HOW SOLID IS NEW 'AFGHANISTAN COMPACT'?  

By Amin Tarzi

The international community and Afghan delegates emerged from the two-day London Conference with a clutch of documents. They include a five-year "Afghanistan Compact" that assures continued global support for Afghanistan until 2010. All sides celebrated agreement on such issues, but questions remain over the feasibility and measurability of tasks stemming from the "Afghanistan Compact." In the first in a series of articles, the analysis below looks at commitments regarding Afghanistan's security that arose at the 31 January-1 February London Conference on Afghanistan.

The preamble of the "Afghanistan Compact" notes the "full implementation of the Bonn agreement," listing the adoption of a new constitution and the holding of presidential, National Assembly, and provincial council elections. Those are steps that, according to the document, "have enabled Afghanistan to regain its rightful place in the international community."

The "Afghanistan Compact" acknowledges that the country's "transition to peace and security is not yet assured" and requires "strong international engagement."

Afghan President Hamid Karzai said in London that his country was committed to a compact based on four pillars: security; governance, rule of law, and human rights; economic and social development; and counternarcotics.

According to the compact, the U.S.-led Operation Enduring Freedom and the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) should promote security and stability "in all regions of Afghanistan" through the end of 2010, while the Afghan National Army reaches its target ceiling of 70,000 personnel.

The Afghan government is tasked by the compact with disbanding all illegal armed groups throughout the country by the end of 2007.

The compact, without specifically naming any of Afghanistan's neighboring countries, calls for "full respect of Afghanistan's sovereignty and strengthening dialogue and cooperation between Afghanistan and its neighbors."

On paper, the prospects for Afghanistan beginning to gradually assume more responsibility for its own security within a five-year period look promising. However, there are major questions to which the $10.5 billion pledged during the London meeting for the five-year plan may not be the only answer.

Military And Police Forces
The Afghan National Army (ANA) offers perhaps the brightest ray of hope from among all of the domestic security organizations being reformed and reorganized in Afghanistan. The ANA has around 24,000 personnel who are well trained and have actively and ably -- albeit in limited engagements -- participated in counterterrorism operations alongside international-coalition troops. The target date for the ANA to achieve its full strength of five corps with a total of 70,000 troops is 2009. This is an achievable task in view if the current rate of progress in ANA's enlargement and training.

The ANA arguably needs to become more active in both counterterrorism and counternarcotics operations in the country, however, giving Afghanistan more ownership of its security management chores.

Unfortunately, the relative success of the ANA is not duplicated by the Afghan National Police (ANP). The ANP -- which includes the National Police, Border Police, Highway Police, and Counternarcotics Police -- was to have had a combined force of 62,000 by the end of 2005. On that target date, around 40,000 ANP personnel were trained; but most possessed minimal skills and high levels of corruption are reported. Informal statistics suggest that some 70 percent of ANP personnel are illiterate, and most are poorly paid. As such, they are susceptible to bribes and high desertion rates.

If Afghanistan is to assume more responsibility for maintain its internal security, the plan for the establishment of the ANP needs serious redrafting -- with increased funding along with a realistic timetable for training a police force that can truly become the backbone of the country's internal security and order, not just a task to be checked off.

Prior to achieving its target strength -- not only on paper but in terms of active and successful participation in executing its mandate -- Afghanistan's international backers may have to decide on temporary measures to help the country maintain day-to-day security.

With Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) forces engaged primarily in counterterrorism, the burdens of policing Afghanistan's borders and combating narcotics fall to the ISAF. However, NATO has thus far been reluctant to engage itself in counternarcotics operations, and the alliance has steered clear of border control. Despite the expansion of the ISAF to volatile southern Afghanistan, NATO's overall policy is to conduct stabilization management tasks rather than managing crisis.

The dual command between OEF and the ISAF with a third element -- that is, with ANA and ANP forces that have engaged in armed hostilities in the past -- in areas such as southern Afghanistan, where there the situation is critical, could create murky areas of responsibility to the benefit of domestic or foreign spoilers.

Disarming Militias

The compact places the responsibility for disarmament of the hundreds of militia units squarely on the shoulders of the Afghan government. Kabul estimates that there are some 10,000 "illegal" militias and has launched a new plan with Japan as the lead country disarm these people.

The compact states that "the Afghan government will consolidate peace by disbanding all illegal armed groups." In its timelines, it states, "All illegal armed groups will be disbanded by end-2007 in all provinces."
Some militias might indeed beat their swords into plowshares, with members returning to lives in agriculture or other vocations. There are, however, militia units that are loyal to powerful warlords -- known in Kabul as "regional leaders" -- who control large swaths of Afghanistan. Some of these warlords are currently members of the National Assembly. It seems unlikely that Kabul will be able to shepherd such flocks without access to a powerful stick. Incentives so far have yielded only temporary results, and in some occasions have provided warlords increased legitimacy and funds to increase their respective power bases. Past examples of warlords accepting Kabul's supremacy have been effected through overt displays of force by Operation Enduring Freedom troops or threats of force.

To achieve genuine sovereignty over the all of its territory, the Afghan state needs to rid itself of militias. Kabul has been tasked with doing so in two years, but the tools and the political will from all sides for completing this task have proven elusive.

Neighboring States

A crucial element in ensuring Afghanistan's security that is addressed only vaguely within the compact is the role of the country's neighbors, in particular Pakistan and Iran.

Much of the terrorism and armed opposition directed against the Kabul government has supporters, access to resources, and bases of operation in Pakistan. President Karzai charged in January that "a neighbor" has had a hand in the recent upsurge of violence in southern Afghanistan. Pointing to a series of deadly suicide attacks in Kandahar Province, Karzai said that "the reason for these attacks is the continuation of subversive endeavors" by foreigners whose aim is "to dominate" Afghanistan. The former Taliban regime was part of a "hidden invasion" of Afghanistan "for a second time by a neighbor" after the Soviet Union invaded the country in 1979, Karzai said.

While clearly pointing to -- but refraining from identifying -- Pakistan, Karzai added that since the collapse of the Taliban regime following the U.S.-led invasion in late 2001, those "who controlled Afghanistan during the Taliban regime have not altered their intentions." Karzai went on to say that the unnamed neighboring country has continued to interfere in Afghanistan's internal affairs and, for "this reason, terrorism and attacks [are] still prevailing in Afghanistan."

Iran has been more cooperative vis-a-vis Afghanistan, however, there are signs that issues outside Kabul-Tehran relations -- namely international pressure on Iran regarding that country's nuclear program -- could lead to a hardening of Iran's stance with respect to its neighbor to the east.

In mid-January, President Karzai canceled a planned trip to Tehran, citing technical difficulties (specifically, preparations for the London conference). While both Kabul and Tehran have tried to put a good face on the indefinite postponement of that meeting between Karzai and Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadinejad, observers in both countries have linked the cancellation to external pressure on Karzai.

On the sidelines of the London conference, Iranian Foreign Minister Manuchehr Mottaki said his country wants a timetable for the withdrawal of foreign troops in Afghanistan. He also said he regretted that his country's proposals on the issue of security in Afghanistan were not included in the compact. Mottaki did not elaborate on those proposals.

While not setting a precise timetable for the withdrawal of foreign troops from his
country, Karzai has indicated that he expects such forces will be required for about a decade. That is years longer than acknowledged within the compact signed in London.

Perhaps Afghanistan will require the presence of international forces beyond 2010. If that is the case, the compact represents a positive beginning for the post-Bonn phase of Afghanistan. But in the coming years, both Afghanistan and its international supporters should -- in view of the realities on the ground and inherent limitations on a massive state- and nation-building project -- draw up plans that are achievable. They should avoid Potemkin villages and lay the foundations for a nation-state capable of standing on its own.

KABUL SATISFIED WITH LONDON CONFERENCE RESULTS.
If the London conference opened in an atmosphere of cautious optimism, it arguably concluded on a higher note.

Afghan Finance Minister Anwar al-Haq Ahady welcomed the international community's engagement and its pledges of support at the two-day gathering.

"We have been heartened by the kind of support we have received in more returns since yesterday, and we are very much impressed with the kind of support we have received in pledges in the past two days," Ahady said.

Ahady also tried to dispel concerns that donor countries have not lived up to their pledges of aid.

"I am pleased to say that, actually, almost all of our donors who have pledged [in the past], they have delivered on their pledge," Ahady said. "This is a misperception that money was promised and it was not delivered."

Vote Of Confidence?

Wahidullah Shahrani, Afghanistan's deputy finance minister and an economic adviser to President Hamid Karzai, stressed after its conclusion that the conference represented an international vote of confidence in the Afghan central government.

"We are very satisfied with the outcome of this important conference for two main reasons. The first is that the international community recognized during this conference that the government of Afghanistan is in a position to take the ownership and to come with the initiative, and would lead the nation to determine and implement its development strategy," Shahrani said.

Shahrani also emphasized the conference's commitment to back his government's National Development Strategy, which sets out plans for ensuring security, governing more effectively, and safeguarding citizens' rights.

Shahrani echoed vows from other Afghan officials to devote greater attention and resources to improving the lives of ordinary Afghans He also highlighted recent achievements in the continuing effort to recover after decades of war.

"Right now, we have got 6 million children back to the schools; almost 75 percent of the people across the country have got access to basic health services," Shahrani said. "We have completed a number of key highway or road projects. They will create opportunities for economic activities. We have an agreement with the Asian Development Bank that we can bring electricity from Uzbekistan."
Welcoming Aid

Shukria Barakzai is another member of the Afghan delegation to the London Conference and a member of Afghanistan's new national parliament. She secretly educated women when such education was banned under the hard-line Taliban regime, and said on 1 February that the aid flowing from the conference would do wonders for her country.

"Really it's more than enough, I think. It's a big help for Afghanistan," Barakzai said. "As an Afghan, I am very happy it can transform our country, and of course, the agenda and the arguments was very useful. It's made our government to be more active."

Barakzai said the structure of the Karzai administration's National Development Strategy will make the government more accountable and foster closer coordination with the international community.

Barakzai said top-down improvements to the justice system and law enforcement are important. But she added that the country's long-suffering population needs to see visible improvements like new roads and schools.

"[People's] priorities, it's something normal: security, peace process, democratic process, and, of course, the schools, roads, shelter, factories. That's all very important," Barakzai said. "That's the Afghan people's needs. We need a new map, we need a new timetable, we need a new policy. The parliament also is working as a kind of observer for law."

But Should Countries Do More?

But even as delegates to the London conference dispersed and headed for home, at least one voice emerged to suggest that the international community is not doing enough for Afghanistan.

Fazel Beria is from the Afghan Association of London and has represented Afghanistan in international negotiations. He said that if measured by what Afghanistan has done for the world, the aid has been insufficient.

"The world was an unsafe place with all of those terrorist camps in Afghanistan, with Osama bin Laden and the Taliban government. Now they are not there," Beria said. "And if the Afghan people are participating with the world to destroy those bases, we are actually contributing much, much more to the world [by] providing security, and in return we are getting very little."

Beria suggested that even a "little" more could make an enormous difference. (Jan Jun)

ANALYST DETAILS IMPORTANCE OF LONDON CONFERENCE.

RFE/RL Afghan Service correspondent Sultan Sarwar interviewed author and Afghanistan expert Barnett Rubin, the director of studies at the Center on International Cooperation at New York University, on 23 January. Rubin attended the London Conference on Afghanistan as an observer. The conference aims to set the framework for international engagement in Afghanistan over the next five years. The "Afghanistan Compact" that is to be discussed at the London conference is a plan that will guide international efforts in Afghanistan now that the Bonn process, outlined in the Bonn
accords of December 2001, has been completed.

Rubin on the Afghanistan Compact: This conference will launch the Afghanistan Compact, which is a declaration that sets out the framework for international engagement with and assistance to Afghanistan over the next five years. It takes up where the Bonn agreement left off. The Bonn agreement has now ended with the reestablishment of government institutions in Afghanistan -- with the election of parliament after the election of the president. And this agreement will go on for the next five years to help make those institutions really effective and launch a development program in Afghanistan.

Rubin on the world’s commitment to Afghanistan: It’s the first time that the international community has had this kind of formally organized engagement for a total of nine years with a country that was trying to emerge from conflict. And that’s partly the result of the lessons, from test cases, that it takes some time to reestablish peace and public order and to start development. One of the reasons that some countries relapse into conflict is that the [international] engagement [is] too short.

Rubin on the compact's specific goals: This is not just a political agreement. It isn’t just about holding elections and establishing a government. That's what the Bonn agreement was about. [The Afghanistan Compact] is really about all dimensions of building a state. It’s about security. It’s about building up better [governance], the rule of law, and protection of human rights. And it’s about economic and social development. And this compact recognizes that these are all interrelated and not one of them can succeed without the other. This compact is not aimed at short-term changes. It’s aimed at bringing Afghans greater security. The police are going to be completely reorganized and made more effective so that they protect people rather than abusing them. It has very concrete targets for building roads [and] irrigation works so that farmers have more water. And it supports the Afghan National Development Strategy -- which has a plan for economic development and the reduction of poverty in Afghanistan.

Rubin on Kabul’s responsibility: This is not a plan for the international community giving things to Afghanistan. This is a plan for strengthening Afghanistan and enabling it to assert leadership of its own development. And in return for that it will get international support. There will be measures to provide credit to support small businesses, to generate housing in the urban areas through the use of public lands, for fighting corruption, and all of those things. But those will only be successful if the government really becomes accountable. And Afghan citizens will have to participate.

Rubin on Afghanistan’s neighbors: One of the reasons that some of the neighboring countries are continuing to interfere in Afghanistan is because they think that international involvement will not last that long. And therefore they want to position themselves for a future when the Afghan government may not have that [international] support. This compact shows that there is going to be at least five more years of very significant and direct support for the government of Afghanistan and for the peace process in Afghanistan. So those [neighboring] countries should align their strategy with the international effort.

Rubin on what has been accomplished and what still needs to be done in Afghanistan: This is not an international donor conference like Tokyo or Berlin. This [event in London] is an international political conference. It’s not actually true that the commitments [made at the Tokyo donor's conference in 2002] were not fulfilled. The problem is that these investments take some time. About 13,000 villages have received grants through the National Solidarity Program. A number of roads have been built. But
I think in these first four years, there was a lot of need for urgent humanitarian assistance. For feeding people. For returning and settling about 3 million refugees who came back to Afghanistan. There was relatively little permanent infrastructure built like roads, irrigation works, electricity plants, and so on. That's going to be the focus of the next five years.

Rubin concludes: This compact recognizes some of the problems that have occurred [on aid disbursement]. And it contains a number of requirements for making aid more effective. There is a whole annex to the compact about that. That means that the Afghan government will have to become more efficient and transparent in the way it manages funds. And it will have to mobilize more funds itself. But also, donors are committing themselves that, if the Afghan government does so, they will put more money in through the Afghan government budget. In any case, even if [donor countries] administer the funds themselves they will use more Afghan government contractors, they will make more multiyear commitments, and generally assure that their aid is delivered in accordance with the development priorities of the Afghan government so that it is used more effectively for the development of the whole country. (Transcribed by Ron Synovitz)

NEWS

AFGHAN FOREIGN MINISTER INTERVIEWED ABOUT AL-QAEDA, TALIBAN, AND LONDON CONFERENCE.

This phone interview with Afghan Foreign Minister Abdullah Abdullah in Kabul was conducted by RFE/RL's Afghan Service correspondent Zarif Nazar from Prague on 21 January. Abdullah discussed the most recent videotaped message from Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, the current state of the Taliban, terrorist attacks in Afghanistan, and the London conference on the Afghanistan Compact.

RFE/RL: What are your views concerning Osama bin Laden's recent comments made on audiotape?

Abdullah Abdullah: Osama bin Laden is the murderer of Afghan people and hundreds of other Muslims around the world. He has betrayed Muslims of the world greatly. Now that he is putting himself in the position of defending Afghan Muslims and Muslims in Iraq, it is strange. While in the case of Afghanistan he has been the cause of the wretchedness. And, before there were any foreign forces in Afghanistan, Osama and his followers caused the death of thousands of people and forcing them into exile. Now that he declares his position as defender of Muslims, especially of Afghanistan, I find it strange. But he must be found, and must be punished, he and his followers who have been with him in all the crimes all this time.

RFE/RL: Do you have a specific view about Osama's proposal to the United States [asking for a cease-fire]?

Abdullah: The United States has given its answer to that. But for Afghanistan, as a victim country of his and his followers' terrorist activities, the only thing Afghan people expect is that he would be punished.

RFE/RL: What is your comment about the recent Taliban claim of not having played a role in the Spin Boldak suicide attack [see "RFE/RL Afghanistan Report," 23 January 2006]?
Abdullah: I think those Taliban who are in war, and those foreigners with them, are the cause of all this and part of this crime. Those who have made the decision to destroy Afghanistan have committed different crimes in different parts of Afghanistan during the last four years, including the recent crime. Why do they deny it? In the past, also, in some cases they have claimed responsibility and in others they have not. In this recent case, since the causalities were all civilian, the Taliban didn’t want to take the blame.

RFE/RL: What about the issue of Pakistan and other neighboring countries? Do they cooperate with you about preventing cross-border entry?

Abdullah: The crossing of people from Pakistan to Afghanistan and the carrying out of terrorist attacks has continued. This indicates that the problem continues to exist. There have been contacts, and relations have been strengthened. But there are still problems. We hope we can come to the point that criminals will not be permitted to come and cause insecurity in Afghanistan from any of the neighboring countries.

RFE/RL: About the upcoming London conference: what preparation has the Afghan government made and what issues will be discussed?

Abdullah: The conference, which will be held in London, will be about an Afghan [plan or proposal] which is a mutual commitment by Afghanistan and international society for continuing efforts for stability and security in Afghanistan, the strengthening of the state, and its economic and social development. We are hoping that more than 60 countries and international organizations will take part in this conference. From Afghanistan a delegation headed by President Hamid Karzai will attend. In fact, after the Bonn and Tokyo conferences, this is the most important event with relation to international aid to Afghanistan and the position of Afghanistan with regard to issues relating to Afghanistan and international society. In fact, we expect a five-year framework of cooperation to be endorsed by the participating countries.

RFE/RL: Now that your government has accomplished the Bonn conference terms and conditions, it has been said that the government wants to directly implement the aid as opposed to letting the NGOs [implement it]. Do you have any specific proposals on this?

Abdullah: Yes. Our specific proposal for the international community is that Afghanistan’s role in implementing and the ownership of the aid should be increasingly greater. At the beginning all aid was implemented through NGOs. This has changed today and we hope we can get this commitment from the international community that -- considering the positive efforts the government has made -- there would be substantial change in the role and ownership of the government in terms of international aid. In the document that will be presented to the conference, there is a section about ways of ensuring the effectiveness of the aid. If supported by the participants, there will be commitment in moving in this direction.

DESPITE THREATS, FEMALE TAJIK SINGER PERFORMS IN KABUL.

Popular Tajik singer Manizha Davlatova played two concerts in Afghanistan on 19 and 20 January, in Kabul and Mazar-e Sharif, respectively. The concerts were held under tight security and, despite the relatively expensive tickets (about $40), many people attended the events. The concerts were the first of their kind in more than two decades to be held in the deeply conservative Afghan society, where women entertainers do not appear in public. Manizha, who is from Kulob, has become one of Tajikistan's most
well-known singers over the last three years. RFE/RL's Tajik Service correspondent Khiromon Bakoeva interviewed Manizha on 23 January while she was still in Afghanistan.

RFE/RL: How were the concerts? Are you satisfied with them?

Manizha: I'm happy that I could make people at least a little bit happy. My main goal was to break taboos. It had been 23 years since a woman had appeared on the scene [here in Afghanistan and performed]. My goal was really to break this taboo. "I was told that it's better not to have the second concert. But in general it was good."

RFE/RL: So you achieved your goal?

Manizha: I believe I did.

RFE/RL: How many people attended your show?

Manizha: There were many people. I had one concert in Kabul but the second concert, which was due to be held the next day, had to be cancelled because of security concerns.

RFE/RL: There were some unconfirmed reports that some conservative politicians had threatened to disrupt your concert. Were you actually threatened? Why didn't you have your second concert in Kabul?

Manizha: I had two concerts in one day but the next day I didn't have it because of security -- there were many people. I was told that it's better not to have the second concert. But in general it was good.

RFE/RL: How were you dressed and what songs did you sing?

Manizha: I had prepared 23 songs but unfortunately I wasn't able to sing all of them during the concert in Kabul. I think my dress matched the songs that I played. I wore a Tajik dress at one time and had some other dresses.

RFE/RL: You were dressed according to Afghan tradition [more conservatively]? Not like you would have on the Tajik scene [which is more liberal], right?

Manizha: That is correct, yes.

Compiled by Amin Tarzi.