

## **END STATE AFGHANISTAN**

### **Report of the Paper Presentation**

*Prieuré de Val Duchesse, Brussels, 15 May 2009*

This roundtable was convened in order to present the Egmont Paper on the situation in Afghanistan drafted by Brig-Gen (R) Jo COELMONT, Senior Associate Fellow at Egmont, after extensive consultation with a working group of experts on the subject. The paper aims to present the initial strategic objectives of the international actors in Afghanistan as well as the progression of events which led to the current situation. Additionally, it analyzes recent ideas about appropriate objectives and strategy before providing a series of recommendations to all major actors in the international community.

General COELMONT began the discussions with a brief summary of the highlights of the paper. These include several key ambiguities of policy which have so far significantly hindered the effort to establish a “Safe and Secure Environment” (SASE), which is usually one of the key goals of an acceptable “end-state” by most international organizations. The primary ambiguity has been about the nature of the mission in Afghanistan: Is the objective simply to establish a secure environment which will no longer provide safe harbor for terrorists, or is a long-term, concerted effort at democratic state building the goal? Another key area of confusion is in the area of implementation. The military objectives are implemented as a coherent strategy coordinated from a unified command, but the civil side is entrusted to the Afghan government and thus lacks accountability. Three specific guidelines were discussed which might safeguard the future chances of achieving a SASE in Afghanistan. The first is that there must be clarity in any operation which includes the establishment of realistic objectives and no false hope of more significant success than is easily conceivable. Second is the need to construct a way for some single authority to have the overall responsibility for the civil side of the security situation in place of the current ambiguously shared responsibility between all contributing organizations. The third guideline is the need for a comprehensive political strategy shared between all major actors involved in Afghanistan. This requirement is part of the idea presented in the paper that there must be a collective debate on the future of Afghanistan which includes all participants.

The presentation of the paper was followed by debate. One of the critical issues addressed was the general lack of understanding by most parties of the situation on the ground in Afghanistan. Pakistan, despite its years of experience, remains in a general state of denial about the seriousness of the situation in its territories; the lack of

coordinated efforts to address this situation is a key cause of the spillover of violence back into Afghanistan. Additionally, the current occupying powers must be careful not to make the mistake of the Soviets and the Taliban in treating Afghanistan as a centrally governed country. Whatever the criticisms of the Afghan government, it does understand this fact and has made great strides in approaching governance in an appropriate way. Further problems have been represented by the lack of planning for coordinated development assistance and governance before the start of operations. While such efforts are necessary, NATO plays a leading role in security operations and is not set up to provide such assistance and instead tends to focus too much on the military aspects. Where assistance is provided, there are additional problems in that it tends to go to the “bad guys,” leading at least one Afghan provincial governor to wonder whether they might be better off growing poppies or starting an insurgency, as the regions with these problems receive much more aid. Myriad problems such as severely underpaid judges, total illiteracy among the Taliban, and serious corruption hamper efforts to truly establish a secure governance system. In many cases more modest goals might better fit the criteria of realistic objectives, but public opinion demands more complete solutions. Europe has contributed significantly to police training efforts as well as a substantial number of troops, but these forces have been difficult for EU nations to muster and have had a correspondingly limited affect.

The perceived role of the Afghan conflict as a litmus test for the future of the NATO alliance was emphasized. While the military situation is certainly not bleak, with increasing troop numbers and 80% of combat happening in only 11% of the territory, the lack of civilian capacities within NATO is jeopardizing the effort. There are few controls on economic development and none on the behavior of the Afghan government. The Pakistani government has been exacerbating the problems in Afghanistan recently by continuing to focus on the enemy to the East, in India, rather than the “real enemy” in Afghanistan to the West. Where they do recognize issues, the Pakistani army uses traditional tactics in an attempt to disrupt the Taliban rather than counterinsurgency tools. Ultimately, a safe and secure environment can only be achieved as an end-state through the development of high quality Afghan governance with a cooperative Pakistan assisting with the efforts to control their Western neighbor.

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The full Egmont Paper is available on-line at  
<http://www.egmontinstitute.be/paperegm/eg29.pdf>.