

EUROPE, AFGHANISTAN AND THE TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONSHIP AFTER 2014

ERIK BRATTBERG



STOCKHOLM INTERNATIONAL PEACE RESEARCH INSTITUTE

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Preface

With barely a year and a half to go, Afghanistan's neighbours are understandably nervous about what will happen to security and stability in the region after the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) leaves Afghanistan in December 2014.

There is a clear need for cooperative policy approaches based on better understanding of the interests and worries of Afghanistan and its neighbours. SIPRI launched the Wider Central Asia (WCA) initiative in January 2012 with the express purpose of promoting and facilitating dialogue on security in Afghanistan's neighbourhood. It has brought together experts and officials from Iran, Pakistan and five Central Asian states: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, as well as from Europe and the United States. It has also sought to complement structured dialogues with independent analysis.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which has led ISAF for over a decade, knows that its credibility will be judged by what it leaves behind in Afghanistan. Equally important is what Afghanistan has left behind of the NATO alliance. From the earliest days of the military intervention in 2001—even before NATO's involvement—Afghanistan has tested the transatlantic partnership.

I would like to congratulate transatlantic relations expert Erik Brattberg for this excellent analysis of what Afghanistan has meant for the transatlantic partnership, and its implications for the future. Gratitude is also due to Hans Binnendijk, Melissa Hersh, Josef Janning and Andras Simonyi for their feedback on the paper during its development, and to the numerous regional officials and experts who have contributed to the WCA initiative. I would also like to thank the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, which generously funds the initiative. Finally, thanks to all those within SIPRI who helped in the development of this report, in particular Dr Neil Melvin, Dr Bruce Koepke, Theresa Höghammar and the SIPRI editors, especially Dr David Prater.

Professor Tilman Brück
Director, SIPRI
Stockholm, May 2013

Summary

As the December 2014 deadline for withdrawal of international forces from Afghanistan approaches, it is already clear that the future footprint of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in the country will be markedly smaller. Given the importance of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission for NATO over the past decade, future developments in Afghanistan will carry serious consequences for the alliance between Europe and the United States.

One of the early fault lines in the transatlantic relationship in Afghanistan concerned the relative importance of military operations versus the wider political approach. Frustrated by the US-dictated coalition strategy in Afghanistan and Europe's perceived lack of influence in shaping this strategy, many European observers increasingly came to see the Afghanistan mission's goals as unachievable and sought instead to bring international forces home.

Despite Europe's initial backing of the USA's surge strategy announced in 2009, overall European support for the war effort soon started to dwindle, commensurate with the erosion of the Afghan security situation during this time. The inability of the transatlantic partners to commit sufficient troops to meet on-the-ground requirements undermined ISAF's ability to tackle the growing insurgency in the country. Under the mantra 'in together, out on schedule', NATO leaders have since reiterated the importance of carrying out an orderly and coordinated exit from Afghanistan.

While the USA still sees a clear security imperative for remaining in Afghanistan beyond 2014, European involvement will be driven primarily by a sense of responsibility for Afghanistan following a decade of intervention, as well as Europe's ambition to be a significant actor in foreign and security issues. It is vital, therefore, that Europe continues to be engaged in Afghanistan, in order to ensure that the country does not relapse into chaos and disorder.

The way forward

The international community now has less than two years to carry out the full transition of security responsibilities to the Afghan national security forces (ANSF). Europe should deploy a force of 4000 to 6000 troops in Afghanistan after 2014 to signal its commitment to supporting Afghanistan for the long haul, and demonstrate its ambition to be a significant actor in foreign and security issues in the context of the transatlantic relationship.

Europe's near-term priorities in Afghanistan should be: (a) development assistance to Afghanistan; (b) continued support for human rights, rule of law and democracy (including support for the presidential elections); (c) training for the ANSF and a possible new police assistance programme; (d) diplomacy to support national reconciliation in Afghanistan; and (e) efforts to boost regional stability (notably in regard to Central Asian states and Pakistan).

While the current European approach already encompasses most of these dimensions, it is not ambitious enough. More resources are needed in each of these areas if Europe is to play a role in shaping Afghanistan's development over the coming 'transformation decade'.

The end of the decade-long Afghan engagement, and the high fiscal and human costs it has entailed, have had a damaging effect on transatlantic solidarity and called NATO's viability into question. While the agenda for transatlantic cooperation is extensive, the ball is currently in Europe's court. The USA's declining relative power means that it will require more assistance from its partners and allies in order to maintain its global commitments.

As Europe ponders its post-2014 role in Afghanistan it is imperative that it engages in a 'strategic reflection' about its future role as a global actor within the context of the transatlantic relationship.

Abbreviations

ANA	Afghan National Army
ANP	Afghan National Police
ANSF	Afghan national security forces
BOMCA	EU Border Management Programme in Central Asia
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
EUPOL	EU Police Mission in Afghanistan
ISAF	International Security Assistance Forces
OEF	Operation Enduring Freedom
PRT	Provincial reconstruction team
SOFA	Status-of-forces agreement

1. Introduction

The decade-long North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) operation in Afghanistan is ending. In 2014 NATO's International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) will formally hand over all security responsibilities to the Afghan Government. Although NATO has pledged an 'enduring commitment' to the country beyond 2014, it will have a significantly smaller footprint and a narrower role, focused on training and advising the Afghan national security forces (ANSF). However, with less than two years to prepare for the transition, there are already many signs—including a possible rise in insurgency levels and insider attacks—that the security situation in Afghanistan may remain initially volatile.¹ While it is impossible to predict the situation in 2014, the legacy of the Afghanistan mission will certainly influence future relations between the United States and its European allies. This paper discusses Afghanistan through the lens of this transatlantic relationship.

Now is an opportune moment to take stock of transatlantic efforts in Afghanistan. The Western approach to Afghanistan has failed to achieve many of its goals. The country remains in a perilous state, with a real risk of an intensification of the current violent instability and a distinct possibility of more serious conflict with negative consequences for the people of Afghanistan and for the wider region. Popular support in Western countries for the intervention in Afghanistan is low, and the economic crisis is undercutting budgets and military capacities. At the same time, the achievements of the past decade need to be safeguarded and further developed. Afghanistan will require additional support, including security training and development assistance, in its transition to self-sufficiency. Similarly, in order to maintain the coherence in the transatlantic community, European states must demonstrate continuing solidarity with the United States through engagement in Afghanistan, while recognizing the constraints in terms of what they can commit and achieve.

As the withdrawal of NATO and US troops continues and the debate about the legacy of the ISAF operation intensifies, it is worth recalling why European states found themselves in Afghanistan in the first place. A combination of at least four factors was at play. First and most obvious was the need to show solidarity after the terrorist attacks on the United States of 11 September 2001. Second, European governments had their own concerns about terrorist threats, particularly after the 2004 and 2005 bombings in Madrid and London, respectively. Third, European states had broader strategic ambitions, both regionally and globally, concerning intervening in conflicts. Fourth, Europe sought to demonstrate its commitment to democracy and human rights and to addressing failing states.

¹ Insider or 'green-on-blue' attacks are attacks carried out by members of the Afghan police and army against coalition forces in Afghanistan. On the general security situation in Afghanistan see e.g. Cordesman, A. H., 'Afghanistan: meeting the real world challenges of the transition', Center for Strategic and International Studies, 23 Jan. 2013; and Chayes, S. and Grare, F., 'Avoiding catastrophic failure in Afghanistan', Carnegie Endowment of International Peace, 29 Nov. 2012.

The context for the transatlantic community today varies across these four dimensions. While the USA still sees a clear security imperative for remaining in Afghanistan beyond 2014, European involvement will be driven primarily by a sense of responsibility for Afghanistan following a decade of intervention. Most European countries will prioritize humanitarian assistance and development aid. Displaying solidarity with the USA will remain important, although slightly less so as Afghanistan drops down the transatlantic agenda and the focus of the mission shifts from military campaigns to training and advising. Europe also has some unique strategic interests in the wider Central Asia region, especially in terms of anti-terrorism. Together, these factors will shape Europe's approach to Afghanistan over the coming years, although it is still too early to tell precisely how.

This paper assesses the key lessons learned in Afghanistan and their implications for the future ability of the transatlantic partners to cooperate. Chapter 2 discusses NATO's intervention in Afghanistan, in particular the burden-sharing issue and the impact of the 'surge'. Chapter 3 describes the current transition plan. Chapter 4 discusses NATO's options for supporting Afghanistan beyond 2014. Chapter 5 analyses the implications of the NATO mission in Afghanistan for the transatlantic relationship. Chapter 6 provides recommendations on how to strengthen Europe's role in Afghanistan over the coming 'transformation decade'.

2. Afghanistan: a test for the transatlantic community

Largely neglected by the international community during the 1990s, Afghanistan was cast under the international lens following the events of 11 September 2001. In the aftermath, NATO activated Article V of its collective defence clause for the first time in its history, but its offers to assist with removing the Taliban regime were turned down.² Nevertheless, in a display of transatlantic solidarity, several European states opted to participate in the US-led military intervention Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), although their contributions were generally modest in size.³

When NATO took over command of ISAF in August 2003, this marked the culmination of NATO's efforts to define a post-cold war vision and mission. The end of the cold war had prompted many observers to predict the impending unravelling of NATO, whose cold war focus on territorial defence had made it shy away from out-of-area operations.⁴ However, the Balkans crisis in the mid-1990s and the NATO intervention in Kosovo in 1999 provided impetus for those who argued that in order to remain a viable modern security organization, NATO must take on out-of-area crisis-management responsibilities.⁵

NATO's takeover of combat operations and the mission's new UN mandate altered the European rationale for committing forces to Afghanistan.⁶ European troop contributions grew as a result.

The burden-sharing issue

One of the early fault-lines in the transatlantic relationship in Afghanistan concerned the relative importance of military operations versus the wider political approach. While the USA tended to focus on the former, European states generally emphasized the latter. As the security situation on the ground became increasingly untenable in 2003, the light footprint approach that guided international engagement during the first few years was jettisoned in favour of a fully-fledged stabilization effort, consisting of a larger ISAF force with a strengthened

² Hoehn, A. and Harting, S., *Risking NATO: Testing the Limits of the Alliance in Afghanistan* (RAND Corporation: Santa Monica, 2010), p. 16.

³ Siegel, S. C., 'Bearing their share of the burden: Europe in Afghanistan', *European Security*, vol. 18, no. 4 (2010), p. 465.

⁴ See Liland, F., *Keeping NATO Out of Trouble: NATO's Non-policy on 'Out-of-area' Issues During the Cold War*, Forsvarsstudier no. 4 (Institutt for Forsvarsstudier: Oslo, 1999).

⁵ Jervis, R., 'Alliances, perceptions, and current frictions', eds F. Zola and M. Smith, *Transatlantic Relations: Prospective Vision for the US and Europe* (Routledge: London, 2010).

⁶ European states nevertheless differed in their motivations for committing to the intervention. Germany and the UK viewed ISAF as strengthening the transatlantic security framework, while France viewed European contributions as a means to further the EU's emerging security identity.

combat role.⁷ At the same time, divergent interpretations of ISAF's new mandate hampered operational effectiveness.⁸

The expansion of ISAF's mandate prompted contributing countries to send additional troops to help provide security beyond Kabul. NATO also signalled a renewed commitment to the Afghan state-building process, marking a watershed moment in the West's previously limited engagement in the country. A part of this effort was the creation of provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs) to assist the UN with reconstruction and development in the Afghan provinces.⁹ The further deterioration in the security environment in Afghanistan in 2006 led ISAF to take on additional roles to counter the Taliban and other insurgent groups. However, ISAF's ability to conduct these tasks was severely impeded by insufficient armed personnel and equipment, national caveats and divergent rules of engagement.

The inability of the transatlantic partners to commit sufficient troops to meet on-the-ground requirements undercut ISAF's ability to tackle the growing insurgency in the country. While US leaders have chastised Europe for repeatedly falling short on its troop contributions to ISAF, the blame can hardly be put on Europe alone. In fact, for a long time the USA also remained unwilling to provide sufficient troops.¹⁰ Moreover, when accounting for population size, European contributions seem somewhat more impressive.¹¹ However, the debate over how the transatlantic partners should share the burden in Afghanistan was never solely about troop numbers. A major source of friction over the past decade has been the various restrictions (or 'caveats') imposed on military forces by European governments.¹² The impact of national caveats is clearly visible when accounting for the number of combat deaths.¹³ However, the willingness of individual European countries to support the Afghan engagement has also

⁷ Gross, E., 'The EU in Afghanistan: peacebuilding in a conflict setting', ed. S. Blockmans, *The European Union and International Crisis Management: Legal and Policy Aspects* (T. M. C. Asser Press: The Hague, 2007), p. 121.

⁸ Sperling, J. and Webber, M., 'NATO: from Kosovo to Kabul', *International Affairs*, vol. 85, no. 3 (2009), p. 502.

⁹ See Jakobsen, P. V., 'PRTs in Afghanistan: successful but not sufficient', DIIS Report no. 6, Danish Institute for International Studies (2005); and Sedra, M., 'Civil-military relations in Afghanistan: the Provincial Reconstruction Team debate', Canadian Institute for Strategic Studies, Strategic Datalink no. 126 (Mar. 2005), <<http://www.opencanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/SD-126-Sedra.pdf>>, p. 1.

¹⁰ Zakheim, D., *A Vulcan's Tale: How the Bush Administration Mismanaged the Reconstruction of Afghanistan* (Brookings Institution Press: Washington, DC, 2011).

¹¹ Gierich, B. and Wallace, W., 'Not such a soft power: the external deployment of European forces', *Survival*, vol. 46, no. 2 (2004), pp. 163–82. Four European countries—Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway and the UK—had at one point deployed more troops per capita than the USA. Aaron, P. J., 'Mighty Denmark pulls its weight in Afghanistan', *Foreign Policy*, 2 Apr. 2008.

¹² Some European countries placed their troops in relatively safe areas (e.g. northern Afghanistan). Others—notably Germany, Italy and Spain—imposed limitations on the kind of activities their troops could undertake, preventing them from participating in combat operations other than self-defence. Another commonly cited problem has been the inability or unwillingness of some governments to provide troops with appropriate equipment. Gallis, P. and Morelli, V., *NATO in Afghanistan: A Test of the Transatlantic Alliance*, Congressional Research Service (CRS) Report for Congress (CRS: Washington, DC, 2008), p. 5.

¹³ Three-quarters of the 1078 troops killed in combat-related incidents in Afghanistan between Oct. 2001 and Feb. 2009 were from the UK or the USA. Sperling and Webber (note 8), p. 508.

varied, in terms of both troop numbers and the ability to share risks.¹⁴ Over time, partly due to extensive US criticism, some of the most limiting caveats were removed.¹⁵

Frustrated by the US-dictated coalition strategy in Afghanistan and their perceived lack of influence in shaping this strategy, many European observers increasingly came to see the Afghanistan mission's goals as unachievable, and sought instead to bring international forces home. Commensurate with the deterioration of the security situation on the ground and the increased risks posed to the international troops, public support for the mission gradually eroded on both sides of the Atlantic.¹⁶

Transatlantic burden-sharing has been somewhat more evenly distributed in the area of civilian assistance, and development assistance efforts have also enjoyed a fairly high degree of complementarity. However, despite European rhetorical support for a civilian approach in Afghanistan, the EU has not been willing to invest in civilian assistance.¹⁷ In fact, as of 2010, overall US civilian assistance surpassed that of the 27 EU member states combined.¹⁸ This counters traditional notions of the division of labour between Europe and the USA, whereby Europe assumes responsibility for 'softer' issues such as peacekeeping and reconstruction, and the USA provides the heavy military assets. Instead, the division seems to lie within Europe itself, with states such as France and Italy contributing more troops than average, and the Netherlands and the Nordic countries—perhaps unsurprisingly—devoting more attention to development.¹⁹

Apart from the humanitarian assistance provided by the individual member states and the European Commission, the EU has also operated a police training mission, the EU Police Mission in Afghanistan (EUPOL Afghanistan) since mid-2007, following a request from NATO. US encouragement for the creation of an EU mission under the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) in Afghanistan marked a shift in US policy towards Europe. Rather than merely advocating more European contributions to ISAF, the USA increasingly came to recognize the EU as a useful security actor complementing NATO military activities on the ground.²⁰ As one author observes, this can be interpreted as broadening the transatlantic space, shifting towards a stronger emphasis on direct EU–US relations.²¹ At the same time, EUPOL has been far from a success story. The mission has suffered from serious deficiencies, including severe staffing shortages,

¹⁴ When accounting for population size, Denmark, Estonia and the UK have all experienced higher casualty rates than the USA. Aaron (note 11).

¹⁵ France and Germany allowed their troops to assist other ISAF troops in emergencies and participate in counterterrorism operations against al-Qaeda. Gallis and Morelli (note 12), p. 6.

¹⁶ *The Pew Global Attitudes Project* (Pew Research Center: Washington, DC, 2008).

¹⁷ Korski, D., 'Shaping Europe's Afghan surge', European Council on Foreign Relations Policy Brief, 25 Mar. 2009.

¹⁸ Flanagan, S. et al., 'Afghanistan: a stress test for transatlantic security cooperation', *EU–US Security Strategies: Comparative Scenarios and Recommendations* (Center for Strategic and International Studies: Washington, DC, 2011).

¹⁹ Siegel (note 3), p. 467.

²⁰ Korski, D. and Pothier, F., 'Can Afghans still count on the EU?', *European Voice*, 3 Sep. 2009, <<http://www.europeanvoice.com/article/imported/can-afghans-still-count-on-the-eu-/65765.aspx>>.

²¹ Gross (note 7), p. 123.

lack of funding, disorganization, unclear chains of command and weak coordination.²² This calls into question the EU's credibility as a civilian crisis-management actor.²³

Transatlantic perspectives on the 'surge'

While most European governments' strategic rationales for committing troops to ISAF reflect a belief that such commitments strengthen their relationship with the office of the US president, this bilateral calculation became even more pronounced with the change of US administration in 2009.²⁴ Many in Europe saw the election of US President Barack Obama, who had campaigned on reallocating more resources from Iraq to Afghanistan, as a vindication of their view that the conflict in Iraq had been a wrong priority from the beginning.²⁵ In December 2009, after much consideration, the Obama administration finally announced a new US approach to Afghanistan. By deploying 30 000 extra American troops and additional troops from the other participating ISAF countries, in a so-called surge intended to break the Taliban's momentum and increase the ability of the Afghan National Army (ANA) to stand on its own feet. Other elements of this approach included engagement with 'moderate' Taliban and insurgency groups, offensive military targeting of hardliners, and efforts to win the hearts and minds of the Afghan people.²⁶

European governments and their constituents generally welcomed the Obama administration's decision to narrow the objectives of the mission, increase the civilian side of stabilization efforts, and set a clear target date for military reductions, despite their reluctance to take on a reinforced military counter-insurgency mission at a time when the overall mission was growing increasingly unpopular in Europe.²⁷ Although US officials hoped that President Obama's popularity in Europe would prove sufficient to generate stronger European troop contributions, the response from Europe was lukewarm at first.²⁸

Nevertheless, following increased consultation on the part of the Obama administration, the commitment and the mandates of the European forces on the ground were eventually broadened.²⁹ In 2010 several European nations, including Germany, reinforced their troop levels in Afghanistan despite widespread domestic opposition. In most cases, these decisions were driven both by security

²² British Parliament, House of Lords, 'The EU's Afghan police mission', European Union Committee, 8th Report of Session 2010–11, London, 1 Feb. 2011; and International Crisis Group (ICG), 'Rebuilding the Afghan state: the European Union's role', Asia Report no. 107 (ICG: Brussels, Nov. 2005).

²³ See Larive, M., 'From speeches to actions: EU involvement in the war in Afghanistan through the EUPOL Afghanistan mission', *European Security*, vol. 21, no. 2 (2012).

²⁴ Korski, D., 'Transatlantic AfPak policy: one year later', FRIDE Policy Brief no. 40, Feb. 2010.

²⁵ Emiliano, A., 'Transatlantic relations four years later: the elusive quest for a strategic vision', *International Spectator*, vol. 47, no. 3 (2012), p. 25.

²⁶ Harsh, E., Ebert, H., and Cohn, L. P., 'On the road to disengagement? Envisioning a long-term strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan', *Transatlantic Security Paper* no. 6, June 2012, <<http://www.isn.ethz.ch/isn/Digital-Library/Publications/Detail/?id=143908>>, p. 2.

²⁷ Flanagan et al. (note 18), pp. 189–190, 194.

²⁸ Siegel (note 3), p. 461.

²⁹ Emiliano (note 25), pp. 20–36.

requirements on the ground and international admonishments. Between February 2009 and February 2010, EU states committed an additional 6765 soldiers to the surge.³⁰ However, these additional troop commitments were still smaller than what the USA had requested. Moreover, European contributions were highly uneven, with a handful of countries accounting for the lion's share of non-US troops in Afghanistan. While this reinforced the debate in the USA regarding Europe's unwillingness to play a constructive role in global security, European states did not rush to exit Afghanistan—although in the face of mounting domestic scepticism some states (e.g. the Netherlands and Spain) did indeed pull home troops prematurely.³¹

Despite European support for the new surge strategy, overall European support for the war effort dwindled after 2009, commensurate with the erosion of the Afghan security situation during this time. Pressure on European governments to bring home their troops has only grown since. In a 2012 survey, 75 per cent of European respondents supported either total withdrawal or partial troop reductions in Afghanistan. American support for troop withdrawals was only slightly less, at 68 per cent.³²

³⁰ 'NATO allies pledge 7,000 more troops for Afghanistan effort', *Washington Post*, 5 Dec. 2009.

³¹ 'Dutch troops end Afghanistan deployment', BBC News, 1 Aug. 2010; and 'Spain to pull troops back in Afghanistan', United Press International, 16 Mar. 2013.

³² *Transatlantic Trends 2012: Key Findings* (German Marshall Fund of the United States: Washington, DC, 2009), <<http://trends.gmfus.org/files/2012/09/TT-2012-Key-Findings-Report.pdf>>.

3. In search of a sustainable transition strategy

Paving the way for transition

After a decade-long engagement the transatlantic partners are currently on track to transfer full security responsibilities to Afghan forces by the end of 2014. This exit strategy has been a work in progress for several years. As a presidential candidate in 2008, Barack Obama campaigned to end the war in Afghanistan and as president he has repeatedly pledged to ‘finish the job’.³³ Increasingly sceptical of the overall mission, European governments used the US announcement of a drawdown timeline as an opportunity to gradually remove their forces without facing heavy US criticism for doing so.

The Obama administration’s surge strategy was an intrinsic part of the exit strategy, and was intended to pave the way for an eventual exit from Afghanistan by improving the security situation on the ground. In November 2010 the first formal step towards winding down the ISAF mission was taken at the NATO summit in Lisbon, where member states agreed to begin turning over security responsibilities to the Afghans in 2014. Although it was already becoming clear that the surge had not achieved its intended effect, NATO leaders nevertheless pledged to abide by a ‘conditions-based and not a calendar-driven’ approach.³⁴ In Lisbon, NATO leaders and the Afghan President, Hamid Karzai, also agreed on an ‘enduring partnership’ agreement that would bind the international community to ‘provide sustained practical support to Afghan security institutions’ beyond 2014. In response, the Afghan Government pledged to ‘be an enduring partner to NATO and provide NATO with the necessary assistance to carry out its partnership activities’.³⁵

The terms surrounding this strategy were further clarified during an international conference in Bonn in December 2011.³⁶ The international donor community reaffirmed its support for Afghanistan, pledging comprehensive political and financial support over the ‘transformation decade’ (2015–24). The main objective of Bonn II—generating international support for another decade of support to Afghanistan—was largely fulfilled, although the conference illustrated several problems.³⁷ In May 2012, at NATO’s Chicago summit, its leaders willingly endorsed the Obama administration’s transition plan, under which Afghan forces

³³ White House, ‘Remarks by President Obama in address to the nation from Afghanistan’, 1 May 2012, <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/05/01/remarks-president-address-nation-afghanistan>>.

³⁴ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, ‘Lisbon Summit Declaration’, 20 Nov. 2010, <http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_68828.htm>.

³⁵ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, ‘Declaration by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan on an Enduring Partnership signed at the NATO Summit in Lisbon, Portugal’, 20 Nov. 2010, <http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_68724.htm>.

³⁶ The conference was held to mark 10 years since the first Bonn conference, where key international and Afghan stakeholders (but not the Taliban) had met to codify international support for post-Taliban Afghanistan, set out a reconstruction process and create a new government structure, the Afghan Transitional Authority. The UN Security Council also authorized the Bonn Agreement’s call for the formation of ISAF to create a secure environment in and around Kabul. UN Security Council Resolution 1386, 20 Dec. 2001.

³⁷ Safi, M., ‘Bonn II: from transition to transformation in Afghanistan’, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, 22 Dec. 2011, <<http://www.ipcs.org/article/pakistan/bonn-ii-from-transition-to-transformation-in-afghanistan-3528.html>>.

would assume lead responsibility for security in Afghanistan by mid-2013, at which point international forces would shift to a primarily supportive role before completing the transition by the end of 2014.³⁸

However, NATO leaders also affirmed their intention to continue providing support to the Afghan Government in the transformation decade. Finally, in July 2012, at the Tokyo conference, the international community pledged a post-2014 annual supplement of \$4 billion for Afghan security forces and an equal amount in development and economic assistance.³⁹ Although several details surrounding the nature of the transition process remain unspecified, the re-election of President Obama in November 2012 helped ensure that the current timetable will remain in place and that the transition will occur without interruption. Afghanistan and the USA have also agreed the bilateral Enduring Strategic Partnership Agreement guaranteeing a long-term US role in the country.⁴⁰

‘In together, out on schedule’

Under the mantra ‘in together, out on schedule’, NATO leaders have reiterated the importance of carrying out an orderly and coordinated exit from Afghanistan. However, the precise speed of the coalition’s military withdrawal remains unclear, and will depend on a number of factors. First, while the withdrawal of foreign forces could be accelerated in certain areas where security is deemed sufficient, some analyses suggests that the security situation may also deteriorate if troops are pulled out too fast:

An uncoordinated withdrawal would risk the collapse of the weak Afghan security forces and, in turn, the weak Afghan state. Such a breakdown could spark renewed bloodshed and large-scale population displacement inside Afghanistan and into neighboring countries and leave swaths of territory unprotected against militants and terrorists, thereby undermining US strategic interests in the region.⁴¹

A second factor concerns NATO member states and partners’ political willingness to maintain their forces throughout 2013 and into 2014. While NATO’s Secretary-General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, has made it clear that the withdrawal does not represent ‘a race to the exits’, not all participating states will keep their forces in Afghanistan through to the end of 2014.⁴² The USA currently deploys approximately 68 000 troops in Afghanistan, fewer than before the surge. While the USA has signalled its intention to withdraw these contingents at

³⁸ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, ‘Chicago Summit Declaration issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Chicago on 20 May 2012’, <http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_87593.htm?mode=pressrelease>.

³⁹ The USA is expected to provide half of this sum. So far, the EU has pledged approximately €1.5 billion in aid up to 2017 in the areas of governance, justice sector and human rights, and has promised to continue economic cooperation with the Afghan Government. ‘US reducing plans for large civilian force in post-2014 Afghanistan’, *Washington Post*, 5 Dec. 2012.

⁴⁰ Enduring strategic partnership agreement between the United States of America and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, signed 2 May 2012, Kabul, <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/2012.06.01u.s.-afghanistanspasignedtext.pdf>>.

⁴¹ Hadley, S. and Podesta, J., ‘The right way out of Afghanistan’, *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 91, no. 4 (2012).

⁴² ‘NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan could be speeded up, says Rasmussen’, *The Guardian*, 1 Oct. 2012.

a 'steady pace', President Obama announced in his 2013 State of the Union address that half of these forces would be brought home by the end of the year.⁴³ Meanwhile, many European forces have already started pulling out.⁴⁴

From a US perspective, the main fear has been that European forces would leave their missions undone, forcing the USA to step in. The announcement by French President François Hollande ahead of the Chicago summit that France would prematurely remove all French combat soldiers serving under ISAF is on the verge of being fulfilled. Today, only a small number of French forces remain in Afghanistan to remove equipment and help train Afghan soldiers.⁴⁵ The UK has also announced plans to expedite its own withdrawal, removing some 4000 troops during the course of 2013.⁴⁶ According to existing transition plans, Germany, Italy and Spain are also expected to announce significant troop reductions in the coming months.⁴⁷

With such sizeable reductions already underway, there is a risk that much of the international forces' attention and resources will be devoted to managing the withdrawal in 2013. At the same time, maintaining all the forces until the end of 2013 could generate serious problems with regards to force protection. Further complicating the matter is the logistical challenge that the drawdown from Afghanistan presents.⁴⁸ Finally, the questionable readiness of the ANSF to gradually assume responsibilities for security presents a potential obstacle to the current transition strategy. Multiple problems continue to plague the ANSF's operational capabilities.⁴⁹ It lacks air power, has insufficient access to logistics, and faces difficulties with medical evacuation. By most accounts, the ANSF is far from ready to bear the full responsibility for securing Afghanistan, and it will remain heavily dependent on international assistance for years to come. The planned reduction of the ANSF in 2015 could also give rise to additional security concerns unless measures to disarm and reintegrate the demobilized soldiers are effective.⁵⁰

These factors suggest a scenario in which ISAF troops will remain in Afghanistan until the end of 2013, albeit in a reduced number, and then begin withdrawing more rapidly in 2014. If the security situation in the country deteriorates further, this could increase the pressure to pull out prematurely. Some states may therefore withdraw their troops while others stay the course, with a damaging effect on transatlantic solidarity as a result.

⁴³ White House, 'Remarks by the President in the State of the Union Address', 12 Feb. 2013, <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/02/12/remarks-president-state-union-address>>.

⁴⁴ Today, some 26 000 European troops are present in Afghanistan. See Livingston, I. S. and O'Hanlon, M., 'Afghanistan Index', Brookings Institution, 19 Mar. 2013.

⁴⁵ 'France pulls last troops from combat roles in Afghanistan', CNN, 15 Dec. 2012.

⁴⁶ 'Afghanistan's security transition reaches key point', IISS Strategic Comments No. 7, International Institute for Strategies Studies, Mar. 2013.

⁴⁷ International Crisis Group (ICG), 'Afghanistan: the long, hard road to the 2014 transition' (ICG: Brussels, Oct. 2012), p. 17.

⁴⁸ Resinger, H., 'How to get out of Afghanistan; NATO's withdrawal through Central Asia', NATO Defence College Research Paper no. 79, June 2012.

⁴⁹ 'NATO alarm over Afghan army crisis: loss of recruits threatens security as handover looms', *The Independent*, 31 Mar. 2013; and 'Afghan army's turnover threatens US strategy', *New York Times*, 15 Oct. 2012.

⁵⁰ The ANA is larger now than it has ever been: in Oct. 2012 it consisted of 195 000 troops and by 2014 it is expected to have reached its goal of 350 000 troops. If the security situation permits, the current plan is to then reduce troop numbers to 230 500 by 2015. 'NATO expects troop decision on post-2014 Afghan force by mid-year', Reuters, 4 Mar. 2013.

4. Supporting Afghanistan's 'transformation decade'

The 2014 deadline will mark a fundamental shift in the transatlantic community's presence in Afghanistan. After a decade of ISAF's strategy, the coming transformation decade signals a shift toward stronger Afghan self-government. However, despite notable improvements on a number of fronts, Afghanistan is predicted to remain heavily reliant on the international community for the foreseeable future. The transatlantic community will play a leading role in ensuring that the past decade's achievements are not forfeited and that the country does not once again relapse into chaos and disorder. As the transatlantic partners develop their respective assistance plans for post-2014 Afghanistan, close coordination of efforts is essential. European states are uniquely positioned to play constructive and supportive roles, and should also seek to take advantage of their comparative advantage over the USA in the areas of diplomacy, trade and humanitarian assistance.

Training and supporting the Afghan security forces

The international community now has less than two years to carry out the full transition of security responsibilities to the ANSF. The main objective at this point must be to leave Afghanistan in the best possible shape. While the international community's exit strategy is already in motion, several details regarding the handover of security responsibilities will be finalized in 2013.

A few specific details surrounding the post-2014 military engagement have emerged. First, rather than conducting active combat operations, NATO forces will primarily serve as 'enablers' to the ANSF. The mission will therefore undergo a fundamental shift towards a focus on training and advising. In addition to this, special forces will also engage selectively across the country. The USA is expected to maintain a smaller counterterrorism force to target al-Qaeda sanctuaries in the Afghan-Pakistani hinterland. This force will probably consist of around 1000 special forces as well as drones.

Most US training and counterterrorism troops will be positioned in Kandahar and at the Bagram air base. The scope for the counterterrorism mission is still not entirely clear, although the targets of the counterterrorism force would include al-Qaeda.⁵¹ The new mission will be headquartered in Kabul but will advise Afghan forces at major regional military and police headquarters throughout the country. In the absence of any permanent international bases in the country, international troops will operate from Afghan military bases.⁵² While NATO

⁵¹ 'Time slipping, US ponders Afghan role after 2014', *New York Times*, 25 Nov. 2012.

⁵² Benitez, J., 'NATO closes over 200 bases in Afghanistan', NATO Source, 27 Aug. 2012, <<http://www.acus.org/natosource/nato-closes-over-200-bases-afghanistan>>.

advisers will not actively participate on the battlefield, they may occasionally accompany Afghan forces on major operations.⁵³

While the precise number of international troops to remain in Afghanistan after 2014 is not yet known, the new mission, Operation Resolute Support, will be 'significantly smaller in size' than the present-day ISAF operation.⁵⁴ Current estimates suggest a combined NATO force of 8000–12 000 US and coalition troops.⁵⁵ Considerably fewer European states will participate in the new mission. Estimates suggest 10 to 12 countries will make contributions, depending on their political will and commitment. NATO member states are currently awaiting the US troop numbers decision and the outcome of negotiations between the USA and Afghanistan on the international forces' future status.⁵⁶ The most difficult aspect of the ongoing discussions involves reaching a status-of-forces agreement (SOFA) defining the future parameters for the international forces. These negotiations have begun and are likely to be completed during the first half of 2013. If the USA is seen to be 'abandoning' Afghanistan, this would send a signal to Europeans that it is permissible for them to disengage as well. Another issue of concern for European states is the question of whether or not they will continue to have access to US air support and tactical capabilities (e.g. helicopter evacuation of wounded soldiers) beyond 2014. Meanwhile, there is also a risk that the indecision on future troop deployment will deprive the transatlantic forces of valuable time.⁵⁷

Although Europe's decision on its post-2014 military footprint in Afghanistan is to a large extent dependent on the outcome of the Afghan–US strategic agreement and the success of the current transition strategy—both of which remain uncertain—Europe must maintain a sufficiently large force contingent in Afghanistan. With declining US ability and willingness to continue to support Afghanistan militarily, Europe should step up its military commitment, providing at least half of the international troops necessary to complete the objective of training and advising the ANSF. A European force of at least 4000 troops would signal Europe's commitment to supporting Afghanistan in the long haul, and demonstrate its ambition to be a significant actor in foreign and security issues in the context of the transatlantic relationship.

⁵³ 'Time slipping, US ponders Afghan role after 2014' (note 51).

⁵⁴ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 'Closing press conference by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen following the meetings of NATO defence ministers', 22 Feb. 2013, <http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_98658.htm>.

⁵⁵ 'NATO expects decision on post-2014 Afghan force by mid-year', Reuters, 4 Mar. 2013; and 'NATO in talks on scale of Afghan role after 2014 deadline', *New York Times*, 22 Feb. 2013.

⁵⁶ On 18 Apr. 2013, Germany's Defence Minister, Thomas de Maizière, announced that Germany would offer approximately 600 to 800 soldiers for the duration 2015–16. Gubauer, M., 'After ISAF: Germany commits to post-2014 mission', Spiegel Online, 19 Apr. 2013.

⁵⁷ Interview with senior NATO official, Brussels, 28 Nov. 2012.

Development assistance

The progress made in Afghanistan over the past decade in education, public health, and transport infrastructure is often understated.⁵⁸ At the same time, Afghanistan remains one of the poorest countries in the world and is not expected to become self-sufficient during the transformation decade.

Notwithstanding the commitments made at the Tokyo conference in 2012, Afghanistan is likely to receive far less development support than is currently the case, with a real possibility of substantial aid disengagement beyond 2015.⁵⁹ Moreover, the disbanding of the PRTs means that the geographic reach of international assistance efforts will ultimately depend on the ANSF. Should the security situation on the ground worsen, this would severely undercut the sustainability of Europe's development work in the country. While post-2014 engagement in Afghanistan will cost less than the intervention over the previous decade, the level of investment required remains substantial. The peace dividend that some countries are expecting is therefore not realistic. In particular, the costs for the participating states in the new NATO mission may be even higher in the coming decade, as these states will finance both reconstruction efforts and training programmes.

Europe can continue to play a prominent role in providing various forms of civilian assistance to Afghanistan. The Afghan Government and the EU are still in the process of negotiating the Cooperation Agreement on Partnership and Development, which will provide a framework for the EU's long-term engagement in Afghanistan in the fields of development, trade and governance. In the past decade, EU assistance to Afghanistan has been concentrated in the following areas: promoting the rule of law, democracy and human rights; election observation; rural development, humanitarian and counternarcotics assistance; and health. Another area where Afghanistan will require help is with the promotion of economic growth. A notable example here is the UK's support for a commercial approach to promoting the long-term development of resources in Afghanistan.⁶⁰ While these areas will continue to be important in the post-2014 environment, high levels of corruption in Afghanistan are likely to affect the sustainability of activities.⁶¹ Given that Europe is looking to focus on development assistance and financial support, anti-corruption measures should also be a strong focus. At the same time, plans for a robust civilian and diplomatic presence are currently being hampered by budgetary and safety concerns. There is a

⁵⁸ World Bank, 'World Development Indicators: Afghanistan', [n.d.], <<http://data.worldbank.org/country/afghanistan>>.

⁵⁹ Reyes, G., '2014: The other Afghan withdrawal', Notes Internacionales no. 68, Barcelona Centre for International Affairs, Feb. 2013, p. 2.

⁶⁰ UK Government, Department for International Development, 'UK support for Afghan drive to harness natural resource wealth', 13 Mar. 2013, <<http://www.dfid.gov.uk/News/Latest-news/2013/Afghanistan-UK-support-for-drive-to-harness-natural-resource-wealth/>>.

⁶¹ In 2012 Transparency International ranked Afghanistan 174th out of 176 countries in its annual Corruption Perceptions Index. Transparency International, '2012 Corruption Perceptions Index', 5 Dec. 2012, <<http://cpi.transparency.org/cpi2012/>>.

considerable risk that the conditions in Afghanistan will simply become too dangerous for civilian personnel to operate effectively.

Continued support for human rights, rule of law and democracy

The EU can make an immediate contribution by providing electoral assistance to the upcoming presidential election in 2014, as it has in four previous elections. After the 2014 election, when President Karzai steps down, the transatlantic partners must also help ensure a smooth power transition. In the long term, Europe and the USA should also seek to foster a stronger political culture in Afghanistan by supporting training programmes for legitimate domestic opposition and civil society organizations.⁶² Several European states have already supported political reconciliation in Afghanistan. For example, Germany has played a supporting role in promoting reconciliation with the Taliban since 2010, while both France and the UK have hosted several rounds of talks with different groups.⁶³ While the prospects for political solutions to the conflict in Afghanistan remain bleak, European support for reconciliation efforts will be vital in the years ahead.⁶⁴

Civilian policing assistance

Civilian policing is another area where the EU can continue to contribute beyond 2014. The Afghan National Police (ANP) will require additional support for some time.⁶⁵ However, the withdrawal of ISAF and US troops leaves open the question as to who will be responsible for providing training, equipment and technical assistance to Afghan police forces beyond 2014. While the EUPOL mission has been extended until the end of 2014, there could be a need for an additional extension, or for the EU to launch an entirely new police training mission in Afghanistan. However, both of these options would need to be renegotiated with the Afghan Government, as would the issue of whether trainers should be allowed to operate in the field.

With NATO focusing more heavily on military assistance, a police training mission would also constitute a comparative advantage for the EU in Afghanistan. Given the differences between their approaches to police training, the EU and NATO will need to develop joint solutions while still allowing European leaders to retain ownership over specific policy questions. A more robust Afghan police force playing a role in counter-insurgency would also require a different kind of police training mission to what the EU has previously deployed. Finally, the EU must learn the correct lessons from EUPOL, recognizing the sources of its

⁶² Hadley and Podesta (note 41).

⁶³ 'Taliban talks in Doha drag on endlessly', *Al Jazeera*, 26 Feb. 2013; 'New scenery for breaking the ice with the Taliban', *New York Times*, 20 Dec. 2012; and 'David Cameron invites Taliban for talks over Afghanistan's future', *The Guardian*, 3 Feb. 2013.

⁶⁴ Wörmer, N., 'Exploratory talks and peace initiatives in Afghanistan', SWP Comments, German Institute of International Affairs, Dec. 2012; and Sheikh, M. K. and Greenwood, M., 'Taliban talks: past, present and future prospects for the US, Afghanistan and Pakistan', DIIS Report no. 6, Danish Institute of International Studies, Mar. 2013.

⁶⁵ Planty, D. J. and Perito, R. M., 'Police transition in Afghanistan', US Institute of Peace, Feb. 2013, <<http://www.usip.org/files/resources/SR322.pdf>>.

many shortcomings and taking concrete steps to resolve them, including addressing funding and staffing issues.

The prospects of a new EU police mission are therefore uncertain at this point. On the CSDP front, the EU has launched several new missions in the past year. This calls into question Europe's readiness to take on an additional CSDP mission in the near future, especially one that would probably be costly and occur in a country not seen as critical to European security.⁶⁶ Should a new police training mission prove impossible to agree on, European states could still opt to support Afghan police reform by providing funding.

Diplomacy to support regional stability and reconciliation

Another vital aspect of the post-2014 transatlantic agenda is fostering a sustainable regional solution to the situation in Afghanistan. The negative spillover from Afghanistan into the wider Central Asian region has been a long-standing issue.⁶⁷ Generating support and buy-in from the major regional stakeholders for the reconstruction and development process is crucial in order to reach a political settlement to the conflict in Afghanistan.⁶⁸ Recent attempts to build a regional framework have yielded few results. One notable step was the establishment of the Istanbul Process on Regional Security and Cooperation for a Secure and Stable Afghanistan.⁶⁹ While this process has received backing from countries in the region, as well as the USA and other leading NATO states, it has suffered from a lack of substance and binding commitments.⁷⁰ In seeking to build regional support for the post-2014 agenda, the transatlantic partners must maximize their relations with Afghanistan's neighbours, including Pakistan and the Central Asian states, and focus on supporting a multilateral approach to stabilization in the region. Europe has the potential to play an important role in this process.

In contrast to the USA, the EU is widely seen as an 'honest broker' in Pakistan and should therefore utilize its strategic relationship to encourage Pakistan to play a responsible role in post-2014 Afghanistan. While some individual EU member states such as Germany, Spain and the UK have specific (often security-related) interests in Pakistan, the EU has also taken steps to develop its bilateral ties with Afghanistan's eastern neighbour. During Sweden's EU Presidency in 2009, the EU adopted an Action Plan for Afghanistan and Pakistan. While this plan has been criticized for containing too many priorities, it did represent the

⁶⁶ EEAS official, Interview with author, Brussels, 22 Nov. 2012.

⁶⁷ 'Not as smooth as silk', *The Economist*, 2 Mar. 2013.

⁶⁸ For a recent discussion about regional cooperation in post-2014 Afghanistan see Riecke, H., 'Partners for stability: Afghanistan's neighbors and regional cooperation', eds H. Riecke and K. Francke, *Afghanistan after 2014: How Can Reconstruction Succeed?* (German Council on Foreign Relations/Schriften zur Internationalen Politik/Nomos Verlag: Baden-Baden, Mar. 2013).

⁶⁹ Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Istanbul Process on Regional Security and Cooperation for a Secure and Stable Afghanistan', Istanbul, 2 Nov. 2011, <<http://www.mfa.gov.tr/istanbul-process-on-regional-security-and-cooperation-for-a-secure-and-stable-afghanistan.en.mfa>>.

⁷⁰ Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Istanbul Process: a new agenda for regional cooperation in the heart of Asia', 12 June 2012, <<http://mfa.gov.af/en/news/10569#>>; and Harsh, Ebert and Cohn (note 26), p. 9.

member states' long-term commitment to the region.⁷¹ The EU has subsequently held bilateral summits with Pakistan, discussing issues ranging from trade to counterterrorism. Following the 2012 adoption of the EU–Pakistan five-year Engagement Plan, which widened the scope of cooperation, the first Pak–EU Strategic Dialogue was held in Islamabad in June 2012.⁷²

When it comes to Central Asia, the EU could take advantage of its relatively uncontroversial posture in the region in comparison with the geopolitical giants China, Russia and the USA, to support a regional framework for post-2014 Afghanistan. While few EU member states have any specific long-term interests in the region, the EU as an institution has actively worked to raise its profile in Central Asia in recent years. A key milestone was the adoption in June 2007 of the EU and Central Asia: Strategy for a New Partnership.⁷³ Subsequently, the EU has given assistance in a number of areas, including good governance, economic development and security. Despite the increased number of EU activities in the region, little progress has been made in the areas of democracy and human rights, with energy and security concerns frequently taking priority.⁷⁴

Given the significant changes taking place in Afghanistan, now is an opportune moment for the EU to update its regional strategy to provide a clearer political vision of what its specific interests and comparative advantages in the region are and how this engagement can contribute to stability in Afghanistan.⁷⁵ In particular, the EU should explore ways to boost funding to its programmes in Central Asia and improve their links to those in Afghanistan, such as the EU's Border Management Programme in Central Asia (BOMCA) and counternarcotics programmes. A consolidated West Asia approach could help remedy regional fears of Western 'abandonment' of Afghanistan. As both the EU and the USA face domestic pressure to cut down on costly overseas undertakings, they must also seek to better streamline their respective approaches and policies in the region.

Finally, European activities and wider interests in Central and South Asia could benefit from a shared strategic framework for EU engagement on regional issues. By pursuing an approach linking its policies in Central and South Asia and the Middle East, the EU can better ensure coherence and consistency across its various regional activities. This engagement could also provide the basis for adopting a more comprehensive stance towards the entire region that would allow European states to draw on their particular strengths across a variety of different areas while fostering multilateral approaches. For example, the EU

⁷¹ EU Institute for Security Studies and Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 'Afghanistan 2011–2014 and beyond: from support operations to sustainable peace', June 2011, <http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/Afghanistan_2011-2014_Joint_Report.pdf>, p. 48.

⁷² 'Pakistan, EU enter multifaceted strategic dialogue', *Dawn*, 5 June 2012.

⁷³ European Union, 'The European Union and Central Asia: the new partnership in action', June 2009, <http://eeas.europa.eu/central_asia/docs/2010_strategy_eu_centralasia_en.pdf>.

⁷⁴ Melvin, N., 'The EU needs a new values-based realism for its Central Asia strategy', *Eurasia Review*, 5 Nov. 2012; and 'Security dominates EU talks in Central Asia ahead of Afghan drawdown as rights take back seat', *Washington Post*, 27 Nov. 2012.

⁷⁵ European External Action Service, 'Progress report on the implementation of the EU Strategy for Central Asia: implementation review and outline for future orientations', June 2012, <http://www.eeas.europa.eu/central_asia/docs/20120628_progress_report_en.pdf>.

should consider an annual conference mechanism (focusing on monitoring and evaluation of current programmes) or designating an EU Special Representative to oversee its activities in these geographical areas. Such a mechanism could help create shared regional views in areas of mutual concern (e.g. border security and narcotics trafficking), and help underpin the democracy and human rights component of the EU's regional activities.

Prospects for peace and stability in Afghanistan

Numerous security challenges—ranging from an active insurgency (including the Taliban) and other militia activity to the trafficking of narcotics—will continue to plague the prospects for stability and development in Afghanistan.⁷⁶ In particular, the Taliban and other insurgent groups continue to attack government and foreign forces alike on a nearly daily basis in many parts of the country. Although overall violence levels in Afghanistan declined somewhat in 2012, including in populous districts such as Kabul and Kandahar, the situation looks bleaker in other parts of the country.⁷⁷ A particularly worrying trend in this regard is the recent sharp increase in the number of insider killings by members of the ANSF. In 2012 'green-on-blue' attacks accounted for around 15 per cent of coalition deaths, up from 6 per cent in 2011.⁷⁸ Poor recruitment and vetting processes for new recruits and ethnic fractionalization within the ANSF suggest that these kinds of attacks will continue to occur. While overall coalition casualties declined in 2012—due in part to fewer insurgency attacks in the south and east of the country—insurgency activities in the north and west rose during the year.⁷⁹

Other problems include the continued rise in opium cultivation, despite intensified international eradication efforts, and the regional situation. In particular, the notoriously porous borders between Afghanistan and Pakistan have allowed the Taliban and other militant groups such as the Haqqani network to establish sanctuaries in north-west Pakistan and to operate throughout the Afghan–Pakistani hinterland. Given this sobering outlook, the transatlantic partners' involvement in Afghanistan should be considered a success if Afghanistan reaches a point by 2014 where insurgent violence no longer threatens the survival of the state. However, with the international forces soon to be departing and with an upcoming presidential election, the ANSF will face 'a perfect storm' in 2014. Previous presidential elections in Afghanistan have led to increased violence, and as the 2014 election approaches, the risk of a destabilizing security situation must be taken seriously and prepared for.

⁷⁶ UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2012: Summary Findings* (UNODC: Vienna, 2012).

⁷⁷ See e.g. US Government, Department of Defense, 'Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan', Report to Congress, Dec. 2012, <http://www.defense.gov/news/1230_Report_final.pdf>.

⁷⁸ Roggio, B. and Lundquist, L., 'Green-on-blue attacks in Afghanistan: the data', *Long War Journal*, 23 Aug. 2012, <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/08/green-on-blue_attack.php>.

⁷⁹ Gray, D. D. and Faiez, R., 'Afghan violence falls in 2012, insider attacks up', Associated Press, 30 Dec. 2012, <<http://bigstory.ap.org/article/afghan-violence-falls-2012-insider-attacks>>.

5. Europe and the United States beyond 2014

The impact of the Afghan legacy for future operations

The end of the decade-long Afghan engagement, and the high fiscal and human costs it has entailed, have had a damaging effect on transatlantic solidarity and call NATO's viability into question. European backing for a military operation in West Asia for more than a decade is a remarkable achievement in itself. However, while a majority of European states have supported or contributed to ISAF, few have been eager to take on additional costs and risks for their troops. As a result, a few select European states 'punched above their weight' while others made more modest contributions or pulled out of the mission altogether. Europe's post-2014 engagement in Afghanistan is already likely to be based on the commitments of only a limited number of states.

It is highly probable that future crisis-management missions will also take on a similar character. In fact, a 'two-tier alliance' is emerging, with the first tier made up of a core group of states willing and able to carry out military interventions.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, these states' contributions will frequently take place on an 'opt-in basis, rather than a genuinely collective effort'.⁸¹ Of course, this approach may still be preferable to doing nothing at all.⁸² While the conflicts in both Afghanistan and Libya prove that ad hoc coalitions do not necessarily endanger NATO, they may increase the risk of moral hazard and 'free riding', thus potentially further undermining solidarity within the transatlantic community. The slow EU response to the conflict in Mali, characterized by half-hearted solidarity and a unilateral French intervention, suggest the likelihood of more 'coalitions of the willing' and less formal 'transatlanticism' in the years ahead.

Enthusiasm in Europe and the USA for new large-scale state-building missions—especially in faraway places with little direct strategic significance for security at home—is dwindling. Moreover, the type of commitment required is likely to dictate public support for military interventions on purely humanitarian grounds.⁸³ Declining public support for overseas engagements, coupled with the eroding cohesion within NATO, suggest that the transatlantic community will eschew large-scale nation-building exercises in the medium term, favouring instead a lighter footprint with few or no boots on the ground as a way to respond to crises. While fewer European states will be willing to follow the USA in military operations, when they do participate, Europeans will probably demand greater influence over strategy to reduce the risk of entrapment.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Rupp, R. E., *NATO After 9/11: An Alliance in Continuing Decline* (Palgrave: New York, 2006).

⁸¹ Mattelaer, A., 'How Afghanistan has strengthened NATO', *Survival*, vol. 53, no. 6 (2011), pp. 127–40.

⁸² Schake, K., 'US retrenchment is right and overdue', ed. T. Valasek, *All Alone? What US Retrenchment Means for Europe and NATO* (Centre for European Reform: London, 2012).

⁸³ 'Transatlantic trends: public opinion and NATO', German Marshall Fund of the United States, 16 May 2012, <<http://www.gmfus.org/archives/transatlantic-trends-public-opinion-and-nato/>>.

⁸⁴ Biscop, S. et al., 'What do Europeans want from NATO?', European Union Institute for Security Studies Report no. 8, Nov. 2010, p. 26.

In the longer term, the new approach used in Afghanistan of resorting to drone strikes, special forces and training of local forces to conduct the actual fighting may emerge as a model for future operations, and also signals a growing dissatisfaction with the counterinsurgency doctrine. In fact, this approach already seems to be the preferred US option in Pakistan, Yemen, the Horn of Africa and the Sahel. There are also signs that the EU is moving towards a similar idea of 'boots on the training ground'. Two examples in this regard are the EU's ongoing training mission to Somalia and the new mission to Mali. Libya also represents a new departure in that, unlike Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan, an initial military intervention has not been followed by a NATO peacekeeping force on the ground.

NATO's management of the transition in Afghanistan will have major repercussions for its future orientation. According to the former chairman of the Atlantic Council, General James Jones, a failure in Afghanistan would mean that 'NATO's cohesion, effectiveness and credibility will be shaken and the rationale for NATO's expeditionary, out of area, role would be undermined'.⁸⁵ The end of ISAF, therefore, could give credence to those who argue that NATO should focus on more traditional territorial defence tasks.⁸⁶ However, if this were to occur, the USA could increasingly come to view NATO as strategically irrelevant and, hence, have less interest in making further investments in its alliance with Europe. For a security organization that is already facing internal challenges on multiple fronts—including the lack of common strategic assessments; the lack of common perspectives on NATO's future role; the decline of national defence capabilities; and gaps in leadership, solidarity and public support—this prospect should serve as a wake-up call.⁸⁷

Therefore, the transatlantic partners cannot afford to be seen as abandoning Afghanistan. The fate of Afghanistan and the transatlantic alliance will remain bound together in important ways, even after 2014. Moreover, a continuing engagement in Afghanistan can help alleviate fears that the achievements in terms of military interoperability, civilian–military cooperation and partnership policies that NATO has gained during the Afghanistan mission are at risk of being lost.⁸⁸

The transatlantic security community in a multipolar world

The strategic environment in which NATO operates is currently undergoing a number of major changes. The ongoing global power shift from West to East, the US pivot to Asia, the financial and economic crisis in the West, the security challenges in Europe's southern neighbourhood following the Arab Spring and the

⁸⁵ Atlantic Council, Strategic Advisors Group, 'Saving Afghanistan: an appeal and plan for urgent action', Issue Brief, Mar. 2008, cited in Cook, F., 'NATO operations: current priorities and lessons learned', NATO Parliamentary Assembly, 158 DSC 08 E, para. 148.

⁸⁶ See e.g. Coker, C., 'Why NATO should return home: the case for a twenty-first century alliance', *RUSI Journal*, vol. 153, no. 4 (2008), p. 11.

⁸⁷ Volker, K. and Green, K. P., 'NATO reform: key principles' Atlantic Council Issue Brief, Dec. 2011.

⁸⁸ Mattelaer (note 81); and Chaudhuri, R. and Farrell, T., 'Campaign disconnect: operational progress and strategic obstacles in Afghanistan, 2009–2011', *International Affairs*, vol. 87, no. 2 (2011), pp. 271–96.

approaching drawdown of the mission in Afghanistan will all form the backdrop to transatlantic relations in the coming years.

While the agenda for transatlantic cooperation is extensive, the ball is currently in Europe's court. The USA's declining relative power means that it will require more assistance from its partners and allies in order to maintain its global commitments.⁸⁹ As a result, US willingness to invest in the transatlantic relationship is increasingly being compared with the actual contribution that Europe is making to global security. From the US perspective, Europe must increasingly move from being a security 'consumer' to becoming a security 'producer'. Unless Europe does so, transatlantic relations may very well face 'a dim if not dismal future'.⁹⁰

What, then, can Europe do to demonstrate utility in a changing transatlantic relationship? First, it must assume more responsibility for its own neighbourhood. Contrary to some fears, the US strategic pivot toward the Asia-Pacific region does not imply that it will abandon Europe anytime soon. However, a declining US willingness (and ability) to patrol Europe's neighbourhood is already visible, meaning that Europe must do the heavy lifting, albeit with occasional US support.⁹¹ This neighbourhood includes the wider Central Asian region, where the USA is less likely to remain involved in the coming decade. If Europe could ensure security here, this could allow the USA to devote more of its resources elsewhere as it increasingly seeks to 'rebalance' eastward.

US policymakers have continuously sent the message to their European counterparts that the transatlantic partnership will remain relevant to the USA only as long as it lives up to certain military expectations. Despite this, the gap between what Europe and the USA spend on defence is widening.⁹² Moreover, Afghanistan has exposed Europe's limited capacity to conduct a mission requiring highly sophisticated and well-equipped forces.⁹³ The end of ISAF may even provide impetus for further cuts in European military programmes. Rectifying these inadequacies and competence gaps requires reversing the long-term trend of declining military spending in European countries that has been further exacerbated by economic and financial crises.⁹⁴ To reverse this negative trend, Europeans will have to spend more efficiently on defence. Efforts to tackle this problem have been launched, particularly within the framework of the EU's 'pooling and sharing' concept and NATO's Smart Defence initiative, but progress

⁸⁹ Binnendijk, H., 'Rethinking U.S. security strategy', *The New York Times*, 24 Mar. 2013.

⁹⁰ 'Gates rebukes European allies in farewell speech', *Washington Post*, 10 June 2011.

⁹¹ Valasek, T., 'What Libya says about the future of the transatlantic alliance', Centre for European Reform, July 2011, <http://www.cer.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/attachments/pdf/2011/essay_libya_july11-146.pdf>.

⁹² On European and US defence spending see Perlo-Freeman, S. et al., 'Trends in world military expenditure, 2012', SIPRI Fact Sheet, Mar. 2013.

⁹³ King, A., *The Transformation of Europe's Armed Forces: From the Rhine to Afghanistan* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2011).

⁹⁴ See e.g. Flanagan, S. J. et al., *A Diminishing Transatlantic Partnership? The Impact of the Financial Crisis on European Defense and Foreign Assistance Capabilities* (Center for Strategic and International Studies: Washington, DC, 2011).

has been slow.⁹⁵ Without a significant change in the scope and scale of cooperation, these initiatives are unlikely to yield on the scale necessary for global strategic relevance.⁹⁶

Finally, what Europe needs more than ever is a shared sense of strategic interests and the ability to agree to a broad framework of action that will allow European states to cooperate with better direction and effectiveness on key issues. The fact that France, Germany and the UK no longer effectively dictate EU foreign policy is particularly troubling in this regard. While the UK is increasingly bent on pulling away from the EU, and France has become more disillusioned with the prospects of the CSDP (as evidenced by its recent decision to intervene in Mali unilaterally), Germany is still uncomfortable with taking on international political and security responsibilities.⁹⁷ Further, while smaller European states such as Finland and Sweden currently contribute bold foreign policy ideas, their relative size impedes any far-reaching influence.

In summary, the changing nature of the transatlantic relationship implies that Europe will have to bear a bigger share of the military burden in the future. While this will particularly be the case in its own immediate neighbourhood, Europe will also have to assume more responsibility for wider Central Asia.

⁹⁵ European Union, European Defence Agency, 'Pooling and Sharing', <<http://www.eda.europa.eu/about-us/whatwedo/pooling-and-sharing>>; and North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 'Smart Defence', <http://www.nato.int/cps/en/SID-77F26E8160AF5515/natolive/topics_84268.htm>.

⁹⁶ Mölling C., 'Pooling and sharing in the EU and NATO: European defence needs political commitment rather than technocratic solutions', SWP Comments No. 18, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, June 2012.

⁹⁷ O'Donnell, C. M., 'Britain's coalition government and EU defense cooperation: undermining British interests', *International Affairs*, vol. 87, no. 2 (2011), pp. 419–33; and Howorth, J., 'The EU and NATO after Libya and Afghanistan: the future of Euro–U.S. security cooperation', *Yale Journal of International Affairs*, 26 Feb. 2013.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

Afghanistan has played a prominent role in shaping the transatlantic relationship over the past decade. As the transatlantic partners are currently preparing for the full handover of security responsibilities to Afghan forces in 2014 it is already clear that their footprint will be significantly smaller than during the past decade. Although some details remain to be fleshed out, 8000–12 000 NATO troops are expected to remain in the country beyond 2014 to train local forces within the context of Operation Resolute Support. While several European countries have signalled a willingness to contribute to the military training mission, Europe's post-2014 engagement will primarily revolve around providing humanitarian assistance and development aid.

Although NATO leaders have repeatedly pledged to abide by a 'conditions-based' withdrawal, numerous challenges call into question the sustainability of the current transition strategy. Compounding a tenuous security situation are myriad short- and longer-term challenges, including uncertainty over Afghan forces' operational readiness and pervasive public-sector corruption. The triple shock of the withdrawal of international security forces, a reduction in international aid flows, and the upcoming 2014 elections must also be taken into account. While it is impossible to predict the situation in 2014, the legacy of the Afghanistan mission will make a lasting imprint on the future of transatlantic relations.

Several factors contributed to Europe's initial involvement in Afghanistan. These included displaying solidarity with the USA after September 2001; demonstrating Europe's readiness to become a global security actor, especially following the Iraq War debacle; addressing perceived security interests related to Afghanistan and Pakistan; and a general commitment to conflict prevention and nation-building. In 2013 and beyond, these factors are likely to define the future of European engagement in the country.

The Afghanistan engagement has taken a heavy toll on transatlantic solidarity. While European governments have fretted over the US strategy in Afghanistan, US officials have frequently complained about European burden-sharing falling short of expectations. Europe has at best often provided symbolic support to the USA and to the Afghanistan mission through a limited presence and funding while its own efforts, notably in regard to the EUPOL mission, have fallen far short of expectations. Signs of a 'two-tier alliance' are already emerging out of Afghanistan. Future missions are likely to be centred around a core group of a few states willing and able to carry out military interventions. However, such contributions will probably be made on an opt-in basis, rather than as a genuinely collective effort.

Europe's potential to serve as a leading security actor is increasingly being called into question on multiple fronts. Even after a decade of serving in Afghanistan, most European armies are far from ready for anything beyond the tasks of traditional territorial defence. National military spending has sharply decreased

across the continent and the lack of a ‘common voice’ on foreign policy matters continues to hamper Europe’s global role. On top of this, the CSDP instrument is still facing numerous shortcomings, and uncertainty exists as to whether the EU has the capacity to launch another police training mission in Afghanistan.

Further, while the EU’s security interests in Afghanistan remain considerable, they must increasingly be weighed against other, more pressing concerns elsewhere. The unprecedented security challenges emerging in the wake of the Arab Spring combined with new security threats in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa mean that Afghanistan will fall on the priority list in the coming years.

Finally, European commitment to humanitarian intervention, while still high in principle, is less pronounced as Europe has grown more inward-looking and concerned with its own domestic economic issues. Further, on both sides of the Atlantic, there is a dwindling appetite for overseas missions in general, particularly large-scale state-building exercises. As a result, the transatlantic community will increasingly shun ‘deep-out-of-area’ missions that do not serve a core national security purpose, favouring instead a lighter footprint with few or no boots on the ground as a way to respond to crises.

Taken together, these factors suggest significantly less European support for Afghanistan over the coming transformation decade. Even so, two scenarios for Europe’s post-2014 role in Afghanistan are emerging here: one minimalist, the other more robust.

Two scenarios for Europe’s post-2014 role in Afghanistan

The first scenario involves a minimal European commitment to Afghanistan, in which European contributions to the new NATO training mission will be crucial, particularly as US troops are expected to focus on counter-terrorism. Aside from that, Europe’s contributions will largely be concentrated in the civilian area. As both the EU and the USA face domestic pressure to cut down on costly overseas undertakings, they must also seek to streamline their respective aid approaches to the region. However, Europe’s preference for providing development aid must be complemented with stronger attention to anti-corruption measures—without them, international humanitarian aid efforts will be undermined. Another element that fits under this scenario is electoral assistance during the presidential election in 2014.

The second scenario entails a broader European commitment, and suggests the need for Europe to have a more robust commitment to post-2014 Afghanistan. This would include higher levels of financial and aid support than what is currently on the table as well as a significant security commitment. The transatlantic partners must resist the obvious temptation to pull home their troops prematurely, before the handover of security responsibilities to the Afghan forces is completed and before the outcome of Afghan elections, scheduled for 5 April 2014, is known. Additionally, NATO must continue supporting Afghan troops with air power, medical evacuation, intelligence support and command and control. This would help ensure that the withdrawal takes place at a steady pace

and will mitigate the suggestion that the West is abandoning Afghanistan to its fate. Beyond 2014, a sufficient number of international troops should remain in Afghanistan to ensure at least a minimum level of security in Kabul and at other major strategic locations across the country.

The EU can also make a security contribution by either extending the current EUPOL mission or replacing it with a new one, thus helping to enhance the capabilities of the still struggling Afghan police forces. However, this will entail addressing the many shortcomings that have characterized Europe's police training efforts to date, including a lack of personnel, resources and coordination.

Europe can also promote peace and stability by taking an active diplomatic role. The transatlantic partners must seek to help ensure a smooth power transition after President Karzai steps down by fostering a stronger civil society in Afghanistan and providing training programmes for legitimate domestic opposition and grassroots organizations. Individual European states should also continue to pursue negotiations and facilitate talks between the Afghan Government and Taliban representatives in pursuit of political reconciliation.

A final area where Europe has potential to make a vital contribution is supporting a multilateral approach to regional stabilization. Such an approach would need to engage neighbouring states to play a more constructive role in post-2014 Afghanistan. In both Pakistan and Central Asia, Europe has the potential to play an important role but it must also seek to better link its regional activities with its work in Afghanistan. In Pakistan, Europe should seek to utilize its strategic relationship and relative goodwill to encourage Pakistan to play a responsible role in post-2014 Afghanistan. When it comes to the Central Asian states, Europe should seek to complement its focus on security and energy issues with stronger attention to democracy and human rights concerns.

While the most likely outcome lies somewhere in between these two scenarios, minimal European engagement in post-2014 Afghanistan would be very unfortunate. Afghanistan will remain highly dependent on the international community for at least another decade. Given the significance of the ISAF mission for NATO over the past decade, the future development of Afghanistan will have significant implications for the future of the transatlantic alliance, as well as Europe's ambition to be a significant actor in foreign and security issues. As Europe ponders its post-2014 role in Afghanistan it is imperative that it considers its future role as a global actor within the context of the transatlantic relationship. The ongoing US rebalancing to the Asia-Pacific region means that a renewed commitment to West Asia should be considered a priority for Europe. This would suggest that Europe should strive for a more substantial commitment to Afghanistan over the coming transformation decade.

Europe, Afghanistan and the Transatlantic Relationship after 2014

As the December 2014 deadline for the withdrawal of international forces from Afghanistan approaches, it is already clear that NATO's future footprint in the country will be markedly smaller. This report explores the importance of ISAF to the alliance between Europe and the United States. The author argues that, as Europe ponders its post-2014 role in Afghanistan, it is imperative that it considers its future role as a global actor within the context of the transatlantic relationship.

This paper is published under the Wider Central Asia Initiative, a two-year SIPRI project to promote and facilitate dialogue among the main external stakeholders in Afghanistan's future. The project has included consultations with senior government officials and experts from Afghanistan, from Iran, Pakistan and five Central Asian states—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan—as well as from Europe and North America. It is funded by the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

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