

The Role of Afghan National and Defense Security Forces in the Security of Afghanistan

* Dr. Muhammad Tariq, Lecturer (Corresponding Author)

** Muhammad Amir, Lecturer

*** Saira Bano, Lecturer

Abstract

Security has been one of the greatest concerns of Afghanistan for a long but this aspect gained great momentum in 1979 upon the Russian intervention in Afghanistan. It became a common phenomenon in the entire world in September 2001 when the Pentagon was hard hit by the terrorist attacks. This led to the establishment of a democratic government in Afghanistan Vis Vis the need for an increased security system. With the transition of the NATO forces from Afghanistan in 2014, the Afghan National and Defense Security Forces were assigned the task of maintaining security in the country. Main objectives of the study circle around challenges before the ANDSF, its achievements, and the future of the ANDSF. This paper focuses on the current status of the ANDSF in the security paradigm of the country since security is still a big challenge before the government.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Security, ANDSF, Withdrawal and Challenges

Introduction

The Security of Afghanistan has been one of the greatest concerns of the Afghan government as well the global actors. Afghanistan has faced security challenges from many quarters including the non-state actors. It is a fact that this phenomenon gained great momentum during the Russian intervention in Afghanistan in 1979 but this paradigm also remained at the top of the government agenda even after the withdrawal of the Russian forces from Afghanistan in 1989. The 9/11 syndrome made it a great concern of the entire world whereby different security approaches were adopted by the global powers for keeping their security. Almost all global actors had to evolve strategies to safeguard their installations and key sectors against any untoward challenges and both internal and external aggressions. It was this security paradigm that led to the various military operations in Afghanistan by the NATO forces. Not only this, the Pak-Afghan border during this period remained the center of military operations by both the respective law enforcement agencies as well as joint military operations by the NATO forces.

Keeping in view the current political scenario in Afghanistan, the security of the country is prone to attacks from the various quarters of the non-state actors. The responsibility for the security of Afghanistan was handed over to the Afghan National and Defense Security Forces (ANDSF) in 2013 when the United States decided to embark upon the strategy of the drawdown of the NATO forces from the country (Ayotte, Dunford & Lindborg, 2021). Despite the strength of the ANDSF, it remains dependent upon the US forces for assistance and guidance in security measures. The US provides about 80 % of all public security expenditures in Afghanistan and 85% of all donor support for security (Defense, 2017).

Key Objectives of the study include;

- Challenges before the ANDSF
- Achievements of the ANDSF
- Future of the ANDSF

* Department of Political Science, Hazara University Mansehra Email: muhammadtariq@hu.edu.pk

** Department of Pakistan Studies, Abbottabad University of Science & Technology, Abbottabad
Email: muhammadamir@aust.edu.pk

***Department of Pakistan Studies, Hazara University Mansehra Email: sairabano@hu.edu.pk

Challenges before the ANDSF

The ANDSF has developed into a collection of professional institutions inherently committed to their mission of keeping security at the topmost priority (Jalali, 2016)). Security is their main concern in the entire country but despite their huge efforts, they are faced with some of the challenges in some areas regarding logistics, airpower, and intelligence. Some of the key concerns which the ANDSF has been faced with the challenges are:

- a) The ANDSF has faced shifting political and security conditions that have impacted its size, structure, mission, and capacity.
- b) It is a great reality that the ANDSF has been dependent upon the US for its financial, and functional assistance as well as support from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). It is since the very inception that it has been dependent on foreign aid since 2013 and is still dependent on it to date.
- c) The command and control structure of the ANDSF does not as was expected. Its hierarchical structure is strong at the top but weak at the bottom.
- d) Interference from the political sphere and circumventing formal command levels often prevent the carrying out of established procedures, plans and carrying out of established procedures, plans, and unit functions.
- e) There is still a lack of coherence among the Afghan National Army (ANA), Afghan National Police (ANP), and the National Directorate of Security Forces (NDSF). The nature of shared decision-making has been an important cause in the delay of appointments, inhibiting the ability of Afghan Security ministries and their forces to effectively exercising command and control.
- f) The ANDSF is also faced with the challenge of major logistics, airpower, and intelligence shortfalls, weakening their operational posture and the combat the efficacy of the security troops.
- g) The long-term security strategy of Afghanistan needs to focus on reducing the threats emanating from the various non-state actors through the process of political settlement and building the security policy of the country to meet the requirements of the country and avoid any untoward security situation in the future.

It is worth mentioning that from the period of 2002 to 2014, the United States and the foreign troops in Afghanistan had to take the lead to build, train, equip and finance Afghanistan's National Army and para-military forces to prepare them for the future challenges of life and show strong enough to maintain the security of the country (Ayotte, Dunford & Lindborg, 2021). It was in 2006 that the United States took the lead in bearing the responsibility for training most of the Afghan National Police (ANP). Germany and the European Union shouldered the responsibility to provide training sessions to some officers, while multiple donors continue to provide financing facility for police salaries through the United Nations-run Law and Order Trust but the actual bulk of support does come from the United States. The persistent insurgency in Afghanistan led the United States to evolve a strategy to "militarize the police as a localized defense force" rather than encourage the law enforcement agencies (D.C, 2017). It does not mean that the law enforcement agencies are not well equipped to combat any terrorist or insurgent activities, but some special police units such as the Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP) and Border Police have proved themselves to be very effective in combating terrorism in all circumstances.

One of the greatest flaws in the security forces of Afghanistan is the element of corruption and misuse of power. It is on account of the rampant corruption that has led to the failure of the law enforcement agencies. It is a fact that since the training and assistance of the ANDSF in 2006, it has not been able to become a successful force of the country and remains dependent on the US forces for the security of the country. Another of great concern is the misuse of authority by the law enforcement agencies for their vested interest. Security personnel has been accused of misusing the authority of the government. To streamline the security system of the country, it is necessary to uproot corruption and stop the system of misuse of authority by the security personnel.

It is a great dilemma of Afghanistan that she has always faced insecurity even in the presence of the NATO forces in Afghanistan. So, the United States had to train, provide advice and assist the security forces to increase their potentialities that started functioning as a regular force of the country in 2014. The vulnerability of the ANDSF came to the surface in 2014 when the drawdown of the

NATO forces from Afghanistan took a transition turn of withdrawal from the country of Afghanistan in different tranches. But this does not mean that the Afghan Security Forces are unable to face the challenges of security in Afghanistan. Many experts also showed their concern regarding the success of the transition of the NATO forces from Afghanistan. Even just after the drawdown of the NATO forces, there occurred some unpleasant events in the history of the country. The capture of some of the Provinces and Districts of Afghanistan during 2015 is testimony to the fact that the Afghan Security forces still lack the capacity and potential to protect each nook and corner of the country. During 2015 and 2016, most of the security systems of the country remained prone to many attacks and dangers from the various quarters of the non-state actors. But the most important thing about the law enforcement agencies of the country is that they have the potentiality to regain the lost territories and areas after a short period.

Another issue creating misunderstanding among the Pentagon, the NDS, and their North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was the conceptualization of war in Afghanistan where several states viewed the ongoing war against terrorism through different glasses (Wardak, 2017). The difference of concept of war between the Afghan National Army (ANA) and the NDS has faced numerous challenges after the drawdown of the US forces from Afghanistan. Since 2014, there have been high-profile attacks by the Taliban threatening the control of the Afghan government over its territory. The security agencies of the country suffer from the lack of key intelligence potentialities, particularly in gathering intelligence from remote areas for preventing sudden and surprise attacks (Wardak, 2017).

The weakness of the law enforcement agencies of Afghanistan has led to the creation of civil war. This has resulted in the weakening of the entire security system and institutional decay which can further cause damage to the key installations of the country. This weakness has invoked the neighboring countries' regional powers to interfere in the internal affairs of Afghanistan. The presence of the neighboring countries in Afghanistan is in itself a great challenge to the security of the host country since it is very difficult to determine the role of different countries in assisting the security agencies in providing training programs and other financial and logistic support as each country is interested in upholding the cause of her interest. Moreover, this political and military involvement by the neighboring countries has created further dissents and factions among the various circles in Afghanistan. The current growth of warlordism, the huge growth of the Taliban, and the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria owe their origin to the presence of the alien power in Afghanistan (Wardak, 2017). These elements may prolong the already ongoing civil war in Afghanistan, which may further deteriorate the security situation in Afghanistan. One thing is very clear that after the perpetration of every attack, the responsible institutions of security criticize the people that these attacks were being planned and masterminded from across the border (Wardak, 2017).

This criticism from the security institutions is very harmful to the bilateral security of the two countries of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Bilateral relations between the two countries are already suffering from the pangs of accusation and counter-accusation on both sides of the border. But this would further add fuel fire to the relations of the two neighboring countries that are pre-occupied with the security concerns of their respective countries since October 2001 when the US and allied forces started military operations in both countries under different nomenclatures. The most affected areas were the Pak-Afghan border commonly known as the Durand line that has provided sanctuaries to the terrorists and insurgents of the two countries and the foreign terrorists that usually took shelter in the safe havens of the treacherous and windy caves of the border. But since the inception of the ANDSF in 2013, there has been a tremendous decrease in the episodes of terrorism and insurgency both across the border and even inside Pakistan and Afghanistan. The security agencies have been successful in thwarting any untoward events that may further exacerbate their bilateral relations.

Achievements of the ANDSF

The Afghan Security Forces have been very successful in combating the challenges of fighting against the non-state actors in a very brave way. It is a fact that the transition period of the US drawdown brought challenges and opportunities for the law enforcement agencies of the country (Lmar, 2107). The transition, on one hand, shows the self-reliance of the ANDSF in security measures but on the other hand, it has also brought challenges to the government of Afghanistan. But it is also an admitted fact that despite challenges, the security forces of Afghanistan have been able to make huge achievements in security measures. It has guaranteed the survival of the country and has washed away

the stigma of the war-stricken country or prospects of civil war. Achievements of the ANDSF cover two important aspects of the government of Afghanistan; the successful transition of the security responsibilities and defusing the plans of the Insurgents.

i) Transition of the Security Responsibilities

The system of the old army of Afghanistan got destroyed completely due to the civil war in the post-Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. However, the rebuilding process of the Afghan National Army was initiated right after the establishment of the new democratic government in 2001 (Lmar, 2107). The strength of the local security forces of Afghanistan at the stage was considered to be ranging from 50,000 to 70,000 but then its strength was increased owing to the growing need for security in wake of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. In 2019, the strength of the ANA stood at approximately 180,000 soldiers out of an authorized strength of 195,000 (Wikipedia, 2020). This increase in the total strength of the ANA has led to the increased security of Afghanistan and has made it clear to reduce dependence on the presence of foreign troops. It is also significant to mention that the strength of the 70,000 ANA was not strong enough to combat terrorism and insurgency but the current strength of 180,000 is strong enough to face the challenges of modern warfare and keep the security of the country. It was also agreed upon during the US-Afghan government to increase the number of Afghan security forces further to ensure better security of the country (Defence, 2019).

Before handing over the responsibility of security to the ANA in 2012, its strength was very less and could not fight against insurgency and terrorism but in 2013 its number increased on account of its direct involvement in the combat operations and direct engagements against the insurgents and terrorists. Though during 2013 and 2014, security problems still overpowered the country yet the NATO forces there to assist the ANA in thwarting the outlaws and terrorists. The presence of the NATO and even in the post-drawdown scenario of 2014, the Resolute Support Mission (RSM) had the responsibility of training, assisting, and funding the Afghan security forces and till now had produced better results but it is still a mystery as to what will the future of the security forces be after the complete withdrawal of the US forces from Afghanistan.

However, some of the regional actors and neighboring countries are of the view that the Afghan security forces would not be in the position of holding the security of the country (Lmar, 2107). The same view is also held by the Taliban regarding the capability of the Afghan forces in the post-withdrawal scenario. It is on account of this contention that the armed militants have intensified war in Afghanistan. The drawdown has increased the problems of security in the country because the Taliban have got support from various circles of people and the number of foreign troops has shown their appearance in their circle (Lmar, 2107). Despite all the challenges and problems faced by the ANDSF, it has been successful in the combat operations against the insurgents and other non-state actors.

ii) Defusing the Plans of Insurgents

Responsibility for the shifting of security measures in Afghanistan was handed over to the ANDSF in 2013, while in the same year Operation Zarb-e-Azab was also started in Pakistan to cleanse the areas of terrorists and insurgents. This operation resulted in the crossing of the armed Taliban and other foreign fighters to flee to the other side of the Durand line. This operation by Pakistan was meant to get rid of the involvement of the international community in the affairs of Pakistan and Afghanistan since both are inter-related but this resulted in the intensification of the war in Afghanistan. This intensification of war had great repercussions on the history of Afghanistan and the Taliban.

The Taliban and their supporting countries have shown their concern that in the post-US withdrawal scenario, the ANDSF would not be able to defend the country and can very easily be defeated. It was under this consideration that the Taliban militants were mobilized with full energy and zeal to overthrow the Afghan government and administration but the security forces did well in defending the government as well as the administration from being collapsed. With the collapse of the Afghan government and administration, the Taliban would have again ascended the throne of Afghanistan and would have established their self-styled government in the country as was witnessed in 1996. This was expected during 2015 and onwards to destabilize Afghanistan but nothing could subdue the Afghan government and the security forces due to their strong security and surveillance.

An effort was made by the Taliban to toppe down the government but the sane was defused and the Taliban failed to overthrow the Afghan regime. It was planned that the Taliban would succeed

in getting the control of some provinces under their control and would raise their flags in at least six provinces of the country. In case of the success of the scheme, the country would be divided into two parts; one part would run under the supervision of the National Unity Government's control while the other part would remain under the control of the Taliban. But this plan was defused by the wise and timely action of the ANDSF. The emergence of the Islamic State(Daesh) was considered to be one of the greatest challenges to the security of Afghan security forces since Daesh had announced Afghanistan to be the capital Province of Khorasan, where they could keep contact with other regional countries (Defence, 2019). Daesh initially started its operation in the Helmand Province of Afghanistan but could not succeed in establishing its strong foothold as most of the top leadership got killed during this stage. It was during this stage that the Daesh was defeated in the provinces of Helmand, Farah, and Nangarhar. Since that the operation of this group cannot be considered to be remarkable.

Future of the ANDSF

Acting Defense Secretary of the United States, Christopher Miller paid a surprise visit to the war-stricken country of Afghanistan and particularly the war-hit zones whereby he dilated upon the worsening security situation in the country just a week before-elect Joe Biden's inauguration (Acting Defense Secretary Miller Visits Afghanistan Amid U.S. Withdrawal, 2020). One thing is more important in this visit of the Defense Secretary that on one hand, he expresses his concern over the growing security situation in Afghanistan but on the other hand, by reducing the strength of the US forces to 2,500 testifies the fact that the ANDSF is strong enough to combat the non-state actors and can maintain the security of the country without the assistance of the foreign troops. This visit is very important in the face of the US drawdown from Afghanistan since he had a meeting with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani by discussing with him the ongoing peace process and worsening security situation in Afghanistan. His visit is also significant in extending the SU support for the assistance of the ANDSF in improving the quality of security at both the local and national level (Acting Defense Secretary Miller Visits Afghanistan Amid U.S. Withdrawal, 2020).

The future of the ANDSF is very significant is evolving out a strategy for the future security of Afghanistan. It has to decide on showing its worth and potentiality in combating terrorism and avoid future challenges that may put the security of the country at high risk. In either case of the peace deal with the US government or even its failure, the whole responsibility of the country lies with the ANDSF. It is now in the interest of the security agencies to face all the dilemmas of security and fight tooth and nail for curbing against the elements of insecurity and any incongruity. But despite its strength and capacity, it still lacks certain inherent flaws that need to be given more importance and priority in the future.

- a) To improve in the capacity of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces to such an extent to be independent in maintaining security in the country without dependence on any foreign troops.
- b) To make arrangements for reducing dependence on the support of the US forces in terms of funding, logistics, and assistance for their competency and survival. Furthermore, it is also in the interest of the Afghan Security Forces to have very little dependence on the US forces, and that too in very rare cases.
- c) The ANDSF should ponder over the presence of US presence on a very limited scale so that it may develop its capabilities and potentialities to combat challenges and imminent dangers.
- d) Retaining morality and cohesion during the drawdown of the US forces from Afghanistan is another great challenge before the ANDSF which must show determination in the face of ongoing peace negotiations with the Taliban.
- e) To work upon the prospects of converting the Taliban forces into the ANDSF and utilize them for the welfare of the country and make the ANDSF a much stronger forces to make the country more secure and strong by making it politically stronger and stable in the face of challenges of civil war and insecurity.

The future of the ANDSF would prove to very successful and strong if the forces work jointly for mitigating their dependence upon the US forces and take prompt decisions in keeping the security of the state. After the security forces have to reduce dependence on the US for the sake of strengthening their position and should better remain less dependent on the little amount of US funding and financial support and should recommend for just the nominal presence of the US forces

and too in the key sectors and installations of the country. The ANDSF also needs to focus on morale and cohesion during the ongoing peace settlement with the Taliban in the wake of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. The strength and combating potentiality of the ANDSF would reflect the true spirit and political stability of the country coupled with the security paradigm in the drawdown scenario. One of the greatest challenges before the security forces of Afghanistan is to integrate the Taliban forces into the mainstream of the Afghan National and Defense Security Forces to achieve better results and better prospects of stability in terms of politics and democratic setup.

Conclusion

With the withdrawal of the US forces from Afghanistan, the role of ANDSF also keeps on increasing with the main focus on the restoration of the lost prestige and confidence of the country. Till now the Afghan security forces had to depend on the NATO and US forces for maintaining security in the country. Till 2014, the law enforcement agencies of Afghanistan had to rely on the NATO forces for the security of key installations and important sectors of the country but from 2014 onwards, the role of the foreign troops changed from maintaining security to that of training, assisting, and funding the ANDSF. Now, it is the sole responsibility of the Afghan security forces to safeguard the country against internal as well as external aggression. But most of the threats to the security of the country come from the internal non-state actors that have led the country towards civil war and political instability coupled with insecurity.

Moreover, the ANDSF has been able to face all the challenges of security and do all to get the writ of the government established in all spheres of life and particularly safeguarding the country against all sorts of aggression. It was the fighting and defensive spirit of the law enforcement agencies of the country that enabled it to suppress all the insurgents and terrorists including the elements of the Daesh in the provinces of Khorasan, Helmand, and Nangarhar. Most of the sanctuaries of the non-state actors meant for destabilizing the country have been destroyed due to the efforts of the security forces. But it does not mean that the Afghan security forces are perfect in all respects, the elements of corruption and misuse of power and authority by the security personnel. Despite that, the security forces of Afghanistan are very strong and defensive in keeping the country secure in all circumstances of life.

References

- Acting Defense Secretary Miller Visits Afghanistan Amid U.S. Withdrawal. (2020, December 22). *The US. News*. Retrieved from <https://www.usnews.com/news/national-news/articles/2020-12-22/acting-defense-secretary-miller-visits-afghanistan-amid-us-withdrawal>
- Ayotte, K. A., Dunford Jr., J. F., & Lindborg, N. (2021). *Afghanistan Study Group Final Report: A Pathway for Peace in Afghanistan*. Afghanistan Study Group Final Report:
- D.C, W. (2017, September). *Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, Reconstructing the Afghan National Defense & Security Forces: Lessons from the US Experience in Afghanistan*. Retrieved from www.sigar.mil/pdf/lessonslearned/SIGAR-17-62.11.pdf
- Defense, D. o. (2019, April 1). Operation Freedom's Senital Lead, Inspector General Report to the United States Congress.
- Defense, o. o. (2017, May). *"Justification for FY 2018 Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) Afghanistan Security Forces Fund (ASFF)"*. Retrieved from http://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defudget/fy2018_ASFF_J.Book.pdf
- Jalali, A. A. (2016, May 20). *Afghan National & Defense Security Forces: Mission, Challenges, & Sustainability*. Retrieved from Geneva Center for Security Sector Governance (DCAF): <https://www.usip.org/publications/2016/05/afghanistan-national-defense-&-security-forces>
- Lmar, M. (2107). Afghan Forces; Challenges & Achievements. *Office of the Chief of Staff for President, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan*. Retrieved from <https://prev.ocs.gov.af/english/3539/Afghan+Forces%3B+Challenges+%&+Achievements>
- Wardak, D. P. (2017, January 19). Why the NDS matters: The Emergence of the Afghan Intelligence Agency After 9/11. *International Journal of Intelligence & Counter-Intelligence*, 1-11. Retrieved from <http://doi.org/1022261/LDS6AJ>
- Wikipedia. (2020). Afghan National Army. Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afghan_National_Army