Security and Peace Support in Afghanistan:  
Analysis and Short- to Medium-Term Options 
Executive Summary 

by 

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Project on the Future of Peace Operations*

Revised 9 August 2002 

(The full report is available online at: http://www.stimson.org/fopo/pubs.cfm?ID=58.)

* The project on the Future of Peace Operations evaluates and seeks to enhance US policy and policy making for peace operations; advances UN reform of peace operations, especially through implementation of the “Brahimi Report” and companion UN reform measures; and provides timely and useful information and analysis on peace operations to increase public understanding of and support for judicious use of these tools for enhancing international peace and security.
OVERVIEW

In Afghanistan, a widely-perceived and well-documented security gap threatens to derail the country's transition from civil war to stable and accountable governance, frustrating major US objectives in the war on terrorism. Greater security is needed both to encourage donors to invest in national reconstruction and to reduce the risk of Afghanistan reverting to war, a risk that history indicates is substantial. If international partners are not encouraged by US government example to contribute to closing the gap, responsibility will fall on US shoulders, even as other foreign policy priorities intrude.

This paper summarizes a longer briefing on security options for Afghanistan intended to fill an analytical void and stimulate debate about security requirements there, as the country enters two years of internationally-supported political, economic, and social transition from civil war and misrule by the Taliban, whose regime for years played host to Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda.

To bridge the security gap while an Afghan national army, police, and border security forces are being trained and equipped with outside assistance, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), now authorized 5,000 troops and limited to patrolling in and around Kabul, the capital, should be expanded to about 18,000. It should be deployed to defined areas of operations in and around other key cities and their airports, and to patrol the roads that connect these cities to each other and to the country's borders, both to promote commerce and to gain control of critical customs revenues that will help to reduce central government reliance on foreign aid. This force should work closely with the new Afghan national forces as they are trained, and hand off tasks to them as national capacity grows. The international force would revert increasingly to an advisory role after two years. Depending in part on who participated, the recommended force would cost $2-4 billion per year.

APPLYING LESSONS FROM OTHER CONFLICTS

States just emerging from civil wars have a high relapse rate. The main factors contributing to relapse are violent local faction leaders, scheming or failing neighbor states, and local factions' ability to self-fund via black market sales high-value commodities like diamonds or opium. As long as Afghanistan's warlords have access to opium and to supportive elements in neighboring states, as well as a lock on Afghanistan's customs revenues, they can snub any new government in Kabul and frustrate efforts to unify and stabilize the country.

Controlling these factors requires serious engagement by major outside powers, reinforced by demobilization of fighting factions and the securing of their heavy weapons. Local faction leaders who would like to upend a peace accord have trouble doing so without standing forces to command or the heavy weapons that may decisively tilt a local balance of power.

Basic personal security for repatriating refugees and for displaced persons who are returning to their homes is key to making these programs work. About 1.4 million Afghan refugees have returned to the country this year, at double the anticipated rate. They have not necessarily returned to their homes: According to UN figures, 43 percent of returnees have converged on Kabul province as agency support budgets ran low.

Security is prerequisite to economic reconstruction and development in general. Sustained development, in turn, helps reduce the need for international security support.
THE GOALS-RESOURCES MISMATCH IN US POLICY

Afghanistan’s recent history of civil war and its de facto capture, during Taliban rule, by the forces of international terrorism makes restoring peace and stability a key objective of the war against terror. The Bush Administration has committed itself to “ensure” the country’s “security, stability and reconstruction” and to “foster representative and accountable government for all Afghan men and women.” But the security resources that it and the rest of the international community have thus far applied to the task, other than those used to pursue al Qaeda and their discredited Taliban hosts, fall short of what the country needs for short term stability.

With international assistance, Afghanistan’s many factions are working their way through the process set up in December 2001, at a conference in Bonn, Germany, to decide “who rules”—without resort to violence. The current Transitional Administration, headed by President Hamid Karzai, has two years in which to draft a new constitution and hold national elections.

President Karzai has a tough job to do and ignoring the lessons of recent history and the evidence, accumulating daily, of violent instability in Afghanistan places the whole transition at risk. The violence comes in three varieties: from die-hard al Qaeda and Taliban remnants, from fights over political turf, and from all-too-common violent crime. Al Qaeda has been implicated in a spate of bombings and an attack on an army post south of Kabul. Anti-Pashtun violence, attacks on aid workers, and clashes between Uzbek and Tajik militias roil the northern part of the country. In the west, Tajik and Pashtun militias sporadically fight for control of territory. In the southeast, US payments to local warlords to support the hunt for al Qaeda may work at cross purposes to the extension of central government authority. Violent crime is widespread.

To improve security, Mr. Karzai has long sought expansion of ISAF—deployed since January to good effect in and around Kabul—to other parts of the country while the country’s own capacity to provide for its security is rebuilt. Karzai’s requests have been echoed repeatedly by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, by Lakhdar Brahimi, head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), and by non-governmental organizations delivering aid and development assistance inside the country. Rather than expand ISAF, the US government has focused on training the new national forces.

(In April 2002, foreign donors meeting in Geneva pledged to support the creation of Afghan national forces, which are to consist of a 60,000-strong army, 12,000-strong border security force, and 8,000-strong air force, plus 70,000 police. Present US plans call for training, by the end of calendar year 2003, up to 18 army battalions (10,800 troops total) and 12 border security battalions (3,600 troops total). News, in late July, from the graduation ceremony of the first army battalion to complete basic training suggests that only 350 members of what was to be a 600-strong battalion actually completed training and that most of those remaining were “drawn from the Northern Alliance”—undercutting US hopes for a multi-ethnic force and making future recruitment of non-Tajiks even more difficult.

Although Afghanistan’s security must, in the end, rest upon its own capacities, no country builds a cohesive army from scratch in one or two years. Failing to bridge this security gap during the critical transitional period will place that transition at risk. The longer the United States waits to take steps to close this gap, the more responsibility for doing so is likely to fall on its shoulders, in an unplanned fashion, for example, sending a Special Forces detail to guard President Karzai following the assassination of Vice President Haji Abdul Qadir.

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Comparing Political and Security Timelines in Afghanistan

Security outside Kabul now rests upon regional and local "commanders," their militias, and their Special Forces liaison teams, whose principal goal, together with the rest of US forces there, remains rooting out al Qaeda. Supporting the aspirations of the Bonn Process for a stable and unified country with a responsive and accountable government is a secondary task. Ongoing US support for regional militias—estimated to include 70,000–200,000 fighters nationwide—will delay their demobilization, which will pose a risk to national stability. However, some local forces (for example, those answering to regional governors who cooperate with the Transitional Administration) might usefully be incorporated into a federated security structure as components of the military or the police.

A Kabul-first deployment of the new national army, as presently planned, implies either competition with or co-optation by the Northern Alliance. It will not be able to compete effectively and if co-opted will not achieve the goal of being a national force. The new army units could be put to better use patrolling Afghanistan's dangerous main roads, reducing informal "taxation" and facilitating commerce, and working in tandem with an expanded ISAF, which could also work with the new border security force.

CLOSING THE GAP: EXPANDING ISAF

Key assumptions underlying ISAF expansion are:

- that significant US and allied forces remain in-country to deal with al Qaeda and Taliban remnants and to assist ISAF in the event of substantially increased hostilities;
that the United States, major European powers, and the other members of “Six Plus Two” (i.e., Russia, China, Iran, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Pakistan), continue to support the Bonn Process; and

that Afghanistan’s factions support the Bonn Process even as they maneuver for position within it.

An expanded ISAF should be able to:

- defend itself against localized al Qaeda and Taliban remnants;
- deter political violence;
- separate local forces;
- oversee voluntary demobilization of local forces and cantonment of their heavy weapons;
- enforce rules against brandishing of light weapons in public spaces;
- manage and facilitate de-mining and reconstruction of roads and bridges connecting its deployment areas; and
- support UNAMA and facilitate civilian-managed reconstruction efforts.

Light Option

Because the major cities are the political prizes in this struggle for power, mechanized infantry battalions should patrol areas in and around key cities hosting field offices of UNAMA (Jalalabad, Gardez, Kandahar, Herat, Mazar-e-Sharif, Kunduz, and Bamyan) plus their associated airports. About 4,500 troops would be enough to give each of these areas at least as great a ratio of peacekeepers to population as Kabul enjoys now.

Because the legitimacy of foreign military presence and of the Transitional Administration will hinge on making visible improvements in the average Afghan’s quality of life, an expanded ISAF should include engineering troops (about 2,500) to help repair roads that connect major cities, managing work parties that include demobilized fighters.

Because weak states generate most of their revenues from export/import fees, ISAF should deploy troops (about 1,200) at major border crossings to help persuade local commanders and regional governors to share customs revenues with Kabul and to both support and monitor the functioning of the new border security force.

Because repaired roads are no good without security, cavalry and reconnaissance troops, with substantial air support (about 5,300 troops altogether) should patrol the roads that the engineers repair.

The stabilizing effect of coalition forces proximate to Kandahar is credited against what would otherwise be a requirement for ISAF infantry. If coalition forces in Kandahar were restricted to a quick reaction role vis a vis ISAF, then an international battalion would be needed for Kandahar as well.

Adding these 13,500 troops to the roughly 4,600 ISAF troops already deployed in Kabul would result in a force of about 18,100 troops, including support forces. Direct US participation, even if token and drawn from US forces already deployed, may well be needed to induce other countries to contribute troops to this force.
Expanding ISAF: Light Option

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UN Region:</th>
<th>Capital</th>
<th>East</th>
<th>South East</th>
<th>South</th>
<th>West</th>
<th>North</th>
<th>Central Highland</th>
<th>North East</th>
<th>Totals:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UNAMA Regional Offices</td>
<td>Kabul</td>
<td>Jalalabad</td>
<td>Gardez</td>
<td>Kandahar</td>
<td>Herat</td>
<td>Mazar-e-Sharif</td>
<td>Bamiyan</td>
<td>Kunduz</td>
<td>4,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current ISAF Force</td>
<td>4,600</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4,600</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Force Sizing Criteria for Other Regions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Kabul</th>
<th>Jalalabad</th>
<th>Gardez</th>
<th>Kandahar</th>
<th>Herat</th>
<th>Mazar-e-Sharif</th>
<th>Bamiyan</th>
<th>Kunduz</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Infantry, Sized by Political Threat Level &amp; Population</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>915</td>
<td>952</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>532</td>
<td>4,455</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combat Engineers (1-2 companies per region)</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>2,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Road and Border Crossing Forces</td>
<td>398</td>
<td>427</td>
<td>1,210</td>
<td>1,849</td>
<td>1,210</td>
<td>456</td>
<td>949</td>
<td>6,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals:</td>
<td>4,600</td>
<td>1,548</td>
<td>1,577</td>
<td>1,710</td>
<td>3,264</td>
<td>2,663</td>
<td>962</td>
<td>1,731</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Kabul</th>
<th>Jalalabad</th>
<th>Gardez</th>
<th>Kandahar</th>
<th>Herat</th>
<th>Mazar-e-Sharif</th>
<th>Bamiyan</th>
<th>Kunduz</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Forces of Operation Enduring Freedom</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Threat levels estimated by analysts familiar with the security situation on the ground; levels indexed to Kabul.
- Forces calculated using deployment norms for NATO-standard forces of one armored reconnaissance company per 300 km lines of communication, supported by aviation units for observation and transport.
- The New York Times, 6 May 2002. Other supporting units are based outside Afghanistan.

Medium Option

Although the light option would be preferable for reasons of politics, culture, cost, and availability, one could also use the force-to-space ratio of ISAF-Kabul (troops per square kilometer of area patrolled) rather than its force-to-population ratio, to calculate troop numbers for the other AORs. Doing so would generate a requirement for about 18,500 infantry to patrol the seven new AORs outside Kabul, or roughly one brigade or battle group for each. Road and border security components would also be augmented, so the total “medium option” force would be 30,000 – 40,000 troops. These larger formations would be better able to function selectively outside their AORs, responding to trouble spots within their regions, and to reinforce each other. On the other hand, their military and political footprint would be sufficiently heavy as to risk looking like an occupation force, yet they would lack the power to be one.
ESTIMATING COST

In the table below, the costs per troop-year (what it costs to deploy one soldier for one year, including all operations and support costs) are based on aggregate annual US spending in the Balkans, as reported to the US General Accounting Office; on allied costs for initial deployments to Kosovo, as provided to the US Congressional Research Service; and on official mission costs as reported for the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Total costs would of course vary with force size; different configurations of forces or variations in overall troop quality would alter the numbers of troops needed to accomplish particular tasks, and thus alter mission cost. Air support added about ten percent to the cost of US operations with NATO forces in Bosnia and Kosovo; a similar percentage was assumed for allied forces. These figures do not include the cost of rapid response forces that would normally be part of or associated with Operation Enduring Freedom. Such costs could be estimated, however, from the US cost per troop-year once the response force was sized.

Also not included in the table are costs for police, rule of law, or other security-sector personnel often associated with a large, complex peace-building operation. At present, neither UNAMA nor ISAF have such a mandate. Training of police, and related capacity-building, is assumed to be ongoing “under separate cover,” as pledged by Germany.

### Expanded ISAF: Estimated Annual Costs of Light and Medium Options

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>US Forces @ $215,000 per troop-year</th>
<th>Other Developed States @ $120,000 per troop-year</th>
<th>UN Force @ $103,000 per troop-year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Light Option, year one</td>
<td>18,100</td>
<td>$3.9-$4.3 billion*</td>
<td>$2.2-$2.4 billion*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light Option, year two (less engineers)</td>
<td>15,600</td>
<td>$3.4-$3.7 billion*</td>
<td>$1.8-$2.0 billion*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Option, year two</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>$4.0-$4.3 billion*</td>
<td>$2.2-$2.4 billion*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In short, the numbers above are the minimum security buy-in that may be needed for a given-sized force for at least the next year or two to make the rest of the peace-building package in Afghanistan viable. The greater the up-front effort devoted to training indigenous Afghan forces and securing customs revenue streams for the central government, the sooner international security forces could depart.

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APPENDIX

The map below, one of a series issued since November 2001 by the office of the United Nations Security Coordinator, indicates relative levels of risk within the country. Viewing successive editions of the map illustrates how risk levels and areas of threat have changed over time but not why. That is a task for separate analysis.

Overlaid on the map are UNAMA’s eight regions, with its field offices marked. UNAMA has a small satellite office in each region.
NOTES

1 For further discussion of the evolving security situation, see:
2 Paul Collier (2001) "Economic Causes of Conflict and Their Implications for Policy." In Turbulent Peace, edited
3 UN High Commissioner for Refugees (2002) "UNHCR Afghanistan humanitarian update No. 63," 22 July. Online at:
The United States has the lead for training the armed services, Germany for training the police, Italy for the justice
system, and the UN for demobilization. US Department of State, Office of International Information Programs
“Rebuilding Afghanistan’s Armed Forces: Issues, Obstacles and Insights from Recent Training Experiences.”
Near Kabul, Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) promotes local security by its very presence. Its forces intervene
intermittently with local faction leaders to damp down violent jockeying for position, and small numbers of US
Special Forces work with most of the major military factions. US Department of Defense, Office of the Secretary
State, supra, note 6.
Anja Manuel and Peter W. Singer (2002) “A New Model Afghan Army,” Foreign Affairs, Vol. 81, No. 4,
July/August, pp. 44-59.

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