

Turkey Has Been Successful As the Leader of the International Force in Afghanistan

Nov 27, 2002



Brief Analysis

ISAF's Mandate

The creation of ISAF was authorized by UN Security Council Resolution 1386 in December 2001. The United Kingdom served as the first lead nation until Turkey took over command on June 20, 2002; the Turkish mandate was granted by Resolution 1413, which extended ISAF's authorization until December 20, 2002.

Under Turkish leadership, ISAF is envisaged as 1) assisting in the development of future security structures, 2) assisting in Afghanistan's reconstruction, and 3) assisting in the training of future Afghan security forces. The main threat to Kabul's security is posed by remnants of the Taliban and al-Qaeda. They are unlikely to have a mass following or popular appeal; Afghans are tired of violence and factional politics. Yet, these remnants may be able to carry out isolated attacks and temporarily disrupt daily life in the city. Their usual methods and tools include improvised vehicle-borne explosive devices, rocket attacks, explosive ordnance, and surface-to-air missiles.

ISAF's area responsibility spans 50 kilometers in the north-south direction and 45 in the east-west direction around Kabul, for a total area of 2,250 square kilometers. Three battalion-level task forces operate in the city: the Turkish task force in the west and southwest; the German task force in the north, center, and northwest; and the French task force in the north. In addition, an Italian force-protection company operates in the center. Turkey also supervises the military portion of the Kabul airport (which is a crucial link in ISAF's logistics operations) and provides air traffic control for the entire airport. ISAF has roughly 4,800 authorized personnel drawn from 22 countries. The ISAF headquarters includes 51 Turks and 42 Afghan nationals. In recent weeks, Azerbaijan joined ISAF, and Croatia is expected to join soon as well.

ISAF takes great care to remain equidistant to all ethnic groups within Afghanistan, avoiding at all cost any involvement in Afghan domestic politics. ISAF fully respects Afghan customs, cultural values, and religious beliefs; all ISAF personnel are under strict orders to be courteous to Afghan citizens at all times.

ISAF conducts approximately forty-five patrols per day, on a twenty-four-hour basis and mostly on foot. Nearly 70 percent of these patrols are conducted jointly with the Afghan police. Lately, the number of ISAF patrols has reached sixty on some days. ISAF continues to find and confiscate a significant amount of weapons and ammunition, including rockets, unexploded ordnance, and air-defense systems, indicating that terrorist elements are experiencing increasing difficulties in their movements and planning. As of November 1, ISAF explosive ordnance disposal teams have destroyed 107,000 rounds of ammunition, including antitank weapons, missiles, rockets, and mines.

Kabul itself is calm and quite nowadays. Security improves every day, despite the residual threat of terrorism. Terrorist attacks are rare and isolated, and crime rates are low. This led to the lifting of the night curfew on November 3 -- for the first time in twenty-three years -- following consultations with the Afghan Ministry of the Interior.

The United States is the lead nation for the task of preparing the Afghan national army; two battalions have already been trained, and a third battalion is currently undergoing training. France has trained two battalions as well, while Turkish instructors are providing ten weeks of advanced training to the First Battalion of the Afghan National Guard.

ISAF runs an extensive Civil-Military Cooperation program that includes the following: renovating schools and orphanages; supplying stationery, water, and electricity to schools; restoring mosques; constructing sewerage; rehabilitating hospitals, clinics, and emergency services; distributing regular and baby food; and providing training for fire brigades and air traffic controllers.

Turkey wishes to hand over its leadership responsibilities to another party on December 20, 2002, when its official term expires. Germany and the Netherlands have indicated their intention of jointly assuming leadership of ISAF. The three countries are currently holding talks to determine the hand-over arrangements. In any case, Turkey will continue to contribute to ISAF in one way or another.

Turkey's Success

Why has Turkey been successful in leading ISAF? First, as a Muslim country, Turkey has had an advantage: Turkish ISAF personnel know the Afghans' beliefs and customs to such an extent that they do not feel like aliens in Afghanistan. Second, Turkey has traditionally had good relations with the Afghan people. Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founder of the Turkish Republic, sent doctors and diplomats to help Afghans and established good relations with Amanullah Khan, the former king of Afghanistan. Today, Afghans remember the past fondly, expressing appreciation for Turkey's help at a time when Turks were fighting their own war of independence and were themselves in need of help. Third, under Turkish leadership, ISAF has never become involved in Afghan domestic political issues. Therefore, the Afghan people and the interim government trust ISAF fully.

Moreover, the Turkish leadership convened a working group comprising representatives from all twenty-two ISAF countries in order to establish general rules for the behavior of all ISAF forces. As the commander of the force, I endorsed the working group's report as an advisory paper. Despite its multinational nature, ISAF has been functioning quite well; from a personal standpoint, I have not experienced any significant difficulties in leading a multinational force.

Afghanistan will need ISAF's assistance for another two to three years. As an EU candidate country, Turkey willingly accepted its leadership role, yet Ankara has not received any financial or technical help from NATO, the UN, or the United States. Although the United States has delivered financial aid to Turkey, ISAF has not received any American funds. It must be remembered that ISAF is more than a military force; it is a symbol of the international community's determination to help the Afghan people. As a committed member of the international community and a historical ally of Afghanistan, Turkey believes that the Afghan people deserve whatever money is spent on ISAF.

This Special Policy Forum Report was prepared by Ayca Ariyoruk.

Policy #682

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