



POLICY STUDY

Seria Policy Study cuprinde
texte bazate pe surse publice.
Opiniile exprimate reprezintă
punctele de vedere ale
autorilor.

Institutul Diplomatic Român

Policy Study nr. 3 / 2014

**Some comments on ongoing evolutions and future
perspectives in Afghanistan-Pakistan (AfPak),
November 2013-February 2014**

Mihai Cătălin Avram, Ionel Radovici and dr. Florin Diaconu

ISSN 2343 – 9238

ISSN-L 2343 – 9238

București 2014

Some comments on ongoing evolutions and future perspectives in Afghanistan-Pakistan (AfPak), November 2013-February 2014



Policy Study prepared by Mihai Cătălin Avram, Ionel Radovici and dr. Florin Diaconu (project co-ordinator), within the framework of the Romanian Diplomatic Institute Internship Program on the problems of the Greater Middle East

Summary:

I.	Executive Summary	p. 3
II.	Afghanistan: some significant problems and trends	p. 5
III.	Pakistan: some significant problems and trends.....	p. 20
IV.	Ongoing evolutions and future perspectives in AfPak, reflected in U.S. top level political discourse, and in some Pentagon (U.S. Department of Defense) official documents and reports	p. 35
	Final note	p. 55

I. Executive Summary

While looking at the general security developments in Afghanistan and Pakistan / AfPak (mainly along the three months – November 2013 to February 2014 – representing the total duration of the internship program at the Romanian Diplomatic Institute, program which generated in the end this report), we do observe a set of clearly positive trends.

In Afghanistan, for example, the international community has managed to help local forces gain some ground in fighting the Taliban. These forces have been the direct recipients of training, as well as hardware, seen as essential in the effort of consolidating internal security after the ISAF mission will come to an end, in December 2014. Economic projects have been aimed at building a more stable internal market, while aid is being constantly invested in order to sustain key democratic developments such as elections. The overall birth of an intelligible institutional framework within the security apparatus of the country, as well as within the governmental fabric of the state, is also to be noted.

Such positive developments may be observed in Pakistan as well. The state itself is functional, even though it has to deal with terrorism. The security forces have managed to keep key strategic resources, such as nuclear materials or technology, out of the reach of radical or terrorist groups. One may also observe that Pakistan itself is taking some steps towards an enhanced democratic outlook by pursuing the path of free elections.

Even though it is obvious that such *positive* developments are to be noted and taken into account, we have decided, within the framework of this study, to focus more on the *negative* elements continuously present in AfPak (negative trends, problems, goals not reached, risks not properly coped with). The decision to explore *mainly* the negative elements of the evolutions in AfPak shows that our main interest is that of *identifying the key elements that have the most obvious potential of disrupting the very fragile regional security balance* to be observed within AfPak, and also in the Greater Middle East, with possible negative effects in other regions of the world, including Europe, and for the EU and NATO (Romania being an element of both the European Union and NATO).

Thus, our research has taken into consideration numerous topics such as: for Afghanistan - development status and trends, problems in transferring and reinforcing security responsibilities, strategic developments in the context of the ISAF steps progressively leading to complete withdrawal (ISAF mission is going to come to the end in December 2014), poppy related threats, election-related trends and security implications, international interactions between different sovereign actors with interests in the area: for Pakistan - drone related activity, structural challenges to militant activities and prospects of negotiations with the Taliban and other radicals and insurgents. A third major element of the text explores in a quite detailed way the manner in which evolution in AfPak are reflected in top level political discourse in the U.S., and also the way in which the same evolutions are evaluated by the most recent report of the Pantagon dealing with the situation in Afghanistan.

Because of institutional limitations of the total volume of text (a policy study usually has to be 50 to 75 pages long), in the following pages we have decided to present only a fraction (roughly 40%) of the open source information we have processed. Final note explain how are we going to continue the effort of studying evolutions and future perspectives in AfPak.

Given the open source information available in the timeframe in which the study has been conducted (November 4, 2013 - February 4, 2014), *it is our professional opinion that some of the present trends in AfPak suggest a highly probable short, medium and long term security destabilization of the area as a result of the ISAF withdrawal, with high levels of potential increased lack of stability of the rest of the Greater Middle East security environment, and beyond.* However, we strongly underline the fact that the situation to be observed is both highly volatile and extremely complex. This is to say that the nonlinear manner in which events are unfolding may generate at any given moment unforeseeable facts and trends which we cannot rationally anticipate at this time.

II. Afghanistan: some significant problems and trends

The following part of our research will deal with the volatile security environment to be observed in Afghanistan, as well as with the challenges to be observed as a result of the ISAF progressive withdrawal (the current ISAF mission will come to an end in late December 2014). Thus we will further discuss a series of aid-related issues, strategic implications derived from transferring control and responsibility for security issues to the Afghan forces, poppy related challenges and, last but definitely not least, implications derived from Afghanistan's reluctance to sign a further cooperation deal with The United States, and election derived trends.

1. Problems in using development funds

Generally speaking, “development programs have long been used to promote economic and political development. In recent years, however, they have assumed yet another role: they have been used to promote security in countries fighting fierce insurgencies, such as Afghanistan and Iraq. The approach contends that such projects, which are commonly used by the domestic government and allied entities to provide basic services and infrastructure, improve economic outcomes, build support for the government, and ultimately reduce violence as sympathy of the population for the insurgency wanes. The idea of using development projects as a counter-insurgency strategy is becoming more and more influential and now constitutes a major component of the new U.S. counterinsurgency doctrine (U.S. Army/Marine Corps, 2006).”¹ In Afghanistan the largest such development initiative is the National Solidarity Program (NSP)² which “has already brought almost \$1 billion in aid to more than 26,000 Afghan communities.”³ Independent research, reviewing statistical data from as much as 500 communities randomly selected, suggest that “that NSP has a strong positive effect on people’s economic wellbeing and on their attitudes towards the Afghan government (both at the central and local level). NSP also appears to improve attitudes toward NGOs and, to some extent, coalition forces on the ground. Respondents in NSP villages have significantly more positive attitudes toward government figures at almost all levels, including district and provincial governors, central government officials, the President of Afghanistan, Members of Parliament and government judges.”⁴

But it is however true that “results for the two eastern districts, which experienced high initial levels of violence, are completely different. There is no positive effect of NSP on attitudes toward any government bodies, ISAF soldiers, or NGOs, and the effect on attitudes towards many figures is, in fact, significantly negative.”⁵ Although the cash flow, in terms of development, has been constant and potent throughout the country, the overall security level is still low in areas where militant forces have been strong. In other words “overall, the empirical evidence suggests that strategies for winning *hearts and minds* through the provision of development projects are working, but only in relatively secure regions.”⁶ Consequently “the results suggest that development programs can prevent the spread of violence in relatively secure

¹ Ruben ENIKOLOPOV, *Development Programs and Security in Afghanistan*, Free Policy Brief Series, November 2011, p.1, <http://freepolicybriefs.org/2011/11/28/development-programs-and-security-in-afghanistan/>, consulted on the 22nd of October 2013.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 1-2.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 2.

⁶ *Ibid.*

regions, but they are not effective in reducing violence in regions that are already experiencing significant security problems.”⁷

From a development perspective it is also obvious that NSP is not the only program having difficulties in transforming the landscape of political security within Afghanistan. According to *Stars and Stripes* “The U.S. Agency for International Development has given nearly \$50 million to contractors for a grant program intended to fund *quick-turnaround* community projects jointly with the Afghan government. But in 16 months the program has only funded numerous meetings and preliminary training, according to the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction. The delays have led to dissatisfaction in the communities, undermining the intent of the program — to bolster confidence in the Afghan government.”⁸ In effect “part of the reason for the delay, the report says, is that it took USAID nine months after the contract award to sign an agreement with the Afghan government on the program, which was an essential part of convincing local Afghans that their leaders are behind the development projects, not just foreign donors.”⁹ The efficiency of the program has thus been reduced to virtually nothing before it even had the chance of starting. The potential miss-usage of 50 million dollars only adds to lingering concerns regarding the overall investments in Afghanistan as security levels are far from reaching a ideal standard for both the legitimacy of the ISAF presence in the region as well as the stability of the country in the long run.

At times, development funds are even covertly redirected towards activities that destabilize the Afghan security environment, with potential reverberations across the world, such as poppy farming.¹⁰

1.1. Negative impact of ISAF withdrawal on aid

Perspectives directly linked to the aid effort in the country may, in theory, receive a potent negative blow in the following months, given the fact that “as coalition forces withdraw from Afghanistan, U.S.-funded reconstruction projects worth billions of dollars in far-flung regions of the country will soon be impossible for American officials to safely visit and directly inspect. The planned removal of more than 40,000 troops and the closure of dozens of bases over the next year will shrink the protective umbrella for U.S. officials to keep tabs on construction work, training programs and other initiatives in the corruption-plagued nation. Only about 20 percent¹¹ of the country will be accessible to U.S. civilian oversight personnel in 2014.”¹² It is interesting to observe the fact that in 2009, 68% of Afghanistan was accessible to oversight

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Cid STANDIFER, “SIGAR slams Afghanistan development grant program”, *Stars and Stripes*, the 29th of July, 2013, <http://www.stripes.com/news/sigar-slams-afghanistan-development-grant-program-1.232744>, consulted on the 22nd of October 2013.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ For more on this see Part I, Chapter 3 of the study.

¹¹ The actual letter sent by Special Inspector General John F. Sopko to John Kerry, Chuck Hagel and Rajiv Shah actually states that a 21% coverage is probable. See John F. SOPKO, *Oversight Bubble Inquiry*, Sigar, the 10th October 2013, p. 1, www.sigar.mil/pdf/alerts/SIGAR_14-4-SP.pdf, consulted on the 28th of October 2013.

¹² Rajiv CHANDRASEKARAN, Scott HIGHAM, “After troops leave, U.S. to lose access to Afghan reconstruction projects worth billions”, *The Washington Post*, the 27th of October 2013, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/after-troops-leave-us-to-lose-access-to-afghan-reconstruction-projects-worth-billions/2013/10/26/5a9212a6-3d9c-11e3-b6a9-da62c264f40e_story.html, consulted on the 29nd of October 2013.

personnel¹³ and that the overall coverage has steadily dropped to 59% in 2011¹⁴ and to 45% in 2013.¹⁵

Consequently, it is obvious that “the inability of U.S. government personnel to inspect development projects is prompting worry among lawmakers and government inspectors that millions more dollars could be squandered in what has become the costliest reconstruction of a single country in American history.”¹⁶ This is of course partly why the American Government is trying to negotiate a continuous presence of American military personnel within the country after the ISAF retreat.

This however would further put a medium to long term strain on the Americans. A senior official said that “the Pentagon would seek to place more responsibility on the Afghan government to track the use of U.S. funds.”¹⁷ But given the fact that corruption is endemic within the country, such hopes of transferring accountability seem to be a bit too optimistic.

The scenario of not being able to properly track aid funds is already unfolding. “Among those most affected by the travel restrictions will be Sopko and his auditors, who may not be able to conduct field inspections that can be used to sanction contractors or pursue criminal prosecutions. In a letter he sent this month to Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel and Secretary of State John F. Kerry, Sopko noted that earlier this year, his inspectors were unable to visit infrastructure projects in northern Afghanistan valued at \$72 million *because they are located in areas that could not be reached by U.S. civilian employees.*”¹⁸ Special Inspector General John F. Sopko also noted the fact that “it is clear that everyone working in Afghanistan, including SIGAR, will struggle to continue providing the direct U.S. civilian oversight that is needed in Afghanistan. U.S. military officials have told us that they will provide civilian access only to areas within a one-hour round trip of an advanced medical facility. Although exceptions can be made to this general policy, we have been told that requests to visit a reconstruction site outside of these *oversight bubbles* will probably be denied. Similarly, State Department officials have warned us that their ability to reach reconstruction sites will be extremely limited due to constraints on providing emergency medical support without assistance from the Department of Defense (DOD). They have also warned us about the challenges of providing adequate protection to civilians travelling in insecure areas.”¹⁹

General Jack Keane “came with another request: that the US continue to fund the 352,000 Afghan security forces through 2020, and not reduce the funding as many in Congress have advocated. *We’re actually arguing over what – \$2 billion or \$3 billion a year for five years?* Keane said. *That makes no sense to me whatsoever.* On this point, lawmakers chided

¹³ John F. SOPKO, *Oversight Bubble Inquiry*, Sigar, the 10th October 2013, p.5, www.sigar.mil/pdf/alerts/SIGAR_14-4-SP.pdf, consulted on the 28th of October 2013.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁶ Rajiv CHANDRASEKARAN, Scott HIGHAM, “After troops leave, U.S. to lose access to Afghan reconstruction projects worth billions”, *The Washington Post*, the 27th of October 2013, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/after-troops-leave-us-to-lose-access-to-afghan-reconstruction-projects-worth-billions/2013/10/26/5a9212a6-3d9c-11e3-b6a9-da62c264f40e_story.html, consulted on the 29th of October 2013.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ John F. SOPKO, *Oversight Bubble Inquiry*, Sigar, the 10th October 2013, p.5, www.sigar.mil/pdf/alerts/SIGAR_14-4-SP.pdf, consulted on the 28th of October 2013.

Keane about the “offhand way” he was describing the costs of the war. *Here in Washington these days we have debates in every one of our committees about where we spend money and how we spend money and what our priorities are, and I don’t think it’s irresponsible for us to struggle through ... whether \$2 billion or \$3 billion a year more in Afghanistan is something that we should be spending*, said Rep. Ted Deutch of Florida, the top Democrat on the House Foreign Affairs Middle East subcommittee.”²⁰

In an effort to counteract such prospects, “after months of tense negotiations over the size and role of a post war presence in Afghanistan, senior North Atlantic Treaty Organization officials say they are planning a more minimalist mission, with a force consisting of fewer combat trainers and more military managers to ensure that billions of dollars in security aid are not squandered or pilfered.”²¹ In addition, “NATO officials say they are acutely aware that Afghanistan has been the scene of spectacular corruption, including bank fraud, drug trafficking and bribery for services, all of which undermines the credibility of the Afghan government and its Western benefactors.”²²

This, of course, demonstrates the fact that Afghanistan is far from being ready to be freed of both international help and supervision and that endemic corruption and lack of proper training of Afghan troops will seriously put at risk eventual civilians trying to monitor the situation on the ground after the end of the ISAF mission. There seems to be a significant spirit of resignation as General Barno²³ observes while stating that, “the most important thing we can do is keep writing checks so the Afghan National Security Forces can remain funded — fuel, food, weapons, salaries. If that continues, they will be at least able to maintain a stalemate with the Taliban, and that is enough to keep the state up and running.”²⁴ However, such a perspective is far from ideal given the security environment to be observed in the country as well as the low accountability of the political elites.

1.2. Negative impact of corruption on foreign aid

Numerous pieces of publicly disclosed information give testimony to the large corruption problem that Afghanistan continuously has to deal with. For example on the November 6, 2013, “a spokesman for Afghanistan's Ministry of Finance said two men were arrested after \$5.7 million was stolen from the ministry's bank accounts. Two Finance Ministry employees were arrested and were being investigated by the attorney general's office for the alleged theft, ministry spokesman Abdul Qadir Jilani said. Officials believe the men were behind the theft, Khaama Press reported Wednesday. About \$1 million of the money was stolen with 38 forged checks by a ministry employee, the news service said.”²⁵ One of the checks was actually cashed

²⁰ Anna MURLINE, “With US set to exit Afghanistan, is legalizing the Taliban the way to end the war?”, *The Christian Science Monitor*, the 5th of November 2013, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Security-Watch/2013/1105/With-US-set-to-exit-Afghanistan-is-legalizing-the-Taliban-the-way-to-end-the-war>, consulted on the 7th of November 2013.

²¹ Thom SHANKER, “NATO Reduces Scope of Its Afghanistan Plans”, *The New York Times*, the 27th of October 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/28/world/asia/less-extensive-mission-planned-in-afghanistan.html?_r=1&, consulted on the 28th of October 2013.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Senior fellow at the Centre for a New American Security

²⁴ Thom SHANKER, “NATO Reduces Scope of Its Afghanistan Plans”, *The New York Times*, the 27th of October 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/28/world/asia/less-extensive-mission-planned-in-afghanistan.html?_r=1&, consulted on the 28th of October 2013.

²⁵ “\$5.7 million stolen from Afghanistan Ministry of Finance”, *UPI*, the 6th of November 2013, http://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2013/11/06/57M-stolen-from-Afghanistan-ministry-of-finance/UPI-92321383743102/, consulted on the 7th of November 2013.

"from a Governor's office in northern Afghanistan."²⁶ This is obviously to show that the Government institutions are plagued by individuals seeking their own benefit while putting national security at risk. These high levels of corruption obviously influence the aid effort that has been made in Afghanistan.

Corruption seems at times to be directly aimed at subtracting American funds that are directed for fighting the Taliban. After being rerouted, the funds end up in militant hands. 150 million \$ thus seems to have been paid to Zurmat Material Testing Laboratory, a firm with potent Taliban ties.²⁷ The U.S. Commerce Department noted the relationship between Zurmat and insurgents in early 2012 by citing the company having supplied bomb-making materials to enemy forces, according to Army Times.²⁸ Although there were some efforts to stop the funding for the Zurmat group, "Zurmat still obtained a contract in November 2012 to do construction-related work at the Parwan Justice Center Complex, the site of a U.S.-run prison next to Bagram Airfield. According to Army Times, Sopko discovered the Zurmat contract during an unrelated 2013 investigation into shoddy work at the Afghan facility.²⁹ 43 other such contractors have been on Special Inspector General's for Afghanistan Reconstruction John Sopko's list of possible ties with Taliban insurgents, "But the Army has proved intransigent, citing concerns for the contractors' *due process rights*."³⁰

2. Problems in transferring security responsibilities to the Afghan forces

In a significant number of occasions, Afghan security personnel does not seem to be able to effectively act in the absence of ISAF support, a fact which became self obvious on the 5th of November 2013, when "Afghan and coalition security forces killed 14 Taliban militants, injured one and detained 53 others during military operations, the Interior Ministry said."³¹ In addition "The Afghan army, Afghan intelligence and coalition security forces led the operations conducted in eight provinces. Forces also seized weapons, ammunition and explosives, Khaama Press reported."³² This is of course a blow to Taliban capabilities but nevertheless, it still does not show that Afghans are able to perform such deeds on their own, the phrase "coalition forces" being often linked to the success of many operations.

The international efforts aimed at training and preparing the Afghan soldiers and law enforcement personnel for an eventual full transfer of power have already been extremely expensive for all ISAF partners involved in the reconstruction and peace-keeping process. Nevertheless, the results are not at all as expected. In this regard we might note the fact that "the

²⁶ Amir SHAH, "Afghan Finance Ministry: Employees steal \$1.5M", *Yahoo News*, the 6th of November 2013, <http://news.yahoo.com/afghan-finance-ministry-employees-steal-1-5m-162731901.html>; [vlt=A2KJ3CwcHpSAVKAoEDQtDMD](http://news.yahoo.com/afghan-finance-ministry-employees-steal-1-5m-162731901.html), consulted on the 7th of November 2013.

²⁷ Jeanne SHAHEEN, "US hired Afghan contractor with ties to terror groups, inspector general says", *Fox News*, the 17th of November 2013, <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2013/11/17/us-hired-afghan-contractor-with-ties-to-terror-groups-inspector-general-says/>, consulted on the 17th of November 2013.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Zurmat still obtained a contract in November 2012 to do construction-related work at the Parwan Justice Center Complex, the site of a U.S.-run prison next to Bagram Airfield. According to Army Times, Sopko discovered the Zurmat contract during an unrelated 2013 investigation into shoddy work at the Afghan facility.

³⁰ Jeanne SHAHEEN, "US hired Afghan contractor with ties to terror groups, inspector general says", *Fox News*, the 17th of November 2013, <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2013/11/17/us-hired-afghan-contractor-with-ties-to-terror-groups-inspector-general-says/>, consulted on the 17th of November 2013.

³¹ "Afghan forces kill 14 Taliban militants, detain 53 and seize weapons", *UPI*, the 5th of November 2013, http://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2013/11/05/Afghan-forces-kill-14-Taliban-militants-detain-53-and-seize-weapons/UPI-44701383659569/, consulted on the 6th of November 2013.

³² *Ibid.*

Taliban failed to capture any ground from Afghan security forces fighting for the first time without foreign firepower this fighting season, U.S. officials say, but the insurgents killed scores of soldiers, police and civilians in their campaign to weaken the government."³³

The level of efficiency manifested by the Afghan military was quite low as "holding territory came at a high price. Coalition officials say Afghan forces were at one point losing 100 men a week, mostly from roadside bombs. The Afghans' weakness, say military officials, is logistics — they have trouble with the upkeep of vehicles and other crucial equipment supplied by the West".³⁴ At the beginning of November 2013 there were "about 87,000 coalition troops, 50,000 of them American, and that number is expected to halve by early next year. Last year there were nearly 150,000 coalition troops."³⁵ The insurgency is obviously far from being over, despite a continuous predictable drop in American and ISAF personnel as "insurgents mounted 6,604 attacks in 30 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces during that period, including 50 suicide bombings, 1,704 shootings and shellings, 1,186 bombings and 920 ambushes"³⁶ in a single fighting season. This means that their appetite for fighting has not at all been diminished. On the 1st of November 2013, 14 Taliban have been killed in the Helmand province. They have managed to at least injure 4 Afghan soldiers, although the Taliban themselves have stated that the soldiers reported to be wounded were actually dead.³⁷ It is difficult to award some degree of trust to any of these two sources, since the Taliban want to claim as many lives as possible in an effort of showing that they are efficient in conducting their guerrilla warfare. Afghan troops may be equally reluctant to declare more casualties due to rising desertion among the troops and the reluctance demonstrated by civilians to enroll.

Afghan counter-terrorist troops have been claiming a number of overall victories against the Taliban's capability of perpetrating attacks within the country. On the 17th of January 2014, "Afghan intelligence operatives discovered and seized 4 AK-47 rifles, 2 pistols, homemade rocket launcher, 8 improvised explosive device (IED), 60 kg of explosives, 2 communication device sets, 2 motorcycles and ammunition from Greshk, Nehr-e-Saraj and Marjah districts of Helmand province."³⁸ On the same occasion, in unrelated operations, "The Afghan intelligence – National Directorate of Security (NDS) announced Friday that a vehicle laden with explosives was discovered and seized in southern Helmand province of Afghanistan. NDS following a statement said Afghan intelligence operatives also seized a motorcycle laden with explosives from the same province. The statement further added that the explosives were seized during operations in Greshk district and Lashkargah city of Helmand province."³⁹ Nevertheless, few occasions in which the NDS related personnel seize explosives and armament are also associated with arrests. Thus, on several accounts, the terrorists responsible for acquisitions of IED related materials are free to start over, using the same networks they have become accustomed to.

³³ Patrick QUINN, "Afghans Said To Hold Taliban Back While Fighting Alone", *The Huffington Post*, the 3rd of November 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/11/03/afghans-fight-taliban_n_4208389.html, consulted on the 5th of November 2013.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ "Gun battles cause 14 Taliban casualties in Afghanistan", *UPI*, the 10th of November 2013, http://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2013/11/10/Gun-battles-cause-14-Taliban-casualties-in-Afghanistan/UPI-45581384098150/, consulted on the 11th of November 2013.

³⁸ A. GHANIZADA, "Afghan intelligence seize vehicle laden with explosives in Helmand", *Khaama Press*, the 17th of January 2014, <http://www.khaama.com/afghan-intelligence-seize-vehicle-laden-with-explosives-in-helmand-2705>, consulted on the 18th of January 2014.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

Given the fact that "NATO's primary objective in Afghanistan is to enable the Afghan authorities to provide effective security across the country and ensure that the country can never again be a safe haven for terrorists"⁴⁰ it is quite obvious that such a level of stability and responsibility is far from being reached. Overall "The Afghan National Security Force (ANSF) has made some gains in recent years but their capability in absence of foreign funding and support is not clear, there has also been an increasing number of deaths, causing an impact on the morale of ANSF. Meanwhile, the Taliban on the other hand are patient and organized. They can make slow gains, gaining more support with every victory and moving towards a dominant position in Afghanistan."⁴¹

2.1. Taliban forces ready to regain control

The Taliban themselves are fully aware of their prospects in Afghanistan in the context of Afghan security corpus inefficiency and ISAF withdrawal. "The Taliban militants group in Afghanistan eyes to return to power following the withdrawal of the NATO-led coalition security forces from the country. Taliban group spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid has told BBC that the group is *confident of victory* over the NATO-led forces in Afghanistan. Mujahid further added that Taliban is in control of large areas of the country and the operations of the NATO forces are limited within the vicinity of their bases."⁴² Furthermore, "Mujahid said Afghanistan had always defeated its occupiers looking back into the history of Afghanistan. *We're sure they'll be defeated*, Mujahid told BBC."⁴³ This optimistic perspective, although subject to usual terrorist propaganda, may very well be quite close to the truth giving the reluctance manifested by the Afghan government to sign a cooperation treaty with the United States on a eventual continuous troop presence after December 2014 deadline.

Overall "the competence of Afghanistan's 350,000-member security force remains in doubt, even after a \$40 billion investment in American weaponry and training. Although Afghan forces appear to have mostly held their own against the insurgency in the recent fighting season, they made no significant gains and suffered what some officials said were heavy casualties."⁴⁴ Sources note that "such heavy casualties that some officials called the rate unsustainable."⁴⁵ This is to say that "the Afghan government said 2,970 police officers and soldiers had been killed in 2012."⁴⁶ The problem of keeping American troops within Afghanistan, and also the problem of ongoing training expenditures for the Afghan forces are complicated issues as some reasonably argue that "Congress is unlikely to keep paying for the Afghan Army and police, at a cost that could range from \$4 billion to \$6 billion, unless Americans are deployed there."⁴⁷ But even so, a serious shadow is cast over the possibility of Afghanistan becoming a truly self-governed,

⁴⁰ "NATO and Afghanistan", *N.A.T.O. Official Site*, the 18th of June 2013, http://www.nato.int/cps/ar/natolive/topics_8189.htm?, consulted on the 18th of January 2014.

⁴¹ Salman WATTOO, "Russia needs the US in Afghanistan", *Online Asia Times*, the 15th of January 2014, <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/World/WOR-01-150114.html>, consulted on the 18th of January 2014.

⁴² A. GHANIZADA, "Taliban confident of victory over NATO forces in Afghanistan", *Khaama Press*, the 17th of January 2014, <http://www.khaama.com/taliban-confident-of-victory-over-nato-forces-in-afghanistan-2704>, consulted on the 18th of January 2014.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ "An Exit Strategy From Afghanistan", *The New York Times*, the 20th of October 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/21/opinion/an-exit-strategy-from-afghanistan.html?src=recg>, consulted on the 25th of October 2013.

⁴⁵ Rod NORDLAND, Thom SHANKER, Matthew ROSENBERG, "Afghans Fend Off Taliban Threat in Pivotal Year", *The New York Times*, the 16th of October 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/16/world/asia/afghans-fend-off-taliban-threat-in-pivotal-year.html?src=recg>, consulted on the 25th of October 2013.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

reliable, safe international actor, as during the summer of 2013 “in some areas of the south and east, most notably in the Sangin district of Helmand Province, the Taliban were able to restrict the movement of Afghan forces and inflict heavy casualties.”⁴⁸

3. The poppy issue

Probably one of the most worrying developments is that of the poppy issue. It has been reported that “despite a \$7 billion eradication effort, poppy farming remains a major industry in Afghanistan as U.S. troops exit the country.”⁴⁹ Currently, “production-wise, Afghanistan retained its position as the lead producer and cultivator of opium globally (74 per cent of global illicit opium production in 2012). While the global area under poppy cultivation rose by 15 per cent in 2012, driven largely by increases in Afghanistan and Myanmar, global opium production fell by almost 30 per cent, to less than 5,000 tons in 2012, mainly as a result of poor yields in Afghanistan.”⁵⁰

However, in 2013 the poppy output in Afghanistan rose to more than 5,500 tons.⁵¹ Specialists of the Poppy issue in Afghanistan even observe the fact that “at this moment there is more opium being produced in Afghanistan than is required for the outside market.”⁵² This is to say that in the eventuality of an even better harvest, Afghan opium production will be uninhibited by Western derived efforts in aid. Such a strong presence of Afghan narcotics on the market “has never been witnessed before in the history of Afghanistan”⁵³ according to Jean-Luc Lemahieu of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime. “For the first time over 200,000 hectares of Afghan fields were growing poppies, according to the UN’s Afghanistan Opium Survey for 2013, covering an area equivalent to the island nation of Mauritius.”⁵⁴

This brings to the frontline of the debate the overall aid effectiveness within Afghanistan as well as the proper management and placement of aid funds. “An elder in Helmand province, Hajji Sha Wali, said poppy farmers in the region were once receptive to the idea of giving up their habit of cultivating poppy and thus help the country fight its endemic corruption.”⁵⁵ However farmers state that “*they (aid workers) told us they would give us alternatives, build bridges for us, but they didn't keep their promises.* While many Afghans are opposed to the drug

⁴⁸ *Ibid*. Information also backed up by observations made in Charlie D’AGATA, “As U.S. leaves Afghanistan, engineers safeguard roads”, *CBS News*, the 29th of October 2013, http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-18563_162-57609913/as-u.s-leaves-afghanistan-engineers-safeguard-roads/, consulted on the 29th of October 2013.

⁴⁹ “Afghan poppy trade resurgent as U.S. troops withdraw from Afghanistan”, *UPI*, the 4th of November 2013, http://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2013/11/04/Afghan-poppy-trade-resurgent-as-US-troops-withdraw-from-Afghanistan/UPI-62621383599757/, consulted on the 8th of November 2013.

⁵⁰ United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime, “World Drug Report 2013”, New York, 2013, p. X.

⁵¹ John ROBLES, “US/NATO protecting opium in Afghanistan”, *The voice of Russia*, the 26th of December 2013, http://voiceofrussia.com/2013_12_26/US-NATO-protecting-opium-in-Afghanistan-6358/, consulted on the 30th of December 2013.

⁵² Emma GRAHAM-HARRISON, “Drug trade could splinter Afghanistan into fragmented criminal state – UN”, *The Guardian*, the 6th of January 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jan/05/drug-trade-afghanistan-fragmented-criminal-state>, consulted on 10th of January 2014.

⁵³ Rod NORLAND, “Afghan Opium Cultivation and Production Seen Rising”, *The New York Times*, the 13th of November 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/13/world/asia/afghan-opium-cultivation-and-production-seen-rising.html?_r=1&, consulted on the 18th of November 2013.

⁵⁴ Emma GRAHAM-HARRISON, “Afghanistan’s poppy farmers plant record opium crop, UN report says”, *The Guardian*, the 13th of November 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/nov/13/afghanistan-record-opium-crop-poppies-un>, consulted on, the 15th of November 2013.

⁵⁵ “Afghan poppy trade resurgent as U.S. troops withdraw from Afghanistan”, *UPI*, the 4th of November 2013, http://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2013/11/04/Afghan-poppy-trade-resurgent-as-US-troops-withdraw-from-Afghanistan/UPI-62621383599757/, consulted on the 8th of November 2013.

trade, *people are very impoverished, and costs are rising every day. Meanwhile, the armed opposition forces are getting people to plant poppy so they can make money from it.*"⁵⁶

It has been noted that "although opium prices of around \$130 per kilo are barely half their 2011 peak, they are still well above market rates after the last production glut of 2007, and may have further to fall. Many who grow the crop are aware that mullahs denounce production of the drug and the government bans it. But they say officials also grow the drug and religious leaders are always eager to claim a share of harvest income."⁵⁷ In some areas the Imams take a 10% tax out of the profits made by poppy farmers.⁵⁸ All in all, "Opium farming in Afghanistan, the world's main producer of the drug, hit a record high last year, with farmers harvesting a crop worth nearly \$1bn (£610m) to them, and far more to the traffickers who take about four-fifths of the profit"⁵⁹ a lucrative activity to say the least. All this is obviously to show the fact that the prospect of the ISAF withdrawal, as well as lingering unsuccessful negotiations over a continuous American presence in the area after 2014, have boosted the prospect of militant groups to reuse poppy, and poppy derived activities, as a source of revenue. Specialists speculate that "Afghanistan's booming narcotics trade risks splintering the country into a *fragmented, criminal state*" if the government and its Western allies do not step up efforts to tackle opium production and the illicit economy it supports, a senior UN official warned."⁶⁰ In addition, "In July, a Pentagon progress report on Afghanistan said this year's poppy harvest was expected to be *considerably* bigger than that of 2012. It added that demand remained high and *insurgent penetration of that market is extensive and expanding.*"⁶¹

The deputy Counter-Narcotic Minister of Afghanistan actually stated that if the trend continues, it will erase "*the achievements of the past 10 years.*"⁶² This is because the United States have tried desperately to stop the poppy production ability of local farmers by investing no less than 6 billion \$ in this regard. Nevertheless, the new trends suggest that the 6 billion \$ have had a short term effect and that in the long run the complicated economic and corruption situation of Afghanistan, will boost poppy production thus hindering efforts made to stabilize the country. Farmers are often locked into poppy related activities because they have no other source of revenue as the country itself is unattractive to foreign investors.

Additionally the effort of eliminating poppy, "has struggled, and in many areas eradication efforts have been unofficially abandoned as too costly in terms of lost public support for government"⁶³ Actually some sources have stated that precisely because aid made considerable amounts of money available, corrupt elements of society have managed to reuse the

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Emma GRAHAM-HARRISON, "Afghanistan's poppy farmers plant record opium crop, UN report says", *The Guardian*, the 13th of November 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/nov/13/afghanistan-record-opium-crop-poppies-un>, consulted on the 15th of November 2013.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Emma GRAHAM-HARRISON, "Drug trade could splinter Afghanistan into fragmented criminal state – UN", *The Guardian*, the 6th of January 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jan/05/drug-trade-afghanistan-fragmented-criminal-state>, consulted on 10th of January 2014.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ "Afghan poppy trade resurgent as U.S. troops withdraw from Afghanistan", *UPI*, the 4th of November 2013, http://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2013/11/04/Afghan-poppy-trade-resurgent-as-US-troops-withdraw-from-Afghanistan/UPI-62621383599757/, consulted on the 8th of November 2013.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Azam AHMED, "Addiction ravaging Afghanistan called 'a tsunami'", *The Boston Globe*, the 3rd of November 2013, <http://www.bostonglobe.com/news/world/2013/11/02/the-other-afghanistan-crisis-growing-legion-addicts/yc4GcNgoM6zndbFyKR2BI/story.html>, consulted on the 8th of November 2013.

funds in their own interest.⁶⁴ “The drugs trade ties together the Taliban and many of the corrupt officials inside Afghanistan, whose bank accounts were swollen by the tide of western dollars poured into efforts to pacify and rebuild the country. As foreign cash dries up on the back of the troop withdrawal, businessmen and the officials they paid off are looking for other sources of cash. The government recently arrested the police chief of western Nimroz province on suspicion of ties to the drug trade; a long and porous border with Iran makes the sparsely populated desert province one of the main smuggling routes out of the country.”⁶⁵ The United States also believes that “there are already signs that elements within the Afghan security forces are reaching arrangements with rural communities to allow opium poppy cultivation, or even encouraging production.”⁶⁶

The issue of poppy farming itself has also made futile efforts made by FAO to promote alternative crops. “FAO said it's been working in the northern provinces of Afghanistan to supply farmers with fertilizer and seeds to use as an alternative to opium since 2008. *Since the improved seed project was launched in the northeastern provinces, the harvest has increased to about seven metric tons per hectare of land from about just one metric ton with regular seeds*, FAO regional director Muhammad Jawad Azami said in a statement.⁶⁷ But as a fact seeds are by far not as lucrative and as profit oriented as illegal opiates.

4. Afghan top level reluctance in accepting U.S. military presence after the end of 2014

The U.S. is, of course, fully aware of the complicated security situation in Afghanistan. Thus, Washington has been trying to establish the conditions under which a continued troop presence should develop in Afghanistan after December 2014.

The ongoing violent processes in Afghanistan propose perhaps a different exit strategy that has begun to be tackled by both Kabul and Washington. “Hamid Karzai, the Afghan president, and Secretary of State John Kerry announced on October 12 that they had agreed on key elements of a security deal that could keep some American troops in Afghanistan once the current NATO combat mission ends after 2014.”⁶⁸ In effect “there are around 50,000 American troops in Afghanistan, but that level will drop to 34,000 by February under orders from President Obama. As part of a commitment to helping the Afghans secure the elections, the number of American troops would then hold steady at the 34,000 level and not drop further until next July, according to the senior official.”⁶⁹

The draft security agreement with the United States has been finalized on the 16th of November 2013 with it waiting approval by the “Loya Jirga, the country's national grand

⁶⁴ “Afghanistan opium harvest at record high - UNODC”, *BBC News Asia*, the 13th of November 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-24919056>, consulted on the 14th of November 2013.

⁶⁵ Emma GRAHAM-HARRISON, “Drug trade could splinter Afghanistan into fragmented criminal state – UN”, *The Guardian*, the 6th of January 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jan/05/drug-trade-afghanistan-fragmented-criminal-state>, consulted on 10th of January 2014.

⁶⁶ “Risk of narco-criminal state in Afghanistan: US report”, *Pakistan News*, the 17th of January, <http://paktribune.com/news/Risk-of-narco-criminal-state-in-Afghanistan-US-report-266134.html>, consulted on 20th of January 2014.

⁶⁷ “FAO courting Afghans away from opium”, *UPI*, the 18th of November 2013, http://www.upi.com/Top_News/Special/2013/11/18/FAO-courting-Afghans-away-from-opium/UPI-49211384792388/, consulted on the 18th of November 2013.

⁶⁸ “An Exit Strategy From Afghanistan”, *The New York Times*, the 20th of October 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/21/opinion/an-exit-strategy-from-afghanistan.html?src=recg>, consulted on the 25th of October 2013.

⁶⁹ Thom SHANKER, “U.S. Officer Says Taliban Will Fight This Winter”, *The New York Times*, the 22th of October 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/23/world/asia/taliban-to-fight-during-winter-lull-us-military-officer-says.html?ref=world&r=0>, consulted on the 25th of October 2013.

council.”⁷⁰ In this regard, “the Loya Jirga meeting of about 3,000 tribal elders [had been] set for Thursday⁷¹ in Kabul and its outcome [would had] determine[d] what kind of security deal Afghanistan and the United States would have once the coalition forces leave the country by the end of 2014, how many U.S. troops would stay back and what would be their role.”⁷² Nevertheless fears in regard to what the Council itself would think of US troop immunity were high. For Afghanistan, even though its politicians have not seen it this way, the prospects of American troops leaving the country would be devastating, as Afghan military forces are nowhere near obtaining proper functional power. The Taliban, on the other hand, have ever stronger and ever numerous attacks in Afghanistan as well as Pakistan. Even so, the prospect of just 10,000 American troops to stay on in Afghanistan is not at all encouraging⁷³ as many seem to think that this will hardly be enough for the United States even to secure inspector’s presence in their aid related locations. The issue also seems to be complicated by the fact that the Afghan Government has refused to allow American servicemen to enter Afghan private property as well as Mosques.

“Earlier, a spokesman for the Afghan president Hamid Karzai told the BBC’s David Loyn in Kabul that there was no flexibility possible in the stand taken by his government over US forces entering Afghan homes and mosques. He said President Karzai felt very strongly about this, and would not accept any agreement that would allow US forces to enter Afghan homes for what he called *the purpose of aggression*.”⁷⁴ Furthermore, “The New York Times, quoting an Afghan official, says the commander of the US forces in Afghanistan, General Joseph Dunford, offered to modify the wording of the agreement to say that US troops would only enter homes *on extraordinary occasions*. But the offer was reportedly rejected by Mr Karzai.”⁷⁵ Afghans seem to have asked in return that the United States compose a letter in which they would “recognize past mistakes.”⁷⁶

Washington however has some leverage on the issue considering the fact that the country could not survive without billions worth of aid being poured from America. “If the bilateral security agreement is not reached, US troops would withdraw next year, followed by all other international forces, with grave consequences for other aid donations, jeopardizing Afghanistan’s fragile recovery.”⁷⁷ As Gopal Ratman of Bloomberg observes in an article “Afghanistan will need a U.S. and NATO military presence after 2014 to guarantee the country’s secure enough to keep receiving development aid promised by international donors, the top American military officer said. *After 2014 Afghanistan can live without a ubiquitous presence of U.S. military forces in their country*, Army General Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff,

⁷⁰ “Karzai: U.S.-Afghan security pact ready for national council action”, *UPI*, the 16th of November 2013, http://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2013/11/16/Karzai-US-Afghan-security-pact-ready-for-national-council-action/UPI-18951384624316/, consulted on the 20th of November 2013.

⁷¹ The 19th of November 2013.

⁷² “U.S. hopes for positive outcome of security deal with Afghanistan”, *UPI*, the 19th of November 2013, http://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2013/11/19/US-hopes-for-positive-outcome-of-security-deal-with-Afghanistan/UPI-40801384606032/, consulted on the 20th of November 2013.

⁷³ “Taliban suicide bomber strikes near Kabul university”, *UPI*, the 16th of November 2013, http://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2013/11/16/Taliban-suicide-bomber-strikes-near-Kabul-university/UPI-21001384606032/, consulted on the 19th of November 2013.

⁷⁴ “Afghanistan-US security deal at impasse ahead of Jirga”, *BBC News Asia*, the 18th of November 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-24993599>, consulted on the 19th of November 2013.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ “Afghan-US security deal hits fresh impasse”, *BBC News Asia*, the 20th of November 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-25009163>, consulted on the 20th of November 2013.

⁷⁷ Afghanistan-US security deal at impasse ahead of jirga”, *BBC News Asia*, the 18th of November 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-24993599>, consulted on the 19th of November 2013.

said tonight at an event in Washington organized by the Wall Street Journal. *They can't live without any.*⁷⁸ Moreover the general stated that “the number of U.S. and alliance troops that remain in Afghanistan after next year should be determined by whatever it takes to *guarantee that the money we've all committed to Afghanistan will continue to flow*, he said. *If security deteriorates to a point*” where the \$6 billion in annual aid promised to Afghanistan *dries up, then they can't survive.*⁷⁹

Of course the issue of home searches ranks secondly to that of immunity for the American troops. “Washington says there will be no deal without immunity while Kabul considers it a violation of its sovereignty.”⁸⁰ In a press article on the 19th of November Jen Psaki, US State Department spokesman stated that “*We, of course, respect the Afghan process and continue to work for a positive outcome*, she said. *We believe that would be to the benefit of both countries. So that's the message we're conveying on the ground, and we'll respect the process moving forward.*”⁸¹ It seems that “Afghan officials said on Tuesday that President Hamid Karzai would clear the way for a long-term security pact with the United States after receiving assurances that US President Barack Obama would issue a letter acknowledging US military mistakes in Afghanistan and vowing not to repeat them. Mr Karzai's spokesman, Aimal Faizi, said in return, Mr Karzai would accept wording allowing US-led raids on Afghan homes under '*extraordinary circumstances*' to save the lives of US soldiers. Afghan officials said that the breakthrough had come about during a phone call by US Secretary of State John Kerry to Mr Karzai on Tuesday. Mr Kerry initially offered to write the letter, and Mr Karzai said he would compromise if Mr Obama sent it instead - a stipulation to which Mr Kerry agreed, according to Mr Faizi.”⁸² It thus seems that “Mr Faizi said that Kabul had bowed to Washington's requirement that it retain legal jurisdiction over its soldiers, rendering them immune to Afghan prosecution for their actions in the country.”⁸³ The same has been reported by the Telegraph which stated that “President Barack Obama will acknowledge "mistakes" made during America's 12-year occupation of Afghanistan in an effort to clinch a critical security agreement, the Afghan government said today.”⁸⁴ President's Karzai requests are far from matching in difficulty those made by international humanitarian groups such as Amnesty international, which stated that “Afghan leaders meeting in Kabul this week should demand accountability for war crimes allegedly committed by US military forces in the country.”⁸⁵

⁷⁸ Gopal RATNAM, “Afghanistan Needs U.S. Troops Post-2014 for Aid: Dempsey”, *Bloomberg Politics*, the 19th of November 2013, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2013-11-19/afghanistan-needs-u-s-troops-post-2014-for-aid-dempsey.html>, consulted on the 19th of November 2013.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ “Afghanistan rejects provision of US security pact”, *Press TV*, the 19th of November 2013, <http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/11/19/335392/afghanistan-rejects-provision-of-us-pact/>, consulted on the 19th of November 2013.

⁸¹ “U.S. hopes for positive outcome of security deal with Afghanistan”, *UPI*, the 19th of November 2013, http://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2013/11/19/US-hopes-for-positive-outcome-of-security-deal-with-Afghanistan/UPI-40801384861851/, consulted on the 20th of November 2013.

⁸² “Afghans say deal agreed over US security pact”, the 21st of November 2013, *Brisbane Times*, <http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/world/afghans-say-deal-agreed-over-us-security-pact-20131120-2xvq0.html>, consulted on the 21st of November 2013.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Raf SANCHEZ, “US and Afghanistan closing in on security deal”, *The Telegraph*, the 19th of November 2013, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/afghanistan/10461155/US-and-Afghanistan-closing-in-on-security-deal.html>, consulted on the 21st of November 2013.

⁸⁵ “Afghanistan: War crimes investigations must be part of security deal with USA”, *Amnesty International UK*, the 20th of November 2013, <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/afghanistan-war-crimes-investigations-must-be-part-security-deal-usa>, consulted on the 21st of November 2013.

After some negotiations on the matter of U.S. troops staying on in Afghanistan past the December 2014 landmark, “US Defence Secretary Chuck Hagel has said he has received assurances during a visit to Kabul that a long-delayed deal allowing US troops to stay in Afghanistan after 2014 will be signed *in a timely manner*.”⁸⁶ All in all it is obvious that “The Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) has been at the centre of a public dispute between the allies, with the US increasingly frustrated by President Hamid Karzai's negotiating tactics over the deal.”⁸⁷ Probably influenced by the electoral prospects that the country would be going to and the fact that he might be a victim of the new power structure to be established after the elections, “the Afghan president, [...] recently refused to sign the pact promptly despite a *Loya Jirga* national assembly that he convened voting for him to do so.”⁸⁸

After constantly refusing to ratify any agreements in regard to continued US servicemen presence after 2014, Karzai also moved for making full use of an unfortunate event in order to gain leverage on the issue. On the 10th of January 2014, “a spokesman for the governor of the southern province of Helmand told Reuters that U.S. Marines based in the violence-plagued province mistakenly shot a boy on Wednesday because visibility was poor. *As the weather was dusty, the Marine forces based there thought he was an enemy and opened fire. As result of mistaken fire, he was killed*”⁸⁹ the spokesman, Omar Zwak, said by telephone. A spokesman for the NATO-led force said the matter would be investigated and all possible measures were taken to avoid civilian casualties.”⁹⁰ Karzai made full use of the tragic circumstances in order to reiterate the fact that “*We have called ... for an absolute end to ISAF/NATO military operations on homes and villages in order to avoid such killings were innocent children or civilians are the victims*, the president's spokesman, Aimal Faizi, said when commenting on the death of the boy.”⁹¹ But obviously “The United States has said its troops cannot remain without a deal. Their complete departure of U.S. troops would leave Afghan security forces on their own to battle the Taliban.”⁹² Additionally, “A spokesman for the NATO-led force said the matter would be investigated and all possible measures were taken to avoid civilian casualties”⁹³ but given the circumstances it is highly obvious and probable that a security agreement will not be ratified soon, a situation which puts pressure on Afghan perspectives for the future, both in terms of security and economic development (since aid for the country would probably drop in the event in which the treaty will not be ratified). We see here Karzai's determination to delineate him-self from his most important ally in the effort against terrorism, a political shift that is without a doubt worrying in Washington. As time went on Karzai has manifested an increasing effort to underline U.S. servicemen alleged mistakes on the battle front. He additionally “accused the United States of killing seven children and a woman in an airstrike in central Afghanistan. *As a result of bombardment by American forces last night*⁹⁴ ... in Siahgird district of Parwan province,

⁸⁶ AFP, “Deal for US troops to stay in Afghanistan 'will be signed soon'”, The Telegraph, the 7th of December 2013, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/afghanistan/10502799/Deal-for-US-troops-to-stay-in-Afghanistan-will-be-signed-soon.html>, consulted on the 7th of December 2013.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ “U.S. forces accidentally kill Afghan boy, strain ties further”, *Yahoo News*, the 10th of January 2014, <http://uk.news.yahoo.com/afghanistan-free-most-inmates-seen-u-threat-002143691.html#Be2PDcw>, consulted on the 10th of December 2014.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² “US forces accidentally kill four-year-old Afghan boy”, *Independent*, the 10th of January 2014, <http://www.independent.ie/world-news/us-forces-accidentally-kill-four-year-old-afghan-boy-29904385.html>, consulted on the 10th of December 2014.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ The 15th of January 2014.

one woman and seven children were martyred and one civilian injured, a statement from Karzai's office said.”⁹⁵

Upcoming elections & associated problems, risks and challenges

The upcoming presidential elections to be held in Afghanistan are of particular concern as “the insurgent winter campaign is expected to include *attempts at high-profile attacks, attempts at targeted killings of political officials, election officials and candidates* rather than traditional battlefield engagements.”⁹⁶ The militant Taliban have made such declarations in the past and “while the Taliban’s assassination campaign did take a toll on police officials and mostly low-level district officials, an insurgent success came late in the season — on Tuesday, when the well-regarded governor of Logar Province was killed while preparing to speak in a mosque, though the Taliban denied responsibility.”⁹⁷ If this trend will prove to intensify, as envisaged, during the winter campaign, the situation would resemble a double edged sword. On one side we have the continuous presence of violence in Afghanistan and a severe reluctance manifested by militant groups towards accepting modern political structures and mechanisms grown by means of international assistance. These political aspects should not however be mistaken to be democratic ones as the Karzai regime is seen as being corrupt as well. For example “According to Reuters reports, voter cards, which are used to cast ballots, *have become a form of currency*, selling for about \$5 each. American troops, no matter how long they stay, cannot compensate for this kind of self-inflicted damage.”⁹⁸ On the other side however this would suggest that the terrorist efforts within Afghanistan are beginning to retreat within a more classical form of terrorism in which the primary concern is no longer a transnational one but rather a national one, somewhat contained within the borders of the country. Obviously this does not mean that the conflict will not irradiate across borders and that Afghanistan is no longer a source or regional and potentially global violence and terrorism.

Even so, it is clear that the local Afghan security apparatus is keen on trying to maintain some stability as elections are drawing nearer. In this regard “the Afghan intelligence – National Directorate of Security (NDS) announced Thursday that a huge cache of improvised explosive device (IED) was discovered and seized in north-eastern Takhar province of Afghanistan.”⁹⁹ At the time a statement underlined the fact that “the explosives cache included 96 anti-tank improvised explosive devices (IEDs), 149 anti-personnel IEDs, 33 anti-personnel mines, 6 boxes of pistol ammunition, heavy machine gun ammunition, RPG explosives, 3 hand grenades, 8 magazines of pistol ammunition, one motorcycle and 7 sets of mobile phones,”¹⁰⁰ a impressive capture that sources say was directly intended to be used during the election process. This is a worrying reminder as to the fact that besides a complicated future to be in stored by

⁹⁵ “TOWDE KHABARE: US Troops Break the Bilateral Agreements“, *Tolo News*, the 17th of January 2014, <http://www.tolonews.com/en/towde-khabare/13495-towde-khabare-us-troops-break-the-bilateral-agreements>, consulted on the 17th of December 2014.

⁹⁶ Thom SHANKER, “U.S. Officer Says Taliban Will Fight This Winter“, *The New York Times*, the 22nd of October 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/23/world/asia/taliban-to-fight-during-winter-lull-us-military-officer-says.html?ref=world&_r=0, consulted on the 25th of October 2013.

⁹⁷ Rod NORDLAND, Thom SHANKER, Matthew ROSENBERG, “Afghans Fend Off Taliban Threat in Pivotal Year“, *The New York Times*, the 16th of October 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/16/world/asia/afghans-fend-off-taliban-threat-in-pivotal-year.html?src=recg>, consulted on the 25th of October 2013.

⁹⁸ “An Exit Strategy From Afghanistan“, *The New York Times*, the 20th of October 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/21/opinion/an-exit-strategy-from-afghanistan.html?src=recg>, consulted on the 25th of October 2013

⁹⁹ A. GHANIZADA, “Afghan intelligence seize huge cache of explosives in Takhar“, *Khaama Press*, the 9th of January 2014, <http://www.khaama.com/afghan-intelligence-seize-huge-cache-of-explosives-in-takhar-3276>, consulted on the 18th of January 2014.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

unpredictable elections, the country may further be destabilized by violent acts aimed at casting a shadow and reasonable doubt over the electoral process. Furthermore, militant elements are seeking to identify and destroy as many moderate voices as possible, probably given the electoral circumstances, and make way for more radical perspectives. Thus, as the Afghan government is struggling with corruption and the law enforcement agencies find it difficult to summon themselves to properly tackle terrorism, the Afghans that support the government and are trying to fight the Taliban peacefully find themselves murdered. “More than 800 religious scholars who confronted the Taliban by calling their insurgency un-Islamic and unlawful have been killed. The most recent killing took place a week ago when prominent religious scholar Maulawi Ata Muhammad was shot dead in Kandahar. He was head of programming for local radio station, Voice of Islam. Some targets are very high profile. Among the first to be killed in this way was, Maulawi Abdullah Fayaz, head of the Kandahar religious scholars council, in May 2005.”¹⁰¹ What is probably most important is the fact that “their deaths have created a vacuum when it comes to religious knowledge and created a rift within the religious establishment, with profound implications for the future of healthy debate.”¹⁰² Also it is safe to say that such vacuum spaces may be easily occupied by strong militant voices that would further hinder the eradication of terrorism within the country. Since the killings are targeting mainly areas where insurgent activity is at its highest, “by silencing the moderate clerics, insurgents are posing serious challenges to the stability of both Afghanistan and Pakistan”¹⁰³ while possibly assuring themselves of the fact that they strike fear into the heart of moderate candidates and support the radical ones.

The picture to be seen here is not at all a common one if we reference it to an elective democratic process in general. Voting while being aware of the fact that some improvised explosive device might just go off as you enter or are about to leave the polling station is a reality which from the start undermines the reasons for which one has elections in the first place (that is to try to avoid violence within the nation state by offering the citizens proper instruments of peaceful change and existence). With the country being a borderline failed state, it thus seems that these elections are futile and that the many unknown variables in electoral preferences, combined with an overall destructive militant activity and the insertion of possible militant-linked candidates on the electoral market, make for worrying future prospects in Afghanistan. The fact alone that cash derived from the poppy cultivation and opium trade “is vital for all the officials and their supporters counting on the drugs for unorthodox campaign finance during presidential elections this year and parliamentary ones in 2015”¹⁰⁴ and the fact that “despite opium's dual role fuelling the insurgency and a large portion of much-resented government corruption, poppy eradication still does not feature on a list of national priorities drawn up by Kabul”¹⁰⁵ are enough in order to demonstrate that the electoral process in Afghanistan is immune from being analyzed with common instruments that one might use generally to assess such a situation. It is clear however that the process will probably not bring any form of stability to the country as a whole, more likely the opposite.

¹⁰¹ Dawood AZAMI, “The ‘dissenting’ clerics killed in Afghanistan”, *BBC News Asia*, the 19th of November 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-22885170>, consulted on the 19th of November 2013.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Emma GRAHAM-HARRISON, “Drug trade could splinter Afghanistan into fragmented criminal state – UN”, *The Guardian*, the 6th of January 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jan/05/drug-trade-afghanistan-fragmented-criminal-state>, consulted on the 10th of January 2014.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

III. Pakistan: some significant problems and trends

The following portion of our research, dealing with Pakistan, is aimed at understanding effects and security implications derived from drone usage, negotiation perspectives with the TTP, internal conflicts to be witnessed among the Taliban structures, as well as some elements regarding the preparedness of some of the Pakistani security forces. Again, one must bear in mind that this is the shortened version of our much more extensive research. Nevertheless, these key elements do suffice for our effort of underlining possible security hazards to be observed on a short, medium and long-term scale.

1. Problems associated to the use of drones

Unmanned Combat Aerial Vehicles (UCAVs), or simply drones, have been a key element of the strategic approach set out by Washington in the effort of surgically hitting militant and terrorist forces and of pacifying the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. In effect drones are “the technological Western response to Al-Qaeda terrorism and Taliban insurgency. In this respect they present a series of challenges to our conceptions of warfare. They blur the distinctions between the military and intelligence worlds, between warfare and law enforcement, between combat and assassination; between the battlefield and the hinterland, between the territories of allies and enemies, between domestic and foreign threats, and between counterterrorism and counter-insurgency.”¹⁰⁶

Historically, “the vast majority of US drone strikes in Pakistan have taken place in the North Waziristan tribal agency, which shares a porous and largely unregulated border with Afghanistan, a fact of geography that has had considerable impact on events in the area. Since late 2001, when thousands of Taliban and al-Qaida members fled to North Waziristan to escape US military operations in Afghanistan, the area has become a refuge for militants, as well as a training ground and base for attacks in Pakistan and Afghanistan.”¹⁰⁷ It is also well known that “the U.S. carried out its first drone strike in Pakistan in 2004 and has carried out nearly 350¹⁰⁸ more since then, the majority of which have been in North Waziristan. President Barack Obama significantly ramped up attacks when he took office in 2009, and the number peaked the following year with over 100 strikes. The frequency has steadily dropped since then, partly because of growing tension between Pakistan and the U.S. There have only been around two

¹⁰⁶ David Hastings DUNN, “Drones: disembodied aerial warfare and the unarticulated threat”, *International Affairs*, no. 89, 5/2013, The Royal Institute of International Affairs, John Wiley & Sons, Oxford, UK, pp. 1237-1246, <http://www.chathamhouse.org/publications/ia/archive/view/194091>, consulted on the 26th of November 2013.

¹⁰⁷ *Will I be next, Us drone strikes in Pakistan*, Amnesty International, Amnesty International Publications, London, 2013, p.12, www.amnestyusa.org/sites/default/files/asa330132013en.pdf, consulted on the 22nd of October 2013.

¹⁰⁸ Greg MILLER, Bob WOODWARD, “Secret memos reveal explicit nature of U.S. Pakistan agreement on Drones”, *The Washington Post*, the 24th of October 2013, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/top-pakistani-leaders-secretly-backed-cia-drone-campaign-secret-documents-show/2013/10/23/15e6b0d8-3beb-11e3-b6a9-da62c264f40e_story.html, consulted on the 29th of October 2013.

dozen strikes¹⁰⁹ so far this year”¹¹⁰ (it is important to note the fact that there has been a significant change in the strategy employed by Washington in regard to drone strikes. “After taking office in January 2009, President Barack Obama markedly expanded the use of drone aircraft for killings. During the Bush Administration, the USA indicated that it generally targeted only specific, known individuals on a *kill list*. Under the Obama Administration, there has been an increased use of *signature strikes* – attacks in which the victim’s identity is unknown but their behavior appears suspicious to US security authorities undertaking surveillance of the Tribal Areas”¹¹¹).

Drone violation of airspace integrity has been viewed in general as a major subject of debate among scholars. For example “drones have facilitated an increase in covert warfare and a blurring of what is meant by combat, intervention and indeed sovereignty.”¹¹² A resolution on the matter “also labeled as *unacceptable* the US use of pilotless planes to attack militants along the mountainous border with Afghanistan.”¹¹³ Such perspectives regarding the need to stop us drone strikes in Pakistan seem to have been born also out of the discontent of Pakistan’s citizens which have stated “now that the so-called head of the Taliban has been killed, the US drama and drone attacks in Pakistan should end.”¹¹⁴

Of course such perceptions are highly subjective as long as “several different organizations have tried to track the number of civilian casualties from nearly ten years of drone strikes in Pakistan, including the Long War Journal website, the New America Foundation think tank and the Bureau of Investigative Journalism. These groups indicated that the attacks have killed between 2,065 and 3,613 people, the report said. Between 153 and 926 were thought to be civilians.”¹¹⁵ This is to say that, in the worst case scenario, about 1.130 terrorists have been killed through the usage of drones within Pakistan. A satisfying number, some would say, given the fact that militant violent pressure seems to be mounting as NATO forces prepare themselves to leave Afghanistan by the end of 2014.¹¹⁶ The issue of hitting civilians as well as terrorists is however of great importance, no matter of how effective one may or may not see the Pakistan drone strategy. This is because such events strain the relations between the two countries and may very well fuel Pakistan’s resolve to view other international partners as being more feasible for its long term international purposes.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ This year referring to 2013, see “Amnesty Criticizes US Drone Program in Pakistan, *ABC News*, Islamabad, the 22nd of October 2013, <http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/amnesty-criticizes-us-drone-program-pakistan-20641745?page=2>, consulted on the 22nd of October 2013.

¹¹¹ See Greg MILLER, Bob WOODWARD, “Secret memos reveal explicit nature of U.S. Pakistan agreement on Drones”, *The Washington Post*, the 24th of October 2013, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/top-pakistani-leaders-secretly-backed-cia-drone-campaign-secret-documents-show/2013/10/23/15e6b0d8-3beb-11e3-b6a9-da62c264f40e_story.html, consulted on the 29th of October 2013, as well as *Will I be next, Us drone strikes in Pakistan*, Amnesty International, Amnesty International Publications, London, 2013, p.12, www.amnestyusa.org/sites/default/files/asa330132013en.pdf, consulted on the 22nd of October 2013.

¹¹² David Hastings DUNN, “Drones: disembodied aerial warfare and the unarticulated threat”, *International Affairs*, no. 89, 5/2013, The Royal Institute of International Affairs, John Wiley & Sons, Oxford, UK, pp. 1237-1246, <http://www.chathamhouse.org/publications/ia/archive/view/194091>, consulted on the 26th of November 2013.

¹¹³ “Pakistan condemns Bin Laden raid and US drone attacks”, *BBC News South Asia*, the 14th of May 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-13398281>, consulted on the 22nd of October 2013.

¹¹⁴ “Pakistani reactions to bin Laden death”, *Euronews*, the 2nd of May 2011, <http://www.euronews.com/2011/05/02/pakistani-reactions-to-bin-laden-death/>, consulted on the 22nd of October 2013.

¹¹⁵ “Amnesty Criticizes US Drone Program in Pakistan, *ABC News*, Islamabad, the 22nd of October 2013, <http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/amnesty-criticizes-us-drone-program-pakistan-20641745?page=2>, consulted on the 22nd of October 2013.

¹¹⁶ United Nations SC/11143, 7041st meeting, “Security Council Extends Authorization for International security assistance force in Afghanistan, adopting resolution 2120 (2013)”, *United Nations Department of Public Information, News and Media Division*, New York, the 10th of October 2013, <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2013/sc11143.doc.htm>, consulted on the 21st of October 2013.

Although the drone issue is one of the key elements that seems to be holding the United States and Pakistan at odds, Pakistan's military has stated that "Just 67 civilians were killed by US drone strikes since 2008."¹¹⁷ All in all, "the figure amounts to just 3% of the total number killed and is strikingly lower than tallies compiled by organizations that track drone attacks through media reports, which claim many hundreds of civilians have been killed."¹¹⁸ To add insult to injury, "the information, released by Pakistan's Ministry of Defence to a parliamentary inquiry, also said no civilians were killed in 2012 and 2013. The military said 2,160 Islamic militants were killed since 2008."¹¹⁹ This officially stands to prove that "basic information about the number of civilians and militants killed by drones is controversial and highly politicized in Pakistan."¹²⁰ It also seems that "independent investigators are unable to operate in the dangerous tribal borderlands of Waziristan where nearly all drone strikes take place, while locals are often prevented from observing drone damage by militants."¹²¹ This demonstrates that independent assessments of drone strikes killing civilians are not necessarily a trustworthy source.

The Pakistani Government has stated the fact that "Pakistan has the capability to shoot down US drones but such decisions need thorough deliberation and it is not prudent to take the action (downing drones) right now."¹²² This is to show the fact that although they perceive the drones to be a violation of national sovereignty, Pakistani officials are not at all eager to end the problem violently, either due to fear of retaliation or because some drone strikes may be viewed as a necessary must.

1.2. Severe problems along NATO ground lines of communication (GLOCs) in Pakistan

Pakistani protests over drone striking within the country became fully inflamed after Hakimullah Mehsud "the head of the Pakistani Taliban was killed by a U.S. drone strike on Friday"¹²³, security and Taliban sources said, in a blow to the fragmented movement fighting against the nuclear-armed South Asian nation."¹²⁴ This situation has been used by different political factions within Pakistan in order to underline the fact that America's policies are destabilizing an alleged peace negotiation process with the Taliban. After the drone strike itself, "some Pakistani politicians have demanded that transit routes through Pakistan, used to supply NATO-led forces in Afghanistan, be cut in response."¹²⁵ It is the case of a resolution constructed by Imran Kahn, leader of the Tehreek-e-Insaf party which threatened that a blockade of NATO supply lines will be put into practice if drone strikes would not be ended until the 20th of November 2013.¹²⁶ This ultimatum was issued after Khan had stated only a day before the drone strike at hand that "if drone attacks are carried out during peace talks with Taliban, NATO

¹¹⁷ John BOONE, "US drone strikes have killed 67 civilians since 2008, says Pakistan's military", *The Guardian*, the 31st of October 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/oct/31/us-drone-strikes-pakistan-military>, consulted on the 12th of November 2013.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ The 1st of November 2013.

¹²⁴ Mehreen ZAHRA-MALIK, Jibrán AHMED, "Pakistan Taliban chief killed in drone strike", *Reuters*, the 1st of November 2013, <http://mobile.reuters.com/article/idUSBRE9A00QY20131101?rpc=932>, consulted on the 1st of November 2013.

¹²⁵ Bushra MAKHDOOM, "Kerry calls Nawaz to ease Pak-US tensions", *The Daily Mail International*, the 5th of November 2013, <http://dailymailnews.com/kerry-calls-nawaz-to-ease-pak-us-tension/>, consulted on the 5th of November 2013.

¹²⁶ "Supply line blockade not in Pakistan's interest: NATO", *National Herald Tribune*, the 6th of November 2013, <http://www.dailynht.com/epaper/index.php?action=epaper&id=main&page=1&dt=files>, consulted on the 6th of November 2013.

supplies will be stopped.”¹²⁷ Additionally, "officials said in his telephonic conversation with the US Secretary of State, the PM pointed out that missile strike has sabotaged Pakistani government's planned peace talks with the militants, and that the Washington must keep Islamabad's sensitivities in view. John Kerry assured that his country respects Pakistan's sovereignty and integrity. He underscored the need of Pak-US strong relations and vowed to support Islamabad in war against terrorism."¹²⁸

The Pakistani opposition parties were also keen on using the drone strike in an effort to boost their visibility on the media. A number of opposition party members have gathered outside the Parliament for a parallel meeting, as a protest in regard to the very weak response given to the government in the light of drone attacks.¹²⁹ The quarrel between the ruling party and the opposition had started after the defense minister offered some statistics regarding drone strikes in Pakistan.¹³⁰ Senator Razza Rabbani "said a privilege motion will be presented in the formal Senate session against the interior minister for providing wrong figures to the House. He said that the statistics provided by the minister of defense provide justification for drone attacks in Pakistan, as according to them no civilian had been killed in the attacks in the last two years. Rabbani said the Ministry of Defense has accepted that it had provided wrong figures about killing of people in terrorist attacks."¹³¹

This is of course to demonstrate the double edged politics that Pakistan is undertaking in regard to its drone policy, as it is obvious that the Minister of Defense himself seems to shift his opinion in regard to civilian casualties according to the political situation.

In addition "the Senate had on Monday, while condemning the US drone attack that killed TTP chief Hakeemullah Mehsud, asked the government to review its policy with the US and the so-called war on terror, saying Washington does not care about Pakistan's interests. Senators said the US does not want peace in Pakistan and the region, as on one hand it calls Pakistan a close ally but on the other hand never allows peace talks with Taliban to start."¹³² However, again on this very matter Pakistan, as a sovereign actor, seems to be applying double standards as Husain Haqqani revealed in his book the fact that "the chairman US Joint Chiefs, Admiral Mike Mullen travelled to Pakistan in 2008 demanding action against the Haqqani network and other militant groups. During the visit, the Pakistani Army requested that the US target Baitullah Mehsud the former Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) chief who had threatened Pakistan. It was upon this request that American officials included the Pakistani Taliban on their hit list."¹³³

Imran Khan's protest begun on the 23rd of November 2013 when "party workers from the PTI and the JI travelled to Peshawar from across Pakistan and an estimated 10,000 people

¹²⁷ Tim CRAIG, Haq Nawaz KHAN, "Pakistani political leader says NATO supply routes will be cut off if U.S: drone strikes continue", *The Washington Post*, the 31st of October 2013, consulted on the 15th of November 2013.

¹²⁸ Bushra MAKHDOOM, "Kerry calls Nawaz to ease Pak-US tensions", *The Daily Mail International*, the 5th of November 2013, <http://dailymailnews.com/kerry-calls-nawaz-to-ease-pak-us-tension/>, consulted on the 5th of November 2013.

¹²⁹ "Two Parallel Senate sessions make history in Pakistan", *Pan Tribune*, the 7th of November 2013, <http://paktribune.com/news/Two-parallel-Senate-sessions-make-history-in-Pakistan-264325.html>, consulted on the 7th of November 2013.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ "Military dictator made drone strike agreement with U.S: Hussain Haqqani", *National Herald Tribune*, the 10th of November 2013, <http://dailyhnt.com/epaper/main.php?action=epaper&id=main&page=1&dt=10-11-2013>, consulted on the 10th of November 2013.

participated in Saturday's protests. The protesters shouted anti US slogans such as *Stop drone attacks* and *Down with America*.¹³⁴ As the protest went on "strict security measures were in place Saturday, with 500 police personnel on duty. Trucks were directed to use an alternative route, although Tahir Khan, a government official, said there was normally little NATO traffic Saturday as most of the trucks arrived by Friday night to clear the border crossing."¹³⁵ The protesters decided to blockade supplies on the 24th as well when "members of Khan's party stopped trucks and roughed up drivers ferrying NATO supplies at a toll booth on the outskirts of Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's provincial capital. Police were present at the scene Sunday but did not stop the protesters, some of whom were carrying wooden batons."¹³⁶ On the 25th of November however authorities stepped in and the Pakistani police did not further allow protesters to blockade NATO trucks.¹³⁷ This is because "the federal government has also criticized drone strikes but has indicated it has no interest in blocking the NATO supply route, which could spark a crisis with the U.S. and other NATO countries. The police actions Monday indicated that the federal government had intervened to stop the NATO blockade."¹³⁸ The police soon seem to have lost control of the situation however, given the fact that on the 28th of November The Dawn reported how "all containers passing through Peshawar's Ring Road were undergoing searches by activists of the PTI and its allies in the coalition government of KP. Moreover the activists were also accompanied by the parliamentarians belonging to the parties demonstrating against the drone attacks."¹³⁹

During the blockade, different participants took it upon themselves to verify all NATO trucks passing by. As far as the 28th of November "11 Nato trucks have been returned whereas the rest of the trucks were allowed to continue their travel."¹⁴⁰ In an effort to negotiate for some form of concession, "Rick Waters, the Political Counselor at the US Embassy in Islamabad held a meeting with senior Pakistan Tehrik-i-Insaf (PTI) leader Shah Mehmood Qureshi during which issues related to PTI-led protests against drone strikes and blockade of Nato supplies were discussed."¹⁴¹

While trying to tackle increasing criticism in regard to its drone policy, The United States of America seems to be taking steps towards thoroughly regulating drone protocols and casualties disclosure. "The US Senate Intelligence Committee has quietly approved a plan to step up both public and internal government oversight of the use of armed drones to kill suspected militants overseas, including American citizens."¹⁴² In effect, "if the language approved by the committee becomes law, once a year the president would be obliged to issue a report setting out the total number of combatants killed or injured in US drone strikes abroad, as well as the number of *non-combatant civilians*."¹⁴³ Eventual Pakistani casualties, militant or nonmilitant,

¹³⁴"Thousands block NATO convoy route to protest US drone strikes in Pakistan", *RT News*, the 23rd of November 2013, <http://rt.com/news/nato-pakistan-drone-protest-208/>, consulted on the 28th of November 2013.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶"Pakistan's police stop NATO supply truck blockade", *Fox News*, the 25th of November 2013, <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2013/11/25/pakistan-police-stop-nato-supply-truck-blockade/>, consulted on the 28th of November 2013.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ "US political counselor meets PTI's Qureshi", *The Dawn*, the 28th of November 2013, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1059138/us-political-counselor-meets-ptis-qureshi>, consulted on the 28th of November 2013.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴²"US approves plan to beef up oversight of drone attacks", *Daily Times of Pakistan*, the 10th of November 2013, http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2013%5C11%5C10%5Cstory_10-11-2013_pg1_5, consulted on the 10th of November 2013.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

would be part of the report as “exempted from the report would be any drone strikes that were launched in Afghanistan before the end of US combat operations there, which are due to conclude at the end of next year, and any drone strikes conducted in a war explicitly authorized by Congress.”¹⁴⁴ It is probable that the U.S. Congress has made such steps in an effort to diplomatically deflate increasing pressure coming from Islamabad in regard to alleged multiple civilian casualties which resulted from drone strikes on militant leaders and soldiers. Nevertheless, if this is indeed the situation, it is highly probable that Pakistan would not suffice, since politicians have been using drone strikes, as a populist discourse and as a manner of explaining their failure to negotiate with the Taliban.

2. Ruptures in the Taliban *fabric* and negotiation perspectives

Soon after the death of the TTP chief Hakeemullah Mehsud, "The Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), or Pakistan Taliban, has appointed Asmatullah Shaheen as their interim leader."¹⁴⁵ From a historical perspective it's relevant to observe the fact that “the TTP has almost exclusively targeted elements of the Pakistani state although it took credit for the 2009 Camp Chapman attack and the 2010 Times Square car bombing attempt. On September 1, 2010, the United States designated the TTP as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO). The TTP is allied with al Qaeda. TTP was accused of involvement in the terrorist attacks at Mehram Naval Base in Karachi and in the attack of former prime minister, the late Benazir, daughter of the late prime minister Zulfikar Bhutto.”¹⁴⁶

The fact that Asmatullah was only appointed as an interim leader of the Pakistani Taliban is a direct result of Pakistani Taliban leaders not being able to unanimously agree on a successor. This is a situation that poses both a significant opportunity and a serious problem. If the Pakistani Taliban leadership is not capable of coagulating around a singular figure, this shows a weakness that may be properly exploited by intelligence and military efforts aiming to solve the Taliban problem of Waziristan. But the same situation also is a significant challenge, as negotiations publicly mentioned by the Pakistani government with the Taliban will be significantly more difficult without of a centralized Taliban leadership with proper credentials. Even if such leadership has emerged it is difficult to believe that it will have utmost authority and full power of negotiation on behalf of *all* Taliban groups.

The rupture seems to have been initially born out of disagreements between Pakistani Taliban leaders in Waziristan and a Consultative Body meeting in Nuristan, Afghanistan.¹⁴⁷ The difficulty in following up on assumed negotiations, in the absence of a common Taliban leader, has been pointed out by Pakistan's Minister of the Interior. "Interior Minister Nisar Ali Khan announced that dialogue process could not be initiated until the new chief of TTP takes over the charge of the terrorist outfit."¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ "Pakistan Taliban appoints Asatullah Shaheen as acting chief", *China Daily, Xinhua*, the 3rd of November 2013, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2013-11/03/content_17077779.htm, consulted on the 3rd of November 2013.

¹⁴⁶ Nirode MOHANTY, *America, Pakistan and the India factor*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2013, p. 164.

¹⁴⁷ "Pakistan Taliban appoints Asatullah Shaheen as acting chief", *China Daily, Xinhua*, the 3rd of November 2013, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2013-11/03/content_17077779.htm, consulted on the 3rd of November 2013.

¹⁴⁸ "Talks can't resume until TTP appoints 'permanent' chief: Nisar", *Pak Tribune*, the 5th of November 2013, <http://paktribune.com/news/Talks-cant-resume-until-TTP-appoints-permanent-chief-Nisar-264270.html>, consulted on the 5th of November 2013.

2.1. Mullah Radio

After further negotiations within Taliban structures, "Mullah Fazlullah alias Mullah Radio, a fugitive leader of Swati Taliban, has been appointed new chief of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Sheikh Khalid Haqqani has been appointed Naib Amir of the banned organization."¹⁴⁹ In this regard, "Taliban spokesman Shahidullah Shah told BBC on Thursday that the appointment of Maulvi Fazlullah as Amir and Sheikh Khalid Haqqani as his deputy was made with consensus. He said he himself was present in the shura meeting. He said the meeting was attended by one representative of Talban from each of the tribal agencies and settled areas of Kohat, Bannu and Tank. He said three member of Mehsud tribe were also in the meeting in recognition of their services for TTP."¹⁵⁰

However the so-called consensus took several days to produce itself which meant that indeed the Taliban in Pakistan have not been prepared to recognize a common leadership as fast as one might have imagined. Nevertheless, the press declaration seems to have left out some crucial information. For example, online sources have later stated the fact that "when a tribal council declared Mullah Fazlullah as the new leader of the Pakistani Taliban..., several furious commanders from a rival clan stood up and left."¹⁵¹ Even if it took some time to reach consensus, it is clear that the selection of a new Taliban leader in Pakistan signifies the fact that militant hostilities in the region are far from being over and that the Taliban will carry on fighting. Actually there are some that tend to underline the fact that Mullah's appointment as the leader of the Pakistani Taliban is a strong message showing that negotiations are no longer an option. "The appointment of Fazlullah as head of the TTP means the chapter of talks is closed for the time being, said Sen. Haji Muhammad Adeel, a top leader for the secular Awami National Party."¹⁵² Furthermore, "Adel said the Pakistani army would also be averse to talks since Fazlullah was behind the attack that killed Maj. Gen. Sanaullah Niazi, a top military officer, in September."¹⁵³ In this regard, it is clearly known that "earlier this year, the Swat Taliban released a video to accept the killing of Maj General Sanaullah, and showed Fazlullah celebrating the attack's success. In the video, he had expressed great happiness that the attack had targeted a police official."¹⁵⁴

2.2. No apparent room for negotiations and Waziristan-Afghan ties

Fazlullah himself has an interesting background. As he is currently described, "the 39-year-old is a passionate ideologue, a cleric implacably opposed to any rapprochement with the Pakistani state. He has appeared in numerous militant videos wielding knives and guns as soldiers are slaughtered in the background."¹⁵⁵ He was "originally known, as a common village

¹⁴⁹ "Fazlullah appointed new TTP Chief", *The Daily Mail International*, the 7th of November 2013, <http://dailymailnews.com/fazlullah-appointed-new-ttp-chief-of-ttp/>, consulted on the 9th of November 2013.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ "Hakeemullah's death plunges TTP into dangerous disarray", *The Dawn*, the 14th of November 2013, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1056330/hakeemullahs-death-plunges-ttp-into-dangerous-disarray>, consulted on the 14th of November 2013.

¹⁵² Daud KHATTAK, "Who is Mullah Fazlullah?", *Foreign Policy*, the 8th of November 2013, http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/11/08/who_is_mullah_fazlullah, consulted on the 9th of November 2013.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ "Mullah Fazlullah chosen as Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan Chief", *The Express Tribune*, the 7th of November 2013, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/628568/mullah-fazlullah-chosen-as-tehreek-e-taliban-pakistan-chief/>, consulted on the 9th of November 2013.

¹⁵⁵ "Profile: Mullah Fazlullah", *BBC News Asia*, the 7th of November 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-24847165>, consulted on the 15th of November 2013.

boy who joined the religious seminary of a Malakand-based cleric, Sufi Muhammad, and later married one of Muhammad's daughters. He was impressed when his mentor and father-in-law launched the Tehrik Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Muhammadi (TNSM) in the early nineties, but his first fighting experience began when Muhammad led a lashkar of thousands of volunteers from Malakand, as well as the Bajaur and Mohmand tribal districts, to fight alongside the Afghan Taliban against NATO and U.S. forces in October 2001."¹⁵⁶

Fazlullah "began daily sermons on illegal FM frequencies. He installed several dozen FM transmitters and used them to spread his message throughout the region - possibly the first cleric to put religion on radio."¹⁵⁷ As a general overview, "in 2007 Swat and the adjacent Buner and Dir districts were dominated by pro al Qaeda Taliban militants under the command of extremist leader Maulana Fazlullah."¹⁵⁸ As he gained more and more control over the region "the Taliban's intolerance and brutality soon became apparent. During Fazlullah's reign in the Swat Valley, DVD shop owners and barbershops were attacked for what the Taliban said were *un-Islamic* practices, Sufi mystics and dancing girls were killed and dumped in the city square, and girls were not allowed to go to school. It was during that time that Malala first attracted notice, for writing a diary under a nom de plume for the BBC's Urdu service about life under the Taliban."¹⁵⁹ Academic sources even give account of the fact that "the TTP which intermittently ruled this vread, lush region from 2007 to 2009, did so with an iron fist – lashing people in public."¹⁶⁰

Al in all, "during his 2007-2009 reign in Swat, the Pakistani government signed two peace agreements with Fazlullah, both of which ended in a military operation and further escalation of violence" with the Pakistani government finally being able to get rid of him through the operation Rah-e-Raast (Right Path) of May 2009¹⁶¹ when "Pakistan deployed more than 25,000 troops to fight the radical militants and restore state authority."¹⁶²

He later "took shelter in Afghanistan Kunar province after the Pakistan military launched a massive operation in Swat to purge the valley of militants. From Kunar and Nooristan provinces of Afghanistan, Fazlullah with the support of Afghan intelligence agency has been carrying out terrorist activities in Pakistan."¹⁶³ The hypotheses are supported by other online sources as well. For example Time World explained that "since being chased away from Swat, Fazlullah is said to have found shelter across the western border, on the east bank of the Kunar River. There, Pakistani military officials claim, he enjoys the protection of Afghan officials."¹⁶⁴ The Guardian also reports on this by stating that "perhaps most alarming for Pakistan is

¹⁵⁶Daud KHATTAK, "Who is Mullah Fazlullah?", *Foreign Policy*, the 8th of November 2013, http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/11/08/who_is_mullah_fazlullah, consulted on the 9th of November 2013.

¹⁵⁷"Profile: Mullah Fazlullah", BBC News Asia, the 7th of November 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-24847165>, consulted on the 15th of November 2013.

¹⁵⁸Nirode MOHANTY, *America, Pakistan and the India factor*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2013, p. 164.

¹⁵⁹Omar WARAICH, "Mullah Radio: the New Leader of the Pakistani Taliban", *Time World*, the 7th of November 2013, <http://world.time.com/2013/11/07/mullah-radio-the-new-leader-of-the-pakistani-taliban/>, consulted on the 8th of November 2013.

¹⁶⁰Nirode MOHANTY, *America, Pakistan and the India factor*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2013, p. 164.

¹⁶¹Daud KHATTAK, "Who is Mullah Fazlullah?", *Foreign Policy*, the 8th of November 2013, http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/11/08/who_is_mullah_fazlullah, consulted on the 9th of November 2013.

¹⁶²Nirode MOHANTY, *America, Pakistan and the India factor*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2013, p. 164.

¹⁶³"Fazlullah appointed new TTP Chief", *The Daily Mail International*, the 7th of November 2013, <http://dailymailnews.com/fazlullah-appointed-new-ttp-chief-of-ttp/>, consulted on the 9th of November 2013.

¹⁶⁴Omar WARAICH, "Mullah Radio: the New Leader of the Pakistani Taliban", *Time World*, the 7th of November 2013, <http://world.time.com/2013/11/07/mullah-radio-the-new-leader-of-the-pakistani-taliban/>, consulted on the 8th of November 2013.

Fazlullah's success in setting up a base of operations in Kunar and Nuristan, provinces in eastern Afghanistan where the Kabul government has minimal control. If he stays in Afghanistan he will remain even further out of the reach of the Pakistani military than Mehsud, who ran the TTP from North Waziristan. The lawless tribal region is effectively controlled by militant groups including the TTP, al-Qaida and Afghan insurgents, with US drones providing the only opposition to them."¹⁶⁵

This is to show the level of cooperation that might ever be reached between intelligence servicemen in Afghanistan and Pakistan, as long as the Afghan intelligence service is, according to the Daily Mail International, rather keen on collaborating with militant structures against Pakistan's national interest. This very piece of information might also suggest the fact that the two neighboring Taliban structures may further work together, even better than before, since the new leader's experience in Afghanistan may have helped him establish potent militant contacts. In this regard, "Mullah Omar, the reclusive, one-eyed leader of the Afghan Taliban, is said to have stepped into the debate and backed Fazlullah's candidacy. Fazlullah knows Omar personally, having fought alongside his men in Afghanistan in 2001."¹⁶⁶ Moreover, from a historical perspective, "Fazlullah is extremely close to the Afghan Taliban and was always their preferred choice as the Taliban leader in Pakistan."¹⁶⁷ It is also safe to say that "although the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban have their own domestic agendas, analysts say the Taliban in Afghanistan believe Mullah Fazlullah was the most likely of all the Pakistani candidates to accept the supremacy of Mullah Omar, the spiritual founder of the Afghan Taliban."¹⁶⁸ It is highly interesting to notice the fact that after the beginning of the Global War on Terror, "Pakistan, one of the three countries in the World that recognized Taliban rule in Afghanistan, could not persuade Afghanistan to yield. Mullah Omar fled from Kabul, the Afghanistan's capital, to Pakistan after the American invasion, a country with thirty million people."¹⁶⁹

Given the complexity of the area in which the newly elected Pakistani commander is thought to be residing, drone strikes seem to remain the only proper answer that could bring some peace and stability in the region since negotiations are nowhere in sight. It is clear that "the precision of the drone as a weapon of war makes it too precious to abandon"¹⁷⁰ and a fitting weapon one might add given the fact that "drone strikes must take place when the target cannot be captured and where the local authorities cannot act independently against the terrorist. In other words, Islamabad cannot demand an end to drone strikes while it continues to grapple ineffectually with the wider threat posed by the Taliban."¹⁷¹ Currently however, "Fazlullah is still holed up in his base in Nuristan, a thickly forested Afghan region favored by many militants hiding from US drones. To reassert control over feuding groups he would have to come back and establish a foothold in Pakistan *He is a non-resident commander, he is not present physically,*

¹⁶⁵ Jon BOONE, "Pakistani Taliban selects hardliner Mullah Azlullah as new leader", *The Guardian*, the 8th of November, 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/nov/07/pakistani-taliban-mullah-fazlullah-leader-malala-yousafzai>, consulted on the 11th of November 2013.

¹⁶⁶ "Hakeemullah's death plunges TTP into dangerous disarray", *The Dawn*, the 14th of November 2013, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1056330/hakeemullahs-death-plunges-ttp-into-dangerous-disarray>, consulted on the 14th of November 2013.

¹⁶⁷ ¹⁶⁷ "Profile: Mullah Fazlullah", *BBC News Asia*, the 7th of November 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-24847165>, consulted on the 15th of November 2013.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ Nirode MOHANTY, *America, Pakistan and the India factor*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2013, p. 1.

¹⁷⁰ Damien McELROY, "The drone didn't kill a Taliban peacemaker", *The Guardian*, the 3rd of November 2013, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/pakistan/10424085/The-drone-didnt-kill-a-Taliban-peacemaker.html>, consulted on the 13th of November 2013.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

said a Pakistani intelligence source. *But he has two advantages: He's got a lot of money and he has Afghan support.*"¹⁷²

However, the fact that he is not a member of a close-knit Taliban network may prove to be a strong disadvantage, as the level to which he is sustained by other tribal chiefs may not at all be that high in the first place, even though some high level concessions have been reached in his case. In this very regard, media sources have already outlined the fact that the new leader could "face a challenge to control the Mehsud fighters, who make up the bulk of the Taliban's manpower."¹⁷³ It really is "the first time that the Pakistani Taliban have chosen a leader who does not come from the country's volatile tribal belt - or from the Mehsud or Wazir tribes."¹⁷⁴ It is also a well known fact that "the Pakistani Taliban have always been divided, a loose alliance of militant bands united only by extremist beliefs and their hatred of the government. The group operates independently of its Taliban allies in Afghanistan, who are fighting US-backed forces there. But the death of Hakeemullah, a member of the dominant Mehsud tribe, and the rise of Fazlullah, a Swat Valley native and hence an outsider in the eyes of tribesmen, changes the picture in the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), or Pakistani Taliban."¹⁷⁵

Given Mullah's complicated past, it is clear that negotiating with him will prove difficult since such trials have been made in the past when he was ruling the Swat area, but have failed repeatedly. This is why "while some in the Pakistani government still hope the Taliban will agree to carry forward the peace process, Adeel, whose party held extensive negotiations with Fazlullah in 2008 and 2009, says *the chapter is closed, at least for the coming few months, if not years, after the appointment of Fazlullah as the TTP head.*"¹⁷⁶ This perception is further supported by the fact that "the Pakistani Taliban say that they are not interested in a peace deal with the government. *There will be no more talks as Mullah Fazlullah is already against negotiations with the Pakistan government,* Shahidullah Shahid, the Taliban's spokesman, told Reuters by telephone from an undisclosed location across the border in Afghanistan."¹⁷⁷ This is also apparent in the fact that, although lacking commanding skills, "Fazlullah is considered hard-line even within the Pakistani Taliban movement itself."¹⁷⁸ The Taliban spokesman also "threatened to avenge the killing of chief Hakimullah Mehsud in U.S. drone strike. *This incident was a violation of Pakistani culture. You can't engage someone in peace talks and then attack his home and kill his father. Hakimullah Mehsud was ours, our hearts are heavy and our anger will soon be felt by everyone.*"¹⁷⁹ It is said that Fazlullah "declared the start of a new campaign to

¹⁷² "Hakeemullah's death plunges TTP into dangerous disarray", The Dawn, the 14th of November 2013, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1056330/hakeemullahs-death-plunges-ttp-into-dangerous-disarray>, consulted on the 14th of November 2013.

¹⁷³ "Mullah Fazlullah chosen as Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan Chief", *The Express Tribune*, the 7th of November 2013, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/628568/mullah-fazlullah-chosen-as-tehreek-e-taliban-pakistan-chief/>, consulted on the 9th of November 2013.

¹⁷⁴ "Profile: Mullah Fazlullah", BBC News Asia, the 7th of November 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-24847165>, consulted on the 15th of November 2013.

¹⁷⁵ "Hakeemullah's death plunges TTP into dangerous disarray", The Dawn, the 14th of November 2013, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1056330/hakeemullahs-death-plunges-ttp-into-dangerous-disarray>, consulted on the 14th of November 2013.

¹⁷⁶ Daud KHATTAK, "Who is Mullah Fazlullah?", *Foreign Policy*, the 8th of November 2013, http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/11/08/who_is_mullah_fazlullah, consulted on the 9th of November 2013.

¹⁷⁷ Omar WARAICH, "Mullah Radio: the New Leader of the Pakistani Taliban", *Time World*, the 7th of November 2013, <http://world.time.com/2013/11/07/mullah-radio-the-new-leader-of-the-pakistani-taliban/>, consulted on the 8th of November 2013.

¹⁷⁸ "Pakistan Taliban scrap peace talks after electing new chief Mullah Fazlullah", *Euronews*, the 7th of November 2013, <http://www.euronews.com/2013/11/07/pakistan-taliban-scrap-peace-talks-after-electing-new-chief-mullah-fazlullah/>, consulted on the 11th of November 2013.

¹⁷⁹ "Zero possibility of talks with the government", *National Herald Tribune*, the 10th of November 2013, <http://dailynt.com/epaper/main.php?action=epaper&id=main&page=1&dt=10-11-2013>, consulted on the 10th of November 2013.

attack the government and security installations in Punjab, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's political base."¹⁸⁰

During his first meeting with the Chief of Staff, Pakistan's Prime Minister has been "briefed by the military leadership on the pros and cons of contacting new Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan chief Maulana Fazlullah, a sworn enemy of the army"¹⁸¹ but a decision on the matter had yet to be made official. This signaled the military's unease in continuing to negotiate with the new Taliban leader. Despite all this, Pakistan lawmakers have still been trying to translate the blame of failed negotiations over drone strikes, with members of Parliament stating that there cannot be any peace talks unless the United States ends the drone policy.¹⁸² Even though this has been the assessment made by Parliamentary officials, the Government seems to have a different side on the story. In a report, Rana Tanveer, Pakistan's Federal Minister for Defence Production stated that the Government itself "was waiting for the climate to become conducive for peace talks with Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). He said it will take a few months"¹⁸³.¹⁸⁴ The minister was quoted saying that "Taliban are angry at the moment. Therefore, talks are not possible until they calm down."¹⁸⁵ He did however underline the fact that the government seemed to be committed to negotiating and that "military action would be used as a last resort."¹⁸⁶ This declaration in itself strongly contradicts however the Minister of the Interior which had previously stated for the National Assembly that "the Government virtually shelved, for now, its plan to revive a disrupted peace effort with Taliban insurgents."¹⁸⁷ Tanveer was also quoted stating that some militant groups would like to negotiate in exchange to be allowed to "be inducted in the national mainstream."¹⁸⁸ It is probably the case of Jamiat Vlema-e-Islam, Jamiat Vlema-e-Pakistan and Tehrik-e-Insaf who stated through a common spokesman that they are ready to hold some negotiations in Lahore.¹⁸⁹

The prospect of negotiation with the Taliban is therefore directly linked to a triple set of elements. On the one hand it seems to be linked to whether the army is ready to negotiate with the new Taliban leader, second whether the new leader himself has any agenda set for eventual negotiations and thirdly whether negotiations as a whole are a potential solution to the problem, given the fact that not all tribal leaders seem to have been on the same page in selecting the newly elected TTP chief. But Tanveer observed the fact that "both (government and Pakistan

¹⁸⁰ "Fazlullah's elevation as TTP chief creates split among Taliban", *The News International*, the 15th of November 2013, <http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-13-26672-Fazlullahs-elevation-as-TTP-chief-creates-split-among-Taliban>, consulted on the 18th of November 2013.

¹⁸¹ "PM visits GHQ, briefed on security", *The Dawn.com*, the 12th of November 2013, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1055855/pm-visits-ghq-briefed-on-security>, consulted on the 12th of November 2013.

¹⁸² Raja ASGHAR, "Plan for Taliban talks shelved for now: Nisar", *The Dawn.com*, the 12th of November 2013, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1055713/plan-for-taliban-talks-shelved-for-now-nisar>, consulted on the 12th of November 2013.

¹⁸³ *A few months* seems to define a time span of anywhere between 2 to 3 months. See "Time not fit for peace talks with Taliban", *The News International*, the 13th of November 2013, <http://www.thenews.com.pk/article-126298-Time-for-peace-talks-with-Taliban-not-conducive:-Rana-Tanveer>, consulted on the 13th of November 2013.

¹⁸⁴ "Time not fit for peace talks with Taliban", *The News International*, the 13th of November 2013, <http://www.thenews.com.pk/article-126298-Time-for-peace-talks-with-Taliban-not-conducive:-Rana-Tanveer>, consulted on the 13th of November 2013.

¹⁸⁵ "No peace talks till Taliban cool down", *The Dawn.com*, the 13th of November 2013, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1056135/no-peace-talks-till-taliban-cool-down>, consulted on the 13th of November 2013.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ „Taliban do not want further destruction in Pakistan”, *The News International*, the 17th of November 2013, <http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-13-26703-Taliban-do-not-want-further-destruction-in-Pakistan>, consulted on the 18th of November 2013.

Army) are on same page and there is no rift among them”¹⁹⁰ this meaning that negotiations were viewed as a must by potent elite factions. We however observe here a clear lack of long-term strategic perspective on the issue as officials cannot make themselves agree on a view regarding the subject of negotiation.

3. The Pakistani military and security forces

All in all, if we decide to look at some of the situations developing in Pakistan, we might observe the fact that, at times, the Pakistani forces are lacking the proper ability or the necessary will to act in a really effective way against the Taliban. Sometimes this problem is derived from historical factors describing the Taliban-government relationship. Other times, the problem is derived from a poor efficiency in managing troops as well as an overall faulty assessment of protocols to be used either against the Taliban or in order to protect officials in the face of terrorist threat.

For example, on the 9th of January 2014, BBC News Asia reported that “Chaudhry Aslam, the head of the city's anti-terror operations, and at least two others died in an attack on a police convoy in the Essa Nagri area of the city, reports say. Mr Aslam had survived a number of previous attempts on his life. The Pakistani Taliban said they carried out Thursday's attack. A spokesman said Mr Aslam had been targeted as he had *killed, tortured and wounded* Taliban members.”¹⁹¹ Additionally, open sources have reported the fact that “several policemen also were injured in the blast that targeted the car of Chaudhry Muhammad Aslam, chief of the crime investigation department of Sindh Police.”¹⁹² This is a serious blow to the security environment of Pakistan, in direct correlation to that of Afghanistan, as “since 2008, his (Chaudhry Aslam) unit has been involved in the arrests of dozens of militants - including would-be suicide bombers - planning attacks in Pakistan and across the border in Afghanistan.”¹⁹³

Aslam seems to have been well known and feared by the Taliban as he had been involved in numerous acts of violence against the militants. He preferred gunfights over the processing of Taliban assets through the legal system. Close to his death “he killed three Taliban militants in a gun battle in Karachi.”¹⁹⁴ After 8 people were killed in 2011 on a previous attempt on his life he was quoted stating, in reference to the Taliban, that “they are cowards. They call themselves Muslims but they are unbelievers. This will make me even more determined to carry on operations against them. They targeted sleeping children. I walk these streets day and night. If they want to kill me, they should come and attack me directly.”¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁰ “No peace talks till Taliban cool down”, The Dawn.com, the 13th of November 2013, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1056135/no-peace-talks-till-taliban-cool-down>, consulted on the 13th of November 2013.

¹⁹¹ BBC News of Asia, “Bomb kills Pakistan police chief Chaudhry Aslam”, the 9th of January 2014, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-25667842>, consulted on the 14th of January 2014.

¹⁹² UPI, “Senior Pakistan anti-terrorist chief dies in car bomb attack”, the 10th of January 2014, http://www.upi.com/Top_News/Special/2014/01/10/Senior-Pakistan-anti-terrorist-chief-dies-in-car-bomb-attack/UPI-11601389337260/, consulted on the 15th of January 2014.

¹⁹³ BBC News of Asia, “Bomb kills Pakistan police chief Chaudhry Aslam”, the 9th of January 2014, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-25667842>, consulted on the 14th of January 2014.

¹⁹⁴ UPI, “Senior Pakistan anti-terrorist chief dies in car bomb attack”, the 10th of January 2014, http://www.upi.com/Top_News/Special/2014/01/10/Senior-Pakistan-anti-terrorist-chief-dies-in-car-bomb-attack/UPI-11601389337260/, consulted on the 15th of January 2014.

¹⁹⁵ BBC News of Asia, “Bomb kills Pakistan police chief Chaudhry Aslam”, the 9th of January 2014, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-25667842>, consulted on the 14th of January 2014.

The killing of Aslam raises serious security questions about Pakistan as his wife was quoted stating that during the attack “he wasn't in his usual bomb-proofed car because it was in for repairs this week.”¹⁹⁶ It would be sure to assume the fact that a high profile official placed at the top half of a Taliban hit list would have a spare bomb-proofed car for occasions when his usual vehicle is in for repairs. Since this was not the case, it seems that internal anti-terrorist protocols within the Pakistani forces are sometimes faulty. This could also be an indicator to the fact that Taliban militants may have infiltrated police and other security structures as they might have been aware of the fact that the usual vehicle used by Chaudhry Aslam was indisposed at the time of the attack.

Open sources seem to imply the fact that Pakistani antiterrorist personnel have been quite keen on offering an equal response to the death of Chaudhry Aslam. It was thus reported that “three suspected militants including Amanullah Mehsud who operated as chief of the Tehrik-i-Taliban in Karachi's Quaidabad area, were killed in a police encounter in the city's Musharraf Colony on Friday. The militants, including Mehsud, were affiliated with Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), police said. Mehsud was the chief of the Taliban in Quaidabad and the other two militants were identified as Mirza Ali and Sher Muhammad. The militants were killed nearly a day after a powerful explosion claimed the life of senior police official Chaudhry Aslam.”¹⁹⁷ But such a comment raises serious doubts on anti-terrorist activities in Pakistan as it seems that only when the Taliban take responsibility for some attempts on high profile anti terrorist targets they are being hunted in a serious manner.

It is highly unclear whether the Pakistani forces are capable of stopping terrorist elements from leaking within Pakistan. Many pieces of news describe such a situation. For example, on the 10th of October 2013 “three alleged terrorists were killed in a blast that took place on Mangopir Road in Orangi Town area.”¹⁹⁸ Interestingly enough, “the three killed in the explosion were reported as suspects attempting to plant explosive material or were carrying it, which went off prematurely, according to police”¹⁹⁹, an all too familiar scenario which may easily link terrorism groups of Afghanistan to Pakistan. Voices from Islamabad have raised concerns over the fact that “the port city has become bastion of terrorism.”²⁰⁰ The geographical presence of terrorists able to construct IEDs (Improvised Explosive Devices) far off from the Afghan border proves not only the fact that Pakistani borders are penetrable but that the degree of territorial penetration of such groups are significant and that their ability to destabilize cities well into the territory of Pakistan are significant.

¹⁹⁶ UPI, “Senior Pakistan anti-terrorist chief dies in car bomb attack”, the 10th of January 2014, http://www.upi.com/Top_News/Special/2014/01/10/Senior-Pakistan-anti-terrorist-chief-dies-in-car-bomb-attack/UPI-11601389337260/, consulted on the 15th of January 2014.

¹⁹⁷ The Daily Mail International, “Three TTP militants killed in Karachi”, the 10th of January 2014, <http://dailymailnews.com/2014/01/10/three-ttp-militants-killed-in-karachi/>, and National Herald Tribune, “Three TTP militants killed in Karachi”, <http://dailynt.com/epaper/main.php?action=epaper&id=main&page=1&dt=11-01-2014>, consulted on the 16th of January 2014.

¹⁹⁸ “Three alleged terrorists killed in Karachi's Orangi Town blast”, *The news international*, the 10th of October 2013, <http://www.thenews.com.pk/article-121970-Three-alleged-terrorists-killed-in-Karachis--Orangi-Town-blast>, consulted on the 25th of October 2013.

¹⁹⁹ “Three alleged terrorists killed in Karachi's Orangi Town blast”, *The news international*, the 10th of October 2013, <http://www.thenews.com.pk/article-121970-Three-alleged-terrorists-killed-in-Karachis--Orangi-Town-blast>, consulted on the 25th of October 2013.

²⁰⁰ “Karachi has become bastion of terrorism: Achakzai”, *The news international*, the 18th of September 2013, <http://www.thenews.com.pk/article-118786-Karachi-became-bastion-of-terrorism--Achakzai->, consulted on the 24th of October 2013.

The Taliban themselves are well-feared within local communities with their structures being perceived as more potent than those of the ISI. While citing an article posted by AFP, The Dawn comments on current corruption issues within Islamabad and Rawalpindi (headquarters for the Pakistan army). The story states that a certain businessman had received a letter of extortion from the TTP, signed by former leader, Hakimullah Mehsud. In the letter the family was accused of not living proper Muslim lives. Consequently, they should have paid a considerable amount of money to the TTP or suffer the consequences. It turned out that the signature was a false and that the letter was only one in many that extortionists tend to send in order to make money of the terror being imposed by the TTP all over. What is interesting about the article however is the fact that as soon as the man's wife read the letter she immediately observed the following "the Taliban were also attacking the police and intelligence agencies, they can't protect us from them!"²⁰¹ This is to show that as time goes by, Pakistani citizens are beginning more and more fearful not of the law, or even of the terribly efficient ISI structures, but of the Taliban themselves, as a source of alternative control that cannot be regulated by the authorities.

At times it seems that the terrorist presence within Pakistan is so well established that intelligence bodies devise special code names for regions involving a high risk factor. For example "in time, the CIA identified so many suspected al-Qaeda and militant compounds that it gave them coded designations, including MSC 215 for a Miran Shah compound where explosives were manufactured and SC 5 for Spailpan Compound No. 5 in South Waziristan."²⁰²

3.1. Strong links to the Taliban

While speaking on Fox news on the 3rd of May 2011, Henry Kissinger was quoted stating in regard to Pakistani officials that "they have sympathy for some terrorist groups. They do because they created some - the Taliban was actually created by Pakistan as part of the war against the Soviet Union and Afghanistan."²⁰³ Furthermore "the territories in which some the terrorists are based in Pakistan have never really been fully controlled by the government, then under the British and then under the current government. So to some extent, there is some plausibility but there is no doubt that the Pakistanis would at least some elements in Pakistan want to keep the Taliban as a reserve in case of a conflict with India, which is their overriding obsession."²⁰⁴

The link between some Pakistani officials and Taliban groups within the country seems to be at times exceeding the negotiation climate and rather demonstrate strong and stable relationships. The Pakistan Observer thus noted the fact that "US President Barack Obama secretly offered Pakistan in 2009 that he would nudge India towards negotiations on Kashmir in lieu of it ending support to terrorist groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba and Taliban, but much to his

²⁰¹ "Pakistani extortionists cash by posing as Taliban" The Dawn Pakistan, the 17th of November 2013, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1056757/pakistani-extortionists-cash-in-by-posing-as-taliban>, consulted on the 18th of November 2013.

²⁰² Greg MILLER, Bob WOODWARD, "Secret memos reveal explicit nature of U.S. Pakistan agreement on Drones", *The Washington Post*, the 24th of October 2013, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/top-pakistani-leaders-secretly-backed-cia-drone-campaign-secret-documents-show/2013/10/23/15e6b0d8-3beb-11e3-b6a9-da62c264f40e_story.html, consulted on the 29th of October 2013.

²⁰³ Nirode MOHANTY, *America, Pakistan and the India factor*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2013, p. 13.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.* p.131.

disappointment Islamabad rejected the offer."²⁰⁵ Such a perspective on Pakistani policy, according to which the country is more eager to act on behalf of keeping close relations with Taliban leaders, rather than solve a decades old Kashmir problem, fully demonstrates the multiple standards that Pakistani policy-makers and decision-makers use in conducting their politics. The story has been brought to the attention of the general public by Pakistan's former Ambassador to the United States, Husain Haqqani.²⁰⁶ It seemed that the American President was not particularly happy to see that "some countries have turned to proxy groups to do their fighting instead of choosing a path of peace and security. The tolerance or support of such proxies cannot continue"²⁰⁷, which is a direct hint towards Pakistan's alleged collaboration with some militant groups against neighboring countries. The Army however is obviously keen on denying professional underground links with terrorist groups and factions. As such "Speaking at a briefing during his first visit to the headquarters of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), the army chief (General Raheel Sharif) said the role of the intelligence agencies was very crucial in the current circumstances. He asked the intelligence agencies to improve cooperation and intelligence sharing with other organizations to ensure elimination of terrorism. He said the role of the ISI for national security was commendable."²⁰⁸ In this regard "the army chief assured that all the requirements of the ISI will be fulfilled."²⁰⁹

All in all "in a startling image of apparent symbiosis between the Pakistani military-which controls the ISI-and the Haqqani fighters, both forces have bases in Miram Shah, the main town in North Waziristan. Five brigades of Pakistani arm, about 15,000 soldiers, and the Frontier Cops, a paramilitary force of about 10,000 men, have never touched the Haqqanis. Estimates of the Haqqani fighting strength in North Waziristan vary from 10,000 to 15,000. The Pakistani army struggled to defeat the Pakistan Taliban in the Swat Valley and South Waziristan in 2009 and 2010, but the Taliban are still present in both places."²¹⁰ Furthermore, the scientific community tends to stress the fact that "CIA and other American intelligence reporting had documented many links between ISI, the Taliban, and bin Laden, and other Islamic militants operating from Afghanistan. Classified American reporting showed that Pakistani intelligence maintained about eight stations inside Afghanistan, staffed by the ISI officers or retired officers on contract"²¹¹ a clear indicator of the fact that Pakistan is also trying to use terrorist elements against Afghanistan.

²⁰⁵ "Obama secretly offered to nudge India on Kashmir: Haqqani", *Pakistan Observer*, the 6th of November 2013, <http://pakobserver.net/detailnews.asp?id=222844>, consulted on the 6th of November 2013.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁸ Makhdoom BABAR, "COAS briefed at ISI headquarters", *The Daily Mail International*, the 4th of December 2013, <http://dailymailnews.com/coas-briefed-at-isi-headquarters/>, consulted on the 5th of December 2013.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

²¹⁰ Nirode MOHANTY, *America, Pakistan and the India factor*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2013, p. 161.

²¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 133.

IV. Ongoing evolutions and future perspectives in AfPak, reflected in U.S. top level political discourse, and in some Pentagon (U.S. Department of Defense) official documents and reports

This part of the present study explores the way in which both positive and negative trends in the ongoing evolutions in AfPak, and future perspectives in AfPak are present in top level political statements / discourse in the U.S., and also the way in which some official documents and reports of the Pentagon (the U.S. Department of Defense) are dealing with the same ongoing problems and future perspectives in AfPak.

1. U.S. top level evaluations of ongoing evolutions and future perspectives in AfPak (the President, the Vice President and top presidential advisors)

At the end of January, 2014, the acting President of the United States of America publicly offered a *dominantly optimistic* set of evaluations dealing with both ongoing evolutions and possible future trends in Afghanistan and Pakistan (AfPak). According to the text of the *2014 State of the Union Address*²¹², delivered in front of the U.S. Congress by Barack Obama, at this very moment, “because of the extraordinary troops and civilians who risk and lay down their lives to keep us free, the United States is more secure”. Obama emphasized that “When I took office, nearly 180,000 Americans were serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. Today, all our troops are out of Iraq. More than 60,000 of our troops have already come home from Afghanistan”. He also stated that “with Afghan forces now in the lead for their own security, our troops have moved to a support role. Together with our allies, we will complete our mission there by the end of this year, and America’s longest war will finally be over”. Speaking about ongoing and future evolution in Afghanistan, Obama offered the audience some extra reasons for his quite clear optimism. According to the U.S. president, the general situation in Afghanistan is going to improve even more in the foreseeable future: “After 2014, we will support a unified Afghanistan as it takes responsibility for its own future”. And, according to the the evaluation made by the presidential staff and advisers, “for while our relationship with Afghanistan will change, one thing will not: our resolve that terrorists do not launch attacks against our country”.

Another significant reason for optimism is, according to President Obama, the clearly decreasing might of al Qaida. Obama stated that “we’ve put al-Qaida’s core leadership on a path to defeat”, The activity of other terrorist organizations is also severely jeopardized, mainly because the U.S. are actively involved in a global strategy whose basic feature is to “actively and aggressively pursue terrorist networks, through more targeted efforts and by building the capacity of our foreign partners”.

²¹² “FULL TRANSCRIPT: Obama’s 2014 State of the Union address”, online text, in *Washington Post*, January 28, 2014, at the Internet address http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/full-text-of-obamas-2014-state-of-the-union-address/2014/01/28/e0c93358-887f-11e3-a5bd-844629433ba3_story.html

This broad optimistic vision of the situation in AfPak (optimism based on several reasons: a diminished need to maintain there a very large military presence; more and more effective local institutions and capabilities able to cope with local threats and risks; and decreasing might and effectiveness of al-Qaida) is slightly moderated by only two factors. One of them is the capability of al-Qaida to relocate itself and to adapt to new realities. Obama officially recognized that “the threat has evolved as al-Qaida affiliates and other extremists take root in different parts of the world”, and that “in Yemen, Somalia, Iraq, Mali, we have to keep working with partners to disrupt and disable these networks”. Another reason leading to a more moderate optimism is the exceedingly unclear future of bilateral relations with Afghanistan. Barack Obama had to use, with all necessary caution, a quite large *if*: “If the Afghan government signs a security agreement that we have negotiated, a small force of Americans could remain in Afghanistan with NATO allies to carry out two narrow missions: training and assisting Afghan forces and counterterrorism operations to pursue any remnants of al-Qaida”. But, as the already quoted lines clearly show, the continuation of strategically significant activities, and the fulfillment of major strategic goals are strictly connected to a set of uncertainties. The most important of these uncertainties is that no one can accurately predict if the Afghan authorities are really and deeply interested – and have the political courage and will – to quickly sign the bilateral security agreement Barack Obama was speaking about.

Quite clearly, beyond the level of *some* reasons to make political optimism more moderate, *optimism was, strictly speaking about AfPak, the prevailing mood in the 2014 State of the Union Address*. The obviously positive basic trends of the regional arena, clearly stated the President of the U.S., generate a clear consequence: “America must move off a permanent war footing”. Obama was also convinced that long conflict can be avoided and has to be avoided (“I will not send our troops into harm's way unless it is truly necessary, nor will I allow our sons and daughters to be mired in open-ended conflicts”), and that political will of the U.S. is, necessarily and without doubt, more powerful than that of terrorists and insurgents in AfPak (“we must fight the battles – (applause) – that need to be fought”, but “not those that terrorists prefer from us – large-scale deployments that drain our strength and may ultimately feed extremism”)²¹³.

But the optimistic view of AfPak evolutions was *not at all present only* in the 2014 *State of the Union Address*. In early November, 2013, President Obama clearly stated, on the solemn occasion of the Veterans Day, that some extra efforts are both possible and necessary, “because this chapter of war is coming to an end. Soon, one of the first Marines to arrive in Afghanistan 12 years ago – Brigadier General Daniel Yoo – will lead his Camp Pendleton Marines as they become one of the last major groups of Marines to deploy in this war. And over the coming months, more of our troops will come home. This winter, our troop levels in Afghanistan will be down to 34,000. And by this time next year, the transition to Afghan-led security will be nearly complete. The longest war in American history will end”²¹⁴. The same idea, also obvious in January 2014, is present here as well: the very long war definitely comes to an end. And, politically and strategically, wars come to an end only if – and when – major and stable victories have been won.

²¹³ *Ibidem*, for all fragments quoted along these paragraphs (starting from the previous endnote)

²¹⁴ “Remarks by the President on Veterans Day, Arlington National Cemetery, Arlington, Virginia”, published by The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, November 08, 2013, at the Internet address <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/11/08/remarks-president-veterans-day>

The same dominantly optimistic vision on evolutions in AfPak – and, more generally, on global affairs – was obvious *even earlier*, in different occasions, as an important and stable (or repetitive) element in the U.S. Presidential discourse.

In late September, 2013, for example, in front of the U.N. General Assembly, President Obama stated that “Together, we’ve also worked to end a decade of war. Five years ago, nearly 180,000 Americans were serving in harm’s way, and the war in Iraq was the dominant issue in our relationship with the rest of the world. Today, all of our troops have left Iraq. Next year, an international coalition will end its war in Afghanistan, having achieved its mission of dismantling the core of al Qaeda that attacked us on 9/11”²¹⁵. In this very case, the evaluation in a very clear one: the end of military operations in Afghanistan, in the final days of 2014, will be not at all a simply political and / or administrative decision, but the very clear consequence of a major strategic victory: that meaning the complete and long-lasting defeat of al-Qaida.

For the United States, these “new circumstances” already generated major positive consequences, potentially generating both strategic and political optimism. “These new circumstances have also meant shifting away from a perpetual war footing. Beyond bringing our troops home, we have limited the use of drones so they target only those who pose a continuing, imminent threat to the United States where capture is not feasible, and there is a near certainty of no civilian casualties. We’re transferring detainees to other countries and trying terrorists in courts of law, while working diligently to close the prison at Guantanamo Bay. And just as we reviewed how we deploy our extraordinary military capabilities in a way that lives up to our ideals, we’ve begun to review the way that we gather intelligence, so that we properly balance the legitimate security concerns of our citizens and allies with the privacy concerns that all people share”²¹⁶.

The same speech in front of the U.N. General Assembly presented the global arena as being clearly safer and more stable than a few years ago: “As a result of this work, and cooperation with allies and partners, the world is more stable than it was five years ago”. It is true, some dangers still do exist, and Obama listed some of them: “But even a glance at today’s headlines indicates that dangers remain. In Kenya, we’ve seen terrorists target innocent civilians in a crowded shopping mall, and our hearts go out to the families of those who have been affected. In Pakistan, nearly 100 people were recently killed by suicide bombers outside a church. In Iraq, killings and car bombs continue to be a terrible part of life. And meanwhile, al Qaeda has splintered into regional networks and militias, which doesn’t give them the capacity at this point to carry out attacks like 9/11, but does pose serious threats to governments and diplomats, businesses and civilians all across the globe”²¹⁷. Anyhow, these threats – even if significant ones – can not obscure the positive – or clearly optimistic – evaluation of the global security situation: the world is, we repeat, according to the official opinion of the U.S. President, “more stable than it was five years ago”.

²¹⁵ Remarks by President Obama in Address to the United Nations General Assembly, United Nations, New York, published by The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, September 24, 2013, at the Internet address <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/09/24/remarks-president-obama-address-United-nations-general-assembly>

²¹⁶ *Ibidem*

²¹⁷ *Ibidem*

Earlier in September, 2013, Barack Obama also stated that the U.S. has a clearly distinctive feature on the world arena: “there is no calamity we cannot overcome”. He also stated, speaking about evolutions in the entire Greater Middle East, that “We pray for all those who have stepped forward in those years of war – diplomats who serve in dangerous posts, as we saw this day last year in Benghazi, intelligence professionals, often unseen and unheralded who protect us in every way -- our men and women in uniform who defend this country that we love”, and also that “today we remember not only those who died that September day”, in 2001, but “we pay solemn tribute to more than 6,700 patriots who have given their full measure since – military and civilians. We see their legacy in the friendships they forged, the attacks they prevented, the innocent lives they saved and in their comrades in Afghanistan who are completing the mission and who by the end of next year will have helped to end this war”²¹⁸. Again, even earlier, the idea that at the end of 2014 the war in Afghanistan will come to an end, because strategic victory will be won, is clearly present.

On the same occasion, the President of the U.S. made abundantly clear that already gained strategic successes represent “new circumstances” that “have also meant shifting away from a perpetual war footing. Beyond bringing our troops home, we have limited the use of drones so they target only those who pose a continuing, imminent threat to the United States where capture is not feasible, and there is a near certainty of no civilian casualties. We’re transferring detainees to other countries and trying terrorists in courts of law, while working diligently to close the prison at Guantanamo Bay. And just as we reviewed how we deploy our extraordinary military capabilities in a way that lives up to our ideals, we’ve begun to review the way that we gather intelligence, so that we properly balance the legitimate security concerns of our citizens and allies with the privacy concerns that all people share”.

In early August, 2013, President Obama was clearly optimistic when he talked about Afghanistan, in front of a large body of Marines, at the major USMC base in Camp Pendleton, California. “I’m here because, for more than a decade, you – and all our men and women in uniform – have borne the burden in this time of war. Ever since that awful September morning when our nation was attacked, when thousands of innocents were killed, we’ve been at war against al Qaeda. And our fight in Afghanistan – nearly 12 years – has become America’s longest war. I’m here because we recently marked another milestone in this war. As of this past June, for the first time, Afghan forces have taken the lead for security across their entire country”, said Barack Obama to the Marines. He went on, saying to the applauding audience that “instead of leading the fight, our troops now have a different mission, which is to train and advise and assist Afghan forces. And what the signals is that our war in Afghanistan has entered the final chapter. More of our troops are coming home. We’ll be down to 34,000 this winter. By the end of next year – in just 17 months – the transition will be complete. Afghans will take full responsibility for their security and our war in Afghanistan will be over”²¹⁹. Again, the

²¹⁸ “Remarks by the President at the September 11th Observance at the Pentagon Memorial, The Pentagon, Arlington, Virginia”, published by The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, September 11, 2013, at the Internet address <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/09/11/remarks-president-september-11th-observance-pentagon-memorial>

²¹⁹ “Remarks by the President at Camp Pendleton, CA, Hangar 6 West”, August 07, 2013, published by the The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, at the Internet address <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/08/07/remarks-president-camp-pendleton-ca>

optimism prevails. And the President presents some elements making him optimistic: the Afghan institution becoming able to operate with a significant level of success and effectiveness; this generates the possibility to sharply decrease the total number of U.S. troops deployed in Afghanistan; and, above all, the President stated, there is a definitive possibility for the “transition” to go on according to the plan, allowing to bring back home, in less than one year and a half, all the U.S. troops. On the same occasion, Barack Obama told the Marines, with a lot of details, which the main ingredients of strategic success are, in AfPak: “And here’s what I want every single one of you to know. Because of you – the 9/11 Generation – we are accomplishing what we set out to do. Because of you, Osama bin Laden is no more. (Oorah!) Because of you, al Qaeda’s top ranks have been hammered. The core of al Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan is on the way to defeat. That happened because of you. Because of you, more Afghans are reclaiming their communities – their markets, their schools, their towns – and they have a chance to forge their own future. Because of you, more Afghans are trained and stepping up and defending their own country. Because of you – and to preserve the gains you fought and bled for – we are going to make sure that Afghanistan is never again a source of attacks against our country. (Oorah!) That happened because of you”²²⁰, Obama said to the cheering Marines. He also offered an optimistic vision of the professional and personal future of the battle-hardened combat troops: “So the war in Afghanistan will end. For you, that means fewer deployments. It means more training time, preparing for the future – getting back to what Marines do better than anybody else on Earth, amphibious operations. (Oorah!) It means more time here on the home front with your families – your wives, your husbands, your kids”²²¹. Here, the very idea of fewer combat missions and longer training periods clearly indicates that *White House is evaluating the evolutions in AfPak, and more generally the global security situation in broadly optimistic terms.*

But institutional optimism (which sometimes seems to be excessive or at least almost excessive) was not present only in some speeches delivered to smaller or larger, civilian or military audiences by the acting President of the U.S., Barack Obama. Several other key officials intensely share, at least sometimes, the Presidential optimism when they are speaking about both ongoing evolutions and future perspectives in Afghanistan, in AfPak, and in more general terms in the entire Greater Middle East.

In December, 2013, for example, Susan Rice, National Security Advisor to the President of the U.S., stated that “more broadly, after over a decade of war, we continue to transition from a perpetual war footing while robustly protecting America’s interests and security around the world. Earlier this year, President Obama announced new guidelines governing the use of lethal force in our counterterrorism operations outside areas of active hostilities, including the use of drones. Congress is briefed on every strike taken, and we are committed to sharing as much information as possible with the American people about our efforts”. Rice does not speak here only about the fact that the U.S. has all the reasons to finally abandon what she calls “war footing”, but she also deals with long term forecasting. She stated that “over time, continued

²²⁰ *Ibidem*

²²¹ *Ibidem*

progress against al Qaeda and associated terrorist groups should reduce the need for such actions”²²².

We have to strongly underline, anyhow, that in some significant occasions, top-level optimism in the U.S., when dealing with evaluating the present and / or future situation in AfPak was more moderate, or even simply non-existent. This might indicate several potential situations, and we clearly state that it is not the aim of this very study to find out which of these possibilities is more probable.

First of all, it is clearly possible – and not necessarily only strictly theoretically – to have a non-homogenous American top-level leadership, accommodating, in a way or another, several different (and sometimes clearly contradictory) opinions on Afghanistan, AfPak and the Greater Middle East. This possibility is strongly enhanced by the basic fact that individuals in key positions – both elected and appointed ones – are, in most occasions, not at all identical. Major differences usually occur at individual level. From such a perspective, it is not at all difficult to understand that the average mood and the average style of Barack Obama is, quite naturally, not identical with the personal mood and style of Vice President Joe Biden, for example.

Secondly, it is possible to be confronted with another politically significant reality: elected political leaders are (and *have to* be) significantly more optimistic, mainly the acting President, because of a reason which is not at all too difficult to understand – it is their job to deliver hope and confidence to past and future voters and, more generally, to the entire nation. We are speaking, let us not forget this, about a nation which is, according to what both sociological research and election results show, “tired” by unexpectedly very long wars (both in Iraq and Afghanistan), and by too many combat casualties of all sorts, including very many KIA, and worried by the fact that the strategic gains are sometimes modest and slow, while the costs of major military interventions abroad are huge and quickly increasing.

A third explanation is also possible: that of different (or even very different) tonalities, each of them precisely tailored for a certain audience, with its own features – with significantly more optimistic elements when the audience is made up of U.S. citizens, and a more realist(ic) – and less optimistic – approach when the dialogue partner is non-American and / or clearly more experienced, in foreign affairs & strategic analysis and forecasting, than the average U.S. citizen / voter, or than the average American target group.

Vice President Biden was, in some occasions, clearly less optimistic than the acting president of the U.S. Speaking in front of a large group of Indian businessmen and technocrats at the Bombay Stock Exchange, in late July, 2013, Biden said that, when we talk about really sensitive topics (each of them “an incredibly difficult nut to crack”) such as AfPak, or the bilateral India-Pakistan relations, “we have no illusions that it will be easy” to get some positive

²²² For elements quoted here see Susan E. Rice, National Security Advisor, “Human Rights: Advancing American Interests and Values”, Remarks at the Human Rights First Annual Summit, Washington, DC, Wednesday, December 4, 2013, published by The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, at the Internet address <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/12/04/remarks-national-security-advisor-susan-e-rice-human-rights-advancing-am>

results which, put together, shape a certain amount of “progress” that “would benefit anyone and make all of us, particularly this region, more secure”²²³.

In other occasions, the differences separating Obama and Biden in evaluating progress and in exploring the future of AfPak is even more obvious. Along some of the previous pages, we could see that in some significant occasions, the President of the U.S. stated that “our mission will be completed”, “the war will be over”, and that, as a result of the clearly positive results, “America must move off a permanent war footing”. For Biden, quite clearly, major responsibilities of the U.S. in Afghanistan – including a potent military presence – are not at all coming to an end. On the contrary In July 2013, Biden told a large audience at the George Washington University that “when President Obama and I came to office, to state the obvious, we inherited two wars. And it was costing us in blood and treasure and time. And we knew we had to end both those wars responsibly. We’ve done that in Iraq, and we’re doing that as I speak in Afghanistan. We’ll obviously continue to be engaged in both places. And of course we’ll continue to take the fight to Al Qaeda and its affiliates there or wherever they are. But winding down those wars has allowed us to turn to the opportunities that reflect the realities of a fast-changing world”²²⁴. So that, Biden thinks that fighting is going to go on, at least against al-Qaida, and that “war footing” is not to be completely abandoned: it simply has to be deliberately diminished.

In some other occasions, Barack Obama is clearly less optimistic, simply accepting that war in Afghanistan (and, more generally, fighting in AfPak) is an extremely severe and difficult test the U.S. is continuously confronted with. The *immense difficulty* of fighting against resolute, imaginative, and well motivated enemies is taken into account in several occasions. In such occasions, the main focus of the Presidential political discourse is not any more on the idea that war is clearly coming to an end, and that mission has been accomplished, but the on the *extreme intensity and ferocity of warfighting in Afghanistan*.

In October 2013, for example, the President of the U.S. vividly described an episode showing, with all necessary details, how difficult the situation in Afghanistan is, in not very few occasions: “It’s around sunrise. A column of Afghan soldiers and their American advisors are winding their way up a narrow trail towards a village to meet with elders – but just as the first soldier reaches the outskirts of the village, all hell breaks loose. Almost instantly, four Americans – three Marines, one Navy – at the front of the column are surrounded”. At least one American soldier “has been shot in the neck”. Medevacs²²⁵ are called. In the meantime, “the enemy has gotten even closer – just 20 or 30 meters away, and over the radio, they’re demanding the Americans to surrender”. The pressure of the insurgent attack is so powerful, than even those

²²³ “Remarks by Vice President Joe Biden on the U.S.-India Partnership at the Bombay Stock Exchange, The Bombay Stock Exchange, Mumbai, India”, July 24, 2013, published by The White House, Office of the Vice President, at the Internet address <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/07/24/remarks-vice-president-joe-biden-us-india-partnership-bombay-stock-excha>

²²⁴ “Remarks by Vice President Joe Biden on Asia-Pacific Policy, George Washington University, Washington, D.C.”, July 19, 2013, published by The White House, Office of the Vice President, at the Internet address <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/07/19/remarks-vice-president-joe-biden-asia-pacific-policy>

²²⁵ Helicopters used to evacuate combat casualties from the battlefield, in order to transport them to the nearest medical facility

with medical skills have to fight, lobbing grenades. An increasing number of Afghan soldiers are wounded and have to be picked up from the battlefield. For several hours, “four missing Americans”, all of them wounded, “were trapped” in a nearby village. At the end, “four Americans... gave their life that day”²²⁶. The official citation that have been read by the Presidential military aide on the same occasion offers even more details about the *extreme intensity* of fighting: “On that morning, more than 60 well-armed, well-positioned enemy fighters ambushed Captain Swenson’s combat team as it moved on foot into the village of Ganjgal for a meeting with village elders. As the enemy unleashed a barrage of rocket-propelled grenade, mortar and machine gun fire, Captain Swenson immediately returned fire and coordinated and directed the response of his Afghan Border Police, while simultaneously calling in suppressive artillery fire and aviation support. After the enemy effectively flanked Coalition Forces, Captain Swenson repeatedly called for smoke to cover the withdrawal of the forward elements. Surrounded on three sides by enemy forces inflicting effective and accurate fire, Captain Swenson coordinated air assets, indirect fire support and medical evacuation helicopter support to allow for the evacuation of the wounded”. The official citation also stated that “Captain Swenson ignored enemy radio transmissions demanding surrender and maneuvered uncovered to render medical aid to a wounded fellow soldier. Captain Swenson stopped administering aid long enough to throw a grenade at approaching enemy forces, before assisting with moving the soldier for air evacuation. With complete disregard for his own safety, Captain Swenson unhesitatingly led a team in an unarmored vehicle into the kill zone, exposing himself to enemy fire on at least two occasions, to recover the wounded and search for four missing comrades”. The tactical situation was very difficult, the citation said, so that “after using aviation support to mark locations of fallen and wounded comrades, it became clear that ground recovery of the fallen was required due to heavy enemy fire on helicopter landing zones. Captain Swenson’s team returned to the kill zone another time in a Humvee. Captain Swenson voluntarily exited the vehicle, exposing himself to enemy fire, to locate and recover three fallen Marines and one fallen Navy corpsman”. The conclusion of the citation telling how heroic the behavior of Captain William D. Swenson has been is that “his exceptional leadership and stout resistance against the enemy during six hours of continuous fighting rallied his teammates and effectively disrupted the enemy’s assault”²²⁷. 60 Afghan insurgents, armed with heavy weapons (including machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades), able to successfully ambush and to almost completely surround a smaller Afghan-American combat team is not at all an episode able to prove that Afghanistan is fully pacified and stabilized. More than this, we have to take into account other elements as well, which offer some supplementary details for better understanding how difficult the situation is, at least sometimes, in Afghanistan: the fight went on for no less than 6 hours, and several American and Afghan soldiers have been killed or severely wounded. We also underline the fact that insurgent attack went on – and inflicted casualties – even after the moment when “air assets” and “indirect fire” (most probably artillery) started to hit the ambushers.

The same basic features of the tactical and strategic landscape in Afghanistan (resolute enemy, American forces sometimes severely outnumbered, insurgent able to freely operate and

²²⁶ “Remarks by the President at Presentation of the Medal of Honor to Captain William D. Swenson, East Room”, published by The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, October 15, 2013, at the Internet address <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/10/15/remarks-president-presentation-medal-honor-captain-william-d-swenson>

²²⁷ *Ibidem*, fragments of the citation read by the Military Aide

to inflict important combat casualties and damages) are present in other Presidential interventions, too. At the end of August, 2013, Barack Obama spoke about the moment when an American base, Combat Outpost (COP) Keating (somewhere in “Kamdesh District, Nuristan Province”) was attacked by a vastly superior Taliban force. The President of the U.S. told the audience present at the White House: “As some of you may recall, COP Keating was not just one of the most remote outposts in Afghanistan, it was also one of the most vulnerable – on low ground, deep in a valley, surrounded by towering mountains”. Here, against this military facility described by American soldiers as “like being in a fishbowl – easy targets for enemies in the hills above”, a massive enemy attack took place. “Fifty-three American soldiers were suddenly surrounded by more than 300 Taliban fighters”, said Barack Obama, and “the outpost was being slammed from every direction – machine gunfire, rocket-propelled grenades, mortars, sniper fire. It was chaos – the blizzard of bullets and steel”. The “ferocious fire” forced five American soldiers to seek shelter in a damaged armored Humvee, in a moment when “Taliban fighters were penetrating the camp”²²⁸. Again, exactly as in the episode listed above, the fight went on for several hours, and the Taliban enjoyed not only a significant superiority in manpower, but also the significant advantage of tactical effectiveness and of skillfully using local geography. The official citation read by the military aide said that “on that morning, Specialist Carter and his comrades awakened to an attack of an estimated 300 enemy fighters occupying the high ground on all four sides of Combat Outpost Keating, employing concentrated fire from recoilless rifles, rocket propelled grenades, anti-aircraft machine guns, mortars and small arms fire”. The text goes on, describing the really difficult tactical situation: “Specialist Carter reinforced a forward battle position, ran twice through a 100-meter gauntlet of enemy fire to resupply ammunition, and voluntarily remained there to defend the isolated position. Armed with only an M4 carbine rifle, Specialist Carter placed accurate, deadly fire on the enemy, beating back the assault force and preventing the position from being overrun over the course of several hours. With complete disregard for his own safety and in spite of his own wounds, he ran through a hail of enemy rocket propelled grenade and machine gunfire to rescue a critically wounded comrade who had been pinned down in an exposed position. Specialist Carter rendered life-extending first aid and carried the soldier to cover”. The official citation also said that “on his own initiative, Specialist Carter again maneuvered through enemy fire to check on a fallen soldier and recovered the squad’s radio, which allowed them to coordinate their evacuation with fellow Soldiers. With teammates providing covering fire, Specialist Carter assisted in moving the wounded soldier 100 meters through withering enemy fire to the aid station and before returning to the fight”, and concluded that “Specialist Carter’s heroic actions and tactical skill were critical to the defense of Combat Outpost Keating, preventing the enemy from capturing the position and saving the lives of his fellow soldiers”²²⁹.

In other occasions as well, the extreme intensity and ferocity of fights in Afghanistan is present in the public speeches of the U.S. President, who lists names and deeds of military heroes

²²⁸ “Remarks by the President in Presentation of the Medal of Honor to Staff Sergeant Ty M. Carter”, published by The White House Office of the Press Secretary August 26, 2013, at the Internet address <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/08/26/remarks-president-presentation-medal-honor-staff-sergeant-ty-m-carter>

²²⁹ *Ibidem*, fragments of the official citation read by the military aide when the President of the U.S., “authorized by Act of Congress, March 3, 1863, has awarded in the name of Congress the Medal of Honor to Specialist Ty M. Carter, United States Army, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty”

acting in really very difficult circumstances. For example, on the occasion of celebrating the 4th of July, in 2013, Barack Obama spoke about large numbers of “incredibly capable and brave men and women from each service branch”, soldiers “like Specialist Heidi Olson, who, when she was wounded by an IED in Afghanistan, gave lifesaving treatment to another injured soldier, and then another. She had to be ordered to stop and get treatment for herself when the MEDEVAC aircraft arrived. And for her courage she was awarded a Bronze Star”, or “like Staff Sergeant Adam Ybarra, who helped save nine lives in 11 combat search and mission rescues in Afghanistan in 2012”, or “like Corporal Amber Fifer, who was shot five times in an attack in Helmand Province, and has stayed on to serve as a Marine Corps drill instructor”²³⁰. The meaning of such speeches can be interpreted in vastly different ways. For some commentators, they are speaking about courage and military values. But, beyond the level of extremely obvious military valor, these Presidential statements are offering a lot of details about the extreme difficulty of fighting in Afghanistan, against battle-hardened enemies.

The general tone of the public speeches of the U.S. President is sometimes less optimistic and more moderate in describing the situation in Afghanistan, when his dialogue partner is another experienced and important political leader from abroad. In mid-June 2013, for example, Barack Obama was in an official visit to Germany. On that occasion, Chancellor Merkel said that “we talked about a number of foreign policy issues. We are, both of us, engaged in Afghanistan. A new process has been initiated there of a transition of responsibility. This is a process that we are going to tackle together, just as we tackled the greater military challenges of the past together – building up the security forces in Afghanistan together”. Merkel also stated that “we will stand together with the United States and solve outstanding problems”, deliberately emphasizing that these problems “are very difficult, indeed, still”²³¹. A few moments later, President Obama said that “our men and women have been serving side-by-side in Afghanistan. Germany is the third-largest troop-contributing nation there. We’re both grateful for the sacrifices that our servicemen and women and their families have made in this common effort. And because of those efforts, Afghanistan now has the opportunity to secure itself and determine its own destiny”. Obama also stated that “we welcome President Karzai’s announcement yesterday that Afghan forces will soon take the lead for security across the country, which is an important milestone – one that we established in our NATO summit. Even as we wind down the war responsibly and NATO’s combat mission in Afghanistan comes to an end, we’re going to have to continue to invest in the shared capabilities and interoperability painstakingly built by the tremendous sacrifices of our troops. And I appreciate Germany’s interest in making sure that even after our troops are no longer involved in combat operations that we can continue to see progress in Afghanistan”. For our presentation here, the most interesting part of this Presidential statement is that clearly stating that “we don’t expect that it will be easy”²³². A really vast distance separate this set of

²³⁰ “Remarks by the President at Fourth of July Celebration, South Lawn”, July 04, 2013, published by The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, at the Internet address <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/07/04/remarks-president-fourth-july-celebration>

²³¹ German Chancellor Angela Merkel, in “Remarks by President Obama and German Chancellor Merkel in Joint Press Conference, German Chancellery, Berlin, Germany”, June 19, 2013, published by The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, at the Internet address <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/06/19/remarks-president-obama-and-german-chancellor-merkel-joint-press-confere>

²³² U.S. President Barack Obama, in “Remarks by President Obama and German Chancellor Merkel in Joint Press Conference, German Chancellery, Berlin, Germany”, June 19, 2013, published by The White House, Office of the

clearly moderate and cautious evaluations of the present situation and future perspectives in Afghanistan, on one hand, and other optimistic (and sometimes excessively optimistic) speeches dealing with the same basic issues, on the other hand.

The same *moderate tone* is present in a speech delivered in the context of a visit of the NATO Secretary General to the United States. On that occasion, at the end of May, 2013, the U.S. President briefly spoke about the fact that “obviously, at the top of our list was Afghanistan, where the international coalition that has worked alongside our U.S. troops has achieved significant progress”. But not the successes achieved in Afghanistan are the main topic of the Presidential statement. The core issue of what Barack Obama said on that occasion is a somber – and not at all exaggeratedly optimistic – evaluation of the measures to be implemented in order to maintain, stabilize and develop those strategic gains: “We’ve seen great progress in the Afghan National Security Forces”, Obama said. And he went on, saying that “we want to continue that progress. And central to that will be those NATO members, who are contributing, continuing to work effectively with their Afghan counterparts so that moving into next year we have a successful Afghan election and we continue transition until the end of 2014 whereby our combat roles will be completed”. Obama also clearly stated that “we had an opportunity to discuss not only the planning for the next year and a half, but also what kinds of steps we could take post-2014 to continue to ensure that Afghan security forces are effective and can control their own borders, and that NATO members can be assured that Afghanistan will not be used as a base for terrorism in the future”. The U.S. President also said that only strongly supported by NATO, the United States will be “able to underscore this final chapter in our Afghan operations”, and “also to paint a picture of a future whereby we’re partnering with the Afghan government on behalf of the Afghan people and on behalf of world security”²³³. In this context, the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization strongly emphasized not the successes accomplished on those remote battlefields in AfPak, but mainly the need *to go on* with resolutely and continuously supporting Afghanistan *after* the end of the ISAF mission: Our troops will move into a support role. By the end of 2014, our combat mission will be completed, our combat troops will return home, the Afghan security forces will take full responsibility for the security – but we will still be there to train, advise, and assist”. Rasmussen also said that “to that end, we are now preparing a training mission to be established from 2015. It will be a very different mission – a non-combat mission with a significantly lower number of troops and trainers. So we are determinedly moving towards our goal: an Afghanistan that can stand on its own feet. But the Afghans will not stand alone. We are prepared for an enduring partnership with the Afghan people”²³⁴.

Press Secretary, at the Internet address <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/06/19/remarks-president-obama-and-german-chancellor-merkel-joint-press-confere>

²³³ U.S. President Barack Obama, in “Remarks by President Obama and NATO Secretary General Anders Rasmussen After Bilateral Meeting, Oval Office”, May 31, 2013, published by The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, at the Internet address <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/05/31/remarks-president-obama-and-nato-secretary-general-anders-rasmussen-aft>

²³⁴ NATO Secretary General Rasmussen, in “Remarks by President Obama and NATO Secretary General Anders Rasmussen After Bilateral Meeting, Oval Office”, May 31, 2013, published by The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, at the Internet address <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/05/31/remarks-president-obama-and-nato-secretary-general-anders-rasmussen-aft>

2. The most recent U. S. Department of Defense official report dealing with evolutions in Afghanistan: a lot of very worrying data, accompanied by some optimistic evaluations

According to our *professional* opinion, *many* official reports dealing with ongoing evolutions, and with prospecting (or forecasting) possible / probable future scenarios in Afghanistan have either conclusions, or executive summaries which clearly are heavily contaminated with what we might legitimately call *wishful thinking* or *excessive optimism*. These official reports present a lot of real aspects (with significant amounts of important accurate details and figures), but *in many occasions the way in which such extensive and accurate raw data are interpreted, and mainly the conclusions are obviously exceedingly optimistic* (most probably because of the very fluid and complex domestic political context in the US, and because of the more or less direct institutional – or extra-institutional – pressures of all sorts). But, in spite of the exceedingly optimistic conclusions of quite many U.S. official reports, these official texts offer *a lot of evidence that present and future evolutions in Afghanistan are – and will be – nothing else but a huge pile of problems, risks and threats, for at least: a. peace, stability and development in Afghanistan; b. regional peace, stability and predictability; c. the power status of the United States of America; d. global relevance and future of NATO; and e. defense and security interests of the Western World which integrates Romania (whose vital strategic interests are strongly connected to both the U.S. and NATO, and to the long-term trends in the Greater Middle East, including Afghanistan and Pakistan – AfPak).*

The general situation in Afghanistan is regarded as being dominantly positive by some of the documents made public by the U.S. Department of Defense. There are several clear statements indicating the mainly optimistic mood of the Pentagon analysts. The main sectors of the Afghan situation in which the Pentagon thinks really major positive results are obvious are these: a. a sharp increase in size and effectiveness of the Afghan military and police forces; b. interconnected failures of the insurgency; c. improved cooperation with Pakistan, generating enhanced chances for regional stability; d. positive evolution of the U.S.-Afghan relations, offering positive future perspectives; e. significant progress of effective governance in Afghanistan; and f. positive evolution of the Afghan economy.

In the most recent *Report* made available for public use in late October / early November 2013, the Pentagon clearly states, first of all, that “Afghan security forces are now successfully providing security for their own people, fighting their own battles, and holding the gains made by the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in the last decade. This is a fundamental shift in the course of the conflict. The Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) have seen their capabilities expand rapidly since 2009, while insurgent territorial influence and kinetic capabilities have remained static. During the 2012 fighting season, ISAF led the fight against the insurgency, helping to put the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) firmly in control of all of Afghanistan’s major cities and 34 provincial capitals”²³⁵.

²³⁵ The U.S. Department of Defense, “Executive Summary”, in *Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan: Report to Congress In accordance with sections 1230 and 1231 of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2008 (P.L. 110-181), as amended; to include reports in response to section 1221 of the NDAA for Fiscal Year 2012 (P.L. 112-81), and sections 1212, 1223, and 1531(d) of the NDAA for Fiscal Year 2013 (P.L. 112-239)*, November 2013, p. 1 (for the rest of the text, this report will be quoted, when it is necessary, as *Pentagon report, November 2013*)

The same opening part of the Report also states that “the insurgency failed to achieve its stated campaign objectives during the reporting period and its ability to strike at major population centers is under pressure. The enemy is now less popular than in 2012”²³⁶, and that “during the reporting period, sustained counterterrorism (CT) operations exerted pressure on AQ personnel and networks, and eliminated dozens of al Qaeda (AQ) operatives and facilitators, restricting AQ movements to isolated areas within northeastern Afghanistan. ISAF estimates that the number of AQ fighters in Afghanistan remains very low”²³⁷.

The same document states that regional stability is clearly enhanced, as a direct result of “improved cooperation” (of both ISAF and GIROA²³⁸) “with Pakistan”. More precisely, the texts strongly underlines that both “Pakistan and Afghanistan acknowledge that stability in their respective countries is inter-related”, and that “relations between the two nations began to improve in September when President Karzai visited Prime Minister Sharif. Additionally, the military-to-military relationship between the nations improved incrementally; senior Pakistani, Afghan, and ISAF leaders took part in tripartite discussions, with similar meetings held at lower levels”²³⁹. Later on we shall see how limited are the real strategically significant results of the bilateral relations of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Another *exceedingly optimistic* part of the official evaluations of the situation in Afghanistan generated by the U.S. Department of Defense is that dealing with the “U.S.-Afghan relations”. The Report we are quoting and commenting here offers a lot of optimistic statements dealing with the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) negotiated by the U.S. And Afghanistan, saying that “the BSA would supersede the 2003 Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) with Afghanistan and provide the legal framework for the presence of U.S. forces in Afghanistan after 2014” and that “the BSA would also set parameters for future defense cooperation activities between the two countries, confirm and codify this enduring defense partnership, and send a clear message that the United States will not abandon Afghanistan”. The same report states that the BSA is to “enter into force on January 1, 2015. The BSA will serve as a blueprint for the NATO-Afghanistan SOFA. Following completion of the BSA, NATO working groups would negotiate a new SOFA with Afghanistan for the NATO post-2014 RESOLUTE SUPPORT mission”²⁴⁰. But, *in spite of these hopes, at the beginning of February 2014 the BSA is not yet signed, as a direct result of problems and delays in the decision-making process in Kabul. We strongly underline that any significant extra delays in signing and implementing the U.S.-Afghanistan BSA might seriously harm the effectiveness of the RESOLUTE SUPPORT mission* and, by means of this, might seriously diminish the chances for a sound and stable future of Afghanistan.

Speaking about “effective governance” in Afghanistan, the Pentagon Report made public in late autumn 2013 states that “GIROA capacity to provide stable, representative, transparent, and responsive governance for the citizens of Afghanistan continues to develop”, and that

²³⁶ Pentagon report, November 2013, p. 4

²³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 5

²³⁸ GIROA means Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan)

²³⁹ Pentagon report, November 2013, p. 6

²⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 6

“revenue generation, including tax collection at the municipal level, has improved in recent years”²⁴¹. Later on, we will see that *the real situation is still difficult, with a lot of corruption and lack of governmental effectiveness.*

The most recent Report of the DoD addressed to the U.S. Congress also states that *the general development trends are clearly positive*: the “economic growth and development in Afghanistan will continue to be led through 2014 by investments in construction and by private consumption driven largely by donor contributions and ISAF spending”, and “donor funding commitments made in Tokyo provided an important signal from the international community that there will be continued funding after 2014 to support the Afghan economy and mitigate the effects of transition”²⁴². The same document says that at this very moment “mining accounts for a marginal share of GDP but has the potential to expand if the government implements pending legislation to modernize the rules and regulations governing this sector”, and that “the information technology sector, particularly telecommunications, is one area of Afghanistan’s economy that is showing continued growth”²⁴³ along the past few years. Later on, we will see *how limited and fragile the perspectives of the Afghan economic evolutions are.*

But the same official document, together with many other U.S. official documents identify, list and comment a lot of problems, challenges, threats and partial failures the U.S military and civilian structures and institutions, ISAF (the “ISAF coalition consists of all 28 NATO Allies plus 22 partner nations”, with “NATO allies” commanding “three of the six Regional Commands in Afghanistan: RC-North (Germany), RC-West (Italy), and RC-Capital (Turkey)”²⁴⁴) / NATO and, generally speaking, Western World (which includes Romania, too) are confronted with in their attempt to pacify, stabilize, democratize and implement a significant amount of development and modernization in Afghanistan. Along the next few pages we are going to list and comment some of the most important problems of this sort, emphasizing the basic fact that many of these problems and hardships are not at all new ones but, on the contrary, they represent stable (or perennial) elements of the strategically significant realities in AfPak (and we are speaking here about problems which have been presented in several previous official U.S. documents). The fact that they were listed again by the Pentagon report made public in late autumn of 2012 clearly signifies that these problems and hardships have not been solved / eliminated, in spite of the efforts made by the U.S., NATO / ISAF, a situation which means that there is a definite possibility that they are to influence a lot the general strategic landscape in AfPak at (and after) the moment when the current ISAF mission will come to an end, in the final days of 2014.

For example, if we are speaking about the sheer size of the Afghan governmental forces (military unit plus police forces), we might tend to be optimistic, because “the ANSF has nearly doubled in size since 2009”, reaching a total strength of “344,602, which is 98 percent of its 352,000 authorized end strength. Including its 24,169 Afghan Local Police (ALP) Guardians, GIRoA had 368,771 uniformed troops and police”²⁴⁵. On the other hand, we have to take into

²⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 7

²⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 7

²⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 8

²⁴⁴ For ISAF structure and forces see *Ibidem*, p. 13

²⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 3

account that this sharp increase in size of the military and police Afghan governmental forces was not accompanied by a really adequate, coherent and homogenous progress of qualitative features. With more details, “continuing problems with literacy, corruption, leadership, Afghan National Army (ANA) attrition, and manning inhibit ANSF progress. The single most important challenge facing the ANSF, however, is in developing an effective logistics and sustainment system. A lack of trained maintenance technicians and spare parts, and a logistics system that struggles to resupply units in the field, adversely affects every branch of the ANSF”²⁴⁶.

The Pentagon report we are quoting and commenting here strongly underlines that these “gaps” and “challenges” do exist *mainly* “in areas where ISAF currently provides support”, and that *the shortcomings we are speaking about cant not be solved, most probably, by the Afghan themselves*, mainly because “Afghanistan’s security ministries, despite substantial progress, still require substantive improvements in planning, programming, budgeting, and acquisition”. In such a situation, state the authors of the most recent Pentagon report, the Afghan authorities might be able to solve most of the problems ANSF are confronted with *only* if they are granted, continuously, *massive* “additional equipment fielding and continued ISAF training and advising”²⁴⁷. But in order to allow the U.S. to go on with offering help and assistance to the GIRA, a comprehensive bilateral security agreement is a must. As we know, “as agreed in the Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) signed by Presidents Obama and Karzai in May 2012, the United States and Afghanistan are negotiating a Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA). The BSA would supersede the 2003 Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) with Afghanistan and provide the legal framework for the presence of U.S. forces in Afghanistan after 2014”. We also know that “the BSA would also set parameters for future defense cooperation activities between the two countries, confirm and codify this enduring defense partnership, and send a clear message that the United States will not abandon Afghanistan. The BSA will be concluded as an executive agreement, not a mutual defense treaty”. In spite of the fact that “BSA negotiations began in November 2012, with a goal to conclude within one year” and in spite of the fact that “the BSA text is now largely complete and negotiations have moved to Kabul for policy level decisions and conclusion”²⁴⁸, the BSA is still not signed, which means a delay – generated, open sources say, *exclusively* by decision-making problems of all sort in Kabul – at least two or three months long. We strongly underline here that NATO seriously prepared itself to accompany the U.S.-Afghanistan BSA with its own set of measures, adopting significant decisions very early, in the opening days of June, 2013: “Planning for the post-2014 mission was bolstered by approval of the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) Strategic Concept of Operations (CONOPS) at the NATO Defense Ministers meeting on June 5, 2013. SHAPE is currently drafting a plan for the post-2014 NATO-led RESOLUTE SUPPORT mission with the expectation that it will be approved in the coming months. Individual Allies and partners have made informal personnel and capability pledges to the RESOLUTE SUPPORT mission and some have announced their plans for bilateral military engagement with Afghanistan”²⁴⁹. But, as long as the U.S.-Afghanistan BSA is not yet signed and not yet operational, “most of the 28 NATO nations continue to await political decisions before making any final announcements for contributions to the post-2014 NATO RESOLUTE SUPPORT mission”. *Until November*

²⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 3-4

²⁴⁷ For all elements quoted along this paragraph see *Ibidem*, pp. 3-4

²⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 6

²⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 10

2013 only a few NATO countries stated how large their contribution in manpower might be for the post-2014 NATO mission in Afghanistan: “Germany, as the Northern Framework Nation, committed 600-800 forces to RESOLUTE SUPPORT. Italy, as the Western Framework Nation, committed up to 800 forces. Turkey announced its commitment as the Capitol Region Framework Nation but has provided no additional clarity on personnel commitments. Furthermore, Georgia indicated potential contributions of up to 750 forces, Australia up to 450 forces, and Romania up to 250 forces”²⁵⁰. For the rest of the NATO members no accurate data are publicly available. Our conclusion is that, *the longer is going to be the delay in the signing process of the BSA in Kabul, the larger the political and military uncertainty will be, when we are speaking about the size and structure of the forces to implement RESOLUTE SUPPORT*

In some occasions, *measures already implemented, both in Afghanistan and in Pakistan, simply did not completely solve (or did not completely eliminate) the problems or threats they were tailored to cope with.* For example, “the mitigation measures applied over the previous year” are thought to “have reduced, but not eliminated, the inherent threat of insider attacks”²⁵¹. We also underline the fact that anti-corruption activities have very limited results (to put it mildly) as well: the from spring to autumn 2013, “Afghan government’s counter-corruption efforts have shown no substantial progress, apart from the public acknowledgement that large-scale corruption exists”²⁵². Along the Pakistani ground lines of communication (GLOC), “losses from pilferage and attacks” are a clearly perennial feature of strategic transports, and these losses are “remaining close to historical averages”²⁵³ (which means that, in spite of major efforts along many years, they can not be eliminated). Also, in spite of massive and continuous efforts made by both ISAF and ANSF along several years, “entrenched criminal networks maintain freedom of movement throughout the country, constituting a threat to the long-term stability of Afghanistan”²⁵⁴. Also, in spite of significant ANSF efforts, “Faryab Province”, which has been “identified” since early spring 2013 as a “potentially problematic province due to the increase in insurgent activity experienced after the withdrawal of the permanent ISAF presence” remained a quite hot spot, with ANSF forces clearly “unable to significantly reduce insurgent activity”, even if “it remains restricted to the western districts of the province, away from its main population centers”²⁵⁵.

The “transition” (the complex, multi-stage process by means of which ISAF forces and command structures are becoming less and less involved in combat missions, while the Afghan forces “take the lead”) is, Pentagon specialist are stating, *not at all homogenous, not at all linear and not at all completely successful*: “Transition is a dynamic and uneven process, with some areas progressing quickly and others moving slowly or even regressing. Notably, some areas of Badakshan Province saw increased insurgent attacks, with the ANSF taking significant casualties”²⁵⁶, says the Pentagon report made public in late autumn 2013. The same official document also states that “in districts along Highway 1 in Wardak, the level of insurgent activity increased over the reporting period. In Zabul province, the insurgency has managed to hinder

²⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 13

²⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 4

²⁵² *Ibidem*, p. 8

²⁵³ *Ibidem*, p. 12

²⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 14

²⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 20

²⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 5, and p. 20

GIRoA freedom of movement and influence in three districts along Highway 1. Security also remains contested in Paktiya and Khost provinces and the contest flows over into Paktika due to the insurgents need to retain their support network across the Afghan border with Pakistan”, and that “Farah Province has not seen its security situation improve over the reporting period, predominantly due to limited ANSF capacity in such a large geographical area”²⁵⁷. The text goes on saying that “the situation in Farah continues to affect the southern district of Shindand in Herat Province and, combined with a number of changes in provincial leadership, has slowed security progress across the region. In remote provinces such as Nuristan and Badakshan, ANSF progress towards consolidating control continues to be slow due to the poor road networks and inaccessibility to many parts of the province”²⁵⁸

At *strategic* level, beyond the quite large number of successful ANSF missions and operations, we are to take into account that “although localized in nature, the insurgency” managed to maintain “pressure on ISAF and ANSF through the use of IEDs, infiltration and co-option, intimidation, assassinations, and HPAs²⁵⁹ in major population centers. In addition, Taliban leaders have increased focus on non-kinetic means of influencing the local population, including intimidation and propaganda, and are improving relationships with influential local leaders and elders. Insurgents are intentionally increasing the targeting of ANSF and Afghan officials throughout the country, and have assassinated a number of key provincial leaders”²⁶⁰. More than this, at least in some occasions, ANSF clearly lacks self-confidence, in spite of being successful in many fights and larger operations. In “some areas”, mainly in “Pashtun-dominated rural areas in southern Afghanistan, particularly in northern Helmand Province”, the Pentagon analysts say that there exist “ANSF fears of being isolated and overwhelmed by what they perceive as a superior insurgent force”²⁶¹

But progress in Afghanistan “is slow and uneven” not only when we are speaking about strictly military / security / defence issues. *Many non-military evolutions and realities do have the same basic problem-generating (and risk-generating) feature.* For example, “revenue generation, including tax collection at the municipal level, has improved in recent years, but has decreased this year compared to the last”. And “additionally, execution of the development budget remains” a very serious “concern”²⁶².

We also note here that “in many occasions, “governance and development progress on a different timeline than security”., and that in order “to ensure the irreversibility of transition, the Afghan government will need to reduce the lag between the start of transition in an area and the provision of effective governance, and address endemic corruption. The most significant threats to transition remain government ineffectiveness and endemic corruption”. In many occasions, “progress toward strengthening sub-national governance remained slow over the reporting period. The connection between provincial and district governments and the national government, particularly in the areas of budget support and policy implementation, remains weak

²⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 18

²⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 19

²⁵⁹ HPAs means High Profile Attacks

²⁶⁰ *Pentagon report, November 2013*, pp. 14-15

²⁶¹ *Ibidem*, p. 16

²⁶² For a brief presentation of the the uneven pace of non-military evolutions see *Ibidem*, p. 7

and hampers local development. Local governments lack a systematic and proactive method for strategic planning, budget development, and sustainment processes. Many provincial governors criticize line ministries for a lack of cooperation and coordination, and complain that slow budget transfers hamper the implementation of projects”, while “local governments often lack the means to attract highly-qualified staff and have little authority in the hiring process”. The Pentagon Report we are quoting here also tells that “the absence of judges and prosecutors in some districts, and the lack of local administrative control over them, also hampers progress at the provincial level”²⁶³.

Speaking about the *role of Pakistan for the stability and predictability of Afghanistan*, the same Pentagon report says *some realities in Pakistan simply augment the already important difficulties in Afghanistan*. We have to take into account mainly that “the Afghan insurgency maintains sanctuaries in Pakistan, which is a major factor preventing their decisive defeat in the near term”, and that “furthermore, a significant portion of the materials which perpetuate the conflict emanate from or transit through Pakistan”²⁶⁴. More than this, “tactical level military-to-military coordination continues to be problematic without a politically endorsed, diplomatically supported bilateral border management strategy. As a result, cooperation along the border remains uneven” and “some Pakistani insurgents have fled into Afghanistan and then staged attacks into Pakistan”. The report states that counterinsurgency operations planned and led by Pakistani authorities were *only partially successful*: only in “some cases” these Pakistani CT operations “have restricted the operating space and resources of Afghan-focused insurgents”²⁶⁵. The Pentagon report we are commenting here also states that most of the improvised explosive devices (IEDs) “which are responsible for more coalition, Afghan, and Pakistani casualties than any other weapon, are made primarily from fertilizer and military or commercial grade explosives produced in, or imported through, Pakistan”²⁶⁶.

Institutional weakness in Afghanistan, at almost all levels (national, regional, provincial and local) is another problem severely harming the chances for a positive evolution leading to a quick and coherent stabilization of the situation in the country. *One of the weaknesses is the exceedingly centralized nature of governmental processes of all sorts, a feature strongly augmented by the obvious lack of adequate human capital in public institutions, and by important delays in implementing structural reforms potentially able to make institutions more effective*: “The Afghan government is highly centralized, with revenue, budgeting, spending, and service delivery authority residing with the central ministries in Kabul. This level of centralization limits the efficiency of service delivery at the provincial and district levels. Development of capacity at local levels is slowed by limited human capital as well as by delays in enactment of structural reforms by the central government”²⁶⁷.

Economy of Afghanistan is still weak and clearly underdeveloped (how severe underdevelopment is becomes very clear if we take into account that “about 80 percent of the

²⁶³ *Ibidem*, p. 22

²⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 6

²⁶⁵ For these elements see *Ibidem*, p. 6

²⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 15

²⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 7

work force is involved in agriculture”²⁶⁸). The U.S. officially estimates that Afghan economy “does not yet have a basis for sustained growth”, and that, to a certain degree, “economic growth and development in Afghanistan will continue to be led through 2014”, but *mainly* “by investments in construction and by private consumption driven largely by donor contributions and ISAF spending”. The most recent Pentagon report on Afghanistan states that “the ongoing reduction of ISAF personnel is likely to have a negative effect on economic growth”.

In some occasions, *clusters of strongly interconnected problems generate synergetic consequences almost impossible – or at least very difficult – to successfully cope with*. For example, estimates the November 2013 Pentagon report, in Afghanistan “opium production... remains a substantial portion of overall agriculture output and will continue to fuel corruption and fund the insurgency”²⁶⁹. We also have to take into account that “the convergence of insurgent, terrorist, and criminal networks is pervasive and constitutes a threat to Afghanistan’s stability”, and that “revenue from opium trafficking continues to contribute to the insurgency and Afghan criminal networks. Additionally, some areas of Afghanistan have seen a recent increase in extortion and kidnappings by low-level criminal networks”. More than that, “expanding criminal networks have undercut security and governance gains in several ways. Criminal networks, insurgent groups, and corrupt government officials are often interlinked via multilayered connections, making ties between the officials and the criminal activity difficult to prove and prosecute. These factors all contribute to popular disaffection with the government and create opportunities for the insurgency”²⁷⁰, say the authors of the Pentagon report made public in November 2013.

Some of the activities of the international community in Afghanistan seem to be, according to the data offered by Pentagon report made public in November 2013, able to generate *results which are both very expensive ones, and placed under a huge question mark, in 2014, because of the obvious lack of necessary resources*. The most interesting situation of this sort is that of APRP. “The Afghan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP) is an internationally funded, GIRoA-led initiative that encourages insurgents to renounce violence via honorable means, live within the laws of Afghanistan, and peaceably return to their communities as a productive part of Afghan society”. According to the available data, “APRP is a five-year program that will conclude in mid-2015”, and there is an “U.S.-funded Afghan Reintegration Program (ARP)” which “enables the U.S. military to provide critical support to the Afghan-led APRP program”²⁷¹. Since 2010, when it started, APRP managed to enroll and reintegrate “7,168 insurgents in over 230 districts in 32 provinces”, and “a total of 805 of these reintegrations occurred” between April and October 2013 period. Most notable is that “307 (38.14 percent of all enrollments in 2013) occurred in RC-East, one of the country’s most kinetic²⁷² regions”²⁷³. At the first glance, more than 7,000 former insurgents converted into peaceful citizens is an

²⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 7-8

²⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 8

²⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 16

²⁷¹ *Ibidem*, p. 25

²⁷² The authors of the Pentagon report use this concept to briefly describe a situation whose main features are high dynamics of a general situation which is complex and fluid, but also a very active insurgency. Eastern provinces, let us remember this, are near Pakistan, which was – and still is – a very important safe heaven for many Afghan insurgents, in many occasions

²⁷³ *Pentagon report, November 2013*, p.

important success. More carefully evaluated, the data say a more complex story. 7,000 insurgents integrated in 4 years means only less than 1,800 / year, which means less than five / day, in a country three times larger than Romania and with a total population larger than that of Romania. More than this, the total costs of the program are huge: 176.2 million \$, provided by 12 donor countries. In late autumn 2013, 107,1 million \$, and almost 80 % of the total amount of fund were supposed to be used until the end of 2013²⁷⁴. *This means that in order to transform one average Afghan insurgent into a peaceful citizen, the international community spent almost 20,000 \$, a really huge – and maybe excessive – amount of resources in a country where the GDP / capita / year is only .* But when we are speaking about future perspectives of the APRP we have to take into account that, according to what we know, all the available money will be used until the end of the second quarter of 2014²⁷⁵. *This means that there is a distinct possibility to have a second half of 2014 without really adequate funding for APRP, in a context dominated by a more and more diminished presence of NATO / ISAF, and also by the legitimate desire of the integrated former insurgents to be granted benefits not only before, but also after the elections in spring.*

²⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 28

²⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 28