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The Afghan National Security Forces Beyond 2014: Will They Be Ready?
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Introduction

Afghanistan's state-building project following the removal of the Taliban regime in 2001 has become one of the longest and costliest in history. The United States alone has spent more than US$100 billion, most of which has gone toward developing the new Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). Despite the enormous commitment of funding and troops, the Afghan government still struggles to contain the extensive insurgent, terrorist and criminal networks that undermine the country's stability. The ANSF has difficulty maintaining control over large parts of the country, with the Taliban extending its influence over vast areas, particularly in the south and east of the country (Freedom House, 2013: para. 6). Worse still, linkages between criminal networks, insurgent groups and corrupt government officials confound the efforts of genuine local reformers. All of these factors contribute to popular dissatisfaction with the government and fuel the insurgency.

In 2014, Afghanistan will experience three major transitions: from the Hamid Karzai-led government to a newly elected one in April following the presidential election; from an economy driven by international military and economic assistance to one more reliant on domestic sources of growth; and from a US and International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)-led counterinsurgency (COIN) mission to one that is led by Afghan forces (Jones and Crane, 2013: 3). International military involvement is winding down. NATO member states and other troop-contributing countries decided in November 2010 on a gradual handover of responsibility to the ANSF. By the end of 2014, Operation Enduring Freedom, which has included a mix of combat and reconstruction activities, will come to an end. The next phase, Operation Resolute Support, will focus more specifically on training and advising the ANSF. However, international support for the ANSF will depend on the signing of security agreements with the United States and NATO, which President Karzai has so far resisted, and which will now likely be delayed until after the election of his successor in April 2014.

With the security mandate for Afghanistan and its citizens shifting to the ANSF, critics, researchers, policy makers and politicians alike are questioning whether the ANSF is up to the task. Has the last decade of security force assistance, training and reform programs created an effective and sustainable security sector capable of maintaining order and the rule of law while combatting an active insurgency?

The Security Situation at Present

Afghanistan continues to struggle with the presence of insurgent and extremist groups, and the limited (but notable) presence of al-Qaeda in remote areas of the country (United Nations General Assembly [UNGA], 2013: 6; Department of Defense [DoD], 2013: 14).[4] Groups such as the Haqqani network still possess the ability to conduct high-profile attacks on both Afghan and ISAF targets, especially in Kabul (DoD, 2013: 14). According to the US Department of Defense, insurgent and terrorist groups in Afghanistan often facilitate and support one another, further extending their capabilities (ibid.). For its part, the Taliban continues to challenge Afghan forces for control of remote and sparsely populated areas in the southern and eastern parts of the country, and along Highway 1 and other main transport routes (ibid.). Engagements with these insurgent groups continue to inflict high casualties on the ANSF, particularly the Afghan National Police (ANP) and the Afghan Local Police (ALP). Effectively responding to the threat of these groups without international financial and military support will be a crucial test of the ANSF's capabilities after 2014.

The southern, southeastern and eastern provinces continue to account for the bulk of security incidents in the country (UNGA, 2013: 6), and are consistently ranked as the most violent areas of Afghanistan (see Table 1)."Entrenched" criminal networks also pose a long-term threat to the stability of the country (ibid.).

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4 Al-Qaeda has a limited presence in remote areas of eastern Afghanistan such as Kunar and Nuristan provinces, and a seasonal presence in other areas.

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Opinions on Afghanistan's security situation vary. Reports from the US government, NATO and the United Nations point to several ways in which the security situation has improved (DoD, 2013; UNGA, 2013). They cite the improved capability of the ANSF to respond to attacks and hold territory, as well as growth in ANSF force strength, as signs of the country's improving situation. Others have argued that a Taliban resurgence — or the toppling of the Afghan government — is unlikely given the ANSF's current capabilities (Barfield, 2013: 16). On the other hand, some non-governmental organizations and researchers have argued that the security situation has not changed substantially since the start of the reconstruction effort (Jarstad, 2013; Freedom House, 2013), and that the Taliban will storm Kabul and take power once US and NATO forces have withdrawn (Barfield, 2013: 14). They argue that the conflict appears to have increased in intensity as security control has been handed over to Afghan forces, and as insurgent groups attempt to undermine public confidence in the ANSF by attacking bases and checkpoints that have recently been handed over to them (Jarstad, 2013: 386; Aziz, 2013: 3). This trend was also noted in a 2013 report of the

UN Secretary-General (UNGA, 2013: 6).

The general statistics on security incidents are similarly varied.[5] In 2012, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) reported a 12 percent decrease in civilian deaths over 2011 (UNAMA, 2013: 1). This appeared to indicate that a five-year trend in increasing civilian casualties had been reversed (Freedom House, 2013: para. 10). However, civilian deaths are once again rising, as UNAMA reported a seven percent increase in 2013 (UNAMA, 2014: 1). These security trends continue to raise questions about the competence of the ANSF, while other trends, such as the number of "green-on-blue attacks,"[6] raise doubts about the loyalty of some ANSF personnel and the degree to which the security sector has been infiltrated by insurgents. In 2012, more than 70 international military personnel were killed by their Afghan counterparts (Jarstad, 2013: 381).

ANSF Capabilities

A major recruitment push has steadily increased the size and strength of the ANSF. It has nearly doubled in size since 2009. As of 2013 there was a total of 334,852 ANSF personnel (SIGAR, 2013b: 85). These personnel are divided amongst the two main components of the ANSF, the ANP and ANA. These numbers represent 95 percent of the current planned goal of 352,000 personnel. The remaining five percent, comprising 25,477 security personnel, come from the ranks of the ALP.

Furthermore, the ANSF is beginning to demonstrate some capability to provide security without heavy US and NATO assistance. Combined ANSF and ALP forces have demonstrated an ability to seize and hold terrain, and have successfully held territory in districts that are strategically

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5 In 2011, UNAMA reported 3,021 civilian deaths, an eight percent increase over 2010. In 2012, UNAMA documented 2,754 civilian deaths, a 12 percent decrease over 2011. In UNAMA's latest report on civilian casualties in 2013, however, the decline has been reversed: 2,959 civilian deaths were reported in 2013.

6 Green on Blue attacks are incidents where ISAF personnel are attacked and/or killed by ANSF personnel.

Figure 1: Density of total individuals targeted (dead and injured) in security incidents
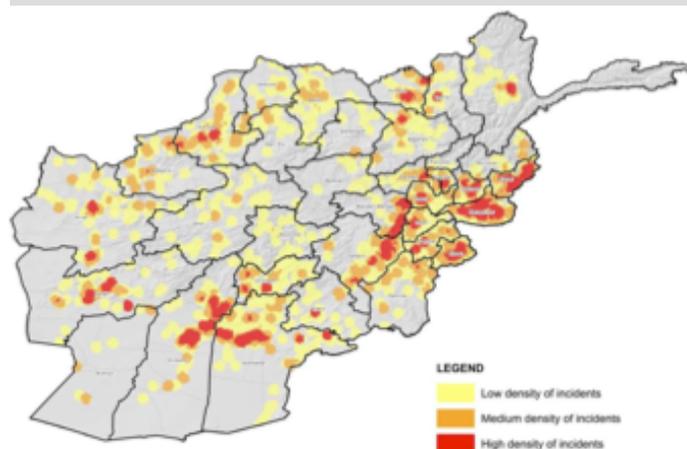
Source: iMMAP (2013)

Table 1: 10 Most Violent Districts

	Top 10 Districts in Enemy-Initiated Attacks (EIAs)	Province	% of National EIA in Date Range
1	Nahr-e Saraj	Helmand	4%
2	Sangin	Helmand	4%
3	Nad 'Ali	Helmand	4%
4	Musa Qal'ah	Helmand	4%
5	Panjwa'i	Kandahar	3%
6	Sayyidabad	Wardak	3%
7	Now Zad	Helmand	2%
8	Maiwand	Kandahar	2%
9	Pul-e 'Alam	Logar	2%
10	Darah-ye Pech	Kunar	2%

Date Range: April 1, 2013-September 15, 2013
Source: DoD (2013, 18)

Afghanistan's Security Landscape

Security in Afghanistan is currently provided by the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), with assistance from the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). The ANSF refers to the Afghan National Army (ANA), the Afghan National Police (ANP), the Afghan Local Police (ALP) and the National Directorate of Security (NDS). Afghanistan's Ministry of Interior (MoI), the Ministry of Defense (MoD), the Office of the President (OP), the Office of the National Security Council (ONSC), and the National Assembly are directly involved in civilian oversight of the security sector.

The OP: The president of Afghanistan is the commander-in-chief of the Afghan Armed Forces. He has the power to determine the policies of the Afghan state and, with the approval of the National Assembly, the power to appoint cabinet ministers such as the ministers of interior and defense.

The ONSC: The ONSC functions as a kind of secretariat, providing security advice to the president, and the National Security Council and its committees, subcommittees and working groups. It also produces draft papers on security policy and strategy, national threat assessments, and papers on topics of "cross-government security interest" (Dennys and Hamilton-Baille, 2012: 10-11). Where necessary, it coordinates intergovernmental activities in implementing security policy.

National Assembly: The National Assembly has legislative powers to ratify, modify or abrogate laws or legislative decrees, most notably the national budget of Afghanistan. It must also approve any declaration of war or ceasefire, deployments of armed forces abroad, declarations of a state of emergency and the appointments of ministers (Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces [DCAF], 2011: 93). The National Assembly also has the power to convene a special commission if one third of its members put forward a proposal to inquire about government actions. Articles 93 and 103 of the Afghan constitution give the Assembly the power to demand the participation of ministers in these commissions, and articles 91 and 92 grant it the ability to sanction ministers.

The MoI: The MoI is responsible for law enforcement in Afghanistan. It exercises conreol over the ANP, the Afghan Special Narcotics Force (ASNF), the Counter Narcotics Police of Afghanistan (CNP-A) and the Afghan Public Protection Force (APPF). The minister of interior functions as the head of the national police and as the chief commander of police operations.

The MoD: The MoD oversees and maintains the ANA. It is also responsible for producing a National Military Strategy, which provides general staff planning guidance over a multi-year period (DoD, 2013: 37).

Military
- The ANA: The ANA currently has 178,816 personnel (Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction [SIGAR], 2014a: 84). Efforts are currently underway — and are achieving some success — to develop both the combat readiness of the ANA (to ensure success) and its logistical (or enabling) capabilities to allow it to initiate operations independently.
- The Afghan Air Force (AAF): The AAF currently has approximately 6,600 personnel, including aircrew and maintenance and support staff. It also has a fleet of 100 fixed-wing and rotary aircraft such as C-130 Hercules cargo aircraft and Mi-17 helicopters. Development of the AAF is still underway, and it is expected to begin autonomous operations by 2017 (NATO, 2013).

Police
- Afghan Uniform Police (AUP): The AUP is the "face of the government to the Afghan people" (Planty and Perito, 2013: 4). It is the largest component of the ANP with 90,500 members. It provides key police services such as public order, crime control, traffic control, and fire, rescue, and emergency response. It has a presence in all 34 provinces.
- Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP): The ANCOP is an elite unit created to respond to civil disorder. It is headquartered in Kabul and has 14,500 personnel assigned to five different bridges: Kabul, Kandahar, Herat, Gardez and Helmand.
- Afghan Border Police (ABP): The ABP has 20,000 members, and is responsible for security at Afghanistan's international airports and land entry points, and for a border security zone that extends for 50 km into Afghanistan.
- Afghan Anti-Crime Police (AACP): The AACP provides the investigative and intelligence services of the ANP. It also takes on the internal roles of inspector general and internal affairs. It is currently divided into separate branches tasked with specific roles: counterterrorism, counternarcotics, police intelligence, criminal investigation, major crimes, special operations and forensics. With only 3,400 personnel, and limited financial and material resources, its ability to fulfill its stated responsibilities is limited (ibid.).

Afghan Public Protection Force (APPF): The APPF was an initiative spearheaded by President Karzai, and was intended to replace the numerous private security contractors that were protecting public facilities, officials, etc., with personnel that were under the control of the Afghan government. The APPF does not have arrest powers, and is unable to conduct investigations (ibid.: 5). It currently has 16,483 guards, just over three quarters of the required 19,000 personnel (NATO, 2013).

Afghan Local Police (ALP): The ALP currently has over 24,000 members, with a goal of 30,000 by the end of 2014. Its purpose is to complement Afghan-led counterinsurgency efforts. The force falls under MoI authority and is supervised by the local AUP office; therefore, it does not qualify as a militia. It has proven controversial mostly due to a lack of criteria for selection, abusive behaviour against citizens and infiltration by insurgents (Planty and Perito, 2013: 4).

Afghan Special Narcotics Force (ASNF): The ASNF is an elite counternarcotics force responsible for conducting interdiction missions against "high value narcotics targets" in remote areas of Afghanistan (Department of State and Department of Defense, 2006: 12).

Counter Narcotics Police of Afghanistan (CNP-A): The CNP-A was founded in 2003, and is the lead agency for counternarcotics investigations in Afghanistan. Training of CNP-A members is highly specialized; members are recruited from existing ANP units, and sometimes directly from the graduating class of the police academy (ibid.: 13). As of October 2013, the CNP-A consisted of 2,759 personnel (SIGAR, 2014b: 12).

important for the Taliban, such as Arghandab in the central part of Kandahar province (Jones and Crane, 2013: 9). In cases where the ANSF has been driven from positions by insurgent forces, especially along highways and in rural areas, the forces recaptured the positions shortly thereafter (DoD, 2013: 17). Furthermore, the ANSF has begun conducting its own proactive operations against insurgent groups with some success. In June 2013, national and local forces completed a series of clearing operations along the Nuristan-Kunar border with only limited US air support (Jones and Crane, 2013: 9).

Indeed, the ANSF continues to demonstrate its ability to engage in unilateral operations. The ANSF now conducts 95 percent of conventional security operations and 98 percent of all special operations in Afghanistan. ISAF personnel no longer engage in unilateral operations (i.e., not in conjunction with the ANSF) aside from protecting their own forces, and route clearance activities (DoD, 2013: 17).

Table 2: ANSF by the Numbers			
ANSF Component	Strength as of Dec. 2013	Target Strength	Gap in Strength
ANA	178,816	187,000	-8,184
AAF	6,700	8,000	-1,430
ANP	149,466	157,000	-7,534
ANSF Total	334,852	352,000	-17,148
ALP	25,477*	-	-

* Current ALP strength as of January 4, 2014
Source: SIGAR (2014a)

Challenges for the ANSF

Sustainability
Even if the ANSF could operate without a significant US or NATO troop presence, which is far from clear, it will remain dependent on international financial and training assistance for some time to come. In 2012, the ANSF budget was US$4.1 billion, US$3.6 billion of which was provided by international donors (The Economist, 2012). NATO estimates that sustaining the ANSF could cost as much as US$5 billion annually (SIGAR, 2014a: 4).[4] Considering that the Afghan government's entire budget is only US$7.4 billion (Ministry of Finance, 2014),[5] it is clear that the international community has created a security sector that Afghanistan is and will remain unable to pay for and maintain on its own. Without significant financial assistance from the international community, a decline in ANSF force strength and capabilities seems inevitable.

Force strength
The ANSF in general suffers high attrition rates. The losses are particularly severe among the ANP and ALP ranks, whose personnel engage more frequently with insurgents. Police are easy targets for insurgents, despite the years and effort spent training them for COIN operations. Each successful operation has brought with it heavy casualties. In fact, police casualties have exceeded those of the military by up to a factor of three over the past decade (Planty and Perito, 2013: 5).[6] Casualties for the Afghan National Army (ANA) have also increased significantly as they have taken over from international forces. ANA casualties increased by 49 percent in 2013, and represented 40 percent of total ANSF casualties (DoD, 2013: 47).

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4 Costs include paying salaries, purchasing new equipment, maintaining facilities and other operational costs that have so far been paid by NATO and other troop-contributing countries.
5 In January 2014, the national budget was set at 428.478 billion Afghani, or roughly US$7.5 billion.
6 Between January and June 2012, the ANA lost 173 personnel, while the combined losses of the ANP, ALP and ABP was 349 (Chesser, 2012: 3-4).

Combat losses are also complemented by high losses to disease and desertion, which has yet to be criminalized in Afghanistan. Police and military officers are able to abandon their post with impunity. High attrition rates have made it difficult to meet recruitment and force strength targets set for the ANSF, as shown in Table 3. The result is that the ANSF — and the police in particular — have a constant need to recruit large numbers in order to replenish their losses, and struggle to meet ever-increasing recruitment targets.

As for the ANA, questions have been raised about the reporting of its force strength, and the actual number of available troops. Of the 128,658 combat-assigned personnel in the ANA, over 9,000 were listed as AWOL and more than 15,000 others were still in training (SIGAR, 2014a: 84). Another 63,905 personnel (more than 50 percent) were "unavailable," meaning that they were currently missing, in police custody (arrested), in hospital or on training assignments (ibid.). It is worth noting that the "unavailable" category does include personnel that are currently deployed in the field; however, such a large number of unavailable troops arguably still raises concerns about ANA capabilities.

Lack of ministerial and logistical capacity
With the development of the ANSF well underway, ISAF has recently redirected its attention toward improving the capacity of the Ministry of Interior (MoI) and the Ministry of Defense (MoD). In general, governance and management structures in the main security ministries are weak and underdeveloped. While Afghans are making gains in meeting shorter-term needs, they still lack a "systematic and proactive planning method" for developing budgets and strategic plans (DoD, 2013: 36). The MoI, especially, has been plagued by constant changes in leadership,[7] which have significantly hampered attempts to engage in long-term planning (ibid.: 39). Despite this, both ministries have made some gains. The

Table 3: Maintaining ANSF Strength		
ANSF Component	Recruitment (Sept. 2012 - Sept. 2013)	Attrition (Sept. 2012 - Sept. 2013)
ANA	64,383	67,682
ANP	26,857	26,853

Source: DoD (2013)

MoI published a 10-year vision plan, a National Police Strategy and a National Police Plan, all of which were developed independently with only minimal guidance and oversight from international advisors (ibid.: 39-40). The MoD built its first budget and requirements package in August 2013 and submitted it to the Ministry of Finance for approval (ibid.: 36).

Both ministries, and the MoI in particular, are not prepared to sustain their security operations without international assistance. Their future success will be largely dependent on the strength and mandate of those international forces that remain after the withdrawal.

Corruption
Afghanistan is currently ranked 175 out of 177 on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (Transparency International, 2013). Corruption is perhaps the most pervasive and debilitating problem facing Afghanistan's state- building process. Examples of corruption in the security sector include the proliferation of unofficial checkpoints, and constantly escalating bribes demanded at those checkpoints (Felbab-Brown, 2013).[8] These are very harmful to Afghanistan's emerging market economy. Tribal and ethnic discrimination, clientelism and nepotism are also common forms of corruption in the ANA and the ANP. Personnel from particular ethnic groups or regions who do not have access to influential powerbrokers can often find themselves posted to the most violent areas of the country, and are often not rotated out. It is also common for salaries and leaves to be unequally

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7 In recent years, the MoI has had 10 different ministers, and several deputy ministers have also been replaced. By contrast, the MoD has had only three changes in leadership during a similar period (DoD, 2013: 39).

8 The Asia Foundation, in particular, has conducted several surveys on perceptions of corruption in Afghanistan. See Shawe (2013) and Kryzer (2012).

distributed (ibid.). Corruption threatens to exacerbate the ethnic and factional tensions that are present within the ANSF.

Ethnic and patronage fissures within the ANSF

The ANA, in particular, is plagued by ethnic and regional imbalances and fissures that dampen unit cohesion. Command positions within the ANA are disproportionately filled with individuals from the northern regions of Afghanistan, Tajiks in particular. ISAF has made a substantial effort to reduce the Tajik domination of command posts. In 2008, approximately 70 percent of Afghan commanders were Tajiks. As of 2012, that number had been reduced to 40 percent. This move was intended to appease ethnic Pashtuns in Afghanistan, although even within the Pashtun ethnic group there is an imbalance: the ANA has disproportionately recruited Pashtuns from the northern and central regions, with very few emanating from the south (ibid.). With ethnic fissures and patronage networks running deep within the ANA, some observers have expressed concern that the institution could be fractured by the election in April 2014 (Smith et al., 2013; Jones and Crane, 2013: 7).

The ANP has also encountered difficulties addressing ethnic imbalance within its ranks. Like the ANA, it has been unable to recruit large numbers of southern Pashtuns, and northerners, particularly Tajiks, dominate the senior ranks (Planty and Perito, 2013: 6). Ethnic imbalance is particularly problematic for everyday policing functions, as ANP units in the south are often unable to communicate with local citizens. They also tend to be viewed as outsiders, making their job even more difficult. This alienation is further exacerbated by the high levels of corruption and ANP involvement in illicit activity such as the drug trade.

Lack of policing ability/overemphasis on counterterrorism

The ANP has received minimal anti-crime training, and has instead been configured as a light COIN and "SWAT-like" force (Felbab-Brown, 2013). The dominant role of the US military in the training process coupled with the urgency of advancing COIN operations has pushed training objectives toward a COIN rather than law enforcement focus (Planty and Perito, 2013: 5). Unfortunately for most Afghans, it is crimes like murder, robbery and extortion that remain the most common everyday threats. A 2013 survey revealed that only half of Afghans feel confident that perpetrators of violence or crime will be punished (Shawe, 2013: 7). Across the country, only two percent of Afghans reported incidents to the Taliban instead of the ANP. In certain areas such as Zabul province, however, that number was as high as 51 percent (ibid.). The inability of the ANP to respond to these problems gives the insurgency a chance to influence citizens.

A further problem is illiteracy within the police, with over 80 percent of ANP recruits unable to read or recognize numbers. Mandatory literacy training has since been instated, however, recruits who fail the training are still able to enter service (Planty and Perito, 2013: 6). When combined with the absence of an effective judicial system, corruption and political interference, the police's ability to enforce the rule of law is questionable at best.

Conclusions

There is wide consensus that the ANSF will be unable to maintain order after 2014 without some level of international assistance. Coalition officials have stated that the ANSF will continue to need mentoring and training, as well as financial resources. The Afghan government does not have the funds to pay salaries, purchase equipment, maintain facilities and mount security operations. The sustainability of the gains to date will be dependent on the April 2014 elections, the level of financial support provided to the Afghan government after the drawdown of foreign forces and on the size and structure of the post-2014 US and NATO military mission.

The United States and NATO have planned to keep several thousand military personnel in Afghanistan to provide training and support to the ANSF, and to conduct minor counterterrorism operations. However, the presence of these personnel is dependent on the ability of the United States and NATO to negotiate security agreements with the Afghan government. Although a bilateral security agreement between the United States and Afghanistan was drafted in late 2013, President Karazi has refused to sign the agreement, and has shelved it until his successor is chosen in April. American officials have consistently warned that further delays could result in the "zero option," wherein all US forces — including training and combat — personnel will be withdrawn from Afghanistan (Rosenberg, 2013). Despite this forceful response from the US, Karzai has remained defiant. In early February the US National Intelligence Director, James Clapper, stated that it is unlikely that Karzai will ever sign the agreement (Zengerle, 2014). More recent reports in the US have indicated that American officials will now wait until Karzai leaves office before finalizing the agreement and deciding on a troop presence beyond 2014 (Reuters, 2014).

Many Afghans fear a return to civil war and violence should there be a complete withdrawal of foreign troops (Barfield, 2013: 14). Taking into

Table 4: US Military Presence post-2014: Four Options		
Option	Primary Mission	Troop Strength
Zero Option	No military mission, but could include limited civilian, diplomatic and intelligence missions	0
Counterterrorism	Conduct counterterrorism strikes against al-Qaeda and associated groups with Afghan partners	1,000-3,000
Light Foreign Internal Defense	Conduct counterterrorism strikes; limited train, advise and assist to Afghan units	4,000-6,000
Heavy Foreign Internal Defense	Conduct counterterrorism strikes; more robust train, advise and assist roles	8,000-12,000

Source: Jones and Crane (2013).

account the problems that the ANSF still faces — such as endemic corruption and high attrition rates, the questionable financial sustainability of the ANSF, and the persistence of the insurgency — it seems more imperative than ever that the international community continues its support to the Afghan government.

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