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NATO in Afghanistan: A Test of the Transatlantic Alliance

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Summary

The mission of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in Afghanistan is seen as a test of the alliance's political will and military capabilities. The allies are seeking to create a "new" NATO, able to go beyond the European theater and combat new threats such as terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Afghanistan is NATO's first "out-of-area" mission beyond Europe. The purpose of the mission is the stabilization and reconstruction of Afghanistan. The mission is a difficult one because it must take place while combat operations against Taliban insurgents continue.

U.N. Security Council resolutions govern NATO's responsibilities. The NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) faces formidable obstacles: shoring up a weak government in Kabul; using military capabilities in a distant country with rugged terrain; and rebuilding a country devastated by war and troubled by a resilient narcotics trade. NATO's mission statement lays out the essential elements of the task of stabilizing and rebuilding the country: train the Afghan army, police, and judiciary; support the government in counter-narcotics efforts; develop a market infrastructure; and suppress the Taliban.

Although the allies agree on ISAF's mission, they differ on how to accomplish it. Some allies do not want their forces to engage in combat operations. None wants to engage directly in destruction of poppy fields in countering the drug trade; how to support the Afghan government in this task — largely through training the police — is proving to be a difficult undertaking. In the wake of the Abu Ghraib scandal and criticism of U.S. practices at Guantanamo, the allies are insisting on close observation of international law in dealing with prisoners taken in Afghanistan.

ISAF has proceeded in stages to stabilize the country. In Stage One, ISAF took control of Kabul and northern Afghanistan. In Stage Two, ISAF moved into western Afghanistan. Stage Three, in the still restive south, began in July 2006. ISAF's principal mechanism for rebuilding Afghanistan is the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT). PRTs, composed of military and civilian officials, are charged with extending the reach of the Afghan government by improving governance and rebuilding the economy. There are significant differences in how individual NATO governments run their PRTs. Some U.S. officials believe that several allies do not commit sufficient resources to make their PRTs effective.

Most observers predict that ISAF's efforts to stabilize Afghanistan will require five years or more. An exit strategy has multiple components: suppressing the Taliban; rebuilding the economy; and cajoling Afghan leaders to put aside tribal and regional disputes and improve governance. U.S. leadership of the alliance as well as NATO credibility are at issue. The allies are sharply critical of aspects of the Bush Administration's foreign policy, and sometimes specifically its NATO policy. U.S. leadership in Afghanistan may well affect NATO's cohesiveness and its future. This report will be updated as needed. See also CRS Report RL30588, *Afghanistan: Post-War Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy*, by Kenneth Katzman.

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Introduction

NATO's mission in Afghanistan is seen as a test of the allies' military capabilities and their political will to undertake a complex mission. Since September 11, 2001, the allies have sought to create a "new" NATO, able to go beyond the European theater and combat new threats such as terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). NATO is seeking to be "global" in its geographic reach and in the development of non-member partner states that assist in achieving an agreed mission. This change in overall mission reflects a NATO consensus that the principal dangers to allied security lie distant from the treaty area and require new political tools and military capabilities to combat them.

Two military operations in Afghanistan seek to stabilize the country. *Operation Enduring Freedom* (OEF) is a combat operation led by the United States against Taliban and Al Qaeda remnants, primarily in the eastern and southern parts of the country along the Pakistan border. OEF is not a NATO operation, although many coalition partners are NATO members. Approximately 27,000 troops are in OEF, including 23,000 U.S. forces.[1] The second operation is the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), established by the international community in 2002 to stabilize the country. NATO assumed control of ISAF the following year. By the end of July 2006, ISAF had an estimated 18,000 troops from 37 countries, with NATO members providing the core of the force. The United States has very few forces in ISAF.

NATO's effort in Afghanistan is the alliance's first "out-of-area" mission beyond Europe. The purpose of the mission is the stabilization and reconstruction of Afghanistan. Although NATO has undertaken stabilization and reconstruction missions before, for example in Kosovo, the scope of the undertaking in Afghanistan is considerably more difficult. Taliban and Al Qaeda remnants are resisting the operation, Afghanistan has never had a well-functioning central government, and the distance from Europe and the country's terrain present daunting obstacles. Reconstruction must therefore take place while combat operations, albeit often low-level, continue. And although the allies agree upon a general political objective, some have differing interpretations how to achieve it.

The mission in Afghanistan is likely to be important for NATO's future, and for U.S. leadership of the alliance. The European allies insisted that a U.N. resolution

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[1] For details of the military operations in Afghanistan, see CRS Report RL33503, *U.S. and Coalition Military Operations in Afghanistan*, by Andrew Feickert.

govern NATO's mission to give legitimacy to the insertion of allied troops in Afghanistan. This important political requirement was achieved. In the past several years, NATO governments have also repeatedly pledged to develop capabilities making their forces more expeditionary and "deployable." The mission in Afghanistan provides a hard test of these capabilities. Several key NATO members, above all the United States, have insisted that the allies must generate the political will to counter the greatest threats to their security. Again, Afghanistan provides a test of will against the concrete danger of international terrorism.

NATO's mission in Afghanistan also tests U.S. leadership of the alliance. Some allies question whether the United States will distance itself from inhumane practices reportedly used in U.S. military-run prisons, such as at Guantanamo; and whether the U.S. commitment to the interests of the allies preserves the mutual sense of obligation that once more clearly characterized the alliance. The allies also believe that the United States, as a global power, must provide leadership and resources to counter the destabilizing influences upon Afghanistan of two neighboring states, Iran and Pakistan.

Afghanistan presents a growing challenge to NATO. Recently, Taliban attacks appear to be increasing in scope and number, and Taliban fighters are adopting some of the tactics, such as roadside bombs, used by insurgents in Iraq. The Karzai government in Afghanistan is coming under international criticism, and its public support has diminished, due to corruption and an inability to improve living conditions. Some warlords continue to exert influence, and the narcotics industry remains an entrenched threat to the country's political health.[2] The allies are not in full agreement how to counter these problems, but allied officials say that they need a strong and reliable Afghan government to provide reasonable services and competence to the population if NATO is to succeed.

This report follows the path of NATO's evolution in Afghanistan. The first section covers the initial two stages of ISAF's mission, and analyzes key issues in the mission: use of Provincial Reconstruction Teams to stabilize and rebuild the country; overcoming caveats placed by individual allies on the use of their forces; and managing the counter-narcotics effort. The next section of the report examines the debate to develop a refined mission statement and a new organizational structure for Stage Three by analyzing issues that are both political and military, such as securing more troops, the treatment of prisoners, and organization of command; it covers roughly the period December 2005-spring 2006. By spring 2006, the allies began to realize that Stage Three would require a greater combat capability than originally believed, and the mission began to change. This adjustment in mission is the subject of the next section of the report, which discusses Stage Three and overall ISAF operations beginning in July 2006 through the perspective of several key allies. The final section of the report assesses ISAF's progress to date.

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[2] For an overview and analysis of key issues in Afghanistan, see CRS Report RL30588, *Afghanistan: Post-War Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy*, by Kenneth Katzman.

Evolution of NATO in Afghanistan: Stages One and Two

Purpose of the Mission

The United Nations, at the request of Afghan President Hamid Karzai, has asked for NATO's presence, supported by Security Council resolutions. The Security Council passed the currently governing resolution, S/RES 1623, unanimously on September 13, 2005, to be in force until mid-October 2006, when it must be renewed. The resolution calls upon NATO to disarm militias, reform the justice system, train a national police force and army, provide security for elections, and combat the narcotics industry.[3] The resolution does not provide details of how NATO should accomplish these tasks; rather, the allies among themselves, in consultation with the Afghan government, have refined the resolution's provisions into active policy.

NATO involvement began in Afghanistan under a U.N. mandate in August 2003. Some non-NATO states, such as Australia and New Zealand, contribute resources to the allied effort. Over time, the alliance has laid out four stages to bring most of Afghanistan under NATO control. Especially during the early phases of NATO operations in the country, NATO leaders faced considerable difficulty in persuading allies to contribute forces to ISAF. As the danger posed by terrorism and the drug industry grew more apparent, allies began more readily to contribute forces.

In Stage One in 2003-2004 NATO moved into the northern part of the country; French and German forces predominate in these areas. Stage Two began in May 2005, when NATO moved into western Afghanistan; Italian and Spanish forces are the core of the NATO force there. These sections of the country are relatively stable. The United States has very few forces in ISAF. The U.S.-led OEF will simultaneously continue its combat operations in border regions still under threat.

National Caveats

Some allies commit forces to a NATO operation, then impose restrictions — "national caveats" — on tasks those forces may undertake. These restrictions, for example, may prohibit forces from engaging in combat operations, or from patrolling at night due to a lack of night-vision equipment.[4] Caveats pose difficult problems for force commanders, who seek maximum flexibility in utilizing troops under their command. NATO must accept troops from governments, and shape the mission to fit the capabilities of and caveats on those troops. NATO commanders have sought to minimize the number of caveats on forces dedicated to ISAF, and effort that has met with mixed success.

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[3] UNSC 8495, Sept. 13, 2005.

[4] Interviews of NATO officials, Feb. 2006.

Provincial Reconstruction Teams

NATO officials describe Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) as the "leading edge" of the allies' effort to stabilize Afghanistan. Some allied governments believe that poor governance, rather than an insurgency, is the principal problem impeding stabilization of the country. NATO's assistance to the Afghan government in controlling the narcotics trade, disarming militias, reducing corruption, and building an economic infrastructure is the essence of the effort to bring stability to the country.[5] The purpose of the PRTs is to extend the authority of the central government into the countryside, provide security, and undertake projects (such as infrastructure development) to boost the Afghan economy. The PRTs are composed of soldiers, civil affairs officers, representatives of the U.S. and other government agencies focused on reconstruction, and Afghan government personnel.

NATO now controls 15 of the 23 PRTs. There are now 8 U.S.-led PRTs, some managed with other countries, under OEF and not ISAF's command. U.S. officials say that they would like to see more NATO and OEF PRTs created later in 2006 and in 2007.

There is no established model for PRTs, and they receive mixed reviews. By most accounts, those serving in U.S. PRTs make an effort to move about surrounding territory, engage the local governments and citizens, and demonstrate that the U.S. presence is bringing tangible results. The United States government controls the funds for its PRTs, in part to ensure that the money does not disappear through the hands of corrupt officials in the provinces or in Kabul, and that it goes directly to designated projects. U.S. PRTs also have the military capacity to respond to any situation in which their personnel are endangered. While not overtly offensive military instruments, U.S. PRTs are directed to provide security and respond aggressively to any threat.[6]

By most accounts, ISAF PRTs differ considerably from those of the United States. While their mission is the same, their resources and activities are not. ISAF PRTs generally have fewer personnel. Some U.S. officials believe that most European-led PRTs are too hesitant in their engagement of the Afghan population. Some European-led PRTs are minimally funded, or provide little supervision of how their funds are managed and dispensed.[7] Individual European government perspectives on PRTs will be more fully discussed in another section that will illustrate the range of allied thinking on the principal issues confronting ISAF.

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[5] Statement of Nancy Powell (Dept. of State), House Armed Services Committee hearing, June 22, 2005; interviews with European officials, Nov. 2005- July 2006.

[6] "Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan - An Interagency Assessment," Dept. of Defense, Washington, D.C., Apr. 26, 2006; Interviews of U.S. officials, Jan.-July 2006.

[7] Interviews of U.S. officials, Nov. 2005-July 2006.

Counter-Narcotics

The allies are struggling to combat Afghanistan's poppy crop. Afghanistan supplies 87% of the world's opium. The crop is therefore a major factor in the economic life and stability of the country.[8] Opium poppy farmers are heavily concentrated in the southern part of the country.

The repercussions of Afghanistan's poppy crop for the future of the country and for ISAF operations are extensive and complex. The Afghan government lacks the law enforcement apparatus, including a well-functioning judicial system, to combat the narcotics trade successfully. Narcotics traffickers can exploit the country's primitive transportation network, as an extensive road system is not needed to move opium to market; a small load of opium can yield a high financial return.

The opium trade has a corrosive effect on Afghan society. Some U.S. officials believe that it is not primarily the Taliban that threatens Afghanistan's future, but rather illegally armed groups, criminal elements, and their links to the narcotics industry. At the same time, farmers in parts of the country view the poppy as their only source of income. Eradication of the industry without a substitute source of income would throw these farmers into destitution, and they violently resist any effort to destroy their crops. Allied officials believe that destruction of the poppy crop today could fuel an insurgency. The allies have decided against the destruction of poppy fields, but they provide training, intelligence, and logistics to Afghan army units and police who destroy opium labs.[9]

In these circumstances, ISAF and the Karzai government are working on a long-term solution to the problem. NATO is assisting in the building of an Afghan law-enforcement infrastructure intended to dismantle the opium industry and prosecute drug traffickers. To this end, ISAF is training a special narcotics police force and developing a professional judiciary, heretofore absent in Afghanistan. Each is a project that may require years to accomplish. Some western officials in Afghanistan note that the country has very few well-educated individuals able to serve in the judiciary and in other professions.[10]

Another component of the counter-narcotics effort is to persuade farmers to switch to alternative crops. Such crops cannot compete with poppies; income from a hectare of poppies can reach $4600 a year, while wheat, one of the suggested substitute crops, can bring only $390. Orchards might bring more money, but they require years to develop. A more extensive market infrastructure is necessary as

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[8] See CRS Report RL32686, *Afghanistan: Narcotics and U.S. Policy*, by Christopher Blanchard; Pankaj Mishra, "The Real Afghanistan," *New York Review of Books*, March 10, 2005, p. 44-48; "L'Afghanistan a fourni 87% de l' opium mondial en 2004," *Le Monde*, July 1, 2005, p. 6; "Global Opium Down 22%," Associated Press, June 26, 2006; House Armed Services Committee, hearing on "Security and Stability in Afghanistan," June 28, 2006.

[9] House International Relations Committee, hearing on "U.S. Counternarcotics Policy in Afghanistan," March 17, 2005; Mishra, *op. cit*, p. 46.

[10] Interviews with European Union officials, spring 2006; "GB Lead Nation on Counter-narcotics," United Kingdom Ministry of Foreign Affairs, July 2005.

well. U.S. officials believe that an extensive road-building effort is imperative to modernize the country's economy.

Stage Three: Establishing Mission and Structure

ISAF's task in Stage Three is to bring stability to the southern part of the country, where the writ of the Karzai government is limited. Initially, in late 2005, the allies believed that Stage Three would emulate Stages One and Two by seeing a replacement of OEF forces by NATO forces in a stabilizing environment. The allies nonetheless knew that there would be several significant new challenges in Stage Three. The Taliban originated in the south, in Qandahar province, and they retain their most active network there. Poppy farming is widespread in the south, particularly in Helmand province, where British troops will operate, and in Uruzgan province, where Dutch troops will predominate.

Stage Three came into force on July 31, 2006, after having been postponed several times due to violence and an effort to secure pledges of troops from allied governments. NATO's Allied Rapid Reaction Corps (ARRC), led by British general David Richards, is supplying the headquarters. Elements of ISAF had been present in the region for several months, preparing for their mission. Several non-allies, such as Australia and New Zealand, are contributing modest amounts of troops, money, and expertise to ISAF, a sign of the importance of the mission in South Asia and to the allies' effort to build a "global NATO" of members and partner states.

The allies confronted four issues in attempting to develop a coherent force for Stage Three: writing a mission statement; raising troops to accomplish that mission; agreeing upon treatment of prisoners; and creating a command structure.

Mission Statement

From fall 2005 through early 2006 the Bush Administration wished to merge the functions and command of ISAF and OEF. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld asked the allies to assume counter-insurgency and anti-terror responsibilities in the southern and eastern parts of Afghanistan. Some allies balked, contending that such combat operations were OEF's task, that the U.N. resolution governing ISAF called for a stabilization operation only, and that, in some cases, the allies did not have forces available for the counter-insurgency and counter-terror tasks.[11]

In December 2005 the allies announced a mission statement for ISAF's Stage Three in the form of a communiqué. They pledged to work to extend the authority of the Afghan government, primarily through development of PRTs. They also committed themselves to training the Afghan army and police, an effort in state-building meant to provide a Kabul government with reliable security forces, a formidable task because such forces were barely in existence. They further

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[11] "Europeans Balking at New Afghan Role," *New York Times*, Sept. 14, 2005, p. 1; interviews of European officials, Sept. 2005 - Feb. 2006.

committed themselves to "supporting Afghan government counter-narcotics efforts."[12] They also agreed upon guidelines for dealing with prisoners.

The mission statement reflected European and Canadian views that Stage Three operations should concentrate on reconstruction and stabilization, with concern over military threat at a minimum. The Taliban were relatively quiet when the allies wrote their communiqué, perhaps due to the winter weather in Afghanistan, perhaps because the Taliban were organizing and seeking to gather their strength. In April 2006, then British Defense Secretary said that he hoped that his country's forces could deploy "without firing a shot."[13] Peter Struck, Defense Minister under the previous German government, said in September 2005 that "NATO is not equipped for counter-terrorism operations. That is not what it is supposed to do."[14] The Dutch parliament held a contentious debate in February 2006 over whether to send forces to ISAF. Government and opposition members of Parliament opposed sending Dutch forces for a combat operation; their view was clear that Dutch forces were to support a stabilization mission, and to use their weapons only if attacked.[15]

By spring 2006 events on the ground in Afghanistan imposed new exigencies to ISAF's mission. An attack on the Norwegian-Finnish PRT in normally tranquil Meymaneh, in western Afghanistan, in February 2006 had given an indication of an emerging problem: the need for a rapid military response capability for rescue operations. When the PRT was attacked, no NATO combat forces were in the region to protect the ISAF personnel. Other NATO forces that were nearby had caveats prohibiting their use in combat operations. Eventually a British plane and forces were found to end the attack on the PRT. Before and after the attack on the PRT, NATO SACEUR General James Jones called upon the NATO governments to pledge forces to ISAF that would be capable of combat operations. He has waged a constant campaign to cajole allied governments not to place caveats on their forces that ruled out combat operations.[16]

NATO governments ultimately agreed to adjust how ISAF would fulfil Stage Three. They wrote more "robust" rules of engagement, which have not been made fully public. By May 2006, British General David Richards, the ISAF commander, was describing Stage Three as a "combat operation." He added that caveats affecting Stage Three forces had been "reduced." He dismissed the tendency of some NATO governments to draw a line between OEF's counter-terror operations and the supposedly low-level counter-insurgency responsibilities that had crept into Stage Three responsibilities. He told visiting members of a NATO parliamentary delegation

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[12] "Final Communiqué," North Atlantic Council, NATO, Brussels, Dec. 8, 2005.

[13] "UK Warned of More Afghanistan Deaths," *Financial Times*, July 3, 2006, p. 3.

[14] "Europeans Balking at New Afghan Role," *op. cit.* Struck's view seems to be contradicted by the 1999 NATO Strategic Concept, the alliance's guiding political document, which clearly states that counter-terrorism is one of NATO's new post-Cold War tasks.

[15] "Peacekeeping in Afghanistan Is Modern Crisis Management," in *European Affairs*, spring/summer 2006, p. 3-4.

[16] Comments by Gen. Jones at NATO Parliamentary Assembly meetings in Copenhagen, Nov. 2005.

that counter-terror and counter-insurgency operations in Afghanistan were not always distinguishable.[17] When OEF turned southern Afghanistan over to ISAF on July 31, some OEF forces remained in the region to continue combat operations targeted against terrorist elements.

Difficulties in Raising Troops

The debate over mission affected the effort to raise forces for Stage Three. In late 2005 and early 2006, NATO officials again experienced difficulty persuading member governments to supply forces. According to NATO officials, the attack on the Norwegian-Finnish PRT awakened some governments to the continuing threat posed by instability and the insurgency.[18] Rapid-response forces suddenly became available. Britain, Canada, and the Netherlands pledged forces for Stage Three.

Britain initially promised to send 3600 troops to Helmand province by the beginning of Stage Three operations in July 2006. London met this deadline, and in July promised another 900 troops to counter the growing Taliban insurgency and other elements opposing the Karzai government. Canada was one of the first allies to recognize the need for combat forces. By a close vote in the Canadian parliament in May 2006, the government designated 2300 troops for Afghanistan until February 2009, most of which have been sent to Qandahar province.

The debate in the Dutch parliament over assigning troops to ISAF was the most contentious in NATO member states. The Dutch population opposes sending forces into a combat operation. Ultimately, the Netherlands designated 1,400 to 1,700 troops for duty in ISAF's Stage Three operation.

The views of the British, Canadian, and Dutch governments will be discussed more extensively later in this report.

Disagreements over Treatment of Prisoners

There was a contentious debate among the allies over the December 2005 final communiqué guiding NATO operations in Afghanistan. Most of the allies were critical of U.S. abuse of prisoners at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq; they extended this criticism to the U.S. detention policy at Guantanamo Bay, where some prisoners captured in Afghanistan have been sent since 2001. These allies contended that the Bush Administration was ignoring the Geneva Convention governing treatment of prisoners taken in combat, and that the issue was a significant one among their publics and in their domestic political debates.[19]

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[17] "Visit to Afghanistan," report by the Defence Committee of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, May 23, 2006, p. 2.

[18] Interviews with NATO officials, Feb. 2006.

[19] Interviews with officials from NATO governments, Dec. 2005-Feb. 2006; "En Afghanistan, l'OTAN évolue de la pacification vers le contre-terrorisme," *Le Monde*, Nov. 20-21, 2005, p. 4.

These allies insisted that the communiqué explicitly address the issue of treatment of prisoners. The final document contains the statement: "In addition to NATO's agreed detention policy for ISAF, which is and remains consistent with international law, we welcome initiatives by Allies to assist the Afghan authorities in the implementation of international standards for the detention of prisoners."[20]

The allies also agreed that prisoners taken by ISAF should be turned over to the Afghan government. Some allied governments reportedly told the Afghan government that they did not wish such prisoners to then be transferred to the United States government. The Afghan government reportedly insisted upon its sovereign right to determine the disposition of prisoners in its custody. General Richards, the ISAF commander since May 2006, said that he would not follow U.S. practices in treatment of prisoners.[21]

Command Structure: Coordinating ISAF and OEF Operations

NATO's discussion over the command structure for Stages Three and Four in Afghanistan reflected the U.S. desire to see the allies more fully embrace combat tasks. Reluctance on the part of some European governments to clash with the Taliban and warlords was evident in these discussions.

From at least 2004, the Bush Administration began to urge the allies to assume more responsibilities in the fight against insurgents and terrorists in Afghanistan. By 2005 the Administration was urging that ISAF and OEF be merged under one command. Many allies at first resisted the call to merge the two commands, largely because of the different nature of the two operations and differing national agendas.

Britain, Germany, and France were the principal allies opposing the U.S. idea to merge the commands. They did so for differing reasons. Britain and Germany wished to preserve ISAF as a stabilization, and not combat, mission. Britain, leading the ISAF anti-narcotics effort, wished to ensure that that initiative remained in the political sphere; along with other allies, the British believe that using force against Afghan farmers to eradicate the poppy crop might result in a broadened insurgency. Germany opposed a merger of the commands because German forces in ISAF were trained only for stabilization, and not for counter-insurgency operations.

The French view was somewhat different. The French government was close to the Administration view that some combat operations against the Taliban and other elements would be necessary. At the same time, French officials were concerned that the Administration, after having a U.S. commander in place to guide all military activity in Afghanistan, might use NATO as a "toolbox" to accomplish Washington's broader objectives. Specifically, Paris was concerned that the Administration would designate more U.S. units from Afghanistan to be sent to Iraq,

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[20] "Final Communiqué," North Atlantic Council Ministerial meeting, Dec. 8, 2005.

[21] Interviews with officials from NATO governments, Dec. 2005-Feb. 2006; "Kabul Riots Direct Fury at GIs," *International Herald Tribune*, May 30, 2006, p. 1.

and leave the allies to stabilize Afghanistan. Administration officials insist publicly and privately that they have no intention of sharply reducing forces in Afghanistan.[22]

In resolving the issue of command structure, the allies sought to address practical problems for the two operations. ISAF and OEF operate in contiguous areas, but there is no clear dividing line between regions where the Taliban and Al Qaeda are active, and the relatively stable regions of the country. A weakness of ISAF had been deficient capability for rapid response rescue, should soldiers and civilian personnel find themselves under fire.

The allies agreed upon a "synergy," rather than a merger, of the two commands to solve this problem. The ISAF commander now has three deputies. One deputy leads the stabilization operations, working closely with the Afghan government to identify priorities in reconstruction and governance. The Italians, for example, are leading the effort to build and professionalize an Afghan judiciary. A second deputy commands air operations, as the hurdles for successful strategic and tactical lift and search and rescue are formidable.

A third deputy directs security operations. This deputy answers to both the OEF and ISAF commanders. The purpose of the security commander's dual role is to provide coordination between the two operations. For example, if troops in one operation need air cover or an emergency response, then those resources could come from either OEF or ISAF, depending on which was nearest to the action and had available resources. This arrangement was in fact already in place with some allied governments before Stage Three began. French air combat forces operating out of Tajikistan, for example, have been providing this function to troops in the field in both ISAF and OEF since 2005, and other allies' air components are now prepared to do the same. In addition, French and Dutch officials say that their air force components serve both commands by gathering and sharing military intelligence.[23]

Stage Three Operations: Allied Viewpoints

Once the allies agreed on ISAF's mission for Stage Three, they began to differ on how to accomplish it. The previous section analyzed allied views in establishing the mission and structure of Stage Three. This section discusses the developing views of allies as Stage Three moves forward. Allied views began to change between the time of the December 2005 NATO communiqué describing ISAF's mission and July 2006, largely due to the surge in Taliban activity. For purposes of analysis, the range of views begins with governments most hesitant about the use of combat forces in Afghanistan and proceeds through a list of governments that believe that a more forceful military hand will be necessary to stabilize and rebuild the country.

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[22] Interviews with officials from allied governments, Dec. 2005-July 2006.

[23] Interviews of officials in allied governments, Nov. 2005-July 2006.

Germany: Rebuild but Avoid Combat

Chancellor Angela Merkel's coalition government has expressed a more decisive commitment to securing stability in Afghanistan than its predecessor. Germany now has 2300 forces in ISAF trained for stability operations but not for combat in the northern part of the country, a figure that may rise to 3000 once Stage IV operations begin, possibly in late 2006. Fifty-nine percent of the German public support their troops' presence in Afghanistan. Merkel has said that she will return to parliament in October 2006 and ask for a five-year commitment for German troops.[24]

Under the preceding Schroeder government, Berlin was adamant that German forces would not engage in combat operations; according to NATO officials, the German caveat against combat has limited the alliance in integrating German forces with those of other allied governments. Former Defense Minister Struck had opposed merging ISAF and OEF commands because it "would make the situation for our soldiers doubly dangerous and worsen the current climate in Afghanistan." These restrictions on German forces in ISAF continue. However, when the mandate for German forces in Afghanistan expires and is renewed in fall 2006, there is a possibility that the Merkel government may allow a more forceful response from its soldiers when they confront warlords, drug traffickers, and other armed groups in the vicinity of their PRTs.[25]

Some officials from other allied governments and the EU have criticized the existing restrictions on German forces and the capabilities of those forces. These officials say that German troops and civilians rarely venture beyond the perimeter of their PRTs due to concern that they might arouse Afghan public criticism or come into contact with armed elements. German troops reportedly do not go on extended patrols and do not respond to local security incidents. Critics of the German approach say that it is important to engage local officials and demonstrate that NATO has an active approach to rebuilding the country and persuading the Afghan population that the alliance is serving a constructive role.[26]

Some U.S. and European officials are also critical of the manner in which Germany has managed its task of training the Afghan police force (ANP). The task is a daunting one, given the low pay provided by the Afghan government and the modest numbers of police used to cover a broad territory. In this view, the Afghan police remain "corrupt and hollow" as a force. At the same time, SACEUR General Jones has said that while training of the Afghan army is "one of the bright stories,

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[24] "Germany/Afghanistan," *Atlantic News*, June 15, 2006, p. 2; "Canadian and Dutch Publics Feeling Stretched by Expanded Military Role in Afghanistan," World Public Opinion Organization, June 2, 2006.

[25] "Europeans Balking at New Afghan Role," *op. cit.*; interviews with NATO and European officials, May-June, 2006. German forces in the OEF, in contrast, are combat forces.

[26] Interviews with European and U.S. officials and observers, June-July 2006.

one of the not-so-good stories... is the inadequacy to bring similar progress to police reform, which is the responsibility of Germany."[27]

The United States has become more active in training the Afghan police, possibly as a result of the reported deficiencies in German training and the general obstacles faced by the police. The police play a key role in Afghanistan's stabilization because they, along with the Afghan army, have primary responsibility for destroying poppy fields and opium labs. The effort to build a professional police force may have suffered a setback in the summer of 2006 when President Karzai, noting the ineffectiveness of the force, began to consider placing individuals closely associated with warlords into senior positions in the force due to their knowledge of the region, a proposed move sharply criticized by U.N. officials in the country.[28]

The Netherlands: A Nuanced Position

A divided parliament and a hesitant population are placing restraints on the Netherlands' role in Afghanistan. Dutch forces in Stage Three are concentrated in the south, in Uruzgan province, one of Afghanistan's most unstable regions and an area that has seen considerable Taliban activity since spring 2006.

The Abu Ghraib prison scandal and U.S. treatment of prisoners at Guantanamo are important issues in the Dutch debate over Afghanistan. Dutch officials say that "the rules of the road in fighting terrorism" are not clearly agreed upon in the alliance. For this reason, Dutch officials are reluctant to have their forces closely associated with U.S. forces in Afghanistan. Dutch forces wish to minimize joint operations with U.S. forces in which insurgents or suspected terrorists are arrested and detained over a period of time, a position that contributed to the section of the December 2005 NATO communiqué detailing allied treatment of prisoners in Afghanistan.[29]

The Dutch government was the most publicly critical of U.S. handling of prisoners taken in the conflict against terrorism. Dutch government spokesmen and opposition leaders criticized U.S. handling of prisoners who had been sent to Guantanamo and called for treatment of detainees to meet the strictures of "international law." In a memorandum of understanding with the Afghan government, the Netherlands secured a pledge that prisoners turned over to Kabul would not receive the death penalty for any crimes committed. The Dutch expressed

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[27] Cited in "If Called to Lebanon, NATO 'Could Go In,'" *International Herald Tribune*, July 28, 2006, p. 3.

[28] "U.S. Considering Troop Reduction in Afghanistan," *Washington Post*, (Sept. 14, 2005), p. A26; "Foreign Troops in North Afghanistan Say 'Drug Wars' the Biggest Threat," *Agence France Presse*, Aug. 30, 2005; "Shake-up of Afghan Police 'Brought Back Corruption,'" *Financial Times*, June 13, 2006, p. 2.

[29] Discussions with Dutch officials, September 2005-May 2006.

their desire to the Afghan government that such prisoners not be turned over to the United States.[30]

The Dutch government, as noted earlier, does not want its ground forces involved in combat operations. Dutch forces are wearing olive, and not camouflage, uniforms. In the Dutch view, ISAF's purpose is "to provide a secure and stable environment for reconstruction." However, the Netherlands endorsed the "synergy" of ISAF and OEF commands and has made available four F-16s for missions in both ISAF and OEF. The aircraft may be used for missions from intelligence gathering to close air support. As mentioned earlier, the Netherlands is in the process of sending 1,400 troops to Afghanistan for Stage Three operations.[31] The political effects of the domestic Dutch debate have found their way into the field. Dutch commanders on the ground in Afghanistan reportedly insisted to NATO counterparts that no Dutch troops must be killed in combat, a view they were told was unrealistic, given that Uruzgan is one of the most restive provinces in Afghanistan.[32] The first Dutch soldiers died in a helicopter crash in July 2006.

The Netherlands participates in two PRTs. The Dutch give their funding for PRT reconstruction activities directly to the Afghan central government. Dutch officials note the contrast with the U.S. approach, which is to bring in a "turnkey" operation in which U.S. officials are trained to undertake reconstruction projects, using U.S. manpower and equipment. The Dutch instead provide money directly to the Afghan government for reconstruction and argue that the Karzai government itself must undertake responsibility for planning and implementation of projects to rebuild the country. Only in this way, the Dutch believe, can the Afghans learn good governance and management of their own affairs. Some U.S. officials believe that the Dutch practice has led to the money being spent on other governmental purposes or landing in the pockets of corrupt Afghan officials.[33]

The contentious debate in the Dutch parliament in February 2006 over sending troops to Afghanistan raised issues still not fully resolved. Public support for Dutch troops being sent to Afghanistan has dropped sharply. In 2004, 66% of those polled supported the mission; by January 2006 that figure had halved, standing at 33%. The parliamentary vote in February 2006 provided a two-year commitment of 1,400 to 1,700 troops. However, the Dutch government has suffered a range of political setbacks, and elections are now set for November 2006.

A new government, possibly to be led by the Labor Party in a coalition, could alter the commitment to ISAF. The Dutch Labor Party is split over the mission of the country's troops. Some believe it is necessary to assume a combat role to defeat the resurgent Taliban; another wing of the party is adamantly opposed to a combat role for Dutch forces. Some Dutch officials and prominent members of Parliament insist that no military operation by Dutch forces should be carried out except under the

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[30] "Peacekeeping in Afghanistan Is Modern Crisis Management...," *op. cit.*, p. 3-4.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Interviews with officials from NATO governments, June 2006.

[33] Discussions with Dutch and U.S. officials, Feb.-July 2006.

direct orders of the Dutch commander, a position that clouds the authority of the overall ISAF commander. Should the Labor Party find itself in coalition with another party or parties that oppose the Netherlands' deployment, it is possible that Dutch forces could be withdrawn.[34]

The United States, Britain, and Canada: A Broad Mandate

The governments of the United States, Britain, and Canada share similar views on how ISAF should fulfil its mission. They have sent combat forces to Afghanistan, maintain PRTs in the most unstable parts of the country, and have engaged the Taliban resurgence aggressively. Many of the British and Canadian forces for Stage Three began to arrive in Afghanistan in spring 2006, and worked under OEF command fighting the Taliban. On July 31, 2006, most of these forces were "rebadged" as NATO forces serving ISAF's Stage Three mission.

The United States has approximately 23,000 troops in OEF, a figure that, if security improves, could fall to 16,000 by the end of 2006. However, some U.S. officials believe that the increased level of Taliban activity could lead to a postponement of plans for such troop reductions. The U.S.-led OEF controlled southern Afghanistan until ISAF's succession there at the end of July. Currently, there are few U.S. forces in ISAF; the U.S. practice has been to lead OEF operations in unstable areas, then turn those areas over to ISAF as conditions stabilize.

U.S. officials believe that ISAF must undertake tasks "from the lowest level of peacekeeping to combat operations against the Taliban and warlords." OEF's task should be counter-terrorism against Al Qaeda. These officials concede that the line between the two operations is blurred, given that OEF in the summer of 2006 has been fighting both an insurgency led by the Taliban and searching for Al Qaeda.[35]

The Bush Administration has a well-developed view of the role of PRTs. U.S. PRTs, as noted earlier, are a mixture of combat forces to provide security and logistical support, Agency for International Development (AID) personnel to develop reconstruction plans, and State Department officials to oversee and coordinate operations. In the U.S. view, PRTs should be initially established in remote areas where most non-governmental organizations will not go. The PRTs undertake reconstruction projects such as road building to enhance economic development and irrigation networks to assist in agricultural development and diversification, and political tasks, ranging from gaining the confidence of local officials to "workshops" to educate officials and tribal leaders in governance and long-term reconstruction plans. Administration officials express concern that when U.S. PRTs are turned over to ISAF, succeeding allied governments sometimes take a more guarded approach to reconstruction and stabilization, or put less money into PRT projects.[36]

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[34] Discussions with Dutch members of parliament, May 2006.

[35] Discussions with U.S. officials, May-June 2006.

[36] "Provincial Reconstruction Teams...," *op. cit*., Dept of Defense, p. 9-20; interviews with U.S. officials serving in PRTs, Nov. 2005-June 2006.

The British view on the role of its ISAF contingent mirrors the U.S. view of NATO's role in Afghanistan. Britain also has an OEF contingent, and its combat aircraft support both OEF and ISAF. Most of Britain's ISAF troops, numbering approximately 6600 in the entire country and 4200 in the south, are combat units. British forces in the south are largely in Helmand province, the principal poppy-growing region in the country; Britain leads the ISAF effort in counter-narcotics. A British general is also currently the ISAF commander.

From a hesitant position on ISAF's mission in early 2006, noted earlier, the British government has adopted a more aggressive stance, caused by the increase in Taliban activity in southern Afghanistan. Britain has a clearly vested interest in ISAF's stabilization mission, not only out of concern that terrorist activity has emanated from south Asia but because most of the heroin found in the United Kingdom comes from Afghanistan. British PRTs reportedly reflect the view that ISAF must be more assertive in its stabilization efforts. U.S. officials believe that Britain's PRT in Helmand province is well-funded and concentrates on local governance and economic development.[37]

Canada also has primarily combat forces in Afghanistan, in both OEF and ISAF. There has been a vigorous debate in Canada over the country's involvement in Afghanistan. In May 2006, by a narrow vote of 149-145, the Canadian parliament approved Ottawa's plan to commit 2300 troops to ISAF until February 2009. Public support for the mission has fallen, however. In 2002, 66% of those polled supported sending Canadian forces to Afghanistan; that figure in June 2006 was 57%, and only 44% supported the two-year extension for Canadian troops. While Canadians appear to support their country's long involvement in U.N. peace operations, the need for combat operations in Afghanistan has eroded support for the ISAF mission.[38]

Canadian forces joined U.S. and British forces in summer 2006 OEF combat operations against the Taliban in southern Afghanistan. Some of these operations, led by Canadian teams, were joined by Afghan army (ANA) elements in Qandahar province. The Canadians eventually wish to turn over such operations to the ANA. Some of the Canadian forces assigned to OEF were transferred to ISAF's Stage Three operations on July 31, 2006, and Qandahar province will be their principal region of responsibility. Canada leads a PRT in the province.

France: Combat and Stabilization

The French government believes that ISAF must be a combat force that buttresses the efforts of the Afghan government to build legitimacy and governance. Unlike German forces, for example, many French forces are trained both for combat and for stabilization. France has 1500 troops altogether in Afghanistan, with special forces and other contingents in OEF, and combat units in ISAF. While France's area of responsibility in ISAF is principally Kabul, Paris' role in the whole of the country

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[37] "Provincial Reconstruction Teams...," *op. cit.*, Dept. of Defense, p. 22; "Opium War an Absolute Disaster," *Financial Times*, July 5, 2006, p. 3.

[38] "Canada Votes to Extend Mission in Afghanistan," *Washington Post*, May 18, 2006, p. A18; "Canadian and Dutch Publics Feeling Stretched...," *op. cit*.

demonstrates the importance of enhanced military capabilities that NATO is attempting to bring to the overall stabilization effort.

The Afghan mission has marked important changes in French NATO policy. France supported the invocation of Article V, NATO's mutual security clause, after the attacks of September 11, 2001, on the United States. Those attacks were decisive in the French government's change of position on NATO's "out-of-area" responsibilities. For many years, Paris had argued that NATO was a European security organization, and must only operate in and near Europe. After September 11, the French government embraced the emerging view that NATO must be a global security organization able to combat terrorism and WMD proliferation around the planet. French officials say that ISAF is NATO's most important mission.[39]

Since the late 1990s, NATO has urged member governments to construct more "deployable," expeditionary forces, and gave the notion a concrete base in the Prague Capabilities Commitment (PCC) in 2002, when allies pledged to develop capabilities such as strategic lift, aerial refueling, and more special forces.[40] Among the European allies, France has made considerable progress along this path. French aerial tankers refuel not only French aircraft in the Afghan theater, but U.S., Dutch, and Belgian aircraft as well. French Mirage jets based in Tajikistan gather intelligence over Afghanistan and provide close air support to both ISAF and OEF. These capabilities have contributed to the improving integration of NATO forces in the Afghan theater, according to U.S. officials, and to the ability of ISAF and OEF to share capabilities and command.[41]

The French government has clearly defined its interests in Afghanistan. French officials argue that the allies must commit to a long effort to assist the Afghan government in eradicating the opium industry, in part because heroin finds its way into western societies, in part because it fuels terrorist groups. Ultimately, French officials believe that the Afghan government itself must learn to govern the country, and that NATO and partner states cannot do this for Kabul. To this end, the French have a contingent in place that assists in training the Afghan army. France does not believe that PRTs can play a meaningful role in Afghanistan, and believes that the Karzai government must itself exercise the initiative and build good governance in order to gain the confidence of its people. France does not accept the view, held by some U.S. officials but nowhere present in NATO's ISAF mission statement, that part of NATO's brief is to build democracy in Afghanistan. In the French view, Afghanistan is a highly diverse ethnic state with no tradition of democracy; at best, for the foreseeable future, a more representative and tolerant society can be built.[42]

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[39] Interviews with French and U.S. officials; Remarks by Defense Minister Michèle Alliot-Marie at the NATO Parliamentary Assembly plenary, Paris, May 30, 2006.

[40] CRS Report RS21659, *The Prague Capabilities Commitment*, by Carl Ek.

[41] Interviews with U.S. and French officials, Aug. 2005-June 2006; "France Quietly Offers More Military Help," *Army Times*, Aug. 29, 2005; "Français et Américains louent une coopération exemplaire en Afghanistan," *Le Monde*, Oct. 24-25, 2004, p. 3.

[42] Interviews with French officials, Aug. 2005-July 2006; Alliot-Marie, *op. cit*. Afghanistan

(continued...)

French officials are less likely to parse the NATO-defined difference that OEF is a counter-terror operation and ISAF is a counter-insurgency and reconstruction mission. French forces fight in both operations, and describe both operations as fighting terrorism and developing a more stable society.[43]

Assessment

The allies have maintained a basic unity of purpose in Afghanistan. Their desire to stabilize the country to prevent the return of a terrorist state has led to an ongoing general consensus. Member states that refused to contribute troops to the U.S. effort to bring order to Iraq are present in Afghanistan. The allies believe that there is a tangible benefit to ISAF. If ultimately successful, ISAF can help to build a state that is relatively stable, no longer a source of international terrorism., and one that attempts to eradicate or dampen a narcotics trade that is a threat to European societies.

Nevertheless, NATO faces complex issues in its own ranks and on the ground in Afghanistan that are likely to concern ISAF over the next several years. While the allies agree on their overall mission to stabilize the country, they often differ on the means to reach that objective and on the amount of resources to be made available.

While ISAF does not explicitly have a counter-terror mission, it is clear that contributing governments believe that fighting the Taliban, warlords, and the narcotics trade can prevent the return of Al Qaeda or radical Islamic groups inimical to western interests.

NATO leaders have at times had difficulty in persuading allies to contribute forces to ISAF. Of equal and perhaps greater difficulty today is the effort to persuade governments to contribute the money necessary to rebuild Afghanistan. Key allied governments say that they are committed to staying for a period of years to stabilize the country. Some EU officials believe that five years or more will be necessary to build a market economy and proficient governance.[44]

Afghanistan's long history without a central government able to extend its reach over the country's difficult geographic and political terrain is presenting the allies with problems rivaling the threat of the Taliban. Political differences within the alliance over how to manage Afghanistan's future are apparent in ISAF's operations. The allies' description of PRTs as the "leading edge" of their stabilization effort masks a divergent reality. Some PRTs are clearly effective, building needed infrastructure and by most accounts gaining the confidence of local populations. Others, in the view of some U.S. and European officials, are no more than

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[42] (...continued)
supplies an estimated 90% of the heroin that finds its way to France.

[43] Alliot-Marie, *op. cit.*

[44] "EU/Afghanistan: Europeans must Prepare for Losses...," *Atlantic News*, July 20, 2006, p. 2.

showcases, aimed more at demonstrating an ally's desire to participate in an important NATO mission than at producing concrete results for the stabilization plan. In the view of these same officials, NATO may be expecting too much from some of its new member governments, which, only recently coming out of communism, lack the experience and the funds to mount an effective reconstruction effort in a distant, impoverished country.[45]

The declining fortunes of the Karzai government also present a difficult obstacle. NATO is attempting both to respect the policies of a nascent representative government and to urge it forward to better governance. The Karzai government's own problems are apparent: discontented warlords, a vigorous drug trade, the Taliban, and a rudimentary economy and infrastructure. In the view of General Karl Eikenberry, commander of U.S. forces in Afghanistan, "The enemy we face is not particularly strong, but the institutions of the Afghan state remain relatively weak."[46] There is a widespread view that President Karzai is losing the confidence of the Afghan people; he blames the slow pace of reconstruction and insufficient financial support from the international community. General Ed Butler, the commander of British forces in Afghanistan, said in May 2006: "This year we need to be seen to be making a difference. It is a real danger that if people do not feel safer, we may lose their consent." In his view, poor governance and not the Taliban insurgency is the country's central problem, a view widely reflected by other officials from NATO governments.[47] NATO, in this view, must prepare to deal with successive governments of unknown composition and policies should the Karzai government fail to endure.

NATO's effort to assist the Karzai government in weakening the narcotics trade demonstrates the central dilemma of ISAF's mission. The allies must fight an insurgency tied to the opium industry with forceful means while at the same time attempt to win the confidence of the Afghan people through reconstruction of the country. In this view, "breaking down suspected insurgents' doors in the morning [makes] it difficult to build bridges in the afternoon."[48] While NATO officials state publicly that allied forces are not burning poppy fields and are depending instead on the Afghan army and police to do the job, farmers are well aware that it is ISAF that supplies the intelligence, training, and logistics enabling government security forces to attack the industry, the lifeline of many poor Afghans.[49]

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[45] Interviews with U.S. and European officials, May-July 2006.

[46] House Armed Services Committee, hearing on "Security and Stability in Afghanistan," June 28, 2006.

[47] "UK Troops 'Must Beat Back the Taliban this Year,'" *Financial Times*, May 23, 2006, p. 7; interviews with U.S. and European officials, May-July 2006.

[48] "Mission Impossible? Why Stabilising Afghanistan Will Be a Stiff Test for NATO," *Financial Times*, July 31, 2006, p. 9. The quotation is a paraphrase by the *Financial Times* of a French official who was reflecting on a similar dilemma for French forces in Algeria in the 1950s.

[49] Interviews with U.S. and British officials, Nov. 2005-July 2006.

NATO's training of Afghan officials has made measured progress in some areas, and very little in others. Although the Karzai government has complained that NATO is not building a sufficiently large army, most allies believe that substantial progress has been made in developing a professional and reliable force. In Stage Three, British and Canadian troops are reportedly giving more and more responsibility to the ANA in joint operations. At the same time, the NATO-trained police forces, as already noted, are clearly not a success story. EU officials say, in addition, that Italian efforts to train a competent judiciary have faltered, in part due to the small number of well-educated Afghans available for the legal profession, in part due to insufficient resources provided by Rome.[50]

The quality and practices of NATO's own forces have also come into question by some U.S. and European officials. It has already been noted that some of NATO's newer member states attempt to manage PRTs with troops not yet trained for a stabilization mission in a dangerous environment. Some NATO forces also do not have the appropriate equipment for their tasks. They may lack night-vision equipment, or the technology necessary to detect roadside bombs. Some NATO governments send forces inappropriate for the task, forces that are heavy on support functions but light on combat capabilities. These governments tend to be reluctant to send their forces out into the field to confront the Taliban and to control warlords and their militias. The result, in this view, has been that British and Canadian ISAF forces, and U.S. forces in OEF, bear a disproportionate share of the most dangerous tasks.[51]

The United States has made an evident effort through its PRTs to engage local Afghan leaders and the general population to convince them of the worth of ISAF's mission. While some progress has clearly been made, several U.S. officials have noted that Afghanistan is a society where personal contact and developed relationships are critical in building trust and in persuading Afghans to pursue better governance. The six-month rotations of U.S. forces have impeded this effort, for example, as have the four-month rotations of Dutch forces. Some allied governments, however, are now sending troops into Afghanistan for two-year rotations, which provide a better opportunity to gain the confidence of the population.

Cohesiveness of command is another lingering issue. While the allies reached agreement on a command structure linking ISAF and OEF, some observers believe that national commands will preserve the authority to make final decisions about use of their forces. The Dutch parliamentary debate clearly signaled this inclination.

ISAF may be having a residual, positive effect on the militaries of some NATO members, particularly new member states. U.S. military personnel say that true reform of new members' militaries can best take place in the field, under difficult

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[50] Interviews with U.S. and European officials, May-July 2006.

[51] Ibid.

conditions, and through operations with more experienced NATO militaries. By several accounts, this experience is being gained in Afghanistan.[52]

The allies have a consensus that reconstruction is the key to building a viable, functioning Afghan state. Officials in allied governments repeatedly point to the need for more road building to extend the reach of Kabul and to provide the infrastructure to diversify and strengthen the economy of a country lacking the capacity to develop enduring market practices. General Eikenberry, when asked by a congressional committee what he needed to build a stable society, responded, "Would I prefer to have another infantry battalion on the ground of 600 U.S. soldiers or would I prefer to have $50 million for roads, I'd say... $50 million for roads."[53] His view has been echoed by calls from the NATO Secretary General for allies and international institutions to provide more funds for reconstruction.

Prospects

The Afghanistan mission is an important test of NATO's out-of-area capability. In a view of growing prevalence, Afghanistan exemplifies conditions in which "extreme belief systems,.... unstable and intolerant societies, strategic crime and the globalization of commodities and communications combine to create a multi-dimensional threat transcending geography, function, and capability."[54]

The attacks of September 11, 2001, led the Bush Administration to abandon its skepticism about nation-building as a task for the United States or for NATO. Today, the Pentagon gives great attention to training forces for nation-building; other allies have also embraced stabilization and reconstruction as central to NATO's mission.

NATO's exit strategy requires laying the economic foundations and providing the security for a fledgling government to find a stable political footing that excludes violence, reduces corruption, and creates a climate conducive to representative institutions. External factors will affect realization of this exit strategy. Stabilization of Afghanistan is closely linked to developments in and the intentions of neighboring Iran and Pakistan, a situation that many in the alliance believe demands a continuing U.S. presence.[55] For these reasons, the allies believe that the success of the mission will also be a test of the United States' ability and commitment to lead NATO, even if they do not always agree with every element of U.S. policy in the country.

U.S. leadership of the alliance appears to be at a key moment. The Bush Administration has been unable to persuade the allies to play a major role in Iraq. Among the allies, broader U.S. Middle East policy is widely seen as a failure. U.S.

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[52] Interviews with military officers from NATO governments, May-July 2006.

[53] House Armed Services Committee, *op. cit*.

[54] Julian Lindley-French, "Big World, Big Future, Big NATO," *NATO Review*, Winter 2005, p. 5.

[55] Olivier Roy, "Afghanistan: La Difficile Reconstruction d'un État," *Cahiers de Chailliot*, Dec. 2004.

support for the development of democratic governments is a controversial policy. In Iraq and the Palestinian Authority, where democratic elections have taken place at U.S. urging, factions supported by Iran have fared well, enhancing Tehran's influence in a region where it was long kept at bay. Strong U.S. support for Israel in its conflict with Lebanon is another factor seen in Europe as serving to radicalize Arab populations against western interests.[56] In contrast, the United States and its NATO allies have greater unity of purpose in Afghanistan. The ultimate outcome of NATO's effort to stabilize Afghanistan and U.S. leadership of that effort may well affect the cohesiveness of the alliance and Washington's ability to shape NATO's future.

Figure 1. Map of Afghanistan

Source: Map Resources. Adapted by CRS. (K.Yancey 8/23/06)

[56] "US Policy in the Middle East Unravels," *Financial Times*, Aug. 4, 2006, p. 3; "Washington, en s'alignant sur Israël, a perdu son influence dans la région," *Le Monde*, July 20, 2003, p. 3.