

Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit

**Public Lecture and Open Discussion
“The Afghan National Army: Sustainability
Challenges beyond Financial Aspects”**

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The Afghan National Army: Sustainability Challenges beyond Financial Aspects

Transcript of talk by Dr. Antonio Giustozzi

Giustozzi: Thank you and, well, I don't know how many people here have read the report. I assume not too many in the end but I only want to go through and very, very briefly summarize what the report was about because the report was not about every single aspect of the Afghan National Army, it was about certain specific aspects. The title was the “Sustainability Challenges beyond Financial Aspects.” As you know much of the debate even now is about the money, whether the money will be forthcoming. We didn't look into that in the report. We look at all the other sustainability challenges, which means we didn't look at the actual fighting, you know, the tactical issues, whether the army was fighting well or not. But we're looking at the army; actually, in fact, the Ministry of Defence at the structure that is supposed to be able to function on its own. And we ask the question, is it going to happen? Is it going to function on its own?

Once the withdrawal or the drawdown takes place, will they be able to, for example, support logistically the units in the field, because an army might even fight very well (and I'm not saying it fights well or not; we didn't discuss that in the report) but even assuming an army is very good tactically, if they don't get supplies, ammunition, fuel at the right time and the right place they can't fight. So logistics are very important. And as you probably know, until now the logistics have been mostly delivered by the American army to the Afghan units in the field. But there also are a number of other issues in administration, personnel; these are all the more institutional aspects of an army, the functioning of the ministry of the Interior. These are also important, like procurement; you know all these kinds of things. So the report was essentially about that.

As mentioned by Nader, we did the research in 2013, it took a little while to of course produce the report and publish it. It is already essentially more than a year since we did the research so of course a number of things have happened in a number of fields. So I think I'll start by trying to give a little update of developments over the last 14, 15 months. Of course it isn't going to be a complete update because as you know, you may have noticed there is a war going on so access to information is not easy. As some people say, you know, truth is the first casualty of war so it's very difficult sometimes to figure out what's really going on the field. And not only in the field; also what is really going on in Kabul, in the ministries. So inevitably any information I'm going to give here now is the result of my own conversations and what I hear, it's not the result of more research because we didn't have the funds to do a quick update. So it's not going to be quite as accurate as the report was when we published it.

But certain things are pretty clear. I think on many issues many people will agree with me, that in the army the idea of a drawdown is essentially a withdrawal of western military support, did not improve much the morale of the Afghan army. In fact many people in the army have been worried about whether they can really function on their own and whether the withdrawal might be a prelude to even a curtailing of funding,

for example, and the provision of essential military supplies which Afghanistan alone cannot afford. I mean Afghanistan doesn't have, as you know, the financial resources to fund an army of this size essentially, without very substantial support from abroad. So essentially the army at the beginning of this year was in rather weak morale, it is my view, and merely because, you know, these fears about the future, what would happen once the withdrawal would be complete.

What we've seen since then is wide fluctuations in the army's morale. The elections, the handling of the elections by the security force, of course the army was only one of the bodies there, and the police in fact did even more work than the army. But in general the election, the electoral process, the role the police and the army, and other security forces, played was seen as very positive. And I think this had a very significant impact, positive impact, on the army's morale. So I think the morale of the army probably peaked around early summer, with the second round going in a sense even better than the first round. Of course there are a number of reasons for that; it was not only the security force's work. But you know, the point is that its participation was modest and the security forces were able to lead more than be a spectator, which normally is a morale booster, and in this case it was a morale booster.

The problem is that at the time, and this happens very often, there was not in the Ministry of Defence or elsewhere (certainly not even in ISAF) an accurate analysis of what had been going on, on the ground. Of course in a war it's inevitable that politicians, even generals often have to deliver more propaganda than truth. It's inevitable, you know, all sides in a war do that. It's not only Afghanistan; every war in history has been like that. So you don't expect to hear from official sources necessarily what the situation is on the ground. But my sense is that even behind closed doors there was a lack of adequate analysis of the situation on the ground. And essentially there was a serious underestimate of the situation the Taliban were in. So the sense the Taliban had not been able to disrupt the election because they were weak was soon proved to be inaccurate. And in fact what we had during the summer is a very dramatic resurgence of the Taliban on the battlefield and very serious pressure being placed on the security forces, particularly the police but also the army.

And it's clear now, I think few people dispute that what the Taliban had is quite different than what they had in, say, June. In June the Taliban started upgrading, up-scaling their village operations. And in a number of provinces where they decided to focus their force, the security force had been under very heavy pressure. Kunduz in particular, Nangahar, Helmand, these had made the headlines, you know but they were speaking of their security situations worsening in some places more than others but the Taliban have become more active. Now, it's not my task here to discuss in detail what's going on with the Taliban but I can just tell you that my view and based on the information I have, is that what we've seen this summer is only partial mobilization of Taliban resources. The Taliban didn't fully mobilize yet. If you look at the different regional commanders of the Taliban, the potential is higher than what we've seen this summer. So you know, in this context, I think the performance of the security forces from June onwards is certainly worrying, from a point of view. If you look at Helmand, for example, where essentially the army is concentrated, you know Helmand is the strongest concentration of the Afghan army in the whole country with around 27,000 (at least on paper) troops, police, a lot of local police, and a few other known official militias. They logically struggle to contain, in fact really they didn't contain, a Taliban offensive in northern Helmand which was in fact the work of just one of the various Taliban groups operating in the south. The numbers are very difficult to establish but even the Afghan government has not estimated the number of Taliban there higher than 6,000. They say much less than

that. Even if it takes 6,000 against around 35,000 Afghan security forces, the fact that Taliban were gaining ground and taking under control the villages of northern Helmand and even some villages in central Helmand, is not very encouraging. It's true, they were not taking any district but from the perspective of the Afghan elite, the people living in the cities, what matter are these city centers; but I'm not sure that in terms of analyzing how the war is going ignoring the villages is the right thing to do.

So I would say that even within ISAF, within the diplomatic level, there is growing concern over the ability of the Afghan security forces and primarily the army, to hold on the next two years. You may have read recently in the press, statements reported by some senior NATO or ISAF officers that the current level of casualties is not sustainable; it is indeed the highest ever. That's not surprising because, of course, ISAF's pulling out of the battlefield. There is still a high level of desertions, I don't like to call them desertions but they are desertions, which is not necessarily increasing but it's not decreasing either which means a high level of turnover. But I think the casualties are the most worrying thing because of course that in the long run is going to have a negative impact on morale and possibly at some point in the future, recruitment. Recruitment is not a problem now at the national level but of course is a problem in certain areas and might become a problem in more areas in the future. As you know, Nangahar for example has traditionally been one of the main sources of recruitment for the army, disproportionately so, and now the Taliban are much stronger than they were a year ago in Nangahar, and particularly western Nangahar is largely under Taliban influence. That is going to affect recruitment to the army. So at some point, you know, if this trend of losing control over the villages continue, recruitment is going to be affected. You know, few people joined the army from the cities, very few. Essentially this war is fought by villages versus villages. Some villages join the Taliban and other villages join the army, the police. It's not a war that so far has affected in any way very much the whole population.

Now, other developments since we did the research from the ground, I think that for the new US administration now, in Afghanistan there is also greater readiness to discuss the issue of corruption among donors because they're worried about the future, maybe because they feel that this is the right time to discuss certain issues. There is still a reluctance to discuss these matters in public, so figures and numbers that there are available estimates of are not being leaked to the press yet. We shall see what happens over the next few weeks. But this trend of corruption in the army, I'm focused on the army of course. I'm not saying the Ministry of Defence is necessarily more corrupt than any other Ministry but, you know, it's not my task to discuss any other ministry right now. The corruption is recognized to be much greater than it was earlier thought. You know, the army as such might not be a particularly corrupt government by the standards but the ministry that is structured above the army is a big issue. And the current estimates, which aren't official because nobody wants to release this information to the public, is that roughly, possibly two thirds of procurement is going, basically is lost to corruption. That means that 63% of the fuel procured for the army is stolen, that maybe at least two-thirds of the food purchased for the army is stolen. And so on and so forth.

There are issues of, with the quality of certain equipment delivered to the army, particularly boots. Good boots are important, Napoleon conquered Europe with an army that was working on boots, you know. Boots are essential. If you have boots that disintegrate after a week, then you know, the performance of the army is going to be affected. The morale of the troops fighting a war in flip-flops is not quite as easy as with boots.

And you know, any aspect of recruitment is subject to high level corruption and also probably to lower level corruption because much procurement is actually done at the corps level. And of course when you procure food, it's often procured at the corps level. Whatever the case, greater readiness to meet the corruption is a very big concern. I understand, through my personal contacts, that now in the present office there's a lot of scrutiny over these issues. And I heard but I haven't gotten confirmed that the President has ordered the fuel supplies to the army to be cut in two, because he knows that so much of it gets stolen that even half the supplies would be more than enough to keep the army moving. And of course the hope is that some of the money they save this way can be allocated to other necessary expenditures within the Ministry of Defence. Now whether that is going to happen now, how it will work out, I don't know. What I'm saying is I see these actually as a positive sign that at least there is some attention at the political level start being paid to these issues. Of course, looking at these issues doesn't mean that you know how to resolve it or that you will succeed in it but if you don't look at the problem then it is guaranteed that you won't resolve it. So the first step and at least say its good news but also means that it's becoming increasingly clear to everybody the extent of the problem.

The Americans in particular have agreed recently to a higher financial commitment to the Afghan security forces; they've promised a billion dollars. I think, you know, I believe the Americans will actually keep paying. I can suspect both parties in the States to create problems but not on this issue, not in terms of financial support. But again, because of this type of corruption which I think might be getting worse if nothing is done, there might not be enough because we haven't heard anything now about ghost soldiering.

Ghost soldiering was a feature of the Afghan army in the early days; then it was largely contained through the introduction of electrical payments and also through the introduction of (or through the intervention, if you like) of mentoring on a large scale. So mentoring teams were also contributing too, acting as inspectors, keeping an eye on what was going on down at the company level. So any large-scale corruption would probably be noticed and reported. Now, as you know, the mentors are gone and I'm not sure that they in the meanwhile, during those years that the mentors were keeping the lid on this type of corruption, this behavior, I'm not sure that the structures have been put in place that could actually prevent corruption or contain corruption without the mentors being there. So structures within the Ministry of Defence that would allow for corruption to be contained are not there.

In fact, another consequence, another development we are beginning to see is one of the consequences of lifting foreign presence starting from the unit level and now increasing also from the brigade. Basically, foreign presence is already limited to corps level and of course the ministerial level. So there is almost no mentoring anymore going on at the unit level. As far as the army is concerned, we haven't seen a lot but when we look at the police (and the desertion might be very similar) we see that in certain areas, we don't have to mention names but I think everybody has heard of a provincial chief of police who announced in public he executes prisoners. This is not a joke. The consequences of this type of behavior, which was contained because the mentors were there, is now...

My worry is that many people in the police and the army believe that that's the right way to fight. You have enemies, you think you know who those enemies are, and you should fight and kill them. And we hear from a province in the south, even elders who were

pro-government, who have relatives in the administration of Kandahar, complaining and issuing reports and sending delegations complaining about the extent of arbitrary killing by the police. And this is what we have heard of these matters that many young men are driven to join the Taliban by this kind of indiscriminate killing. So the gains that we have made in Kandahar for example, over the last two, three years might be lost very soon because of this behavior. Many people in the army and police believe that this is Western ideas being imposed on an Afghan way of doing things, and in some cases it might be, but I think an army is strong on training and if you look at the history of internal conflicts, arbitrary violence is never the way to win a conflict because you've made more enemies than you've killed. But you take a country where kin and relations are so strong, you kill one and you turn a whole clan against you. And I think we have a sense that this is happening again in Kandahar; it is actually one of the factors that drove many Kandahari communities into the arms of the Taliban in 2005/6 and it might be happening again now. Of course they're going to know for sure only when it is too late, but if you wait until it's too late then there's nothing you can do about that.

So I haven't seen that, I haven't got any particular report about this type of behavior coming out of the army yet, but of course it's much more difficult to find out because the police is much more exposed to public scrutiny while the army carries out operations more rarely on a different scale and in more remote locations so this kind of information might be coming out much more slowly, if indeed it happens. But I think the risk definitely is there. I've read I think all the memoirs written by mentors who served either with the Afghan army or police over the past years and almost in every single memoir you'll find some episodes where mentors intervene to prevent the execution of prisoners. So even in the past year the problem was there so my fear is that it could escalate.

That actually leads me to some important points which I think would be good to debate if anybody's got particular views about this. You know, recently one of the first measures President Ghani has taken with the army has been to actually lift a number of restrictions that have been imposed on the army by his predecessor. This included the ability to call in airstrikes essentially from ISAF because the Afghan Air Force has no ability to carry out airstrikes, and also some restriction on the ability of the army to arrest people. Now, this lifting of this restriction has actually contributed a lot to the army and police uncovering some threats recently, in the last few weeks. Because this is what they like, to have the freedom to arrest and bombard when it's required.

But I think that this is a very dangerous freedom for any security force engaged particularly in an internal war. At the end of the day there are volunteers coming from the other side but essentially the bulk of the people who are fighting are Afghans. Whether we like it or not these are Afghans. Many of them have grown up in Pakistan but they are Afghans. And of course they are relations, they are families, they are communities, so when somebody dies, whatever his personal background is, other people are affected. And the risk is also that if this is not subject to some kind of control or some kind of restriction, of course a lot of people who are only remotely connected with insurgents or not even connected at all, might belong to the wrong tribe or community, have the wrong brother, might be caught in this kind of repression. Even in the past year it was very common for the police or the army to arrest relatives of suspects.

I'm not thinking of the insurgency but in general there has been a practice to put pressure on people to hand the suspect over, they often arrest their relatives. So if this happens on a large scale, I think that potentially there could be very negative consequences. There are short-term gains, because of course when you carry out an operation you want to capture somebody; if you start arresting the relatives you might

sometime actually be able to capture the individual. But then if you think more long-term, the kind of long-term reaction you may have among those communities that could be more than upsetting any short-term gain.

And of course the ability to call in airstrikes, assuming ISAF is willing to actually deliver these airstrikes, that's another question, but that also could be very negative because the experience of the '80's is that at the time the Afghan army was much better equipped than today's army, which is a good thing because an army will always say, the more equipment we have the better it is. But I think that's not always necessarily true, because if you give the average general (and there are always exceptions) but if you give the average general a lot of artillery, a lot of air support, every time he faces a tactical situation which is going to be difficult to handle, every resort will see violence. And this is what happened. We are reading tons and tons of Russian books and documents over the '80's when the Russians were here. They are writing about themselves but also about the Afghan army, the Afghan police. You're not finding any way out. A lot of these books are very critical, now, and you're not finding a way out if anybody ever issues the order to destroy the villages, push millions of people into Pakistan. There was no such order. The order was, what they decided to do, which was unusual for the Russian Army, was to give the tactical commander down to company level the ability to call in artillery fire. And that was used and abused on a very large scale.

So there was never a grand Russian plan as alleged at the time to destroy half of Afghanistan. The problem was at the tactical level, where you give a company commander who's under fire the ability to call in artillery fire to respond, and you might not think too much about the fact that there might be some people living there with nothing to do with the insurgents. The fire from their house, they might not want it, the people who live in that house, the people who live next to it, and this kind of thing. So, of course, you can talk to any officer or tactical officer who served in American Army, the British Army, they didn't like the restrictions that were posed on them as in tactical engagement. But I sense that, my view is that those restrictions were actually politically progressive in undermining the legitimacy of the insurgency with certain communities, certain areas, particularly those where the military fought most often. I do think that for example in Helmand and Kandahar in 2012 and 2013 there was a shift in attitude of communities toward the Taliban and insurgents because, this thing didn't happen overnight. The Americans have been criticized sometimes for their unruly behavior but if you compare American behavior now with Russian behavior in the '80's or even American behavior in Vietnam in the '60's and early '70's, they are way more restrained than anything before.

And I think, because of interviewing for other projects, that a lot of elders, including some of the communities and tribes that were said to be supporting the Taliban in the early years, that there has been a shift in many of these communities that have pulled back. They don't necessarily love the government but they started pulling back from the insurgents because they realized that maybe the other side, the government side, was not so easily as they were originally thinking. So they are, essentially the message is, it's not just a matter of military techniques or military tactics. Every war is inevitably political and an internal conflict, whether you want to call it civil war or insurgency or whatever, is more political than any other war. So I think when you fight this kind of war, you need a political strategy out to engage with the community that supports insurgents because without those communities the insurgency will still exist but will be largely marginal.

I think there's more to say on this regard, when we talk about the political dimension of the conflict there is also, there will be increasingly be in Afghanistan (for now, initial) of the degree to which society is mobilized for this war. In the West, Europe and America, we think of this war as a small war. To the American, to the Europeans, this is indeed a small war. In one war anywhere, your commitment, the commitment to Afghanistan was

quite large but still it's a small war. The way people see it and the way bureaucracy see it, relate to this war, it's a small war. It's something this time that okay, you might win or lose, but your life is not that dramatically affected nor is your national interest. That is the perception.

I think it is actually the correct perception in Europe, in America. But to Afghanistan, this is not a small war. To Afghanistan this is like (I tell the Brits this because I have a British passport and I often meet them) this is like World War II for the United Kingdom. This is not a small war. This is a war that will determine the fate of Afghanistan as a nation. Whether they're going to be independent or not, it will be determined by this war. The outcome of this war will determine if Afghanistan goes back to pre-1919, the king not having full control over his foreign policy, or whether it stays as essentially an independent state.

So while this is certainly true, I don't see in Afghan society, certainly not in the cities, the realization of concern that's due this fact in this kind of situation. This is largely I believe because of until now the Afghan women's society and the Afghan elites were sheltered to the conflict by the fact that ISAF was doing much of the fighting, supplying, paying for war. It was Afghan villages, the poorer section of the population, from certain provinces because in many areas there was not much recruiting, but mostly eastern Afghanistan some pockets of the north, some areas around Kabul. These are where the people were sent to fight, and actually volunteered to fight. They've been dying. These are the people who've mostly been dying in the conflict. The middle class and the elites were not affected in any way because they didn't even pay tax. Tax is detracted from my fee. When I told my researchers outside Kabul, “okay this is your share but they detracted tax from your share,” they refused to pay tax. And these people are not poor villagers, these are educated Afghans with typically a journalist background, living in Kandahar, Herat city. These guys don't want to pay tax. And the tax is not a lot, it's 7%, as you know, so it's not a huge amount.

Of course, this is the middle class. If you look at the elite, the people who made a lot of money out of it (I don't mean stealing but you know, contracting for ISAF or for whoever), who've made millions, how much tax have they paid? So what has been their contribution to the war? They haven't even mobilized their wallets for the war. I don't think this can continue, because even if there is a degree of commitment, particularly in the United States, to keep supporting the Afghan government, that increasingly will have to be matched by greater mobilization of resources, human and otherwise, in Afghanistan itself.

Let's look at the middle class, because it's easy for everybody to accuse the elites, the elites are not in this room and they wouldn't listen anyway to what we say. They don't care. Well, the middle class, I think most Afghans see themselves are the middle class. How many of you have sent a son into the army as a volunteer not necessarily to fight but to occupy a job in the administration or logistics? People have done that mostly

because they are hoping to reap benefits out of the security ministries. Few people have done this because they wanted to contribute to the fight and the war out of patriotism. I think and this is my personal opinion, I think that the future of the new government will have to look into this issue because ISAF will not or the issue will be alerted about the fact that simply, educated Afghans don't join the security ministries. In fact they don't join most ministries but in particular the security ministries. There's a huge shortage of people who can deliver logistics and do administration, do personnel. You need educated people to do this. You can't take a villager in the little village and say, now you do logistics. Now you will handle this. No, this has to be done by educated people. And on the other hand, there are unemployed young Afghans coming out of university. Now this is a kind of paradox where you have lots of unemployed people making no money but they will not volunteer for, maybe will not take paid jobs in Ministry of Defence but still you know, these are jobs and they will be contributing to the military force.

I think any government that wants to face the reality of 2015/16 will have to confront this issue. Whether by providing incentives, maybe upping the regulatory on the conflict, or something that I would consider if I was the Minister of Defence is introducing selective conscription. Because I think Afghanistan might face a situation, a very dramatic crisis in the next two years. The next few years will be decisive ones, whether this state will survive or not will be determined largely by the ability to confront a widespread insurgency, and I think that conscripting university graduates into serving (not in the trenches because that wouldn't serve any purpose, and they're not going to be able to fight in the villages effectively) but conscripting them into providing the kind of bureaucratic layers that the security ministries need to run the fort. Because we're going to see now, whatever they might deliberate, and if the security ministries are going to mobilize people fast enough to staff the jobs that they need to staff in order to be able to handle all this relatively bureaucratic task effectively.

Even procurement, and particularly international procurement, is still done by essentially ISAF, and ISAF's got a month and something to go. ISAF is still doing the procurement for the Afghan army or at least still doing the paperwork because this is difficult. It's more difficult to buy spare parts for Russian helicopters than to buy boots, you know? You need to handle international contracts for the delivery of spare parts and there are a number of other issues to be resolved. And for that you need people with a certain level of education, maybe some people with a background in law, all this kind of people who are not there now. Some have proposed contracting private companies to deliver this kind of services, which is a possibility but this is going to cost a lot of money. If they keep finding solutions that are very expensive, I think this vicious cycle where you keep going but by increasing the expenditure when you're already spending, the Afghan army is already costing about as much as the Pakistani army, which is much bigger and has got much more equipment. So it's quite a paradox, in my view.

These are a number of problems that I'm telling to you, in case some of you want to discuss this or have certain ideas about how these issues can be resolved. But I think my key message is that this war can only be won if Afghan society can be mobilized to fight it. Not necessarily in the trenches, you know, that's a job for a specialist, but the war can be fought in many different ways. Starting by paying tax, first of all, and by supporting the forces of the government for the income that's been lost to customs and in the mines, which has always been lost. And sometimes understand that some middle class families have other ideas for their children going to work in the Ministry of Defence

two, three years. But many of them are unemployed, so if they spend two, three years there that should be beneficial to them in that we pay a little bit of money. And it won't be such a dramatic sacrifice compared toward what these villagers who are dying every day are doing.

So there is potential and you see it in every city we have. Pakistan mobilizes around 10 percent of GDP in tax. Afghanistan is nine. But if you were able to resolve the issue of leakage from the customs and seizing control over the mines, probably would be easy to reach 20%. Which is not a lot compared to Western Europe but is a lot compared to Pakistan and even the region. So it's a matter of mobilizing the resources that actually

exist, let alone inventing resources that will never be there. But even if they exist, the resources, much can be done. I mean, the Taliban are not ten feet tall. They've strengths and weaknesses but it's always the matter of matching one's strengths to the enemy's weaknesses. So that has to be done. Whatever resources are there, that will be mobilized.

I think it would be good if I now leave space to debate, and ask questions, and whatever.

Question: In the paper, one of the major challenges for the sustainability of the army and for them to play their role was the air force, that they need that support from ISAF. Did you see any change recently? Especially of course these planes that are trashed and turned to garbage, and while again it was not procured by the ministry, it was by the Americans and ISAF. And with that like 400 million dollars gone, wasted. Did you see any change in the thinking, operations, planning, or any real focus on the air force?

Giustozzi: In fact in a sense what we've seen over the summer it's been a worsening of the situation in regard to the Afghan Air Force. The main reason is nothing to do with Afghanistan; it's got to do with Ukraine and the sanctions the American Congress has imposed on purchases from Russia. The Americans are not able, I mean the government doesn't want them, but the military would like to buy spare parts for the helicopters provided to the Afghan Air Force in Russia but they can't. So that is an issue of who is going to do that, and the debate is quite important because spare parts are running out already. So that has to be resolved very quickly. There are rumors that somebody else might volunteer to pay for that but you know, even if they decide now who is going to do that, by the time you order spare parts it takes six months or whatever for them to be delivered. So already it looks like unless emergency procurement is set up, buying from existing stocks somewhere, it might be a period of months where the fleet of helicopters will be partially or completely immobilized because they won't be able to fly. So that's a new problem that was not foreseen in the past. There are a number of issues that are not being resolved. The Afghan Air Force has got a total of 11 Mi-24 combat helicopters, which are the only combat aircraft they have and which have not been flying for some time because they've got only a few hours left of life, essentially, before they're overhauled. So they're sparing them for next year but it means that actually the pilots are not getting trained. This kind of dilemma they're facing with the resources -- what do you do? Spend the last few hours training these people, but then they won't be able to fly because they won't have helicopters, or you keep the hours to do some fighting next year but without being trained. It would be possible to find somewhere, some kind of contracting arrangement where somebody would maintain it, overhaul these helicopters, but there hasn't. The idea was to replace them with these planes that the Americans are buying in Brazil, but that's been delayed for bureaucratic reasons, so they'll only be operational, fully operational, in 2017. So there will be more than two years gap without any close air support.

Question: Do we know the numbers?

Giustozzi: 20, because there will be two squadrons of ten each in the south. They're deployed in the south because the original plan was made when the conflict was worse in the south. Now actually I would say that the war is probably worse in the east than in the south. These planes are not very suitable for eastern Afghanistan because in general what you need there are probably helicopters to fly in the mountains and identify targets in the mountains. This type of planes is not very suitable. But for that there's been no progress, these things take time because even if someone was interested, and there might be some neighbors of Afghanistan who might be interested in something like that, by the time you finalize the arrangements of what you're contracted to do, then of course depending on what is supplied, if it's not equipment that has already been in use in Afghanistan in the past, training will be required. Mechanics will have to be trained, pilots, that takes a long time.

So I think the options are limited but if you want to speak openly, India or Russia might step in but those will come with strings attached. There's a diplomatic trade-off there. The Russians would be interested, they have a lot of equipment they don't use, actually, but if they do it it's essentially to embarrass the Americans and will be to insert themselves into the government as a wedge between Afghanistan and Washington. So that's something that any government would have to consider carefully: whether to accept this aid or not. There might be some diplomatic backlash if they do that. But they aren't the only ones who could supply the helicopters that have crews that are at least partially trained that could be quickly deployed. It happened in Iraq, the Iraqi Air Force, tired of waiting for American planes, just purchased, in days, secondhand Russian planes and started using them against Islamic State. So in terms of existing planes there has not been a lot of good news on this front.

As for the C-27, we asked the question how it could be that they procured planes that were so completely unsuitable for Afghanistan and we got very different answers. Some people denied they were unsuitable but they claimed there was initial maintenance. The planes by the way were 30 years old when they were delivered to Afghanistan and overhauled. I understand the engines they have are not the best to fly in very hot climates so during the summer their performance declines considerably. What is the truth? I think basically the truth is ISAF went into this without proper scrutiny. The planes were offered as a present, actually, by the air force, and then what they needed, what they procured, was a maintenance contract. And they didn't realize when they signed the contract what the cost would be, it was very difficult to estimate, of course. But when you buy something, I can tell you the price is projected this and that. But then you pay for the maintenance and find out that next year the lamp costs more than the projector, and that's something that you didn't foresee because you've never used the projector and you didn't know how many years the lamp could last.

So they walked into this without reporting into the financial debacle. But they were not paid by Afghanistan so this is more of an American issue; they wasted their own money.

Question: Considering the financial aspect of the ANA, we’ve seen both national and international people involved in corruption on a high level. What will be the consequence of this on national people?

Giustozzi: Well I think the new president to the military was symbolic in this regard, but in terms of practical consequences the whole thing was never properly investigated and in fact I don’t know of many things that have been properly investigated in Afghanistan in the last 12 years. Even with regard to the Americans, they deny that they are mentors with the responsibility to oversee, but actually they’re not

supposed to oversee. Technically the job is to mentor. Of course, we all know that they are actually doing some supervision and overseeing but it’s not their task. It’s not their job. You can’t accuse somebody of not having overseen when it’s not in their job description. So that is an ongoing issue. The only positive thing is that it raises awareness about this type of corruption. As far as I know, corruption continued after the scandal. The chief surgeon was removed but the selling of medicine on the black market continued. Maybe not continuing right now but it was alleged to continue for some time after the scandal. This scandal was a major blow to morale because of course when you fight and you know that if you’re injured and wind up in this kind of situation, it’s not something that people want to hear.

So all this, despite awareness of this, in practice not much has been done. Now, of course, there’s a new administration so we’ll have to see once we have a Minister of Defence, it’ll be up to him. I think inevitably the only way to address this issue is to start replacing people from the top, particularly those who have not been delivering or effectively supervising their subordinates. Education should help in removing that, but that’s a process. It starts from the top and then it takes some time to reach the bottom. Certainly for the morale of the army addressing these issues is very symbolic. The other issue that people complain about is the lack of or decreasing availability of medical evacuations because now the army’s used to American helicopters. Even in the best years they complained that Americans got priority or ISAF got priority over Afghans. Even then they were getting evacuated pretty quickly but now that is disappearing very quickly and the Afghan air force is doing better at that but will never be able to provide the same kind of service that the American Air Force was providing. Aside from the American Air Force no other air force in the world can provide that type of service, it was top-rate service.

And so the decline is inevitable. In many cases there will be no 24-hour medical evacuation. Many units are already told medical evacuation will be by road. Which means if you are in an outpost in Kunar, you are dead by the time you arrive anywhere. So this is going to affect the morale. For this, the only thing you can do is improve as much as possible the maintenance capability of the air force so at least the capacity is there, potentially is fully delivered. If you have 20 planes but only 30% are operational at any given time, you can only do so much medical evacuation. If the maintenance improves and you have a service rate of 60%, even if the number of planes is the same you have twice as much in terms of medical evacuation capability. So I think again

it's, in a sense it's clear that people should do the maintenance, that a plane doesn't fly it means some injured soldier has died. This is something that can only be resolved once there is a Minister of Defence who is on the job.

Question: Ashraf Ghani has same view of the war as you, of it being fought by poor people in the south or poor people who get recruited in Nangahar, Takhar, Badakhshan. He said the BSA gives us control, it means that we have to take control of this war. We've had some work done of militia relations within the police corps but the army was set up as multiethnic, a real state institution. Is that the case?

Giustozzi: The way the army functions is very different from the police because the police, particularly the uniformed police, is local recruitment, basically. So it means that if you recruit a militia commander in the police, it's very likely he brings his own people into the police. So there should be some vetting but there isn't. But in the army every unit is mixed. It goes down to every unit, to the tactical unit. So if the commander is Pashtun, the second in command will be Tajik or Uzbek or Hazara or whatever. Nobody can serve in their own district, at least in the first contract. They will be sent somewhere else. You can't have homogenous units that are basically lifting militias into the army. That cannot be done. But what you can have is if the commander is charismatic enough or resourceful enough, even financially somehow, to reward his men, make the kind of bond between him and the men that will be loyal to him more than to the Afghan state, for example. That can happen but of course there's also a system of rotation in place where commanders are rotated every few years. So I don't have the sense that this as such is a major problem in the Afghan Army. At least nowhere like the police.

Question: We've heard in the past few years with the Afghan army fighting fiercely with the Taliban that in some cases are turning a blind eye to them if they're not posing a severe problem. Did it seem like they were trying to keep a low profile and not fight with the Afghan Taliban in their communities? I mean there's definitely deference in their approach toward these different groups.

Giustozzi: Yeah, I think that there it's not that the army as such is doing these things but I think that there are doctrinal differences within the army; different commanders with different views. And I think these views can be summarized essentially to different attitudes. One is that we're in the army, and our job is to fight. Then there might be some politicians and police with other tasks but we fight. And our job is if they say this area is under the control of the enemy, and they tell us to go there, our task is to go, fight and take it. And that's it. And that goes with some political views which are that if the fighting has to take place in settled communities that shelter the Taliban, you know, sorry, but they shouldn't do that. And when we go in there will be some collateral casualties and it's actually their fault.

And the other view is that the army inevitably has to think politically as well, you can't just isolate fighting from politics. That if these communities are sheltering the Taliban, then moving in with extreme force will be counterproductive. According to the law, they're committing a crime. If you cooperate with insurgents you could be

arrested, according to the law. But politically you know that if you move in you can't arrest everybody, you can't kill everybody. You kill some, arrest some others, and make many more enemies. There've been cases of different army commanders adopting very radically different approaches. Typically after an operation by some of the outliers they have delegations coming to Kabul to complain about extreme violence, destruction, arbitrary killing, all this kind of stuff. And I think this is still the case, these two different attitudes.

Simply found, these are the two poles internally in the army, the two types of thinking of how to behave in this type of conflict. And they still co-exist. There's not been a very strong sense of strategic reduction from the top of the ministry. So there's no available policy in this regard as far as I know. From the top of the ministry, there's nobody saying it should be like this or it should be like that. And there's no doctrine, in the Afghan army, written doctrine, except American doctrine which has been translated. In this manual we find out about nuclear warfare, biological warfare, these manuals are just translated word by word without consideration for the fact that there's a slightly different embodiment from what the American army might have to face. So these manuals are not very useful and I don't think anybody really reads them.

There's no indigenous doctrine being developed and systematized. There's no effort by the military academy or the Ministry of Defence to collate episodes, experiences from people who have been fighting now and in the past, and say, how did you fight, how successful were the tactics, and out of that develop doctrine tailored toward Afghanistan in particular's war. So every commander does it as he sees fit on his own personal experience and views, and I don't think this is changing. I understand from the military academy that they're not even thinking of developing this kind of doctrine. They're still trying to synthesize from a bunch of western military doctrines, the French, the Brits, the Americans, all have been involved in training officers here and this means they've been injecting doctrines that are very different (particularly French doctrine is very different from British or American) and they're still trying to reconcile this to get doctrine. It might be impossible in fact, because I don't think they can be reconciled. But I haven't been able to find any evidence of them trying to develop something out of their own experience or the experience of their commanders in the field.

Question: This is very common that the war has political things behind it. The collapse of Iraq after the army's withdrawal has people concerned that the same thing will happen here, with others pointing out the situation here is very different. What are the differences?

Giustozzi: I think the first thing to note is that the collapse of the Iraqi Army didn't happen immediately but three years later. What happened in these three years in Iraq? Two things. One is that the then-prime minister Maliki replaced the top commanders of the army with cronies. He was worried about a coup and felt insecure in his job and started replacing the top people. And then those top people in three years replaced the next layer, and the next layer, and the next until everybody got

replaced, including the rank and file. People were bringing in their cronies, militias, until it wasn't actually an army anymore. It took time for this to happen. It didn't happen suddenly. Then their position was demoralized and little by little they forged an alignment around one strong personality, i.e al-Baghdadi, and even that took quite a while and eventually al-Baghdadi was able to mobilize money somewhere to consolidate these lowly un-aligned forces into a relatively cohesive military force.

So when these two things came together, then the Iraqi Army collapsed. So it's not an unavoidable process but is something that I think could happen here as well because it all depends on what the political elite will do. And I think already the previous management in the ministry and at the political levels been indulging in a lot of nepotism and patronage.

So I think that it's not quite as bad as the Iraqi Army was a few months ago, but I think it's 50/50. I think it will be hard because the senior officers and unit commanders of the Afghan army (and this is not my personal judgment this is what I hear from the mentors who have been working with them) are not up to the task. And the same estimate came from the Indians, talking to some Indians who've been training some of these people in India, who say that maybe half of the people we get should not be in the army. They're not trainable. So let's say 50/50, it's not an accurate estimate, I don't have the means to do an accurate estimate and nobody can, probably, but very roughly. I think there is much of that, but not to the same extent. Then also it depends on what the new leadership will do. They could indulge in more of this, and then reach the Iraqi stage, or could try to professionalize, introduce more military officers in the army, then things could get better.

And then on the other hand the Taliban are divided internally. It doesn't mean that two years from now the Taliban will still be divided, they may be forced to unify politically and militarily, until now unsuccessfully. But tomorrow, who knows? I wouldn't want to wait for them to remain fragmented. I think essentially their political leadership will do its best to throw the army out and have the Taliban the only thing in the province. So it's not a foregone conclusion but it could happen.

Question: There's been some criticism of President Karzai calling the Taliban brothers. Has this affected the morale of the ANSF on the front line? There has been some similar of President Ghani. Having in mind the current structure of the government, with Dr. Abdullah as CEO and General Dostum, a strong anti-Taliban figure being the first vice president, do you expect any change of approach from the current government toward the Taliban?

Giustozzi: No, I think that in this regard they will continue operating. When some Taliban leaders say we have to negotiate, they know that makes them liabilities. Saying 'we have to negotiate with the enemy,' eventually, within your own ranks will be people who say this is a betrayal. This is going to demoralize the rank and file, et cetera, et cetera. So inevitably when you're at war, particularly internal conflicts, when you start raising the issue of, 'we have to consider the other side not as a devil but as somebody you might be able to talk to.' So that inevitably gives them some legitimacy and by doing that you raise a lot of issues within your own camp. But this happens in every negotiating process, not just about Afghanistan.

So either the war continues forever until somebody wins, or we have to go through this stage which is always going to be controversial. In war, every single war that you had, negotiating with people who tried to kill you yesterday is going to be very problematic, particularly because at the early stage you don't know whether you

actually can successfully negotiate. So far example with the Taliban now, the big debates are if they talk to this coalition government, likely nothing will come out of it because the majority of the cabinet will veto and Abdullah will veto any deal. If you come to the point of having something like a deal, which will include a number of conditions that the Taliban will impose, it's very unlikely that all or the main figures in government will all agree on a deal. For they say we would have to pay a big price now, take a risk, and the likely rewards are not there. So I think that right now both sides are considering what to do and I think what the results will be is that they will downplay this aspect and keep some communication going but for now they will not push it too hard until the conditions are in place.

But at the same time you need to send from time to time some signal that we are still interested to the other side so that they don't completely lose interest because the conditions might align and then you might need to talk. You should think of the Karzai era; it took years (literally, several years) even just to establish communication. Now if you lose this channel of communication, when you have finally will have the conditions aligning, it might take again years to establish it and the conditions might not be aligned anymore to be able to talk. So I think in general the two sides agree on one thing, that the channel of communication should stay open because if things align quickly then they can start talking.

I don't want to go into too much detail about the Taliban but I think that in this province nothing exists only on the government's side. It's obviously going to be controversial, you know, war is controversial, and making peace after war is always controversial. The problem is that I talk to many people in Kabul on their sofa watching TV and they say that the war should go, and we should win. But they let somebody else fight. They don't want to pay tax and are not going to send their children easy, to say that. But I think in the villages the attitude might be different. In the villages people might say, we are tired of dying, we are tired of being bombed, and we want peace. For us, peace is better than war; whatever peace. So there's always a trade-off but I say, there's only two here. Nobody's going to win this war for us, nobody's going to fight and win this war for Afghanistan. Afghanistan will have to sort it out itself.

Question: I found your remarks on the work force interesting, that there is big need for educated people who should work inside the institutions, the Ministry of Defence, the police, and so on. How do you assess the potential for reform in these big, powerful entities? Now, with the new government there really is a hope that

this corruption is now tackled, at least to a certain extent. As far as you know these two ministries, could that be a hope or good signal for certain people there who actually want to do the job and are committed and capable? How do you assess the potential now to develop more positively with the new administration?

Follow up question: The major recipient of foreign aid will be the two security institutions and therefore will you see a change in the interest of those who were not much impressed with the security institutions but working other places with a good income. But now, because the only institutions with the resources will be

these security institutions so you will see a change of attitude and people will be interested because of the high income to go and work for those. In addition to tackling corruption you see this new idea presented by President Ghani that will develop a central procurement department with oversight by the president's office.

Giustozzi: I do think that the reform is being attempted already, we don't even have a cabinet but the president's office is already getting ready to replace a lot of people and to change some of the ways money is spent. Whether that can succeed or not I think depends on a number of factors. The government will have to stop insisting on this optimistic narrative that everything is fine, that the Taliban is a band of mercenaries that don't bother us. I think this is counterproductive. The fate of Afghanistan is at stake; we should mobilize, everybody should be ready to make some sacrifice and certain powerful men that have been milking the country, well, we have to confront that not just because the President wants that but because we should all want that, otherwise the country will not win this war. So I think they need a strong narrative to underpin and move against this. Because this narrative is not going to just make them say, okay, fine, I go. They're going to say, oh no, this is targeting this province, is targeting this ethnic group, is targeting this and that, and would really like its own narrative. If there is not an alternative narrative that unifies, it will be difficult to contest this because many of these narratives are Kabul-based, ethnically-based, regionally-based.

With regard to the shift of the educated class a bit more toward the security ministries, for now I can see that. There could be some potential particularly if finally the government accept that they recruit civilians in the bureaucracy because I think actually in the army there's been a law passed that allows for that but I haven't seen anything happen. I think it should be the same in the Ministry of the Interior because right now anyone who joins a security ministry has to be a military officer. So that of course is a strong disincentive to people who have a degree. They might not be used to or even willing to submit to military discipline. So for them it's going to be difficult to go for that even if financially the offer looks attractive, better than being unemployed. But you know, real military discipline if you've never been in the army (because no conscription means these guys have never been in the army) makes it difficult for people. So I think if the government implements these decisions and the military does the same for the Ministry of the Interior, there is some potential of being voluntary without forced conscription. That will have to see if that's enough, but it could be a start.

The central procurement department, I think the President wants to have direct control. I'm sure the President will be more careful about corruption than his predecessor had been but the risk is that if you centralize too much then you create

inefficiencies. In procurement you have a lot of things going on, some very minute, things are very difficult for a few people at the center to monitor everything, so excessive centralization is also a problem. So now I don't know exactly how this is going to work, what the details of the central procurement department is going to be but if they only focus on the big contracts, for example fuel that has to be procured centrally and then distributed, that can be fine. If it is about procuring ammunition, which I think will be donated by the Americans in the future, and procuring spare parts is fine, but for example food is going to be difficult to centralize food for units on the ground. So it depends really on where they're going to draw the line in terms of centralization. At the center there are not so many people they trust to actually procure things without corruption. Centralization has got this rationale but it could create big management issues.

Question: It's a very big task to build up the ANA, especially with the literacy rate so high, but they've made some mistakes by sending soldiers overseas for training which costs thousands of dollars instead of doing such training here and giving these resources to building up training programs here. If a focus were put on internal institutions, I think that would facilitate training more soldiers in less time and with less of a budget.

Giustozzi: This has been slowly happening as institutions that are needed to train, particularly the officer corps, now are in place. It would have been probably more rational and certainly more useful if this institution had been established early on because you know it takes a long time to train and then the officers have to gain experience to a career path that can take 20, 25 years, so they're starting a little late in the day. I think in part the issue was that the process of training particularly the top level of the army but also the police was support-driven, not demand-driven, so it was about who offers what. So it was asking NATO members, what can you do, how many can you train, how many trainers can you send, as opposed to having a plan and say we should implement this plan, which would serve the purpose of creating a security establishment which is self-reliant and relatively cheap to maintain. So in my view it was the wrong approach. It was essentially a debate in NATO saying okay, I'm willing to take 15 trainees to my military academy, they will take 20, others 50, and I will give you some money for that, without really having a coherent plan around which to operate.

Now this is less of a problem because the institutions are in place but the problem is really that we're going to see the output coming out of this institution only years from now, if even that. In a modern army logistics is very important and in America they estimate that a top level logistician takes 20 years, 25 years to develop. The problem is that Afghanistan doesn't have 25 years to develop so you want to have this institution now working and delivering the resources that are slow in coming. So meanwhile you need some other some other option to fill the gap, that's the real problem now.

Question: Most of the kinds of conflicts we're seeing here are military and civilian elements. What kinds of institutional linkages have you seen among the kinetic actors and the non-kinetic actors to try to foster stability?

Giustozzi: Well, in a sense the situation we've got is very similar to what you have in all other aspects. I was talking about doctrine not being developed institutionally, were basically emerging out of individuals and usually not being submitted beyond our circles. So the successful general who develops some kind of tactics will use it for himself, maybe will tell some friends, some admirers, some of his subordinates but his experience will not be collated by a central organization and used to reshape the army. The same I think is with regard to the collaboration between the various organs of the state. Sometimes, certain individuals might have either the charisma or the connections to create this kind of relations so some army corps commander in the past were well-connected with the governor of the province or the various provinces where they operated, then had some good relations with one or the other chiefs of police but that was more the exception than the rule. And for a force to create an institution that will handle this and not be unsuccessful they've mostly been limited to the security establishments and coordination bodies for the various security agencies but that doesn't necessarily include the governors or these kinds of people. So it was all left to the personal initiative of individuals. Sometimes the individuals do this and sometimes they would not. More often than not they wouldn't. And there were of course personal rivalries, et cetera, that complicate things and little involvement from the level of the national leadership to intervene and resolve these issues. Or even trying to align, the tendency was to try to have different actors at the regional and operational level being in competition with each other as opposed to align and create a strong lock. And that has affected negatively I think the military, you know, the country insurgency has fought. So even though we've had problems, you know, that is my sense.





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