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Library of Parliament Seminar “Afghanistan: Where Do We Go from Here?” Summary Highlights and Follow-up Developments

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Library of Parliament Seminar
“Afghanistan: Where Do We Go from Here?”
Summary Highlights and Follow-up Developments
(Occasional Paper)

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In the electronic versions, a number of the endnote entries contain hyperlinks to referenced resources.

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LIBRARY OF PARLIAMENT SEMINAR “AFGHANISTAN: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?” SUMMARY HIGHLIGHTS AND FOLLOW-UP DEVELOPMENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

On 7 October 2010, the Library of Parliament held a two-and-a-half-hour seminar for parliamentarians and staff on the future of the Afghanistan conflict and Canada's role. That date coincided both with the ninth anniversary of foreign troops invading Taliban-ruled Afghanistan in 2001, and the inauguration by Afghan president Hamid Karzai of an appointed 68-member High Peace Council to pursue overtures for an end to the Taliban-led insurgency.

The seminar was moderated by Gerald Schmitz, special advisor on institutional knowledge with the Library of Parliament, whose background study [*Canadian Policy Toward Afghanistan to 2011 and Beyond: Issues, Prospects, Options*](#) was published in 2010. Four internationally recognized experts were the featured speakers. In the first part of the seminar, presentations were made by three distinguished Canadians: Mark Sedra, senior fellow and program leader at the Centre for International Governance Innovation; Nipa Banerjee, a professor at the University of Ottawa's School of International Development and Global Studies as well as its Graduate School of Public and International Affairs; and Grant Kippen, international consultant and chairman of the Afghanistan Electoral Complaints Commission during the 2009 presidential elections. (For brief biographies, please see the appendix.) Their remarks, followed by a question-and-answer period, concentrated in turn on the situational challenges in regard to security and security-sector reform (Sedra), development and reconstruction (Banerjee), governance, democratization and political reform (Kippen); at the same time recognizing that these core issues are interconnected and cross-cutting.

The second part of the seminar began with a keynote address by leading American scholar and commentator Anthony H. Cordesman, the Arleigh A. Burke Chair in Strategy at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C. and a national security analyst for ABC News, among many other distinctions. He provided a detailed assessment of trend lines in Afghanistan and the critical challenges confronting Western policy-makers as the war continues. A 2010 Center for Strategic and International Studies PowerPoint presentation, [*Afghanistan: Progress and Challenges*](#), references these same remarks. The seminar concluded with a second question-and-answer period.

The purpose of this follow-up document is to expand on the richness of the speakers' formal presentations by highlighting points that were emphasized in their oral remarks, and to summarize key points and responses from the two question-and-answer periods. In addition, two further sections contain follow-up information on some significant developments and documents released since September 2010.

2 SEMINAR PRESENTATIONS

2.1 PART I

2.1.1 MAIN POINTS

2.1.1.1 MARK SEDRA – [“AFGHANISTAN: CANADA’S MILITARY MISSION IN AFGHANISTAN IS DUE TO END IN JULY 2011: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?”](#)

- Canada’s role must be viewed within an international context that has been burdened by multiple unrealistic expectations and a basic miscalculation that only a “light footprint” would be required following the overthrow of the Taliban regime. We are looking at generational investments and progress that will not be linear. A first principle should be to “do no harm.”
- The reality is that 2002–2003 were two lost years followed by a series of missed opportunities. That has been compounded by competition rather than coordination among donors. Serious action on security-sector reform did not happen until 2006–2007 and the rush to catch up has created its own problems.
- What can we do now? Options: provide continued mentoring to Afghan Security Forces, including local and civil order police; contribute to under-resourced “soft sectors,” notably functioning courts; strengthen the Afghan government’s ability to provide security-sector services; work effectively with non-state actors in these areas.
- Ultimately, there has to be consideration of a “political settlement” and the prevention of a return to the kind of civil war that took place in the 1990s. Afghans’ loss of faith in their public institutions and in donor promises has to be addressed.

2.1.1.2 NIPA BANERJEE – [“CANADA’S DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE TO AFGHANISTAN: WHAT AFTER 2011?”](#)

- News headlines in the Afghan press present a depressing picture. Foreign troop deaths have also soared from a total of 198 in the first four years, from 2001 to 2004, to more than five times that many (1,005) in the past two years, 2009–2010, as of 1 September 2010.
- The primary objective must be stabilization, which requires addressing the many deficiencies, notably in the state machinery, institutional capacity and service delivery, that have eroded popular support for the government at all levels.
- It has to be frankly acknowledged that most indicators of Afghan development remain extremely low. It is an illusion to think that there are quick fixes. We know what has not worked: politicized and militarized aid; aid that lacks transparency and relies on expensive foreign consultants; poor technical assistance; unfulfilled donor and Afghan government agendas; and numerous conferences resulting in too many promises with too little implementation and results-based evaluation.
- There is no “exit strategy” for development. At the same time, the current strategy is “not salvageable” and must be revised.

- Canadian approaches should consider the following: investment in Afghan-led national programs; program- rather than project-focused aid emphasizing shared donor–Afghan government accountability; sector-wide coordination and pooled funds; strengthening Afghan management of development programs rather than running parallel programs; “vigilant” monitoring of Canadian private-sector aid projects; and better quality technical assistance.
- “No” to any potential negotiated settlement with the Taliban that violates basic human and constitutional rights. If it comes to that, we should leave.

2.1.1.3 GRANT KIPPEN – [“DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE IN AFGHANISTAN”](#)

- Expectations were unrealistic. Achieving electoral and systemic political reforms requires a long-term engagement from international partners.
- The number of elections “does not a democracy make.” We need to examine the roots of fraud in the 2009–2010 elections and take away lessons. A lot of time, money and opportunities were wasted after the first 2004–2005 electoral cycle. For example, \$100 million was spent on a failed voter registry.
- There were a few improvements in regard to the recent parliamentary elections, notably in the conduct of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC). However, a great deal more needs to be done. Building civil society within Afghanistan’s traumatized population is a key element of democratic development.
- We should involve Afghans in deeper partnerships, addressing areas such as civic education, professional training, and human and institutional capacity. We should also send the message that we are not leaving after July 2011.

2.1.2 POINTS RAISED DURING THE FIRST QUESTION-AND-ANSWER PERIOD

- In what key area is Canada well-placed to assist Afghanistan beyond the end of our Kandahar combat mission in 2011?
- What is the biggest risk confronting Canadian policy-makers in determining the best and most appropriate future role for Canada?
- How do we go about doing nation-building in Afghanistan?
- Are there certain aspects of nation-building that Canada is good at and where it could make a particular contribution?
- Is Canada sending the wrong signal by withdrawing its forces from Afghanistan?
- Given Afghanistan’s very low level of development, even compared to other least developed countries, do we have a results-based aid strategy? If aid is externally driven and delivered by those lacking local language skills, how can this build Afghan capacity?

Mark Sedra

- Canada should contribute to the training and mentoring of Afghan security forces, consolidating gains and demonstrating a continuing commitment to Afghan security goals. The biggest risk is the pressure of the news cycle, a lot of which is negative, resulting in Canadians souring on the mission. “No one wants to be

part of an unwinnable engagement.” Afghanistan presents an especially challenging case and the tasks are immense. At the same time, Canada has been a leader in developing a “whole-of-government” approach. We should be able to transfer knowledge and lessons learned from our experience.

Nipa Banerjee

- We should not think in terms of a model for nation-building because “we are not building a state” as such. It will take a long time to reverse the decline that Afghanistan has suffered. Although there has been some progress since 2001, it is very little given the large amount of money spent. There is not much evidence of learning from our mistakes. Programs such as those for the reintegration of insurgents have made minimal headway under the circumstances. Volume of aid is not the issue; poor strategy is.

Grant Kippen

- Canada could make a substantial contribution in professional development and training across different levels of government. The risk is that we do not clearly communicate to Afghans our intentions to support them over the long haul. Their biggest fear is that international partners will leave before the job is done.

2.2 PART II

2.2.1 MAIN POINTS

2.2.1.1 ANTHONY CORDESMAN

- There really is no such a thing as an “international community” when it comes to Afghanistan. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has had many failings and a lot of time has been wasted since 2001. “We have had zero meaningful assessments of progress up to 2009.” Meanwhile, there has been a steady escalation in the war and shadow Taliban governments exist where there were none in 2003.
- In the case of the United States (U.S.), Iraq spending trumped the Afghanistan effort. There were no timelines in place to make funding effective given an “inability to track it against effects.” You had made-up figures of kinetic incidents (those involving violent acts). The first meaningful U.S. military assessment was conducted only in 2009. The counter-insurgency strategy elaborated by former U.S. commander General Stanley McChrystal was a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) / International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) strategy, not just an American one. “God save us from 48-country alliances.” However, trying to “force coordination” internally – and with a weak United Nations (UN) partner – is bound to be difficult. The U.S. now accounts for 66% of the NATO/ISAF presence in Afghanistan.
- Winning tactical battles is no achievement if one is losing the war. That goes for the war on drugs, too. Transparency is imperative. “If you lie to yourself, you cannot win.”

- The fact that 40% of the value of aid is lost to corruption indicates problems on the donor side as well as the Afghan side. Donors need to “look in the mirror” in combating corruption.
- The PRT (provincial reconstruction team) civil-military approach to aid has also been problematic. The longest tour in these is one year; the average is six months. But it takes one to two years in theatre to become effective. Canada’s Kandahar PRT may not be a model, but many others are much worse.
- The one international agency that has been truly effective is the UN World Food Programme and it should be recognized as such.
- One cannot hope to be effective without a carefully selected focus and preparation that fully addresses conditions on the ground. The ideal is not achievable. Rather, the real strategic goal is to reach a state of “Afghanistan good enough.”
- Winning support among ordinary Afghans is a major challenge. One reason is distrust of the current regime. Tellingly, a U.S. Department of Defense March 2010 colour-coded map (refer to page 38 of Dr. Cordesman’s powerpoint presentation) shows not a single area of the country in which the “population supports the government.”
- A lot of interventions have not worked. For example, “rule of law” initiatives have been largely a waste of time and resources. Capability is very low. Also, quantity is no substitute for quality. Some countries are not fulfilling their pledges. Others are missing in action. When it comes to project sustainability, we are still well behind the curve.
- “The Afghan government operates in a given day within the range of their vehicles.” Moreover, we are facing a multitude of local powerbrokers (26 in Kandahar, for example) and an insurgency that is not unified or coherent. Solutions must work locally and have a local face. We have to demonstrate an enduring presence and build long-term relationships. Otherwise, the result will be “attrition without declaration.”
- With respect to “reconciliation,” which is now much talked about, there is no evidence yet of its happening on the ground in any area.
- The strategic importance of Pakistan should be underlined. Not only do we face a resilient and complex insurgency, but one that is not confined to Afghanistan’s contested borders. Unfortunately, Pakistan is in many ways as much a failed state as Afghanistan.

2.2.2 POINTS RAISED DURING THE SECOND QUESTION-AND-ANSWER PERIOD

The future of Canada’s mission poses a dilemma for elected politicians across the political spectrum. In taking our responsibilities seriously, all the political parties are wrestling with the question of what to do next in Afghanistan. What is our best effort under the circumstances? In Quebec, for example, 80% of the public is opposed to the current combat mission, so there are limits to what is politically possible. Given that, what could we do in such areas as public service professional development, training of police and correctional officers, and the like?

In Afghanistan, we are dealing with unconventional asymmetric warfare of a kind that ultimately defeated the Soviet occupation. At the same time, the public has a hard time understanding why our NATO coalition, with all its combined military might, seems unable to cope with these insurgencies. What lessons can be drawn? What is the message that needs to get through?

Anthony Cordesman

- We have been falling down in the area of civil policing. That is one area that definitely needs attention. There is also a real critical need for more qualified military trainers and that is another area where Canada possesses unique expertise to pass on.
- Realistically, in the post-World War II era, the average length of an insurgency in which the government side prevails is 14 years. Moreover, insurgency must be defeated politically and economically, not just tactically. That involves the broad dimensions of governance and stabilization. So this must be seen as a long-term project.
- Accordingly, a “priority for the future is to have the *strategic patience* to allow Afghans the chance to move forward” in these areas. International partners need to show staying power because there are no leaps to success.
- For the U.S., Afghanistan has become a constant test of its priorities as well as its capacity to learn from past mistakes and avoid further “self-inflicted wounds.” Afghanistan’s situation may appear grim, but it must be acknowledged that “this did not have to happen.” We can do better and we must.

2.3 BIOGRAPHIES OF PANELLISTS

Nipa Banerjee, Professor, School of International Development and Global Studies, University of Ottawa

Nipa Banerjee earned Doctorate and Master’s degrees, specializing in development studies, from Toronto, Carleton and McMaster universities. She served as a practitioner and policy analyst in international development and foreign aid for over 30 years. Ms. Banerjee worked with CUSCO and IDRS and 33 years in CIDA. She represented CIDA in Bangladesh, Indonesia, India, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and in Afghanistan (2003–2006), heading Canada’s aid program in the four latter countries. She joined the University of Ottawa in July of 2007, teaching international development. Her primary objective as a teacher is to transfer development knowledge, expertise and skills to young Canadians, and prepare them as analytic and critical thinkers and future practitioners in international development. She strives to promote debates and dialogue on development and aid, aiming to influence public opinion and public policies. Ms. Banerjee has to her credit several published policy briefs and a chapter on Canada’s role in Afghanistan in a recently published book. Her research interests include reconstruction, development and aid effectiveness, and coordination, management and related policies in fragile states and in general and a special focus on Afghanistan, where she travels frequently. Her other activities comprise capacity building in partner developing countries in planning and managing for results and monitoring and evaluation. She also conducts evaluation of effectiveness of aid in partner countries.

Anthony H. Cordesman, Arleigh A. Burke Chair in Strategy, Center for Strategic and International Studies

Anthony H. Cordesman holds the Arleigh A. Burke Chair in Strategy at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (SIS). He also acts as a national security analyst for ABC News. He is a recipient of the Department of Defense Distinguished Service Medal. During his time at CSIS, he has completed a wide variety of studies on energy, U.S. strategy and defence plans, defence programming and budgeting, NATO modernization, Chinese military power, the lessons of modern warfare, proliferation, counterterrorism, armed nation building, the security of the Middle East, and the Afghan and Iraq conflicts. Many of these studies can be downloaded from the [Burke Chair in Strategy](#) section of the CSIS website. At CSIS, Mr. Cordesman has been director of the Gulf Net Assessment Project, the Gulf in Transition study, and principal investigator of the Homeland Defense Project. He directed the Middle East Net Assessment Project, acted as co-director of the Strategic Energy Initiative, and directed the project on Saudi Arabia in the 21st century.

Grant Kippen, Former Chair of Afghanistan's Electoral Complaints Commission

Grant Kippen has spent the past 30 years involved in electoral politics and democracy-strengthening activities. In Canada, Mr. Kippen has worked within the Prime Minister's Office, as an Advisor to a federal Cabinet Minister, a Special Assistant to a Member of Parliament, as well as the Director of Organization for a national political party. He has written a number of published articles on such issues as e-democracy, electoral financing within post-conflict countries, and the impact of information technology on electoral campaigns, as well as on elections and democracy in Afghanistan.

Internationally, Mr. Kippen has worked in Afghanistan, Algeria, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Egypt, Georgia, Jordan (in support of the 2005 Iraq elections), Kosovo, Moldova, Nepal, Pakistan, Timor Leste and Ukraine. During this time, he has been employed by the United Nations, International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), the National Democratic Institute (NDI), Elections Canada and the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs. He was the Chairman of the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC) in Afghanistan for the 2009 Presidential and Provincial Council elections and the 2005 Wolesi Jirga and Provincial Council elections. Mr. Kippen was also Country Director in Afghanistan for the National Democratic Institute in 2003–2004.

Mr. Kippen has a BA from the University of Western Ontario and an MBA from the University of Ottawa. He is also a Fellow at the Centre for the Study of Democracy, School of Policy Studies, Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, Canada.

Mark Sedra, Senior Fellow and Program Leader, Centre for International Governance Innovation

Mark Sedra is a Research Scholar in the Department of Political Science at the University of Waterloo and a Senior Fellow at the Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI). His research focuses on the topic of post-conflict state-building with an emphasis on security issues. He has conducted research on a

number of countries and regions, including Northern Ireland, the Middle East and the Balkans; however, the bulk of his research in recent years has centred on Afghanistan.

Mr. Sedra was formerly a Research Associate at the Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC), a German-based independent think tank specializing in peace and security issues, and a Visiting Research Fellow at the U.K. Defence Academy based in Shrivenham, U.K. He also served as the 2004–2005 Cadieux-Léger Fellow in the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs. Mr. Sedra has been a consultant to governments, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on issues pertaining to the security and political situation in Afghanistan, including the United Nations, the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and the U.K. Department for International Development.

Mr. Sedra received an Honours BA in Political Science and History from the University of Toronto and an MSc in International History from the London School of Economics (LSE). He is currently a PhD candidate in the Political Studies Department at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in the University of London. His dissertation focuses on the challenges of rebuilding security structures in post-conflict societies, with Afghanistan and Iraq serving as his principal case studies.

Gerald J. Schmitz, Special Advisor, Institutional Knowledge, Library of Parliament (moderator)

Gerald Schmitz is currently special advisor, institutional knowledge, in the Library of Parliament's Information and Research Service (PIRS) which he joined in 1981. He holds degrees in economics and political science from the University of Saskatchewan and Carleton University, where he completed his doctorate in 1978. Mr. Schmitz has been a principal and director within PIRS, and was lead analyst for the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development (Trade) from 1994–2008, including for its 2008 report, *Canada in Afghanistan*. Mr. Schmitz has addressed international conferences on Canada's role in Afghanistan and Central Asia. Among his numerous publications is the bilingual book, *The Challenge of Democratic Development: Sustaining Democratization in Developing Societies*.

3 SOME SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENTS SINCE SEPTEMBER 2010

- 9 October President Karzai announced that Burhanuddin Rabbani had been selected to head the High Peace Council which was inaugurated on 7 October. Rabbani is currently leader of the Afghanistan National Front (also known as the United Front). From 1992–1996, he was Afghanistan's president during the savage civil war among mujahideen commanders and factions that preceded the Taliban takeover of most of the country. Subsequently, he served as political head of the United Islamic Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan.

- 20 October Preliminary results of Afghanistan's September 18 parliamentary elections, which had been due by 9 October, were finally released by the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC). Only partial results had been indicated up to that time. Although the IEC revised the total vote count upward to 5.6 million (out of a population of some 30 million, with 39% of votes cast by women), it rejected 1.3 million votes, or about one quarter, as invalid. Ballots were disqualified from 2,543 of 17,744 polling stations. The UN Secretary-General's Special Representative to Afghanistan, Staffan de Mistura, acknowledged in a statement, "The number of votes invalidated and identified by the IEC point to considerable fraud and electoral irregularities on election day." At this point, the five-member Electoral Complaints Commission was still in the early stages of investigating thousands of allegations it had received (the deadline for submission was 24 October).
- 21 October In the wake of President Karzai's establishment of a High Peace Council, press reports suggested that secretive talks were taking place between Afghan government officials and Taliban leaders. U.S. General David Petraeus, commander of the NATO-led and UN-backed International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, was said to have facilitated safe passage for certain Taliban figures to go to Kabul. However, U.S. officials expressed strong cautions about the very preliminary and fragile nature of such overtures. Many international observers remained sceptical and analysts generally assessed that an acceptable peace process leading to political negotiations and an eventual settlement was still far from being realized.
- 28 October The ECC announced that almost 6,000 election-related complaints up to the 24 October deadline, and about 1,800 of them had been adjudicated. Ballots from 36 polling stations in seven provinces were disallowed. As well, several successful candidates were belatedly disqualified on the grounds that they had failed to meet the candidate eligibility criteria. In other words, they should never have been on the ballot. That same day, British Foreign Secretary William Hague told the U.K. Parliament, "We are not remotely at the stage of laying down the terms of a political settlement. There is no political settlement currently being discussed around a table by the Afghan government and the Taliban leaders. That is not the stage that we are at."
- In a briefing for Pentagon reporters in Washington, British Major-General Nick Carter pointed to "some encouraging signs, definitely momentum" and "a sense that probably the initiative is now with us and not, as it was a year ago, with the insurgency." At the same time, he cautioned that "you, in Afghanistan, have to be very careful about not measuring progress until you can match it to the appropriate season and the appropriate time of year. And I sense it won't be until June next year that we'll be sure that the advances we've made during the course of the last few months are genuine success."

30 October In light of intensified counter-insurgency operations, U.S. General Petraeus told the Cable News Network (CNN), "There is no day in Afghanistan that doesn't have some bad news. The question is how much bad news, relative to how much ... good news. As a general assessment right now, the trajectory of the roller coaster in Afghanistan is upward and that is a change. We intend to maintain the pressure, to increase it."

31 October U.S. Lieutenant-General William Caldwell, chief of NATO's training mission in Afghanistan, stated in Kabul that the mission lacked 900 qualified instructors in a number of security-related areas; 440 of these positions were judged to be critical. NATO was currently covering some of the shortfall by sending Afghans for training outside the country, including to the United Arab Emirates.

The UN Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) announced that it had formed a group of experts, to be known as the Salaam Support Group, to assist the work of the High Peace Council in finding ways to ensure lasting peace in Afghanistan.

1 November Following vigorous debate in the Swedish parliament, a compromise supported by most parties was reached on that country's future role in Afghanistan. (Sweden is not a NATO member but has some 600 troops in ISAF.) As a result, 500 Swedish troops will remain in Afghanistan in 2011. That number will decrease in 2012. Swedish troops may remain beyond 2014, but as of that year only in a training support capacity.

2 November On the same day that the U.S. midterm elections were held, protesters, including parliamentarians, candidates and their supporters, demonstrated in the streets of Kabul, denouncing the 18 September elections as fraudulent, and calling for them to be annulled and a new vote to be held.

3 November Afghanistan's Deputy Attorney-General Rahmatullah Nazari announced the assignment of three prosecutors to conduct an official probe of allegations that staff of the IEC had engaged in electoral fraud.

According to media reports, the Canadian Forces are unlikely to be able to conduct "full spectrum combat operations" in Kandahar province until the 1 July 2011 withdrawal date. Dismantling and gearing down could begin as much as three months earlier.

7 November Defence Minister Peter MacKay indicated publicly that the Canadian government was contemplating continuing a limited non-combat military mission in Afghanistan beyond July 2011. This future role for

the Canadian Forces would be “behind the wire, outside of Kandahar, and it would involve further training.” A decision was expected to be announced before the 19–20 November NATO Summit in Lisbon. Subsequent press reports suggested that up to 750 military personnel, along with 200 or more support staff, could be involved in such a training mission for a period ending in 2014 at the latest.

11 November While attending the 2010 G20 Summit in Seoul, Prime Minister Stephen Harper confirmed there would be an extension of a limited military mission along these lines. He was quoted as saying, “I’m not going to kid you. Down deep, my preference would have been to see a complete end to the military mission, but as we approach that date, the facts on the ground convince me that the Afghan military needs further training. I don’t want to risk the gains that Canadian soldiers have fought for. I think if we can continue a smaller mission that involves just training, I think frankly that presents minimal risks to Canada, but it helps us ensure that the gains we’ve made are continued ... to truly ensure that the Afghan forces are able over the next couple of years to take over true responsibility for their security. So I do this with some reluctance but I think it is the best decision when one looks at the options.”

14 November In a wide-ranging interview with *The Washington Post*, Afghan President Hamid Karzai again blamed electoral fraud on outsiders, specifically Americans. “An effort was made by our allies, by people in the United States of America, by people in your government, to rig our elections. How can you rig a country’s election and yet claim to be supporting democracy ... ?” On future security arrangements he stated, “I think 10 years is a long time to continue to have military operations. The time has come to reduce military operations. The time has come to reduce the presence of, you know, boots in Afghanistan ... to reduce the intrusiveness into the daily Afghan life. ... Make it more civilian. ... It’s not desirable for the Afghan people either to have 100,000 or more foreign troops going around the country endlessly, there has to be a plan inside whereby the Afghan capacity increases, whereby the NATO presence decreases to the extent that we can provide our own security, that we can also contribute to the security of the world, and where you can also have the unnecessary burden on your taxpayer removed for paying for such an extensive presence in Afghanistan.”

U.S. media reported that the Obama administration has developed a four-year transitional plan to 2014 that would transfer in phases responsibility for security operations to Afghan forces (army and police). The plan, to be released at the 19–20 November NATO Summit in Lisbon, would envisage a gradual drawdown in U.S. troops with a targeted completion of the combat mission in 2014.

15 November Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar issued a statement dismissing talk of peace negotiations as “rumours” and “mere propaganda” while reiterating that these would not be possible until foreign troops left Afghanistan.

The Afghanistan [Electoral Complaints Commission](#) and the country’s 34 provincial electoral complaints commissions announced that they had finalized the adjudication of 2,495 “A” complaints – defined as those “which if upheld could affect the results of the elections” – with a report to be delivered to the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC).

16 November Foreign Minister Lawrence Cannon, Defence Minister MacKay and International Cooperation Minister Bev Oda jointly announced the elements of Canada’s non-combat role after July 2011. It would be centred on (though not limited to) Kabul and would focus on four areas: “investing in the future of Afghan children and youth through education and health; advancing security, the rule of law and human rights; promoting regional diplomacy; and delivering humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people.” The military aspect, which would exclude Kandahar, would entail providing “up to 950 military trainers and support personnel.” That mission would end in March 2014. Costs to Canada were estimated at \$500 million annually for the training mission and \$100 million annually in development aid. Further details are in the [news release and backgrounder](#).

19 November Foreign Minister Lawrence Cannon told a news conference in Lisbon that Canada’s extended military training mission had a firm end date of March 2014.

An Ipsos Reid poll found that a slim majority of Canadians, 53%, supported the new Canadian military training mission. A stronger majority, 61%, favoured a debate and vote in Parliament on the mission.

20 November The NATO Summit meeting in Lisbon issued two declarations on Afghanistan:

- [*Declaration by the Heads of State and Government of the Nations contributing to the UN-mandated, NATO-led International Security Assistance Force \(ISAF\) in Afghanistan*](#). This reaffirmed “our support for President Karzai’s objective for the Afghan National Security Forces to lead and conduct security operations in all provinces by the end of 2014.”
- [*Declaration by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization \(NATO\) and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan on an Enduring Partnership signed at the NATO Summit in Lisbon, Portugal*](#).

Under this, the Afghan government reaffirmed its commitment to “actively carry out its security, governance and development responsibilities in a manner consistent with the commitments made at the London Conference of January 2010 and the Kabul Conference of July 2010 such as combating terrorism, strengthening the economy, addressing corruption, regional security and economic co-operation and respect for human rights, in particular the rights of women. ...”

NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen stated that “NATO is in this for the long-term. We will not transition until our Afghan partners are ready. We will stay, after transition in a supporting role.”

Prime Minister Harper stated that any Canadian aid to the government of Afghanistan would be strictly conditional on its “respect for and its acting upon basic principles – respect for democracy, for the rule of law and fair elections, for human rights, for good governance and for cleaning up corruption.”

24 November The IEC announced nearly final results for the 18 September elections in Kabul, setting off strong protests and new allegations of fraud and corruption. These did not include the eastern province of Ghazni where, despite a Pashtun-majority population, all 11 winning candidates in preliminary tallies were ethnic Hazaras. These results were postponed, citing “technical problems,” though President Karzai indicated he favoured a new election in Ghazni “for the sake of our national unity.” Of 5.6 million votes cast country-wide, 1.3 million were declared invalid. As well, 24 preliminary winning candidates, or nearly 10% of the total, were disqualified.

While the IEC deemed the elections to be a “major success,” the Free and Fair Election Foundation of Afghanistan saw them as massively fraudulent and called for major reforms. Abdullah Abdullah, a 2009 presidential candidate, also criticized the results but said that he believed he could put together an opposition bloc of some 90 members of Parliament.

Afghanistan’s Attorney General Mohammad Alako also announced a criminal investigation into high-level corruption by the electoral bodies.

Foreign Minister Lawrence Cannon issued the following statement: “Canada recognizes the complexity of the electoral process and supports the hard work done by Afghanistan’s Independent Election Commission and the Electoral Complaints Commission. We welcome the efforts of the commissions to identify and address irregularities and fraud.

Canada commends the Afghan people for their commitment to the electoral process through their participation in organizing, campaigning and voting. With a record number of candidates,

including a record number of female candidates, and millions voting, Afghans demonstrated their support for the establishment of democratic institutions, many risking their lives to do so.”

- 27 November On this date, the foreign troop presence in Afghanistan surpassed the nine years and 50 days of the Soviet occupation from December 1979 to February 1989. Some 15,000 Soviet soldiers were killed during that time compared to the NATO-led coalition's 2,230 fatalities to date, and currently averaging about 60 per month. Civilian casualties during the Soviet occupation were vastly higher, numbering over one million.

- 29 November In Nangarhar province an Afghan border police trainee fired on his U.S. trainers, killing six, bringing the number of coalition fatalities to 668, compared to 521 in all of 2009.

- 30 November A Bloc Québécois Opposition Day motion to “condemn the government’s unilateral decision to extend the Canadian mission in Afghanistan until 2014” was defeated in the House of Commons by a vote of 209 to 81.

- 2 December The potentially damaging disclosure of leaked diplomatic cables on the website WikiLeaks, including from Canadian ambassador to Afghanistan William Crosbie, revealed the seriousness of increasing tensions between the Karzai government and the governments of the NATO/ISAF coalition.

- 3 December U.S. President Barack Obama made an unannounced visit to Afghanistan, the second of his presidency, in advance of a major U.S. policy review to be released in mid-December. The primary purpose was to speak to U.S. troops at Bagram Air Base outside Kabul. Obama did not meet with President Karzai. During their 15-minute telephone conversation, the leaks about concerns over Karzai’s leadership and electoral fraud were not discussed, according to White House adviser Douglas Lute.

- 6 December The Karzai government softened its stance on the disbanding of all private security firms, which was to be completed by the end of December according to an August presidential decree. Existing contracts would be allowed to continue until they expired but would not be renewed.

- 8 December The Government of Canada released its [10th Quarterly Report on Canada’s Engagement in Afghanistan](#).

- 10 December Afghanistan was among 17 countries to officially boycott the ceremony in Oslo, Norway, awarding the Nobel Peace Prize to imprisoned Chinese human rights and democracy activist Liu Xiaobo.
- 11 December A group of noted academics and other expert observers published "[An Open Letter to President Obama](#)," which stated, "The situation on the ground is much worse than a year ago." The letter called for the U.S. to quickly take the initiative on "direct dialogue and negotiation with the Afghan Taliban leadership residing in Pakistan," arguing that "it is better to negotiate now rather than later, since the Taliban will likely be stronger next year."
- 13 December The London *Daily Telegraph* reported that the chief of Pakistan's armed forces, General Ashfaq Kiyani, was promoting a plan to include elements of the Taliban-led insurgency in a "broad-based" Afghan government. President Karzai confirmed that his government was in talks with Pakistan and that he had met with General Kiyani several times. A few days earlier, Amrullah Saleh, the former head of the Afghanistan National Directorate of Security (from 2004 to June 2010) was quoted by the Associated Press as stating that insurgent groups must be disarmed first if peace talks with the Taliban were not to lead to disaster – "Demobilize them, disarm them, take their headquarters out of the Pakistani intelligence's basements. Force them to play according to the script of democracy."
- A group of about 100 Afghan MPs calling themselves the "Administrative Board of the Parliament" demanded that President Karzai convene the newly elected legislature by 19 December.
- 15 December The International Committee of the Red Cross issued a press release "[Afghanistan: a people trapped between sides](#)," warning that "against the background of a proliferation of armed groups," by every measure that the Red Cross tracks, the situation has worsened throughout the country for civilian casualties, internal displacement and health care access.
- The Canadian Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights tabled a report, [Training in Afghanistan: Include Women](#), with 14 recommendations calling on Canada to make "the advancement of women's rights a fundamental element of its approach to Afghanistan post-2011."
- 16 December The White House released "[Overview of the Afghanistan and Pakistan Annual Review](#)," several days after the death of Richard Holbrooke, the U.S. special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan. For more details of the review see the end of the next section.

For developments after 16 December, the best source is the [Afghanistan Conflict Monitor](#).

4 SOME NOTEWORTHY RECENT PUBLICATIONS AND MAIN FINDINGS

A new series of studies by the Kabul-based Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) on the September 2010 elections:

Noah Coburn, [*Afghan Election, 2010: Alternative Narratives*](#), September 2010.

Insecurity and rumours of violence have benefited certain candidates while hurting others. Many political actors have been able to use insecurity to their advantage in the election process, and in some cases they are actually encouraging violence that is often glossed over as Taliban insurgency. ...

Learning from previous campaigns can also have its drawbacks. In light of fraud in the 2009 elections and minimal reforms by the IEC, it seems likely that fraud will actually increase as successful techniques are spread among the numerous candidates. ... Most respondents felt that the IEC had made no real changes to address issues of fraud and corruption, and that this would favour those who had been successful within the system once before.

...

Violence is viewed as an effective political tool; the country is deeply divided on the question of whether it should be ruled by religious leaders, former commanders or bureaucrats; and there is a deep sense that the current political elite, who most Afghans feel are corrupt and unsympathetic to community needs, are so firmly entrenched that it is impossible to remove them from power.

The 2010 election in Afghanistan are likely to be deeply flawed, marred by fraud and, perhaps, violence. Members of the international community who have been disappointed by these faltering steps on what many hoped would be the path toward democracy should not be asking what procedures might address these election flaws. Rather, the question should be: How can a more transparent, accountable and impartial political culture be encouraged in Afghanistan? Elections by themselves will not necessarily bring stability, or even representative governance, to Afghanistan.

Anna Larson, [*The Wolesi Jirga in Flux, 2010: Elections and Instability I*](#), September 2010.

... Afghanistan's recent political history demonstrates a general tendency toward shifting alliances and deal-making behind closed doors. ...

... The legislative and executive branches of government have become increasingly intertwined since 2005, and in particular since 2009. While pre-election politicking combined with sincere indignation on the part of MPs toward the government has generated a prominent (and very public) chasm between the Wolesi Jirga and the Karzai administration, under the surface exist connections between MPs and the executive that threaten to strip the parliament of any of the monitoring or oversight capacity that it currently has. Business deals and nepotism in particular thrive between MPs and cabinet ministers, entrenching vested interests and often predetermining the outcome of plenary votes.

... These alliances between the lower house and the executive are fragile and subject to a great deal of instability. Moreover, this instability is heightened by elections, which in their most basic definition are designed to promote change and uncertainty of outcomes in the short term. In the Afghan context, it is very likely that the process of elections will be politically disruptive in the short term, with the potential to destabilise local communities. However, if the outcome of elections is not uncertain *enough* - with results predictable and a significant amount of government control over candidacy, vetting, participation and results – elections will not contribute to stability in the long term either.

Noah Coburn, [*Parliamentarians and Local Politics in Afghanistan: Elections and Instability II*](#), September 2010.

Recent elections in Afghanistan have created a new set of winners and losers based upon the ability to manipulate a corrupt, non-transparent system. Respondents complained less about the outcomes of elections than about the fact that elections were a part of political processes where they did not always know the rules, and where powerful figures could alter those rules when they desired. Due in part to this lack of predictable outcomes, elections have encouraged decision-making by political leaders that often ignores the needs of local communities and have fuelled community divisions along ethnic, class and tribal lines, without allowing equal access to political resources ideally guaranteed in competitive democracy. In fact, the case of the 2010 parliamentary election sheds doubt on the value of continuing elections in Afghanistan if significantly more is not done to ensure greater equality of access to these resources. More generally, this example demonstrates some of the issues with holding elections quickly in post-conflict situations.

Two other AREU publications:

AREU Director Dr. Pierre Fallavier in the [*Afghanistan Research Newsletter*](#), No. 27, October/November 2010.

It's a cliché, but the greatest challenge is for Afghanistan to take care of itself. Right now, a lot of the decisions that are taken on Afghanistan's behalf are not really informed by facts. Instead, outcomes are determined by political expediency, and financial and personal interests. We must remember that every single country intervening in Afghanistan is here on a bilateral basis. These political leaders have their own agendas at home, which often have nothing to do with the needs or capacities of Afghanistan. When they don't see any security advantage in staying here, these countries will just withdraw. While they are not going to withdraw completely in the foreseeable future, they are trying to replace some of their military intervention with a civilian one.

Tazreena Sajjad, [*Peace at All Costs? Reintegration and Reconciliation in Afghanistan*](#), Issues Papers Series, October 2010.

This study examines the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP) as approved by the June 2010 Kabul peace jirga and to which international donors have pledged US\$784 million to date. The author finds considerable disagreements over the meanings assigned to "reintegration" and "reconciliation," their interrelationship, sequencing, preconditions and operating principles.

The APRP strategy is based on the assumption that reintegration will lead to a de-escalation of conflict, will take place within the context of good faith between the parties involved and will, because of disarming insurgents, result in better security conditions and a corresponding strengthening of the rule of law. Simultaneously, it is also based on the premise that insurgent leaders will be interested in “reconciling” with the GoA (Government of Afghanistan) because of the incentives being offered, such as amnesties and third-country settlement. These assumptions are flawed. Reintegration and reconciliation may not be mutually reinforcing (i.e. a campaign to disarm soldiers is not necessarily conducive to the building of trust required to engage the political leadership at the negotiating table, nor are political negotiations alone likely to result in rank and file soldiers disarming in large numbers, given the complexity of the conflict). Unless adequate support for the reintegrating combatants is provided, and the need to transform highly antagonistic relations between the insurgency leadership and the GoA to a more civic one through generating trust and confidence on both sides (as required for political reconciliation) is properly addressed, neither reintegration nor reconciliation will be achieved. ...

This research also unveiled a common perception among both national and international actors that the APRP is a desperate bid by the international community to support any quick “winning strategy” that will get their troops home. This is combined with a growing sentiment that the APRP is not an Afghan-owned and led strategy, but a component of the counter-insurgency (COIN) strategy and is hence under the control of the international military forces. ...

The APRP's focus on simplifying the insurgency to a poverty-induced movement does not address the disenchantment of the Afghan people with the failures of the GoA and the mistakes of the international community. Neither does the APRP have the scope to address the international dimensions of the conflict, which are critical to its solution. The question of political reconciliation too raises legitimate concerns about the capacity of the GoA, the existing absence of communication and coordination between national and international actors, and what could perhaps be compromised in the desperate bid for peace. As the GoA and the international community move forward to approve, implement and expand this program, realities on the ground should give stakeholders and experts some pause. Unless expectations are mitigated and precautions are taken, the temptations of political expediency will continue to overshadow any prospects of peace in Afghanistan and the nation will remain precariously poised on the brink of an unending conflict.

T. X. Hammes, [“Private Contractors in Conflict Zones: The Good, the Bad, and the Strategic Impact,”](#) *Strategic Forum*, No. 260, Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University, Washington, D.C., November 2010.

This study provides a wealth of information about the “unprecedented use” of private contractors in U.S. military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the many problems associated with this trend (also faced by Canada and other troop-contributing countries in Afghanistan), and the lack of knowledge of the strategic impact of contractors in conflict zones. It does not deal with the possible withdrawal of armed contractor services in light of President Karzai's announced intention to eliminate the use of private security contractors by the end of 2010.

Excerpts:

As of March 31, 2010, the United States deployed 175,000 troops and 207,000 contractors in the war zones. Contractors represented 50 percent of the Department of Defense (DOD) workforce in Iraq and 59 percent in Afghanistan. These numbers include both armed and unarmed contractors. Thus, for the purposes of this paper, the term *contractor* includes both armed and unarmed personnel unless otherwise specified. The presence of contractors on the battlefield is obviously not a new phenomenon but has dramatically increased from the ratio of 1 contractor to 55 military personnel in Vietnam to 1:1 in the Iraq and 1.43:1 in Afghanistan. ...

By the end of 2009, contractors reported almost 1,800 dead and 40,000 wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan. As the fighting in Afghanistan gets worse, contractors are now suffering more deaths than U.S. forces: "In the first two quarters of 2010 alone, contractor deaths represented more than half – 53 percent - of all fatalities. This point bears emphasis: since January 2010, more contractors have died in Iraq and Afghanistan than U.S. military soldiers." For practical purposes, these casualties were "off the books" in that they had no real impact on the political discussions about the war. ...

Three inherent characteristics of contractors create problems for the [Afghan] government. First, the government does not control the quality of the personnel that the contractor hires. Second, unless it provides a government officer or non-commissioned officer for each construction project, convoy, personal security detail, or facilities-protection unit, the government does not control, or even know about, their daily interactions with the local population. Finally, the population holds the government responsible for everything that the contractors do or fail to do. ... An unacknowledged but serious strategic impact of using contractors is to directly undercut both the legitimacy and the authority of the host nation government. ...

The United States must develop policies and procedures to deal with the presence of armed contractors in conflict zones. Because these armed entities are generally outside the experience and mandate of current international organizations and mechanisms, they will continue to have unforeseen impacts. Thus, the United States must work with other states, NGOs, and international organizations to develop policies, procedures, and institutions to deal with the presence of armed contractors in conflict zones.

Kenneth Katzman, [*Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy*](#), Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, Washington, D.C., 19 October 2010.

Until October 2010, there had not been a consensus that U.S. strategy has shown clear success, to date. However, in October 2010, the top U.S./NATO commander in Afghanistan, Gen. David Petraeus, as well as other U.S. and partner military officials say that signs are multiplying that insurgent momentum has been broadly blunted. One particular sign is that insurgent commanders are exploring possible surrender terms under which they might reintegrate into society. Still, some experts remain pessimistic, asserting that the insurgents have expanded their presence in northern Afghanistan, and that President Hamid Karzai's refusal to forcefully confront governmental corruption has caused a loss of Afghan support for his government. ...

In order to try to achieve a strategic breakthrough that might force key insurgent leaders to negotiate a political settlement, Gen. Petraeus is attempting to accelerate local security solutions and experiments similar to

those he pursued earlier in Iraq, and to step up the use of air strikes and special forces operations against key Taliban commanders. In order to take advantage of an apparent new willingness by some insurgent commanders to negotiate, Karzai has named a broad-based 68-member High Peace Council to oversee negotiations. However, there are major concerns among Afghanistan's minorities and among its women that reconciliation could lead to compromises that erode the freedoms Afghans have enjoyed since 2001.

Through the end of FY2010, the United States has provided over \$54.5 billion in assistance to Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban, of which about \$30 billion has been to equip and train Afghan forces.

Care Canada, [*Looking for Leadership: Women's Empowerment and Canada's New Role in Afghanistan*](#), Report, 20 October 2010.

In releasing the report, which was presented to the House Special Committee on the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan, Jennifer Rowell of CARE Afghanistan observed that 87% of Afghan women have suffered from some form of abuse. The report's overarching conclusion and recommendation is:

The people of Afghanistan still need Canada, and Canada has an obligation to see through its commitments. ... Canada should become the international leader in advancing women's rights, empowerment, and development in Afghanistan.

The report makes a detailed case for placing women's rights at the centre of Canada's post-2011 mission and for making Afghanistan a priority country under Canada's G8 maternal and child health initiative. Key recommendations are summarized in the opening pages under the headings of security; social and economic development; governance, rule of law and human rights; and aid effectiveness.

[*Policy Options*](#), November 2010.

This issue's cover feature includes seven articles on Afghanistan, each preceded by a bilingual abstract:

- Chris Alexander, "Afghanistan and Pakistan: A strategy for peace"
- Jeremy Kinsman, "The US and Afghanistan: In search of an exit strategy"
- Sean M. Maloney, "Afghanistan: Not the war it was"
- Nipa Banerjee, "Aid development for a secure Afghanistan"
- David T. Jones, "The Afghan conundrum"
- Robin Sears, "Afghanistan: The last war of choice"
- Douglas Bland, "In defence of Canada's defence"

[Policy Options](#), December 2010.

This issue also contains an article on Afghanistan:

- John Manley, "Canada's New Role in Afghanistan: Leading rather than following public opinion"

Asia Foundation, [Afghanistan in 2010: A Survey of the Afghan People](#), The Asia Foundation and AINA Media, Kabul, released 9 November 2010.

Funded by the United States Agency for International Development and conducted by the Afghan Center for Socio-economic and Opinion Research, this is the most comprehensive survey of the population to date, covering all 34 provinces and involving interviews with almost 6,500 Afghans during June and July 2010. Key findings are summarized in the executive summary.

Excerpts:

In 2010, 47% of respondents say that the country is moving in the right direction. This figure has been increasing since 2008 (38%) and 2009 (42%). The proportion of respondents (27%) who say the country is moving in the wrong direction has fallen compared to 2008 (32%) and 2009 (29%). The remaining 22% have mixed feelings (23% in 2008 and 21% in 2009).

Security continues to be a major factor in the way respondents assess the direction of the country. The main reason cited for optimism continues to be the perception of good security, mentioned by 38% of respondents who say the country is moving in the right direction. This number has decreased from 44% in 2009. Construction and rebuilding (35%), and opening of schools for girls (15%) are other factors cited for optimism in 2010.

However, insecurity is cited as the main reason for pessimism, cited by 44% of respondents who say the country is moving in the wrong direction, a slight increase from 42% in 2009. The proportion of respondents who identify corruption as a reason for pessimism has increased significantly to 27% in 2010 from 17% in 2009. The other main reasons for pessimism identified by respondents include poor government (18%) and unemployment (16%). This year, unemployment continues to be among the most serious problems at both national (35%) and local (26%) levels. ...

Support for the Government's approach for negotiation and reintegration of armed opposition groups is significantly higher in 2010 than in 2009. Eighty three percent of respondents support the government's attempts to address the security situation through negotiation and reconciliation with armed anti-government elements, compared to 71% in 2009. Support is highest in the East (89%), South East (85%) and North West (85%) and lowest in the Central/Hazarajat region (78%). Eighty-one percent agree with the government providing assistance, jobs and housing to those who lay down arms and want to reintegrate into society, compared to 71% in 2009. Men (88%) are more supportive than women (78%) of this approach. Around three quarters of all respondents (73%) think that the government's reconciliation efforts will help stabilize the country.

The proportion of respondents who say they have some level of sympathy with the motivations of armed opposition groups has fallen from 56% in 2009 to 40% in 2010. However, at least half of respondents say they have some level of sympathy with armed opposition groups in the South West (52%), South East (50%) and West (50%). ...

The majority of Afghans continue to say that corruption is a major problem in all facets of life and at all levels of government. In 2010, there has been a sharp increase since 2009 in the proportion of respondents who identify corruption as one of Afghanistan's major problems, and as a main reason for pessimism amongst respondents who say that the country is moving in the wrong direction. Corruption is also given greater emphasis than insecurity as a government failure, suggesting that respondents feel the government is better placed to tackle this issue but has failed to do so. This is borne out by respondents' experience that between a third and a half of contacts with core government institutions involve some level of corruption.

Anthony Cordesman, "[Afghanistan and the December Review: Making the Right Judgments](#)," Center for Strategic & International Studies, Washington, D.C., 2 November 2010.

In a new commentary, this distinguished seminar speaker argues that U.S. General David Petraeus' December 2010 review of the situation in Afghanistan must honestly address a number of critical factors using realistic timelines.

One should never judge whether the glass is half empty or half full while it is still being poured. The review of progress in Afghanistan due in December 2010 is definitely a case of prematurely assessing the situation and can provide only a limited picture of whether the new strategy will work.

There will be positive indicators. It would be amazing if a massive increase in the US troop presence and in US spending did not have such effects at the local level. ... At the same time, other insurgencies have shown that short term gains and largely tactical victories are meaningless unless they can be scaled up to win an entire conflict, sustained over time, and then provide a lasting transition to a reasonable degree of security and stability. ...

The December 2010 report can only be a stepping stone, but next December's report must be decisive – in supporting a decision to either to stay on a long-term basis or to go. This, however, leads to two cautions.

First, those who argue to stay must be ready to face the fact that it will mean a serious force commitment through at least 2015, unless the opposition collapses far faster than is normally the case. It also means continuing major aid efforts through at least 2020. At the same time, no such decision can be written in stone. US and allied commitments will remain optional and not a vital strategic interest. Those who advocate staying the course must be ready for similar annual reviews in the future – each of which must be progressively more demanding of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Second, those who argue for leaving must be honest about the high probability that all of the past and current efforts to encourage democracy, human rights, and development will probably collapse – regardless of what the Taliban and other insurgent appear to agree to. The war cannot be won by military means alone. This is equally true of political accommodation, however, and particularly at a time when the enemy feels it is winning, the quality of Afghan and Pakistani governance is low, and Afghan and/or Pakistani forces have not demonstrated they can either endure or turn tactical victories into civil-military success.

Moreover, far too many who talk about exit strategies forget that every exit strategy inevitably involves some new destination with new security problems and risks. Running away from a problem is only a sound strategy if there is somewhere better and safer to run to.

Anthony Cordesman with Adam Mausner and Jason Lemieux, [*Afghan National Security Forces: What It Will Take to Implement the ISAF Strategy*](#), Center for Strategic & International Studies, Washington, D.C., November 2010, (274 pages).

President Barack Obama's new strategy for Afghanistan is critically dependent on the transfer of security responsibility to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). His speech announcing this strategy called for the transfer to begin in mid-2011. However, creating the Afghan forces needed to bring security and stability to the region is a far more difficult challenge than many realize and poses major challenges that will endure long after 2011.

A successful effort to create effective Afghan forces, particularly forces that can largely replace the role of U.S. and allied forces, must overcome a legacy of more than eight years of critical failures in both force development and training, and in the broader course of the U.S. effort in Afghanistan. Such an effort must also be shaped as part of an integrated civil-military mission, and not treated simply as an exercise in generating more Afghan military and police forces. Success will be equally dependent on strategic patience. There is a significant probability that the ANSF will not be ready for any significant transfer of responsibility until well after 2011. Trying to expand Afghan forces too quickly, creating forces with inadequate force quality, and decoupling Afghan force development from efforts to deal with the broad weakness in Afghan governance and the Afghan justice system will lose the war. America's politicians, policy-makers, and military leaders must accept this reality – and persuade the Afghan government and our allies to act accordingly – or the mission in Afghanistan cannot succeed.

Richard L. Armitage, Samuel R. Berger and Daniel S. Markey, [*U.S. Strategy for Pakistan and Afghanistan*](#), Council on Foreign Relations, Independent Task Force Report No. 65, New York and Washington, released 12 November 2010.

From the foreword by Council president Richard N. Haass:

In Afghanistan, the Taliban insurgency is more violent than at any point since the U.S. invasion after 9/11. NATO forces are paying a heavy toll. Afghan public enthusiasm for the government is waning after years of unmet expectations. The economy, devastated by more than thirty years of war, has not recovered sufficiently to provide for the people, while the government remains largely ineffective and riven by corruption.

The Obama administration, about to embark on its third policy review in two years, must decide how best to address these challenges, given local realities, growing U.S. debt, and wide public scepticism about the present U.S. strategy. ...

In Afghanistan, the Task Force notes that the Obama administration will need to find a way to address the government's weakness, corruption, and political division; determine the terms of reference for negotiations with the Taliban; increase the quantity and, even more, the quality of Afghan security forces; and encourage the development of Afghanistan's economy while decreasing the production of drugs. If the December 2010 review of U.S. strategy in Afghanistan concludes that the present strategy is not working, the Task Force recommends that a shift to a more limited mission at a substantially reduced level of military force would be warranted.

Anthony Cordesman, [*Private Security Forces in Afghanistan and Iraq: The Potential Impact of the Montreux Document*](#), Center for Strategic & International Studies, Washington, D.C., 17 November 2010.

The role of private security companies has been a constant source of concern and trouble in both Afghanistan and Iraq. Such forces are essential in nations which do not yet have adequate security forces or a rule of law but can quickly become a “necessary evil” – or an “evil necessity” – if they do not have the proper controls. They also can become a critical source of corruption, power brokering, and a challenge to the state.

The Montreux Document is an effort by the Swiss government, the ICRC, and participating countries and experts to create an international standard for the companies providing such forces and for their use. It also sets clearly defined standards for host countries, outside powers, and corporations. ...

[T]he Montreux Document deserves close attention as a tool for reforming legal contracting standards affecting both foreign and local private security forces in Afghanistan and Iraq, particularly in the current effort to restructure military, civilian, and NGO contracting efforts in Afghanistan. It also has broad application to many of the states in ISAF and in the aid effort in Afghanistan. ...

Any effort such as the Montreux Document presents the risk that unrealistic constraints can be placed on military action and civil-military operations. The fact is, however, that something similar to it is critical to being able to sustain the use of private security contractors, to avoid their becoming a political and military liability, to winning the acceptance of host governments and peoples, and giving reputable firms both the credit for their conduct and rules and condition they know are acceptable. None of these goals have been met in Afghanistan and Iraq. The failure risks depriving the US and its allies of a critical method of supplanting military forces at far lower cost, as well as giving international investors the security they need.

Anand Gopal, [*The Battle for Afghanistan: Militancy and Conflict in Kandahar*](#), Counterterrorism Strategy Initiative, New America Foundation, Washington, D.C., November 2010.

The resurgence of the Taliban was not inevitable. A failed reconciliation process, together with perceived abuses by the government and foreigners, fueled the insurgency. Once the Taliban was able to reassert itself in Kandahar, it expertly exploited popular grievances, operating with an understanding of local dynamics unmatched by the foreign forces. Coalition forces have difficulty competing with the insurgents even when they have a distinct military advantage: the Taliban utilize networks that were not available to the foreigners, such as kinship ties, mullah networks, and so on. The Taliban's structure in Kandahar is a potent mixture of formal, top-down command and informal, bottom-up initiative. The movement is not so tightly-structured that the arrest or killing of top leaders affected its activities, but at the same time it is not so decentralized that coordinated action cannot be taken.

Yet the insurgents have weaknesses. That which they cannot achieve through appealing to local sentiment, they do so through force. So just as they position themselves as protectors of marginalized communities, their harsh rule can also breed resentment. And their informal structure, which has proven so hardy, relies on bonds between fighters that have persisted for decades. As a newer generation of fighters emerges to replace slain

commanders, this informal structure could become an impediment and the leadership's ability to control its charges could weaken. The Taliban in Kandahar has proven itself resilient, however, and it is too soon to say for sure whether such trends will materialize. But what is certain is that so long as the war continues Kandahar province will remain one of its key fronts, and the Taliban there will continue to be the heart of the insurgency.

International Crisis Group, [*Reforming Afghanistan's Broken Judiciary*](#), Asia Report No. 195, Kabul/Brussels, 17 November 2010.

Afghanistan's justice system is in a catastrophic state of disrepair. Despite repeated pledges over the last nine years, the majority of Afghans still have little or no access to judicial institutions. Lack of justice has destabilised the country and judicial institutions have withered to near non-existence. Many courts are inoperable and those that do function are understaffed. Insecurity, lack of proper training and low salaries have driven many judges and prosecutors from their jobs. Those who remain are highly susceptible to corruption. Indeed, there is very little that is systematic about the legal system, and there is little evidence that the Afghan government has the resources or political will to tackle the challenge. The public, consequently, has no confidence in the formal justice sector amid an atmosphere of impunity. A growing majority of Afghans have been forced to accept the rough justice of Taliban and criminal powerbrokers in areas of the country that lie beyond government control.

To reverse these trends, the Afghan government and international community must prioritise the rule of law as the primary pillar of a vigorous counter-insurgency strategy that privileges the protection of rights equally alongside the protection of life. Restoration of judicial institutions must be at the front and centre of the strategy aimed at stabilising the country. The Afghan government must do more to ensure that judges, prosecutors and defence attorneys understand enough about the law to ensure its fair application. Reinvigoration of the legal review process and the adoption of a more dynamic, coordinated approach to justice sector reform are critical to changing the system. Justice is at the core of peace in Afghanistan and international engagement must hew to the fundamental goal of restoring the balance of powers in government and confronting governmental abuses, past and present. Urgent action is also needed to realign international assistance to strengthen support for legal education, case management, data collection and legal aid.

Action Aid et al., [*Nowhere to Turn: The Failure to Protect Civilians in Afghanistan – A Joint Briefing Paper by 29 Aid Organizations Working in Afghanistan for the NATO Heads of Government Summit, Lisbon, November 19–20, 2010*](#), Oxfam, 19 November 2010.

Security for the vast majority of Afghans is rapidly deteriorating. As 29 aid organizations working in Afghanistan, we are deeply concerned about the impact of the escalating conflict on civilians. It is likely that increased violence in 2011 will lead to more civilian casualties, continue to fuel displacement, cut off access to basic services and reduce the ability of aid agencies to reach those who need assistance most. This paper does not attempt to address all aspects of the current conflict. It concentrates on those that negatively impact civilians, particularly in the context of transition to Afghan responsibility for security. While this paper primarily focuses on the actions and strategy of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), it is important to remember that armed opposition groups (AOG), who are stronger and control more

territory than at any time since 2001, also have clear obligations under international humanitarian law (IHL) to protect civilians. As such, this paper will make reference to AOG actions and issue recommendations to AOG where applicable. As world leaders meet in at the NATO summit Lisbon, we strongly urge them, along with all parties to the conflict, to minimize the harm to civilians and reduce threats and disruptions to basic services and development and humanitarian activities across Afghanistan. In addition, ISAF should do much more to ensure that ANSF, as they take on greater responsibility for security, fully respect human rights and the laws of war.

The International Council on Security and Development, [*Afghanistan Transition: Missing Variables*](#), London, released 19 November 2010.

Afghanistan Transition: Missing Variables draws on findings from field research interviewing 1,500 Afghan men in October 2010. The research, conducted by Afghan interviewers, asked questions of 1,000 men in Kandahar and Helmand provinces, the two provinces currently suffering the most violence in southern Afghanistan; and 500 men in the provinces of Parwan and Panjshir in the north of the country. Interviews in the south took place in the Kandahar districts of Zhari, Panjwai and Kandahar City; and in the Helmand districts of Lashkar Gah, Marjah, Nawa, Sangin, and Garmsir. The report underlines that security efforts during the transition must be accompanied by long-overdue efforts to gain grassroots political support. The report shows that to succeed, the transition must provide positive impacts on the lives of ordinary Afghans caught up in the fighting. Of serious concern, 92% of respondents in the south are unaware of the events of 9/11 or that they triggered the current international presence in Afghanistan, while 43% of respondents in Helmand and Kandahar are unable to name the good things about democracy. The field research shows that many Afghans remain hostile towards the international community, unsure of its objectives, and are unaware of or untouched by international development efforts. Forty percent of those interviewed in the south believe the international forces are there to destroy Islam, or to occupy or destroy Afghanistan. Sixty-one percent of respondents in Helmand and Kandahar believe the Afghan National Security Forces will be unable to provide post-transition security, revealing a worrying lack of confidence in the two key provinces in the ANSF's ability to protect them once NATO-ISAF forces leave. The news is not all bad: ICOS figures show several areas where the numbers, while remaining low, have improved. Eighty-one percent of Afghans interviewed in the south also think that Al Qaeda would return to Afghanistan if the Taliban regained power, and 72% of southern interviewees believe Al Qaeda would use Afghanistan to launch attacks on the West if they returned. Support for women from the men interviewed in the conservative provinces of Helmand and Kandahar is surprisingly high. In the north of the country, interviews took place in Parwan and Panjshir provinces, and findings indicate some successes: 80% of Tajik interviewees believe that the central government is protecting their interests.

United States Department of Defense, [*Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan*](#), Washington, D.C., released 23 November 2010.

This mandatory semi-annual report to Congress, covering the period 1 April–30 September 2010, found that although the frequency of violent incidents was at its highest level since 2001 (up 300% from 2007), there were some significant if uneven improvements.

Progress across the country remains uneven, with modest gains in security, governance, and development in operational priority areas. ... Overall governance and development progress continues to lag security gains. Governance capacity and economic development are long-term efforts that will require sustained support from the international community. ...

The increase in violence during this period was concurrent with the arrival of Coalition personnel, the dramatically accelerated pace of operations, and the spike of violence often seen on election day. The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) is seeing some early indications that comprehensive counterinsurgency operations are having localized positive effects and are producing initial signs of progress. Indications of local resistance to insurgents continue to emerge alongside positive indications, such as newly opened schools and police stations. ...

The Karzai Administration has improved its stance against corruption by prosecuting several high-profile senior officials. However, progress remains uneven and incremental. The Afghan Government also has improved inter-ministerial coordination, but faces several challenges and has yet to establish unified control over border control and customs – one of the primary sources of government revenue. The Kabul Bank episode continues to foster uncertainty in the financial sector and poses potential threats to investment and economic growth.

International Crisis Group, [*Afghanistan: Exit vs Engagement*](#), Update Briefing, Asia Briefing No. 115, Kabul/Brussels, 28 November 2010.

Nearly a decade after the U.S. engagement began, Afghanistan operates as a complex system of multi-layered fiefdoms in which insurgents control parallel justice and security organs in many if not most rural areas, while Kabul's kleptocratic elites control the engines of graft and international contracts countrywide. The inflow of billions in international funds has cemented the linkages between corrupt members of the Afghan government and violent local commanders – insurgent and criminal, alike. Economic growth has been tainted by the explosion of this black market, making it nearly impossible to separate signs of success and stability from harbingers of imminent collapse. The neglect of governance, an anaemic legal system and weak rule of law lie at the root of these problems. Too little effort has been made to develop political institutions, local government and a functioning judiciary. Insurgents and criminal elements within the political elite have as a result been allowed to fill the vacuum left by the weak Afghan state. ...

Unless the U.S. and its allies are willing to address these mistakes, no subtle tweaks in policy are going to change the situation in Afghanistan. There is unlikely even to be a period of sufficient calm for a withdrawal of NATO forces. An enduring negotiated settlement is not likely unless the government that makes the deal has a greater degree of legitimacy and more internal resilience than the Karzai administration currently has. Overcoming the trust deficit between the Afghan government, the Afghan people and the international community will rely on more concerted efforts to increase political representation, to expand access to justice and to confront corruption. In the long term, winning the engagement in Afghanistan means engaging with reality.

Gilles Dorronsoro, [Afghanistan at the Breaking Point](#), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington D.C., November 2010.

The current strategy of defeating the Taliban militarily is unrealistic. The coalition is on the defensive across much of Afghanistan and, with current troop levels, can at most only contain the insurgency. On present course, the coalition is swiftly heading toward an impasse.

Just to retain the areas currently controlled by the coalition would require significant additional troops next year. Many more than that would be required for the coalition, with heavy losses, to adopt an offensive stance and win back territory. Such an escalation, though, is politically untenable given the impending departure of European forces and dwindling public support for the war. A new strategy is required.

Rather than committing more troops, the United States should instead pursue a political solution to the conflict, including a cease-fire and negotiations with the insurgents. By insisting on power-sharing among the various Afghan factions and reserving the right to intervene militarily to prevent Afghanistan from becoming a sanctuary for extremist groups, the United States can still accomplish the more limited objective of preventing the return of al-Qaeda.

However, the United States must act quickly. Given the rapidly deteriorating security situation, every passing month strengthens the position of the Taliban. A viable exit strategy is still possible, but time is not on America's side.

President Obama and U.S. military leaders must keep five important truths in mind as they review the Afghanistan war strategy:

- **Optimistic assessments.** The U.S. command sees the situation in Afghanistan in overly positive terms and this jeopardizes its credibility with decision makers and public opinion.
- **Unrealistic objectives.** American commanders cannot defeat the Taliban militarily and can at best contain the insurgency in most provinces.
- **Irreversible advances.** As the Taliban strengthens and the Afghan government weakens, turning over security to the Afghan army is impossible in the near term.
- **Escalating troop numbers.** The current military option will only lead to an increase in U.S. troops to counter the insurgency's rise and the withdrawal of European forces.
- **Take the initiative.** The Obama administration must push for negotiations with the insurgency and a cease-fire rather than be boxed into dead-end military logic.

Matthieu Aikins, ["Last Stand in Kandahar: Can the military's massive counterinsurgency gamble salvage the Afghan war?"](#) *The Walrus*, December 2010.

Given the perverse incentive system ISAF has created, powerful Afghans now have a strong interest in perpetuating the conflict. ... Thanks to the increasingly corrupt Afghan government, the flourishing insurgency, and the massive increase in troop strength and foreign money, this system has now mutated into a vast web of private security and trucking companies, informal militias, and insurgents, through which mega-contracts like the US's \$2.16-billion Host Nations Trucking initiative flowed. ... Under ISAF,

international money – along with income from drugs and smuggling – has eaten through Afghan government and society like a universal solvent. ... This behind-the-scenes struggle for money has become the real story of Kandahar's politics, leaving formal institutions to play only a marginal role. ...

This fall's major military operations will no doubt establish greater physical control over the areas surrounding Kandahar City, by virtue of ISAF's might. But everyone knows the international forces won't be staying for long. "It is a fifteen-year job – but not a fifteen-year job for us," (Brigadier General Johnathan) Vance (Canadian commander Task Force Kandahar) had said.

RAND Corporation, [*Risking NATO: Testing the Limits of the Alliance in Afghanistan*](#), RAND Project Air Force, 2010.

NATO's success in Afghanistan – or lack thereof – will have significant implications for the future of the alliance. A successful mission in Afghanistan could promote the vision of NATO as a global security alliance capable of undertaking a wide scope of operations, ranging from diplomatic engagement to peace-keeping operations and even to combat operations beyond the bounds of the treaty area. Failure, or even an indeterminate outcome, would cloud the alliance's own future. The authors examine the risks, commitments, and obligations of the current mission in light of NATO's history and with an eye toward the future, as well as the effects on the alliance's internal dynamics. Drawing on a wide range of sources, the authors describe how NATO came to be involved, concerns and tensions that have developed over the investments and risks that member and nonmember states have in the operation, management of the expectations of nations and peoples, and the need for a coherent, comprehensive, and coordinated long-term strategy. The list of issues NATO faces is long and daunting and extends beyond the borders of the member countries. If the goal is indeed to look toward the future, however, the alliance must confront them; failure to do so would risk the long-term success and sustainability of the alliance.

United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, [*Harmful Traditional Practices and Implementation of the Law on Elimination of Violence against Women in Afghanistan*](#), Kabul and Geneva, 9 December 2010.

Widespread harmful traditional practices – child marriage, giving away girls for dispute resolution, forced isolation in the home, exchange marriage and "honour" killings – cause suffering, humiliation and marginalization for millions of Afghan women and girls. Such practices are grounded in discriminatory views and beliefs about the role and position of women in Afghan society. Many Afghans, including some religious leaders, reinforce these harmful customs by invoking their interpretation of Islam. In most cases, however, these practices are inconsistent with Sharia law as well as Afghan and international law, and violate the human rights of women. ...

Key recommendations:

- **The Government of Afghanistan** at the highest levels including the President should continue to publicly emphasize that promotion and protection of women's rights are an integral part and main priority of peace, reintegration and reconciliation throughout Afghanistan, and a central pillar of the country's political, economic, and security strategies.
- The Government should expedite implementation of the National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan, in particular a national strategy to

implement the EVAW [Elimination of Violence Against Women] law. As an immediate step, the President could by decree release from detention any woman or girl arrested for “running away,” which is not a crime under Afghan law (usually women who run away are charged with intention to commit *zina* [sexual relations outside marriage]).

- **The Supreme Court and Office of the Attorney General** should issue directives instructing the courts and prosecution offices to apply the EVAW law. Police and prosecutors should as required under the law register all complaints of harmful traditional practices criminalized by the EVAW law, and the Attorney General's office should promptly investigate and prosecute such cases.
- **The Ministry of Justice**, in cooperation with the national High Commission for Prevention of Violence against Women, should provide training and capacity building on the EVAW law to all law enforcement officials, including on recognizing, investigating, and prosecuting forced and child marriage and the practice of giving away girls to settle disputes.
- **Religious leaders**, together with the ministries of Hajj and Religious Affairs and Women's Affairs, should develop and deliver training and awareness-raising programmes for mullahs, imams and religious teachers about women's rights and the EVAW law. Religious leaders should speak out about harmful practices that are inconsistent with Islamic teaching and principles and hold open discussions among Sharia experts on Islam and women's rights.
- **International donors** should increase support to Government and civil society initiatives aimed at enforcement of the EVAW law and efforts to implement the National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan.

Canada, Senate Standing Committee on Human Rights, [*Training in Afghanistan: Include Women*](#), tabled in the Senate 15 December 2010. The report's recommendations address five areas of focus:

- **Political reconciliation:** Afghan women must be fully supported so that they can assume meaningful roles in any future peace negotiations and work to protect women's rights.
- **Security:** To acquire the tools needed to gain the trust of local communities and to uphold the rule of law, Afghan security forces need training in community policing, UN Security Council resolution 1325, women's rights and civilian protection. The trainers themselves – Canada's armed forces and police – require gender-sensitive training.
- **Justice:** Perpetrators must be held accountable for crimes committed against women. Capacity-building and awareness-raising initiatives across the justice system are needed to implement existing laws, such as the Elimination of Violence against Women law.
- **Education:** Education is central to sustainable development in Afghanistan. The education system and literacy programs require further resources, and a community-driven approach. Canada should also prioritize secondary and post-secondary education.
- **Local development:** Economic and social development assistance should target small-scale, local initiatives. Moreover, as they have benefited less than women living in urban centers since 2001, an increased focus on women in rural communities is required.

United States, The White House, [*Overview of the Afghanistan and Pakistan Annual Review*](#), Washington D.C., released 16 December 2010.

Only this unclassified summary was made public. Among its main findings:

The surge in coalition military and civilian resources, along with an expanded special operations forces targeting campaign and expanded local security measures at the village level, has reduced overall Taliban influence and arrested the momentum they had achieved in recent years in key parts of the country. Progress is most evident in the gains Afghan and coalition forces are making in clearing the Taliban heartland of Kandahar and Helmand provinces, and in the significantly increased size and improved capability of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). ...

While the momentum achieved by the Taliban in recent years has been arrested in much of the country and reversed in some key areas, these gains remain fragile and reversible. Consolidating those gains will require that we make more progress with Pakistan to eliminate sanctuaries for violent extremist networks. Durability also requires continued work with Afghanistan to transfer cleared areas to their security forces. We are also supporting Afghanistan's efforts to better improve national and sub-national governance, and to build institutions with increased transparency and accountability to reduce corruption – key steps in sustaining the Afghan government. And we have supported and focused investments in infrastructure that will give the Afghan government and people the tools to build and sustain a future of stability.

As President Obama emphasized in 2010, our civilian and military efforts must support a durable and favorable political resolution of the conflict. In 2011, we will intensify our regional diplomacy to enable a political process to promote peace and stability in Afghanistan, to include Afghan-led reconciliation, taking advantage of the momentum created by the recent security gains and the international consensus gained in Lisbon. As we shift to transition, a major challenge will be demonstrating that the Afghan government has the capacity to consolidate gains in geographic areas that have been cleared by ISAF and Afghan Security Forces.