



## THERE IS STILL TIME TO KEEP AFGHANISTAN FROM GOING THE WAY OF IRAQ – IF DRAWDOWN PLANS ARE SIGNIFICANTLY MODIFIED

By Thomas F. Lynch III



*Thomas F. (Tom) Lynch III is a Distinguished Research Fellow for South Asia and the Near East at the National Defense University's Institute for National Strategic Studies. He was also the Special Assistant for South Asian security matters for then-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen from 2008-10, an Army regional support commander with responsibilities in Afghanistan from 2005-07, A Special Assistant to the US CENTCOM Commander for South Asia security matters from 2004-05, and a Military Special Assistant to the US Ambassador to Afghanistan to Kabul in 2004. The opinions expressed in this commentary represent his own views and are not those of the National Defense University, the Department of Defense or the United States Government. This is a condensed version of an article that will appear in [Orbis](#), Spring 2015.*

On October 1, 2014, the Obama Administration announced that it had concluded a long-awaited Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) with the newly-formed government in Kabul, Afghanistan.<sup>1</sup> The announcement of this ten-year security arrangement, which had languished for almost a year, alleviated fears that Afghanistan's lingering political morass might require the full departure of American and western forces from that country by the end of 2014. But the details behind this agreement, one primarily focused on a post-2014 US counterterrorism mission in Afghanistan, remain a source for serious concern. A parallel bilateral deal struck between Kabul and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), where the United States is a member state, continues a heavily circumscribed post-2014 NATO mission of training, advising and equipping Afghan security forces.

Nothing in these agreements places a formal, low-threshold limitation on post-2014 US or western military forces in Afghanistan. Indeed, there are strong indications that the newly seated Afghan government of President Ashraf Ghani would welcome a far more robust and capable extension of US and western military forces in the country.<sup>2</sup> Yet President Ghani inherited a situation where the Obama Administration – in partial concert with an alienated Karzai Administration – generated a self-limiting framework for BSA implementation in which US and NATO support troops in Afghanistan were voluntarily constrained to 12,500 in total beginning on January 1, 2015 – about 9,800 of them U.S. troops<sup>3</sup> and another 2,700 NATO

<sup>1</sup> Marherita Stancati and Nathan Hodge, "U.S.-Afghan Bilateral Security Agreement Signed," The Wall Street Journal, September 30, 2014 at <http://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-afghan-bilateral-security-agreement-signed-1412076436>.

<sup>2</sup> "Afghan lower house approves 12,500 NATO-led troops remaining," Agence Francais Presse (AFP) in The Japan Times, November 23, 2014 at <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/11/23/world/politics-diplomacy-world/afghan-lower-house-approves-12500-nato-led-troops-remaining/#.VH9okDGkPME>; Clar Ni Chonghaile, "Afghanistan: what will happen when the troops – and their dollars – depart," The Guardian (UK), November 27, 2014 at <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2014/nov/27/afghanistan-nato-troops-withdraw-ashraf-ghani>; and Rod Nordland and Taimoor Shah, "Afghanistan Quietly Lifts Ban on Night Raids," The New York Times, November 23, 2014 at <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/24/world/asia/afghanistan-quietly-lifts-ban-on-night-raids.html?hp&action=click&pgtype=Homepage&module=photo-spot-region&region=top-news&WT.nav=top-news&r=1>.

<sup>3</sup> Karen DeYoung, "Obama to Leave 9,800 U.S. Troops in Afghanistan," The Washington Post, May 27, 2014 at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/obama-to-leave-9800-us-troops-in-afghanistan-senior-official->

forces<sup>4</sup> – with complete withdrawal of American military forces promised by President Obama for the end of 2016.<sup>5</sup> On November 21, 2014, the Obama Administration announced a modest extension in to 2015 of some of the pre-2014 use-of-force authorities for remaining US military forces in Afghanistan. But this represented no revisit of the basic premise of comprehensive military and intelligence withdrawal from Afghanistan.<sup>6</sup>

The Obama Administration has argued that the steady and steeply sloped withdrawal of American military forces constitutes a responsible transition to 350,000 Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) taking the lead for national security. It asserts that the residual 12,500 member US/western military force left in early 2015, then tapered to around a couple thousand by late 2016 will be sufficient to facilitate ANSF responsibility for national security by 2017. It will assure American freedom of action in the conduct of counter-terrorism operations against any renewed presence of international terrorist outfits for the coming decade.<sup>7</sup>

The assurances of a low risk transition to security in Afghanistan do not withstand scrutiny. The residual force planned is too small to offset the major operational support shortcomings of the under-resourced ANSF, making it unlikely that outside financial donors or entrepreneurs will accept the risks of significant economic investment in Afghanistan. Its sizing constraints and operational limitations require confinement to locations insufficient to disrupt the inevitable rise in intra-regional militant and proxy outfit conflicts, with too little attention paid to intelligence collection and information fusion regarding the rapidly evolving South Asian terrorist threats.

### **Assessing the Environment: Afghanistan & the Wider Region**

Undeniably, Afghanistan entered 2015 in a better place than it did 2002. The Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) completed formation in late 2014 a third democratically elected government and the first peaceful transition of power between outgoing and incoming administrations in Afghanistan's modern history. Enormous international attention and investments between 2003 and 2010<sup>8</sup> have advanced Afghanistan's capacity for self-governance, improved national health care, expanded schooling opportunities for Afghan youth, especially girls, and better connected Afghanistan to the outside world than ever before. Afghanistan also began 2015 with a 350,000-member security force consisting of an army, a limited air force, national police and border and customs forces.

These improvements and others are important. Yet Afghanistan remains significantly challenged in 2015 and will remain so for the foreseeable future. Economically, Afghanistan is extremely poor, landlocked and highly dependent on foreign aid. Almost 40 percent of the population is below the official poverty line. A similar percentage is unemployed. Most Afghans continue to

---

[says/2014/05/27/57f37e72-e5b2-11e3-a86b-362fd5443d19\\_story.html](http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702304811904579588022751706240). Also see Adam Entous, Julian E. Barnes and Caril E. Lee, U.S. to Leave 10,000 Troops in Afghanistan After 2014,” The Wall Street Journal, May 27, 2014 at <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702304811904579588022751706240>.

<sup>4</sup> Erik Kirshbaum and Steve Scherer, Germany and Italy to keep up to 1,350 soldiers in Afghanistan, Reuters, November 18, 2014 at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/11/18/us-afghanistan-germany-troops-idUSKCN0J211820141118>. Also “Security and Defense Cooperation Agreement Between the United States of American and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs – Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, November 20, 2013 at <http://mfa.gov.af/en/news/bsa>; and, Charles Recknagel, “Explainer: Key Points In US-Afghan Bilateral Security Agreement,” Radio Free Europe – Radio Liberty, December 3, 2014 at <http://www.rferl.org/content/explainer-bsa-afghan-us-security-agreement-bsa/26613884.html>.

<sup>5</sup> The US-Afghanistan BSA makes no guarantees of minimal military assistance, monetary contributions or basing locations.

<sup>6</sup> Mark Mazetti and Eric Schmitt, “In a Shift, Obama Extends U.S. Role in Afghan Combat,” The New York Times, November 21, 2014 at <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/22/us/politics/in-secret-obama-extends-us-role-in-afghan-combat.html>; Steve Holland and Mirwais Harooni, “Obama widens post-2014 combat role for U.S. forces in Afghanistan,” Reuters, November 23, 2014 at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/11/23/us-usa-afghanistan-idUSKCN0J600V20141123>; and Azam Ahmed, “1,000 Extra U.S. Soldiers Will Remain in Afghanistan,” The New York Times, December 6, 2014 at [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/07/world/asia/1000-extra-us-soldiers-will-remain-in-afghanistan-.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/07/world/asia/1000-extra-us-soldiers-will-remain-in-afghanistan-.html?_r=0).

<sup>7</sup> Gordon Lubold, “Obama Orders 9,800 Troops to Remain in Afghanistan with All Out by 2016,” ForeignPolicy.com, May 27, 2014 at [http://blog.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2014/05/27/obama\\_to\\_announce\\_9800\\_troops\\_to\\_remain\\_in\\_afghanistan\\_all\\_out\\_by\\_2016](http://blog.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2014/05/27/obama_to_announce_9800_troops_to_remain_in_afghanistan_all_out_by_2016); and, Adam Entous and Carol Lee, “Obama Details Plan for Forces in Afghanistan,” The Wall Street Journal, May 28, 2014 at <http://online.wsj.com/articles/obama-details-plan-for-forces-in-afghanistan-1401234489>.

<sup>8</sup> Afghanistan Economy Profile 2014, Index Mundi at [http://www.indexmundi.com/afghanistan/economy\\_profile.html](http://www.indexmundi.com/afghanistan/economy_profile.html); Also see Tony Capaccio, “US Military Classifying Assessments of Afghan Military,” October 30, 2014 at <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2014-10-30/u-s-military-classifying-assessments-of-afghan-military.html>.

suffer from shortages of housing, clean water, electricity and medical care. Assistance remains critical; as Afghanistan had a 9 percent budget deficit in 2012 that grew to a 13 percent in 2013 as the decade-long artificial economy fueled by international security-related investments rapidly contracted. The US and other international donors fund almost 60 percent of Afghanistan's national budget.<sup>9</sup> In 2014 GIROA experienced two major budget crises. These halted critical infrastructure projects and required an international bailout of \$537 (US) million to pay civil servant salaries including those for its military and police.<sup>10</sup> Few post-2015 donations, beyond those promised by India and China, now exist.<sup>11</sup> It seems clear that the international community anxiously awaits evidence that Afghanistan can provide acceptable domestic security and stability to warrant the investments.

Like international donations, international business investment in Afghanistan beyond 2015 awaits proof of stability and security. Serious investment also requires belief that the Kabul leadership is taking verifiable steps to curb the expansive corruption in Afghanistan.<sup>12</sup> China and India have already contracted to invest billions in mining Afghan natural resource deposit areas, but security fears have dramatically limited the pace and cash-flow of these ventures.<sup>13</sup> Afghanistan's viability between 2015 and 2024 relies upon an outside donor and investor perception that ANSF units, under direction from Kabul, can provide protection against major security threats.

The most dangerous threats to Afghan security have not changed much in the past twenty years. There are three main regional security dynamics that impact stability in Afghanistan, each also affecting major US/western security interests in preventing Afghanistan from again becoming an insurgent-riven nation, a civil war battle ground, an international terrorist safe haven or a combination of all three.

First, the *Taliban insurgency* remains Afghanistan's most pressing security issue. It is uncertain that the Afghan Taliban will be able to unseat GIROA ever, much less in 2015. Although it is an indigenous insurgent group, the Afghan Taliban is substantively abetted by Afghanistan's cross-border rival, Pakistan. The Afghan Taliban's patrons, the Pakistani military and intelligence services, support Taliban militant operations (but not country-wide governance) against GIROA forces and coalition support formations within Afghanistan.<sup>14</sup> Such a presence challenges GIROA authority and puts at risk Afghanistan's major economic transit route, the Ring Road – a serious risk that can only negatively impact outside donor and investor confidence.

Second, the *security dilemma competition between India and Pakistan* weighs heavily on future Afghanistan internal security prospects. India and Pakistan have a longstanding history of treating influence in Afghanistan as a zero-sum game. The fear of being

---

<sup>9</sup> See David Lerman and Eltaf Najafizada, "Afghan Deal Rekindles Question on U.S. Pace in Leaving," Bloomberg News, October 1, 2014 at <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2014-10-01/afghan-deal-rekindles-questions-on-u-s-pace-in-leaving.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Kevin Sieff and Joshua Partlow, "Afghan economy facing serious revenue shortage," The Washington Post, April 15, 2014 at [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia\\_pacific/afghan-economy-facing-serious-revenue-shortage/2014/04/15/6ddce38a-5be9-46ad-8f3b-1eb2ef4ed9bd\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/afghan-economy-facing-serious-revenue-shortage/2014/04/15/6ddce38a-5be9-46ad-8f3b-1eb2ef4ed9bd_story.html); and, "Letter from the Office of the US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) and US Department of State Response," September 26 and October 10, 2014 at <http://www.sigar.mil/pdf/special%20projects/SIGAR-14-101-SP.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> See Brian Spegele and Nathan Hodge, "China Pledges \$327 Million in Aid to Afghanistan," the Wall Street Journal, October 29, 2014 at <http://online.wsj.com/articles/china-pledges-327-million-in-aid-to-afghanistan-1414566221>; Gareth Price, India's Policy Towards Afghanistan, AS\_ 2013/14, Chatham House, August 2013, p. 5-6, at [http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/public/Research/Asia/0813pp\\_indiaafghanistan.pdf](http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/public/Research/Asia/0813pp_indiaafghanistan.pdf); "India promises more reconstruction aid for Afghanistan," Press TV, May 22, 2013 at <http://www.presstv.com/detail/2013/05/22/304832/india-vows-to-send-aid-to-afghanistan/>; and Lucy Westcott, "Afghanistan Conference: U.S., U.K., Pledge Support to Fledgling Government," Newsweek.com, December 4, 2014 at <http://www.newsweek.com/afghanistan-conference-us-uk-pledge-support-fledgling-government-289338>.

<sup>12</sup> Karen DeYoung and Joshua Partlow, "Corruption in Afghanistan still a problem as international donors meet," The Washington Post, July 6, 2012 at [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/corruption-in-afghanistan-still-a-problem-as-international-donors-meet/2012/07/06/gJQAhxjgSW\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/corruption-in-afghanistan-still-a-problem-as-international-donors-meet/2012/07/06/gJQAhxjgSW_story.html).

<sup>13</sup> See Lynne O'Donnell, "China's MCC turns back on US\$3b Mes Aynak Afghanistan mine deal," South China Morning Post, March 21, 2014 at <http://www.scmp.com/news/world/article/1453375/chinas-mcc-turns-back-us3b-mes-aynak-afghanistan-mine-deal>.

<sup>14</sup> Matthew Waldman, The Sun in the Sky: The Relationship between Pakistan's ISI and Afghan Insurgents," Crisis States Research Centre Discussion Papers – London School of Economics, June 2010 at <http://www.aljazeera.com/mritems/Documents/2010/6/13/20106138531279734lse-isi-taliban.pdf>, Wahid Brown and Don Rassler, *Fountainhead of Jihad: The Haqqani Nexus, 1973-2012*, London: Oxford University Press, 2013, especially pp. 129-234.

squeezed in an Indian security nutcracker has led Pakistan's ISI to keep the Afghan Taliban in play as a security proxy in Afghanistan when it was placed under duress by US and NATO military forces from 2001-2012. Since 2012, Pakistan has increasingly come to fear a growing intelligence nexus between the Afghan national intelligence service (NDS) and the Indian foreign intelligence service (RAW). Pakistani officials point to a growing number of reported contacts between NDS and anti-Pakistan Taliban insurgents (TTP) as evidence that GIROA and India are colluding to topple the government in Islamabad.<sup>15</sup> While shrill, there appears to be modest substance behind these Pakistani complaints making it certain that Pakistani security concerns in Afghanistan will only grow worse as western forces meet drawdown timetables.

The mistrust between Kabul and Pakistani's military-intelligence establishment runs deep and will not be overcome easily. Pakistan's ISI cannot be trusted to share fully with the Afghan NDS its interactions with an array of Pashtun militant groups operating from within Pakistan. Faced with such an asymmetry in transparency, the Afghan NDS will not decouple from historic ties to the Indian RAW, leaving Pakistan's ISI wary of NDS-RAW support for anti-Pakistan militant leaders and outfits that may be hiding in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region.

For its part, India has been relatively circumspect in security-based interactions with Afghanistan during the decade of US/NATO security leadership, preferring not to provoke Pakistan while the prospect for outside-generated security and stability in Afghanistan was present. Nonetheless, Indian military and civilian leaders uniformly fear any Afghan Taliban return to power would carve-out a safe haven for Islamist militant training and staging for terrorism against Indian and Indian interests. Increasingly, India has been offering more direct support to Afghan security forces – training, equipping and education – as western forces stand down. At the same time, New Delhi has been expanding and extending its military and intelligence footprint at locations in Tajikistan that can be used to provide support for a GIROA fight against militant groups, simultaneously setting the diplomatic conditions in Iran and the military-intelligence access conditions in Tajikistan to sustain organized militant resistance should GIROA suddenly collapse under the weight of Pakistani-abetted insurgency.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, Afghanistan will remain a *top tier target for international terrorist organizations seeking safe haven* from which to plan, plot and launch catastrophic global attacks against US and western interests. Robust American counterterrorism activities on both sides of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border during 2008-2013 greatly disrupted the activities of a host of groups, killing dozens of prominent global jihadist outfit leaders and denying these areas for unfettered terrorism plotting. In his September 2014 announcement of al Qaeda of the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), al Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri signaled to all Salafi jihadist groups in South Asia that their main calling should be to fully resource the Taliban-led effort to re-establish a Salafist emirate in Afghanistan as western military forces depart.<sup>17</sup> A growing array of South Asian based jihadist groups have been reported infesting eastern Afghanistan. Afghanistan will remain a highly contested space for bruised but unrepentant international jihadist organizations – and in combinations that will be a challenge to even well-resourced and well-focused intelligence agencies to address.

The successful disruption of jihadi terror organizations from 2009-13 in Pakistan and Afghanistan emanated from eastern Afghanistan and functioned on the backbone of US military presence there. A primary feature of the 2008-09 military uplift, this backbone enabled the coalition to independently generate rich and timely human, signals and electronic information about militant interactions on both sides of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.<sup>18</sup> While the size of this U.S. intelligence backbone was never sustainable indefinitely, the complexity of the challenges it faced in tracking a fluid cross-border terrorist and militant milieu has not diminished dramatically. It is thus more than fair to ask how well the residual arrangements for a post-2014 Afghanistan accommodate the retention of this important intelligence capability.

<sup>15</sup> See Umar Farooq, "Afghanistan-Pakistan: The Covert War," *The Diplomat*, January 1, 2014 at <http://thediplomat.com/2014/01/afghanistan-pakistan-the-covert-war/>.

<sup>16</sup> Rajeev Sharma, "India's Anyi military base in Tajikistan is Russia-locked," *Russia and India Report*, October 26, 2012 at [http://in.rbth.com/articles/2012/10/26/indias\\_ayni\\_military\\_base\\_in\\_tajikistan\\_is\\_russia-locked\\_18661.html](http://in.rbth.com/articles/2012/10/26/indias_ayni_military_base_in_tajikistan_is_russia-locked_18661.html); and, "India, Tajikistan to step up counter-terrorism cooperation," *Business Standard*, September 11, 2014 at [http://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/india-tajikistan-to-step-up-counter-terrorism-cooperation-114091101203\\_1.html](http://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/india-tajikistan-to-step-up-counter-terrorism-cooperation-114091101203_1.html).

<sup>17</sup> See "Al-Qaeda chief Zawahiri launches al-Qaeda in South Asia," *BBC News Asia*, September 4, 2014 at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-29056668>; and, "Full Text of Al Qaeda chief Ayman al-Zawahiri's audio message," at <http://www.thedailystar.net/upload/gallery/pdf/transcription-zawahiri-msg.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> See Stephen Tankel, *Domestic Barriers to Dismantling the Militant Infrastructure in Pakistan*, US Institute of Peace, July 2013, especially pp. 15-21 at [http://www.operationspaix.net/DATA/DOCUMENT/8112~v~Domestic\\_Barriers\\_to\\_Dismantling\\_the\\_Militant\\_Infrastructure\\_in\\_Pakistan.pdf](http://www.operationspaix.net/DATA/DOCUMENT/8112~v~Domestic_Barriers_to_Dismantling_the_Militant_Infrastructure_in_Pakistan.pdf).

## Fully Appreciating the Security Risks

Disturbingly, signs abounded in 2014 that the US/NATO military drawdown has dramatically increased risk in all three areas of the Afghan security challenge. To begin with, the Afghan National Army (ANA) has demonstrated considerable weakness in maintaining security against Taliban resurgence Afghanistan's south, its east and in Kabul itself – areas where US/NATO combat troop presence had all but vanished by mid-2014. In the south and east, Afghan military units have lost many hard-won gains from the US/NATO uplift of 2009-11. By the end of October 2014, Afghan Army and National Police forces had suffered more than 4,600 deaths for the year – an unsustainable rate of attrition.<sup>19</sup> ANSF field units lack sufficient aerial resupply, casualty evacuation capabilities, and intelligence support, as well as timely indirect fires or air strike support.<sup>20</sup> ANSF performance in late 2014 has eroded international confidence in Afghanistan as a secure environment for financial investments.

Pakistan's military and intelligence agencies exhibit no fundamental change in support for the Afghan Taliban and other anti-Indian jihadi outfits operating in Afghanistan. Despite late 2014 statements by US military officials in Afghanistan that Pakistan military operations into North Waziristan have disrupted the ability of the Haqqani Network to launch terrorist attacks on Afghan territory – statements dramatically amplified in Pakistani press – there is little to suggest that even if true, these will produce lasting effect.<sup>21</sup>

Pakistan military-intelligence accusations that Afghan government and ANSF forces are unable to capture or kill escaping North Waziristan militants and that Afghanistan's NDS is actually working with Indian intelligence services to "turn" fleeing Pakistani Taliban into agents for use against the Pakistan government grow greater every day.<sup>22</sup> The historic Indo-Pakistani animus is palpable in Afghanistan and the space for this animus to grow in size and scale increases with every withdrawn US/NATO military asset.

Finally, the American draw-down of 2013-14 has already badly compromised the linchpin of a successful future counter-terrorism campaign in Afghanistan: a robust and autonomous intelligence backbone. But most of this backbone has been lost already – a direct casualty of the Obama Administration's move to a skeletal military footprint by December 2014. CIA officials made it clear that while intelligence assets and contractors are used to guard its bases, it relies on military transportation, logistics and emergency medical evacuation and cannot risk significant deployment in Afghanistan's rural areas without US troops nearby. Without another 3,000-3,500 US troops – about a military intelligence brigade with supporting logistical and force protection forces – the American contingent will wind through 2015-16 increasingly unable to monitor, anticipate and counteract what certainly will remain a rapidly evolving and increasingly complex set of terrorist interactions.

The worrisome security indicators in Afghanistan during 2014 must give one pause – and especially in light of the outcomes witnessed in Iraq and Syria. There, Iraqi-demanded US/western military departure clearly contributed to a too-late discernment of a major terrorist-insurgent threat requiring a taxing and expensive US military response.<sup>23</sup> Two lessons from

---

<sup>19</sup> See Andrew Tilghman, "New Afghanistan Commander reviews Drawdown Plans," *Military Times*, November 14, 2014 at <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2014/11/14/afghanistan-drawdown-review/19041195/>.

<sup>20</sup> See Jonatan Schroden, et. al., "Independent Assessment of the Afghan National Security Forces," Center for Naval Analyses (CNA), January 2014 at <http://www.cna.org/sites/default/files/research/CNA%20Independent%20Assessment%20of%20the%20ANSF.pdf>.

<sup>21</sup> See "Pakistani Army's operation in North Waziristan disrupted Haqqani network: US commander," *NewsNation Pakistan*, November 6, 2014 at <http://www.newsnation.in/article/60114-pakistani-armys-operation-north-waziristan-disrupted-haqqani-network.html>; "Pakistani forces target militants without discrimination in Waziristan – security advisor," *Xinhuanet China News Service*, July 21, 2014 at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/world/2014-07/21/c\\_133500222.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/world/2014-07/21/c_133500222.htm); and, "US military leaders say it's too soon to evaluate Pakistan offensive in N. Waziristan," *Associated Press*, August 29, 2014 at <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2014/08/29/us-military-leaders-say-it-too-soon-to-evaluate-pakistan-offensive-in-n/>.

<sup>22</sup> "Pakistan censures NATO over militant safe havens in Afghanistan," *English Islam Times*, June 26, 2012 at <http://www.islamtimes.org/en/doc/news/174377/en/doc/news/423234/israeli-soldiers-shoot-injure-palestinian-teen-in-west-bank>; "Striking revelations: Hakimullah Mehsud's top aide in US custody," *The Express Tribune*, October 12, 2013 at <http://tribune.com.pk/story/616941/striking-revelations-hakimullah-mehsuds-top-aide-in-us-custody/>; Matthew Rosenberg, "U.S. Disrupts Afghans' Tack on Militants," *The New York Times*, October 28, 2013 at <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/29/world/asia/us-disrupts-afghans-tack-on-militants.html?pagewanted=all&module=Search&mabReward=relbias%3As%2C%7B%22%22%3A%22RI%3A13%22%7D>; and Farooq (January 1, 2014).

<sup>23</sup> See Rick Brennan, "Withdrawal Symptoms: The Bungling of the Iraq Exit," *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2014 at

Iraq/Syria stand out. First, the nexus between insurgents and Salafi jihadist terrorism is pernicious and fast-moving. A robust, autonomous US/western intelligence network is vital as local intelligence agents cannot be counted on for unbiased collection and transmission of important nuances of network interactions. Second, once lost in a country, a viable US military-interagency intelligence nexus is very costly and time-consuming to reconstruct.<sup>24</sup>

### **Into 2015: It's Late – But Not Too Late**

A truly serious level of security commitment by the US and its allies *in* Afghanistan *and for* the wider region must meet three main objectives, none of which are sufficiently accommodated as of late 2014 in the announced implementation framework for the US-Afghan BSA and the NATO-Afghanistan security pact.

First, any serious commitment must include *independent and robust intelligence and strike* assets to track in detail and act swiftly against international terrorist organizations looking to establish sanctuary in Afghanistan. Second, it must *provide ANSF with sufficient direct operational support* in the key counterinsurgency capabilities these units inherently lack: aero-medical casualty evacuation, aerial troop transport to crisis areas, heavy indirect fire support from air and artillery, rapid and reliable logistical resupply, and reconnaissance and intelligence support down to brigade and regimental levels. Finally, it must *sustain sufficient training and operational military presence in Afghanistan* to dampen the incentives for proxy militia agents sparking internecine war in Afghanistan or cross-border war in Pakistan.

In November 2014, new American forces commander, US Army General John Campbell, publicly signaled a desire to revisit the severe limitations of the Obama Administration drawdown plans, telling American media outlets that he was conducting a review to make sure it, "...still made sense."<sup>25</sup> This review is overdue, and its conclusions already clear.

This post-2014 residual American military presence should be composed of 20,000 personnel, augmented by 4,500-5,000 NATO trainers and advisors. This force should remain at a 20,000 level until political and security accommodations between Pakistan and Afghanistan and Pakistan and India mature to the point where regional collaboration on Afghan stability is assured. Such an American force could easily be sustained with an annual budget of \$20B.

Three thousand of these Americans would provide multi-dimensional air and ground logistical support for tactically capable but operationally limited ANA. Another 10,000 Americans are necessary for advise and assist missions with the ANA and with selected Afghan National Police (ANP) formations down to the levels of divisions and brigades – a far more robust undertaking than the present limitations to ANA corps level and above. There is no way to fight a credible counter-insurgency in the inhospitable and mountainous terrain of Afghanistan without indirect fire support, timely aerial strike support, aero-resupply, and aero-medical evacuation. A modest commitment supplementing Afghan Air Forces of a US Army helicopter lift battalion, an attack battalion and a dedicated US Air Force Fighter wing would comprise about 3,500-4,000 of this 10,000 person package.

A robust U.S. Special Operations element of 3,000 members must remain to assure responsive and capable counter-terrorism capability. These will assist Afghan special units against threats to Afghan sovereignty and must conduct autonomous counter-terrorism operations against potential encroachment by international terrorist organizations. Finally, some 4,000 military intelligence troops must remain to assure quality and timely tracking of the threats faced by Afghan and American forces; and, more importantly, to autonomously track the complex interplay of jihadist outfits across Afghanistan and Pakistan, assuring rapid US operational responsiveness to metastasizing threats and an robust independent capability to assess what will surely be biased assessments from the Afghan NDS and Pakistan ISI.

The U.S. also would be wise to fashion a recurring annual (or biannual) field training exercise featuring an Afghan division paired with an American brigade rotated in from the United States – thereby demonstrating continuing commitment and U.S.-Afghan interoperability. Major American force concentrations would best base from Bagram, Kabul, Kandahar and points north and west, with only those advise-assist troops, autonomous intelligence and Special Forces assets necessary for the south and east basing within compounds there run by the ANA. The composition, disposition and authorities of a post-2014

---

<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/142204/rick-brennan/withdrawal-symptoms>.

<sup>24</sup> See Decade of War, Volume I: Enduring Lessons from the Past Decade of Operations, Joint & Coalition Operational Analysis (JCOA), Suffolk, Virginia, June 15, 2012 especially pages 2-5, 25-28 and 36-37.

<sup>25</sup> Tilghman, "New Afghanistan Commander reviews Drawdown Plans," at <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2014/11/14/afghanistan-drawdown-review/19041195/>.

American residual force are the most important aspects of leverage available now for American policy in a very dangerous portion of the world. The United States cannot 'fix' the region or eliminate the three major challenges to security most dominant within Afghanistan. However, America can be better postured to deter the worst threats, better enable support to already faltering ANSF units, be better informed than it might otherwise be about the evolving nature of Indo-Pakistani proxy hostilities, be better assured that it has timely and relevant intelligence and the evolving nature of international jihadist outfits. The promised post-2014 US/NATO military presence and operational authorities are insufficient to meet these major requirements.

Residual American bases and forces in South Korea have been performing precisely such a crisis deterrence and crisis response capability for at least the past 40 years. The absence of US intelligence and operational forces in Iraq from 2011-14 surely blinded America and her allies from the dangerous convergence of resurgent jihadist groups and politically disaffected Iraq and Syrian Sunni tribes, denying a timely or effective early response. American security interests in South Asia are no less demanding than in Northeast Asia or the northern arc of the Middle East. Thus, why not scope the residual American military presence in Afghanistan to size and a posture able to address the intractable dilemmas that remain? The hour is late, but the means to reduce presently unacceptable local, regional and international security risks in Afghanistan are clear. With sober reflection on the aftermath of too-dramatic exit from Iraq, a comprehensive policy and strategy review for post-2014 military-intelligence support to Afghanistan needs be conducted in early 2015.

---

**FPRI, 1528 Walnut Street, Suite 610, Philadelphia, PA 19102-3684**

**For more information, contact Eli Gilman at 215-732-3774, ext. 103, email [fpri@fpri.org](mailto:fpri@fpri.org), or visit us at [www.fpri.org](http://www.fpri.org)**