

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نباشد تن من مباد بدین بوم ویر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبان های اروپائی

<http://www.ctv.ca>

Will the war in Afghanistan bring down NATO?



Ian Munroe

11/1/2009

Next week in Washington, U.S. President Barack Obama will host a summit of European Union leaders to discuss a number of issues, including what to do next in Afghanistan.

Despite the presence of about 70,000 troops under NATO command, the central Asian country has become increasingly violent and unstable. NATO's International Security Assistance Force has been looking for more troops in order to reverse course.

But NATO nations have so far come up short on offering troops, and now their alliance's reputation is on the line.

NATO defence ministers met in Bratislava, Slovakia, last week to discuss the war. They endorsed a recent assessment by ISAF's commander, U.S. Gen. Stanley McChrystal, that tens of thousands of additional troops are needed or NATO will lose to the Taliban.

However, the gathering of defence ministers stopped short of committing more troops. NATO said that discussing "the resource implications" of endorsing McChrystal's assessment "will follow at a later stage."

Growing concerns

While NATO's 28 member countries grapple with how to improve their chances of beating the Taliban, the alliance is facing growing criticism over how the mission has been conducted and whether it can go on for much longer.

The autobiography of Rick Hillier, a retired Canadian general and former chief of defense staff in Ottawa, landed in book stores this week. In it, he provides a written attack on the alliance's performance in Afghanistan from his time as commander of ISAF.

The mission's leadership is "abysmal," he writes. Staff at NATO's headquarters in Kabul "had no strategy, no clear articulation of what they wanted to achieve, no political guidance and few forces."

Afghanistan has shown that the alliance has become "a corpse, decomposing," Hillier concludes. "Unless the alliance can snatch victory out of feeble efforts, it's not going to be long in existence in its present form."

Ret. Gen. Lewis MacKenzie, a Canadian who worked with the alliance in the early 1990s while he was in charge of the United Nations peacekeeping force in Bosnia, has voiced similar concerns.

"Forget about bombing Serbia from the safety of 20,000 feet," he told CTV.ca earlier this month. "Now that we're having blood being spilled, we have 28 different opinions as to how things should be done. You just can't run an alliance that way."

"It's proven that it's incapable," he added.

Experts south of the border are also cautioning that the alliance may not survive its foray into central Asia.

Charles Kupchan, a senior fellow at an influential American think-tank, warned the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Oct. 22 that NATO is at risk of being seen as ineffective.

"Unity of command has proved elusive, as has co-ordination between NATO and EU efforts," he said. "Moreover, it will be no easy task maintaining the NATO coalition at current levels, with domestic pressure mounting in several member states for winding down of their national contributions."

The German question

Counterinsurgency experts say it would take a force of 400,000 to 500,000 to secure all of Afghanistan, a mountainous country larger than France or Ukraine. But keeping enough NATO troops on the ground to provide even scaled-back security in urban areas could be an uphill battle:

- Canada has pledged to stop its military operations there by the end of 2010.
- The Dutch parliament passed a motion earlier this month barring the renewal of its Afghan presence.
- And Denmark's leader recently said his country's commitment depends on whether Afghanistan's Nov. 7 presidential runoff produces a credible leader.

Many European countries may follow whatever Germany decides to do. Europe's most populous country has had a withdrawal plan in place since April, according to security analyst Sunil Ram. It also has the third-largest contingent of soldiers in Afghanistan.

"It's a tough slog in Germany," said Dan Hamilton, a NATO expert at the Center for Transatlantic Relations in Baltimore. "The image of German soldiers killing civilians haunts the debate, given their history."

German forces have been stationed in a few northwest provinces that were relatively quiet until recently, but they're now engaged in heavy fighting.

Some NATO and German officials have reportedly said the Taliban is targeting Germany, supposedly as a potential weak link in the alliance. Meanwhile, the Bundestag is scheduled to vote on the mission in December.

Winning votes

Obama is said to be waiting for Afghanistan's political situation to stabilize, before announcing whether he will grant McChrystal's request for more troops.

Already the U.S. has about as many soldiers in Afghanistan as the other 41 countries participating in ISAF put together. That proportion could rise much higher if Obama sends in more troops and other NATO choose not to, making the alliance look ineffective.

It's not clear whether that will happen. But the debate over whether to send in more soldiers is creating growing tensions within the alliance, Ram said.

"You have a lot of NATO countries who don't want to be there. They went in under the impression they were a stabilization force, similar to what they have done in the Balkans -- only problem is, they walked into a war," he said.

Public opinion is divided across Europe, the U.S. and Afghanistan about whether NATO forces should continue the war.

Poll results released in September by the German Marshall Fund, a non-profit group that has offices on both sides of the Atlantic, found that only 37 per cent of Afghans think NATO should remain in their country. Fifty per cent of Afghans polled said NATO forces should leave immediately.

In Europe, two-thirds of respondents said NATO is incapable of stabilizing the country. Even in the U.S., which initiated the war, the poll found that 56 per cent of Americans were optimistic about the mission.

Regardless of public opinion, if NATO fails to stamp out the Taliban it would raise questions about whether Western countries need the alliance at all, Hamilton said.

"(Afghanistan) is the most acute and direct security threat to Europeans and North Americans that we face in the world today," he said. "If we aren't able to master our most direct challenge, then what's the alliance for?"