AFGHANISTAN'S HARD SUMMER

43

THE IMPACT ON EUROPEAN TROOP CONTRIBUTING NATIONS

Toby Archer (editor)

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ULKOPOLIITTINEN INSTITUUTTI
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- The increase in fighting in the summer of 2009 has led to renewed debate in many of the countries contributing troops to the international mission in Afghanistan.
- In the UK the heavy loss of life amongst British soldiers has been central to the discussion on Britain's continued contribution.
- In Germany the debate has more focused on the increasingly offensive actions that the Bundeswehr is undertaking.
- France's contribution to the Afghanistan mission is less politically controversial than in other European countries because of the president's power over foreign and security policy.
- For many years Italy's Afghanistan contribution was less politically sensitive compared to the Italian presence in Iraq, but this is changing with the increase in violence in Afghanistan.
- In Sweden the annual parliamentary approval process and the increased expeditionary focus of the armed forces have lead to a strong consensus on the need to participate in Afghanistan.
- The debate in Finland is sporadic and reactive as there is not an annual parliamentary debate as is the case in Sweden and Germany. Nevertheless Finland's contribution is centrally linked to the decision made in those countries.

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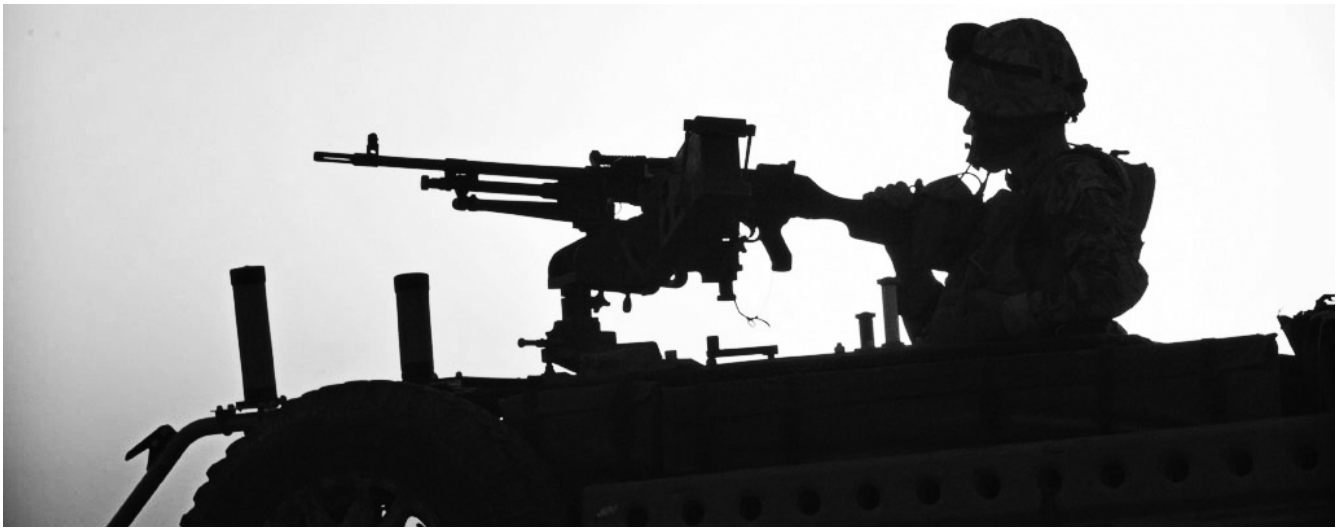

The summer of 2009 has been without a doubt a bad one for ISAF, the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. The increase in fighting this summer has led to debates in most of the troop contributing nations as to how they perceive Afghanistan's future and their role in it. A complex insurgency has spread across the country as different groups have come together under the banner of the Taliban fighting both the international troops and the Afghan government. In the south and the east of Afghanistan, where guerilla warfare has been ongoing for at least three years, the fighting has intensified and an increase in the technical abilities and tactical skill of the Taliban insurgents has taken a heavy toll on coalition soldiers. In the north and west of Afghanistan—previously considered safer areas—the security situation has worsened considerably and troops who had been able to focus predominantly on reconstruction work are increasingly finding themselves soldiering in far more traditional ways. The Afghanistan general elections of 20 August can be considered a very limited success at best, not only because of the extensive and seemingly well based accusations of vote rigging, but also because in many parts of the country although the ISAF forces could secure the voting sites themselves, they could not provide sufficient security to stop Taliban intimidation from dissuading many Afghans from going to the polls in the first place. As the fighting has increased across the country, it is the Afghan civilians who are paying highest price.

In the United States, the conflict in Afghanistan is rapidly becoming seen as "Obama's war". Earlier this year President Obama replaced Gen. David D. McKiernan as the commander of US and NATO forces in Afghanistan with Gen. Stanley A. McChrystal, believing that McChrystal would bring a bolder and more aggressive strategy to the war. This was followed by the announcement of another 21,000 US soldiers being committed to the theatre, bringing US forces in Afghanistan to over 60,000. There are increasing signs from opinion polling that the American public is turning against the war and what policies should be pursued in Afghanistan is the subject of serious debate in the US. One matter not up for debate though, is whether the United States is at war in Afghanistan—it clearly is—but this understanding has not been shared by all the other troop contributing nations to the ISAF mission.

A group of researchers at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs, plus one outside colleague, decided this was an opportune moment to consider the discussions taking place on Afghanistan across Europe. In all but one case, we have written about our countries of origin, but this has produced an interesting sample of troop-contributing countries. Our descriptions of the political debates taking place back in Europe demonstrate how the different political structures and historical experiences condition how the countries involved perceive their mission in Afghanistan. But just as important are the difference in both size, structure, position and policy priorities of the missions deployed.

The differences amongst the countries considered here range in terms of the numbers of soldiers provided: from large to relatively small, and in terms of where in Afghanistan those troops have

been deployed. The sample also includes both NATO members and non-NATO states. The countries considered here also have had very different experiences in Afghanistan: from Finland that has suffered only one fatality during its operations, to the UK that has lost over 200 of its servicemen. Indeed for the authors of the Italian and British chapters, we have both seen the death tolls of our respective countries' servicemen climb considerably in only the few weeks it has taken to prepare this paper. At the same time the German forces have become embroiled in their most difficult incident of their deployment.

We offer no deeper analysis than sketching out the different national situations and debates, but hope they may serve to help policymakers from any of the ISAF contributing nations to better understand the political dynamics affecting their fellow coalition members and to better contemplate their own country's involvement in Afghanistan. After this summer of violence and loss, such consideration is clearly timely.

Great Britain

Toby Archer

Great Britain is the second largest contributor of forces to Afghanistan after the United States. Although numbers fluctuate, the British military have around 9,000 personnel involved in Afghanistan representing the Army, Royal Air Force, Royal Navy and Royal Marines. The majority of British soldiers are in Helmand Province where they have been involved in heavy fighting with the Taliban for the last three years. Additionally the RAF, Army Air Corps and Navy aircraft are in heavy use.

British involvement in Afghanistan dates to the start of the conflict; the Royal Marines and special forces were fighting the Taliban and al-Qaeda only weeks after the attacks of September 11 2001. When ISAF was set up under UN mandate in December 2001, the UK took command for the first six month period in 2002 contributing 2,100 troops. Troop numbers dropped off when Turkey took over the rotating command for the second half of 2002 and the British contribution was mainly involved in training the nascent Afghan National Army. Numbers went up again in 2003 when the UK formed the core of two of the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT) in northern Afghanistan. At the time the PRTs were part of the coalition efforts as opposed to ISAF which had not yet expanded beyond controlling Kabul. Once NATO took command of ISAF in late 2003, it began growing and the British PRTs were transferred to NATO command. As NATO's role became larger the UK moved further assets to Afghanistan, including providing one of the Quick Reaction Forces (quickly deployable fighting troops to reinforce other ISAF forces that came under attack) and air power in the form of Harrier attack aircraft.

For the British military, the 2006 "Phase Three" of ISAF's expansion—into southern and eastern Afghanistan—proved a step change in its involvement. That summer over 3,000 British troops were sent to Helmand as part of Regional Command South (RC-S) where they have been fighting since. By the end of the summer the British Army was engaged in what Lieutenant General David Richards, commander of NATO forces in Afghanistan at the time, called "the worst fighting since Korea". Considering Britain's war fighting record of Iraq, the Gulf and the Falklands War amongst many others since Korea, this shook up the domestic discussion. Most notably the number of casualties climbed significantly. Between 2001 and 2005, only five British servicemen had died in Afghanistan with the majority of those being accidents or suicide victims. But in 2006, 39 servicemen lost their lives; this figure rose to 42 in 2007, 88 in 2008, and as of the time of writing in late-September the death toll has already reached 81 in 2009. In July of this year the British military reached the sad milestone of having lost more soldiers fighting in Afghanistan than they did fighting in Iraq. The central problem was that although the British military could always best the Taliban in Helmand in open engagements, they never had the numbers to hold the areas afterwards. This necessitated numerous sweeps up and down the Helmand river valley that became known as "mowing the lawn". Each offensive claimed more lives.

Until the summer of 2006 British involvement in Afghanistan was not politically controversial, particularly in contrast to the Blair government's 2003 decision to join the US in attacking Iraq. The original commitments were made in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 with Britain standing 'shoulder to shoulder' with the US—still seen by many as the country's closest and most important ally.

The operation also had the approval of the United Nations and therefore was uncontroversial from a legal perspective. Over the next four years this support continued as the UK was involved in, at best, classic peacekeeping and, at worst, 'only' crisis management. It was operating in conjunction with long time allies both in NATO and non-NATO friends such as Australia. The operations were approved by UN mandate and could appeal to all political tastes, whether it was the emancipation of Afghan women for the liberal-left or the suppression of poppy production for heroin for the more conservative right.

The upsurge in fighting in 2006 began to fracture this political equilibrium. The government came under increasing pressure for the failure to properly equip and support the troops who were now clearly at war. This criticism has focused particularly on the lack of mine and IED (improvised explosive device) resistant vehicles and insufficient helicopters necessitating dangerous ground journeys. The treatment of injured British soldiers back in the UK has also become contentious. Much of this criticism was valid and the Ministry of Defence has rushed through various procurement projects giving the military better equipment than they had previously. At the same time the criticism also has a party political dimension to it, even though it is not apparent that the Conservative opposition would have a radically different policy had they been in power. Recently, failings in Afghanistan have played into a wider sense of malaise around Gordon Brown's government and the sense that Labour will loose the general election in 2010.

A second dimension was tensions developing within the alliance. The UK felt it, along with a limited numbers of other allies—notably Canada, the Netherlands, Australia and Denmark—were being left to fight and die for NATO by the other big alliance members. Particular ire was aimed at Germany and France and the word "cowardice" crept into the public debate. Even between the UK and the US hard words were exchanged. Some in Britain thought that the Americans were too willing to use airpower and not concerned enough about alienating the local population by killing civilians. The US military was critical of the British Army arranging a truce with the Taliban in the winter of 2006–7. US forces were involved in the retaking of Musa Qala a year later after the failure of this arrangement. These problems increased the sense in Britain that there was no clear goal in Afghanistan and no unified international effort.

Finally there was, until recently, no one clear reason provided by the government as to why Britain is fighting in Afghanistan. Originally it was to destroy al-Qaeda, but since the creation of democratic institutions, alliance solidarity, opium suppression, the emancipation of women, the stability of South Asia and even the morale of the British army have all been suggested as reasons for participation. The government has now settled firmly on the message that fighting there prevents terrorism on the streets of the UK, but opinion polls suggest that the public is far from convinced by this argument.

Public support remains high for the troops but critical of the politicians who deployed them. This

year has witnessed an unprecedented phenomenon of crowds gathering in the town of Wootton Bassett to pay their respects as the repatriated coffins from Afghanistan are driven through the town after leaving the nearby RAF airbase. What began with a few locals standing silently along their high street has become the focus of national grief and support for British armed forces and their families. The British people may not be happy with the situation in Helmand, but it is far from clear that they are ready to be beaten there either.

Germany
Timo Behr

As the third largest troop contributor to ISAF and lead nation for Regional Command North (RC-N), Germany plays a key role within the international alliance. It currently has 4,200 troops that are deployed in Kabul and throughout Afghanistan's northern sector, where Germany leads Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in Kunduz and Feyzabad and a Provincial Advisory Team (PAT) in Taloqan. Faced with increasing pressure from a strengthening Taliban insurgency in what was for long one of Afghanistan's most peaceful sectors, Germany's deployment has undergone a dramatic transformation. Forced into taking a more offensive role, Germany is confronting growing criticism at home and abroad while its troops struggle to come to terms with their new mission.

Germany's Afghanistan deployment goes back to the terrorist attacks of 9/11, when the government of Gerhard Schröder promised "unconditional solidarity" to the United States in its war on terror. In late 2001, the German Bundestag approved the participation of the Bundeswehr in the US-led Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and ISAF in Kabul. Germany also hosted the first UN conference on Afghanistan the same year and ever since has underlined its role as guardian of the democratization process. Germany's military deployment began in late 2001, with the dispatch of 100 German Special Forces (KSK) to participate in OEF missions in the south under US command, followed by the deployment of German peacekeepers to participate in ISAF's mission in Kabul.

The following years saw a steady expansion of both numbers and roles of German forces in Afghanistan. Germany's growing financial and military commitment was partly driven by developments on the ground—necessitating ever more troops—and partly by the desire to rebuild relations with the US following the fallout over the Iraq War. When ISAF expanded its role to the provinces, Germany took over PRTs in Kunduz and Feyzabad in 2004 and became the lead nation for RC-N in 2006. As part of its overall command of the northern sector, Germany coordinates the 5,600 allied troops and five PRTs in the region and runs the airports and supply bases in Mazar-e-Sharif and Termez, Uzbekistan.

Germany's approach within its own PRTs in Kunduz and Feyzabad, is based on the idea of "networked security" that goes back to the government's 2006 White Book on security policy. By purposefully trying to distinguish itself from the more 'militaristic'

approach taken by the US and the UK in Afghanistan's south, Germany's "networked security" seeks to emphasize reconstruction tasks and civil–military cooperation. The most visible manifestation is that Germany's PRTs are led by a joint diplomatic and a military leadership and include experts from different German ministries and agencies responsible for development and economic cooperation. Within ISAF, Germany has sought to emphasize the importance of economic reconstruction and military and police training and has tended to be critical of the US for its "disproportionate use of force."

The Bundeswehr, for its part, has regularly been criticized for its reluctance to take on a more active military role and for allowing the security situation in the once peaceful northern sector to deteriorate. Allied criticism has regularly focused on two specific points: Germany's refusal to deploy its troops to the unstable south and Germany's extensive "national caveats." These caveats are based on the German understanding of the Bundeswehr deployment as a "stabilization mission" and have strictly limited the ability of German troops to use force or pursue their enemy. Pressure to revise or drop some of these caveats has grown, as the number of German casualties increased to 38 by September 2009 (25 of which as a result of enemy activity).

A combination of allied pressure, the deteriorating security situation in the north and increase in attacks on German troops has resulted in the Bundeswehr taking an increasingly offensive role. In late 2007 and early 2008, German troops participated in offensive military operations (Operation Harekat Yolo I/II; Operation Karez) together with Norwegian and Afghan forces that included deployments to the western sector. Since mid-2008, Germany also provides ISAF's Quick Reaction Force (QRF) in the north—a 200 strong combat unit with the explicit task of engaging the Taliban. Finally, in the summer of 2009, Germany conducted a large joint military offensive with Afghan forces in Chahar Dara province near Kunduz (Operation Eagle), dropping some of its long-standing national caveats and revising its rules of engagement.

In the latest development, Germany has been fiercely criticized by some amongst it allies for ordering the bombing of two fuel tankers that were captured by the Taliban near Kunduz. In a surprising change of roles Germany has been forced to defend the attack—which is feared to have led to a large number of civilian casualties—against accusations from its ISAF partners. The episode further demonstrates the growing problems for Germany's Bundeswehr as it tries to come to grips with its unfamiliar role as a combat force.

At home, the German deployment has been complicated by a steady decline of public support for the mission. One reason for this has been the reluctance of Germany's political class to communicate the situation on the ground to its war-wary public. The recent tanker bombing changed this situation, forcing the government to make a stand and to reconsider its Afghanistan strategy. A leaked report from the Foreign Ministry now calls for the development of a result-oriented road map to start preparing the ground for an

eventual German withdrawal sometime after 2013. Greater openness seems to have paid off domestically, leading to a 12% jump in public support for the mission. In the meantime, a renewal of the Afghanistan mandate, due in December, is likely to receive broad cross-party support and will probably lead to a further increase in troop numbers.

The problems for the Bundeswehr in adapting to its new role in Afghanistan are complex and cannot be understood without placing the deployment within the context of Germany's changing international role since the end of the Cold War. The transition of the Bundeswehr from a peacekeeping force into a crisis response and combat force is putting an enormous strain on Germany and its military establishment—materially, organizationally and mentally. The deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan has forced the Bundeswehr to speed-up this transition process and to adopt an unfamiliar mode of behaviour. In this situation, more friction might be unavoidable.

France

Matthieu Chillaud

Within NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), France is one of the larger contributors. Although figures change regularly, the country has approximately 3,000 soldiers in Afghanistan and will soon be sending a further 150 gendarmes (paramilitary police) who will be training Afghan security forces.

Beside the supporting of the creation of the Afghan National Army—with training and operational assistance to units—France has taken command of the region around Kabul (Regional Command-Capital, RC-C), one of the ISAF's five regional commands. RC-C comprises three tactical groups: French, Turkish, and Italian. The Italian battalion is assigned to the western zone, the Turkish battalion to the southern area, and the French battalion is assigned to the northern sector. Command of RC-C rotates between these three countries, with France currently in its second period as the lead nation. A French general, Michel Stollsteiner, took over the command from an Italian, Gen. Frederico Bonato, in August 2008; France had previously led the command between April 2006 and August 2007.

The RC-C French contingent, made up of about 1,400 men, encompasses the RC-C staff, commanded by Gen. Stollsteiner, that coordinates the French, Turkish and Italian contingents' actions. The French battalion (BATFRA) is made up of about 800 military personnel and since late August 2008 it has been supervising the progressive transfer of security responsibilities to Afghan forces. In Kapisa, in the northeast of Kabul, the country has a 600 man combined arms task force that fulfils joint protection missions together with the Afghan National Army (ANA). A further 100 military personnel man the support and command battalion in Kabul, in charge of providing support to the joint-service battlegroup, GTIA (currently these soldiers are from the 8th Airborne Marine Infantry Battalion). France also contributes armoured vehicles from the 1st Foreign Legion Armoured Recce Regiment (1st REC), an

Engineer component from the 17th Airborne Engineer Battalion (17th RGP) and a fire-support component from the 35th Airborne Artillery Regiment (35th RAP). As regards air missions, since October 2001, France has been providing air support to at first operation Enduring Freedom, and now to ISAF. This includes support of ground troops, military intelligence, transport and refuelling. It is provided on a permanent basis from Kandahar (Afghanistan), Dushanbe (Tajikistan) and Manas (Kyrgyzstan). It has been reinforced four times by the carrier air group from the Charles-de-Gaulle carrier sailing in the northern Indian Ocean. Six combat aircraft, which were operating from Dushanbe in Tajikistan, were redeployed to the NATO Kandahar base in Afghanistan in September and October 2007. 170 French troops are presently deployed in Kandahar in support of them.

The French involvement—its durability as well as its relatively small scale—cannot be understood if it is not seen in context: firstly, the French 'return' to the NATO military structures, and secondly the importance of the number of French soldiers overseas elsewhere (35,000 troops chiefly in Lebanon, Cote d'Ivoire, Chad and in the Balkans). France also ranks fourth in NATO amongst contributors to the Alliance's operations in terms of manpower, providing 5,000 troops to NATO operations worldwide.

Opinion polls show that the French public are significantly against the French involvement in Afghanistan, and this sentiment has increased whenever there has been news of French soldiers being killed or injured. So far 35 French soldiers have died in Afghanistan, but by far the worse single incident was an ambush on August 19 2008. Ten French soldiers were killed and a further 21 wounded in one ambush, one the heaviest tolls extracted from NATO troops in a single attack. The loss of life is thought to be the heaviest suffered by the French military since the French deployment in Lebanon in the 1980s (100 died in Lebanon, 58 of them in the Beirut bombings of 23 October 1983).

Surprisingly, a significant number of French generals—in a context where a recent defence White Paper argues for a dramatic shrinkage of the size of the army—have called for a withdrawal of the French soldiers. Not since the end of the war in Algeria, where the army was subordinated to strict political control, have high ranked officers shown such wariness.

The relative absence of domestic debate over the French policy in Afghanistan results from the French constitutional model. Since the establishment of the 5th Republic in 1958 (and especially since the 1962 amendment whereby the head of state was to be elected by direct universal suffrage conferring on him greater legitimacy than the parliament) the French president has made foreign affairs and defense issues his *domaine réservé* and French involvement in Afghanistan does not break with this unspoken rule. Hence there is no real public discussion, at least comparable to the debates taking place in other states contributing forces to ISAF. The Parliament has no real powers over this field (during the 5th Republic only one motion of censure succeeded in overthrowing the government). From time to time

the opposition has tried to initiate a public debate but with little impact. These attempts at debate seem more connected to party politics at home and overall there is an unspoken consensus between the major parties about the necessity of maintaining the French presence in Afghanistan.

It is interesting to note that in 2007, between the two rounds of the presidential election, the then candidate-Nicolas Sarkozy publicly pondered the relevance of the French military presence in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, as soon as he became president, he did not question it. In particular, the reintegration of France into the NATO military structures would have been unthinkable if the country had decided to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan. France's full return to NATO has been important to Sarkozy and activism in Afghanistan has been important to this.

Unlike other comparable democracies, France is definitely less constrained by the 'coffin factor'. Neither the public, the political opposition, nor the military establishment, have much influence on the official position of the executive. In that sense, no policy change should be expected before the next presidential election in 2012.

Italy

Barbara Zanchetta

The Italian government currently contributes about 3,000 troops to ISAF, making Italy one of the main European contributors. The Italian presence is divided between the area of Kabul (with about 600 soldiers) and the western province of Herat (where the majority of the troops are located). In the area of Kabul, the Italian contingent operates under the Regional Command Capital (RC-C), currently headed by France. In western Afghanistan, Italy heads the Regional Command West (RC-W) and commands operations in the area that extends from Herat to the province of Farah. The RC-W includes four Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT): in Herat (also led by Italy), Farah (USA), Qala-e-Naw (Spain) and Chaghcharan (Lithuania).

Italy has contributed to ISAF since its early phases. Different governments have underscored the importance of Italy's role in the international fight against terrorism and in supporting the process of reconstruction in Afghanistan, considered a safe-haven for the terrorists. However, from the beginning, Italy's participation was dependent on a two-pillared legal framework. First, a UN Security Council resolution (1386 of 20 December 2001) that authorized the deployment of a multinational force to operate under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. Second, the "Military Technical Agreement" signed in January 2002 between the commander of ISAF I (UK General John McColl) and the Afghan authorities.

On this basis, Italy granted its support to the successive developments of ISAF—from the extension of the mandate to areas outside of Kabul in 2003, to the creation and expansion of the Provincial Reconstruction Teams throughout the country. From August 2005 to May 2006, Italy commanded ISAF VIII (the command rotated among NATO countries). From December 2007 to August 2008, it headed RC-C. In mid-2006, following NATO's decision to expand ISAF to western Afghanistan (the second phase of expansion outside of Kabul, the first being to the northern areas of the country), the Italian troops moved to lead the PRT of Herat and to assume control of RC-W, where they remain today.

Since 2004 Italy has suffered 21 casualties, mainly as a consequence of insurgent attacks. The casualties are still less than those suffered in Iraq (31 military, 7 civilians). In Italy's collective memory, the involvement in Iraq remains linked to the 2003 attack against the base in Nasiriyah which killed 19 Italians. This tragedy deeply shook Italian public opinion and triggered a fierce political debate on the nature and scope of Italy's participation in international missions.

Compared to Iraq, the domestic debate regarding Italy's involvement in Afghanistan has been less intense for two reasons. First, the Italian government has clearly linked the mission in Afghanistan to the global fight against terrorism, therefore sharing President Obama's notion of a "war of necessity". Secondly, to date there has not been a single dramatic event that has deeply stirred Italian public opinion. Even the national mourning following the most recent attack in Kabul on 17 September 2009 that killed 6 Italian soldiers does not compare with the shock caused by the Nasiriyah attack.

Despite a less controversial political climate, the death of an Italian Paratrooper in July 2009 had sparked a call for withdrawal from members of the Lega Nord (a party which supports the current Berlusconi government). However, Minister of Defense Ignazio La Russa immediately stated that the members of the Lega had simply expressed their "personal opinions" and that these did not signal a diminished determination on the part of the Italian government to honour its commitments. In general, the government has repeatedly conveyed a clear-cut support for the military presence in Afghanistan, a support echoed by the main opposition parties.

While Italy's commitment to ISAF is not seriously questioned, the deeper and more open debate revolves around the overall objectives and purposes of the NATO-led mission. On the one hand, it is evident that the historic invocation of NATO's article V in the aftermath of 9/11 effectively meant an acknowledgement that 'we' were at war. This activated the collective defense mechanism of the alliance, a mechanism that, when inserted within the UN framework, received general international legitimacy. On the other hand, the recent escalation of fighting in areas neighbouring those under Italian responsibility has forced the Italian troops into more offensive operations. This has produced a need to clarify the role of the Italian contingent within the context of an international mission still burdened with ambiguity over its ultimate aims.

After the 17 September attack, Minister La Russa denounced the Taliban as "cowardly aggressors" and firmly stated that they will "not stop us." Along the same line, Interior Minister Roberto Maroni rejected suggestions of withdrawal because they would signify a "surrender to the logic of terror." Earlier this year, Minister of Foreign Affairs Franco Frattini had publicly defended the ISAF mission with strong rhetoric: "we are in Afghanistan to defend our national security and that of the West," our only "way out is peace." At the same time, however, he stressed that the mission is not straightforward and that it cannot involve military means alone. For this reason the stabilization strategy adopted by Italy and its allies "is a multifaceted and highly detailed one." Months later Frattini acknowledged that much still needs to be done in order to "win the trust of the Afghans"—the "general vision of the mission much change," emphasis on security needs to be coupled with greater attention "towards those who suffer, towards civilian reconstruction."

With American troops pouring into Afghanistan, and with the prospect of a further increase in US troop deployment in the near future, it is difficult to maintain the perception of a "multifaceted and highly detailed" strategy for Afghanistan. If the Italian government really believes in a broader, longer term and more complex strategy that emphasizes reconstruction, development and a regional cooperative framework, then it should forcefully raise its voice within the alliance. Although Italy's relative weight within NATO remains limited, the position expressed by Frattini seems to offer a realistic chance for progress in the current Afghan impasse.

Sweden
Charly Salonius-Pasternak

Sweden has contributed to the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan since 2002. The original participation decision was made based on a broad consensus between the government and opposition parties. This consensus has been maintained for the past eight years. Recently, as in many other contributing nations, discussion has increased on the desirability, duration and type of contribution.

Sweden's current military contribution is at more than four hundred soldiers (437 in mid September), with an increase to nearly five hundred agreed to by the end of 2009. Since the spring of 2006, these soldiers have been primarily located in northern Afghanistan around Mazar-e-Sharif, leading one of five PRTs (provincial reconstruction team) of Regional Command – North (RC-N). Staff officers and a National Intelligence Cell are also located in Kabul, with four additional soldiers in the United Arab Emirates as part of the National Support Element.

Sweden's contribution has changed in size, scope and task during the past eight years. Initially Sweden contributed an intelligence-reconnaissance unit. This soon evolved into a CIMIC (Civil Military Cooperation) unit. Sweden wound down their CIMIC work in the spring of 2004, and contributed to the British PRT in Mazar-e-Sharif. It took over responsibility for the PRT in March 2006. All of these changes have been explicitly approved by the responsible Parliamentary committees (and full Parliament), which has to re-approve the mission every year. A maximum of 855 soldier could be sent to Afghanistan, but an increase from the planned end-of-2009 figure of 500 to that maximum number would require additional action by the government. The relatively high contribution is a result of the Swedish military having shifted its primary focus from cold war era territorial defense capabilities to expeditionary crisis management capabilities. The force is now expected to participate in international operations in far greater numbers than ever before.

To date two Swedish soldiers have died, both in a bomb attack in November 2005. Despite this fortunately low toll, there is still much concern over the risks that the Swedish troops face. It is notable that individual attacks on Swedish forces are nowadays usually reported in the media and a lack of injuries noted. This could be compared to the press coverage of the ISAF forces fighting in the south, where the fighting has been intense enough that only deaths of service personnel is likely to merit specific reports in the press of their respective countries.

The information necessary to assess the risks that the Swedish forces are confronted by has become a point of political debate in Sweden. The members of the Swedish Parliament's defence committee publicly criticized the Swedish Defence Forces in

2006 for not having informed them of a number of incidents where Swedish troops came under attack. The Defence Forces felt there was a danger of an excessive focus on individual incidents giving the wrong impression about the overall situation in Afghanistan. Furthermore the military felt that it was the government's responsibility to inform parliament rather than that of the military. However some members of the Defence Committee felt information about all attacks on Swedish personnel were relevant when deciding on future participation and that it was the role of the most knowledgeable institution—the Defence Forces themselves—to provide that information.

In 2009 the increase in violence throughout Afghanistan has increased the debate on the mission within Sweden. Paralleling the debates elsewhere in Europe, one important topic of discussion has been whether troops had the right type of equipment, and if so, whether there was enough of it. The severely delayed procurement and delivery of helicopters that are capable of emergency medical evacuations (medevac) has also caused consternation within Parliament. Increasing violence and post-election questions about the legitimacy of the Karzai government have also begun to expose a rift within the opposition Social Democrat Party, with some arguing for a withdrawal of Swedish soldiers and others for increasing Sweden's overall contribution. If 2010's elections usher in a left leaning coalition, the nearly decade long broader consensus on the necessity of participating in the ISAF operation may be weakened. This is of importance, because unlike in Finland, Sweden's participation is conditioned on an annual 'yes' from Parliament with the next vote coming in early November of this year. A change in governing coalitions could also result in stronger demands to balance Sweden's contributions to Afghanistan, which currently see more than twice as much money being used for military efforts as for development aid.

Finland

Valtteri Vuorisalo

Finland's troop contribution to the ISAF operation (International Security Assistance Force) has grown steadily. Initially in 2002 Finland decided to send 50 troops but, after the operation became NATO led and the ISAF's mandate was increased to include all of Afghanistan, the troop contribution has grown to the current 110. For the August elections, this number was temporarily increased by another 100. Finland sees participating in the operation both as an important part of its foreign and security policy and as a policy that aims at providing peace, security, human rights and development in this demanding environment.

Finland's contribution focuses on PRT (Provincial Reconstruction Team) activities in northern Afghanistan, operating under PRT Mazar-e-Sharif that is led by Sweden. PRT Mazar-e-Sharif is one of five PRTs operating under ISAF Regional Command North (RC-N), led by Germany. The implementing and operating procedure of the PRT activities is based on an integrated approach between the civilian and military actors in the area. A central goal is therefore to promote the creation of a safe and secure environment and society in Afghanistan. In addition to PRT activities, Finland also contributes staff officers and OMTL (Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team) personnel that are involved in training the Afghan National Army.

The main activity of Finnish troops has been reconstruction and civil-military cooperation. This is viewed as the correct *modus operandi* for modern Finnish peace-keeping. Finland still holds to the idea set out in 1961 by the longtime cold war president, Urho Kekkonen, that Finland is a doctor, not a judge, in international issues. Therefore all news coming out of Afghanistan that shifts the focus away from "peaceful" peace-keepers, successful reconstruction and good relations with the locals has the potential to spark debate amongst Finns.

There have been many such examples during the current operations in Afghanistan—more than in any other recent mission. These have included an incident of corruption where two Finnish peace-keepers were convicted of taking bribes during 2004–2006. On the other hand, the one death suffered by the Finnish contingent in 2007 was not viewed through the same framework; it was portrayed more as an unnecessary tragedy. As a consequence, Finnish troops moved their focus of operations away from Maimana where the bombing incident occurred, and concentrated on Mazar-e-Sharif.

This year has been the most active for public discussion regarding the Finnish presence in Afghanistan. As a case of reconstruction gone wrong, the Finnish public learned that the Ministry for Foreign Affairs had funded a women's prison that had been used as a brothel. It was a credit to the Ministry, and helpful from a public relations perspective, that they themselves revealed the prostitution abuse during their own project evaluation. However, as consequence, Finland simply withdrew from all prison reconstruction projects for the time being.

The public was also prepared for the August election in Afghanistan. Many officials declared that radical groupings might use violent methods to advance their goals and disrupt the elections. Finland increased its troops by almost 100 percent in order to help secure the elections. The debate arguing for the increase also served as a warning to the public that violence faced by the Finnish soldiers might increase.

And increase it did. This has led to the biggest and most heated debate of the summer of 2009; as to whether Finland is at war in Afghanistan or not. Sparked by a comment in an opinion piece in the leading national daily, the political leadership was quick to denounce such a suggestion, emphasising the traditional reconstruction focus of Finnish peace-keeping. The only politicians to voice different views were the Minister of Foreign Trade and Development Paavo Väyrynen who stated that Finnish troops should be withdrawn during the next electoral period and an opposition party leader, Paavo Arhinmäki of the Left Alliance, who stated that "it would be odd to claim Finland is not at war". These two statements were the only deviations from what otherwise was a uniform consensus amongst top political leadership both in and outside of government.

The public, however, have been more sceptical of their leadership than has usually been the case in the past. Finnish troops have been active participants in gun battles and are regularly coming under fire, to an extent not seen before in the long history of Finnish peacekeeping. For many, this break from the traditional "peaceful" habitus of the Finnish peace-keeper was clear evidence that, if not at war, there has been at least a paradigm shift in the nature of Finnish involvement in crisis management operations. Blogs and editorials have been filled with various opinions and interpretations of this.

Currently, the political environment is calm, as if waiting for the next gust of wind to blow. If fighting suddenly increases and Finland suffers further deaths, Finnish involvement will need to be defined in a new way. The old reconstruction ideal may no longer apply as its legitimacy fades amongst the public. Moreover, Finland should pay attention to developments in Sweden and Germany—countries with a leadership role in the Finnish area of operations. For example, Germany has made public a plan where the withdrawal of German troops will start in 2013. Continued Swedish participation is dependent on a yearly vote in the Swedish parliament. In comparison Finland's domestic debate has been more sporadic and reactive; contesting views are not presented by the political leadership but rather by prominent individuals outside of the main political realm. For example the retired former Chief of Defence, Gen. Gustav Hägglund, stated on 17 September that "Finnish troops do not belong in Afghanistan", yet emphasising that Finland cannot pull out alone. It is well worth considering if the Finnish debate could benefit from a transparent yearly parliamentary process of the type happening in Finland's most immediate reference group: Sweden and Germany.

If nothing else happens, the report from General McChrystal on the future of the Afghanistan mission should inform further debate on Finnish involvement. Yet there are no indications that Finland wishes to play any other role beyond its current one. After talking to US Secretary of Defence Robert Gates on 15 September, Defence Minister Jyrki Häkämies stated that there is no military solution in Afghanistan. So far there is no clear indication that the Taliban, al-Qaeda or other militant groups agree.

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