

A PARTIAL SUCCESS

AN INITIAL ASSESSMENT OF ELEVEN YEARS OF GERMAN MILITARY INVOLVEMENT IN AFGHANISTAN

Tinko Weibezahl

“The security situation remains difficult in certain parts of the country, but has improved somewhat: Afghan security forces have now taken over responsibility in large parts of the country and generally appear to be up to the task.” This is what was reported in the “Interim Report on the Progress Report on Afghanistan”, which was presented to the German Bundestag by the government at the end of June 2012.¹ Federal minister Dirk Niebel recognised the progress that had been made during his last visit to Kabul and gave the go-ahead for a payment of 175 million euros to be made from Germany’s development budget: “All the targets that were jointly agreed have been met”, he said at the end of August 2012 after meeting with Afghan president Hamid Karzai in Kabul.²

However, there are a growing number of suggestions in the media that after eleven years of deployment by the German Military (Bundeswehr) expectations initially set by the international community could not be met. Indeed, the security situation remains fragile. The safety of visiting international politicians still requires whole contingents of security staff, and foreign aid workers are subject to strict curfews and in some cases are no longer able to work full-time on their own projects. Diplomats tend to be withdrawn after one year of service because the psychological strain



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- 1 | Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung, *Fortschrittsbericht Afghanistan zur Unterrichtung des Deutschen Bundestags. Zwischenbericht Juni 2012*, 3 Sep 2012, <http://auswaertiges-amt.de/cae/servlet/contentblob/622096/publicationFile/169621/120622-Zwischenbericht.pdf> (accessed 5 Oct 2012).
- 2 | “Besuch am Hindukusch: Niebel fordert von Afghanistan Reformen”, *Tagesschau.de*, 23 Aug 2012, <http://tagesschau.de/ausland/niebel-afghanistan100.html> (accessed 5 May 2012).

is too great. Ministries, universities and even restaurants resemble high-security zones and there are constant attacks resulting in many dead and injured. Attacks on ISAF's international security assistance troops occur on a daily basis.

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However, it would be unfair to ignore the partial successes that have been achieved. In some regions at least, stability is possible, but it requires concentrated effort and continuity. In many parts of the country it can be said that Afghanistan today is very different to ten years ago, when the Taliban regime was publicly executing people, blowing up cultural sites and brutally suppressing all forms of economic activity. However, despite the progress that has been made, the impression remains that these successes have been dearly purchased.

By the end of September this year, coalition troops had been attacked 35 times by their supposed allies, and over 50 ISAF soldiers have been killed by Afghan security forces since the beginning of the year. The number of these attacks has risen dramatically. In the whole of 2011, 35 soldiers were killed in this kind of incident. As a result, NATO has ordered that all coalition troops should carry a loaded weapon at all times, even in their own camps.³ This is hardly a sign of progress in the security sector.

Eleven years after the military intervention by the international community got underway, public debates on the sense and success of such an undertaking are becoming more and more heated. As a result, the pressure on all those involved is growing. European and American politicians constantly have to explain to their voters why the sacrifice of human lives, not to mention the billions in taxpayers' money, is still justified, while every year the Afghan government fails to live up to its duty to make clear and sustainable improvements to the security situation. On top of this, even those who had political responsibility for the operation in the past, such as former German Minister of Defence Peter Struck and the former Chief-of-Staff of the

3 | Cf. "Schutz vor Taliban. Isaf-Soldaten müssen geladene Waffen tragen", *Spiegel Online*, 18 Aug 2012, <http://spiegel.de/politik/ausland/isaf-soldaten-muessen-geladene-waffen-tragen-a-850739.html> (accessed 5 Oct 2012).

Bundeswehr Harald Kujat have started to distance themselves from what is happening in Afghanistan and are talking of the failure of the operation.

So it is worth taking a look back, more than a decade after the first German soldiers landed in Afghanistan. What were the circumstances and strategy that brought about the deployment? What were the goals and to what extent have they been achieved? Have the human and financial sacrifices made by the international community in Afghanistan been justified?

A LOOK BACK AT THE COLLECTIVE DEFENCE CLAUSE

The pictures of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the USA flew around the world creating massive shock waves over the four coordinated suicide attacks that resulted in over 3,000 deaths. The very next day, the United Nations unanimously condemned the attacks in Resolution 1368 and permitted the USA to use military force to defend itself.⁴ For the first time since its inception, NATO invoked the "collective defence clause": an armed attack on the sovereign territory of a NATO member country had occurred, and in accordance with Article 5 of the NATO Treaty this was to be treated as an attack on all NATO members and therefore required the military support of all these members. However, it was still unclear who lay behind the attacks, or how this collective defence clause should be enacted in practical terms.

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One week later, in an extraordinary government statement to the U.S. Congress, President George W. Bush claimed that the international terror network al-Qaida were the organisation responsible for the attacks and demanded that the Taliban regime in Afghanistan hand over Bin Laden immediately. Bush announced that there would be a "war on terror" if this did not happen. He wanted to stress the difference between the people of Afghanistan and their government, whose human rights violations he was quick

4 | Cf. United Nations, *Resolutions and Decisions of the Security Council from 1 January 2001 to 31 July 2002*, 12 Sep 2001, http://un.org/Depts/german/sr/sr_01-02/sr1368.pdf (accessed 5 Oct 2012).

to condemn. He also gave all nations an ultimatum in terms of supporting the USA: "Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists."

On 13 November, the Afghan Northern Alliance, a group with close links to the USA, was able to take the city of Kabul. By the end of the year, the regime under Mullah Omar had been toppled.

On 7 October 2001 the U.S. military began bombing Taliban positions and infrastructure in Afghanistan. Initially, the USA opted against deploying ground troops. On 13 November, the Afghan Northern Alliance, a group with close links to the USA, was able to take the city of Kabul without a fight. Kunduz was occupied on 25 November and Kandahar on 7 December. By the end of the year, the regime under Mullah Omar had been toppled. Bin Laden himself escaped during the battle for Tora Bora.

On 16 November 2001, while the Northern Alliance were still advancing on Kunduz, the German government under Chancellor Gerhard Schröder asked the Bundestag to vote on a motion to allow the "deployment of German armed forces to support the joint response to terrorist attacks on the USA." Schröder linked the motion to a vote of confidence.⁵ The motion was narrowly accepted – and so Germany joined operation "Enduring Freedom." With the vote on 22 December 2001 on the motion supporting "the participation of German armed forces in the deployment of an international security assistance force in Afghanistan in accordance with resolutions 1386, 1383 and 1378 of the UN Security Council," the deployment of troops was dependent upon being part of the new International Security Assistance Force (ISAF).⁶

Germany's political contribution included organising the Petersberg Afghanistan Conference from 27 November to 5 December 2001. On 21 and 22 January 2002 a donor conference was held in Tokyo at which Germany made a commitment to donate 320 million euros, spread over the

5 | Cf. DocumentArchiv, *Antrag der Bundesregierung auf Einsatz bewaffneter deutscher Streitkräfte bei der Unterstützung der gemeinsamen Reaktion auf terroristische Angriffe gegen die USA vom 7. November 2001*, <http://documentarchiv.de/brd/2001/bundesregierung-antrag-bundeswehr.html> (accessed 5 Oct 2012).

6 | Cf. *ibid.*

following four years. The European Union agreed to give around half a billion euros for 2001 alone.⁷



After the disengagement of international forces the Afghan police (photo with the author) is supposed to secure the country. | Source: KAS.

STRATEGY AND MISSION

The reason for the first Petersberg Afghanistan Conference was to develop a five-point-plan for the period of political transition in Afghanistan. This was presented to the UN Security Council on 13 November 2001 by United Nations Special Representative for Afghanistan, Lakhdar Brahimi. The Security Council then passed Resolution 1378 on 14 November accepting the plan:

1. The United Nations calls a conference, with the agreement of the Northern Alliance, at which all the various groups representing the people of Afghanistan should be present. Even those groups supported by Iran and Pakistan should be represented.

7 | Cf. "Geberkonferenz für Afghanistan – Die ersten Milliarden stehen bereit", *Spiegel Online*, 21 Jan 2002, <http://spiegel.de/politik/ausland/geberkonferenz-fuer-afghanistan-die-ersten-milliarden-stehen-bereit-a-178220.html> (accessed 5 Oct 2012).

2. The conference will elect a provisional council. It will be presided over by an Afghan person who "is recognised as a symbol of national unity and around whom all ethnic, religious and regional groups can unite."
3. The council will propose a transitional government for two years, in which all the most important ethnic groups and interest groups will be represented.
4. An assembly of all tribal leaders, known as a loya jirga, will install the transitional government and charge them with the task of drawing up a democratic constitution. The government should also pave the way for the first free elections since 1973.
5. A second loya jirga will pass the constitution into law and appoint a permanent government for Afghanistan.

The job of the international military coalition initially consisted of "supporting Afghanistan's provisional government bodies in maintaining security in Afghanistan in such a way that the Afghan government bodies and the staff of the United Nations and other international civilian personnel, especially those involved in rebuilding and humanitarian work, can work in a safe environment, as well as providing security support during the exercise of other

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activities in support of the Bonn Agreement."⁸ So the goal of the ISAF was to support the elected government in Afghanistan in creating and maintaining a safe environment in the country. The main priority in rebuilding Afghanistan was to establish democratic structures and to help the freely elected government to reach a position of self-determination as quickly as possible. Originally, the ISAF was meant to operate totally independently of Operation Enduring Freedom. The ISAF was allowed to use "all necessary means, including armed force, in so far as this is

8 | "Motion by the German government to continue the deployment of armed German combat forces in the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan led by NATO and based on Resolutions 1386 (2001) of 20 December 2001, 1413 (2002) of 23 May 2002, 1444 (2002) of 27 November 2002, 1510 (2003) of 13 October 2003 and 1563 (2004) of 17 September 2004 of the UN Security Council", Bundestag paper 15/3710, <http://dip21.bundestag.de/dip21/btd/15/037/1503710.pdf> (accessed 5 Oct 2012).

required to meet the needs of UN Security Council Resolution 1386." The ISAF's area of operation was initially limited to Kabul and the surrounding area, but from October 2003 to 28 September 2006 it was gradually expanded to encompass other areas of the country.

In October 2009, 43 nations were involved in the ISAF (NATO and non-NATO countries) supplying 71,000 soldiers, around 30,000 of whom came from the United States. The European Union supplied around 30,800 soldiers, with 8,300 coming from Britain, 3,380 from Germany, 3,130 from France, 2,800 from Italy and 2,000 from Poland. In 2010, the number of troops increased considerably. Currently there are 50 countries involved with a total of almost 130,000 troops, of which 90,000 are from the U.S. European Union troops in Afghanistan currently number about 32,500, with 9,500 coming from Britain, 4,715 from Germany, 3,960 from Italy, 3,490 from France and 2,470 from Poland.⁹

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DEPLOYMENT OF GERMAN TROOPS

After the German Bundestag had agreed to German soldiers being deployed to Afghanistan, the government was keen to stress that the soldiers were not being sent there in a combat role. Their job was to support the elected government in creating and maintaining a secure environment, in rebuilding the country and creating democratic structures. Peter Struck, who at the time was Chairman of the SPD parliamentary group in the German Bundestag, said: "The key thing is that the Americans will have command of the combat troops, while we will be a part of the peace-keeping effort."¹⁰ This clear differentiation of roles was particularly stressed in the face of strong criticism from the German public, and German soldiers were to be part of the ISAF security force. Initially, they even carried out patrols without wearing helmets because they wanted to be seen as being there to help rather than as an occupying force.

9 | Cf. ISAF, "Troop Numbers and Contributions", <http://isaf.nato.int/troop-numbers-and-contributions/index.php> (accessed 5 Oct 2012).

10 | "Chronologie des Afghanistan-Einsatzes", *Wochenschau*, <http://wochenschau-online.de/downloads/11210/S6-7.pdf> (accessed 5 Oct 2012).

The first draft of its Afghanistan strategy envisaged the deployment of German troops being extended beyond Kabul and advocated the use of troops in Kunduz, in the north of Afghanistan.

On 7 June 2003, an attack was carried out on a bus in Kabul carrying German ISAF soldiers who were travelling from "Camp Warehouse" to the airport to catch a flight home to Germany. Four soldiers were killed and 29 seriously wounded. In September of the same year, the German cabinet passed the first draft of its Afghanistan strategy which had been proposed jointly by the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). This draft strategy envisaged the deployment of German troops being extended beyond Kabul and advocated the use of troops in Kunduz, in the north of Afghanistan. The U.S. approach of using decentralised military/civilian support groups was expressly welcomed, but the government wanted to develop and implement its own concept for civilian and military involvement. Consideration was also given to the possibility of providing police training and help with expanding the police, as well as sending police advisors to other provinces. One outcome of the Berlin Afghanistan conference was a pledge to provide international aid to Afghanistan to the tune of 7.4 billion euros. The key message that emerged from the conference was that joint efforts between Afghanistan and the international community, under the umbrella of the United Nations, were needed if the process of state building was to continue.

Following a resolution by the Bundestag in September 2005, German soldiers were allowed to be deployed for limited periods in combat regions in other parts of Afghanistan and not just in Kabul and the north. The Bundestag raised the upper limit on the total number of army personnel deployed to 3,000. German soldiers were being attacked more and more often in the north of the country, which had previously been relatively peaceful. Suicide attacks were becoming more common. Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer commented: "This is tragic news, and it just goes to show how dangerous this operation is and what risks our soldiers are facing in Afghanistan."

In March 2007, the German Bundestag decided to send six Tornado reconnaissance planes to Afghanistan. This deployment of Tornados was highly controversial in Germany. It

was argued that Germany would effectively be involved in the fighting if pictures taken by these planes were used for American bomb attacks or by British fighter jets in the south of the country. Defence Minister Franz Josef Jung argued that: "The most important thing is to win the hearts and minds of the people. We are already running more than 650 projects in the north of the country involving water supplies, roadbuilding, hospitals and kindergartens. This is the right way to proceed and we will continue with this strategy." Two months later, three German soldiers and five Afghan civilians were killed in a suicide attack in the centre of Kunduz. Five other German soldiers were injured, some seriously.

During the Paris Afghanistan Conference in June 2008 it was calculated that the German contribution to the rebuilding of Afghanistan for the period 2002 to December 2009 would be more than 1.3 billion euros. The Foreign Minister, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, summarised the results of the conference in a statement. German soldiers were increasingly becoming involved in exchanges of fire and skirmishes with insurgents. Between April and June 2009 four German soldiers were killed. The first died when a patrol northwest of Kunduz ran into an ambush. Four other soldiers were also wounded in the attack. Three German soldiers, who had taken part in a joint operation with Afghan security forces, were killed in a skirmish with insurgents in June. On 4 September, 142 Afghans were killed after a German officer requested an American airstrike on two tanker trucks in the north western Kunduz province.

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At Christmas 2009, Margot Kässmann, Chairperson of the Council of the Protestant Church in Germany (EKD), commented that the deployment of German troops in Afghanistan "could not be justified by even the broadest of standards" acceptable to the EKD. She claimed that evidence of military and civilian victims had been suppressed for years and the army's operations dressed up as assistance in the country's rebuilding. She urged that the violent conflict be brought to an end as quickly as possible and that German

soldiers should be brought home without delay in a calm and orderly fashion.¹¹

At the beginning of April 2010, Defence Minister Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg admitted for the first time that it would be fair to "talk in terms of war" when discussing Afghanistan. That month, three more German soldiers were killed during a patrol in the vicinity of Kunduz, with a further eight wounded. Four soldiers were killed in action in the Baghlan

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area when they were operating as part of an Operational Mentor and Liaison Team (OMLT) together with Belgian and Swedish soldiers. Up to this point, 43 German soldiers had died in Afghanistan.¹² In December of the same year, Chancellor Merkel visited the German troops in northern Afghanistan. During the visit, she made the clearest references yet to "a war." When she spoke at the Mazar-i-Sharif military camp she said: "If you look at the reality of the situation facing our soldiers, it is clear that even in the Kunduz region they are involved in real battles – like soldiers in any war."¹³

In early October 2010, the news magazine *Der Spiegel* referred to a report from the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW) to the effect that the deployment of the Bundeswehr in Afghanistan had cost 17 billion euros over the previous ten years, three times the 5.5 billion euros quoted by the German government. According to the authors of the report, the operation was likely to cost another five billion euros before the planned return of the last German combat troops at the end of 2014. They also

11 | Michael B. Berger, "Käbmann für Abzug deutscher Soldaten aus Afghanistan", *Hannoversche Allgemeine*, 24 Dec 2009, <http://haz.de/Nachrichten/Politik/Deutschland-Welt/Kaessmann-fuer-Abzug-deutscher-Soldaten-aus-Afghanistan> (accessed 5 Oct 2012).

12 | Gesche Weiland, "Eckdaten der politischen Entwicklung in Afghanistan seit 2001 und des deutschen Bundeswehreinsatzes (ISAF). Afghanistan Chronologie", *SWP-Chronologie*, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), Jun 2011, http://swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/sonstiges/DECKBLATT___Chronologie.pdf (accessed 5 Oct 2012).

13 | "Afghanistan-Besuch der Kanzlerin – Karzai lässt Merkel eiskalt abblitzen", *Spiegel Online*, 18 Dec 2010, <http://spiegel.de/politik/ausland/afghanistan-besuch-der-kanzlerin-karzai-laesst-merkel-eiskalt-abblitzen-a-735466.html> (accessed 5 Oct 2012).

took into account the investments made by the Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development and the Foreign Office towards the stabilisation of the Hindu Kush region, and the social costs resulting from the death or injury of soldiers.¹⁴

That same month, the former Chief-of-Staff of the Bundeswehr, Harald Kujat, announced that he considered the army's operations in Afghanistan to have been a failure. "The operations have helped to achieve the political goal of showing solidarity with the United States" he said to the *Mitteldeutsche Zeitung*. "But if you look at the goal of helping to stabilise a country and a particular region within that country, then this mission has been a failure."¹⁵ In February 2011, an Afghan army soldier opened fire on a group of German soldiers in an outpost in Baghlan province. Three of the German soldiers were seriously injured and subsequently died.

In the closing statement of the International Conference on Afghanistan held in Bonn in December 2011, attended by more than 100 delegations from around the world, it was made clear that support for Afghanistan was bound up with the expectation that the country would "do its homework."¹⁶ On the fringes of the conference, the former defence minister Peter Struck was critical of the operation: he commented to the *Hamburger Abendblatt* that if the Taliban wanted to take power again, they simply had to wait until the withdrawal of international troops in 2014. "For this reason it is vital to ensure that the Afghan army and police are in a position to guarantee the country's future security. What Germany and the EU are doing in terms of

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14 | Cf. "Bundeswehr: Afghanistan Einsatz kostet 17 Milliarden Euro", *Spiegel Online*, 3 Oct 2011, <http://spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/bundeswehr-afghanistan-einsatz-kostet-17-milliarden-euro-a-789640.html> (accessed 5 Oct 2012).

15 | "Bundeswehr am Hindukusch – Ex-General erklärt Afghanistan-Einsatz für gescheitert", *Spiegel Online*, 7 Oct 2011, <http://spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/bundeswehr-am-hindukusch-ex-general-erklaert-afghanistan-einsatz-fuer-gescheitert-a-790422.html> (accessed 5 Oct 2012).

16 | Ulrich Lüke, "Welt redet Kabul ins Gewissen", *General-Anzeiger Bonn*, 6 Dec 2011, <http://general-anzeiger-bonn.de/lokales/bonn/Welt-redet-Kabul-ins-Gewissen-article575450.html> (accessed 5 Oct 2012).

training the police, for example, is simply not enough." Struck also suggested that he had lost confidence in the Karzai government.¹⁷

On 26 January 2012 the German Bundestag agreed another one-year extension to the Afghanistan mandate. In the ballot on the government's motion for the "continuation of the involvement of the German armed forces in the activities of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan" 424 of 569 members of the Bundestag were in favour (votes cast), 107 parliamentarians opposed the motion and 38 abstained. Prior to the vote, the government had tried to play down expectations of an early decision to withdraw German troops from Afghanistan. "Climbing down from a tree is much more complicated than quickly scaling one," said Defence Minister Thomas de Maizière when he met with NATO colleagues in Brussels. He said the key thing was to be in close agreement with our allies. "We therefore need something that could be called strategic patience."¹⁸

UNAMA in Kabul claimed that there were 925 women and children amongst the 3,099 dead and wounded. The United Nations believe insurgents were to blame for 80 per cent of the victims.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) reported that 1,145 civilians had been killed and 1,954 wounded in the first six months of 2012, a reduction of 15 per cent on the previous year. UNAMA in Kabul claimed there were 925 women and children amongst the 3,099 dead and wounded. The United Nations believed insurgents such as the Taliban were to blame for 80 per cent of the victims, with Afghan and international security forces responsible for 10 per cent.¹⁹ However, ISAF spokesman Brigadier General Carsten Jacobson warned against any premature euphoria. The somewhat better situation "should not be allowed to obscure the fact that there

17 | "Ex-Verteidigungsminister Struck – Kritik an deutschem Afghanistan-Einsatz", *RP-Online*, 5 Dec 2011, <http://rp-online.de/politik/deutschland/kritik-an-deutschem-afghanistan-einsatz-1.2628323> (accessed 5 Oct 2012).

18 | Damir Fras and Thorsten Knuf, "Zehn Jahre Afghanistankrieg – Wir brauchen Geduld", *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 7 Oct 2011, <http://fr-online.de/politik/zehn-jahre-afghanistankrieg-wir-brauchen-geduld,1472596,10975294.html> (accessed 5 Oct 2012).

19 | Cf. "Erstmals seit fünf Jahren weniger zivile Opfer", *Süddeutsche.de*, 8 Aug 2012, <http://sueddeutsche.de/politik/1.1435700> (accessed 5 Oct 2012).

is still a highly active, adaptable and motivated resistance movement in the country that uses terrorist methods to try to regain power.”²⁰

Until now, over 3,000 coalition personnel have been killed, of which 53 were from the Bundeswehr and three from the German police. The USA is the largest supplier of troops and has suffered the largest number of casualties, with Americans making up 65 per cent of all coalition soldiers killed. The total number of Afghan soldiers and insurgents killed is unknown. Official figures on civilian casualties are incomplete, with estimates varying widely.²¹

THE SITUATION TODAY

In November 2011, Germany’s Defence Minister Thomas de Maizière gave the newspaper *Die Zeit* a remarkable interview about the goals of the Afghanistan operation, in which he explained: “The operation has already lasted as long as the First and Second World Wars combined. We need to scale back the excessive expectations of the operation’s goals. At this point we simply want to ensure two final things: first, that no terror can be exported from Afghanistan, and second, that the Afghans have adequate and stable security structures of their own in place. These are the goals of the new strategy. We all went into this with too many illusions.”²²

When asked if German soldiers should “kill and be killed” just so that Afghanistan can organise its own security independently, the minister said: “We didn’t go to Afghanistan with this goal in mind and this would probably not have been sufficient justification. But now it is the right strategy. Once you’ve gone in, you can’t just pull out and leave the

20 | “Ein Jahr ohne deutsche Gefallene”, *Hannoversche Allgemeine*, 2 Jun 2012, <http://haz.de/Nachrichten/Panorama/Uebersicht/Ein-Jahr-ohne-deutsche-Gefallene> (accessed 5 Oct 2012).

21 | Cf. “Names of the Dead”, *The New York Times*, 16 May 2011, <http://nytimes.com/2011/05/17/us/17list.html> (accessed 5 Oct 2012).

22 | Peter Dausend and Jörg Lau, “Thomas de Maizière: ‘Afghanistan war kein Irrtum’ – Verteidigungsminister Thomas de Maizière über gute Gründe für Auslandseinsätze, Libyen und die Chancen der arabischen Revolution”, *Zeit Online*, 10 Sep 2011, <http://zeit.de/2011/37/9-11-Interview-de-Maiziere/seite-2> (accessed 5 Oct 2012).

country in chaos. Our withdrawal is made possible by an Afghanistan that can guarantee its own security."²³

This new minimal goal of achieving "adequate security" is by no means guaranteed, despite the deployment of so much personnel and materials, as the other NATO countries involved are also having problems justifying to their own people such a substantial commitment to Afghanistan.

After a decade of determined effort and meagre successes and with an eye on the potential failure of the operation, no NATO member is keen to claim it has been a key player, especially as the USA itself, is starting to pull back more and more

The international financial crisis is no doubt partly to blame for this, as countries have become less willing to take on such extensive financial obligations. Another problem is the fact that over the years NATO has come to be seen as less and less relevant. After a decade of determined effort and meagre successes and with an eye on the potential failure of the operation, no NATO member is keen to claim it has been a key player, especially as the USA itself, despite being the initiator of the whole operation, is starting to pull back more and more due to war-weariness amongst its own populace.

Therefore it is no real surprise that in early 2012 it was the USA itself that initiated the debate over an earlier withdrawal when Defence Minister Leon Panetta named 2013 as the year the USA would end military operations, effectively ignoring agreements already made within NATO. The fact that such agreements seemed to no longer carry much weight was also reflected in the French presidential election campaign, when the opposition candidate François Hollande called for a speedier withdrawal of French combat troops from Afghanistan. As elected president, he is sticking with his target of the end of 2012 and as a result risks coming into conflict with his NATO partners.

In the run-up to the 2012 NATO summit in Chicago there was concern that, once the floodgates have been opened by the USA and France, other countries would also see the advantage of early troop withdrawals in order to bring an end to the increasingly disquieting political debates at home. Ironically, it was Hamid Karzai himself who added fuel to the fire by calling for the early withdrawal of ISAF troops following the desecration of the bodies of insurgents

by U.S. soldiers.²⁴ However, in Chicago reason prevailed over short-term domestic political gain – in retrospect it would have been too obvious to make the connection between early withdrawal and the loss of all that had been achieved in the efforts to rebuild Afghanistan. What became clear, however, was that discussions about withdrawal dates and the passing of responsibility for security were no longer being determined solely by what was happening on the ground in Afghanistan, but were also to a large extent subject to domestic political considerations – a somewhat dangerous trend. This kind of development is also being seen in Afghanistan itself. Having been built up to a total of 352,000 men, the security forces will be reduced to 228,500 over the coming years as this is considered the optimal number for guaranteeing the country's security.²⁵ In reality, the reasons for the downsizing have more to do with the financial considerations of the donor countries, which are not prepared to finance such a high number of soldiers and policemen on a long-term basis. No one seems to know what will happen to the remaining 75,000 personnel that have been trained in weapons use once they are demobilised.

In NATO's official version, these developments within the security sector can be understood as follows: "The international community's role is becoming less and less significant as the Afghans are increasingly able and willing to assume responsibility. Today, more than half of the Afghan population lives in areas where security responsibility lies with the Afghan national security forces. So the good news is: the process of a responsible handover agreed at the Lisbon NATO Summit in 2010 is moving forward, and it is doing so in the way we expected"²⁶

24 | Cf. "Afghanistan: Karsai fordert nach Leichenschändung frühen Abzug", *Die Welt*, 19 Apr 2012, <http://welt.de/politik/ausland/article106203859/Karsai-fordert-nach-Leichenschandungen-frueheren-Abzug.html> (accessed 5 Oct 2012).

25 | Cf. "Nach dem Chicago-Gipfel: Ungewisse Zukunft der afghanischen Sicherheitskräfte", SWP, 24 May 2012, <http://swp-berlin.org/de/nc/publikationen/kurz-gesagt/nach-dem-chicago-gipfel-ungewisse-zukunft-der-afghanischen-sicherheitskraefte/print/1.html> (accessed 5 Oct 2012).

26 | Permanent Representation of the Federal Republic of Germany on the North Atlantic Council in Brussels, *Regierungserklärung der Bundeskanzlerin Merkel zum NATO-Gipfel in Chigaco*, http://nato.diplo.de/Vertretung/nato/de/06/Erklaerung_Verteidigungs_Aussenminister/BKin-RegErkl_C3_A4r-Btag-10052012-Seite.html (accessed 5 Oct 2012).

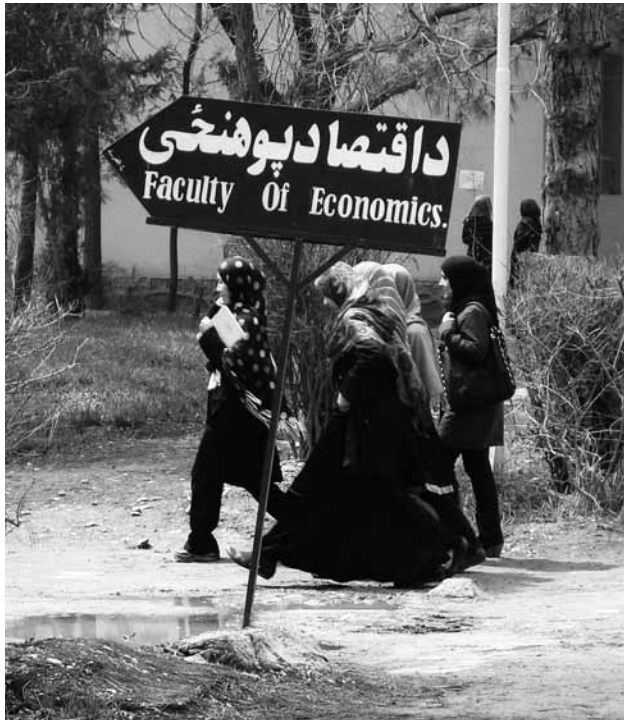
Despite this “responsible handover,” insurgents still present a huge problem to Afghanistan’s security. Huge military efforts on the part of the coalition have not been enough to prevent insurgent attacks, mostly because of the decentralised nature of the terrorist organisations. Even with a massive military presence, it is difficult to prevent a few people with relatively limited resources from causing considerable damage, and this has meant high numbers of casualties, not only in the provinces, but also in the capital Kabul, despite all its security measures. Combating the political causes of the ongoing insurgency is more critical than having well-equipped police and soldiers, but so far there have been few successes in this area.

Repeated calls for negotiations with the Taliban regularly come to nothing because neither side can agree on the preconditions for such talks. The Taliban see the full withdrawal of international troops as a prerequisite for serious talks. They also refuse to recognise the Afghan government as a legitimate party to the negotiations. For its part, the international community is demanding that the Taliban recognise the Afghan constitution, renounce violence and stop cooperating with international terrorist groups. These

If the ongoing peace process remains unsuccessful, then the insurgents can simply wait for the withdrawal of international combat troops at the end of 2014. The worst-case scenario would be the withdrawal of civilian aid workers.

demands are proving to be insurmountable obstacles for both sides.²⁷ If the ongoing peace process remains unsuccessful, then the insurgents can simply continue to maintain a high profile in the short term while staging spectacular individual incidents and waiting for “their time” to come, i.e. after the withdrawal of international combat troops at the end of 2014. The worst-case scenario would be not only the full withdrawal of international troops, but also the withdrawal of those civilian aid workers involved in rebuilding the country because their security can no longer be guaranteed. If this happened there would be a very real risk of civil war breaking out and the whole operation becoming a total failure in the long run.

27 | Cf. “Afghanistan: Kein Grund zu Optimismus nach Bonner Konferenz”, SWP, 5 Jan 2012, <http://swp-berlin.org/de/nc/publikationen/kurz-gesagt/afghanistan-kein-grund-zu-optimismus-nach-bonner-konferenz/print/1.html> (accessed 5 Oct 2012).



Partial success: Under the taliban, women were not allowed to go to universities. | Source: KAS.

However, a long-term political solution to the conflict requires a fully-functioning government that has the trust of the Afghan people. Many people are fed-up with the corruption in their country and have lost faith in those in charge. Although the international community accepted the outcome of the last elections in 2009 for want of any alternative, the irregularities that plagued the electoral process meant that Afghanistan has lost the trust of its international allies. Unless there is real progress in finding a government that is willing to address the ongoing problems in its own country, the Afghan state will never find itself on a solid footing. Afghanistan is currently a long way from being in this position and three-quarters of the state budget and 90 per cent of investment is still being financed by international donor countries.²⁸

28 | "Afghanistan – Situation und Zusammenarbeit", Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung (BMZ), http://bmz.de/de/was_wir_machen/laender_regionen/asien/afghanistan/zusammenarbeit.html (accessed 5 Oct 2012).

With every passing international conference, the picture remains the same – Lisbon 2010, Bonn 2011, Chicago 2012 and Tokyo 2012 – all high-ranking meetings called to address the issue of Afghanistan's future. The Afghan president makes promises, the international community points the finger and demands good governance, the combating of corruption and respect for human rights before finally promising yet more billions.

In Lisbon, Karzai was bullish about the future. "We are confident that the transition will be a success" he said, adding

In Bonn Karzai said that his country would still have to rely on international help for a further ten years after 2014. He suggested that five billion dollars per year would be an appropriate amount of international aid.

that the international community had placed much faith in them and the Afghan people would work hard to justify that trust.²⁹ In Bonn he said that his country would still have to rely on international help for a further ten years after 2014. He added: "Afghan people do not wish to remain a burden on the generosity of the Afghan people for a single day longer than absolutely necessary." Just prior to the conference he had suggested that five billion U.S. dollars per year would be an appropriate amount of international aid.³⁰ In Chicago, Karzai suggested that Afghanistan was looking forward "to an end to this war" and the possibility of building a fully functional state.³¹ Finally, in Tokyo, Karzai promised to step up the fight against corruption in his country, saying that for all the progress that had been made in recent years, the situation in his country continued to be "precarious" and the "economy underdeveloped." Corruption continued to undermine the efficiency and effectiveness of international aid. There was still a need for "many years" of hard work, before Afghanistan can become truly independent.³²

29 | "Gipfel in Lissabon: NATO will Kampfeinsatz in Afghanistan 2014 beenden", *Zeit Online*, 20 Nov 2010, <http://zeit.de/politik/ausland/2010-11/nato-abzug-afghanistan> (accessed 5 Oct 2012).

30 | "Merkel fordert Karsai zum Kampf gegen Korruption auf", *Süddeutsche.de*, 5 Dec 2011, <http://sueddeutsche.de/politik/1.1226731> (accessed 5 Oct 2012).

31 | "Karsai: Afghanistan ab 2014 keine Last mehr", *RP-Online*, 20 May 2012, <http://rp-online.de/1.2839335> (accessed 5 Oct 2012).

32 | "Internationale Geberkonferenz in Tokio – Karsai ruft Westen zu Hilfe im Kampf gegen Korruption auf", *Focus Online*, 8 Jul 2012, http://focus.de/politik/ausland/geberkonferenz_aid_778771.html (accessed 5 Oct 2012).

Karzai's assurances that he would finally take action against corruption and mismanagement within the government and other authorities have been repeated about as often as the calls from donor nations that the Afghan government should finally put their house in order in a conscientious manner – or indeed to do anything at all. Unfortunately, not much has actually been done in recent years. The German government's progress report on Afghanistan says: "The Afghan government has been slow to implement its promises to start combating corruption, and there has been little in the way of tangible progress."³³

What is unclear is how Karzai, who has been in power for ten years, is now in the two remaining years of his government going to take all the necessary action that has been demanded and promised in the past. It must seem like an insult to all the international community's efforts and casualties that Karzai is now saying how happy he is to finally have the opportunity to build a fully functional state – more than ten years after taking power and two years before the next elections (in which he is constitutionally prohibited from standing) – as though operations in Afghanistan and his time in government are somehow just beginning.

It must seem like an insult to the international community that Karzai is now saying how happy he is to finally have the opportunity to build a fully functional state – as though his time in government was just beginning.

These demands and promises only serve to underscore the dilemma that besets the international community. The Afghan government likes to play on the potential return of a Taliban dictatorship in order to repeatedly request more aid. Karzai used the same argument again in Tokyo: "Once again today I ask Afghanistan's friends to continue to support us. The region as a whole will not be safe if Afghanistan itself is not stable." In order to achieve this stability, the international community promised 16 billion U.S. dollars of civilian reconstruction aid for the three-and-a-half years up to 2015 alone, of which Germany will be contributing 430 million euros per year.

But how do we explain this perpetual merry-go-round of false assurances, demands and billion-dollar contributions? The problem is multifaceted. For one thing, there is no

33 | *Progress report on Afghanistan to update the German Bundestag*, n. 1.

real alternative to continuing to support Karzai's regime, because, for all the justified criticisms levelled against him, he is still the West's only real point of contact in Kabul. If the payments were to be suddenly stopped, the worst affected would be those who are actually least to blame for the wilful incompetence of those in power in Kabul: the poor and needy in this impoverished country, who would deserve an explanation as to why even the successful projects which help a great many people could no longer be continued.

If all payments to Afghanistan were to be abruptly halted, it would be tantamount to an admission that the reconstruction of Afghanistan and the mission as a whole has been a failure, that the billions given in the previous ten years have been wasted and that all the soldiers who have been killed have died for nothing. No politician who is hoping to be re-elected wants make such an admission.³⁴ Of course Karzai knows this too, which is why he has no great desire to make fundamental changes. The question also remains as to just how capable he would be of actively fighting corruption anyway, bearing in mind that there are regular media reports about his own family being involved in shady business deals.³⁵

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The fact that after 35 years of war Afghanistan is still incapable of being readily changed into a fully functioning state should be clear to all concerned. But the insurgents will only start to lose the support of the Afghan public when the people themselves feel they can look forward to a worthwhile future. This is why the donor countries keep paying: the success of the military operation should not be put at risk because there is insufficient funding available for the country's civil reconstruction. However, the two years that are left are not enough to do all those things that should have been done in the past. After Tokyo, the general feeling was that if the latest

34 | Cf. Ulrike Scheffer, "Wie sieht die Zukunft Afghanistans aus?", *Cicero Online*, 9 Jul 2012, <http://cicero.de/weltbuehne/truppenabzug-konferenz-tokio-wie-sieht-die-zukunft-afghanistans-aus/51164> (accessed 5 Oct 2012).

35 | Cf. Christine-Felice Röhrs, "Wie korrupt ist Hamid Karzai?", *Cicero Online*, 14 Apr 2009, <http://cicero.de/weltbuehne/wie-korrupt-ist-hamid-karzai/39630> (accessed 5 Oct 2012).

promises coming out of Kabul are not carried out, no more funds will be forthcoming. The German government claims this approach is beginning to pay off: "Attaching concrete conditions to our payments last year and this year has helped to encourage genuine reforms" says federal minister Dirk Niebel. "Afghanistan has also made progress in setting up anti-corruption units and in training federal employees."³⁶ After a decade of more-or-less empty promises coming out of Kabul, it will be interesting to see just what progress is made in the remaining two years.

SUMMARY

If the original goal of the mission in Afghanistan was to stop international terrorists using the country as an operating base, then we can certainly view it as a success. The fact that terrorist groups have not entirely been destroyed, but have dispersed to other countries, cannot be blamed on the operations in Afghanistan. It was never going to be an easy task to locate terrorist leaders in Afghanistan's difficult terrain, and because of this many have been able to escape and take advantage of the weakness of other countries in order to set up bases within their borders. But both former and current politicians believe that the second very ambitious goal of trying to create a democratic state with a fully functioning economy has not been achieved to the extent that was originally envisaged. There have, of course, been some partial successes. Referring to the government's second progress report on Afghanistan, German Foreign Minister, Guido Westerwelle, said: "With all the setbacks we should not lose sight of the progress that has been made. One-third of all school pupils are now girls, over 80 per cent of Afghans now have access to medical services, and infrastructure and water supplies are both much improved."³⁷ But is that enough to consider the ten-year operation in Afghanistan a success? And what happens now?

36 | Timot Szent-Ivanyi, "Afghanistan: Ein Hauptübel ist die Korruption", *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 24 Aug 2012, <http://fr-online.de/politik/afghanistan-ein-hauptuebel-ist-die-korruption,1472596,16955898.html> (accessed 5 Oct 2012).

37 | „Fortschrittsberichte zu Afghanistan“, Auswärtiges Amt, 12 Jul 2012, http://auswaertiges-amt.de/sid_0D13414B8798261C9CDBE03706454A11/DE/Aussenpolitik/RegionaleSchwerpunkte/AfghanistanZentralasien/Fortschrittsbericht-node.html (accessed 5 Oct 2012).

As Germany is a democratic society, military operations are not only dependent upon the agreement of parliament, but they also need to be constantly justified to the public at large. In the case of Afghanistan, the lack of success, the humanitarian and financial sacrifices and the sheer length of the operation have made this increasingly difficult.

If the original goal of the mission on the part of the North American allies was indeed to stop international terrorists using Afghanistan as an operating base following the attacks of 11 September 2001, then another objective was added as operations progressed: the humanitarian, development-oriented aim of creating a democracy, promoting economic development and thus improving the lives of the Afghan people – in short, making life worth living again for the people of Afghanistan after decades of war. Without wishing to question the motives of the politicians involved, one thing has become clear: in countries such as Germany in particular, where the issue of “national security” is not as critical as in the USA, it is easier to sell the idea of civil aid for reconstruction than it is to sell the fight against international terrorism. For this reason, Peter Struck’s suggestion that Germany’s freedom was also being defended in the Hindu Kush attracted a great deal of criticism, while, for a long time, the military deployment in Afghanistan was actively promoted to the public as being predominantly about German soldiers helping with the country’s reconstruction, and there was no mention of the word “war”.

Faced with growing numbers of victims and exploding costs, it has become clear that it is no longer acceptable to focus purely on reconstruction aid in the public debate, nor can the German public be sold the idea of long-term participation in a war with an uncertain outcome. To varying extents, this is also true for the other countries that have troops in Afghanistan and in the medium-term there have been political consequences, such as the unilateral declaration of the withdrawal of French troops during François Hollande’s election campaign.

Back in January 2011, Markus Kaim, the head of the International Security research division at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), wrote

in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* suggesting three possible scenarios for Afghanistan. In light of the current situation, these deserve to be looked at more closely.

1. A mission that is primarily focused on fighting international terrorism does not necessarily need to be an extensive military operation. The leadership of al-Qaida has long moved on and now it is more active in Yemen, Mali, Somalia and elsewhere. A few special troops, better intelligence and improvements in the way the NATO countries share information, along with further support for the Afghan security forces, would be enough to prevent al-Qaida returning to Afghanistan.

2. If the international community seriously wants to continue pursuing its humanitarian, development-oriented approach to achieving its goal of creating a functioning democracy in Afghanistan, then large numbers of troops will have to remain there for the foreseeable future. However, in political terms this seems unrealistic as the financial resources of the coalition countries are limited and the public is war-weary. The random decision to withdraw troops at the end of 2014 can therefore be viewed as a compromise between what Afghanistan needs and what is possible within NATO, but it depends on the Afghan government finally attending to its responsibilities and on its security forces actually being in a position to guarantee the country's security. Whether or not this happens is outside the control of the countries that have troops in the region. As a result, the success of the mission is bound up with conditions that are largely beyond the control of the international community.

3. If the security situation continues to deteriorate, if even more ISAF soldiers are attacked and killed, and if the Karzai government fails to keep its promises, then the heads of the coalition countries will be left with little choice but to allege there have been successes in Afghanistan. They will have to imply that there has been success in terms of guaranteeing security in certain

The random decision to withdraw troops at the end of 2014 depends on the Afghan government finally attending to its responsibilities and on its security forces actually being in a position to guarantee the country's security.

provinces and in the country's progress, so that they can declare a rapid troop withdrawal as being the end of a successful mission and justify it to their people.³⁸

Today, almost two years after the publication of these scenarios, we can see elements of all three. In favour of the first option is the fact that no western country is likely to be ready to once again run the risk of being the victim of large-scale terrorist attacks after such a long mission with so many casualties. For this reason alone, they will want to maintain their strategic partnership with Afghanistan. The second scenario, the long-term reconstruction of Afghanistan to turn it into a functioning democracy with a flourishing economy, has already been shelved to some extent and the focus has shifted to the question of security. It can hardly be denied that there are clear indicators in favour of the third scenario – emphasising partial successes in order to justify “the right way” out of Afghanistan has become standard at every conference and in most press releases. Of course it is right to assume that eleven years ago no-one could have predicted how difficult the mission would be, particularly as the international players were also bound by their national interests. The Afghan side for its part also had unrealistic expectations. Against the backdrop of the plans to withdraw the troops, there is still the need for a clear strategy for ensuring these achievements have a lasting effect. Nobody wins if Afghanistan once again descends into chaos. Realistic assessments are needed, as much as a distinct way in dealing with the Afghan partners, who have to realise that the continuing spiral of promises and financial commitments can no longer be an option for the future.

38 | Cf. Markus Kaim, “Es fehlt der strategische Konsens”, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 24 Jan 2011, No. 19, 8.