Afghanistan Analysts Network

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BEATING A RETREAT

Prospects for the Transition Process in Afghanistan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The US and its allies in NATO are now beating a retreat from Afghanistan. Although there are plans for a continuing US-led counterterrorism strategy in the region, the phased transfer of full responsibility for security, governance and development to the Afghan government, its forces and people is underway. But after one year of a transition process that started in 2011, and will officially be completed by the end of 2014, concerns are mounting over the formidable challenges facing the transition and whether it will succeed in delivering its objective: a self-sustaining Afghan state.

The intervention by the US-led coalition in Afghanistan has been shaped by the fact that it was based on two related agendas: to counter terrorism and to build a viable state to prevent Afghanistan again becoming a haven for Al Qaeda and its associates. These agendas have never been fully reconciled and have often acted at cross purposes. Despite claims by some Western diplomats that the international engagement in Afghanistan has been over-ambitious in scope, in reality the state-building process was never given the fighting chance it needed to succeed and that the majority of Afghans, wanting stability and development, had expected and hoped for.

The intervention veered from 'too little too late' in its crucial early years, to one of 'too much too late'. This peaked in 2010 with the temporary commitment of additional US military and financial resources to enable an intensified counterinsurgency (COIN) military campaign that prominent figures in the US military had argued would avert a highly damaging defeat while saving Afghanistan from itself. These efforts, however, still failed to tackle the causes underlying the country's deepening problems.

Growing opposition within key NATO member states to a continuing military engagement in Afghanistan, donor fatigue and the global financial crisis are critical factors informing the statements by Western diplomats that now stress the limits of what the international community will guarantee in Afghanistan. The transition strategy is presented by them as a realistic and responsible one, on the basis that by 2015 the Afghan government and security forces will be in a position to take responsibility for security, governance and development at levels that are 'good enough' to ensure reasonably positive prospects for stability.

However, to succeed in reaching its objective, the transition process cannot be divorced from actual conditions on the ground with respect to security, governance and development. Implementation of the transition without these conditions being sufficiently in place, in combination with the brevity of a transition timeline that is likely to be accelerated further, increases the risk of the Afghan state's collapse and with it, the prospect of strategic failure for NATO. In the rush to get out of the quagmire that Afghanistan has become, the US

and other NATO member states may be preparing the ground for more instability there, rather than less.

The predicament now facing the US and its NATO allies is that, while weighing the costs of failure in Afghanistan that would have profound effects on the region and beyond, political pressure is mounting domestically for a swifter exit. Increasing Afghan hostility to the international military presence poses a further dilemma, decreasing NATO's room for manoeuvre over the option of extending the transition timeline. The violent Afghan response in February 2012 to the discovery that copies of the Quran had been incinerated on a US military base and the massacre of 17 Afghan civilians, allegedly by one US soldier in March 2012, have further strengthened perceptions among some Western policy-makers that the international military exit from Afghanistan should be expedited.

The ten-year 'Enduring Strategic Partnership Agreement' (SPA) signed by the US and Afghan Presidents on May 1 this year lacks clear guarantees or consequences should the commitments made therein not be met. The Agreement is only a first step in a further twelve month long negotiating process between the two governments on the exact nature of the Afghan/US military relationship. This is likely to prove an even more fraught process than reaching the SPA, with key aspects, such as the question of the legal immunity of US forces in Afghanistan after the end of 2014, to be decided.

NATO/ISAF efforts are focused on the mainly military process that is governing the phased security transition and on setting in place the security conditions for a self-sustaining Afghan state. The main strands of its transition strategy are to reduce the insurgent threat in order to improve security and theoretically enable the Afghan government to expand governance and service delivery throughout the country. But plans underway to do this, through an intensified counterinsurgency campaign and by building up the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) numbers and capabilities, are increasingly viewed as vulnerable at best and transient at worst.

Though Afghanistan's best chance of avoiding anarchy following the withdrawal of international forces is widely recognised to depend on the ANSF's effectiveness, it still remains unclear how the funding shortfall faced by the Afghan government in resourcing its scaled-up security forces will be bridged, beyond the short-term. The imminent reduction of Afghan forces, possibly by as much as one-third, is being actively discussed within NATO, undermining the credibility of the transition strategy.

Prospects for an 'irreversible' transition also depend on international support for the Afghan security forces following the transition, especially through the commitment by NATO member states of sufficient numbers of mentors and trainers to cushion the transition's effects and to build ANSF capacity in light of the challenges ahead. It is unclear where these additional numbers of mentors/trainers will come from. The increase in the first three months of 2012 in 'green on blue' incidents has brought the basis of mutual trust, on which this key component supporting the transition strategy depends, into question.

Indications now point strongly towards the US and other NATO member states bringing the security transition process forward by completing the transfer of lead security to Afghan security forces by mid-2013. This would mean that NATO's combat role in Afghanistan will end in 2012 facilitating the option of an accelerated withdrawal of international military forces. Should this happen, Afghan security forces will take tactical control in countering the insurgency even sooner than expected, despite existing doubts about their state of preparedness to do so even by the end of 2014. Given the fact of the transition going ahead, this could engender positive outcomes if the ANSF can swiftly improve its capabilities through the act of taking command and provided that some level of international military presence will be available for support up to the end of 2014. However, well-founded concerns regarding the absence of security sector reform, ethnic and factional divisions endemic in the security forces and its relevant ministries, as well as corruption and the overall political context in Afghanistan militate against such improvements.

In essence, the viability of the Afghan state is critically challenged from within. The related problems of structural corruption, impunity and the absence of political and security reforms has hollowed out the Western-backed state building project from the outset. The side-effects of the security transition - from the closure of PRTs to the projected declines in development funding - will negatively impact government capacity, stripping away the veneer of progress over governance and service delivery. If the trend in declining funding levels continues, achievements in governance and development in Afghanistan may not prove to be sustainable. This scenario would erode the Afghan government's legitimacy amongst Afghans further and contribute to instability.

According to a former NATO Senior Civilian Representative, the purpose of the transition is to act as a 'forcing mechanism'. But a weak Afghan government cannot be forced into being a sufficiently strong or effective one through the rushed withdrawal of the support on which it has come to depend. The primary question raised in this report is whether the transition amounts to a strategy at all. The conclusion reached that it does not, is based on a detailed examination of the context and content of the US and NATO's transition strategy, the obstacles confronting the wider strategy underpinning the military exit, NATO's approach to the criteria for implementing the transition, as well as the identifiable impacts and consequences of the transition. The report explores several factors that threaten to undermine the prospect of a successful transition.

Firstly, the idea that the official transition timeline can generate even minimally conducive conditions on the Afghan ground - that would substantiate claims that the transition strategy can succeed - is a delusion. The 'good enough' approach may exemplify the priorities of the US and NATO member states in radically reformulating their military engagement in Afghanistan, but it fails to establish what conditions are necessary to avoid the collapse of the central government and with it, the failure of the West's policy in Afghanistan.

Secondly, NATO's effective abandonment of a conditions-based approach in implementing the transition has in practice been rendered unavoidable by the brevity of the transition's timeline. But the weakness of Afghan institutions that may be subjected to additional and intense economic and political pressures linked to the transition, beyond the challenges of taking over responsibility for security, makes the risk of state collapse all the greater. So far, the US and NATO member states have shown no signs of reconsidering the viability of the transition timeline despite multiple factors, including the state of the Afghan security forces, that make this essential. Instead, the priority of the NATO member states most prominently engaged in Afghanistan is to keep the transition timetable on track, or even to speed it up.

NATO's marginalisation of governance criteria reflects a growing disengagement by the wider international community from attempts to address Afghanistan's problems which lie beyond enabling the transition and international military exit. Yet prospects that the transition process can deliver its objective of a self-sustaining Afghan state must be assessed against the overall context of failure by the Afghan government and its international partners to build the right conditions for a stable Afghanistan: What has been impossible to achieve over the last ten years will not be miraculously transformed by Afghan ownership, especially with overall security and economic indicators trending downwards.

Thirdly, prospects for a responsible withdrawal of international forces via the security transition are now entwined with Afghanistan's national reconciliation process which, so far, has focused on the insurgents. Despite its late and slow start, this has moved to the top of the international agenda as a means of ending the conflict and shoring up the security transition. Difficulties that must be overcome before substantial negotiations can start, range from establishing a consensus inside Afghanistan, with all relevant social and political actors, that a political settlement including the Taleban is a meaningful step towards a political solution in the broader sense, to addressing the lack of knowledge about the political aims of the Taleban and its sub-networks. The belief that political reconciliation can end the conflict is not shared by all Afghans, nor by all states in the region. How a potential political deal with the Pakistan-based Taleban leadership can be enforced, and what relevance any deal would have without an effective enforcement mechanism, should be prominent items for discussion at the upcoming NATO summit in Chicago.

Fourthly, if moves to bring the Taleban into the political process succeed, this is likely to collide with US plans to continue its counterterrorism strategy from bases inside Afghanistan. Taleban members of a future Afghan government are unlikely to agree to a longer-term US military presence given their long-standing rejection of foreign military forces within the country. Some insurgent groups may decide to fight on until the last foreign soldier leaves. The virtual collapse in relations between the US and Pakistan and the political turmoil within Pakistan, adds to the challenges faced by the US in its attempt to reformulate its engagement within, and from, Afghanistan while needing to address, with its NATO allies, the terrorist threats to Western interests, believed to be emanating from the region.

The prospects for what happens following the security transition will depend on fluid strategic, political and economic factors with differing international, regional and domestic dimensions. Overshadowing this highly complex situation is the question of whether the US, the main strategic actor in Afghanistan, will maintain this costly role. The lead-times involved in funding and implementing the transition's aftermath means that the time for decisions on this is fast running

out in Washington. Whether the US Congress and other key actors within the international community will agree to continue to cover the financial costs of sustaining the Afghan government over the longer-term and will see this as being in the vital interest of the West, is a further question. That argument will be made at the NATO summit in Chicago, but it will be done against a background of a deepening global financial crisis, donor exhaustion with Afghanistan and increasingly negative perceptions of the Afghan government amongst the constituencies of the NATO member states that matter.

The danger is that US-led international policy and NATO's management of an orderly military withdrawal from Afghanistan will become more incoherent. This is being driven partly by well-founded perceptions of growing Afghan hostility to an international military presence and by NATO member states rushing to withdraw their forces on the back of the US troop drawdown, which is likely to be speeded up further.

The weakness of the government and its security forces is already understood by an Afghan population that is highly sensitised to shifts in power. This may further increase insecurity and create opportunities for the armed opposition to exploit. In addition to the possibility of a fully resumed insurgency, security vacuums created by the departure of foreign forces may result in conflict between and among Afghan military and paramilitary forces. It is important to note, in this context, that none of the Afghan civil society actors interviewed for this paper believed that the transition will lead to improved security and that international humanitarian organisations, with decades of experience in Afghanistan and the region, are gearing their operations towards post-transition scenarios in which the further fragmentation of power is a strong possibility.

The chances of strategic failure for NATO cannot be dismissed. The Afghan people would pay the immediate price should there be a wider civil war. The calculation may be that such an outcome is not, in and of itself, of vital strategic importance to the West. The same cannot be said for the broader consequences of this strategic failure which would cascade throughout the region and beyond in unforeseeable ways.

1 INTRODUCTION[1]

1.1 Introducing the Challenges of Transition

The departure of the bulk of International Security Assistance Force combat troops under NATO command from Afghanistan and the *de facto* restoration of Afghan sovereignty is officially scheduled for completion by the end of 2014. This will end the phased security transition process that formally began in March 2011 with President Karzai's announcement of those districts and provinces selected to participate in the first phase.

As Afghan forces assume responsibility for security in transition areas and take the lead at the tactical level, international military forces are gradually pulling back. They will initially continue to provide direct support and mentoring before moving into a monitoring and support role. This will transform NATO's mission from combat to training. While the security handover will involve the closure of all Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) and Forward Operating Bases (FOBs), negotiations over the next twelve months over a 'Bilateral Security Agreement' - following the recent signing of a Strategic Partnership Agreement by the US and Afghan governments - will probably result in the US retaining a number of regional bases in Afghanistan after the transition.[2]

Although the transition timeline was formally agreed by the Afghan government and NATO at the Lisbon summit in November 2010, the political decision to withdraw international regular forces from Afghanistan (and end the ISAF mission) had apparently been taken within NATO two years

1 The author would like to thank Obaid Ali, researcher in the Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN) office in Kabul, for his assistance during field research; and Thomas Ruttig and Sari Kouvo at AAN for their editorial suggestions. She also acknowledges the contribution made to this paper from those consulted who wish to remain anonymous; their insights and timely assistance despite busy schedules greatly helped in guiding her thinking on the challenging subject of the transition and its implications.

2 See 'Enduring Strategic Partnership Agreement between the United States of America and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan' signed by the US and Afghan Presidents on 1 May 2012, http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/2012.06.01u.s.-afghanistanspasignedtext.pdf. Find a list of relevant documents in Annex 2.

earlier.[3] But the rate at which the withdrawal of US troops will be conducted remains at issue in Washington.[4] Whether the US decision on this will set the overall pace of the withdrawal of forces by other NATO member states and troop contributing nations has come under greater question with the Australian government's decision to withdraw their forces by 2013.[5]

The overriding objective of the security transition is a self-sustaining Afghan state.[6] The strategy for achieving this aim is presented by the NATO member states that lead on the transition process (the US, UK, Germany and France) as both realistic and responsible. They argue that by 2015 the Afghan government and security forces will be in a position to take responsibility for security, governance and development at levels that are 'good enough' to ensure reasonably positive prospects for achieving the transition's objective. However, the success of the transition process depends on the actual conditions on the ground in Afghanistan with respect to security, governance and development. This report highlights the dangers of implementing the security transition without these criteria being sufficiently in place.

Moreover, a transition process that is increasingly driven by Western political leaders with other priorities than those obtaining within Afghanistan, could also heighten the risk of strategic failure. Questions over more manageable aspects of the US/NATO strategy to ensure a stable Afghan state following the transition have come increasingly to the fore. The global financial crisis has led to questions about the short to medium-term fiscal sustainability of the recently scaled-up Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF).[7] Reducing ANSF numbers, possibly by as much as one third, is now under active discussion within NATO.[8] Furthermore, the recent and dramatic increase in fatal attacks against international forces by ANSF personnel is not conducive to getting NATO member states to commit the numbers of mentors and trainers to fulfil NATO's strategy to 'train and advise' the ANSF after the transition.[9]

The transition process is headed on the Afghan side by Dr Ashraf Ghani, a former Minister of Finance, who has advocated a twin-track approach termed 'Transition and Transformation'. He argues that continuing to build the economic and political institutions of the Afghan state is fundamental to an irreversible transition and that financial support will be needed until 2025 to achieve this. Afghanistan's leading donors have not committed themselves to this vision so far, but it is possible that pressure over the issue of sustainability in the lead-up to the Tokyo conference on Afghanistan in July 2012 may change their minds.

For many Afghans, confidence that current progress towards transition will be sustained in the future is diminishing.[10] Interviews for this paper

3 According to an off the record comment made by a senior civilian NATO representative to the author in February 2011.

4 See 'Top commander in Afghanistan says he prefers robust force of 68,000 in 2013', *Associated Press*, 22 March 2012, http://www.nypost.com/p/news/national/top_commander_in_afghanistan_says_IP2oJOBEbfq2OJaof7JuOM.

5 See Nick Hopkins, 'Obama and Afghanistan: Is it time for the UK to go its own way?', *Guardian*, 19 December 2011, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/defence-and-security-blog/2011/dec/19/obama-and-afghanistan-and-british-withdrawal, and Matt Siegel, 'Australia to Withdraw from Afghanistan Earlier Than Planned', *New York Times*, 17 April 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/18/world/asia/australia-to-withdraw-from-afghanistan-earlier-than-planned.html.

6 In testimony to the House Armed Services Hearing, 23 June 2011, the then Chairman of the US Joint Chief of Staffs, Admiral Mike Mullen, stated 'the strategy is working […] and we are in a position to make a responsible transition out of Afghanistan', http://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=488037.

7 The ANSF include the Afghan National Army (ANA), the Afghan National Police (including the Afghan National Border Police ANBP and other special police units) as well as the National Directorate for Security (NDS). Usually, the NDS is not included when ANSF figures are discussed.

8 This would reduce numbers from the transition-linked target figure of 352,000 security forces to 240,000 by 2017 – see Transcript (of testimony from) Gen John R Allen, COMISAF, House Committee on Armed Services, 20 March 2012, http://www.isaf.nato.int/from-the-commander/from-the-commander/transcript-gen.-john-r.-allen-comisaf-senate-armed-services-committee.html.

9 Douglas A Ollivant, 'The Afghan Trust Deficit', *Foreign Policy*, AfPakChannel, 7 March 2012, http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/03/07/the_afghan_trust_deficit.

10 See 'Afghanistan in 2011: A Survey of the Afghan People', *Asia Foundation*, 15 November 2011, http://asiafoundation.org/country/afghanistan/2011-poll.php. Findings from the 6,348 Afghans polled across 34 provinces list the three leading problems identified by respondents as insecurity (38 per cent), unemployment (23 per cent) and corruption (21 per cent). As a rare non-Afghan on-the-record voice confirming this fear, the head of the European Union's police training mission in Afghanistan Brig. Gen. General Savolainen said in early 2011: 'The locals are so afraid. They are convinced that once we leave, their throats will be cut.' Judy Dempsey, 'A Rare Voice Against Plan to Leave Afghanistan', *New York Times*, 15 February 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/16/world/europe/16iht-germany16.html.

asked Afghans from a range of backgrounds about the prospects for the transition's success. Their assessments of the post-transition outlook were predominantly made in the context of Afghanistan's political culture, and their daily confrontations with the weakness and ethnic factionalism that can easily be revived in times of turmoil. They saw the scheduled completion of the transition by the end of 2014 as both rushed and premature; for many, this was cause for alarm. They also expressed continuing confusion about what the security transition will mean, especially with regard to the number of US forces that will remain in Afghanistan once the transition is complete, and over the quality and reliability of the Afghan security forces in the face of a resilient Taleban insurgency that is likely to continue.

1.2 Aim, Methods and Structure

The objective of the transition process is to achieve a self-sustaining Afghan state. This paper analyses the ongoing transition process and questions whether this process amounts to a strategy capable of delivering this objective.

During the eight years the author was based in Kabul (2002-10), she observed at first hand the often incoherent attempts by the international community to address the symptoms of Afghanistan's deepening problems. In lacking clear and unified aims over Afghanistan the international engagement also lacked an overall political strategy. The author considers that the security transition and its implementation is a departure from this norm in that it represents a clear strategy for the military exit of international forces from the Afghan war. Yet paradoxically, in simultaneously failing to come up with a viable strategy to end that war, the transition process is at risk of failing to meet its primary objective.

Two periods of field research on the transition process, its context and prospects were conducted in Kabul between April and July 2011. Interview respondents were selected for their ability to comment on the economic and political context of the transition process, as either observers or participants. Due to political sensitivities, it has not been possible to attribute all comments directly, nor to provide a full list of interviewees, but a list of those who agreed to be named is attached as Annex 1.

The report is structured as follows. Chapter 2 opens with a discussion of the context and content of the transition, beginning with a background sketch of the objectives of the 2001 Bonn Agreement, which was directed towards an 'end state' for Afghanistan. The reader is then introduced to the transition process and its broader context and to the strategy which surrounds and underpins the military exit. The chapter goes on to examine the content of the strategy, including the intensification of the counterinsurgency (COIN) campaign from 2010 and the US/NATO strategy to increase the capacity and size of the Afghan security forces. Finally, it discusses the criteria intended to govern the implementation of the transition process and NATO's approach to meeting them.

Chapter 3 examines the challenges of meeting the goal of a stable government after the transition process. These include the different perceptions of NATO, regional actors and Afghans of trends in security. The economic outlook is also discussed, including the direct and indirect financial consequences of ISAF's withdrawal, the impact of the Kabul Bank scandal on Afghanistan's banking sector and recent developments in opium production.

Chapter 4 looks at the consequences of the transition. It identifies some of the effects of closing PRTs on subnational governance, before turning to the increasing levels of concern evident within the international humanitarian sector about the negative impact the transition is likely to have on human security and the sustainability of development gains made since 2001.

The paper's concluding remarks focus on the prospects for the transition delivering the objective of a self-sustaining Afghan state.

2 THE CONTEXT AND CONTENT OF THE TRANSITION STRATEGY

2.1 Background

The first international conference on Afghanistan's post-Taleban future was held in Bonn in December 2001. The negotiations did not include the Taleban. The outcome amounted to a roadmap for a political transition to a sovereign Afghan state, rather than a peace process. The political transition was to be achieved through the re-establishment of state structures modelled on Afghanistan's 1964 constitution, bar the monarchy and the position of a prime minister (*sadrazam*). The Bonn agreement included: (re)construction of the country's war-shattered infrastructure, private sector-led economic development, public administration reform, and security sector reform (SSR). SSR aimed to bring the means of violence under central state control, and included the disarmament,

demobilisation and reintegration of armed groups; the creation of a new Afghan army; reforms of the police force and judiciary, and countering the cultivation and trafficking of narcotics. The processes encompassed by the Bonn agreement were intended to lead to an 'end state': a self-reliant, stable and democratic Afghan state which would permit military withdrawal.

The SSR processes, however, failed to tackle the political culture of warlordism that had developed during the series of Afghan wars that followed the 1978 Saur Revolution.[11] This culture had engendered political fragmentation and an unpredictable security landscape and had paved the way for the rise of the Taleban in the mid-1990s. The overthrow of the Taleban regime at the end of 2001 returned power to former warlords and commanders, many of whom were known to have Afghan blood on their hands from various periods of conflict. Their co-option into the governance and security structures shaped by the Bonn agreement, widely viewed as political expediency on the part of the US-led international community and the Afghan transitional authority, undermined the domestic legitimacy of the new Afghan government. It dismayed both civil society actors and substantial parts of the wider population, many of whom had hoped for the establishment of the rule of law and long-term stability.[12]

The handling and outcomes of the 2002 Emergency Loya Jirga, which saw the return of the warlords to official power, clearly signalled that the hoped-for political changes were not on the agenda.[13] The 2005 parliamentary elections, which marked the formal end of the Bonn agreement, brought many of those warlords and their former sub-commanders into the new parliament. This marked a further decline in popular confidence in the democratic process.

Early concerns that security aspects of the US-led coalition's mission were ill-conceived and inadequately supported were crystallised by the United Nations (UN) Security Council's 2002 decision not to extend ISAF's presence beyond Kabul. This left a security gap that was exploited by increasingly organised criminal syndicates profiting from the illicit trade in opium, timber, gems and weapons that characterised the war economy. It was also exploited by anti-government militant groups that re-established themselves near the Pakistan border, their membership swollen by many recruits alienated by the predatory and abusive behaviour of some local representatives of the Kabul government.[14] The government's slow progress in building its capacity for service delivery and the return of impunity after the repressive rule of the Taleban were other factors that fed the nascent counter-insurgency.

The differing national approaches within NATO member states, exemplified by various PRT approaches and often long lists of 'national caveats', constrained ISAF Headquarter's use of the limited military resources committed to Afghanistan by many NATO and non-NATO member states. This, combined with the deflection of US attention from Afghanistan to Iraq from mid-2002, contributed to the increasingly incoherent nature of the international engagement in Afghanistan.[15] Meanwhile, the Afghan government's slow progress in building its capacity for governance and service delivery, the growing power of criminalised patronage networks within and outside Afghanistan,[16] the return of impunity after the repressive rule of the Taleban, constituted internal factors that worsened human security and fed the insurgency.

From 2005, NATO/ISAF's strategy in Afghanistan was characterised by the quest for improved levels of coordination that the 'comprehensive' or 'integrated' approach, promoted in NATO member state capitals, was supposed to deliver.[17] The

11 See Antonio Giustozzi, 'Respectable Warlords? The Politics of Statebuilding in Post Taleban Afghanistan', *London School of Economics Crisis States Programme*, Working Paper no 33 (series 1), September 2003 and Niamatullah Nojumi, *The Rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan*, Palgrave 2002.

12 The author was advocacy and policy coordinator for ACBAR, the NGO coordination body from January 2003-December 2005 and was directly engaged in Afghan civil society discourse and statements made during this period.

13 See Francesc Vendrell, 'A decade of mistakes', *Foreign Policy*, AfPak Channel, 3 December 2011, http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/12/03/afghanistans_missed_opportunities.

14 'Operations in Afghanistan', *British Parliamentary Defence Committee*, Report of Session 2010-12, 6 July 2011. See Chapter 2: 'Operations in Helmand' for an examination of the causes for the UK's under-estimation of the strength of the insurgency in 2006.

15 See Barbara J Stapleton, 'A Means To What End? Why PRTs Are Peripheral To The Bigger Challenges In Afghanistan', *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies*, University of Calgary, Fall 2007, Vol 10, no 1.

16 See Citha D Maass, 'Afghanistan's Drug Career: from War to Drug Economy', *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, Thematic Report 02/2011, 31 March 2011, http://www.aan-afghanistan.org/index.asp?id=1592.

17 Political sensitivities in many NATO member states, including the US, had prohibited public references to a 'counterinsurgency' until 2009; a 'comprehensive approach' was referred to instead.

integrated approach entailed combining security, diplomacy and development resources to amplify 'effects' on the ground in line with counterinsurgency doctrine.[18] But the approach was also a means of offsetting a limited international military commitment as the security gap widened.

In parallel with the adoption of the comprehensive approach, the international community addressed the growing challenges to security and the state-building process with the 2006 Afghanistan Compact.[19] This brought a greater international focus to the critical issues of economic revival, job creation and poverty alleviation. But despite upbeat international pronouncements surrounding the Compact's goals, this renewal of international commitment was not matched by a more rigorous implementation of the policies identified therein, aimed at remedying Afghanistan's deepening problems.[20] Western diplomats now routinely refer to the folly of having tried to build another Switzerland in Afghanistan. However, the requisite levels of international political will and resources were never committed in a timely fashion to overcome the political obstacles blocking even the most fundamental reforms.[21] The continuing failure to tackle the causes underlying the country's deepening problems further eroded Afghan trust in the agenda of the international community, and what remained of the moral basis of Western leadership in Afghanistan evaporated.

2.2 Timetable for the Security Transition and Military Exit

In July 2011, the implementation of the first phase of the handover of security from ISAF to the Afghan authorities and the ANSF began. A total of five tranches will ultimately bring the entire country into the process. The final tranche should start around June 2013. The transition process in any specific area is an open-ended one. It theoretically can continue up to the end of 2014 when the political process of the transition ends, even in those provinces, districts, cities or towns chosen for its earliest phases. According to a US former advisor to NATO, 'wherever things stand on the ground at the end of December 2014, that's what transition will look like.'[22]

The military process of security transition entails ISAF gradually pulling back from front-line fighting to the operational level and ultimately to the strategic level. Once implementation has begun, there are four stages through which ISAF's tactical engagement is downgraded: 'Support' (ANSF lead, ISAF support); 'Mentor' (tactical overwatch); 'Enable' (operational overwatch); and 'Sustain' (strategic overwatch). This fourth stage will characterise NATO's support to ANSF after transition, but the extent and nature of the future commitment of resources by the US and NATO have yet to be defined.[23] The type of Afghan security forces that will be left in place after transition therefore remains a subject for speculation.

Levels of governance and development were part of the selection criteria agreed by the Afghan government and NATO for choosing which areas enter the different phases of the security transition process. In practice, however, transition is proceeding without the constraints that establishing 'adequate' levels of governance and development on the ground would impose.[24] This amounts to a tacit acceptance that in many areas governance and development criteria will be impossible to meet within the transition timeline, and means in effect that a condition-based approach to implementing transition has been abandoned.[25]

18 See Alexander Alderson, 'Comprehensive Approaches: Theories, Strategies, Plans and Practice' in Operationalising a comprehensive approach in permissive environments, *NATO Defense College*, Rome, June 2009, 15.
19 Find the original text here, http://www.nato.int/isaf/docu/epub/pdf/afghanistan_compact.pdf.
20 International and Afghan failure to implement designated policies was repeatedly observed by the author during her years in Kabul. This point is strongly made by the former Pakistani foreign minister, Riaz Mohammad Khan, in *Afghanistan and Pakistan – Conflict, Extremism and Resistance to Modernity*, Oxford University Press, 2011, 121.
21 See Vendrell, 'A decade of …' [see FN 13].

22 Observation noted by the author at a Swedish Defence Research Agency seminar on the transition in Stockholm, November, 2011.
23 See the 'Declaration On An Enduring Partnership' agreed by the Afghan government and NATO at the 2010 Lisbon Summit outlining NATO's limited support in mentoring and training the ANSF and Afghanistan's access to NATO's Partnership For Peace toolbox. See the full text of the declaration here: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_68828.htm.
24 Ibid.
25 NATO and US embassy sources interviewed by the author in Kabul, July 2011 clarified that meeting governance and development criteria within the official transition timeline was an impossibility in many parts of the country.

The sense of confusion over the management of the transition and its aftermath grew during 2011. US political and military analysts questioned exactly what NATO member states are committed to after the transition. The number of NATO personnel that will remain in Afghanistan after the transition is unclear. The drawdown of the 33,000 US forces that constituted the 'surge' of 2009-10 will be completed by summer 2012.[26] What has yet to be decided is how fast the remaining 68,000 international forces can be withdrawn afterwards.[27]

A public adherence to the formal completion of the transition timeline at the end of 2014 was being maintained by senior representatives of the US administration at the time of writing.[28] However, a decision to complete the hand-over of the lead combat role in fighting the Taleban to Afghan forces a year and a half earlier than formally planned was announced for the first time by the US President and the UK Prime Minister at a White House press conference on 14 March 2012.[29] The joint announcement shows the UK's reluctance to leave their forces exposed to the 'inevitable Taleban resurgence' following the withdrawal of US combat forces.[30] A response likely shared by other troop contributing nations.

Furthermore, comments by US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta fuelled speculation that conventional US forces would be withdrawn faster than anticipated.[31] This option is strongly backed by US Vice-President Joe Biden, although reportedly opposed by some senior US military representatives.[32] It would effectively bring NATO's combat role to an end by the middle of 2013. This outcome was endorsed by President Karzai's call, made after the murder of 17 Afghan civilians by a US soldier in March 2012, for foreign troops to stop patrolling rural areas by 2013.

Political developments in the US over the possible acceleration of the US troop withdrawal are affecting the overall pace of transition. The Australian Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, is the latest Western leader to announce the withdrawal of forces from Afghanistan well ahead of schedule.[33]

Competing approaches to timing within and between US military and civilian policy circles have surfaced repeatedly.[34] In recent testimony to the US Senate Armed Services Committee, ISAF Commander General John R. Allen signalled a potential halt in the troop drawdown. He testified that the military campaign in 2013 would 'need significant combat power,' confirming that 'sixty-eight thousand is a good going-in number in 2013'.[35] He deferred his final recommendations

26 The planned troop drawdown of surge forces in 2012 will remove 10 thousand combat soldiers with a further 23,000 being withdrawn in 2013, theoretically leaving 68,000 pre-surge combat forces in theatre.
27 There is an ongoing discussion over the continuing role of Special Operations CIA and forces associated with them. See for example, Kimberly Dozier, 'US special operations expanding as wars recede', *Associated Press*, 27 January 2012, http://news.yahoo.com/us-special-operations-expanding-wars-recede-140326261.html and Kate Clark, 'War Without Accountability: The CIA, Special Forces and plans for Afghanistan's future', *Afghanistan Analysts Network blog*, 10 February 2012, http://www.aan-afghanistan.org/index.asp?id=2502.
28 Mark Thomson, 'Afghanistan mission: Impossible?', *Time*, 16 March 2012, http://battleland.blogs.time.com/2012/03/16/afghanistan-mission-impossible/, and Karen de Young, 'Despite challenges in Afghanistan, U.S. determined to stick to exit strategy', *Washington Post*, 13 March 2012, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/despite-challenges-in-afghanistan-us-determined-to-stick-to-exit-strategy/2012/03/12/gIQAr9iN8R_story.html.
29 Matthew Green, James Blitz and Geoff Dyer, 'West's Afghan strategy hit by double blow', *Financial Times*, 16 March 2012, http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/07c3f40c-6e9c-11e1-b98d-00144feab49a.html.
30 Philip Stephens, 'New friends race to end an old war', *Financial Times*, 16 March 2012, http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/11f3c488-6d03-11e1-a7c7-00144feab49a.html.
31 See Robert Grenier, 'Istanbul and the US "Peace Proposal" for Kabul', *al-Jazeera*, 15 November 2011, http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/11/20111111410721313364.html, and Craig Whitlock and Karen DeYoung, 'Panetta: U.S., NATO will seek to end Afghan combat mission next year', *Washington Post*, 2 February 2012, http://www.washingtonpost.com/panetta-us-nato-will-seek-to-end-afghan-combat-mission-next-year/2010/07/28/gIQAriZJiQ_story.html.
32 See Adam Entous and Julian E Barnes, 'Commander Seeks Delay in U.S. Troop Drawdown', *Wall Street Journal*, 7 December 2011, http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970204083204577082603515444194.html, and Donna Cassata, 'Afghan commander prefers significant US combat power in 2013, sees no drawdown beyond 68,000', *Associated Press*, 22 March 2012, http://news.yahoo.com/afghan-commander-prefers-significant-us-combat-power-2013-220048769.html.
33 Matt Siegel, 'Australia to Withdraw From Afghanistan Earlier Than Planned', *New York Times*, 17 April 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/18/world/asia/australia-to-withdraw-from-afghanistan-earlier-than-planned.html.
34 See Entous and Barnes, 'Commander Seeks…' [see FN 32] and Cassata, 'Afghan commander prefers…' [see FN 32].
35 See Transcript, Gen. John R. Allen [see FN 8].

until the last three months of 2012, after the US Presidential elections.[36]

The debate on timing centres on whether the pace of the drawdown will be driven by conditions in Afghanistan or by domestic political factors within NATO member states.[37] President Obama and Prime Minister Cameron's joint statement on 14 March followed by Prime Minister Gillard's announcement just over a month later would indicate the latter. Stating that the next phase of the transition will be determined at the May 2012 NATO summit in Chicago, President Obama clarified that, 'this includes shifting to a support role next year, in 2013, in advance of Afghans taking full responsibility for security in 2014.'[38] The acceleration of the security transition was also flagged by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who remarked that the Chicago summit would define the next phase of the transition, 'working towards a 2013 goal when NATO-led forces would move from a predominantly combat role to a supportive role, only participating in combat when necessary.'[39]

The possible acceleration of key aspects of the security transition will also affect decisions by regional states capable of exerting influence and projecting power into Afghanistan. These would include China, Russia, Iran, India and especially Pakistan. The handing-over of the management of the insurgency to the Afghan government and forces ahead of schedule is likely to be a factor in the calculations of internal Afghan actors.[40] Even if the military withdrawal is completed at the end of 2014 as officially planned, for logistical reasons alone international military forces will already have been significantly reduced by the summer of that year. As this is when Afghanistan's next Presidential elections are scheduled to be held, it raises the question as to whether sufficient troop numbers and other resources will remain to support the ANSF in providing the requisite security.[41] One international analyst speculated that a rationale for expediting the military exit ahead of 2014 is to avoid the risk of NATO being dragged into a serious conflagration over what are certain to be hotly disputed election results.[42]

The short timeline is 'pulling governance, development and diplomatic efforts in Afghanistan into its slipstream' and indicates the urgency with which NATO member states view the military drawdown and transition.[43] The tightness of the transition timetable is presented by diplomats from some of the most influential NATO member states as challenging and risky but also as a means of creating outcomes. The risk that presentation is being elevated over substance was highlighted by Ronald Neumann, a former US Ambassador to Afghanistan, who wrote in September 2011 that 'claims by some serving and retired American generals that security gains in southern Afghanistan are irreversible seriously overstate the situation. None of my many Afghan contacts fully accept this view… [N]owhere have Afghan forces yet stood largely on their own. Their ability to do so remains an unproven theory, not an established fact.'[44]

In an interview for this paper, the NATO Senior Civilian Representative (SCR) in Kabul, Ambassador Sir Simon Gass, emphasised that although 'we can create the right conditions for the Afghan government and people to build their future, the responsibility for this in the future will be an Afghan one. The limits of what the international community can guarantee have to be recognised'.[45] But lack of time and Afghan capacity militate against the 'right conditions' - even along the minimalist lines defined by NATO as being

36 Ibid.
37 David Ignatius, 'How quick to the exits in Afghanistan', *Washington Post*, 22 December 2011, http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/how-quick-to-the-exits-in-afghanistan/2011/12/21/gIQAHNSDAP_story.html.
38 See 'Remarks by President Obama and Prime Minister Cameron of the United Kingdom in a Joint Press Conference', *The White House, Office of the Press Secretary*, 14 March 2012, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/03/14/remarks-president-obama-and-prime-minister-cameron-united-kingdom-joint-.
39 'US Does Not Seek Permanent Bases in Afghanistan Post 2014: Clinton', *TOLOnews*, 5 April 2012, http://tolonews.com/pa/afghanistan/5825-us-does-not-seek-permanent-bases-in-afghanistan-post-2014-clinton.
40 These questions were raised by a retired former commander of coalition forces in Afghanistan at a US-German COIN symposium in Hamburg, 31 August – 2 September 2011 attended by the author.
41 Meanwhile, there is a discussion to possibly hold the elections in 2013 already, fort hat very reason.
42 Email exchange with the author, April 2012.
43 Paul Turner, former head of programming, EU assistance in Afghanistan, speech to the UK Institute of Directors, 3 June 2011.
44 See Ronald Neumann, 'Tricky questions and troop transfers in Afghanistan', *Foreign Policy*, AfPak Channel, 19 September 2011, http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/09/16/political_questions_and_troop_transfers_in_afghanistan.
45 Author's interview with Simon Gass, NATO SCR, HQ ISAF, 16 July 2011.

'good enough' to support the transition - being put in place by the end of 2014.[46]

2.3 Related Strategies for Military Exit and Security Transition

2.3.1 Key Components

The security transition has to be viewed within the inter-related components of the wider strategy supporting the viability of the international military exit, the exit being linked to achieving the overriding objective of the transition, namely 'an Afghanistan which can secure and govern itself'.[47] The wider strategy includes a (belated) gearing up of diplomatic efforts to establish a regional security and economic framework. Since 2011, this US-led shift towards prioritising a political strategy has increasingly been focused on establishing negotiations with the Taleban and a long-term partnership between the Afghan government and the international community.

This combined diplomatic, political and security effort seeks to shift international engagement in Afghanistan towards mainstream development support. Though this outcome, too, is presented by NATO representatives as attainable, it depends on certain assumptions being met - namely, that security by 2014 will have significantly improved, that development aid is sustained at levels sufficient at least to maintain the Afghan rentier state and, in particular, the resourcing of its security forces is secured. If this is achieved, proponents of the transition strategy claim, Afghanistan will become a more normal country and the strategic goal met.

These assumptions ignore the internal, regional and international factors negatively affecting prospects for stability in Afghanistan. The weakness of government institutions at all levels, linked to the political and economic interests of Afghan powerbrokers who have repeatedly neutralised past attempts at reform, constitutes an overriding constraint to attaining the objective of the transition. A further constraint is the impact of the global economic crisis on donor aid commitments.

In addition to the phased security transition, the wider strategy for military exit comprises four main components which are discussed in turn below.

46 See Tim Lister, 'Analysis: The Afghan balance sheet-a transition to "good enough"', *CNN*, 30 March 2012, http://security.blogs.cnn.com/2012/03/30/analysis-the-afghan-balance-sheet-a-transition-to-good-enough/.
47 Former NATO SCR Mark Sedwill's speech to the Asia Society, Washington DC, 28 March 2011.

Each faces obstacles that, at best, will defer intended outcomes beyond 2014.

2.3.2 National Reconciliation Process

Pressure for reconciliation or a 'peace process',[48] nominally led by the Afghan government but diplomatically pushed ever harder by the US since 2011, finally bore some fruit in January 2012. After a year of on-and-off secret contacts between the Taleban and Washington,[49] an agreement was reached for the Pakistan-based Taleban leadership to open an overseas office in Qatar.[50]

Bringing the Taleban into the political process is being actively promoted by the US and its main European allies in the expectation that this will help bring the conflict to an end, easing the security transition and underpinning its intended outcome.[51] Mutual confidence-building measures, involving the release of some Taleban prisoners from Guantanamo by the US and a Taleban renouncement of links to al-Qaeda, are reportedly being explored.[52] While the argument that peace can only be reached through a political settlement that includes the Taleban is now broadly accepted in international opinion, it is opposed by many Afghans who fear that it will not end the conflict.

Significant obstacles surround a peace process that could take years and is unlikely to include an effective means of monitoring and enforcement. The Taleban have continued to reject the Afghan constitution, despite this being a supposed 'red

48 The term 'peace process' itself is seen by some analysts as a euphemism, see Candace Rondeaux, 'Reconsidering reconciliation in Afghanistan', *Foreign Policy*, AfPak Channel, 22 September 2011, http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/09/21/reconsidering_reconciliation_in_afghanistan.
49 Talks had been broken off again by the Taleban at the time of writing apparently due to US insistence that the Afghan government was included in the process. A Taleban statement about suspending dialogue with the US was emailed to media outlets 15 March 2012. See Kate Clark, 'The End of the Affair? Taleban Suspend Talks', *Afghanistan Analysts Network blog*, 16 March 2012, http://aan-afghanistan.com/index.asp?id=2610.
50 On latest developments and problems in this process, see Thomas Ruttig, 'Talks on Two Channels? The Qatar office and Karzai's Saudi option', *Afghanistan Analysts Network blog*, 29 January 2012, http://www.aan-afghanistan.org/index.asp?id=20.
51 See 'Talking About Talks: Towards a Political Settlement in Afghanistan', *International Crisis Group*, Asia Report no 221, 26 March 2012.
52 Jonathan S. Landay and Nancy A. Youssef, 'Intelligence report: Taliban still hope to rule Afghanistan', *McClatchy Newspapers*, 12 January 2012, http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2012/01/11/135574/intelligence-report-taliban-still.html.

line' for the main stakeholders, including the US, for entering any negotiations towards a peace process. The Taleban have also continued to reject direct talks with the Afghan government, maintaining that negotiations will only be held with the US as the other party to the conflict.[53]

Within Afghanistan, reactions to the US-backed reconciliation process are shaped by ethnic and geographic divisions.[54] The already weak incentives for the mainly non-Pashtun north to support the process were further diminished by the murder of former President and head of the High Peace Council Burhanuddin Rabbani, in 2011. Northern political leaders believe that the Taleban leadership is more interested in toppling the Afghan government than joining it, a view supported by the leaked December 2011 US National Intelligence Estimate which concluded that the leadership of the Taleban 'remains locked into its political objectives' to retake total control of Afghanistan.[55] Opponents to an agreement with the Taleban may be joined by President Karzai, reportedly infuriated by being sidelined from the process.[56]

In interviews with the author, several Afghan civil society actors opposed secret negotiations aimed at reaching narrow political deals which would not be capable of conferring a peace dividend. As an Afghan journalist representing civil society at the December 2011 Bonn conference stated, 'we want peace and reconciliation, but not when it jeopardises our fundamental rights and freedoms.'[57]

2.3.3 Framework for Regional Security and Cooperation

In November 2011, a regional meeting on Afghanistan held in Turkey and attended by thirteen states produced the Istanbul declaration which it had been hoped would expedite reaching a framework for regional security.[58] This document did not overcome the lack of consensus for institutionalising such a framework that had been promoted from behind the scenes by the US, its close NATO allies such as Germany and the Afghan government in the run-up to the Istanbul meeting. Some of the regional delegations expressed concerns that NATO's withdrawal might lead to civil war, or even to the breakup of Afghanistan. The final agreement reflected this with its repeated references to Afghanistan's 'indivisible security' and 'territorial integrity'.[59] The declaration was seen as 'a series of platitudes' by some commentators[60], and included no enforcement mechanism.[61]

At the same time, regional tensions were intensified by the signing of a strategic agreement between Afghanistan and India in October 2011. Most provocatively, from Pakistan's point of view, the agreement provides for the ANSF to be trained by Indian forces. This has reportedly strengthened the position of anti-Indian hardliners in the Pakistani army, including the Inter-Services Intelligence Agency. It will do nothing to defuse the proxy war between India and Pakistan being played out in Afghanistan.

A regional trade framework is far from being agreed, and the obstacles to implementation would present significant challenges.[62] The Afghan

53 Landay and Youssef, 'Intelligence report…' [see FN 52]; Martine van Bijlert, 'Are the Taleban talking to Karzai (and does it matter)?', *Afghanistan Analysts Network blog*, 18 February 2012, http://www.aan-afghanistan.org/index.asp?id=2519.

54 Haroun Mir, a prominent Afghan political analyst with links to northern political circles.

55 Landay and Youssef, 'Intelligence report…' [see FN 52].

56 'Karzai concerned over role in Afghan peace talks', *AFP*, 6 January 2012, http://dawn.com/2012/01/05/karzai-concerned-over-role-in-afghan-peace-talks-official/.

57 Barry Salam's remarks were reported by Thomas Ruttig on the Afghanistan Analysts Network website: http://www.aan-afghanistan.org/index.asp?id=2310.

58 Find its full text here: http://www.mfa.gov.tr/istanbul-process-on-regional-security-and-cooperation-for-a-secure-and-stable-afghanistan.en.mfa.

59 See Graeme Smith, 'Hands off Afghanistan, nations agree in security pact', *Globe and Mail*, 2 November 2011, http://www.afghanistannewscenter.com/news/2011/november/nov32011.html.

60 See MK Bhadrakumar, 'US's post-2014 Afghan Agenda Falters', *Asia Times online*, 4 November 2011, http://atimes.com/atimes/south_asia/mk04df03.html ; Grenier, 'Istanbul and the US…' [see FN 31], and Thomas Ruttig, 'Afghanistan Conference in Istanbul: The clogged arteries of the "Heart of Asia"', *Afghanistan Analysts Network blog*, 1 November 2011, http://www.aan-afghanistan.org/index.asp?id=2201.

61 The December 2002 Kabul Declaration on Good Neighbourly Relations represented an earlier exercise in wishful thinking with no commitments embedded in it. Find it full text here: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,,NATLEGBOD,,AFG,,42ef429e4,0.html.

62 See Karl F. Inderfurth and Chinmayar R. Gharekhan, 'The Afghanistan Endgame', *New York Times*, 13 May 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/14/opinion/14iht-edinderfurth14.html.

Pakistan Trade Transit Agreement (APTTA) provides an example of the delays in implementing economic cooperation agreements already on the bilateral level. In the case of the APTTA, the disincentive to implementation on Pakistan's side concerns the economic disadvantage for Pakistan's transport mafia that would result.[63] Multilateral projects like the New Silk Road[64], also discussed in Istanbul, will have to overcome even more divergent interests of different groups and countries.

2.3.4 The Long-term Strategic Partnership between Afghanistan and the US

The ten-year Strategic Partnership Agreement signed in Kabul by the US and Afghan Presidents on 1 May 2012 lists promises by the US and Afghanistan but few guarantees that they will be able to keep. Nor are any consequences identified should the Afghan government not keep its promises over fighting corruption or upholding human rights. The agreement has loophole that include the right to abandon the agreement at any time subject to a year's written notice.[65]

The protracted series of negotiations leading up to this agreement encountered sticking points. This included the questions of who has control over detained insurgents and US Special Operations Forces' night raids.[66] A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed by the Commander of ISAF and the Afghan Defense Minister in March 2012 resolved the question of control over detainees, and the US finally ceded its control over the controversial night raids following failed attempts to decouple them from the US-Afghan negotiations over the strategic partnership.[67]

The 1 May agreement does not provide the comprehensive security guarantees from the US that the Afghan government wanted.[68] General Allen indicated continuing difficulties over this in November 2011, stating that 'it has not yet been determined what the US role would be if Afghanistan suffered a conventional attack from one of its neighbours.'[69] Though reportedly the deal is legally binding, it does not carry the force of a treaty as sought by the Afghan government.[70]

The most contentious issue is likely to be the question of legal immunity for US soldiers operating inside Afghanistan after the security transition. This will be part of the negotiations over the next twelve months during which the specific terms of a 'Bilateral Security Agreement' are to be determined.[71] The form of a future status of forces agreement and even its title are yet to be decided.[72]

The long-term strategic partnership agreement has been a controversial issue within Afghanistan from the outset. In November 2011, President Karzai had to call a 'Traditional *Loya Jirga*' in order to project a national consensus about it which formally backed a longer-term US military presence. Although the jirga appeared to be tightly controlled in terms of attendance and process,[73] it also demanded to bring US military personnel under Afghan law after the transition is completed. It should be recalled that a similar decision by the Government of Iraq was a determining factor in President Obama's decision to withdraw all US forces from Iraq by the end of 2011.[74]

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63 According to a diplomatic source in Islamabad.
64 More detail in Ruttig, 'Afghanistan Conference in Istanbul' [see FN 60].
65 See Anne Gearan, 'Afghanistan security deal Obama signed has holes', *Associated Press*, 2 May 2012, http://news.yahoo.com/afghanistan-security-deal-obama-signed-holes-213308336.html.
66 Both sticking points were reportedly the subject of intense negotiation between the Afghan and US governments in the run up to the upcoming NATO Summit in Chicago in May 2012 where it is hoped the agreement will be announced.
67 In his address on the occasion of the Afghan New Year, the country's First Vice President Fahim stated that any long-term military agreement with the United States will respect his nation's sovereignty. See 'Officials: Afghanistan, US looking at removing detention, night raids from partnership talks', *Associated Press*, 22 February 2012, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia-pacific/officials-afghanistan-us-looking-at-removing-detention-night-raids-from-partnership-talks/2012/02/22/gIQAPNLySR_story.html?. See also 'Security Council Renews UN Mission in Afghanistan', *RFE/RL*, 22 March 2012, http://www.rferl.org/content/securit_councul_renews_mission_in_afgh/24524499.html.
68 According to a diplomatic source in Islamabad.
69 See TOLOnews interview with General Allen on post-2014 US plans, reported in CJ Radin, 'US military's role in Afghanistan after 2014', *Long War Journal*, 13 November 2011, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2011/11/us_military_role_in.php.
70 See Gearan, 'Afghanistan security deal...' [see FN 65].
71 See Para 6 (c) in the 'Enduring Strategic Partnership Agreement…' [see FN 2].
72 Ibid.
73 See Kate Clark, 'Traditional Loya Jirga 4: lacklustre political theatre (amended)', *Afghanistan Analysts Network blog*, 19 November 2011, http://www.aan-afghanistan.org/index.asp?id=2259.
74 See Michael S Schmidt, 'At all times staying very diplomatic', *International Herald Tribune*, 28 October 2011.

Though a long-term strategic partnership agreement has been reached in time for announcement by the US President at the NATO summit in Chicago, the absence of concrete stipulations on the legal immunity of US soldiers will render it meaningless to the Appropriations Committees in the US Congress that approve financial support.

The US Under-Secretary for Defense Michele Flournoy clarified in 2011 that the strategic partnership agreement also needs to include, 'a security cooperation component to press our shared counterterror objectives'.[75] Paragraph 6 of the Enduring Strategic Partnership agreement stipulates that this will be included in the negotiations over the Bilateral Security Agreement during the next 12 months. The continuation of counterterrorism operations from bases within Afghanistan after transition was also recently referred to by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton[76]. According to a senior Afghan Ministry of Defence official[77] following the security transition the US will consult with the Afghan government over counterterrorism operations, but counterinsurgency operations will become an Afghan affair. This is significant because counterterrorism does not require the commitment of conventional combat forces nor engagement in the host country's domestic affairs.[78] Limiting US military engagement to a counterterrorism strategy in Afghanistan would involve an increasing reliance on the use of special forces, drones and airstrikes.[79]

The viability of this strategy for a post-transition US counterterrorism strategy is questionable. Some of the Afghans interviewed by the author in 2011, well before recent events that have increased Afghan hostility to an international military presence, predicted a scenario of growing public hostility to an arrangement that would create sealed-off US bases divorced from a domestic political situation that is expected to become more fragmented, violent and repressive.[80]

The closure of PRTs and FOBs already being implemented as part of the security transition has begun the process of further distancing international military forces from local realities. This, in addition to an increased reliance on the use of drones[81] and other forms of air-support following the transition, arguably could increase opportunities for instances of manipulated intelligence, resulting in even more civilian casualties.[82] Alternatively, if an inclusive political agreement is reached within Afghanistan, envisaging Taleban elements within a future Afghan government agreeing to either a long-term US military presence or joint counterterrorism operations stretches the bounds of credibility.

2.4 The Financial Context of the Transition

The global financial crisis has affected the entire operating framework for Afghanistan, changing the funding assumptions informing transition plans, the COIN campaign, the future resourcing of ANSF and the planned implementation of the government's sub-national governance policy.

Managing the fiscal dimensions of the transition may prove even more difficult than managing security. In September 2011 the Pentagon, under pressure to make steep budget reductions,[83]

75 To a House Armed Services Hearing in Washington, 23 June 2011. This endorsed aspects of Obama's speech announcing the troop drawdown the day before.
76 See 'US Does Not Seek…' [see FN 39].
77 Author's interview with MoD spokesman, Kabul, July 2011.
78 See the US 'National Strategy For Counterterrorism', June 2011, 9. Similarities of approach are apparent in 'Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence And Security Review', *HMG White Paper*, October 2010, http://www.direct.gov.uk/prod_consum_dg/groups/dg_digitalassets/@dg/@en/documents/digitalasset/dg_191634.pdf?CID=PDF&PLA=furl&CRE=sdsr.
79 Jim Michaels and Tom Vanden Brooks, 'Precision strikes are new weapon of choice', *USA Today*, 30 September 2011. The author was informed by NATO sources that the use of such air assets in post-transition Afghanistan was expected to go markedly increase.
80 This is the consensus from a number of longstanding academics on Afghanistan including Professor Michael Barry, Professor William Maley and Dr Marvin Weinbaum. Such views were also prominent in interviews with Afghans, Kabul, July 2011.
81 According to NATO sources interviewed by the author in Kabul, July 2011, the use of drones is expected to significantly increase after the transition.
82 During 2006-2010 the author reported on political and security developments for the Office of the EU Special Representative for Afghanistan. There were multiple instances of civilian casualties caused by coalition/ISAF actions generated by manipulated intelligence. Though instances of civilian casualties linked to manipulated intelligence decreased over time, the provision of intelligence was described to the author as 'a business' in Afghanistan in Kabul, 2004 by a then deputy interior minister.
83 Peter Baker, 'Charting Pentagon's new course', *International Herald Tribune*, 25 October 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/24/us/at-pentagon-leon-panetta-charts-change-of-course.html?pagewanted=all.

agreed to cut expenditure on the ANSF by more than half by the end of 2014.[84] This is only the beginning of the impact of the US fiscal deficit on Afghanistan. In January 2013, USD 1.2 trillion in automatic spending cuts will theoretically come into force, 500 billion of which will be taken from a Pentagon budget already reduced by the earlier cuts.[85]

The Afghan government's vision for 'Transition and Transformation', discussed above, would require significant additional donor funding for transformation, which it defines as 'a process of building Afghan state, political, social and market institutions to render the transition sustainable.'[86] Delegates to the 2011 Bonn conference did not make commitments to fund this vision beyond those already made for stabilisation, development and transition-related projects.[87] It seems likely that the role of both the Afghan and international private sector in leading economic development will continue to be promoted as pivotal by increasingly hard-pressed Western donors. Whether the security and political conditions will be in place for the private sector to fulfil its designated lead role in the development of the Afghan economy, in the short to medium term at least, remains doubtful.

In addition to the global financial context, possibilities for funding the transition were adversely influenced by the Kabul Bank scandal, which saw the alleged involvement of members of the Presidential and Vice-Presidential families in the embezzlement of USD 900 million. The widening scandal[88] triggered a year-long stand-off between the Afghan government and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). During this period, donor funds to the Afghan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF) were frozen, threatening the government's ability to pay public sector salaries including those of teachers, nurses and the ANSF. While relations between the government and the IMF were resolved in the run-up to the Bonn Conference in November 2011, the failure to date to effectively address the abuse of power implicit in the scandal has resulted in lasting damage to donor confidence in the Afghan government.[89]

2.5 Increasing Tensions between the US and Pakistan

Divisions in Washington over strategic objectives in Afghanistan also signalled growing concerns over the regional context to the Afghan conflict, in particular the complexities and challenges emanating from Pakistan.[90] The urgency with which the US administration views the threat of 'terrorist development, acquisition and use of weapons of mass destruction' is apparent in the US government's revised 'National Strategy for Counterterrorism'.[91] Pakistan's nuclear capacities and the presence of extremist groups operating in the region surrounding the Afghanistan-Pakistan border gave rise to a flurry of comments from senior US government representatives towards the end of 2011 to the effect that the US is not

84 David S Cloud, 'The Pentagon to drastically cut spending on Afghan forces', *Los Angeles Times*, 12 September 2011, http://articles.latimes.com/2011/sep/12/world/la-fg-us-afghan-police-20110913.

85 Jake Sherman from the US political analyst website politico.com expects that reducing these cuts to the Pentagon budget will be one of the biggest political battles of 2012.

86 Ibid.

87 Delegates to the 2011 Bonn conference steered clear of making specific pledges to make up a funding gap of USD 7 billion from the end of 2014 calculated by the World Bank. See Myra Macdonald and Hamid Shalizi, 'Afghanistan's allies pledge to stay for the long haul', *Reuters*, 6 December 2011, http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/12/06/us-afghanistan-conference-idUSTRE7B402K20111206. There was an agreement, though, to hold another donor conference in Tokyo in July 2012.

88 The International Monetary Fund also wanted the Afghan government to agree to a forensic audit of the Azizi Bank. Though reputedly better run than the Kabul Bank, such an audit allegedly would have revealed similar abuses linked to the provision of slush funds by the Azizi Bank for the Presidential re-election campaign. In addition to the Kabul Bank scandal this would have been too politically damaging for the Afghan government to agree to.

89 Preconditions to resolving the crisis were finally agreed in October, see Alissa J Rubin, 'Afghan Deal With I.M.F. Will Revive Flow of Aid', *New York Times*, 6 October 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/07/world/asia/afghanistan-deal-with-imf-will-renew-credit-program.html. An IMF loan of USD 129 million over a 3 year period to support economic reforms was announced by the Afghan Finance Ministry in Kabul resolving the funding crisis on 15 November 2011 in the run up to the international Bonn conference early the following month.

90 Ahmed Rashid, 'Once again US Afghan policy is hobbled by divisions', *Financial Times*, 19 September 2011, http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/7d6fd072-e2d8-11e0-93d9-00144feabdc0.html. On US divisions over Pakistan see Greg Miller and Karen De Young, 'Admiral Mullen's words on Pakistan come under scrutiny', *Washington Post*, 28 September 2011, http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/12/06/us-afghanistan-conference-idUSTRE7B402K20111206.

91 Published in June 2011. See section on 'Our Overarching Goals', 8-9.

departing from Afghanistan.[92] The difficult relationship between the US and Pakistani governments that surfaced during 2011 exposed the limits to US room for manoeuvre.[93] The relationship reached crisis point after the US Special Forces operation targeting Osama Bin Laden and subsequently broke down altogether after a joint ISAF-Afghan patrol called in air support that resulted in the deaths of 24 Pakistani soldiers on the Pakistan side of the border in November 2011.

Against this background, the possibility that - in addition to a special forces presence focusing on counterterrorism after 2014 - residual conventional US forces might retain a combat footing after transition was raised for the first time by the US Ambassador to Afghanistan, Ryan Crocker, on 10 December 2011.[94] This statement was intended to convey the message that rather than abandoning the region, the US is staying on.[95] It was hoped that if regional actors were convinced about continuing US engagement, it would encourage their commitment to a regional framework for cooperation and security and lead them to view a stable Afghanistan as being in their best interests.[96] Whether American promises that the post-transition bases will not be permanent (as referenced in the US-Afghan Strategic Partnership Agreement), will suffice to allay the concerns of Russia, Iran and other opponents of a long-term US military presence in Afghanistan, remains to be seen.

If US residual forces do retain a combat capacity, the decision must at least nominally be made by the Afghan government. This has major political and military implications. It will mean the Afghan government waiving their insistence on US soldiers coming under Afghan law in whatever Status of Forces Agreement is ultimately agreed. The process of reaching this agreement could conceivably be spun out indefinitely by the US to circumvent the problem. But perceptions that the Afghan government and its armed forces are simply US proxies would undermine Afghan claims to sovereignty and boost Taleban propaganda in this regard.

2.6 The Temporary US Military Surge

The 2010 US military surge highlighted the US as the strategic international actor in Afghanistan, rather than NATO. The temporary 'surge' of the US forces, by 33,000 more soldiers, enabled the better-resourced COIN campaign called for by the former US Commander of ISAF, General Stanley McChrystal, in 2009. This increase in US forces was made after the political decision for military withdrawal had been taken within NATO.[97]

General McChrystal and his closest US and British military colleagues in ISAF Headquarters had all been involved in the military strategy that had eased the US military exit from Iraq under the command of US General Petraeus. The perceived success of the US military exit from Iraq also helped foster American perceptions that the decision to withdraw US forces from Iraq was a responsible one. They appear to have sought to replicate similar perceptions of 'success' subsequently in Afghanistan. The case for retaining US surge forces for the full 2012 fighting season in order to focus the COIN campaign on insurgents like the Haqqani network and non-Afghan jihadist groups in the east and southeast of the country was pressed.[98] General Allen, the current ISAF Commander, has more recently argued for the further deferral of the planned drawdown of non-surge forces, to allow the retention of the maximum number of combat forces for the full 2013 fighting season.[99]

The COIN campaign is designed to facilitate the transition through four steps: Clear, Hold, Build, and Transfer. The ability of joint ISAF-ANSF

92 See for example US Secretary of State's statement at the International Conference in Bonn, that 'the United States intends to stay the course with our friends in Afghanistan', quoted from: 'Afghanistan's allies pledge to stay for long haul', *Reuters*, 5 December 2011, http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/12/06/us-afghanistan-conference-idUSTRE7B402K20111206.
93 Matthew Green and Farhan Bokhari, 'Pakistan intelligence chief warns on US ties', *Financial Times*, 29 September 2011, http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/22ab5e96-eabb-11e0-ac18-00144feab49a.html.
94 Rod Nordland, 'U.S. Troops Could Stay in Afghanistan Past Deadline, Envoy Says', *New York Times*, 10 December 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/11/world/asia/troops-in-afghanistan-past-2014-us-ambassador-ryan-crocker-says.html.
95 According to emailed communication to the author at the end of 2011, from a leading South Asia expert based in Washington advising the US government.
96 Ibid.

97 According to a senior NATO civilian representative interviewed for this research in Brussels, May 2011.
98 According to a well-placed NATO source interviewed by the author in Kabul, April 2011.
99 Adam Entous and Julian E Barnes, 'Commander Seeks Delay in U.S. Troop Drawdown', *Wall Street Journal*, 7 December 2011, http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970204083204577082603515444194.html.

operations to 'Clear' areas in southern Afghanistan from insurgent control has never been in question;[100] the problem has come with the 'Hold' and 'Build' stages. Failures in these regards have substantiated concerns over the ability of the Afghan government to effectively counter an insurgency, a task that they will shortly be taking full command of. Whether the Afghan government commands sufficient support from the Afghan population is also pivotal to in the waging of a successful counterinsurgency.[101] This will be a particular challenge in areas now under Taleban control, where many factors threaten the potential ability of the ANSF to hold on to the security gains made on the back of the counterinsurgency that has been temporarily intensified due to the US military surge.

From a strategic perspective, the US-led COIN campaign has failed to address the underlying structure of the Afghan insurgency. In particular, the COIN equation of 'Clear, Hold, Build, Transfer' has proved inadequate for dealing with the political infrastructure furnished by non-militant supporters of the insurgency, which provides the intelligence that militant groups need to operate. It is also inadequate for tackling outside support for the insurgency, which includes alleged sanctuary for Afghan insurgents in Pakistan. For these reasons, President Obama's claim that the surge has broken the momentum of the insurgency is open to question.[102] It is likely that security gains under the COIN strategy will only be temporary and that the current conflict will continue as a civil war once ISAF has left the country.[103]

2.7 ANSF Morale and Security Sector Reform

The level of security that the ANSF is able to maintain following the withdrawal of ISAF will determine subsequent stability. Some security analysts argue that the development of ANSF capabilities will progress substantially once the Afghans are in charge of security, and if continuing support from NATO is given.[104] However, the development of the ANSF's professional capabilities and its morale are critically dependent on progress being made in security sector reform (SSR). The state of ANSF morale is particularly important in light of the continued resilience of the insurgency, despite the coalition's intensified targeting of insurgents since 2010.[105]

According to interview respondents, there has been little evidence of substantive progress in SSR since 2006, and attempts at reform have not ended the appointment of officers on a factional and ethnic basis or the domination of key security ministries by certain groups.[106] Ministry of Interior (MoI) officials were particularly concerned that no progress was being made in protecting the ANSF from the factional and ethnic influences which they saw as undermining the development of national security forces.[107] The establishment of an ethnically representative national army has been constrained by 'abysmally low' recruitment levels of southern Pashtuns.[108] As an American military analyst advising the NATO/ISAF forces put it, 'if you talk to the junior and mid-level of ISAF in private, you will see that they understand all this. But they'll never say it in public and the senior guys simply cannot.'[109]

The Afghan National Army (ANA) is considered by many Afghans and international analysts to be the best chance Afghanistan has got of avoiding

100 NATO troop contribution nations such as the UK from 2007/08 had been able to 'clear' areas under their respective commands but both ISAF and ANSF numbers and capacity were insufficient to maintain the 'hold' resulting in repeated clearing operations referred to informally by the international military as 'mowing the grass'.

101 Karl Eikenberry, then US ambassador to Afghanistan, warned the US government against sending substantial numbers of additional troops on the basis that the GoA was ,not an adequate strategic partner'. His diplomatic cable was leaked to the US press in November 2009.

102 In his 2 May speech in Kabul after the US-Afghan Strategic Partnership Agreement was signed, he stated: 'We broke the Taliban's momentum. […] We devastated al Qaeda's leadership'. See: 'Text of Obama's Speech in Afghanistan', *New York Times*, 1 May 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/02/world/asia/text-obamas-speech-in-afghanistan.html?pagewanted=all.

103 Points informing this section emailed by a leading US counterinsurgency expert to the author in 2011.

104 An argument made to the author in emailed communication by a US security analyst advising the US military on ANSF development in September 2011. Also see Andy McNab, 'Taking Control In Afghanistan', *Financial Times*, Weekend Magazine, 28/29 April 2012.

105 See the leaked ISAF report, 'State Of The Taliban', Overview, *New York Times*, 6 January 2012, 2 (for example), http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/world/asia/23atwar-taliban-report-docviewer.html.

106 Author's interviews, Kabul, July 2011.

107 The problem of factionalism in the ANSF is central to the case studies examined by Christian Dennys and Tom Hamilton-Baillie. See 'Strategic Support to Security Sector Reform in Afghanistan, 2001-10, *Centre for International Governance Innovation*, Geneva, SSR Issue Papers: No 6, January 2012.

108 Email to the author, August 2011.

109 Comment emailed to the author, October 2011.

anarchy in the aftermath to the international military withdrawal. Levels of attrition are a significant problem, averaging 32 per cent over the twelve months ending November 2011.[110] Deaths, injuries and incapacitations account for a minority of losses, while the estimated 30 to 40 per cent of personnel who do not re-enlist at the end of their three-year contracts and 'soldiers abandoning their posts' make up the majority.[111] Moreover, because published statistics and actual numbers of serving soldiers may differ, the true size of the Afghan army is likely to be significantly smaller than officially estimated.[112]

By October 2012, the size of the ANSF is meant to reach a government-approved target of 352,000, but how this larger force would be maintained financially was increasingly under question by the end of 2011.[113] By early 2012, US and NATO officials were reportedly moving towards revising the target figure, possibly reducing it by as much as a third within a few years of the transition.[114]

A report by the US Government Accountability Office, based on assessments by NATO/ISAF and published in January 2011, disclosed that in September 2010, not one Afghan army unit was able to operate independently of US-led coalition forces.[115] In testimony to the US Senate Armed Services Committee in February 2012, the head of the US Defense Intelligence Agency informed the Committee that 'the Afghan army remains reliant on US and international forces for logistics, intelligence and transport' and that 'persistent and qualitative deficiencies in the armed and police forces' were undermining the effort to increase security.[116]

These evaluations of the ANSF endorse conclusions reached earlier by some regional analysts and diplomats that the security transition timeline is unrealistic, especially with regard to the state of the ANSF.[117] This view was expressed to the author by the ambassador of the Russian Federation, Andrey Avetsiyan,[118] who made an unfavourable comparison between US-led approaches to the development of the ANSF and those taken by the USSR before and after the Soviet invasion in 1979. Current training periods are, for example, much briefer than those of the Soviets. They are also increasingly focused on direct training during joint military operations.[119] This on-the-job training was designed to fast-track improvements to the morale and development of the ANSF and is based on an initial ratio of one international soldier to one Afghan soldier changing to a ratio of one to three as performance improves.[120] The international troop drawdown will have a negative effect on partnering ratios, which is at the forefront of concerns voiced by the current ISAF commander. Therefore, he stresses the need to cushion the drawdown by increasing the number of international military trainers and mentors from 2012.[121] Where these increased numbers of trainers and mentors will come from will be an issue at the Chicago summit in May 2012.

A further threat to ISAF training and mentoring of the ANSF is what ISAF refer to as 'ANSF-committed

110 See Graeme Smith, 'Canada's quest to turn Afghanistan's army of phantoms into fighters', *Globe and Mail*, 14 December 2011, http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/canadas-quest-to-turn-afghanistans-army-of-phantoms-into-fighters/article2271703/.
111 Ibid.
112 Ibid.
113 See 'Transition in Afghanistan: Looking Beyond 2014', *The World Bank*, 18 November 2011, Executive Summary, 2-3, http://siteresources.worldbank.org/AFGHANISTANEXTN/Resources/305984-1297184305854/AFTransition.pdf.
114 See Missy Ryan, 'Costs in doubt as NATO moves towards smaller Afghan force', *Reuters*, 16 January 2012, http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/01/16/us-usa-afghanistan-troops-idUSTRE80F19Z20120116.
115 See United States Government Accountability Office, *Afghan Army Growing, but Additional Trainers Needed; Long-term Costs Not Determined, Report to Congressional Addressees*, Highlights, 27 January 2011, http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-11-66. The methodology for such assessments by the US Government Accountability Office is apparently under periodic review, the author was informed in March 2012 by a military analyst in Washington.
116 See 'U.S. Intelligence official offers grim words on Afghanistan', *Los Angeles Times*, 16 February 2012, http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/world_now/2012/02/senior-us-intelligence-officials-offer-grim-words-on-afghanistan.html.
117 Vishal Chandra, Institute for Defence Studies & Analyses, New Delhi, questioned the state of preparedness within the ANSF for the transition at a conference in Stockholm in November 2011.
118 Author's interview, embassy of the Russian Federation, Kabul, 14 July 2011.
119 The tactic of partnering the ISAF and ANSF as a means of building ANA capacity goes back to 2006 and the introduction of operational mentoring and liaison teams but on more limited partnering ratios.
120 These ratio levels were provided by a former US advisor to NATO.
121 See Alissa J. Rubin, 'U.S. General in Afghanistan Says Troops May Stay Past 2014', *New York Times*, 22 December 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/21/world/asia/american-commander-in-afghanistan-john-allen-hints-at-post-2014-military-presence.html?pagewanted=all.

Fraticide-Murders'.[122] In the first three months of 2012 alone, sixteen NATO service members have been killed by Afghan soldiers, police or militants disguised in their uniforms,[123] a trend that intensified following the burning of copies of the Quran by US military personnel at Bagram in February. This has dealt a possibly fatal blow to the basis of trust on which sustaining any future mentoring arrangement would depend that is sufficiently robust.

While the ANA are central to plans for post-transition security, an augmented Afghan Local Police (ALP) force is also intended to contribute to the 'Hold' stage of the COIN equation by pushing back the insurgency in rural areas.[124] Critics of this plan highlight the frequent overlaps between the community *shuras* that are supposed to appoint the ALP and local powerholders with close links to militias. They are also concerned that the Interior Ministry, which would nominally have authority over the ALP, has weak systems of command and control. Fears that the ALP could be easily infiltrated by insurgents, conveyed to the author by Afghan respondents in 2011, appear to be being borne out by events.[125] Representatives of security ministries, civil society actors and even tribal elders have repeatedly raised strong concerns over the ALP. According to one senior (Tajik) MoI officer who, based on his past experience of militias operating outside any form of control, had opposed the ALP plan early on, the north of the country has re-armed and there were no prospects for more Japanese funding for disarmament in the post-transition future. He wondered how Afghanistan ever could free itself from the grip of illegal commanders and good governance be built in villages where illegal armed groups and the ALP are situated. He concluded that the government does not have the resources to deal with either challenge.[126]

Diverse concerns about different sections of the ANSF were cited by many of those interviewed. The overriding question however remains one of morale, and how many in the ANSF will be willing or able to fight after the transition. This question received an unsettling answer from one respondent[127]: 'Some armies have ideological motivation and/or professional motivation. We have neither.' In the absence of ideology, he continued, the main reason for rank and file recruitment into the ANA was the incentive of a regular salary. 'If the US cut off the salary and food to the ANA today,' he concluded, 'they would disappear'.[128]

2.8 Changing Approaches to the Criteria for Transition

The security transition process was initially designed as 'conditions-based' by NATO. In theory the selection for each area entering the hand-over process is based on their meeting the governance and development criteria agreed by NATO and the Government of Afghanistan. Verbal references to a 'conditions based' transition process have decreased as the political imperative to shift combat responsibility to the Afghans has became more insistent.[129]

The 'Joint Framework For *Inteqal*',[130] agreed by the international community and the Afghan government at the 2010 Kabul conference, does not refer to the transition process being

122 See an unclassified military report. Jeffrey Bordin, 'A Crisis of Trust and Cultural Incompatibility: A Red Team Study of Mutual Perceptions of Afghan National Security Personnel and U.S. soldiers in Understanding and Mitigating the Phenomena of ANSF-committed Fraticide-Murders', [ISAF, Kabul], 12 May 2011, http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB370/docs/Document%2011.pdf (Red Teams are a research structure of ISAF), and Sami Kovanem and Amador Guallar, 'The Rising Danger of Insurgent Infiltration within Afghanistan's National Security Forces and Government: Methods, Tactics and Influences', *Indicium Consulting*, April 2012.

123 See 'New security for US troops in Afghanistan to guard against Afghan insider threats', *Associated Press*, 29 March 2012, http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2012/03/28/new-security-for-us-troops-in-afghanistan/.

124 From mid-2011 Regional Command North ordered the PRT in Mazar-e Sharif to set up the 'Critical Infrastructure Protection Project' in three districts. This involves militia type structures in addition to the ALP that will be transitioned to the flimsy command and control of the Interior Ministry in the future, according to a former Swedish Political Advisor to the PRT.

125 Farooq Jan Mangal and Matthew Rosenberg, 'Afghan Militia Member Drugs and Kills Colleagues', *New York Times*, 30 March 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/31/world/asia/afghan-militia-member-drugs-kills-colleagues.html.

126 Author's interview with senior MoI official, Kabul, July, 2012.

127 Ibid.

128 Ibid. See also Anthony Cordesman's comments on the ANSF in his paper for an Aspen Institute conference, Berlin 2012, 123, http://www.aspeninstitute.de/en/publication/download/30/Sustainable+Strategies+for+Afghanistan+and+the+Region+after+2014-Conference+Papers.pdf.

129 NATO sources made this point to the author on the back of statements during 2010-2011 by NATO member state ministers to the North Atlantic Council.

130 The Dari translation of 'transition'.

'conditions-based', but cites instead 'assessment', 'milestones', 'mutually-agreed criteria' and 'conditions in place'. On the basis of these and other official references by NATO to the security, governance and development criteria agreed between the Afghan government and NATO,[131] it was widely assumed that security, governance and development conditions, though set at minimal ('good enough') levels, would underpin the transition and ensure a sufficiently stable aftermath.[132]

Competing approaches to transition have however become apparent through contradictory statements by military and civilian actors. Verbal references by politicians and NATO civilian representatives to a conditions-based transition process decreased from late 2010 as the political imperative to transfer combat responsibility to the Afghans has become more insistent.[133] Nonetheless US military commanders continued to refer to the transition being conditions-based well into 2011, illustrating that some senior figures still saw it primarily as a result of a successful and ongoing COIN campaign.[134] Consequently they had sought to avoid any diversion of resources from the military campaign into the transition process.[135]

Governance and development are seen by NATO as secondary to its key task of setting the conditions for the security handover.[136] This begs the question of who is intended to ensure that governance and development criteria are met during and after the transition. The Afghan government has repeatedly demonstrated its apparent inability to implement governance reforms and the restoration of Afghan sovereignty will irreversibly diminish the ability of the international community to influence developments in domestic politics, including the appointment of 'malign actors' to political office.[137] This, combined with indications that funding lines from leading donors are decreasing faster than anticipated,[138] gives a hollow ring to international assertions that adequate levels of governance reform and development will be in place to support the irreversibility of the transition.

A senior NATO officer commented off the record that what he saw as the politically driven transition timeline was in conflict with NATO's Operational Plan (OPLAN) for its evolving campaign in Afghanistan. The OPLAN comprises five phases: 'Assessment and Preparation', 'Geographical Expansion', 'Stabilisation', 'Transition' and finally 'Redeployment,' when troops would either return home or be re-deployed in a new mission. Under the OPLAN, as regions enter one of the five phases of the official transition plan, they move from Stabilisation into Transition. In actuality however the Stabilisation phase is being shortened to expedite the implementation of the official transition process according to or ahead of timetable. This was seen by the NATO officer as being driven by external political imperatives disconnected from local Afghan realities assessed by ISAF.

According to NATO's SCR, identification of areas ready for inclusion in the official transition process are arrived at via an 'exhaustive', district-by-district

131 The criteria for transition defined in a NATO factsheet, 'NATO's role in Afghanistan' require that ANSF under effective Afghan civilian control 'will be capable of tackling existing and new security challenges, with continued support from ISAF. Transition assessments will also consider the ability and authority of the Afghan government to provide the rule of law and manage public administration at sub-national and local levels; and the capacity of an area to sustain socio-economic development'.

132 See for example UK House of Commons paper on 'Afghanistan: The Timetable for Security Transition', Standard Note SN/1A/5851, *House of Commons Library*, 11 May 2011, 7-8, that explains the transition process to British MPs, www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/SN05851.pdf.

133 NATO sources made this point to the author on the back of statements during 2010-11 by NATO member state ministers to the North Atlantic Council.

134 See 'Hearing To Receive Testimony On The Situation In Afghanistan', General David Petraeus's testimony to the US Senate Armed Services Commission, 15 March 2011, and General Rodriguez, 9 July 2011 briefing to Pentagon correspondents that transition 'will continue to be conditions based'. 'Department of Defense News Briefing with Lt. Gen. Rodriguez from the Pentagon', US Department of Defense, 1 February 2011, http://www.defense.gov/Transcripts/Transcript.aspx?TranscriptID=4764.

135 According to emailed correspondence with the author from a senior source in NATO HQ, Brussels, September 2011.

136 Author's interview with a member of the NATO SCR office, Kabul, July 2011.

137 See Dipali Mukhopadhyay, 'Warlord as Governor in Afghanistan', in: Wolfgang Danspeckgruber, ed, *Liechtenstein Colloquium Report*, Vol 5, 2011. Mukhopadhyay argues that international attempts to impose Weberian concepts of statebuilding in Afghanistan are ultimately futile.

138 For Afghanistan's single biggest donor, the US, this is reportedly due to decisions taken by a US Congress that is increasingly losing interest in Afghanistan.

assessment which places each province on a scale from 'most difficult' to 'most benign'.[139] This process, updated every two months, is based on the state of the insurgency, the capability of the ANSF and the state of governance in each area. In terms of governance, the assessment examines how local people see governance, whether the *Tashkil*[140] is filled, the presence of corrupt actors, the effectiveness of the local administration and the delivery of basic services. This process may be informative but a fundamental constraint is that the very criteria for transition ignore the subverting effects of the continuing absence of any meaningful central government reform agenda.[141] This point was repeatedly made to the author by former and current senior MoI representatives.[142]

The gap between Afghan realities and officials rhetoric was implicitly recognised in the SCR's comment that '[w]e have to make the facts on the ground work, which will be challenging in many places.'[143] The NATO SCR also made it clear when interviewed that NATO was stuck with a timeline that member states had no intention of changing: ISAF has 'a political mandate until the end of 2014, it does not go beyond that.'[144]

The areas selected for the first tranche of the official transition process were relatively stable and already under the *de facto* control of Afghan security forces. They clearly reflected the 'most benign' end of the NATO assessment scale.[145]

According to NATO sources consulted since interviewing the SCR,[146] however, plans for phase two of the security transition are 'much more concise, much more practical and much more minimalistic'. The second phase has expanded the transition process into more insecure provinces such as Ghazni, Wardak and Badghis.[147] Expanding the transition process into insecure areas will continue under the third phase which is expected to be announced at the May NATO summit.

The rationale for moving more quickly than planned into 'most difficult' areas is linked to the ISAF commander's mandate to execute the transition in the knowledge that he will have lost 33,000 US troops by July 2012. By expediting the security transfer to Afghan forces in these areas, ANSF abilities can be tested and backup provided while the maximum number of international combat troops and resources are still available.[148] How the ANSF will manage these more challenging areas in the near future is another matter.

Representatives of NATO, the UN, the US and the Afghan government continue to report that conditions are in place to complete the transition by the end of 2014,[149] labelling transition as 'irreversible'.[150] International media reports questioning the viability of the transition timeline, however, started to surface following a spate of attacks on international targets in Kabul in the second half of 2011.[151]

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139 Author's interview with Simon Gass, NATO Senior Civilian Representative, HQ ISAF, Kabul, 16 July 2011.
140 Tashkil is the Dari term for the GoA's official payroll. Literally it means 'structure'.
141 See 'The Insurgency in Afghanistan's Heartland', *International Crisis Group*, Asia Report No 207, 27 June 2011, i.
142 Despite the diplomatic language in its final conclusions the lack of reform was also a major issue at the latest international conference on Afghanistan in December 2011. See the full text here: http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/cae/servlet/contentblob/603684/publicationFile/162762/Conference_Conclusions_-_International_Afghanistan_Conference_Bonn_2011_engl.pdf.
143 Author's interview with the NATO SCR, HQ ISAF, Kabul, 16 July 2011.
144 Ibid. The political mandate referred to is the November 2010 Lisbon Summit Declaration, see full text here: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_68828.htm.
145 See a series of seven AAN blogs on these initial transition areas. One in particular shows how local administrative boundaries were doctored in order to achieve a more positive picture, see Fabrizio Foschini, 'The Enteqal Seven (2): Around Mehtarlam, an "insurgency corridor" in the making', *Afghanistan Analysts Network blog*, 10 May 2011, http://www.aan-afghanistan.org/index.asp?id=2502.
146 Author's interview with NATO SCR, Kabul, 16 July 2011.
147 See 'Afghanistan to announce handover of Helmand and 16 other provinces', *The Telegraph*, 26 October 2011, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/afghanistan/8850484/Afghanistan-to-announce-handover-of-Helmand-and-16-other-provinces.html.
148 See Ignatius, 'How quick…' [see FN 37].
149 See Mullen testimony [see FN 6]. On 30 September 2011, President Obama reiterated to the US Congress that 'the strategy for winding down the war remained unchanged'.
150 'NATO's role in Afghanistan', undated NATO Factsheet seen by the author in 2011.
151 Julius Cavendish, 'US embassy attack raises doubts over Kabul police', *The Independent*, 15 September 2011, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/us-embassy-attack-raises-doubts-over-kabul-police-2354925.html; John Wendle, 'Inside the Kabul Firefight: Can Afghanistan Take on the Taliban Alone?' *Time*, 15 September 2011, http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2093392,00.html.

These left the US and NATO struggling to maintain a credible narrative on the feasibility of the security transition as fears intensified within and beyond Afghanistan that the country is heading towards a widening civil war,[152] and that 'Afghanistan is being handed back to the Afghans, for better or for worse.'[153]

3. CHALLENGES FOR STABLE GOVERNMENT BEYOND TRANSITION

3.1 Managing Regional and Afghan Perspectives

NATO and its member states have several audiences to convince about the transition: their domestic constituencies, the Afghan people and regional actors. Messages intended to reassure one audience can reverberate negatively with another. President Obama's announcement on the timing of the troop drawdown, for example, was primarily directed at US domestic opinion, but it heightened Afghan uncertainty about the future, provided grounds for the Taleban to wait out the transition process in the expectation that power would return to them when it was over and led regional actors to adjust their policies on Afghanistan.

NATO representatives and Western diplomats have repeatedly stated that the security transition does not amount to a strategy for a complete international exit and that there will be no repeat of the West's abandonment of Afghanistan in 1989.[154] These statements were apparently made in the hope that a post-2014 US military presence in Afghanistan would result in a more constructive relationship between Afghanistan and its neighbours.[155] Regional actors have not been convinced and the security transition is widely perceived as an exit strategy, not least because NATO's drawdown will be accompanied by a diminishing engagement by Afghanistan's biggest aid donors who are also leading NATO member states.

Afghan pride has been assuaged by the restoration of sovereignty that transition will deliver, despite a widespread lack of confidence in the government's ability to provide security, governance and development. The Afghans interviewed for this paper saw the speed of the transition as a clear signal of NATO's determination to extract itself from the Afghan quagmire, no matter what the circumstances. Hardening ethnic divisions have added to Afghan fears that should events go out of control this could lead to a war of all against all.[156] One example is that the northern-linked political opposition to the central government has once again formed along ethnic lines.[157]

Afghan media professionals are increasingly concerned that the media will become 'yet another tool for the promotion of intolerance.'[158] They point to the fact that religious conservatives who are already using the *ulama shura* (council of clerics) as a means of exerting pressure on the independent media, are moving into governing the television, radio and print media. Furthermore, Afghan suspicions of increasing regional interference in the Afghan media, with regional actors funding media outlets to exert their influence over Afghan public opinion, is increasingly apparent.[159]

Afghan frustrations with the international presence have undoubtedly built up over the years. In great

152 Matthew Green, 'Hurtling down Afghanistan's road to perdition', *Financial Times*, 26 September 2011, http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/7c25c174-e515-11e0-9aa8-00144feabdc0.html; Citha D. Maaß and Thomas Ruttig, Is Afghanistan on the Brink of a New Civil War? Possible Scenarios and Influencing Factors in the Transition Process, *SWP Berlin*, August 2011, http://www.swp-berlin.org/en/products/swp-comments-en/swp-aktuelle-details/article/afghanistan_neuer_buergerkrieg.html.

153 Author's interview with senior official of international humanitarian organisation, Kabul, May 2011.

154 Such statements were at the forefront of international messages delivered at the December 2011 Bonn conference, for example, The US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's statement 5 December 2011 at the Bonn conference. See also Rubin, 'U.S. could remain…' [see FN 121].

155 According to a US specialist on the region based in Washington.

156 A prominent view amongst the Afghan civil society and ANSF representatives interviewed by the author in Kabul, July 2011.

157 See Thomas Ruttig, 'Coalition or National Front: Two opposition alliance put Jamiat in a dilemma', *Afghanistan Analysts Network blog*, 4 January 2012, http://www.aan- afghanistan.org/index.asp?id=2418.

158 See Shirazuddin Siddiqi, 'Afghan media sector's policy considerations', *BBC World Service Trust*, October 2011.

159 Ibid. Afghan suspicions about regional funding for media outlets was also emphasised by an Afghan journalist at a symposium on Afghan youth and the future of Afghanistan organised by the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan in Stockholm, November 2011.

part due to a growing dependency culture and incomprehension of the inability of the world's most powerful countries to prevent deteriorating security, poor governance, increasing impunity and a strengthening insurgency that has been facilitated by access to safe havens in Pakistan. Afghan perceptions of the international presence are also influenced by memories of the CIA's role in supporting and funding *mujahedin* groups during the 1980s.[160]

There is now a commonly-held belief in Afghanistan that the West has provided direct support to the Taleban and has a hidden agenda to bring them back to suit strategic ends divorced from Afghan interests.[161] This belief is held across ethnic lines and within Afghan institutions,[162] and can even be inferred from some of President Karzai's speeches.[163] While such views are easily dismissed by non-Afghans as outlandish conspiracy theories, they make sense to Afghans in light of their direct observations and experiences.

3.2 Different Interpretations of Security

A credible narrative on positive prospects for the transition must first establish grounds for optimism. In this regard, perceptions that the Afghan security situation is improving, in the short-term at any rate, are pivotal.

ISAF findings that the number of insurgent attacks had begun to decrease from May 2011 were cited by General Petraeus as he departed Afghanistan not long after seeing them. By September, however, the 'overall' security trends estimated in the UN Secretary-General's report on the situation in Afghanistan, suggested that the year-on-year growth in overall security incidents had increased by 39 per cent.[164] Analysis of the security situation by the Afghan NGO Security Office (ANSO) in 2011 also questioned the basis for NATO/ISAF claims that security trendlines had started to improve.[165]

These variations in findings made over comparable periods of time are partly due to the different methodologies employed by ISAF, the UN and ANSO in analysing security data. ISAF only records violent security incidents that involve them directly. In assessing operating conditions on the ground in terms of access by UN Agencies and NGOs, the UN and ANSO record security incidents against non-military targets that provide a wider picture of the overall security situation. While military volatility decreased in 2011, security incidents affecting civilians increased.[166] This trend has not changed and though the military dynamics have improved in ISAF's favour, the continuing perception of increasing insecurity is fuelled by the

160 See Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan and Bin Laden*, Penguin books, 2004, and George Crile, *Charlie Wilson's War*, Grove Press, New York, 2004.

161 According to a senior UNAMA political analyst these perceptions are not just held by Pashtuns but also by the Tajik dominated National Directorate for Security (NDS). This is confirmed by another Kabul-based independent security analyst regularly consulted by leading donors. The security incident in Dara district in the Panjshir valley on 9 July 2011 that involved a US PRT convoy being stopped by a NDS member who then killed a US soldier and US civilian was interpreted by security analysts within the context of a growing perception within the NDS that the US was assisting the Taliban. See also, Vanessa M Gezari, 'The Secret Alliance', *The New Republic*, 19 August 2011, http://www.tnr.com/article/world/magazine/92775/taliban-conspiracy-theory.

162 During visits to Kandahar the author was repeatedly informed by Afghans of an 'American- backed Taliban' as early as 2004. Such views have now spread throughout the country according to senior officers in the Interior ministry, political analysts and civil society representatives interviewed in July 2011.

163 In Karzai's speech to the 'Traditional Loya Jirga' called in November to Kabul to discuss the long-term strategic partnership with the US, he stated, '[i]f they want military facilities, we are ready to give them, but Afghanistan, its vision, its interests, should be clear'. See Alissa J Rubin, 'Karzai Details Vision for Long-Term Partnership With U.S.', *New York Times*, 16 November 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/17/world/asia/karzai-pushes-partnership-with-us-as-afghan-elders-convene.html.

164 There were fewer security incidents in July (2,605) and August (2,306) than in June (2,626). As at the end of August, the average monthly number of incidents for 2011 was 2,108, up 39 per cent compared with the same period in 2010. The UNDSS statistics on security incidents have continued to decline below the levels of the second half 2010 and first half 2011, but remain higher than the first half of 2010 according to a security expert in UN headquarters. See United Nations, 'The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security', Report of the Secretary-General, 21 September 2011, http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N11/498/72/PDF/N1149872.pdf?OpenElement.

165 ANSO's different line was widely reported by the media at the time and was confirmed by the director of ANSO, Nic Lee, in an interview with the author, Kabul, July 2011.

166 See 'Afghanistan Mid Year Report 2011 Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict', *UNAMA*, July 2011, http://unama.unmissions.org/Portals/UNAMA/Documents/2011%20Midyear%20POC.pdf, and United Nations, 'The situation in Afghanistan…' [see FN 164].

increase in civilian casualties, the militarisation of the countryside and the growing sense of a generalised preparedness to use violence.[167] In the eyes of the Afghan population, these factors count for more than the ISAF-versus-Taleban security incident ratio.

The downward trend in violent security incidents in the south of Afghanistan reported by ISAF from June 2011 was put in context by an independent security analyst consulted by the author. He agreed that there had been a significant decrease in incidents in the south from mid-2011, particularly in Helmand and Kandahar provinces, which was sustained over the following months. He attributed these developments to the intensified tempo of military COIN operations from 2010 which yielded explosives, weapons, ammunition and narcotics. The downward trend may also have been linked to the start of the 2011 poppy planting season, which diverts fighters from the battlefield.[168] But he doubted the sustainability of the security gains this represented. Amongst other factors, the steady flow of materials for making improvised explosive devices (IED) across the Pakistani border virtually ensures that IED and suicide-IED attacks will continue at a high rate.[169]

Another factor adversely affecting prospects for future security is the assassination campaign conducted by the Taleban against Afghan government officials and the ANSF. This has intensified and expanded since 2010, to cover the whole country,[170] targeting not only high- and mid-level officials, but also low-level government employees and their families, affiliates and supporters. Other than assassinations of high-profile victims, these attacks tend to be largely ignored by ISAF, possibly because they are under-reported by the ANSF.[171] This intensified assassination campaign may indicate that ISAF is no longer the primary target for the insurgent opposition to the Afghan government. Not all assassinations of government officials can be clearly attributed to the Taleban however, underlining the complexity of a security situation that too often is over-simplified.[172]

Beyond disputed interpretations of the military security situation, the critical question is whether the effects of an intensified COIN campaign have built a strategic momentum that can be sustained by the Afghan security forces in the future. The likelihood that once ISAF has departed, the insurgency will be renewed where it was suppressed has informed the increased US emphasis on continuing its military presence after the transition discussed above. Whether a future US military presence will contribute to Afghan stability or become hostage to an increasingly hostile security environment remains to be seen.

3.3 The Economic Outlook

The most immediate impact of the transition for many Afghans will be the negative effects on the economy should the international military withdrawal be accompanied by a continued decline in development aid. Evidence from other countries suggests that this may be the case. Aid for Bosnia, for example, fell rapidly after NATO forces withdrew in 2004, from a peak of about 57 per cent of Gross National Income (GNI) in 1995 to 8 per cent in 2004. Levels of aid immediately after East Timor became independent in 2002 were around 70 per cent of GNI, declining steadily 10 per cent over the next five years.[173] The outcomes of two upcoming international conferences on Afghanistan's future - in Chicago in May, and in Tokyo in July – will show whether Afghanistan is going to be viewed by donors as a special case in which drastic aid reductions can be avoided in the wake of military withdrawal.

Regardless of the outcomes of these conferences, levels of funding are already being reduced. By 2011 many donors were already talking about cuts to aid programmes in Afghanistan in 2014 and

167 The preparedness to use violence was a conclusion reached by one highly experienced security expert on Afghanistan who travelled to all main regions of the country in February 2012.
168 The UN attributed the continuing decline into 2012 to factors that included the very harsh winter of 2011-12 and the intense COIN campaign. See section on 'Security' in United Nations, 'The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security', Report of the Secretary-General, 5 March 2012, http://unama.unmissions.org/Portals/UNAMA/SG%20Reports/SG%20Report%20to%20the%20Security%20Council-March%202012.pdf.
169 Information emailed in October 2011 from an experienced security analyst in Kabul consulted by leading donors.
170 See Michael Hart, 'West's Afghan Hopes Collide with Reality', *The National Interest*, 28 February 2012, http://nationalinterest.org/article/wests-afghan-hopes-collide-reality-6510.
171 Ibid.
172 For example, Mayor Hamedi of Kandahar city is believed to have been killed as a result of business interests, possibly in tandem with the Taleban, possibly not – according to emailed communications from a well-placed source in ISAF HQ in early 2012.
173 All figures provided in response to author's emailed enquiries during 2011 by the World Bank office in Kabul.

beyond.[174] USAID, Afghanistan's biggest single donor, had already made sharp cuts to its budget, which peaked in 2010 at USD 4.1 billion before almost halving in 2011 (USD 2.5 billion).[175] The 2010 peak corresponded with the 'surge' in military operations that were concentrated on the south-west of the country. According to sources in Washington and Kabul, USAID's downward budgetary trajectory is expected to continue, 'almost certainly' going down to around USD 1 billion after the election year of 2012.[176]

An experienced EU official sees current levels of aid as unsustainable, noting that 'the EU is putting around EUR 1 billion in aid into Afghanistan every year. The US gives more or less triple that amount in aid. And whilst I believe our aid will continue for the next few years – if nothing else, as compensation for our military pull-out – it is difficult to see how we can sustain it in the long-run.'[177] This assessment was endorsed in a 2011 World Bank briefing on the economic outlook in the context of the transition. It expected a downturn in funding levels and warned that 'violent fluctuations [...] especially abrupt aid cutoffs are extremely damaging and destabilising.'[178]

In addition to declining levels of aid, a major concern remains the Afghan government's inability to effectively disburse the aid it does receive,[179] due to limited absorptive capacity, lack of capacity in line ministries, bureaucratic inefficiencies and corruption. Government representatives stress that donor conditionalities and the complex reporting procedures donors demand are also relevant. Although at the 2010 Kabul conference donors pledged to increase the proportion of their aid delivered through the central budget, this was conditional on the government making improvements in transparency, accountability and effective anti-corruption measures. But the challenges in providing effective oversight of development aid may increase after the transition. Rent-seeking and corruption are likely to worsen and focus more on foreign aid as NATO/ISAF sources of finance dry up with the completion of the transition.[180]

Significant funding shortfalls are predicted after 2014, just as the Afghan government is scheduled to take over responsibility for security and the management of the counterinsurgency.[181] The government will remain dependent on external funding for resourcing the ANSF, which currently costs around USD 8 billion a year.[182] The government's core budget, which stood at USD 3.4 billion in 2011, is significantly funded by aid resources. This includes an externally-funded development budget and an operating budget which is not fully covered by domestic revenue. Even assuming best-case scenarios, this presents 'an unmanageable fiscal gap' for future Afghan governments.[183] The historical lesson provided by the stop of Soviet military and financial support to Afghanistan in 1992, which precipitated the collapse of the Najibullah regime, probably informs US attempts to muster a shared approach by donors in shouldering the future financial burden for the ANSF that will be an issue further discussed at the upcoming NATO summit in Chicago.[184]

In the context of a continued decline in aid, maintaining even the appearance of progress in the Afghan government's national priority programmes could be problematic. The services currently delivered by the central government are largely co-ordinated by a 'second civil service' comprising about 6,500 external consultants, national project staff and civil servants receiving

174 According to diplomatic sources interviewed by the author, Kabul, July 2011.
175 Figures provided to the author by the US embassy, Kabul, by email in 2011.
176 According to information from sources in the US embassy, Kabul provided in mid-October. Subsequent press reports in early November endorse these views.
177 Paul Turner, speech [see FN 43].
178 World Bank, Executive Summary [see FN 113], 1.
179 In the last Afghan fiscal year (ending 20 March 2011) reportedly the Afghan government was able to disburse about USD 937 million, or just 40 per cent of its original development budget of about USD 2.3 billion. That sum is derived from previous years of development aid that the GOA has rolled over, budget after budget. See 'For Afghanistan's government, getting foreign money to build desperately needed roads, schools, wells and clinics isn't the hard part. Spending it is', *Associated Press*, 26 May 2011.
180 For a brief overview of the threat corruption poses to the viability of the Afghan state, see Barbara J Stapleton, 'Corruption Should Be Addressed Structurally, Including The Security And Justice Sectors', in *Afghanistan 2011-2014 and beyond: from support operations to sustainable peace*, EU Institute for Security Studies and Carnegie Endowment, Joint Report, June 2011.
181 See Julian Borger, 'Afghanistan faces $4bn defense funding shortfall', *Guardian*, 1 December 2011, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/dec/01/afghanistan-faces-defence-funding-shortfall.
182 Ibid.
183 World Bank [see FN 113].
184 According to a security expert interviewed in London in April, 2012 the US is proposing covering USD 2 billion of resource costs for the ANSF and is looking to the wider donor community and the Afghan government to cover the remainder of the shortfall.

higher salaries than those working in *tashkil* positions.[185] These salaries, topped up by donor funds, are unlikely to be maintained. The reduction of donor support for salary funding in line ministries and central agencies, such as the Ministry of Finance, is predicted to lead to the resignation of highly qualified staff and consequent falls in performance.[186] A risk analysis drafted by the Independent Directorate for Local Governance (IDLG), the government body responsible for subnational governance, also raises concerns over the impact of the transition on subnational governance capacity. If the ANSF and the justice system prove unable to provide adequate security for government officials, subnational civil service positions are likely to remain vacant.

Given the overall climate of donor exhaustion and the global financial crisis, should transition lead to the bursting of what some see as a bubble economy, some of the funding shortfalls will have to be bridged by internal growth.[187] Such growth as Afghanistan has experienced in recent years is fuelled by private consumption. Private investment on which job creation and long-term growth depends, remains 'abysmally low', and private sector investment stood at only 4.3 per cent of Afghanistan's GDP in 2009.[188] The exploitation of mineral resources, including large copper and iron ore deposits,[189] is unlikely to provide the Afghan government with a financial substitute for aid in the short to medium term, given the obstacles posed by insecurity, limited infrastructure and corruption. Furthermore, World Bank analysis concludes that the transition and its concomitant decline in aid expenditure will have negative implications for the growth of Afghanistan's service sectors - transport, construction and security - which account for 53.6 per cent of GDP and have been the main drivers of licit economic growth. This contraction will affect employment and impact negatively on a range of businesses, from mobile phone cards to the commercial media. Afghanistan's nascent middle class will be particularly vulnerable.

3.4 The Banking Crisis

The Kabul Bank scandal,[190] discussed in Section 2.4, resulted in an erosion of public confidence in the commercial, banking and trade sectors, a rapid decline in domestic investment and capital flight. This has serious implications for a country in which the private sector is designated as the engine of economic growth and which is in process of developing a functional banking sector in order to move away from a cash economy.

The development of a banking sector primarily depends on confidence, regulation and transparent operations. To be effective in Afghanistan's risk-laden environment, regulations would need to be proclaimed and rigorously supervised by the central bank. But the central bank lacks appropriate capacity, the banking sector is controlled by unqualified individuals who lack any understanding of how banks operate but are allegedly linked to powerbrokers and structural institutional flaws make reforms unlikely to succeed.

In the event that the Afghan banking sector crashes, technical solutions are available to restore it and return it as a driver for growth, but success in this would largely depend on the political direction taken.[191] The current situation is not only putting the brakes on the development of the licit economy, but also strengthening the war economy in many ways, not least because many Afghans are retreating to the informal economy where transactions are not subject to tax.[192] Immediate reforms are necessary if the prospect of the country continuing its trajectory towards economic insolvency is to be avoided.

185 World Bank, 2011, 'Governance and the Public Sector in Afghanistan', http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/SOUTHASIAEXT/EXTSAREGTOPPRISECDEV/0,,contentMDK:20584869~menuPK:496677~pagePK:34004173~piPK:34003707~theSitePK:496671,00.html.

186 Draft 'Transition Risk Analysis IDLG Governance Implications', *IDLG*, Kabul, 2 October 2011. This is an unclassified document and was most probably drafted by a US advisor to the Independent Directorate for Local Governance (IDLG).

187 This has developed on the back of increasing numbers of ISAF forces, the need for more infrastructure and services including resupply plus the high levels of development aid now going into decline.

188 Figures cited confirmed in email exchanges with the author by economists in the World Bank office in Kabul during 2011.

189 Terry Atlas, 'Afghanistan's Embattled Helmand Region Holds Rare-Earth Elements', *Bloomberg*, 14 September 2011, http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-09-14/afghanistan-s-embattled-helmand-region-holds-rare-earth-elements.html.

190 For a full account see Dexter Filkins, 'The Afghan Bank Heist', *The New Yorker*, 14 February 2011, http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2011/02/14/110214fa_fact_filkins.

191 This point was stressed in an interview with an independent Afghan economist with the author, July 2011.

192 Author's interview with Afghan economic advisor, Kabul, July 2011.

3.5 Opium Production

The corrosive effects of the narcotics trade on state-building and attempts to end the war economy are widely recognised. In its October 2011 report on opium cultivation in Afghanistan, the UN Office of Drugs and Crime stated that insecurity, lack of agricultural assistance and an expected increase in the value of opium were the key factors in a seven per cent increase in the amount of land under opium cultivation.[193] The main problems in the agricultural sector have not changed over the last decades: lack of infrastructure; problems with the maintenance of irrigation infrastructure; marketing difficulties for fresh produce; lack of improved seeds, particularly for wheat; drought over the last several years. Afghanistan remains a food deficit country but lacks the resources and infrastructure to purchase and distribute imported food. Under these circumstances, the drug sector will continue to provide a livelihood for many Afghans and will continue to grow in importance because of the lack of alternative sources of income.[194]

The negative economic impacts associated with the transition, discussed in Section 3.3, are likely to significantly increase the importance of the narcotics trade and other aspects of the informal economy. This will make it more difficult to develop the licit economy and strengthen the position of those who benefit from the war economy and want it to continue. Following the withdrawal of the bulk of international forces, the ability of the Afghan government alone to check this trend must be seen within the context of structural corruption at all levels of government including the police.

4. CONSEQUENCES OF THE TRANSITION

4.1 The Side-Effects of Closing PRTs

The closure of PRTs[195] fundamentally alters the financial and political support that donors provide to the Afghan government at provincial and district levels.[196] During transition, PRTs will 'evolve, re-invest and phase out',[197] shifting their focus from service delivery to building the capacity of Afghan institutions, where they exist, in support of transition objectives.[198] PRT-led projects and activities are already being transferred to the Afghan government, private sector and civil society, and to humanitarian and development organisations. This has happened at the same time as the sharp drop in donor funding has forced the Afghan government to radically revise its subnational development strategy.[199] For example, USAID funding for its primary programme for increasing the capacity of municipal officials, improving municipal service delivery and supporting economic growth initiatives[200] was cut by 60 per cent in 2011.[201]

A significant side-effect of PRT closure for donors and for the civilian advisors they employ for development, governance and stabilisation objectives will be a reduction in access in some parts of the country to more accurate information about conditions beyond the main urban centres and regional commands.[202] So far, ISAF/NATO has provided localised information from its areas of operations on matters of mutual concern to military and humanitarian actors, in compliance with international humanitarian law.[203] Its ability to do so will disappear with the closure of PRTs and FOBs. If the assumption that the withdrawal of international forces will, in effect, remove the *casus belli* and result in decreased violence and

193 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Ministry of Counter Narcotics, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2011*.
194 This section of the report is informed by discussions with Doris Buddenberg, former UNODC representative in Afghanistan, initially in Berlin, October 2011 and subsequently by email.
195 For an overview of the evolving role of PRTs see Stapleton, 'A Means To What End?' [see FN 15].

196 CERP funding is expected to decline in 2012 according to US embassy sources in Kabul.
197 'Statement of Intent, NATO/ISAF Principles of and Guidelines for PRT Evolution', *NATO*, 9 June 2011.
198 An approach that some PRTs had been incorporating since 2008.
199 This may force the Afghan government to develop a more realistic sub-national strategy but time is short and donor support for building governance capacity takes on greater strategic importance in view of the transition.
200 Regional Afghan Municipalities Program for Urban Populations (RampUp).
201According to a senior Afghan official in the IDLG interviewed by the author in Germany, November 2011.
202 The effect of the reduction in situational awareness was evident for example in an early case of withdrawal by the German Provincial Advisory Team (a kind of mini-PRT) in Taloqan. See: Marcel Häßler, 'The Quran burnings and the German retreat from Taloqan', *Afghanistan Analysts Network blog*, 26 February 2012, http://www.aan-afghanistan.org/index.asp?id=2556.
203 It was stressed in related interviews to the author that where such bilateral exchanges were utilised in the interests of accessing beneficiaries, exchanges with NATO/ISAF were conducted by operationally-experienced humanitarian actors, able to manage the civil-military interface and avoid any blurring of lines.

more access by civilian actors proves to be correct, this will not be a significant loss. But this is by no means certain. Should violence continue and power fragment further, accurate information may be even harder to come by.

The need for a more accurate understanding of local political developments and opportunities became increasingly clear to some NATO member states as COIN objectives increasingly dominated the international strategy in Afghanistan, beginning from 2008. The resourcing of field-led stabilisation processes allowed a more nuanced understanding of Afghan needs and constraints to reach some NATO member state capitals. Above all else, progress made in political stabilisation at local levels had resulted from having the flexibility to accommodate Afghan timelines. These lessons emphasised by former British stabilisation advisors to the Helmand PRT in interviews with the author contrast with current hopes that the imposition of a brief transition timeline will force the Afghan government somehow to improve its governance efforts at subnational levels.[204] Afghan interviewees do not view this hope as realistic, nor do they think Afghan civil society sufficiently developed or organised to fill the looming governance vacuum to which the closure of PRTs will contribute. As some PRTs have coordinated service delivery and development efforts, their closure worries many of the Afghans interviewed. Some expressed concern about the end of provision by PRTs of basic equipment and maintenance costs for local government offices. Respondents had little confidence in the government's ability to bridge their absence in this and other regards including service delivery. The loss of PRT-related jobs was also seen as adding to the negative economic effects of the transition.

Concerns about the potentially negative impact of PRT closure were also highlighted in the IDLG's 'Transition Risk Analysis'.[205] The identified risks included diminishing PRT transportation (especially by air), reduced contact between civil servants and the public as well as a reduction or cessation in PRT financial support to the IDLG and line ministries that would undermine their capacity to function. These scenarios would contribute to a further decline in the public perceptions of the legitimacy of the state.

Several of the Afghans interviewed raised concerns about PRT closure in the context of plans for the country-wide extension of the ALP programme. One civil society activitist, formerly a government minister, commented that 'this brought in all the local thugs and criminals, armed them and put them into a position of authority over the local population'. He anticipated that, with the departure of PRTs, objective analysis of the behaviour of local authorities would end.[206]

PRT policies have created financial winners and losers through the award of lucrative contracts at provincial and district levels. This has caused intense resentment amongst those who did not profit, and many fear that the departure of international military forces will provide further opportunities for revenge that could trigger yet more conflict.[207]

4.2 Concerns about Human Security

The lack of accountability in Afghan security forces and related ministries assumes a far greater urgency following the completion of transition, raising a red flag for international humanitarian organisations.[208] Concerns about the potentially negative effects the transition and its aftermath may have on Afghan human security and the country's development are becoming more prominent. For example, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) recently warned that the national health programme, one of the main development achievements of the international community and its Afghan partners, will be at risk if future resources are not committed

204 According to sources within NATO. Also see Conference Conclusions, para 9, Bonn Conference 5 December 2011.

205 IDLG Draft 'Transition Risk Analysis' [see FN 186].

206 Author's interview with former minister in the Afghan government.

207 This is exemplified by the situation in Uruzgan where an infamous Popalzai commander, Matiullah, has recently been made police chief. He is known to have made millions out of PRT contracts. An international researcher who regularly travels to Uruzgan described at a Liechtenstein Institute for Self Determination (at Princeton University) conference on the transition held in Potsdam, Germany in October 2011 the ambiance there in terms of Matiullah's enemies 'counting the days' until international forces depart. This situation may be replicated in other parts of the country.

208 See 'No Time To Lose Promoting the Accountability of Afghan National Security Forces', *CIVIC, HRAAC, OXFAM, PTRO, Joint Briefing Paper*, 10 May 2011, http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/no-time-to-lose-promoting-the-accountability-of-the-afghan-national-security-fo-129343 and Louis Belanger, 'Afghan Police and Army Still Not Ready to Safeguard Civilians', *Huffington Post*, 29 September 2011, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/louis-belanger/afghan-police-and-army-st_b_987700.html.

by donors.[209] The UN stresses that ensuring the sustainability of Afghanistan's achievements in development will be a critical concern raised by them at the Chicago and Tokyo conferences.[210]

Establishing meaningful levels of transparency and accountability about security incidents involving the ANSF or international forces after the transition will become more challenging simply because the chain of command will become more opaque.[211] Detention issues are also at the forefront of ICRC concerns; it has stated that, in the context of the security transition, 'the ICRC is monitoring how the Afghan defence and security forces perform their tasks, including those related to detainees.'[212]

The increasingly volatile security situation and decreasing access to many parts of the country have added to a growing sense of alarm in the international humanitarian sector. According to an NGO security specialist, the security situation has never been harder to read, partly because of the development of new militias in more areas of the country[213] and because of the clarification of the timing of the US troop drawdown announced by President Obama on 22 June 2011.[214] This contributed to a security situation of 'strategic ambiguity,' meaning that 'it is not in anyone's interests any more to show whose side they are on, as Afghans retreat to a position of self-preservation in a more unpredictable situation'.[215]

Humanitarian organisations that have been present in or near Afghanistan for decades assess that the security transition will create vacuums that have the potential to destabilise the country further. They highlighted four aspects of the context of transition which gave rise to concerns about its impact on human security.

The regional political context of increasing tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan saw a spate of cross-border shelling in 2011. This resulted in cross-border population movements and internal displacement occurred in Nuristan, which is inaccessible to international humanitarian organisations.

The domestic political crisis in Afghanistan, epitomised by the stand-off between the executive and the judiciary on one side and parliament on the other, brought the legislature to a standstill for over a year.

The funding context, which has already affected UN agencies reliant on USAID. These include the World Food Programme, which experienced a USD 200 million cut in USAID funding in 2011. The result of this was exemplified by the end of school meal provision in most of the country, which removed an important incentive for getting poor children into school.

The possibility that the ANSF will fracture along ethnic lines after the transition, with the potential for increased destabilisation by the ALP and other militias.

Figures on Afghan asylum applications to industrialised countries reflect a decreasing confidence in the future felt by many in the face of increasing insecurity.[216] After a drop between 2002 and 2007, Afghans now make more applications for asylum than any other nationality, as they did in the 1980s and in 2000/01. The March 2012 UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) report indicates that applications had increased by 34 per cent since 2010, to 35,700 claimants in 2011.[217]

Repatriation figures from Iran and Pakistan have also proved to be an accurate barometer of

209 See Anne Ferris Rotman, 'Health gains in Afghanistan at risk, warns Red Cross', *Reuters*, Kabul, 8 March 2012, http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/03/08/us-afghanistan-redcross-idUSBRE8270FB20120308.
210 Ibid.
211 A Status of Forces Agreement is not yet on the horizon. When it is agreed, the chain of command must at least nominally come under an Afghan government that to date, has not been noted for its transparency or accountability.
212 See ICRC news release, Kabul, 3 October 2011.
213 ANSO had given up trying to track the militias in terms of who's who, who they are actually working for and where they are located by May 2011. The Director of ANSO doubted that any actor, including US special forces, could keep on top of the confusion. Interview with Nic Lee, the Director of the Afghan NGO Security Office (ANSO).
214 Jim Sciutto, Mary Bruce and Devin Dwyer, 'Obama Orders Start to US Troop Withdrawal From Afghanistan', *ABC News*, 22 June 2011, http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/transcript-obama-afghanistan-troop-withdrawal-full-speech/story?id=13906420.
215 Author's interview with Nic Lee, Director of ANSO, Kabul, 17 July 2011. He further stated: 'Afghan political actors are moving back to their starting positions territorially, ethnically and politically, knowing that foreign forces are not going to be involved in their domestic war for much longer'.
216 The author cannot count the times that Afghans have said to her in recent years, 'we do not know who is trying to kill us'.
217 'UNHCR report on asylum in industrialised countries shows claim rates sharply up in 2011', *UNHCR press release*, Geneva, 27 March 2012, http://www.unhcr.hr/eng/news/unhcr-report-on-asylum-in-industrialized-countries-shows-claim-rates-sharply-up-in-2011.html.

Afghans' perceptions of the country's political and security prospects. Twice in the last three years, in 2009 and 2011, these figures have dipped under 70,000, which has not happened since the demise of the Taleban regime. The 2011 figures show a reduction of almost 50 per cent over the 2010 figures. Most telling is the lower rate of returns from Pakistan, where the majority of registered Afghans originate from Pashtun areas where the conflict has been most persistent. In 2002 voluntary returns numbered 320,906 families; updated UNHCR repatriation figures for 2011 show the figure had dropped to just 12,295 families.[218]

4.3 Increasing Internal Displacement

The intensification of the conflict and the 2011 drought have both contributed to a rapid increase in numbers of Internally Displaced People (IDPs).[219] The UNHCR noted that there was an increase of 130 per cent in 2011 compared to the previous year.[220] UNHCR figures for 29 February 2012 give a total of 429,000 IDPs, with the majority (154,721) coming from the south.

In mid-2011 the ICRC highlighted the increasing militarisation of the Afghan environment, noting that 'increasing numbers of people openly carry weapons and armed groups proliferate […] Besides uniformed forces, a multitude of armed opposition and pro-government armed groups are actively engaged in fighting'.[221] Rather than 'sitting on the fence', this situation forces many Afghans to take sides or leave home; in reality, the luxury of choice does not extend to the poor. The fact that armed insurgents now operate far beyond the traditional heartlands of the insurgency in the south and have expanded to the north of the country[222] has added to the numbers of people facing these dilemmas, and decreased access for many humanitarian agencies.[223] One international humanitarian organisation cites full access throughout the country at 29 per cent, access by implementing partners at 24 per cent, no access at all at 28 per cent, partial access accounting for the rest.[224] This situation is 'uncomfortably reminiscent' of the civil conflict of the early 1990s.[225]

Fears were also expressed by international humanitarian actors interviewed that the post-transition counterinsurgency will become as bloody as it is in Pakistan, where the actions of the government in confronting the Pakistani Taleban have been described by a source in ISAF as 'very heavy-booted'. The ethnic composition of the Pakistani army may partly explain why it had few inhibitions in its counter-insurgency operations in Pashtun areas of Pakistan in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (formerly known as the North West Frontier Province). A parallel can be drawn with the Afghan army, which has a similarly unbalanced ethnic composition and is probably less hampered by public opinion. In the predominantly Pashtun areas of Afghanistan where the ANA is not accepted locally, this might cause great harm to innocent civilians.[226]

5. CONCLUSION

In drawing conclusions about the prospects for the transition process reaching its objectives, the primary question raised is whether it amounts to a strategy at all. In the rush to extract themselves from the quagmire that Afghanistan has become, the US and NATO may be preparing the ground for more instability, rather than less. There appears to be no Plan B; instead, the transition must be seen to work.[227] The outcomes of processes aimed at

218 Ibid.
219 See for example, 'Why hunger looms in aid-rich Afghanistan', *BBC News*, 18 November 2011, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-15724911.
220 See UNHCR's 18 August 2011 update on IDP numbers. This update also states that 'the increase in the number of IDPs corresponds to the trend of rising civilian casualties tracked by UNAMA'.
221 ICRC's director of operations Pierre Krähenbühl, statement from his press conference in Kabul, 17 July 2011.
222 See Antonio Giustozzi and Christopher Reuter, 'The Insurgents of the Afghan North', *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, April 2011, http://www.aan-afghanistan.org/index.asp?id=1679; Joshua Partlow, 'Taliban stalks outskirts of calm Afghan city', *Washington Post*, 28 September 2011, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia-pacific/taliban-stalks-outskirts-of-calm-afghan-city/2011/08/12/gIQAspkV5K_story.html.
223 Development actors have also raised concerns about decreasing security in the north where an insurgent shift to attacking soft targets may prevent civilian actors from working there. One actor, GTZ (now GIZ), ceased operations in Kunduz in the second-half of 2011.
224 May 2011 figures from an international humanitarian organisation with offices throughout Afghanistan that does not want to be quoted.
225 According to one senior humanitarian professional with decades of experience in the region in emailed communication with the author, September 2011.
226 Ibid.
227 This position was spelled out clearly by a senior German diplomat addressing a colloquium attended by the author, 'Towards A Sovereign Afghanistan', organised by the Liechtenstein Institute on Self-

ensuring the irreversibility of the security transition are increasingly viewed as at best vulnerable and at worst transient. The predicament facing the US and its NATO allies is that the costs of failure in Afghanistan, which would profoundly affect the region, must be weighed against growing political pressure domestically for a swifter exit.

All the indications point to the US and NATO bringing the security transition process forward, completing the transfer of security to ANSF by mid-2013, facilitating the option for an accelerated withdrawal of international military forces.[228] This would mean that the 2012 NATO military campaign, focused on the east of Afghanistan, will be the last involvement of international combat forces in military attempts to reduce the insurgency. Afghan security forces will thus take tactical control of the counterinsurgency even sooner than expected, further undermining the credibility of the transition process.

The US-led coalition's main agendas in Afghanistan - to counter terrorism and build a viable state – have never been fully reconciled and the international community is now beating a retreat. This means effectively giving up on what many international diplomats now characterise as an over-ambitious attempt at state-building, which some argue has been defeated by what they describe as the intransigent nature of Afghans, their inherent corruption and their unchanging culture. In reality, the state-building process was never given the fighting chance it needed to succeed and that the majority of Afghans, wanting stability and development, had expected and hoped for.

In many ways the Afghan government has been its own worst enemy. It now has limited room for manoeuvre over the transition process and its timing. Its main bargaining chip has been the question of a future US military presence in Afghanistan. Its apparent success in gaining control over night raids and detainees[229] has paved the way for an 'agreement' over a strategic military pact in time for the Chicago summit, but any agreement will be hostage to an uncertain future.

In Afghanistan a long-term US military presence is highly controversial, while in the US, the Congress and its powerful appropriation committees will require a clear commitment on the legal immunity of US forces after the end of 2014.

The economic outlook for Afghanistan is a worrying one. Capital flight and falling land prices continue to reflect uncertainty about the imminent future. Although President Karzai now appears to be taking action over the Kabul Bank scandal in the run-up to the international conferences in Chicago and Tokyo, the restoration of donor confidence in the Afghan government will require substantive political and financial reforms that the Afghan government has so far, failed to deliver.[230]

In short, the assumption held by some elements with the Afghan ruling elite and beyond, that the international community will be stuck in Afghanistan 'for the next 100 years' looks to be a serious miscalculation.[231] Establishing alternatives to international aid, through the exploitation of Afghanistan's mineral wealth or the construction of a working regional economic framework, will take time. The latter would also have to overcome the formidable, disparate interests of the regional actors capable of projecting power and influence into Afghanistan, which include Iran, Pakistan, India, Russia and China. Whether the Afghan government can effect bilateral arrangements to help maintain its rentier state remains to be seen. If it does, it runs the risk that the conditionalities built into these arrangements are likely to increase its unpopularity amongst Afghans.

The US-led international intervention in Afghanistan veered from 'too little, too late' in its crucial early years, to 'too much, too late' with the commitment of additional military and financial resources by the Obama administration in 2010. The latter was driven by the argument that an intensified, military-dominated counterinsurgency campaign could avert a highly damaging defeat at the same time as saving Afghanistan from itself.[232]

Determination at Princeton University, held in Potsdam, 20-23 October 2011, in the run-up to the December 2011 Bonn Conference.

228 See The White House [see FN 38] and TOLOnews [see FN 39].

229 See Sayed Salahuddin, 'United States and Afghanistan sign deal on night raids', *Washington Post*, 8 April 2012, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/united-states-and-afghanistan-sign-deal-on-night-raids/2012/04/08/gIQA3Sf13S_story.html.

230 Matthew Rosenberg, 'Karzai Orders Prosecutor and Tribunal in Scandal Over Kabul Bank's Losses', *New York Times*, 5 April 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/06/world/asia/karzai-orders-inquiry-in-kabul-banks-losses.html.

231 According to well-placed Afghan contacts, including in the Palace, during the author's tenure as senior political adviser to the Office of the EU Special Representative for Afghanistan, this view was strongly subscribed to by President Karzai.

232 In testimony to the US Congress, 24 April 2009, General Petraeus stated that '[t]he intellectual construct for the War on Terror needs to be a counterinsurgency construct, not a narrow counterterrorism construct.' See

For critics, the COIN strategy only delayed and diverted the US from prioritising a political solution to Afghanistan's problems.[233] But prioritising the need for a sustainable political settlement does not expedite achieving one that is both sustainable and acceptable by most Afghans and the international community. The latest report on Afghanistan by the International Crisis Group (ICG) warns that mishandled approaches to the search for a political settlement by the Afghan government and its international backers risk further destabilising the country.[234] The ICG report emphasises that rather than being Afghan-led, 'the negotiating agenda has been dominated by Washington's desire to obtain a decent interval between the planned US troop drawdown and the possibility of another bloody chapter in the conflict.'[235]

Turning to the transition process itself: Its purpose may be, in the words of a former NATO Senior Civilian Representative, to act as a 'forcing mechanism' on the Afghan government. But a weak Afghan government system cannot be forced into being sufficiently strong or effective through the rushed withdrawal of the support on which it has come totally to depend on. It is a delusion to think that the official transition timeline can accommodate the establishment of even minimally conducive governance conditions on the ground - that would substantiate claims that the transition strategy can succeed in its objective which, as this paper shows, is highly doubtful.

This assessment is based on factors that include the fiscal unsustainability of the Afghan security forces, factional and ethnic fault-lines in the security forces and security ministries, endemic structural corruption and the long crisis in relations between the executive and the legislature that followed the 2010 elections. Moreover, it is widely anticipated that the transition will burst the economic bubble that formed on the back of Afghanistan's black economy, the security and military contracts derived from the international military presence, and development aid. Levels of aid, already in decline, may drop further after military withdrawal. The 'good enough' approach may exemplify the priorities of the US and NATO member states in radically reformulating their military engagement in Afghanistan, but it fails to establish the conditions that are necessary to avoid the collapse of the Afghan state.

NATO has effectively abandoned a conditions-based approach to the transition resulting in its governance elements being increasingly marginalised in the successive phases of the implementation of the process. From a pragmatic perspective the brevity of the transition timeline has made this unavoidable. But in the absence of support for governance, weak Afghan institutions will be subjected to intense transition-related economic, political and security pressures increasing the risk of state collapse. So far, the US and NATO member states have shown no signs of reconsidering the transition timeline, despite many factors, including the state of the Afghan security forces, that suggest this is essential. The political priority of the NATO member states leading on transition is to keep its timetable on track or even to speed it up.

NATO's marginalisation of governance criteria for the transition reflects a growing disengagement by the wider international community from attempts to address Afghanistan's structural political problems. Yet prospects that the transition process can deliver its objective of a self-sustaining Afghan state must be assessed against the overall context of failure by the Afghan government and its international partners to implement systemic reforms that would have improved governance, livelihoods and the financial system. Such steps could have contributed towards building the right conditions for a stable Afghanistan over the longer-term, but were often dismissed as 'foreign interference' by the Karzai government. What has been impossible to achieve over the last ten years will not be miraculously brought about in a much shorter period of time, under the immense pressure of transition.

Prospects for a responsible withdrawal of international forces are increasingly entwined with Afghanistan's national reconciliation process, which has so far been focused only on the insurgents. Despite its late and slow start, reconciliation has moved to the top of the international agenda as a means of ending the conflict and shoring up the security transition. However, a formidable set of difficulties has to be overcome before substantial negotiations can start. These range from establishing a consensus inside Afghanistan that a political settlement including the Taleban is a meaningful step towards a political solution, to the lack of knowledge about the Taleban's political aims, to the need to identify a convincingly neutral mechanism to implement a

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Michael Hastings, *The Operators*, Orion Publishing Co, 2012, 208-209.

233 See for example: Sherard Cowper Coles, *Cables from Kabul: The Inside Story of the West's Afghanistan Campaign*, Harper Collins 2011, and Hastings, ibid.

234 See Executive Summary and Recommendations, 'Talking About Talks: Toward a Political Settlement in Afghanistan', *ICG*, Asia Report no 221, 26 March 2012.

235 Ibid.

reconciliation process. To be effective, a reconciliation process must first and foremost enable some kind of acknowledgment of past crimes.

The belief that political reconciliation can end the conflict is not shared by all Afghans nor by all states in the region. How a potential political deal could be enforced and what relevance it would have without the participation of all involved Afghan groups should be prominent items for discussion at the upcoming NATO summit in Chicago.

Should moves to bring the Taleban into the political process succeed, the US is unlikely to have any basis to implement its plans to continue its counterterrorism strategy from bases in Afghanistan. Should the Taleban be included at senior levels of any future Afghan government, they are unlikely to agree to a longer-term US military presence. Some insurgent groups may decide to fight on until the last foreign soldier leaves. These and other factors that include the virtual collapse in relations between the US and Pakistan, and the political turmoil within Pakistan, add to the challenges faced by the US in its attempt to reformulate its engagement within Afghanistan, while simultaneously addressing terrorist threats to NATO interests that are believed to emanate from the region.

As this paper has illustrated, the viability of the Afghan state is compromised from within. The related problems of structural corruption, impunity and the absence of political and security reforms have hollowed out the internationally-supported state-building project from the outset. The side-effects of the security transition - from the closure of PRTs to the projected declines in development funding – will have a further negative impact on government capacity, stripping away the veneer of progress towards improved governance and service delivery. Many of the Afghans interviewed for this paper showed no confidence in the ability or desire of the government to forge a path away from Afghanistan's past. As one interviewee commented, it is a government comprised 'of institutions captured by actors perceived as perpetrators of war'.[236]

Afghans are increasingly at a loss as to who to trust. This makes the secret processes surrounding a possible political settlement all the more frightening for them. The belief that the political objectives of the Taleban remain unchanged is prominent amongst ethnic minorities, but also held by Pashtuns who oppose the Taleban's militant Islamist agenda.[237] The idea of a rehabilitated Taleban movement was dismissed by some of the Afghans interviewed for this paper; as one civil society interviewee observed, 'even if they come with a different uniform they will come with the same ideology.'[238] Others, however, view the devastation that would be caused by a wider civil war as trumping such concerns, seeing an end to the fighting as the most important condition of all.

In summary, the prospects for what happens following the security transition will depend on fluid strategic, political and economic factors with different international, regional and domestic dimensions. Overshadowing this complex situation is the question of the future US engagement in Afghanistan. The time for decisions is fast running out. The timelines involved in funding and implementing the transition's aftermath means that 'Washington really has only a few months in which to decide whether [to] take on the burden of funding the Afghan government through 2014 and beyond, and whether [to] provide most of the funds, advisers and partners the Afghan forces will need until 2020 and beyond.'[239]

Whether the US Congress and other key actors within the international community will agree to continue to cover the financial costs of sustaining the Afghan government over the longer term is a central question. Some at the NATO summit in Chicago will argue that this course is in the best interests of NATO countries, but they will do so against a background of a deepening global financial crisis, donor exhaustion with Afghanistan and increasingly negative perceptions of the

236 Author's interview with civil society actor, Kabul, July 2011. See also: Graham Bowley and Matthew Rosenberg, 'Businesses Plan Their Own Exits', *New York Times*, 30 March 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/31/world/asia/businesses-may-flee-afghanistan-after-troop-withdrawal.html?nl=todaysheadlines&emc=tha2_20120331.

237 A belief endorsed by the leaked December 2012 US National Intelligence Estimate which concluded that Taleban leaders have not given up on their objective of reclaiming power. See Landay and Youssef, 'Intelligence report…' [see FN 52].

238 Also see Rachel Reid, '"Moderate" Taliban: A wolf in sheeps clothing', *Foreign Policy*, AfPak Channel, 10 February 2012, http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/02/10/moderate_taliban_a_wolf_in_sheeps_clothing.

239 Anthony Cordesman, 'The U.S. has to make up its mind now on Afghanistan', *Washington Post*, 14 January 2012, http://article.wn.com/view/2012/01/14/The_US_has_to_make_up_its_mind_now_on_Afghanistan/.

Afghan government amongst the most powerful NATO member states.

The danger is that US-led international policy and NATO's management of the military withdrawal from Afghanistan will become more incoherent. Unforeseen events, including the violence of the Afghan response to the US burning of copies of the Quran in February and the response by the Afghan President to the massacre of Afghan civilians in March in Kandahar province, have reinforced the perception amongst some policy-makers that exiting Afghanistan should be conducted as quickly as possible.[240] Meanwhile, NATO member states are pressing ahead with plans to withdraw some of their forces alongside the US troop drawdown, contrary to understandings reached at the 2010 NATO summit in Lisbon that they would not withdraw any of their forces until the transition was completed.[241] Concerns about whether an orderly withdrawal will ultimately be possible were raised with the author by more than one NATO official in 2011. To quote an observation by Henry Kissinger, 'the exit strategy has become all exit and no strategy'.[242]

At an event at the Council on Foreign Relations in Washington in October 2011 to mark the tenth anniversary of the engagement in Afghanistan, the former US commander of NATO/ISAF, General Stanley McChrystal, remarked that 'we didn't know enough and we still don't know enough. Most of us, me included, had a very superficial understanding of the situation and history, and we had a frighteningly simplistic view of recent history, the last 50 years.'

This 'simplistic' view of Afghanistan's security situation has also been a selective one. It has obscured a multitude of problems for which no-one has wanted to take responsibility.[243] Should the insurgency end tomorrow, Afghan civilians would often be exposed to elite and corrupt local administrations, a predatory police co-opted by powerful criminalised patronage networks and a plethora of armed groups ready to enforce and protect the vested interests of their powerful masters in an illicit economy. To expect that a nascent and vulnerable civil society could lead the push for political reforms would be both ineffective and irresponsible. Civil society in Afghanistan will only be in a position to take things forward if the limited space in which it functions can be protected to allow its development over time.

The assumption that the removal of the bulk of international forces will remove the *casus belli* and thus lead to swift improvements in the security situation is also likely to prove illusory. The chance of strategic failure for NATO cannot be dismissed. Though Afghans will pay the immediate price should there be a wider civil war, the calculation may be that such an outcome is not, in and of itself, of vital strategic importance to the West. The same cannot be said for the broader consequences of strategic failure which would cascade throughout the region and beyond in unforeseeable ways.

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240 See Matthew Green, 'Afghan massacre hits hopes of smooth exit', *Financial Times*, 11 March 2012, http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/3abd94cc-6b9e-11e1-ac25-00144feab49a.html#axzz1uTeALyrE, and Rod Nordland, Alissa J Rubin and Matthew Rosenberg, 'Infuriated Karzai sees Americans as "demons"', *International Herald Tribune*, 19 March 2012.

241 According to sources in HQ ISAF.

242 Stephens, 'New friends race to end an old war', [see FN 30].

243 The author participated in the 2009 McChrystal Review of the Afghan insurgency and attended military briefings in Bagram for the prominent US civilian analysts participating in the Review. Detailed presentations were made on the local situation in Kapisa, where close links between the local and central Afghan administration, organised criminal syndicates and insurgent groups obtained. This situation was replicated in many other parts of the country.

ANNEX 1

List of interviewees

Afghan civil society actors interviewed in Kabul included:
Aziz Rafiee, Afghanistan Civil Society Forum
Ehsan Shafaq, independent
Haroun Mir, Afghanistan's Center for Research & Policy Studies
Masood Karokhail, The Liaison Office
Mir Ahmad Joyenda, Deputy director, Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit
Mirwais Wardak, Peace Training and Research Organisation
Muhammad Ehsan Zia, Tadbeer Consulting Inc
Muhammad Suleman Kakar, CPAU
Nargis Nehan, Equality for Peace and Democracy
Niamatullah Ibrahimi, Afghanistan Watch
Sanjar Sohail, 8 Sobh Daily Newspaper
Sidiqullah Tawhidi, Nai

Afghans in international organisations
Daoud Yaqub, former Afghanistan National Security Council staff
Horia Mosadiq, Amnesty International
Nilofar Sakhi, Open Society Institute
Sayed Salahuddin, Washington Post
Shahmahmood Miakhel, United States Institute of Peace
Shirazuddin Siddiqi, BBC World Service Trust

Afghans in government ministries, parliament and commissions
General Abdul Hadi Khaled, former deputy Minister of Interior
Ahmed Gul Rassouli, former border affairs officer
Atta Ullah Ludin, Deputy head of the High Peace Council
General Hilaluddin Hilal, former deputy Minister of Interior
Engineer Muhammad Daoud, former provincial governor, Helmand
Muhammad Sediq Sediqi, spokesman, MoI
Nader Nadery, former Commissioner, Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission
General Noor ul Haq Ulumi, MP
General Sher Muhammad Karimi, MoD
General Zaher Azimi, Spokesman, MoD

International interviewees in Kabul included:
Ambassador Andrey Avetsiyan, Ambassador of the Russian Federation
Ciaran Carey, Political Advisor to NATO's Senior Civilian Representative
Pamela Constable, The Washington Post
Jess Dutton, former Deputy Head of Mission, Embassy of Canada
Magnus Forsberg, former Senior Political Advisor/First Secretary, Embassy of Sweden
Georgette Gagnon, Director, Human Rights Unit, UNAMA
Ambassador Sir Simon Gass, NATO Senior Civilian Representative
Camilo Gomez Osorio, Economist, The World Bank
Sheilagh Henry, Deputy Country Representative, The Asia Foundation
Richard Hogg, Governance advisor, The World Bank
Peter Joshi, Operations Support & Risk Manager, UNHCR
David J. Katz, former Deputy, Force Reintegration Cell, ISAF
Michael Keating, Deputy to the SRSG, UNAMA
Shem Klimiuk, Indicium Consulting
Sami Kovanen, Indicium Consulting
Nicholas Krafft, former Country Director, The World Bank

Brigadier General Serge Labbe, ISAF
Nic Lee, Director of the Afghan NGO Security Office
Jean-Luc Lemahieu, Country Representative, UNODC
Dawn Liberi, Embassy of the United States
Talatbek Masadykov, Chief of Political Affairs Unit, UNAMA
Brigadier General H R McMaster, Director, CJIATF-Shafafiyat, ISAF
Heidi Meyer, Embassy of the United States
Megan Minnion, UNAMA
Alessandra Morelli, Deputy Representative, UNHCR Afghanistan
Tonita Murray, Senior Advisor to the Minister, Ministry of Interior
Vadim Nazarov, Senior Political Affairs Officer, UNAMA
Ambassador Torbjorn Pettersson, Ambassador of Sweden
Neville Reilly, former Ambassador of New Zealand
Candace Rondeaux, Senior Analyst, International Crisis Group
Susanne Schmeidl, Senior Advisor Research/Peacebuilding, The Liaison Office
Reto Stocker, Head of Delegation, International Committee of the Red Cross
Rachel Wareham, Senior Resident Director to the National Democratic Institute

Interviewees outside Afghanistan included:

Michael Barry, Mark Beautement, Doris Buddenberg, Wolfgang Danspeckgruber, Gilles Dorronsoro, Antje Grawe, Ewen Macleod, William Maley, Eckart Schiewek, Francesc Vendrell, Marvin G Weinbaum, Nicholas Williams.

Some interviewees have not been added to the list according to their wish to remain anonymous.

Repeated attempts were made to interview Dr Ashraf Ghani, head of the Afghan government's Transition Coordination Commission, regrettably without success.

ANNEX 2

The following official documents (not an exhaustive list) chart the evolution in the build-up of NATO forces to peak-surge capacity. The NATO Lisbon Summit (November 2010) marks the turning point towards the process of decline in NATO's combat presence in Afghanistan:

NATO Summit, Prague (2002)

NATO Summit, Istanbul (2004)

NATO Summit, Riga (2006)

NATO Summit, Bucharest (2008)

International Conference on Afghanistan, The Hague (2009) - *The Afghanistan Conference 2009: A Comprehensive Strategy in a Regional Context;* link: http://www.afghanistan-un.org/2009/03/international-conference-on-afghanistan-2009/

London Conference Communiqué
The London Conference: Afghan Leadership, Regional Cooperation, International Partnership, 28 January 2010; link: http://centralcontent.fco.gov.uk/central-content/afghanistan-hmg/resources/pdf/conference/Communique-final

Kabul Conference Communiqué
The Kabul International Conference on Afghanistan, 20 July 2010 – 'The Joint Framework for Inteqal, A Process For Strengthening Peace And Stability In Afghanistan And The Region'; link: http://www.unodc.org/documents/afghanistan/Kabul_Conference/FINAL_Kabul_Conference_Communique.pdf

The Lisbon NATO Summit, 19-20 November 2010 - **Declaration by NATO and the GIRoA on an Enduring Partnership** ; link: http://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_2010_11/20101120_101120-declaration.pdf

The International Afghanistan Conference in Bonn, 5 December 2011, 'From Transition to the Transformation Decade', Conference Conclusions; link: http://eeas.europa.eu/afghanistan/docs/2011_11_conclusions_bonn_en.pdf

Further clarification on the transition process can be found in:

Afghanistan: The Timetable for Security Transition, UK Library of the House of Commons, May 2011 (offers some background information on the situation in Afghanistan as it relates to the ISAF presence and also details various countries' plans for troop withdrawal from the area); link: www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/SN05851.pdf

Other key documents to the transition and its aftermath include:

'Enduring Strategic Partnership Agreement' between the United States of America and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan signed in Kabul by the US and Afghanistan Presidents, 1 May 2012; link: http://photos.state.gov/libraries/afghanistan/231771/PDFs/2012-05-01-scan-of-spa-english.pdf

Istanbul Process on Regional Security and Cooperation For a Secure and Stable Afghanistan
The Istanbul Conference for Afghanistan, 2 November 2011; link: http://mfa.gov.af/en/news/4598

The Council of the European Union Conclusions on Afghanistan
The 3124th Foreign Affairs Council Meeting, 14 November 2011, link: http://www.eu-un.europa.eu/articles/en/article_11585_en.htm

Other background documents include:

Declaration of the Special Conference on Afghanistan convened under the auspices of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization
Moscow Special Conference on Afghanistan, 27 March 2009, link: http://www.afghanistan-un.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/03/declaration_of_the_special_conference_on_afghanistan2.pdf

Declaration of the International Conference in Support of Afghanistan
Paris International Conference on Afghanistan, 12 June 2008, link: https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&pid=sites&srcid=ZGVmYXVsdGRvbWFpbnxhZmdoYW5wb2xpY3lzaXRlfGd4OjExOTY4NzBiODEyZjE0NjQ

Joint Recommendations from the Rome Conference
Rome Conference on the Rule of Law in Afghanistan, 2-3 July 2007, link: http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/IMG/pdf/Romejointrecommandations.pdf

The Afghanistan Compact
The London Conference on Afghanistan, 31 January - 1 February 2006, link: http://www.nato.int/isaf/docu/epub/pdf/afghanistan_compact.pdf

Berlin Declaration
International Afghanistan Conference in Berlin, 31 March - 1 April 2004, link: http://www.ag-afghanistan.de/berlindeclaration.pdf

Bonn Agreement
First International Bonn Conference on Afghanistan, December 2001, link: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3f48f4754.html

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