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**NATO Parliamentary Assembly**

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**AFGHANISTAN: A TURNING POINT?**

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**GENERAL REPORT**

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International Secretariat

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

1. A unique confluence of events makes 2009 a seminal year for the international community's ongoing efforts in partnership with the Afghan people to achieve meaningful progress in Afghanistan.
2. Members of the Assembly are well aware that after the initial dislocation of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda, Afghanistan made hopeful and promising steps towards a more secure future. However, the subsequent collective failure to implement a clear and sustained strategy has led to a dangerous return of violent extremists to both Afghanistan and Pakistan. It has also resulted in the emergence of an ungoverned space in the frontier tribal lands in which attacks are planned on our citizens and their communities. Allowing chaos to re-emerge in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region would be a clear and constant danger to all of our nations.
3. The initial hope offered by a number of elements unique to the first part of this year has to some extent been disturbed by developments on the ground. Your Rapporteur's initial draft of this report, prepared in the first months of 2009, anticipated that our combined efforts in Afghanistan were being offered a second chance by several milestone events. The elections in Afghanistan for the office of the President scheduled for 20 August and the coinciding provincial elections, the initial comprehensive policy review by the United States, the attendant increases in military and civilian resources and the high-level attention devoted to the Afghan conflict by the US were all promising developments. In addition, the renewed impulses generated throughout the international community by the 2009 NATO Summit in Strasbourg and Kehl and the International Conference on Afghanistan in The Hague also represented key developments.
4. Unfortunately, undeniable trends including continued insecurity, exacerbated by the uncertain outcome of the elections, suggest that momentum has not yet swung decisively in favour of a brighter future for the Afghan people and success for the international community's efforts. This judgement has been borne out by a fundamental and extremely persuasive reassessment of the mission by ISAF Commander General Stanley McChrystal, described to your Rapporteur in Kabul in October 2009.
5. Your Rapporteur firmly believes that, although faced with an extraordinary challenge, the Afghan authorities, NATO and its international partners can complete this mission successfully. The international community has rightly adopted a strategy that is "*regional*," addressing the importance of Afghanistan's neighbours in its future; "*comprehensive*," combining security provision with increased emphasis on governance and development; and increasingly "*Afghanised*," demonstrating increasing leadership and stakeholding by Afghans themselves. These elements make up a strategy for success, if they are properly resourced. This Assembly as well as our national parliaments have a crucial role in ensuring that a positive outcome prevails, through our collective oversight and resource-allocation functions, as well as our interactions with our constituents.
6. The Afghan authorities, NATO and its international partners will continue to confront a complex web of challenges, including dangers posed by eroding security, increasing corruption, the corrosive narcotics economy, and the unresolved problem of Pakistani safe havens. The perceived lack of legitimacy that threatens to taint the results of the August 20 elections further complicates the picture.
7. Even in the face of these challenges, however, we dare not shirk our responsibilities to the Afghans or to our own populations. We are all aware of the suffering caused by the Taliban within Afghanistan's borders during its period of harsh rule. We equally cannot forget that our indifference allowed Afghanistan to become a safe haven for the generation of murderous attacks against many of our countries. We simply cannot allow the re-emergence of such a situation.

8. In this report, your Rapporteur will seek to lay out some of the principal elements of the challenges facing Afghanistan at this time, as a starting point for an informed debate amongst our members. It will, to a large extent, avoid recounting the contents of the Committee's previous reports on Afghanistan and NATO operations, focusing instead on current developments and areas where real change is occurring.

9. Already our membership is well aware that in Afghanistan, nearly 100,000 men and women from 42 NATO and non-NATO partner nations assigned to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and US Forces Afghanistan (USFOR-A) are assisting the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) in the establishment and maintenance of a safe and secure environment, facilitating reconstruction and development, and extending GIROA control.

10. While it is therefore natural for this inquiry to focus to some extent on NATO's role in Afghanistan, it is fundamental to recall that the formal responsibilities of the Alliance itself have always centred almost exclusively on one area: the provision of a safe and secure environment. NATO does not have the lead in providing for democratic development, agricultural reform, or literacy programmes and the like, but far too frequently NATO is criticized for shortcomings in these areas, which more appropriately fall under the responsibility of other organizations and agencies.

11. This report is informed by your Rapporteur's repeated travels to Afghanistan with the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, most recently from 29 September to 2 October 2009, for meetings with senior Afghan and international officials. On the most recent visit, the delegation discussed military strategy with General Stanley McChrystal, the Commander of ISAF, as well as reviewing the current political situation in the wake of the inconclusive elections with the Speaker of the Lower House of Parliament, the Ministers of Defence and Interior, and senior UN and diplomatic representatives. The delegation also visited the Afghan National Military Academy, observing training manoeuvres and interacting with cadets. Members also received very encouraging briefings from the ISAF Special Operations Fusion Cell, established on February 1 to collate and correlate intelligence gleaned throughout the country.

12. After three days of discussions in Kabul, the delegation travelled to Mazar-e Sharif, where members heard the ISAF Regional Commander's situational assessment had exchanges with regional UN staff, and visited a regional co-ordination centre for Afghan security forces as well as a Provincial Reconstruction Team led by Sweden.

13. Given the information gathered in the visit, as well as unfolding events and feedback from fellow Assembly members, this version of the report differs significantly from the draft presented in the spring of this year. The political fluidity surrounding Afghanistan at the time of writing also ensures that elements of this report are unfortunately likely to rapidly be surpassed by events.

## ***II. THE CURRENT SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN***

14. The litany of inter-related challenges facing Afghanistan today is complex and profound. This section will briefly recapitulate some of the most challenging areas evident at the time of writing.

### **A. CONTINUED INSECURITY**

15. By any reckoning, 2008 and 2009 have been marked by an increase in insurgent violence in Afghanistan, both in terms of geographic scope and frequency of attacks. Efforts to improve governance and extend development have been hampered by the resulting lack of security in

many areas as well as a general lack of government capacity and competency. ISAF Commander General Stanley McChrystal's leaked Initial Assessment bore this out, as have numerous public statements by, among others, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Afghanistan Kai Eide. Afghan Parliamentarians have also echoed these realities in statements to our Assembly, both in Kabul and at our Sessions.

16. More specifically, the security situation has deteriorated in all areas, with the level of violence reaching new heights throughout the country. The insurgency has, over time, demonstrated greater aggressiveness and more lethal tactics. Taliban and affiliated insurgent groups have expanded operations into previously peaceful areas of the north and west and around Kabul. The Taliban-dominated insurgency has expanded in scope, despite ISAF and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) military operations targeting insurgent command and control networks.

17. General John Craddock, formerly Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), attributed this increase in violence to three factors. First, ISAF and the Afghan National Army (ANA) have increased operational tempo and extended their reach into areas which were once safe havens for the insurgents. Second, the Federally Administered Tribal Areas in Pakistan remain a sanctuary for the arming, training, and planning of operations against ISAF in Afghanistan. Third, insurgents have taken to attacking reconstruction and development through attacks on convoys and aid facilities, as well as the intimidation, abduction, and killing of aid workers. This insurgent tactic is clearly intended to convince Afghans that their government cannot provide for their individual security, or the security of the international community's efforts to reconstruct Afghanistan.

18. The insurgency itself is not a homogenous movement. The political motivations rooted in the fundamentalist attitudes of the Taliban have been joined by a conglomerate of dissatisfied tribal groups as well as criminal and drug gangs. General David McKiernan, then Commander of ISAF, described the insurgency to a visiting Assembly delegation in October 2008 as a "syndicate" that brought together numerous groups with diverse and overlapping interests, including but not limited to the Taliban.

19. In battling this insurgency, ISAF itself continues even today to face serious shortfalls in critical assets as the Combined Joint Statement of Requirements (CJSOR) remained unfilled. While the end of 2008 saw some increase in national troop commitments and a reduction in national force caveats, the shortfalls remaining continued to hamper NATO operations in certain areas.

20. General McKiernan also told the Assembly delegation that national caveats forfeited NATO's inherent advantage over any adversary in Afghanistan through ISAF's intelligence, speed, firepower, logistics and other attributes, and therefore put NATO soldiers at higher risk. In addition, insurgents are fully aware of national caveats and plan their own activities accordingly in order to exploit the chinks they unwittingly create.

21. Several NATO and Afghan sources have told Assembly members repeatedly about the difficulties posed by the relatively rapid rotations of ISAF personnel. Tours of as little as four months often limit ISAF personnel's ability to learn lessons and maintain in-depth knowledge of Afghan society. In such a complex operating environment, it is essential to put a premium on experience and relationships with local populations and officials, which can only be developed over time.

22. The Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) must be the central element in combating the insurgency. According to information obtained by your Rapporteur in Afghanistan in September 2009, the Afghan National Army (ANA) is planned to expand from its current strength of 93,980 to 134,000; it grew by 26,000 in 2008 and should grow by 28,000 this year. The ANA is leading more than 61% of deliberate operations in 2009. The ANA participates in more than

90% of all ISAF operations. The Afghan National Army Air Corps (ANAAC) continues to grow in size and capability thanks to contributions of aircraft and training teams. In the past year the ANAAC has provided 90% of the airlift required by the ANSF.

23. On the other hand, the shortage of international trainers in the field, high operational tempo, attrition, and absenteeism hamper efforts to make ANA units capable of independent action. The Afghan National Police (ANP), for its part, remains a largely untrained force with high rates of corruption and absenteeism. The key ANP training program – Focussed District Development (FDD) – takes local police “off-site” for several weeks of training while local security is maintained by a temporary force from the Afghan Civil Order Police (ANCOP). This approach has produced at least temporary improvements in ANP performance where FDD has been applied, but the re-training effort is proving to take much longer than expected, with a drop-out rate of nearly a third.

24. Insecurity has also had an impact on NATO’s supply routes into Afghanistan and forced episodic closures, straining logistical pipelines. These concerns have only been heightened as the US has increased its troop numbers dramatically, requiring by some estimations a threefold increase in supplies. ISAF daily fuel consumption, for example, has increased in 2009 from 2m litres/day to 4.1m litres/day.

25. Approximately three-quarters of the food, fuel and other provisions that supply NATO forces pass through Pakistan. As a result of the mounting violence targeting Pakistan-based supply routes, NATO and US forces sought alternative transport routes, eventually leading to the establishment of the Northern Distribution Network through the Baltic States, Russia, and Central Asia. Increased insurgent activity in northern Afghanistan has put pressure on this supply route as well. The Taliban has also sought to deter co-operation by Central Asian states in the Network, including through direct threats directed at their governments. Russia has largely co-operated in establishing the NDN but insists its use exclude shipment of military hardware and ammunition.

26. Fundamentally, the continued support of the Afghan people for the government and the international community will be dependent on the ability of the Afghan government, NATO, and the United States to push back the Taliban and deliver security, basic governance, and economic development. And without security, nothing else – especially development and reconstruction -- is possible.

## **B. GOVERNANCE CHALLENGES**

27. High hopes in the immediate aftermath of the defeat of the Taliban regarding the delivery of services and good governance have unfortunately proven too optimistic. Indeed, recent years have seen negative trends in these areas, as demonstrated by the fact that Afghanistan was considered more at risk of state failure than it was in 2005 (rising on the “failed states” index from 11<sup>th</sup> in 2005 to 7<sup>th</sup> in 2008). Afghanistan was also rated as increasingly corrupt over the same period (dropping from 117<sup>th</sup> to 176<sup>th</sup> on *Transparency International’s* corruption index).

28. President Karzai told a visiting Assembly delegation in October 2008 that combating corruption was an exceptionally difficult challenge due to the poverty of most Afghans and the corrosive effect of the narcotics trade, coupled with the country’s weak governance structures and administrative capacity. This would be a years-long effort by any account. President Karzai further lamented the fact that the contracts structured by donors often resulted in funding channelling back to western contractors rather than Afghans.

29. The cabinet re-shuffle by President Hamid Karzai in the fall of 2008 was widely seen as an encouraging step. In particular, the new Ministers of the Interior and of Agriculture were seen as especially competent and wise choices given the challenges to the previous incumbents. The

future of these Ministers in the aftermath of the 2009 elections will be crucial and remained, at the time of writing, uncertain.

30. The absence of effective governing structures also presented an opening that the Taliban has exploited. According to Jelani Popal, Director of the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG) in Kabul, the international community's initial focus on supporting the central government allowed a void to emerge at the local level, which had been filled in some areas by the Taliban. For example, in the absence of a reliable justice system, Taliban courts had emerged in Helmand province and were actively and rapidly resolving property disputes. Contrary to official institutions, these courts made decisions quickly and were in a position to enforce them.

31. The IDLG was therefore created to supervise provincial and district governors, provincial councils and municipalities outside of Kabul. Among its most visible achievements as of late 2008 was the replacement of 13 provincial governors; it has also prompted progress of legislation that would mandate the delegation of authority and funding to provinces.

### **C. NARCOTICS: PROGRESS, IN PART THROUGH ISAF EFFORTS**

32. The scourge of opium continues to pose significant challenges to Afghan development, although the September 2009 UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) report offers some positive news on opium production in Afghanistan. Opium cultivation is down, at least when measured in physical terms (hectares and tonnes). Following the 19% reduction in opium cultivation in 2008, a further decrease in opium cultivation of 22% occurred in 2009, including a major drop in Helmand province. The volume of production was reduced by 10%. The number of poppy-free provinces has increased from 18 in 2008 to 20 in 2009. Four other provinces have 'marginal' cultivation and three others could become drug free in the next farming season. Effectively, opium production is now largely confined to a few southern provinces, although trafficking continues through "poppy-free" provinces along traditional smuggling routes.

33. The UN attributes much of this progress to a collapse of the Afghan opium market, in which over-supply at the source and lower market penetration in Europe are pushing opium prices down. It estimates that 800,000 fewer Afghans are involved in opium production compared to 2008.

34. Market forces have been reinforced by pressure put on the link between drugs and insurgency by Afghan and NATO forces, according to the UN, leading to a shifting risk/reward balance tilting against drugs. In October 2008, based on the request of the Afghan Government, NATO Defence Ministers agreed that ISAF could act in concert with Afghan police and army against narcotics facilities and facilitators who support the insurgency. As a result, in the first half of 2009, military operations destroyed over 90 tons of precursor chemicals, 450t of seeds, 50t of opium, 7t of morphine, 1.5t of heroin, 19t of cannabis resin and 27 labs. This has increased the risks of drug trafficking and created a deterrent for the future.

35. However, despite the reductions in cultivation in 2008 and 2009, the Afghan drug trade remains a major source of revenue for corrupt officials, the Taliban and other insurgent groups operating in the country. It is one of the greatest long-term challenges facing Afghanistan. Afghanistan still accounts for 90% of the world's opium supply and the UN estimates that the total export value of the country's 2008 opium crop was nearly US\$ 3.5 billion. The reduction in size of the 2009 crop is viewed as a window of opportunity through which the opium industry in Afghanistan may be dealt a significant blow.

36. In order to consolidate these gains, the Executive Director of the UNODC has called for:

- Vigilance against the emergence of Afghan narco-cartels, increasingly motivated by drug money rather than ideology;
- Avoiding a relapse by focusing international assistance programs on rural development, and particularly avoiding individual foreign-sponsored projects around each Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) rather than coherent assistance programs across Afghanistan;
- Focusing on *interdiction* rather than *eradication*, and continuing to target drug kingpins;
- Targeting massive missing stocks of opium produced in recent years;
- Emphasizing a regional approach including both Pakistan (through which 25% of Afghan narcotics is smuggled) and Iran (through which perhaps 50% of Afghan opium is exported), as well as Central Asia.

#### **D. DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES AND CO-ORDINATION**

37. Without a doubt, progress has been made in a number of crucial development areas. One example is the Afghan health sector, in which the number of functioning primary health care facilities increased from 498 in 2002 to 1,443 in 2008; 85% of Afghans now have access to basic health services. The per capita GDP has also steadily risen since 2002. Since 2001, more than 3,500 schools have been built.

38. NATO Senior Civilian Representative Ambassador Fernando Gentilini told Assembly members in October 2008 that a number of promising reconstruction-related events had occurred in that year. First, the mandate of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) was strengthened and Ambassador Kai Eide, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Afghanistan, arrived in Kabul. Second, significant funding (US\$ 21 billion pledged by more than 80 donors) was generated at the June 2008 donors' conference in Paris, in support of the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS), which itself provided an overall framework for the international community's coordinated efforts under the three pillars of security, development, and governance.

39. Several interlocutors in Afghanistan underlined to your Rapporteur in September 2009 that the ANDS remains the most effective comprehensive development plan and represents a plan not only endorsed by the Afghans but in large part authored by them. Thus, they argued, national agendas by donor countries should be aligned with the ANDS rather than on purely bilateral assistance programs.

40. NATO nations also operate a system of 26 PRTs, led by 14 different nations. A total of 30 countries contribute to the PRTs, which have provided more than US\$ 545 million in projects throughout the country.

41. Despite these advances, perceived inefficiencies in the delivery of international assistance have undermined the confidence of the Afghan population in its Government and in the international community. UN personnel and NGOs continue to struggle to provide assistance in areas "cleared" of insurgents after counter-insurgency operations, as these areas often cannot be "held" by Afghan or international forces and are devoid of enough personnel and equipment to "backfill".

42. Kai Eide is cited in a recent UN report as concerned that, despite his efforts to increase UNAMA's co-ordination capacity, any impact remained limited by the lack of a comprehensive picture of the aid being provided to Afghanistan as well as by the continued unwillingness of some donors to fully back existing co-ordination mechanisms. UNAMA itself continues to be hampered



by personnel and funding shortages, inexperience of some of its staff members, internal uncertainties over the appropriate degree of co-operation with ISAF forces, and its inability to create and man field offices in critical provinces.

43. Ambassador Eide has also stated his concern about the concentration of aid in conflict areas, to the detriment of more stable regions (particularly the north of Afghanistan) where the returns on aid could be much higher. While progress in implementing the Afghanistan National Development Strategy was accelerating, further gains would take time and sustained effort, as well as increased Afghan government capacity.

44. Senior Afghan officials, including President Karzai, have regularly called for increased channelling of aid through Afghan institutions. He argues that funding needs to go through local actors rather than contractors who create new bureaucracies and are relatively expensive.

45. Jelani Popal, the Director of IDLG, has made it a priority to co-operate with PRTs to implement government priorities through Provincial Development Plans, which were based on projects suggested by locals. Popal sought the PRTs' assistance in developing Afghan capacity at the provincial level for planning and budgeting, in an effort to strengthen the skill set and independence of local officials. He also called for the civilian elements of PRTs to be strengthened and to remain in the country for longer than 6 month tours in order to ensure continuity. Finally, he suggested PRTs focus more on long-term projects rather than exclusively on quick-impact ones. Popal affirmed that one kilometre of road financed through Afghan channels would cost US\$ 500,000, while the same kilometre, built using direct bilateral assistance, would cost no less than US\$ 1,000,000.

46. UNAMA regional officials have repeatedly told Assembly members that donor funds should increasingly be channelled through Afghan authorities rather than bilaterally, and called in particular for greater use of the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund by donors in order to increase Afghan ownership of development projects. UNAMA regional officials also called for prioritized funding of long-term projects over quick-impact proposals, and for increased investment in the extraction of the region's mineral resources, which could be exploited for Afghanistan's long-term gain. Very little aid was reaching Afghans at the district level, and their lives had not improved appreciably since the fall of the Taliban.

## **E. PUBLIC SUPPORT IN AFGHANISTAN AND AT HOME**

47. The continued support of the public – both in Afghanistan itself as well as in the nations providing troops, funding and other assistance – is absolutely critical to achieving success. Unmet expectations on all sides are beginning to erode confidence that the mission is achievable.

48. The principal complaints and accusations against international forces by Afghans centre on tactics such as forced entry of houses and the arrest of Afghans by international forces. Of course, the tragic problem of civilian casualties, which by some estimates rose 40% last year, is also a core grievance. According to NATO, these are still caused principally by the insurgency, which systematically targets civilians as part of its strategy. Indeed, NATO officials point out that insurgents accounted for 80% of civilian casualties in 2008. NATO further points out that insurgent attacks using improvised explosive devices (IED) continue to be the largest single cause of civilian casualties. The importance of this issue has been repeatedly emphasized by ISAF commanders in successive "tactical directives". However, translating that policy into actions at the soldier level has proven difficult.

49. Even so, some positive indicators exist, including the fact that Afghan institutions maintain some public support and that the Afghan public continues to reject the Taliban. Most polls show Afghans rating the performance of the Afghan Army positively (particularly high relative to the

perceived performance of the United States and NATO/ISAF). One possible conclusion of such surveys is that, given these results, it could prove more popular to put the relatively more trusted and popular Afghan institutions – rather than a Western face – on anti-insurgent efforts.

50. Uncertain public opinion on the war in Afghanistan in troop contributing nations is only exacerbated by instances such as the proposed Afghan family law that the United Nations has compared to legalizing rape within marriage. The so-called Shia Personal Status Law, covering the Shia minority (roughly 10-20 % of the population), was first reported in late March 2009.

51. According to Human Rights Watch, after its submission to a consultation process with civil society groups, the final version was published in the official Gazette on July 27, 2009. That version of the law still contained many regressive articles that deny women rights guaranteed to them by the Afghan constitution, for example allowing a husband to withdraw basic maintenance from his wife, including food, if she refuses his sexual demands.

52. Speaker of the Lower House (Wolesi Jirga) H.E. Younus Qanooni expressed disappointment that the Parliament, which he said had demonstrated more achievements than any other Afghan institution, had come under criticism regarding this law. He assured Assembly members in October 2009 that Parliament had “improved” the law significantly, fundamentally altering the original version of the law. After the August 20 elections, President Karzai had proposed new amendments to the law, according to Qanooni, and the Parliament was reviewing it carefully with an eye to further improving its provisions.

53. The ongoing Personal Status Law controversy continued to demonstrate the challenges of the interactions between domestic and international politics in Afghanistan. It also posed a fundamental challenge to members of the international community regarding the balance between respecting sovereign political processes and defending their shared values.

## **F. SAFE HAVENS IN PAKISTAN: A CENTRAL ELEMENT OF THE CONFLICT**

54. The security of Afghanistan is inextricably linked to that of Pakistan. General McChrystal’s leaked assessment could not be clearer: “Afghanistan’s insurgency is clearly supported from Pakistan.” This message was emphasised to your Rapporteur in September 2009 by numerous members of the Afghan parliament.

55. It is critical to engage Pakistan fully if there is any hope of denying safe havens to the Afghan insurgency. A promising development in this regard is the improved communication and co-operation between Afghanistan and Pakistan over the past year. Increased contacts at all levels have resulted in multiple channels of dialogue across the border, although particularly in the community of ethnic Tajik and Uzbek former Mujahidin, there remains deep suspicion of Pakistan’s strategic motives toward Afghanistan – suspicion that is mirrored by some on the Pakistani side.

56. In support of a regional approach and to facilitate a mutually reinforcing co-operation between Afghanistan and Pakistan, Turkey initiated the Trilateral Summit process with the participation of the Presidents of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in 2007. The three Summits held since then focused on the issues of dialogue, development and security, respectively. The last trilateral Summit, held in Ankara last April, focused on regional security. Together with Presidents, the top military and intelligence officials of the three countries attended the Summit in order to institutionalize the process among military and intelligence chiefs to focus on security issues.

57. Recent proactive engagement by the Pakistani government and Army (with support from the US) to address the presence of Pakistani Taliban in the North-West Frontier Province and

Federally Administered Tribal Areas has also been encouraging. These efforts have begun to provide the Pakistani government space to reassert control in the areas.

58. India's increasing role in Afghanistan through reconstruction projects and diplomatic efforts is also of concern to Pakistan. Some Pakistani analysts suggest that India's influence could lead to a strategic encirclement of Pakistan, and seek the assistance of the US in reducing any perceived gains by India.

59. Without seeking to imply that Pakistan is anything other than a central element of this overall picture, your Rapporteur will not dwell further on Pakistan's own challenges; this issue is treated in some detail in the 2009 report by Political Committee member Congressman Mike Ross of the United States.

60. Of course, other external actors also have major levers to affect the future of Afghanistan. Iran is undeniably one such actor, and in General McChrystal's report, it is named as playing an ambiguous role in Afghanistan. On the one hand, it has supported the Afghan government by, among other steps, pledging US\$ 560 million at the Tokyo Conference on the Reconstruction of Afghanistan in 2002, and an additional US\$ 100 million at the 2006 London Conference. At the International Conference on Afghanistan in The Hague in March 2009, the Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister suggested that while Iran objected to foreign forces being present in Afghanistan, his country was "fully prepared to participate in the projects aimed at combating drug trafficking and the plans in line with developing and reconstructing Afghanistan".

61. On the other hand, ISAF Commander General Stanley McChrystal's Initial Assessment points to reports of a more malign influence:

*"... the Iranian Qods Force is reportedly training fighters for certain Taliban groups and providing other forms of military assistance to insurgents. Iran's current policies and actions do not pose a short-term threat to the mission, but Iran has the capability to threaten the mission in the future. Pakistan may see Iranian economic and political initiatives as threats to their strategic interests, and may continue to address these issues in ways that are counterproductive to the ISAF effort." (McChrystal Report, page 2-11)*

### **III. ELEMENTS OF A TURNING POINT?**

62. Your Rapporteur believes that 2009 remains a pivotal year in the effort to make progress in Afghanistan. Several critical developments have already taken place: the announcement of a new approach by the United States, outlined in March of this year; the outcomes of the NATO Summit in April 2009 and the International Conference on Afghanistan in The Hague on 31 March; the Afghan elections held on 20 August; and the increased focus on the necessity for a reconciliation and reintegration process. In addition, the outcome of decisions being made at the time of writing in the United States and elsewhere, as well as the ultimate results of the electoral process and nature of the resulting government, will also have fundamental ramifications for Afghanistan's future.

#### **A. A NEW APPROACH BY THE UNITED STATES**

63. In March 2009, President Obama outlined a new approach by the United States towards the challenges facing Afghanistan. Emphasizing prior consultation with Allies, the Administration announced several new steps in what it called an "Afghanistan-Pakistan strategy" culminating from a 60-day inter-agency review. White House documents underlined that "the strategy starts with a clear, concise, attainable goal: **disrupt, dismantle, and defeat Al-Qaeda and its safe havens.**"

64. The strategy focused more intensively on Pakistan than in the past, calling for a regional approach. The Obama Administration sought, and received, from Congress an additional package of assistance to Pakistan that is planned to disburse US\$ 1.5 billion a year over five years (for a total of US\$ 7.5 billion).

65. As outlined by Secretary of State Clinton at the International Conference on Afghanistan in The Hague on 31 March 2009, the new US strategy rested on three prongs: that the challenge is comprised of both Afghanistan and Pakistan; that military and civilian activities are equally necessary and must be supported by diplomatic efforts; and that Afghanistan's own people and institutions bear ultimate responsibility for Afghanistan's future.

66. The new strategy recognized that "Security is the essential first step; without it, all else fails". In order to assist the Afghan National Security Forces' efforts in this regard, the Obama Administration announced an additional 17,000 soldiers and 4,000 additional military trainers to build up the Afghan security forces, bringing the total number of US forces to more than 68,000.

67. However, even this number of additional troops in combination with the NATO forces in theatre cannot hold territory across Afghanistan in a sustained manner. Thus the new US plan calls for the training and equipping of much larger ANSF. It aimed for a target size of 134,000 for the ANA and 82,000 for the ANP by 2011, to accelerate Afghan ownership of security provision throughout the country.

68. On issues other than physical security, the new US strategy foresaw a doubling of American civilian officials in Afghanistan, to over 900. US Deputy Ambassador to Afghanistan Frank Ricciardone told a visiting Assembly delegation in October 2009 that the rapid increase of civilians including five Ambassador-rank officials in the US Embassy was evidence of this approach, while admitting that numerous challenges have slowed progress in this area. The new strategy emphasizes support to the Afghan National Development Strategy and identifies agriculture as a key for development. Underlining the problems of corruption, it sees Afghan institutions such as the Independent Directorate of Local Governance as key to ensuring that the government is responsible, transparent, and effective at all levels.

69. The Presidents of Pakistan and Afghanistan both welcomed the new US strategy. Afghan President Hamid Karzai praised the regional emphasis as well as the potential reconciliation efforts, while Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari commended the renewed focus on economic development and assistance to Pakistan.

## **B. NATO RENEWS ITS COMMITMENT**

70. NATO's Heads of State and Government at the Alliance's 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Summit meeting in Strasbourg-Kehl declared that security in the Euro-Atlantic area is closely tied to Afghanistan's security and stability, and underlined that the 42-nation UN-mandated ISAF mission in Afghanistan is NATO's key priority.

71. According to the NATO Secretary General, more than 10 countries announced new contributions. NATO leaders also pledged to build closer political and practical ties with Pakistan. Several thousand additional troops were pledged to bolster security for the August 20 elections, and an additional 2,000 personnel were pledged to train Afghan Security Forces.

72. NATO nations also pledged to expand the NATO-ANA Trust Fund for the army to cover running costs and to encourage international contributions to the fund. The NATO-ANA Trust Fund provides a mechanism for ISAF nations to support the transportation and installation costs for equipment donations by ISAF nations to the ANA; the purchase of ANA equipment and services for engineering infrastructure projects; and in-and out-of-country training

73. The sustainment part of the ANA Trust Fund is estimated to require annual financial support of US\$ 1.8 billion (on the basis of a 134,000-strong ANA ceiling). The Fund will help pay for salaries and other costs, complementing separate support from the United States, which concentrates on initial build-up of the force (ammunition, uniforms, training, as well as the construction and maintenance of security infrastructures).

74. European Allies and partners pledged in 2009 some US\$ 350 million to the trust fund, and the United States is spending US\$ 5 billion this year and over US\$ 7 billion next year to train, equip, and sustain the army and police. The US-led efforts totalled 7 billion in 2009.

75. A French initiative, calling for a 300-member European Gendarmerie Force to train and mentor Afghan National Police, was also approved. The force would conduct its training for periods of up to 11 months in areas "cleared" of insurgents and "held" by Afghan forces – increasing efficiency of programmes in which police forces were sent to Kabul for training. It was also announced that 70 additional military training teams would be sent by European governments to assist with the growth of the ANA to its authorized level of 134,000.

76. In addition, the assembled Heads of State and government decided to establish a NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan (NTM-A) to oversee training for the Afghan army and police and pledged to provide more trainers.

77. NTM-A will comprise senior-level mentoring of the ANA and an expanded role in developing professional ANP. The mission will operate under a dual-hatted command, with a single commander for both the US-led Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A) and the NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan. The mission will provide higher-level training for the ANA, including defence colleges and academies, and will be responsible for doctrine development, as well as training and mentoring for the ANP. This will reflect the Afghan Government's policing priorities and will complement existing training and capacity development programmes, including the European Union Police Mission and the work of the International Police Co-ordination Board (IPCB). In a briefing to Assembly members in Kabul in October 2009 by CSTC-A Commander, MGEN Formica and his key staff, he emphasized the critical need for additional trainers, equipment donations and funding to maintain the momentum of the ANSF training effort.

78. In practical terms, the new mission means bringing most current army and police training programmes under a single umbrella, drawing on and better utilising resources that are already in theatre. NTM-A is intended to help reduce duplication of effort, whilst creating more integrated, coherent and robust ANA and ANP training structures and capabilities.

79. The establishment of the NTM-A is part of a significant restructuring and clarification of responsibilities that has been taking place over the past year but which has accelerated since General McChrystal assumed command. The restructuring essentially comprises the alignment of US commands with ISAF, the establishment of an Intermediate Joint Command (IJC) on 12 October, which is focused on operations, and the establishment of the NTM-A. This restructuring in itself is a reflection of a continued and renewed commitment from ISAF contributors but it has also enabled a more coherent and dynamic ISAF command.

80. The new NATO commitments can be seen in conjunction with the results of the International Conference on Afghanistan in The Hague on 31 March 2009. Over 70 countries met to discuss the overall picture in Afghanistan and the region, and generally endorsed the Obama Administration's shift in emphasis.

### C. ELECTIONS IN AUGUST 2009: CAN MOMENTUM BE RE-ESTABLISHED?

81. The Presidential and provincial council elections held in August 2009 were intended to be a key step in the democratic construction of the Afghan state, as laid out at the Bonn Conference in 2001. A state's capacity to conduct free and fair elections in a relatively safe and secure environment is a test of its functioning as a government. Successful elections in Afghanistan were said to have the potential to re-energize the political process both domestically and internationally. The international community therefore sought to ensure that the elections were conducted in a safe and legitimate manner.

82. The run-up to the elections themselves was in many respects promising. The voter registration process was completed successfully, and perhaps surprisingly, faced no concerted efforts by the insurgency to disrupt it. Approximately 4.5 million new voters were registered (of which almost 1.7 million were women), in addition to the more than 10 million registered in 2004, which far exceeded expectations. Several on-the-ground observers told your Rapporteur that the process leading to the elections engaged the population in open and serious debate between alternatives and demonstrated an appetite amongst the Afghan people for further continued democratic development.

83. According to Afghan authorities, only 10 districts out of 398 across Afghanistan could not participate in the registration process for security reasons. This success has received little attention in western media, for whom the lack of significant violent attacks against the registration process meant that the process itself was a 'non-event'.

84. In addition, the international community made significant pledges towards supporting the elections, allowing President Obama to announce at NATO's Strasbourg Summit that the election support requirements laid out by NATO authorities had been "fully resourced".

85. The extraordinary security challenge requiring the security of more than 7,000 polling stations was met principally by Afghan forces, with the national police providing the first line of security, the Army providing the second, and ISAF providing the third. The fact that the security effort was Afghan-led was itself a significant indicator of the growing maturity of the ANSF and the improved ability of the ANA and ANP to work together.

86. On the day itself, 41 presidential candidates, including two women, and over 3,000 candidates for provincial council seats presented themselves. According to the UN, more polling stations opened than during previous elections. Voter turnout was much lower than the 2004 election, with an estimated 38% of the eligible population casting ballots, compared to 70% in 2004. One explanation for the low voter turnout could be a result of the spike in violent attacks leading up to the election: the Taliban issued threats warning voters to stay away from the polls; a car bomb exploded before the election outside ISAF headquarters; August marked the deadliest month since the inception of the war; and on election day, ISAF reported more than 400 insurgent attacks – a one-day record.

87. ISAF Commander Stanley McChrystal's Initial Assessment included the following evaluation of the election:

*"From a security standpoint, they (the elections) were generally executed smoothly and without major physical disruption, although the credibility of the election results remains an open question. The country-wide spike in violence against ISAF and ANSF, with three to four times the average number of attacks, underscores the widespread reach of insurgent influence, particularly in the south and the east and in select areas of the north and west. However, the relatively low number of effective attacks against polling centers offers some evidence that insurgents were targeting ISAF and ANSF, not the voters."*

*(McChrystal, Stanley, 30 August 2009. "Commander's Initial Assessment.")*

88. On September 16, the Afghan Independent Election Commission (IEC), a group of Afghan officials appointed by President Karzai, published the final uncertified voting tallies: of the two leading candidates, incumbent President Hamid Karzai received 54.6% of the vote and principal challenger Abdullah Abdullah received 27.8%. At the time of writing, these totals remained in question pending the results of investigation by the UN-backed Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC).

89. Local observers told visiting members of the Assembly that the population was hoping simply to have the process finalized. Indeed, it seemed clear that uncertainty regarding the electoral results has the potential to further erode the legitimacy of the central government in the eyes of the Afghan population and could represent an opportunity for the insurgency to grow. The extended process of determining a winner had tried the patience of the population.

90. Unfortunately, the international community's response was, in some respects, fragmented; a possible lack of consensus on issues surrounding the election outcome emerged through public reports of high-level disagreements within the UNAMA mission leading to the departure of the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General (DSRSG) for Afghanistan.

#### **D. ISAF COMMANDER MCCHRYSTAL'S INITIAL ASSESSMENT**

91. At the time of writing, public debate on the future of the international military approach in Afghanistan was focused on the Initial Assessment of the operation by ISAF Commander General Stanley McChrystal, which became public in September 2009, and the anticipated resource requirements entailed by his proposed approach. Indeed, the plan's stark assessment and proposed way forward were widely endorsed by officials (Afghan and international) who met with an Assembly delegation in Kabul shortly after its dissemination.

92. McChrystal's strategy, as he described it to Assembly members, is based on gaining the support of the Afghan people and providing them with a secure environment, as compared to seizing terrain or destroying insurgent forces. The main lines of his strategy are improving the effectiveness and size of the Afghan National Security Forces through closer partnering with international forces; elevating the importance of governance; prioritizing major population centres where vulnerable populations are most threatened; and gaining the initiative to reverse the insurgency's momentum.

93. The resource implications of McChrystal's strategy were being widely debated at the time of writing, but the overall approach was already in evidence in a number of areas. For instance, the Assembly delegation learned that the development of the Afghan National Army had already been further accelerated under General McChrystal's leadership; current plans at the time of writing called for an ANA of 134,000 by October 2010, rather than the previous target date of 2011. The American command responsible for training activities expected ANA growth of 28,000 soldiers in 2009 (by comparison, it grew by only 9,700 in 2006-2007).

94. There is no doubt that the rapid consolidation of the Afghan National Security Forces is a central element of any strategy for success in Afghanistan. Training teams are the key to standing up these forces. As of late September, of the 169 training teams estimated to be necessary to achieve the 134,000 end strength of the ANA, 137 training teams have been made available or offered (66 US Embedded Training Teams and 71 NATO Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams/OMLTs). This leaves a shortfall of 32 training teams.

95. It is anticipated that a decision will be made this year to increase the number of Afghan National Police to around 140,000 as well. In addition to the increased number of new police

forces, lowering the ANP's attrition rate of 20-25 % will be crucial and will require better training, more equipment and improved incentives.

96. ISAF Commander McChrystal has pressed to eventually increase the Afghan army to 240,000 and the police to 160,000 for a total security force of 400,000, more than doubling currently projected force levels. The ability to recruit personnel for such a force, and its economic sustainability are outstanding issues.

#### **IV. THE WAY FORWARD**

97. Your Rapporteur had the opportunity to visit Afghanistan for discussions with leading Afghan and international officials in early October of this year. In the run-up to the mission, there was a veritable sense of unease regarding the challenges facing the Afghan population and those who seek to assist them. However, several areas of progress, and clear expositions on the way forward, have convinced your Rapporteur that it remains possible to move beyond the political challenges so evident at the time of writing. Even so, several major elements will have to be resolved in order to ensure that our efforts over the past eight years have not been in vain.

98. First, the political process engaged by the elections must be brought to a clear and credible conclusion; the judges of the validity of the process must ultimately be the Afghan people. The resulting Afghan leadership must then make it a priority to renew the bonds that link it with the Afghan people, bonds that have been frayed through the disputed electoral process but also the perception of slow progress and uneven delivery of services to the Afghan population.

99. In addition, the Afghan leadership will have to make a credible case to the international community that it remains a reliable partner for the furtherance of the common vision for Afghanistan spelled out in agreements made since 2001.

100. The evidence of this would first and foremost emerge in the nature of the new cabinet appointed by the Afghan leadership; clearly, the re-appointment of key Ministers who have earned a reputation for delivering results is critical. Of course, the appointment of counterproductive individuals to key posts would also send a signal to international institutions and the publics of donor and troop contributing nations.

101. The Afghan leadership should also propose a positive agenda, to include better governance, significant efforts against corruption – to include high-profile prosecutions – and strengthened rule of law. There should also be an increased emphasis, as pledged in the presidential campaign, on the reconciliation and reintegration process. One element of this approach must be the development of clear and tangible incentives for low-level fighters to rejoin their communities.

102. The international community, for its part, should demonstrate its continued commitment to the future of Afghanistan by agreeing to hold a Ministerial-level conference in Kabul in early 2010 to signal its determination and steadfast dedication, as well as to witness the establishment of a new compact between the Afghan leadership and the Afghan people.

103. In the context of this process, the international community will certainly have to back up its renewed commitments with renewed dedication to providing the resources commensurate to the task.

104. On the security side, the international community's efforts must focus especially on the development of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). The growing size of the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police will require more effort from all contributing nations to provide training teams and equipment.



105. Full support of the NATO Training Mission in Afghanistan will be a key element to the eventual ability of the ANSF to stand between the Afghan population and violent extremists. This includes the Trust Fund for the ANA launched by NATO, which seeks a total of US\$ 8.6 billion for the first five years of a long term sustainment programme.

106. The international community must also strengthen its efforts to provide development results for the Afghan people. It will be particularly important to do this in a manner that does not simply focus on quick-impact projects at the expense of longer term, more comprehensive strategies. All efforts should also be made to ensure that provision of assistance flows to the greatest extent possible through Afghan authorities rather than bilaterally; the Afghan government must be seen by its people to be delivering. Of course, rigorous measures should be taken to ensure the proper level of oversight for funding streams.

107. The influx of American resources – personnel, funding, training teams and others – has made some observers concerned about an excessive ‘Americanization’ of the effort. It is particularly in the area of the consolidation of the ANSF that other nations could and should make greater efforts to ensure that the mission does not become unbalanced.

108. Your Rapporteur views the overall trajectory of Afghanistan with cautious optimism. Reports by this committee over the last several years have called for additional resources and co-ordination in Afghanistan, and it appears that the international community as a whole may be ready to move in that direction, albeit at painfully slow pace.

109. The Assembly and our national parliaments will have a crucial role to play in ensuring that our combined efforts come to fruition. We **must** ensure that the resources pledged are actually delivered. Indeed, one of the principal obstacles to ISAF’s success since its launch has been the substantial gap between the political will expressed by member states and the resources that have been subsequently committed. Assembly members can and must play a crucial role in ensuring that the pledges made, with our support, are fulfilled completely and in a timely manner.

110. ISAF will likely face significant challenges in the next two years as the Netherlands is planning to withdraw its 1,700 combat troops next year and Canada has announced its intent to withdraw its 2,800 troops in 2011. The possibility that more nations will begin to announce their own exit strategies in an unco-ordinated and potentially dangerous fashion must be avoided. All NATO nations agreed at the recent Summit that the collective commitment to Afghanistan is by its very nature a long-term endeavour; we cannot sacrifice the gains we have fought so long and hard to achieve.

111. This is a fight that ultimately the Afghans must win. We cannot do it for them. However, in the short and medium term, the Afghan people will continue to require the assistance of NATO, its member states, and all contributing nations.

112. We must not forget the dangers of allowing this mission to go unfulfilled. Islamic militant extremists would be inspired and energized by the apparent victory of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda over the civilized world. The destabilization of the region, including a nuclear-armed Pakistan, cannot be excluded. And of course, the Afghan population would itself be subjected to a return to the darkest days of Taliban rule.

113. We are engaged in this effort because it is the right thing to do for the Afghan people as well as for our own populations. As your Rapporteur recently heard the Deputy Commander of ISAF state in Mazar-e Sharif:

*“...I must admit I am confused by the doubts about our mission, our commitment and our chances of success that are circulating in Western capitals. There can be no doubt about it: the challenges posed by three decades of conflict in this country – and the insurgents would now extend that violence indefinitely – are extraordinarily difficult to solve. But it is our duty to dare to do what is difficult. No nation has cornered the market on military excellence ... courage recognizes no national borders... determination to persevere and succeed is a mark of excellence among people of all races and creeds. The 42 nations of ISAF... together with our Afghan partners... are not a hopeless jumble of languages, cultures and military traditions, but a united alliance who have sent their best men and women to Afghanistan. Here, we take our stand against those who would turn this country back into a nest of ignorance, hatred and fear.”*

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