

Afghanistan from 2012- 2014:

Is A Successful Transition Possible?

Anthony H. Cordesman
Arleigh A. Burke Chair in Strategy

acordesman@gmail.com

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To comment, or to provide suggestions and corrections, please email the author at
acordesman@gmail.com.

The key issue in evaluating the prospects for a successful Transition in Afghanistan is not whether a successful transition in Afghanistan is *possible*, it is rather whether some form of meaningful transition is *probable* – a very different thing. The answer is a modest form of strategic success is still *possible*, but that it is too soon to know whether it is *probable* and there are many areas where the current level of planning, analysis, and action combined to sharply reduce the chances for success

The Afghan government, the US and its allies, and aid donors have not made enough collective progress to assign a clear level of probability. Equally important, it is too soon to know what level of forces they will maintain in Afghanistan through the end of 2014 and beyond, what levels of military and civil aid they will provide, and what level of success Afghanistan can achieve moving forward.

If they are to succeed, major improvements must take place in the depth and quality of planning and analysis, as well as in the transparency, credibility, and integrity of reporting within the US government, allied government, ISAF, and international institutions. To date, all have failed to properly meet these tests; and most public studies and reports have relied on hype, skewed reporting, vague analysis, and good intentions. This may cover the needs of domestic politics and provide for a de facto exit during 2013-2015, but it cannot support an effective transition.

The Afghan government also continues to pledge reforms in dealing with corruption, the control of funds, security issues, and the use of aid without making the progress that is necessary. It too exaggerates success and progress. More importantly, it is far from clear that the Afghan government can manage the transition to taking real responsibility for its own security, or increase its ability to absorb even a reduced level of outside funding and aid with integrity and competence. Furthermore, the true amount of foreign aid that will be available to Afghanistan after 2014 remains unclear.

Correcting this situation cannot guarantee a successful transition. The political, security, and economic circumstances within Afghanistan are too unstable, and insurgent sanctuaries in Pakistan and Pakistan's conduct create major challenges. Moreover, today's plans and pledges may still not be implemented at a time when the war is steadily more unpopular among aid donors and ISAF members, both of which face serious domestic problems and growing strategic demands in other areas. Even a modest form of mid-term success is a high-risk proposition.

This paper addresses these issues in summary form. It cannot address in depth the full range of issues shaping transition, especially false or misleading reporting on military and civil success and the basic shortfalls in the quality of the data and methods used for planning the economic side of transition. These issues are, however, addressed in far more depth in the studies referenced at the end of this analysis, which are all available on the CSIS Burke Chair website.

Defining the Mission: The Increasingly Conditional Nature of Transition

One of the most important tasks in assessing whether a mission can be accomplished is to define the mission. The politics of the Afghan War have made this difficult, particularly in a US election year. On May 1, 2012, President Obama announced that the US had

signed a Strategic Partnership Agreement with Afghanistan, and described US goals in Afghanistan as follows:

...over the last three years, the tide has turned. We broke the Taliban's momentum. We've built strong Afghan security forces. We devastated al Qaeda's leadership, taking out over 20 of their top 30 leaders. And one year ago, from a base here in Afghanistan, our troops launched the operation that killed Osama bin Laden. The goal that I set -- to defeat al Qaeda and deny it a chance to rebuild -- is now within our reach.

... tonight, I'd like to tell you how we will complete our mission and end the war in Afghanistan.

First, we've begun a transition to Afghan responsibility for security. Already, nearly half of the Afghan people live in places where Afghan security forces are moving into the lead. This month, at a NATO Summit in Chicago, our coalition will set a goal for Afghan forces to be in the lead for combat operations across the country next year. International troops will continue to train, advise and assist the Afghans, and fight alongside them when needed. But we will shift into a support role as Afghans step forward.

As we do, our troops will be coming home. Last year, we removed 10,000 U.S. troops from Afghanistan. Another 23,000 will leave by the end of the summer. After that, reductions will continue at a steady pace, with more and more of our troops coming home. And as our coalition agreed, by the end of 2014 the Afghans will be fully responsible for the security of their country.

Second, we are training Afghan security forces to get the job done. Those forces have surged, and will peak at 352,000 this year. The Afghans will sustain that level for three years, and then reduce the size of their military. And in Chicago, we will endorse a proposal to support a strong and sustainable long-term Afghan force.

Third, we're building an enduring partnership. The agreement we signed today sends a clear message to the Afghan people: As you stand up, you will not stand alone. It establishes the basis for our cooperation over the next decade, including shared commitments to combat terrorism and strengthen democratic institutions. It supports Afghan efforts to advance development and dignity for their people. And it includes Afghan commitments to transparency and accountability, and to protect the human rights of all Afghans -- men and women, boys and girls.

Within this framework, we'll work with the Afghans to determine what support they need to accomplish two narrow security missions beyond 2014 -- counter-terrorism and continued training. But we will not build permanent bases in this country, nor will we be patrolling its cities and mountains. That will be the job of the Afghan people.

Fourth, we're pursuing a negotiated peace. In coordination with the Afghan government, my administration has been in direct discussions with the Taliban. We've made it clear that they can be a part of this future if they break with al Qaeda, renounce violence and abide by Afghan laws. Many members of the Taliban -- from foot soldiers to leaders -- have indicated an interest in reconciliation. The path to peace is now set before them. Those who refuse to walk it will face strong Afghan security forces, backed by the United States and our allies.

Fifth, we are building a global consensus to support peace and stability in South Asia. In Chicago, the international community will express support for this plan and for Afghanistan's future. And I have made it clear to its neighbor -- Pakistan -- that it can and should be an equal partner in this process in a way that respects Pakistan's sovereignty, interests and democratic institutions. In pursuit of a durable peace, America has no designs beyond an end to al Qaeda safe havens and respect for Afghan sovereignty.

As we move forward, some people will ask why we need a firm timeline. The answer is clear: Our goal is not to build a country in America's image, or to eradicate every vestige of the Taliban. These objectives would require many more years, many more dollars, and most importantly, many more American lives. Our goal is to destroy al Qaeda, and we are on a path to do exactly that. Afghans want to assert their sovereignty and build a lasting peace. That requires a clear timeline to wind down the war.

President Obama's latest definition of "transition" was far more modest than the ambitious goals for transformation and regional stability the US and its allies initially set in 2002, and it still left many of the key aspects of "transition" undefined. The President did not define specific goals for what kind of Afghan government should exist after transition, or for the level of security and stability that Afghanistan should achieve by 2014. It did not provide any specific goals for development, democracy, or human rights.

The President did make it clear that "transition" would not mean an end to long-term US support of Afghanistan. He stated that the US would provide substantial aid after 2014, would not withdraw its advisors, and would keep small units to deal with the worst terrorist cells. He did talk about destroying Al Qaeda, but in very general terms and in a context where other news events make it clear that Al Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan is becoming less relevant than Al Qaeda groups in Yemen, Iraq, and the Maghreb.

However, the President did not call for the defeat of the Taliban and other insurgents, and did not call for the total elimination of all forms of terrorist presence. He did not address the issue of Afghan insurgent sanctuaries and the Al Qaeda presence in Pakistan, the future of US relations with Pakistan, regional stability or the broader "war on terrorism."

Moreover, the announcement of the Strategic Partnership Agreement did not define transition in terms of future US and allied force levels, or levels of civil and military aid. In fact, it would not have been possible to do so. While the Afghan government had made its broad desires for aid clear at the Bonn II Conference in late 2011 -- and called for total levels of aid equally to \$120 billion through 2020 -- the US and its allies had only begun to develop detailed plans for future levels of support to Afghan forces at the time of President Obama's speech.

No real plan existed for economic aid and how to deal with the problems the Afghan government will face as foreign military spending and military and civil aid are gradually reduced up until 2014, and then after the withdrawal of most foreign combat troops. Even in the wake of the Chicago Conference, only vague guidelines exist for allied military assistance to Afghanistan. The alliance declaration defined what Afghan forces should look like in terms of finances and manpower, but offered little in terms of concrete commitments for future assistance or plans for how the Afghan government will finance its military in the absence of foreign support.¹

The broader strategic realities behind the President's speech were that "transition" would evolve depending on Afghan success in governance and security forces, negotiations with the insurgents, and the relative value of Afghanistan to the US in a world with steadily evolving terrorist threats and competing security interests. The definition of "transition," and the US mission in Afghanistan, had become conditional, and would be determined by the course of events, rather than defined as a set of specific goals.

So far, little has changed. The NATO meeting in Chicago in May 2012 only vaguely addressed the critical problems in shaping effective Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), did not provide any credible plan for the development of such forces or for funding their development, and raised serious questions as to whether adequate numbers of qualified trainers and partners would be provided over time. It produced yet another

¹ NATO, *Chicago Summit Declaration on Afghanistan*, May 21, 2012.

set of pledges and good intentions, merely adding to a decade-long series of vague declarations rather than meeting the immediate need for credible, fundable plans and efforts.

The US and its allies will go into the Tokyo Conference in early July with scant real-world data for planning a coherent approach to Afghanistan's transition. From an aid perspective, the US and its allies have little concept of either the aid levels that are required or that can be effectively absorbed by the Afghan government, nor is there any credible understanding of the country's realistic economic options as outside military and civil spending are cut.

In terms of the Afghan economy, there has been no meaningful effort to link economic analysis and aid spending to progress in fighting, or to plan for the serious problems with unemployment, income distribution, and heavy dependence on the domestic narco-economy that are sure to be exacerbated after the withdrawal of foreign troops. Politically, Afghanistan faces great uncertainties surrounding its coming election, its corrupt governance, and its shaky search for some semblance of peace settlement. It seems highly unlikely that credible real-world progress will come close to the needs of a successful transition.

The Key Factors Shaping the Conditions for Success

The US, its allies, international institutions, and NGOs may want a stable, secure, and democratic Afghanistan that has modern values in terms of human rights, the rule of law, and good relations with all of its neighbors, and moving towards economic development on a national and regional basis. It was clear at the time the President Obama spoke, however, that "success" was going to be defined by a range of factors that all involved serious risks, even if success was defined as minimal security and stability -- or Afghan "good enough."

In practice, any meaningful form of success depends on the following ten conditions:

- *The level of real world military progress the US, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), and the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) have made against the insurgents to date, and can make through 2014.*
- *The progress the ANSF make in assuming responsibility for Afghan security between 2012 and 2014, and then sustain after that date with only US and ISAF advisors, far more limited aid funding, and a small US military presence designed to deal with key terrorist threats.*
- *The extent to which the key insurgent factions – Taliban, Haqqani, Hekmatyar, and Uzbek – either choose to keep fighting and wait out the withdrawal of most US and ISAF forces, or accept some form of peace negotiation based on an end to violence and the legitimacy of the Afghan central government.*
- *The degree to which the Afghan civil government becomes effective enough to win public support, and provide enough services to win popular support as outside military and aid programs are sharply reduced.*
- *The extent to which there will be enough foreign aid to help Afghanistan through the period in which massive cuts in outside aid and military spending take place.*
- *The degree to which a new election between 2013 and 2014, and other changes in Afghan politics, establish a new post-withdrawal balance of power between the non-Pashtun north, various*

Pashtun elements, and areas under Taliban/Haqqani/Hekmatyar influence and control to create a reasonable level of stability.

- *The extent to which Pakistan and other neighboring states accept the creation of a “new” Afghanistan, and the degree to which they do not actively undermine its stability.*
- *The quality of US and Afghan relations, and whether the US Congress and public see Afghanistan as friendly enough, making enough progress, and valuable enough, for them to support a prolonged transition.*
- *The degree to which US strategic interests continue to focus on Afghanistan, and saw it as key to checking terrorist threats to the US, its allies, and its interests versus evolving threats from Al Qa’ida and other Islamist extremist groups in other countries and regions.*

The level of real world military progress the US, ISAF, and the ANSF has made against the insurgents to date, and can make through 2014.

Prior to 2012, security incidents had undergone a sustained year-on-year increase since at least 2005, a result of both growing insurgent strength and a steady increase in ISAF and ANSF troop levels and effort. ISAF claims that the US, ISAF, and ANSF have made major military progress in the last two years, and have halted and reversed the insurgents’ “momentum.” While some of these claims are exaggerated, it does appear that since mid or late 2011 there has been a year-over-year decrease in the number of insurgent attacks. Sources often skeptical of ISAF reporting, including the UN and the Afghanistan NGO Safety Office, have for the first time reported a similar drop in security incidents, particularly in the first months of 2012.²

The latest Department of Defense semi-annual report to Congress was issued on April 27, 2012 and quoted ISAF statistics that showed: “Security incidents from October 2011 through March 2012 decreased by 15 percent compared to the corresponding period last year. Notably, data reflects nine straight months (since July 2011) of year-over-year (YoY) decreases in security incidents.” It also said that, “Enemy Initiated Attacks [EIAs] – which, unlike security incidents, do not include potential or attempted IED attacks – were also down 16 percent from October 2011 through March 2012 in comparison to the corresponding period last year. Since May 2011, each month has seen fewer enemy EIAs than the corresponding month from the previous year.”

The US Department of Defense reported in April 2012 that,³

The insurgency failed to regain momentum during the fall and winter following the operational failure of their summer 2011 campaign, and the gap between insurgent intent and capability continued to grow. This has been further exacerbated by the increasing success of the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP) where reconciliation efforts appear to be hurting Taliban cohesiveness. Since March of last year, there has been a more than three-fold increase in the number of formal reintegrees choosing to leave the battlefield through the APRP.

... The progress of the civil-military COIN campaign has severely degraded the Taliban-led insurgency, limiting their operational capacity and undermining their popular support. The decline in insurgent capability, coupled with improvements in the operational effectiveness of the ANSF

² Afghanistan NGO Safety Office, “Quarterly Data Report: Q.1 2012,” April 2012; UN Security Council, “The Situation in Afghanistan,” March 5, 2012.

³ Department of Defense semi-annual report to Congress, *Report on Progress Towards Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, April 27, 2012.

and a resilient ANSF-ISAF partnership, has enabled the security transition process to expand. The transition of security responsibility to the Afghans by the end of 2014, as agreed at Lisbon, remains on schedule.

The factors behind the decrease in insurgent initiated attacks do, however, remain unclear. Recent changes are limited to the arena of tactical fighting and kinetics, rather than the overall actions and goals of major insurgent factions. While US force levels have only just begun to drop from their ‘surge’ peak in 2011, ISAF operations have slowed in tempo while ANSF operations have held steady⁴ – as should be expected for the transitional period.

Comparisons between June-September 2010 and June-September 2011 are distorted by the high levels of violence specifically associated with the 2010 parliamentary elections. The year-over-year fall in violence for the subsequent late fall and winter months can be partially explained by the extremely harsh 2011-2012 winter compared to the relatively mild 2010-2011 winter; insurgent attacks have always fallen in the cold winter months due to the difficulty of travel and the lack of foliage cover. While these specific one-time factors are all important, the extent of the reduction in violence in recent months does seem to indicate that insurgent capability has fallen at the tactical level in most of the country, at least temporarily.

Breaking down the drop in violence by province and region brings the situation further into focus. Low levels of violence in parts of the east, including the entirety of Nuristan province and parts of Paktika, Zabul, and Kunar provinces, are a reflection of ANSF/ISAF withdrawal, allowing insurgents to freely consolidate control over these areas. Conversely, the significant drop in violence throughout RC-North is due rather to the degrading of insurgent capacity in previously violent and contested provinces such as Kunduz, a clear credit to ISAF/ANSF efforts. The largest drop in violence has been in RC-Southwest, which is due to the consolidation of ISAF/ANSF control over Helmand province – a massive improvement from previous years. The situations in RC-West, RC-South, and RC-East remain mixed, however, with increased insurgent activity in a number of provinces.

That same Department of Defense report stated that,⁵

The Taliban-led insurgency, however, remains adaptive and determined with a significant regenerative capacity and retains the capability to emplace substantial numbers of IEDs and conduct isolated high-profile attacks. As insurgent capacity to directly contest ANSF-ISAF gains erodes, insurgents have increasingly resorted to asymmetric efforts in an attempt to regain territory and influence, including assassinations, kidnappings, intimidation tactics, and strategic messaging campaigns. The insurgency will likely expand its asymmetric operations as a result of its diminished operational capability and in order to conserve diminishing resources.

The insurgency also continues to receive critical support – including sanctuary, training infrastructure, and operational and financial support – from within neighboring Pakistan. In fact, key elements of the insurgency remain potent and threatening due to the availability of sanctuary inside of Pakistan including the Afghan Taliban based in Balochistan Province and the Haqqani Network in North Waziristan Agency.

⁴ Afghanistan NGO Safety Office, “Quarterly Data Report: Q.1 2012,” April 2012, p. 3.

⁵ Department of Defense semi-annual report to Congress, *Report on Progress Towards Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, April 27, 2012.

It is now clear that US and allied forces are now making significantly greater and faster withdrawals than was called for in the strategy developed in 2009, or in the ISAF campaign plan for the spring of 2011. This is affecting ISAF's ability to carry out military operations and the campaign plan that was a key part of this strategy a year ago.

ISAF has had to shift to a strategy emphasizing partnering and the development of the ANSF over efforts to defeat the Taliban and other insurgents, and that ISAF cannot make the planned gains in the East given major US and allied force cuts take place this spring and summer. By September, the US is expected to have withdrawn an additional 22,000 troops, reducing American forces to 68,000. It is also unclear if the US, ISAF, and ANSF can hold on to their gains in the south during 2012-2014..

France's decision to accelerate its withdrawal from Afghanistan in May 2012 is only one sign that ISAF members will not keep their forces at currently planned levels during 2012-2014. Moreover, ISAF has yet to provide any unclassified analysis and metric to support the probability that the ANSF can transition to take over responsibility for security in high threat areas.

More broadly, military progress against the Taliban and other insurgents must be measured in a much wider context. The issue is not simply how effective the Taliban can be during and after transition. It is the level of Afghan political coherence that develops between now and 2015 and whether the Afghan government can win popular support in contested areas. In this broader context, the ISAF and US' focus on winning tactical victories against the insurgents is hardly relevant.

The overall success of the war and every other aspect of the transition depend on the progress being made in reducing the political popularity of the insurgents relative to the Afghan government and regional power brokers.

Like the war in Iraq, and in virtually every major modern counterinsurgency, any meaningful form of victory must be defined in terms of the ability of the government to defeat insurgents at the political level, through successful governance, through economic incentives and security, through measurable popular support, and through local and national security.

Meaningful progress towards victory – either through combat or some workable form of peace settlement – will be determined by the level of progress in all of these areas, and must be measured in net assessment terms: progress towards victory in a strategic sense is the rate of overall success of the government relative to insurgent influence and control.

As was the case in Vietnam, the US, ISAF, and ANSF can win every major tactical engagement and still see the Afghan government lose the war if the insurgents take control of the countryside and the Afghan government cannot win the support of the people or establish effective governance in the field.

This is not a lesson that the US, its allies, ISAF, UNAMA or any other source of unclassified reporting on either the Iraq War or the Afghan conflict seems to have fully learned in the last decade. Moreover, there is no meaningful unclassified net assessment of the progress of Afghan government forces and governance relative to

the influence of insurgent factions, the role of power brokers, and the risk of the country fragmenting along ethnic, sectarian, and regional lines. Integrated civil-military reporting and net assessment have been no more real than integrated civil-military planning. Worse, unclassified reporting remains stovepiped and often distorted by “spin” and “cheerleading” in exaggerating progress in a given part of the mission.

What has always been an exercise in armed nation building – where every meaningful assessment and metric should have been tailored to measuring success in meeting this overall goal – is now a race to 2014. It is a race between the ability to create a successful and stable Afghan government and political system against insurgent ability to outwait the US, ISAF, and outside aid efforts and score victories in a war of political attrition.

Major improvements in reporting are needed to provide transparency and credibility on the military side of the war. These include:

- *A focus on each major insurgent faction estimating its current effectiveness, attitude towards a peace settlement, access to sanctuary in Pakistan and outside funding and volunteers, and key areas of presence and influence.*
- *A net assessment of the relative strength of insurgent influence versus that of the Afghan government and forces with mapping to show relative inference/ presence by key district. And the trends.*
- *Analysis of the full range of insurgent actions including intimidation and lower level threats, using of methods like kidnapping and night letters, shadow governments, and other non-kinetic activities.*
- *Analysis by key district of the relative success of the Afghan government and ANSF relative to insurgents and key power brokers/warlords.*
- *Key district reporting – where possible – of polling or sampling data on attitudes towards the insurgents and Afghan government.*

The progress the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) make in assuming responsibility for Afghan security between 2012 and 2014, and then sustains after that date with only US and ISAF advisors, far more limited aid funding, and a small US military presence designed to deal with key terrorist threats.

Afghan forces are making real progress, particularly the Afghan National Army. Even the Army, however, faces major challenges in becoming a self-sustained force managing all of its command, force development, and support functions, and fighting virtually all of its own battles with limited outside advisors and partners.

The ANA is racing to create a force structure over the next two years that normally would take a decade. To illustrate this point, the total ANSF increased from 276,000 to 340,000 between June 2011 and June 2012 – an increase of well over 23% if attrition is taken into account. This is far too quick to create an effective force at the same time, and NTM-A has – and will continue to – attempt to generate an adequate force in spite of serious shortfalls in the number of specialized advisors it needs and uncertainties about both the

outside funding it will have and the number of ISAF forces that will remain through 2014.

In May 2012, the NATO countries set benchmarks for the Afghan government's financing of the ANSF. The alliance agreed that the Afghan government would finance the ANSF with no less than \$500 million by 2015. Moreover, it was agreed that by 2024, the Afghan government would bear the entire burden of financing the force. Anticipated force levels for the ANSF would be roughly 228,500, receiving \$4.1 billion a year in funds.⁶

Despite these ambitious goals, there is no explanation in the alliance's declaration as to how the Afghan government will be able to finance the ANSF to these levels. Moreover, the NATO communiqué after the Chicago conference referred to conditions based reductions in the ANSF while the fact sheet issued by the White House was specific in mentioning that the cuts would be achieved by 2017.

More importantly, no responsible discussion of the ANSF has dealt with the total manning and cost of such different forces. There is no question that real improvements are being made in every element of the ANSF, and in the roles of the Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Interior. However, the discussions at the Chicago conference lumped together the Afghan Army, Afghan Air Force, and three very different elements of Afghan Police – while ignoring the gross differences between them. They ignored the real-world issues in dealing with the Afghan Local Police, ethnic and sectarian alignments and militias, and the uncertain role of the Afghan Public Protection Force (APPF).

The end result was to create nonsensical manning totals and costs for every aspect of ANSF development. ISAF and NATO Training Mission Afghanistan (NTM-A) have failed to justify the current force goal of 352,000 and have failed to explain the rationale – if one exists – for cutting the force in the future.

The overall force plan and its funding are now highly unstable. Plans still call for a build up to a total of 352,000 men – but only for three years and then for cuts down to 228,500 to 230,000. Outside funding will shrink from over \$11 billion this fiscal year to \$5.6 billion next year. Planned aid funding later in transition has dropped from \$7-9 billion in plans issued in early 2011 to \$4.1 billion a year in tentative plans as of May 2012, but there is no annual break out of how funding will occur after 2012.

Unclassified statements and reporting leave the overall funding stream between 2012 and 2014 unclear. The lack of meaningful plans and data is compounded by uncertain counts of trainers and partners that ignore qualifications and treat pledges as actually being in place. Moreover, no responsible discussion can ignore the reporting on corruption in the forces and operations of the Ministry of Defense and Ministry of the Interior, and particularly in the various elements of the ANP.

Again, it must be stated that the various branches of the Afghan National Police (ANP) – the Afghan Uniform Police (AUP), Afghan Border Police (ABP), and Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP) – have elements that have made major progress, and act

⁶ NATO, *Chicago Summit Declaration on Afghanistan*, May 21, 2012.

with considerable effectiveness in paramilitary roles. Every element of the ANP – with the possible exception of the ANCOP force -- does, however, suffer from massive corruption and extensive ties to Afghan power brokers.

Far too often – particularly in districts with the presence of or risk of insurgents – the elements of the police that are present are not supported by effective local governance or a functioning local justice system. This problem has made the Taliban the de facto justice system in some areas. Moreover, serious problems exist with local militias, given that post-transition government support for Afghan Local Police (ALP) is in question. Another ongoing issue has been the failure of the Afghan government to replace private security contractors with an effective government force.

Adequate transition planning and execution must include transparent public reporting on:

- *As complete open source reporting of the full range of Commanders Unit Assessment Tool (CUAT) readiness assessments as possible.*
- *Integrated plans for each separate element of Afghan forces during 2012 through at least 2016, showing the annual plans for development, cost, manning and readiness levels, and problems to date.*
- *Full disclosure of the actual level of national funding of the ANSF, and provision of qualified trainers and partners based on actual presence, not pledges.*
- *Explicit justification of manpower goals for each element of Afghan forces through 2016, including a discussion of the trade-offs between quality, quantity, and an estimation of actual progress by the end 2014.*
- *Explicit justification of the shifts in funding plans and force goals between 2011 and 2012.*
- *Mapping by at least key district of the level of presence and effectiveness of each element of Afghan forces.*
- *Analysis and mapping that show how the Afghan police presence correlates to the presence of effective Afghan governance and a working justice system.*
- *Public analysis of each individual force element's levels of corruption, ties to power brokers and criminal networks, ties to insurgents, and ethnic and sectarian loyalties such as the Northern Alliance,*

The extent to which the key insurgent factions – Taliban, Haqqani, Hekmatyar, and Uzbek – either chose to keep fighting and wait out the withdrawal of most US and ISAF forces, or accept some form of peace negotiation based on an end to violence and the legitimacy of the Afghan central government

It is important to note that peace negotiations operate in near parallel with plans for transition, and no one has attempted to publically define what “transition” would mean if the insurgents did reach a peace agreement. In practice, such an agreement would force the US, its allies, aid donors, and the Afghan government to virtually reshape all current transition planning from the ground up.

So far, however, it is unclear that any major insurgent group – other than possibly elements of the Hekmatyar faction – has any serious interest in peace talks. The Taliban

or “Emirate” web site claims victory, claims negotiations simply reflect its strength, and announced a new 2012 offensive in mid-May 2012. The Taliban have long demanded that foreign military forces withdraw from Afghanistan before they will officially enter talks; as transition progresses, the Taliban will both cast the Western military drawdown as a victory and be more willing to enter negotiations. The reintegration effort is largely nominal, and most returnees come from areas outside the primary Taliban and other insurgent power centers.

Moreover, while the Afghan people have shown far more support for the Afghan government than the Taliban, polls indicate they are willing to compromise with the latter to put an end to the fighting. An ASCOR/D3 Systems poll in early 2012 found that:⁷

Forty-eight percent in this national survey say the Taliban have become more moderate, double the number three years ago. More, 74 percent, support a negotiated settlement that would allow Taliban members to hold political office, and 65 percent say they would accept a deal that gave the Taliban control of some provinces. . .Three-quarters also would back a settlement allowing Taliban members to serve in the armed forces. And most would accept Taliban-inspired restraints on women’s ability to appear in public unescorted, although majorities reject other restrictions on women’s rights in a settlement deal.

The survey was completed in January and February, 2012, via face-to-face interviews with a random national sample of 2,018 Afghans in all 34 provinces of the country.

- In addition to substantial support for reconciliation, the survey, as noted, finds new lows in reports of bombings, killings and arson of public buildings by the Taliban. Fewer than a quarter of Afghans report such activities in their area (23, 23 and 21 percent, respectively), well down from their highs of 43, 42 and 45 percent in a 2006 survey. Among the survey’s results on reconciliation:
- Three-quarters support a negotiated settlement that would allow Taliban members to hold political office. At the same time, in response to a follow-up question, eight in 10 of those who support a settlement also say the government should negotiate only if the Taliban first put down their arms.
- Support for a settlement holds steady if an agreement allows the Taliban to join the Afghan national security forces, and it’s 65 percent for a settlement that cedes control of some provinces to the Taliban.
- Among groups, backing for a settlement is considerably lower in the Hazarjat region, chiefly populated by members of the Hazara ethnic group, which has been suppressed by the Pashtun-dominated Taliban.
- Fifty-seven percent of Afghans say they would support a settlement with the Taliban that prohibited women from being outside unescorted – not a reach, since in a 2010 survey, even in the absence of the prospect of a deal with the Taliban, Afghans divided 50-50 on whether women should be out unescorted in their own village or neighborhood, and by 61-38 percent opposed women going farther afield without an escort.
- Regardless, majorities are unwilling to give up other women’s rights as part of a Taliban deal, including the ability to attend school, vote, work or hold political office.
- Beyond the Taliban, nearly two-thirds also support negotiations with the Haqqani network, another armed insurgent group.

⁷ ACSOR/D3 Systems: Afghan Futures , Analysis by Langer Research Contact: Matt Warshaw, ACSOR/D3 Systems, 703 388-2450, info@d3systems.com.

- Belief that the Taliban have moderated is a strong factor in views on negotiating with the group: Depending on the conditions, support for a settlement is about 25 points higher among Afghans who think the Taliban are more moderate than it is among those who reject that suggestion. Support for a settlement allowing Taliban to hold political office, for example, includes 86 percent of those who see them as more moderate, vs. 61 percent of those who don't.
- Views that the Taliban have become more moderate peak in two areas of particularly strong Taliban influence, reaching 69 percent in the South West, which includes their home base, Kandahar; and 59 percent in the East, along the Pakistan border. This sentiment dives to 33 percent in the West, 38 percent in the Hazarjat and 41 percent in Kabul province.

Effective transition planning and execution must include transparent public reporting on:

- *How much damage has actually been done in a decade of attacks on each key insurgent element.*
- *A survey by region and key district of insurgent influence and trend an analysis.*
- *A realistic and detailed assessment of whether insurgents are really "tired," "disaffected." Or seeking peace, or desired and in tend to ride out transition and the withdrawal of US and ISAF forces.*
- *An assessment that does not artificially separate the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban, looks at the role of Al Qa`ida in both countries, and assesses the current and probable future role of the ISI and other elements in Pakistan that support insurgents.*
- *A detailed look at the financing of insurgents, the role that narco trafficking still plays in supporting them, and their ties to outside financing.*
- *An examination of why Afghan polls show a steadily rising design for a peace settlement and to include insurgents in the government and political process.*
- *An analysis of past trends in insurgent influence by key district and rolling projection through at least end 2014.*
- *An objective examination of the extent to which operations in Afghanistan really matter in terms of the evolving nature of international terrorism in Pakistan and areas outside Afghanistan.*

The degree to which the Afghan civil government becomes effective enough to win public support, and provide enough services to win popular support as outside military and aid programs are sharply reduced

Outsiders often seem far more concerned about the quality of Afghan support for the war and the Afghan government than Afghans. Polls have obvious limits, but they have consistently found that Afghans do still support the war, and large numbers support the Karzai government. The same poll referred to above found that,⁸

- Only 12 percent of Afghans see them (the Taliban) favorably overall. That compares with favorable ratings of 72 percent for the Afghan government and, at the time the survey was completed, 51 percent for the United States.
- As of early February, fewer than one in four Afghans favored the immediate withdrawal of U.S. and NATO forces, with more saying they should stay until Afghan forces are trained (37 percent)

⁸ ACSOR/D3 Systems: Afghan Futures, Analysis by Langer Research Contact: Matt Warshaw, ACSOR/D3 Systems, 703 388-2450, info@d3systems.com.

or the Taliban have been defeated (27 percent), if not longer. Seven in 10, moreover, said their lives in general had improved since the start of the U.S. presence in the country a decade ago.

- Forty-five percent in the survey report development projects occurring in their area, and a majority, 57 percent, also say the country is generally heading in the right direction, 6 points fewer than said so in the first Afghan Futures survey in May 2010.
- The survey also found some gains from polling last summer in ratings of basic living conditions. Availability of clean water, education for children, the security situation and freedom of movement all are rated positively by 70 percent or more. But the availability of jobs and electricity continue to languish, both rated positively by 39 percent.

So far, however, the Afghan government has made only limited progress in establishing the level of governance at the provincial and district level necessary to win lasting support. It is far more popular in most areas outside a relatively narrow Pashtun belt in the east and south than the Taliban, but it has done far less to provide security, service, and a rule of law than the US, allied, and UNAMA planners hoped – even after substantial cuts in goals and expectations in shaping the current strategy in 2009-2010.

Corruption, de facto rule by power brokers and ex-warlords, problems with criminal gangs and narco-trafficking (which the UN estimates accounts for 15% of the Afghan GDP), and failed economic development at the popular level all now combine to raise serious questions about the government's ability to carry out transition and deal with the loss of outside forces and major reductions in aid.

The US Department of Defense reported in April 2012 that,⁹

The civil-military COIN strategy continues to expand security for the Afghan population, providing the necessary conditions for the Afghan Government to extend effective governance and promote economic and social development.

During the reporting period, the Afghan Government made limited progress towards effective and sustainable governance. The executive branch focused primarily on supporting the security Transition process and negotiating a long-term strategic partnership with the United States. The Loya Jirga, Afghanistan's highest consultative body, reaffirmed the country's commitment to such a partnership with the United States. Afghanistan has reached similar agreements with the United Kingdom, France, Italy, and Turkmenistan. The Afghan Parliament resumed operations following the resolution of fraud allegations from the September 2010 *Wolesi Jirga* elections and made progress on important legislative initiatives, including approval of the supplementary budget request to recapitalize the Afghan Central Bank for costs related to the Kabul Bank bailout. Importantly, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) approved a three-year, \$133.6M extended-credit facility program, which is intended to support strengthened economic and financial governance. Considerable progress was also made in the health and education sectors, and critical infrastructure continued to develop.

However, the capacity of the Afghan Government and the extension of effective governance and rule of law have been limited by multiple factors, including widespread corruption, limited human capacity, and uneven concentration of power among the judicial, legislative, and executive branches. Setbacks in governance and development continue to slow the reinforcement of security gains and threaten the legitimacy and long-term viability of the Afghan Government. The Ministry of Defense (MoD) and Ministry of Interior (MoI) are working closely with ISAF to develop and implement initiatives to combat corruption. Minister of Defense Wardak has personally taken ownership of anti-corruption reforms within the Ministry of Defense and is fighting to make the MoD an example for the rest of Afghanistan. The United States and the international community

⁹ Department of Defense semi-annual report to Congress, *Report on Progress Towards Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, April 27, 2012

will continue to work closely with their Afghan partners to address these challenges.

Reporting by the US Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction (SIGAR) found that,¹⁰

Corruption and organized crime remain grave threats to ISAF's mission and the viability of the Afghan government, according to DoD. Criminal patronage networks continue to penetrate and subvert critical state functions and institutions... Transparency International released its annual corruption perception index rankings. Afghanistan tied with Myanmar for the third most corrupt country in the world. The only countries that ranked lower were North Korea and Somalia.

According to the Asia Foundation survey, despite a relatively positive perception of the government, a large majority of Afghans (76%) see corruption as a major problem in the country; only 5% said it was not a problem. Corruption frequently affects Afghans in their daily life: 56% saw it as a major daily problem, and an additional 31% saw it as a minor daily problem. The type of corruption that affected individuals the most was administrative corruption (39%), which was identified significantly more often than moral corruption, bribes, and corruption in the legal and education systems.

This quarter, an initiative facilitated by the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) that brought together 1,500 Afghans in 65 focus groups found further evidence about the extent of the corruption problem. Afghans themselves see corruption as pervasive; it affects nearly every aspect of their lives and leads to security concerns, limited economic development, and human rights abuses, according to the UN Secretary-General. Afghans also said that ISAF and international development partners needed to play larger roles in efforts to address the problem.

Adequate transition planning must address the real world challenges Afghanistan faces in developing effective governance, security and rule of law, its economy, and its ability to use and manage outside funding effectively and honestly. This means a credible effort to support transition must include:

- *A clear understanding that it is now mid-2012, that the lead times for major program changes and new programs are 12-18 months, and that there is no time left for more conferences and vague, well-meaning concepts and pledges.*
- *Honest assessments of the impact of cuts in future military spending and aid, real world Afghan revenue raising capabilities, and the impact of coming cuts in spending tied to realistic estimates of the programs and costs necessary to reduce such impact to an acceptable level.*
- *Detailed assessment of the ability of the Afghan government and institutions to absorb aid and outside spending rather than seeking more aid regardless of Afghan absorption capability.*
- *A focus on Afghanistan's current agricultural sector, SOEs and other industries, and service sector based on near-term options and capabilities, rather than creating new fields of dreams.*
- *An objective analysis of Afghanistan's near and mid-term prospects for development that uses realistic estimates of costs, time, and economic impact rather than the kind of gross exaggeration of near and mid – term possibilities used in the "New Silk road" and similar studies.*
- *Honest assessments of the Afghan economy that address the narcotics sector, current dependence on military spending and aid, the impact of the black and gray sectors of the economy, and the role of criminal networks and extortion.*
- *Analyses that provide some realistic basis for planning that takes into account the probable levels of security and insurgent presence and activity through 2014-2015; plans that explicitly recognize that Afghanistan is, and will remain, at war unless a peace settlement changes every parameter of planning.*

¹⁰ SIGAR, *Quarterly Report*, January 2012, pp. 107-108.

- *Explicit analysis of the limits and uncertainties in current data and reporting, honest statements describing the problem where the data are misleading or cannot be verified, and serious efforts to correct key shortfalls and problems.*
- *Realistic plans to deal with cutbacks in outside aid staff and spending, cutbacks or elimination of PRT and other aid personnel, and that provide some workable way for Afghanistan to plan and manage efforts in both Kabul and the field, and do so with adequate fiscal controls and limits on favoritism and corruption.*
- *Realistic priorities for Afghan reform and measures of progress and effectiveness that are directly linked to the flow of aid from the outside, and subject to fiscal controls and audits. This includes public transparency for governmental and private donors and for NGOs requiring suitable contracting and auditing procedures.*
- *Creation of tangible transition planning and management efforts in Afghanistan that involve joint mechanisms for planning and managing outside aid that ties together the Afghan government, international institutions, and outside donors. Reorganization of the UNAMA to make it effective in assisting in this role, and creating some function in the World Bank to provide outside aid in planning and analysis.*
- *Plans that address actions, costs, and measures of effectiveness by year and that focus in enough detail on key provinces and districts to set meaningful operational goals and a basis for managing and evaluating action.*
- *Public statements of all pledges and aid commitments that report on actual progress in providing funds. This should have been a key UNAMA function and led to comprehensive semi-annual reporting for the last decade.*

The Afghan government's major challenges involve not only the peace process and the upcoming election, but the government's ability to provide incentives for foreign investment in the country and create effective governance structures at the national, provincial, district, and urban levels. Although addressing these issues is obviously critical to a successful transition, it is unclear whether any real progress in these areas has been made over the last half decade. The training of more civil servants to work in "Kabulstan," and a focus on the time and "honesty" of the next presidential election are not a substitute for a process of transition that builds effective national governance and garners broad public support.

The extent to which there will be enough foreign aid and outside funding to help Afghanistan through the period in which massive cuts in outside aid and military spending take place and help the government to provide adequate security and services

Afghanistan's elite may have benefited from the war and sometimes grown rich, but it remains a grimly poor state that the CIA estimates ranks 214th in the world in per capita income, has massive refugee problems, has major unemployment issues, and has over 30% of its population below the poverty line.¹¹ Moreover, UN reporting indicates it still has serious malnutrition problems in spite of World Food Program aid to some 30% of the population in recent years – reflecting what is still a sub-subsistence economy for large numbers of the country's poor.

¹¹ Central Intelligence Agency, "The World Factbook [Afghanistan]." <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html>

This creates massive problems for a country that has not made any serious nation-wide progress towards development, and whose domestic economy is largely agricultural and heavily driven by exports of narcotics – exports that a decade of counter-narcotics efforts have done nothing to eliminate or reduce on a sustained basis.

As noted earlier, there is no clear way to know how outside military expenditures and aid to the ANSF will alter over time. They have, however, dominated civil aid by a factor of at least five – the US alone will spend more than \$60 billion on aid to the ANSF during FY2002-FY2012 versus some \$17 billion in all forms of civil aid, and this does not take account of the massive US spending in Afghanistan in support of its military operations.

Afghanistan now faces a future where it not only will not be receiving military assistance in quantities it was receiving in the past, but will see massive cuts in economic aid that has recently averaged at least seven times the domestic revenues of the Afghan government. Again, no reliable data are available, but there is a critical risk that these funding cuts could cause a serious recession or depression in the market sector of the economy in 2014 and beyond.

This is not simply a matter of aid and development. It is providing bridging funding to deal with the broader economic impact of cuts in military civil spending that have directly and indirectly generated virtually all of the increase in Afghanistan's GDP and government revenues, and which have created the core of market-related employment in a country which still have major direct and disguised unemployment.

Preliminary World Bank studies warn that Afghanistan's domestic revenues will continue to rise, but that operating costs will rise much more quickly than revenues. They estimate that security costs could reach 17% of GDP; and that other governmental wages, operating costs, and maintenance costs could reach another 14% of GDP.¹²

Domestic revenues are projected to increase from 10% of GDP to 17.5% by 2021/22, driven largely by the planned value added tax and mining revenues[.] But over the same period, operating spending on:

- **Security:** Wage bill to increase from 7% of GDP to 10% to reach 352,000 troops and Operations & Maintenance (O&M) from 1% to 10.5% of GDP (\$3.5 billion annually in 2011 prices) by 2014/15
- **Non-security:** Civil service wage bill will increase from 5% of GDP to 9%, and O&M spending required to sustain donor capital investments from 1% to 4% by 2014/15 (\$1.3 billion in 2011 prices)
- Combined, these operating expenditures will be almost twice the size of domestic revenues by 2021/22

The current Afghan budget projects some \$2.5 billion in outside aid for 2012-2017, but this ignores the need to compensate for large amounts of off-budget donor aid. If all such expenditures were included in the cost of replacing items currently covered by the external budget, the total deficit could reach some 25% of GDP (\$7.2 billion in \$US 2011).¹³ Other working level studies indicate that foreign spending totaled some 40% to 75% of Afghan GDP in 2011. No one can currently predict just how serious the drop in outside spending will

¹² World Bank, *TRANSITION IN AFGHANISTAN LOOKING BEYOND 2014*, November 21, 2011, p. 11.

¹³ World Bank, *TRANSITION IN AFGHANISTAN LOOKING BEYOND 2014*, November 21, 2011, pp. 13-16.

be by 2014, or in the year beyond, but estimates of the cut in current military spending in Afghanistan range from 70 to 90%.

The Afghan plan to deal with these aspects of transition that was presented at the Bonn II Conference in November 2011 set goals that are very unlikely to be achieved: President Karzai requested some \$10 billion a year in aid through 2020 for a program that set ambitious goals for both security and development, called for equally ambitious reforms and improvements in governance, and called for the Afghan government to achieve full independence from outside support in 2030:¹⁴

- By 2015 Afghanistan will have taken over full responsibility for its own security, and will be leading development initiatives and processes with the confidence to make critical foundational investments that will lead to economic growth and fiscal sustainability.
- By 2025 Afghanistan will have eliminated its dependency on international assistance for funding to non-security sectors and will only receive support consistent with all other least developed nations. A robust and growing extractive industries sector will have developed. Through effective development and, improved delivery of Government services, the root causes of insurgency will be reduced and, in consultation with international partners, plans will have been put in place to reduce the size of the ANSF.
- By 2030 Afghanistan will be funding a professional, highly effective ANSF. Achievements in development and governance will see Afghanistan emerge as a model of a democratic, developing Islamic nations [sic].

The Afghan government's projected increases in its own domestic revenue were very ambitious. They called for revenues to rise from \$2.0 billion in fiscal 2011–12, corresponding to just over 11% of GDP, to \$4.4 billion, or 15% by 2016, an average annual revenue growth rate from 2009 of more than 30%. The requirement for outside aid was described as follows,¹⁵

Based on our initial analysis we must look to donors to finance approximately 47% of GDP or approximately \$10 billion in 2015. At first glance, this figure may look enormous. However, it reflects a 40% reduction from current aid levels, and it is expected to decline over time. The Government takes the challenge donors will face in maintaining this level of assistance seriously, but notes that when compared to the current spending of the International Community it is small.

The current estimated cost of the international military presence in Afghanistan is \$140 billion per year; 7% of total 2011 security costs is sufficient to fund the entire gap. This cost savings can facilitate Afghanistan's passage to a future that is not aid-dependent. A long-term funding commitment by the International Community, declining over time and ending in 2030, would provide the necessary stability in financing to allow Afghanistan to arrive at a stable and prosperous future.... Based on current analysis the Government of Afghanistan believes it will be necessary for the donor community to fund the cost of the Afghan security forces through 2025.

To be successful, this financial support should be defined in two categories: security assistance and non-security assistance.

Security assistance. Based on current analysis the Government of Afghanistan believes it will be necessary for the donor community to fund the cost of the Afghan security forces

¹⁴ The details were provided in a separate paper circulated in addition to the President's statement entitled, *Towards a Self-Sustaining Afghanistan, An Economic Transition Strategy*. It was issued by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, and dated November 29, 2011.

¹⁵ *Towards a Self-Sustaining Afghanistan, An Economic Transition Strategy*. Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, and dated November 29, 2011.

through 2025. The Government will continue to contribute to the recurrent cost of maintaining the security forces. The Government commits to work closely with the International Community to develop strategies to reduce the number of troops, and their recurrent maintenance costs.

Non-Security assistance. We ask the International Community to work with Government to implement the NPPs in a manner that creates conditions where strong economic growth is enabled and the root causes of insurgency are diminished. Donor funds will [be] used to achieve the commitments laid-out in this document and to achieve our shared goals of improved public financial management, reduced vulnerability to corruption, broad political and institutional reform, improved public service delivery, a strong enabling environment for growth, and direct poverty reduction.

So far, the US, other donors, and the Afghan government are still examining plans to deal with these issues. There is no meaningful transition plan, and most of the studies and preliminary plans available have crippling limitations in their data and depth of analysis that make them useless or misleading.

This is especially true in those studies and plans that do not explicitly consider:

- Ongoing military threats and risks through 2014 and beyond,
- Corruption and the role of power brokers.
- Limited Afghan ability to absorb aid and properly use and spend even its current revenues and aid funds. The problem has so far never been a focus on military spending and a failure to provide aid. The US is the largest aid donor by far, and the May 30, 2012 report of SIGAR to Congress notes that the principle civilian aid program – the Economic Support Fund – had \$14.95 billion in appropriations between 2000 and June 2012, and could only disperse some \$8.82 billion of that aid in spite of lax contracting procedures and fiscal controls.¹⁶ Groups as diverse as Oxfam and the World Bank caution that some 40% of aid funds never reach Afghan's, and failed pledges of aid remain a major problem. SIGAR also reports that Jap – the second largest donor to the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund – has pledged \$158 million in aid to date, but only paid \$20 million of that total.¹⁷
- The economic impact of tensions with Pakistan,
- Capital flight (which has already begun).
- A combination of extortion, criminal gangs, corrupt police, and narco-economics in a country where UNDOC estimates that some 15% of the GDP comes from narco-trafficking even at a time where outside military spending and civil and military aid are still so high.
- Real world costs and lead times.
- Serious regional differences in economics and dependence on outside military and aid spending.
- The ongoing demographic pressures in Afghanistan which are rapidly increasing the potential labor force, and often much faster than the even to optimistic job creation estimates in many development plans.
- Ongoing Afghan dependence on the UN World Food Program for food aid that has reached an average of 30% of the population at some point during the year in recent years.
- The high rate of unemployment among young men, how many are armed, and the impact of coming force cuts and potentially a peace settlement.

¹⁶ SIGAR, *Quarterly Report*, May 30, 2012, p. 56.

¹⁷ SIGAR, *Quarterly Report*, May 30, 2012, p. 58.

No studies and plans which ignore such critical realities can describe a useful path to transition.

It is true that no plan or analysis of the situation and requirements can be stable, and that plans will have to be constantly updated and revised. Transition, however, cannot simply “grow by chance.” There must be an ongoing plan and constant revision and change, and aid must be clearly related to what can realistically be accomplish and what donors will realistically deliver.

At present, the transparency, credibility, and depth of aid providers is a critical issue. USAID and the US State Department, for example, provide no credible reporting on overall performance, and do not validate their data or claims. UNAMA has never provided a meaningful analysis of aid in its more than ten years of existence. The rate and volume of spending – rather than the validity of the requirement and the impact of spending – has become virtually the only measure of effectiveness based on actual program data. This must be changed for Transition to succeed.

The degree to which a new election between 2013 and 2014, and other changes in Afghan politics, establish a new post-withdrawal balance of power between the non-Pashtun north, various Pashtun elements, and areas under Taliban/Haqqani/Hekmatyar influence and control to create a reasonable level of stability

US officials still seem to be obsessed with the issue of when an election will be held, its legitimacy as an honest election, and who will replace President Karzai. These issues are not unimportant, buy they probably do reflect a broad Western focus on elections per se, rather than the effectiveness of governance and legitimacy in terms of serving the peoples' interest.

The political dynamics of Afghanistan are still ethnic, sectarian, and regional. There is no meaningful census, and even the most basic population and demographic data involve substantial guesswork. The CIA estimates, however, that the country's ethnic structure is Pashtun 42%, Tajik 27%, Hazara 9%, Uzbek 9%, Aimak 4%, Turkmen 3%, Baloch 2%, other 4%. It is 80% Sunni – although deeply divided as to degree of fundamentalism and tribal custom, and 18% Shi'ite – much of which are a Hazara minority that were a victim of Taliban extremism. It is deeply divided linguistically – Afghan Persian or Dari (official) 50%, Pashto (official) 35%, Turkic languages (primarily Uzbek and Turkmen) 11%, 30 minor languages (primarily Balochi and Pashai) 4% – with considerable – if often less than fluent bilingualism.¹⁸

The schedule for transition has already led to the rebirth of the “Northern Alliance” and quiet contingency planning for local forces if the insurgents come to dominate the east or south or again seek to control the country. These divisions between the ethnic groups in the North, the Shi'ite Hazara minority and the major Pashtun regional and tribal factions affect the ANSF and the entire structure of government.

Coupled to the nation's poverty, and the impact of major coming cuts in military and aid spending, they create a real risk that “transition” will either divide the country and its

¹⁸ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html>.

security forces, or force major changes in the practical structure of Afghan politics and governance that have little to do with how honestly and when the new President is elected.

As noted earlier, the challenge is not to have a “good” or “honest” election between 2012 and 2014, it is to create an effective Afghan leadership and political structure. The US and its allies need to set clear goals not only for election reform, but for the broader reform of government. This should include:

- *Clear goals for reform of the role of the President and legislature to give the legislature effective control over money and ability to function.*
- *A clear plan for expanding the role of provincial, district, and urban governments; their self-funding, and their transparency and public accountability.*
- *Public ratings of the competence and integrity of provincial, district, and urban governments.*
- *Regular reporting on the role of “warlords,” power brokers, and criminal networks.*
- *Ongoing assessment of sectarian and ethnic divisions with the government and structure of the Afghan body politic, the risk of the emergence of the new northern Alliance, and possible fracturing of post Transition Afghanistan along regional, ethnic, sectarian, and tribal lines.*

The extent to which Pakistan and other neighboring states accept the creation of a “new” Afghanistan, and the degree they do not actively undermine its stability

At this point in time, the US sees Pakistan as drifting towards the status of a failed state, and as unwilling to end Afghan insurgent sanctuaries in Pakistan, and take on Al Qa’ida. It sees Pakistan as less and less of a credible ally, and as a state where it can at best trade aid for access routes and some cooperation in the border area. Even this remains uncertain, and if no compromise is reached soon, the US and allied forces will be forced to withdraw through critical chokepoints like the Salang tunnel, which already is operating at growing risk before some 68,000 US plus other allied troops begin major withdrawals this summer.

The US will continue UCAV strikes in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, particularly North Waziristan,, but has no plans to try to deal with the insurgent sanctuaries in Pakistan on its own, or to try to fully secure the Eastern border areas in Afghanistan, and all of the areas in the South and Southwest. It has questions about the future role of Iran, and would like to see more Russian, Chinese, and Central Asian efforts to help Afghanistan, but has largely abandoned its once ambitious goals for a “New Silk Road” and regional integration.

The US, its allies, and the Afghan government are currently trying to deal with Pakistan in reaching some kind of peace in Afghanistan. They now correctly see that Pakistan seeks to ensure that Afghanistan provides “strategic depth” in terms of its overarching conflict with India, and is willing to use Afghan insurgents as part of this effort to expand its influence.

The iron rule for transition is that any analysis or plan that does not explicitly analyze the role of both Pakistan and Afghanistan – and other neighboring states where applicable – will be a failure.

The quality of US and Afghan relations, and whether the US Congress and public see Afghanistan as friendly enough, making enough progress, and valuable enough, for them to support a prolonged transition

The long series of clashes between the US and Karzai government, debates over night raids and the use of airpower, tensions over Afghan government corruption, “green-on-blue” incidents of ANSF forces attacking US and ISAF troops, and ISAF mistakes in attacking or killing Afghan civilians has all created a steady rise in tension on both sides. An April 8, 2012 poll by ABC and the *Washington Post* found that:

- A record high 66 percent of Americans said the war in Afghanistan has not been worth fighting, matching opposition to the war in Iraq at its peak five years ago. This rose first after the Koran burning, then again after the civilian massacre in Kandahar.
- Six in 10 Americans said they believe most Afghans themselves oppose the U.S. mission there.
- President Obama had escaped the brunt of the criticism, with a 48-43 percent approval-disapproval rating on handling the war. But that the President was at risk as war weariness rose.

The US Congress, and US presidential candidates, do not want to appear to be “soft” on the Afghan War in an election year where the Democrats seek to exploit the death of Bin Laden and security issues, and the Republicans seek to portray them as weak. The US faces major political battles over federal spending, however, and many members of Congress privately express a lack of support for the war and future spending. “War fatigue” has created similar problems in virtually every other ISAF country, and many donor countries.

This might not limit the President’s ability to keep supporting the war and transition if 2012-2014 bring steady success in every critical area, and economic and government spending pressures ease or at least hold steady. This, however, is highly uncertain. Moreover, Presidential advisors seem increasingly divided over the merits of any major effort, and some see higher strategic priorities in other areas, or a need to shift resources to domestic spending.

The US is already cutting spending on the Afghan War from \$109 billion in FY2011 to \$89 billion in FY2014, and some plans put the President’s FY2014 request at around \$50 billion.¹⁹ Some discussions also call for spending levels of \$10 billion to less than \$20 billion after 2014. These still, however, are very substantial figures given competing demands on US spending. It is also important to note that virtually every European ISAF state and other major aid donor is under far more current financial pressure – as they face more near-term economic risk – than the US.

Like it or not, the US is the leader in the Transition effort. If it does not develop clear and consistent plans, funding, and management tools, Transition will fail. So far, the US has

¹⁹ Source: OMB, *Fiscal Year 2013 Budget of the US Government*, “Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO),” pp. 89-92, Budget.gov. Total is for all federal spending in the President’s request, not just Department of Defense.

failed to provide meaningful plans, or demonstration it will provide the real world support Afghanistan will need after 2012.

The degree to which US strategic interests continue to focus on Afghanistan, and saw it as key to checking terrorist threats to the US, its allies, and its interests versus evolving threats from Al Qa'ida and other Islamist extremist groups in other countries and regions

The new US strategy announced in early 2012 puts primary emphasis on Asia and the Middle East, and sees ending the kind of counterinsurgency warfare fought in Iraq and Afghanistan as a major objective. "Transition" might lead to enough cuts in forces and spending to suit these goals, but the growing pressure on US and allied national security spending will push the US to focus on other regions.

The US has few practical strategic or commercial interests in Central Asia other than countering direct threats to the US and the West. It has no major investment opportunities in Central Asia relative to those other regions. Russia and China are not competitors in this region, share a common interest in fighting extremism and terrorism, and may act as a force for regional stability.

The US has faced years of confrontation with Afghan leaders like President Karzai over the need for key tactical measures like night raids, the proper use of air power, detention of prisoners, and limits on rules of engagement and it is unclear that the current Strategic Agreement will solve any of these problems or allow the US to play an effective security role in Afghanistan.

Moreover, the US has little current reason to assume it can establish a real strategic partnership with Pakistan, or overcome its tensions with the country. It has a continuing interest in preventing Pakistan from remaining a center for Al Qa'ida and becoming a major center for other extremist groups, but it is unclear that keeping a counterterrorism base in Afghanistan will serve this end or that US UCAV strikes into Pakistan can continue.

Much will depend on whether a new form of serious international jihadist movement emerges in either Afghanistan or Pakistan that the US can counter through supporting transition in Afghanistan, and the trade-offs between the value of such efforts and dealing with other such threat in areas like Yemen, Iraq and the Levant, the Maghreb, Iraq, Syria, and other parts of the Islamic world; and the reality that Al Qaida "central" is now based in Pakistan, and not in Afghanistan.

While broad statements are made about the strategic importance of Afghanistan, these generally are not meaningfully supported by analysis or evidence, and no effort has been made to provide a comparative assessment of the costs and benefits of the transition effort – particularly one that involves any assessment of the probability of lasting post-2014 success

Afghanistan, "Success" in "Transition," and Realpolitik

The US is still committed to trying to make transition work from 2012 onwards, and it may still succeed. However, the odds of "success" in creating a stable, secure, and democratic Afghanistan moving towards economic development on a national and

regional basis by 2014 – or even 2020 – are less than even. If “success” is further defined in terms of adherence to modern values of human rights and rule of law, respected throughout the country, then the odds of “success” seem bad to negligible.

There are simply too many problems interacting at the same time. The US and its allies made too many mistakes at the beginning of their intervention, and devoted too few resources until the Taliban and a major insurgency developed. They have consistently faced too many internal Afghan problems, and too many regional challenges in an area whose sudden political and emotional importance after 9/11 in no way reflected its overall global strategic importance to either the US or Europe. The cost of supporting a sustained transition is high relative to its probable benefits, and there are too many other areas of strategic interest that have a greater impact on US and European security relative to Afghanistan and Central Asia.

At the same time, US and allied strategic interests may be satisfied by a wide range of scenarios that fall short of success *if* they are narrowly defined in terms of realpolitik. The insurgents are not unified, popular, or strong. A divided Afghanistan that has a new Northern Alliance, substantial Pashtun areas that resist any insurgent effort to take them over, a mix of local force and self-sustaining elements of the ANSF, and at least the shell of a functioning central government in Kabul would meet US strategic needs.

So would a functional division of the country, and a continuing low-level civil conflict that kept the insurgents from any serious support of outside or domestic Jihadists that acted as an international threat. Even the creation of some form of new Jihadist sanctuary in Afghanistan would have to be evaluated at the time relative to other threats, and the credibility of support some form of transition that would limit or destroy it. The high costs and limited success of the US mission in the past ten years will dampen any prospects for renewed military operations in Afghanistan following transition, even if a terrorist threat re-emerges in the country.

An outcome based on this kind of realpolitik is unpleasant, goes against US political and ideological values, and would present risks of its own. It is important to note, however, that definitions of “success” are already unstable, and will continue to evolve on a month-by-month and year-by-year basis.

ADDITIONAL REPORTS

- **Measures of Progress in Afghanistan in the Spring of 2014: The Need for Strategic Focus, Transparency, and Credibility**, May 9, 2012, http://csis.org/files/publication/120510_Afghan_Military_Progress.pdf.
- **The US Cost of the Afghan War: FY2012-FY2013**, May 14, 2012, http://csis.org/files/publication/120515_US_Spending_Afghan_War_SIGAR.pdf.
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