

Dynamics of NATO Drawdown from Afghanistan and Future Implications

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The NATO/ISAF drawdown from Afghanistan scheduled through various tranches has drawn the attention of the whole world. The drawdown taking place through five phases is a matter of great importance as Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan destined Afghanistan for civil war, power vacuum, and continuous power struggle between the various ethnic groups and the ascendance of Taliban to the throne of Kabul. This paper discusses the dynamics of NATO drawdown from Afghanistan and its repercussions on Afghanistan. It will focus on schedule for security transition, different stages of drawdown, security assessment and future size and strength of the residuary forces in the post 2014 scenario. Withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan testifies the fact that the latter may once again be faced with certain chronic issues such as power vacuum, future threats and challenges. This will also analyze Afghan-US bilateral security agreement .

Key Words: NATO, drawdown, Afghanistan dynamics.

The 9/11 episode was a landmark in the history of the world in general and the United States, Afghanistan and Pakistan in particular. Soon after this tragic incident by a non- state actor, the United States and its allies started the war against terrorism under the umbrella of NATO/ISAF. Now, since their mission has been a *fait accompli*, the drawdown of NATO/ISAF from Afghanistan is in the offing as has been reiterated by President Obama of the United States and President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan through many occasions. The word dynamics encompasses the drawdown of NATO forces from Afghanistan through five different phases, timetable for drawdown, likely size of the residual forces in the post-2014 scenario and security assessment.

The United States is the key actor in the whole scene of drawdown of NATO forces from Afghanistan which fact is crystal clear from the statements of the US President Obama whose Administration emphasized that the transition process beginning in July 2011 would provide greater chances of opportunity to the Afghan forces to be trained so as to cope with the security challenges. This transition is looked upon as a rapid decrease in the internal affairs of Afghanistan by the US (NATO/ISAF, 2009). The transition of NATO drawdown from Afghanistan has raised many issues inside the Obama government and has become a debatable issue. Addressing this controversy, the Obama administration clarified the situation on 31st August 2010 stating that the future of Afghanistan is to be determined as per ground realities. (Katzman 2013: 24) However, the controversial debate over deadline of July 2011 further aggravated the NATO Summit held in November 2010 in Lisbon wherein it was decided that the period of transition regarding giving power to the Afghan leadership would begin in July 2011 and would culminate by the end of December 2014. The view of transition was further verified by the president of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai stating that the transition of NATO forces would be conducted in five tranches. (Katz man 2013: 25) The announcements were made by Hamid Karzai with the first one in March 2011, the second one was made in November 2011, and the third announcement was made in May 2012. The fourth tranche was made on 31st December 2012 that included 52 Districts, while the fifth and last one was made on 18th June 2013 pertaining to 92 Districts along the border of Pakistan. The process of transition was scheduled to take 12-18 months with 2014 as its culminating point where authority would be transferred to the Afghan government. The Bilateral Security Agreement between the United States and Afghanistan left a contingent of a few thousand forces in Afghanistan beyond 2014.

Time Table for Security Transition

The NATO Summit that was held in May 2012 in Chicago in furtherance of the Lisbon Summit held in 2010 determined the future line of action for the ISAF contributing nations in Afghanistan, urging that the ISAF mission would culminate on 31st December 2014 as per prescribed program of transition. The process of Drawdown of U.S. forces from Afghanistan commenced in 2011 and would undergo through five different phases of transition culminating in December 2014. Schedule for the drawdown of NATO forces from Afghanistan was determined in the Chicago Summit clearly indicating that the NATO forces will ultimately shift from combating practices to that of

training, advising, assisting and supporting role to the Afghan National Army. The main responsibility for the security of Afghanistan and law and order situation would remain with the security forces of Afghanistan as enshrined by the Chicago Summit Declaration on Afghanistan held in May 2012. According to Hamid Karzai:

"In the history of Afghanistan 2013 would mean that the lead of the Afghan government and security would be handed down to them save for a few provinces or areas where the presence of foreign forces is still needed? But 2014 is the year where everything will be completely handed over to the Afghani people, everything is likely to be completed, and transition to be completed with the ISAF leaving Afghanistan" (Karzai, 2012).

Group Brigadier of ISAF Strategic Transition Group, Gen. Richard Cripwell, stated in these words:

"Till date no regressions in prospects of security or governance or development has been observed in tranches one and two during this period but there are challenges in the way of the next tranche, I have observed no point that the Afghan National Forces would not be in a position to combat or they would question the timetable of transition of drawdown" (Cripwell, 2012).

Phase One

On 22 March 2012, the first phase of transition handing over the security of Afghanistan to the Afghan Security Forces and was announced by Afghan President, whereby listing seven districts and provinces (Brook, Louisa, & Claire 2012: 9). This phase particularizes seven key provinces where security responsibility would be transferred. However, an attack was made by insurgents on the UN compound on 1st April 2011 in Mazar-e-Sharif Killing Seven UN workers that aggravated the security situation, which in turn, overshadowed its transition. The gradual shift of responsibility for security began in May 2011 in each of these areas and was completed in mid-July. Bamiyan Province was handed over on 17 July, Lashkar Gah on 20th July while Punisher on 24 July 2011.

Phase Two

On 27 November 2011, Phase two to transition was announced by President Hamid Karzai. This phase covered many important Provinces and Districts where responsibility of security would be shifted to the security agencies of Afghanistan. In pursuance of this transition, the Afghan forces will take the responsibility for the security of the country and this could be completed in a span of twenty four months. Following this phase of transition, the ANSF will be responsible for the security of 50% of the Afghan population. So, the second phase of transition made the Afghan Security Forces responsible for the 50% of population of Afghanistan.

Phase Three

The phase of transition was announced on 13 May 2012 and would include all the provincial headquarters and metropolitan cities of Afghanistan. On this occasion the government of United Kingdom (UK) urged that 75% of the population of Afghanistan will remain under the auspicious control of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) "once tranche three begins" (Afghanistan, May 2012.) . The number of Provinces in this phase is increased to eleven and marks an important phase of the security transition. In this phase all the administrative units in the provinces of Uruzgan, Kapisa and Parowan are included.

Phase Four & Five

No proper schedule has been fixed regarding the beginning of the fourth phase. General Allen, Commander General of the International Security Assistance Force has stated that he anticipates the fifth and final tranche to be announced by the government of Hamid Karzai in summer 2013. (NATO Secretary General 2012) The Chicago summit declaration on Afghanistan states:

"On 13 May 2012, President Hamid Karzai announced the third wave of provinces to enter the transition process. According to this transition 75% population of Afghanistan would live in the areas where security responsibility would be taken by the Afghan National Army. It was further enshrined that all areas of Afghanistan will have commenced transition by the mid of 2013 and the Afghan forces will be in the lead for all security nation-wide (Summit, 21 May 2012).

As a result of the transition process, Afghan National Security Forces have taken the responsibility of Afghanistan from the NATO/ISAF. In November 2009 NATO Training Mission (NTM-A) was set up in Afghanistan which bonded together NATO and national training efforts under a single security umbrella to which pledge was showed by 38 nations (Factsheet, 2012). Now, the lead in Afghanistan is taken by ANSF while the ISAF has been assigned the duty of training, monitoring and operating purposes in the most sensitive areas. NATO states that both

the police and army are on the same track and no divergence occurs anywhere. (Factsheet, 2012) This cooperation and coordination show their confidence on Afghan National Army for taking control of security matters.

Afghan Security Forces Assume Leadership Role

NATO Secretary General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen has made it clear that leading role has been assumed by the Afghan Security Forces in the country and security has been controlled very well by the local security forces. The transfer of role was in line with the security plan of President Obama announced by him on 15th March 2012, which was formally announced by both the presidents on 11 January 2013 in a joint statement. The U.S forces ceased to patrol the areas and villages of Afghanistan through this joint statement. U.S President Obama also stressed that the death of Osama Bin Laden (OBL) as a result of military operation represents a major achievement for the United States and now it was very necessary to reduce the budget deficit of the U.S. He also announced that ten thousand U.S. Forces are going to be withdrawn by the end of 2011, while twenty three thousand forces would be withdrawn by September 2012. After his drawdown, the strength of U.S. Forces will be reduced to sixty six thousand (Katzman 2013).

Upcoming milestone in Afghanistan

According to the U.S. President Obama 34,000 US forces would be withdrawn from Afghanistan by the end of February 2014 in furtherance of handing over the security of Afghanistan to the Afghan government. The remaining portion of the NATO Forces that will exit by the 2014 transition deadline are likely to be withdrawn after the April 5, 2014 i.e. after Afghan Presidential Elections. A few thousand of the 34,000 have been withdrawn leaving about 63,000 US forces still in Afghanistan (Katzman 2013). These moves of drawdown further support the views of the various reports that U. S. combat mission in Afghanistan is going to wind up by the end of 2014 with a few contingents of residuary forces. Most of the Airbases of the United States have left Afghanistan urging that their work has been a *fait accompli* now (Chivers, 2012). As compared to 150 US run bases, only 50 bases remained operational by the end of 2014 while many are being closed down or handed over to the Afghan forces and their number will still be reduced. This reduction in the bulk of the security forces coupled with the closing down of most of the US airbases in Afghanistan and the reduction in the size of vehicles is indicative of the fact that Afghanistan is moving towards a self-styled democratic government through elections conducted by their security agencies.

Security Assessment

Assessments of the security situation in Afghanistan and the performance of the local security forces was an encouraging point for the ISAF as they were relegated to the status of a supporting role. According to an assessment conducted in August 2009, by the Afghan Interior Minister, it was calculated that the Karzai government was functional in thirty percent of the country, while the insurgents represented four percent i.e. thirteen out of three Hundred and sixty four Districts and influenced or operated in another 30%. According to that estimate, Shadow governors (self-styled) were made by the Taliban in 33 out of 34 provinces of Afghanistan. The assessment further stated that minimum representation is possessed by the Taliban in the Northern Afghanistan (Katzman 2013).

Surveys conducted by the Security Agencies supplement the view that NATO/ISAF has been successful in maintaining law and order in Afghanistan during its stay. A survey report that was published in July 2013, pinpointed the following points (Katzman 2013).

1. Territorial influence of Taliban has been decreased during the stay of NATO.
2. The Afghan National Army has been successful in maintaining law and order and no major areas or bases have been lost by the ANA.
3. During the period the basic goods and services have been quite accessible and easy.
4. The shift of responsibility for the security of the country to the Afghan National Security Forces has negated the view that Taliban can portray itself as an obstacle to the foreign troops.

The provinces of Wardak, Faryab, Farah and Herat are some of the areas that are prone to insurgency and terrorism. The provinces of Faryab and Wardak have been the worst areas where irreparable loss was caused after a short span of time by some suicide bombers (Katzman 2013). Despite bringing in stability in most of the provinces of Afghanistan where law -enforcement agencies have been successful in maintaining law and order situation but fears still haunt the minds in some of the areas. The hard areas include provinces of Wardak, Faryab, Farah and Herat where security situation has deteriorated a lot and a sense of insecurity pervades everywhere.

Likely Size and Structure of Post-2014 Force

The United States along with its allied partners are formulating plan for the future size and structure of the residuary forces in Afghanistan in the post-2014 scenario and also to assist the ANSF and carry on military operations against the most wanted terrorists in Afghanistan. Only such a security force can have the capacity to ensure peace and stability in Afghanistan wherever and whenever required. Gen. Dunford, top U.S. and ISAF Commander has expressed his deep concern in the current state of affairs in Afghanistan saying that the U.S and coalition forces are still required in Afghanistan to ensure that insurgency does not expand further in the country. General Dunford also rebutted the concept of Zero Option for Afghanistan as this would mean a complete withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan as was believed to be under consideration by the US Administration as per reports of July 2013 press (Katzman 2013). While Afghan President Hamid Karzai looks at the concept of zero option from different angle and says that this would completely guarantee peace, stability and security in Afghanistan.

General Allen in November 2012, while addressing the White House, presented three options: 6000, 10000 or 20000 forces. Of the three options, the first one opted for operations in the most sensitive areas particularly where the high value insurgents seek refuge. The second one was meant for the assistance and training of Afghan Security forces. The last one provided for US patrols in highly contested areas without any break. (Eric, 2012) The NATO meeting of Brussels held 21st February 2013; the United States suggested having about 8,000 to 12,000 in the form of mentors and trainers in the post-2014 scenario in Afghanistan. Out of these, 2/3rd are to be US forces while 1/3rd are to be non US force-plus a still an unspecified contingent of mostly US counter terrorism forces. (Jim, 2013) Sources also prognosticates that the post-2014 US forces would be just a bridging force between the ANSF and the United States, only to assist the Afghan forces in the performance of their responsibilities. The main duty of that force would be to provide support to the Defense and Interior Ministries of Afghanistan but the name of the remaining force in Afghanistan would be changed to the "Resolute Support" for which some of the allied countries of the ISAF have shown willingness. (Katzman 2013) Germany has also consented to be part of the post-2014 allies in the war against terror (Reisinger, 2012)

Power Vacuum

Withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan in 1979 created a huge gap in the internal politics of Afghanistan and was struck by civil war that continued till 1996 as a consequence of which Taliban emerged on the landscape of Afghanistan. In the wake of current drawdown, it is feared that a situation worse than that may emerge. Keeping in view the past history of Afghanistan, it can easily be deduced that fears of civil war may overpower the country as was witnessed in 1979. (Chandran 2012: 131) It is also important to note that the new government of Afghanistan would be faced with numerous challenges particularly in the sphere of governance and administration (Harach & al, 2012).

After the draw-down scenario, there seems to be a great power vacuum and continuous struggle of various political and ethnic groups to gain access to power of the country which will ultimately lead to violent conflict of interest between the various sects and ethnic groups. (Rutting, 2009) Even presently, the unpopularity of Karzai's government allows the insurgents, as Mao put it, "to swim like fish in the Inn". In the absence of drastic change of course, post-2014 prospects of Afghanistan seem bleak water (Tung 1937). The Bonn Conference and Chicago Summit were quite in consonance with the demands of the common people of Afghanistan as they focused on a stable political, financial and practical support while keeping in view the inherent structural weaknesses of the Afghan government (Declaration 20 May, 2012).

Challenges before Afghan Government

The drawdown of foreign forces from Afghanistan would provide an equal chance of opportunity to the neighboring countries to play their role in filling the gap of power vacuum and would help in taking the country towards stability and prosperity. Moreover, they should also contribute towards the decentralization of the country as this would be a great step towards the power sharing formula on the basis of their ethnic representation. (Destradi, 2012: 2) Some incidents of hostages and bombing in the most luxurious places such as near Qarga Lake in June 2012 are the evidentiary proofs that Taliban still reside the area. Gilles Doronsoro foresees three crises that are going to haunt Afghan government in the aftermath of drawdown scenario. There are fears of economic crises; institutional crisis and security crisis as Taliban are expected to launch attacks with new fervor and zeal in the summer of 2013 (Doronsoro: 7). Western spending that stood at more than \$100 billion in 2011 that was contributed by the United States only, will be reduced will be reduced to less than \$5 billion a year after 2014.

The Afghan government needs to focus more on the security measures of the country as Taliban are now more than a military or religious class and has assumed the role of a political class or party seeking to take control of

the territories and topple down the regime in Kabul (Doronsoro, 13) According to an estimate, out of the 398 districts in Afghanistan, about a quarter (¼th) of these could fall to the insurgency totally or partially, including the capitals of the Districts in a period of two years. There are apprehensions that main roads will also be threatened by them. The Taliban are likely to form a state within the state with their self-styled Islamic government based on their own perception of Islam.

Future Threats

Ian Lye is of the view that security situation in Afghanistan can adopt a worst form and seem to remain far from being stable in the post-2014 scenario. He foresees threats from the Taliban, the Haqqani network, Hizb-i-Islami Gulbadin and Pakistani factor resulting in the political instability. (Ian) Of all the insurgent groups, Taliban are supposed to be the most detrimental group operating in Afghanistan under the command of Mullah Umar with their strong foot holds in the provinces of Helmand and Kandahar. The death of Mullah Umar recently circulated in the news circles, will put the Taliban on a weak point as problems of cohesion may arise which in turn may divide the Taliban into many groups and dissensions. The Haqqani Network is another threat to the security of Afghanistan having close ties with both the Al-Qaeda and Taliban. The group is currently led by Sirajuddin Haqqani and has established close links with the Taliban and its leadership. The Hizb-i-Islami of Gulbadin Hekmatyar is another group that poses threat to the stability of Afghanistan. Gulbadin has acted to be an ally of the U.S. who fought against the Soviet Forces in 1979 during the intervention of Soviet forces in Afghanistan. But presently this group has been instrumental in engaging itself against the ISAF in the key areas of the Northern part. This faction operates in the North-eastern provinces of Kunar and Nuristan. The current flaring situation in Afghanistan and presence of many insurgent groups, it can be argued that Afghanistan may be faced with significant challenges such as state-building, Rule of Law, fixed deadline for the complete withdrawal of the US and NATO forces from Afghanistan, drug economy, and corruption and above all, the insurgency of Taliban.

British Defense Secretary, Phillip Hammond and many other observers are also uncertain about the likely future of Afghanistan and state that nobody can say with certainty what the future of Afghanistan will be. On the basis of this uncertainty, one can deduce that three factors comprising economic, political and security will shape the future and overall trajectory of Afghanistan in the post-2014 (Oskarsson, 2013).

Afghan-US Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA)

In the face of high security risks, both the United States and Afghanistan circulated a draft of a Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) that will extend the presence of U.S. forces in Afghanistan beyond next year's combat troop draw-down. (Pakistan Observer, 2013) The document of the agreement resolves the dilemma of immunity of American troops from being prosecuted by the Afghan government. The United States will have the exclusive legal jurisdiction over the law enforcement personnel working in Afghanistan and the Afghan government will have no power over the American troops. The document of the BSA will determine the size of the residual force in Afghanistan and is greatly concerned with the security agreement to be concluded between the two countries. Some circles argue that the Obama administration will have 5,000 to 10,000 residual forces in Afghanistan in the post-2014 with the sole purpose of providing training and advice to the local forces of Afghanistan. Former President Hamid Karzai refused to sign the document of the BSA. But in September 2014, just one day after the oath taking ceremony of the president Dr. Ashraf Ghani, the document of the BSA was signed by the new president.

Since opium and drug-trafficking across the Pak-Afghan border has created huge security concerns for Pakistan as a result of which the entire region is affected. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has estimated that opium cultivation in Afghanistan covered an area of 200,000 hectares in 2013 which saw an increase of 36% in the year of 2014. This increase calls for alarming bells for the international community as well as the immediate neighbors of Afghanistan. Yuri Fedotov, Executive Director of UNODC has called for a more comprehensive strategy towards this nuisance. Strict counter-narcotics efforts are required to be adopted to do away with this problem forever. Joint efforts by both Pakistan and Afghanistan would be of great help to redress the issue particularly across the border region.

The timeframe for the drawdown of NATO forces from Afghanistan scheduled through five phases is indicative of the fact that the United States and its allies have been successful in achieving their stated objectives in the region. But as has been reiterated on many occasions that even after 2014, the strength of residual forces under the Resolute Support program in Afghanistan would be from 8000-9000 which is indicative of the fact the United States is not leaving the region for reasons better known to them. On the other hand it also leaves a question mark on the weak security system of Afghanistan that high profiled areas in Afghanistan would still remain under the direct protection of the NATO forces out of which two-third would be US while one one-third would be non-US forces.

Security situation in Afghanistan has also remained far from being stable despite strict measures by law enforcement agencies in most sensitive areas. More than 5,000 (five thousand) local security forces have lost their lives only during 2014, which is the highest total since the war began in 2001. On the other hand, the coalition partners have suffered a total of 3,485 casualties since 2001 which further supplement the view that security situation may worsen after the drawdown of US forces from Afghanistan. The number of civilian casualties either killed or wounded in Afghanistan during 2014 is round about 10,000. This fact is supported by the UN report and 2014 has been termed as the bloodiest year for Afghanistan since 2001. So, the Afghan National Security Forces are going to face serious security challenges in the post-drawdown scenario. A few remedies would contribute to make Afghanistan a stable and democratic country.

Firstly, a fragile oligarchical system would help to resolve the issue of power vacuum to a great extent. This system needs to be based upon the interplay of the Afghan President and co-opted multi-ethnic Afghan groups and regional power brokers through joint venture would help to prevent civil war in Afghanistan and have access to power and patronage. Under this scheme, the Taliban would not be given any share in the power structure but would have indirect control over the rural areas while the central government will have control over the urban centers. This aims at a strong central government eliminating the role of Taliban at central level while giving them share in the rural areas in an indirect way.

Secondly, the power oligarchy would be shared by all the groups and parties including the minor factions as they are to become partners in the formation of the government. In both of these two cases the political system would continue to be coupled with a power sharing formula through a proportionate way catering to their representation in the parliament on the basis of their population. This would bring stability to Afghanistan to a great extent

In the post 2001 scenario a strong personalized and centralized government was established in Afghanistan which lacked the system of checks and balances. The result was nepotism, corruption, malpractices and lack of coherence among the multi-ethnic groups which further exacerbated the ongoing security situation. To overcome these problems, there needs to be a decentralized government representative of all ethnic groups with their proportionate share in the set up. Proper system of checks and balances coupled with transparency and accountability would resolve the issue to a great extent. Thirdly, the Taliban could become the sole governors and could seize control of the capital and large parts of the country. In case Taliban comes into power there are chances for a transitory stability with greater fear that Afghanistan could descend into a civil war. Fourthly, the Bilateral Security Agreement should be extended to include security personnel from the regional powers such as Pakistan, Iran and India beside Afghanistan and the United States in order to avoid any future conflict of vested interest in Afghanistan.

Conclusion

In the wake of draw-down scenario, Afghanistan is amid transition which will set the stage for its future destiny. Perspectives of civil war and instability seem to overpower the country with the persistent threat of Taliban's rising into power. A combination of factors comprising rise in the drug-trafficking across the border, events of insurgency and militancy, weak security system, lack of coherence among the various ethnic groups and political instability seem to shape the future trajectory of Afghanistan. But coherence among all the stakeholders in Afghanistan could save it from civil war, political instability and make it a strong democratic country.

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