it difficult to assess the benefits against the partnership objectives. Many pointed out that, initially, the decision to participate was driven by the foreign policy obligation to the United States at the time and not defence cooperation. The interviews also highlighted that the intervention in Afghanistan was not Finland's only, or necessarily the most significant, operation in terms of its defence partnerships and interoperability. The country's involvement in the Balkans also cultivated interoperability and added to its political capital.

375 See Limnéll and Salonius-Pasternak 2009 on the operation in Afghanistan as an opportunity for Finland to demonstrate its military expertise.

Another tangible benefit resulting from the broadened partnerships and cooperation included Finland's improved possibilities to purchase defence matériel, as mentioned in the interviews. It was also considered important that Finland was involved in the development of systems supporting NATO operations in Afghanistan. Finland's support, especially from the United States and Great Britain, in connection with the kidnapping of a Finnish aid worker, was also mentioned as a tangible indication of the broadened partnerships. In the end, the situation was resolved in a different way, but according to a respondent an agreement on "far-reaching, tangible cooperation related to intelligence support" had already been made with the partners.[376]

The interview data showed that in addition to the capabilities in defence cooperation, Finland's national defence capabilities also developed in Afghanistan and responded to the objectives of the Finland as a Learner framework. First of all, soldiers accumulated skills and experience while in Afghanistan. Moreover, the Finns gained leadership experience in war-like circumstances. As regards technical and tactical lessons learned in combat, the respondents expressly mentioned the skills gained in working with air strikes and air-to-ground fire control. Additionally, Finland gained new skills and knowledge in mobility, protection, use of fire, intelligence, maintenance and logistics, as well as military medicine. Cooperation with the special forces proved to be a useful experience in terms of developing interoperability with partners and national capabilities.

The experiences of Afghanistan in general strengthened the faith in how well Finnish military training and matériel function even in difficult conditions. The operations also contributed to the development of defence matériel and equipment, as they offered opportunities to test the matériel in extreme conditions. One interviewee stated that Afghanistan was the hot spot for crisis management where cutting-edge technology was developed and tested.[377] The current Finnish model of psycho-social support for soldiers was also developed as a result of the lessons learned in Afghanistan.

The respondents pointed out that, on the strategic level, the understanding of the comprehensive approach also developed during the operation. In addition to the lesson in comprehensive crisis management and application of it during the operation, Finland also acquired practice in cooperation between the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of the Interior.

376 Interview H34.

377 Interview H8.

The respondents felt that in Finland the negative effects of the involvement were minor. The intervention resulted in the death of two Finnish soldiers, while fifteen were wounded. In addition, some of the soldiers suffered from mental health issues, the treatment of which was criticized by some of the respondents. The number of soldiers suffering from such issues was so small that proper treatment could have been arranged for them.

In conclusion, according to the interview data, which was gathered during Finland's application process for membership in NATO, the partnership benefits Finland achieved seem to be key. As the Ministry of Defence states in its memorandum[378], Finland's political capital and military interoperability developed, while the objectives of stabilizing Afghanistan were not achieved. In addition, Finland's national defence capabilities developed in tandem with the other lessons learned.

The contradiction between the achieved benefits and the objectives initially set for getting involved in the intervention should be taken into account when assessing the purposefulness of the involvement. Throughout the entire period of the involvement, advancing Finland's capabilities was seen as a factor in favour if it — not as a driving force. The partnership objectives did not formally guide Finland's decision to participate in the intervention in Afghanistan. Rather, official documents, such as reports to Parliament and, for example, plenary debates at the beginning of the involvement, refer above all to the objectives related to the stabilization of Afghanistan.[379] When comparing the outcome of the involvement to the publicly set objectives, it cannot be considered a success, even if the outcome fulfils an unwritten foreign and defence policy need.

3.3 CIVILIAN CRISIS MANAGEMENT

Over the course of twenty years, Finland sent about 140 civilian crisis management experts to Afghanistan, the first of whom were deployed to Afghanistan in 2003 and the last was repatriated in 2020.[380] The majority of them worked in EUPOL. In addition, Finland seconded individual experts to assignments for NATO, the European Union, the United Nations and the international coalition.[381]

378 Ministry of Defence 2022.

379 See Section 3.1 Foundations of Finland's efforts: from reports to reality. Stabilization is also considered important in the eradication of international terrorism.

380 The figure is based on an estimate from the Crisis Management Centre pertaining to the civilian crisis management experts sent to Afghanistan by various government actors.

381 Crisis Management Centre 2022.

This analysis focuses on Finland's civilian crisis management operations as part of EUPOL, because the interviews and background research indicated that Finland's contributions in other international organizations in Afghanistan were of little importance in relation to Finland's objectives.[382] At most, in 2012, more than fifty civilian crisis management experts from Finland were on secondment in Afghanistan.[383] The following analysis examines the grounds and objectives of Finland's civilian crisis management measures and assesses the challenges and consequences of the efforts in light of the interview data.[384]

3.3.1 Finland's civilian crisis management objectives in Afghanistan

> "*Finland needed its next operation (in civilian crisis management) because the forces in the Balkans was being reduced. Finland was looking for an effort that would be beneficial, such as a transatlantic relationship with NATO. This had an EU political dimension, as well. Then it was also used as a justification for military crisis management.*"[385]

The interview data suggested that Finland's goals as a benefactor and partner were the driving force behind Finland's involvement in the international intervention in Afghanistan through civilian crisis management. Three-quarters of the Finns interviewed who participated in the civilian crisis management operations mentioned support and help for Afghanistan or the Afghans as the reason for Finland's involvement, although few identified this as the primary reason. Following this interpretation framework, human rights issues, among others, were considered feasible reasons to direct civilian crisis management efforts towards Afghanistan. Finland's publicly proclaimed perspectives on equality, such as the goal of increasing the number of women police officers in Afghanistan, are also part of Finland's benefactor narrative.[386]

More than 60% of the respondents who participated in Finland's civilian crisis management operations mentioned the international

382 See, e.g., Foreign Affairs Committee UaVM 3/2010.

383 Crisis Management Centre 2022: the largest number of experts in the field at one time was about forty.

384 The following analysis is based on interviews with ten people who participated in the civilian crisis management operations in Afghanistan and with three people, based in Helsinki or Brussels, whose work involved following the operations. In addition, reference is made to interviews with five Finnish politicians and fourteen diplomats or officials who participated in the planning, monitoring or implementation of the efforts in Afghanistan. Further, the analysis comprises interview data provided by international and Afghan partners who followed Finland's efforts in Afghanistan, as well as data from discussions in the workshops that were held during the research process.

385 Interview H1.

386 Finnish Government 2014.

partnership objectives as the foundations for Finland's efforts. A relatively large number of the respondents mentioned that the partnership objectives were the primary reasons.[387] According to them, Finland seconded civilian crisis management experts to Afghanistan because it was seen to support Finland's international relations, especially with the United States, but also with EU countries such as Germany.

Being involved in civilian crisis management involvement was a natural way to uphold the continuity of Finland's international profile, as Finland was active in the development of civilian crisis management measures and wanted to be prominently involved in EU operations. According to the interviews, the operations in the Balkans were also winding down, which directed Finland's gaze towards Afghanistan. The role as a 'superpower' of civilian crisis management had to therefore be shifted to a new environment. Then again, Finland had political reasons to be expressly in the international coalition in Afghanistan, and involvement in civil crisis management was a counterbalance to involvement in military crisis management.

According to an official, civilian crisis management did not become a priority because Finland's civilian involvement would have been particularly needed in Afghanistan. Instead, it was a by-product of Finland's military involvement which was to begin in any case, thereby making civilian crisis management also a priority for Finland.[388] The role of civilian crisis management as a counterbalance to military involvement, according to the interview data, triggered Finland's emphasis on and development of the comprehensive approach during the intervention in Afghanistan.

The comprehensive approach and its precedence in civilian crisis management supported the justification of military involvement as an intervention tool, responding to political sensitivities and dividing lines at home. Nevertheless, for some Finnish civilian crisis management experts, the approach became a key precept: it was seen to have added value, which Finns would be able to promote in Afghanistan. However, it should be noted that the comprehensive approach is not only a Finnish concept but also a guiding principle in the European Union framework, and some of the respondents perceived it above all as the Union's approach to crises and conflicts.

387 Approximately 40 % of the respondents felt the partnership objectives were the primary reasons for Finland's involvement, and 15% stated that helping Afghanistan was the primary reason.

388 Interview H1.

3.3.2 EUPOL: establishing a civilian police force in war-like conditions

> "*I've been thinking about the female police officers and the kind of risk people have been put in [...]: did we always think enough about the safety of the locals – we thought a lot about our own safety.*"[389]

EUPOL began operating in Afghanistan in 2007 at the beginning of the Downward Spiral period, described above, and ended in 2016 in the Stagnation period. Finland's contribution to EUPOL was significant when measured in the number of deployed experts, including two heads of mission.[390] Finland also actively supported the establishment of the mission in the European Union.[391] Based on the interviews, EUPOL was established in an exceptionally challenging operating environment, driven by political pressure. According to one respondent, experts from the Council Secretariat who visited Afghanistan on a fact-finding mission warned of the unrealistic nature of the operation, but some of the EU member states, including Finland, wanted to set it up despite the risks.[392] The security situation and the fact that only some EU countries found the operation meaningful were later reflected in a shortage of personnel in the operation.

The operation began in a hopeful atmosphere, but the difficult security situation and its continued deterioration soon became key challenges. According to the respondents, the security arrangements were underestimated at the beginning of the operation. By the end of it, the cost and scale of the arrangements for international personnel had increased to such an extent that they were disproportionate in relation to the achievable results.[393] From the perspective of the Finland as a Benefactor framework, the conditions for achieving Finland's goals quickly diminished because the operations plan could not be implemented. Moreover, contact with local partners was impaired as meetings and mobility could not be arranged for safety reasons. The rapid turnover of civilian crisis management personnel also hampered the establishment of trusting and effective relations with the Afghan partners, undermining the impact of the work.

389 Interview H60.

390 See, e.g., Government report VNS 3/2018; Ministry for Foreign Affairs (n.d.).

391 E.g., Ministry for Foreign Affairs memorandum UTP 23/2006. Also mentioned in international literature; see, e.g., Pohl 2014, 101.

392 Interview H54; another respondent also commented on the tensions between the results of the fact-finding data and the decision-making regarding the operation. In previous literature, Pohl (2014, 102) also mentions the Secretariat's in-house advice against the establishment of a Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) operation, but eventually complied to the wishes of the member states in its recommendation.

393 The European Court of Auditors estimated in 2014 that security-related expenditures accounted for almost a third of the total cost of the operation. See European Court of Auditors 2015, p. 12.

According to the interviews, the second stumbling block in achieving the goals of supporting Afghanistan was the onset of the venture: the priorities of the operation stemmed from the participating countries' interests and views, rather than from the needs Afghans themselves had expressed.[394] The Afghans and local community were included in principle in the planning the operation, but in reality the Afghan actors played a secondary role.[395] Concrete examples of this are that EUPOLS's Afghan partners did not have access to the operations plan because it was classified. Moreover, the Afghans were not involved in all the key coordination bodies of the international actors. Most notably, if resources had to be used quickly, plans were made without the input of the local partners.

According to the respondents, the model for the security sector reform promoted by EUPOL copied European models which were not always appropriate for the Afghanistan context. The weak local buy-in, i.e., the willingness or ability to adopt and implement the operating models proposed in the operation, decreased the effectiveness of the operations. For example, the objectives set to professionalize the police force proved to be unrealistic. The civilian police model advocated by the European Union was often in conflict with the operating environment, because in practice the police in Afghanistan performed military duties.[396] Some experts felt that the promotion of democratic norms and modern principles for policing in general was hopeless and inappropriate in a situation where there was a shortage of basic foodstuffs.

The respondents considered the goal to increase the number of female police officers as unsuitable or even unethical, although efforts to increase equality were well organized and well-resourced in EUPOL. Although one of goals was to prevent harassment of female police officers, EUPOL did not anticipate enough the risks women would face if recruited to the police force. As a result, tensions arose between the Finland as a Benefactor goals and the priorities set at the operational level.

The interviews revealed that EUPOL's operating logic, which aimed at strengthening the civilian police functions in the security sector, was partly in conflict with the aims of the US-led military intervention and could not therefore be carried out systematically. Not only did the United States and the European Union differ in their understanding of police functions, the EU countries within EUPOL also had different understandings of them.[397]

394 See Section 1.2.1. Similar observations are made with EUPOL: Tardy 2018 and Pohl 2014.

395 For documents containing mention of local ownership, see Council of the European Union 2007.

396 In previous literature, see Tardy 2018.

397 In previous literature, see Larivé 2012.

The United States had significantly greater resources and thus had the power to influence the goals of the international intervention at large and the actions of other countries in Afghanistan.[398] The intersecting goals of international actors led to conflicting and overlapping training and advisory activities, even though effective coordination formats were indeed developed between international projects and actors. Differing views also emerged in the Afghan state institutions and administration where the Afghans had numerous advisers representing the international actors.

The lack of a comprehensive and long-term plan was, according to the interviews, also a key challenge in the goal to support Afghanistan. Due to the lack of progress in the overall stabilization of the Afghan society, the success of EUPOL or its individual projects, such as Finland's police-prosecutor cooperation initiative, lost their significance in the long run. However, EUPOL's internal planning was also considered inadequate: although it evolved during the mission, the plan for civilian crisis management was not grounded on an adequate analysis of the situation in Afghanistan. According to an expert who had worked in EUPOL's projects, new projects were often started without planning or a clear link to the mission's strategy.[399]

In the end, the decision to end the EU police mission in Afghanistan was not due to an improvement in the situation in Afghanistan but to a change in the political will: the EU countries were tired of the long, costly intervention. Preparations to end EUPOL also began because US withdrawal from Afghanistan seemed likely: field offices had already been closed as the military presence in the areas decreased. When EUPOL left Afghanistan, the Commission's instruments did not continue to follow up its results in the country quickly enough. It was acknowledged, however, that the intervention should not end abruptly. The actors in Finland, too, had emphasized that continuing EU support in Afghanistan was necessary.[400]

398 For the EU's independent agency in relation to the US in previous literature, see Fescharek 2015.

399 See also Section 1.2.1. See SIGAR 2022, Larivé 2012, International Crisis Group 2008, or in Finland Launiala & Viikki 2011.

400 Foreign Affairs Committee memorandum UaVM 18/2014; Government report VNS 3/2018.

3.3.3 Self-assessment: Finland's investments do not translate into results in Afghanistan

> "*The intention was to go and transform the structures, but we didn't understand the context, so it evolved into violence. This demolishes things; it doesn't build anything. It drains a lot of resources from the other side.*"[401]

EUPOL's progress was reported in great depth and detail, but the reporting focused primarily on numerical productivity measures, such as the number of training sessions and mentees. According to civilian crisis management experts interviewed by our research team, the reports did not give a realistic picture of the development of the situation in Afghanistan and the effectiveness of civilian crisis management, as they were either glossed over or measurements focused on irrelevant issues. The metres also often varied. Short-term goals were foregrounded, whereas measuring long-term effectiveness and understanding the development of the overall situation were superficial.[402]

The varying degree of cooperation between the mission command and the EU institutions further hampered realistic monitoring of the situation. The interviews revealed that the assessments of the situation conveyed to the EU countries were not accurate. Then again, those working in the field doubted whether the messages about the difficult situation were taken seriously and whether the reporting had an impact on Finnish politics, for example. When EUPOL ended, the monitoring that focused on implementation indicated that most of the mission's objectives had been achieved. According to the respondents, however, the objectives had not been achieved for the most part.[403]

For the most part, the goals in the Finland as a Benefactor framework, in particular, were not achieved. Civilian crisis management built the foundations for a modern society by developing the Ministry of the Interior, the judicial system and the police. However, the permanent changes were few and dwindled away completely after the collapse of the government. According to the respondents, achieving sustainable changes would have needed more time, a more comprehensive plan and the development of local ownership from the very beginning. In the end, EUPOL's role in the international efforts overall was minor. Some civilian crisis management

401 Interview H55.

402 For the challenges of reporting and evaluating CSDP missions in previous literature, see Tardy 2015 and Tamminen 2016.

403 See, e.g., the news from the European External Action Service (EEAS 2016 A) about the successful conclusion of the mission after nine years of progress.

experts stated that EUPOL may have even done more harm than good in Afghanistan.[404]

The interviews also indicated that civilian crisis management contributed to creating harmful dependencies, which turned against the intervention's and Finland's goals.[405] Not enough effort was made to avoid creating dependencies, even if information on the risks was available. For example, it was more worthwhile for a local doctor to resign and become an interpreter in the mission, because it was a better paid job. At the same time, working in the civilian crisis management operation or as a partner to it could have been life-threatening for the Afghans. The risk of being subjected to violence due to connections with the Western countries increased after the fall of the regime. Then again, the women trained as police officers faced violence and the threat of it already during international intervention due to their work.

The interview data suggests that Finland's participation in civilian crisis management appears to be more successful when compared to the partnership objectives. Finland gained valuable experience in international cooperation. Finland raised its profile as a good partner for the European Union and the NATO countries. The country demonstrated its expertise and added value, such as commitment to the common goals instead of its own national interests. The respondents inferred that the high professionalism of the Finnish police promoted Finland's image in the international intervention — the views of the interviewed international partners support this narrative. According to some inferences, the experts sent by Finland lacked cultural competence and conceptual understanding. For example, activities linked to gender equality mostly achieved results at the tactical level. Having an impact at the strategic level would have required deeper understanding of the concept and expertise in this area.[406]

Having two Finns at the head of the operation increased Finland's visibility and impact. However, several respondents critically raised the question of whether their expertise and position were utilized to their full potential in EUPOL. The experts deployed by a number of other countries typically worked under the supervision of their home countries and embassies, whereas the Finns adhered to the common objectives of the operation, which was according to Finland's policy.

404 For discussions on the outcomes of EUPOL in previous literature, see Tardy 2018, European Court of Auditors 2015, House of Lords 2011 and Fescharek 2015.

405 Similar observations have been made in the literature on police support programs. See, e.g., SIGAR 2022.

406 The crisis management personnel's lack of skills in encountering cultures also provoked public debate in Finland. See, e.g., Häikiö 2010. Gaps in understanding the concept of reform in the security sector have been highlighted in the past. See Launiala & Viikki 2011.

According to the experts interviewed, Finland could have flown the Finnish flag much more visibly in the projects and courses of action it promoted in civilian crisis management, for example when local ownership and working together with the Afghans succeeded in an exemplary manner. This is significant with regard to the partnership objectives. Using civilian crisis management for political purposes was not however, taken to its full potential. Nonetheless, active involvement itself served Finland's partnership objectives, which for its part explains why more precise national goals were not set or making an impact within the mission was not prioritized.

The Finland as a Learner framework (see Section 3.1.3) does not appear to be a key justification for Finland's deployment of civilian crisis management experts to Afghanistan, but it does allow us to identify some implications. According to the interviews, Finnish civilian crisis management experts increased their professional capital, such as cross-cultural expertise, during their deployments in Afghanistan. However, utilizing the professional capital the experts acquired has proven to be challenging in their host organizations in Finland and in society at large. Earlier literature has also addressed this perspective in a negative light or with reservations.[407]The respondents felt the skills they had learned in international assignments went to waste after returning to their home country. This could be explained by the fact that skill-building was not a key motivation for Finland to participate in civilian crisis management operations in Afghanistan in the first place.

In conclusion, while Finland's EUPOL involvement, in particular, corresponded to its objectives for international relations and positioning itself among its counterparts, more caution should have been used from the outset concerning the objectives related to supporting Afghanistan.

The conditions for the mission were poor in the deteriorating security situation, and the planning and implementation of the mission did not follow the principles of well-known state and peacebuilding literature with regard to, for example, local ownership and conflict analysis. Considering the objective to support Afghanistan, it is impossible to explain why Finland participated in development of a civilian police model in Afghanistan on the basis of European models without taking into account the specific characteristics of the context. Instead, Finland's efforts seem to have gratified the objectives for positioning itself among the international actors and demonstrating its ability to take responsibility.

407 E.g., Juvonen 2020, 56; Rautarinta 2020, 84.

From this point of view, achieving sustainable results in Afghanistan was not a central objective in the first place.[408]

3.4 DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AND HUMANITARIAN AID

> "*In the end, the money comes from wealthy countries, and so national values and the countries' own blunt axes are the guiding forces in using it. Only Finland's axe was less blunt and a better grindstone, but just the same, we had our personal axe to grind.*"[409]

Afghanistan became Finland's partner in development aid in 2002, shortly after the start of the international intervention. Prior to this, Finland had provided aid in humanitarian mine clearance, but the total amount of aid quickly rose to a completely new level. The annual amount spent on development cooperation increased from just under EUR 7 million in 2001 to a peak of EUR 32 million in 2021.[410]

Between 2002 and 2021, Finland spent approximately EUR 398 million on development cooperation and humanitarian aid in Afghanistan. Approximately EUR 281 million of it was allocated to programmed development cooperation, EUR 51 million to humanitarian aid and EUR 23 million to humanitarian mine clearance.[411] The figure also includes the expenses for the embassy in Kabul, a total of EUR 25 million, and EUR 17 million for security.[412] More money was spent annually on military aid than on development cooperation in 2005–2013, but from 2014 onwards, development cooperation was clearly a priority. In the final years of the intervention, Afghanistan even became Finland's largest development cooperation partner country.

This section examines Finland's objectives for development cooperation, the ways development cooperation was conducted, the challenges posed by the conditions in Afghanistan and, finally, the development

408 The respondents' experiences support this interpretation. According to one respondent, some of the EUPOL personnel felt that the message from the member states and the EU institutions was that EUPOL was a political operation whose function was to be present in Afghanistan and that it did not have any other goals or objectives that it needed to achieve.

409 Interview H27.

410 It should be noted that humanitarian aid accounted for a relatively large portion of the appropriations in 2021. The importance of this aid grew, especially with the rise of the Taliban and the end of actual development cooperation funding.

411 This figure does not include payments for humanitarian mine clearance between 2011 and 2016, as they are recorded in other statistics.

412 In addition to the development cooperation appropriations, humanitarian aid and mine clearance support, the total sum of EUR 398 million includes PRT and CIMIC projects, the operating expenses of the embassy in Kabul in 2008–2021, separately recorded security expenses in 2015–2021 and Finnpartnership support. Information from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in autumn 2022.

Finland's development cooperation and humanitarian aid transfers to Afghanistan, 2001–2021

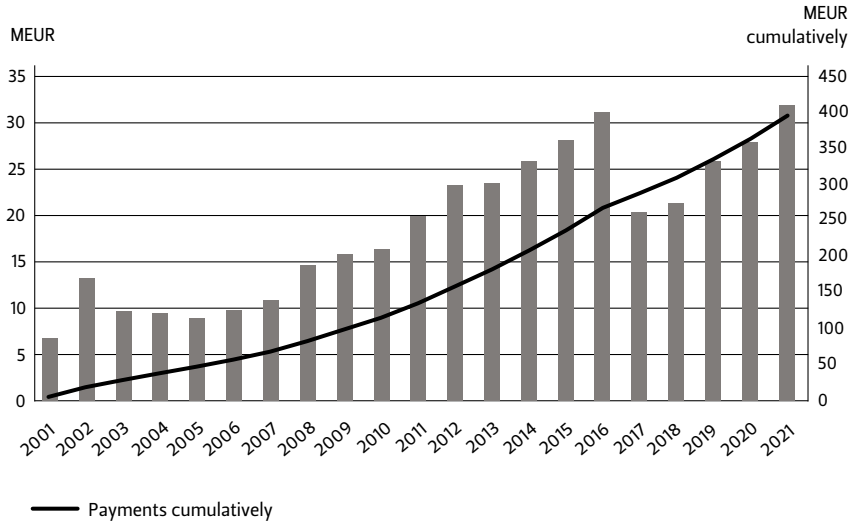


Figure 10. Finland's development cooperation and humanitarian aid transfers to Afghanistan, 2001–2021
Source: Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland 2022

cooperation outcomes.[413] As stated in the assessment of the outcomes, the interviews on development cooperation highlighted Finland's role as a benefactor, which the set objectives also reflected. All the respondents who had worked in development cooperation and humanitarian aid mentioned support of the Afghans and Afghanistan as the grounds for the efforts. The majority considered these objectives as priorities.

Then again, the structure of the multilaterally funded work in itself steered efforts towards the partnership framework, and some of the respondents identified the partnership objectives as the primary grounds for involvement.[414] Partnership involved cooperation with other donor countries. As a joint endeavour, the objectives, implementation, challenges and results of the cooperation are difficult to specify for each participating country individually.

413 The following analysis is primarily based on interviews with eleven people who were responsible for implementing or coordinating Finland's development cooperation in different roles. In addition, the analysis makes use of other interviews, especially with fourteen diplomats or officials who participated at some level in the planning, monitoring or implementation of the development cooperation.

414 Five out of eleven respondents who worked in development cooperation mentioned the partnership objectives as the primary grounds for involvement.

3.4.1 Development cooperation objectives in Afghanistan

> "*The international community should have a clear vision, but this was difficult. It was like bringing a knife to a gunfight — we'll only be there for a short while. But then it dragged on. There was no long-term vision.*"[415]

The stated development cooperation objective was to serve the stabilization, democratization and reconstruction of the Afghan society, which, broadly speaking, was the objective of the entire international intervention. Ultimately, development cooperation also faced exactly the same challenges as the entire intervention with regard to the vagueness of these overarching objectives. This was a problem especially during the Window of Opportunity period (2001–2005), but also later. Clear, detailed and long-term objectives on what Afghanistan should develop into and when were not really set.

The objectives for development cooperation at the international level were set at pledging conferences and when dividing roles among the international community. Although local ownership is considered an important principle in development cooperation, the Afghans' views did not receive enough attention, especially during the first decade. This was recognized as a mistake, and the role of the Afghan government was augmented particularly from 2012 onwards. At this point, the capacity of key ministries had also increased significantly. The pledging conferences also sought to hear the voice of Afghanistan's civil society, but in practice the support was allocated primarily to the state administration, until the end.

At the pledging conference in Tokyo in 2012, the countries supporting Afghanistan and the Afghan government negotiated the *Mutual Accountability Framework (MAF)*. The purpose of the programme was to set mutually binding objectives and principles and to pave the way forward. The same approach was used at subsequent pledging conferences, and the Tokyo MAF was followed by the SMAF (2015), GMAF (2018), and finally the APF (2020) documents.[416] Alongside these, Afghanistan has its own development plans ANPDF (2017–2021) and ANPDF II (2021–2025).[417]

Despite its good intentions, Afghanistan's development cooperation can be considered very donor-focused. Local ownership is not resolved

415 Interview H23.

416 *Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework (TMAF)* 2012; *Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework (SMAF)* 2015; *Geneva Mutual Accountability Framework (GMAF)* 2018; *Afghanistan Partnership Framework (APF)* 2020.

417 *Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework (ANPDF)* 2017–2021; *Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework II (ANPDF II)* 2021–2025.

simply by involving the Afghans in decision-making. Afghanistan's ministries were given responsibility for defining the objectives of the development programmes, but it was the donors who ultimately decided whether or not to accept these objectives. This guided the delineation of the objectives in advance, as the Afghans had a strong interest in receiving funding.

These power structures were never broken down. The Afghans' own goals were not always considered realistic, but the goals specified by the international actors, which in themselves were laudable, were not necessarily the ones the Afghans would have chosen themselves. This can be interpreted as undermining the dedication of local partners to projects and programmes that they had not planned.[418] Our discussions with Afghans living in Finland revealed that, according to their experiences, the goals and nature of individual projects did not always meet the needs of the locals.[419]

Each donor country also had its own priorities and views, but not necessarily a sufficiently shared overall view. Even if each of these priorities were good in itself, it easily resulted in a patchwork quilt when looking at the overall picture.[420] This made the overall development efforts difficult.

The goals were ambitious and rather broad. The European Union's 2017 strategy for Afghanistan prioritized the following:

- Peace, stability and regional security
- Democracy, rule of law and human rights
- Economic and human development
- Migration

Finland closely monitored the objectives of the Nordic Plus countries (the Nordic countries and the Netherlands), and the development policy priorities in line with them were then selected. The thematic platforms Finland supported (see Section 2.2. Downward Spiral, 2006–2011) were as follows:

1. Reform of the judicial system and security sector, including police force development
2. Improving access to and development of education and health care services
3. Developing the foundations of the economy, especially in rural areas[421]

418 This has also been identified in previous research literature, such as Giustozzi & Ibhrahimi 2013.

419 Recent research literature also supports this; see, e.g., Amiri & Jackson 2022.

420 Interview H27.

421 Government report VNS 3/2018.

The principal objectives by 2018 were to:

- strengthen the position of women and girls.
- promote human rights and equality.
- strengthen the democratic and functional capacity of the society.
- control migration.
- support the fight against corruption.[422]

Finnish development cooperation workers had internalized the objectives well and considered them valuable. The same objectives were kept under discussion for the long term. However, development cooperation in Afghanistan differed to some extent from Finland's development cooperation elsewhere due to its particularly fragile society and the ongoing military operation. Development cooperation began through a unique process, and for example before 2019 a country programme for development cooperation did not exist.[423] Nevertheless, the high-level objectives allowed reporting to be largely similar to that of other development cooperation.

The Finnish respondents who worked in Afghanistan's development cooperation expressed criticism towards the lack of a high-level vision and Finland's own strategic vision, especially. The definition of objectives was seen as being too broad. For example, what exactly was meant by women's rights and human rights in the context of Afghanistan? Broad goals also allowed for too many sub-goals. Criticizing this, the respondents alluded to the hanging of decorations on a Christmas tree.[424] The relatively quick turnover of the officials responsible for Afghanistan's development cooperation facilitated this type of goal setting because they all had their personal priorities. Efforts were made from time to time to streamline the growing number of development cooperation projects.

Finland's participation in development cooperation can be viewed in the light of the Finland as a Partner framework, and so it was. Finland considered sharing the extensive international burden as important in principle, as all its international counterparts were indeed involved. Significant development cooperation efforts were also seen as serving transatlantic relations. While it was not considered appropriate to emphasize publicly the importance of partnerships in operations, there was a desire to communicate that Finland is not a bystander, but a participant and a bearer of responsibility. This involved sharing the burden through

422 Government report VNS 3/2018.

423 The respondents did not overtly mention the lack of country-specific programmes, nor did they provide any reasons for it. One of the respondents speculated that forging a country-specific programme earlier could have clarified the performance indicators for development cooperation. Interview H23.

424 Interview H27.

traditional development cooperation in addition to military and civilian crisis management, which suited Finland's self-image as a benefactor, as well as the comprehensive approach.

Involvement in development cooperation was in many ways less problematic than military involvement from the point of view of Finland's identity. Nonetheless, development cooperation was also considered to play a role in increasing security, as it aimed not only at reconstructing Afghanistan but also at increasing stability and eradicating terrorism and its breeding grounds. Therefore, development cooperation could also be seen as supporting Finland and common security in the context of Afghanistan.

The people who were closely involved in development cooperation, especially, viewed their form of work through the lens of the Finland as a Benefactor framework. This perspective revolved around Afghanistan's many needs and Finland's opportunity to do good by supporting the reconstruction of a stricken country. This framework had strong advocates both in the foreign ministry and in the political field. It also echoed the tones sought after in the soapbox speeches. Nevertheless, the people working in development cooperation, in particular, criticized the fact that security and political issues were always given priority.

3.4.2 Implementation of development cooperation

> "*There was frequent questioning about UNDP's LOTFA projects and the World Bank's ARTF whether we were funding ghosts.*"[425]

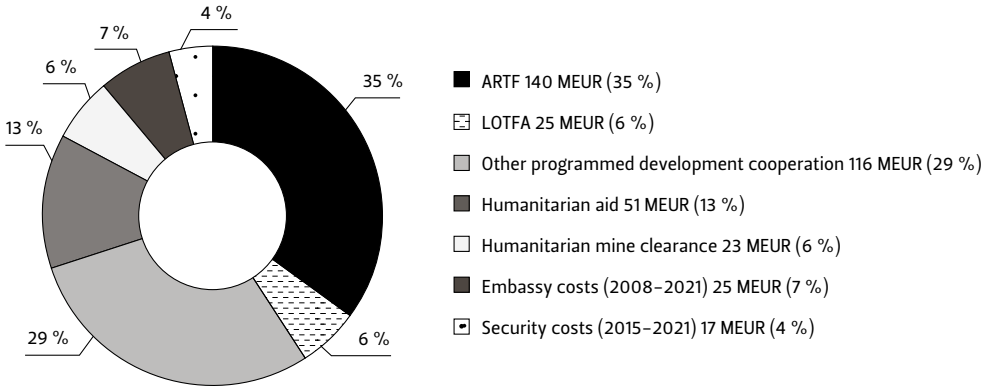
In practice, more than a third of all Finland's development cooperation appropriations, approximately EUR 140 million, were allocated to the World Bank's *Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF)*. Other major recipients of aid were mainly UN organizations, such as UNDP's *Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan (LOFTA)*, UNODC's work on combating drugs and crime, and UN Women.

Finland also supported the work of the *Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC)* and the *Marie Stopes International (MSI)* organization's work on reproductive health. Humanitarian aid was channelled through UNHCR, UNICEF, the Finnish Red Cross, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the World Food Programme (WFP).

As a rule, the appropriations for development cooperation in Afghanistan were slightly below EUR 10 million per year until 2006. After that,

425 Interview H6.

The key targets of development cooperation



The numbers have been rounded up to millions. Total payments amounted to €397 686 070.

Figure 11. The key targets of Finland's development cooperation investments
Source: Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland 2022

they began to increase steadily, reaching a level of EUR 31 million in 2016. In 2017, appropriations decreased again to EUR 20 million per year but increased again year by year until they reached EUR 32 million in 2021. The years 2016 and 2021 were the only years when development cooperation appropriations reached and exceeded the EUR 30 million milestone. In 2021, the projects ended at the latest when the Taliban seized Kabul in late summer, however, and the sum includes an exceptionally large amount of appropriations for humanitarian aid, EUR 12 million. The main reason for the increase was the steady increase in ARTF funding. From 2014 onwards, it was at least USD 10 million per year, which entitled Finland to membership in ARTF's strategy group. Half of the appropriations Finland allocated to ARTF concerned priorities that could be more directly influenced. Additionally, Finland had the opportunity in the strategy group to contribute to the discussions on the development policy priorities of the entire ARTF.

On the whole, however, Finland was a minor donor when considering the scale of ARTF. Finland's share of funding varied around 2% per annum, and its total funds accounted for just over 1% of ARTF's total funding.[426]

Although Finland was a rather small donor among all the others in these funds, the focus on funds and UN programmes dominated, from

426 ARTF 2021.

Finland's point of view, Afghanistan's development cooperation. ARTF and LOTFA alone accounted for almost half of all Finland's development cooperation funding over the entire period 2001–2021.

Both LOTFA and ARTF were regularly criticized, however, which was also noted in Finland. LOTFA funded the *Afghan National Police (ANP)*, which was accused of incompetence and corruption. ARTF, in turn, was the largest single financial instrument. It worked closely with the Afghan government and in effect provided the government with funds to build an annual budget and finance *National Priority Programs (NPPs)*. Since the administration was also plagued by persistent corruption, questions arose about this form of support.

The corruption took many forms. The quote at the beginning of this section refers to 'ghost workers' whose salaries were diverted to certain people's pockets. Then again, if Afghanistan were to manage on its own at some point, the state administration had to be established. ARTF and LOTFA remained Finland's support channels for most of the intervention.[427]

Whatever the assessment of ARTF's role, successes and failures was, it had been a joint mechanism for donors since 2002. Participation in it was part of a coordinated contribution to Afghanistan's development cooperation and therefore funding it might have been difficult to avoid.

Effectiveness and human resources were other key reasons for concentrating development cooperation aid in funds and major UN programmes. In practice, both large and small projects require the same amount of human resources for monitoring and management. In other words, small projects became relatively expensive compared to large ones, because the salaries paid to the Finnish experts coordinating them in Kabul were paid to Finland. In addition, by participating in large projects, it was possible to influence the direction of them, albeit to a small extent. For example, Finland participated in ARTF's gender equality committee and advocated for a greater focus on improving the position of women.

Nevertheless, a significant proportion of the funds allocated to ARTF, for example, were not directly related to promoting women's and girls' rights. Considering how much it was talked about, Finland financed relatively few projects overall, which focused on the topic. Work to improve the situation of women and girls and human rights did indeed receive funding, such as UN Women, MSI and AIHRC. However, some of the gender equality work was directed at other donors, such as the advocacy work done in ARTF's steering committee. Considering gender issues was not a matter of course for international donors.

Although the development cooperation appropriations allocated to funds and UN programmes were relatively cost-effective, at least from

427 LOTFA was discontinued after 2019.

Finland's point of view, human resources were generally perceived as being insufficient in relation to the amount of appropriations allocated and the needs of advocacy work.

In the first decade of the 2000s, smaller-scale projects were carried out with funds for local cooperation allowing direct contact with Afghan civil society. However, these were abandoned precisely because of the workload and the risk of corruption. In practice, the use of humanitarian aid was monitored in Helsinki. The Finnish Embassy in Kabul had a maximum of four development cooperation experts, but in reality, continuous rotations for periods of recovery and holidays in Finland reduced the number of people on site. This became an issue when the number of experts was only two in 2015–2021. Personnel turnover was also a challenge, as most often they spent a maximum of two years in Kabul.

3.4.3 Development cooperation challenges in Afghanistan

> "*If we really wanted to make a difference, we should have had more people in diplomacy, in the political efforts, and clear objectives from Helsinki. That was missing. --- When money was given, we had a place at the table, but how could we use that to wield influence? When there was something that needed attention, we didn't have the people.*"[428]

Finland's involvement in Afghanistan's intervention also had several clear stages in terms of development cooperation. There was a lot of hope and even enthusiasm in the Window of Opportunity period (until 2005). During the Downward Spiral period (2006–2011), the situation in the country began to resemble a war, and from 2010 onwards, especially, the possibilities to operate were highly dependent on security measures.

Visiting development cooperation sites became difficult, if not impossible, as travelling outside Kabul became increasingly dangerous. Contacts with the locals also decreased and became restricted within Kabul due to the security measures and prior coordination. In the last years, going anywhere without armed guards and an armoured car was impossible.

The dramatic deterioration of the security situation affected access to information and knowledge about the situation. Many Finns who worked in Afghanistan felt that they did not know the country's conditions, culture and especially its languages very well when they arrived in the country. Everyone who worked in development cooperation did indeed meet with local Afghans and learned a lot during their assignment, but the opportunities were considerably more limited than in Finland's

428 Interview H12.

usual development cooperation destinations. Those on assignment may have felt they had poor local knowledge even after their deployment in Afghanistan due to the limited mobility and security situation. Under these circumstances, project evaluation became more challenging than usual and often involved reliance on third-party reports.

The international actors' isolation in Kabul and its security zone and the donor countries' focus on funds and UN programmes were both factors that guided close interaction with representatives of the donor community, i.e., other international experts, diplomats and organizations. In addition to reporting, this coordination took up a large part of the time of the experts working in Kabul.

Coordination and communication took a lot of time, and several Finns pointed out that human resources were insufficient. Assessments of the effectiveness of coordination vary considerably from period to period and from different actors' point of view, but the general problem seems to have been a certain structural flaw.

Coordination took place primarily in Kabul, but decisions on development cooperation were nevertheless made in the capital cities of the donor countries. For this reason, coordination often resembled more information exchange than genuine strategic planning. If information was exchanged at a sufficiently early stage, it might have contributed to successful allocation of tasks between countries. However, things may also have gone differently, as many elicited complaints about outright withholding of information and constant raising of national priorities above the jointly set goals.

As such, Finland sought to profile itself as a cooperative actor prepared to coordinate activities. The Nordic Plus countries in particular were key partners and with them pursuing the jointly agreed priorities was possible, including in the ARTF and UN programmes funded by Finland. However, since the other donors were also key western democracies, it was unclear how important emphasizing precisely Finland's and the Nordic countries' priorities was in the overall situation.

Since Finland largely contributed to financing the common funds and projects, it was almost always just another donor among the others. This inevitably ties the examination of the impact, implementation and challenges of Finland's development cooperation to this wider, shared level. Although each participating country was keen to talk about the use of its own money and the results achieved with it, separating national contributions from the broader results and challenges is virtually impossible.

For example, corruption was identified as a major problem in all work carried out in Afghanistan. Attempts to eradicate it were never successful; on the contrary, the huge sums of money poured into Afghanistan by the international community have apparently fuelled a massive problem

with corruption. There are many levels of corruption; the outright theft of money is only the most obvious and blatant.

Project reports were prepared carefully to the best of the available information, and development cooperation was evaluated repeatedly. In the light of these reports, relatively little money was lost to obvious corruption, and Finland's development cooperation can be considered well-controlled and successful. However, the impact the funds channelled through the colossal ARTF had on the Afghan society, for example, is a separate and more difficult question to answer.

As regards the deteriorating security situation, all the development cooperation donors had shared problems. The development cooperation personnel often criticized the way in which military and political considerations took precedence over development issues. The interaction between them was however complex.

3.4.4 Outcomes of development cooperation

> "*I would not say that Finland has failed, but the international community has. What would it have looked like to the world if we had not been involved in this? It's important to be involved, but you have to be realistic about what you're looking for.*"[429]

Reports on Finland's development cooperation were actively compiled, but assessing the efforts' wider societal impact and effectiveness was difficult. It is relatively easy to monitor the implementation of projects and the use of funds, but finding reliable indicators and signs of sustainable progress is more challenging — under any circumstances. A number of prevailing conditions in Afghanistan, which were common to all the development cooperation donors, hampered this generally difficult task. Special circumstances included Afghanistan's very inadequate starting level, the effects of the deteriorating security situation and the vagueness of the objectives. The escalating civil war in Afghanistan and the central government's loss of more and more regions also created significant challenges.

After decades of war, Afghanistan was poverty-stricken and its infrastructure was in extremely bad condition. Women and girls' educational level was particularly low, the health care system was non-existent and the state virtually collapsed. The country's inter-regional disparities were also great, and the war had further deepened the chasm. The new central government's grip on the country's different regions was also

429 Interview H23.

questionable, if not entirely illusory. Warlords who had a dreadful past in the Afghan civil war controlled many of the regions.

The warlords' constant presence was the result of the choices made early in the intervention. Particularly during the Window of Opportunity period (2001–2005), the United States tried to maintain a light footprint and focused primarily on winning the war on terrorism. To this end, decisions were made on the structure, alliances and stabilization of the Afghan regime that would not necessarily have been made solely from a development perspective. The priorities of the first years of the intervention remained in the minds of many development cooperation actors until its very end: military and political considerations were constantly given priority over development issues. Development cooperation was seen as being subordinate to the stability of Afghanistan.

The interaction between military, political and development perspectives was very complex. For example, development projects may have been used very straightforwardly to promote soldiers' self-protection by creating amity in the area of operations. Finnish troops did the same. These *Quick Impact Projects*, had also a positive impact on building genuine relationships with the locals and the results of the work were visible.

In contrast, the local cooperation fund projects, which could have played a similar role for the Finnish Embassy in Kabul, at least in terms of gaining better local knowledge, were suspended. Small-scale projects, which entailed direct contacts with the locals, were generally considered to be positive experiences and they allowed opportunities to gain information and contacts. However, by definition they were small-scale, unlike the building of state structures.

The role of the corrupt and inefficient state was difficult enough. For example, projects implemented directly through the UN or other experienced actors may have been effective, but the locals felt that the help came from the international community, not from their own government. The projects also had weaker local ownership, wages may have been paid to the international employees and consultants, and the sustainability of the work could not necessarily be guaranteed.

With the rapid deterioration of the security situation beginning from the Downward Spiral period (2006–2011), military and political priorities gained new momentum. Likewise, development cooperation became difficult, although at the same time Finland invested more and more in it. Over the years, more and more parts of the country became inaccessible. By no means was the international community the primary target for violence or the threat of it — it was precisely the local Afghans themselves. For example, supporting education was difficult if no one dared to go to school.

The impact of the security situation on access to information about Afghanistan is difficult to assess. The authors of the monitoring reports were often unable to get to different areas due to the security situation and had to rely on third-party information of those in the field. The Finns who read these reports then reported to Helsinki. Many raised questions about the reliability of reporting, because there were suspicions that the threshold for reporting problems was high.

Qualitative measures were extremely challenging, both in Afghanistan and elsewhere. How can changes in values be measured? Or professional empowerment? Quantitative measures, such as the number of teachers trained or the number of children attending school, were in principle much easier to measure and therefore more commonly used, but their correlation with qualitative objectives was not always verifiable or even clear. If a certain number of schools was built, were they used? If so, did it continue? What was learned and what was the impact? Many respondents doubted the reliability of even simple quantitative measures, and indeed the measures have posed numerous problems.[430] In the case of large international projects, Finnish donors relied on the projects' own reports, and on-site independent data collection to verify the information in them may not have been possible at all.

The pressure to find positive results was substantial. The Afghan partners, in particular, were clearly interested in finding signs of progress in order to secure funding. Then again, many Finns who worked in development cooperation pointed out that funding seemed to continue regardless of whether Afghanistan's development programmes, for example, achieved their objectives or not. "*There should be more impact assessment, and if there are no results, then it [the programme] should end*," as one Finnish diplomat stated.[431]

In the big picture, however, the intervention in Afghanistan continued through political will, not because of progress in achieving objectives. The significance of the Finland as a Partner framework was such that it would not necessarily have been easy for Finland, on the basis of the impact assessments, to arrive at a conclusion that Afghanistan's development cooperation would not be continued.

The overall experience of those involved in Afghanistan's development cooperation was that the objectives of the intervention did not seem realistic at all. Afghanistan would have required much more time. Rising above such a low baseline at the pace desired by the donors and the lack of persistence were big problems. This may sound surprising when considering twenty years of intervention, but the starting level in Afghanistan was

430 See, e.g., Adili 2017.

431 Interview H16.

so low and the problems so severe that a significantly longer time frame would have been needed to achieve the desired changes.

Some of the actors in development cooperation saw this as a contradiction between the realities of their own sector and the aspirations of the political actors. More general structural reasons, such as the cyclical nature of the central government and project work, were also considered obstacles to progress to some extent. In any case, many people's assessments of the overall progress, sustainability of the results of the work or the reliability of the available data pertaining to the results were rather bleak.

Nevertheless, the development cooperation supported by Finland did indicate results that benefited the Afghans, and the respondents generally deemed the intervention as successful in this regard. The results of the development cooperation were assessed primarily within the Finland as a Benefactor framework, favoured by the subdivision's employees. The highlighted results were largely the same as those highlighted in the public sphere earlier: a new generation of Afghans was educated, including girls. Maternal health and the health of new-borns improved. The work of MSI, in particular, was mentioned several times in a positive light, as was the mining education project carried out by the Geological Survey of Finland.

Successes especially in education and health care were seen as areas to which Finns had contributed and which could also be considered as positive results of Finland's involvement. However, since Finland's funding was channelled mainly into funds and UN programmes, none of these results were exclusively or even primarily the work of Finland. The international intervention in Afghanistan was a joint effort where distinguishing more accurately between country-specific successes or failures is impossible.

Another interesting aspect of the evaluations of how successful the efforts in education and health care were, is the idea of the results' relatively high sustainability. The timing of the interviews may be an important factor here. They were all conducted after the end of the international intervention, after the collapse of the Afghan government and the entire political system, which the intervention had supported. In these circumstances, all the investments to develop the state structures, armed forces, police, judicial system, good governance and the fight against corruption seemed to have been wasted. "*If we achieved anything, now much of it is lost*," as one diplomat stated.[432]

When the comparison to the results of other efforts is this clear and negative, the results for education stood out, regardless of the scope of the results and how positive they were. The Finnish respondents saw education at least as something that could not be taken away afterwards.

432 Interview H10.

This point of view in itself underlines nonetheless how something good came out of a failed intervention. At least while the international intervention was still in progress, some Afghan girls were allowed to attend school. Now they cannot, but there is still a generation of educated women left.

The successes experienced in well-doing, at least in terms of development cooperation, do not seem to have been enough to overcome the contradiction between political will and situation evaluations at given times, even during the intervention.

Finnish experts, soldiers and diplomats followed the developments in Afghanistan. The diplomats tried to make the priorities, such as the position of women and girls, more visible in the international intervention through Nordic Plus cooperation, for example. Despite this, however, they did not feel that they could significantly impact the big picture. Indeed, they did not try to impact it; Finland settled on following the others for the most part.

Despite all the pessimism and criticism, the collapse of the entire state of Afghanistan was not considered inevitable. The Finns who worked in Afghanistan in different periods found signs of both turns for the better and turns for the worse. Regardless of the situation, however, year after year decisions were made to continue support because it was a joint project with the other donors.

The Finland as a Partner framework also surfaced in the evaluations of the development cooperation. As a rule, the donor countries were the richest countries in the world, and Finland's aid was not very high in absolute terms. However, the proportion of it in Finland's development cooperation funds was relatively high. Calculated as a share in the development budget, Finland was reported to have invested the fourth highest amount of funds in Afghanistan in the world. Some mentioned that the United States had certainly taken note of this contribution. Perhaps a more noticeable gesture was Finland's decision to organize the 2020 pledging conference, which was considered to be an extremely challenging endeavour. The success of the conference was a clear diplomatic victory.

In terms of development cooperation, the Finland as a Partner framework manifested in a different way and less directly than in the case of military crisis management. Despite its shortcomings, the close coordination between Finland and its partners lasted for many years. In particular, the cooperation with the Nordic Plus countries and the values and priorities they shared were mentioned in many interviews. Although it was hardly used as a basis for intervention or even considered a benefit of it, the experience of all the countries as being in the same boat was undoubtedly strong, for better and for worse.

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4. LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE

Until now, our research report has focused on analysing Finland's involvement in the international intervention in Afghanistan. The report now looks to the future and identifies the most important lessons for Finland's agency in future foreign and security policy.

This section focuses on what the observations presented in this report mean for Finland's agency in future crisis management and development cooperation efforts in similar circumstances. What can the international community and a small player like Finland learn from Afghanistan? What should be learned?

The complex historical and social dynamics of Afghanistan at the beginning of 2002 made it a particularly difficult environment for international intervention. Generalizing the lessons learned in Afghanistan to cover other contexts is indeed limited. Moreover, we may not see an international intervention and intervention in a country's internal conflict similar in scale to Afghanistan for a while. Partly as a result of the experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq, the United States and the Western world seem reluctant to engage in large-scale interventions, which have been associated with even more problems and have not been seen to achieve the desired results.[433]

The global political upheaval, the growing tension between the great powers and the full-scale war in Europe are turning NATO's attention back to regional defence, as opposed to crisis management, in the near future and medium term. It is anticipated that the European Union will be under pressure to take more responsibility for crisis management efforts alongside UN peacekeeping operations as NATO's focus shifts.[434] EU crisis management efforts will likely be built around strengthening carefully defined capacities, for example by providing training and matériel support.[435]

The experiences gained in Afghanistan make it possible to formulate some lessons, however, which will broadly benefit the members of the international community. Despite the specific features of Afghanistan's operating environment, many will be repeated in other interventions

433 See, e.g., Aydintasbas et al. 2021.

434 See, e.g., Iso-Markku & Karjalainen 2022.

435 See, e.g., Pietz 2021; Black 2022.

in which Finland will also be involved. An increasing share of Finland's development cooperation appropriations is allocated to countries that are classified as fragile states. Furthermore, international and non-state actors are abounding in an increasing number of conflicts and crisis environments.

In addition, the transformation of Afghanistan's conflict environment over a twenty-year period shows how significantly crisis management environments can change, also with regard to the operations' own part, from the initial decision to participate. For these reasons, the lessons learned about international intervention in Afghanistan are relevant more broadly, also. In a global political context where insecurity, unequal development and authoritarianism threaten development of democracy and are linked to geopolitical and geoeconomic competition, support for democracy and human rights needs to be re-examined in order to strengthen the credibility of actions.[436] Reflection on the lessons learned is also necessary from the perspective of the current situation and future of Afghanistan and Afghans.

The lessons learned are divided into three parts: We will begin with the lessons related to the international intervention and its starting points in general. We will then delve into the most salient lessons for Finland, focusing especially on the challenges and needs of Finland's agency. Thirdly, we will return to Afghanistan in particular and examine the significance of the lessons in the light of Afghanistan's current situation and near future.

The lessons arising from our research are examined particularly in relation to the trends of Finland's foreign and security policy. The main emphasis is on the lessons that appear central to Finland's current and future intervention efforts. In particular, Finland's membership in NATO will have an impact on Finland's foreign and security policy agency. Therefore, the lessons learned in Afghanistan will be discussed in relation to this agency in this section. In our scrutiny of the lessons, we also anticipate the impacts of Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine on Finland's foreign policy and security and defence policy priorities. We take into account the major developments and mega-trends which affect international mechanisms in general to situate the lessons in the world where they may be used.

436 Notably, some experts view the chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan and the rapid rise of the Taliban as contributing to the Russian leadership's interpretation, in the months leading up to the invasion of Ukraine, of Western international actors as being weak. See, e.g., Lehtonen 2022; Aaltola 2022.

4.1 LESSONS LEARNED CONCERNING INTERNATIONAL INTERVENTIONS

In this section, we summarize the key lessons learned concerning international interventions into three main observations:

- Importance of understanding the conflict context as a starting point for action
- Challenges related to local ownership
- Importance of a long-term and coherent strategy reflective of the conflict context[437]

4.1.1 Understanding and acknowledging the conflict context as a basis for actions

> "*But money or interest alone are not enough. There should be a greater understanding of the society.*"[438]

One of the key lessons learned as per this report and other reports on Afghanistan is the understanding and consideration of the contexts of the intervention as a starting point for actions. Although the issue is, in principle, well acknowledged and in many ways completely self-evident, it was in no way given sufficient consideration in Afghanistan. It is therefore necessary to stress that understanding local circumstances and the context of the conflict is of the utmost importance.

Poor consideration of context is widely considered to have significant negative effects on the expediency of interventions.[439] Today's conflict and crisis contexts are multilevel and network-like. To understand them, we must take into account the international, regional, national and local levels, historically structured power relations, governance structures, local cultures, conflict dynamics and character of the involved actors.

The thought that going to Afghanistan was like "taking a knife to a gunfight" came up repeatedly in our interviews and workshop discussions.[440] The intervention was shaped around a narrow concept of security and general state-building norms, with no understanding of the local context or sufficient interest in it.

437 Many lessons related to the international intervention and the actions of the United States, for example, have been identified. Here, we focus on those which are the most significant for Finland. For example, the SIGAR reports shed detailed light on the actions and doctrines of the United States.

438 Interview H31.

439 SIGAR 2021a; Norwegian Commission on Afghanistan 2016; Pain 2021.

440 E.g., interview H23.

The intervention efforts were based on a poor understanding of Afghanistan, especially in its early days. This partly explains how strategic mistakes and other challenges emerged, such as prioritizing a government model that fit poorly, pervasive corruption, underestimation of the Taliban's influence and the delay in the peace process, as well as challenges in security sector reform and strengthening local ownership.[441] The ending of the international intervention in the hasty evacuation out from under the collapsing government also unveils the difficulties the international actors had in understanding and discerning the real situation in Afghanistan.

Importantly, the international actors' inability or unwillingness to take the local context into account does not mean that the local political dynamics and actors would not have influenced the implementation and outcomes of the intervention in Afghanistan, or more generally.[442] Whether they are taken into account or not, conflict dynamics, social power relations and institutions of governance have a significant impact on the implementation of intervention and on its outcome.

If an intervention is planned and implemented without taking into account local dynamics, anticipating the impacts will become increasingly difficult, which may lead to unwanted and unexpected consequences. The suitability for and the impact of operations and projects on local power relations, for example, cannot be realistically assessed without an understanding of the local context. As a result, the effectiveness and relevance of the efforts can also be expected to decrease. In other words, a lack of understanding or attention to the conflict context poses a tangible threat to the success of the support measures.

Then again, it should be noted that consideration does not mean the same as legitimacy and acceptance. Consideration of the customs that violate human rights, for example, may be essential to the implementation of the *do no harm* principle, but this does not obligate anyone to accept or support such practices. On the contrary, understanding the context can empower sustained collaboration to correct harmful customs.

Developing ways to analyse conflict is essential to understanding and considering societal contexts. Conflict analysis is the systematic investigation of a conflict situation (or a preceding situation involving risks) with the purpose of constructing understanding of the social, political and socioeconomic structures and institutions which influence the context,

441 Our respondents also referred a so-called 'railway' phenomenon where decisions based on a lack of understanding of the initial context and strategic mistakes shaped a framework for the intervention and forms of action that were difficult to change later on, i.e., once the railway was built, you could not change the route.

442 Giustozzi and Ibrahimi 2013.

the factors and driving forces behind the conflict, as well as the actors influencing the context and their interrelationships.

It is only on the basis of conflict analysis that outlining the goals to be pursued with regard to the context is possible. Moreover, it reveals how different structures, driving forces and actors (their interrelationships) are expected to facilitate or shape actions and an intervention's chances of success. Analysis also helps to predict the risks and potential impacts of intervention measures. In the case of fragile states in particular, conflict analysis must also consider the role of non-state actors in the social context. Furthermore, the context should not be examined in the light of state ideals alone.

To be useful in planning and implementing intervention measures, the analysis must also reflect the level of intervention. If, for example, support for peacebuilding projects across a country is being planned, the analysis must cover the power relations and governance institutions affecting the projects at both the national and local levels.

Considering who is conducting the analysis and on what basis is salient. As national interests strongly influence the motivations and policy objectives of various state actors, it is obvious that each country participating in the intervention must conduct its own analyses (see lessons for Finland below).

With regard to multilateral efforts, entrusting coordination of context analysis to the most capable actor would be more feasible to achieve the shared objectives. In practice, this may mean, for example, that NATO and EU institutions may have a role in producing and compiling the conflict analyses, and member states participate as their own resources and knowledge base allow. Depending on the context, conflict analysis coordination may also be the responsibility of an ad hoc coalition. However, a shared analysis does not replace Finland's own analysis, which considers national targets and international partners.

Conflict analysis cannot succeed without the participation of a sufficiently broad and diverse group of experts. Local researchers and experts play a particularly important role in the production of information, for example in terms of political relations and the legitimacy of actors. In addition to local experts and sources of information, consulting, for example, the diaspora can provide significant added value in the development and updating of the analysis (see also lessons for Finland). Digitalization offers quick access to more and more public data. Intelligence and sharing it among partner countries also plays an increasingly important role, as disinformation increases and undermines the reliability of public data.

However, emphasis on conflict analysis runs the risk of becoming yet another bureaucratic exercise which collects dust on a shelf somewhere.

Instead of being an exercise or preparatory work, conflict analysis should be an integral part of the support measures. The results of the analysis should be applied as early as possible and constantly modified as operations progress.

The analysis can also be understood as a way to build a more equal dialogue and understanding between the donors and recipients. Conflict analysis prior to an intervention serves as a foundation for anticipating needs, opportunities, risks and challenges. However, updating it must be made a priority to be able to respond to rapidly changing situations. Here, too, Afghanistan serves as a warning: even if significant resources had been devoted to understanding Afghanistan at the turn of 2001–2002, the analysis would have become hopelessly outdated within a few years as the operating environment changed.

To be able to support the understanding and consideration of the operating environment when planning and implementing intervention measures, conflict analysis must have resources – especially skilled human resources – for conducting the analysis and communicating about it. Moreover, the analysis must be free from political pressures – only an objective analysis will provide genuinely useful information on the opportunities and risks of actions.

4.1.2 Local ownership and leadership in efforts

The Unites States' light footprint approach, in particular, which the entire intervention then adopted, emphasized local ownership, i.e., Afghanistan's interim government's responsibility for the country's stabilization and reconstruction processes. Despite this emphasis, however, the stabilization and reconstruction plans, with their objectives and timelines, were largely planned by the international actors for the Afghans to execute. In other words, local ownership took the form of participation and responsibility for implementation, rather than of control over goals, processes, or courses of action.

The workshop discussions revealed that the Afghans felt that many of the concrete actions responded poorly to Afghanistan's social context and local needs. Moreover, the Afghans were not seen as having control over the projects. Local ownership served, especially in the beginning, the international community's need to avoid politically excessive resourcing and risk-taking in Afghanistan.[443] However, the light footprint approach was coupled with ambitious objectives for the development of state institutions and structures. Afghan officials did not necessarily

443 See, e.g., Rynning 2012, Chapter 4. *Original Sins*.

have the capacities to achieve them, and many Afghan authorities were not necessarily dedicated to pursuing them.

Critically examining local ownership from these points of departure is relevant beyond Afghanistan: for example, in EU crisis management which, as with Afghanistan, emphasizes a light footprint approach, training and capacity building. Modern crisis management aims at reforming local administrations and security sectors through training and technical capacity-building, without acting on behalf of the locals.

These missions, too, such as the EU missions in Africa's Sahel region or in Ukraine, have ambitious, value-based objectives in terms of the rule of law and standards of good governance. Similarly, in the case of these operations, critically examining whether the local actors are truly committed to the very objectives for which they are working with the support of international actors, is necessary. In other words, do the international and local actors actually share common objectives?

The experiences in Afghanistan serve as an indication that genuinely shared objectives play a key role in the effectiveness and sustainability of intervention. Then again, having shared goals calls for local ownership from the very beginning, while setting goals and planning, to engage the local owners in defining the goals, also.

The experiences in Afghanistan also exposed the importance of considering which locals to work with and knowing who represents the local actors. The international actors had a narrow understanding of the key players in terms of local ownership in Afghanistan. State administration representatives or certain people of power were mainly those who were invited to participate in the joint efforts. Relatively few resources were used to support the dialogue between the Afghan civil society and different actors, a problem which was also recognized in both the interviews and the workshop discussions.

The accountability of supported Afghan actors and international actors towards other Afghans was not prioritized, either. According to the interview respondents and workshop participants, conditionality in consolidating the responsibility of the ruling elite should have been established at a much earlier stage. Cooperation in local ownership became too close with 'our Afghans', meaning the people Finland worked most closely with in the state administration. This disguised not only the weakness in devotion, but also the immense lack of trust between ordinary Afghans, the local and national elite and the international actors.

An important lesson based on this at the level of international intervention constitutes the need to strive for higher quality and more extensive local ownership, on the one hand, and critical examination of the rhetoric and actions that emphasize it on the other hand. Ultimately, it is a

question of whose interests and objectives the intervention efforts reflect: the international actors' (and which actors) or the local population's, state leadership's, local power figures' or of a specific group of people?

Both military and civilian support involve an inherent imbalance of power between the supporter and the recipient of support. Ownership may thus well be in the hands of the international actors, even when working with local authorities or, for example, women's groups.

When these challenges are identified, however, efforts can be made to engender activities with locally defined objectives and plans and local commitment. Reinforcing strategic coordination and division of labour between international actors could, for example, create opportunities for civil society and minority groups to influence support at an earlier stage and in the long run. It could also create opportunities for them to hold their decision-makers accountable. However, this requires high-quality conflict analysis.

International actors should also reflect on their own role, especially in situations where the plans and practices proposed by local partners seem irrelevant or inappropriate. Does the fault lie in the priorities, or is this a question of different perspectives?

The international community's experiences in Afghanistan reveal that the lack of local ownership and, in particular, of commitment to the desired reforms threatens the sustainability of the support overall, as evidenced by the rapid collapse of the supported security forces and government. Then again, clear communication and consistent monitoring of the terms of support are essential to strengthen the accountability of both the supporter and the recipient of the support.

This is especially important because there is no single 'local actor' representing the multiple interests and priorities of the population as a whole. Appealing to local ownership becomes problematic from the point of view of Finland's foreign policy value base if it means empowering an elite which violates the local population's human rights.[444]

4.1.3 Long-term and consistent strategy on the level of the international actors

Another lesson international actors can learn from Afghanistan is that without a coherent and long-term strategy, taking realistic and comprehensive action is not possible. One of the most recurrent criticisms

444 One respondent (H52) mentioned Afghanistan's 'tea boy culture' where young boys are sexually abused by men. US soldiers were instructed not to intervene in the Afghan commanders' sexual violence against young boys. The reason for giving such instructions was to maintain good relations with the Afghan police and military forces (Goldstein 2015). Interpretation, which did not want to question sexual abuse of children as a cultural practice, is very problematic in terms of human rights and good governance objectives.

of international intervention in our data is the lack of shared goal setting and strategy that take the context into account.

For example, no clear exit plans were made at any time for ending the intervention in Afghanistan, meaning that the circumstances of success or failure in which the international actors would end the intervention were never defined.[445] This presumably made it more difficult to anticipate and control the risks associated with the efforts and ending them.[446] Instead, the decision to withdraw from Afghanistan was ultimately made by the United States' and dictated by its own national interests, which reflects the entire course of the intervention well.

Instead of following a long-term and comprehensive strategy, extensive international spending was guided by national and actor-specific interests. Moreover, to ensure continuation of funding, all the funds must be spent. Short assignments combined with pressure to achieve results, which were not set in advance, nor realistically, created a cycle of reinventing the wheel – or wheels. The Afghans and people who worked in Afghanistan on several occasions saw the same initiatives and monitoring processes start all over again – institutional memory was playing tricks.

A comprehensive and realistic plan therefore requires extensive conflict analysis (see 4.1.1) and local actors' central role (see 4.1.2). The Bonn Conference in 2001 sought and achieved a commonly agreed roadmap for Afghanistan. In reality, however, its outcomes were in the hands of the international actors, particularly the United States', which created an imbalanced relationship between Afghanistan and the donors, on the one hand, and the Afghan elite and the rest of the Afghans, on the other hand.[447]

Then again, the experiences in Afghanistan should teach the international actors about developing mutual coordination and a comprehensive approach. For the former, it is important to distinguish between strategic coordination and coordination at the level of information exchange. According to our primary data, the exchange of information and functional coordination developed quite smoothly during the intervention. From Finland's point of view, the exchange of information and cooperation in the Nordic Plus group, in particular, was seen as a positive and desirable form of cooperation, for the future as well.

445 As regards Finland, Vuori and Vaittinen (2010), for example, already raised concerns about Finland's lack of an exit strategy during the intervention. See also Vesa 2010.

446 The risks related to building competence and technically equipping the Afghan security sector and the risks of hasty withdrawal became a reality when the Taliban authorities used the provided equipment, and former members of the special forces were reported to have been recruited by Russia to Ukraine. See Al Jazeera 2022; O'Donnell 2022. Strategic cooperation in planning and monitoring operations and the termination thereof could help to anticipate and control the risks related to future operations.

447 See, e.g., Giustozzi and Ibrahimi 2013.

Strategic coordination, i.e., clarifying and coordinating the objectives and plans of various international actors with regard to Afghanistan, was considered an area needing improvement. The divergent views between the international actors as to what was to be achieved and how to go about achieving it formed the root of the problem. For example, the Afghans, the European Union and the United States did not have a common understanding of the nature of and objectives for the Afghan national police. The police force was primarily developed under the US's leadership, as it had by far the most resources, while EUPOL's objectives were detached from the operations as a whole.[448]

The lack of coordination at the strategic level, as demonstrated by the operations in Afghanistan, makes the overall comprehensive approach almost impossible, or at least haphazard. Comprehensive refers to progressing in different subdivisions in the same direction in such a way that they support each other and, through their independent goals, reach a shared goal. The experiences in Afghanistan indicate that the comprehensive approach must be applied at the international intervention level, which was not the case. Therefore, the ways in which each actor can support the comprehensive nature of operations, taking account of their own circumstances, should form the primary basis for national comprehensive strategies.

Accentuating national and actor-specific interests will most likely continue to be a challenge to strategic consistency and taking a comprehensive approach in the future, also. Individual states and other international actors participate in crisis management and international support, each from their own perspective and different political objectives.

As one of the participants in our diaspora workshop aptly summed up, there were at least three types of actors in Afghanistan, each with their own reasons to be involved. They were those who had their own strong interests in Afghanistan, those who had some interests but less at stake, and those who participated mainly because they wanted to be part of the intervention. Categorizing the actors like this may help to identify realistic opportunities in terms of goal setting, strategic coordination and a comprehensive approach. For example, actors with fewer interests may be well suited to take on a coordinating and facilitation role to harmonize different objectives and interests, for example within and between NATO or EU operations.

Clear, realistic common goals are key to both the effectiveness of the operations and to communicating about them to the public.

448 This also emerges in the SIGAR report on police reform and its limited attention to EUPOL. See SIGAR 2022, 102.

Over-ambitious goals that require quick results are likely to cause disappointment, both in the crisis context and in the audience at home.

Adapting the objectives to each environment is more important than trying to adapt the environment to third-party objectives. This does not mean forgetting, for example, the promotion of human rights or democratic governance. It is a question of forming sub-objectives suitable for the operating environment. In some contexts, building a foundation for democracy may mean working to reduce extreme poverty rather than making administrative reforms. To be able to set realistic and context-specific goals, international actors need to understand operating environments better than they do at present.

Distinguishing between the international actors' objectives in relation to the conflict and other objectives underlying involvement is also important. Even if the actors' motivations for involvement are very different, finding common goals related to the conflict may still be possible. The experiences in Afghanistan indicate that the diversity of national interests can be used as an excuse for setting superficial objectives in the target context and as shield to hide behind in the midst of failures.

In any case, from the point of view of the local population, distinguishing between the international actors involved in the same intervention is difficult and pointless, even if the different objectives marked the actors' involvement. Identifying realistic common goals is also a precondition for monitoring operations and the long-term, credible planning of them — both for local and potential competing initiatives. This lesson is also relevant in the context of supporting Ukraine's defence against Russia's war of aggression. The international actors such as the US, EU and NATO states supporting Ukraine need to strategically coordinate and coherently communicate about the aims and limits of the support, despite varying forms of support.

It is likely that ad-hoc coalitions of willing and capable states will increasingly carry out future military interventions. The most capable nations are often the lead nations, typically large nations. The lead nations have relatively high influence on the aims, scope and strategy of the operations. However, this does not eliminate the other participants' responsibility to try to rectify shortcomings and influence the course of the intervention.

In Afghanistan, for example, the United States was considered to have taken the intervention down a overly militaristic road. However, we must ask to what extent did the other participating countries try to rectify this or other strategic mistakes in the intervention. To influence or balance the lead nations' actions and objectives, like-minded actors and organizations would benefit from working together to influence the intervention.

According to many respondents, the European Union could have been more active in terms of strategic influence and also in providing critical feedback to the United States when needed.

Then again, the respondents also drew attention to the EU's limited agency and its weak capacity to operate independently in challenging environments. The EU's ability to act was largely based on the protection offered by the United States and the NATO coalition, while at the same time internal coordination difficulties challenged the sustainability of the activities. The police mission ended before the goals were achieved, because the political enthusiasm of the EU member states waned and because continuing the mission was impossible after the US's decision to withdraw from Afghanistan. EU support to local partners was severed partly in an unforeseen way because *follow up* on the police force operations could not be organized quickly enough.

In the future, when Finland considers involvement in and support for the EU's crisis management operations, it must acknowledge the EU's lack of strategic autonomy and limited capacity to act independently in demanding crises. Since Afghanistan and EUPOL, the EU has developed its crisis management tools, for example by enabling the supply of military equipment to partners through the European Peace Facility.[449]

Recent strategic processes in the EU and NATO demonstrate that the division of labour between the EU and NATO is becoming increasingly clearer and that the EU does not create overlapping functions with NATO.[450] The European Union's endeavours to balance between being able to operate more independently and avoiding overlapping functions has been reflected in, for example, the development process of its Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC). In addition, new, flexible forms of cooperation have been developed around the EU to facilitate joint military interventions and defence cooperation in the future. Furthermore, it is possible that willing coalitions led by European countries may be used to support the EU's crisis management efforts in the future.[451]

The European Union's role as a crisis management actor may expand, as NATO's attention has returned from the war on terrorism to collective defence due to Russia's war in Ukraine. The European Union will continue, however, to represent a gateway for most European countries to channel

449 Mustasilta & Karjalainen 2022.

450 The EU's new Strategic Compass and NATO's updated Strategic Concept.

451 Examples of this are the EU's Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), the UK's Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF), Germany's Framework Nations Concept (FNC) and France's European Intervention Initiative (EI2), in which largely the same European countries participate. Utilizing coalitions of willing states is also mentioned in the EU's Strategic Compass.

non-military efforts to crisis areas, which means that its capacity to act independently in demanding circumstances will remain limited.

Ultimately, each international actor involved in an intervention must reflect on the balance between its own political motivations, the objectives it has set in relation to the conflict and the interests of the actors leading the intervention and how best to balance these factors. Many of our respondents hoped that in the future, Finland will seek to play a more active role within international interventions and use its voice to rectify shortcomings and challenges. The best avenues for this are likely to continue to be multilateral channels and NATO, now that Finland is a full member.

4.2 LESSONS LEARNED CONSIDERING FINLAND'S AGENCY

Finland's extensive involvement in Afghanistan's international intervention enables not only a comprehensive examination of its agency, but also the identification of broader lessons necessary for the future. We have categorized the learning needs related to Finnish foreign and security policy agency into four categories, based on our analysis:

- Objectives guiding Finland's efforts
- Quality and effectiveness of Finland's involvement
- Analysis and monitoring of efforts
- Human resources and use of expertise

It is important to distinguish the lessons identified in this section from those in the Finland as a Learner framework discussed earlier (see Section 3.1.3) where we introduced the justifications for Finland's involvement in the intervention: capability development, benefits and experience. This section examines what can be learned from the challenges and identified development areas to consider for the future.

Our analysis reveals that situations where the international community practises cooperation or tests and develops its capabilities in a vulnerable context, in which the risks and negative impacts on the local population and the development of its society have not been sufficiently taken into account, should be critically examined. When examining in this section the lessons for Finland to learn, we assume that, in addition to developing its own capabilities and partnerships, Finland will aim at higher-quality operations from the perspective of peace and security objectives.

4.2.1 Clarity of objectives guiding Finland's efforts

A wide range of objectives guide Finland's involvement in the international crisis management, reconstruction and peacebuilding efforts. They are related to Finland's international status and partnership relations, national security and capabilities, as well as international peace and the promotion of core values.

Diverse objectives are not a problem in themselves: they can contribute to political consensus and thus enable long-term actions. However, this diversity can pose challenges when the objectives invoke conflicting pressures and are not put into context in a deliberate and clear way in relation to each other. Ambiguous objectives also make evaluation of the logic and successes in the efforts difficult, predisposes operations to unsystematic monitoring of objectives, and can ultimately lead to ineffective actions (regarding all the objectives).[452]

The objectives that guided Finland's efforts in Afghanistan to strengthen partnership relations on the one hand and to stabilize the country, on the other hand, seemed to progress consistently and in tandem at first. However, over the course of the Downward Spiral period and the Transition period, the situation changed: the partnership objectives continued to provide an increasingly strong basis for involvement, even though from perspective of the Finland as a Benefactor framework and the objectives therein, the relevance and direction of the international intervention became more conflicting.

A particular problem was that the objectives for maintaining and strengthening partnerships were not clearly set and they were not seen as feasible for justifying Finland's efforts to the public. Therefore, continuing the efforts had to be justified by the progress made towards the crisis context objectives, although they had serious shortcomings and challenges. This, in turn, appears to have hampered formation of a realistic picture of the situation and a critical assessment of the efforts. Moreover, it does not seem to have encouraged the actors to address the problems of reconstruction and stabilization in Afghanistan.

A clearer and more transparent, at least at the administrative level, formulation of the various objectives, in different conflict and crisis contexts would be beneficial in many respects. For example, clear partnership objectives would make it possible to consider how much investment and what kind of participation would be required to promote the objectives

452 Limnéll & Salonius-Pasternak (2009, 10) described the rationale for involvement in ISAF as a 'variety store' already in 2009. They called for more open discussion on the significance of transatlantic relations for Finland and stated that "making strategically useful decisions on the operational and tactical level of actions is difficult" (ibid. 13, unofficial translation from Finnish) when the goals have not been clearly set.

in different contexts. This could contribute to appropriate allocation of resources.

Let's imagine two scenarios: In the first scenario, partnership is the primary reason for Finland to participate in a crisis management operation. Finland does not have strong objectives of its own because, for example, the situation is too distant and unfamiliar from the point of view of Finland's foreign policy and expertise. In such a situation, participating in everything may not be appropriate for Finland. It would be more pragmatically sensible to acclaim achievement of the partnership objectives with minimal resources (of course, in the most constructive and conflict-sensitive manner possible).

In the second scenario, Finland has clearer objectives and the necessary expertise for the context, which catalyses appropriate allocation of resources and prioritization of the objectives set for the situation. Without clear and transparent objectives for partnership and, for instance, capacity, involvement may also be disproportionate in situations such as the first scenario in order for involvement to appear driven by non-national interests.

Then again, clear and transparent objectives for political partnership and capability development may also encourage the actors to set clearer objectives for conflicts or crises, and ways to monitor their progress, provided that Finland maintains the will and pressure to act as a constructive benefactor in foreign policy. If decisions to participate (or continue to participate) in a particular operation are made more transparent in terms of partnership and capability development objectives, the way the actions would correspond to the Finland as a Benefactor framework would be more open for critical discussion.

Here, setting clear and realistic objectives and strategies for the crisis could help. If clear, situation-specific objectives had been set for the efforts in Afghanistan, Finland would have found it easier to plan its efforts and ensure that the objectives were consistent, both in terms of Finland's value-based policy and international relations. Setting clear objectives and principles to guide the efforts makes identifying related problems and challenges possible.

Managing multiple goals is particularly important from the perspective of Finland's comprehensive and triple nexus approach. As our analysis shows that the pursuit of a comprehensive approach has gained more and more importance in Finland's foreign and security policy over the past twenty years, and Afghanistan's experiences play a significant role in the development of this approach.

In Afghanistan, the concept of comprehensiveness was primarily as a framework to justify multidisciplinary and, in particular, military

involvement, rather than as strategic coordination of the various support measures. The emphasis on partnership and capability development objectives in steering Finland's efforts also raises the question of how comprehensively the development of a crisis context can be influenced if, for example, support for the lead nation and the desire to develop specific capabilities are the driving forces behind military involvement, while at the same time development cooperation responds to the resourcing of partner countries.

To be able to apply the comprehensive approach in practice, it is necessary to consider the impacts these various overarching objectives have on steering the operations and, therefore, on the operations overall.

Clear, realistic objectives concerning the crisis context itself are of key importance as regards the comprehensive approach. If there is a lack of knowledge pertaining to the intended outcomes of concrete support measures during a given period of time, predicting the combined impacts of the measures and how the big picture will take shape is difficult. For example, unrealistic objectives as regards timing prompt actions that seemingly produce rapid results, even if they are not sustainable in terms of the fundamental objectives.

When considering international intervention and impacting crises, pursuit of the comprehensive approach does not require Finland's involvement in all operations and subdivisions. Rather, efforts should be targeted in such a way that they contribute to the international support measures overall.

Examining Finland's target setting in relation to international crisis management and support is particularly topical today. It seems that the objectives associated with Finland's capabilities and interests are guiding decision-making more and more, particularly with regard to participation in crisis management.[453]

NATO membership will also affect Finland's foreign and security political considerations and grounds for involvement. It is therefore important to discuss how the interests associated with Finland's partnerships and capabilities guide its actions, for example, in relation to the human rights based nature of its foreign policy and the goal to operate comprehensively. It is also good to consider how to respond in possible situations where conflicts arise between the two. The fact that Finland's partnership and capability development objectives largely pilot its decisions to participate in crisis management is justified from the point of view of foreign

453 See, e.g., Minister of Defence Kaikkonen 2020 on the grounds for Finland's participation in crisis management. A report on Afghanistan by the Ministry of Defence (2022) also indicates that objectives pertaining to partnership and skill-building are now being discussed more openly. The shift in goal-setting is in line with developments at the EU level, which emphasize pragmatic decision-making and actions that reflect intrinsic interests alongside normative foreign policy actions. See, e.g., the EU's Global Strategy 2016.

and security policy, both with regard to Afghanistan and, for example, the Sahel region, and it is not in itself a barrier to well-doing.

However, based on our analysis, transparency in this is key so the conditions and limits set by the partnership objectives for the continuation, termination and changes in operations – in relation to the performance of the operations themselves and the development of crises – are clearly visible and thus also measurable.

Setting clearer and more transparent goals, of course, also involves risks. For example, would Finland's value-based foreign policy suffer if, for example, decisions to participate in crisis management were driven more openly by Finland's immediate national interests in connection with alliances and capabilities? Would the objectives of building good governance and defending human rights become less important if foreign and security policy interests became more prominent?

National interests can certainly still justify pursuing these goals, because failure to achieve them has been known to escalate conflicts and crises, ultimately endangering Finland's interests as well. As mentioned above, setting clear goals may strengthen accountability, also for those goals that stem more from Finland's benefactor role.

Also problematic from the point of view of democracy is if the Finnish public understands Finland's participation in a crisis management operation as due to the target country's needs, when in fact the reason is because of Finland's obligations to its partnerships. People's ability to understand Finland's diverse objectives should not be underestimated. Although not all foreign policy can be fully transparent, adequate transparency in decision-making and administration is essential with respect to the functioning and monitoring role of civil society.

It is assumed that political pressure to maintain Finland's foreign policy identity as an actor that strengthens peace and human rights will continue. Our primary data suggests that the will to maintain and strengthen Finland's role as a promoter of comprehensive security and peace, human rights and good governance is strong. Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine and the wider conflict with the Western world have also highlighted the importance of defending and acting on core values, although at the same time and above all it has put the issue of hard security at the heart of foreign policy.

Discussions in our diaspora workshops suggest that Finland's potential added value stems primarily from the areas of human rights and education. However, many of the respondents and participants emphasized that Finland should develop its participation, monitoring of its efforts and allocation of its resources to make a positive impact on conflicts and

crises in terms of peace and stability. We now turn to our attention to these lessons.

4.2.2 Participation versus influence within a broader intervention

The experiences in Afghanistan underline the importance for Finland to actively participate in international networks from the point of view of foreign and security policy objectives and the objectives for influencing the conflict.

Our data repeatedly elicits positive assessments of the benefits of involvement, not only in terms of tangible capabilities and broadened defence cooperation, but also more generally in relation to Finland's positioning as a part of the international and especially the Western community. Then again, many pointed out the limitations on how active Finland can be and how well it can make an impact within the international community. Although Finland was considered to have systematically raised certain issues, especially the rights of women and girls, on the international community's agenda, many stated that Finland was overly kind and went along with the others.

Of course, Finland's relatively small resources principally prevented it from having greater influence. Finland's feeble pursuit to exert influence may also be related to the fact that the partnership objectives significantly influenced what Finland did and in this light it was 'enough' for Finland to just be involved.

However, many of the respondents felt that Finland could and should seek to exert more influence in international interventions, if its investment is indeed quantitatively significant. On the one hand, the cooperation and dutifulness of Finland's actors are considered positive attributes, but on the other hand, the respondents felt Finland could express its own position more boldly.[454] One diplomat put it this way: "*If we are going to take part in these things, we have to use our voices.*"[455]Influencing within the intervention frameworks is not only about shaping intervention measures, but also about promoting Finland's other interests. Taking initiative can strengthen Finland's international position and also open doors for practising new skills and capabilities. Influencing crisis management and multilateral aid architectures requires proper human resources, as will be discussed below. Then again, maximizing the cost–benefit ratio of participation through active influencing within the operations takes

454 The matter has also been raised previously. For example, Häikiö (2010) wrote in *Helsingin Sanomat* that Finland should have made a bigger effort to influence the Obama administration and the EU in promoting its views on comprehensive crisis management in Afghanistan's intervention. Highlighting the importance of influencing, Häikiö stated, "Without our own quality control, crisis management can lead to unpleasant and surprising results."

455 Interview H11.

us back to the questions of what Finland is aiming for in a given crisis management or aid context and why Finland is involved.

When the motivations for participation are clearer and defined right from the beginning of the operations, targeting influencing efforts in contexts where Finland has clear objectives for the situation will be easier. In addition to adequate human resources (see below), being active requires international networking. For example, Finland could work with other Nordic countries to build ways of influencing specific international aid architecture situations on the basis of the long-term cooperation in Afghanistan.

As a member of NATO, Finland's international position, responsibility and influence may expand in many contexts in the future. Finland can now sit at the NATO tables full time, and thus having an influence is no longer dependent on participating in crisis management operations, such as in Afghanistan. Then again, as a NATO member Finland is obligated to support other NATO member states, and Finland must find its own role within the defence alliance. Here, the experiences in Afghanistan, as discussed under the Finland as a Learner framework, yielded advanced skills in cooperation in many areas, as well as tangible lessons on NATO's operations and decision-making processes.

The experiences in Afghanistan may also provide indication of Finland's possible roles and profile as a member of NATO. For example, Finland's national defence based on general conscription and the reserve force's civilian expertise in crisis management are valued in NATO. On the other hand, they play a different role in today's NATO, which focuses not on crisis management operations but on strengthening collective defence and maintaining deterrence.

The experiences in Afghanistan also taught how Finland can influence in the European Union, for example in the framework of the Union's Common Security and Defence Policy operations. In principle, Finland has more influence on operations in the European Union than in the United Nations, for example. Indeed, many respondents highlighted Finland's active role in promoting the establishment of EUPOL.

There were also dubious aspects to the setting up of the mission: the interviews revealed that EUPOL was established despite warnings of the unrealistic nature of it. Finland was a significant actor in EUPOL in terms of the number of experts seconded to the mission and headed the mission with two Heads of Missions, Jukka Savolainen and Pia Stjernvall.

However, the interviews give the impression that despite being active and giving effort to the mission, Finland's goals were unclear. Describing the attitude, one respondent stated, "*Finland deploys these people and*

then the EU *does something with them.*" The respondent called for more strategic influence on the mission, especially in Brussels.[456]

Many of the respondents felt that the experts seconded by Finland to EUPOL would have benefited from stronger national guidance on the direction and objectives of the mission, even on an individual level. It is legitimate to ask how much Finland benefited from EUPOL considering the investments Finland made in the mission and the modest results it yielded. Could Finland have been more active in improving the visibility of the operation in Afghanistan, for example? Is it enough of an achievement for Finland to have profiled itself as an active EU member in civilian crisis management to some extent?

The experiences in Afghanistan more generally support the critical observations made in Finland's civilian crisis management, whereby the purpose and objectives of participating in a civilian crisis management mission are not elucidated in Finland as openly as with participating in military crisis management, with the exception of quantitative objectives.[457]

The interviews also highlighted the European Union's potential but limited influence on the international intervention as a whole and Finland's influence through the EU. The European Union was seen as a supporter of the United States, which did not, at least visibly, question its strategy or policies, for example from the point of view of human rights.

In doing so, the European Union was obliged to observe and adapt to the United States' policy in Afghanistan, such as the schedule for withdrawal. The European Union's presence in the country was natural, as a large number of the EU countries invested in Afghanistan. The EU delegation was seen as a well-resourced and effective platform for coordination among the EU countries.

According to the interviews, however, the European Union could have played a more active role in influencing the intervention as a whole, especially during periods when the focus of the United States' policy was elsewhere. As with Finland, the respondents criticized the European Union for being content with being involved rather than actively influencing and achieving tangible goals. In practice, for example, the European Union's role in anticipating and implementing the evacuation was minimal. However, after the evacuation, the EU route to Afghanistan

456 Interview H37. Reports show that some efforts were made to exert influence. For example, the Foreign Minister's letter to High Representative Catherine Ashton drew attention to the need to develop EU practices to enhance the effectiveness of EUPOL's operations (Government report VNS 2/2011, 16).

457 Ketola and Karjalainen 2022.

is particularly important to Finland: unlike the national delegation, the EU delegation still operates in Kabul.[458]

One concrete observation, which has emerged regarding Finland's international profiling, is the idea of its role as a coordinator or facilitator at the international actor level. Although Finland did not particularly profile itself as a peace mediator in Afghanistan, some opportunities to facilitate contacts between the international actors presented themselves to Finland. The most visible example was the Afghanistan Conference in Geneva in 2020, which Finland organized and in so doing demonstrated its ability to bear burden in a difficult situation.

In addition to large facilitation tasks, Finns were considered suitable for bringing different parties together behind stage curtains, even in sensitive situations. Finland's relatively small role in Afghanistan contributed to this. In other words, the very fact that Finland is a limited actor in terms of resources and perhaps even interests may render opportunities to facilitate discussions between different actors and find common ground. Given Finland's emphasis on peace mediation, it would seem logical to take a more active facilitation role among the international intervention actors.

In terms of development cooperation, many of the respondents highlighted the need to focus support more strongly than before. Although efforts were made over time to better target Finland's support in Afghanistan, it was described as being fragmented until the very end. Disseminating aid to many different targets was influenced, at least in part, by the desire to remain involved in certain funding channels due to the partnership frameworks (LOTFA is an example). Then again, the comprehensive approach was behind the reason for this.

Ultimately, the question of the diversity or focus of funding targets is again related to what is to be achieved in each context and on what type of analysis are the actions grounded. As a small actor with a desire to influence the context, focusing on a few targets seems more appropriate than diversifying.

A closely related issue concerns effectiveness in relation to multilateral and bilateral channels, i.e., aid can be more easily channelled through smaller bilateral projects (such as local cooperation fund) in a preferable way, and actors can work more closely with the local civil society, for example. Then again, monitoring these small projects requires similar staff resources as multinational projects, and yet small projects are just a drop in the ocean. Influencing through multilateral channels, again, depends how active the actors are and their ability to lobby for their priorities. The impact, however, often remains dependent on the interests of other actors

458 Reuters 2022.

and their diligence in monitoring activities. Furthermore, the individual donors in multilateral channels are often more obscure. These issues are also intrinsically linked to human resources (see Section 4.2.4.).

Noteworthy is that participation in international operations and bearing burden are important factors in Finland's international positioning, especially now as our security environment is in flux. As the experiences in Afghanistan show, involvement can open institutional doors and develop broad bilateral and diplomatic relations. Involvement in Afghanistan opened up access to information and resources that Finland would not otherwise have had access to.

Finland's participation in NATO discussions and meetings improved the conditions to obtain information. Moreover, bilateral relations, especially with the United States and other coalition countries, also proved useful. The most tangible example of broadening bilateral relations was the United States' support in connection with the kidnapping of a Finnish aid worker. Some of the respondents also mentioned the exchange of information and coordination within the EU framework during the operation as being important for Finland's access to information regarding intervention and the development of the context in general.

4.2.3 Analysis, monitoring and preparedness

Assuming that Finland wants to develop its effectiveness in crisis management and development cooperation and to benefit from participating in international operations, our analysis suggests that the monitoring of Finland's operations and basing the monitoring on research should be reinforced.

First of all, conflict analysis plays a central role in Finland's lessons, also. We have already discussed the importance and need for conflict analysis at the level of international lessons. With respect to Finland's agency, the importance of conflict analysis emerges on two levels. As mentioned above, setting realistic and appropriate objectives requires proper analysis to be able to understand the social situation in the target area. The possibilities to carry out this analysis independently in Finland depend on how much expertise Finland has in the area in question and on network in which support is provided.

In any case, a small actor such as Finland must also create an understanding of the broader context of international support and operations. To be able to optimize involvement and understand the added value Finland can give, foreign and security policy planners and leaders need to understand the objectives and interests of the other international actors, especially the leading nations and other major actors in each situation. How do these interests fit in with the themes and areas of focus that are

important to Finland? What possible conflicts between different interests and objectives or threats are evident in the operating environment, and how can they be minimized? What types of roles are available to Finland, and how do they contribute to Finland's own diverse objectives?

As we pointed out earlier, conflict analysis is not a one-off exercise; rather, it must be updated regularly to reflect the understanding that accumulates. This underlines the role of independent and well-resourced research institutions in Finland, also.

Quick availability of broad-ranging expertise is key in constructing topical and comprehensive analysis. The role of local experts and researchers is significant in understanding many of the contexts which are distant to Finland. Then again, Finland also has a network of extensive expertise comprising, for example, NGOs and researchers around the world that can be easily contacted nowadays through hybrid and remote connections.

Moreover, engaging with and hearing the voices of the diaspora is an underused resource in constructing broad understanding. Engaging with the diaspora can be useful in conflict analysis, especially in perceiving the sentiment of the local population, provided that the diaspora has active connections and networks with the country or region in question. Important aspects in engaging with the diaspora are full voluntary participation, confidentiality, understanding the reasons behind the participants' perspectives and conflict sensitivity, for example, when bringing together participants from different areas. The making of this research report has in itself shown that listening to the Afghans living in Finland broadened the research team's perspective on the environment under investigation. It also allowed the researchers to compare the observations and assumptions made to different backgrounds and perspectives.

Our analysis also invokes qualitative development of monitoring and evaluation of actions, especially at the strategic level. A realistic and broad situational picture of the conflict, progress towards the objectives, the expected and unexpected results, as well as of the implications of the operations is crucial in terms of their development and outcomes.

Challenges in this regard constituted a fundamental problem in Afghanistan, which also affected Finland and, in fact, all the subdivisions. Our primary data revealed that even though the picture of the situation, which reached the capitals, was in no way a rosy one, but it was still far too optimistic. Many factors have certainly affected this.

The administrative and budgeting logic in both the development projects and in crisis management call for reports on positive progress and identification of continuing needs to ensure funding continues. Additionally, in Finland's case it also seems that the challenges in strategic monitoring and critical reporting were also related to its benefactor role

and difficulties in unlocking the reasons for partnership in the involvement. If a realistic picture had been given of the situation – and it had been critically monitored at all – the modest results of the measures and the disturbing developments in the situation should have been dealt with more. Then again, monitoring effectiveness was not a focal point in the Finland as a Partner framework, because being involved in itself was enough to fulfil the partnership objectives.

Appropriate objectives for the context and the theories of change set in relation to them, i.e., plans on how the operations are thought to reach the objectives, form the basis for monitoring and evaluation. In addition, defining the indicators for measuring the results and impacts is essential.

The development experts pointed out in the interviews that the policies for monitoring objectives, theories of change, results and impacts are relatively established in development cooperation and that crisis management could learn from this example. The typical reporting of the number of projects carried out, the number of meetings held or the number of persons participating in training, as is common in EU crisis management reporting, does not measure the effectiveness of operations. Measuring the success of projects becomes merely an evaluation of its participants and actions as opposed to measuring the projects' results and implications. Measuring potential impact requires separate indicators. The number of Finnish civilian crisis management experts around the world, which is often highlighted in Finland, does not on its own describe Finland's impact or is it a good indicator of it.

The indicators for monitoring and evaluating operations in development cooperation were also somewhat problematic. The reports described their own activities: how much money was spent on this and how much action was taken on that. Impact measurements and the impacts' relationship to operations were, however, unclear (such as the increase in school attendance, but how and for which reasons, and what kind of learning did it lead to).

Finland's development cooperation lessons from Afghanistan are also strongly linked to the dependence of monitoring and evaluation on multilateral frameworks through which aid was channelled. The respondents in the study called for more active lobbying and better human resources to be able to influence channels. The extent to which it was beneficial with respect to the wider picture for actors to lobby other donors in pursuit of their own priorities remains an open question. There were indeed other good priorities. Those responsible for planning foreign policy recognized in general that more independent third-party evaluations of the purposefulness of the operations would have been needed.

One possible development, which could also strengthen local ownership, would be to conduct baseline surveys among the locals more systematically. It should be done as early as the planning stage of programmes and operations and repeated as the operations progress and come to an end. In this way, operations could be better geared towards the local population's needs, and they could express their views on the developments in the situation and the benefits of the operations to use in evaluating the progress of the operations. This requires appropriate resources and planning.

To monitor the purposefulness of operations, a more systematic approach to follow-up with Finnish experts after assignments – coordinated by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, for example – could strengthen Finland's foreign and development policy planning with regard to particular country and region. Our interviews revealed, however, that follow-up was rarely done. Moreover, the acquired expertise of the people in different fields who served in Afghanistan was not evaluated, at least not systematically.

Strategically monitoring operations and achievement of objectives should also be reinforced in relation to the partnership and capability objectives. As we have highlighted in our report, there are doubts about whether the Finnish civilian crisis management experts were able to utilize their acquired skills after repatriation (see below). An important step in this is the monitoring and evaluation of the acquired skills. An evaluation of the partnership benefits in Afghanistan has also now been conducted ex post facto without clearly defined objectives and indicators. In the future, it would be good to consider the anticipated benefits of international relationships in more detail and how success in achieving them can be evaluated.

Our interviews raised a tangible proposal for improving Finland's comprehensive approach in the form of organizing one- to two-day workshops. The idea would be to bring together Finnish actors representing different subdivisions and operating in specific conflict or crisis contexts to take part in workshops at the earliest possible stage to construct a common understanding of the compatibility of practical measures, tasks, possible overlaps and borders and form a think tank for strengthening the comprehensive approach.[459]

It is important to note that investing in conflict analysis and monitoring the effectiveness and efficiency of operations is essential not only for improving the quality of operations, but also for anticipating the development of the situation. A realistic picture of both the conflict context and

459 Similar proposals have been made and to some extent implemented in the past (see Crisis Management Centre 2010, 6).

the international operating environment enables a more timely response in rapidly changing conflict environments. This, in turn, is essential for optimizing one's self-protection, for example.

The quality of the analysis ultimately affects how significant needs for change can be anticipated and addressed. A legitimate question to ask is whether the over-optimistic reporting on Afghanistan and the pressure to maintain the image of progress contributed to the surprise associated with the government's collapse in late summer 2021. Would Finland have been better able to prepare for the evacuation needs if everyone involved had had a more honest picture of the gravity of the situation?

4.2.4 Use of human resources and expertise

On a general level, our study suggests that the Finnish experts and personnel sent by Finland to Afghanistan worked in an impeccable and responsible manner. Our data do not give reason to doubt that Finland's actions in Afghanistan would have been plagued by problems with the quality of personnel and the "wrong people in the wrong place" phenomenon, as opposed to the United States.[460] Indeed, our data largely comprise Finnish actors' self-reflection and their subjective image of Finland and Finns as actors, which cannot, of course, be considered an objective assessment of quality.

Then again, Finland's international partners have expressed similar opinions. Respondents from both military and civilian crisis management felt that the Finns had performed their work with high quality, and they were appreciated. The expertise of Finnish reservists, in particular, seems to have been considered as a positive special feature in Finland's troops. The expertise they had acquired in their civilian professions and the skills they had in interacting with the locals emerged especially in the early stages of the intervention when the situation was still relatively calm. The versatile expertise, high level of education and professional integrity of the Finnish soldiers and experts supported Finland's international profile, and therefore investing in these areas will be worthwhile in the future, as well.

Our data showed that there was a lack of knowledge and skills in intercultural interaction and expressly in the context, history and culture of Afghanistan. Lack of knowledge and skills undermined the effectiveness of consultation work and training and led to situations where the provided support was not useful or sustainable. However, the deficiencies in cultural competence were not seen to concern Finns in particular; rather, it was a problem among the personnel in the international intervention in general. Individual cases of alcohol abuse were specifically mentioned as a

460 SIGAR 2021a.

problem with Finns. Several respondents raised the issue, and therefore it can be considered to have been more serious than a few individual cases.

Challenges related to human resources and using them were also evident in Afghanistan, and this is something to consider for the future. The first challenge is the above-mentioned insufficiency of human resources in relation to the amount of aid channelled into Afghanistan, assuming that there is a desire to influence the quality of the support. The diplomats and development cooperation experts, in particular, pointed out that influencing the international intervention and allocating Finnish support resources would have required both more people and a stronger presence.

There were also issues related to the strength of Finland's troops: the optimal size of the troops in terms of self-protection, for example, did not correspond to the political will. As discussed above with regard to the effectiveness the involvement, the questions pertaining to resourcing ultimately go back to the reasons and objectives of the efforts. If Finland really wants to influence either the crisis itself or the actions and priorities within the group of international actors, it must guarantee adequate human resources as per the needs of the intervention, not Helsinki.

A related question is that of a suitable rotation and duration of employment relationships for diplomats, officials working in Helsinki and the personnel deployed to crisis areas. Many of our respondents highlighted the challenges the rapid turnover in personnel imposed on the operational strategy. Rapid personnel rotation prevents the personnel from learning their tasks well, understanding the context properly and forming relationships with local and international stakeholders in the target country. Continual recruitment and training of new personnel require resources.

Then again, rapid rotation has been considered to prevent the excess burden on the personnel, which may have potential health risks. It may make the work more attractive to people and thus facilitate recruitment. At best, rapid personnel turnover may also prevent the processes from becoming personified, as long as institutional memory continues through systematic information management. Locally hired employees could have a key role here, in addition to investing in information management systems and how to use them.

The experiences in Afghanistan accentuate the need to acknowledge the deterioration of the security situation and understand when sensible use of the human resources is no longer possible. A respondent involved in civilian crisis management in Afghanistan described situations where, for example, a brief mentoring meeting in the ministry required several vehicles, security personnel and special arrangements for accommodation, in addition to personal safety equipment. The availability of the Finland's crisis management force was considered good compared to the

requirements set by some other countries for their forces, which could concern, for example, the presence of medical personnel. The general deterioration of the security situation and the increase in the need for and costs of self-protection, however, weakened implementing and strategic monitoring in all the subdivisions of the operations. In the future, the consequences of such situations with regard to the continuation of different operations, different subdivisions and individual projects must be carefully examined.

Lastly, we present a few observations on utilizing the expertise the personnel gained in Afghanistan after repatriation. From the point of view of Finland's military involvement, the respondents' considerations of how well the lessons learned in Afghanistan could be used in Finland were positive. The training of 2,500 Finnish soldiers, and especially the experiences gained during the NATO operation, and the experience in cooperation and leadership are considered to directly serve the needs of Finland's national defence.

The respondents who worked in civilian crisis management were more critical in their considerations of how useful the skills and knowledge they gained in Afghanistan are. They felt that they had acquired a limited amount of the professional skills they needed for their work in Finland. Moreover, they felt that other skills, such as language and cultural competence, remain unexploited in Finland.

Although work has been done in Finland to utilize the expertise of civilian crisis management experts, our analysis showed that more work needs to be done. Could, for example, the skills and knowledge of those who worked in Afghanistan be used more systematically for decision-making and collecting information during asylum processes? Additionally, could the expertise of those who worked in crisis environments be used to strengthen crisis preparedness and resilience in Finland?

4.3 LESSONS LEARNED CONCERNING AFGHANISTAN'S SITUATION

The current situation of the Afghans and of Afghanistan is a tangible consequence of the challenges and learning needs highlighted in our study. It is principally important to acknowledge that the international intervention, guided above all by the interests of the international actors, contributed to the developments that led to the collapse of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and to the current plight of the country.

The intervention shaped the power elite of Afghanistan's society and the economic and administrative structures of the state and was part of

the armed conflict. The intervention's impact on these issues is ambiguous, to say the least. The challenges of aid sustainability, aid dependency and local ownership materialized in the rapid collapse of the subsidized state administration and the economy when the United States made the decision to withdraw from Afghanistan and the pressure of the intervention abated. The Afghan security forces collapsed not because of their cowardice or inexperience, but because of the corruption and the system's sustainability problems that dominated their actions, its lack of legitimacy, and the forces' lack of faith in their ability to meet the Taliban's challenge in the long run.[461]

After more than a year since the Taliban's rise to power, the situation in Afghanistan is still difficult.[462] The sudden collapse of massive international aid in an aid-dependent country has undermined an economy which was already plagued by a historic drought and the COVID-19 pandemic. A large part of the population is in need of humanitarian aid and there are fears that the situation will worsen.

Although the Taliban's rise to power ended the war between them and the Republic of Afghanistan and the forces that supported it, political violence still strongly persists in Afghanistan. It should be noted that many of the ethnic groups and individuals whose situation with regard to human rights, for example, had improved during the international intervention are now in a particularly fragile situation. The Hazara minority, for example, is facing significant violence which experts say exceeds the risk of genocide under the Taliban regime and ISIS-K.[463] Also, the human rights of women in particular are being systematically trampled upon.

Then again, the Taliban regime has control of the entire country, and in many of the areas where civilians lived under the threat of air strikes and combat are now more peaceful. The Taliban regime is seen as having succeeded in collecting an extensive amount of tax revenues, and it is considered less corrupt than the republic in this regard. However, in the absence of lucid budgeting, it is not known how the current administration uses the tax revenues.

The international actors face a difficult situation. An authoritarian movement is in power which systematically oppresses a significant part of the population, especially women and girls, and whose commitment to eradicating international terrorism is questionable. There are blatant human rights violations and unpunished violence against civilians under the regime in Afghanistan. Even considering and negotiating economic

461 See, e.g., Schroden 2021

462 See Mustasilta, Ruohomäki & Stewart 2022.

463 The Hazara Inquiry 2022; Ochab 2022.

and other cooperation with such a regime would appear as a recognition of violent extremism to many Afghans.

Then again, the sanctions against the Taliban and freezing the relations with the current regime are contributing to the economic and humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. Humanitarian aid, which Finland has now focused on in Afghanistan since the Taliban seized power, can and must mitigate the risk of a humanitarian catastrophe. However, aid does not solve the root causes which create the need for continuous aid.

Reducing the sanctions and relaxing the economic policy towards the Taliban regime could ease the situation in Afghanistan in the short term. Nonetheless, an actor whose motives and visions of the state are even further from Western ideals than those of the previous regime, would become responsible for using the funds released from the sanction and sources of income.

Challenges and experiences of failure do not justify turning a blind eye to the development of Afghanistan. Nor can we hide behind a multitude of objectives in order to wash our hands of the current situation. Although neither the international coalition nor Finland had clear, uniform plans to support Afghanistan and to end the support, the goal was certainly not for the opposing side of the conflict to take over eventually.

The international actors' credibility also comes into question. In today's world power struggles, it is in the interests of the West and Finland to demonstrate commitment to the principles of democratic governance and respect for human rights and to acknowledge the challenges in their efforts in this regard. This is not the case in Afghanistan at the moment. Regarding the credibility of Finland's foreign political agency, continuing long-term support for women and girls in Afghanistan, which Finland also emphasizes, is particularly important.

How, then, can commitment be demonstrated in the current situation? First of all, keeping the situation in Afghanistan on the international agenda is essential. Our discussions with the Afghans living in Finland revealed concerns that Afghanistan will be abandoned and the Afghans forgotten. This fear was not so much ascribed to the amount of concrete support — on the contrary. The workshop participants were critical of the immense support given during the international intervention, which was perceived to be poorly planned and thus exacerbated corruption and injustice. There was more concern about taking the Afghans' current situation into account on the international agenda. Finland, for its part, can keep the situation in Afghanistan on the agenda. For example, membership in the UN Human Rights Council provides a front-row seat for addressing the situation of women and girls, as well as the situation of the Hazara community.

In terms of actual actions, our analysis invokes prioritizing research and conflict analysis in constructing knowledge and understanding. Projects such as this study support a better understanding of the challenges associated with intervention. However, this study does not replace the need for conflict analysis to understand the current situation in Afghanistan, how it is being shaped and the purposefulness of possible action. Conducting conflict analysis requires resources that enable local consultation, the use of extensive expertise and the collection and analysis of data.

Ways must be found to take into account the needs and priorities of the local people as a basis for action. Moreover, the focus of resources must be on listening to the diverse views of Afghans and identifying commonly shared needs and priorities. The Afghan diaspora in Finland has grown even more since the rise of the Taliban, and they have a proven interest in and awareness of the dialogue on the situation in Afghanistan and Finland's role. The diaspora is an important resource, and it would be inefficient not to use it when planning Finland's operations.

The changed international dynamics with regard to Afghanistan affect the possibilities for strategically coordinating actions. The United States continues to play an important role, particularly with regard to the assets of the Central Bank of Afghanistan and the sanctions policy in general. Then again, the United States' withdrawal has increased the real importance the United Nations in Afghanistan. UNAMA's agency suffered from the overwhelming dominance of the United States during the international intervention, but the significance of its long-term and continuous presence in Afghanistan is momentous in the current situation.

In the absence of a government to allocate support to, the international community's aid architecture needs to reform its channelling of aid, also. Aid continues to be channelled through multilateral funds, but now the aim is to reach the grassroots as directly as possible with the help of organizations.

The changes will allow for the practical application of the lessons learned, for example in terms of responding to the needs of the local population. This requires a shift in the mindset of the international actors regarding who will be involved and how much authority they will have in channelling multilateral funds and in setting priorities.

Without genuinely listening to the beneficiaries, there is a risk that the international actors' efforts to reform the aid architecture will not translate into practice at all. The importance of monitoring aid and communicating about it is also key, especially at the grassroots level, because at least part of the population is increasingly sceptical about the current administration and the arrival of aid. This again underlines the importance of monitoring the results and impact of aid, even in the current context

of limited aid. The experiences in Afghanistan should be taken as a serious lesson in how the beneficiaries understand that the amount of aid and the types of projects implemented have an impact on the success of the entire cooperation, of course in addition to the objective quality and nature of the aid.

From Finland's point of view, the importance of the European Union alongside the United Nations has become pivotal now as NATO has withdrawn from Afghanistan and the international efforts focus on the humanitarian and economic situation. Strategic consistency at the EU level is necessary not only to influence the international community but also to increase pressure on the Taliban regime. Clear expectations and framework conditions, specific to the operating environment, for economic and political relations are key. Being clear about what is actually expected and in which situations, as well as with whom actors accede to work, when it comes to human rights is also important. Commonly agreed practices should also be consistently monitored.

Finland should also consider the change in the Afghan society and the situation of various minority groups there in its refugee and asylum policy. A legitimate question is what Finland's obligation is, for example, with regard to the women who were trained in the police force over the years and who are now particularly threatened under the Taliban. Furthermore, in what circumstances is the human rights repression against women and minority groups under the Taliban regime interpreted as grounds for granting individual international protection to an asylum seeker who is identified as belonging to these groups?[464]

Our discussions also raised the concern that the current situation poses challenges related to family reunification, for example as regards the required documents, making the situation more difficult. The decisions made pertaining to Ukrainian refugees, both at the EU level and by individual states, demonstrate the ability to create new solutions when the situation so requires. Our discussions also brought about the idea of using student visas and scholarships to help Afghan youth.

464 After finalizing this research report in November 2022, the Finnish Immigration Service made a decision in December 2022 to grant asylum to all Afghan women and girls seeking asylum in Finland due to women's changed situation in Afghanistan. Prior to this decision, the policy stated that "women without a safety net" are considered one group in need of international protection (Finnish Immigration Service 2022d), yet that the situation of both women and the Hazara people varies from region to region and from person to person to such an extent that belonging to these groups is not sufficient grounds for a decision on individual international protection. The Finnish Immigration Service stresses that each asylum seeker is assessed individually, as per legislation. The asylum experts we consulted during the research process pointed out that it would be justified to consider whether systematic discrimination against women and human rights violations, as well as the Taliban regime's inability to protect minority groups facing violence are enough reasons for granting international protection to everyone belonging to these groups. According to the Aliens Act (301/2004, § 87), a person being persecuted in their home country or country of permanent residence as a result of belonging to a certain social group entitles them to asylum. Persecution includes both physical and psychological violence, discriminatory legal and judicial measures and unreasonable punishment.

To conclude, bearing in mind the regional aspect and the cross-border nature of conflicts and political violence with regard to the situation in Afghanistan would be worthwhile. Forgetting Afghanistan and leaving it in the hands of violent extremists would most likely backfire, causing the security threats and instability to spread. The tensions between Central Asian countries, particularly between Tajikistan and the Taliban regime, but also between Uzbekistan and the Taliban regime are already evidence of this spread. The Russian war of aggression in Ukraine and its consequences for the geopolitical situation in Central Asian countries may have an effect on the regional dynamics and thus enabling, for example, ISIS's local fiefdoms.[465] Finland and the European Union must take the regional context into account in conflict analysis and when identifying conflict prevention needs. The reopening of the Finnish Embassy in Islamabad is a useful step in increasing understanding and restoring regional presence.

465 See, e.g., Zardykhan 2022.

CONCLUSIONS

This report analyses Finland's involvement in Afghanistan's international stabilization and reconstruction efforts over a period of nearly twenty years. The aim was to clarify the overall picture of Finland's efforts and the grounds thereof, as well as to identify the lessons to be learned from them. It is worthwhile to summarize the main conclusions and discuss the study's limitations and challenges.

The shaping of Finland's efforts in Afghanistan can be described by the simultaneous nature of change and continuity. The context of early 2002, in which Finland embarked on a CIMIC mission to support the reconstruction of the post-conflict country changed significantly during the period under review, as observed in the overview (Section 2).

This changing operating environment, to which the international actors themselves contributed, shaped the nature of the international intervention, especially with regard to military crisis management and also Finland's participation in it. Then again, Finland's involvement and decision-making were characterized by considerable continuity in this significantly changing operating environment. The shift from a relatively calm environment to an active civil war, for example, does not seem to have led to a significant reassessment of whether to continue being involved. Our key observations based on our research questions help us understand this and Finland's agency in general:

1. Finland's efforts were motivated by multifarious objectives, which were not always clear or mutually consistent. We have categorized them in three frameworks: Finland as a Partner, Finland as a Benefactor and Finland as a Learner. In particular, Finland's efforts were guided by the desire to maintain and strengthen international partnerships. Within this framework, Finland aimed to direct its efforts towards well-doing, on the one hand, and using the opportunity to strengthen its capabilities on the other hand. Finland's efforts were not primarily grounded in Afghanistan's social context or local needs.
2. Overall, Finland is estimated to have benefited from and succeeded in Afghanistan in terms of partnerships and developing national capabilities and interoperability. Similarly, Finland benefited from the technical and political strengthening of cooperation with NATO, as well as the strengthening of its relations

with the Nordic countries and bilateral relations with, for example, the United States and Germany. It was also estimated that Finland raised its profile in the European Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) with its involvement in EUPOL. Then again, assessing how the different forms of involvement contributed to this and whether Finland's actions were cost-effective as regards the partnership objectives and its own capabilities is difficult ex post facto, as the objectives had not been clearly set during the intervention. As part of the wider group of international actors, Finland failed to attain the ambitious general objectives set for Afghanistan, including its own objectives, i.e., good governance and rule of law. During the intervention, positive changes took place in the areas of human development, which Finland had emphasized and highlighted on the international agenda. However, in the absence of a long-term strategy, the results of the efforts were not sustainable, and they had a low impact on society. Then again, Finland participated in an intervention that on a large scale caused corruption and resulted in the deaths of thousands of civilians.

3. Finland's efforts were a minor part of the multilateral international efforts and lacked clear national mission or programme objectives. Moreover, theories of change concerning the expectations of what was to be achieved in a given period of time were also lacking. In terms of the structure of the operations and multilateral funds, this is justified in itself. Challenges regarding the goals of stability and peace originated in the unrealistic goals at the international level and incongruous strategies to achieve them. The ambiguity of the nationally set goals was also problematic from the perspective of the comprehensive approach. Since Finland's efforts primarily served the framework of the international partnerships, justification for multidisciplinary participation shaped the approach, rather than it being a strategy to implement in Afghanistan.
4. Different fora have considered that Finland's concrete involvement in Afghanistan's support efforts was of high quality and appreciated. However, the expediency and impact of Finland's efforts were poorly monitored and assessed at the strategic level. The situation was described with optimism and the efforts' shortcomings were not given systematic attention. In general, Finland was perceived to have followed its international partners without questioning them, and its agency in the intervention was weak. This may have been influenced by the need to depict

development in a positive light and the efforts as appropriate to ensure continued support and work, as well as Finland's desire to profile itself as a flexible and constructive partner. Then again, from the point of view of international partnerships, being involved in general was enough to achieve the goals. There was a perceived disproportion between the financial contribution and the number of personnel, especially in development cooperation and diplomacy. In an environment imbued by international actors and different interests and priorities, Finland would have needed to have a stronger presence in order to influence the direction and substance of the intervention.

It is worth noting that the main findings in our study on the foundations of Finland's agency are in line with reports on other Nordic countries, such as Norway and Sweden. Likewise, the actions of our close partner countries were also seen as motivated by the desire to maintain and broaden essential international relations, which was considered a success. The reports by Sweden and Norway regarding the situation in Afghanistan are also critical in terms of both the results and the level of realism in assessing the situation, as well as in terms of tackling the challenges and shortcomings of the intervention.[466]

This report has also highlighted the limited attention given to the prerequisites for operations and the deteriorating security situation, as well as to the challenges and shortcomings of the intervention itself. Finland was not seen as being as affected by these challenges and shortcomings to the same extent as the other countries, nor was it considered to have had any opportunity to influence them. However, this interpretation did not take into account the impact of the bigger picture on how well Finland could achieve its goals, nor did it factor in the local population which considered the international actors primarily as part of the same intervention led by the United States.

Due to the multifaceted foreign and defence policy objectives and benefits, Finland will continue to participate in international crisis management and development efforts, in which international actors have their own national objectives, priorities and practices.

When participating in multinational interventions, Finland must expect that it will find it difficult to manage the beliefs and perceptions associated with Finland by third parties. The intervention's challenges and shortcomings are also associated with Finland in the eyes of the local population and third parties, which may affect Finland's credibility as

466 See the Norwegian Commission on Afghanistan 2016; Afghanistanredningen 2017; Pain 2021.

a human rights actor, for example. For small actors such as Finland, it is essential to try to influence the nature of the intervention as early as possible in the planning phase, through networking and realistic conflict analysis. At the same time, it is important to assess how consistently the principles of Finnish foreign policy can be followed in different operating environments.

Our research has broadly examined Finland's involvement in international intervention in Afghanistan, focusing on the rationales of the operations and their consequences. This big picture and year-long research project excludes many issues, especially detailed analyses of the sectors of participation. For example, in the case of development cooperation, the analysis focuses on the nature of Finland's efforts and how multilateral funds shaped them and what this meant, as well as the related challenges and lessons learned, without going into detail about individual programmes and projects. Further questions based on our research findings could be, for example, how Finland's rhetorical emphases in international forums in Afghanistan affected the substance of support measures and whether they were reflected in Finland's efforts as qualitatively different, tangible measures compared to other countries.

Also beyond our research focus and capacity is a detailed analysis of Finland's military efforts, which would require access to non-public documents. Our interview data indicated a clear change in the nature of the operations and the involvement of Finnish troops in combat situations during the ISAF mission. Our research also helps to understand how Finland became involved and why the change in the operating environment was not followed by thorough discussion and assessment of the consequences.

It may be useful for the future to examine Finland's legal and democratic capacity to respond to rapidly changing crisis management environments or situations where Finland's efforts may require the use of force against an enemy that is difficult to identify. Further, our research does not address development of measuring the impact of Finland's efforts in conflict and crisis contexts. Our research does, however, provide some indication of this by highlighting the lack of critical monitoring of efforts and by underlining the basis of Finland's efforts in goals that were not directly related to the crisis context.

The added value of our research lies in our extensive primary data. According to the research group's own assessment, comprehensive sampling and confidentiality have produced high-quality data, which contributes significantly to both the research and public discussion of Finland's agency in crisis management and support contexts.

There are also noteworthy aspects to this. The interviews encompass perspectives, experiences and descriptions voluntarily shared with us, which are ultimately always tied to time and place. Although we emphasized to the respondents that they should recall their time working with Afghanistan when disclosing their views and experiences. However, the impact of today's realities on the discussions could not be completely prevented. This was evident, for example, in the emphasis placed on the benefits of NATO partnership in a situation where in the spring and summer of 2022 it was politically appropriate. As we pointed out in our analysis, the question in the end goes back to the lack of transparency in the partnership objectives, which guided the intervention: how would the success of the objectives be assessed if the security situation in Europe today were different?

In accordance with our mandate, we do not analyse the conflict situation in Afghanistan. Our primary data focus specifically on perspectives related to Finland's agency. Here, too, our data rely very heavily on the self-reflections of the Finns who were involved in the intervention. Additionally, the perspectives of the people of Afghan origin residing in Finland, local representatives hired in Afghanistan and representatives of the partner countries have provided extremely salient reflections on Finland's efforts.

Our research has highlighted a number of observations and lessons which are relevant beyond Afghanistan. As regards the goals of stability and peace, the lessons learned add up to the importance of clear, realistic goals to guide efforts and to piloting interventions primarily according to the needs of the societies and populations, which are the target of support.

This is of course difficult in the context of fragile states and contemporary conflicts, as the operating environment is typically characterized by the diversity of actors, changing conflict dynamics, the weakness of state administrations and mistrust towards them. The cornerstone of intervention must be a current understanding of the operating environment and its complex societal dynamics. Understanding the dynamics helps to identify key local owners of change, their networks and interests and how these meet the needs of the local population and framework conditions of the donors, such as their values and goals.

Our research sheds light on the plethora of reasons for the efforts and the limitations of agency, particularly in the case of small actors such as Finland. When entering into international intervention, it must be assumed that the circumstances prevailing at the time of the initial decision will change, presumably changing the needs and expectations regarding the nature of the involvement. To ensure the efforts are consistent and

strategic, the reasons for involvement, the context-specific objectives and exit plans must be clear, and they must be open to discussion.

Understanding the limitations of the lessons learned is just as important as recognizing them. Drawing conclusions about the hopelessness of international crisis management, democracy support or peacebuilding on the basis of the international intervention in Afghanistan would be hasty. Many of the identified challenges also apply to other international aid architectures, but instead of falling into despair, this should encourage the implementation of alternative approaches and identified lessons. Drawing conclusions, based on the outcome of the intervention, about the Afghan people's views on democratic governance or human rights would also be hasty and arrogant. Seeing human rights only as a privilege advocated in the West is as inconsiderate as establishing off-the-shelf state institutions in a foreign context.

The continuing protests against the Taliban regime to end the deprivation of women's liberties are evidence of the Afghan people's desire to live freely. At the same time, getting protection from air strikes, providing food for oneself and one's family, and engaging in livelihoods are important basic needs anywhere, and the rupture of them makes abstract speeches on equality problematic.

It is more a question of how rights and needs are advocated in different situations and from whose perspective, and how this fits into the context. This, in turn, comes back to the question of the donors' own objectives and motives. As in Finnish foreign policy in general, when operating in conflict and crisis environments, wisdom begins with acknowledging the facts, both in terms of the reasons for one's actions and the nature of the situation.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1: RESPONDENTS BY SUBDIVISION

Diplomacy	14
Development cooperation	11
Politician	7
Civilian crisis management	13
Military crisis management	14
International partners	5
Total	64
Females	21
Males	43

In addition to the above-mentioned interviews, the researchers had several discussions with experts familiar with Afghanistan and Finland, including researchers, officials and practical actors, the purpose being to gain background knowledge of the topic.

Also, a total of 44 people participated in workshops for Afghans living in Finland in May 2022. A total of twelve people not affiliated with the Finnish Institute of International Affairs attended the workshop for crisis management experts.

APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW BATTERY

1. Would you tell us about your work in Afghanistan and the situation there at the time?
2. What were the main objectives of the work in which you participated?
3. More broadly, what did Finland aim to achieve by participating in the reconstruction and stabilization of Afghanistan?
4. Where did the objectives that guided your work in Afghanistan come from? If the objectives came from several stakeholders (e.g., Finland, the mission, international partners), how were they prioritized?
5. How realistic and clear were the objectives, given the resources available and the operating environment?
6. How were the objectives pursued, that is, what strategy or broader approach guided the activities?
7. How were the other international actors in the same areas and assignments taken into account in your work; what about the Afghan actors?
8. Did the objectives and main activities change during your engagement with Afghanistan?
9. How were the results and implementation of the activities monitored or evaluated?
10. How were the objectives pursued, that is, to what extent were they achieved?
11. What positive consequences do you think Finland's efforts in Afghanistan had for the Afghans?
12. What positive consequences did Finland's efforts in Afghanistan have for Finland?
13. How do you think Finland "fared" in relation to our partner countries and other international actors in general?
14. What were the main challenges of the activities you participated in, and what were their consequences?
15. What negative consequences did the activities have for Afghanistan (and the Afghans) and Finland?
16. How were the challenges and potential negative impacts taken into account?
17. What lessons can and should be learned from Afghanistan for the future? What changes are needed in different institutions, among different stakeholders and at different decision-making and implementation levels?
18. What lessons has Finland already learned from the experiences in the Afghanistan mission?

CONTRIBUTORS

Katariina Mustasilta works in the European Union research programme at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs. She is the leading researcher in the Finland in Afghanistan project. Her research focuses on political violence, conflict, international conflict prevention and crisis management efforts. She has recently published peer-reviewed research on EU conflict prevention and the role of non-state actors in conflicts, among other topics. Mustasilta has previously worked at the European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) and in various roles related to peacebuilding and conflict analysis. She holds a PhD from the Government Department at the University of Essex. In her doctoral dissertation, she investigated the role of traditional governance structures in countries' internal conflicts in sub-Saharan African states.

Tyyne Karjalainen is a researcher in the European Union research programme at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs. She researches the European Union's foreign, security and defence policies and the Eastern neighbourhood policy, which is also the topic of her doctoral dissertation at the University of Turku. Her publications have addressed issues such as differentiated integration in the European Union, crisis management and peace mediation. Karjalainen has previously worked in the European Union Advisory Mission (EUAM) Ukraine and at the Crisis Management Centre Finland research unit. She holds a master's degree from the Tampere Peace Research Institute at the University of Tampere. In this report, she contributed especially to the research on Finland's military participation and civilian crisis management.

Timo R. Stewart is a senior research fellow at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs. His areas of research are related to relations between Europe and the Middle East. Stewart previously worked at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in the team which organized the 2020 Afghanistan Conference for aid pledging. He has also worked in non-governmental organizations in roles related to conflict resolution and conflict analysis. In addition, he was a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Helsinki. He is particularly interested in the role of religion and nationalism in politics and conflicts. Stewart's peer-reviewed book *Valter Juvelius ja kadonneen arkin metsästys* (Valter Juvelius and the search for the lost ark) (Gaudeamus, 2020) was a nominee for the Finlandia Award for nonfiction in 2020. In 2021, he was chosen for the Lauri Jäntti Award for nonfiction. Likewise, Stewart's latest work *Luvatun maan lumo* (Enchantment of a promised land) (Gaudeamus, 2022) was a Tieto-Finlandia Award nominee.

Mathilda Salo worked at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs as an expert for the Finland in Afghanistan 2001–2021 research project. Salo has a master's degree in political science from the University of Helsinki and is versed in violent non-state actors in the Middle East. Together with Leading Researcher Katariina Mustasilta and non-resident Senior Fellow Olli Ruohomäki of the Finnish Institute of International Affairs, Salo examined non-state armed groups from the perspectives of their governance and local legitimacy in the FIIA Working Paper published in summer 2022. Salo has also written for the Ulkopolitiikka (foreign policy) magazine and worked in the research communication team at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs.

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FINLAND IN AFGHANISTAN 2001–2021:

FROM STABILIZATION TO ADVANCING FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY RELATIONS

The Taliban's quick rise to power in August 2021 marked the end of the international intervention in Afghanistan. Finland was involved in the stabilization and reconstruction of Afghanistan through efforts in military crisis management, civilian crisis management, development cooperation, humanitarian aid and diplomacy. This study analyses Finland's efforts and the underpinnings of them in an intervention that lasted for nearly twenty years. It also identifies key lessons to apply in future crisis and conflict situations.

Finland's efforts in Afghanistan were piloted primarily by the desire to maintain and deepen international partnerships in foreign and security policy. The goals set for Afghanistan and the strategic monitoring of the efforts fell into second place on the list of priorities. Moreover, the efforts themselves were not based on a comprehensive or realistic understanding of the situation. This is evident from an analysis of extensive interview data.

The study highlights the importance of conflict analysis, setting clear goals, monitoring and evaluation as well as sufficient resourcing. These lessons are examined in the context of the main developments in Finland's foreign and security policy environment. /

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