

# ESEMINAR SUMMARY

Centre for Security Governance

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## The Afghan National Security Forces Beyond 2014: Will They Be Ready?

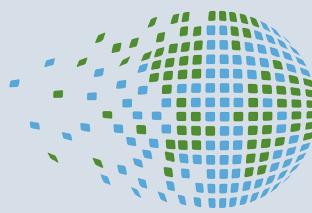
*The Centre for  
Security Governance  
eSeminars bring  
together leading  
security sector reform  
experts to discuss a  
range of SSR-related  
issues and cases on a  
quarterly basis.*

### Introduction

Afghanistan has undergone a long and costly reconstruction and state-building process, with specific emphasis placed on security sector reform as way to forge peace, stability, and a solid foundation for democratic development. Yet, despite such efforts, the country's long term future remains very much in doubt. Of particular concern is the capacity of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) – a 352,000-strong force that includes the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP) as its major components.<sup>1</sup> While opinions differ on its progress and achievements, a consensus has emerged that the ANSF still requires significant international security assistance to maintain order beyond 2014.

Simply put, Afghanistan's security situation is too precarious and the threats facing the government too plentiful for the ANSF to stand alone. The Taliban insurgency shows little sign of abating, despite continuing efforts to quell the violence. The Afghan government also faces extremist elements like Al-Qaeda and the Haqqani network, which have a growing propensity to cooperate with insurgents. Criminal networks, involved in human and drug trafficking and other black market activities, remain deeply entrenched in the country's burgeoning illicit economy, often to the benefit of Taliban insurgents and other extremists.

To counter such challenges, the ANSF has benefited from a steady increase in size and capability since 2009. Yet Afghan security services are limited by high attrition rates (especially among the police) and modest levels of recruitment. Even more worrisome is the ANSF's



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long-term future. True, the June 14 runoff featured two candidates – Abdullah Abdullah and Ashraf Ghani – who have already signaled their willingness to sign the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA). Among other things, the BSA would cement continued American support for the Afghan government and allow for a modest force presence to be retained in the country for training and counter-terrorism. But the ANSF is almost totally reliant on donor financing to maintain its current force levels, and there is no guarantee that continued high levels of funding will continue for the foreseeable future, even if the BSA is approved.

On February 18, 2014, the Centre for Security Governance organized an eSeminar that brought together three distinguished observers to discuss the current state of ANSF and the role of international assistance in developing and sustaining the force. Particular attention was paid to the most pressing question – whether the ANSF will be ready to assume full responsibility for security in Afghanistan?

## Summary of Presentations

### *Omar Samad – Afghanistan’s Security Transition*

Afghanistan has undergone a “security transition” over the past two years. As Omar Samad notes, this process is now almost complete, with the ANSF poised to take over full responsibility for security provision in the country.

## *About the eSeminar Series*

The Centre for Security Governance eSeminars are a series of virtual meetings that bring together experts and practitioners from around the world to discuss security sector reform (SSR) and related themes, issues, and case studies. The eSeminars are open to the public, and includes three key components: the eSeminar Primer, eSeminar Summary, and eSeminar Videos. For information on upcoming eSeminars, please visit <http://www.secgovcentre.org/events>.

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## *About the CSG*

The Centre for Security Governance is a non-profit, non-partisan think tank dedicated to the study of security transitions in fragile, failed and conflict-affected states, a process also known as security sector reform. A registered charity based in Kitchener, Canada, the CSG maintains a global network of research fellows from a variety of backgrounds, including practitioners, research analysts and academics, and partner organizations from the public and private sector engaged in SSR.

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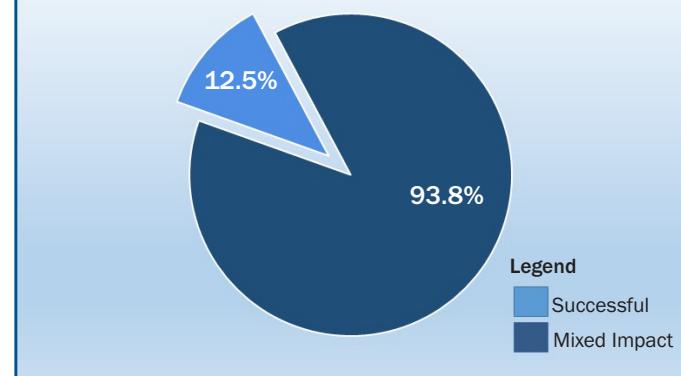
Compared to only a few years ago, the ANSF now has “the capability and the morale” necessary to withstand Taliban attacks and protect regions susceptible to such violence.

Samad admits that the ANSF is “a relatively cohesive and coherent force,” but one that also faces some key challenges. Polling of seminar participants seems to support such an assessment, with 94 percent saying ANSF development has only achieved mixed results (see Figure 1). For instance, in spite of the progress made over the last several years, Samad argues that the ANA still needs to become more of a truly “national institution” – and this means recruiting from all parts of the country, including the south. Also, despite significant investment, more needs to be done to make the ANA “self-reliant.”

If the ANA hopes to sustain recent progress, it needs the continued support of both the international community and Afghan political leadership. The last point was reiterated in the

**Figure 1: eSeminar Polling Question**

*How would you rate the achievements of the ANSF development program?*

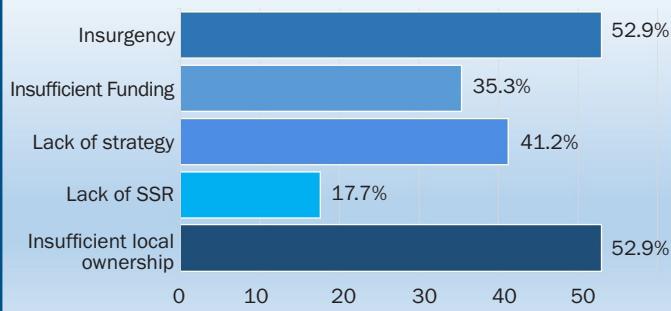


seminar polling, which found that 53 percent of participants blame insufficient Afghan ownership and leadership as the major impediment to the ANSF’s development. Notably, this deficit in ownership/leadership was rated by the seminar participants as the most imposing challenge to the ANSF, tying only with the insurgency itself (see Figure 2).

According to Samad, the ANSF’s future will be determined by the country’s political track. Afghanistan is in the midst of both a presidential election and an economic transition. The latter point is often overlooked, given that the Afghan economy has so far relied on (and been distorted by) the international community’s sizable presence in the country. While the election is a “healthy and positive development in Afghanistan,” security has become the major topic of discussion, with a particular focus on the future of the ANSF. Candidates will now have to present ideas, programs, and plans.

**Figure 2: eSeminar Polling Question**

*What has been the most difficult challenge facing the development of the ANSF?*



Each candidate appears to have distinct views on the ANSF.

The incoming president will also decide whether the government signs the BSA. In its absence, it is clear that the “future of ANSF is going to be a huge question mark” – though some certainty now exists that the agreement will be signed. The BSA is also directly tied to those international commitments made at the summits on Afghanistan held in Chicago and Tokyo. Without a signed agreement many of those commitments of funding and support will be in jeopardy. Securing a compact with the United States will shape Afghanistan’s relations with key regional players like Iran and Pakistan. Importantly, Russia and China appear to have taken relatively neutral stands on the BSA.

Omar Samad finished his talk by offering a suggestion for the ANSF’s future development. Alongside better equipping the ANA, he suggests that the force should also build up its neglected air force, which constitutes a huge gap in the ANSF’s force structure. As he concludes, without “adequate air support, air cover, [and] air defence capability,” the ANSF will be unable to defend the country.

#### *Antonio Giustozzi – The ANA’s Logistical Challenge*

The recent Western military disengagement from Afghanistan has sparked heated debate on the future of the country. The ANA devel-

oped substantially since 2002, but opinion on the force’s sustainability and future trajectory remains divided. Antonio Giustozzi seeks to address a fundamental question in his talk: “Is the Afghan Army, on its own [and] without the kind of massive foreign support that it enjoyed up to now...able to contain [the] insurgency and at some point defeat it?”

Giustozzi asserts that obtaining objective assessments of the ANA has been difficult. Trainers frequently voice a “positive view,” which is not surprising since “their careers are at stake.” Sources are difficult to find in the midst of a war, while accessing personnel willing to speak freely about the state of the armed forces remains challenging. Giustozzi’s most recent work seeks to overcome this subjectivity by conducting more comprehensive research and interviews with “as many officers and soldiers in the Afghan army as possible.” He concludes that the overwhelming view is “that the army has big flaws [and] has big weaknesses, which unfortunately are very difficult to resolve quickly.”

Giustozzi contends that the support and logistical components of the ANA are largely underdeveloped. Yet comparing the army’s logistics with those of any North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) country would be unfair. A better comparison is with the Indian army. Yet even Indian army officers are “quite dismissive” of the ANA, highlighting two main problems. First, a large proportion of the Afghan army lacks the

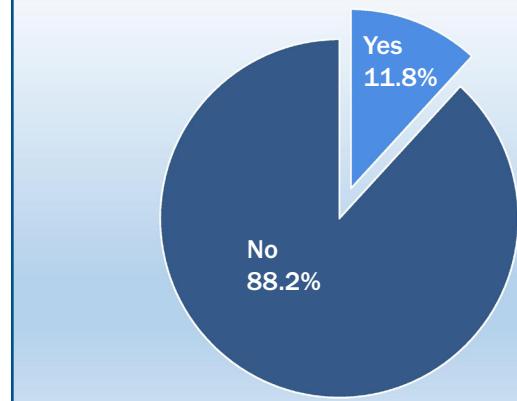
"basic skills requirements for their job." Second, the ANA has been conditioned to behave in a wasteful manner, likely owing to their close proximity to and tutelage by wealthy Western armies, which have access to more plentiful supplies and greater resources than their Afghan protégé. This behaviour often degenerates into graft and corruption; a good example being the ANA's high consumption of fuel, where officers are prone to sell fuel allowances on the black market.

Furthermore, Afghanistan's rapid economic development has only made it more "difficult for the army to recruit in the first place and retain people who have any skills." With a more robust job market, individuals have other opportunities beyond the military, which can constrain recruitment drives and stymie retention efforts by offering the prospect of better paying positions outside the military. A related problem is the time needed to train people to use and maintain equipment. So, in the unlikely event that the Afghan air force acquires new aircraft, it will be many years before the country can operate such equipment.

"The real problem here," Giustozzi emphasizes, is that the ANA's "most difficult specializations [e.g., logistics, administration, military combat]...only started developing very late." Indeed, prior to 2013, the force depended exclusively on logistics systems introduced and maintained by the United States. As a result, the Afghan army must "go back to something

**Figure 3: eSeminar Polling Question**

*Do you think the ANSF will be ready to assume full security responsibility beyond 2014?*



more basic" and contextually relevant in the post-2014 period. To some extent, there is already an effort to abandon some of the more sophisticated models imported by the Americans and return to how the Afghan army was like in the past. Giustozzi recommends that Afghans take cues from India or Pakistan, and develop logistical systems that are not heavily reliant on computers and advanced software.

Giustozzi admits that he is not very optimistic about the ANA's future – a view shared by many event participants, with almost 90 percent responding negatively in a poll when asked whether the ANSF will be ready to assume full responsibility for Afghanistan (see Figure 3). Patronage and nepotism remain perennial problems, while the attrition rate of individuals choosing to leave the forces is "still exceptionally high." The ANA's fighting capability has increased, but it continues to be deficient in tactics, doctrine, and especially logistics: the Afghan army is still underprepared to

“hold onto” the kind of operational deployment against the Taliban “on their own.”

### *Cornelius Friesendorf – Accountability and Human Rights: The Afghan Police*

Observers tend to focus on the ANSF’s effectiveness rather than its accountability and human rights record. This, as Cornelius Friesendorf argues, is problematic for two reasons: First, Afghans have a right to be protected from “predatory groups” like insurgents and criminal gangs or “predatory state actors,” such as corrupt or abusive police. Second, “morals and effectiveness go together,” meaning that more legitimate police are often the most effective, not least in their ability to rely on citizens for information.

Much like the ANA, it is difficult to “assess the state of policing in Afghanistan.” No unified data system exists, making it hard to ascertain ANP performance across districts and provinces. Yet some general trends can be observed. The ANP is closely linked to human rights abuses, drug abuse, and corruption, although the situation has improved in recent years. Even worse is the Afghan Local Police (ALP), an irregular police force made up largely of local militiamen that the US is planning to build into a 30,000-strong force. Despite some positive reports on their role in ethnically and religiously homogenous districts, the ALP has been known to exacerbate local conflicts in heterogeneous districts and their human rights abuses have

been well documented by bodies like UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan.<sup>2</sup>

This point was brought home in Friesendorf’s visit to Kunduz in 2013, where non-governmental groups confirmed the egregious human rights abuses committed by the local police and the tendency of ALP commanders to pursue their own interests at the expense of the public good. “People accept some level of corruption, some level of police brutality as long as police establish a modicum of security,” a point also raised in Giustozzi’s co-authored book.<sup>3</sup> Yet there are limits to this acquiescence, and the ALP’s abuses have since become a “very convenient recruitment mechanism for the Taliban and other insurgent groups.”

Friesendorf admits the difficulty of prioritizing human rights when facing a “well-armed, well-organized insurgency.” Yet, despite the emphasis on strengthening the police, the results have been ambiguous – as shown by the ANP’s “staggering” casualty figures, with an average of 80 officers killed on a weekly basis in 2013. Another obstacle is how the Afghan police must play multiple roles, switching from “community policing to fighting insurgents.” They also operate within the confines of Afghanistan’s nepotistic and patrimonial power structures, in which gender discrimination continues to be the norm for female police officers.

International donors are also not blameless,

given their tendency to look for quick fixes in what Mark Sedra has called the “slide to expediency.”<sup>4</sup> A good example is the shift from comprehensive SSR to security assistance. As Friesendorf says, the Pentagon is not an “ideal actor...for reforming [the] police force.”

So what can be done to improve this situation? Friesendorf is not very optimistic, concluding that the “window for comprehensive security sector reform has closed.” As he goes on to say, progress has been “very slow and partial,” even at times when donors had invested heavily in trainers and funding. Yet, without accountability and human rights, it is likely that support for the ANP and ALP will prove “ineffective and possibly counterproductive” over the medium- to long-term.

## Issues and Themes

The eSeminar concluded with a question-and-answer discussion moderated by the CSG Executive Director Mark Sedra, which raised key issues and themes relevant to ongoing SSR efforts and particularly the ANSF’s future.

### Afghan Corruption

Afghanistan has found itself near the bottom of Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index.<sup>5</sup> Corruption can be seen on the streets, with unofficial checkpoints pilfering money from motorists, just as it can be found among high-ranking government officials. As

Samad explains, Afghanistan has “some very corrupt ministers...very corrupt advisors, very corrupt high officials, police chiefs,” while the “legal and justice system is almost broken.” Large-scale corruption involving either narcotics or the siphoning off of foreign aid is certainly an issue. But ordinary Afghans are more concerned with “petty corruption,” says Giustozzi, which they typically confront on a daily basis.

The presidential elections provide one possible avenue for change, given that the key candidates are promising to prioritize anti-corruption activities. Yet the spectre of voter fraud hangs over the election.<sup>6</sup> Giustozzi points out that “power brokers” control the “vote banks” and can “throw those votes in some direction” to their preferred candidates. The seemingly inevitable decline of foreign aid will also have an immense impact, notes Friesendorf, reducing the amount of money flowing through patronage systems. Such funds rarely trickle down to the district-level and instead end up lining the pockets of higher-level officials.

### *Perceptions of the BSA*

Some see the BSA as a possible impediment to talks with the Taliban. Yet the impact of the BSA is not necessarily so straightforward. After all, a failure to sign the BSA should not be construed as the end of all direct and indirect foreign support. As Giustozzi admits, even without the BSA, it is likely that “some kind of other

formula” would be reached to support “the Afghan government with the provision of funds.” The BSA itself is unlikely to have a detrimental impact on whether the Afghan government chooses to negotiate with the Taliban.

Importantly, however, the BSA’s signing could influence the perception of international support on each side of the conflict. Without a framework for international support, the Taliban’s position in any bargaining process with the Afghan government would be strengthened. According to Samad, if the BSA is signed, the Taliban have two choices – they will either continue fighting, in full knowledge of the continued international presence in the country, or they will finally select a political route. As he goes on to explain, if some Taliban factions finally do put down their arms, it raises the “question of what would they ask for, what would they want, what would they get in return?”

### *Role of Regional States*

According to Giustozzi, India plays an underappreciated but supportive role in Afghanistan’s SSR process, particularly in regard to ANA officer training. At the same time, Friesendorf argues that a more prominent Indian role in Afghanistan could prove problematic. It would agitate Pakistan, which sees the “Afghan war through the prism of its conflict with India.” A greater variety of ANSF trainers is also not necessarily in Afghanistan’s interest, since each

actor exports (and often fails to coordinate) their own military and policing models, training methods, and logistical structures.

Many regional countries, such as Afghanistan’s Central Asian neighbours, lack either the capability or inclination to play a significant role. Others, like the Gulf States, are limited to small-scale support. Some, like Iran and Pakistan, are simply not welcome. Modest forms of cooperation like joint counter-narcotics efforts with Iran may still be possible due to their long history of interference and proxy competition in the country. President Karzai wants to shift the focus of Afghanistan’s political and security transition from Western state-building approach to a regional agenda, says Samad. This opens up the possibility of finding a win-win solution for both regional spoilers and those with links to the government in Kabul – something that the next government must find a way to achieve.

### *ANSF Sustainability and Funding*

With the Afghan government only able to cover 12 percent of the ANSF’s annual cost, Afghanistan will require over 5 billion USD in annual subsidies to maintain the force at current levels.<sup>7</sup> Polled seminar participants did not see funding as being a central concern for Afghanistan; only 18 percent cited insufficient funding as a significant challenge to the ANSF (see Figure 2). Still, many of the panelists raised the issue of whether and for how long donors will

continue to fund the ANSF.

For example, Friesendorf points to the Soviet experience, which saw the Afghan army collapse shortly after the Soviet Union withdrew funding and subsidies, a lesson that NATO has likely studied. Foreign advisors and mentors will still be needed for the foreseeable future. Yet, with the “financial crisis in parts of the West,” politicians will inevitably lose interest in Afghanistan while continued funding for the ANSF will be harder to justify in the long term. Equally important, the continued engagement and support of the US Congress is key to avoid sudden cuts in funding. Much depends on whether a reformist leadership team emerges from the Afghan presidential elections, adds Samad, which would help “regenerate” some of the optimism in the US Congress (and indeed in other nations’ capitals).

An important determinant is how rapidly funding is scaled back. Giustozzi argued that an abrupt reduction could make the ANSF’s “collapse...inevitable.” If the cut is gradual, however, the ANSF will likely reduce “the size of the regular forces...and create more irregular forces” to compensate for the contracted funding envelope. Notably, the ANSF is increasingly relying on more irregular forces, such as the ALP – and this process will likely accelerate in coming years. These irregular forces might be funded privately, through illicit activities, or with the support of neighbouring countries. The end result would be a

“patchwork of militias,” some formally linked with the government but in reality having multiple loyalties.<sup>8</sup>

#### *ANSF versus the Taliban after 2014*

The Afghan Taliban has so far refrained from attempting to hold territory, cut off main highways, or directly attack major cities, preferring instead insurgent/attrition tactics designed to keep the ANA and Afghan police overstretched. Yet a concerted Taliban offensive in 2015/16 cannot be discounted, especially since the international community’s capability to respond militarily will be limited. The country’s south is particularly vulnerable. As Giustozzi explains, the Taliban are “strong” in that region and have been strengthening their “command and control capabilities” there as well.

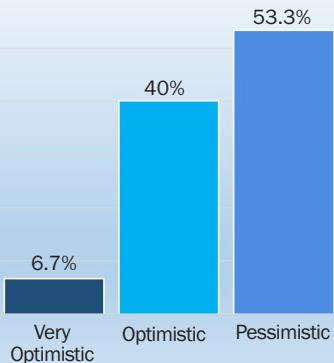
This does not mean that the ANA will immediately collapse. But it does mean that one might see the Taliban try to control the highways in these areas, as a possible prelude to taking the cities themselves. Given such uncertainties, it can come as no surprise that eSeminar participants were evenly divided on the future of Afghanistan, with 54 percent pessimistic and 47 percent optimistic or very optimistic about the outcome of the donor-supported transition (see Figure 4).

#### *Human Rights*

The international community tends to focus on their own interests and the broader strategic

**Figure 4: eSeminar Polling Question**

*Are you optimistic about the future of Afghanistan beyond 2014?*



situation facing Afghanistan. But, as noted by Friesendorf, one should not forget the human rights dimension for the “population on the ground.” The Afghan populace have had to bear the brunt of the consequences of this conflict. Human rights violations have occurred in prisons run by international and Afghan security forces. Civilian casualties, refugees, and internally displaced persons have all steadily increased, while the country has become a hub for human trafficking and smuggling.

## Conclusion

Afghanistan has come a long way after over a decade of engagement by the international community, particularly the United States. The ANSF is arguably a more capable force than at any other time in its recent history, in terms of size, training, and equipment – evidenced by its growing capacity for independent, large-scale operations, such as the Afghan-led

security operation during its 2014 presidential elections. The BSA also appears on track to be signed after these elections, so long as the ongoing dispute over alleged electoral fraud between the two run-off candidates does not degenerate into something more serious. As a result, the United States has an opportunity to stay engaged in Afghanistan into the future.

Yet the BSA is no guarantee that the ANSF will emerge from America’s planned military departure unscathed. Numerous problems beset the ANSF, from the ANA’s logistical shortcomings to the corruption and incompetence that plagues the Afghan police. Even more serious is the question of whether the ANSF can be sustained into the future, especially as Western attention shifts and international financing potentially dries up. The next few years will be critical. With America withdrawing much of its forces, the ANSF could face an emboldened Taliban insurgency – and to do so largely alone. Recent events in Iraq provide a cautionary tale in that regard. Despite certain dissimilarities, it is difficult to ignore the spectre of a large, American-trained, and well-equipped Iraqi Army quickly collapsing against a small insurgent group. At the very least, it makes it difficult to be sanguine on how ANSF may fare against a potentially resurgent Taliban.

## About the Presenters

**Ambassador Omar Samad** is Senior Central Asia Fellow at the New America Foundation in Washington D.C. He served as Ambassador of Afghanistan to France (2009-2011), Ambassador to Canada (2004-2009), and was the Spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Kabul (2001-2004).

**Dr. Antonio Giustozzi** is an independent researcher who took his PhD at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) and is currently associated with the IDEAS (International Affairs, Diplomacy, Strategy), LSE.

**Dr. Cornelius Friesendorf** is a lecturer at Goethe University Frankfurt and a researcher at the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (PRIF/HSKF).

## Notes

1. It also includes the Afghan Air Force, Afghan Special Narcotics Force, Afghan Public Protection Force, as well as various policing components, such as the Afghan Uniform Police, Afghan National Civil Order Police, Afghan Border Police, Afghan Anti-Crime Police, and Afghan Local Police. See Chris Bordeleau, "The Afghan National Security Force Beyond 2014: Will They Be Ready?" *eSeminar Primer No. 2* (2014), p. 4.

2. United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, *Afghanistan Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2013* (Kabul, Afghanistan: February 2014).

3. Antonio Giustozzi and Mohammed Isaqzadeh, *Policing Afghanistan: The Politics of the Lame Leviathan* (London: Hurst, 2013).

4. Mark Sedra, "Security Sector Reform in Afghanistan: The Slide Towards Expediency," *International Peacekeeping* 13, 1 (2006): pp. 94-110.

5. Transparency International, "Corruption Perception Index 2013," <http://cpi.transparency.org/cpi2013/results/>

6. Vote fraud allegations have been made in the June 14, 2014 run-off between Abdullah Abdullah and Ashraf Ghani, with Mr. Abdullah accusing his opponent of widespread fraud, especially in eastern and southern Afghanistan. So far, this has resulted in the Chief Electoral Officer Ziaulhaq Amarkhil resigning. At the time of writing, this dispute has yet to be resolved. See Yaroslav Trofimov and Nathan Hodge, "Afghan Chief Electoral Officer Resigns Amid Vote Fraud Allegations," *Wall Street Journal*, 23 June 2014, <http://online.wsj.com/articles/afghanistan-chief-electoral-officer-resigns-1403526114>.

7. Mark Sedra, "A Job Half Done: Afghanistan and the Afghan Transition," *ISPI Analysis No. 260* (June 2014), p. 10.

8. Such a scenario is similar to what occurred in post-revolution Libya (though, unlike Libya, this force would also be tasked with combating a ruthless insurgency). See David McDonough, "Reforming Libya's Post-Revolution Security Sector: The Militia Problem," SSR Resource Centre's *The Hub blog* (May 21, 2014), <http://www.ssr-resourcecentre.org/2014/05/21/reforming-libyas-post-revolution-security-sector-the-militia-problem/>