# Ten Years of the United Nations in Afghanistan: A Closer Look at Recent History and a Glimpse into what Lies Ahead

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## Resumo
### Dez Anos da ONU no Afeganistão: Um Olhar Próximo sobre a História Recente e um Vislumbre sobre o Futuro

A missão da ONU no Afeganistão sofreu várias transformações desde o seu estabelecimento em 2001, aquando da Conferência de Bona. Ao longo da última década o Afeganistão tem enfrentado um conjunto complexo de desafios nas áreas de segurança, desenvolvimento e governação. A *United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan* (UNAMA) e outras agências da ONU em serviço no país têm enfrentado o desafio de constantemente se adaptarem à evolução das condições no terreno, e que é espelhado nas sucessivas renovações anuais dos mandatos através das Resoluções do Conselho de Segurança.

Com o processo de transição em curso, o papel da comunidade internacional no apoio ao Afeganistão sofrerá modificações substanciais no sentido de mais e maiores *inputs* internacionais no âmbito da componente civil. Sem dúvida, no actual processo de transferência de autoridade para os afegãos, a ONU tem e terá (bem para além de 2014) uma acção primordial.

Ainda que a missão das Nações Unidas no Afeganistão seja uma das mais importantes, recentemente deu-se início a um debate entre a liderança Afegã e os doadores internacionais sobre o modelo de envolvimento, o papel e a estrutura da ONU durante e após o período de transição.

Neste contexto, quaisquer projecções sobre o papel futuro da organização no Afeganistão devem ter em linha de conta três questões estruturais: a sua adequação aos objectivos de médio e longo prazo do país; em coordenação com o governo Afegão, o estabelecimento de um calendário claro e orientado para a consecução de objectivos relativos à transferência de responsabilidade na condução de actividades de apoio ao desenvolvimento; e o aperfeiçoamento da gestão através da racionalização das operações da organização por intermédio da aplicação do princípio de "*One* UN".

## Abstract

*Since the original vision for the United Nations (UN) work in Afghanistan was laid out in the 2001 Bonn Conference, its role has undergone a number of transformations. Over the last decade, Afghanistan has faced a complex array of challenges in the realms of security, development and governance. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and other UN entities working in the country have had the difficult task of adjusting to the changing situation on the ground, which has been reflected in the annual renewals of UNAMA's mandate through UN Security Council Resolutions.*

*With the transition process now underway, the role of the international community and its assistance in Afghanistan will undergo massive changes, towards a larger emphasis on international civilian input. Undoubtedly, in the current transition to Afghan leadership and ownership, the UN will play an important support role not only through 2014 but in the following years.*

*While Afghanistan remains one of the UN's key engagements, a debate has begun among the Afghan leadership and international donors about the commitment, role, and structure of the work of the UN during transition and the post-transition period. Any projections about the future role of the UN in Afghanistan should focus on three overarching issues: reflecting the medium and long term goals of the country; a clear action-oriented timeline for transitioning the lead role for development activities and coordination to the Government; and improved management through applying the "One UN" concept for streamlining UN activities.*

### Introduction: The UN and Afghanistan, 2001-2009

In the last decade, the role of the United Nations (UN) in Afghanistan has been characterized by an increase in the scope of its operations and assistance programmes. Although the UN started with a light footprint model at the 2001 Bonn Conference, throughout the decade its mandate and presence have expanded considerably. As a result, the goals outlined in each of the annual mandate renewals, most recently as expressed in Security Council Resolution 1974 (S/RES/1974), have been defined in increasingly broad terms.

*2001: The Brahimi Report, the Light Footprint Model, and the Bonn Conference*

The initial goals of the United Nations in Afghanistan were conveyed in the Bonn Conference in December of 2001. These goals were developed in the context of the strategic review of UN Peacekeeping operations conducted in 2000 as described in the Brahimi Report, and in light of the ensuing concept of the "light footprint" model, prioritizing the transfer of governing responsibilities to national governments. The Brahimi Report emphasized improving effectiveness and efficiency of UN Peacekeeping operations. According to the light footprint concept, the UN must avoid creating "dual systems" alongside national governing structures, due to the fact that they "undermine local authority, hinder coordination, and precipitate competition" (Brahimi, 2007: 4).

The idea of the light footprint model and UN Peacekeeping's focus on avoiding parallel structures influenced the vision for Afghanistan at Bonn significantly; the original mandate for the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) stresses that UN bodies should use a minimal number of international staff and focus on a timely transfer of power to an Afghan authority. Furthermore, the mandate lays out a detailed timeline for the transfer of authority, from the initial Afghan Interim Authority to a Transitional Authority, and finally to the elected Government of Afghanistan. The architects of Bonn recognized that historically, foreign interventions in Afghanistan have been unsuccessful. By attempting to implement a light footprint approach after 2001, they hoped a minimized UN presence would lead to a strong and stable Afghanistan. As the situation in Afghanistan unfolded, however, the role of the UN shifted in response to a multitude of factors. This shift is illustrated by the subtly changing language of the yearly Security Council Resolutions that renew UNAMA's mandate.

*UN Security Council Mandates*

The Security Council mandates, which give UNAMA the international authority to continue operations in Afghanistan, are an important gauge of the UN's level of involvement in the country's security, politics, economy and humanitarian affairs. The mandates also reflect the numerous external factors affecting UNAMA's responsibilities, and the increasing complexity of the situation from 2002 – 2007. UNAMA's initial mandate states that its purpose is to "…play a central role in supporting the efforts of the Afghan people to establish urgently such a new and transitional administration leading to the formation of a new government" (UN Security Council, S/RES/1378). The mandates of 2002 and 2003 stress "quick impact projects," which transfer authority to Afghan officials as swiftly as possible (UN Security Council, S/RES/1510). These earlier mandates therefore appear to incorporate the concept of the light footprint model, using language which assures that the UN's focus was on the hand-over of responsibility to the Afghan leadership.

A major shift in attitude and language occurred in the UN Security Council Resolutions from 2005 – 2007, during which the mandates for UNAMA's renewal became lengthier, as a reflection of the developing crisis in Afghanistan. The increase in the length of each mandate is an indicator of the UN's amplified involvement in the country: the 2002 resolution is only two pages long, while the 2011 resolution is twelve pages (UN Security Council, S/RES/1378 & 1974). The ten pages added over the course of the last decade reflect the increasing involvement and responsibilities of UNAMA and other UN agencies each year.

In 2005, the Security Council added the phrases, "reform of the justice system;" "election monitoring;" and "helping deal with the reintegration of militia forces" to UNAMA's responsibilities (UN Security Council, S/RES/1589). A year later, the Security Council explicitly recognized the intense complexity of the situation, in language rarely used in previous resolutions. The 2006 resolution states:

> *"Recognizing once again the interconnected nature of the challenges in Afghanistan, reaffirming that sustainable progress on security, governance and development, as well as on the cross-cutting issue of counter-narcotics, is mutually reinforcing and welcoming the continuing efforts of the Afghan Government and the international community to address these challenges…"* (UN Security Council, S/RES/1707).

By highlighting the "interconnectedness" of the issues in Afghanistan, the UN implicitly acknowledged its involvement in diverse aspects of aid and reconstruction and that UNAMA had grown to encompass a wide spectrum of

duties. For example, UNAMA's involvement in election monitoring, counter-narcotics efforts, infrastructure development and anti-corruption efforts all extended beyond its original mandate. The increased number of UN entities operating under UNAMA's umbrella in Afghanistan, which is now over thirty, are evidence of its expansion across the country and demonstrate a divergence from the light footprint approach.

The UN's increased footprint could be justified by the weakness of the inherited governing institutions and the simultaneously increasing instability of the security situation. The weakness of Afghan government institutions in the aftermath of the Taliban was understandable given the state of Afghan civil society as a result of internal fighting, insecurity and the nature of the Taliban regime. The Taliban were a national security "government," which functioned more as a dominant militia group; they did not have real governing institutions beyond their security muscles, and as a result, they paralyzed almost all useful governing institutions and bureaucracy in the country. Afghan governing institutions nonetheless made significant progress after the Bonn Conference; the assistance of the UN and the international community laid the framework for a functioning government. However, a continuing role of the UN to manage aid funding and other key aspects of governance was viewed by some as having an adverse effect on the strengthening of national governing institutions. This created a classic self-perpetuating dependency cycle: the UN responded to weak institutions by increasing its presence in vital areas of governance, and because of the increase in the presence of the UN, the Afghan Government's institutions became more dependent. This dependency cycle encompasses more than just budgetary issues. As knowledge and know-how, which are essential for effective governance, continue to strengthen the UN system and capacity in the country, the Government of Afghanistan further relies on the UN for these vital elements.

Starting in 2006, as the situation continued to worsen and the specter of renewed internal conflict loomed, the UN's responsibilities increasingly resembled its role during the crises of the 1990s. The deteriorating security situation both exacerbated the internal weakness of Afghan institutions and further increased the presence of the UN. As the UN grew, especially in relation to aid and development, it was in a better position to help in humanitarian crises where the Government had little presence during the period of increasing instability from 2006-2009. However, building stronger national governing institutions is central to any post-conflict reconstruction mission; a lack of robust national institutions further perpetuates the potential for a continuing dependency cycle.

### 2009 to Present

In 2009, Afghanistan's second presidential election stirred the nation towards a new beginning. These elections occurred during a period of insecurity in many parts of the country, accompanied by a shift in the leadership of the United States and other nations involved. In addition, an emerging sense of fatigue in some countries that supported Afghanistan led to a negative debate that influenced broader public opinion. It is within this context that a consensus emerged between the UN and relevant stakeholders that the UN should act as a reference point between opposing forces within Afghanistan as well as in the international community.

In 2010, the Afghan leadership and the international community began to discuss the need to transition to Afghan leadership and ownership in the country. The London Conference of January 2010 and the Kabul Process, created in June 2010 at an international conference in Kabul, reflect the agreement for a transition to Afghan--led security, development, and governance. In reference to the UN's role in Afghanistan during the transition, the main document of the Kabul Process, referred to as the Kabul Communiqué, states:

*"Participants affirmed their support for relevant United Nations Security Council Resolutions upholding the security, prosperity and human rights of all Afghans and in particular the central role of the UN to support the Afghan Government's efforts in achieving these goals"* (Kabul International Conference on Afghanistan, 2010).

UNAMA continues to play the role of lead international coordinator as outlined in UN Security Council Resolution 1974, which stresses that "UNAMA and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General within their mandate and guided by the principle of reinforcing Afghan sovereignty, ownership, and leadership, will continue to lead the international civilian efforts in accordance with the London and Kabul Conference Communiqués…" (UN Security Council, S/RES/1974). Such a role, as laid out in the resolution, involves co-chairing the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board (JCMB), in cooperation with the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), as well as leading international civilian efforts.

The lead coordinating role has been central to the mandate of the UN from the outset of the Bonn Process, through the establishment of UNAMA and the appointment of the Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG), who leads the UN Mission in Afghanistan. UNAMA acts on behalf of the international community in co-chairmanship of the JCMB with the Government of Afghanistan, and both bodies are tasked with jointly assuming responsibility for organizing the use of resources for achieving national priorities.

### Afghanistan and the UN in 2011 and Beyond

In shaping the role of the UN in Afghanistan through 2014 and beyond, with the transition to full Afghan responsibility, a number of key issues should be addressed. Through the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1974 on 17 March 2011, which extended UNAMA's mandate for another year, the UN Security Council called for a comprehensive review of the UN's mandate in Afghanistan. The Government of Afghanistan in a letter to the UN Secretary General from Afghanistan's Minister of Foreign Affairs requested the review in March 2011. The Secretary General subsequently responded to the letter of the Foreign Minister, welcoming the requested review.

The mandate review, which will link the UN-mandated activities of UNAMA and the support role of the UN in Afghanistan with the needs of transition, is essential for ensuring Afghan sovereignty, and national ownership and leadership in the country. Security Council Resolution 1974 requested that "the Secretary General conduct a comprehensive review of UNAMA's mandated activities and the UN's support in Afghanistan, including UNAMA's presence throughout the country, in consultation with the Afghan Government and relevant international stakeholders, by the end of 2011, with the aim of strengthening national ownership and leadership consistent with the Kabul Process, taking into account the evolving nature of the international community's presence and the role of ISAF, and including first experiences with the Transition, with a view to informing the Council's review of UNAMA's mandate in March 2012;" and called on all actors concerned to cooperate with UNAMA in this process (UN Security Council, S/RES/1974).

Any projections about the future role of the UN in Afghanistan should focus on three overarching issues: reflecting the medium and long term goals of the country; a clear action-oriented timeline for transitioning the lead role for development activities and coordination to the Government; and improved management through applying the "One UN" concept for streamlining UN activities.

### The Main Elements of an Evolving Mandate

*Aid Coordination and Development Strategy*

A strategically designed and well-orchestrated transition is essential in order to transfer the central coordinating role to the Government of Afghanistan. Greater control over assistance funding would strengthen the effectiveness of the Afghan

Government in the political, development, and security realms, and would help eliminate the peril of parallel structures. The JCMB and the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) provide a useful framework for shifting aid coordination to the Afghan Government. President Hamid Karzai has called ANDS "an Afghan-owned blueprint for the development of Afghanistan in all spheres of human endeavor" (Afghan National Development Strategy Executive Summary 2008-2013). ANDS represents a cohesive long-term plan for Afghanistan, through which it can continue to achieve its political, development, and security goals. Participants at the London and Kabul Conferences supported the continuing role of JCMB during the transition (Kabul International Conference on Afghanistan, 2010). Nevertheless, the JCMB's role along with other entities should be adjusted over time to reflect the transition to Afghan leadership and ownership. Ultimately, an independent Afghan national coordinating body would not only coordinate international and national efforts, but should also take on the responsibility of managing resources. While Afghan leadership gradually increases, the UN will work closely with the Government of Afghanistan, and will continue to play an essential support role.

*Elections*

As a sovereign state, Afghanistan is responsible for administering its own elections; however, as an emerging democracy, there is also a need for the Government to reform its electoral process. The Government of Afghanistan has expressed its strong commitment to facilitating electoral reforms. However, if requested by the Afghan Government, the UN will support the reform process; this role is maintained in the existing mandate. UNAMA has played a critical role in the past towards building the capacity for free and fair elections in the country. During the 2005 and 2009 elections, UNAMA administered and financed election support and all international election aid was channeled through the UN.

In future elections, the Government of Afghanistan can benefit from the support of the international community, particularly given the plethora of experience of the UN; at the same time, a leadership role for the Afghan Government in the elections process will help avoid some of the wariness that posed a challenge during the last elections. The Constitution of Afghanistan requires that the Independent Election Commission have the authority to supervise and monitor elections, and the transition is reinforcing this provision (Afghan Constitution Commission, 2004).

*Reconciliation and Reintegration*

Afghan ownership of reconciliation and reintegration is the key for a successful peace process. Through the establishment of the High Peace Council (HPC), Afghanistan took a substantial step in assuming leadership of reconciliation efforts to help bring together all segments of Afghan society around the peace process. The Government of Afghanistan's reconciliation and reintegration programme involves reintegrating those who are verifiably willing to renounce violence, sever ties with terrorist groups, and accept the Afghan Constitution. Much progress has been made in the first year of Afghanistan's Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP); over 2,400 former militants have rejoined the country in over twenty-three provinces.

The UN Security Council contributed to the Government of Afghanistan's reconciliation efforts through passing resolution 1988, which paved the way for separating the *Taliban* and *Al Qaeda* sanctions lists and to de-listing fourteen former *Taliban* members who have joined the peace process. Going forward, the continued support of the United Nations for the Afghan-led process will be crucial to the success of the APRP.

The UN, with its extensive experience in political negotiations and conflict resolution, can be a valuable support for the peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan. The UN role can also be envisaged as supporting the Afghan Government's efforts and providing facilities for the APRP, while simultaneously supporting the framework of regional diplomacy.

*Governance, Rule of Law and Human Rights*

The support role of the United Nations includes all priority areas of the Government of Afghanistan. These include assisting the efforts of the Afghan Government in improving governance, promoting the rule of law and strengthening human rights. In all areas, Security Council resolution 1974 of 2011, which renewed UNAMA's mandate, highlights more explicitly the supporting role of UNAMA.

In the mandates of previous years, the supporting role of UNAMA has also been emphasized. Throughout the last decade, such a need for and reliance on the UN encouraged UNAMA to engage extensively with all Afghan institutions at all levels. As a result, Afghan institutions began to rely upon the UN, turning a relationship of support into one of dependence. The ability of Afghan institutions to grow stronger and more independent was thereby stalled. Ten years after the UN began its work in Afghanistan, with the emergence of new institutions and increased capacity there is a real need to put Afghan institutions in a central position for addressing governance, rule of law, and human rights.

*UN Coherence and "Delivering as One"*

The mandate renewal of 2011 reiterates "the need for all United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, through the Country Team mechanism and a "One UN" Approach and under the guidance of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, to achieve greater coherence, coordination, efficiency and full alignment with the National Priority Programmes identified by the Government of Afghanistan" (S/RES/1974). The "One UN" approach refers to the streamlining and coordination of efforts that aims to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of any United Nations Country Team (UNCT). The idea of having more integration and coherence between UN entities, particularly funds, programmes and agencies related to development and aid efforts, has long been on the UNAMA agenda.

To better understand the issues surrounding UN coherence in Afghanistan, it is useful to examine other recent United Nations assistance missions. The nature of transition to national governments in countries with a significant UN presence varies from nation to nation; in some countries, the UN shifted to a new role defined by the "Delivering as One" project, as in Tanzania and Pakistan, while in some post-conflict countries, there was still a need to act as a primary coordinating body, as in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Somalia.

For example, in 1999 the UN established a Peacekeeping and Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in response to the growing crisis in the country. The Mission (MONUC) was mandated to provide peacekeeping troops and "to facilitate humanitarian assistance and human rights monitoring" (S/RES/1291). The UN continues to play a lead role in humanitarian aid coordination in the country twelve years later because, due to numerous issues and outside forces, MONUC has not yet been able to implement a plan of transition to the national government.

In contrast to MONUC, the "Delivering as One" or the "One UN" initiative at the UN Development Group (UNDG) was designed to create a solution to the problem of multiplicity and redundancy of offices, responsibilities, and funding in countries where the UN was able to transition from a lead coordinating role. Although the pilot project, carried out in eight countries, has so far not shown conclusive results, the principles behind it are clearly applicable to the Afghan context. The initiative features four main areas at the country level: "One Programme"; "One Leader"; "One Budgetary Framework"; and "One Office". On the ground in Tanzania, these areas have yielded some progress so far and have generated useful questions about the impact of new interventions on existing operations, and the potential for synergy among several UN agencies (United Nations Development Assistance Framework 2010).

While the situation in each of the pilot countries is unique, the "Delivering as One" approach could be tailored to benefit the Afghan context. UNAMA's work could be enhanced from enacting "Delivering as One," through streamlining the multiple departments and offices in the country, including at the sub-national level. In recent years, the UN has had over thirty active agencies, funds, and programmes in Afghanistan with different budgets, mandates, and functions. They each have their own offices, representatives, and operations in different parts of the country. During the transition and beyond, it is imperative to have more effective, coherent, coordinated UN entities throughout the country, able to work as one development partner with the Government of Afghanistan.

*Humanitarian Assistance*

The UN serves in an essential coordinating role in facilitating the delivery of humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan. The humanitarian role of the UN has become crucial, particularly during emergencies, which require urgent assistance and relief aid. For example in 2011, fourteen provinces are facing the threat of drought, affecting nearly three million people. It is anticipated that the number of Afghans struggling with food insecurity will increase tremendously due to this crisis. In such a situation, the humanitarian assistance of the UN is vital.

The UN has helped to make basic humanitarian services available to the Afghan people, such as food, drinking water, and healthcare, especially for rural populations out of the reach of the central Government reach for many years. UNAMA's responsibility as the lead coordinator of all UN relief, recovery and reconstruction efforts also entails ensuring that the UN's activities are linked with the Government of Afghanistan's work in this area. A key part of this cooperation involves maintaining the goals and framework outlined in the ANDS. Further coordination of efforts with the Afghan Government can help to streamline humanitarian aid and avoid the duplication of initiatives.

Efforts in the area of humanitarian assistance should make a substantial shift from relief towards development in order to better promote long term stability in the country. Not only will focusing on development efforts in support of national priorities help to strengthen the sovereignty of the Government of Afghanistan in-line with the needs of transition, but such a shift would embody widely-accepted principles for effective practices in sustainable development.

To further enhance the effects of development and humanitarian efforts, international organizations and other external actors operating in the country should similarly work towards greater communication, transparency, and accountability during the transition of responsibilities to the Government of Afghanistan.

### Conclusion: What Lies Ahead?

For the last ten years, the United Nations has been, in principle, the leader of the international community in Afghanistan. Throughout the last decade the UN's support for capacity building and the strengthening of Afghan institutions, as well as its role in humanitarian and reconstruction efforts have been crucial for the country, as it emerges from over thirty years of war and crisis.

As Afghanistan continues to transition full responsibility for security, governance and development to the Government of Afghanistan, the UN will continue to play an important role in the coordination of international civilian activities and in support of the Government in the years to come. The next decade of the UN's work in Afghanistan must be defined by effective support for Afghan leadership and ownership, which is central for building a peaceful, stable, and prosperous nation. For the transition process to succeed, the UN will be required to play a more enabling, facilitating and supporting role.

The challenges of UN coherence and the transition to Afghan leadership and ownership are the principal factors shaping the nature of the long term engagement of the UN in the country. A thorough understanding of such challenges as well as the UN's multifaceted, evolving role in Afghanistan can be a starting point from which to draw lessons for enhancing the work of the United Nations in other contexts as well.

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