



AREU Afghanistan Research & Evaluation Unit

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Minimal Commitments Fuel Downward Security Spiral in Afghanistan

A newly released AREU briefing paper – *Minimal Investments, Minimal Results: The Failure of Security Policy in Afghanistan* – argues that the absence of a political-military strategy and the required security resources in Afghanistan is compromising the safety of its people.

As NATO meets in Istanbul to determine its future role in Afghanistan — its first “out of area” operation — the organisation missed yet another chance to show strong multilateral leadership and display a renewed international commitment to this troubled land. Thus far, NATO has only decided to increase its in-country forces incrementally, from 6,500 to 8,700, which will not fundamentally alter the deteriorating security situation.

“Shamefully, Afghanistan has the lowest international troop to population ratio of any recent intervention,” asserts Col. (UK – ret.) Philip Wilkinson, OBE, who co-authored the paper with Michael Bhatia and Kevin Lanigan. “NATO’s continued inability to provide significant forces will only further embolden President Karzai’s opponents — whether warlords, poppy-growers or terrorists,” stresses Bhatia.

While NATO nations dither, violent attacks on aid workers, civilians and government officials are on the rise. Not only are these incidents occurring in areas previously considered safe, but the scale and ambition of these attacks have dramatically increased. In contrast to President Bush’s mid-June declaration of Afghanistan as “the first victory in the war on terror,” the Taliban are far from defeated, poppy production has soared, and regional warlords are still brazen in their abuse of citizens and in their dealings with the central government.

For individual Afghan citizens, where a local commander or police officer arbitrarily jails a villager or forces a family’s daughter into an unwanted marriage, where a corrupt local official extorts an unlawful tax, *no one* – Afghan or international – is likely to play a visible or effective role to redress the situation. If this continues, there is a danger that the current strong support by Afghans for international troops will wither away.

“What is immediately needed is a comprehensive security plan, backed by the required resources, to improve existing initiatives, remedy chronic gaps, and define the road-map for the path ahead,” declares Andrew Wilder, director of AREU. “Such a plan must be committed to fixing security sector reform, and to ensuring that Afghan institutions are sufficiently strengthened and reformed to assume responsibility for security.” Instead, efforts thus far — to build an army, police and judiciary, eradicate narcotics and demobilize private militias — have been woefully inadequate, and characterized by chronic incrementalism, ad-hocism and poor coordination. As Lanigan argues, “Security sector reform is fundamentally broken.”

Unless this downward trend is remedied, these weak commitments will undermine progress made towards a stable and democratic Afghanistan. “As the situation stands now, free, fair, and safe elections will not be able to be held,” asserts Wilder. “To do so would require immediate and substantive steps in Coalition and NATO troop allocation, militia demobilization and police and army training, all of which are falling seriously behind schedule. It is time to move away from a minimalist approach designed to avoid failure, to a better-resourced strategy designed to achieve success.”

About the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU)

The Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) is an independent research institution that conducts and facilitates quality, action-oriented research and analysis to inform policy, improve practice and increase the impact of humanitarian and development programmes in Afghanistan. It was established by the assistance community working in Afghanistan and has a management board with representation from donors, UN agencies and NGOs.

Fundamental to the AREU's purpose is the belief that its work should make a difference in the lives of Afghans. The AREU is the only humanitarian and development research centre headquartered in Afghanistan. This unique vantage point allows the unit to both produce valuable research and ensure that its findings become integrated into the process of change taking place on the ground. Current core funding for AREU is provided by the European Commission (EC), United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the governments of Sweden and Switzerland.

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