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AFGHANISTAN NATIONAL DEFENSE AND SECURITY FORCES

MISSION, CHALLENGES, AND SUSTAINABILITY

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About the Report

This report examines the development of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF), their current structure and capacity, and their challenges in securing long-term financial and operational sustainability. The report also explores how the ANDSF can more effectively operate on a nonconventional battlefield and deal with emerging new threats of violent extremism—both alone and as part of a larger regional and global coalition. The information is based on field research and interviews conducted by the author in Afghanistan in 2015.

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Cover photo: An Afghan National Army soldier listens during a training event hosted by the ISAF [International Security Assistance Force]. Nate Derrick/Shutterstock.com.

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[From inception, the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces have experienced shifting political and security conditions that have impacted their size, structure, mission, and capacity.]

Summary

- From inception, the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) have experienced shifting political and security conditions that have impacted their size, structure, mission, and capacity.
- The ANDSF have long been dependent on U.S. financial and operational assistance, as well as support from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. They are expected to remain dependent on foreign aid for many years.
- Although well-designed on paper, the ANDSF's command and control structure does not function as intended. The structure is bureaucratically heavy at the top and weak at the bottom. Political interference and the circumventing of formal command levels often prevent the carrying out of established procedures, plans, and unit functions.
- Coordination across the Afghan National Army, Afghan National Police, and National Directorate of Security forces in the field is dangerously lacking. The nature of shared decision making within the National Unity Government has led to delays in appointments, thus inhibiting the ability of Afghan security ministries and their forces to effectively exercise command and control.
- The ANDSF continue to experience major logistics, air power, and intelligence shortfalls, undermining their operational posture and the combat effectiveness of their troops.
- To avoid overextension and improve the space-to-force ratio, Afghan leadership may want to change the ANDSF operational posture from being defensive to offensive. This would mean prioritizing some areas and leaving other areas for local forces to cover. Remote, hard-to-reach locations would only be watched and hit where the enemy shows concentration.
- Given that the Taliban and other anti-Afghan government insurgents have operational and logistic infrastructure in Pakistan, the country has significant control and influence over them and can therefore play a key role in reducing the level of violence in Afghanistan.
- Afghanistan's long-term security strategy needs to focus on reducing threat levels through political settlement and building indigenous security capacity to respond to emerging threats.

Introduction

On January 1, 2015, the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) took over full security responsibility in Afghanistan, after the United States officially concluded Operation Enduring Freedom and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) ended the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission. The follow-on, NATO-led Resolute Support (RS) mission provides further training, guidance, and assistance to Afghan security forces and institutions. The U.S. Forces-Afghanistan transitioned to Operation Freedom's Sentinel, contributing to both the NATO's RS mission and continuing U.S. counterterrorism efforts against the remnants of al-Qaeda and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS, also known as DAISH).[1] In a revision of the initial White House plan to withdraw most U.S. troops from Afghanistan by the end of 2016, President Barack Obama decided to maintain the current troop level (9,800) for at least another year and to reduce only to a baseline of 5,500 afterward. It is expected that the level and strength of the residual military presence in Afghanistan in future years will be revisited this spring under the new RS commander, General John Nicholson. Regardless, the impact of U.S. forces in Afghanistan depends less on their numbers and more on their assigned mission and rules of engagement.

The ANDSF faced an upsurge of insurgent attacks in 2015 and largely held their own, albeit with a higher casualty rate. The ANDSF are expected to face continued security threats and violence at least in the immediate future, while international military and financial assistance dwindles. The rise of new threats of violent extremism in the region, including from local supporters of ISIS, may turn the Afghanistan-Pakistan region into a hub for global terrorism.

The ultimate goal for the United States and ANDSF should be building and sustaining indigenous defense and security capacity sufficient to deal with existing and emerging threats in the region. This involves not only generating and maintaining adequate forces but also ensuring the ANDSF's financial sustainability, operational effectiveness, and ability to thwart adaptive enemies in primarily nonconventional combat.

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Foundation of the ANDSF

Few reconstruction tasks have proved more difficult than building the capacity of indigenous security forces during war. Stabilization requires curbing the ability and desire of former combatants to renew violence and transforming militia structures into formal state institutions. This involves replacing war machines with a credible legal and political system, reestablishing public confidence in state institutions, and shifting from a culture of violent opposition to a peaceful competition for power and influence. It is a multifaceted process of "breaking" and "making." Breaking the war machines in the postconflict period is a prerequisite for sustaining peace. However, failure to create attractive alternatives for former militia fighters can lead to instability, renewal of violence, and proliferation of criminal activity and banditry. Deactivating the war machines is an immediate need; making them obsolete is a long-term goal. Therefore, the process must include making the use of war machines irrelevant. This can be achieved by creating national capacity to transform war-instigated structures into peacebuilding institutions.

Afghanistan, one of the poorest countries in the world, has suffered institutional, economic, social, and political destruction during a long period of war and violence. Numerous factional militias and nonstate armed groups emerged as a result of foreign intervention (1979–89) and civil war (1992–2001)—some with extensive foreign links. The breakdown of central authority

over more than two decades of conflict and violence stimulated a sociopolitical transformation in Afghanistan, which became dominated by nonstate patronage networks operating under the leadership of regional commanders who often invoked ethnic references to legitimize their leadership. The country became politically fragmented, economically bankrupt, and socially atomized, leading to a vortex of proxy wars waged by regional powers vying for influence. Other challenges that emerged included a lack of basic infrastructure, low economic capability, corruption, and illiteracy.

The 2001 military invasion of Afghanistan by the United States and its allies was not initiated to fix the failed Afghan state through military action and stability operations. Had the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States not happened, a U.S. intervention into Afghanistan would have been unlikely. The U.S.-led military invasion targeted one side of the civil war (Taliban regime) and its in-country support network (al-Qaeda), in close alliance with the second party (anti-Taliban militias) in the civil war. In contrast to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the U.S. operation was launched with minimum American and allied ground troops supporting the local anti-Taliban militia forces (represented mainly by the Northern Alliance).[2]

The fall of the Taliban regime was celebrated as the end of the conflict, but combat conditions lingered. On May 1, 2003, U.S. defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld announced that major combat in Afghanistan was over.[3] This determination was mostly motivated by American political considerations rather than the situation on the ground. The authority of the central administration in Kabul hardly extended beyond the capital. In the next two years, clashes continued between local commanders, stemming from old rivalries or the desire to control or consolidate more territory. Standoffs between the Kabul-appointed governors of Paktia and rebel forces kept the region unstable.[4] In the north, forces loyal to Uzbek General Abdul Rashid Dostum, the leader of the Junbish Mili Islami (National Islamic Movement) party, and militia units controlled by Tajik Commander Atta Mohammad clashed in several provinces. In the west, ethnic differences and rival claims for control of the Shindand District led to recurring skirmishes between militias loyal to the Herat strongman Ismail Khan and those supporting the local Pashtun leader Amanullah Noorzai.

Enlisting militia commanders and warlords as coalition allies in fighting terrorism hindered the development of formal democratic institutions. The Bonn Agreement of 2001 stipulated that "upon the official transfer of power, all Mujahidin, Afghan armed forces and armed groups in the country shall come under the command and control of the Interim Authority, and be reorganized according to the requirements of the new Afghan security and armed forces."[5] These rival factional militias were integrated into the government system but continued to respond only to their faction leaders, often instigating turf battles at the expense of public security. The U.S. military's aid and reliance on these groups in the counterterrorism effort empowered them at the expense of formal state institutions. In December 2002, former president Hamid Karzai issued a decree banning political leaders from taking part in military activity.[6] However, he had little power to implement his decree so long as international actors were not interested in getting involved in intra-Afghan disputes and were more focused on fighting "terrorists."

The co-option of the resurrected anti-Taliban Afghan militia forces in the campaign empowered them after the fall of the Taliban regime, which was removed from power but not decisively defeated or reconciled. Nor was al-Qaeda fully defeated, although its leadership and network were driven out of Afghanistan across the border into difficult-to-access tribal

areas of Pakistan. As conflict conditions endured, the south and east eventually exploded into a full-fledged insurgency. Ultimately, the fall of the Taliban regime was not a transition from war to peace or from a conflict to postconflict situation but rather a new phase in the long-standing conflict.

The international effort to build post-Taliban state institutions in Afghanistan has today become one of the longest and costliest reconstruction projects in history. By the end of 2015, the United States alone had appropriated more than $113 billion dollars—of which more than 60 percent was invested in standing up the ANDSF.[7] In the past fourteen years, the ANDSF have come a long way, transforming from an odd assortment of factional militias into a collection of modern security institutions with professional capacity and loyalty to a unified state. But despite significant investments, international peacekeeping forces in Afghanistan have focused primarily on immediate tactical issues at the expense of long-term priorities. Building the army took precedence over constructing rule of law institutions, including the police, regardless of their key role in a postconflict environment. The emerging police forces were organized as a paramilitary force, primarily intended to fight armed spoilers and protect the government rather than serve the public. Since the military intervention was deemed over, there has been an acute shortage of donor institutional capacity and resources for stability operations. Reintegration of former combatants has been a major challenge due to decreased and incremental funding, thus driving marginalized armed men to renew violence.

The initial false assumption that the conflict was over had a profound effect on the establishment and development of Afghanistan security forces. Planning for their size and capacity was based on an assessment of short-term political and security conditions that ignored the potential of strategic changes in the area, such as an upsurge in insurgency and activity of nonstate armed groups, as well as the dynamics of ongoing conflict.

In the past fourteen years, the ANDSF have come a long way, transforming from an odd assortment of factional militias into a collection of modern security institutions with professional capacity and loyalty to a unified state. But despite significant investments, international peacekeeping forces in Afghanistan have focused primarily on immediate tactical issues at the expense of long-term priorities.

International Support

Unlike some other international postconflict stability operations, no major international peacekeeping forces were deployed in Afghanistan. The U.S.-led coalition military forces were narrowly focused on fighting terrorism, while the U.N.-mandated ISAF was deployed only in Kabul, with a limited mandate and limited numbers. The wartime militias, which were integrated into the security forces of the interim administration, were ethnically divided and loyal to their factional leaders. The donor community's goal was to build new Afghanistan security forces that would be nationally respected; professionally capable; ethnically balanced; democratically accountable; and organized, trained, and equipped to meet the security needs of the country. Building such national institutions became part of the Security Sector Reform (SSR) program.

Formally established in April 2002 at a security donors conference in Geneva, the SSR program consisted of five pillars, each supported by a different donor state: military reform (United States); police reform (Germany); the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of ex-combatants (Japan); judicial reform (Italy); and counternarcotics (UK). While all these pillars of reform and development were interconnected, they were pursued by different actors with varying levels of commitment, resources, priorities, and procedures. This stove-piping approach inevitably precluded a holistic approach to building state institutions and reform. The lack of coordination—both between donor states and between those states' implementing agencies—further hindered progress. This problem was compounded by insufficient donor investment in the initial stages; the political influence of nonstate armed groups and patronage

networks; inadequate reform in the ministries of defense and interior; and the absence of a committed third-party military force to facilitate the process.

The planned size and professional capacity of the Afghan security forces were not proportioned to the requirement of their mission to fight terrorism and insurgency while providing space for statebuilding and development. Nor was it attuned to the threat environment. The SSR program planned to build a 70,000-man Afghan National Army (ANA) and 62,000-man Afghan National Police (ANP) force, which took many years to accomplish. By 2005, the ANA and ANP could hardly field more than 60,000 poorly trained and lightly armed troops and policemen. They were no match to the threats faced by the vast majority of Afghan citizens, which included terrorists and insurgents, militia commanders, drug traffickers, corrupt provincial and district administrators, and government incompetence.

Like in many other postconflict projects, the focus was more on building the army than the police. The focus on fighting terrorism and insurgency forced Operation Enduring Freedom to place its highest priority on rebuilding the armed forces, taking attention away from developing the police, which was badly in need of rebuilding. This subordinated justice to security considerations and turned the police into a tool primarily used in combating insurgency, instead of protecting law and justice. The national police had virtually ceased to exist after years of a devastating civil war. The ANP effort, and the reconstruction effort more broadly, faced a dearth of human resources; sparse or nonexistent equipment and infrastructure; politicized ethnic differences that impede the impartial administration of justice; corruption and organized criminal activity; and the lack of a public service ethics and public administrative structures that can help foster professionalism and accountability.

The German-led effort to create a new professional civilian-led officer corps for the police ran into two major hurdles. First, the underresourced, long-term training program was not able to produce sufficient numbers in a short time to meet immediate needs. The deployment of police across the country made it difficult to train policemen as single units, like army battalions, and then deploy them where they were needed. Police needed to be recruited, trained, deployed, and coached at the same time. The urgency to fill the ranks often reduced this process into a recruit-and-deploy practice. Second, local power brokers seized the title of police commanders, many of whom had questionable backgrounds including human rights abuses and drug trafficking linkages. Political decisions to reintegrate "demobilized" former factional combatants into the police force further undermined the ANP's development. In most cases, former factional commanders who were appointed to (or seized command of) the police loaded their offices with their unqualified supporters and corrupt cronies. The dominance of local loyalty and links with corrupt networks, along with poor training and low pay, contributed to endemic corruption in the police force.

To augment the German-led effort, the U.S. Department of State's Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs launched a massive, short-term training program in 2003, which helped train up to 40,000 patrolmen and police officers in basic skills in a one-to-three-week program at police training centers, which were established in the capital and six regional centers. Meanwhile, Germany continued its multiyear training of senior police officials. With the upsurge of insurgency in Afghanistan and the heavy involvement of the ANP in the counterinsurgency fight, the lead role in the U.S. police training effort was taken over by the Department of Defense in April 2005, while Germany's traditional policing program was augmented by the combined European Police Program (Europol). In

both cases, the ANP transformed mostly into a paramilitary force, fighting on the front lines of the counterinsurgency and sustaining the heaviest casualties.

The U.S.-led effort to build the ANA was also slow, marred by problems in attracting recruits and by the lack of support from the Ministry of Defense (MOD), which was dominated by the Minister of Defense and Northern Alliance commander General Mohammad Qasim Fahim's Panjsheri clique (which saw a strong military loyal to the state as a threat to its parochial power).[8] A plan for forming the army, drafted by a government commission and released by the MOD in October 2002, was criticized by Karzai and his foreign backers as an attempt to perpetuate the dominance of factional militias in the ANA. The plan awarded the militiamen command over military units when they reenlisted in the ANA.[9]

The so-called "Long War" strategic approach to the "global war on terror," which dominated U.S. military thinking in the early 2000s, promoted a comprehensive and enduring long-term military engagement in areas threatened by international terror.[10] Along this line, the presumption of an open-ended presence of international forces in Afghanistan with the expectation of no strong armed opposition tempered the urgency and pace of building indigenous security forces. The situation led to the chronic dependency of the ANDSF on international forces for enablers, including air cover; fire support; air and ground mobility; intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), logistics, and command and control. The dependency continued to limit the ANDSF's combat effectiveness.

In early 2006, just months before the sudden upsurge of insurgency in the south, the Pentagon hoped, against Kabul's objections, to cut the planned end-strength of the ANA to 50,000 troops, citing Afghanistan's inability to pay for a larger army and "current intelligence" about the size of the Taliban and other potential threats.[11] The eventual increase in number of troops came as a reaction to rising security threats rather than a deliberately thought-out plan or a long-term vision.

The growth of the insurgency in Afghanistan has outpaced the expansion of foreign and national security forces.

The growth of the insurgency in Afghanistan has outpaced the expansion of foreign and national security forces. For several years, both the U.S.-led coalition forces (conducting counterterrorism operations) and the ISAF (providing security assistance to the indigenous forces) operated with a light footprint and defined security in different terms. From 2002 to 2003, the number of U.S. troops in Afghanistan as part of Operation Enduring Freedom ranged from 10,000 to 12,000 and then increased to about 16,000 in 2004. Four thousand more troops were added in 2005. During this period, the size of ISAF forces increased from 5,000 in 2002 to about 9,000. At the end of the Bonn process and the upsurge of insurgency in 2006, about 10,000 coalition troops came under command of the ISAF, while the number of American troops fluctuated between 25,000 and 30,000 through 2006 and 2007. The Afghanistan Compact, adopted in 2006 to establish post-Bonn benchmarks for political, economic, and security development, was not backed up by adequate military force at the time that the Taliban-led insurgency intensified. In the first half of 2008, the number of U.S. troops in Afghanistan increased substantially from 21,643 to 48,250. The ISAF commander, David McKiernan, who took over in June 2008, requested 30,000 more troops to blunt the Taliban insurgency. Before the end of the Bush administration, 17,000 more troops were authorized for deployment into Afghanistan but were not deployed until February 2009.[12]

A serious international effort to develop the ANDSF did not begin until 2009. The ensuing military surge undertaken in the first year of the Obama administration—which raised the level of the ISAF to more than 140,000 (including 100,000 U.S. service members)—and a new population-centered stabilization strategy represented the first serious counterinsurgency effort

in the nine-year war. The military surge slowed the momentum of the Taliban in key areas. Further, significant progress in building up the ANDSF allowed the gradual shift of security responsibility to Afghanistan as the United States reduced its military presence beginning in July 2011 and withdrew the surge troops by the end of 2012. By that time, the ANDSF reached its new authorized level of 352,000, with the Afghan Local Police (ALP) numbering an additional 12,000. A counterinsurgency campaign, however, required patience and time to succeed. The surge troops took about six months to deploy, and they began withdrawing in July 2011—about one year after their full deployment. Political pressure and financial constraints in donor countries eroded support for an extended counterinsurgency effort, leading to a drawdown of U.S. forces at the end of 2014.

The accelerated development of the ANA and ANP and rush to expand the number of units and men during the surge period overshadowed the need for their professional growth and solid institutional capacity building. No serious measures were taken to strengthen the ANDSF's professional capacity and eliminate their habitual dependency on international forces. The race to add battalions and police units as part of the exit strategy left the ANDSF with limited maneuverability, fire power, aviation support, intelligence capacity, logistic capacity, and command and control aptitude. These limitations are now recognized as major liabilities. Plainly, the main goal of the security transition was meeting the deadline set for the exit strategy rather than building a self-reliant indigenous defense and security operation. Consequently, in spite of its major achievements under extremely trying conditions, the ANDSF continues to depend on international assistance in the short term, as well as full financial backing for at least another ten years. The rise of new extremist violence in Afghanistan may require additional resources that cannot be provided by Afghanistan.

In spite of its major achievements under extremely trying conditions, the ANDSF continues to depend on international assistance in the short term, as well as full financial backing for at least another ten years.

Obama's October 2015 decision to maintain U.S. forces in Afghanistan at current levels for at least another year and to reduce only to a baseline of 5,500 military personnel based in Kabul and Bagram, in addition to a limited presence in the east and south of Afghanistan, recognizes that the ANDSF will require more time and assistance to develop into a capable independent force. Whether the presence of a baseline 5,500 U.S. troops in Afghanistan can make a major difference is hard to determine since there are other domestic and regional factors that affect the situation. However, the absence of U.S. forces in Afghanistan will definitely have an adverse impact on regional stability. Their presence sends a strong message to friends and foes that Afghanistan is not going to be abandoned.

However, the effect of U.S. forces in Afghanistan depends less on their numbers and more on their assigned mission and rules of engagement. NATO partners saw their combat role end in 2014, even as they continue to support Afghan combat troops who are often engaged in fighting. U.S. forces, in partnership with the ANDSF, continue to conduct counterterrorism operations against al-Qaeda and its facilitator networks. Based on their new rules of engagement, U.S. forces only take action against non-al-Qaeda groups (including the Taliban) if they pose a direct threat to U.S. and coalition forces or provide direct support to al-Qaeda.

But, as part of the continued tactical-level training and assistance mission, U.S. and coalition forces may accompany Afghan counterparts on missions in an advisory role. U.S. forces may also provide combat enabler support, such as close air support. Similarly, U.S. forces are also permitted to provide combat enabler support to Afghan-only missions under limited circumstances to prevent detrimental strategic effects to the campaign. The recent Taliban attacks in the Kunduz and Helmand provinces showed that without direct air support from U.S. forces, the Taliban would have overrun and controlled several key areas. This requires a

review of the rules of engagement to allow greater and more flexible support from U.S. forces until the ANDSF narrow their capability gaps—an effort that may take at least five years given the current level of international assistance.

The ultimate goal is to bolster Afghanistan's indigenous capacity to defend itself through addressing their gaps, particularly in five key functional areas: leadership, combined arms integration, command and control, training, and sustainment. This may take longer than the assumed life of the NATO RS mission (set to end in 2017). Follow-on assistance to the ANDSF may be required for at least five more years and a NATO-Afghanistan counterterrorism partnership for ten years. The nature of NATO's involvement beyond the RS mission is expected to be defined at the next NATO summit in Warsaw. The U.S.-Afghanistan Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) commits the United States "to assist ANDSF in developing capabilities required to provide security for all Afghans," which includes "upgrading ANDSF transportation and logistics systems; developing intelligence sharing capabilities; strengthening Afghanistan's Air Force capabilities; conducting combined military exercises; and other activities as may be agreed." The BSA also obligates the United States "to seek funds on a yearly basis to support the training, equipping, advising, and sustaining of ANDSF, so that Afghanistan can independently secure and defend itself against internal and external threats, and help ensure that terrorists never again encroach on Afghan soil and threaten Afghanistan, the region, and the world."[13] These commitments require long-term U.S. assistance.

ANDSF and the Government's Legitimacy

The ANDSF are highly respected by the majority of Afghans. The most recent survey of the Afghan people by the Asia Foundation indicates a high level of public confidence in the ANA (80.8 percent) and ANP (70 percent).[14] The multiethnic forces show strong commitment to the mission, which they see as a legitimate duty and a patriotic cause worth fighting for. However, they do not want to get killed because of poor leadership and inadequate fighting equipment and means.

Institutionally, the ANDSF's legitimacy derives from the legitimacy of the government—a legal authority that instills a sense of devotion, loyalty, and resilience into state institutions including the army and police. This emanates not only from the government's representation of and political and legal acceptance by its constituencies but also from its effectiveness. That includes the ability to maintain "state monopoly on the use of legitimate force in its territory," to provide security and deliver services, and to uphold the rule of law and affirm economic prosperity. Rule of law is at the heart of any government's legitimacy and a prerequisite for human security that involves the protection and empowerment of citizens. And yet, in the recent past, the inability of government in Afghanistan to deliver services and exert influence throughout the country began to erode its "structural legitimacy," which, in the words of Max Weber, is obtainable only when rules, supported by institutions to enforce them, underpin popular acceptance of government.[15]

During the past fourteen years, the structural legitimacy of the Afghan government has suffered from a lack of capacity, particularly at the subnational level, where government authority is contested by local patronage networks. The vacuum created by the absence of central government influence is filled by insurgents, militia commanders, and local criminal gangs—all of whom undermine human security, local governance, democratic values, and the delivery of basic services. However, the government still enjoys public support, given that the perceivable alternative is the Taliban and other violent extremists. Further, strong international

support of the Afghan state also contributes to its legitimacy by raising citizens' hopes for its survival.

The political transition in Afghanistan in 2014 presented new challenges to the legitimacy of the government, which was threatened by disputes over the results of the presidential election of 2014. The issue of fraudulent votes drove the process to the brink of delegitimization and potential civil disturbances. The confusion undermined public trust in democracy, slowed down the economy, and had other negative effects, including the deterioration of security and stagnation in government functions. The tension was eventually defused tactically by a U.S.-mediated, power-sharing deal under the rubric of a National Unity Government (NUG), in which the winner, Ashraf Ghani, was announced as president and the runner-up, Abdullah Abdullah, assumed the office of the chief executive as a "second among equals" (pending the legitimization of the post as prime minister through possible constitutional amendments in two years).

Power-sharing arrangements do not have a good track record in Afghanistan's recent history. The key challenge has been how to reconcile the competing demands of maintaining unity and governing effectively in the face of the shared authority of the two leaders. For example, it has been particularly difficult to appoint key government officials and reconcile the diverse political programs of the two main components of the NUG. The problem of reconciling frictions in a duumvirate system has been exacerbated by the lack of a solid constitutional basis for the arrangement.

If legitimacy could not be derived through elections, it now has to be secured through government performance and meeting citizens' expectations. This means that numerous structural obstacles in the agreement must be overcome, and Afghan elites need to generate a sufficient spirit of compromise and cooperation to begin the actual process of governing. It requires a strong, unified commitment to reforms and cooperative decision making on the basis of a unified national agenda. However, it is hard to achieve this under the current deal, because both election campaigns were directed more toward winning rather than promoting a clear governing agenda. Both Ghani and Abdullah depended on borrowed constituencies and co-opted odd bedfellows with extremely different visions, interests, and concerns—and with high expectation of reward for their support in the election. Only when the choices of the two teams are politically and professionally integrated into a unified governance body will there be hope for a viable and effective NUG.

The record of the government's first full year in office (2014–15) is not impressive. Ultimately, the NUG failed on both counts: It failed to integrate the two camps into a unified governing body and it failed to win support of the population through becoming effective. Despite pledges to crack down on corruption and reform the government, the actual steps taken have been cosmetic, haphazard, and tactical at best. Although President Ghani took steps to implement some reforms and crack down on corruption, his actions were mostly at the lower level, tactical in nature, and failed to bring fundamental changes and improve governance and efficiency. Because of the influence of an odd assortment of self-interested political allies of the elected leaders, the government has become gridlocked and has lost significant support of the citizens. Meanwhile, security has deteriorated, the economy has taken a down turn, and the government has not been able to form a complete cabinet and appoint capable persons to key positions. The institutional fragmentation of power and shared authority of Ghani and Abdullah to appoint key positions—along with their diverging interests and political allies—impedes reform, stagnates governance, and hampers response to emerging issues. The latest

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Asia Foundation annual survey of the Afghan people indicate that optimism about the future of the country has dropped to the lowest level recorded over the past ten years.[16]

The fractured political structure strongly affects the professional capacity of the ANDSF. Interference of politicians, top government officials, and power brokers in managing promotions within the force not only undermines the professional effectiveness of the army and police as they face a brutal war but also undermines morale and motivation to fight.[17] The situation encourages corruption, where incompetent officers and commanders can gain their posts through bribery or political influence. The most challenging issue is the rush of political elites to extend their patronage networks through posting their cohorts in key security positions at the expense of winning the war. With the rise of the insurgency, some power brokers have managed to remobilize and rearm their militias under the guise of local anti-Taliban militia or the ALP. These forces in certain areas have been involved in pillage and abuse of the population, further undermining legitimacy of the state. The destabilizing effects of the rapidly expanding insurgencies in the north, northeast, and west only amplify this cascading process by providing a conducive environment for crime. All of these factors, coupled with insurgency-related violence in the south and southeast and the inability of security forces to counter local criminals and drug lords, has led to a tremendous loss of public confidence.

These problems notwithstanding, the legitimacy of the Afghan government is helped by strong international backing, particularly U.S. support of the NUG, and compromises by the political elite to maintain unity albeit at the expense of effectiveness. The absence of a viable alternative is another element of public acceptance of the NUG. A majority of Afghans continue to see the armed opposition as an undesirable choice. But this situation can change, either as a result of fading international support or continued ineffectiveness of the NUG, particularly its failure to improve security, fight corruption, ensure economic recovery, and address growing unemployment. A recent Afghan government study claims that youth constitute 63 percent of the country's population, and over the next five years, four million of them will attain employment age. The study adds that this many jobs should also be created during the period, but employment has been declining the past few years.[18]

Economic decline and rising unemployment have prompted an exodus of tens of thousands of Afghans fleeing violence and lack of opportunities at home. According to a recent report by the International Organization for Migration, Afghan emigrants seeking refuge in Europe constitute 20 percent of the recent wave of more than one million refugees from the Middle East heading to Europe,[19] making them the second largest national group after the Syrians. Many of these Afghans are young, educated professionals who benefited from education and job opportunities provided by the presence of the international community during the past fourteen years.[20] Their departure deals a major blow to the capacity and human capital built at a high cost over the last decade.

One key challenge facing the NUG is the timely convening of a Constitutional Loya Jirga to establish constitutional legality for the power-sharing arrangement. The political deal that created this government was originally for a two-year period that is set to expire in September 2016. Under the terms of that deal, the government was supposed to implement electoral reforms and hold district council and parliamentary elections to allow a Constitutional Loya Jirga to be convened. However, the reform process has stalled; the current term of parliament has expired without new elections being held, and district boundaries have not been drawn. Therefore, convening the Constitutional Loya Jirga on time, before the mandate of the NUG expires, is hardly feasible. The situation may lead to a constitutional crisis with uncertain consequences.

To enhance morale and the professional loyalties of the ANDSF, structured measures need to be established to fight corruption and nepotism, and action must be taken to provide for job security, merit promotion, monetary incentives, family benefits, and depoliticization of appointments.

During a visit to Kabul in April, Secretary of State John Kerry stressed that the unity government's tenure would continue for a full five years from the 2014 elections, remarks which were endorsed by government officials but challenged by opposition figures. Discussions among the political class in Kabul are increasingly turning toward alternative means of securing political order, such as holding early presidential elections in the hopes that a single figure with authority might emerge and holding a "traditional" Loya Jirga—a representative national assembly but not one that is convened according to the explicit conditions in the constitution. Neither solution is optimal, but either may win a large following if the NUG fails to take bold steps to win the trust of the people through bringing positive changes in the way it governs. To enhance morale and the professional loyalties of the ANDSF, structured measures need to be established to fight corruption and nepotism, and action must be taken to provide for job security, merit promotion, monetary incentives, family benefits, and depoliticization of appointments. Whatever the reason, the government's waning popularity, and for some its legitimacy, could jeopardize the sustainability of the ANDSF and lead to its fragmentation along ethnic, regional, and factional lines.

Size and Structure of the ANDSF

In military counterinsurgency doctrine, the rule of thumb in determining the size of the security force is one soldier per fifty residents in an area.[21] Using such norms, military leaders in Afghanistan called for up to half a million soldiers and policemen to pacify Afghanistan's estimated population of twenty-five million. Although there is no military solution to the insurgency, the absence of adequate military forces to provide a security cover for the development and establishment of good governance has hindered stabilization efforts. The current authorized strength of the ANDSF is 195,000 for the ANA (including 7,800 Afghan Air Force personnel) and 157,000 for ANP. Additionally, the ALP are authorized an additional 30,000 personnel.[22]

The ANA is organized into one division and six regional corps, plus Special Forces units and the Air Force.[23] Each corps typically comprises three to four infantry brigades and various specialty battalions. In addition, two Mobile Strike Force brigades (with wheeled medium-armored vehicles) provide an additional seven Mobile Strike Force battalions based in Kabul and Kandahar. These formations are capable of rapid deployment in offensive operations. Organized and trained as a light infantry force, the ANA has developed in recent years from an infantry-centric force to a fully fledged army that comprises both fighting elements and enabling capabilities, including combat, intelligence, military police, medical, aviation, and logistics support. ANA soldiers are well-trained and well-organized but need enablers to support their combat action. Apart from small arms, the support weapons available to ANA units include only light- and medium-range mortars, the SPG-9 recoilless gun, and 122 howitzers. The ISAF and NATO Training Mission had argued that heavy equipment was counterproductive in fighting a counterinsurgency;[24] but the ANA has been trained to fight with strong ISAF air support, which is no longer available.

As of the end of 2015, the Afghan Air Force (AAF) had a total of ninety-one aircraft, including helicopters (1 Mi-35 gunship, 49 Mi-17, 10 MD-530, and 3 Cheetah) and fixed wing transport planes (4 C-130 and 24 C-208). To provide tactical air support, Afghanistan is acquiring twenty A-29 Super Tucano turboprop aircraft from the United States, which will be fully operational in 2017. However, the AAF is not expected to acquire more sophisticated combat aircraft in the near future. In addition to combat support, the AAF provides air assets

for logistics, resupply, humanitarian relief, human remains return, air interdiction, and aerial escort. The AAF is headquartered in Kabul and has three wings based in Kabul, Kandahar, and Shindand. Additionally, there are air detachments in Mazar-i-Sharif, Jalalabad, Shorab (Helmand), Gardez, and Herat. A Special Mission Wing (SMW) was stood up on July 18, 2015, in support of ANA Special Operations Command. It includes an additional thirty special Mi-17 helicopters and thirteen (eighteen planned) fixed wing PC-12 airframes with ISR capability.

About 10,000 ANA Special Forces personnel are grouped into ten battalions, geographically dispersed across Afghanistan. At least one special operations battalion operates in each corps area of responsibility. All these battalions come under the command of the ANA Special Operations Command. Among the maneuver units, the ANA and ANP special forces are the most capable and agile units for fighting the insurgency. They are specialized light infantry units that can conduct raids, direct action, and reconnaissance in support of counterinsurgency operations; and they can execute a strategic response for the Afghan government. They are considered the most elite fighting forces of the ANDSF. But because of their "lightness," they still depend on international forces for firepower, close air support, air mobility, intelligence, and operational and strategic logistics support.

The ANP, initially organized as a security force, is shifting from a mostly paramilitary force to a more sophisticated multipurpose institution that can undertake law enforcement, public protection, civil order, and criminal investigation efforts. However, because of the ongoing insurgency and ANA's low space-to-force ratio, most ANP units are employed as counterinsurgency forces complimenting the ANA. Among them, the Police Special Forces (*Qeta'at-i-Khas*) are often used unsparingly for complex combat missions, frequently without the ANA, and sustain heavy casualties.[25] The ANP has four main pillars, which include approximately 100,000 Afghan Uniformed Police; 16,000 Afghan Civil Order Police; 23,000 Afghan Border Police (ABP) deployed in six operational zones; and 2,000 Afghan Anti-Crime Police. Additionally, the ANP has three national mission special units (totaling more than 5,000 personnel), including the Crisis Response Unit 222, Commando Force 333, and Afghan Territorial Force 444. These units operate across the country. Further, thirty-three provincial special units directly support the provincial chiefs of police. There is also a nationwide Investigative and Surveillance Unit. Three other units include the ALP, the Afghan Public Protection Force, and the Counternarcotic Police.

Indications are that none of the ANDSF units are up to the authorized strength. The number of personnel actively serving in the ANA, ANP, and ALP is difficult to determine, because thousands of "ghost" soldiers and "ghost" police officers are believed to be counted in the rosters. Due to attrition and other factors, the actual on-hand ANDSF force level fluctuated between about 91 and 92 percent of authorized levels during the first six months of 2015.[26] The rise of violence during the summer further dropped the number of servicemen on duty. A recent survey in fifteen Afghan provinces suggests that there are up to 130,000 ghost servicemen on the payroll in the ANDSF.[27] Although the government has dismissed the report as highly exaggerated, it has acknowledged the problem of ghost soldiers. In November 2015, Ghani ordered a thorough inventory of armed forces personnel and their equipment. According to a U.S. source in Kabul, the number of servicemen in the ANA at that time was about 170,000, which is 25,000 short of the authorized strength.[28] The gap within the ALP is much wider. Because a significant number of ANA and ANP troops are usually assigned to noncombat duties, including serving as bodyguards of senior officers and security details of

senior government officials, the actual number of troops in the field further shrinks. This cuts the number of combat forces in the field and overexerts certain units who remain for long periods in the combat zone with no chance to go on leave. The situation causes exhaustion and low morale, which takes a heavy toll on combat capability.

To boost public protection capacity, the ISAF and Afghan government created the ALP force (with up to 30,000 men) in 2012. They are tasked with securing public installations, preventing armed opposition infiltration, and providing favorable space for governance and development. Formed locally in threatened areas, the ALP is only meant to perform guard duties, not conduct law enforcement activity. The police officers are recruited, trained, paid, and controlled by provincial and district police departments in close consultation with and vetted by local *shuras*. They serve where they live and use their weapons to defend the local populace.[29] The ALP has expanded rapidly in the rural areas of twenty-nine of Afghanistan's thirty-four provinces, with an overall authorized number of 30,000. With the rise of violence across the country, the ALP has become a frontline fighting force, suffering the highest casualties in proportion to its size.

If properly selected and closely controlled, ALP village guards can help; otherwise, the program could add to problems caused by existing illegal armed groups. The ALP has contributed to security in areas where its members could be recruited from local villages and tribes, where they serve and are accountable to their local communities. In other places where the ALP is organized and led by local militia leaders and patronage networks, the armed men become engaged in predatory acts—abusing the population—and in many locations, they worsen security. In some areas in the north, militias raised by and loyal to local strongmen have been registered as ALP with the political support of top government officials in Kabul. Such contingents rarely answer to provincial officials and act as they please. They often prey upon the local population whom they are supposed to protect. Their predatory behavior causes public resentment, paving the way for the insurgents to make inroads into the communities. In such areas, the ALP program has not improved security and even exacerbated the conflict in a number of districts. The main reason for Taliban inroads in the northern provinces since 2010 is attributed to the abusive behavior of local commanders formed under the anti-Taliban uprising movement.

Various safeguards have been established for ALP management and recruitment, but they are rarely implemented. Although ALP units are supposed to be under the control of district and provincial police chiefs, who report to the head of the Afghan Uniformed Police in the Ministry of Interior (MOI), the isolated locations of the ALP's deployment and the absence of effective mechanisms for registering and responding to complaints about the ALP contribute to command and control problems. This is usually associated with ALP units that have ties to factional militia leaders, often in places where Afghan power brokers want control of drug routes or other strategic territory. They freely abuse the system thanks to the support and influence of some top government officials. In such cases, the ALP is more of an instrument of corruption and instability than an element of security.[30]

In some areas, up to 70 percent of the ALP authorized strength comprise ghost policemen or unfilled positions. The real number of the ALP is believed to be half the official count.

The absence of systematic control has left the program vulnerable to abuse and misuse. In some areas, up to 70 percent of the ALP authorized strength comprise ghost policemen or unfilled positions. The real number of the ALP is believed to be half the official count.[31] A recent survey by the RS mission indicated that up to 4,000 ALP members are not on active duty but rather serve as bodyguards of local influential figures or engage in other nonactive services.[32] All these shortfalls notwithstanding, the Afghan government plans (as of early 2016)

to request an expansion of the ALP to 45,000. Unless the current ALP program is reformed, though, any expansion will be a waste of resources. Reforms should include disbanding the militias posing as ALP and other ineffective units, supporting functional units, and filling the existing gaps in accountability of the ALP program.

Current Capability Gaps

The ANDSF continue to face capability gaps in combat and combat enablers, as well as shortfalls in logistics and other services. The gaps can be classified under several interconnected areas:

- Force generation and retention
- Leadership, command, and control
- Intelligence, susrveillance, and reconnaissance
- Air support and mobility
- Operational capacity
- Logistics and supply

Force Generation and Retention

One major factor affecting the sustainability of the ANDSF is the high rate of attrition within the rank and file of the ANA and ANP (attrition rarely affects officers and noncommissioned officers). Attrition was estimated between 4,000 and 5,000[33] per month during the early summer of 2015 and increased slightly during the following months. The ANDSF's overall attrition rates in 2015 averaged 2 percent per month. The RS mission estimates that ANDSF casualties were approximately 59 percent higher in the first half of 2015 compared with the same period the previous year.[34] The ANP and ALP suffered the majority of ANDSF casualties, because they are often deployed in remote and isolated posts while not sufficiently armed or well-trained.

If present rates continue, attrition will pose challenges to creating a professional force. Lieutenant General Joseph Anderson, chief of ISAF's Joint Command, said in a November 2014 briefing that unless the rate of losses goes down, the force level will not be sustainable in the long term.[35] The attrition is mostly caused by combat casualties, desertion, absent without leave (AWOL), refusal to reenlist, and sometimes a limited volunteer pool from which to recruit. While policies exist to prevent personnel from going AWOL, they are often unenforced, and commanders frequently welcome absent personnel back without exercising any formal discipline.[36] General John Campbell, at the time the ISAF commander, did not dispute the claim of a loss of about 20,000 troops and police to combat deaths and desertions in 2014 but asserted that it "hasn't had a severe impact on their readiness."[37] Campbell later stated at a meeting in Washington in August 2015 that poor leadership, fatigue, lack of training, and hunger were driving the high attrition rate within the Afghan security forces.[38]

Rates of desertion differ between regions and time of year but are highest during fighting season and in the most insecure or remote areas. The main reasons cited for desertion include poor leadership, insufficient and untimely pay, difficulties accessing pay, the absence or misunderstanding of leave policies, constant combat deployments with little or no leave or training rotations, the lack of casualty care, and inadequate living and working conditions. With the rise of violence across the country in 2015 and the high operational tempo, the regular cycle of force generation, field deployment, and rest and recovery of the combat troops

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has been interrupted. Troops who normally took turns being in training, deploying in the field, and going on leave were forced to stay in the field for longer periods, causing fatigue and undermining morale.[39] Delays in evacuation of the wounded, who die because of a long wait, also contribute to poor morale and desertion. There are reports that, in many cases, servicemen on leave do not return to duty, either because of insecurity or at the request of their families, who are intimidated by the insurgents.[40] Other reasons for desertion cited by Afghan sources include corrupt procurement practices, theft of essential supplies by some commanders that cause dangerous shortages in combat units, and delays in supply of ammunition and fuel to remote posts.

In 1988, the Afghan army suffered an attrition rate slightly higher than the ANA in 2011 (annually, 36.6 percent in 1988 versus 34.2 percent in 2011).[41] But in the 1980s, replacement draftees were conscripts, press-ganged into the service and often hard to retain in the ranks. Today, the availability of volunteers for ANA recruitment has so far offset the negative impact of the losses, but problems still remain. Attrition significantly raises the cost of training and development of the ANDSF and impedes combat readiness. The cycle of recruiting, training, posting, and deploying soldiers and policemen has rarely been a regular process, coordinated in time and location. Recruitment during the fighting season has traditionally been slower, leading to the loss of trained cadres when they are most needed, with little time for recruitment and replacement. And the pressing need to recruit and assign men to units leaves limited time for predeployment training. This is particularly an ongoing problem in the ANP, where recruits are often assigned to units without basic training.[42]

Attrition significantly raises the cost of training and development of the ANDSF and impedes combat readiness.

According to a Pentagon report, over the course of 2014, the ANA did not recruit at a level sufficient enough to outpace attrition, resulting in a decline in strength. In November 2014, the ANA increased its monthly recruiting targets and began work on a fourteen-month recruiting and training surge plan. Since then, the ANA's strength has increased steadily. Current recruiting goals are ambitious though, averaging approximately 5,000 new recruits per month. It was reported that recruiting in early 2015 was well below the target.[43] In recent months, the RS mission helped introduce measures to enhance the sustainability of the ANDSF by planning recruitment as a continuous process throughout the year.[44]

Professional training of the recruits is further hindered by illiteracy (over 60 percent of them are illiterate, coming mostly from rural areas). Few educated, urban Afghans volunteer to serve in the ranks of the ANA. A five-year literacy program, costing about $200 million, was set up in 2009 to educate 100 percent of the recruits up to the first grade reading level and 50 percent of them to the third grade level. However, by 2014, more than half of soldiers and police officers were still unable to read.[45] The urgent need for field deployment often caused the recruits to be sent out without training. For example, between July 2012 and February 2013, about 45 percent of ANP recruits were sent to the field without receiving any literacy training. There are also reports of lax vetting of police recruits and their lack of proper training before they are posted and deployed. The gaps created by police casualties are filled by readily available unemployed volunteers, which include some drug addicts.

Leadership, Command, and Control

The command and control structure of the ANDSF looks good on paper, but the system is bureaucratically heavy at the top and weak at the bottom. In the words of one senior Afghan general, the "force has an inflated head and skinny legs."[46] Political interference by official and

unofficial power brokers and the circumvention of formal command levels disrupts established procedures, plans, and normal unit functions. The coordination and operational cohesiveness of the ANA, ANP, and National Directorate of Security (NDS) forces in the field are dangerously lacking. The multilayered command and control system slows communication and the implementation of decisions made both at the top and the bottom (up through the chain of command). Joint cooperation cells established at the corps headquarters (bringing together the ANA corps commander, provincial police chiefs, ABP, and NDS) function in a stove-piped fashion, with no effective cooperation. The same pattern of dysfunction exists in provincial centers and at battalion and company levels in the districts (army, police, ABP, and NDS).[47]

Concerned about the incompetence of key command personnel and rampant corruption, Ghani spent considerable time at the beginning of his term removing and appointing tactical-level ANDSF officials, bypassing formal institutions. This practice not only hindered the development of ANDSF institutions but also dealt a heavy blow to state authority and public confidence. The nature of shared decision making within the NUG has led to delays in appointments, which has had a negative impact on the ability of the Afghan security ministries and their forces to exercise command and control effectively. It took the government more than seven months to fill dozens of senior positions in the MOD, which were vacant after the retirement of general officers. The delay in naming the Minister of Defense contributed to the tendency of incumbent leaders to evade making tough decisions pending the appointment of permanent leaders.

In 2015, the government restored six ANP zonal commands, plus Kabul; these commands place a single commander in charge of all police forces within a zone, which encompasses several provinces. Such an arrangement added an unnecessary layer to the chain of command, which failed in the past and was consequently phased out. A better policy may be to integrate the security elements into the structure of the provincial government instead of making the provincial police chief report to more than one superior. In January 2015, another security body, the Kabul Garrison Joint Command, was established by a presidential decree to coordinate cross-ministerial security in the capital. Such a garrison may function well in the provincial cities, but in the capital—where the security ministries, the ANDSF joint command and coordination bodies, and the National Security Council are engaged in joint effort—it is hard for a subordinate body to coordinate cross-ministerial security.

Moving the directorate of local government from its well-entrenched and effective coordinating role at the MOI and making it a separate administrative unit weakened the coordination and functional relationship between the provincial governors and provincial police chiefs. This decision was made several years back for political reasons ahead of the 2009 presidential election.

The lack of competent leadership in key positions at different levels of the ANDSF remains a critical issue. The deficiency is not due to a dearth of well-trained, experienced, and talented officers but is instead due to a poor system of appointment and promotion. Nepotism, political favoritism, bribery and corruption, and political pressure for ethnic balance and patronage all shape senior position appointments. Finally, overlapping functions, a lack of clarity in vertical and horizontal functional relations, the multilayered chain of command, and poor oversight and accountability contribute to gaps in the command and control system. A comprehensive approach to address them would decisively improve the capacity, effectiveness, and sustainability of the ANDSF.

Nepotism, political favoritism, bribery and corruption, and political pressure for ethnic balance and patronage all shape senior position appointments.

Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance

Intelligence gaps are caused by the uneven development of Afghanistan intelligence institutions, lack of professional capacity, dearth of means for ISR, poor coordination among different intelligence and reconnaissance elements, and failure to operationalize acquired intelligence in a timely and coordinated way. In addition to the NDS, several intelligence entities have been formed and organized within the structure of the ANDSF, including the Assistant Ministry of Defense for Intelligence, the ANA General Staff Intelligence Directorate, and the MOI Directorate of Police Intelligence. These entitites were created at different times for distinct purposes by separate institutions with divergent political preferences. They have been supported and aided by different donors and trained using various methods and means. Thus, they have developed unevenly and adopted different professional cultures.

The NDS is still strongly influenced by the legacy of its past, when it was formed based on the KGB model during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s. The NDS became an intelligence agency with the authority to arrest and detain suspects and conduct combat operations. While such activities contribute to kinetic actions in counterinsurgency operations, they strongly influence the agency's main role as a national intelligence agency. Further, the situation puts the agency in competition with the ANDSF for scoring political points by carrying out special operations. Such competition fosters a reluctance to share tactical and operational intelligence with other parts of the government and poor coordination across agencies.

Within the ANDSF, there are no clear lines of responsibility regarding the division of labor and how intelligence is shared. The confusion is particularly prevalent in relations between the MOD Department of Intelligence and the ANA General Staff Intelligence Directorate.[48] Several coordinating bodies have been established to bring the intelligence organizations onto the same page. The new National Threat Intelligence Center at the General Staff brings together representatives of the MOD, MOI, and NDS for information sharing and joint intelligence assessments.[49] However, most respected authorities are not convinced that the intelligence sharing is done wholly or in a timely manner. Although similar mechanisms are in place at the lower levels, including the army corps/police zones, they are not fully functional or effective either. For example, the NDS claimed that it had warned the ANDSF and provincial government in advance of the Taliban plan to attack and capture Kunduz in September 2015, but still every unit was taken by surprise. The National Threat Intelligence Center creates increased possibilities for cooperation among the MOD, MOI, and NDS. Having these three entities work side-by-side and share intelligence is a major step forward in Afghan intelligence development.[50]

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Currently, the ANDSF depend on limited equipment to collect intelligence and target insurgents. These include the Wolfhound radio direction finding system that targets VHF and UHF radio bands and surveillance aerostat blimps and towers that can detect threat activity and lead to effective countermeasures. The ANA is expected to acquire a few more aerostats and ISR drones in 2016, but most international assets have been withdrawn from Afghanistan since the end of combat operations. Further, closing additional bases in Afghanistan will affect the ability of U.S. forces to conduct certain types of counterterrorism operations given the constraints of specific ISR collection platforms. As noted earlier, the SMW supporting the operation of the Special Forces is equipped with ISR means onboard its fixed-wing PC-12 aircraft. However, the availability of trained air crew and the capacity for technical sustainability are still limited.

To narrow the capability gap in intelligence, structural changes should be made to draw a clearer distinction between intelligence, security, and combat action. The NDS should become a professional, civilianized intelligence agency. This reform may require restructuring the agency to establish a clear distinction between intelligence gathering and paramilitary covert operations. Therefore, the NDS should undergo fundamental structural and procedural reform to focus on national-level strategic requirements. The intelligence elements of the MOD and MOI should focus on situational intelligence that supports decision making at the departmental, operational, and tactical levels. This requires unity of effort in the collection, processing, integration, evaluation, analysis, and interpretation of available information concerning the actual and potential hostile forces in the area of operation. This means that the intelligence institutions should focus on these tasks and not duplicate the tasks assigned to army and police units. Meanwhile, the RS mission and its successor need to focus on the development of intelligence capabilities within the ANDSF through, for example, training, the provision of ISR means, and greater involvement in the operational planning process for the next five years.

Air Support and Mobility

Quick movement by land and air can serve as a force multiplier for the ANA and ANP, which are often overstretched. The ANDSF's current airlift capacity is insufficient to quickly move reinforcements to the battle areas, mount airborne raids on enemy concentrations, deliver emergency supplies to isolated posts, or evacuate wounded personnel to medical facilities and retrieve the bodies of killed servicemen. This undermines the agility of combat troops to act faster than the enemy. Mounting surprise (night) raids, one of the most effective tactics in counterinsurgency operations, largely depends on airlift capability and close combat air support of the raiding forces. Although the SMW supports the ANA Special Operations Command, long delays in replacing crashed Mi-17 helicopters undermine sustainability of the operation.

The gaps in aviation support not only undermine combat effectiveness and agility of the army and police units but also take a toll on troop morale and confidence. The ANDSF, which have operated under cover of coalition direct air support for years, have developed the perception that counterinsurgency war requires direct air support at all times. In the absence of air cover, there is less motivation for deployed forces to take bold action against the enemy in the open. Some isolated security posts on major highways and other key locations are seen as reluctant to move outside of the wire for fear of getting overwhelmed by the enemy, particularly at night. This lack of action provides the insurgents with freedom of action to block major roads even in areas not far from security posts. Further, due to the topography and security environment of Afghanistan, aviation support remains a key enabler, helping to deny freedom of movement and safe haven in remote areas to insurgents, terrorists, and drug trafficking networks. As the Afghan Air Force will take years to build, the ANDSF will require international aviation support for an extended period. Recently, the gaps in air power led the United States to provide air support to the ANDSF beyond 2014.[51] The recent ANDSF operation to recapture the provincial city of Kunduz (October 2015), which was briefly overrun by the Taliban, succeeded largely with the help of close air support provided by U.S. forces. In Helmand Province, U.S. direct air support and assistance from Special Operation Forces enabled the ANDSF to contain the insurgents trying to overrun a number of district centers.[52]

Due to the topography and security environment of Afghanistan, aviation support remains a key enabler, helping to deny freedom of movement and safe haven in remote areas to insurgents, terrorists, and drug trafficking networks.

While the insurgents act with tactical agility, choosing the time and place for hitting individual government posts, the ANDSF are mainly deployed in small security posts across extended areas, with little tactical cooperation between them and often with no immediately available quick reaction forces to join the battle.

Operational Capacity

The ANDSF's low space-to-force ratio results in an overextension of forces, impeding operational capability and tactical agility and often precluding the holding of areas cleared of enemy forces. ANDSF operations primarily consist of covering population areas through a network of security posts, launching large-scale sweeping operations to clear extended areas from insurgents and destroy their infrastructure, and mounting raids on enemy fixed targets.

While the insurgents act with tactical agility, choosing the time and place for hitting individual government posts, the ANDSF are mainly deployed in small security posts across extended areas, with little tactical cooperation between them and often with no immediately available quick reaction forces to join the battle. During the 2015 fighting season, the network of isolated ANA and ANP security posts suffered heavily; each post of ten to fifteen men was attacked by often dozens of well-armed militants. The Afghan Uniform Police particularly suffered in this regard, because they are often deployed in small teams in remote areas without adequate combat means, supplies, and training.[53] In some cases, control of the area is contested by local strongmen connected to influential officials in Kabul. According to a Pentagon assessment, as of September 2015, the ANP devoted more than half of its total end strength of approximately 147,000 to checkpoints and fixed sites.[54] ANP leaders are reluctant to consolidate due to civilian demand for police presence in all communities. The absence of checkpoints even in areas that cannot be guarded against insurgents is often perceived as giving up space to the Taliban.

The deployment of ANA and ANP units to a wide network of fixed security posts and checkpoints thwarts maneuverability and impedes force concentration against the enemy at the right time and place. By October 21, 2015, the ANA had reduced their total number of checkpoints and fixed sites by almost 40 percent when compared to the first half of 2015 but still had an estimated 53,000 personnel stationed at those sites. Consequently, major sweeping counterinsurgency operations have to be conducted by forces brought temporarily to the affected areas, as described earlier.

The ANDSF show a high level of professional effectiveness when they take initiative and act aggressively against insurgents. Special Forces' surprise raids on enemy targets, ambushes by ANA and ANP units, and long-range patrolling constantly result in decisive tactical achievements. This suggests that the ANDSF should maximize the use of such methods. With the development of the ANA and ANP Special Security Operation Forces (ASSF) and their ISR and airlift capability, the ANDSF are improving their ability to wage a far more effective counterinsurgency. Establishment of the SMW to support air-assault operations by ANA and ANP's ASSF provide tactical agility in combat actions. The SMW conducts day and night air-assault and ISR missions. Its thirty specially equipped Mi-17 helicopters provide the ASSF with medium airlift, personal transport, casualty evacuation, and quick reaction force capability. The units' fixed-wing PC-12 aircraft with ISR capability (more than a dozen) support special forces operations to disrupt insurgent and drug smuggling networks. The SMW has three operational squadrons (two based in Kabul and one in Kandahar).

According to a Pentagon assessment, the ASSF have proved to be among the best special operations forces in the region. Working together, commando units and the SMW are consistently running unilateral direct action missions against insurgent leaders and facilitators.[55] Challenges remain in sustainment, SMW force generation, and targeting. In the first six months of 2015, the ANDSF Special Forces and commando units conducted more than 2,800 independent operations, accounting for 82 percent of all ANDSF missions. More

than 92 percent of all missions by special security forces were Afghan-led. Commando units now conduct night raids independently, using their own intelligence to drive their operations. The SMW is also executing long-range, full-mission profiles in low illumination.

To avoid overextension and improve the space-to-force ratio, Afghan leaders should consider changing the ANDSF operational posture from being defensive to offensive. The ANDSF will need to demonstrate resiliency and steady improvement to achieve more than a stalemate against the insurgency across the country. Remote, hard-to-reach locations that are difficult to hold should be only watched and hit where the enemy shows concentration. Instead of holding every district and village, a watch-hit-degrade strategy needs to be adopted. The number of committed insurgents in Afghanistan is estimated to be ten times less than that of the ANDSF, and the latter are better trained and equipped than insurgent forces. The enemy's advantages are its agility and choice of time and space to hit government targets. Meanwhile, the use of ANA and ANP special operation raids should be increased. However, all these tactical adjustments will not be fully effective unless other capability gaps are narrowed (in maneuvering and mobility, aviation support, and intelligence).

During the Soviet occupation (1979–89) in Afghanistan, the level of Soviet troops was only enough for partial occupation and part-time control of selected territories. Most of the Soviet forces' success in driving the mujahideen from their strongholds was temporary, as the mujahideen returned as soon as the Soviet columns left the area. There was "clearing" without "holding." The low space-to-force ratio precluded holding the areas overrun by attacking forces.[56] However, the Soviets often used their technological edge as a force multiplier to offset the low ratio. Air supplying their isolated garrisons and the centers of subnational government during years of continued sieges by the mujahideen helped maintain control of key locations. Constant and reliable air supply, and often unchallenged air support and bombing, helped the Soviets' encircled military bases to withstand the mujahideen's attacks.

Logistics and Supply

Logistics continue to be a major challenge for the ANDSF, undermining the combat effectiveness and operational posture of soldiers and police. Delays in supply and service provision take a heavy toll on troop combat agility, often forcing ANDSF units into an immobile defensive posture. The ANDSF have long been dependent on U.S. forces for logistics support and have not been able to develop a self-reliant support system.

Delays in supply and service provision take a heavy toll on troop combat agility, often forcing ANDSF units into an immobile defensive posture.

The ANDSF's military logistics and maintenance systems can handle basic supply and distribution functions, but the ANDSF need coalition assistance to improve their distribution capacity. Existing systems are largely manual and paper-based and often require the intervention of senior officers to resolve relatively minor issues. The MOD's ability to manage supply and distribution outside of Kabul varies considerably, with ineffectual controls, poor consumption reporting, and little visibility below the regional and corps levels. The ministry's procurement system requires significant coalition support for major procurement initiatives. The absence of effective internal control processes increases the risk of poor management and corrupt practices, which deprives the ANDSF of vital resources and could lead to a reduction in international contributions over time. Continued financial support from the international community depends on a transparent and accountable resource management process that enables oversight by third-party organizations.

The national-level Central Supply Depot is the primary supply depot for the ANA, responsible for issuing, shipping, receiving, storing, and replenishing supply items, except for

rations, POL (petroleum, oil, lubricants), and ammunition, which are handled by separate organizations that report to NATO's Logistic Command. The depot serves seven regional maintenance and supply facilities called regional logistics supply centers. The centers are located at each corps command and allow for more complex maintenance tasks than those performed at the unit level.

Units are obligated to send supply and resupply requests up the support chain through a cumbersome bureaucratic system. The process requires approval from regional and national levels and takes an average of ninety days. According to Pentagon sources, supply shortages in operational units are most commonly the result of the ANDSF's underdeveloped logistics system, rather than actual supply shortages within the system as a whole. Warehouse managers are often "unaware of inbound shipments, and units in the field may lack the ability to requisition necessary items. Since the supply and demand signals do not match, supplies can sit in warehouses unsorted."[57]

Food provision is contracted independently by brigades and other entities, who receive supplies at major garrisons and bases. Units deployed in remote areas receive supplies intermittently or use cash provided by contractors to purchase their food, which constrains local resources. This system contributes to desertion and makes it difficult for troops to withstand long periods of isolation. This system also applies to ammunition and fuel. Although ammunition storage exists at the brigade headquaters level, the ANA does not have a regular indigenous ammunition supply system, depending instead on provisions air-transported monthly by NATO. Fuel for operational support is widely wasted because of corruption or significantly delayed, rendering combat vehicles inoperable for a time. According to Afghan MOD leadership, the ineffective distribution of fuel and other supplies among ANA units is the main reason for shortages of POL and other material.[58]

Technical maintenance and repair is one of the weakest points in the logistics system. The ANA maintains a ground-wheeled fleet of more than 48,000 vehicles. For many years, army and police vehicles have been serviced by high-priced contractors who would junk thousands of slightly damaged vehicles to offset the high repair costs. Consequently, today, tens of thousands of repairable vehicles are junked across the country. The Central Workshop in Kabul (Fabrika-e-Harbi) has recently been restored and is responsible for repairing and rebuilding equipment to a serviceable condition, but it does not have the capacity to meet the increasing demand for repairs.[59] The workshop is able to send mobile maintenance teams across the country to repair weapons and vehicles; however, the operation is often hindered by the lack of parts, inefficient requisition processes, and poor communication with the Central Supply Depot.

Given the ANDSF's constant engagement in combat and expected damages to hardware, an organic system of technical and repair support needs to be reestablished. In the past, the ANA had organic technical support units at different levels of command. Routine maintenance was conducted by battalions, while light and medium repairs were done at the regiment/brigade workshops and divisional maintenance units. The Kabul Pul-e-Charkhi central plant had the capacity to conduct major repairs and overhauls.

The AAF faces difficulties with sustaining its maintenance capability at all bases across Afghanistan. With the exception of the Mi-35, which will likely exit service in the near future, all AAF aircraft platforms will require varying degrees of contract logistics support through at least 2023. Additionally, as coalition advisers decrease in number, the ability for AAF to order parts and sustain its systems will be a challenge, as it currently lacks the planning and

discipline required to keep its fleet up and running. Maintenance support within the Kabul area is sufficient due to adequate coalition and contract logistics support.[60]

ANDSF Funding

The United States has provided nearly $14 billion worth of equipment to the ANDSF and another $9 billion for building their infrastructure.

The ANDSF are expected to remain dependent on foreign aid for many years. At the 2012 NATO Summit in Chicago, international donors agreed to fund an initial force level of 228,500 personnel, subject to periodic reviews based on security conditions and other factors, at an annual estimated cost of $4.1 billion. However, based on assessments of the difficulty of securing Afghanistan, the decision was reversed at a subsequent NATO meeting on February 21, 2013.[61] At the 2014 NATO Summit in Wales, international donors affirmed pledges to provide $1 billion annually to supplement U.S. funding, with the Afghan government pledging $500 million annually to support its security requirement. The anticipated fiscal year 2015 cost for the current ANDSF structure is $5.4 billion, which is expected to decrease to $5 billion in 2016.[62] Equipment and infrastructure costs are estimated at about $800 million per year for at least five years, assuming current usage remains constant.[63]

During Ghani's visit to Washington in March 2015, the United States reaffirmed that it would seek continued funding for 352,000 ANDSF troops at least through 2017; the United States has requested a slightly lower amount ($3.8 billion) for 2016, while U.S. partners have pledged $1.25 billion annually for 2015–17 and Afghanistan has pledged $500 million for 2015. It is not expected that Afghanistan will be able to fund its armed forces from domestic revenue after 2017.[64]

The level of future funding will depend on additional donor commitments, the level of the threat, the amount of domestic revenue, and the possibility of downsizing the ANDSF. Political settlement of the conflict is the key factor in securing the ANDSF's financial sustainability by reducing the need for maintaining a large force and drastically cutting the cost of security operations. However, the cost of downsizing the security forces and reintegrating former combatants would require some funds for the following three to five years. A sharp cut in foreign aid while the conflict continues will have a drastic impact on maintaining the integrity of the ANDSF, as it may take years before domestic revenues are sufficient to cover security costs. The International Monetary Fund has concluded that the Afghan government will be incapable of paying ANDSF costs until at least 2023.[65] In December 2015, a NATO ministerial meeting indicated that the alliance may fund the ANDSF for the next five years. A joint statement issued after the meeting confirmed that at the NATO Summit in Warsaw in July 2016, international support and partnership with Afghanistan will be renewed until 2020, in parallel to the security-related efforts pursued under the NATO framework.

The Way Forward

The ANDSF's mission has evolved over the past fourteen years, along with changing security conditions. The ANDSF were established to stabilize the country following years of conflict, as well as support the development of democratic institutions to counteract entrenched postconflict criminality, including warlord- and drug-related crime. However, over the years, the ANDSF gradually got pulled into counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations,

as the resurgent Taliban and their foreign supporters exploited the light footprint of foreign forces, the slow development of the ANDSF, and the weakness of the Afghan government.

Although the NATO combat mission ended and international military assistance declined at the outset of 2015, the ANDSF held their own and foiled the Taliban's repeated effort to overrun key areas. Despite challenges, the ANDSF proved their resolve to fight and learn from their mistakes. The ANDSF have been able to reverse Taliban inroads into some remote district centers, albeit with high costs in lives and materials. The fall of Kunduz to the Taliban on September 28, 2015, following a brief resistance, marked the changing nature of the insurgency, which took the ANDSF by surprise. Although the Afghan forces, with the help of U.S. air strikes, reestablished control over the city after two weeks of fierce fighting, the situation revealed serious gaps in the structural cohesiveness of the NUG at the local level and in the ANDSF's operational command and control system.

The ANDSF continue to face threats from both the Afghan insurgency and extremist networks—including the Taliban, al-Qaeda, Haqqani Network, and emerging local affiliates of ISIS—which continue to attempt to assert their authority and prominence in isolated pockets across the country. The convergence of insurgent, terrorist, and criminal networks is pervasive and endangers Afghanistan's stability. Revenue from opium trafficking continues to sustain the insurgency and Afghan criminal networks. Additionally, there has been a recent increase in extortion and kidnappings by low-level criminal networks in some areas of the country. The Afghanistan-Pakistan border areas remain an extremist safe haven providing sanctuary for various groups, including regional militant groups such as Lashkar-e Tayyiba and the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan. Cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan to fight insurgents in Afghanistan and violent extremists in the region is essential to regional security and the stability of both countries. A belated Pakistani military crackdown on terrorists in the bordering areas pushed many extremists across the border into Afghanistan in 2014 and 2015, causing an upsurge of violence in Afghanistan.

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In the short term, the ANDSF do not have to defeat the Taliban, but they need to support the state's survival and strengthening to ensure peace and stability. The longer the state survives, the less likely an overthrow of the government becomes; sustainability of the state may sway insurgents and their foreign supporters, particularly in Pakistan, to opt for political settlement of the conflict.

The long-term security strategy needs to focus on two sets of mutually reinforcing measures. One set should be directed toward reducing the threat level. This can be achieved through interlinked actions, including a rapid improvement in government performance, strengthening of the rule of law, successful reconciliation and reintegration of less ideologically zealous fighters, and regional cooperation.

Pakistan can play a key role in reducing the level of violence in Afghanistan if it chooses to. The presence of operational and logistic infrastructure of the Taliban and other anti-Afghan government insurgents, including the Haqqani network and the Hekmatyar militant group, provides Pakistan the opportunity to exert a significant level of control and influence over them. In March 2016, in an unusually candid admission, Sartaj Aziz, adviser to the Pakistan Prime Minister on Foreign Affairs, said that Islamabad has considerable influence over the Taliban because its leaders live in the country with their families and benefit from medical services there.[66] Although Pakistan may ultimately see the return of the Taliban to power in Afghanistan as neither possible nor desirable, it uses its control and influence over them as a leverage to secure its regional geopolitical interests through influence in Afghanistan. While a

U.S. ally in fighting terrorism and extremism, Pakistan views the challenge in the context of its regional interests, including its geopolitical vision of Afghanistan as a zone of strategic depth in its long-standing dispute with India over Kashmir. Pakistan has made repeated attempts in recent times to help install a pliable, subordinate regime in Kabul, including the Taliban government (1996–2001). Pakistan's recent military operation against violent extremists in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas targeted the militants that fight against the Pakistan government, leaving the Haqqani network and other Taliban groups that fight in Afghanistan mostly untouched. In the words of U.S. congressman Ed Royce, "Pakistani governments have come and gone, but Pakistan has remained a terrorist haven, with its security services supporting what it considers to be 'good' Islamist terrorist groups. These 'good' groups—under Pakistan's calculus—destabilize Afghanistan and threaten neighboring India."[67]

There are indications that Pakistan, in a recent policy shift, no longer distinguishes between good and bad Taliban, and, therefore, to defeat the Tehreek-e-Taliban, they must also fight the Afghan Taliban.[68] This is good news, but actions rather than rhetoric are now needed. The most unsettling perception entertained by some Pakistani circles is the notion that Pakistani army and intelligence have the ability to manage the crisis in Afghanistan, allowing them to prevent rivals from gaining ascendency without the conflict blowing back against Pakistan. They may be able to do this in the short term, but eventually such a dangerous approach will be destructive to Pakistan.

Ghani has taken steps to improve relations with Pakistan and form joint efforts to deal with the security challenges in Afghanistan and the region. He proposed a step-by-step approach, beginning with a Pakistani effort to end the undeclared war between the two states through limiting the ability of the Taliban based in Pakistan to continue violence in a friendly neighboring country (Afghanistan). Following such an act of confidence building, the Afghan leader offered to normalize bilateral relations and address the issues of concern to Pakistan. Pakistan responded with a different roadmap, suggesting that all of Islamabad's political, security, and intelligence demands be settled as an inclusive package addressing all issues at once—a controversial demand that proved to be a nonstarter in Kabul. After some initial improvements in relations—as demonstrated by Islamabad's assistance in hosting the first direct talks between the Afghan government and Taliban representatives in Murree, Pakistan, on July 7, 2015—the relationship suffered a major setback. The setback was caused by rising mistrust between Kabul and Islamabad following the announcement of the death of the Taliban leader Mullah Omer, who had died more than two years previously in Karachi, leading to Kabul's suspicions of Pakistani cover up. Furthermore, the upsurge of violence in Afghanistan by the new Pakistan-based leadership of the Taliban and failure of Pakistan to stop public gatherings and free movement of the Taliban on its soil added to the mistrust.

Rising concerns over continued instability and the emergence of ISIS in Afghanistan and Pakistan have created a new regional dynamism among major powers, including China and the United States, to support the peace process. However, even if begun today, it will take several years before the process leads to a peaceful settlement of the Afghan conflict. The recent division within the insurgents' ranks lowers the prospects for achieving a legitimate, inclusive, and sustainable peace deal in the short run. However, if the division leads to the movement's fragmentation, chances for making separate local deals with insurgent groups may improve. In any case, the role of Pakistan, which controls or influences several groups, continues to be crucial in limiting the Taliban's capacity and encouraging them to hold peace talks with Kabul.

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Closing the gaps in the ANDSF's capabilities, building an indigenous capacity for efficient and effective service delivery and economic development, fighting corruption, and strengthening the rule of law are the most viable long-term strategies to secure Afghanistan and the region's stability.

Meanwhile, the second set of simultaneous measures must include further building Afghan capacity to govern and provide security. Closing the gaps in the ANDSF's capabilities, building an indigenous capacity for efficient and effective service delivery and economic development, fighting corruption, and strengthening the rule of law are the most viable long-term strategies to secure Afghanistan and the region's stability. As prospects for political settlement in the immediate future dwindle, regional countries and those beyond—including China, India, Russia, and the Central Asian states, which fear violence spreading across the region and Afghanistan once again becoming the hub of violent extremist forces—are increasingly interested in assisting the ANDSF to build its counterterrorism capability.

The ANDSF have long been dependent on U.S. support of their operations. The fast-paced numerical force generation of the ANDSF during the transition period left little time to develop capabilities that need more time and elaborate infrastructures (e.g., the air force, intelligence, and logistics). The size and professional capacity of the security forces have been evolving according to the changing ANDSF mission and emerging threats. The current size of the ANDSF (352,000) is adequate to fulfill their mission, but success hinges on forces being maintained at their authorized levels and international support being received at least until 2018. The level of further funding will depend on additional donor commitments, the threat level, the amount of domestic revenue, and the possibility of downsizing the ANDSF. Political settlement of the conflict will be the key factor in the ANDSF's financial sustainability, because such a settlement will reduce the need for maintaining a large force and drastically cut the cost of security operations.

Obama's decision in October 2015 to maintain U.S. forces in Afghanistan at current levels for at least another year and to reduce only to a baseline of 5,500 military personnel recognizes that the ANDSF will require more time and assistance to develop into a capable independent force. Whether the presence of 5,500 U.S. troops in Afghanistan can make a major difference is hard to determine because there are other domestic and regional factors at play. However, the absence of U.S. forces in Afghanistan would definitely have an adverse impact on regional stability. The effect of the U.S. forces in Afghanistan depends less on their numbers and more on their assigned mission and rules of engagement.

Notes

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In the past fourteen years, the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) have come a long way, transforming from an odd assortment of factional militias into a collection of modern security institutions with professional capacity and increasing loyalty to a unified state. However, while strongly committed to their mission and highly respected by the majority of Afghans, the ANDSF continue to depend on foreign assistance to fill gaps in certain key areas (e.g., logistics, air power, and intelligence). This report assesses the structure and capacity of the ANDSF, as well as the broader conditions needed for their long-term financial and operational sustainability. Political settlement of the conflict and a reduction in the threat level both from within and outside Afghanistan will be essential to reaching this goal.

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