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Afghanistan in the news

Whatever happened to Enduring Freedom?

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On the official website of the Afghanistan conference in The Hague, there is a gaping hole in the 'Useful links' section: what's happened to the US-led military campaign known as Operation Enduring Freedom?

It might be that the Dutch Foreign Ministry - like us - is still hard at work to make the website and the links as comprehensive as possible. But it might also be that the Operation is too sensitive an issue in the eyes of some. This is odd, since the Netherlands - like most of the other countries taking part in the conference - is a coalition member of the Operation, launched in the wake of the 9/11 attacks to take out al-Qaeda and their Taliban hosts.

Many people have a simplistic view of Operation Enduring Freedom, dismissing it as a blind manhunt aimed at al-Qaeda and the Taliban, one that involves a great deal of collateral damage.

This was reflected in the events of 2006, when the first Dutch troops to be stationed in the Afghan province of Uruzgan were issued with dark green camouflage gear to make sure the local population did not mistake them for US troops.

Police force

But what would the situation in Afghanistan be like without Operation Enduring Freedom? Without it, the building up of an Afghan police force would never have properly got off the ground. True, the EU had promised to take care of this task, but it failed utterly to deliver on that promise, leaving the Americans to take up the slack. It is only recently that 'EUPOL Afghanistan' has finally started to take shape.



Without Operation Enduring Freedom there would be no serious air support for the many NATO units in Afghanistan, since the lion's share of that support is provided by US aircraft.

Military presence

Without Operation Enduring Freedom, a number of districts in Uruzgan would have been without any kind of international military presence, since in its wisdom the Dutch government decided only to send a limited number of troops to the province. And without the Operation a number of prominent Taliban leaders would still be going about their business as usual in the mountains of Afghanistan.

In addition to all of this, NATO's ISAF operation has very close personal ties with Operation Enduring Freedom: ISAF's commander, US general Dan McKiernan heads both the NATO troops and those involved in Operation Enduring Freedom.

In short, there is no getting around Operation Enduring Freedom: it is key to all of the West's objectives in Afghanistan.



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