



The EU's Afghan Police Mission: Failing to Meet Commitments

by Matthew Ince

The publication of a report by the House of Lords' European Union Committee released on 16 February 2011 has served as yet another illustration of civilian under commitment within the international community's counterinsurgency efforts in Afghanistan. If this trend is left unaddressed and civilian missions such as the EUPOL continue to fall short of meeting their commitments within the region, the international community may well find it increasingly difficult to address key grievances within Afghanistan and ensure that legitimate governance is maintained. Furthermore, this could fundamentally disrupt their ability to successfully train Afghan security forces and enable the Afghan Government to provide security to its citizens; a prerequisite for overcoming the excessive levels of corruption that must be addressed if stability is ever to be sustainable within the region.

Despite repeated calls for the need to adopt a coherent civilian strategy within counterinsurgency (COIN) operations in Afghanistan, the political and economic pillars of the international community's efforts continue to be overshadowed by their own shortfalls and a disproportionate emphasis on the military dimension of the campaign.¹ The latest illustration of this pervasive trend came in the form of a publication by the House of Lords' European Union Committee released on 16 February 2011.

The report, entitled *The EU's Afghan Police Mission*, has outlined the failure of the EUPOL to deliver on commitments within current police training efforts in Afghanistan. Undertaking a thorough evaluation of the EU's activities in this regard it describes how it has yet to meet the target of providing 400 police trainers to the mission, instead only typically managing to deploy numbers in the high 200s.² Commenting that this is too small a contribution to make a major difference to civilian outcomes in Afghanistan, the Committee's report notes that this demonstrates an overarching lack of commitment by the EU to its allies engaged within the region and has prevented the mission from extending across other important parts of Afghanistan.

¹ Matthew Ince, 'Counterinsurgency: Falling Short of the Comprehensive Approach in Afghanistan', *smallwarsjournal.com*, January 23 2011, <<http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/journal/docs-temp/653-ince.pdf>> (Accessed 24/02/11)

² House of Lords, *The EU's Afghan Police Mission*, House of Lords European Union Committee, 8th Report of Session 2010-11 (London: The Stationery Office, HL Paper 87, February 2011), p.5. (Available online) <<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201011/ldselect/ldeucom/87/87.pdf>> (Accessed 18/02/11)

Part of a wider trend

As well as drawing attention to the difficulties faced by EUPOL in its attempts to train the Afghan police force, where illiteracy rates among recruits are as high as 70 per cent,³ this most recent account of EUPOL under commitment also serves to represent a broader failure in the implementation of a coherent civilian strategy. This has been a key short fall in the adoption of the comprehensive approach by the international community in Afghanistan and illustrates the hesitancy felt among many of those involved with regards to burden sharing within the campaign. At an operational level, advocates of the comprehensive approach are united in their belief that achieving successful outcomes within Afghanistan are dependent upon the ability to intertwine the activities of the international community in areas of reconstruction, governance, security and law and order so that they mutually support one another. Within Afghanistan, where COIN involves a diverse spectrum of multinational contributions, there is a general consensus that such an approach should therefore be one that employs a fully encompassing range of civil, military, and economic capabilities, where all participants are coordinated in a unified effort to fulfill the tasks and activities that the campaign requires for success.

At present, the chance of success in implementing such an approach is dependent upon the creation of a secure and stable environment where political objectives can be achieved. This is an endeavour that will unavoidably involve winning over the population, neutralising the insurgency, building infrastructure, civil capabilities, stable government, and facilitating the creation of a situation whereby the Afghan Government and its security forces possess the full range of competencies necessary for them to provide their own security. Nevertheless, the House of Lords' report has echoed sentiments repeatedly made by observers over the last few years with regards to the EUPOL mission; namely that the efforts of EUPOL have widely been regarded as a disappointment and that its weak leadership on the ground has failed to create a clear direction to guide the activities of its various member states.⁴ Its actions, or lack of in this regard, have thus inevitably had a counterproductive effect upon attempts by the international community to facilitate the provision of security for Afghans by Afghans, something that it now widely considered as a necessary condition before it can consider broader troop withdrawal from the region. The EU is not however the sole culprit in this regard. EUPOL shortfalls have also been accompanied by the persistent failure of other civilian bodies such as UN's assistance mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA) to meet their commitments in the region. For example, in 2009 UNAMA only delivered a total disbursement of US\$31.36m in development aid to Afghanistan of the US\$89.2m that it had pledged to commit.⁵

Another key contributing factor in current failures to adopt the comprehensive approach has also been an increasing trend towards the militarisation of civilian activity within Afghanistan whereby military operations have become the main focus of, and primary vessel for, the implementation of civil initiatives in the region. According to a review conducted by the Afghan Government's Ministry of Finance, military agencies committed over US\$18.3bn in aid

³ *Ibid.*, p.17.

⁴ International Crisis Group, 'Policing in Afghanistan: Still Searching for a Strategy', Asia Briefing No.85, Kabul/Brussels, 18 December 2008, p10.

⁵ Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Ministry of Finance (GIROA MoF), Donor Financial Review, Report 1388, November 2009, p.46 Available online

<<http://www.undp.org.af/Publications/KeyDocuments/Donor'sFinancialReview%20ReportNov2009.pdf>> (Accessed 18/02/11).

to Afghanistan from 2001-2009. This equated to 40 per cent of the total development aid that was committed to Afghanistan by the international community within that timeframe. Of this, 91 per cent has been invested in security sector reform which has become an integral part of the military operations being conducted.⁶

Some explanations

A variety of explanations can be given for why and how such shortfalls in the adoption of a coherent civilian strategy have arisen in Afghanistan over the last eight years. In particular, these can be understood as the combination of an interconnected set of limitations.

First, in this case of the EU, this recent announcement regarding its failure to meet targets in the deployment of police trainers is particularly characteristic of the capabilities-expectations gap which the EU repeatedly demonstrates with regards to its external policies. In part this is largely due to complications brought about by a multitude of varying threat perceptions felt amongst EU member states with regards to the importance of the current AfPak campaign for their own national self-interests. This also reflects a wider trend that has continued to resonate among a number of European nations in the post-Cold War era, whereby some Europeans still expect the US to continue to singlehandedly shoulder a large proportion of the cost of ensuring European security. This underlining culture of reliance and passing responsibility has similarly been the cause of many of the challenges that ISAF is attempting to overcome at present in relation to burden sharing within the region.

Second, the civilian aspects of COIN operations, which largely constitute the political and economic pillars of the approach, are often restricted by the bureaucratic shortcomings of the range of actors involved. These restrictions can include the need of policy makers to occasionally pander to domestic political considerations, the requirement of practitioners to adhere to the varying limitations often imposed by individual government ministries, agencies and funding bodies to whom they are answerable, and the constraints imposed upon all actors by the framework and protocols of international laws, codes of conduct, and rules of engagement. Such prerequisites have therefore restrained growing efforts to adopt a comprehensive approach and have forced the military to take the lead within COIN – an outcome that inevitably causes military objectives to rise to the top of the international agenda.

Third, the operating environment within Afghanistan is an inescapably hazardous site for non-military personnel to work within. The difficulties that have arisen when deploying civilians within the region, particularly within areas of heightened conflict, have therefore contributed towards the growing decline of civilian professionals within the field and has often led to the retrenchment of non-military personnel to provincial capitals – a tendency that has escalated as civilian professionals increasingly find themselves the victims of insurgent attacks. Within this context there is often therefore no alternative to civilian tasks being delivered through military means, a trend that has seen the Armed Forces increasingly take on new roles to fill the void created by civilians being unprepared to work within the region.

⁶ Ibid., p15.

Conclusions

Traditionally COIN strategists would advocate that the balance between the civil and military pillars of any COIN operation should ideally see the military enacting only 20 per cent of the overall effort while the remaining 80 per cent is then conducted by civilian means.⁷ Nevertheless, within the current environment responsibility for conducting the 80 per cent non-military contribution thus continues to increasingly fall to ISAF, requiring its military personnel to conduct activities that are often outside of their purview and for which they are often inadequately trained. The failure to adopt a comprehensive approach at an operational level within the current campaign can therefore point towards the lack of an overarching civilian strategy and the unwillingness by civilian actors such as the EU and UNAMA to bear the responsibility of undertaking the full spectrum of tasks and activities that such an approach demands.

Too much of the international community's effort in trying to practically implement an effective COIN doctrine is therefore being conducted by military means and set against an agenda of military priorities – a trend that has blurred the distinction between military personnel and civilian professionals operating on the ground, increased the number of civilian deaths in theatre, placed larger financial strains on military budgets, demanded higher numbers of trained military personnel to be operating in country and contributed towards the difficulty of deploying development professionals within the field. If this current dilemma is left unaddressed and civilian missions such as the EUPOL continue to fall short of meeting their commitments in the region, the international community may well find it increasingly difficult to address key grievances within Afghanistan and ensure legitimate governance is maintained – not to mention their ability to successfully train Afghan security forces and enable the Afghan Government to provide security to its citizens and overcome the excessive levels of corruption that must be addressed if stability is every to be sustainable within the region.

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⁷ David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (London: Praeger, 1964), p89.