

# ISSUE BRIEF

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## NATO Summit 2014: Stay Committed to Afghanistan

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The 2014 NATO summit will be held in September in Wales. It will be the last summit before NATO ends its combat operations in Afghanistan and begins its Resolute Support mission to train, advise, and assist the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF).

The two most important issues at the summit regarding Afghanistan will be the financial funding for and size of the ANSF after 2015 and the number of U.S. and NATO troops in Afghanistan. More than 50 international leaders of those nations that are participating in the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) will attend the summit. This offers a unique opportunity to address these issues.

### **Lessons from Iraq: Stay Committed to the Mission**

For the past 13 years, the U.S. has been involved in combat operations in Afghanistan. NATO has been commanding various aspects of the campaign there since 2003 and in 2006 assumed command of the whole campaign. At NATO's 2010 Lisbon summit, the alliance decided that its combat operations will finish by the end of 2014 and that full security control will be transferred to the Afghans.

This has mostly been accomplished. The U.S. and NATO have closed or transferred to the Afghans all

but 70 of the 852 bases and outposts they held at the peak of the campaign. The Afghans are now responsible for almost 100 percent of their country's security, and on an average day, NATO forces conduct just two dozen patrols, compared with the hundreds of daily missions of previous years.<sup>1</sup>

However, this does not mean that it is "mission accomplished" in Afghanistan. One of the most crucial periods of the Afghan campaign will commence in 2015, when Afghans take the lead for their security. NATO should avoid using the summit as a victory lap for its mission in Afghanistan. Recent events in Iraq show what happens when the U.S. fully disengages after combat operations end. The end-of-2014 deadline for Western-led combat operations is not the end of the war but simply a continuation of the campaign led by the Afghans and supported by the international community.

### **Challenges for NATO after 2014**

A major part of the transition strategy in Afghanistan has been training the ANSF to a level where it can meet Afghanistan's internal security challenges without tens of thousands of NATO troops on the ground. This comes with a hefty price tag, and there is still a shortfall in funding.

Maintaining the ANSF of 352,000 troops and police after 2015 will cost the international community approximately \$6 billion per year. So far, the U.S. has committed about half of the funding. The U.K. (the world's seventh-largest economy) and Germany (the world's fourth-largest economy) have contributed only \$110 million and \$190 million, respectively. The international community is still short \$2.5 billion each year for the years 2015–2017.<sup>2</sup>

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at  
<http://report.heritage.org/ib4266>

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Currently, the ANSF has 352,000 Afghans in uniform. Under current plans, it will be reduced to a level of 228,500 by 2017. This planned reduction will take place during the first two years after NATO troops end combat operations in the country and during a period when Afghanistan will be at its most vulnerable. Any decision to reduce ANSF numbers should be based on a realistic assessment of security needs, not financial concerns.

The 2014 NATO summit will also be an opportunity for alliance members to commit troops for the Resolute Support mission. The U.S. is expected to leave behind 9,800 troops to train and mentor the ANSF and conduct counterterrorism operations so long as the Afghan government signs a bilateral security agreement spelling out the parameters for the residual U.S. force presence. Although no exact figure has been made public, it is thought that NATO is planning to keep 3,000 to 4,000 troops in Afghanistan for the ANSF training mission.

NATO members have been hesitant to make public commitments with respect to numbers of troops in Afghanistan after 2014. It has been reported that Germany will leave between 600 and 800 soldiers in Kabul and the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif until 2017. Italy has committed around 600 troops for the western part of the country. The U.K. is reportedly committing only 200 troops.<sup>3</sup> Non-NATO members Georgia and Australia have pledged up to 750 troops and 450 troops, respectively. More needs to be done at the summit to get the number of troops required for the Resolute Support mission.

### Do Not Waste an Opportunity

The timing of the NATO summit provides a great opportunity for the international community to demonstrate commitment to NATO's upcoming Resolute Support mission in Afghanistan. The U.S. and NATO should ensure that:

- **The alliance stays committed to Afghanistan.** Too often, the international community has turned its back on Afghanistan. The fail-

ure of U.S. disengagement in Iraq is playing out with disastrous results. The summit should be used to show international commitment to Afghanistan.

- **The ANSF remains at 352,000 for the foreseeable future.** The strength of the ANSF should be determined by security conditions on the ground. NATO leaders should resist the temptation to reduce the ANSF's size and capability simply for financial reasons.
- **International partners provide their fair share of the funding for the ANSF.** Everyone benefits from a strong ANSF. However, maintaining a robust Afghan force will not be cheap. The U.S. should continue to press international partners to commit adequate funding for the ANSF for the foreseeable future.
- **The ANSF remains capable.** The U.S. should ensure that the ANSF has the equipment and capabilities required to fulfill its mission—especially helicopters and counter-improvised-explosive-device capability.
- **Firm up NATO troop commitments for the Resolute Support mission.** NATO members need to make public commitments for their planned post-2014 troop numbers. This will send a message to the Afghan people, the insurgency, and the region that NATO is committed to Afghanistan's future.

### Learn the Lessons of History

When Russia stopped funding Mohammad Najibullah's regime in 1992, the Afghan air force was grounded due to lack of fuel, and Afghan army desertions increased by 60 percent due to lack of pay and food shortages. This established the chaotic conditions in Afghanistan that, in part, helped to bring the Taliban to power in 1994. Today in Iraq, the consequences of full disengagement are seen in the rise

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1. Michael M. Phillips, "In Afghanistan, the Two-Generation War," *The Wall Street Journal*, August 8, 2014, <http://online.wsj.com/articles/in-afghanistan-the-two-generation-war-1407515418> (accessed August 19, 2014).

2. Kenneth Katzman, "Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy," Congressional Research Service *Report for Congress*, July 11, 2014, p. 20, <http://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL30588.pdf> (accessed August 19, 2014).

3. Emma Graham-Harrison and Mokhtar Amiri, "UK Military Cedes Senior Post in Kabul as Troops Pull Out," *The Guardian*, June 25, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/25/uk-military-cedes-senior-post-afghanistan> (accessed August 19, 2014).

of the so-called Islamic State. NATO should learn these lessons and not disengage from Afghanistan at such an important time.

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