

Summary of the Report of the Inquiry on Sweden's Engagement in Afghanistan 2002-2014

Remit

The Inquiry's remit is to evaluate Sweden's concerted engagement in Afghanistan – political-diplomatic efforts, military operations, and development cooperation – between 2002 and 2014, with a particular focus on activities in northern Afghanistan between 2006 and 2014. The Inquiry is to describe, analyse and evaluate the Swedish engagement on the basis of the considerations and objectives established, and make proposals for the future work of the Government and relevant government agencies with international missions and operations.

The Inquiry is to report the effects of the engagement on Afghan society (including gender equality and women's rights), the effectiveness of the Swedish Government's governance of relevant agencies, and analyse coordination and cooperation between different actors, focusing on development cooperation and the military operations.

The work of the Inquiry

The Inquiry has conducted its work in an inclusive manner, through a large number of contacts with people with a good knowledge of Afghanistan. Meetings and interviews were held with some 250 sources in Sweden, Afghanistan and other countries. The Inquiry has taken part in seminars in Sweden and abroad on experiences of Swedish and international engagement in Afghanistan. The Inquiry has reviewed a large volume of archive

material at Swedish government agencies and benefited from reports specially requested from relevant agencies. The Inquiry has studied the various types of policy documents and decisions by the Government, and has reviewed extensive materials from the Riksdag (the Swedish Parliament). A number of studies from FOI¹, international organisations and institutions and literature about Afghanistan have been of great value to the Inquiry.

Sweden in Afghanistan

Sweden has been a small actor in the large-scale international engagement in Afghanistan since 2002, but the contributions have been major ones for Sweden. More than 8 000 Swedes were involved in military operations and civilian activities in Afghanistan between 2002 and 2014. Six Swedes lost their lives.

The most tangible element of the Swedish engagement was the lead nation responsibility for PRT-MeS², covering the northern Afghan provinces of Balkh, Jowzjan, Samangan and Sar-e Pul, between 2006 and 2014.

The Swedish involvement has contributed to both positive and negative effects of the engagement as a whole, but has not had any decisive impact.

The international engagement in Afghanistan

Following the terrorist attacks in the United States on 11 September 2001, a US-led coalition intervened in Afghanistan, toppling the Taliban regime with the assistance of the Northern Alliance³. This was the starting point for extensive international civil and military engagement in Afghanistan. Initially, the international engagement was small-scale, aiming to leave a “light footprint” in the country. A statebuilding process was initiated through the Bonn Agreement in December 2001. A new constitution was ratified, and presidential elections were held in

¹ Swedish Defence Research Agency.

² Provincial Reconstruction Team – Mazar-e Sharif.

³ The Afghan resistance to the Taliban regime was organised in an alliance of resistance groups, the Northern Alliance.

2004. Parliamentary elections were held in 2005. The International Security Assistance Force, ISAF⁴, assisted the new Afghan government to maintain security, initially only in Kabul, and after 2003 throughout the country. NATO assumed leadership of ISAF in 2003.

The resurgence of the Taliban and ISAF's expansion, both geographical and in terms of troop levels, between 2003 and 2006 intensified the internal armed conflict in Afghanistan. In 2005 at the end of the Bonn process, it appeared that the foundations of a modern Afghan state had been successfully laid, but Afghanistan remained characterized by the influence of warlords, corruption, nepotism, poverty and deficient governance. International engagement – both military and civilian – gradually increased in scale.

In 2009, the new US administration reviewed its operations in Afghanistan, pointing the way for the rest of the international engagement. Subsequent years saw the largest military presence – some 132 000 soldiers – but the conflict in the country continued to intensify. The Afghan presidential elections in 2009 were characterized by electoral fraud and power struggles. Starting in 2011, ISAF began to transfer responsibility for security to the Afghan security forces. The emphasis was placed on increasing their size and enhancing their capabilities.

ISAF was concluded at the end of 2014. Earlier that year, presidential elections were held that had been characterized by electoral fraud and political confrontation, necessitating political intervention from the US and the UN. In early 2015, a new train, assist and advice mission, RSM⁵, was launched.

The armed conflict in Afghanistan

The internal armed conflict in the country gradually became more widespread and intensive from 2005/2006 onwards. The conflict was between the Afghan government, supported by ISAF, and the

⁴ International Security Assistance Force.

⁵ Resolute Support Mission.

Taliban and other armed groups. Ultimately, the conflict was about the political power in the country.

The intensity and dynamics of the armed conflict have varied over time in different parts of the country.

The internal armed conflict was for the first time publicly termed as such by the Swedish Government in 2009. In the view of the Inquiry, the Government should have stated that there was an internal armed conflict throughout the country – including in the Swedish PRT area – at a much earlier stage.

The objectives of the engagement

The objectives of Sweden's entire engagement in Afghanistan have been formulated in various ways over the period 2002–2014. In the view of the Inquiry, the objectives can be summarised in six points:

- Poverty reduction
- Security and stability
- Social and economic development
- A democratic society
- Empowerment of women
- Credibility and capability of Sweden as a participant in international operations.

The above points correspond to the overall Swedish objectives presented in July 2010 in the *Strategy for Swedish support for international involvement in Afghanistan*, which were also repeated in the Inquiry's terms of reference:

Sweden's engagement is to strengthen Afghanistan's capacity to maintain stability and security, democracy and human rights, and to offer its inhabitants opportunities to improve their lives, as well as equitable and sustainable development.

“Within the framework of the above objective, Sweden can, where possible, also promote other Swedish foreign, security and development policy interests and national interests.”

Military operations

Sweden's military operations in Afghanistan were initially on a small scale in Kabul, encompassing 45 soldiers. Following the decision to expand ISAF in 2003, ambitions were raised and Sweden assumed lead nation responsibility of PRT-MeS in 2006, covering the four northern provinces of Balkh, Jowzjan, Samangan and Sar-e Pul. These four provinces constituted a multifaceted environment in political terms, and also in terms of security and development. Sweden's troop contribution was at its largest in 2011, encompassing more than 570 soldiers. A total of 8 024 soldiers have served in the Swedish military operations.

The aim of Sweden's troop contribution was to provide a stabilising military presence in the four provinces through so-called Military Observation Teams, MOTs. The contingents were stationed at Camp Northern Lights in Mazar-e Sharif and also had provincial offices (POs) in the three other provinces.

As time went on, the contingents were increasingly involved in combat incidents. The contingents were engaged in counterinsurgency operations in accordance with the so-called COIN concept. The rules of engagement were expanded. MOTs were phased out in favour of a contingent structure similar to a mechanized battalion. The contingents received heavier equipment, and operations were directed at specific problem areas. There are uncertainties concerning the contingents' handling of detained persons.

In the latter years of the engagement, the emphasis was on increasing the capabilities of the Afghan National Security Forces. The use of OMLTs⁶ increased. Sweden also contributed advisers and trainers to the Afghan security forces in northern Afghanistan.

The role of the Swedish troop contributions has moved from stabilisation, to combat, and finally to security assistance. Over time, PRT-MeS took on a somewhat more civilian character. A Swedish Senior Civilian Representative was appointed in 2010, and in 2012 the unit was transferred to civilian leadership. PRT-MeS was nonetheless primarily a military engagement. ISAF operations were wound up in 2014.

⁶ Operational Mentor and Liaison Team.

The current security situation in Afghanistan, including the four PRT provinces, is discouraging. There are serious shortcomings in the capabilities of the Afghan National Security Forces. The Swedish military operations have not succeeded in contributing to sustainable security. However, the operations have had a positive impact on the development of the Swedish Armed Forces.

Development cooperation and humanitarian aid

Between 2002 and 2014, Sweden gave a total of SEK 6.7 billion in aid to Afghanistan, of which SEK 5.6 billion was development cooperation and SEK 1.1 billion was humanitarian support. Afghanistan became one of the largest recipients of Swedish aid.

Aid was governed by the strategies for development cooperation with Afghanistan. In practice, some areas have been constant:

- poverty reduction
- education (particular focus on girls' schooling and disabled children and young people)
- health and medical care (including SRHR⁷)
- road networks/infrastructure and transport
- capacity development of central government administration, including democracy and election support
- women's rights/gender equality
- civil society (including independent analysis and media)
- mine clearance
- private sector development/employment (from 2009)

In June 2007, the Swedish Government decided that 15–20 per cent of bilateral aid to Afghanistan would be directed to the PRT-MeS provinces. The earmarking of aid to these provinces was discontinued in 2014.

⁷ *Sexual and reproductive health and rights.*

The five largest channels for aid in Afghanistan were the World Bank/IDA (SEK 2 billion), the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SEK 1 billion), UNICEF (SEK 722 million), UNOPS (SEK 366 million) and UNDP (SEK 362 million).

Several Swedish government agencies were involved in aid to Afghanistan: the Folke Bernadotte Academy, the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency and the Swedish Police.

Sweden took an active part in international aid coordination efforts, primarily in cooperation through the UN system and the World Bank, in particular through the multi-donor Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF). Sweden actively supported the EU's police mission, EUPOL Afghanistan, from 2007.

Sweden took part in all of the major international aid conferences on Afghanistan. At the international conference in Tokyo in 2012, Sweden pledged SEK 8.5 billion in aid to Afghanistan between 2015 and 2024.

In the Inquiry's assessment, Sweden's aid has been relevant to Afghanistan. It has contributed to some positive results in education and health, women's rights and gender equality, for example, and in supporting the establishment of central government administration. The sustainability of the results is questionable, given Afghanistan's considerable dependence on aid, its corruption and the widespread armed conflict. Poverty has not been reduced.

Political and diplomatic efforts

Sweden's engagement in Afghanistan has also included various political and diplomatic efforts. These have supported the other components of the engagement. At times, Sweden was perceived to play a somewhat stronger role than was actually justified by the scale of its engagement.

Six years elapsed between the start of the engagement and Sweden establishing an embassy in Kabul in 2008. The embassy was significant to Sweden's engagement in the country, but could have been provided with greater resources.

Like many other countries, in 2009 Sweden appointed a Special Envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Special Envoy participated actively in international coordination of the engagement.

Sweden had an active role in multilateral forums concerning the engagement in Afghanistan. Sweden sought to contribute to and strengthen the UN's and the EU's respective roles in Afghanistan, but in practice this had little impact. The US and NATO were the key actors in the engagement. Sweden's participation in ISAF helped to strengthen Sweden's partnership with NATO.

Women's rights and gender equality

The difficulties associated with promoting women's rights and gender equality were reduced by the fall of the Taliban regime. The new situation in the country opened up certain possibilities. However, the traditional conservative view of women's status and role in society meant continued discrimination and resistance from traditional forces. A Ministry of Women's Affairs was established in 2002, and in the same year the new government signed the Declaration of the Essential Rights of Afghan Women. In 2003, Afghanistan ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) without any reservations. The country's new constitution from 2004 establishes that women and men have equal rights and responsibilities. However, other areas of legislation in the country, particularly family legislation, do not conform to the constitution and instead enshrine the traditional, subordinate role of women. In 2008 the National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan was adopted, and in 2009, then President Hamid Karzai promulgated the Law on Elimination of Violence Against Women, as a majority of the parliament did not support it. Women have voted in general elections to a greater extent than previously. In 2014, the proportion of women parliamentarians was around 28 per cent. The personal security of girls and women is extremely precarious; gender-based violence is widespread.

Progress has been made in terms of girls' and women's access to health and medical care, although there are still many constraints. Access to maternity care has increased, and the number of women

dying in childbirth and the infant mortality rate have decreased. Fewer girls marry at young ages.

From 2002 onwards, Afghan children – both boys and girls – poured into schools. Considerably more girls and women had access to education in 2014 compared with 2001. The proportion of girls who attended school increased from 40 per cent in 2002 to 61 per cent in 2014/2015. The statistics show that the proportion of female pupils declines as pupils get older. This mirrors the many gender-specific challenges in the country.

Sweden has provided support to Afghan actors working to implement UN Security Council resolution 1325 in the country.

Civil-military cooperation

In general terms, civil-military cooperation came to be strongly emphasised in several government bills and policy documents related to the engagement in Afghanistan. However, no more concrete analysis was ever made of what was meant by ‘cooperation’, what form it would take and how it would work, particularly in the field. In several cases, the uncertainties generated friction and tensions between and within government agencies, and between decision-makers. The field level was, in some ways, left in the lurch. Civil-military cooperation was expected to lead to synergies, which were to be encouraged. It was never clarified how these synergies would arise.

In the view of the Inquiry, a clear dividing line needs to be drawn between military operations and development cooperation in complicated countries with complex conflicts.

Civil-military cooperation can be seen as the most advanced and, possibly, the most impossible form on a scale of conceivable civil-military *relations*: from exchange of information/co-existence, collaboration, and coordination to possible cooperation/integration. It is important to clarify what civil-military *relations* should or can be in a particular context, so that there is no risk of negative effects arising.

Regardless of the scale of civil-military relations applied, adequate information exchange between the civilian and military components of an engagement must be a basic premise.

For humanitarian aid, it is important to respect and work according to the four fundamental international humanitarian principles: humanity, independence, impartiality and neutrality. A dividing line must be maintained between humanitarian actors and the warring parties in an armed conflict. Being confused with the military increases the risk to humanitarian operations in an armed conflict with strong political tensions between the armed parties.

A joint analysis of the conflict situation in question, and established objectives for the Swedish engagement and its various components that are known to all participants in the operation, are fundamental prerequisites for fruitful *civil-military relations* in an international engagement, including the possibility of cooperation. It should also be established who is to do what, what form the civil-military relations will take, and whether there are any conceivable potential conflicts between the various components of the engagement.

Governance and coordination

Throughout this period, the engagement in Afghanistan has been the subject of consideration in the Riksdag. Twelve bills concerning ISAF were presented to the Riksdag. A number of themes and issues were raised in deliberations in the Riksdag. These have included women's and girls' rights, possible confusion between ISAF and OEF⁸, civilian deaths, and the handling of detained persons. Throughout the period, there was broad, cross-party support in the Riksdag for the Swedish engagement.

The Government's governance of the engagement was handled in customary ways. Different ministries were responsible for different parts of the engagement in line with regular routines. The Inquiry observes – as previous inquiries and evaluations also did – that the different parts of the engagement were governed in separate processes, or in so-called 'silos'. In that sense, there was no concerted engagement to speak of.

In the latter years of the engagement, measures were taken towards more concerted and coordinated governance of the

⁸ Operation Enduring Freedom

engagement. The Government presented a strategy for the entire engagement and established a coordinating function at state secretary level. These measures had a limited effect.

Extent to which the objectives of the Swedish engagement were fulfilled

The Inquiry draws the conclusion that *overall, the fulfilment of the objectives of the Swedish engagement in Afghanistan between 2002 and 2014 was highly inadequate.*

The fulfilment varied somewhat for the six Swedish objectives identified by the Inquiry.

In the Inquiry's assessment, *the fulfilment of objectives in terms of security and stability was poor.* The Swedish military operations – and ISAF operations as a whole – did not succeed in assisting the Afghan authorities and government to maintain security and stability in the country. In the four 'Swedish' PRT provinces, the Swedish forces, together with those from other countries, did not assist in maintaining security to the extent desired, nor did it sufficiently succeed in building the capabilities of the Afghan security forces.

In the Inquiry's assessment, *objectives were not fulfilled at all in terms of poverty reduction.* According to the World Bank, poverty levels remain at 36 per cent of the population. Swedish aid has not succeeded in contributing to a reduction.

In the Inquiry's assessment, *objectives were fulfilled to a certain degree in terms of social and economic development.* This assessment is primarily based on the positive developments with respect to the right to education and the right to health, not least for girls and women. The situation in 2014 in these areas was substantially better than in 2001, although huge shortcomings remain. Swedish aid has contributed to improvements.

In the Inquiry's assessment, *objectives were fulfilled to a certain degree in terms of a democratic society.* A number of foundation stones have been laid for a political system with democratic aspirations. Several general elections have been held at various levels – albeit featuring uncertain results, considerable irregularities, electoral fraud, and international involvement. Civil society has been strengthened to some extent (although it is still

underdeveloped) and the media situation is better today than it was in 2001. In practice, Afghanistan still has a long way to go to achieve the democracy prescribed in the 2004 constitution.

In the Inquiry's assessment, *objectives were fulfilled to a certain degree in terms of strengthening the status of women*. This assessment is based on the fact that certain steps and results have helped to strengthen respect for women's rights and position, compared with the situation of women in 2001. The continued widespread discrimination of women and the absence of gender equality are of course clear, but some steps in a new direction have been taken since 2002. Swedish aid and political support have contributed to this.

In the Inquiry's assessment, *objectives were fulfilled satisfactorily in terms of Sweden's credibility and capability as a participant in international military operations*. Participation in ISAF, including the lead nation responsibility for PRT-MeS, contributed to this. Cooperation between NATO and Sweden as a partner country was developed. Participation in ISAF contributed to the development of some parts of Swedish Armed Forces capabilities.

The total economic costs

The Swedish engagement in Afghanistan was a small part of the extensive international engagement. By Swedish standards, Sweden's contribution was considerable in economic terms. The Inquiry notes that it is difficult to establish with any certainty the costs of the military operations in particular, due to the reporting system employed.

The Inquiry's conclusion is that the costs of Sweden's engagement between 2002 and 2014 total at least SEK 18.2 billion (of which SEK 11.1 billion for the military, SEK 75 million to the Afghan National Army Trust Fund, SEK 6.7 billion in aid, SEK 282 million for Swedish diplomatic presence in Afghanistan⁹ and SEK 55 million for staff at the Afghanistan department at Sida¹⁰), but that the actual total is in all probability considerably higher.

⁹The Embassy in Kabul and the office in Mazar-e Sharif between 2008 and 2014.

¹⁰Inquiry estimate based on data from Sida concerning the number of full-time equivalents between 2002 and 2014.

Added to the basic costs of the military operations are the additional military costs reported by the Inquiry in section 5.12.2, that is, the staff costs in Sweden as estimated by the Swedish Armed Forces, SEK 4.6 billion, and certain special equipment costs, SEK 4.7 billion.

Depending on how the calculation is made, the total costs of the entire Swedish engagement in Afghanistan are at least SEK 18.2 billion and at most SEK 27.5 billion.

Reflections and lessons identified

The Inquiry reflects that the engagement in Afghanistan was unique. Nonetheless, there are lessons to be learned for future international engagements.

The Inquiry identifies the following lessons from the international engagement as a whole and Sweden's participation in it:

- Every part of an international engagement should aim at inclusive political solutions.
- Statebuilding is hardly possible in the midst of a widespread and drawn-out internal armed conflict.
- Sweden can pursue its own priority issues within the framework of the engagement in various forums.
- Sweden can always consider and choose not to participate in the engagement or parts of it.
- Considerable or particularly sought-after contributions can increase Sweden's credibility as a partner and strengthen relations with other countries and organisations.

Security and development, and civil-military cooperation are concepts that governed the Swedish engagement. In the opinion of the Inquiry:

- Links between security and development depend on context, and need to be analysed carefully.

- What kind of civil-military relations are appropriate in an international engagement depends on context, and requires careful analysis.
- Military operations and civilian efforts should, as a general rule, have separate tasks and not be mixed up.

The Swedish engagement, and the arrangements of the overall international engagement in Afghanistan, changed substantially over time, and faced a number of challenges. The following lessons for the design of Swedish international engagements have been identified:

- Swedish lead nation responsibility of an integrated and extensive area-specific mission must be preceded by careful analysis.
- Capacity-building in the area of security is of great importance, and should be linked to capacity-building in other areas of the judicial sector.
- A political-diplomatic presence on the ground is important when participating in a concerted engagement.
- Longer periods of service in the field are desirable for both civilian and military personnel in complex missions and operations, so as to ensure continuity and effectiveness.
- The total costs of engagement should be continuously reported in a structured and cohesive manner.

The international engagement in Afghanistan was fragmented. The Swedish engagement was less cohesive than reported. To achieve a genuinely concerted engagement, the lesson is that a more cohesive system is required:

- Swedish participation in an extensive, complex, long-term and risky international engagement requires a specific system of strategic governance, analysis and follow-up.
- Achieving a concerted Swedish engagement requires an overall analysis established by the Government, and a guiding strategy for all agencies involved.

The Inquiry's recommendations

The Inquiry proposes that in the event of future complex Swedish engagement, the Government establish *a specific function at the Government Offices* for governance, analysis and follow-up of the engagement. There should be a specific function for each concerted engagement. The criteria determining the need for such a function could include the fact that it is a complex and perilous conflict situation, that a concerted Swedish contribution involving both civilian and military components is to be sought, and that the engagement is judged to be long-term and resource-intensive. The function would be placed at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The head of the function should have the status of a state secretary and be allowed to engage any advisers required.

At an early stage, the Government should establish an overall strategy that applies to the entire engagement. The special function should draft the proposal for such a strategy. The overall strategy should state the objectives, timeframes and division of tasks and responsibilities for the various parts of the Swedish engagement.

Alternatives for terminating the engagement should be included in the overall strategy.

The function is responsible for recurrent and structured reporting of results of the engagement to the Government and the Riksdag.

The function receives all reports from the field and the government agencies involved. It reports and analyses how the concerted engagement is progressing and monitors the need to revise the overall strategy. The function ensures that costs are reported in a concerted and cohesive manner.

Reports are given to the relevant committees of the Riksdag on request. Reporting can also be done in an annual written communication to the Riksdag.

The Inquiry also proposes that *the Government ensure that there is an adequate political-diplomatic presence in the country from the start of the engagement*, primarily through an adequately staffed embassy led by an ambassador. The mission in the country and the governance, analysis and follow-up function in Stockholm should develop close regular contact and dialogue.

Furthermore, the Inquiry proposes that *longer periods of service in the field be applied to ensure increased continuity* in both civilian

and military operations. Those working in the country of operations must also have very good knowledge of the overall Swedish strategy for the concerted engagement.

The Inquiry proposes that the government agencies involved establish *a clear system and policy for locally engaged staff contracted for Swedish missions and operations*. Regulations concerning security and protection aspects in the short and long term need to be established by the agencies involved, including what applies for local staff on completion of service involving sensitive tasks.

The Inquiry also proposes that *agreements be concluded with the host country from the start of operations concerning the transfer of individuals whom Swedish soldiers or police may wish to detain* in connection with their operations. If it is not possible to achieve a joint agreement for all troop-contributing countries in a multilateral operation, Sweden should seek a bilateral agreement.