

Philipp Münch

Resolute Support Light

NATO's New Mission versus the Political Economy of the Afghan National Security Forces

1. A NEW MISSION AND MANY QUESTIONS

After 13 years in Afghanistan, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) has been replaced by NATO's Resolute Support (RS) mission.¹ Since even the major participants in the 2001 intervention are reluctant to describe the international engagement as a clear success, one should ask whether we can expect the new NATO mission, which began on 1 January 2015, to be more likely to succeed. To judge its chance of success and likely performance, however, one faces the same problem as judging its predecessor – its goals are often not clearly defined; nor are they prioritised.²

¹ NATO representatives also use the acronym RSM for Resolute Support Mission instead of RS, but the latter seems to be more common.

² This paper is based on information gathered at the Transatlantic Opinion Leaders Tour to Afghanistan (TOLA) from 17 to 23 October 2014, organised by the NATO Public Diplomacy Division. The tour involved talks with NATO officials at NATO HQ in Brussels as well as senior ISAF and NATO representatives, Afghan members of the Afghan National Security Forces, parliament, government and 'civil society' representatives in Kabul and Mazar-e Sharif. The following article also quotes from this TOLA event: Jason Campbell, "What's the Plan? The NATO Coalition in Afghanistan", November 19, 2014, <http://warontherocks.com/2014/11/whats-the-plan-the-nato-coalition/>.

The final declaration of NATO's most recent summit in Wales, on 4 and 5 September 2014, lists a wide range of well-known, non-specific goals, ranging from "stability" to "good governance." Contributors to RS, however, seem to give higher priority to the goal of fighting "terrorism" which, in the context of Afghanistan, is mainly understood as taking on foreign fighters affiliated to al-Qaeda and other groups. This is reflected by the declaration stating as NATO's aim "to never again be threatened by terrorists from within Afghanistan."³

Representatives of the biggest troop contributor and main driver of RS, the United States, also mention wider and more abstract aims. US President Barack Obama defined "giving the Afghan people the opportunity to succeed as they stand on their own" as a third objective of US policy besides counterterrorism and security assistance.⁴ In contrast

³ Wales Summit Declaration, issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Wales, Press Release (2014) 120, 5 September 2014, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm, no 44. See also Agreement between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan on the Status of NATO Forces and NATO Personnel Conducting Mutually Agreed NATO-led Activities in Afghanistan, <http://mfa.gov.af/Content/files/SOFA%20ENGLISH.pdf>.

⁴ Statement by the President on Afghanistan, 17 May 2014, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/photos-and-video/video/2014/05/27/president-obama-makes->

to the US, NATO as a whole has not decided on an end date for RS or for specific stages of withdrawal.⁵

As was the case with ISAF, it is paradoxical that the *means* to achieve these uncertain goals are much more clearly defined. In the case of RS, it is to “train, advise, and assist” the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF)⁶ in order to enable them to assume their security functions – usually understood as defeating the insurgency, as well as protecting the population and the country from outside attacks. In contrast to ISAF, RS personnel are supposed to generally work only with the top level of the ANSF, i.e. the Ministries of Interior and Defence, together with the National Directorate of Security (NDS), as well as at the level of army corps and police zone – these being the largest organisational units of the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP). NATO officials describe RS as a “non-combat mission,” pointing out that it will not directly engage in the fight of the ANSF.⁷ Rather, it will – as ISAF has also done – focus on helping Afghan officials to draft strategic and operational plans and the day-to-day bureaucratic work of these Afghan security institutions, such as organising logistical procurement and distribution, personnel selection for educational facilities etc.

The goals of RS raise numerous questions. The first is the relationship between its quasi-state building goals and ‘counterterrorism.’ As was the case with the mandates of the US-led Operation Enduring Freedom

statement-afghanistan#transcript; Commander of ISAF forces US General John F. Campbell even stated that the US strategic objectives after 2014 would include to “contribute to regional and international peace and stability, and enhance the ability of Afghanistan to deter threats against its sovereignty, security, and territorial integrity.” US Senate Committee on Armed Services, Advance Policy Questions for General John F. Campbell, USA Nominee to Commander, International Security Assistance Force and Commander, United States Forces Afghanistan [Hearing 10 July 2014], http://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Campbell_07-10-14.pdf, p. 6.

⁵ Communication with senior NATO representative of NATO Headquarters, Brussels, 17 October 2014.

⁶ Here, ANSF serves as a term for the Afghan National Army (ANA) under the command of the Ministry of Defence, the various Afghan National Police (ANP) forces who report to the Ministry of Interior and the National Director of Security (NDS).

⁷ See referring to RS’s operation plan North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO’s commitment to Afghanistan after 2014. Media Backgrounder, September 2014, p 2. See also Agreement between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan on the Status of NATO Forces, Art 2, No 2.

(OEF)⁸ in relation to that of ISAF (the latter was also initially designed, largely, as a mission to form and strengthen the ANSF) it is hard, again, to distinguish between the bilateral US counterterrorism mission and RS. This is particularly the case as RS, like ISAF from 2007, will be led by a ‘double-hatted’ American, i.e. a single commander for not only the NATO mission, but also US Forces Afghanistan (USFOR-A) which comprises all US armed services members of RS and of the separate counterterrorism mission. The US-led counterterrorism mission will actively hunt ‘terrorists’, and President Obama in November 2014 extended the period in which the ANSF can expect the US to play a combat role in support of it to 2015.⁹

Secondly, and more generally, one may ask whether it makes sense to tailor the ANSF after the image of Western armed forces and police, despite the completely different socio-economic context.¹⁰ Further security force assistance could even create more instability by distributing expertise in violence to actors who are not necessarily loyal to the central government, for example, many units of the Afghan Local Police, despite the force being nominally under the MoI, regularly violate their mandate, including perpetrating abuses against the civilian population.¹¹

⁸ OEF was the US-led mission that was tasked to fight international ‘terrorism’ in general and the perpetrators of the 11 September 2001 attacks in Washington and New York in particular. Its first campaign started in October 2001 to capture or kill al-Qaeda fighters in Afghanistan and remove the Taliban government. Legally, it was justified referring to the right of self-defence and ended after 31 December 2014.

⁹ Mark Mazzetti/Eric Schmitt, ‘In a Shift, Obama Extends U.S. Role in Afghan Combat’, *New York Times*, 21 November, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/22/us/politics/in-secret-obama-extends-us-role-in-afghan-combat.html?_r=0; Michael Knigge, ‘Feldman: “Positive Initiativen der afghanischen Regierung”’, *Deutsche Welle*, 3 December 2014, <http://www.dw.de/feldman-positive-initiativen-der-afghanischen-regierung/a-18107732>.

¹⁰ See e.g. Adam R. Grissom, ‘In our Image. Statebuilding Orthodoxy and the Afghan National Army’ in *New Agendas in Statebuilding, Hybridity, Contingency and History*, ed by Robert Egnell and Peter Haldén, Milton Park/New York, Routledge Studies in Intervention and Statebuilding, Routledge 2013, pp 186-209.

¹¹ See e.g. Lola Cecchinell, Back to Bad: Chahrdara between Taliban and ALP – a district case study, *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, 6 September 2013, <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/back-to-bad-chahrdara-between-taliban-and-alp-district-case-study/>; Borhan Osman, The Making of Another ‘Uprising’: The ALP in Panjwayi, *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, 22 April 2013, <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/the-making-of-another-uprising-the-alp-in-panjwayi/>. See in general the results of a research project on 80 non-state armed groups,

Considering the limited space available here, however, this paper will not discuss such questions. Instead, it focuses on the most clearly defined objective of RS – the improvement of the ANSF. Primarily, it asks whether the new mission is likely to be successful in this goal during its *de facto* two-year mandate. To answer the question, the current capabilities of RS will first have to be reviewed. Following this, a closer look will be taken at the political economy of the ANSF and how this might influence the outcome of RS.

2. CAPABILITIES OF THE RESOLUTE SUPPORT MISSION

Compared to ISAF, which had around 132,000 soldiers at its zenith in 2011,¹² the forces available to RS are limited. RS will comprise of only up to 13,000 soldiers, stationed in five bases, in Kabul, Bagram, Herat, Kandahar and Mazar-e Sharif. Additionally, the US will bilaterally use a base in Jalalabad. These bases will also host the headquarters of what were formerly known as Regional Commands (RC) and what is now termed Train Advise and Assist Commands (TAAC).¹³ The largest part of the force will enable relatively few trainers – senior NATO representatives give a figure of 1,200 to 1,400 – who will carry out RS's main task.¹⁴ In TAAC-North, for instance, only 81 trainers among – as projected for 1 January 2015 – around 1,600 soldiers will serve in the Command's area of

which comes to the conclusion that most staff members had a background in state security institutions. Klaus Schlichte, *In the Shadow of Violence. The Politics of Armed Groups*, Frankfurt/New York: Campus 2009, pp 35-7.

¹² International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), Key Facts and Figures [ISAF Placemat], 6 June 2011, p 1.

¹³ Communication with senior NATO representative of NATO Headquarters, Brussels, 17 October 2014; Department of Defense, Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan, October 2014, p 11.

¹⁴ According to the German commander of the Joint Forces Command in Brunssum, under which ISAF operated, as will RS, General Lothar Domröse, cited in Thomas Ruttig and Kate Clark, Three Birds with One Stone: Signing the BSA and NATO SOFA to Project Reliability, *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, 6 October 2014, <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/three-birds-with-one-stone-signing-the-bsa-and-nato-sofa-to-project-reliability/>. In another interview, he confessed that the small number of trainers would be in disproportion to the number of force protection and support personnel. However, this could not be changed due to the needs for security and logistics. Christian Dewitz, 'Neue NATO-Mission " Resolute Support" nimmt Gestalt an', *bundeswehr-journal*, 16 November 2014, <http://www.bundeswehr-journal.de/2014/neue-nato-mission-resolute-support-nimmt-gestalt/>.

responsibility.¹⁵ The number of insider killings of ISAF personnel carried out either by disgruntled ANSF members or insurgent infiltrators over recent years and the fact that they even managed to kill a US general in 2014 has led ISAF representatives to consider whether personnel for force protection should be increased even more.¹⁶ Of the around 2,000 US special operations forces in Afghanistan, 980 will directly support the US-led counterterrorism mission after 2014.¹⁷ It has been reported that they will be accompanied by around 100 British special operations forces.¹⁸

President Obama has already decided that the 10,800 US troops participating in RS at the start of 2015 will be halved as early as the end of that year. By the end of 2016, there will only be US military forces of the size of "a normal embassy presence in Kabul, with a security assistance component"¹⁹ – judged by experts as amounting to about 1,000 soldiers.²⁰ It is not clear, however, how many private contractors RS or its contributors will employ to support their mission. As of October 2014, when US troops strength was around 24,000, 45,349 contractors were working for the US Department of Defence in Afghanistan – among them 2,472 on security tasks.²¹ It should be expected that the ratio of troops to contractors will

¹⁵ Presentation of senior ISAF representative at TAAC-N, Mazar-e Sharif, 20 October 2014.

¹⁶ Communication with senior NATO representative of NATO Headquarters, Brussels, 17 October 2014. In August 2014, an ANA soldier managed to kill a US general and wound several others at the Afghan National Officer Academy. Department of Defense, Report on Progress, p 18.

¹⁷ Kenneth Katzman, Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy, RL30588, *Congressional Research Service*, 9 October 2014, p 22.

¹⁸ Ben Farmer, "SAS to Remain in Afghanistan to Target al-Qaeda", *Daily Telegraph*, 14 November 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/afghanistan/11232282/SAS-to-remain-in-Afghanistan-to-target-al-Qaeda.html>.

¹⁹ Statement by the President on Afghanistan. Obama initially ordered for a US troop presence of 9,800 at the beginning of 2015 but in December 2014 decided that 1,000 more soldiers should remain at the beginning of the year. Jim Sciutto/Jennifer Rizzo, 'Hagel: More U.S. troops than Planned Will Remain in Afghanistan next Year', *CNN.com/International*, 6 December 2014, <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/12/06/politics/afghanistan-chuck-hagel-visit/>.

²⁰ Katzman, Afghanistan, 9 October 2014, p 22.

²¹ Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Program Support, Contractor Support of U.S. Operations in the USCENTCOM Area of Responsibility, October 2014, p 1-2; Department of Defense, Report on Progress, p. 12.

remain roughly the same. As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, NATO as a whole, in contrast to the US, has not decided an end date for RS or specific stages of withdrawal. However, as US forces comprise the bulk of the personnel, it seems impossible that the NATO mission might be maintained beyond their withdrawal.

To achieve the wide-ranging goals of RS with the relatively small number of trainers at a time of conflict and with decreasing funding seems already to be highly ambitious and therefore uncertain in outcome. This is why the then commander of ISAF and US forces in Afghanistan, General John R. Allen, advised Obama in 2012 to either opt for a minimal counterterrorism-only force of 6,000, or a larger force of either 10,000 or 20,000 troops which would both train the ANSF and fight 'terrorists.' According to Allen, the option actually taken by Obama, (with numbers of troops on the low side, but with a dual goal) increases the risk of the mission failing.²² Furthermore, an independent assessment of the ANSF, commissioned by the US Congress in January 2014, came to the conclusion that the ANSF will "require international enabling assistance – including advisors – through at least 2018."²³ In accordance with this, the last commander of ISAF Joint Command, Lieutenant General Joseph Anderson, also gave a sobering assessment of the prospects for RS, stating right before his departure: "The fact that we are in less places, the fact that there are less of us as a coalition, is obviously concerning."²⁴

Given all these uncertainties, it does seem strange that President Obama ordered such a precise withdrawal date. However, the same had earlier held true for the 'transition' of security responsibility from ISAF to ANSF to be carried out between 2011 and June 2013.²⁵ The way in which transition was

²² Kenneth Katzman, Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy, RL30588, Congressional Research Service 17 January 2014, p 23.

²³ Jonathan Schroden et al, Independent Assessment of the Afghan National Security Forces, CNA Analysis & Solutions, January 2014, p 8.

²⁴ Azam Ahmed, "Misgivings by U.S. General as Afghan Mission Ends", *New York Times*, 8 December 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/09/world/asia/us-general-joseph-anderson-mission-in-afghanistan.html?_r=3&utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_term=*Situation%20Report&utm_campaign=SitRep%20December%209%202014.

²⁵ The 'transition' was said to be oriented on the ANSF's capability. However, its predetermined end date, 2014, contradicts this. Furthermore, transitioned areas were selected on the basis of a regional and ethnic quote, which demonstrates that it was not the capability of the ANSF that determined the handover.

conducted clearly shows that it was shaped not by conditions in Afghanistan, but by US domestic considerations: the timeline was shaped by Obama's desire to set the termination of the US participation in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan as a key foreign policy goal to help his re-election in 2012. He also had to find a compromise between members of his cabinet who wanted to end the major military presence of the US in Afghanistan and those who tried to extend it.²⁶ The withdrawal date of late 2016 similarly looks timed to match the end of Obama's tenure rather than the point when RS is likely to have succeeded. The small number of forces, as well as the short, inflexible timeline has put enormous strains on NATO's post-ISAF mission even before it has started. It has also helped the insurgents plan their own operations.

3. POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THE AFGHAN NATIONAL SECURITY FORCES

There is another fundamental problem with Resolute Support's goals. The implicit assumption behind its focus on training, advising and assisting the most senior levels of the ANSF is that, for the most part, the ANSF already function as proficient organisations as per their formal structure and aims. This argument is based on an assessment that the ANSF successfully took over security responsibility in the country and that 83 per cent of reviewed units "are rated as capable or fully capable." Therefore, only 'fine-tuning' its leadership is required.²⁷ However, this assumption is highly questionable. It is doubtful that the ANSF is as proficient as publically asserted. For instance, the criteria defined by ISAF to measure the performance of ANA units have repeatedly been lowered, obviously to meet the – politically defined – transition date.²⁸ Most recently, ISAF decided to classify the up

²⁶ See the memoirs of his former Secretary of Defence Robert M. Gates in which he points out that Obama seemed to be determined to set the beginning of the withdrawal at 2014 irrespective of the outcomes of the military campaign. Robert Michael Gates, *Duty. Memoirs of a Secretary at War*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf 2014, pp 556-7.

²⁷ Department of Defense, Report on Progress, p 4-5, 60.

²⁸ Gary Owen, Paint It Pink: The US Redefining ANA Success, *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, 1 August 2012, <http://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/paint-it-pink-the-us-redefining-ana-success/>; Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, Afghan National Security Forces: Actions Needed to Improve Plans for Sustaining Capability Assessment Efforts, SIGAR 14-33 Audit Report, February 2014, p 6.

to then publicly available summary of the assessment of ANSF capabilities, which hints that they do not comply with the politically set dates for transition and withdrawal.²⁹ ISAF representatives even confess that there are serious ANSF capability gaps in the fields of intelligence, special operations, maintenance and logistics.³⁰

What may be even more decisive than the practical skills of its personnel are the cohesion, loyalty and general attitudes of the ANSF. As shown below, the available evidence suggests that many senior ANSF members, in particular, use their positions to enrich themselves. Within the ANSF, there are also strong external loyalties to factions which themselves compete for influence and control of resources. All this means that the ANSF may not work as they officially should. Rather, it appears that the *political economy* of the ANSF prevents them from working like modern organisations – the very prerequisite of RS's mission. The following paragraphs will focus on this decisive issue.

As in every country, ministers and directors of the independent agencies are appointed according to the arithmetic of government coalitions. However, in Afghanistan, almost all governmental and administrative positions, including generals, both on national and sub-national levels, are subject to a far-flung patronage system whose centre is in Kabul.³¹ Moreover, formal and informal income, which can be generated through state positions, serve as 'rents' – defined as "an income without a corresponding investment of labour or capital."³² To distribute state positions to both allies and possible domestic opponents – the so-called 'political opposition' (in contrast to the 'armed opposition' of the insurgency) – has been the route taken by the presidency to ensure its survival from the beginning in 2001. This practice of distributing patronage (and with it, the

potential to take rents from state positions) can not only be seen in an exclusively negative way as 'corruption', but also as a means to stabilise the political order – at least as long as power brokers redistribute large shares of their income.³³

The political and rent-seeking character of the ANSF differs from institution to institution. Information on the internal working logics of the ANSF is rare, but some preliminary conclusions can be drawn. Although not surprisingly, least information is available on the NDS, some of the available evidence indicates that it may come closest to a modern, task-oriented organisation among the security services. (It should be noted, here, that the NDS does not only collect intelligence, but also works as a paramilitary organisation with infantry forces and commando units and controls some *arbaki* militias in the provinces.³⁴)

As in the case of the ANP, the most senior heads of NDS in the central office and at the provincial level are often appointed due to their political affiliation.³⁵ However, at the same time, the percentage of professionally trained senior staff, displayed by the relatively large body of Soviet and Western trained personnel, appears higher than in the rest of the ANSF.³⁶ In contrast to many ANA and ANP units, the materiel of regular NDS units also looks more often to be relatively well-maintained, which might be an

²⁹ Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2014, p 94.

³⁰ Communication with senior ISAF representative, Kabul, 18 October 2014 and with ISAF trainers and mentors at TAAC-N, Mazar-e Sharif, 20 October 2014; Department of Defense, Report on Progress, p 27.

³¹ Antonio Giustozzi, 'The Resilient Oligopoly. A Political-Economy of Northern Afghanistan 2001 and Onwards', *Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit*, December 2012, p 7; Haseeb Humayoon, 'The Re-election of Hamid Karzai', *Afghanistan Report 4*, *Institute for the Study of War*, January 2010, p 20.

³² Florian P. Kühn, 'Aid, Opium, and the State of Rents in Afghanistan: Competition, Cooperation, or Cohabitation?', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 2 (2008) 3, pp 309-327, 310-18.

³³ Philipp Münch, Local Afghan Power Structures and the International Military Intervention. A Review of Developments in Badakhshan and Kunduz Provinces, AAN Thematic Report 03/2013, *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, November 2013, pp 8-9.

³⁴ These militias should not be confused with the Afghan Local Police (ALP), which is funded by and formally reports to the MoI, *ibid*, pp 36-8.

³⁵ Candace Rondeaux, 'Afghanistan's Colossal Intelligence Failure', *Foreign Policy. The South Asia Channel*, 22 January 2013, accessed 23 November 2014, http://southasia.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/01/22/afghanistans_colossal_intelligence_failure.

³⁶ Interview with former Afghan general, Kabul, 13 November 2013. The only comprehensive published quantitative assessment known to the author, which lists district chiefs of NDS according to their political affiliation, is one for Kunduz. Officials in this sample who were termed by informants as 'communist' – meaning not necessarily that they still believed in this ideology, but rather that they were Soviet-trained, 'modern' persons without an affiliation to one of the former jihadi factions – clearly outweighed the number of communist district chiefs of police or district governors. None of the latter and just three district chiefs of police were considered 'communist.' On the other side, ten district chiefs of NDS belonged to this group. Also, the only affiliate of Nejat-e Melli party was a chief of NDS. Münch, *Local Afghan Power Structures*, p 70.

indication of better discipline and professionalism. There is, however, also information on corruption within the NDS, including the use of state assets for business and regular allegations of security detainees being released (because of influence or payments is not clear).³⁷ There are repeated accounts of torture being practiced against captives in some departments of the NDS (as was also reported about its predecessor organisations).³⁸

Being slightly bigger than the ANP,³⁹ the ANA receives most international resources.⁴⁰ It is a relatively lightly armed force, comprised mainly of infantry units aimed at defeating the insurgency, but modelled after a centralised Western armed force.⁴¹ Since the ANA recruits its members centrally and usually deploys its forces irrespective of their origin to different parts of the country, it seems to be somewhat protected from massive local political interference. However, reports suggest that its centralised structure facilitates influence on senior appointments by various powerful national level actors ranging from the president's office to MPs to various levels of the MoD. Reportedly, appointees also often maintain clients so that patron-client networks, structured into competing factions, can be traced within the ANA down to the lower levels.⁴² There is evidence that Afghan officers and officials, especially in the higher echelons, appropriate large parts of the vast resource flows, which are directed by international donors, into the ANA. This is most easily done by selling ANA fuel and taking (shares of) the salaries of 'ghost' soldiers that are kept in the salary register, but do not exist, as well as those of

actual soldiers.⁴³ Even though they were not tasked with investigating this issue, researchers who provided an independent assessment of the ANSF to US Congress could not avoid noting the "pervasive corruption" and lack of accountability in the Afghan MoD and MoI.⁴⁴ To reduce the 'ghost worker' problem, ISAF recently forced the Afghan security agencies to introduce a digital Afghan Human Resources Information Management System (AHRIMS).⁴⁵ Besides political influence in a more general sense, political power brokers from outside or within the ANA compete for these resources.⁴⁶

The ANP, which is more of a paramilitary force, is difficult to generalise about. This is due to the fact that it is comprised of several organisational units and that it often has a very local character.⁴⁷ From the start, many top positions were filled with local strongmen, even though professional career police officers do also exist.⁴⁸ International police advisers and donors and reformers within the MoI have largely failed to create a centralised, meritocratic process for the selection of senior officers. According to one small survey, more than half of the policemen

³⁷ International Crisis Group *The Insurgency in Afghanistan's Heartland* (Asia Report N°207), 27 June 2011, pp 11, 25-7.

³⁸ United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan/UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights *Treatment of Conflict-Related Detainees in Afghan Custody: One Year On*, January 2013, pp 34-41; United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan/UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Treatment of Conflict Related Detainees in Afghan Custody*, October 2011, pp 16-7.

³⁹ The latest figures of the US Department of Defence suggest that the ANA counts 165,000 soldiers and the ANP 152,000 members. Department of Defense, *Report on Progress*, pp 41, 52.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, pp 61-5.

⁴¹ Adam R. Grissom, 'In our Image', p 197.

⁴² Interview with former Afghan generals, Kabul, 13 and 16 November 2013. Antonio Giustozzi and Peter Quentin, *The Afghan National Army. Sustainability Challenges beyond Financial Aspects*, Kabul, *Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit*, February 2014, pp 30-37.

⁴³ Communication with ISAF trainers and mentors at TAAC-N, Mazar-e Sharif, 20 October 2014; Antonio Giustozzi and Peter Quentin, *The Afghan National Army*, pp 4, 27. Also see the evidence presented by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, *Afghan National Army: Controls over Fuel for Vehicles, Generators, and Power Plants Need Strengthening to Prevent Fraud, Waste, and Abuse*, SIGAR Audit 13-4, January 2013, pp 5-7. There is also anecdotal evidence that officers take shares of inexperienced soldiers' salaries for supporting them to withdraw their pay from bank accounts.

⁴⁴ Jonathan Schroden et al, *Independent Assessment of the Afghan National Security Forces*, p 165.

⁴⁵ Communication with senior ISAF representative of CJ7, Kabul, 19 October 2014, with senior ISAF representative of IJC, Kabul, 22 October 2014 and with member of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction's staff, Berlin, 11 November 2014.

⁴⁶ Senior ISAF officers attribute large parts of the 2014 fighting in Badakhshan to the competition over this province's resources. They report that in this context different decision makers outside the official chain of command gave orders to individual battalions and even platoons of the northern 209th ANA Corps to secure drug and gemstone trade routes.

⁴⁷ Andrew Wilder, *Cops or Robbers? The Struggle to Reform the Afghan National Police*, Issues Paper Series, Kabul, *Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit*, July 2007, pp. 39-42; Antonio Giustozzi and Mohammad Isaqzadeh, *Policing Afghanistan. The Politics of the Lame Leviathan*, London, Hurst 2013, pp 183-5.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp 99-100.

usually serve in their home areas.⁴⁹ To the confusion of most international cooperation partners, the conduct of the ANP is therefore often shaped not by its formal structure or official tasks, but by local power relations.⁵⁰

Like the ANA, reports suggest that ANP members also appropriate large parts of the aid they receive from international donors, including the salaries of 'ghost' policemen. After investigating the issue, the US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction therefore in February 2014 urged those responsible among the ISAF generals to take action against it.⁵¹ Even the most recent report on progress in Afghanistan by the US Department of Defence terms accountability in the MoI an "area of concern."⁵² There are also repeated complaints of police extorting money from people who run businesses or pass through check points and of them taking shares of the tolls gathered at border posts and sometimes even of involvement in kidnapping.⁵³

Cooperation between the components of the ANSF is often reported to be problematic.⁵⁴ This seems to be especially the case when the commanders in charge belong to competing factions or struggle over

resources.⁵⁵ As shown by the aforementioned evidence suggesting enormous efforts in at least the ANA and ANP to appropriate rents, one may ask if the task of fighting the insurgency is a secondary one for many ANSF officers. One indicator for this might be the fact that the withdrawal of ISAF from the countryside has led to informal truces between "some ANSF units" and insurgent forces in contested areas.⁵⁶ Observers frequently describe the ANSF as rather passive and defensive, with the usually better paid and supplied special forces often being the only forces who regularly take offensive action.⁵⁷ Also a closer look at the ANA attrition rate reveals that despite the growing number of casualties by far the largest part is caused by desertion or not re-enlisting.⁵⁸ This indicates that the legitimacy and morale of the ANA might be in danger.

4. APPLICABILITY OF RS'S MISSION AND ALTERNATIVES TO IT

The success of the RS training, advising and assistance mission is closely linked to there actually being ANSF, which already work as modern organisations. However, as argued here, this is not the case. Rather, they are still dominated by patronage networks shaped to a large degree by factional interests and rent-seeking by senior personnel (and other members of the Afghan elites). The key deficiencies as identified by ISAF often reflect this, although ISAF usually identifies them wrongly as 'technical'

⁴⁹ Danny Singh, 'Corruption and Clientelism in the Lower Levels of the Afghan Police', *Conflict, Security & Development* 14 (2014) 5, p 642.

⁵⁰ See for a detailed study on local power relations and how the ANP fits into them Noah Coburn, *Bazaar Politics. Power and Pottery in an Afghan Market Town*, Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press 2011, pp 135-137, 198-201. See also Münch, *Local Afghan Power Structures*, passim.

⁵¹ Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction John F. Sopko to Generals Wendel, Greene, and Milner, 19 February 2014, <http://www.sigar.mil/pdf/special%20projects/SIGAR-14-36-SP.pdf>.

⁵² Department of Defense, *Report on Progress*, p 35. See also Jonathan Schroden et al, *Independent Assessment of the Afghan National Security Forces*, p 165.

⁵³ Communication with senior NATO representative of NATO Headquarters, Brussels, 17 October 2014; Ahmed, 'Misgivings by U.S. General as Afghan Mission Ends'; Singh, 'Corruption and Clientelism', pp 624-627; Giustozzi and Isaqzadeh, *Policing Afghanistan*, pp 79-93.

⁵⁴ Ahmed, 'Misgivings by U.S. General as Afghan Mission Ends'; Jonathan Schroden et al, *Independent Assessment of the Afghan National Security Forces*, p 4; communication with ISAF trainers and mentors at TAAC-N, Mazar-e Sharif, 20 October 2014; Shakeela Ibrahimkhail, 'No Coordination Between Security Agencies: Ghani', *Tolo News*, 15 December 2014. <http://www.tolonews.com/en/afghanistan/17479-no-coordination-between-security-agencies-ghani>.

⁵⁵ Communication with senior ISAF mentors at TAAC-N, Mazar-e Sharif, 20 October 2014; Ahmed, 'Misgivings by U.S. General as Afghan Mission Ends'; Münch, *Local Afghan Power Structures*, passim.

⁵⁶ Department of Defense, *Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, April 2014, p 13; Katzman, *Afghanistan*, 9 October 2014, p 24. The report does not provide examples, though.

⁵⁷ Communication with senior ISAF representative, Kabul, 18 October 2014 and with ISAF advisor to the ANA, Kabul, 19 October 2014. The authors of the independent ANSF assessment characterise the ANP – except for the Afghan National Civil Order Police – as a "paramilitary guard force" and state that the ANA requires a reserve force to be able to act offensively. Jonathan Schroden et al, *Independent Assessment of the Afghan National Security Forces*, pp 84, 108, 122.

⁵⁸ Giustozzi and Quentin, *The Afghan National Army*, p 7. A senior ISAF stated that 70% of the ANSF's attrition rate would not relate to casualties. Communication with senior ISAF representative at TAAC-N, Mazar-e Sharif, 21 October 2014. Also, the US Department of Defence states that "about a third of all attrition" would be caused by soldiers who opt not to re-enlist after their contract ends. Department of Defense, *Report on Progress*, p 38.

deficiencies. For example, deficits in ANA logistics, seen by most advisors as the most pressing problem, are not, in the first place related to a lack of capacity. Rather, it is rent-seeking by ANSF officials which, for the most part, prevents materiel from being distributed the way it should. According to ISAF officers, the problem of intelligence in the ANSF is also not so much one of gathering, but of distributing it among the different services.⁵⁹ This deficit also, therefore, seems to be a problem rather of the tenacious factional structures in the ANSF, which prevent officials from sharing knowledge that might give others an advantage in internal competition.

If RS continues to deal with these issues as technical problems and trying to solve them by training or adding more formal processes, the underlying causes of the deficiencies will continue to be ignored. Rent-seeking cannot be defeated by training as it is about the very interests of the actors involved and not about a lack of expertise.⁶⁰ Also, additional processes often just result in additional efforts to circumvent them – or indeed, actually create new rent-seeking opportunities. The problem of rent-seeking and factionalism can only be solved by an Afghan government gaining control over its administration and, itself, wanting to run a different sort of ANSF. It seems, therefore, unlikely that RS will succeed with its training-only mandate.

RS, however, could fulfil an important function as a deterrence factor as ISAF did for most of its time; at least in the northern half of the country, one may argue that it was the presence of ISAF, combined with foreign money, that kept local power brokers at bay and allowed the central government to buy their loyalties, thereby preventing the sort of civil war witnessed in the 1990s.⁶¹ At the same time, one may also argue that the enormous enlargement of ISAF forces in the late 2000s and its vast expenditure often actually fuelled the insurgency.⁶² The reasons for this is that ISAF unintentionally – but sometimes also intentionally – became entangled in local power

conflicts in the context of what the US armed forces representatives called ‘tribal warfare’,⁶³ while the enormous influx of money transformed local economies, created or amplified inequalities and fuelled existing or new conflicts.

Any future NATO military presence should therefore be kept small and concentrated in a few places – and this is how RS has, indeed, been designed. There, it should serve as deterrence to the perpetration of grave human rights violations and to any return to factional fighting. It should also gather information on how the ANSF uses the aid they receive. Otherwise, they might, for instance, use donated vehicles for private transportation or openly sell fuel and ammunition.

The current approach of RS is built on the assumption that the component parts of the ANSF already work as task-oriented organisations. This, however, does not seem to be the case for significant parts of the forces. Problems that relate to power conflicts in the ANSF and rent-seeking tendencies are perceived by NATO and US representatives mostly through a technocratic lens, seeing training as a means to reduce them. To attempt to change the very character of the ANSF through mere training is, however, wholly unrealistic. Moreover, the very short time table for the decisive US participation in RS is obviously tailored after US internal policy than the conditions in Afghanistan. If decision makers at NATO do not change these conceptual cornerstones of its new Afghan mission, the likelihood of it succeeding in significantly improving the ANSF appears slim.

⁵⁹ Communication with ISAF trainers and mentors at TAAC-N, Mazar-e Sharif, 20 October 2014.

⁶⁰ A study on the practice of extortion against drivers found that professional chiefs of police are more likely to extort money. Mohammad Isaqzadeh and Antonio Giustozzi, On Afghanistan’s Roads. Extortion and Abuse against Drivers, Kabul, *Integrity Watch Afghanistan*, November 2013, p. 2. This indicates that they use their organisational and leadership skills to seek for rents more efficiently.

⁶¹ Münch, *Local Afghan Power Structures*, pp 65-6.

⁶² On the militarisation of aid in the context of counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism strategies, see: Thomas Ruttig, *Militarisierung der Entwicklungszusammenarbeit*, Afghanistan Info (Neuchâtel), March 2014.

⁶³ The best-known example for this was Jim Gant’s paper “One Tribe at a Time: A Strategy for Success in Afghanistan” that became required reading in the US forces. But see for example also Martine van Biljert, “The revolt of the good guys in Gizab”, *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, 24 June 2010, <http://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/the-revolt-of-the-good-guys-in-gizab/>.

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AUTHOR BIO

Philipp Münch is a research associate at the German Institute for International Affairs and Security Policy of the Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP) in Berlin. He earned a doctoral degree in Political Science and History at the University of Münster, a Master's degree in History at the University of Hamburg and one at the Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy (IFSH). He learned Dari at the Humboldt University of Berlin and conducted several independent field trips to Afghanistan. From 1999 to 2002 he served as an officer candidate and later as a reserve officer. His research focusses on state formation and conflict in Afghanistan and Western security policy.

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