



BULLETIN

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NATO in Afghanistan after 2014

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On 23 April, the foreign ministers of NATO and 50 partner countries supporting the ISAF mission in Afghanistan agreed on the mechanism of funding Afghan National Security Forces that would guarantee transparency and accountability. However, NATO and the U.S. are still in negotiations with the Afghan government about two new military missions after 2014 and the end of the ISAF mission. While the Alliance might be tasked with training and assistance to the Afghan security forces, the U.S. in parallel will be leading a counter-terrorist special forces mission. Current challenges include setting precise parameters for both missions as well as improving the fragile state of security in Afghanistan. Poland, while demonstrating its Allied solidarity, should consider wider engagement in both future operations.

According to the strategy adopted by the NATO Lisbon summit in 2010 and agreement between the Alliance and Afghanistan, the ISAF combat mission will end in December 2014. After this date the Afghanistan National Security Forces (ANSF) will take full responsibility for the security in Afghanistan. At this same date, NATO will start mission of training and assistance to the ANSF and the U.S. will start to separate counter-terrorism mission. Progress in the stabilisation of Afghanistan will depend on the success of both missions, however many details of these operations are still unclear, similar to the clear direction of the state of security in this country.

Security in Afghanistan. On a positive side, the situation in Afghanistan has seen significant weakening of the Afghan Taliban military force, following the implementation of the “surge” strategy by ISAF and the ANSF in 2009–2011. It is illustrated by a decline in enemy-initiated attacks and growing capabilities to detect IEDs (Improvised Explosive Devices). The Afghan administration and ANSF are now present in areas previously controlled by the Taliban, including their stronghold in the south of the country, the province of Kandahar. A decline in support of the local population for the Taliban is also visible with the creation of additional tribal militias in a few districts in Kandahar and Ghazni provinces, where they fight the insurgents. Another positive indicator of a consolidation of the Afghan administration is seen in the process of re-integration of low-ranking members of the Taliban, among whom almost 5,600 were disarmed then employed in their local communities. There also is a stabilising influence created by the growing capabilities of ANSF. By May or June of 2013, ANSF should finish the process of taking over from ISAF control areas with over 90% of the country’s population. This transition to ANSF’s independent capabilities and activities is illustrated, though, by its growing losses in personnel: almost a thousand soldiers and policeman have been killed in 2012 (about 20% more than in 2011).

The present challenges are tied mainly to a growth in the penetration of ANSF by Taliban sympathisers and by attacks on NATO trainers (with almost 60 losses in 2012). The unfavourable perception of ISAF amongst Afghans is being fuelled by civilian losses during commando and air raids. Prospects for better political and security situations are constrained also by slim chances for national reconciliation between the government in Kabul and the leading and influential leaders of the Taliban, especially those from the Quetta Shura Taliban and Haqqani network. There is also a low probability of change in Pakistan’s attitude towards Afghanistan as it tolerates the activities of the Taliban in the border areas of both countries. Moreover, the most serious political challenge is the presidential elections, which should be organised for spring 2014. Currently, it is hard to identify a candidate who could unite the main political and tribal factions in Afghanistan and become a successor to President Hamid Karzai. The future stability of the country may also be threatened if the abuses and manipulations seen during the presidential elections of 2009 occur again in 2014. Corruption in the central and local Afghan administrations is another factor that may aid the reconstitution of

the Taliban as a military and political force. The prospects for strengthening the economy and lowering the country's dependence on the international community are also dim. Although Afghanistan possesses significant natural resources, extracting and exporting them will not be possible until the security and investment climate significantly improves.

From Combat to Training Mission. A majority of NATO-ISAF troops are under systematic and essential reductions and transitioning from combat (counter-insurgency) to assisting their Afghan counterparts. Meanwhile, ANSF has reached its anticipated number of 352,000 soldiers and policeman. However, there are differences among the ANSF units in the level of their training as well as in the equipment they have on hand and readiness for fully independent operations.

Since the beginning of 2013, the NATO discussion has departed from the plans agreed at the Chicago summit, which were that after 2015 ANSF would be reduced from 352,000 to 230,000 personnel. Currently, the U.S. is pushing forward with sustaining the present number of soldiers and policemen until at least 2018. This level will demand Allied agreement about sources of funds for ANSF. To support the Afghan forces at the current level, \$6.5 billion every year is required, with a majority of the money—\$5.7 billion—provided by the U.S. Since funding of ANSF after 2015 was foreseen at level of \$4.1 billion, it means that to preserve the current size of ANSF beyond this date, an additional \$2.4 billion will have to be secured.

NATO has already begun discussions about the size and form of its engagement in Afghanistan after 2014. The Alliance will probably focus on training and equipping ANSF, while the U.S. will take the lead in anti-terror operation outside NATO, with the latter mission directed against the remnants of Al Qaeda leadership. One of the options discussed at the February 2013 NATO defence ministers' summit in Brussels was to create a new NATO mission consisting of 9,000–12,000 troops, and preliminary assessments regarding the anti-terrorist mission refer to 2,000–3,000 special forces. It is planned that both missions would use the same logistic support. So far, only Germany has officially offered to provide 600–800 troops after the 2014 deadline on the condition that the Afghan government will issue a formal invitation to foreign soldiers and the mission will have the support of the UN Security Council. The other NATO member states seem to be waiting with their declarations until the outcome of negotiations is known on a new Status of Forces Agreements (SOFA), as they are trying to secure immunity for foreign soldiers.

Conclusions and Recommendations. The new missions in Afghanistan will probably operate in an environment of permanent internal political instability and risk of violence. The strengthening of the ISAF mission in recent years and expansion of ANSF contributed to a reversal in negative trends in Afghan security and helped restrain a counteroffensive by the Taliban. Nevertheless, the resumption of the insurgency and various forms of terrorist attacks cannot be excluded. The sustainment of Afghan forces at the current level until at least 2018 would be a strong symbol of a long-term partnership between the West and Afghanistan. The new mission would also be indispensable for ANSF to retain control of security of the country. For this, however, it should not be limited to training but also include intelligence, logistic and equipment support for ANSF.

U.S. proposals to maintain support for ANSF at the current level seem necessary for the stability of Afghanistan, as premature cuts in the numbers of ANSF could encourage some of the trained Afghans to shift their loyalty to anti-government militias. Limiting the number of ANSF would still require large contribution from Western countries. Still, the negotiations on the shape and form of the new missions will be a challenge. NATO members seem to be discouraged by financial constraints, risks associated with keeping troops in Afghanistan, lack of public support at home and the reluctance of the Afghan government to grant immunity to Western forces.

Financial and political constraints already draw the attention of the Allies to increased civilian efforts focused on building the capacity of the central government. While planning the new mission, NATO should consider a larger role for civilian and diplomatic activities in Afghanistan (as well as in Pakistan), including extending the presence of a NATO Senior Civilian Representative (SCR) and reactivation of the International Contact Group for Afghanistan and Pakistan. At the same time, the broad mandate of the new post-ISAF missions offers the Allies a wide selection of different forms of support to Afghanistan, which would significantly lower the costs of their current engagement.

Irrespective of the desired full support from Poland and all other European NATO allies for the new mission it would be worth considering other forms of Polish involvement in Afghanistan after 2014. It may be in Poland's interest to replace its previous engagement in Afghanistan with funding ANSF and development aid. Polish participation in the training mission could also include the training of Afghan officers in Poland and/or sending Polish trainers to Afghan military academies (Afghan National Army Officer Academy and Combat Service Support School). Regarding its military presence, Poland could build on the experience of the special forces fighting in Afghanistan and delegate them to the U.S.-led anti-terrorist mission. By doing so, Poland would contribute to the security of the new NATO mission while at the same time allowing for a continuation of the Polish-U.S. special forces cooperation.