

ROMANIAN ARMED FORCES CONTRIBUTION TO THE STABILITY IN AFGHANISTAN AND THE BUILD UP OF THE SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

Dumitru SCARLAT

scarlat@yahoo.com

Land Forces Staff, Bucharest, Romania

ABSTRACT

The Afghan people has the indefeasible right to security, peace and freedom, to a decent living, the right to decide its own destiny, by respecting the values and national traditions, but also the international law norms and principles. Romania, alongside NATO and the Coalition's forces, has brought a significant contribution to counter terrorism and to the creation of a lasting and stable security environment in Afghanistan, as well as to the reconstruction of the country, thus contributing to the security within the European-Atlantic environment. Afghanistan needs a security environment based on democratic principles and norms, but also on a law state capable to guarantee and respect the human rights and freedom that can be accomplished also with the military and financial support offered by Romania.

KEYWORDS: *global war counter terror, Al Qaeda, 11/9 2001, security environment, Afghanistan*

1. General Framework of the Operations in Afghanistan

The 11 September 2001 attacks against and on the territory of the United States of America determined an important change of the foreign policy and security of the USA, of the theory paradigm and the international relationships practice, all of which led to the invocation of Article 5 [1] for the first time by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), as well as the appreciation as legitimate [2] the US military intervention in Afghanistan.

On 20 September 2001, the American president, George Bush, within a speech in front of the nation [3], stated that behind the terrorist attacks is the Al Qaeda leader, Osama bin-Laden and that "*the USA delivers an ultimatum to the Taliban government, by requesting them to turn over Al Qaeda*" [4] leader to the USA, release of all foreign citizens who were in a state of captivity, close of all terrorist training camps, surrender of every terrorist and their supporters to the US authorities. Also, President Bush requested that US

have access within the terrorists' training camps [5].

The Taliban rejected the ultimatum as they considered that there was no concrete evidence of Osama bin-Laden's involvement [6] in the September 11 attacks, which led to Operation "Enduring Freedom" initiation on 7 October 2001 by launching an important attack conducting airstrike campaigns with the support of Great Britain and Australia. An important support for this operation was provided also by the mujahedeen groups, members of the North Alliance and the purpose was the destruction of the training camps and the entire Al Qaeda terrorist cells' infrastructure, capture of any Al-Qaeda leaders, fighters or affiliates and cease of the terrorist actions in this country.

Operation „Enduring Freedom” (OEF-A) – initially named “Infinite Justice” – is the official name used by the USA government for the Afghanistan war. The change of the name initially given to the operation was made because of the criticism and sensibilities of the Muslim world and because of the President Bush's statement that “... *this crusade, this war on terrorism, is going to take a while*” [7].

OEF-A strategic objective, together with a series of small scale military actions were developed under the umbrella of “Global War On Terror” (GWOT) [8] and was to impede the terrorist actions and to capture the Al Qaeda leaders [9].

It has to be mentioned that the actions developed within OEF-A were supported by the North Alliance [10] that provided vital information to the American special forces within the operations developed in the North side of Afghanistan. After the Mazar-e-Sharif's occupation, on 9 November and Kabul's occupation on 13 September, the actions continued in the South part, conquering Kandahar also, the Taliban's fee in December. Also, the December 2001 battles from Tora-Bora caves area remained famous in history. They were developed by

the American and British forces together with North Alliance combatants with the purpose to capture al-Qaeda leaders known to be in that area. Thereafter, the US actions developed during 2001-2003, within the operation “Enduring Freedom” were backed up and supported by an important number of states over the world.

The operations continued in the South of Afghanistan under the aegis of OEF-A [11] by 2006, when they were undertaken by the International Security Assistance Force-ISAF mission. Also, it is important to mention that the United States led actions independently from NATO also, in Baghram and Kabul.

On 5 December 2001 within the Bonn conference, it was agreed upon the execution, simultaneously with OEF-A, of an international mission of peace keeping in Kabul and its surroundings and the retirement of the North Alliance's forces from the capital. This way ISAF arises, force that executed operations up to December 2014. The end of 2014 represents the moment when ISAF ceased combat operations in Afghanistan, the Coalition's forces passing to a new type of mission – an advisory and assistance mission known under the name of Resolute Support Mission (RSM).

2. Romanian Armed Forces Participation to the Campaign in Afghanistan

Romania participated to the military operations in Afghanistan since 2002, when an expeditionary force, battalion level was starting the campaign within this theatre of operation within ISAF coalition. Our armed forces strength was gradually augmented, at a certain point having a strength of 1900 personnel [12]. The Romanian soldiers' missions were various, from basic missions- specific to the manoeuvre units to training and education missions of the new Afghan armed forces (Afghan National Army – ANA TRAINING), Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) assistance by the

specialized teams (Operational Mentor and Liaison Team – OMLT, Military Advisory Team-MAT, NATO Training Mission – NTM), and the involvement of military police subunits, special forces or aviation detachments (that provided the command of the International Airport from Kabul) [13]. The Romanian soldiers acted especially in Zabul province, mountain area situated in the South of Afghanistan not at all immune from perils. One of their main missions was to provide security of the A1 highway that connects Kandahar-Kabul and Kandahar-Pakistan [14].

On 24 January 2002, the administration of Operation “Enduring Freedom” (OEF), the armed forces expression of the Coalition in the theatre of operations in Afghanistan, officially asked the Romanian authorities to contribute to this mission. Only few days after this request, the Romanian soldiers disembarked on the International Airport in Kabul. The actual contribution (46 soldiers) was, initially, a military police platoon, a C 130 Hercules aircraft and staff personnel. The Romanian soldiers participated to NATO Operation known under the name of “FINGAL Operation” at that time under the aegis of United Nations Organization (UN).

Afterwards, a group of staff officers that activated within the multinational brigade from Kabul joined it. Few months later, on 30 April 2002, the Parliament of Romania decided the Romanian Armed Forces participation to Operation “ENDURING FREEDOM” with one infantry battalion, an NBC company and staff officers.

The official requirement of the US Central Commandment to Tampa (USCENTCOM), on 11 May 2002, concerning Romania’s participation with an infantry battalion to Operation “ENDURING FREEDOM”, represented the base of first Operations Order drawn up, for the forces in Afghanistan. On 13 June 2002, Romania’s Government sets up 597th Decision

concerning mission’s finance for 1 July-31 December 2002. Between 19 and 24 May 2002 takes place a reconnaissance mission in Bagram Base, the largest military base on the Afghanistan territory, and between 1 and 5 June in Kandahar, base with the largest fire power.

Thus, 26th Infantry Battalion/2nd Infantry Brigade was the first Romanian unit, battalion level deployed in the theatre of operations in Afghanistan, during July 2002-January 2003, having as location the military base in Kandahar (KAF). The main missions were the humanitarian actions, area security where the coalition forces executed reconstruction activities, convoys’ escort, patrolling missions, and sensitive site exploitation (SSE) [15], security of the military base in Kandahar.

Within the Operation “ENDURING FREEDOM” a number of eight infantry battalions, summarizing 3200 soldiers participated by 2006, that contributed to the Coalition’s international missions in the theatre of operations in Afghanistan. Starting with July 2006, the Romanian units acted as manoeuvre battalions, being deployed in Qalat. Twenty two structures, battalion level summarizing approximately 15,000 soldiers, developed missions under the aegis of ISAF [16]. The manoeuvre units’ missions had a high level of danger, given the fact that the province they acted in and the difficulty of providing security of the A1 highway that was within the Romanian units’ area of responsibility.

Between 2010 and 2013, Romania participated with brigade level staff personnel within Combined Team Zabul (CTZ), thus providing the military command of Zabul province, alongside the American soldiers. CTZ coordinated the manoeuvre battalions, advisory operational equipment and liaison OMLT type actions. This mission committed to our armed forces was an acknowledgement of professionalism and credibility that our country rejoices within NATO alliance. The

Romanian soldiers successfully executed all the tasks, being a good ambassador in this remote corner of the world [17].

Another important task, executed in Kandahar, was the Ground Defence Area (GDA)/KAF [18] mission where a company level structure acted, mission started in December 2012 and that from 2015 has 450 soldiers [19].

The Romanian armed forces, alongside with the battalion level units that acted in ZABUL province, sent in the theatre of operation in Afghanistan – training structures, assistance and advisory structures that were deployed especially in KABUL, but also in ZABUL province.

From the very beginning of ANA TRAINING mission [20], January 2003, Romania participated with 25 soldiers deployed in Kabul, coordinated by the military cooperation office for Afghanistan (OMC-A) and supervised by the American structure situated in Camp Phoenix from the capital of the country. The main missions of ANA TRAINING detachment were:

- The participation to the formation process and Afghan armed forces making operational process;
- Tank and mechanized battalion training within the new armed forces;
- Inspection and maintenance of the techniques in the endowment of the two battalions.

The detachment's organization chart was modified along the mission, continuously adapted to the requirements imposed by the real situation, to the needs and necessities of the central structure from the Coalition, responsible with the coordination of this type of missions. Starting with 2011, ANA TRAINING detachment acted in Afghanistan, with four teams of trainers for: ANA, ANA non-commissioned officers' school, specialized positions training battalion and Afghan armor school.

The main tasks were constituted by: assistance of Afghan trainers within the

education and training process for the formation of the Afghan soldiers specialized on tank branch; organization and development of formation courses for tank drivers (for armored, infantry combat vehicles – MLI, armored carriers for troops – TBT, armored multirole vehicles – HMMWV); organization and development of tank commanders formation, gunners' formation; check up of the technical status and maintenance of armored vehicles (Eastern provenance tanks); firing execution with the weaponry on the armored techniques, coordination of the handbooks' translation processes for the Afghan soldiers trainers and set up of a training combat service support base; Afghan trainers formation that leads the maintenance process to the endowment technique, etc.

In a word, a complex and difficult mission, given the operational environment, the local traditions, linguistic barrier and the change of the Afghan armed forces doctrine according to the US doctrine principles.

Another type of mission to which our country participated was determined by the teams' introduction for the provinces' reconstruction – Province Reconstruction Team (PRT) [21], mission to which 4 officers contributed: 2 CIMIC officers, 2 vertical and horizontal engineering construction specialists.

The main activities developed within the PRT concept were:

- Grant the specialty expertise for the Afghanistan reconstruction process stimulation;
- Participation to the coordination accomplishment between the organizations that participated in the reconstruction;
- Participation to the extension of the central Afghan authorities influence and outside Kabul.

During the time the activity developed, the Romanian soldiers planned and distributed the humanitarian help offered by the Romanian government. The help

consisted in 31 tons of wheat, 36 tons of flour, 1 tone of veal cans, 20 military tents, 150 summer uniforms and 150 winter uniforms. Also, during 2003-2006, Romania activated within a British PRT with a military police officer and a group of military observers. Furthermore, in PRT Kunduz, the Romanian state had a medical team [22] deployed there.

Within the international coalition effort, the Romanian soldiers also participated to assistance and advisory missions with OMLT teams (Advisory and liaison operational teams – garrison type, infantry, combat support or combat service support) and MAT detachment (Advisory teams – combat support type, combat service support or infantry battalion). By the developed activity executed by these teams, our armed forces contributed to the Afghan units training and making operational, with the purpose to assume by ANA forces the tasks to provide security of the Afghanistan national territory.

3. The Perspective of the Romanian Armed Forces Participation in Afghanistan Beyond 2014.

It was established, as a result of the adopted decisions to the Chicago Summit in May 2012, that “*the transition of responsibility concerning the Afghanistan security from ISAF forces towards Afghan national security forces (ANSF), be ended by the end of 2014*” [23]. NATO continues its missions in Afghanistan in 2015, also and will be focused mainly on training, education and counseling of Afghan armed forces, police and other structures within the national defense system, its missions being shaped depending on the needs.

The Romanian armed forces mission in Zabol province was concluded in 2014 [24] and the strengths started to be gradually drawn off according to the established chart within the NATO Alliance [25]. According to the statement of the minister of national defense, Mircea Dușa,

the Romanian soldiers participation in Afghanistan cost half a billion euros, 23 soldiers died in the line of duty and 131 injured. According to the statement of the minister of national defence, in the context of the new security environment, Romania will continue to support the effort for the stability in Afghanistan [26].

Although, at the end of 2014, ISAF mission was concluded – ANSF and Afghan institutions’ training, advisory and assistance acts continued under a new name: Resolute Support Mission [27]. This new type of mission doesn’t have a combat type role, its main effort being directed towards the support of superior echelons of command of the Afghan security forces and ministers of resort, within the process of providing a good governance, legal order and law state in Afghanistan. The details concerning the new mission’s plan were agreed by the exterior ministers of NATO countries at the end of June 2014. The mission’s legal base is provided by the agreement concerning forces’ status, Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), signed in Kabul, on 30 September 2014, during the inauguration festivity of the new Afghan president by the NATO high representative in Afghanistan and was ratified by the Afghan parliament on 27 November 2014.

SOFA defines the terms and conditions where NATO forces are developed in Afghanistan as part of *Resolute Support* mission, as well as the activities they execute. The mission is coordinated by a headquarter located in Bagram and has four important centers in Mazar-e-Sharif, Herat, Kandahar and Jalalabad.

This mission’s main tasks are as follows [28]:

- Support concerning planning, programming and budgeting;
- Provide transparency, responsibility and surveillance;
- Provide support for the adherence to the principles of law rules and good governance;

- Support, settlement and back up of force generation, recruitment, training, personnel management and development.

After the last meeting at the NATO alliance level, the members of Supreme Council of National Defense analyzed the requirements concerning the Romanian forces and assets supplementation aimed to participate in the theatre of operations in Afghanistan. Thus, during 25 November 2014 [29] meeting, the supplementation was approved in 2015 with up to 450 soldiers, a maximum of 650 soldiers being settled to be deployed within NATO mission, Resolute Support Mission.

The Romanian Armed Forces activity in Afghanistan was often appreciated by the Afghan government, through the voice of the former president, Hamid Karzai, and also by the ISAF military commanders and by the NATO alliance leadership. The mission also led to casualties among the Romanian Armed Forces. According to a victim balance sheet, during the 12 years of continuous presence in Afghanistan, 23 soldiers lost their lives and the number of wounded personnel is over a hundred [30].

The armed forces has been and is a good ambassador of the Romanian state,

bringing its contribution to the effort of the entire alliance to accomplish and settle peace in this remote corner of the world of which, we may say, the human fate depends, if one regards the overall effects of terrorism dissemination and danger of this phenomenon exportation.

Essential for the Euro-Atlantic and international security is to provide in Afghanistan a new environment that should offer a serene, decent and peaceful living of the Afghan people, favorable for a lasting stability and country reconstruction to contribute to the formation of institutions specific to a law state, capable to provide the security and defense of the country. As it concerns the operations to be executed by NATO, they will be adjusted depending on the registered progress and challenges met within the security environment in Afghanistan.

By its contribution with soldiers to training and advisory missions of the Afghan armed forces and financial help annually granted over 3 years time, starting with 2015 [31], Romania is a security generator in Afghanistan and an “*example for the other states through its soldiers’ professionalism*” [32].

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15. SSE-Sensitive Site Exploitation.

16. See the article: “NATO ceased its mission in Afghanistan. Another one is about to start”. Available on: www.telegrafonline.ro/1419804000/articol/288512/nato_537ia_incheiat_misiunea_in_afghanistan_incepe_alta

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