

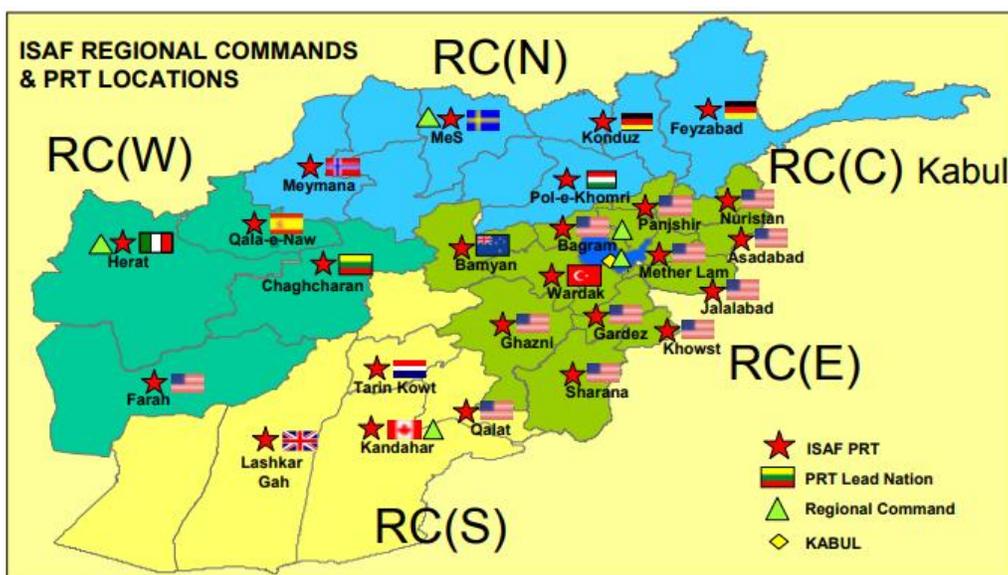


## ISAF in Afghanistan

*Dr. Stuti Banerjee\**

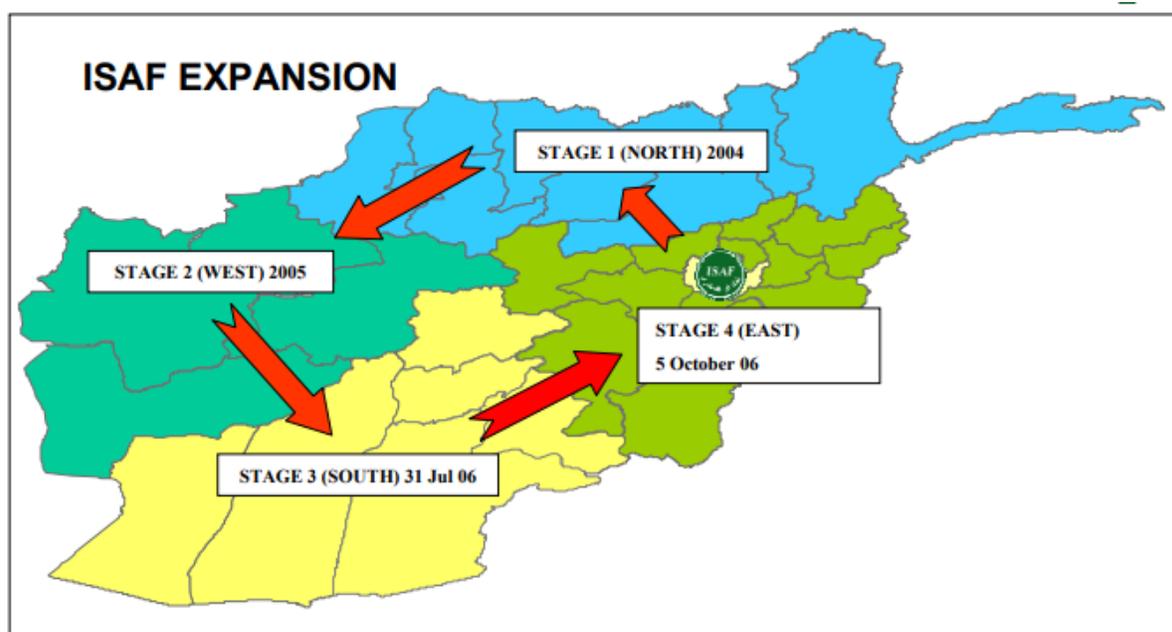
International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was a United Nations (UN) authorised force established in 2001, to “...assist the Afghan Interim Authority in the maintenance of security in Kabul and its surrounding areas, so that the Afghan Interim Authority as well as the personnel of the United Nations can operate in a secure environment.”<sup>1</sup> ISAF was created in accordance with the Bonn Conference<sup>2</sup> in December 2001.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) commanded the ISAF in Afghanistan from August 2003 to December 2014. Its mission was to enable the Afghan authorities to provide effective security across the country and ensure that it would never again be a safe haven for terrorists. ISAF helped build the capacity of the Afghan national security forces. As these forces grew stronger, they gradually took responsibility for security across the country before the completion of ISAF’s mission.<sup>3</sup>



Source: NATO, [http://www.nato.int/isaf/placemats\\_archive/2007-12-05-ISAF-Placemat.pdf](http://www.nato.int/isaf/placemats_archive/2007-12-05-ISAF-Placemat.pdf)

ISAF was one of the largest coalitions established by the UN. At its height, the force was more than 130,000 strong, with troops from 51 NATO and partner nations. Originally deployed to provide security in and around the capital Kabul, in October 2003, the UN extended ISAF's mandate to cover the whole of Afghanistan (UNSCR 1510)<sup>4</sup>, paving the way for an expansion of the mission across the country. As ISAF expanded into the east and south, its troops became increasingly engaged in fighting a growing insurgency in 2007 and 2008, while trying to help Afghanistan rebuild. In 2009, a new counter-insurgency plan was launched and 40,000 extra troops were deployed. In support of the Afghan government, ISAF assisted the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) in the conduct of security operations throughout the country, helping to reduce the capability of the insurgency. An important priority for ISAF was to increase the capacity and capabilities of the Afghan forces. This became the main focus of the mission from 2011 onwards, as responsibility for security was progressively transitioned to Afghan lead forces and ISAF shifted from a combat-centric role to training, advising and assisting.<sup>5</sup>



Source: NATO, [http://www.nato.int/isaf/placemats\\_archive/2007-12-05-ISAF-Placemat.pdf](http://www.nato.int/isaf/placemats_archive/2007-12-05-ISAF-Placemat.pdf)

While the aim of all NATO members continues to be to provide assistance to Afghanistan such that it is able to achieve its political potential along with establishing a sound economic base; issues related to the capacity of the Afghan Security Forces, the situation of law and order in the country, providing basic social, economic and political opportunities and building better relations with Pakistan continues to remain elusive.

The ISAF mission has been deemed less than a success and more than a failure by most security experts. Some point out that the death of Osama bin Laden and the fact that the Taliban is not in power in Afghanistan should be viewed as successes of the mission. They also state that the ISAF missions have also helped build infrastructure in the country such as roads and schools and market places. Others point out that the successes of the missions are now in danger of being reversed. They claim that while the al Qaeda and the Taliban no longer enjoy sanctuary in Afghanistan, they continue find shelter in neighbouring Pakistan. These groups may not be in

power but they are gaining ground. The security situation in Afghanistan continues to be volatile with bomb attacks leading to large scale civilian casualties. Today the responsibility of Afghanistan lies with the Afghan forces. While the Afghan forces are well trained there are still gaps in the Afghan security architecture leading many to question the sustainability of long term security in the country without international assistance. The Afghan forces' effectiveness and the Afghan government's dependence on international assistance to fund their operations is another area of concern. The Afghan local police have not been able to win the trust of the citizens who continue to view it as a corrupt institution that is abusing its power. The security forces also have to deal with high casualty numbers. The forces continue to be plagued by desertion, combat related in-capabilities, drug abuse and corruption. On the political sphere, negotiations for peace between the Afghan government and the various factions of the Taliban have also not been a success, raising fears of a return to civil war. In this fragile environment, Afghanistan will conduct presidential elections in 2018. For the Afghan government it would be essential to ensure that as many citizens as possible participate in these elections as a sign of stability in the nation. It would also have to ensure that there is a smooth transfer of power to boost the prospects of democracy and the electoral process. While the Afghan economy is developing it will be a slow process. It would help if Afghanistan is able to build better relations with all its neighbours to aid the landlocked nation to build its trade with other nations. However, this would take time, especially with Pakistan as a result of past differences.

Perhaps keeping this in mind, a new NATO led mission, Resolute Support Mission, was launched in January 2015, to assist the Afghan forces and institutions.

### ***Resolute Support Mission***

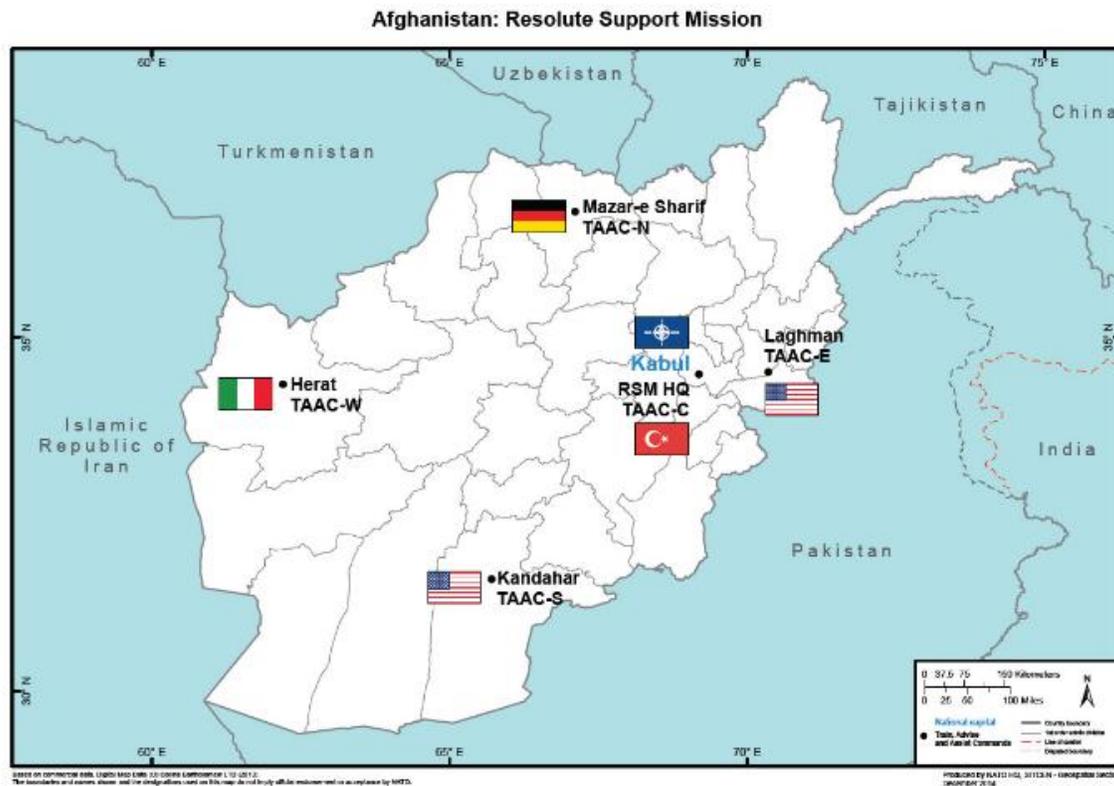
The Resolute Support Mission (RSM) is a new NATO-led mission to train, advise and assist the Afghan security forces and institutions. The legal framework for the RSM is provided by a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), signed in Kabul on 30 September 2014 and ratified by the Afghan Parliament on 27 November 2014. The SOFA defines the terms and conditions under which NATO forces are deployed, as well as the activities they are authorised to carry out. The mission is also supported by the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2189, unanimously adopted on 12 December 2014.<sup>6</sup>

RSM is a non-combat mission to continue supporting the development of the Afghan security forces to build capabilities to counter a growing Taliban insurgency. The RSM is providing training, advice and assistance activities at the security ministries and national institutional levels and the higher levels of army and police command across the country. As of July 2016, it has approximately 13,000 personnel from NATO Allies and partner countries, operating in one hub (Kabul/Bagram) and four spokes (Mazar-e Sharif in the north, Herat in the west, Kandahar in the south, and Laghman in the east).<sup>7</sup>

The key functions of the mission include:

- Supporting planning, programming and budgeting;
- Assuring transparency, accountability and oversight;

- Supporting the adherence to the principles of rule of law and good governance;
- Supporting the establishment and sustainment of such processes as force generation, recruiting, training, managing and development of personnel.<sup>8</sup>



Despite the new missions that have been announced by NATO and a commitment by President Donald Trump towards expanding the United States role in Afghanistan, it would be fair to say that the situation in Afghanistan has not improved much in the nearly two decades of foreign military presence. Attacks on civilians and security forces have increased significantly, opium cultivation has achieved record highs, reconstruction efforts have faltered and the Afghan people appear increasingly wary of the direction in which their country is headed.<sup>9</sup> Aside from pressing security challenges, the national unity government seems to agree on several other top priorities, including reforming the electoral body and tackling corruption, aimed at securing the trust of the Afghan public and the international community. The government has to also work towards building an economy that is less reliant on foreign assistance. The other major challenge is the illegal drug trade which provides close to 60 percent of the Taliban's funding. While the Afghan National Defence and Security Force (ANDSF) have prevented the Taliban from capturing and holding any provincial capitals, security incidents and armed clashes have increased, civilian casualties reached new heights, and the insurgents retained control of certain rural areas.<sup>10</sup> According to the United States Force for Afghanistan (UNFOR-A) the districts under Afghan government and insurgent control both increased between January-April 2017. USFOR-A reported that approximately 59.7% of the country's 407 districts are under Afghan government control or influence as of February 20, 2017. The number of districts under insurgent control or influence

also increased 45 districts (in 15 provinces).<sup>11</sup> The United States military claims that the rise in insurgent controlled areas is a result of the ANDSF strategic approach to protecting important areas and not laying emphasis on less vital areas.

## Conclusion

Afghanistan continues to remain for the United States an important partner in the American fight to defeat terrorism. The present relationship is based on the Enduring Strategic Partnership Agreement signed between President Obama and President Karzai in May 2012. The agreement lays out the economic and political commitments of the United States and Afghanistan, respectively. With the entry into force of the agreement in July 2012, the United States declared Afghanistan a major non-NATO ally. The two nations have also signed the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) in September 2014. The security agreement laid out the mutual security understanding between the two.

The United States under the President Trump has decided to follow his predecessor's policy on Afghanistan engagement, to achieve stable and peaceful Afghanistan and negotiated peace with the rising Taliban. Nonetheless, there are a few modifications in how these goals are to be achieved. The decisions on how the military is going to proceed in Afghanistan would be decided by the Department of Defence under Secretary Lt. Gen. James Mattis and not by the White House. The decision comes nearly three months after the United States dropped its largest non-nuclear bomb in Afghanistan (on April 2017) to destroy tunnel and cave networks used by terrorist groups such as the ISIL. Along with this approach the White House is also building a larger regional approach to Afghan stability. It is calling the policy part of its South Asia policy distinguishing it from the Af-Pak policy that was followed by the Obama Administration. The United States would not like to provide space for Russia or Iran to increase their influence in either Afghanistan or the larger South Asia region. The regional approach also involves Pakistan and India and was probably the major reason for the visit by both Secretary Mattis and NSA Lt. Gen. H. R. McMaster to the two nations a few months ago.

For the moment there seems to be no clear direction within the United States on how to successfully withdraw all its troops from Afghanistan, while ensuring that the Afghan government and security forces are adequately equipped to build a nation that would be able to keep terrorist groups and civil war in check.

President Trump as a private citizen had not supported the war in Afghanistan but now as the Commander in Chief, whose main campaign agenda has been to protect America and American citizens from terrorist attacks he would have to continue to support Afghanistan, both militarily as well as through financial assistance. There are no clear paths for the United States on Afghanistan. President Trump has inherited a complex problem. One has to wait and see if President Trump's policy for Afghanistan will be able to produce different results than the efforts of the two previous Presidents.

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Disclaimer: The views expressed are that of the Researcher and not of the Council.*

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The United Nations Security Council, “Resolution 1386 (2001),” <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/No1/708/55/PDF/No170855.pdf?OpenElement>, Accessed on 2 July 2017.

<sup>2</sup> The agreement is available at <http://www.un.org/News/dh/latest/afghan/afghan-agree.htm>

<sup>3</sup> NATO, “NATO and Afghanistan,” [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_8189.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_8189.htm), Accessed on 26 July 2017.

<sup>4</sup> The resolution, “Authorizes expansion of the mandate of the International Security Assistance Force to allow it, as resources permit, to support the Afghan Transitional Authority and its successors in the maintenance of security in areas of Afghanistan outside of Kabul and its environs, so that the Afghan Authorities as well as the personnel of the United Nations and other international civilian personnel engaged, in particular, in reconstruction and humanitarian efforts, can operate in a secure environment, and to provide security assistance for the performance of other tasks in support of the Bonn Agreement...” The text of the resolution is available at [http://www.nato.int/isaf/topics/mandate/unscr/resolution\\_1510.pdf](http://www.nato.int/isaf/topics/mandate/unscr/resolution_1510.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> NATO, “ISAF’s mission in Afghanistan (2001-2014),” [http://www.nato.int/cps/in/natohq/topics\\_69366.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/in/natohq/topics_69366.htm), Accessed on 27 July 2017.

<sup>6</sup> NATO, “Resolute Support Mission,” [http://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf\\_2017\\_05/20170523\\_2017-05-RSM-Placemat.pdf](http://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2017_05/20170523_2017-05-RSM-Placemat.pdf), Accessed on 27 July 2017.

<sup>7</sup> NATO, “NATO and Afghanistan,” [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_8189.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_8189.htm), Accessed on 27 July 2017.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> British American Security Council, “Assessing ISAF: A Baseline Study of NATO’s Role in Afghanistan,” <http://www.basicint.org/sites/default/files/afghanistan.pdf>, Accessed on 27 July 2017.

<sup>10</sup> Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, Department of Defence, “SIGAR: Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction Quarterly Report to the United States Congress (April 2017),” <https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/quarterlyreports/2017-04-30qr.pdf> Accessed on 27 July 2017, pp. 61.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, pp. 86-87.