



NATO in Afghanistan: A Test of the Transatlantic Alliance

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January 23, 2009

Congressional Research Service

7-5700

www.crs.gov

RL33627

CRS Report for Congress

Prepared for Members and Committees of Congress

Summary

The mission of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in Afghanistan is a test of the alliance's political will and military capabilities. Since the Washington Summit in 1999, the allies have sought to create a "new" NATO, capable of operating beyond the European theater to combat emerging 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 has proven difficult because it must take place while combat operations against Taliban insurgents continue. Recent assessments of the situation in Afghanistan point to a rise in the overall level of violence due to increased Taliban military operations and an increase in terrorist-related activities.

U.N. Security Council resolutions govern NATO's responsibilities in Afghanistan. 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.

ISAF has proceeded in four stages to extend its area of responsibility over the whole of Afghanistan. Although the allies agree on ISAF's mission, they continue to differ on how to accomplish it. Some allies do not want their forces to engage in counter-insurgency operations and have placed operational restrictions on their troops. The principal mechanism to rebuild Afghanistan are the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT) composed of military and civilian officials and charged with extending the reach of the Afghan government by improving governance and rebuilding the economy. However, there are significant differences in how individual NATO governments run their PRTs. Until recently, only the United States wanted to engage directly in the destruction of poppy fields and drug facilities in countering the drug trade. Finally, continued turmoil in parts of Pakistan has complicated the effort to prevent the Taliban from infiltrating Afghanistan.

The 111th Congress will likely support the new Administration's policies in Afghanistan, but may seek a more coherent plan for integration, stabilization, and reconstruction operations. In 2008, Congress appropriated \$31 billion for the conflict in Afghanistan (H.R. 2642/P.L. 110-252) Most observers predict that ISAF's efforts to stabilize Afghanistan will require a long-term commitment. U.S. leadership in Afghanistan may well affect NATO's cohesiveness, credibility 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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Introduction¹

NATO's mission in Afghanistan is seen as a test of the allies' military capabilities and their political will to undertake a complex mission in a distant land and to sustain that commitment. Since the Washington NATO Summit in 1999, the allies have sought to create a "new" NATO, capable operating beyond the European theater to combat emerging 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 can assist in achieving an agreed mission. This change in overall mission initially reflected 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 counter-insurgency, combat operation led by the United States against the Taliban and al Qaeda insurgents, 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 20,000 troops operate in OEF, including approximately 18,000 U.S. forces.²

The second operation is the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). ISAF was created by United Nations Security Council Resolution 1386 on December 20, 2001. Led by the United States, the ISAF mission was initially limited to Kabul. NATO took over command of ISAF in Afghanistan in August 2003. The Security Council passed the currently governing resolution, Res. 1776, on September 17, 2007. The Resolution calls upon NATO to disarm militias, reform the justice system, train a national police force and army, provide security for elections, and provide assistance to the effort to address the narcotics industry. By December 2008, ISAF had an estimated 51,000 troops from 40 countries, with the 26 NATO members providing the core of the force. The largest troop deployments come from the United States which has approximately 19,000 troops, the United Kingdom (8,700), Germany (3,600), Canada (2,700), Italy (2,300), France (2,700) the Netherlands (1,800), and Poland (1,200)³. The NATO/ISAF mission in Afghanistan is led by U.S. General David McKiernan who assumed command in June 2008.

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 insurgents are providing stiff resistance to the operation, Afghanistan has never had a well-functioning central government, the distance from Europe, and the country's terrain present daunting obstacles to both NATO manpower and equipment. Stabilization and reconstruction must therefore take place while combat operations, continue. And although the allies agree upon a general political objective of the ISAF mission, some have differing interpretations of how to achieve it.

¹ The original version of this Report was produced by former CRS analyst, Paul Gallis, Specialist in European Affairs.

² See CRS Report RS22633, *U.S. Forces in Afghanistan*, by JoAnne Bryan and Michael Waterhouse.

³ Note: The number of "boots-on-the-ground" are approximations due to regular unit rotations and the different ways in which the U.S. Joint Staff and ISAF account for personnel.

The mission in Afghanistan is likely to be important for NATO's future. 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. Afghanistan provides a test of will against the concrete danger of international terrorism. Over the past several years, NATO governments have also repeatedly pledged to develop capabilities making their forces more expeditionary, flexible, and "deployable." The mission in Afghanistan provides a hard test of these capabilities.

NATO's mission in Afghanistan also tests U.S. leadership of the alliance. Some allies have questioned whether the U.S. commitment to the interests of the allies preserves the mutual sense of obligation that characterizes 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 particularly, Pakistan.

A highly respected German Marshall Fund poll has found a sharp decline in European public opinion towards U.S. leadership since 2002. In key European countries, the desirability of U.S. leadership in the world fell from 64% in 2002 to 36% in June 2008; the approval rating of former President Bush in these same countries fell from 38% in 2002 to 19% in 2008.⁴ This decline complicated the effort of allied governments to sustain public support for the ISAF mission. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates gave credence to the political ramifications of the Iraq war when he said in February 2008, "I worry that for many Europeans the missions in Iraq and Afghanistan are confused.... Many of them...have a problem with our involvement in Iraq and project that to Afghanistan."⁵ Whether Europe's public view toward U.S. world leadership will begin to change as the new U.S. Administration begins to govern will also be a test of how well NATO's mission in Afghanistan will be viewed.

The conflict in Afghanistan continues to present a growing challenge to NATO. Over the past two years, Taliban attacks have increased in scope and number, and Taliban fighters have adopted some of the tactics, such as roadside bombs and suicide attacks, used by insurgents in Iraq. In January 2008, a report issued by the Afghanistan Study Group, claimed that the year 2007 was the deadliest for American and international troops in Afghanistan since the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan.⁶ However, in 2008 the violence continued to escalate with a reported 30% increase nationwide and an estimated 40% rise in attacks over 2007 in the U.S.-led eastern sector. As a result, 2008 has now recorded the most U.S. combat casualties (150) and Afghan deaths (5,500) of the war. In June 2008, a Taliban-led attack on a prison in Kandahar resulted in the release of several hundred Taliban inmates. On July 13, 2008, a Taliban attack on a joint U.S.-Afghan outpost along the eastern border with Pakistan resulted in the death of 9 U.S. troops. This attack was the deadliest against U.S. forces in Afghanistan since 2005. On August 20, 2008, French forces suffered their worst combat casualties when 10 soldiers were killed after an ambush of a patrol by Taliban forces.

In addition to increased insurgent activity, terrorist violence has increased since the beginning of 2008. In February 2008, a terrorist bomb killed over 70 civilians and police officers near Kandahar. In April 2008 an assassination attempt was carried out against President Karzai.

⁴ *Transatlantic Trends*, The German Marshall Fund, September 2008.

⁵ "Gates asks Europeans to face Afghan threat," *International Herald Tribune*, Be. 9-10, 2008, p. 3.

⁶ "Revitalizing our Efforts, Rethinking our Strategies," Report of the Afghanistan Study Group, Center for the Study of the Presidency, January 30, 2008, p.17.

The north and west of Afghanistan, and Kabul in the east, are largely stable, but combat operations in the south and east against the Taliban and al Qaeda continue. Forces from the United States, Britain, Canada, and the Netherlands, which are deployed in the east and south, bear the brunt of the fighting. The inequity of burden-sharing in combat operations remains an important point of contention within the alliance, and is a factor in the domestic opposition to the conflict in states that contribute the most combat forces.

Turmoil in neighboring Pakistan has further complicated ISAF's mission.⁷ The assassination of presidential candidate Benazir Bhutto in December 2007, possibly by Islamic extremists, led to increasing internal restiveness against President Pervez Musharraf, criticized by some NATO governments as unable or unwilling to stem Taliban movement across the Pakistan border into Afghanistan. Some experts see Pakistani and Afghan Taliban militants increasingly merging and pooling their efforts against governments in both countries; Al Qaeda is reportedly actively facilitating the Afghanistan insurgency. Since the resignation of Musharraf, the new government in Pakistan has dispatched military units to the border region and has authorized the army to conduct offensive operations against Taliban forces in the northern tribal areas. In October 2008, the Pakistan government announced that it would begin to arm anti-Taliban tribal militias in the northern region in an attempt to control Taliban activity.⁸ With the inability of the Pakistani government to control the number of Taliban insurgents who use Pakistan as a sanctuary, the United States has stepped up its use of missile attacks against suspected insurgent hideouts. This has caused a deterioration in U.S.-Pakistan relations to the point where there have been some shooting incidents between Pakistani forces and U.S. forces patrolling the Afghan border area. U.S. officials, in July 2008, confronted Pakistani officials with evidence that Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence agency (ISI) was actively helping Afghanistan militants, particularly the Haqqani faction.⁹

In another development, intelligence sources suggest that there has been an increase in the number of pro-al Qaeda foreign militants arriving in Pakistan from Iraq and other places in the Middle East. These sources believe these new arrivals continue to join Taliban fighters in Afghanistan.

The Karzai government in Afghanistan has come 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. The allies are not in full agreement on how to counter these problems, but allied officials say that they need a strong, competent, and reliable Afghan government to provide reasonable services to the population if NATO is to succeed.

The 110th Congress largely supported Administration policy in Afghanistan and it is expected that the 111th Congress will follow those same general lines of support. However, a number of congressional committees had called on the previous Administration to develop a more coherent plan to coordinate ISAF's stabilization and reconstruction efforts and it is expected that the same sentiments will be expressed to the new Obama Administration. In response, the Bush Administration led an effort before NATO's Bucharest summit in April 2008 to develop a

⁷ For an overview and analysis of key issues in Afghanistan, including the role of Pakistan, see CRS Report RL30588, *Afghanistan: Post-War Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy*, by Kenneth Katzman.

⁸ "Pakistan will give Arms to Tribal Militias," *Washington Post*, October 23, 2008.

⁹ Mazzetti, Mark and Eric Schmitt. "CIA Outlines Pakistan Links With Militants." *New York Times*, July 30, 2008.

“strategic vision” white-paper for Afghanistan that laid out a rationale for the mission that could be used to garner more public support for ISAF. The paper made four principal points: the allies promised a “long-term commitment” to Afghanistan; expressed support to improve the country’s governance; pledged a “comprehensive approach” to bring civil and military efforts to effect stabilization; and promised increased engagement with Afghanistan’s neighbors, “especially Pakistan.”¹⁰

The paper represented some strides in bringing together allied views, but it also masked some important differences. It committed the allies to an indefinite period of time to stabilize Afghanistan, something that several allies had previously resisted. The paper, however, did not commit governments to pledge more forces; rather, the phrase “comprehensive approach” was seen by some observers as a euphemism for equating the importance of reconstruction and combat. Some governments believe that the military commitment remains paramount if security in the country is to improve so that reconstruction may proceed throughout Afghanistan. The paper also did not present a plan for engaging Pakistan or Iran; instead, the allies would continue to do so bilaterally, an approach that has not thus far yielded success in stemming the flow of arms or fighters into Afghanistan.¹¹

This report follows the path of NATO’s evolution in Afghanistan and addresses the current situation on the ground. 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 stages three and four of the ISAF mission which cover roughly the period December 2005 to the present. In this section, the debate to develop a refined mission statement and a new organizational structure is analyzed by looking at issues that are both political and military, such as securing more troops, the treatment of prisoners, and organization of command. By late 2006 as ISAF extended its responsibilities to cover all of Afghanistan, the allies began to realize that ISAF would require a greater combat capability than originally believed, and the mission would have to change. This adjustment in mission is discussed through the perspective of several key allies. The final section of the report assesses ISAF’s progress to date.

Stages One and Two: Evolution of NATO in Afghanistan

Purpose of the Mission

The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was created by United Nations Security Council Resolution 1386 on December 20, 2001. Led by the United States, the ISAF mission was initially limited to Kabul. The United Nations, at the request of Afghan President Hamid Karzai, then asked for NATO’s participation. NATO took over command of ISAF in Afghanistan in August 2003. The Security Council passed the most recent resolution, Res. 1776, on September 17, 2007. Like its predecessors, it calls upon NATO to disarm militias, reform the justice system,

¹⁰ “ISAF’s Strategic Vision,” NATO summit, Bucharest, April 3, 2008, p. 1.

¹¹ Interviews with officials from European governments and U.S. specialists, April 2008.

train a national police force and army, provide security for elections, and combat the narcotics industry. 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. The International Security Assistance Force includes troops from all 26 member states of the NATO alliance and has included troops from several non-NATO nations, such as Australia, New Zealand, Sweden, Jordan, and Azerbaijan.

Over time, NATO commanders laid out and implemented four stages designed to bring all of Afghanistan under NATO's operational responsibility. 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. Stage Three began in July 2006 when ISAF moved into the volatile southern region of Afghanistan, where U.S., British, Canadian, and Dutch forces predominate. Stage Four began in October 2006, when ISAF extended its geographic area of responsibility to include the entire country.

Issues

From the beginning of NATO's command of ISAF, political leaders and local commanders have had to deal with several significant issues which have influenced the implementation of the ISAF mission.

National Caveats

At the outset, NATO leaders faced considerable difficulty persuading some member states to contribute forces to ISAF. More importantly, however, a significant problem has been how some of those forces actually provided would operate once deployed. Many allies have committed forces to the NATO operation, then imposed restrictions—"national caveats"—on tasks those forces could undertake. It is reported that almost half the forces in ISAF have some form of caveats. National "caveats" or restrictions that allied governments, or their parliaments, place on the use of their forces, continue to trouble ISAF. While caveats in themselves do not generally prohibit the kinds of operations NATO forces can engage in, caveats do pose difficult problems for commanders, who seek maximum flexibility in utilizing troops under their command. Some governments' troops lack the appropriate equipment to function with other NATO forces. Some nations will not permit their troops to deploy to other parts of Afghanistan. Still others prohibit their troops from participating in combat operations unless in self-defense. NATO commanders have willingly accepted troops from some 40 governments but have had to shape the conduct of the mission to fit the capabilities of and caveats on those troops.

NATO commanders have long sought to minimize the number of caveats on forces dedicated to ISAF, an effort that has met with mixed success. In September 2006, former NATO SACEUR General James Jones expressed frustration at the limitations that some allies placed on their troops. "It's not enough," he said, "to simply provide forces if those forces have restrictions on them that limit them from being effective."¹²

¹² "NATO Commander Asks Member Nations to Drop Troop Limits," *Mideast Stars and Stripes*, October 25, 2006.

At the NATO summit in Riga, Latvia in November 2006, some allied political leaders sought to reduce the caveats placed on forces in Afghanistan. The United States, Canada, Britain, and the Netherlands, which have forces in the highly unsettled areas of southern and eastern Afghanistan, appealed to other governments to release combat forces to assist them in moments of danger. Some progress has been made over time in persuading NATO members to adopt more flexible rules of engagement but those nations whose forces continue to bear a higher burden of risk continue to appeal to their partners for relief.

At the Bucharest summit in April 2008, NATO leaders again pledged to continue to work to remove the limitations placed on their troops. Some allies had singled out Germany for special criticism, given that Germany has a large contingent of over 3,000 troops most of which are deployed in what has been a relatively quiet area of northern Afghanistan. German troops reportedly patrol only in armored personnel carriers, and do not leave their bases at night.¹³ This has led some to suggest that the implementation of excess force protection measures by the Germans has made their work, even in a safe area, far less effective. Former NATO SACEUR General Jones complained about German restrictions after he had specifically requested that Germany send some of its force in northern Afghanistan into the south to help combat Taliban activity, a request the German government initially refused. Since then, however, Germany has allowed some of its forces to respond in emergency situations.

The French government has somewhat reduced its caveats and agreed to allow its forces in Kabul and elsewhere come to the assistance of other NATO forces in an emergency. The Italian and Spanish governments have said that their force commanders in the field could make the decision to send forces to assist in an urgent situation. It remains unclear whether and when these commanders would have to request permission from their capitals to do so, a complicating factor that could delay a decision. Turkey, in contrast, has not changed its proscription against its forces' use in combat.

While there have been criticisms of NATO's role in Afghanistan, many NATO/ISAF forces do engage in offensive operations. Since 2006, NATO/ISAF combat forces have launched several operations, including Operation Medusa in 2006 aimed at ousting Taliban forces in Kandahar province. In 2007, NATO and Afghan forces retook the town of Musa Qala in Helmand province and conducted operations, Achilles and Silicon against Taliban forces. In 2008, in reaction to increased operations by the Taliban, NATO forces have increased the number of offensive operations they have engaged in.

The concern over the impact of national caveats has spread even beyond NATO itself. On July 9, 2008, the European Parliament debated and voted on a report on Afghanistan presented by its Committee on Foreign Affairs. One of the provisions in the report emphasized "that a major strengthening of political will and commitment is necessary, and that this should be followed up not only by a willingness to provide additional combat troops in the most difficult areas, unrestricted by national caveats..."¹⁴

¹³ Interviews at the NATO Defense College, Rome, December 2006, and Washington, DC, April-May 2007; "Germans wavering on Afghan mission," *International Herald Tribune*, August 20, 2007, p. 3.

¹⁴ See Report, "Stabilization of Afghanistan: Challenges for the EU and International Community, Report (2007/2208(INI) of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, European Parliament, June 2008.

Provincial Reconstruction Teams

Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) are civilian-military units of varying sizes designed to extend the authority of the central government into the countryside, provide security, and undertake projects (such as infrastructure development and the delivery of basic services) to boost the Afghan economy. Although some allied governments believe that poor governance, rather than the insurgency, is the principal problem impeding stabilization of the country, NATO officials describe the PRTs as the “leading edge” of the allies’ effort to stabilize Afghanistan.

There are 26 ISAF-led PRTs in operation. Virtually all the PRTs, including those run by the United States, now operate under ISAF but with varying lead nations. Each PRT operated by the United States is composed of U.S. forces (50-100 U.S. military personnel); Defense Department civil affairs officers; representatives of USAID, State Department, and other agencies; and Afghan government (Interior Ministry) personnel. Most PRTs, including those run by partner forces, have personnel to train Afghan security forces. Many U.S. PRTs in restive regions are “co-located” with “forward operating bases” of 300-400 U.S. combat troops. U.S. funds support PRT reconstruction projects. According to U.S. officials in March 2008, 54 PRT development projects have been completed and 199 (valued at \$20 million) are ongoing.

In August 2005, in preparation for the establishment of Regional Command South, Canada took over the key U.S.-led PRT in Kandahar. In May 2006, Britain took over the PRT at Lashkar Gah, capital of Helmand Province and the area of recent heavy fighting in the Fall of 2008. The Netherlands took over the PRT at Tarin Kowt, capital of Uruzgan Province. Germany (with Turkey and France) took over the PRTs and the leadership role in the north from Britain and the Netherlands when those countries deployed to the south.

Representing evolution of the PRT concept, Turkey opened a PRT in Wardak Province on November 25, 2006, to focus on providing health care, education, police training, and agricultural alternatives in that region. In March 2008, the Czech Republic established a PRT in Lowgar Province. South Korea has taken over the U.S.-run PRT at Bagram Air Base. There also has been a move to turn over the lead in the U.S.-run PRTs to civilians rather than military personnel, presumably State Department or USAID officials. That process began in early 2006 with the establishment of a civilian-led U.S.-run PRT in the Panjshir Valley.¹⁵

There is no established model for PRTs, and many are dominated by military forces, rather than civilian technicians. By most accounts, those serving in PRTs make an effort to move about surrounding territory, engage the local governments and citizens, and demonstrate that the international presence is bringing tangible results. Despite general support for PRTs, they receive mixed reviews and there have been criticisms of the overall PRT initiative. Some observers believe the PRTs operate without an overarching concept of operations, do not provide a common range of services, do not have a unified chain of command, and often do not coordinate with each other or exchange information on best practices.¹⁶

Another problem that has risen for PRTs in some areas is that civilian relief organizations do not want to be too closely associated with the military forces assigned to the PRTs because they feel their own security is endangered as well as their perceived neutrality. On September 10, 2009,

¹⁵ Katzman, *op. cit.*, p. 33

¹⁶ Report of the Afghanistan Study Group, *op. cit.* p. 22

U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates testifying before the House Armed Services Committee stated that “absent a broader international and interagency approach to the problems there... no amount of troops in no amount of time can ever achieve all the objectives we seek in Afghanistan.” He went on to say that “Afghanistan doesn’t just need more boots on the ground. It needs more trucks, teachers judges... foreign investment, alternative crops, sound governance, and rule of law. These are the keys to success in Afghanistan. No armed force, anywhere, no matter how good, can deliver these keys alone.”¹⁷

Although U.S. and ISAF PRTs share the same mission there are reportedly considerable differences in structure. U.S. PRTs are composed of military personnel, civil affairs officers, representatives of the U.S. and other government agencies focused on reconstruction, and Afghan government personnel. Some observers believe U.S. PRTs are too heavily weighted with military personnel who lack the expertise to assist in developing important elements of the economy.¹⁸ Others believe that there is a lack of qualified civilian personnel to accomplish key tasks. For instance, some claim that there is a critical shortage of U.S. agricultural specialists on the ground in Afghanistan.¹⁹ 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.

ISAF PRTs generally have fewer personnel as well as a different mix of military forces and civilian experts. Some U.S. officials believe that 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.²⁰ The Dutch, for instance, give their funding for PRT reconstruction activities directly to the Afghan central government, mainly through U.N. and World Bank channels. The Dutch argue that the Karzai government itself must undertake responsibility for planning and implementation of projects to rebuild the country. By contrast, the French have declined to lead a PRT and have questioned NATO’s role in the PRTs.

In hearings before the 110th Congress, witnesses urged steps to strengthen the PRTs. Some witnesses argued that the Administration should increase funding for the State Department, AID, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, three parts of the government able to provide needed expertise in the PRTs. Witnesses also repeatedly called for a model for ISAF PRTs that might provide guideposts to “best practices” to ensure a higher quality of assistance to the Afghan population.²¹ The new Administration has begun to discuss a more enhanced role for the Department of State in tasks such as those required in Afghanistan and it is likely the 111th Congress will continue to press for a more coherent reconstruction effort.

¹⁷ Statement of Defense Secretary Robert Gates before the House Armed Services Committee, September 10, 2008.

¹⁸ “Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan - An Interagency Assessment,” Dept. of Defense, Washington, DC, April 26, 2006; Interviews of U.S. officials, 2006-2008.

¹⁹ Discussion with U.S. official, February 2008.

²⁰ Interviews of U.S. officials, 2005-2007.

²¹ For example, see House Armed Services Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, hearing on PRTs, 1st session, 110th Congress, December 5, 2007.

Counter-Narcotics

The allies are struggling to combat Afghanistan's poppy crop. Some reports suggest Afghanistan supplied up to 90% of the world's opium in 2007. Poppy farmers are heavily concentrated in the south of the country and the crop is a major factor in the economic life and stability of the country. The drug trade is also a major source of funding for the insurgency as, according to some estimates, the Taliban draw an estimated 40%, or close to \$100 million, of their funds annually from this industry.

The NATO/ISAF mission, from its inception, was not authorized to play a direct role in the counter-narcotics effort, such as destroying poppy fields or processing facilities. Nevertheless, NATO commanders had been instructed to provide assistance to the local counter-narcotics authorities. Britain leads the international effort to coordinate the counter-narcotics assistance. The allies provide training, intelligence, and logistics to Afghan army units and police who destroy poppy fields and opium labs.²² One former regional commander believed that the Afghan government's destruction of poppy fields was too random to be effective, and that the government has not taken decisive action to end warlord involvement in the narcotics trade. There are also reports that the government primarily destroys the crops of the poorest farmers, and leaves those of more influential families whose support is needed by the government.²³ The Bush Administration had initially urged the Karzai government to consider spraying herbicide on the poppy fields, however, the Afghan government decided against this proposal because of possible effects of herbicide on public health and the environment. No other ally reportedly supported aerial spraying largely for fear of alienating the local populations that rely on poppy cultivation for income.²⁴

On September 3, 2008, the Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Antonio Maria Costa, briefed the North Atlantic Council (NAC) on the counter-narcotics effort in Afghanistan. Mr. Costa suggested that Afghan Army and Police efforts in the counter-narcotics strategy have largely been ineffective and that ISAF should consider expanding its support of the Afghanistan government's counter-drug effort by including the destruction of opium labs and the interdiction of drug distribution networks as part of the ISAF mission. He also suggested that ISAF focus on major drug traffickers and the drug trade along Afghanistan's borders. On October 9, 2008, at an informal meeting of NATO defense ministers in Budapest, NATO leaders agreed to authorize its ISAF forces to act with Afghan forces against opium labs and other facilities that use drugs to finance the Taliban. However, according to an article in the December 23, 2008, edition of the *New York Times*, there appears to be on-going objections by some nations that their laws do not permit their soldiers to engage in counter-narcotics operations.²⁵

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

²² Testimony of Director Negroponte, "Annual Threat Assessment," Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, January 11, 2007; House International Relations Committee, hearing on "U.S. Counternarcotics Policy in Afghanistan," March 17, 2005; Mishra, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

²³ Interview, June 20, 2007; and "Opium guerre, le 'narco-état afghan," *Le Monde* (December 13, 2007), p. 5.

²⁴ Interviews with officials from allied countries, June-December 2007.

²⁵ "Obstacles arise in Bid to Curb Afghan Trade in Narcotics," *New York Times*, December 23, 2008.

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. Former CIA Director John Negroponte told Congress in January 2007 that the drug trade contributes to endemic corruption at all levels of government and undercuts public confidence. A dangerous nexus exists between drugs and insurgents and warlords who derive funds from cultivation and trafficking. At the same time, farmers in parts of the country view the poppy as their only source of income. One component of the counter-narcotics effort is to persuade farmers to switch to alternative crops. Many crops, however, cannot compete with poppies; income from a hectare of poppies can reach \$4,600 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 well. Eradication of the industry without a substitute source of income would throw these farmers into destitution, and they would violently resist any effort to destroy their crops.

Another component in this effort is the status of the police and judicial systems. Some western officials in Afghanistan note that the police remain corrupt and distrusted by the population. They lack extensive training and experience, as well as transport. The police could 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.²⁶ Police training was initially the responsibility of the Germans. The task was a daunting one, given the low pay provided by the Afghan government and the modest numbers of police used to cover a broad territory. However, difficulties in recruiting German police trainers and sub-par performance of the training program necessitated a change. Part of the problem may have been the lack of authority of the German government to order police to Afghanistan; unlike its military forces, German police must volunteer for such an assignment.²⁷ Some U.S. and European officials were critical of the manner in which Germany managed its task of training the Afghan police force (ANP). At the same time, former SACEUR General Jones said that while training of the Afghan army was "one of the bright stories, one of the not-so-good stories ... is the inadequacy to bring similar progress to police reform, which is the responsibility of Germany."

In May 2007, the EU accepted a request by NATO to take the lead in training Afghanistan's police. The European police (EUPOL) training mission began in June 2007 with the addition of some 120 EU police trainers who joined the 41 German trainers that remained in the program. In September 2007, the German general heading the EU police training mission reportedly quit in frustration over complications with the program, and the corruption encountered in dealing with the Karzai government.²⁸ In a February 2008 report by ISAF to the U.N., NATO noted that the Afghan police "still fall behind the desired level of capability."²⁹ In March 2008, officials at the EU suggested that the EUPOL training team could be doubled.

²⁶ "Foreign Troops in North Afghanistan Say 'Drug Wars' the Biggest Threat," *Agence France Presse*, August 30, 2005; "Shake-up of Afghan Police 'Brought Back Corruption,'" *Financial Times*, June 13, 2006, p. 2.

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

²⁸ "German giving up on Afghan position," *International Herald Tribune*, September 12, 2007, p. 1; interviews with officials from allied governments, June-September, 2007.

²⁹ "Quarterly Report to the U.N. on ISAF Operations," NATO, Brussels, February 1, 2008, p. 3.

The EU effort has faltered thus far, for several reasons including its relations with other allied nations. Turkey has reportedly blocked any provision by NATO of intelligence to the EU and the Afghan police because (Greek) Cyprus and Malta, both in the EU, are not NATO members. Turkey is also blocking any agreement for NATO to provide protection to police who come under attack by the Taliban. Turkey's actions are a side effect of its dispute with the EU over a range of issues.

The court system remains in its infancy, with few capable jurists and attorneys.³⁰ The Italian government leads the effort to build a professional judicial system. In July 2007, Italy held a conference in Rome to develop a strategy to build such a system. Governments in attendance pledged \$360 million to the effort over a period of several years; they linked the pledges to specific programs. Among the principles and steps that the program will seek to establish are: a code of conduct, transparency, and accountability for officials in the judicial system; and equipment, salary support, qualification requirements, and an educational system for those interested in the legal profession. A follow-up meeting was held in Kabul in October 2007 to begin implementation of these programs.³¹

Stages Three and Four: Establishing Mission and Structure

ISAF's task in Stage Three was to bring stability to the southern part of the country, where the writ of the Karzai government had been limited. In Stage Four, ISAF consolidated its responsibilities to cover all of Afghanistan. Initially, in late 2005, the allies believed that Stages Three and Four 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 both Stages. The Taliban originated in the south, in Kandahar province, and they retain their most active network there. Poppy farming is widespread in the south, particularly in Helmand province, where British troops operate, and in Uruzgan province, where Dutch troops predominate.

Stage Three came into force on July 31, 2006, after having been postponed several times due to insurgent violence and an effort to secure pledges of additional troops from allied governments. Elements of ISAF had been present in the region for several months, preparing for their mission. Stage Four began on October 5, 2006. In Stage Four, the United States transferred 10,000 to 12,000 of its own troops to ISAF, who now serve under NATO commander U.S. General David McKiernan. ISAF now has approximately 51,000 troops.

In the attempt to develop a coherent force for Stages Three and Four, the allies confronted four issues: writing a mission statement; raising troops to accomplish that mission; agreeing upon treatment of prisoners; and creating a command structure. The allies continue to address the latter three of these issues.

³⁰ Interviews with European Union officials, 2006-2007; presentation of former Afghan Finance Minister Ashraf Ghani, Brookings Institution, April 30, 2007; and "McCaffrey Sees 2007 as a Crucial Year," *Washington Post*, April 10, 2007, p. A15.

³¹ "Rome Conference on Justice and Rule of Law in Afghanistan," Rome, July 2-3, 2007; interviews of Italian officials, August 2007. The United States pledged \$15 million for the program, and Italy pledged approximately \$13.5 million.

Mission Statement

From the fall of 2005 through early 2006, the Bush Administration argued to merge the functions and command of ISAF and OEF. Then-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.³²

In December 2005, the allies announced a mission statement for ISAF's Stages Three and Four 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 committed themselves to "supporting Afghan government counter-narcotics efforts."³³ They also agreed upon guidelines for dealing with prisoners.

The mission statement reflected European and Canadian views that Stages Three and Four operations should concentrate on reconstruction and stabilization, with initial 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 or perhaps because the Taliban were organizing and attempting to enhance their strength. In April 2006, the British Defense Secretary said that he hoped that his country's forces could deploy "without firing a shot."³⁴ 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."³⁵ The Dutch parliament held a contentious debate in February 2006 over whether to send forces to ISAF. Some government and opposition members of Parliament opposed sending Dutch forces for combat operations; their view was clear that Dutch forces were primarily to support a stabilization mission.³⁶

By spring 2006, events on the ground in Afghanistan imposed new exigencies on 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 force was found to help end the attack on the PRT. Before and after the attack on the PRT, then NATO SACEUR General Jones called upon the NATO governments to pledge forces to ISAF that would

³² "Europeans Balking at New Afghan Role," *New York Times*, September 14, 2005, p. 1; interviews of European officials, September 2005 - February 2006.

³³ "Final Communiqué," North Atlantic Council, NATO, Brussels, December 8, 2005.

³⁴ "UK Warned of More Afghanistan Deaths," *Financial Times*, July 3, 2006, p. 3.

³⁵ "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.

³⁶ "Peacekeeping in Afghanistan Is Modern Crisis Management," in *European Affairs*, spring/summer 2006, p. 3-4.

be capable of combat operations. As mentioned above, he waged a constant campaign to cajole allied governments not to place caveats on their forces that ruled out combat operations.³⁷

NATO governments ultimately agreed to adjust how ISAF would fulfill Stage Three. They wrote more “robust” rules of engagement. By May 2006, then-ISAF Commander British General David Richards, described Stage Three as a “combat operation.” He added that caveats affecting Stage Three and Four 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 that counter-terror and counter-insurgency operations in Afghanistan were not always distinguishable.³⁸ When OEF turned southern Afghanistan over to ISAF on July 31, 2006, some OEF forces remained in the region to continue combat operations targeted against terrorist elements.

Difficulties in Raising Troops

The debate over the mission and public opinion throughout Europe continues to affect the effort to raise forces for the ISAF mission. The highest priority for any ISAF commander is to have the forces necessary along with the greatest amount of flexibility possible to provide a safe and secure environment in which the government of Afghanistan can extend its authority. Since the beginning of the ISAF mission, NATO officials have consistently experienced difficulty persuading member governments to supply adequate numbers of forces. U.S. Defense Secretary Gates has been critical of the allies at times for not providing more troops, although he has softened his tone. In December 2007 he told the House Armed Services Committee that an additional 7,500 troops were needed, in addition to the 41,700 then in ISAF. At the time, he suggested that approximately 3,500 should be trainers for the Afghan army. He also called for at least 16 more helicopters.³⁹ A week later, however, after a NATO Defense Ministers’ meeting, he acknowledged that domestic political problems were preventing some allies from increasing their force levels in Afghanistan. Allied government officials stated privately that their populations were reluctant to follow the Bush Administration, largely due to the U.S. invasion of Iraq and subsequent criticism of the United States in Europe and the Middle East.⁴⁰ The German Marshall Fund poll noted earlier found that while 64% of those polled supported the reconstruction effort in Afghanistan, only 30% supported combat operations against the Taliban.⁴¹

According to NATO officials, the 2006 attack on the Norwegian-Finnish PRT awakened some governments to the continuing threat posed by instability fueled by the insurgency.⁴² Rapid-response forces eventually became available. Britain, Canada, and the Netherlands were the first to pledge forces for Stage Three. 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 2,300 troops for Afghanistan until February 2009, most of which have been sent to

³⁷ Comments by Gen. Jones at NATO Parliamentary Assembly meetings in Copenhagen, November 2005.

³⁸ “Visit to Afghanistan,” report by the Defence Committee of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, May 23, 2006, p. 2.

³⁹ Testimony of Sec. Gates, House Armed Services Committee, hearing, 1st Session, 110th Congress, December 11, 2007.

⁴⁰ Interviews, June-December, 2007.

⁴¹ *Transatlantic Trends*, *op. cit.*, p. 17-18.

⁴² Interviews with NATO officials, February 2006.

Kandahar province. Britain initially promised to send 3,600 troops to Helmand province by the beginning of Stage Three operations in July 2006, and has steadily increased its contribution to its current 8,000 troops. In early 2008, Germany agreed to send 200 troops to replace a Norwegian contingent in the north. In February 2008, the U.S. deployed the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) to southern Afghanistan.

The debate in the Dutch parliament over assigning troops to ISAF was also contentious. The Dutch population initially opposed sending forces into a combat operation. Ultimately, the Netherlands designated 1,700 troops for duty in ISAF's Stage Three and Stage Four operations.

Despite these pledges, the upturn in violence in 2007 and 2008 led U.S. and NATO commanders in Afghanistan to conclude that they needed about three more brigades (20,000 troops) to be able to stabilize the still restive southern sector.

At the April 2008 NATO Summit at Bucharest a key objective of several allies with combat contingents in Afghanistan was to persuade other governments to send more forces. When the allies issued their "strategic vision" statement on Afghanistan, the allies agreed to a shared long-term commitment, something that some allies had theretofore resisted stating publicly, but they did not promise to contribute an equitable share of combat forces. Part of this inequity is attributable to NATO's own budget rules. When a member state agrees to deploy troops to a NATO operation, that nation must pay the costs associated with that deployment. Thus, there is a built in disincentive for nations to agree to commit any troops to a mission or to increase the number of troops already deployed. This problem complicates attempts by leaders of fragile governments or coalition governments to convince their legislatures and publics to support a deployment and the costs associated with that commitment.

In 2008, the Canadian government threatened to withdraw its forces in 2009 if a commitment of at least 1,000 new combat troops was not made by the allies. President Bush pledged to increase U.S. forces in Afghanistan by 5,000 additional troops by the end of 2008. France agreed to send 720 combat troops. Germany agreed to deploy an additional 1,000 troops to the northern sector pending approval by the German Parliament in October when the current German mandate was to have expired. Poland, the Czech Republic, and several other allies pledged smaller contingents, allaying Canadian concerns to some degree. However, allies with forces in harm's way continued to criticize other allies that will not send combat forces or commit them to areas where the Taliban are more active.

As the perception of deterioration in Afghanistan continued, it was reported in September 2008 that both the U.S. military and NATO were conducting a number of different strategy reviews. Among the issues under review was how to prevent the movement of militants across the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. Although some of the reviews have been completed, it is unclear if or when any major changes in policy would be initiated. U.S. officials at the time said more U.S. and partner forces were needed, and U.S. officials were trying to identify more forces to go to Afghanistan. In September 2008 President Bush announced that at least 5,000 more U.S. forces would be sent to Afghanistan by early 2009. However, ISAF Commander, General McKiernan recently suggested that the effort still needed about 20,000 additional troops. The incoming Obama administration has suggested that an additional

20,000 - 30,000 U.S. troops will ultimately be deployed to Afghanistan.

The new U.S. Administration has already hinted that it will ask other partner countries to contribute additional forces to the ISAF mission. However, in a sign of how stretched some allies are or how reluctant others will be, U.K. Prime Minister, Gordon Brown on December 16 indicated that he could only contribute an additional 300 British troops in 2009. In November, a U.S. House congressional delegation visiting Italy was told that the Italian troop commitment to Afghanistan could not be increased further. Also in November, the Spanish Foreign Minister told a meeting of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly in Valencia that Spain would not send additional troops to Afghanistan.

The reluctance of the NATO allies to commit additional troops to the ISAF mission is being driven in part by the opposition of many of Europe's citizens who see little progress in Afghanistan and in part by the realities of the global economic crisis that is currently having a negative impact on national budgets. This could complicate attempts by the new U.S. Administration to create the kinds of conditions in Afghanistan that could lead to a greater stabilization of the country. The NATO allies are expecting President Obama to ask for more allied troops and are preparing for that discussion at the April 4 NATO summit in Germany and France. These additional troops would be used to train the Afghan security forces, to try to stabilize the still restive southern sector, and reverse the deterioration of the eastern sector and the areas around Kabul. Some equate this to the Afghanistan equivalent of the U.S. "troop surge" that has been credited with greatly reducing violence in Iraq.

For some, the concern over the troop issue means that the extra forces will likely be contributed almost entirely by the U.S. This could further add to the "Americanization" of the conflict in Afghanistan and could provide less of an incentive for NATO allies to send additional troops. This development could result in an increase in negative criticism of NATO and Europe within the United States. Some critics of the Alliance counter with the argument that if every one of the NATO member countries, with the exception of the United States contributed just 200 additional troops, the ISAF Commander would have 5,000 new assets to deploy. Similarly, just 400 troops per nation would provide ISAF with 10,000 troops. Even eliminating the request for additional troops from those nation already deploying thousands of troops, a commitment of somewhere between 200 and 400 troops by the rest of the Alliance would provide a sufficient new force. These critics point to countries such as Bulgaria, Romania, the Czech Republic and Hungary that have large armed forces but contribute less than 500 troops each. Similarly, critics ask why a nation such as Turkey that deploys 20,000 troops in northern Cyprus can only provide 800 troops as their commitment to the Alliance mission.

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 had 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.⁴³

⁴³ Interviews with officials from NATO governments, December 2005-February 2006; "En Afghanistan, l'OTAN évolue de la pacification vers le contre-terrorisme," *Le Monde*, November 20-21, 2005, p. 4.

These allies insisted that the communiqué explicitly address the issue of treatment of prisoners. The final document contained 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.”⁴⁴

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. The Afghan government reportedly insisted upon its sovereign right to determine the disposition of prisoners in its custody. A new problem has arisen over allegations that Afghan officials have tortured detainees turned over to them by ISAF forces.⁴⁵

Command Structure: Coordinating ISAF and OEF Operations

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

Although the allies agree on ISAF’s mission, they differ on how to accomplish it. From at least 2004, the former Bush Administration had consistently urged the allies to assume more responsibilities in the fight against insurgents and terrorists in Afghanistan. By late 2005 the Administration was urging that ISAF and OEF be merged under one command. 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 and because German forces in ISAF were trained only for stabilization, and not for counter-insurgency operations.. Britain, leading the ISAF anti-narcotics effort, wished to ensure that the initiative remained in the political sphere.

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, France was 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 global objectives. Specifically, Paris was concerned that the Administration would designate more U.S. units from Afghanistan to be sent to Iraq, and leave the allies to stabilize Afghanistan. Administration officials insisted publicly and privately that they had no intention of sharply reducing forces in Afghanistan, and in fact had increased U.S. forces there.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the government of President Nicolas Sarkozy, as noted earlier, decided to increase its combat contingent in Afghanistan.

In attempting to resolve 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 has been no clear dividing line between regions where the Taliban and al Qaeda are active, and the

⁴⁴ “Final Communiqué,” North Atlantic Council Ministerial meeting, December 8, 2005.

⁴⁵ Interviews with officials from NATO governments, 2005-2007.

⁴⁶ Interviews with officials from allied governments, December 2005-October 2007.

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. In September 2008 at a hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee, U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates, testified that he believed there were still questions regarding the efficacy of having two lines of command.⁴⁷ He noted that he was considering a plan to place almost all U.S. troops, including those performing OEF anti-insurgent missions, under General McKiernan's NATO/ISAF command,

Today, a "synergy" exists between the two operations which allows each operation to support the other in times of emergency. U.S. General David McKiernan, now commands both the OEF and ISAF operations which has served to create unity of command, and to improve flexibility of deployment of U.S. forces throughout the battlefield. General McKiernan and his successors report to U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM, now headed by General David Petraeus, formerly top U.S. commander in Iraq) not only to NATO headquarters. However, U.S. officials say that the OEF and NATO/ISAF missions will not formally merge, meaning that there will still be separate U.S. operations against high value targets and other militant concentrations.⁴⁸

Allied Viewpoints

Once the allies reached consensus on ISAF's mission for Stages Three and Four, they began to differ on how to accomplish it. The previous section analyzed allied views in establishing and implementing the mission and structure of Stages Three and Four. This section discusses the developing views of allies as Stage Three and then Stage Four moved 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 with governments that believe that a more forceful military hand will be necessary to stabilize and rebuild the country.

Germany: Reconstruction is the Priority

After coming to power in October 2005, Chancellor Angela Merkel's coalition government initially expressed a more decisive commitment to securing stability in Afghanistan than its predecessor. Berlin has long advocated a shift in its and NATO's Afghanistan strategy toward civilian reconstruction and development projects, army and police training activities, and enhanced political engagement with Afghanistan's neighbors. 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 had limited the alliance's ability to integrate German forces with those of other allied governments. Under the Merkel government, German forces are authorized to engage in combat if in defense of German positions but they are still prohibited from engaging in counter-insurgency operations.

⁴⁷ Testimony of U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates before the Senate Armed Services Committee, September 23, 2008.

⁴⁸ Katzman, op. cit., p.24.

Germany now has approximately 3,500 forces in ISAF trained for stability operations in the northern part of the country where they lead two PRTs, one in Kunduz and one in Feyzabad. 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.⁴⁹ However, even this area has become more dangerous as the Taliban increase operations throughout the country. For instance, on October 20, 2008, a suicide bomber in Kunduz killed several civilians along with two German soldiers. German forces are authorized to engage in combat operations as part of their defense of the northern sector but they are not deployed to conduct counter-insurgency operations.

At NATO's Riga summit Germany agreed to send troops to assist allied forces in an emergency. In spring 2007, the German government assigned six Tornado aircraft to Afghanistan for use in surveillance operations. In October 2007 when the *Bundestag* renewed the commitment to keep German forces and Tornado aircraft in Afghanistan for another year, Chancellor Merkel rejected an appeal by the NATO Secretary General to send some of Germany's forces to the south for stabilization operations. Since then, however, Germany has agreed to send troops to other parts of the country to assist allied forces in emergency situations.

As noted above, in June 2008, Berlin announced that it would seek approval to increase troop levels in Afghanistan by up to 1,000. On October 7, 2008, the German government extended the German troop commitment to Afghanistan and agreed to send the additional 1,000 troops to Afghanistan. On October 16, 2008, the German *Bundestag* approved the government's decision in what was considered a fairly non-controversial debate. In approving the additional deployment of German forces, however, the *Bundestag* made it clear that no additional troops beyond the additional 1,000 would be approved, and that no special forces troops would be assigned to the OEF counter-insurgency operation. The additional troops are expected to boost Germany's efforts in northern Afghanistan, with a stated aim of tripling the amount of training Germany gives to Afghan troops.⁵⁰ In December, Berlin announced that it would provide 3 million euros to aid the Afghanistan police force. The additional funds will be provided through the United Nations-backed Law and Order Trust Fund.⁵¹

While Chancellor Merkel and her Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier (also Merkel's opponent in national elections scheduled for October 2009) have consistently expressed their support for the ongoing German military engagement in Afghanistan, public support in Germany for the Afghan mission has steadily declined. In 2002, 51% of those polled supported German involvement in Afghanistan's stabilization; as of October 2007, that figure had declined to 34%. In September 2008, a new survey of public opinion conducted by the German Marshall Fund found that while German support for the Afghanistan mission continued to be lukewarm, support

⁴⁹ Interviews with European and U.S. officials and observers, June-July 2006.

⁵⁰ "Germany Plans to Raise Troops Level in Afghanistan," Spiegelonline, June 24, 2008.

⁵¹ "Germany to Send More Aid to Afghanistan via UN Fund," *DPA News Agency, Deutsche Welle*, December 16, 2008.

among the population for combat operations against the Taliban has declined to around 36%.⁵² Low public support for the ISAF mission and some political opposition from within Chancellor Merkel's coalition have dampened expectations. According to some observers, the German population has serious doubts about Germany's role in Afghanistan and they are beginning to feel Germany does not have a winnable strategy for Afghanistan. Some observers also fault Chancellor Merkel for failing to lay out the importance of the Afghan mission to the German people.⁵³

The Netherlands: An Increasingly Decisive Position

Dutch forces numbering approximately 1,700 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 the spring of 2006. The debate in the Dutch parliament over assigning troops to ISAF was contentious. The Abu Ghraib prison scandal and U.S. treatment of prisoners at Guantanamo were 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 were initially reluctant to have their forces closely associated with U.S. forces in Afghanistan. The Netherlands was the principal proponent of the section of the December 2005 NATO communiqué detailing allied treatment of prisoners in Afghanistan.⁵⁴

The Dutch population initially opposed sending forces into a combat operation. Ultimately, the Netherlands deployed significant troop levels for duty in ISAF's operations. Dutch troops have grown increasingly engaged in providing security, in tandem with an active and well-funded reconstruction effort. In December 2007, the Dutch parliament agreed to keep troops in Afghanistan, but to begin a withdrawal in August 2010 until all Dutch forces are withdrawn by December 1, 2010. The parliament expressed dismay that more allies have not been forthcoming in providing forces for southern Afghanistan.

In the Dutch view, ISAF's purpose is "to provide a secure and stable environment for reconstruction." The government's policy has been that measures of "defense, diplomacy, and development" are key to ISAF's success. When necessary, Dutch troops will use force to subdue the Taliban to build stability so that reconstruction projects may take hold. A growing number of combat engagements, occasionally along with U.S. troops, has occurred since late summer 2006, and Dutch forces have suffered casualties.⁵⁵ 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.

Dutch officials offer a strategic approach to Afghanistan's problems. They believe that the alliance must make a more concerted effort to engage regional countries—above all, Pakistan, India, and Iran—to bring stability to the country, a view given increasing attention in some allied capitals after the assassination of Benazir Bhutto. These officials are concerned that NATO's military operations, including air strikes, are alienating the Afghan population. They have

⁵² *Transatlantic Trends*, Key Findings 2008, the German Marshall Fund annual survey, September 2008.

⁵³ Judy Dempsey, "Merkel aloof as public wavers on Afghanistan," *International Herald Tribune*, October 19, 2007, p. 2.

⁵⁴ Discussions with Dutch officials, September 2005-May 2006.

⁵⁵ Bernard Bot, "Saving Democracy in a World of Change," speech at Georgetown University, Washington, DC, October 24, 2006; interviews, 2007.

advocated the creation of a general fund to rapidly compensate local victims of mistaken attacks by NATO forces. In addition, they advocate a common approach in NATO and the EU to the problems presented by the drug trade. In the Dutch view—echoed by Italy—NATO must emphasize reconstruction more than combat operations.⁵⁶

Others counter this argument by saying that “there can be no reconstruction without security.” The Taliban must be cleared out before reconstruction can proceed. Many in the ISAF command share the Dutch view that NATO should build roads and other economic infrastructure to help create an economy to give Afghans promise of a future.⁵⁷

As stated previously, the Dutch give their funding for PRT reconstruction activities directly to the Afghan central government, mainly through U.N. and World Bank channels. 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 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. The Dutch are directly involved in some projects, providing clean water to villages and almond trees and seeds to farmers for alternative crops, for example. Some U.S. officials believe that the Dutch practice of providing assistance funds directly to the Afghan government has led to the money being spent on other governmental purposes or landing in the pockets of corrupt Afghan officials.⁵⁸

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 now has approximately 19,000 troops in ISAF. There has been an ongoing debate in the Pentagon over whether a possible draw-down of U.S. forces in Iraq could open the door for more U.S. forces in Afghanistan. Former President Bush agreed to increase U.S. forces in Afghanistan by 5,000 by the end of 2008, necessitated at least in part by some allies’ refusal to agree to a greater sharing of the burden.⁵⁹ An additional 20,000 - 30,000 U.S. military forces could be sent to Afghanistan during 2009.

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

⁵⁶ Remarks by Bert Koenders, Minister for Development and Cooperation, The Netherlands, at CSIS, Washington, DC, April 16, 2007. Koenders is the highly regarded former President of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, and is well-versed in NATO issues. For a view advocating EU coordination of reconstruction/civilian programs in Afghanistan, see Julianne Smith, “How the EU Can Act Now to Assist Global Leadership,” CSIS report, March 26, 2007.

⁵⁷ Remarks of Gen. Eikenberry at Brookings conference on Europe, April 30, 2007.

⁵⁸ Discussions with Dutch and U.S. officials, February-July 2006.

⁵⁹ Discussions with officials from the Dept. of Defense, October-December 2007; “An Afghan mission short of troops,” *International Herald Tribune*, May 3-4, 2008, p. 3.

against al Qaeda. These officials concede that the line between the two operations is blurred, given that OEF has been fighting both an insurgency led by the Taliban and searching for al Qaeda.⁶⁰ Some allied governments believe that the U.S. combat effort is overly aggressive and, in some instances, has been counterproductive. President Karzai has said that air strikes have sometimes been poorly targeted and have carelessly killed civilians, which he believes may be alienating the population in some areas of the country. In July 2007, NATO announced a new policy. ISAF would postpone a combat response, where possible, when civilians are present near the Taliban; in addition, ISAF aircraft will use smaller bombs to limit damage to an area.⁶¹ In October 2008, NATO/ISAF further refined that policy by suggesting that NATO forces would disengage when the need for air strikes could endanger local civilian populations.

The British view largely mirrors the U.S. view of NATO's role in Afghanistan. From a cautious position on ISAF's mission in early 2006, the British government has adopted a more aggressive stance, as a result of the increase in Taliban activity in southern Afghanistan. Britain has ISAF and OEF contingents, and its combat aircraft support both missions. Most of Britain's ISAF troops, numbering approximately 8,700 are located throughout the country with approximately 4,200 in the south. British forces in the south are largely in Helmand province, the principal poppy-growing region in the country. British forces have an "inkblot" strategy, in which they clear an area of Taliban, then undertake reconstruction projects, such as road building, moving out from a village into the countryside.⁶² 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. U.S. officials believe that Britain's PRT in Helmand province is well-funded and concentrates on local governance and economic development.⁶³

At the same time, a debate over the proper balance between combat missions and reconstruction continues in Britain. Prime Minister Brown's government now reportedly believes that more emphasis must be given to an effort to reconcile elements of the insurgency with the Karzai government. The British government reportedly believes that there are "hard-core" Taliban elements incapable of accepting the Karzai government, but that there are other levels of Taliban, not affiliated with Islamic extremism, that can be persuaded to lay down their arms. A key component of such an approach would be a successful reconstruction effort that would provide jobs and broadened economic growth.⁶⁴ Britain had reportedly hoped to increase its force contingent at the Bucharest summit, but increased violence in Iraq has kept combat elements tied down there.

After the Bucharest summit in April 2008, the Brown government came under increasing political and economic strain. The opposition has called for general elections earlier than those scheduled for 2010. Some in Brown's own government had suggested he step down as leader of the Labor Party. Brown has recovered somewhat recently as a result of his actions in response to the global economic crisis but his recent decision to only send an additional 300 troops to Afghanistan continues to reflect the opposition to the war in the U.K. The decision by Canada and the

⁶⁰ Discussions with U.S. officials, 2006-2007.

⁶¹ "NATO plans to reduce Afghan casualties," *Financial Times*, July 30, 2007, p. 1.

⁶² "For British in an Afghan province, initial gains against the Taliban," *New York Times*, August 5, 2007, p. 1.

⁶³ "Provincial Reconstruction Teams ...," *op. cit.*, Dept. of Defense, p. 22; "Opium War an Absolute Disaster," *Financial Times*, July 5, 2006, p. 3.

⁶⁴ "Fields of little glory," *Financial Times*, November 19, 2007, p. 10.

Netherlands to begin withdrawing troops from Afghanistan by 2010 could become a campaign issue for Brown in the run up to the 2010 elections.

Canadian forces joined U.S. and British forces in the summer and fall 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 Kandahar 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 Kandahar province is their principal region of responsibility. Canada leads a PRT in the province.

There has been a vigorous debate in Canada over the country's involvement in Afghanistan. In 2006, by a narrow vote of 149-145, the Canadian parliament approved Ottawa's plan to commit 2,300 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, but only 44% supported the two-year extension until 2009. By April 2007, support for keeping Canadian forces in Afghanistan had dropped to 52%. 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. When the alliance pledged more combat forces for southern and eastern Afghanistan at the Bucharest summit, Ottawa withdrew its threat to remove its troops in 2009. On March 13, 2008, the Canadian parliament extended the commitment to keep troops in Afghanistan until 2011.⁶⁵

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 stabilization. As of September 2008 France has 2,700 troops in ISAF; most are in a stabilization mission in Kabul and in army training missions elsewhere in the country. French officials express concern that ISAF will fail "if not accompanied by increased capacity by the Afghan police and judicial system."⁶⁶

French President Nicolas Sarkozy has reaffirmed Paris's commitment to ISAF. In 2008 France moved 6 Mirage fighter bombers from a French base in Tajikistan to the NATO base in Kandahar, in southern Afghanistan. These jets are used in intelligence and close air support missions; their relocation to Kandahar will allow them to spend more time in the air on mission rather than on the long return to Tajikistan for resupply.⁶⁷ France also supplies C135 tankers to refuel French and other allied aircraft. France has built 4 operational "OMLTs," a term used to describe a joint allied and Afghan combat force, and participates in another with Dutch forces. These forces are in the east and south where combat is at the highest levels. U.S. and French forces are jointly training Afghan special forces teams.

As noted above, President Sarkozy pledged an additional 720 combat troops for Afghanistan at the NATO Bucharest summit in April 2008. Two hundred are special forces, and some of these

⁶⁵ "Canadian and Dutch Publics Feeling Stretched ...," op. cit.; "Troop Pullout Bill Defeated in Canada," *Washington Post*, April 25, 2007, p. A12.

⁶⁶ Interview with Defense Minister Morin in "Hervé Morin: 'La situation se dégrade en Afghanistan,'" *Le Monde*, December 21, 2007, p. 5.

⁶⁷ "La France redéploie ses avions de combat dans le Sud afghan," *Le Monde*, August 31, 2007, p. 4.

may join U.S. forces in OEF; the rest are in mobile combat units. These troops will be under U.S. command in eastern Afghanistan where, according to NATO, Taliban operations “continue at a high level.”⁶⁸

The opposition Socialist Party in France has strongly criticized Sarkozy’s decision to increase French force levels in Afghanistan. The Socialist leader in the National Assembly characterized the decision as asking “France to support in Afghanistan the American war burden in Iraq” as part of the French president’s “Atlantic obsession;” in this view, European forces in Afghanistan free the United States to send or keep forces in Iraq, a war that is highly unpopular among the French public. Prime Minister François Fillon responded that in fact the troops will be sent to Afghanistan as part of a NATO “common strategy.” President Sarkozy has described ISAF’s mission as one to counter global terrorism.⁶⁹ Criticism of Sarkozy’s commitment increased in August 2008 after a French combat patrol was ambushed by Taliban forces resulting in 10 French casualties. President Sarkozy visited French forces soon after the battle and reiterated France’s continued commitment to the ISAF mission.

On September 22, 2008, the French Parliament, at the insistence of the Socialists, debated the continued presence of French military forces in Afghanistan. By large margins, both the National Assembly and the Senate voted to continue to support French participation in Afghanistan. After the vote, President Sarkozy announced that an additional 100 troops would be sent to Afghanistan along with helicopters and ariel drones.

The French government, mindful of civilian casualties and Afghan criticism of ISAF, is emphasizing more restrictive rules of engagement for its forces. Its troops have been instructed to use force “proportional” to a threat, to avoid bombing civilian infrastructure, and to have “visual recognition” of a target before releasing bombs.⁷⁰

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.⁷¹

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.⁷² Among the European allies, France has made considerable progress

⁶⁸ NATO quarterly report to the U.N., op. cit.; “Mille soldats français en renfort dans l’Est afghan,” *Le Monde*, April 2, 2008, p. 4.

⁶⁹ “L’Opposition français craint un ‘enlèvement’ en Afghanistan,” *Le Monde*, April 3, 2008, p. 6; and “A Kaboul, M. Sarkozy évoque un effort militaire français,” *Le Monde*, December 25, 2007, p. 4.

⁷⁰ “À Kandahar, dans la base sous haute sécurité, d’où opèrent les Mirages français en Afghanistan,” *Le Monde*, November 25-26, 2007, p. 5.

⁷¹ Interviews with French and U.S. officials; Remarks by Defense Minister Michèle Alliot-Marie at the NATO Parliamentary Assembly plenary, Paris, May 30, 2006.

⁷² CRS Report RS21659, *NATO’s Prague Capabilities Commitment*, by Carl Ek.

along this path. As noted above, French aerial tankers refuel not only French aircraft in the Afghan theater, but U.S., Dutch, and Belgian aircraft as well. These capabilities contribute 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.⁷³ U.S. officials give French forces high marks for their ability and their willingness to fight.

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 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.⁷⁴

France also contends that the EU and other civilian institutions, such as the U.N. and the World Bank, are more suited to undertake development projects than NATO. In Paris' view, NATO should concentrate on collective defense.

Congressional Action

A bipartisan consensus continued to support the Afghanistan mission during the 110th Congress. The Afghan Freedom Support Act of 2002 (P.L. 107-327), as amended, authorized U.S. aid for reconstruction, military operations, counter-narcotics efforts, election reform, and human rights assistance. A succession of appropriations bills has met or exceeded authorization targets.⁷⁵ Since the 9/11 attack, Congress has appropriated over \$176 billion for Afghanistan. In hearings during the first session of the 110th Congress, Administration officials told Members that the United States spends approximately \$2 billion a month in Afghanistan on troops and reconstruction.

On June 19, 2008, the House passed the supplemental appropriations bill and on June 26, the Senate passed its version. On June 30 the President signed the FY2008-FY2009 Supplemental Appropriations bill into law (P.L. 110-252). The law provided \$31 billion for the conflict in Afghanistan. The bill also provided \$1.3 billion for economic reconstruction in the form of Economic Support Funds (ESF), primarily to strengthen regional governance, health care and

⁷³ Interviews with U.S. and French officials, 2005-2007; "France Quietly Offers More Military Help," *Army Times*, August 29, 2005; "Français et Américains louent une coopération exemplaire en Afghanistan," *Le Monde*, October 24-25, 2004, p. 3.

⁷⁴ Interviews with French officials, August 2005-July 2006; Alliot-Marie, *op. cit.* Afghanistan supplies an estimated 90% of the heroin that finds its way to France; "Hervé Morin: 'La situation...,'" *op. cit.*

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See CRS Report RL34276, *FY2008 Emergency Supplemental Appropriations for International Affairs*, by Susan B. Epstein, Rhoda Margesson, and Curt Tarnoff.

education, development of the rural economy, and civilian infrastructure.⁷⁶ An additional \$35 million was provided to support the counter-narcotics programs in Afghanistan.

On July 15, 2008, former-Senator Biden and Senator Lugar, the Chairman and Ranking Member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, introduced S. 3263, a bill that would significantly increase non-military aid to Pakistan. The assistance would, among other things, be used to improve Pakistani counter-terrorism capabilities and ensure more effective efforts are made against Taliban and al Qaeda forces using Pakistan as a springboard for launching military and terrorist attacks into Afghanistan.

Several hearings were held during the 110th Congress that addressed a range of Afghanistan-related issues, including troop levels, command and control arrangements, counter-narcotics efforts, PRTs, and others. During the 110th Congress, congressional committees continued to press Secretary Gates and other officials to provide Congress with a more detailed accounting of ISAF's operations, and urged the Administration to persuade the allies to provide a greater proportion of ISAF's forces. In addition, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008 (P.L. 110-181) established three new reporting requirements: a twice yearly report from the President on progress toward security and stability in Afghanistan; an annual report from the Secretary of Defense on a long-term, detailed plan for sustaining the Afghan National Security Forces; and a one-time requirement for a report from the Secretary of Defense on enhancing security and stability along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.⁷⁷ The 111th Congress is likely to continue to pursue oversight of the operation in Afghanistan. Hearings on the overall status of the conflict, the NATO commitment, the ability of the Kabul government to establish nation-wide authority, and the problems associated with the unsettled Pakistan-Afghanistan border are likely topics for those hearings.

Assessment

Afghanistan's long history without an accountable central government able to extend its reach over the country's difficult geographic and political terrain continues to present the allies with problems rivaling the threat of the Taliban. For some, Afghanistan's political transition was completed with the convening of a parliament in December 2005. However, after seven years neither the government in Kabul nor the international community has made much more than incremental progress towards its goals of peace, security, and development. According to a March 2008 report issued by the Atlantic Council of the United States, the situation on the ground has gradually settled into a strategic stalemate. NATO and Afghan forces cannot eliminate the Taliban threat by military means as long as they have sanctuary in Pakistan, and the civil development efforts are not bringing sufficient results.⁷⁸ With this reality, there have been increasing calls for the Karzai government and the US/NATO leadership to consider reaching out to moderate Taliban forces and sympathizers inside Afghanistan to explore the idea of a cease fire and coalition government. Meetings between the Kabul government and some elements of the Taliban were

⁷⁶ For a detailed description, see CRS Report RL34278, *FY2008 Supplemental Appropriations for Global War on Terror Military Operations, International Affairs, and Other Purposes*, by Stephen Daggett et al..

⁷⁷ National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008.

⁷⁸ "Saving Afghanistan: An Appeal and Plan for Urgent Action," Issue Brief, The Atlantic Council of the United States, March 2008.

held during the summer of 2008 but it would appear at this point that the Taliban is too disjointed of a movement to provide any realistic political settlement.

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, endemic corruption, a vigorous drug trade, the Taliban, and a rudimentary economy and infrastructure. In the view of former NATO Deputy Commander, General Eikenberry, "The enemy we face is not particularly strong, but the institutions of the Afghan state remain relatively weak."⁷⁹ 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 former commander of British forces in Afghanistan, said back 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 was the country's central problem, a view widely reflected by other officials from NATO governments.⁸⁰ NATO, in this view, must prepare to deal with successive governments of unknown composition and policies should the Karzai government fail to endure. New Presidential elections will be held in 2009 and several candidates have already declared their intention to oppose President Karzai's re-election. U.S. and NATO political and military leaders must be prepared to walk a fine line during the election campaign as they continue to prosecute the war effort and work with the existing government.

NATO's effort to assist the Karzai government in weakening the narcotics trade demonstrates a 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 and by providing poppy farmers alternative ways to make a living. In this view, "breaking down suspected insurgents' doors in the morning [makes] it difficult to build bridges in the afternoon."⁸¹ While NATO officials state publicly that allied forces have not been burning poppy fields, 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.⁸²

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 fast enough, most allies believe that substantial progress has been made in developing a professional and reliable force that will eventually equal approximately 125,000 troops. Since the beginning of Stage Three, British, French, and Canadian troops have reportedly given more and more responsibility to the ANA in joint operations.⁸³ As of September 2008, the ANA had 70,000 troops.

⁷⁹ House Armed Services Committee, hearing on "Security and Stability in Afghanistan," June 28, 2006.

⁸⁰ "UK Troops 'Must Beat Back the Taliban this Year,'" *Financial Times*, May 23, 2006, p. 7; interviews with U.S. and European officials, 2006-2007.

⁸¹ "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.

⁸² Interviews with U.S. and British officials, 2005-2007.

⁸³ "Army Woefully Unready, Afghans Say," *Globe and Mail*, November 16, 2006, p. A13.

NATO and the broader international community are now making a more substantial effort to reform the judicial system and build an effective police force. Italy has successfully urged donor nations to provide more funding to build a judicial system and to begin implementation of specific programs using the funds. The EU has assumed responsibility for training the police, and put professional trainers on the ground in June 2007, an effort yet to bear significant fruit.

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. Although 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. As a result, NATO commanders continue to have difficulty persuading allies to contribute forces to ISAF or to provide NATO forces the appropriate equipment for their tasks. Despite past pleas for more troops, and an anticipated new effort by the U.S. administration to secure commitments for additional troops, it does not seem likely that significant troop increases will come from NATO member countries. The Obama Administration is likely to continue to work behind the scenes to have NATO leaders announce at least a symbolic contribution of additional troops when the Alliance meets in April for its 60th anniversary summit.

The issue of military equipment continues to remain an unresolved problem. Many allied forces lack night-vision equipment, or the technology necessary to detect roadside bombs. The current global economic crisis has made it difficult for some militaries to even consider buying the requisite equipment. Some NATO governments send forces inappropriate for the task, forces that are heavy on support functions but light on combat capability. These governments tend to be reluctant to send their forces into the field to confront the Taliban and to control warlords and their militias. The result, in this view, has been that British, Canadian, Dutch, Danish, French and U.S. forces bear a disproportionate share of the most dangerous tasks.⁸⁴ For some allies, it is clear that fighting the Taliban, warlords, and the narcotics trade can prevent the return of the Taliban, al Qaeda, other or radical Islamic groups inimical to western interests. For others, the sooner the Afghan government and the civil sector can win the hearts and minds of the general population through economic development and the efficient provision of services, the faster stability will take hold.

The allies had long reached 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. U.S. General Eikenberry, former Deputy Commander in Afghanistan, 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.”⁸⁵ His view has been echoed by calls from the NATO Secretary General for allies and international institutions to provide more funds for reconstruction.

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

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ House Armed Services Committee, June 28, 2006, *op. cit.*

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 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.

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 short rotations of some allied forces impede this effort. 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.

Some observers have indicated that while some governments have pledged money in the past many have not yet contributed to the reconstruction effort. At an international conference to support Afghanistan convened in Paris in June, 2008, delegates pledged \$20 billion to support the Afghanistan National Development Strategy. 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.⁸⁶ Some allies that were reluctant to commit additional troops to the ISAF mission had suggested that they may be willing to contribute additional financial or technical support through the EU effort in Afghanistan or the UN. However, the recent global economic crisis has forced most of those nations to pull back from making significant financial contributions.

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.

An additional problem for many of the allies is a growing feeling of an "out-of-area" fatigue in Afghanistan and a lack of public support for continued involvement in the ISAF mission. Many of the allies have a difficult enough problem trying to address the issues of troop commitments and national caveats for their troops already in Afghanistan. Now, however, many are facing a growing restlessness among the public who see little accomplishment and who are calling for bringing the seven year war to an end or at least withdrawing troops from the theater. Many Europeans no longer see Afghanistan as a threat to Europe and in the wake of the Russian conflict with Georgia in the summer of 2008, believe NATO needs to refocus its responsibilities.

For their part, the allies desire to stabilize the country and to prevent the return of a terrorist state has led to an ongoing general consensus that if Afghanistan cannot be stabilized and made more secure, the future credibility and relevance of NATO will come into question. Press reports state that the allies produced a classified document at the Bucharest summit that lays out a five-year plan for ISAF to stabilize the country and turn most combat operations over to the Afghan National Army.⁸⁷ Subsequently, in September 2008, the new Commander of the U.S. Central Command, General David Patreus, indicated that he was conducting a total review of the Afghanistan war strategy with the intention of developing a more comprehensive U.S. approach

⁸⁶ "EU/Afghanistan: Europeans must Prepare for Losses ...," *Atlantic News*, July 20, 2006, p. 2.

⁸⁷ "Mille soldats français....," *op. cit.*

to dealing with that conflict along with ideas for the ISAF mission. 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 diminish a narcotics trade that is a threat to European societies.

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 conditions, and through operations with more experienced NATO militaries. By several accounts, this experience is being gained in Afghanistan.⁸⁸

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."⁸⁹

As previously suggested, the NATO allies have maintained a basic unity of purpose in Afghanistan. Their desire to stabilize the country and to prevent the return of a terrorist state has led to an ongoing general consensus that ISAF can help to build a state that is relatively stable and no longer a source of international terrorism.

On the other hand, the growing level of violence carried out by what some perceive to be a resurgent Taliban, reinforced by the a growing number of al Qaeda and other foreign fighters, and the perception that the Afghan government has not made tangible progress in extending its authority, could lead to some wavering among the allies with respect to a long term commitment to remain in Afghanistan. Many observers predict that ISAF's efforts to stabilize Afghanistan will require at least five more years, or longer. This prospect has exacerbated an existing problem that several allied governments already face with respect to declining support among their general populations. As the years wear on and the situation on the ground shows little progress and more violence, some policy-makers believe that the five-plus years time-frame could ultimately lead to new public pressure on NATO member parliaments to consider downgrading support, or at least reducing the military commitments to the Afghan mission. In a public opinion survey released by the German Marshall Fund in September 2008, only 43% of those Europeans polled supported combat operations against the Taliban.⁹⁰ As was pointed out by the Atlantic Council in its March 2008 Issue Brief, "the stalemate in Afghanistan poses a great dilemma for NATO: how can the 26 NATO governments convince their public to support a long-term effort in Afghanistan without clear indications of real progress either in the security or reconstruction sectors. Those allies with substantial forces fighting in Afghanistan are already fatigued by the political battles at home, as adverse domestic opinion challenges the governments."⁹¹

⁸⁸ Interviews with military officers from NATO governments, 2006-2007.

⁸⁹ Julian Lindley-French, "Big World, Big Future, Big NATO," *NATO Review*, Winter 2005, p. 5.

⁹⁰ *Transatlantic Trends*, *op. cit.*, September 10, 2008.

⁹¹ "Saving Afghanistan: An Appeal and a Plan for Urgent Action," *op. cit.*, p.7

Some observers believe a good portion of the negative public opinion within some allied nations could be directly attributable to an overall negative opinion of the foreign policy of the previous Bush Administration, especially its Iraq policy. These observers suggest that the new U.S. Administration could have a more positive effect on the international stage and could serve to help reverse some of the prevailing skepticism. For some observers, however, a renewed emphasis on Afghanistan by the Obama Administration could result in increased pressure on the NATO allies to send more troops to Afghanistan and lift their restrictive national caveats. They argue that a more secure environment will allow a more rapid development of the Afghan infrastructure, the economy and government institutions such as the military, police and judiciary. On the other hand, some believe that increased military engagement could lead to more combat operations, more violence and more casualties, a prospect many NATO allies would be reluctant to have to explain to their public. Should the new Administration fail to secure even modest new troop commitments from the allies and does eventually send upwards of 30,000 additional U.S. soldiers, some believe the Alliance will face the dual problem of their publics no longer willing to support the “American” war in Afghanistan and the U.S. public turning a sour view toward Europe and NATO.

NATO’s exit strategy for Afghanistan requires supporting the development of the economic foundations of the country 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.⁹²

U.S. leadership of the alliance appears to be at a key moment. 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. The United States and its NATO allies have greater unity of purpose in Afghanistan for now. 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.

⁹² Olivier Roy, “Afghanistan: La Difficile Reconstruction d’un État,” *Cahiers de Chaillot*, December 2004.

Figure I. Map of Afghanistan



Source: Map Resources. Adapted by CRS. (K.Yancey 11/22/05)

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