

Towards the Bonn conference: Afghanistan at a crossroad?

Conference, 29 November 2011

Royal Military Academy, 8 Rue Hobbema, 1000 Brussels

We are now 10 years into the war in Afghanistan. Yet, the country still looks very much like a battlefield in many provinces, as NATO forces confront well-organised insurgents. Although military operations can claim some successes in the recent years, the situation is fragile and reversible. Particularly, as Western troops are due to pull out by 2014, a new strategy is necessary to put Afghanistan on the right track.

The road to a peaceful – or at least secure – democracy will be long and bumpy. It will also require a concerted effort from a broad range of actors, including NATO, the EU, the UN, NGOs, regional stakeholders (i.e. China, India, Pakistan and Russia) and, primarily, the Afghan themselves. This concerted effort is precisely the aim of the second Bonn Conference on Afghanistan, which will take place in Germany on 5 December. The agenda of the conference includes discussions on the transfer of responsibility for security to the Afghan Government by 2014, the international commitment to the country until and – even more importantly – after 2014, and thirdly the process of national reconciliation (including possibly with Taliban fighters).

Challenges ahead are countless. The elaboration of an ambitious but realistic strategy for Afghanistan is not an easy task. Western governments and their constituencies must be convinced that continuous efforts and resources need to be channelled towards Afghanistan. Regional powers must redefine the balance between a short-sighted vision centred on their national interest, and the long-term perspective of a peaceful and prosper Afghanistan. Finally, the Afghans must fully grasp the opportunity to control their own destiny through a peaceful transition process and strengthened efforts against the many destabilizing forces proliferating in the country, notably drugs and corruption.

This conference, organised a few days ahead of the Bonn conference, convenes a group of eminent experts, practitioners and officials from various backgrounds to discuss the future of democracy, security and stability in Afghanistan.

The conference language will be English.

Participation by invitation only.

Conference Programme

13.45 – 14.00

Registration

14.00 – 15.35

Introductory Remarks

Ambassador Marc Trenteseau, Director-General, Egmont Institute.

Panel 1. Is there a peaceful and democratic future for Afghanistan? Regional views.

A view from Pakistan. What can be realistically expected from Islamabad.

Gareth Price, Senior Research Fellow, Chatham House,

A view from India. Can New Delhi stabilize its neighbourhood?

Swashpawan Singh, Former Ambassador and Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations.

A view from Russia. Lessons learned from the past, and future contribution.

Dr. Ekaterina Stepanova, Senior Researcher, Institute of World Economy & International relations (IMEMO), Moscow.

Chair: *Dr. Alexander Mattelaer, Researcher, Institute for European Studies.*

Discussant: *H.E. Mr. Homayoun Tandar, Afghan Ambassador to Belgium, Luxembourg and the EU*

15.35 – 16.00

Coffee Break

16.00 – 17.30

Panel 2. What role for international actors in the reconstruction of Afghanistan?

The road to 2014: What NATO forces can do to build a sustainable peace.

Nicholas Williams, Head of the Operations Section, NATO.

The European Union: What strategy for what added value?

Bettina Muscheidt, Political Desk Officer for Afghanistan, EEAS.

Workers on the ground: What NGOs can do and what they need.

Marta de la Cera, Coordinator, European Network of NGOs in Afghanistan.

Chair: *Brig-Gen. (R.) Jo Coelmont, Senior Associate Fellow, Egmont Institute.*

Discussant: *Ambassador Waheed Waheedullah, Expert in International Peace and Security, Designer and Architect of the Bonn Agreement.*

17.30 – 17.45

Concluding Remarks

LtCol BEM Patrick Goovaerts, Royal Higher Institute for Defence