

# After ISAF: Afghanistan's make or break year

Report



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In cooperation with



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## After ISAF: Afghanistan's make or break year



While the policy community in Brussels looks with anxiety at the post-ISAF period, with human and women's rights as well as governance and economic issues in the spotlight, what do Afghan actors have to say about the transition? What kind of scenarios do they expect and how do they assess the current and future role of the international community? Introducing a compelling debate gathering a large audience from EU institutions, NATO, media and the NGO community, **Giles Merritt**, Director of the Security and Defence Agenda and Secretary General of *Friends of Europe* invited the speakers to discuss the challenges and opportunities of the transition, the peace process and the question of women's and human rights, in light of next year's presidential elections.

### **No security without international support**

Security is a crucial dimension of this transition after the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) took over full responsibility in June 2013. "We are proud that Afghans are now standing on their own feet and we hope that NATO and the EU will be able to fulfil their partnership role in the next years", said **Hekmat Khalil Karzai**, Founder and Director of the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies.

"We do not want international forces in Afghanistan for the next decade", said Karzai. Still, he explained, the ANSF need financial and technical support to develop medical evacuation, logistic and air force capabilities as well as to move from a basic counter-insurgency to a conventional security force. In this regard, **Hamid Saboory**, Founder of Afghanistan Analysis and Awareness argued that NATO will surely wait for the Afghanistan-U.S. bilateral security agreement to determine the scale of its support to ANSF. Yet, Karzai expressed optimism over NATO's and the EU's engagement, saying "the international community committed to provide about 3.7 billion dollars for the Afghan security sector at the Chicago NATO Summit in 2012".



"Political awareness is not enough if we cannot ensure physical and psychological security during the vote, especially to women".

**Farkhunda Zahra Naderi,**

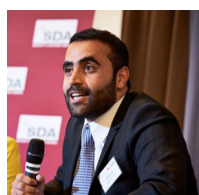
### **Youth, women and the election: the hope for a true political and economic transition**

Next year's election could become a benchmark of the country's democratic future, with participation of youth and women at centre stage. "In the past, political players were ready to seize power through violence, while today we see a process of coalition-building between political parties", said Saboory, adding that, more than ever before, youth organisations are working hard to make sure the election takes place. "We expect NATO and the EU to pro-

vide technical and financial support to ensure a free and fair election” affirmed **Shenkai Zahen Karokhil**, MP from the Kabul Province and women’s rights advocate. “We are not asking the international community to vote on behalf of the Afghan people”, affirmed **Farkhunda Zahra Naderi**, MP from the Kabul province, “but political awareness is not enough if we cannot ensure physical and psychological security during the vote, especially to women”.

Despite their increasing involvement in public life, women in Afghanistan still face discrimination on several grounds. For this reason, “women’s presence in the governmental, economic and social structure as well as in the police and security forces should be a priority for Afghanistan and part of NATO’s commitments in the post-ISAF period” affirmed Naderi.

On the economic front, transition means that Afghanistan must work on its economic assets and no longer rely on international aid. “Afghanistan is rich in minerals,” Karzai pointed out, adding that the country’s geography connects various regions, particularly South Asia and the Middle East. “If we work on our assets, I believe we will move towards not only a stable but even a prosperous Afghanistan”, observed Karzai.



“The increasing engagement of Afghan youth in the economy and public life is a big change proving that, despite existing challenges, the country has greatly progressed”.

**Masood Azizi**

To that end, the country needs investment in education to tap the entrepreneurial spirit of Afghan people and offer economic opportunities to one of the youngest populations in the world. In this regard, **Massood Azizi**, Chairman of *Afghanistan Forward* and Chief of Staff of the Governor of Nangarhar, affirmed that “the increasing engagement of Afghan youth in the economy and public life is a big change proving that, despite existing challenges, the country has greatly progressed”.

And yet the question of corruption encumbers the transition process. How to evaluate the magnitude of the problem in the country and who could legitimately step up and deal with the issue? asked **Mark Pyman**, Programme Director for international defence and security counter-corruption at Transparency International.

Panellists agreed that, today, the strongest and most effective voices speaking against corruption are the youth and women. To tackle the issue, “there must be specific responses to different types and levels of corruptions” replied Karzai. “We need a simplification of administrative processes, a strong political will and more transparency from the international community” he explained.



## The regional and international players vis-à-vis the transition: burden or shared opportunity?

“The reality is that the engagement in Afghanistan was not only in the interest of the Afghan people, but also in that of NATO and its members” affirmed Azizi, warning that a possible failure of the transition would affect not only Afghanistan but the whole region and beyond. Insisting on the need for a practical transition plan, Saboory declared that “ensuring that the achievements of the past ten years in terms of women’s rights, economic development and political consciousness stay in Afghanistan is a shared responsibility”.

The transition to greater stability could also become an opportunity to build fruitful political and economic relations with regional and international players. “NATO, the EU as well as our neighbours have an interest and therefore a role to play in the peace process”, said Azizi. Besides the clear regional implications of curbing drug trafficking and



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**Hamid Saboory**

the insurgency, the transition could open the door to foreign public and private investors.

“In 2012 the Afghan government launched the Istanbul process, to work on confidence-building measures with neighbouring countries”, added Saboory. “China, India and Pakistan are already part of the process and we are optimistic about the outcomes”, he concluded.

## The open question: making peace with the Taliban

Participants solicited a debate on the implications of the Taliban’s involvement in the political transition. “Making peace is a long-term, inclusive process involving both the people and the political players”, observed Naderi. Yet, “the Afghan people are not willing to accept and tolerate the Taliban’s policy and idea of government anymore”, intervened Karokhil.



“If for the past twelve years we have had a military approach to the insurgency, today Afghanistan needs a political settlement that must include the Taliban”,

**Hekmat Karzai**

The dilemma of ensuring an inclusive and legitimate peace process without compromising fundamental rights and democratic principles was central to the discussion. “If for the past twelve years we have had a military approach to the insurgency, today Afghanistan needs a political settlement that must include the Taliban”, declared Karzai, clarifying however that human and women’s rights are not up for negotiation.

While the panel seemed to agree on the need for a peaceful and inclusive political settlement, their responses proved the matter delicate and the road to peace still long.

As 2014 approaches, the post-ISAF scenario takes shape through the challenges, hopes and ongoing efforts to make of this transition the beginning of a stable and democratic Afghanistan.



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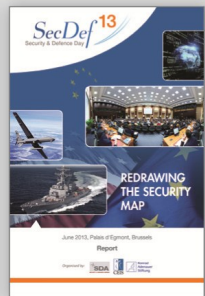
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