

3 NATO AND AFGHANISTAN

AFGHANISTAN, ONCE A ROGUE REGIME led by the Taliban, was put on track for a new future in late 2001 following a brief war and a diplomatic conference to commence the rebuilding of the country. Discounting the large sums of development money the international community seemed willing to disburse, the effort of assisting the new government was meant to be fairly painless. Things turned out differently. In late 2011 Western forces had been in Afghanistan for a decade, and the stress and difficulties experienced by the Atlantic Alliance easily surpassed those of earlier allied experiences. This chapter provides an overview. It is designed to set up the analysis that follows and will therefore focus on NATO's involvement, how it happened, and how it divides into distinct phases. The chapter begins with a brief outline of the 2001 Bonn agreement and the Afghan government it gave birth to. It is, after all, this government that NATO is assisting. The chapter then moves on to three phases in NATO's involvement: how NATO got into Afghanistan and in the process defined a potentially very comprehensive role for itself that was unexpected but that flowed with the currents inherent in the benevolent alliance; how NATO was severely challenged once it fanned out into all of Afghanistan and yet managed to define a comprehensive response corresponding to the role it had set for itself; and how it has struggled to have this comprehensive response evolve and transition into a strategy for detachment. We begin in Bonn, Germany.

THE NEW AFGHANISTAN

The blueprint for a new Afghanistan emerged in Bonn, Germany, between November 27 and December 5, 2001, at a diplomatic conference held under

U.N. auspices. The Taliban regime, which the U.S.–led Operation Enduring Freedom had begun a war against on October 7, was coming apart. At the time of the opening of the conference, the Taliban forces had receded to their geographical center of gravity, Kandahar in southern Afghanistan, where they stood their ground until two days after the Bonn conference. With the fall of Kandahar and the Taliban defeat, the Afghan ground was seemingly cleared for the new government defined in Bonn.

Bonn was an appropriate town in which to negotiate Afghanistan's future. Western Germany's small-town capital through the Cold War, Bonn crystallized the intricate web of hostility, hope, anxiety, and suspicion that was the Cold War and that John le Carré captured in his 1968 novel, *A Small Town in Germany*.¹ Some thirty years later, Bonn became host to yet another intricate web, only this time it was Afghanistan's web of political, ethnic, and tribal intrigue. However, where John le Carré's improbable 1968 hero, Leo Harting, symbolically operated from the doldrums of the British embassy's cellar, the 2001 peace conference was lifted to the heights of the Petersberg Mountain across the Rhine and the fashionable Petersberg Hotel on top of it. The site portended a brighter future for Afghanistan, but the intricate and troubled relations that in a way had become the trademark of the town of Bonn remained.

The Bonn Agreement essentially provided a road map for rebuilding the Afghan state that should be understood literally: The focus was on state institutions, and the agreement foresaw a process through which they were to fall into place.² The key enabler in the realization of the blueprint was the type of grand assembly of community leaders known from Afghanistan's history, a *loya jirga*. According to the script agreed to in Bonn, *loya jirgas* would be the engine of the new Afghanistan.

The Bonn conference was de facto a first such *loya jirga*. The Bonn negotiations took place principally among Afghan parties and under the auspices of the U.N. special representative, Lakhdar Brahimi, an Algerian with extensive experience in the business of peace mediation and conflict resolution. Brahimi had made his first steps in this business in Lebanon, from 1989 to 1991, where he as an Arab League envoy successfully mediated an end to civil war; later in 1997 through 1999 and now as a U.N. envoy, he moved on to mediate—unsuccessfully, as it turned out—another peace in Afghanistan. Brahimi later led a U.N. review of peacekeeping operations before the terrorist attacks of September 2001, and the Afghan war once again directed his attention to Kabul—though via Bonn. At the Petersberg Hotel in Bonn exter-

nal parties such as the United States and other countries were present but not allowed into the principal chamber of negotiation. The principal negotiators were Afghans, divided into four delegations representing the principal interests in the country, save for the Taliban who were still fighting at the time of the conference.³ At this Bonn *loya jirga* the delegations agreed to establish an Interim Authority in lieu of a government and invest its leadership in Hamid Karzai, a Pashtun who had sought to rally Pashtuns against the Taliban in the midst of Operation Enduring Freedom in the fall of 2001. Annex IV of the Bonn Agreement appoints him as such and names a set of ministers to serve under him. Hamid Karzai was sworn in as interim head of state on December 22, 2001.

An “emergency” *loya jirga* (foreseen in the Bonn Agreement) in June 2002 led to establishment of a Transitional Authority, again headed by Karzai, and also of a Constitutional Committee. A third and this time “constitutional” *loya jirga* followed in December 2003 through January 2004 and resulted in the adoption of a new constitution for the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. It also resulted in a road map for presidential and parliamentary elections. These were meant to take place simultaneously, but events caused them to take place about a year apart: Presidential elections were held on October 9, 2004, with Hamid Karzai winning; and parliamentary as well as provincial elections followed on September 18, 2005.

With these events, the state institutions were established, and the Bonn process came to an end. The new Afghanistan is a centralized state in which the president has considerable power: The president appoints ministers (who must be approved by parliament, though) and presides over the government; local assemblies of the principal territorial units (provinces, of which there are thirty-four) are elected but merely consultative; and power is delegated from the president downward, which is to say the president appoints provincial governors in the spirit of “centralism.”⁴ Keeping in mind Afghanistan’s intricate webs of friendship and hostility nourished by the approximately twenty-five years of war that preceded the Bonn Agreement, the Bonn delegations really argued that Afghanistan faced a choice between a strong center and continued war—and thus they opted for a strong center.

The international community was involved from the outset in the new Afghanistan. The Bonn Agreement invites this involvement along the lines of security (Annex I), governance (Annex II), and development (Annex III). Annex I calls for an “international security force” to operate in “Kabul and its

surrounding areas” in support of the Interim Authority. “Such a force could, as appropriate, be progressively expanded to other urban centres and other areas,” the Annex continues, but the original U.N. mandate for the force, from December 20, 2001, limited the force to Kabul and the surrounding areas. Extension of the force—which in the meantime had come to be labeled the “international security assistance force” (ISAF)—thus required renewed international agreement.⁵ Annex II invited the United Nations to assist in the implementation of the Bonn Agreement, and Annex III requested the United Nations and the international community writ large to assist in the country’s development.

The international community responded in parts by organizing and deploying an ISAF force, which will be discussed shortly. It moreover organized an aid and development program. For the duration of the Bonn process, from January 2002 through December 2005, and as defined at a Tokyo donors’ conference in January 2002, the program was organized thematically in five pillars and with a lead nation assigned to each pillar: The United States took the lead in rebuilding the Afghan National Army; German the lead in rebuilding the Afghan National Police; Italy in reconstructing a judicial system; Britain in setting up a counternarcotics program; and Japan in disarming, demobilizing, and reintegrating war lords’ militias. In parallel, and beginning in March 2002, the U.N. assistance mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) coordinated the work of multiple U.N. agencies in the country. In early 2006 it was time for change because the Bonn process had come to an end and the Afghan state had been stood up. The result was a new “Afghan Compact” that was de facto an equal partnership between Afghanistan and the international community.⁶ It focused on three “critical and interdependent” pillars of security, governance, and development, and it was translated into an Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS), an interim version of which was ready in 2006 but which was finalized in 2008.⁷ Such was the theory of Afghan government and international assistance.

GETTING INVOLVED (SEPTEMBER 2001–DECEMBER 2005)

NATO became the official lead organization behind ISAF on August 11, 2003, slightly less than two years after the onset of U.S.-led operation Enduring Freedom. “A greater role for NATO simply makes sense,” is how NATO’s deputy Secretary General Alessandro Minuto Rizzo phrased it at the ISAF assumption of command ceremony in Kabul.⁸ It made sense, he argued, be-

cause NATO had already been involved in supporting ISAF and because ISAF nations had primarily also been NATO members (ISAF lead nations had to this point been Britain, Turkey, and then Germany and the Netherlands in unison).⁹ With this commonsense approach, NATO stepped out of the OEF shadows and into the Afghan spotlight, de facto acquiring a direct stake in the management of the Afghan conflict where it had previously been involved merely as background support.

NATO had invited this direct involvement in the immediate wake of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks with its unprecedented Article V declaration. The “appalling attacks perpetrated yesterday against the United States” were henceforth to be considered an attack against all allies, though only if the attack could be determined to have been directed from abroad.¹⁰ Following visits to NATO by Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage and Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, on September 20 and 26, respectively, U.S. Ambassador at Large and Department of State Coordinator for Counterterrorism Frank Taylor briefed the North Atlantic Council (NAC) on October 2 and cleared away any lingering doubts. “The facts are clear and compelling. The information presented points conclusively to an Al-Qaida role in the 11 September attacks,” concluded NATO Secretary General Robertson, and Article V was therefore conclusively activated.¹¹ Within two days, NATO was ready to define the first and concrete measures with which it would participate in the new fight against terror. Six of these measures were individual in nature, two were collective:¹²

- Enhanced intelligence sharing and cooperation;
- Assistance to allies and other states under terrorist threat as a result of this campaign;
- Increased security for U.S. and allied facilities on national territory;
- Backfill of selected assets in NATO’s area of responsibility to support operations against terrorism;
- Provision of blanket overflight clearances for U.S. and allied aircraft in operations against terrorism;
- Provision of port and airfield access to U.S. and allied forces in operations against terrorism;
- Readiness to deploy NATO’s Standing Naval Forces to the Eastern Mediterranean;
- Readiness to deploy the NATO Airborne Early Warning and Control Force System (AWACS).

Within about five days of this declaration, NATO deployed its Standing Naval Forces Mediterranean (STANAVFORMED) and also its AWACS aircraft: It was the first time that NATO had deployed assets in support of an Article V operation.

The war in Afghanistan had begun in the meantime, however, on October 7, and it was undertaken not by NATO but the broad coalition organized by the United States under the banner of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). NATO was supporting OEF but not participating in it. NATO's decision-making body, the NAC, had no say in the campaign, nor had NATO's military command. The shots were called by the White House and the Pentagon's Central Command (CENTCOM) headquartered in Florida. An OEF village of containers housing coalition partners grew up next to CENTCOM, and many partners were also NATO allies, but this was not NATO. NATO's AWACS did not head toward Afghanistan: They deployed to the United States (Operation Eagle Assist) to backfill for U.S. assets heading to Afghanistan (Operation Enduring Freedom).¹³

In early December 2001 NATO's foreign ministers meeting in the NAC could therefore only make small moves. One was to continue NATO's support for OEF: "We will continue our support to the United States for the US-led operation against these terrorists until it has reached its objectives." Another was to begin work on adapting NATO to the new world of counterterrorism and operations beyond the Euro-Atlantic area, which implied work on "capacities" and "partnerships" and an ambition to define a reform program for the November 2002 Prague summit.¹⁴ "All dressed up and nowhere to go" may have been an appropriate view of NATO at this time, but NATO was about to discover that it did have places to go; the question was whether NATO was truly ready.

If we were to identify a single point in time to illustrate NATO's growing involvement in ISAF, it would be April 16, 2003, when NATO decided to become ISAF lead by August. NATO's decision involved three measures that all related to the challenge of providing a more solid and continuous command and control structure for ISAF:¹⁵

- The deployment of a composite headquarter to Kabul;
- The appointment of local commanders by NATO's top military commander, SACEUR;
- And the exercise of strategic coordination, command, and control by SACEUR and his headquarters, SHAPE (Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe).

To these three points, emphasized by NATO's spokesman, we might add a fourth, namely political direction by the NAC, which is the political authority guiding SACEUR. The NAC thus also became a key interlocutor of the U.N. Security Council, which had mandated ISAF and would continue to do so.

ISAF at this point comprised around 4,000 troops and was confined to the city of Kabul, and it would therefore not be outrageous to downplay the significance of the April 2003 decision. "The keyword here is continuity," as NATO's spokesman emphasized, with reference to ISAF's mandate and operations. Yet the decision portended great change.

This was so first of all because NATO became the architect of operations whose design had begun outside the Alliance. ISAF was not defined by NATO, nor did it fully control its implementation by virtue of the continuous operational involvement of non-NATO nations in ISAF, the political involvement of the mandating body, the UNSC, and the continuous political leadership granted to the Afghan government that ISAF was mandated to "assist." Diego Ruiz Palmer of NATO's International Staff saw in this a significant new way to conceive of NATO's relationship to the wider international community: "as an architect in the planning, organisation, generation and sustainment of complex multinational peace-support operations, combining forces from NATO, Partner and other non-NATO nations."¹⁶ The decision to take on this role as "architect" of complex peace-support operations dated back to reactions to the terrorist attacks of 2001 and more specifically to the desire to maintain NATO as a relevant security organization in spite of its sidelining by the U.S.-led OEF in Afghanistan. NATO laid the groundwork for its architect role in the course of 2002 first in October when it agreed to assist ISAF and then when it agreed at the Prague summit on November 21 to its own "transformation."¹⁷ ISAF assistance followed a German-Dutch request for assistance in setting up their ISAF lead, which resulted in NATO's principled decision to help ISAF nations generate forces, share intelligence, and coordinate airlift. In reality, therefore, there had only been two ISAF rotations without NATO assistance (Britain and Turkey, December 2001 through January 2003), and from ISAF assistance to ISAF lead there was only a comparatively small step.

This leads us to the second major change portended by the April 2003 decision: that of NATO's involvement in Afghanistan's nationwide struggle to rescue the political regime that had been erected by the 2001 Bonn agreement and subsequently challenged by a growing insurgency. In the spring of 2003 it may have been hard to predict the scale and severity of the insurgency

that would erupt in subsequent years, but it was not hard to predict that ISAF would expand beyond Kabul. The Bonn agreement foresaw this possibility, as we have seen. Moreover, NATO had not done its own mission analysis between the April decision and the August takeover. It had simply taken over the old ISAF mission and put NATO labels on it. It had been convenient to do so because time had been short, decision makers feared to an extent the kind of demands a new mission analysis might come up with, and NATO's operational command (Joint Forces Command in Brunssum, or JFCBS) had never been put to a real test.¹⁸ It was clear that NATO would have to do its own mission analysis at some point, therefore, and more than likely that this requirement would merge into the debate on ISAF expansion.

Around one month after taking the ISAF lead, on September 18, 2003, the NAC tasked NATO's military authorities to assess options for ISAF expansion beyond Kabul and required their receipt within eight days. The buck therefore soon came back to the NAC, which needed to decide on the big issues: Who would actually do the hard work of expansion, and according to what game plan? For a brief moment it seemed that NATO would get bogged down in this issue. The problem was that NATO had taken the ISAF lead at a time when ISAF by its U.N. mandate was limited to Kabul: NATO's operational plan (OPLAN)—SACEUR's plan of August 11, 2003 (OPLAN 10149)—was therefore a Kabul-only plan. Changing this plan could be done in one of two ways, either ad hoc in the shape of revised OPLANs or more thoroughly by devising first a type of strategic concept for the entire operation, which would have to come out of the NAC. In NATO such strategic concepts are known as "concepts of operations" or CONOPS.

When Germany on October 6 announced its readiness to take over the American Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Kunduz in northern Afghanistan it provided an answer to the "who, where, and when" question of ISAF expansion but not to the question of "how" NATO should plan for it. The end result reached in mid-October was a split decision: NATO agreed to revise its OPLAN to allow for the German expansion of ISAF and simultaneously begin work on new a CONOPS for the entire mission. The ISAF expansion train could thus start running. NATO asked the United Nations to amend ISAF's mandate accordingly, which it did one week later on October 13, 2003, with Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1510. NATO de facto assumed control of the German PRT on December 31, 2003. The North Atlantic Council meanwhile, in mid-December, received a drafted CONOPS from NATO

military authorities, and it approved it early in January 2004. With the Kunduz PRT as well as its CONOPS in place, NATO could turn in earnest to the task laid out in UNSCR 1510: to plan its support to Afghanistan's government "in the maintenance of security in areas of Afghanistan outside of Kabul and its environs."¹⁹

The German force deployed north of Kabul was small, around 250 troops, but it was bigger than the previous American Kunduz contingent and moreover a first of several expansive steps. The provision of political guidance—a CONOPS—was difficult, as the December 2003 NAC conclusions illustrate. It was clear that NATO would work primarily with PRTs but in a "progressive" deployment that on the one hand would be "limited in size and duration" but whose "scope" on the other hand would have to be addressed continuously.²⁰ The virtue of the PRTs was their character as forward-operating bases housing both military troops and civilians and therefore offering an integrated package of security, development, and reconstruction for a given province. The basic idea was to spread a network of PRTs across Afghanistan with the help of lead nations. The CONOPS of early 2004 thus had PRTs as its centerpiece and foresaw a counterclockwise PRT-led expansion that began in the north and proceeded to the west before encountering the south and east (Table 3.1).

Two comments should be attached to Table 3.1. First, the table may convey the impression that expansion happened smoothly and according to plan. It did not. It was a slow and tortuous process marked by political debate and division that illustrated how difficult the realization of the "architect" ambition could be. NATO decided in December 2003 that it wanted to expand ISAF but only stepped up to the plate six months later in Istanbul. The decision to move west was made in February 2005 when planning for a move south and east also began, but it was only in December 2005 that NATO approved the revised operational plan for these two latter moves. In practice, ISAF expansion involved a difficult debate on burden sharing, alliance commitment, and adaptation to a new kind of war for which the Alliance was unprepared.

Second, ISAF is more than just a headquarters in Kabul and then PRTs; it has a significant military infrastructure to support the PRTs—the so-called leading edge. This infrastructure consists notably of (brigade) task forces assigned to support PRTs in the local area and since 2006 of (divisional) regional command headquarters to run regional efforts. Outside of Kabul there were originally four regional headquarters located in Mazar-e-Sharif (RC/N), Herat (RC/W), Kandahar (RC/S), and Bagram (RC/E); these multiplied into

Table 3.1. ISAF's counterclockwise expansion.

<i>Region</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>PRTs</i>	<i>Location and framework nation</i>
North (ISAF Regional Command North, RC/N)	First PRT decided in December 2003; an additional four in June 2004 at Istanbul summit	5	Kunduz (Germany), Kunduz province Mazar-e-Sharif (Sweden), Balkh province Feyzabad (Germany), Badakhshan province Pol-e-Khomri (Hungary), Baghlan province Meymaneh (Norway), Faryab province
West (RC/W)	Decision in February 2005; PRTs set up in May–September	4	Herat (Italy), Herat province Farah (United States), Farah province Qala-e-Naw (Spain), Badghis province Chaghcharan (Lithuania), Ghowr province
South (RC/S)	Decision in December 2005; ISAF command July 2006	4	Kandahar (Canada), Kandahar province Lashkar-Gah (United Kingdom), Helmand province Tarin Kowt (The Netherlands), Uruzgan province Qalat (United States), Zabul province
East (RC/E)	Decision in December 2005; ISAF command October 2006	13	Bamyan (New Zealand), Bamyan province Bagram (United States), Parwan province Nurestan (United States), Nurestan province Panjshir (United States), Panjshir province Gardez (United States), Paktika province Ghazni (United States), Ghazni province Khowst (United States), Khowst province Sharan (United States), Paktika province Jalalabad (United States), Nangarhar province Asadabad (United States), Kunar province Mihtarlam (United States), Laghman province Wardak (Turkey), Wardak province Logar (Czech Republic), Logar province

SOURCE: Retrieved in January 2010 from www.nato.int/isaf/topics/prt/index.html. This table provides an overview of the original ISAF PRT and regional command structure, which has since been revised.

five when in the summer of 2010 RC/S divided into two new commands (with a reduced RC/S still headquartered in Kandahar and a new southwestern command, RC/SW, based in neighboring Helmand and headquartered northwest of the capital of Laskar Gah in Camp Leatherneck, lying adjacent to British Camp Bastion).

Each regional command involves a number of task forces to support the PRT and conduct operations, and each task force has its own elaborate infrastructure of bases and support elements. These structures continually evolve: They have been built up and are now being drawn down. Consider the regional command south, RC/S:

- The original RC/S was headquartered at the airfield outside Kandahar and covered six provinces but with only four PRTs. The United States ran one PRT (in Zabul province), but RC/S command rotated among the three NATO allies who had delivered the other three PRTs: Britain, Canada, and the Netherlands (Helmand, Kandahar, and Oruzgan, respectively). Each PRT had a task force assigned to it, and each task force was multinational. U.S.-led Task Force Stryker comprised notably Romania; British-led Task Force Helmand, Denmark and Estonia; Dutch-led Task Force Oruzgan, Australia; and Canadian-led Task Force Kandahar, a number of U.S. battalions.²¹ Each of these came under RC/S command but had its proper force headquarters and base infrastructure.
- The British-led Helmand Task Force, for instance, was finally headquartered in Helmand's capital of Lashkar Gah following initial deployments to Kandahar air base and then Camp Bastion. The British-led PRT that the task force supported was also located in Lashkar Gah, with Camp Bastion serving as a logistical hub for all British operations. The prize of Helmand has been the green zone, the cultivated land stretching north of Gereskh, the other main urban center in Helmand, and along the Helmand River. To control it or to stem the insurgency in favor of the PRT activities, the task force relied on a Main Operating Base (MOB), Camp Price, right outside of Gereskh, and a number of Forward Operating Bases (FOBs) such as Sandford, Keenan, Armadillo (later Budwan), and Musa Qala inside the green zone.
- In 2010 RC/S was split into two (RC/S and RC/SW) given the need for ISAF to align with Afghan force structures in light of the new emphasis on transitioning to Afghan lead; the decisions of Canada and the Netherlands to draw down their contributions; and the U.S. decision to surge in Afghanistan, which has notably brought an influx of U.S. troops to the old RC/S.

- RC/S continued to be headquartered in Kandahar but with responsibility for four instead of six provinces (Kandahar, Oruzgan, Zabul, and Dai Kundi) under British lead. The British-led Helmand Task Force has remained in Helmand, however, and has now come under U.S. command in RC/SW, based at Camp Leatherneck next to Camp Bastion. The U.S. Task Force Leatherneck operates in Helmand's north and south, leaving central Helmand to the British-led task force, and has pushed from Helmand into neighboring Nimroz where ISAF previously had no presence. In northern Helmand a British Battle Group along with the Musa Qala FOB has come under Task Force Leatherneck, but British and American forces tend to operate in parallel and under overall U.S. regional command.

One could probably regress indefinitely into the details of ISAF command but, the basic points are that ISAF covered most provinces; that provinces were engaged via PRTs; that PRTs were supported by task forces gathered in regional commands; and that the task forces varied significantly in size and composition, with the heavy and large forces engaged in RC/S and RC/E. Finally, it was all run from ISAF (corps) headquarters in Kabul, where the central regional command or RC/C (divisional) headquarters also was. This was the ISAF footprint—and in early 2012 it still was, though the structure will evolve significantly as transition progresses.

It would be appropriate to define December 2005 as the end point of NATO's entry phase. NATO had taken the ISAF lead in Kabul and extended it to the north and the west and in December 2005 finalized its revised Operational Plan for moving south and east. NATO knew that conditions would be more difficult in these other two regions, but it remained within the planning framework of security assistance. "Provincial Reconstruction Teams are at the leading edge of NATO's effort, supported by military forces capable of addressing security threats where ISAF operates, and reinforced by flexible, robust reserve forces, whenever the situation on the ground so requires," is how NATO chose to describe its approach.²² The need for "robust" forces would soon become apparent.

STUNNED BUT NOT SHATTERED (JANUARY 2006–APRIL 2008)

In going into Afghanistan's south and east, NATO exposed itself to the full thrust of the insurgency it is still seeking to come to terms with. NATO officials and decision makers foresaw that things could get heated but not the

extent of it. By late 2006 the insurgency had erupted, and NATO looked stunned and shaken through 2007. Yet by April 2008 it managed to put together a response—a comprehensive strategy—that at least represented the Alliance’s ability to recover and articulate a response to a situation that could have proven mortal for the Alliance.

The expansion to the south and east was gradual and involved in parts the deployment of new troops from Europe and Canada, largely to the southern command RC/S, and the inclusion of American OEF troops under the ISAF umbrella, largely in the eastern command RC/E run from the air base Bagram north of Kabul. This expansion to the south and east formally took place in July and October of 2006, which is to say that this is when ISAF’s command began. As is practice, though, NATO forces began moving in quite soon after the approval of the revised operational plan in December 2005. In an anticipatory move, Canadian personnel had already deployed to Kandahar prior to this date, though the bulk of Canadian forces—from Kabul as well as Canada—moved in only during the spring of 2006. Britain deployed to the south in parallel, with British Special Forces (Royal Marines Commandos) moving to Helmand in mid-February to enable the buildup and with the British 16 Air Assault Brigade taking over the security of Helmand from American forces by May. The 16 Air Assault Brigade then became the nucleus of Task Force Helmand. By August, and thus once ISAF’s command was in place, Dutch forces moved in to Oruzgan, north of Kandahar, to form Task Force Oruzgan. In short, the transition began in mid-2005, a full year before ISAF’s formal command.

Table 3.2 illustrates the dramatic rise in allied casualties and how big an impact RC/S and RC/E had. OEF continued, but it is fair to view 2005 through 2006 as the decisive turning point in the OEF-ISAF balance: Beginning in 2006, the level of casualties was mainly an ISAF concern. OEF continued to have casualties that thus fell outside ISAF, and this distinction is not made in Table 3.2. With this caveat in mind, Table 3.2 illustrates the trend in violence and the stress to which NATO was submitted.

Table 3.2 also illustrates that the insurgency slowly began in 2002–2003 and that the U.S.–led OEF forces were submitted to the brunt of it because they dominated the eastern region up to 2006. ISAF forces were submitted to violence in 2005, particularly in RC/West where they suffered twenty-one fatalities. Still, the ISAF total for 2005 and 2006 contrast significantly: thirty in 2005 and 154 in 2006. From this point on, the upward trend continued,

Table 3.2. Allied casualties by year and region.

<i>Region</i>	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	<i>Total</i>
North	1	0	0	0	5	1	8	5	12	32
West	0	0	0	0	21	1	8	20	31	81
South	3	9	6	13	32	85	107	144	175	574
East	0	5	26	26	60	57	62	85	120	441
Central	0	15	8	10	4	10	13	19	21	100
Total	4	29	40	49	122	154	198	273	359	1228

SOURCE: Compiled from data available at iCasualties, <http://icasualties.org/OEF/ByProvince.aspx>. Figures boldfaced in this table indicate ISAF command of the regions (North, West, South, and East). The Central region is Kabul, ISAF's original area of operation, which prior to 2006 was not a regional command but referred to as Multinational Brigade Kabul. The total figure in this table deviates slightly from the total figure provided by iCasualties, which is due to the omission here of fatalities whose location could not be attributed.

and it grew particularly worrisome in RC/S, which in some respect was the Alliance's main new challenge, with the United States continuing its efforts in RC/E while mostly changing hats from OEF to ISAF.

NATO's method for dealing with such an operation consists in part of Concepts of Operations (CONOPS) and Operational Plans (OPLAN). The CONOPS concern the political framework; the OPLAN the military campaign. There are many OPLANs for any given mission—moving from the strategic OPLAN of the SHAPE headquarters to the operational OPLAN (in Afghanistan's case written by the Joint Forces Command Brunssum, JFCBS) and then to the ISAF commander's plan made in Kabul, which again trickles down into operational plans for ISAF regional commands and individual military units. NATO can adjust these as the campaign evolves, and this will happen within a broader and phased view of the campaign that begins with assessment and preparation, followed by engagement and stabilization, and concluding with transition and withdrawal or redeployment (see Table 3.3).

NATO's Afghan difficulties have appeared mainly in the phase of stabilization, which has necessitated a clear conception of what "stabilization" is in the Afghan context and how NATO might achieve it. The challenge was on the agenda at the NATO summit in Riga, Latvia, in late November 2006, at which point NATO had completed its geographic expansion and now needed to confront the reality of the campaign. The response was timid, however, as NATO stuck to the Bonn provision that all ISAF was there to do was to support the Afghan authorities.²³

Table 3.3. ISAF phases.

<i>Phase</i>	<i>Focus</i>	<i>Timing*</i>
1	Assessment and preparation	Initiated in September and completed by December 2003
2	Geographical expansion	Initiated in December 2003 and completed by October 2006
3	Stabilization	Ongoing
4	Transition to Afghan lead	In preparation since October 2009,** with first transfer of security leadership taking place in early 2011 and with full transfer of nationwide Afghan leadership completed by mid-2013
5	Redeployment	Completed by end of 2014

SOURCE: Compiled by author.

* There are overlaps between the phases, for instance between expansion and stabilization where stabilization began before expansion was completed, just as transition will take place in parallel to stabilization.

** NATO approved a Strategic Concept for this phase in October 2009.

The timidity of the Riga declaration turned out to be real and a sign of strategic and political hesitation on the Afghan issue. The summit was dominated by another issue that deflected attention—the issue of missile defense—which in and of itself is a noteworthy point: At a moment when its soldiers were severely stretched at the foot of the Hindu Kush, NATO became engulfed in a debate on Europe’s nuclear architecture that recalled the days of the Cold War. To the extent that the allies did address Afghanistan, and they did, they grappled with two issues and provided no real solutions. One was how to pull together a greater civil–military effort to provide sustainable solutions to Afghanistan’s problems; another was the question of burden sharing because, as always, burdens were not distributed evenly in the Alliance.

The elasticity and complexity of civil–military cooperation and of simultaneously providing for security, development, and governance help explain the timidity of NATO but also served as a convenient foil for inaction. NATO noted that Afghanistan now had its own national development plan that originated with the conclusion of the Bonn process and the renewed contract between Afghanistan and the international community—the Afghan Compact and the ANDS. NATO was thus guided by the principle of “local ownership,” which put the onus on the Afghan government. If this government experienced problems of capacity or skill, it was also up to other organizations to

step in and help it out: “NATO will play its full role, but cannot assume the entire burden.”²⁴ As it turned out, the Afghan government lacked both capacity and skill, and thus emerged the Afghan Gordian knot of security, development, and governance.

NATO was at this point failing to comprehend, much less to address, the full implications of the Taliban insurgency. NATO, the key agent of security provision, needed to step in and devise a strategy that addressed the nature of the insurgency and devised ways and means for dealing with it. True, NATO was in a supporting role and not responsible for development and governance, but security was critical across the board, and NATO faced a determined and expanding adversary. This required a strategic approach that indicated in which ways security, development, and governance could be made to evolve simultaneously, and it required political leadership vis-à-vis other parties involved, from the insurgents to the Afghan government and U.N. agencies. The insurgency had very quickly in 2006 relegated “the Compact to the history books,” as Ahmed Rashid writes,²⁵ and the question for NATO was what it could put in its place and hope to achieve.

General James Jones knew well the predicament of NATO because as SACEUR between January 2003 and December 2006, interacting with NATO political authorities and directing the military strategic work of the Alliance, he oversaw NATO’s descent into the desolation of Afghan insurgent warfare. Jones, who would later become President Obama’s assistant for National Security Affairs, issued a dire warning in early 2008: “Make no mistake, the international community is not winning in Afghanistan.” This warning was issued as part of a larger offensive in which think tanks and prominent experts highlighted NATO and the wider international community’s predicament and offered advice for improvement.²⁶ The common thread running through these reports and assessments was the observation that the international community lacked a strategy and that any strategy needed to be comprehensive and to address all three lines of operations—security, development, and governance. The advice dovetailed with NATO thinking on the issue, which goes back to the civil–military debate of the Riga summit and even further back, as we shall see, but now the call for moving beyond thinking to action was gaining steam. Remarkably, action followed. The NATO heads of state and government who met in Bucharest in early April 2008 agreed to a blueprint for comprehensive action that in fact would become NATO’s recipe for relief.

NATO's Bucharest summit was a comprehensive summit resulting in a comprehensive strategy for Afghanistan. It was a comprehensive summit because NATO had invited the full ISAF family, including ISAF partners such as the United Nations, the World Bank, the World Food Program, and the High Representative for External Relations of the EU Council, as well as the president of the European Commission and other organizations and countries. And the outcome was comprehensive because NATO took the lead in writing an ISAF Strategic Vision that was issued at the summit and in parallel wrote its own and confidential plan for realizing this vision, the Comprehensive Strategic Political-Military Plan (CSPMP), which remains in place to this day. The summit communiqué dealt briefly with Afghanistan and mostly referred to the parallel Strategic Vision, but it did take note of the ISAF mission as NATO's "top priority" and highlighted the need for long-term and comprehensive engagement.²⁷ The Strategic Vision set out four themes that crystallized the lessons learned from the past six to seven years of conflict:²⁸

- The commitment to Afghan must be long term and include the provision of adequate troop levels and flexible and unconstrained command options.
- Afghan leadership must be encouraged and implemented, and ISAF should therefore increasingly focus on the training and mentoring of Afghan national security forces.
- Coordination within the international community must be enhanced, which concerns notably NATO and U.N. agencies. PRTs are maintained as a key enabler of reconstruction and development.
- The regional dimension must be addressed more systemically, which notably means Pakistan and the Afghanistan–Pakistan border area. No other country is mentioned by name in the Vision.

The underlying and more substantial CSPMP fleshed out these themes and defined them as a range of "desirable outcomes" (seventeen in all). It did not matter if the outcome related to security, development, or governance—NATO dealt with it, comprehensively. In matters of security NATO foresaw its own lead, while in matters of development and governance it wanted merely to act in support of other organizations. It was thus comprehensive and cooperative.

At this point NATO had come some way toward defining its leadership role, therefore. It had continued the emphasis on the simultaneous development along all three lines of operation and now tied them together in a

comprehensive strategy. It had thus not substituted itself for the Afghan government or the United Nations, but it had taken the lead in devising the strategy, which was in fact anchored inside NATO where the short and generic vision was published as ISAF's. It prodded the ensemble of the extended ISAF family to do more—the Karzai government in Kabul, the United Nations, and individual partners in addition to its own allies—as it developed this strategic approach.

This we knew by April 2008, then: NATO had managed to respond to the insurgency that exploded in its hands once it completed its counterclockwise expansion to all of Afghanistan; the response consisted of a comprehensive strategy that placed NATO within a network of security, governance, and development actors; and NATO had taken the lead, using its ISAF hat, in organizing the comprehensive strategy.

COPING AND PREPARING FOR TRANSITION (MAY 2008–MARCH 2012)

NATO now had a blueprint for addressing how it would contribute to the successful implementation of security, development, and governance. The risks remained obvious: Coordination and implementation needed to happen; the Taliban remained an impressive adversary; and NATO still needed to devise a security strategy to simultaneously counter the Taliban and underpin the comprehensive strategy. If progress could be made, however, NATO could begin to move its mission from phase 3 (stabilization) to phase 4 (transition) and let the Afghan government take control to a much greater extent. The CSPMP is classified, but sources reveal that it contains seventeen desired outcomes (revised upward from an original fifteen outcomes) that run across the three lines of operations (security, development, and governance), and for each desired outcome the CSPMP specifies a number of intermediate goals and notably also NATO's role. The CSPMP is a framework document because NATO is supposed to prioritize issues within it that will then drive the overall process. It is in addition evolutionary because this prioritization will change with time. The CSPMP is regularly reviewed in the so-called Policy Coordination Group under NATO's Division of Operations and fully updated once a year, with the first update taking place in late 2008 and another following in late 2009. Three issues stand out.

One is the question of regional diplomacy and the role of Afghanistan's neighbors, notably Pakistan, in stabilizing or destabilizing Afghanistan's gov-

ernment. Pakistan generally climbed up on the Western agenda in 2008, and we saw how regional diplomacy and Pakistan were emphasized in the Bucharest Strategic Vision. It is also through 2008 that U.S. drone attacks in the Pakistan border area picked up, though the increase was to become much more pronounced from 2009 on, and it was in July 2008 that President Bush secretly approved of new and permissive rules for Special Forces ground assaults inside Pakistan.²⁹ NATO's role in this regional affair is limited because ISAF is strictly confined to the Afghan territory, but NATO still seeks to promote greater use of the ISAF–Afghan–Pakistan Tripartite Commission, including a Joint Intelligence Operations Center, that has lingered on to address border cooperation, just as NATO has sought to establish the presence of a Pakistani military representation in Kabul and has promoted a range of political and military contacts, ranging from visits to Pakistan by NATO's secretary general and to NATO by Pakistan's president, to visits by Pakistani military officers to NATO's school in Oberammergau, Germany, in what NATO hopes will be Pakistan's inclusion in its Partnership Cooperation Menu (PCM).

Another issue has been the presidential elections in Afghanistan scheduled for August 2009. Being focused on security, NATO prepared for the elections with enhanced security measures, including additional force contributions announced at the sixtieth anniversary summit in Strasbourg-Kehl in April 2009. NATO managed to muster an additional 5,000 troops for the elections, although this was counting some troops already in Afghanistan whose deployment was prolonged. Around 3,000 of the new troops were scheduled to go home following the elections, but at this point the Obama strategy review was reaching its conclusion and pushed the allies to revise plans and contribute more forces.³⁰

A third and final key CSPMP issue was the training of Afghan national security forces—armed forces as well as police—that was a *sine qua non* of moving to stage 4 and Afghan leadership. Hitherto most training had fallen under the U.S. lead in the framework of its coalition operation (OEF), where its Combined Security Transitions Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A) ran the training of the armed forces as well as most police forces (the EU had from the summer of 2007 taken over the police academy training in a European Union Police, or EUPOL, mission). However, the OEF label did not square with an enhanced NATO effort in this area, and the debate therefore turned on whether the training effort could be moved under NATO's command. This was another issue solved at the Strasbourg-Kehl summit, which saw

agreement to the establishment of a NATO Training Mission–Afghanistan (NTM-A).³¹ The NTM-A took over from CSTC-A on November 21, 2009. These decisions—concerning Pakistan, Afghan elections, and the training mission—were outcomes of the evolving CSPMP, which is not to say that the initiatives would not have happened in its absence but that the CSPMP facilitated strategic thinking and initiatives in distinct but related domains.

NATO's work happened in parallel to U.S. strategy, which, like NATO's, continued to evolve. The year 2008 was the final stretch of the Bush presidency, and President Bush had put in motion a number of strategy reviews that came to a conclusion in December 2008 and fed into the reviews that had begun on the election (in November 2008) of President Barack Obama. President Obama announced a first set of reforms, as it turned out, in March 2009, a few days prior to NATO's sixtieth anniversary summit. Unsurprisingly, the allies endorsed the American strategy that consisted of a triple surge in terms of troops (21,000 troops), civilian personnel, and regional diplomatic effort. President Obama decided on a second strategic review in the fall of 2009, which this time resulted in an additional troop surge of 30,000 U.S. soldiers, greater efforts to protect major population centers (a more stringent population-centric counterinsurgency strategy), as well as greater efforts to eliminate the hard core of insurgent and terrorist leaders (a renewed counterterrorist strategy) and a determination to draw down troop levels beginning in the summer of 2011. President Obama outlined the results of this second review on December 1, 2009; NATO and its ISAF partners welcomed it three days later following the regular NAC meeting and also added more forces to the mission.³² The NATO increase did not match the American increase in terms of numbers—NATO in December 2009 committed an additional 7,000 troops, although only around 5,500 of these were new troops; the other 1,500 were already in Afghanistan but hitherto temporarily—but it did signal NATO's commitment to the new strategy.³³

NATO's CSPMP was broad and flexible enough to dovetail with the Obama administration's refinements of U.S. strategy, and the summit and regular NAC declarations of support did therefore not require strategic reassessments on behalf of NATO. NATO needed to provide troops and funds, but this was not new. The cause for strategic concern came from Afghanistan, where the presidential elections of August 2009 turned into a farce of fraud and incompetence. The incumbent Hamid Karzai won the elections but with such a degree of taint that the result was canceled by the electoral commission

and a runoff prepared between Karzai and his principal opponent, Abdullah Abdullah. When the latter withdrew his candidacy on November 1, and the electoral commission then canceled the runoff elections, the incumbent Karzai was able to continue but as a besmirched and weakened president. Parliament, sensing an opportunity to leave its mark within Afghanistan's centralized political system, in two turns refused to approve of Hamid Karzai's list of ministerial appointees.

ISAF's commander (COMISAF) had in some ways foreseen this situation insofar as he had placed a corrupt government on par with the insurgency in his August 2009 assessment of the security situation. General Stanley McChrystal, who took over command from General McKiernan as COMISAF in June 2009, wrote over the summer a "Commander's Initial Assessment" that was finalized in August and, while confidential, leaked and appeared in the *Washington Post*. COMISAF wrote that ISAF faced two threats and that a failure to address both of them would lead to mission failure:³⁴

- "The first threat is the existence of organized and determined insurgent groups working to expel international forces, separate the Afghan people from GIROA [the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan], and gain control of the population.
- The second threat, of a very different kind, is the crisis of popular confidence that springs from the weakness of GIROA institutions, the unpunished abuse of power by corrupt officials and power-brokers, a widespread sense of political disenfranchisement, and a longstanding lack of economic opportunity."

COMISAF General McChrystal in consequence wanted to pursue a stringent policy of counterinsurgency (COIN) that would protect the population from both insurgents and corrupt government officials, a demanding task requiring considerable troop numbers, development skills, and patience. It was the formulation of force requests subsequent to the Commander's Initial Assessment that set off Obama's second review process in the fall of 2009, even though the assessment flowed from the principles inherent in Obama's first review of March 2009. McChrystal wore two hats: He was the commander of U.S. forces in Afghanistan and thus part of the U.S. chain of command, and he was the ISAF commander that forms part of NATO's chain of command. His political masters were the U.S. government and NATO as a whole.

This put NATO in a delicate position through 2009, although the dual command structure goes back further than that and has been a consistent problem for the allies. We shall delve more into this issue later, but 2009 was different because NATO now had a comprehensive “strategy”—the CSPMP—that the local commander could refer to, and he did. This was a first such connection because prior commanders simply did not have a NATO strategy to refer to: They had political guidance and concepts for the operation but nothing resembling a theater strategy. General McChrystal astutely made reference to the CSPMP as well as Obama’s review in the opening paragraph of his document. It begins as follows: “The stakes in Afghanistan are high. NATO’s Comprehensive Strategic Political-Military Plan and President Obama’s strategy to disrupt, dismantle, and eventually defeat Al Qaeda and prevent their return to Afghanistan have laid out a clear path of what we must do.”

This “clear path” is then what he set out to, if not define, then operationalize in the guise of a COIN campaign plan. It was astute, of course, because he argued that the military strategy followed logically from the political strategies. Political objections to his preferred course of action would thus be both difficult to raise and controversial. President Obama’s second review in the fall of 2009 was certainly controversial, and we shall have more to say about this process later. NATO did not enter into such controversy. In fact, NATO approved of McChrystal’s assessment before the U.S. government did, albeit it happened at the level of defense ministers—at an informal meeting in Bratislava, Slovakia, on October 23, 2009. U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates understandably adopted a low profile at the meeting—“I am here mainly in listening mode,” he said—but NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen noted “broad support from all ministers of this overall counterinsurgency approach.”³⁵

This was a remarkable turn of events because NATO had hitherto been split on the nature of the mission and had resisted COIN terminology. Now, at Bratislava, the Alliance endorsed COMISAF’s COIN strategy and, as a logical follow-on, tasked NATO military authorities to work out a NATO COIN doctrine because NATO, in Afghanistan for five years, simply did not have one. Moreover, the Alliance endorsed a strategic concept for moving to Phase 4 planning (see Table 3.3, p. 55). With the military strategy shaping up, NATO needed then to work at the political strategy—or on specific initiatives that would move the political process in Afghanistan forward within the CSPMP framework. The allies have sought to do so along three tracks.

The first has been to work out a plan for the transfer of lead to Afghan authorities and forces. The transfer will happen gradually and province by province, based on certain conditions that must be in place first—which is to say a competent local police force, the presence of durable government service, and signs of reconciliation with Taliban. At a large international conference held in Kabul July 20–21, 2010—the first such conference to be held inside Afghanistan—President Karzai outlined his vision that this transfer should be completed in full by the year 2014. It was the culmination of a process that began in the fall of 2009 and in preparation of a London conference on January 28, 2010, which was focused on “phase 4”—transition, that is.³⁶ NATO endorsed the Kabul transition road map at an informal foreign ministers’ meeting in Estonia on April 22–23, 2010, and put it in motion at their Lisbon summit on November 16, 2010.³⁷ President Obama renewed his commitment to the surge in a review of December 2010 but also stuck to the logic of drawing it down sooner rather than later, and in June 2011 he thus announced that 10,000 U.S. troops would come home by December 2011 and that the remaining surge force of 23,000 would come home by September 2012.³⁸ In the meantime, on March 11, 2011, a first tranche of Afghan areas was set to transition to Afghan security leadership, with a second tranche announced on November 27, 2011. With these two tranches, approximately half the Afghan population moved under Afghan security leadership. An Istanbul summit on November 2, 2011, was engineered by Turkey in an effort to bring notably both Pakistan and India on board for regional stability, and the mere fact that these countries could agree to meet was seen as promising. This summit was followed in early December 2011 by a grand rerun of the 2001 Bonn summit, though the “Bonn 2.0” label was not endearing to diplomats who struggled to make a new contribution to the peace effort. They made little progress on the issue of Afghan reconciliation but some headway on defining the long-term, post-2014 international engagement in Afghanistan. Political reactions to the casualties of war made the work of diplomats all the harder. Pakistan refused to go to “Bonn 2.0” because of a border incident in late November 2011 in which ISAF forces by mistake killed twenty-six Pakistani troops; and President Karzai, reacting to US troops’ accidental burning of several copies of the Koran in February 2012 and also a massacre on civilians inflicted by a disturbed U.S. sergeant in March 2012, has asked ISAF not only to end night raids by special forces—a long-standing demand of his—but to pull back troops to major bases by 2013 in what would significantly advance security transition to Afghan leadership.³⁹

The one sure thing about these diplomatic ups and downs is their testimony to the reality of an end game with high stakes. The international community and NATO seek to frame their efforts to put phase 4 on track with continuing international summits: in 2010 in London, Tallinn, Kabul, Lisbon, and Washington, in 2011 in Kabul, Washington, Istanbul, and Bonn, in 2012 in Chicago, and more are to come. In this fight for transition, the underlying tension remains: The combined desire to do things right (condition-based) and to see the end of the engagement (calendar-based).

The other and closely related track is reconciliation and reintegration, by which is meant an Afghan government–insurgent dialogue to engineer peace. The idea is to incite the insurgency’s political core to negotiate with the Kabul regime (reconciliation) and to lure low-rank insurgents—the accidental guerrillas—away from the fight with prospects of improved living conditions (reintegration). The Afghan lead has been visible in this respect, notably with the Karzai-led Consultative Peace *Jirga* of June 2–4, 2010, which took place in Kabul and gathered 1,600 Afghan delegates. NATO’s official policy is to insist that all this must be Afghan-led and done in respect of the constitution that came out of the Bonn process, but NATO then distinguishes between reintegration, which it will support, and reconciliation, to which it is ready to contribute. Put differently, NATO as a whole is more engaged in drawing in the accidental guerrilla than in making deals with the hard core of the insurgency.⁴⁰ Individual allies contribute to the reconciliation effort, but it is all very discrete and also very difficult, as we can gather from the murder of Burhanuddin Rabbani, president of the Peace Council, on September 20, 2011, and the subtle change in the December 2011 Bonn conference’s agenda from reconciliation to long-term international strategy.⁴¹ Shortly into 2012, the Taliban announced the opening of a political office in Qatar, which raised hopes for a negotiated settlement, but both the Afghan and Pakistan governments jostle to gain influence on what is mostly a U.S.–Taliban dialogue. The widespread perception is that the Taliban must struggle to cohere on the issue of whether to talk and on what terms, but so, for sure, must the international community.

Finally, the allies have with limited success sought various ways to prop up the Karzai regime and President Karzai himself following the disastrous presidential elections of the fall of 2009. In the spring of 2010, relations were at a low as President Obama revoked an invitation for a Karzai state visit to Washington; as President Karzai responded by inviting the *bête noire* of the

West, Iran's president Ahmadinejad, to Kabul for an official visit; and as President Obama then jetted into Kabul for a quick nighttime rendezvous with President Karzai to remind him of his duties to clean up government, with President Karzai subsequently accusing the West of instigating the election fraud. Ahmed Rashid, who has good access to President Karzai, has argued that President Obama's alleged decision to seek confrontation rather than partnership equals a missed opportunity.⁴² In contrast, almost every diplomat interviewed for this book has emphasized how difficult President Karzai is to work with, confirming his reputation as a difficult and temperamental figure, with some diplomats going so far as to pinpoint President Karzai as Afghanistan's key obstacle to progress. At issue is the question of whether Karzai is a nuisance with whom we to an extent can do business or rather an integral and critical part of a predatory (corrupt) Afghan state that feeds the insurgency and which therefore must be fundamentally changed. Western allies waver, hoping to build up the administrative capacity of the state—notably at the local level where so-called Village Stability Programs (VSP) sometimes combined with local security in the shape of Afghan Local Police (ALP) have gained traction since 2009–2010—while fencing them off from central spoilers. Not coincidentally, President Karzai has only with reluctance endorsed the VSP and ALP. The international hope seems to be that they can draw in enough stakeholders in villages and provinces and build up enough ministerial capacity in Kabul to leave behind a system that will be imperfect but functioning. If President Karzai can deliver on reconciliation with the Taliban, so much the better, the idea seems to be, but in the meantime ISAF must anchor Afghan stability and phase 4 in other parts of Afghanistan's complex physical and social geography.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has reviewed the trajectory of NATO's Afghan mission to identify the mission's key phases and the nature of turning points. The chapter has not sought to scrutinize and much less criticize NATO decisions but to present a certain pattern based on the facts of the matter—the nature of the new Afghan political system, the Bonn agreement, NATO decisions as communicated by the Alliance, and NATO actions in Afghanistan. The pattern consists of three phases and a troubled ambition to become the architect of complex multinational peacekeeping operations. Table 3.4 presents an overview. Summit agendas are rich, of course, and the overview is therefore to be treated as

Table 3.4. NATO summits and Afghanistan.

<i>Phase</i>	<i>Key events</i>	<i>Summits</i>
Going in, December 2001– December 2005	ISAF support and then lead Control of Kabul Expansion to North and West	Rome, May 28, 2002: No Afghan agenda/focus on Russia Prague, November 21–22, 2002: Transformation of purpose, partners, and means Istanbul, June 28–29, 2004: Support for northern ISAF expansion Brussels, February 22, 2005: Affirmation of ISAF expansion to West and beyond
Stunned, January 2006–April 2008	Expansion to South and East Insurgency and war Review of mission and adoption of comprehen- sive strategy	Riga, November 28–29, 2006: Burden sharing and measures to counter- insurgency, comprehensive strategy in principle Bucharest, April 2–4, 2008: ISAF Strategic Vision and comprehensive strategy (CSPMP)
Coping, May 2008–December 2010	Implementation of strategy Adaptation to COIN and new U.S. strategy Review of NATO’s purpose	Strasbourg-Kehl, April 3–4, 2009: Maintain Vision, enhance Afghan lead Lisbon, November 18, 2010: Endorsement of <i>Inteqal</i> plan for transition to Afghan lead and new NATO Strategic Concept Chicago, May 20–21, 2012: Irreversibility of transition, financing of ANSE, partnership beyond 2014

SOURCE: Compiled by author.

such, a mere overview. Moreover, as this chapter has highlighted, several key NATO decisions were made during foreign ministers’ NAC meetings that do not qualify as summits but that can be of great consequence nonetheless.

The first phase runs from the Bonn agreement in late 2001 to mid- to late 2005, and this is where NATO defines its ambition to become relevant to the new world of globalized terror threats and new security missions and where it gradually becomes the ISAF lead organization. It would be both possible and reasonable to distinguish between the two periods of 2001–2003 and 2003–2005, between the sidelining of NATO in favor of OEF and the inclusion of NATO into the Afghan game, because the politics of this shift in 2003 matter enormously to the way in which NATO’s mission was defined. However, and while the politics of this shift will be analyzed in detail in the next chapter, it is ultimately of greater consequence that NATO continuously saw

an opportunity to continue its Balkan experience—to come into a troubled country and support if not a peace agreement between belligerents then the peace offered by the central government. The modalities differed, to be sure, and NATO knew this well, but the framework of thinking and planning was one of peace-support operations. The extension of ISAF into Afghanistan's north and west embedded rather than challenged this framework, not least because it happened in parallel to the realization of the Bonn blueprint for a new Afghan government.

It follows that the second phase is the period of NATO's rude awakening. Moving into Afghanistan's south and east, NATO encountered a stubborn, brutal, and growing insurgency for which it was unprepared. It was a kind of war. Counterinsurgency (COIN) is how most observers today label it, but NATO was not in the counterinsurgency business back then. It was simply not an articulated task for the Alliance. NATO was stretched militarily and threatened politically at this point—in 2006–2007—insofar as it was failing in its mission. NATO did manage to step back from the brink of the abyss, as we saw, and the outcome of this reversal was the adoption of the comprehensive strategic political–military plan—the CSPMP—in Bucharest in April 2008.

The third phase runs from the Bucharest summit in 2008 to the present and is defined by NATO's effort to maintain its strategic focus while adapting to the evolving war and dysfunctional government in Afghanistan. NATO has used the CSPMP as a framework within which it can prioritize certain issues, such as regional diplomacy and training of Afghan forces as designated engines in the larger effort. We know from the record of events that NATO has found this strategic approach appropriate and valuable: It has been maintained while the United States, quite clearly the number-one international player in Afghanistan, has undertaken a number of important reviews of its Afghan policy; it has incorporated the ISAF commander's request for a COIN approach that previously was anathema to NATO; and it sustains NATO's engagement in the string of international conferences that began in London in January 2010 and that open the end game of transition to Afghan lead and thus, by 2014, the “redeployment” of NATO and ISAF forces. What this implies for NATO's sense of rationale and political purpose is what this book is about to account for in earnest.