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Chapter 4 From Regime Change, to Peace Building, to Countering Insurgents: Stabilising Afghanistan

4.1 Introduction

Intervention of (Western) powers has a long history in Afghanistan. It is not without a great degree of pride and dignity that Afghans can refer to a history in which no occupying power has successfully conquered Afghan soil and its people for a long period in time. Throughout history, only some[1] have come close to claiming a long lasting victory over the Afghans, but military experiences of more recent times all resulted in disenchantments.[2] Against the background of these disillusioned military endeavours, one would have expected a certain degree of modesty with regard to what can be achieved.

Yet, many Western nations and their respective (military) organisations entertained ambitious goals in terms of changing the regime, beliefs and habits of the inhabitants of Afghanistan.[3] In turn, the majority of the Afghans were not in favour of the imposition of foreign models of, amongst others, governance and development. As posited in Jonathan Steele's book, *Ghosts of Afghanistan: Hard Truths and Foreign Myths*, the Afghan people predominantly want to be left alone, leaving the presence of foreign troops likely to be one of the major causes of current instability.[4]

This chapter serves merely to set out the developments in Afghanistan since the intervention of the 'coalition of the willing': a formation of Western military powers led by the United States that invaded Afghanistan in October 2001 until NATO's expansion to the South of Afghanistan in the summer of 2006. As such, this chapter is designed to provide an understanding of the environment in which the Netherlands and the United Kingdom felt they needed to engage by contributing to NATO's expansion in this country.

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1   Alexander the Great in fact reached a high degree of popularity in Afghanistan. In his quest for the country he did not experience a high degree of resistance. See: Jonathan Steele, *Ghosts of Afghanistan: Hard Truths and Foreign Myths* (London 2011). But also the Arabs, Mongols, and Persians have established long-lasting empires in Afghanistan. A point raised by Afghanistan expert Robert Johnson, personal conversation with author, Oxford, July 2014.

2   See: Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan: a Cultural and Political History* (Princeton 2010); Stephen Tanner, *Afghanistan: A Military History from Alexander the Great to the War against the Taliban* (Philadelphia 2009); Robert Johnson, *The Afghan Way of War: Culture and Pragmatism: A Critical History* (London 2011); William Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars* (New York 2009).

3   Astri Suhrke, *When More is Less: the International Project in Afghanistan* (London 2011).

4   Steele, *Ghosts of Afghanistan*.

4.2 Setting

The pursuit of stabilisation of Afghanistan has been hindered by the number of strategic goals set for the mission, as well as in the shift of priorities. The initial goal was defeating Al-Qaida and Taliban and by doing so eradicating their ability to threaten the West as well as regional neighbors (2001); this then changed to the development of the Afghan economy – the security and development agenda (2002 onwards); the building of good governance (2005); the creation of stability, possibly via deals or negotiation with the Taliban (2008), resulting in a reconsideration of the strategic priorities[5] and, recently, to the planning of a way out without having achieved any of these goals.

As articulated in most writings about the current instability in Afghanistan, the ongoing insurgency is mostly addressed as the main hindrance to a lasting (political) settlement. When looking at Afghanistan, one can actually distinguish four of the strongest statistical predictors required for a successful insurgency: for one, large parts of the population are excluded from politics and estranged from the state authority; secondly, an unresponsive, inept, and corrupt government; thirdly, various militant groups of people (mainly referred to as insurgents) committed to destroying such government; and fourthly, a significant popular sympathy for the insurgents[6], often engendered by either ethnical ties or unemployment.[7]

The insurgents in Afghanistan are comprised of various groups: the Taliban, Hezb-i-Islami, the Haqqani network, foreign fighters, criminal groups (often drug related) and various tribal militias, and, lastly, one should not overlook a large group of frustrated citizens who join insurgent groups hoping to ensure or to improve the quality of their lives, or defend particular, and sometimes nefarious, 'interests'. Sometimes the actions of the insurgents are coordinated but usually they are isolated.[8]

The distinction between these insurgent groups is that the Taliban is seeking political power, groups like Hezb-i Islami, the Haqqani network and the foreign fighters - such as Al Qaeda - are mainly there to fight the Western 'infidels', and the criminal groups and the militia are fighting to maintain the status quo in order to ensure their income and power base. According to Taliban expert Antonio Giustozzi, the Taliban has transformed itself into

5   Christopher Dandekker. 'From Victory to Success' in: Jan Angstrom and Isabelle Duyvesteyn (eds.), *Modern War and the Utility of Force: Challenges, Methods and Strategy* (New York 2010) 16-38, 26.

6   David C. Gompert and John Gordon IV, *War by Other Means, Building Complete and Balanced Capabilities for Counterinsurgency: RAND Counterinsurgency Study- Final Report* (Santa Monica, Arlington and Pittsburgh 2008) 13-14.

7   See: James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, 'Ethnicity, insurgency, and civil war', *American political science review* 97 (1) (2003) 75-90; James D. Fearon, Kimuli Kasara and David D. Laitin, 'Ethnic minority rule and civil war onset', *American Political Science Review* 101 (1) (2007) 187-193.

8   Seth G. Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan: RAND Counterinsurgency Study* IV (Santa Monica, Arlington and Pittsburgh 2008). The point of defending particular nefarious interests was a point raised by Robert Johnson in a personal conversation with the author about the background of the conflict (Oxford, July 2014).

what he coins a 'neo Taliban' movement successfully aligning the clergy, the militants, and the populace as a result of abusive and factionalised local authorities.[9] However, Cyrus Hodes and Mark Sedra refute the use of the term neo-Taliban. According to them, it is not accurate to talk about 'neo-Taliban', as the Taliban never disappeared but simply blended into the wider population and regrouped. As such, the Taliban-led insurgency is not so much a monolith but rather an amalgam of various groups with different motivations, from peasants fighting for a decent wage to madrassa-indoctrinated youths or villagers following the directions of tribal or clan elders, or even foreign fighters and Afghan exiles.[10] Whether or not the Taliban has renewed itself, it has been very successful in establishing temporary coalitions between several deprived groups and powerbrokers threatened by the authorities and foreign forces. Consequently, the heterogeneity of the 'spoilers' challenging the Afghan state complicates the design of the counterinsurgency strategy, since various groups and issues need to be addressed.[11]

In the Afghan insurgency, the competence - and, in some areas, incompetence - of the indigenous government and its security forces have been critical factors. Also, the legitimacy of the state has been questioned by many Afghans (especially the insurgents) due to the direct intervention by foreign forces who have installed the central government in Kabul. The weakness of state administration, excessive tribal-based government patronage and the varying levels of corruption among the Afghan police and military forces, other government institutions and administrators, has alienated large segments of the population and provided a breach for the Taliban to penetrate.[12] Moreover, the Taliban has been able to adapt quite fast and has become a learning organisation. Its adaptability has enabled it to gain the upper hand among the population in a number of key provinces.[13] The fact that major Western military organisations have not been able to learn and adapt as fast as insurgents such as the Taliban creates a major disadvantage in their counterinsurgency operations. This does not withstand the fact, that in their response to the insurgent activities, the Western militaries adapted their tactics as well.[14]

The whole undertaking has been complicated further by the absence of an effective political strategy that envisaged at least the possibility of political accommodation with

9   Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop: The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan* (New York 2008) 231.

10   Cyrus Rhodes and Mark Sedra, 'Chapter Two: Spoiler Groups and the Anti-government Insurgency' in: Idem, *The Search for Security in Post-Taliban Afghanistan. The Adelphi Papers* 391 (Londen 2007) 17-34, 25. The point of Afghan exiles was a point raised by Robert Johnson in a personal conversation with the author about the background of the conflict (Oxford, July 2014).

11   Mirjam Grandia Mantas, 'The 3D Approach and Counterinsurgency. A Mix of Defence, Diplomacy and Development. The Case of Uruzgan' (Master thesis, Leiden 2009).

12   Austen Long, *On 'Other War', Lessons from Five Decades of RAND Counterinsurgency Research* (Santa Monica, Arlington and Pittsburgh 2002); Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop,* 11-29.

13   Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop,* 97-139.

14   See: Theo Farrell, Frans Osinga, and James Russell (ed.s), *Military Adaptation in Afghanistan* (Stanford 2013).

insurgents thereby treating military power as but one instrument among others for achieving strategic goals. Such an approach would have identified the obstacles to such an outcome, especially mutual mistrust and potential spoilers, and the available sources of leverage to establish a structured, multiparty dialogue. Yet, apart from the reintegration and reconciliation program, no such international efforts were made until 2011[15], and a timetable for the withdrawal of American forces - the key Taliban demand - was instituted unilaterally, without any attempt to use it as leverage for a political settlement.[16]

Some argue the current instability, rather than being due to local traditions, is more the result of decades of conflict and the intentional dismantling of traditional structures in conflict, thereby leaving extremist groups to fill the social, political and security vacuum.[17] However, most accounts of the battles fought in Afghanistan and about their 'ways of war', are troubled with stereo types and more often than not portray a Western perspective.[18]

4.3 Intervening in Afghanistan in Pursuit of Osama: The Coalition of the Willing (2001)

The initial intervention in Afghanistan was designed to retaliate for the attack on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon on American soil. The United States had asked NATO to invoke article five – which prescribes a joint effort of all NATO member states to regard an attack on one of its allies as an attack on all.[19] Soon thereafter, a 'coalition of the willing'[20] was composed and started its joint (predominantly air) operations against Al Qaeda and its host, the Taliban. Using the Northern Alliance as its primary agent to take up most of the ground fighting, international special forces were operating in the bordering areas with Pakistan (Baluchistan) trying to locate and eliminate Al Qaeda and its leader Osama Bin Laden. Both the United Kingdom and the Netherlands provided personnel and equipment to support the mission albeit in different shapes and sizes.

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15 Talatbek Masadykov, Antonio Giustozzi, and James Michael Page, 'Negotiating with the Taliban: Toward a Solution for the Afghan Conflict', Crisis States Research Centre Working Papers 66 (London 2010); Steven A. Zyck, 'Former Combatant Reintegration and Fragmentation in Contemporary Afghanistan: Analysis', *Conflict, Security & Development* 9(1) (2009) 111-131; Deedee Derksen, 'Peace from the Bottom-Up? The Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program', PRIO Paper, Oslo, PRIO, 2011.

16 Waldman, 'System Failure', 835.

17 Masadykov and Giustozzi, 'Negotiating with the Taliban', 1-2.

18 Johnson, *The Afghan Way of War*, 1-2.

19 Waldman, 'System Failure'.

20 This initially was a coalition between American and British forces and Afghan militias, but soon thereafter reinforced with Special Forces elements from Norway, Canada, Germany, Australia and New Zealand.

Soon after the Taliban government was toppled at the end of 2001, the United Nations had convened a relatively diverse but unrepresentative group of Afghans in Bonn to agree on a power-sharing arrangement that would bring different Afghan factions into an interim administration led by Hamid Karzai. The Bonn Agreement was to facilitate the establishment of a centralised and democratic state and advance a more representative and legitimate administration. However, it 'imposed a victor's peace' on the country and excluded key Pashtun figures and Taliban supporters from any (political) role in Afghanistan.[21] Furthermore, the modernisation goals as formulated by Western (donor) nations were highly ambitious and lacked the inclusion of the local perspective and understanding of the power politics at play.[22]

Also, the reconstruction efforts of the international community were often poorly coordinated and in addition the financial assistance provided for various projects were frequently exploited by local power-holders. Hence, the financial resources provided by the foreign forces, especially the American funds that were made available, unintentionally engendered corruption and also reinforced criminal, patronage and insurgent networks.[23]

The materialisation of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and a UN Special Political Assistance Mission (UNAMA) emerged out of the United Nation's Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1386) in 2001. This resolution provided Western powers the mandate to engage politically and militarily in Afghanistan.[24]

In 2001, the United Nations desired a comprehensive nation building effort in order to reconstruct the country. By doing so, they insisted the foreign forces would assist with expanding the influence of the central government in Kabul throughout the rest of the country.[25] In fact, shortly after Hamid Karzai had been installed as the interim president of Afghanistan, UN officials, and others, called for ISAF to expand its operations beyond the central capital. However, American officials believed a traditional peacekeeping approach would be ineffective in Afghanistan. In addition, their European allies were unwilling to deploy large numbers of troops throughout Afghanistan. Thus, an alternative was provided by the Americans in the summer of 2002 as a response to the desire as voiced by the United Nations and the Afghan president to expand the legitimacy of the central governance; Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT).[26]

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21 James F. Dobbins, 'America's Role in Nation-Nuilding: From Germany to Iraq', *Survival* 45(4) (2003) 87-110.

22 Rubin Barnett and Humayun Hamidzada, 'From Bonn to London: Governance Challenges and the Future of State Building in Afghanistan', *International Peacekeeping* 14(1) (2007) 8-25, 8; Suhrke, *When More is Less*.

23 Waldman, 'System Failure', 827.

24 Masadykov and Giustozzi, 'Negotiating with the Taliban', 1.

25 Robert Johnson, *The Afghan Way of War*, 277.

26 These teams were originally named *Joint Regional Teams*. On the request of President Karzai they were renamed into PRTs since he wanted to emphasise the importance of reconstruction. See: Michael J. McNerney, 'Stabilization and Reconstruction in Afghanistan: are PRTs a Model or a Muddle?', *Parameters* 35(4) (2005) 32-46, 32.

The task for the PRTs was to expand the legitimacy of the central government of Kabul.[27] The first three PRTs were deployed by the United States between the end of 2002 and March 2003.[28] The PRT Working Principles, issued in February 2003, identified three areas of activity: security, central government support and reconstruction.[29] The teams consisted of 60 to 100 soldiers and Afghan advisors and representatives from civilian agencies like the State Department, the US Agency for International Development, and the US Department of Agriculture.[30]

The international interest in Afghanistan and consequently the commitment of military forces quickly diminished as the United States and the United Kingdom were preparing themselves to invade Iraq in the first quarter of 2003. Suddenly, the earlier rhetoric that Afghanistan needed to be reconstructed in order to prevent another terrorist attack had become unpopular. The new threat was believed to have emerged in Iraq, and as such diverted all attention to Bagdad.

4.4 A Collective Effort Towards Building Peace: NATO's Arrival (2003)

Up until 2003, ISAF primarily operated in and around Kabul. The American-led mission Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in the rest of the country was aimed at countering terrorists. However, at the end of 2003, the UN Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG), Lakhdar Brahimi, requested ISAF to move beyond Kabul and in fact assume responsibility for the whole of Afghanistan, be it in a phased manner. This request was also heavily influenced by the American need to relieve military troops for their operations in Iraq.[31]

27 A central point remains to be whether the central government of Kabul was granted with legitimacy amongst its constituents in the first place. This debate however carries well beyond the scope of this study.

28 The first three pilot PRTs were established in Gardez, Bamiyan and Kunduz in early 2003. Three more were then established in Mazar-i-Sharif (British-led), Parwan and Herat. See: Gerard Mc Hugh and Lola Gostelow, *Provincial Reconstruction Teams and Humanitarian– Military Relations in Afghanistan*. Save the Children 2004 London, 21.

29 Peter Viggo Jakobsen, *PRTs in Afghanistan: Successful but not Sufficient*. Danish Institute for International Studies (2005 Copenhagen) 11.

30 Michael J McNerney, 'Stabilization and Reconstruction in Afghanistan', 32. As described by McNerney: 'The initial PRT organizational chart focused on the military structure, with a dotted line connecting to "Afghan Government, government organizations (e.g. USAID), State Department, NGOs, and UN'. Later charts proposed integrating State and USAID, as well as the US Departments of Justice, Education, Agriculture, and other agencies. For many months, competing PRT organizational charts floated around Washington, US Central Command and Coalition headquarters'. See: McNerney, 'Stabilization and Reconstruction in Afghanistan', 36.

31 Astri Suhrke, 'A contradictory mission? NATO from stabilization to combat in Afghanistan', *International Peacekeeping* 15.2 (2008): 214-236

Hence, on 11 August 2003, NATO assumed command and coordination of ISAF. Two months later, the Security Council authorised Resolution 1510 (UNSC 2003) allowing the expansion of ISAF operations throughout Afghanistan. Consequently, the First German Netherlands Corps was sent to Afghanistan to prepare the ground for NATO's arrival.[32] ISAF's expansion in terms of both geography and function advanced so gradually, unfolding into a particularly complex command structure, that the qualitative transformation of the mission went largely unnoticed.[33]

The objectives of NATO as articulated in their plan were first and foremost to stabilise and reconstruct Afghanistan. Their tasks had derived from UN resolution 1386 which called upon NATO to disarm militias, reform the justice system, train a national police force and army, provide security for elections, and lastly, combat the narcotics industry.[34]

These various different objectives however were not clearly delineated. Consequently, their inter-relationship and priority remained vague and had not been operationalised. In addition, the ISAF plan contained what Matt Cavanagh described to be, 'the classic strategic mistake of being neither one thing nor the other; neither light-touch and pragmatic nor full-blooded and properly resourced'.[35]

The primary vehicle for NATO to achieve its stated ambition of extending its operations further throughout the country, were the PRTs. As such, in 2003, NATO adopted the American developed PRT concept[36]. NATO's expansion was initiated by taking over command of the military component of the German-led Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Kunduz[37] in December 2003. Six months later, at the NATO summit meeting in Istanbul, NATO announced

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32   United Nations Security Council Resolution 1510 (2003) see: http://www.nato.int/isaf/topics/mandate/unscr/resolution_1510.pdf (last accessed 10.05.14).

33   Suhrke, 'A Contradictory Mission?'.

34   See: Paul Gallis and Vincent Morelli, *NATO in Afghanistan: a Test of the Transatlantic Alliance.* Congressional Research Service (2008 Washington DC).

35   Matt Cavanagh, 'Ministerial Decision-Making in the Run-Up to the Helmand Deployment', *The RUSI Journal* 157(2) (2012) 48-54, 49.

36   There is no blue print for the PRTs in terms of size, composition and operational style but they do however share a number of common features: they are joint teams of civilian and military personnel consisting of 50-300 personnel, they are generally made up by military personnel (90-95 per cent of total), political advisors and development experts. The civil military configuration of the teams was designed to improve civil military coordination and enhance the quality of the military 'hearts and minds' campaigns by drawing on civilian expertise and facilitating the dispersal of government funds for relief and reconstruction projects and security sector reform. The level of civil-military integration varies between the PRTs and each PRT has been tailored to the mission requirements in their respective regions to ensure that they have the capabilities suited to the local situation. The purpose of the PRTs is to expand the legitimacy of the Afghan central authority to the various provinces and rural areas of Afghanistan. In order to achieve this goal the PRTs have to improve the security in the provinces by promoting the rule of law and to facilitate and support the (re)construction process. The first three PRTs were launched between December 2002 and March 2003. See: Jakobsen,. *PRTs in Afghanistan,* 11-12.

37   The other eight PRTs operating in Afghanistan remained under the command of the American led Operation Enduring Freedom until 2006.

it would establish PRTs in North Afghanistan. This process was accomplished in October 2004, marking the conclusion of the first phase of NATO's expansion.[38]

The positioning of PRTs to the north and west of Afghanistan had occurred within the framework of the formal expansion of NATO's command to areas outside Kabul – respectively, Stage 1 (to the north), and 2 (to the west).[39] However, the expansion of NATO-ISAF through a PRT network generated a new dichotomy in the sense that two different 'types' of PRTs with different mandates were operating in Afghanistan: US/Coalition-led PRTs with the support of (but no explicit mandate from) the international community and in fact at the request of the Afghan government and NATO-ISAF PRTs mandated through ISAF's mandate from the UN Security Council. This distinction reflects two separate legal 'regimes' for the different types of PRT (Coalition-led, and ISAF-led).[40]

A further dichotomy advanced between the US lead operation Enduring Freedom and the ISAF operations led by NATO, since the American forces present in Afghanistan were primarily engaged with counter-terrorism operations in Afghanistan. This seemed to drive a wedge between the two from the outset since the American style of operations was perceived to be working against the trust of the ISAF mission. Furthermore, the international community had been preoccupied with the events in Iraq and so the requirement of stabilising Afghanistan had lost momentum.[41]

However, the PTRs remained a primary vehicle for NATO nations to contribute to the stabilisation effort in Afghanistan. Countries like Germany, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands, viewed their PRT operations in North Afghanistan as relatively successful.[42] In March 2005, NATO announced its plans for Stage 3 of its operations in Afghanistan. This phase entailed assuming command over the most notorious regions: the Southern provinces, home to the Pashtuns and the Taliban. By this time, as will be evidenced in the following chapters, detailed planning concerning the deployment of military forces to South Afghanistan were well underway in Ottawa, London and The Hague.

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38 See: International Security and Assistance Force, 'About ISAF, History', http://www.isaf.nato.int/history.html (last accesses 10.06.2014).

39 Suhrke, 'A Contradictory Mission?'.

40 Gerard Mc Hugh and Lola Gostelow, *Provincial Reconstruction Teams and Humanitarian– Military Relations in Afghanistan*. Save the Children (2004 London) 22.

41 Michael Clarke, 'The Helmand Decision', *Whitehall Papers* 77(1) (2011) 5-29, 10-11; Ali A. Jalali, 'Afghanistan: Regaining Momentum', *Parameters* 37(4) (2007) 5-29.

42 Mirjam Grandia Mantas, 'Provincial Reconstruction Teams', *Militaire Spectator* 179(10) (2010) 480-492.

4.5 Disillusionment: From Assisting to Fighting (2006)

The attention of the international community was directed towards Afghanistan yet again, by the time NATO decided to assume responsibility – as explained earlier - for the stabilisation of the whole country in a phased manner. In addition, the earlier voiced [2001] ideological concerns about Afghanistan as a safe haven for terrorists [directly positioning the country in the struggle against global terrorism] were reiterated. Also, there seemed to be an international sense of obligation to help reconstruct the war torn country. This engendered the resource to the use of military force to establish the required preconditions for economic reconstruction in line with evolving UN and NATO doctrines of peacebuilding. [43]

Next to these ideological motivations, another less alluring but nevertheless very clear interest-based motivation surfaced: the credibility of the Alliance. The rationale of it entailed the credibility and future of NATO itself. Hence, the credibility argument was greatly used by governments that had already sent troops to the South and wanted other NATO members to reinforce their efforts as well. By publicly declaring NATO's expansion to the South to be the ultimate test of the Alliance's credibility and relevance, and consequently acquiring a combat role, NATO members were seen to provide the argument a self-fulfilling character.[44]

NATO's expansion to South Afghanistan had instigated a debate about whether NATO was up to the job of conducting combat operations. It had taken on a complex mission of which the original mandate was vaguely defined as 'security assistance'. However, by dispatching combat troops and expanding its command to the Southern provinces, NATO had taken on the additional task of defeating the Taliban. This was in fact the first 'out of area' mission and, in addition to that, the first ground combat mission of the Alliance since its establishment.[45]

However, the force contributing nations, committing their military troops for NATO's expansion to the South chose – perhaps unconsciously - to downplay the fact that they were going to war. This in itself was not surprising since after the Iraq invasion combat missions, initiated and requested by the United States, had become domestically sensitive in most European nations. Therefore the rationale for yet another battle, again in the Afghan theatre, was not as persuasive as it had been in the aftermath of 9/11. Moreover, the planned operations in the South were assessed to include a significant risk of casualties.[46]

Since the fall of the Taliban in late 2001, the situation in Southern Afghanistan had remained relatively quiet. At least up until 2004, limited insurgent activity mirrored by a

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43 Carl Robichaud, Remember Afghanistan? A Glass Half Full, on the Titanic', *World Policy Journal* 23(1) (2006) 17-24; Suhrke, 'A Contradictory Mission?'; Ali A. Jalali, 'The Future of Afghanistan', *Parameters* 36(1) (2006) 4-19.

44 Clarke, 'The Helmand Decision', 11-12 Suhrke, 'A Contradictory Mission?'.

45 Gallis and Morelli, *NATO in Afghanistan: a Test of the Transatlantic Alliance*; Suhrke, 'A Contradictory Mission?'.

46 Suhrke, 'A Contradictory Mission?'.

very light Afghan government and American military presence best describes the situation. The region had, however, been the heartland of the Taliban from its emergence in 1994. The conservative Pashtun and rural nature of the region, dominated by the Tajiks and Uzbeks of the Northern Alliance, meant that its inhabitants were culturally and politically opposed to President Karzai's Kabul-based government. In fact, the foreign presence had intervened into an ongoing civil war between the Taliban and Northern Alliance, which although quiescent between late 2001 and 2003, had not been ended. On top of that, the severe economic underdevelopment and chronic neglect by central government of the region ever since 2001 had worsened the situation even more. [47]

Perhaps naïve or maybe ignorant, the international military forces present in Afghanistan underestimated the Taliban's resurgence in the Southern provinces. Moreover, hardly any effective steps were taken to address regional dynamics that perpetuated the conflict, especially the sanctuary and support provided to the Afghan Taliban by Pakistan.[48] NATO had communicated that it expected to encounter resistance to its expansion to the South but believed it would be able to pacify the region through an integrated stabilisation effort.

This concept, now known as the comprehensive approach, at the time became the dominant approach within the field of stabilising (post) conflict states. It encompassed an integration of diplomatic, military and developmental efforts directed towards creating a sustainable stable state.[49] The concept adhered to various dominant normative beliefs about how Western states are to transform fragile states and promote democracy as stabilising cement.[50] It informed the way Afghanistan's future was discussed at the international conference 'Afghanistan Compact' held in London (31 January – 1 February 2006). At the

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47 Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop*, 60; Adam Roberts, 'Doctrine and Reality in Afghanistan', *Survival* 51(1) (2009) 29-60, 30-31.

48 See e.g. the leaked ISAF report, *State of the Taliban: Detainee Perspectives*. International Security and Assistance Force (2012 Kabul), which describes 'the Government of Pakistan's persistent and fundamental role in the Afghan insurgency' and records that 'senior Taliban leaders meet regularly with ISI [Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence] personnel, who advise on strategy'. See also the leaked US cable of 23.09.2009 from Ann Patterson, US ambassador in Islamabad: 'There is no chance that Pakistan will view enhanced assistance levels in any field as sufficient compensation for abandoning support to these groups [the Taliban and others], which it sees as an important part of its national security apparatus against India. Despite this, the US has given Pakistan a total of US$24 billion of assistance since 2001' , cited from Waldman, 'System Failure', 827; Seth G. Jones, 'Averting failure in Afghanistan', *Survival* 48(1) (2006) 111-128.

49 Mirjam Grandia Mantas, 'Shafer Revisited–The Three Great Oughts of Winning the Hearts and Minds: Analysing the Assumptions Underpinning the British and Dutch COIN Approach in Helmand and Uruzgan', *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 24(4) (2013) 731-750.

50 Astri Suhrke, 'Reconstruction as Modernisation: the 'Post-Conflict' Project in Afghanistan', *Third World Quarterly* 28(7) (2007) 1291-1308; Michael J. Williams, 'Empire Lite Revisited: NATO, the Comprehensive Approach and State-building in Afghanistan', *International Peacekeeping* 18(1) (2011) 64-78; Karsten Friis, *The Politics of the Comprehensive Approach: The Military, Humanitarian and State-building Discourses in Afghanistan*. NUPI Working Paper 773 (Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2010).

conference, the donor countries committed themselves to the stabilisation of Afghanistan, outlined in a plan with a five year timeframe.[51]

ISAF implemented the final stage of its expansion in October 2006, by taking over command of the international military forces present in East Afghanistan from the American led operation Enduring Freedom[52] It introduced a comprehensive approach to stabilisation, operationalised through the establishment of 'Afghan Development Zones'.[53] The purpose of the ADZs is to connect security with development and vice versa, providing a visible sign to the Afghans that the international forces and the Afghan government actually are delivering improvement in their daily lives. However, despite NATO's revised operational plan, advancing a greater role for ISAF throughout the country aiming to achieve stability in a comprehensive manner, it could not make up for the already flawed international engagement. This was primarily due to the fact that it had, yet again, not concerned itself with a political settlement of the problem.[54]

4.6 Conclusion

The security and political situation in Afghanistan at the time when the Netherlands and the United Kingdom decided to reinforce their military effort was deteriorating. After initial enthusiasm of both the efforts of coalition forces, and, later on, of NATO forces to stabilise and reconstruct the country, momentum had been lost. This was compounded with a shift of attention of the international community towards Iraq. A reinforcement of international troops and resources in Afghanistan was communicated by 2005. At that time, NATO was preparing itself to further expand its presence throughout Afghanistan. In fact, its ability to do so was perceived the ultimate test for the Alliance. Their renewed approach to the stabilisation of Afghanistan had been informed by a comprehensive plan to bring about equilibrium through the establishment of the Afghan Development Zones.

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51 Mike Capstick, 'The Civil–Military Effort in Afghanistan: A Strategic Perspective', *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 10(1) (2007).

52 See: http://www.isaf.nato.int/history.html (last accessed 10 June, 2014). However, as postulated by Rob Johnson OEF remained to have its own command and control structure until 2009 (Oxford, July 2014).

53 The ADZ concept is built on the assumption that, if a geographically defined area is made secure for the local population to live in providing time large-scale development projects and good governance, those residing outside the ADZ would also like to be part of a development zone. The focus lies on creating conditions in which the local population will cooperate with, or at least not fight against, the local government and the foreign forces. The ultimate aim of the strategy is to win hearts and minds and consequently undermining the basis for insurgent support. The means required to advance these objectives are not available in theatre, nor are they being made available in sufficient quantities to create success within a reasonable time-frame. See: Grandia Mantas, 'Shafer Revisited'; Peter D. Thruelsen, *NATO in Afghanistan - What Lessons Are We Learning and Are We Willing to Adjust?*. Danish Institute for International Studies (2007 Copenhagen) 10.

54 Clarke, 'The Helmand Decision'.

However, a lasting political settlement had not been part of the initial efforts of the international community when it drafted the Bonn agreement. In fact, by excluding the most important party to the (national) conflict, the Taliban, the foundations for a potential insurgency were sowed. It is against this background that the Netherlands and the United Kingdom were contemplating committing themselves to NATO's expansion to the Southern provinces of Afghanistan: a region that had been troubled for many years, and had no appetite for another foreign intrusion.