

# THE POST 9/11 SECURITY PROSPECTS OF AFGHANISTAN

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*The multinational efforts directed towards the stabilization and reconstruction of Afghanistan is characteristic of post-conflict military missions. The stages of such missions involve managing the post-conflict situation, as well as the rehabilitation, rebuilding and reconstruction of the area that underwent or generated the conflict. Afghanistan is a case study that underlines not only the complexity, but also the extremely ambitious objectives of the stabilization and reconstruction process unfolded in this country. At the time, the aim of strengthening NATO's presence in Afghanistan was triggered by the necessity to create a peaceful security climate and to counter terrorism. The part played by Romania in the efforts to counter the global challenges to international peace and security through peace consolidation, stabilization and democratic reconstruction of the area has been characterized as a proactive one.*

**Key words:** *stabilization, reconstruction, Provincial Reconstruction Team, multinational effort, interoperability*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Romania has played an important role in the efforts directed towards countering the new global challenges to international peace and security. As such, it actively participated in the peace consolidation efforts unfolded during post-conflict periods and in the stabilization and democratic reconstruction of areas prone to insecurity and warfare. In this respect, it must be noted that such an approach is part of the country's view on the tight interconnection between its national security and the regional and international stability. As a result, Romania focuses on its political and military involvement in supporting the post-conflict stabilization processes. From this perspective, such an approach is part

of a broader effort towards defining a coherent policy for a greater region including the Western Balkans, the Greater Middle East, Central Asia (Afghanistan included).

Since 1991 Romania has actively participated with a wide range of forces: infantry battalions, mountain and engineer troops, field hospitals, military police, transportation capabilities, military observers, liaison and staff officers in the peacekeeping missions of the UN. The broad spectrum of missions accomplished, ranging from humanitarian ones to reconstruction and combat missions, directly contributed to a better training of the participants and to the implementation of NATO interoperability standards.

Between 2003 and 2011, 19 Romanian military died on duty in Afghanistan.

Focusing on the post 9/11/01 security prospects of Afghanistan, as well as on the way Romania met its commitments to the coalition that took an active part in restoring peace in the aforementioned region, this article will try to highlight the manner in which this country succeeded in defining its part in the global view on security.

## **2. THE STABILIZATION AND RECONSTRUCTION PROCESS IN AFGHANISTAN**

Immediately after the Taliban regime was removed from power, a wide array of challenges related to peace, stabilization and reconstruction lay ahead. Afghanistan had been at war for more than two decades and owned the largest mined area in the world. According to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), 70% of the 22 million inhabitants were malnourished and average lifespan reached 40. However, significant progress was made in the subsequent period as a result of NATO and international community cooperation with Afghan authorities.

The Bonn Process, officially launched in 2001 after the overthrow of the Taliban regime, successfully ended with the organization of Parliamentary elections. Despite the gloomy forecasts, these elections, as well as the ones organized for appointing a President in 2004, unfolded quite peacefully and safely as a result of the support offered by the international community to the Afghan government. Thus, political pluralism gradually developed all over Afghanistan and the elected Parliament members started acting in accordance with

their mandate. The government of President Hamid Karzai expanded its influence around the country and succeeded in reintegrating many of the regional power representatives, as well tribal and clan leaders (the so-called warlords) into the political and social life. Even though the process aimed at building the Afghan institutions was a slow one, the latter advanced with the support of the international community. As such, the multinational effort directed towards the stabilization and reconstruction of the country could be characterized as a post-conflict military mission.

The historical perspective has shown that the post-conflict stages involve measures aimed at managing the situation, as well as at the rehabilitation, rebuilding and reconstruction of the area that underwent or generated the conflict. An analysis of the post-Cold War conflicts markedly emphasized that acting on a volunteer basis, in an arbitrary, extreme and intolerant manner had led to situation deterioration in the areas under investigation and, in the end, to conflict. Therefore, taking into account not only the challenges, vulnerabilities, risks and asymmetrical threats emerging at international level, but also the fact that some areas are traditionally prone to conflict, a differentiated approach to such areas was considered necessary especially in terms of the strategies to be employed in countering new threats, terrorism representing the most important one.

With a view to all of the above, Afghanistan is a case study that underlines both the complexity and the ambitious objectives of the stabilization and reconstruction efforts unfolded in this country.

The Istanbul Summit, held between 28-29 June 2004, centered around refining a NATO policy on Afghanistan. In this respect, the statement released by the state and government heads who participated in the North Atlantic Council reunion officially acknowledged that NATO's main priority was ensuring peace and stability in Afghanistan in order to consolidate a multiethnic and fully representative governance. In order to meet this challenge NATO was to take a two-fold approach: strengthening the military troops and creating a number of Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs). More specifically, the Council decided that NATO would supplement the ISAF troops that were already deployed under UN mandate by about 3500 military, out of which 1300 would be stationed outside the country and deployed only in crisis situations. Thus, the ISAF personnel that at the time totaled 6500 people, reached in the months to come 10000. Moreover, alongside with the Kunduz PRT, ISAF extended its presence in Mazar-e-Shariff, Maymana, Faizabad and Baghlan. The first step in this direction was taken two days after the Istanbul Summit on July 1, 2004. As a result, the teams from Mazar-e-Sharif and Maymana that at the time were under the authority of the coalition led by the US were taken over by NATO.

The strengthening of NATO's presence in Afghanistan was aimed at creating a security climate necessary for the reconstruction and stabilization of the country, for countering terrorism and for ensuring the organization and unfolding of elections. The latter's postponement would have represented an obstacle to the Afghan government's authority

consolidation. The aims of ISAF were to encourage cooperation between as many international institutions as possible and the Afghan government, and to cooperate with the Afghan government and with the US led coalition as part of the "Enduring Freedom" operation, as well as with the United Nation's Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

The mission of ISAF also included the West and South of Afghanistan. As a result of the ISAF involvement in the PRT project, the former was perceived as a reliable partner supporting the efforts to maintain security and stability. On October 5, 2006, ISAF implemented the final stage in the takeover of the international forces deployed in the East of Afghanistan that had acted as part of the US led coalition. Apart from fulfilling its ordinary tasks, ISAF also supported the reconstruction process, the disarmament of the former combatants, armament storage and the implementation of the measures aimed at ensuring trust in its area of responsibility.

The PRTs represented an administrative unit aimed at providing international aid to Afghanistan. It consisted of an operational basis of various sizes that included a group of people ranging between 60 and more than 1000 military and civil specialists involved in reconstruction projects or in ensuring the security of those involved in such endeavors. A PRT included 3 to 5 civilians and military personnel. The teams were supported by international security forces. Initially, they were formed and used by the American military to facilitate the reconstruction efforts in the provinces outside Kabul. As a result of NATO's involvement in

Afghanistan the command of the PRTs was handed over to ISAF. The PRTs employed the expertise of all contributing agencies and consisted of military personnel, civil police councilors and civil representatives of the US Foreign Affairs Agencies such as USAID, the State Department, and the Department of Agriculture. As of October 5, 2006, the PRTs became part of the ISAF and hence subordinated to NATO. During the main stages of ISAF missions the number of PRTs constantly increased.

Starting with January 2006, the deployment and command of PRTs were as follows: Baghlan (Netherlands and Hungary as of October 2006), Chaghcharan (Lithuania), Farah (US), Fayzabad (Germany, Denmark), Herat (Italy), Kunduz (Germany), Mazar-e-Sharif (UK, Denmark, Sweden and Germany), Maymana (UK, Norway) and Qala-e-Naw (Spain). As for the PRTs of the Combined Joint Task Force 76, their location and command were: Asadabad (US), Bamyán (New Zealand), Jalalabad (US), Kandahar (Canada), Khowst (US), Lashkar Gah, Parwan, Qalat Sharana (US), Tarin Kowt (Netherlands, Australia).

When ISAF assumed command of the PRTs on October 5, 2006 there were 24 PRTs coordinated by 5 regional command centers: the Regional Command Capital and the Regional Command Centers located in North, West, South and East (within the Combined Joint Task Force – CJTF 76 under the command of the US).

The main goal of the PRTs was to promote a government that was credible and able to expand its influence over the Afghan territory. These teams did not work as

peacekeeping units. Their members were quite few and collaborated in an interdisciplinary manner in assisting local authorities, the national government, NGOs, UN agencies that contributed to the efforts directed towards the reconstruction of Afghanistan, the security sector reform, the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants.

The PRTs' military component was subordinated to ISAF and, besides providing security support, also dealt with infrastructure work. Its aims were to facilitate and implement changes, to ensure security, to support information exchange among various groups, to stimulate reconstruction and, in the end, to contribute to the stabilization of Afghanistan. Due to their small size the PRTs ensured security only at local level and were involved in fields like education, customs, infrastructure, agriculture, judicial activities, public health. Once the field developed, they gradually transferred their tasks to the government or to local authorities.

The US and the international community created the PRTs as transitional structures in order to support the elected Afghan government. With an extended mandate related to the reconstruction efforts of Afghanistan the PRTs were supposed: to involve themselves in the communication process with governmental leaders, as well as with the military, tribal and religious heads from the provinces and to monitor and report on the evolution of the political, military and reconstruction processes in due time; to work with the Afghan authorities in order to ensure the security for important events such the Parliamentary

and presidential elections, or the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants; to provide specialized assistance and to support the efforts of creating the Afghan national military and police forces; to participate alongside the Afghan government and UN in providing humanitarian assistance.

In conclusion, the PRTs represented a landmark in the stabilization and reconstruction process of Afghanistan. At a conceptual level the PRTs were quite a new structure that underwent criticism during the initial stages of the international military's deployment to Afghanistan. However, the concept underlying their establishment evolved and they lately have been viewed as an extremely efficient means to provide assistance to the Afghan government in its efforts to expand its influence in the provinces. As mixed teams of military and civilians, varying in size and led by different countries the PRTs were deployed in the capital cities of the Afghan provinces and offered solutions to the problems of the Afghan government. The teams supported numerous reconstruction projects, mediated among parties in conflict, participated in the process of Afghan combatant groups' disarmament, assisted in the deployment of ANA and national police forces, facilitated the improvement of the security environment as a result of their contact with the population, the Afghan leaders and local authorities. All of the above proved an original method to bring together the military and civil actors in order to accomplish the task of ensuring the external assistance to nation building.

### **3. ROMANIAN CONTRIBUTION**

On October 7, 2001, the American and British forces launched the first air strikes meant to annihilate the Taliban regime from Kabul. On December 2001, the Romanian Parliament approved, as a result of the request made by the Romanian President, the participation of the Romanian forces in ISAF and empowered the Romanian Government to earmark the forces and to establish the means, the financing and the conditions under which these were to be part of the international mission in Afghanistan.

Initially, the Romanian participation in the theatre of operations was based on self sustaining means and involved 15 military doctors and a C-130 Hercules airplane destined for transportation. In case of special requests, Romania was to make available up to 20 military medical personnel, 1 CBRN company of 70 militaries that was to be transported by a third party, as agreed during negotiations, 1 military police platoon of 25 militaries (the latter could be supplemented up to 30 people and was to be trained in accordance with the missions in which they were to participate) to be shipped by the C-130 Hercules, 1 mountain troops company of 170 people ready to go into action 30 days after the request was issued.

Four months later, on April 30, 2002, the Romanian Parliament approved the participation of Romanian troops to the "Enduring Freedom" operation from Afghanistan. For this, the following forces were earmarked to be deployed: 1 infantry battalion of 405 military personnel; 1 CBRN company of 70



people and a reserve of 10 military in case the Romania's contribution was to be supplemented with liaison and staff officers.

An agreement concerning the deployment of the South – Eastern Europe Brigade (SEEBRIG) to Afghanistan was signed on the occasion of the South – Eastern Europe Defense Ministerial – SEDM that unfolded on December 5-6, 2005, in Washington DC. The Brigade acted under the UN mandate and the operational command of NATO and during its mission in Afghanistan was known by the name of Kabul Multinational Brigade IX (KMNB IX).

As a result of the agreement, 233 Romanian military and 2 support subunits participated in the ISAF mission for six months starting with February 2006. Out of the 101 positions within the Brigade, 18 were filled by Romanian representatives. Moreover, Romania supplied 125 military for the general staff company and 90 militaries for the communications company. On August 11, 2006, the Romanian forces that had been part of the SEEBRIG returned from mission. In this respect, it is worth mentioning that this mission was the result of deploying the multinational peace force, established in 1999, in a theatre of operations for the first time and that the force benefited from the participation of military contingents from Albania, Bulgaria, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Greece, Italy, Romania and Turkey.

On April 1, 2006, 39 military from the Romanian Air Force took over the control over the Kabul International Airport (KAIA) from the Greek contingent and filled in positions in the administrative and

management structures of the airport. The Romanian detachment conducted their activities as part of ISAF. The main missions accomplished by the Romanians for four months were: airport management, daily aerial operations coordination, control of takeoffs and landings, and monitoring of the air traffic in the area. Moreover, they provided meteorological analyses and forecasts in order to ensure the security of flights, maintained communications equipment within parameters and ensured logistic support for airport activities.

In order to eliminate the risks and threats raised by the presence of Taliban combatants and of Al Qaeda terrorist groups in certain areas, especially in the South and East of Afghanistan, NATO and the coalition conducted a number of operations aimed at annihilating them. Thus, between September 2-17, 2006, ISAF launched the “Medusa” operation with a view to reducing the number of insurgent activities in the South of the country and strengthening the stability in the area. The same goals were pursued during the “Achilles” operation launched on March 6, 2007, by ISAF in cooperation with the Afghan forces. The latter was the most important offensive operation ever conducted in the South of Afghanistan, in Helmand, since the fall of the Taliban regime, and the number of military personnel involved in it (5500) was a tell tale sign of its significance. The reasons for launching it can be found in the number of suicide attacks that had taken place in the area as a preliminary to the spring offensive that was to be launched by the Talibans.

Starting with July 31, 2006, Romanian troops of the “Călugăreni” Task Force joined the American troops in the Southern province of Zabul within the Forward Operating Base (FOB) Maizan. Their mission consisted in ensuring base and area security. In an interview, LTC Michael E. McLaughlin, PRT head in Qalat noticed Taliban’s reluctance to launch attacks against Coalition forces in Zabul because of their fear of the Romanians’ 14.5 mm machine guns.

On January 19, 2007, the “Călugăreni” Task Force (i.e. the 2nd Infantry Battalion) was replaced by the 812th Infantry Battalion “Carpathian Hawks” (Șoimii Carpaților) in a ceremony held at the Forward Operating Base (FOB) Lagman from Zabul. During the six months spent in the theatre of operations, the “Călugăreni” Task Force conducted, as part of the Zabul Task Force, conducted missions together the American military from the 1st Battalion, the 4th Infantry Regiment, the C Company, and ANA. As for the 812th Infantry Battalion, the latter conducted during its six-month stay 600 missions in the support of the stabilization and post-conflict reconstruction of the region.

On May 29, 2007, the Romanian military deployed in the Qalat base were visited by the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), the American General John B. Craddock. On this occasion, the battalion commandant reported on the security status in the province, on the missions conducted by the Romanians in order to secure highway 1 and its adjacent areas, as well as on the possibility to extend the PRT projects in cooperation with the Zabul Task

Force in the Qalat area. At the end of his visit, John B. Craddock wrote in the Book of Honor of the Battalion: “Many thanks for the great mission you are undertaking”.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Romania’s contribution to the stabilization and reconstruction process of Afghanistan was included on the agenda of the meeting between Romania’s President, Traian Băsescu, and the Commander of the US forces in Afghanistan, Lieutenant General Karl W. Eikenberry, which took place at Cotroceni, on February 1, 2007. On this occasion the Romanian President reiterated Romania’s determination to fulfill its commitments to the partners involved in NATO’s mission in Afghanistan. Moreover, he underlined the importance of achieving success on such a mission and also mentioned that Romania will be constantly focused on acting as a loyal and principled partner in accordance with its engagements. During the talks, Lieutenant General Karl W. Eikenberry expressed his appreciation for the Romanian forces deployed in Afghanistan. Also, he reminded that an American company was subordinated to a Romanian battalion in the Zabul province. In his turn, Traian Băsescu underlined Romania’s preoccupation for the improvement of its performance in the theatre of operation through a modernization of the technical capabilities made available to the Romanian forces deployed in Afghanistan.

Romanian troops have been actively participating in multinational military missions unfolded in various theaters of operation under

the NATO and EU command or under the mandate of international organizations. As a result, they have improved their practical abilities and preparedness for planning and taking part in such missions.

Participation in multinational operations, the transformation of the classical concepts on defense into expeditionary policies, a broader role and spectrum of missions for the Romanian military have all contributed to the shaping of a new strategic profile for Romania. As a result, the defense policies have changed from the traditional

approach to the security issue as a matter of national territory defense to an approach that views security as part of a coherent policy at multiregional level that focuses on the reconstruction and stabilization of areas outside the European continent.

The role and involvement of the Romanian military in mediation activities, as well as in ensuring security are significant. Consequently, Romania has gradually become a contributor to the regional and global security.

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