

Afghanistan

The year 2008 in Afghanistan was marked by increasing pessimism over the prospects of stabilizing the country. Amid a growing tide of violence, few positive developments stood out. The government launched the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS), against which donors pledged some \$20 billion at the Paris donor conference in June. The ANDS emphasized the need for stronger partnership between the Afghan government and the international community to achieve stability and deliver vital economic development. In support of the ANDS, the Security Council expanded the mandate of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), strengthening its coordination role among the Afghan government and international partners. In a symbolic move, Afghan National Security Forces assumed responsibility for security in Kabul in August, a tentative first step toward their leadership and primacy nationwide. And, as a result of counternarcotic efforts, drought, and low prices due to large stocks, the area under opium cultivation decreased 20 percent in 2008—the first decline since 2005. However, due to increasing yields in the south, where the insurgency is strongest, actual poppy production did not fall significantly from 2007’s record 8,200 metric tons.

Underscoring the deteriorating security environment, civilian and military casualties, as well as terrorist incidents, reached their highest levels since the fall of the Taliban in 2001. By October 2008, thirty-one humanitarian workers had been slain—compared with fifteen during all of 2007—forcing several aid groups to severely limit, if not halt, their work. Several high-profile attacks demonstrated the growing reach and boldness of insurgents and their international backers, while attacks on international

and national forces showed increased coordination and complexity in their tactics. In February 2008, according to US intelligence estimates, the Afghan government controlled only 30 percent of the country’s districts; a more conservative estimate by the UN cited 36 of 376 districts as “largely inaccessible to Afghan officials and aid workers.”¹ Summarizing the situation, the US chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Michael Mullen, stated on 10 September 2008, “Frankly, we are running out of time.”²

Violence related to the armed conflict claimed the lives of more than 1,445 civilians in 2008, making it the deadliest year since 2001. As of September 2008, an estimated 395 Afghan civilians had been killed by US and NATO air strikes. Indeed, civilian casualties from air strikes—a perennial source of contention—received new political urgency following the death of what the UN reported as 92 civilians in Herat province on August 21; initial US estimates of 7 civilians dead were later raised to 33. The incident stoked the growing impatience of Afghans with the international military presence, and strained Afghanistan’s relations with the United States as well as with the United Nations.

Nor were the challenges facing Afghanistan confined to its own borders. The increasing power and influence of the Pakistan Taliban Movement and other extremist groups operating inside Pakistan, and indications of links between members of Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence and terrorists responsible for bombing the Serena Hotel and the Indian embassy in Kabul earlier in the year, as well as an assassination attempt on President Hamid Karzai, threatened stability on both sides of the border. At the same time, the attacks on the Indian city of Mumbai



UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA)

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| • Authorization and Start Date | 28 March 2002 (UNSC Res. 1401) |
| • SRSG | Kai Eide (Norway) |
| • Senior Military Adviser | Brigadier-General Mark Skidmore (Canada) |
| • Senior Police Adviser | Roberto Bernal (Philippines) |
| • Budget | \$240.0 million |
| • Strength as of 31 October 2008 | Military Observers: 17 Police: 3 International Civilian Staff: 247 Local Civilian Staff: 1,160 UN Volunteers: 40 |

For detailed mission information see p. 240

International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)

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| • Authorization and Start Date | 20 December 2001 (UNSC Res. 1386) |
| • Force Commander | General David D. McKiernan (United States) |
| • Budget | \$361.0 million (October 2007–September 2008) |
| • Strength as of 31 October 2008 | Troops: 50,719 |

inflamed tensions between India and Pakistan, thereby diverting Pakistan's attention from its operations in the tribal areas bordering Afghanistan. The result was an increase of attacks on NATO supply convoys inside Pakistan that threatened to disrupt the flow of critical resources to NATO forces in Afghanistan. This raised the possibility of diverting supply convoys through Russia at a time of increased tension between that country and the West.

Severe food shortages and rising fuel costs meanwhile threatened the livelihoods of 9 million Afghans, risking a humanitarian crisis and adding to civil unrest.

Background

Current international efforts to stabilize and rebuild Afghanistan were initiated in 2001 following military action by the US-led coalition forces under Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). The aim of OEF was to kill or capture the leaders of the Al-Qaeda terrorist network, to destroy its training camps, and to deny it a safe base of operations. With the coalition forces focused narrowly on counterterrorism, the signatories to the Bonn Agreement requested the United Nations and other international actors to support the political transition and economic reconstruction. In response, the Security Council established UNAMA in March 2002 (Resolution 1401) with a mandate to assist in the establishment of a permanent Afghan government, encourage aid coordination among donors, and mediate disputes through the good offices of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG). Under this mandate, UNAMA organized the key political elements called for in Bonn: the 2002 Emergency Loya Jirga, the 2003 Constitutional Loya Jirga, the 2004 presidential elections, and the 2005 parliamentary elections.

With the completion of the Bonn Process, many within the international community felt a need for a new framework of cooperation. This resulted, in January 2006, in the Afghanistan Compact, an agreement between the Afghan government and its international partners on high-level benchmarks in the areas of security, governance, reconstruction, and counternarcotics.

3.4.1 The Independent Panel on Safety and Security of UN Personnel and Premises Worldwide

On 11 December 2007, the terrorist organization Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) detonated a car bomb outside the UN office in Algiers, the capital of Algeria. The attack, which deliberately targeted the United Nations, killed seventeen UN staff, injured forty, and destroyed the building. In response, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon established the Independent Panel on Safety and Security of UN Personnel and Premises Worldwide (IPSS), led by Ambassador Lakhdar Brahimi, to recommend improvements to the UN's security management system worldwide.

In its June 2008 report, the panel cited several improvements in the security system since the establishment of the Department of Safety and Security in 2005, including the adoption of threat and risk assessment methodology. Nonetheless, it identified several priority areas—including weak accountability, leadership, internal management, and oversight—that had not been adequately addressed despite similar recommendations made by an independent panel established after the deadly 2003 attack against the UN office in Baghdad, Iraq.

The IPSS emphasized the primary responsibility of member states, and called for more transparent information-sharing by governments on matters concerning the security of UN operations. The panel also reaffirmed the decentralization of day-to-day security decisionmaking under designated officials at the country or mission

level; recommended improving both the security training provided to designated officials and UN security team members in the field, and the recruitment profile for security officers; and called for a proactive balance between security needs and program delivery, particularly humanitarian assistance. Among its urgent recommendations, the panel called for replacing the system of security phases with one based on risk management; implementing minimum security standards for UN offices in vulnerable locations; and reducing the perception of inequity between national and international personnel by improving the transparency and accessibility of information on working conditions.

The public image of the United Nations also has implications for the safety of its operations. The panel argued that some of the UN's decisions and statements “are seen as ignoring the very principles on which the Organization was founded. . . . The UN is then seen by those directly concerned, and by the many millions around the world sympathetic to their causes, as being on the wrong side of justice.” To restore the credibility of the UN, it called for greater adherence to the principles of the UN Charter and greater demonstration of the organization's impartiality and neutrality.

Following completion of the panel's report, the Under-Secretary of Safety and Security, Sir David Vaness, resigned, taking full responsibility for any lapses in security

that may have led to the high level of fatalities in the December 2007 attack. As of late October 2008, he remained at his post, pending identification and confirmation of a replacement.

A subsequent panel, the Independent Panel on Accountability—headed by Ralph Zacklin, former assistant secretary-general of the UN Office of Legal Affairs—was established by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on the recommendation of the IPSS to specifically investigate the individual culpability of UN personnel for security shortcomings related to the Algiers attack. The Independent Panel on Accountability submitted its findings in October 2008, recommending administrative measures against several UN staff responsible for security in Algeria. The report also confirmed findings of the IPSS related to the overall supervision and management of the Department of Safety and Security; the political manipulation of the system of security phases by host governments; and security system inconsistencies from country to country, including a preoccupation with high-risk areas of operation, like Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, and Somalia, at the expense of other potential sources of threat.

Implementation of the reforms recommended by the independent panels, many of which are systemic in nature, will be contingent upon finances from the assessed and voluntary budgets.

Source: Independent Panel on Safety and Security of UN Personnel and Premises Worldwide, “Towards a Culture of Security and Accountability,” June 2008.

The compact endorsed a “central and impartial” coordination role for UNAMA, which was given the responsibility of jointly chairing, with the Afghan government, the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board (JCMB), the body responsible for overseeing implementation of the compact. Commensurate with this role, the UNAMA

mandate was expanded in Security Council Resolutions 1662 (2006) and 1746 (2007).

In March 2008, veteran Norwegian diplomat Kai Eide was appointed SRSB by the Secretary-General, replacing Tom Koenigs of Germany. Eide, in his first briefing to the Security Council in July, reported that UNAMA's



REUTERS/Fabrizio Bensch

A German member of ISAF instructs Afghan National policemen during a training drill in Feyzabad, north of Kabul, Afghanistan, 21 September 2008.

capacities for supporting the 2009 presidential elections, assisting with coordination of the ANDS, and improving donor aid effectiveness, institution building, and delivery of humanitarian assistance, required strengthening. Additional staff—and provision for their security—were required for establishing new field offices in support of these activities. Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1806 (2008), UNAMA was mandated to lead international civilian efforts to promote, in its role as cochair of the JCMB, more coherent international support to the Afghan government, to strengthen coordination among national and international civilian and military actors, and to provide political outreach through an expanded field presence.

From the outset, delivery of political and development assistance has been contingent on provision of security. The Bonn Agreement called for establishment of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), which was subsequently established under Security Council Resolution 1386 (2001) “to assist the Afghan Interim Authority in the maintenance of security in Kabul and its surrounding areas.” ISAF deployment initially was limited to Kabul and its environs due to insistence by European

governments on a separate chain of command and related concerns by the United States that a wider ISAF presence would conflict with ongoing counterterrorism operations. Despite repeated calls by Afghanistan, the UN, and non-governmental organizations to expand ISAF, it remained limited to the Afghan capital until 2003, when the North Atlantic Treaty Organization assumed command of the force. In 2004, under Security Council authorization, NATO began a four-phase expansion of ISAF into the provinces. Existing provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs) in the north (2004) and west (2005) were transferred to ISAF. In July 2006, the robust deployments by the United Kingdom in Helmand, by Canada in Kandahar, and the Netherlands in Uruzgan transferred to ISAF command. Later that year, some 12,000 US troops previously under OEF were transferred to ISAF command, making it the primary military force on the ground. As of November 2008, forty-one countries had contributed troops to the over 50,000-strong ISAF.

Key Developments

In the United States, rising demand for increasing forces in Afghanistan ahead of the US election led President George W. Bush to announce that an initial combat brigade would be redeployed in early 2009. General David McKiernan of the US Army, the commander of ISAF, later stated that an additional three brigades—some 20,000 troops—were required to counter the increased violence. In a bid to strengthen stabilization and counterinsurgency efforts, US secretary of defense Robert Gates unveiled plans in August 2008 to restructure OEF. ISAF and OEF maintain separate chains of command, but these are becoming increasingly interlinked. OEF is overseen by the US Central Command and is divided into two component missions: Combined Joint Task Force 82 (CJTF-82), which oversees US forces in Afghanistan, and the Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan (CSTC-A), which is responsible for training the Afghan National Security Forces. Since the expansion of ISAF to eastern Afghanistan, the commander of

CJTF-82 has served as the deputy commander of ISAF. The new structure brings nearly all of the 19,000 US forces currently outside of ISAF under the NATO commander, General McKiernan (some 20,000 US troops are already deployed as part of the 50,000-strong ISAF). OEF will maintain a separate, unspecified number of forces for counterterrorism and administration of the detention facilities at Bagram Airbase north of Kabul.

Capacity of Afghan Institutions

The Afghanistan Compact established high-level benchmarks for the formation of a professional and effective Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police. Amid the increased violence of 2008, the need to build these institutions took on renewed urgency. Shortages of NATO troops and related anger among Afghans over air strikes, as well as renewed attention to Afghanistan in the United States during the run-up to the 2008 US presidential election, prompted calls for accelerating the “Afghanization” of the military mission. In August 2008, US secretary of defense Robert Gates announced plans for the expansion of the Afghan National Army to 120,000 personnel over the next five years—nearly double the current level of 60,000 (of an authorized 80,000). The JCMB subsequently approved a ceiling of 134,000—requested by the Ministry of Defense—at its eighth meeting, in September. This includes “sustaining institutions” such as an Afghan National Air Corps, regional military intelligence offices, an acquisition agency, and communications support.

The Afghan National Army has consistently proven itself in combat alongside international military troops. Nonetheless, the force is still operationally and financially dependent on the US military. According to the US Government Accountability Office, only 2 of 105 army units “are assessed as being fully capable of conducting their mission,” and 65 of 105 “are either planned, in basic training, or assessed as partially able or unable to conduct their mission.”³ The assessment cited a lack of leadership within the Afghan National Army, shortfalls in

personnel, including trainers, shortages of equipment, and low readiness levels. High levels of attrition and absenteeism were also found. Moreover, the expected price tag of the expansion, \$20 billion—equal the total pledges at the Paris donor conference—means that sustainability of the force remains a major challenge. Maintenance of an expanded Afghan National Army is estimated to cost an additional \$2.5 billion per year—significantly more than domestic revenue. The United States—the lead nation for rebuilding the army—has “not yet developed a coordinated, detailed plan for completing and sustaining [it].”⁴ Afghanistan will therefore remain dependent on year-to-year foreign assistance to subsidize its military for the foreseeable future.

The numerically superior Afghan National Police lags far behind its Afghan National Army counterpart in effectiveness and readiness. Plagued by corruption, inadequate training, and insufficient equipment, the Afghan National Police suffers from both a lack of public trust and an inability to protect itself from insurgent attacks. Assessing the police force, the US Government Accountability Office found no unit fully capable of performing its mission, while “less than one-quarter of the [force] has police mentors present to provide training in the field, evaluate police capacity, and verify that police are on duty.”⁵ In May 2008, the European Union agreed to double the size of its EU Police Mission in Afghanistan (EUPOL Afghanistan), the training mission that succeeded an earlier German-led initiative in June 2007. The mission had a strength of 274 staff, including 184 internationals, by mid-September 2008. Filling the additional posts remains dependent on the willingness of EU members to field more law enforcement and justice experts. Germany agreed to triple its contribution to the EUPOL force to 120 personnel, despite domestic opposition to the country’s role in Afghanistan.

The effectiveness of the Afghan National Police is also undermined by Afghanistan’s weak judicial system. Efforts to strengthen mechanisms of justice since 2001 have focused predominantly on state institutions, including legal

reform, training personnel, and rebuilding infrastructure. In the interim, the Afghan government and donors have begun to explore potential linkages with institutions of customary law and dispute resolution.

The challenges faced by the Afghan National Police reflect those of the government as a whole. According to the World Bank, Afghanistan is second only to Somalia as the weakest government in the world. The illegal narcotics industry, as well the vast wealth provided by international assistance, have fueled rampant corruption, which the government has so far proved either unwilling or unable to tackle. Corruption threatens implementation of the ANDS and confidence in the justice and security sectors, undermining the legitimacy of the government overall. At the Paris donor conference, the Afghan government renewed its commitment to combating corruption.

Coordination

OEF, ISAF, UNAMA, UN agencies, bilateral donors, and international financial institutions each have distinct mandates and missions. International military forces, the UN, and major donors recognize that improved coordination with each other and with the Afghan government is vital to their success. Yet they also acknowledge that the current level of coordination is lacking. Political, military, and development activities frequently have been pursued independent of each other, without agreement among the principal actors on an overarching strategy, let alone a desired end state. Different goals and modus operandi exist not only across the political, military, and development realms, but within each of these individual areas as well.

In an effort to bring greater unity of purpose to the diverse actors involved, the United States, the United Kingdom, and other key donors sought the appointment in February 2008 of Lord (Paddy) Ashdown, the former UN High Representative in Bosnia-Herzegovina, as a “super envoy” to simultaneously fulfill the roles of SRSG, NATO senior civilian representative, and EU envoy. Ashdown’s candidacy—and with it the “super envoy” role—was ultimately withdrawn

following objections from President Karzai in a move widely regarded as an effort to assert his authority vis-à-vis the West.

The need for more effective coordination was subsequently included in the revised mandate for UNAMA. However, better coordination cannot alone align the fundamental differences and justifications among actors for their presence in Afghanistan. In the military realm, ISAF has a unified command in theory, but in practice, each troop-contributing country has control over the deployment of its troops—including where and in what role they serve, as well as their terms of engagement. The resulting national caveats are indicative of the wide range of differences among NATO member states on offensive engagement. Individual contingents and PRTs have been more responsive to the political exigencies of national capitals than to the civil-military needs of the provinces in which they are based, or to the need for an overall NATO strategy. Several NATO members have staunchly resisted involvement in counterterrorism and counterinsurgency roles. The revised ISAF operational plan of 2005 clearly delineates that the force will not engage in or command counterterrorism missions. Yet other ISAF contingents—particularly those in the south and east—have engaged in offensive actions against insurgents and terrorist elements, as in Arghandab district, Kandahar, and Musa Qala district, Helmand.

Differences in approach between the United States and other NATO members have also emerged over counterinsurgency tactics, particularly the role of air power, in the face of efforts to “win hearts and minds.” The shortage of international forces for Afghanistan, combined with tensions between counterterrorism and state-building objectives, has increased reliance on air strikes when engaged with insurgents. This has resulted in high levels of “collateral damage.” Civilian deaths from air strikes pose a major challenge to the legitimacy and tolerance of international military forces in Afghanistan. Following a series of incidents in July 2008, President Karzai blamed international forces for the rising violence in the country. The

Afghan parliament likewise sought—without result—greater control over the terms of the US military presence. The tide of discontent swelled after the 21 August air strikes in Shindand district, Herat. President Karzai publicly called for a status of forces agreement with the US-led coalition forces, which have thus far operated without a formal legal agreement with the Afghan government.⁶ ISAF, by contrast, has a UN mandate and signed a military technical agreement with the government. But both forces are increasingly under pressure for greater government control, as the increased combat role of ISAF, and a command structure interlinked with OEF, have made it more difficult to determine responsibility for errant air operations.

Counternarcotics policy is another area where differences among external actors are prevalent. Until recently, the United States has continued to press for eradication as a central component of its efforts, despite opposition from the Afghan government, other major external actors, and evidence that the policy disproportionately harms poor farmers, undermining their livelihoods and strengthening the appeal of Taliban propaganda.

The United States initially demonstrated a wariness of multilateralism. It remains the largest troop contributor, controls key command positions both on the ground in OEF and ISAF, and at NATO headquarters, and is also the largest donor. All of these factors contribute to making it among the most difficult of international partners to coordinate with. Meanwhile, civilian casualties further complicate its relationship with other actors. Following the Shindand air strikes, the United Nations challenged the assertion by the United States that thirty to thirty-five of those killed were insurgents and only five to seven were civilians. A joint United Nations and Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission panel of human rights experts dispatched to the site concluded that the victims were civilians. US political and military officials pressured the UN to relent, but SRS G Eide held his ground, underscoring the tensions between his roles as advocate for Afghanistan and in leading international coordination. In a move

likely to strengthen the position of the United Nations, the United States ultimately apologized for the deaths. It took the added step of issuing new rules of engagement on 2 September 2008 in an effort to limit future civilian deaths, agreeing to undertake joint investigations with the Afghan government, as well as pledging to offer more rapid compensation to the families of victims. Notwithstanding tensions over air strikes, senior US officials have repeatedly signaled their willingness to support SRS G Eide in taking a more proactive coordination role than his predecessor.

The revelation in September 2008 that the George W. Bush administration had authorized cross-border operations into Pakistan by special forces created a new fissure between the United States and its allies. The former stated that it viewed the insurgency in Afghanistan and the threat from Pakistan's tribal regions as "a single problem." According to a NATO spokesperson, however, "The NATO policy, that is our mandate, ends at the border. . . . There are no ground or air incursions by NATO forces into Pakistani territory."⁷

NATO's engagement in Afghanistan remains a source of strain for the alliance, as the previously clear line between ISAF as the "stabilizing" force, and the coalition as the "war-fighting" force, has become blurred. "National caveats" divide ISAF between those countries deploying troops—and suffering heavy losses—in combat zones in the south and east, and those—including Germany, France, Italy, and Spain—that have deployed in the relatively safer north and west due to domestic political pressure. The former continue to seek greater equity among the twenty-six NATO members, but despite NATO vows to the contrary, troop commitments remain problematic. Canada threatened to withdraw its troops from Kandahar unless other nations supported its efforts. French president Nicolas Sarkozy increased the size of France's NATO contingent from 700 to 3,300 earlier in 2008. Domestic support for deployment plummeted after the killing of ten French troops in August. Following a parliamentary vote on 22 September to maintain its presence in Afghanistan, the French government stated it would

provide more matériel and consider sending back special forces troops it had withdrawn in 2007. Germany also promised an additional 1,000 troops by year's end to complement its existing contingent of 3,500, and signaled that, for the first time, it would consider deployment to the south. Nonetheless, the crisis in Georgia in August 2008 has caused some European countries to question NATO's out-of-area role.

National caveats—and calls for withdrawal following the death of soldiers—undermine the message to insurgents that international commitment to Afghanistan is unequivocal (ahead of the September 2008 election in Canada, and after the Conservatives pledged to pull out of Afghanistan by 2011 if reelected, the Taliban claimed to have stepped up attacks in order to pressure the government to withdraw its forces). Moreover, the shortage of troops exposes humanitarian and development workers to greater risk. When these organizations are forced to halt work, it justifies the use of terrorist tactics and furthers the insurgent goal of isolating the Afghan population from the government and essential services.

International support for the political dimension of stabilization is under UN auspices. The separate authority for military and political realms has led to lack of coherence between military, political, and development goals. Since his appointment, SRSR Eide has, as noted above, sought and received wider powers and resources from the Security Council to fulfill the UN's coordination role. Eide's role as chair of the JCMB—which was convened in April 2006 to oversee implementation of the Afghanistan Compact and to improve donor coordination to this end—has provided the UN its main source of convening power and leverage over other actors. With twenty-eight members representing the Afghan government, the UN and other multilaterals, major donors and troop contributors, NATO and OEF, as well as regional governments, the JCMB has in the past been criticized as “unwieldy.” Eide has moved to improve the JCMB, and has restructured the unwieldy Consultative Group process, replacing it with three standing committees—one for each pillar of the

Afghanistan Compact: security, governance, and development. These committees are supplemented by ad hoc, time-limited subcommittees focused on providing policy recommendations on specific problems, such as counternarcotics.

In 2008, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) established offices in Afghanistan separate from UNAMA despite earlier indications that the plan had been rejected. The move followed calls from some quarters of the humanitarian community, challenging the effectiveness of the mission's integrated structure. UNAMA had pledged to keep full responsibility for humanitarian issues and to increase its humanitarian officers.

Regional Dynamics

The situation in Afghanistan is intrinsically linked to the wider South and Central Asia region through political and economic ties, both licit and criminal. Porous borders exacerbate the inability of the Afghan government, its international partners, as well as its neighbors to control the illegal drug trade and cross-border dimensions of the insurgency.

During 2008, events across the shared border with Pakistan threatened to worsen the situation not only in Afghanistan, but in the wider region as well. In the federally administered tribal areas, the growing power of the Pakistan Taliban Movement and other extremist groups provided a safe haven for Al-Qaeda and affiliated terrorists hostile to the West and the Afghan and Pakistani governments. Following the resignation of President Pervez Musharraf, the successful bid for power by Asif Ali Zardari of the Pakistan People's Party fractured the governing coalition. The government renewed military operations in the tribal areas, though with questionable commitment and effectiveness. Pakistani military engagement is overshadowed by deep-seated concerns about the threat posed by India and its growing influence in Afghanistan. Nonetheless, US secretary of defense Robert Gates testified in September 2008 that “their mere presence and willingness to fight has reduced some of the pressure on the Afghan side of the border.”⁸

Iran and Afghanistan maintain amicable ties, including economic trade and joint efforts to combat illegal drugs. Iran, meanwhile, continues to host over 900,000 Afghan refugees despite deporting nearly 500,000 since the beginning of 2007. It again extended its voluntary repatriation program in February 2008. Iran exerts political and economic influence in Afghanistan, particularly in the western provinces. The Afghan government dismissed US charges of Iranian collusion with insurgent elements in Afghanistan.

China has pledged \$170 million to Afghanistan since 2002. While ranking well behind other major contributors, China has staked out a seat at the table—providing military assistance and support on road reconstruction to reconnect Afghanistan to regional trade routes where security permits overland travel. In the largest foreign direct investment project ever in Afghanistan, China won a \$3.5 billion contract to develop the Aynak copper reserve, including a rail link connecting the two countries through Tajikistan and Pakistan.

Conclusion

Whether the international community and the Afghan government can succeed in stabilizing Afghanistan will depend on whether they are able to reach agreement on an overarching strategy and deliver better coordination in its implementation. NATO members will need to follow up on promises of additional troops and trainers, and donors will need to fulfill their Paris pledges. Maintaining the legitimacy

of international forces is another challenge, particularly as the line between stabilization and combat roles is likely to remain blurred, while the development of independent national security forces is still only an aspiration. Effective measures to minimize civilian casualties, should they prove sustainable, would be an important step in this direction.

Insecurity may force a delay in Afghanistan's 2009 presidential elections, though key external actors and the Afghan government itself are signaling resolve to see credible elections held on time. Delays would likely undermine the legitimacy of the current government. There is, moreover, a further risk that a delay, combined with the inability of international military forces to rein in the Taliban and other insurgents, would reverse the modest gains made to disband illegal armed groups and further undermine local government control.

Finally, stabilizing Afghanistan is dependent on events in the wider region, above all the ability and willingness of Pakistan to address the lawlessness in the federally administered tribal areas. Whether the government can establish greater control over interservice intelligence (ISI) will need to be addressed as part of this solution. Recent discussions between Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the United States on joint missions in the border region could prove a step in the right direction, provided Pakistan's concerns over sovereignty are addressed.

As outgoing European Union envoy Francesc Vendrell described the prospect in Afghanistan, "The international community is not destined to fail, but we are far from succeeding."⁹

Notes

1. United Nations, *Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security*, UN Doc. A/62/722-S/2008/159, 6 March 2008.

2. Robert Burns, "Defense Chiefs: Afghan Fighting Is Getting Harder," *Associated Press News*, 10 September 2008, <http://wiredispatch.com/news/?id=340000>.

3. US Government Accountability Office, "Afghanistan Security: Further Congressional Action May Be Needed to Ensure Completion of a Detailed Plan to Develop and Sustain Capable Afghan National Security Forces," June 2008, p. 3.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

6. The United States and Afghanistan signed a joint declaration of strategic partnership in May 2005 that provided "freedom of action" for US forces.

7. Augustine Anthony, "Karzai Backs U.S. on Pakistan, NATO Holds Back," *Reuters*, 11 September 2008, <http://www.reuters.com/article/latestcrisis/iduslb388056>.

8. Anna Mulrine, "Gates Says Pentagon Will Try to Stop Prioritizing Iraq over Afghanistan," *US News and World Report*, 23 September 2008, <http://www.usnews.com/articles/news/iraq/2008/09/23/gates-says-pentagon-will-try-to-stop-prioritizing-iraq-over-afghanistan.html>.

9. Alison Smale, "Afghanistan Is in Its Worst Shape Since 2001, European Diplomat Says," *New York Times*, 14 September 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/15/world/asia/15kabul.html>.