

# CHANGING TIMES IN THE HINDU KUSH?

## AFGHANISTAN FACING THE TRANSFORMATION DECADE

*Nils Wörmer*

To many Afghans, 2014 turned into a seemingly fateful year with the conclusion of the three-and-a-half-year transition phase, the end of the ISAF mission and the first presidential elections, from which Hamid Karzai, who had been in office since 2001, was constitutionally barred. This particularly applies to those who have a positive view of the international intervention. Frequent use of terms such as break, turning point or fateful year by international and Afghan observers becomes understandable when one looks back on the election process, which lasted for nearly six months and came close to failure, as well as the complicated and lengthy negotiations of the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) and the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA).

Where does Afghanistan stand after 13 years of Western military presence and reconstruction work with over 140,000 foreign soldiers on its soil at times,<sup>1</sup> with an unprecedented influx of development aid<sup>2</sup> and with the



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1 | The number of foreign soldiers stationed in Afghanistan was at its highest during the period from May to July 2011, involving some 100,000 U.S. soldiers and over 40,000 soldiers from other nations, including some 5,000 from the German Bundeswehr. Cf. Ian S. Livingston/Michael O'Hanlon, "Afghanistan Index. Also including selected data on Pakistan", Brookings Institution, 10 Jan 2014, pp. 4-5, <http://brookings.edu/~media/Programs/foreign%20policy/afghanistan%20index/index20140110.pdf> (accessed 24 Nov 2014).

2 | During a hearing in the U.S. House of Representatives on 10 June 2014, Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), John F. Sopko, declared that the USA alone had provided 103.17 billion U.S. dollars for reconstruction, humanitarian aid and the development of the security forces in Afghanistan by 31 March 2014. This sum does not include the expenditure for the deployment of U.S. military since 2001. Cf. John F. Sopko, "Testimony. Before the Subcommittee ▶

international community focusing their policies strongly on the recently completed, three-and-a-half year transfer of security responsibility from the international assistance force ISAF to the Afghan security forces (transition phase)? Which of the objectives set for the transition phase at the conferences on Afghanistan held in 2010 and 2011 have been achieved and where are there still deficits? How do Afghans view the security situation and their living conditions at the beginning of 2015?



Cautious confidence: Many Afghans consider the security situation to be acceptable, although the governmental security institutions do not exert the monopoly on the use of force in every region. | Source: Will Craig, UK MOD/Crown Copyright, 2010, ISAF, flickr ©.

### **PERCEPTION OF THE SECURITY SITUATION AND PEOPLE'S LIVING CONDITIONS**

Speaking of "the security situation" in Afghanistan is difficult. The situation differs from one province to the other (in terms of attacks, fighting as well as crime in some cases) and also varies considerably between individual

on the Middle East and North Africa", Committee on Foreign Affairs U.S. House of Representatives, 10 June 2014, <http://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA13/20140610/102322/HHRG-113-FA13-Wstate-SopkoJ-20140610.pdf> (accessed 24 Nov 2014).

districts within a province.<sup>3</sup> The provinces in the north and west are still considered safer than those in southern and eastern Afghanistan. This applies despite some districts in the north and west, in the provinces of Kunduz, Faryab and Herat for example, being in part or to a very large extent no longer under the control of the Afghan state and its security institutions.

That said, large parts of the Afghan population consider the security situation acceptable in spite of the drastic escalation in violence between 2010 and 2014. This is a consequence of having lived through the devastating armed conflicts of the 1990s. At that time, the Western countries and the Soviet Union had withdrawn and –

in the eyes of many Afghans – abandoned the country to its heavily armed warlords.<sup>4</sup> Afghanistan subsequently turned into a playing field for regional powers, including India,

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Pakistan, Iran and Saudi-Arabia. Compared to that phase of the conflict, basic care, access to medical facilities as well as elementary and higher education have undergone steady improvement since the end of the Taliban rule thanks to the efforts made by ISAF and actors of international Development Cooperation. The GNI per capita, for instance, rose from 1,020 U.S. dollars in 2005 to 2,000 U.S. dollars in 2013,<sup>5</sup> the proportion of the population with access to basic medical care has increased from nine to

3 | Afghanistan has 34 provinces, subdivided into 398 districts. In Nangarhar Province to the east of Kabul, for instance, the districts around the provincial capital Jalalabad, Behsud, Surkh Rod, Kama and Kuz Kunar, are mostly stable and under the control of the Afghan government. In the districts of Rodat, Bati Kot, Shinwar and Nazyan, on the other hand, entire areas are under the control of the insurgents. Here, the Taliban are in power, including control of jurisdiction and taxation.

4 | On 13 Sep 1991, the foreign ministers of the USA and the Soviet Union, James Baker and Boris Pankin, signed an agreement ("Negative Symmetry Agreement"), in which the two states undertook to cease providing any financial and logistical assistance to the conflicting Afghan parties. Cf. Peter Tomsen, *The Wars of Afghanistan. Messianic Terrorism, Tribal Conflicts and the Failures of Great Powers*, New York, 2011, p. 448.

5 | Cf. The World Bank, "World Development Indicators, Afghanistan", <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/views/reports/tableview.aspx> (accessed 24 Nov 2014).

57 per cent since 2001,<sup>6</sup> infant mortality (per 1,000 live births) fell from 95 in 2000 to 70 in 2013,<sup>7</sup> and just under one third of the population now has access to electricity (in Kabul it is 70 per cent compared to six per cent in 2001).<sup>8</sup> In addition, the number of university students has increased from some 8,000 in 2001 to approximately 100,000 now,<sup>9</sup> and there are some 34,000 young people undergoing training at 250 institutions of technical and vocational training around the country.<sup>10</sup> As far as freedoms of the individual are concerned, the situation has improved markedly compared to 2001, at least in parts of the country. The media have also been able to establish themselves more widely. In the press freedom ranking, Afghanistan outdoes most other countries in the region (including India and the large neighbours of Iran and Pakistan).<sup>11</sup>

**The early setting of the withdrawal date for the NATO combat troops resulted in a strong sense of uncertainty.**

Against this backdrop, i.e. the experiences from the civil war after 1991 and the gradual improvement of the living conditions of large parts of the population between 2001 and the present day, the fear of a complete civil and military withdrawal by the international community is understandable. The debate about the withdrawal conducted in Europe and the USA in 2010 and 2011 and the early setting of the withdrawal date for the NATO combat troops resulted in

6 | Cf. Ministry of Finance of Afghanistan, Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework (TMAF), Senior Officials Meeting Joint Report, 3 Jul 2013, [http://mof.gov.af/Content/files/TMAF\\_SOM\\_Report\\_Final\\_English.pdf](http://mof.gov.af/Content/files/TMAF_SOM_Report_Final_English.pdf) (accessed 24 Nov 2014).

7 | Cf. The World Bank, n. 5.

8 | Cf. Katerina Oskarsson, "Energy-Development-Security Nexus in Afghanistan", *Journal of Energy Security*, 11/2012, [http://ensec.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=386:energy-development-security-nexus-in-afghanistan&catid=130:issue-content&Itemid=405](http://ensec.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=386:energy-development-security-nexus-in-afghanistan&catid=130:issue-content&Itemid=405) (accessed 24 Nov 2014).

9 | Cf. German Bundestag, Committee on Economic Cooperation and Development – 18<sup>th</sup> electoral term: Motion by the CDU/CSU and SPD parliamentary groups, Transformationsdekade mit zivilen Mitteln erfolgreich gestalten, printed matter 18/3405, <http://dip21.bundestag.de/dip21/btd/18/034/1803405.pdf> (accessed 8 Dec 2014).

10 | Cf. Ministry of Finance of Afghanistan, n. 6.

11 | Cf. Reporters without Borders, "World Press Freedom Index 2014", 11 Feb 2014, [http://rsf.org/index2014/data/index2014\\_en.pdf](http://rsf.org/index2014/data/index2014_en.pdf) (accessed 17 Dec 2014).

a strong sense of uncertainty, which is still persisting to this day.<sup>12</sup> The announcement of the transformation phase for the period from 2015 to 2024 and pledges of a long-term civil engagement by the international community were not made until December 2011 in Bonn and could not fully dispel people's fears and the lack of trust associated with it. Many Afghans are sceptical about the idea that the security forces trained by NATO will prevail in the conflict with the insurgents and that the newly established state institutions will be able to consolidate in the long term, given the endemic corruption and nepotism.



Part of the ISAF Mission was the training of Afghan security forces as seen here in Kunduz. But police and army lose about one quarter of their personnel during operations or due to desertion. | Source: Cynthia Van Cleve, ISAF, flickr ©📷

## FROM TRANSITION TO TRANSFORMATION

At the London Conference on Afghanistan held in 2010, the states involved in ISAF and the Afghan government set the course for the process of the handover of security responsibility to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), subsequently referred to by the term Transition by the international protection force. This phase was initiated in

12 | Cf. Kai Eide, *Power struggle over Afghanistan: an inside look at what went wrong – and what we can do to fix it*, New York, 2011, chapter 31, "The military buildup".

July 2011 and completed on schedule in December 2014. In London, the Karzai government had further announced that it would hold a Loya Jirga (Grand Assembly) in the early summer of 2010, which would initiate a national process of peace and reconciliation. This consultative national council, frequently referred to as the Peace Jirga, convened in June 2010 in Kabul, chaired by former President Burhanuddin Rabbani, and formally initiated the peace process. To this end, a High Peace Council was appointed, whose remit was to act as a permanent institution of the government's reconciliation policy and to drive the peace process forward. In addition, a program financed by the international community was set up in the country to encourage rebel fighters to lay down their arms and abandon their insurgency.<sup>13</sup>

The Bonn Conference on Afghanistan in December 2011 and the NATO Summit in Chicago in May 2012 set the course for the post-2014 period early on. First came approval of the Transformation Decade (2015 to 2024) to

**One common element of the conferences on Afghanistan since 2010 has been the definition of areas where progress needs to be made, e.g. political reforms and regional cooperation.**

follow on from the Transition.<sup>14</sup> In Chicago, the NATO member states then announced plans for a training, advising and assistance mission to follow the ISAF mission. They further pledged annual financial support in the amount of 4.1 billion U.S. dollars to finance the ANSF after 2014.<sup>15</sup> One common element of the conferences on Afghanistan and the NATO summits since 2010 has been the definition of areas where progress needs to be made. This was to be a crucial prerequisite for the withdrawal of the

13 | Cf. Permanent Mission of Afghanistan to the UN, "The Resolution Adopted at the Conclusion of the National Consultative Peace Jirga", 6 Jun 2010, <http://afghanistan-un.org/2010/06/the-resolution-adopted-at-the-conclusion-of-the-national-consultative-peace-jirga> (accessed 24 Nov 2014).

14 | Cf. "The International Afghanistan Conference in Bonn, "Afghanistan and the International Community: From Transition to the Transformation Decade. Conference Conclusions", 5 Dec 2011, [http://auswaertiges-amt.de/cae/servlet/contentblob/603684/publicationFile/162762/Conference\\_Conclusions\\_-\\_International\\_Afghanistan\\_Conference\\_Bonn\\_2011\\_engl.pdf](http://auswaertiges-amt.de/cae/servlet/contentblob/603684/publicationFile/162762/Conference_Conclusions_-_International_Afghanistan_Conference_Bonn_2011_engl.pdf) (accessed 24 Nov 2014).

15 | Cf. "Chicago Summit Declaration on Afghanistan. Issued by the Heads of State and Government of Afghanistan and Nations contributing to the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)", 21 May 2012, [http://nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_87595.htm](http://nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_87595.htm) (accessed 17 Dec 2014).

ISAF combat troops by the end of 2014 and the country's long-term stabilisation. It was deemed that progress in the following areas was essential: the development of the ANSF, the improvement of governance, the peace process, regional cooperation (particularly with Iran and Pakistan) as well as economic development. In a strategy paper produced at the congress of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group of 28 November 2011, the late Deputy Chairman of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group Dr Andreas Schockenhoff MP described the Transition succinctly as follows under the headline "What needs to happen by 2014?":

"The responsible handover of security into Afghan hands has priority over the realisation of ambitious schedules. We will only be able to scale back our military engagement to the extent that the Afghans have the situation truly under control. [...] The capabilities of the Afghan security forces need to be strengthened further. [...] The Afghan side must act in concert with us and fulfil the undertakings it made at the conference in Kabul and which it last confirmed in Bonn – namely to exercise good governance, take action on corruption and develop an independent judiciary. [...] Continuing strenuous efforts must be made to pursue an approach aimed at a regional solution".<sup>16</sup>

## GOVERNANCE

Former President Karzai had affirmed at virtually all major international conferences on Afghanistan in recent years that his government would take stronger action against corruption, nepotism and abuse of office. In Tokyo in July 2012, the international donor community had made an outline agreement ("Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework", TMAF).<sup>17</sup> This contained a commitment by the

**In July 2012, the international donor community had made an outline agreement. This contained a commitment by the Afghan side to concrete and verifiable measures.**

16 | Cf. CDU/CSU parliamentary group in the German Bundestag, "Afghanistan: Internationaler Einsatz im Wandel. Gemeinsam für eine sichere Zukunft", 01/2012, [https://cducusu.de/sites/default/files/CDU\\_BR\\_Afghanistan\\_final.pdf](https://cducusu.de/sites/default/files/CDU_BR_Afghanistan_final.pdf) (accessed 24 Nov 2014).

17 | Cf. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Tokyo Conference on Afghanistan: Annex. Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework (Tokyo Framework)", 8 Jul 2012, [http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/middle\\_e/afghanistan/tokyo\\_conference\\_2012/tokyo\\_declaration\\_en2.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/middle_e/afghanistan/tokyo_conference_2012/tokyo_declaration_en2.html) (accessed 24 Nov 2014).

Afghan side to concrete and verifiable measures to improve its governance, the enforcing of the rule of law, the protection of human and women's rights, the monitoring of public finances and the development of private enterprise. It further undertook to conduct free, fair and transparent presidential elections in 2014 and parliamentary elections in 2015.<sup>18</sup> To ensure better monitoring of the implementation of the TMAF undertakings by the Afghan government, it agreed to 17 so-called hard deliverables with the donor community in April 2013. These were reviewed for the first time in July 2013 and then again in January 2014. Eleven of the 17 reform promises are now deemed to have been fulfilled.<sup>19</sup>



Lengthy election process: The successor of President Karzai was determined in two rounds in April and June 2014 respectively. International monitoring missions like EUPOL kept a close eye during the counting of votes. | Source: EUPOL, flickr ©🇺🇸🇪🇺.

18 | Cf. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Tokyo Conference on Afghanistan: The Tokyo Declaration. Partnership for Self-Reliance in Afghanistan. From Transition to Transformation", 8 Jul 2012, [http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/middle\\_e/afghanistan/tokyo\\_conference\\_2012/tokyo\\_declaration\\_en1.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/middle_e/afghanistan/tokyo_conference_2012/tokyo_declaration_en1.html) (accessed 24 Nov 2014).

19 | Cf. The German Federal Government, "Fortschrittsbericht Afghanistan 2014 einschließlich einer Zwischenbilanz des Afghanistan-Engagements", 1 Nov 2014, [http://auswaertiges-amt.de/cae/servlet/contentblob/691670/publicationFile/199511/141119-Fortschrittsbericht\\_AFG\\_2014.pdf](http://auswaertiges-amt.de/cae/servlet/contentblob/691670/publicationFile/199511/141119-Fortschrittsbericht_AFG_2014.pdf) (8 Dec 2014).



Besides the Tokyo process, the 2014 presidential elections in particular were considered an indicator of the level of democratisation in the country. It is not as if the international community had expected them to be perfect. They would be judged in part against previous elections. Seen in that light, they were to be deemed "successful" if they proceeded significantly better in terms of being transparent, fair, free and inclusive than the 2009 presidential elections, which had been marred by election fraud, abuse of office and violence. Despite a number of positive aspects, including the partly high turnout in both rounds, the effective deployment of ANSF personnel and predominantly peaceful demonstrations, the election process clearly demonstrated the inadequacies of some state institutions and existing deficits in the democratic process. Public structures were ultimately too weak to guarantee fairness

and transparency so that the cast votes would produce a clear winner and clear loser, who would then accept the outcome. It also became obvious that in some areas, leading politicians did not really want a clear winner

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and a clear loser to emerge.<sup>20</sup> In the end, the process produced a government of national unity after a number of failed negotiations and under massive pressure from the international community, which some Afghan and international observers consider the "royal road", others a "poor compromise". Although there are signs of the new president taking some promising initial steps (see below), it remains to be seen to what extent the unity government can implement the election promises of Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, particularly with respect to curbing the pervasive corruption.

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

A minimum level of security and stability is the most important prerequisite for creating opportunities for economic development. What is important in this context is not so much the official classification of individual areas as

20 | For a more detailed analysis of the election process see Nils Wörmer, "Unity Government in Kabul. Afghan Handover Undemocratic but Peaceful", KAS Country Report, 10/2014, <http://kas.de/afghanistan/en/publications/39346> (accessed 24 Nov 2014).

secure, partly secure or insecure, but rather the subjective perception of the security situation by the Afghan population and by domestic and foreign investors. Besides the security situation affecting economic development, structural factors such as the lack of legal certainty, skills shortages, poor (traffic) infrastructure and energy shortages as well as the dysfunctional system for collecting taxes and customs duties play an important role. Added to this is Afghanistan's demographic development,<sup>21</sup> which means that some further 400,000 people join the job market every year.<sup>22</sup>

Over the last ten years, the international community has made substantial efforts towards progress in the development of the infrastructure, in the creation of legal certainty, which is of great relevance particularly for foreign investors in connection with the exploitation of raw materials, as well as the establishment of a vocational education system. However, due to the precarious security situation, the use of high-quality infrastructure is not feasible in some parts of the country,<sup>23</sup> and the adoption of important bills has been delayed by years in some cases. The new "Mining Law", which is considered a prerequisite for the development of the raw materials sector and the mining of metals, precious stones and rare earths, was not adopted until August 2014 after a delay of over two years. The "Law on Strengthening the Banking Sector" and a new "Tax Administration Law" have also been delayed. This means that while Afghanistan is making some progress in creating the

21 | According to the United Nations, Afghanistan's population will increase from currently around 32 million to almost 48 million by the end of the Transformation Decade, based on calculations involving the Constant Fertility Variant. Cf. Population Division UN Department of Social and Economic Affairs, <http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/unpp/p2k0data.asp> (accessed 24 Nov 2014).

22 | Cf. BMZ, "New Country Strategy for Afghanistan 2014 – 2017. Reliable Partnership in Times of Change", BMZ Strategy Paper 3/2014e, [http://bmz.de/de/mediathek/publikationen/reihen/strategiepapiere/Strategiepapier342\\_03\\_2014.pdf](http://bmz.de/de/mediathek/publikationen/reihen/strategiepapiere/Strategiepapier342_03_2014.pdf) (accessed 24 Nov 2014).

23 | One pertinent example is the Salma Dam in Chishti Sharif District in Herat Province. This hydroelectricity project, financed by India, would supply 42 megawatts of electricity upon completion and provide irrigation for cultivating an additional 40,000 hectares of land (Herat currently has some 35,000 hectares of farmland). Completion had originally been planned for September 2011, but has been delayed again and again because of the unstable security situation.

structural prerequisites for economic development, it lags behind the schedule set by the international community.



Dangerous top position: Afghanistan remains the largest producer of opiates and narcotics. More than two million people are involved in the business of growing, trafficking and selling of drugs. But also consumption is widespread. | Source: ISAF, Laura K. Smith, flickr ©.

The drug economy and the declining war economy are posing further problems for economic development. Afghanistan is still the largest global producer of cannabis, heroin and opium. At the same time, drug consumption is common among the population, which means that the country also leads the global statistics in that area.<sup>24</sup> Both of these, i.e. the cultivation of plants for manufacturing drugs and narcotics as well as consumption, have social consequences. Some 2.2 million people's livelihood depends on the cultivation, transportation and sale of drugs. The ISAF withdrawal is affecting the construction sector as well as the transport and services sectors particularly badly. The construction and maintenance of 850 foreign military bases, which were still operational in Afghanistan in 2012, as well as the required road links, the transport activities including the guarding of military transports and the

24 | Cf. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *World Drug Report 2012*, [http://unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/WDR2012/WDR\\_2012\\_web\\_small.pdf](http://unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/WDR2012/WDR_2012_web_small.pdf) (accessed 4 Dec 2014).

running of military camps, which required cleaning staff, security staff, kitchen staff and craftsmen, had directly and indirectly created several hundred thousand jobs, most of which are now redundant. The decline in economic growth from 14.4 per cent in 2012 to 3.6 per cent in 2013 is attributed to a large extent directly to the withdrawal of the military as well as the uncertainties created by the end of the ISAF mission and the 2014 presidential elections.<sup>25</sup>

## PEACE PROCESS AND REGIONAL COOPERATION

None of the mediation initiatives of recent years has led to substantial negotiations between the central government and the leaderships of the insurgent groups to date. The probing efforts made so far are characterised by numerous partly independent, partly coordinated series of exploratory talks as well as a multitude of actors. Unfortunately, it has not proved possible to establish a structured peace process, such as that set up successfully in the Middle East through the Madrid Conference of 1991 and the subsequent secret talks in Oslo. In that case, there had at least been a negotiation framework, which determined who was going to negotiate with whom about which topics at certain intervals, who was a conflicting party and who had observer status, as well as which topics would initially be excluded.

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The conflicting parties also took the initial step of recognising each other as negotiating parties. Afghanistan is nowhere near this, which means that the term peace efforts is more fitting than the term peace process.

There is no societal consensus on whether to seek a peace process predominantly between Afghanistan and Pakistan or between the Afghan government and the Afghan Taliban; with respect to the second case, views on the role played by Pakistan also differ fundamentally.

The key demands of the Afghan government include the recognition of the constitution and the willingness of the insurgent groupings to give up the armed struggle as well as unconditionally renouncing their cooperation with

25 | Cf. The World Bank, "Afghanistan: Country Snapshot", Mar 2014, <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/SOUTHASIAEXT/Resources/223546-1398285132254/Afghanistan-Country-Snapshot-Spring-Meetings-2014.pdf> (accessed 24 Nov 2014).

transnational terrorist organisations (such as al-Qaida and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan). The Taliban neither recognise the constitution nor the central government, the latter not even as negotiating party. With reference to the signing of the BSA and the implementation of Resolute Support, the Taliban reaffirmed their demand for the withdrawal of all foreign troops as a condition for participating in peace negotiations. In the eyes of the Taliban, NATO and the USA are the main enemies, with whom they were prepared to negotiate about specific points. This resulted in the Taliban liaison office being set up in Qatar in June 2013 and in the captured U.S. soldier Bowe Bergdahl being exchanged for five high-ranking Taliban leaders held in Guantanamo in May 2014. Apart from these measures, the demands of the Kabul government and the Taliban currently appear irreconcilable, particularly with respect to the Afghan constitution. There have been suggestions from the circles around Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah as well as from some members of the High Peace Council that the new government needs to initiate a restart of the peace process. Where the Taliban movement is concerned, there are currently as many indications that some relevant actors are seriously interested in a peace process as indications that the key Taliban figures are playing for time, are unwilling to compromise and are intent on making military gains after the withdrawal of the ISAF combat troops in order to enhance their political strength.

**The Taliban neither recognise the constitution nor the central government, the latter not even as negotiating party.**

The efforts to stabilise Afghanistan through regional cooperation have centered on the Istanbul Process (also referred to as Heart of Asia Process), which was initiated in November 2011. To date, four conferences of the fourteen participating countries have been held at a ministerial level, the last one on 31 October in Beijing. The choice of that venue was, in fact, significant as China is keen to assume a more active role as a conflict mediator. Despite a few steps in the right direction, the process is lagging far behind the ambitious goals and high expectations from 2011.<sup>26</sup> In the case of regional cooperation as well, the ver-

26 | Cf. S. Reza Kazemi, "Will the 'Heart of Asia' start beating? A review of the regional co-operation process", Afghanistan Analysts Network, 29 Aug 2014, <https://afghanistan-analysts.org/will-the-heart-of-asia-start-beating-a-review-of-the-regional-cooperation-process> (accessed 24 Nov 2014); ▶

dict is, therefore, that it cannot be judged a failure by any means, but will at least require more time.

There has hardly been any progress made to date in the efforts to involve Afghanistan's two most important neighbouring states, Iran and Pakistan, either. For years, the policies on Afghanistan pursued by Teheran and Islamabad have included the provision of support to armed non-state actors such as the Taliban, a point that has been picked up repeatedly in the Western debate about Afghanistan. Although there have been phases during which the two countries were put under great diplomatic and military pressure particularly from the USA, they never abandoned their policies. In view of the expected complete withdrawal of NATO armed forces from Afghanistan by 2016, it is not likely that Iran and Pakistan will change their stance.

### **SECURITY FORCES AND INSURGENCY**

Since the resurgence of the insurgency movement (Taliban, Haqqani network and Hezb-e Islami) during the period from 2003 to 2005, Afghanistan has experienced a military conflict which the population perceives as a war and which is also referred to as such by the conflicting parties, particularly the government and the Taliban. So far, ISAF and the ANSF have been able to keep the foreign groupings in check. Consequently, the attacks and the fighting have mainly occurred in provinces in the east and south as well as a few insurgent strongholds in the north and northwest of the country. Because Afghan army and police units have gradually replaced the ISAF combat troops, the conflict has increasingly adopted the character of a civil war, which affects roughly a quarter to a third of the country's territory. Added to this are terrorist attacks in the urban centers, which are generally unaffected by open fighting. The insurgents target predominantly the large cities of Kabul and Kandahar, but also smaller towns such as Jalalabad and Kunduz.

**Because Afghan army and police units have gradually replaced ISAF since 2011, the conflict has increasingly adopted the character of a civil war.**

S. Reza Kazemi, "More bilateral than multilateral effects: The Afghanistan conference in China", Afghanistan Analysts Network, 7 Nov 2014, <https://afghanistan-analysts.org/more-bilateral-then-multilateral-effects-the-afghanistan-conference-in-china> (accessed 24 Nov 2014).

On 5 November 2014, the commander of the ISAF Joint Command, Lieutenant General Joseph Anderson, put the number of Afghan soldiers and police killed in action so far that year at 4,634; the total for the previous year had been 4,350.<sup>27</sup> Total annual losses suffered by the ANSF through death and injury in 2013 and 2014 are estimated at between 15,000 and 20,000. A UN report put the losses suffered by the Taliban in 2013 at between 10,000 and 12,000.<sup>28</sup> According to UNAMA, the number of civilian casualties for 2013 was 8,615 (2,959 killed and 5,656 injured).<sup>29</sup> According to reports by soldiers and members of the police, the fighting between the ANSF and the insurgents is being conducted with great ferocity on both sides. On the one hand, several high-ranking ANSF commanders admitted in the summer of 2014 that they had given instructions to take no prisoners.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, there were over 1,000 documented cases in 2013 (743 killed and 333 injured) of reprisals against the families of ANSF members such as intimidation, revenge attacks and politically motivated executions, where insurgents had set out to kill or injure civilians.<sup>31</sup>

The security architecture in itself produces fundamental problems for the Afghan state. There are overlaps in competences and responsibilities between the three major security institutions, namely the army, the police and the

27 | Cf. David Alexander/Phil Stewart, "Afghan casualties on battlefield at unsustainably high level: U.S. general", Reuters, 5 Nov 2014, <http://reuters.com/article/2014/11/05/us-usa-afghanistan-idUSKBN0IP2MM20141105> (accessed 24 Nov 2014).

28 | Cf. UN Security Council, "Third report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, submitted pursuant to resolution 2082 (2012) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan", 11 Nov 2013, [http://securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s\\_2013\\_656.pdf](http://securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2013_656.pdf) (accessed 24 Nov 2014).

29 | Cf. United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, "Afghanistan Annual Report 2013. Protection of civilians in armed conflicts", 2/2014, [http://unama.unmissions.org/Portals/UNAMA/human%20rights/Feb\\_8\\_2014\\_PoC-report\\_2013-Full-report-ENG.pdf](http://unama.unmissions.org/Portals/UNAMA/human%20rights/Feb_8_2014_PoC-report_2013-Full-report-ENG.pdf) (accessed 24 Nov 2014).

30 | Cf. Hamid Shalizi, "As Taliban push quickens, Afghan troops ordered: take no prisoners", Reuters, 18 Aug 2014, <http://reuters.com/article/2014/08/18/us-afghanistan-violence-idUSKBN0GI1YM20140818> (accessed 24 Nov 2014).

31 | Cf. *ibid.*

intelligence agency. They all have units that were structured, trained and equipped for domestic deployment and for the fight against the insurgency. Besides combating the insurgency, all three also perform policing duties and have departments dedicated to intelligence operating within the country. This has caused considerable rivalries, which quickly developed into battles for resources, recognition and – against the backdrop of foreseeable budget cuts – the right to exist in the long term.

During the course of 2012, ISAF and the Afghan government completed a successful recruitment drive for the army and the police force, boosting the number of soldiers

**The ANSF need to replace between a quarter and a third of their personnel each year due to losses, desertion and low re-enlistment.**

and police to the target figure of approximately 352,000. However, this achievement is marred by the fact that the ANSF need to replace between a quarter and a third of their personnel each year due to losses, desertion

and low re-enlistment. This makes it difficult for a common identity and stronger internal cohesion to develop between the individual units in the newly constituted armed forces. It also hampers the efforts made by the international community to enhance the quality of the Afghan security personnel through basic and advanced training. The fact that the former President has repeatedly referred to the Taliban as “brothers” since 2009 has watered down the concept of the enemy for the ANSF. Given this situation, how can soldiers and members of the police, who have regularly witnessed corruption and abuse of office by their superiors and whose commander-in-chief refers to enemy fighters as “brothers”, identify with the state and its institutions? There are also financial aspects. The low pay did not compensate adequately for the risk of being killed or badly wounded or for the inadequate medical care, which meant that morale and motivation among many ANSF members, particularly in the lower ranks, remained poor for a long time. The new Kabul government under Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah has already responded to this situation during several troop visits in the autumn of 2014 in order to strengthen the internal structures of the ANSF.

Having said all this, the quality of the Afghan security forces has improved steadily over the last few years, resulting in some successes in the fight against the insurgency,



which has in turn led to greater esteem for soldiers and the police among the civilian population. The fact that the government forces were able to provide security for the first and second round of the presidential elections while at the same time coping with a country-wide intensification of operations between February and November 2014 was seen as an achievement and a positive development. In conclusion, one can say that although the ANSF may be on a positive trajectory, they are not yet capable of mastering the challenges of logistics, medical supply, intelligence and reconnaissance, air transport and close air support as well as the training of commissioned and non-commissioned officers and specialists by themselves.



Competitors seek consensus: On 21 September 2014 the candidates for the presidency, Ashraf Ghani (3.f.r.) and Abdullah Abdullah (4.f.l.), here seen with U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, agreed on building a government of unity. | Source: U.S. Department of State, flickr ©©©.

### **FIRST STEPS TAKEN BY THE NEW PRESIDENT AND THE RESOLUTE SUPPORT MISSION**

Within hours of his inauguration, Ashraf Ghani appointed former Minister of the Interior Hanif Atmar to the post of National Security Advisor by presidential decree. During a ceremony led by the President, which was held on 30 September and attended by the new leadership, Atmar signed the Bilateral Security Agreement between the Afghan

and U.S. governments as well as the agreement on the stationing of troops with NATO. These agreements finally put to rest the long-standing disagreements between the Kabul and Washington governments. This also established the prerequisites for setting up the Resolute Support Mission (RSM) for 2015 and 2016 as well as for the continued financial support of Afghanistan by the international community.

The initial official actions taken by Ashraf Ghani included budget cuts involving the presidential palace and the presidential staff. This was complemented by directives and statements addressed at state officials and members of parliament, aimed at curbing the extensive wasting of state funds and abuse of office by top public officials. In addition, Ghani immediately announced that he would reopen the inquiry into the scandal around Kabul Bank, which involved the embezzlement of almost one billion dollars. His plans further include reforms in the justice and tax systems and in the top echelons of the security apparatus. Where the peace process is concerned, he appears to be intent on a new beginning and therefore a restructuring of the High Peace Council. Apart from indications that Ghani wants to give new impetus to the peace process particularly by creating economic incentives and enhancing regional cooperation – with much greater involvement of China – few details about the new government's future peace strategy have so far emerged.

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After the end of the ISAF Mission on 31 December 2014, the training and advisory mission Resolute Support, which is also conducted by NATO, began on 1 January 2015. With a contractually agreed upper limit of 15,000 soldiers, the actual number of personnel involved in the mission is between some 13,000 and 14,000, just under 11,000 U.S. soldiers and up to 850 members of the German Bundeswehr. The mandate is limited essentially to providing training and advice to the highest leadership echelon of the Afghan security forces. It does not include a combat remit. The NATO combat troops remaining in Afghanistan are there exclusively to protect the bases as well as trainers and military advisers. In 2015, the locations where RSM personnel will be stationed will include Kabul as well as

Bagram, Jalalabad, Herat, Mazar-e Sharif and Kandahar. From 2016, the deployment of personnel is to be restricted to the capital and Bagram. The announcement by the U.S. President that the mission is to terminate by the end of 2016 came at a time when it was difficult to gauge how the 2014 presidential elections and the ISAF withdrawal would affect Afghanistan's stability. For NATO and many allies, who had anticipated that the Resolute Support Mission would last longer, the announcement of the complete withdrawal of U.S. soldiers by the end of 2016 came out of the blue.<sup>32</sup>



New mandate: Up to 850 Bundeswehr members will be stationed from 1 January 2015 in Afghanistan. They have no combat mission, but focus on education and consulting. | Source: Andrea Bienert, Bundeswehr, flickr ©©©.

## CONCLUSIONS AND OUTLOOK

Thirteen years on from the overthrow of the Taliban, there is still hope for a permanent peace to be established in Afghanistan, for a democratisation process to take hold and for people's living conditions to be improved fundamentally and sustainably. Neither the end of the monarchy in 1973

32 | Cf. Matthias Gebauer, "Reaktion auf US-Abzug: Bundeswehr soll Afghanistan schneller verlassen", *Spiegel Online*, 5 Jun 2014, <http://spiegel.de/politik/ausland/a-973448.html> (accessed 24 Nov 2014).

nor the coup against the dictatorship in 1978, the downfall of the Communist regime in 1992 or the expulsion of the mujahedeen in 1996 had opened up similar prospects. The goals Western politicians had derived in this scenario, namely to stabilise Afghanistan for the long term, to develop its economy and to firmly establish the principles of democracy and of the rule of law, have been achieved to some extent. However, it will require further serious efforts by the Afghan government and the international community during the Transformation Decade to consolidate what has been achieved to date.

When comparing the conditions for the ISAF withdrawal defined in 2010 and 2011 with the reality at the close of 2014, one has to say that the efforts made by the Afghan government and the international community during the transformation phase will be hampered by a negative legacy from the transition phase if nothing else. This does not mean that the key objectives of the Afghanistan strategy of the international community, namely the pacification and long-term stabilisation of the country as well as the establishment of democratic structures, are unattainable. However, with the exception of governance thanks to the political new beginning, Afghanistan has clearly fallen short of the milestones set for 2014. This applies mainly to the peace process, cooperation with the neighbouring countries and economic development. Against this backdrop and in view of the impressive ability of the insurgency movement to regenerate, which it has proved repeatedly since 2009, it would make sense to revisit the decision about the withdrawal date for the Resolution Support Mission, which was made at such an early date.

Notwithstanding all the adversities and setbacks, the international community has achieved much. While the situation in Afghanistan is only comparable to that in Iraq to a limited extent, there are some very obvious parallels connected to the questions relating to the prolonged stationing of troops and the right time for a full withdrawal. Events in Iraq have shown that a war cannot be ended simply by declaring it to be so. This should not be Afghanistan's fate.