Jochen Hippler

Afghanistan: Policy Adjustments or Withdrawal?

Political Implications of the Escalation of Violence

Policy Paper 29

Today, German and international policy towards Afghanistan is dominated by scepticism and disillusionment, which have supplanted the – often naïve – optimism of the early days. Since the international military and civilian presence in Afghanistan began more than seven years ago, the geographical parameters of the military operation – which at first was confined to Kabul and surrounding areas – as well as the force strength and the initially very limited timeframe for the mission have steadily expanded. Nonetheless, the political situation remains highly volatile and has deteriorated in many areas. Since 2003, there has been a steady increase in the level of violence and a noticeable worsening of the security situation, both for the Afghan population and the international forces. The dramatic increase in the number of suicide attacks – a completely new phenomenon in Afghanistan – is just one indication of the critical escalation of the situation.

In the US, a serious debate is now under way about the option of redeploying forces from Iraq to Afghanistan, and it is only the equally difficult situation in Iraq itself which has so far prevented this from happening. In Germany, there are increasingly vocal calls, across all political parties, for an „overall strategy" for Afghanistan, while the problems facing that country are prompting a more general debate about the purpose, rationale, opportunities and limits to the involvement of the Federal Armed Forces (Bundeswehr) *in military operations abroad. This debate is indeed urgently needed, but will not be conducted in this paper. Equally important, however, is a proper analysis of the origins of the current crisis in Afghanistan, which increasingly appears to be at an impasse. Such an analysis is essential if appropriate policy adjustments are to be made. This policy paper will therefore examine the lessons* from *and* for *Afghanistan, with a focus on the following four key areas: the need for an „overall strategy" and the role of decision-making on military operations abroad; the problem that the war in Afghanistan is primarily a political conflict which requires a political solution, whereas the political and public debate is focussed primarily on military intervention; the paradox that state-building should be a priority in efforts to resolve the situation but has largely been ignored so far, notably in relation to the intermediate and especially the lower tiers of government which will be decisive in the long term; and the failure to address – as well as the distorted perceptions of – the linkage between the war in Afghanistan and the situation in neighbouring Pakistan.*

I. The current situation in Afghanistan: escalation of violence and an expanding military presence

Afghanistan has been at war for almost 30 years: first against the country's pro-Soviet government and Soviet occupying forces, then against the Najibullah government, followed by the conflict among the mujahedin parties, and finally between the mujahedin and the Taleban. The current round in this ongoing cycle of warfare was precipitated by the successful military action against Afghanistan by the US and its local allies, the Northern Alliance, and the ousting of the Taleban. The starting point for this new war was 9/11 – the terrorist attacks on the US by Al-Qaeda on 11 September 2001 – which prompted the US to launch its „war on terror". A short-lived period of pacification ensued, which ended after an upsurge in violence from 2003/2004. This has now spread to large parts of Afghanistan and threatens to engulf the hitherto relatively peaceful north of the country as well.

The dramatic increase in violence that has occurred in Afghanistan since 2003 is an indicator of the serious crisis besetting the country. It signals that after almost seven years of military intervention and civilian reconstruction, the planned stabilisation of Afghanistan and the marginalisation or neutralisation of violent anti-Western factions have so far been unsuccessful. It also demonstrates that despite the successes achieved in some sectors – such as the education system – setbacks rather than progress are the main characteristic of the current situation.

Washington and to some extent NATO have responded to the heightened security situation by deploying additional forces. In autumn 2001, the Taleban and their Al-Qaeda allies were toppled by just 100 CIA operatives and 350 soldiers from the US (plus the US Air Force and Afghanistan's Northern Alliance). Soon afterwards, a few thousand US troops and some 5000 soldiers constituting the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) were deployed in Afghanistan, with ISAF's mandate being confined to Kabul and its immediate surroundings. At that time, the security situation in most of the country was relatively good. In March 2003, ISAF consisted of around 4700 soldiers from 28 countries, while the US force totalled approximately 10,000 troops, with the US Department of Defense making it clear that there would be no increase in force numbers. And yet by early April 2007, the US force alone had increased to 24,300 troops, and this figure had risen to 33,000 just one year later. This puts the number of foreign soldiers (ISAF and Operation Enduring Freedom – OEF) at almost 65,000 by mid 2008 – with the deployment of additional troops from various countries having already been announced or agreed. The total number of foreign troops has therefore more than quadrupled over the last five years – accompanied by a massive increase in force strength in the Afghan armed forces as well. And yet despite these troop reinforcements since 2003, the security situation has not improved dur-

ing this period; on the contrary, it has escalated quite dramatically. According to the US Congressional Research Service, for example, suicide attacks increased by 27% in 2007 compared with the previous year, while the number of victims of these attacks rose by a full 600% compared with 2005. In 2007, the conflict resulted in the deaths of more than 8000 people, at least 1500 of them civilians. Humanitarian projects and aid workers are being targeted more frequently as well.

According to other sources, there were almost 9000 armed attacks in 2007 – around a tenfold increase compared with 2004 (*Der Spiegel* 22/2008, p. 122f). In mid 2008, it was reported that the number of attacks had increased by a further 35-40% compared with the previous year. And since May 2008, the US Department of Defense has been forced to acknowledge several times that more US troops are dying in Afghanistan than in Iraq – despite force numbers being almost five times higher in Iraq. A response to these figures that is dictated purely by military logic will invariably demand more and more troops to deal with this rise in violence. ISAF Commander General Dan K. McNeill, for example, recently stated that 400 000 troops are needed to genuinely pacify Afghanistan. At present, however, there is every indication that the steady rise in force strength is part of the problem, rather than part of the solution to the escalation of violence.

Recommendations

- The German government should resist calls for any reinforcement of the military presence in Afghanistan and an increase in troop numbers. Under present conditions, these measures offer no prospect of a de-escalation of violence. Instead, a political strategy to end the conflict is urgently required. Until such a strategy exists, troop reinforcements as a means of pacifying the country are unlikely to be successful. The Federal Armed Forces (*Bundeswehr*) should therefore reaffirm its mandate as being geared towards stabilisation and protection, and should resist any calls for an active combat role beyond self-defence or the fulfilment of its protective tasks.
- Germany should continue to deploy its troops only in the agreed area of Northern Afghanistan and resist any move towards geographical expansion of ground or air operations. This applies at least as long as (a) the political parameters for a solution to the conflict are not in place and (b) expanded deployment does not clearly *serve* the objective of such a political solution to the conflict. At present, attempts to create "security" through military force often detract from the development of a realistic political strategy.

II. Failures since 9/11

1. Political justification for the *Bundeswehr* mission

In the early days, the German political debate about participation in the Afghanistan operation focussed almost entirely on the need to support the US after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, with Chancellor Schröder offering Washington Germany's "unconditional solidarity" in the immediate aftermath of 9/11. Addressing the German *Bundestag* in October 2001, Schröder stated that this would "explicitly include participation in military operations in defence of freedom and human rights, and for the establishment of stability and security." (Plenary sitting of the German *Bundestag*, 11 October 2001). A month later, he added: "One thing must be clear: *this is not just about foreign policy strategy*; this is about defending our own interests and protecting our own values – the values by which we live and want to carry on living." And he continued: "We have experienced solidarity for decades. It is therefore, quite simply, our duty – and accords with our understanding of our self-worth – to reciprocate this solidarity, through the Alliance, in the present situation." (Plenary sitting of the German *Bundestag*, 8 November 2001).

During the same debate, which focussed on the deployment of German troops in Afghanistan, the then Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer observed: "The crucial question – the core question – which we face, and which we cannot evade answering, is this: in this situation, in which the people and the government of the United States have been attacked and are now reacting and defending themselves in clear compliance with international law, do we want to leave the United States, our most important ally, standing alone? Yes or no? That is the decision which the House must take." Thus the decision to deploy troops was first and foremost a demonstration of solidarity and loyalty to Germany's Alliance partner.

Other arguments – albeit clearly secondary to the aforementioned factors – were also advanced in support of Germany's participation; they highlighted issues such as the oppression of the people, and especially women, in Afghanistan, the need to build democracy in that country, the preservation of world peace, and combating terrorism.

This is not to deny that Alliance policy – and in this instance, the desire to avoid being isolated in Europe and NATO – can and must be considered when major political decisions are taken. It is entirely legitimate to consider political factors of this kind. The problem, however – and this was the case with the decision on Afghanistan – is that they have very little relevance to the country in which the troops are to be deployed. Not surprisingly, then, the deployment became an improvised mission in which the troops themselves – as well as civilian policy-makers – had to devise a workable strategy through trial and error after deployment had already taken place.

In retrospect, it is clear that the bases for the decision, as formulated at the time, were unrealistic and coloured by wishful thinking. For example, the decision to deploy the

troops was hedged about with all kinds of restrictions, and in particular, strict limits on the mission's duration, personnel and geographical scope.

The picture which emerged from this crucial debate in the German *Bundestag* was full of contradictions: the "complete destruction" of the Taleban was cited as a benchmark of the operation's success, and yet the then Defence Minister Rudolf Scharping conceded that the international community lacked the capabilities even to safeguard security in Afghanistan. (Plenary debate of the German *Bundestag*, 22 December 2001). This obvious contradiction was resolved by the Federal Chancellor with the following words: "Is the success of this contribution to the Alliance [i.e. troop deployment: author's note] guaranteed? No one can say so … with absolute certainty. But what kind of solidarity would this be if we made it contingent, from the outset, on success?" (Plenary debate of the German *Bundestag*, 8 November 2001).

In other words, the Federal Government and, indeed, the Chancellor himself declared to the German *Bundestag* that the Federal Armed Forces were about to be deployed in a crisis and conflict region without a firm belief in – or even an accurate appraisal of – their prospects of success; indeed, success was viewed as secondary. The main basis for the decision thus had very little to do with Afghanistan itself, or even the – later – much-vaunted "war on terror" or the restoration of a stable state in Afghanistan. No, the primary consideration behind the deployment was to demonstrate solidarity within, and make a contribution to, the Alliance. The gaping holes in the argument became even more apparent when the Foreign Minister, speaking soon after the Chancellor, rightly pointed out that this was "one of the most difficult, and weighty, decisions ever taken by the German *Bundestag* and the Federal Republic of Germany in foreign and security policy". He went on to explain why: "It is a decision which revolves around one question: war or peace? It is the crucial decision." (Plenary debate of the German *Bundestag*, 8 November 2001).

2. The lack of an "overall strategy" in German and international policy

Overall, then, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the Federal Government and the German *Bundestag* sent *Bundeswehr* troops to the Hindu Kush without a properly thought-out strategy of direct relevance to Afghanistan. To make matters worse, this deficit was apparent not only in Germany's policy towards Afghanistan, but also in the policies pursued by the US and its other allies.

As a result, the international community's military and civilian engagement in Afghanistan was ad hoc and ill-prepared. The mission's objectives were, in some cases, unclear and even contradictory, making their prioritisation and operationalisation almost impossible. Some objectives were – and remain – implicitly or overtly conflicting: anyone whose main aim in Afghanistan is democracy-building, for example, cannot avoid placing emphasis on local ownership, but actors who are primarily concerned with their own security interests will invariably prioritise their own troops' security, even if this means alienating or weakening local actors. And in a country with an extremely weak state, like Afghanistan, any actors seeking to achieve rapid successes in development or infrastructure-building (quick impact projects – QIPs) will be heavily dependent on external non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or international organisations with relevant experience and expertise, which will inevitably detract from state-building, which is a more drawn-out process. For a long time, 80% of the international aid to Afghanistan bypassed the Afghan government altogether, thereby clearly reducing it to one actor among many and directly undermining one of the core objectives of nation-/state-building. These goal conflicts have still not been resolved, but are often simply camouflaged through rhetoric. Later on, other tactical objectives were adopted which were also only indirectly relevant to Afghanistan itself: these included efforts to demonstrate NATO's capabilities and ensure that it was not seen to fail in Afghanistan, and the avoidance of German participation in the Iraq war through reference to the *Bundeswehr's* presence in Afghanistan.

In light of these factors, it is sensible, in the context of civil-military operations, to clarify in conceptual terms, and at an early stage, the relationship between the mission's objectives, means and strategies and make this the basis for all operational planning.

The call for an "overall strategy" for Afghanistan is therefore entirely justified, even if it is not always clear what is meant by this. It is often argued that this "overall strategy" has already existed for some time, its aim being to stabilise Afghanistan and combat terrorism through the deployment of civil – and especially development – resources, with the *Bundeswehr* safeguarding security. However, a "holistic strategy" must entail more than these generalities. It must serve as a strategic blueprint, rather than simply consisting of a list of tactics or objectives. In simple terms, it should include the following:

(1) *A definition, as precise as possible, of the operation's various objectives in strict order of priority*: it is not enough simply to list all manner of desirable but sometimes contradictory and even conflicting goals. The objectives must be clearly ranked, and must consist of more than a general wish-list or statements of intent.

(2) A basic *strategy*: in other words, the formulation of *a basic methodology for the attainment of the goals*. For example, if the main goal is to combat terrorism, should this be achieved by means of military action against terrorists, by establishing governance structures at local level, or by improving living conditions for the general population to discourage them from supporting terrorist groups? How should these various approaches be prioritised and interlinked if necessary?

(3) The *resources* necessary to achieve the main and subsidiary objectives must be identified.

(4) A statement of *how* these instruments should be deployed in practice in order to achieve the defined objectives. It is not enough, for example, to state that "the military" should "safeguard security". Instead, it is essential to clarify precisely what is meant by "security" in the given context and how the military should proceed in order to achieve it. The same applies, of course, to civilian resources as well.

(5) *An outline of how the various instruments should be applied in a coherent manner* in order to avoid duplication of, or even conflicts between, the various objectives.

(6) An outline of the desired *end stage of the operation*, to serve as a benchmark against which to measure outcomes.

(7) Plans for a *regulated exit strategy at the end of the operation*, once the goals have been achieved, or once it has become clear that they are unattainable. This strategy must safeguard the security of mission personnel while avoiding negative impacts on the country of operation.

Recommendation

Future decisions on the deployment of the *Bundeswehr* should only be taken if a coherent country-specific "overall strategy" has been established in advance, clearly formulating the various policy objectives, identifying priorities, and mapping out a viable strategy, including an exit strategy. Without this overall strategy, troop deployment becomes unpredictable and the operation difficult to justify.

3. Key problems in the state-building process

A political conflict resolution process requires a functioning state apparatus (or intensive efforts to establish this), especially if the conflict resolution process is to be based on local ownership – to which there are no alternatives. After the fall of the by then discredited Taleban, the foreign forces were received with goodwill in Afghanistan, for they were perceived as offering a route towards peace and an end to more than two decades of war. It should be noted that in a country like Afghanistan, which has traditionally repelled foreign invaders by force, such benevolence cannot be taken for granted and therefore constitutes a significant opportunity. In this situation, it must be a political priority to put these hopes on a sound footing as *swiftly* as possible. Here, the parallels to Iraq after the fall of Saddam Hussein are obvious. In Afghanistan, however, this window of opportunity to set the right policy course as quickly as possible was wasted.

This difficult situation was exacerbated by the plethora of external actors. In most cases, attempts to cope with this diversity proved only moderately successful. The lead-nation strategy, whereby major countries assumed responsibility for reform in key sectors, must be regarded as a failure: there was little sign of leadership, and strategic coordination between sectors was often poor. Germany's weak performance as lead nation for rebuilding Afghanistan's police force not only seriously obstructed the development of a functioning police service in Afghanistan; it also caused conflicts and rivalry with the US, which attempted to make good the shortcomings through ad hoc, unsupported and over-hasty action. This did not reflect well on Germany.

Recommendations

- When planning complex civilian or military post-conflict operations in future, it should be assumed that the operation will last several years, at the least, but the key policy course must be put in place during the first few months. In the Balkans and Afghanistan (or indeed the US mission in Iraq), unrealistic assumptions were made about the short-term nature of the operation. This obviously made long-term planning more difficult, or implied that it was unnecessary. Any future operations should be based from the outset on realistic (but not unlimited) timeframes. However, it is also essential to capitalise on the local population's goodwill during the first few months of the operation, in order to avoid popular disenchantment and minimise the risk that fundamental errors will be made, due to actions or omissions, which are difficult to correct later.
- *If* a decision in favour of intervention is taken, adequate funding and personnel must be made available from the outset. Unless these resources are secure, the temptation to launch a limited or "piecemeal" operation should be resisted. If a country takes over a role as lead nation – in police training in Afghanistan, for example – it should do so only if the political commitment, financing and human resources are available from the start, and if the task can indeed be mastered with this high level of resource input.

The Petersberg Process

In the early days of the military and civilian intervention in Afghanistan, the priority, from the US perspective, was to crush the terrorist groups and their supporters (i.e. Al-Qaeda and the Taleban). As a consequence, the basic strategy adopted by Washington was geared heavily towards the military and security, with development and governance policy coming a very poor second. The US government had explicitly stated that its role was to prosecute the war, not engage in nation-building (or state-building). By contrast, some of its allies, including Germany, did their utmost to stay out of the hostilities, placing greater emphasis on civilian measures instead. This approach was the cause of frequent irritation in Washington and NATO.

Notwithstanding the de facto and – in the case of the US – politically desired dominance of military and security measures, the international community embarked, in parallel, on a political reconstruction effort for Afghanistan whose starting point was the Petersberg Process. This approach focussed on the appointment of a transitional government, the drafting and adoption of a constitution, the staging of elections, and the ensuing establishment of a legal and legitimate Afghan government. The process was the outcome of a package of sometimes conflicting political factors. From the perspective of the US Department of Defense – probably the key actor following the ousting of the Taleban – the Petersberg Process flanked and facilitated its own focus on security; its thinking was

that if a legitimate government was established, the US – based on a division of labour – would be able to concentrate on a military role, whose agenda was to combat terrorism and insurgency, and would not be drawn into the complex area of nation-building. This approach also dovetailed nicely with the US President's democracy rhetoric. The European allies and the United Nations endorsed this approach. Their view was that it would produce a legitimate and recognised Afghan partner and was therefore not only in line with the nation-state-oriented structure of the international system but also avoided potential problems under international law, as the deployment of foreign troops could thus be regarded as the international community's response to a corresponding request from a national government. There were other two plausible lines of argument to back up this approach: firstly, the recognition that long-term stability in Afghanistan cannot be imposed from outside, but is dependent on a functioning state apparatus of its own; and secondly, the hope that the emergence of an Afghan state would enable the universally desired *light footprint* (in other words, limited engagement by the international community) to be maintained. The US, its European allies and the UN all adhered to the view that their respective commitments in Afghanistan were intended solely to *support* the Afghan government – so the existence of a (legitimate) government was the logical prerequisite. The swift appointment of an Afghan government was therefore in the interests of virtually all actors, including almost all the Afghan factions (and the former exiles), who – given the strength of the external forces and their own fragmentation and military weakness – had no other hope of securing a power-sharing role. In light of all these factors, the Petersberg Process was rational in principle.

The new state apparatus to be established in Afghanistan thus became the cornerstone of the country's future development, and of the civilian and military engagement by external actors. The underlying thinking was this: the better this apparatus functioned, and the smoother its relationship with the various forces within society, the more realistic and effective the international community's policy of *supporting* this state would be. But although the Petersberg Process obviously made sense, it very quickly became the starting point for the crisis which began in 2003/2004 and has worsened since 2006. Various problems have arisen:

The new state apparatus: serious flaws from the outset

The new state apparatus established on the basis of the Petersberg Process has displayed serious flaws from the outset. In the rural regions, there are large geographical and functional areas in which the state remains nothing but a fiction. The constitutional process and the ensuing elections were based on "islands" of statehood, with broad regions outside the cities lacking any (functioning) institutions or administrative structures – hardly surprising in view of Afghanistan's history and especially in the aftermath of the Taleban regime. President Karzai, as the key representative of this new state, attempted to circumvent this problem in two ways. Firstly, he sought to integrate local commanders and warlords into the state structures in order to prevent them from resorting to overt opposition. In large areas of the country, however, this has resulted in the new state being identified with the notorious old violent actors. Secondly, he attempted, via the constitutional process, to bring about an extreme degree of centralisation, with the formal structures of power being tailored to Karzai, as President, himself. This conflicts with the great diversity and localised structure of Afghan society and politics. What's more, Afghanistan's governance structures lack the capacity to implement this type of centralisation in practice. In another attempt to boost his personal position, President Karzai also sought to undermine the political parties (especially during the elections). This has impeded the development of a functioning party system which is a key prerequisite for stable statehood.

The Afghan state is extremely top-heavy, which poses serious problems. In Kabul and other major cities, all the organs and institutions associated with statehood exist: there are ministries, a President, a Parliament, a constitutional court, and numerous other bodies. External actors have very little difficulty in identifying appropriate government interlocutors here. Below this level, however, the state architecture is fragmentary, and the closer one gets to the mass of the population, especially in rural regions, the less evidence there is of a state presence or efficiency. In many villages, the only representative of the state is, at best, a poorly trained teacher. In other words, below the top tier of government, the substance of statehood steadily thins out until it is virtually non-existent. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that the elements of the state's presence at the middle and lower tiers have in practice been infiltrated or are dominated by private actors such as local commanders, warlords, religious figures or tribal leaders whose loyalties are often divided, at least, between the state and their own group but generally lie with the latter. This partial "privatisation" of public institutions dilutes them, often to the point where they are unrecognisable as part of the state's architecture. Corruption on a massive scale, too, is tending to erode the substance of statehood and, what's more, is fomenting public antipathy to the state.

Recommendation

State-building and governance-oriented policy should not be limited to the upper echelons of government but must include the establishment of functioning tiers of government in the provinces and rural regions. The interfaces between society/citizens and the state are especially important in ensuring the credibility and acceptance of the state apparatus. Among other things, this means that the justice system and the police must be capable of functioning and must be fair and, as far as possible, free from corruption, that the content of legislation is often less important than everyone's equality before the law, and that legal certainty must not be dependent on income. A functioning police and justice system which is responsive to citizens is the core of credible statehood.

The lack of a basis for a democratic state

Underlying the difficulties mentioned above is one fundamental problem. When the international community announced, after the fall of the Taleban, that the creation of a new democratic state was one of its core objectives, the starting points for this process were poor, if not to say almost non-existent, in Afghanistan. Normally, there is a strong and self-confident middle class to act as the basis for democratic state-building, but in Afghanistan, after more than a generation of war and economic hardship, this middle class barely exists. The majority rural population may not be opposed on principle to state-building, as long as this brings peace and stability and improves their conditions of life, but this demographic group is not organised, nor does it have any real potential to become an organised and dependable political force in the foreseeable future. The mujahedin parties, warlords, drug barons and other local and regional actors do not constitute a basis for democratic statehood. The same applied to the old Northern Alliance. In essence, then, this left only the small group of returning exiles to support the international project; this group has very shallow roots in the country, generally existing outside local clientelistic relationships and therefore usually sympathetic to the notion of a new nation-state which is dependent, at least in part, on their skills and expertise. The new state has also been able to rely on its own bureaucrats (as well as those seeking to enter government service) and on broad sections of the urban population. Overall, then, the social base for democratic state-building in Afghanistan is extremely narrow – which put the new state in a difficult position from the outset. To some extent, it was at times able to compensate for this weakness by drawing on external assistance – but the longer and greater the reliance on external support, the greater the state's alienation from Afghan society.

Recommendation

In the event that the international community or the German government should consider the option of intervention, with state-building and/or nation-building dimensions, in the context of failed or failing states in future, this must be preceded by a thorough appraisal of local conditions. Unless state-building/nation-building is supported by key actors in the society concerned, no attempt should be made at state-building by external actors, due to the lack of this prerequisite for its success. If necessary, less ambitious forms of intervention should be resorted to instead (e.g. humanitarian measures).

Further erosion of the state's monopoly of force

Understandably, one of the Afghan people's dearest hopes was that there would be an end to the plethora of violent actors and the arbitrary rule of the warlords at long last, and that legal stability and personal security in their own environments (villages, provinces and road network) would be established.

The problem of assaults on the general public by local commanders, armed gangs, warlords and even government functionaries flared up again after the fall of the Taleban, albeit under different conditions. For example, the international community supported President Karzai, who was appointed after the intervention, but at the same time, it – and especially the US military – deployed notorious warlords in a security role, e.g. in hostilities against the Taleban or Al-Qaeda. The practice of financing and arming warlords led to two extremely damaging outcomes: firstly, it weakened the new state apparatus by massively undermining its monopoly of force and boosting forces which had every intention of evading the state's control; secondly, it inevitably appeared to some sections of the population that the warlords, who in their eyes were discredited by their previous crimes, now enjoyed the support of the international community, or at least Washington. One example occurred back in late 2001 (i.e. immediately after the ousting of the Taleban), when the US military not only supported and armed the criminal warlord Gul Agha Shirzai but even secured his appointment as governor of Kandahar. This not only established him in a position of power in a strategically importance province; the symbolic significance of his appointment also contributed to the local population's loss of faith in the country's political rebirth and discredited the government in Kabul. This is now exacerbated by the problem of the sometimes massive violations of the law by the government itself and its officials: corruption is rife, and human rights violations (including violations of freedom of opinion and religion, as well as torture) are commonplace.

Recommendation

When selecting local partners for cooperation in political, development or military tasks, not only should their efficiency in dealing with the agenda in question be considered and monitored; there should also be careful analysis of their political role in the local context, their previous conduct (violence, crime, corruption, drug trafficking, political alliances, etc.) and their reputation in the local community. Local perceptions of external actors tend to be strongly influenced by their choice of partners for cooperation.

This problem is exacerbated by Afghanistan's booming narcotics industry. The drug economy undermines the state in two ways: it is a substantial source of revenue for insurgents and warlords, allowing them to prosecute their wars, and it generates massive amounts of money to fuel corruption, thereby undermining the effectiveness of the state apparatus and engendering sympathy or dependency on political-criminal structures among many officials (and some sections of the population).

External actors' dependency on a functioning state

The weak and fragile state in Afghanistan is not an abstract or academic problem; on the contrary, it calls the very bases of the international military and civilian intervention in that country into question. In political, legal and practical terms, this intervention was supposed to *support* the Afghan state, but due to the state's extreme weakness, this basis for the operation only exists in part.

It quickly became apparent that the external actors' most important task was in fact to keep the state alive – which, predictably, led to the state becoming dependent on the international actors. An untenable situation arose: on the one hand, the external actors were forced to extend their activities far beyond the mere provision of support for the Afghan state so that they themselves were not paralysed by its weakness; but on the other hand, they were reluctant, and indeed unable, to assume the core functions of the state themselves, as this would have led inexorably to the emergence of a quasi-colonial situation. The idea of the international presence in Afghanistan as an operation to *support* the Afghan government was based on the assumption that a functioning state actually existed. The deficiencies and, indeed, partial absence of this state apparatus outside the towns and cities have plunged the international actors into a state of quasi-impotence. They are now having to combat the growing violence in the country without being in a position to tackle the sources of this violence on a political level themselves, while the government proves incapable of doing so.

At the same time, most of the humanitarian and development activities have bypassed the new and barely functioning state. At the start, only around 16% of international aid was channelled through the state, although there was a moderate increase in this figure later. In order to achieve "quick impacts", international organisations and NGOs were designated as key actors, which further marginalised and weakened the fledgling Afghan state.

Recommendation

Development and infrastructural projects only help consolidate statehood if they are in the ownership of, or directly subordinate to, the state apparatus. Otherwise, there is a risk that they will strengthen local power-holders and weaken the government. Wherever possible, these projects should therefore be designed so that they genuinely facilitate the political consolidation of the state apparatus that is the recipient of support. Medium- to longer-term development measures should, in principle, take precedence over quick impact projects.

The governance gap between security and development policy

After Petersberg, the US government believed that it could shift responsibility for the political hot potato of nation-building to the new Afghan government, the UN and the European allies, thereby freeing up its capacities to prepare for the war in Iraq. The US commitment was therefore low-level and contradictory at first, and geared heavily towards security.

In the civilian sector, the European allies focussed primarily on humanitarian and development measures, mainly of a short-term nature. This emphasis on humanitarian and development services to the detriment of the core task of state-building had a devastating impact. Grave errors were made in key areas of state-building, notably as regards the establishment of a functioning legal system and police force. In the ensuing years, this vacuum was filled by the neo-Taleban and other insurgents, who attempted to establish their own systems of law in place of the barely functioning state system.

The segmentation of the international community's engagement into security components (generally geared towards the needs of external actors and bypassing those of local communities) and development tasks left a yawning gap in the creation of governance structures that were close to citizens, which remain underdeveloped in Afghanistan. The general failure of efforts to establish a police force, and what could perhaps be regarded as an even more alarming failure to create a functioning justice system, cannot simply be brushed aside as minor errors or weaknesses; they go to the very heart of credible statehood. In other words, a combination of military and security policy with development cooperation does not, in itself, constitute state-building. The creation of effective governance structures at the lower tiers of government in response to citizens' needs should not be viewed as a separate policy area, but must be at the heart of state-building efforts, and is essential to integrate and ensure the political viability of work in other policy sectors. Neither military and security policy nor development cooperation has adequate instruments at its disposal in this core area, however.

Recommendations

- **In the triangle formed by military operations, development projects and state-building/governance, priority should be given to the latter, with the other two sectors playing a subsidiary role. Security and development are important, but without successful state-building, they take place in a vacuum, are not sustainable, and miss their target, which is to achieve long-term stability.**
- **In future operations, Germany should keep in reserve a pool of appropriately trained police officers (federal and state police, 100-150 officers), to be available for immediate deployment to work on police capacity-building in crisis countries. The same applies to legal experts and the development of the justice system. It is important to ensure that the professionals concerned do not experience any disadvantages with regard to their career progression or promotion, or in other respects. The German government should lobby for the development of appropriate capacities within the EU framework.**

Misinterpretation of Pakistan's role

A key problem in the Afghanistan war lies in its cross-border linkage with neighbouring Pakistan. An overly narrow perspective is often apparent, however, in the public debate on this issue, which tends to focus on the notion that forces from Pakistan are having a destabilising effect on Afghanistan and that insurgents in Afghanistan are receiving support from Pakistan and finding safe haven in its Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). The role of the FATAs and the extremist parties and organisations in Pakistan is obvious, but there is a tendency to over-state its significance in order to distract attention from Afghanistan's own problems and the home-grown

causes of its conflict. The insurgency in Afghanistan has its roots and origins in the country itself and is merely supported, not stage-managed or initiated, from outside. The opportunities available to the government of Pakistan to seal off the FATAs or fight the Taleban forces located on these territories are very limited, for both topographical and political reasons: Pakistan's military has already lost around 1500 troops in operations of this kind (i.e. around three times the number of US casualties in Afghanistan) without achieving any real success.

It should also be borne in mind that the war in Afghanistan is having an extremely destabilising effect on Pakistan. Since 2002, as a direct consequence of the war, a climate of violence has developed in the FATAs but also across much of Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), posing a threat to Pakistan's overall stability. Since then, a wave of terrorist attacks and suicide bombings has begun whose most prominent victim, in late 2007, was the former Prime Minister and opposition leader Benazir Bhutto. Today, this wave of violence threatens to spill over into other areas of the country, including remote regions. The resulting death toll in Pakistan last year stood at around 3600 (compared with 8000 in Afghanistan).

Such a development would have catastrophic impacts: unlike Afghanistan, which has relatively little significance in a broader context, Pakistan has a population of almost 170 million and a large migrant community in Western countries. It is a fragile state with a very high level of ethnic and religious diversity, and possesses nuclear weapons. It also shares borders with several problematical neighbours (Iran, Afghanistan, China, Kashmir/India). So if, as a result of the war in Afghanistan, Pakistan becomes further destabilised and is sucked into a spiral of growing violence and fragmentation, this would potentially pose a far greater threat than the war in Afghanistan. Western policy has tended to exacerbate rather than ameliorate this problem. For tactical reasons – to pacify the situation in Afghanistan – the extremely unpopular President Musharraf was propped up for years despite clear opposition from almost the entire Pakistani population, and Pakistan's democratic potential was ignored and undermined. As a result of the immense pressure to achieve military control of the FATAs, the level of violence in Pakistan has increased, even though achieving such control is well-nigh impossible. Overall, the massive backing for Pakistan's military regime (until early 2008) against the democratic opposition, and exploitation of the regime as an auxiliary force in the war in Afghanistan, have destabilised Pakistan and plunged it into deep crisis. In view of Pakistan's far greater importance and greater threat potential, this policy course should be abandoned.

Recommendations

- The German government and its NATO partners should not view Pakistan primarily from a tactical perspective, i.e. how it can be utilised to secure Afghanistan's borders; instead, they should develop a pro-active policy towards Pakistan which recognises and focusses on that country's importance in its own right.
- Pakistan's stability is, potentially, of far greater global significance than that of Afghanistan and should not be sacrificed to the interests of the latter. Germany should develop a coherent strategy to stabilise Pakistan which incorporates economic, social policy and governance aspects. The German government should bring appropriate pressure to bear on the European Union in this context.
- German and international policy towards Afghanistan should in future identify potentially destabilising impacts on Pakistan and take steps to mitigate them as far as possible.

III. Ways out of the current situation

The international community is at a crossroads in Afghanistan. It can respond to the escalation of violence with progressive reinforcements of foreign and Afghan troops – albeit at the risk of entrenching the current impasse. With their obvious military superiority – NATO currently faces no more than approx. 17 000 insurgents, and has almost unlimited military resources by comparison – the US and its allies cannot possibly lose the war on the battlefield, hence their obvious tendency to rely primarily on military measures. Continuing with this approach, however, would be a grave mistake, as "not losing" the war is not enough for NATO. NATO must win the war, for otherwise it will face political defeat despite its superior strength. For the Taleban and other insurgents, the opposite applies. They do not need to win on the battlefield: not being crushed by the Western forces is enough to secure them a resounding political victory.

The present war is, in any case, a political rather than a military conflict, and like most insurgencies and ensuing countermeasures, is being waged for the hearts and minds of the Afghan people. In that sense, clear military superiority may well be irrelevant or, indeed, harmful, if, for example, frequent "collateral damage", i.e. civilian casualties, results in widespread public hostility to NATO's military might. During the first four months of 2008, for example, around 200 civilians were killed in attacks by NATO troops – almost as many as the 300 who died in attacks by the Taleban. The neo-Taleban and their allies seem to have a better understanding of the political character of the war than NATO does at present. The Taleban's attacks are targeted not only against the foreign troops, who are now seen as occupying forces, but mainly against the manifestations of Afghanistan's already fragile statehood, with a view to moving in to fill the ensuing political vacuum. Examples are the attacks on police stations

and schools – prompted not so much by the Taleban's opposition to schools per se, but by their desire to crush the remaining vestiges of Afghanistan's weak state.

Recommendation

The German government, the *Bundestag* and the *Bundeswehr* should adhere consistently to their role of *providing support* to the Afghan government, but should focus primarily on strengthening the state apparatus in Afghanistan so that this support can have a genuine and positive impact in the country at large.

1. Massive efforts to support state-building

The potential for violence arising from Afghanistan's internal power struggles and associated state-building process cannot be mitigated on a sustainable basis through military repression, but only through (a) practical proof that from society's perspective, the new state is showing itself to be superior to fragmented forms of governance, and (b) a successful conclusion to the state-building process, which itself may – indeed, will inevitably – cause intermittent instability by redistributing social and political power.

Under these circumstances, the creation of a public infrastructure is desirable in principle, but – as explained above – it will not promote peace or make a contribution to national reintegration in all circumstances. On the contrary, this can only happen if development measures are linked with building at least a basic governance architecture. Where no functioning state exists, development projects or humanitarian activities at local level are better than no development process at all, but do not, in themselves, help to enhance the state's legitimacy or the assertion of its legitimate monopoly of force. The efficiency of the public administration has remained low in many areas, with the state having only a minimal level of embeddedness, so the sustainability of the current form of governance in the country at large is poor: indeed, without the presence of foreign troops and the international financial flows, the present government would be unlikely to survive for long.

Ruling out any fragmentation of Afghanistan into numerous, loosely associated and, in de facto terms, autonomous spheres of influence as a solution to the current conflict, the only chance of marginalising the insurgents over the medium term is to progressively consolidate the fragile state structures in the provinces and rural regions so that the state becomes a nationwide reality and increasingly relevant to the rural population as well. This type of state cannot afford to be seen as corrupt or incompetent, so the police salary increase is an important step in the right direction. The state must be seen to be neutral, as a matter of principle, in local conflicts or disputes, and demonstrate this neutrality through mediation and a functioning justice system. These are the areas where the clear focus of international support must lie, and if progress is achieved here, then in a second (and possibly parallel) process, state-sponsored development and infrastructural measures could be undertaken for the further consolidation of statehood. As a prerequisite, however, the state's operational role and ownership of these measures must be clearly apparent; the relevant projects should not bypass the state. The key to success therefore lies in the core areas of statehood and governance, flanked by development policy measures.

It is essential, then, to put governance and state-building at the heart of the international community's engagement and mobilise all other measures to support them. A key obstacle in this context is that neither military and security policy nor foreign or development policy has a well-established and tried and tested tool box – such as exists in other policy fields – in this core area, i.e. the stabilisation of failed states in post-conflict situations. So in the medium term, it is essential to build state and non-state capacities here.

It is only against this background that military measures have any justification or relevance: they can be deployed in order to gain time to facilitate this type of policy, and they can and should protect and secure the process. Without the type of policy outlined above, however, they cannot win the war. If the political process fails or is lacking, military intervention is useless and serves only to camouflage and delay failure.

Recommendations

- If the swift establishment of functioning governance structures and a viable and sustainable state apparatus is unsuccessful, the international community's engagement in Afghanistan will fail in the medium or long term. For that reason, the current measures being pursued in this area must be stepped up dramatically and become the main focus of the agenda.
- Substantial capacity-building must take place as a matter of urgency in these policy areas, not only in relation to Afghanistan but also in anticipation of future missions in contexts of weak, fragmented or failed statehood elsewhere.
- In state-building measures, there should be a greater focus on their sustainability: if the international support leads to permanent dependency (e.g. on external financing or expertise), there will be a constant latent threat to the state-building process.
- It goes without saying that more intensive efforts to improve the organisation and financing of the Afghanistan engagement are urgently required. Greater pressure should be brought to bear on the various donor countries to honour their financial pledges. This will become increasingly important if a stronger state apparatus is established which is capable of absorbing and deploying these funds appropriately.

2. Push for the rectification of flaws

The Afghan state is still extremely fragile and weak. Since the initial euphoria which followed the first free parliamentary elections, its legitimacy has noticeably declined, and it now relies on fragile cooperation between "mod-

ernisers", some of whom have returned from exile, Islamist hardliners, some of whom are barely distinguishable from the Taleban in terms of the ideology they espouse, and local and regional commanders and warlords or their representatives. Many state functionaries are corrupt, and arbitrary or repressive action by the state's own officials is by no means rare – even the US Department of State has criticised the very high level of human rights violations.

It is therefore crucial not only to strengthen the Afghan state but also to address its serious flaws and weaknesses as a matter of urgency. Support and aid measures are required in this context, as outlined above, along with more intensive pressure on the relevant government bodies in Afghanistan to adopt a more resolute approach to combating corruption and human rights violations, both of which will undermine international support for Afghanistan in the long term and deprive the state of some of its legitimacy at home, thus playing into the hands of the neo-Taleban and their allies.

Recommendation

The German government, the *Bundestag* and German civil society should apply increased pressure to ensure respect for basic human rights and combat corruption. Here, a mixture of influence behind the scenes, public statements and symbolic acts is appropriate.

3. The alternative: a pull-back to the cities

The international community must therefore decide whether or not to mobilise – albeit rather late in the day – the resources and commitment needed to help establish a state which is embedded in society and is genuinely effective on a nationwide basis. It is only in this context that the debate about further troop reinforcements makes sense and *the provision of support* for the Afghan government becomes a viable policy option. If efforts to establish a more robust state in Afghanistan are unsuccessful in the foreseeable future (or the international community lacks the energy or commitment needed for this task), the international forces – including the *Bundeswehr* – will find themselves in an almost untenable situation as their operations will have taken place in a vacuum without the prerequisites for success. In this situation – which can no longer be ruled out – the question of troop withdrawal would quickly arise, as armed forces should not be left in a conflict environment unless there is a prospect of their mission being successful. However, an abrupt withdrawal would further destabilise the situation and probably spell the end of the Afghan government in the medium term. That being the case, one option which should be discussed is whether to pull the troops back from the provinces and concentrate them in the larger towns and cities, where they could continue to protect the existing governance structures as well as the civilian population. This option would constitute a reversion to ISAF's original mandate, which was centred around the capital Kabul, but under changed conditions and on a broader basis. If the Afghan government proves capable, in this framework, of embedding itself on a stronger basis across the country (as the government of President Najibullah managed to do for a time after the withdrawal of Soviet troops, until it collapsed under the weight of its internal discord), the stabilisation of Afghanistan would be the result. Otherwise, it would at least pave the way for subsequent phased withdrawal.

Recommendation

In the event that the international community is unwilling or unable to drive forward state-building in Afghanistan with real vigour, or if this shows little prospect of success in the foreseeable future due to the conditions within Afghanistan itself, the German government and other countries should consider pulling their troops out of the provinces and redeploying them in the larger towns and cities. This would gain time without the troops becoming bogged down in what would probably be an escalating conflict. Rapid or over-hasty troop withdrawal from Afghanistan at present would simply destabilise the situation even further. This concentration of the foreign military in the towns and cities (e.g. from autumn/winter 2009 or 2010) would demonstrate whether the Afghan government and their armed forces are up to the job – and without that prospect, at least in the foreseeable future, the war would be unwinnable anyway. The question of withdrawal would then arise again with greater urgency.

Author:

Dr. Jochen Hippler, Senior researcher at the Institute for Development and Peace (INEF), University of Duisburg-Essen, and part-time freelance policy advisor and consultant

Co-signatories:

Victor Kocher, Middle East correspondent for *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (NZZ), Limassol

Dr. Reinhard Mutz, Senior research fellow at the Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg (IFSH)

Hans-C. Graf von Sponeck, Long-serving UN diplomat, inter alia UN coordinator in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iraq

Published by:
Stiftung Entwicklung und Frieden (SEF)/
Development and Peace Foundation
Dechenstraße 2
D-53115 Bonn

Phone: +49 (0)228 9 59 25-0
Fax: +49 (0)228 9 59 25-99
e-mail: sef@sef-bonn.org

Website:
http://www.sef-bonn.org

Editor: Dr Michèle Roth
Translation: Hillary Crowe

ISSN 1437-2819

The **Development and Peace Foundation** was founded in 1986 on the initiative of Willy Brandt and in collaboration with Minister-President Dr Johannes Rau, who later became President of the Federal Republic of Germany. A cross-party and non-profit-making organisation, the Foundation sees its role as helping to drive forward the German and international debate about social and political responses to globalisation and transnational problems – in short: Global Governance. It strives to make complex global topics comprehensible and suitable for policy-making, and through its recommendations on practical action, to contribute to political opinion-forming on urgent future challenges.

The Foundation's Board of Trustees is chaired by the minister-presidents of the four donor states, i.e. North Rhine-Westphalia, Berlin, Brandenburg and Saxony. The Chair of the Executive Committee is Professor Sabine von Schorlemer; her deputies are State Secretary Dr Gerd Harms and State Secretary Michael Mertes. The Foundation's Advisory Board is chaired by Professor Dieter Senghaas. The Foundation's Executive Director is Dr Michèle Roth.

The **SEF Policy Paper** publish the views of noted experts on urgent issues in world development. In this way too, the Development and Peace Foundation seeks to participate intensively in the political debate about global issues and provide recommendations for political action.

Selected Policy Papers

(Unless otherwise stated, the Policy Papers are available in German and, in electronic format, in English):

28 *The Responsibility to Protect as an Element of Peace. Recommendations for its Operationalisation. Sabine von Schorlemer, December 2007*

27 *Global Resource Management: Conflict Potential and Characteristics of a Global Governance Regime. Raimund Bleischwitz, Stefan Bringezu, October 2007*

26 *Justice and Solidarity in the Shadow of Globalisation: Options for Mature Economies. Friedhelm Hengsbach SJ, June 2007*

25 *The Metropolises of the South: Laboratory for Innovations? Towards better urban management with new alliances. Peter Herrle, Alexander Jachnow and Astrid Ley, May 2006*

Contents do not necessarily reflect the views of the publisher.