

## Transatlantic 'AfPak' Policy: One Year Later

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>> Transatlantic cooperation on the Afghanistan-Pakistan strategy was bound to become easier with President Obama in charge. And so it did, at least at first. Obama's demands for a greater European role in 'AfPak' were initially met. European governments deployed more troops and agreed to a new NATO training mission for the ANSF. \$500 million in additional civilian assistance to Afghanistan was pledged at the NATO meeting in April 2009.

Looking back over Obama's first year in office, however, one can discern two phases of transatlantic cooperation. One started in January 2009 and lasted until mid-year, during which time US-European cooperation was close. Another ongoing period began in autumn 2009, during which US-European policy began to falter, a US Afghanistan-Pakistan policy re-examination ensued and transatlantic cooperation decreased.

This is not to say that Europe was content with US strategy in one period and dissatisfied in another. Throughout, European governments have happily declared NATO's Afghan mission vital to their own security, but in practice have continued to treat it as a US responsibility. Together, they have undertaken little joint strategising – as opposed to national planning – and have generally used their troops to curry favour with the US administration.

Concerning Pakistan, little has changed since the Bush administration. EU governments have a limited desire to see the country as a strategic, rather than development challenge. EU aid to Pakistan, largely unchanged from the late 1970s until last year, is still a fraction of the \$10 billion in US aid to the Islamabad government and

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»»»»» the EU's overall development budget. Though EU and Pakistani leaders held their first-ever summit on June 17 2009 in Brussels, follow-up has been uneven. In a few weeks' time, a second Pakistan-EU summit will take place, but it has garnered little interest in Europe's chanceries or among the new EU leaders. What the Pakistani government hopes to obtain from a summit – such as the GSP Plus (Generalised System of Preferences) trade scheme – some EU governments are reluctant to give. Initiatives that the US would welcome, such as a commitment to reform the Ministry of Interior, are seen as too risky. US-European policy cooperation therefore remains quite limited.

Nobody is well-served by this state of affairs. The fight against the Taliban on both sides of the Hindu Kush is one of the few security issues binding the US and Europe together; on so many other foreign policy priorities, the US is now looking to other partners and allies or has begun to espouse policy preferences at variance with European concerns, for example on Russia. If Europe values a strong transatlantic relationship, EU member states will have to develop a strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Whatever strategy they adopt, a debate must occur within the EU or among key European member states to determine exactly what Europe wants from the NATO mission and how important they think Pakistan's stabilisation is. This would allow for discussion of areas where the EU can add value, for example in boosting EU-India ties. Cordiality, a continued belief in President Obama's multilateral instincts and fetishising shared values help neither the US nor Europe, but instead mask problems with the current strategy.

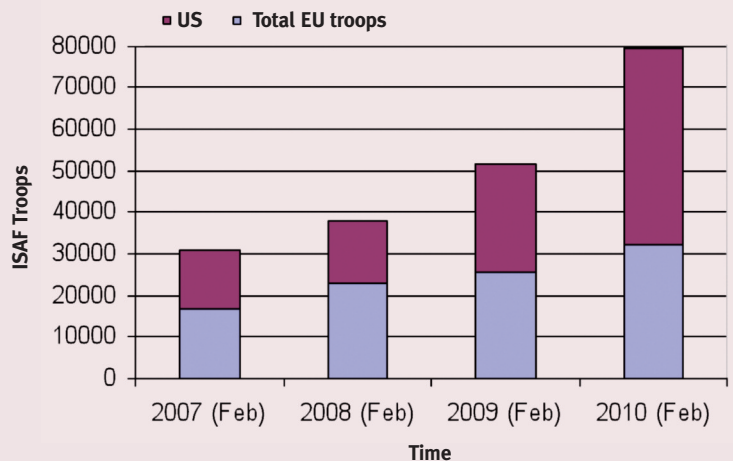
The EU's new foreign policy 'czarina' Catherine Ashton could appoint a temporary, high-level European envoy who, like Wolfgang Ischinger when he represented the EU in the Troika negotiations on the future of Kosovo, could examine what a European post-surge strategy might look like. Obama is set to review the progress of his new strategy in late 2010 and has announced

that US troops will begin withdrawing from 2011. Nick Witney has observed that, 'The policy of heroic interventionism has run its course'. But what should international assistance look like from then on? What should the European role be? This and other questions could be explored by a high-level envoy. If the EU also moves to consolidate its numerous Kabul operations under one senior diplomat, it could begin to speak with the clout that its investment merits.

**EUROPE'S SURGE**

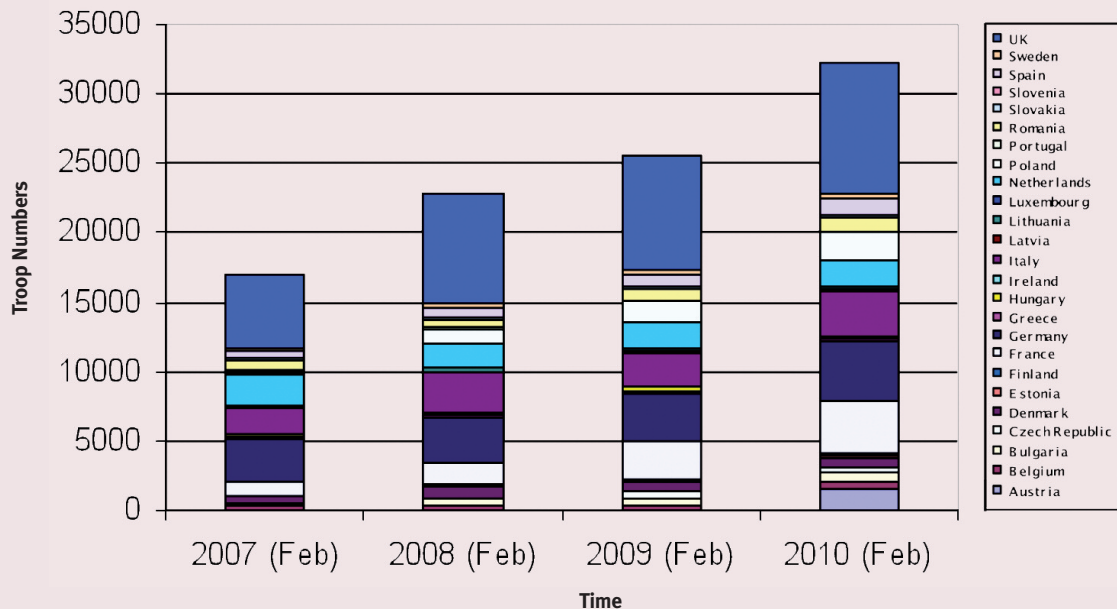
The contribution of EU member states to NATO's ISAF has grown from 16,900 soldiers in 2007 to 22,774 in 2008, 25,572 in 2009 and 32,337 in 2010. Soldiers from EU countries have until this year made up 45–53 per cent of the total force and for three consecutive years most EU states have increased their contribution. In 2010, following a US surge, the percentage has slipped down to 38 per cent while the US has maintained substantial troop numbers outside of ISAF. But the ISAF figures are not far from the European contribution to past NATO missions.

**EU member-state and US troop contributions to ISAF, 2007–2010**



*Data from successive 'NATO in Afghanistan. ISAF placement' documents, February 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010.*

### EU member-state troop contributions to ISAF, 2007–2010



Data from successive 'NATO in Afghanistan. ISAF placemat' documents, February 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010.

It would be inaccurate to say that EU states were reluctant to back 'Bush's War', but they were certainly happy to support NATO's mission once Obama entered office. The exponential increase in European troops happened between February 2009 and February 2010, when EU member states committed an additional 6765 soldiers to ISAF – more than the number of troops Britain had in theatre in 2007 and one and a half times as many as Germany has deployed today.

The key event between the two dates was Barack Obama's arrival in the White House. Many European leaders were quite open, even in semi-public, about this. The steady increase in non-US troops happened while many surveys showed that European citizens wanted to reduce their countries' troop numbers, or have their military withdrawn entirely.

Measuring Europe's commitment to the mission by how many troops it has in ISAF gives only a partial perspective. Military utility depends on where new troops can be deployed and how many operational restrictions they are deployed with. If those deployed can only remain in one place, or cannot

leave their base at night, their utility to the ISAF leadership belie their numbers. Similarly, if the ISAF command needs a particular kind of troops – for example EOD specialists – and a nation volunteers another kind, they may not be helpful to the military strategy. The lack of trainers has been particularly problematic, with EU member-states struggling to supply the necessary number.

US pressure alone cannot explain deployment decisions. From his appointment, NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen worked hard to persuade European governments to support ISAF. Some EU governments increased their deployments as much as a result of local requirements as of US pressure. In late 2009, the Taliban re-emerged in Kunduz – a trans-shipment point for NATO military supplies via Russia – with such force that during the presidential election police officers were fending off attacks on the outskirts of the city. Germany's decision to send up to 850 troops to Kunduz was probably equally motivated by security requirements and international admonishments.

Yet there is no denying the three-year long European surge and the increase in troop deploy-



»»»»» ments since Obama took office. In exchange for additional troop commitments, allies were consulted as Obama instigated a review of US policy by former CIA official Bruce Riedel. US diplomats, from Hilary Clinton down through the State Department hierarchy, aimed to create the best possible impression of cooperation and consultation. Richard Holbrooke, the US administration's AfPak 'czar', became a regular fixture at the North Atlantic Council and various EU committee meetings. The US envoy also welcomed the appointment of counterparts by many EU governments; some twenty-odd diplomats meet regularly in the so-called 'Envoys Group', which is coordinated by Germany.

#### **CONVERGENCE – REAL AND IMAGINED**

The US and Europe began to align on some contentious issues. Long-standing European criticism of US counternarcotics policy was shared by the Obama team. The civilian death toll due to NATO bombing was seen as a strategic concern rather than a tactical problem. A major European worry, that the US had underfunded its strategy because of the Iraq War, was also shared by the new US administration. In the first budget submitted to Congress, the outlay for Afghanistan surpassed that for Iraq (\$65 billion versus \$61 billion). US development assistance for 2009 was \$10,352 billion, but the White House's 2010 request was \$13,124 billion.

Perhaps the best test of transatlantic goodwill at the time was a belief in many EU capitals that the new US strategy represented a much greater break with past US policies than it actually did. On key issues, such as the need for greater civilian reconstruction, the policy reinforced pre-election trends rather than breaking with past practice. US regional policy may have been neologistic and undertaken with great fanfare, but the need to work with both the Kabul and Islamabad governments was hardly new; the Friends of Democratic Pakistan was established as a forum in September 2008, a month before the US election. Concerning civilian casualties, it was General

David McKiernan's tactical directive, issued before the US election, which changed policy. Finally, though Obama could have prevented additional US troops deploying in spring 2009, the decision to reinforce ISAF had already been taken by his predecessor.

Existing and potential areas of transatlantic disagreement were also overlooked by both US and European governments. Obama limited the war's objectives, shedding his predecessor's utopian rhetoric about promoting a Western-style democracy and focusing instead on preventing Afghanistan from reverting to a haven for global terrorists. The less ideological policy was welcomed in many European chanceries. But whether or not this shift would mean a shorter-term US engagement – something numerous EU states would be concerned about – was never resolved. Disagreement was therefore avoided. This was also the case when the new US administration trampled on allied prerogatives with the sudden replacement of ISAF commander General McKiernan with General Stanley McChrystal, which happened without proper NATO consultation.

The most important reason for the state of transatlantic cooperation, however, was probably a strategic calculation by most EU governments that support for the NATO mission would enhance their standing in the US. The change of US government only made this bilateral calculation stronger. For this reason, European governments have shunned the development of a common European position, even (or particularly) if such a position would contradict the US. The Swedish EU Presidency was successful in getting an EU plan agreed by European foreign

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ministers, but amounted to a series of tactical initiatives rather than an overall strategy.

### THE ENEMY VOTES

In mid-2009, there were no signs of divergence in transatlantic cooperation on the Afghanistan-Pakistan strategy. Yet as the year progressed, the US strategy ran into trouble and transatlantic problems became more visible. During 2009, the Taliban's clear strategy and increasingly coherent organisation put NATO on the defensive, marginalised local governments and gave the Taliban insurgency control of many districts in the southern and eastern parts of the country. High US casualties in the period (about 45–55 per month in mid–late 2009) and high-profile Taliban attacks, such as a large-scale attack in Kandahar in August 2009, also illustrated the extent to which the security situation was deteriorating. Meanwhile, the US strategy was complicated by the widespread fraud allegations in the Afghan presidential election, which was foreseen by many, but not prevented.

When the US began its second high-level strategy review, there was less space for allied interventions. So while Obama and his aides talked the language of consultation, this became a byword for post-facto briefings, rather than a policy dialogue. In addition, by taking a considerable time to decide their new policy, the Obama administration helped to create a perception of drift. This contributed to the increasing European disbelief in the likely success of the US strategy.

The final version of the new strategy – additional US troop deployments tied to a timetable of drawdown of forces and narrowly defined counter-terrorism goals – also posed problems for some EU governments, who could not offer additional military support and were concerned that a narrowly-defined campaign would contradict their domestic messages about the mission; in Germany, NATO's mission is still not referred to as *krieg* (war).

But even if the review process had been shorter and more inclusive, it would probably not have changed matters. Most EU member-states still view their commitment to NATO's Afghan mission mainly through a transatlantic prism and have done little to develop views and policy ideas that could assist US policymakers.

The result is that although some EU governments have deployed more troops and have toned down criticisms of US policy, many seem content to take the role of a collective 'armchair general', dispensing advice from afar and scoring points on TV. For the most part, however, they are unwilling to take to the battlefield in the numbers required. For example, the EU's police mission, now in its fourth year, remains understaffed and a number of European governments are also expected to reduce their troop numbers during 2010.

Europe's Pakistan policy has strengthened, but not as dramatically as the situation on the ground requires. Since the first EU-Pakistan summit in June 2009, the EU has pledged financial assistance to Pakistan of €485 million by 2013 and is a vital player in The Friends of Democratic Pakistan process. Individual European governments have worked with the US to help the Pakistani authorities reconstruct militancy-hit areas like Malakand and Swat. Member states have committed a total of €800 million, with an injection this year of an estimated €71 million into emergency and other humanitarian programmes.

But compared to both the size and multidimensional nature of Europe's assistance to other fragile states, its Pakistan aid represents at best a second-tier contribution. Besides Britain, no other European country has a long-standing political, military or developmental relationship with the Islamabad authorities. To this end, the US has yet to take Europe seriously as a partner in Pakistan's stabilisation; while the Pakistani authorities continue to look for hand-outs, but shirk a substantive relationship with Europe.

»»»» **CONCLUSION**

Cordiality, a continued belief in President Obama's multilateral instincts and a shared set of fundamental values serve to mask the depth of tensions in Europe. With the 2011 troop withdrawal deadline looming, progress against the Taliban insurgency slow and the Afghan government showing few signs of rising to the task of governing the country, transatlantic fissures are likely to grow. The withdrawal of Dutch and Canadian troops in mid-2010 and 2011 respectively could trigger tensions.

Such tensions may have repercussions beyond Central Asia. Unless the EU can offer support in areas that the US cares about, or can spend money and send greater numbers of experts to the world's hotspots, working with the EU is unlikely to be a priority for the Obama administration. The situation in Pakistan and Afghanistan is likely to remain a US national security priority for the next decade. With this in mind, European governments need to urgently and systematically debate what they want from the NATO mission and how important they think Pakistan's stabilisation is.

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