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Is lasting peace possible in post-2014 Afghanistan?

By Tim Dunne

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NATO's training mission in Afghanistan ends in two years, amid questions about the country's ability to manage its own security when the alliance, Canada included, departs.

The transition to 2014 has started. Afghanistan has accepted greater responsibility for its own security, with increasing Afghan planning and leadership in security operations. Last March, President Hamid Karzai directed Afghan security forces to take charge of security, initially in five regions, and the Afghan area of responsibility continues to grow.

The NATO training mission will have prepared 320,000 police and military for service in Afghan security forces when NATO begins its withdrawal in two years. But there are concerns that the costs of domestic security may not be sustainable in the long term.

NATO acknowledges that in the post-2014 period there will be a continued need for training, education and mentoring, but in the end Afghanistan will still be among the world's poorest nations. It begs the question: Will the nation be able to sustain the costs of a national police force and an army?

The country receives between \$11 billion and \$12 billion per year from the international community, and it is uncertain if this funding will continue in the long term. NATO disclosed that Afghanistan's customs revenue last year was \$1.5 billion from all sources, a long way from meeting the costs of government, governance and security.

The European Union provides the Law and Order Trust Fund, NATO contributes the Afghan National Army Trust Fund to pay for equipment for the army, and Canada has focused much of our international development funding to Afghanistan. However, Afghanistan needs a continuing process to generate sustained funding for security, equipment, training and salaries. Over time, external funding will decrease, requiring the Afghan security forces to develop a sustained process to generate funds.

According to NATO, the Afghan security situation is currently manageable. But in the post-2014 period, when the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) stands down, will the framework be in place to allow the peace process to be successful? The process of "reintegration" will attempt to take the lower-level Taliban fighters off the battlefield. To date, some 650 Taliban have agreed to stop fighting and reintegrate into the Afghan population.

If Afghanistan is unable to consolidate and entrench the gains made in the past decade, the country risks sliding backwards to an opium-funded, totalitarian and misogynistic regime.

The Canadian Forces continue their efforts to prevent this.

Beginning in two weeks, ROTO 1 begins its move from CFB Gagetown to join the NATO training mission in the Afghan capital of Kabul, to replace ROTO 0 by mid-March. "ROTO" is army-speak for "rotation."

Of the 933 members of the Canadian Forces task force, 533 come from Atlantic Canada-based units, including the Second Battalion-The Royal Canadian Regiment and 42 Health Services Centre, both from CFB Gagetown, N.B., and 45 military personnel from Halifax's 3 Military Police Group and Maritime Forces Atlantic.

The NATO training mission is preparing the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police to assume full responsibility for security throughout Afghanistan.

The Canadian principal effort is concentrated in Kabul and two satellite sites at Herat and Mazar-e-Sharif, and Canadians will fill some leadership command and training development positions within the mission.

Canada's military operations in Afghanistan began in January 2002 when the first task force deployed into Kandahar Province. Our military forces returned to Afghanistan in August 2003 as part of a major operation, including a substantial combat force as part of NATO's ISAF in Kabul until December 2005, and later in Kandahar Province from August 2005 to July 2011. Canada's accomplishments have been impressive.

The Canadian task force in Kandahar concluded combat operations and completed its handover to the U.S in July 2011. The task force returned to Kabul with a new mission: to support the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan as it develops into an independent and self-sustaining nation with an effective leadership and efficient national security forces. Our forces are assisting with training Afghan trainers and instructors, developing leaders and building literacy and vocational skills.

The new mandate focuses on four key areas: investing in the future of Afghan children and youth through development programming in education and health; advancing security, the rule of law and human rights, including up to 950 Canadian trainers for Afghan national security forces; promoting regional diplomacy; and helping deliver humanitarian assistance.

We are now one of 50 nations involved in Afghanistan.

Tim Dunne is a Halifax-based communications consultant and military affairs writer, a Research Fellow with Dalhousie University's Centre for Foreign Policy Studies and a member of the Royal United Services Institute (NS) Security Affairs Committee.
