

NATO in Afghanistan: Challenges to Security Establishment 2003-2013

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to analyze problems and challenges which have been faced in NATO's operation in Afghanistan over the last decade. We encounter that the main security challenges have been derived from Afghanistan instable domestic situation which largely caused by the rise of radical groups insurgency. In such violent movements, include elements of terrorist networks and local warriors. In addition, regional powers' recalcitrant attitude towards stability establishment project in Afghanistan has brought about more challenges to NATO's existence in the war-torn society.

Keywords: NATO, Afghanistan, security establishment, domestic instability, external challenges.

Tulisan ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis masalah dan tantangan yang dihadapi oleh NATO ketika melakukan operasi di Afghanistan selama satu dekade terakhir. Dalam hal ini, penulis menemukan bahwa tantangan keamanan utama berasal dari situasi domestik Afghanistan yang tidak stabil yang disebabkan oleh peningkatan pemberontakan kelompok radikal. Gerakan kekerasan tersebut juga meliputi jaringan teroris dan pejuang lokal. Di samping itu, sikap penolakan oleh kekuatan dalam kawasan terhadap proyek pembentukan stabilitas di Afghanistan juga menjadi tantangan tersendiri bagi keberadaan NATO di masyarakat yang hancur akibat perang tersebut.

Kata-Kata Kunci: NATO, Afghanistan, pembentukan keamanan, ketidakstabilan domestik, tantangan-tantangan eksternal.

The operation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in Afghanistan is seen as a test of the alliance's political will and military capabilities. Since the Washington Summit in 1999, the allies have sought to create a "new" NATO, to combat emerging threats such as terrorism and the proliferation of mass destruction weapons. Afghanistan is NATO's first area operation outside Europe. The purpose of the mission is the stabilization and reconstruction of Afghanistan. The situation of Afghanistan is seen as a crisis with a high level of violence due to increased Taliban military operations and terrorist-related activities, and recent major offensive operations conducted by the allies. This paper tries to evaluate the challenges faced by NATO in Afghanistan for establishing the security during the past decade.

Afghanistan: A Test of Capability for New NATO

International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was created by United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution 1386 on December 20, 2001. Led originally by US, the ISAF mission was initially limited to Kabul. NATO took over the command of ISAF in Afghanistan in August 2003. The Security Council passed the currently governing resolution, Res. 1883, on September 23, 2008. The resolution calls upon NATO to provide security, law, and order, promote governance and development, help reform the justice system, train a national police force and army, provide security for elections and assistance to the local government to address the narcotics industry.

Table 1. Number of forces of each member

International Security Assistance Force: Troop Contributing Nations								
	Albania	250		Germany	4350		Poland	2500
	Armenia	75		Greece	75		Portugal	265
	Australia	1550		Hungary	340		Romania	1140
	Austria	3		Iceland	3		Singapore	40
	Azerbaijan	90		Ireland	7		Slovakia	290
	Belgium	590		Italy	3300		Slovenia	75
	Bosnia & Herzegovina	10		Jordan	6		Spain	1415
	Bulgaria	525		Republic of Korea	0		Sweden	500
	Canada	2830		Latvia	170		The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*	210
	Croatia	280		Lithuania	245			Turkey
	Czech Republic	525		Luxembourg	9		Ukraine	15
	Denmark	750		Mongolia	40		United Arab Emirates	25
	Estonia	160		Montenegro	30		United Kingdom	9500
	Finland	115		Netherlands	1705		United States	78430
	France	3750		New Zealand	155			
	Georgia	925		Norway	500		Total	119,500

Note on numbers: Totals are approximations and actual numbers change daily. Number of troops should be taken as indicatives.

* Turkey recognises the Republic of Macedonia with its constitutional name

7 June 2010

Source: ISAF 2010.

Although NATO has undertaken stabilization and reconstruction missions before, the scope of the undertaking in Afghanistan is more difficult. Taliban and Al Qaeda insurgents put a strong resistance to the operation, Afghanistan has never had a well-functioning central government, and moreover, the distance from Europe and the country's terrain formed hard obstacles for NATO manpower and equipment. Although the allies had agreed upon the general political objective of the ISAF mission, some have different interpretation of how to achieve it. Politically, the mission in Afghanistan is likely to remain important for NATO's future. Several key NATO members, especially US, view the Afghanistan operation as a test for the allies' ability to generate the political will to counter significant threats to their security. These countries believe that Afghanistan provides a concrete danger of international terrorism although some allies may disagree with this assessment.

The Rise of Insurgency

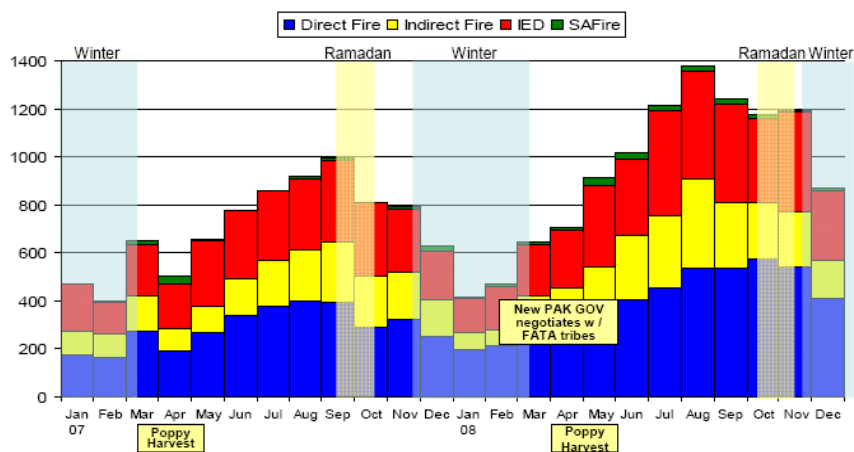
The conflict in Afghanistan put a significant challenge to NATO's military commanders as well. Over the past ten years, Taliban attacks have increased in scope and number, and Taliban fighters have adopted some tactics, such as roadside bombs and suicide attacks. In January 2008, a report issued by the Afghanistan Study Group claimed that the year 2007 was the deadliest for American and international troops in Afghanistan since 2001 (Jones and Pickering 2008). However, in 2008 the violence continued to escalate with a reported 30% increase nationwide and an estimated 40% rise in attacks over 2007 in the US-led eastern sector. The continuation of violence, including allied operations in Helmand province has increased the number of casualties resulting from Taliban attacks and made 2009 the deadliest year for the allied.

US officials, in July 2008, apparently confronted Pakistani officials with evidence that Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence agency (ISI) was actively helping Afghanistan militants, particularly the Haqqani faction (Mazzetti and Schmitt 2008). The new government in Pakistan after Musharraf has dispatched military units to the border region and has authorized the army to conduct offensive operations against Taliban forces in the northern tribal areas. In October 2008, the Pakistan government trained anti-Taliban tribal militias in the northern region in an attempt to control Taliban activity (DeYoung 2008).

The Karzai government in Afghanistan has also come under both domestic and international criticism due to rampant corruption and inability to improve security and overall living conditions for its citizens. Some warlords continue to exert strong anti-government influence, and

the narcotics industry remains as a threat to the country. Allied officials said that they need a strong, competent, and reliable Afghan government to provide good services to the people if NATO succeeded. The national elections held on August 20 in which President Karzai was reelected for another term were considered seriously flawed in many areas of the country and a run-off election had been initially scheduled. However, the opposition candidates decided against another campaign and vote.

Figure 1. Insurgent-initiated Attacks, 2007-2008



Source: Department of Defense United States of America 2009.

Characterizing the Insurgency

While many observers use the term “Taliban” for the insurgency in Afghanistan, senior Western officials in Afghanistan stress that the insurgency is not unified. ISAF prefers the term “insurgent syndicate” refer to all its various strands. Further, insurgent activities are closely linked with criminality, a potent force in ungoverned areas, and related with drug cultivation and sales (Jones 2008).

Taliban

Taliban is more a network than a single organization (Afsar, Samples, & Wood 2008). Taliban emerged from the Afghan civil war of the early and middle 1990's, and the organization ruled Afghanistan in 1996 until 2001. Mullah Mohammed Omar, the *de facto* head of state during Taliban rule, is generally assumed to be alive and leading the organization from Pakistan. In December 2008, for example, he reportedly issued new threats over the Internet against international forces in Afghanistan (Reuters 2008). Taliban leadership includes two main “shuras” (councils)—a leadership council in Quetta, Pakistan,

under Mullah Omar's and another shura based in Peshawar, Pakistan (Stanekzai 2008). Taliban reportedly receives support from Pakistani officials, including members of ISI, with logistics, medical, and training assistance (Jones 2008).

Haqqani Network

The Haqqani network is closely associated with Taliban and one of its strongest factions. Reportedly, the network is also closely linked to Al Qaeda. Jalaluddin Haqqani fought as a mujahedin leader against Soviet forces, receiving substantial assistance from the CIA by Pakistan's ISI (Solomon 2007). When Taliban came to power, they join the government as a Minister but retained a separate power base in his home Zadran district and tribe, east of Kabul. His son Sirajudin has reportedly ascended to a key leadership role, and has reportedly called for changes in the leadership of the Quetta shura. US officials in Afghanistan note that Sirajudin, like his father, has focused on his home Zadran district but has also expanded.

Hezb-i-Islami Gulbuddin (HiG)

Gulbuddin Hekmatyar was a key mujahedin leader against Soviet forces. His organization, then known as the Hezb-e-Islami, received substantial aid from the U.S. government, which reportedly considered him a key ally. He twice held the title of Prime Minister during the early 1990's civil war period, before seeking refuge in Iran when Taliban came to power. He has re-emerged in Afghanistan as the leader of the insurgent group, Hezb-i-Islami Gulbuddin (HiG), which is affiliated with both the Taliban and Al Qaeda. In 2008, Hekmatyar apparently opened the door to talks with GIRoA, in part through a spring 2008 letter addressed to President Karzai.

Foreign Groups

Foreign groups play critical roles by various supports to Afghan insurgents (Stanekzai 2008). Al Qaeda, which both enabled and leveraged Taliban during its years in power, reportedly mobilizes foreign fighters from the Arab world, Chechnya, Uzbekistan, and other locations, to join the fight in Afghanistan. Tehrik Taliban-i Pakistan (TTiP) is an umbrella organization for indigenous Pakistani Taliban commanders, based in Pakistan, in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) along the border with Afghanistan. TTiP is led by Baitullah Mahsud, who is from South Waziristan in the FATA, and who has reportedly built up strongholds in North and South Waziristan by recruiting and training young men, and "killing uncooperative tribal leaders" (Perlez 2008). -e-Tayba, a Pakistani insurgent group, trains

Afghan insurgents to fight in the border. Tehrik Nefaz-e Shariat Mohammadi (TNSM) is a Pakistani insurgent group, has also supported some Taliban operations in Afghanistan (Yusufzai 2007).

Challenges Facing NATO: Structural Challenges within NATO

NATO faces complex issues both in its own ranks and on the ground in Afghanistan that are likely to concern ISAF in the future. Although the allies agree on their mission to stabilize the country, even with their endorsement of the US strategy, some allies have differed on the means to reach that objective and on the amount of the resources. As a result, NATO commanders have had difficulty persuading allies to contribute forces to ISAF or provide NATO with appropriate equipment.

Weakness of Unity of Command

Unity of command is a non-negotiable principle within NATO operations. With unity of command, a clear command and control mechanism, the authority, roles and relationships involved in accomplishing an assigned task are clear and unrestricted. This enables the commanding officer to lead his forces with free maneuverability in order to counter any situation that might develop in the area of operations. The lack of a unity in command is often reflected in national restrictions imposed on the use of different national forces in operations. National restrictions, also called caveats, are written restrictions formulated by the particular country deploying forces and they are mainly intended to limit how that country's military contingent may be used.

ISAF National Caveats

From the outset, ISAF operations have been constrained by "national caveats"—restrictions that individual troop-contributing countries impose on their own forces' activities. National caveats frustrate commanders on the ground because they inhibit commanders' freedom to apportion forces across the battle space—to move and utilize forces freely. The nature and extent of national caveats varies greatly among ISAF participants. Senior US military officials point with concern, for example restrictions on German training and advisory teams that do not allow them to conduct combined offensive operations with their Afghan counterparts, and on capable German Special Operations Forces (SOF) that are "FOB-locked," that is, effectively confined to their Forward Operating Base. Not all contingents are constrained. US officials praise the 700-strong French infantry battalion that works closely with US SOF

and Afghan counterparts in Kapisa province, at the “north gate” into Kabul, which witnessed growing insurgent infiltration in 2008.

Difficulties in Raising Troops

The debate over the mission and public opinion throughout Europe affected the effort to raise forces for the ISAF mission. The highest priority for any ISAF commander is to have the forces necessary along with the greatest amount to provide a safe and secure environment in which the government of Afghanistan can extend its authority. Since the beginning of the ISAF mission, NATO officials have consistently experienced difficulty persuading member governments to supply adequate numbers of forces. US Defense Secretary Gates had been critical of the allies at times for not providing more troops, although he has softened his tone. In December 2007, he told the House Armed Services Committee that an additional 7,500 troops were needed, in addition to the 41,700 then in ISAF. At the time, he suggested that approximately 3,500 should be trainers for the Afghan army. He also called for at least 16 more helicopters (Gates 2007). According to NATO officials, the 2006 attack on the Norwegian-Finnish PRT awakened some governments to the continuing threat posed by instability fueled by the insurgency (Tetra 2010).

Canada was one of the first allies to recognize the need for combat forces. By a close vote in the Canadian parliament in May 2006, the government designated 2,300 troops for Afghanistan until February 2009, most of which have been sent to Kandahar province. Britain initially promised to send 3,600 troops to Helmand province by the beginning of Stage Three operations in July 2006, and has steadily increased its contribution to 8,300 troops. In early 2008, Germany agreed to send 200 troops to replace a Norwegian contingent in the north. In February 2008, US deployed the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) to southern Afghanistan.

Provincial Reconstruction Teams

Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) are civilian-military units of varying sizes designed to extend the authority of the central government into the countryside, provide security, and undertake projects (such as infrastructure development and the delivery of basic services) to boost the Afghan economy. NATO officials describe the PRTs as the “leading edge” of the allies’ effort to stabilize Afghanistan. There are 26 ISAF-led PRTs in operation. Virtually all the PRTs, including those run by the US, now operate under ISAF but with varying lead nations. Each PRT operated by the US is composed of 50-100 US military personnel; Defense Department civil affairs officers; representatives of USAID,

State Department, and other agencies; and Afghan government (Interior Ministry) personnel. Most PRTs, including those run by partner forces, have personnel to train Afghan security forces.

There is no real model for PRTs and many are dominated by military forces, rather than civilian technicians. By most accounts, those serving in PRTs make an effort to the surrounding territory, engage the local governments and citizens, and demonstrate that the international presence is bringing tangible results. Despite general support for PRTs, they have received mixed reviews and there have been criticisms of the overall PRT initiative. Some observers believe the PRTs operate without an overarching concept of operations -didn't provide a common range of services, a unified chain of command, and coordination with each other or exchange information on best practices (Jones and Pickering 2008) Another problem that has risen for PRTs in some areas is that civilian relief organizations didn't want to be too closely associated with the military forces assigned to the PRTs because they feel their own security is endangered as well as their perceived neutrality.

Allied Viewpoints

Allied views began to change, largely due to the surge in Taliban activity. The following sections represent a look at only a few allies and their early views and does not necessarily represent the views of the entire 28-member Alliance.

Germany viewed reconstruction as the priority. After coming to power in October 2005, Chancellor Angela Merkel's coalition government initially expressed a more decisive commitment to securing stability in Afghanistan than its predecessor. Chancellor Merkel and her Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier have consistently expressed their support for the ongoing German military engagement in Afghanistan. However, Berlin had consistently advocated a shift in its and NATO's Afghanistan strategy toward civilian reconstruction and development projects, army and police training activities, and enhanced political engagement with Afghanistan's neighbors.

Meanwhile, the governments of Britain and Canada have shared similar views with US on how ISAF should fulfill its mission. They have sent combat forces to Afghanistan, maintained PRTs in the most unstable parts of the country, and fought the Taliban resurgence aggressively. Thus, the French government believes that ISAF must be a combat force that buttresses the efforts of the Afghan government to build legitimacy and governance. Unlike German forces, for example, many French forces are trained both for combat and stabilization. As of October 2009 France has deployed 3,100 troops in ISAF; most are with a stabilization mission

in Kabul and army training missions elsewhere in the country (Le Monde 2007).

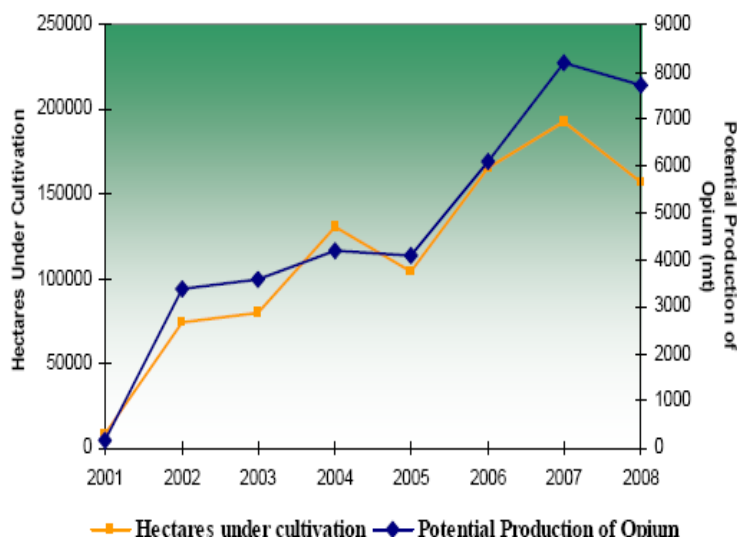
Challenges for NATO: Derived from Indigenous Situation

The NATO mission in Afghanistan is also compounded by a number of problems facing the Afghanistan government led by President Hamid Karzai, including corruption, the slow progress of reconstruction, widespread poppy cultivation and the continued power of local warlords and militias (Pak Tribune 2004).

Poppy Cultivation

Criminality, particularly poppy cultivation and the heroin trade, has developed in Afghanistan. The trade outcomes used to increase their military capability and gain independence from the central government and any international troops working with them. Taliban also used this trade to finance its attacks. As a result, Afghanistan has regained UN Office on Drugs and Crimes, the country's 3,000 metric tons of opium production in 2003 constituted two-thirds of the world's supply and generated revenues of \$2.3 billion for Afghan warlords, corrupt provincial authorities, and even the Taliban. There are strong indications that the regional armed leaders—the warlords—are extensively involved in the drug and smuggling trade (Human Rights Watch 2004).

Figure 2. Area under Poppy Cultivation (ha) & Potential Production of Opium (mt) 2001-2008



Source: Department of Defense United States of America 2009.

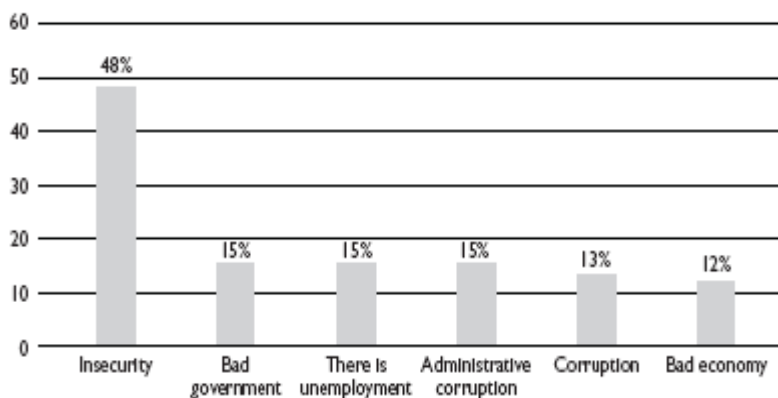
The Rule of the Warlords

These warlords in Afghanistan known as “jangsalar,” refer to any leader of men under arms. The country has thousands of such men, some deriving their power from a single roadblock, others controlling a town or small area, and others reigning over large districts. At the apex of this chaotic system are some six or seven major warlords, each with a significant geographic, ethnic, and political base of support. Human Rights Watch has documented criminality and abuses by commanders small and large, and by nearly all of the major warlords: General Atta and General Dostum in the north, Ismail Khan in the west, Gul Agha Shirzai in the south, Abdul Rasul Sayyaf in the center, and the most powerful, Marshall Fahim, the senior vice president and minister of defense (Human Rights Watch 2004).

Governmental Corruption

The Karzai government is increasingly unpopular throughout the country, despite its attempts to build support with various give away programs, such as free seed distribution. It's seen as corrupt and similar to the warlords who pillaged the country in the lawless years preceding the Taliban and impotent in the face of rising terrorist violence. Corruption and collusion between government and business are common. Business is conducted based on personal, familial, ethnic and historical relationships. Those with the right connections are able to sidestep many of the costs and risks. They are also more successful in getting access to land and capital. However, for small business and potential new investors or entrepreneurs without political influence, there are significant and sometimes insurmountable barriers to entry (Pike 2012).

Table. 2 The problems facing Afghanistan



Source: Dahl Thruelsen 2007.

Perceptions about NATO as an 'Occupation Force'

The main constraint faced NATO in Afghanistan are growing domestic and regional perceptions about an 'occupation force' with an expansionist regional agenda. The ISAF was mandated by the UN to secure and stabilize post-Taliban Afghanistan. Instead, its primary mission is to secure the Karzai government in Kabul, which is perceived to be unrepresentative of the majority Pashtun interests, especially in Taliban infested south and south-eastern parts of the country. Even otherwise, the Afghans in general have historically distrusted a strong central authority, what to speak of a foreign power trying to forcibly dictate its will upon them. Given that, it is but natural for the Afghan people living in southern and south-eastern regions and in the firing line of US/NATO operations to increasingly perceive NATO as an "occupation force." The significant rise in civilian deaths caused by ill-planned NATO air-strikes has alienated the very civilian population whose support is essential for the success of NATO mission (Pak Tribune 2004).

Challenges for NATO: Regional Context

Afghan officials, and international practitioners and observers, generally agree that Afghanistan's security is intimately linked with its neighbors, first of all Pakistan, and to relations among those neighbors.

Support to Taliban from Pakistan

NATO's failure to co-opt Pakistan for jointly managing the threat from Taliban and their militant-extremist sympathizers in Pakistan is another major challenge facing the NATO operation in Afghanistan. There is no doubt that Pakistan's tribal regions have served as an important base for Taliban re-grouping and infiltration across the unrecognized Durand Line into Afghanistan. Preventing Pakistan's tribal regions from becoming a safe haven for Taliban requires close collaboration between NATO command in Afghanistan and Pakistan's security apparatus. Pakistan has, indeed, been a part of the Tri-Partite Commission tasked with ensuring security in Afghanistan's border areas—with Afghanistan and US/NATO being its two other members—but the NATO leadership has preferred in much of the past four years of its ISAF command to side with the Afghan and US leadership in blaming Pakistan for not "doing enough" to prevent Taliban regrouping in its tribal regions and their infiltration into Afghanistan. The strong resistance that Pakistan military has received from pro-Taliban extremists in the tribal regions indicates that preventing the re-grouping of Taliban in these regions and their infiltration into Afghanistan is quite a huge task that Pakistan alone may

not be able to perform. As long as Pakistan's tribal regions are beset by extreme poverty and illiteracy, they will remain an ideal place for the generation of extremism and terrorism.

Iran

ISAF officials note that the role of Iran is also critical and they describe Iran's approach as a "dual-track strategy." On one hand, Iran enjoys close, long-standing cultural, linguistic, and religious ties with significant portions of Afghanistan's population. ISAF official's estimate that Iran is the second-largest contributor of reconstruction assistance to Afghanistan, after the US—its efforts are most evident in Herat Province in western Afghanistan. And since Iran is a major destination for Afghan heroin, Iranian officials share with their Afghan counterparts a vested interest in effective counternarcotic approaches. Some officials also point to the generally positive role Iran played at the 2001 Bonn Conference, to help forge consensus among Afghan factions about the creation of a post-Taliban government, as evidence that Iran can play a constructive role on Afghan matters.

At the same time, ISAF officials state that Iran has provided some weapons and training to Afghan insurgents. Some add that Tehran may be concerned about a growing US military footprint along both its eastern, western, and southern Afghanistan border. One official argued that Iran's interest is to "keep it simmering" in Afghanistan (Bowman and Dale 2008). Most practitioners and observers suggest that, in some capacity, a comprehensive solution for Afghanistan must take Iran into account (Bowman and Dale 2008).

Conclusion

Afghanistan's long history with an unaccountable central government to extend its reach over the country's difficult geographic and political terrain continues to present the allies with problems rivaling the specific threat of the Taliban. NATO and Afghan forces cannot eliminate the Taliban threat by military means as long as they have sanctuary in Pakistan, and the civil development efforts are not bringing sufficient results. With this reality, there have been increasing calls for the Karzai government and the US/NATO leadership to consider reaching out to moderate Taliban forces and sympathizers inside Afghanistan to explore the idea of a ceasefire and coalition government. Meetings between the Kabul government and some elements of the Taliban were held during the summer of 2008 but it would appear at this point that the Taliban is too disjointed of a movement to provide any realistic political settlement. The idea of approaching moderate elements of the Taliban

has also been adopted as part of President Obama's strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan. The declining of the Karzai government has presented a difficult obstacle. NATO is attempting both to respect the policies of a nascent representative government and to urge it forward to better governance. The Karzai government's own problems have been apparent: discontented warlords, endemic corruption, a vigorous drug trade, the Taliban, and a rudimentary economy and infrastructure.

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