



Civil Society Recommendations for the NATO Summit 2014

September 02, 2014

The decisions made at the NATO Conference due to begin in the United Kingdom on 4 September 2014 will have a significant impact on the direction of Afghanistan's peace and security efforts for the coming years. Most importantly, it will show the extent to which the international community is prepared to honor their commitment to sustain support to Afghanistan's peace and security as set out in the agreements and declarations of the Chicago Summit of May 2012 and other international pledges and agreements on Afghanistan since 2001.

Afghanistan once again stands at an important crossroad where its future hangs in a balance. With the prospect of complete withdrawal of international troops at the end of this year, it is important to evaluate the impact of the collective efforts by the Afghan government, international actors, as well as civil society groups on peace, security and stability in the country to date.

We believe that while some progress has been made, it is tenuous at best. Especially in the area of peace and security there have been setbacks in recent years that should not be ignored. Though increasing in numbers and capacity, the Afghan National Army (ANA) and the Afghan National Police (ANP) are not yet able to fully shoulder the responsibility of protecting Afghanistan and its people at this juncture. Though we are confident that with continuous international assistance Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) will be able to defend the country and contribute to regional and international security in the next ten years, it is too soon to let them fend for themselves at a time when they have just begun to find their footing.

Thus, we call on NATO, especially the United States, to revisit the current transition trajectory and reconsider a complete withdrawal of international military from Afghanistan by the end of 2014. It simply comes at the wrong time and will have grave repercussions not only for Afghanistan and the region, but also for international security at large. The situation as we see it today in Iraq must not be repeated in Afghanistan.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Afghanistan has undoubtedly made many gains since 2001. The following are worth highlighting:

- Our constitution has bridged Afghan and democratic values. Our population has actively embraced the democratic process, and policies, laws, and systems have taken into account global trends as well as the local context.
- There have been improvements in education and health care for both men and women.

- Women have been able to actively participate in the political and economic life of their country for the first time in many decades.
- Civil society groups and Afghan media are a vibrant and visible force interacting dynamically with communities and governing bodies, bridging the gaps between state and society, and actively influencing legislation and national policies.
- The capacity and size of the ANP and the ANA have improved after an important reform process. Despite shortcomings, especially in the area of women's rights and participation, both have managed to garner tremendous public support.
- The unprecedented wide participation of the Afghan people, especially women and youth, in both rounds of the presidential elections in the face of very real security threats, was a demonstration of Afghan desire for democratic and peaceful change. While the tension over the election results between the two presidential candidates and the election commission continues, it is important to reiterate that the Afghan population wants a peaceful resolution of the electoral impasse.

CHALLENGES

Despite achievements made, including with the ANSF, insecurity is getting worse, with significant numbers of civilians bearing the brunt of the conflict, especially in Afghanistan's South and East but also increasingly in the West and North. The first six months of this year witnessed a 24% increase in civilian casualties when compared to the same period in 2013. A total of 1564 Afghans were killed and many more injured, with especially women and children increasingly victimized.¹ What has changed with the international transition is that for the first time a greater number of individuals were killed in direct ground combat between ANSF and anti-government groups than Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), though the latter is still threatening many lives. The ANA's lack of international air support has allowed the Taliban to regroup and move around in greater numbers and engage an insufficiently equipped ANSF in ground combat with dire consequences for the civilian population.

A key challenge for the ANSF is to maintain its numbers and replace killed soldiers and police with new men. The Afghan government no longer shares ANSF casualty figures publicly, so we assume them to be high. This leads to problems of rapid recruitment and hasty training, weakening the morale of the ANSF further. The ANP has long been forced to take on military responsibilities in the fight against the Taliban, often serving as cannon fodder. This has stretched their capacity to adequately provide civilian policing.

The creation of the Afghan Local Police (ALP), as a temporary alternative, has only added to the problem as it has put arms and authority in the hands of individuals of questionable background and qualification. This has aggravated stress on the local population with rampant human rights violations by the ALP and other irregular pro-government militia. The Afghan government's capacity to reign in misbehavior has been very limited.

The inability of the Afghan government to maintain relative peace and security outside provincial and some selective district centers, especially in the country's South, East and West is leading to ever-increasing internal displacement. While official figures put Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) at nearly 700,000 (with a steady increase of 100,000 displaced per year over the past

¹ UNAMA 2014 Mid-year Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict
(http://www.unama.unmissions.org/Portals/UNAMA/human%20rights/2UNAMA%20of%20Civilians%20MYR%20014_17%20July%202014_FINAL.pdf)

three years), we believe this to be only the tip of the iceberg, as many more individuals (possibly twice or thrice as many) are fleeing toward the relative safety of the big urban centers in Afghanistan, especially Kabul. Afghans are also again increasingly seeking refuge abroad, and continue to top the list of the world's refugee and asylum seeker population.

Already struggling, the conflict in Pakistan has begun to spill-over further into Afghanistan with thousands of refugees fleeing the fighting in Waziristan and other border areas of Pakistan.² This has further exacerbated the humanitarian and security situations in these areas.

Last but not least, too little attention has been paid to Afghanistan's youth, especially young men coming to urban areas in search of education and employment. There has been ample evidence internationally that a rapidly growing young population that is unable to access education and employment leads to crime and insecurity; marginalized young men are very susceptible to be recruited into armed and insurgent groups or an ever-growing powerful (international) drug mafia. This is a problem Afghanistan and the international community needs to tackle jointly and very soon.

At present the Afghan government lacks capacity to deal with all these challenges alone. Widespread corruption and inertia in government departments has only aggravated the situation. The declining assistance by international actors will exacerbate this, if there is not a clear and transparent strategy for reduced donor engagement. We all know that the Afghan government is in essence a rentier state, dependent on international assistance and unable to pay for its security forces and bureaucracy. Drastically cutting off assistance can lead to collapse and intensify security challenges.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite the achievements made, there are many challenges ahead, which we believe need to be tackled jointly by the Afghan government, the international community and civil society. We understand that the current stand-off between the two leading presidential candidate has led to a loss in confidence vis-à-vis the Afghan government. We would like to remind NATO and international actors that Afghanistan is more than just its government and that the Afghan people need a functioning government and strong international support more than ever.

The SALAH consortium, speaking on behalf of the eight member civil society organizations and their constituencies in all provinces of Afghanistan, therefore call on NATO and international actors to:

- 1- Continue international financial and technical support to the ANSF for at least another decade.
- 2- Focus assistance on strengthening the ANSF rather than parallel structures such as the ALP, and work with the Afghan government to integrate ALP fighters into the ANP or ANA.
- 3- Revive a DDR programme targeted at all irregular armed groups and ALP remnants.
- 4- Develop a holistic strategy for the provision continuous technical and material assistance as well as capacity building to both the ANA and the ANP based on needs and priorities,

² UNHCR 2014 Conflict Induced Internal Displacement May 2014 update

so that security personnel are better qualified and equipped. A strong and capable security force will have a better morale and become a more attractive career option to Afghan youth.

- 5- Evaluate and improve the capacity building strategy to sensitize the ANSF to the needs and rights of the civilian population, especially the protection of women and children.
- 6- Work with the Afghan government to improve upon existing accountability mechanism, such as the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework, with clear and measurable indicators for the development and professionalization of the ANSF, especially in the areas of protection of civilians and human rights.
- 7- Support continued regional dialogues such as the Istanbul Conference for Afghanistan to facilitate a confidence-building process among neighboring nations in the region and develop joint strategies to combat threats posed by the insurgency, drug and weapons smuggling and the trafficking of humans.
- 8- Support an Afghan-led independent, inclusive and representative peace process that is facilitated by members of civil society, and not direct parties to the conflict in order, to ensure the participation of a broad cross-section of the Afghan population, especially women and youth.
- 9- Review and reevaluate the timeframe for the military security transition in order to ascertain whether it is realistic and will not risk the progress made so far in Afghanistan since 2002. Ensure the voices of the Afghan people weigh into this decision and human security and the protection of civilians is taken into account.

“END”

Please Do Not Forget Afghanistan and Above All Its Civilian Population

SALAH is a consortium of eight well established Afghan civil society organizations with a combined presence in all 34 provinces of Afghanistan active in policy and advocacy for promoting peace and security in Afghanistan based on the principles of democracy, respect for human rights, and equal participation of all Afghans regardless of their background: Afghan Community Rehabilitation Unit (ACRU), Afghan Public Welfare Organization (APWO), Afghan Women Education Center (AWEC), Coordination for Peace and Unity (CPAU), EQUALITY for Peace and Democracy (EPD), Peace Training and Research Organization (PTRO), Sanayee Development Organization (SDO), The Liaison Office (TLO) are members of Salah consortium.