



Interview with Colonel Erik B. Bruhn, a member of HQ MNC NE Szczecin deployed to Afghanistan.

Anna Gałyga: **Where have you been posted in ISAF?**

Col. Bruhn: ISAF has established altogether with the International Community and the Afghan Government a Policy Acting Group. It is a kind of forum where President Karzai, his ministers and advisers, the International Community, and ISAF representatives meet every second week. Policy Acting Group has a Secretariat in which there are two colonels sent by ISAF and I am one of them. The main task of the Secretariat is to prepare the meetings but also to take part in some discussions as well.

- Do the meetings involve going outside the camp?

In fact, we are outside the camp every day as we have meetings downtown in Kabul, for example in different ministries or in the Palace.

- How do you assess the security level in Kabul then?

Generally speaking Kabul is a quite safe city. And do not be misled - an exploding bomb, which is very seldom in Kabul, is nothing in comparison with a number of people dying on the roads every day. But psychological effects are extremely high and the Taliban are really good at propaganda.

- And how about the contact between NATO soldiers and the local people?

The relation is fairly good because most of the people support a new direction Afghanistan is approaching and do not want the Taliban to come back. Of course, this attitude is different in those regions, especially in the south and east of the country, where the Taliban are supported.

- How do you assess the progress of the ISAF mission?

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Written by AG

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There has been made a plan for Afghanistan called the Millennium Goal describing the development of Afghanistan according to the ideas of the Afghan government and the International Community. This is a 15-year plan, which is supposed to end in 2020. Therefore, when you are deployed to Afghanistan for six months, you cannot see that much difference because the changes are very slow.

- And do you think it is possible to accomplish the plan in 2020?

First of all, the standards that Afghanistan should achieve have to be set. Looking at Afghanistan's neighbours, we can have an idea what the country may look like. We have to remember that it took Europe about 300 years to come from complete dictatorship into democracy. So if Afghanistan ends up with a society of slightly different standards from ours with a political system somewhere in between of democracy and dictatorship, it will be fine.

In order to complete this plan, three goals should be achieved. The first one is to create stability and security. But it will take years before the Afghan army and the police are built up and able to control the country on their own.

The next goal is to rebuild the country, which has been destroyed after years of fighting. You can go for example to Lashkar Gah in the Helmand province and ask what they want their city to look like. They would probably say that it would be perfect if the city looked like in 1968. The Afghans simply wish to go back into the 'future' when Afghanistan was flourishing. However, it is only possible if the Afghans themselves are involved in the process of reconstruction and take responsibility over what is being done in their country.

And finally, the third goal is to learn the Afghans governance so that they are able to administer their own country, which is also not easy.

- Talking about the MNC NE personnel, how do you perceive their presence in ISAF?

There are about 160 soldiers from the MNC NE deployed to Afghanistan and we have our own network in the new composite ISAF HQ. And it is a wonderful feeling to go along the camp and meet someone you have known from Szczecin. It also means that when you have some problems, support from the MNC NE staff makes it easier to overcome them.

However, even though we are all in a multinational headquarters a lot of things are organized within national communities. When someone is deployed to ISAF, he immediately moves to his national community, which takes care of him.

- Have the MNC NE soldiers been well prepared to the mission?

Our soldiers have been well trained to the level needed. In fact, we are one of the best prepared for the mission in the whole composite HQ. And this is all thanks to a long process of preparations and exercises, like the one we had in Stavanger in October 2006.

- Talking every day life, what surprised you most in Afghanistan?

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The most surprising thing in Kabul is, just like a Norwegian journalist Asne Seierstad has already mentioned in her book about Afghanistan – 'The bookseller of Kabul', fine dust. I think that six months spent in Kabul equals about 20 years of smoking twenty cigarettes a day... Another thing is that when you take a one-day trip by plane for example from Kabul to Mazar-e-Shariff, you should always pack your rucksack for a week. You never know whether a plane takes off because your flight may be cancelled due to engine problems, other task priority or, what happens most often, because of bad weather conditions in Afghanistan.

- Is there anything that you really miss apart from your family of course?

Personally I have the possibility to go outside the camp and meet people, but what probably the people in the camp miss most is security on such a level, which would allow them to go out and have a cup of tea in a restaurant...