

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**MERGING THE INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AND ASSISTANCE FORCE (ISAF)
AND OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF): A STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE**

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ABSTRACT

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Afghanistan has provided the International community the opportunity to demonstrate the power of democratic nations in fighting tyranny. NATO's International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF) has played a critical role in Afghanistan since the first international peace keepers arrived in 2002. The American presence under Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) has another national agenda in Afghanistan. Tension between these operations as to scope, force structure and mission adds an interesting international dynamic to these military missions. The US advocates merger of OEF and ISAF with the caveat that this consolidation must have two points as a mandate: first, a mission to destroy Al-Qaeda and Taliban forces and second, to assist the Afghanistan government with opium eradication. Given the opposition by many European capitals to a direct combat role for ISAF, progress toward a consolidated NATO command has been difficult. That being said, ISAF has made progress with the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) and the recent decision by the Alliance to expand NATO presence by over 10,000 troops is proving successful in creating a more stable Afghanistan. The merging of OEF and ISAF will provide the U.S. with the strategic flexibility to draw-down forces in Afghanistan to meet further National Security threats.

MERGING THE INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AND ASSISTANCE FORCE (ISAF) AND OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF): A STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE

“The events of September 11, 2001 taught us that weak states like Afghanistan, can pose as great a danger to our national interests as strong states.....We are also guided by the conviction that no nation can build a safer, better world alone.”¹ These words were used by President Bush in announcing his signature to the National Security Strategy that was released on 17 September 2002. In this 31 page document that covers the security environment through which the United States must navigate in a dangerous world, the ‘weak state like Afghanistan’ was referenced several times. International involvement in this nation since the US bombing campaign prosecuted shortly after the 911 attacks has evolved in the past four years but the guiding principle has remained the same; namely, stability. How stability in Afghanistan is to be achieved is open to a broad range of interpretations defined by the filters of national political agendas of each nation currently working in that part of the world. For the United States, the issue of an Afghanistan that can become a terrorist haven once again still looms large, but there are other issues, such as the continuing involvement of US personnel in Iraq, that make the continued high-intensity involvement of US personnel in Afghanistan difficult. An answer to this issue is the involvement of other nations under various organizations to increase the size and depth of their efforts in Afghanistan. Still, the US does not want to relinquish its influence, access and indeed control of efforts in the region. US goals in Afghanistan are broad and clear: root out Al Qaeda and Taliban forces, prevent their return, support self-governance, and ensure security, stability and reconstruction. To accomplish these goals, the United States and the international community are undertaking two major campaigns simultaneously. First, a military effort to kill or capture terrorist forces in Afghanistan, and second a political/civil effort to build a viable and secure state, with each campaign dependent upon the other's success. Without an end to hostilities, reconstruction and governance will fail. If reconstruction and governance fail, the resulting power vacuum could potentially allow a return of Al Qaeda and terrorist factions.²

One answer for the US desire to remain engaged but not so heavily invested in Afghanistan is the merger of the US military effort, Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and the NATO military effort, the International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF) into a single entity. The merger of these two missions is a strategic imperative for the US policy in Afghanistan because it will do two things: maintain the US leadership and influence of international efforts in Afghanistan while allowing the US to reinvest assets currently committed in Afghanistan to other parts of the world. Recent discussions quoted in a number of open source publications

reference the figure of 4,000 troops as an initial number of US military personnel that could potentially be withdrawn if international contributions in Afghanistan were increased.³ General John Abizaid, the Commander of US Central Command, recently stated that "it makes sense that as NATO forces go in, and they're more in numbers, that we could drop some of the US requirements somewhat."⁴

First, some very brief history. On 14 November 2001, shortly after the onset of the US bombing campaign in Afghanistan, the United Nations released UN Security Resolution 1378⁵ which called on the world body to work towards creating an environment in Afghanistan that would "promote stability and secure the delivery of aid," and gave the UN a central role in the creation of a stability force. A conference took place in December 2001 in Bonn, Germany which further defined international involvement in Afghanistan. Labeled the "Bonn Agreement,"⁶ this convention called for a number of initiatives, one of which was the establishment of an international stability force working inside the capital city, Kabul. This agreement was endorsed by UN Resolution 1385⁷ on 6 December 2001. UN resolution 1387,⁸ signed on 20 December 2001, created the International Stability and Assistance Force (ISAF) as an international military operation. In August 2003, NATO adopted a mandate⁹ that assumed the leadership role for international operations in Afghanistan from the UN and expanded the original efforts outside of Kabul. It is important to note that the development of an international military force to create security for the delivery of aid inside Afghanistan was operating concurrently with the US military's Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). The purpose of OEF was to root out Taliban and Al Qaeda forces by direct ground combat. The dichotomy of these two operations remains even four years later. The US operation involves direct combat related in its quest to capture or kill Osama Bin Laden and his Al Qaeda operatives supported by Taliban forces, while the international operation remains largely dedicated to both security operations connected with provincial reconstruction, and the reconstruction task itself.

In the past four years there have been a number of successes by the international and US forces in Afghanistan. Afghanistan has conducted several successful *Loya Jirga* conferences of local Afghani tribal leaders which have yielded agreements in principle between the warring factions. Several local elections, all conducted with limited and localized violence, have taken place culminating with a nationwide election which selected a president, Mr. Hamid Karzai, and a governing council. US operations have netted several high-level Al Qaeda leaders, reduced the fighting capability of both Al Qaeda and Taliban forces in the area and have weakened their grip on local populations, particularly in the southern regions of Afghanistan. A case can be made that Al Qaeda and Taliban forces have been driven into the virtually ungoverned parts of

southern Afghanistan and Northern Pakistan where their influence over the local populace is limited. Given the success of both OEF and ISAF, the US is now looking to reduce its operations in Afghanistan so that it may recapitalize those capabilities elsewhere. At the same time, the US does not want to lose access, influence and leadership of the international community's commitment to Afghanistan. Furthermore, the conditions have been set for this event to take place in a recently released joint statement issued by Secretary of State Rice and Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld at the conclusion of the February 2005 NATO Defense Ministerial Meeting in Nice, France which stated that the US was willing to conclude OEF and join in a NATO-led operation that would continue the international efforts to create a stable Afghanistan as early as 2006.¹⁰

At the core of the international security efforts in Afghanistan is the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT). The PRT is a combination of international military and civilian personnel based in one of Afghanistan's provinces with the aim of extending the authority of the Afghan central government as well as facilitating development and reconstruction by contributing to an improved security environment. In addition to reconstruction and stabilization, PRTs support reform of the "Afghan Security Sector" with a set of actions focused on the demobilization and disarmament of militias; building a national army and national police force that is accountable and under democratic control; eradicating the drug trade and building a coherent legal system. The development of the PRT concept as employed in Afghanistan has not been a coherent approach by any stretch of the imagination. Shortly after the UN resolutions that called for international involvement in security operations in Afghanistan, many nations, such as Germany and Canada, concluded bilateral agreements with Afghanistan and deployed troops to the region to begin building national PRTs. As time progressed, NATO developed a mandate that called for additional nationally manned PRTs to deploy to Afghanistan under the auspices of both the UN and NATO. Concurrently, NATO began planning a phased operation of successive nationally manned PRTs that would be deployed by NATO and under exclusive NATO command and control. The phased operation was to have four stages with stage 1 moving in the north, stage 2 in the west, stage 3 in the south west and finally stage 4 in the south. Over the past four years, the manning and command structure of the PRTs has become somewhat confusing. An example, Germany, had one PRT operating in Afghanistan under a bilateral arrangement between Berlin and Kabul and then transferred it to a subordinate formation of the US-led OEF. A second German PRT deployed as a NATO element. Nevertheless, the PRT construct has proven a viable method to introduce international assistance for stability operations in Afghanistan.¹¹

When NATO entered Afghanistan under the UN Resolutions it did so with a NATO mandate that called for the creation of Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs). These organizations would be nationally manned, work in clearly defined geographic areas and would be deployed with their own set of national caveats. NATO made the decision that it would work in the north and north western part of Afghanistan from an ISAF Headquarters that would remain in Kabul. Initially, with the exception of the UK, NATO had no desire to move into the southern regions of Afghanistan since that was where the US, headquartered in Khandahar, was prosecuting a robust combat mission to locate and eliminate Al Qaeda and Taliban forces. It can also be assessed that the north and northwestern portion of Afghanistan was already more stable and less likely to pose a combat risk to NATO forces operating in those areas. The plan was for an initial eight PRTs, the first of which was run by Germany in the northern city of Kunduz. The idea of these PRTs was to allow a national military structure to directly liaise with the local Afghani population and assist in creating an environment of security which would allow people to go about their daily lives without the threat of violence. Stability, created as a result of the PRT presence, was to allow for the conduct of commerce with international assistance in infrastructure development such as road construction, building of schools and hospitals and the building of modern communications networks. Creating stability would encourage international investment in the rebuilding (in some cases building) of Afghanistan by ensuring that the money and manpower were a safe investment. At the NATO Defense Ministers meeting in Prague, the Czech Republic,¹² the ministers agreed to capitalize on the success of the first few PRTs by expanding the number of PRTs to 22 and to deploy them further west and south. To date, there are 8,000 NATO troops in Afghanistan operating in 16 PRT locations subordinate to the ISAF headquarters located in Kabul with a plan to increase this number to 10,000 with the addition of future PRTs.¹³

The history of the NATO approach to the deployment of national PRTs over the past four years reflects the political agendas of all the Alliance troop contributing nations. The plan was to deploy national PRTs to specified regions of Afghanistan beginning with the north and east part of the country, and then spreading to the west and south-west. Final deployment would be south toward the border with Pakistan, as support for increased NATO involvement grew on the part of the participating states in Brussels. The plan initially had four phases and had to be flexible enough to absorb the changing political landscapes of many of the nations which were facing national elections. And most importantly, the phasing had to build in time for the Alliance to come to terms with the idea that direct ground combat operations would be required in the south and east to root out Al Qaeda and Taliban forces (hence the expansion into the south and

east is stage 3 and 4). Phasing also had to build in time to establish command and control relationships between the nationally manned PRTs and the various command headquarters operating in Afghanistan, most notably the US-led OEF and the NATO-led ISAF. ¹⁴

In early 2003, the PRTs began deployment in the north with a total of three PRTs led by the US in Gardez, Bamian and Kunduz. By August 2005, a total of 21 PRTs had been established across Afghanistan with different nations deploying to various population centers throughout Afghanistan; sometimes assuming control of a PRT from another nation. By October 2003, the PRTs led by the US and the PRTs in Bamian (now led by New Zealand) and Khandahar (now led by Canada) operated under the US-led OEF. The United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) adopted on 13 October 2003 expanded the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mandate to allow it to operate outside Kabul, both in the form of PRTs and through limited temporary deployments. UNSCR 1623 of 13 September 2005 extended the UN's authority for ISAF for a further 12 months until October 2006. As already detailed, the PRT concept is central to international efforts in the region and NATO viewed the PRT as the best way to extend ISAF beyond Kabul. Even so, command and control relationships of individual PRTs within Afghanistan continue to evolve. The Kunduz PRT led by Germany, transferred to ISAF control on 30 December 2003. Following the NATO Istanbul Summit in June 2004, the two UK-led PRT teams in Mazar-e-Sharif and Meymana transferred to ISAF along with the associated Forward Support Base (FSB) on 1 July 2004. The establishment of a German PRT in Feyzabad and a Dutch-led PRT in Pol-e-Khumri in September 2004 completed Stage 1 (North) of the phased expansion of ISAF. Following the meeting of NATO Defence Ministers in February 2005, NATO announced Stage 2 (West) of ISAF expansion. This initially involved bringing the existing OEF PRTs in Farah and Herat under ISAF control. The US continues to lead in Farah, while Italy has taken over in Herat. Spain has established a new PRT in Qal'eh-ye Now, and Lithuania a PRT in Chagcharan, completing Stage 2 (West). Italy and Spain jointly provide the FSB for the west, also based in Herat. In December 2005, the NATO Defense Ministers announced that NATO would expand in the South. Stage 3 (South and West) is designed to extend the PRT concept to Southern Afghanistan with troops from the United Kingdom, Romania, Canada and hopefully the Netherlands. Under the expansion plan, NATO troops will move into Helmand province, a notorious hotbed of unrest and a center of opium production. A true test for a NATO which is redefining its role as a military alliance in the midst of conducting its first true out-of-area operation. ¹⁵

Stage 3 (South and West) of ISAF expansion brings with it a host of operational considerations that make this stage markedly different from the first two. NATO military planners have followed the direct combat operations executed by the UK and US forces already deployed to these areas of Afghanistan and to extend NATO presence into these areas necessitates the understanding that NATO forces will be exposed to combat operations. This strong possibility of involvement of NATO forces in combat operations was the major topic of discussion at the Defense Ministers meeting in December 2005 with many nations opposed to sending their troops into this part of Afghanistan to support Stage 3 expansion. A consensus decision was reached at the end of the discussion stipulating that the Alliance would support a Stage 3 deployment in the South and West of Afghanistan, but only those nations willing to accept the risk of involving their soldiers in direct combat operations would deploy at PRT to this region. As stated above, the UK, Romania and Canada committed to establishing PRTs in this region with the Netherlands expressing interest provided the Dutch Parliament voted to support the commitment (this vote is still pending). Romania had previously voted to lift the restrictions against their forces being deployed in a combat role when it deployed a Romanian task force to support the Polish Multi-National Division in Iraq in June 2003.¹⁶

One thing that must be restated often is that the United States is a member of NATO. With 'victory' being declared in the Cold War when the Berlin Wall was dismantled in 1989, US military attention turned sharply from Europe and NATO as a viable military force. Even during NATO military operations during the Balkan crisis beginning in 1993 and the Kosovo crisis of 1999 there was a very clear distinction between what American forces were doing in the Balkans and what NATO was doing in the former Yugoslavia. In the press, it appeared that there were two separate military forces working in the region: the United States and NATO. As a member of NATO and stakeholder in the Alliance, the US provides 25.2%¹⁷ of the annual NATO budget and provides the Commander of NATO, the Supreme Allied Commander – Europe (SACEUR) which it has done since NATO's inception at the conclusion of the Second World War. Having NATO assume greater military roles and missions in Afghanistan permits US influence on operations through its leadership role in the Alliance and its status as a troop contributing nation to Alliance operations.¹⁸

The US leadership role in NATO being stated, and the fact that the US is contributing forces to ISAF, the US is still prosecuting a unilateral combat operation in Afghanistan. What will be the impact on US operations, specifically OEF, if the merger of ISAF and OEF becomes a reality? Our own coalition doctrine describes a parallel command structure defined as "when two or more nations (this could also very easily apply to the NATO Alliance) combine to form a

coalition and none of the nations are designated to take the lead, a parallel structure must be formed. Why nations won't subordinate their forces to foreign command are many, including political factors, national prestige....¹⁹ This basic framework would also apply to the ISAF/OEF command structure. A consensus formula is for the ISAF commander to have three deputies; one for peacekeeping efforts (selected from a nation which opposes direct combat operations such as France or Germany), one for air operations and one for security (meaning potential combat operations). The last deputy would report to the US-led OEF command structure.²⁰ This new arrangement would preserve some political separation between ISAF and OEF and would assuage some of the concerns in some capitals across Europe who find it uncomfortable to have their soldiers working too closely with the US unilateral effort of OEF. Although on the face this arrangement looks convoluted, it would create a greater synergy and unity of command in a form with which NATO has use in the past with operations in the Balkans.

With ISAF, the 'consensus formula' command relationship is for the ISAF commander to have three deputies; one for nation building which would include training Afghani security forces, one for air operations, and one for security. The Security Deputy would report to the US led OEF headquarters. The new command relationship would preserve some separation between ISAF and OEF and yet eliminate a significant portion of the exclusive "stove-piped" command and control arrangement. Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Fried has characterized this proposed command arrangement as "...we've made good progress in ways that satisfy everyone's fair interests."²¹ The recent announcement by Secretary Rumsfeld and General Abizaid to reduce US forces in Afghanistan by 2,500 troops in 2006 illustrates the benefits derived from this 'greater efficiency' achieved through closer ISAF/OEF coordination.²² The US Joint Staff J5 further highlighted this greater synergy with regard to further US troop reductions when he praised the international / NATO competence and contributions: "We're winning this, and it's because of their great effort that we're able to make these adjustments (US troop withdrawals in 2006) in cooperation with our friends the Afghans and with our friends from NATO."²³ As events in 2006 unfold, we will experience a closer 'linkage' between OEF and ISAF. The political realities, however, will laboriously prolong the eventual merger needed to achieve total unity. The political priorities in the North Atlantic Council (NAC) will continue to focus on language that address the political concerns in Paris and Berlin at the expense of greater military efficiency----not a totally new dynamic for NATO. Yet as we witnessed in Kosovo, military expedients will eventually lead to greater clarity in the political discourse in all capitals resulting in greater synergy.

“Alliance operations” and their definition is the major challenge to the merger of ISAF and OEF. What constitutes the military definition of “operations?” The US bombing campaign in Afghanistan was a unilateral response to intelligence produced in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks. Subsequent US military operations on the ground were a continued unilateral effort to remove the Taliban and Al Qaeda elements ruling Afghanistan, in addition to providing a safe haven for the indoctrination and training of international Islamist terrorists. The deployment of international troops to Afghanistan (most notably the Germans, British and Turks) was conducted under UN resolutions. The deployment of NATO as a military entity was also conducted under the auspices of a UN resolution that formed the basis of a NATO mandate directing the deployment of Alliance members to contribute forces that “would promote stability and secure the delivery of aid.” If the definition of “Alliance operations” is a major challenge, the root of “Alliance operations” is what constitutes the definition of “stability” and how to create it. In this one word, “stability,” is the challenge and perhaps the answer in how to successfully merge ISAF and OEF into an effective international military force that will achieve the ends desired by both the US, which wants to create a stable Afghanistan and deny the state as a training ground for terrorists, and NATO which wants a stable and economically viable Afghanistan.

While both the US and NATO desire a stable Afghanistan, the methods in use to achieve that goal is at issue. Differing views, goals and ends of a merger might be problematic. In the past two years a great deal of dialogue has taken place between troop contributing nations concerning what type of operations would contribute to a stable Afghanistan. For the US, ‘stability’ has many definitions, but two of the methods to achieve that goal often make discussions with other troop contributing nations difficult; direct ground combat operations necessary to eliminate Al Qaeda and Taliban forces, and deliberate steps to eradicate poppy cultivation (broadly discussed as “counter narcotic” operations). NATO troop contributing nations have been reluctant to participate in direct ground combat operations and poppy eradication, focusing instead on the definition of ‘stability’ as a political outreach program with local tribal leaders.

These programs take the form of support to Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) and a longer view of investment in infrastructure support, building, education and commercial trade. Many European leaders see a ‘conflict of interest’ because the hunt for terrorists will undermine ISAF’s mission of reconstruction and assistance to the fledgling Karzai government in Kabul.²⁴ To the American mind this “conflict of interest” which concerns so many European capitals can be interpreted as “risk aversion.” Why is it that European nations are so reluctant to commit

their troops and use military force as an option? A full answer to this question could fill volumes, but the short answer is found in their long and often brutal histories of armed conflict over a period of 1000 years. Much of the senior leadership in Europe; be it political, business or military and those older generation members who vote, remember all too well that last use of their militaries which devastated them physically, morally and economically. This concern is imbedded so deeply in their national psyches that it is difficult for the American mind to comprehend the European aversion to the use of military force. As discussions continue within the NATO Alliance about the merger of ISAF and OEF, the US must be sensitive to this aspect of the European mind set.

The greatest challenge to the merger of ISAF and OEF will continue to be the collective European domestic will. There continues to be a general feeling amongst many Europeans that the US prosecution of the Global War on Terror has made the world a more dangerous place. This feeling is well represented in the political dialogue in European capitals. Although on the surface there appears to be a great divergence, both France and Germany have contributed a significant number of forces in support of OEF. France has provided its only Carrier Battle Group, the "*Charles DeGaulle*" to support combat operations in the Arabian Sea. Aircraft from this battle group have flown more than 2,000 hours for OEF supporting Coalition air reconnaissance, strike missions and electronic surveillance. German Special Operations Forces are currently in Afghanistan conducting a full spectrum of SOF missions.²⁵ In a recent article published in the Defense News there is a line reading:

and while NATO diplomats wrangle over the possibility of formal military cooperation in Afghanistan, their troops on the ground here are already helping each other. Despite a lack of formal links between ISAF and OEF forces cooperating. Their spokespeople hold joint press conferences in Kabul. Royal Netherlands Air Force F-16s based in Kabul and assigned to ISAF can and do support CFC-A forces in emergency situations as cited on 29 June 2005 by Air Commodore J.L.H. Eikelboom, Commander of the Dutch contingent in Afghanistan.²⁶

CFC-A includes NATO Allies operating outside the Alliance context conducting combat operations. Dutch and French Special Forces whose nations oppose a combat role for ISAF conduct highly sensitive combat operations along the Pakistani border. This informal cooperation on the ground between ISAF and OEF's CFC-A could facilitate a formal relationship between the two."²⁷

The use of military force is problematic for other nations as well. It must be noted that NATO is not the only element contributing military forces to the region. To date, there are 43 other nations, the largest non-NATO nation being Australia, participating in international

operations in Afghanistan, all of whom restrict participation in combat operations and limit their soldiers to self defense. Additionally, while poppy eradication is central not only to US policy in the region, but a stated national imperative for the Karzai government, most of the international forces operating in Afghanistan admonish local Afghani leaders not to cultivate poppies as a way of generating income, but take no overt actions to stop farmers from growing them.

The question that must be asked at this point is can the domestic political will in European states be altered to gain support for a military mission likely to involve combat operations? The answer to that question is yes and there is precedence to demonstrate that domestic political will can be brought to a point where involvement in the NATO operation is possible even though the mission is not wholly acceptable. NATO is a consensus organization which fully appreciates that it will be a rare occasion when all 26 member-nations will agree, in the same way, on a given situation. During the Kosovo crisis of 1999, many NATO nations opposed the bombing campaign in the skies over Serbia but were in support of providing aid to Kosovar refugees fleeing to Albania. Both aspects; bombing and humanitarian assistance, were part of the same mission prospectus of the NATO operation in the Balkans and Alliance members contributed money, supplies and capabilities for the mission as well as troops. National caveats were crafted to ensure that troops were operating under the NATO flag but constrained to those aspects of the mission for which the contributing nation could muster national domestic support.

Understanding this dynamic of a large Alliance makes the idea of “duality,” where a nation can involve itself and its military in a mission largely found unpalatable by its domestic constituency, states must limit their actions to roles within that mission which can find broad based support on the domestic front. Nations understand that elected officials that strive to contribute troops to a mission for NATO eventually must stand for reelection and this flexibility (read “duality”) within the Alliance allows for national political entities to marshal support for military missions. In the case of ISAF, a NATO nation can involve itself in direct combat operations or limit its participation to provincial reconstruction – all under the umbrella of a single command structure.

It will be a political and diplomatic challenge to combine all the troop contributing nations operating in Afghanistan under one command and control structure called ISAF. A possible template for successful merger of the two missions is already in effect in Baghdad, Iraq, with the NATO Training Mission – Iraq (NTM-I) where the term “duality” is the key to success. Although heavily criticized in European circles, the NTM-I concept of duality has proven to be a palatable solution for many European capitals opposed to using their forces in combat operations in Iraq. This approach may also work when applied to the relationship of NATO forces in Afghanistan

and a desire on the part of some NATO members to clearly separate themselves from US combat operations. This would mean that the NATO command and control umbrella would have both a provincial reconstruction (read: nation building) focus and as well as a direct ground combat focus along the same lines as the NTM-I in Iraq. Currently the plan is for overall NATO command to reside with the NATO subordinate operational formation, Joint Forces Command – Brunssum located in the Netherlands, commanded by a German four star general with his in-theater chain-of-command being a rotational NATO HQ commander and two Deputy Commanders; one responsible for provincial reconstruction and the other for combat operations (most likely this would be a US or UK position).

To the American mind, the question of how to combine all the troop contributing nations operating in Afghanistan under one command and control structure called ISAF, allowing for some nations to prosecute a direct combat mission and other nations to pursue a more benign nation building role seems impossible where the military tenet of “unity of effort” reigns supreme. But to NATO, the idea of “duality” to achieve the same end state prosecuted through multiple national methods of employment is nothing new. Referenced earlier is the example NATO’s NTM-I mission in Baghdad, Iraq. At the NATO Summit in Istanbul in June 2004, NATO committed to deploying forces to Iraq to assist in the training of Iraqi stability forces.²⁸ After the outcry from most of the capitals in Europe against the US-led invasion of Iraq, it was very surprising that a NATO mission exists in Baghdad. Granted, not all NATO Alliance members deploy troops to Iraq, but all agreed in Istanbul that there is a role for NATO to play in the training of Iraqi security forces and all nations have contributed financially to support this NATO operation.

The NTM-I exists as a headquarters within a short drive of the US headquarters in Baghdad. The NTM-I is a subordinate element of the Multi-National Force – Iraq (MNF-I), a US-led organization responsible for prosecuting direct combat operations in Iraq to root out and destroy terrorist organizations with in Iraq. The NTM-I orchestrates the efforts of 11 member-nations that contribute forces to a training base for Iraqi security forces in the southern suburb of Al Rustamiyah in Baghdad. Each of these nations has a different national caveat for what their troops can and cannot do in the conduct of their duties. As an example, Hungary, Portugal and Rumania would not allow their troops to leave the heavily defended “Green Zone” in most circumstances (what NATO termed the “International Zone”). Polish forces would not fire their weapons except in self defense; Norwegians could not be sent to areas where there was an expectation of direct combat operations. Even with the disparate national caveats, this NATO training element works side-by-side with US elements prosecuting a direct combat role of

locating and eliminating terrorist insurgents. Despite the objections of many national capitals in Europe, the preeminent military alliance of Europe is deployed to a location where direct ground combat is a daily facet of international operations in a foreign country. ISAF may well use the NTM-I as a model for organization even though in Iraq, the NTM-I is a subordinate formation of the US led Multi-National force – Iraq (MNF-I) and in Afghanistan the US contingent would be a subordinate formation of the NATO led ISAF headquarters. NATO is well versed in conducting coordinated military operations even with frequently restrictive national caveats that come with the deployment of troops from different countries.

The question remains: how closely can NATO and the US work together without undermining the ISAF mission? Many in Europe are skeptical as the German Minister of Defense, Mr. Peter Struck, explained during an interview in October 2004²⁹ when he stated that “it makes a difference whether you help a government rebuild its country or whether you wage war on terrorists.” He assumed that the two missions would “remain distinct for a long time.” That same month, Germany’s Development Minister, Ms. Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul, warned that ISAF and OEF should “definitely not” be merged, and she gave a convincing reason for her opinion: “We can only get the people to trust us if we make a clear distinction between reconstruction and the battle against terrorism.”³⁰ Some OEF commanders in effect supported the argument of Wieczorek-Zeul when they told the Washington Times³¹ that they were concerned that a merger with ISAF would make it harder to cooperate with Afghan warlords in hunting terrorists.³²

The discussions in capitols across Europe continue, but the Ministers decision during the NATO Summit in Nice in February 2005 determined that a single headquarters with a dual mission in Afghanistan will be the future of NATO involvement in the region. No one doubts the difficulty this arrangement will cause. Even the current SACEUR, US Marine General James Jones has expressed concern with the intelligence sharing process when he said “most of the nations operating military forces in Afghanistan run their own intelligence-gathering centers. Instead of sharing data, most work solely to support their own operations. As NATO takes responsibility, intelligence sharing will emerge as a prime concern.”³³ The merger of the ISAF and OEF headquarters and their missions will not be easy but the desire to create more synergy between the two operations make this a strategic imperative that has a workable precedence-setting framework already employed by NATO in Iraq that can be used as an initial template.

The merger of ISAF and OEF will clearly be a significant challenge for NATO as the Alliance strives to achieve unity of command and unity of effort with two opposing methodologies for NATO forces with as many national agendas as countries participating in the

mission. It is clear that the NATO Defense Ministers and military planners have yet to address the transatlantic differences to create a command structure designed to address all the concerns of the NATO allies. US military commanders are concerned that ISAF will be under-equipped to handle their new combat mission.³⁴ These same military commanders are quick to point to the difficulties that NATO experienced when charged with operating the Kabul International Airport and could only land aircraft during the daylight hours, had difficulties in protecting the aircraft on the ground from being damaged by looters, and frequently could not repair aircraft that sat on the ground for weeks waiting for repair parts. Further, much of what NATO promised to provide to the airport sat at airfields all over Europe for months waiting on agreements to determine which countries would be responsible for the strategic lift necessary to send the pallets to Kabul. Close Air Support (CAS) that was promised for use by OEF if an emergency arose could not fly due to disagreements between the Royal Dutch Air Force planners and the Dutch Parliament that had yet to vote on whether or not Dutch pilots could fly combat missions. However, the new US Ambassador to NATO, Victoria Nuland is quick to point out that "we do have a couple of allies who are not yet sure that they are ready to participate in the highest end of the counter-terrorism mission that U.S. forces and others are pursuing primarily now through Operation Enduring Freedom." Further, "I would say that as we talk to the NATO countries who are getting ready to deploy with us in the south -- Canada, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and a number of others -- they all understand that the mission in the south is going to be manifestly more combat intensive than the mission in the north or the west has been. They are preparing for it very well." ³⁵

In NATO, where the political desires of 26 member-nations must be considered at every turn, *words*, their definitions and use are critical to achieving consensus. The appearance of the term 'linkage' is a large step in NATO's rethinking of the mission in Afghanistan and the fact that the Alliance is considering linking the NATO mission with the US mission marks a significant reassessment of the NATO involvement in Afghanistan. The US, as a NATO member-nation should encourage as broad a definition of the word "linkage" as possible to gain as much support to the merging of ISAF and OEF. The NATO Ministerial Meeting in December 2005 resulted in an agreed mandate for NATO expansion in the South (stage 4). NATO will expand ISAF with troops from the UK, the Netherlands, Romania and Canada into Southern Afghanistan next year. Although a detailed plan for further ISAF / OEF integration was not discussed, the general mood appears to encourage a larger and more robust military role for NATO. To support this, a senior NATO official in Brussels was quoted as saying, "We are moving towards consensus. There is broad agreement on command arrangements".³⁶

Although, France and Germany continue to oppose a 'complete merger', they do however agree to a stronger relationship between ISAF and OEF. France's announcement in December of an increased number of French forces in Kabul for 2006 is yet another indicator of a greater role for ISAF in Afghanistan. Daniel Fried, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, defined NATO's and Germany's greater role in Afghanistan and NATO vis-à-vis OEF accordingly:

In Afghanistan, NATO is taking over more and more of the security responsibilities in the country, that is, the security responsibilities that are the problems, for now, of non-Afghans. Germany is playing a major role, with over 2,000 troops in the country. We very much appreciate that, and Germany is both in ISAF and OEF, which should not be forgotten. And NATO needs to do what it has offered to do, which is to expand its security presence. Now this is going to take greater capacity; it's going to take more coordination of the various contingents, and better coordination between ISAF and OEF, not a merger, but a kind of linkage and coordination between the two of them.³⁷

Whether we define better synergy by 'linkage' or 'merger' it has now become clear that a politically palatable command arrangement between ISAF and OEF can be reached in Brussels to achieve unity of effort and unity of command. NATO Assistant Secretary General Reid goes on to say; "we've been working toward a kind of linkage in the command structure between ISAF and OEF which would achieve both the purposes of closer coordination, greater efficiency---especially as ISAF expands into the South and the East."³⁸

Words and their definitions; how nations relate to the definitions and how those definitions support political agendas are critical in all coalition operations and alliance structures. *Words* like 'linkage,' 'merger,' 'consensus formula' all have a slightly different definition to each of the Alliance members. *Time* is also a critical component to the success of an alliance; partner nations must have *time* to define these words in the same way before substantive action can be taken, but in NATO *words* and how they are used is the first step in the process of creating a shared vision which over *time* translates into a common objective which is resourced with money and manpower.

As far as US national interests are concerned and in light of the National Security Strategy, continued robust international involvement in the development of Afghanistan as a free and viable nation is crucial. It is in the US interest that NATO and other troop contributing nations are allowed the flexibility to define 'stability' as broadly as necessary to ensure their continued efforts in the region. Further, the US must encourage the development of the idea of 'linkage' between ISAF and OEF in the coming months as NATO develops the next phase of its strategy in Afghanistan. Ideally, the merger (or 'linkage') of ISAF and OEF into one strategic

headquarters suits the US interests best since it will allow for continued US access to and influence of military operations in the region without the current levels of troop and resource commitments in Afghanistan. The synergy created by linking both operations would improve the international unity of effort and facilitate the physical reconstruction process. It will allow for the US to reinvest those assets elsewhere as America continues its Global War on Terror.

Endnotes

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