Women and Peace Operations: The Achievement of the Italian Mission in Herat

by Paola Sartori and Alessandra Scalia

ABSTRACT

The research that forms the basis of this study aims to address women's roles within peace operations, as well as their contribution to security and peace-building. Based on Italy's contribution to the NATO-led missions – the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and, currently, Resolute Support (RS) – the subject of the analysis is Afghanistan, and particularly Herat Province. The research effort is specifically aimed at assessing the impact of the civil–military cooperation (CIMIC) initiatives implemented by Italian troops in Herat, with a specific focus on gender and Afghan women. The first part of this paper addresses the theoretical framework on women's participation in stabilization and reconstruction efforts. It introduces concepts such as gender analysis and gender mainstreaming, and, consequently, the benefits of focusing on gender when carrying out CIMIC initiatives within peace operations. The second part focuses on the CIMIC activities implemented by the Italian contingent in Herat Province. The concluding section of the paper provides some "food for thought", aimed at contributing to further enhancing the effectiveness of the CIMIC projects carried out by the Italian military and their related effects.

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Introduction

> "We can no longer afford to minimize or ignore the contributions of women and girls to all stages of conflict resolution, peacemaking, peace-building, peacekeeping and the reconstruction processes. Sustainable peace will not be achieved without the full and equal participation of women and men."
> Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan[1]

This paper is the result of a research project conducted by the Institute of International Affairs (IAI) in cooperation with the Italian Ministry of Defence (MoD). As part of the initiatives carried out by IAI's Security and Defence Programme, the research aims at addressing women's roles within peace operations as well as their contribution to security and peace-building.

From 28 July to 3 August 2016, the two authors carried out the fieldwork for the research. During this time, they had the opportunity to interview over 20 interlocutors among the local population. Interviews were based on a questionnaire prepared during a preliminary research exercise carried out in Italy before their departure for Herat. Interviewees included both women and men with a background ranging from civil society to provincial institutions, from NGOs to security forces. Interviews were arranged with the support of the "Pinerolo" Brigade and the Civil-Military Cooperation division (J9) within the Train Advise Assist Command West (TAAC-W), and took place both inside and outside the military compound.

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[1] UN Secretary-General, *Report on Women, Peace and Security* (S/2002/1154), 16 October 2002, http://undocs.org/S/2002/1154.

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1. War as a gendered process

Taking gender within peace operations into account means, first and foremost, recognizing that conflicts and wars affect men and women, girls and boys, differently. There are clear gender dimensions that relate to both the understanding of conflict and efforts to build peace and support reconstruction activities. During wars, women and men have differential access to resources, carry out different types of work, balance different responsibilities, play different roles within communities, respond to different social norms and tend to build peace in different ways.[2] Conflict is, therefore, a gendered process. As argued by Beth Woroniuk, "it is impossible to fully understand power and conflict without understanding gender differences and inequalities [...] the power differences between and among women and men and the mobilization of gender identities influence how conflicts begin, evolve and end".[3]

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[2] At the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995, participating countries adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action as an agenda for women's empowerment. Concerning conflict situations, the Platform explicitly established the goal of "[i]ncreas[ing] the participation of women in conflict resolution at decision-making levels and protect[ing] women living in situations of armed and other conflicts or under foreign occupation" as one of its strategic objectives (E-1). See United Nations, *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995* (A/CONF.177/20/Rev.1), 1996, p. 58, http://undocs.org/A/CONF.177/20/Rev.1.

[3] Beth Woroniuk, *Women's Empowerment in the Context of Human Security*, Discussion Paper prepared for the IANWGE Joint Meeting with OECD/DAC Network, Bangkok, 7-8 December 1999, http://www.un.org/womenwatch/ianwge/collaboration/womempmtg1999.htm. See also Cynthia Cockburn, "The Gendered Dynamics of Armed Conflict and Political Violence", in Caroline Moser and Fiona Clark (eds.), *Victims, Perpetrators or Actors? Gender, Armed Conflict and Political Violence*, London and New York, Zed Books, 2001, p. 13-29.

Historically, the impact of conflict on women has mirrored its repercussions on all the more marginalised members of a community.[4] Civilians, particularly women and children, are the primary victims of conventional wars. Whilst research on the First World War suggests that soldiers accounted for around 95 percent of its victims, in more recent conflicts this ratio has been inverted, with non-combatant civilians now accounting for the vast majority of victims – suffering as they do displacement, exile, attack, torture, death or disappearance.[5] As concluded by the Peace Research Institute Oslo, adopting a gender perspective on this shift has contributed to showing that while "men die more frequently than women in direct armed conflicts […] more women than men die in post-conflict situations of the indirect causes of war".[6]

Whilst men and boys are sent to the battlefield in disproportionate numbers, many women and girls are left with the simultaneous burdens of managing the home; growing and providing food; earning an income; and caring for children, the elderly and the wounded.[7] Hence, women are often the first to be affected by any breakdown of infrastructure, social stability or the rule of law.

Furthermore, the researchers have drawn upon measures of gender equality to highlight correlations between gender discrimination and violence at the societal level, and the likelihood of intrastate conflict.[8] The promotion of gender equality is, therefore, a critical component in preventing violent conflict. This is due to the fact that greater levels of gender equality are linked to both more sustainable development and to lower levels of interpersonal violence – which, in turn, reduce the risk of conflict.[9] Gender equality should, therefore, be considered an integral

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[4] For instance, particularly with respect to disarmament demobilization reintegration (DDR) activities, scant attention has been given to the more vulnerable; women and children involved in armed groups, the wives and relatives of combatants and those mentally and/or physically disabled in the conflict. All these groups have distinct and different needs. See Stephanie Groothedde, *Gender Makes Sense. A Way to Improve Your Mission*, 2nd ed., The Hague, Civil-Military Cooperation Centre of Excellence (CCOE), 2013, p. 4, http://www.cimic-coe.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Gender-makes-sense-final-version.pdf.

[5] Beatriz Frieyo de Lara and Margarita Robles Carrillo, "Integration of the Perspective of Gender into the Analysis of Armed Conflicts and Security", in Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies and Granada University–Army Training and Doctrine Combined Centre (eds.), "The Role of Women and Gender in Conflicts", in *IEEE Strategic Dossiers*, No. 157-B (June 2012), p. 51, http://www.ieee.es/documentos/cuadernos-de-estrategia/detalle/Cuaderno_157_B.html.

[6] Christin Ormhaug, Patrick Meier and Helga Hernes, "Armed Conflict Deaths Disaggregated by Gender", in *PRIO Papers*, 23 November 2009, p. 23, https://www.prio.org/Publications/Publication/?x=7207.

[7] Lena P. Kvarving and Rachel Grimes, "Why and How Gender Is Vital to Military Operations", in Bojana Balon et al. (eds.), *Teaching Gender in the Military: A Handbook*, Geneva, Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), 2016, p. 11, http://www.dcaf.ch/Publications/Teaching-Gender-in-the-Military-a-Handbook.

[8] Mary Caprioli, "Primed for Violence: The Role of Gender Inequality in Predicting Internal Conflict", in *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 49, No. 2 (June 2005), p. 161-178, https://www.amherst.edu/media/view/233359/original/Caprioli+2005.pdf.

[9] Åsa Ekvall, "Norms on Gender Equality and Violent Conflict", in *E-International Relations*, 10 June 2013, http://www.e-ir.info/?p=39107.

part of conflict prevention rather than simply a "women's issue", to be dealt with only once the hard security threats have been addressed.

In particular, women play several and distinct roles within conflict situations and civil wars. These go well beyond the traditional notion of women "as victims" of war. In order to grasp the roles of women within peace operations, it is therefore essential to understand how their roles in conflict situations develop within the pre-conflict, open-conflict and post-conflict phases.

Women's roles within internal conflict situations can be grouped into the following categories:[10]

- *Women as victims of (sexual) abuse*: during conflicts violence against women increases, as traditional forms of moral, community and institutional safeguards have disintegrated and weapons have proliferated. One of the major threats to women during conflicts is systematic rape, which represents both a crime against the individual and an act of symbolic aggression against their community.
- *Women as combatants*: women's decisions to engage in combat activities are due (as they are for men) variously to enforced recruitment, agreement with the goals of war, patriotism, religious/ideological motives and economic necessity. Compared to male combatants, however, during and after conflicts female combatants tend to receive little support from their families because they are often seen as having participated in "unsuitable" activities.
- *Women for peace in the non-governmental sector*: conflict provides "windows of opportunity" for the establishment of women's groups, which may eventually enter public arenas to which they had traditionally enjoyed limited access. After conflict, it is usual for women to become involved in existing and newly established non-governmental organizations (NGOs), human-rights activism and development projects.
- *Women in formal peace politics*: during conflicts, few women manage to gain access to formal peace politics, which span the entire process of negotiations – often beginning in the midst of conflict and continuing through the various phases of a transition to peace. In fact, while women's organizations often assume the roles of public institutions during conflicts, very few women tend to be involved in the peace negotiations as those conflicts end.
- *Women as coping and surviving actors*: during conflicts, women are the first ones to have to cope with the accompanying breakdown in basic services such as health and school systems, and the decreasing availability of and access to resources such as food and water, but also to information and support networks.
- *Women as household heads*: conflict forces women to become "breadwinners", taking over the responsibility for earning a livelihood and, in general, shouldering those activities previously carried out by men in order to ensure their families' survival.

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[10] These represent ideal-typical constructs and in practice characteristics of these different roles may combine or partially coincide.

- *Women in the informal and formal employment sectors*: during conflicts, women are often forced to accept poorly remunerated work in the informal employment sector, which tends to expand rapidly in conflict situations. However, the typical wartime loosening of traditional labour relations and the increase in war-related economic sectors may broaden women's involvement in the formal employment sector.

In light of women's roles within internal conflict situations, they should be regarded as major contributing stakeholders to security and peace activities. However, although, as will be further discussed, civilian and military stakeholders are striving to integrate a gender perspective within security activities, the majority of women still continue to be excluded from security-related decision-making, including the post-conflict peace settlements of wars.[11]

2. Gender and peace operations

2.1 Integrating gender perspectives within peace operations

Being gender a crosscutting theme, a gender perspective should be integrated into all lines of operations, considering both their external and internal dimensions.

Externally, having an enhanced gender perspective improves the way in which we look at a society. For instance, this means, as previously discussed, analysing the roles that women play in conflict situations. Acquiring a gender perspective externally contributes to creating a better understanding of culture and local customs. It can improve access to and communication with the local population, local government and the international community.[12]

If integrated appropriately, a gender perspective should also include an internal focus, looking at the military's internal procedures, policies, training means and assets.[13] These aspects include, for instance, standards of behaviour (e.g. adhering to rules of engagement, ROE; being aware of local laws, customs, culture and traditions; and displaying integrity, dignity and respect); force composition (e.g. gender balance within the forces, female engagement capacity, number of female personnel in command positions, etc.);[14] and various activities such as training, analysis, planning, reporting and evaluation.

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[11] Lena P. Kvarving and Rachel Grimes, "Why and How Gender Is Vital to Military Operations", cit., p. 12.

[12] Stephanie Groothedde, *Gender Makes Sense*, cit., p. 23.

[13] Ibid.

[14] For instance, concerning gender balance within the Italian Armed Forces. As of 31 December 2015, women represented 6.10 percent of personnel within the Army, 5.20 percent in the Navy, 2.80 percent in the Airforce and 2 percent in the Italian Gendarmerie "Carabinieri". The total number of female personnel is 4.25 percent.

Overall, gender is a responsibility for all military personnel up to the level of commander.[15] A full integration of a gender perspective should be ensured in the planning, execution and evaluation phases of operations.

In the pre-deployment phase, acquiring a gender perspective means, for instance, providing cultural-awareness training based on an analysis of gender relations in the Area of Operations (AO), and information on how to engage with local women. In the execution phase, based on existing mission documents, reporting on gender issues should be integrated within standard reporting procedures, and should include statistics disaggregated by gender and information on the distinct impacts of the mission on men and women. During the transition phase, responsibility needs to be handed over to the host nation. The running, staffing and future development of gender mainstreaming – defined in this context as the process to recognise and incorporate the role played by gender in operation concepts – will, therefore, become a responsibility of local authorities, supported by international partners.[16]

2.2 Gender and security within peace operations

At the legal and policy level, United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on women, peace and security addresses the disproportionate impact that armed conflict has on females, as well as recognizing their undervalued contributions to conflict prevention, peacekeeping, conflict resolution, peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction missions. UNSCR 1325 was unanimously adopted on 31 October 2000 in light of the atrocities committed in Rwanda and Bosnia, particularly against women. Its key points are protection, prevention, participation and gender mainstreaming.[17]

Within the military community, in 2007 the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) adopted the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) policy for the implementation of UNSCR 1325. Two years later, the Alliance issued BI-SC Directive 40-1,[18] which actually integrates elements of UNSRC 1325 into the NATO command

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[15] Stephanie Groothedde, *Gender Makes Sense*, cit., p. 44.

[16] Ibid., p. 57.

[17] While UNSCR 1325 is recognized as an unprecedented document, it does not exist in a vacuum. Many other resolutions, treaties, conventions, reports have followed. Concerning gender perspectives, relevant UN resolutions are: UNSCR 1820 (June 2008): focused on the prevention and response to sexual violence in situations of armed and post conflict; UNSCR 1888 (September 2009): envisaged the appointment of a UN Special Representative to advocate the ending of sexual violence in armed conflict; UNSCR 1889 (October 2009): aimed at improving the monitoring and reporting component and highlighting the importance of resource allocation; UNSCR 1960 (December 2010): called for parties to armed conflict to make specific time-bound commitments to combat sexual violence; UNSCR 2106 (June 2013): added greater operational details on conflict-related sexual violence; UNSCR 2122 (October 2013): addressed the persistent gaps in the implementation of the women, peace and security agenda.

[18] NATO, *Bi-SC Directive 40-1, Integrating UNSCR 1325 and Gender Perspectives in the NATO Command Structure Including Measures for Protection During Armed Conflict*, 2 September 2009,

structure. Based on the Directive, the full integration of gender perspectives within the Alliance extends to the planning, execution, and evaluation phases of NATO-led operations.

In 2010, the NATO Action Plan on Mainstreaming UNSCR 1325 into NATO operations, missions and the Alliance itself was approved. Concerning NATO-led operations, the action plan, which is reviewed and updated biennially, envisaged, for instance, gender-mainstreaming actions (e.g. within operational execution and reports and reporting systems) in operational theatres such as Afghanistan and Kosovo.[19] Furthermore, in 2012 the post of NATO Special Representative on Women, Peace and Security was created. It was made permanent in September 2014.

At the operational level, empirical evidence shows that security actors are more likely to accomplish their mission when they take the differing needs and perspectives of men and women into account.[20]

Gender is recognized as a "force multiplier" in operational planning and mission execution.[21] This means that there are specific factors linked to gender perspectives that increase security within peace operations and positively influence operational effectiveness. For example, according to the NATO Civil-Military Cooperation Centre of Excellence (CCOE), overall attention to gender contributes to situational awareness and the provision of better advice to senior decision-makers. At the operational level, for instance, when they conduct searches and gather information, male and female personnel may look for different things because of their own experiences and attitudes.

Since security in operations is defined as the reduction of physical threats to personnel and equipment, attention to gender contributes to:
- enhancing situational awareness through unique observations, as well as strengthening situational awareness through varied perspectives;
- providing information about specific security threats;
- promoting operational effectiveness through gender-sensitive development;
- influencing a conflict's "narrative", as well as moderating political and religious extremism throughout conflicts;

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http://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_2009_09/20090924_Bi-SC_DIRECTIVE_40-1.pdf. This directive has been superseded by Bi-SC 40-1 Rev 1, dated 8 August. 2012.

[19] At all levels of its organization, NATO appointed a range of Gender Advisors (GENAD), Gender Field Advisors (GFA) and Gender Focal Points (GFP), including in the Allied Command Transformation (ACT) and Allied Command Operations (ACO), and at the operational level in the Joint Forces Commands Brunssum (JFC-B), Naples (JFC-N), and the Afghan and Kosovar operational theatres.

[20] Tobie Withman and Jacqueline O'Neil, *Attention to Gender Increases Security in Operations: Examples from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)*, Washington, The Institute for Inclusive Security, April 2012, p. 1, https://www.inclusivesecurity.org/?p=3542.

[21] Sahana Dharmapuri, "Just Add Women and Stir?", in *Parameters*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (Spring 2011), p. 59, http://strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/parameters/Articles/2011spring/Dharmapuri.pdf.

- using gender norms to engage male informants; and
- increasing force acceptance and strengthening the capacities of government partners.[22]

2.3 Gender and civil–military cooperation

Peace operations, particularly when conducted within areas affected by high levels of abuse and repression, had highlighted the fact that gender is an integral part of the so-called "comprehensive approach" to civil–military cooperation (CIMIC).

The changing nature of conflict since the end of the Cold War requires a multidimensional and comprehensive approach, which goes beyond the deployment of purely military means to include activities within the social, economic and political spheres.[23] NATO published its first CIMIC Doctrine in 2003. The Alliance defines civil–military cooperation as "[t]he coordination and cooperation, in support of the mission, between the NATO Commander and civil actors, including the national population and local authorities, as well as international, national and non-governmental organizations and agencies".[24]

The level of interaction achievable between security and civilian personnel actually varies from de-confliction, coordination, cooperation, mutual support, cohesive joint planning and information exchange up to partly integration between different bodies and stakeholders.[25] Although its activities share some core functions, the profile of CIMIC varies according to each specific operation. With reference to stabilization, the type of operation that forms the basis of the current analysis, CIMIC has a threefold scope within stabilization operations: (i) to "win the hearts and minds" of the local population; (ii) to enhance force acceptance by showing the "benign face of the mission"; and (iii) to initiate and support reconstruction efforts.[26]

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[22] The list is not exhaustive and may not reflect experiences in all theatres of operation. The factors listed here have been identified in a variety of studies of stabilization and peacekeeping operations in Afghanistan, Cambodia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kosovo, Liberia and Timor Leste. For further reference on this matter, see: Tobie Withman and Jacqueline O'Neil, *Attention to Gender Increases Security in Operations*, cit.

[23] Tina Johansson, *The Effectiveness of CIMIC in Peace Operations. From the View of the Local People*, Uppsala, Uppsala University Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Spring 2011, p. 4, http://www.pcr.uu.se/digitalAssets/67/c_67531-l_1-k_tinajohansson.pdf.

[24] NATO Standardization Office, *NATO Glossary of Terms and Definitions* (AAP-06), Ed. 2016, https://nso.nato.int/nso/zPublic/ap/PROM/AAP-06 202016.pdf.

[25] Allard-Jan ten Berge, *Best & Bad Practices on Civil-Military Interaction*, The Hague, Civil-Military Cooperation Centre of Excellence (CCOE), June 2014, p. 4.

[26] Volker Frank, "The Peacebuilding Dilemma: Civil-Military Cooperation in Stability Operations", in *International Journal of Peace Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (Autumn/Winter 2006), p. 10, http://www.gmu.edu/programs/icar/ijps//vol11_2/11n2FRANKE.pdf.

From a military perspective, by contributing to gaining the support of host communities and facilitating cooperation with civilian organizations,[27] CIMIC can become a force multiplier in the operational environment.

In this sense, integrating a gender perspective into the conduct of CIMIC activities is crucial in terms of operational effectiveness, as it allows the personnel on the ground to address the whole population and increases both support and engagement capacity for the mission. Hence, including women in NATO-led forces is recognized both as an asset and an enabler, and having a gender-balanced force and team is advisable – especially when addressing women's rights and engaging with the local population.[28] Adopting a gender-mainstreaming approach within the CIMIC framework of operations, therefore, is not simply a matter of fulfilling international obligations, but of greater effectiveness.

First, integrating a gender perspective[29] within CIMIC activities is in ensuring an effective management of resources and implementing tailored projects able to address the different needs of women and men.

Second, fostering gender awareness enhances women's opportunities to participate in a society, with consequent positive externalities. For instance, the active presence of even a few women within the community can work as an incentive for others, thus starting a potential virtuous cycle liable to increase that community's resource base and reach a more equal balance between numbers of female and male employees.[30] In addition, in post-conflict scenarios women's involvement in decision-making provides the female portion of a population with an increased sense of ownership over the reconstruction process.[31]

Third, strengthening women's rights leads to a positive "spill-over" effect on the living standards of children and the family as a whole.[32] Women can help identify priority infrastructures and development needs, which differ from those seen from a traditional male perspective as they focus more on familiar and community well-being and on longer-term sustainability.[33]

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[27] Tina Johansson, *The Effectiveness of CIMIC in Peace Operations*, cit., p. 9.

[28] NATO, *Bi-SC 40-1 REV 1, Integrating UNSCR 1325 and Gender Perspective into the NATO Command Structure*, 8 August 2012, p. 11, http://www.nato.int/issues/women_nato/2012/20120808_NU_Bi-SCD_40-11.pdf.

[29] It assesses "gender- based differences of women and men reflected in their social roles and interactions, in the distribution of power and the access to resources". Ibid., p. 5.

[30] Johan Tejpar et al., "Background: Afghanistan and NATO", in Louise Olsson and Johan Tejpar (eds.), "Operational Effectiveness and UN Resolution 1325 – Practices and Lessons from Afghanistan", in *FOI Reports*, May 2009, p. 32, https://www.foi.se/reportsummary?reportNo=FOI-R--2760--SE.

[31] NATO, *How Can Gender Make a Difference to Security in Operations. Indicators*, 2011, p. 27, http://www.nato.int/issues/women_nato/2011/1869-11 Gender Brochure.pdf.

[32] Johan Tejpar et al., "Background: Afghanistan and NATO", cit., p. 32.

[33] NATO, *How Can Gender Make a Difference to Security in Operations. Indicators*, cit.

Finally, because of the extensive knowledge of certain international organizations (IOs) and NGOs in the AOs, it is vital that gender activities by different foreign actors are harmonized to prevent the duplication of efforts, preserve resources and reduce friction.

As the adoption of a gender-mainstreaming approach represents a method for covering all aspects of CIMIC activities, on both tactical and operational levels, and for improving the performance of civil tasks,[34] gender is considered an integral part of CIMIC.[35]

3. The Italian contingent in Herat: Background to the operational environment

3.1 A brief overview of gender issues in Afghanistan

Based on its religious and cultural specificities, as well as a tumultuous past, Afghanistan certainly represents a challenging case study when addressing women's rights and gender issues. Over the last three decades, the country has been first occupied by Soviet troops, then riven by civil war and subsequently ruled by the oppressive Taliban regime, which was finally overthrown in 2001 following military intervention by a US-led coalition.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century and throughout these political changes, the emancipation of women in Afghanistan has been a disputed political issue, often exploited by different groups, sometimes being improved upon but often being abused. In particular, the Taliban regime was sadly notorious for its severe application of Sharia law and violation of women's rights. However, throughout Afghan history, women have always been marginalized and accorded a subordinate status to their menfolk. Several factors have contributed to shaping the status of women within the Afghan family and society at large, which is distinguished by strong cultural roots of gender discrimination.[36]

A deeply rooted tribal culture[37] and a strict religious interpretation of the Sharia,

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[34] Stephanie Groothedde, *Gender Makes Sense*, cit., p. 3.

[35] Peter Houdijk et al., *Gender Makes Sense*, The Hague, Civil-Military Cooperation Centre of Excellence (CCOE), 2008, p. 16, http://www.nato.int/ims/2008/win/opinions/gender_booklet_ccoe_v12.pdf.

[36] Harjot Kaur and Najla Ayubi, "Status of Women in Afghanistan", in *In Asia blog*, 21 January 2009, http://asiafoundation.org/?p=861.

[37] After its unification in 1747, the country was a Pashtun monarchy for over 200 years until 1973 when the Kingdom fell. During the first century, Afghanistan was ruled according to the interpretation of the Pashtunwali code and this phase had a significant impact on the Afghan culture. The Pashtunwali is an ancient Pashtun tribal code of honour prescribing norms and values, as well as sanctions for their violation. The main elements of this code are hospitality, bravery, and honour but also the specific importance attributed to women as the embodiment of

along with a weak central state, have hindered reforms and advancements towards gender equality over many decades in Afghanistan.[38]

In such a scenario, the US-led intervention of 2001, together with the signing of the Bonn Agreement (actually a series of agreements intended to recreate the state of Afghanistan following the US invasion), opened the door for new political options. Nonetheless, despite the achievement of considerable results in the intervening period, significant challenges remain today – as is shown by all major social indicators in the country. Since the fall of the Taliban around 2.5 million Afghan girls have returned to school,[39] and today girls account for more than one-third of all students compared with the very low level of female educational enrolment recorded in 2001.[40] Over the same period, maternal mortality decreased by around 60 percent from 1,100 to 396 deaths per 100,000 births.[41] On the other hand, the country's female illiteracy rate remains high, with a percentage of 87.4 as against 57 percent for men.[42] Only 6 percent of Afghan women over the age of 25 receive a formal education, with resulting gaps in the labour market where female force participation rates – defined as the female proportion of the country's working-age population that engages in the labour market, either by working or actively looking for work – amount to 47 percent compared to 86 percent for men.[43]

Overall, women are still severely under-represented in all sectors of Afghan society.[44] Moreover, even if these women perform many roles within their

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the family's honour. In order to uphold honour this moral system introduces a symbolic veil, which separates the men's sphere from the women's. For example, women were allowed to participate in public meetings and events and were not obliged to wear the burqa, but women's participation in public was subject to specific restrictions. Notably, honour for women "is necessarily passive, submissive, and centered [a]round avoidance of shame". Carol Mann, Models and Realities of Afghan Womanhood. A Retrospective and Prospects, Paper prepared for the UNESCO Gender Equality and Development Section, Social and Human Sciences Sector, July 2005, http://www. womeninwar.org/CMann_afghanwomanhood.pdf. See also Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), *Afghanistan Country Gender Profile*, February 2009, http://www.sida. se/contentassets/8f8cfc54a7ab4e31a7cd2e0f0114f955/afghanistan_299.pdf.

[38] Since the beginning of the twentieth century there have been a number of attempts to modernize Afghan society and address women's rights. The first attempt dates back to 1919 and lasted until 1929, under the rule of King Amir Amanullah, while the second was made after the coming to power of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan in 1978. Both failed due to the strong opposition of the more traditional elements of society.

[39] Don Steinberg, *Hearing before the US House of Representatives Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission*, 112th Congress, 3 May 2011, https://humanrightscommission.house.gov/events/hearings/women-afghanistan.

[40] Afghanistan Government, *Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework (ANPDF) 2017 to 2021*, September 2016, p. 6, http://afghanistan-un.org/?p=8302.

[41] World Health Organization (WHO) et al., *Trends in Maternal Mortality: 1990 to 2015*, Geneva, WHO, November 2015, p. 70, http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/monitoring/maternal-mortality-2015/en.

[42] UN Women Afghanistan, *Development Results Narrative 2014-2017*, June 2015, p. 8, http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/executive board/2015/as 15/un women afghanistan programme-pdf.pdf.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid.

communities, this does not always translate into having control over and effective access to power and resources. For instance, a man allowing his wife to be decisive and controlling of his behaviour will likely face social pressures from his peers. The majority of women, particularly in southern and eastern Afghanistan, are at the mercy of men for their basic survival. They often struggle to challenge male relatives directly because of prevailing social attitudes and norms.[45]

3.2 Herat Province: key aspects and specificities of the case study

Afghanistan is a country of great diversity in terms of terrain, climate and, above all, language and culture. Gender perception is, clearly, affected by such heterogeneity. This draws a multi-faceted picture of the country when it comes to women's rights and empowerment. Specifically, factors like geographical location, ethnic composition and the attitude of local governors play a key role in shaping the situation of women within society at the provincial level.

Herat Province – the region forming the subject of this analysis – is no exception to these considerations. In fact, its geographical location near the Iranian border and its ethnic composition have deeply influenced its development.[46] Herat is a frontier area between different geographical and cultural zones, as the province shares its western and north-western borders with Iran and Turkmenistan respectively. Geography has contributed to the development of a rather heterogeneous society, composed mainly of Farsi-speaking-Tajiks followed by Pashtuns and minority groups of Hazaras, Turkmens and Baluchs.[47] As a result, the region is considered open and culturally vibrant compared with other areas of Afghanistan.[48] Nonetheless, considerable differences exist between urban and rural centres in the province, where a deeply rooted tribal hierarchy, ethnic cultures and traditions, together with a lack of education, exacerbate gender inequalities. Given that 85 percent of all Afghan territory is rural, such considerations must be taken into account when analysing the overall situation of women's rights at national as well as regional level.[49]

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[45] Of note, this often remains unchanged even in cases where women are better educated or have an income. Sippi Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, "Seeking out their Afghan Sisters. Female Engagement Teams in Afghanistan", in *CMI Working Papers*, No. 2014/1 (March 2014), p. 38, https://www.cmi.no/publications/5096.

[46] Louise Olsson and Johanna Valenius, "The Italian PRT in Herat", in Louise Olsson and Johan Tejpar (eds.), "Operational Effectiveness and UN Resolution 1325 – Practices and Lessons from Afghanistan", in *FOI Reports*, May 2009, p. 58, https://www.foi.se/reportsummary?reportNo=FOI-R--2760--SE.

[47] USAID and UC Davis, *Food Security Social Assessment Profile Herat*, 2014, http://afghanag.ucdavis.edu/country-info/Province-agriculture-profiles/hirat-herat/fsnhlpheratpdf.pdf/view.

[48] The city of Herat is considered the economic and political hub of the western part of the country. This was the seat of the Timurid Empire in the fifteenth century and a key cultural and economic stopover on the Silk Route. Many still consider Herat the "cultural capital" of Afghanistan. Neamatollah Nojumi, Dyan Mazurana and Elizabeth Stites, *Life and Security in Rural Afghanistan*, Lanham, Rowman and Littlefield, 2010, p. 17.

[49] Emmanuele Aresu, "Il Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Afghanistan", in *Informazioni*

Another important factor concerns the attitude of local governors, who can either support or oppose women's empowerment. Although governors are representatives of the central government at the provincial level, with theoretically only limited official authority, some of them exercise significant influence over the local administration.[50]

This is true, for instance, in the case of Ismail Khan, Governor of Herat from 2002 to 2004. A former member of the Mujahedeen resistance to the pro-Soviet regime, Khan established a "provincial emirate of sorts",[51] and was able to control and provide for its population in a manner largely independent of the central government. He consistently used coercion and patronage to govern Herat, and this set the stage for widespread corruption still characterizing Herat's local institutions today.[52] Moreover, Khan's conservative attitude posed considerable limitations on women's freedom of speech, association and movement, and also regulated women's dress and behaviour.[53]

Things gradually improved with the appointment of subsequent governors. Currently, with Mohammad Asif Rahimi, appointed after the 2014 presidential election and reconfirmed in August 2016,[54] the situation is purportedly better than that in other Afghan provinces.

4. Italy's contribution in Herat

The Italian contribution to the NATO-led ISAF mission began in 2003. ISAF's original mandate was to assist the Afghan Transitional Authority in the Kabul area. Later, the scope and scale of the mission were expanded to bring the entire country within its remit. Through the creation of Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT), ISAF supported reconstruction and development and Security Sector Reform (SSR), and encouraged good governance.[55]

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della Difesa, No. 6/2014, p. 5, http://www.difesa.it/InformazioniDellaDifesa/periodico/periodico_2014/Documents/R6_2014/04_13_R6_2014.pdf.

[50] Dipali Mukhopadhyay, "Provincial Governors in Afghan Policy", in *USIP Special Reports*, No. 385 (January 2016), p. 9, https://www.usip.org/publications/2016/01/provincial-governors-afghan-politics.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Jolyon Leslie, "Political and Economic Dynamics of Herat", in *USIP Peace Works*, No. 107 (April 2015), p. 22, http://www.usip.org/publications/2015/04/02/political-and-economic-dynamics-of-herat.

[53] For more information, see chapter 4 in Human Rights Watch, *"We Want to Live as Humans". Repression of Women and Girls in Western Afghanistan*, December 2002, https://www.hrw.org/reports/2002/afghnwmn1202.

[54] Afghanistan Government, *President of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan's Decree on Appointment of Mohammad Asif Rahimi as Governor of Herat*, 2 January 2017, http://president.gov.af/en/decrees/president-of-islamic-republic-of-afghanistans-decree-on-appointment-of-mohammad-asif-rahimi-as-governor-of-herat.

[55] NATO, *About Resolute Support: History*, http://www.rs.nato.int/history.html.

Given the specificity of the operational theatre, a "semipermissive" environment "following open hostilities",[56] the international community's approach to crisis management in Afghanistan primarily has focused on stabilization and reconstruction. Such a comprehensive approach included the conducting of civilian activities by the armed forces, and contributed to the further development of CIMIC. Although CIMIC began to find its first application earlier, during the Balkan missions of the 1990s, according to some observers the Afghan operational environment actually represents "the precedent" when it comes to CIMIC.[57]

This approach has been primarily developed within the PRT framework, which had a threefold objective: implementing security, institution-building and enabling reconstruction.[58] The PRT proved to be a useful device for supporting the Afghan Government in gaining power and influence over remote regions of the country.[59] Besides the location and the specific security and development needs of a particular area, the practices and military culture of contributing states played a key role in determining the success or failure of this approach. The most successful PRTs have been those promoting sustainability strategies along with an understanding of the societal dynamics of the region in question.[60]

Since 2005 Italy has been leading the Regional Command West (RC-W), which extends over four provinces – Herat, Badghis, Ghowr and Farah[61] – and includes 16 districts with a total estimated population of 1.5 million.[62] Under the aegis of RC-W, four PRTs operated in Herat, Farah, Chaghcharan, Qala-e-Now, the administrative centres of Ghor and Baghdis provinces and the Forward Support Base (FSB) of Herat.[63] Italy was in charge of coordination between the four PRTs, and led the Herat PRT located at Camp Vianini.[64] The ISAF mission ended in December 2014 and was replaced by Resolute Support, whose focus is on strengthening the sustainability of the Afghan National Security Force (ANSF). Italy continues its efforts within RS

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[56] US Army Center for Army Lesson Learned, *Afghanistan Provincial Reconstruction Team, Handbook 11-16*, February 2011, p. 1, http://usacac.army.mil/sites/default/files/publications/11-16.pdf.

[57] Volker Frank, "The Peacebuilding Dilemma", cit. p. 10.

[58] Markus Gauster, "Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan", in *Marshall Center Occasional Papers*, No. 16 (January 2008), p. 8, http://www.marshallcenter.org/mcpublicweb/mcdocs/files/College/F_Publications/occPapers/occ-paper_16-en.pdf.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Wiliam Maley, "Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan – How They Arrived and Where They Are Going", in *NATO Review*, No. 3/2007 (autumn 2007), http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2007/issue3/english/art2.html.

[61] See the Italian Army website: *ISAF: National Contribution*, http://www.esercito.difesa.it/en/Operations/international-operations/Pagine/ISAF-National-Contribution.aspx.

[62] Louise Olsson and Johanna Valenius, "The Italian PRT in Herat", cit., p. 60.

[63] Italian Ministry of Defence, "Passaggio di consegne tra 'Enduring Freedom' e ISAF. L'Italia, con il Gen. Santangelo, alla guida della regione Ovest dell'Afghanistan", in *ISAF/Notizie dal teatro*, 1 June 2005, http://www.difesa.it/OperazioniMilitari/op_int_concluse/ISAF/notizie_teatro/Pagine/Passaggio_di_consegne_tr_3561dellAfghanistan.aspx.

[64] Louise Olsson and Johanna Valenius, "The Italian PRT in Herat", cit., p. 60.

as leader of the Train Advise Assist Command West (TAAC-W), which is responsible for supporting the Afghan national defence and security forces and institutions in the country's western region.[65]

The Italian experience certainly provides a significant case study, as its activity within the PRT had a primary focus on CIMIC. In particular, the Italian PRT built on previous national experiences in the field of reconstruction and governance support in other operational theatres, and adopted an "inclusive approach" by recognizing "Afghans' conception of Afghans' needs"[66] and promoting mutual comprehension through a listening attitude. The Italian intervention also preferred the implementation of small-scale initiatives to grand projects.

According to this logic, the Italian military forces in Herat gave specific consideration to gender issues.[67] Even before the adoption of a National Action Plan for implementation of UNSCR 1325,[68] thanks to their awareness of the cultural and social dynamics of the operational context, Italian military personnel were able to addressing the needs of the Afghan female population.

This attitude is clearly reflected in a number of concrete initiatives – for instance, the practice of having only female guards to monitor the outside perimeters of the PRT compound. This provision aimed at avoiding women of neighbouring families being accidentally seen by male soldiers, thus offending cultural sensibilities. Moreover, female soldiers were assigned the task of performing body searches on female visitors.

In 2010, the introduction of the NATO BI-SC 40-1 Directive and the adoption of the first National Action Plan for Implementation of UNSCR 1325 contributed to boosting the integration of gender perspectives within the mission. Starting from 2010, all the regional commands, including RC-W, adopted appropriate measures within their organizations, such as:
- the introduction of the Gender Advisor (GENAD) position within ISAF operations/activities, providing expertise and gender analysis to planners and the commander in order to identify and understand gender differences;
- the introduction of Female Engagement Teams (FETs). These initially had two main objectives: increasing liaison with local/national institutions as well as with local and international organizations mandated to protect women's rights, and encouraging the development of CIMIC projects in order to promote

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[65] See the Italian Army website: *ISAF: National Contribution*, cit.

[66] Wiliam Maley, "Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan…", cit.

[67] Louise Olsson and Johanna Valenius, "The Italian PRT in Herat", cit., p. 66.

[68] Italy adopted a first National Action Plan for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 back in 2010, valid for a three-year period until 2013. After that, the Italian government further confirmed its efforts in this regard by adopting two more National Plans: in 2014 for the period 2014-2016 and the last one in 2016, valid until 2019. For further information in this regard please refer to the website of the Italian Inter-ministerial Committee for Human Rights (CIDU): *Piano nazionale, "Donne, Pace, Sicurezza"*, http://www.cidu.esteri.it/comitatodirittiumani/tiny/38.

gender balance.[69]

With specific reference to Herat and the Italian contribution, CIMIC activities can be grouped into three main categories: (i) infrastructure projects; (ii) liaison and coordination tasks; and (iii) various development and support initiatives.

Regarding the first group of activities, the Italian PRT engaged in building facilities that were ultimately designed to accommodate activities targeting women and girls. For instance, upon the request of the Afghan Government, the PRT built a new correctional centre for women, a female as well as a male orphanage and several schools dedicated to female education. It is also worth mentioning here the inclusion of a female architect within the Italian CIMIC team, which made it possible to assess the condition of the women's prison in Herat and to decide on the construction of a replacement facility.[70]

Another important set of CIMIC initiatives relates to the establishment of effective liaison and coordination with key stakeholders within the local community. To this end, the Italian contingent initiated an effective cooperation with the Women and Social Affairs departments of Herat as well as influential local NGOs, such as the "Voice of Women".[71] In this case, fruitful cooperation with the organization was made possible through the engagement of its director, Ms. Soraya Pakzad.[72] The Italian contingent also strongly supported Ms. Maria Bashir, Chief Prosecutor

[69] According to a comprehensive analysis by former ISAF Cultural Advisor Sippi Azarbaijani-Moghaddam on the role of UK and US FETs in Southern Afghanistan, FETs' implementation has also encountered difficulties. These were due to the fact that: decades of knowledge on Afghan women available in the aid community was not integrated into the FETs' implementation; Marine FET teams often lacked knowledge of Afghan institutions; only a minority of engagements actually took place in women's Shuras; blessings and signs of hospitality were often reported as signs of successful interactions; it was regularly assumed that any women could understand gender in Afghanistan simply because of their gender. Most importantly, there was confusion over the role of FETs, which were initially instructed to avoid gender issues and were not designed to gather intelligence. However, since engagements hoped to influence gender relations, FETs stumbled into gender territory. Based on their actual tasks, FETs also put their efforts into providing sound intelligence when interacting with the local population. As argued by Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, UK forces and USMC did not capitalize effectively on FETs' major potential. Utilised strategically, the search function could have been used to gradually encourage Afghan forces to accept the presence of female Afghan searchers from urban areas in suburban and rural areas, thus contributing to increasing the recruitment of women into Afghan security forces. Sippi Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, "Seeking out their Afghan Sisters", cit.

[70] To note, the Herat female prison also benefited from Italian support through other initiatives, such as the provision of carpet looms to female prisoners in order to allow them to weave carpets to be sold within the RCW military compound and in the city. The revenues were given to the women to sustain themselves and their families. Louise Olsson and Johanna Valenius, "The Italian PRT in Herat", cit., p. 65.

[71] It is a women rights, gender equity and equality organization.

[72] Suraya Pakzad is a famous Afghan women's rights activist, named one of the 100 most influential people in the world in 2008. Ms. Pakzad offers shelter to women who have suffered sexual violence or other gender based violence. Several CIMIC projects addressed support for these individuals.

General of Herat,[73] who contributed to the development of joint activities and meetings aimed at reducing gender inequality in the country.

Furthermore, the Italian CIMIC group contributed to several development projects specifically targeting women. These included: a project, conducted in cooperation with the "GORIAN Women Saffron Association", aimed at replacing poppy cultivation with saffron; and an initiative, organized with the support of the Italian university "La Cattolica", which developed a journalism course for the women of Herat Province.

Figure 1 | Trends of defence funds in Afghanistan, 2005-2016 (in euros)
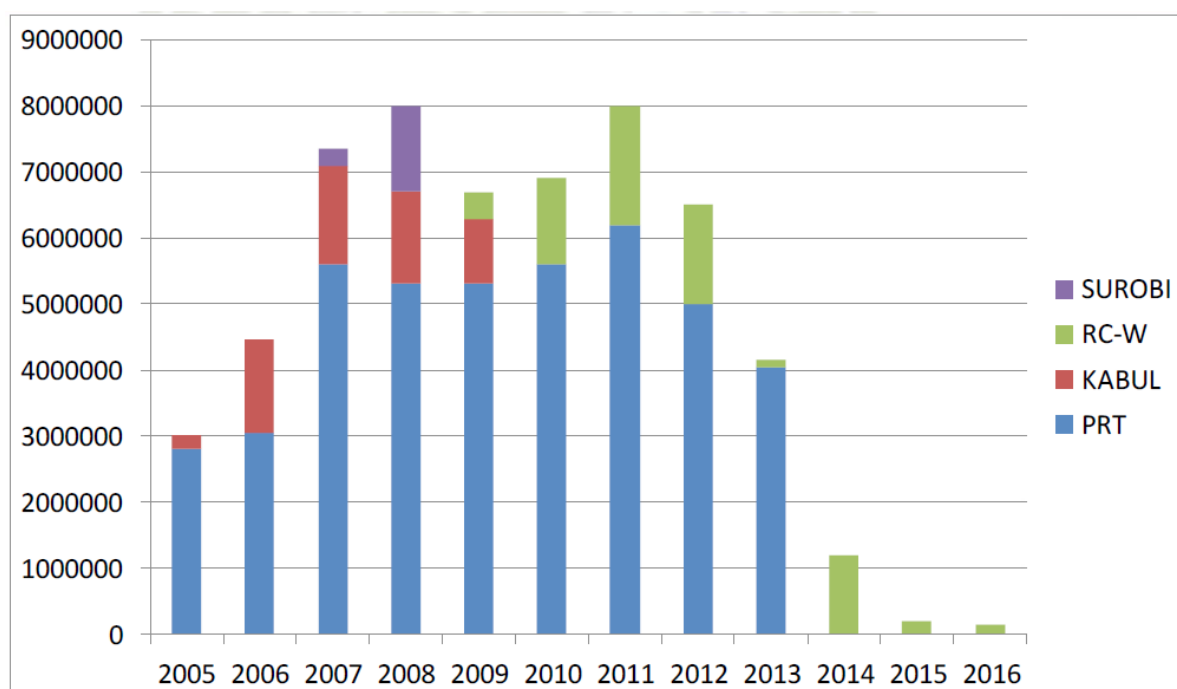
Note: Resources and funds allocated to the Italian military Task Force Surobi (named after a Kabul Province), ISAF's Regional Command West, the city of Kabul and the PRTs.
Source: Davide D'Intino, *La Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) nelle operazioni*, cit., p. 30.

Overall, on the civilian side, the Italian CIMIC group carried out its own initiatives as well as supporting projects by international organizations and NGOs. During 11 years of operations, the group implemented over 1,450 projects with a total expenditure of around 60 million euros.[74] From 2005 to 2016, the Italian effort led to the construction of 93 schools; 36 hospitals; three shelters for women, children and

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[73] Of note, at the time of her appointment in 2006, she was the only woman to hold such a position in the country.

[74] Davide D'Intino, *La Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) nelle operazioni*, Presentation at the training course "La partecipazione italiana in operazioni e missioni Internazionali", Rome, 23 May 2016, p. 30, http://www.fnsi.it/la-partecipazione-italiana-in-operazioni-e-missioni-internazionali-i-materiali-del-corso.

disabled people; 620 water wells; 124 km of highways; 23 km of irrigation canals; and 53 institution buildings, both for security-related activities and for governance functions, as well as the Herat airport terminal.[75] All these initiatives had a positive impact on local employment and economic development, as Afghan companies were in charge of their realization. Moreover, the Italian effort contributed to building confidence in local institutions and the "elders" of numerous villages.[76]

The mandate of the Italian PRT-CIMIC Detachment expired on 25 March 2014, and all projects previously approved were taken over by the CIMIC cell (J9) of the Italian contingent. This is still operating in Herat within the RS mission.

According to various interlocutors in the Italian military contingent, the adoption of a gender-mainstreaming approach has increased the level of force acceptance as well as improving security conditions in the Italian area of responsibility. This, in turn, has helped the achievement of the military mission's goals. Furthermore, in the long-term, the implementation of gender mainstreaming is indicated as potentially able to increase the stability of the country overall.

5. Key findings from the field research

This section presents the key findings from the interviews conducted in Herat addressing the Afghan female condition and the (perceived) impact of the Italian military contribution on it. In order to provide a comprehensive picture of the situation, the results are grouped according to various categories: (i) security; (ii) education; (iii) civil authorities; and (iv) the economy and employment.[77]

Nevertheless, before applying this categorization, some crosscutting issues should be highlighted – in particular, the fact that:
- insecurity has a significant impact on women's rights and empowerment;
- when it comes to gender issues, the picture varies not only across the country but also within Herat Province itself;
- interviewees underscored that there have been significant improvements from 2001 onwards but, nevertheless, variables such as the worsening of the security situation and the conservative attitude of local institutions can still negatively affect women's conditions;
- overall, underlying drivers of gender inequality and discrimination find one of their root causes in Afghanistan's low level of education;
- systemic corruption hinders the effective management of funds and the implementation of development projects, and restrains women's access to

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[75] Emmanuele Aresu, "Il Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Afghanistan", cit., p. 10.

[76] See the Italian Ministry of Defence website: *ISAF: Contributo nazionale*, http://www.difesa.it/OperazioniMilitari/op_int_concluse/ISAF/Pagine/Contributonazionale.aspx.

[77] For the sake of clarity, these categories have been identified to match information collected during the field research according to the interviewees' background.

education, justice and health;

- both male and female civil-society representatives have been interviewed but, nevertheless, it has been observed that women and girls tended to be less outspoken if they were escorted by men; and
- in general, some of the interviewees – especially men holding high-level offices – tended to express a more optimistic perspective than female interviewees on women's rights and empowerment, and to neglect problems such as corruption.

5.1 Security

Interviews conducted with various representatives of the Afghan security forces – including the national police, the border police and the army – highlighted a general improvement of the security situation in the country since the intervention of the international community. According to the interviews, contacts with international military forces, including the Italian contingent, had raised awareness regarding gender issues. The presence of women within the Italian military was regarded with great interest, and had boosted a positive perception of the mission within the female section of the country's civil society.

In general, Herat is the second province after Kabul for the number of women serving in the security forces, counting around 200 female personnel units. Interestingly enough, considering the peculiarity of the Afghan environment, several interviewees highlighted the contribution of Italian female officers to security. In such a context, women in the security forces represent an asset in terms of carrying out specific tasks requiring close contact with Afghan women, such as search activities (both house and body searches), the collection of reported cases of domestic violence and sexual abuses,[78] and checkpoints. Overall, the training and recruitment activities performed by the Italians were recognized by the interviewees as being extremely valuable for boosting Afghan women's contribution within the security forces.

Concerning the conditions of women in custody, Herat's female jail was built with the contribution of the Italian PRT in 2008. As of August 2016, Herat prison, hosting 2,628 detainees – of which 174 were women at the time of the interviews – is considered a model for other facilities in the country. Thanks to the infrastructure provided, children younger than seven years have the possibility of staying with their imprisoned mothers.[79] Furthermore, detainees, both women and men, have the possibility of attending training and professional courses such as IT, English teaching and industrial training. In this regard, initiatives addressing both female

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[78] In fact, it has been highlighted that women feel more confident in reporting cases of domestic violence and sexual abuses to female officers.

[79] According to the interviewees, 115 children are below 7 years of age and 89 were reported to be between 7 and 13 years old. Among the youngest, 44 are taken to kindergarten thanks to the contribution of War Child, while the older ones are hosted in another shelter where they are provided with some training courses organized by charity associations such as Women for Afghan Women.

prisoners and officers were characterized as very successful CIMIC initiatives. The activities consisted of supporting the organization of vocational courses that aim at training prisoners with a specific skill in order to ease their reintegration into civil society. Furthermore, TAAC-W, in collaboration with the Istituto Studi Informazione Difesa (ISTRID), conducted a workshop in Herat Camp Arena in March 2016 aimed at providing female prison guards with appropriate knowledge regarding security dynamics and improving their communication skills with the detainees.

Overall, the Italian effort in this area was assessed as positive; however, several challenges remain. In particular, interviews with female members of the security forces highlighted the fact that the goal of having 5,000 female officers within the Afghan police forces is still far from being achieved. Currently, there are 3,326 female units within the Afghan National Police (2,937 police officers and 389 civilians). In the Afghan National Army, out of 195,000 recruits only 1,400 are women.[80]

Recruitment represents a major obstacle to women. Critical factors in this respect are weak and ineffective recruitment campaigns, as well as a prevailing negative perception – especially in rural areas – of the participation of women within the ANSF. Furthermore, promotion is easier for male than female personnel. Rather than being merit-based, promotion is often linked to personal or political references and contacts.[81] In particular, women are rarely promoted to leadership positions. Due to the precarious security situation in the country, women are also not deployed to the front line but rather they are tasked with administrative duties. Finally, despite the introduction of new policies aimed at combating discrimination and sexual abuse within the ANSF – such as the creation of female shura[82] – sexual harassment, assault and coercion within the workplace still represent a serious problem.

5.2 Education

Since the end of Taliban rule, significant improvements have been achieved within the Afghan education sector, with their positive effects being felt in Herat Province. This outcome is confirmed by data from the Ministry of Education, which estimates an 80 percent gross enrolment ratio (GER). Such figures highlight the fact that, given its aforementioned specificities, the province represents a place

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[80] Data from interviews were confronted with official data taken from: Afghan Women's Network, *Policy Brief: Afghan Women Empowerment in Security Sector*, June 2016, http://www.awn-af.net/index.php/cms/download/990.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Shura literally means "consultation" or "council". The word itself can refer to an assembly, an organized body of participants, an administrative body or council, or may describe a decision-making process. For instance, towns and villages usually hold jirga or shura, local councils that typically oversee public goods and disputes. Peter Dizikes, "Empowering Women in Afghanistan", in *MIT News*, 2 August 2013, http://news.mit.edu/2013/empowering-women-in-afghanistan-0802.

amenable to female education.

Regarding higher education, data collected from the interviews indicates that approximately 14,700 students are enrolled in the University of Herat and that 40 percent of these are women.

Despite acknowledging persistent gender gaps within the education sector, interviewees expressed a positive feeling regarding future developments. Younger generations generally tend to have higher literacy rates than their predecessors, with a consequent positive spill-over effect for society at large.[83] Moreover, interviewees recognized the positive effect of exchange programmes on students and teachers, particularly for raising gender awareness. It is worth noting that the University of Herat hosts visiting students from Turkey, and that over 100 of its teachers had travelled abroad for research activities at the time of interviews.

Besides providing the necessary security conditions, the Italian contingent's contribution in this sector mainly consists, as previously mentioned, of building and restoring schools and centres for female gatherings and cultural activities.

Notwithstanding the significant progress achieved, specifically on female enrolment, several factors still represent major obstacles to reaching gender equality. First, in some provincial districts such as Shindad and Farsi, the security situation is still hindering school attendance. Second, major disparities are still experienced between rural and urban areas. Overall, due to the country's high illiteracy rate and prevailing conservative mentality, gender discrimination affects mainly villages rather than cities. Third, a lack of qualified teachers constitutes the main problem affecting the quality of education within the province. As confirmed by official reports from the Ministry of Education, the proportion of unqualified teachers in Herat Province reaches 80–89 percent.[84] Among female teachers, less than 30 percent are actually qualified sufficiently to carry out their jobs.[85] Such a situation allegedly affects the level of gender awareness within civil society and among students. Improving the teaching system has been highlighted as a crucial factor in ensuring improved school attendance. In this regard, corruption, which affects all levels of education in Afghanistan, not only creates major obstacles to the effective management of funds allocated by the international community, but reportedly has a negative impact on the recruitment of teachers.

5.3 Civil authorities

Since 2001, the Afghan Government, with the strong support of the international community, has invested a significant amount of resources in promoting the

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[83] Afghanistan Ministry of Education, *Afghanistan National Education for All (EFA) Review 2015 Report*, UNESCO, 2014, p. 40, http://www.unesco.org/ulis/cgi-bin/ulis.pl?catno=232702.

[84] Ibid., p. 49.

[85] Ibid.

empowerment of women to key positions in politics and public administration, as well as promoting female-oriented civil-society organizations. Nowadays, many women hold nationally relevant institutional positions,[86] whereas, as highlighted in several interviews, 15 years ago it would have been impossible for females to hold positions of national importance in so many diverse sectors.[87]

Currently, within the Afghan Government female office-holders head four ministries – Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled, Ministry of Counter-Narcotics, Ministry of Higher Education and Ministry of Women's Affairs. With specific regard to Herat Province, currently four out of 52 departments and entities, such as the Department of Women's Affairs and the Department of Social Affairs, have female directors.

Interviewees highlighted the fact that NGOs led by women are gradually acquiring a stronger status within Afghan society, as well as gaining increased support from male community leaders. For instance, Ms. Soraya Pakzad, director of "Voice of Women", stresses the fact that an increased number of provincial governors now support the opening of shelters for women within their administrative areas. In director Pakzad's view, this is the result of a change of attitude amongst civic leaders, according to which improving women's status is seen as enhancing their own image.

According to the interviewees, the presence of female units within the international armed forces and the Italian Army in Herat Province has contributed, directly and indirectly, to these improvements. The presence of young female officers and soldiers in Herat seemed to have had a positive impact on civil society in terms of raising awareness and providing role models, especially for the members of younger generations.

In this regard, promoting women to high-level and leading positions within civil institutions is beneficial in boosting female participation in society. It is particularly noteworthy that out of 300 workers in the Social Affairs Department, headed by Ms. Basira Mohammadi, 247 are women. Departments headed by a female director, in turn, tend to have higher numbers of female employees. In such cases, women also seem to feel more comfortable with reporting potential cases of harassment and "mobbing". Professional relations with men are generally described as not being problematic, but they are still affected by a prevailing conservative mentality.

When asked to assess the contribution of Italian CIMIC activities, interviewees highlighted facts such as the construction of the Herat Department of Women's Affairs and the Department of Social Affairs, as well as these bodies' close cooperation

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[86] Aarya Nijat and Jennifer Murtazashvili, "Women's Leadership Roles in Afghanistan", in *USIP Special Reports*, No. 380 (September 2015), p. 1, https://www.usip.org/publications/2015/09/womens-leadership-roles-afghanistan.

[87] Ibid., p. 2.

with the mission. For instance, the Italian PRT supported the construction of an orphanage for 70 children in 2014 and the J9 cell within the RS mission provided the Department of Social Affairs with a significant amount of resources.

Despite the significant progress achieved, many challenges still hamper women's empowerment in Afghanistan. Despite the advances highlighted above, only 7 percent of Afghan women hold high-level decision-making positions; this figure should be raised to 30 percent by 2024, according to the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals.

In this regard, one of the major trends emerging from the interviews concerned the substantial lack of political support for women holding leading positions. The tendency has been to promote female empowerment by focusing on a crude head count of women involved in politics, without taking into account their actual decision-making power or access to financial resources and human capital.[88] As a result, women's roles are often perceived as merely symbolic and lacking in credibility.

Moreover, interviewees pointed out that issues such as harassment, mobility restrictions and religious extremism still represent significant obstacles to reaching gender equality. To this extent, corruption again represents a further hindering factor, constraining the effectiveness of development programmes and the management of funds as well as the functioning of the justice system itself. As a result, women tend to avoid resorting to judicial channels – whether institutional or tribal – because of the distrust engendered by corruption. According to the interviews, being a woman in Herat and holding a public position is still a source of insecurity. All female interviewees holding high-level positions admitted to having received, at least once during their career, threats and intimidations aimed at forcing them to leave their jobs.[89] They also reported having received official communications issued by the Afghan Government warning them about potential threats, although Kabul did not undertake responsibility for their protection.

5.4 The economy and employment

Herat is one of the wealthiest regions in Afghanistan, and is often portrayed as an "economic powerhouse". The province's annual output, estimated for the year 2011, accounted for 1.2 billion dollars, accounting for 7 percent of the national total, despite the fact that Herat's population is only 0.5 percent of the total.[90] Within its

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[88] Ibid., p. 8.

[89] Usually in the form of "night letters", "threatening letters" to communities or individuals that are generally hand-delivered or posted to a door or mosque by insurgent groups at night and that are a common means of intimidation and control of local communities by insurgents. For more information in this regard, please refer to: Canada Immigration and Refugee Board, *Afghanistan: Night Letters [ShabNameha, Shabnamah, Shabnameh], Including Appearance (2010-2015)*, 10 February 2015, http://www.irb.gc.ca/Eng/ResRec/RirRdi/Pages/index.aspx?doc=455723&pls=1.

[90] Jolyon Leslie, "Political and Economic Dynamics of Herat", cit., p. 13.

economic structure, agriculture represents the most important sector, providing 30 percent of provincial output and employing almost 70 percent of the working population.[91]

Although a precise assessment of employment trends in Afghanistan is constrained by an absence of reliable data, the number of women employed in wage labour in Herat Province is higher than that recorded in other provinces.[92]

With regard to women's economic empowerment, the interviewees positively assessed the initiatives carried out by the Italian CIMIC cell. In particular, the "vocational courses" initiated by the Italian federation of craft and small and medium businesses, Confartigianato, and carried out with the support of the Julia Brigade, a light infantry brigade of the Italian army, represent positive examples. In 2015, four Italian artisans spent one month in Herat training 40 Afghan citizens (20 male and 20 female).[93] Courses took place in the Italian compound of Camp Arena, and female-attended courses focused on hairdressing and tailoring. According to interviews, although no specific figure had been provided this initiative had a positive impact on the employment rate of those who attended the courses. Communication with the private sector in order to boost women's employment has been outlined as a priority issue in various interviews, and is being also addressed through communication campaigns.

"Economy and employment" represents no exception to the sectors previously analysed – and, despite some achievements, women's active roles within the economic sector are still hampered by a range of factors, including female mobility being restricted because of the security situation, a lack of infrastructure, and prejudice.[94] Although the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industries (ACCI) 2015 annual report provides a positive picture regarding the support for women engaged in business and economic activities, which in Herat is assessed at 82.5 percent,[95] interviewees underlined the scant attention paid by the national government to facilitating women's presence in the private sector.

Addressing such a challenging situation is perceived as being of the utmost importance. This is especially true considering that women's passive economic roles limit their capacity to emerge as leaders in the family, which, according to Afghan sociologists, is the "foundational building block of Afghan society and the starting point of the practice of leadership for women and men".[96]

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[91] Ibid.

[92] Ibid., p. 19.

[93] Confartigianato, *Quattro artigiani di Confartigianato Udine in missione formativa in Afghanistan*, 10 July 2015, http://www.confartigianato.it/?p=36603.

[94] Aarya Nijat and Jennifer Murtazashvili, "Women's Leadership Roles in Afghanistan", cit., p. 9.

[95] Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce & Industries, *ACCI Business Monitor 2015*, Kabul, December 2015, p. 9, http://www.acci.org.af/media/English Report 2015 v11.pdf.

[96] Aarya Nijat and Jennifer Murtazashvili, "Women's Leadership Roles in Afghanistan", cit., p. 9.

Conclusions

Resorting again to our theoretical framework and in the light of our empirical analysis, we may draw some general and conclusive considerations.

First, the military alone cannot resolve a crisis or conflict.[97] Adopting a comprehensive approach to military/security operations begins with promoting a culture of active collaboration among those involved in crisis management. More specifically, CIMIC personnel can serve as a liaison between different organizations in order to streamline gender-related activities in conflict situations, in which development and aid organizations often have limited access to a crisis area.

Second, it is essential that CIMIC personnel continue to receive pre-deployment and in-theatre training as well as targeted information on the culture, values and social norms of the host country, and that they include a gender perspective and conduct gender analyses within the framework of their activities.

Third, achieving gender equality in extremely complex environments, such as that presented by Afghanistan, is a long and demanding process that will most likely outlast any single peace operation. Implementing gender-mainstreaming policies and ensuring the protection of all citizens is ultimately the responsibility of the host nation. In light of the Italian mission's mandate, the military's responsibility is to be aware of the gender roles in a given society and to support the local government and its international partners in striving for gender equality.[98]

Fourth, specifically concerning our case study, the evaluation of multiple aid programmes in Afghanistan has shown that Afghans will almost always say that the programme implemented has been successful. This is mainly due to politeness and a sense of hospitality, as well as a desire for interventions of any kind and quality to continue just in case there is a positive outcome.[99] Such local attitudes were considered when drawing the following conclusions and analysing the findings of the interviews, which throughout the study were integrated and crosschecked by relevant literature on the topic.

Finally, based on the findings from the field trip to Herat and the specificities of the case study, this section provides some "food for thought", which could eventually contribute to enhancing the effectiveness of CIMIC activities designed and implemented by the Italian contingent.

- *Continued engagement and cooperation with civil society will be crucial in ensuring stability, mission effectiveness and steady advancements in promoting*

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[97] Stephanie Groothedde, *Gender Makes Sense*, cit., p. 44.

[98] Ibid., p. 57.

[99] Sippi Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, "Seeking out their Afghan Sisters", cit., p. 20.

women's empowerment. This also incorporates the adoption of a "bottom-up", rather than "top-down", approach when interacting with the local population concerning women-related issues.

Interviews highlighted the fact that Western perspectives regarding the nature of PRT support for Afghanistan's stabilization and reconstruction did not match those of Afghans themselves. While, according to the NATO concept of PRT, stabilization and reconstruction was meant to continue for a limited period of time – as the long-term aim was to hand over full responsibility to the Afghan authorities – the local population regarded the PRTs as permanent installations, similar to international charities and quasi-job centres.[100] This goes some way towards explaining the seemingly divergent trends emerged from the interviews: on the one hand, overall appreciation for the support of the international community; on the other, partial dissatisfaction at the limited number of CIMIC activities carried out from 2014 onwards, as well as unrealistically high expectations of an increased contribution over the coming years.

A particularly relevant factor in this regard was the transition from ISAF to Resolute Support mission. This strongly and adversely influenced the capacity of the troops to interact with civil society. Besides the difference between the RS mandate and ISAF, the faltering transition, especially in terms of available resources and personnel, affected the implementation of CIMIC. The initial uncertainty regarding the future of Italy's contribution in Afghanistan diverted attention from cooperation with local actors. Informal talks with Italian military personnel confirmed this issue, underlining the fact that the lack of specific provisions concerning CIMIC initiatives within the RS mandate could affect the stability of the province. Although the objectives of the new mission are to train, advise and assist the Afghan security forces, engagement and cooperation with the country's civil society still play a crucial role in order to ensure stability, mission effectiveness and steady advancements in promoting women's empowerment. As was stressed in the interviews, cooperation and interaction with locals should continue and should focus on the institutional/top-down process as well as the bottom-up dimension (e.g. interactions with civil-society associations and stakeholders). According to several evaluations of the situation on the ground, achieving these objectives would take generations and at least another 10–20 years of continuous effort.[101]

- Increasing efforts towards supervising longer-term projects conducted under Afghan responsibility and adopting a "train-the-trainers" approach will be instrumental in boosting sustainability and capacity-building within gender-related development initiatives.

Interviewees voiced criticism of the short-term duration of training projects, which were usually structured as three-week "crash courses". Participants stressed

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[100] Markus Gauster, "Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan", cit., p. 9.
[101] Ibid., p. 8.

that the limited timeframe was often insufficient to acquire adequate working proficiency. Moreover, such criticism concerns the overall planning of support initiatives that were not included in broader or more long-term programmes. This was seen as affecting not only the immediate outcome of these projects but also their sustainability in the long run. Besides their limited duration, the lack of advanced courses was also pointed out as one of the major constraints on their effectiveness.

According to some experts, greater efforts should be oriented instead towards monitoring the implementation of long-term and sustainable projects conducted under Afghan responsibility. In this sense, a "train-the-trainers" approach, which is currently being implemented by RS in the security sector, could be made to apply also to CIMIC initiatives in order to boost their sustainability and capacity-building potential.

According to their personal and professional experience, some of the interviewees suggested a minimum duration of six weeks and a maximum of three months for such initiatives.

Interestingly, the vocational courses launched in January 2017 seem to have taken these considerations into account. Although the Italian mission provided material and resources for such courses, this time Afghan instructors conducted them. In addition, the courses lasted six weeks. The major advantages of such a revised approach derive from the involvement of Afghan trainers and include the facts that (a) courses were tailored, based on local needs and involved local resources and products; and (b) as relying on local expertise reduced costs for translation services and reimbursements – which would have been allocated for Italian trainers – resulting in reduction of costs-per-trainer.

These outcomes ultimately facilitated the attendance of a larger number of students on the courses.

- Factors such as the introduction of eligibility and funding criteria for development initiatives, as well as the involvement of men in such activities, contribute to maximizing the impact of international investments and ensuring lasting empowerment for women in Afghanistan.

In order to maximize the impact of international investments, some interviewees suggested the introduction of eligibility and funding criteria for development initiatives. According to this view, all projects, regardless of size or scope, should dedicate adequate attention to women. Thereby, priority should be given to those initiatives that will be primarily aimed at promoting gender equality and improving women's conditions. However, this should not lead to the marginalization of men. Male engagement should be ensured in order to avoid distorted perceptions and to effectively tackle women's issues. As reported by a United States Institute of Peace (USIP) analysis on "Women's leadership in Afghanistan", the disproportionate allocation of resources aimed at improving women's conditions by paying special

attention to female issues had led a portion of the Afghan male population to believe that their needs were being overlooked compared with those of women. This boosted the impression of an inequality between women and men's needs, and fostered a distorted perception regarding the situation of women within Afghan society. As a matter of fact, several men were reported as believing that women are accorded a privileged status within government and society as result of quota and preferential-treatment mechanisms.[102] Hence, including men in all initiatives aimed at improving the situation of women in Afghanistan emerged from the interviews as an urgent priority.

- In order to foster progressive social change towards gender equality and women's rights, outreach initiatives should devote specific attention to men, especially within the younger generations, by relying on the influential role of the media (e.g. radio).

In order to design and implement initiatives aimed at effectively engaging larger sections of the Afghan population, including men from the younger generations, some interviewees outlined the significant role that the media could play in engaging a wide audience when discussing women's rights. As 98 percent of the Afghan population has access to it, either in cities or villages,[103] radio is one of the most suitable means of communication in the Afghan environment in order to address women's issues. In particular, radio could serve as an outreach tool by conveying the message that women's empowerment actually has positive effects on men's lives as well by indirectly contributing to the country's prosperity. Based on the findings from the interviews, when discussing gender, young men who had grown up during the civil war and the Taliban regime should be the targeted audience. While older generations, who experienced a more liberal lifestyle during the Seventies and before the Soviet invasion, are keener to gradually accept women's empowerment, younger generations appear more reluctant to address gender issues as they have been educated in a much more conservative society. Considering that 63 percent of the Afghan population is under the age of 25,[104] it follows that young men will have to play a crucial role in fostering progressive social change with regard to gender equality.

- Continued cooperation and effective communication should be ensured between security actors and civilian stakeholders (international organizations, NGOs, humanitarian and development organizations, etc.).

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[102] Aarya Nijat and Jennifer Murtazashvili, "Women's Leadership Roles in Afghanistan", cit., p. 10.

[103] United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), *Herat. A Socio-Economic and Demographic Profile*, 2007, p. 20, http://afghanag.ucdavis.edu/country-info/Province-agriculture-profiles/unfr-reports/All-Herat.pdf/view.

[104] See the UNFPA Afghanistan website: *Young People*, http://afghanistan.unfpa.org/en/node/15227.

Multiple IOs and NGOs usually work within operational theatres where the military is deployed. Because of the extensive knowledge held by certain IOs and NGOs in a crisis area, it is important for CIMIC personnel to liaise with them. This liaison could, for instance, be a task for Gender Advisors (GENADs) and Gender Field Advisors (GFAs) in close cooperation with members of a CIMIC team. An important step in this direction would be for the military to take part in aid and development networks (e.g. the UN Cluster Approach,[105] On-site Operations Coordination Centres, etc.). Within such clusters and related meetings, security forces might, for instance, be involved as observers rather than, necessarily, as full members.

Another key factor within civilian–military interaction (CMI) is the difference between the timeframes of action of security and civilian actors. When working in the field, IOs and NGOs usually carry out long-term projects. On the contrary, NATO military forces focus on short-term and quick-impact initiatives. By combining short- and long-term efforts whenever possible, civilian and military activities can truly be harmonized through a compatible approach.

The interviews conducted in Herat confirmed that it is particularly effective when, for instance, the military involves itself in Quick Impact Projects (QIPs), particularly those aimed at building infrastructure (e.g. the Italian contingent's construction of the female Herat jail), whereas, following the implementation of QIPs, civil associations, NGOs and IOs engage in conducting long-term projects using these facilities (e.g. War Child and the Women for Afghan Women association working in the Herat jail).

Concerning specific cases of interactions, based on the interviews, civilian–military interaction had been more frequent during the ISAF mission that under Resolute Support. Currently, interaction with all the NGOs and IOs present in Herat Province is rather limited and not conducted in a systematic way. Nevertheless, updates and communications are carried out on a weekly basis with, for instance, the liaison officer of the United Nations Herat Office.

Finally, according to the Civil-Military Cooperation Centre of Excellence, best practice in the field of CMI is for Quick Impact Projects to be audited by local authorities prior to their implementation. As RS initiatives are currently implemented on the request of local stakeholders, it might be useful in the future to have QIPs audited not only by the local population but also by representatives of the international and aid community working in the field.

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[105] In 2005, a major reform of humanitarian coordination, known as the Humanitarian Reform Agenda, promoted by the United Nations, introduced, among several new elements, the Cluster Approach, in order to enhance predictability, accountability and partnership in the field of humanitarian action. Clusters are groups of organizations, both UN and non-UN, in each of the main sectors of humanitarian action, e.g. water, health and logistics. They are designated by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) and have clear responsibilities for coordinating humanitarian actions worldwide. See the Humanitarian Response website: *What is the Cluster Approach?*, https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/node/1351.

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