

Noref Policy Brief

Drawing the lines: the Norwegian debate on civilian-military relations in Afghanistan

Arne Strand

Executive Summary

Military and civilian actors are engaged in a debate over where to draw the lines in the provision of humanitarian and development assistance. This is illustrated in Afghanistan by the different national models applied to Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs). Norway has opted for a model that clearly separates the civilian and military components within the PRT.

Specific guidelines, both international and Afghan, emphasise the need to separate military and humanitarian activities. Humanitarian assistance should be distributed on the basis of need while upholding the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality and neutrality; it must not be used for the purposes of political gain, relationship-building, or “winning hearts and minds”.

The Norwegian military argues that NGOs should contribute toward a “whole-of-government approach” in the area under Norwegian PRT responsibility to help “hold and build” upon the military gains. The NGOs’ position is that minimising security risks and maximising the impact of NGO assistance requires neutrality. Development assistance might be determined as political support, though the Norwegian government here takes a functional approach by arguing for implementation to be undertaken by professional development organisations, be they Afghan or international.

Recent research has questioned the impact of military aid delivery both in terms of development and added security. The present Norwegian PRT model has ensured that the delivery of humanitarian and development assistance avoids being conflated with military functions and political partiality, while ensuring professional delivery of assistance. One recommendation, therefore, is for this model to be further developed and advocated for other members of the International Security Assistance Force.

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Military and civilian actors are engaged in a debate over where to draw the lines in the provision of humanitarian and development assistance. This debate is clearly evident in the assistance efforts in Afghanistan that emerged following the introduction in November 2002 of United States joint military and civilian Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs). Other countries followed suit as the International Security Assistance Force (Isaf) moved outside the capital Kabul from 2003 onwards. However, Norway has developed a model in Faryab province that differs from the US model. The Norwegian model ensures a clear division between military and civilian engagement and provides a framework for collaborating with the local Afghan authorities. Nevertheless, this model is constantly under debate and might be further challenged as the US civilian surge is rolled out across Afghanistan.

International guidelines

For this debate it is essential to take note of several United Nations guidelines that regulate civilian-military relations. Developed in 1994, the first guidelines established protocols for the use of military assets in disaster relief operations. Frequently referred to as the “Oslo Guidelines”, they were followed in 2003 by the “Guidelines on the use of Military and Civil Defence Assets to support United Nations Humanitarian Activities in Complex Emergencies”.¹ Guidelines specific to Afghanistan were established by the Afghanistan civil-military working group in 2008, termed “Guidelines for the Interaction and Coordination of Humanitarian Actors and Military Actors in Afghanistan”.² These regulations were intended to support “the development of a relationship between military and humanitarian actors in which differences are recognised and respected.” In short, all of these guidelines advocate for a clear distinction between civilian and military actors and activities.

1 “Guidelines on the use of Military and Civil Defence Assets to support United Nations Humanitarian Activities in Complex Emergencies”, Revision 1, January 2006, <http://ochaonline.un.org/OchaLinkClick.aspx?link=ocha&docId=1112407>, accessed 23 June 2010.

2 Afghanistan civil-military working group, “Guidelines for the Interaction and Coordination of Humanitarian Actors and Military Actors in Afghanistan” 2008, <http://ochaonline.un.org/OCHALinkclick.aspx?link=ocha&docid=1159906>, accessed 23 June 2010.

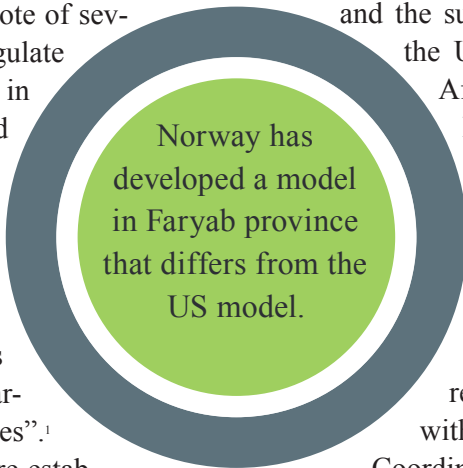
These distinctions are evident in relation to PRTs specifically. A policy note from the Afghan PRT Executive Steering Committee, as quoted in the Afghan guidelines, explains that humanitarian assistance “must not be used for the purpose of political gain, relationship-building, or ‘winning hearts and minds’. It must be distributed on the basis of need and must uphold the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality and neutrality.”³ Moreover, the Afghan guidelines specify that “no asset of any kind belonging to a humanitarian actor may be used by military actors without explicit, prior permission of the actor concerned.”

Another PRT policy note on provincial development underscores that such activities are supposed to support “local priorities within the national development framework, such as the Afghan National Development Strategy”. In this development strategy, activities should be coordinated with the government of Afghanistan, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the sub-national governance programme of the United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (Unama). Furthermore, the PRT is encouraged to coordinate and connect all projects with the provincial requirements of the Provincial Development Council (PDC).⁴ Together, both notes acknowledge the particular role of the UN in such a coordinated effort, placing the primary responsibility for supporting the PDCs with Unama and the UN Humanitarian Coordinator which oversee any humanitarian response in Afghanistan.

The guidelines also establish that “the use of military or armed protection for humanitarian agencies or for specific humanitarian activities is a measure that should be taken only in exceptional circumstances in order to meet critical humanitarian needs”. Furthermore, “any

3 PRT Executive Steering Committee Policy Note Number 3 “PRT Coordination and Intervention in Humanitarian Assistance”, updated 29 January 2009, https://www.cimicweb.org/Documents/PRT%20CONFERENCE%202010/Policy_Note_3_Humanitarian_Assistance.pdf, accessed 23 June 2010

4 PRT Executive Steering Committee, “PRT Engagement in Provincial Development”, Policy Note Number 1, endorsed 7 December 2006, https://www.cimicweb.org/Documents/PRT%20CONFERENCE%202010/Policy_Note_1_Engagement_in_Provincial_Development.pdf, accessed 23 June 2010.



decision to request or accept military or armed protection must be made by humanitarian organisations, not political or military authorities.”

The PRT structure

There are presently 26 Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in Afghanistan under Nato/Isaf command, divided among 13 lead nations. Their mission is to “assist The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to extend its authority, in order to facilitate the development of a stable and secure environment in the identified area of operations, and enable Security Sector Reform (SSR) and reconstruction efforts.”

The PRT concept was initially launched by the US Department of Defence in November 2002 “to facilitate reconstruction, extend the reach of the Afghan central government, establish favourable working conditions for humanitarian aid workers and build a foundation for sustainable post-conflict security”. The PRT was conceptualised (in the words of Scott R. Peck) as “an attempt to attack the enemy’s (terrorists and anti-government groups) strategic centre of gravity – the allegiance of the Afghan people. By simultaneously providing the Afghan people with tangible humanitarian, reconstruction and security benefits, PRTs build goodwill, trust, credibility and cooperation among the people, the Afghan central government and the Coalition forces.”⁵

The PRTs that were gradually launched throughout Afghanistan from 2003 onwards each contained a military and civilian component. There were differences, however, in the way these respective components were organised. The scope of these differences relates to how military and civilian components are aligned and governed, the size of component budgets, and the number of staff assigned to each PRT component. Last but not least, PRTs differed according to the level of civilian component independence vis-à-vis the military and the extent to which project implementation was left to military personnel or civilians.

Afghan specific guidelines

Afghan specific guidelines state that military assets should only be used in the following circumstances:

1. where there is no comparable civilian alternative
2. when the assets are needed to meet urgent humanitarian needs
3. to the extent possible, when there is civilian control over the operation involving the assets, meaning civilian direction and coordination, as defined in the Oslo Guidelines
4. to the extent possible, when the assets are used only for indirect assistance or infrastructure support
5. when military assets are clearly distinguished from those used for humanitarian purposes
6. when the use of assets is limited in time and scale
7. when there is an exit strategy defining how to achieve a civilian response in the future.

Afghanistan civil-military working group, “Guidelines for the Interaction and Coordination of Humanitarian Actors and Military Actors in Afghanistan” 2008.

There have been a number of expressed concerns about the organisation of PRTs. At an early stage, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) raised objections about the blurring of the line between civilian and military actors and activities. They feared that this could expose aid actors and Afghan communities to larger risks since

5 Scott R. Peck, “PRT’s: Improving or Undermining the Security for NGOs and PVOs in Afghanistan?”, Newport, RI, U.S. Naval War College, 2004, <http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA425994&Location=U2&doc=GetTRDoc.pdf>, accessed 23 June 2010.

they could be regarded as part of the military operation. The NGOs also expressed concerns over the costs of such military interventions and questioned the ability of military personnel to determine community needs.⁶

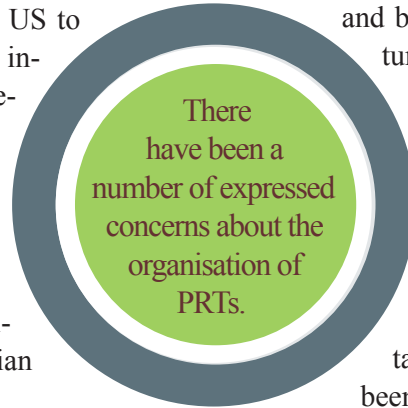
The NGO concerns did not prompt the US to change its PRT concept, but they did influence other countries in their PRT development. In some cases, countries responded by having NGOs or local businesses implement projects identified by the PRT. In other cases, such as for Norway and Sweden, countries established a clear organisational division between these military and civilian components.

The Norwegian PRT

Norway assumed responsibility in 2004 for the Faryab PRT, presently manned by about 500 soldiers from Norway and Latvia and a small civilian team. The latter includes a civilian coordinator, a political advisor and development advisors, all of whom are seconded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Other countries, like Iceland, have also supported development advisors in Faryab. The civilian team maintains contact with appointed and elected local authorities, Unama representation and NGOs. The team also participates in local coordination efforts.

Moreover, together with the Norwegian embassy in Kabul and the Norwegian foreign ministry, the civilian team decides upon and monitors the provision of humanitarian and development assistance to the province. This includes support for Unama's integrated approach for implementation of the Afghanistan National Development Strategy and the Provincial Development Plan. Norway has had a 20 % upper limit for Norwegian humanitarian/

⁶ Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR), "NGOs concerns and recommendations on civil-military relations", Policy brief, 7 December 2002. Kabul, <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/AllDocsByUNID/008dbe057ac260cac1256c8c004edb14>, accessed 23 June 2010.



development aid channelled to Faryab province, including funding through Afghan national programmes, but is now attempting to secure more funding for Faryab through Afghan national programmes. The Norwegian engagement is guided by a multi-ministerial strategy and by a formal ministerial coordinating structure in Oslo.⁷

The Norwegian Refugee Council and Norwegian Church Aid, along with a number of their Afghan partner NGOs, have established offices in Faryab over the past few years. The Norwegian Afghanistan Committee is considering establishing itself there. These NGOs have been present in Pakistan and Afghanistan since the 1980s, and include a broad range of humanitarian and development expertise. However, Norwegian support for Faryab province is only to a limited degree channelled through Norwegian NGOs.

Challenges in the Faryab province

Faryab is the Afghan province with the highest representation of ethnic Uzbeks, the next highest being in the neighbouring province of Jowzjan. The Uzbeks' political/military party – Junbesh-i Milli, headed by Ahmed Rashid Dostum – is highly influential in both provinces. Having military and non-military backgrounds, their members are centrally placed in the government structure and elected to the provincial council. However, the present governor of Faryab belongs to another ethnic and religious minority, the Hazaras.

There has historically been a strained relationship between the Pashtuns and Afghanistan's minorities, which include Uzbeks, Tajiks and Hazaras. From 1880 onwards, the Afghan kings deported Pashtuns opposing their reign to northern Afghanistan as part of an effort to establish pockets of Pashtuns within the minority groups in order to weaken their influence. The kings

⁷ Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Defence and Ministry of the Justice and the Police, "Strategy for Comprehensive Norwegian Civilian and Military Efforts in Faryab province, Afghanistan", May 2009, Oslo, http://www.regjeringen.no/upload/UD/Vedlegg/Sikkerhetspol/faryab_strategy0906.pdf, accessed 23 June 2010.

provided these deportees, along with the Pashtun teachers that later moved to northern Afghanistan, with land for settling. Pashtun nomads (koochiees) that shifted their grazing routes to the north also made use of the local pastures. Taken together, Pashtun migration led to continuous conflicts over land and water and generated opposition to Pashtun dominance. This intensified as minorities formed ethnically-based military groups following the Soviet invasion in 1979, and later joined forces with the Northern Alliance.

The northern-based Pashtuns gained influence during the Taliban period, but were targeted for retaliation as the Northern Alliance came to power after joining forces with Operation Enduring Freedom in late 2001. Pashtun farmers then had their land and herds confiscated and many fled south and west to stay in camps in Kandahar or Herat. One estimate is that 10,000 families left Faryab alone. Efforts to repatriate and restore the property rights of the northern Pashtuns have only been a partial success, as many families still remain displaced. Thus, ethnic tension has increased in northern Afghanistan, including in Faryab, and the area is now described by Antonio Giustozzi as “the warlord’s hotbed” due to the extreme levels of violence there in the 1980s and 1990s and the continued competition among militant leaders today.⁸

This became a further concern when in 2008 a presidential decree temporarily included the predominately Pashtun Ghormach district of neighbouring Badghis province within Faryab. The rationale was that elements of the Pashtun opposition in the district were suspected of being linked to the Taliban movement and thus regarded as a potential military threat to the Faryab PRT. The border adjustment, however, led to increased ethnic and political tension that adversely influenced the security situation. This in turn posed challenges to the provision of humanitarian and development assistance as NGOs faced increasing risks working in this district.

⁸ Antonio Giustozzi, *Empires of Mud: Wars and Warlords in Afghanistan*, London, Hurst & Company, 2009.

The Norwegian civil-military debate

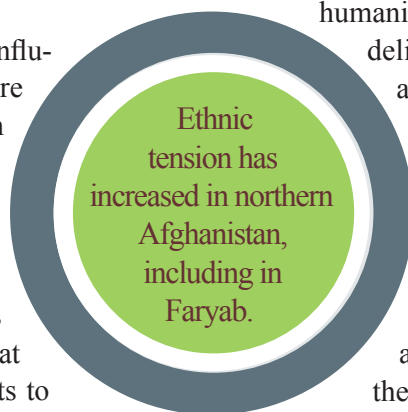
While these ethnic and political challenges to the Norwegian engagement have not been broadly discussed, there has been a public exchange over the direction of Norwegian humanitarian and development assistance. This exchange illustrates several aspects of the larger civilian-military debate.

The exchange was initiated when the Norwegian military, following their military interventions, called for humanitarian and development assistance to be delivered to the Ghormach area. The military argued that in order to “hold and build” within the population as they attempted to clear the area of Taliban elements, there needed to be corresponding provisions for humanitarian and development assistance. While Unama and the Afghan government identified Ghormach as a focus area for their integrated approach, the Norwegian NGOs remained reluctant to engage due to security concerns. From the NGO perspective, minimising operational security risks and maximising the impact of NGO assistance requires the perception of neutrality.

Critics of this view expressed a need for Norwegian-funded NGOs to contribute towards a “whole-of-government” approach in the now extended Faryab province, to ensure well-sequenced and coherent progress across political, security, economic and administrative domains. They argued, moreover, that NGOs which provide development assistance in support of the Afghan government could not claim neutrality.

Army calls for civil-military integration

Taking the view that integrating civilian and military operations would help buttress the popular credibility of military interventions, General Sverre Diesen has encouraged Norwegian support for the new Afghan counterinsurgency strategy laid out by the former head of the Nato mission, US General Stanley McChrystal. Acknowledging the need for a long-term military engagement (over 10 to 20 years) for such a strategy to



succeed, with the likelihood of increased human and economic costs, Diesen declared that the new strategy will ensure the military a larger degree of trust among the population.

Furthermore, General Diesen emphasised the need for increasing civilian engagement to generate economic development and a functioning society, and argued for improved coordination between civilian and military components. Ideally, having the civilian and military activities located under one “supreme commander” will ensure an integrated approach for establishing an immediate and visible connection between security operations and livelihood improvements among the population. He feared, however, that such a strategy might be partly hindered by traditional bureaucratic barriers among departments in individual countries, by different national approaches among countries involved and by the unwillingness of humanitarian organisations to conform to overall strategies that include military means.

NGOs favour civil-military division

In contrast to arguments for functional integration, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), along with a group of seven other international NGOs, has been at the forefront in arguing for a strict division between civilian/humanitarian and military roles. They have highlighted their concerns in a number of publications and through presentations at international conferences. They were also instrumental in arguing the case for establishing a purely humanitarian and neutral UN coordination body in Afghanistan, the UN Organisation of Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (Ocha), to complement the political mission of Unama.

In the lead-up to the London conference held in January 2010, these NGOs issued a warning that the use of aid by international military forces as a “non-lethal” weapon was putting Afghans at greater risk. The NGOs requested a rethinking of the “militarized approach to aid” and a refocusing of aid “towards a long-term aid strategy based on meeting the real needs of the Afghans”. They raised additional concerns that “excessive influence of short-term military goals over aid policy is part of a larger flaw in the US-led Strategy”.⁹

⁹ Norwegian Refugee Council, “Aid Agencies in Afghanistan Warning”, Oslo, NRC press release, 27 January 2010, <http://www.nrc.no/?did=9461784>, accessed 23 June 2010.

The reply from a former Norwegian PRT commander emphasised the positive developments in Afghanistan, in contrast to the rather bleak picture painted by the NGOs. Additionally, he argued that since the international community (including Norway), through Nato and the UN, was committed to implementing a “Comprehensive and Integrated Approach”, the NRC’s claim that separation between the military and civilian activities was already Norwegian policy should be questioned.¹⁰

The Norwegian government position

In a reply clarifying Norwegian policy, state secretary Espen Barth Eide (then of the Ministry of Defence and now of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) supported the NRC position by citing that the military has to respect “humanitarian space”, and that humanitarian actors must be allowed to work independently of the warring factions.¹¹ In drawing the boundaries for such a space, he emphasised that Norwegian development assistance, in contrast to humanitarian assistance, is an expression of political support to the government of Afghanistan and thus is not to be defined as impartial.

However, Barth Eide elaborated here that Norway, in line with UN recommendations, applies a functional division of labour between civilian and military actors in the development sector. This leaves development activities to the professional development organisations, including Afghan institutions, to ensure better and more sustainable implementation than what is provided by the military. Rejecting the notion that Afghan “hearts and minds” can be won over through rapid, short-term and often uncoordinated development efforts, he argued that such assistance has had a very limited impact. Instead, in his opinion, such assistance often produces unintended results caused by a lack of understanding of local culture and social conditions.

¹⁰ Ole-Asbjørn Fauske, “Debatten om Afghanistan savner kunnskap”, Kronikk, Adressavisen, 3 February 2010, <http://www.adressa.no/meninger/article1439820.ece>, accessed 23 June 2010.

¹¹ Espen Barth Eide, “Flyktningehjelpen har et poeng”. Kommentar, Adressavisen, 20 February 2010, <http://www.adressa.no/meninger/article1447484.ece>, accessed 23 June 2010.

These arguments are supported by recent research undertaken by the Feinstein International Centre at Tufts University which explores the effectiveness of the hearts-and-minds strategy. In fact, Faryab province is one of the case studies in the research. The initial findings demonstrate that the funds available to the Commander's Emergency Response Programme (CERP) to implement such a strategy, budgeted with \$1.2 billion for 2010, "might be hurting – or at best, not helping – U.S. counterinsurgency efforts in Afghanistan".¹²

The research team found that there is little evidence of aid projects winning hearts and minds or promoting stability simply because "the major factors perceived to be fuelling insecurity have little to do with the lack of social services or infrastructure." The research also finds that "not only is aid not contributing to improved security, but in some cases it may actually be fuelling the conflict". As evidence of this, the researchers recorded a strong belief among the population that aid delivery, with some notable exceptions like the National Solidarity Programme (NSP), fuelled massive corruption.

Upcoming challenges

The debate over civilian and military roles is likely to continue, as Norway, in contrast to most other Isaf countries, maintains a division of labour between the military and civilian components and applies a strict yet functional adoption of the UN guidelines. However, there are two upcoming challenges that might alter the direction of this debate.

The first challenge is the military and civilian surge, which involves the deployment of US troops and development advisors to Faryab. The number of US troops tasked to mentor the Afghan National Police is expected

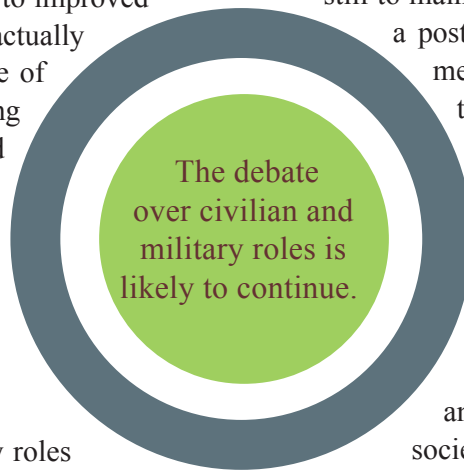
12 Andre Wilder and Stuart Gordon, "Money Can't Buy America Love", Foreign Policy, 1 December 2009, http://www.foreign-policy.com/articles/2009/12/01/money_cant_buy_america_love, accessed 23 June 2010.

to outnumber PRT soldiers, while the US development advisors on short-term contracts and fixed budgets are already operating in parallel to the PRT structure. Efforts are being made from the Norwegian side to establish communication and meeting points with the US advisors in order to ensure awareness of Norwegian policy and provide advice if requested. However, it must be expected that this will challenge the "Norwegian model", including established communication and coordination with the Afghan government, the UN and the NGOs.

The second challenge is that the current policy for the Norwegian PRT needs to move gradually towards a mentoring, partnering and supporting role for the Afghan National Security Forces, where a reduction in foreign troop levels is expected over time. The plan is still to maintain civilian representation in Faryab in a post-PRT phase of the Norwegian engagement. This strategic clarification reduces the significance of any Norwegian military aid involvement, and could allow the debate to concentrate on longer-term planning of the humanitarian/development engagement of the civilian arm. Among the urgent issues to be addressed here are how to ensure sustained dialogue and coordination with and among Afghan authorities and civil society and the UN; how to define the roles and responsibilities of the NGO sector beyond project implementation; and matters related to the possible promotion of larger projects that might benefit and establish relations across provinces.

Recommendations

Recent research has questioned the impact of military aid delivery both in terms of development and added security. The present Norwegian PRT model separating the civilian and military components has ensured that the delivery of humanitarian and development assistance avoids being conflated with military functions and



political partiality, while ensuring professional assistance delivery. To secure further benefits for the population of Faryab and to inform the debate over civilian-military relations, the following ideas are recommended.

- Stick to the present model of clear separation, and make this more visible to the Faryab population and other Nato countries by placing the civilian component outside the PRT camp.
- Continue to advocate the Norwegian model towards Isaf and Nato and initiate debates on how US development advisors can best complement – rather than compete with – the present PRT and Afghan government structures and strategies. Promote a national focus for all PRTs in line with Afghan policies and strategies rather than an exclusively provincial one.
- Focus on the quality and durability of humanitarian and development interventions, including funding of longer-term and larger projects that can ensure continued dialogue and interaction with and among communities and authorities.
- Ensure that humanitarian and development needs are a priority for assistance delivery rather than favouring areas with the highest conflict level.
- Initiate a broad debate within the Norwegian military on civilian/military issues and how to comply with UN guidelines in Afghanistan.
- Consider a “Faryab lessons learned” seminar with representation from Norwegian ministries, Norad, NGOs and researchers.

Further reading

1. Sippi Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, Mirwais Wardak, Idrees Zaman and Annabel Taylor, Afghan Hearts, Afghan Minds: Exploring Afghan perceptions of civil-military Relations, Kabul, BAAG/ENNA, 2008, http://www.enanet.eu/news/index/BAAGENNA_CIVMIL_Report.pdf, accessed 23 June 2010
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3. Cedric de Coning, Helge Lurås, Niels Nagelhus Schia and Ståle Ulriksen, “Norway’s Whole-of-Government Approach: Challenges for Engagement with Afghanistan and Other Fragile States”, Policy Brief 2, Oslo, NUPI, 2010, <http://english.nupi.no/Publications/Popular-publishing/2010/Norway-s-Whole-of-Government-Approach.-Challenges-for-Engagement-with-Afghanistan-and-Other-Fragile-States>, accessed 20 June 2010

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