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Afghanistan

Over the past year, the extension of state authority developed a new urgency in Afghanistan. Following the NATO summit in Lisbon in November 2010, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) began handing over governance and security responsibilities to the Afghan government in anticipation of the withdrawal of international forces by December 2014. Along with attempts to reconcile with the Taliban, this “transition” of greater responsibility for national security to Afghan authorities has become the pivotal component of NATO’s plans to draw its decade-long deployment in Afghanistan to a close.

The transition comes at a particularly volatile time in Afghanistan. According to UN estimates, an average of 2,108 “security incidents” occurred per month in the first eight months of

2011, an increase of 39 percent over the same period in 2010.¹ The majority of the civilian deaths during this period, which increased by over 5 percent compared to the previous year, were attributed to insurgent forces. The Taliban also deepened its presence in areas beyond its traditional heartland in the east and south, including in districts surrounding Kabul. The expanding insurgency resulted in the death of approximately 573 ISAF soldiers between December 2010 and November 2011, making this one of the deadliest periods in recent years.²

The escalating violence, combined with growing war fatigue, prompted stark operational shifts in ISAF. Following changes in senior US military leadership, the coalition started to move away from its counterinsurgency doctrine and toward a more conventional counterterrorism operation focused on targeting key insurgent and terrorist leaders. By focusing on enhancing the capacity of the Afghan government, ISAF leadership seeks to maintain security in the country while expediting the withdrawal of international forces.

Despite the deteriorating security conditions, and lingering doubts about the capacity of the Afghan government, the transition has received considerable political support. President Hamid Karzai applauded the drawdown of ISAF forces, calling it an essential step in Afghanistan’s development as a sovereign nation-state.³ Similarly, amid diminishing public support for ISAF’s mandate, voters in the United States and many parts of Europe looked favorably on the withdrawal of their troops from Afghanistan.

Nonetheless, this transition has only deepened long-standing concerns among Afghans about the future of their country. The announcement of the formal end of ISAF operations has



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stoked persistent fears that the international community will abandon Afghanistan and allow it to return to the protracted warfare and human suffering that pervaded the past three decades. These fears have been exacerbated by increasing skepticism about the viability of reconciliation efforts, particularly since the Taliban's assassination of former president Burhanuddin Rabbani, who led the Afghan government's High Peace Council.

Background

In response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks, a US-led coalition operating under the auspices of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) launched a military campaign in Afghanistan in October 2001. Coalition forces and their Afghan allies overthrew the Taliban government and tried to kill or capture the leaders of the Al-Qaida terrorist network. Most of the Taliban and Al-Qaida leadership escaped across the border to Pakistan. Many rank-and-file members of the Taliban returned to their villages in Afghanistan.

After the fall of the Taliban regime, a group of prominent Afghans and world leaders met in Bonn, Germany, in early December 2001 under UN leadership to form a successor government. The resulting plan, known as the Bonn Agreement, outlined a series of benchmarks for the development of a new Afghan state. To provide security in Kabul and the surrounding areas, the Security Council authorized ISAF under Security Council Resolution 1386 (2001), and extended its mandate again for a full year in October 2011. In March 2002, under Resolution 1401, the Security Council authorized the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) to support the establishment of a permanent government as outlined in the Bonn Agreement.

In 2003, NATO assumed command of ISAF, which had previously rotated among participating troop contributors on an ad hoc basis. With more than 40 contributing countries, ISAF gradually expanded beyond Kabul, taking command of existing provincial reconstruction teams in the northern and western regions. The same year,

International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)	
• Authorization Date	20 December 2001 (UNSC Res. 1386)
• Start Date	December 2001
• Force Commander	General John R. Allen (United States)
• Budget	\$292 million (1 January 2011–31 December 2011)
• Troop Contributing Nations	48
• Strength as of 30 September 2011	Troops: 130,670

EU Police Mission in Afghanistan (EUPOL Afghanistan)	
• Authorization Date	30 May 2007 (EU Council Joint Action 2007/369/CFSP)
• Start Date	June 2007
• Force Commander	Brigadier General Jukka Savolainen (Finland)
• Budget	\$68.4 million (1 October 2010–30 September 2011)
• Contributing Nations	27
• Strength as of 30 September 2011	Civilian Police: 187 Civilian Staff: 134

following the integration of nearly 12,000 US troops under NATO command, ISAF replaced OEF as the main combat force on the ground. ISAF steadily expanded into more volatile parts of the south, succeeding US forces in Helmand, Uruzgan, and Kandahar provinces and establishing a presence across the entire country by 2006.

The Afghan presidential and parliamentary elections, held in 2004 and 2005 respectively, completed the political objectives established in the Bonn Agreement. In response to the expressed need for further international cooperation, the Afghan government and its international partners signed the Afghanistan Compact in January 2006, committing to high-level benchmarks in the areas of security, governance, reconstruction, and counternarcotics. The Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board (JCMB),

co-chaired by UNAMA and the Afghan government, was established to oversee implementation of the compact.

In November 2010, NATO members convened in Lisbon to establish the broad contours of the drawdown of ISAF. Several contributing countries, most notably Canada and the Netherlands, had already begun planning to withdraw their combat forces, raising questions about the fragility of the alliance. The Lisbon agreement called for a process of “transition” to full Afghan security responsibility and leadership to begin in July 2011. However, a timeline for the handover to Afghan authorities was not identified in the summit declaration, which specified that the transition would be “conditions-based, not calendar-driven.” NATO officials reiterated that the plan did not amount to a withdrawal of ISAF forces and that NATO would remain committed to Afghanistan, but no details were offered about the nature of that commitment beyond 2014.

Key Developments

Inconclusive Surge

Following the Lisbon conference, the United States marked the first anniversary of its much anticipated “military surge.” An additional 33,000 US soldiers and 10,000 allied forces were deployed, bringing the total number of ISAF troops to over 130,000 in November 2010. The US government celebrated the move as a decisive step in reducing the influence of the Taliban in strategic parts of Afghanistan. “The surge in coalition military and civilian resources,” White House officials detailed in a December 2010 report, “along with an expanded special operations forces targeting campaign and expanded local security measures at the village level, has reduced overall Taliban influence and arrested the momentum they had achieved in recent years in key parts of the country.”⁴ These gains, US officials argued, were most decisive in the south, where the Afghan government had historically struggled to extend its writ amid continued Taliban presence and antigovernment sentiment.

Growing insurgent activity in other parts of the country, particularly in areas beyond the Taliban’s traditional strongholds in the south and east, tempered the perceived security gains following the surge in the south. In many provinces surrounding Kabul, for instance, Taliban shadow governors operate alongside the official government, administering taxes, adjudicating disputes, and appointing local military commanders through a mixture of intimidation and corruption.⁵ This proximity posed a considerable liability to the Karzai government and its international backers. Besides threatening security in the capital, as seen in several high-profile attacks in 2011, the Taliban’s encroachment on Kabul underscored the Afghan government’s limited political authority.

The Search for a Political Settlement

The planned strategic and political transition, combined with the inconclusive military surge, led to a decisive shift in the US-led mission in Afghanistan. After years of public reluctance to discuss the possibility of negotiations, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced in February 2011 that the US government had started a “new phase of our diplomatic efforts” regarding Afghanistan.⁶ Alongside ongoing military activities, the United States would publicly support an Afghan-led political process to reach a negotiated settlement with the Taliban. Perhaps more important, Secretary Clinton suggested that, instead of necessary preconditions to negotiations, the Taliban’s renouncement of Al-Qaida, suspension of violent activities, and acceptance of the Afghan constitution could be treated as “necessary outcomes.” The policy speech marked a decisive new priority for the US-led mission in Afghanistan.

Secretary Clinton’s speech had mixed effects on the ongoing negotiation process. Anticipation about a possible end to the fighting, and the willingness of the United States to deliver sufficient concessions for the Taliban to agree to a political settlement, elicited considerable support from many Afghans and commentators in ISAF-contributing countries. However, the announcement also sparked speculation that,

despite assurances to the contrary, any political settlement with the Taliban would necessarily come at the expense of key social and political gains, such as women's rights, access to education, and representation of ethnic minorities in government.

Numerous rumors about the timing, scope, and participants in the negotiation process surfaced throughout 2011. Some of these revelations undermined the confidence established between the US and Afghan governments, as well as with their Taliban counterparts. More importantly, the assassination of former president Rabhani cast considerable doubt on the viability of any negotiation process with the Taliban. In response to the attacks and growing public criticism of the strategy in Afghanistan, the Karzai administration announced that it would not negotiate with the Taliban but with the government of Pakistan, which it believes to have orchestrated much of the recent insurgent activity.

The coherence of the Afghan government was further tested amid fallout from the 2010 parliamentary elections. After an investigation into widespread allegations of corruption, the Independent Election Commission (IEC) finalized the results in late 2010 after removing nearly a quarter of the ballots. However, President Karzai subsequently established a controversial special court to investigate the election results, which called for sixty-two candidates to be seated in the lower house. The ensuing constitutional crisis was resolved in August 2011, when President Karzai issued a decree annulling the special court and granting the electoral commission final authority on the issue. Four days after the special court was dissolved, the election commission announced that only nine parliamentarians would be ousted amid allegations of fraud.

Change in Strategy and ISAF Drawdown

Other decisive shifts in ISAF's operations in Afghanistan followed from the security transition and reconciliation process. In April 2011, President Barack Obama announced that General David Petraeus had been nominated as the new



UN Photo/Eric Kanstein

Afghan National Police (ANP) cadets stand in formation during a crowd control exercise at the ANP training facility in Kabul, Afghanistan, 5 February 2011.

director of the US Central Intelligence Agency. Petraeus had succeeded General Stanley McCrystal as the top US and NATO commander in Afghanistan less than a year earlier. The new commander, Marine Corps General John R. Allen, assumed control of ISAF forces in mid-July, promising to work closely with Afghan forces in assuming greater responsibility over national security affairs.

The change in command reflected a wider, unofficial strategic shift in ISAF's mission in Afghanistan. After several years of waging a counterinsurgency against the Taliban, the departure of Petraeus, who was one of the chief architects of the strategy in Iraq and Afghanistan, marked a return to a more traditional counterterrorism campaign in many parts of the country. Instead of trying to extend the writ of the Afghan state, largely by attempting to protect civilians, hold "secured" areas, and build up the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), the counterterrorism strategy calls for a more targeted, less resource-intensive campaign against key insurgent leaders. The shift seemingly addressed several of the growing concerns among the United States and other contributing countries,

Box 2.1 India-Pakistan

While the past year has seen several positive developments in the decades-long dispute between India and Pakistan over Kashmir, new and traditional sources of tension continue to plague the contested region. The UN Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP), the second oldest UN peacekeeping mission, continues to operate within its limited mandate while it awkwardly finds itself a focus of separatist activity in Indian-controlled Kashmir.

Since 1949, UNMOGIP has been monitoring the cease-fire line established by the Karachi Agreement, which separates the Pakistani- and Indian-controlled areas of Kashmir, a disputed territory over which three armed conflicts have been waged since the end of British rule in 1947. The 1972 Simla Agreement established the current line of control (LOC), which differs only slightly from the original 1949 cease-fire line. Since then, UNMOGIP has monitored the LOC and is mandated to engage in patrols, inspections, and investigations of alleged violations of the line. The mission may also perform other field tasks in the area when permitted by both countries. In 2010, Major-General Raul Gloodtdofsky Fernandez of Uruguay was appointed the new head of UNMOGIP.

Since the establishment of the current LOC, India has held that UNMOGIP has no operational role to play in Jammu-Kashmir. It restricts the activities of UN observers on the Indian side of the LOC and provides the mission limited support, though it has allowed UNMOGIP to operate out of its summer office in Indian-controlled Srinagar. Pakistan believes that the mandate still applies and has continued to file complaints with the mission regarding perceived violations of the LOC.

Frequent separatist protests have continued in India-controlled Kashmir,

UN Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP)

• Authorization Date	21 April 1948 (UNSC Res. 47)
• Start Date	1 January 1949
• Chief Military Observer	Major-General Raul Gloodtdofsky Fernandez (Uruguay)
• Budget	\$21.2 million (1 January 2012–31 December 2013)
• Strength as of 31 October 2011	Military Observers: 39 International Civilian Staff: 25 National Civilian Staff: 51

and UNMOGIP headquarters has become a symbol for protesters seeking UN intervention in the dispute, with frequent protest marches and demonstrations taking place in front of the mission's office. Tensions between Indian authorities and rebels remain high, with frequent instances of violence leading to the deaths of both civilians and Indian troops and police. In 2010, India arrested and detained over 300 separatists and imposed a broad curfew in the area.¹ The UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights visited the country in January 2011 and expressed concern about India's treatment of separatists, citing the "arbitrary application of security laws" in Jammu-Kashmir and the country's hindrance of the work of human rights defenders.²

While there have been no recent hostilities between Indian and Pakistani forces, a number of Indian soldiers and separatist rebels have lost their lives in clashes near the LOC over the past year. India says it regularly intercepts Islamist rebels sneaking into Indian-held territory, but Pakistan denies allegations that it assists insurgents in their passage across the de facto border. There is long-standing speculation in India that some segments of the Pakistani government

have been actively encouraging the rebellion against Indian authorities.

While Indian forces killed over a hundred Kashmiris in a two-month span in 2010, the summer of 2011 was much less violent, with tourists returning and protests diminishing. India's revised training for security forces, improved governance, greater communication with Kashmiri civilians, and renewed dialogue with Pakistan are seen as contributing to these positive developments.

Despite new tensions raised by bomb attacks in Mumbai in early July 2011, the Indian and Pakistani foreign ministers met later that month and agreed to a set of small but significant policy changes regarding Kashmir that ease LOC crossings as well as the permit process for tourists and religious pilgrims. Shortly thereafter, gunfights between Indian soldiers and Kashmiri rebels near the LOC added to the long list of fatalities in this conflict. Recent bilateral developments may give renewed hope that a solution can be reached, but without serious progress toward substantive negotiations, it appears that little will change in a dispute that has persisted for over sixty years.

Notes: 1. Amnesty International, "A 'Lawless Law,'" May 2011, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA20/010/2011/en>.

2. "New Delhi: UN Special Rapporteur on HRDs Margaret Sekaggya Expresses Serious Concerns at End of Mission to India," *Frontline*, 24 January 2011, <http://www.frontlinedefenders.org/node/14311>.

including growing casualties, escalating costs, and the political need to redeploy soldiers.

The move away from counterinsurgency, along with the killing of Osama bin Laden in May 2011, has accelerated the drawdown of troops from Afghanistan. In June 2011, President Obama announced that, with the United States having largely achieved its limited goals in Afghanistan, the administration had ordered a phased withdrawal of the 33,000 troops deployed as part of the military surge. An initial 10,000 troops would return by the end of 2011, and the remainder would follow by September 2012. The scale of the drawdown surprised many officials, including several senior US military leaders, prompting widespread questions about the potential detrimental consequences for the overall military mission in Afghanistan.

The announcement led other ISAF contributors to accelerate their own drawdown plans. Twelve countries, accounting for nearly 85 percent of ISAF forces, announced that their troops would be redeployed in 2011 or 2012. Canada completed the withdrawal of combat forces in July 2011, with the remaining several hundred police and military trainers scheduled to leave by the end of 2011. The United Kingdom plans for approximately 500 or more troops to withdraw by the end of 2011. President Nicolas Sarkozy followed suit in announcing that French troops would be withdrawn “in a proportional manner and in a timeframe similar to the pull-back of the American reinforcements.”⁷

Security Handover

The accelerated drawdown of international forces gave greater urgency to the ongoing transition toward greater Afghan leadership over national security. Withdrawal plans were predicated on expectations that, with the assistance of ISAF and other international backers, the ANSF would be capable of assuming responsibility for national security affairs by the end of 2014. This imperative prompted a concerted effort to enlarge the army and police ranks. The Afghan National Army (ANA) enlarged to 164,000 active troops in mid-2011, an increase of approximately 25,000 soldiers since December 2010.⁸ During the same period, the Afghan

National Police (ANP) enlarged to approximately 126,000 officers, from a force size of 116,300 six months earlier.

The first formal security transitions were completed in July 2011. Several relatively stable areas, including the provinces of Bamyan and Panjshir, as well as the cities of Herat, Mazar-i-Sharif, and Lashkar Gah, and the areas surrounding Kabul, were among the first transferred to Afghan security authorities. Although ISAF forces remain in these areas, their official capacity is to serve in a supportive or consultative role rather than an operational one. A subsequent round of security handovers is expected in 2012 for other provinces in northern and central Afghanistan, including several areas with greater insurgent activity and political instability.

Despite the apparent success of the initial handover, the rush to enlarge the ANSF and devolve greater leadership to Afghan officials underscores unresolved challenges. Persistent attrition, for instance, hampers plans for the ANA, as approximately one in four recruits drops out within months of entering the military. Furthermore, high illiteracy rates and drug consumption have long frustrated attempts to train ANSF recruits. In addition, in October 2011 the UN released a report detailing the systematic use of torture against detainees by the Afghan police and intelligence service. These long-standing liabilities have deepened concerns among international observers about the capacity of the ANSF, particularly following several high-profile insurgent attacks and political violence, including the assault on UNAMA offices in Mazar-i-Sharif, the British council in Kabul, and the US embassy.

Targeted Assassinations and Growing Civilian Casualties

The Taliban insurgency continued to undermine the transition by exploiting the personalities and patronage that structure the Afghan government. Several key powerbrokers, many with deep ties to the Karzai administration, have been killed in recent months in a campaign of increasingly sophisticated assassinations. Perhaps the most notable example was President Karzai’s half-brother, Ahmed Wali Karzai, who was

killed in a suicide attack in July 2011. As chairman of the Kandahar Provincial Council, he was one of the administration's key interlocutors in the south and an important part of US intelligence activities. The assassination of former president Burhanuddin Rabbani undermined already lagging public confidence in the reconciliation process. The death of other close Karzai allies, including Jan Mohammed Khan, Matiullah Khan, and General Daud Daud, further compounded the frailties of the Afghan government.

Assassination has long been one of the Taliban's principal tactics. Insurgent commanders have targeted opposition leaders, particularly defiant tribal leaders and public officials, to stoke greater fear and compliance. The recent wave of assassinations has been even more destabilizing, not only because of their brutality but also because of the growing complexity of and casualties caused by suicide attacks.⁹ The Taliban's ability to reach the highest levels of the Afghan government has cast doubt on the ability of the ANSF to protect key leaders and heightened fears about future attacks.

This assassination campaign has compounded long-standing frustrations among Afghan and international officials regarding Pakistan's role in the ongoing transition in Afghanistan. Despite claims to support the Karzai government and the transition process, the Pakistani army and intelligence services have been indicted for supporting and directing Taliban activities in Afghanistan, including several high-profile attacks in Kabul. These frustrations reached new highs following the Rabbani assassination. As Admiral Michael Mullen, then-chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee: "In supporting these groups, the government of Pakistan, particularly the Pakistani Army, continues to jeopardize Pakistan's opportunity to be a respected and prosperous nation with genuine regional and international influence."¹⁰ The increasingly fractured relationship between the United States and Pakistan poses considerable risks to the transition process in Afghanistan and to regional stability more generally. Shortly following the Rabbani assassination,

Afghanistan signed a strategic partnership with India that included support for the ANSF, which may exacerbate tensions with Pakistan.

The violence in Afghanistan continues to be disproportionately felt by Afghan civilians. After recording the deadliest year since the fall of the Taliban, with at least 2,421 Afghan civilians killed in 2010, the first half of 2011 witnessed a 15 percent increase in deaths over the same period.¹¹ Insurgent groups were responsible for approximately 76 percent of civilian deaths, as compared to 21 percent attributable to ISAF and 3 percent to Afghan government troops.¹²

Casualties have been a particular source of animosity between the Karzai government and ISAF. On several occasions President Karzai has cited ISAF bombings and night raids as especially egregious examples suggesting that ISAF should relinquish greater authority to Afghan security officials. However, these charges have further frustrated ISAF leadership, as air strikes accounted for only 3 percent of civilian deaths in 2010.¹³ The dynamic has compounded long-standing tensions between the Afghan government and its international backers.

Conclusion

Growing international desires to conclude combat operations in Afghanistan have imparted a new urgency in extending the authority of the Afghan state over national affairs. The emphasis on transition, however, has done little to resolve lingering questions about the capacity of the Afghan government to assume such leadership, particularly in the absence of sustained support from the international community. These doubts have deepened anticipation in Afghanistan for a strategic partnership declaration with the still reluctant United States, which would create a long-term binding commitment to the country. In addition, reconciliation attempts in 2011 and the assassination of Burhanuddin Rabbani have further complicated the fractured relationship between Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the United States and cast increasing doubt on the potential for a negotiated settlement to end the violence.

Notes

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3. Alissa J. Rubin and Taimoor Shah, "Karzai Welcomes Withdrawal, but Many Afghans Are Wary," *New York Times*, 23 June 2011, p. 11.
4. White House, "Overview of the Afghanistan and Pakistan Annual Review," Washington, D.C., 16 December 2010, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2010/12/16/overview-afghanistan-and-pakistan-annual-review>.
5. International Crisis Group, "The Insurgency in Afghanistan's Heartland," Asia Report No. 207, 27 June 2011, p. 8.
6. Hillary Rodham Clinton, "Remarks at the Launch of the Asia Society's Series of Richard C. Holbrooke Memorial Addresses," New York, 18 February 2011, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2011/02/156815.htm>.
7. C. J. Radin, "ISAF Nations Follow US Lead, Announce Early Troop Drawdowns," *The Long War Journal*, 8 July 2011.
8. Ian S. Livingston and Michael O'Hanlon, *Afghanistan Index: Tracking Variables of Reconstruction & Security in Post-9/11 Afghanistan* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2011), p. 6.
9. UNAMA, "Afghanistan Midyear Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, 2011," Kabul, July 2011, p. 17.
10. Michael Mullen, "Statement of Admiral Michael Mullen, U.S. Navy," Senate Armed Services Committee on Afghanistan and Iraq, 22 September 2011, <http://armed-services.senate.gov/statemnt/2011/09-%20September/Mullen%2009-22-11.pdf>.
11. Afghanistan Rights Monitor, "ARM Annual Report: Civilian Casualties of War, January–December 2010," Kabul, 2010, http://www.arm.org.af/index.php?page=en_Our+reports.
12. Ibid.
13. Susan G. Chesser, "Afghanistan Casualties: Military Forces and Civilians," Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 3 August 2011, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R41084.pdf>.