

THE PROGRESS OF THE ISAF MISSION IN AFGHANISTAN AND THE NEW WAY TO EFFECTIVE STRATEGY

(Прогрес міжнародних сил сприяння безпеці (ISAF) у Афганістані і новий шлях до ефективної стратегії)

Після терористичних атак 11 вересня 2001 у Нью-Йорку та Вашингтоні, округ Колумбія, американські сили увійшли до Афганістану та проголосили «глобальну війну з тероризмом». Війна триває вісім років, і ніщо не передвіщає її закінчення. Здійснюючи доктрину дій проти партизанів, оперативна організація й стратегія в Афганістані повільно розвивається. Успіхи військової операції пов'язані не тільки з поразкою Талібану або воюючих сторін Аль-Каїди, але й з підтримкою від місцевого населення, побудовою інфраструктури, навчальних афганських сил безпеки, відновленням сільського господарства, створенням умов для демократії й верховенства закону. Командуючі НАТО й політичні діячі недавно просили більше військ і підтримки. Вони визнають, що вони в цей час переживають критичний момент у війні.

Ключові слова: Афганська Національна Армія, Аль-Каїда, військовий конфлікт, Міжнародні сили сприяння безпеці.

После террористических атак 11 сентября 2001 в Нью-Йорке и Вашингтоне, округ Колумбия, американские силы вторглись в Афганистан и возвестили «Глобальную войну с терроризмом». Продлившись восемь лет, война в Афганистане не подходит к концу. Осуществляя недавно развитую доктрину действий против партизан, оперативная организация и стратегия в Афганистане медленно развивается. Успехи военной операции связаны не только с поражением Талибана или воюющих сторон Аль-Каиды, но и с развивающейся поддержкой от местного населения, построением инфраструктуры, учебных афганских сил безопасности, восстановлением сельского хозяйства, созданием условий для демократии и верховенства закона. Командующие НАТО и политические деятели недавно просили больше войск и поддержки. Они признают, что они в настоящее время переживают критический момент в войне.

Ключевые слова: Афганская Национальная Армия, Аль-Каида, Военные Силы Международной безопасности, военный конфликт.

Following the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, DC, American forces invaded Afghanistan and ushered in the «Global War on Terrorism.» Having lasted eight years and claimed thousands of lives, the war in Afghanistan shows no signs of slowing. NATO must continue to adapt its strategy and resourcing in Afghanistan, identify clear goals and milestones, and definitively tailor ISAF's mission to defeat a constantly evolving extremist enemy. Drawing on their initial experiences, the US-led coalition slowly began to define the tactics, ideas, and methods of asymmetric warfare. Implementing newly developed counterinsurgency doctrine, and drawing on successes from Iraq, task organization and strategy in Afghanistan slowly evolved. Success in Afghanistan derives not only from defeating Taliban or Al Qaeda combatants in battle, but from developing support from the local population, building infrastructure, training Afghan security forces, re-establishing agriculture not reliant on the drug trade, and fostering an environment of democracy and the rule of law. NATO commanders and

politicians have recently requested more troops and support. They recognize that they currently face a critical moment in the war, and they understand the necessary ingredients for victory. Their actions in implementing the strategic, operational, and tactical pieces of this complex puzzle will set ISAF either on the path to success, or to potential failure.

Key words: *Afghan National Army, Al Qaeda, Counter-insurgency, International Security Assistance Force.*

In 2001, the United States invaded Afghanistan, where they found an Al Qaeda stronghold protected by the ruling Taliban government. This decision resulted from the 11 September 2001 attack by this terrorist organization on the United States. US President George W. Bush announced the beginning of the «Global War on Terror and began construction of a coalition. Analysts, along with the President and his administration acknowledged that this war would be long lasting. President Bush asserted that this conflict would be different than previous wars, with a different opponent, and a lack of defined battlefields and beach-heads in the traditional sense [1].

In accordance with Article 5 of The North Atlantic Treaty, adopted 4 April 1949 in Washington:

«The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognised by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area. Any such armed attack and all measures taken as a result thereof shall immediately be reported to the Security Council. Such measures shall be terminated when the Security Council has taken the measures necessary to restore and maintain international peace and security.»

NATO countries gave the United States absolute support in the fight against Al Qaeda terrorists [2].

The Soviet army's experiences in Afghanistan from 1979-1989 and the initial military operations of the Northern Alliance and US army in 2001 heralded the beginning of this new type of conflict-asymmetric warfare of the 21st century [3]. Under the protection of the Taliban, Al Qaeda worked secretly and had become a well-organized terrorist organization. The situation, therefore, required modified military doctrine and a new mindset toward revised strategy and tactics [4]. However, US and NATO forces had little experience in fighting in such conditions, had to learn from their mistakes, and the elaboration of the new doctrine took time.

After suppressing the Taliban state in Afghanistan, the US-led coalition implemented a multilevel program of reconstruction within the country. Without this rebuilding, the Taliban or an Al Qaeda backed regime could likely regain influence. The first

editorials on this subject appeared as early as September 2001 [5]. Absolutely necessary, however, was the establishment of internationally recognized legal authority within the state. This occurred officially after the Bonn Conference (5 December 2001) [6] and by 22 December 2001 Hamid Karzai assumed office as Prime Minister and NATO forces within Afghanistan received UN mandate to continue the protection and stabilization of the country [7].

The first International Security Assistance Force (ISAF I) consisted of 5,000 soldiers based in Kabul by December 2001. This marked the beginning of NATO's official commitment into the conflict. Major General John McColl of the British Army commanded ISAF I until July 2002 [8].

Beginning in June 2002, command of the mission (now ISAF II) transitioned to Turkey on the basis of UN resolution 1413 (2002), and Turkish Major General Hilmi Akin Zorlu commanded the mission until January 2003. Simultaneously, NATO confirmed the support of Germany and the Netherlands for the mission. Lieutenant General Norbert Van Heyst of the German Army took command of ISAF III, holding this office from January to August 2003 [9].

A key development came on 15 April 2003 with the NATO decision affecting authority over the international peacekeeping force in Afghanistan on the basis of UN resolution 1386 (20 December 2001). Additionally, the Security Council authorized ISAF to operate forces throughout the area of Afghanistan [10].

In summer 2003, the commander of ISAF IV was again a German officer, Lieutenant General Gotz Gliemeroth. In December 2003, NATO took command of the Provincial Reconstruction Group in Qunduz from Germany in what became an enlargement of the war from simple military action against the Taliban to the fight for the hearts and minds of the citizens of Afghanistan. The following months yielded great changes for Afghan statehood, and on 7 October 2004, Hamid Karzai won the first democratic presidential election.

From April 2003 to August 2004, Canadian Lieutenant General Rick Hillier commanded ISAF V. In 2005, during ISAF VI, under the command of French General Jean-Louis Py, NATO decided to broaden activity in western Afghanistan [11].

In connection with the upcoming parliamentary election in 2005, NATO decided to increase military operations in the southern provinces as well. During ISAF VII, lead by Turkish General Ethem Erdagi, the first parliamentary election in 30 years took place on 18 September 2005.

Italian General Mauro Del Vechio commanded ISAF VIII during which defense ministers of the NATO states attended a conference in London to decide on safety measures and the reform of the Afghan defense system. From this conference came «Building On Success, the London Conference on Afghanistan, the Afghan Compact.» This was a breakthrough in reference to the close coordination between ISAF forces and the US Army working within the framework of Combined Forces Command-Afghanistan [12].

British General David Richards commanded ISAF IX beginning in June 2006. Based on the difficulties of earlier increases to the scope of activity in southern Afghanistan, on 8 June 2006, the 37 defense ministers of the NATO states met regarding ISAF. They unanimously offered support, and by the end of June, plans were put into effect, widening the activities of the ISAF contingent in the six southern provinces [13].

The direction and condition of the collaboration between NATO and the government of the Islamic Afghan Republic were defined in the 6 September 2006 declaration «Framework for Enduring Cooperation and Partnership.» In this document, NATO announced reforms of the defense system in Afghanistan, construction of defensive institutions, and the cooperation between the Afghan National Army (ANA) and NATO forces. In October 2006, ISAF took command of international forces in eastern Afghanistan from the US Combined Forces Command.

The first American commander, General Dan K. McNeill took command of ISAF X (June 2006 – December 2007) and remained as the commander of ISAF XI through June 2008. The consolidation of command greatly facilitated the coordination of military operations in Afghanistan.

Preparations began for the next step of building democracy in Afghanistan: the presidential elections in August 2009. Through autumn and winter of 2008, individual provinces began registering voters. ISAF and ANA forces, as well as the Afghan National Police collaborated to ensure the safety of voter registration. Midway through February 2009, this process ended with success: 4,365,292 voters successfully registered, and only 10 of 398 districts did not participate in the process [14].

Both NATO and the Afghan government worked together in the enlargement and consolidation of legal authority, reconstruction of the state, and ISAF led military activity on the basis of the UN mandate. From 2003 onward, NATO and ISAF gradually widened the scope of their mission. Originally focused on Kabul, the coalition eventually covered all Afghan territory [15].

Activity occurred simultaneously on many levels, and such strategy inevitably brought good results. Throughout the country, ISAF, in concert with Afghan security forces, conducted operations targeting militants and other threats from the Taliban, Al Qaeda, and other terrorist organizations. Every year these activities increased in intensity. The ISAF contingent trained and mentored the ANA through Operational

Mentoring and Liaison Teams (OMLTs) embedded throughout the ANA at battalion, brigade, and higher levels. These OMLTs supervise training and act in an advisory role at each respective level. Additionally, the presence of OMLTs ensures communication among ANA units and communication with ISAF forces so that support and coordinated operations are more easily facilitated. OMLTs serve at least six months with their respective ANA units [16].

ISAF supplies support for the Afghan National Army in both funding and equipment: small arms, ammunition, individual equipment, as well as tanks and helicopters. The coordination of the NATO Equipment Donation Program comes directly from the general headquarters in Mons, Belgium.

One of the current challenges is coordination and collaboration between the Afghan National Police, the US forces, and the European Union Police (EUPOL) Mission in Afghanistan, formed in June 2007. The EU has thus far been the largest hindrance in this initiative. In December 2008, the EU decision to send a additional 400 policemen to support the program did not materialize due to a lack of volunteers. Due to this, disputes arose between the US and France over who maintains the responsibility of training the Afghan police forces; the US or the EU. France considered dispatching the gendarmerie from EU countries to Afghanistan to remedy the situation. In this situation, France's influence and veto capability regarding NATO is controversial [17].

The agreement between the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the international community became known as «The Afghan Compact,» a five-year plan to restore the country. This agreement contains the framework for defense and police force reform. It initially established the creation of 62,000 police officers, but in compliance with the Afghan National Development Strategy, created by the Afghan government, the requirement increased to 82,000.

ISAF also is responsible for the disarming of illegal groups, collecting the illegal weapons and ammunition, cataloging, and destroying them. NATO still has some management over the protection of ANA ammunition dumps as well.

Since 2006, there have been many projects within the framework of ISAF. For instance, the Post-Operations Humanitarian Relief Fund (POHRF) delivers aid immediately following a military operation. They supply the Afghan populace with food and medicine, repair buildings, and other critical infrastructure. These are voluntary gifts from ISAF countries. Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), working within the ISAF framework, support the reconstruction and the development of Afghanistan. PRTs have both civilian experts as well as soldiers working together on the expansion and strengthening of government authority and in supporting public safety. PRTs prepare projects, and ISAF engineers build roads, bridges, irrigation ditches, cisterns, wells, and schools. They are rebuilding, in many cases from the ground up, Afghan agriculture and infrastructure,

both of which experienced degradation and destruction in multiple long-term conflicts. PRTs also work to improve medical availability and services within their provinces. In 2009, 26 PRTs operated throughout Afghanistan. Some teams consist of only one nation's troops while others have a multi-national character [18].

Despite numerous difficulties and struggles, ISAF and US forces have made positive steps in improving Afghanistan. Such was the conclusion at the NATO conference in Bucharest from 2-4 April 2008. After five years of operations, this was a valid test of the efficiency and cooperation of the NATO operation. One example given was the reduction in security incidents in all 398 districts in 2007 from 70% to 10%. The Afghan National Army grew steadily thanks to training developed and provided by ISAF. Through military operations ISAF gained new ground from the Taliban where they could begin further reconstruction [19].

PRTs played a special part in the reconstruction of Afghanistan, collaborating with the Afghan provincial government and the tribal shuras. Fourteen countries led PRTs with a total of 30 countries participating. PRTs, from the outset, began 7,500 civil-military projects with a 75% completion rate. In 2001, Afghanistan had only 50 km of improved roads outside of cities, and by 2008 this number had increased to 4,000 km. Another project centered on electric power to farms. In 2007, 1,080 civil-military projects were started; in 2008, another 800. The National Solidarity Program (NSP) included within its scope 2/3 of Afghan communities, that is, over 20,000 villages. Each of these projects carried a value in excess of 60,000 USD. Within five years, they also built 440 acequias. One of the greatest projects, however, was the road system. In Regional Command-East, headquartered in Bagram, projects included a «ring» road connecting the major population centers. As of 18 January 2008, it was 73% complete. Due partly to the improvement in lines of communication, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita doubled from 175 USD in 2002 to 352 USD in 2007. Afghanistan's nominal GDP grew from 4,000,000,000 USD to 10,000,000,000 USD in 2007 [20].

In 2001, only 900,000 boys attended school and any teaching of girls was illegal. With an average age of only 17.5 years, education holds a special meaning for Afghans. Within five years of beginning operations, ISAF constructed 1,816 schools. Today, 6.4 million children (of which 1.5 million are girls) attend school. In Kabul there are five universities with 10,000 students studying a variety of curricula.

In 2001, the mortality rate for infants and children under five hovered around 22-26%. Additionally, at this time, only 8% of the population had access to health care. By 2008, 80% had access to some form of health care. By 2007, there were 102 hospitals and 878 medical centers throughout the country [21].

Opium production, of which Afghanistan contributes 93% of the world's supply, continues to be a major problem. To fight this, farmers require help

transitioning to other legitimate, but profitable crops. From 2001 through 2005, the profit from opium poppy cultivation rose 12%. From 2006-2009, 14 provinces eliminated poppy cultivation altogether (Balkh, Bamyan, Ghazni, Jawzjan, Khost, Qunduz, Logar, Nuristan, Paktika, Paktya, Panjshir, Parwan, Takhar, Wardak), and four provinces made substantial reductions (Ghor, Nagarhar, Samangan, Sari Pul). Two provinces have very low production (Baghlan, Herat), seven have moderately low production (Badakhshan, Badghis, Faryab, Kabul, Kapisa, Kunar, Laghman), and seven have consistently high poppy cultivation (Day Kundi, Farah, Helmand, Qandahar, Nimroz, Uruzgan, Fork). In 2009, 98% of Afghan poppy cultivation occurred in the south and southwest regions [22].

One original goal of ISAF operations in Afghanistan was to earn the support of 70% of the populace. Most Afghans consider their country headed in a good direction, and 84% support the current government while only 4% support the Taliban. Additionally, 63% of Afghans acknowledged that, since 2002, rebuilding and reconstruction programs have brought positive results [23].

In 2008, Afghan authorities created and ratified a 300 page document, «The Afghanistan National Development Strategy, 2008-2013.» It contained strategies for security, governance, economic growth, and poverty reduction based on detailed analysis. They also identified specific threats affecting Afghanistan and methods for overcoming them. This analysis predicted that by 2020, Afghanistan will be a stable state, with the Islamic constitutional democracy in place, peacefully disposed toward its neighbors, and fully engaged in the international community. Some of this success would be due to the multi-national missions within Afghanistan. Just as important, however, is embracing tolerance, unity, pluralism, and Afghan national pride in rebuilding their country. Afghanistan must develop based on a strong private sector, market economy, social justice, and environmental compatibility. To achieve this, Afghan authorities acknowledge there are fundamental requirements: 1) safety, 2) law and order, to include the observance of law and human rights, and 3) economic and social strategy [24].

In May 2003, the Afghan government accepted the National Drug Control Strategy, with a target of cutting production 70% by 2007, and by 2012 eradicating production. However, this strategy requires a large amount of foreign help; therefore these operations are one of the key missions of ISAF. Support for Afghan authorities includes the transfer of intelligence data and public information campaigns. ISAF armies train the Afghan National Security Forces in counter-drug operation and supply them with logistic support. According to report of analysts UN and NATO then local military governors in Afghanistan make the key link among the production and with the drug traffic and with the rebellion. For this reason, the Afghan administration asked the ISAF countries for support in the fight against the drug

trade. This request was discussed in October 2008 at the meeting of defence ministers of the NATO states at their meeting in Budapest [25].

Despite organizational changes within the ISAF framework and the political transformations happening in the country, the asymmetric conflict, known as «stability operations,» continued to rage. In 2008, there was no indication of an early victory for the coalition forces. ISAF armies, American forces with «Operation Enduring Freedom», and the ANA were far from defeating the Taliban and Al Qaeda [26]. Instead of destroying the Taliban, fresh manpower flowed in from the Pakistani tribal territories; over which the Afghan government had no authority.

Incidents of violence in Afghanistan in 2008 increased alarmingly. The rebel powers, after spending the winter in the bases on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border [27], quickly rebuilt their militias and in the summer of 2008 began intensive operations [28].

In 2008, 132 American soldiers were killed in action (KIA) and 778 were wounded in action (WIA)[29]. Insurgents set over 2,000 ambushes, a 50% increase from the previous year [30]. For the US military, 2008 was the deadliest year since the beginning of the operation [31]. Through the first half of April 2009, American losses totalled 450 KIA and 2,778 WIA [32].

Diplomats warned in the autumn of 2009 that the situation, in every respect, had not yet been so bad. Everything indicated that in 2009 the coalition's position would face a considerable downturn [33].

Through 28 August 2009, American losses totalled 558 KIA and 3,772 WIA [34]. Since the invasion in 2001, a total of 1,286 coalition soldiers had been killed. In 2009 alone, there were 320 coalition KIA, with the bloodiest month being August, when 75 soldiers were killed.

In 2008, 3,276 improvised explosive devices (IEDs) exploded, a 45% increase compared to the previous year. In the first six months of 2009, there were 828 IED attacks. 108 of those resulted in a coalition fatality.

The British bore especially large losses in the southern province of Helmand, where the death toll from 2002 until August 2009 reached 204 soldiers and the number of wounded hit 741. Since the beginning of 2009, 67 British soldiers were killed [35]. These losses led to protests among the public and 59% of British society demanding the withdrawal of the British contingent, according to «The Guardian» [36].

Behind these losses was the lack of military progress in this conflict which started as the primary stage of the «Global War on Terror.» By the beginning of 2009 this war already possessed a completely different face than in 2001. Especially shocking is that through eight years, neither US nor ISAF forces have not realized most of their military goals. Such conditions have prompted reflection and American analysts if the US and NATO might exit this conflict as winners and whether the conquest of the Taliban and construction of a stable state is

possible. Another certainty, of course, is the change in strategy, not only in relation to Afghanistan, but to Pakistan as well [37].

At the beginning of 2008, senior US commanders identified that the American forces were too under resourced for the conquest of the Taliban and stabilization of the country. They suggested immediately sending 10,000 additional troops. In January 2007, the US military amounted to only 20,947, but by the following December had increased to 24,780, reaching 48,250 in June 2008 (37,700 active component and 10,550 National Guard and Reserve). The strengthening of the American contingent was a highly awaited moment [38].

In September 2007, the coalition controlled slightly more than half of the area of the country. The commander of the allied armies, US Gen Dan McNeill, carefully evaluated the number of insurgents to be 20,000, consisting of both Afghans and holy war Islamic volunteers from other countries [39].

At the end of February 2008, Mike McConnell, the US Director of National Intelligence, testified before a Senate committee that the Taliban controlled 10% of Afghanistan and that President Karzai controlled only 30%, the rest being controlled by Afghan tribes. In October 2008, the National Intelligence Estimate warned that the situation in Afghanistan is «a downward spiral.» In addition to the rebels, another threat to the stability of the country is the widespread corruption in Hamid Karzai's government. Regardless, the coalition armies and Gen. David McKiernan saw that within most of the country there was visible process and accepted the difficulty of fighting the rebellion. Under Gen. McKiernan's guidance this tendency was to continue for some time. According to the report, the serious threat was the opium trade, which supported over 50% of the country's economy [40].

NATO analysis also indicated that where reinforcements had come, in this instance the 24th US Marine Expeditionary Unit in the district of Garmsir, the number of violent acts had diminished about 43% between 2007 and 2008. After a month of intensive fighting, the marines had calmed the area and from ISAF resources, they distributed \$823M for reconstruction. This permitted the reopening of the main bazaar in the district, the hospital, the reconstruction of the irrigation canals, digging of more wells, and school repair. This process occurred in other regions of Afghanistan, and the number of the ISAF contingent grew from 43,000 in February 2008 to 56,000 a year later. This stabilized the situation, but only locally. Constant troop reinforcement was necessary [41].

The antidote for Afghanistan's problems had to be the appointment Gen. David Petraeus [42] to command the US Central Forces Command (CENTCOM), headquartered in Tampa, Florida. Included in this command was responsibility for 20 middle eastern countries on operations «Iraqi Freedom» and «Enduring Freedom.» There was also the development of the US Army Field Manual 3-24 «Counterinsurgency» (COIN), which detailed strategies and tactics that had

success in the Iraq war. Theoretically, this success could be duplicated in Afghanistan with minor modifications. The main foundations of the COIN doctrine could be: [43]

- the assurance of safety for the Afghan population
- cooperation with Afghan security forces
- the creation police and other self-defense forces
- the transition of American forces from large bases to smaller, more widely dispersed bases
- the execution employment programs
- the reconstruction of agriculture
- dialogue with local leaders
- negotiations with the Taliban and attempts to bring less radical groups into the mainstream,
- the elimination of radical Taliban elements,
- the destruction of detected concentrations of rebels,
- the maintaining of already seized locations
- the deployment the Afghan National Army to the areas cleared of insurgents

Consequently, the war will change in nature due to both military and political resources. According to the COIN manual:

«COIN involves all political, economic, military, paramilitary, psychological, and civic actions that can be taken by a government to defeat an insurgency (JP 1-02). COIN operations include supporting a Host Nation's military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken to defeat an insurgency. Avoiding the creation of new insurgents and forcing existing insurgents to end their participation is vital to defeating an insurgency. COIN operations often include security assistance programs such as foreign military sales programs, the foreign military financing program, and international military training and education programs. Counterinsurgency operations, on the other hand, focus on detecting and defeating the armed insurgent or guerrilla, without solving the society's underlying problems. Military efforts alone, however, cannot defeat an insurgency». [44]

Gen. Petraeus asserted that the strengthening of American forces in Afghanistan served to, first of all protect the population, pursue extremists, support the development of the Afghan defence forces, reduce the drug trade, and enforce the authority of central and local governments. The elections in August 2009 also posed a security challenge. The civil rights of the citizens of Afghanistan and Pakistan were an important consideration. American forces require the support of the Pakistani army in the fight with extremists on the borderland. This is where both armies need to focus their efforts. To facilitate this, American forces will train the Afghan and Pakistani armies, as well as supply equipment and intelligence for the purpose of defeating the extremists [45].

A large problem in Afghanistan is the production and the trafficking of drugs, which generates a \$70-

100M profit annually for the Taliban[46]. To combat this would require a significant restructuring of Afghanistan's agriculture, the main occupation for 60-70% of the population. Many of these farmers grow poppies, the main ingredient of opium and heroin. [47] Most of these farms are found in the Taliban-controlled southwest, where the profits from drug trafficking finance the rebellion [48].

Simply destroying the poppy fields, as is the current US and ISAF plan, is a poor solution, since it deprives the Afghan farmers of a means to make money. A better solution would be to reintroduce orchards to cultivate the fruit and nuts that Afghanistan was once celebrated for. This would require retraining Afghan farmers, since the agrarian culture has disappeared due to continuous warfare. This would fall within the current plan of improving the agricultural infrastructure, which already includes developing irrigation channels, dams, and wells. Civil consultants and advisors are indispensable in these types of missions. Some small-scale trials have already begun and will increase with future COIN operations [49].

The US government agency, USAID, had success with an agricultural reform program: they educated over 100,000 farmers and supported the planting of more than 3.2M fruit trees. Thanks to this program, Afghanistan exported over 4,200 tonnes of fruit and vegetables in 2008 alone. The following year, 30,000 farmers signed contracts with processors and wholesalers [50].

3,000 soldiers from 3rd Brigade Combat Team (BCT), 10th Mountain Division were assigned to Logar and Wardak provinces in January 2009. In February, President Obama pledged to send 17,000 additional soldiers: 8,000 marines from the 2nd Expeditionary Brigade in Camp Lejeune, North Carolina by the end of May, followed by 4,000 soldiers from 5th Stryker Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division from Fort Lewis, Washington by the end of July. The additional 5,000 soldiers will be from an undetermined unit. This will increase the number of US forces in theatre from 36,000 to 56,000. These new units will focus on southern and eastern Afghanistan. This convergence was timed to support the presidential elections in August 2009 [51].

At the end of July 2009, ISAF consisted of 64,500 soldiers from 42 countries, including 28 NATO member countries, as well as 26 PRTs. The largest contingents in the coalition are the United States (29,950 ISAF forces, including Operation Enduring Freedom forces, the total is 48,250 soldiers), Great Britain (9,000), Germany (4,050), France (3,160), Canada (2,800), Italy (2,795) and Poland (2,000). The country is divided into five regional commands (RCs): RC Capital in Kabul, RC South in Kandahar, RC Vestas in Heart, RC North in Mazar-e-Sharif, and RC East in Bagram. The commands of these sectors are divided among different nations with the French controlling RC Capitol, the Dutch in RC South, the Italians in RC Vestas, the Germans in RC North, and the US in RC East. With most of the Taliban threats in

the south and east, these two commands consist of 29,400 and 19,900 soldiers respectively. RC Capital commands 6,200 soldiers, RC North has 5,600 and RC Vestas has 3,400 [52].

By the end of January 2008, two reports appeared that questioned the commitment of US and Canadian forces. The first report came from the Afghanistan Study Group (ASG) of Centre for the Study of the Presidency and Congress, an independent organization that examines previous actions of the executive and legislative branches; the second report came from Canadian experts under the direction of former deputy prime minister and the minister of foreign affairs, John Manley. The ASG report asserted that the US had engaged in the conflict with too few forces, too little money, without a coordinated international coalition, and without a solid strategy. One of the recommendations was to create a US envoy to Afghanistan, who would coordinate US, NATO and UN assistance. Hamid Karzai did not agree with this, due to the large authority that this one person would hold. ASG also proposed a formation of an «Eminent Persons Group» to develop a new, common, long-term strategy. It also recommended utilizing more NATO troops in the police and army training mission as well as focusing on reducing civilian casualties. The Manley report recommended that Canadian forces remain in Afghanistan on the condition that the Kandahar contingent is increased by 1,000 ISAF soldiers and coordination is improved [53].

The mission in Afghanistan is a high priority for both the US and NATO. For the first time, NATO hosted a meeting on the topic at a ministerial level in February 2009 in Kraków. 40 ISAF countries sent representatives, to include Afghan Defence Minister Rahim Wardak, who presented some of the issues his country faced and appealed for help. A few days before the meeting, its profile was amplified by the attendance of US Secretary of Defence Robert Gates, NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, and Supreme Allied Commander Europe Gen. John Craddock [54]. Secretary General Scheffer maintained that NATO could not accept a defeat in Afghanistan and that the military operations needed to also help the civilian population [55].

The United States continued development of its new strategy in March 2009, when Richard Holbrook, the US envoy to Afghanistan, attended meetings with allies in Brussels. There were several new programs presented to the NATO Secretary General and other ambassadors. One of these was the enlargement of the Afghan police force to combat the safety issues plaguing the country. The EU and UN programmes of crop transition from poppies to other income-generating crops were also presented [56].

President Barack Obama presented his long-awaited new strategy for the US in Afghanistan and Pakistan on 27 March 2009 [57]. The latest reports showed that Al Qaeda continues to plan new attacks on the US from their safe houses within Pakistan. The planners of the 11 September attacks continue to operate in this area. If the government of Afghanistan

were to fail, this would allow Afghanistan to again be a terrorist haven. Therefore, the future of Afghanistan is directly linked with the future of Pakistan.

President Obama stated that the purpose of US forces in Afghanistan was not to control the country or dictate its future. Instead, the purpose is to confront and defeat Al Qaeda in both countries. In order to improve the military situation, the governments and economies of both countries require international help. Terrorism is a major problem for Pakistan and has already claimed thousands of victims and destabilized the country. The US will provide all the assistance possible.

US forces in Afghanistan were deprived of sufficient military and financial support, but with the change in force levels in Iraq, this will improve. President Obama stated that in addition to the 17,000 soldiers already promised, there would be 4,000 soldiers deployed for training Afghan security forces. Additionally, every US unit will be partnered with an Afghani unit. These measures will help to meet the 2011 goals of 134,000 Afghani soldiers and 82,000 police.

Another critical requirement is the improvement of the civilian quality of life, beginning with combating government corruption. The drug trade, which finances the rebellion, is another major challenge. This will require agriculture specialists, teachers, engineers, and lawyers. NATO allies are also indispensable to not only training the army but ensuring security during the elections and other civil support.

One of President Obama's most important statements was that many nations have a stake in the future of Afghanistan, most notably its neighbours: Iran, India, and Pakistan. By establishing reconciliation between Pakistan and India, Pakistan could redistribute its troops from the Indian border to the Afghani border where they could be used in the fight against Al Qaeda.

At the beginning of April, at the NATO summit in Strasbourg and Kehl, President Obama appealed for a greater allied commitment in Afghanistan and in support of Pakistan. German Chancellor Angela Merkel committed greater military and civil support, while France and Spain committed economic support and instructors. Great Britain pledged more troops to support the elections and Belgium promised to allocate two more F-16s. Poland announced that it would increase its contingent from 1,600 to 2,000. President Obama's appeal for allied support towards the new strategy brought positive results [58].

Later in the month, NATO organized a meeting of 70 national representatives at The Hague to discuss operations against the Taliban and how to ensure the safety of Afghanistan. Included in this group was a US representative as well as a delegation from Iran, which was distrustful of this western-state initiative. The US appealed to the coalition countries to increase their contingents as well as contribute more money. Between the US and the EU, \$100M was pledged solely to support the presidential election. However, NATO Secretary General Scheffer estimated that the

Afghan security forces required \$2B annually. France was one of the countries who volunteered increased financial assistance, provided that it would not send additional troops. This conference became another step in constructing a stable Afghanistan, even though there were no significant breakthroughs [59].

A major development was the Gen. McKiernan's retirement in May 2009 from commanding the US forces in Afghanistan. Taking his place was Gen. Stanley McChrystal, who had been serving as the director of the Joint Staff. According to the Associated Press, Gen. McKiernan was asked to resign; he had commanded in Afghanistan for 11 months and served in the army for 38 years. It is hard to determine if this resignation was related to the massacre of Afghan civilians by US aviation in Farah province. According to Secretary Gates, the reason was that the new administration needed a fresh look at the conflict. This resignation subsequently ended McKiernan's career [60].

Gen. McKiernan's resignation is the first dismissal of a commander from a combat command since Gen. Douglas McArthur's during the Korean War. Secretary Gates praised Gen. McKiernan's long and distinguished service, but felt that the new mission demanded new thinking and a new approach. Admiral Mike Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, recommended Gen. McChrystal to be the new commander of all forces in Afghanistan.

One of the weak links in ISAF's operations has been the actions of the 4,050 German soldiers in RC North and Mazar-e-Sharif. Despite having adequate weapons and equipment, they did not conduct any offensive operations against the militants. In October 2008, the German parliament voted to extend their commitment for an additional year and even increase the troop level to 4,500. The German strategy holds that military activities must include rebuilding programs. This will require monetary assistance, as well as utilizing German firms to help with the rebuilding of industry, infrastructure, and education. In 2008 alone, Germany spent €170M; between 2002 and 2008 they spent a total of €117M on improving the police force [61].

German authorities point to their constitution as a reason for not conducting offensive operations: it forbids them from leading military actions in a foreign territory. Therefore, the German contingent has the same mandate. However, they do acknowledge the conflict as part of the stabilization mission. In June 2009, the first direct Taliban attack on German soldiers in Qunduz killed three Germans. Due to the lack of offensive operations in the northeast, the Taliban has regained their foothold in the region. German bases have received rocket fire and their patrols have been attacked by suicide bombers. To date, 35 German soldiers have been killed. Because of this, German Defence Minister Franz Josef Jung has asserted that the German contingent must begin actively fighting the Taliban. One of the soldiers' representatives in parliament demanded that the government acknowledge that their soldiers are at war.

If Germany were to begin offensive operations, it would considerably improve the ISAF position and security in northeast Afghanistan. Without them, the Taliban will continue to improve their base of power in the area and strengthen its position in the local society [62].

Just prior to the elections, the Germans carried out an offensive mission in Qunduz with several hundred soldiers and armoured vehicles. This was to counter the excessive Taliban activity and was the first offensive operation since 2001, when they participated in the invasion. This action hopefully will be only the beginning of a serious German approach to their NATO and ISAF duties and fighting alongside other allied nations.

In June, the British contingent launched «Operation Panther's Claw» in Helmand province. Initially, there were a dozen casualties in the first two weeks, but the operation successfully seized several administrative districts and cleared them of the Taliban. Among the British casualties was Lt. Col. Rupert Thorneloe, the highest-ranking British officer to be killed in combat since the Falklands in 1982. Eventually, the Taliban quit resisting, in order to regroup and prepare for additional attacks [63].

Assisting the British in southern Helmand province were 8,500 US Marines. An operation in July in the Helmand river valley codenamed «Operation Khanjar» or «Sword Strike» involved 4,000 US forces and 650 Afghan soldiers and police. Helmand province's fertile lands support the majority of the poppy cultivation and drug production. The Marine Expeditionary Force commander, Gen. Larry Nicholson remarked that this operation is one of the largest ISAF operations to date. The goal of this strike in the heart of the Taliban's territory was to demonstrate the power of ISAF prior to the elections [64].

An interview with Mahmud Husamuddin Al-Gailani, a member of the Afghan Parliament from Ghazni, sheds new light on the situation in the country. He states that while international powers train the soldiers and police, they don't train the clerks, judges, engineers, teachers, and doctors who will be the ones to build a stable country. This may seem like groundless pretension, since the security of the state must be established before any other structures are improved. He also believes that the west should support Afghanistan and its future and not President Karzai. He states that President Karzai should be held accountable for all the money spent and be placed on a quarterly audit schedule as Pakistan is. If the money is not spent in a responsible manner, there should be no more. He predicts that the American plan from Iraq to utilize tribal structures will not work. After 30 years of war, the Afghan society is broken. If the coalition leaves Afghanistan quickly, the Taliban will return to authority again and become a base for the enemies of the west [65].

Meanwhile, Gen. McChrystal has stated that the Taliban possesses superiority over coalition forces. Due to the lack of troops, the Taliban was able to spread throughout the country. This will require a

change in tactics and movement of troops towards the larger cities due to the Taliban threat in cities like Kandahar. Based on rocket attacks from Herat in the west and the increasing suicide attacks, the US needs to increase its troop levels. According to Anthony Cordesman from the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, and an advisor to Gen. McChrystal, the Taliban now influences 153 of the 364 administrative districts (excluding major urban areas) [66].

Gen. McChrystal intends to change the mindset of the military concerning operations in Afghanistan. He states that the security of the population is the highest priority. Secretary Gates added that the situation is serious, but does not want to make the error of committing too many forces, as the Soviet Union did in the 1980s. Important to the effort are the civil advisors. Gen. McChrystal called for a new and better strategy for the US and NATO forces to defeat the Taliban [67].

The national elections went as scheduled on 20 August, despite the Taliban's attacks on both polling stations and ballot transportation. In some regions, there was significant voter intimidation. It is estimated that turnout was only about 40%, compared to 70% in the 2004 election. Despite a lower turnout, the elections were still successful. President Obama pointed out that the rebels had murdered innocent Muslims in order to reach their political goals; he also stated that the US had not supported any candidate during the campaign. According to preliminary data, it appeared that Hamid Karzai had won re-election with 40.6% of the vote, but it will be necessary to wait for the official results [68]. If this is the result, the question remains if Karzai's re-election is good news for the coalition. Many believe that Karzai is a source of much of the corruption in the government.

To realize the new strategy in Afghanistan and Pakistan, there will be many threats for the US and coalition forces to overcome. In accordance with COIN doctrine, this fight will involve many different scopes of operations and will therefore be quite challenging. The primary focus will not be on fighting the Taliban and other terror organizations [69], but instead on protecting civilians from violence, reconstructing the infrastructure, and ensuring a stable defence force [70]. Coalition victories will not come from destroying the enemy, but from persuading the population by listening to the Afghans, discussing their problems, responding to local communities, and observing the environment and enemy tactics. In his commander's guidance, Gen. McChrystal reminded all forces that this is a battle of wits. [71] He also emphasized minimizing aviation attack in urban areas, respecting cultural sites, correct procedures for searching homes, and opening fire only in self-defence. This unification of strategy under COIN doctrine will, over time, allow the people to decide the future of their country.

ISAF armies have moved throughout the provinces, providing a presence in the small, mountainous villages where the rebels had previously moved freely. Their mission is to work with the local tribes and support the population in their daily endeavours. Especially important is programme for rebuilding agriculture. This is only one example of how the fight is for the «hearts and minds» of Afghans. Analyzing the US and ISAF activities in March and April 2009, it is clear that these tactics have already begun to produce results. The question remains, however, is how long this will last [72].

Retired Australian Lt. Col. David Kilcullen, author of «The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One», believes that there are only 2 or 3 years left before the patience of the Afghans runs out. During this time, the Taliban will either be neutralized or ISAF forces will leave and the Taliban will resume power. President Obama will also want to redeploy America forces prior to his next election. Right now, the insufficient number of troops allowed the Taliban to roam freely, terrorize the citizens, collect taxes, and re-establish their power in the areas previously cleared and now greatly improved by the ISAF rebuilding [73].

Both NATO and the US have committed themselves so fully to this conflict they do not dare say the word «defeat». However, claiming victory requires many things: defeating the Taliban, increasing national security, safety of the population, the rebirth of agriculture, trade, and industry, ceasing opium production, and the removal of terrorist influences. The PRT activities have begun to produce results. Through international monetary assistance there are more roads, better irrigation ditches, schools, new crops, wells, dams, and hydroelectric power stations. Many cities and villages have been improved. But there is also a requirement to destroy the terrorist sanctuaries along the Pakistani border.

On the other hand, retired Polish General Stanisław Koziej believes that NATO should change the status of the operation from a stabilization operation to a declaration of war and require obligatory presence from all members. This would end the current inequality of force commitments [74]. This lack of unity in NATO is a detriment to the alliance. He believes it is scandalous that American, British, Canadian, and Polish soldiers fight and die for the defence of Europe, which other nations avoid fighting by never leaving their bases. The Afghanistan conflict is a bellwether test for NATO and the results will influence the future of the alliance.

It is ultimately NATO's responsibility to determine a new strategy for Afghanistan. The new NATO Secretary General, Anders Rasmussen, appointed a 12 member panel to craft a new strategic concept under the leadership of former US Secretary of State Madeline Albright. Their ideas will become the foundation of the future of NATO as well as ISAF's role in Afghanistan [75].

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Рецензенти: Багмет М.О. – д.і.н., професор;
Сорока С.В. – к.політ.н., доцент