

Background

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NATO in Afghanistan: A Test Case for Future Missions

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The future of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has become inextricably linked to the future of Afghanistan. NATO, an alliance created in the early days of the Cold War to defend the West against Soviet aggression, is actively engaged in assisting Afghanistan's young democratic government against the resurgent Taliban. This is not only NATO's first mission outside of Europe, but also its largest ever operational deployment. Afghanistan has now become a test of NATO's ability to transform itself and adapt to the post-9/11 threat environment.

The NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission in Afghanistan presents an opportunity to observe both the successes and shortcomings of voluntary international military operations. Some of the problems that the ISAF has encountered thus far are an insufficient number of troops, a lack of troop transport, and inadequate defense spending by Alliance members.

To perform its mission in Afghanistan successfully, NATO should develop interoperable communications systems, address troop levels and capabilities, address proportional funding, and seriously consider another round of enlargement to include Alliance-friendly members. All of these issues were brought to the table at the NATO summit in Riga, Latvia, on November 28–29 by President Bush, who strongly urged other Alliance members to increase their contributions.

The International Security Assistance Force

When the U.S. government commenced Operation Enduring Freedom on September 12, 2001, it in-

Talking Points

- The NATO International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission in Afghanistan presents an opportunity to observe both the successes and shortcomings of voluntary international military operations.
- The ISAF has encountered a number of problems, including insufficient troop levels, a lack of troop air transport, and inadequate defense spending by NATO members.
- NATO members have placed about 102 national restrictions on their national contingents (e.g., limits on deployment areas or types of missions), 50 of which have significantly hampered ISAF operations.
- To accomplish its mission in Afghanistan and its overall mission, NATO should develop interoperable communications systems, address troop levels and capabilities, address proportional funding, and seriously consider another round of enlargement to include Alliance-friendly members.

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voked the Alliance's mutual defense clause but chose not to let NATO take the lead, despite an outpouring of support from other NATO countries. Although NATO was a part of Operation Enduring Freedom, it did not command a force of its own until years later and still does not oversee all troops in Afghanistan. The International Security Assistance Force is NATO's first mission outside of Europe and is meant to create a shield behind which the Afghans can establish security, the rule of law, and representative government.¹ The ISAF is also bolstering Afghan security with international troops, reforming the Afghan defense program, and working to improve communication between Afghanistan and neighboring countries.²

On August 9, 2003, NATO began Phase 1 of five phases by assuming authority for the ISAF mission and taking over operations in Kabul. It moved on to Phase 2 in 2004, geographically expanding its mission to include the North in 2004, the West in 2005, and the South and East in 2006, a process that was completed in October 2006. Phase 3 consists of stabilizing these areas.

The ISAF is currently in Phases 4 and 5, which involve the transition to security provided by Afghan troops and the redeployment of NATO troops where necessary. This expansion of NATO's responsibility included assuming command of 12,000 American soldiers who had previously been under U.S. command. The inclusion of U.S. troops was also meant as an attempt to curb insurgencies in eastern and southern Afghanistan, where there has been a resurgence of Taliban militia along the Pakistani border. Estimates of actual numbers of troops deployed vary, but official NATO numbers

Country	Troops	Country	Troops
Albania	30	Latvia	30
Australia	200	Lithuania	140
Austria	5	Luxemburg	10
Azerbaijan	20	Netherlands	2,000
Belgium	340	New Zealand	100
Bulgaria	150	Iceland	15
Canada	2,500	Norway	320
Croatia	100	Poland	160
Czech Republic	100	Portugal	150
Denmark	300	Romania	750
Estonia	90	Slovakia	60
Finland	90	Slovenia	50
France	975	Spain	650
Macedonia	120	Sweden	200
Germany	2,700	Switzerland	5
Greece	170	Turkey	460
Hungary	200	United Kingdom	6,000
Ireland	10	United States	11,800
Italy	1,800	Total	32,800

show over 32,000 soldiers from 37 countries currently under NATO command.³

Even with the transfer of 12,000 American troops to NATO command, U.S. Lieutenant General Karl Eikenberry continues to command 8,000 U.S. troops outside of the NATO force. These U.S. troops are facilitating reconstruction projects, training Afghan security forces, and tracking al-Qaeda terrorists.⁴ They are assigned to the Com-

1. North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, "NATO in Afghanistan," November 10, 2006, at www.nato.int/issues/afghanistan/index.html (November 10, 2006). Another expert defines the ISAF's Afghanistan mission as "to help the Afghan authorities provide security according to the Bonn Agreement, relevant U.N. Security Council resolutions, and a bilateral agreement with the Afghan government." Although inclusion of the terms of all these agreements is beyond the scope of this paper, more information can be found in Barnett R. Rubin, "Afghanistan's Uncertain Transition from Turmoil to Normalcy," The Center for Preventive Action, Council on Foreign Relations, *Council Special Report No. 12*, March 2006, at www.cfr.org/content/publications/attachments/Afghanistan_CSR.pdf (November 22, 2006).
2. North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, "NATO in Afghanistan."
3. Agence France-Presse, "NATO Force Not Big Enough for Quick Victory: British General," *Defense News*, November 1, 2006, at www.defensenews.com/story.php?F=2325790&C=landwar (November 1, 2006).
4. Associated Press, "NATO Assumes Control of Eastern Afghanistan," *The New York Times*, October 5, 2006, at www.nytimes.com/aponline/world/AP-Afghan-NATO.html (October 5, 2006).

bined Forces Command—Afghanistan. This U.S. command will be going through some transitions culminating with the inactivation of Headquarters Combined Forces Command—Afghanistan after November 30, 2006.⁵

NATO's contribution to the ISAF mission in Afghanistan is a test of legitimacy for future NATO missions. U.S. Ambassador to NATO Victoria Nuland recently told a meeting of the Manfred Worner Circle that "If we can't do missions like that of Afghanistan, then we can't do our overall mission."⁶ Nuland used the occasion to highlight the objectives that the U.S. hoped to see discussed at length at the upcoming NATO Riga summit in Latvia. The ambassador stressed the importance of making certain that NATO had a well-equipped and well-prepared response force. In 2001, no such NATO force existed, which limited the extent to which the United States could rely on NATO involvement when it went into Afghanistan.

ISAF Problems Mirror NATO Problems

The problems that beset NATO are also the problems that beset operations in Afghanistan.

Troop Levels. The biggest problem is meeting troop commitments from NATO members. In February 2006, General James Jones, NATO's top commander, declared that NATO's members had not come up with the final one-fourth of the 25,000 troops needed for a NATO Response Force (NRF).⁷ The NRF was planned at the NATO Prague summit in November 2002 as a fully operational task force with the capability of deploying within a week's notice. The NRF was scheduled to become fully operational by October 2006 in time for its first

mission in Afghanistan. The United States initially held back troop commitments in the hope that European members would supply more troops, which they did, albeit haphazardly.

In September 2006, when NATO was having difficulty coming up with the remaining 2,500 troops needed to reach the goal of 31,000 for the multinational force in Afghanistan, NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer pleaded with NATO members, "If you are a member of an alliance based on solidarity, you have to deliver... We need to do more."⁸ NATO finally did receive most of the needed commitments (2,000 soldiers) from Britain, Canada, Poland, and Romania, although Scheffer said that more were still needed.⁹

Troop Transport. Airlift is a major problem for most NATO members. NATO had problems airlifting troops into Afghanistan because it did not have the aircraft capable of performing the task. NATO does have transport aircraft, including C-130s and KC-130Js, that could be deployed around Europe, but transporting troops as far as Afghanistan was inconceivable. As a result, NATO troops have been transported to Afghanistan aboard U.S. C-17s. Ambassador Nuland observed, "All our U.S. screaming at them for the last decade to get airlift led nowhere until they deployed to Afghanistan and only then did they realize the extent of the problem."¹⁰

On September 13, NATO announced that 13 allies are negotiating to purchase three or four C-17s for delivery beginning in 2007. The 13 allies will buy shares of the planes, which will be based at Germany's Ramstein Air Base, the same air base used by U.S. airlift.¹¹ Each C-17 costs \$202.3 mil-

5. News release, "Coalition Headquarters Assumes New Role in Afghanistan," Combined Forces Command—Afghanistan, Coalition Press Information Center, October 6, 2006, at www.cfc-a.centcom.mil/News%20Release/2006/10-October/Coalition%20headquarters%20assumes%20new%20role%20in%20Afghanistan.htm (November 8, 2006).
6. Brooks Tigner, "Afghan Challenges Strike at Core NATO Mission," *Defense News*, October 23, 2006, at www.defensenews.com/story.php?F=2305153&C=europe (October 23, 2006; subscription required).
7. Reuters, "NATO Commander Fears Rapid Force Delay," *Defense News*, February 10, 2006, at www.defensenews.com/story.php?F=1527177&C=europe (October 8, 2006).
8. BBC News, "NATO to Extend Afghan Operations," September 28, 2006, at news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/5390174.stm (October 17, 2006).
9. Helene Cooper, "NATO Chief Says More Troops Are Needed in Afghanistan," *The New York Times*, September 22, 2006, p. A10.
10. Tigner, "Afghan Challenges Strike at Core NATO Mission."

lion, and the United States has already committed to buying one of the planes to provide NATO with a long-range airlift capability.¹²

Defense Spending. Defense spending is critical to transforming NATO, with 20 of the 26 NATO members spending less than the suggested 2 percent of gross domestic product on defense.¹³ At a conference on NATO's global agenda, Secretary General Scheffer proposed extending funding for a trial period to fund short-term NRF deployments, chiefly strategic airlift.¹⁴

Other parties need to assume financial responsibility for Afghanistan's reconstruction so that NATO members can concentrate on defense and security. Scheffer pointed out that NATO needs to tighten coordination with the United Nations, the European Union, and non-governmental organizations to bridge the gap between those who supply security and those who supply development.

The recent ISAF expansion into southern Afghanistan has provided an opportunity for other parties to step up and prove themselves. As Ambassador Dann Everts, NATO's top civilian representative in Afghanistan, told a news conference, "Particularly the EU has a great opportunity to make a significant and very timely difference in the area of the judiciary and the police.... The goal is wide open. They just have to kick the ball."¹⁵ Secretary General Scheffer said that NATO is neither a

relief organization nor a reconstruction agency and argued, "Now is the time for the international community to step in and help push Afghanistan further in the right direction."¹⁶

The Problem of Caveats

In addition to the problems that have long impeded NATO operations, the ISAF is hampered by national caveats that restrict the operations of many units deployed in Afghanistan. Such restrictions limit deployment areas and types of missions for particular national contingents or impose other criteria that reduce the effectiveness or flexibility of ISAF operations.

On October 24, 2006, General Jones estimated that there were about 102 national restrictions, 50 of which significantly hampered operations. While he said that he would welcome more troop contributions, lifting the caveats was more important.¹⁷ National caveats are classified for security reasons, but some have been leaked to the media, including a German restriction on "extended patrols" for German troops.¹⁸ Other nations have forbidden deployment of their troops to eastern or southern Afghanistan, where support for the Taliban and insurgent threats are highest.

Only six of NATO's 26 countries have placed no caveats on their ISAF forces. One reporter summarized the situation: "Countries sending their troops to Afghanistan have placed a web of restrictions on

11. Vince Crawley, "NATO Allies Agree to Buy C-17 Aircraft, Reducing Airlift Shortage; Three or Four Cargo Planes Based in Germany Would be Shared by 13 Nations," U.S. Department of State, Bureau of International Information Programs *Washington File*, September 14, 2006, at usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=September&x=20060913162646MvYelwarC0.4751245 (November 24, 2006).
12. U.S. Air Force, "C-17 Globemaster III," May 2006, at www.af.mil/factsheets/factsheet.asp?fsID=86 (November 11, 2006).
13. Lionel Beechner, "NATO Looks to Expand Mission and Membership," Council on Foreign Relations *Background*, July 27, 2006, at www.cfr.org/publication/11159/nato_looks_to_expand_mission_and_membership.html (October, 20, 2006).
14. Brooks Tigner, "NATO Chief Calls for Common Funding for More Alliance Operations," *Defense News*, November 6, 2006, at www.defensenews.com/story.php?F=2336721&C=europe (November 6, 2006; subscription required).
15. Reuters, "NATO Urges EU to Do More in Afghanistan," November 2, 2006, at today.reuters.com/news/articlenews.aspx?type=worldNews&storyid=2006-11-02T190845Z_01_L0278934_RTRUKOC_0_US-AFGHAN-NATO.xml (November 11, 2006).
16. Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, "Global NATO: Overdue or Overstretch?" speech at Security and Defense Agenda Conference, Brussels, November 6, 2006, at www.nato.int/docu/speech/2006/s061106a.htm (November 24, 2006).
17. Umit Enginsoy, "NATO Urges Nations to Lift Caveats on Forces in Afghanistan," *Defense News*, October 24, 2006, at www.defensenews.com/story.php?F=2308519&C=europe (October 24, 2006).
18. See Jim Michaels, "Nations Limit Use of NATO Forces," *USA Today*, September 28, 2006, at www.usatoday.com/news/world/2006-09-28-afghanistan-nato-caveats_x.htm (November 10, 2006).

how they can be used, creating headaches for combat commanders and hurting the coalition's ability to fight a resurgent Taliban."¹⁹ Over time, ISAF commanders have persuaded some NATO members to lift or modify their caveats. For example, Poland dropped deployment restrictions on its 1,050 troops.²⁰ More countries should be persuaded to do likewise to improve the ISAF's operational effectiveness.

NATO Enlargement and the Lugar Bill

At the Riga summit, President George W. Bush was expected to announce U.S. support for Japan, Australia, and South Korea to increase their cooperation with NATO through a global partnership.²¹ NATO enlargement is a hot topic for many people, including Members of Congress. On September 29, Senator Richard Lugar (R-IN) introduced the NATO Freedom Consolidation Act of 2006 (S. 4014),²² which reaffirms U.S. commitment to NATO enlargement, particularly with regard to Albania, Croatia, Georgia, and Macedonia.

In his introductory remarks, Senator Lugar argued that if NATO is to remain relevant to the security and defense interests it purports to represent, "it must continue to evolve and that evolution must include enlargement."²³ He noted that three countries—Albania, Croatia, and Macedonia—had made significant progress toward needed political and economic reforms since having been granted Membership Action Plans (MAPs) in 2002.²⁴

He further noted that while Georgia has not been granted a MAP, it is geostrategically important and warrants NATO consideration because of its proximity to Russia and the fact that it is home to a large portion of the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan pipeline. Moreover, despite persistent pressure from Russian-backed republics, it has persevered in its plan to forge a democracy.²⁵

Additionally, Albania, Croatia, and Macedonia have all contributed troops to the Afghanistan ISAF, although none has achieved full NATO membership. It seems likely that increased NATO membership would lead to an increased troop presence in Afghanistan, especially among young members determined to prove their allegiance to NATO's goals.

The Riga Summit: A Chance to Bolster ISAF and Enhance NATO

The NATO summit in Riga, Latvia, on November 28–29 was an ideal opportunity for NATO members to "reconfirm the continuing importance of NATO as the key transatlantic forum to ensure our collective security."²⁶ The agenda for the summit included:

- The challenging security situation in Afghanistan,
- The need for more appropriate funding arrangements for overseas missions,
- The shortfalls and deficiencies in Alliance operational capabilities,
- The inadequate levels of defense expenditures,

19. *Ibid.*

20. Ed Johnson, "Poland Will Speed Up Troop Deployment in Afghanistan, NATO Says," *Bloomberg.com*, September 27, 2006, at www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601085&sid=accM011Zv7P4&refer=europe (October 6, 2006).

21. Tom Raum, "Bush Agenda: Stronger NATO," *The Mercury News* (San Jose, Cal.), November 22, 2006, at www.mercurynews.com/mld/mercurynews/news/world/16073579.htm (November 22, 2006).

22. Senators Bill Frist (R-TN), Joseph R. Biden (D-DE), Gordon Smith (R-OR), and John McCain (R-AZ) co-sponsored S. 4014.

23. Richard Lugar, in "S. 4014," *Congressional Record*, September 29, 2006, p. S10692.

24. A Membership Action Plan is a step toward NATO membership. It details reforms that the country needs to undertake to prepare for NATO membership.

25. Lugar, in "S. 4014," p. S10692.

26. North Atlantic Treaty Organisation Parliamentary Assembly, Standing Committee, "Declaration on NATO's Riga Summit," October 3, 2006, Section 1.1, at www.nato-pa.int/Default.asp?SHORTCUT=1007 (November 22, 2006).

- The creation of new forms of association for contributing non-partner countries,
- The further evolution of Alliance partnerships, and
- The future membership of the Alliance.²⁷

This agenda indicates that many NATO members have the same problems that have plagued the ISAF:

Interoperability. “Interoperability will...depend on the development and integration of military information networks to share and exploit relevant information in real time. The United States and its Allies must therefore develop technology transfer policies to facilitate the effective sharing of relevant technical information.”²⁸

Troop Capabilities. “Forces deployed for NATO missions must have the flexibility to perform the range of operations demanded by a particular mission. All efforts should therefore be made to reduce the use of national caveats which all too often restrict national contingents from participating in operations to their full capability.”²⁹

Proportional Funding. “A mechanism for the common funding of operations should be accompanied by commitments by individual members to devote sufficient resources to defence to meet the global challenges to our security. NATO members should at the very least commit themselves to making no further cuts in their national defence expenditures.”³⁰

NATO Enlargement. “Membership of the Alliance must remain open to those aspirants who demonstrate their adherence to the common values of the Alliance and are assessed by member countries as being ready for membership.... Riga Summit Alliance leaders should provide clear guidance to Albania, Croatia, and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia as to when they can expect invitations to join the Alliance.” The agenda also expresses the desire to encourage Georgia’s mem-

bership and the need to “formulate a strategic vision on the long-term future of enlargement.”³¹

What Should Be Done

The Riga summit gave NATO a vital opportunity to discuss pressing concerns regarding NATO operations in Afghanistan and wider issues about NATO’s future. Specifically, NATO members should now:

- **Boost troop commitments for Afghanistan.** Taliban forces are likely to present a greater threat to the Afghan government next year, in part because of Pakistan’s recent agreement with Pushtun tribal leaders along the Afghanistan–Pakistan border, which will make it easier for Taliban forces to launch cross-border attacks. In particular, countries seeking NATO membership should be pressed to increase their troop commitments in Afghanistan to demonstrate their value as allies.
- **Reduce the number and restrictive nature of national caveats on ISAF units.** More countries should be pressed to follow Poland’s example and lift restrictions that hamper the effectiveness and flexibility of ISAF operations.
- **Increase pressure on NATO members that are spending less than 2 percent of GDP on defense.**
- **Undertake another round of enlargement.** NATO should seriously consider expanding to include Albania, Croatia, Georgia, and Macedonia.

Conclusion

NATO’s challenges have changed, and NATO needs to evolve to meet them. NATO’s International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan presents an opportunity to observe both the successes and shortcomings of voluntary international military operations. To accomplish both its mission in Afghanistan and its overall mission, NATO should develop interoperable communica-

27. *Ibid.*, Section 1.3.

28. *Ibid.*, Section 4.2.

29. *Ibid.*, Section 4.3.

30. *Ibid.*, Section 5.2.

31. *Ibid.*, Sections 14.1–14.4.

tions systems, address troop levels and capabilities, address proportional funding, and seriously consider another round of enlargement to include Alliance-friendly members.

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sion of the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies, at The Heritage Foundation. The author would like to thank Davis Institute Production and Operations Coordinator Marla Graves and Heritage intern Paul Detrick for their assistance with the research for this paper.