

The OSCE and transnational security challenges

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Introduction

Although the engagement of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) with Afghanistan, as an OSCE Asian Partner for Co-operation, is not a new effort, a more structured and focused approach was initiated in November 2007 with a decision by the participating States taken at the Madrid Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council. Since then, the implementation of this Decision (MC Decision No. 4/07) has put OSCE efforts towards Afghanistan on a more systematic basis.

The OSCE's comprehensive and co-operative approach to security and its commitment to address new security threats and challenges provides the underlying principle and foundation for the Organization's engagement with Afghanistan. Several milestones can be identified that have shaped the OSCE's efforts in that regard — granting Partner for Co-operation status in 2003; then in 2004 and 2005, the deployment of OSCE/ODIHR¹ Election Support Teams (EST) to provide electoral assistance to the presidential and parliamentary elections in Afghanistan; Afghan participation in on-going and subject-specific OSCE projects and events; the Ministerial Council Decision No. 4/07, mandating a more sustainable form of OSCE engagement with Afghanistan; and more recently, in early April, the OSCE Permanent Council's decision on election assistance for the August 2009 Presidential elections.

Before exploring these milestones in more detail, this article will first analyze the security challenges stemming from Afghanistan, which have a direct impact on the stability and security of the OSCE area, and particularly on its Central Asian participating States. These perceived challenges and threats provide the context for MC Decision No. 4/07, which calls for more concerted and cross-dimensional OSCE activities in assisting Afghanistan. The article then reflects on the state of progress related to the implementation of MC Decision No. 4/07 and the OSCE's commitment to promote regional security and stability. Inherent challenges pertaining to the extent and scope by which the OSCE can proceed toward further engagement with Afghanistan will also be explored in the article's concluding section.

The security context

OSCE participating States continue to express their concern over the evolving political and security situation in Afghanistan and its direct impact on their security, emphasizing that sustainable stability in the country is of utmost importance for the OSCE region. Weak institutions and a deficit in the rule of law, terrorism, organized crime, narcotics production and trafficking as well as corruption are among those serious security challenges experienced by Afghanistan. These are directly affecting participating States, particularly those in Central Asia.

Porous borders between northern Afghanistan and several of the OSCE Central Asian participating States are responsible for the manifestation of several cross-border security challenges. These include narcotics trafficking, terrorist or anti-government groups operating out of Afghan territory that could target Central Asian States, the illicit trafficking of small arms and light weapons, the trafficking of human beings and illegal migration.

While there is some hope that a stable Afghanistan could potentially yield in the long-term perspective some mutual benefits to Central Asian participating States, such as through the enhancement of trade, transport,

1 Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.

economic development and regional integration, for the time being, the greatest concern remains the volatile situation in the country and the spill-over effect this could have on Central Asia's States.

One of the more serious security challenges is posed by the trafficking of narcotics, as it affects not only the Central Asian States but all of the OSCE participating States and their societies. Narcotics trafficking proceeds not only through Central Asia but further on via the Caspian Sea into the South Caucasus and the Russian Federation, with destinations also in other European countries. Narcotics trafficking also brings with it other side effects, such as an increase in criminal networks operating across borders which fuels corruption, all of which can undermine governments, economic development, and societal structures. Moreover, revenues from narcotics trafficking provide for the financing of terrorist and other anti-governmental groups. Parts of Afghanistan have become safe havens for traffickers and terrorist alike, with porous borders allowing for illegal crossings of groups that might also pose a threat to the governments in Central Asia. Illicit trafficking of small arms and light weapons also concerns neighboring countries, as does the trafficking of human beings.²

In addressing and responding to these security risks, another challenge is evident — how to support activities and measures that address these legitimate security concerns on the one hand, while on the other hand, assuring the free and secure movement of peoples and goods across regional frontiers and enhancing prosperity through increased regional cross-border co-operation.

This means that in many ways, the OSCE has to maintain a fine balancing act between assuring security while not undermining its commitment to promote economic prosperity among its participating States. It is for these varied reasons that the OSCE's activities, particularly in border security and management, remain prominent on the Organization's agenda.

At the same time, the OSCE continues to support Central Asian participating States to strengthen their capacities against the security risks stemming from Afghanistan, particularly with the assistance of OSCE Field Operations — five altogether — through activities that reflect the three OSCE dimensions of security — the politico-military, economic and environmental and human dimensions. Activities involving support for political dialogue, border management and security, anti-corruption programmes, water and energy issues, democratic institution building, or regional activities (such as, for example, the OSCE Academy in Bishkek), represent some of the concrete efforts undertaken by the OSCE to strengthen Central Asian participating States.

First steps in engaging with Afghanistan

The basic foundation of OSCE-Afghanistan interaction was established on 3 April 2003, when the Permanent Council — the OSCE's standing political body — in its Decision No. 537 granted Partner for Co-operation status to Afghanistan, following a request by the Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan on 18 February 2003. Already in February 2002, President Rakhmonov of Tajikistan had proposed that Afghanistan be invited to become a Partner for Co-operation. Also, the United States was a crucial actor in moving the Decision forward following the US-led Operation Enduring Freedom and the deployment of NATO/ISAF troops in Afghanistan in 2001. With PC Decision No. 537, OSCE participating States underlined the importance of Afghanistan as a

² See Thomas de Waal and Anna Matveeva, *Central Asia and the Caucasus: A Vulnerable Crescent*, New York, International Peace Academy, February 2007. Jaroslaw Pietrusiewicz, 'The OSCE, Afghanistan and Central Asia,' in *OSCE Future Operations and Leadership*, Geneva, 2008, pp. 49-57.

Partner for Co-operation as it shared common borders with three Central Asian States and had mutual security interests.³

Partner for Co-operation status was crucial as it opened the way for Afghan participation in major OSCE-related events, including the annual Ministerial Council Meetings, the Human Dimension Implementation Meetings, meetings of the Economic and Environmental Forum, and the Annual Security Review Conference. Also, Partner status allowed Afghanistan to participate in specialized events pertaining mostly to the managing of those security problems that also were of primary importance to the country, that is, combating terrorism, illicit narcotics and weapons trafficking and fighting organized crime.

There are several examples of Afghan participation in such OSCE events, often organized jointly with other international actors, including the conference on combating illicit drugs organized by the OSCE and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Regional training seminars have also included Afghan participants, such as the one in Almaty in 2008, organized by the OSCE's Strategic Police Matters Unit (SPMU), the Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities (OCEEA), and the UNODC. Cross-border training programmes on specific issues such as combating small arms and light weapons (SALW) trafficking have also provided for Afghan participation, as have those supporting capacity-building efforts. Other examples are those projects organized by the SPMU that seek to enhance the policing capacity of Afghan National Police and counter-narcotics police in combating narcotics trafficking. One such training course has been organized with the International Drugs-fighting Centre of the Russian Advanced Police Academy at Domodedovo, Russia, which Afghan police officers have attended. While OSCE activities have remained within the confines of the OSCE area, that is outside Afghanistan, there have been two important exceptions, with the third one just recently agreed to by participating States. The exceptions refer to the OSCE's election support to Afghanistan. The precedents for OSCE assistance inside of Afghanistan were set in 2004, and then again in 2005, when the OSCE provided election support teams to assist in organizing Afghanistan's first presidential election, and then the first parliamentary election, at the request of the Afghan government. The first Permanent Council decision in 2004, authorizing an election support team, made clear from the beginning that this was not to 'set a precedent for OSCE activities beyond the Organization's geographic area of responsibility.'⁴

OSCE Permanent Council decisions were necessary for dispatching OSCE/ODIHR Election Support Teams (EST) with the explicit mandate to provide technical expertise and analyzing aspects of the electoral process, and with specific modalities given as to the EST's duration and size. The decision-making process on the first EST deployment in 2004 captured the various reasons for not sending an election observation mission. For one, there were diverging views among the participating States with the United States and several EU countries actively supporting an OSCE engagement, while others, such as the Russian Federation initially resisting any involvement. Also, Afghanistan had not formally subscribed to the OSCE's Copenhagen Commitments on election standards and, as such, had not made any commitments to implement them; therefore, a traditional election observation mission was not possible as such a mission would have to issue a report on possible election shortcomings. Lastly, the volatile security environment did not lend itself to a traditional observation mission as random visits to polling stations would not have been possible. However, the deployment of two

3 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Permanent Council, *Decision No. 537, Granting of the Status of Partner for Co-operation to Afghanistan*, PC.DEC/537, 3 April 2003, p.1.

4 See Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Permanent Council, *Decision No. 622, Election Support Team to Afghanistan*, PC.DEC/622, 29 July 2004, p.2

election support teams in 2004 and 2005 has served as a precedent for the 2009 Election Support Team that the Permanent Council authorized a few months ago.

OSCE Ministerial Council Decision No. 4/07 and steps towards implementation

One of the most substantive steps taken towards enhancing and strengthening OSCE engagement with Afghanistan has been Ministerial Council Decision No. 4/07. Agreed by the fifty-six OSCE participating States in Madrid, the Decision identifies the need for OSCE activities in three major areas: border security and management, policing and combating trafficking, with such activities complementing other national and international efforts. The Decision provides for a more sustained OSCE engagement with Afghanistan than has hitherto been the case as participating States tasked the Secretary General 'with examining the prospects for intensifying OSCE action to support measures for security of the borders between the Central Asian participating States and Afghanistan in line with the objectives and principles set forth in the OSCE Border Security and Management Concept.'⁵ However, as no consensus could be reached for OSCE assistance within Afghanistan, the Ministerial Council Decision remains for the time, limited to activities and projects outside of Afghanistan, with the inclusion of Afghan participants wherever possible.

The Decision has its origin in the September 2007 request by Afghanistan asking the OSCE to assist with border security, police training and combating narcotics trafficking. Its provisions also acknowledge the accumulative expertise that the OSCE has with regards to border security and management, customs related issues, police training and anti-terrorism activities, and with responding to trans-boundary and cross-dimensional security challenges. Moreover, it calls for close co-operation and co-ordination with other international and regional organizations, and for OSCE field operations in Central Asia to be engaged in relevant activities.

To implement the Decision, the OSCE Secretariat started in 2008 to design a package of sixteen Afghan-related projects, working hand-in-hand with the participating States and relevant international and regional actors in order to complement existing international efforts as effectively as possible and to avoid duplication. The package included project proposals to strengthen border security and management, to facilitate cross-border co-operation, and to enhance national law enforcement capacities — with the inclusion of Afghan participants in any such activities. Several of these projects build on existing OSCE activities in Central Asian participating States, primarily to train customs and border police, including counter-narcotics police. Also, as two of the projects became contested by some participating States because they involved activities inside Afghanistan, and so as not to delay the implementation process, it was agreed to start implementation of those within the OSCE area. Thus, while some of the projects are already in progress, others remain pending, either due to political decision or availability of funding.

What is telling about the projects, as well as other Afghanistan related OSCE activities, is that they combine substantial OSCE expertise within its existing channels, including the Secretariat's Conflict Prevention Centre (here in particular the Operations Service's Borders Team), the OCEEA, the SPMU, the Action Against Terrorism

5 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, *Decision No. 4/07, OSCE Engagement with Afghanistan*, MC.DEC/4/07/Corr.1 of 30 November 2007, Fifteenth Meeting of the Ministerial Council, 29 and 30 November 2007, Madrid, 30 November 2007, pp. 20. For further elaboration on this Decision and its Implementation see also Marc Perrin de Brichambaut, 'OSCE Engagement with Afghanistan,' in *CORE Yearbook*, eds. IFSH, Hamburg, Nomos, pp. 361-368; and Alice Ackermann, 'Engaging with Afghanistan – An OSCE Perspective,' *Defense Nationale et Sécurité Collective*, January 2009, pp. 41-45.

Unit (ATU), or the OSCE field operations in Central Asia. Among the specific projects involving assistance in the areas of border security and management and police and customs is for example, the Kyrgyz Customs Training Facility in Bishkek which will also include Afghan participants.

One of the flagship projects so far is the OSCE Border Management Staff College in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. The College project was launched on 27 May 2009 and is designated to bring together several objectives: to enhance the knowledge of senior managers of the border security and management agencies of the OSCE participating States and Partners for Co-operation and promote co-operation and exchange of information; to act as a research and development centre to link the Staff College to border management training and research institutes in the OSCE area; and to facilitate an outreach programme of workshops and seminars within Central Asia to support cross-border and inter-agency co-operation by means of exchange of information, lessons learned and best practices. At this point, the Staff College will offer four security and management staff courses per year, with senior managers drawn from the OSCE area as well as Afghanistan.

The OSCE's programme of activities developed within the context of MC Decision No. 4/07 also found support at the '2008 OSCE-Afghanistan Conference on Strengthening Co-operation between the OSCE and its Asian Partners for Co-operation to Address Challenges to Security.' Held in Kabul on 9-10 November 2008, representatives of the Afghan government reiterated their support for OSCE activities and also expressed interest for OSCE support of the 2009 Presidential elections.

The 2009 OSCE Greek Chairmanship and engagement with Afghanistan

The Greek Chairmanship has actively supported the OSCE programme of activities pertaining to Afghanistan. At her speech at the International Conference on Afghanistan in The Hague on 31 March 2009, the OSCE Chairwoman-in-Office, Greek Foreign Minister Dora Bakoyannis, emphasized that 'Engagement with Afghanistan remains high on the Greek OSCE Chairmanship agenda'⁶ making reference to continued OSCE commitment to enhance its co-operation with Afghanistan by means of the 16 projects' package.

Under the Greek Chairmanship, OSCE participating States also agreed on 2 April to Permanent Council Decision No. 891 tasking the OSCE/ODIHR to deploy an Election Support Team to Afghanistan for the presidential and provincial council elections. The decision came as a response to an invitation by Afghan Foreign Minister Rangin Dadfar Spanta on 22 February 2009. It tasks the ODIHR with the following: assistance with international efforts for the upcoming elections; the preparation of a report on the electoral process in view of providing recommendations for future elections; co-ordination with international, regional and domestic monitoring and support organizations in Afghanistan; determining the size of the EST (not to exceed 50 election staff); and conducting consultations with relevant actors pertaining to security arrangements.⁷

At present, the OSCE/ODIHR EST includes 20 experts who arrived in Kabul on 26 July 2009 and who will be assisting election stakeholders in Afghanistan, including election administration bodies and domestic observer groups. The ODIHR experts plan to conduct short field visits in the provinces, if the security situation allows for this. Campaign, pre-election preparations and the media situation as well as election day

⁶ 'Speech of Foreign Minister Ms. Dora Bakoyannis at the International Conference on Afghanistan, The Hague (31.03.2009),' CIO. GAL/43/09, 1 April 2009.

⁷ Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Permanent Council, 'Decision on the Election Support Team to Afghanistan' PC.DEC/891, 2 April 2009.

proceedings, the count and tabulation results, and the complaints and appeals process will be followed. The Afghan Government and the OSCE participating States will be provided with a report of findings by the OSCE/ODIHR experts after the completion of the electoral process. The EST WILL also closely co-ordinate with other international actors, in particular the EU and UN observation and assistance missions.⁸

Concluding remarks

The OSCE's engagement with Afghanistan is truly a challenging undertaking, one that will require considerable human and financial resources over a prolonged period of time. Among some of the challenges the OSCE is facing in that engagement is more than evident: ensuring that OSCE efforts are well co-ordinated with other international and regional actors engaged in Afghanistan and with Afghanistan to guarantee complementarity and avoid duplication; that there is political support by all 56 participating States as OSCE activities must be part of a long-term and sustainable endeavour; that participating States assist OSCE field operations in Central Asia by supporting programmatic and Unified Budget resources that make possible their continued involvement; that in time of a global financial crisis, the momentum for launching new activities is maintained and that appropriate extra-budgetary contributions are made available; that the deteriorating security situations within Afghanistan will not, to a great extent, be a factor constraining any robust OSCE activities. So far, though, despite the various challenges, there is a positive outlook that the OSCE can continue to build on its solid framework of interaction that is has already established with Afghanistan as a Partner for Co-operation.

8 OSCE/ODIHR Press Release "OSCE/ODIHR deploys expert team to support Afghanistan elections," 27 July 2009, ODIHR.PR/47/09.



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