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FYI

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From: Simon, Jessica L
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Subject: U.N. Rejects 'Militarization' of Afghan Aid (NYT, Nordland)

By ROD NORDLAND

Published: February 18, 2010 KABUL, Afghanistan - Senior United Nations officials in Afghanistan on Wednesday criticized NATO forces for what one referred to as "the militarization of humanitarian aid," and said United Nations agencies would not participate in the military's reconstruction strategy in Marja as part of its current offensive there. "We are not part of that process, we do not want to be part of it," said Robert Watkins, the deputy special representative of the secretary general, at a news conference attended by other officials to announce the United Nations' Humanitarian Action Plan for 2010. "We will not be part of that military strategy." The American commander in Afghanistan, Gen. Stanley A. McChrystal, has made the rapid delivery of governmental services, including education, health care and job programs, a central part of his strategy in Marja, referring to plans to rapidly deploy what he has referred to as "a government in a box" once Marja is pacified. Mr. Watkins did not specifically criticize the Marja offensive, saying, "It is not the military that will be delivering the services, they will be clearing the area so the government can deliver those services." However, the United Nations would not be participating, he said. Wael Haj-Ibrahim, head of the United Nations' Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs here, said the military should not be involved in providing health care or schools. "If that aid is being delivered as part of a military strategy, the counterstrategy is to destroy that aid," Mr. Haj-Ibrahim said. "Allowing the military to do it is not the best use of resources." Instead, he said, the military should confine itself to clearing an area of security threats and providing security for humanitarian organizations to deliver services. "The distribution of aid by the military gives a very difficult impression to the communities and puts the lives of humanitarian workers at risk," Mr. Watkins said. Last month, eight leading humanitarian organizations working in

Afghanistan, including Oxfam and ActionAid, issued a joint report that was highly critical of the International Security Assistance Force, as the American-led NATO force is known, because of "the international militaries' use of aid as a 'nonlethal' weapon of war." They maintained that this violated an agreement between international forces and the United Nations that the military's primary role should be to provide security and, only when there is no other alternative, to provide limited developmental and humanitarian assistance. The agencies maintain they are able to work in conflict areas of Afghanistan when local residents see them as independent and not connected with the military, and this approach puts that at risk. "Military-led humanitarian and development activities are driven by donors' political interests and short-term security objectives and are often ineffective, wasteful and potentially harmful to Afghans," a statement by Oxfam said. The United Nations officials expressed the same concern, though more diplomatically, and one official, who did not want to be quoted by name because of the political sensitivity of the issue, said the United Nations had repeatedly raised those concerns with the international forces without success. The American military refers to its strategy, first enunciated in Iraq in 2006, as "clear, hold and build." Previously there were insufficient foreign and Afghan troops in Afghanistan to pursue that strategy systematically because they were unable to hold large areas for long periods of time. The offensive in Marja is intended as a showcase where the strategy can work, and the coalition says it has adequate forces now to do that. "Clear, hold and build, it's short-sighted for two reasons," the United Nations official said. "Territory changes hands in a conflict, and if the services are associated with a particular group, it will be destroyed." That has happened often with projects like schools and clinics around the country. The officials were particularly critical of NATO's planned "civilian surge," bringing in more government-financed aid workers involved in projects like the country's provincial reconstruction teams, which are located in each province and designed to provide fast-track development and aid services in their areas. These reconstruction teams are NATO groups run by various allied countries, including Canada in Kandahar, and Britain in Lashkar Gah, and they primarily disburse development and aid money locally in each province. Many of the reconstruction teams, the official said, see their role as providing services in exchange for intelligence-gathering and political activity directed against the insurgents. He declined to identify any that operate under that premise, although he added that not all did so. In many parts of the country, only nongovernmental organizations are able to operate safely because of the security situation, and they fill the gap in governmental services. Because the reconstruction teams are run by foreigners and are associated with their countries' militaries, they need to go out with heavy security, and aid groups worry that locals begin to associate all aid workers with the military. Oxfam said the military "was going way beyond its remit" in Afghanistan, citing an American Army counterinsurgency manual that defines humanitarian aid as a "nonlethal weapon." A statement issued Wednesday by the international forces emphasized the military's new, population-centered approach to fighting the insurgents. "The conduct of Operation Moshtarak is visibly demonstrating that the force has changed the way it operates and that it is working with and for the people of Afghanistan," the statement said, referring to the Marja offensive. It also suggested the military phase of the operation could be protracted. "The insurgents are tactically adept, have resilience and are cunning, so continued tactical patience on the part of the combined force is important. Mining is significant in areas, and the combined

force must be very deliberate in its movement in order to minimize local Afghan and combined force casualties." The United Nations' Humanitarian Action Plan has a proposed budget of \$870.5 million, a substantial increase over previous years, because the increased level of NATO military activity has led to increased needs for services in many parts of the country, according the United Nations.