

Counterinsurgency and the Future of NATO

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Counterinsurgency is much more than a military discipline. As General David Petraeus recently noted, successful COIN requires the integrated employment of all components of national power. This paper evaluates the fundamental underpinnings of the NATO counterinsurgency effort in Afghanistan, examines past and current practices, and explores attempts to create best-practice doctrine for future COIN operations by examining the experiences of France, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. The essay also evaluates the factors that have prevented NATO from effectively wielding its collective military and economic strength in Afghanistan and suggests lessons that NATO should draw from its experience with counterinsurgency in Afghanistan in order to prepare better for future requirements. Achieving a genuinely “integrated” or “comprehensive” transatlantic COIN approach requires that all elements of diplomatic, economic, intelligence, and military power be combined to assist the host government to develop its country and deny territory and safe havens to insurgents, gradually strangling their capabilities and motivation—and ultimately rendering them irrelevant. It remains to be seen whether NATO has the political will to conduct such an operation in Afghanistan over the time span required to succeed.

“The campaign in Afghanistan must be a fully integrated civil-military effort, one that includes an unshakable commitment to teamwork among all elements of the U.S. government as well as an unshakable commitment to teamwork with members of other NATO and coalition governments and the United Nations mission in Afghanistan, as well as, of course, members of the Afghan government.”

—General David Petraeus, June 29, 2010²

The Transatlantic Paper Series is a product of The Chicago Council on Global Affairs’ project on “The Future of the Transatlantic Alliance in a Changing Strategic Environment.” The project was made possible by generous funding from the Robert Bosch Stiftung, the McCormick Foundation, and the Adenauer Fund at The Chicago Council on Global Affairs.

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For the first time in its history, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is today engaged in a land war. However, rather than the conventional war on the plains of Europe that NATO was built to deter, the alliance is instead entangled in a protracted and bloody counterinsurgency campaign in Afghanistan. After a deceptively easy military campaign that drove the Taliban from power, ensuring Afghanistan's security and rebuilding its political and economic foundation have proven to be challenging tasks for the transatlantic community.³ Despite the deployment of tens of thousands of foreign soldiers in Afghanistan over nearly a decade—the bulk from NATO member countries—the Taliban insurgency has grown while the Afghan populace has wearied of thirty years of conflict. The inability of President Hamid Karzai to govern effectively has further sapped his support, at home and abroad. The NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission has strained relationships between member states, exposed the alliance's shortcomings in asymmetric warfare, and brought into question NATO's future willingness to conduct operations outside of the European theater. The difficulties that ISAF has encountered in organizing, conducting, and resourcing the counterinsurgency (COIN) campaign in Afghanistan are understandable in light of the very different mission that NATO was established to accomplish, but must be overcome if NATO is to remain an effective security pillar in the changing world of the twenty-first century.

Counterinsurgency is much more than a military discipline. As General David Petraeus recently noted, successful COIN requires the integrated employment of all components of national power.⁴ This paper evaluates the fundamental underpinnings of the NATO counterinsurgency effort in Afghanistan, examines past and current practices, and explores attempts to create best-practice doctrine for future COIN operations by examining the experiences of France, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. The essay also evaluates the factors that have prevented NATO from effectively wielding its collective military and economic strength in Afghanistan and suggests lessons that

NATO should draw from its experience with counterinsurgency in Afghanistan in order to prepare better for future requirements.

NATO's European members invoked Article V of the North Atlantic Treaty for the first time in its history after the United States was attacked on September 11, 2001. Article V states, "The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all." Unfortunately, these governments did not anticipate that doing so would involve them in such a long and grinding war. The gesture was intended as a low-cost demonstration of solidarity with the American people rather than a protracted operational commitment.

According to one recent assessment:

European politicians have declared that Afghanistan is vital to their own security, but in practice continue to treat it as an American responsibility. In the context of a faltering campaign, the upshot is evaporating public support; mutual transatlantic disillusionment; and a European failure to act as the engaged and responsible partner that the U.S. has clearly needed for the last eight years.⁵

This may be overly harsh. While NATO has appeared incapable of grasping and implementing the full spectrum of demands required of an effective COIN campaign in Afghanistan, the United States had also struggled to understand and come to terms with the requirements of counterinsurgency in both Afghanistan and Iraq. U.S. forces made real progress in this dimension only after several years of ineffective operations in Iraq and really only began fully resourced comprehensive COIN operations in Afghanistan in 2009.⁶ For several years after the fall of the Taliban, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States focused on counterterrorism, counternarcotics, and conventional kinetic operations. Germany and other European members concentrated on reconstruction and stabilization work, including training host nation forces and providing basic security to the

Afghan population while avoiding combat-related duties. France has focused on training and supporting the Afghan security forces while establishing a significant and effective combat presence over time, although it has to some extent avoided immersion into local culture and governance. The Dutch complemented U.S. practices in pursuit of common strategic objectives, but withdrew from the conflict in 2010 after a lack of support for the campaign from the Dutch public, which contributed to the fall of the Dutch government.

NATO's role in Afghanistan has gone through significant changes over the past decade as the mission has transformed dramatically over time. From December 2001 through August 2003, ISAF was based exclusively in Kabul and not led by, or even affiliated with, NATO. From August 2003 until January 2007, a NATO peacekeeping force gradually expanded from Kabul through the north and finally the west of the country, while from January 2007 until the present day, NATO has maintained a nation-wide military mission including many combat operations. The Obama administration put a much higher priority on Afghanistan than the previous administration did, and arguably began another phase of the mission after General Stanley McChrystal was concurrently made the commander of ISAF and the U.S. Forces Afghanistan (USFOR-A) in May 2009. That was the first time the United States embraced and began to adequately resource "full-up" counterinsurgency.

It is not unfair to argue that ISAF has been hobbled by an *ad hoc* patchwork of objectives without a clear consensus from its members on a common strategy. NATO member states—including Germany, Italy, and Spain—insisted for years that ISAF's primary mission is peacekeeping and nation-building, and not combat operations or conducting counterinsurgency. For nations such as Canada, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States, all operating in the hostile southern and eastern provinces of Afghanistan, combat was common and counterinsurgency the nominal strategy, even if it was not properly resourced until very recently. This disunity was further complicated by the continuation of Operation

Enduring Freedom (OEF), which was conducted by the United States outside of ISAF's command structure and focused on disrupting terror networks and capturing or killing al Qaeda and Taliban leaders.⁷ It is hard to dispute McChrystal, who reported to President Barack Obama in August 2009 that "ISAF is a conventional force that is poorly configured for COIN, inexperienced in local languages and culture, and struggling with the challenges inherent to coalition warfare."⁸

Nonetheless, there is some good news: the many challenges Afghanistan has posed to European military forces have spurred the development of national COIN capabilities and doctrines from the ground-up, much as the Iraq war spurred much needed changes in U.S. military doctrine and capability. European militaries have overcome many obstacles, an especially impressive accomplishment considering that they not only have to deal with the situation on the ground in Afghanistan but must also balance their operations against other considerations, such as the opinions of their national governments, domestic publics, coalition partners, and the Afghan national government. All of the military forces in NATO made initial mistakes in strategy and tactics over the past decade while coming to terms with counterinsurgency. These early failures allowed for the growth of a Taliban-led insurgency while the United States focused on the war in Iraq. As unfortunate as this focus was for the U.S. commitment to Afghanistan, it did drive the United States to develop and adopt a more sophisticated COIN strategy over time in reaction to its early difficulties. Not all of the United States' NATO allies have followed this path, and none have done so as thoroughly as has the United States. The development of NATO-wide COIN capabilities has been hindered by a lack of resources and uneven political will.

Unity of purpose requires more than simply a large force under united direction; it requires a concerted effort to bring together all elements of national and international power to achieve coalition objectives. Achieving a genuinely "integrated" or "comprehensive" transatlantic COIN approach requires that all elements of diplomatic, economic,

intelligence, and military power be combined to assist the host government to develop its country and deny territory and safe havens to insurgents, gradually strangling their capabilities and motivation—and ultimately rendering them irrelevant. It remains to be seen whether NATO has the political will to conduct such an operation in Afghanistan over the time span required to succeed.

NATO's COIN Challenge

After the September 11, 2001 attacks, the United States and the United Kingdom sent small military forces and intelligence operators to Afghanistan to topple the repressive Taliban regime that was providing safe haven to transnational terrorists. Initial military success was hobbled by inadequate efforts to build a better peace; the Taliban regrouped and gained strength in Pakistan before launching another, reenergized insurgent campaign in 2006 against the Afghan government and its supporters. NATO has since struggled to adapt to a modern variant of centuries-old guerilla warfare.

Insurgency may be the oldest form of war. In its modern form, insurgency is defined as “an organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through the use of subversion and armed conflict.”⁹ Counterinsurgency is then “military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government to defeat insurgency.”¹⁰ COIN is very much a population-centered strategy; McChrystal's *Commander's Counterinsurgency Guidance* stated, “Protecting the people is the mission. The conflict will be won by persuading the population, not by destroying the enemy.”¹¹

In Afghanistan, some NATO governments have sought to employ a “comprehensive approach” utilizing all elements of diplomatic, economic, intelligence, and military power to assist the host government to provide vital services, reconstruct infrastructure, develop rural areas, and ensure the population's security while simultaneously defeating the insurgency. It has proven a difficult challenge, made harder by parallel chains of command among the U.S. military and civilian commands,

the NATO-led ISAF, and the Afghan government. Unity of command and unity of purpose are critical in carrying out the “comprehensive approach,” but are elusive when so many different groups, including governments and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), are involved. The ability of NATO and ISAF to successfully defeat insurgent operations depends upon the ability of the member countries to develop and adhere to a strategy that is not just comprehensive but also cohesive. Throughout the Afghan war, European countries have supported the idea of a comprehensive strategy of reconstruction and security, but NATO has yet to deliver on the promise of a truly comprehensive approach. As a collective entity, NATO had no experience preparing for or waging a COIN campaign prior to its involvement in Afghanistan. Previous NATO combat missions in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo were initially conducted as conventional military operations that transitioned to peacekeeping missions dedicated to establishing a benign security environment in which other institutions could assume the lead role in promoting political and economic reconstruction. Many European countries' individual COIN experiences come from the post-war decolonization era when they struggled to maintain their overseas empires against nationalist uprisings, e.g. the British experience in the so-called “Malayan Emergency” and the French campaigns in Algeria and Indochina. In these cases European powers usually enjoyed the support and resources of the indigenous regimes, security forces, and bureaucratic institutions they had built up over years of interactions. Furthermore, the Europeans possessed a high level of institutional knowledge and familiarity with the culture, economy, history, and language of their colonies. In other words, European militaries were used to adapting themselves as colonial police forces and were able to learn the complexities of low-intensity warfare while being able to successfully conduct COIN operations within their colonies.¹²

The lessons of these campaigns, while offering a great deal of tactical knowledge on counterinsurgency from a military perspective, are not easily applicable to the situation in Afghanistan. Here,

NATO faces a sophisticated insurgency in a large country that has essentially not been governed for thirty years, and where the fledgling Karzai government set up in 2002 is the first widely recognized government of Afghanistan since 1979. Since NATO assumed command of the overall mission in Afghanistan in 2007, the alliance has had to contend with shortages of intelligence, lack of indigenous support, insufficient troop levels, and various political and legal restraints.¹³

The fundamental structures of NATO have been ill suited to the mission at hand. The decision making process at the highest level of NATO requires consensus building among twenty-eight member nations, each with varying military strength, commitments elsewhere in the world, and unique domestic political circumstances that place constraints on their foreign and defense policies. Within the broader context of military campaign, consensus-based decision-making cannot keep pace with the immediacy of battlefield events that require real time responses. As Benjamin Schreer argues, this “consensus rule also invites insurgents to get into NATO’s decision loop by specifically targeting those allies deemed politically weak.”¹⁴ Taliban insurgents have been known to step up attacks on national military contingents during times of internal political stress in the home country, such as increased violence against German troops in the run up to the 2009 German parliamentary elections. Al Qaeda has followed the same tactic in targeting certain Western European countries in advance of elections, with some observers crediting its mass casualty attack against the Spanish rail network a few days before Spain’s March 2004 national elections with helping to defeat the country’s incumbent government and ending its policy of contributing troops to the military campaign in Iraq.¹⁵

The deployment of most European troops in Afghanistan was qualified with national “caveats” that limited their operations to certain types of missions or specific geographical areas. As a result, ISAF was divided along national lines, making specific countries responsible for particular Afghan provinces. Daniel Korski has noted the result:

“EU countries have treated the common effort in Afghanistan like a potluck dinner where every guest is free to bring his own dish. In doing so, they are effectively ignoring the lessons learned—at a high cost to the population and to themselves—in the Balkans.”¹⁶ Former NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer commented, “Multiple approaches to military operations and development assistance within one mission reduce effectiveness and can strain solidarity.”¹⁷

NATO Enters Afghanistan

Following the September 11, 2001 attacks, NATO invoked Article V of the North Atlantic Treaty for the first time in its history, declaring that the attack against the United States shall be considered an attack against all members of the alliance.¹⁸ The United States chose not to accept NATO’s initial offer of Article V assistance, although several NATO nations contributed Special Forces and other military support to OEF Partnering with the Northern Alliance and other anti-Taliban opposition groups, the United States and several coalition allies followed a “light footprint” strategy. Combining small contingents of Special Forces teams with airpower, the coalition successfully unseated the Taliban from power and routed al Qaeda, sending both fleeing across the Pakistani border by early 2002. ISAF was created under the auspices of the 2002 Bonn Agreement to provide security and support for the fledgling Afghan Transitional Authority and the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. The initial ISAF mandate did not extend outside of Kabul for the first two years, as the country appeared to be largely at peace for the first time since the Soviet invasion in 1979. In August 2003, NATO assumed leadership of ISAF; in October 2003, ISAF’s mandate was expanded by UN Security Council Resolution 1510 to encompass all of Afghanistan.¹⁹ The country was relatively peaceful as ISAF’s 4,000 soldiers were initially restricted to Kabul and its immediate surroundings. From 2004 to 2006, ISAF gradually extended its area of operation to include all of Afghanistan in a phased expansion. The current ISAF area of operations and force totals are:²⁰

Figure XX – ISAF Nation Commands

Each Regional Command includes one lead nation and several supporting nations.²¹

ISAF Nation ²²	RC-North	RC-West	RC-South	RC-East	RC-Capital
Lead	Germany	Italy	UK	U.S.	Turkey
Supporting	Sweden	Spain	U.S.	Poland	France
	Hungary	Lithuania	Denmark	France	Italy
	Norway		Netherlands	Czech Rep.	
			Canada	Turkey	
			Australia	New Zealand	
			Romania		

- Regional Command North (RC-North): headquartered in Mazar-e-Sharif under German command, with five Provisional Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) and approximately 11,000 troops.
- Regional Command West (RC-West): headquartered in Herat under Italian command, with four PRTs and approximately 6,000 troops.
- Regional Command South (RC-South): headquartered in Kandahar under a rotating command between Canada, the United Kingdom, and (until recently) the Netherlands, with four PRTs and approximately 35,000 troops.
- Regional Command South West (RC-South West): consisting of Helmand and Nimroz provinces under the command of U.S. Marines, with approximately 27,000 troops.
- Regional Command East (RC-East): headquartered in Bagram under U.S. command, with thirteen PRTs and approximately 32,000 troops.
- Regional Command Capital (RC-Capital): headquartered in Kabul under a composite command, with approximately 5,000 troops,
- ISAF Commands in Kabul, consisting of HQ ISAF under General David H. Petraeus, ISAF Joint Command (IJC) under Lt. General David Rodriguez, and the NATO Training Mission – Afghanistan under Lt. General William Caldwell; total strength of approximately 3,500.

Each Regional Command includes one lead nation and several supporting nations:²¹

As NATO increased its stake in the Afghan war, the United States concentrated on the war in Iraq. Until late 2006, U.S. forces operating in eastern and southern Afghanistan were under OEF command. U.S. commanders in Afghanistan had differing philosophies on the relative importance of COIN and counterterrorism missions, with some focusing on the former and others on the latter. Counterterrorism operations aimed to capture or kill senior al Qaeda and Taliban leaders, many of whom were destabilizing Afghanistan from headquarters across the border in Pakistan. Even as violence escalated across Afghanistan in 2006, U.S. forces did not reallocate manpower and resources to conduct COIN operations.²³ While the United States focused the majority of its military and civilian resources in Iraq, the war in Afghanistan remained critically under resourced as NATO struggled to marshal the political will and the military resources to fight its first war against an insurgency without the full attention and commitment of the alliance's key member, the United States.²⁴

The Taliban Returns: Counterinsurgency in Southern Afghanistan, 2006–2008

As attacks were isolated and non-U.S. ISAF casualties somewhat rare, increased violence levels in Afghanistan did not attract much notice among the North Atlantic Council policymakers overseeing ISAF. From 2003 through 2005, NATO's mission in

Afghanistan garnered significant European popular support as Afghanistan seemed to be headed toward stability and peace for the first time in decades. Further, many NATO members were eager to show solidarity with the United States after the invocation of Article V and the transatlantic rifts caused by many European governments' opposition to the Iraq war. The war in Afghanistan contrasted starkly with the war in Iraq, which by then had descended into sectarian civil strife that was bloodying the U.S. military, blemishing the United States' international image, and provoking a political backlash from the American public. European countries conjectured that sending troops to Afghanistan would be a low-risk political move that they could justify to their publics, as the fighting was not intense and casualties were low. The violence, however, was rising and the weaknesses of both the Afghan government and international effort were beginning to show as the insurgency grew stronger. Few international or Afghan forces operated in the Taliban strongholds of Helmand and Kandahar provinces until ISAF's phased expansion reached the area in 2006.²⁵

That year, Canada, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom took the lead in ISAF's third phased expansion with the establishment of RC-South in Kandahar City, covering six southern provinces including Daykundi, Helmand, Kandahar, Nimroz, Uruzgan, and Zabul. Originally, RC-South was composed of British (3,600), Canadian (2,300), and Dutch (~2,000) troops alongside smaller deployments from Australia, Denmark, Estonia, Romania and the United States, while command over RC-South rotated between the three lead countries. The British, Danish, and Estonian troops were deployed to Helmand province, the Canadians to Kandahar, the Dutch and Australians to Uruzgan, and the Romanians to Zabul. RC-South took control of four U.S. PRTs and replaced the 1,000 U.S. soldiers in the area. Some U.S. special forces remained under OEF auspices to continue counterterrorism operations and assist ISAF and Afghan forces.²⁶ The United States also maintained control and funding of the massive Kandahar Air Base and logistics facility.

Afghan officials in Kabul exercised little control over the rural areas of RC-South, as corruption from the booming opium trade pervaded every level of government. The few Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP) units stationed in the south were understaffed, poorly trained, and lacking in sufficient weapons and ammunition to defend their isolated police stations and garrisons from Taliban attacks. Long stretches of time without meager wages from Kabul contributed to widespread corruption and desertions in their ranks. The United States and ISAF rarely partnered with the ANA or ANP for operations. When they did, the Afghans usually took a backseat role. While the British, Canadian, and Dutch governments understood they were deploying their forces into a highly volatile environment, they were not prepared for the ferocious fighting they confronted or the scale of the Taliban insurgency, which had grown and intensified.²⁷

Elsewhere in Afghanistan, the Taliban could only mount relatively smaller attacks. But the security vacuum in southern Afghanistan, the absence of the Afghan government, the booming opium trade, and safe havens in Pakistan had enabled the Taliban's evolution into a full-fledged insurgency capable of mounting large sophisticated attacks and controlling large swaths of territory with a shadow government. ISAF forces were shocked to find themselves engaged in hours-long conventional firefights against company and battalion sized Taliban forces of several hundred fighters who organized coordinated ambushes and fought from layered defensive positions. In the face of ISAF victories in every conventional battle, and incurring heavy casualties as a result, the Taliban grew stronger, purging the countryside of pro-government supporters through intimidation tactics and executions, and deteriorating the overall security situation.²⁸ Improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and ambushes greatly restricted freedom of movement across the provinces.²⁹ Taliban members controlled checkpoints on the region's roads, which gave them a strong hold over the region's economic activity and the blossoming opium industry. The Taliban's asymmetric tactics, such as IEDs and sui-

cide bombings, inflicted heavy casualties on the unprepared and ill-equipped Afghan forces. These types of attacks, which had previously been rare on the Afghan battlefield, became increasingly common as the Taliban adopted tactics from insurgents in Iraq. Civilian casualties skyrocketed as the Taliban increased the number of suicide bombings and IEDs, while ISAF, short of boots on the ground, often had to resort to air strikes that too often hurt innocent civilians.³⁰

ISAF's deployment to southern Afghanistan was designed to focus on reconstruction work and bolster the Afghan national government's presence in the area. ISAF, however, was unexpectedly thrust headlong into a war against an entrenched insurgency that it was neither expecting nor prepared to fight. ISAF troops were insufficiently trained in COIN tactics, the local language and culture, and tribal political structures. The forces suffered from a lack of operational intelligence regarding the insurgency in the southern provinces that too often resulted in ISAF troops swinging blindly at an invisible enemy. Due to the unstable security environment and low resource levels, RC-South's PRTs were ineffective and reconstruction projects stalled. The corrupt Afghan government was incapable of delivering sufficient governance to the few population centers held by ISAF; its presence was virtually non-existent elsewhere.³¹

Perhaps the most pervasive problem that ISAF faced was inadequate force levels. For years, its troops have been unable to hold territory taken after fierce fighting with the Taliban. Insufficient force densities throughout the south had precluded the establishment of a permanent presence that could provide security for the local population. ISAF operations in southern Afghanistan since 2006 have cost NATO countries dearly in terms of lives, money, and equipment. But in the absence of trained, equipped Afghan forces, the COIN effort has made little progress towards holding territory beyond causing temporary disruptions to the Taliban's momentum.³² The effort to train and equip Afghan security forces, like much of the campaign to date, was inadequately resourced until 2009; it only began to show results in mid-2010.³³

The British Counterinsurgency Experience: Learning Over Time

Helmand province is the heartland of the Taliban insurgency in southern Afghanistan and a major hub of opium production. In 2006, the British took over security responsibilities in the province as part of ISAF's expansion into the South. The main objectives of the mission were to provide "peace support" to the local Afghan security forces and implement a counternarcotics campaign to stem the massive quantity of poppies grown there.³⁴ The campaign, as described by Theo Farrell and Stuart Gordon, was flawed from the beginning because "The UK's national planning also reflected many of the assumptions of the post-Bonn period; envisaging a largely top-down, technocratic and 'apolitical' approach to state-building and neglecting the sub-national state-building agenda."³⁵

The plan for Helmand province was intended to be a comprehensive COIN campaign based on the strategies learned by the British in Malaya. The "Malayan ink-spot strategy" called for 3,600 British troops to secure Helmand's provincial capital of Lashkar Gah, where a British PRT would also be stationed. Forces would spread out and occupy other small outposts or "platoon houses" throughout the province. The British, working with the Afghan government, would then slowly expand security, governance, and reconstruction efforts outward. The operation was allocated £6 million for small-scale reconstruction projects and £30 million for long-term rural development programs.³⁶

There is no doubt that the British plan was audacious. Helmand province covers nearly 23,000 square miles of southern Afghanistan along the Pakistani border and has a population of over 1.4 million extremely poor Pashtun Afghans who mostly live in small towns and villages along the Helmand River.³⁷ Until 2005, there had been no significant Afghan government or coalition presence in the province. In their absence, the Taliban had been able to heavily infiltrate Helmand and terrorize locals into supporting them. Its local government barely functioned and was staffed by highly corrupt officials and security forces. Its

economy is largely agricultural and produces half of Afghanistan's opium, making it a haven for various insurgent and criminal groups. Its proximity to Baluchistan makes Helmand a highway for the Taliban, foreign fighters, and weapon and drug traffickers coming from Pakistan.³⁸

From the onset, the British effort was hampered by too few troops covering too much ground, by shortages of helicopters and armored vehicles, and by a more hostile environment than had been expected. The British were unable to effectively shape the intelligence environment in Helmand province and underestimated the Taliban's capabilities. The Taliban launched well-coordinated attacks on the British upon their arrival, and the "platoon house" strategy of deploying approximately 150 troops into small towns such as Musa Qaleh, Now Zad, and Sangin became unsustainable as ferocious Taliban attacks besieged British soldiers in town after town.

The British forces were too small to properly secure the area and, as a result, were primarily limited to activity on or very near their bases. Without broader freedom of movement, they had no chance to expand security perimeters, protect the population or begin reconstruction projects. Ahmed Rashid writes that, "Instead of these British garrisons becoming a security anchor for NATO to win over the population, they became a magnet for hundreds of Taliban, who poured in from Pakistan to do battle and were ready to take heavy losses."³⁹ The British inflicted heavy casualties on the insurgents in every encounter, but the Taliban onslaught continued. The Taliban surprised British commanders by conducting sophisticated conventional attacks with battalion-sized units. By October 2006, twenty-nine British soldiers had been killed and scores wounded after two months of intense fighting in Musa Qala. The British, unable to sustain the high level of casualties, agreed to allow the local population to negotiate a ceasefire with the Taliban on their behalf if both sides withdrew from Musa Qala.⁴⁰ The locals opted to evict both the British and Taliban from the area.⁴¹ The British withdrew shortly after, but the Taliban returned and quickly retook the town in February 2007.⁴²

The British COIN effort struggled throughout 2006 and 2007. Short on helicopters, armored vehicles, and enough troops to secure the area and push the insurgents out of population centers, the British relied heavily on less targeted airstrikes and artillery for protection. As a result, Afghan civilian casualties mounted while the security situation made it impossible for PRTs or civilian reconstruction projects to be effectively realized. This turned the skeptical local population, both deeply infiltrated and also terrorized by the Taliban, firmly against the British presence in many areas. The reconstruction projects that were completed, including schools, government buildings, and roads, were often either located inside isolated "zones of development" or, if not, quickly became targets for the Taliban.⁴³

While planning the Helmand campaign from the top down and focusing on building up the Afghan national government in the area, the British neglected to engage the local political and tribal structures that dominate the province. The British forces placed too much faith in the Afghan government and security forces to meet unrealistic commitments and in their own capacity to conduct COIN and reconstruction in a highly volatile environment.⁴⁴ British, Canadian, and Dutch forces relied heavily on conventional military tactics, overwhelming firepower and airstrikes to compensate for shortages in intelligence capabilities, equipment, and most importantly the manpower required to secure and hold ground.

The British have learned important lessons from their COIN campaign in southern Afghanistan, at both the operational and strategic levels, that build on the lessons of previous COIN campaigns in other countries. British Army Colonel Alex Alderson, who now heads the newly established British Army Counterinsurgency Centre, notes that, "The question is not whether broad principles are relevant, but the extent to which those principles of British doctrine have been followed, resourced, and applied. Presence matters, numbers are required, and plans need resources. Without them, in counterinsurgency, securing the population is an unachievable aspiration."⁴⁵

Germany and “Networked Security” in Afghanistan

Although Germany contributes the third most troops to ISAF, with 4,200 troops in country, and is RC-North’s lead nation, Germans did not anticipate having to fight a major insurgency and were politically challenged to accept the daily operational realities their forces face on the ground. The expansion of the Taliban insurgency and violence into the once peaceful northern provinces where German troops started their operations has sparked a debate over Germany’s military capabilities, its purpose in Afghanistan, and its future role in NATO combat operations.⁴⁶

Germany’s involvement in Afghanistan began in 2001 with the deployment of German Special Forces in the early stages of OEF. In October 2003, the German Bundestag approved the deployment of a contingent of troops and civilians to conduct peacekeeping and reconstruction work in the northern province of Kunduz, where in late 2003 they would take over a PRT.⁴⁷ German politicians sold their presence in Afghanistan to a skeptical domestic audience as a “non-combat” operation that would be providing support for a multinational stability and reconstruction operation that was akin to NATO’s efforts in the Balkans. Few Germans expected their troops to engage in large and dangerous combat operations given the public consensus dating back to World War II that Germany no longer fights wars and that the Bundeswehr exists solely for territorial defense. Although the Bundeswehr has expanded its mandate since 1994 and taken on an increasingly important role in multinational operations abroad, it has generally taken on responsibilities of crisis management, conflict prevention, peacekeeping, or humanitarian relief and has always acted under the auspices of the UN, EU, or NATO. Furthermore, German forces are subject to strict legal guidelines and are only deployed after authorization from the Bundestag.⁴⁸

Since the end of the Cold War and German reunification, the Bundeswehr’s budget has slowly shrunk and equipment has not been modernized while its forces remain designed for a conventional

European-style war against an extinct Soviet adversary. Modern Germany has never fought a COIN war on a distant battlefield. Unlike the U.S. experiences in Vietnam and Iraq, the British in Malaysia, or the French in Algeria, Germany has no institutional experience with counterinsurgency on which to formulate its approach. As a result, the Bundeswehr has no comprehensive COIN doctrine.⁴⁹ The Bundeswehr strategy in Afghanistan is based on the German concept of “networked security,” an all-encompassing multilateral approach to civilian-military reconstruction efforts, development projects, and indigenous security force training. Some aspects of networked security can be seen as integral parts of counterinsurgency, particularly interagency and civilian-military cooperation on reconstruction projects and security forces training. Networked security, however, lacks emphasis on the war fighting aspects of counterinsurgency, particularly at the operational and tactical levels.⁵⁰

Germany has long argued that ISAF’s mandate in Afghanistan is restricted to stability and reconstruction. German politicians and military commanders made it clear that their troops were not to be used in counterinsurgency, counternarcotics, or counterterrorism operations, which were seen as combat and therefore the responsibility of the U.S. and coalition forces operating under separate OEF command. The German government placed extensive national caveats on the use of troops for combat and limited their deployment to the northern provinces and Kabul where there had been little Taliban activity.⁵¹

Although initially secure, the situation in northern Afghanistan deteriorated as Taliban insurgents reentered the provinces largely unimpeded and began conducting IED and suicide attacks. German politicians were slow to acknowledge the existence of the growing insurgency in Afghanistan as fellow ISAF members engaged in heavy fighting in the south and east. In fact, some German politicians claimed the north was secure because German troops took a less confrontational approach. This process of denial echoed the Bush administration’s contesting of the existence of an insurgency

in Iraq in 2003–2004.⁵² Despite the perceived stability in northern Afghanistan, the German government repeatedly turned down requests from its allies and ISAF commanders to redeploy troops to assist in the southern fighting and refused to concede that the situation was deteriorating there even while the attacks led Berlin to apply even more severe national caveats on the use of force by German troops.

In May 2007, 2,000 Afghan, German, and Norwegian troops launched a two-part offensive in northern Afghanistan called Operation *Harekate Yolo* aiming to stabilize the security situation in Badakshan, Badghis, and Faryab provinces by sweeping out Taliban strongholds and clearing out the area's criminal gangs. *Harekate Yolo* was the first large ground offensive conducted by the German military since World War II. Although the Norwegians made up the bulk of the operation's combat force, the Germans provided leadership, planning, and logistical support. U.S. forces were also on the ground, embedded with the Afghan security forces to provide training and guidance.⁵³ The operation's first stage was successful at dispersing the insurgents from the northwest, allowing UN reconstruction work to resume in those areas. As the first major combat offensive against insurgents in northern Afghanistan, it was an important step in Germany's effort to begin reorienting its mission toward the protection of the population and the Afghan government from the insurgency rather than just the protection of its own forces.

Unfortunately, the initial tactical successes of *Harekate Yolo* were not exploited and the second stage of the operation was cut short. Senior commanders had set ambitious goals to disperse the insurgents and provide security for civilian reconstruction work, but political and strategic support to continue the operation was not forthcoming. The German led-efforts succeeded in "clearing" the insurgents from the northwest, but because of political nervousness about the operation's risks and poor coordination between the civilian and the military contingents, the ground was not held and the insurgents eventually returned.⁵⁴ There was a growing realization among Bundeswehr

commanders in the field that they had to reduce their high level of force protection dictated from Berlin and more willingly accept the risk of casualties to create room for the operational flexibility demanded in counterinsurgency, but this understanding was not mirrored at home.

The Germans' heavy emphasis on force protection has limited their forces' ability to contribute to security operations. In 2004, construction began on a large \$70 million fortified compound at Mazar-e-Sharif that would serve as the Bundeswehr's headquarters and seal the Germans off from the local population.⁵⁵ The Bundeswehr was given strict rules of engagement to mitigate any risk of casualties on the rare occasions that soldiers traveled outside of their fortified compounds. Troops were only allowed to patrol in the daytime from the inside of armored vehicles that had to be accompanied by an ambulance. From their armored vehicles, the soldiers had no interaction with locals and could not collect intelligence. Furthermore, foot patrols were forbidden in mountainous provinces where few roads exist, even though there was little ground to be patrolled in the first place.⁵⁶ If they came under fire, troops were required to break contact with the enemy and disengage.⁵⁷

Even without the caveats and strict rules of engagement, the Bundeswehr is not properly structured or equipped for a sustained COIN campaign. Germany employs compulsory conscription with approximately 37,000 draftees incorporated into the 250,000-person German military. The draftees, however, are restricted from overseas duty, which has created significant structural obstacles for sustaining German force levels abroad.⁵⁸ The typical rotation for a German unit in Afghanistan lasts three to four months, which is not enough time for units to gain familiarity with their area or build lasting relationships with locals. According to Seth Jones, the Bundeswehr "lacked trained personnel, combat equipment, and supporting communications and intelligence gear necessary to perform offensive attacks, raids and reconnaissance patrols."⁵⁹ It also suffered from serious shortages of tactical airlift helicopters, mine-resistant vehicles, and combat multipliers such as artillery

and attack helicopters. Even German units that are fully equipped are not always employed properly. In October 2008, the German foreign minister revealed that 100 commandos from the elite German Kommando Spezialkräfte (KSK) unit had been in Afghanistan for three years without being deployed for a single mission and hence were being withdrawn.⁶⁰

On September 4, 2009, a German commander called in a U.S. airstrike on two hijacked fuel trucks that were believed to be surrounded by Taliban insurgents outside of Kunduz province. The airstrike killed 142 people, almost all of them now believed to be civilians. The German public was shocked and outraged that its forces were responsible for such an incident. The commander of the German forces on the ground was relieved by McChrystal, and German Defense Minister Franz-Josef Jung and several German military officials resigned over the controversy, which triggered investigations in the Bundeswehr and the German Federal Parliament. The airstrike has also raised questions over the expanded use of force by German troops and likely reversed many of the small gains made in recent years by German ground commanders seeking more flexibility.⁶¹

ISAF was quick to blame the airstrike on German tactical failures. In mid-2009, 2,500 U.S. troops were moved to northern Afghanistan to stabilize the region's security situation and protect vital ISAF supply lines. The U.S. deployment to the north was seen as a vote of no-confidence in the capabilities of German forces to control the situation. The U.S. forces quickly moved into a base in Kunduz province near the Germans and began training Afghan security forces and conducting offensive operations against insurgents. Unlike German troops, the U.S. forces integrated Afghans into joint operations against insurgents. German forces have refused to participate with the U.S. and Afghan forces in combat operations against insurgents, calling them "targeted killings."⁶²

Many German politicians have welcomed the gradual usurpation of Germany's role in northern Afghanistan by the United States since this transition relieves their country of responsibility for the

deteriorating security situation. As of February 2010, thirty-four German soldiers have been killed and dozens seriously wounded in Afghanistan, and domestic support for the mission has continued to wane.⁶³ With the country-wide deterioration of security, rising casualties across ISAF contingents, and news from Afghanistan in the daily headlines, the German deployment to Afghanistan is increasingly unpopular at home. The German government's long insistence that it is participating in a stabilization operation in Afghanistan has created a credibility gap with a skeptical German public.

The German government has continued to insist on the stability operation narrative, raising already high force protection levels to prevent casualties from further eroding public support, and reversing the Bundeswehr's ground-up reforms aimed toward developing a COIN capability. These steps have prevented the Bundeswehr from adopting the offensive mindset of counterinsurgents and the lower force protection levels required to be an effective COIN practitioner. It is therefore unlikely that Germany will adopt counterinsurgency as a military doctrine in Afghanistan or fight another COIN conflict anywhere—or any time—soon.⁶⁴

Dutch Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan: "Rebuild Where Possible, Fight Where Necessary"

The Netherlands became the first NATO country to remove its entire military contingent from Afghanistan when it commenced withdrawal on August 1, 2010. That move could increase pressure on other European governments to curtail their own unpopular military deployments in Afghanistan; in Iraq, after Spain and the Ukraine withdrew their troops, many others followed, and eventually U.S. troops remained the only significant foreign military presence in the country. The same pattern could recur in Afghanistan in coming years.

In December 2005, the Dutch government decided, despite considerable opposition in the national legislature and among the Dutch public, to send combat forces to the southern province of Uruzgan to provide security and to support the

region's political and economic development. The Dutch government justified its participation in NATO's first out-of-area operation—and the first Dutch combat deployment since the Korean War—by citing alliance and transatlantic solidarity.⁶⁵

From the spring of 2006 until August 2010, the Netherlands deployed approximately 2,000 troops in Afghanistan. Some 1,400 of these Dutch soldiers, along with a smaller number of Australians, were in Uruzgan, a small mountainous province north of Helmand and Kandahar.⁶⁶ Its population of 312,000 consists mainly of ethnic Pashtuns, though there is a significant Hazara minority.⁶⁷ Uruzgan province has long had a strong Taliban presence and was the birthplace of Taliban leader Mullah Omar. It is also one of the Afghan provinces with the highest level of opium production. The Dutch order of battle included Task Force-Uruzgan (TF-U), a battalion-sized battle group of airmobile and mechanized infantry, and a battalion-sized PRT in the provincial capital of Tarin Kowt. These formations were accompanied by various fire support units, headquarters staff, medical personnel, and several aircraft crews.⁶⁸ The Dutch deployment coincided with the expansion of operations of the NATO-led ISAF, originally established to provide security around Kabul, to cover all of Afghanistan. The Dutch rotated command of RC-South in Kandahar, one of five regional commands within the ISAF, with the British and Canadians; as of late summer 2010 RC-South is being taken over by U.S. forces.

The Dutch adopted a so-called “3D” strategy of defense, development, and diplomacy. The Dutch strategy stressed support for Afghan-led economic initiatives by engaging community leaders in developing and implementing local projects. The defense dimension focused on protecting population centers in a modified version of the British “ink-blot” COIN strategy rather than seeking out opportunities to fight the Taliban. Dutch forces were generally reluctant to engage in combat operations against the Taliban and instead operated under rules of engagement that typically required them to use force only if attacked and to maneuver out of enemy fire instead of staying in contact. They did not regularly patrol into Taliban-controlled ter-

ritory but focused on building relationships with the local population, which provided useful intelligence and some degree of force protection.⁶⁹ The Dutch also managed to keep civilian deaths and physical destruction relatively low and established a compensation system for local property damaged by combat or otherwise.⁷⁰ The motto of TF-U was “Rebuild Where Possible, Fight Where Necessary,” which demonstrated the primacy of reconstruction in the Dutch strategy and highlighted a reluctance to use force.⁷¹

The strategy enjoyed some degree of success. The number of NGOs in Uruzgan province increased from six to fifty during the years of the Dutch deployment.⁷² According to the Dutch Foreign Ministry, while Uruzgan province had no Afghan police officers in 2006, it had 1,600 by summer of 2010. In addition, the number of schools in the province doubled and local health services improved considerably.⁷³ Unlike in Helmand province, the Taliban in Uruzgan appeared unwilling or unable to challenge the Dutch directly for control of urban areas.

Despite these apparent successes, however, critics complain that the Dutch troops spent too much time in secured areas rather than fighting insurgents. Furthermore, the Dutch approach, while minimizing casualties, failed to contest the Taliban's control over most rural areas or over the narcotics trade, which remained robust despite the development projects generated by the Dutch soldiers and the NGO community.⁷⁴ The Dutch strategy was seen by some as being politically motivated to keep casualties low in order to stem domestic dissent from the casualty-averse Dutch public. If this interpretation is correct, it was initially effective. The Dutch troops were originally scheduled to withdraw by the end of 2008, but in November 2007 the new Dutch coalition government, elected the previous year, extended their Uruzgan deployment until August 2010. At the time, Dutch coalition members publicly stated this extension was a one-time arrangement.

In early 2010, NATO representatives, aware of the domestic opposition to further Dutch participation in combat operations in Afghanistan, asked

the Netherlands to maintain a smaller number of troops in Uruzgan province to train Afghan security forces. In a February letter to Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende, NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen wrote that “It is of paramount importance for the success of ISAF, for the alliance contribution in Afghanistan and for the sustainable and successful transfer of responsibility to Afghan authorities that the Netherlands continue to contribute to ISAF in such a way and for such a period of time that the Dutch accomplishments in Uruzgan will be secured.”⁷⁵ Balkenende’s center-right Christian Democrat party, the largest in the three-party coalition government, proposed keeping a smaller Dutch combat contingent for one additional year after the August 2010 deadline. Deputy Prime Minister Wouter Bos and his Labour Party, the second largest coalition partner, insisted on adhering to the original schedule. The resulting deadlock led to the government’s collapse on February 20, 2010.⁷⁶

The subsequent national elections in June produced inconclusive results, and the parties haggled for months over the formation of a new ruling coalition. Regardless, whatever government emerged would not reverse the pullout decision. Starting in early August, a U.S.-led force that includes troops from Australia, Singapore, and Slovakia began replacing the Dutch contingent.⁷⁷ The Netherlands has pledged to continue to provide development aide to Afghanistan and diplomatic support for the coalition.

Among other governments, much sympathy exists for the Dutch given their strong support for the Afghan mission despite the relatively small size of their national military and defense resources. As of August 1, 2010, the Netherlands’ deployment had cost almost \$2 billion and the lives of twenty-four of their soldiers.⁷⁸ Some 140 Dutch soldiers were also wounded during the four year mission.⁷⁹ Most Dutch casualties were caused by IEDs, friendly-fire, or non-hostile accidents.⁸⁰ One factor strengthening the Dutch desire to withdraw was popular resentment of other NATO member state governments that refused to rotate their forces into more dangerous southern Afghanistan, which would

have allowed Dutch troops to relocate to more secure regions.

The French Approach: Back in NATO

France contributes the fourth largest number of troops to ISAF—as of this writing it has 3,750 troops deployed in Afghanistan and has participated in coalition operations since October 2001. There are approximately 1,400 French troops stationed in northern Kabul, where France rotates the command of RC-Capital with Italy and Turkey. Since April 2008, the French have also deployed approximately 1,200 troops to the small northeast province of Kapisa, where they fall under the command of the U.S.-led RC-East.⁸¹ France assumed responsibility for Kapisa province in July 2008 and has since suffered a sharp spike in casualties.⁸² Several hundred other French troops are deployed to Kandahar Airbase in southern Afghanistan, where they support several French combat aircraft.⁸³

France, which has a long history fighting insurgencies in Indochina and Algeria, has not fully embraced counterinsurgency as its strategy in Afghanistan.⁸⁴ The French perspective on ISAF’s mission and its national expectation of success significantly differ from those of other NATO-ISAF nations. France believes its ISAF role is as a combat and training force that augments the capabilities of the Afghan government by providing support to Afghan security forces.⁸⁵ Unlike the Germans and other Europeans who perceive the core of ISAF’s mission to be stabilization and reconstruction, the French have rejected the PRT model and military participation in reconstruction efforts, which they believe are best carried out by civilian institutions and the Afghan government. French officials have also rejected U.S. efforts aimed at using NATO and ISAF to promote Afghan democratization and liberalized nation-building. They believe these goals are not authorized under ISAF’s mission and best pursued by the European Union, the United Nations, or other bodies.⁸⁶ Despite its self-image as a combat force, France has generally refrained from fighting Taliban insurgents in Afghanistan and has instead focused on training the ANP and ANA. French

troops function under national caveats that bar them from combat in the southern provinces; strict rules of engagement are designed to minimize risk and casualties.⁸⁷ Nevertheless, France has suffered thirty-nine killed in Afghanistan, mainly from small arms and IED attacks in and around Kabul.⁸⁸

Some French units are adopting elements of a COIN campaign while remaining mindful of French apprehensions concerning military-sponsored nation-building and excessive casualties. In June 2009, a battalion under Colonel Francis Chanson assumed command in Kapisa province. Unlike his predecessor, who focused on kinetic operations to disrupt insurgent activity, Chanson implemented a strategy based on deterring enemy attacks while attempting to “protect, seduce, and convince” the population.⁸⁹ This provided an opportunity to build local government capacity and encourage NGO-led economic development. Later that year, other French commanders followed suit. French forces began to build combat outposts within populated areas while employing political officers to partner with local leaders. Additionally, French Operational Mentor and Liaison Team (OMLT) mentors are redoubling their efforts to train Afghan forces.⁹⁰

France’s troop deployment has been gradually increasing over the last several years and French troops have taken on a larger role in conducting joint operations alongside Afghan security forces in Kabul and Kapisa provinces. On February 12, 2010, French Prime Minister Francois Fillon told Afghan President Karzai, “France will stay for as long as it takes to bring stability to Afghanistan.”⁹¹ France recently rejected U.S. calls for additional combat troops; President Nicolas Sarkozy, however, appeared amenable to sending more trainers or civil engineers.⁹² French leaders have additionally emphasized their support for the U.S.-led mission and warned of Afghanistan’s collapse if French forces were to withdraw.⁹³

Joint U.S.-French operations in eastern Afghanistan have produced praise from U.S. commanders about the capabilities of the French soldiers on the ground. Many commentators point to the unpopularity of the war among the French public, which spikes with the announce-

ment of each French combat death, as the reason for France’s ambivalence in Afghanistan. France appears to have little desire to build capacity within its armed forces for extensive counterinsurgency. This seems to run parallel with French efforts to lower France’s overall defense spending by decreasing the size of its military and reducing its global military commitments.

The Future of Counterinsurgency in NATO

Counterinsurgency requires carrying out a complicated series of interlocking economic, humanitarian, military, and political initiatives in the face of armed opposition. Conventional military forces traditionally struggle with the challenge of adapting to the demands of COIN warfare; the United States has learned to conduct counterinsurgency more successfully over the past nine years of war, largely as a result of extraordinary individual leadership motivated by the clear and present danger of losing the war in Iraq.⁹⁴ The NATO allies have not reached a uniform conclusion based on the ongoing events in Afghanistan. Winning the war in Afghanistan will require making progress on a range of military, political, and economic issues. These include reversing the recent successes of the Taliban and bolstering Afghans’ physical security; establishing effective Afghan political institutions that provide essential services to the Afghan population; improving the effectiveness of the Afghan police and judiciary to ensure that they have a legitimate monopoly over the means of violence; reviving Afghanistan’s national economy; and diverting farmers away from narcotics trafficking into legal livelihoods.

Allied contributions of men, money, and materiel to this and future missions should be guided by their efficacy rather than political symbolism. All too often, they supply such small numbers of troops as to suggest that performance and effectiveness in theater has given way to “political theater” in which a token display of solidarity among member nations is as important as meeting objectives and achieving results. A multinational coali-

tion with small pockets of troop concentrations, when combined with limited and restrictive rules of engagement, is a recipe for confusion at best and ineffectiveness at worst.

In September 2006, when NATO military planners made clear that the alliance needed more troops to conduct counterinsurgency effectively in Afghanistan, NATO could only make note of the request for an additional 2,500 soldiers.⁹⁵ It was up to the member states to decide, unilaterally, whether or not to deliver the troops—and most did not, despite the U.S. officials' warning that NATO's future in Afghanistan was at stake.⁹⁶ Notwithstanding President Obama's December 2009 decision that the United States would significantly increase its troop strength in Afghanistan, equivalent European increases have not been forthcoming. Several NATO contingents in Afghanistan continue to lack adequate enabling forces—including attack and lift helicopters, smart munitions, and digital command and control—to fully leverage and sustain their ground combat power. NATO's strategy requires sustainable military victories on the ground in order to induce the Taliban to negotiate, but many Europeans want to end their military engagement in Afghanistan regardless of the situation on the ground.⁹⁷

The experiences of the past years make clear that European countries are unlikely to agree to a major increase in their combat forces assigned to Afghanistan. Both the Bush and Obama administrations have struggled to persuade Europe to commit more troops, equipment, and resources to Afghanistan. In December 2007, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates publicly criticized European members of NATO for their refusal to send troops into southern Afghanistan, their inability to properly train and equip their forces, and their over-reliance on air strikes that cause civilian casualties.⁹⁸ Gates remarked, "Most of the European forces, NATO forces, are not trained in counterinsurgency; they were trained for the Fulda Gap."⁹⁹ These comments stirred outrage from NATO allies—particularly from Canada, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. Europeans sincerely believe that they have stood in solidarity with the United States in

Afghanistan, even at the risk of increasing their exposure to angry Islamist militants. Gates again vented frustration at Europe's defense capabilities in February 2010, stating, "The demilitarization of Europe—where large swaths of the general public and political class are averse to military force and the risks that go with it—has gone from a blessing in the 20th century to an impediment to achieving real security and lasting peace in the 21st."¹⁰⁰

A more plausible hope is for European governments to contribute to greater civilian capacity for reconstruction and development. Unfortunately, Europe's civilian capacity, like that of the United States, has not been fully mobilized or effectively used in Afghanistan. Germany's inability to properly resource its training of the ANP in 2002–2003 created concerns in the United States that the Germans were squandering the narrow window that the fragile transitional government had to build up security forces. After repeatedly prodding the Germans to step up their efforts, the United States eventually took charge of training the ANP.¹⁰¹ Moreover in 2009, the EU's police training mission came under intense scrutiny because, after two years, the program had only half of the necessary trainers, was underfunded, and was not coordinated with other coalition training programs.¹⁰²

Coalition warfare is inherently frustrating. European civilian staffing efforts suffer from the same problems as those involving the United States: most diplomatic or law enforcement personnel are permanently employed. There is no floating reserve of civilians ready to be deployed to trouble spots around the globe. Like the United States, European governments have strained to find sufficient numbers of civilians with the experience necessary to be useful, the professional freedom to be deployed, and a willingness to be sent to a high-risk area like Afghanistan.

Unity of effort is critical for making the most of available resources. Ideally, effort would build on available indigenous assets to eventually produce a self-perpetuating culture of development and security. For example, an operation to clear a village must be viewed not as an isolated event but as part of a broader strategy. A village is cleared so that its

people can be free of Taliban interference. A road is built so that commerce can occur. Local police are trained to solidify the security gains. All too frequently, NATO has been guilty of “mowing the grass”—clearing an area, leaving, and returning six months or a year later to counter the Taliban insurgents who have exploited the security vacuum. This approach to dealing with insurgents is a recipe for failure. Although NATO has made progress in eliminating some national caveats, the remaining domestically driven constraints, compounded by the requirement to negotiate with twenty-eight separate NATO governments for the use of their ISAF-assigned forces, represent a significant burden on the alliance in terms of both operational and tactical flexibility.

NATO’s experience in Afghanistan has been sobering. Even for the world’s most powerful military alliance, putting a shattered country back together is difficult under the best of circumstances—and the current situation in Afghanistan is clearly not the best of circumstances. NATO should continue to build its COIN capacity, unify its efforts across Afghanistan, and operate effectively alongside civilian reconstruction efforts. Its European members should join the United States as full partners in rebuilding Afghanistan and defeating the Taliban if success is to be achieved. British scholar Christopher Coker recently argued, “The gravest danger of all for the prospects of a Western community is that the U.S. will one day conclude that Europe is no longer of any significance, geopolitically or culturally.”¹⁰³ European contributions to Afghanistan to date have demonstrated the continued significance of the NATO alliance, but improvements in doctrine, training, and understanding of counterinsurgency are necessary to preserve the geopolitical significance of the alliance if it is to continue to meet the security challenges of the twenty-first century.

Not all future military campaigns will look like Afghanistan, but terrorism and the stress on natural resources caused by population growth and climate change will likely result in failed and failing states becoming a growing security challenge in the twenty-first century.¹⁰⁴ The United States is working

to increase its whole of government capacity to deal with these challenges, including by building more capabilities to raise and train host nation security forces. NATO, established to provide a conventional shield against a conventional military threat, must increase its capacity to meet these challenges while maintaining some degree of conventional military capability against more standard threats. In the face of rising budget pressures, this search for balance in military capability across the spectrum of conflict will be enormously difficult, but essential if NATO is to provide comprehensive security to the transnational community in coming decades.

About the Project

The Transatlantic Paper Series is a product of The Chicago Council on Global Affairs’ project on “The Future of the Transatlantic Alliance in a Changing Strategic Environment.” The project seeks to identify ways in which the United States and Europe can deepen cooperation and maintain collective influence as the geopolitical center of gravity moves toward Asia and the Middle East. In addition to the paper series, the project includes a final report entitled “The Transatlantic Alliance in a Multipolar World,” authored by Thomas Wright and Richard Weitz. Over the past year, project activities have included workshops, conferences in the United States and Europe, and research trips to Asia and Europe. The project was made possible by generous funding from the Robert Bosch Stiftung, the McCormick Foundation, and the Adenauer Fund at The Chicago Council on Global Affairs. All views and opinions expressed in the papers are those solely of the authors. The Chicago Council takes no institutional position on policy issues and has no affiliation with the U.S. government. All statements of fact and expressions of opinion contained in this paper are the sole responsibility of the author and may not reflect the views of his respective organization or the project funders.

Appendix

Figure 1 – NATO Contributions to ISAF and Coalition Casualties as of August 2010

NATO Country	Troop Contribution ¹¹¹	Rank	Percentage of Total Contribution	Fatalities ¹¹²	Percentage of Total Fatalities	Armed Forces Personnel ¹¹³	Troops per 100 Armed Forces Personnel	Rank
Albania	295	19	0.255	0	0.00	14,500	2.034	8
Belgium	575	12	0.497	1	0.05	39,000	1.474	13
Bulgaria	540	13	0.467	0	0.00	75,000	0.720	22
Canada	2,830	6	2.447	152	7.33	64,000	4.422	3
Croatia	295	19	0.255	0	0.00	22,000	1.341	14
Czech Republic	500	14	0.432	3	0.14	27,000	1.852	10
Denmark	730	11	0.631	37	1.78	30,000	2.433	6
Estonia	160	24	0.138	8	0.39	7,000	2.286	7
France	3,750	4	3.243	49	2.36	353,000	1.062	17
Germany	4,590	3	3.969	42	2.03	244,000	1.881	9
Greece	75	25	0.065	0	0.00	161,000	0.047	28
Hungary	360	17	0.311	4	0.19	37,000	0.973	19
Iceland	5	28	0.004	0	0.00	130	3.846	4
Italy	3,400	5	2.940	29	1.40	436,000	0.780	21
Latvia	170	23	0.147	3	0.14	16,000	1.063	16
Lithuania	245	22	0.212	1	0.05	24,000	1.021	18
Luxembourg	9	27	0.008	0	0.00	1,612	0.558	25
Netherlands	380	16	0.329	24	1.16	47,000	0.809	20
Norway	500	15	0.432	9	0.43	19,000	2.632	5
Poland	2,630	7	2.274	21	1.01	143,000	1.839	11
Portugal	250	21	0.216	2	0.10	91,000	0.275	27
Romania	1,750	8	1.513	15	0.72	153,000	1.144	15
Slovakia	300	18	0.259	0	0.00	17,000	1.765	12
Slovenia	70	26	0.061	0	0.00	12,000	0.583	24
Spain	1,555	10	1.345	30	1.45	223,000	0.697	23
Turkey	1,740	9	1.505	2	0.10	613,000	0.284	26
United Kingdom	9,500	2	8.216	337	16.25	160,000	5.938	1
United States	78,430	1	67.826	1,305 ¹¹⁴	62.92	1,540,000	5.093	2
Total:	115,634			2,074		4,569,242		

Notes

1 The authors would like to thank Jonathan Abraham Kerie Kurtz, Matt Castline, Lauren van den Berg, David Barno, Brian Burton, Haly Laasme, Andrew Rigney Alexander Wilner, and Thomas Wright for their helpful contributions to improving the text.

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