

MISSION AFGHANISTAN: WHO BEARS THE HEAVIEST BURDEN?

R.J.M. (Robert) Beeres

Associate professor of Defence Accounting Control & Economics
Netherlands Defence Academy
Faculty of Military Sciences
Section Management Organization and Defence Economics
P.O. Box 90 002
4800 PA Breda
The Netherlands
Telephone: +31 76 527 3231
Fax: +31 76 527 3255
E-mail: rjm.beeres@nlda.nl

M.P. (Marion) Bogers

Assistant professor of Defence Accounting Control & Economics
Netherlands Defence Academy
Faculty of Military Sciences
Section Management Organization and Defence Economics
P.O. Box 90 002
4800 PA Breda
The Netherlands
Telephone: +31 76 527 3227
Fax: +31 76 527 3255
E-mail: mp.bogers.01@nlda.nl

ABSTRACT

During the NATO Lisbon Summit, November 2010, the United States president Obama asked the 28 NATO member states for further contributions to the operations in Afghanistan. In particular, he asked the Netherlands to contribute to training the Afghan police. However, at that time the Netherlands could not make any specific commitments due the political situation of the country. Dutch Prime Minister Rutte was not worried this would harm the prestige of the Netherlands in NATO. He stated “[t]he Netherlands already sent thousands of troops to Afghanistan, far outreaching the number one could expect when considering the size of our population”. This quote touches the very core of the ongoing debate within NATO concerning burden-sharing among the partners in Afghanistan. The Netherlands, being a relatively small country, has done ‘enough’ according to Prime Minister Rutte. But, how can we assess whether this self-image is right? Is the Netherlands really such a ‘small country’ or a ‘superpower in pocket size’? Against this background this paper addresses three questions. First, does the contribution of the Netherlands to Afghanistan indeed outreach the contribution of other ‘small’ countries in terms of Prime Minister Rutte’s measure: deployed troops relative to population size? Second, is this the only relevant measure to compare countries’ contributions to Afghanistan? And, if there are other relevant measures, how does The Netherlands compare to other countries when these measures are applied?