



The war in Afghanistan, triggered by the terrible events of September 11, 2001, was widely supported by the international community in 2002-3. Their support manifested itself in a large military coalition in the form of the ISAF (International Security Assistance Force)¹ and similarly in support of US operations, to try and enforce peace and oversee an economic, political and social reconstruction campaign. The aim of the campaign is to deny militant Islamists Afghanistan as a center of operations – as a place to train and plan freely. In achieving this goal, it was always widely assumed that this would result in Afghanistan becoming a democratic, stable and economically viable member of the international community. But there is more at stake in the Afghanistan campaign than just the future of Afghanistan, as the contagion effect of violent and radicalized forms of Islam have taken hold in Pakistan and have now eroded the viability of the Pakistani state. This has had a wider impact in the relationship between Pakistan and India (who has faced attacks from Pakistani-led Islamists in November 2008 and July 2011), and with it raised the possibility of a conventional or nuclear war between the two countries. For Europe and America, there is the unwelcome prospect of an ever greater number of Pakistanis becoming radicalized and trained in terrorist techniques, with the aim of harming western interests. This is not exclusively limited to Pakistan or Afghanistan, but it is noticeably acute here.

The death of Osama bin Laden on May 2, 2011 has produced political momentum for those who wish to see a prompt withdrawal from Afghanistan, and it is difficult not to see it as an important punctuation point in the development of US policy towards South Asia and the Middle East. Put more bluntly, in a time of economic crisis does spending \$106 billion a year on an enhanced counterterrorism and reconstruction campaign in Afghanistan make sense for the US? An alternative view of that question might be to explore whether providing that \$106 billion to supporting the new democratic institutions in Egypt and Libya (if they come about) would do more for US security – and the answer is almost certainly yes.

The ISAF and US military operations in Afghanistan – which involve a coalition of American and European allies – are now into their tenth year. The mission's key objectives remain unmet, but this has not arrested the groundswell of opinion (certainly in Europe) that a substantial reduction in commitment to the military and developmental efforts in Afghanistan is needed. This is due to the combination of many factors, including the distant prospect of victory (however defined); the financial crisis engulfing Europe and the US, which raises large questions over voluntary wars; the death of bin Laden and the sense of closure this brings to the operation; and that other operations, such as those in Libya, feel more pressing and strategically important.

¹The European Union Center of Excellence of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill is funded by the European Union to advance knowledge and understanding of the EU and its member countries.

Even if public opinion in Europe differs, the conflict in Afghanistan should not be seen as remote from European and American domestic counterterrorism efforts, but rather as an integral part of them. How the situation in Afghanistan (and Pakistan) develops and whether moderate Islamism prevails in these countries will be strong determinants in the success of the war against terrorism. While this counterterrorism fight is commonly seen as an American concern (and American interests do undoubtedly continue to be threatened by Islamic terrorism), the frontline for this conflict is Europe with its porous borders and large migrant communities.

This brief focuses on several important aspects of the situation in Afghanistan: burden sharing across the coalition, prospects for withdrawal, the transfer of military and government functions to the Afghanistan civilian authorities, the continued problem of opium production and the virtual collapse of the Pakistani state. The troubles in Afghanistan are a good litmus test of the strength of the Atlantic bridge – the range and extent of cooperation between the EU and the US – on issues of common importance. This paper makes a series of assessments about this relationship and the recent developments, while assuming that much of the background issues are known to readers and do not need restating.

The Military Campaign and State-building Efforts

The Afghanistan conflict has highlighted the many tensions across and within the Atlantic security community when it comes to military, security and reconstruction matters. These tensions have revolved around:

- the ability of the EU to deploy and sustain sufficient capacity in Afghanistan (especially as prohibitive country-specific rules of engagement have created some notable difficulties).²
- disagreement over the strategic direction of the campaign (mostly the mix and the timing of reconstruction efforts versus establishing security and whether an enhanced counterterrorism campaign is sufficient in Afghanistan)
- problems in the compatibility of European and American military efforts in Afghanistan.

The general approach to Afghanistan is based on new thinking about counter-insurgency actions. Such actions cover a broad spectrum from peace and stabilization to cooperation and development. As progress is made in diminishing conflict, the balance of effect shifts toward institution building. The basic units for implementing this strategy are provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs).³

Each PRT is a combination of military and civilian personnel drawn from across the coalition. There are 26 such PRTs operating in Afghanistan and each has a lead nation responsible for its conduct and each is staffed by representatives of other coalition nations. Each PRT has three core tasks: to support the extension of the authority of the Afghan central government, to support reform of the security sector, and to facilitate

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development and reconstruction.⁴ The PRTs have been particularly successful in the Northern and Western regions, where fighting has been less prevalent. The PRTs have facilitated various kinds of projects, including rebuilding schools, constructing a safe water supply for the local population and for agriculture, and creating infrastructure for transport, communications, and a functioning health system. While the conditions on the ground for ordinary Afghans are still not good, such efforts have resulted in a 70% increase in GDP per capita since 2001, improvements to infant mortality rates, and improvements in literacy levels. These kinds of reconstruction are premised on the transition from military to civilian rule. All sides of the coalition agree with the aims of reconstruction, with slight differences in emphasis between security and civilian tasks, for which the EU is well-suited.

European armed forces' attempts to keep up with the high levels of technology deployed in US defense equipment have been stretched by a failure to cooperate and invest in new technologies. This issue is also symbolic of a different approach to military campaigns. The US approach has been to combine high-end airborne technologies with Special Forces and local friendly insurgents. The European approach involves many more troops on the ground and visible presence, and so is less technology-based. The creation of the European Defense Agency [EDA]⁵ was meant to herald a new age of European cooperation, but merely inspired more competition. As a result, the British and French governments signed a treaty in November 2010 pledging greater defense integration to help bridge the gap between the European forces and the US military.⁶

But the story of Afghanistan in terms of European military endeavor has been one of poor quality military equipment and not enough of it. The examples from the British military are informative:

- rifles that jammed in hot-weather conditions
- infantry boots that melted in the field
- lack of helicopter lift capability (Chinooks)
- lack of armored personal carriers and exposure to IEDs
- and massive delays to the field communications system (Bowman), which led to infantrymen using their mobile phones instead.

In reality the British military is one of the better supplied European forces. The Europeans are difficult partners at war for various reasons, including their restrictive rules of engagement, the possibility that electoral concerns will cause a rapid withdrawal of forces, and the relative lack of well-provisioned European forces in theatre. For the Europeans to share more of the military and strategic burden, unlikely now in Afghanistan, will require an order of magnitude of political and economic coordination that they have yet to achieve.

Aside from questions of reliability within the coalition, the question of troop numbers has also dogged the military campaign. While ISAF commander General McChrystal publicly announced in 2009 that it was his view that ISAF required 30-40,000 more

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troops to tip the military balance in Afghanistan, President Obama was eyeing a staged withdrawal, to begin in July 2011 and wind down by 2015.⁷ Obama's determination to draw a line under these conflict zones should not come as a surprise: the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan and the developments in homeland security have cost the American taxpayer an estimated \$5 trillion, and some commentators have also argued that the low interest rates of the 2000s – to protect against an Iraq-inspired recession – helped cause the economic problems of 2008-9. The starker economic climate in the EU has forced the Dutch, British and German governments to express similar sentiments (partly based upon the state of their finances and partly based upon strategic considerations). Of the 132,000 coalition troops present in Afghanistan in March 2011, some 93,780 were American, with the next largest contribution being the 9,500 armed forces from the UK. However, the Strategic Defense Review (SDSR) removes the British airborne intelligence platform and ground attack aircraft, and also assumes a withdrawal of British forces by 2015. In July 2011, Prime Minister Cameron announced a drawdown of 500 troops by mid-2012.⁸

The more influential EU nations with regard to military action (France, Germany and Italy) have managed contributions of 12,700 troops between them, while the other nations of the EU struggle to collectively approach 9,000 further troops (Austria manages only three).⁹ Deployment into Afghanistan is not just a numbers game, although the success of the surge shows that numbers are important, it is also about how those troops and support personnel are used. The slight annual increases in civilian deaths in Afghanistan (from 910 in the first half of 2010 to 1167 in the first half of 2011) demonstrate the precarious nature of the improvement in security conditions. While the transfer of security to Afghan forces continues, it is not at all clear that they are competent to take over these functions. An international military and reconstruction coalition was necessary to avoid the knee-jerk charge of imperialism against America, but the incohesion and military weaknesses within the coalition over the last ten years may have offset the benefits. Getting the European nations to do dangerous things will continue to be a challenge for the foreseeable future, particularly in an economic and political climate where the received wisdom is that western powers should be intervening less, and where there is little money to spend on wars of choice.

The erosion of European public and political support for this campaign ties in with President Obama's policy to try and encourage Afghan forces to take primary responsibility for their security. To this end the US plan envisages drawing down the 30,000 "surge" troops by the end of 2012, reducing from 99,000 in June 2011 to 89,000 by December 2011, and then down to 69,000 by December 2012. On the plus side US troops will train 171,000 Afghan troops by the end of 2011 (with the goal of a force level of 265,000 by 2015), and according to defense analysts they are on course.¹⁰ The achievement and maintenance of this goal will of course allow President Obama to withdraw troops in mid-2011, which will be electorally useful to his campaign. Such a move would also signify an end to the problems that have blighted the Afghan National Army, such as its lack of discipline and training (facilitated by high levels of illiteracy amongst its members); corruption (commanders with lists of fake soldiers, skimming

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money); the theft of US supplied equipment; and also the widespread infiltration of the Army by forces loyal to the Taliban. All of these factors make it highly dangerous for US troops to operate in the field with the Afghan National Army – a situation which is exactly mirrored with the Afghan National Police service. This often results in the Afghan officers not being told the detail of an operation until the last moment to prevent information leaking out to the Taliban, which would prompt an attack.

Running parallel to the stated desire to withdraw from Afghanistan is the build-up of American and coalition capacity in Afghanistan. The construction of semi-permanent US military bases in Afghanistan, as well as in Iraq, points to a long-term strategic presence in the region, which sits between the three valuable hydrocarbon resources of the Middle East, the Caspian Sea and Central Asia. Both the EU and the US would be keen to see neither China nor Iran extend their influence in this area.

Thus, the EU and American military presence in Afghanistan is nuanced. There is a desire to leave active military and tough policing operations, but also a desire to manage the competition for natural resources and the power politics of the region. A key element of balancing these tensions comes from the effective operation of the Afghan National Police force, described by some as a “Cinderella service”.¹¹ The widespread drug-taking and corruption within the force, coupled with Taliban infiltration and desertion, make the police a widely mistrusted and problematic element of the security situation in Afghanistan, and one that has to be resolved before the coalition can safely leave the country.

Eradicating the Production of Illegal Drugs

Except for the period between 1999 and 2001 when the Taliban conducted its campaign against drugs, Afghanistan has always been a large producer of opiates, which contribute significantly to addiction, poverty, misery and criminality in Europe. Opiates from Afghanistan are also transited through Iran, and so this trade also has regional implications for Iranian influence. It should be noted that the Iranian government has extensively supplied the Afghan insurgents with light weaponry and sophisticated anti-tank mines. Since the fall of the Taliban, Afghanistan’s poppy farmers have increased production exponentially and are now said to have captured 93% of the world’s illicit opiate market.¹² Ironically, the Taliban leader, Mullah Omar, whom the coalition defeated in 2001, was highly effective in reducing poppy cultivation in Afghanistan. In 2000 he declared opiate production to be “un-Islamic”, which heralded the most successful (and shortest) anti-drug policy the modern world has seen. Opiate production across Afghanistan was reduced by an incredible 91% in the twelve months preceding the coalition’s invasion.¹³ The post-Taliban rise in production is, however, a large concern to European law-makers and enforcement agencies, as there are large financial savings to be made by European governments by restricting the drug trade from Afghanistan.¹⁴

Afghan farmers receive half the proceeds from their crop, with the other half going to a vast network of corrupt officials, law enforcement officers and insurgents. Afghanistan,

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along with Colombia, can be described as a narco-state. Over half of its annual gross domestic product is tied up in the illegal drug trade.¹⁵ Hence, to roll back this trade requires a rewiring of the governance structures of Afghanistan, which have themselves become addicted to the proceeds of the poppy. It also poses a large problem for ISAF forces, who are simultaneously engaged in trying to eradicate the poppy crop while attempting to garner support from the local population. These aims are mutually exclusive, particularly with the absence of clear and viable alternatives for the poppy growers. Attempts to curtail the poppy trade will have a direct security impact in Afghanistan, making the mission objectives more difficult to meet, while a failure to curb the poppy farmers and their onward supply chain has a direct impact on social, economic and crime indicators in Europe. Weaning the Afghan regional and national elites off poppy money is one key to this problem; the other is in providing a viable and lucrative alternative to poppy production with guaranteed advantages that run into the medium term. The incentives for poppy farmers to move into alternative crops simply have to outweigh the current benefits of growing poppies, regardless of the ideological implications for Europe and the US of pursuing such a route. One modification to the ISAF approach since 2009 was the exchange of intelligence for an unimpeded cultivation of poppies. While this practice is said to have yielded good results, it also stores up future problems for the coalition when it comes to rolling back opium production. Another modification to the ISAF approach was the decision to target those who process and trade the processed poppies, rather than the farmers (nevertheless, this policy does impact the farmers' trading conditions).

The Virtual Collapse of Pakistan

One of the unintended consequences of the Afghanistan campaign has been the many, and often violent, impacts that it has had on Pakistan, Afghanistan's bordering neighbor. In the Pakistan President's own words in April 2011, the Afghanistan war is "destabilizing Pakistan".¹⁶ This is important to the EU particularly because of the number of first and second generation Pakistanis living in European countries.

Pakistan's initial support for the coalition's operations ran in stark contrast to the support that its principal intelligence agency the ISI (Directorate for Inter-Services Intelligence) provided during the 1980s and 1990s, when it had effectively funded and trained the fundamentalist Taliban government in Afghanistan. Some scholars maintain that the ISI still officially supports the Taliban today.¹⁷ As such, the decision of Pakistan's then-President Pervez Musharraf to support coalition calls for intelligence sharing and military support to counter the Taliban and Afghani insurgency in 2001 played very badly with elements of his own intelligence agency, and with a large number of ordinary Pakistanis.

Anti-western feeling has been heightened by the case of the alleged CIA contractor Raymond Davis who in March 2011 shot two robbers dead in Islamabad. The US Administration claimed he should be covered by diplomatic immunity, while others claimed he was a CIA agent, and therefore not covered by this immunity and free to be prosecuted in local Pakistani courts. Such high-profile incidents only accentuate the

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growing friction caused by American efforts to eradicate Al Qaeda terrorists. The use of UAVs to hunt and kill Al-Qaeda organizers and operatives over Pakistan, without Pakistani government authority, has severely tested the US-Pakistan relationship.

On April 12, 2011, the Pakistani government asked the CIA to withdraw between 25 and 45% of their personnel in Pakistan, a request personally made by the head of the armed forces in Pakistan, General Kayani.¹⁸ This will further strain the relationship between the two sides: European and American military and intelligence agencies have been critical of the attempts made by the ISI to disrupt and roll-back terrorist groups in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border regions, while the Pakistanis maintain that they are being made a scapegoat for western failures in Afghanistan. The balance of available evidence would suggest that, for good or ill, the ISI are an important strategic player in Afghanistan and their operations and preferences should be watched carefully.

The reality is that the ISI sits more alongside the Pakistani state (as a semi-autonomous organization) rather than within it, and this adds to the political dynamic between the security forces and the political class. This dynamic also made Musharraf's pragmatic support for the West, and Zardari's current careful diplomacy, personally hazardous for these statesmen. There have been loud accusations from 2001 that the ISI – who have benefited from shared coalition intelligence – have systematically informed the Taliban about where coalition airstrikes were targeted, something that brought the coalition authorities into conflict with the Pakistani government.¹⁹ But this intelligence liaison relationship had become complicated for western agencies too. The ISI was accused of garnering information from detainees via torture, something that was against many of the European agencies' codes of ethics.²⁰ There have been strenuous denials from former European intelligence chiefs that they sanctioned or wanted information gathered under conditions of torture, something that Musharraf has publicly scorned.²¹

The approach taken by European governments to the threat from terrorism has varied greatly – the French, German and Spanish governments have taken a strongly interventionist line, while the British government has taken a softer, community-based approach known as “CONTEST”, which aims to counter radical propaganda, prevent extremism, and stop terrorist acts before they come to fruition.²² As an individual national response CONTEST has had its share of problems, including isolated areas of poor racial relations, and the difficulties of bringing cases to court, which has resulted in a “fronting up” policy of confronting plotting terrorists to frighten them off further actions.²³

The EU's response has been patchier. The European Arrest Warrant – a device that allows the extradition of an individual without trial or the presentation of evidence – has been used in several high profile terrorism cases, including in the case of Hussain Osman, the failed July 21, 2005 London bomber, who fled to Rome.²⁴ But the failure to agree on a common approach to immigration policy means that Europe remains a magnet for migrants without a sensible or robust pan-European response. Crucially, though, the Europeans lack the psychological robustness to this kind of threat, and to successful

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terrorist attacks. The American public psyche – after 9/11 – was keen to exact a high level of retribution on those who had attacked the US; and it is this difference between the EU and US in their responses that partly accounts for the differing approaches that coalition partners have advocated for Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Consequences for the Atlantic Bridge

Afghanistan (along with Pakistan) has the capacity to hold the attention of America and its European allies for another 15-20 years. It remains to be seen whether the political and financial pressures that have emerged since 2008 will prompt the coalition to leave the region prematurely, before the security situation has settled and can be managed by locals. The impact that recreational drug use and radicalization (and terrorism) has on European and American societies is reason enough to keep the coalition interested and active in the region. The value for money argument of spending \$106 billion on Afghanistan when stabilizing Egypt has greater strategic payoff for America may weigh heavily on American policy makers. In a similar vein, Afghanistan's strategic positioning between the three large hydrocarbon basins of the Middle East, the Caspian Sea and Central Asia, is also reason enough – in the current economic climate – to retain a close interest in the international balance of power there. European powers have worked well, for the most part, with their American allies, and while the reconstruction effort in Afghanistan is stuttering, the problems in the region are highly complex. Annihilating the Al-Qaeda high command proved to be straightforward in Afghanistan, and had been completed by 2004, with only bin Laden proving to be a hard-to-get target. What has proved to be more difficult, and the creep of Al-Qaeda inspired groups across the Maghreb shows, is that a radical ideology is far more difficult to challenge and roll back. As a result, Afghanistan and Pakistan are no longer the only frontlines in this particular conflict – rather, they are important lines amongst many others.

¹ See: <http://www.isaf.nato.int/> accessed May 2011.

² For example, German forces (who were stationed in the low intensity battle areas) had rules of engagement that only allowed them to be deployed in daylight hours.

³ See, for example, Markus Gauster (January 2008) Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan, George Marshall

Centre, http://www.marshallcenter.org/mcpublicweb/MCDocs/files/College/F_Publications/occPapers/occ-paper_16-en.pdf

⁴ For example, the UK team in Afghanistan: <http://ukinafghanistan.fco.gov.uk/en/about-us/working-with-afghanistan/prt-helmand/>

⁵ European Defence Agency – background

notes: <http://www.eda.europa.eu/Aboutus/Whatwedo/Missionandfunctions>

⁶ British Government (November 2, 2010) UK–France Summit 2010 Declaration on Defence and Security Co-operation, <http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/statements-and-articles/2010/11/uk%E2%80%93france-summit-2010-declaration-on-defence-and-security-co-operation-56519>

⁷ Fox News (September 16, 2009) McChrystal wants up to 40,000 more troops in

Afghanistan, <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2009/09/16/sources-mcchrystal-wants-troops-afghanistan/>

⁸ ISAF figures: <http://www.isaf.nato.int/images/stories/File/Placemats/20100303%20Placemat.pdf>; Reuters (March 26, 2011) Most Britons unsure of Afghan Mission

Aims, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2011/03/23/uk-britain-afghanistan-poll-idUKTRE72M00R20110323>

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Michael O'Hanlon (May 19, 2010) A Bright Spot amongst Afghan woes, Brookings Institute, http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2010/0519_afghan_army_ohanlon.aspx

¹¹ See, for example, BBC World Service (June 26, 2011), Afghanistan: A War Without End?; and Stephen Carter and Kate Clark (December 2010), No Shortcut to Stability: Justice, Politics and Insurgency in Afghanistan, Chatham House: London

¹² United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2007, http://www.unodc.org/pdf/research/AFG07_ExSum_web.pdf

¹³ The Taliban have subsequently gone back on their opposition to poppy cultivation, as it now provides a means by which to finance their insurgency and also to carry favor with locals.

¹⁴ For America, however, their war on drugs is focused also on opiate cultivation and refinement in Colombia and Mexico.

¹⁵ United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime, Opium Amounts to Half of Afghanistan's GDP in 2007, http://www.unodc.org/india/afghanistan_gdp_report.html

¹⁶ Simon Tisdale (April 10, 2011) War in Afghanistan is destabilising Pakistan, The Guardian: London

¹⁷ See, for example, Matt Waldman (June 2010), The Sun in the Sky: The Relationship Between Pakistan's ISI and Afghan Insurgents, London School of Economics Discussion

Paper: <http://english.aljazeera.net/mritems/Documents/2010/6/13/20106138531279734lse-isi-taliban.pdf>

¹⁸ BBC News (April 12, 2011) Pakistan warns US "to restrict CIA activities", BBC News: London <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-13046012>

¹⁹ Jayshree Bajoria (July 26, 2010) The ISI and Terrorism: Behind the Accusations, Council on Foreign Relations, <http://www.cfr.org/pakistan/isi-terrorism-behind-accusations/p11644>

²⁰ Laura Pitel (March 10, 2010), Baroness Manningham-Buller: US concealed torture from MI5, The Times: London.

²¹ Peter Taylor (March 2011) The Secret War on Terror, BBC Broadcasting Documentary.

²² See the UK Home Office's pages on this: <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/counter-terrorism/>

²³ Duncan Gardham (April 12, 2011) MI5 adopts new tactics to "front up" terrorism suspects, Daily Telegraph: London, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/terrorism-in-the-uk/8443920/MI5-adopts-new-tactics-to-front-up-terrorism-suspects.html>

²⁴ It should be noted that the European Arrest Warrant is currently being reviewed, having been widely abused by European governments in bringing people to lengthy custody, while preparing charges without presenting any prima facie evidence.