



NATO Parliamentary Assembly

DEFENCE AND SECURITY
COMMITTEE

AFGHANISTAN

SPECIAL REPORT

Wolfgang HELLMICH (Germany)
Rapporteur

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	OVERVIEW	1
II.	THE MISSION: ENDS, WAYS, AND MEANS RSM ADAPTATION AND RESPONSE	2 2
III.	THE ANDSF AND THE INSURGENCY	4
	A. ANDSF	4
	B. INSURGENT FORCES	5
	C. TALIBAN	5
	D. DAESH IN AFGHANISTAN – ISIL-K	6
	E. OTHER INSURGENT GROUPS	7
IV.	POLITICAL, SOCIAL, AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS	7
	A. AFGHANISTAN'S NATIONAL UNITY GOVERNMENT'S POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS	7
	B. THE STRUGGLE TO STEM CORRUPTION IN AFGHANISTAN	9
	C. NUG'S PROGRESS ON PEACE NEGOTIATIONS WITH NON-STATE ARMED GROUPS	10
	D. STATUS OF THE CURRENT CIVILIAN SECURITY ENVIRONMENT: PRECARIOUS	11
	E. INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS AND RETURNEES	12
	F. WEAK ECONOMIC GROWTH (ECONOMIC GROWTH FIGURES) AND LOSS OF PRIVATE-SECTOR, FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT (FDI)	13
V.	CONCLUSIONS	14
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	15

I. OVERVIEW

1. In his February 9, 2017 testimony before the United States Congress, General John W. Nicholson, Jr., Commander of Resolute Support Mission (RSM) and of US Forces in Afghanistan (USFOR-A), told the US Senate Armed Services Committee the battle theatre in Afghanistan is at a “stalemate” (Nicholson, 2017). A review of the Afghan security sector in 2016 reinforces this understanding: the balance of forces on the ground may continue to favour the government in Kabul, but a lasting peace remains far off. Still, the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) are increasingly optimised for defending against the threat posed by the myriad insurgent and terrorist groups in the country, reinforcing hope the ultimate goal of a peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan remains achievable.

2. NATO and its international partners’ forces continue to provide linchpin support against the persistent insurgency in the country, which continues to inflict high casualty levels against the ANDSF, as well as a growing number among the civilian population and the rising levels of internally displaced persons (IDPs). The stalemate between the government and the forces opposing its consolidation of power leaves a largely rural/urban divide in the country, with insurgent forces holding considerable sway in the vast rural expanses of the country, while urban population centres remain in the hands of government forces as they concentrate their efforts to secure and hold these areas.

3. President Ghani has a four-year vision for the enhancement of the capabilities and, as a result, effectiveness of the ANDSF and its ability to expand control over Afghan population centres. In the interim, it is clear international forces will have to play an essential supporting role – from close air support to more calibrated training, advising, and assisting. NATO Commanders at Allied Joint Force Command Brunssum note the concerted efforts to improve logistics, command and control, intelligence gathering and analysis, to the finer attributes of effective security sector maintenance, such as leadership skills and resource management.

4. Despite tactical level setbacks in the face of the widespread Taliban campaign, the ANDSF is organising effective operational counter-attacks, neutralising any real advances by the Taliban. The delivery of fixed and rotary wing aircraft is greatly improving the ANDSF’s ability to execute its mission at all operational levels. In addition, modifications to the RSM mandate and US Forces’ Rules of Engagement in the country have given international forces much greater ability to support the ANDSF in operation.

5. While continued efforts and adaptation from international forces are necessary for the ANDSF, they are not sufficient for the ANDSF and the government in Kabul to find a lasting peace in the country. As this report notes, a clear, sustained campaign to push for effective governance and management in Kabul and throughout the country is essential – this means continued efforts to diminish the corrosive effects of corruption at all levels, particularly in the ANDSF.

6. The international community continues to maintain a conditions-based withdrawal schedule for the country, but support for and patience with the government in Kabul will not last forever. NATO and its operational partners are committed to the improvement of forces on the ground throughout Afghanistan and to the development of sound institutions in Kabul beyond 2020.

7. As such, the coming year is essential for the government in Kabul to show marked improvement in its ability to reform and refine its institutional governance, and to find solutions to resolve the continued fighting disrupting the country’s development.

8. Finally, a critical element will be the steps regional actors take to join the international community’s efforts and investment goals in Afghanistan. Various regional actors’ courses of action with the Taliban will be critical. Further, recent interest in the fight against Daesh¹’s advancements

¹ Arabic acronym of the terrorist organisation “Islamic State in Iraq and Syria”

in the country conceals hidden economic interests by certain actors seeking to exploit weak government control outside of Kabul; China's Silk Road initiative, which interests Pakistan, Russia, and Iran, illustrating this point well.

II. THE MISSION: ENDS, WAYS, AND MEANS

9. NATO Allies and partners agreed at the June 2017 Meeting of NATO Defence Ministers to extend NATO's Resolute Support mission beyond 2017 (NATO). The goals of the mission remain the same: to prevent Afghanistan's retreat into a sanctuary for terrorist forces capable of exporting violence and instability; as well as to provide the conditions and support for Afghanistan to sustain its own 'security, governance, and economic and social development.'

10. To achieve these ends, Allies and partners also agreed to continue funding the Afghan defence and security forces until the end of 2020. In addition, the Alliance committed to strengthen the breadth and depth of its partnership with Afghanistan via 'political dialogue and practical cooperation.'²

11. The shift from a calendar-driven approach to a more conditions-based framework for Allied defence and security support to Afghanistan in 2016 implicitly recognised the declining security environment in the country. Several key variables are currently slowing down any consideration of a total Allied withdrawal from the country.

12. First, the increasingly effective and violent Taliban-led insurgency in the country is shifting the balance of forces on the ground in the battle theatre, prompting RSM and USFOR-A Commander General John W. Nicholson, to call the current struggle for control over Afghanistan's territory "a stalemate" (Nicholson). Such a dynamic is stalling any real progress to negotiate peace between the government and its opposition forces. Until the tide turns decidedly against the Taliban-led insurgency, this will likely remain the case.

13. Second, the ANDSF continue to have capability shortfalls hampering their ability to execute their missions effectively, efficiently, and independently. These shortfalls are the most pronounced in the following areas: leadership, ISR, inter-service and agency logistics and coordination, and capable air wing support (IISS).

14. Third, the ANDSF are hobbled by endemic corruption within the broader institutional framework, from the defence ministry to the enlisted soldier. Persistent problems with corrupt procurement practices to the on-going phenomenon of 'ghost soldiers' undermine the performance of the ANDSF at all levels, leading to poor mission execution, underequipped soldiers, and even battlefield deaths due to incompetent command and control (SIGAR, 2017a; US DoD, 2016).

RSM Adaptation and Response

15. To fulfil their task, Allies and partners are focused on several broad areas. First the mission is adapting its efforts to better address continued ANDSF capability shortfalls: the Warsaw Summit declaration on Afghanistan is providing the time and resources necessary to achieve this.

16. Resolute Support mission in Afghanistan will continue to focus through the coming years on training, advising, and assisting the ANDSF, as well as the Ministries of Defence (MoD) and

² As noted in the *Warsaw Summit Declaration on Afghanistan*, paragraph 6 section C, which was issued by the Heads of State and Government of Afghanistan and Allies and their Resolution Support Operational Partners. http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133171.htm

Interior (MoI).³ The framework for the mission remains the same as NATO and partner forces work through regional and functional commands - meaning train, advise, and assist commands in Kabul, as well as in the north, east, south, and west of the country.

17. Specific changes to strengthen the necessary hard and soft skills of the ANDSF come with the decision to deploy RSM expeditionary advisory teams, which provide an immediate, on-site and situationally-appropriate support to the ANDSF both on base and in operation. The mission also continues to work closely with the ANDSF, the MoD and the MoI in the capital to stem inefficiencies in procurement, training, as well as in planning and operations (US DoD, 2016).

18. RSM coalition forces continue to work to integrate combat enablers to address the operational shortcomings of the ANDSF; specifically, modern ISR platforms, artillery systems, aerial fires, and counter-IED (Improvised Explosive Device) capabilities (DoD, 2017). Encouragingly, thanks to the delivery of eight Super Tucano light attack aircraft, 18 MD-530 helicopters, and 159 UH-60A Black Hawks, the ANDSF is strengthening the integration of close air attack capability to its operations (IISS; Snow and Wolf).

19. Since the end of the EUPOL Afghanistan Mission, RSM is leading the training, advising, and assisting mission with the Afghan National Police (ANP). The Afghan National Army (ANA) and Police lead the intelligence-driven strike operations against the various insurgent networks in the country. A focus on the Afghan National Police is part of the RSM exit strategy for NATO and its operational partners' forces once reconciliation agreements are reached with the principal insurgent forces (JFC Brunssum briefings, 2017).

20. RSM currently consists of 11,599 personnel from 39 contributing nations (26 NATO Allies and 13 operation partner nations). The United States' overall force structure numbers approximately 11,000; approximately 8,400 US soldiers are assigned to RSM and the remainder conduct counterterrorism operations in the country under USFOR-A's Operation Freedom's Sentinel (OFS) (Cooper). However, given the deteriorated security environment several Allies have committed to increasing their force levels.

21. Following the Meeting of NATO Defence Ministers in June, Secretary General Stoltenberg announced that 15 member states pledged to increase the size of their forces participating in the mission in Afghanistan. The UK Defence Minister, for example, announced that the UK would deploy approximately 100 additional troops to Afghanistan in the coming months. (Agence Europe, 2017). Lithuania, too, will increase its force level by 30% this fall (Baltic Times).

22. US policy makers have long-debated the need for a new strategy and force level increases in Afghanistan. However, the United States' longest war tests the attention of a weary public, and a President who has historically admonished the mission there. Still, on 21 August, President Trump outlined a continuing strategy for the United States in Afghanistan that would continue a mini-surge of an additional several thousand troops, relaxed rules of engagement for US Forces in the battle theatre, and increased pressure on regional states to help stabilise Afghanistan. President Trump noted particular pressure to be put on Pakistan to become part of the solution to peace in the region. President Trump's new strategy outlined few real details, however, and made it clear any future withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan would be conditions based (Hirschfeld Davis, 2017).

³ Resolute Support is a non-combat, train, advise, and assist mission launched on January 1, 2015 in the immediate aftermath of the NATO-combat mission, ISAF (International Security Assistance Forces) . In parallel to the launch of Resolute Support Mission, the ANDSF took responsibility for security throughout Afghanistan. NATO forces are in Afghanistan at the invitation of the Afghan government in Kabul, and a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), which entered into force on the same day as Resolute Support mission, provides the legal framework authorising their presence.

III. THE ANDSF AND THE INSURGENCY

A. ANDSF

23. The Alliance's recommitment in Warsaw to Resolute Support prompted the Ghani government to renew the strategic objectives of the ANDSF. The plan, entitled the "ANDSF Road Map", began in early 2017 and is a 4 phase plan to, 1) restructure the ANDSF in 2017 and set the conditions for offensive operations; 2) continue building the ANDSF's offensive capabilities in 2018 through special operations force growth and set the conditions for major offensive operations; 3) execute large-scale offensive operations in 2019, targeting areas with a weak Afghan Government presence; and 4) ensure that the ANDSF can protect these expanded population centres, where 80% of the Afghan population lives.

24. Taken together the Ghani government hopes the "Road Map" can lead to expanded governance and economic development while also "compel[ling] the Taliban to seek reconciliation". The four-year plan will undoubtedly be challenged by an emboldened Taliban, which perceives battlefield momentum to be shifting in its favour. However, ANDSF have demonstrated their effective offensive capabilities throughout 2016 and 2017 by their ability to hold urban centres (US DoD, 2017).

25. This year will be a crucial for the ANDSF in their fight against insurgent forces. The "Road Map's" emphasis on shifting force posture from defensive to offensive and ANDSF reliance on Special Forces units is straining these forces. In combination with US and NATO-led force development programmes and building the capacity of the Afghan Air Force (AAF), international and Afghan military planners consider the current period to be a building year. However, the AAF's newly developed capacity for ISR and indirect air fires emboldens Afghan forces' ability to retake lost territory quickly. As a result, the ANDSF remain in control of approximately 60% of the total territory in the country. The remaining 40% can be understood as follows: 10% controlled by insurgent-led forces, and the remaining 25% contested.

26. The ANDSF are authorised to scale to 352,000 ANA and ANP personnel. In addition, 30,000 Afghan Local Police are funded by the United States and overseen by the Afghan Mol. The ANDSF continue to operate below its authorised levels; attrition is mostly the result of desertion, which accounts for over 70% of all personnel losses. The current force levels of the ANDSF are as follows: 174,274 ANA, 7,952 AAF, and 148,710 ANP (US DoD, 2017).

27. ANDSF casualty rates continued to climb over the last year of reporting; direct fire attacks, IED explosions, and mine strikes continue to be the leading causes (US DoD, 2016).⁴ As mentioned in the previous two DSC reports [164 DSC 16 E bis] and [169 DSC 15 E rev.1 fin], ANDSF casualty rate increase is the result of the forces taking sole responsibility for security throughout the country. In addition, relatively mild winters over the last two years have lengthened the traditional Spring-to-Summer fighting season and allowed insurgent fighters greater freedom of movement throughout most of the year (US DoD, 2016).

28. Insider attacks have reemerged as a threat to Afghan forces in 2017. While these attacks have plagued the ANDSF in their fight against the Taliban since 2002, they have never been an existential threat to either Afghan or international forces. Insider attacks have caused a total of 362 coalition casualties since 2006 (i.e., dead and wounded). However, their re-emergence is cause for concern because insider attacks inflict deep psychological harm and engender mistrust between Afghan and international forces; adversely affecting force morale. Insider attacks include both green-on-blue attacks (e.g., friendly fire) and infiltrations by insurgent forces. Specifically, 40% of all green-on-blue attacks can be attributed to ANDSF soldiers' personal grievances; 14% can be attributed to co-opted Afghan forces and the Taliban is responsible for another quarter of attacks

⁴ The number of IED explosions and mine strikes has declined consistently over the last two-years, as reported by the US Department of Defense.

by infiltration - the remaining quarter are listed as undetermined. Fortunately, military planners have successfully addressed insider attacks in the past. In mid-2012, Afghan and coalition military leadership made a series of internal reforms and removed hundreds of suspect soldiers from their ranks. The result was an 80% decrease in insider attacks (Ahmad, 2017). Recently however, Taliban and ISIL-K infiltrations have led to a series of large-scale attacks against civilian and military personnel across the country. The lethality of recent insider attacks brings the ANDSF's vulnerabilities into sharp relief and demonstrates the sustained effectiveness of the Afghan insurgencies.

B. INSURGENT FORCES

29. The insurgent threat in Afghanistan continues to present a persistent and daunting challenge to US and NATO forces. The Afghanistan-Pakistan region is infamously home to 20 designated terrorist organisations and insurgent groups, 13 groups are principally or totally in Afghanistan and the other seven in Pakistan (SIGAR, 2017a). Specifically, Afghanistan and its border regions provide the principal operating areas for the Taliban, Al-Qaeda and its affiliates, the Haqqani Network, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), ISIL-K, and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). The density of non-state armed groups in Afghanistan produces a complex security environment which continuously upends the region's peace and security (US DoD, 2016).

C. TALIBAN

30. The Taliban's spring 2017 offensive is a continuation of the insurgency's unprecedented violence from 2016. As noted above, the insurgency currently maintains control of at least 10% of Afghanistan's population and is contesting ANDSF for control over another approximately 25% of the population. The insurgency continues to lead successful campaigns in rural parts of the country where Kabul's administrative control is weak. The Taliban's resurgence focused on Badakhshan, Baghlan, Farah, Faryab, Helmand, Kunar, Kunduz, Laghman, Sari Pul, Zabul and Uruzgan Provinces. Within Helmand specifically, the Taliban retook 4 of 14 districts and are vying for control over the capital, Lashkar Gah (UN, 2017). In March 2017, the Taliban also managed to capture the Sangin district, thereby consolidating its position in the main poppy-growing areas straddling Helmand and Kandahar provinces. Afghanistan's military leadership admits that if it were not for US close air support, Afghan forces could not halt the Taliban in Helmand (Mackenzie).

31. The Taliban continues to achieve success in periodic, large-scale attacks inside Afghanistan's capital, Kabul. Between June 2016 and May 2017, the Taliban conducted 18 major attacks in Kabul, including high-profile assaults on the American University of Afghanistan and the Ministry of Defence (US DoD, 2016). Notably, the National Directorate of Security, Afghanistan's security agency, credited the Haqqani Network for the massive truck bomb in Kabul's diplomatic quarter that killed 90 people and injured nearly 400 (Hindustan Times, 2017b; Rasmussen, 2017a). On 21 April 2017, the Taliban struck a major blow to Afghan forces when, dressed as a local police officer, a man detonated a bomb inside the Balkh military base near Mazar-e Sharif. The massive explosion killed 144 people and injured 66. Most of the victims were Afghan soldiers (i.e., *hors de combat*) and hospital staff (Constable and Salahuddin, 2017b; US DoD, 2017).

32. The deadly trend of targeting urban centres, like Kabul, has taken a toll on the civilian population. Though, as of this update, there have 20% fewer attacks in Afghanistan's capital in 2017, 20% of all reported civilian casualties in the country were in Kabul (US DoD, 2017; Al Jazeera, 2017c). The Taliban's ability to straddle the urban-rural divide in its conflict with the ANDSF is an effective tactic to undermine public perceptions of the government in Kabul's ability to provide security in the country. The Taliban's success in Kabul can be attributed to its alliance with the Haqqani Network that was established in 2016 (Weinbaum and Babbar, 2016).

33. As noted in the 2016 DSC Special Report on Afghanistan, Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada, the Taliban's leader, successfully cultivated alliances to strengthen the operational reach of the group, with Sirajuddin Haqqani, the head of the Haqqani Network, being among the most high-profile (NATO PA, 2016; US DoD, 2016). The latest US DoD's assessment highlights the Taliban's strategic alliance with the Haqqani Network as a key driver of the enhanced lethality of the insurgency (US DoD, 2016). In contrast with previous Taliban leaders, Mullah Akhundzada's alliance building strengthened the Taliban's cohesion and expanded its tactical operations (US DoD, 2016). Additionally, General Nicholson, in his Senate testimony in February 2017, noted the Russian Federation's increased support to the Taliban, a variable that surely strengthens the group's effectiveness (Nicholson, 2017).

34. The Taliban's 2017 spring operation produced an unprecedented level of violence. There were 6,252 security-related incidents between 1 March and 31 May—a 2% increase compared with the same period from 2016. The central and south-eastern regions of Afghanistan were the most affected by insurgent violence with a 22% increase from 2016. While 64% of the fighting between the Taliban and the ANDSF were direct-fire armed clashes, the Taliban continues to employ a range of asymmetric tactics from abductions and assassinations to IEDs (UN, 2017).

35. It is for these reasons Secretary James Mattis stated in testimony in the United States Senate in June 2017 that US and coalition forces were not “winning” in Afghanistan (Mattis, 2017).

D. DAESH IN AFGHANISTAN – ISIL-K

36. ISIL-K's operational posture continues to decline throughout 2017. Aggressive US counterterrorism operations, ANDSF operations, and competition with the Taliban weakened the group (US DoD, 2016). ISIL-K once held territory in six Afghan provinces, but is now limited to south and south eastern Nangarhar with hold on four districts (US DoD, 2017; United Nations 2016).

37. Under the banner of Operation Hamza, US counterterror and Afghan Special Forces are conducting aggressive air and ground operations against the group (US DoD, 2017). In April, US forces successfully targeted and killed ISIL-K's most recent leader, Abdul Hassib—the second such assassination of an ISIL-K leader in a year (United Nations, 2016; US DoD, 2016; Al Jazeera, 2017a). ISIL-K, however, still maintains the ability to conduct high-profile attacks across Afghanistan. In March 2017, the group attacked a military hospital in Kabul killing 30 and wounding 70 (Bruton and Mengli, 2017). In May, the group targeted a state television station killing 6 and wounding 24 in Jalalabad (Shirzad).

38. The group's utilisation of former Al-Qaeda cave networks has been cause for concern by US counterterror forces. This resulted in the decision by US forces to use, for the first time, a massive ordinance air blast (MOAB)⁵ against the group (Constable and Salahuddin, 2017a; US DoD, 2017). The use of this particular ordinance was praised by the Trump administration, but prompted a larger discussion on US Afghanistan policy (Cunningham and Salahuddin, 2017). In fact, despite MAOB's deployment in April, it is unclear that its tactical success led to any sort of strategic achievement. In June, ISIL-K successfully retook a former Al-Qaeda mountain network in Tora Bora (Constable and Salahuddin, 2017a). Second, analysts question whether the headline-grabbing fight against ISIL-K is useful when it is the Taliban who is effectively threatening the national government's control across the country (Smith and Shalizi, 2017).

39. High levels of attrition continue to eat away at the group's base of available fighters. While the group used to be able to field up to several thousand fighters in the country, most recent estimates now put that number at approximately 700 (Mashal and Abed, 2017). ISIL-K is attempting to counter its losses with aggressive recruitment activities in eastern Afghanistan. They have found some success recruiting former TTP members and former IMU members (US DoD,

⁵ Colloquially referred to as the “Mother of All Bombs”

2016; Tarzi, 2017). However, the group's ideology is gaining little support among civilians given ISIL-K's characteristic differences with Afghanistan's domestic ethnic and religious groups (Barr and Moreng, 2016).

40. ISIL-K is also experiencing difficulty raising revenue inside Afghanistan. While the Taliban has expanded its narcotics-trafficking and tax collection schemes, ISIL-K relies primarily on international funding (Mashal and Rahim, 2017). ISIL-K's attempts at domestic revenue collection have increasingly put it at odds with the Taliban, which does not bode well for the insurgent group (US DoD, 2016).

E. OTHER INSURGENT GROUPS

41. Al-Qaeda narrowed its focus in the second half of 2016 to "survival, regeneration, and planning of future attacks" (US DoD, 2016). Though a shadow of its former presence in the country, the group remains a priority to US counterterrorism efforts in Afghanistan, especially in targeting Al-Qaeda's presence in the east, northeast, and southeast of the country. The group receives some critical support from both the Taliban and, specifically, the Haqqani Network. There is no evidence, however, to suggest coordination between the groups at the strategic level. Al-Qaeda's recruitment remains focused on Arab populations abroad; however, the group's regional affiliate, AQIS, continues to recruit militants from South and Central Asia successfully (US DoD, 2016).

42. While the leadership of the Taliban, the Haqqani Network, ISIL-K, and Al-Qaeda are strategically separate, many of the insurgents do cooperate at the tactical level (US DoD, 2016). Among the challenges cited in the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction report is the potential of an amalgamation of these groups into a "virulent strain" of insurgent groups greater than the sum of their parts (SIGAR, 2017a). On 19 March 2017 Qari Yasin, the alleged leader of Al-Qaeda in Paktika province, was killed in a US airstrike.

IV. POLITICAL, SOCIAL, AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS

A. AFGHANISTAN'S NATIONAL UNITY GOVERNMENT'S POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

43. Government cohesion and cooperation remain a challenge for Afghanistan's national unity government (NUG) and for its executive leadership due to continued crisis and controversy. However, Afghanistan's leadership is neither indifferent to, nor unaware of, the disunity within President Ashraf Ghani's administration. First Vice President Abdul Rashid Dostum has been the most recent high-profile force for continued disunity.

44. Mr Dostum, an ethnic Uzbek and former warlord who joined the national unity government in 2014, is known for his forces committing grave atrocities during Afghanistan's long civil war. In October 2016, Dostum accused President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah of ethnic bias due to their perceived partiality for Pashtuns and Tajiks respectively (UN, 2016; Khaama Press, 2016). The following month, Dostum was under investigation by the Minister of Justice for ordering his security guards to kidnap and sexually abuse Ahmad Eshchi, the former governor of Jowzjan province, whom Dostum considers a political opponent. In a sign, the government is seeking to strengthen the application of the rule of law, even among powerful figures in the country, General Dostum's guards were taken in custody and questioned in February 2017 (Mashal, 2017; Nordland and Sukhanyar, 2017). In May, Dostum distanced himself from the accusation by allegedly seeking medical treatment in Turkey (Rasmussen, 2017b).

45. Political unrest in late 2016 and early 2017 was not solely limited to Mr Ghani's administration. Movements such as the Hazara Enlightenment Movement and the Afghan Protection and Stability Council (APSC) continue to present a degree of external challenge to the current government (UN, 2016). Following a terrorist attack against the Enlightenment Movement during a public demonstration in July 2016 (BBC News, 2016), the group insisted on greater Hazara youth representation in government ministries as well as for the government to review the plans for a key infrastructural development project affecting their community (UN, 2016). The Hazara, a mostly Shia ethnic minority in the country, has insisted the government keep its original plan of passing the TUTAP⁶ electricity project through its territory in Baniya province, which the government is currently reviewing.

46. To the relief of many, the APSC, which is composed of former senior government officials from the Karzai administration, as well as former warlords and members of civil society, indicated publicly on 21 September 2016, it would seek to help the government carry out its five-year mandate. Many from within the original movement, with which former President Hamid Karzai is aligned, continue to maintain a critical stance on the government. Particular points of concern for the dissenters include the inclusion of under-represented ethnic groups in government posts as well as addressing endemic corruption (Associated Press, 2016). The Ghani government is attempting to address these groups' concerns through mediation efforts, which began on 1 November 2016; yet, it remains to be seen if the government can deliver (UN, 2016).

47. The combination of political unrest within Afghanistan's executive leadership, pressure from external opposition groups, and persistent ethnic tensions within the government and throughout the country brought the Ghani government to an impasse with Afghanistan's National Assembly. This resulted in the parliament passing no confidence votes on the performances of 7 of 16 summoned ministers last November. The chief complaint being the ministers had not spent their allocated budgets, a euphemism for the corrupt allocation of resources. Key ministries figured among the accused, such as Foreign Affairs, Labour, Education, Public Works, Transport and Civil Aviation, Higher Education, and Communications and Information Technology (Mashal, 2016; UN, 2016). However, some progress has been made on appointments to the following ministries: Labour, Mines and Petroleum, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled, Tourism Affairs, and the State Minister for Parliamentary Affairs (UN, 2017).

48. The Wolesi Jirga's actions provoked a political confrontation between the legislature and President Ghani late last year (Mashal, 2016). More recently, MPs of the parliament's administrative board called for President Ghani's resignation. Their biggest contention being that the President does not cooperate with parliament and has taken an "autocratic" attitude towards the body (Ansar, 2017). The challenges to the NUGs internal cohesion and its relationship with the Wolesi Jirga will come to ahead as political parties and actors prepare for the 2018 parliamentary and 2019 presidential elections.

49. It should be also noted that the Afghan government continues to make progress in electoral reform, despite the above-mentioned domestic political unrest. In late September President Ghani issued a decree to streamline electoral law. The new law simply entitled, Election Law, set out new guidelines governing Afghanistan's Independent Election Commission (IEC) and Independent Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC) (Adili and van Bijlert, 2017; UN, 2016). In March, President Ghani appointed a new Chief Electoral Officer—a position that had been vacant since 2014 (UN, 2017).

⁶ The Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan-Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan electricity project has set off a contentious geopolitical and ethnic debate inside of Afghanistan: The project's passage through specific regions will not only bring much-needed electrical supply to impoverished regions, but it will also give the region control over the supply of power to the capital city, Kabul.

50. The IEC's most significant task is outlined in Article 35 of the Election Law and will be to reorganise the Wolesi Jirga by partitioning provincial constituencies into smaller electoral units. Along with changing the electoral units, Article 35 aims to replace Afghanistan's single non-transferable voting system to a first-past-the-post, single-member constituency system. Analysts believe the new first-past-the-post system may undermine gender quotas in Afghanistan's electoral process—a feature enshrined in Article 83 of the Constitution (Adili and van Bijlert, 2017). However, ECC leadership have begun drafting a gender policy to improve women's representation in the Commission. The ECC is also undertaking a study for consideration on the implementation of new voting technologies in future elections including "electronic national identification (ID) cards". National authorities ran a pilot programme of the ID cards this summer, which may be ready for use in the next election (UN, 2017).

51. National consensus on electoral reforms is an essential prerequisite to the election of the National Assembly. The current Assembly is governing outside its elected mandate, which was supposed to end in 2015. This puts the legitimacy of Afghanistan's legislative body at stake. Recently, however, the election commission chief Najibullah Ahmadzai announced that new elections will take place in July 2018 (Hindustan Times, 2017a). In preparation for the parliamentary elections, Afghan officials have already begun identifying and testing the nation's 7,000 polling stations (Shaheed, 2017). The proposed 2018 date should give IEC officials and political actors enough time to prepare for a vibrant election. It should also give Afghan forces adequate time to establish relative security across the country.

B. THE STRUGGLE TO STEM CORRUPTION IN AFGHANISTAN

52. Among Afghanistan's greatest challenges is persistent public-sector corruption. Continued corruption from the procurement sector to the nomination of key government posts saps efficient government function at the institutional level and is even a direct cause of battlefield casualties. For a country so highly dependent on international aid for all sectors of government and civil society function, this is among the most (if not the most) pernicious problems facing Afghanistan's reconstruction.

53. Although President Ghani made combatting corruption a priority of his administration in 2014, progress remains slow. This is evidenced by the lack of year-on-year improvement measured by Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index: Afghanistan still ranks near the bottom at 169 out of 176 countries (Transparency International, 2017). Further, for every USD8 billion of aid to Afghanistan, USD1 billion is lost to corruption, which is a staggering percentage (Transparency International, 2016).

54. Combatting public sector corruption is especially important in Afghanistan because its transatlantic partners cover 60% of the country's USD7.331 billion national budget. Moreover, 50% of the national budget will be spent on public procurement, which is especially vulnerable to corrupt practices (SIGAR, 2017a; Integrity Watch Afghanistan, 2016). The reliance on US and European funds encouraged the United States' Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) to place heavy emphasis in helping the Afghan government confront corruption in public contracts.

55. SIGAR has investigated a number of cases with Afghan authorities saving hundreds of millions of dollars in public contracts—one example includes a USD1 billion fuel contract. Afghan suppliers colluded against the Afghan government by offering the same bid price and blocking other bidders. An investigation into the bids made by non-colluding firms found that the fuel contract could be completed at a reduced cost of USD785 million instead of the initial, USD1 billion offer. In the end, proper Afghan and US oversight on the bidding process saved US taxpayers USD200 million (SIGAR, 2017a). To date, SIGAR has identified USD2.1 billion in cost savings for US taxpayers (SIGAR, 2017b).

56. Regarding the government's response to the problem of unaccounted for (or 'ghost') soldiers, Afghan officials have registered 88% of ANA, AAF, Special Mission Wing, and MoD elements into the Afghanistan Human Resource Information Management System; 7% of MoD personnel still remain "unaccounted for". Biometric records and registering ANDSF personnel into integrated online management systems has provided for USD18.5 million in cost avoidance since January 2017 (SIGAR, 2017b).

57. The international donor conference held in Brussels in 2016 made clear that, following discussions between donors and the Afghan government, future support to Afghanistan would be dependent on progress by the Afghan government on a range of policy priorities, including on effective action to combat corruption. To this end, the Ghani administration promptly moved forward with their plan to develop self-reliance. The five-year *Afghan National Peace and Development Framework* is a long-term plan to guide the government and donors towards a sustainable and viable Afghan state by addressing poverty, improving education and promoting social welfare through public programmes and stimulating the private sector.

58. With regards to combatting corruption, there have been some significant achievements, most notably the establishment of the Anti-Corruption Justice Centre. In June 2016 President Ghani established the Anti-Corruption Justice Centre (ACJC) through Presidential Decree No. 53 with the purpose of investigating, prosecuting and adjudicating serious corruption cases. The ACJC represents a turning point in the country's fight against corruption as it delivers justice in an impartial, transparent, and effective manner. Since 2015, President Ghani has chaired, the National Procurement Commission (NPC). Afghanistan's NPC resides within the National Procurement Authority (NPA), which trains and assesses the quality and completion of public contracts. The NPC reviews specific government contracts relating to infrastructure, construction, and utilities valued at more than USD300,000. Through September 2016, Transparency International estimated the NPC's oversight was responsible for nearly USD350 million in savings (SIGAR, 2017a). The NPA continues to make progress and in September 2016 signed a Memorandum of Understanding with a Washington, D.C.-based firm, to enhance oversight and improve transparency in bidding processes for public contracts. Progress is expected in 2017 as the Afghans continue to build their capacity for transparency, and international donors continue to demand it in return from the government in Kabul.

C. NUG'S PROGRESS ON PEACE NEGOTIATIONS WITH NON-STATE ARMED GROUPS

59. 2016 saw mixed progress on peace negotiations between the Afghan government and the various insurgent groups (e.g., the Taliban), as the Taliban's military successes during the year's fighting season did not allow for a ripe negotiating environment (Mashal, 2016). As noted in previous reports, President Ghani's government sought a peace agreement with Hezb-e-Islami, which was successfully negotiated and signed on 29 September 2016. The agreement was the first of its kind between the government in Kabul and a domestic insurgent group since 2001 (Al Jazeera, 2016). As part of the agreement, Hezb-e-Islami would recognise Afghanistan's constitution and cease all of its military activities. In exchange, the Ghani government would support a request to remove the group's leader, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, from the UN Security Council's (UNSC) sanctioned individuals list. The sanctions request was fulfilled in February 2017 and, after 20 years in hiding, Hekmatyar returned to Afghan national politics (Al Jazeera, 2017b). Following a speech at the Presidential Palace in May, analysts anticipate Hekmatyar's Hezb-e-Islami will unite with the Arghandiwal Hizb-e-Islami in an effort to establish themselves as the dominant political force in Afghanistan (UN, 2017).

60. In an effort to build on the momentum from the negotiated settlement with Hezb-e-Islami, the Ghani government launched a new, inclusive effort to achieve peace and security in Afghanistan this past summer. The Kabul Process on Peace and Security Cooperation is an Afghan led initiative that aims to promote a whole-of-government approach to achieving peace through

regional cooperation. Specifically, the regional approach reflects the Ghani administration's belief that to achieve peace in Afghanistan there must be a reliable Pakistani partner for peace (Hadley and Yusuf; *The Nation*; Faramarz). The first conference, held in June, brought together 23 countries including the European Union, the United Nations, and NATO representatives (MFA; TOLO News).

61. The momentum of a successfully negotiated settlement with Hizb-e-Islami and the government-led Kabul Process are welcome developments from the Ghani government. The dual successes demonstrate that President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah are both open to negotiating with various non-state armed groups and that the government understands the regional scope of establishing peace in Afghanistan. In combination with the ANDSF Road Map, sustained international support for peace talks, such as the Kabul Process, will be key to stability in Afghanistan and the region.

D. STATUS OF THE CURRENT CIVILIAN SECURITY ENVIRONMENT: PRECARIOUS

62. The general security situation for Afghan citizens deteriorated throughout 2016 and remains precarious today. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) report cites 11,418 conflict-related civilian casualties for all of 2016 and 5,243 for the first half of 2017.

63. UNAMA's 2016 figures represent the largest year-on-year casualty count since the mission began record keeping in 2009. The first half of 2017 represents a continuation of the record-breaking violence against civilians. As mentioned earlier, however, there have been more security-related incidents in 2017 than in 2016. The intensifying ground fighting since January 2016 has increasingly prompted civilians to flee conflict-affected areas, which is reflected in Afghanistan's persistent IDPs crisis.

64. UNAMA notes the greatest portion of civilian casualties can be attributed to ground engagements between pro- and anti-government forces. UNAMA specifically cites that anti-government forces were responsible for nearly two-thirds of civilian casualties, while pro-government forces were responsible for just over a fifth of civilians killed or wounded (UNAMA, 2017b). By way of example, the report notes the AAF was responsible for double the number of civilian casualties in 2016 as compared to 2015 (UNAMA). Aerial operations continue to inflict significant harm on the Afghan population in 2017—UNAMA recorded a 43% increase in civilian casualties as compared with the first six months of 2016 despite anticipated improvements to AAF close air support assets, as mentioned by General Nicholson during his February 2017 Senate testimony (Nicholson, 2017).

65. The significant surge in violence beginning in 2016 did not go unnoticed by Afghanistan's civilian population. In polls conducted annually by the Asia Foundation, the Afghan population is increasingly pessimistic about the general security environment in the country. In fact, insecurity accounted for nearly 50% of the population's pessimism about the future in 2016, a 4% increase from the previous year. A record 69.8% of the Afghan population cited they were "afraid for their personal safety" (The Asia Foundation, 2016).

66. The trending pessimism about the future of the country is not only reflective of the rising levels of violence between the ANDSF and insurgent groups in the country, it is also due to various economic, political, and social variables complicating prospects for peace and prosperity in the country. A relatively new, and key, factor affecting popular perception in Afghanistan is the rapid influx of returning refugees, causing increased strain on an already overburdened public sector.

E. INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS AND RETURNEES

67. The large-scale repatriation of returnees as well as internal displacement due to increased fighting greatly deteriorated the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan in 2016 and 2017.

68. At the start of 2016, Afghan refugees made up about 12% of the total global refugee population. Pakistan and Iran host the largest number with about 1.9 million and 3 million registered refugees and undocumented Afghans respectively. The European Union registered the arrival of about 350,000 Afghan refugees between January 2015 and September 2016, and Turkey is now hosting approximately 120,000 (Human Rights Watch, 2017).

69. Repatriation of both refugees and undocumented persons is adding to a burgeoning humanitarian crisis in the country. Over the course of the second half of 2016, large waves of Afghan refugees living in the region, and further abroad, began returning *en masse* to the country; the vast majority are returning from Pakistan and Iran, with a smaller stream coming in from the EU.

70. The second half of 2016 saw approximately 372,282 registered refugees and another 200,000 undocumented Afghan refugees returned from Pakistan alone (UN, 2016; Human Rights Watch, 2017). The flow of refugees and undocumented persons stabilised in the first half of 2017, still more than 111,000 Afghans have returned since January (OCHA, 2017). The massive and unexpected forced repatriation of Afghan refugees by the Pakistani government is due to several factors, all signalling a decided downturn in relations between Islamabad and Kabul.

71. Pakistani police began to step up their levels of abuse and coercion toward the long-standing Afghan refugee population in its border regions in 2015, as there was a growing perception some Afghan refugees were to blame for several high-profile terrorist attacks inside Pakistan at the end of 2014 (Human Rights Watch, 2017). Several key events in 2016, however, seem to have triggered large-scale abuse and government efforts to force the *en masse* repatriation of the Afghan refugee population living in Pakistan. The first were a series of trade deals and joint-infrastructure projects between Afghanistan and India, which were viewed with suspicion by the Pakistani government. Mid-June border clashes between Afghan and Pakistani forces resulted in the more systematic calls by the Pakistani government to coerce the remaining Afghan refugee population to leave the country. The ongoing border conflict between Afghanistan and Pakistan as well as Pakistan's partially implemented plans to construct a barrier along the so-called "Durand Line" (which runs through the middle of the Pashtun area) is a further obstacle to a settlement between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

72. The move by Pakistan adds significant strain to the already 9.3 million people currently requiring humanitarian assistance inside of the country (OCHA, 2017): the clear majority of the returning refugees have been abroad for decades⁷, often in relative economic marginalisation; they have little prospect of finding any kind of employment, and will place increased demand on the already struggling housing, health, and education sectors in the country.

73. Further complicating the ability to absorb the rising flow of returned refugees is the expanding number of internally displaced people. The UN High Commission for Refugees registered approximately 671,000 IDPs in 2016. Nearly half of these IDPs were displaced in the last four months of the year, highlighting the spiralling intensity of armed clashes in the country, particularly the Taliban's October and November offensives across Kunduz, Helmand, and Uruzgan Provinces. Since January, conflict across Afghanistan internally displaced 173,000

⁷ Several waves of Afghan refugees began flowing into the Pakistani border regions with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the subsequent wars over the past four decades pushed more and more refugees out of Afghanistan into Pakistan, with peak levels surpassing 3 million. Efforts by the UNHCR and the Afghan and Pakistani governments to help repatriate Afghan refugees reduced the number of Afghan refugees in Pakistan to about 1.5 million by the end of 2015.

Afghans, which suggests that internal displacement continues but is stable at the moment (OCHA, 2017).

74. The European Union continues to implement its collaborative strategy with the Afghan Government entitled “Joint Way Forward on Migration Issues” to combat irregular migration and assist the return of Afghan refugees (UN, 2016). The flow of Afghan migrants to Europe continued to decline in 2016: while 209,367 Afghan migrants sought asylum in Europe in 2015, less than 50,000 Afghans migrated to Europe between January and October of 2016. The European Union estimates that up to 80,000 of the 176,900 asylum applicants will likely be deported back to Afghanistan in the near future (Council of the EU, 2016).

F. WEAK ECONOMIC GROWTH (ECONOMIC GROWTH FIGURES) AND LOSS OF PRIVATE-SECTOR, FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT (FDI)

75. Widespread violence and the resurgence of insurgent groups had a negative impact on economic growth and stability across Afghanistan in 2016. In the Afghan parliament’s 2017 budget report, the government expects GDP growth to be 4.4% for 2017. In comparison, the International Monetary Fund expects Afghanistan’s GDP growth to be 3% in 2017. The GDP projection is modest considering the economy grew at an annual average of 8% between 2003 and 2014 (The World Bank, 2016). It is important to note, however, the Afghan economy underwent significant transformation in 2014 with the withdrawal of the International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) mission, which had been a reliable source of national income (SIGAR, 2017a). In addition, Afghanistan’s private sector is heavily reliant on foreign direct investment (FDI) and investors are increasingly weary of the deteriorating security situation.

76. Afghanistan’s labour market is also underperforming. Between 60-80 % of the labour force is employed in Agriculture; however, due to technological inefficiencies and the lack of market access, agriculture accounts for only a third of the nation’s GDP (State Department, 2016). This is combined with a rapidly increasing labour market, which amount to over 400,000 individuals entering the labour force on average per year according to both the IMF and the World Bank (SIGAR, 2017a): Labour market woes will only be further exacerbated by the increased arrival of returned Afghan refugees and migrants.

77. Until the security situation in Afghanistan stabilises, economic growth and FDI, which Afghanistan so desperately needs, will remain elusive. It is important to note that although European and Transatlantic investors are risk averse to investing under a dubious security climate, regional players (e.g., Iran, Pakistan, India, and China) are seemingly willing to invest. For example, the last report expanded on regional actor’s infrastructure spending in Afghanistan (NATO PA, 2016). The risk for European and trans-Atlantic investment is that economic influence, and eventually political influence, may be substituted with regional actors who were first-mover investors in Afghanistan—China and India for example (Stanzel, 2016). Engagement is often focused on the exploitation of natural mineral resources, such as copper and rare earths, which are urgently needed by, for example, the Chinese economy. Such investments, however, often do little to benefit the Afghan economy. Therefore, while security challenges make FDI difficult in the short-term, the trans-Atlantic community must remain engaged in Afghanistan’s long-term economic prosperity as ancillary support for NATO’s long-term political and strategic objectives.

V. CONCLUSIONS

78. Well into their second decade in the country, Allied financial support along with their embedded training, advising, and assisting mission remain as vital as ever: Afghanistan faces an emboldened and strengthened insurgency, and its political, social, and economic institutions remain hobbled by infighting and corruption. Despite the recurring theme of these challenges, NATO and its partners are committed to the long-term goal of peace and stability in Afghanistan. Key components to this ultimate objective are capable and effective Afghan National Defence Security Forces.

79. Allies agreed in Warsaw to continue financing the ANDSF through the end of 2020. Whether through the US-direct Afghan Security Forces Fund (ASFF), NATO Allies' contribution to the NATO ANA Trust Fund, or through the UNDP Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan (LOTFA), international donations pay for all but USD500 million of the approximately USD5bn needed to sustain the forces and institutions surrounding them.

80. In parallel Allies and their partners expect a concerted effort by the Afghan government to build upon this investment to create strong institutions, capable of bringing the kind of prosperity needed throughout the country, so that Afghanistan will never again be a safe haven for terrorists. The Government in Kabul agreed to raise its contributions to the ANDSF such that, by 2024, it will be responsible for the entirety of its budget. Given the economic trends in the country, this seems unlikely.

81. NATO's Resolute Support mission is adapting to be as effective as possible in its role of training, advising, and assisting the development, deployment, and sustainment of the ANDSF. The development of expeditionary advisory teams is a key development providing effective and focused support to the ANDSF in real-time on operations. The success of such efforts is clear from reports received from the field. As such, NATO and its operational partners must continue to staff the regional and functional commands.

82. In addition, Allies must continue to invest the resources necessary to install funding and oversight mechanisms of the ANDSF, the MoD, and the MoI to guarantee the transparent, accountable, and even cost-effective institutions they seek to partner with in the country. A self-sustaining and capable ANDSF requires effective leadership, transparent procurement processes, proper equipment for both training and exercising, and political support.

83. Currently, most, if not all, of these attributes are either lacking or are identified as key deficiencies. Anti-corruption oversight is vital to efficient security forces; whether from high-level procurement processes to corrupt officers to ghost soldier payroll schemes, transparency and accountability are still clearly lacking in the ANDSF.

84. President Ghani has developed a four-year roadmap to enhance the capabilities of the ANDSF. A key focus is the fight against corruption. This Committee hopes the Government and Parliament of Afghanistan will move forward quickly to continue to implement this plan – it is vital not only to the long-term success of their state-building enterprise, but also to create the security environment necessary for the men and women of the ANDSF, as well as Allied and partner nations' armed forces, willing to put their lives on the line for a peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adili, Ali Yawar, and Martine van Bijlert. "Afghanistan's Incomplete New Electoral Law: Changes and Controversies." Afghanistan Analysts Network, 22 January 2017. <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/afghanistans-incomplete-new-electoral-law-changes-and-controversies/>.
- Agence Europe. "NATO/Afghanistan: NATO plans to bolster Resolute Support mission," Europe Diplomacy & Defence 1000. 3 July 2017.
- Ahmad, Javid. "What Drives Insider Attacks in Afghanistan?" *Foreign Affairs*, 5 April 2017. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/afghanistan/2017-04-05/what-drives-insider-attacks-afghanistan>.
- Al Jazeera. "Afghanistan: Ghani, Hekmatyar Sign Peace Deal," September 29, 2016. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/09/afghanistan-ghani-hekmatyar-sign-peace-deal-160929092524754.html>.
- Al Jazeera. "US Confirms Death of ISIL Leader in Afghanistan," 7 May 2017a. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/05/confirms-death-isil-leader-afghanistan-170507202702947.html>.
- Al Jazeera. "Hekmatyar Returns to Kabul after 20 Years in Hiding," 4 May 2017b. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/05/hekmatyar-returns-kabul-20-years-hiding-170504145123325.html>.
- Al Jazeera. "Taliban Claim Deadly Kabul Suicide Attack," 24 July 2017c. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/07/casualties-feared-kabul-car-bomb-attack-170724034019038.html>.
- Ansar, Massoud. "MPs Ask President Ghani To Step Down." *TOLOnews*, 23 July 2017. </index.php/node/54501>.
- Associated Press. "Afghan Political Dysfunction Affects Battle Against Insurgents." VOA, 8 April 2016. <http://www.voanews.com/a/afghan-political-dysfunction-affects-insurgency-battle/3276096.html>.
- The Baltic Times. "Lithuania to Send More Troops to Afghanistan," 2 July 2017. https://www.baltictimes.com/lithuania_to_send_more_troops_to_afghanistan/.
- Barr, Nathaniel and Bridget Moreng, "The Graveyard of Caliphates: The Failure of ISIS in Afghanistan," *Foreign Affairs*, 13 January 2016.
- Bruton, F. Brinley, and Ahmed Mengli. "ISIS Claims Spotlight but Taliban Remains Afghanistan's Main Threat." NBC News, 9 March 2017. <http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-terror/isis-claims-kabul-hospital-attack-taliban-remains-main-threat-n731086>.
- BBC News "God Forgot Afghanistan." 30 July 2016. <http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-36925169>.
- Constable, Pamela, and Sayed Salahuddin. "Afghan War Faces Flurry of Setbacks as New U.S. Military Policy Nears." *Washington Post* 18 June 2017a, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/afghan-war-faces-flurry-of-setbacks-as-new-us-military-policy-nears/2017/06/18/e24acaf2-5383-11e7-b064-828ba60fbb98_story.html.
- Constable, Pamela and Sayed Salahuddin. "At Least 140 Dead after Taliban Attack on a Key Afghan Army Base, Officials Say." *Washington Post*, 22 April 2017b, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/at-least-160-dead-after-taliban-attack-on-major-afghan-army-base-official-says/2017/04/22/239aa398-2750-11e7-a1b3-faff0034e2de_story.html.
- Cooper, Helen, "U.S. Says it Has 11,000 Troops in Afghanistan, More than Formerly Disclosed" *The New York Times*, 30 August 2017.
- Council of the European Union, « Joint Commission-EEAS Non-paper on Enhancing Cooperation on Migration, Mobility and Readmission with Afghanistan », 3 March 2016 (6738/16), Brussels.
- Cunningham, Erin, and Sayed Salahuddin. "Some in Afghanistan Question U.S. Choice to Use 22,000-Pound Bomb against ISIS." *Washington Post*, 14 April 2017. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/massive-us-bomb-in-afghanistan-killed-36-from->

- islamic-state-say-local-officials/2017/04/14/dae924e4-20dd-11e7-a0a7-8b2a45e3dc84_story.html.
- Faramarz, Samim. "Ghani Says 'Peace With Pakistan Before Taliban.'" *TOLOnews*, 11 July 2017. /afghanistan/ghani-says-%E2%80%98peace-pakistan-taliban%E2%80%99.
- Gibbons-Neff, Thomas. "Mattis: 'We Are Not Winning in Afghanistan,' New Strategy Is Weeks Away." *Washington Post*, 13 June 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2017/06/13/mattis-we-are-not-winning-in-afghanistan-new-strategy-is-weeks-away/>.
- Human Rights Watch. "Pakistan Coercion, UN Complicity: The Mass Forced Return of Afghan Refugees," 13 February 2017. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/02/13/pakistan-coercion-un-complicity/mass-forced-return-afghan-refugees>.
- Hirschfeld Davis, Julie and Mark Landler, "Trump Outlines New Afghanistan War Strategy with Few Details" *The New York Times*, 21 August 2017.
- Hadley, Stephen J., and Moeed Yusuf. "Opinion | For Peace in Afghanistan, Talk to Pakistan." *The New York Times*, 16 June 2017, sec. Opinion. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/16/opinion/afghanistan-pakistan-taliban.html>.
- Hindustan Times. "Afghanistan to Hold Delayed Parliamentary Polls in July 2018." <http://www.hindustantimes.com/>, 22 June 2017a. <http://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/afghanistan-to-hold-delayed-parliamentary-polls-in-july-2018/story-7aerw9KyahcogsNjxBkN0I.html>.
- Hindustan Times. "90 Killed in Kabul Blast: Afghan Intel Says Attack Planned by Haqqani Network, ISI." 1 June 2017b. <http://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/massive-blast-near-indian-embassy-in-kabul/story-hkByrUDwxyJi6eflbt4oDJ.html>.
- Integrity Watch Afghanistan. "National Budget 2016 (1395): Budget Allocation and Citizens Participation in Afghanistan," 2016. <https://iwaweb.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Designed-Policy-Brief-BTAP-Public-Hearing-Event-30-Nov-2015-11.pdf>.
- The International institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance, 2017*, Routledge, 2017.
- Khaama Press. "Dostum Accuses Ghani of Nepotism, Slams Abdullah for Being Incapable," 25 October 2016. <http://www.khaama.com/dostum-accuses-ghani-of-nepotism-slams-abdullah-for-being-incapable-02137>.
- Mackenzie, James. "As Washington Ponders Afghan Mission, Marines Toil in Helmand." *Reuters*, 17 July 2017. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-afghanistan-usa-idUSKBN1A10JL>.
- Mashal, Mujib, and Najim Rahim. "Taliban, Collecting Bills for Afghan Utilities, Tap New Revenue Sources." *The New York Times*, 28 January 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/28/world/asia/taliban-collecting-electricity-bills-afghan.html>.
- Mashal, Mujib. "Taliban Envoy Breaks Silence to Urge Group to Reshape Itself and Consider Peace." *The New York Times*, 31 October 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/01/world/asia/afghanistan-taliban-peace-talks.html>.
- "Afghanistan Fires 7 From Cabinet in Intensifying Political Crisis." *The New York Times*, 15 November 2016a. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/16/world/asia/afghanistan-ashraf-ghani-cabinet.html>.
- "Afghanistan Orders Arrest of Vice President's Guards in Rape and Torture Case." *The New York Times*, 24 January 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/24/world/asia/afghanistan-vice-president-dostum-warrant.html>.
- "Afghanistan Orders Arrest of Vice President's Guards in Rape and Torture Case." *The New York Times*, 24 January 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/24/world/asia/afghanistan-vice-president-dostum-warrant.html>.
- Mashal, Mujib and Fahim Abed. "After Deadly Attack on Kabul Hospital, 'Everywhere Was Full of Blood'", *The New York Times*, 8 March 2017
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Afghanistan. "The Kabul Process." 2017, <http://mfa.gov.af/en/page/the-kabul-process>

- The Nation. "Ghani Insists on 'reconciliation with Pakistan' to Bring Peace in Afghanistan." 2 July 2017. <http://nation.com.pk/national/02-Jul-2017/ghani-insists-on-reconciliation-with-pakistan-to-bring-peace-in-afghanistan>.
- NATO. "Press Conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg Following the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council with Resolute Support Operational Partner Nations at the Level of Defence Ministers." 29 June 2017. http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_145389.htm.
- NATO PA, Afghanistan Post-ISAF, [169 DSC 15 E rev.1 fin], DSC Special Report, 2015 <http://www.nato-pa.int/Default.asp?SHORTCUT=4025>
- NATO PA, NATO's Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan 2016, [164 DSC 16 E bis], DSC Special Report, 2016; <http://www.nato-pa.int/Default.asp?SHORTCUT=4321>
- Nicholson, Gen. John. Military Operations in Afghanistan. CSPAN, February 9, 2017. <https://www.c-span.org/video/?423552-1/general-john-nicholson-tells-senate-stalemate-afghanistan>.
- Nordland, Rod, and Jawad Sukhanyar. "Afghanistan Police Surround Vice President's House." *The New York Times*, February 21, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/21/world/asia/abdul-rashid-dostum-afghanistan.html>.
- Radio Free Europe. "Kerry Urges Taliban To Strike Peace Deal With Kabul." *RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty*, 5 October 2016. <http://www.rferl.org/a/afghanistan-kerry-urges-taliban-peace-deal/28033314.html>.
- Rasmussen, Sune Engel. "Vice-President Leaves Afghanistan amid Torture and Rape Claims." *The Guardian*, 19 May 2017b. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/19/vice-president-leaves-afghanistan-amid-torture-and-claims>.
- Rasmussen, Sune Engel. "Kabul: At Least 90 Killed by Massive Car Bomb in Diplomatic Quarter." *The Guardian*, 31 May 2017a, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/31/huge-explosion-kabul-presidential-palace-afghanistan>.
- Rubin, Barnett R. "The Art of the Deal in Afghanistan." *The New York Times*, 1 February 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/01/opinion/the-art-of-the-deal-in-afghanistan.html>.
- Secretary James Mattis. *President's 2018 Defense Budget Request*, 13 June 2017. <https://www.c-span.org/video/?429898-1/armed-services-chairman-expresses-frustration-lack-afghanistan-strategy>.
- Shaheed, Anisa. "IEC to Review 7,000 Polling Stations Nationwide." *TOLOnews*, 30 July 2017. <http://www.tolonews.com/node/55941>.
- Smith, Josh, and Hamid Shalizi. "Afghan Taliban's Brazen Attack Eclipses Trump's 'Mother of All Bombs.'" *Reuters*, 23 April 2017. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-afghanistan-taliban-analysis-idUSKBN17P0RJ>.
- Snow, Shawn, and Mackenzie Wolf. "US to Provide Afghanistan with up to 159 Black Hawks to Help Break 'Stalemate.'" 17 May 2017. <http://www.militarytimes.com/articles/blackhawks-airforce-afghanistan-stalemate>.
- Shirzad, Rafiq. "Islamic State Claims Attack on State TV Station in Afghanistan," *Reuters*. 17 May 2017. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-afghanistan-attack-idUSKCN18D0HT>.
- Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), "Quarterly Report to the United States Congress," 30 January 2017a.
- Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), "Quarterly Report to the United States Congress," 30 July 2017b.
- Stanzel, Angela. "China's Interests in Afghanistan." *China Policy Institute: Analysis*, September 5, 2016. <https://cpianalysis.org/2016/09/05/chinas-interests-in-afghanistan/>.
- Tarzi, Amin. "Iran, Russia, and the Taliban: Reassessing the Future of the Afghan State." *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, 14 June 2017. <http://www.fpri.org/article/2017/06/iran-russia-taliban-reassessing-future-afghan-state/>.
- The Asia Foundation. "Afghanistan in 2016: A Survey of the Afghan People," 7 December 2016. <http://asiafoundation.org/publication/afghanistan-2016-survey-afghan-people>.
- Transparency International. "Corruption Perceptions Index 2016." *Www.transparency.org*, 25 January 2017. https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_perceptions_index_2016.

- Transparency International. "Afghanistan Must Refocus Efforts to Fight against Corruption to Safeguard US\$12 Billion in New Aid." Transparency.org, 4 October 2016. https://www.transparency.org/news/pressrelease/afghanistan_must_refocus_efforts_to_fight_against_corruption_to_safeguard_u.
- The World Bank. "Afghanistan's GDP Growth (Annual %)," 2016. <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?end=2014&locations=AF&start=2003&view=chart>.
- TOLO News. "Ghani Officially Opens Kabul Process Meeting." 6 June 2017. /afghanistan/ghani-officially-opens-kabul-process-meeting.
- United Nations, "The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security," Report of the Secretary-General, 13 December 2016 (A/71/682-S/2016/1049).
- United Nations, "The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security," Report of the Secretary-General, 15 June 2017 (A/71/932-S/2017/508).
- United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). "Afghanistan Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2016." Annual Report. February 2017.
- United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). "UNAMA First Quarter 2017 Civilian Casualty Data." Quarterly Report, 25 April 2017b. <https://unama.unmissions.org/protection-of-civilians-reports>.
- United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). "Afghanistan: Snapshot of Population Movements." 23 July 2017. http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/afg_population_movement_snapshot_20170723_v1_0.pdf.
- United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). "2017 Humanitarian Response Plan: January-December 2017," November 2016. https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/Afghanistan/afg_2017_hrp_english.pdf.
- US Department of Defense (DoD). "Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan," December 2016.
- US Department of Defense (DoD). "Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan," June 2017.
- US Department of State. "2016 Investment Climate Statements: Afghanistan." Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs, 5 July 2016. <http://www.state.gov/e/eb/rls/othr/ics/2016/sca/254473.htm>.
- Weinbaum, Marvin G., and Meher Babbar. "The Tenacious, Toxic Haqqani Network." MEI Policy Focus, September 2016. http://www.mei.edu/sites/default/files/publications/PF23_WeinbaumBabbar_Haqqani_web_0.pdf.
- Yousufzai, Sami, and Jon Boone. "Taliban Envoys Travel to Pakistan to Discuss Afghanistan Peace Talks." The Guardian, 21 October 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/21/taliban-envoys-travel-pakistan-discuss-afghanistan-pea>
-