

“NATO in Afghanistan: A New Mission for an Old Alliance”

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Introduction

In October 2006, NATO took formal control of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. This was a remarkable step for an alliance that had been formed nearly six decades earlier to counter early Cold War threats by the Soviet Union towards West Europe. In 1949, no one of its founders would have dreamed that the alliance would eventually be operating in a country in the Middle East. To them, it would have been incomprehensible that a force of 40,000 would be attempting to stabilize a country that had succumbed to an extreme, militant, Islamic movement like the Taliban. No doubt, equally surprising would have been the fact that the militant movement had both harbored and refused to surrender a terrorist whose commands had resulted in attacks on key buildings in New York City and Washington, D.C., with the ensuing deaths of about 3,000 persons. Probably, NATO founders would also have been amazed, when they realized that contributing members of the alliance in Afghanistan included ten nations that had formerly been part of the communist bloc that the architects of 1949 were establishing NATO to contain.

Primarily, this paper will focus on the nature of the mission since October 2006, the point at which NATO took over the operation in a formal way. At the same time, it is important to examine certain aspects of the operation as it evolved after September 2001. Attention will focus in the first section on evaluation of the foundation document transferring control of ISAF to NATO. Second, the concerns will center both on the make-up of the military force itself and on the changing strategies in which it has been involved. Third, there will be some analysis of the degree and amount of economic assistance provided by the various national members of the allied forces. Some nations that have supplied troops have also provided economic aid and assistance in rebuilding facilities that would nurture further economic growth. Others, however, have preferred to assist with economic resources as a substitute for troops. In a number of cases, public opinion within those nations would not have

supported dispatch of military forces. Fourth, political development in terms of institutions and the machinery of democracy have also been part of the effort in Afghanistan. What role have NATO nations played in that challenge? A fifth section will examine briefly the related areas of policy decisions, current issues, and visions for the future. Sixth, there will be an extended section in the paper that treats the individual contributions made by the member states. All alliance partners have contributed in some way on the ground in Afghanistan. What have been their specific contributions, and what has been the overall division of labor. A conclusion will then present several challenges that need immediate attention by NATO planners in Afghanistan.

**Declaration by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan:
September 6, 2006**

The initial document bears the signatures of Mr. Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, Secretary General of NATO, and Mr. Hamid Karzai, President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. A first section presents a framework for cooperation between the two entities. NATO enunciated goals center on creation of more “security and stability” in both Afghanistan and the wider region. Successful completion of the 2005 National Assembly elections established a basis that such a hope could be realized. The Afghan Government looked at the incoming support as a step on the path to the eventual taking of “full responsibility for its own security.” NATO’s cooperative role would not just concentrate on military capabilities, but it would also include progressive measures to assure good government and the rule of law. The triple battle would be against “terrorism, extremism, and drug trafficking.” Interoperability between Afghan and NATO military capabilities was also part of the process.

Secondly, certain agreed upon principles would underpin this framework. Realism was essential, especially in light of the imperative of maintaining the current NATO budgetary ceiling. Control and ownership by Afghan authorities was also significant. They needed to play a central role in

determining priorities. Both units needed to preserve firm links with the security and defense institutes in Kabul. Links with other key programs such as those of the London Conference were also on the agenda.

Third, the document outlined a number of concrete activities that would flow from the cooperative framework and principles. NATO would welcome Afghan participation in activities that took place elsewhere, such as Central Asia. There was an expectation that Afghan expert teams would visit alliance headquarters in order to learn more about defense reform and institution building. In addition, NATO would set up special short courses for Afghan participants at the NATO Defense College, NATO School Oberammergau, and elsewhere.

Fourth, the agreement looked also at the related matters of assessment and implementation. The key players in that vital process of assessment would be the NATO Senior Civil Representative and the Afghan Mission in Brussels. Allies involved in the Afghanistan mission would also be invited to provide bi-lateral aid, and in some cases PfP funding would be added in a supplementary way. Fifth, planning and assessment would target, in particular, improvements in the Afghan National Army. Goals would include increased professionalism and hence credibility of the military force.

Sixth and finally, the landmark arrangement enumerated a number of key areas of cooperation. Selected key areas include more openness in the democratic foundation of the Afghan military, a more transparent personnel management and training system, joint participation in NATO/PfP military exercises, assistance that ranged from aircrew training to military equipment, greater emphasis on border security, cooperation on civil emergency planning, language training of security personnel, civil/military co-ordination of air traffic management, increased public understanding of security issues, and use of the Virtual Silk Highway to enhance access to information (*Declaration by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, September 6, 2006*).

The document summarized above was a path-breaking one that involved NATO in a very new type of military project. Instead of countering threats that emanated from the heart of Europe or even from the Balkans, the alliance would now manage military and related projects far from its previously defined orbit. As the U.S. Permanent Representative to NATO put it in a speech given in late 2006, the original Cold War goal of protecting national territory had yielded to the objective of transferring power to the place where threats originated (Nuland, October 23, 2006). In that sense, it was very important to lay out the new objectives through a joint statement that was as specific as possible. Similarly, in early 2007 President Bush argued that the NATO take-over of ISAF had made a real difference. A result had been creation of a “robust security force” that operated throughout all of Afghanistan rather than in only several regions and that also managed twenty-five Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT’s). The injection of NATO’s management role into the quicksand of Afghanistan had enabled the Afghan central government to at least reach out to all corners of this complicated nation (Bush, January 15, 2007). Thus, official governmental leaders of NATO made positive assessments in the early months of the new NATO operation. The “Declaration” was a meaningful one that had led to improved conditions in the Afghan battle against global terrorism.

Composition of the ISAF Force

Creation of ISAF had taken place in December 2001, at the time of the struggle against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. From 2001 until October 2006, ISAF reported to the North Atlantic Council in Brussels (Saikal, 2006). The NATO take-over of the ISAF operation then occurred on October 5, 2006. Under NATO control, the force increased to 36,000, and a full 37 countries took part in the mission. All 26 NATO members were part of that contributing team. The workload was divided up into 25 Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT’s). This is a significant NATO commitment in light of the fact that it is the first alliance operation outside of Europe (NATO 2007a). New programs have also been

added. For example, in the summer of 2007, the alliance set up an Operational Mentor and Liaison Team, and its responsibilities were provision of specific advice to the Afghan military (NATO 2007b). In the end, there were five regional commands under NATO. They included North, South, East, West, and Kabul (NATO 2007c).

A number of key developed nations assist in the ISAF operation. Saikal (2006) suggests that both France and Germany took part in ISAF operations in order to compensate for their unwillingness to participate in the 2003 invasion of Iraq. In effect, several nations took up specific functional areas of work in the overall Afghanistan activities. For example, Italy was a key actor in the challenge of reforming the judiciary. Germany provided assistance in training the police, and the United Kingdom had primary responsibility for counter-narcotics. Japan's functional areas included disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration. Uniquely, each of those activities was suited to the particular strengths and historical experiences of the countries themselves. Of course, the United States took on overall supervision of training and building the Afghan National Army. These integrated efforts combined with expansion of the military activities to cover the entire country. Presumably, the net benefit would be penetration of control from the Kabul area into every corner of the country (Saikal, 2006).

Several participants called for even higher levels of involvement. For instance, in the summer of 2007 the consensus emerged that NATO was short two battalions. This shortage resulted from the restrictions that member nations were putting on their troops in terms of mission and military activity. The restrictions were intended to save the lives of their own personnel and thus avoid the inevitable public criticism back home (MIL 2007a). Karel Schwarzenberg (2007), the Czech Foreign Minister, envisioned a situation in which the European nations would take over the PRTs in the near future. He saw this unique, expanded operation in Afghanistan as a "self-defining mission for NATO."

Finally, calls emerged for growth of the Afghan National Army itself. In a nation with 31 million people, some wondered why the army consisted of only 30,000 troops. Plans developed to increase that number to 70,000 in the near future. Inclusion of Afghanistan in the PfP process was also a key ingredient in the discussion. Thus, NATO's take-over of the ISAF operation involved more than added military muscle to the battle against terrorism. Both coordination with other allied nations and increased contributions by the host nation itself were essential needs.

Economic Assistance

The nations allied in the effort to both stamp out terrorism and rebuild Afghanistan contributed enormous sums after 9/11. By June 2007, the total package of economic assistance amounted to \$26.8 billion. Nations that had attended the London Conference in 2006 at that time pledged nearly forty per cent of the above total, so much of the aid was earmarked well after the liberation of the nation from the Taliban. Specific areas designated for receipt of the assistance included health, the economy itself, the private sector, infrastructure, security, refugees, women, schools, and media (NATO 2007d).

A particularly interesting discussion of future needs took place within the German government in September 2007. The Foreign Minister Franz-Walter Steinmeier called for a twenty-five per cent increase in the amount of euros earmarked for Afghanistan. Specific areas that would benefit from this increased assistance entailed the building sector, income creation, and cross-border projects that touched on Pakistan. None of this would come to pass, however, unless a security foundation was first established. Only within the framework of security would economic aid have any impact (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Germany 2007a). Germany's record on both counts between 2002 and 2007 was commendable. They had provided 38 million euros to assist in clearing of land mines, and that project extended back into the 1990s. Understanding that return of refugees was vital in restoring a sense of

economic momentum, the Germans had also channeled 20 million euros to that endeavor (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Germany 2007b). Overall linkage of aid to projects that intertwined security and economic considerations made great sense in such a threatening and fragile environment.

A related issue that emerged was the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in assisting NATO governments and militaries in the campaign. In many ways, the work of the NGOs adds the potential ingredient of winning “hearts and minds.” These workers are not part of any perceived occupying military force and thus can add a human face to the NATO presence. However, there are several pitfalls that accompany injection of this dimension to the turbulent Afghan setting. Military forces often complain that the NGOs are in the way of their missions. NGO leaders sometimes feel exploited when the military channels assistance in directions that serve only strategic goals rather than human need. NGO’s also fear for the lives of their workers as the enemy may mistakenly target the aid workers as in fact part of the military force. For example, a total of 68 aid workers died in conflicts in Afghanistan between 2003 and 2005. Finally, the Taliban may be well aware of the distinction between military personnel and aid workers. However, they may target the aid workers since they are doing the work of the hated American government (Lischer, 2007, 99-118). In sum, use of NGO’s in the economic assistance effort is a double edged sword. They offer the possibility of humanizing the face of NATO’s military intervention, but they also can inextricably become involved in the various battles and conflicts in ways that undermine their purpose.

Political Development and Infrastructure

The take-over by NATO of ISAF brought one significant new political player into the picture. The office that then became part of the political infrastructure was that of NATO Senior Civilian Representative in Afghanistan. This office became operational on August 24, 2006, and Daan W. Everts

from the Netherlands was its first occupant. There was also an office called First Representative, and that secondary position went to Hikmet Cetin from Turkey (NATO 2007e). The main focus of these two offices was the non-military part of the ISAF mission. Selected important concerns of these two representatives were the secure delivery of goods, improvements in the police force, better courts, and enhanced border control with Pakistan. This new NATO machinery could build on the foundation of political development achieved by ISAF alone in the previous five years. They had achieved successes in the areas of education/employment for women, improved schools, and tools of democracy such as an elected Parliament (NATO 2007f).

The United Nations continued to be a significant part of the political process in Afghanistan. For example, on January 31, 2006, the UN assisted in creation of the Afghanistan Compact (UNAMA). This compact included the UN, the Afghan government, and the international community represented eventually by NATO. A main concern of this new organization in 2007 was the factional infighting within the police. In addition, the Afghan Compact played a role in development of plans for new networks of highways as well as construction of highways and clinics. They would also take up the touchy issue of those provinces that permitted high poppy production and enticed drug traffickers (NATO 2007g). All of these worthwhile projects came under the heading of political development and added needed institutional components to that process. These endeavors constituted vital supplements to the military effort on the ground and in the air.

Policy Issues, Decisions, and Visions

The Rome Conference of July 2007, offers a useful summary of the policy issues on the table in Afghanistan for both the UN and NATO. The participants at that meeting listed six issues that need goals and solutions. First, lack of political development was a major problem that needed attention. Growth

of participatory institutions and effective governing structures were equal necessities. A second issue was the set of problems that afflicted the Afghan army and police. Training by the allies was one key method for defusing this particular issue. Third, there was a need to maintain an international military presence for an indefinite time period. By passing the baton of leadership to NATO in 2006, those involved were addressing that issue. Fourth, there was a need for steps to reduce the loss of civilian lives and property. This would be difficult in light of the increased number of casualties in 2007, especially in the summer and early fall. Fifth, there was a clear need to include Pakistan in planning and discussions, given the porous nature of the Afghan-Pakistan border. Stability of the Musharaff government in Pakistan was a question that affected planning in that issue area. Sixth, lack of effective coordination between the military and civilian sectors was a real challenge to mission effectiveness. With the arrival of NATO officially into the arena, planned additional infrastructure would address that issue (NATO 2007h). Thus, the Rome meeting both displayed the range of current issues and implicitly pointed the way to concrete steps that would address them.

The above array of issues did parallel a limited number of decisions in the early period after the NATO take-over of ISAF. A summer 2007 meeting of NATO Defense Ministers in Brussels resolved to supply more funds to equip the Afghan Army, to more strictly enforce rules of engagement in order to reduce civilian casualties, and to provide relief funds to families and communities that had been harmed (NATO 2007i). Another set of decisions that accompanied the transition to NATO control centered on the extent of military operations in the country itself. At the June 2004 Summit in Istanbul, NATO had committed itself to spread the campaign gradually to the entire country. In the middle of 2006, they had established a presence in the entire, conflicted southern region, and by the fall they had become more active in the east (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Germany 2007c).

A highly interesting issue about usage of allied troops had percolated for several years and needed attention, once NATO took formal charge of the military effort. A number of nations had limited the movement and activities of their troops, based on the fear of casualties and corresponding reactions from public opinion back home. At the Riga Summit in November 2006, NATO asked members to consider lifting the so-called “caveats” on the activities of their troops. A number of alliance partners agreed with this request, and improvements took place. Based on one estimate, the commitments ensured that 26,000 of the 32,000 troops were more usable than they had been before (*Hampton Roads.*, 2007, p. 4).

In fact, one could look at the formation of the Afghan Compact in early 2007 as a decision of sorts. The Compact itself announced three types of decisions. All 26 NATO partners would contribute a total of 30,000 troops to Afghanistan. A new Senior Civilian Representative would promote the political-military goals of the alliance. NATO would engage in liaison efforts with ISAF, the Afghan government, other international organizations, and neighboring countries (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic 2007a). Each of these three goals implied a series of subsequent decisions by other parties and somewhat changed the direction of general activities.

Visions for the future were an additional patch in the overall fabric of NATO operations in the host nation. A British specialist (Sky, 2007) called for a vision that centered on the pragmatic goal of assisting the Afghan military in holding ungoverned spaces and containing the insurgency. This vision was a stark contrast to the dream of others that NATO should be endorsing primarily and promoting a liberal democratic model as the only basis for stability. Karel Schwarzenberg, the Czech Defense Minister, (2007, pp. 43-45) offered a forward-looking, somewhat futuristic vision for the joint operation. First, open the door for further assistance to new NATO membership for countries in the Western Balkans. Second, cement partnerships with non-NATO countries that shared alliance values. He

mentioned Israel, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan. Third, strengthen and use the NATO Reaction Force (NRF) as a tool in situations that threatened to move to the emergency level. Such visionary thinking took strategists beyond the nuts and bolts of day to day activities in Afghanistan. That vision also suggested the possibilities for creation of a broader framework that maintain some sort of stability, once most of the short-term goals had been achieved.

Contributions by the Member States

Breadth and Specialization of the NATO -led Coalition

As NATO began to play a larger role in the Afghan operation, a number of the alliance partners carved out their own special roles. For example, Germany provided 41 instructors to assist in training Afghan police officers. Especially important was their work with border police. Since Italy had experience in cleaning up its own corrupt legal system, they received special responsibilities in working with Afghan judicial personnel and offices. In fact, the Italians organized a Rule of Law in Afghanistan Conference. Britain assumed leadership of the counter-narcotics effort (McCain, April 15, 2007, pp. 29-33). Japan's role centered on disarming various armed groups, and the United States took the lead in building a national Afghan Army. This work of the U.S. included education at the Police Academy in Kabul, construction of seven regional training centers, and integration of women into the police force (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Germany 2007d). All was not perfect harmony, however, for the European partners at times complained that the United States permitted them little influence over policy (Keohane, 2006).

Contributions to the Afghanistan operation come from all 26 members. However, participation in the NATO mission was not confined to alliance members only. Several nations with PfP status also made contributions, and they included Sweden, Finland, and Austria. While the European Union (EU) did not have a very visible presence in the country, only Malta and Cyprus among its members played no

role at all (Rinkevics, January 15, 2007, pp. 29-30). In addition to all of those national players; Albania, Australia, Azerbaidjan, Macedonia, Croatia, Ireland, and Switzerland, and New Zealand chose to be involved in various ways (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, 2007b). By early 2007, the total troop level was at 32,000, and later it would hit 36,000.

In what kinds of activities did this array of NATO and non-NATO nations involve themselves? A selective picture can at least give a sense of the types of activities. One example was the contingent that operated in Helmand, in the conflicted southern part of Afghanistan. This had originally been a British contingent, but in the spring of 2007, a 35-member Czech contingent joined them. The job of the Czechs was to protect key British personalities and significant objects with military value (Ministry of Defense of the Czech Republic, 2007a). In addition, there was a joint operation in the north east area of Fayzabad, in the province of Badakshan. Danes, Czechs, and Germans were all part of that unit. They mainly provided protection to the base and to its transportation vehicles (Ministry of Defense of the Czech Republic, 2007b, iDNES 2007a). Civilian workers at the base included those from the United States, Slovakia, Croatia, and Belgium. Activities were significant enough that the German Defense Minister Franz Josef Jung came for a visit in July (Ministry of Defense of the Czech Republic, 2007c). Kandahar was a much troubled province, and the allies focused on “governance, economic development, and counter-narcotics” in addition to military operations. However, those actually engaging in battle with the Taliban included the UK, Canada, Netherlands, Australia, Romania, Estonia, Denmark, and the Afghan Army itself (Gates, 2007, pp. 36-39). During similar battles in the summer of 2006, they also received operational support from Portugal (Bush, January 15, 2007, pp. 5-10).

Dilemmas emerged for a number of the NATO allies during the first year of NATO-commanded military activities. For instance, in the early stages of “Operation Achilles in June 2007, the Taliban kidnapped a British journalist (sueddeutsche 2007a). Several months later the British admitted that

their troops were totally stretched out with activities in both Iraq and Afghanistan. They were considering a pull out of 5500 troops from Iraq in light of that pressure (sme 2007a). At the end of August the British actually suffered casualties from American bombs. The three deceased soldiers had been dragged into a battle with the Taliban in Helmand Province. The American bombing targeted the Taliban forces but ended up hitting British troops as well (dagens nyheter 2007a). Finland had also lost a soldier in northwestern Afghanistan in May. A bomb had exploded while Finish and Norwegian soldiers were on patrol (dagens nyheter 2007b). In May of 2007, Polish forces had become stirred up about the quality of their vehicles and actually carried out a formal protest. They claimed that the Hummers that the Americans provided them were inferior to the ones used by the Americans themselves (iDNES 2007b). A major problem emerged at about the same time in connection with South Korean Christians who were working with NGOs in Afghanistan. A group of 23 were captured, and two were killed before release was finally negotiated. It was unclear if the South Korean government had paid a large amount to the Taliban, but there was a suspicion that the government had paid a sum of around two million American dollars (iDNES 2007c).

A number of additional divisive issues plagued the alliance, even in its first year of operation. Civilian deaths were one of those main concerns. In May 2007, there was concern, especially from Germany, about the fact that U.S. special forces operations had resulted in the deaths of 90 Afghan civilians. The German Defense Minister expected to talk with the U.S. leadership with an eye on exercising more restraint (USA Today 2007a). The NATO Secretary-General cautioned that such casualties were at times unavoidable (Los Angeles Times 2007a). By late summer the British were calling for a pullout of U.S. troops from the southern part of Afghanistan (sueddeutsche 2007b). In fact, in mid-October Afghan authorities shut down two private security firms in light of allegations of murder and robbery (USA Today 2007b). Another complicating issue emerged in October 2007, when the Afghan government itself executed 15 prisoners, for the first time in three years. NATO allies

opposed to capital punishment had mixed feelings about such an act in a country in which they had committed troops (USA Today 2007c). Continuing concerns developed over American plans to locate a radar site in the Czech Republic as well as anti-missile capabilities in Poland. Although this was not on Afghan terrain, the logic of the emplacement was based on threats emanating from the Middle East. One of the main agenda items for NATO at its meeting of Defense Ministers in June was this controversial plan (iDNES 2007d). Finally, a number of NATO partners had put restrictions on the nature of their participation in the battles. They did so in an effort to reduce casualties. President Bush called upon those member states to carry their share of the burden in the knowledge that there would be risks to many in the battle against terrorism (sueddeutsche 2007c.)

Experiences of Selected Countries

At this point in the analysis, the focus will sharpen if the spotlight shifts to the Afghan experiences of selected countries. Inclusion of Germany makes sense because they have been one of the traditional NATO members, and they were critical of the initial decision to invade Iraq. Commentary on the Czech Republic is useful as they are an illustration of a post-communist nation admitted in 1999, and they were part of the “coalition of the willing” that supported even the Iraq intervention from early 2003. Both nations have been involved in Afghanistan as a consequence of the direct correlation between the Taliban period and the 9/11 attacks. Of course, in the parlance of the early years of the war, the first was a member of the “old” Europe and the second a full participant in the “new” Europe.

German Perspectives and Role

Germany first took part in ISAF in December 2001. However, it was not until August 2003, that they funneled their troops through the NATO structures. At present, they have 3,200 troops working within the ISAF framework. Further, they direct two Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), those in Kundus and Faisabad. Annually, the German Bundestag renews the troop commitment, and they did so

in September 2007 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Germany 2007e). Their troops were also active in Mazar-e-Sharif (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Germany 2007f).

In the months immediately following the fall of the Saddam government, Germany became involved in a number of contributions. These included establishment of a Goethe Institute in Kabul, construction of partner schools for girls and boys, training of 170 Afghan high school docents in Germany, DAAD-supported instruction of the German language in Kabul, and use of the Lucky 40/60 Program that brought highly qualified Afghan students to Germany in hopes of helping create a newly educated elite. Deutsche Welle and other non-profits also worked with the Afghan media so that it could create its own shows. In the cultural area, German specialists both helped restore the sixteenth century Babur Garden and assisted in cataloging fragments from the exploded Buddha statues of Bamijan. Other important work included the involvement of the Max Plank Institute for International Private Rights in developing family rights law in Afghanistan. Germans worked with UNESCO to translate German children's books into Dari and Pashti. Sports additionally received attention, as Germans helped in both creating a soccer league and training personnel and referees (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Germany 2007g). Finally, Afghanistan sent 25 delegates to Berlin in January 2007. They were part of a Conference on Reconstruction with goals of both rebuilding the infrastructure and promoting the concept of Afghan ownership (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Germany 2007h).

In spring 2007 German Tornados carried out their first reconnaissance missions in Afghanistan. The Ministry of Defense had sent six such planes to the area, and they flew over the northern part of the country. There was some controversy within Germany, as public opinion polls revealed opposition by a majority. In response, military leaders emphasized that these flights would not be engaged in combat, and so the risks would be minimal (sueddeutsche 2007d). However, other kinds of risks did emerge for Germans working in the nation. In July the Taliban took two German hostages. Taliban

pronouncements stated that both would be killed, unless Germany pulled its troops out of Afghanistan (sueddeutsche 2007e). In the ensuing days the Taliban carried out its threat and executed one of the hostages (sueddeutsche 2007f). At that point the radical Islamic group claimed that it had also killed the other hostage (iDNES 2007e). However, the second one did survive and was released, in exchange for four Taliban prisoners, in the middle of October (sueddeutsche 2007g). Another German hostage taken in August was a woman who worked for a Christian group that cared for Afghan women. It was unclear if it was her religion that made her a target for this act (sueddeutsche 2007h, dagens nyheter 2007c).

In addition, three German police officers died in a bomb explosion in the month of August. The explosion occurred in August, and these were the first deaths within the German police contingent (sueddeutsche 2007i). German leaders realized the impact this would have on the public. They underlined their continuing commitment to the mission and pointed out that casualties were inevitable. However, they also took steps to provide more protection to the police (sueddeutsche 2007j). Their decision a bit later to extend the Afghan mission for at least one more year reinforced their unwillingness to permit terrorist attacks to weaken NATO's collective resolve in light of the terrorist threat.

Czech Perspectives and Role

Czech troops took on a large number of NATO-related activities, and thus they assumed a role of extensive involvement in Afghanistan relatively soon after joining the military alliance. As early as the spring of 2004, their meteorologists took on assignments at the Kabul airport. Part of their job was to provide weather reports for the Czech field hospital and chemical units. They also worked closely with others who were providing air transport and airport security. In addition, they provided forecasts that were linked to specific military activities, in particular along flight routes. This meteorological unit was

particularly significant, since there were only twelve functioning stations in the country, and a number of them were only partly operational (Ministry of Defense of the Czech Republic 2007d).

A very different type of activity centered on inoculation of Afghan children against disease. Soldiers from the fifth contingent took the lead in this, but the Olivova Foundation assisted them. Orphanages in particular often had a lack of drinkable water, and so infections easily spread. Other NGOs supplemented this work by supplying the children with blankets, school supplies, and a new kitchen (Ministry of Defense of the Czech Republic 2007e).

Czech troops were also involved in work of a more military nature. For example, the Fifth Contingent spent 86 days patrolling mountainous terrain in the Fajzabad area. Danish and German troops joined them in the effort. In addition, that contingent was involved in working with the local police, protecting several military bases, interacting with the Rapid Reaction Force, searching for explosives, building water tanks, and assisting the schools. After the 5th Contingent returned to its base in Pardubice, Czech Republic, the 6th Contingent based in Chrudimi replaced them. Thus, the Czechs had a continuing and diverse set of tasks as part of their overall work in provincial reconstruction (Ministry of Defense of the Czech Republic 2007f). Czechs almost became used to a regular rotation of units in and out of Afghanistan (Ministry of Defense of the Czech Republic 2007g).

Czechs also contributed to other specialized types of activities. Interestingly, civilian workers went to the Afghan village of Itarchi. While there, they assisted at a school which provided education to boys in the morning and to girls in the afternoon. Only female members of the Czech team received permission to work with the girls. They also provided equipment to the school. During their stay, the Czechs learned to be sensitive to certain features of Afghan culture. For example, they had to cut out of their educational material illustrations of women in short European summer skirts, views of people from the back, and pictures of the traditional Czech beer (Ministry of Defense of the Czech Republic 2007h).

Another contribution in the region was dispatch of a specialist team in 2005 to western Pakistan. After the earthquake there, there was a need for medical specialists and a 35-person trauma team (Ministry of Defense of the Czech Republic 2007i).

Risks to Czech personnel operating in Afghanistan provoked concern about the future of involvement there. In May the car of Czech chargé d'affaires Filip Velach received fire. Two body guards were injured, but the diplomat escaped unscathed (iDNES 2007f). During the same month, the first Czech soldier died in the area near Fajzabad, a region in which the Czech troops were part of PRT. In an accident of nature, he and five others had been buried in a landslide. The others survived. This symbolic death led to a commemoration at the airport upon the return of his body. Both the Chief of Staff and Minister of Defense were present at the ceremony (iDNES 2007g). There was a moment of silence then and plans for another ceremony at the time of his burial (iDNES 2007h). Thus, the government treated his death as an event of national significance.

Some Czech units worked in quite dangerous terrain on a regular basis. Czech guards patrolled in the nearly inaccessible Badakshan mountain area of northeastern Afghanistan. They gathered information and also helped select sites for reconstruction projects (iDNES 2007i). They provided special assistance during the spring floods in that region (iDNES 2007j). Their highly respected field hospital worked continuously at the Kabul airport. They had been there for a year and helped airlift the wounded after treating them for their injuries. A predecessor field hospital unit had actually treated about 16,000 patients in the 2002-03 period (iDNES 2007k). A discussion also took place within the Czech Republic about the possibility of sending civilian experts into the theater of operations. They could help with transportation, health care, and agriculture. Dispatching them was a tough decision due to the fear that they could become obvious targets for attack (iDNES 2007l). The possibility of taking over the entire Logar province came up for discussion in late summer. This would add to Czech prestige

but could cost as much as 650 million crowns each year. However, Czech firms might be involved in the reconstruction work, and so there would be an economic benefit to the Czech Republic. This proposal by the Czech government then became a subject for discussion in the legislature (iDNES 2007m). Czech soldiers also worked with Afghan police officers. They discovered that they had more impact if they dressed in local garb. Among other conclusions, they found that the Afghans responded well to award ceremonies, as they liked to be singled out (iDNES 2007n).

The continuing saga of the American-initiated proposal to locate a radar post in Brda had implications for Afghanistan. Presumably, the site, in connection with the ten anti-rocket weapons to be located in Poland, would protect against attacks from Afghanistan and other suspicious locations. However, public opinion polls revealed a deeply divided citizenry on that particular topic. The Greens were particularly opposed to the radar site, and the communists had actually once gone to Brda with two hundred supporters to protest the plans (iDNES 2007o). These critical viewpoints led to a governmental response. Ministry of Foreign Affairs Karel Schwarzenberg pointed out that NATO would control those radar facilities, while the United States alone would make decisions about the use of the rockets located in Poland (iDNES 2007p).

Overall, the Czechs played a role in Afghanistan that paralleled but was broader than some of its other NATO related missions. They had contributed in important ways in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Iraq. However, they had taken on significant positions of responsibility and authority in Afghanistan. This was particularly the case after the transfer of ISAF to NATO control in October 2006.

Conclusion

There are several strategic points that need attention from NATO planners in the near future. They include the matter of obtaining commitments from members for future years, changes in military

tactics on the ground, evidence of involvement by outside powers such as Iran, and the huge challenge of bringing stability and control to the entire country, its rural as well as its urban areas.

Each fall, under the auspices of the United Nations, the alliance partners had committed troops for one more year of military activity and contributions. The Security Council extended the NATO mission again on October 13, 2007. At that time, the ISAF force consisted of 40,000 troops. That 2007 UN resolution called for contributions of personnel, equipment, and other resources (iDNES 2007q). So far, so good. However, each year more countries within the alliance have questions about the future direction of policy. Each year, more nations experience casualties through violence. The increased number of violent acts there in the middle of 2007 does not bode well for those whose publics are so doubtful about the need to be involved there. It may be wise to consider UN resolutions that last more than one year. If two-year commitments were passed, then NATO planners could have more flexibility in managing the whole operation in a way that had real prospects for success.

NATO also began to consider tactical changes on the ground. They considered providing smaller bombs to the geographic areas most subject to violence. The objective behind this proposed shift was to reduce the number of civilian casualties. Technically, this meant that planes would carry 250-kilogram bombs instead of 500-kilogram ones. This shift would lead to more precision bombing and a greater ability to hit the enemy with a lightning strike (sueddeutsche 2007k). Another change adopted at the same time switched responsibility for house searches from ISAF forces to Afghan troops. Both these reforms were directed at reduction of the number of civilian casualties, a much publicized issue in June when 90 civilians died (sueddeutsche 2007l).

The whole issue of Iranian involvement, which reared its head so noticeably in discussions about Iraq, also affected the assessment of future prospects in Afghanistan. In June, Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates decried the flow of "illicit weapons" from Iran to the Taliban fighters. Other American

officials voiced a concern that the Iranian government itself was fostering the movement of these weapons. A cloud of suspicion especially hung over the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps command (Shankar, June 14, 2007). This discussion brought into the picture the larger issue of NATO/U.S. relations with Iran. Progress on talks between those two hostile parties would have a powerful effect on prospects for containing the influx of outside destabilizing capabilities into Afghanistan.

Finally, the challenges both of penetrating NATO influence and bringing stability to all areas of Iran are continuing ones. A number of informed observers maintained that NATO and the Afghan Army were doing a reasonable job of holding the cities. At the same time, the Taliban had penetrated its influence deep into the rural areas. With 75% of the population living in those rural areas, Taliban and al Qaeda are free to wage vigorous information campaigns. It is also true that allied control differs from region to region. The highest levels of stability exist in the north, west, and center regions. However, there is tough fighting going on much of the time in the east and south. Provision of stability to the whole nation does not depend only on commitments, tactics, and outside influence. It also depends on levels of troop commitments. In one study, RAND analysts concluded that security personnel needed to constitute at least two per cent of the population to have a fighting chance in Afghanistan. However, the per cent in mid 2007 was less than half of one per cent (Godge, 2007). Such data underline the vital significance of the NATO role. They also drive home the importance of maintaining allied commitments at current levels and beyond. Finally, they point to the need to improve planning capacities by lengthening the commitments of allied forces beyond the one year extensions currently in place.

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