

NATO's New Momentum

EU support key to success in Afghanistan

As the war in Afghanistan entered its ninth year, NATO promised a new push to deliver control of the nation to its people sooner. Spurring the new momentum is an influx of thousands of troops that will help the Alliance's International Security Assistance Force, or ISAF, increase security in the country and give it the added clout to fight insurgents.

NATO expects 2010 to be a decisive year in Afghanistan. The coalition will follow a wider political, and more people-centric, strategy to "lay the groundwork for greater Afghan leadership in its own affairs," NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen told Alliance foreign ministers in December 2009.

That will be a challenge. Insurgents in Afghanistan increased strikes on coalition troops and ramped up suicide bomber attacks. Insurgents killed more civilians in 2009 than in previous years, NATO reported.

On Jan. 29, 2010, representatives from 70 nations met in London for a summit on Afghanistan hosted by British Prime Minister Gordon Brown and Afghan President Hamid Karzai. The summit aimed to refocus on what the coalition must do to secure the nation to allow Afghan forces to begin taking control of some security this year.

Brown told delegates that mid-2011 should be the deadline for "turning the tide" in Afghanistan, the BBC reported.

An announcement after the one-day summit stated Afghanistan would assume the "majority of operations in the insecure areas of Afghanistan within three years" and take control of all physical security within five years.

Karzai told the BBC that his country is willing to reintegrate some Taliban fighters into Afghan society. He also said his nation's security forces would need support for at least 15 years.

An appeal should be made to insurgents in Afghanistan to "lay down their arms in exchange for recognition as a legitimate opposition group," Fabrice Pothier, director of the Carnegie Europe policy institute, wrote on the group's Web site.

The United States promised an additional 30,000 troops in December 2009, which will increase the total U.S. troop strength in the nation to more than 90,000. Rasmussen praised the U.S. commitment, and said the increase is proof of U.S. resolve for the mission in Afghanistan.

"But this is not a U.S. mission alone: America's allies



Afghan and Dutch troops search for weapons in an Afghan village. NATO's goal is to turn over primary responsibility for Afghan security to its own forces.

INTERNATIONAL SECURITY ASSISTANCE FORCE

in NATO have shared the risks, costs and burdens of this mission from the beginning," he said. "As the U.S. increases its commitment, I am confident that the other allies, as well as our partners in the mission, will also make a substantial increase in their contribution."

The initial reaction to the troop increase announcement was positive. Response in Europe was quick, and Brown urged the coalition to follow suit. Britain, which has 9,500 troops in Afghanistan, pledged 500 more.

In January 2010, Germany announced it would send an additional 850 troops to train Afghan security forces and help in other noncombat roles. At the same time, the government said the number of troops would not exceed 5,340. In addition to their resolve to stand firm in Afghanistan, the Germans plan to gradually reduce troop strength and turn over their duties to Afghan forces in 2014, according to the German Foreign Office.

France announced in January 2010 that it would not send more troops to Afghanistan, but would instead offer 80 more military trainers.

European nations have been quick to promise support, but they have been slow to follow through on committing more troops to the assistance force. However, Brown told Reuters news agency in December 2009 that his country will “play its full part in persuading other countries to offer troops to the Afghanistan campaign.”

The reinforcements are necessary to speed up the battle against insurgents, secure key towns and train Afghan security forces. That will also clear the way for the coalition to begin reducing forces in the country.

What is not in doubt is the importance of the coalition effort. Addressing the summit, Rasmussen tried to alleviate Afghan fears that the international force will leave without finishing its job. He told summit delegates that NATO’s ultimate goal is to hand over lead responsibility for Afghan security to its own forces. He said it was too early to know when that process would take place, but it will start in 2010. The transition will take place based on “conditions, not calendars.”

“Let me put it very clearly. Transition is not a code word for exit,” he said. “The Afghan people should have no fear that we will leave too early. The enemies of Afghanistan should have no hope that we will leave too early. We will not.”

Winning the war in Afghanistan is the NATO-led security force’s top priority, Rasmussen said. “It matters to us all, to prevent Afghanistan from becoming, once again, a breeding ground for international terrorism.”

Success in Afghanistan is important to the European Union because it proves the union is a “reliable and unified transatlantic partner,” Pothier, an expert on Afghanistan and European foreign policy, said in 2008. “The EU’s much-vaunted European security and defense policy will be meaningless if it cannot adequately win the support of its citizens for, what is after all, the defining conflict of this new century.”

British politician Jeremy Ashton said failure in Afghanistan would have dire consequences. “Withdrawal would have baleful consequences including abandoning the clear majority of Afghans who want us to be there,” he said in a November story published in Britain’s *Telegraph* newspaper. “It would allow al-Qaida to expand from a small area of northern Pakistan where they are under pressure to a larger area of Afghanistan where they are not.” That could lead to the collapse of Pakistan’s government and deepen instability in the region, he said.

On the ground in Afghanistan, the coalition continues to focus on the people and their security. They are training the Afghans who will replace them. And troops are slowly gaining the trust of the people to whom they provided food, water, medical support and security. Some Afghans have reciprocated with information that has led to the capture or killing of insurgents and the seizure of weapons and bomb-making materials.

Across Afghanistan, the need for troops is apparent, especially in the southern Helmand province. The police training academy there continues to graduate new policemen. But the insurgents have a stronghold in the province.

“We all recognize that the key to success in Afghanistan is the situation in southern Afghanistan,” Dutch Army Maj. Gen. Mart de Kruif said in December at a Pentagon press briefing. He is a former commander of ISAF’s Regional Command South, which oversees operations in extremist strongholds such as Helmand and Kandahar provinces.

The general said the U.S. decision to increase troops was “spot on.” He said, “You can’t do just a little bit of counterinsurgency. You do counterinsurgency and protect 90 to 95 percent of the population, or you don’t do counterinsurgency at all.”

The bottom line is that winning in Afghanistan depends on resolving a host of issues. And it depends on European nations sending the additional troops they promised.

NATO is in Afghanistan “out of necessity,” British parliamentarian Liam Fox said in a September lecture The Heritage Foundation posted on its Web site.

“It is sometimes difficult for us to express what we mean by winning in Afghanistan, but it is easy to describe what we mean by losing,” he said. “Were we to lose and be forced out of Afghanistan against our will, it would be a shot in the arm for every jihadist globally.”

Fox said that would signal NATO’s lack of “moral fortitude to see through what we believe to be a national security emergency. It would suggest that NATO, in its first great challenge since the end of the Cold War, did not have what it takes to see a difficult challenge through.” □

Since November 2009, European nations and the United States have pledged to send more troops to assist the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. Some of the increases include:

Country	Current Troops	Pledged Increase
United States	50,590	30,000+
Britain	9,500	500
Germany	4,335	850
France	3,750	80
Poland	2,140	600
Spain	1,075	500
Bulgaria	525	370
Czech Republic	455	55
Georgia	175	1,000
Macedonia	165	80

Source: NATO, as of March 2010
Numbers fluctuate with troop movements.