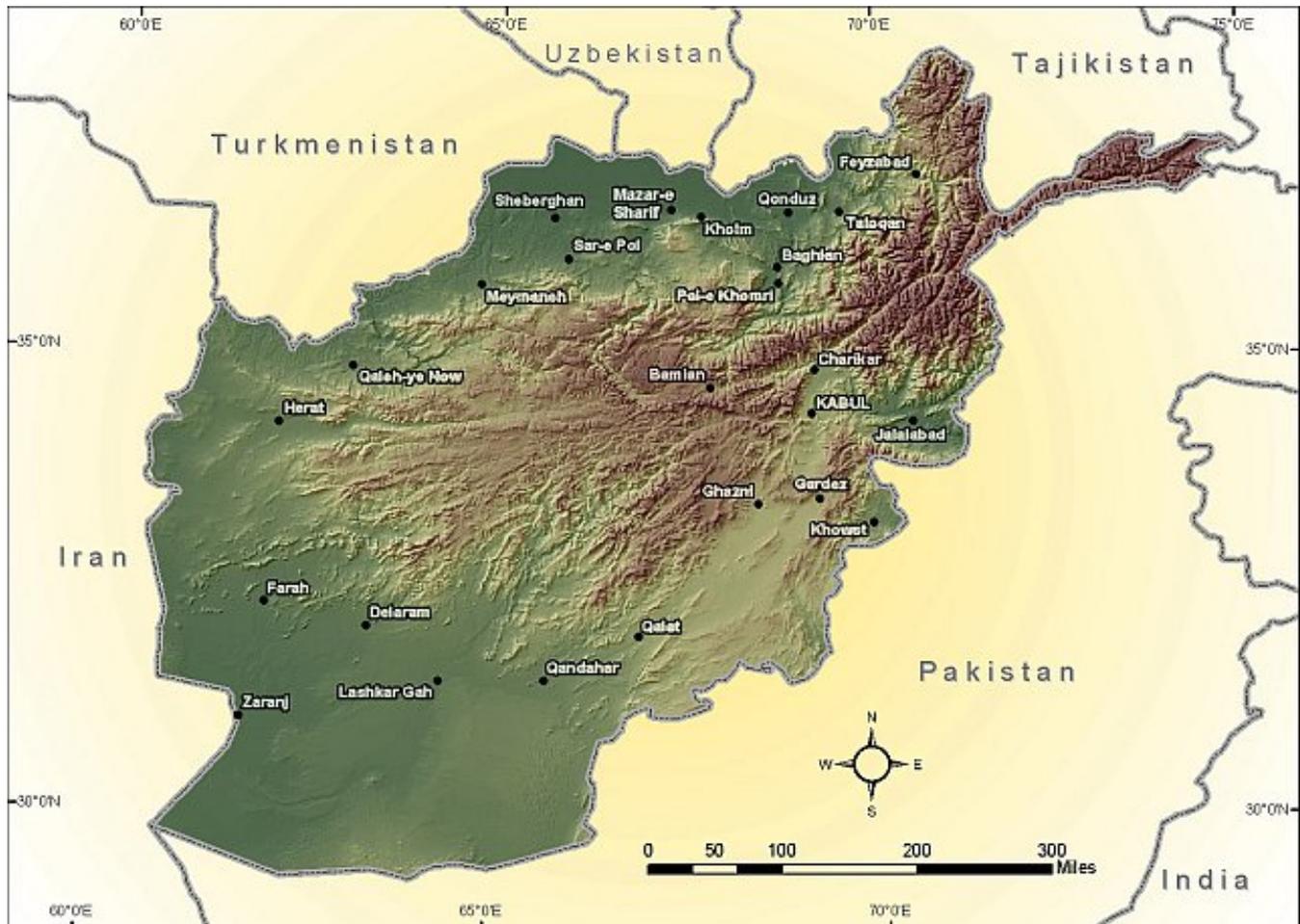


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**Since our allies and we have established a corps, which we have put at NATO's disposal, we have to be consistent and deploy the formation in an operation. Otherwise, it is going to be difficult to justify the 7-year investments in personnel, facilities and equipment.**

NATO operation in Afghanistan is a perfect opportunity for verification of Poland's credibility as an already "old" NATO member and it is an opportunity to gather new experiences, which has not been possible for us hitherto.

Certainly, together with the Danes and Germans we could take on command of KFOR forces in Kosovo which is not so far. But it is a military effort in remote Afghanistan, lying 4,5 thousand km away from Szczecin, that poses a truly ambitious challenge. And this is all the allies have been waiting for- commanding ISAF forces is undertaken in turn by all NATO Corps Headquarters which have applied for it with the NATO Military Committee.

### **(Almost) sentenced to leave**

Presently, the Italian Rapid Response Corps commands ISAF VIII. It will be followed by other similar Corps: the British ARRC and a Spanish corps. The 1. German-Netherlands Corps (ISAF III), Eurocorps (ISAF VI) and 3. International Army Corps from Turkey (ISAF VII) had their turns in Central Asia before. In this situation the information on deployment of the Szczecin-based formation (as ISAF XI) is not a sensation. All the more that Minister of Defence Jerzy Szmajdziński revealed our intentions as early as in March last year and specialists have known about them for a year- that is since the September meeting of Defence Ministers of Denmark, Poland and Germany, which bore fruit in form of the NATO authorities' decision on inclusion of MNC NE into the ISAF headquarters rotation plan. Some well-informed specialists learnt about it even earlier! After all, nothing happens accidentally in NATO's military planning. We successfully passed IOC in September 2003. In November this year we will conduct an exercise confirming FOC. With the tests successfully passed, deployment of the formation seems to be a natural step.

### **LEADING NATION**

Deployment of Corps HQ and Support Brigade to mission area is regulated by the project of Understanding among the governments of Poland, Denmark and Germany. Once it has come into force, it will be a formal basis for execution of commitments accepted by Poland as the leading nation and it will result in Poland bearing the main part of the burden connected with manning, HQ and Support Brigade deployment and command organization in mission area.

It would be an unnatural step to squander this moment, said Lieutenant General Egon Ramms Commander MNC NE in an interview with Polska Zbrojna in spring this year. At the same time he explained that the HQ would have definitive certainty with regard to a deployment after the exercise certifying the HQ as NATO Lower Readiness Headquarters, to be held in September. In spite of appearances, the minister's declaration and the general's explanations are not contradictory. Without the autumn test certifying fulfilment of about 570 technical and organizational criteria, it is dubious that ACO and the JFC, which directly coordinates the Afghan mission, would entrust the formation with responsibility for the 8 thousand ISAF troops. It is in the framework nations' interest to see the Corps deployed in a mission. As soldiers we have been getting prepared for it and we believe that regardless of circumstances, our HQ should constitute the main part of ISAF XI headquarters- said general Ramms and added that responsibility for success of the operation also was in the hands of the defence ministries of the countries that made up MNC NE. What he meant was fulfilment of commitments made by the framework nations with regard to command support and communications equipment as well as real life support.

### Six months

According to the information which minister Szmajdziński gave the Cabinet on 23 August, Polish contingent would serve in ISAF XI for half a year, from August 2007 to February 2008 and Poland would be the leading and framework nation of the operation. This means that we have committed ourselves to set up organization of the entire shift (we will among others coordinate provision of supplies to formations in the operation theatre and settle accounts for joint use of some services as well as act as host during visits of prominent politicians) and probably we will deploy most troops and equipment for the operation. As a matter of fact, we take into account the possibility of deploying up to 1000 soldiers to Afghanistan, but it is likely that the number will be slightly larger, because the obligation to provide personnel for vacancies that have not been manned by the allies lies with the framework nation. It seems though that this mainly concerns staff positions within the multinational structure (Corps HQ), so it would be relatively few troops, as the NATO Command from Brunsum will help us man the positions with foreign soldiers during a co-organised force generation conference scheduled for January 2006.

The number of the involved troops will make the Polish personnel deployment cost alone reach 8-9 million dollars. This time the Americans will not sponsor us. The financial burden comprising equipment, transport and operation of our sub-units and multinational structures, in which we will be the leading nation, will have to be shouldered in its full extent by the Ministry of Defence (until shared invoices are settled). Let us be frank: we should realize that we might have to shell out several hundred million zloty from the Defence Ministry's budget. That is why the mission will last six months, while other headquarters usually stay in Afghanistan one-five months longer. One of the most cost-generating items will be transport of troops and equipment. We will be able to transport the troops and some of the light equipment in our Tu-154M and CASA-259M aircraft. Heavy materiel will have to be sent in chartered An-124 (250 thousand euros per flight) if time is important, or if we are economical, by sea and land through Pakistan (Szczecin is 7 thousand sea miles away from Karachi; depending on weather conditions, a fast vessel sailing at 16,5 knots can cover this distance in 17-24 days; chartering an entire containership costs 40 thousand dollars a day; freight alone is cheaper). In economical version we may use rail transport. In 2002 Germans brought their supplies to their newly established contingent in Afghanistan through the Commonwealth of Independent States. Why should we not make good use of the experiences of our main Corps partners if they are at hand? It was general Ramms who organized the rail escapade from over the river of Odder to Central Asia and it was done in more difficult conditions than present, because Russia was not party of the NATO SOFA at that time.

### Before the third phase

International Security and Assistance Forces (ISAF) in Afghanistan commenced their mission at the beginning of 2001, after collapse of the Taliban regime. On 11 August 2003 NATO assumed command of the mission. In the first years ISAF aimed at ensuring security in Kabul and its vicinity. Passing of the UN resolution on enlargement of ISAF mission on 13 October 2003 was a breakthrough. ISAF troops commenced assuming responsibility for security from Enduring Freedom troops in the relatively most peaceful northern part of the country. Initially, the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) was established in Qonduz, the capital of the Konduz province. Soon similar teams were setup in four other northern Afghan cities: Meyman, Mazar-e-Sharif, Feyzabad and Baghlan. In the first phase NATO forces assumed responsibility for 9 provinces of northern Afghanistan with the area of 185 thousand km<sup>2</sup>. In the second phase ISAF has extended its mission to the country's western provinces. In Herat, the biggest city in this part of Afghanistan, besides PRT, a Front Support Base (FSB) was established on 31 May 2005. Another PRT, led by Americans, has been created in Farah. The second phase will be completed upon establishment of two last PRTs in Chakhchran and Qal'eh-Now, the capitals of Ghor and Badghis provinces. According to the plans, in the last phase ISAF is to take control over the southeastern territory of Afghanistan, where Taliban and al Quaida members are still active. According to the concept, the security situation is to improve after the general elections to be held this month. However, what has happened so far is not optimistic. This year the Americans have suffered their biggest human losses since the beginning of the Enduring Freedom operation. ISAF consists of four components: - the command that controls the operation and cooperates with Afghan authorities and international organizations and NGOs. - the Kabul-based international brigade as the formation in charge of planning and execution of patrols and projects on civilian and military cooperation in the capital region.- the team that supports operation of Kabul airport.- PRTs operating in the northern and western part of the country in order to extend the authority of the central government in the areas and to promote development and reconstruction.

### Three in one

Currently, three simultaneous military operations are under way in Afghanistan: NATO stabilisation operation (ISAF), American- led offensive Enduring Freedom operation (fights remaining Taliban forces; Polish engineering contingent works within the structure) and anti-drug operation led by the UK (aims at elimination of so-called drug warlords who maintain their own armed forces which threaten entire provinces).

So far ISAF has been covering rather peaceful northern and western provinces. Armed conflicts with opponents of the new system and foreign military presence occur mostly in the south and east, where there are deployed 16 thousand American troops and 2 thousand coalition forces. However, in 2007 ISAF and Enduring Freedom are to be merged, and thus NATO will extend its "umbrella" over the entire 24-million people country which is twice as big as Poland and has had its infrastructure ruined in years of wars and severe climate. The countrywide mission is to take

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over some offensive tasks of Enduring Freedom. This would involve command over Uncle Sam's troops! This clearly shows what a difficult task is to be faced up by Polish troops, HQ MNC NE and a three-star general in charge (we speculated on possible candidates in Polska Zbrojna no. 22/2005).

Certainly, we are not throwing ourselves suicidally into deep water! In other words, we will swim with the stream of a river in which our predecessors have partly marked the trail. However, we will have to explore a part of it on our own and we still do not know which style we are to use (we do not know, for instance, which command support system will be used by the Corps). And if we return victorious from Afghanistan, in the opinion of Brigadier General Krzysztof Załęski, Chief Planning Centre at Operation Command, we will contribute to the number of outstanding achievements of our commanders who have been in charge of battalions, brigades and divisions in international environments. Now it is time to reach for the highest command positions that are available to us. In the future it will pay off with careers of well-prepared and modern officers both at home and abroad.

### **Candidates, step out**

Although the forces generation conference for ISAF XI will not take place until January, let us try to foresee what formations may be deployed to Afghanistan. Let us start with HQ MNC NE. For a mission its staff number should grow to at least 350-400, of which the leading nation will probably provide one-third. Final number of staff will depend on development in Afghanistan. It is certain that the personnel with regular posts at HQ will be sent to Kabul as the core, while personnel from Denmark, Germany and Poland should constitute reinforcement, according to the crisis establishment. Interested countries will fill remaining vacancies during force generation conference. Besides HQ MNC NE, Polish-led multinational Support Brigade, made up of formations from the Land Forces of Poland, Germany and presumably from Denmark, will also be deployed to Afghanistan. Our contribution to the Brigade may be the 100th signal battalion from Walcz. The formation is a part of the MNC NE Command Support Brigade, which is under construction, and will be made up of regular soldiers next year. The leading nation, as seen in Iraq, is to shoulder establishment of a field hospital and tactical air transport (helicopter squadron) as well as an aeromobile company. The two latter can be provided by the 25th Air Cavalry Brigade. Such a contingent should also comprise protection, CIMIC, intelligence, psychological operation, military police and logistical sub-units, including national support element. Most troops will be based in Kabul, as ISAF headquarters and airport are there. Some troops (logistics) will operate from the Bagram base.

### **This is just beginning**

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A mission to Afghanistan will be a state operation and not just ministry-scale operation. This is not dictated by the mission's financial cost, but by necessity to involve our diplomatic services (there is no Polish embassy in Afghanistan), ministries of interior, health, infrastructure and agriculture. Presumably, we will leave there a PRT dealing with construction of democratic governmental structures. Besides CIMIC specialists, the team should also be made up of experts from civilian services. If we cannot cope with running of PRT alone, we will have to ask for help one of the several dozen partners participating in the operation. However, we should be ready to maintain there at least a 100-person unit provided with real operation capabilities (assets for yielding assistance). Experiences of countries which have already formed their PRTs tell us that we may have to spend 12 million dollars a year for such a team.

Choice of a location for the new post may also become troublesome. We will establish it late, when better and more peaceful places will have been occupied long before. We would not be surprised if Poles were to operate in a province in the east or south, near the Pakistani border. The Taliban are more numerous there, poverty is widespread and the mountains are higher than the Tatras. One of the names such as Paktia, Paktika, Host, Kandahar or Zabul will remain in the history of the Polish Armed Forces for longer. In these circumstances it is difficult to believe that the number of Poles who serve in ISAF can be counted on the fingers of both hands.

## **On Course for Afghanistan by Artur Gołowski**