



## The presidential elections and the end of the ISAF: changes not only for Afghanistan

The year 2014 will be a turning point for Afghanistan. With the elections in April, the leadership of Hamid Karzai (in power since 2002) will come to an end. In December 2014, NATO troops will formally end the ISAF operation. These are events so significant that in their aftermath the reality of Afghanistan will be an issue of a totally different nature than today. President Hamid Karzai has maliciously been called “a Western puppet” by his opponents. Meanwhile, in recent months, he has changed his attitude to the western allies. H. Karzai has set tough conditions for signing a strategic pact with the United States. At the same time, he has accused the Americans of attacks on Afghan civilians, of a lack of good will to resolve the conflict in Afghanistan, and even of organizing terrorist attacks and impersonating the Taliban movement. In the face of Karzai's malevolence, the U.S. Congress almost immediately threatened to cut by half the planned funds for support for Afghanistan. Discussions have also started about the point of further military presence in the country.

In the current issue of the “Pulaski Policy Papers” Research Fellow at the Casimir Pulaski Foundation Mr. Jakub Gajda analyses the impact of the elections in Afghanistan on regional security. “It is already known that the turnout will be low. In 2004 elections more than eight million citizens voted. Five years later fewer than five million people went to the polls. According to projections in the upcoming elections, the turnout may be half as low as it was five years ago. This raises the question of the legitimacy of presidential power, where no more than 20 percent of citizens will vote. In many parts of the country, especially in the troubled provinces along the border with Pakistan, polling stations will not be opened for safety reasons, and intimidation of the population taking part in the elections can achieve a higher scale than five years ago.”

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**Editorial Staff of the “Pulaski Policy Papers”**

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The Casimir Pulaski Foundation is an independent, non-partisan think tank with a mission to promote freedom, equality and democracy, as well as to support actions of strengthening civil society. The foundation carries out such activities as conducting scientific research, preparing publications and analyses, organizing seminars and conferences, providing education and support for leaders in Poland and abroad. The Casimir Pulaski Foundation is one of only two Polish institutions that have a partnership status with the Council of Europe and is a member of the Group Abroad – an umbrella organization of top 40 Polish NGOs working outside of Poland.

## Jakub Gajda, Research Fellow

### Jakub Gajda

Research Fellow at the Casimir Pulaski Foundation (CPF).

The year 2014 will be a turning point for Afghanistan. With the elections in April, the leadership of Hamid Karzai (in power since 2002) will come to an end. In December 2014, NATO troops will formally end the ISAF operation. These are events so significant that in their aftermath the reality of Afghanistan will be an issue of a totally different nature than today.

President Hamid Karzai has maliciously been called “a Western puppet” by his opponents. Meanwhile, in recent months, he has changed his attitude to the western allies. H. Karzai has set tough conditions for signing a strategic pact with the United States. At the same time, he has accused the Americans of attacks on Afghan civilians, of a lack of good will to resolve the conflict in Afghanistan, and even of organizing terrorist attacks and impersonating the Taliban movement. In the face of Karzai's malevolence, the U.S. Congress almost immediately threatened to cut by half the planned funds for support for Afghanistan. Discussions have also started about the point of further military presence in the country.

Afghan authorities are seeking self-governance and sovereignty. However, the dependence on external financial assistance and activities conducted by armed groups with which Afghan soldiers and policemen, still in training, are unable to cope, make financial and training support essential to Afghanistan. The presence of foreign troops, regardless of the nature of their support, will certainly continue to cause controversy. However, assistance seems necessary because the results of the proposed solution with the involvement of regional powers: India, China, Pakistan, Iran and Saudi Arabia, and the countries of Central Asia (mainly Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, but also Tajikistan and Turkmenistan) may raise some concerns. This is especially the case since the interests in Afghanistan of the countries in the region are often contradictory, and one needs to bear in mind that since the 1980s regional actors of the last century have contributed more to the destabilization rather than stabilization of this state so mired in the chaos of war. The key issue for both the cooperation with the West, as well as with the countries of the region will be the attitude of the new Afghan government and its president. Hamid Karzai, despite many differences of opinion with Washington, for 13 years has reigned as the leader closely associated with the West, including the United States. Today, however, facing the option of a regional solution, Afghanistan will need a completely different leader.

### **Frontrunners in the elections**

Abdullah Abdullah was already standing in the shadow of Hamid Karzai when the latter took his position as the head of the interim government in 2002. It was Abdullah who at a conference in Bonn in 2001 announced that the Northern Alliance agreed to the appointment of Hamid Karzai as the head of the Afghan government. Then, Abdullah was the minister of foreign affairs until 2006 in Karzai's government. In 2009 he took part in the presidential elections, winning over 30 percent of the vote in the first round, and entered the second round against Karzai who was applying for reelection. Eventually Abdullah withdrew, explaining that he did not believe in the integrity of the members of the Independent Electoral Commission.

With less than three months before the next elections, Abdullah Abdullah, is the favorite to win. The most serious of his rival – Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai – has similar results in some polls, but it is worth noting that in the elections five years ago he also had high ratings, and ended up with less than 3 percent of the vote.

### **Presidential multiethnic 'troika'**

Afghan electoral law requires candidates to give two names of the future vice-presidents. So voters de facto vote for three candidates. Abdullah, who by virtue of his origin, is considered more often as a Tajik (from the mother's side) than Pashtun, chose a Pashtun in his next cabinet: Mohammad Khan, and a Hazara: Mohammad Mohaqiq. Such a configuration would bring him the vast majority of the vote of Tajiks and Hazaras, as well as some Pashtun votes. Meanwhile, Ashraf Ghani, if successful, will make Uzbek General Rashid Dostum his first deputy. He is the most controversial among the candidates, and famous for his unpredictability in making and breaking alliances. This move will attract to Ghani, most of Uzbeks living in Afghanistan (approximately 9 percent of the total population). However, Ashraf Ghani is primarily a candidate supported by Pashtun nomads who are in conflict with the Hazara people. To overcome animosities, he chose a Hazara, Sarwar Danish, for the second vice-president, which is unlikely to give him more than 20 per cent of the vote of the Hazara minority. If Afghan fundamentalists vote in the elections, they will most likely support Abdul Rab Rasoul Sayyaf (a Pashtun).

Opinion polls do not give Sayyaf much of a chance, but in practice he may prove to be the dark horse of the elections, because in most surveys the opinion of fundamentalist circles is not reflected in the right proportions. The Hazara community fears Sayyaf because he is linked to the massacre of the Hazara population of the Afshar district in 1992. Along with Abdul Wahab Erfan (Uzbek) and a former warlord from Heart – a conservative Mohammad Ismail Khan (Tajik), Sayyaf may create the most anti-Western government of potential configurations. The candidates who can count on a few percent support are Hamid Karzai's people: Zalmay Rassoul, Gul Agha Sherzai and older brother of the incumbent president – Qayum Karzai. According to opinion polls, none of them has a realistic chance of getting more than 5 percent of the vote.

### **International support**

The United States and the European Union have not yet endorsed any of the candidates. It is speculated, however, that Ashraf Ghani is supported by a group of American politicians from Republican circles associated with Zalmay Khalilzad, a politician of Pashtun origin, a former United States Ambassador to the United Nations (2007-2009). The problem for the U.S. administration, however, may be Dostum who in case of victory of Ghani will be the vice president. Aside from the fact that he has been accused of war crimes, he is also perceived as an anti-American and pro-Russian politician – hence Ghani's victory suits the Russians. Therefore, the United States may turn towards Abdullah Abdullah. The problem with Abdullah, however, may rely on the fact that he has strong support from Iran, which, in the circumstances of possible warming of relations between Washington and Tehran, might not be an obstacle. For the present moment, one should still assume that Washington will continue to be skeptical about Iran's involvement in Afghanistan.

Paradoxically, Tehran would see benefits in not only Abdullah coming to power but also Ghani, due to his connections with pro-Iranian Ismail Khan. However, the presence of pro-Turkish Dostum in the same government is not favorable to Tehran. In this context it is worth underlining the close relationships between Tehran and Hazara politicians (Hazara people are Shiites) such as Mohaqeq, who has been chosen to the position of vice-president by Abdullah. The candidacy of Sayyaf is favored by Saudi Arabia. Riyadh can sympathize with Sayyaf due to his Wahhabi vision of Islam and explicitly anti-Shiite beliefs. Choosing Sayyaf is nothing other than the restoration of the status quo in Afghanistan from before the attacks on the WTC and the Pentagon and the implementation of anti-Western attitudes in foreign policy, even though he declares himself an enemy of the Taliban movement.

Significantly, Pakistan does not seem to have a favorite among the leading candidates. It is

closest to G. Sherzai and Q. Karzai (on March 6, 2014, Q. Karzai stepped down in favour of Z. Rassoul), who are both bound to fail. It is worth noting that in terms of solving the Afghan conflict, it is Pakistan who is the key country here.

### **President of a part of Afghanistan**

It is already known that the turnout will be low. In 2004 elections more than eight million citizens voted. Five years later fewer than five million people went to the polls. According to projections in the upcoming elections, the turnout may be half as low as it was five years ago. This raises the question of the legitimacy of presidential power, where no more than 20 percent of citizens will vote. In many parts of the country, especially in the troubled provinces along the border with Pakistan, polling stations will not be opened for safety reasons, and intimidation of the population taking part in the elections can achieve a higher scale than five years ago.

For several weeks before the elections, the situation in Afghanistan has been tense. The current president does not want to sign a strategic agreement with the United States, and rebel and terrorist attacks, which a few years ago practically did not happen in winter time, are now on the daily agenda. The Taliban movement and other armed groups are sending a clear message to the world – the elections will be held in an atmosphere of terror, and the next president will be the head of a failed state.

### **Recommendations for NATO and the West**

In the first place, even within the framework of the ISAF mission, the Afghan security forces should be supported at the elections so that the largest possible number of citizens decides to go to the polls. The new president should be aware that the West will continue to back him. In view of the conflict of interests of various regional players, after 2014, NATO should not count solely on regional solutions. Contemporary Afghanistan with its democratic political system has been co-created by the West, and leaving a state that is still weak and largely dependent on foreign aid risks undermining the achievements of the Alliance.

Asian countries will be able to ensure the economic development of Afghanistan, but in practice they will be guided by self-interest, so as far as safety and building democratic institutions go, Afghanistan will continue to need support from the West. Afghanistan needs NATO to engage in the Resolute Support training mission and observe the process of stabilization. One has to take into account the high risk of sending instructors and observers to Afghanistan – in this context a crucial role should be played by U.S. troops, whose task is the protection of training personnel (after the strategic partnership agreement between Kabul and Washington has been signed). In addition to support for the Afghan armed forces, it is worth maintaining the current commitment of the European Union Police Mission (EUPOL). The huge Afghan National Police (ANP) (over 160,000 policemen) is almost equal in size to the 200,000 strong Afghan National Army (ANA). In addition, the fact it is stationed in many inaccessible areas of the country is an important component for maintaining stability. After 2014 the so-called 'soft measures' should also be continued, in the areas of education, training and scholarships, conducted in particular by organizations not connected with the armed forces of the countries involved. Funds obtained from the American, British, German, French and Japanese programs (the largest donors so far) and the World Bank should go, more often than was the case previously, to appropriately profiled NGOs directly connected to Afghanistan by the presence of Afghan citizens in their structures.

Drawing on the experience and knowledge of Afghan realities acquired during the ISAF mission, Poland should also maintain involvement in Afghanistan as part of the Resolute Support training mission and Afghanistan's EUPOL mission. Consideration should also be given to re-activating the Polish MFA funds (the Polish aid program) to be spent on the ongoing civil projects in Afghanistan. Compared to other countries involved in Afghanistan, Poland's chief asset is its ability to share the lessons it learned from its own experience of transformation.

### Conclusions

- 1) NATO military operations have been in effect in the country since 2001. However, Afghanistan's authorities are still far from being fully prepared to take responsibility for the future of their country.
- 2) Abdullah Abdullah and Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai are the main favorites in the elections.
- 3) None of the candidates in the April presidential elections will be able to unite the entire Afghan society and meet the expectations of all the countries involved in Afghanistan.
- 4) The departure from Afghanistan by NATO stabilization forces, the small number of American troops, and the fact that the government in Kabul has only partial control of the situation in the country – these factors will create the opportunity for the reconstruction of the position of the Taliban and armed groups associated with Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and Hakkani organization, as well as the tribal militia (Arbakai) – who are not particularly enthusiastic about either the West or the Afghan government.
- 5) Iranian, Indian and Chinese investments in Afghanistan should ensure economic development in many regions, but simultaneous rivalry between regional powers (including Pakistan and the Central Asian states) may well lead to an escalation of tensions and further destabilization.
- 6) With the barely non-existent involvement of the West in the Resolute Support mission and without U.S. military supporting Afghan security forces, Afghanistan may face the threat of decentralization of power, anarchy, and finally the return to power of such elements as the Taliban.

## The Casimir Pulaski Foundation

is an independent think tank which specializes in foreign policy, with a mission to promote freedom, equality and democracy, as well as to support actions of strengthening civil society. The foundation carries out activities both in Poland and abroad, among others in Central and Eastern Europe and in North America.

The Casimir Pulaski Foundation was founded due to political changes that took place in Poland after 1989. The principal values of Casimir Pulaski (freedom, justice and democracy) are an inspiration for every initiative undertaken by the Foundation. A few of the Foundations activities include: conducting scientific research, preparing publications and analyses, organizing seminars and conferences, providing education and support for leaders ([www.instytutprzywodztwa.pl](http://www.instytutprzywodztwa.pl)).

The Foundation is the main organizer of the Warsaw Regional NGOs Congress ([www.warsawcongress.pl](http://www.warsawcongress.pl)), the co-organizer of the Academy of Young Diplomats ([www.diplomats.pl](http://www.diplomats.pl)) and publisher of the Communication Platform for Non-Governmental Organizations ([www.non-gov.org](http://www.non-gov.org)).

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