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**AFGHANISTAN'S NATIONAL SECURITY FORCES: THE  
TURBULENT PRESENT AND THE UNKNOWN FUTURE**

By

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**Introduction**

The departure of the U.S. military forces from Afghanistan has always been a controversial issue to reckon with. Their eventual exit is subject to the restoration of Afghanistan's domestic security forces to the point that they can effectively take over the country's security. Very recently, in July 2010, NATO nations agreed to support President Hamid Karzai's goal of Afghanistan assuming the sole responsibility for its security by 2014, although that particular goal appeared to be somewhat elevated in nature.<sup>1</sup> Key U.S. military leaders in Afghanistan, such as former commanding army General David McKiernan, stated that the transfer of security to indigenous forces is “years away.”<sup>2</sup> Further, the new commander of international forces in the country, General David H. Petraeus, has discreetly departed from any attempt to surrender

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provincial security operations to the indigenous forces.<sup>3</sup>

In March 2009, President Obama announced the deployment of about four thousand additional U.S. troops to train Afghan soldiers. Subsequent deployments, including an influx of thirty thousand additional forces announced in December 2009, have included pledges of spare trainers to assist in Afghan force development.<sup>4</sup> In November 2009, NATO assumed full control of training efforts, transforming the U.S. - led mission into a single NATO - run operation to ensure and establish a combined venture.<sup>5</sup>

This paper wishes to evaluate the role of the Afghan National Security Forces, their composition, as well as the efficacy of their operations in the near future. It also attempts to ascertain ways and means through which the international community may assist in the revival of the same.

### **The Afghan National Security Forces**

Afghanistan's National Security Forces consist of four major components: the Afghan National Army, the Afghan Air Force, the Afghan National Police, and the Afghan Public Protection Force. These units include communications and logistical staff, border police, public protection forces, local police, and narcotics officers. But the effectiveness, professionalism, and state of readiness of this security apparatus is asymmetrical in more ways than one. Within police units specifically, drug abuse, desertion, and violence remain persistent challenges. Further, the army faces issues relating to ethnic factionalism and poor civilian administration.<sup>6</sup>

### The Afghan National Army:

It is considered to be the most capable branch of the country's security forces. It recruits soldiers nationally and pays up to \$240 a month; which is, quite often the same amount that the Taliban pay insurgents.<sup>7</sup> The size of the Afghan army is roughly 113,000, a significant development from nearly 83,000 in March 2009. Structurally, the army is divided into six ground - manoeuvre corps of two to four brigades. Each brigade is comprised of infantry *kandaks* (Afghan battalions), combat support *kandaks*, and combat service support *kandaks*.<sup>8</sup>

President Obama has called for an expansion of the Afghan army to 134,000 as early as December 2011. But these benchmarks, set by Obama in March 2009, were originally approved by the U.S. military in late 2008, leaving some Afghan officials to question the U.S. president's allegiance to the Afghan cause. Officials close to the U.S.- led training effort had expected a broader expanded force much earlier.<sup>9</sup>

### The Afghan Air Force:

Formerly the Afghan National Army Air Corps, the Afghan Air Force remains in its formative years. By March 2010, the force had grown to 3,100 personnel and 46 aircrafts, including 25 MI-17 helicopters and 8 fixed-wing propeller-driven cargo planes. Pentagon planners state that the Afghan Air Force will eventually provide Afghan forces with helicopter air support and reconnaissance capabilities. Development of light air attack and close air support aircraft capabilities is also being considered. A 2009 summary of international activities in Afghanistan by NATO reported that the air corps aims to employ 7000 personnel and 126 aircraft-by 2016.<sup>10</sup>

### The Afghan National Police:

Afghanistan's national police contain the Afghan Uniformed Police responsible for general enforcement and public safety; the Border Police patrolling the country's borders; the Civil Order Police responsible for disturbances in urban areas; and a number of more specialised police units conducting operations like counterterrorism missions, criminal investigations, and counter narcotics patrols. But the Pentagon has acknowledged that the development of Afghanistan's police force "has been hindered by a lack of reform, corruption, insufficient U.S. military trainers and advisors, and a lack of unity of effort within the international community."<sup>11</sup>

Magnitude and lack of professionalism are two issues that plague the National Police. Erosion is a problem, as is a lack of effective training and equipment. Drug abuse remains rampant, and is yet another perennial challenge to the body politic of the nation. Reports have also been unearthed with regard to appalling cases of police officers shooting each other and other Afghan forces. Even more troubling are reports that the Taliban is systematically targeting police officers.<sup>12</sup>

### The Afghan Public Protection Force:

Another element of Afghanistan's security forces is the tribal protection force, an experimental militia programme in Wardak province modelled after a successful local security force programme in Iraq. In 2009, President Obama vowed to "support" this local initiative.<sup>13</sup> These units are recruited and evaluated by regional leaders, who assume responsibility for their performance and discipline. But some experts on Afghanistan's tribal structure warn that lackadaisical arming of local tribes could awaken deep-rooted tribal feuds and do more harm than good in the long run.

The future of these units is also a cause for dilemma, as in March 2010, the Pentagon announced it had no plans to continue support for the enterprise due to its high cost and resource needs. But the Afghan Ministry of Interior reported in its March 2010 National Police Strategy that the Afghan Public Protection Force would continue to operate throughout the country, protecting key infrastructure, facilities, and personnel, with an ultimate aim to “gradually replace private security companies.”<sup>14</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The U.S. military provides the bulk of the training to Afghanistan's security forces, but available advisers remain short in supply. Aware that quality leaders are an integral part of an effective force, NATO has sought to expand training opportunities for army and police recruits. NATO's 2009 assessment<sup>15</sup> of allied efforts in the war noted that by December 2010, the security bloc will require up to 82 training teams, nearly double the 2008 allotment. By late 2010, the expansion of Afghan army and police forces should create a shortage of 125 training teams, according to Pentagon planners, at a time when the Obama administration has made security force training a top priority.<sup>16</sup>

Other pragmatic challenges loom large in the distant horizon. For example, the Afghan police, face widespread training and equipment underperformance; as many as 50 percent has never received any formal training. The judicial system is incompetent, posing hurdles towards the effective enforcement of the rule of law. Within the army and the Ministry of Defence, years of failed training coordination, ethnic friction, and political factionalism have “stunted the army's growth”, according to the International Crisis Group reports.<sup>17</sup>

However, in a nutshell, it may be stated that all hope is not lost and it is possibly just a matter of time before the Afghan security forces resuscitate themselves and ensure

effective security once the international forces have pulled out of the country. For the said purpose, the requirements are proper training, efficient co-ordination, an increased intelligence database as well as the successful implementation of the rule of law through the length and breadth of the strife-torn country.

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<sup>1</sup> Bruno, Greg, "Afghanistan's National Security Forces," *Council on Foreign Relations*, August 19, 2010, accessed electronically at

[http://www.cfr.org/publication/19122/afghanistans\\_national\\_security\\_forces.html](http://www.cfr.org/publication/19122/afghanistans_national_security_forces.html), on September 1, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> "Afghan handoff 'years away': McKiernan," *Daily Times*, April 8, 2009, accessed electronically at [http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2009\04\08\story\\_8-4-2009\\_pg20\\_1](http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2009\04\08\story_8-4-2009_pg20_1), on August 23, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Boone, Jon, "Plan to begin Afghan security handover this year dropped," *The Guardian*, July 20, 2010, accessed electronically at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/jul/20/plans-afghan-security-handover-dropped>, on September 3, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> "Remarks by the President on a New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan," *Office of the Press Secretary*, The White House, March 27, 2009, accessed electronically at [http://www.whitehouse.gov/the\\_press\\_office/Remarks-by-the-President-on-a-New-Strategy-for-Afghanistan-and-Pakistan/](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-on-a-New-Strategy-for-Afghanistan-and-Pakistan/), on September 3, 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Bruno, *op. cit.* Also refer to the NATO website at <http://www.nato.int>

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Bumiller, Elisabeth, "Afghan Army Offers Raise, and Recruits Flock to Join," *The New York Times*, December 9, 2009, accessed electronically at [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/10/world/asia/10afghan.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/10/world/asia/10afghan.html?_r=1), on September 6, 2010.

<sup>8</sup> Bruno, *op. cit.*

<sup>9</sup> Shanker, Thom, and Eric Schmitt, "U.S. Plans Vastly Expanded Afghan Security Force," *The New York Times*, March 18, 2009, accessed electronically at [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/19/us/politics/19military.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/19/us/politics/19military.html?_r=1), on September 6, 2010.

<sup>10</sup> "Afghanistan Report 2009," *NATO Public Diplomacy Division*, Brussels – Belgium, accessed electronically at [http://www.nato.int/nato\\_static/assets/pdf/pdf\\_2009\\_03/20090331\\_090331\\_afghanistan\\_report\\_2009.pdf](http://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_2009_03/20090331_090331_afghanistan_report_2009.pdf), on September 7, 2010.

<sup>11</sup> "Report on Progress toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan," June 2008, *Report to Congress in accordance with the 2008 National Defense Authorization Act (Section 1230, Public Law 110-181)*, accessed electronically at [http://www.defense.gov/pubs/Report\\_on\\_Progress\\_toward\\_Security\\_and\\_Stability\\_in\\_Afghanistan\\_1230.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/pubs/Report_on_Progress_toward_Security_and_Stability_in_Afghanistan_1230.pdf), on September 5, 2010.

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<sup>12</sup> “A Force in Fragments: Reconstituting the Afghan National Army,” *International Crisis Group*, May 12, 2010, accessed electronically at <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/south-asia/afghanistan/190%20A%20Force%20in%20Fragments%20-%20Reconstituting%20the%20Afghan%20National%20Army.ashx>, on September 10, 2010.

<sup>13</sup> Radin, C.J., “The Afghan Public Protection Force pilot program is underway,” *The Long War Journal*, March 25, 2009, accessed electronically at [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2009/03/afghan\\_public\\_protec.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2009/03/afghan_public_protec.php), on September 10, 2010.

<sup>14</sup> “Afghan National Police Strategy,” *Ministry of Interior Affairs, Deputy Minister for Strategy and Policy, Department of Strategy*, Kabul, March 2010, accessed electronically at <http://www.ntm-a.com/documents/other/anps.pdf>, on September 12, 2010.

<sup>15</sup> “Afghanistan Report 2009,” *NATO Public Diplomacy Division*, *op. cit.*

<sup>16</sup> Bruno, *op. cit.*

<sup>17</sup> “A Force in Fragments: Reconstituting the Afghan National Army,” *International Crisis Group*, *op. cit.*