The ISAF Mission and Turkey's Role in Rebuilding the Afghan State

Nov 18, 2005

Brief Analysis

On November 14, 2005, Lt. Gen. Ethem Erdagi, commander of the International Security Assistance Forces in Afghanistan (ISAF) from February to August 2005, discussed the roles of ISAF and Turkey in Afghanistan at a special Policy Forum at The Washington Institute. General Erdagi currently serves as commander of NATO's Rapid Deployable Corps-Turkey. The following is a rapporteur's summary of his remarks.

View **a PDF version of the PowerPoint presentation (http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/html/pdf/erdagi-20051114.pdf)** that accompanied General Erdagi's remarks.

Before the deployment of the International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF), the situation in Afghanistan was similar to that in Bosnia. The central state had collapsed; the independent militias had taken over the army and the police, and all the conditions necessary for a potential ethnic struggle were present. On top of that, Afghanistan was economically the least developed country in the world.

The international community's, and thereby ISAF's, most important mission in Afghanistan is nation-building. Beside ISAF, other actors involved in the country include the U.S.-led coalition forces; multilateral organizations such as the United Nations; sixty-seven nations as donors or as contributors to the security forces, thirty-six of which are under NATO command; and more than three thousand nongovernmental organizations.

International Military Presence in Afghanistan: ISAF and CFC-A

There are two types of military presence in Afghanistan. The first is the American-led coalition forces, called Combined Forces Command-Afghanistan (CFC-A), which operates in the southern half of the country and carries out security operations, including active combat operations. The second is the NATO-led ISAF.

ISAF predates NATO's assumption of command in August 2003. At that time, the operation was limited to Kabul, but under the terms of the October 2003 UN Security Council Resolution 1510, NATO expanded its area of operations. It is now active in Kabul and northern Afghanistan and is gradually assuming responsibility in the rest of the country, starting in western Afghanistan. By spring 2006, CFC-A will cease to exist and ISAF will take charge of the latter's area of operations. ISAF provides stability operations -- that is, it does not initiate combat against terrorism, in contrast to CFC-A.

Although ISAF is a NATO initiative, it also includes non-NATO members; thirty-six countries in all are involved. ISAF is NATO's first real out-of-area operation; the earlier Bosnia operation was within Europe and so close to NATO's formal area of operation that it did not require the kind of logistical and supply effort needed for an out-of-area operation. As ISAF takes on responsibility for all of Afghanistan, different NATO members will be in charge of different parts of the country: Germany will take control of operations in the north, Italy of the west, Canada and the Netherlands of the south, the United States of the east, while France and Turkey will take control on a rotational basis of operations in the central area including Kabul.

Lessons Learned in Afghanistan

The operation has proved to be problematic; there have been many national restrictions and caveats due to the multinational nature of the operation. Different pillars of the security sector have been put under different countries' leadership. The United States is in charge of setting up an army, while Germany is to build up the police forces; Japan is to take care of disarmament; Britain is to fight narcotics; and Italy is to build the judicial system.

Overall stability in Afghanistan has been hindered by the lack of parallel progress in different pillars of the security sector. Without an effective judicial system, which faces serious problems today, the fight against narcotics is difficult. America's staunch commitment has meant that the army has become one of the most reformed of all pillars, with 25,000 troops already trained. By contrast, the police force, which numbers 40,000, suffers immense problems such as corruption and illiteracy rates that run as high as 60 percent in its ranks. Reforming the police is more urgent for security than the army, but as in other cases of nation-building, creating police forces has been very difficult. These challenges could be dealt with better if there were a single body overseeing reform. It should be noted, however, that despite attacks in various parts of the country, life is getting back to normal. The attacks are manageable and the overall trend seems to be toward an increase in security.

Other lessons learned in Afghanistan that apply to nation-building operations elsewhere include the usefulness for winning the hearts and minds of local people of respecting local tradition and religion and not acting as occupying forces. In addition, international forces must also develop public awareness, because they operate under heightened media scrutiny. They need to be transparent and must avoid collateral damage in order not to attract negative media attention.

The locals do not understand the mandate of international forces and do not care what that mandate is. International players must see it as their duty to help local people, whether it is their mandate or not. This is especially the case for all sorts of humanitarian and relief efforts. Currently, ISAF has no capacity to offer widespread humanitarian aid. Such aid can be a key factor to build respect. One important instrument in this regard could be the provincial reconstruction teams, run by individual countries, which have been successful. But to increase their success, NATO needs to take ownership of the military aspects of the teams.

NATO's commitment to Afghanistan of 9,000-10,000 troops is very low, especially when compared to its commitment to Bosnia, which is only the size of one Afghan province. There, NATO had close to 60,000 troops.

As it adapts to unconventional warfare, NATO needs to develop the following capabilities: better psychological operations (which were effective in Kabul but weak outside the city); more and better unmanned aerial vehicles; counterinsurgency technology such better nightvision devices; satellite and aerial reconnaissance equipment to track terrorists hiding in difficult terrain; and better equipment for crowd control.

Turkey's Added Value

Turkey is the only NATO power that has twice run ISAF. As such, it has played a crucial role in Afghanistan. In the 1920s and 1930s, under Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founder of the Turkish republic, Turkey trained Afghan military officers and helped Afghanistan in its state-building efforts. As a result, much military terminology in Afghanistan is in Turkish. That historical cooperation ended during Russian and Taliban occupation, but it is restarting now. Afghanistan's soldiers and officers are once again being trained in Turkey's military academies.

Militarily speaking, Turkey was able to bring much to the table because of its experience in fighting terrorists. Turkish forces were able to bring to bear valuable counterinsurgency experience learned in the campaign against the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) terrorist organization. Turkish soldiers took it as a duty to demonstrate to the Afghans that they are not occupying forces in the country. Accordingly, for instance, they chose to patrol on foot and not in cars, and when they patrolled, they never wore bulletproof jackets, even if it meant putting their lives on the line. For the locals, this meant respect. In return, local Afghans showed admiration for the Turkish troops and were

willing to cooperate with them. In order to defuse the negative effects of the intimidation the Afghan people feel because of the economic, military, and manpower strength displayed by the international community, respect shown to the people is key to gaining their trust.

This rapporteur's summary was prepared by DÃ¼den Yegenoglu.

Policy #1052

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