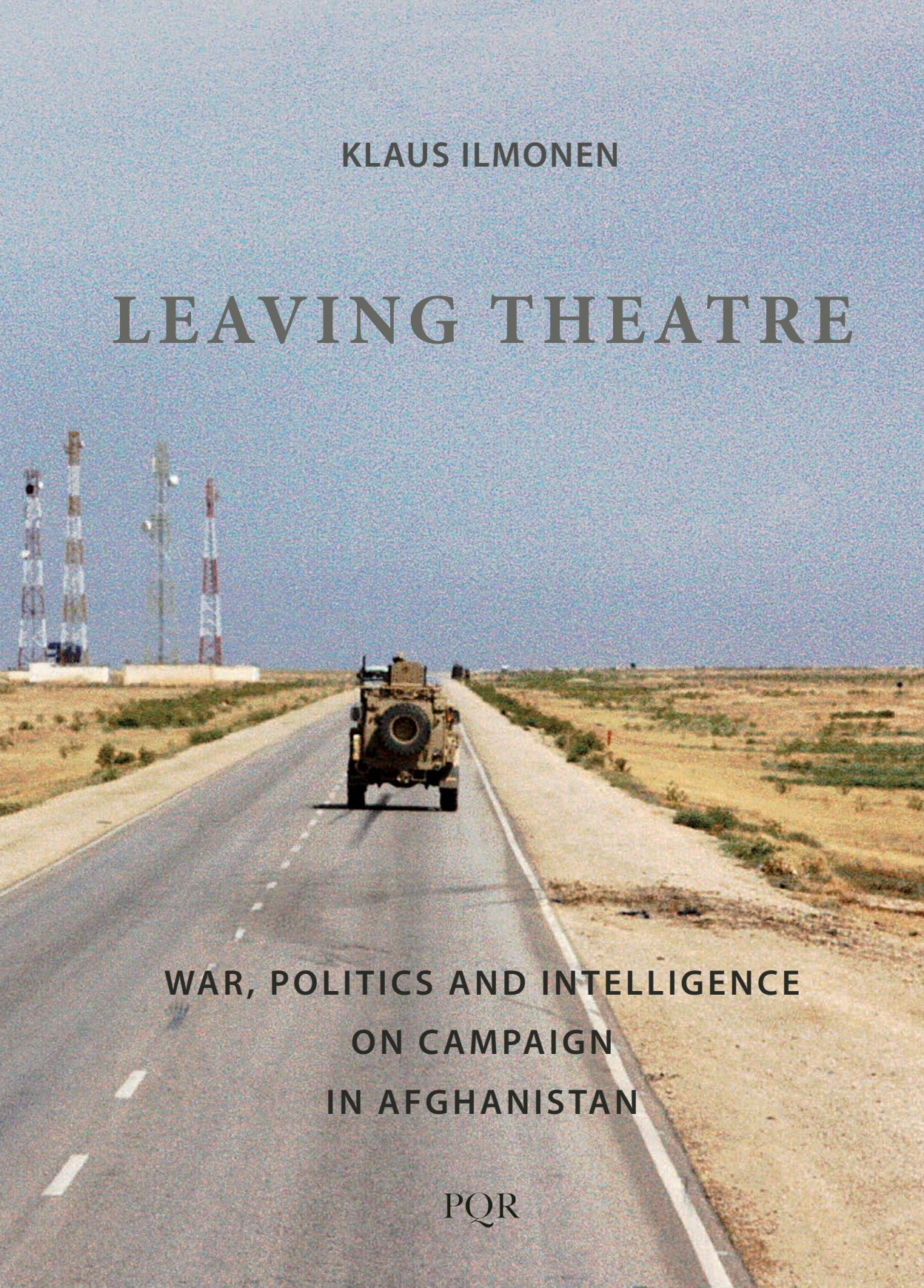
KLAUS ILMONEN

# LEAVING THEATRE



## WAR, POLITICS AND INTELLIGENCE ON CAMPAIGN IN AFGHANISTAN

PQR

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*"An Nescis Mi Fili*
*Quantilla Prudentia Mundus Regatur."*

*(Axel Oxienstierna, 1583-1654)*

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# PREFACE

If war is a tragedy then politics is a tragic comedy. For me Afghanistan has been a live theatre of international politics – inspiring the title of this book.

As the Western military intervention in Afghanistan draws to a close, it is timely to assess the merits of the campaign and the real motivations for the military involvement. Working inside military intelligence in Afghanistan has allowed me to look behind the scenes of the theatre of operations and unravel the rhetoric of international diplomacy. There has been much tension between the policies regarding Afghanistan and how the situation has developed on the ground. In this account, I draw on my own experiences in the region to consider the discrepancy between the politics of Afghanistan and its very challenging realities.

The harsh and hostile environment in Afghanistan seems to reveal the true nature of people, politics and society. Intelligence officers tend to have a pessimistic and at times even cynical view of the world. This account may well confirm that rule. Having followed how the strategies and policies of the international community and the Afghan political actors were developed and how they were executed, it is not without reason I have started this account with the quote from a former statesman: "You do not know, my son, with how little wisdom the world is governed."[1]

These notes were not initially intended to be published. I am an attorney in private practice and, as a reserve officer, applied to be deployed with military intelligence in Afghanistan. When I returned from my tour I was not quite finished with Afghanistan. At first I simply put my thoughts to paper to understand the finer tactics of the Buzkashi[2] game that was Afghanistan. I imagine my notes were also focused on figuring out why on earth I had volunteered for

1 The quote is attributed to Axel Oxenstierna (1583-1654), Swedish statesman and prime minister during the reign of Queen Kristina. Oxenstierna sent his son to negotiate a peace treaty abroad. When the son was unsure of whether his experience and capabilities would be sufficient in such prominent company, the elder Oxenstierna is said to have responded with this remark.

2 Afghan national sport played on horseback similar to polo but based on dragging a headless goat carcass to a designated spot on a field. The rules vary and sometimes involve teams that can be reallocated as the game commences with the scoring individual declared winner.

service in Afghanistan in the first place. This is primarily a personal account, but as I was following the day-to-day developments in Afghanistan I could not help considering what I saw in a broader context as well. Building on my personal experiences I have also included reflections on broader themes related to war and politics.

As my notes started to have some structure I felt it would not be inappropriate to contribute to the public debate on Afghanistan which at times seems characterized more by political rhetoric and unwarranted optimism than somber analysis and reflection. Considering the investments made in Afghanistan both in economic terms and in human sacrifice, it seemed warranted to share my account of the international political dynamic in Afghanistan from the vantage point of an occasional intelligence officer with little use for rhetoric. I also found that despite the contrasts between the situation in Afghanistan and the peaceful existence at home, there were clear similarities in the dynamics of society and politics that seem to apply universally.

At the outset I want to extend my profound thanks to the Finnish Defense Forces. I am very grateful for having had the opportunity to serve with the Finnish military in theatre and I have been proud of the dedication and hard work of so many professionals working in demanding circumstances and a hostile environment far away from home. This book is dedicated to Finnish fellow soldiers who have served in Afghanistan.

Every effort has been made to ensure that no classified or compromising information has been disclosed in this book, and the manuscript has been reviewed to that end by the Finnish Defense Forces. All opinions and views presented herein, mistakes included, are solely those of the author.

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Reserve officer, Finnish Defense Forces

# PROLOGUE

## "Complex Attack, Kabul, 15 April 2012"

One Sunday in mid-April 2012, reports started to come in on our screens from both public media and other sources that insurgents were mounting a series of complex attacks in Kabul. Insurgents had again been able to infiltrate the heavily guarded capital city and had initiated multiple attacks within the city center. Fighters were attacking key government and ISAF-sites possibly with bombs, small arms fire and RPGs from positions inside the city center. There was a firefight outside the parliament building, and the gate guards at some of the central ISAF and embassy compounds were exchanging fire with groups of insurgents. There were reports of casualties, buildings on fire and heavy fighting in key locations in downtown Kabul. The city went into lock-down; bases were closed and people were taking cover in shelters. The insurgents had also mounted simultaneous attacks in three provinces outside the capital causing several casualties. Bombs had gone off, and a governor's residence was attacked with RPGs[3].

I had been in Kabul earlier but had missed the attacks and, in some bizarre way, I was quite disappointed not to have been there for the action. As a staff officer it would have been suitable battle experience to witness urban attacks – mostly by being holed up inside a compound in downtown Kabul in lock-down listening to the gunfire and waiting for the mop-up. But with my job and at my age, kinetic work is left to younger boys and girls. This time I was back at my base following the events and putting the attacks into context.

Looking at the reports that were coming in and following how the situation had evolved it seemed clear that this was not a real military push but an Afghan style political statement. The attacks seemed to be the result of some rather

3 For media reports, see *The New York Times*, Complex Attack by Taliban Sends Message to the West, April 15, 2012

nicely coordinated work. I was quite impressed by the insurgents' capability to infiltrate Kabul, and even more so with their ability to conduct several simultaneous complex attacks in different cities. Security is relatively tight around Kabul – a "ring of steel" with check-points and security checks surrounding the city. Even so, skilled fighters with sufficient patience should be able to blend with locals and pass through into Kabul. However, conducting significant tactical level attacks simultaneously in different cities required the involvement of several operational teams, logistics and an organized chain of command. That required a more robust military organization. At this point in the Afghan campaign it was impressive to see the insurgents managing this. Considering the level of proficiency of the attacks this was in fact likely not the work of the Taliban but of more professional crews, such as the Haqqani network.

By the following morning the insurgents had managed to gain prime time coverage on most networks and in the international press, which must certainly have been their main goal. Video clips were shown of houses on fire, explosions and firefights in downtown Kabul over and over again on CNN, the BBC and Al-Jazeera. The media questioned the effectiveness of the Afghan government and the Western coalition if the capital could be attacked in this manner. ISAF spokesmen emphasized how the attacks were being dealt with and how well the Afghan security forces were able to cope with the situation. This was an asymmetric event, however. It was not a military operation with traditional goals; the insurgents had certainly not planned a military overthrow of Kabul. They just wanted to make a strong statement that they were still around and could not be neglected in the political arena. So analyzing the attacks and the responses in military terms alone was not really sufficient and missed the point of what was going on.

This kind of push by the insurgents was not to last, however. While the insurgents managed to make their statement they also got most, if not all, participating rebels killed. The insurgents mostly died in their battle positions with their weapons by their sides. There had been a robust response mostly by Afghan special forces – helped by their mentors a little – and this had certainly not been one of the large-scale military campaigns of former days. This was no prolonged campaign or an "opening" of the spring fighting season as in earlier years. These types of surprise attacks have a political rather than a military effect. Many large cities even in the West have been subject to attacks, and Af-

ghan cities will most certainly remain vulnerable to similar incidents for years to come.

These attacks were part of the political dialogue in Afghanistan. The attackers had managed to demonstrate that even Kabul was vulnerable, and that they could still conduct coordinated and sophisticated attacks. This was, in my opinion, a message to the political players in Kabul that the insurgents were a constituency that would be a relevant political force in the post-ISAF Afghanistan, and that they should be taken seriously in future political dealings. This might even have been an effort to tell the incumbent political decision makers that it was time to talk again. In summary, this was just politics Afghan style.

# ACT I

## CIVILIAN TO SOLDIER

# CHAPTER 1

# AFGHANISTAN – A CRASH COURSE IN INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

For me a tour with the military in Afghanistan was about an intellectual challenge more than anything else. Would I be able to make sense of what was going on, and put it into context?

## Civilian and Military Worlds

I work as an attorney and a corporate partner with a large law firm. Working with corporate law does not cease to provide challenges or the occasional spout of adrenaline, but for me soldiering has provided unique experiences in a demanding working environment. So I have managed – with some difficulty – to disappear from time to time from my firm, my clients, and the world of equity capital markets and corporate law to go on military operations. Some years ago I took time off to serve as a military legal adviser in Kosovo. This time I was doing a tour with the Finnish forces in Afghanistan with intelligence duties.

It has been an exciting challenge to work in hostile environments where the infrastructure of society we take for granted back home does not exist. Security is poor and there are physical threats against your own forces, effective civilian governance is lacking, roads and electrical grids are failing, there are no external phone lines, far less any phone books. Just getting a day's work done in that environment is a challenge in itself, and requires much ingenuity and long hours. It is also an excellent challenge to work in a completely different

environment in a professional capacity and to deliver work products to exacting standards in demanding circumstances; and that is why I have found this work so interesting.

Participating in overseas military operations also provides an excellent opportunity for someone interested in how the world works to gain insight into international politics. Military operations are about executing policy, and it has been interesting to see how the grand phrases of international summits translate into action on the ground. Having witnessed operations on location it has also been easier to see the real incentives for political actors to get involved in these situations.

As I have lived in some of the more peaceful corners of the world – in an autonomous demilitarized zone no less[4] – there was also a sense of responsibility to make at least a modest contribution to international intervention in a humanitarian and military crisis. Finally the contrast between my civilian life in a corporate environment and the military is refreshing and inspiring. Changing my business suit and briefcase for uniform and a sidearm is to enter a different world.

The possibility to work with intelligence in Afghanistan was a unique opportunity to look inside the international intelligence community and to understand its dynamics. The importance of intelligence has clearly increased as the world has become more complex and interdependent. Robust intelligence organizations, rightly used and monitored, provide invaluable insights and can have a beneficial effect on international stability (wrongly organized, the opposite has been demonstrated to be true). Having worked with military law earlier in my military career I had already experienced how important intelligence was from a legal perspective.

### Politics and Security through the Eyes of the Intelligence Community

I found that working in the intelligence community provided an excellent platform for looking at the situation in Afghanistan. It provided vantage points to both operational and national perspectives to international military intervention. The intelligence perspective to international politics and security in Afghanistan should provide tools to a better understanding of the factors that drive different parties in the conflict. The goal of intelligence is to understand

4 The Åland Islands are an autonomous and demilitarized region between Finland and Sweden; population 28,000; number of islands in the region approximately 6,700.

not only the capabilities and tactics of any opposing forces but also their intent, their strategy and their lines of reasoning.

The situation in Afghanistan was much more complex than a traditional military conflict would be. Many different actors affected the situation each with their own agendas. In Afghanistan, it was not sufficient to try to understand the incentives of the opposing forces – there was really no uniform opposing force to start with. It was just a region with complex political dynamics, political instability, a bad economy and poor security. So it was just as important to understand the motivations of other Afghan political groups in the government and outside of it, as well as how the public viewed their society.

Afghanistan's neighbors were also contributing to the misery in the country. It was not as if the poor situation in Afghanistan was exceptional in the region. Pakistan and Iran, in particular, as well as India, China, Russia and the three neighbors to the North – Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan – all had their own issues which were reflected in the situation in Afghanistan. The question of what was driving their policies towards Afghanistan was at least as important as understanding the tactics of the Taliban – and in my opinion actually much more important.

Finally, it is not as if the participants in the Western coalition chose to intervene without agendas of their own. Each participating country probably had a plethora of reasons underlying their varying degrees of participation in the mission. Some had a clearer strategy than others, but most were ultimately unrelated to fixing the security situation in Afghanistan. Some of these agendas were not publicly stated or even, for that matter, obvious to the states themselves. Moreover, their own perspectives skewed the way they represented the security situation in Afghanistan – you could not really trust anyone to be objective in their description of how the Afghan campaign was progressing.

The situation in Afghanistan was politically very sensitive and no one could be expected to tell you what was really going on. They would tell you what they wanted you to hear. The Afghan government would say that the security situation was getting better but that it was very fragile and Western support (especially financial support) would still be needed for years to come. The formal ISAF position would be that the situation was stable enough for the West to leave, and that Afghanistan was ready to take over responsibility for security – with appropriate Western support. Afghan minorities would say that the situa-

tion was getting worse and that more of an ISAF presence was necessary as they were worried about the potential for political maneuvering of the dominant political groups after the West had withdrawn.

Trying to understand the real motivations for the different constituencies in the Afghan campaign was certainly important for an intelligence officer trying to figure out the security situation in Afghanistan. The environment provided an excellent challenge for intelligence work. But I found that the situation in Afghanistan offered just as much of a lesson in how politics works universally as it did in the regional political dynamics of the crisis itself. The political system of Afghanistan in its crudeness gives insights into the inherent nature of politics. The political institutions we take for granted in western democracies are largely missing in Afghanistan and the business of politics is carried out outside established institutions or systems on the basis of influence, networks and power. But as one observed how the international community – the West – operated in the country and what the real incentives for intervention were, one had to ask to what extent our own democratic institutions are just facades behind which the real political game takes place. So to me Afghanistan was a laboratory or a testing ground of applied international political theory.

### Lessons from Afghanistan?

When I saw how the Afghan campaign was managed, how strategies and policies had evolved over the years, how money had been spent, and how the intervention had been planned from the start, I could not help recalling the words of the 17th century Swedish statesman Axel Oxenstierna: "You do not know, my son, with how little wisdom the world is governed". He was sending his son to an international summit for a peace treaty, and his son wondered how he would fare among the political leaders of the day. The elder Oxenstierna knew well what the quality of leadership was and did not hesitate to encourage his son not to worry.

I had the same feeling about how matters were handled with respect to Afghanistan. It was not that the people in theatre, or even back home, were incompetent – the contrary was true in most cases. The problem was that the political systems we have to deal with situations such as Afghanistan are inadequate. They do not have the characteristics required to pursue robust long term policies. Moreover, political decision making is driven by completely different

factors related to election cycles and domestic political concerns far removed from the situation on the ground in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan abounds with experts with opinions on how the crisis should be solved. Think-tanks, governments, politicians, soldiers and NGOs all provide views on what went wrong and give advice on how the matter should be solved. I do not intend to provide the solution or the magic bullet that no one has noticed yet. In studying and trying to understand the Afghanistan crisis, one comes to see the underbelly and some unsavory aspects of international politics. To see the reality of how and why global issues are managed gives a view far beyond just the Central Asian plains and helps one to see the broader picture of international politics. And here I believe there is still room for a few thoughts on the otherwise rather well-supplied market on "things Afghanistan".

These notes or journal, or whatever this has turned out to be, is not primarily about my work. Most of that is classified anyway, or too mundane to write about. Indeed, I cannot discuss matters related to my unit or the exact tasks or our operational capabilities, for example. But I can discuss my own views and my experiences of Afghanistan, and share my analysis of how they relate to international politics generally.

# CHAPTER 2

# BECOMING A SOLDIER AGAIN

In February 2012 I had just returned to Finland from the United States where I had stayed with my family since the previous summer. I had taken study leave from my law firm to do research for a doctorate. I had been accepted for a research position at Harvard Law School where I had spent the fall term. The time in Cambridge was wonderful with new experiences for our whole family. I put in the same hours at the law school as I had done at the office to get as much as possible out of my stay at the university. The academic community at Harvard was truly inspiring. Students were made to think very hard by their professors, but the professors were also put under quite a test by their students. Nothing was taken at face value. Younger researchers never had more than five minutes to prove they indeed knew what they were talking about – but the point was that everyone did give them the benefit of the doubt for those five minutes.

I had been to Kosovo years earlier as a military legal adviser, but times had changed since then and my military experience had become a little dated. Over the past few years I had occasionally discussed with my contacts in the Finnish Defense Forces the possibility of going on another mission. But with my job as a practicing attorney it was difficult to see that happening. I had been approached earlier about the possibility of joining the Finnish Navy as a military lawyer for a tour off the coast of Somalia to hunt pirates. But I could not take time off then, and did not see serving onboard for six months as particularly appealing either.

Now that I was on a leave of absence I was not tied up by work commitments in the same way, and I got an offer I really could not turn down. I was offered a position with intelligence duties in Afghanistan. This was completely different to the job I had held earlier and offered a new level of insight. Also, my absence from the firm had already been explained to clients and other contacts as study leave which provided a convenient cover for my participation in an intelligence mission in Afghanistan. So I decided that since I had managed to take time off from my practice I might as well make the most of it.

Once I had accepted the offer I needed to start preparing for deployment. I had already been reading up on Afghanistan and the development of the military campaign that at this point had already lasted over a decade. I had also studied the main events of Afghan history and the earlier periods of violence from Russian intervention to civil war and Taliban rule. While at Harvard I also needed to get into shape to survive deployment training with young men and women less than half my age. So I jogged up and down the Charles River and visited the law school gym as regularly as I could. To my wife's amusement I also went jogging carrying a large backpack. I would fill the largest backpack we had with my own books and put it on my back and then borrow my son's schoolbag and carry it over my front. With my boots on I would run along the Charles past the JFK park and all the way round to the rowing club on the other side and back again. But this I did only when it was dark to avoid embarrassing myself too much. However, later I was very happy I had made the effort as I walked around in my bullet-proof vest and other battle rattle weighing easily over 25 or 30 kilograms in temperatures of over 40 degrees centigrade.

After returning from Harvard I had my dentist's appointment to get an x-ray for identification purposes; then I had some lab tests and a hearing test. I already had a small dent in my hearing chart showing damage in the frequency zone for live fire from earlier similar adventures, but otherwise I was good to go.

### The Long Road from Civilian to Soldier

Considering the contrast between my civilian life and deploying with the Finnish military in Afghanistan, it was appropriate that it was a long and winding road that took me from my home to the military base where personnel were trained for overseas operations. Most Finnish military bases are located in the

middle of nowhere. The reason I have been given is that the locations allow the military access to large training grounds and cheap real estate. I suspect regional politics play a role too, however.

In any case I found myself driving late one Sunday night in mid-winter in complete darkness on icy roads somewhere in southwestern Finland towards the base where I was to report for deployment training the following morning. The drive was longer and the roads darker than I had expected. The route was pitch black, the roads narrow and used mainly by trucks coming in the opposite direction, it seemed. There were many turns and short-cuts, roundabouts and country roads. But with my iPad and Google maps I did find my way and arrived at the base late in the evening.

Pori Brigade is like many other training bases in Finland; a large fenced base with 1970's style two or three story barracks and concrete dining halls. While the unit may have traditions dating back to the 17th century, this certainly was not reflected in the architecture. The young MPs at the gate found my name on their list and let me through. I drove past the dining facilities and conscripts' mess, the long line of parked Finnish APCs by the vehicle halls and the series of conscripts' barracks. Ours was the last one with white UN-marked Land Rovers and green-painted blast-proof RG-32 vehicles outside.

First impressions were not overwhelming. All personnel participating in deployment training, from privates to staff officers, bivouacked in barracks. Conscripts were on duty to sign us in – five guys were watching TV and one was working wearing his duty badge next to a misspelled sign for us to "sgin in at the desk". The environment from my conscript days over twenty years earlier had not changed much. There were eight or nine men to a room, two cabinets for equipment and the all-too-familiar blue and white checkered bedcovers on the metal army issue bunks – at least they weren't double bunks. The change from our apartment in Cambridge and even from the officers' living quarters when I trained for the Kosovo mission was marked. But I would learn that a lot had changed since Kosovo. So back to military life it was.

The first impressions of some of my colleagues in deployment training were not too exciting either – though these would luckily be proven wrong with time. I will not disclose our unit or its strength or exact tasks. But suffice it to say that my immediate superior, for example, treated me first with extreme sus-

picion merely because I was not active military personnel. It took some time for him to get comfortable with me reading up on classified memos. Needless to say he turned out to be an excellent superior and soldier. His deputy was from one of the more secretive departments at military HQ, and was mostly quiet – a characteristic common to these departments. But I sometimes suspected they were quiet not only to protect the secrets of the Finnish government, but also to hide any lack of depth in their own knowledge. Luckily that did not necessarily apply to our guy who could make an accurate and timely observation on occasion to break the otherwise mute appearance. Another colleague that comes to mind had security related tasks and proved to be the one most qualified of us considering our respective job descriptions. Having grown up on a farm he was a handy and steady guy with a broad view on life – and a real soldier. He was equally capable of fixing our computers as he was maintaining our grenade-machinegun and the plumbing in our compound - all skills that make a modern soldier. One colleague with a similar job description as myself was the youngest of the crowd. He was a paratrooper by military training and a poli-sci guy with intel experience from Kosovo, intel studies from abroad, a substantive library on intel literature and was very keen to land a job with the army. With clear insights in international politics, he certainly had my recommendation for a permanent job with the military rather than just a mission to "the 'stan".

### Back to Basics

On several occasions during training I had to ask myself whether I was in the right place at all. At first, this really did not seem to be my environment. The contrast from my fairly comfortable academic life at Harvard could hardly have been more pronounced when just a week after returning from Cambridge I was marching in formation to breakfast at 06:30 in -15 degrees centigrade. Formation! During the staff officers' training period for the Kosovo mission I recall we might have done it once for fun. But now we were reminded that since the troops to be deployed in Afghanistan were the most operational unit in the defense forces, we had to make sure to set an example to the conscripts at the base. At this point, warning signals were going off as I began to wonder what the hell I was doing here.

Finnish contingents on overseas missions consist of both active military personnel and reservists. A large part of the infantry units are formed of volunteer

conscripts who sign up after they have completed their national service. However, in Finland deployment overseas is voluntary for all, both personnel in active services and all reservists. Usually the military tries to sign up people with civilian skills that can be useful far away from home, ranging from carpenters and plumbers to electricians and IT specialists. Sometimes the general atmosphere among Finnish troops has been slightly "civilian" as a result – this was still the case in Kosovo to some extent. But I would come to notice that things had changed.

Over coffee I tried to get acquainted with the crowd and started to see the developments since the Kosovo days. It began to become clear that Kosovo had been a summer camp by comparison. First, the number of military personnel in active service was extremely high with very few reservists having signed up for more senior duties and those few mainly from special police units or from the border guard. In Kosovo, the balance had been very different. This time I was one of the odd men out. An attorney slightly over 40 mostly focused on my practice and my doctorate, I had worked on getting in shape by running a little bit along the Charles River with and without a backpack. The other guys were tactical professionals and into endurance training or Brazilian jiu-jitsu. I understood that even the female junior medical officer had gone through special forces exams.

I still had an honorable exit opportunity. Mission training typically starts with the Cooper test to get rid of people who are out of shape. The 12 minute running test is carried out only once and failure means automatic disqualification from deployment. However, over the years the test has also provided an opportunity for people who have noticed they are in the wrong place to get out with a plausible explanation. Just fail the test and say you were sick or had hurt your knee. I understood that sometimes people were perhaps even invited to fail if something sensitive had come out – like a criminal record – that would mean they could not go on the mission. I still had some doubts. I knew my firm certainly did not like me disappearing off on a mission again; I worried that I might not be able to work as much on my research during the next months as I would otherwise have done; and the environment seemed much rougher and more serious than I had wished. Just run slow and go home…

So off we went with the Cooper test in -13 degrees. But should I run fast or slow? My step was light and fast – practice along the Charles River had paid off.

Others were suffering halfway into the run and I stayed with them to support and cheer them on. But at this point I had gotten used to the smell of weapons oil again and was starting to find my old soldier-self that had been hidden under too many layers of civilian life. So I speeded up. I passed the minimum criteria with plenty of time left and added more speed to try to get a decent result. Then it was back to training with the next six months of my life set.

The Finnish military puts all personnel to be deployed on missions abroad through more or less the same basic training program regardless of rank or type of duty in theatre. Everyone is expected to have soldiering skills required in action, and to be able to function as a part of the unit. So from young privates to older staff officers we all went through the same physical and tactical training. Deployment training and getting into the military role again was of course very different from my civilian life as an attorney and even more so compared to doing research at Harvard. But that was also part of the appeal. Finding areas outside of one's immediate comfort zone and becoming proficient enough to do work in new areas at a professional level is of course an interesting challenge – very refreshing and a lot of fun.

The physical and technical aspects of soldiering, for example, were certainly not my area of core competence any more. But that is why obtaining a proficiency in live firing, mounting small-scale counterattacks and other soldiering skills was just what I needed. This was also a good opportunity just to get fitter. It was as if I was on a government sponsored get-in-shape program. We were outside a lot, had plenty of exercise, three hot meals a day, and our days planned for us – easy living. The physical nature of it all showed at the barracks. In the evenings lights would easily be out by nine o'clock.

The whole environment of military hierarchy is also not something a law firm partner having passed 40 normally has to deal with. Typically, the only hierarchy we have relates to the clients whose projects we are working on. But mastering the military organization and finding one's place is also an interesting challenge. What I wanted was to be able to move from being just a lawyer with a basic understanding of the military to working at a completely professional level within my area of responsibility.

As always in military training you first check out from the army stores a huge amount of gear most of which you never use. They always have you pick up

everything in one go, in bags that are impossibly heavy to lift or handle. I imagine they want to show that the army can give you more than you can handle. So it was this time, except that we did use most of our training gear. We signed for uniforms, underwear, cold weather gear, tactical gear, weapons and accessories. I easily filled my two allotted cupboards with all the stuff, and just hoped I would have enough time to learn to use all the new gear, from night vision goggles to new optical sights.

The deployment training reminded me of conscript days. Living in barracks, the smell of gun oil everywhere – even in newly laundered clothes – marching in formation, freezing at the shooting range, savoring the hot cup of coffee like it was champagne, army doughnuts, saluting, being saluted, being on time; you know how it is.

But there were differences from my earlier army experiences too. We were trained by special forces guys, which did provide an additional sense of security. It was not just drilling based on the old army manual as it had been back in the day. They showed us how it is really done. We were standing at the shooting range practicing fast reactions with our Glock 9 mm pistols, when the commands were shouted: "Threat to the right"…I turn…shooting position… two shots….high readiness position…check left, check right…low readiness position…"Threat ahead!"…and so on. Then stress shooting with a short run and press ups, getting into shooting position with numb muscles, and plenty of repetitions.

Firing exercises with our assault rifles were very different from the training I'd had for national defense purposes. For the "big war to defend the nation" firing is based on shooting at longer range from a covered position. The idea was more or less that Finnish soldiers are protecting the homeland in defensive positions and taking aimed shots at the enemy assault force. In training, the odds with respect to defensive positions, the terrain and the strength of the opposing force were usually nicely laid out to our advantage. This time the idea was to shoot double taps fast at short range from a standing or kneeling position. The opposition would not be a mechanized assault brigade, as in our exercises during conscript days, but a few gunmen setting up an ambush with a huge IED explosion followed by fire from RPGs and small arms. So we practiced reacting to hostile intent rapidly, taking two shots, checking left and right, and preparing for any new attacks – over and over again.

Some of the officers in training rightly questioned whether you really needed special forces people to run shooting drills for peacekeepers. They were right, I am sure, that most qualified officers could have trained us. But the point was a bit different: First, we were not really peacekeepers, but had to train for battle situations and fast armed responses to surprise attacks. Second, the type of firing that is needed in Finnish national homeland defense situations was very different from the type of situations that might appear in an insurgency driven battlefield. Third, the Finnish training manual for shooting was for conscripts and a very long time had passed since any real hostile shooting had occurred involving the Finnish military. So there was a concern that perhaps the training manual was more attuned to training conscripts and dealing with security on the shooting range than to fighting wars. Finally, being trained by special forces gave confidence that this was the way this was really done.

Our days on the shooting range happened to be some of the coldest days of the training period and even of the whole winter as a matter of fact. Standing around on the range was cold, for sure, but manageable. The Finnish army has plenty of experience of a cold environment and the kit is well planned for extremely low temperatures. However, for adjusting our weapons and filling the clips we had to work without our thick gloves. Fingers got numb in no time at all, after which you had to worry about them freezing. It was strange to be practicing in freezing temperatures for a campaign in desert conditions in extreme heat. But working in relatively extreme climate conditions did in itself prepare us for the conditions in Afghanistan.

We also carried our battle vests all over the place. At least 20 kilograms extra and this was without full clips. In theatre my stuff weighed closer to 30 kilos, but the younger infantry soldiers carried even more stuff. I will never understand how they can do their work in summer temperatures of 40 degrees and above. Anyway, I was happy I had done my backpack running in Cambridge despite my wife laughing and thinking I was crazy. The younger guys spent a lot of time adjusting the gear on the vest to get it "just right". But generally you wanted to have your extra clips or magazines in front for easy access; medical kit to the left and pistol to the right on the hip or in front at chest level on the vest. I had a general purpose pouch on the right side and radio pocket up left. And everyone was ordered to have their emergency tourniquet in the middle of their vest so it would be accessible by either hand.

The medical training forced me to consider once again whether going to Afghanistan with the military really was such a good idea. The list of diseases and other ailments one could catch in Afghanistan was impressive. Parasites and stomach trouble were more or less a given and more serious diseases were routine. Vaccines were so numerous they had set up an assembly line for us with a nurse reading out the shots each of us was to get and four nurses sticking us with needles at the same time – in the two shoulders and two buttocks that all have available.

Altogether it seemed the Finnish contingent remained quite well under the circumstances with a lot of discipline on hygiene, cleanliness and protection against risky elements. We also went through – in some detail – the first aid procedures for typical blast and gunshot injuries. So we learned to use chest packs to prevent lungs from collapsing in case of chest wounds, as well as to apply tourniquets for wounds elsewhere. The newest innovation, it seems, was uniforms with built-in tourniquets – how very convenient.

After medical training in the classroom we had good practical exercises where we applied the skills in different simulated scenarios. What struck me was how heavy a wounded soldier is and how difficult an emergency evacuation would be. As an exercise we did a battlefield emergency evacuation where an armored personnel carrier would drive right up to the frontline to pick someone up. Two guys would jump down and lift and a third would pull the wounded soldier into the vehicle. Well, first we tried with me as the "patient". With a body mass of just below 70 kg and two big guys lifting it worked. But then we had a soldier weighing 90 kg and his gear weighing around 25 kg and tried again. He would have pretty much been left lying on the battle field. There was no way we could lift him into the APC. I just hoped that in that terrible situation we would have big guys available to do the lifting and a smaller guy to be evacuated or that one would just have so much adrenaline in those circumstances that one would just get it done. Doubtful, I think.

During training our unit – the new Finnish contingent in Afghanistan – was roughly divided into two or three parts. You had the actual infantry company or the "jaeger company" as we call our better quality infantry units. These were young men and women in their early twenties, fresh from military service, who would sometimes actually call me "sir" as one should. They had mostly been conscripts with the unit that trained soldiers for international missions, and so

had really worked on getting to be more or less professional soldiers. Discipline was good, and they were in great shape, young and strong.

Then you had the older staff officers in their forties and fifties. To be fair, I think this is where I fit in rather well. All were still in good shape, most were army officers and long used to the system. Many went skiing or jogging in the evenings despite having been in training all day. But for some of us the more advanced equipment was still new; not gear that had been available when we were trained as conscripts or in connection with earlier deployments. So we needed a little more training with night vision goggles, fitting out our kit on the body armor, and testing modern shooting positions.

Finally, there was a smaller group of slightly more mature guys, in their thirties but in excellent shape and with extraordinary shooting skills. They came from special units in the military, the frontier guard and the police. I remember being placed next to one of them in shooting practice for side arms. We did stress shooting with a run and push-ups before shooting. While I was happy if I got at least one of five shots on target, my neighbor was measuring how many shots he had put within five centimeters from the middle of the target. These men mostly kept a low profile. Once I got to know them better I was impressed by their kinetic and tactical skills, as well as their mature approach to their work. It was nice to see we had people like that, but I won't go into more detail on their work here.

Once again, the army did not disappoint when it came to the amount of chow we were expected to eat. Breakfast was at 06:40. In normal circumstances I would not even dream of getting up by then, far less trying to eat something at that hour. But I knew I needed the energy and especially the coffee to get through the first hours of the morning. Coffee indeed! In my time as a conscript coffee was not a daily occurrence at breakfast but rather a Sunday luxury – how things had changed. Support had also opened a coffee shop especially for the training unit – they had named it the "Tear of Joy" – that opened at 10:00. It allowed for a second breakfast after the early risers' coffee or a late caffeine boost for the mornings I could not face battling the elements to make it to the dining hall by 06:40. Lunch was around noon – lots of carbohydrates and cream in every kind of casserole you can imagine, but not that much protein. Some health nuts had calculated that an average conscript cannot really expect to lose weight in the army, nor build muscle, with the kind of menus they serve. I

am sure the army will be able to produce statistics to disprove that but I know whom to believe from my experience. The Tear of Joy then offered afternoon coffee with sweet rolls around 15:30 or 16:00, often out on the shooting range or elsewhere in the field where we had our training. We finally had dinner at around 18:00. I often skipped that part – at my age I did not need this amount of energy, and settled for a rye-bread sandwich in the conscripts' mess. Finally, there was an evening snack available for those whose hunger was not quite satisfied yet.

During deployment training I was not able to completely withdraw from my practice. So I was on my iPad during most breaks and most evenings working away on e-mails and returning phone calls. I did not tell anyone I was in military training so I had to make sure to go on mute if there was any shooting around me, or military commands shouted close by. I could not take an active role in any assignments, and had formally delegated authority to my colleagues to handle the cases, but I had to be involved for client relation purposes and to deal with specific firm issues that matched my expertise. It did add some sense of adventure to negotiate such matters while doing military training.

### Are We Good to Go?

Were we ready for Afghanistan? Would the Finnish contingent be up to its job? Would I be able to jump into a new professional environment with this training? In some other overseas operations the Finnish rotation system used to be to rotate half the troops at a time, so you would always have experienced troops in theatre. But in this operation the majority would be new guys, and after a fairly short handover and takeover ("HO-TO") period we would take over responsibility.

The small contingent to be deployed, the training we were given and the assets and equipment that Finland was contributing to the ISAF operation were the reality of Finnish participation in international military intervention. The foreign policy statements and the commitments given at international summits boiled down to the skills of the new contingent being trained at Pori Brigade. In this sense it seems relevant to briefly reflect on our training period. The training had clearly been more serious and much more advanced than in earlier years when the operations were "softer". On a general level I felt there was a

clear difference in the level of proficiency of the troops prepared for Afghanistan compared to the soldiers in Kosovo years earlier. The size of the Finnish unit was smaller, of course, so the military had the luxury of selecting from a relatively large pool of applicants. Moreover, the military had a pool of conscripts who had volunteered for military training aimed specifically at international operations. So they were very well acquainted with the techniques and tactics used in Afghanistan which did differ considerably from how troops were generally trained for warfare closer to home. The high level of professionals and officers in active service also brought a level of organizational skill and form that coincided with how matters were dealt with by the military at home. So the operations in Afghanistan would be run more or less as everyone was used to in Finland.

I think most deploying soldiers felt comfortable with the training as such and knew their profession. They would definitely form a real fighting force in theatre. But I think we all felt we knew far too little about Afghanistan and our new operating environment. We were worried we would not know how things are best done in this theatre of operations, and that we would just not be versed enough to be at the same level as others with more in-country experience.

But now training was over and the first soldiers of our deployment had already embarked on flights to Afghanistan. We were flown over in several stages to allow for a phased-in change of responsibility. I had just about one week of leave after training before my deployment flight. I worked like crazy on my doctorate, trying to fix footnotes for my articles; then a business trip for my law firm to London, and a short but sweet private trip with my wife to Stockholm and our favorite hideaway, the Grand Hotel, where inevitably we spotted other acquaintances who also had gone there to be left alone.

On my last day in Finland I was at work at the office in Helsinki, and went directly from my last meeting to the train station. There was a small crowd of men and women in uniform getting on the train to Tampere where we had a bus to take us to the airport and then a transfer flight was due to take us onward. I changed from my suit into my uniform in the train bathroom – very cramped. At the airport we had a crowd of some fifty new soldiers deploying with us, and some soldiers returning from leave. We finally boarded the chartered commercial plane where the Swedes had already taken the best seats. The Finnish and Swedish troops shared flights to save costs, and the plane had started in Sweden

earlier in the day and was already half full with Swedish soldiers from their jaeger unit. The flight goes in two legs overnight thus minimizing the chance of getting any decent sleep. The ridiculously small space between the seats on the plane did not help much either in this regard. We landed in Turkey at midnight and the plane was cleaned and crew changed; then onwards to Mazar-e Sharif where we landed at dawn.

# CHAPTER 3

# KOSOVO – YESTERDAY'S CRISIS

I will take a small step back to give a little more background on why I had just landed in Mazar-e Sharif. Years ago, when I first started thinking about serving overseas as a peacekeeper, the whole idea seemed a bit strange. Soldiering and peacekeeping were not very highly appreciated endeavors in the Finnish business community or elsewhere for that matter. Peacekeepers had a bit of a reputation from old UN operations, perhaps unfairly, for not doing much other than sunbathing and enjoying cheap beer. The perception was that the main motivation for deploying had been the possibility of importing a tax-free car after the tour. However, times had changed and the peace support operations in the Balkans, for example, had posed completely different challenges to the troops than many of the earlier deployments. But for a corporate lawyer it was still not the expected career move to be planning for deployment with Finnish forces in operational theatre. Nevertheless, the more I looked into what peace support operations and military intervention had to offer the more convinced I became that I really wanted to serve.

When I first mentioned my plans to my then girlfriend (now wife) her friends thought it was just a way to get out of the relationship. Eventually I was able to convince her that this was not an awkward way to break up but actually something I wanted to pursue. But it still seemed unrealistic to try to get six months off from my work to do something that definitely did not promote my career in the eyes of employers or clients. Luckily there was a brief slow-down in the economic cycle, the deals I was working on went sour and suddenly a six

month break was not completely impossible – if perhaps frowned upon. So I was off to Kosovo.

At the time the crisis in Kosovo was very topical. Finland had deployed a battalion early on in the crisis and had its own AOR in central Kosovo. The Balkan conflicts in the 1990s had coincided with my years at university and law school. The conflict was in the news a lot but it was so complex it had been difficult to follow. But it did bother me a little that there were wars going on in Europe while I had the privilege of going to school and getting ready for a professional career. It seemed a bit empty to just worry about exams and getting the best possible job when not too far away people were at war in neighborhoods that on TV looked like my own home town. Wars were usually fought by very different people very far away, and so armed conflict had little to do with us. But this one had – and I felt I was not doing anything about it. It felt right to finally have the opportunity to personally take some responsibility for stability on the outskirts of Europe.

### LEGAD

I served as a military legal adviser ("LEGAD") with the Finnish battalion in KFOR in Kosovo in 2003. I had the opportunity to work with operational legal matters, including interpreting rules of engagement and supporting individual operations. But my main areas of responsibility also included administrative and disciplinary matters.

The role of military legal advisers in international military operations has increased significantly in the past two decades. Previously lawyers mainly dealt with administrative or disciplinary duties in the more traditional peacekeeping operations that Finland predominantly participated in up to the 1990s. As the nature of peacekeeping evolved, operational legal matters became increasingly important. Suddenly troops were not just standing around with guns; they were actually using them.

It still took time for the legal side of things to develop. Legislation still reflected old times when peacekeepers rarely had to use force in any robust manner. In Finland, for example, there was no legal basis for the use of force in peacekeeping operations other than regulation related to self-defense. This regulation is intended to allow individuals to protect themselves from an un-

warranted attack in an otherwise peaceful and stable society with access to law enforcement. It was not well adapted to situations where the use of force was organized and institutionalized (as in using military force), or where complex operations were planned and executed.

In peace-keeping operations the legal situations are often complex. Operations are being executed based on a specific mandate of the UNSCR, for example, and a set of ROEs. The objectives have to be in line with this framework, and the methods used must pass muster both with regard to ROEs and Finnish law (which is applied to peacekeepers abroad). A lot of this was new in Finland in the early years of the KFOR operation and it seemed to me that the organization was learning by doing – but very slowly. It also seemed clear that the organization ducked many of the legal issues that were emerging and hoped they would not have to be dealt with. Addressing crowd control issues from a legal perspective, for example, only really started after the deadly riots in Kosovo in 2004. Did it really have to take these riots to get a couple of staff lawyers and officers to figure out the finer points of preparing Finnish troops for these types of situations?

Involving legal advisers in the planning of operations still remained an open issue. Officers had not really been trained to integrate lawyers in war-fighting, and did not really understand why lawyers would need to have anything to do with operational planning. It still took a lot of work for an operational lawyer to be accepted as a part of the planning team. By the time I was in Kosovo, things had already evolved so that as a lawyer I did participate in planning and even in the execution of operations. I was at the tactical command post, for example, when troops were out on large scale operations. Sometimes we reviewed operational plans that seemed more demanding or looked at the basis for specific operations – whether they were within the mandate, for example.

Most of the things we did in Kosovo were very interesting from the perspective of international law. Kosovo was, in principle, Serbian territory, and we were definitely there without the invitation of the Republic of Serbia. The international community had acted based on a UN Security Council Resolution and drove out Serb troops from Kosovo by force. A UN authority, UNMIK, was then set up to control the administration in Kosovo. One of the decisions that UNMIK took was to grant immunity for KFOR troops from the application of local laws with respect to any action they would take in Kosovo. While this is

normal practice in international operations, it was strange to, in effect, have the international community grant immunity to itself. In fact, the way the international legal regime had been constructed in Kosovo was not really satisfactory for anyone with some insight into international law. In reality, it seemed that legal rules had been technically drawn up to satisfy political requirements. But that did not necessarily mean that the mission would not have been justified, it just meant that – as is so often the case – our legal concepts were outdated.

There was plenty of work for a military lawyer in Kosovo. I worked long hours with my colleague in our small container-come-office. There were plenty of meetings, legal training, reports, disciplinary matters, claims proceedings, operational planning and advising the troops at the tactical command post. We also advised the soldiers on customs procedures for their tax-free cars and I once explained, in German, the Finnish tax code for cars over the satellite phone to Austrian border guards who were not letting the soldiers' vehicles pass through to the EU zone.

I also participated in the technical negotiations between Finnish and Russian troops as the Finns were taking over the security of Pristina airport from the Russians. I understood that the technical memorandum of understanding we drafted was one of the only documents the Russians had signed with anyone during the whole campaign. Given the history of Finland and Russia, people were just a bit on their toes to ensure that the transition at the airport would go smoothly. The Finns demonstrated their efficiency as they handcuffed the first suspected intruder inside the airport area during the actual transition ceremony.

Pristina airport has a special place in the Kosovo story. During the crisis in 1999 the Russians had – uninvited – taken over Pristina airport and manned it without really being a part of the KFOR operation. The U.S. general responsible for the operation, having heard of the Russian plans, had ordered his British counterpart to block the Russian entry to the airport. The British general had refused, saying he would not be responsible for starting World War III. After a few days of a more or less tense stand-off at the airport, the lightly equipped Russian troops had finally walked over to their Western counterparts to see if they had anything to eat. The Russians had cooperated rather well with the other KFOR nations after that. So it was an interesting experience to be involved in seeing the Russians off from Pristina airport.

During my tour the ICTY tribunals had started in the Hague and I also worked with investigators for the tribunal supporting their work in investigating suspected war crimes – mass murders mainly. The first Finnish contingent had to work with actually digging up mass graves, but we only helped them in investigating the cases pending in the Hague. It was a good reminder that what had occurred in Kosovo justified the international military presence.

The operations our troops conducted were mainly intended to search and locate illegal weapons caches. I sometimes participated in the operations at the tactical command post where I would be available if legal issues came up with respect to rules of engagement or detention policies or the like. We also looked to make sure we did the work properly from a legal perspective. It was important to conduct any handling of located contraband in a manner which maintained its integrity as evidence. If we had to force our way into buildings we would actually have locksmiths come in at the end of the search to fix the doors and leave a note that the new keys could be picked up at the Finnish HQ. The locals would otherwise claim that they had been burgled as the KFOR soldiers had left the doors open.

### "Roughing It" In Kosovo

Finns had a relatively large contingent in Kosovo during my time there with some 800 men and women serving in the Finnish battalion as well as a signals company and staff officers at brigade and KFOR HQ level. The operation lasted for a decade or so altogether, and the battalion was already rather well set by the time I got there. The setting was comfortable. Our barracks reminded me of a mid-scale holiday resort with comfortable housing, courtyards and pools in the summertime. And for winter we had over ten different saunas in the main camp. The construction platoon sauna was legendary with LED lighting built into the sauna seats, speakers and a large pool. In fact, I believe the staff officers' sauna was the most modest as no one really had time to be fixing it up.

But there was a point to all of this. It was said that we were not in Kosovo to practice inconvenience but to get work done. And since Finns tended to do longer missions, it made sense to have slightly better infrastructure. Most soldiers served in theatre for a year, which entitled them to bring home a car free of import taxes – a considerable benefit in Finland. A senior officer said that

he always encouraged any reasonable efforts by his men to make their environment more comfortable. He had served in Lapland in the harshest climate conditions we have in Finland and summarized that anything that is "life-building" should be encouraged. It kept the troops busy and happy and, for that purpose, getting some extra timber and a few LED lights was not that expensive at the end of the day.

The environment in Kosovo remained relatively calm during my stay with the occasional ethnically driven murder or threats of violence against the Serb minority. Only some six months after I left the region, however, unrest broke out again resulting in a few dozen casualties, plenty of burned houses and some renewed ethnic tensions. But during my time, in fact, the only time I saw the commanding officer of our battalion in Kosovo get slightly worried was when we had run out of milk in the DFAC. His mood never changed when he got operational news, or when reports came in on alarming political development. But the milk issue had him rattled. As a reservist who was "roughing it in theatre" I thought this was rather funny. But as a layman I had not immediately understood that the milk in itself was not the issue – any problem with logistics chains was something a commander should worry about.

During the KFOR mission I learned to appreciate the type of work the military can do and the type of environment it can cope with. From an organizational perspective it was interesting to see what type of organizations society uses in times of crisis. A military organization can be set up in any hostile environment where it will start working in a completely self-sufficient way. The personnel office (G1) will recruit soldiers and take care of the terms of service and their private affairs; the intelligence office (G2) will go out and scout the environment and any threats or targets that may be relevant with whatever tools and assets are available; the operations office (G3) will use this information to provide operational plans for how the military can conduct its mission in the relevant theatre. These could range from psy-op and information campaigns to delivering aid to conducting kinetic attacks on hostile forces; the support office (G4) would be responsible for logistics and for maintaining the troops, i.e. that the troops are fed, clothed and have bunks and shelter, that vehicles work and have fuel and that sufficient munitions and stores are maintained; the planning office (G5) will look ahead in time and plan for how the campaign might develop in the weeks or months to come; the communications office (G6) will be

responsible for internal and external communication networks; i.e. radios, telephone systems, satellite links and so on; the engineering office (G7) will deal with combat engineering, clearing mine fields or IEDs, with force protection structures as well as with any infrastructure that is needed from camps to road construction – nothing is impossible; a separate economic management office (G8) might be established to manage financial and economic issues whereas a civilian military cooperation (CIMIC) office (G9) would be set up to maintain relations with the civilian population in theatre, to provide aid and to hear the concerns of the neighbors so that the military might get along as well as possible with the civilians. This organizational structure can be set up anywhere and would immediately start working like clockwork. This is a less advanced and perhaps inefficient organizational model compared with modern corporations, but it is often the case that any normal organization will be dependent on the local infrastructure and the institutional environment. Not so with the army.

Sometimes I actually use the military briefing style at my law firm if we have very intensive transactions with large teams. Morning briefings in the military would consist of brief reports from the different sections starting with the G2 and an overview of the situation over the past 24 hours. Then G3 would report on on-going operations and G4 would report on logistics with the other sections following. In large-scale corporate transactions we would sometimes also have morning briefings if we had bigger teams with up to 20-30 lawyers and support personnel. The briefing style with the latest intelligence and reports on on-going operations including due diligence and updates from the negotiation team actually worked quite well for corporate work as well.

### The Kosovo Story

The Balkans, including Kosovo, was an ugly reminder of how close brutality and evil are even in our seemingly civilized part of the world. The Balkans, with its geographic and ethnic diversity and the various alliances and minority groups, posed a challenge for any external observer to figure out. The news reporting got so confusing during the Balkan crisis that many stopped following the situation altogether. I recall a newspaper interview with Balkan residents on the complexity of the situation. They recognized that foreigners could not really be expected to understand the wars and the factional hostilities when the people in the Balkans did not always understand this themselves. There were

references to injustices between and before the world wars; the Serbs even made reference to the battle of Kosovo Polje in 1389 when justifying their campaign against ethnic Albanians. Much of this was just political rhetoric, of course. In economically and politically unstable times it was easy to play the ethnic card.

In the aftermath of the break-up of Yugoslavia, the Serb leadership promoted fierce nationalism to support their political agendas and used their ethnicity against the Albanian population in Kosovo. With references to ethnic clashes in the past – including in the middle ages – the Serbs felt they were entitled to stand up against the foreign Albanians. They also took advantage of prejudice against the Albanian population in Kosovo who did not always enjoy the best reputation to begin with. Kosovo was economically a miserable part of Yugoslavia, and the population was easily dismissed as backward looters and smugglers. Indeed, Kosovo had never been much of a tourist hotspot to put it mildly.

So the Serbian government pursued a determined agenda against the Albanian population, limiting administrative decentralization and restricting self-rule of the region. Then, in the darkest days in spring 1999, they started ethnic cleansing, driving out the Albanian population in the hundreds of thousands, killing people who resisted or who were simply caught in the wrong place at the wrong time. The time had come to right old "injustices" and promote Serbian nationalism over the whole of Serbian territory.

People left their homes and hundreds of thousands fled over the border into Albania. It was unclear just how they would be fed and where they would stay. So the refugee population was a human rights problem right in Europe's own back yard. The brutal treatment of the Albanians was also front page news so there was no denying what was happening. And it all took place just a few years after Europe had failed to prevent other massacres in the Balkans.

A very considerable concern was where these refugees would go. They were not likely to keep to Albania, itself a poverty stricken country with few opportunities or means to take care of or settle that amount of people. Italy and Germany, of course, were quite close by and already had significant ethnic minorities and robust economies where hungry refugees could very well try to flee to build a better life. This risk was a key reason why the EU felt that the situation in Kosovo was in acute need of intervention. And all in all, a huge refugee population on the outskirts of the EU was not conducive to increasing political stability in Europe.

However, the EU was not able to get its act together to intervene. European governments protested and used sanctions and what have you, but did not get much done. One of the problems was a lack of a coherent security policy. The Europeans were somewhat divided on the matter. Germany and Italy may well have had an interest in increasing the stability of neighboring regions and challenging Serbian interests as a result. But France, on the other hand, had always maintained close relations with Serbia and was not keen on a military solution. Greece was also known to have similar policies.

Another problem was the lack of resources necessary to execute a military intervention. The position of Russia in this matter was also a political obstacle for a frail Europe. Serbs typically had the backing of their ethnic slavic brethren in Russia. Kosovo was also somewhat close to Russia's zone of influence and it was not simply a case of marching in (as would be demonstrated during the early days of the intervention). The Kosovo crisis certainly had some geopolitical angles to it. For these reasons it was vital to involve the Americans.

The United States, however, had been reluctant to intervene in Kosovo. It had enough on its plate without another European campaign, and was particularly reluctant to put "boots on the ground" and take casualties in a context which might be difficult to explain to the voters back home. After some convincing, the United States backed intervention together with a reluctant NATO. However, a ground war was very difficult to consider so, instead, an air campaign was launched targeting Serb air defences and military installations and critical infrastructure. The Serbs were made to understand that there was no real way out of this. A critical factor must have been that the United States managed to involve Russia in finding a solution to the situation rather than backing the Serbs.

The Finnish president at the time, Martti Ahtisaari, also had a role in the peace negotiations. Given the tense situation, it was deemed problematic to have someone negotiate with Serbia's president who directly represented the United States or its immediate allies. Russia, on the other hand, was acting as a middleman, having traditionally had close ties to Serbia. Someone with a neutral background, yet with a sufficiently high political status to negotiate with a head of state, was needed. At the same time that person had to be completely in line with the message the principals wanted to send. It seems that the president of Finland satisfied the criteria. Ahtisaari's role at that point, as I understand it, was not really to negotiate but rather to deliver a message – a demand of

surrender. Later President Ahtisaari had a more significant role as a head negotiator in settling the final outcome for Kosovo. I understand that here, too, the end result of the negotiations was really set from the start. Everyone knew that the Serbs would lose Kosovo – but it was important that an appropriate process was followed.

The ruling of the International Court on the independence of Kosovo was a game-changer in that it recognized the possibility of unilateral declarations of independence. One of the key issues in the Kosovo case was that the declaration had been given on behalf of the "People of Kosovo" rather than by parliament or some other regular political actor. Formal government organs would have been bound by rules of international law in a different way and may not have been able to make unilaterally a legally valid declaration of independence – but the "Representatives of the People of Kosovo" could. I suspect, however that it may have been more by luck than by advanced analysis of international law that the declaration by the extra session of parliament was given this final and decisive formulation.

The Kosovo operation was bound to succeed. It seemed that the international community (i.e. the "West") had good momentum. It also seemed that the time was opportune for independence. Russia was not politically able to prevent Kosovo seceding from Serbia, but later showed its displeasure in the form of the war with Georgia in 2008. Russia seemed like a wounded bear, and the development was not altogether reassuring. For Finland, for example, the campaign in Georgia surely demonstrated that Russia may choose to use military force in adjacent regions to pursue its political goals, and has the capability to project force with surprising strength. Developments in Ukraine have enforced this perception.

### Lessons from Kosovo

NATO peace support operations were still a relatively new concept in Finland as our country had traditionally participated in more traditional peacekeeping roles under the UN regime. The philosophy of "blue beret" peacekeeping – at least as I had understood it – was very different from peace enforcement or peace support with more robust mandates, rules of engagement and areas of responsibility. In UN peacekeeping the idea was to be the neutral party between

two military forces that had agreed to a ceasefire or a peace arrangement, but who needed some help in verifying each other's commitments, keeping them separated and ensuring that no one would stray from his or her commitments out of thoughtlessness.

KFOR was my first overseas operation. My expectations before the mission were relatively low. I was interested in working with the military in what was an interesting theatre of operations from a Finnish perspective. I had expected to be doing perhaps less demanding legal tasks even if the environment in itself was challenging. My expectations were to be proven very wrong, and I found myself working with very complex legal issues in the middle of a mess of international law and politics.

From a legal perspective I found that even small matters had very interesting aspects when studied in a broader perspective. Just the fact that we had entered what was in effect Serbian territory without invitation (and very much against their will) raised relevant questions about our status. The UN interim regime had given immunity to KFOR from local laws, but from an international law perspective this seemed a bit unsatisfactory, and just emphasized how the world of international law had changed since the end of the cold war. This was also the first time I witnessed the results of international political solutions – this time in the form of the NATO-led mission in Kosovo.

As I spent time in the region and started to understand the political dynamics of the situation and the drivers for the various countries and other participants to be in Kosovo, a new picture of how international intervention works began to take shape. Some of these observations should be self-evident to anyone with work experience in the field – yet it seems to me that many of these lessons are not part of the political rhetoric related to international intervention.

### *The International Toolbox*

The ways in which the international community can intervene in a regional crisis are varied, ranging from public declarations at the United Nations to humanitarian aid and development programs to monitoring, peacekeeping and more robust military measures. The enforcement of no-fly zones, bombing campaigns and large-scale military operations are at the extreme end of the scale of what the international community (often with the United States in the lead) can provide.

International intervention is immensely costly and complex. Bringing in funds and organizational structures from the outside can create a number of problems. International aid can distort the existing economy and an international presence can create artificial demand that does not develop the society on a sustainable basis. Any international intervention beyond immediate humanitarian relief to provide food and shelter in times of crisis is complex.

Societies and their institutions develop over centuries. Creating the infrastructure of organized society from the start and trying to short-circuit the need for the normal organic development takes immense effort and the risk of failure is very high. As far as possible, therefore, it makes sense to build on existing infrastructure, supporting the existing elements of society and helping them to start functioning in a sustainable way. Sometimes these elements do not function based on Western principles or in a way that we would be used to in the West. But introducing new Western concepts to a society that functions in a completely different way may not be sustainable and does not necessarily make much sense. The concepts of democracy and elections that we take for granted still represent Western values that may be foreign in the regions where we are intervening. This creates a dilemma for Western donors. Providing financing for building and supporting a society that does not reflect their values might be difficult to explain to the tax paying electorate. When elections are clearly rigged, when human rights are not respected and the legal system seems corrupt, it might be difficult to continue to give foreign aid.

### *EU Policy and Enforcement*

What I found quite distressing was that Europe was not able to deal with problems in its own backyard in the Balkans. We needed the United States to come and fix both Bosnia and Kosovo as the EU was not able to form a uniform policy. In the Dayton peace negotiations in 1995, for example, the EU had managed to nominate a formal representative who acted as vice-chairman of the negotiations, but at the same time both the British and the French participants had made it clear that he did not have the mandate of their countries[5].

With regard to Kosovo I understand it was equally clear that the EU was not able to act alone. It seems, in fact, that the United States was initially reluctant to take action and had to be asked to join in the efforts by European partners. Tony Blair likes to take credit for ultimately convincing Bill Clinton

5 Richard Holbrooke, *To End a War,* 1998, p. 242

of the merits of intervention[6]. I have no idea how the situation developed, but it seems clear enough that we in Europe did not have the capacity to deal with the security situation in our own backyard again. And when the United States and Britain ultimately did deal with the situation, many EU countries focused a lot of attention on criticizing how they went about it.

That Western European governments or the EU were not able to act decisively on Bosnia I can understand as the war started just a few years after the end of cold war. So perhaps it was not reasonable to expect Europe to have developed a common post-cold war security policy. But that West European countries were not able to act without the United States on Kosovo is somewhat embarrassing. The EU did not seem able to pursue a uniform coherent policy regarding Kosovo, far less a military intervention to prevent the ethnic cleansing that occurred as hundreds of thousands of ethnic Albanians were driven from their homes and out of Kosovo[7].

In the 1970's Henry Kissinger was seeking Europe's telephone number[8]. Some forty years later Europe still doesn't have that number.

### *Boots on the Ground Matter*

I recall many discussions over the years with Finnish and other European policy makers, government officials and human rights lawyers highly critical of U.S. overseas military intervention. They emphasize how the Iraq war was based on lies about weapons of mass destruction, and how the intervention in Kosovo was technically illegal. The arguments are in part correct as the United States has taken some liberties with respect to its right to act in the international arena in the past decade or so. But there was something that bothered me in these discussions.

Basically, we in Europe have been free-riding on the United States with respect to security for decades. The U.S. security focus on Western Europe and NATO has allowed European countries to underinvest in security and enjoy decades of tranquility and economic growth. The United States also did much of our work elsewhere in campaigns that served European interests but where European governments were politically restricted from acting. So in Europe we let the United States go about this business and then publicly were critical of how they did it.

6 See Tony Blair, *A Journey*, p. 227

7 It is estimated that some 600,000 Kosovars were refugees abroad and 400,000 were internally displaced. For analysis of numbers and reasons for flight, see Patrick Ball, *Policy or Panic? The Flight of Ethnic Albanians From Kosovo, March – May 1999*, available at http://www.hrdata.aaas.org/kosovo/policyorpanic

8 Wall Street Journal, Europe Still Seeks Voice, Kissinger Says, June 27, 2012; there have been doubts as to whether Henry Kissinger actually ever made this statement, but he has had every reason to do so.

If we had our act together in Europe, robust forces of our own, and a coherent security policy, and had we wanted to ensure things were done by the book, we could have done so. If we want to be critical of how the U.S. is dealing with international intervention, we need to be able to provide a solution ourselves.

A large part of international politics is about the ability to put boots on the ground – or drones in the sky for that matter. It is about the ability to ultimately project force when needed, and the willingness to put your money where your mouth is. These abilities matter and they dictate the dynamics of international politics – if anyone ever had any doubt about that in the first place.

### *Basis for Intervention*

Unfortunately, even large scale humanitarian crises caused by conflict have not been an adequate basis for international military intervention or for putting soldiers in harm's way. It is clear that the international community cannot go around and fix tragedies around the world – there are too many of them. Remote atrocities have not been an issue that draws political attention. Political decision making is driven by a completely different agenda and different priorities – mostly domestic concerns. Any plans for intervention will most likely face reluctant decision makers at all levels of government.

But on occasion, when intervention serves the right political interests, some catastrophes can be addressed. Some 800,000 people were murdered in Rwanda, as there was no interest to intervene. The UN force in Rwanda amounted to no more than 2,500 soldiers and the force commander was very frustrated at not being able to stop the massacres with the limited contingent and its restrictive rules of engagement[9]. At the same time, some 40,000 soldiers were sent to the Balkans, where the crisis, while serious, was not quite in the same ballpark. However, the Balkans was of political interest to the West, whereas Rwanda was not.

Generally, international military intervention can be based on the need to secure political stability in regions that are vital to national or regional interests. For political actors it is responsible to pursue a clear international security policy in relation to one's own region and its immediate neighborhood. It is not wrong to have a stated policy on how to deal with other regions that can directly affect the stability of your own region. It would not be inappropriate for an international regional community, such as the EU, to seek to promote

9 See General Romeo Dallaire, *Shake Hands With the Devil*, 2004, for an on-hand account.

the security and stability within its own area and adjacent regions. It is also appropriate to seek to promote human rights in these areas and even to intervene in situations where gross abuse is taking place.

### Geopolitics

The United States set up their main base in Kosovo just outside the capital city Pristina. Camp Bondsteel is a huge area expanding over large grassy hills and small valleys. The area was leased for 99 years. When visiting Camp Bondsteel one got the impression that it was indeed being built for the long run. However, I believe that the United States did not assume that solving the Kosovo crisis would take quite that long. There were clearly other reasons to be in Kosovo, too. The United States and NATO had made good progress in advancing into former Warsaw Pact nations and into the former Soviet zone of influence in Europe. The Balkans and Kosovo provided a good platform for that.

It is clear that geopolitics is also an aspect that is considered in connection with assessing intervention in any regional crisis. From a geopolitical perspective, the timing, political momentum and geography were all favorable when it came to Kosovo and supported intervention. In other regions at other times the situation may well be different. However, geopolitical interests must always be taken into consideration when assessing the participation in international military intervention by superpowers and their proxies.

#### *Fragile societies*

The development in Kosovo demonstrated to me how fragile political governance structures are, and how vulnerable civilization is in itself.

Just a trivial example was how quickly people had rid their cars of registration plates after Kosovo went into turmoil. When people were able to return to Kosovo after NATO took over the region from the Serbs they did so in vehicles without registration plates. People preferred being anonymous and not to show which part of the region their cars had been registered in, which may have revealed their likely ethnicity. Anonymity also allowed for stolen cars to be used in Kosovo without too much of a problem.

But there were more serious examples of the breakdown of society. In the aftermath of the Kosovo crisis the basic functions of society were missing. There

were no police officers, no judges, no taxmen and no governors. So what do you do as a soldier when you run upon a murderer caught red-handed (literally) or a rapist? Where do you take him when the jailers have left the jails, when there are no police around and judges have been murdered?

Society was certainly getting back on track when I made my way to Kosovo in 2003. The region was stable and calm, but the authorities still needed plenty of support to carry out their work. It was unlikely, for example, for a judge to find a defendant of a different ethnicity not guilty of whichever crime he may have been accused – so it did not much help changing the judge. The police were still not adept at handling serious crimes, and taxes were not collected. In fact, not even the UN made sure their local employees paid taxes to the government.

It had also struck me how easily people can become hostile towards each other and how cruelty can so suddenly become normal. As organized society collapses people fall back on family, tribe and ethnicity and become all too comfortable vilifying people who are different and showing incredible cruelty against them. First Serbs had driven up to perhaps 800,000 Albanians out of their homes in Kosovo and murdered hundreds, if not more; now we had to protect the Serb enclaves in Kosovo from the revenge of the Albanians.

Societies are fragile and the rules we live by in the West even more so. Even smaller disturbances seem to make us question the way we organize our co-existence in society. A favorite professor of mine commented on the rise of extreme political movements after the financial crisis in Europe, saying that hate comes out of uncertainty and fear, and wondered how we can develop our political systems to deal with that. I don't have an answer to that. But considering the atrocities conducted in Europe and its adjacent regions, perhaps there should be a minimum criteria of what should always be expected of people even when the going gets tough. It seems too much to expect people to actually help others, or to risk their own safety or well-being even if others are suffering, but I would certainly draw the line at supporting or condoning ethnic cleansing.

### *Need for Robust Political and Legal Systems*

We do not really have very effective political and legal systems in place to deal with crises on an international level. Our international institutions remain weak as politics remains in the national (or at best regional) domain. Interna-

tional institutions largely lack an independent political base. And the policies of the states participating in these institutions are driven by their own national agendas.

At the national level it has been interesting to observe the dynamics of domestic politics and how that affects and interacts with foreign policy. From a broader perspective, it has been interesting to observe the ability of states to formulate efficient policies in general. For example, during the past few years Europe has been economically weakened by the financial crisis resulting in increased political instability. This affects our ability to project our foreign policy beyond the borders of the EU, as well as our ability to support regions such as Afghanistan. But the on-going development in Europe has also demonstrated how our political system is ultimately driven by factors similar to those in Afghanistan – the promotion of short-term self-interest and a disregard for long-term development of robust institutions. It demonstrates how the development of political systems goes hand in hand with economic growth.

As we were battling with the financial crisis in Europe and some of the weaknesses in our political systems were exposed, it was interesting to observe how our systems compared to those in Afghanistan. I saw the demonstrations in Greece turn violent, and reports of increasing ethnic tensions and racial problems emerge as the economy was failing. There were reports of huge corruption scandals and widespread institutional failure in the countries the financial crisis had hit the hardest. The same phenomenon, albeit admittedly on a different scale altogether, could be seen in Afghanistan. Ethnic tensions among the population were evident, and corruption was a way of life as people were looking after their own in a very harsh environment. Our part of the world has developed in a much more favorable environment so things still work much better than in an Afghanistan that has experienced several decades of conflict. Nevertheless, the way society works still seems somewhat similar.

Even though many problems extend beyond national borders or are completely international in nature, our political systems still remain national or regional at best. Political actors will look to their national or regional supporters and constituencies in forming their policies rather than at the international phenomena they are trying to deal with. There is not really an avenue for a cross-border or international constituency – to the extent such a constituency would even exist – to make its voice heard.

Another basic issue is that our economic and political systems are based on a premise of short term growth. Political systems are notoriously unstable in the face of a bad economy. In democracies people require jobs and a never-ending increase in living standards, and will vote accordingly. However, their voting behavior is based on short term perceptions and goals, rather than on an analysis of some parameter of sustainable growth. Essentially, politics is still dependent on "panem et circenses". Needless to say, this can cause some obstacles for developing long term policies.

# ACT II

## IN THEATRE

# CHAPTER 4

# FROM ROMAN CAMPS TO HESCO WALLS

Political and military power has been projected beyond national or regional borders with campaigns of different kinds through history. In essence, not much has necessarily changed in the kinds of structures and concepts that are available for the execution of foreign policy. Clausewitz emphasized the use of military force as an extension of foreign policy and more recent scholars see that states always conduct their affairs "in the brooding shadow of violence"[10]. Armies and their hierarchic standardized model of organization have proved an efficient structure for organizing military forces. The operational aspects of military campaigns have evolved with technology, of course, but there is much that is alike in how force is used, how the dynamics of the battlefield work, and for more mundane matters, how camps and forts are set up, and how soldiers live their lives on campaign. It may sound ridiculous, but having participated in military operations in Kosovo and Afghanistan even I felt a vague connection to soldiers who have served in a theatre of operations in military campaigns through history.

## Camp Marmal

I had landed on a cold March morning in northern Afghanistan on the airfield inside Camp Marmal just outside Mazar-e-Sharif, the largest city in the region. Camp Marmal is the base of the regional headquarters of the ISAF mission, and is home to several thousand coalition troops. As we landed the airfield was already alive with helicopters idling on their platforms ready to lift

10 Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 1979, p.102

and AWACS planes taking off. Fighter jets stood in long rows along the side of the field. The sheer power of the sound of the jets taking off seemed to rip the air apart. We were driven directly to the Finnish NSE base where we were met by the contingent commander and logistics support. After typically short words of welcome we got in line to sign off our tactical gear from vests and helmets to assault rifles and ammo clips before finding our quarters. We had certainly arrived in a theatre of operations.

At the time of my tour northern Afghanistan was one of the more stable and peaceful regions in the country, representing only some three per cent of all security incidents in the country. So it was a real retreat compared to other regions and indeed I often heard it said that military in other parts of the country would find an excuse to come over when they needed a little respite from the real Afghanistan. But nevertheless, casualties did mount up in northern Afghanistan as well, and there were regular insurgent attacks on Afghan security forces and ISAF alike. So no summer camp exactly, but relatively peaceful.

The camp is an element of the basic infrastructure of military intervention and of how power is projected in practice. In this sense, taking a short look at Camp Marmal also provides insight into the practical aspects of international politics. Similar structures and procedures have been applied by military organizations through the ages. Military camps still have the same basic structure as in Roman times. You choose a favorable geographic location that supports defense and logistics. You set up camp so that you have broad and open fields of vision and fire. Then you build a first line of defense – a moat in the old days, now a barbed wire fence some hundreds of meters beyond the camp walls. The walls themselves are mostly built of Hesco blocks nowadays – large metal cages filled with rocks. Usually the outer walls are two or even three meters high. You still set up watch towers at the corners just as two thousand years ago.

While the structure of the camp might have resembled the set-up of military camps from bygone days, that is probably where any similarities end. It must be said at the outset that as Camp Marmal was the main hub of ISAF in northern Afghanistan the set up was fairly luxurious compared to living conditions in smaller camps and cannot really even be compared to how soldiers got along in forward operating bases or small patrol bases. We had plenty of variety in meals and fresh vegetables available at all times. There were PX shops and espresso bars, and you could order from Amazon. So Spartan it was not. In smaller pa-

trol bases out in the field the young soldiers would sleep on the floor or in cots, if lucky, and live in tents with or without air conditioning, but certainly with a lot of dust everywhere. They would eat MREs and might have a choice between the American and German versions if logistics worked (the Germans' rations were better). Being stuck in a smaller camp with a few iron bars for a gym and a jogging route of a half a mile at best did not seem like the best way to pass a tour in Afghanistan. But it was there that the operational work was done a lot of the times, and it was there that ISAF really could maintain some contact with the population it was so keen to win over. Camp Marmal, however, was the largest base in the region from where serious force could be projected with fighters, drones and helicopters. This was the central hub for the coalition operations in North Afghanistan.

For matters of comfort, living in a large camp meant that you could generally choose among the services provided by the different nationalities. Germans, Americans and Norwegians provided dining facilities. Americans had their steak and lobster on Fridays with long lines extending outside; A few civilians and lots of uniforms; US Army, US Airforce, US Navy, Croatia, Norway, Sweden, Mongolia, the Netherlands, Germany, and Armenia. On the whole, however, food was a bit better at the Norwegian place. The German facility, on the other hand, was the closest. Generally, the food was good, but because most of it had been frozen it just did not quite do the trick and one certainly looked forward to getting home to a freshly cooked meal.

Most nationalities also had their own gyms. I generally used the German gym, but I understood there were a number of blond reasons to use the Norwegian gym more often than I did. Troops were confined to their camps when not working and visiting the gym was one of the few possible ways to spend one's free time. Considering the requirements of our work, staying in shape and increasing muscle strength was as much a necessity as a pastime. I even participated in some mixed martial arts training and continued despite being bruised by a large German military self-defense coach, who first gave me a knock on my Adam's apple (as I could still breathe I was doing ok), then twisted my wrist as you do when disarming someone holding knife (which I was not) and then dropped me (he said he slipped as I was so sweaty) so I landed with my fist under my kidneys. As an apology he offered to let me punch him – which I politely declined.

The camp was sizable, providing a jogging route of some six kilometers if you went all the way around. On one side of the camp there was the airfield and the facilities related to air operations, from airplane hangars to flight terminals. The regional headquarters were inside the camp as well – an area with a large number of long barracks built mainly from containers. Then different national, operational and support units had their own smaller camps and compounds all around the main camp. There was a small road network in the camp creating rectangular blocks where different units lived and worked. The paved roads had deep ditches on both sides to deal with the rain that was torrential when it came.

Traffic was busy inside the camp with plenty of armored blast resistant military vehicles gearing up for operations, as well as lighter 4x4s or SUVs for use inside the camp. There was every kind of car for different contractors and service suppliers who drove around, construction crews working on a new part of camp or a new road, as well as small electric vehicles driving soldiers to and from guard duty. The camp was big enough that it made sense to use a bicycle to move around unless you needed to haul gear with the cars. It was so hot most of the time that walking rarely made sense. And with so many military issue bicycles in use I marked mine with a flag from the Åland Islands – not very likely to be mixed up with anyone else's.

The camp was a support base for several nationalities. The Germans were in charge of the camp, but it hosted the national support elements of Finland, Norway and Sweden as well. The Americans had a considerable presence in the camp, and were building an enlargement pretty much the size of the original camp for their own logistics. The Germans had their units also pretty much all over the camp. These had the interesting characteristic that most had their own small more or less informal bars. In the smaller bars they weren't as picky with ration cards and people let their hair down a bit (what little they had).

The camp boasted three different PX stores, where you could get necessities and snacks, such as beef jerky and instant noodles, as well as tax free electronics, brand clothes and any item of tactical gear a military buff might want. It was a common pastime for many to see if the PX had any new stuff, but more often than not the selection was limited to satisfy only more immediate needs. So we were overly happy on one occasion to find a selection of microwave popcorn to go with the ritual evening sitcom sessions.

There was a barber shop with hairdressers mainly from Kazakhstan. My colleague did not stop reminding me of the time when he overheard me specifically ordering the barber to cut a "civilian look". Despite my orders the barber had clearly been affected by his long stay inside a large military camp and I did come out with very short hair and still very much looking like a soldier. There was even a pizzeria inside the camp. It was not wholly unusual to take an afternoon espresso break from drafting reports, or sometimes to enjoy a pizza instead of the DFAC dinner. It was also just a tiny bit absurd, which made it all the more satisfying.

In many respects the ordinariness of some everyday aspects of life was such a contrast to the environment and circumstances in which we served as to seem a bit surreal. When working in the field you would expect to be eating MRE's or the traditional Finnish army pea soup, sleeping in cots or in barracks and doing instructed PE and five mile runs at dawn. And at dusk the flags should be taken down to the evening reveille. But real life is not like that. People enjoy the occasional evening stroll, they go shopping and work-out just as they do at home. And the small extra treats are just as tasty (or even more so) when they also offer a small break from an otherwise very dreary everyday existence.

Most of the camp facilities were tents, containers or other interim structures. In Kosovo there had been far more permanent structures specifically built for military use. It was clear that logistics was a challenge in land-locked Afghanistan, and that affected all aspects of the mission from the standards of housing to the selection at the PX.

The hospital was one of the few more permanent buildings, and considering the young men and women who would need that facility for the terrible wounds that IEDs could cause I was certainly pleased that the effort on the medical side seemed serious. They brought casualties with the U.S. MEDEVAC helicopters to the airport tarmac and rushed them up to the German Role II hospital. The IED's really did get to us. A Swedish soldier in the AOR was severely hurt on patrol a few weeks into our tour. Another Swede was luckier, surviving two IEDs in the course of a few weeks with just bruises.

In the middle of the camp they had built a recreation center in brick with gyms, cafés and restaurants around a courtyard – the Atrium, as it was called. A nice chatter could be heard from the cafés most evenings, and more noise was guaranteed when field entertainers performed. I was impressed by the uni-

formed Swedish hard rock band that definitely worked to get the crowd moving. I told the younger Finnish soldiers who had gathered for the concert that I was sorry I had come a bit too late – about 20 years ago I might have gotten excited, too. Now the sea of camouflage uniforms jumping up and down in the heat of Afghanistan was too strange for me.

In general, the rather widely applied no-can-rule dampened the night life in camp somewhat. Many of the troop contributing nations did not allow their personnel any alcoholic beverages in theatre. The United States had adopted that policy years ago. Now others were starting to apply it as well. The Finnish troops in Afghanistan were denied alcoholic beverages just before we arrived. First I thought it to be paternalistic and a little annoying. After all, two beers after the sauna would not hurt anyone; it would just be a nice respite for the troops after a sweaty day at work. But Afghanistan seemed a little different. It was more for soldier athletes and very soon it seemed very natural that alcoholic beverages were just not part of the equation. Most took this as an exercise in healthy living – bar the shooting and bombs. Still, with the no-can-rule it was admittedly a bit of a stretch to walk down to the Atrium just for orange juice.

There was actually only a little socializing altogether in this operation. After all, most folks had come down to fight a war, and the focus was very much on the job rather than on entertainment. People worked very long hours in their own units and then went back to their own living quarters. The different operational units – maintenance, psy-ops, K9, intel, HQ, MP etc. all had separate compounds for work and mostly also for living quarters, so it was all quite secluded, and people did not interact outside their own units all that much. I thought that it was just plain healthy to try to have more social interaction, and made a point of visiting events that were organized every now and then (concerts mainly, but also a cultural exhibit by the Mongolians!) – even if I just stayed for a few minutes.

However, there were other reasons that drew the young soldiers to the Atrium. For some reason the women in the camp tended to gravitate towards the Atrium in the evenings and I believe many of the young men appreciated the sight of some femininity – even if robed in military attire. And perhaps some of us were even a little bit partial to women in uniform. A military uniform can even emphasize the femininity of the female soldiers. If you see my wife in military style attire you will know why. Even if there were few women around, most

were quite a delight to look at. The Swedes and the Norwegians were of course in a league of their own, but others were not bad at all. With each HO-TO the young women seemed to become better looking, too. Or is it more likely that it was just me having been there longer?

But the insurgency and the fact that we were in a theatre of operations was still with us at all times. I was leaving the Atrium late one evening and the music in the background soon disappeared and was replaced by the sound of large jet planes warming their engines and helicopters landing at the airfield. You could hear the roar of the jet engines, and see the orange fire from the afterburners, but then it would be pitch dark again. The flying lights of the planes and choppers were turned off immediately after take-off and they disappeared into the darkness. Once I got back to the compound I just checked on the intranet whether there had been any kinetic action going on to explain the choppers, but happily there was no news of casualties at least.

### The Compound

One of my favorite travel books used to be a journal documenting a scientific expedition to Antarctica a few years after World War II. A joint Norwegian-British-Swedish expedition (I think they had someone from New Zealand with them as well) took an old whaling vessel to Antarctica where the scientists set up a research base – "Camp Maudheim"[11]. The expedition was led by an experienced arctic expert from Norway. The scientists were mostly young, unmarried and very much into their work – not wholly unlike the soldiers at our base. During the summer months they made field trips for geological and geographic studies. But they also spent quite some time at their base camp, making observations and measurements in the immediate vicinity of the camp.

The scientists were there to work and not for a survival exercise. Although the environment was harsh, they had tried to make themselves as comfortable as the environment allowed. They all had their own small sleeping cabins, and they had brought along plenty of books and even musical instruments. Their cook tried to prepare meals that were as tasty as possible from the penguin meat they had. And on special occasions a cake would appear as would a small shot from the bottle that officially did not exist.

Somehow the atmosphere in the scientists' expedition comes to mind when looking at how the Finns build their compounds when on operations. The en-

11 See John Giaever, *The White Desert; The Official Account of the Norwegian-British-Swedish Antarctic Expedition*, 1954

vironments where we operate are typically difficult with primitive infrastructure. You basically have to build your own living environment from scratch.

At the same time we are not deployed to experience hardship, but to get work done – a bit like the Antarctic scientists. So facilities are built to support that. Also, Finns have a tradition of staying longer in theatre which makes building something a little more permanent and a little more comfortable quite understandable. Finnish living quarters and offices are built to reasonably high standards. Facilities may be cramped and simple, but they will be clean and practical enough to let you do your work and allow for some privacy and downtime.

The living quarters in my little compound inside Camp Marmal were hardly as rugged as those of the scientists in Antarctica (either in the early 1950's or today for that matter). I lived inside a small walled compound located inside the main base just off the military airport. Inside everything was very clean and modern with functional and comfortable office spaces. Our sleeping quarters were in the same space – we shared a container sized room among two men, with cupboards and walls that provided a small but sufficiently private sleeping quarter for each of us. I brought a small campaign chair for my quarters in my luggage, and kept a large maritime chart of my home waters on the wall – no military stuff in my sleeping quarters.

We had hot showers, and running potable water. I nevertheless brushed my teeth with bottled water – it was still Afghanistan. We didn't really have cooking facilities other than an outside grill for barbecues which we used too rarely. So it was instant noodles on the nights I didn't feel motivated to visit the DFACs and cold cuts from the fridge for breakfast. By the time I went on leave I was getting really tired of the DFAC food and brought back a whole selection of deli items – salted biscuits, breakfast biscuits, English marmalade, porridge, popcorn and cheeses that could handle the overnight trip to Afghanistan in my luggage without walking away independently. I also got hold of some excellent Swedish coffee and a small coffeemaker to save my mornings.

Being Finns we had a sauna inside the compound, no matter that it was over 30 or even 40 degrees centigrade every day during the summer season. The sauna is still an integral part of the daily or weekly evening routines. Finnish peacekeepers set them up on almost any mission they go on regardless of local temperatures. They make them out of plywood, HESCOs, tent fabric, or when logistics allows, from timber delivered from Finland. In Kosovo, the construc-

tion platoon sauna had a built-in sound system and the largest swimming pool in the camp (they were called fire extinguishing reserve tanks). No such tanks in Afghanistan; water was still a scarce commodity there. The special feature in our sauna was that the window was made out of bullet-proof glass. However, as the rest of the sauna was plywood, this was more of a decorative feature.

During the day I sometimes took a short break and stepped outside just for a few rays of sunshine. And a few moments is really all you want to spend under the charring heat of the Afghan sun. The surroundings I stepped out into were also not the most inspiring. I usually took a few turns just inside our own compound behind high concrete walls – it is very much what a walk inside a prison yard must be like. It did not help much to go outside the compound either – just more concrete walls and HESCOs.

The heat during the Afghan summer got a bit ridiculous. Our thermometer showed readings of over 40 degrees centigrade outside on a regular basis. After dusk it "cooled down" to 35 degrees, which is still unbelievable for a Finn. I didn't spend too much time outside during the hotter daylight hours if I did not have to. When I did go jogging in the evenings I started by pouring water over my clothes, which helped me to keep cool as the water was evaporating. During July and August I had to bring extra water along when I went running as my drenched clothes would be completely dry in fifteen or twenty minutes due to the heat.

### *Outside the Wire*

Any movement outside the camp was operational and required careful planning. Just driving to a meeting at another camp was a small military exercise in itself and longer transits were real operations.

There would always be an operational plan – a very simple plan, perhaps, if we were just going to the next camp, but a plan nevertheless. Maps would be ordered and operational orders drawn up. All personnel had their own responsibilities in cases of emergency based on standard operational procedures exercised time and again during deployment training. Gearing up was a bit of an exercise too. We had rather robust force protection rules and had heavy personal protection when we moved around. We generally packed our survival backpacks and enough water for a few days and donned our vests and battle equipment with quantities of ammunition for our assault rifles and side

arms, smoke grenades, medical kits, more water (or rehydration drinks for me), knives, extra comms equipment, some more water again, helmets, ballistic eye protection and earplugs. It was certainly bulky, but did the job.

The extreme conditions – the heat and bad roads – definitely put a severe strain on maintaining tactical capability when working outside the wire. An experienced soldier, my superior officer demanded that we stay in shape and maintain an adequate level of tactical skills. So he would keep an eye on how often we went jogging and that we had our gear in shape. Weapons needed to be cleaned from dust and sand regularly and emergency back-packs filled with the required items. At times it felt a bit patronizing, but whenever we were on the road I felt we had it figured out. To increase my own alertness during the summer season I usually poured a pint of water down my shirt before I got into the vehicle so that I would have some cooling effect when it started to evaporate. As a rule my tactical shirt was dry again in no time at all despite the air conditioning.

The vehicles we used were large South African RG-32 armored four by fours made to be blast resistant. In our camp depot I had seen these types of vehicles that had driven on IEDs. Their wheels had been blown off, the vehicles thrown 10-15 meters into the air, but the passenger space was intact and those wearing seatbelts had often come away with only some scratches. But it was obvious that without seatbelts tightly secured there was a high risk of breaking your neck. It was also obvious that the vehicle designers had put all their energy and focus on the blast protection (rightly so I am sure) because clearly not much thought had gone into the ergonomics of the personnel space inside the vehicles. The RG-32s were difficult to get into, cramped, very uncomfortable to sit in, and almost impossible to get out of after your legs had gone to sleep sitting in a weird crouched position. Emergency evacuation drills were a funny sight as there was a huge sense of urgency, but everything happened in slow motion because of how difficult it was to get out of the vehicles. But I shall not complain. Those vehicles have undoubtedly saved numerous lives, and they look cool enough that I am looking out for the civilian version – I think you could basically run over a Hummer without noticing.

As a rule troops moved in convoys. Very often the rule requiring multiple vehicles demonstrated its legitimacy as vehicles broke or got stuck in the extreme road conditions in Afghanistan. There were plenty of stories and pictures

of soldiers digging vehicles out of the mud, or pulling them out of ditches or wadis, or sometimes pulling the locals out too. Even in Kosovo a Land Rover would be ready for the scrapyard when it had been driven less than 50,000 kilometers. The conditions in Afghanistan were much worse.

Even the smaller vehicles typically had rooftop weapons – either heavy machine guns or grenade machine guns. I particularly liked the grenade machine gun, a Heckler & Koch I recall. It spewed out tennis ball sized grenades at an impressive speed and accuracy at significant distances. It was an excellent force equalizer for even a small unit. On one of our outings I had the pleasure of pulling guard duty behind the grenade-launching Heckler & Koch and felt pretty safe.

### Life in Theatre

Life is on hold while serving in theatre. This was not meant to be an ordinary existence. We were there to work, of course, and to fight a small war. I believe that most people working in theatre felt they were doing meaningful work and enjoyed what they were doing. But being on a military campaign is still a temporary existence. Being away from home and normal society for too long does have an effect on motivation and well-being. Modern technology offers an effective link to loved ones, sometimes with live video feed and excellent voice connections. Most of the time that is great, of course, but many can feel a sense of frustration hearing about domestic problems without any means to solve them.

A six-month tour is something anyone can certainly cope with easily, and for most a twelve-month tour is still doable. But sometimes it was clear people had overstayed. The symptoms were usually that people got short tempered, their judgment was poor, they tended to gripe for one reason or the other, and their productivity declined rapidly. The Finnish military had a rather strong rule against anyone serving over twelve months, which seemed well advised. We also had excellent leave-arrangements, which I will not even describe here for the risk of making people from other troop contributing nations jealous. But on the other hand, thanks to the fairly good terms of service, Finland generally managed to recruit good quality people and staff was mostly very competent, dedicated and hard working.

Even if the work as such was interesting, the everyday life in theatre in a military camp can be dreary. People work long hours at their posts – staff officers

longer than most. The isolation and the monotony of being stuck at your desk at the office or in camp or just in theatre can be stressful in itself. Being inside the military hierarchy without any real off-hours can also be a stress factor. But in my mind this was all part of the challenge – and part of the experience. It was interesting to test how one deals with all the different aspects of working in this environment.

Overall, however, my stay was not really characterized by isolation or monotony, but rather by trying to be in two places at the same time. It wasn't quite possible for me to just drop everything in my civilian life when I deployed. I had commitments to my family, my practice and my firm, as well as to my academic endeavors. I had to make sure I was online, and had my mobile on. I had to make sure that the firm got hold of me, but also had to be careful not to make it too evident I was in Afghanistan – not the kind of thing clients want to hear about. It just doesn't work telling people in the business community that in fact you are in Afghanistan participating in a small scale war, while having this phone call. The added challenge was that there were just two spots inside our compound with good mobile reception. So I would stand in the middle of our front yard usually late at night and make work calls. Occasionally I had to go on mute as helicopters passed overhead, or fighters took off from the airfield – they make an unbelievable noise.

I called my family every night on our welfare line – a local Finnish line with VOIP. We had planned to talk on Skype with video contacts, but the welfare net broadband width didn't allow for that. But I did call often – it was certainly good to hear from my family. At times, though, it was not fun to notice how tired my wife was from looking after the household on her own – and her work – and our son – and the pets.

In the beginning I had some difficulty finding time for academic work. I had worked 13-15 hours a day on my research at Harvard and was making good progress. But now I had a different job and could not keep up with my academic work in the same way. It took some effort to get up to speed on the Afghan environment. But soon I found the right balance allowing me to do a good job on the intel side, but still leave some time to take my doctorate forward. I couldn't afford to have my work just stand still.

***Back from Leave***

9 August 2012

*"I have now been back from my last leave for a few days. Same long-haul overnight flight arriving at dawn with a stop-over in northern Turkey that breaks the flight sufficiently to prevent any chance of sleep longer than a cat nap. The charter plane legroom didn't allow any sense of comfort either, of course. Hauling my gear from the airstrip back to our compound as the sun rises over the camp; sitting down for a cup of coffee and waiting until the guys wake up; same summary of 'nothing of interest has really happened in theatre, but oh yeah you missed the last trip to Kabul' or something like that; then to sleep until the early afternoon, and groggily back to my desk but already with the understanding that nothing very useful will come out of today.*

*Only a few weeks left of the tour but time is moving veeery slooooowly; trying to read up on reports, going to meetings; thoughts already back at home and at the office; e-mails from clients; new projects. Not packing my gear yet, though, and trying to get my focus back on the job at hand.*

*It seems to be the case that there is always a bit too much of a hectic timetable during leave – to compensate for the lack of contact with my family over the periods I am here I suppose. Same story this time; it was almost so I had to come back to Afghanistan to rest from a ridiculous social schedule. But there were certainly a few highlights that brought a smile when thinking back. I spent a day or two in Stockholm with my wife waiting to pick up our boy when he arrived in Stockholm from his summer camp. Then back to our own little island for the weekend with a private crayfish party for two; and an evening making pancakes for a horde of hungry young sailors among the outer islands by the sea.*

*Afghanistan and the military had been pretty much absent from my mind during the whole leave – there had been plenty of activities to make sure of that. But once I was in uniform again and joined the others at the airport for the flight to Afghanistan I was back from civilian life again and ready to get into theatre again."*

# CHAPTER 5

# THE SOLDIER CLASS

### The Soldiers

There were soldiers from some 40 nations serving with ISAF. There were plenty of Americans everywhere, but also British and French soldiers, Canadians, Australians and soldiers from New Zealand. Camp Marmal was operated by the Germans, but also had Norwegians, Swedes, Finns, Czechs, Danes, Dutchmen, Latvians and believe it or not, Mongolians. So how and why did the Mongols get to Afghanistan from their plains and, more interestingly, what were the beautiful Norwegian blonds with their plaited hair doing here?

For most soldiers in active service this was just part of the job. They pulled guard duty and went on patrol, they were out on operations, spent their free time in the gym and by their computers. They were not happy being away from their families, but reasonably relieved to be serving in northern Afghanistan rather than in the more dangerous southern parts of the country. It seemed that soldiering was not just a job but a life-style.

There were plenty of officers and NCOs in our camps for whom serving in Afghanistan was a part of the career ladder. For them this was what their careers were about – commanding men and women in a theatre of operations, or working in a staff function in an operational HQ. For career officers especially this was the place to perform. The career officers I saw worked very long hours with their troops or at their designated desks and computer screens. But then again it is a bit difficult not to put in every ounce of effort you have when you are a professional soldier working in the middle of armed conflict.

With regard to the folks with more kinetic tasks the SOF stood out in every way. They were really the troops making a significant tactical effect. SOF made their jobs look easy. But when I saw how they prepared I understood that a lot of experience and skill went into their work. They were usually more mature, intelligent and very athletic people. It was always a pleasure to see that we had people like that on our side.

Many of the young men and women in theatre were looking for adventure, and the retired career soldiers were making some extra money from an extra tour. I heard someone say how her tour was paying for a year of college for her eldest child. Some of the Finns were on their umpteenth tour – they would enlist for a new tour as soon as they got home from the last one. For many the tour was used to finance a new car or a remodeling of the house. Everyone had his or her reasons to be there.

It seemed to me, however, that there were some major differences in the types of soldiers who were serving in Afghanistan and how that was reflected in the type of operations their respective countries carried out. To me it seemed that the social class of soldiers varied when comparing the different contingents and that this related to the level of acceptable risks taken by different countries in their operations, to the infrastructure they built for their troops, to the length of tours, and even tactics. Some countries can better take casualties while others really cannot. The reasons, I believe, are in part related to class structure.

In many countries soldiers came from a lower social class – especially perhaps in countries with professional armies. It seemed that these countries also had clearer class distinctions. The United Kingdom, for example, has long military traditions and experience of overseas campaigns. They also have a large warrior class. I cannot claim to have enough expertise to make any solid analysis of the social structure of the British army, but based on my observations it would seem that a large portion of the fighting men and women do come from the lower classes. Some officers still represent the upper classes – even royalty as we all are aware. But the main burden of casualties and the tragedies of war seem to be carried by representatives of a lower class.

In the United States, soldiers were driven by a combination of patriotism and financial incentives. Many of the U.S. soldiers come from lower social classes and clearly are in the army for financial reasons[12]. They seem almost to enter

12 See Amy Lutz, *Who Joins the Military?: A Look at race, Class, and Immigration Status, Journal of Political and Military Sociology* 36(2): 167-188, 2008

into a Faustian financial deal with the government. The army promotes you economically providing schooling and perhaps even giving you a basis for a future career – but first you give them a number of years in harm's way. The people who sign up for the deal seem to be the ones who really need that financial deal.

In some other countries class structures are less clear cut, or a larger portion of the soldiers come from the middle class (even if from its lower echelons). The soldiers in the Nordic contingents, for example, to me seemed to represent the middle class. In Finland people have traditionally joked that Finnish peacekeepers actually need to be rather well off to afford the investment in the tax free car that used to be a key incentive for many to apply for deployment overseas. But on the whole people were somewhat ambitious and educated. It is possible that in fact our lower classes would not qualify for military service overseas. The criteria currently are such that some level of education and skill is necessary to be recruited in the first place.

When I observed the infrastructure that different countries provided to their troops I wondered whether that also reflected the class of people who would use it. It seemed to me that the offices, chairs and desks and services for contingents with a large "warrior class" looked more like something you would see in a blacksmith's shop while the housing and common areas for other countries might have looked like country clubs. It seemed that the infrastructure was just planned to be used by different kinds of people. One should not generalize too broadly, however. Many countries were in Afghanistan actually fighting a war, while others were there clearly for other reasons, and this might also have been reflected in the infrastructure.

The question I also had to ask was whether the social class of soldiers affected the risk levels their countries were willing to accept politically with regard to their activities in theatre. Did countries with soldiers from lower social classes accept casualties better than countries where soldiers were middle class and have a larger political footstep? Intuitively one might assume that these countries would not be comfortable with casualties, as they will have political implications sooner than in countries where the soldier class has less political influence. I do not have enough information to make any claims in this regard, but the question seems relevant.

### Soldier or Civilian?

In the army everyone from the cook to the commander is a soldier and feels like a soldier. You feel that you represent your unit, your mission and your country. By comparison, if you work in the copy room of a large conglomerate it may not matter that much whether it is corporation A, B or C. In that sense it seems to me the military has done a good job in branding what it is about.

Many people working for the military are not looking for the best buck, but specifically want to work for the armed forces. Perceived job security may be behind this, but so does some perception of patriotism and willingness to serve. I understand, for example, that outsourcing in the Finnish army has been difficult because personnel specifically want to work for the armed forces instead of a service company. When you place them with a contractor they no longer accept the same terms of pay.

I did like the concept that being a reserve officer allowed one to maintain a close relationship with the military. Every so often you could jump into a military role taking the experience you have obtained in your civilian career to apply it towards a military function for a while; then return back to "real life" again. The army gets to borrow high quality human assets for a period of time, while the individual gets a stimulating experience and a refreshing break from work, and the civilian business gets a motivated employee who is wired to deal with challenging circumstances.

Having served with the military on occasion, and having some insight into how the organization works I think, on the whole, the Finnish military does a good job and can be proud of the quality of its personnel. But this has to be seen in relation to the investments made in the military and to how military organizations generally can be expected to perform. I found that many people working for the army were smart, very dedicated and driven by patriotic motives. The army provides a sense of identity, pride and purpose of mission. It also seems that the military does offer something unique as an employer that I cannot completely identify. Many of the employees are dedicated to the organization even though they have undergone years, if not decades, of on-going down-sizing and restructuring. I wonder how corporate organizations would have managed in similar circumstances. So overall this seemed like an organization with a soul.

But there was certainly another side of the medal. The military is still a government bureaucracy and, as governments do, performs at the C+ level as an organization at best. A lot of the staff put in long hours and the career officers work very hard but the performance of the organization is still mediocre. It tends to hold back people with skill and ambition who could perform at a much higher level. The possibility for promotions depends on time served, and the system does not seem to encourage people to perform beyond their pay grade. My own organization (the law firm) is not perfect either, of course. But we actively strive to be best at what we do and face fierce competition that we have to stand up to. So we just cannot afford to perform at less than full capability or we would go out of business. The organization has to be agile and has to be open to new ideas and development proposals. The environment in the corporate world is less static and dusty, from what I can see, than the public sector which has less benchmarking or competition to keep the organizations on their toes.

A civilian with over 30 years in the military once summarized the key to understanding the military organization like this. The army is a sandbox for the higher officer corps – i.e. those elected for higher staff duties. They change jobs every three years or so running one unit or post after another as they climb the career ladder. The best you can do is to maintain your office and ensure that nothing significant happens. If you over-perform it creates unnecessary expectations for your successor. And if something negative should happen, it is best brushed under the carpet and kept there by strong collegiality. I don't have sufficient experience to assess the accuracy of this view, but career officers to whom I have recounted this description have pretty much confirmed it's not too far from how things really work.

To me the organization of the armed forces seems remote and the military altogether seems somewhat removed from real society. This is, I believe, the case in most societies that live in peace around the world. The military form their own little world and society with its own systems and don't interact too much with civilian society. Who am I to question the wisdom of this arrangement – but it does seem counterproductive to me.

A system where the military would have more interaction with civilian society seems healthier. As a layperson I would advocate for a system where people have better chances to move between military and civilian careers, where officer training would also provide for jobs outside of the military. At the same

time, the military would provide interesting short careers for young men and women who want to experience that life, and then prepare them for careers and lives in civilian society as well. Now officers and others soldiers in Finland are rather stuck with their employer, which does not seem to be a good idea. I recognize that military technology is increasingly complex and it is difficult to have reservists and other amateurs handling weapons systems. But I do feel that the military has much to give to society. It places demands on people that they no longer face in other walks of life, and challenges them in a constructive way.

### The Wrong Way, the Right Way and the Army Way

A funny, yet frustrating, feature in the military is the formal bureaucratic process that they apply in operational and administrative matters alike. Basically, in any matter in which you need to consult or make inquiries with different military offices or units you need to address the issue through formal channels at the appropriate level of seniority in your own unit who will forward the request to the points of contact in the other unit, who will send it down the line to the persons in charge of finding an answer to your inquiry.

If I had a legal question in Afghanistan, for example, I should first take the matter to my CO, who would forward the question to the superior of our local legal adviser. The legal adviser would then be asked to look at the question and would, likely, forward it to the legal office of the headquarters in Finland that is responsible for the operations in Afghanistan. Their legal team might well forward it again through proper channels to the legal office at the Finnish Defense Command. This would take a while, as you might guess. Questions I sent down this line were never answered during my time in theatre. The questions I sent had direct operational impact, and in any normal organization would have been answered within a few days.

I understand that in operational matters it is important to follow the military hierarchy strictly so that the military effort was coordinated, that tactical decisions were in line with strategy and, basically, that people were shooting at the right targets at the right time. But the same process is not very effective for administrative matters. It leads to an incredibly ineffective and expensive administration that leaves anyone trying to take something forward in quick tempo rather frustrated. It is easy to think that the same organizational structures that work for the core business of the military, conducting military operations, will

also work in other areas. But I think the system also protected senior officers. As the people working for them did not have the right to manage things independently, they did not have to make an effort to stay on top of what was going on.

My solution to the problem lay in the fact that I was a reserve officer and would go back to my real job after the mission, so I was not really dependent on the military in any way. I would not care too much about the administrative requirements or proper channels when it did not suit me. When I could find the right phone numbers I would call the right people directly. I might get hollered at but what did I care? I just made sure I did nothing that would be compromising or that my superiors would not find useful at the end of the day.

# ACT III

## THEATRE INTELLIGENCE

# CHAPTER 6

# THE INTELLIGENCE TRADE

The intelligence perspective provides valuable insights into security and politics. Intelligence offers the right set of questions for identifying different alternative outcomes as well as the processes and analytical tools for assessing how likely these different scenarios might be. Importantly, the intelligence community also has special assets available to find answers to these questions. However, intelligence also has its own dynamic that affects how the work is done.

## Why Intelligence Fails

A critical report on how U.S. and coalition intelligence functioned in Afghanistan came out in 2010. The report had been drawn up by the senior U.S. military intelligence officer in theatre, a major general, together with his staff officers[13]. The report criticized the whole mindset of the intelligence operation in Afghanistan and its lack of appreciation for the nature of the conflict.

Afghanistan had proven to be a more complex theatre of war than expected. A theatre of war is traditionally defined as the space in which significant military operations take place. In most cases, the theatre is defined in geographic terms of sea, air and land, where lines are held or offensive operations conducted, or areas are controlled or denied from the opposing forces. The U.S. report suggested that the intelligence community had adopted an overly traditional view of the theatre of operations, focusing solely on detailed analysis of the "enemy" and of insurgent cells.

13 Major General Michael T. Flynn, Captain Matt Pottinger, Paul D. Batchelor, *Fixing Intel: A Blueprint for Making Intelligence Relevant in Afghanistan*, 2010

But in Afghanistan that type of intelligence was not so relevant. The theatre in Afghanistan is less characterized by opposing forces or lines of battle. Instead, it is about the challenges of international intervention in an environment with weak social infrastructure, political instability and lack of economic growth. Indeed, more recently the theatre of war has also been understood to include society, politics and the economy. Without political or economic strategies a military strategy has little chance of success on an asymmetric battle-field such as this one. And that is what makes Afghanistan so interesting. There were numerous analyses and reports of how initial strategies had failed in Afghanistan, how the lessons of the past had been forgotten and how the international community had failed in a nation building exercise it probably never should have undertaken.

The report argued that the whole U.S. intelligence community was only "marginally relevant to the overall strategy". The intelligence community was "unable to answer fundamental questions about the environment in which U.S. and allied forces operate and the people they seek to persuade. Ignorant of local economics and landowners, hazy about who the powerbrokers are and how they might be influenced, incurious about the correlations between various development projects and the levels of cooperation among the villagers, and disengaged from people in the best position to find answers – whether aid workers or Afghan soldiers – U.S. intelligence officers and analysts can do little but shrug in response to high level decision-makers seeking the knowledge, analysis and information they need to wage a successful counterinsurgency"[14].

There have been many examples of intelligence failures in recent history. The fact that no weapons of mass destruction were actually found in Iraq was a considerable embarrassment for the political leadership in the United States and the United Kingdom, for example. Other dramatic examples include the fall of the Berlin Wall or the combined attacks on Israel at the outset of the Yom Kippur war. Many intelligence theorists have addressed the reasons for intelligence failures. Some have blamed the adoption of fixed notions of the political or military basis for action by an opposing force. Others have focused on insufficient theoretical models for analyzing information. In my experience both reasons are correct.

As far as I have seen, a key reason for intelligence failure is that intelligence uncritically adopts the doctrine and strategies of its own side and looks at the

14 Ibid. at p. 7

phenomena on the battle field from a tainted perspective. In other words, you believe your own propaganda. It seems that this was part of what the U.S. report from 2010 had found as well. The intelligence branch operated based on the strategy adopted by the U.S. forces and provided the type of intelligence that it thought the operational branches needed to support their strategy. The problem was that as the strategy was flawed so was the focus of the intelligence operations and so was the interpretation of the phenomena and data points that were observed.

If intelligence is clearly subordinated to the operational branches it will serve their intentions. But the risk is that the intelligence branch produces exactly what operations wants to hear without being sufficiently detached and objective. To some extent this is what I experienced when discussing with many of the intelligence units working closely with the operational side of the campaign. It seemed that many analysts had truly adopted the ISAF mission and the strategy as their own and lacked perhaps some distance from the campaign. As a result the integrity of their reporting could easily suffer.

The same observation has been made in comparing analysis of CIA and U.S. military intelligence in relation to the situation in Afghanistan. CIA analysts who were kept separate from their operational divisions seemed to have provided consistently more negative – and more accurate – assessments of the Afghan situation than their military counterparts[15]. It was similarly observed that military intelligence had changed their evaluations based on the requirements of the operational command.

Another aspect of intelligence in an international theatre of operations is that the missions are driven by complex political goals. Participating nations each have their own agendas for participating in the mission; the military establishments have their own political interests (i.e. sufficient funding) as do the local players. In Afghanistan what was being reported through the international channels was tainted by politics and by the interests of whoever was producing the information. We got to hear what someone wanted us to hear. Afghans would make sure reporting suggested that more funds and support would be needed for years to come but that the operation was making some progress. The United States would make sure reporting supported their agenda of controlled retrograde, and the political establishment wanted to make sure report-

15 Sherard Cowper-Coles, *Cables from Kabul*, 2011, p.54

ing supported the notion that the international community would be able to put a positive spin on the mission back home.

Intelligence can be controversial. Intelligence services operate to some extent outside the operational chain of command and do not fit comfortably in the military hierarchy. A significant cause of friction between the intelligence services and the operational leadership is that intelligence services can sometimes provide information or analysis that is not in line with reporting within the operational chain of command.

Operational reporting is sometimes a bit self-serving so that findings tend to support operational goals, whereas intelligence services can sometimes provide overly pessimistic estimates. There is some embarrassment if intelligence suggests that the overall campaign strategy is based on faulty premises or that real circumstances do not support the expected outcome of the campaign. There is a good example from Finland in World War II, where the head of Finnish military intelligence briefed the political leadership about the situation and provided a blunt estimate that the war would be lost – over two years before the war finally ended much as he predicted. He was severely chastised by politicians and accused of defeatism or worse. There were also times during the war when the head of operations of the Finnish military ordered intelligence to change its negative reports before they were provided to the supreme commander.

In a hierarchic organization such as the military, conflicting reports tend to cause almost an amusing degree of alarm in the higher echelons when, in fact, differences of opinion could at times actually provide deeper insight into complex situations. However, in order to maintain rapport with the operational side it often makes sense to take some steps not to make them look bad.

Overall, intelligence services are sometimes caught between a rock and a hard place. Sometimes intelligence is deemed too far removed from operations, and the service is accused for not making a contribution. And sometimes intelligence is too close and subservient to the operational branch and loses its integrity. So in many situations intelligence services are treated with suspicion due to the nature of the trade, as other branches want to have them under their control or when their findings are often controversial. So it was in Afghanistan.

It was important to look through the several layers of the fog of war, and the smoke and mirrors of the many political agendas, to figure out what was really

going on. Below, I share some experiences of intelligence work on a general level, but will not of course discuss any operational matters I have worked with. Nevertheless, I hope that this gives a picture of the "intelligence perspective" that I believe can provide much added value to political and military decision making.

### The Intelligence Perspective

There are plenty of guides to the methods used in intelligence work[16], and this is not the place to give an overview of intelligence as such, but merely to reflect on my own experiences of that work. My views on intelligence will be limited to the structure and general modus operandi of how this work is done. But the account will not discuss any classified issues or any aspects of my work related to operational capabilities or tactical operations. As a result, certain descriptions or references may seem imprecise or unclear by necessity.

Intelligence work is the process whereby information is obtained, processed and analyzed to support military and political decision making. Intelligence can identify threats and targets, explain and analyze situations and increase situational awareness and security. An analysis of this information can result in predictions of possible scenarios and recommendations on possible courses of action.

In the military context intelligence can vary from obtaining information on battlefield conditions and the strength of the enemy to analysis of regional political stability. In this regard there are three different levels of intelligence – strategic, operational and tactical.

At the strategic level the intention is to obtain information to support the highest level of military and political decision making. Issues to address include the political structure and stability of the forces that are being analyzed, their overall economic resources, as well as their capabilities and intentions. To be able to support political decision making at this level national intelligence services need to be equipped with high quality analytical human resources with skills in geopolitics, as well as in regional politics, economics, police and security expertise and expertise in military issues. Needless to say it is not always the case that such resources are available.

In Afghanistan, strategic level intelligence might mean obtaining information that supported situational awareness on a national level and domestic deci-

16 See Michael Herman, *Intelligence Power in Peace and War*, 1996 and Robert M. Clark, *Intelligence Analysis, a Target-Centric Approach*, 2nd. ed., 2003

sion making about participation in the ISAF operation in general, for example. For the different troop contributing nations it may have been just as important (or more so) to focus on how contributing to the ISAF campaign was promoting their national policy goals than to put intelligence efforts on following the insurgency or even how the ISAF campaign was proceeding as such. The goals of the ISAF nations may well have varied and might not necessarily be tied to the development of the security situation in Afghanistan or the greater well-being of the Afghan people at all, though that might have been a beneficial byproduct of participation. The real goals of participation in the Afghanistan mission might be linked to different national foreign policy goals and the nations' roles in the international community.

Operational level intelligence is related to obtaining information to support decision making in relation to a specific military operation. In an operational military context the process starts with intelligence preparation of the battlefield. You identify and analyze the operational environment, different factors that can affect your operation, threats, and then alternative courses of action. In traditional military contexts the environment means the geographical factors you have to face, while in counterinsurgency or asymmetric warfare the most important aspects can be the social and economic factors in the society that in effect is the battlefield. Here it seemed that intelligence in Afghanistan had been weak over the years.

At the tactical level, intelligence is obtained on the environment immediately preceding or during operations to support the battle. This could include sending out scouts to reconnaissance enemy positions, or using a drone to get live feed of the enemy. UAVs were a fantastic asset that saved human lives in battle situations. A small aerial vehicle could be launched manually and could produce live video footage from areas behind walls or other obstructions so that troops knew in which directions the opposing forces were positioned. It was certainly interesting to see footage showing the dynamics of firefights.

### Strategic and Political Analysis

There are several methods of intelligence analysis that can be used to resolve different types of problems. Often intelligence analysis might relate to the likelihood of different scenarios and outcomes in political or military developments. Intelligence could be asked to assess what steps the opposing force

(or a friendly force) might take in order for your own forces to be able to be prepared. The question can be approached by establishing what resources the target has available (means) and what policies or interests the target might wish to pursue (will). Figuring this out involves acquiring a lot of information that may or may not be in the public domain. Here different sub-inquiries might be needed to establish the whole framework for the broader intelligence questions.

The next step would be to draw up different scenarios of how the situation might develop and then start shooting them down one by one. In intelligence analysis it is important not to focus on the likelihood of a single outcome but to look at as many scenarios as possible and try to prove each one wrong. The one least wrong might be the most likely outcome.

To me it seemed that intelligence work at the political or strategic level is really about taking an analytical or scientific approach to a problem. You identify a research question and then use different analytical tools to address the question. You make assumptions and form hypothesis that you test and try to rule out based on empirical evidence, for example.

Very often the testing is not the real problem. It is not so difficult to get data points that you can test your hypothesis on. Very often analysis goes wrong at the start when the questions you seek to answer are not correctly chosen or the basic assumptions of cause and effect are wrong. To me it seemed that the key issue is to understand the phenomena you are analyzing and identify the correct research questions (or hypothesis). Then the data might actually already be sitting right there in front of your eyes. Sometimes, you might have to use some alternative tools (obtained by covert means, for example) to get the data points, but to me the focus was really on "getting it". And "getting" Afghanistan was certainly not easy.

For example, someone might reasonably analyze the security situation of a given region based on the number of security incidents or kinetic action during a given period and compare it with similar data from previous periods. It makes sense, at face value, that based on the number and intensity of firefights or insurgent attacks one can make an assessment of the security situation. If there is a lot of kinetic action, the area is not safe, and if there is little action, the area might be deemed safer. For empirical testing it would be relevant to get accurate data on security incidents, to check whether the data points are reliable and whether external abnormalities make the different periods comparable, for

example. This is not as easy as it sounds, since getting reliable information and reporting in a theatre of operations is no simple task. You might never hear of smaller battles between local Afghan units and small Taliban (or bandit) units in areas where ISAF no longer operates, and reporting might be very unreliable in general in a very demanding and difficult environment. But the basic question is still pretty straight forward.

However, in an insurgency setting the whole question might be wrong. There might not be security incidents in a given area because it is already completely under insurgent control. The locals might have given up any hope of resistance and the insurgents could have complete freedom of movement and be able to control the population (i.e. they would have "won"). The lack of kinetic action might also just depend on the fact that no coalition forces have entered insurgent controlled areas. Many areas in Afghanistan are very remote and difficult to access, and ISAF operations certainly did not cover the whole country anymore. As ISAF forces were starting to withdraw and limited their movements, it could be expected that there would be a decrease in kinetic action. The insurgents could afford simply to avoid contact with ISAF and wait until the Western forces left. So the fact that no security incidents were reported may not really mean that much. On the other hand, the fact that insurgents had to use force against the local population might be a show of weakness and reflect the fact that they had not been able to control the population, who were resisting. So signs of kinetic action in a region might, in fact, tell you that the coalition still had a chance to "win" in that area. It might also show that there was security in the area, because you still at least had someone there who was putting up a fight against the insurgents. Security incidents might also relate to criminals and feuds that could be deemed more or less "Afghan normal" in a society where violence had dominated for decades.

To properly analyze the security situation in an insurgency situation, the whole set of research questions should be set based on understanding what an insurgency is, how it develops and how it can be "measured". One would first have to ask what the "telltales" of the effects of an insurgency are so that they can be measured. Insurgencies are mainly social phenomena so the "telltales" might be how the development of the political power of insurgents is reflected in the surrounding society. The data sets one ends up with could well be related to behavioral patterns of the local population and might in fact be very easy to

identify and calculate by just asking people. In fact, sociological research methods actually fit quite nicely in analyzing insurgencies and, not surprisingly, there are a considerable number of reports of this nature in the public domain[17].

There have been refreshingly different approaches to analyzing insurgencies as well. A team of physicists in the United States wrote a paper on quantifying insurgencies as human behavior in a mathematical formula[18]. They had obtained data points from public sources from a number of insurgencies around the world in the past decades from North Ireland and Peru to Iraq and Afghanistan. They used mainly news clippings of security incidents as representative data points of the intensity of the insurgency. Interestingly, the development of the insurgencies in the conflicts they studied were very similar. The result of the mathematical formula for an active consistent insurgency was a constant, in fact (approximately 2.5).

The researchers explained that if the number started changing, it was the result of the insurgency either starting to disintegrate or strengthen so that they would ultimately be victorious. I found the study very interesting. It defined insurgency as a pattern of human behavior that could be quantified. They argued that in order to be effective and to survive insurgents had to continuously develop their modus operandi against the incumbents who were fighting them – resulting in an increase of the effects of the insurgents. The incumbent force would then react to the changed modus operandi thus decreasing the impact of the insurgency. This would go on, as it had gone on in Afghanistan, with insurgents changing tactics from open battle to IEDs and suicide bombs. I was really keen to find out in what direction the number for Afghanistan was developing over the past few years. I suspected that it was not changing significantly.

### Drones in the Sky and Spies on the Ground

To be able to analyze information you have to get hold of that information. Intelligence operations can be very demanding as the information to be obtained is often secret and protected by other parties. Moreover, it is often important that it is not known that someone, an intelligence service in particular, is seeking such information. So getting hold of the right information can be really hard work, and requires the use of every trick in the book. Intelligence work can be broken down based on the methods of how information is obtained. Some of these are described briefly from my own perspective.

17 See surveys of the Asia Foundation available at http://afghansurvey.asiafoundation.org/

18 See Juan Camilo Bohorquez, Sean Gourley, Alexander R. Dixon, Michael Spagat & Neil F. Johnson, Common ecology quantifies human insurgency, Nature 462, 911-914 (17 December 2009)

OSINT: Open source intelligence refers to information obtained by normal means from public or other open sources. In the intelligence community it is often said that more than 90 percent of the information you are looking for is publicly available, but that the remaining 10 percent is what counts, and that is what the intelligence services are there for. Very often it is possible to more or less deduct what that 10 percent will be based on publicly available information and open source analysis often provides an excellent basis for strategic and political analysis. It seems to me, for example, that one can produce high quality analysis on Afghan political and military development based on public sources alone. However, classified operational data can confirm your assumptions or can help you analyze a situation in a much shorter timeframe.

One might question whether open source information can be called "intelligence" at all in the traditional sense. There are no secrets that are being obtained, and no covert elements necessarily involved. Some intelligence agencies explicitly leave this work to others and focus on obtaining secrets only. However, in my experience it is the kind of perspective you take that sets you apart as an intelligence officer. It is the questions you are getting answers to that are the key issue – it matters less how you get the answers. It is putting pieces together that as single incidents do not really signify but as a pattern can tell you what someone is up to. An intelligence officer can certainly create added value to decision making processes even without access to any confidential information or special means to obtain such information. Sources needed for strategic level intelligence are often mostly available in the public domain. So more often than not you would be able to do quite accurate strategic analysis based almost entirely on publicly available information. However, access to confidential information may allow for faster verification of assumptions or better data points that can be measured to support the analysis.

HUMINT: Human intelligence is the classic form of intelligence, where intelligence officers seek to recruit agents to acquire information they have access to that is not in the public domain. Someone with an interesting position and some vulnerability that can be exploited makes the perfect target: An officer whose career is not quite going to plan or who has debts or a drinking habit; a lonely secretary who works in an interesting office and is looking for companionship; or someone with an ideological or ethnic loyalty. Intelligence services can make use of a person's bitterness or vindictiveness, and give him or her new

purpose – at a price, of course. So called "honey traps" can be used to place people in awkward situations – supported with photographs if necessary. These are the classic examples. But human intelligence can also take place without recruiting by meeting with a source and just interviewing him or her directly, or by more covert or indirect means so that the source is not aware of the real identity of the intelligence officer or the reasons for the inquiry. Sometimes a direct approach can work very well, but more often than not you want to ask questions in a manner that does not reveal what your real interest is. The fact that an intelligence agency is concerned by one or another issue is in itself classified information.

And this is what can make the work difficult. These restraints can make productivity seem rather low – one would have to put in a lot of time and effort to obtain a minor piece of information without letting on why these questions were being asked. Going about it in a more direct manner would have revealed the tasks and mission of the agency to someone who was not supposed to know.

IMINT: Image intelligence refers to surveillance by satellites or drones, for example. One can assume that Afghanistan was full of the most advanced intelligence assets available. There probably weren't many places in the country that could not be made subject to continuous surveillance. News reports abound of how drones can monitor suspected insurgent activity for days until it is appropriate to act on the information. Drones can also routinely support coalition troops in TIC situations, if needed, with video feed or indirect fire.

Among my favorite features in the Afghan skyline were the blimps that floated above any major camp or other outpost[19]. The blimps were typically armed with extremely powerful cameras and could monitor activity over a very broad geographical range around sensitive objects or along roads, for example. The blimps that I saw in Afghanistan were white huge things that for some reason reminded me of Snoopy's snout. It always gave a small feeling of comfort to look up to "Snoopy", who was watching over us.

SIGINT: Signals intelligence refers to surveillance of radio transmissions and telecommunications, for example. Based on the number of AWACS planes that kept taking off, every kind of advanced SIGINT must certainly have been in use. I did not work with SIGINT and remain happily uninformed of the available capabilities. Nevertheless, I assumed that mobile phone traffic had to be monitored. But I imagine that SIGINT must also be very effective. Though I

19 See *The New York Times*, Spy Balloons Become Part of the Afghanistan Landscape, Stirring Unease, May 12, 2012

am sure insurgents must have been aware that any communications would be monitored if at all possible and must have learned that by now and taken available precautions, such as using prepaid phones or going "low-tech" by using messengers to relay traffic from commanders.

### Operators and Analysts

Jobs in the intelligence community include two main forms – jobs related to obtaining information and conducting intelligence related operations (surveillance, handling of agents, covert operations etc.) and jobs related to drawing conclusions or analyzing information acquired in this way. I have had the opportunity to work with representatives from both fields and can vouch that this is a very effective set up.

#### *Operators*

Obtaining information can often involve operational work; i.e. going out and using OSINT, HUMINT, SIGINT etc. to get requested data points. Operators also work with special forces operations or covert action only indirectly related to intelligence. This work can be very independent and exciting.

People involved in this work are often more mature in age and character and are extremely professional. The operations -side of intelligence can be dangerous and physically demanding. It can require advanced tactical skills and usually involves special forces in the military or specially trained operators on the civilian side. Out of necessity these people will generally be very fit and have excellent tactical skills, such as shooting, close combat and tactical movement. Due to these requirements operators may sometimes have a little trouble looking "civilian". In some cases being a bit too smart may also get you into trouble. A U.S. diplomat was caught in Moscow in 2013 moving around with two wigs and a compass, which pretty much gave away what he was really up to. In most cases, however, operators will blend into the crowd with a little ingenuity and a good cover story.

Special forces and other operator units typically keep to themselves. They keep outside the normal operational chain of command and are not a part of the ordinary contingents. They are often billeted in separate compounds and work within the special forces chain of command. So one generally does not

come into too much contact with these units. To the extent we have worked together I have found special forces excellent people to do business with. Operational planning is usually of a high quality, and procedures are well established and followed. Senior people are involved in leading the operations, and the use of force is "smart". The risks are carefully weighed against the benefits of the operation, and the whole process is characterized by skill and intelligence rather than any gung-ho mentality. One can also be impressed by how the operations are executed. You have very skilled and street smart tactical teams supported in many instances by state of the art technology. Intelligence related operations are usually conducted at the level of regional or theatre headquarters, so they get direct access to the best assets that are available.

But at the same time operations-related work is usually very tactical and local. It might mean you spend a week inside a car trunk or other more or less comfortable OP and keep a look out. Or if you conduct a more kinetic operation (detention, for example) you will have practiced and practiced and practiced, and practiced some more for an operation that lasts half a day. Operators are also usually dependent on a large logistical support function. Their ability to operate independently is somewhat limited in time and substance. They can do specially tailored short operations very well, but not really independent long term impact operations.

The operators also need someone telling them what to do. The operational level is certainly good at running operations, but those operations have to be meaningful to have any point. In this respect they need a strong intelligence driven management for tasking purposes. There also needs to be a strong link between the operational needs and the intelligence operations. Special operations need to serve the needs of the overall strategy. In many cases, however, the operational side is not trained to take advantage of special forces and operators, and these assets may be underutilized. However, the other side of the intelligence community – the analysis functions – can easily find tasks for the operators. There is always so much more information out there that can be collected, so many sources and contacts to meet, so much work to be done.

#### *Analysts*

The analytical side of intelligence requires a whole different skill set. You want to have educated people with good analytical skills. You need different

types of people who understand economics and politics, how people behave and how society works. Military skills are also important, of course. You need to have officers available who understand from the available data points what kind of troops and units the opposition has available and what types of operations they are preparing. But you get into trouble if you only have people with a military or police background. You will lack perspectives that are vital to understanding what is going on in a theatre of operations.

Analytical work can be very interesting and stimulating, but you don't get out a lot. It is primarily an office job requiring lots of reading, meetings and writing. Yet if the agency where you work is small enough and you are skilled you may very well find yourself participating in operations in an expert role, for example. An analyst may be the right person to conduct an interview, if properly prepped, if he or she has the right expertise and background that works as a cover, for example. It's easy to claim to be a lawyer if you actually are a lawyer, for example. HUMINT operations might well allow analysts to "jump the fence" and join the ops teams.

# CHAPTER 7

# THE INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY

Working with the international intelligence community in Afghanistan gave me an opportunity to meet and work with representatives of the intelligence services of many different countries and helped me to better understand the basis for how national governments obtain information to support their policies. It was a privilege to be in a position such as this one and to be able to see how a complex modern military operation was being pursued. In my view this provided a grass-roots perspective on how international security policy was being executed.

I cannot discuss the details of my work but I can try to give some flavor of what my days looked like.

### On Business in Kabul

We tried to travel to Kabul as often as possible. It was clear to me that staying on top of what was happening in Afghanistan required regular visits to Kabul. I believed that the added value of anything I had to say was dependent on getting insights from people working in the capital.

The trip down to Kabul from our base in northern Afghanistan was just over an hour on a shuttle flight, but as this was a war zone things were not that straight forward. You might end up having flights canceled or delayed due to other priority flights, bad weather conditions, or security reasons. For example, a foreign colleague had ended up spending two or three days at Kabul airport

and couldn't get to her base just a mile or two away after a security incident had caused the airport and all ISAF bases to go into lock-down.

But our flight had not been canceled the morning we got ready for our first trip to Kabul. We biked over to the passenger terminal at the airport inside our camp with our gear and went through security to enter the terminal. There is something absurd when normal everyday procedures are applied in the military context. There was a security check, to be sure, but the only thing they pointed out was that I should take the clip out from my pistol. I don't know what they said about hand grenades; maybe you put those in the hold. In the terminal there was a bar and even a VIP lounge – a group of four chairs cordoned with a piece of rope.

Before we took off a group of officers in full battle rattle took the chopper shuttle to nearby camps. A resolute young brunette civilian came to pick up the assortment of colonels and majors for their ride. Then it was our turn, a quick drive in the jeep to an old turbo propeller plane. After we had been seated a close protection team walked in with their "package" and heavy equipment, then some private contractors and a few staff officers, and off we were.

It was a short hop over the Hindu Kush before we landed in Kabul, where the weather was much milder than up North. Kabul is at an altitude of 1800 meters so it's a bit cooler. We landed directly at the main base in Kabul, the ISAF operational HQ connected to the airport.

The office buildings were large two floor pre-constructed barracks with large rooms and low ceilings. Military personnel and civilians sat cramped behind rows and rows of computer screens. People were more or less locked to their screens for the duration of their tours. You had desk officers responsible for different regions, liaison officers, analysts and experts on a wide variety of issues. The machinery seemed to be hard at work.

Later in the morning we were picked up for meetings in and around Kabul. It was a quick drive from the airport, past the Massoud roundabout and the U.S. Embassy to the diplomatic quarters and the other parts of the city center that we visited. The basic rule for driving in Kabul was to keep moving. Our drivers kept the vehicle rolling the whole time – as best they could due to the traffic. We changed lanes, took a different route, and drove beside the road, but we pretty much kept moving the whole time. Another rule was to drive – if not

forcefully – at least decisively. The idea was to signal with your driving that you do not intend to stop or give way and seek to encourage the other drivers to make room for our vehicles. We also kept watch on the sides, and everybody in the vehicles was armed.

We carried plenty of equipment for personal security with us, including medical equipment and comms. It was all a bit bulky with my clothing, but these were just the minimum precautions for military personnel in these circumstances. For civilians Kabul might be a relatively safe city where you just had to be smart about how you move around. There have been kidnappings, however, and some reporters were shot in broad day-light, likely just for being foreigners. But we were not civilians, of course, nor "packages" to be protected by bodyguards. Certainly our primary modus operandi was to avoid any problems and to drive away and avert any bad situations. But if we would get stuck, we would have some firepower. My favorite in this regard would have been the handy H&K MP9 sub-machinegun that is not too bulky and uses a 9mm pistol cartridge but that certainly provides another level of accuracy over a handgun – a good weapon for business travel.

The expatriate scene in Kabul is relatively lively to my understanding. Due to security issues normal urban life is somewhat restricted and I understood that the diplomatic corps and the international community mainly socialized behind the walls of their compounds. Our experience this time was limited to a visit at one of the more western style restaurants. We chose a Lebanese restaurant for dinner for some reason. I believe the place was destroyed later in a suicide attack that killed a large score of the guests and the owner of the restaurant[20]. The Taliban had condemned the place for entertaining foreigners with an abundance of alcoholic beverages.

Restaurants in Kabul do not have fancy windows towards the street – or even signs actually. That would be like inviting someone to throw a bomb at you. Instead, it's just an anonymous gate in the wall. In many places you pass through multiple courtyards and guarded steel doors before you get in the actual sanctuary of the restaurant. This was a nice place with both locals and expats. Women wore scarves as they came in but could take them off during dinner. We saw the local powerbroker, the foreign company reps, the young in-love diplomat couple (too well dressed to be NGO staff) and a variety of expats. The food was good – I really appreciated the break from camp food. We ordered beers, which

20 *Washington Post*, 18 January 2014, Taliban attack on restaurant in Afghan capital kills at least 21, including two Americans

were served from coffee mugs. Wine would have been poured from a teapot – we were in an Islamic country after all.

Our accommodation in Kabul was completely adequate if Spartan. I slept on an afghan woven donkey sack and two yoga mats with my backpack as a pillow. While satisfactory under the circumstances, the yoga mats were not too comfortable and I woke with the first morning call to prayers between 4 and 5 a.m. Later in the morning we drove across the city for our first meetings. We talked shop, of course, but they also showed us a slide show someone had made from the previous Taliban attack on Kabul in September 2011. Basically, what happens in situations like that is that all camps, compounds and offices with international personnel go into lock-down – no one goes out anymore. Most personnel move to shelters and guards are deployed in key positions. Dedicated quick reaction forces respond to the situation while others are just responsible for staying out of the way and staying safe. The slide show mainly had pictures of people in flak-jackets being bored or scared in shelters, and taking cover behind walled compounds – appropriate battle experience for a staff officer, I imagine.

It was mainly the Afghan troops that were responsible for facing security threats like the ones described above. But in the attack in September 2011 they had not really pulled it off, and Western special operation forces and gunships had to come in and end the situation. But in spring 2012 they were already capable of dealing with attacks in Kabul. In the attack on Kabul in April 2012, there were at least three separate attacks and more than 20 insurgent fighters. Even if the number might seem low, the problem is that they were suicide fighters. So where normal soldiers would retreat and decide to face the enemy again another day, the Taliban resisted until all were dead (bar one, I think). This makes it far more difficult and costly to quell the attacks. The Afghans took serious casualties, unfortunately, in responding to these attacks.

After some further meetings we enjoyed a wonderful barbeque with steaks, salads and strawberries distracted only by the helicopters flying just over the house we were staying at. We retired early as we had to get to the airport on time and fly back to Marmal. This time we flew on a German military cargo plane together with a Toyota Land Cruiser strapped tightly behind us.

### The International Intelligence Community

Afghanistan was flooded with intelligence agencies and services from around the world. I make no claim of having identified the multitude of services present in Afghanistan, and to the extent I did I will not disclose it here. Intelligence agencies are typically structured so that different units are separated from each other, and many work quite independently. Meetings between agencies occur, of course, but are conducted in a way which protects confidentiality and the integrity of each unit.

The operational troops had their own intelligence functions, including technical ISR capabilities at different levels, special operations forces, as well as analysts at tactical, regional and theatre level. These intelligence assets supported the ISAF operations and reported to the operational side of ISAF. In this context the different nationalities seemed to work quite seamlessly together. The multinational headquarters were full with intelligence officers from a wide range of troop contributing nations. In addition to operational intelligence units, many troop contributing nations usually have representatives of their national intelligence organizations present in theatre. The function of these was to assess the situation from a national perspective and provide information to the decision makers at home with regard to intelligence related matters.

The Afghans also had their own intelligence service, the National Directorate of Security (NDS). The NDS was generally respected and it was deemed to be well connected and manned by relatively capable officers. However, the NDS of course had an Afghan agenda, and probably had a reasonably realistic picture of the overall situation.

Interaction in the international intelligence community was very interesting. There is a sense of community among intelligence officers. Everyone is bound by the same type of restrictions characteristic of a trade that requires confidentiality and that can be politically very sensitive. Everyone recognizes that interaction must be limited and that people cannot be as open as one would normally expect. It was clearly useful to exchange views with other representatives of the community. Generally intelligence has a fairly cynical view of how matters are likely to develop and in sharing opinions it was mainly different levels of gloom and frustration that were exchanged.

The situation in Afghanistan was highly political and the international in-

tervention was sensitive in political terms. So at this point there would be differing interests in how volatile, good or bad the situation in Afghanistan was perceived. This meant that it was far from clear that one could believe any information that came through official or unofficial channels regarding the development of the situation without independent verification. It was not clear that reports would be objective or would even try to give accurate information. Instead, reporting might well have the aim of supporting the agendas of whoever distributed it.

For these reasons there was, out of necessity, always a level of reserve in discussions between agencies. Even if everyone participated in the same mission it was not the case that everyone had the same principals, nor did these principals necessarily have identical interests. It is also not the case that sharing everything people knew would benefit principals equally. There was also a level of selfishness that one can meet when dealing with intelligence agencies from different countries. Information can be shared and traded, of course, but it would be far better if someone were to win in the trade. Information was a commodity, I learned, and some countries were a bit more selfish than others in trading that commodity.

There is a slight awkwardness in working closely with intelligence officers from other countries as everyone primarily had a national agenda. It was also the case that many people deployed in theatre worked with different intelligence tasks back home, and may have had their reasons not to share too much information about their backgrounds or even their personal information. It was polite to recognize this in how one interacted with colleagues from other countries. Surnames were not used and you did not ask too many personal questions. In dealing with foreign colleagues you were not supposed to be too friendly and people did keep their distance. There is a tradition of maintaining integrity in the intelligence community – of everyone understanding that we were supposed to be friends in business when it served our purposes, but not otherwise.

Intelligence people might be interesting targets to recruit, and any steps that might lead to an awkward situation should simply not be taken. With regard to integrity I was given a good tip. If faced with a situation that might get awkward – say an invitation for a lunch or drinks that seems a bit out of place - just bring along a colleague or two. Being in a crowd should ensure that no recruiting attempts will take place.

### National Interests First

When I looked at the situation in theatre, I felt that my first concern was not really the development of the situation in Afghanistan at all. As I saw it, the outcome of the Afghanistan campaign was not going to be affected one way or the other by the minute Finnish contingent. And at this stage the fate of the campaign was pretty much sealed anyway. The withdrawal schedule had been set, ISAF was pulling out of outlying regions and the Afghan local dynamic with tribes, warlords, smugglers, drug dealers and the Taliban was taking over. The situation would likely drift towards "Afghan normal" over time.

I wondered why we in Finland should really be concerned about the outcome of the political situation in Afghanistan in the first place? We had very little skin in the game beyond the safety of our men and women in theatre. So why even focus efforts on trying to understand the Afghan political Buzkashi scene or the state of the insurgency? Should they really be a primary concern?

What I was personally more interested in was how Finnish political goals were being met in our participation in the ISAF mission. Finland participates in overseas military operations mainly for reasons of foreign policy. We are a small country in a peaceful corner of the world (so far at least) with a rather homogenous population. We don't really have any independent security or other type of interest in Afghanistan. We have been largely left alone by Islamic terrorism – we have little immigration to start with, far less from Muslim countries.

Our security problems mainly arise due to a long eastern border with Russia, and in fact two of our main concerns in our foreign policy are to remain firmly anchored among the community of Western European countries and to maintain good relations with the United States. The reason we were in Afghanistan was because the United States wanted us to be there with them, and because our peers were there. These are both bona fide and valid reasons for participating in the mission. And, if we happen to simultaneously do something to develop Afghan society, so much the better.

With these premises the important question is whether our participation served these underlying goals effectively and cost-efficiently. Did we get credit for our participation? Were our partners happy with the kind of contribution we were making? Could we get the same political benefits with a different

(cheaper) contribution? Did we have national interests that could be served at the same time – like training or testing equipment or new tactics?

I did not get the feeling that there was a coordinated Finnish strategy for international peacekeeping or military crisis management. I question whether our international participation, including parts of our foreign policy, has really been geared to serving Finnish interests in the best and most cost-efficient manner. There didn't seem to be a core team at the political level who would have formulated a clear strategy and communicated it to the executive echelons.

It should be the case, of course, that a commander or military or political leaders make requests to intelligence for information that they believe they need to support their decision making. The intelligence services will then formulate specific questions for their operational units who go out and get that information based on the different methods described above (OSINT, HUMINT etc.). The acquired information is passed on to an analysis department and processed so that the questions can be answered. But many people in the intelligence community must share the experience that it is more often than not the intelligence department that makes its own information requests as no one on the operational side knows what to request.

Once matters and alternative courses of action became policy issues they would be raised to the political level and be affected by ever swaying political trends, which may not have allowed clear strategies to develop. The politicians working on these issues had to deal with the way the political winds were blowing, media reporting and the public mood. They did not really like setting exact and concise long-term policies or commitments that they could not later change. While I understand that this is how things largely work, I did not find it wholly satisfactory.

### A Finnish Intelligence Service?

While I was working in Afghanistan I could not help considering the status of the intelligence community in Finland. It is in the public domain that Finland does not really have a very organized foreign intelligence service to start with. The military has an intelligence branch, of course, and we have a security police force – the Finnish Security Intelligence Service. This service investigates activity that is related to government security. Matters that have been

in the public domain have varied from expelling foreign agents to monitoring environmental activists. But it seems that the service is not really an independent intelligence service that would provide satisfactory analytical support for political decision making, far less a foreign intelligence service with overseas capabilities.

The unit is trying to move towards being a full-fledged intelligence service. A head of the service has called for authorization to have covert officers abroad to expand the scope of the service[21]. When confronted with these concerns the Finnish minister of foreign affairs responded that Finland has no threats that would call for a foreign intelligence service[22] – which considering that all of our neighboring states have such services says a lot about how the Finnish government is run. Furthermore, only a year later it was revealed that, in fact, the foreign ministry information systems had been subject to a security breach and traffic had been monitored – possibly by the Chinese or Russians – for the past four years.

A recent report[23] has claimed that, in fact, the Finnish cabinet is not fully briefed by the ministries and has little access to classified intelligence. Instead, they mainly rely on media reporting, even if more information would be available in the government. This has resulted in the cabinet having unsatisfactory situational awareness in exceptional situations, for example. It was also reported that the cabinet and the office of the president have not exchanged information efficiently resulting in a sense of frustration at the highest levels of government. It seems to have been unclear, for example, whether the president has been fully briefed on foreign policy matters before meetings with foreign heads of state[24].

Considering that all of our neighboring countries have intelligence services with larger budgets than we do, and have more or less advanced foreign intelligence services as well, it is just not legitimate to state that a foreign intelligence service would not serve Finnish interests. As a citizen and tax payer, one would be entitled to expect our political leadership to be well informed of current events that can affect Finland and Finnish interests. We need a robust foreign intelligence service to help our political decision makers figure out what our neighbors are thinking, what their real goals are, and what the real goals of our peers and friends are. They won't always tell you.

21 Interview with Ilkka Salmi in *Helsingin Sanomat*, 18.11.2012

22 *Helsingin Sanomat*, 19.11.2012

23 Rauno Saari, Pääministerille ja valtioneuvoston jäsenille suunnattu tilannekuvatoiminta (*Situational Awareness Reporting to the Prime Minister and Cabinet Members*), The Finnish Prime Minister's Office, 2012

24 *Helsingin Sanomat*, Presidentille halutaan lisää EU-tietoa Putin-tapaamisiin (*More information wanted for the president for meetings with Putin*), 23.3.2013

I believe that our political leadership has, over recent years, come to better understand the need for better intelligence as international politics moves faster and decisions affecting us are increasingly taken in arenas where we are not necessarily present. Our government can't expect to figure out everything by reading the newspapers, far less by reading ambassadors' reports. Only very recently has there been more debate on the need for a Finnish foreign intelligence service and it seems that preparations may be underway to establish such a unit[25]. It is possible that the service would be connected to the current security police organization, which may or may not be the best idea. As discussed, the security police are focused on analyzing internal and external security threats and the mind-set may be very different from what would be needed for a foreign intelligence service that seeks to support political decision making with analysis and, when needed, special information. Nevertheless, the fact that the issue is being discussed may be a small step in the right direction and I would not rule out the possibility of Finland setting up a foreign intelligence service organization in the next few years.

25 *Helsingin Sanomat*, 22.12.2013

# CHAPTER 8

# THE LAWS OF INTELLIGENCE IN PEACE AND WAR

Military and intelligence operations can be very interesting for a lawyer. The use of military force and the covert nature of intelligence clearly pose significant legal challenges. At the same time international military operations and intelligence services are an integral part of our security in an increasingly complex world. It has been interesting to look at how military and intelligence operations are regulated and how the law deals with the challenges of the modern world. Not surprisingly the law lags behind technological and political development and problems are created in international military intervention by antiquated legal concepts just as often as they are by the lack of legal oversight and control.

## The Laws of War and Peace

The legitimization of war sometimes seems like a fig leaf covering political and military might. With Security Council resolutions, Hague rules and rules of engagement war becomes a sanitized legal affair provided that you have the political and military power to intervene, and to face the international community having done so. With sufficient political consensus even international law seems to be flexible. The campaign against Serbia in Kosovo, for example, was deemed "legitimate" even if it seemed not to be supported by a strict interpretation of international law. Having worked as a military lawyer the steps taken to

legitimize military intervention have at times seemed a bit too convenient to be really convincing.

But the laws of war do matter nevertheless. When reading accounts of armed conflict from ancient days one is often shocked by the brutality of warfare and the treatment of civilians. It seemed routine in the Roman times, for example, to let women and children starve and to use the taking of hostages and revenge on unarmed civilians as a battle tactic[26]. In those days it was thought that in war laws are silent – *inter arma silent leges*.

Sadly one can read present day accounts of the same behavior as hundreds of years earlier with mass killings, the use of child soldiers, and the barbaric treatment of civilians. But the law no longer goes completely silent in war, and political and military leaders who have been guilty of atrocities have started to find themselves on the receiving end of justice and some have even ended up behind bars in the Hague after trials at the International Criminal Court. This does not mean, of course, that there exists an effective legal regime with regard to crimes committed in a theatre of war. Those who have ended up at the ICC have mainly been the ones who have lost their battles, been overthrown and lost the political support of their constituencies or key sponsors. Nevertheless, at least some war criminals are behind bars who would not have been in earlier years.

Some countries place more emphasis on legal considerations than others, which can also be seen in how campaigns are pursued. In Afghanistan, for example, some 14,500 Russians and over one million Afghans lost their lives during the Russian campaign from 1979 – 1989[27]. The Russians were known to be less discriminate in their use of force, carpet bombing and targeting whole villages if that was the direction where attacks or threats had originated from. The Taliban rule was possibly less bloody in body count but certainly harsher in how people were treated, as we know all too well. During the decade long U.S. led campaign over 3,300 coalition soldiers have died together with tens of thousands Afghans. While the numbers remain large, they are not comparable with the previous conflicts. It can also be noted that the United States with its allies in Afghanistan has a more or less robust framework of operational law and rules of engagement that do affect how the campaign is pursued. I think the Russian guidebook, as well as the Taliban rules on the conduct of hostilities, are somewhat shorter than their Western counterparts.

26 See, for example, Adrian Goldsworthy, *In the Name of Rome: The Men Who Won the Empire*, 2006

27 See Noor Ahmad Khalidi, *Afghanistan: The Demographic Consequences of War 1978 – 1989*, Central Asian Survey, Vol. 10, No. 3, 101-126, 1991

Military intervention by the international community, in particular, is and should be a closely regulated affair. Both domestic and international legal frameworks regulate the use of force in military operations from domestic laws on the conduct of armed forces to international conventions and UN Security Council Resolutions. Even if much of the international regulatory framework might be affected by politics this regulation does matter. It creates a basis and scope for military intervention and an expectation of how force is used. It allows states to participate in an international intervention knowing that some standards of international law will be complied with.

Generally international military intervention always starts in New York, as a UN Security Council Resolution is generally needed as a basis for the operation. Concepts such as "all necessary means" and "establishing a secure environment" are vital mandates for the international forces to be able to use force. Problems with these mandates can create serious situations. A gross example is the Srebrenica massacre, where Dutch peacekeepers did not protect Muslim civilians from Serb slaughter due to their limited manpower, lack of air support and challenges with the mandate. UNSCR mandates nowadays typically have a "Srebrenica clause" clarifying the right to use force against threats to civilians, but there are many other issues that mandates do not cover. Supporting law enforcement operations against criminal activity, as well as intelligence activities, are typically sensitive issues in this regard.

The resolutions have a political origin and getting the wording in place has often required delicate diplomacy and much negotiation. However, sometimes more skillful legal drafting of the resolutions or military technical agreements could have provided better mandates from an enforcement perspective without raising sensitive political issues. The UN must have many lawyers skilled in international law, but it seems that they may not have many lawyers with advanced drafting skills and a sufficient understanding of military and law enforcement environments.

### Domestic Frameworks for Operational Law

The laws related to Finnish participation in international military operations have raised sensitive issues over the years. It has been unclear – time and again – whether our troops have a satisfactory legal basis to execute the missions they have been sent on. There has been an inherent risk that Finnish troops could be

subject to legal consequences for merely doing their job. It is of course not a very responsible policy to send men and women into harm's way without the legal tools to do their jobs safely. The situation has improved only over the past decade.

The background to the problem is in part due to the tension between our foreign policy needs and our domestic political challenges. From a foreign policy perspective we want to "fly the flag" and participate in missions, demonstrating Finland's willingness to pull its weight as a member of the Western international community. But at the same time we might have little interest in participating in actual enforcement and employing our military assets to real use due to domestic political concerns and the human and monetary sacrifices involved.

Put in practical terms, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs would want Finnish troops to go on a mission, set up camp and then do nothing, with the exception, perhaps, of giving out aid to women and children that would help the ministry meet its development aid quotas. The reality on the ground is a bit different, of course. In some cases it is sufficient just to be present and provide political support to the countries pursuing a military intervention. But often participating nations are expected to take responsibility on the ground as well, which can involve the use of force. And in these situations our men and women in uniform must have the best tools to do their work safely, and that has not always been the case.

### Are We at War in Afghanistan?

A few years ago there was some consternation and a small political uproar in Finland caused by a senior foreign policy expert claiming that Finland was at war in Afghanistan[28]. Considering that we are part of a NATO led military operation, that we have had armed units in combat situations in Afghanistan and even a few casualties, it may not be wholly surprising that someone would deem Finland to be a part of an armed conflict.

War is a loaded concept, however, and in Finland mainly associated with the immediate defense of the homeland on the Finnish borders. There are constitutional issues involved as well – only Parliament can declare war whereas the President and Cabinet can decide on participation in peacekeeping operations. So if Finnish participation in the ISAF operation would be deemed a "war" there would be a bit of a constitutional issue. There were condemnations by

28 Charly Salonius-Pasternak of the Finnish Institute of International Affairs in an article 2010 (Suomi on Sodan osapuoli Afganistanissa, Kosmopolis 1, 2010)

the opposition and red faces in government and ultimately explanations from government that from a legal perspective this was clearly not a "war" in any constitutional sense.

Based on my understanding we can be fairly comfortable that for Finnish legal purposes we are not necessarily at "war" in Afghanistan as understood in the Finnish constitution. However, the interpretation based on international law – the laws of war – may well be different. It is indeed far more difficult to argue that we would not be participants in an "armed conflict" as provided under the Hague Convention. I have not in fact run into any lawyers who, among colleagues, would try to dispute this.

The political noises soon subsided. Ultimately people didn't seem to care enough to pursue this further. Finnish participation has been well managed in a political sense in that we have largely avoided Afghanistan becoming a domestic political battleground as has occurred in some other European countries. The fairly low profile of our operational participation and the low level of casualties may also be explained as mechanisms needed to ensure sufficient political support for continued participation.

### Evolving Rules of Engagement

Finland has a long tradition of UN peacekeeping starting from Cyprus in the 1950s to UNIFIL in Lebanon in the 1980s and 1990s. Participation in more robust operations only started in the 1990s in Bosnia, but at that time was restricted to a specialist engineering unit. Kosovo, starting in 1999, has been perhaps the largest and most high profile operation for the Finns. We took more responsibility, having a large battalion size unit of over 800 men and women with our own AOR and even a Finnish brigadier running one of the regional commands at one point. The operations prior to Kosovo had not been very demanding from a military perspective, but with Kosovo the need to consider the basis for the use of force started emerging.

Until the first years of the 21st century there was no explicit legal base for the use of force by Finnish troops participating in international military operations. Instead, the use of force was derived from the right to self-defense. The idea was that Finnish troops would carry out their mission based on orders and then, if they faced resistance, they could react with force based on the princi-

ples of the right to self-defense. However, this does not give you much in the way of a mandate to actively carry out your duties. Under Finnish self-defense doctrine you are expected to try to prevent the escalation of violence by backing off if you can, for example. This does not go together that well with peacekeeping, or with protecting civilians under threat, to put it mildly.

The situation started changing when it became obvious during the KFOR operation that the legal framework was inadequate. This was really the first operation where Finns had been faced with the possibility of serious situations where force might be used (and was used). It started to become clear that our soldiers were really at risk for breaking the law just by doing their jobs. At least it was clear that the current legal basis was insufficient. For example, under the Finnish constitution there was a new explicit requirement that any use of force by government authorities must be based on explicit authorization in law (i.e. not just self-defense doctrine). I believe that there was much concern that raising these problems would empower "anti-militant" political powers to try to use these legal problems to prevent Finnish participation in international military operations – which Finland needed to do to carry out its foreign policy. For the opposition, on the other hand, it provided a tool for domestic politics to criticize the government.

A new act on Military Crisis Management was being drafted which provided a clear legal basis for the use of force and a broader framework for Finnish participation in more robust peacekeeping operations. When the new act was introduced there was indeed a political outcry driven more or less by the exact political groups that had been expected to do so.

However, the political attention was directed at the decision making process for Finnish participation in operations. According to the government proposal for the new act, the President would decide on participation in new operations on the advice of the Cabinet, and Parliament would only be informed. This the opposition could not digest. There was a heated debate in Parliament with constitutional references and plenty of political rhetoric. At the end of the day, the powers of the President to decide on participation were restricted somewhat and the Parliament was given more of a say as a result.

This had been a political game in Finnish constitutional development that followed a very predictable pattern. In fact, based on even limited experience

of parliamentary politics, it should have been foreseen that this part of the proposal would get a lot of attention.

In fact, I almost started to wonder whether indeed someone had foreseen it and deliberately created this debate as a red herring. Even if Parliament was given a larger role, it would not really change the basis for decision making from a practical perspective. Typically military operations were planned at the Cabinet level, and typically the parties in Cabinet represented a majority in Parliament so this was not a practical concern.

It was important that the political furor did not extend to the provisions related to the use of force in the new proposal, which had been drafted to be somewhat robust. It seemed, at least, that the rather dramatic change in the Finnish legal position in this regard might have gone largely unnoticed by the political opposition. One reason could have been the reference in the proposal to a new provision in the Finnish constitution requiring that use of forceful means by Finnish authorities always had to have a basis in explicit legislation. So it might have looked like a technical fix when in fact it increased Finnish participation potential significantly. But I was happy that politics was not being made with the security of our men and women in uniform.

### The Legal Regulation of Intelligence Operations

The significance and complexity of intelligence has increased significantly with the development of warfare. More advanced intelligence is required today to identify military threats. In earlier days a military build-up was necessary prior to projecting force and that build up could be observed with more traditional means. There was also more time to react to signals that a hostile action might be in the making. These circumstances have changed dramatically. It is no longer sufficient to send scouts out to see whether the potential enemy is readying his troops for attack. As military action has become much easier to project at long distances it has become much more important to be able to anticipate hostile actions. The asymmetric nature of warfare has also increased the importance of intelligence. Now you need every intelligence source available to help you identify potential threats to your computer systems or your infrastructure, for example.

The legal significance of intelligence has also increased. With the increas-

ing complexity and legalization of warfare, it has become more important, vital even, to be able to justify the use of force in legal terms, and intelligence is an important element in that regard. Intelligence is vital in order for force to be correctly projected. It seems that the importance of the principle of discrimination has increased as it relates to the application of the laws of war. Collateral damage is less acceptable than before and force has to be projected at legitimate targets and at no one else. But to identify and find those targets you need intelligence.

At the same time intelligence work is becoming more difficult as legal restrictions based on individuals' rights to privacy, for example, are applied more vigorously, and governments are becoming more accountable. I am concerned that as intelligence is becoming more important we are also making intelligence work more difficult to pursue.

### *Caught In the Act*

Intelligence gathering operations have received much attention with the whistle-blowing incidents of recent years. U.S. diplomatic and military correspondence was leaked through Wikileaks and more recently contracted intelligence personnel leaked specific information of massive intelligence gathering operations related to electronic communications. In both cases there was a huge public outcry at the fact that the United States was actually conducting large scale intelligence gathering. I think it would have been more shocking if this type of activity was not taking place.

The Wikileaks incident mainly seemed to provide background on how diplomatic processes work and how policy is made. Reports from local embassies demonstrated how assessments of the local situations are made, and confirmed what we already knew about many political leaders. I recall the reports did not have that much good to say about European Prime ministers Silvio Berlusconi or Gordon Brown, for example. The Russian dynamic duo of Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev were appropriately referred to as "Batman and Robin" and French president Nicolas Sarkozy as "an emperor with no clothes". The assessments just confirm that policy is made by people on the ground with the resources and capabilities available to them and that political leaders can be mediocre people just trying to get their jobs done. Rather than exposing any government conspiracies, the leaks just confirmed the mediocre state of international politics.

The leaks related to the international intelligence gathering by the United States were not that surprising either. It seems that European political leaders, even heads of state, had their e-mail traffic and mobile phones monitored and that EU institutions have been wiretapped by the NSA. It also appears that the United States has been collecting information from other countries and governments through massive-scale spying on telecommunications. However, the incidents are mainly an embarrassment for the heads of security and counter surveillance in targeted countries. They must be aware of the risks related to surveillance and their job is to ensure it cannot occur. Security has to be at a level that heads of state can be reasonably sure that at least sensitive discussions and calls are not being wiretapped.

In an increasingly complex world, the use of intelligence agencies for strategic, policy and legal purposes has certainly become more important. Our political decision makers need better information faster to make the best possible decisions – reading the newspapers is not sufficient in that regard. It is clear therefore that intelligence targets not only opposing interests but those of allies and partners as well. It is just as important to understand the drivers of your partners as well as those of the enemy. Obtaining such accurate intelligence is just a part of what would be expected of any modern government in formulating its policy in a rational manner[29]. So there is not that much room to be critical of the United States. Even if it is not polite to spy on one's allies and guests, intelligence operations and spying are not prohibited under international law as such[30]. However, as has been seen from the political reactions to the leak, you really do not want to get caught spying on your friends.

### *Legal Regulation*

For legal purposes, the need to justify the use of force and military intervention has increased significantly over the past few decades. Obtaining the information to justify government action is not easy and requires advanced techniques and skill sets that the intelligence community can offer. A well-managed, professional high quality intelligence service, that is legally accountable, can provide significant added value to politicians and tax payers alike.

The fact that intelligence work is classified or even covert at times does not mean it should be unregulated or that intelligence services should be unaccountable. To a lawyer, it seems obvious that regulation should be in place

29 Michael Herman, *Intelligence Power in Peace and War*, 1996, p.139
30 See Geoffrey B. Demarest, *Espionage in International Law*, 24 Denv. J. Int'l L. & Pol'y 321 (1996)

which recognizes the need for governments to resort to intelligence agencies as well as the special characteristics of intelligence as opposed to law enforcement. A robust legal mandate forms the basis of a well-functioning and modern intelligence service.

There may be concerns that regulating these matters will allow too much transparency into what is supposed to remain secret or that introducing regulation will restrict what agencies can do. However, intelligence work raises constitutional issues in many countries, and is closely related to the right to privacy and fair trial clauses in human rights conventions, among other. Intelligence officers should also have a clear legal mandate for their work, both domestically and abroad.

Would it be possible to clearly separate intelligence collection from criminal investigations? This might entail that an intelligence agency could be given a mandate in law to obtain information for government use through extraordinary means. The mandate would have to be subject to legal and political scrutiny. However, any information obtained by the intelligence agency through extraordinary means could not be used against a person in a court of law and would have to kept confidential under criminal penalty. The agency could only take such action as is necessary to avoid any critical damage as provided in the mandate. The German domestic intelligence service is based on this type of concept to some extent. The service does not have law enforcement rights and does not operate together with the police. Its job is not primarily to catch criminals but to follow trends that could be a threat to the constitution of Germany.

### Targeting, Intelligence and Law

Drone strikes have characterized much of the U.S. anti-terrorist operations over the recent years. The number of strikes has increased significantly under president Obama and they have been a central element in the campaign in Afghanistan as well. Indeed, drones were very much a part of everyday life in Afghanistan. Most of the time drones were used for recon purposes and served as eyes in the sky[31]. In a kinetic situation with enemy contact, a request for a "bird" might go out very quickly – getting live feed of your opponent is a rather valuable recon asset to have. So it was not unusual in Afghanistan to see a drone take off or happen to see live feeds in situation rooms with interesting footage of the battlefield.

31 BBC News, Armed drones operated from RAF base in UK, says MoD, 27 April, 2013

But drones can carry more than cameras. And when they do, things get serious very quickly.

The use of drones (unmanned aerial vehicles or UAVs) in connection with targeted killings has been very controversial. There is some discomfort among commentators about the set-up where an unmanned armed weapons-platform can be operated remotely and a target can be ambushed and assassinated without any prior warning. As the distance between the belligerents increases and their relative positions on the battlefield are so asymmetric people come to question the applicability of the laws of war altogether and the tolerance they allow for killing legally in war. Increasingly, the question arises as to whether this activity amounts to an assassination or an extra-judicial execution without due process.

But from a legal perspective this is much like ambushing the enemy. Under the laws of war, enemy combatants are legal "prey" whether they are engaging in battle or not, and regardless of whether they are troopers, staff officers or cooks, as long as they are soldiers or combatants. You can bomb them, shoot them and try to kill them on the frontlines in battle, or when they are going on leave or sleeping in their bunks. Similarly, if an enemy combatant in Afghanistan is identified in targeting and taken out by a drone attack when he is riding his motorbike that is generally seen as legitimate use of force.

The more immediate problem is how you differentiate one bike rider from another; i.e. how can you be sure the target is a combatant, and what collateral damage can you accept under the laws of war? That is where the issues can get difficult. To resolve this problem a process of targeting has been developed to ensure that the target is properly identified and that the operation regarding that target is within the relevant legal framework (mandate) and that the methods used are legal (laws of war, rules of engagement).

The targeting process starts with identifying the "target" and analyzing whether and what kind of force can and should be used against such target. In U.S. manuals "targets" are defined as entities or objects considered for possible engagement or other action[32]. Targets can be military installations or infrastructure, such as bridges or defensive positions, as well as equipment such as heavy weapons. But targets can also be units or individuals of an opposing force.

Intelligence plays a very important role in targeting. The target has to meet criteria under applicable international law and operational rules of engagement

32 See U.S. Army FM 3-60, *The targeting Process*, November 2010, p.1-1

allowing the use of force. This can usually be established only by using different intelligence tools from HUMINT to SIGINT, including informants, tapping phone lines or using drones with cameras. Based on that information you should try to identify combatants that have a position in the chain of command of the opposing force that warrants action against them. In this process the quality and integrity of intelligence is very important – it has to form a legally solid base for using possibly lethal force.

In a more conventional theater of operations it might be straight forward to identify enemy leadership. An armed soldier in uniform with appropriate rank is easy enough to spot. But in Afghanistan it is not clear who is in fact just a drug dealer, a local warlord having a disagreement with the neighboring tribe, a bought fighter just tagging along with an unclear legal status, and who is a dedicated "enemy combatant", a leader and high-value target. Getting such information in a battle space like Afghanistan is not easy, but with enough work the intelligence sections should be able to identify the "bad guys" with a high degree of certainty.

Then an assessment would have to be made as to what level of force would be appropriate to be used (based on the principle of minimum use of force). If the person is engaged in qualified hostile activities then the outcome can be that deadly force is appropriate under the applicable rules of engagement or the applicable laws. Consequently, the person can be challenged and detained when met. Alternatively, in certain cases, the person can be targeted by lethal force.

Targeting was a serious matter within ISAF. It seemed to me that there was a robust system in place in Afghanistan with officers and operational lawyers who did not take their duty lightly but put a lot of effort into pursuing the campaign with legal integrity.

# ACT IV

## THE ENEMY

# CHAPTER 9

# WHERE ARE THE TALIBAN?

## The "Insurgents"

When senior commanders or visiting generals from troop contributing nations arrived fresh in theatre they were often interested in "enemy capabilities and strengths", and in particular in the number of fighters the Taliban had. They would also be interested in how ISAF engaged the enemy and how the strength of the enemy had weakened as the Taliban had taken casualties. By that point, the visiting officer would be categorized as another cold war soldier not really versed in what was going on. There would be an awkward silence and a short explanation of the Afghan campaign and of COIN strategy might follow. If the visitor had a very senior rank, however, the question would be answered without a change in expression and the briefing would move on. He would still be rated a cold war dinosaur, though.

The insurgency in Afghanistan is not one clear cut armed force with a political agenda, and there was no clear unified enemy force in Afghanistan. There was, instead, a fragmented and unstable political situation with local, regional and national power-brokers and militias. The violence originates from a band of actors from drug dealers and local criminals to tribal feuds and a variety of ideologically motivated, loosely allied insurgents.

The Taliban is the most vocal insurgent group with an excellent rhetoric and a well versed political agenda. Their stated goal is to create an Islamic emirate in Afghanistan, after having driven out the foreign heathens. They have some

experience of politics and governance having run the country before the U.S. invasion in 2001. Experiences from that era suggest that while they may be able to provide some stability, their political agenda is hardly forward looking or one that would enhance economic development in the country. Reports abound of sanctions against schooling for girls, kite flying, soccer or music and dancing. Their administrative skills were also rudimentary. The general notion was that the Taliban may well be good at providing application of law and justice on the local level (albeit in a very harsh form); but running a country or an economy is not something they excelled at.

After ten years of war the Taliban were also lacking somewhat in both strength of organization and tactical capabilities. There were Taliban leaders in Pakistan who communicated with local level commanders. The core factions of the Taliban were loyal to Mullah Muhammed Umar, who was the leader of the Taliban regime prior to 2001. He operated most likely out of Quetta in Pakistan. But in many cases the local players had their own agendas and may also have used the Taliban brand to pursue criminal and violent political activity. In some places Taliban were highly ideological fighters who wanted to rid the country of foreigners, but in others they were local bad boys who abused and terrorized villagers and used armed force to protect their drug trade. They followed the directives of their commanders when it suited them and hid their criminal goals under the cover of insurgent rhetoric.

There were also more professional organizations, such as the Haqqani network named after Jalaludin Haqqani, who fought the Russians as a Mujahedin leader. He later allied with the Taliban prior to 2001 and served as a minister with the Taliban regime. The Haqqani are largely deemed to be a criminal organization interested in the income from businesses and regional power that they have. The Haqqani have links to the Pakistani intelligence organization and were the "go to" guys for effectively creating havoc and disorganization in Afghanistan. The fact that the Haqqani have also operated against Indian interests and have a safe haven in the northern parts of Pakistan has also supported the notion that they have links to Pakistan security agencies. The Haqqani network had made a lucrative business of military-style violence and provided executive and logistical support to Taliban operations. It was the Haqqani, for example, who likely orchestrated the complex attacks in Kabul in April 2012.

Another significant group were the HIG or the Hizb-e-Islami Gulbuddin,

led by Gulbuddin Hikmatyar. The group fought the Russians with significant U.S. support but later turned against the other mujahedin after the Najibullah regime fell in the early 1990s. HIG operates in the regions North and East of Kabul and has developed alliances with the Taliban – though there have been clashes over regional control between these factions as well.

The other real professionals were the fighters of IMU, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. The IMU were likely very few in number and used Afghanistan as a base as they had been largely driven out from Uzbekistan. There may have been one or two al-Qaeda fighters in Afghanistan as well, but they certainly did not dominate any part of the insurgency anymore.

These different groups did not form a coherent body or force. They may have been able to coordinate amongst themselves to some extent, but had different political agendas and different drivers.

The problem was how to fight these different kinds of opposing forces. It may not be the best solution to fight criminals with the same means that you would use to fight the organized military forces of a political regime. It seemed important to identify the drivers underlying different insurgent groups and, based on that analysis, choose how best to engage them. Trouble caused by local young men might best be addressed by social programs, while criminal groups and drug smugglers might best be countered by police strategies and tactics, the politically inclined groups would be addressed with diplomacy and the diehard insurgents would be targeted with hard military force.

In this regard commentators sometimes emphasized how the U.S. strategy of confronting the Taliban and categorizing them as the enemy together with al-Qaeda may have been a mistake. The Taliban did not demonstrate international ambitions, but were mainly a domestic political force with a strong military arm. Their objectives and policies seemed clearly distinct from al-Qaeda. Their "harbouring" of terrorists, which was focused on by the then U.S. administration, was perhaps not a deliberate and conscious strategic choice. It may have been wiser to work a wedge between al-Qaeda and the Taliban by targeting al-Qaeda and giving the Taliban a different status and a diplomatic avenue towards a political solution.

At times I wondered to what extent the categorizations of "insurgents" or "terrorist groups", "cells" or "networks", were really justified in Afghanistan.

Were the local criminals who were mainly interested in drugs trading and racketeering "insurgents" because they were fighting against government representatives who were not necessarily less interested in drugs trading? And the extent to which the insurgents really worked together in an organized way – in a "network" – seemed to vary considerably. One also wondered to what extent ISAF may have defined the nature and role of different violent groups in order to justify the scope of the mission. After all, it would be difficult to get the money and the hardware if you didn't have a robust enemy. However, for my purposes it was good enough to refer to the trouble makers in general as insurgents as they opposed the authority of the Afghan government.

### The Battle Field

Afghanistan was an asymmetric battlefield if ever there was one. It might not even be accurate to talk about a "battlefield" at all. Just referring to the "volatile security situation" might better describe what was going on.

A basic dilemma was that the insurgents could not challenge the ISAF forces in military terms, and could not really even fight the Afghan National Army ("ANA"). In a battle situation the insurgents could not win. But at the same time there was no purely military solution that ISAF and ANA could achieve. There was no enemy force that could be defeated. It was the security situation that had to be fixed, and the loyalty of the Afghan people that was the battlefield.

From a security perspective ISAF and ANA generally could be said to control the main highway circling through Afghanistan – the so called ring road – and its immediate vicinity. But off the ring road the situation was different. The Afghans themselves had assessed that their government controlled perhaps some 30 percent of the country, while the insurgents controlled 4 percent and could influence and operate in another 30 percent[33]. In fact, the insurgents maintained freedom of movement largely throughout the country. They had access to the population and could both intimidate and entice vulnerable villagers that ISAF and ANA could not protect. Night letters, threats and assassinations were all tools in the insurgent toolbox and the population in most regions had to pay heed to what the insurgents wanted.

This is one of the key issues in a COIN operation – the battle was really about the loyalties or preferences of the population. Whoever managed to convince the population would win. The problem was, however, that to "win" the in-

33 See Kenneth Katzman, Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security and U.S. Policy, Congressional Research Service Report, August 8, 2013, p.23

surgents only had to demonstrate they can access the population and threaten them into obedience, while the coalition had to demonstrate they can protect the population from any such threats, which of course was not really possible – an asymmetric situation indeed.

The security situation overall was not that bad in the spring and summer of 2012. In northern Afghanistan especially, the number of security incidents was down markedly from the previous years. But in other parts of the country insurgent activity continued at earlier levels or had even increased. So the war was not really being won by the coalition. This was a stalemate at best. But then ISAF was withdrawing, and the balance of power was certain to change in the future as a result of that.

The insurgents had also adopted new methods of fighting ("tactics, techniques and procedures" or "TTPs") in addition to the traditional IEDs and ambushes. They now also focused on high publicity incidents where the effect was both kinetic and psychological. Suicide bombings were on the rise. These are difficult to defend against and so raise anxiety among potential targets, as did the increasing number of assassinations of local officials. This had become quite an effective measure to prevent the government from doing its job.

Assassinations were somewhat routine during the period I spent in theatre. Local leaders would be targeted by suicide bombers when in transit or at public events. These acts provided an effective way to decrease the impact of the central government. If anyone working in public office was automatically a target for murder it might well affect how one went about doing one's job, as well as decrease interest in applying for such jobs in the first place.

Weddings seemed to be popular events for this kind of activity. In July 2012, for example, a member of parliament was killed together with nineteen wedding guests in Aibak in Samangan province, just tens of kilometers from our base[34]. The photos of the scene were gruesome. Despite their investigations, it seemed even the Afghans could not immediately work out who was behind the attack in the complex political environment of that period.

### Green on Blue

There was an increasing number of so called "green on blue" incidents where individual Afghan police officers or soldiers had turned their weapons on ISAF

34 Pajhwok News, MP among 19 killed in Samangan attack, 14 July 2012

soldiers. In late 2011 an Afghan soldier had shot two U.S. officers inside an Afghan government building and managed to escape. As a result, all government mentoring operations had been suspended for a long period. In some cases this meant that the output of particular ministries and offices decreased significantly, as the coalition representatives had held key advisory positions. The effects on the mission had been considerable. Many Afghan government agencies drew heavily on the resources of their Western counterparts with regard to expertise and finance, and their work was clearly hampered by the suspension of mentoring work.

The number of green on blue incidents was still low, and many of these were the acts of individuals who just felt slighted or wanted to settle a quarrel in the Afghan way. Some still argued that the threat had been completely exaggerated and blown out of proportion. The chance of a green on blue incident was statistically so small that one should take it as an acceptable risk while working in theatre. Moreover, it was argued, there was relatively little evidence that the attacks were really connected to the Taliban or the result of a deliberate Taliban strategy.

However, that analysis misses the point. Green on blue incidents had developed into a phenomenon that hit right into ISAF's Achilles' heel. In connection with the withdrawal of forces the plan was to focus increasingly on training and monitoring in the "post-ISAF" era. However, as the operation changes character it becomes even more vulnerable to these types of attacks. The main focus of how ISAF can make an impact will be through the contacts between mentors or trainers and Afghan government representatives and military personnel. To succeed, this strategy requires a certain level of trust between the parties. And the risk of being blown away by your colleagues does not contribute to a pleasant working environment. Targeting this rather thin "impact channel" can have a significant effect on the efficiency of the whole campaign.

So green on blue attacks were truly tactical operations with strategic impact regardless of whether they were initiated by the Taliban or not. And as the Taliban found out about their promising effect they were likely to pursue these. In my view the reactions to the increase of green on blue incidents demonstrated that this was a strategic threat.

# CHAPTER 10

# FIGHTING THE TALIBAN

## Clear-Hold-Build

So how did the coalition fight the Taliban in practice? What did the war look like? There were no "shock and awe" attacks by tanks and motorized units as in the Gulf Wars, no aircraft carrier groups and very few massive air assaults, if any. This was a very different kind of fight.

With the COIN strategy the idea was generally to first clear an area of insurgents through a military operation, usually with infantry supported by close air support (CAS). Then troops would hold the area sometimes supported by other security personnel, such as Afghan police forces, so that insurgents could not return. According to doctrine, this phase would last for weeks or longer. During the hold phase government presence would be introduced and increased. The idea of "clear – hold – build" was that when you had created a sphere secure from insurgent influence you would fill it with government administration and thus integrate the population with the government.

The theory might have been sound, but it is generally recognized that you need a substantial amount of troops and funds to execute it. At least in northern Afghanistan it seemed that these operations had little impact – especially after the Afghans took the lead. The planning phase would take too long and too many people would be involved. Generally information about the operations might leak[35] to the insurgents in advance and they would just clear tem-

35 See Jeremy Gwinn, *Risk and Transition in Afghanistan*, Small Wars Journal, January 24, 2012

porarily from the area of operations and hide in the mountains for a while. Afghan infantry would go in supported by ISAF forces and consider the area cleared from the opposing force. Then they would hold the area for a week or so and return to base, after which the insurgents would return to the area again and everyone would carry on as usual.

### Operations in RC North

The Finnish contingent was attached to the Swedish task force with an AOR in northern Afghanistan. The area was largely peaceful (in relative terms), but had some interesting features. One of the main withdrawal routes passed through the AOR to the Heiratan port facility – certainly an area of focus as the ISAF operation was winding down. Also, as ISAF was withdrawing from the western parts of North Afghanistan the Swedish-Finnish AOR would have responsibility for the front line to the west. I suspected that the freedom of movement (FOM) of the insurgents would increase further as we withdrew.

The Afghan army was likely not overly keen to challenge their opponents. So the insurgents could move right up to and into our AOR. Of course, there was already some insurgent activity inside the AOR, but it was mainly local compared to the insurgency towards the west, which was influenced by Taliban leadership. Our bad guys were mainly local drug dealers and criminals with some rebel influences. In the west it was – in part – the other way around. Altogether, of course, the insurgency was far less centrally organized up north than it was down south in Helmand and Kandahar and in the eastern parts of Afghanistan. That's where you had real insurgents and a real war.

The Finns and Swedes did meet resistance when they were out patrolling. A typical operation in the AOR where I served would be aggressive patrolling in areas known to be insurgent strongholds. A very strong unit would be sent out that would clear their way to dedicated villages, cordon them off and search them. It was no easy going as patrols moved in sweeping for IEDs ready to respond to ambushes or surprise attacks. If insurgents had not left the area they would usually challenge the patrols with SAF and RPGs. Mostly it would be ineffective harassing fire as they often lacked the power to do much more than that. Our troops would return fire and sometimes conduct a counter attack with APCs and infantry, as well as with mortars sometime. The insurgents

would leave their positions after a short fire fight, hide their weapons and drive away on motor cycles.

The initial patrol phase was then supposed to be followed by the "hold" and "build" phases, but these were typically as unsuccessful as elsewhere in the country. Often the Afghan security forces called in for these parts of the operation might have another mission to do, or were too vulnerable and lightly armed to stay. The build phase would also typically fail as a consequence of the government administration being as much a part of the problem as the solution.

The population knew we did not have the resources to stay on indefinitely and that the insurgents would return. However, in many cases the insurgents were a "normal" element of their life and the society that they had learned to cope with. When they learned what the drivers of the insurgents were, it may very well have been the case that even if it was unpleasant, living with the insurgents was not completely impossible.

Conducting several of these operations admittedly did slow down further political destabilization. Flying the flag and denying freedom of movement to insurgents – even on a temporary basis – increased the possibility for the development of governance and institutions locally to some extent at least. But that development was very fragile and could be reversed as the population remained vulnerable to the influence of the insurgents. Our side had to prove we could keep the population safe and provide them with services. But all it took for the insurgents to be successful was to show they could still prove a serious threat to the population in order to have their policies respected and adhered to. This was made easier by the fact that the Afghan governance institutions were generally deemed corrupt and ineffective.

There were other types of operations that seemed to make a difference. There has been much reporting about the increasing focus on special operations forces (SOF) in Afghanistan. Even as troop levels were decreasing, special operations forces seemed to remain in theatre. The operations by special operations forces must have had at least a temporary effect on the capabilities of the insurgents. SOF are capable of hunting down insurgent leadership[36] – or "removing them from the battle field" – and thus weakening the organization of the insurgency. If middle management is "removed" from the chain of command the organization must be hampered and there could be a growing gap between local insur-

36 The *New York Times*, Afghan Commandos Step Up Their Combat Role, May 14, 2013

gents driven by local interests, including just criminal intent and tribal feuds, and the high level leaders in Pakistan with their ideological mission.

Special operations are being executed on a daily – or nightly – basis, and on a relatively large scale[37]. The typical mission seems to be a night time raid on a compound where a suspect was known to reside. The special operations teams would be transported by land or air to the target area, the compound would be cordoned off and a raiding party would enter and take the target and secure the compound. The target would be either taken into custody or be dead at this point. A team would go in and collect materials for the purposes of intelligence and criminal proceedings. The operation would be over in the morning, more or less, and another one would already be in planning for the next night[38].

The special operations had been conducted predominantly by U.S. forces even though some other nationalities also maintained these capabilities[39]. Afghan special operations forces would routinely participate in this work at the support and tactical operational level. In 2012 the lead on these operations was supposed to be transferred to the Afghans, and there was much concern that the efficiency would decrease substantially as a result. However, based on public information, it seems these are proceeding at least on a satisfactory level.

Based on news reports it seemed to me that there had been a considerable increase in special operations. It seemed that these were used as a force equalizer. Before ISAF would withdraw from a region the local insurgents would be pounded by intense SOF operations and their organization weakened as much as possible to even the odds for the ANA when they took over responsibility for security.

I have great respect for SOF and their capabilities, and I have no doubt that the operations have had a significant effect on insurgents. Yet I wonder, as I am sure the SOF people do, whether the effect is temporary only. The insurgents do not have much to gain by challenging ISAF at the point where we are withdrawing anyway. Better to keep a low profile, stay in the shadows but make sure to remind the local population that you will be back.

37 *New York Times*, Afghan Commandos Step Up Their Combat Role, May 14, 2013

38 *New York Times*, For a Long-Term Afghan-American Accord, Night Raids Are a Sticking Point, December 3, 2011

39 According to news reports there are some 10,000 U.S. special forces soldiers in Afghanistan, and altogether some 13,700 NATO and coalition operators (*New York Times*, Afghan Commandos Step Up Their Combat Role, May 14, 2013 and *American Forces Press Service*, Special Ops Task Force Helps Shift Afghanistan Trend Line, May 15, 2013)

I was generally not concerned with specific security incidents or firefights even if they involved our troops. Afterwards it might be important to figure out how some incident fit into a political or security framework, but that is a different story. Generally, I knew little of local firefights or ambushes and had little to contribute. However, it was still useful to have up to date information on any security incidents, and people at home would come through the telephone wires as soon as there was even a shadow of an incident involving our troops. I understood the media pressure had increased for the military as well. So I had to make it my business to keep up with any significant incidents that occurred.

Basically, the development of an operational situation would be reported in military shorthand over the networks. A "troops in contact" call by the commander at the scene would be registered. This might be followed by a METHANE report if someone was injured[40]. The Methane report form worked for general updates as well. In Methane the M stands for military identification details (unit etc.). The E was "Exact location" so it would be a coordinate number series that I never got too good at. T was type of injury (or situation). H was hazards in the area (for MEDEVAC purposes). A was for Approach – i.e. from which direction and how should the supporting elements (Quick Reaction Unit or QRU) or the MEDEVAC approach. N was the number, nationality and type of the casualties, and the last E stood for the response Expected by the troops in the field (so QRU or MEDEVAC, or just UAV or other air support).

You always hoped there would be no KIA or injured CAT A statements[41], but sometimes there were. Every so often the CAT A was downgraded later. It is possible that injuries were given a CAT A mark to get the MEDEVAC assets you needed moving. It was very impressive to read the updates on MEDEVACS. It was usually under 10 minutes from the METHANE report that the helicopter would report dust off from the airfield, then usually a little over ten minutes to reporting hovering above the pick-up site, and no more than a minute later en route back. Then the wounded would be at the German hospital in just a matter of minutes from the helicopter landing back at the base.

It was impressive work. And it was the United States that provided much of the airlift capacity in our part of the country. Other nationalities had some

40 Col. Dr. Ingo Hartenstein, Medical Evacuation in Afghanistan, NATO presentation available at :ftp.rta.nato.int/public//PubFullText/RTO/MP/...///MP-HFM-157-05.docx

41 See "25th CAB medevac crew receives Australian award", November 1, 2012, available at www.army.mil

limited helicopter capacity, but could take more time to get them in the air and I also understood they might not always have the same attitude as the Americans. The U.S. pilots would get the wounded boys and girls out of harm's way under any conditions and regardless of enemy action[42].

42 I have no doubt the RAF provides an excellent MEDEVAC service as well.

# ACT V

## LEARNING THE RULES OF BUZKASHI

# CHAPTER 11

# "SET YOUR WATCHES BACK 500 YEARS"

A Swedish Ambassador to Afghanistan explained that Afghan society and politics are a direct reflection of the Afghan sport of Buzkashi[43]. In this sport played on horseback the goal is to transport a headless goat's carcass over a field into a marked area. So it's much like polo but not quite. The game starts with teams but only one person is declared a winner and carries the prize money typically provided by a cash rich sponsor. Teams are rearranged and broken as the game proceeds and as the players position themselves to score. So it is with Afghan politics. Everyone is fighting to survive, and build and change liaisons and coalitions as the balance of power shifts. The goal is to be on the side of whoever is winning. Only by doing so can one survive another day.

Buzkashi was a very popular theme when explaining Afghanistan to visitors. So much so, that pretty much every power point presentation on the situation in Afghanistan ended with a picture from a Buzkashi game. By 2012 it was already passé to use the metaphor in discussions within ISAF. But I still think it is a good introduction to the situation and gives a better understanding of why things work in a different way over there.

When following news reporting on Afghanistan, and when I was reading up on the country prior to deploying, much of the society and the political environment seemed foreign to me. There were horrible stories of Taliban terror, of how badly they treated women, how kite flying was forbidden and how dancing could be a capital offense. It was all a bit hard to comprehend.

43 Krister Bringeus in documentary *Krig för Fred (War for Peace)*, 2012

Much of this was used in the political rhetoric for justifying our presence in Afghanistan. According to the public statements at international summits we were all supporting the development of Afghanistan into a modern democracy with elections and equal rights and better schooling for everyone. Our perspective on Afghan society was certainly tainted by our own western way of life. I believe this made it much harder to understand the dynamics of Afghan society. If we really believed we were helping by projecting our own values on Afghanistan we were fighting blind without any idea of what we were doing.

In order for an intelligence officer to be able to report anything about Afghanistan in a way that made sense, they first needed to try to understand the dynamics of Afghan society. They needed to work out how Afghans themselves looked at their society and the situation that was going on around them. I am sure it takes a much longer time to figure out this strange place than the time I had available, but with an open mind I tried to understand it as best I could.

### 1391

Afghanistan was four and a half hours ahead of GMT (or Zulu time, for enthusiasts), but a comment one heard on occasion was that actually you need to set your clocks back 500 years on landing. A former British defense minister unhelpfully described Afghanistan as a "broken 13th century country"[44]. In fact, the year according to the Afghan calendar was 1391 during my time in theatre. Certainly the very localized way of life, the patriarchal nature of society, the treatment of women, and the political system resembling a royal court all bear some resemblance to how we see our own middle ages in Europe. In fact, scholars have compared the structure of medieval societies in Europe with Afghanistan today[45], and a debate has ensued over whether or not it is accurate to call Afghanistan "medieval".

It is not really fair to call Afghan society "medieval" in the way this word is understood in Europe. There is no standardized path for how societies develop on which Afghanistan would be behind us in some way. Society in Afghanistan has its own dynamics with very different institutional structures and drivers than the ones we experience in our societies. Afghanistan may seem primitive to a western observer, but that is simply because we compare it to our way of life. They likely see it in a very different light altogether.

44 BBC News, Ministers "united" on Afghanistan, 22 May 2010
45 Thomas Barfield, Is Afghanistan Medieval?, Foreign Policy, 2 June, 2010

For me, it seemed important to recognize that Afghanistan was a very different place from where I was coming from, and that I had to try to understand how the Afghans assessed their society and their environment. To me, the comparison of Afghanistan to medieval Europe was actually not something I felt derogatory to Afghanistan. Instead, it was a reminder that just a few hundred years ago, our societies could have been subject to quite messy stories too. So it gave me some link to try to understand Afghans. They were of course smart people who were responding to different phenomena in a logical way in the context of their own environment.

### From the Least Failed State to One of the Most Failed States

In 2010 *Newsweek* elected Finland as the best country to live in[46]. It says something about us Finns that people immediately contacted *Newsweek* to question their findings and methodology. With our cold and dark winters and with our record-high suicide rates people thought Finland simply could not be the best country to live in[47]. However, there is another survey in which Finland has more deservedly come first (or last, depending on your perspective). According to the metric drawn up by the *Fund for Peace*[48], a U.S. research institution, Finland was the least failed state both in 2012 and 2013. While Finland is the last country in the failed state list (out of 177), Afghanistan was in seventh place after Somalia and Sudan, among other.

This statistic is very insightful. Just by rephrasing the relative success of countries and governments into relative degrees of failure the statistic captures the essence of governance. Political systems are never perfect. Governments are no great success stories and the public sector typically cannot be expected to run much of anything without developing bureaucracy and inefficiency. Considering how fragile peace and democracy are, it has been said that instead of being critical or disappointed with how we are governed we should be surprised that we have managed this well, and are not constantly at each other's throats.

And here lies the potential for what lessons one can hope to gain from working in Afghanistan. Afghanistan and Finland, in some way, just represent opposite ends on a sliding scale of how societies are organized. Observing how basic functions of society work in Afghanistan can demonstrate the elementary aspects of human interaction in society more generally. It can then be interest-

46 *Newsweek*, Best Country Survey, August 2010

47 Switzerland and Geneva, in particular, might come close, where residents get to enjoy the organization skills of the German culture, but get to live in the French part of the country with the "joy de vivre" that entails.

48 The Fund for Peace, The Failed State Index 2013, available at http://library.fundforpeace.org/library/cfsir1306-failedstatesindex2013-06l.pdf

ing to identify these same aspects in a "well organized" society such as Finland. I was often reminded of similarities in human behavior and society when reading up on news from home, where neighbors and local politicians carried out the same quarrels that I saw in Afghanistan. But instead of using AK-47s they just wrote nasty letters to the editor in the local newspapers. I sometimes asked friends back home how anyone could expect different ethnicities to find peaceful solutions in regions with real conflict when even the local hunting parties on our peaceful home islands could not find ways of working together.

### (Not) Understanding Afghan Society – A Primer

There is often a tendency among the representatives of the international community working in the field to look down on the local population in theatres of operation. People scoff at the corruption and the often inefficient bureaucracy, the lack of hygiene, and the simple ways of the local people. The regions are often in the developing world, including some of the poorest countries in the world in the middle of, or just emerging from, armed conflict. Of course the basic structures of society will be completely lacking and the people poor, uneducated, and easy to belittle.

It is both inappropriate and unfair to have a condescending attitude to the local population in theatre. The people we meet are often the survivors – tough people who have gone through desperate circumstances that would have seen most of us perish. However, in many cases a basic reason for our prejudice is that we assume they as people and their society function more or less on the same principles as we do, or that the same concepts of social interaction are present as in our own countries. In Afghanistan, at least, that was largely not the case. There are different premises for how individuals succeed and how society works than what we imagine. Understanding the drivers for Afghans helps a little way forward in analyzing their society as well.

As I was trying to understand Afghan society I found that the phenomena described below gave me some insight into how things worked in the country.

### Family, Clan and Tribe

The Afghan society is heavily focused on family and tribal connections. You are expected to look after your own. And as life is extremely hard and annihila-

tion lies all too close, you are forced to become skilled at surviving. As Afghanistan had been in turmoil for decades, the mere fact that a middle aged person was alive was evidence that he or she was smart and skilled at this game. Afghans played a continuous game of Buzkashi at all levels with the aim of survival and they were much quicker at playing the game than we were at following it.

There are several different ethnic groups in Afghanistan. Out of a population of some 35 million[49] the majority are Pashtun, who predominantly live South of the Hindu Kush in the southern and eastern parts of the country. Some 42 percent of the population is Pashtun, and due to their majority position they have also dominated Afghan politics. It was often said that all Taliban are Pashtun but not all Pashtun are Taliban.

North of the Hindu Kush live ethnic Tadjiks and Uzbeks. Tadjiks make up around 27 percent of the population and Uzbeks some nine percent. The Tadjiks tend to dominate most of northern Afghanistan (especially the central and eastern regions), while the Uzbeks live predominantly in the western parts. Northern Afghanistan also has a large number of Pashtun pockets, and, interestingly, these pockets turned out to be the trouble spots and bases for insurgent activity. The question is, of course, to what extent the resistance in these areas was related to ideologically driven insurgency and to what extent to ethnic tensions and more local dynamics. Given the very local nature of Afghan society I assume the latter is the more prominent reason.

Finally, ethnic Hazaras form the smallest ethnic majority representing some nine percent of the overall population, and live mainly in the western parts of the country. The Hazaras are often poor and not very popular among the other ethnic groups. One reason may be that they are descendants of the Mongols, who really have been the only people ever to really conquer Afghanistan, and some resentment seems to have survived over the centuries. The Hazaras also tend to have a more dominant position in Afghan society than their share of the population would suggest.

Politics in Afghanistan is based on coalitions largely formed along these ethnic lines reflecting people's loyalties to tribe and ethnic background. The minorities had to try to work together to form a sufficient balancing power to the Pashtun, while the Pashtun, on the other hand, tried to liaise with some of the ethnic minorities to strengthen the position of the Pashtun controlled central

49 Population data is relatively uncertain as a census has not been carried out for a long time, and as the population has been affected by decades of conflict.

government in regions where it had less influence. So this is the background reason, for example, why former warlords and power-brokers in northern Afghanistan Fahim Khan and Atta Mohammed Noor, both Tadjiks, were the vice-president of Afghanistan and governor of the central Balkh province in northern Afghanistan, respectively. The Uzbek leader, General Abdul Rashid Dostum, held a formal position as chief of staff of the army, but was largely outmaneuvered with respect to any real political influence.

These networks and loyalties seemed to mirror how the basic elements of society work. Of course it is about families and villages and survival! Societies have been based on these elements all over the world through history. Even in the allegedly strongest democracies in the world political families and dynasties still have a larger role than could reasonably be expected – the phenomenon is certainly well established in the United States, for example.

But while political institutions have developed away from the feudal stage in many parts of the world, the situation has remained very different in Afghanistan. The environment in Afghanistan is much more fragmented than ours ever was, for example. Society in Finland developed under a strong central government that provided a governance framework and periods of relative peace that allowed for economic growth. They've had neither in Afghanistan. So of course the structure of Afghan society must be different than ours.

But instead of looking at how different Afghanistan was from Finland, I tried to look for similarities – I tried to look past the institutional structures of our form of government and see whether the Afghan ways of dealing with things could be identified under all the rhetoric and formal structures of our political systems back home. To me it seemed that politics as a basic phenomenon is about promoting structures in society that benefit the constituents of the political movement in question, be it based on ethnicity, class, level of income or mode of ownership. The system of government, be it an autocracy or democracy, does not change these goals. It just affects the mechanisms for how they are achieved. In Afghanistan, these mechanisms involved the immediate threat of violence. In other countries the mechanisms involve voting systems and how these, for example, can be structured to benefit one or the other political constituency.

## Corruption

Corruption was not just a problem in Afghanistan. It was a central element of all economic interaction in society. The level of corruption was extreme, representing almost a quarter of GDP in 2009 (2.5 billion dollars). By 2012 the UN reported that the annual amount of bribes amounted to 3.9 billion dollars[50]. In aggregate, bribes and the drug industry correspond to over 50 percent of GDP.

As salaries were so low, officials had to try to raise some additional income which meant that bribery was a form of additional levy. Also, Afghan society functions largely based on family and tribal networks where favoring related parties and looking after your own relatives are just standard elements of how things work.

Given the existing levels of corruption, it is clear that a large part of international aid disappeared before reaching its intended recipients. The western governments supporting Afghanistan had a big problem with the funds they provided being stolen and flown back out of the country into the offshore accounts of rich Afghans. In their declarations at the NATO summit in Chicago in May 2012 ISAF states had emphasized that future financial assistance would be dependent on Afghanistan taking steps to decrease corruption and to support the development of democratic institutions in the country.

It was not likely that Afghanistan would be able to do much about corruption within the time limits related to ISAF troop withdrawals in 2014 or in the post 2014 period when aid would really be needed, as Afghanistan would need to start tackling its future alone. But the West would likely not cut off aid as it would not be politically acceptable that we leave the country and it completely collapses immediately thereafter. It would likely take a generation or two, and a significant increase in the literacy rates and a reduction in poverty, to get corruption under some kind of control. I imagine the situation will look different in twenty or thirty years, perhaps. We'll see.

The very high level of corruption was an obstacle to Afghan development that was very difficult to address. I do not claim to have any easy solution to the issue. However, from my perspective it was sufficient that we recognized and took into account the effects of corruption on the behavior and responses of Afghan decision makers. Thus corruption was just another matter that should

50 Pajhwok Afghan News, 7.2.2013, "Afghans Paid USD 3.9 Billion in Bribes in 2012: UN"

be added to the analysis when assessing likely scenarios and how key decision makers might act in different situations.

### Motorcycle Judges

The importance of the legal system is sometimes underestimated in nation building. Other institutions, such as political systems, security and health care, are often given priority. These are more visible parts of society and may attract more attention than the legal system.

But it is difficult to build a society without the rule of law. People do not want to commit to a society if they feel that they do not have access to justice at least at some level. Moreover, property rights are generally deemed to be a prerequisite for economic growth. Many argue that clear property rights are the foundation of market development[51]. You cannot invest or trade if property rights are unclear or cannot be enforced. And for that you need a legal order that you can count on – at least to some extent. The Afghan legal system, however, was both inept and corrupt. Cases would take ages to go through the system and criminals could be set free if they paid the right people.

A situation that was painful for Finland occurred a few years ago. Our first casualty in Afghanistan was a sergeant on foot patrol who was struck by an IED. The strange thing was that the Afghan authorities actually got hold of the people who were responsible for the attack and – unbelievably – even managed to sentence them. But a bit later they were pardoned by the Afghan president himself. I imagine Karzai didn't much care as the victim was a foreigner. Other cases we read about were similar. Taliban would be captured and later released as bribes were paid to judges and prison wardens. Judges were among the professions deemed most likely to accept bribes in Afghan surveys – together with prosecutors and customs officials[52].

An interesting initiative emerged during my tour in relation to my legal background. There were plans to support the development of the Afghan legal system in the operational context. ISAF was looking to conduct operations based on the local legal system. This meant that intelligence would provide information and evidence for the Afghan legal system; then local Afghan prosecutors or judges would provide warrants for arrest under local laws based on that evidence and the police (supported by ISAF, if needed) would conduct an

51 See Daron Acemoglu & James A. Robinson, *Why Nations Fail*, 2012; but see also Terra Lawson-Remer, Property Insecurity, 38 Brookly Journal of International Law 1, 2013

52 The Asia Foundation, A Survey of the Afghan People, 2012, p.112

operation for detaining and arresting key targets. Then the biggest challenge would follow – to have a suspect sentenced in accordance with the rule of law, and to enforce the ruling. Lawyers would be needed to liaise with representatives of the Afghan legal system and to coordinate support by ISAF from a legal perspective.

These types of "Rule of Law" operations may be very valuable in contributing to the development of the legal system. As mentioned, having some reliance on the legal system can be an important element in developing society altogether. However, the circumstances in Afghanistan posed singular challenges to such a mission. Afghans did not really have a tradition of the type of legal system we recognize. Dispute resolution was based on local and traditional systems. An independent judiciary and formal procedures did not seem to fit very well in that context. I have some doubt whether the mission is sustainable and suspect it may well collapse once Western advisers withdraw.

However, there was another legal system that did seem to work – the Taliban motorcycle judges. The Taliban had a shadow governance system with their own regional governors who – in principle – were responsible for developing Taliban governance in the different provinces and districts in the country. The level of governance they provided may have been minimal, but the presence of the central government was not that robust in many regions either. One issue they had managed with was to introduce a relatively effective and quick court system. The Taliban provided mobile judges that moved around on motorcycles to settle small and practical every day legal problems the local population had. These might have been marital or land disputes or the like. The Taliban also provided quick and effective execution of the judgments that locals dared not challenge.

The fact remained that the central government had a very limited footprint across the country. Much of the population lived in isolated areas in the countryside where the government presence was extremely limited or nonexistent. And what presence there was may well have been corrupt. This was not the case all around the country but it did present a prevailing problem that had strategic consequences. The basic characteristic of Afghan society was that it was extremely decentralized and local. The population had little connection to the central government and little expectation of the government providing them with anything – which it didn't. So there was clearly room for the Taliban

to introduce their own governance systems. As ISAF was pulling out, the void was being filled by others.

### The Drug Industry

Opium production is one of the main industries in Afghanistan. Between 75 and 90 per cent of the global opium production is said to originate from Afghanistan. It appears that the arid and hot climate of Afghanistan is extremely well suited to poppy cultivation. The value of the opium industry in Afghanistan has been estimated to be at least USD 2.4 billion representing roughly 15 per cent of GDP. As the ISAF operation is reaching its end and the troops do not operate as much as earlier the cultivation of opium has increased again. In fact, it has been reported that the 2014 crop was the best in many years. Estimates on the production and sales of opium are not very reliable due to the nature of the industry. Nevertheless, considering the weak state of the Afghan economy and the actual importance as a fairly stable or reliable source of income the opium industry should not be underestimated.

Considering the size and importance of the drug industry, it is not surprising that a large portion of people in the agricultural industry are involved in the drug trade in one form or another. It is usual for farmers to have at least a small plot for poppies hidden somewhere as extra security if other crops fail. Many have much larger plots of poppy and employ extra labor during the harvest season. In fact, the effects of the harvesting season can often clearly be seen in the turnover of tradesmen and other businesses at the local and regional level as there is extra cash in the economy.

The potential for enrichment through the drug industry is enormous and its effects are felt through all levels of Afghan society. It is said that to an extent Afghanistan is a "narco-state" where drug trafficking and trading is entrenched in the political framework of society, so that government representatives in many regions are central players in the drug industry as well[53]. This means that political decisions at the regional and even national level are also driven by the interests of the drug lobby.

The main regions for growing opium are located in southern Afghanistan, while refining takes place in the remote northeastern parts of the country, among other. After the harvest season small labs pop up around the mountain-

53 See UNODC & World Bank, Afghanistan's Drug Industry, 2006

ous regions and opium is processed into heroin for delivery abroad. The transportation and smuggling of drugs are very important elements of the business overall and are controlled largely by power-brokers and key insurgent movements. It is generally believed that many of the incumbent power-brokers in Afghanistan are deeply involved in the drug trade due to the significant income it generates.

The coalition's approach to the drug industry has not been consistent, coherent, or very well advised at all times. There have been projects to burn and eradicate opium fields and to target opium labs and drug smugglers. The results have been mixed. Eradicating opium fields, for example, is not necessarily a very smart solution to the drug problem. First, you take away the livelihood of farmers who rely on income from small opium fields just to survive. It may not be a question of farmers being greedy, but rather a question of whether they can feed their family or need to sell one of their kids (there are actually public news reports of this happening). Second, you alienate normal farmers and others who in fact are more or less neutral members of society – apart from growing some drugs on the side for extra cash. This does not support a COIN strategy where you are trying to win the support of the population and stabilize the political situation. Third, it seems that the eradication programs have also been subject to corruption as local authorities will require bribes for not targeting specific plantations. Thus only the weakest and poorest actors are actually targeted. Compared with targeting other parts of the value chain it is also a very ineffective and expensive way to affect the supply of drugs to go around eradicating individual opium fields in remote parts of the country.

Targeting the refining labs, drug smugglers, or the dealers is more difficult unfortunately. While the poppy fields are sufficiently easy to identify during the growing season, the harvest time is short, and the refining and transportation processes both quick and hard to target. Labs pop up after the harvest time or poppy is stored and hidden for future refinement. Smuggling routes, on the other hand, are difficult to access and heavily protected. At this point in the value chain the economic interests have started to mount and, in a country where corruption is part of the fabric of society, it is clear that safe passage can be obtained for a price.

Finally, it may be possible to go after the funds obtained from drugs trading in anti-money laundering operations. However, operations of this kind require

international cooperation and advanced police techniques, and it is not always clear that there is actually sufficient interest in pursuing operations at this level. I believe there is a concern that if (or, indeed, when) investigations point to leading power brokers and politicians this might have negative and destabilizing effects on the overall political situation in and around Afghanistan.

It has often been clear that the coalition military do not want to get too involved in the war on drugs. It is not part of their core strategy and, in fact, goes against their goals and has a negative effect on the safety of the troops.

An important element of fighting the drug trade would be to offer alternatives to opium production which bring an acceptable level of income for farmers. The problem is that opium may actually provide a good means of crop diversification. Other ways to affect the drug trade would be to decrease demand by looking at the reasons for drugs use in the countries that Afghanistan serves with opium. But that is a completely different problem and not very feasible.

The big question is to what extent the drug trade really should be targeted in the first place. From a purely Afghan perspective it is not clear that the drug trade is a very urgent concern at all. Afghanistan certainly has a drug problem, but in relative terms it is not the largest or by any means a key challenge that Afghanistan faces. The terrible security situation and the lack of potential for economic growth seem the most urgent issues, followed by the extreme poverty and lack of access to medical treatment. Opium cultivation can even provide the extra income that may help a poor farmer not having to sell his children. Most of the drugs are exported anyway, and the trade brings income and a livelihood to many Afghans and enriches those in power. While the drug trade may feed corruption and tolerance of crime in society this may not be a decisive factor considering the current status of Afghan society – at least from the perspective of the Afghan political leadership.

Once the immediate crisis in Afghanistan has been addressed and there is some measure of decreased political instability the interests of the Afghan people would be well served by the government driving a program dedicated to decreasing the drug trade by different means – mostly by creating an environment allowing people to make a living by other means than growing and dealing in drugs. If the drug trade was more clearly a criminal endeavor and not so deeply integrated in normal society there might also be a better chance of

targeting the trade through police action at some point in the future if Afghanistan moves in a favorable direction.

### The Gender Issue

The governments of the Nordic countries, in particular, often justified participation in the campaign in Afghanistan by the need to promote the position of women in Afghan society. The Finnish minister of foreign affairs has stated that Finland participates in the Afghanistan operation out of solidarity towards the Afghan people and because of our concern for women's issues in Afghanistan[54]. The Finnish ambassador also emphasized how Finland was particularly looking at projects with an aim to support women's rights[55]. So gender balance and women's rights were themes that were clearly important politically. Efforts were made to fund schools for girls and social centers where women could congregate safely in an otherwise hostile environment. Overall there has been a significant improvement in the position of women since the Taliban days when girls had not been able to go to school and women had been banned from work. There was still, of course, a great need to make the lives of women and children better in this part of the world. However, it seemed to me that emphasizing the gender issue as a reason for military intervention was, to a large extent, political rhetoric.

In Afghanistan the status of women remains unsatisfactory. The infant mortality rate and that of mothers in connection with child birth are the highest in the world. The illiteracy rate of women can be up to 75 percent. There were plenty of media reports of the horrific treatment of women during the Taliban era. There were plenty of stories of girls who had been victims of acid attacks for daring to go to school, or who had been beaten, cut or killed by the Taliban or by their male family members. In 2012, videos emerged of the Taliban executing a woman they suspected of adultery with AK-47s by the side of a road with villagers sitting passively by. I recall that some of the elders were even encouraging the gunmen as they believed the woman had committed a mortal sin. But perhaps they were just scared of the gunmen and wanted to please them. It is unclear to me whether these attacks have been motivated by religious fanatics or rather by a combination of a crisis of cultural norms and the threat felt by the local tribal establishment of the perceived westernization seen to result from educating women.

54 Erkki Tuomioja, statements in parliament, 12 March 2012, summary available at http://web.eduskunta.fi/Resource.phx/eduskunta/ajankohtaista/tiedotearkisto.htx?templateId=1.htx&id=4812&titlenro=3/2012&sort=32012&cache=no

55 Suomen Kuvalehti, 11 July 2011

The story of the girl whose nose had been cut off by her husband stayed in the news throughout 2012. She had tried to run away from her forced marriage at the age of twelve and, when she was caught, her husband or in-laws cut her nose off and left her to die. It was reported that if a woman dishonors a man she is said to have "taken his nose", so this was just responding in kind. She was now living in the United States waiting for surgery to hopefully fix the nose. Another piece of news reported in local media was a husband having been arrested for trying to cut off the tongue of his sixteen year old wife for not agreeing to prostitute herself. At the time, she had been seven months pregnant. She lost the baby, but the tongue had been saved.[56] Our soldiers who went on patrols also told of coming into contact with the less than adequate position of women. Forced marriage and the rape that goes with it are common-place and the results often witnessed by international troops. There's plenty of domestic violence back home in Finland, and around the world, but Afghanistan seems to take the prize.

There have been many initiatives in Afghanistan to promote women's interests. Schools have been opened, women are encouraged to work for government and to enter politics. One type of pet project was to build women's centers, where women could congregate, meet and trade without danger of attack. The center could just be an open market place or a small building, but the key issue was that a wall was built to prevent outsiders (men) from seeing inside. These centers could provide a basis for micro financing, for example. There are excellent experiences from around the world relating to allowing women in developing countries to establish small businesses with micro loans. They typically succeed in their business thus promoting their own position and that of women in their society in general, and most often pay back the loan, too. It has been argued that educating girls and providing women with a means to develop their economic positions are the best tools to fight over-population. So if one wants to find a good cause to support where you simultaneously invest in your own and your children's future global environment, it would be microloans and schools for girls.

Yet I have wondered whether these investments have been – in part – misplaced in Afghanistan. Norwegians had produced a documentary TV-series about their troops in Afghanistan. In one of the last episodes a commanding officer expressed his frustration about the development in the country. He con-

56 Tolonews, Husband arrested after trying to cut off pregnant wife's tongue, 30.5.2012

cluded that the chances of achieving even the most rudimentary elements of any semblance of stability are remote, and that with respect to human rights or women's rights the chances for development were slim. "Just forget it!" he exclaimed. He was right, as terrible as it may sound.

Afghanistan faces multiple problems including severe security issues. Jumping into human-rights development was certainly important but were we really there yet? Were we trying to force progress in a way that did not take into account how society worked and developed? The position of women was still culturally a sensitive and problematic area, and I had a sense that what we were doing might not have been sustainable in light of Afghan society and culture. It might be the case that development in Afghanistan is at a stage where more benefit could be gained from addressing poverty and illiteracy in general, and perhaps specific investments in the position of women would be more efficient once the general level of education and the economic situation are just a bit better. The investments in promoting the position of women in Afghanistan may be laudable and just a matter of basic human rights, of course. Especially as one read of the horrific cases of abuse one could not help but be outraged. Yet the question remained as to whether the investments made to help women were sustainable and really leaving a mark in Afghan society.

It seemed to me that the main reason for focusing on gender issues was really related to our own needs. The poor situation of women and our (modest) efforts to make it better provides excellent rhetoric for domestic political purposes when involvement in Afghanistan is defended and explained to a public perhaps skeptical of military engagement and the related loss of life and huge costs. It is more difficult to protest against the war when the opposing force is so evidently pursuing policies that are repulsive to citizens in Western countries. So as long as the Afghans, and especially the Taliban, keep beating their women they are making it easier for Western countries to keep troops in theatre.

# CHAPTER 12

# AFGHANISTAN, POLITICS AND BUZKASHI

At first, the political environment in Afghanistan was confusing to me. New political parties and alliances were established from time to time, ministers were sacked, governors murdered, and elections held while little seemed to change. I wondered if I really had any chance of understanding what was going on.

Again it was time to reject ideas based on Western concepts of political interaction in order to try to understand what was really happening. The basic premise of Afghan politics, as I understood it, was that the political institutions, parties, elections, parliaments and ministers, did not really matter. They were only facades behind which the real political action took place. The real power lay in tribal networks and in the ability to project economic, political and military power by different means. That was the basis upon which domestic political negotiations took place.

The Buzkashi metaphor for Afghan politics fits perfectly. It's all about survival by any means necessary, by building alliances and by breaking them and building new ones. This was a dangerous country run by men with power and money and means to mobilize military force. The Buzkashi game was usually played at such an advanced level by the Afghans that we Westerners were a few steps behind out of necessity. However, when the situation was at its most confusing in the spring and early summer of 2012 I felt that even the Afghans did not quite know how this was going to play out and how the game should be

played. There were a few very interesting turns in the political field which were truly fascinating to follow.

## The Road that Never Got Built and the Road that Never Closed

There are two roads in northern Afghanistan that may shed some light on the interesting dynamic of politics and power in Afghanistan. The ring road built by the Russians circles through almost the whole country except for a short distance in the western parts of North Afghanistan despite years of efforts to complete the road. There was some construction work going on even as I was in theatre. Considering the huge investments and the size of the security apparatus brought to Afghanistan I had to ask why the road never got finished.

At the same time the road to the northern port and border city of Heiratan remained very secure and largely safe from insurgent attacks despite the huge loads of valuable cargo that musts tempt insurgents. Why weren't there more attacks at the border? As I followed the situation in the relatively calm northern Afghanistan Heiratan still seemed to stand out with no disturbances and very few reported attacks. At the same time the border area was clearly an important transit route for smugglers.

It turns out these two roads tell their own interesting stories about Afghanistan.

### *Completing the Ring Road*

The Russians did make one significant contribution in Afghanistan in the form of the Ring Road that was built connecting the main cities around the country. The road connects Mazar-e Sharif and Kunduz in northern Afghanistan with Kabul through the Kyber pass and the Salang tunnel. The road passes through troubled regions such as the Wardak province on the way. From Kabul the road goes southwest to Helmand and Kandahar, the hotbeds of insurgent action in the country. Then it turns northwest to Herat and then north over the Hindu Kush again to the western parts of North Afghanistan. It is here that the road has never been completed.

Why didn't the Russians complete this part during their ten year reign, and why haven't the Americans built it during the decade-long ISAF campaign? For the past few years, completion of the ring road was a definite goal, and some considerable efforts were made to get the project moving. But it never seemed

to materialize. First I wondered why, but after spending a little time in Afghanistan I had to recognize the futility of the effort.

It is possible that completing the road in these areas does not really serve the interests of anyone in Afghanistan. Completing the road would facilitate the access of insurgents from the remote northeastern parts of the country to the more secure central regions of northern Afghanistan. This would also allow Iran to project its interests and send its agents towards the heart of the better-off north. The road might also give the central government better access to northern Afghanistan, affecting the balance of power locally. This naturally is not necessarily in the interests of the power-brokers and warlords who currently have influence in the North. Completing the road would also facilitate access by ISAF and ANA to insurgent sanctuaries and transport routes used by smugglers and insurgents alike. So it is also not in the interests of the insurgents to have the road completed. And in fact they have attacked the construction crews that have been working on the project.

I found it interesting, nevertheless, that despite their pronounced efforts huge military powers had not been able to build a relatively short stretch of road. But as the interests of the different Afghan groups coincided – government, insurgents and regional power-brokers – and were against road construction it just didn't get built.

### *The Bridge of Friendship*

Heiratan is one of the main border-crossings in northern Afghanistan. It boasts both road and railway connections to Uzbekistan and, in addition, a river-port allowing shipping operations in an otherwise land-locked country. Heiratan is also famous from the period of Russian occupation. This was the place where the last Russians withdrew from Afghanistan over the infamous "Bridge of Friendship". News footage showed the last Russian APCs drive over the bridge in 1989, leaving the Najibullah government to deal with the mess.

It was just over an hour's drive to Heiratan from our camp, and I had the opportunity to pay a site visit. A railroad runs parallel to the paved highway, secured by watch towers and small ANA forts that resembled something one would have seen in cowboy movies or old films about the foreign legion. It did not seem possible for anything except a goat, perhaps, to pass unobserved to

the road or the railway. So there was a clear investment in security. As we got closer to Heiratan security got even tighter with a number of checkpoints. Once we got to the outskirts of town there were lots and lots of trucks waiting to pass the border – hundreds of them pulled up along the road in varying degrees of maintenance. Heiratan was clearly a very busy border town characterized by the chaos of trucks and railroad wagons waiting for inspections or custom clearances in order to cross, and clearly very much open for business.

The importance of Heiratan had increased during my tour in Afghanistan. Pakistan had closed the border crossings and logistical routes to ports in southern Pakistan for ISAF cargo after some 35 Pakistani soldiers had been killed by US fire in an accidental incident[57]. Even though the route was later opened, the closure demonstrated how vulnerable ISAF logistics were given that Afghanistan is a land-locked country very far away. As it was evident that the Pakistani route was not completely reliable, the northern logistical routes had increased in importance for getting material out of Afghanistan. Moreover, the amount of material in the country is so enormous that it had been calculated that a truck or container would have to leave the country every seven minutes from the summer of 2012 onwards to get everything out by the end of 2014. Heiratan would be one of the main ports in northern Afghanistan used to get this material out.

One could expect that the route to Heiratan would be a weak spot in the logistical chain for evacuating equipment, as there is a single long road to the city and a border crossing where trucks amass waiting for border and customs checks, such as they are, before passing over to Uzbekistan. Insurgents might be expected to target the road and the supply convoys to cause havoc to coalition and Afghan supply routes and logistics. Yet the road to Heiratan is one of the safest in Afghanistan. No dramatic battles or firefights, no suicide bombs, no insurgent territory.

The border was a business opportunity and lifeline for everyone and that is why it was so secure. For ISAF it was the way out and a major logistical hub. For the government it gave some hope that trade could be developed with goods crossing in both directions one day. And for the local political leadership it was claimed to be a major source of income[58]. They controlled the border area and were resisting heavily any efforts from the central government side to increase government influence at the border. This was a major smuggling route and

57 See *The New York Times*, 26.11.2011: Tensions Flare Between U.S. and Pakistan After Strike
58 See Tolo News, 20.1.2013, Northern Leaders Accused of Embezzlement, Land Grabbing

some of the most powerful people in the region were heavily involved. So they also wanted to keep the border area safe and secure. But they did not really want the central government or ISAF to be too involved. Smuggling was a major industry for not only the power-brokers and the warlords, but for the insurgents as well. They sought to finance their operations from the opium trade, for example. So it was not in their interest to make this area unstable or insecure, either, and thus draw more government attention and troops to the area.

Again, the different political groups all had an interest in keeping the border secure and calm so they could go on with their businesses. It was clear, also, that the governor was putting a lot of resources into securing the border post and I assume he also had the means to react very robustly to any disturbances.

My own visit, after our business meetings, culminated at the Bridge of Friendship. The thinking at the time was that the bridge with its history involving some of the less glamorous episodes of the Soviet Union would be the perfect background for a mission photo.

### The Warlords

*The New York Times* reported in July 2012[59] that the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission had prepared a report on human rights abuses that connected many of the past atrocities to current key leaders of Afghanistan including General Abdul Rashid Dostum, Vice president Fahim Khan, and Mohammed Atta Noor. Dostum, for example, has been suspected of ordering or allowing the execution of Taliban prisoners in northern Afghanistan in connection with the fighting in 2001. Prisoners were allegedly locked in containers and either sprayed with bullets or left to suffocate[60].

Atrocities have undoubtedly taken place throughout the past few decades in Afghanistan. The country has been marred with much war and violence. In this environment people have looked to strong leaders to protect them from threats from other tribes and ethnic groups or foreign forces. These leaders have been able to mobilize military force by different means for their own benefit and that of their supporters. But these leaders also have a darker side – most of them, if not all, have blood on their hands and a brutal past. To maintain security they can use any means necessary which, in the context of Afghanistan, can be interpreted quite broadly. The dilemma of the warlord is that he (for most of them

59 *The New York Times*, Top Afghans Tied to 90's Carnage, Researchers Say, 22.7.2012
60 Report of the Afghanistan Justice Project, 2005

are men) is needed as a leader and a guarantor of security, but he may not make the best political leader to build a modern society.

No one makes a better example of an Afghan warlord than Abdul Rashim Dostum – "Big Daddy" in our internal jargon. Dostum was the protector of the Uzbek people in northern Afghanistan. Despite representing a smaller ethnic minority group, he had survived decades of conflict by mastering how to manage and change his alliances. He had worked with the Russians, and both against and with the other leaders in northern Afghanistan. He had been against Karzai and then supported him in the 2009 presidential elections, and held a formal position as chief of staff of ANA but without real power as Karzai tried to get rid of him. His position had consequently deteriorated in the past few years.

In early 2012 Dostum was working hard on a come-back. The 2014 elections were looming on the horizon and the local power-brokers had started to think about the post-2014 and post-ISAF era, but no one was making any moves yet as there was very little visibility. Cautious steps were taken to feel out possible alliances between ethnic and political groups, but everything was preliminary and careful. But Dostum started political posturing early – possibly because he had little to lose. He traveled to Saudi Arabia on a pilgrimage before the Hajji season in the spring of 2012 revealing the sense of urgency in kick-starting the political process. It seems he did get some recognition from government representatives, as well as from some political allies within the insurgency. With this endorsement he went on a roadshow with other key leaders of the Northern Alliance to drum up support in the western parts of North Afghanistan.

It seems that his political meetings were only partly successful and his welcome wasn't as robust as he might have hoped. People were cautious of Dostum. While he had served as the security-provider of last resort there was fear that his controversial reputation and his aversion towards other political leaders would cause trouble.

Nevertheless his posturing seemed to have alarmed political rivals. The ministry of defense suddenly approached Dostum and reminded him that, as a military officer, he could not pursue a nomination for public office. The public prosecutor's office had also suddenly announced he was suspected of blackmailing a Chinese petroleum company for protection money in connection with mineral exploration in northern Afghanistan. But these efforts then went

quiet. Had Dostum overpowered them, or was this a warning from Karzai to Dostum's supporters not to put their money on him? Or was this a warning to Dostum that steps would be taken if he pursued a political nomination? Perhaps the next prosecution would be related to the alleged war crimes and murders of prisoners in the 2001 campaign. All power-brokers had their pasts and criminal networks, but Dostum's seemed more public than many others.

As the months passed it started to look like Dostum had played his hand too early and lost. It seemed that he was not being made to feel welcome in the national arena or as a political leader. I believe that people were worried that as a politician he would have a destabilizing effect given his conflicts with some of the key Tadzik leaders and the Karzai government. However, the role he did still have support for was that of warlord – provider of a security guarantee of last resort for his ethnic minority and for his traditional support enclaves in the western parts of North Afghanistan. It was still likely he could raise and arm local militias to put up a serious defense against a possible military threat coming from the Taliban or the Pashtun – in case of civil war.

This is the point that describes the political situation in Afghanistan. There is still significant political instability, and people worry about the future. They worry especially about the security situation that is likely to get worse as Western forces withdraw. It is likely that people will again increasingly look to their local leaders and warlords to provide security at the local and regional level. Even if the capabilities of ANA have developed over the years, they are not likely to engage the Taliban proactively who are likely to have much increased freedom of movement. People need additional security elements – as has been the case so many times before.

Decades of wars and violence have certainly inflicted a trauma in Afghanistan that the country has not had the opportunity to deal with or leave behind. They live in crisis still. In some regions around the world, as conflicts are being resolved, people have started to deal with these issues in different ways. Truth and reconciliation processes have taken place in post-conflict regions such as Rwanda and South Africa, for example. There have been investigations, legal processes, confessions, pardons and a joint effort to move forward towards a better world. Some of the non-governmental analyst groups following Afghanistan were looking into the possibility of launching a truth and reconciliation process in Afghanistan as well[61]. They emphasized the trauma caused by the

61 Seminar presentation by AAN at the University of Helsinki, October 2012

fighting over the past few decades and the need to deal with the perpetrators in some manner to allow the people to reconcile and move forward.

The problem with Afghanistan is that there is no evident future. There are no promising opportunities for economic growth, and no visible framework for political stability. There is no viable alternative to the world in which most Afghans live today. So it is premature to start thinking about national reconciliation or the need to deal with human rights abuses by warlords. They still represent the political establishment in the country and the way that politics is done in Afghanistan. The warlords are still needed to provide security for their supporters, and there is no one else to do the job. I think this is a vital aspect in understanding Afghan politics.

The report on human rights abuses is likely to remain outside of the public domain for some time yet. And if it does appear, it will be for political gain rather than for national reconciliation. The leaders that were identified in the parts of the report that were leaked were all power-brokers in northern Afghanistan or the Taliban, rather than current national level Pashtun-politicians – certainly no coincidence.

### Elections

At the start of the campaign in Afghanistan, there were crucial political meetings in Europe (the Bonn meeting in 2001, for example) to set up a political regime with participation by the main political groups in Afghanistan. Later a huge Lloya Jirga was arranged with representatives of all main tribes in Afghanistan to elect the interim president. The Taliban, however, were not invited to these discussions, which certainly did not contribute towards a sustainable political solution. The early political set-up in Afghanistan was largely dictated by the powers involved in the military intervention, and there was not too much concern about the democratic legitimacy of the government. It was important, of course, to get government wheels rolling and start to build the basic structures of society again.

It seems that a key mistake was made in how the government was set up. Prior to 2001 Afghanistan had never really had any democratic political institutions[62]. The governance structure had consisted of a weak central government without much interest or capability to control local affairs. Regional affairs were

62 Kenneth Katzman, Afghanistan: Politics, Elections, and Government Performance, Congressional Research Service Report, August 14, 2013

dealt with based on local traditional political structures. Now, for some reason, a strong central government was found to be the best solution for a country that had never had this type of government. Moreover, the president was given a central position, probably with the goal that the West and the United States could have better insight and control into the relevant political processes in the country. Much of this was in direct conflict with how Afghanistan had been governed over the past decades and centuries. Basically the West was trying to implement a completely new form of government that had no basis in existing society and thus little chance of success.

In continuing the introduction of new and strange institutions the Western countries started to make a big fuss about arranging elections in Afghanistan. There had to be elections and Afghanistan had to be governed based on legitimate democratic principles. It seems that the Western campaign was at a point where additional legitimacy was needed in the eyes of the taxpayers to allow for continued involvement and investment. Presidential elections were first organized in 2004 with Karzai taking over 50 percent of the vote in the first round. Irregularities were reported but it seems that the magnitude of fraud or the effect of security incidents on voting was not as bad as might have been expected.

As the situation in Afghanistan became more volatile, the environment for the next presidential elections was less hospitable. There was much discussion of whether elections could really be carried out in 2009 after Karzai's first five year term was coming to its conclusion. However, after some pressure from the United States and the international community, presidential elections were arranged in Afghanistan in 2009 as planned. The country, however, was not ready. The elections were marred by violence and corruption. Attacks were carried out against election officials and people were murdered on the day of the elections. It was also apparent that serious fraud had taken place with ballot stuffing of significant proportions for the benefit of president Karzai. But I imagine that what happened was just what is supposed to happen in Afghan politics: To the extent that you can use your position and favor your own you do it. So to the extent that Karzai supporters were in a position to favor their man it was but natural to do so; they would see nothing wrong with that.

The formal political system in Afghanistan was underdeveloped. Politics in Afghanistan was based on networking and favoritism as well as on power politics outside the actual formal political institutions. Political parties in Af-

ghanistan are mainly platforms for individual power-brokers to promote their own agendas (and the agendas of their ethnic supporters at the same time). The party was used as a power base for leverage in political negotiations. The political parties had only a limited role in forming policies, and the ability of parliament to actually monitor the executive branch was very limited.[63] The Loya Jirga had tried to have government ministers fired, which they had the authority to do, but the president would reappoint them on a different basis (as acting ministers based on executive authority) and carry on.

The point is that politics in Afghanistan may well be at a "pre-parliamentarian stage". Basically, elections did not yet really matter. The political system was such that power could not be wielded based on an election result but still had to be based on alliances and understandings among power-brokers who represented the power of ethnic and regional groups and military force. It would be unrealistic to expect these power-brokers to allow parliamentarians or other officials to take decisions on their behalf. Just because a government official shows up saying he represents the will of the people does not mean that he or she has much to say – especially if budgets are limited and the added value of the central government on a local basis is negligible. Society did not necessarily work so that institutions mattered in the way we would expect them to.

We generally assume that people voting in an election make some level of individual assessment of whom they will support based on a variety of factors, some ideological. First, illiteracy was still very high in Afghanistan, so it was somewhat unclear how any political messages would reach the electorate. Second, central government mattered little to people at the local level. For practical help they relied to a large extent on traditional networks rather than on the government. From their perspective, the central government was more often part of the problem than the solution. Decision making would be based on the same dynamics regardless. Moreover, politics was largely driven on a tribal and ethnic basis so the normal "democratic" drivers of political systems were not really present. I understood that in many cases it was the village elders who would decide whom the village voted for, which in the scheme of things might actually have reflected the dynamics of Afghan society quite well.

The elections were ultimately organized more for the West than for Afghanistan. The coalition states needed to show to their own electorates that the intervention was legitimate and that the government, which was being supported

63 National Democratic Institute, Political Parties in Afghanistan – A Review of the State of Political Parties after the 2009 and 2010 Elections, June 2011

by hundreds of millions of dollars of taxpayer funds, was legitimate. And in our part of the world this legitimacy is demonstrated through elections. In Afghanistan, however, the concept of elections did not translate so well in 2009.

During the spring of 2012 the Afghan power-brokers were slowly starting to position themselves for the next elections in 2014 in a "post-ISAF" era. ISAF troops would be withdrawing, so the power balance would look different after the elections. I got the impression that there was uncertainty among the Afghan power-brokers about how the situation was developing, and that the political activity in preparation of the elections was still preliminary posturing rather than campaigning. This surprised me as I had the impression that these leaders were miles ahead of us in the Buzkashi game of building new alliances and later simply turning and building new ones as fortunes changed. It seemed that different alliances and positions were being tested, but no one was willing to commit to anything before they could see more clearly how the situation would develop.

One point of uncertainty had been the level of ISAF-withdrawal. Would Western forces really leave altogether or would their military might still be present and if so, to what extent would they have boots on the ground and eyes in the sky? It started to become apparent during the spring of 2012 that there was a great deal of rhetoric in the "withdrawal" and that a Western military presence would remain post 2014. However, the nature of that presence did not seem to be clear in 2012.

Basically we were going to leave, but we were also staying. A "new operation" was planned to start once the ISAF operation has been completed at the end of 2014. While the purpose of the new operation is to focus on training and support, one can be relatively sure that sufficient resources will be kept in theatre to enable kinetic operations against insurgents should they challenge Afghan government forces. Structuring these enablers is difficult, however. You would expect the enablers to consist largely of UAVs and special forces. But troops on the ground will need Medevac capabilities and basing, which the US is cutting down severely. On the other hand, special forces are relatively light and you could foresee a model where mobile support bases are set up where needed at relatively short notice (inside existing ANA compounds, for example). UAVs are not as problematic and provide rather nice air capabilities. Manned air support could also be provided from Bagram to allow for serious pounding of any

remaining insurgent strongholds. It is possible that the potential for increasing capabilities will also be maintained. This will be a signal to the neighboring trouble spots that the United States is right at their back door.

Many of the ISAF states, with the United States in the lead, have entered into strategic partnership agreements with Afghanistan, confirming their long term commitment financially and otherwise to the country, but also placing some requirements on the Afghan side when it comes to political development, anti-corruption efforts and human rights – and rightly so. The United States started negotiating a more detailed bilateral security agreement immediately following the signing of their strategic agreement in early May 2012. The security agreement includes provisions on troop numbers, capabilities and immunity for U.S. soldiers in the country. This requirement proved critical in Iraq. As the Iraqi government refused to grant U.S. troops immunity the United States left. The Afghans know this and will be putting a lot of pressure on the United States, trying to steer and limit their capacity to take military action in Afghanistan to suit the central government. They have already limited the efficient but unpopular night raids, and will likely try to prevent U.S. forces from harassing whatever illegitimate businesses the political leaders are involved in. However, the Afghans are dirt poor and the incoming funding is also channeled to the pockets of the political leaders in different ways, so the United States has at least some bargaining tools for obtaining the commitments they need from the Afghans. But I can see the Afghans emphasizing how foreign troops should only have advisory roles and do not need the same level of immunity as earlier.

Karzai had been relatively quiet on the solution he was looking for as he, at least in theory, could not pursue another term as president. It would be in Karzai's interests to have elections sooner rather than later and reveal his solution at a relatively late stage. The Taliban were also hesitant. They were and were not participating in "peace negotiations". They showed up in meetings with mediators but emphasized that they would not negotiate. As I saw it this was just another political tactic to obtain legitimacy and recognition. The Afghan situation did not really lend itself to "peace negotiations" – things were more complex[64]. The Buzkashi game was going to continue in one form or another.

The political game for the "post 2014 era" is an on-going process. As the end of 2014 draws closer, it seems clear that some assets will be left in theatre as a "force equalizer" to support the Afghan government and ANA. Yet the differ-

64 See Tolonews, Ambassador Crocker: No "Grand Bargain" With Taliban in Afghanistan", 28 July 201

ent political groups, including the insurgents, will have very much increased freedom of movement in the country. Thus it will be even more important than usual to form appropriate political alliances and play the Afghan political Buzkashi game. Finding the right alliances and balance of power that Afghans seem to thrive on will be particularly complex this time.

The presidential elections in 2014 seem to confirm the assumptions about how Afghan politics evolve. The elections are about reflecting the power of politically dominant groups and about trying to align the political system with the reality on the ground. Ideally you will have a president from the dominant Pashtun group with vice presidents representing the ethnic groups of the North so that a consensus can be ironed out without the need of armed conflict. Whether the president is Abdullah Abdullah or Ashraf Ghani does not necessarily matter that much as long as the winner has the support of a coalition that supports the real power on the ground. Fraud in connection with the elections is a given.

### With Neighbors like these, who Needs Enemies?

Just trying to keep up with the internal dynamics of Afghanistan was challenging enough, but adding the international dimension to the political situation created a rather complex web to understand. All the foreign powers involved in Afghanistan had their own agendas and Afghanistan's neighbors were clearly meddling to promote their own interests. In trying to understand and report on the developments in Afghanistan it was important to keep in mind that whatever happened in the political field in Afghanistan was also affected by the policies of neighboring countries – be it through financing or political support or even through foreign agents or indirect or direct military intervention.

Afghanistan has for centuries been a buffer zone between geopolitical actors while its neighbors have sought to increase their influence in the country for their own benefit. It was the scene for the Great Game between the Russian and the British empires in the 19th century, and again the 1980's served as a display of Russian geopolitical decline as the U.S. sponsored Mujahedin drove the Russians out of the country. Many of the neighboring countries have their own internal and external political challenges and do not hesitate to address these in Afghan territory. The ethnic diversity of Afghanistan allows neighboring

countries to influence Afghan politics. Northern Afghanistan is dominated by ethnic minorities, Uzbeks, Tadziks and Turkmens, related to the people of the bordering countries. In the western parts of the country, Iranian influence is evident, while southern Afghanistan, and especially southeastern Afghanistan, is dominated by Pashtun with close ties to their brethren across the border in Pakistan.

Most of the neighbors were certainly not contributing towards peaceful solutions to the Afghan situation. It was important to know which insurgent groups had foreign contacts and which were driven by local agendas (such as the drug industry). It was also important to have an understanding of which regions foreign nations might be active in, and how they might try to affect development there.

Learning the basic elements of the international political dynamic in the neighboring countries was important for understanding the situation in Afghanistan. Pakistan, of course, was the most important neighboring power that significantly affected the political and security situation in the country. Iran, China, India and the northern countries – Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan – were also important actors in this region, but perhaps less so than Pakistan. And for me, as a Finn, understanding Russian interests in the region was also interesting.

#### *Pakistan*

Pakistan has a considerable influence on security in Afghanistan. The Taliban would not survive for long without the support they can obtain from Pakistan. The Taliban leadership resides in Pakistan to some extent – largely beyond the reach of ISAF or U.S. weapons. The tribal areas in North Afghanistan provide safe havens for insurgents and the very porous border with Afghanistan offers a relatively safe route in and out of the country. More recently the border has presented increasing problems and there have even been clashes between Afghan and Pakistani forces emerging from disputes on the exact location of the border. Some have argued that all you would really need to win in Afghanistan would be to close the border with Pakistan, but that is easier said than done.

Pakistan has formally been supporting the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan, though it was originally forced to do so under the threat of being bombed "back

to the stone age", as the former president of Pakistan claimed. Pakistan nevertheless received considerable financial and military support from the United States in order to be able to afford to focus military assets towards the less stable areas in North Pakistan.

It has been apparent that while cooperating with the United States in the fight against terrorism, Pakistani intelligence has also been supporting insurgent groups. It seems that elements in Pakistan use insurgent groups to pursue their domestic and foreign policies – seeking to minimize the influence of India in Afghanistan, among other goals. But Pakistan also has problems with domestic militants who sometimes have ties with the same groups that operate in Afghanistan. Pakistan also does not have complete control of its own territory in the northern tribal areas. So the question arises – why isn't Pakistan doing more to address this threat and cooperating fully with the United States and the West? Pakistan's seemingly strange stance on Afghanistan can be confusing for the casual observer of Central Asia. In particular, the seemingly duplicitous or contradictory positions of Pakistan and its different agencies have sometimes been difficult to understand.

The thing to note about Pakistan is that it also has considerable internal problems. Struggling with poverty, lack of political stability and diverse ethnicities, it remains a divided nation. Political leadership remains unstable and there have been several periods of military rule in the past few decades. The military and political leaderships are separate actors with different views and policies on, among other things, insurgents and the situation in Afghanistan. The military intelligence in Pakistan, the Directorate for Inter-Service Intelligence or ISI, in particular, operates on several different levels with regard to Afghanistan. On the one hand, they cooperate with the United States and the West in the war on terror (against al-Qaeda), but on the other they retain ties (or do not actively work against) certain insurgent groups that they can use to pursue their interests in Afghanistan.

Pakistani interests in Afghanistan are sometimes difficult to establish clearly. However, considering the somewhat diffuse nature of the border between the two countries and the fact that the same ethnic group dominates the regions on both sides of the border, it would seem to make sense to influence the policies and interests of that ethnic group regardless of national borders. So working towards influencing the policies of "Pashtunistan" would of course be important

for Pakistan. Also, as insurgents also pose a considerable threat on the Pakistan side of the border, it would make sense to encourage insurgents to operate in Afghanistan rather than in Pakistan. So dealing with insurgents with this goal in mind might make sense.

Finally, and most importantly, both the Pakistani military and political leadership have been reported to worry about the potential threat, as they see it, that India poses to Pakistan, and want to ensure that Afghanistan provides "strategic depth" for national defense. This does not necessarily mean that the Pakistanis would physically need to use Afghan territory, but it does mean that they need some assurance that the regime in Kabul is friendly towards Pakistan and that, at a minimum, India cannot "encircle" Pakistan in military or political terms. This also suggests that Pakistan wants to affect Afghan politics. It seems that elements of Pakistani leadership are convinced that their ability to control insurgent groups allows them to work against any developments that could increase India's influence in Afghanistan, even if that means destabilizing the central government.[65]

However, the instability caused by the domestic insurgency seems to be a very immediate concern in Pakistan. One would think that a slightly more stable Afghanistan would help Pakistan deal with its own problems, provided the regime is friendly to Pakistan and that Pakistan can still influence Afghan policies thorough their Pashtun liaisons. Pakistani goals regarding Afghanistan can be expected to include a reasonably stable government in Afghanistan. Ideally the Taliban would ultimately have some role in the Afghan political landscape to the extent that Pakistan can sufficiently influence Taliban policies.

It might not be so strange that Pakistan seems to pursue dualistic policies with regard to Afghanistan. The mess the country is in does not allow for the most coherent foreign policy to be formulated and executed in the first place. It has often been said that the war in Afghanistan was really about Pakistan. One U.S. general wrote that the forces used in Afghanistan should all really be in use in Pakistan to solve the problems in the region. As a country with nuclear capabilities, solving Pakistan's problems was far more important than trying to fix Afghanistan. A key issue in this regard is addressing the problems between Pakistan and India. So it was not surprising that U.S. dignitaries, and delegation after delegation of diplomats, kept flying to Pakistan and to India

65 See Matt Waldman, The Sun in the Sky: The relationship Between Pakistan's ISI and Afghan Insurgents, Carr Center for Human Rights Policy, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, June 2010, available at http://www.aljazeera.com/mritems/Documents/2010/6/13/20106138531279734lse-isi-taliban.pdf

during the Afghan crisis – and especially during the time Pakistan had closed their borders and ports for the transit of ISAF and US transports to and from Afghanistan.

### *Iran*

Iran also had a significant impact on the situation in Afghanistan, but not necessarily in any positive way. First of all, Iran is not a politically stable country. There is considerable political tension between the fundamentalist interests and the more secular middle class. The political unrest in Iran has been well documented in the media over recent years. The situation has not been improved by the developments in Afghanistan. Drug smuggling routes from Afghanistan pass through Iran, and a huge number of refugees from Afghanistan have made their way over the border to the relative safety of Iran. It is estimated that there are some one million Afghan refugees in Iran in addition to 1.4 million migrants. From time to time Iran makes statements suggesting these might be expelled to Afghanistan, which would result in a humanitarian disaster.

The unstable situation in Iran is reflected in how Iranian interests are projected in Afghanistan. First, Iran supports the central government as decreasing security in Afghanistan is certainly not in Iran's best interests. At the same time, Iran supports the ethnic Hazaras and other Shia-groups in Afghanistan, who are often in conflict with the central government. In addition, Iran does have links with the Taliban and supports their fight against the United States – Iran's pronounced enemy. Iran probably does not want to see complete failure by the United States in Afghanistan. As discussed, deteriorating security in Afghanistan does not help Iran. But they would like to see the United States suffer losses and, at least, stay no longer than absolutely necessary.

### *Russia*

Whatever Russia does is of great interest to Finland. We want to understand their geopolitical priorities, their national and regional concerns, their way of thinking in matters of foreign policy and security, and their way of responding to political conflicts.

Russia does not have much direct involvement in Afghanistan at this point. But the region remains important for Russian interests. Central Asia is a problematic region for Russia. It may be a source of raw materials, but it has also

provided its fair share of separatism, radical Islamism and drugs. Russia also has its own sorry history in Afghanistan. Hundreds of thousands of people lost their lives in the country during the decade of Russian occupation from 1979 – 1989. Russian intervention was ruthless and there have been many reports of the indiscriminate use of force with high levels of collateral damage[66].

Russians seem to be rather pleased that someone else is trying to put a lid on the problems in Central Asia for a change. Not surprisingly, then, Russia has been rather cooperative with ISAF with regard to logistical support and lack of political opposition to the operation. At the same time, Russia can use the security umbrella provided by the West to develop its own political and economic ties with Afghanistan.

Russian policy on Afghanistan is driven by its geopolitical interests and goals for material advantage[67]. Russia's goals would be to limit Islamic extremism from reaching Russia or its adjacent regions, reducing the flow of drugs to Russia but also preventing other powers from taking advantage of a more stable Afghanistan at the cost of Russian international influence. The West had in fact dealt Russia a very nice hand in this regard. Russian influence was on the increase in early 2012 when Pakistan had closed the supply routes from ISAF. The Northern supply route through Russia became a potential lifeline to get equipment both in and out of the country. Despite some domestic opposition the prime minister at the time, Vladimir Putin, made sure that the line was open. But at a price, of course! Russia could use the situation to obtain economic and political leverage over the West whether it was opposing Georgian membership in NATO, missile shields or potential opposition to Russian gas pipes. But that is business as usual in foreign relations.

### The Politics of the Peace Process

Every now and then there would be news of a promising start for peace negotiations with the insurgents. Taliban leaders had attended negotiations somewhere, or there were "talks about talks" arranged by some think tank or political intermediary. At some point Taliban leaders participated in negotiations abroad – in Japan and in France, for example. Karzai had also appointed a High Peace Council that could engage political leaders in a high level dialogue on a political solution for the country. Big hopes were laid on the office the Taliban were to open in Qatar, where contacts could be maintained with the Taliban

66 See Rodric Braithwaite, *Afgantsy – The Russians in Afghanistan 1979-1989*, 2011
67 See James Shinn & James Dobbins, *Afghan Peace Talks: A Primer*, RAND Report, 2011

leadership and a constructive dialogue initiated. Might there be "peace negotiations" that could resolve the conflict in Afghanistan?

There were no peace negotiations. This was not a conflict between two parties who can sit down with a mediator and resolve whatever disagreement they might have. This was a political situation with multiple interest groups – some of which would benefit from one peaceful solution whereas others might benefit from a less peaceful solution. The Afghan situation did not really lend itself to "peace negotiations" at all. Things were more complex. The Afghan buzkashi game was going to continue for years to come in one form or another.

And when the Taliban did participate in these negotiations it was not to talk. These were just political tactics to obtain legitimacy and recognition. Being called to negotiate meant political recognition that could provide a basis to obtain more support for their political positions when their time came.

### Back to Afghan Normal?

Intelligence folk tend to be rather cynical when discussing politics. However pessimistic or generally negative one is, there will be an analyst or intelligence officer with an even gloomier view of any political situation. I had many discussions where civil war was seen as the only reasonable foreseeable long term outcome in the Afghan crisis.

My view was a bit more positive. After long analyst meetings and heated debates, I concluded that the likely development might be the following. After ISAF withdrawal the influence of the Afghan central government would decrease quite rapidly – over a period of months rather than years. Regional power-brokers would already have been developing political alliances – especially in North Afghanistan, where there was valid concern over what the position of ethnic minorities would be after ISAF had left. The regional power-brokers would have increasing access to armed groups (local security forces armed, trained and paid by ISAF) as the influence of ISAF and the Afghan government over the forces decreased. The armed groups, sensing what was going on, would choose their side based on whoever they thought would be on the winning side the next day. So, as ISAF pulls out, they would align themselves with regional power brokers who have created sufficient alliances to protect their interests.

As ISAF pulls out, the Afghan security forces will not be able to fill the void and the insurgents will have even more freedom of movement than they currently have. In all honesty, it has to be emphasized that even during the height of the ISAF campaign we only controlled the Afghanistan ring road and the area immediately surrounding it, as well as some selected points of interest in a few population centers. As the footprint of the Afghan central government is minimal and extremely corrupt, it does not take much for the population to – perhaps grudgingly – accept insurgent rule and domination. It might or might not be worse than the government, but not by much in any case. However, the insurgents are likely to be drawn into local power struggles and become part of the domestic political dynamic – the "Afghan normal". That, in any case, is the positive scenario.

# CHAPTER 13

# THE ECONOMIC PREREQUISITES OF PEACE

Many people working with Afghanistan have been frustrated with the negative view given of the country in the media and in international debate. They emphasize that the country has another side with people getting on with their lives and making slow progress towards a more stable society. They tell stories of the courage of Afghan people in the face of hardship, and there are many tales of businesses that succeed, of cultural achievements and political heroes who stand for human rights and democracy[68].

There were reports on individual cultural achievements in the fields of music and the arts, for example. In 2013, the *New York Times* reported on an Afghan youth orchestra's performance at Carnegie Hall and hailed their efforts in such difficult circumstances[69]. Afghans participated in the 2012 Olympic Games bringing back a medal in taekwondo. There were also entries in boxing, judo and the women's 100 meter event. The media reported widely on the heroism of the athletes in making it to the Olympics from the midst of a war-torn country.

On the business side, the success of the telecommunications and media industries has been emphasized. The media empire of Saad Mohseni, with news and television shows, is impressive. In the field of TV entertainment Afghanistan had its own Pop Idol competition on Tolo TV, for example. I recall a documentary recording the fate of the girl who made the mistake of dancing on the television show during her performance. She had also shown her hair, it

68 See Jyrki Iivonen and Pauli Järvenpää, *Kirjeitä Kabulista* (Letters from Kabul), 2012, p.228

69 *The New York Times*, "'Bolero' on Instruments Ravel Never Dreamed Of, Afghan Ensembles at Carnegie Hall", 14 February 2013

appeared. After the program aired she had to move to another city in fear of her life having been deemed to have brought dishonor to her whole home region.

So positive developments were observed, and people rooting for Afghanistan wanted to emphasize these. Commentators developed a "positive narrative" of Afghanistan to try to balance the negative media reporting[70]. They emphasized the indisputable development that has occurred since 2001 – the initially strong economic growth, the potential of the natural riches of Afghanistan, increases in life expectancy and health indexes and developments in basic education after the Taliban regime.

But somehow these observations were never convincing. They were presented as anecdotal arguments that not all hope was lost in this country, but there was clearly a concern that these small success stories were not going to survive in the long run. Moreover, a critical analysis of much of the "positive narrative" revealed that the statistics did not actually support it. The U.S. inspector general of Afghanistan questioned the reports on health improvements; economic growth had slowed down after the initial post-war growth, and any realization of income from natural resources was still far in the future.

The positive developments were mostly examples of human endurance and the bravery of individuals rather than signals of a positive trend in Afghan economic or social development. The overall trend could still be seen in the growth estimates of the World Bank. If the economy was dependent on foreign aid, and that aid was likely to decrease in the following years without the likelihood of robust domestic economic developments compensating for the downfall in demand, it was clear that the economy would shrink with resulting unemployment, increased poverty and political instability.

### The Economy

Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world, ranking 171st of 177. Even if severe malnutrition is far too common, there has been no acute large-scale famine and extreme poverty is not perhaps as visible as it sometimes is in Africa. But the statistics are still shocking. Access to medical services in Afghanistan is the worst in the world. Infant mortality was at 77 per 1,000 live births in 2010 (down from 111 in 2008)[71] according to Afghan statistics (102 according to UNICEF), and the rate of women dying in childbirth was

70 See Jyrki Iivonen and Pauli Järvenpää, *Kirjeitä Kabulista* (Letters from Kabul),, 2012, p.26-29
71 World Bank, Afghanistan Country Overview 2012

1,600 per 100,000, representing 1.6 percent according to WHO and UNICEF data (other sources put the number at 1,900). Literacy was at approximately 28 percent. Among men the portion was approximately 43 percent but among women only 12 or 13 percent. Average life expectancy was 48.1 years according to UNICEF statistics in 2010[72].

Agriculture and small scale manufacturing represented a significant share of the legitimate economy in Afghanistan. Fruit and vegetables grow well in the Afghan climate, and melons, pomegranate and nuts are produced for both domestic use and for export. Main crops include wheat, corn and rice. Altogether agricultural products represent roughly half of the country's legitimate exports. Manufacturing is mainly for domestic use except that the manufacture and sale of traditional handmade carpets is also for export.

A considerable portion of the economy came from sources that were deemed problematic. The drug industry contributed approximately one quarter of GDP in 2010 as Afghanistan produced over 90 percent of the world's opium at the time. Also, a huge portion of the Afghan economy is completely based on international aid. In some years foreign aid actually corresponded to the nominal GDP. Aid in 2010-2011 had been approximately 16 billion dollars while GDP had been 15 billion dollars according to the World Bank.

One of the assets often referred to as the magic wand of Afghan economic development is its mineral resources. Afghanistan did provide some possibilities for mining, and the Chinese had already made some investments in exploration in Faryab and Sar-e-Pul provinces in North Afghanistan. The security situation limited the possibility of developing these resources, however. Mining projects had been stalled or were moving forward at a very slow pace. Local power-brokers wanted protection money and greater warlords wanted more significant pieces of the cake. There were news reports that Dostum had been suspected of trying to blackmail the Chinese to make payments in connection with explorations in areas located in Dostum's areas of influence[73]. The Chinese were indeed taking a very long view in their investments even though they have often demonstrated a capacity to operate in difficult environments. The Afghan buzkashi game may be just too much even for the Chinese.

Even if the security situation were to improve, which I doubt, it is still unclear how long it would take for the mines to be economically productive. The inef-

72 The World Bank reported an increased life expectancy of 62 (men) and 64 (women) based on Afghan statistics. The previous numbers from 2006 were 44 and 43. The UNICEF numbers seem more in line with previous calculations.

73 Reuters, Afghans say former warlord meddling in China oil deal, 11 June 2012

fective government and direct corruption will take a toll on development, as will the remoteness of the mines. It will take years and years before the mines start producing real money for the government (and not only for government officials personally). In their economic projections the World Bank warned that sufficient income from mining will not be available to support the Afghan economy for many more years – including the post-2014 transition period when Afghanistan should start to support itself.

### International Aid

The U.S. has invested almost 90 billion dollars in Afghan reconstruction over the past decade[74]. According to the US Inspector General for Afghanistan this was more than the U.S. had ever invested in a single country over a similar period. Even after World War II U.S. reconstruction aid in Germany amounted to less than 35 billion (in 2011 value). In his periodic report to congress, the inspector general was very critical of the planning and execution of U.S. reconstruction projects. It seems that the sustainability of the projects has not been sufficiently taken into account in planning and execution. For example, the US might build a facility or infrastructure that Afghanistan cannot afford or will not be able to maintain; or reconstruction projects will not be completed by the end of 2014 or their final completion date remains unclear. The inspector general's report suggests that U.S. taxpayers are not getting good return on their investment and that their money is not looked after with sufficient concern and seriousness of purpose. My own analysis of the report is that it will increase pressure against continued funding of Afghanistan – including funding that is really needed. Public discontent may stop not only reconstruction projects but also support to the Afghan security forces. While reconstruction may be important, it is still secondary to the continued financing of the security forces and the government. A crisis is likely to emerge immediately if the government or the security forces implode due to lack of financing.

There were other interesting initiatives for international aid as well. The Finnish education system has received international recognition as students seem to achieve good results in international comparisons. So it was suggested that Finland should support education in Afghanistan and strengthen the Finnish "brand" for high quality education.[75] To me the proposal just seemed to emphasize how people debating Afghanistan were distanced from the situation

74 Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), Quarterly report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2013

75 Jyrki Iivonen and Pauli Järvenpää, *Kirjeitä Kabulista* (Letters from Kabul), 2012, p.29

on the ground. Any Finnish educational achievements are the result of decades of development of the whole of Finnish society and a reflection of the welfare state. In Afghanistan, the problems were related to security and threats to teachers, as well as to the availability of teachers who were literate and had even basic educational skills. The finer points of the Finnish education system would be more or less useless over the next few decades of Afghan development.

There was some concern over whether Western countries would continue to support Afghanistan after they withdrew the troops. It has been demonstrated that the international community is not very good at maintaining support after immediate involvement comes to an end. It seems that development assistance has fallen by half or more in many of the regions that have gone through crises over the past few decades[76]. It seems that it is difficult (or uninteresting) to provide economic support as the political salience of a crisis starts to decrease. The West, and the United States in particular, do not have the best track record in following up on and transitioning regions in crisis towards stable societies[77].

Many countries had made solemn commitments not to abandon Afghanistan and to dedicate funds and resources to supporting the government. But those same commitments were not unconditional. They were tied to democratic developments, anti-corruption efforts and the promotion of the position of women in Afghanistan, among other. The conditions were not clearly defined and subject to discretion so the Western countries could always decrease or stop the promised aid and refer to the lack of progress in democratic development. But that was obvious. The interesting aspect was that, at the point the commitments were made and the conditions drafted, we all knew they would not be fulfilled. We knew the government did not have the means or the will to deliver on these points. It was not on their agenda. I recall that the UN Secretary General more or less pointed this out in his statements in connection with the Tokyo conference in the summer of 2012. He highlighted that Western countries should not set too rigid expectations on the Afghan government with regard to anti-corruption and democratic development, for example. He emphasized that the country was at a very fragile point in its development and needed more time (and money) to ensure that the regime would survive.

It is expected that the withdrawal of international forces will have an immediate negative effect on economic growth in Afghanistan[78]. Military spending

76 Anthony H. Cordesman, Failing Transition: The New 1230 Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan, CSIS Report, August 5, 2013

77 Id.

78 James R. Clapper, Director of National Intelligence, Statement for the Record, Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, March 12, 2013

and aid projects have injected capital into the economy and increased growth in the construction and services sectors, for example. The agricultural sector and small businesses have also been the recipients of foreign aid according to the view of the U.S. intelligence community. As troops withdraw so will many of the civilian actors and aid projects as well, and spending will decrease, perhaps dramatically[79]. The local economy will not be able to compensate for this downfall in the short or even medium term. Unemployment is likely to increase, as is poverty and food insecurity.

### Economic Development and Peace

Afghanistan has been at war for decades. Government infrastructure is weak and corrupt, the levels of income are low, and there is very little manufacturing. From 2001, economic growth had actually first reached the high levels typical for post-war development. When the starting point is everyone shooting at each other, it's not difficult to get good growth numbers after you stop and people go back to their lives. But as war weariness was starting to amount in the West, and as the withdrawal date of 2014 announced by the U.S. started to get closer, Afghans started to take their money out of the country. Investments in the country began to decrease and even local businesses started hedging their country risk by setting up shop abroad.

The World Bank had published different scenarios on economic growth and aid in Afghanistan. At best, the World Bank estimated long term growth rates of 5-6 percent. With an annual population growth rate of 2.8 percent these levels of growth would still only have a limited impact on reducing the extreme poverty that is prevalent in the country. In fact, with real annual GDP growth at 6 percent it would still take a generation to double the current very low average per capital income of USD 528. However, in many discussions people were looking at much lower numbers, even negative growth. The abrupt decrease of foreign aid and an increase in political instability could easily have this impact. A lack of economic growth was something to be very worried about. Abrupt declines in the economy as a result of cutting off aid, for example, could lead to "fiscal implosion, loss of control over security sector, collapse of political authority and possibly civil war"[80] according to the World Bank. Afghans were already extremely poor; how could they cope with further negative development without this resulting in significant instability?

79 *The New York Times*, 14.2.2013, As Troops Leave, an Uncertain Future for U.S. Aid in Afghanistan"
80 The World Bank, Afghanistan in Transition: Looking Beyond 2014, 2011

The World Bank expected a financing gap to arise as Western funds start to decline. Basically, it predicts a hole in the Afghan finances of approximately 25 percent of GDP by 2021 that will drive how money can be spent[81]. The World Bank estimated that the budget would decrease to approximately 43 percent of GDP, while domestic revenues might increase to 17.5 percent provided the Afghan government starts getting revenue from certain mining operations[82] (the likelihood of that, of course, is debatable). As foreign actors withdraw the government will need to step up its activities in both security and non-security spending. The World Bank emphasized that the tightening of financing will force the Afghan government to prioritize spending and adhere to general austerity. However, considering the need for security spending which is required just to keep the country together, I could not see that there was much left to prioritize. There will undoubtedly be a significant and dangerous gap for public finances in Afghanistan post 2014 that does not seem sustainable.

The World Bank had published interesting comparisons with regard to the impact of economic growth. Situations where peace and stability had been achieved after a crisis were linked to periods of strong economic growth. This, according to the World Bank statistics, had been the case in Mozambique and Rwanda, for example.[83] Economic growth provided better political stability and opportunities for the parties of a dispute. It was easier to give up fighting when you could, in fact, pick up a plow of one kind or another. The projected slowdown of the Afghan economy did not seem to provide the basis for a success story in Afghanistan. I could not see any reasonable basis for economic growth in the country, nor could the World Bank. And without economic growth peace will not stand a big chance. I believe this to be the biggest problem for the country, dwarfing any other issues on the rather bleak Afghan horizon.

### Analyzing Afghanistan

I tried to form a picture of the drivers underlying Afghan society so that I could assess and understand the political goals and the behavior of different interest groups better. As I was reading report after report on Afghanistan prepared by Western news agencies, political analysts and NGOs, it seemed that these were further and further removed from the reality of Afghan society and had a misconceived picture of how Afghanistan worked.

81 International Development Association and International Finance Corporation Interim Strategy Note for Islamic Republic of Afghanistan for the Period FY12-FY14, 9.3.2012 (Document of the World Bank, Report No: 66862-AF)

82 The World Bank, Afghanistan in Transition: Looking Beyond 2014, Volume I, Overview, May 2012, p.8

83 See The World Bank: Afghanistan in Transition: Looking Beyond 2014, 2011

There were, of course, positive developments that could be reported from Afghanistan. According to U.S. reports the average life expectancy had increased somewhat as had the availability of medical care with the infrastructure the West had provided. And at least girls were allowed to go to school, to work and even to enter politics. There was a central government and even a parliament of sorts; there was also some level of economic development, even if prerequisites for robust growth were still lacking. So perhaps at least some aspects of life for average Afghans had improved, which might be applauded as significant gains under the circumstances. Yet even the U.S. inspector general for Afghanistan reconstruction had found that the reports on increased life expectancy and better medical aid were inaccurate, and that the investments in developing Afghanistan were often ineffective and unsustainable[84].

Many commentators, NGOs, foreign aid providers and analysts, tried to be optimistic and tried to draw different positive scenarios for the future of Afghanistan. Everybody wanted to see a positive spiral with better security, more robust political institutions and a growing economy. These factors would reinforce each other and the country could be on a stable track of development. In most reports the conclusion was that there had been progress but that it was still fragile, and not necessarily sustainable without further foreign support[85]. It was vital that the West not leave Afghanistan at the crucial moments before the situation had somehow stabilized. This applied regardless of whether the report discussed political, economic or security developments.

Most reports saw so many benefits for Afghans and most other participants in the crisis, to committing to positive development that it seemed counterintuitive that there had been so little sustainable progress. Why didn't the Afghans want to help themselves? Why didn't they want to develop their government and be tougher on corruption? As one looked into the dynamics of Aghan society and politics it became clear that these commentators were looking at Afghanistan as though it was a society much like our own with similar institutions and similar cultural norms and traditions. But this was obviously not the case.

It was so important to understand what the drivers were in Afghan society, what factors Afghans were reacting to and how they looked at their own society and their own life. Once one looked closely at how Afghan society really worked it became much clearer why there appeared to have been so little progress. With the dynamics of society and the security and economic situation

84 SIGAR Quarterly reports, April 2013, http://www.sigar.mil/quarterlyreports/
85 Sherard Cowper-Coles, *Cables from Kabul*, 2011, p.7

being what they were, Afghans really had no choice in how they went about things. Understanding these drivers was a key to understanding the prerequisites for development in Afghanistan.

With the Western intervention we had supported institutional structures that were foreign to Afghanistan and simply not sustainable. Afghan society would have to be built based on Afghan principles, not our own. An institutional set-up that might have had some chance of survival would have been one that relied on existing local structures – including village elders and councils (shuras). Now local representatives of the central government could be competing with traditional established governance structures and were much less effective for it. In a model more attuned to the Afghan environment the government would be largely decentralized with only certain key functions managed at the level of central government. This is the way Afghan government has worked previously in times of peace, and might work again.

Arranging elections was all a bit of a show at this point. Afghan society was not really quite ready to jump into advanced democratic processes. The whole concept of elections was still a bit removed from how things really worked. Governance was something that was negotiated among powerful groups – not something that could just be accepted based on people voting for one candidate or another.

With regard to the economy it was more difficult to see alternatives for how things might develop, which was disheartening. Without economic growth there will most likely not be political stability or peace. It was clear that the international efforts to develop the Afghan economy had been no great success. An economy cannot be built on international aid. It has to have an independent basis – and that basis was really nowhere to be seen in Afghanistan. Moreover, we had created a service industry to support our presence that was not sustainable as we were leaving. There were plenty of transportation and construction companies that would not have any work once we were out, for example. Much of the footprint that we brought into the economy was false and unsustainable.

# ACT VI

## A WESTERN CRUSADE?

# CHAPTER 14

# RUNNING FOR THE EXITS?

The spring and summer of 2012 was a very interesting time to be in Afghanistan. It seemed to be a time when strategies changed and when a possible end game was becoming remotely visible.

In 2011 the U.S. initiated surge was still continuing and ISAF had some of its largest troop strengths in theatre since the start of the campaign. There was little notion of how this would all play out. There had even been some confusion as to whether the West really intended to leave at all. Camps were still being built and significant infrastructure investments were being made. The coalition was heavily invested in Afghanistan and there seemed to be no notion of leaving theatre.

But by early 2012 the situation started to change. This was the time of troop withdrawals in Afghanistan. The United States had announced a fixed date for troop withdrawals and NATO had confirmed that the ISAF operation was to be completed by the end of 2014. Moreover, the operational role of ISAF would be concluded by mid-2013, when Afghan forces would take over responsibility for security throughout the country. ISAF would continue to support the Afghan troops with training and special assets, such as air support and MEDEVAC. ISAF states would reduce their troop numbers accordingly, so that after 2014 only a limited number of troops would remain in a new role largely focused on training.

The political pressure had been increasing in the West as the cost of the Afghan war had mounted and as more and more troops were sent into theatre and the number of casualties increased. At the same time it was unclear whether they were really getting the kinds of results expected. The media was also full of reports of an Afghan government at times in open confrontation with the international community that was pouring in money that it depended on – a government that was not up to its task of stabilizing and leading the country.

But the political pressure only really began to affect the situation as election times came closer in troop contributing nations. During 2012 there was a trend of announcing early troop withdrawals by countries that happened to have elections. It seems that participation in the ISAF campaign had become a political liability that was taken advantage of in domestic political settings with opposition parties making campaign promises of bringing back the troops. The political mood had perhaps turned against the campaign due to loss of life or increasing economic costs. Australia, for example, started pulling troops after a new government took over, as did the new French president François Hollande, following up on his campaign promises. Hollande felt the need to publicly explain that France was not leaving irresponsibly, but had done more than its duty[86]. The fact that he needed to explain himself reveals, in itself, that this move was not ideal from a foreign policy perspective.

The most important reason affecting the fate of the ISAF mission was the political situation in the United States. Indeed, the main political reason for announcing troop withdrawals became imminent in early 2012. With U.S. presidential elections coming up in the fall of 2012, it was important for Barack Obama to send a message domestically that troops were coming home, and that the endless spending of U.S. funds in far-away countries would finally stop. He needed to "bring home the troops" well before the elections. For domestic purposes he also needed to communicate that the campaign had been a success and that it was time to declare victory and go home.

However, internationally the United States and the Western coalition could hardly be seen irresponsibly leaving a region where it had committed significant political and economic capital. All the economic investments and political efforts had to amount to something and the casualties could not be in vain. This could not end with an image like the last helicopter from Saigon. There had to be a victory or a success of sorts; a "mission accomplished" moment, perhaps.

86 Remarks by François Holland at NATO Chicago Summit, 22 May 2012

So strategies changed and new more realistic definitions for the mission were developed. Suddenly the operation was no longer a COIN operation endeavoring to win over the whole population. It was an anti-terrorist operation targeting al-Qaeda[87]. And I think the real goals were narrower still. The exit by the United States and the coalition had to be an orderly withdrawal without shame and cost in international influence. Basically the West had to make sure that the situation in Afghanistan would remain under control for a sufficient time period after the withdrawal and that Afghan government would retain some level of security at least so that the walls don't cave in right after we leave.

The problem was that without continued Western support the influence of the central government in Afghanistan would likely decrease in a matter of months. The government's presence and footprint at the local level around the country was very weak. The political and security dynamic in the country was very local so that the balance of power among political constituents was often settled on local terms without the government being a relevant or, in any case, decisive player. Even the likelihood of civil war and anarchy was discussed as a not wholly unlikely scenario.

With adequate financial commitments the ship could be kept afloat for a time period sufficient for the West to get out without losing face. The Najibullah regime had survived for a few years after the Russians left in 1989 as long as they had adequate funding. So the United States was running a program to ensure that sufficient funds and other support were available for the Afghan government, at least for a time, to allow the West to exit. Before the NATO summit on Afghanistan in Chicago in the summer of 2012, the United States had been rallying and harassing its allies and friends to commit funds to Afghanistan. I assume a message was given by ambassadors and other delegates in various countries across the West that the United States expected some "membership dues" to be paid for a continued good relationship. I am sure there were hasty phone calls between many foreign ministries and treasury departments about how to balance the need to appease the United States and the terrible fiscal situation that so many countries were dealing with in 2012. However, I think the requests by the United States were reasonable, and can assume that they gave some assurances regarding improved trade relations or, where needed, positive review of applications to buy weapons from the United States as a sweetener (or contrary signals in case purse strings were too tight).

87 Pajhwok News, Goal in Afghanistan is to disrupt dismantle, defeat Al-Qaeda: White House, 18.4.2013

### The Political Rhetoric

As the political dynamic started shifting so that a withdrawal from Afghanistan was becoming the state of play, the political rhetoric started shifting as well. It was impressive to see these somewhat contradictory messages play out and resonate simultaneously at the NATO Chicago Summit in 2012. On the one hand the U.S. president did get across the message to the U.S. electorate that the campaign was a success and the troops were coming home (in time for the elections). On the other hand, the summit participants made solemn declarations of support to Afghanistan to ensure that satisfactory resources would be available to maintain government influence and political stability for a transitional period. This was a well-handled publicity arrangement.

In the political sphere there were still strong efforts to maintain the standard rhetoric that there was "promise" and "potential" for the Afghan situation to develop[88]. It was difficult to tell the tax payers that ten years of investment had not really produced the expected results. I am sure that many also found it very difficult to talk about any level of failure considering the human sacrifices made. Young soldiers had given their lives in Afghanistan – it was impossible to admit that the sacrifices had resulted in anything but success.

A small example of the rhetoric related to Afghanistan was apparent from the statements of the Finnish Minister of Defense after his visit in theatre in April 2013. At the same time that the minister was quoted stating how security was improving in Afghanistan, the Finnish immigration authorities published their decision to facilitate asylum applications from Afghanistan as the security situation had deteriorated so badly[89]. Just the previous day, the representative of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Afghanistan had stated his concern about deteriorating security and the safety of the civilian population[90]. On the political side it is important to maintain the stand that the West can leave Afghanistan and that the mission has been a success. At the same time, international organizations start seeing how the situation might actually develop.

A factor increasing the complexity of the situation was that so many decisive developments were to occur during the same year: 2014. Afghanistan would see the withdrawal of Western operational forces, the end of the ISAF operation, presidential elections and an economic transition during the same year. This creates the potential for considerable instability, and it really seems as

88 *The New York Times*, Departing French Envoy Has Frank Words on Afghanistan, 27.4.2013
89 *Hufvudstadsbladet*, 19.4.2013
90 Pajhwok News, 18.4.2013, "Security deteriorating in Afghanistan, warns Red Cross" and Radio Pakistan, 18.4.2013, "Security is deteriorating across Afghanistan: International Red Cross"

though we are challenging some pretty high odds by arranging transition in this way. But I believe this is being driven by the domestic political dynamic in the United States and elsewhere. Afghanistan is becoming too much of a liability for political decision makers in their own four-year cycles of battling for survival.

As 2014 started to get closer, it became more difficult to maintain the traditional rhetoric on Afghanistan. The French ambassador departing Kabul in spring 2013 had given a very critical farewell address confirming what many already knew[91]. The West had not done a great job in Afghanistan, but nor did the Afghans make much of a contribution to stabilizing their own country, he suggested. The government was not acting responsibly and did not seem to have a strategy to maintain and develop Afghanistan as a sovereign nation. He did not seem to have much faith in the ability of the Afghan security forces to maintain order either. The departing Finnish ambassador was also interviewed on the situation in Afghanistan in 2013. His statements did not contain much of his former optimism (which he rightly suggests is a better approach than the opposite), and the only thing we can know for certain, he said, is that following the tumultuous and decisive 2014 there will be a new 2015.

### Leaving the West and the East?

During my time in theatre ISAF forces started to withdraw from the western and eastern parts of North Afghanistan. The region must have been deemed sufficiently stable so that the coalition could pull out without an immediate breakdown of society and a surge in violence. Slowly ISAF started to focus less on maintaining control in North Afghanistan and more on keeping the main transit routes secure to ensure the way out as we were preparing to leave. These developments seemed to reveal how limited the impact of the Western presence had really been.

#### *Withdrawing From Faryab….*

The Norwegians had their AOR in the western parts in Jowzjan and Faryab provinces far West from the Swedish AOR and Mazar-e-Sharif. There was also a considerable U.S. force located in the same area. The security situation in that part of the country was mediocre[92]. The political situation was not very stable,

91 *The New York Times*, Departing French Envoy Has Frank Words on Afghanistan, 27.4.2013

92 Obaid Ali, Insurgents and Factions: Waves of insecurity rising in Faryab, Afghanistan Analysts Network, 21 September 2012

with tension between the locally dominant Uzbek population and Tadziks that dominated the other parts of northern Afghanistan. A local governor who did represent the locally predominant ethnicity, for example, had not been able to take over his position for security reasons and was administering his domains from a distance.

The insurgents excelled in this environment. Their main area of concentration was actually west of Faryab in the northern parts of Baghdis province in the Ghormach district[93]. But they have also been active in Faryab in places like Qaysar and Pushtun Kot[94] that were in the Norwegian and U.S. AOR. They were also able to extend their influence east which was a slight concern as ISAF troops started to withdraw.

During the summer of 2012 there was a transfer of responsibility to ANA in the key regions in the west. In late summer 2012, ISAF troops stopped operations and prepared to withdraw in the Fall[95]. With this development the western parts were effectively outside the ISAF AOR. As the troops also left their camps there were no ISAF bases in the area. This meant that it would be effectively quite difficult for ISAF to conduct significant operations in these areas going forward. I imagine it would be possible to set up temporary bases to support small-scale SOF operations, which had proved quite effective. But still ISAF would likely find it difficult to conduct or support more lengthy "hold" operations.

Before ISAF left these areas I suspect they did their best to even the odds for ANA by pounding the insurgents with targeted operations. It is likely that a significant amount of operations would have been carried out so that the Taliban organization would not be at its strongest just as the ISAF troops left to allow ANA some time and space to try to establish a security presence. Having already left theatre at that point, I saw in the media that several hits had been reported on Taliban leaders in this area. This surely gave ANA some comfort that the situation might stay calm at least until the next "fighting season". I understood, however, that the security situation was already deteriorating after the withdrawal of the Western forces[96].

Given the capabilities of ANA, it is unlikely that they would create a permanent and effective security presence or be able to restrict the freedom of move-

93 Ariana News, Taliban Plan to Seize Ghormach; Faryab Council, 14 August 2013; *Afghanistan Times*, 1500 families flee possible clashes in Faryab, 1 September 2013

94 See OCHA, Update conflict displacement Faryab Province, May 22, 2013

95 Norwegian Defence Forces Press Release, Norwegian forces to withdraw from Faryab in the autumn, 24 April 2012; Pajhwok, Faryab Security Transitions to Afghans, September 12, 2012

96 See Kenneth Katzman, Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security and U.S. Policy, Congressional Research Service Report, August 8, 2013, p.23

ment of the insurgents. This had been a problematic region for years – even when ISAF troop numbers were at their highest levels. My conclusion is that the western parts of North Afghanistan will soon be back to Afghan normal with clans and tribes disagreeing as they have in the past, and with the Taliban participating in the melee as best they can.

There were some immediate concerns related to this development, however, as the insurgents had increased freedom of movement in the region. From a Finnish perspective this had some implications as after the Norwegian withdrawal, the next ISAF troops to face any insurgents coming from the west would be the Swedes and the Finns who operate in the area west of Mazar-i-Sharif, or "West of MeS". This area already had some less secure areas, but the trouble was mainly locally driven and largely limited to certain Pashtun pockets and specific villages. To the extent that insurgents would have an interest in expanding their sphere of influence, the Swedes and Finns expected to see some increase in activity before the end of the ISAF mission. However, as the insurgency in the north is relatively weak and has different drivers than in the south, the overall situation is likely to remain relatively stable in Afghan terms.

### *Leaving Badakshan…*

The eastern parts of North Afghanistan were seeing the same development as the West. The eastern province of Badakhshan was very remote and mountainous. There were a few accessible river valleys but otherwise the area was largely wild and mountainous. Parts of Badakhshan border Pakistan in the South, Tajikistan in the North and China in the East. As the area is not very accessible and far away from the reach of government, it has become an important smuggling route. The area is used as a route to transport drugs from southern Afghanistan, for example. Opium would be refined in labs in the mountains of Badakhshan and taken northward to be transported towards Russia.

It was unclear to me to what extent the insurgency in this area was really driven by any ideological motivation. It seemed clear that smuggling and the drug trade were important motivators for the power-brokers in the region, who had to secure their freedom of movement to carry on with their trade. It also seemed that there was a considerable power-play among regional warlords and power-brokers. This area had seen several local Taliban related power-brokers first turn themselves over to the government in the reintegration program as

winter started to approach just to turn back after they had picked up their government allowances and after spring allowed another "fighting season" to begin.

ISAF and ANA conducted some operations in the central parts of Badakhshan with possibly some effect during the first half of 2012[97], but then it seemed that ISAF started losing its interest. The area was subject to transition and would probably go back to "Afghan normal". It seemed that the smugglers, warlords and insurgents had largely maintained freedom of movement in the region anyway.

#### *Securing the Exits…*

As ISAF was starting to withdraw and was limiting its operations it was rather clear that ISAF was focusing on maintaining control of the ring road and the transit routes out of the country. In fact, one might ask to what extent ISAF ever had an interest in ensuring influence outside the immediate vicinity of the ring road in the first place. Even before troop withdrawals the focus seems to have shifted so that responsibility for operational work in different areas was turned over to the ANA but ISAF made sure it maintained the assets to provide a security umbrella over the exit routes. As the retrograde went forward the main concern was to secure the key roads and work out the enormous logistical challenge of getting material out of land-locked Afghanistan.

One problem with this refocusing of ISAF attention was that it must have been transparent to the Taliban. The insurgents must have realized what was going on and that this was a clear signal that the West was on its way to leave. There was no urgency for them to escalate violence just yet – doing so might even have drawn unwanted attention from ISAF. Instead the Taliban could enjoy a better freedom of movement and had more access to the population than before. They could start establishing their presence in a low key manner reminding the population that they were here to stay while the West was just visiting.

### Southern Afghanistan – The Real War

As mentioned earlier, northern Afghanistan was relatively calm. The real trouble was in southern Afghanistan and specifically in Kandahar and Helmand provinces, which usually represented easily more than half of all security incidents and casualties in the operational theatre. I will leave it to others better

97 See Pajhwok, Badakhshan students protest against ISAF, May 24, 2012

versed in the security situation in these provinces to discuss the nature of the insurgency there in detail. But there is one point in relation to the insurgency in the south that I feel qualified to discuss – the characteristics of the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan and how it affects the situation overall.

The northeastern parts of Pakistan are generally not under government control, but are instead dominated by local tribes. To some extent these tribes live on both sides of the border, and may not really define themselves in terms of nationality at all. The area south of the Hindu Kush reaching well into northeastern Pakistan is largely dominated by ethnic Pashtun.

The border, then, remains a flexible concept to the locals. The border is also porous, ill-defined and not very well controlled. There are not only local or tribal contacts and traffic across the border, but a whole lot of illegitimate traffic as well. Taking advantage of the border, insurgents can use northeastern Pakistan as a safe haven from harassment from ISAF and ANA. The Taliban, for example, are deemed to have their headquarters in Pakistan in Quetta and in Peshawar, where their leaders go for the winter season.

Due to the political situation in Pakistan it is very difficult for ISAF, or even for the Pakistanis, to pursue the Taliban or other insurgents in northern Pakistan. Pakistan is politically unstable and it is difficult for the central government to put pressure on the Islamist movements or on the tribes in the north. They also do not have sufficient military capacity to pursue the insurgents in remote areas.

The United States has followed the Taliban into Pakistan with drones and – who knows – may well have conducted SOF operations in the country as well. However, they cannot really operate in a robust manner in the country without risking very serious political or even military consequences. Pakistan has already reacted to US intrusion by closing transportation routes for ISAF, for example. Anti-American sentiment is very high in the country and the central government, even if it wanted to, could probably not survive if it is seen as too pro-U.S.

Some frustrated U.S. officers have said that they are actually fighting a war in the wrong country against the wrong enemy. They may well be right. It is important that Pakistan remains politically stable. The country has nuclear weapons, and is an important political actor in Central Asia. A Pakistan in political

turmoil would destabilize the whole region and risk war with India, which also has nuclear weapons. Avoiding negative developments in Pakistan would be worth a small war in Afghanistan.

### The Transition Process

The withdrawal had partially been draped in a conceptual cloak of "transition". In this process Afghan forces would take over the primary responsibility for security from ISAF in selected regions across the country. The first phase of the process took place in 2011 when fairly stable regions were "transitioned" to the ANA. These included some larger cities where the central government had a clear grip over the security situation. There had been an understanding that transition would be based on the development on the ground, and that responsibility for security would be transferred depending on the stability of each region and the ability of Afghan forces to cope with the situation.

The transition of a specific region would be based on a comprehensive plan incorporating security, stability and governance. When the different elements were on a satisfactory level a region would be declared ready to be handed over to the Afghan troops. A transition ceremony would take place in the presence of dignitaries, flags would be hoisted, and speeches given.

However, it soon emerged that the transition process had little to do with security or governance. To me it seemed that this was a political process linked to the planned withdrawal schedule. Basically, Afghans had to take over responsibility for their own country, and ISAF forces would simply stop being in charge according to a given schedule regardless of how the situation developed (more or less). Some of the transition ceremonies were actually organized inside ISAF bases for security reasons. However, to the extent that ANA was not able to cope with the situation, little could be expected to change on the ground. ISAF would no longer plan independent operations, but ANA might not be too proactive either, and might avoid confrontation with insurgents. If you don't go on patrol you don't need to fight. This would mean that the insurgents had increased freedom of movement, and locally the situation would go back to "Afghan normal".

The transition process could just as well have been called a withdrawal process, except that transition sounds better. To be fair it was high time for the

Afghans to take responsibility for their own country after ten years of foreign intervention. So I have a lot of understanding for a semi-forced withdrawal schedule by the West. It may well have been long overdue, and there certainly was nothing inappropriate in getting out. It is just that the process is a reflection of the failure of the strategies that had been pursued in the Afghanistan campaign. The fact that the West was so heavily involved in all elements of Afghan society that a transition process of this magnitude was necessary was something of a failure in itself.

### A Declining Security Situation?

As the ANSF started taking over responsibility for the security situation, reports started to come in that confirmed some of the expectations regarding how the security situation would develop. The UN issued a report in July 2013 on civilian casualties in the Afghan conflict. The report found that civilian casualties had increased in the first half of 2013 by 23 per cent from the same period a year earlier[98]. The trend had been decreasing, but has changed as insurgents have increased their freedom of movement after the decrease in the number of ISAF led operations. The report documented 1,319 dead and 2,533 injured civilians during the period.

A majority of the casualties resulted from insurgent activities – especially IEDs, but also targeted killings and assassinations, as well as the so called "complex attacks" that the insurgents have been using in populated areas. It seems that there has also been an increase in casualties among civilians caught in cross-fire in clashes between insurgents and ANSF. This could suggest that ANSF is actually actively engaging the insurgents, which might even be a positive matter. However, the report finds that the clashes occurred at checkpoints, along some of the strategic highways, and in areas bordering neighboring countries. It seems that the increase could be explained by the increased freedom of movement of the insurgents as they slowly try to increase territorial influence and push back on the possibly softer resistance that ANSF provided compared to ISAF.

As early as the summer of 2012 I heard our own Afghan interpreters had started to apply for refugee status in Sweden[99]. The official comments from Sweden exhibited surprise and offered a legalistic response to what was in fact

98 UNAMA, Afghanistan, Mid-Year Report 2013 – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, July 2013, available at http://unama.unmissions.org

99 *Hufvudstadsbladet* 31.7.2012 and 1.8.2012

a political issue. First, they said, asylum could not be granted based on a joint application by a group – application had to be filed on an individual basis. Second, an application can only be made in Sweden. The current application had been given to embassy staff at the Swedish military camp in Afghanistan and did not qualify. Third, asylum is only granted based on need, not as a reward for service for the Swedish government – that would be against administrative equal treatment principles. Finally, the Swedes argued that it was not clear that the interpreters were really in any danger to start with, at least not yet. Sometimes it was even suggested that interpreters had been appropriately compensated for the risk they were taking by helping the coalition.

With perfect timing, newspapers reported within the next few days that the Taliban had executed (or murdered) Afghans who had worked for ISAF in security jobs. The interpreters will be similarly marked men in the eyes of the Taliban, who see them as collaborators who have cooperated with the heathens occupying the country. The insurgents could very well start targeting these men after 2014 if not sooner.

It would seem fair to grant asylum to people if they take on a significant risk by working for the coalition forces. You could turn the question around – why would we not take on people who have helped us in our work and because of that have an increased risk of being murdered? It was almost preposterous to start resorting to legal rules on asylum in these circumstances. So the Swedish position is not satisfactory. Indeed, to me it seemed almost unethical. But I am sure that the Finnish embassy and the Finnish foreign ministry was immensely relieved that the applications were not (yet) being made to Finnish authorities.

Later, in the spring of 2013, the British government announced that the interpreters working with the British forces would be allowed to move to the United Kingdom[100]. They seem to have concluded that it is not quite right to leave people out in the cold who are tainted due to their contact with the coalition forces. The political pressure on other coalition countries to accept asylum applications from interpreters will likely rise as a result of the decision – as well it should.

But the rights and wrongs of this are less material. What is interesting is the fact that Afghans do not expect the security situation to get better and want to get out. This is partially opportunistic, of course. They are running out of a

100 BBC News, Afghan interpreters to get right to live in UK, 22.5.2013

lucrative job, and need to find income elsewhere. So why not take asylum status in the UK or Sweden and check it out for a while and at best have the UK or Swedish taxpayers pay for room and board for your extended family for the duration; then see how things lie, and go back home. But part of it is real concern that with the ISAF footprint getting smaller, the insurgents FOM will broaden and they may well target people who have worked for the coalition.

There was news that wealthy Afghans were also leaving the country. They were sending their families abroad to school and trying to get dual citizenships. Successful businesses were no longer investing domestically, but were instead opening offices in neighboring countries. And cash was being exported in exorbitant amounts all the time, legally and illegally.

Another point with regard to the interpreters was of some concern to our troops. As the time of withdrawal was getting closer, the interpreters might start selling information about us to the insurgents to try to safeguard their position, and that of their families, in the eyes of the Taliban. It is hardly reasonable to expect a sense of loyalty from the interpreters under these circumstances. They have to start thinking about how they and their families will survive and how they can avoid being targeted by the insurgents. The reader can ask what he or she would do in a situation where your employer is leaving the country and you will be out of a job, and he is not going to make provisions for your future security. Oh – and his country just told you that they will likely give you no special consideration for asylum status either. Perhaps providing or selling information to the insurgents might be a way to demonstrate that one is not actually supporting the West, and is ready to side with the insurgents. It would be a sign of a new loyalty towards the insurgents on whose goodwill one's life might depend.

One had to be concerned about the security risk the interpreters could cause, and consider what information they had that could be sold to the insurgents. They might have information on camp layouts and troop movements or even SOPs to some extent. The real concern is they knew who we were meeting with. So they could point the insurgents to pretty much anyone who was cooperating with us, which is slightly uncomfortable. Treating interpreters in a way that would result in them having a grudge against us – for whatever reason (including lack of asylum) – is not the best thing for our safety or that of our partners and friends.

There could be a lesson in this for future missions. It would be better to rely more on interpreters from troop contributing nations to start with. Another lesson might be to focus more on the security of the interpreters. They could be recruited to serve in regions where they are reasonably far from home so they are not recognized, and technical measures could be taken to protect their identity from the locals they meet in the course of their work. But for now we need to find a satisfactory solution with respect to people who face an increased risk of being murdered as a result of working for us.

# CHAPTER 15

# AN AMERICAN CRUSADE?

George W. Bush's unfortunate use of the word "crusade" in describing the U.S. response to the 9-11 attacks has left a mark on Western intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan[101]. Is this really about securing the United States from terrorist attacks, about helping the government and people of Afghanistan against the extremist "evil doers", about making the life of women better in Afghanistan and about stabilizing the political situation in Central Asia? Or is it about geopolitics, domestic political agendas, proxy wars and catering to the military industrial complex? Looking at the situation in the field in Afghanistan the answer did not seem so clear on the face of things. One thing was quite certain, however. We were not in Afghanistan just because we thought they really could use our help.

## United States Strategy in Afghanistan

As the ISAF-mission was winding down one had to consider the reasons for being there in the first place. This was a U.S. operation first and foremost. What was it that the United States wanted to achieve with this huge build up? And was the result worth the investment? They had poured billions (over 600 billion dollars cumulatively[102]) into the mission in Afghanistan. But what had the United States (and the US tax payer) gained in global influence or in increased security? And having made all these investments and having built this presence why now a withdrawal? I was sure there had to be a grand scheme behind US involvement and that I just hadn't been able to figure it out.

101 Remarks by George W. Bush at White House on 16 September 2001

102 See Anthony H. Cordesman, *The U.S. Cost of the Afghan War FY2002 – FY2013, Cost in Military Operating Expenditures and and Aid and Prospects for "Transition"*, CSIS Report, May 2012

It was very difficult to find the reason for the scope of current U.S. engagement based on observing the strategy that was being pursued. The U.S. strategy for Afghanistan had changed over the years so much that it was unclear what the goals of the intervention might actually be. Originally the stated mission was to fight international terrorism and to deny any safe-havens that terrorists might take advantage of. However, it seemed that the strategies being pursued were not necessarily geared for that task, and that perhaps such a mission might be based on flawed premises to start with.

When the United States was working on clarifying its vision for Afghanistan in 2008-2009, people participating in the process stated that after the country had been at war for some eight years no one was actually able to explain the strategy in Afghanistan[103]. It has been argued that the United States in the early days lacked a comprehensive and realistic vision of the end state for Afghanistan and a strategy for executing that vision. In the beginning, it seems, the U.S. miscalculated the costs of the war and pursued a strategy that was largely unwinnable[104]. They focused on nation building in a country that really had never been a nation in the traditional sense, at least not a nation based on a centralized government. They were also distracted by the war in Iraq and, at least at that point, lost the momentum for whatever possibility there was for success with the original strategy of nation building[105].

In the later years of the ISAF mission there was a revelation with regard to the strategy. It was noticed that this was actually a counterinsurgency and would need a wholly different strategic approach. A new manual on counterinsurgency, or "COIN", was published where many points were based on lessons learned from previous campaigns, such as Vietnam, now largely neglected and forgotten. The COIN strategy is based on recognizing that insurgencies are asymmetric situations where traditional military means are ineffective. By killing the enemy you actually create more hostile forces as you increase the hostility felt by the local population – at least the part of the population for whom the insurgency might be appealing to start with. In COIN you work with the population to win their loyalty, you offer stability and security and thereby undermine the support for the insurgency so that it is weakened and broken from an organized or semi-organized opposition force to different ineffective fractions with different underlying drivers.

103 *The New York Times*, 19.5.2012
104 *The New York Times*, 19.5.2012
105 See Sherard Cowper Coles, *Cables from Kabul*, 2011, p. xx

The COIN strategy has come under criticism since its inception, however. Some cold war soldiers just cannot recognize war fighting where the focus isn't on kinetic action and killing enemy forces. Many commanders have been reported to more or less openly neglect COIN and just go for fighting an (imagined?) uniform enemy[106]. The other end of the criticism argues that COIN is not really a strategy but a tactic or method in asymmetric warfare[107]. To pursue COIN as a strategy and not link it to the specific requirements of the environment is argued to be a significant mistake.

But other critics recognize that COIN can produce results – they just question the cost in relation to the attainable strategic goals in the particular mission. So yes, COIN could work in Afghanistan if the coalition were to stay there for generations rather than years[108]. But then you have to ask what the strategic goals in Afghanistan are and whether it is worth staying in Afghanistan for the time it would take to pursue a COIN strategy to its completion. As discussed earlier, it is unclear whether the U.S. tax payer has received anything in return to match the investments made in Afghanistan. It seems clear that pressure was mounting to get out.

Now the goals were being narrowed down – as perhaps they could have been from the start. The goal was to destroy the capabilities of al-Qaeda to conduct serious terrorist attacks against U.S. interests and reduce the capability of the Taliban and related insurgents to a level that the Afghanistan government could endure. A counterinsurgency operation was changed into a counter-terrorism operation.

The question has to be asked whether the United States should have pursued a more cost-efficient strategy in Afghanistan from the start. They might have chosen a traditional "imperial punitive expediton"[109] and made a demonstration of force and retaliation, but with limited military goals combined with a political strategy based on existing Afghan political structures. They could have opted to target al-Qaeda and related groups, and given the Taliban the option to choose by their actions whether to be targeted or not. The Taliban have not demonstrated any interests outside of Afghanistan, and likely never posed a direct threat to U.S. interests other than providing a haven for al-Qaeda. The focus of the intervention might in fact have been to create a wedge between the

106 See Greg Jaffe, *The Fourth Star: Four Generals and the Epic Struggle for the Future of the United States Army*, 2009

107 Gian Gentile, A Strategy of Tactics: Population Centric COIN and the Army, 2009, http://strategicstudies-institute.army.mil/pubs/parameters/Articles/09autumn/gentile.pdf

108 *The New York Times*, West Point Is Divided On a War Doctrine's Fate, 28.5.2012. The article sites Colonel Gian P. Gentile, director or West Point's military history program saying: "I'm talking 70, 80, 90 years."

109 Sherard Cowper Coles, *Cables from Kabul*, 2011, p.289

Taliban and al-Qaeda with diplomatic efforts towards the Taliban and military strikes against al-Qaeda. Making the Taliban an enemy seemed to be a strategic mistake[110]. The strategy might also have given up the idea of nation building as such and opted to go for a smaller impact on governance. Any political solutions should have been based on existing Afghan political structures. It is completely unsustainable to introduce governance models from the West in a country with such different basic structures of society.

It is admittedly easy to be critical after the fact, and dealing with a situation as complex as Afghanistan is certainly no easy task. But considering the extraordinary cost of the Afghan war for U.S. tax payers, one cannot but wonder whether sufficient planning and thought went into the intervention.

### Geopolitics and Domestic Politics?

As far as one could see there were three different drivers underlying the Afghan campaign. First, the U.S. did in all likelihood find itself attacked by a foreign force in September 2001 and decided that a military response was legitimate. However, the framework of that war was alien to international law which originates from an era of nation state dominance and monopoly over organized institutional violence. This approach might have justified and given rise to a short and intensive expeditionary mission – a punitive expedition of older days. The punitive expedition of the modern world might well have been a good show with the United States demonstrating it was "doing something" in response to the 9/11 attacks. Go in with force, kill al-Qaeda leaders, scare the others, and then leave. The fight against international terrorism might then be pursued more effectively in other forums.

The second reason for U.S. presence in Afghanistan was that there were geopolitical interests to pursue in Central Asia. The United States has invested so much in this project that it would not make any sense to just leave it. They have to obtain some geopolitical gains from the intervention to justify the expenditure. And, in fact, it might not be that bad to keep a regional presence in Central Asia creating a vulnerable "second front" for many of the troublesome regimes in the region. The United States now had a presence in the back yards of Pakistan, Iran, China and Russia. Of course, sending over 100,000 troops to Afghanistan might not be the most cost effective way to pursue U.S. interests in this region, but as the United States now had a presence anyway it might be tak-

110 See Matt Waldman, System Failure: The Underlying Causes of US Policy-Making Errors in Afghanistan, International Affairs 89:4 (2013) 825-843

en advantage of by creating a contingent threat towards Iran, and a reminder of U.S. power to Pakistan. It seemed to me that Iran had to be acutely aware that a U.S. presence right next to its border was less than ideal. Iran could certainly use the vulnerability of the ISAF mission to its advantage and coordinate harassment of ISAF and U.S. work in Afghanistan, but it must feel a little bit uncomfortable to know that the United States has a significant air capability very close to Iranian targets, including their nuclear facilities. This was not helped by the fact that Israel had been developing closer ties with Turkmenistan immediately north of Iran.

The United States can also affect the extent to which Pakistan can rely on the safety of its northern border – which again affects how much it can afford to focus on its main foe towards the south – India. The United States had an established if strained relationship with Pakistan. It seems the United States had sent Pakistan a clear message that if they opposed United States actions in the area, the United States would retaliate with extreme measures[111]. Perhaps U.S. presence might be taken advantage of to increase pressure on the counterparts to seek amicable solutions to their problems. The relationship between Pakistan and India had long been a key problem of this region.

It was unclear to what extent the United States had managed to take advantage of its presence in Afghanistan relative to Russia and China. It seemed that Russia was actually gaining an advantage by the United States providing some stability in an area that traditionally projected instability to the southeastern parts of Russia with Islamist separatism and drug smuggling. Russia also offered an important land route for the transit of equipment out of Afghanistan, and could basically put some pressure on countries that were relying on that route. Russia likely was given more leeway in many politically sensitive issues as long as they kept cooperating with the West on Afghanistan. With respect to China, a presence in Afghanistan can help the United States to balance Chinese influence in the region, which is likely to increase as China expands its economic and political might. However, at the same time, the United States seemed to be paying for a security umbrella for the Chinese to make infrastructure investments. To me it seemed China was winning on this deal.

The third aspect that must be taken into account is the effect of U.S. domestic politics. George W. Bush was executing a war presidency after 9/11 so he needed a war – two, in fact, with both Iraq and Afghanistan. With the increas-

111 BBC News 22.9.2006; Pakistani president Pervez Musharraf claimed the US Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage had suggested that the United States would bomb Pakistan to the stone age if they did not sufficiently cooperate in the operations against al-Qaeda.

ing polarization in U.S. domestic politics, a cynic might argue that the Republicans thought that any way to empty the government coffers favoring their constituencies (including the "military industrial complex") would be better than leaving a single nickel to the democrats if they ever got into power to use for what they would consider un-American projects such as "Obamacare". In fact, a study on the long-term costs of war suggested that the true cost of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars for the United States amounted to between four and six trillion dollars (including long-term medical care and disability costs, military replenishment and social and economic costs)[112].

It has also been argued that the military has become a "third rail" of U.S. politics, and that it is not possible to question defense financing. It seems that even the sequestration agreed in the budget deal in the United States will not affect military spending as was expected. The military-industrial complex is a very powerful factor representing significant economic and political interests domestically[113].

### U.S. Presidential Elections and Afghanistan

The significance of U.S. domestic politics for how international events develop should not be underestimated. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are driven by U.S. domestic politics as much as they are driven by anything else. After my return from theatre Afghanistan remained topical with the U.S. presidential elections taking place in November 2012. But it seemed to me that neither candidate wanted to make Afghanistan a battle issue as one might have suspected. This I found interesting.

As presidential elections were nearing Obama had to get a message across to the public that the troops were coming home and that the "war" or the "operation" was a success of sorts. I think Barack Obama had also concluded that enough was enough when it came to spending taxpayers' money in Afghanistan. The United States had run up a deficit of historic proportions and was running out of money. It can also be noted that the United States had financed the war by borrowing funds – up to some two trillion, in fact, for the Afghanistan and Iraq wars and the related defense build-up[114]. There was something uncomfortable about the United States borrowing billions (from China, among other countries), pouring the money into the bottomless well that was Afghanistan and

112 Linda J. Bilmes, The Financial Legacy of Iraq and Afghanistan: How Wartime Spending Decisions Will Constrain Future National Security Budgets, Harvard Kennedy School Faculty Research Paper Series RWP 13-006, March 201, p.1

113 See Aaron B. O'Connell, assistant professor of history at the US Naval Academy, The Permanent Militarization of America, in *The New York Times*, November 4, 2012

114 Id. at 19

then seeing China making infrastructure investments in the country and buying up the mining and oil rights under the U.S. financed security umbrella. One had to wonder what benefits the United States had really got from this expedition.

President Obama had shown that he was not soft on military issues, a PR challenge that democrat leaders had dealt with over the years with varying degrees of success. Given Obama's background, one could have expected some dilly-dallying on issues of this kind. But, on the contrary, he had increased drone attacks significantly from the days of the Bush administration, and on his watch Osama-bin-Laden was found and killed, while on George W. Bush's watch, 9/11 happened. So his PR situation was pretty good in this regard. Everyone knew the situation in Afghanistan was a mess, and that it was really difficult if not impossible to fix. So the important aspect was to make sure it didn't become a political liability. And I believe that factor, beyond anything else, was driving the policy on Afghanistan.

Obama had certainly been dealt a poor hand when it comes to military involvement, but he really seemed to have played his Afghanistan cards well. First, he managed to get the United States out of Iraq with some sense of order after a not wholly successful or well-coordinated campaign by the Bush administration. He had then focused efforts on Afghanistan to avoid all-round chaos. Obama had agreed to the surge of troops proposed by his generals, which seemed to have improved the security situation somewhat. He then started withdrawing troops and announced a time schedule for ending the current U.S. involvement in Afghanistan. So by the time of the elections he was able to signal legitimately that the troops were coming home.

### Vietnam Light?

There has been a lively debate over whether it is appropriate to compare the campaign in Afghanistan with the war in Vietnam. Many emphasize how categorically different these campaigns were. Over 50,000 U.S. lives were lost in Vietnam, and much of the fighting was conventional warfare with major battles as well as organized guerrilla warfare. Afghanistan, on the other hand, has been a low intensity conflict and a counterinsurgency effort with a completely different dynamic than in Vietnam. Moreover, Vietnam was a proxy war of sorts involving superpowers representing different ideologies. The conflict in Afghanistan is rooted in conflicting values, cultures and religion.

But there were similarities as well. In both cases the United States and its allies have met a very resilient opposing force that has been able to find effective ways to fight a military superpower. To some extent both conflicts have included elements of asymmetric war. Guerrilla warfare and counter insurgency doctrines have been relevant in both theatres. Both conflicts have also dragged on for far too long and been extremely costly and politically unpopular.

In theatre, I could not help drawing parallels. Working at Camp Marmal one could certainly relate to the feeling of being at a large base in Vietnam a bit further away from the frontlines. Transport planes were taking off every so often, a jet or two streaked by regularly and choppers landed during all hours of the day – MEDEVACs from time to time. The local regional headquarters were busy with career officers working long hours. At the same time there was a feeling of the war winding down, of our side getting ready to withdraw and redefining the mission (and success) accordingly.

The reference to Vietnam does not seem far-fetched in this regard at all. One has to recognize that the world has changed since the 1970's. The United States has a far superior position than it had in Vietnam with far more advanced military technology. The Taliban is also a foe of a far lesser magnitude than North Vietnam supported by the Soviets and China. So of course the number of casualties is lower and of course the United States is not losing as comprehensively as it did in Vietnam. Nevertheless, taking these differences into account one wonders whether not Afghanistan in relative terms is indeed a comparable conflict from economic and political perspectives. Afghanistan is the longest war the U.S. has ever been involved in. And the costs for the U.S. amount to approximately 8.7 billion dollars a month. The media reported in 2011 that air-cooling alone costs some 20 billion dollars annually[115]. Even if this statistic was exaggerated, the ball park in itself is staggering. In political terms Afghanistan does not seem as directly detrimental to the United States as Vietnam once was. However, the enormous costs of the conflict and its coinciding with the global financial crisis have also contributed to the relative global shift in economic and political power towards Asia, and China in particular.

However, when compared to the deep trauma of Vietnam one can refer to Afghanistan as "Vietnam Light" at best. Time will tell if this ends like Vietnam with the last helicopter from the roof of the U.S. Embassy. My guess is it will

115 *Daily Mail*, U.S. military spends a cool $20billion on air conditioning annually in Iraq and Afghanistan, 26 June 2011

end with a token base with a token presence, and finally a big orderly airlift will be the final exit. So it won't end with a bang, but with a whimper.

### The American Taxpayer

The United States had invested over 600 billion dollars in the "crusade" in Afghanistan[116]. Estimates of the total costs over time were significantly higher. Had U.S. tax payers received a good return on their investment?

I did feel for the Afghan people. Much of their suffering and poverty seemed unnecessary and avoidable and I really hope they get a better future which these proud people certainly deserve. But I could not help also feeling sympathy for U.S. taxpayers. They were footing an enormous bill in a faraway corner of the globe using a lot of borrowed money while getting less in return in the way of increased security or in increased U.S. influence in global affairs than they were paying for. On the contrary, it seemed that the economic cost was draining the highly leveraged U.S. economy. At the same time the U.S. efforts and investments were creating a security umbrella for others to take advantage of.

The U.S. special inspector general for Afghanistan (SIGAR) had also drawn attention in several reports to the mismanagement of spending in Afghanistan. Several projects failed or were never completed. Some projects were completed just as they were no longer needed, such as a new base that was built just as the U.S. troops it was intended for were leaving the country. Some projects were completely mismanaged, so that expenditure was in no proportion to expected results. And in many cases there had been insufficient monitoring and accounting. Many projects, even if they were completed, may not have been sustainable. The Afghans could not afford to maintain them once the West withdrew. One simply had to draw the conclusion that, even allowing for the admittedly very difficult circumstances, U.S. taxpayer money had been mismanaged.

It is often said that short wars are good for the economy but long wars are not. I wondered whether from the perspective of the U.S. taxpayers a short "punitive expedition" followed by quick withdrawal and focus on hitting al-Qaeda instead of the Taliban would have given a better cost-benefit ratio.

116 See Amy Belasco, The Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Other Global War on Terror Operations Since 9/11 (Congressional Research Service Report, 2011) available at http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RL33110.pdf; see also Anthony H. Cordesman, The U.S. Cost of the Afghan War: FY2002-FY2013 Cost in Military Operating Expenditures and Aid and Prospects for "Transition" (CSIS Report, 2012), available at http://csis.org/publication/us-cost-afghan-war-fy2002-fy2013

# CHAPTER 16

# WHY ARE WE IN AFGHANISTAN?

### ISAF – Coffee and Cookies?

The Afghanistan campaign has been and remains mainly a U.S. operation. The United States has over the years made by far the largest contribution to the campaign in terms of troops, money and other resources. It could be said without much exaggeration that the other countries mainly provide the coffee and cookies. The United States also runs the Afghanistan campaign to a large extent as if it was a purely U.S. operation. They did not seem to rely a great deal on what the other ISAF nations would contribute by way of operational capabilities or real military responsibility. The United States did not have very high expectations of what the other participating nations could or would execute – with perhaps the exception of the United Kingdom.

To a large extent the other nations participating in ISAF were NATO members, and their participation was largely a part of their undertakings as allies to the United States. For NATO, Afghanistan was an opportunity to redefine itself after the end of the cold war. Yet most nations did not have very advanced capabilities in theatre and the more robust military assets were typically American. Also, even where other nations did provide some functionality, the United States would often have their own national functions that could duplicate the corresponding contributions of other nations. Many nations placed restrictions on their troops for national reasons and out of concerns for casualties. So in reality the United States was largely justified in relying on its

own capabilities. In fact, the United States had their own troops under Operation Enduring Freedom that could operate in the same areas as ISAF troops if needed. These troops were largely outside the ISAF chain of command and their operations were not necessarily coordinated with ISAF – except to the extent that would be required to ensure that kinetic activity would not coincide at the tactical level.

It seems relevant to ask what other drivers than just NATO membership might underlie the decision of so many nations to participate in the ISAF operation – an operation that was often unpopular domestically, and that certainly took place in a very remote part of the world where few countries had any independent national interests. The question also seems relevant because the other nations' contributions were largely marginal – even where real sacrifices and commitments were made. It was interesting to look at the security policy of different states participating in the ISAF campaign; and to compare the political statements and the rhetoric on their domestic forums, and the reality in theatre.

### *The United Kingdom*

The United Kingdom has a long if not overly successful history of Afghan campaigns. The British fought three different campaigns in Afghanistan in the 19th century. The country was an important buffer zone between the Russian empire and British India at the time, and Britain had an interest in controlling the regions bordering its empire.

There is a painting of the lone survivor of the British army retreating from Kabul in 1842 riding into camp on an exhausted pony. A force of 4,500 had perished in fighting the Afghans who had left a single soldier, badly wounded, to tell of the fate of the British. The story is a good reminder of the fierce opposition that Afghans can provide, and confirmed the title of Afghanistan as the cemetery for empires after all the imperialistic missions that had ended in failure in that remote land.

The experiences from Afghanistan survived for a long time in British politics. In fact, it has been said that the former Prime Minister Harold Macmillan, in summarizing the basic lessons of British foreign policy, concluded that the first rule of politics is not to go to war in Afghanistan. But this lesson seems to have been lost and history has again demonstrated its tendency of repeating itself.

There has been some criticism of UK involvement in Afghanistan. The UK has been deemed not to have succeeded very well in their AORs in Helmand province in southern Afghanistan, admittedly a very tough area of insurgent resistance. It has been argued that UK battalions and battle groups with six month tours were not able to maintain an adequate momentum or a coherent strategy to "win" in Helmand. The Taliban may not have been able to resist UK troops in combat but mainly evaded direct contact and changed tactics to ambushes and IED attacks. At the same time UK forces were not able to hold the areas they had cleared allowing the Taliban back in to influence the population once UK troops ended the operation[117]. By 2009 it had become clear that the UK could not manage and the United States Marine Corps with more manpower and equipment took over.

The official UK strategy links UK involvement to fighting terrorism and to ensuring that Afghanistan does not again become a safe haven for terrorists, which is a sound goal, but may well have required a different strategy than the one chosen. The British ministry of defense has suggested that the UK and Western strategy in Afghanistan has the goals of (i) ensuring that Afghan security forces are capable of keeping the Taliban from regaining control; (ii) credible governance that gives the Afghan people confidence in the elected government; and (iii) economic development that gives Afghans a stake in their own future.

As has been discussed, it does not appear that these goals will have been reached by the end of 2014 or during the transition period thereafter. The ANSF was not keen to go after the Taliban and had more understanding for the prevailing balance of power on the ground. The Taliban had been able to largely maintain freedom of movement in the country, if not a dominant political position. To the extent that their power was based on local dynamics they would likely regain control on a local and regional basis.

The Afghan government had not really developed credible governance at the local level. There was little confidence in government institutions with corruption rife and a very weak administrative footprint of the central government out in the regions. The issue of democracy was also an open question. It remains unclear to me to what extent democratic institutions had that much difference in Afghanistan in the first place. Finally, as to economic development, things were not looking good. The rate of growth was decreasing, though partially this is just natural after post-war high growth numbers. But there was

117 See Frank Ledwidge, *Losing Small Wars*, 2011, p.93

significant concern that the economy would sag after Western withdrawal and that an unsustainable financial gap would appear with destabilizing effects.

Considering the lack of success one has to wonder if these indeed were the real goals of the UK government. Or, instead of really working on these issues, was it perhaps more important that the UK at least looked like it was doing something in Afghanistan. To me it seemed that the British were in Afghanistan mainly to support the Americans. For the most part this is a very valid reason to stay involved considering the special relationship that the UK believes it maintains with the United States. This, I understand, is an accepted basis for the UK operations in Afghanistan[118]. The UK had to provide a credible and effective contingent in Afghanistan that the United States could count on. One author summarized the goal as follows: "We stuck it out because Britain couldn't and wouldn't let down its coalition partners, especially the Americans"[119]. And the British did stick it out I think. The UK military gives a very professional impression with a no nonsense approach to military work. What seems to be a UK trademark is that they are able, better than many, to bridge cultural gaps and work in culturally challenging environments successfully.

There has also been some debate on the extent to which the British have had any role in steering the Afghan campaign as the key partner of the United States. The British take some pride in being the partner the United States can rely on and in having direct access to top U.S. leadership to influence U.S. policies. I am not in a position to assess UK participation and their relationship with the United States in any detail but I understand from other commentators that the British had perhaps much less leverage with the United States than they wished or thought they had.

### *Estonia*

Our southern neighbor Estonia also had troops in Afghanistan. They served in the hairier parts of the country in Helmand province where ISAF and ANA troops were suffering worse casualties and there was still an organized and capable opposing force. Estonia had approximately 150 troops in theatre, and had taken some nine KIA and tens of WIA over the years. With a population of approximately 1.3 million the casualty numbers are actually relatively high. So why does Estonia send its men and women from the temperate shores of the Baltic Sea to the heat of battle in the deserts of Afghanistan?

118 Sherard Cowper-Coles, *Cables from Kabul*, 2011, p. xx
119 Id.

Some commentators have applauded Estonia for its solidarity with other people who have suffered under the plight of conflict. Estonia has a long history of foreign rule having been occupied by and a part of the Soviet Union for almost fifty years after World War II. The tiny country, when finally liberated, had joined NATO to secure their independence from Russia and then gallantly offered to help the Afghan people in their time of need. A Finnish analysis[120] suggests that as Estonians still recall what hard times mean, they have a better understanding of the Afghan situation and of the need for the West to demonstrate solidarity and make sacrifices for a better future for the Afghan people.

The analysis is heartwarming, but hardly accurate. The former UK ambassador to Kabul[121] gave an account of his visit together with an Estonian diplomat and ambassador with Estonian troops in Helmand. He found the Estonians in trenches holding the front line against Taliban within eyesight. According to the account the Estonians were supposed to be mentoring local police but had not been able to find any. Instead, they were engaged in on-going skirmishes against the insurgents. The Estonian diplomat had asked the Estonian officer in charge point blank: "What the fuck are we doing here?"

The Estonian diplomat must not have been very well briefed. Estonians in Afghanistan were actually fighting for Estonian independence from Russia, and paying their membership dues to NATO. They were building and committing to their relationship with NATO and the United States so that NATO and U.S. planes would monitor their airspace and guarantee their sovereignty from Russia, and – in a bad situation – come to their help based on Article 5 of the NATO Treaty. The Estonian people were aware of their geographic location and remembered how it was to be a part of the Soviet Union. They probably understood that there was a price for their independence and were prepared to pay for it. As the crisis in the Ukraine has demonstrated their investment may well have been worthwhile as the United States has increased its military presence in Estonia.

### *Germany*

The Germans had made quite a significant contribution in Afghanistan. Within ISAF they had overall responsibility of North Afghanistan and lead the regional command, RC(North). At best Germany had over 4,000 soldiers in Afghanistan. Their economic investments were also considerable with Germany

120 See Jyrki Iivonen and Pauli Järvenpää, *Kirjeitä Kabulista* (Letters from Kabul), 2012, p.228
121 See Sherard Cowper-Coles, *Cables from Kabul*, 2011, p.179-180

having contributed far over a billion euro in aid to Afghanistan over the years[122] – still a trifling amount compared to U.S. aid in the region, though.

Germans had a significant responsibility in being the lead nation for RC(North). The region may have been the most peaceful in the country, but being lead nation required a significant contribution in manpower as well as in economic terms. The Germans operated several camps in the region and contributed air assets, including fighter planes and transports. They also had the largest field hospital in the region. However, there had been some criticism of a lack of will in engaging the "enemy" and Germans were reported to have stringent restrictions on the use of force – to the extent that it had irritated NATO allies[123].

But to me it seemed that the Germans were pursuing a very deliberate policy. They wanted to take on responsibility and were willing to make significant economic contributions. But they wanted to do it in their own way. So there was less direct kinetic military action and more economic aid and civilian projects. Of course this kind of a policy had its restrictions and could certainly not have been pursued in southern Afghanistan. But in RC(North) it seemed to be working to some extent at least. To be honest, however, the Americans seemed to have their own parallel organization in northern Afghanistan that did not necessarily follow the German doctrine.

At first, it was difficult to see why Germany was keen on making this contribution or what the immediate interest of Germany was in Afghanistan. Germans have been very reluctant to contribute to international military intervention due in part to their restrictive policies in this regard after World War II. Germans have preferred multilateral solutions and have supported NATO and UN missions, but have not been interested in taking a lead in military operations of this kind.

However, Germany is a NATO member and should be expected to support the United States having for so many years been under the US security umbrella in Europe during the cold war. Importantly, Germany is also a very large country in European terms and their contribution may well be in line with how they perceive their position in the international community. So perhaps a billion is not really that much considering the relative size of Germany and its position in the world.

122 Paul Belkin, German Foreign and Security Policy: Trends and Transatlantic Implications (Congressional Research Service Report, 2009), p.23 - 24

123 Id. at 23

Yet I did think that the German policy in Afghanistan was about more than just paying dues to NATO. Germany was still taking on a larger role than what was really necessary for these purposes alone. It seemed to me that Germany was taking small but decisive steps beyond its restrictive policies on international intervention. Perhaps Germany wants to demonstrate European and international leadership and wants to be involved and affect decisions on international politics. Being active in Afghanistan provides a good platform for pursuing this type of leadership as other European countries hesitate and try to minimize their exposure. So German involvement, it seemed, was less about Afghanistan and more about Europe and European politics and Germany's position as a European leader.

### The Finnish Contribution – Why Are We in Afghanistan?

Finland kept a rather low profile with respect to the operational aspects of the campaign in Afghanistan. Our main troop contribution at the time, an infantry company, was a part of the Sweden-led Public Reconstruction Team Mazar-e Sharif (PRT MeS, later renamed Nordic Baltic Transition Support Unit or NB-TSU). The area where we served was far from the center of gravity of the ISAF mission. The real trouble was in southern Afghanistan whereas the North remained calm and isolated from the real troubles by the Hindu Kush. One of our senior officers put it as follows: "Regional Command North and northern Afghanistan is the secondary direction of interest of the ISAF mission and the Taliban, and PRT MeS is the secondary direction of RC (North)".

We contributed less than 200 soldiers and did not have a lead-nation role or our own AOR. We provided an operational maneuver force amounting to one rifle company, which in fact was a glorified platoon – an enlarged rifle platoon with supporting elements[124]. The troops did operations on a regular basis together with their Swedish counterparts and supported the local elements of the ANSF with dedication and skill. Yet the number of troops out in the field remained somewhat limited.

The other troops we provided performed important functions as well. We provided staff officers in regional and ISAF operational headquarters, as well as mentors for the Afghan army (the 209th corps in North Afghanistan and some training units in Kabul[125]). The mentors were advisers to ANA commanders and officers. The work was certainly not easy. In a diplomatic manner without

124 The force was further downsized in September 2012.
125 Finnish Defence Forces, "Shona ba shona" Mentors Guide Afghan Army, 5 July 2012

authority of rank, the mentors guided their Afghan counterparts in their work. Just overcoming cultural boundaries in offering constructive criticism can be demanding. Operating day in and day out very closely as the sole westerners among ANA could also be a bit of a lonely task. So the contribution should not be belittled unfairly. Yet it is accurate to say that we did not have any independent area of responsibility or any unique function that we would have provided for the ISAF mission.

Finnish participation in international military operations is dictated by foreign policy as it should be. With respect to Afghanistan the real reasons for participating are to be seen to participate in international intervention with our peer nations and to maintain our bilateral relationship with the United States[126]. We need these associations to keep close to the West. The thinking seems to be that if everyone else is in Afghanistan so should we. Ideally we might even do some good for the Afghan people while we are at it. These are important reasons for us to contribute forces of course, if not quite in line with the political rhetoric.

I am sure Finland understood what the expectations were with regard to Finnish military participation. I think what was expected included a demonstration of political support, a decent number of boots on the ground and a moderate economic commitment – all relative to our size and the nature of our relationship with the United States. We might have been reminded of the terms and conditions of this relationship and how those related to joining the United States and the international community in Afghanistan if there was any lack of clarity in that regard. It can be noted, for example, that the United States often restricts the possibility for foreign nations to purchase military equipment from them. Countries have to qualify to be treated favorably with respect to such purchase programs. It has not always been clear that Finland can qualify as a purchaser of weapons systems we might desire. In the past couple of years, however, we have been quite successful in obtaining permits to buy the kind of missile systems that were needed to provide counter strike capability against new Russian missiles close to our eastern border[127]. So the expectation is that we should help the folks that sell us this stuff and, more importantly, are the only ones that can provide some help to us if we really need it one day.

126 Finnish goals are explicitly spelled out in, among other documents, the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs action program on Afghanistan (Suomen Afganistan-toimintaohjelma), dated 14 April 2009. Accordingly, "Afghanistan is an important part of Finnish EU- and transatlantic policy." While this appeared last on the list of reasons for Finnish participation, it is reasonable to assume it is the first, if not only, key reason for participation in Afghanistan.

127 See Stefan Forss, The Russian Operational-Tactical Iskander Missile-System, National Defence University, Department of Strategic and Defence Studies, Working paper No 42, 2012

The issue that requires more consideration with regard to our participation in international campaigns is how we can maximize the return on investment from our participation – i.e. how to get the greatest possible political advantage with economic and political investments that we can afford. One challenge for Finland is how to do this without getting too dependent on the United States while maintaining very friendly relations with Russia at the same time. Another is to get the scope of participation right. The United States and other Western countries will look at Finnish participation based on their own goals with respect to the Afghan campaign. But what does it take for the United States, the EU and our peer nations to feel that Finland is "pulling its weight"? Do we have a sufficient troop contribution and is the troop structure optimal with respect to our goals? Is it a good idea to have a half-baked infantry company or would it be more cost-effective (politically) to have an engineering or other enabler unit (as we did in Lebanon and Bosnia)? Or would it suffice to have a couple of staff officers for our flag to be included in the coalition? In some cases it might require contributing a battalion to get any political capital, but in others the presence of just a few men and women in uniform might well give you a sufficient return on investment.

It seemed to me that Finnish participation in Afghanistan had been limited for political, military and economic reasons. Politically, we clearly had to be involved in Afghanistan. We needed to be there for our peers and in order to maintain our relationship with the United States. But I think for domestic political reasons we were a bit reluctant to participate in a heavily U.S. dominated NATO lead mission to a place very far away where we did not have any direct interests. Politicians had little appetite to push for a robust mandate when doing so may be very much against public opinion, especially if Finnish soldiers would come in harm's way. So they probably wanted a small number of troops doing less dangerous work.

The military, it seems, also preferred a small contingent this time. Even though a large part of the financing for international military participation comes from the budget of the foreign ministry, large operations still place a strain on the military in the form of training facilities, equipment and officers being tied up abroad. International military operations are third and last in order of priority of the tasks provided to the Finnish Defence Forces pursuant to Finnish law. The first is national defence (i.e. preparing for defending

Finland against foreign intrusion). The second is providing assistance to other authorities with military assets[128]. Large scale international military operations come in third and clearly do not seem to be a top priority for the highest military leadership. So the mission in Afghanistan just wasn't a priority which was clearly evident in the amount of focus given to the operation.

Afghanistan also seemed to represent a type of mission that we were not too familiar with which may also have increased reluctance among top military leadership to commit heavily. Finland has more experience from traditional peacekeeping operations that require lower levels of military operational or strategic skills, but a high level of cool-headedness, where the "slow and level Finns" might actually have some relative advantage and a calming effect on belligerents. The demanding nature of the ISAF operation also likely made top leadership hesitant to get too heavily involved.

Economics also had an effect. As discussed, Finland participated, in effect, with an enforced infantry platoon, as well as some staff officers and mentors. However, considering our relative national advantages and disadvantages another type of participation might have served ISAF (and our relationships with our peers) better. We could have sent an engineering unit as we did in Lebanon or Bosnia, a signals company as in Kosovo or some other specialist units, such as field hospitals as we did in Congo. But specialist units incur enormous costs compared to infantry, and military budgets were already strained. So sending infantry was a fairly cheap way to participate and yet be able to demonstrate a somewhat respectable headcount or number of boots on the ground. We had very little heavy equipment or infrastructure in Afghanistan – probably really no special equipment and nothing of significant value that could not have been airlifted with a couple of cargo loads out of there.

### *Casualties*

Casualties are a very sensitive topic regardless of one's perspective. From the basic human perspective any loss of life is always tragic. It is an ultimate loss and causes grief for loved ones: wives, husbands, children and parents. From a political perspective casualties are a difficult matter as well. Finland has lost two soldiers in Afghanistan, which is two too many, of course, but a very low number compared to many other countries involved in the conflict. Yet this, to me, reflects a prudent approach to the mission. Our interests in this part of the

128 The police occasionally make use of APCs when raiding motorcycle clubs, for example. Everyone thought it was complete overkill until they found a few RPG's in one of the clubs.

world are remote and indirect and mainly a part of our ordinary foreign policy where we are positioning Finland through different international initiatives. So this is not the place for us to take casualties. Kosovo was clearly a project closer to Finland, where some level of losses could have been acceptable. It has sometimes been said, however, that the only place where any Finnish losses should really be taken is east of the Viro-River close to the Russian border – and in very, very different circumstances that everyone hopes will never materialize.

I think that our politicians had spelled out to our military leadership that Finland could not afford to take casualties because we could not afford to make our involvement so unpopular among the Finnish public that we would have to pull out. We needed to be in Afghanistan to support our foreign and security policies. The politicians would have to react if public opinion turned against the operation and continued participation would cost votes. So even for political reasons there was a lot of concern for safety – no high risk work would be allowed and safety had to come first. When we lost one soldier in an IED attack against a vehicle I was astounded, as were many others, how quickly the Finnish contingent got completely new blast resistant vehicles. I am not even sure from which budgets they got the money, but it was impressive. The new vehicles may have been a demonstration of the care we take for our men and women in harm's way, but I imagine that the speed with which they were acquired demonstrated how important it was for political reasons that there would not be pressure to pull out.

### *Assessing Finnish Participation*

All things considered, were we making an optimal investment in Afghanistan? Were these the right troops to send? Were we overinvesting or were we clearly below what could be expected of us? And could we do something else that would bring the same return on investment but serve national interests better, and indeed make a better contribution in Afghanistan too? While I was in theatre I felt there was some frustration about the set-up of the Finnish contingent. It was felt that playing second fiddle under the Swedes and living in their camp in their AOR was not the best way to fly the Finnish flag and promote our country as a reliable partner. In retrospect one cannot be too critical, however. It seems that Finnish ISAF participation, on the whole, has perhaps been well balanced with respect to the political goals and strategies we ought to be pursuing.

From an economic perspective our investment was rather well optimized. Even if we had troops in theatre, we had minimized our logistical footprint. We had really no Finnish camps or heavy infrastructure. With a focus on infantry troops we had a relatively cheap unit engaged, so the financial commitments were reasonable – no special engineering or communications equipment that would be expensive or difficult to transport back home. We serve in a relatively calm part of the country, and do not undertake very high-risk operations, so casualties remain low, as they should considering the relative interests we have in Afghanistan. At the same time we are supporting the coalition with our participation, and flying our flag with our peers. Our important partners seem to understand that this is really the main contribution we are offering considering our size.

However, our participation could always be better organized. We could make better use of the mission for testing units and equipment, for example. We could also work harder on getting Finnish officers placed in interesting tasks in the international headquarters for experience, and to show our flag in the right places (provided we can pull our weight). I did feel that we did not sufficiently link our national interests with our actions in the field. So I believe the military leadership felt that they were not getting enough out of these operations to justify what was still a considerable commitment of time and resources by the Finnish Defense Forces.

As I saw it, the Swedes were somewhat more advanced in their thinking. At times it seemed to me that they are better at taking advantage of their participation, and more effectively promote their own self-interest (in a very distinguished manner, of course). They might contribute troops or use tactics that are not really tailored for the mission in Afghanistan, but that serve their national training agendas, for example. Or they might just be more effective in getting the Swedish flag to show on forums where that is useful for Sweden. And I only say this as an acknowledgement of their professionalism in coordinating foreign policy and military work. However, Sweden has been an actor (albeit a small actor) in the international arena for much longer than Finland. They have traditions of foreign policy over many centuries while Finland is a much younger country with far less experience of foreign relations.

In an ideal situation a Finnish contingent might consist of a specialist unit which demonstrates Finnish know-how and can use the opportunity to test

Finnish systems in the interests of national defense. We would ideally also have infantry units for force protection and for tactical operations. These are relatively cheap units to deploy, I understand, and increase the number of "boots on the ground" as our participation is assessed by our partners. These troops would also serve as a testing unit to develop new tactical concepts and to obtain theatre experience for Finnish officers.

We might also try to deploy special operations forces as much as possible so as to have very high quality tactical skills available in theatre if needed in special situations, and to contribute towards developing our capabilities in this regard, for which these types of missions seem to provide an excellent testing ground. The importance of special operations forces has clearly increased during the past decades and can function as an important building block of the armed forces.

Special efforts should also be made to get interesting and senior staff positions in operational headquarters for Finnish officers. But participation has to be balanced with the real national political interests, which should be based on long-term policies to increase Finnish influence as an established member of Western Europe with excellent relationships to the United States and our peer countries. Admittedly, getting the balance right is not easy and, moreover, these matters may not have the highest priority in Finnish foreign policy.

### Finnish Security Policy – How to Sleep Next to an Elephant

This is not the right context for any extensive analysis of Finnish security policy, but a few thoughts might be justified as our presence in Afghanistan was clearly linked to our own foreign and security policies. Unfortunately, the debate on security policy in Finland has been very sensitive and burdened by our awkward history with the Soviet Union during the Cold War and by foreign policy which has been used as a tool in domestic politics over the Cold War decades. It seems that the debate is finally becoming more acceptable as a result of the Ukraine crisis, for example.

When a former Finnish defense minister was asked by press in the United States what the three main foreign policy challenges of Finland were, his answer was "Russia, Russia, Russia". One can debate how smart it was to make that statement publicly at a formal state visit to the United States, but it is a rather accurate summary. The major wars Finland has been forced to fight have been against

Russia (or the Soviet Union). During the Cold War Finland was forced to tread carefully between maintaining its sovereignty and appeasing Russian interests.

It is certainly a tricky task for a very small nation to develop a stable and independent society right next to a large empire. It is like a mouse sleeping next to the elephant – even if it were a kind elephant you should be very careful[129]. However, we cannot expect Russia to have a friendly or neutral attitude to Finland but have to manage the relationship very closely. We should work on being very good friends with all our neighbors, including Russia, but be very firm in our integrity and in our ways of dealing with Russia. In order to do this, we must show that we mean business – in trade relations as well as with respect to our national defense[130].

Russia is a huge power willing to extend its influence beyond its borders[131] as it has demonstrated in Georgia and again in Ukraine. While our big neighbor might not have any interest in a military intervention, there is no guarantee that Russia would not seek to put considerable pressure on Finland to adopt policies favorable to Russian interests – even where that would go against Finnish interests.

The question remains, however, whether our small country is geared to deal with the potential security challenges that our geographic location and the Russian "risk" raise. From a military perspective Finland must recognize that size matters. Even if Russian armed forces have been in an era of decline after the end of the Cold War, we are a much, much smaller country with very limited resources to face up to a regional superpower. Defense spending in Finland is smaller than that of our key neighbors both in absolute and relative terms. The capabilities of our military acting alone must similarly be limited.

Finland remains formally unallied for different reasons. Russia has certainly made it clear by different means that Finnish NATO membership would not be welcome. When asked what Finland should do about NATO membership, a Russian commentator said that Finland should "think, think and think again" – a response in kind to the Finnish defense minister's statement on the three foreign policy challenges of Finland. Formal membership would have to lead to a response by Russia, and it would likely first take the form of economic sanctions. We have a lot of business with Russia that would be affected by such a response, as Russia has demonstrated a few times. A few years ago, for example, they threatened to raise export duties for timber and wood for the pulp indus-

129 The statement was originally made by Pierre Trudaeu, then prime minister of Canada, on the country's relationship with the United States.

130 Alpo Juntunen, *Venäjän imperiumin paluu*, 2. ed. (The Return of the Russian Empire), 2012, p.140

131 See Alpo Juntunen , *Venäjän imperiumin paluu*, 2. ed. (The Return of the Russian Empire), 2012

try by 150 percent pretty much overnight, which of course would have had a huge impact on our paper industry already in dire straits. A tax hike of this dimension was nothing less than a political signal.

The memories of the Cold War are starting to fade as are the self-imposed restrictions on the political debate about Finnish security concerns. Over the years there has also been a quiet realization that, unfortunately, we cannot avoid facing the consequences of geographic and political realities. The Russian war in Georgia and its actions in Crimea, together with Russia's voiced policy of using military force to protect the interests of Russian citizens abroad, have resulted in a renewed sense of realism in the Finnish debate. Russian capabilities had not completely rusted after the end of the Cold War, and it had been impressive to see how they managed to project military force so quickly and effectively. People increasingly recognize that we do need to be stronger in military terms to be able to cope in the modern world but that we also need to find a solution that satisfies Russia's legitimate security concerns in our region.

With regard to Russian security concerns it is important to reflect on Finnish NATO membership from a Russian perspective. Obviously they would not be happy having an additional 800 kilometer border with NATO. They would have to react to that situation and would have to allocate more assets in our direction. Somehow we would need to demonstrate to Russia that our need to increase our security does not have offensive undertones, but that the measures are only intended to increase defensive readiness. In fact, our awkward maneuvering in the NATO matter may well really be about emphasizing towards Russia that we recognize their security concerns and do not want threats to be presented towards Russia from our region. But by cooperating closely with NATO in the NATO-PfP framework and by supporting the United States we are also signaling that we do not want to see any threats from the Russian side either.

Finland will likely continue to work on international cooperation in defense issues with Western countries and especially the United States. Even if we might for formal purposes choose to stay out of NATO for the time being, we will likely make every effort to show ourselves to be worthy of U.S., NATO and EU support in terms of national security. This includes participating in the Afghan campaign. Active participation in Afghanistan and in other NATO campaigns could be seen as a fee for the "NATO-option" that is part of the official Finnish security policy.

# CHAPTER 17

# POLICY AND POLITICS

Intelligence has been a key component of politics since organized societies were established. It has been vital for princes and monarchs as well as democratic republics to try to understand and foresee the intentions of adversaries and allies. Similarly in Afghanistan intelligence provided a platform to look in more detail at the agendas of the constituencies contributing to the overall situation. As discussed, due to the political sensitivity of the situation, no one could be expected to tell you anything other than what they wanted you to hear to promote their own interests and agendas.

The situation in Afghanistan was really a lesson on how politics works universally. Having followed day to day events in Afghanistan one easily starts to extrapolate from the situation in that theatre to politics more generally. The political system of Afghanistan in its crudeness gives insights into the inherent nature of politics. The political institutions we take for granted are largely missing in Afghanistan and the business of politics is carried out outside established institutions or systems and pursued on the basis of influence, networks and power. At the same time, observing how the international community operated in the country and what the real incentives for intervention were, one came to consider the extent to which our own institutions are just facades behind which the real political game takes place. It was clear that the political rhetoric in relation to the Afghan campaign did not reflect the reality on the ground, and that the Afghan policy of different governments was not based on any coherent

strategy or plan to "solve" the situation in Afghanistan but was driven in part by completely unrelated political agendas. So, to me, Afghanistan provided an exciting field experiment in applied political theory.

### Political Analysis

Theories of international politics abound. Many emphasize the anarchic order of international relations. Even in the era of established international organizations, international relations must be defined by the possibility of hostile action. Calculations based on this possibility dictate foreign policy[132]. Realist theories of international politics suggest that in international relations states are largely self-interested and seek to maximize their security and their power in a rational way. These theories were largely at play in Afghanistan as well. Realist theories do give a good basis for understanding the drivers of different countries' foreign policy at different times, including participation in the Afghan mission. Many of the participating countries speak of addressing global or national security concerns related to international terrorism by joining forces in Afghanistan. However, the Taliban do not really have interests outside of Afghanistan or its immediate neighborhood – they are not really into international terrorism. The few people who might still be categorized as "al-Qaeda" do have a terrorist agenda, but I imagine there is a cheaper way to go after them than a campaign lasting more than a decade with over 3,000 coalition casualties and costs amounting to hundreds of billions of dollars. So what was the national self-interest that justified the operation? Might different countries have different interests, in fact, and how did that affect their participation in the Afghan campaign? The answers were straight forward enough but were certainly not in line with the public and political rhetoric.

Other theories of international politics provide different insights. A liberal or idealist approach to international relations evolved after World War I. Many countries in the West had experienced a horrendous war and believed that the objective of international relations should be to limit such atrocity. The theory seems to be based on the notion that human rights are a key basis for the legitimacy of international relations and international law. But the situation in Afghanistan did not seem to reflect those theories either. This was not really a humanitarian intervention and the real drivers for our participation were not really related to the plight of the Afghan people. No one had intervened in Af-

132 See Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 1978, at 117

ghanistan when the Taliban took over. The international community protested strongly when they destroyed the huge Buddha statues in Bamyan province, but no one spoke of intervention prior to 9/11.

As the world is increasingly globalized, countries become dependent on each other for basic utilities and services, and are also more sensitive to international developments. The more domestic interests are affected by activities or developments elsewhere in the world, the more the country has to be able to adapt to those changes. While globalization has certainly benefited us greatly it has also united us with respect to the potential negative effects of problems in far-away regions. So intervention in Afghanistan is not just a crusade, but is driven by concerns related to political developments in Central Asia and how these affect European and American interests with respect to international trade, access to raw materials, as well as political stability in regions which share our borders and our overall security situation. However, even if the intervention may have been driven by concerns related to political stability and security, the strategies applied in Afghanistan did not seem to be aligned with these goals.

In following how the situation in Afghanistan was managed I looked back at the first practical lessons in international politics I thought I had picked up during my deployment in Kosovo. Were these views on international politics confirmed by what was going on Afghanistan?

Geopolitics mattered in Kosovo as it does in Afghanistan. The Balkan situation was still affected by the shadow of the cold war and the emergence of a "New Europe" with pro-U.S. interests. In the Balkans the political dynamic seemed to favor the West, and the Russian sphere of interest was pushed back somewhat. Afghanistan represents a new era in this regard. The country in itself is of little interest to anyone, but it is situated in a region with interesting neighbors, many of whom have mixed feelings about having had up to 100,000 U.S. soldiers in their backyard. However, it is unclear whether having forces in Afghanistan provides sufficient leverage in terms of geopolitics to justify the costs. It is possible that the geopolitical area of interest is actually shifting towards the Pacific theatre, as has been publicly stated by the United States, for example. So it may well be advantageous at this point to start packing up and leaving Central Asia, and not staying with a 99 year lease as the United States had done in Kosovo.

The Balkan crisis had demonstrated the weakness of the EU with respect to a common foreign and security policy. Afghanistan, however, could not be

compared with the Balkans. European countries did not really have too many independent interests in these latitudes, so it could not be expected that the EU would go out of its way and get heavily involved in Afghanistan. This was really a U.S. operation, and EU countries were here mostly as allies and partners of the United States. So the dynamic was different this time. Nevertheless, the EU did make some contributions. Whether these made much of a difference is another story. The former UK ambassador to Afghanistan commented on the efforts of Sweden, for example, when the country held the EU presidency and the special representative wanted to make a difference on EU Afghan policies during the six month presidency. Despite the many Swedish and EU initiative during this period the conclusion was that "it would be foolish to pretend that any of this made much difference to the situation on the ground"[133]. The EU still lacks the will and the means to create and enforce policy. The ability to put boots on the ground still matters, and we do not have it.

### Policy and Politics

There was a further factor, however, that seemed to me to be of some significance in analyzing the reality of international politics in Afghanistan. Theories often assume that states are rational actors that form coherent policies and act upon them in a consistent manner. However, this is not necessarily the case. Having seen how international politics is executed on the ground, and how it was reflected in what went on in Afghanistan, one can question the ability of political actors to really form and pursue a coherent strategy in the first place.

Afghan politics is complex, and many of the local political actors are relatively sophisticated and experienced in operating in this type of environment. In fact, due to the violent nature of the society, merely the fact that local power-brokers stay alive is testimony of their political skills. Many of the other actors are experienced participants in the field of international politics as well – countries with centuries of established institutions and robust foreign policy. So when one was looking behind the scenes of the Afghan campaign one might have expected to find sophisticated strategies honed by skilled professionals. But that is not quite what seemed to be going on.

The public portrayal of the international intervention in Afghanistan and the related political rhetoric sometimes seemed to have the characteristics of a scripted play that was not related to the situation on the ground. Official state-

133 Sherard Copwer Coles, *Cables from Kabul*, 2012, p.232

ments regarding Afghanistan were often in sufficient contrast with what was occurring on the ground that they appeared almost fictional. Political leaders at international summits or in interviews repeated their lines on the progress and success of the intervention and early withdrawal regardless of the actual development of the security situation on the ground.

Policy is not necessarily formulated to address the actual problems. Views on how international relations may be split between strong domestic constituencies, for example, and foreign policy can be used as a tool in domestic politics regardless of its merits. In many cases the policy and strategy of ISAF troop contributing nations was largely dictated or heavily affected by their domestic political situations rather than by the realities on the ground. Policy statements on Afghanistan have to cater to domestic audiences out of concern for the polls rather than to address the situation in Afghanistan. As the political environment back home evolves so does policy in Afghanistan – without much regard for what is actually going on in Afghanistan.

To the extent that Afghan policies were driven by foreign policy they were not necessarily linked to the situation in Afghanistan either. As mentioned, the perceived threat that the situation in Afghanistan may or may not have posed did not affect troop contributing countries in a uniform manner. In any case the type of campaign that was pursued in Afghanistan was not necessarily even limited to addressing the specific concerns of international terrorism. So participation in the ISAF campaign was largely based on foreign policy drivers related to maintaining the relationships and alliances that troop contributing nations have in order to pursue their individual foreign policy agendas far away from the Afghan plains.

It also seemed that a lot of actors in Afghanistan were hustling. They were just trying to make the most of a bad situation with very little time to prepare or plan. Political leaders had to take public opinion into consideration in how they committed to the Afghan campaign, particularly if elections were approaching. More often than not the public is against foreign military intervention as immediate concerns at home are closer to mind. Foreign policy is ultimately subject to the demands of domestic politics. In democratic countries politics run on four year cycles with most political actors focusing on getting re-elected. So Afghan policy in most troop contributing countries was mainly formed based on a "getting re-elected" agenda. The rhetoric on Afghanistan –

and related policy to some extent – would shift based on the mood of the day among the electorate. The volatility of the policies increased as elections came nearer. There just did not seem to be a basis for developing robust long term sustainable policy. Some countries were able to throw more money at the problems than others, but that did not change the overall view of the rather shallow base for pursuing constructive policies in Afghanistan.

There was often also a discrepancy between the goals and views of the people executing policy in theatre and their principals at home. The people on the ground representing international organizations or troop contributing nations who were serving or working in Afghanistan were often hard-working and dedicated to their mission. They sympathized with the Afghans or at least with the mission. They wanted the mission to succeed and they often even believed the mission could succeed. Many felt they were doing important work and often felt frustrated when they didn't get the support or understanding they expected from their home countries. Sometimes people in the field focusing only on the ISAF operation may have had an unrealistic view of the real importance of the mission on the agendas of the troop contributing nations. It was often evident that governments had their own agendas and concerns where the work in Afghanistan did not necessarily have a very high priority.

It also seems that the practical management of policy is not always at the level one would expect. Governments are often hierarchical organizations characterized by turf wars and departments which do not talk to each other or even trust each other. It is not unusual for there to be some tension between state departments and foreign services on the one hand and defense departments and the military on the other. In Afghanistan, I believe these departments could also have their own agendas, policies and goals that were not necessarily aligned. But also, governments generally do not get A's for how they are run, they are lucky to get C's. Government officials sometimes enjoy perpetual job security and there is no guarantee that they will be of a high caliber or make extra efforts beyond the minimum. This was also sometimes visible in how policies were formulated and executed.

### Politics Without Institutions?

When I was following the political development in Afghanistan, many questions came to mind about the essence of politics more generally. As the formal

political system in Afghanistan was so inadequate, it was apparent that decisions were taken on other forums outside the formal government institutions. The extreme situation at hand also made it quite transparent on what basis and by whom decisions were taken. Politics in Afghanistan was a question of pursuing the economic and political interests of powerful people and interest groups and of how these interests were coordinated and executed by force or by other means. In this regard I started to see similarities between how things were managed in Afghanistan and how they are managed elsewhere. It seemed to me that the basic essence of politics is similar despite the system of government.

### *Autocracies and Democracies*

Political systems, democracies and autocracies alike, are power structures. They are often formed and reformed based on the interests of politically dominant constituencies. Taken to an extreme, this can be applied to our democratic systems as well. If liberty, equality and fraternity were the cornerstones of the formation of republics on both sides of the Atlantic at the end of the 18th century, then those ideals likely served the interests of the groups that were able to focus sufficient political and physical force to gain political power.

Political parties are interest groups or networks that seek to promote their interests or their mission through the political system or by whatever other (legal) means are available. Parties do not necessarily represent the "people" or a fraction thereof. They trade policies for votes when trying to obtain political power. In Afghanistan they mainly functioned as the public platforms for political leaders. The party or the political system was by no means the sole avenue for projecting the power of these leaders. Parties and their leadership need not be limited to the political system to project power but of course have networks and connections that provide a number of policy avenues to pursue.

The difference between the former monarchies with their courts on the one hand and societies of today on the other is mainly that in most states with a "democratic system" you every now and then have an election of sorts. However, this alone does not guarantee that an ideal form of "democracy" would evolve, or that such an ideal even exists. In fact, it does not seem appropriate to define countries based only on the form of government. Political systems should be defined by their real world institutions – by both their strengths and their deficiencies. So even if Afghanistan has a parliament and elections it

would not be fair to call the country a democracy. The question that then easily arises is what makes our societies in the West "democratic" if the mere existence of institutions cannot be relied on.

Elections can be rigged or bought and real political power can be transferred outside the formal political system if needed. The electoral system can easily be manipulated through changing voting districts or by different voting systems that support different constituencies. In the United States, for example, manipulating voting districts has become such an established form of art that it has been given its own name - gerrymandering. In Finland, until recently, the election system favored less populated regions, so that in some regions you needed only a few thousand votes to get elected into parliament and in the capital you needed far more. The system has been changed so that in smaller constituencies today larger parties are favored over smaller ones.

Another method of affecting democratic institutions is by decreasing the powers of the elected body and moving relevant decision making to other forums. During earlier decades in Finland many significant decisions were taken in negotiations between the unions and employer organizations. The government was then informed of the pension or other labor related decisions taken in these industrial settings. As the political system becomes less representative, pressure to affect the development of society through means other than the parliamentary democratic system increases. Decision making can move away from political systems making that system increasingly marginal and volatile. A report was published in the UK with respect to the state of democracy in 2012. The study finds that democracy is in "long term terminal decline". This development with an unrepresentative political system leaves voters disillusioned and ultimately makes the United Kingdom "increasingly unstable"[134]. So we see that "democracy" is not a stable state that we in the West have all uniformly achieved and can enjoy. We can't just tell the Afghans that this is exactly how they should develop their system. Our systems need work and maintenance all the time.

It is also possible to limit the effects of government by economic means. An administration might choose to promote "small government" or "large government" each favoring different constituencies in society. Or you might make sure that while your constituency is in power you use up all the money there is – and then some – in order to prevent your successors from executing their

134 Democratic Audit Report, How Democratic is the UK? The 2012 Audit, July 2012

program even if the opponents win political power. If you are an incumbent and it looks like you are going to lose the next election, you would make sure to entrench and lock down your achievements, and then try to tie the hands of government as much as possible to prevent action being taken that would be against your interests. One way of doing this is to make sure that the government has no money – i.e by overspending as much as possible while in power. During the George W. Bush administration, for example, U.S. debt rose by 89 percent from approximately 5.9 trillion dollars to almost 11 trillion. Bush financed two wars and cut taxes at the same time. I think the U.S. taxpayers did not get enough bang for their buck for those wars. They had dubious merits and limited strategic impact or benefit to U.S. geopolitical interests and status in relation to the investment made. But the military industrial complex, first referred to by Eisenhower, certainly prospered. The national debt has increased further during the Obama administration (2012) by 4.9 trillion dollars, or 40 percent – a faster increase than during Bush, in fact. But Obama's programs have indeed been very hard to execute with the huge debt burdens the country has.

I sometimes also wonder whether the number or portion of celebrities in parliament could be a metric of the quality of the political system. In Finland, as in some other European countries, there has been a surprising number of celebrities of different kinds elected to parliament (skiers seem popular in Finland). If candidates for public office are elected based on celebrity status it is not a good sign with respect to the significance of the institution. It is unlikely that decisions of real significance would be allowed to be taken by athletes or musicians, and therefore this phenomenon may reflect the fact that important decision making has been shifted to other forums. It also reflects the basis on which the interest of the electorate is caught and how they choose their representatives. If what the institution decided really mattered people might choose their candidates more carefully based on their perceived ability to make good decisions. But often people choose candidates based on celebrity status and the extent to which the candidate's views are aligned with those of the voter, which may not necessarily be the best criteria at all.

Democracy may not be an effective form of government in the poorest countries in the first place. It has been argued that democracy only starts making sense when GDP per person averages at USD 6,000[135]. In fact, at income levels below USD 2,700 it seems that democracies are in fact more unstable than other

135 Björn Wahlroos, *Marknader och Demokrati* (Markets and Democracy), 2012, p.92

types of political systems[136]. At these levels of income you just need someone who keeps some level of order so that people can go about their daily lives and develop an economic basis for a stable political system. So in a very challenging environment you just don't have the basic premises for what a "democracy" is supposed to be. A functioning legal system, for example, is a key element of a democratic system. This might require a level of education or that some forms of law actually exist, however. It would also be a bonus if courts are not overly corrupt.

### *The Quality of the Governance System*

The system of government is not the only factor that should be considered in assessing the quality of a political system. Whether a political system is labeled a "democracy" or not does not seem to be the only relevant consideration. The quality of governance also matters. A democratic government can be failing its mission just as an autocratic government can. An autocratic society is more likely to have low quality governance mechanisms in areas such as human rights or the accountability of the leadership. But democracies, on the other hand, can pursue overly populist short-term policies. The democratic system is often dependent on short-term economic growth, for example. When the economic situation worsens political stability decreases as has been seen in many parts of Europe after the financial crisis. The electorate requires short-term fixes – bread and circus – at the cost of sustainable long term development. There have been interesting studies on the relationship between economic growth and political systems[137]. Autocratic systems have at times been able to accomplish significant economic change without the constraints related to democratic systems. Economic growth in China has been a good example. On the other hand, there are many examples of complete failures where political agendas have been pursued relentlessly as in Cuba or, more dramatically, in North Korea. Democracies seem to produce more stable development with less variation in results.

To me the "failed state" index seems an interesting benchmark in assessing government and governance systems. One could work out metrics of "good governance" that pay less attention to the formal aspects of governments, i.e. whether it should be labeled a "democracy" or not, and focus more on how government and the governance system is able to cope with the issues faced

136 Paul Collier, Wars, *Guns and Votes – Democracy in Dangerous Places*, 2009, p. 20-21; see also Björn Wahlroos, *Marknader och Demokrati* (Markets and Democracy), 2012, p.382

137 See, for example, Becker-Posner blogs at the University of Chicago Law School, Democracy or Autocracy: Which Is Better for Economic Growth?

by its population. The metrics in the failed state index include both social and economic indicators (demographic pressures, refugees and internally placed persons, uneven economic development, group grievances, brain drain, poverty and economic decline) as well as political and military metrics (state legitimacy, public services, human rights and rule of law, security apparatus, factionalized elites and external intervention).

The current failed state index has been calibrated for more dire environments than Western Europe. But many of the indicators were certainly valid for our part of the world as well. Parameters that deserve more attention could include inclusive growth, environmental sustainability, youth employment and generational economic and political solidarity, improvement of health and education and quality of life factors, for example. The budgets and quality of certain key institutions that support the legitimacy of society could also be measured. As a lawyer I tend to have some concern over the quality of the Finnish legal system, as do some leading Finnish judges as well[138]. Finland has repeatedly been cited by the European Court of Human Rights for failure to provide a fair process, for example, and attorneys often recommend arbitration for any business-related disputes – not only for increased confidentiality, but to ensure even adequate subject matter expertise and expediency of process. One might measure whether the courts are adequately financed and do judges have sufficient pay; and how long court proceedings take, for example (here Finland would score miserably).

### Fragile Institutions

This is not the context for an extensive analysis of democracy – better studies have certainly been published in that regard. Yet some aspects of what should be expected from governments and from governance became fairly obvious by their absence in Afghanistan. When one considered the governance systems we had in the West in light of how they would be applied in Afghanistan their flaws and inadequacy also came to light. The structure of politics and economics still seems based on similar basic aspects of human behavior and of how society works.

The euro area and Greek financial crisis culminated during my time in Afghanistan. It was interesting to observe how economic crisis immediately

138 Statements by President of the Finnish Supreme Court in press reports (Savon Sanomat, November 27, 201, *Helsinki Times*, 16 December 2013) and statements by the Chief Judge of the Helsinki District Judge in *Helsingin Sanomat*, May 4, 2009

brought political instability to the "cradle of Western democracy". There were mass demonstrations and strikes where there should have been serious reflection on how the public finances could have got into this state, how retirement ages could have been cut to unsustainable levels, and how tax evasion could be so rampant. How could the people have elected a government that so badly managed daily business? Instead the Greek people vilified the Germans for actually placing some conditions on continued financing. Overall, it was interesting to see how badly the political and economic systems coped with the crisis.

In fact, it is interesting to consider how dependent our political and economic systems are on continued short-term economic growth. As soon as the economy is in trouble political instability ensues. My concern is how such systems can ever cope with demands on increasing sustainability from an environmental perspective, for example. It is clear that we have not been carrying the real costs of externalities, such as pollution and use of natural resources. Instead, these are passed on to future generations. As the human footprint has increased environmental issues have become more nascent. As pollution increases so that we cannot avoid observing its consequences the thought might arise that the polluters (shareholders, consumers) should actually pay for cleaning up the damage their economic activity and their consumption has caused. My concern is whether our systems could cope with that.

It was also interesting to consider the strength and integrity of our democratic institutions. Is political decision making in Western countries really based on our institutions, or is there an extent to which decisions are in fact taken outside of the democratic processes? I cannot see that real political power will be held based on institutional structures alone. If significant economic or political interests are at stake interest groups will not simply rely on formal political institutions and hope for the best. If parliaments are deemed unreliable then meaningful decisions will be transferred away from them. Budgets may be nailed down with little room for political changes, or matters can be decided outside the institutional set up altogether.

The key factors that are too often neglected in how we assess how our political systems work are sustainability and inclusive growth[139]. We do not seem to have a focus on long-term sustainability in either our political or our economic systems. There is research to support the assumption that the net present value of long-term profits is typically undervalued – it seems to be human nature.

139 See Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson, *Why Nations Fail*, 2012

This of course creates a dilemma for any efforts that are needed to maintain a sustainable model for humans to use natural resources and enjoy non-pecuniary benefits of our planet, such as clean air and nature.

Societies also seem to require uninterrupted short-term economic growth to avoid instability – even if that means moving structural problems forward for future generations to deal with. Another important aspect is how economic growth is distributed. It has been noted that an increasing portion of economic growth in the United States benefits the top earners of the population[140]. From a market based perspective that should be fine, of course. Even based on the often used pareto-optimality the result could be deemed fair if growth has benefited some but not been detrimental to anyone else. However, this is not necessarily how society works. Growth must be inclusive in order for the system to be politically sustainable. Especially if large politically relevant interest groups are not included in growth the development will not be sustainable. If differences in income and wealth increase dramatically it could well be lead to outcomes such as the French revolution – or some other means by which the systems are changed.

### The End of History in the West?

Francis Fukuyama has famously argued that the Western system of republics and majoritarian democratic systems represent the culmination of the development of human political systems[141]. Yet it seems that these systems are inadequate to address the challenges of society today. It has been argued that the scope of political decision making is too broad, and should be balanced with an increase of market based systems and hierarchies, i.e. corporations[142]. Political systems have demonstrated themselves to be lacking capabilities in dealing with the efficient distribution and production of services, for example. But to me it seems that political systems are also too vulnerable to short-term crisis or disturbances to be able to focus on long-term policies.

Our political systems seem to be based on unsustainable expectations of economic development. They seem highly sensitive to short term economic development or other short term crisis. Political change is imminent in the face of economic downturns (whether or not in any way the fault of the government in office), and political systems become unstable with more severe economic crisis, as has been seen even in Europe during the past years after the financial crisis.

140 Linda Levine, The U.S. Income Distribution and Mobility: Trends and International Comparisons (Congressional Research Service Report 2012) available at http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R42400.pdf

141 See Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History*, 1989

142 See Björn Wahlroos, *Marknader och Demokrati* (Markets and Democracy), 2012

The systems allow for recognized problems to be addressed in the future and for opportunism by the dominant political coalitions. So those who can affect the system take out benefits today that will be paid for by others in the future. There seems to be little concern for long term issues and consequently little interest in addressing them. Examples abound from current underfunded pension systems being supported by the part of the population benefitting from them at the cost of future generations to dodging environmental problems. In addressing the financial crisis in Europe, much of the political focus has been on short-term solutions to the crisis, in many cases just attempting to move the problems forward in time with the hope that the economic cycle will mitigate the crisis without really addressing the deep structural problems.

So one has to wonder how political systems can further be developed to be less sensitive to short term issues and populism and how long term political strategies and policies can be developed. Could a first step be to identify the matters that political systems should address and that are vital in the long-term? Could the failed state index be further refined to provide some much-needed guidance even to those that are "last" on the list? When these factors have been worked upon it could well be possible to reassess which aspects of society are best dealt with in the political sphere and which by markets and corporations, for example.

# ACT VII

## THE WAR IS OVER WHEN THE NEWSPAPERS STOP WRITING ABOUT IT

# CHAPTER 18

# GOING BACK HOME

### Kabul One Last Time

Before returning home I made a quick last trip to Kabul. I thought it would be worthwhile to say good bye to friends and colleagues and to get some updates and briefings on recent developments. The ISAF operational headquarters was right next to the Kabul International Airport (i.e. KAIA), so this time I would not even have to move around in Kabul. And as a matter of fact there were movement restrictions in force so I would likely not have been able to get out of the base anyway.

The flight from our base was very early in the morning, as usual. I had the privilege of flying on a C-130 Hercules operated by the Swedish Air Force. Hercs are old classics but were starting to be obsolete so it was nice to get the opportunity. The plane first made a commuter-hop to Maimanah West from our base, where we had a five minute stopover. As we started to approach the Maimanah airfield the close protection team geared up and as soon as we had stopped taxying they got out and stood to. The passengers got off and new ones got on while the engines were idling. As soon as everybody was belted in we took off within just minutes of landing – very effective compared to any civilian stop-overs I have experienced. The flight south over the Hindu Kush was only an hour or so, which was just as well: Hercs have interesting bathroom facilities – they have a urinal at the front end of the passenger area – basically about 30 cm from my face as I sat on the bench towards the front. As the flight was short luckily no one had to go.

At KAIA I checked in with visitor billeting and was assigned a bunk in a comfortable, but perhaps not five star, 20 person tent in the transit billeting area. Luxurious it was not, but certainly good enough for an overnight stay. The shower and bathroom facilities were adequate, though primitive enough that I decided I might wait until I was back at Camp Marmal to have a shower.

International military headquarters are strange places. At the national level the highly structured nature of the military is often reflected in how headquarters work. There are very clear chains of command and everyone knows how the organization works, who is in charge and what to do. But international headquarters are more chaotic with people from different nationalities rotating at different times into theatre, people having no clue of the organizational structure or who does what. There are also dual chains of command that make command structures unclear. There is an international operational hierarchy where commanders might have the right to give orders to troops of a different nationality. But different countries have different policies, and operational decisions may well be second guessed by national leaders.

At some level the international characteristics of HQs are visible in theatre as well. The funnier part is the variety of headgear. At the main HQ, staff officers typically wear formal headgear whereas at the more operational level people take more liberties or just wear field uniforms. But at KAIA there were berets, caps with tussles or feathers, boonie-hats, caps with or without visors and the huge hats of the French alpine corps. The overall atmosphere was somewhat relaxed as well, reflecting the slight lack of strict hierarchy that you have in a purely national operation. People might have been a little bit casual or "matey" or even flirtatious at times. Some more fighting-focused officers have been a bit frustrated at these international HQ's in general, and suggested that the people there don't seem to recognize there is a war going on. But in truth, this may well have been a war for some but for others it was a peace support operation or even just an offshore tour with higher daily danger allowances.

As I wandered around at the HQ I stopped at the LEGAD office to see colleagues. As I had worked as a legal adviser previously it was easy to connect with operational lawyers and their concerns. As I had lunch with one of the lawyers his main concern was the army in general. He had served for a good number of years and enjoyed it but had now married and had young children at home. Being in theatre was no longer fun. As I tried to discuss operational law

the discussion returned over and over again to the pleasures of civilian life. My status as a reserve officer seemed to be of interest, but I understood his country did not really offer that opportunity. It was either the next six month mission after Afghanistan, or getting out altogether. We all had our personal stories, and our reasons for being in theatre or wanting to get out.

When we finally got back to business I did actually get to discuss operational law matters as well. The lawyers had been up in RC North giving targeting training. Basically, it had been a course on the processes and authorizations required for the use of indirect fire (mainly air support). The process was relatively vigorous with lawyers and other specialists involved. I won't go into any detail on the course for operational security reasons.

There has been plenty of discussion in the public domain on the use of drones to take out insurgents or to "remove them from the battlefield". The coalition could basically keep a target under surveillance for quite a while and collect information to serve as an additional legal or tactical basis for action. Daily patterns could also be monitored to allow minimizing collateral damage – i.e. to avoid killing a target's family, for example. From a war-fighting perspective targeting could be compared to ambushes, which as such are in accordance with the laws of war. However, the use of drones leaves little room for the application of the principle of using minimum force required. Basically, you don't give the target any chance to surrender. While this might be ok when you are in war fighting mode, I do see some issues when your use of force is somewhat more restricted and you are working from a law enforcement perspective, for example.

Starting at 09:00 I was in meetings pretty much the whole day until 21:00. I had expected some of the meetings to get canceled or otherwise not work out, as is typical. So I was prepared to go jogging or visit the gym. But now I really only had time for a short walk around the HQ area. I walked pass the national NSE houses, where some countries had national recreation facilities. I thought I heard someone hitting a boxing sack at the German NSE, and a bunch of Italians were having espressos outside their office, but otherwise it was very quiet. I looked into the local bar, but was not immediately able to see whether they served real beer or whether it was a dry outpost altogether. The bars in these international military compounds always remind me of the bar in Star Wars with a lot of different military uniforms, different races and types sitting in

groups talking in their own languages. And everybody is appropriately armed of course. Luckily, however, no shoot outs between different alien groups as in Star Wars! But even inside the bases there is always the small but disturbing risk of green on blue attacks that had been increasing in number recently, though not at central HQ level. So there were guards, or guardian angels, milling around with loaded weapons, and pretty much everyone was carrying a sidearm.

The next morning I had to get up at 5 am again. I hadn't slept that well with the visitor tents located right next to the landing strip. There had been helicopters taking off and landing again through the night. I walked over to the terminal for check-in and weigh-in – we were weighed with our body armor. Military security screenings are always a bit weird as you put your gun through the x-ray machine and then you put it back on again. I had heard that knives, on the other hand, could not be carried in the cabin – go figure. This time we flew courtesy of the Germans on a Transall C-160 with fewer people and less cargo than on the way over. It even got a bit chilly during the flight, but with the temperatures we were having it was almost a small luxury. As we landed at Camp Marmal we had about 40 degrees again, and a new morning. I started with a cup of strong coffee and a long overdue shower.

I felt that the general atmosphere at HQ had still been confident. In the summer of 2012 there were still large numbers of operational troops deployed. Withdrawals had only just started and they were focused on calmer regions of the country. The logistical challenges of the retrograde had also not yet really started to show. At the same time, there seemed to be an extra effort to target the insurgents and basically give them a severe thumping prior to withdrawal in order to give ANA some breathing room when they took over responsibility for security. So there was still plenty of operational work going on.

There were a few signs of developments possibly underway that I believe caused some concern. One was the freedom of movement of insurgents that was certainly increasing with the on-going withdrawal. ANA would be unlikely to have the capabilities to restrict the insurgents in this regard. There were also some signs that, to some extent, ANA might not have the will to engage the insurgents either if they could avoid it. Another development that was very topical during 2012 was the increase in green on blue incidents, i.e. ANA or Afghan police personnel attacking representatives of the international com-

munity. As ISAF decreased operations, the intention was to increase training and mentoring of Afghan security forces, and thus support the Afghan government's efforts to maintain security and to maintain the situational awareness of the international community. However, as insider attacks increased, it was difficult to carry out this mission securely. It is a difficult job if you have to worry that the people you are training or mentoring might turn their weapons against you at any time.

Another issue was that the security situation was not really getting a whole lot better. In the north the situation was more or less under control, but not necessarily due to ISAF. The region just had a completely different dynamic both for geographic reasons and because of the ethnic breakdown. The Taliban did not gain the same momentum there. But in the south the situation was not that great, and it did not seem to me that the trend looked that good either. There was no momentum to suggest that southern Afghanistan would become more stable over time. The border area towards Pakistan, in particular, was the cause of much concern.

But these developments were not really the immediate concern of the soldiers and officers in theatre during the summer of 2012. The campaign was still progressing more or less to some amended strategy and new people would take over before the effects of the withdrawal would really start to show.

### The Last Week

The last week in theatre dragged on forever. I did have a few reports to finalize, but that was rather quickly done. I was working on my thesis as well, but still time went slowly. The last days I was pretty much locked into camp – especially after I returned all my gear. I did keep my pistol until the last day due to the at least theoretical green on blue threat, though in our part of the country and in this camp in particular it was miniscule.

Working in theatre had been a unique opportunity. It had been a tremendously interesting and inspiring six months. I had certainly gained new insights, new experiences and met very interesting people. It had been a privilege to work in such a demanding environment. I also felt we had made a good effort and developed organizational competence during our tour. It was certainly a job well done I felt. But at times it had also been tremendously boring. For

days on end I could be confined to my desk, the compound and the camp with similar routines. But that is the nature of a lot of military work, and it is part of the challenge, too. To be able to keep motivated and working hard despite at times monotonous or solitary surroundings is part of the job.

I was packed, repacked and ready to go way ahead of schedule. Despite having taken home souvenirs and carpets on a previous leave I still had too much stuff. My bags weighed far above the maximum with all of my personal gear, my dissertation materials and the few items I had to make my quarters more livable. I even gave away my blast resistant boxer shorts and left my books on Afghanistan as a donation to the unit.

The army sometimes excels in HR and despite leaving theatre separately from the main force there was a formal departure ceremony with the presentation of plaques and a few speeches, as well as a more informal get-together with colleagues at some of the equally informal German bars hidden somewhere in the camp. I also left a small souvenir – a miniature flag of my home region as a token presence after my repatriation in our main meeting room. As the region is a demilitarized zone I thought the flag might raise a few eyebrows among visiting military personnel. Under the foot of the flag I left the inscription "An nescis mi fili quantilla prudentia mundus regatur".

### Debriefing

I had managed to leave theatre and end my mission a few days early so I could make our firm's partners' meeting and get busy with new work. I got back into my routines surprisingly fast. There were some very large assignments going on where I could get involved and pull my sleeves up. Then a few meetings with old clients and contacts, and new assignments started to roll in slowly but surely. Soon I was so busy again it was hard to find time for the compulsory debriefing sessions at Pori Brigade in early November 2012.

The military had started to organize debriefing sessions for all personnel who had been on overseas operations. Previously the mission ended when you landed at the airport in Finland. It had taken many years of requests by soldiers and their families, by chaplains and peacekeepers' groups for some kind of follow-up by the military before debriefing sessions were organized. Belatedly, after some suicides by deployed personnel and other mishaps, the military

got their act together. Now we had a fairly comprehensive meeting with group discussions and private meetings with counselors, and a nice get together at the officers' mess. The military had actually put quite some effort into this.

For people with a little more life experience, and no real traumatic experiences, it was all a non-event, except that it was nice to meet up with colleagues and "brothers in arms" again. But for the younger lads and gals the situation was different. Many might be coming back to relationships broken by the distance during the mission, to unemployment or menial jobs, or disappointments in educational opportunities. There could be quite a contrast in coming home to a society that did not necessarily have a place for you compared with the lifestyle experienced in Afghanistan – a seemingly meaningful job, new challenging environments, danger and camaraderie. A follow-up was certainly not misplaced.

There was one area where the Finnish government was still lagging when it comes to soldiers participating in overseas operations. Healthcare and health and life insurance matters were still dealt with in an unsatisfactory way. The State Treasury was responsible for health insurance for soldiers, as they are for any other government financial risks and they treated soldiers in the same way as they treated their other exposures. The treasury has a reputation for working to minimize government expenditure by all available means. So every claim was scrutinized in infuriating detail, every medical procedure could be questioned, and every accident and injury could be challenged. The treasury was sure to question whether the person could already have had a bad back or broken knee when whatever accident or incident happened in Afghanistan or Kosovo or Chad.

There had been an outrage a year or two earlier in this respect. A soldier was badly hurt in an incident that killed another Finnish soldier in Afghanistan. The State Treasury had refused to pay for some back surgery and his union ended up footing the bill. He went public and the matter became political. The president of Finland and the Cabinet tasked the treasury to work out a solution together with the military to address this. And they did develop some kind of coordination cell that would facilitate access to care for injured soldiers – but they did not, mind you, change the compensation policies. So you are likely to still have the same fights for claims on your hands, but now a "coordination cell" is supposed to help you navigate through those fights.

The idea still seems to be that soldiers should have a right to the same minimum standard of care that the government provides elsewhere. The State Treasury staff actually came over to explain during our deployment training before we went into theatre how their approach was fair as it guaranteed equal treatment to people the government is liable for. But the whole approach is flawed. If someone goes to a theatre of operations as a soldier and gets hurt in a hostile incident wearing the Finnish uniform we need to take care of that person. There is no comparing a soldier in theatre being shot or bombed with a government employee who falls in the stairway or complains of being overworked. We don't need to go for the lowest possible acceptable level of care, but should pay for the best available care. A solution could be to have special coverage for incidents that occur on operations or during a contact and have the more traditional approach cover other accidents or injuries that occur away from the line of fire. The government has finally noted this and new legislation is being worked on.

I felt that the way the government had organized healthcare for injured soldiers was not quite up to par, but that was predictable from a government with little experience from veterans' affairs since World War II. In any case, it bothered me enough that part of the proceeds of this book, if any, will be going towards the care and rehabilitation of Finnish soldiers injured on overseas missions.

# CHAPTER 19

# BEYOND 2014

## 2014

The ISAF mission is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2014. Afghans have, in principle, taken over responsibility for security in the whole country and the remaining troops are supposed to be focusing on supporting the Afghan forces and on the logistics of withdrawal. After 2014 the mission will formally change into a training and mentoring operation.

The Afghan security forces have started to take much heavier casualties as their role has been increasing and the amount of civilian casualties has been growing as well. The insurgents are moving back into areas that ISAF has been vacating. Yet they have been pounded hard by Western military power and are unlikely to have the same force as they did a decade ago. However, as has been said so often, the Afghan crisis is less about fighting an organized insurgency and more about dealing with political instability in a country fractionalized by ethnic, geographic, economic and political factors. If the economic situation does not get better, political instability is likely to increase and the security situation will get worse. The crucial question is whether the security situation remains within the parameters of "Afghan normal" or whether violence and instability starts to tear apart what organized society there is.

The year 2014 will likely be an interesting time in Afghanistan with elections scheduled without an obvious outcome ahead of the campaign. Even after the elections have been settled it is likely that the political stage will remain unsta-

ble as the political and other interest groups continue to maneuver to position themselves for an Afghanistan with a decreased Western presence. As warlords, regional and national power-brokers and other political leaders maneuver for power, there is less room for a strong national leader with centralized power. It may well be that the political landscape changes so that regional power increases at the cost of the central government as the Western backing of the government decreases.

### "Peace in Afghanistan"

Too many commentators have offered recipes for solving the Afghan crisis. They argue that the United States should do this or that; that Pakistan ought not to meddle in Afghanistan, and that the Afghan government and the Taliban should accept a political solution so that peace might be had in Afghanistan. But the commentators do not address why it would be in the interests of the different political constituencies in Pakistan to stop meddling in Afghanistan, or why the United States "should" do anything there anymore, or indeed why the Taliban should accept a political solution at all. A stable centrally led Afghanistan is not necessarily in the interests of many of the constituencies involved in the crisis.

Unfortunately the parties that affect the situation in Afghanistan are not driven by altruistic motives, but mainly by their own short-term economic and political self-interest. The real question is whether solutions could be found that contribute to peaceful development and speak to the interests of the relevant constituencies at the same time. What could be offered to the Taliban (or one of the fractions of the insurgents), to the warlords, to Pakistan and to the United States, so that everyone gets a short term incentive and benefit that fits their political agendas?

It is also relevant to note that instead of considering what external parties should do, one can ask what it is that they really can do. Afghanistan has been an extremely difficult environment in which to execute the strategies of the Western coalition. The West may simply not have the answers required at this point. And more importantly, the mission has started to reach the end of its political feasibility. Western politicians are just not able to keep troops in theatre and remain in office.

A few years has passed since the United States withdrew from Iraq. There are no more Western casualties in Iraq and foreign aid has decreased substantially with the military intervention having ended. Iraq has experienced increasing sectarian violence and political instability, but it has not been as interesting for us. It may well be a problem for us considering this is the region where a lot of our oil originates from, but it does not make headlines in the same way as earlier. Headlines have finally started to appear as Iraq is nearing civil war – evidence, it seems, that efforts at nation-building were not as successful as one would have hoped.

I believe the same will happen in Afghanistan. When troops leave so will the journalists, and there will be a lot less reporting reaching the West – at least as long as the situation does not deteriorate to down-right civil war. Economic support is likely to decrease despite promises of continued aid and solidarity made to the Afghan government. But governments will face new crises and problems that require investments and it will be easy to say that Afghanistan has not fulfilled the criteria set for continued financing – i.e. positive political and democratic development and legitimate steps to eradicate corruption.

Commentators have also been talking about reaching a sustainable peace in Afghanistan, suggesting that society would develop in a state of harmony[143]. However, Afghanistan was not a very peaceful society to begin with. Violence is not only related to an on-going conflict between organized constituencies that could be solved through a political understanding – or a peace treaty perhaps. Violence is based on the way people interact in what is a deeply fractured society with political instability and a very bad economy. So violence will continue in Afghanistan as it has for the past decades.

Some type of political solution involving the Taliban could have a positive effect on the security situation. This could mean allowing the Taliban and like-minded insurgents to maintain political control in their key areas of support in southern and southeastern Afghanistan. At the same time, interference by the Taliban in North Afghanistan would be prevented while allowing smuggling routes to operate to protect economic life-lines of key constituencies. The central government would remain allied with the North, and provide military security, but a balance of power would be maintained between the central government and the local power-brokers or warlords with interests in the North. So Mohammed Atta Noor would continue to control Balkh province and its

143 See Jyrki Iivonen and Pauli Järvenpää, *Kirjeitä Kabulista* (Letters from Kabul), 2012, p.75

capital Mazar-e Sharif, as well as the lucrative trade through the northern borders, and perhaps Abdul Rashim Dostum would control Sheberghan and northwestern parts of North Afghanistan). Kabul and other regional capitals would be in the hands of the central government.

This development means a considerable risk of a regional split between the South and the North with civil war as a possible consequence. However, this does not have to be the final outcome. The North does not seem to be sufficiently powerful from a military perspective to be able to win such a fight. But if the central government and the North can work together they can perhaps keep the insurgents under control while allowing them back into politics. Maintaining a credible army controlled by the central government is a key factor in this regard. If the army loses U.S. and coalition support, and if it also loses its financing, parts of the army could easily start dissolving. Considering that the Afghan military even with current levels of support, can barely deal with the insurgency it may well fail in that task if it does not have the same strength and resources in the future[144]. And one has to ask whether the Afghan forces are able to take increasing casualties without the troops simply leaving their posts.

### From Afghanistan to Ukraine

As the ISAF operation in Afghanistan is winding down many European decision makers must be hoping not too many questions will be asked about how successful the mission has been, whether tax payer money has been well spent and whether the sacrifices have been justified. The security situation in the country has been deteriorating and civilian casualties are on the rise as insurgents have increased freedom of movement. The economy is not showing promise and the withdrawal of Western presence will further affect growth prospects. Politically the country is at a crossroads with both presidential and parliamentary elections in 2014, which certainly does not add to political stability. Everyone will be crossing their fingers hoping just enough time will pass before any major setbacks or escalations so that the West would not be seen to have abandoned their Afghan partners.

But decision makers should not fret. From the perspective of many European countries the mission has largely been a success. The campaign has contributed towards NATO cohesion and served as a demonstration of the ability of

144 Dexter Filkins, After America: Will Civil War Hit Afghanistan When the U.S. Leaves?, *The New Yorker*, July 9, 2012

the international community to pursue common security objectives. We may also have benefited the Afghan people a little bit at the same time. Overall the intervention in Afghanistan has been U.S. driven and most European countries had few national interests at stake there. Europeans have now demonstrated to the United States that they are trusted allies and as the events in Ukraine have unfolded many countries are looking to collect on the investments made in Afghanistan by calling on the United States and NATO for increased presence to protect their own borders. For these countries deployment in Afghanistan has been far from a campaign in foreign lands with dubious merits. It has been an investment in the defence of their homelands.

### "You do not know my son…"

Studying Afghanistan has been something of a Pandora's box, revealing the inadequacies of international politics, political systems and human behavior.

Looking at what was going on in Afghanistan has also been a little dispiriting. There was no grand plan for Afghanistan anywhere. But the disappointing factor was, perhaps, the extent to which everyone involved was really just hustling. Concerns were immediate and planning was short-term. The local power-brokers were involved in their own politics and racketeering without much concern for the future of the country. Afghans were not known to plan ahead a great deal. A week ahead was already the distant future for many Afghan power-brokers, and not many really bothered to consider the situation a year forward. The government and the political institutions were unable and often unwilling to form and execute reasonable and coherent policies and survival strategies for the country either for the short-term or the long-term.

The international community itself had not that much to be proud of either. There was little smart coordination of efforts or a grand plan for a peaceful solution in the region. Most smaller countries were scaling down their participation in Afghanistan mainly based on the changing balance between their need and desire to cooperate with the United States and their peers, and the domestic political opposition to military involvement overseas that different governments were facing. I doubt many countries, if any, had any real security interests in the region. Even the United Kingdom, with the second largest contingent in the country, was in the game mainly to support their relationship with the United States[145].

145 See Sherard Cowper-Coles, *Cables from Kabul*, 2011, p. xx

The United States, on the other hand, had pursued somewhat unclear and ineffective strategies for years, and had spent hundreds of billions of dollars of taxpayer funds with questionable results and a relatively weak return on investment. As discussed earlier, one of the key concerns on the financial side is the seemingly complete lack of coordination of the huge financial investments the U.S. taxpayers have made – with mostly borrowed funds. Was this expenditure, in part at least, a way to favor domestic political constituencies rather than an investment in the international security interests of the United States?

It was interesting to observe how, at the international level, we lack a framework for addressing the kind of problems that Afghanistan represents. Our political systems are not constructed to try to solve problems of this kind. They are constructed to support the best interests of politically dominant constituencies on a national or regional level and we do not seem to be able to maintain long term consistent international strategies.

The experience in Afghanistan strengthened my notion of not over-emphasizing a human-centered view of the world. Perhaps it might be good to remind oneself that we are just one species among others, who by happenstance developed language and conceptual thinking, and at the end of the day, developed farming. The rest is history – some of it sad.

### Planning For Complex International Crisis Intervention

Perhaps some thought should be given to developing our institutions with regard to international crisis intervention. Or at least some lessons might be outlined to be taken into account when planning for the next intervention. There is no doubt that very skilled people will try to work out strategies and tactics for military intervention and make comprehensive plans for nation building, should anyone dare to endeavor into that field in the foreseeable future. I have little to contribute either to military strategy or to nation building that trained professionals could not do better. However, there are other issues that also have to be taken into account. The political dynamic in relation to international intervention is complex. Policies are not formed based on the situation on the ground but rather driven by an international political dynamic and significantly affected by domestic political requirements. Developing sustainable policies for intervention in this environment is naturally challenging.

One issue that emerges from the Afghan campaign is "mission creep"; i.e. that if the goals of the campaign are unclear, strategies will be changing and evolving and the mission will broaden and intervention deepen. It seems important to have as clear and narrow goals for intervention as possible. In Afghanistan, some thought should have been given to whether just a punitive expedition of one kind or another would have been sufficient followed by very limited political goals.

Another point with regard to governance is that one should make use of what is there. If one must go into nation-building a basic premise seems to be that the existing political structures should be used in building an organized society. Constructing a formal political structure in parallel with existing ones does not seem to be a winning concept. In Afghanistan this would have meant a more decentralized government, for example, with more reliance on the existing local and regional political structures.

In Afghanistan it has also emerged that there really was no purely military solution available. There was no organized enemy that could be beaten so that peace would prevail. The military solution needed to be backed up with a robust political solution, which was clearly missing in the Afghan intervention formula[146]. Such a combined solution could have meant including the Taliban early on in the political processes, and treating the Taliban differently from al-Qaeda at the outset.

It is politics as usual to deal with the tension between short-term political drivers and the long-term requirements of intervention (i.e. the situation on the ground). Planners recognize that political decision makers are bound by domestic political priorities (if they want to stay in office). Intervention often needs to be "sold" to the public, and congress or parliament, with political rhetoric that too often becomes so removed from reality it is not sustainable and decreases the legitimacy of the project. Instead, perhaps intervention should be planned from the start in phases so that short-term political concerns can be dealt with.

An interesting alternative would be to try to change the political rhetoric. Typically politicians are forced into a rhetoric removed from reality as addressing real concerns by their real names is immediately attacked by media and the electorate. Political "third rails" are plentiful. The problem is that, as the

146 See Sherard Cowper-Coles, *Cables from Kabul*, 2011, p.200 and Jyrki Iivonen and Pauli Järvenpää, *Kirjeitä Kabulista* (Letters from Kabul), 2012, p.221

theory of rational ignorance suggests, it does not really make sense for much of the electorate to form educated opinions about policy. Lobby groups will be able to steer the public debate and force politicians to stay to the scripts. As a tax payer, however, I often feel offended as I see how far removed the rhetoric is from reality and how politicians are forced to duck the "third rail" time and again. One might ask whether it would be possible in Western democracies for politicians to actually obtain legitimacy by trying to say things such as they are. Could someone in Finland say that we are in Afghanistan to pay for our NATO-option? Could someone in the United States discuss the effects of the public debt on national security? Could someone in the EU discuss the lack of a coherent security policy? Considering the financial health of quality media it is unclear whether there are any prerequisites for increasing the quality of the public debate, unfortunately.

Finally, it has to be acknowledged that political actors will all be driven by their short-term self-interest. It cannot be expected that political interest groups that can affect the development on the ground are driven by altruistic motives. Efforts should be made to understand and appeal to their immediate interests in campaign planning. Significant and sustainable steps in developing security and political stability can be made by accommodating the self-interest of important constituencies. At the minimum there should be guarantees that the priorities of these constituencies will be protected if some other compromises are sought. In Afghanistan this would have entailed acknowledging the position of central power-brokers and warlords, as has largely been done, but ultimately taking advantage of their own self-interest, so that they would be incentivized to pursue the same goals as the ones set by the West.

# EPILOGUE

## LEARNING THE RULES OF BUZKASHI

I bid farewell to Afghanistan as I flew out of the country at the end of my tour. I have a lot of respect for the Afghan people, and it is a beautiful country, but the Afghans need to take responsibility and deal with the problems they have in their society. I wish them well on that journey.

But did I say goodbye to the military altogether after my tour in Afghanistan? Before deployment I was almost convinced that this would be my last mission overseas. I felt a bit out of place with the crowd of tactical professionals I trained with. I was getting older too. But once I was in theatre I felt much more at home again. Modern political and military intervention is highly complex and offers a variety of challenging tasks. There was clearly demand for my skillset and the operation certainly provided intellectual challenges and new problems to solve. So I wonder whether there will be another operation down the line that will prove too interesting to miss.

Afghanistan is probably not the last campaign we will get drawn into and I will be keeping my eyes open for the next crisis. In the meantime I have plenty of conflicts and opposing forces to face in the context of my legal practice.

I was not quite finished with Afghanistan when I came back home. I had left Afghanistan in a hurry to get back to my "real job". After my return I felt that all the pieces had not quite fallen into place – I had not yet fully figured out the dynamics related to the situation in Afghanistan, and what it all meant. With a little distance from the theatre of operations, the picture started to come together. I made notes and diary entries and collected published reports on Afghanistan. These then started to develop into a small journal – still without much structure – perhaps for my young son to read in the distant future so that

he would know what his dad had been up to. At a later stage I decided that I wanted to put down my picture of Afghanistan on paper in a more structured format. The fact that the ISAF operation was coming to an end provided a reason to produce an account of the costs and benefits of the investments made in the Afghanistan campaign.

The situation in Afghanistan, extreme as it was, really revealed a lot of the drivers underlying politics in general, whether it was domestic politics in Afghanistan or international diplomacy. It seemed to me that some less upbeat theories of international politics and some hypotheses on human behavior and societies in general were confirmed on the arid plains of Afghanistan. Soon enough the structure of this book started to take form, and I was already typing in my favorite phrase from Afghanistan: "You do not know, my son, with how little wisdom the world is governed."

# ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| ANA | Afghan National Army |
| ANP | Afghan National Police |
| ANSF | Afghan National Security Forces consisting of ANA, ANP, NDS and other security elements |
| AOR | Area of Responsibility |
| APC | Armored Personnel Carrier |
| AWACS | Airborne Warning and Control System |
| CAS | Close Air Support |
| CO | Commanding Officer |
| COIN | Counter Insurgency |
| DFAC | Dining Facility |
| ECHR | European Convention of Human Rights |
| FOM | Freedom of Movement |
| HESCO | Rapidly deployable barriers typically filled with gravel or rocks and often showing the logo of the manufacturer HESCO Bastion Ltd. |
| HIG | Hizb-e-Islam Gulbuddin, insurgent fraction founded by Gulbuddin Hikmatyar |
| HO-TO | Handover-Takeover |
| HQ | Headquarters |
| HUMINT | Human Intelligence |
| ICC | International Criminal Court |
| ICTY | International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia |
| IED | Improvised Explosive Device |
| IMINT | Image Intelligence |
| IMU | Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, insurgent fraction |
| IPB | Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield |
| ISAF | International Security Assistance Force |
| K9 | Canine Unit |
| KAIA | Kabul International Airport |
| KFOR | Kosovo Force |

| | |
|---|---|
| KIA | Killed in Action |
| LEGAD | Legal Adviser |
| LOAC | Laws of Armed Conflict |
| MEDEVAC | Medical Evacuation |
| METHANE | Emergency report outline: Military identification details, Exact location, Type of injury or situation, Hazards in the area, Approach, Number, nationality and type of casualties, Expected response |
| MP | Military Police |
| MRE | Meals ready to Eat |
| NCO | Non-Commissioned Officer |
| NDS | National Directorate for Security; Afghan intelligence service |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organization |
| NSA | United States National Security Agency |
| NSE | National Support Element |
| OSINT | Open Source Intelligence |
| PRT | Provincial Reconstruction Team |
| PX | Post Exchange (military store) |
| RC(N) | Regional Command North |
| RG-32 | BAE manufactured armored patrol vehicle used by Finnish and Swedish forces in Afghanistan |
| ROE | Rules of Engagement |
| RPG | Rocket Propelled Grenade |
| SAF | Small Arms Fire |
| SIGAR | Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction |
| SIGINT | Signals Intelligence |
| SOF | Special Operations Forces |
| SOP | Standard Operation Procedure |
| TIC | Troops in Contact; radio call when troops are engaging hostile forces |
| TTP | Tactics, Techniques and Procedures |
| UAV | Unmanned Aerial Vehicle |
| UNMIK | United Nations Mission in Kosovo |
| UNSCR | United Nations Security Council Resolution |
| West of MeS | West of Mazar-e-Sharif |
| WIA | Wounded in Action |

# RECOMMENDED READINGS

### A Short List of Literature on Afghanistan

There is a huge amount of literature on Afghanistan and the Afghan crisis. There are many books that would be essential for an even rudimentary understanding of the political dynamics of the region. I have listed here a few select and easily accessible sources which I have found particularly concise, and which would be a good starting point for anyone planning to work with Afghanistan related issues or who is simply interested in the dynamics of the region.


Rodric Braithwaite, *Afgantsy: The Russians in Afghanistan*, 1979-1989, Oxford University Press, 2011

Sherard Cowper-Coles, *Cables from Kabul*, HarperPress, 2011

Kenneth Katzman, Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security and U.S. Policy, Congressional Research Service Report, August 8, 2013, available through https://opencrs.com/

Niccolò Macchiavelli, *The Prince*, 1532

Ahmed Rashid, *Descent Into Chaos*, Penguin Books, 2009

Ahmed Rashid, *The Taliban*, 2nd ed., Yale University Press, 2010

The World Bank, Afghanistan in Transition: Looking Beyond 2014, Volume I (Overview) and Volume II (Main Report); available through http://siteresources.worldbank.org

Abdul Salam Zaeef, *My Life With the Taliban*, Hurst, 2011

*"You do not know my son*
*with how little wisdom the world is governed"*

*(Axel Oxienstierna, 1583-1654)*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Klaus Ilmonen has served as an officer with military intelligence in Afghanistan, and has previously been deployed as a military legal adviser in Kosovo. He is an attorney and partner with a law firm practicing corporate and securities law. He holds a master's degree in law from Columbia University, and has been a visiting researcher at Harvard Law School. He lives with his family in Helsinki, Finland.

# PHOTOGRAPHS


With full battle-rattle, North Afghanistan.

Trying out the grenade machine gun, North Afghanistan.

On maneuvers, North Afghanistan.

Afghan business as usual, on the way to Heiratan, 2012.

Heavy vehicles were the norm in Afghanistan; just not always made for the road system, Camp Marmal.

Private quarters, Camp Marmal.

Tools of the trade of a Finnish public servant (including the FT), Camp Marmal.

The train to Heiratan; but was it going according to timetable?, North Afghanistan.

The Bridge of Friendship between Afghanistan and Uzbekistan, from the Heiratan side of the bridge.

The view across the river to Uzbekistan, Heiratan.


On Business in Kabul in 2012.

Returning from a business trip, Northern Afghanistan.

All smiles on returning home, Pirkkala Airport.

Just returned all my equipment and slightly less happy having received the invoice for lost gear, Pori Brigade.

Inspecting a road built by Finnish engineers, Kosovo, 2003.


The Finnish EOD vehicles, Kosovo, 2003


Map No. 3958 Rev. 7 UNITED NATIONS
June 2011

Department of Field Support
Cartographic Section

The Hindu Kush mountain range separates the country into northern and southern regions. In the North insurgents are active predominantly in the western parts, including Faryab province, for example. Balkh province around the regional capital Mazar-e Sharif and the routes to the northern border crossings are the most stable in the country. The areas to the East, especially Badakhshan, are mountainous and largely outside the influence of the central government. In the South the insurgency is most active in the provinces of Helmand and Kandahar with relatively porous borders with Pakistan. The Pashtun ethnic group dominate South Afghanistan as well as the northern parts of Pakistan.

*Map courtesy of the United Nations (UN Cartographic Section, permission dated 11 July 2014).*

Leaving theatre; on the way home; 2012

# LEAVING THEATRE

## – Behind the Scenes of the Theatre of Operations

**As the military intervention in Afghanistan draws to a close, it is timely to assess the merits and real motivations of the campaign.**

**Having worked inside military intelligence in Afghanistan, the author provides a personal account behind public rhetoric on the reality of war, politics and intelligence in Afghanistan.**

PQR