



Outcomes of the Kabul International Conference

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The Afghan government and the international community held a historic conference in Kabul on 20th July 2010, to pave the way forward for the initiatives presented in the London Conference. The Kabul Conference saw more than 70 countries and international and local organizations come together to discuss Afghanistan's plans for development, governance and stability. Several important issues such as the fundamental mechanisms of effective partnership, governance, rule of law and human rights, peace, reconciliation and reintegration, regional cooperation and security were examined at the conference. Another significant matter brought to surface in the conference was the request of the Afghan government to have 50 percent of international aid channeled through the Afghan government instead of international organizations based in Afghanistan. The participants vouched their commitment and support for the Afghan government and the implementation of the development, governance, and stability initiatives.² Therefore, it is believed that the Kabul Conference will have a positive impact on the political and security dynamics of war torn nation, but only upon the effectively and speedy implementation of the development, governance and stability strategies.

The first important issue raised in the Kabul Conference was the transition of security responsibilities from NATO to Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) by 2014. This transition period has raised a key concern amongst Afghans regarding the capability of ANSF in 2014 to take over operations from NATO. Is the scheduled time frame realistic for the handover of security responsibility to Afghan security forces? Evidently, this is unlikely when one examines the current status of the conflict and ANSF capacity. This will weigh heavily on the overall development of Afghan security institutions and the technical assistance they receive in terms of training and weaponry. President Hamid Karzai, in light of his reintegration and reconciliation initiative, pronounced his determination to build Afghan Security Forces so as to enable them to take over security responsibilities from NATO in the near future which would facilitate the dialogue process

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² "Afghanistan aims for full security handover by 2014." CNN.Com. 20 July 2010.
<http://edition.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/asiapcf/07/20/afghanistan.conference/index.html>. 04 August 2010



with the insurgency. President Karzai added in his closing remarks that "this is a national objective we have to fulfill -- and we must."³

In the concluding session of the conference, both President Karzai and the United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon assured their commitment to developing the capacity of the ANSF. Moreover, if Karzai succeeds in reconciling with the militant groups, with the support of the international community, 2014 could prove to be a realistic timeframe for the Afghan security forces to take over security responsibilities. This would also pave the road map for foreign forces to gradually withdraw from Afghanistan. Developing the capacity of ANSF has been a key debate in Afghanistan, however, what most discussions neglect to understand is that even if the size of the ANSF is increased this would not necessarily translate into an effective army. The ANSF needs proper training and equipment to enable them to operate independently, without this, the size of the army would be irrelevant.

The reconciliation and reintegration initiative can also contribute to making the security transition possible by 2014. However, the mechanisms for reconciliation and reintegration were not defined in the Kabul Conference. The leadership of the insurgency is located in Quetta, Pakistan while the Afghan government is struggling to reintegrate the foot soldiers in Afghanistan. The Afghan government presented the Afghan Peace and Reintegration programme (APRP) to which the international community showed much commitment too. Moreover, the international community mentioned during the conference that they will continue to support efforts of the Afghan government to reintegrate those insurgents who renounce violence and distance themselves from Al-Qaeda.⁴ However, the future prospects of the current reconciliation and reintegration initiative is still unknown specially when reports have shown the failures of the National Independent Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC) that commenced in 2006. Reports show that those insurgents who had given up fighting and reintegrated in the past are now rejoining the insurgency. This is in part due to the failures of the Afghan government in delivering on their promises to the disarmed insurgents. Those insurgents who have re-joined the insurgency claim they would never go back to the government as they have lost their trust and faith in the state and are now fighting with more ardor than ever before.⁵ If the renewed reconciliation and reintegration efforts produce the same results as the previous attempts at dialogue with the insurgency, it would make any security transition highly unlikely by 2014.

Another priority discussed at the Kabul Conference was the effective channeling of international aid to Afghanistan. President Karzai requested from the international community to spend at least 50 percent of the nearly USD 13 billion through the Afghan government instead of NGOs in an attempt to help fight corruption and promote good

³ Ibid

⁴ "Kabul International Conference." Foreign Commission Wealth Office, 20 July 2010. <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/global-issues/conflict-prevention/afghanistan21/004-kabul-conference/>. 04 August 2010

⁵ Zia Ahmadi. "Afghan Former Militants Rejoin Insurgency." Institute for War and Peace Reporting. 08 August 2010. <http://iwpr.net/report-news/afghan-former-militants-rejoin-insurgency>. 10 August

governance. Consequently, the participants at the Kabul Conference agreed to transfer 50 percent of the funds pledge through Afghan channels.⁶ This will enable the government to build trust amongst the Afghan people by proving to them that the agenda set at the London and Kabul conferences was indeed Afghan owned and led.

Other critical issues that were elaborated upon in the conference were the issues of good governance, a fair judicial system and provisions of basic human rights at all levels of the government. It is widely believed that the Afghan government is not capable of ensuring good governance or basic services to the public. In addition, recent reports claiming that more than £6 million is smuggled out of Kabul airport every day has furthered aggravated the government attempts to building its credibility. This sum is equivalent to more than £2.3billion a year, or three times the government's official tax and customs revenue.⁷ In addition, till now there has not been any concise strategy in fighting corruption at the administration level. The provision of good governance is essential in combating corruption as well as improving the justice sector. The populace needs to be guaranteed their fundamental rights which at this stage are beyond the reach of a government distraught with insecurity and rampant corruption.

Other issues, such as the centrality of women's rights including, political, economic and social equality and a commitment to implement governmental responsibilities under the National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA) were also addressed. The matter of narcotics and regional co-operation were also highlighted in the Kabul Conference; both hold great concern for Afghanistan's neighbors namely Iran and Pakistan.⁸ Women in Afghanistan need a lot more attention and resources so as to increase their attendance in the education sector as well as enhance their participation in the workforce. This would pave the road map for women to actively participate in the development of the country and their rights could be availed. In addition, the problem of narcotics must also be addressed. Currently, Afghanistan is leading the world in hashish and opium production. According to United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime's (UNODC's) Executive Director, Maria Costa, "the astonishing yields of the Afghan cannabis crop (estimated at 1,500 and 3,500 tons a year) makes Afghanistan the world's biggest producer of hashish."⁹ The government of Afghanistan should provide farmers with alternative crops such as saffron instead of opium, the price of which is much higher than opium. According to the UNODC report of 2010, an opium survey shows the price of one kg of opium to be USD 83.00,¹⁰ while the price of one kg of saffron is 1,100 US

⁶ "Afghanistan aims for full security handover by 2014." CNN.Com. 20 July 2010.

<http://edition.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/asiapcf/07/20/afghanistan.conference/index.html>. 04 August 2010.

⁷ Ben Former. "£6m smuggled out of Afghanistan everyday." www.telegraph.co.uk, 25 January 2010.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/afghanistan/7072263/6m-smuggled-out-of-Afghanistan-every-day.html>. 04 August 2010.

⁸ "Kabul International Conference." Foreign Commission wealth Office, 20 July 2010.

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/global-issues/conflict-prevention/afghanistan21/004-kabul-conference/>. 04

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⁹ UNODC. "Afghanistan World Leader in Hashish Production." 31 March 2009. www.unodc.org. 04

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¹⁰ UNODC. "Afghanistan Opium Winter Rapid Assessment 2010." February 2010. www.unodc.org. 04

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dollars.¹¹ Nonetheless, problem with growing saffron is that it takes three years to be harvested while opium takes less time. The Afghan government and international community should focus on this issue in order to be able to demolish the cultivation of narcotics which is also believed to be one of the sources of financing for the insurgency. Hence, Saffron could be one of the alternative crops that could potentially reduce poppy cultivation in Afghanistan.

Last but not the least, regional cooperation, is one of the foremost elements that can put an end to the insurgency that was heavily emphasized upon at the Kabul conference. In a recent development the disclosure of secret Pentagon files pertaining to the conflict in Afghanistan highlighted the sever lack of regional cooperation and secret operations conducted by the U.S. and Paksitan in the past nine years. These secret military documents were leaked by a website, called Wikileaks, which published over 90,000 secret military documents that show talks of Afghanistan's neighbors-Pakistan and Iran being involved clandestine support for the insurgency.¹² Regional cooperation could be another tool to minimize the expanding insurgency in Afghanistan. If these neighboring countries stop providing the insurgents with support and sanctuaries, it is likely that the insurgents would become weakened and finally end up their movement of resistance. In the conference, the neighboring countries assure that they will cooperate with Afghanistan and international community in Afghanistan to lead it to a peaceful country which is also in their benefit.

In conclusion, if the aforementioned issues continue to remain as concerns for Afghanistan, we cannot expect the current political and security dynamics to improve. In addition, the cooperation of regional players is key to attaining the objectives set forth at the conference; therefore, it is critical to adopt effective implementation mechanisms to see through the Kabul Conference agenda. Furthermore, for reconciliation and reintegration plan, there is a need for the fulfillment of promises that are made with the insurgents to reintegrate or reconcile should take practical shape and do not remain as words on the surface of the paper. Additionally, the international community should focus on the quality of the ANSF in order to enable them to conduct military operations independent of the foreign forces help and pave the way for the withdrawal of the foreign forces by the 2014.

¹¹ "Top 9 Most Expensive Foods in the World." 26 March 2010.
<http://www.worldinterestingfacts.com/lifestyle/top-9-most-expensive-foods-in-the-world.html>. 08 August 2010

¹² "Afghanistan war leak papers will take 'weeks to assess.'" BBC News. 27 July 2010.
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-1> 2010