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#### **Bosnia to Assist Danish Colleagues in Helmand**

By: Chelsea Plante

Since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States, Denmark has been highly proactive in endorsing and implementing American, UN, and EU-initiated counter-terrorism measures. Consistent with this trend, Denmark has contributed substantially to NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. Danish troops committed to ISAF operations have primarily worked alongside British Task Force Helmand (TFH). There are currently about 750 Danish soldiers working in this capacity, operating without *caveat* and concentrated in Helmand province.

Despite having a small number of troops deployed relative to other NATO states, Denmark actually has the highest rate of casualties of any ISAF nation. In light of this, a small contingent of Bosnian soldiers has been deployed to Helmand Province to assist their Danish colleagues by providing security for their base in Gereshk.

The decision taken by the Presidency of Bosnia-Herzegovina to deploy a contingent of Bosnian troops with the Danish contingent was welcomed by NATO, reflecting close military ties between Denmark and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The deployment of troops is also a very important signal that Bosnia-Herzegovina is keen to contribute to the Alliance as well as international peace and security more generally.

This is the first overseas deployment for these Bosnian soldiers, who relish the chance to display the professional skills of their nascent army. "For me, as a soldier, this is a big mountain, something that I have wanted to have in my career and it's something perfect to have at the end of my military career," says Captain Ahmetovic of the Bosnian contingent.

Guarding the camp in Gereshk is vital to mission success and as it impacts the operations of Danish soldiers in the area. "It's a great advance, they are doing a perfect job with their guard duties and have been validated during their stay here...it really means that we can deploy more combat units out in the area solving other tasks" said Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Pederson, Deputy Commander of the Danish Battle Group.

Defying traditional ethnic cleavages, Bosnia's decision to send troops to Afghanistan was strongly supported by the Bosnian Public. This in turn allowed Bosnia to send a multi-ethnic military unit on this operation. Having something of a fractured history, the Bosnian soldiers are uniquely suited for this operation in that they are able to identify with Afghan people better than most other ISAF nations.

When asked if mixed religious beliefs and ethnicities within the Bosnian-Danish force ever caused problems, Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Pederson replied "no, we are professionals and have no place for that here, we are colleagues and we are soldiers and that's what's important." On this point, Captain Ahmetovic added,

"I am actually very proud of my men. I have here all of the big Bosnian nations, and they have been in a war, and have fought against each other, and are ex-combatants. But now, they are ready to give their lives for each other – that's a very good thing,"

The Bosnian contribution of troops in Helmand is of benefit to the Danish force as it has allowed them to reprioritize their military operations. The focus moving forward for the Danes will be on training local Afghan soldiers and assisting with civilian reconstruction work.

Further Reading: [Danish Chief of Army Operational Command, Major-General Agner Rokos, visited the Camp Shorabak home of 3rd Brigade of 215 Corps \(3/215 Bde\) Afghan National Army \(ANA\) yesterday, Bosnians in Helmand, Bosnian Soldiers Assist Danish in Afghanistan](#)

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## Springing Forward: A New Stage of Engagement in Afghanistan

By: Chelsea Plante

At his first press conference of 2011, NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen presented a forward looking plan on how he intends to turn the Lisbon agenda into action before the next NATO summit in the spring of 2012.

A sustainable transition in Afghanistan will be one of three key Alliance priorities in 2011, alongside NATO reform and engagement with Alliance partners, said NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen this week. He described work on educating and training the Afghan security forces as a key priority for NATO, adding that "more than ever, this is our ticket to a successful transition process."

Last year, NATO members and allies agreed with the Afghan government that the 'transition' process, by which Afghan troops will take control of the fight against the insurgency, should start in the first half of 2011, but set no precise date. Instead, NATO and the Afghan government will decide in the spring on the first provinces where responsibility for security will be transferred to government forces – a critical step in the Alliance's exit strategy.

"I envisage a decision in the months of February and March ... We have already made our assessment, and on that basis we are ready to take a decision," Anders Fogh Rasmussen said. The spring will mark a new stage of the Alliance's engagement in Afghanistan with the announcement of the first provinces where Afghan forces are ready to take the lead.

The decision would mean transferring full responsibility for security and fighting any insurgent attacks to Afghan troops in those provinces of Afghanistan which are considered less at risk from the Taliban and other militants.

Rasmussen also said Monday that the Afghan parliament and President Hamid Karzai should end their differences and Afghanistan's new parliament should be inaugurated before the transition process starts. "It is a prerequisite for success that one have a stable political environment," he continued, "that's why I stress the need for a timely opening of parliament." The legislature has still not been installed four months after elections due to political infighting.

The transfer of responsibility to the Afghan government's army and police is a cornerstone of the Alliance's plan to begin withdrawing US and NATO troops next June. The Alliance plans to complete the transition by 2014 - the same time NATO forces will end their combat role in Afghanistan.

Initially, the Alliance expected the transfer of security to start by the end of 2010 in the safest of Afghanistan's 34 provinces. That date was set back, however, because of escalated fighting and the expansion of the insurgency into areas of the country where there was not a significant presence before.

"Last year we made hard-fought changes on the ground. Now we need to ensure those changes are durable," Rasmussen said. "We have already made evaluations, and we envisage the decision on transition to be taken in March."

NATO countries have more than 140 000 troops in Afghanistan, with roughly two-thirds of them being American. Afghan security forces, which currently number 256 000 troops, are expected to climb to over 300 000 members by the end of this year. There are roughly 25 000 insurgents.

Further Reading: [NATO to decide first Afghan handovers by March, Rasmussen confirms](#), [Security Transfer in Afghanistan by March? Secretary General Determined to Turn Lisbon Plans into Action](#), [Afghan Security Handover Expected Per Schedule](#), [NATO Sets Goal for Afghan Security Plans](#)

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## **A Tough Week for Albanians: Political violence and Corruption in the Balkans**

By: Jonathan Preece

This past week was one to forget for Albanians. In Kosovo, the Albanian leader stands accused of serious criminal charges stemming from a report written in December by former Swiss prosecutor Dick Marty and more recently endorsed by the Council of Europe. The 'Marty Report' claims that Hashim Thaci, acting Prime Minister of Kosovo, formally led a mafia style organization that violently controlled the heroin trade and was linked to kidnappings and murders of Serbs for the purpose of organ trafficking. Making things worse, this report has been substantiated by leaked NATO intelligence from 2004 which claim that Mr. Thaci was one of the biggest players in organized crime in the region. For his part, Thaci has adamantly denied these accusations and claimed that the Marty Report is simply a result of Serbian propaganda. However the damage has already been done; these accusations have not only created instability in Kosovo's already precarious political system, but have also undermined repeated attempts to improve Kosovo's poor international image. EULEX, the EU's police mission in Kosovo, has been tasked with investigating these accusations.

Meanwhile in Albania, violence erupted at a political rally in Tirana on January 21 leading to an estimated 150 injuries and three civilian deaths at the hands of Albanian National Guardsmen. Fallout from these shootings continued throughout the week as Albania's Prime Minister Sali Berisha defended the actions taken by Albanian security forces and accused opposition leader Edi Rama of organizing bands of criminals and terrorists. Mr. Rama added fuel to the fire by stating that the Prime Minister is personally responsible for these deaths and referring to Albania's interior minister as a "socially dangerous worm who should be arrested." Earlier this week both sides vowed to hold additional rallies and public demonstrations. However, under pressure from the international community and fearing that such protests would insight further violence, both sides have softened their positions. Mr. Berisha has urged his supporters to refrain from engaging in protests and, on January 28, Rama's opposition held a peaceful gathering to mourn those killed last week and called on the international community to help mediate a peaceful resolution to this conflict.

This latest roe spawned from this month's resignation of Berisha's deputy Prime Minister over claims of corruption related to construction contracts. However this conflict has been brewing since the Albanian elections in 2009 elections which the opposition claims were rigged by Mr. Barisha and supporters of his Democratic Party. Despite the fact that the 2009 elections were deemed free and fair by the international community, Mr. Rama's Socialist party demanded a public inquiry and has called for Mr. Barisha's resignation. Since these bitterly disputed elections, domestic politics in Albania has been marred by constant infighting and parliamentary debate has ground to a halt. This in turn has had detrimental effects on Albanian efforts in economic development and democratization. Some observers fear that this squabbling could spiral out of control and encourage further violence as Albanian nears elections set for May. In 1997, a similar political deadlock resulted widespread rioting and the eventual collapse of the Albanian government.

These events are deeply alarming for those concerned with European peace and stability. For the European Union, these events are significant given Albania's formal application for EU membership and the investments that have been made in police and justice missions in Kosovo. As far as NATO is concerned, such events serve as an unpleasant reminder of lingering instability in the Balkans. In case of Albania, this week's violence is particularly troubling as Albania has been considered a model example of peace and reconciliation in the region.

**Further Reading:** [A Bad Week: Criminal Accusations and Democracy protests hurt Albanians' good name](#), [Albanian Violence hits Banker's Stock](#), [Albanian Politician vow Protests](#), [Deadly Protests Don't End Albania's Power Play](#), [Stop Albania's Self-Destruction](#), [Albania Opposition Calmly Honors Dead Protesters](#)

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