INTERNAL AUDIT DIVISION

REPORT 2017/137

Audit of the political affairs programme in the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

The Mission needed to develop a political strategy, improve planning and monitoring of political affairs activities, and periodically conduct self-evaluation of the political affairs programme

13 December 2017
Assignment No. AP/2017/630/05

Audit of the political affairs programme in the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of the political affairs programme in the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). The objective of the audit was to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of governance, risk management and control processes over the implementation of the political affairs programme in UNAMA. The audit covered the period from 1 January 2015 to 31 December 2016 and included a review of planning and risk management, programme implementation and performance monitoring, and management of human resources.

UNAMA established strategic objectives for the political affairs programme, provided good offices in support of the peace process, monitored and reported on political developments and implementation of the political mandate, coordinated the programme with relevant stakeholders, and conducted outreach activities at the grassroots level. However, the Mission needed to improve planning, monitoring and periodic self-evaluation of the programme.

OIOS made three recommendations. To address issues identified in the audit, UNAMA needed to:

- Develop the Mission's political strategy;

- Improve the planning process to facilitate performance monitoring and management and provide relevant training to key staff of the Political Affairs Division; and

- Conduct periodic self-evaluations to determine whether objectives of the political affairs programme were being achieved.

UNAMA accepted the recommendations and has initiated action to implement them.

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Audit of the political affairs programme in the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

I. BACKGROUND

1. The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of political affairs in the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

2. The Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General (DSRSG) Political leads the political affairs programme in UNAMA and advises the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) on political issues. The Political Affairs Division (PAD) supports the DSRSG and the Middle East and West Asia team based in the Department of Political Affairs at United Nations Headquarters (MEWAD/DPA) in implementing the political mandate of the Mission. DPA provides overall policy guidance and liaison with Member States and the Security Council on mandate related issues.

3. PAD provides good offices and support at the national, regional and international levels in collaboration with all stakeholders to: (a) promote peace and reconciliation with all parties to the conflict; (b) assist in elections and electoral reforms; (c) enhance regional cooperation by promoting bilateral and multilateral political dialogue between Afghanistan and its neighbours; (d) initiate confidence building measures through intra-community dialogue to resolve local conflicts; and (e) conduct outreach activities to promote peace and reconciliation. In addition, PAD regularly reports on political developments, participates in peace conferences at national and international levels, and encourages participation of women in the peace building and political process.

4. The Division has five thematic units: national reconciliation, elections, regional cooperation, security sector monitoring, and reporting. In addition, PAD deploys political affairs officers to all 13 field offices in Afghanistan and collaborates with two liaison offices in Islamabad and Tehran. A director at the D-1 level heads PAD, assisted by 104 staff comprising 33 international, 2 United Nations Volunteers and 69 locally recruited staff including National Professional Officers. The total budgeted cost for the political affairs programme in 2016 was $10.1 million, including staffing and other costs.

5. Comments provided by UNAMA are incorporated in italics.

II. AUDIT OBJECTIVE, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

6. The objective of the audit was to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of governance, risk management and control processes over the implementation of the political affairs programme in UNAMA.

7. This audit was included in the 2017 risk-based work plan of OIOS due to the criticality of the political affairs programme in implementing UNAMA's mandate to support the Afghan-led peace process to achieve long-term stability in Afghanistan.

8. OIOS conducted this audit from March to August 2017. The audit covered the period from 1 January 2015 to 31 December 2016. Based on an activity-level risk assessment, the audit covered higher and medium risks areas in the political affairs programme, which included: planning and risk management; programme implementation and performance monitoring; and management of human resources.

9.	The audit methodology included: (a) interviews of key personnel, (b) reviews of relevant documentation, (c) analytical reviews of data, and (d) review of a sample of PAD periodic internal reports and field office work plans.

10.	The audit was conducted in accordance with the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing.

# III.	AUDIT RESULTS

## A.	Planning and risk management

<u>Strategic objectives were developed and communicated, but a political strategy needed to be developed</u>

11.	DPA start-up guide for political missions and the DPA strategic plan 2016-2019 require UNAMA to establish key strategic objectives and plans, and involve substantive mission managers in their conceptualization. The start-up guide also requires the development of a political strategy, which serves as a central message that all Mission components can rally around, and articulates how the Mission would engage local, national, sub-regional, regional, and international counterparts.

12.	The Mission in consultation with MEWAD/DPA established the strategic objectives and priority areas for the political affairs programme considering local political needs. The Mission leadership including PAD, held annual retreats to discuss the strategic objectives and challenges and provide guidance on alignment of resources to overall mission vision and priorities. UNAMA also convened annual Head of Office conferences to disseminate the strategic priorities and focus areas for mandate implementation. The established strategic objectives reflected in the Secretary-General's report to the Security Council guided the development of PAD annual work plans.

13.	However, PAD had not established a political strategy. Therefore, PAD's approach to providing good offices and support to the Afghan-led political processes differed from that adopted by political officers in field locations. Absence of a well-documented political strategy affected the ability of PAD and various field offices to achieve greater coherence, consistency, and a focused approach to engage local, national, regional, and international stakeholders in implementing the Mission's political mandate. OIOS concluded that PAD needed to develop a political strategy for greater coherence to implement its mandate.

> **(1)	UNAMA should develop a political strategy that is aligned to its strategic objectives to achieve greater coherence and a more focused approach in implementing its political mandate.**
>
> *UNAMA accepted recommendation 1 and stated that a political strategy was being developed based on recommendations of the UNAMA strategic review and the Mission's strategic framework.* Recommendation 1 remains open pending receipt of a copy of the political strategy.

<u>Preparation of annual work plans needed improvement</u>

14.	DPA start-up guide requires UNAMA to prepare work plans for the political component as a management tool to implement mandates. The minimum contents for work plans established in the United Nations planning tool kit include timeframe covered by the plan, objectives, expected accomplishments and related indicators and outputs, deadline for completion of each output, roles and responsibilities, planning assumptions and risk management measures. Outputs should be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound.

15.   PAD prepared annual work plans for implementation of the political affairs programme. The plans focused on five thematic areas, i.e. peace and reconciliation, elections, monitoring security sector developments, regional cooperation, and reporting. The field offices used the plans to develop field level annual plans taking into account the local context. In addition, PAD also prepared weekly forecast plans of activities to be undertaken. PAD work plans were generally aligned with the mandate and strategic objectives. However, a review of 17 work plans including those of PAD and field offices showed that: (a) roles and responsibilities were not consistently allocated to implementing partners or lead units responsible for executing various planned activities; (b) planned outreach activities and meetings were not specified in detail and time-bound; (c) outputs were not specific and measurable; (d) there was no provision in the annual work plan template to review status of implementation of planned activities and make any necessary adjustments; and (e) the work plans did not establish adequate benchmarks, success criteria, and performance indicators. This occurred because of absence of a standardized planning template and skills capacity gaps. As a result, there was inadequate precision in developing work plan targets, priorities and criteria to measure performance.

> **(2)   UNAMA should improve the planning process of the Political Affairs Division to ensure that its: (i) annual work plans assign roles and responsibilities and include specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound outputs; and (ii) staff are properly trained in developing the plans.**
>
> *UNAMA accepted recommendation 2 and stated that some progress had already been made in 2017 to improve PAD work plans and further improvements were in progress.* Recommendation 2 remains open pending receipt of evidence of the improved work planning process and training of staff.

PAD needed to document identified risks relating to the political affairs programme

16.   The United Nations Secretariat enterprise risk management policy requires missions to implement and document a risk management process by identifying and assessing risks and determining and monitoring suitable responses.

17.   The Mission did not maintain a formal risk register to document identified risks and the risk management process of the political affairs programme. Nevertheless, during budget preparation and planning processes, UNAMA identified risks such as the safety and security situation and anti-government element activities that could potentially threaten implementation of the Mission's mandate. PAD also assessed major developments, both internal and external, that may affect the achievement of objectives of political affairs programme, and established measures to manage them. In addition, the Mission mapped all key political actors and documented identified conflict drivers.

18.   Furthermore, given the significantly complex and protracted peace negotiations and security challenges, PAD constantly monitored political developments through a variety of mechanisms to identity emerging risks, their impact, and determine mitigating measures to manage them. Information gathered was analyzed and evaluated, and issues of significant potential impact requiring immediate attention, were escalated through flash reports to the senior leadership and code cables to United Nations Headquarters (UNHQ) for timely action. A review of correspondence between the Mission and UNHQ indicated that plans were underway to implement the risk management policy in UNAMA in 2017 and a staff member had already received requisite training. Therefore, OIOS did not make any recommendation on this issue at this time.

B.   Programme implementation, performance monitoring and reporting

(i)   Implementation of the political affairs programme

<u>UNAMA provided good offices to support the peace process</u>

19.   Security Council resolutions 2210 (2015) and 2274 (2016) require UNAMA to provide good offices to support the Afghan peace process. PAD's work plans for 2015 and 2016 listed six activities to provide good offices to support the peace process, which included: (a) conflict resolution; (b) monitor the peace and reconciliation process; (c) monitor implementation of the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Programme; (d) regional cooperation; (e) outreach and consensus building; and (f) support implementation of agreement on the national unity government.

20.   A review of the Secretary-General's report to the Security Council (A/70/348/Add.4) and discussions with key mission staff showed that there were challenges in supporting the peace process because of frequent interruptions in peace negotiations, rising internal tensions within the national unity government, and deteriorating safety and security situation. Notwithstanding these challenges, the Mission maintained close interaction and collaboration with the government and parties to the conflict, the United Nations Country Team (UNCT), regional powers, international community and other key stakeholders to advance the peace process, develop democracy, provide technical assistance to electoral institutions and reforms, promote regional cooperation and advocate for international economic engagement in Afghanistan.

21.   A review of 104 sampled after action reports relating to mediation and conflict resolution initiatives, and peace, reconciliation and political outreach activities at UNAMA Headquarters and field offices indicated that PAD collaborated with relevant substantive sections, UNCT, local authorities, and peace bodies to support the peace process. The activities targeted different focus groups such as civil society organizations, women, and key interlocutors from tribal and religious leaders on preventative approaches to conflict resolution initiatives, inter-community dialogue, advocacy for participation of women in peace building, and democratic processes including elections. The activities were conducted through local and national radio and television round-table discussions, public gatherings and conferences, thematic workshops, and social media. UNAMA shared feedback obtained from participants and local population with relevant local government authorities.

22.   The five thematic units in PAD as well as the 13 field offices in the Mission were all involved in continuous interaction with relevant stakeholders to obtain information, monitor political developments and progress in the security sector through media reports, attending parliamentary sessions, and conducting outreach activities. This ensured availability of up-to-date information, which PAD used to conduct daily situational analysis to detect potential drivers of conflict as well as issues that can affect the political process. Emerging issues of concern requiring more in depth analyses were escalated through flash reports and code cables to senior mission leadership and relevant stakeholders in the Mission and UNHQ respectively, for timely interventions.

23.   PAD prepared some 2,214 reports on political developments internally and externally during the audit period as part of its reporting requirements. These reports provided the Mission leadership and all other stakeholders an insight into political and security developments that were likely to have an impact on the peace process and ensured timely and informed decision-making. The reports were categorized as confidential, classified and unclassified, respectively, and shared on a need to know basis.

24.   PAD provided training, technical support and guidance to counterparts to strengthen their capacity on conflict resolution and negotiation skills, election related matters, role of women in peace and security and gender mainstreaming. The Mission also engaged partners at the national and sub-national levels to support participation of women in the peace process. In addition, the Mission coordinated global open days on women, peace, and security, as well as a gender dialogue to promote integration of women in peace and security as well as gender mainstreaming in the Mission. UNAMA also sought requests for projects in support of consensus building and reconciliation efforts to include proposals on how they would promote the participation of women in prevention and resolution of conflicts. OIOS concluded that UNAMA made efforts to implement its core mandate of supporting the peace process to achieve peace and stability in Afghanistan.

(ii)   Coordinated management

The Mission was developing a system to document minutes and action points on coordination

25.   The Mission's standard operating procedures on field coordination require the Field Coordination Cell to ensure that all field offices are fully integrated into the work of the Mission and their activities reflect the vision of the Mission leadership to effectively implement the mandate. Best practices require that minutes of important meetings should be documented.

26.   Field offices prepared integrated work plans indicating relevant sections/partners they needed to coordinate with for joint execution of activities on crosscutting issues such as gender, governance, and human rights. PAD, in collaboration with the Strategic Communications and Spokesperson's Unit and other substantive sections, conducted 264 outreach activities on such crosscutting issues. In addition, PAD and Heads of Offices held weekly meetings with substantive team leaders to discuss and provide guidance in their respective areas of responsibility. The Senior Leadership Team, Expanded Senior Leadership, and Task Force on Peace and Reconciliation met to discuss political direction and strategies. PAD also coordinated inputs from all mission components and United Nations entities for inclusion in Mission reports, SRSG's reports to UNHQ, and Secretary-General's quarterly reports to the Security Council as part of its reporting function. OIOS concluded that UNAMA established mechanisms to coordinate on crosscutting issues on political affairs within the Mission.

27.   However, minutes of meetings were not consistently documented. Interviews with key staff indicated that some issues discussed in the high-level meetings were sensitive and hence, not documented. Nevertheless, UNAMA needed to maintain adequate records of its activities and classify them according to the requirements of the Secretary-General's bulletin on information sensitivity, classification and handling (ST/SGB/2007/6). In addition, OIOS noted substantial movements of staff during the audit period due to the mobility scheme and hence, there was a need to document outcomes of meetings to ensure institutional memory, continuity and an audit trail. UNAMA stated that it was developing a system for documenting action points and outcomes of meetings with the aim of improving follow-up and maintenance of institutional memory; therefore, OIOS did not make any recommendation on this issue.

The United Nations Development Assistance Framework was developed

28.   The United Nations Policy on Integrated Assessment and Planning requires UNAMA to develop an integrated strategic framework (ISF) to bring together the Mission and UNCT's mandates around a set of agreed priorities, and to maximize the collective impact on the country's peace consolidation. Other planning documents such as United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), which incorporates the requirements of ISF, can also be used.

29.   UNAMA in consultation with UNCT and the Afghan Government developed a five-year UNDAF (2015-2019). The plan included peace development and electoral assistance as focus areas. Integrated work plans as well as action matrices were developed after holding UNCT retreats. Meetings were held with relevant senior officials at national, sub-national, and regional levels on a weekly, fortnightly, monthly and ad-hoc basis. The audit did not identify any instances of duplication of activities during review of documents. However, the minutes of meetings of UNCT, the tripartite review report and the Security Council resolutions all stressed the need for greater coordination and programming of activities. The Mission indicated that it would develop an ISF upon completion of its strategic review to enhance coordination. Therefore, OIOS did not make any recommendation on this issue.

(iii)   Performance measurement of the political affairs programme

UNAMA needed to conduct self-evaluation of the political affairs programme periodically

30.   The United Nations Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning (ST/SGB/2016//6) require UNAMA to conduct self-evaluation of programmes and sub-programmes to assess their effectiveness and impact.

31.   Mission-level internal evaluations were carried out by a review body comprising representatives from UNAMA, UNCT, Government of Afghanistan and major donor countries in March and July to September 2015 to review the role, structure and activities of all United Nations entities in Afghanistan, as requested by the Security Council. Both evaluations recommended that UNAMA should continue its good offices role in support of the Government for the long-term stability of the country and the region. Another strategic review of UNAMA was initiated in May 2017 to review mandated tasks, priorities and related resources, and assess the Mission's efficiency and effectiveness in implementation of its mandate.

32.   In addition, PAD held annual retreats as a learning and exchange platform, sharing best practices, challenges, and mapping out the way forward. However, PAD did not conduct self-evaluation of the political affairs programme periodically to assess the effectiveness and impact of the programme. This resulted in a missed opportunity for PAD to establish the extent to which the programme objectives had been achieved and to make any adjustments necessary to ensure effective implementation of the political affairs mandate. UNAMA management indicated that PAD would conduct a self-evaluation of the programme after completion of the strategic review.

> **(3)   UNAMA should implement procedures to conduct self-evaluations of the political affairs programme periodically to determine the extent to which programme objectives are achieved, assess their impact, and make necessary adjustments in the implementation of the programme, if needed.**
>
> *UNAMA accepted recommendation 3 and stated that progress had already been made during the second half of 2017 within the Mission's strategic framework. Further improvements were in progress.* Recommendation 3 remains open pending receipt of evidence that a self-evaluation mechanism has been established.

C.   Management of human resources

The Mission trained PAD staff

33.   DPA strategic plan requires staff training at all levels to build skills and knowledge to support conflict prevention, mediation, and peacebuilding.

34.   PAD established annual training plans to empower staff to perform their duties effectively. During the audit period, 20 PAD staff attended various external training courses on national dialogue, peace mediation, political approach to preventing and responding to electoral violence, women, peace and security, religion and mediation, peacemaking and preventive diplomacy. However, the Mission did not conduct the planned within-mission trainings in 2015 due to budget cuts. Funds were provided in 2017 for various training courses for PAD staff. The trained staff would provide training to relevant staff in other units and field offices. OIOS concluded that PAD was providing training to staff to build their capacity to implement the political affairs programme.

PAD needed gender balance amongst its national staff to reach out to women in local communities

35.   Security Council resolutions urge the Secretary-General to expand the role and contribution of women in United Nations field-based operations.

36.   The Mission's gender balance scorecard as of 31 January 2017 indicated that the PAD office in Kabul had only two females (13 per cent) out of 15 local staff. PAD Units in the 13 field offices with 50 local staff, which interacted directly with communities at grass root levels, had no female staff. This was mainly due to the cultural restrictions on women employment as well as non-availability of qualified female candidates locally to meet recruitment requirements, such as number of years of relevant experience and qualification. The gender imbalance in field offices affected PAD's outreach to women in local communities to promote the Afghan women's participation in the political process. The Mission was addressing the imbalance through proposed recruitment of female national volunteers to enable them to gain the requisite work experience for future recruitment in PAD. As an interim measure, UNAMA was considering lateral reassignment of female staff members in the substantive sections to achieve gender balance in PAD. OIOS concluded that UNAMA was taking steps to address the gender balance issue among staff.

IV.   ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

37.   OIOS wishes to express its appreciation to the management and staff of UNAMA for the assistance and cooperation extended to the auditors during this assignment.

(*Signed*) Eleanor T. Burns
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STATUS OF AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS

Audit of the political affairs programme in United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical[1]/ Important[2]	C/ O[3]	Actions needed to close recommendation	Implementation date[4]
1	UNAMA should develop a political strategy that is aligned to its strategic objectives to achieve greater coherence and a more focused approach in implementing its political mandate.	Important	O	Receipt of a copy of the political strategy	30 June 2018
2	UNAMA should improve the planning process of the Political Affairs Division to ensure that its: (i) annual work plans assign roles and responsibilities and include specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound outputs; and (ii) staff are properly trained in developing the plans.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence that an improved work planning process has been established and staff have received requisite training.	30 June 2018
3	UNAMA should implement procedures to conduct self-evaluations of the political affairs programme periodically to determine the extent to which programme objectives are achieved, assess their impact, and make necessary adjustments in the implementation of the programme, if needed.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence that a self-evaluation mechanism for the political affairs programme has been established.	30 June 2018

[1] Critical recommendations address critical and/or pervasive deficiencies in governance, risk management or control processes, such that reasonable assurance cannot be provided with regard to the achievement of control and/or business objectives under review.
[2] Important recommendations address important (but not critical or pervasive) deficiencies in governance, risk management or control processes, such that reasonable assurance may be at risk regarding the achievement of control and/or business objectives under review.
[3] C = closed, O = open
[4] Date provided by UNAMA in response to recommendations.

APPENDIX I

Management Response

Management Response

Audit of the political affairs programme in the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical[1]/ Important[2]	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation Date	Client comments
1	UNAMA should develop a political strategy that is aligned to its strategic objectives to achieve greater coherence and a more focused approach in implementing its political mandate.	Important	Yes	Director Political Affairs Service, OIC Political Pillar	30 June 2018	A political strategy is being developed based on recommendations of UNAMA Strategic Review and the Mission's Strategic Framework. Implementation of audit recommendation is in progress and likely to be concluded by the end of June 2018.
2	UNAMA should improve the planning process of the Political Affairs Division to ensure that its: (i) annual work plans assign roles and responsibilities and include specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound outputs; and (ii) staff are properly trained in developing the plans.	Important	Yes	Director Political Affairs Service, OIC Political Pillar	30 June 2018	Some progress was already made in 2017 to improve the Political Affairs Division work plans. Further improvements based on the recommendation of the Audit is in progress.
3	UNAMA should implement procedures to conduct self-evaluations of the political affairs programme periodically to determine the extent to which programme objectives are achieved, assess their impact, and make necessary adjustments in the implementation of the programme, if needed.	Important	Yes	Director Political Affairs Service, OIC Political Pillar	30 June 2018.	Some progress was already made during the second half of 2017 within the Mission's Strategic Framework. A further improvement based on implementation of the audit recommendations is expected.

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[1] Critical recommendations address critical and/or pervasive deficiencies in governance, risk management or control processes, such that reasonable assurance cannot be provided with regard to the achievement of control and/or business objectives under review.

[2] Important recommendations address important (but not critical or pervasive) deficiencies in governance, risk management or control processes, such that reasonable assurance may be at risk regarding the achievement of control and/or business objectives under review.