

Estonia's contribution in Afghanistan

Estonia participates in the stabilization and rebuilding of Afghanistan based on its foreign and security policy interests. Although Afghanistan is geographically and culturally far removed from Estonia, its problems are still close to us. Estonia does not have its own special interests in Afghanistan, but Afghanistan is a source for international terrorism, crime and drug trafficking, which pose a threat to international and Estonian security. Estonia's international and moral obligation is to respond to these threats and to take part actively in resolving Afghanistan's problems. Estonia's involvement in the Afghanistan security and development mission is one of our most important and visible contributions as a NATO member. Afghanistan is NATO's most important international operation and as NATO is the cornerstone of Estonian security policy, it is in Estonia's interests that NATO be successful in fulfilling its tasks.

In updating Estonia's objectives and activities in Afghanistan, the Government of the Republic of Estonia discussed on 2 July the country's updated Afghanistan strategy, the principles of which are covered in this summary.

Vision of the future and objectives

The primary goal in Afghanistan for the UN, NATO, the EU and other representatives of the international community is to help create conditions that will allow representative democracy to function in Afghanistan, enabling the Afghan people to independently ensure peace and security in their country. Even though military operations are still ongoing in Afghanistan and there are serious challenges to the functioning of the Afghan government, cooperation is continuing between the international community and the Afghan government to improve the situation.



View to the Babur's Garden in Kabul.

Estonia's most important priorities for Afghanistan are creating the following conditions:

Ensuring international and regional security

The most critical criterion – and the most important for Estonia – is that Afghanistan must not pose a strategic risk to international security. It must be ensured that Afghanistan does not become a recruiting ground or refuge for terrorist groups as well as a source of crime or drug trafficking.

Achieving internal security

Besides the international aspect, it is important to prevent extensive violence inside Afghanistan and to keep the Taliban from returning to power. Afghanistan's internal security must allow primary government functions to be fulfilled throughout the country.

Peaceful power sharing

Afghanistan must have support for a political system that would allow power to be shared and administered by peaceful methods. This includes a system of administration that will be sufficiently well-established by the end of the international mission so that it will not collapse immediately after the end of large-scale aid.

Permanently re-integrating Afghanistan into the international community

Afghanistan's government is continuing its close cooperation with the international community in order to resolve joint problems including the drug trade and Islamic extremism.

Economic and social development

The ability of the population of Afghanistan to be self-reliant must improve. The goal is poverty reduction, regional development, economic stability and general improvement of the quality of life for the population. The Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) and the Afghanistan Compact between the Afghan government and the international community offer a framework of measures and goals.

Achieving the above will likely require working together closely with the international community for several decades, even though it will be possible as well as necessary to reduce the military presence already earlier. To achieve the above goals, Afghanistan and the international community must focus on the following:

- increase the size and the effectiveness of Afghanistan's security forces
- Afghanistan must shoulder greater responsibility, government institutions must develop and a process of reconciliation must take place
- civilian assistance must increase and be better directed by the international community
- there must be cooperation with Pakistan and other countries in the region.

General objectives and basic positions of Estonia's Afghanistan policy

- Estonia's primary goal as well as that of the entire international community is to support Afghanistan's government in achieving peace, stability and national reconciliation, reducing poverty and increasing the well-being of the people. The main role in shaping the country's future is played by Afghanistan's people, which is why it is in our interests to increase the Afghan people's sense of being stewards and caretakers in their own country, their responsibility and capability in matters related to the development of their state.
- International terrorism, organised crime and drug trafficking stemming from Afghanistan pose risks to the security of both the international community as well as Estonia's allies and, by extension, jeopardize Estonian national security. As a member of the international community, Estonia has a moral obligation to contribute to resolving international problems including Afghanistan's problems.
- Estonia is contributing to the realisation of goals set by Afghanistan's government along with the international community. Estonia supports the stabilization and rebuilding process of Afghanistan using military, diplomatic and economic (development assistance) means.
- Estonia completely shares NATO's strategic goals in Afghanistan: extending the central government's authority throughout the country; the provision of military support, material aid and training to Afghanistan's security forces (ANA, ANP), bringing Afghanistan's security forces to a level where they would be able to ensure security without foreign assistance; creating a stable environment for rebuilding the country and engaging in development cooperation; and assisting Afghanistan's government in promoting democracy, human rights and the rule of law.
- ISAF is the most important NATO joint operation. It is important for Estonia that this operation is successful and will do all in ensuring its success. Estonia participates in ISAF on the basis of a UN mandate and at the invitation of Afghanistan's democratically elected parliament and government.
- Estonia completely supports the principle of a comprehensive approach. It is not possible to achieve success in Afghanistan solely by military means. Military action, diplomacy and rebuilding must support and complement each other. It is necessary to implement civilian means more extensively as well as in harmony with military measures.



Estonian Chief of General Staff Colonel Neeme Väli, Chargé d'affaires in Afghanistan Daniel Schärer and civil expert from the Estonian Ministry of Defence Gerry Lesk in Kabul. July 2008.

Foreign and defence policy areas in Estonia's Afghanistan policy

The foreign policy component

The following are Estonia's foreign policy action priorities:

In order to reach the goals set with regard to Afghanistan's future, Estonia actively contributes to shaping Afghanistan's future strategy in UN, NATO, EU and other international organizations and in bilateral relations with partners.

Estonia continues to develop bilateral relations with Afghanistan by organizing high-level visits, promoting contacts between parliaments and other institutions and finding opportunities for establishing economic and cultural contacts.

Estonia is continuing bilateral consultations on Afghanistan-related topics with its partner states, introduces its positions on Afghanistan issues and keeps regularly informed of its partners' activities in Afghanistan.



2009 is of decisive importance for rebuilding in Afghanistan. Presidential and local elections will take place on 20 August. The course of the elections may be impacted by the complicated security situation in the country. To ensure security during elections, Estonia will send an infantry company to Helmand province. In addition, Estonia has also provided financial support for the elections.

Pictured: Estonian Foreign Minister Urmas Paet and Independent Election Commission Chairman Azizullah Ludin.

In making civilian assistance more effective, Estonia:

- proceeds from the Afghanistan Compact, Afghanistan's National Development Strategy (ANDS) and Estonia's development cooperation and humanitarian aid development plan.
- places the first priority on health care, education and the field of implementing good governance practices, but also continues work toward finding other suitable opportunities for assistance.
- continues to provide a health expert to Helmand province
- is doubling the number of its experts to the European Union Police Mission
- is continuing other bilateral projects and joint activities through international organizations (such as UNDP, UNCHR and UNFPA). In addition to longer-term development cooperation projects, Estonia is prepared to provide humanitarian aid based on specific needs for assistance
- continues to be open to cooperation in the civilian field with other strategic partners.



The military and defence policy component

With regard to its military and defence policy activities, Estonia is continuing its caveat free participation in ISAF and cooperation with strategic partner countries.

In rebuilding Afghanistan's security forces, Estonia supports NATO's efforts to train Afghanistan's army, both politically as well as with practical defence-related assistance.

Estonia will continue contributing to ISAF with an infantry company and preparations are under way for creating a joint US-Estonian OMLT.

To provide security for Afghanistan's presidential elections on 20 August, Estonia is temporary deploying its ESTCOY-E infantry company.



Estonian health expert Dr Argo Parts with Dr Enayatullah Ghaffar of Helmand Province Central Hospital and his colleague. April 2008.

In order to expand cooperation with Pakistan, Estonia is providing support to the intensification of political and economic relations between the EU and Pakistan. In order to help the government of Pakistan to deal with terrorism and extremism Estonia supports enhanced cooperation between NATO and Pakistan. Estonia will continue to develop bilateral relations with Pakistan. To emphasize Pakistan's important role in addressing Afghanistan-related issues, Estonia will appoint a special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan.



An Estonian soldier with local children in Afghanistan.

The domestic component

A number of Estonian ministries and government agencies are directly or indirectly involved in stabilization and rebuilding in Afghanistan. It is very important to continue emphasising the importance of coordination and cooperation between agencies as well as to better integrated military and civilian actions.

Effective information and public relations work is necessary in order to better promote Estonia's Afghanistan-related activities.

This fact sheet was compiled in collaboration with the Ministry of Defence www.mod.gov.ee.



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