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SECURITY AND STABILITY IN
AFGHANISTAN (APRIL 2012)**

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Abstract:

On May 1st, the Department of Defense of USA has issued a new "Report on Progress toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan" (April 12). Since it was first published in June 2008, this report has provided the U.S. Congress semi-annual assessments on developments in Afghanistan and the state of the international coalition's campaign. This time, the authors state that a tendency toward greater security and stability in the Asian country, already observed in previous months, still prevails. This paper summarizes the main issues contained in the aforementioned report.

Keywords:

Afghanistan, ISAF, security, stability.

ANALYSIS

On May 1, the Department of Defense (DoD) published a new “Report on the Progress towards Security and Stability in Afghanistan” (April 12)¹. Since it was first published in June 2008, this half-yearly report advises the Congress on the developments in Afghanistan and the state of the International Coalition’s campaign in this country².

The report is divided in seven areas of focus: Strategy; Growth, Development and Operations of the Afghan National Security Forces; Transition Process Situation; Security, Governance; Reconstruction and Development; Counternarcotics; and Regional Engagement.

Strategy

During the reporting period, the ISAF Operations Plan has been revised (OPLAN 38302) to integrate the different aspects of the Coalition’s civil-military campaign: the counter-insurgency strategy, the strategy for the development of Afghanistan, the transition of security responsibility to the Afghan authorities and the development of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF).

In January 2012, Afghan authorities published for the first time their own Operations Plan, the OPLAN NAWOOD (Dari for “Good News”, which presents the actions which the Army and the Afghan National Police will carry out through 2012 and the first half of 2013.

ISAF will support OPLAN NAWOOD through transitioning to a Security Force Assistance model. The adoption of this model will see ISAF transition through 2012, from a “combat force with advisors” to an “advisory force with combat capabilities”.

During the last months the withdrawal of the US forces has continued, consistent with the plan outlined by the Obama administration in June 2011. According to this plan, the 30,000 U.S troops from the “surge³” will depart Afghanistan by the end of September and by the end of this year, the American forces will have been reduced by 10,000 more soldiers. In total, after these withdrawals, there will be 58,000 North-American soldiers left in Afghanistan.

As for the rest of contingents that currently form part of the ISAF’s 50 nations, in the last six months there has been a decrease of more than 2,000 soldiers, reaching the figure of 44,247

¹ www.ieeee.es/Report_Final_SecDef_04_27_12.pdf “Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan (April 12)” covers the period from October 1, 2011 to March 31, 2012.

² There is an available analysis of the previous edition (October 2011) in:

www.ieeee.es/ProgresoAfghanistan_M._Laborie.pdf

³ Troops surge: the deployment of 30.000 U.S soldiers at the beginning of the year 2010. This increase in forces was supported by many NATO member countries, which also increased their level of deployed forces. The Afghan “surge” enabled the ISAF to carry out military operations in rural areas, which were until now considered Taliban bastions.

deployed soldiers. It should be remembered that last January, French President Nicholas Sarkozy announced an accelerated timeline for the withdrawal of French forces and that by the end of 2012, 1,000 soldiers are planned to be withdrawn (400 more than originally planned). Germany has made a similar announcement and it will withdraw 500 soldiers by December 2012.

Despite these withdrawals of forces, and in the meantime of the transfer of authority with the Afghan government in some regions, the mission and the strategy of the Coalition have not changed. The long term commitment is maintained to achieve stability and security and guarantee that Afghanistan never becomes a safe refuge for Al-Qaida or its affiliates again.

The structure that the ANSF adopts after the transfer of authority is a fundamental aspect for the transition of Afghan responsibility for security. There are discussions on this issue going on between the Afghan authorities and the International Community, which consider the required size and capabilities of the ANSF and the capacity of the Republic of Afghanistan to fund its security forces, taking into account the fiscal challenges facing the economies of the ISAF countries. These discussions are aimed at establishing a plan supported by all the parties, to provide the financial, training and advising support to the ANSF as the Afghan Government assumes a greater responsibility to sustain its own security forces.

Nevertheless, it is evident that the relationship between the ISAF and the Afghan Government and its security forces has been damaged because of several events that took place during the DoD reporting period. For example the video release of U.S Marines defiling urinating on dead Taliban bodies, the inadvertent burning of religious materials –including the Holy Quran– by U.S personnel at Bagram Air Base, attacks of ANSF members against some Coalition consultants, and the killing of seventeen Afghan civilians in Kandahar Province, allegedly by a lone U.S soldier. These events have been with any doubt a setback for the ISAF's strategy to maintain the Afghans' support.

Growth, Development and Operations of the Afghan National Security Forces

According to the DoD, during the reporting period, the ANSF have continued making considerable progress in the organization and gradual preparation of a force, which with the passage of time will be able to assume the security responsibility in the whole country. It has proven to be effective in those areas where the security transition has taken place.

During the last six months, the ANSF has continued increasing its troops. As of March 31, 2012, the Afghan Army reached 194,466 soldiers, and the the National Police reached 149.642 police.

In the last report, of October 2011, it was also pointed out that there are still important challenges for the ambitious development of the ANSF. Some of these challenges are the number of desertions, which is higher than the desired levels for the ANA; the deficit in leadership and the limitations in personnel planning, ministration, logistics and procurements. Moreover, in order to carry out its missions, the ANSF still needs the Coalition's support in several abilities, such as logistics and transport and close air support. The influence of criminal patronage networks in the ANSF remains a threat to the transition process.

Transition Process Situation

The purpose of the transition process is the strengthening of the Afghan leadership in all of the government functions within the territory of Afghanistan. The ultimate aim is to give back full sovereignty to the Afghan people by December 31, 2012. This transition is being carried out in subsequent phases.

On July 2011 the first subsequent phase was carried out, throughout the transfer of authority in seven areas of the country, with the city of Herat among them.

On November 27, 2011, President Karzai announced the second phase of the transition. In the last months, five whole provinces (Balkh, Takhar, Daykundi, Samangan and Nimroz) as well as various districts and cities which belong to thirteen other provinces have initiated the transition. In total, 138 districts in 20 provinces have started the transition, which represents approximately 50 % of the Afghan population. This new phase of the process is a litmus test to determine the real skills of the Afghan government. It is much broader in scope than phase one and it also includes several areas with more challenging security environments. In any case, the transitions in the different districts will be carried out according to the security conditions and the ANSF capacities.

At this time, the districts, which will be included in the third transition phase, are being analyzed. This phase will hopefully start before the end of 2012.

Security

Afghan insurgency is composed of a syndicate of semi-autonomous groups, including the Taliban, the Haqqani Network and Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin. In the last months, the activity of these groups has been limited due to the death of some of its leaders, which is a consequence of the Coalition's action. With regard to Al Qaida, the US counter-terrorist campaign has weakened its presence in Afghanistan⁴.

⁴ The analyzed report makes a distinction between "counter-insurgency" operations against the Taliban and other armed groups and "counter-terrorism" operations carried out exclusively against Al-Qaida.

Although the specific area of operations for each group associated with the insurgency varies, the insurgency generally tends to operate along the border with Pakistan, primarily in the Pashtun majority areas of southern and eastern Afghanistan, as well as in Pashtun communities in northern Afghanistan. In these areas, Taliban senior leaders remain capable of providing strategic guidance to the insurgency and channeling vital resources to support their operations.

Within Afghanistan, insurgent leadership structures vary by province. In general, a two-man team composed of a shadow governor and a military commander lead governance efforts and military operations at the provincial level, and also oversee district-level insurgent leadership and lower-level military commanders. Most shadow governors still reside in Pakistan.

At this point of the report the DoD is positive and states that the “surge” is working. Last year saw the first decline in enemy-initiated attack in five years. This decline has been more evident over the last 12 months, when the ANSF and ISAF have halted the insurgent threats. Therefore, enemy-initiated attacks decreased by 9 percent in 2011, compared to 2010, and have decreased 16 percent in 2012 compared to the same period in 2011. With regard to the Regional Command – West (RC-W), where most of the Spanish soldiers are deployed, it presents an opposite trend from October 2011 to March 2012, since enemy-initiated attacks increased by seven percent compared to the same time period one year ago⁵.

Despite the undeniable progress of ANSF-ISAF operations, the insurgency is highly adaptable with a significant regenerative capacity, and retains the capability to emplace substantial numbers of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and conduct “high-profile attacks⁶”. The insurgency continues to exert its influence in Afghanistan through alternate methods, including kidnappings, intimidation tactics and murders. They also use mosques and their networks of sympathizers to spread their ideological messages in areas controlled by the ANSF and ISAF.

The report highlights an important security factor: Green-On-Blue incidents (when an ANSF member attacks a coalition member with the intent to maim or kill him⁷). Although these attacks are statistically small in number and have caused relatively few victims, Green-on-

⁵ The DoD report states that the major challenge within RC-W for the near term will be to sustain the ANSF operational capability as coalition forces withdraw and remaining forces shift to an advisory role within the transition process.

⁶ Un buen ejemplo de estas acciones de “alto perfil” es el llevado a cabo a mediados del pasado mes de abril de 2012 y en el que un grupo de insurgentes atacó de forma coordinada varias embajadas, el Cuartel General de la ISAF y otros lugares clave en el corazón mismo de la capital de Afganistán. Aunque, el incidente acabó con la muerte de al menos 20 insurgentes y sin víctimas mortales entre las ANSF ha tenido un considerable impacto mediático.

⁷ Desde mayo de 2007 a finales de marzo de 2012, se han producido un total de 52 incidentes “Green-on-blue” dando como resultado un total de 86 muertos y 115 heridos.

Blue attacks have a significant negative impact on the ISAF strategy. An attack on NATO mentors at the Ministry of Interior on February 25, 2012 resulted in a brief suspension of mentoring activities while security protocols were reviewed, and other attacks have caused similar problems. Investigations have determined that a large majority of Green-on-Blue attacks are not attributable to insurgent infiltration of the ANSF, but are isolated actions due to personal grievances performed by coalition personnel.

Government

This issue has been analyzed by the report from two different points of view: central and sub-national government. Concerning central government, the Government of Afghanistan is progressively developing the ability of providing a stable, efficient government which is sensitive to Afghan population. However, long term stability is menaced by multiple factors, including widespread corruption, dependence on international aids and mentoring support as well as the uneven concentration of power among the judicial, legislative, and executive branches, which benefits the executive over legislative and judicial.

For their part, local and district level organisms have established structures in a large number of the regions but yet they are not able to provide most of the basic public services. Afghan Government is highly centralized, as those who make decisions and provide public services are the Ministries in Kabul.

As in the past, corruption is considered a crucial obstacle for the strengthening of government institutions and for the consolidation of security and stability in the country. Corruption weakens the Afghan Government's effectiveness, cohesion and legitimacy; it separates the Government from the population and creates public discontent; it discourages investment, stimulates international aids spill-over and stops legal economic growth. In addition, it allows criminal networks to exert their influence over important institutions and State functions, making narcotics trafficking easier and increasing other transnational threats outside Afghanistan.

Despite its importance, Afghan Government still lacks the will to face many corruption issues. That's why the importance of fighting this curse will grow as transition processes progress. The US has set up some initiatives to support the Afghan Government in its efforts to reduce corruption and organized crime, while they work to guarantee that resources and development aid are not used for fraudulent activities or corruption.

On the other hand, the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP), created by President Karzai in 2010, still supports the consolidation of security. At the end of the period studied in the report, the APRP had officially reintegrated the sum of 3,907 insurgents from the whole of the country. In September 2011 the figure was 2,385. More than a third of all the reintegrated insurgents come from only two provinces, Herat and Badghis. This is due to

the leadership combination concerning provincial leaders and to cooperation with Afghan National Directorate of Security.

In order to participate in these same reintegration efforts, the US is searching for a wide variety of contacts belonging to all levels, from Afghanistan and from some other countries in the zone. These contacts search includes preliminary conversations with members of the Taliban⁸.

Reconstruction and development

Although international development aid is going to be necessary in the long term, conditions to a sustainable economic growth need to be created in Afghanistan. In the short term, development initiatives will focus on realistic challenges that can be achieved by the end of 2014. That way, economy will be stabilized and Afghan Government will be able to offer basic social services to the population.

According to the World Bank, Afghanistan's GDP saw a rise of 8% in 2010 and of 7% in 2011. Future growth scenarios will basically depend on security levels, governance, the sufficiency of agriculture sector and the variations in the sum of the aid received.

The situation of women in Afghanistan is an interesting aspect which is described in detail in the report as a sign of the country's development. Afghan women are making progress; their role is more and more important in all levels of society, especially concerning public sphere and politics. Women represent 27% of benches in the National Assembly and 25% of posts in Provincial Councils. Women are also taking more responsibilities in social and economic issues. For example, from 30% to 40% of professional doctors are women.

In order to reduce discrimination and violence against women, the Afghan Government has enacted a law which forbids these actions. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was also adopted. However, the implementation of these agreements is slow and violence against women and girls is still a common issue in Afghanistan. In addition, despite all these progresses, women are disproportionately affected by problems such as poverty, illiteracy and poor health care.

⁸ In the last months, there have been some high-level meetings on reconciliation in Afghanistan. The 25th March 2012, delegations from the so-called "Core Group" (US, Pakistan and Afghanistan) held a meeting in Dushanbe in order with the intention of promoting reconciliation. On the other hand, at the beginning of March, the Afghan Taliban's intention of opening a liaison office in Qatar was published and represented a step towards official conversation to achieve peace.

The fight against narcotics trafficking

Afghanistan leads the operation to fight narcotics trafficking in their territory. The Afghan Government discusses its actions with the US and international organizations against drug-traffickers.

To participate in the campaign against insurgents, the DoD coordinated with the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and some other departments from the US Government are supporting a global strategy against narcotics in Afghanistan. The main objective is to diminish the relation between illegal drug trafficking and the insurgency. To this Coalition, the priority areas are regional commands in the south and southwest. These regions represent the principal areas of poppy cultivation in Afghanistan and that is why they are an important source of income for the Taliban insurgency.

The action of the countries in the zone

The report revises the role played by different countries in Afghanistan.

Unquestionably, Pakistan has a very important role in the way to achieving a stable and lasting peace. Therefore, according to the DoD report, the US keeps trying to establish a relationship with Pakistan, a constructive and beneficial link for both countries that promotes both US and Pakistan interests. We must recall that these relationships lived one of their worst moments due to some events, culminating on the 26th November 2011 with the NATO attack on Pakistani territory that “accidentally” led to the death of 24 soldiers from its Army. After this incident, Pakistan cancelled its participation in the International Conference on Afghanistan, held in Germany, and decided to reconsider its relationships with the US⁹.

On the other hand, during these last months, Pakistani and Afghan officials have held some meetings. The result seems to be a better cooperation between both countries, especially concerning the aspects related to the achievement of a political solution to the Afghan conflict.

However, generalized distrust, past tensions and their different strategic interests remain obstacles to a true cooperation. The insurgents’ actions such as the murder of Afghan officials and the attacks against the Afghan forces and the Coalition carried out by Pakistani sanctuaries (especially the Haqqani network and other Taliban affiliated), still threaten the achievement of the long-awaited lasting stable political solution.

⁹ In mid-April 2012, the Pakistani Parliament unanimously adopted some new guidelines in order to lead the country with the difficult relationship with the US. These guidelines ask for the lifting of the blockade on the NATO supplies in the border with Afghanistan. They also claim for the end of the US attacks with unmanned aircrafts to the militants on Pakistani soil. We must recall that around 30% of the supplies used by the NATO in Afghanistan are delivered through Pakistan.

India is also undoubtedly interested in Afghanistan. In October 2011, the Indian Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh and President Karzai signed a declaration on the strategic association between both countries. This declaration made cooperation concerning government, economy, trade, education, public administration and security official. India's assistance has traditionally been focused in major infrastructure projects such as electric energy production and distribution and roads construction. Nevertheless, we have been able to see a step towards investment in the exploitation of natural resources¹⁰.

Iran for its part is trying to exercise influence in Afghanistan. Iran has supported the Afghan Government through economic and cultural projects, particularly focusing on the Shia minority regions. But, at the same time, they have also helped the Taliban insurgents, providing guns and training¹¹.

Beijing continues to support the regional diplomacy. We can see that especially when President Karzai was invited to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) annual summit and when a Contact Group between this organization and Afghanistan was created. Afghan Government is considering the possibility of becoming an observer in the SCO. In November 2011, China took part in the Istanbul Conference on supporting Afghanistan. China represented an active participant in the so-called Istanbul process, which plans another regional conference to be held at the ministerial level on June 2012.

Russia acknowledges that terrorism is closely related to drugs trafficking. In that sense, Russia's interest in widening cooperation against drugs trafficking is still present. In fact, Russia has participated in multilateral meetings and programs of United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and at the same time, has demanded a stronger international support on the fight against narcotics in Afghanistan. The NATO-Russia Council will also broaden their program to fight drugs trafficking in Central Asia, which consists of training professionals specialized in this fight.

Finally, the DoD report shows the position of the different countries belonging to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). These states still support the Operation Enduring Freedom, provide financial support to Afghanistan and keep in their territories the main facilities and bases used by the US, supporting their operations in the Asian country. However, the "Gulf"

¹⁰ In November 2011, the company SAIL part owned by Indian Government, obtained 75% of the rights of exploitation of an iron mine situated in the province of Bamyán Hajigak.

¹¹ The holding of the third trilateral summit Iran-Afghanistan-Pakistan represents a remarkable event which happened in the period analyzed by the report. It was in Islamabad on February the 17th and president Ahmadinejad, Karzai and Zardari took part in this summit. At the end of the summit, a declaration was published on cooperation issues including the fight against drugs and the refugees, two important topics especially for Iran.

also represents a very important financial source for Taliban terrorists and some other groups that operate in the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

CONCLUSION

The October 2011 report's edition highlighted an important progress concerning security levels in Afghanistan, as well as a reduction of violence figures and the last version of this report states that this tendency is actually being consolidated. The objectives of the "Surge" have been achieved as we can see the number of attacks carried out by the insurgence decreasing. The ANSF benefits from this positive tendency as they save a very valuable time on their way to reaching the utmost effectiveness with December 2014 in view, a date in which the Coalition will complete the transference of the security functions.

However, there are still some worrying issues such as, on the one hand, the insurgence's regeneration and rearmament capacity in their Pakistani sanctuaries and, on the other hand, the still very limited capacities of the Afghan institutions.

In any case, the US has shown their long-term commitment with security and stability in Afghanistan. The recent signing by both presidents from US and Afghanistan of a strategic agreement represents a proof of this commitment. The agreement establishes the relationship between the US and Afghanistan until later than 2014 and regards economic, government and security issues. The rest of the Allies will certainly confirm this long-term commitment with Afghanistan on the next Atlantic Alliance Summit that will be held in Chicago on the 21st and 22th May.

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