

**Operation Moshtarak**, launched in February 2010 in Helmand province, was the first deployment after the beginning of the much-debated surge of 30,000 additional US troops. Welcome improvements in the size and conduct of military operations were undermined by a lack of sufficient corresponding measures in the political and humanitarian campaigns. This report reviews the local perceptions of the operation from more than 400 Afghan men from Marjah, Lashkar Gah and Kandahar, interviewed by the International Council on Security and Development (ICOS) in March 2010.

Field research reveals that Operation Moshtarak has contributed to high levels of anger among local Afghan: 61% of those interviewed feel more negative about NATO forces than before the military offensive. The objective of winning “hearts and minds” was not met. The legitimate grievances of the people of Marjah are being exploited by the Taliban, who will seek to recruit and radicalise the region’s angry young men. Of those interviewed, 95% believe more young Afghans have joined the Taliban in the last year. 78% of the respondents were often or always angry, and 45% of those stated they were angry at the NATO occupation, civilian casualties and night raids.

Additionally, the report recommends the adoption of a new “*Counter-insurgency Impact Equation - Balance any negative impact with a positive impact; Ensure that the positive impact is greater than the negative impact.*” This mandates managing all operations (military, aid and political) with an understanding that an action - or inaction - in one area affects dynamics, results and success in another area. Refugee support and aid capacity must be strengthened dramatically. Despite widespread advanced planning and publicity regarding Operation Moshtarak, there were, in the end, very little aid or infrastructure available for displaced persons. 97% of Afghans interviewed by ICOS said that the operation had led to new flows of internally displaced people. Thousands of displaced Afghans were forced to move to non-existent or overcrowded refugee camps with insufficient food, medical supplies or shelter. Local aid agencies were overwhelmed, and in some areas were not present at all.

Another issue causing friction with the local population is the lack of an effective or realistic counter-narcotics strategy. Poppy crop eradication - which took place during the operation – and a new policy of paying poppy farmers to eradicate their crops themselves, undermines the local economy without putting sustainable alternatives in place. Eradicating the poppy crop is opposed by 66% of Afghans interviewed by ICOS.

59% of those interviewed believed the Taliban will return to Marjah after the Operation. Alarmingly, 67% did not support a strong NATO-ISAF presence in their province and 71% stated they wanted the NATO forces to leave. The report recommends a series of “dramatic positive local level statements” in advance of the operations in Kandahar such as: “Camps in a Box”, Marriage Allowances and Land Allowances, Mosque/Shrine Renovation and Koran Distribution, Food Aid Surge, and Poppy for Medicine Pilot Projects to pilot the licensed production of opium for pain killing medicines.

**Operation Moshtarak: Lessons Learned April 2010 ICOS Afghanistan**

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