

## **Disarming of Militias Behind Schedule**

**Author:** IWPR

The continued presence of armed men under the control of local commanders raises the stakes in elections scheduled for this fall.

The internationally financed programme designed to disarm thousands of armed men who fought for local commanders against the Taleban and during the years of civil war in the country has fallen badly behind schedule.

The delay raises the spectre that local commanders may still lead powerful private armies by the time of the presidential election this autumn, leaving them with the capacity to intimidate local voters and even threaten the new government in Kabul.

The acting programme director for the Demobilisation, Disarmament and Rehabilitation programme, DDR, at the United Nations' Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, UNAMA, said several leading commanders were failing to comply with the disarmament programme.

"We have a variety of commanders around the country who have been less than compliant," said Peter Babbington.

The DDR was created to disarm the powerful private militias of local commanders, provide jobs and training for the former fighters and help build a single, professional Afghan National Army.

At a cost of 167 million US dollars, the three-year project is being implemented by the UN on behalf of the Afghan government, with Japan playing a leading role in the project.

But according to the Afghan government's own deadlines, the whole DDR process is failing to meet its targets.

By the end of June, 40 per cent of an estimated 100,000 soldiers in the private militias of powerful commanders should have handed in their arms and been integrated into civilian life.

But according to the UN, since the programme started last October, only 10,000 fighters have abandoned their weapons.

Babbington said there are several recalcitrant commanders, "General [Mohammed] Daoud [from the northern provinces of Kunduz] has been a reluctant participant. None of the units that he has put forward have completed the process as required under the plan."

Babbington also named listed several other local commanders who he said are failing to fully participate in DDR, "General [Mohammad] Atta [from Balkh], General Hazrat Ali [from Jalalabad], General Almas of Parwan, Dr Abdullah [commander of the 10th Division]. There's a lot of them. All for different reasons, they are not complying fully."

Kinichi Komano, Japan's ambassador to Afghanistan, said officials from the UN and Afghanistan's Ministry of Defence had met several times with commanders to encourage them to support DDR.

Jim Ocitti, a spokesman for the DDR in the United Nations Mission in Afghanistan, UNAMA was more optimistic: "We have talked with the Ministry of Defence and they are saying that almost all the commanders are ready to help in the DDR process," he said. "We still think that we will not fail, because most of the lists are in.

"The DDR programme has an important role in the coming presidential elections and we have three months and are able to decommission 500 soldiers every day, if the commanders support DDR," he added.

Ocitti also said that the list so far indicates that the local commanders' militias may have been smaller than first thought and that the 10,000 men who have already been disarmed may actually be closer to the 40 per cent figure than initially believed. He speculated that the commanders might have inflated the size of their forces.

Ocitti acknowledged that until mid June, many commanders were failing to give the UN the lists of soldiers in their militias. But he says that the UN now has "almost all the lists." It is now involved in a process of checking them.

The timing of the commanders' decision to turn over the lists has proven to be an interesting one.

It followed a controversial meeting in Kabul between President Hamed Karzai and Gen. Abdul Rashid Dostum, the influential commander in the northern provinces of Balkh and Jawzjan; Mohammad Atta; Ismail Khan of the western province of Herat and Hazrat Ali of the eastern province of Nangarhar.

Karzai later scotched rumours that he promised the commanders seats in a future government in exchange for their cooperation prior to and during the election.

Gen. Shir Mohammed Karemi, head of the operations department of the defence ministry hinted, however, that influential commanders might receive leading government posts.

"There are some top jihadi commanders and they may be given positions in the [new] government that are higher than minister," he said.

Karemi said that Dostum, leader of the northern Islamic movement, and his rival commander, Atta, the northern leader of Jamiat-i-Islami, had agreed to disarm most of the militias and retain just one division each.

But another leading commander - Hazrat Ali, who heads the Jalalabad corps - was ambiguous when asked by IWPR whether he would comply with the disarmament plan.

He said that the mujahedin had fought for 25 years, and that the government should pay for their guns and wasn't keeping the promises it made to soldiers taking part in the DDR process.

He also made it clear that he was looking for a position in a new government. "The mujahedin, who really

fought for Islam, are honest to the country and people, so they should be given positions in the government," he said.

Babington said that only one commander in the Kunduz northeast region was cooperative. He said Gen Mir Alam's 54th Division had complied fully with the programme and sent 75 "genuine soldiers" to be disarmed.

Ocitti, the UN spokesman, agreed that the DDR programme is voluntary and dependent on ongoing support from the commanders.

He admitted that in some instances, fewer militia members had been disarmed than originally expected. He said that when the DDR program started in the western city of Jalalabad on 19 June, the UN expected to decommission as many as 200 soldiers a day. Instead, local commanders have provided only 50 soldiers a day to give up their weapons.

The programme has had other problems as well.

Originally, soldiers who turned in their weapons were each to receive 200 dollars, as well as enough food to tie them over until they found civilian work.

But Ocitti said that commanders began to demand that the soldiers give them the cash payments. "They were beating up the soldiers. They were sometimes locking up their families," he said.

The programme has since been modified so that the money is instead used to increase salaries for the men once they start the final reintegration part of DDR.

Reports from those who have participated in the disarmament programme have been mixed.

Aminullah, 39, said he is satisfied with DDR. He fought for 17 years for the Ittihad-i-Islami party and then joined 597 Regiment.

He said that he gave in his weapon voluntarily and received 100 dollars, a bag of flour and oil. He is learning to be a tailor. "Even now, I am able to support my family through my work," he said.

"When I had a weapon, people didn't like me," he said. "But now I have tasted life."

But others complain bitterly about the programme. The elimination of the 200-dollar payment has led some disarmed militiamen to feel cheated.

Fazil Ahmad paid a high price for fighting against the Taleban. A mine shattered one of his legs seven years ago during a battle in the northern province of Kunduz.

The 39 year-old from the northern province of Baghlan fought for 17 years for the Islamic party Jamiat-i-Islami, then joined the 20th Division, based in his home province.

Earlier this year, he handed in his Kalashnikov along with the rest of the division. He now works at a construction site in west Kabul, throwing bricks to a fellow builder perched on the scaffolding above him.

He is not a happy civilian.

Instead of receiving 80 dollars a month in wages and occasional gifts from his commander, he now receives just one and a half dollars a day for work - half the wage of an able-bodied man.

He said that DDR officials failed to deliver on any of their commitments and that he received nothing - not the 200 dollars nor the promised 100 kilograms of flour, nuts and beans. He said he was not even provided with a job.

And he's also disillusioned with the commanders, whom he said sold out their men to acquire property and buy Land Cruisers.

A former militia officer from the 340th Battalion west of Kabul, who spoke on condition that his name not be used, told IWPR that when 26 people from the battalion were disarmed, they were each given just 10 dollars, a bag of flour and a can of oil.

He said that unless the programme is changed, no one would be willing to be disarmed. "I can sell my gun for 300 dollars instead giving to DDR for 10," he said.

Ocitti says he has not heard of any complaints from soldiers in the DDR programme.

The real test of DDR will come in the next few months, and the crucial factor will be the number of ex-combatants demobilised by the time of the elections.

US ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad maintained an optimistic outlook, saying that with the presidential election scheduled for the fall. "We have three months or so to implement the DDR plan".

"The international community, including the United States, will work closely with the Afghan government and with the relevant commanders to make sure the DDR plan is implemented," he said.

But even he admits that the progress on implementation of DDR so far is simply "not enough."

Wahidullah Amani is an IWPR staff reporter and Hafizullah Gardish is an IWPR local editor in Kabul.

**Location:** [Afghanistan](#)

**Focus:** [Afghanistan](#)

---

**Source URL:** <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/disarming-militias-behind-schedule>