

WITHDRAWAL OF INTERNATIONAL SECURITY TROOPS FROM AFGHANISTAN IN 2014: IMPLICATION

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Abstract

This paper attempts to analyze the national and regional security concerns after the withdrawal of NATO-led International Security Forces (ISAF) at the end of 2014 from Afghanistan. President Hamid Karzai refused to sign the bilateral security agreement with United States which lead the situation to withdraw the troops from Afghanistan. The absence of foreign troops would likely dampen donor nations' willingness to provide civilian aid for the development projects. Withdrawal of international troops in Afghanistan post-2014 would also leave the door open for the terrorist groups to gain a foothold in Afghanistan, from where it could launch operations into Central and South Asia as well as the whole world. Afghanistan and the United States had been trying to bring the Taliban to the political fold with the implicit understanding that they won't harbour terrorism anymore that also created mistrust between these two countries. If Afghanistan can hold reasonably free and fair elections, Afghanistan has a chance of moving beyond its contemporary security implications and become a trans-regional communication hub of South Asia, Central Asia and the Middle East.

Introduction

Afghanistan will enter a new era in its journey as a state with the withdrawal plan of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) by 2014.¹ The U.S. officials insisted that they must have the security pact in place without any delay to continue counterterrorism operations and allow for a residual troops presence to train and advise Afghan forces beyond 2014. A traditional Afghan grand assembly (known as a Loya Jirga composed of 2500 tribal elders) in November 2013 also urged the Afghan President, Hamid Karzai to sign the bilateral security agreement, but he did not agree to sign the deal before election in April 2014.² The Obama administration has sought to get permission from the Afghan

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¹ Paul D. Shikman, "Is Obama's Afghan Drawdown Threat Realistic?" July 09, 2013, available at <<http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2013/07/09/is-obamas-afghan-drawdown-threat-realistic>> (accessed on July 09, 2013).

² Missy Ryan, "Analysis: Even if foreign troops leave Afghanistan, U.S. has some options," *Reuters*, December 23, 2013.

government to keep troops that would carry out counterterrorism and training missions beyond 2014. Afghan President Hamid Karzai has so far refused to sign a bilateral-security agreement with the United States. Without the U.S.-Afghan accord, NATO informed it would not be able to finalize its own agreement with the Afghan government. If no deal can be finalized, Washington would withdraw its entire force of 47,000 troops by 2014.³ The absence of foreign troops would likely dampen donor nations' willingness to fund Afghan troops and provide civilian aid. After more than a decade of 'assistance' from the US-led coalition and development partners, it is to be seen whether the country can move forward mostly on its own. There are fears that the Taliban and other militants could regain strength and Afghanistan may be plunged a new into civil war. Iraq is experiencing a major upsurge in terrorist violence from a revived al-Qaeda. A similar situation in Afghanistan would be devastating for regional security and also jeopardise the safety of western nations as they would face an emboldened network of Islamist terrorists with global ambitions. Analysts warn that the recent increase in al-Qaeda violence in Iraq should serve as a warning that failure to maintain a residual force in Afghanistan would increase instability throughout South and Central Asia. An absence of international troops in Afghanistan post-2014 would also leave the door open for the terrorist groups to gain a foothold in Afghanistan, from where it could launch operations into Central and South Asia as well as the whole world.

Against this background, the paper examines the implications of the withdrawal of US military/security forces from Afghanistan with national, regional and global contexts from the security perspectives. It is to be noted that the paper has reviewed the information from various sources including scholarly journal articles, books, newspapers, magazines and policy commentaries of various research organizations up to early January 2014 as the withdrawal of security troops has long term implications on Afghanistan and other countries of the world.

The paper is divided into three sections excluding the introductory section. Section two describes the general information about the establishment of Afghan National Security and the drawdown plan of international security forces and other relevant forces. The national issues for Afghanistan and regional concerns are discussed in section three which consists of two sub-sections. The paper ends up with a concluding remark.

³ "10 Facts About US Withdrawal from Afghanistan," *Countdown to Drawdown*, December 15, 2012, available at <<http://countdowntodrawdown.org/facts.php>> (accessed on November 13, 2013).

The Establishment of Afghan National Security Force and Withdrawal Plan of US Military/Security Troops: An Overview

From the outset of the post-Taliban era, the future of Afghan armed forces was a high level concern to the ISAF. The Bonn Agreement established the first post-Taliban government and highlighted the complex nature of the problem in 2001. The document specified that the international community should assist the new Afghan authorities in the establishment and training of new Afghan security and armed forces. In December 2002, the Afghan government and donor nations met outside Bonn, Germany, and concluded an agreement that became known as Bonn II. The parties at the conference officially agreed that the Afghan National Army (ANA) should be ethnically balanced, that it should rely on volunteers rather than conscripts, and that it would consist of no more than 70,000 personnel, including all civilian and Ministry of Defence (MOD) personnel.⁴ However, they did not specify the time by which the ANA should be complete. After this agreement, U.S. military planners worked with Afghan officials to develop a more detailed force structure for the ANA. Their plans called for:⁵

- 43,000 ground combat troops, to be based in Kabul and four other cities.
- 21,000 support staff, organized into commands for recruiting, education and training, acquisition and logistics, and communications and intelligence.
- 3,000 personnel for the MOD and general staff.
- 3,000 air staff, whose purpose would be to provide secure transportation for the president.

Withdrawal of US troops had started from the relatively stable northern and western parts of the country in 2010. A phased withdrawal plan was developed where about 10000 troops left Afghanistan by July 2011.⁶ About 23,000 American troops were pulled out from Afghanistan in July 2012.⁷ *The Washington Post* reported a withdrawal plan which called for the U.S. forces

⁴ Kaushik Roy, "Afghanistan and the future of war," *International Area Studies Review*, vol. 15, no. 3, September 2012, pp. 301–320.

⁵ Dave Baiocchi, "Measuring Army Deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan," *Policy Commentaries*, (USA: RAND Corporation, 2013).

⁶ Amanda Terkel, "Obama Announces Afghanistan Troop Withdrawal In Speech To Nation," *The Huffington Post*, June 22, 2011, available at <[http:// www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/06/22/Obama-Afghanistan-troop-withdrawal_n_882451.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/06/22/Obama-Afghanistan-troop-withdrawal_n_882451.html)> (accessed on September 04, 2012).

⁷ Larry Shaughnessy, "Allen: U.S. troop drawdown from Afghanistan to begin 'very shortly'," *CNN*, May 23, 2012, available at <http://edition.cnn.com/2012/05/23/politics/us-troop-drawdown-afghanistan/index.html?_s=PM:POLITICS> (accessed on December 04, 2013).