



NATO Topic B

By Kieran Tidball, Adam Hasjzan and Jess Wiles

Re-Evaluating The Resolute Support Mission



INTRODUCTION

After the September 11 attacks which resulted in the deaths, immediate or eventual, of around 3,000 people, the United States initially responded by demanding that Osama bin Laden, then-leader of Al-Qaeda, be extradited from Afghanistan. The subsequent refusal from the Taliban led to the US declaring that it would invade Afghanistan and the commencement of **Operation Enduring Freedom**, a joint military invasion of the country by the US and the UK in October 2001.

In December that year, the United Nations Security Council established the **International Security Assistance Force (I.S.A.F)** under **Resolution 1386**. Said resolution agreed that ISAF would be led by, but *not* exclusively composed of, forces from NATO as envisaged by the Bonn Agreement (ratified by S/RES/1383). This declared that ISAF'S Mission that its mission was to ensure that the transitional government of Afghanistan, the Afghan Interim Authority, maintained control of the nation.

ISAF's role from 2001 until its deactivation in 2014 was initially restricted to Kabul and the surrounding area only, but as time went on its operations expanded across the country. At its peak, it numbered 130,000 personnel from multiple nations both in and outside of NATO (chiefly the USA, which also sustained the most casualties), and operated around seven hundred military bases.

Following ISAF's deactivation, it was acknowledged that a total withdrawal from Afghanistan risked the stability of the government.

It was for this reason that the United Nations Security Council, under S/RES/2189, established the NATO-led **Resolute Support Mission (RSM)**, a non-combatant taskforce that is tasked with providing training, oversight, advice and assistance to Afghanistan's security forces (chiefly its military and police) and institutions so that the country can function independently.

While RSM has had some successes, it is estimated that the Taliban have been making some progress in reclaiming lost territory, partly by using neighboring Pakistan as a haven and base of operations, which threatens Afghanistan's ability to self-govern; there is also the additional problem of neighbouring Iran allegedly providing haven to Taliban members. Without strong diplomatic relations with neighbour states such as Pakistan and Iran, the stability of the government is potentially at risk.

Further complicating matters is the fact that of RSM's 13,000 personnel, over half are American; the election of current President Donald J Trump, and his rhetoric that operations in the Middle East were not working, led to concern that the US would withdraw all troops from the region after more than fifteen years of combat. While Trump has since vowed to commit more troops to the region, other members of NATO and RSM may need to up their commitment to prevent overdependence on America.

Finally, the aim of RSM is to ensure the Afghan government is able to support itself, which requires it to successfully achieve its commitments.

WHAT SHOULD NATO (AND BY EXTENSION, RESOLUTE SUPPORT MISSION)'S NEXT MOVE BE?

Against this background, NATO must seek to coordinate Resolute Support Mission's activities in order to best strengthen the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the current internationally recognized government. In order to do so NATO members must evaluate their contribution to operations, which under RSM cover "providing training, oversight, advice and assistance to Afghanistan's security forces (chiefly its military and police) and institutions". As it is, current RSM commander General John Nicholson (United States) has a degree of flexibility in assigning resources and personnel.

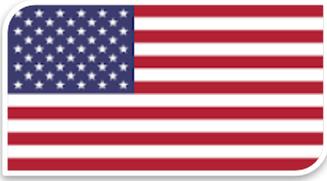
Furthermore, NATO must establish whether its members are content to continue acting in a supporting role, or whether it is necessary to also engage enemy forces directly. At present, RSM presently operates with one 'hub' (Kabul/Bagram) and four 'spokes' (Mazar-e-Sharif in the north, Herat in the west, Kandahar in the south, and Laghman in the east), which could in theory act as a springboard for further operations.

In addition to this, the role of Afghanistan's immediate neighbours, and other countries in the region, is key to ensuring its stability. While the neighbouring Pakistan is officially allied with the United States in combating terrorism, President Trump (USA) has condemned the country for allegedly serving as a sanctuary for terrorists who frequently operate outside its borders. This in turn has led to condemnation from Pakistan's Prime Minister, Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, who says that the American strategy is 'doomed to fail' and has refused to allow the Afghan conflict to 'spill over' into Pakistan. Exacerbating the situation is the role of Iran in Afghan affairs, including allegations of ties to the Taliban, as well as India, which has been called upon to do more in ensuring Afghanistan's stability; India doing so, however, would likely lead to diplomatic incidents with Pakistan.

Finally, while the aim of RSM is to ensure that the Afghan government will be self-sufficient, under the agreements made at the Chicago summit in 2012 the Afghan government is contributing around \$500 million a year to its services, and aims to be self-funding by 2024, with the understanding that as it comes closer to achieving this goal, international funding will decrease. Without the Afghan government sticking to its Chicago summit commitments, RSM will struggle to make any real progress.



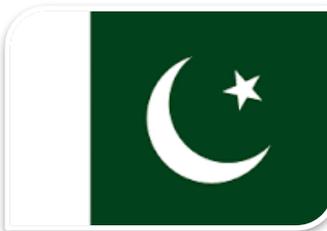
Important Country Positions



The United States is keen to see its international partners help both in terms of military assets but also in providing training and assistance to Afghanistan's services and institutions. Since 2001 the United States has maintained a military presence in Afghanistan, and in fact led the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 alongside Great Britain. This was done in response to the September 11 attacks in New York and the Pentagon, and would be the start of the "War on Terror". The United States' history in the Middle East, combined with its sustaining heavy casualties in its recent operations there, has led to reluctance in maintaining a large number of ground troops in the region, yet it may be about to commit more under the current administration. Moreover, the US has an interest in ensuring that Afghanistan's neighbours assist in its stability.



Likewise, the United Kingdom invaded Afghanistan in 2001 alongside the USA. From 2001 to 2014 it provided a high number of troops in the region as part of ISAF, later withdrawing in October 2014. Following fighting in September 2015 and Taliban forces regaining ground, some troops were redeployed to repel any attacks, while others were sent to Camp Shorabak, near Camp Bastion, in an advisory role. At present, five hundred troops from the UK are assigned to Resolute Support Mission.



While not a member of the Alliance, Pakistan, given its shared border with Afghanistan, has been a key regional player in the War on Terror. Its position has been used for the United States to launch military operations, but also has allegedly provided safe harbour for groups that launch attacks across the border with Afghanistan. These allegations were exacerbated in 2011, when Osama bin Laden was found taking refuge in the country; Pakistan has strongly denied any such claims. The government faces pressure to take a more active role in combatting terrorism that affects its neighbours, chiefly Afghanistan; however, it remains unlikely that Pakistan would take a more active role alongside India, which also faces pressure to do the same.



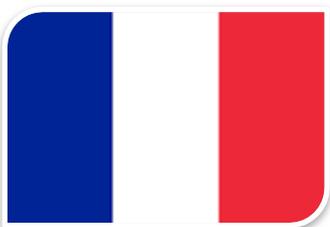
Important Country Positions (2)



Germany has maintained a presence in Afghanistan since 2002, both as part of ISAF and as part of RSM (to which it contributes a maximum of 980 troops). Involvement in ISAF led to national controversy as German military participation is generally frowned upon and has been since World War II, and at one point nearly resulted in legal consequences until the German government defined the mission in Afghanistan as “non-international armed conflict”, rather than “war”. The participation in Resolute Support Mission has not been as controversial, and in November 2016 the Bundeswehr agreed to extend its operations in Afghanistan until 31 December 2017, while capping the number of troops permitted there to 980 exactly (partly to ease concerns of further casualties). Despite the cap and Chancellor Merkel refusing to provide any more forces, Germany provides the third largest number of troops for RSM, with only Italy and the USA providing more.



Iran is not involved with Resolute Support Mission or NATO, but as a neighbouring country to the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (as well as Iraq), it is of interest to the Alliance. Its position has allegedly served as a safe haven, or base of operations, for several terrorist groups seeking to launch assaults into both Iraq and Afghanistan, with claims that fresh recruits for the Taliban are largely Iranian. There are also rumours, though unconfirmed, that Iran seeks to increase its influence over the country and take advantage of America’s seemingly declining presence in order to prop up a government favourable to its interests, thus reducing the impact of any humanitarian crisis that may ‘spill over’ into its borders.



France initially played a role in the campaign against the Taliban, with forces deployed in 2001. However, following national backlash after an Afghan soldier killed four French soldiers, then-President Sarkozy threatened to withdraw troops from ISAF related missions. His successor, President François Hollande, followed through on said threat by withdrawing all combat troops by November 2012, leaving just logistical troops. At present, France provides no troops for Resolute Support Mission, although it has been more committed to fighting the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. In recent months, current President Emmanuel Macron endorsed US President Donald Trump’s call for boots on the ground, although it remains doubtful that any French forces will return to Afghanistan.



Important Country Positions (3)

Other Important Countries:

Afghanistan also shares borders with **Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and China**. Aside from these other neighbouring countries, American President Donald Trump has publicly called upon **India** to involve itself more in regional efforts to stop terrorism, leading to concerns from **Pakistan**. In light of the ongoing refugee crisis, any potential military action should be considered in regard to possible consequences for any member states, especially ones in Europe.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What should NATO's objectives be in assisting Afghanistan's fight against the Taliban?
2. Which groups, if any, should NATO back in the region?
3. How can the alliance address the problem of diplomatic relationships in the region?
4. How can NATO prevent the resurgence of the Taliban?
5. How can the Afghan government be supported?
6. How, if at all, can the alliance help address the needs of civilians?
7. What shape should NATO and RSM's operations take?
8. Who should participate in counter-terrorism operations and how should such operations be conducted?
9. How does the Alliance intend to ensure the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan sticks to its fiscal commitments?
10. Finally, but perhaps most crucially, how long are Alliance members, and by proxy participants in RSM, willing to spend ensuring Afghanistan's stability?

Further reading

Resolute Support Mission on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/ResoluteSupport>

Resolute Support Mission official website: <http://www.rs.nato.int/>

NATO: *The Founding Treaty*,
http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_52060.htm



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Contact Information

www.readimun.org
secretariat@readimun.org

Reading University Model United Nations Society,
Reading University Students' Union
PO Box 230, Whiteknights
Reading, RG6 6AZ, UK