

# Afghanistan: Europe's forgotten war

Daniel Korski  
POLICY PAPER



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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The international community has a second chance in Afghanistan. The appointment of a new UN special envoy and the upcoming NATO summit in Bucharest offer a chance for the coalition partners to adopt a new strategy and avert disaster. The problems are well known.

The rule of Hamid Karzai's government extends only weakly outside of Kabul. The Taliban insurgency will continue to grow stronger as winter ends. Despite the billions of euros spent, most ordinary Afghans have yet to see the benefits in terms of security, access to justice and delivery of basic services. All these difficulties have been exacerbated by European and American policy disagreements.

In their key criticisms of each other Europeans and Americans each have a valid point. While Americans tend to treat a political problem as a military one, Europeans have lagged behind the US in terms of financial and military commitments, and have even failed to co-ordinate their own activities.

In the run-up to Bucharest there will be an opportunity for both partners to strike a new 'grand bargain' where Europeans agree to increase their investment in exchange for a change in American strategy. A new common approach should be based around a strategy for political inclusion, increased resources, and stronger international leadership. This new strategy should be cemented in a new Bonn-type conference, which would bring together heads of states from the US, UN, EU and all of Afghanistan's regional partners.

### *1. Long-term political strategy*

The international coalition should agree on a strategy led by political rather than military goals. This should include:

- **Outreach to the Taliban.** Since the Bonn agreements in December 2001, many Pashtun feel disenfranchised, creating a reservoir of support for the Taliban. The international community must encourage President Hamid Karzai to engage mid-ranking, “moderate” insurgents, by developing a package of financial and other incentives which could encourage them to support the government rather than the Taliban. These financial enticements should be paid in instalments to ensure an ongoing commitment to the government. To minimise corruption and spread the benefits to local society they could also include a reconstruction “benefit package” – such as health clinics and schools -- for the leader’s local fief. At least €50 million should be allocated for such an EU-funded pilot scheme. At the same time, the government should be encouraged to engage the legislature more effectively and to introduce an element of proportional representation for the next parliamentary elections which might lead to more stable and representative political groupings.

- **A new approach to counter-narcotics.** A pressing challenge in civilian policy is to change drugs policy. The US should abandon proposals to eradicate poppy fields through aerial spraying and accept that targeting poppy farmers will only fuel the growing Afghan resentment against the international coalition. As in Bosnia and in Cambodia, it is worth investigating appointing international jurists to the Special Tribunal who could work alongside Afghan officials, according to the Afghan Criminal Code, in prosecuting offenders, and who would themselves effectively become Afghan officials in the process.

- **Local delivery.** Assistance efforts need to be refocused around delivering clear benefits on the ground through strengthening the provincial administrations and through ensuring that the police contribute to, rather than undermine, the safety of ordinary Afghans. The Afghan government should, with U.S and EU support, agree to harmonise and streamline local governance and the delivery of public services. Greater incentives should be created for better governance locally. The EU should also boost the numbers of civilians working in Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), and increase PRT funding from €10 to €50 million – money to be given to provincial governments and used with PRT expertise in support of local development plans. The EU should also consider setting up some form of “good government contracts” for all provincial governments.

- **Regional cooperation.** Since the collapse of the British Empire, Afghanistan has been at the centre of attempts to reconstitute the political order of southwest Asia. Any stability achieved in Afghanistan will remain unacceptably fragile as long as neighbours such as Pakistan, India, Russia and Iran treat the country as a pawn in their own regional power play, and refuse to accept that stable governance in Afghanistan is in their own long-term interests. It will not be possible to stop the border regions in Pakistan from functioning as a hinterland for the Taliban insurgency overnight or without tackling the causes of Pakistan’s quest for “strategic depth” – fears of India. Nor will it be possible to address the drugs trade without Iran’s cooperation. A new trans-Atlantic long-term strategy towards the entire southwest Asian region is required.

## 2. Greater Western commitment

Political outreach must be paired with the ability and willingness to apply force whenever needed. Without such a “surge”, it is simply not possible to carry out the sophisticated, intelligence-led combat operations, targeting leaders of the insurgency, which can bring security at the lowest possible human cost. For its own part, the EU needs to strengthen its position before it can influence the US-led stabilisation agenda. The main goals should be:

- **More troops and trainers.** This will require more troops in the south and greater support for the Afghan security forces. A mere 93 police and army trainers out of the 434 originally planned for are currently deployed. European leaders should commit to meeting the shortfall in trainers. In the short term, an additional 2,000- 2,500 extra NATO troops are probably required for operations in the south alongside the expected deployment of 3,500 US Marines.
- **New rules of engagement.** European governments should agree to lift operational restrictions on existing deployments and move troops to the now quieter east, allowing the US to transfer forces to the south in aid of the British, Canadians, and Dutch.
- **Increase development aid.** The European Union should reverse the decline in reconstruction aid and find ways to spend more funds locally.



### *3. Stronger international leadership*

Implementing the above requires leadership that cuts across military, political and development lines, as well as institutional boundaries – leadership that, realistically, only the UN can provide.

- **Appoint a “Super Envoy”.** The position of the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) should be upgraded to a “Super Envoy” role, with the EU and NATO signalling full support for this person’s leadership, and either mandating the person simultaneously or each contributing a Deputy Envoy. A broad remit should be given to this individual to ensure that all international activities, including military action, follow a political lead. In turn, military training carried out by the US-led Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan should be folded into the ISAF structure.

- **Cover the provinces.** The joined-up, UN-led approach should be extended to the provinces where similar institutional clashes occur as in Kabul. In time, PRTs must give way to a more normal, UN-led international presence; putting the United Nations Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in the lead now would ease this process.

- **Local donor coordination.** The main bodies for international and Afghan coordination – the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board (JCMB), the president’s “War Council”, the unofficial “Tea Club” of a smaller group of nations, and the Policy Action Group – have not proven to be effective at prioritising government action and, in the Tea Club’s case, organising the international effort. Therefore it may be useful to develop a localised UN Security Council-style committee of the main donors and military contributors.

- **Consolidate international presence.** The EU will also need to make changes to its own structures, bringing together the European Commission office, the Super Envoy’s office and the office for EUPOL.

If the new strategy is to be successful, the Afghan people will have to understand what the international community are doing and why. This requires a concerted publicity effort making full use of available media. The international community collectively lacks local knowledge, and key decisions in Afghanistan have been taken on the basis of incomplete and insufficient intelligence. There is little detailed understanding of political and tribal

dynamics, or of the relations between drug traffickers and insurgents. For a start, if coalition experts cannot understand local languages, they have little chance of genuinely understanding the people. More money is needed for language training and for country and regional specialists in foreign ministries and international organisations.

For the United States and the European Union changing course will not be an easy task. EU governments and parliaments will have to win over hostile public opinion to the necessity for further sacrifice. This may be difficult, but the consequences of inaction threaten to be much harsher. There is a danger that the intervention in Afghanistan will become part of a major strategic debacle within the lifetime of present EU governments. It is in EU member states' own interest to confront this reality now. Time is running out for Afghanistan – and for Europe.

## INTRODUCTION

Six years of war and the biggest military operation in the history of NATO have failed to subdue the Afghan insurgency and have left the government of President Hamid Karzai entirely dependent on the continued massive presence of international forces. Afghanistan is the fifth poorest country and the biggest opium producer in the world; its central state, already far too weak to meet all the demands placed on it, is further debilitated by warlordism and the Taliban insurgency.

A swift and successful end to the conflict is out of reach; even optimistic scenarios foresee an international presence in Afghanistan for years to come, with fighting continuing, albeit on a reduced level. In Europe the prospect of such a long-term engagement has significantly eroded support for a war initially backed by a large majority of the population and virtually all political forces.

The continuing strength of the insurgency and the Afghan government's weakness make Western and European defeat in Afghanistan a realistic prospect. The consequences would be disastrous. Afghanistan could once again serve as a base for fundamentalist Islamic terrorism and as a launch pad for devastating attacks in the US, Europe and the rest of the world. Abandoning Afghans to their fate would be morally irresponsible, as the US (and later European countries, too) assumed responsibility for their welfare when they invaded and occupied their country after ousting the Taliban government in 2001. It would discredit future international efforts to stabilise war-torn countries and to engage the Islamic world, and it would hand radical Islamic terrorists a significant military and propaganda victory. In Europe defeat in Afghanistan would imperil the effort to develop a common EU foreign policy, thereby damaging the EU's credibility at home and abroad. Europe's financial, military and political investment in Afghanistan is far too big to allow defeat to go unnoticed.

The international coalition's efforts have been held back by the lack of a common strategy and by tensions between different partners. The current effort is characterised by an over-reliance on military power, a failed counter-narcotics effort, ineffectual management of governance reforms, and by an ad hoc approach to political dealings with the Taliban. But in spite of these numerous problems, most analysts agree that failure is not inevitable. While the international stabilisation effort so far has failed to live up to expectations,

“the paramount reason for our failing grip lies with ourselves”, as Paddy Ashdown, the former High Representative/EU Special Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, and now set to be the UN’s Envoy in Afghanistan, has said.<sup>1</sup>

Although most European countries share a common analysis of the problems, their own lack of co-ordination and their unwillingness to increase their economic and military contributions have left them unable to affect the overall strategy. On paper, the EU’s effort looks impressive. Troops from 27 EU countries account for more than half of the International Security Assistance Force’s total deployment of 41,700 soldiers. The EU has established a police mission, and its member states run 11 Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs). The European Commission (EC) and member states together have contributed a third of the total reconstruction assistance, making the EU the second largest donor. Despite all this, the EU’s real impact is limited. EU countries have treated the common effort in Afghanistan like a potluck dinner where every guest is free to bring his own dish. In doing so, they are effectively ignoring the lessons learned – at a high cost to the population and to themselves – in the Balkans. As in the Balkans, the stabilisation of Afghanistan is likely to remain impossible as long as the EU fails to unify its programmes and speak with one voice.

Europe cannot alter the coalition strategy alone. But a united EU can act as a powerful advocate for a better and more coordinated international approach. The US rightly argues that more troops are needed to dominate the terrain, and lambasts European allies for their failure to step up their effort. European countries are right to criticise the current military strategy and to fear that an increase in troop numbers might only lead to greater civilian casualties, alienating the local population. This paper advocates a new strategy, based on a ‘grand bargain’ between the United States and Europe. EU countries should commit to sending more troops, trainers and civilians to Afghanistan, as well as lifting all remaining “caveats” which hamper their soldiers’ effectiveness. The EU must also reverse the decline in reconstruction funding. Monies should be spent at grass roots level through the PRTs and in support of provincial governments and the reconciliation effort with the Taliban. In exchange, the US must fully accept and implement a shift from a strategy based on combat operations to one focused on protecting the lives of Afghan civilians, on abandoning the current counter-narcotics policy – with its emphasis on crop

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<sup>1</sup> “We are failing in Afghanistan”, Paddy Ashdown, The Guardian, July 19, 2007

eradication and plans for possible aerial spraying – and on helping President Hamid Karzai to engage mid-ranking, “moderate” insurgent leaders in order to negotiate a political settlement with these and other opponents.

## **DISUNITED NATIONS**

Euro-Atlantic unity has been a key to success in past stabilization missions such as in Bosnia-Herzegovina, where Europeans were willing to deploy troops and ramp up aid. This stands in sharp contrast to Afghanistan, where the US and Europe disagree on the nature of the problem – and therefore the solution.

In Europe, many initially saw the Afghan mission as a largely risk-free peace-building exercise. The repressive and misogynist Taliban regime would be replaced by a democratic government that would build hospitals and allow European NATO soldiers to escort smiling school girls to their classrooms - pictures of which would be beamed back to satisfied European publics. The EU – as opposed to the EC and the individual member states - did not have an ESDP mission in Afghanistan until 2006. For the US, however, the Afghan mission was always tied directly to the attacks of 9/11 and the Bush administration’s “War on Terror”. Six years on, this underlying difference is apparent in the importance ascribed to military operations over a more political approach. Europeans, by and large, are in favour of the latter; the US remains more wedded to a military-led strategy.

But Europeans lack credibility to make their case given their limited resources, low troop numbers and lack of prioritisation and coordination. Whether in Brussels or Kabul, Europeans have failed to define and implement a united strategy for Afghanistan. There has been no substantive debate about how to reconcile divergent national approaches to counter-insurgency and policing, nor any attempt to forge an overarching political approach. In Afghanistan itself, the EU effort seems disorganised: chains of command are unclear and coordination is generally weak. Due to institutional overlap and confusion resources have been dissipated in the course of a mission that has received less funding than comparable reconstruction efforts.

Individual EU member states, which contribute well over double the amount of funding provided by the European Commission, have failed to act as a coherent donor group. Instead, they have adopted divergent and often

incompatible approaches. UK funding for the Afghan Ministry of Counter-narcotics has meant that the ministry's staff receive much higher salaries than their colleagues in other parts of the Afghan government – a disparity which undermines attempts by other donors to create a uniform salary system across the Afghan bureaucracy. Concerning the Provincial Reconstruction Teams fielded by EU member states, a study found that “no attempt has been made to harmonise the activities of the PRTs in Afghanistan or those under the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), beyond the overall common objectives of contributing to stability, security, and the effective outreach of government authority in the provinces concerned.”<sup>2</sup>

Most disconcertingly, there has been no EU agreement – and certainly no EU-US consensus – on how to develop a political strategy. General José Enrique de Ayala, a Spanish troop commander in Iraq, has argued that if the coalition wanted to stabilise Afghanistan through a military presence alone, it would have to deploy 300,000 to 400,000 soldiers – an impossibly high number.<sup>3</sup> Estimates such as Ayala's underline the need for a political approach, which first requires consensus on key issues: how to help the Afghan government win over “moderate” Taliban, which electoral changes to implement before the next round of elections, and how to build a better relationship with the Afghan parliament.

### *Scattered Funding*

The amount of money committed to and spent on reconstruction is difficult to determine.<sup>4</sup> Some EU pledges, including those of the European Commission and the UK, have been updated since the February 2006 London Conference, the last big meeting of Afghan donors. The Afghan government itself cannot keep track of the aid flows, and any precise estimate would have to reflect donors' different accounting methods as well as wide variations in administrative and security costs.

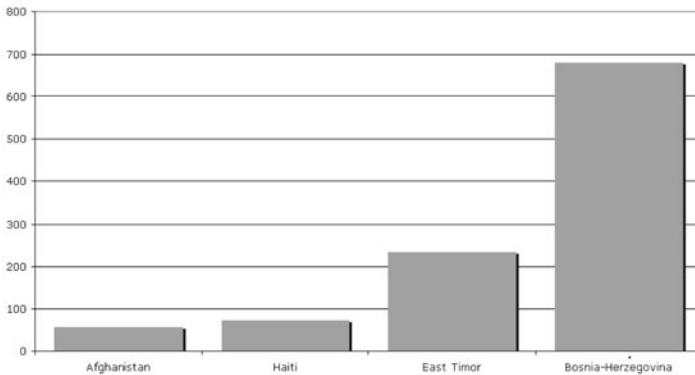
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<sup>2</sup> Chr. Michelsen Institute, Development Consulting and the German Association of Development Consultants. “Joint Evaluation: Humanitarian and Reconstruction Assistance to Afghanistan, 2001-05”, October 2005.

<sup>3</sup> José Enrique de Ayala “¿Hacia una solución política?” *El País*, 7 October 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Hamish Nixon, “Aiding the State? International Assistance and the Statebuilding Paradox in Afghanistan”, *AREU Briefing Paper*, April 2007.

However, according to official figures, of the €7.09 billion offered by the international community by 2011<sup>5</sup>, €2.7 billion was put up by the US. At the Tokyo conference, the European Commission pledged €1 billion in reconstruction aid over 5 years (2002-2006). Since then, the Commission has provided over €657 million to Afghanistan in reconstruction aid. The financial allocation for the 2007-2010 period is € 610 million. The UK alone, Afghanistan’s second largest donor, pledged €598 million over three years. RAND have shown that Afghanistan received €38.5 per capita in the first two years of assistance, while Bosnia received €458.6, East Timor €157 and Haiti €50.<sup>6</sup> In Iraq, the US has spent much more on both reconstruction and military deployments than it has spent in Afghanistan, and in less time. These figures show that international assistance to Afghanistan has lagged behind most other reconstruction efforts. The table below illustrates, in dollars, the different amounts spent per inhabitant on reconstruction in Afghanistan, Haiti, East Timor, and Bosnia-Herzegovina respectively.



<sup>5</sup> “International Community Pledging Outcomes”, London Conference on Afghanistan, 1 February 2006, [www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk), accessed 30 July 2007.

<sup>6</sup> James Dobbins, Seth G. Jones, Keith Crane, Andrew Rathmell, Brett Steele, Richard Teltschik, and Anga Timilsina, *The UN’s Role in Nation-Building: From the Congo to Iraq*, RAND Corporation: Santa Monica CA, 2005, xxii.

The figures also show that European contributions are dwarfed by the US in most areas. While the EU Commission expects to deliver €560 million over four years, the US administration has requested an additional €900 million for reconstruction, governance, and humanitarian activities from Congress for 2008 alone. According to RAND, the US is spending “seven times the resources to counter-narcotics activities provided by the United Kingdom (the lead nation for counter-narcotics), nearly 50 times the resources to the police provided by Germany (the lead nation for police reform), and virtually everything for training the Afghan military (for which the United States was responsible)”.<sup>7</sup> France’s pledge of €37 million over five years<sup>8</sup> is well below not just that of the UK and Germany, but Spain, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, and even Finland. This is particularly striking when set against France’s overall development budget of €7.84 billion in 2007, representing 0.42% of GNP. In addition, with inadequate prioritization, the EU often spends money on projects that are not central to Afghanistan’s reconstruction, thus further limiting the impact of its input.<sup>9</sup>

This disparity has a direct impact on the EU’s ability to influence the US-led reconstruction agenda. A number of European donors are worried that US programmes typically fall outside of the Afghan budget and that policy decisions in important areas, such as the size of the Afghan National Police, are sometimes taken on the basis of US funding choices. But the EU’s programme proliferation and its decreasing financial contribution make it more difficult for Europeans to argue their case.

### *Policing, the rule of law and counter-narcotics*

In the vital areas of policing, the rule of law, and counter-narcotics, EU member states as well as the EU Commission and the Council Secretariat have been ignoring and sometimes undermining each other’s strategies, despite the obvious need for a unified approach. Germany’s police reform programme – which has now been overtaken by EU programmes -- started in the capital and expanded to the provinces, and saw little coordination with the justice and rule of law reforms spearheaded by the Italians. The US supports a separate

<sup>7</sup> Seth G. Jones, Olga Oliker, Peter Chalk, C. Christine Fair, Rollie Lal, James Dobbins, “Securing Tyrants or Fostering Reform? US International Security Assistance to Repressive and Transitioning Regimes”, RAND, 2006.

<sup>8</sup> “L’aide française à la reconstruction depuis 2002”, French Embassy in Afghanistan website, [www.diplomatie.gouv.fr](http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr).

<sup>9</sup> Figures have been changed into Euros based on currency values on 16 January 2007.



programme which has provided basic training to 50,000-60,000 police recruits to date. The Afghan Ministry of Interior was not even represented at a rule of law conference in Rome in July 2007.

Meanwhile, in their attempts to rein in the ballooning opium trade, the British have either ignored or deliberately circumvented the police and justice system reforms put in place by the Germans and Italians. This resistance to cooperation has extended to the creation of separate counter-narcotics institutions such as the Afghan Counter-Narcotics Police and the Special Court. A European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) mission was originally mooted in 2005 to address this lack of strategic level coordination between related sectors – filling in the gaps between the German-led police reform programme, Italian support for legal reform, and British counter-narcotics efforts. However, this was eventually limited to a police mission, which has failed so far to tackle the differences between US and European programmes. The aim of EUPOL is to support the Afghan police through monitoring, mentoring and training within the Ministry of Interior as well as regional and provincial institutions. Many of EUPOL police experts have already served as national experts in PRTs and will thus be simply re-badged. EUPOL Afghanistan does not report to the EU Special Representative but only takes political guidance from him.<sup>10</sup> According to one report, EUPOL Afghanistan - from the start - was “entering a messy situation with an unclear strategy and, given its ambitious plan for security reform and local ownership, looks to be under-resourced.”<sup>11</sup> The EU Commission funds a separate programme on justice.

As with military-to-population ratios, the international police presence in Afghanistan falls short of the troop numbers deployed on previous similar missions: only 160 police officers are slated to join EUPOL in Afghanistan, whereas the EU has 186 police officers in Bosnia and Herzegovina – down from 500 between 2003 and 2005 – and 1,479 in the UN-run Kosovo mission, a figure set to increase when the EU takes over the mission in 2008.

EUPOL Afghanistan may well turn out to be a missed opportunity to increase EU influence in an area where the US, though by far the biggest player with a vast train-and-equip programme, has been asking for further assistance. The annual budget of the US military-led Combined Security Transition Command in Afghanistan (CSTC-A), which operates a police training, mentoring, and

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<sup>10</sup> “EU Police Mission in Afghanistan”, European Union factsheet, May 2007.

<sup>11</sup> Giji Gya, “EUPOL Afghanistan – an opportunity for whom?”, *European Security Review*, No 33, May 2007.

equipment programme, is \$2 billion – as opposed to a total of about \$320 million for all other donor programmes.<sup>12</sup>

European experts have criticised the US approach of expanding the size of the police and army, as it leads to a massive expenditure imbalance which no Afghan government will be able to sustain independently in the foreseeable future. Furthermore, the US strategy concentrates on elementary training and handing out weapons to large numbers of recruits. Citing past examples of equipment and weapons handed over to the police, which then went missing, Europeans argue that the programme may actually prove counterproductive to stability in Afghanistan. In Denmark, for example, this question has become the focus of a spat between the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition.<sup>13</sup> Yet the EU's tight-fistedness and poor coordination deprive such criticism of its potential weight.

A similar conflict rages over the counter-narcotics policy, where the UK has officially been in the lead. The US advocates aerial spraying of poppy fields. Many European governments fear that this could lead to a massive loss of support for the government of Afghanistan and its international allies, with angry poppy-farmers swelling the ranks of the Taliban. But the British government has failed to offer a properly resourced alternative. Expanding cultivation and production of opium, especially in Helmand province which is overseen by British troops, have further eroded trust in the British capabilities. After NATO and Afghan forces retook Musa Qala in Helmand from the Taliban – finding a stockpile of more than 12 tons of brown heroin along with the chemicals for processing – a resident told a journalist, “If the British and Americans destroy the poppy, everyone will leave and join the Taliban.”<sup>14</sup>

The UK's weak performance in this area is due to a combination of factors, including a disproportionate focus on poppy eradication, a flawed attempt at separating counter-narcotics institutions from the overall state-building effort, limited progress in targeting kingpins and their backers in government, and an inability to provide economic alternatives to farmers.

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<sup>12</sup> Combined Security Command in Afghanistan, presentation, February 2007. The figure of \$260 million quoted in the presentation predated the launching of EUPOP, which comes with an additional \$60 million in the first year.

<sup>13</sup> “Thorning og Vestager skriver fælles brev til Fogh”, *Metroexpress*, 14 December 2007.

<sup>14</sup> Stephen Grey, “Inside the Taliban's fallen town of fear”, *The Sunday Times*, 16 December 2007.

### *Uneven Military Contribution*

European troops have been in Afghanistan since the very beginning of the US-led intervention in 2001, when British, Dutch, French, German, and Danish forces, sometimes supported by their national air forces, played an important role in ousting the Taliban. Contingents from almost all EU member states now account for more than half of the 41,700 soldiers of the ISAF. (See total ISAF figures below, as of December 2007)<sup>15</sup>

Country	Troops	Country	Troops
Albania	138	Jordan	90
Australia	892	Lithuania	196
Austria	3	Luxembourg	9
Azerbaijan	22	Netherlands	1512
Belgium	369	New Zealand	74
Bulgaria	401	Norway	508
Canada	1730	Poland	1141
Croatia	211	Portugal	163
Czech Republic	240	Romania	537
Denmark	628	Slovakia	70
Estonia	125	Slovenia	66
Finland	86	Spain	763
France	1292	Sweden	350
Germany	3155	Switzerland	2
Greece	143	Macedonia	125
Hungary	219	Turkey	1219
Iceland	10	UK	7753
Ireland	7	U.S.	15038
Italy	2358		

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<sup>15</sup> "ISAF Placemat", 5 December 2007 accessed from [www.nato.int/isaf/](http://www.nato.int/isaf/) on 14 January 2008

However, the effectiveness of European troops has been severely reduced by restrictions imposed by most national governments. Sixty such national restrictions, or “caveats”, exist, limiting the ability of the ISAF commander to deploy and allocate forces. Caveats include a prohibition on moving forces to a certain area, requirements for lengthy consultations with national capitals before tactical decisions can be made, and restrictions on certain types of activities, for example, riot control.

European troops are most needed in southern and eastern Afghanistan where the insurgency is strong. But most EU countries are unwilling to operate there, leaving some 7,700 British troops in restive, poppy-growing Helmand, and 1,500 Dutch in neighbouring Uruzgan along with mere handfuls of Danes, Estonians, Poles, and Romanians. These troop levels are completely inadequate to control this vast and lawless area.

After significant American pressure prior to NATO’s Riga summit in November 2006, European countries pledged to remove many of these restrictions and to increase their troop contributions. Little, however, has actually changed since the summit. Spain argues that its 700 troops are sufficient and, under parliamentary pressure, the German and Dutch governments are now contemplating reductions in their troop numbers. France has added 150 troops to the 1,000 that were already deployed in Afghanistan; France’s other overseas deployments suggest they could do a lot better.<sup>16</sup> Overall, Europe’s contribution is dwarfed by the US, which has a total of 27,000 troops in Afghanistan- a number set to grow by 3,500 in the first quarter of 2008.

It is difficult to gauge the exact size of the deployability gap – the difference between what European countries have deployed and what they could deploy. But Europe’s military contribution in Afghanistan can be divided into three groups:

- The Netherlands and the United Kingdom, followed by Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark Estonia, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Romania. These countries contribute significant troops either in absolute terms or as a proportion of their national capability. Latvia has deployed 97 soldiers to ISAF. With a military of 5,864, this represents 1.6% of the country’s

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<sup>16</sup> “Sarkozy boosting French force in Afghanistan”, *The Associated Press*, 27 August 2007. France has 36,000 troops deployed abroad, with 13,000 as part of peacekeeping operations. There are more French troops in the largely peaceful Balkans (2,000 in Kosovo and 400 in Bosnia-Herzegovina) than in Afghanistan.

deployable capability. To match this, France would have to deploy 4,144 troops – more than four times its current ISAF contribution.

- Belgium, Hungary, Luxembourg, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, and Sweden have made significant contributions but could do better. Sweden, for example, has only deployed 0.7% of its total military.
- Austria, Finland, France, Greece, Ireland, and Portugal have made minimal deployments well below their capabilities. Finland has deployed only 85 soldiers to ISAF out of a total strength of 34,700. Austria, perhaps the greatest laggard, has deployed a mere 3 soldiers, while Luxembourg only 9.

ISAF commanders complain about a lack of manoeuvre units, rapid reaction brigades, and special operation forces. They also say they have insufficient forces to prevent insurgents crossing the border with Pakistan. As the NATO Parliamentary Assembly noted in 2007: “a consistent feature of the mission has been an incomplete fulfilment of the requirements laid out by the Alliance’s military leadership, and that leadership’s public appeals for additional resources.”<sup>17</sup>

To make up for limited numbers, the coalition has sought to take the fight to the Taliban, using air and ground assaults that frequently result in many civilian casualties. This strategy also tends to spread ISAF forces too thinly, creating vulnerable areas in the rear like Lashkar Gahr in Helmand. As a British officer serving in Helmand recently recounted: “We have often been fighting toe-to-toe, endless close-quarter combat. We have greater firepower so we tend to win [but] you also have to think about how many more enemies we are creating each time we kill one.”<sup>18</sup> More than 1000 civilians have been killed in 2007 alone.<sup>19</sup> The Taliban has grown stronger, perhaps because of the coalition’s strategy.

The German Federal Foreign Office wrote that “in recent months, reports about civilian casualties during OEF or ISAF operations have led to unrest among the local population.”<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, the Taliban has sought to intimidate and

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<sup>17</sup> Frank Cook, “Afghanistan: Assessing Progress and Key Challenges for the Alliance”, NATO Parliamentary Assembly, Spring 2007.

<sup>18</sup> Kim Sengupta, “Soldiers reveal horror of Afghan campaign”, *Independent Online*, 13 September 2006.

<sup>19</sup> “Over 1,000 Afghan Civilians Killed Since April: Interior Ministry”, *Afghan Conflict Monitor*, August 2007, accessed from <http://www.afghanconflictmonitor.org/2007/08/over-1000-afgha.html>

<sup>20</sup> “The German Federal Government’s Afghanistan policy”, Federal Foreign Office, 5 September 2007.

control the population by killing Afghan “collaborators” or those who might threaten its authority in other ways. Even ISAF Commander Lieutenant General Dan McNeil has had to admit that the Taliban might recapture territory throughout the south and east.<sup>21</sup>

## London conference commitments (\$ million)

UK	885
GERMANY	480
EU COMMISSION	268
SPAIN	182
NETHERLANDS	179
DENMARK	120
SWEDEN	120
FINLAND	60
ITALY	56
FRANCE	55
BELGIUM	6
GREECE	5
<b>EU TOTAL</b>	<b>2,416</b>
<b>US</b>	<b>4,000</b>

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Fred Attewill, “Taliban stands to recapture territory, warns Nato commander”, *Guardian Unlimited*, 28 September 2007.

## **WHAT IS TO BE DONE?**

Failure in Afghanistan is now a realistic prospect, and a new strategy will be required to avoid it. What should this look like and what role can the EU play? Firstly, the international community needs to set a realistic aim. The international community's involvement in Afghanistan should thus be considered a success if Afghanistan reaches a tipping point by 2011 where insurgent violence no longer threatens the survival of the state. It will then have been a decade since the original invasion and two years after the country's second set of democratic elections, due in 2009 or 2010.

In the long term, the country should evolve into a relatively stable, conservative Islamic democracy. Even to attain this tenuous result requires a new strategy, strengthened international leadership, and an unambiguous commitment to staying the course in Afghanistan, not just for two or three years, but for a decade or more, and perhaps much longer in a civilian form. By way of precedent, UN-mandated troops are still needed to police the Balkans 11 years after the Dayton Accords.

There are few historical examples of effective counter-insurgency campaigns lasting less than ten years. The last time the US successfully fought an insurgency was more than 100 years ago, when roughly 70,000 US troops established control in the Philippines over four years from 1898 to 1902. The next notable success in a major counter-insurgency war came during the British fight for control of Malaysia, which lasted from 1948 to 1960. However, military victory in both campaigns relied on a level of violence which EU nations would and should deem unacceptable in their counter-insurgency warfare today. An estimated one million Filipinos died during the uprising against the US occupiers. The British war in Malaya was less murderous, but relied not just on a complex interplay of military and civilian policies, but on the use of prototype cluster bombs, forced resettlement, and harsh collective punishment.

History tells us that our counter-insurgency needs to be a politically-led process with reconstruction and military activities in support, not the other way around. Attempts at splitting the insurgency by encouraging individual commanders to defect to the government's side should be at the core of the effort. To achieve this, the closest possible integration between civilian and military missions is required.

The new strategy for Afghanistan would have three key elements: designing a long-term strategy that has a strong political, as opposed to military, foundation; boosting international commitments with regard to both military deployments and development aid; and strengthening and consolidating the international leadership structure. To deliver this agenda, a restructuring of political and civilian leadership in Kabul is also required. The new strategy should be signed off at Bonn-type conference with the US, UN, EU and all of Afghanistan's regional partners.

### 1. Long-term political strategy

#### *Engaging the Taliban*

There will be no stability in Afghanistan unless "moderate" insurgents embrace constitutionalism and enter democratic politics. Since the Bonn Agreement in the wake of the September 11th attacks, the coalition has supported the United Islamic Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan, better known as the Northern Alliance, which brought together the main Tajik, Uzbek, and Hazara groupings. For obvious reasons it had no significant links to the Pashtuns who make up 42% of Afghanistan's population.<sup>22</sup> After 2001, despite Karzai's Pashtun background, Pashtun tribal leaders were largely excluded from government and have been ever since. Many have thus aligned themselves with the resurgent Taliban. The coalition and the Afghan government must work to convince them that they can pursue their interests democratically.

There have already been signs that this is at least possible. Though President Karzai's overtures to reclusive Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar were rebuffed, the Taliban, while insisting on a number of conditions, have been receptive to the idea of negotiations as proposed within Karzai's "Peace Jirga". The British Prime Minister Gordon Brown recently gave his backing to these negotiations, again with conditions attached, but the US administration remains sceptical.

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<sup>22</sup> Thomas H. Johnson, "On the Edge of the Big Muddy: The Taliban resurgence in Afghanistan", *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, Volume 5, No. 2 (2007), p. 93-129.



Political agreements - like the failed Musa Qala deal in 2006 overseen by the then ISAF commander, General David Richards – should aim to isolate the “hard-core”, many of whom are foreigners, from more moderate, indigenous groups. Such political agreements would also help avoid the violent tactics that may have won NATO military victories last year but cost vital public support because of high civilian casualties.<sup>23</sup>

An effective policy in the short term would be to identify insurgent leaders willing to cut a deal. The coalition could then operate a system of “divide and rule”, whereby intransigent insurgents would see their erstwhile comrades rewarded with a package of financial and other incentives which add up to a better deal than that offered by the Taliban. These are not currently being offered to the extent required.

Enticements could include money, paid in instalments to ensure an ongoing commitment to the government. They could also include a reconstruction “benefit package” for the leader’s local fief. For example, the Danish government, in conjunction with the Afghan Ministry of Education, has rapidly established a school in Musa Qala following the fighting there in December 2007, showing the population that ending combat leads to swift structural improvement. These offers would obviously need to be tightly coordinated with local and state officials, and it would be important not to create perverse incentives rewarding bad behaviour. The incentive package must be clear, developed by the Afghan government and agreed by the parliament. Ad hoc, clandestine arrangements led by NATO are likely to do more harm than good.

Ultimately, the best possible scenario would be the long-term development of a “Taliban Party”, prepared to promote its policies within a democratic framework. Like the SDS in Bosnia and Herzegovina, or Sinn Féin in Northern Ireland, a political party is needed to represent the views of those people currently serving in the Taliban. The grouping would obviously have to operate under a different name and explicitly accept the country’s constitution. Such a policy is not without risks, but uneasiness about non-secular politics and rewarding violence cannot be allowed to undermine this crucial part of a future political strategy. The parliament, the only institution where all groups

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<sup>23</sup> Under the terms of the Musa Qala, which was negotiated by the provincial governor, British troops and Taliban fighters withdrew from the town. In return local elders were to provide tribesmen for a new police force that would secure the town and keep the Taliban at bay. The Musa Qala deal generated much controversy among foreign and Afghan officials as the Taliban eventually retook the district, which in turn was retaken by NATO and Afghan forces in December 2007.

within a fractured society can be represented, should play a role in this process. To this end, the government must grant more power to the legislature, and Europeans should enlist their own parliamentarians to mentor and advise their Afghan counterparts.

Afghanistan suffers from a lack of genuine party politics, which Afghans associate with the tyranny of the Communist Party in the 1980s and the civil wars of the 1990s. But a functioning party system is crucial to a durable, democratic settlement; parties create leaders, help define the political agenda, and can help mobilise people across ethnic boundaries.

Although nearly 50 political parties have been registered, they do not even play a central role in elections, which have been hitherto almost entirely fought on the bases of ethnicity, religion, and local power. As the International Crisis Group writes, given the country's ethnic polarization, it is "essential that the multi-ethnic, multi-regional population has pluralistic and participatory avenues to express its demands and articulate its grievances."<sup>24</sup>

This can be done by introducing an element of proportional representation, which would, under a partial list system, *ipso facto* encourage the development of political parties by reserving seats in the parliament for them. However, a critical mass of the population will need to be convinced that the state is effective, representative, legitimate, and capable of providing some basic services in addition to law and order.

This is not simply a matter of transferring knowledge or building technical capacity. It is inherently a political task, which involves cultivating and buying off local power brokers, while encouraging modest but effective interventions within communities to promote social welfare. Strengthening provincial administrations to carry out such local initiatives is essential to this policy.

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<sup>24</sup> "Afghanistan's New Legislature: Making Democracy Work", Asia Report N°116, International Crisis Group, 15 May 2006.

## *Counter-narcotics*

Poppy eradication is the greatest source of popular resentment against the Afghan government and NATO. Neither aerial spraying nor legalisation - as advocated by the Security and Development Policy Group, the Senlis Council<sup>25</sup> - is a solution to the country's drug problem. Afghanistan does not have the administrative infrastructure to run the massive regulation scheme - monitoring farmers, handing out licences, and controlling sales - which legalisation would require. Moreover, a scheme to buy up the entire poppy crop might create a perverse incentive for farmers to grow more poppy without any risks involved, and would just require traffickers to pay slightly more than the licensed price - all at a rising cost for Western taxpayers.<sup>26</sup> Even worse is the current practice of eradication: it achieves almost no results and carries a high cost in resources and lost support among Afghan farmers. Shifting to aerial spraying would probably create a substantial anti-government, anti-NATO backlash in the areas targeted.

The international community needs to rule out aerial spraying and to make clear that traffickers and their protectors, not farmers, are the problem. In conditions of poverty and insecurity farmers will always continue to grow opium. In a climate of lawlessness, kingpins, and their backers in government will continue to ply their trade. The priority, therefore, should be the arrest and prosecution of drug lords and their backers in government. As in Bosnia and in Cambodia, it is worth investigating appointing international jurists to the Special Tribunal who could work alongside Afghan officials, according to the Afghan Criminal Code, in prosecuting offenders. These international jurists would become effectively Afghan officials in the process. What is certain, is that the names of major drug traffickers, who are often well known and have links to the insurgency, should be submitted to the UN's counter-terrorism watch list.

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<sup>25</sup> "Afghan Poppy for Medicine projects - An Economic Case Study", Senlis Council, November 2007

<sup>26</sup> Vanda Felbab-Brown, "Opium Licensing in Afghanistan: Its Desirability and Feasibility", *Brookings Institute*, Policy Paper No 1, 1 August 2007.

Putting pressure on provincial bosses can also be effective. According to a study of the reduction of opium cultivation in Laghman and Nangarhar provinces, “the provincial leaders, who were threatened with losing their position, were able to exercise enough authority over the farmers in order to induce them to almost completely cease opium cultivation.”<sup>27</sup> This approach requires extensive patronage, financed by external donors.

### *Local delivery*

Increasing confidence in the Afghan government and its provincial outposts will be crucial. A critical mass of the population needs to be convinced that the state is legitimate, representative, and effective enough to act in their interests to provide at least some basic services in addition to a measure of security, law and order – in sum, that it provides a better deal than the Taliban. Assistance efforts need to be refocused around delivering clear benefits on the ground through strengthening the provincial administrations and ensuring that the police contribute to, rather than undermine, the safety of ordinary Afghans.

To date, local delivery has been hampered by the often contradictory policies of the national, local and international bodies. PRTs, UNAMA, Special Forces all vie to support local development. But quick-impact, security-focused projects – distributed by the military and aimed at building consent through creating physical assets – often conflict with UN-supported government processes. In addition, there are many different models of local governance – traditional structures such as shuras, Community Development Councils (CDCs), and the country’s formal institutions. This institutional overlap complicates delivery and allows militia commanders to wield undue and undemocratic influence. A third problem lies in Kabul. As a World Bank report notes, highly centralized ministries are responsible for delivery of most key services in the country. The ministries tend to be over-centralized; their offices in Kabul retain functions which could be performed much more efficiently at the lower levels of government.<sup>28</sup> President Karzai has launched a new initiative to focus on local delivery; the Directorate for Local Governance, and some central ministries, like the Ministry for Education, have delegated tasks, such

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<sup>27</sup> Jan Koehler and Christoph Zuercher, “Statebuilding, Conflict and Narcotics in Afghanistan: The View from Below”, *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 14, No 1, January 2007, p. 72.

<sup>28</sup> “Service Delivery and Governance at the Sub-National Level in Afghanistan”, World Bank, July 18, 2007

as teacher recruitment, to provincial level. This push – and the Directorate for Local Governance – will need to be supported in full by the donor community.

Moreover, it may be necessary to establish a process to disentangle the confusing mess of local structures in the run-up to the 2009/10 elections. The EU should also boost the numbers of civilians working in PRTs and EUPOL, and increase PRT funding from €10 to €50 million – money which ought to be given to provincial governments and used with PRT expertise in support of local development plans. The EU should also consider setting up some form of “good government contracts” for all provincial governments, offering additional financial assistance on a *quid pro quo* basis.

### *Iran and Pakistan*

A better strategy for dealing with the region, especially Pakistan and Iran, is essential to the coalition’s effort in Afghanistan. Pakistan, given the kinship between Pashtuns on both sides of the Afghan-Pakistani border, has a major role to play; as Barnett Rubin argues: “success is not possible without a coherent US strategy not only towards Pakistan and Afghanistan but also towards the Pakistan-Afghanistan relationship.”<sup>29</sup> Pashtuns have long resented and never accepted the 2,640km Durand Line which draws the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan and divides the Pashtun people. The under-policed, mostly mountainous border area is a haven for the Taliban who launch operations into Afghanistan from bases inside Pakistan, including Peshawar where its top leaders are based.<sup>30</sup>

Pakistan has been reluctant to deal with this, partly because of General Musharraf’s tenuous hold on power. Yet there is also an inclination in the military-security establishment to see the insurgency as a way to counter what is perceived as the increasing encirclement by the arch-enemy India. New Delhi has established close ties with the Afghan government, giving it \$1 billion in reconstruction aid and even constructing a new parliament in Kabul. Many Afghan leaders, in turn, still harbour dreams of a Greater Afghanistan and refuse to accept the Durand Line as an internationally recognised border, causing continued anxiety in Pakistan.

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<sup>29</sup> Barnett Rubin, “Afghanistan’s Uncertain Transition From Turmoil to Normalcy”, CRS, No. 12, Council on Foreign Relations, March 2006.

<sup>30</sup> Afghan Islamist Gulbuddin Hikmatyar’s Hizb-i-Islami (HIG), the jihadi network of Maulawi Jalaluddin Haqqani and foreign jihadi forces, including the leadership of Al-Qaeda, are also active this border area.

The Pakistani government has recently sought to assert control through the use of its security forces, resulting in ongoing clashes with Islamist extremists. No easy solutions are apparent and lingering suspicions of continued collusion between Pakistani military intelligence and the Taliban remain. As with counter-insurgency in Afghanistan, the aim should be to contain the influence of Islamist extremists in Pakistan, rather than seek to defeat them militarily.

It will also be necessary to address the causes of Pakistan's quest for "strategic depth" – its fears of encirclement by India. Delhi's assistance to Afghanistan has been considerable with Indian-donated Tata buses now an obvious part of Kabul's public transportation system. India is also making important contributions to Afghan education, including rebuilding Habibia High School in Kabul, and President Karzai - who was educated in India – has visited Delhi several times. But this support is seen in Islamabad – and perhaps even more so in the Pakistani military headquarters in Rawalpindi – as part of a deliberate strategy to encircle Pakistan.

To the west, Iran strongly supports the Karzai government in public. But it also maintains close links with its old Northern Alliance friends, now in the National Front. Riding both main Afghan horses enables Tehran to hedge its bets for the future, and indeed play one side off against the other to the detriment of Afghanistan's political stability. The UK, whose forces are most at risk because of their geographical position in southern Afghanistan, has accused Iran of providing material support to the Taliban. It is obviously not in Tehran's interest to see the re-establishment on its borders of the Taliban, a Sunni extremist movement and erstwhile enemy. But although Iran is paranoid about the possible long term presence of western troops in Afghanistan, it judges that its short-term interests are best served by keeping US and UK forces tied down in Afghanistan (particularly given recently heightened US-Iran tensions). This accounts for its limited military support for the Taliban.

Indeed, it is probably fair to assume that Iran will continue to offer the Taliban only a trickle of arms. The Mullahs are wary of the their guns being turned against their main interests in Afghanistan, the Shia Hazara ethnic group and the lucrative commercial markets of Herat and western Afghanistan, as happened in the late 1990s. In addition, Iran suffers more than any other country from the huge influx of Afghan opiates.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to recommend a comprehensive strategy addressing the problems related to Pakistan, Iran and India. But it is clear that for Afghanistan's reconstruction to succeed, a new trans-Atlantic approach to the entire region is required. Three successful regional economic cooperation conferences in Kabul (December 2005), in New Delhi (November 2006), and in Herat (October 2007) have shown that cooperation is achievable. But it would need goodwill as well as substantial, coordinated American and European incentives and political investment. A starting point could be a joint US-EU-UN mission – modelled on the E3+3 approach to Iran – to the entire region (which also solicits support from the UAE, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and China) aimed at forging transatlantic consensus on the interrelations of problems in the region.

## **2. Greater Western commitment**

Containing the insurgency will require a change in tactics, more troops – especially trainers – and more helicopters. Yet European leaders are typically loath to send more soldiers, and prefer them to be deployed among PRTs in the safer central, northern, and western parts of Afghanistan where they are engaged in reconstruction tasks that might be better left to civilians.

Scepticism about sending more troops is understandable and supported by historical experience in pre-independence Ireland, Vietnam, and Guinea-Bissau where more soldiers led to more violence in each case. As Field Marshal Sir Gerald Templer, the High Commissioner for Malaya, said in 1952: “The answer lies not in pouring more troops into the jungle, but in the hearts and minds of the Malayan People”.<sup>31</sup> (Templer himself did not always heed his own advice).

### *From warfare to counter-insurgency*

The ISAF and the Afghan government must drive a wedge between the insurgency and the population – by convincing Afghans that the government is in a better position than the insurgents, both in the short and long term, to provide security for people to get on with their daily lives. To increase confidence in government, the international coalition must work to bolster

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<sup>31</sup> Quoted in *End of Empire*, Brian Lapping, St Martins Pr; 1st Us edition (August 1985).

local institutions and support the state in cutting security deals with tribal elders. But to achieve this, a shift is required to a policy which makes saving Afghan lives a priority. This should be based on more ground troops with strong political support which will be essential to carrying out the sophisticated, intelligence-led combat operations, targeting leaders of the insurgency, which can bring peace and security to Afghanistan at the lowest possible human cost, and on the avoidance at all costs of air strikes on towns and villages, which kill civilians and drive Afghans into the ranks of the Taliban.

More troops are needed to train Afghan forces. The key to ensuring this will be that sufficient numbers of training teams are available for both military and police training. According to military commanders, a mere 93 trainers out of the 434 originally planned for are in Afghanistan. In addition, more helicopters and other aircraft are needed to transport troops across southern Afghanistan's vast expanse. In the short term, an additional 2,000-2,500 extra NATO troops are probably required for operations in the south alongside the expected deployment of 3,500 US Marines. The shortfall could be covered without new troops, if many of the existing "caveats" were to be relaxed, and if French, German, Italian, and Spanish troops could be moved to the east, freeing up American soldiers there to be sent to the south. But fresh troops would still have to be found to eventually replace the Dutch, Danish, and Canadian forces in the south. In sum, the western coalition cannot hope to win the peace by fighting on the cheap.

### 3. Stronger international leadership

A new strategy for Afghanistan will not work without overhauling and streamlining international civilian and military command structures. In the words of Paddy Ashdown, former High Representative in Bosnia, who appeared set to accept the job of UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General to Afghanistan (SRSG) in mid-January, "Our partners in the Afghan government are baffled by the stream of contradictory instructions and the absence of an international partner with a clear view of what must be done."<sup>32</sup> The EU and the US urgently need to agree and yield to clear military and civilian leadership and a closely integrated structure steering the international effort.

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<sup>32</sup> Paddy Ashdown, "We are failing in Afghanistan", *The Guardian*, 19 July 2007.



This requires leadership cutting across military, political and development boundaries – leadership that, realistically, only the UN can provide. The position of the UN SRSG should be upgraded to a “Super Envoy” role, with the EU and NATO signalling full support for this person’s leadership, and either mandating the person simultaneously or each contributing a Deputy Envoy.<sup>33</sup> A broad remit should be given to this individual to ensure that all international activities, including military action, follow a political lead.

This would not be the first time a civilian was interjected into the military’s chain of command. In Vietnam an organization called CORDS, for Civil Operations and Rural Development Support, was established to coordinate the disjointed and ineffective pacification programmes under General William Westmoreland. CORDS was established too late to have a decisive impact but historians now believe that it allowed the pacification programmes to expand dramatically. Controversially, Westmoreland’s deputy was a civilian and thus part of the chain of command. Going back further, in WWII the distinction between civilian and military leadership of reconstruction efforts was less clear cut. General Lucius Clay, for example, was the overall governor in post-war Germany. In more modern times, the UN’s mission in Eastern Slavonia, headed by American Jacques Paul Klein, had both a military and a civilian component.

The purely military chain of command in Afghanistan is not working. Using history as a guide, NATO and the UN need to ensure that military action not only comes under democratic control at the strategic level – in Washington and Brussels – but under day-to-day control in Kabul under a “Super Envoy”.

The joined-up UN-led approach should naturally be extended to the provinces where similar institutional clashes occur as in Kabul. In time, PRTs must give way to a more normal, UN-led international presence; putting the United Nations Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in the lead now would ease this process.

Lobbying key donors to act in unison would be crucial. The Envoy would thus need offices in Brussels and Washington<sup>34</sup>. It is essential that the military

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<sup>33</sup> Like the ‘Pillar Heads’ in the UN mission in Kosovo, they would work for the UN SRSG but remain in charge of their respective organisations to avoid the cumbersome legalities affecting secondments. However, all EU and ISAF civilian staff, including policing and justice personnel and staff in PRTs, as well as police training staff from the Combined Security Transition Command in Afghanistan (CSTC-A), would need to be brought under the “Super Envoy”.

<sup>34</sup> This is similar to the lobbying mandate of the Office of the High Representative in Bosnia, which has maintained an office in Brussels.

effort is itself consolidated and streamlined under a single ISAF command and that military training carried out by the US-led Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan is folded into the ISAF structure. This arrangement, giving the UN a more central role, would probably require a new UN Security Council Resolution. The Super Envoy must not however be seen to take power away from the Afghan and provincial governments; Afghanistan in 2007 is not in need of a Bosnia-style High Representative – a foreigner with extra-constitutional powers. Such a concentration of power over the international effort carries risks. But, as *The Economist* notes, sticking to the present course in Afghanistan would be even more hazardous.<sup>35</sup>

The Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board (JCMB) has come a long way, as have the president's "War Council", the unofficial "Tea Club" of a smaller group of nations, and the Policy Action Group. But they have not proven to be effective at prioritising government action and, in the Tea Club's case, arranging the international effort. International and Afghan officials attend a plethora of meetings at various levels. However, prioritisation and coordination does not seem to have improved. It may therefore be useful to develop a localized UN Security Council-style committee of the main donors and military contributors. In Bosnia, this role was undertaken by a so-called Steering Board. It was only seven-nations large, but provided for a manageable international decision-making body. Even though conditions in Bosnia and Afghanistan are different, this model is worth copying. An expanded Tea Club could form the basis for such a formalized structure. The JCMB can then focus on giving broad guidance.

The EU will also need to make changes in its own structures. The key is consolidation. Separating the Commission office from the Super Envoy's office, with yet another office for EUPOL, will only create confusion. By increasing and improving its involvement in Afghanistan, the EU will learn to deal better with similar challenges elsewhere in the world. EU member states should agree to throw the EU's full weight behind a UN Envoy. The EU must lead by example in presenting a united front so as to encourage other donors to set aside their narrow national interests. As is true in all areas of foreign policy, speaking with one voice is crucial for the EU for the US to treat it as an equal partner.

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<sup>35</sup> "Must they be wars without end?", *The Economist*, Dec 13th 2007.

## CONCLUSION

If the proposed strategy is to be successful, the Afghan people will have to understand what the international community is doing and why. This requires a concerted publicity effort making full use of available media.

The Taliban have the advantage of patience, a near inexhaustible supply of recruits and money, mountainous terrain that favours guerrilla warfare, and sanctuary in northern and western Pakistan. But perhaps their greatest strength is a comprehensive knowledge of local cultures, languages, and tribal hierarchies of which the international community remains ignorant.

The Taliban also have a sophisticated media strategy and full grasp of modern technology (despite rejecting other aspects of modernity)<sup>36</sup>. The Taliban's grassroots political machine provides effective channels to spread information within an illiterate society. They understand the weakness of liberal democracies against suicide bombs and kidnappings of peacekeepers and aid workers. And they are cynically adept at manipulating resentment towards the coalition over civilian casualties – a recent tactic has been to maximise the number of civilian casualties during ISAF air raids by locking people into their homes.

The international community collectively lacks local knowledge, and key decisions in Afghanistan have been taken on the basis of incomplete and insufficient intelligence. There is little detailed understanding of political and tribal dynamics, or of the relations between drug traffickers and insurgents. Our understanding of the Taliban themselves is limited. Many policymakers think of the Taliban just as highly radicalised Islamist terrorists. This view neglects the shared Pashtun tribal basis of the insurgency as well as the kinship and clan ties that are stronger than any loyalty to central government. It is important to differentiate between insurgents and opponents with an Islamist agenda, those with political, economic, or social grievances, and those joining the fight to protect their poppy crops or in order to earn cash to support their families. To understand the Taliban one must understand their Pashtun world. All international actors are thus in need of better information in this area.

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<sup>36</sup> The philosopher John Gray provides an illuminating account in *Al Qaeda and What It Means To Be Modern?*, Faber, 2003.

Bringing stability to Afghanistan relies on the ability of the state, together with the international community, to win over the people. It also requires a number of different approaches tailored to suit local conditions across the country. This will require significant investment. For a start, if coalition experts cannot understand local languages, they have little chance of genuinely understanding the people. More money is needed for language training and for country and regional specialists in foreign ministries and international organisations. The EU has some advantages in these areas. The Special Envoy can rely on a team of experienced political officers, conversant in Dari and Pashtu, whose reports are considered to be among the most valuable coming out of Afghanistan. This research and analytical capacity could be expanded to support the implementation of the new strategy we have outlined under a Super Envoy.

The West has a strategic interest and a moral obligation to deliver on its commitments to Afghanistan. Leaving the country to its fate at the hands of the Taliban would amount to a massive betrayal of the majority of Afghans, who do not wish to be ruled by ideological extremists enforcing a puritanical order through state terror. And as a weak or failing state, Afghanistan could once again provide a haven for terrorists seeking to mount large-scale attacks on the West. A failing Afghanistan would export further instability to its politically fragile neighbourhood, starting with Pakistan, a state already struggling with home-grown Islamic extremism. The weakening of Western and European soft power would be felt around the world and across the whole range of international politics. In an age when China, India and other powers are on the rise, Europe cannot afford a self-inflicted major strategic debacle.

The political and military dynamics in Afghanistan and the erosion of support for the international coalition in Europe have pushed the situation close to a tipping point where a radical overhaul of the existing strategy and its implementation is essential if disaster is to be averted. As this paper has argued, the EU, while not the main player in Afghanistan, has a unique responsibility to improve and restructure its own contribution and act as a catalyst for a better civilian and military strategy. In 2011, it will have been a decade since the original invasion and two years after the country's second round of democratic elections scheduled for 2009. An effective international engagement could and should ensure that by then, insurgent violence no longer threatens the survival of the state.

Working through EU institutions, the EU's national governments must treat their mission in Afghanistan as a common endeavour. EU governments have demonstrated in the Balkans their ability to learn, delegate authority, and take responsibility when their vital interests are at stake; this united intervention made the peacemaking in the Balkans possible. The current military and civilian struggle to bring Afghanistan stability and an acceptable government may be fought a few thousand kilometres further to the east, but success is just as vital for Europe as it was in the ex-Yugoslavia.

Most EU governments know this, but shy away from explaining it to their public. This must change. Time is running out for Afghanistan, and the time for action in Europe is now.

### **About the author**

Daniel Korski is a Senior Policy Fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations. He was previously deputy head of the UK's Post-Conflict Reconstruction Unit, an advisor to the Afghan Minister for Counter-narcotics, and head of the UK/US Provincial Reconstruction Team in Basra, Iraq. He had also worked as political adviser to Lord Paddy Ashdown, former High Representative of Bosnia-Herzegovina.



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"A recent report by the European Council on Foreign Relations, a think-tank, castigated members of the European Union in scathing terms: EU countries have treated the common effort in Afghanistan like a pot-luck dinner where every guest is free to bring his own dish."

**The Economist, 24 January, 2008**

"The international community must try to attract 'moderate' Afghan insurgents away from the Taliban by giving them financial support that encourages them to support the Kabul government, according to a new report."

**The Financial Times, 19 January, 2008**

"What is needed is a 'grand bargain' between the US and Europe – with the US opening up to an approach not exclusively based on military force, and European governments coming clean before their public opinions about the need to fight a real war in Afghanistan - with weapons and risks of casualties."

**Il Corriere della Sera, 21 January, 2008**

"To break the trans-Atlantic deadlock on shared strategy, the report advocates a greater degree of international cooperation as necessary to transcend institutional politics and suggests upgrading the current UN special representative to a 'Super Envoy,' cooperatively backed by the United States and NATO."

**The Middle East Times, 24 January, 2008**

"In relation to Afghanistan, the EU doesn't even score a 'pass'. Beyond grandiose speeches, it does not act in a coordinated way and does not speak with one voice. This severe diagnosis doesn't come from the US, which has recently criticised its European allies on Afghanistan, but from the European Council on Foreign Relations, a new think-tank."

**El Pais, 21 January, 2008**