

The New NATO Members and the Mission in Afghanistan: Political and Economic Risks

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Introduction

The world has been living on an edge since September 11, 2001. The 9/11 attacks stretched the nature of terrorist threats to a new border of risk to individuals and nations. The unexpected assault on innocent human lives raised questions about what the new limits were to rational behavior and understanding. Personal and national edginess created a constant search for new institutional and infrastructural responses to multiple, often invisible sources of risk. In the nation of Afghanistan, whose former Taliban regime harbored bin Laden, emerged the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). In December 2001, concerned nations met in Bonn and created this force in an effort to contain the risks of both terrorism and instability. After five years of operation, NATO took over the ISAF mission and thus expanded the limits of infrastructure mobilized to cope with the new post-9/11 threat. As violence spiraled in the middle of 2007, the NATO alliance partners began to feel that they were on a new cutting edge of fear and concern. In particular, the new alliance members who had been generally supportive of American initiatives in the region may have worried the most. Their citizens feared casualties, and opposition political parties raised their concerns at many curves in the road. How long would these new NATO partners be able to support a military presence in Afghanistan? How close to the edge of public tolerance could the leaders of the new alliance member states push their new defense strategies.

The initial ISAF focus in 2001 was achievement of some level of control in Kabul. Military capabilities were not substantial enough to navigate the difficult terrain of the rest of the nation. Tribal leaders often held sway in their remote mountain outposts, and few roads linked those villages together. In fact, on August, 2003, NATO did become a visible presence in Kabul. On that date they took over the 5,000 person international peacekeeping force in that city. This was a step in the direction of continuity and stability, for since 2001 the leadership had rotated among various nations every six

months. For the first time since its founding in 1949, NATO played a central role in an operation totally out of its normal European theater (Wattad and Rizzuto, 2003, p. 41).

The next critical step in expanding infrastructure in order to meet the continuing risks in Afghanistan was passage of United Nations (UN) Resolution 1510. In that resolution passed in October 2003, the UN called for expansion of ISAF beyond the borders of Kabul. In the same year, they put together a number of Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) to increase the ISAF presence in the rest of the country. At present there are twenty-five PRTs operating in Afghanistan. Those PRTs include twelve in the Regional Command East, five in the Regional Command North, and four each in the Regional Commands West and South. Each team consists of both civilian and military personnel. Although an ideal solution on paper, a number of problems with the PRTs emerged in the ensuing years. Within teams civilian-military conflicts often emerged. Some PRTs became more loyal to provincial administrations than to that of the central government. This habit undercut the goal of knitting together the sections of the country in a coordinated way. In some cases teams pushed for quick results so that they have something to show to the home country that sent them to Afghanistan in the first place. Finally, in spite of their emphasis on “reconstruction” of the nation, there was a tendency for Afghans to see the teams as part and parcel of the occupying military forces. Thus, they operated in a fragile environment of expectations and actually created some risks while endeavoring to reduce others (Maley, 2007).

An underlying problem in this emergent set-up for Afghanistan was the risk that the U.S. and its partners, whether NATO or non-NATO, adopted different views of key needs in the country. One writer (Forbes, 2004, pp. 76-77) wrote of the need to pay attention to the “gap” between the U.S. and Europe in the area of military psychology. While America may have thought of going it alone after 9/11, NATO alliance partners tended to think in terms of the alliance as the “tool of first resort.” Whereas the

United States tended to think exclusively in terms of hard military power, the Europeans were more likely to think in terms of soft power and to make human interactions the central focus. Of course, spending on military forces is far greater for the United States than it is for individual NATO partners, and the deployable military force is much more substantial for the U.S. than for Europe as a totality. In sum, as the missions expanded in Afghanistan after 2003, America and its military partners needed to overcome such different perceptions or at least to admit to their existence. Risks would multiply if the differing mind sets did not receive ample attention.

In October 2006, ISAF underwent its next transformation as NATO took over complete control of all operations in Afghanistan. The founding document was one that Mr. Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, Secretary General NATO, and Mr. Hamid Karzai, President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, both signed. The first section of the document called for a triple battle against “terrorism, extremism, and drug trafficking.” The second section emphasized emplacement of Afghan authorities at the center of the critical process of determining priorities. Training of Afghan teams of experts in European locales was at the heart of the third part of the October 2006 document. Assessment of progress would be a fourth priority. Both NATO and Afghan officials would participate in that process in a collegial way. Fifth, there would be a purposeful effort to upgrade the war-fighting capabilities of the Afghan National Army. By increasing the Army’s professionalism, its credibility with both friend and foe would gain strength. The sixth and final area of emphasis in the founding document was multipronged. This basket of goals included increased transparency in military management and training, enhanced border security, provision of sufficient information to the public so that it would be more understanding of security issues, and greater use of the Virtual Silk Highway to spread information of value (*Declaration by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, September 6, 2006*). Nearly five years after the 9/11 attacks, combined forces had entrusted risk control in remote

Afghanistan to an established military alliance that the West had created to counter the Soviet threat in the early Cold War. What a change in priorities and what a push outward of the geographic edge that previously constituted the limits of NATO activities.

What did all of this change in infrastructure mean for the new NATO partners that had joined the alliance in the previous seven years? In 1999, NATO admitted the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland. Then again, at the Prague Summit in 2004, they granted formal admission to Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. Expansion of the alliance to incorporate these ten had roots in the Balkan Crises of the 1990s. Those countries were closer to the scene of action, and in future crises they might possess more leverage as neighbors. Turbulence emanating from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Iran also played a role in the decision to bring in so many new partners. Many of them were part of the “new” Europe that had been quite supportive of the initial decision of the Bush Administration to invade Iraq. Bulgaria and Romania were rather last minute additions, and their proximity to the whirlpool of trouble no doubt heightened NATO’s interest in their presence within the alliance. However, these new responsibilities brought with them serious risks for the set of ten. This paper offers a classification of the general categories of threats posed by new member activity in Afghanistan for the new members as a group. Analysis will then proceed to evaluate specific risks that pertain to the particular situations of individual nations. Hopefully, such an analysis will provide an accurate and complete picture of the threats posed to a group of nations that had chosen to push outward the edge of their own neighborhood into those regions of the world that had been responsible for expanding the edge of danger to humanity as a whole.

General Categories of Threats

Increased Casualties

One of the key risks to new NATO members is the threat of casualties during peacekeeping missions. This is particularly the case in a highly conflicted area such as Afghanistan. In fact, a number of NATO partners imposed “caveats” on the operations in which their troops could take part (Lugar, 2007, pp. 11-16). Caveats may have included the type of mission itself or the area of the country to which commanders could dispatch troops from that particular country. Specifically, the north-east and south of the country were sites of much of the violence and many of the terrorist attacks. Some nations prohibited activity in those regions.

The Czech Republic is a good example of a new NATO member that had concerns about threats to its military personnel. In April 2007, their troops had begun to operate in the mountainous, remote area of Badakshan in north east Afghanistan. Visibility was poor, it was difficult to see what was going on in certain villages, and the temperatures were extreme as well (iDNES 2007a). A month later the vehicle carrying Czech diplomat Filip Velach received fire. The diplomat was unhurt, but his two bodyguards were lightly wounded (iDNES 2007b). One week later the first Czech military casualty occurred. Heavy rains and flooding had taken place in Fajzabad, and landslides took the life of one Czech member of the local PRT (iDNES 2007c). This casualty had a real shock effect on both the Czech military and nation. In fact, the Minister of Defense took part in a brief ceremony when the remains of the soldier arrived back home in the Czech Republic (iDNES 2007d). In the fall there was concern when a Czech officer was wounded in Helman in the violent southern region. Members of the Taliban had hit a convoy of military vehicles (iDNES 2007e). While these casualties may appear to be few in number in comparison with the experiences of America, their extensive media coverage revealed the depth of a national hope both to minimize risks and even to avoid any casualties at all.

Threats from the Taliban and al Qaeda

One might wonder if the terrorist forces would even need to target new NATO members, given the central role of the United States as the key enemy. Would the forces connected with bin Laden think there would be any advantage in hitting the military forces and missions of European countries? The answer is a qualified “yes.” In particular, as a result of their participation in the mission with the ISAF in Afghanistan, the 10 new NATO members have become inextricably linked to the war on terror, and by extension, broader U.S. interests in the region. Presumably (or so the logic goes), the new NATO members have therefore incurred the wrath of, and are now threatened by, those who oppose the mission in Afghanistan, principally the Taliban currently active in Afghanistan and Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda terror network. While this certainly makes sense at an intuitive level – and after all, there are statements from Osama bin Laden that confirm as much – the immediacy of the threat and the exact nature of the political and economic risks to the new NATO members are unclear and raise certain questions. First, are the new NATO members potential terrorist targets and does the Taliban or al Qaeda have the will and the means to carry out such attacks against the new NATO members? Second, has the level of participation by the new NATO members with the ISAF in Afghanistan been significant enough to precipitate actual attacks by the Taliban or al Qaeda or generate other kinds of political and economic risks? Third, are there political and economic risks resulting from the participation of the new NATO members with the ISAF in Afghanistan that are not terror-related and come from other sources (e.g. Iran and other nations or other entities that are sympathetic to the Taliban and al Qaeda or opposed to the ISAF mission in Afghanistan or broader U.S. foreign policy interests)?

Although Europe (and NATO) has not been a primary preoccupation of Osama bin Laden (Gunaratna 2003, 153-155), he has occasionally focused his attention on the region. In 2000, not long after the attack of the USS Cole, bin Laden tried to enlist a disaffected former professional soccer player

from Tunisia, Nizar Trabelsi, to blow up a NATO base at Kleine Brogel, Belgium (Bergen 2006, 169-172). Shortly after the al Qaeda train bombings in Madrid in March 2004, bin Laden singled out the region in a statement entitled "To the Peoples of Europe" (Lawrence 2005, 233-236). In the statement, which offers a peace proposal to any European country willing to cease hostilities toward Muslims or stop interfering in Muslim affairs, bin Laden presents the justification for launching terrorist attacks and killing foreigners who invade or occupy Muslim countries:

Reality confirms we are right . . . For we have only killed Russians after they invaded Afghanistan and Chechnya. We only killed Europeans after they invaded Afghanistan and Iraq, and we only killed Americans in New York after they supported the Jews in Palestine and Invaded the Arabian peninsula, and we only killed them in Somalia after they invaded it in Operation Restore Hope. We restored them to hopelessness, thank God (Lawrence 2005, 236).

Bin Laden also singles out the Europeans in a statement that aired on Al Jazeera television on November 29, 2007. In this audio message, bin Laden explicitly mentions the NATO forces working with the ISAF in Afghanistan and urges the countries of Europe to stop following the lead of the Bush White House and cease their participation in the mission (Youssef 2007).

At first glance, there is little reason to believe that the new NATO members ought to be excluded from "the Peoples of Europe" or that they have escaped al Qaeda's cross-hairs, especially given their participation in the mission in Afghanistan and bin Laden's latest statement on the matter. Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that the new NATO members might be targeted for attacks by terrorists, whether they are actual members of al Qaeda, fringe groups associated with al Qaeda or simply individual Islamists opposed to the mission in Afghanistan or Western values in general. Certainly the train bombings in Madrid in March 2004 and the July 2005 bombings in London of a double-decker bus

and parts of the London Underground transportation system (the so-called 7/7/05 attacks) are proof positive of the existence of an Islamic terrorist threat capable of carrying out attacks in parts of Europe (Reynolds 2004, CNN.com 2005). It is also well-known that al Qaeda operates in at least 15 European countries (Alexander and Swetnam 2001, 31), almost all of whom are either members of the ISAF mission in Afghanistan (Albania, Croatia, Sweden and Switzerland) or NATO members of the ISAF (Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Luxemburg, Netherlands, Spain and the United Kingdom). Further, it should be noted that recent research by terrorism experts suggests that the al Qaeda terror network may be splintering or morphing into a different kind of organization – that the terrorist threat is essentially protean in nature – and that the methods and tactics used by terrorists in the future will consequently be different and include new and different targets (Stern 2003). It is perhaps reasonable to assume that these fresh targets might include the new NATO members, especially if they remain active members of the ISAF for a very long time or countries which have been hit by terrorists – like Spain and the United Kingdom – take counterterrorism measures which make the new NATO members easier, more attractive terrorist targets.

Yet, interestingly enough, a quick glance back at the list of ISAF member countries and al Qaeda's areas of operation reveals something unanticipated: there are no new NATO member countries contained in the list of al Qaeda's areas of operation. This does not mean that al Qaeda is not present or active in the new NATO member countries – it may well be that the "the base" is undercover and not yet discovered – and does mean that al Qaeda will not move into the new NATO member countries at some point in time. But it is telling and perhaps instructive. Further, a combing of sources that might reveal either the presence of al Qaeda or terrorist activities in the new NATO members turns up very little. In the last several years there has been one terrorist attack directed at a new NATO member country – a Czech diplomat's car was attacked in Kabul on May 1, 2007 – but it was in Afghanistan and reason

dictates that it should be considered part of the conflict there and not part of a larger terrorist threat targeting ISAF members as a result of the mission in Afghanistan. Otherwise, there is no evidence – not another event even perceived threat – that hints of terrorism in the new NATO members countries (Jane's).

One can only speculate as to why this is so; and again, it would be unwise to discount the threat of terrorism in light of bin Laden's statement of late November 2007. However, given the psychology of terrorists, it may well be – at least to this point in time – that there is some distinction being made by those who might pose a terrorist threat to the new NATO members between the so-called "old" and "new" Europe or "old" and "new" NATO. As noted before, the new NATO members may well constitute softer targets at a certain and decisive level over the long run, but why would a terrorist or al Qaeda take out a coffee shop in Romania if a more intriguing target in the UK, Denmark or Germany were in the offing? Further, it could be that the level of activity or operations carried out by the new NATO members with the ISAF in Afghanistan have not generated the level of animosity or hatred as those nations with more frontline or battle responsibilities (Harmon 2008, 1-5; Meialonga 2007).

In terms of numbers, the troop contribution to the ISAF mission in Afghanistan by the 10 new NATO members has been relatively small. As of December 2007, there were 42,014 troops from 39 countries participating in the ISAF mission (troop strength is the total contribution, not necessarily troops on the ground). NATO's total contribution to the ISAF was 40,014. Of that number, the troop contribution by the 10 new NATO members was 3,019 or 7.7% (up from 7% in October 2007). Not surprisingly, the new NATO members hold no command posts, they have not taken an active role in combat operations – those are being conducted by the US, UK, Canada and the Netherlands – and their troops are playing a largely supporting role in the ISAF.

Again, the Czech Republic is a useful example of a nation that perceived such threats to be directed against them. For example, in August of 2007, there was concern within the public that the Taliban might target Czech soldiers operating in Logar province. A spokesperson for the Ministry of Defense, Andrej Čirtek, felt compelled to give an interview in which he pointed out the Logar was primarily an agricultural area, and not one that was not a drug-producing region (iDNES 2007f). Later in the fall the media did an extensive article on the same area. The author concluded that the province was not exactly a children's playground but that it was safer than the terrain in which other Europeans had responsibility. While the Taliban had warned parents not to send their children to school, Czech military officers told the same persons that the schools they were building would be safe (iDNES 2007g).

Danger of Disrupted Energy Supplies

With good reason, a number of the new NATO partners worried about the willingness of certain countries to shut off their energy sales in retaliation for participation in the Afghan operation. Richard Lugar (2007, 11-16) remarked on the importance of NATO's Article Five and its commitment to defend any member nation that came under threat. He suggested that the alliance should be a "refuge" for any of the member nations and should promise re-supply if cut-offs occurred. He also offered a number of tactical steps that could help to guarantee such a "refuge." One was cultivation of Russia, and the other entailed revival of the REFORGER exercises to accomplish the re-supply. In particular, he suspected Iran as a country that might utilize the punishment of energy politics as retaliation for support of American missions in the Middle East. On a related issue, Dan McNeill, the ISAF Commander, worried that Iran was exporting weapons that ended up in the hands of the Taliban in Afghanistan (iDNES 2007h). This could have been punishment to any number of countries for their role in the combined force.

The role of Russia on energy matters was also an unpredictable one. In the middle of 2007, the Russian parliament granted Gazprom and Transneft the right to form its own armed units. Their powers

included possession of weapons similar to those used by interior ministry security guards (Reuters 2007). Given the past debacle of Soviet involvement in Afghanistan, one might expect that modern Russia would be sympathetic to the ISAF goals and motivation. Russia was supportive in the early months after 9/11 but then became quite critical of the occupation. Their higher profile activities in early 2007 were confined to support of Northern Afghan warlords who were creating obstacles to the Karzai central government in Kabul. Oil politics could enter the mix, for in the same year Russia signed an agreement with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan to build the Pri-Caspian gas pipeline. This would provide an alternative to the western-backed Trans-Caspian gas pipeline (Baev, 2007, 3-5). It is certainly the case that Russia would be happy enough to frustrate particularly the three Baltic states through oil politics, if their involvement in Afghanistan led to a scenario that clashed with important Russian interests.

Risks in the Central Asian Connection

Immediately following the al Qaeda attacks on the American targets, Central Asia became much more significant to American national interests. At first, strategic considerations drove this connection. The countries of the region provided landing and over-flight rights, and they also offered the use of air bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. If the United States could offer protection to those regimes against radicalized Muslim minorities, the Central Asian nations in return could promise to keep open the east-west energy corridor. However, any new Western energy dependence on those nations could result in bondage to the domestic situations in those countries. Turmoil and coups could result in negation of security and energy promises. Already, the United States has lost access to the base in Uzbekistan due to the changing domestic political power balance. If one or more Central Asian countries moved into the category of "failed" states, then they ran the risk of falling into the hands of radical Islamic groups or warlords (Ipek, 2007, 95-107). A new rogue regime might more easily succumb to the temptation to use

oil politics as revenge for participation in the NATO operation in Afghanistan. In addition, Central Asia states could also use energy policy in order to gain more leverage over Russia (Baev, 2007, 6). Increasingly, Russia needs Central Asian natural gas for itself, and an unpredictable leader in the latter region could use energy leverage to put Russia on its team in making ISAF nations pay a high price for their involvement in Afghanistan.

Role of the Proposed Missile Shield in Risk Analysis

Throughout 2007 one of the most controversial new issues in the mix is the American proposal to emplace ten missile interceptors in Poland and a related radar station in the Czech Republic. The justification for the shield is the existence of rogue states like Iran in the general neighborhood of Europe. The two states chosen for the site were part of the “new” Europe that had supported the United States so closely in the early days of the Iraq War. They were also a few geographic steps closer to the center of the danger than were the “old” European states that had been more critical of the U.S. led operation. However, their publics feared that the erection of the military infrastructure on their soil could invite terrorist attacks by those who may already have been angered with their involvement in Afghanistan and even Iraq.

Proposal of the missile shield also brought Russia once again into the cauldron. The shield gave Russia another reason to retaliate against certain provocative states through its energy policy. In June, 2007, President Putin surprised the West by suggesting that they instead use an existing Russian radar station in Azerbaidzhan (iDNES 2007i). At another time Russia threatened to build its own facility in the often compliant Belarus (iDNES 2007j). Finally, in July, 2007, Russia announced that it was going to close two out-dated radar stations in Ukraine. The implication was that they might replace them with more modern facilities on their own soil (sme 2007a). Czech discussions in part centered on the manner of approving or disapproving the radar station. One possibility was use of a referendum, but that could fall

victim to a populist campaign against it. Another option was submission to the two chambers of the legislature for ratification (iDNES 2007k). In late summer the station became a kind of throwback to the Cold War, as the United States did all it could to reassure the Czechs that its operation would not endanger the health of those nearby (iDNES 2007l). Russian military leaders reminded the Czechs that Russia itself would probably be the target of the system. In turn, the Russians threatened to aim their ballistic missiles at the Czech Republic (iDNES 2007m). Whether this threat had anything to do with Czech involvement in Afghanistan is difficult to prove, but it does reveal another dimension of the risks to the Czechs of too much closeness to American policy. Concessions to Russia by American Secretary of Defense Robert Gates did not placate Russia. He suggested that only an attack by Iran would lead to “activation” of the missile system, after it had been constructed. He also proposed that Russian personnel have access to the station itself to ease their doubts. That idea alienated Czechs who had suffered from two decades in which Soviet soldiers had occupied their country (iDNES 2007n).

Finally, in late 2007, the NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer took a stand. He stated that the NATO Summit in April 2008, in Bucharest, would take up discussion of the proposal. He suggested that the starting point for that discussion should be the “indivisibility of security” and clearly favored a movement ahead with the plans. This would be a logical follow up to the November 2006 Riga Summit at which the participants called for “study of the practicality of anti-rocket defense.” By the time of the Bucharest Summit, NATO partners would be privy to a study that was due for completion in February 2008. That study would offer the conclusions of specialists about how Europe would defend itself in the absence of any American new capabilities (iDNES 2007o). A final new variable for 2007 emerged in the month of December. A study in the United States concluded that Iran had stopped work on nuclear weapons four years earlier, and this undercut the crying need for the missile shield. Czech responses to that announcement were measured ones. The Assistant Minister for Defense Tomáš Pojar

observed that the shield was needed as a defense against conventional as well as nuclear weapons (iDNES 2007p). However, it was likely that domestic groups that had been opposed to the site would now escalate their arguments that the risks were not sufficient to justify its construction.

Budgetary Challenges

Involvement in peacekeeping missions like Afghanistan also imposed additional budgetary requirements on the member states of NATO. This was particularly difficult for the new NATO partners. A number of them were small and not able to commit sizeable amounts of money for new military involvements. Estonia and Slovenia are good examples, as neither had the capacity of Poland with its much larger population and tax base. Many of these post-communist states had been through difficult times in the 1990s. Some like the Czechs had made the transition to capitalism through painful “shock therapy.” Others like the Poles had elected leftist governments after early experimentation with the capitalist measures. Their publics had wanted to slow down the process and pain, but the postponement of difficult steps only made the transition last longer. All of these nations had been focusing on the admission process to the European Union (EU) in the years leading up to 2004. Increased military spending had not been high on the list of that organization’s priorities. Further, many EU leaders had been nudging the new nations to think in terms of contributions to an EU force rather than to NATO. Once the same group of members joined NATO and became eligible for peacekeeping missions under the auspices of that alliance, new budgetary demands emerged. NATO expected each new member nation to contribute 2% of its GDP to defense (Lugar 2007, 11-16). For most new partners, this was unreachable or impractical. However, the demand for it continued to exert pressure on budgetary discussions and became a kind of risk to other emerging budgetary priorities.

Risk of Identification with Torture Techniques

Stories have emerged since 2001 about the use of torture techniques in the battle against al Qaeda instigated terrorists. Civil Liberties groups as well as members of Congress have raised many questions about treatment of those incarcerated at Guantanamo. Others have issued stinging rebuttals of the implications of the Patriot Acts for those who question suspects in the war on terror. Reports of techniques such as “water boarding” always make the front page of European newspapers. In both Iraq and Afghanistan, the deaths of innocent civilians as a result of allied ground and air operations raise an outcry. Late 2007 reports of unnecessary deaths at the hands of Blackwater-type defense contractors compounded the concerns. How much risk do the NATO partners in Afghanistan run of implication in these suspicious and even sordid acts? One aspect of this crisis that has implicated some of the smaller alliance partners is the probable use by the CIA of their territory for questioning of terrorist suspects. Bulgaria has been one member state that has been implicated in this activity. Even though it is an older NATO partner, Norway experienced such an outcry and controversy in October 2007. Reports surfaced that Norwegian troops had been involved in handing over prisoners to the NDS, an organization that had been reportedly involved in torture. Both Sweden and Denmark then began to explore and explain their role in similar situations (dagens nyheter, 2007a). Such moral quandaries bore the potential to tip public opinion in smaller nations in which doubts already existed about budgetary, energy, and terrorist threats.

Risk Analysis for Potential New NATO Members

Enlargement of NATO could both spread the risk-taking more widely or introduce new threats to countries that are currently on the sidelines of the alliance. In spite of all the risks attendant on the new NATO partners, several other countries are actively seeking membership. Alliance planners have been working to bring in Croatia, Albania, and Macedonia as soon as possible (Lugar 2007, 11-16). In fact, all

three have already received the status of Partners for Peace. The logic of their inclusion is similar to that offered at the last minute in 2003-04 in support of Bulgaria and Romania. These Balkan nations can help contain potential violence that might attend the Serbian-Kosovo conflict. At the same time, these three nations offer the advantage of geography in terms of the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. In addition, Albania contains largely a Muslim population, and its support could provide additional leverage in the conflict in Afghanistan. The presence of its military forces could offer a cultural link that might defuse the sense of the foreignness of the occupation under ISAF.

Another critical new member might be Georgia, a nation that is even closer to the geographic center of operations. Additionally, Georgia has been a critical player in the discussions leading to construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline. A second conduit known as the Georgia-Baku-Supsa Pipeline also crosses its territory. Further, a proposed new South Caucasus pipeline that starts in Shaz Deniz will soon become a reality. Thus, admission of Georgia to NATO offers the potential of reassurance to current NATO partners in the eventuality of retaliatory energy restrictions or cutoffs. In early 2006, reports indicated that 80% of the Georgian population approved of NATO membership (Saakashvili, 2006, 5-7). In light of that possibility, the nation's leaders prepared a referendum on membership in the alliance in November 2007. They planned to hold that referendum in January 2008. Such a vote would coincide with the scheduled presidential elections. If the "yes" to NATO option passes in the referendum, then the April Bucharest Meeting of NATO could result in extension of Partnership for Peace status to Georgia with an eye on potential full membership in 2010 (iDNES 2007q). At the same time, Russia has been the most consistent opponent of Georgian membership (Baev, 2007 6). The two countries have been at odds over many issues to include ethnic minorities, energy politics, leadership quandaries, harboring of terrorists, and border incidents. Admission of Georgia to NATO

would bring the risks that accompany the Russian card more into the center of the stage in reference to the Afghanistan mission.

Impact of Afghan Involvement on Individual New NATO Partners

Bulgaria

There were proposals that would push Bulgaria into the center of the battle against terrorism and thereby increase some risks to its territory and people. In July 2005 Uzbekistan evicted American personnel from Karshi-Khanabad Air Base. They had initially permitted American usage of the base soon after the 9/11 attacks. They reversed course four years later because the United Nations had airlifted over 400 refugees to Romania, and Uzbekistan saw this as an insult. In order to compensate for the lost base, American leaders began to think about Bulgaria as one possible site for a new base. Potential choice of Bulgaria would be consistent with the logic that led to its admission to NATO in 2004. The country is closer to the area of conflict than most other alliance partners. Bulgaria could be an ideal staging ground for operations in the Middle East and Central Asia. Public opinion in the nation was supportive of such a venture, and the Bulgarian political leadership itself had enacted several reforms. They included stronger civilian control over the military, some modernization of the armed forces, and increased transparency in military affairs (Cooley, 2005, p. 79). In spite of the excitement in playing a more central role, addition of a base could make Bulgaria a more tempting target for a terrorist attack.

Czech Republic

In the summer of 2007, Czech troops moved into an operation in the volatile northeastern region of Afghanistan. Previously, they had worked in more peaceful areas. Their Third Contingent collaborated with other ISAF units in training local police units to protect more effectively the central government in Badakshan (Ministry of Defense of the Czech Republic 2007a). The Czech troops also began to play a more central role at the nerve center of the Kabul Airport at the end of 2006. Their 47-

person contingent actually took over the lead role in providing airport security as well as the safety of its transportation network. In fact, they would have supervisory responsibilities over five hundred military specialists from twenty NATO countries. They would also work in tandem with twenty Czech soldiers who had been working at the airport in an engineering capacity. Their duties had entailed the liquidation of unexploded munitions (Ministry of Defense of the Czech Republic 2007b). The increased visibility of the Czechs in both these operations both made casualties more likely and increased the risk of retaliatory attacks on the homeland.

A number of Czech non-profit organizations also played a role in Afghanistan. For instance, a Czech team worked at a school in the Afghan village of Itarchi. While their provision of supplies was not controversial, their presentations to the school children were a more sensitive issue. Only female members of the Czech team received permission to work with the Afghan girls, who themselves had class separately from the boys. In working with the girls, the team had to delete any offensive pictures from their material (Ministry of Defense of the Czech Republic 2007c). The Olivová Foundation similarly worked with the issue of children's health in Afghanistan. In light of the lack of drinkable water in many places, the chance of infections was high. The Foundation provided inoculations to help combat this problem and devoted much of its time to children in orphanages (Ministry of Defense of the Czech Republic 2007d). One big risk for these non-profit groups was the danger that the enemy would consider them part of the occupying military force and target them as frequently as they did armed units.

A Czech meteorological unit had also worked at the Kabul airport since early 2004. This four-person team helped provide reliable weather forecasts in support of military activities. This was important due to the rapid changes in weather, likelihood of heavy rains, and the presence of much dust at many times. In the entire country there were only ten functioning weather stations, and some of

those were not fully functional (Ministry of Defense of the Czech Republic 2007e). Another major responsibility was forthcoming in the second half of 2008. At that point the Czechs would take over leadership of a PRT that operated in Logar province south of Kabul. It was a relatively developed and prosperous province, and so the expectation of serious casualties was not a great one (iDNES 2007r).

While the activities noted immediately above did not run substantial risks, the work of the Fifth Contingent did. They worked in the area around Fajzabad and interacted with units of the Rapid Reaction Force. Their joint work with Danish and German troops had a special focus on raising the confidence level of the Afghan police. This forty-two person group did searches for explosives, protected specialists, constructed water tanks, and provided school supplies. The Sixth Contingent from the Czech Republic replaced them in August 2007 (Ministry of Defense of the Czech Republic 2007f). Risks of casualties in these kinds of operations were higher than they were in more tranquil areas of the country.

In light of the increased violence in Afghanistan in 2007, there was a natural rethinking of the risks of continued operations in that hostile terrain. In December of that year, two circumstances clarified that issue somewhat. First, the lower house of the Czech legislature approved a government plan to pull its troops out of Iraq in the middle of 2008. At the same time, they declared their intention to continue being part of the ISAF/NATO mission in Afghanistan. In fact, they would increase their personnel there from 225 to 415 (sme 2007b). Second, the United States offered to loan the Czechs 30 Humvees to make their operations more secure. These vehicles would be quite helpful in the difficult terrain that some Czech troops were navigating (iDNES 2007s). Finally, continued Czech participation in the NATO mission in Afghanistan had become more likely with a high level promotion in the summer of 2007. Former Czech Foreign Minister Jiří Šedivý became Assistant Secretary General in the NATO organizational structure. He would serve as one of six such Assistants to Secretary General Scheffer, and

he would be the second individual from the new NATO members to achieve such a high position. This appointment brought esteem to him but also credit to the Czech Republic (iDNES 2007t). That promotion also would make it more difficult for the Czechs to pull out of the major undertaking by NATO in Afghanistan. In this case pride would trump risk.

Estonia

Not much evidence exists about activity by Estonian military forces in the ISAF projects. However, just prior to NATO's take-over of all operations in Afghanistan, Estonia took part with several other allies in a dangerous mission in Kandahar Province. At that time, in the summer of 2006, NATO in fact was responsible for security in southern Afghanistan. Thus, Estonia at that time fought under the NATO umbrella. The precipitant to the crisis was the massing of Taliban led forces in the area. The Afghan National Army plus additional allied forces repulsed that movement. Estonia was one of the nations that offered operation support in that defensive effort (Bush 2007, 5-10).

Latvia

It is also important to take a look at the perspectives of some of the new NATO partners with regard to the overall needs in Afghanistan. Edgar Rinkevics (2007, 29-30) offered several perspectives that include different angles on the needs in that military effort. In his view, NATO's main strength was its "common democratic values" rather than its military capabilities. However, the alliance was not designed to provide day-to-day management of a failed state. Thus, expansion of the organization to include states like Georgia would help to increase alliance options. Further, use of the Partner for Peace members could inject supplementary resources. For instance, the NATO Response Force could benefit from contributions that Sweden, Finland, and Austria are now making. Also, more NATO coordination with the EU would enable the work in Afghanistan to benefit from the capabilities of that all-European organization. Another writer expressed Latvian worries about the Russian factor and energy security.

He argued that Latvia always looked to NATO as the main pillar of its security. Further, in dealing with Islamic countries, Turkish membership in the organization was a positive (Pabriks, 2007, 31-32). Such fresh perspectives from a new member state can offer new windows of opportunity to those who think about the military operation in more traditional ways.

Poland

With its large population and central leadership role in Iraq, Poland is a nation that could potentially provide valuable contributions in Afghanistan. In fact, about 1,000 Polish soldiers have made up its contingent in that country. One controversy connected with their involvement pertained to the involvement of Polish troops in the killing of Afghan civilians in August of 2007. In a battle between ISAF forces and the Taliban, a number of civilians had been caught in the middle and mistakenly killed. Among the innocent civilians were women and children. Poland recalled seven Polish soldiers from Iraq and decided to put them on trial. Polish citizens were divided on this matter, and sympathy for the soldiers prompted one individual to threaten to set himself on fire (iDNES 2007u). At another point the Polish government recalled six soldiers from the front because of their protest against inferior equipment provided to them. America had supplied Hummers to the Polish forces, but some protested that they were inferior to the vehicles that American forces used for themselves. American Hummers would provide defense against attacks with heavy weapons, while the vehicles supplied to the Poles would only fend off shots from hand guns. The soldiers recalled faced three years in prison for disobeying an order (iDNES 2007v). In sum, Poland's large contingent made them vulnerable to both the risk of becoming involved in causing civilian casualties and the threats of harm to their own individual troops.

Romania

Romanian troops were involved in at least one main battle with the Taliban. This was the above-noted conflict in summer 2006, and it took place in Kandahar Province. Its military forces took part with others in repulsing the surprise Taliban attack. Like Estonia, those troops mainly provided operational support (Gates, 2007, 36-39). In addition, NATO planners looked to Romania, like Bulgaria, as a potential site for a new base. Again, this would partly offset the loss of a post-9/11 facility in Uzbekistan. The ready availability of Black Sea ports, airfields, and training ranges made a base in Romania an attractive possibility. Proximity to the tumultuous region was, of course, part of its appeal. As in the Bulgarian case, erection of such a base increased the risk of making Romania into a potential target of a terrorist attack. No doubt the base itself would require many layers of security. The economic value to Romania would not be much compensation for that increased risk, for at most one thousand troops would be stationed there. In addition, a rather vigorous Romanian media would uncover any questionable activities that took place at the base (Cooley, 2007, 79). Thus, there was some risk of lessened public support over time.

Slovakia

This small nation provided consistently a helpful level of troops for the ISAF operation, in spite of a governmental change that brought the critical socialists to power. They had campaigned on the promise to end Slovak involvement in Afghanistan sometime in 2008. Initially, in 2005, the government had made a decision to send troops to be part of the ISAF missions. One of their main functions was provision of airport security. For example, an engineering construction team of 40 Slovaks worked at the Bagram Airport, while another 17 were part of a de-mining unit at the international airport in Kabul. The activities of those engineers centered on reconstruction and repair of airstrips as well as de-mining of the airfields and their related communication routes (Ministry of Defense of Slovakia 2007a). In the

summer of 2007, the Czechs requested the assistance of Slovak health specialists as part of its military field hospital in Kabul. It was expected that the Slovaks would provide material assistance as well (sme 2007c). It became clear that probably the Slovak presence in Afghanistan would not actually end in 2008, in spite of earlier election promises. In October they told Secretary of Defense Robert Gates that they would send forty seven more troops to Uruzgan Province to work with Dutch troops in 2007. They would increase their overall commitment in that province to 125 in 2008. In addition, they firmed up plans to send 8 doctors to the previously mentioned field hospital (USA Today 2007a). Finally, in early December, Minister of Defense František Kašický announced that peacekeeping missions in Afghanistan, Cyprus, and Kosovo would be the main priorities in the near future. This meant that they would send 55 professionals to replace existing military personnel in Kandahar (sme 2007d). If they had planned to withdraw totally in 2008, they would not have replaced that unit so late in the year. With this change in plans, perhaps the principal risk would be to the incumbent party SMER in the hearts and minds of the voters.

Conclusion

Having begun with acknowledgement that the world has lived on an “edge” since 9/11, what principal conclusions can emerge through risk analysis of prospects for new NATO partners in Afghanistan. First, there is no doubt that the skyrocketing of violence in 2007 made it more likely that some of those nations would incur casualties. Countries with relatively large contingents like Poland and the Czech Republic ran the greatest risk in this category. Second, there was increased danger of the Taliban and al Qaeda singling out certain countries and personnel for attacks. Czech non-profit organizations might need to be on guard to a greater extent, if the enemy perceived them to be challenging the culture or even doing the work of military forces. If either Bulgaria or Romania agreed to host a NATO military base, their territory and the base itself might become targets. Third, energy cut-

offs directly from Iran or indirectly from Russia might jeopardize some of the new states. Given the history of Russian tension with the three Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania; they might have the most to fear from Russia, particular given the likelihood that President Putin will play a central role in decision-making as Prime Minister for the next few years. Fourth, instability in Central Asian nations could play havoc with both oil politics and Afghanistan. A strengthened role for Islamic fundamentalists in individual Central Asian countries could make that entire belt of states less sympathetic to ISAF forces engaged in battling fundamentalist extremists connected with the Taliban. Oil politics centering on the three new pipelines could accelerate to a much higher level. Fifth, American plans to build a missile shield in Poland and the Czech Republic could heighten the chances of an attack against them. This is partly attributable to references to Iran as one rationale for the shield. Sixth, all the new members could face increasing pressure from American and NATO leadership for more financial contributions. With the weakening of the American dollar, the inability of new alliance partners to commit at least 2% of GDP to defense is less justifiable. Of course, decisions to strengthen defense spending could jeopardize other domestic priorities under heated discussion at the moment. Seventh, involvement of the military personnel of the new NATO members in killing or even torture of innocents could make domestic support for these missions more fragile. Polish internal reactions after the involvement of their soldiers in such events could be repeated elsewhere. Eighth, addition of new members to NATO could increase certain risks to the whole alliance. On the one hand, the Georgia factor could lead Russia to entertain the idea of using oil politics in unpredictable ways. On the other hand, addition of new member states such as the mainly Islamic nation of Albania could defuse certain risks connected with Afghanistan. Overall, attention by NATO planners to these eight sources of risk could make continued participation in ISAF by new alliance partners more reliable. Such an outcome might contribute to bringing Afghanistan, the center of 9/11 planning, back from the "edge."

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