

# BULLETIN

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Editors: Marcin Zaborowski (Editor-in-Chief),  
Jarosław Ćwiek-Karpowicz, Beata Górka-Winter, Artur Gradziuk,  
Leszek Jesień, Beata Wojna

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## Results of Afghan Reconciliation and Reintegration

Marcin Andrzej Piotrowski

*The upcoming “Bonn+10” conference is meant to highlight the progress of international cooperation towards stability in and around Afghanistan. However, the analysis of existing initiatives for reconciliation and reintegration of the Afghan Taliban suggests that meaningful progress in either process is unlikely.*

**The International and Security Context.** The “Bonn+10” meeting scheduled for early December will mark the 10th anniversary of the first Bonn International Conference on Afghanistan. “Bonn+10” will focus on the prospects for international engagement in Afghanistan through 2014. It will be attended by representatives of the Afghan government, legal opposition and NGO delegations from Afghanistan as well as NATO–ISAF countries and the International Contact Group. In addition, the NATO summit in Chicago (May 2012) is expected to decide on further support for Afghan authorities after 2014 and completion of the transition of responsibility for security (“afghanization”). However, there are growing doubts among Afghans about both the essence and the scope of the future U.S.–Afghan “strategic partnership”. Additional concerns were raised by the U.S. administration’s plans for a reduction in the presence of U.S. forces to 68,000 troops by September 2012. An increase in attention is also being paid to the non-military aspects of “afghanization”, such as unresolved political and administrative problems and difficulties with future funds to quickly expand the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF).

Implemented over the period 2009–2011, the counter-insurgency strategy of NATO has brought many successes; nevertheless, the ISAF command admits that these gains are “fragile and reversible”. So far, ANSF has formally taken over responsibility for geographic areas inhabited by 25% of the Afghan population. The U.S. administration claims that the security situation has improved, but this is mainly due to a change in the Taliban’s priorities and tactics. The Taliban now tends to focus on spectacular terrorist attacks and the elimination of members of the Afghan administration and is paying much less attention to clashes with ISAF and ANSF units. ISAF’s response has been to escalate special forces raids to eliminate or capture as many Taliban as possible. According to the UN, in the period of July–August 2011, the total number of armed incidents and attacks was about 39 % higher than in the same period of 2010. These metrics differ from the statistics drawn up by ISAF, which takes into account only Taliban attacks against ISAF and ANSF units, but overlooks other violent incidents in Afghanistan. The upcoming winter season will reduce the violence indicators in the statistics of both the ISAF and the UN, but this will not equal the disappearance of the key drivers of conflict and instability in Afghanistan.

**Afghan Reconciliation.** The currently declared process of reconciliation with the leaders of the armed opposition is another attempt since 2001 for a political solution to the Afghan conflict. Previous efforts in this area have not produced the desired results. In 2003–2008, the Afghan National Security Council implemented the Program for Strengthening Peace and Reconciliation, which was designed both for reconciliation with the Taliban and their reintegration. According to the government of Afghanistan, this program resulted in the handover of more than 9,000 weapons by local and rank-and-file members of the armed opposition, mainly the Taliban. As part of the initiatives undertaken since 2009, the government of Afghanistan has requested the UN Security Council remove 50 names from the list of 140 sanctioned leaders of the Taliban. So far, the UN Security Council has decided to remove the names of 14 Taliban leaders, some of whom have entered into talks with the government of Afghanistan.

The scale of the difficulties with Afghan reconciliation in the last decade also has been reflected in the complete fiasco of all attempts by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Pakistan to support it. The slow progress of reconciliation spurred the ISAF command to go so far as to set up meetings with Said Tayeb Agha, who is believed to be a close associate of Mullah Omar and Quetta Shura Taliban. The fact that the Taliban is not interested in real peace talks is evidenced by their demands: the withdrawal of all U.S. and ISAF forces and the introduction of Sharia law to the Constitution of Afghanistan. The assassination of Burhanuddin Rabbani, the former president and head of the High Council of Peace (supervising reconciliation in a few provinces), was a serious blow to the modest achievements of this body. The Taliban also stepped up killings of Afghan government officials, influential tribal and religious leaders and security commanders. According to the UN, in the summer of 2011 alone there were 183 political assassinations, mainly in central Afghanistan. Among the victims of the assassinations were many key politicians in south Afghanistan, among them Ahmed Wali Karzai, the mayor of Kandahar and chairman of the Council of Islamic Scholars. As a result, Taliban have very strongly hit the pillars of Afghan administration, as borne out by the mass resignations of civil servants in Kandahar.

It is also unlikely that the U.S. attitude to the Taliban's highest ranks will change soon. The most dangerous Taliban faction, the so-called Haqqani Network is personally, operationally and financially tied to al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups from South and Central Asia. Meanwhile, the United States demands the suspension of Taliban ties to al-Qaeda, the laying down of arms and recognition of the constitution of Afghanistan. Any concessions to the Taliban are also controversial for a majority of Afghans, who fear a regression in the rights and freedoms they recovered in 2001. The government of Afghanistan is also stressing the ambiguity of the role of Pakistan, which is accused of shielding Omar and manipulating his confidantes.

**Reintegration of the Taliban.** Reintegration of former Taliban militants with Afghan society has been correctly seen since 2001 as one of the pre-conditions of stability in Afghanistan. In 2005, the government of Afghanistan implemented the DIAG (Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups) program, directed to the disarmament of militias often associated with the Taliban. DIAG was overseen by Vice President Khalil Abdul-Karim, but it was dumped as a failed initiative because of a lack of funds, which otherwise might have created economic alternatives for the now disarmed insurgents and criminals.

The latest initiative was launched in autumn 2010. The Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP) is aimed at average members and local commanders of the Taliban. APRP is dedicated to the reintegration of former Taliban with local communities, through amnesty and the creation of homes and jobs. To September 2011, APRP had reintegrated 2,800 Taliban in 22 provinces, mainly in the north and west of Afghanistan. The U.S. commanders are expecting another 2,000 Taliban interested in benefits of APRP to join the program. However, this program is less effective in the traditional strongholds of the Taliban, i.e., in Kandahar and the eastern provinces. Armed opposition forces are still estimated at 30,000 insurgents. In addition, former insurgents fear retaliation at the hands of their former comrades from the Taliban, stressing that protection is guaranteed only in certain provinces of Afghanistan. Finally, although APRP is run by central and local Afghan authorities, its material dimension is totally dependent on Western aid (so far \$134 million have been transferred).

**Outlook.** In past decade, both the government of Afghanistan and the international community have launched a number of initiatives focused on the peaceful neutralization of the ranks and leadership of the Taliban. However, the majority of these initiatives have been limited in scope and have failed to prevent the reconstitution of the Taliban as an armed opposition to the nation's legal authorities and ISAF forces. Progress in the reintegration of the average Taliban has been possible because of the regaining of military momentum and control over particular areas by the ISAF and ANSF. Progress in security and military advantages have always created favourable conditions for Afghan reintegration and reconciliation. Reductions in ISAF forces and level of economic aid for Afghanistan may weaken these positive trends, leading to a further escalation of the conflict after 2014. The conditions declared by the parties to the conflict prevents any comprehensive agreement between the government of Afghanistan and Taliban leaders. In this context, the "Bonn+10" conference is unlikely to deliver a breakthrough. Still, ISAF forces should continue to support the reintegration of rank-and-file members of the Taliban. One way to do this would be to increase coordination with Japan as the leader of the working group on reintegration in the framework of the International Contact Group. Poland should aim to bolster both reconciliation and reintegration in the districts of Ghazni province that are intended to be handed over to the ANSF.