

## **ISSUES**

- The prospect of intra-Afghan peace negotiations raises questions about whether the Taliban is sincere in seeking a power-sharing arrangement in a peace settlement. The larger issue is whether it is possible for the sides to bridge seemingly incompatible visions of an Afghan state. The Taliban has thus far shown little interest in compromising on any issues of significance.
- In the absence of a comprehensive, sustained cease-fire, the ability of the Afghan security forces to withstand the Taliban and ISIS insurgency will continue to be severely tested, especially with the drawdown of foreign troops.
- The power-sharing agreement signed between Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah has resolved a lingering political crisis in Kabul, but longstanding grievances among the political elites have not been addressed. While the agreement provides legitimacy for the Kabul government in intra-Afghan peace talks, possible future internal power struggles could weaken its negotiating position.

## **US INTERESTS**

- Although determined to have a smaller footprint in Afghanistan, the U.S. has an interest in regional stability and in an Afghan state capable of defending itself and able to chart its own course.
- The U.S. has a stake in a stable Afghan government that can restore the confidence of the Afghan people in their elected leadership. It has a 19-year investment in the survival of a popularly elected, liberal constitutional government and an obligation to continue to provide generous non-military assistance.
- It remains in the American interest that there be a political solution to the Afghan conflict, but without sacrificing the tangible societal gains that have been achieved in nearly two decades in Afghanistan.

## **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

- The U.S. government should continue to give support to the Kabul government but insist on the importance of Afghan political unity and demand greater evidence of efforts to curb corruption.



- The drawdown of U.S. military forces should be conditioned on the Taliban's adherence to the commitments made in the Doha agreement, and the U.S. should also press for retention of special operations and intelligence personnel for counter-terrorism activities.
- The U.S. should do everything possible to facilitate broad participation in an intra-Afghan dialogue and offer to help facilitate any agreements reached.