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Islam and its stereotypes seen by "the missionaries"[1]

When we meet "the other", we tend to judge him not on the basis of our knowledge about him but according to stereotypes made in the process of generalizations, often regarding entire societies. We assign identical features to members of a given population, regardless of real differences between them. A simplified image of a particular social group is created, evoked on the basis of an easily distinguishable feature, for example the professed religion. Such an image is emotionally oversimplified to a primitive extent, too general, rigid and resistant to changes.

It is important to remember that stereotypes are learnt, we believe that they are true because other people do so; we share them because we want to be rewarded for conformism. The key is the role of intersocial relations in the process of shaping and strengthening stereotypes. It is important as long as it relates to specific phenomena occurring in particular cultures, where stereotypes may turn into prejudice.

A group of psychologists attribute to stereotypes the name of *cognitive schemata*. They claim that these particular schemata represent people of a given group; that they are an organized form of knowledge defining attributes of a group's members; knowledge too general, but at the same time apparent. When a relation with particular events, time, people and place is missing, stereotypes are not congruous with the reality.

We have to add to that affects involving the relation of the cognitive subject with "the other". Words of R. Kapuściński are perfect to illustrate this issue. He wrote: "Stereotype – because it comes not from knowledge, but from emotions – is more dangerous. It hinders our real grasp of another human being and the real understanding of his arguments – that is why a stereotype is such a popular evil"[2].

It is possible to claim that a stereotype is a generalized pattern of thinking about a given social phenomenon, group or individual as a part of this group. It is usually oversimplified, reducing everything to a colloquially defined, emotionally tinted scheme.

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[1] A colloquial, but common name of Polish soldiers taking part in military missions.

[2] R. Kapuściński, *Autoportret reportera*, op. cit., s. 63.

A stereotype may lead to prejudice or discrimination. Prejudice is an insistent judgment of a given group, based on real or imaginary features of its members. It can lead to hostile behavior towards the whole group, which can be called discrimination.

The problem becomes particularly important in a case when hostile behavior is associated with the attitude of soldiers performing militant tasks in an environment unknown to them. It can be stated that stereotypes, which can be a primary reason for such behavior, affect the achievement of goals assumed for a mission. It becomes even more important, as the presence of Polish soldiers in Afghanistan raises doubts visible in such questions as: value of a stabilization mission, profits deriving from it, logistical preparation, mental preparation of the soldiers and efficiency of militant equipment.

We rarely ask soldiers what happens to them after their return, not only those who are experienced physically, but also those who have suffered mentally. In fact, we do not wonder whether or not Polish soldiers were and are ready to meet the Afghan culture, if they know its specifics. How do they see Islam in all of its Afghan diversity, how do they make stereotypes about its believers and does it have any effect on the performed tasks?

Such questions touch upon very important, though underestimated problems of the Polish presence in Afghanistan. If it is said that we may not be able to decide on the fate of the war by military means, then maybe it is time to think about the way of how to meet "the other" with the least injury on one's honour.

This task is quite difficult, because, in the common opinion, Islam as a religion will hardly in the nearest future become an area for building dialogues and understanding between the members of conflicts not only in Afghanistan, but also other regions of the world. On the other hand, Islam worshippers are seen in a strongly critical and negative way, their customs are not accepted, their harsh living conditions are not taken into consideration and almost only negative features are attributed to them.

Our research was accompanied by following questions: do sources and the level of knowledge about Islam and Islamists contribute significantly to the creation of stereotypes about them in the consciousness of members of a stabilization mission in Afghanistan, do emotions accompanying soldiers during their preparations to the mission have an influence on the creation of stereotypes about Islam and Islamists in their consciousness, do personal experience coming from direct contacts with Afghanistan inhabitants increase the process of creating stereotypes about Islam and Islamists in the consciousness of members of a stabilization mission, do global changes connected with the clash of modern and traditional civilizations have an influence on creating stereotypes about Islam and Islamists in the consciousness of members of a stabilization mission in Afghanistan, does the public opinion's pressure, denying previous conflict solving with hard methods and in favor of soft methods contribute to weakening of stereotypes about Islam and Islamists in the consciousness of members of a stabilization mission in Afghanistan?

These detailed problems have become the basis of a general problem, which is the following: **Are stereotypes about Islam and Islamists in the consciousness of members of a stabilization mission in Afghanistan created by sources and the level of their**

knowledge about Islam and Islamists, emotions accompanying soldiers during their preparation to the mission, media coverage creating images of Islam and Islamists, personal experience coming from direct contacts with inhabitants of the Ghazni province, global changes connected with the clash of modern and traditional civilizations, the public opinion's pressure denying previous conflict solving with hard methods and in favor of soft methods?

It has enabled us to formulate the following detailed hypotheses: sources and the level of their knowledge about Islam and Islamists significantly contribute to the creation of stereotypes about Islam and Islamists in the consciousness of members of a stabilization mission in Afghanistan, emotions accompanying soldiers during their preparation to the mission do not have an important influence on the creation of stereotypes about Islam and Islamists in their consciousness, media information creating images of Islam and Islamists in the consciousness of mission members significantly contribute to the process of stereotype-making, personal experience coming from direct contacts with Afghanistan inhabitants strengthen stereotypes about Islam and Islamists in the consciousness of members of a stabilization mission, global changes connected with the clash of modern and traditional civilizations do not have an important influence on the creation of stereotypes about Islam and Islamists in the consciousness of members of a stabilization mission in Afghanistan, the public opinion's pressure denying previous conflict solving with hard methods and in favor of soft methods contribute to weakening of existing stereotypes about Islam and Islamists in the consciousness of members of a stabilization mission in Afghanistan.

Their generalization is recapitulated in the fundamental hypotheses, which has taken the form of the following statement: **Stereotypes about Islam and Islamists in the consciousness of members of a stabilization mission are essentially created by their sources and level of knowledge about the Afghan society's characteristic, negative media coverage creating images of Islam and Islamists, personal experience coming from direct contacts with Afghans strengthen stereotypes; the public opinion's pressure denying previous conflict solving with hard methods and in favor of soft methods weakens stereotypes; whereas emotions accompanying soldiers during their preparation to the mission, as well as global changes connected with the clash of modern and traditional civilizations do not have an important impact on their creation.**

In order to validate the hypotheses mentioned above, the following investigation tools have been used:

1. Inquiry questionnaire – it is a standard tool for public opinion research, consisting of categorized questions concerning the problem and demographic questions, which enable a sociodemographic characterization of the population under investigation;

2. Interview questionnaire – consists of open questions, analogical to those in the inquiry questionnaire and demographic questions;

3. Individual interview forms, with questions oriented toward commanders preparing soldiers for stabilization mission, plenipotentiary to the wounded and suffering from

stabilization and pacific missions, the Association of the Wounded and Injured in Missions Abroad members, selected families who had lost their close relatives in those missions;

4. Available governmental documents (acts, regulations, dispositions, instructions, court and prosecution decisions) and personal documents (blogs, memoirs, diaries) connected to military actions during stabilization missions.

The survey of soldier's opinions was made twice (before their mission 6-20 II 2010 and after their return 10-25 X 2010). The inquiry was made on soldiers from the 17th WBZ[3] who constituted the basic group of the consecutive shift in Afghanistan. Before and after the mission, there were plans to inquire 200 soldiers from groups "Alfa" and "Bravo" and make additional 100-200 interviews, but its character and adverse circumstances (killed and injured soldiers, various dates of return, reluctant attitude to the second survey by a part of respondents, time pressure while performing many duties after the return) have led to the point where instead of 400 inquiry questionnaires and 100 interview questionnaires, only 302 of them were used in further survey. Respondents expressed their opinions on a 5-level Likert scale in the case of categorized questions (1 – strongly disagree, 2 – disagree, 3 – neither agree nor disagree, 4 – agree, 5 – strongly agree). The gathered data were handled and statistically described by the program Statistica.

Respondents' opinions about Islam as a religion

On the basis of results presented in table 1, it is visible that negative opinions about Islam as a religion prevail among respondents. At the same time, according to the feature describing Islam, a differentiation of negative views, positive ones and expressing lack of opinion is more or less apparent. On the basis of obtained data, it is possible to build an image of Islam in the consciousness of inquired people.

The most criticized element in Islam as a religion in this respondent group was the permission to discriminate women (the difference between the lack of permission – disagree and strongly disagree and the permission of this situation – agree and strongly agree). This difference is situated at -67%[4]. Its proof were respondents opinions stated below, which were most frequently stated in critical views – "Islam treats women badly, accepts polygamy, treats women as inferior beings, defines the approach towards women differently – they have a much lesser role and position than men"[5].

An equally powerful lack of acceptance was visible in the case of its adversial and repressive character and its lack of possibility of a dialogue with other religions. The

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[3] 17th Wielkopolska Armored Regiment.

[4] The average life expectancy of a woman in Afghanistan is below 50 years and is one of the smallest in the world. Conditions of life at the level of HPI, lack of possibility of solarisation and overwhelming poverty (necessity to cope with many shortages), as well as submission of women's life to Islamic laws are the main causes of criticism towards this religion.

[5] Respondents opinions were presented faithfully and without changes in the sentences in italics. Only orthographical mistakes were corrected.

score -65% suggests that members of stabilization mission did not foresee an alternative religion for Afghanistan inhabitants. In their minds, the religious monism overtakes the whole social life and concentrates it around Islam[6]. Opinions presented above were reflected in the following declarations – "Islam is a religion of fanatics, it makes its followers commit acts of crime towards other religion worshippers, Islamists are intolerant towards people of other religions".

Table 1. Opinions about Islam as a religion by respondents before their departure for a stabilization mission in Afghanistan (data in %)

Choices	Positive value/feature	No opinion	Negative value/feature	Choices	Result	Rank
30	Tolerance	25	Totalitarianism (aggressiveness)	45	-15	VIII
13	Modernization (adaptation to the present day)	17	Outdated (traditional)	70	-57	III
20	Rational and logical	30	Irrational (dominated by axioms)	50	-30	VI
16	Trust-inspiring	29	Mistrust-inspiring	55	-39	V
26	Uniform (monolithic)	22	Diversified (conflicted)	52	-26	VII
9	Caring about dignity of women	15	Discriminating women	76	-67	I
10	Open to other religions (religious dialogue)	15	Closed to other religions (confronting and repressive)	75	-65	II
13	Peaceful (irenological)	20	Hostile (polemological)	67	-54	IV

Notice: The result is the difference of positive (agree and strongly agree) and negative (disagree and strongly disagree) choices, reflecting opinions about Islam of soldiers taking part in a stabilization mission in Afghanistan. The lack of opinion was not taken in consideration.

Source: personal survey.

Another negative image of Islam as a religion was its backwardness, its strong support on tradition (the past) and not taking into account modernizing processes (and the necessity to adapt to modernity). The prevailing negative opinions prove this view – 57%. Contact with Islam provokes in members of other religions and cultures a feeling of anachronism, of a too traditional and simplified understanding of the modern world and processes of change[7]. In this case, the group under investigation expressed the following statements – "Islam is an old-fashioned religion, that is why it is popular among poor communities of Near East, it is used by a small group of leaders to subject (in the negative way) the poor layers of society".

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[6] Press relations from Afghanistan seem to indicate it, telling about the possibility of a death penalty for two Afghans who wanted to quit the Islamic religious community.

[7] Except for inhabitants of big cities, most Afghans are divided into tribes and other communities relying on leaders, who stick to ancient traditions and religious practices.

The negative vision of Islam was additionally strengthened by a belief about its totalitarian and aggressive character, which raised serious doubts and a feeling of threat among the respondents. The difference between a tolerant and totalitarian view of Islam as a religion in this group was – 54%. The following statements were its proof: "Islam is a religion requiring absolute obedience, without permission for freedom and free choice to its followers in contacts with other religions, Islam is very radical, closed to influences, frequently leading to rivalry and fights among members of different religions".

The elements mentioned above connected to the perception of Islam caused other negative connotations. They were: mistrust and irrationality (over-submission to axioms, opposite to logic and science). In the first case the difference was -39%, in the second – 30%. Such choices are reflected by opinions – "Islam is a rigorous religion, demanding commitment, absolute acceptance that Allah is God and that Koran is the Bible, Islam is a religion which installs rules too strict to realize and making normal life harder".

In spite of the dominant influence of Islam on Afghan lives, members of stabilization missions noticed its internal diversity and conflict, among others because of the struggle between Shiites (Ali supporters) and Sunnis (people of tradition and community). It was reflected in the statement that "they are intolerant toward members of other religions, but also that they fight against each other and they can be ruthless and vengeful toward other Islamists".

The peaceful (irenological) character was rated the least favorably, because it was overwhelmed by the hostile (polemological) image. In this case, the difference between the peaceful and the hostile image of Islam was -15%.

After the research performed before the stabilization mission among soldiers preparing for tasks in Afghanistan, the following image of Islam as a religion emerged. In the common understanding, its a religion which accepts women discrimination, has an adversial and repressive character towards members of other religions, is closed to dialogue with them, strongly relies on tradition (the past) and does not take into account modernizing processes (need to adapt to modernity). Additionally, this critical view was strengthened by serious concerns and feeling of threat because of its aggressive and hostile aspect which generated mistrust and irrationality (an over-submission to axioms opposite to logic and science). The above statements were completed by respondents belief about internal diversity and conflict among its worshippers, who had to function in absolute obedience and loyalty in fear of strict sanctions for infringements or will to quit this religion.

Respondents' opinions about Islam as a religion were confronted with their opinions after their return from the stabilization mission. Results of the second research (with the same inquiry and interview questionnaires) enabled to specify the image of Islam in the consciousness of the examined group after their experiences in the stabilization mission[8].

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[8] Members of VII shift of the Polish Military Contingent in Afghanistan, coming mainly from ground forces and 17th WBP functioned in conditions of an increased Taliban activity because of the summer period (enabling furtive attacks on ISAF) and because of events in the Afghan society. It generated an increased number of attacks, rise in sense of threat, risk of health or life loss and material loss.

Its results are presented in table 2. Generally, the hierarchy of the negative image of Islam after experiences in the stabilization mission changed considerably among the respondents. At the same time, it was observed that dispersion of results decreased after the return in comparison to those before the mission.

Direct contacts with local inhabitants in the Afghan Ghazni province made that the most frequent critical opinion about Islam as a religion was determined by its irrational (dominated by axioms) character. The predominance in the number of rejections (indications of a negative view) over choices (positive indications) in this case amounted to -53%. A further consequence of these opinions was a negative image of this religion as old--fashioned (strongly relying of tradition) and preventing any attempt to modernize its society. The difference between rejections and choices was -51%. Additionally, respondents underlined that Islam is closed toward other religions and their worshippers (-48%) and that it has definitely a hostile (polemological) aspect (the difference was -48% as well). In spite of the fact that the Taliban government was abolished by a coalition in November 2001, inhabitants of the provinces still remember and fear restrictions by Taliban partisans acting in concealment. Members of the missions witnessed on many occasions destructions, attempts of intimidation and even murders performed by the Taliban on their fellow--believers and compatriots attempting to rebuild their country after destructive wars and trying to benefit from international help[9].

A direct observation of people's life in the Ghazni province probably enabled members of the mission to notice the adversial and repressive aspect of this religion and its clear closure on other religions and their members[10]. In spite of the fact that Taliban government was abolished by a coalition in November 2001, inhabitants of the provinces still remember and fear restrictions by Taliban partisans acting in concealment. Members of the missions on many occasions witnessed destructions, attempts of intimidation, and even murders performed by the Taliban on their fellow-believers and compatriots attempting to rebuild their country after destructive wars and trying to benefit from international help.

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[9] J. Bajer, *PRT dokształca mułłów i kobiety w Ghazni*, http://www.wojskopolskie.pl/articles/view/15321/159/prt-doksztalca-mullow-i-kobiety-w-ghazni.html [access: 2 XII 10]. Despite the guarantee of equality of rights to women (with equal access to education and development) in the articles of the Afghan Constitution, reality differs considerably from these postulates. Women are still treated as a property of the husband's family. A great majority of women struggle with poverty, limitations in access to education and health care. It is estimated that more than 80% of woman in Ghazni are illiterate and cannot read.

[10] Building of a theocratic society, based on Sharia by the Taliban during the government of Mullah Omar was connected to the persecution of religious minorities (especially the Shiites, as well as few Hinduism followers living in Afghanistan). On the 8th of March 2001 the Taliban destroyed two enormous ancient Buddha statues, because they thought that presenting human figures is discrepant with the Koran. A similar fate met other smaller monuments. Also the Afghans met with restrictions: watching television, listening to the radio and access to the internet were prohibited. Even weather forecasting, in the Taliban minds considered as a kind of black magic, was banned, along with certain sport disciplines, because leaders of the movement claimed these actions lead the society away from prayer and God, even though they were inoffensive.

Table 2. Opinions about Islam as a religion by respondents after their return from a stabilization mission in Afghanistan (data in %)

Choices	Positive value/feature	No opinion	Negative value/feature	Choices	Result	Rank
20	Tolerance	25	Totalitarianism (aggressiveness)	55	-35	VII
16	Modernization (adaptation to the present day)	17	Outdated (traditional)	67	-51	II
16	Rational and logical	15	Irrational (dominated by axioms)	69	-53	I
18	Trust-inspiring	27	Mistrust-inspiring	55	-37	VI
13	Uniform (monolithic)	27	Diversified (conflicted)	60	-47	IV
12	Caring about dignity of women	33	Discriminating women	55	-43	V
17	Open to other religions (religious dialogue)	18	Closed to other religions (confronting and repressive)	65	-48	III
14	Peaceful (irenological)	24	Hostile (polemological)	62	-48	III

Notice: The result is the difference of positive (agree and strongly agree) and negative (disagree and strongly disagree) choices, reflecting opinions about Islam of soldiers taking part in stabilization mission in Afghanistan. The lack of opinion was not taken in consideration.

Source: personal survey.

The never-ending rivalry of many ethnic and religious groups, along with a frequent use of violence, often generated a belief of lack of consensus in a conflict between inhabitants of a province. A sad reflection repeats itself in many opinions, that restraining the progressing brutality and barbarity of local communities is becoming impossible to attain. This feature, proving internal diversity (and conflict) of Islam worshippers has been pointed out by 60% of respondents, which, in comparison to a small number of positive opinions (that it is unified and monolithic – 13%), gave the result -47%. Respondents once again underlined a difficult position of women, their obvious discrimination in comparison to men. Almost 55% of the mission members thought that the social handicap of Afghan women is unacceptable and collides with norms and values that characterize other, non-Arabic, societies[11]. Such a long time on a mission gradually made its participants grow accustomed to another values defining lives in this community. The change of reactions showed a growing indifference to drastic examples of the old-fashioned Islam in comparison to modernizing processes taking place in other societies.

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[11] J. Bajer, *PRT dokształca mułłów i kobiety w Ghazni*, http://www.wojsko-polskie.pl/articles/view/15321/ 159/ prt-doksztalca-mullow-i-kobiety-w-ghazni.html [access: 2 XII 2010]. Despite the guarantee of equality of rights to women (with equal access to education and development) in the articles of the Afghan Constitution, reality differs considerably from these postulates. Women are still treated as a property of the husband's family. A great majority of women struggle with poverty, limitations in access to education and health care. It is estimated that more than 80% of woman in Ghazni are illiterate and cannot read.

Similar opinions were shown towards the aggressiveness and dominance of the Afghan social life (public and private sectors) by Islam, which does not tolerate behaviour going in opposition to its rules. Such a situation strengthened the feeling of mistrust, suspicion and distance, which unable reaching an understanding and living in peace.

Factors complementing the negative opinion about Islam in the respondents' group was its adversial character (enabling and sometimes even encouraging the use of violence) that seeks its justification in the irrational system of values in the sacrum sphere. Their paradoxical understanding results in traumatic events in mutual interactions in the profanum sphere.

A second survey enabled to investigate the change of opinions about Islam as a religion (before and after a direct contact with its followers). Its results are shown in table 3, with reference to eight pairs of values characterizing Islam.

Data shows that there has been a distinct rise in the opinions' polarization (both regarding positive opinions and those clearly in distance from the religion), at a cost to a clear fall in responses "neither agree nor disagree". It shows that direct experience of respondents with Afghans have shaped their opinion (both negative and positive).

Table 3. Opinion change of soldiers about Islam as a religion after their return from a stabilization mission in Afghanistan (data in %)[12]

Choices	Positive value/feature	No opinion	Negative value/feature	Rejections	Quality of opinion change
-1	Tolerance	4	Totalitarianism (aggressiveness)	-3	minor positive
-6	Modernization (adaptation to the present day)	-2	Outdated (traditional)	8	minor negative
-7	Rational and logical	0	Irrational (dominated by axioms)	7	minor negative
-3	Trust-inspiring	-2	Mistrust-inspiring	5	minor negative
-8	Uniform (monolithic)	5	Diversified (conflicted)	3	minor negative
-7	Caring about dignity of women	0	Discriminating women	7	minor negative
-6	Open to other religions (religious dialogue)	2	Closed to other religions (confronting and repressive)	4	minor negative
-7	Peaceful (irenological)	-5	Hostile (polemological)	12	major negative

Notice: The result is the difference of positive (agree and strongly agree) and negative (disagree and strongly disagree) choices, reflecting opinions about Islam of soldiers taking part in stabilization mission in Afghanistan. The lack of opinion was not taken in consideration.

Source: personal survey.

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[12] The following assumption was made for the research: a change of opinions above 10% is relevant (apparent); change of opinions ranging from 3 to 10% are slight (irrelevant). Smaller changes were treated as invisible (lack of change).

Two distinct changes of opinion about Islam were noticed. The most negative changes (rise in criticism) were observed in its hostile (polemological) character by 12%. In the second case the change is smaller, but it has a positive effect and it relates to critical opinions about its totalitarian (aggressive) aspect (by 3%). This apparent paradox proves that respondents observe certain regularities in the ongoing wars and in the Afghan people taking part in them. The use of Islamic fundamentalism in military actions has caused a totalisation of life – the Afghans are forced with threats, blackmail or corruption to take side in the conflict. There is no place in this society for those who seek an alternative way or new solutions. They are being attacked and repressed by both sides of the conflict. Such a totalisation of social life both on a big and a local scale generates conflicts and tensions.

Life in constant danger, tension and conflict forces local inhabitants to seek a niche enabling them to build enclaves in hope for a safer life. Trauma of the province inhabitants, necessity to live in poverty and many threats (a serious threat of life or health loss) make the local communities adapt to such conditions, because they haven't experienced other for decades and they do not know a peaceful life.

Some negative changes were observed also in the estimation of Islam being open to other religions (religious dialogue), care in women dignity and modernization (adapting to modernity). ISAF being a multinational and multireligious contingent, it causes some religious conflicts in direct relations with inhabitants of Afghanistan (for example, on the occasion of religious holiday, farewell ceremonies of fallen soldiers, and so on). At the same time, the concern of specialists from CIMIC[13] and PRT Ghazni[14] makes members of stabilization missions observe certain symptoms of evolution in Afghan behaviour, despite a great distance and cultural differences.

A slight rise in criticism is visible in Islam's irrationality (an oversubmission to axioms), which hinder or even prevent reaching even the smallest understanding of the other side's arguments. A similar rise in negative opinions was observed concerning mistrust to other religion members[15].

Taliban attacks and assassinations of inhabitants profiting from various kinds of international help, which additionally aggravates an already very difficult situation of local society, caused a slight rise in negative opinions about this religion because of its internal diversity and conflict.

The research results presented above show an image of Islam as a religion in the consciousness of members of stabilization mission in Afghanistan. They express a serious criticism towards its hostile and fundamentalist character. Personal experiences and

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[13] CIMIC – Civil-Military Cooperation – a group of specialists realizing projects concerning rebuilding of the most important infrastructure (among others, irrigation and water treatment, electricity, healthcare, etc.)

[14] Provincial Reconstruction Team Ghazni – a team of support which realizes various projects concerning rebuilding social life. One of its biggest recent events was a three months seminary in the middle 2010 on issues of good government, women rights and addictions. Almost 150 people took part in it, 40 of which were women.

[15] Rise of criticism probably results from an increased military activity of the Taliban who have repeatedly harassed respondents with unsuspected attacks and bombings.

contact with the Afghans have caused a fixation of prejudices about its closure to other religions, relying mutual relations with members of other religions or people having atheist views on confrontation or repression. This rising disapproval was strengthened by opinions about discrimination of women (Islam in practice is not a religion friendly for women). A slight positive change was observed in its totalitarian and aggressive character. This change results from adaptation and indifference to harsh living conditions of local communities, which are dominated by rules of this religion. Other elements describing Islam as a religion have been also critically rated by the majority of respondents.

Apart from a negative and very critical view on Islam as a religion, there have been a few positive opinions. They concern its social aspect, which helps its followers survive in very difficult circumstances. The following statements proved this aspect – "Islam gives a sense of fulfillment of a higher aim in regions of extreme poverty, it helps and enables people to survive in extreme poverty".

Also, a group of interrogated soldiers expressed some positive references to inter-actions with other religion believers, which were corrected by an excessive fanaticism of the Islamists. The following opinions may serve as an example – "Islam is a good religion in its foundations, respecting other people, but its fanatic believers exaggerate various factors and justify their bad behavior by protection of the faith".

In conclusion, Islam is perceived as a religion which will not, in the nearest future, become a ground for dialogue and understanding between two sides of the conflict, not only in Afghanistan, but also in other regions of the world.

Respondents' opinions about Islamists

Another scope of the research was to find out respondents opinions about Islamists. Similarly to the case of Islam, they were asked to present their view before and after the mission. For their description, 17 pairs of standard features were used (concerning various aspect of a human life) as well as a 5-level Likert scale. Results are displayed in the following tables.

The presented data show that apart from two features which were valued positively by the majority, a distinct stigmatization is observable (predominance of negative opinions over the positive ones).

A typical image of an Islamist presented by respondents before their mission in Afghanistan is as follows: it is an old-fashioned man who discriminates women and does not care about his external image. This negative portrait of a typical Islam worshipper was shaped by the following statements: "they are short-sighted and closed to the world and to the civilization progress", "they are most frequently analphabets", "they treat women as inferior beings", "their appearance reflects the widespread poverty".

This portrait is completed by other negative features: maliciousness (lack of honesty in relations with other human beings) and being superstitious. They were shown in the

following statements: "they present a false openness in contact with foreigners to startle them later, they are deceitful, life of Islamists follows the religious calendar, they are devoid of their own opinion, they are very dogmatic, they do not decide of their own lives – religion and the whole system of orthodox values decide for them".

Table 4. Opinions about Islamists by respondents before their departure for a stabilization mission in Afghanistan (data in %)

Choices	Positive value/feature	No opinion	Negative value/feature	Choices	Result	Rank
6	Reasonable	30	Superstitious	64	-58	V
6	Honest	27	Malicious	67	-61	IV
8	Trust-inspiring	27	Mistrust-inspiring	65	-57	VI
20	Civilized, cultured	39	Savage	41	-21	XIII
25	Loyal citizen	41	Anarchist	34	-9	XV
7	Clean	31	Dirty	72	-65	III
15	Laborious	34	Lazy	51	-36	XI
14	Obliging	39	Egoist	47	-33	XII
10	Tolerant	24	Aggressive	66	-56	VII
7	Respecting women	16	Discriminating women	77	-70	II
37	Brave	37	Cowardly	26	11	XVII
33	Honorable	34	Without honor	33	0	XVI
10	Economical	40	Wasteful	50	-40	IX
18	Kind	37	Unkind	45	-27	X
25	Disciplined	31	Undisciplined	44	-19	XIV
3	Modern	22	Old-fashioned	75	-72	I
8	Open to others	34	Closed	58	-50	VIII

Notice: The result is the difference of positive (agree and strongly agree) and negative (disagree and strongly disagree) choices, reflecting opinions about Islam of soldiers taking part in stabilization mission in Afghanistan. The lack of opinion was not taken in consideration.

Source: personal survey.

A critical opinion about average Islamists was strengthened by the lack of trust (because their contacts with others were characterized by mistrust, according to respondents), feeling of threat (because of aggressive behavior of the Taliban and the rise in numbers of terrorist attacks), as well as a lack of openness towards attempts of a dialogue. The following declarations may serve as an example of these concerns: "Islamists are very devoted to their religion", "they are ready to kill in its protection", "death during fight with an infidel has another dimension than in Western religion and culture", "they are devoid of their own opinion", "they are very dogmatic".

Further opinions underlined wastefulness (acceptance and adaptation to extreme poverty), unkindness (clear distance from any help attempt or support from stabilization forces) and laziness (lack of effort to change their lives for the better). This image was

reflected in the following opinions: "they are lazy and careless", "life in constant danger makes them forget about the future", "tragic experiences of succeeding interventions made them mistrust others".

Additionally, respondents expressed Islamists' egoism (lack of empathy or altruism in view of other people efforts – from outside their family or neighborhood), lability of behavior, perceived as unkind, difficult to understand from the point of view of circumstances of the interaction. These opinions are reflected in the statements: "they do not use the help rendered for themselves, but they share with the Taliban", "they are willing to accept help, but they approve of the war for religion made by the Taliban". Further critical remarks were expressed towards the lack of discipline and leaning towards anarchization of local social life (lack of respect of the government decisions)[16].

Only in the case of two features, respondents expressed positive opinions. They were courage and honor, features particularly valuable for each soldier and fighter. It proves a certain respect towards the Taliban, who, in spite of an anarchic way of fighting for their military goals, are ready to devote anything, including their lives. They were expressed in the following statements: "they are honorable towards people to whom they offered shelter", "numerous examples of the Taliban behavior during fights proved their determination and readiness to sacrifice their lives for their faith".

A clearly critical and negative image of Islamists results from the description made by respondents. It was determined by unaccepted moral factors (clear isolation and reluctance from others, discrimination of women), harsh living conditions on the subsistence level (increased by lack of hygiene and wastefulness) and negative aspects of their character (malice, mistrust and aggressiveness).

This image was verified after the respondents' experiences during the stabilization mission, the result of which are presented in table 5.

Direct contact with Afghanistan inhabitants caused an increase of negative and critical opinions in the minds of soldiers taking part in stabilization mission towards people living close to places where Polish forces were dislocated and a fixation of stigmatization tendencies. In the first research, respondents attributed two positive features to the Afghans from 17 pairs of features and values, whereas after their return, negative opinions prevailed in all categories.

Negative opinions about the Afghans fixed before the mission still created their image in respondents' minds and in some cases even got strengthened. The biggest criticism was triggered towards attempts to increase hygienic conditions which were very distant from typical European standards. A more or less clear rejection of help proposed by CIMIC and PRT Ghazni were a factor which visibly increased these dispositions of respondents[17].

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[16] This situation is the result of the central power's weakness, which is not respected by the local communities and is too weak when it comes to confront the locals relying on traditional ways of controlling and enforcing the laws.

[17] Respondents were appalled by well-known acts of devastation by the Taliban of infrastructure, which was supposed to make life of the local population easier (wells, small powerhouses, school and health centers'

An equally big objection was caused by discrimination of women, which has not changed visibly despite abolishing the Taliban law. Attempts of ISAF specialized institutions to change this status are too occasional and meet a strong resistance of traditionalists in H. Karzaj government and the elders.

Table 5. Opinions about Islamists by respondents after the stabilization mission in Afghanistan (data in %)

Choices	Positive feature/value	No opinion	Negative feature/value	Choices	Result	Rank
11	Reasonable	27	Superstitious	62	-51	VI
9	Honest	22	Malicious	69	-60	III
15	Trust-inspiring	18	Mistrust-inspiring	67	-52	V
20	Civilized, cultured	42	Savage	38	-18	XV
18	Loyal citizen	35	Anarchist	47	-29	XIII
15	Clean	7	Dirty	78	-63	I
20	Laborious	11	Lazy	69	-49	VII
16	Obliging	29	Egoist	55	-39	IX
20	Tolerant	31	Aggressive	49	-29	XIII
15	Respecting women	9	Discriminating women	76	-61	II
39	Brave	16	Cowardly	45	-6	XVII
28	Honorable	27	Without honor	45	-17	XVI
20	Economical	24	Wasteful	56	-36	X
18	Kind	33	Unkind	49	-31	XII
22	Disciplined	20	Undisciplined	58	-36	X
16	Modern	11	Old-fashioned	73	-57	IV
16	Open to others	26	Closed	58	-42	VIII

Notice: The result is the difference of positive (agree and strongly agree) and negative (disagree and strongly disagree) choices, reflecting opinions about Islam of soldiers taking part in stabilization mission in Afghanistan. The lack of opinion was not taken in consideration.

Source: personal survey.

Another group of opinions was related to direct confrontations with the Taliban during performed patrols. Previous experience from military actions suggested that there is an escalation and brutalization of fights, dependence on startling and unconventional actions. Hence the maliciousness of local battle groups as a negative feature reflected the

equipment), as well as of material gifts (food, books, toys, medicines). The fact of benefiting of this help was considered by the Taliban as treachery and susceptible of sanctions (even death).

respondents reaction to the increasing nuisance of military service[18]. It was also hindered by increasing feeling of mistrust towards the Afghans, necessity of constant control of their actions in the region of the Polish contingent operations.

Respondents expressed equally critical and negative opinions about Afghanistan inhabitants (they were most frequent about men because soldiers' contact with women, due to the local custom, was limited and incidental). The following image of Ghazni province citizens resulted from the research: they are old-fashioned people (they live in their own world strongly relying on tradition and usually rejecting the good aspects of modernity) and superstitious (they base their relation to present and future events on dogmatic interpretations of the Koran by Mullahs and local superstitions). Their very difficult living conditions result from the laziness of men and from their isolation from any attempts of help from outside. Another negative feature attributed to men is egoism, caused directly by their lack of care to free women from their harsh status, even though they most frequently suffer from their men's wastefulness and lack of discipline.

Basing on direct contacts with the Afghans, respondents expressed their opinion about unkindness shown under various forms of aggressive behavior (hostile shouting and furtive stone throwing) and inclination to social life anarchization. The image presented above was complemented by other critical opinions about Islamists as uncultured people, without honor and cowardly (making use of more and more sophisticated and startling battle forms based on harassment and creating threats and dangers to ISAF soldiers).

Results shown in tables 4 and 5 (images of the Islamists in the consciousness of stabilization mission members) were analyzed with regards to opinion change during performance of military actions in Afghanistan, presented in tab. 6. A certain differentiation of opinions occurred, connected to a clear decrease in "no opinion" choices and an increase in positive (minor increase) and negative (major increase) ones. At the same time, this dispersal pointed out a clear increase of a negative and critical perception of Ghazni inhabitants. This distinct change (above 10% of the investigated group) concerned four areas:

1. Change of tactics of furtive attacks, constant harassment of stabilization forces, causing a conviction about lack of courage of militants (increase by 19%);

2. External appearance and surrounding mess, lack of hygiene care (increase by 17%);

3. Lack of respect towards local authorities' decisions, common lack of discipline and pursuit of anarchy (increase by 13-14%);

4. Radicalization of respondents opinions about lack of the Taliban honor (use of violence towards unprotected population and avoiding direct confrontation with ISAF armed forces) – increase by 12%.

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[18] Such opinions are specific to members of missions occurring in summer time, when an intensification of the Taliban attacks on bases and ISAF coalition forces posts is observable. Numerous daily harassments by unexpected gunfire, along with the threat of health and life loss, causes a psychic exhaustion because of life in constant stress. One of the soldiers from the 7th shift reported that during such an attack in which a Polish soldier was wounded, Afghans present in the base expressed their applause (clapped their hands and cheered), which caused a strong emotional reaction by the rest of Poles.

Table 6. Change of respondents' opinions about Islamists after the stabilization mission in Afghanistan (data in %)

Choices	Positive value/feature	No opinion	Negative value/feature	Choices	Quality of opinion change	Rank	
						Before the mission	After the mission
+5	Reasonable	-3	Superstitious	-2	Minor positive	V	VI
+3	Honest	-5	Malicious	+2	No change	IV	III
+7	Trust-inspiring	-9	Mistrust-inspiring	+2	Minor positive	VI	V
0	Civilised, cultured	+3	Savage	-3	Minor positive	XIII	XV
-7	Loyal citizen	-6	Anarchist	+13	**Major negative**	XV	XIII
+7	Clean	-24	Dirty	+17	**Major negative**	III	I
+5	Laborious	-13	Lazy	+8	Minor negative	XI	VII
+2	Obliging	-10	Egoist	+8	Minor negative	XII	IX
+10	Tolerant	-7	Aggressive	-3	Minor positive	VII	XIII
+8	Respecting women	-7	Discriminating women	-1	Minor positive	II	II
+2	Brave	-21	Cowardly	+19	**Major negative**	XVII	XVII
-5	Honorable	-7	Without honor	+12	**Major negative**	XVI	XVI
+10	Economical	-16	Wasteful	+6	Minor positive	IX	X
+4	Kind	-11	Unkind	+7	Minor negative	X	XII
-3	Disciplined	-11	Undisciplined	+14	**Major negative**	XIV	X
+13	Modern	-11	Old-fashioned	-2	**Major positive**	I	IV
+8	Open to others	-8	Closed	0	Minor positive	VIII	VIII

Notice: The result is the difference of positive (agree and strongly agree) and negative (disagree and strongly disagree) choices, reflecting opinions about Islam of soldiers taking part in stabilization mission in Afghanistan. The lack of opinion was not taken in consideration.

Source: personal survey.

In only one case, a rise of positive opinion was noticed (of about 11%), suggesting a decrease of critical views about the Afghans being old-fashioned, an emergence of symptoms of modernity (using technological inventions enabling an improvement of life hygiene, access to information, internet etc.). In the case of 12 remaining aspects of life under investigation, there is a certain lability in opinions before and after the mission.

A slight rise of positive opinions about Ghazni province inhabitants was observed in aspects of a slow opening to others (increase of 8%), a bigger tolerance of the foreigners (7% rise), growing accustomed to women status in local communities (rise in acceptance level by 7%), decrease of mistrust in favor of trust (by 5%), increase in the level of economy (acceptance rise by 3%). A lack of opinion change was observed in honesty and malice

manifested in the Afghan behavior. Minor critical and stigmatizing changes were noticed in the following Islamists' features – their egoism (rise by 6%), lack of will to change their life standards (laziness – rise by 3%) and lack of kindness (rise by 3%) towards attempts of the mission participants to improve their lives.

The most noticeable changes were observed in the case of four features, which were the most important in the creation of opinions about Islamists. Harsh living conditions of the local population and the lack of basic hygiene standards were the most solid memories of the research subjects, which resulted in a major rise of negative opinions (by 17%) about the filth in the Islamists' houses. Also, the collected data showed a small positive change (by 7%) about women discrimination. In spite of a rise of negative opinions (1%), which did not approve of the present relations and dependence between men and women, a group of subjects declaring an approval of this situation rose (by 8%). Respondents underlined that their opinion change resulted from adaptation, and what follows, gradual acceptance of the local customs, as well as from respect to tradition (political correctness) and avoiding conflicts.

Respondents' fears about positive and honest intentions of the Afghans were strengthened in another stigmatization about malicious people (minor negative change) and old-fashioned (major rise of positive opinions by 11%), which did not cause a change of place of this feature in the hierarchy.

What emerges from this description is that direct contacts of research subjects with local inhabitants of the Ghazni province cause a fixation and a slight intensification of their negative views on the Afghans. A major intensity of critical opinions were related mainly to features directly connected to stabilizing actions and fights (their tendency to live in anarchy, lack of courage to lead an open fight, breaking the laws, acting without honor[19], lack of discipline). They are visibly strengthened by difficult living conditions (lack of basic hygiene), which result in an image of the Islamists as dirty people.

Characterization of factors creating stereotypes of Islam and Islamists among members of the stabilization mission

One of the most important goals of this research, other than defining the basic traits of Islam and Islamists, was to determine what were the sources and reasons for creation of stereotypes in the minds of the research subjects. This was mostly connected with the knowledge about Islam, the emotions of soldiers, media coverage, personal experience, influence of globalization and pressure created by the public opinion.

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[19] This view results from many examples of attacks on ISAF forces by allied and trained military (the plan is to train about 70 thousand ANA soldiers) and police units (ANP are supposed to have about 80 thousand agents) of Afghanistan, of whom a group acts on both fronts. On the one hand, they are trying to gain the coalition forces' trust, but on the other, they keep contact with the Taliban and make spectacular attacks (mainly suicidal) on ISAF soldiers.

These factors were chosen based on studies about stereotypes and their creation. Polish authors analyzing this problem usually pointed at two basic sources of stereotypes: subjective and social ones. The subjective source is based on one's tendency to categorize, generalize, use cognitive schemata and to increase one's self-esteem (auto-valorization). The social source is said to consist of theories of the actual conflict, transfer of aggression, clash of cultures and linguistic diversity.

Results of the research about mechanisms of creation of stereotypes about Islam and Islamists among soldiers of the VII stabilization shift in Afghanistan are presented in the tables below.

Sources and level of knowledge about Islam and the Islamists in respondents' opinions

Sources of knowledge and their level was analyzed in the first place. Results are presented below.

Table 7. Sources of knowledge about Islam and Islamists based on respondent's answers (data in %)

Source	Before mission		After the mission		Quality of change
	Result	Rank	Result	Rank	
Media (press, TV, radio, internet)	63	II	49	III	decline
Training and course materials received before the mission	39	III	56	II	increase
Personal interest in Eastern philosophy and the issues facing religions in this part of the world	10	V	27	V	increase
Conversations with other members of the mission	65	I	65	I	no change
Meeting Islamists living in Poland	7	VI	7	VIII	no change
Personal interests – thirst for knowledge about the world, other nations and religions	12	IV	33	IV	increase
Information gathered by intelligence and tactical intelligence	7	VI	24	VI	increase
None – I have no interest in this subject	7	VI	9	VII	minor change
Other – direct contact, conversations, spending time with the people of Iraq and Afghanistan	1	IX	1	IX	minor change

Note: Results are based on questions connected with stereotypes and that were answered as 'agree' or 'strongly disagree'. Omitted are the questions answered as 'disagree', 'strongly disagree'. Lack of opinion was not taken into consideration.

Source: personal survey.

Results in table 7 show that sources of knowledge about Islam and its followers have not changed in a major way. Before and after the mission, the most important sources of knowledge were direct conversations with members of the previous stabilization missions. Well though-out training courses also have an impact on the respondent's opinions. After the mission, this source was found useful by additional 17% of the subjects. Often underestimated and marginalized before the mission, respondents found these extra theoretical courses very useful and helpful while conducting military operations in Afghanistan[20].

At the same time, we there was a major decline in the importance of media (press, TV, radio, internet) as a source of knowledge. Before the mission, the media were a major source of information for 63% of the respondents, but after the mission this number dropped to less than 50%. Based on interviews with members of the mission, this decline was generated by the media being one-sided about the reality of Afghanistan. The media were very subjective and generalized too much. There were times where information was presented in a manner meaning to prove the government and politicians right about certain issues and sometimes to manipulate the public opinion[21].

After spending time in Afghanistan, members of the mission have shown an increased thirst for knowledge about the Eastern culture, Islam and the life of Islamists. The change was an increase of about 17% to 21% among all respondents. This shows that even under harsh conditions of the mission in Afghanistan (threat of health and life loss, constant attacks from the Taliban), its members were still inclined to learn about this interesting, foreign culture.

During the mission, the importance of intelligence and tactical intelligence rose as a source of information, not only about the Taliban as enemies, but also about the local residents. This helped to isolate differences in culture and tradition, making it possible to determine certain reactions to ISAF soldiers. This was used as a source of knowledge for a quarter of the soldiers.

A small number of soldiers (9%) declared that they were not interested in any way in Islam, but instead were focused on daily activities connected with the mission. Their explanation was that Islam was just another religion; like any religion it has its rules and values, clear guidelines for its followers and like any religion, is sick-minded.

The next two groups declared that they gathered information while interacting with followers of Islam. 7% had interaction with Islamists who lived in Poland, while another 1% met new acquaintances during the mission. This last group was the one having the

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[20] The topic of training courses about Islam and it's followers in Afghanistan has also been analyzed. Results of the analysis are presented in a further part of the document.

[21] An example of such actions was the way the Nangar Khel incident was portrayed in the media. Polish soldiers took part in this tragic incident. After seeing the news coverage, the coalition soldiers began to criticize the media – that they only show the stereotypical soldier and his actions, discriminating him and concentrating on the images of the victims and their numbers. At the same time, the media did not show the positive aspects of the coalition soldier's work.

most favorable thoughts about the followers of Islam, compared to soldiers who did not have any interaction with residents of the Ghazni province.

It is clear that the most common source of knowledge about Islam was knowledge exchange among soldiers of the mission, which was modified based on what they learned on the training courses before the mission and with an increase in the amount of criticism towards the media (press, TV, radio, internet). Personal interest in lives of the local residents and information gathered by the intelligence and tactical intelligence have also enhanced the experience.

The research also asked the surveyed how they felt about their knowledge of Islam. The results have been presented in table 9. Based on the results, we can say that almost all groups (officers, non-commissioned officers and privates), with two exceptions, declared that the they lack knowledge about the analyzed topic.

Respondents had more information about the dangers and risks of health or life loss during the mission than about any other topic. It means that each and every member of the stabilization mission in Afghanistan knew about the existing and possible dangerous events that could happen during their duty. Experience gathered during the previous missions was put to use and with each mission the soldiers not only had better equipment, but were also better prepared to protect themselves from loss of health and life.

Table 8. Opinions about the level of knowledge of Islam and Islamists by respondents (data in %)

Knowledge level	Before the mission	After the mission	Quality of change
About Islam as a religion	21	33	major change
About different groups of Islamists	17	20	irrelevant change
About the customs and traditions of the local residents of the region where the stabilization mission will take/took place	27	38	major change
About the relations between different groups of local residents	28	35	minor change
About the relations between the local residents and members of the stabilization mission	36	55	major change
About the dangers and risks of health and life loss during the stabilization mission	53	58	minor change
Other- what?..			

Notice: Results are based on questions connected with stereotypes and that were answered as 'agree' or 'strongly agree'. Omitted the questions answered as 'disagree', 'strongly disagree'. Lack of opinion was not taken into consideration.

Source: personal survey

Compared to the time before the mission, there was a major increase of people who declared having knowledge about the relations between the local residents and members

of the stabilization mission (increase from 36% to 55%). This shows that respondents began to adapt to the difficult operations in Afghanistan, forcing them to work with a culture that is very aggressive and prone to conflicts.

Looking at the respondents' declarations, we can see that it was difficult for them to use *soft* (cultural, non-militant) approach towards the local residents. The results showed that most people declined knowledge in topics (opinions like 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree') that could help them to start a dialogue and create permanent communication (exchange of information and opinions). Lack of that knowledge makes contacts between the local residents and members of the stabilization mission difficult, filling them with existing stereotypes and negative opinions.

Although there was a positive change in the level of knowledge on the topic of Islam among the soldiers, we still can notice that a large amounts of soldiers lack knowledge about the customs and traditions of the local residents of the region where the stabilization mission took place (only 38% answered 'agree' or 'strongly agree'), about the relations between the local residents and members of the stabilization mission (35% positive answers), about Islam as a religion (33% positive answers) and about different groups of Islamists (barely 20%).

This is an enormous, unused source, that, when tapped into, could not only support the military operations, but also break the dead lock (presented in the lack of significant, successful operations that could tip the balance and help ISAF win). Unfortunately, because members of the stabilization mission are already using the *hard* approach (fighting using large forces and heavy equipment), we can't say for certain if following this with a *soft* approach (based on cultural, social, religious factors and negotiation) could eliminate the bias between both sides.

Change of reactions and emotions in the research subject group

Reactions and emotions of soldiers before and after the stabilization mission in Afghanistan were also investigated during the research. We can observe, on the basis of data presented in table 9, that in the research subject environment, there are visible changes of reactions and emotions before and after the mission.

The strongest emotions accompanied soldiers in traumatic moments (loss of a colleague in consequence of a wound or murder by the Taliban). Almost 2/3 of research subjects who directly or indirectly participated in the event showed a will of revenge. Such opinions suggest that the psychical tension, isolation and stress in traumatic situations generate violent and negative emotions. During the second research, after the respondents return from their mission, it is visible that suppression of these violent and negative emotions was reinforced by caring thoughts about the closest ones (56% choices), strong mobilization not to be startled again (53%) and the need to release the pressure in the group of closest colleagues (44% of "agree" and "strongly agree" answers).

Table 9. Reactions and emotions accompanying soldiers before and after the stabilization mission in Afghanistan (data in %)

Soldiers' reactions	Before the mission	After the mission	Quality of change
Want of revenge	48	67	**major increase**
Signs of dejection, bitterness and breakdown	29	31	irrelevant increase
Serious reflection, reverie over fragility of life	32	42	**major increase**
Relief that it didn't happen to me	42	40	irrelevant decrease
Fear for your loved ones	55	56	irrelevant increase
Search for the guilty ones of an incident in your collaborator's group	14	27	**major increase**
Mobilization not to be startled again	57	53	minor decrease
Need to unload the pressure in the group of closest colleagues	35	44	minor increase
Increase of reluctance towards Islamists (especially the Taliban)	43	38	minor decrease
Seek of a psychologist or chaplain help	16	8	minor decrease
Use of alcohol or drugs	3	11	minor increase
Search for loneliness, isolation from other members of the incident	0	18	**major increase**
Search for duties or other activities which could help forget about the incident	4	33	**major increase**
Prayer	8	27	**major increase**
Other – what? ……………………………………			

Notice: The results display choices (agree and strongly agree) with respect to the factor under investigation. The lack of opinion and rejections (disagree and strongly disagree) were not taken in consideration.

Source: personal survey.

Such an event "triggered" in some research subjects emotional defense mechanisms based on reflection about the fragility of life (42% of declarations) and relief that "it didn't happen to me" (40%). Additionally, an effect of rise of aversion towards Islamists was observed, especially towards the Taliban (38% of opinions).

Other emotional reactions show a differentiation of behavior – some tried to overcome the constant threat by seeking duties and other activities which could help forget about the event (33% of declarations), others displayed symptoms of apathy, bitterness and breakdown (31%). In the first group, there were also mechanisms of emotional (frequently devoid of rational background) seeking of the culpable in the co-workers group (27% of opinions), in the second, a way of coping was prayer (also 27% of declarations).

To a small extent, an emotional defense reaction was also seeking solitude, isolation from others witnesses of the event (18% of research subjects declared this solution), risking disciplinary penalty because of alcohol or drugs use (11%) or seeking a psychiatrist or chaplain help (8% of all answers)[22].

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[22] A minor percentage of choices of institutional sources of psychological support (psychiatrist and chaplains) results from a widespread dispersal of forces, activities' dynamics, an important restraint in movements of the helping personnel (usually in convoys), time pressure and soldiers' actions with a "with a pinch of salt".

Presented results show that because of their emotions and reactions accompanying them during their stay in Afghanistan, we can distinguish three types of disposition:

1. Activist (extravert) – based on action caused by strong emotional stir (clearly negative – want of revenge), seeking duties and other activities which could help forget about the event and seeking of the culpable in the co-workers group;

2. Individual (introvert) – concentrated on reflection about the fragility of life, prayer and seeking solitude, isolation from other witnesses of the event;

3. Intermediate (mixed) – based on mood swings, intertwining activist and introvert elements of coping with strong emotions.

Respondents' opinions about media coverage about Islam and Islamists

Respondents' opinions about media coverage, creating images of Islam and Islamists in the consciousness of the mission participants was also analyzed. Results are shown in table 10.

Table 10. Judgment of credibility and reliability of media information which shape images of Islam and Islamists in the consciousness of stabilization mission participants (data in %)

Media information	Before the mission	After the mission	Quality of change
About terrorist attacks performed by Islamist militants	49	31	Major decrease of credibility
About executions of hostages performed by these militants	57	36	Major decrease of credibility
About ideological declarations made by religious leaders	37	20	Major decrease of credibility
About military and pacification actions performed towards Islamists (for example, the Israeli army towards the Palestinians)	38	25	Major decrease of credibility
About violence and law breaking towards alleged al-Qaeda supporters by Americans	34	18	Major decrease of credibility
About mutual fights between various Islam factions	34	18	Major decrease of credibility
About conflicts of different religions worshippers (mutual fights, for example in India)	34	22	Major decrease of credibility
About civilization achievements of countries rich in petroleum (Qatar, Bahrain, UAE, Saudi Arabia)	41	29	Major decrease of credibility
Other – what?			

Notice: The results display choices (agree and strongly agree) with respect to the factor under investigation. The lack of opinion and rejections (disagree and strongly disagree) were not taken in consideration.

Source: personal survey.

Results in table 10 demonstrate that the group of respondents treated media coverage as the most important source of knowledge about the character of different Islamist groups before the mission, but lost confidence in their credibility after the mission. A decrease of trust from 12% (relating to civilization achievements of countries rich in petroleum) to 21% (information about hostage executions made by the Taliban) was observed in every media coverage domain investigated in the survey.

An increasing lack of trust was shown by their most frequent opinions about images of Islam and Islamists presented in the media. The most critical opinions were directed towards media comments willing to persuade that "all Muslims want the death of followers of other religions", "Islam is an intolerant religion, and the lack of chance of understanding between both sides of the conflict results from Islamists' unwillingness for dialogue" and "diversity and specificity of Islam stems from its believers' fanaticism, hostility and lack of respect for other religions".

Reactions of research subjects show that the western media and those which support the world of Islam are in an increasing battle to win the public opinion approval, both on the local and global levels. A polarization of the media which displays a diversity of opinions about events happening in Afghanistan and other countries, involving the relation between the Western and the Islamic cultures makes that what seemed unequivocal and obvious before, now causes more doubts. On the one hand, countries reinforcing ISAF divisions continue their military actions which they decided many years ago, but on the other hand, resistance and objection of the public opinion rises in those countries towards attempts of increasing and continuing operations performed by national stabilizing contingents[23].

The increasing criticism of the Polish participation in Afghanistan causes that there occurs a lack of understanding in the researched soldiers group and a gradual marginalization of personal and material costs they pay in this operation. The deficiency of social approval for actions performed during the mission results from an asymmetry of media coverage (with the exception of military press, concentrating on personal and material loss, as well as on the costs paid by the Polish participation in ISAF) and lack of a close perspective of finding a reasonable solution to the conflict.

The latest events caused by the publication of governmental documents on the exposing site Wiki Leaks, which show, apart from the latest politics, the "misery of the USA diplomatic kitchen"[24], magnify this problem. These events prove that the previous

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[23] In Poland, public opinion is mostly opposite the participation of Polish soldiers in stabilization actions. The CBOS report from November 2010 about our commitment in Afghanistan shows that every sixth respondent approves of the operation (17%), but that 60% is against any participation of the Polish army in this mission. A conviction about an efficient military influence on the stabilization was displayed by 16% of respondents. The majority of research subjects is against the Polish participation in ISAF mission because of a lack of improvement of situation in Afghanistan.

[24] The threat of exposing almost 250 thousand governmental documents caused the suspension of Wiki Leaks site because of a hackers attack, strong pressure by the United States and an ambiguous attitude of newspapers, which had received these materials earlier.

optimism in a successful ending of the ongoing conflict has very fragile and doubtful foundations and that the logic of diplomats' utterances and media connected to them may vary from the logic of facts they talk about or they comment.

Opinions of the stabilization mission participants, in which they claim that the previous media coverage about events in Afghanistan are used for stigmatizing the Taliban[25], render their growing crisis of trust to the media. Their proof is a major increase of these opinions from 43% "agree" and "strongly agree" answers before the mission to 71% after the mission. Additionally, a group of respondents who claimed that the media present the situation in Afghanistan in a reliable and objective way has slightly increased from 15% before the mission to 22% after the mission. Such a polarization of opinions about the reception of media coverage about the Taliban shows that direct contacts and feelings of a major part of the research group differ from daily press, radio and TV information.

Change of attitudes towards Islam and Islamists

The change of respondents attitudes towards Islam and Islamists as a consequence of their personal experiences during direct contacts with Afghanistan inhabitants is displayed in table 11.

Table 11. Progress of attitude change of stabilization mission participants towards Islam and Islamists (data in %)

Durability (changeability) of attitude	Before the mission	After the mission	Quality of change
Towards Islam as a religion	8	16	Minor positive
Towards its followers (local population)	11	9	Minor negative
Towards allies (local soldiers and officers supporting the government in Kabul) and stabilization forces' actions	11	7	Minor negative
Towards the Taliban	7	53	Major positive

Notice: The results display choices (agree and strongly agree) with respect to the factor under investigation. The lack of opinion and rejections (disagree and strongly disagree) were not taken in consideration.

Source: personal survey.

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[25] The Polish society has little access to information about another side of the Afghans fighting with a foreign intervention. S. Popowski, *Wejście bez wyjścia*, "Polityka", 2009, nr 36, p. 68-70, in which the author touches upon a sensitive problem of about 400 Russian soldiers held hostages by the Mujahedeen. Although 20 years have passed, still new ones are being found. There are still about 270 names on the list of the disappeared and their search is made by the Committee of International Soldiers of CIS. Some recent filmed moments of some of their lives show that the fighting Afghans are capable of grand gestures, mercy and forgiveness to their past enemies.

Mistrust towards the local population has slightly risen (from 100% before the mission to 9% after it) and toward allies (local soldiers and officers supporting the government in Kabul – from 11% to 7%). The first one reflects the possibility that the local population is probably tired of the ongoing conflict, lack of stability, interference with their lives, unnecessary victims and damage caused by attacks of stabilization forces made by mistake, all of which create barriers and distance in communication and interaction. The second one reflects the instability of situation in Afghanistan and in the Ghazni province, as well as a minor influence of H. Karzai government on the functioning of local populations[26]. A direct realization of mutual tasks of Polish and Afghan soldiers and policemen in the Ghazni province during their missions would not, in respondents' opinions, contribute to a rise of trust, but rather a minor decrease was observed.

Simultaneously, a minor positive change towards Islam as a religion was observed (rise from 8% to 16% after the mission), as well as a major positive attitude towards the Taliban (from 7% to 53%).

The change of attitude towards Islam (decrease of negative opinions) was reflected by the following statements: Islam is a religion as any other, it has similar rules and values, it clearly states social and religious duties, it provides fulfillment of a higher value, especially in very poor regions.

Some surprising results were observed in the change of attitude towards the Taliban. Before the mission, the level of approval of this formation's actions was at the level of 7%, whereas after the mission, it has risen to 53%. In the respondent group there is a criticism of the Taliban activity (about their terrorist attacks, rigorous execution of Sharia rights, women discrimination), but their battle founded on absolute commitment and fidelity to Islam values are more appreciated. The attempts of portraying them as ruthless, savage, mostly illiterate, even barbarian warriors in the official media provoke a decreasing approval of the public opinion in the world, but also of members of stabilization missions[27].

Such behavior and differences in opinions about the Taliban reflects the tendency of a *homo duplex* (split man)[28]. Pauses made in military actions encourage mission members

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[26] Despite intensive attempts of ISAF forces to create military and police forces of Afghanistan with about 150 thousand people (70 thousand of whom in the ANA army and 80 thousand in ANP police), their capability to install and maintain safety and social order are meager. There are plans to prepare about 350 thousand army and police force until the coalition forces leave Afghanistan; forces which should be able to ensure a normal functioning of the country on their own. However, in the present state of affairs, without direct support of ISAF forces, the realization of this scope is impossible.

[27] More and more published books and articles about the meaning of politics and military activity in Afghanistan are the proof, such as: J. Ziegler, *Nienawiść do Zachodu*, Warszawa 2010; P. Porter, *Talibowie są nowocześni*, „Le Monde Diplomatique", 2009, nr 11, p. 1-4.

[28] This sociological idea firstly occurred in Emil Durkheim who analyzed the eternal battle of the biological human essence (his impressions, senses, instincts) and on the other side his humanity (as a social and cultural product – his soul, thinking, morality and religion). This conflict relies on a game resistant to alternative – if a man wants to act as an animal, then his higher nature (his humanity) loses – and vice versa. What is animalistic and egoistic reflects the biological nature of men, what is collective and social (human, moral, altruistic) leads men to behaviors based on respect and repressing animalistic instincts.

to reflections, transferring them from direct fights to a cultural level. On the one hand, they experience a sensation of superiority and certainty because of their advantage resulting from equipment, modernity, strategy and politics[29], but on the other hand it is difficult for them to understand and rationalize the Taliban actions, who feel from the bottom of their hearts, who are primitive and as if taken from another world. Their strength and will to fight comes from a transcendental peace, awareness of their mission, proximity to God and death, rarely felt in the modern Occidental world. This determination is best rendered by one of the Afghan warriors that "the Americans love Pepsi-Cola and comfort, we love death"[30].

Global changes as a factor generating conflicts

Global changes as a factor generating an increase or decrease of mutual relations between Afghanistan inhabitants and members of the stabilization mission are presented in table 12.

Data presented in table 12 suggest that in majority of cases opinions about the possibility of affection of mentioned global changes on mutual relations present a minor or irrelevant meaning. Only two cases present major changes:

1. An increase of opinions that there were successful attempts to paternalize (dominate) the local Islamist societies by the Western culture. Based on the respondents opinions, these operations usually led to defensive reactions in those societies, where the least likely reaction are terrorist attacks aimed at their countrymen (which want to use outside help), at ISAF forces and international civilian organizations (carrying humanitarian aid to those regions).

2. A major decline in the number of attempts to humiliate and ridicule Islamist traditions and religion (in some of the Western media) while political correctness was used more often while talking about faith and freedom of conscience.

The majority of respondents (53%) believed that another important problem was the inability to solve the situation in regions witnessing the clash of cultures (where the Western culture meets Islam; for example: the Middle East, Iraq, Afghanistan). Stabilization actions taken in the last years, each time sending larger forces, instead of extinguishing the situation, fueled it and created new conflicts inside societies involved in those missions. There was a noticeable lack of facilitation skills and lack of search for a peaceful solution for the existing conflicts between the fighting nations. This made finding a consensus very difficult. According to the respondents, minimizing paternization is a very important factor that could help the stabilization efforts in Afghanistan and other regions, mostly

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[29] Any of the „Enduring Freedom" (NATO's intervention in Afghanistan cryptonym) operation's objectives, which were defined as follows: destroying terrorist training camps in Afghanistan, destroying training infrastructure, capturing al-Qaeda leaders and finishing the actions of terrorist formations in Afghanistan – were not completed.

[30] See P. Porter, *Talibowie są...*, cyt. wyd., p. 4.

those which are deeply religious and cultivate the Islamic traditions. In their opinions, there is a need for multifaceted negotiations and for a common understanding not only on the political and economical ground, but also to understand the traditions of the involved societies[31].

Table 12. Global changes as factors generating an increase of conflict between Islamist societies and Western societies by the research subjects (data in %)

Global changes as factors generating an increase of conflict between Islamist societies and Western societies	Before the mission	After the mission	Quality of change
Increasing feminization and major increase of women role in the modern societies	37	37	No change
Desacralization of social life, gradual expulsion of the "sacrum" sphere by rights and civic freedoms	31	32	Irrelevant change
Major increase of education and knowledge role in the creation of modern social order	36	33	Minor decrease
Visible withdrawal from traditional social life (based on attributed status) for the sake of modern society (based on achieved status)	37	32	Minor decrease
Systematic abolition of barriers and frontiers for the sake of a pluralization of social life and a diversified, multicultural society	30	39	Minor decrease
Increasing social differentiation and creation of clear social distances (rich/poor differentiation)	41	32	Minor decrease
Increasing social mobility causes a more important flow of people, products, capital and cultural contacts (breaking isolation of traditional societies)	35	40	Minor increase
Attempts to dominate the culture of local Islamic populations by the Western culture cause and increase of defense mechanisms (and, in consequence, terrorist attacks)	37	49	**Major increase**
Inability to solve traditional conflicts in explosive regions of the world (on the contact of Western culture and Islam, for example in Iraq or Afghanistan)	54	53	Irrelevant change
Disregarding and satirizing Islamic traditions in some Western media, not acting according to political correctness in cases of religion or freedom of conscience	50	27	**Major decrease**
Other - what? …………….…………………………..……..			

Notice: The results display choices (agree and strongly agree) with respect to the factor under investigation. The lack of opinion and rejections (disagree and strongly disagree) were not taken in consideration.

Source: personal survey.

[31] Words of Ch. M. de Talleyrand-Perigord are suitable for this situation, he said that "bayonets have many advantages, but they also have disadvantages because you cannot sit on them. They are useful in a military intervention but governing the conquered country with their aid for a long run is impossible". Similar views are expressed by R. Kuźniar (head of Strategic Studies in the Institute of Political Science of Warsaw University), who thinks that "the intervention in Afghanistan is becoming a bad war, even if we take in consideration only its length and damage it makes". R. Kuźniar, *My mamy zegarki, oni mają czas*, "Polityka", 18 August 2008.

To sum up, based on the gathered opinions of soldiers from the VII shift of the Polish Military Contingent in Afghanistan, we can see a drastic decrease in people who don't have an opinion in favor of people who either have a very positive outlook on this religion or decided to keep their distance and to not be involved. This shows that meeting people living in Afghanistan had a major impact on their opinions about Islam.

Moreover, there was a major decline in the number of people who criticized discrimination of women (Islam as a religion is not very women-friendly). Respondents after spending some time with the Afghan people reinforced their opinions that Islam is not very open for other religions, followers of those religions or atheists and that a as religion it is fond of using repressions and violence. It has also reinforced the following opinions about Islam: its totalitarian and aggressive nature (largest increase of negative opinions), backwardness (lack of negotiations between warring religions) and lack of trust (towards religious fundamentalists who want to escalate the conflict no matter the cost).

Apart from negative and very critical opinions about Islam as a religion, certain positive elements of its perception are also visible. They concern the social aspect of Islam, which helps its believers in very difficult conditions. This aspect was pointed out especially in regions of extreme poverty: "it helped and helps survive its followers in conditions of extreme poverty".

Direct contacts of participants in the stabilization mission with inhabitants of Ghazni province solidified and slightly strengthened their positive opinions about the Afghans. A major increase in critical opinions concerns mostly features directly connected to stabilization actions and battles (their inclination to anarchy, lack of courage to lead an open war, breaking the laws, acting without honor, lack of discipline). They are visibly strengthened by difficult conditions of living (lack of standard hygiene measures), which make the Islamists look like dirty people.

In this context, it is worth mentioning that the soldiers honored the Taliban absolute commitment and dedication in the battle to install their vision of social life organization without a foreign intervention.

The research provides with conclusions about the preparation of soldiers for meeting Islam and Islamists. It turns out that the level of knowledge in the respondent group is insufficient, which causes major barriers in using soft methods (culture, civilization, religion) in breaking the aversion of local populations to our actions within ISAF. It is crucial to use all possible measures to provide candidates for missions with knowledge about a multicultural world. This knowledge should be installed from the stage of training officers. Methods and forms of communications used so far are insufficient.

It is also worth noticing that the coordination and information flow indirectly helping our forces are also insufficient – psychological and sociological actions describing cultural, religious and social processes in the Islamic world, as well as analyzing and informing about personal experience and those of other contingents in Afghanistan.

Additionally, it has been proven that the stereotypization is made long before the moment in which candidates for mission start to think about their military duty. Con-

sciousness of Polish citizens about Islam and its followers is created on the basis of quotidian knowledge. Especially the media have a very strong influence on its creation. They shape a vision of a Muslim-terrorist. In such a way, without a possibility for interpersonal relations with members of this one of the oldest monotheistic religions, Polish citizens create only an idea of Islamists as others – foreign – unknown. It is good if Poles ever see a necessity to reflect about the problems which, in a subjective reception of a part of them, does not have a direct link to everyday life. The Muslim world is very often subject of abstractions and considerations about are often reduced, unfortunately, to the analysis of recent information about terrorist attacks, beautiful fairy-tales or destinations of tourist trips.

It is then valid to claim that there exist stereotypes and prejudice in the military environment, but there is no discrimination. Soldiers lack knowledge and preparation about this problematic, but such a knowledge is necessary for almost the totality of the Polish society.