

## **We are getting ready for Afghanistan!**

Written by PAO

Wednesday, 16 March 2005 09:00

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**Q: Could you tell me when the decision to deploy the HQ in the mission in Afghanistan was actually taken? What was the background and how did the decision process look like?**

A: It's extremely difficult to set out the precise date for that event. The decision was the outcome of various political and military talks. In September 2004, the Ministries of Defence from Poland, Denmark and German began to discuss the possibility to employ the HQ troops as part of a future military mission. Few weeks later, representatives of the Corps joined the discussion, but the meeting surprisingly was not finalised with the particular decision. Ultimately, the HQ's deployment in Afghanistan was officially announced during the ministerial meeting here in Szczecin in February 2005, even though the official meeting in the HQ was seriously endangered by the election calendar in Denmark, and the decision could have been postponed once again. Due to Danish election regulations, the Minister was not allowed to take part in the conference after the elections had been declared open. However, the remaining Ministers and the HQ pressured Copenhagen, and we welcomed the Under-Secretary of the Danish Ministry of Defence who was authorized to take decisions. Finally, we could sit together around the table and widely discuss the HQ's future participation in the mission and its operational capabilities. I would like to admit that I was very much determined to conduct the meeting and to work out the clear statement concerning the MNC NE's future activities. For me as a German Officer, it was obvious that the HQ would have to take the next step forward and become a part of the military mission. It is the natural and logical consequence of the HQ's operational development.

**Q: As a German citizen and a German officer, what is your view of the operation in Afghanistan and of the HQ's obvious participation in it?**

A: As I said before: from the HQ's perspective, being deployed into a mission is the natural and logical sequence of activities. As you know, we have been training for that. As a German citizen, I can look at that issue from an even broader perspective. From the very beginning, the idea of creating MNC NE was something unique and, as I see it, a politically important issue, especially in the Central European region. Based on common sense and mutual understanding, we have gathered former Warsaw Pact-countries under one roof, and we began to look into the same direction. Regardless of our differing historical backgrounds and traditions we have learnt how

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to cooperate and to set out our objectives together. I want to emphasize that the former Warsaw Pact-countries have done enormous work and have managed within a very short period of time to overcome various difficulties and get prepared to meet NATO-standards and requirements. Without any doubt, multinational cooperation enriches the entire organization, provides for a new appearance of the countries and lays the new foundations for a history of international relations in the region. Therefore, it 's an extremely good sign for Europe and for the future of the NATO alliance as well. Personally, as a German citizen and as the German Commander of the Corps, I am very much satisfied with it. On the other hand, for a German officer, the mission in Afghanistan will not be surrounded by an aura of extraordinariness, since our troops served in ISAF as members of the Eurocorps and of the 1. German-Netherlands Corps. So, I experienced the complexity and difficulty of operations of that kind previously already. For example, I served in the German Armed Forces Staff and my duties included the task to send a German contingent to Afghanistan and to supervise it. Accordingly, at the moment I am just trying to update information and to pass my experience to my staff officers, who also learn about the realities of Afghanistan.

### **Q: So, the HQ will definitely go into that mission in August 2007?**

A: Nothing is sure at the moment. I would rather say that the Ministers have already made the decision, and it also reflects the HQ's willingness and readiness to participate in the mission. Obviously, many factors may influence the Afghanistan mission, and we are not able to foresee all of them. However, the ISAF mission will have two very interesting dimensions – a political and a military one. At that point, we must not forget that the international forces act alongside Afghanistan's legitimate government and have to co-ordinate actions with it. From the political point of view, for instance, we cannot predict how the internal situation in Afghanistan will evolve. Even though Mr. Karzai is doing an extremely good job, it still remains to be seen whether he can gather all oppositionists under one roof. The country is still divided politically with many difficult regions, in particular close to the Afghanistan - Pakistan border area. In addition, the opium fields and black market for drugs represent a serious problem right now, and the government will have to deal with it one way or the other. Nevertheless, those aspects are not closely related to MNC NE's military role in Afghanistan, but they certainly reflect the real conditions and social environment. On the other hand, the military aspect of that mission is related both to our preparation and to the current military situation in the country – in regard to ISAF and the "Enduring Freedom" operations. If ISAF and "Enduring Freedom" are combined, we will have to command bigger forces - also because of the plans to form more Province Reconstruction Teams in the South and West of the country. Nevertheless, I am deeply convinced that the HQ is fully prepared for the mission, and I hope we will provide the core units for the XI. ISAF shift.

### **Q: Undoubtedly, this will be a very challenging task for the HQ's staff! How do you set**

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### **out the HQ's preparations?**

A: No doubt in it! Definitely! We plan and conduct our preparations seriously. For the last two years, all activities have been geared towards the final goal – the deployment into mission. We have already passed the preliminary evaluation (IOC) for the operational capability and, acting consistently, we will take the final exam for the Full Operational Capability (FOC) during the exercise called Compact Eagle 05 in November 2005. Then, it's just a natural step forward to employ the HQ's units in practice. However, the responsibility for success rests not only on the HQ's internal preparations, but also on the Ministries of Defence of MNC NE's framework nations. I will say more: at present, it's not the preparations within the headquarters that cause difficulties, but the nations' unfulfilled commitments in the areas command support and communications equipment. My men will certainly be ready on time to face the mission.

**Q: Sir, considering that you have prepared HQ MNC NE to be deployed into the mission in Afghanistan. Would it be possible for you to command this mission? And, finally, what is your opinion on the recent decision of the Polish MoD?**

A: It's a very difficult question. First and foremost, it is not a decision yet. It was a "most probably" statement – leaving some space for discussion and negotiations. The issue is pretty complex and needs to be explained shortly. But, I have to admit that I was rather surprised by Mr Szmajdziski's declaration given during the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the 12th Mechanised Division in Szczecin that it would be a Polish general, who will take over the Corps during the deployment to Afghanistan. According to the former rotation rule for the post of the Commander in the HQ, the next Commander would come from Denmark. Unfortunately, the Danish MoD will reduce the participation of Danish officers in the HQ establishment, and this is why Denmark will not take part anymore in the Commander's rotation procedure (since the decision on the Chief of Staff in April 2004). So, in view of that situation we may expect a Polish general to be the Commander of MNC NE during the next rotation, and in that case he will be responsible for the Afghanistan mission. To be honest, my personal view on that matter is slightly different from the Polish MoD's official statement. Nevertheless, the final decision will certainly be taken prior to the political and diplomatic Polish-German talks. So, I cannot give you a straight and simple answer to your question - but, considering the fact that I have been engaged in a process lasting more than 2 years to prepare the HQ for that mission, you might have the impression that I could be the right person. But, as I mentioned above, the decision on the Commanding General for that mission will certainly be pondered very well.

**Q; Sir, you have mentioned that Denmark will decrease the number of Danish officers in the HQ – will this also mean a decrease of the financial participation in the Corps'**

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### **obligations? And how will it affect the manning establishment during the mission?**

A: Well, yes, the Danish MoD decided to reduce the manning in HQ but it will stay more or less on the same financial level. But, on the other hand, we will spread out multinationalism in the staff of the HQ. We will increase the peacetime establishment in the HQ from currently 161 persons up to 194. So this year 38 servicemen will reinforce us. Six soldiers will arrive from Germany, Poland has declared to provide 16 (with the possibility to provide more soldiers), Slovakia will send 10, the United States, the Czech Republic and Lithuania will send 2 each. Latvia has already done it. Estonia will add one. Nevertheless, we will still need stronger support from the nations for carrying out the mission, so that we will increase the HQ's manning up to roughly 350 – 400 soldiers. This is quite different from the other multinational Corps that employ much more soldiers than we do. However, this is rather due to differences in various points of view and working philosophies. I am convinced that the HQ is able to carry out the mission and all tasks successfully with such a low manpower. As I mentioned above, the staff establishment as well to a large extent will depend on the political situation prevailing in 2007 in Afghanistan. So, the final number of personnel will depend on the development of the situation in Afghanistan, with the decisive factors being whether ISAF and "Enduring Freedom" will be combined at that time and what scope they will have. We expect that ISAF and the "Freedom operation" will have been merged by then and that MNC NE will be responsible for maintaining peace and stability especially in the Kabul area, and then extending to the North West and East. Finally, MNC NE's successful engagement in Afghanistan may put a question mark on the manning establishment of Eurocorps or of the Turkish Corps (NRDC – T) that carried out a similar mission. As you know, they are much bigger, with manning varying between 600 and 800 soldiers. If MNC NE succeeds with its operational plans in Afghanistan, this may open a very interesting discussion on creating lowly manned multinational corps that would not generate such high costs and be more effective as well.

### **Q: What are the HQ's plans for the coming few months? You still have a very important goal waiting for you, as a sort of graduation exam – the Full Operational Capability.**

A: The deployment in Afghanistan will be the final step – for the last two years, all activities conducted by the HQ have been subordinated to this objective. We have organised and conducted various training programmes and mission rehearsals, during which we made mistakes and which we tried to derive the most essential knowledge and experience from. We tried to create as many various scenarios as possible in order to foresee what might take place on the battlefield. All those small steps led us to the final NATO-evaluation Full Operational Capability (FOC) in which the HQ's crisis establishment organization will be examined. I believe that we will satisfy the verification team from SHAPE that is to examine our fulfilment of about 570 criteria. Today, we still have some problems to be solved, but also over 200 days left. Each of these days will be used for preparations.

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**Q: What would happen, if you should not pass the autumn Full Operational Capability (FOC) test? You would not receive the NATO-Commander's permission to assume command of ISAF, would you?**

A: If that happened, SACEUR certainly would delete HQ MNC NE from the list of headquarters able to cope with such tasks. However, the responsibility for success during the test to a large extent rests on the Ministries of Defence of MNC NE's framework nations as well. I will say more: at present, existing difficulties are not related to the preparations within the headquarters, but to the nations' unfulfilled commitments in the areas command support and communications equipment. My men will certainly be ready on time to face the mission.

**So, I wish you good luck with your final FOC preparations as well as with the Afghanistan operation. Thank you for your time, Sir!**