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OPERATIONS IN AFGHANISTAN AND THE EXPANDING NATO ROLE

DRAFT GENERAL REPORT

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* Until this document has been approved by the Defence and Security Committee, it represents only the views of the Rapporteur.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. Afghanistan is NATO's first truly out-of-area operation and it is proving to be a critical test for the Alliance. NATO's role in Afghanistan is being expanded to cover progressively more of the country beyond the Kabul region. In addition to that NATO operation, some NATO members are involved in other counter-terrorist operations in Afghanistan under the framework of the US-led coalition (Operation Enduring Freedom). What role NATO plays in Afghanistan and how successful it is in stabilising the country will be important for the future of the Alliance and the region. It is not an exaggeration to say that NATO's willingness and ability to affect events in the area often referred to as "the Broader Middle East" will depend in large part on how it fares in Afghanistan.
2. The commitment of troops and materiel to operations in Afghanistan demonstrates a broad recognition that threats to the Euro-Atlantic area must at times be confronted well outside of our region. But it is in Afghanistan that the Alliance faces its greatest challenge. As NATO takes on a larger role there it is important for us as parliamentarians to understand the conditions on the ground and the potential benefits and risks of different types of extended mission for NATO in Afghanistan. Should the Alliance confine its role to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) operation around Kabul and a limited number of Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in other parts of the country? Should the PRT model be extended in its current form and what are the practical limitations to doing so? Finally, should NATO take on a more ambitious role incorporating all on-going PRTs and counter-terrorist operations in Afghanistan?
3. NATO and other international forces in Afghanistan play a fundamentally important role. Afghanistan is beginning to show some signs of economic and political development, but that progress will reverse itself very quickly without the establishment of lasting basic security. Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), the UN, and much less the private sector will be unwilling to invest the necessary time, money, and personnel in a dangerous and unstable situation.
4. A successful NATO operation in Afghanistan could demonstrate that the Alliance is capable of transforming a failed state that had descended into a morass of war, poverty, fanaticism and terrorism into a stable country with increasing economic and political prospects. That would be an extremely powerful message to send to the world. If NATO in co-operation with other international organisations can do that in one of the most geographically challenging parts of the world, there are few potential limits on the extent of "out-of-area" operations.
5. On the other hand, a failure to stabilise Afghanistan and set it on the road to economic and political development would be a serious blow to the credibility of the Alliance. It would also diminish the likelihood that NATO will become involved in other operations far from the Euro-Atlantic area. But as is often said, NATO had a choice of "going out of area or going out of business." An experience in Afghanistan that prevents NATO from undertaking other such missions in the future could ultimately threaten the *raison d'être* of the Alliance in the post-Cold War era. For those reasons, it is vitally important that we consider the ramifications of how the Alliance approaches operations in Afghanistan and a potentially larger role for the Alliance.
6. It is also necessary to understand that the commitment to Afghanistan must be long-term and multi-faceted. NATO could hardly have picked a more difficult candidate for its first out-of-area mission. Afghanistan lacks even basic infrastructure outside of the few urban areas. There are virtually no paved roads, communications, reliable power, or water treatment. It is driven by armed factions, and much of the economy is driven by the narcotics traffic. There has been no functioning central government in control of the country in over a generation. The challenge is to turn a country with those main features into one that has a representative government in control of

the national territory. It is a massive undertaking and even a reasonable rate of progress will mean that NATO will be involved in Afghanistan for years to come.

7. Yet, the constant pleading for sufficient forces and support assets from the military commanders on the ground and the Secretary General casts considerable doubt on the strength of that commitment on the part of the national authorities. In the final analysis, we are faced with a problem of political will. If we as members of the Alliance are not willing to back up our rhetoric with action and commitments, then we should be prepared to face the consequences. Failure in Afghanistan would send a clear message that an alliance of the world's most economically and militarily powerful countries cannot, or will not, live up to its commitments. It would give tremendous encouragement to all of those who claim that the West is weak, decadent and unreliable. It would bolster those forces across the broader Middle East that are trying to drag the region back to the medieval era and weaken the hand of those who are trying to bring the region into the 21st Century. We will face those consequences because we made the choice to stake the credibility of the Alliance on the mission in Afghanistan.

8. This report will first give a brief overview of the events leading to the current NATO role in Afghanistan. We will then consider the status of the situation and proposals for expanded NATO operations. The report also discusses some of the main challenges to the stability of Afghanistan. The ultimate goal is to create a country that can stand on its own rather than remain a ward of the international community, but there are serious structural obstacles to achieving this aim. The overwhelming presence of the narcotics traffic is one of the most significant. As long as the illicit economy thrives and enriches and empowers the regional warlords, it will be difficult for the central government to assert its control and make Afghanistan into anything like a normal country.

9. Although this report is based in large part on published accounts, it also features the observations of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly delegation that went to Afghanistan in May 2004. Led by Defence and Security Committee Rapporteur Pierre Lellouche, the delegation included Franco Angioni (Italy), Vahit Erdem (Turkey) and Julio Miranda-Calha (Portugal). It is our goal to provide the members of the Committee with a factual and accurate assessment of the current situation in Afghanistan and thus to inform their discussions and debates at a national level on this critically important issue for the future of the Alliance. This report is current as of 30 September and will be supplemented by an update to be distributed at the annual session in Venice.

II. EVENTS LEADING TO THE CURRENT NATO ROLE IN AFGHANISTAN

10. The idea of putting a UN-authorised multinational military force in Afghanistan originated at the Bonn Conference in December 2001 that brought together all of the political and ethnic factions in Afghanistan. This came immediately after the successful US intervention in Afghanistan that toppled the Taliban regime as a consequence of its support and continued protection of Osama bin Laden, the architect of the September 11th attacks. That conference set the groundwork for the partnership between the United Nations, the Afghan Transitional Authority and the International Security Assistance Force. (see box 1)

11. The first ISAF was established by a UN Security Council resolution and was designed to support the Afghan Transitional Authority in maintaining security around Kabul. ISAF I was led by the UK (December 2001-June 2002) but included forces from 18 countries, 14 of which were NATO members or soon-to-be NATO members (Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Spain and Turkey). The second six-month rotation (ISAF II) was led by Turkey (June 2002-February 2003) and ISAF III was led by Germany and the Netherlands (February 2003-August 2003).

12. The size of the force continued to grow both in numbers of troops and participating countries. Canada has played a large role and supplied the largest force for many of the later rotations. Portugal ended its participation, but other partner nations and soon-to-be NATO members such as Albania, Azerbaijan, and Lithuania joined ISAF. In 2003, Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Hungary and Iceland came on board.

Box 1: The Roles of Key Players in Afghanistan

International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)

This force is composed of approximately 6,500 troops from 37 countries. It mainly acts as a peacekeeping force in the Kabul area, but is now being extended to cover some Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs). NATO now has overall command of ISAF with one lead nation taking control of operations on a six-month rotating basis.

Operation Enduring Freedom

An operation conducted by a coalition of forces from 27 countries that primarily hunts and eliminates remnants of the Taliban forces and Al-Qaida in Afghanistan. It is led by the United States which supplies the majority of the approximately 21,000 troops involved in this operation at any given time, although special forces from Canada, Denmark, France, and the UK have also played important roles. US Central Command controls the operation although it has a close liaison with ISAF.

Afghan Transitional Authority (ATA)

The internationally recognised government of Afghanistan led by Hamid Karzai. The ATA is an unelected body although elections for the presidency and the parliament are scheduled for 9 October and early 2005 respectively. The ATA has created and staffed a range of ministries, and has been confirmed by representatives of the Afghan people at *loya jirgas* (tribal representative meetings) to govern until elections are held. The ATA has limited control over the country except for the immediate area around Kabul, and its military, the Afghan National Army, is still relatively weak compared to the militia forces controlled by regional leaders in the provinces.

United Nations

Under the framework of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, the UN is in charge of arranging the upcoming elections, provides humanitarian assistance and works with the various Non-Governmental Organisations in the area. The United Nations Security Council also provided the mandate for ISAF and the ongoing military action of the US-led Operation Enduring Freedom.

Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs)

The PRTs are composed of groups of military personnel working with non-military personnel to set up stable islands in various regions of Afghanistan. Their primary task is to guarantee security so that civil reconstruction can begin. There are a total of 13 PRTs in the country. The United States is in charge of 7, the United Kingdom has one PRT in Mazar-e-Sharif, and New Zealand has one in Bamiyan. NATO now runs four PRTs: in December 2003, ISAF took over command of the PRT in Kunduz (formerly a German operation); on July 1, NATO took over the PRTs from the US-led coalition in Mazar-e-Sharif and Maimana; finally, on September 1, NATO assumed the command of a new PRT in Faizabad, in northern Afghanistan. NATO plans to extend its control over several additional PRTs this year and possibly take over all PRTs in the near future. At the present, however, the PRTs function under the direction and control of several different national authorities.

13. ISAF evolved into a three part structure: ISAF Headquarters, the airport task force, and the Kabul multinational brigade. ISAF quickly forged ties with the US-led Operation Enduring

Freedom and US Central Command. This allowed the two missions, ISAF and Enduring Freedom, to co-ordinate logistics and flights in and out of the region while maintaining their separate identities and missions.

14. NATO took on a progressively larger role in assisting ISAF during the first 18 months of the operation. Germany and the Netherlands received planning assistance from NATO in 2002, and NATO provided valuable help in force generation, communications, and intelligence. SHAPE posted officers with the German command. ISAF headquarters was granted access to NATO intelligence and communication systems. This involvement sparked a close working relationship between NATO and the European Airlift Co-ordination Cell at Eindhoven, the Netherlands, to arrange the airlift needs of ISAF.

15. At the same time that NATO was providing this valuable assistance to ISAF, some involved in the mission were concerned that changing the lead nation every six months was hindering its effectiveness and weakening its credibility as a guarantor of a modicum of stability in Afghanistan. As a result, the North Atlantic Council decided in April 2003 to take on command and planning of ISAF as of August 11, 2003. In October, the UN approved an expansion of ISAF and authorised it to deploy outside of Kabul and the immediate surrounding area.

III. ISAF UNDER NATO COMMAND

16. ISAF falls under the responsibility of Allied Forces Northern Europe (AFNORTH) in Brussnum, the Netherlands. Although NATO and the commander of AFNORTH have overall authority, command on the ground in Kabul still rotates between lead nations. It is currently under the command of the Franco-German led Eurocorps which took over from Canada in August 2004.

17. The NATO assumption of command opened the door to discussions about expanding the role of ISAF. Both the UN and the Afghan Transitional Authority favour such a move. In October 2003, NATO endorsed a plan to increase ISAF by 2,000 to 10,000 troops and expand to cover additional cities beyond Kabul, a decision also endorsed by the UN.

18. Assuming control over ISAF is a major step forward for the Alliance, but it also leads to new questions that must be answered if its mission is to be successful. First and most critically, there is the question of how and if the members of the Alliance can supply the troops and military equipment required. The political will of NATO members to pledge resources seemingly outstripped the ability to deliver the needed assets. After much pressure from the Secretary General of NATO was applied to national defence ministers in December 2003, NATO received a commitment of three helicopters from Turkey and three from the Netherlands. It took several additional months of discussion to actually get the much-needed transport helicopters to Afghanistan. The Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) Jones has also spoken out regarding the need for the Allies to meet their commitments in terms of personnel and material in Afghanistan. The force generation conference held at NATO headquarters in March appears to have improved the situation. The conference was to generate forces for the PRT in Kunduz and two others in Feyzabad and Maimana. The helicopter issue was resolved with the Netherlands providing six combat helicopters and Turkey providing three transport helicopters. The three transport helicopters provided by the German military will stay in Afghanistan for the time being.

19. Another question is the relationship between the various operations in Afghanistan and if NATO should play a role in consolidating them under a single command. ISAF and Enduring Freedom are separate operations and the UK and New Zealand PRTs operate under different commands. Those operations are dynamic, changing somewhat to fit the shifting circumstances, but the goals remain constant. ISAF is primarily designed to stabilise the country and provide

basic security, enabling the NGOs to perform their work and the central Afghan government to deepen its hold on the country. ISAF is made up of approximately 7,000 troops and is limited by its size and capabilities to an area around Kabul and some areas in northern Afghanistan where it runs the PRTs. Enduring Freedom is more aimed at eliminating the remnants of Al-Qaida and the Taliban, including capturing or killing Osama bin Laden and his closest associates. The US and a group of coalition partners conduct this operation mainly in southern Afghanistan and along the border with Pakistan. Approximately 21,000 troops (19,000 from US forces) are involved in this operation directed by US Central Command (CENTCOM).

20. Some in NATO and in national capitals argue that it would be a natural progression for NATO to eventually assume control of all operations in Afghanistan. Centralised control under NATO could help reduce the many overlapping authorities and operations in Afghanistan. According to those involved, there is a high level of co-ordination between all of the military commands, but it is possible that the overall effort would benefit from a higher level of centralisation. NATO as the premier international military organisation would be the obvious candidate as the institution to centralise all military operations in Afghanistan.

21. The desirability of a NATO takeover of operations in Afghanistan or an expansion beyond current responsibilities depends on the success of current operations and the progress made towards a more stable and secure Afghanistan. The following section, therefore, offers a brief assessment of current operations conducted under NATO and CENTCOM command.

IV. OPERATIONS IN AFGHANISTAN: AN INTERIM ASSESSMENT

22. Your Rapporteur, the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Future Security and Defence Capabilities, the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Transatlantic Defence and Security Cooperation, and the Vice-President of the Committee travelled to Afghanistan in May 2004 to get a first-hand look at the situation on the ground.

23. The single most important finding to report is that although NATO forces have made significant progress in the past two years, the mission is at risk because the Alliance members are not providing adequate resources. According to military commanders in Afghanistan, NATO needs 3,600 additional troops plus support assets during the election period to help instil confidence in the population. The addition of this brigade-size force could allow NATO to be more of a stabilizing presence beyond the immediate Kabul area.

24. A failure to commit additional troops could jeopardize the entire mission and all of the successes so far. Thanks to ISAF, the Kabul region is stable and showing signs of economic growth. Terrorist activity has been reduced and there are few casualties despite ongoing attacks on NATO troops. The population appears to have a lot of confidence in NATO forces and their presence has improved voter registration and diminished the influence of regional warlords in the areas to which NATO has been able to send its troops.

25. But we are at a critical juncture right now. Without additional forces and the helicopters, logistical support and other assets needed to support them, the warlords will not disarm and the elections to be held in early 2005 will be heavily influenced by the warlords and drug traffickers. The end result could well be a "narco-state" with elections legitimising the very individuals responsible for so many of Afghanistan's problems.

26. Despite the progress made against terrorist elements in Afghanistan, there are still terrorist groups active in the country. The larger threat however is from instability in the form of warlords, bandits, and a rampant narcotics-based economy in the countryside.

27. There are three terrorist groups still active in Afghanistan: the Taliban and Al-Qaida in the south and HIG around the Kabul region. For the most part it appears that the counter-terrorist operations in the south have been successful in pushing the Taliban and Al-Qaida elements into an increasingly small region along the Afghan-Pakistani border. However, those operations have not been successful yet in capturing bin Laden and his main lieutenants. Military authorities told the delegation that active terrorists in the region number only in the hundreds and their support base in the thousands. Despite this there is a persistent level of attacks against coalition forces and other targets, currently running at about six per day, although those attacks are much smaller and generally less lethal than a year ago, generating about 20-30 casualties per month. Terrorists are increasing attacking soft targets such as aid workers. Suicide attacks are relatively rare: there have been only three since June 2003.

28. The most serious problem is general instability and the main challenge is to build an Afghan state. As several political and military authorities told the delegation, despite the various ethnic groups Afghanistan has a sense of nationhood; the problem is that there is no state. Afghanistan is a country of approximately 27 million inhabitants, which if overlaid on a map of Europe would cover the area between Paris and Warsaw. There are very few serviceable roads except for the ring road being constructed by the US, and most basic infrastructure is non-existent outside of Kabul and a few other urban areas. Over this vast area, there are about 7,000 NATO troops, 21,000 US and coalition forces, and the nascent 7,000-strong Afghan National Army available to provide security in a country with perhaps 40-50,000 members of private militias under the control of various warlords. There are approximately a half-dozen key warlords, most of whom are heavily involved in opium production and traffic.

29. Establishing an electoral system in a country that has no experience with voting is a major challenge. One notable success has been the voter registration program, which despite a slow start managed to register the vast majority of the 10 million eligible citizens. Registration is higher in the north where security is better and women feel less constrained by social norms. However, the ethnic majority Pashtuns live in the south and given the lower levels of registration they could be an underrepresented group in the election.

30. The UN-organized Bonn conference that mandated the elections may have set an overly ambitious timeframe for the country's first-ever elections. In what is most likely a wise decision, the Afghan government decided to postpone parliamentary elections until 2005 and not hold them at the same time as the presidential election. But unless more is done in the coming months to reduce the power of the warlords linked to the drug trade, there is a very serious danger that those elections will end up legitimising those that are primarily responsible for Afghanistan's dire condition. Because they control most of the regions outside of Kabul, the warlords and heroin barons are either likely to be elected to or to control whatever sort of parliament is constructed by the elections in 2005.

31. President Karzai calls the militias the greatest threat to the country's security and warns, "Without disarmament the Afghan state will have really serious difficulties." Although the central government is slowly extending its control, these regional warlords are often extremely powerful in their areas and have little incentive to cede power to the central authority. It is estimated that regional warlords have nearly 50,000 armed militants at their disposal. The program to disarm militias and reintegrate them into civilian society or the ANA has fallen far short of its goals. Only about 10,000 militia members have agreed to leave their private armies and the warlords have almost exclusively turned over barely functional weapons as part of the disarmament program.

32. But while confronting those regional warlords may be difficult or impossible given the ratio of forces, co-optation poses another set of problems. Some of the warlords have no interest in building the sort of pluralistic state that the international community is attempting to establish there, but they wield enough power that they must be dealt with as players in the political game.

Abdul Rasul Sayyaf is one such warlord with whom deals reportedly have been struck. Sayyaf's militia was known for its brutality, its particularly hard-line Wahabbi religious orientation and its violent opposition to women's rights. Yet during the *loya jirga* negotiations last year, the US ambassador to Afghanistan met with Sayyaf to secure his support for provisions in the constitution guaranteeing women's rights and a strong presidency. It is not known what Sayyaf received in return. Regardless it is unsettling that, in the words of Kathy Gannon, a journalist with long-standing experience in Afghanistan, that "The United States is betting that the same men who caused Afghanistan so much misery in the past will somehow lead it to democracy and stability in the future".

33. In addition to ISAF the US-led coalition plays a vital role in securing Afghanistan. Operation Enduring Freedom has renewed its focus on capturing bin Laden and his top lieutenants. It is widely believed that bin Laden is hiding somewhere in the lawless region along the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Part of the effort includes pressuring the regional tribal leaders in Pakistan, who wield much more authority than the central government, to assist in the effort. That pressure has come from the Pakistani military under direct orders from President Musharraf who is in turn reacting to increased US pressure to do more to control the border area and the two recent attempts to assassinate him. Local tribesmen along with several thousand Pakistani troops were in place along the border at the end of February. The idea is to turn the Pakistani border into an "anvil" against which coalition forces can hammer the Al-Qaida elements in Afghanistan.

34. The unstable situation in Pakistan is also very troubling. A combination of threats and rewards has secured additional co-operation from Pakistan in combating Al-Qaida, but the fact remains that Pakistan is in a precarious position and extremist organizations have considerable support in elements of the military and intelligence services, and the general population. Therefore, there is a distinct limit to how much pressure can be put upon the government of General Musharraf. Given Pakistan's inventory of nuclear weapons, it is not difficult to conjure up nightmare scenarios resulting from a destabilization of Pakistan. The end result is that the strategy of having coalition forces act as a hammer against the Pakistani "anvil" is often highly suspect. The Pakistani border remains porous, and as one commentator recently noted, the "anvil" is made of clay.

35. These specialised coalition forces, composed mainly of US Special Forces units with important assistance from French Special Forces, launched a new offensive in early spring in the border region. Units including Task Force 121 - the unit that captured Saddam Hussein - were transferred from Iraq to Afghanistan for this operation along with a number of Hellfire missile-carrying Predator UAVs. The units responsible for these operations are organised under the rubric of Combined Joint Task Force 180 (CJTF 180), which was responsible for earlier sweeps of the region in August and September 2003 that captured tons of weapons and ammunition and killed or captured several hundred Taliban and Al-Qaida fighters. CJTF 180 is often augmented by Afghan National Army troops and several thousands have deployed with coalition forces.

36. From the start, military operations have been combined with civil affair teams in an effort to win the "hearts and minds" of the Afghan people. One lesson that seems to have been learned is the importance of this type of combined approach and the need to have coalition forces be more integrated with the local population and better trained in culture and language. Thus, this new offensive is compounded by a shift in the tactics of US forces in Afghanistan to a 'softer' approach designed to win the confidence of local citizens. Platoon size units trained in language and customs of the region are being stationed in remote villages where they undertake operations in the surrounding area, assist in local projects, and provide some basic health care and security. The hope is that this will lead to better intelligence enabling coalition forces to root out the remnants of the Taliban and Al-Qaida.

37. In some cases this appears to be having the desired effect. Although details on those units are difficult to obtain given the level of secrecy surrounding many operations in southern Afghanistan, one such unit - Operational Detachment Alpha 936 - reported that 27 weapons caches were turned over to them in February alone. More recent reports show that the trend continues at the same pace with coalition troops and Afghan National Army forces being led to large caches of high explosives, rocket-propelled grenades, and mortars. Unit 936 has been patrolling the region, but it has also built or repaired bridges, schools and clinics in its area of responsibility. This combination of civil affairs and overwhelming military power is likely to be a very potent mix.

Table 1
Contributors to ISAF as of September 2004

Country	Troops in ISAF	Percentage of Total	Details
Austria	2		
Albania	22	0.2	
Azerbaijan	22	0.2	
Belgium	640	7.2	
Bulgaria	35	0.4	
Canada	713	8.0	
Croatia	43	0.5	
Czech Republic	21	0.2	Medical team in conjunction with Slovakia
Denmark	55	0.6	Mine clearing and military police
Estonia	10	0.1	
Finland	61	0.7	
France	890	10.0	Training Afghan National Army, mine clearing, helicopter transport, medical staff
FYROM	20	0.2	
Germany	2072	23.4	
Greece	121	1.4	
Georgia	50	0.6	
Hungary	166	1.9	
Iceland	15	0.2	
Ireland	6	0.1	
Italy	934	10.5	
Latvia	11	0.1	
Lithuania	7	0.1	Medical team with Czech field hospital
Luxembourg	11	0.1	
Netherlands	472	5.3	
New Zealand	5	0.1	Cargo handling
Norway	301	3.4	Engineering and mine clearing
Poland	3		
Portugal	26	0.3	Medical team
Romania	69	0.8	Military police and engineers
Slovakia	17	0.2	
Slovenia	22	0.2	
Spain	981	11.1	Logistical support
Sweden	32	0.4	
Switzerland	3		
Turkey	242	2.7	
United Kingdom	593	6.7	
United States	177	2.0	

Source: International Security Assistance Force

38. The Provincial Reconstruction Teams, however, are also a focus of attention and there are important questions being asked about their effectiveness and what lessons can be learned from the experience so far. As mentioned earlier there are currently 12 PRTs and they each vary considerably depending on the needs of the particular area. The concept remains fairly consistent however: provide stability in a given area and enable NGOs to act and reconstruction work to proceed in a relatively secure environment. Within that general concept, the different PRTs perform a variety of tasks. In Mazar-e-Sharif for example, the UK-led PRT played an important role in brokering a cease-fire between factions and is actively involved in a programme of disarmament and demobilisation of militia forces. It has assisted the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police in deployments and routine patrols in the area. In other PRTs the emphasis has been more on helping to build basic infrastructure. In Gardez, Bamiyan, Mazar, & Kunduz PRTs have assisted in the construction and staffing of at least 10 medical clinics, 103 schools, and 30 wells.

39. These achievements may appear to be minimal, but they are significant in a country with virtually no infrastructure. Drilling a well or providing even rudimentary medical care can be a major quality of life improvement for the local population. At the same time, these achievements may build popular support for coalition forces and the central government. Some military officials cite improved relations and intelligence offered by locals as one of the main reasons for their increased success in limiting the reach of Taliban and Al-Qaida remnant forces. The ring road under construction is another example of the sort of rebuilding effort that serves both developmental and long-term security goals. The first section between Kabul and Kandahar has been completed, and the road will greatly facilitate travel around the country. This not only enables commerce and economic development, it also allows the central government to establish better control over outlying areas.

40. The PRTs have been criticised for being too small and dispersed to have much of an impact. Teams of as few as 50-100 troops are sometimes expected to make an impact in areas the size of Belgium. Even with the larger PRTs that have 300-400 troops, the number seems inadequate to the task. A 2003 report by the Henry L. Stimson Center, for example, estimates that a security force to provide some basic security outside of Kabul would require approximately 18,000 troops, or nearly three times the current ISAF.

41. The PRTs have also been criticized on a more conceptual level. Some NGOs are concerned that the mix of military personnel and humanitarian relief projects sends the wrong message and makes humanitarian workers the target of attacks. Although terrorist attacks on aid workers are few in number and confined to a few provinces, they have been lethal and have caused some organizations to leave Afghanistan. *Médecins Sans Frontières*, for example, decided to leave after an attack killed several of its volunteers.

42. The PRTs also appear to be avoiding the more problematic parts of Afghanistan. The current plans call for additional PRTs to be established in the calmer northern parts of Afghanistan rather than the more challenging southern sections of the country. In addition, some NGOs question the appropriateness of having military personnel engage in humanitarian reconstruction and argue that the projects undertaken by the PRTs do not add much to the overall development of the region.

43. But in the words of Lt. General David Barno, US Commander of ground forces in Afghanistan, "A PRT is really a catalyst, it forms a focal point in a particular area, with the goal of building not only relationships but also serving as an accelerator in the rebuilding of the nation and extending the reach of the Afghan central government." Thus, the PRTs are not intended to provide a blanket presence. They are designed to create conditions that allow NGOs to operate and the new government to function across the country. To some extent the sheer number of NGOs operating in the country is one measure of success. As of February 2004, there were more

than 200 NGOs working on various projects in Afghanistan, and despite an increasing number of attacks in some parts of the country, most of Afghanistan has been made fairly safe for them to conduct their activities.

44. The PRTs also play a role in furthering the reach of the Afghan central government. This is critical given the fractured nature of the country along ethnic and tribal lines, the poor transportation infrastructure and a history of weak central government. To an increasing degree, the PRTs feature the participation of Afghan central government officials. Afghan Ministry of Interior officials are co-located with PRTs, and the Afghan National Army and National Police are brought into PRT areas to train, patrol, and recruit.

V. AFGHANISTAN SINCE THE ISTANBUL SUMMIT

45. The Istanbul summit produced an agreement that on the face of it supplies the forces and assets asked for by commanders on the ground in Afghanistan. The member states agreed to supply 18 helicopters, 6 transport aircraft and a approximately 3,600 additional troops. But this force is mainly slated to the new PRTs that are being created, and approximately one-third of those troops are to be kept in a reserve outside of the country. It is in fact a far cry from the brigade-sized force that commanders in Kabul stated was needed to expand security beyond the Kabul area before the elections.

46. On the positive side, the Alliance agreed at Istanbul to assume command of the UK PRTs in Mazar-e-Sharif and Meymana, The Dutch PRT in Baghlan and the German PRT in Feyzabad. Additional support bases will be established near the PRTs. ISAF will also now take on expanded operations in the northern nine provinces of Afghanistan, an area of some 185,000 mountainous square kilometres with few roads.

47. NATO also committed to deploying an additional 100 troops during the election period and will augment the PRTs at the same time. The members of the Alliance agreed at Istanbul to deploy a force of up to 1,000 troops to function as a quick reaction force, with an additional two battalions to be kept in high-readiness reserve outside of Afghanistan. The additional troops were deployed in August when the command of ISAF changed from Canada to the Eurocorps.

48. Italy and Spain will each send a mobile battalion and an initial detachment of 240 Spanish troops and 450 Italian troops arrived in September. The Spanish battalion will be the quick reaction force on the ground and the Italian battalion will be the in-theatre operation reserve force. The Italian battalion is the current ground component of the NATO Response Force (NRF). Although the use of the NRF was discussed in Istanbul, the French government was reluctant to see the NRF committed to the mission in Afghanistan, arguing that the NRF should be used for situations where there is a more immediate threat. Therefore, the Italian Battalion is being sent separately and additional units are being kept in high-readiness reserve in Europe to be deployed if the situation deteriorates.

49. As of mid-September, NATO did not have the projected 10,000 troops on the ground. Reinforcements are promised for the 9 October election adding an additional 1,000 troops to the 7,000 in the country. The over-the-horizon force will include at least one American unit, but there are no details yet as to this force's composition or where it will be based. Belgium and the Netherlands have each provided one C-130 transport aircraft to support the mission.

VI. PROSPECTS FOR DEVELOPMENT IN AFGHANISTAN AND THE POTENTIAL ROLE OF NATO

50. NATO is not an economic development agency and we do not plan to focus on those issues in this report, but we cannot ignore some critical economic issues that will affect the stability and long-term prospects of Afghanistan. One basic issue is the need for additional financial assistance. The Afghan government estimates - and regional experts such as Barnett Rubin agree - that Afghanistan needs approximately 27 billion dollars in financial assistance over the next seven years to create the basic conditions to allow for self-sustaining economic growth. Even if it were less, the total amount committed by the international community is about 7 billion dollars. In per capita terms it is far less than has been committed to assisting troubled countries in the Balkans and Africa.

51. The narcotics traffic, specifically opium used to produce heroin, is another important issue. Afghanistan produces an estimated 3,400 tons of opium per year, or three-quarters of global opium production. Almost all of the heroin consumed in Europe originates in Afghanistan. In a desperately poor country with few natural resources, opium production provides one of the only means of sustenance. According to the UN Office of Drug Control, opium production now accounts for approximately half of Afghanistan's GDP, and nearly thirty percent of the population is involved in narcotics production or transport in some way.

52. It is not up to NATO or ISAF as it is currently constructed to stop this traffic or the production of heroin and NATO has no plans to become involved in this issue. As Lt. General Rick Hillier (Canada), the former commander of ISAF said in March, "NATO would absolutely never be used to burn a poppy field". But there is a serious risk that all efforts to stabilise Afghanistan will fail if the country is completely given over to the illegal drug trade. Those that control it will have the resources to arm their private armies, rig elections and keep large portions of the country out of the control of the central government. Afghanistan at that point would simply be a different type of failed state from that which existed in the 1990s, but a failed and dangerous state nonetheless.

53. The UN and national authorities in co-operation with the Afghan Transitional Authority are working to cut opium poppy production. Their efforts thus far have failed. Some plans to curtail the production of opium have actually had the exact opposite effect. An attempt to prevent the poppy seeds from being turned into heroin by buying the poppy crop from farmers in 2002 only succeeded in encouraging farmers to plant more poppies the following year. Efforts to destroy opium crops have also not been successful. Only a tiny fraction of the opium harvest has been interrupted and it is difficult to find the forces that might perform such operations. Local police and officials are under-funded and therefore easily bribed, and international forces are either specifically prohibited from addressing the issue or are reluctant to do so. Troops involved in the PRTs for example, are focused on winning the confidence of the local populations and are not eager to take on a mission likely to alienate large numbers of farmers and the heavily-armed militias controlled by regional warlords.

54. Other plans might have a more positive impact, such as providing subsidies for farmers to grow high value-added crops such as saffron. The head of Afghanistan's counter-narcotics office estimates that a basic plan to do this would cost about 300,000 euros over three years, a small amount compared to the 10 billion dollars spent on military operations per year in Afghanistan. Another proposal calls for the introduction of several hundred counter-narcotics officers into the country. The UK is active in this area, having already set up and trained a narcotics interdiction force that is conducting operations in key areas. The US is assisting this force in developing counter-narcotics intelligence procedures. It is beyond the scope of this report to suggest which if any of those proposals should be pursued, but we should recognise that all military efforts to stabilise Afghanistan are in jeopardy if we cannot find some way to reduce Afghanistan's economic dependence on opium production.

55. Also troubling are the very different approaches that the US and the UK are taking to control the narcotics traffic. According to a recent International Institute for Strategic Studies report, the UK is pursuing a program based on promoting crop substitution. The US program is more aggressive and focused on eliminating poppy fields without compensation to make poppy cultivation an unacceptable risk. This more aggressive approach has met with some success—the largest heroin-producing region recorded a 49% decrease in the area under poppy cultivation this year—but such heavy tactics may be alienating the local population. On the other hand, softer tactics so far have not produced the same measurable results. In addition, there is the question of what may appear to be regional or ethnic group favouritism. In the US-patrolled areas, poppy growers are likely to lose their entire crop without compensation, but in the UK-patrolled areas poppy growers are likely to experience fewer losses and more substitution assistance. This may mean that Tajiks in the northern regions will feel disproportionately punished compared to the Pashtuns in the south, thus further deepening regional political fragmentation.

56. Controlling heroin production is highly problematic, but there are other aspects of national development where NATO can play an important role such as the training and equipping of the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police. A stronger national army could help reduce the power of regional leaders and increase national cohesion. One of the main problems in Afghanistan is the power of the "warlords" in relation to that of the central government. The warlords control key areas where they can collect customs duties illegally, or control the drug traffic. This gives them financial power that they use to maintain their militias. Without decreasing their power - either through confrontation or co-optation - the central government will remain a weak entity.

57. NATO members are already involved in training and equipping the Afghan National Army (ANA) and the Afghan National Police. Germany and the United States have the lead role in training the Afghan National Police. The first few hundred recruits have been trained and dispatched around Kabul and other cities. US, French and UK military personnel are training the ANA, which had approximately 7,000 members in January 2004 and is expected to have about 10,000 members by June. France is training the officer corps, the UK is training the non-commissioned officers, and the US is conducting the basic training of enlisted personnel. The plan is to build the ANA up to its desired full strength of 40,000-70,000 over the next few years.

58. The ANA saw its first military action at the end of 2002 when it was deployed alongside coalition forces, and is now conducting more independent operations in southern Afghanistan against Taliban remnants. It is also playing an important role in supporting the regional governors by dismantling illegal roadblocks set up by local factions and confiscating weapons caches. By all accounts the ANA is performing well and is generally welcomed by the local population.

59. The long-term plan for the construction of the ANA includes the rebuilding of regional command centres, logistics and intelligence units over the next two to three years. The military infrastructure - much as the rest of the infrastructure in Afghanistan - is in serious disrepair and will require a considerable investment before the ANA can function without the assistance of ISAF or coalition forces.

60. The process of setting up the ANA has not been smooth and in some ways the difficulties that have been encountered are a good illustration of the tribal nature of Afghan politics and the effect that it has on building national institutions. The Minister of Defence, General Mohammad Fahim, is a Tajik and the leader of a militia. In the complex tribal world of Afghan politics, Fahim represents an important minority group player in a government led by a Pashtun, the largest of the tribal groups. Thus, including him as Minister of Defence was seen as an important step in creating a nationally unified government. But he was originally perceived as recruiting too many Tajiks for the army, which caused many Pashtuns to refuse positions in the army or leave them after short periods of time. This situation has been improved by the appointment of more

Pashtuns to positions in the Ministry of Defence and higher pay for the troops. The ANA is also purposely creating mixed units of Pashtuns, Uzbeks, Tajiks and other groups to ensure that no individual battalion can be seen as solely representative of one ethnic or tribal group.

61. The ANA is more than a symbol of national unity, however. It is also one of the keys to establishing an Afghanistan that can protect itself against insurgents and prevent the country from being hijacked again by groups such as Al-Qaida. The ultimate goal of the involvement in Afghanistan is the creation of a self-reliant government that can provide for its own security and be a source of stability in the region rather than a haven for terrorists. Building up the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police are important steps in reaching this goal. We should not become so focused on the immediate goal of defeating the remnants of the Taliban and Al-Qaida that we lose sight of the need to help Afghanistan provide for its own security in the future.

VII. PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

62. It is true that the coalition and NATO have been broadly successful in improving security and reducing terrorist activity, and there is some economic life at least in the Kabul region. More than 2 million Afghan refugees have returned and they are eager to rebuild their country. But the remaining challenges are vast. There is no foreign investment; life for the average Afghan has not improved outside of Kabul; and the warlords control most of the country with their private militias and income from the narcotics trade that accounts for nearly half of Afghanistan's GDP. The strategy thus far is woefully incomplete and can only barely maintain an uncomfortable status quo.

63. The question therefore is, should we remain in the current position defined by some as "the comfort zone" or should we radically alter the mission, its objectives, and the level of commitment? There are several options raised by our visit to Afghanistan that we should consider:

64. Aggressively pursue the drug lords now before the elections. If parliamentary elections take place under current conditions, the warlords/drug lords are likely to gain control of the parliament, turning Afghanistan into what might be called a narco-state. The alternative is to break the power of the key warlords now before the elections. President Karzai has taken steps to reduce the independent power of some such as Ismail Khan, but he is only one of perhaps a dozen key warlords. As the commander of the Kabul Multinational Brigade told the delegation, we can have a little pain now for long-term gain, or have a lot more pain later. He was adamant that NATO could make significant progress in forcing the disarmament and demobilization of the private militias with the addition of another 3,600 troops. Although promised at Istanbul, NATO still does not have those additional forces on the ground.

65. Unify the commands. There are currently two separate commands in Afghanistan: US Central Command which controls US forces and members of the coalition operating primarily in southern Afghanistan as well as 7 of the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), and NATO with ISAF under its command in Kabul and most of the other PRTs. Both, however, operate under a UN mandate. The two commands are in close contact and it may make sense to unify all operations under NATO command. This does not, however, free the European members of the Alliance from an obligation to provide troops and support assets. Some US assets such as helicopters might be made available for other missions in Afghanistan under a unified NATO command, but clearly those US forces would not be in Afghanistan if they were not absolutely necessary for existing missions.

66. Move beyond the PRT model. The PRTs are not a panacea; they are a means to an end. So far they have achieved modest successes but they cannot address the main problems by themselves. The keys to long-term stability in Afghanistan are: building roads and communication

links across the country to facilitate commerce; breaking the economy's reliance on opium production; and creating an Afghan state that can control its own territory. At the moment we are doing very little to combat the narcotics production problem that threatens the entire project in Afghanistan. Unless we take effective measures to reduce opium production in Afghanistan, none of the other efforts to rebuild the country will be successful. The PRTs can create islands of stability but the commitment to Afghanistan must be larger in its conception or those islands will remain isolated pockets in an anarchic sea.

67. Increase the size and power of ISAF. No one can visit ISAF and fail to be impressed by the dedication and professionalism of our forces there. NATO members, however, have hamstrung their forces with excessive national caveats and opt-outs. Those restrictions mean that less than one-third of the 7,000 troops in Afghanistan are actually combatants. Those same national restrictions constrain the use of the already paltry helicopter assets available to our forces there. Put simply, ISAF is too small and too restricted by national opt-outs to extend its reach beyond Kabul where it is needed. In addition to the temporary infusion of 3,600 troops for the election period, we need to consider how to maintain a larger consistent presence that is less restricted from undertaking the full range of necessary missions.

68. On its return from Afghanistan, the NATO Parliamentary Assembly delegation strongly recommended increasing our forces there and making them more flexible. Assembly President Doug Bereuter carried those recommendations forward to the Istanbul summit and we are pleased that this Assembly has had a significant effect on the decisions of the national representatives. But we must follow through on those commitments to ensure continued progress in stabilizing Afghanistan.

69. The NATO mission in Afghanistan is at a critical point. We have staked the credibility of NATO on this mission and we should make no mistake that for the people of Afghanistan it is the credibility of the West writ large that is at stake. They do not make distinctions between Canadian, French, German, and US troops. To them we all represent the same thing and for the vast majority of Afghans it is a set of ideas that they generally support: freedom, democracy, and stability. Communism has failed them, extremist Islamic governance has failed them, and now the NATO alliance has a chance to help them develop and build a functioning peaceful state, free of warlords, private armies and massive drug trafficking, but the window for action is limited.
