



# Exclusive Analysis

Turning Insight into Foresight

## Afghanistan Risk Outlook

Scenarios



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(ONLY THE FIRST SCENARIO – ‘ISAF DRAW-DOWN’ IS AVAILABLE IN THIS SAMPLE REPORT.)

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## KEY JUDGMENT

Of the scenarios considered in this report, we assess the most likely to be a significant draw-down of ISAF combat forces, leaving local security forces with lead responsibility for security. We assess the least likely scenario to be a negotiated peace agreement followed by a unity government.

We assess that the US draw-down of troops in Afghanistan will start in 2011, but not impact a significant number of troops until 2012, in the run up to US presidential elections. Afghan security forces are likely to have the security lead in several provinces in west, central and north Afghanistan by 2014. Afghan presidential elections are likely to take place in 2014, as scheduled. If the new president makes notable efforts to expand the influence and power of his ethnic group, this is likely to lead to a generally deteriorated security environment and potential political instability in Kabul. Whilst the number of troops is likely to be reduced, ISAF's mandate will probably be extended in order to allow for continued international operational support and training for Afghan security forces, as well as US Special Forces operations and airstrikes from Afghan bases.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **Scenario 1:** ISAF combat forces significantly draw-down, leaving local security forces with lead responsibility for security, but continue Special Force operations, air transport support and airstrikes in support of the government. *This is the most probable scenario. We view a significant draw-down of ISAF/US forces by 2014, with security increasingly transferred to Afghan security forces, as highly likely.*
- **Scenario 2:** A civil war develops with the backing of regional players along North-South lines: Russia-Iran-India-Tajik vs. Pakistan-Pashtun. *We assess this scenario to be realistic and the second most likely, specifically with Pakistan and India as the primary external actors that re-arm domestic groups in the north and the south.*
- **Scenario 3:** After a significant ISAF draw-down, China signs a bilateral security assistance and development mission with Afghanistan and deploys People's Armed Police. *We consider this to be a likely scenario insofar as China's commercial role in Afghanistan is likely to expand significantly, with a smaller increase in its security presence. This is particularly likely following the pathway of scenario 3, but significantly increased Chinese involvement in Afghanistan in the coming five years is likely in any event.*
- **Scenario 4:** Negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban lead to a unity government supported by Western countries. This is the least likely scenario. *Overall, we judge the likelihood of central level negotiations leading to a peace agreement and a national unity government to be low.*



## SCENARIO CONSEQUENCES

(NOT AVAILABLE IN THIS SAMPLE)



## POST-2013 KEY SCENARIOS

### Scenario 1: ISAF draw-down

**ISAF combat forces significantly draw-down, leaving local security forces with lead responsibility for security, but continue Special Force operations, air transport support and airstrikes in support of the government**

#### 1.1. Probability

**This is the most probable scenario. We view a significant draw-down of ISAF/US forces by 2014, with security increasingly transferred to Afghan security forces, as highly likely.**

This would almost certainly be driven by political and financial considerations in Washington, rather than improved security on the ground. Given the fractured and shifting nature of militant groups in Afghanistan, the large and difficult terrain, limited progress on civilian initiatives to win over local communities (including provision of justice) and the limited capabilities of Afghan security forces, only tactical gains are likely in some areas of the country by 2014. As the US recognises this, we assess that it will be willing to reduce its military presence, allowing increased militant influence in the south and east, so long as US Special Forces and intelligence gathering operations can continue. The focus of international forces beyond 2014 is likely to be guarding Kabul and targeted counter-terrorism operations against militant leaders. We assess that the Taliban’s ability to take over the government once ISAF forces draw down will be limited, given the increasingly fractured nature of the insurgency. However, Taliban leaders, especially of the older generation, are likely to be integrated into government as presidential appointees, especially if the next Afghan president is Pashtun.

#### 1.2. SCORES FOR VIOLENT RISKS

**(THESE RISK SCORES ARE NOT AVAILABLE IN THIS SAMPLE.)**

Province	Relative Risk Score

Severe	3.2 to 10
High	2.4 to 3.1
Elevated	1.6 to 2.3
Caution	0.8 to 1.5
Low	0 to 0.7



### 1.3. Scenario Timeline

#### Pathway to scenario in **2011-2012**:

- Limited US troop withdrawals in 2011.
- In 2012 US elections, Obama argues that successes have been obtained in Afghanistan, and political and development criteria for US 'victory' largely disappear.
- US voter support for the war declines.
- Troop reductions increase in 2012.
- Increased formation of local militias in Afghanistan.

#### **2013-2015**:

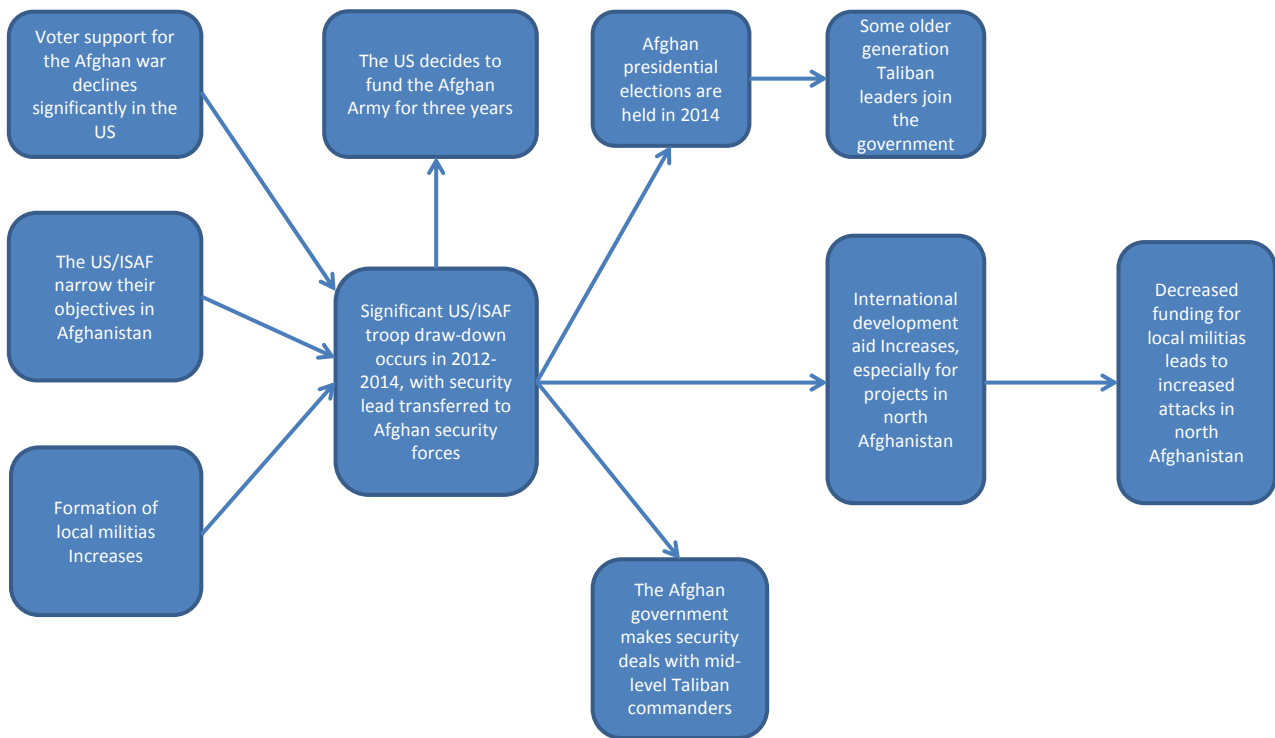
- Afghan presidential elections in 2014.
- Continued falls in US voter support for the war, reflected in mid-term elections in 2014 and further withdrawals.
- The US decides to fund the ANA for at least three more years.
- Local militias lead to overall improvements in security.
- Rural area security deals are made between the government and mid-level Taliban commanders.
- Older-generation Taliban participation in the central government increases, primarily by presidential appointment.
- International aid to Afghanistan rises, supporting northern development projects.
- ISAF mandate is extended until 2018.

#### **Beyond 2015**:

- Decreased international funding leads to fighting between the ANP and local militias, as well as local militias turning to criminal activities to raise funds.



### 1.4. Scenario



- i. **In the run up to 2012 US presidential elections, incumbent President Obama argues that US forces in Afghanistan are making progress towards security benchmarks, namely ensuring that attacks against the US could not be planned within Afghanistan due to the successful targeting of militant leaders, and halting the previous increases in violent attacks in urban areas in the south and the east.** The draw-down of US forces formally began in July 2011, though troop reductions were limited in 2011. Following Obama’s remarks during 2012 campaigning, political and development progress indicators largely disappear from US political debates on ‘victory’ in Afghanistan, as political goals narrow. Despite the US military’s requests for more time with significant US combat forces retained on the ground, draw-downs increase in 2012, and again in 2013 as voter support for the war declines further in the run up to 2014 congressional elections. As such, by late 2014, US combat forces have been significantly reduced, as a result of economic calculations and declining political will in the US to continue to support the war.

**The US draw-down means that ISAF offensive operations consist largely of Special Forces operations and airstrike run out of a few bases in Afghanistan.** The largest international combat troop concentration is in and around Kabul, mitigating risks of increased insecurity or substantially increased attack frequency in the capital. Of the 50,000 ISAF combat troops remaining, around half are based near Kabul, the rest are divided between, Bagram, Shindand, Balkh and Kandahar, with a smaller contingent in Salerno. Most of these troops are from the US, though NATO countries still have Special Forces in Afghanistan, as ISAF’s mandate has been extended until 2018.

**In 2013, the US administration calculates that it is worth the cost to continue to fund the ANA for at least three years as the price to pay for a significantly reduced US troop presence in the country.** ANA numbers will be approaching official targets in 2014, although many troops have not been deployed as they remain in training programmes. While Karzai has managed to promote a few Pashtuns to the upper ranks of the ANA, the organisation remains dominated by Tajiks.



- ii. **In 2011-2012, southern Afghanistan is broadly insecure, but without the threat of the major city centres being retaken by the Taliban. In the east and west ISAF forces were increasingly concentrated in large, urban areas. In order to restrict Taliban and Pakistan-Taliban groups' ability to operate, ISAF significantly increased the local militia programme prior to its draw-down.** In 2013-2014, local militias have a significant effect on the insurgency's ability to operate, even in more rural districts. This programme proves effective at reducing overall risks of attacks, particularly when local militia is made from pre-existing influential local groups. This is in spite of some local disputes being exacerbated by one set of rivals being recognised as a militia and armed, and militias occasionally being used in disputes between warlords they are loyal to – for instance Mohammad Atta in the north. The increased direct funding of militias in 2013-2015 is likely to be the key driver of de facto decentralisation that reduces the central government's influence beyond Kabul.

**However, the militias rely on unsustainable international funding. Once ISAF transfers full security to Afghan security forces and international funding for militias declines, militias are likely to turn to criminal activities to gain income, negatively impacting local security environments.** There will also be increasing fighting between ANP forces and militia forces, largely over the distribution of central government and donor resources. Conversely, in some location there is likely to be coordination between the two in an attempt to marshal greater funds.

- iii. **As the scope of ISAF's role is reduced, the Afghan government is likely to make deals with some mid-level Taliban commanders to assume responsibility for certain remote rural areas, especially in the south; similar deals are unlikely in urban areas.** Karzai is likely to pursue this, as he sees local militias as a threat to his power in the south and a long-term threat to national stability. As part of this process, it is also possible that some older generation Taliban will be brought into the mainstream political process in 2014-2015, primarily through presidential appointment (for further details see next paragraph). However, as the Taliban has grown increasingly fragmented, many younger Taliban commanders will refuse to cooperate with the government. Further, while the older-generation Taliban's relationship with al-Qaeda and their affiliates would likely have degraded by this point, some younger mid-level commanders would likely retain ties to al-Qaeda and might have increased funding from related sources. The disconnect between the older-generation senior leadership in Pakistan and mid-level commanders on the ground in Afghanistan would only reinforce this trend.
- iv. **In the 2014 Afghan presidential elections, Karzai will not be eligible to run for another term. There are multiple potential successors, but the ethnicity of the incoming president is likely to have as much, if not more, impact on security than the individual president himself.** If the new president is Pashtun, they will likely be in a stronger position to make security deals with mid-level Taliban commanders and more willing to integrate older generation Taliban into the government. If they are Tajik, Uzbek or a northern warlord, they are more likely to seek to increase the role of local militias to undermine Taliban influence, especially in the south. The more the incoming president works to advance the interests of his own tribe or ethnic group to the disadvantage of other groups, the greater the risk of political polarisation and corresponding increases in violent attacks. Likely candidates include Abdullah Abdullah, Gul Agha Sherzai and a relative of current President Karzai.
- v. **The military withdrawal is likely to see increased aid money to Afghanistan, allowing for the continuation, if not the expansion, of foreign NGO and non-military organisations based in northern Afghanistan.** Areas of highest risk are Kunduz, Baghlan and Sari Pul (with high risk of kidnapping in the latter due to strong local kidnapping rings being increasingly free to operate due to the decreased ISAF presence). Balkh poses higher risks of Taliban vehicle-borne suicide bombings and armed attacks, given that its Pashtun community is likely to become increasingly active after ISAF's



draw-down. Takhar sees occasional large-scale Taliban attacks. Badakhshan sees attacks between armed groups affiliated with rival warlords.

### 1.5. Indicators

- a. Significant losses by the ANA, notably increased deaths of US soldiers and/or lack of progress securing the south (demonstrated through increased large-scale attacks or the Taliban regaining control of US-held areas).
- b. Increased presence of US/NATO Special Forces at key regional bases, indicating their rising importance in security operations.
- c. Substantial efforts to increase the scope and role of local militias, including through reintegration programmes that place former militants in these militias.
- d. Declining US voter support for the war.
- e. The narrowing of the US definition of 'victory' in Afghanistan, notably the removal of political and development goals.