

NATO IN AFGHANISTAN: A PROGRESS REPORT

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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by

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ABSTRACT

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This paper discusses the ISAF effort in Afghanistan and its ability to sustain operations, more specifically; it examines the effects of national caveats on unity of effort and unity of command, command and control challenges, and the politics of burden sharing. Six years into the security and stability operations in Afghanistan, the command and control has transitioned from a United States-led Multi-National force to a NATO-led operation known as International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF). The composition of thirty-seven nations, whose governments approach both war and security & stability operations (SSO) in various manners, is testing the alliance's effectiveness in operations. The thirty-seven nations are the framework for five regions of the country, all working toward one goal, but constrained by multiple layers of headquarters, national caveats, physical distances, and bureaucracy of governmental interests in facilitating the development of a nation-state of Afghanistan. The goal of a stable and secure nation, a nation who itself has not had a functional government since 1979 to provide at least security and stability of its own country, is the challenge for NATO.

NATO IN AFGHANISTAN: A PROGRESS REPORT

The first and most important advice that I can give to my successors and people to make Afghanistan into a great kingdom is to impress upon their minds the value of unity; unity, and unity alone, can make it into a great power.

—Abdur Rahman Khan
Amir of Afghanistan (1880-1901)
Considered by western scholars
as the "founder of modern Afghanistan"

There are several areas of concern that inhibit the security and stability of the developing nation of Afghanistan. National caveats hinder the unity of effort and unity of command with three different commanders at the theater-level of operations. The command and control of operations suffer from a lack of interoperability at all levels and systems, to include usage of liaison officers. Burden sharing among participating NATO members is a matter of gamesmanship. On one hand, participating nations strive to demonstrate their contributions to appease fellow members, but do so only to benefit self-interest and not necessarily the best interest of NATO or Afghanistan.

Afghanistan risks sliding into a failed state and becoming the “forgotten war” due to deteriorating international support and the growing violence of the insurgency, according to an independent study conducted by The Center for the Study of the Presidency, Afghanistan Study Group Report.¹ Despite comprehensive acknowledgement that Afghanistan represents a test for future viability of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Alliance strategy continues to suffer from a number of deficiencies, which need addressing if the enterprise in Afghanistan is to succeed. After six years, the challenging mission is testing the resources, although not yet the will, of the members of NATO.² For example, the Atlantic Council of the United

States stated “NATO is not winning in Afghanistan” and recommends prompt changes in course, including a coherent security and reconstruction assessment, appointment of a UN high commissioner, and the establishment of a comprehensive regional strategy, to include neighboring actors like Pakistan and Iran.³

National Caveats Hinder Unity of Effort and Unity of Command

Member nation governments must allow the Senior National Representative (SNR) and ISAF commander to represent forces in theater and bring resources to bear in order to remain committed to operations sanctioned by NATO. Nations who agree to contribute forces to the coalition must minimize or remove national caveats so not to impinge on campaign design and the specifics of tactical level operations. National caveats are “restrictions some countries place on how NATO can use their forces.”⁴ Commanders or the SNR must seek approval from their government for specific operations if mission criteria designate the risk as a caveat by the government. The current environment allows little time to review operations to ensure nations participating do not have restrictions from national caveats in effect.

A recommendation by United States Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates urged European governments to increase their countries’ contributions in Afghanistan and eliminate restrictions on their forces that are a threat to mission success.⁵ Along with Secretary Gates, NATO Ambassador Nicolas Burns also believes NATO needs a larger force and one that is less encumbered by restrictions on the troops.⁶ Restrictions placed on troops and where they operate, impede progress in the ISAF campaign.

National caveats force the NATO-International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) Commander and subordinate commanders to defer critical decisions even at the tactical

and operational levels until nations involved in the operation are agreeable, and their governments have approved their participation in the operation.⁷ These caveats continue to hinder progress by ISAF when plans must change to accommodate restrictions. They also prevent the commander from deploying forces where necessary to make a greater impact on the situation. Minimizing or lifting caveats allows the ISAF commander's staff to plan in coordination with a region to maximize resources for successful execution of operations. Nations participating in the ISAF mission must accept a certain level of risk to allow forces flexibility to operate where necessary without constraints.

Use of Bureaucracy to Circumvent Compliance of Command Directives

The principal policy and decision-making body of NATO is the North Atlantic Council (NAC).⁸ The NAC meets weekly to resolve policy issues or to make decisions on behalf of all NATO members. The council is a medium for nations to confer about issues among governments. Some nations avoid adhering to written directives from ISAF that place their forces in questionable situations and maintain the right to make their own decision. They take the path of least resistance and go directly to their nation for a decision. Typically, the issue is brought to the NAC, and a decision is made without consultation of ISAF headquarters. Allowing nations to circumvent or amend directives for their purpose by using this process places precedence for testing the validity of the alliance.

Rules of engagement and directives established by NATO, in concurrence with SNR's from each nation, need to remain consistent for every element operating in theater under the NATO flag. Nations place SNRs in theater to represent their country's

interests, but often SNRs are bound to seek a secondary approval through their government channels, nullifying unity of command and ISAF authority in theater. Resourcing, usage of aircraft, transportation, and logistical resupply likewise require consistency among NATO partners. There are nations who use their government and bureaucracy to thwart directives or initial validations.⁹ Allowing nations to challenge situations with which they disagree questions validity and loyalty to ISAF and the alliance.

National Preferences Regarding Force Contributions Often Conflict with Needs

National “preferences” create operational constraints and tie the hands of the ISAF commander excessively. In addition, they affect the operational boundaries, which need to remain linked to the Afghan National Army operational boundaries, instead of changing every time a national caveat is in question, and a NATO nation wants to alter the boundaries to serve its own self-interest. For example, all NATO forces should rotate for duty to regional command (RC) south and not just as a force provider to one location where the risk is less, where domestic will prevails, and dollar expenditures are less of a burden on the overall expenses of a nation. Many nations have agreed to participate in the ISAF operation, but only if they can work as lead nation in one area of the country or as a specific regional coalition. Preferential selection of regions further constrains the ISAF Commander and subordinate tactical elements from their ability to execute the conduct of the campaign plan.

Nations need to lessen preferences and assist in other parts of the country where additional forces are required in combat-related missions. The desire of nations to value and assist each other across the country would reflect a more cooperative approach of

NATO members. While countries want to retain oversight of forces, this is possible through SNRs, regional headquarters, and commanders in charge of reporting the status of forces. Decisions on types of force contributions and locations are associated with excessive caveats and hinder the commander from achieving success in areas of the country that are not yet stable.

Countries can maintain their political interest without constantly interfering and or constraining tactical and operational-level missions. Nations and the alliance need to agree to long-term support of Afghanistan. NATO needs to cast itself as a mature, unified alliance and not just a few nations of divisive, semi-willing participants. When countries accept the invitation as a member in NATO, the concurrence of participating in a NATO-led operation means reaching consensus and implies an agreement to meet the needs of the NATO Commander. Understandably, nations do not want their forces in danger, nor does the United States as a member of NATO. However, for this first-time mission to be a success the Alliance needs greater commitment from members on contributions.

A major issue is countries agreeing to participate in a NATO coalition to demonstrate support, but then prohibit their military from participating in operations in heavily contested areas and where the commander needs additional forces. On the surface, politically the nation looks impressive for support of NATO decisions as a member of the Alliance. However, in reality several nations will not allow forces to cross into other sectors, with or without the Afghan National Army or Police. This decision further erodes the purpose of NATO as an alliance. Force contributions must meet the

needs of the ISAF campaign plan. The commander must have the ability to position forces where the effort will provide for overall success and not just national preference.

ISAF, as a security provider, will not succeed unless nations are willing to accept risk in allowing the ISAF commander flexibility to allocate forces where they will bring success overall to the operation in theater. The NATO Alliance needs to be more unified in the percentage of force contribution, not just a few nations providing the bulk of dollars, aircraft, and military forces. As reported in *The Economist*, the Western Alliance is in question as to how long it will be able to survive.¹⁰ Nations want to assist, but domestic will constrains contingent deployment to a year or less at a time. With the lack of long-term commitment and specific regional preferences by other nations, U.S. force contributions will continue to remain in effect or increase to fill gaps.

The risk is too high to say there is no longer a U.S. force requirement in theater. Particularly when other nations attend NAC meetings and set forth threats to withdraw their forces due to souring political opinion and questioning the validity of the mission or the direction of the campaign. Although there is 43,250 plus troops in Afghanistan, the national preferences and caveats excessively restrict the ISAF commander from using the forces where they will benefit progress in the tactical and operational levels of the campaign.¹¹ Additionally, only eight out of twenty-six NATO member nations are providing the vast majority of troops in Afghanistan.¹² With only thirty percent of the nations contributing, it undercuts the concept of multinational efforts and demonstrates that NATO is not functioning as a collective will of member governments.¹³ Another issue related to force contributions is the need for additional troop transport, logistics, and inadequate defense spending by Alliance members.¹⁴

A year later in 2008, there is still a problem with troop transport, medical evacuation, logistical resupply, and defense spending to include a manpower shortfall of 7,500 troops. Due to high altitude and mountainous regions of the country, few aircraft have the lift capability to fly across the country. Regionally, aircraft from the host nation are sufficient for local operations but again caveats restrict movement to assist other regions in operations where aircraft are the primary mode of transport. The ISAF mission across the theater continues to have a shortage of helicopters that provide for troop transport, medical evacuation, and logistical resupply. Shortages of force contributions will remain as long as a requirement remains for combat troops or specialty fields, such as medical and logistic soldiers.

ISAF is NATO's first mission outside Europe and its purpose is to demonstrate NATO's new *raison d'être* while the Afghans establish security, rule of law, and a representative government.¹⁵ As Ambassador Nicolas Burns recently observed, "We know that this is the first ground operation in the 59-year history of NATO. It is absolutely essential that NATO succeed."¹⁶ In order for the Afghan government to be successful, the NATO alliance must stay committed and members of the alliance need to assist each other.¹⁷ Some severe critics claim that NATO has already lost the war, and achieving success is doubtful since many allies are unwilling to share risks, commit resources, and follow through on commitments to the mission and to each other.¹⁸ Although nations have agreed in principle to support the mission in Afghanistan, firm commitments come only from the United States, Britain, and Germany. Germany's commitments come with highly restrictive caveats though. Canada is threatening to

withdraw because the security burden appears inequitable. It demands NATO members act in concert as a true coalition in the southern region.

Although there are eight United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCRs) relating to the “Coalition of the willing” and NATO operations as of 2006, currently only ten of twenty-six NATO and thirteen Non-NATO members contribute significantly to the ISAF force. As risks increase, domestic pressures for some participating nations affect their commitments to the mission. As a result, there are nations that plan to complete their mission and withdraw at the end of this year: South Korea, Australia, and potentially Canada, leaving additional gaps in force contributions. Both the United States and NATO must determine how to fill gaps and succeed with the ISAF mission. The additional force contributions constrain the United States and negate any plan of an exit strategy for troops.

National Disagreements Over Ways And Means Impede Progress.

In the overall plan to develop and enhance Afghanistan’s ability to govern and manage itself, there are diverse opinions of how to facilitate the desired outcome of a secure and stable nation-state. Contributing nations do not agree on comprehensive and integrated ways (i.e. lines of operations), and how to reach this goal. Moreover, national strategies do not correspond with the Government of Afghanistan (GOA) or the Afghan National Defense Strategy (ANDS). Furthermore, these same issues occur in relation to the means by which to accomplish the ways. The alliance is divided and does not share a unified vision, nor have the members provided a satisfactory level of political and military commitment to the problem.¹⁹ Military engagement should target terrorists and insurgent organizations to dissuade, deter, and defeat them by direct combat. Non-

military engagement should focus on assuring, persuading, and influencing local population through provisions of security, humanitarian assistance, basic services, infrastructure improvements, institution building, and support for the rule of law. The two strategies to defeat the insurgency in Afghanistan need coordination between military and civilian agencies in theater.²⁰

Despite NATO's commitment to Afghanistan, nations contributing to the Alliance have different opinions in how to achieve success in Afghanistan. Nations have agreed to commit to operations in various parts of the country as lead-nation for the sole purposes of maintaining security, stability, and reconstruction. Initiatives and lead-nation economic expenditures are spent where the greatest impact will reflect positively on the nation supporting the region. Conflict arises when the ISAF commander needs resources and money allocated to a different part of the country where strategy focuses on Afghan Development Zones (ADZs). The Afghan Development Zones are a concentrated effort to reward sectors that achieve secure areas, and can bring governance, economic stability, money, and infrastructure to the local population.

In addition, there is a difference in philosophy over the use of kinetic or non-kinetic instruments to execute a mission. Most European nations support improvement efforts through reconstruction, development, and regional basing, but do not endorse cross-boundary, combat operations or kinetic effects to achieve a desired end-state. A limited number of nations contribute ground forces but do not allow them to move to other regions to support combat operations but use them as regional security elements. Others believe non-kinetic means will bring security by negotiating with the insurgents

and agreeing to work together to provide security and stability for the local population, but this approach does not last and tends to undermine the campaign plan.

Command, Control, Communications, and Computers (C4) Suffers from Multiple Headquarters, Rotation Policies, Physical Separation, and Lack of Interoperability

Executing Command and Control of operations in Afghanistan occurs through multiple layers of command echelons creating unnecessary disruptions. ISAF is but one command in theater. It includes the regional, Alliance-sponsored commanders who report to Joint Forces Headquarters, Brunssum (JFCBrunssum) and their own ministries of defense. When ISAF needs additional forces for an operation, there are five Regional Commands under ISAF, two United States Commanders under Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), Special Operations Command (SOCOM), Supreme Allied Command (SACEUR)/ European Command (EUCOM), and the Afghan Ministry of Defense (MOD) and Ministry of Interior (MOI), all of whom need consulting. In a memorandum dated 26 February 2007, Gen. (R) Barry R. McCaffrey mentioned that the “SACEUR should consider eliminating his intervening level of NATO command supervision, as there is little value added.”²¹ During this same period, the ISAF Commander did not command and still does not command all the forces in theater. There is no unity of command or unity of effort to bring all instruments of power together to achieve a realistic desired end state at a strategic level. Currently every nation in theater has individual constraints that restrict the overall effectiveness of ISAF-NATO operations.

In addition, each region comprises multiple layers of headquarters. There is a regional command represented by the nation sponsoring the region as lead-nation. Located near each Afghan National Security Force (ANSF) regional headquarters is a regional headquarters for the United States Embedded Training Team (ETT)

operations, the ISAF Operational Mentor Liaison (OMLT) team headquarters, and a U.S. Special Forces headquarters or command post. In addition, there usually several, provincial reconstruction team (PRT) command posts. The only elements co-located are the US ETTs and ISAF OMLTs who reside within the Afghan National Army base camp. As OMLTs began deploying into theater, there were feasible areas inside the U.S. section of the Afghan camps that could accommodate an OMLT, but due to security restrictions, the forces cannot co-locate.

Regional operations suffer when dissension between nations occurs, and the regional commanders stipulate that ISAF directives must comply with national interests (i.e. ROE or other national caveats.) In addition, frequent turnovers of regional commanders and contingents, typically every four or six months, result in an associated slowdown of the overall activities of the region and theater operations. Both the regional government and the ANSF must adjust to new personnel, new personalities, establish new levels of trust, and consider a new direction provided by the new commander on the ground.

Rotation Policies Differ Between Nations and Militaries

The dynamics of operations in Afghanistan are unique in that Regional Commanders rotate every four, six, or twelve months. Some contingents change every four and six months; others, every twelve months. The Afghan government and security forces are continuously dealing with the rotation of new personnel, those who are there to “assist” them to secure the country. Contingent rotations should be standardized and synchronized with the ISAF battle rhythm so the commander gains continuity and coherence (i.e., all rotations occur during the winter months.) Currently, the lead nation

controls the rotation and ISAF must adjust operations based on the timing of rotations not the situation.

Although a secondary issue, Afghans believe in building relationships and trust, which requires time. National rotation policies undermine this cultural need. For example, from November 2006 to June 2007 four of the five regional commands changed twice due to a four-month policy established by their nations. Relationships are not built in a four-month time period, especially when some commanders do not believe they need to leave their base of operations to interact with the Afghans, but instead have their staff officers conduct planning meetings and represent them. All forces united and working as a team can only achieve success. Task Force Phoenix V, a combined joint task force is an example with their adoption of the slogan “Yak Team, Yak Jang” (One Team, One Fight). The NAC needs to reconcile these inconsistent rotation policies and develop one that is used by all nations and will meet the needs of the commander on the ground.

Physical Separation of Command Elements Severely Restrict Planning, Coordination, and Harmonization of Efforts

Operations occur in a decentralized manner and each ISAF regional commander plans operations, determines his desired end state, and submits the plan to the ISAF planning staff. Lastly, the ANSF become integrated and briefed on how the operation will proceed. In most cases, as personally observed, the ISAF regional command staff waits until the last minute to include the Afghan corps commander or subordinate elements in the planning process.²² Current philosophy is to wait until within hours of an operation. The international forces do not trust the ANSF and are apprehensive of compromising the operation. Executing missions in this manner will never develop the

ANSF and impedes the progress of the government at both the regional and national level.

Planning operations at a face-to-face meeting is complex due to physical distance and separation between commands and their subordinate elements. At the same time, phone networks and video conferences had not advanced enough for planning to occur remotely. Thus, each region provides a liaison officer (LNO) to its parent headquarters. The role of this officer is to assist in the planning of combat operations and to monitor reconstruction and stability operations in accordance with timelines and in synchronization with the direction of the ADZ's. Although the LNOs work with the higher headquarters, they often reside in the region they represent, thus causing difficulty when flights were cancelled due to weather or down time for aircraft maintenance.

Planning frequently occurs at ISAF Headquarters without LNO participation due to high absenteeism. Additionally, regional force protection measures further limit the ability of LNOs to make meetings. As a result ISAF planning and synchronization lacks regional perspective and clarity of regional operational requirements. Another hindrance to planning is due to housing limitations. Due to space constraints, few liaison officers live full time at the ISAF Headquarters compound, and every time a new liaison officer rotates into theater, housing availability fluctuates based on rank, not staffing requirements at the headquarters.

Computer, Radio, and Telephone Systems Lack Interoperability

Overall, synchronization of verbal and written communication is a tremendous effort that requires prodigious time to pass critical theater and operational information among nations. The classifications requirements of the communications network and

infrastructure in Afghanistan range from ISAF Unclassified, ISAF Secret, US NIPR (Unclassified), US Centrix, to US SIPR, as well as the tactical restrictions used by each nation. The US forces have limited ISAF secret to communicate with ISAF elements, and ISAF elements do not have US SIPR due to US national restrictions. In addition, countries have their own automation systems, which cannot interface with other elements occupying the same battle space in their region. The phone systems are as complicated as the automation. Countries provide their own phones and phone numbers, different satellite phones and different phone servers (i.e. Afghan AWCC and Roshan.) The latter are insecure but are the most reliable means of communication. ISAF elements use different regional phone systems and the US has a separate phone system that does not link into the ISAF system. Although phonebooks exist with procedures on how to connect with different phone systems, connections are usually futile.

Coalition tactical units operating with the ANSF have different phone systems than their parent higher headquarters, and FM communications vary across theater. Communication systems are even different among ISAF Company, battalion, and brigade-level forces dealing with the ANSF. Lack of integrated communications across a full spectrum of operations and lack of one network undercuts functional command and control. Of note, when resourcing units in ISAF battle space, JFC Brunssum does not consider the United States part of NATO for common funding or part of “NATO provided communications” packages.²³ As of January 2007, JFC Brunssum planning staff held the United States responsible for all its elements in theater with all equipment necessary

for dealing with Operational Mentoring Liaison Teams (OMLTs) communication packages.²⁴ The U.S. did not apprehend the communications challenge though.

When OMLTs arrived into theater, there was no computer interface to link the ISAF Regional Commands with the ISAF Regional OMLT attached to the ANA Corps Commander, even though the forces were from the same country. Consequently, LNOs became the primary means to pass information, though the commands were only five miles apart. In addition, the OMLTs did not have a system to talk to the US forces with whom they worked in support of the ANSF. As noted above, the same occurred for the OMLTs in relation to the phone network. Not one region, during an eight-month period in 2006/2007 had the ability to communicate with the training elements of its own nation, nor with the U.S. training elements.

Operations in theater need more effective integration and synchronization to maximize all the specialized trained forces, resources, and equipment in theater. Currently, soldiers and equipment remain under the control of the regional commander and ministries of defense supporting the region, not under the ISAF command. NATO leadership needs to consider the overall, desired effects of the NATO mission in coordination with ISAF under the UN mandate. It is necessary for one comprehensive approach that all nations agree to support. Once agreed through the NAC, nations need to support the strategic direction together, not separately, to build regional strategies nested in the ISAF campaign to accommodate challenges of command and control, distance, and communication shortfalls.

The Politics of Burden Sharing

Burden sharing and military spending are a recurrent and interconnected source of strain within the Atlantic Alliance and with the political system of its members.²⁵ As defined by Dr. Wallace Thies, "Burden shifting is the art of manipulating alliance relationships for political gain."²⁶ In other words, NATO member states seek to minimize their obligations while trying to make other allies carry a heavier burden. NATO members need to work together to share assets and assist each other in common interests. All parties will benefit from sharing the burden and distributing the requirements equally. NATO countries need to be willing to assist each other with areas of each individual country's strengths, so that the duration of commitment of effort continues and provides for enduring operations without strain on any one nation.

Burden Sharing to Keep Defense Spending Down

Burden sharing among NATO, forces to keep defense spending down and to avoid domestic political contention is the appropriate path forward in Afghanistan. As logical as this sounds, smaller alliance members shrink their contributions. Thies observes, "There is repeated evidence of a strong relationship between member size and share of Gross National Profit (GNP) spent on defense, which is interpreted as disproportionate in burden-sharing, also known as exploitation of the great and small."²⁷ NATO needs to change this behavior. National security is not the only measurement of defense terms. Security itself is not merely a military notion and burden sharing is not measured simply in terms of defense. Resources for national military establishments become insufficient as political leaders resolve conflicting demands for homeland defense, foreign aid,

diplomacy, and health, education, environmental protection, tax reductions and other competing demands on state finances that the public demands.²⁸

The underlying issue with the thought of alliance division of labor, is that allies who compete to shift burdens to one another are unlikely to agree on what is a more reasonable, much less a favorable distribution of roles and missions, to include justifying the way burden is shared by redistribution from one member to another.²⁹ Hence, the NAC should set force and resource contributions during the planning process and adjust them as the situation changes. The NAC cannot avoid this responsibility.

Public Pronouncements of Contributions but Lack Follow-through with Obligations

NATO controls operations in Afghanistan, but members lack a long-term commitment due to domestic pressures to leave Afghanistan. Ironically, all alliance members initially stated they were committed to Afghanistan for long-term, despite disagreement on how the burden is shared.³⁰ Although NATO has committed to the mission, it is apparent members are not fully committed in burden-sharing and resourcing the operations. As missions and tasks have increased over time and along with them, higher risk, members have begun to balk.

An unbalanced commitment among coalition members and associated operational constraints has undermined the multinational effort to wage a successful counterinsurgency and state building.³¹ Currently the U.S., Britain and Canada bear the lion's share of burden in terms of dollars, soldiers, equipment, governmental representatives, and combat losses. The reason for this state of affairs, as Thies remarks, is clear: "NATO members have strong incentives to neither commit too much,

otherwise consuming resources that might be better spent elsewhere, nor too little, thus avoiding antagonizing their partners.”³² Individual members endeavor to do the minimum to keep others keenly engaged but no more, while also determined to prevent the others’ efforts to do the minimum necessary.³³ Soldier losses have gained greater domestic political presence as nations answer to their constituencies and still try to adapt to the increase in insurgency activities.

Sub-optimization of Effort, Knowing Others Will Fill the Vacuum

The ISAF commander has made repeated requests for additional resources, such as aircraft, to support elements in the south only to be rebuffed. If the resource vacuum is not filled, operations will suffer and progress may stutter to the point in which Afghanistan slips once again into a failed state. Afghan citizens will eventually grow weary of entrusting their security to NATO, and may side with the Taliban out of desperation or despair in the south.

The lack of willingness of NATO allies to assist each other in the south demonstrates their desire to maintain earlier agreements even though changes in the security environment warrant greater efforts. For example, Germany recently agreed to provide an additional 1,000 soldiers to the operation but the troops have to remain in the north, and national caveats would prevent them operating in the south. Realistically these types of contributions create a facade of full participation in order to enhance Germany’s image as a relevant partner. Additional troops are critical to the south, and not the north where the situation is stable and has been for the last three years. Hence, the main effort should be in the south. German intransigence is the politically safe course domestically, but at a cost to the Alliance internationally.

Nations sponsoring the north (Germany) and the west (Italy) dissent from assisting in the south due to national caveat restrictions. The initial plan of nations sponsoring regions worked well until countries sponsoring the southern region realized they were undermanned and needed additional forces their countries do not have available. The concept of burden sharing is working well with countries that have the same interests regionally, i.e. Italy with Spain in the west, and Germany with several, small countries in the north. However, theater-wide, if it were not for the United States, Britain, Australia, the Netherlands and Canada, the current successes would have eroded by now. Most countries have agreed to participate in the security, stability, and reconstruction operations, but are only willing to do so in less hostile, relatively quiet regions of the country where they have been since ISAF went into theater in 2003.

The United States via Defense Secretary Gates is looking for more creative answers to the troop shortages, such as asking nations to loan helicopters to allies willing to take on combat missions and asking those countries with restrictions on combat missions to take over fixed-site security to free up troops who can take on the aggressive counterinsurgency missions.³⁴ The United States has committed an additional 3,000 Marines, and Britain is considering an increase to meet their requirements as the sponsor nation in the south. Canada is weighing options to withdraw forces unless other members of NATO assist them in the south. Unless members agree on how to bolster Canada in the south they may potentially withdraw their forces completely. Thus, pressures are becoming greater for NATO members to agree to provide additional resources in southern Afghanistan.

Recently Australia, a Troop Contributing Nation (TCN), tentatively said Australia is likely to play a greater role in the training of the ANSF but has also requested NATO countries lift caveats on where troops may operate, and until other NATO countries provide more, Australia will not increase troop numbers or their level of resources.³⁵ Paradoxically, new NATO members and NATO candidates are more willing to provide larger numbers of forces to ISAF. Macedonia, Switzerland, Australia, Sweden, and several other non-NATO countries are stepping up to contribute training forces, PRT sponsorship, and significant base security for both of the ISAF facilities in Kabul. Contributions by these members may demonstrate to NATO members, who have little or no contributions to ISAF, that success in Afghanistan benefits everyone. Ironically, the fact that others are willing to increase their contributions reinforces burden-shifting behaviors of others.

According to an article in the *LA Times*, “Although there are 26 alliance members contributing to the war effort, it [the effect] is nominal. Of the 43,000 troops in theater, the alliance only has 20,000 besides those forces provided by Britain, Canada, and the United States.”³⁶ European domestic opinion has a limited desire for sending fellow citizens to pursue insurgents in other areas of the world; they reflect the will of their people.³⁷ The issue at hand is not so much the failure of NATO in Afghanistan; rather, it is the effect failure will have on the *raison d’être* of NATO.

Conclusion

It is hard to visualize how NATO can succeed in stabilizing Afghanistan without an alliance willing to commit more troops, provide more resources, and allow commanders more flexibility. The governments in Europe and the US focus on short-term budget

problems, but in the long-term, providing greater resources now to Afghanistan could potentially save funds later.³⁸ During an earlier meeting of NATO defense ministers in Riga, Latvia on 28 and 29 November 2006 divisions surfaced among those nations who felt they were bearing too much of the fighting--mainly US, Canada, Britain, and the Netherlands--versus those members with either excessive national caveats on their troops' location or their ability to participate in combat missions, namely Germany, France, Italy, Spain, and Greece.³⁹ It does not appear that any resolution to these deficiencies will be noted at the next NATO summit. One wonders, why have summits then?

In remarks to CNN, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown said he is aware, according to the NATO commander, that other countries are prepared to contribute more. In addition, there are means by which burden sharing can occur but the military effort must be complimented by diplomatic efforts and development work that has been completed.⁴⁰ Although there is a great desire to bring Afghanistan stable governance, regional stability, and security for the people, there remains a great amount of work to do now before the insurgency strengthens and progress is lost.

It is debatable whether the insurgency is growing stronger in the south, but it is undebateable that NATO does not have sufficient commitment from members to ensure success. The countries contributing have experienced forces, yet domestic pressure prevails in limiting contributions of forces and resources. One nation cannot win the war, but integrated as one force, maximizing resources, NATO can bring progress to Afghanistan. Essential to this is the lifting of national caveats for both force contributions and country assets needed to achieve the overall strategy in theater.

Thoughtful consideration is necessary to bring unity of command and unity of effort by all nations, not just European countries. Harmonized communications at all levels are essential if coalition members are to operate in a coordinated manner. Synchronization from the lowest level to the highest must incorporate both Afghans and coalition their partners not only for the operational success, but also to teach the Afghans the benefits of cooperation.

NATO must reflect a true alliance, not just the “Coalition of the willing.” The message must be that NATO will not rest until Afghanistan has security, governance, peace, and stabilization. Every contributing nation must consider the consequences of failure in Afghanistan not just to the Afghans, but also to the future of NATO. Failure can cause the Alliance to crumble.

Every element of national power from NATO needs implementing for success to occur. After six years of war progress continues, but at a slow pace. The conflict is not just a Taliban one but a drug war with opium production at a faster rate than before the war began. Success in Afghanistan not only requires military precision, but also economic revival and reconstruction of key infrastructure.⁴¹

Afghanistan is making diplomatic, economic, and military progress, although not as fast as expectations. Financially, the country continually grows and children attend schools built by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and NATO. The approach towards success must come in the form of more burden sharing by all thirty-seven nations involved, not just three major nations alongside the ANSF fighting intense battles in the east and south of the country. In order for Afghanistan to reverse the negative trends, a comprehensive and realistic appraisal of the situation needs

conducting to include creation of a strategic action plan addressing short and long-term security challenges.⁴² Expanding commitment of the international community to Afghanistan's future will assist the emerging Afghan government and diminish al-Qaida's appeal to people in Central and South Asia.⁴³ NATO must resolve the issues of a unified command strategy, caveats, burden sharing, and capability shortfalls in order to continue a lasting commitment in Afghanistan.

Recommendations:

- Minimize or do away with caveats that restrict the commander's ability to prosecute an operation.
- Minimize the number of Combatant commands involved in managing the command and control of the mission.
- Standardize the timing and length of rotations for predictability and relationship building.
- Fund a communications network that is standard for the entire theater of operations.
- Ensure nations are providing their share of resources as a NATO member

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