

Körper POLICY PAPER

No. 8

**THE UNDECLARED
WAR**

**GERMANY'S
SELF-DECEIT IN
AFGHANISTAN**

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Executive Summary

Germany has a burning desire for a declaration of war. It wishes to declare war, to put the whole matter into words, to try to understand it as a public task. The fact is that Germany is fighting a war in Afghanistan. It is fighting a war because the US was attacked by terrorists, and because the attack had its origins in Afghanistan. Germany is fighting a war in Afghanistan because the world community has come to the conclusion that one of the greatest threats of the age emanates from this country, and that Afghanistan is a failed state which needs to be put back on its feet.

Although Germany is fighting a war, one is not allowed to call it a war. It is referred to as a stabilization operation or as a mission in support of national reconstruction. It is not allowed to be called a war, because war presupposes a sovereign opponent under international law, and because insurance companies refuse to settle claims if a soldier dies in a war zone.

The controversy surrounding the use of what is deemed to be the correct terminology is a reflection of the grand political self-deceit to which Germany has succumbed. Many aspects of the Afghanistan mission remain unsaid, half-baked, untrue and hypocritical. The mission is unpleasant, and most probably not something anyone actually wants. The Red-Green government decided to embark on it in 2001 primarily for political reasons connected with the NATO alliance, and the Grand Coalition has repeatedly restated that it stands by the decision.

In the eighth year of the mission policymakers and the general public can no longer keep up with the dynamic nature of events in Afghanistan. What once really began as a stabilizing operation for the protection of the central government is turning into a veritable struggle for survival for the new Afghanistan. As it endures the assaults of the resurgent Taliban, the world community recognizes that its credibility would be at stake if it were now to leave the country in a panic-stricken manner and consign it to a renewed cycle of war and violence.

Germany refuses to see this drama. As if they were part of a conspiracy of silence, the German government, members of the German Parliament and the military leadership of the German Army have joined forces in order to avoid having to deal with the unpleasant problems of the mission, at least for the time being. It is difficult to be honest because the mission is overshadowed by a terrible threat. Afghanistan could easily be misused in the run-up to the elec-

tions. The 2002 campaign demonstrated that the issue of war and peace can in fact be used to win at the polls.

It would be honest if people were willing to admit that the relatively stable north of the country does not actually need so many soldiers in the camps. And if the military planners really think it is necessary to confine 4,100 members of the German Army in their barracks, then they should at least admit that they can only work to stabilize the north by leaving the camps, and that a stable north is of little use if the south falls into the hands of the Taliban.

It would be honest to admit that the defensive instructions issued to the soldiers lead to absurd military situations, and in fact that the self-imposed reticence actually endangers the soldiers more than it protects them. It would be honest to admit that the Tornados which were sent to Afghanistan to the accompaniment of a great deal of political razzmatazz are operationally useless and are simply intended to be a soothing substitute for contributions that have not been made elsewhere in the alliance. It would be honest to admit that civilian reconstruction has succumbed to routine patterns of behaviour which are frightening and do not do justice to what is actually needed.

Early in 2009 the German Army came under a new kind of pressure. The Taliban had reformed in the north, convoys came under fire, and some soldiers lost their lives. Suddenly the German Army was embroiled in fire-fights of the kind which had hitherto occurred only in the south. A change of strategy was adopted. Too late? Too half-hearted? The public was shocked, and policymakers were filled with consternation only weeks before the parliamentary elections.

Germany was one of the godparents of the political reconstruction of Afghanistan. For a century it had excellent relations with the rulers in Kabul. To this day the Germans have an enviable reputation among Afghans. However, such feelings are not reciprocated. Afghanistan is a distant country and the war is of little or no concern. The soldiers of the German Army sense this lack of interest. And they see the contradiction between the nature of their mission and what the distant country actually wants them to do. The soldiers are the real victims of a grand kind of self-deceit.

Preface

Afghan Chaos and German Confusion

It may well be that from henceforth German and European foreign policy-makers will be confronted with unremitting challenges that they find virtually impossible to deal with. The fact is that the multipolar world makes exceedingly great demands on everyone. No great power, no alliance, and certainly no international organization is strong enough to create stability unaided. The multipolar “all against all” which prevailed in the 19th century, when European states played balance-of-power games, and things often went awry, should be a warning to us all, for in the nuclear age bungled attempts to strike a balance can have even more devastating consequences. Moreover, thanks to terrorism, regional conflicts are making their presence felt everywhere. Yet in a volatile world it is difficult to shape the essential elements of “global domestic policies:” combating malnutrition and promoting human rights, dealing with climate change, and devising a new framework for the global economy.

That is the backdrop to the war in Afghanistan. If the Taliban are victorious here, they will later be victorious in Pakistan. If they are victorious in Pakistan, they will be in the possession of nuclear weapons. Once they have nuclear weapons, other countries, including China and Russia, will regret that they did not take sufficient precautionary measures. Or will the West be triumphant after all? As things stand it cannot win, and yet it must not be allowed to fail either. If it were to lose the battle, it would mean giving the Taliban a free hand—a frightening prospect. Nevertheless, as Stefan Kornelius points out, “the threat as far as the Germans are concerned seems abstract and distant, much farther away than the confrontation of the Cold War.” But Berlin cannot simply look the other way if “the most populous region on earth with the most important sources of raw materials, crucial trade routes and traditional partners” slowly mutates into a “gigantic zone of instability and war.”

Kornelius contends that, if there is something more dangerous than this war, it would be a decision not to fight it. It is a fact that none of the critics of the Afghanistan mission have come up with an alternative strategy of how it might be possible to defend fundamental German interests in a more intelligent manner (for a start, stopping the Taliban from getting their hands on nuclear weapons). Equally hypocritical is the fact that Germany is fighting a war which in official parlance is not actually a war. Thus the German Army has

been sent to the Hindu Kush area, but is prevented on a daily basis from doing its job in an effective way.

Perhaps the war in Afghanistan will go down in history as the first attempt by people who are actually unable to cope with a situation to live with the strain it imposes, and thus to gradually gain the upper hand. There is certainly no prospect of winning the war quickly. But there is also no alternative to it. The principal merit of this well-informed and revealing essay is that it sheds light on Afghan chaos and German confusion, and makes an impressive contribution to improving the coherence of German foreign and security policy.

Roger de Weck

Editor of the series "Standpunkte"

1. A Declaration of War

Gone are the days when battle began with a declaration of war. A mounted envoy no longer delivers a sealed envelope containing a diplomatic note specifying the time and nature of forthcoming military action. A telegram can no longer trigger a crisis between two states. In the 21st century wars are not preceded by announcements. They start in a rather furtive way, and are referred to as instability or conflict. Subsequently the violence increases, though the reasons for it and the underlying aims remain nebulous. Similarly, the participants in the war initially prefer to adopt a low profile. Somewhere along the line the violence escalates and armed forces join the fray. Bombs are dropped. Dynamic action of this kind can also be reversed, and the fighting can die down to the level of skirmishes, tension, and instability. States and regions which are afflicted by such conflicts in the 21st century do not really know the meaning of peace. Afghanistan is a case in point.

Wars in the 21st century take no notice of borders, which are irrelevant because as a rule wars are no longer fought between states. And because borders are of no importance, they no longer afford any kind of protection against war. It can happen everywhere—in New York, Madrid, Wana or Kandahar. And since wars take no notice of borders, they do not start with declarations of war. After all, it is unclear who is supposed to be telling whom that he is the enemy.

There is nonetheless a profound desire for a declaration of war. “Declaring war” means explaining what is at stake and putting it into words. It is now more important than it has ever been to tell large numbers of people about these simmering, smouldering and increasingly dangerous conflicts. In the 21st century a declaration of war is a public task. It is not something which can be popped into a sealed envelope. Since war is of universal significance on account of the omnipresence of the media in an information society hungry for the latest news, there is a need to explain both its causes and the way in which it is conducted. That is the duty of democratic states and open societies which would like to deprive the wars of the 21st century of their asymmetrical character, and drag war out of the murky shadows into the light of day. Clarity and openness are valuable attainments. What are the origins of the conflict? How can one overcome it? And, to put it rather crudely, who is good and who is evil? The aim of conflicts triggered by terrorists is to deprive free societies of their freedom, to sow the seeds of fear, and to create an atmosphere of inse-

curity. Terrorists thrive on the ignorance of their opponents, and the fact that they can pursue their clandestine activities unnoticed. For this reason every democracy which is dragged into one of these new-fangled wars in the 21st century needs a declaration of war. People who do not tell the truth, who go on the defensive and who lie to themselves are simply playing into the hands of their opponents.

Modern wars cannot be pursued if the majority of the voters in a democracy refuse to give their assent. Waging war is not really one of the strong points of democracies. No society is happy to make sacrifices, and democratic societies are especially unwilling to do so. Dead soldiers and civilians can exert pressure on democracies. They can sway the mood of the electorate, and can bring down governments. War euphoria is a thing of the past.

Germany is well aware of its past. It has drawn certain lessons from it and has refrained from getting involved in military operations. In its neighbourhood it has created a system of conflict prevention which exists nowhere else in the world: the European Union. Furthermore, Germany has also joined a military alliance which is designed to be so awesome on account of its size and military clout that an armed dispute with an enemy is to all intents and purposes unthinkable. NATO and EU constitute an ideal combination for a post-bellucist age.

And yet war in the 21st century has finally caught up with Germany. The country is fighting in Afghanistan because the US, its most important partner in the NATO military alliance, was attacked by terrorists, and because the attack was masterminded from Afghanistan. Germany is fighting a war here because the world community came to the conclusion that one of the greatest threats of our time emanates from this country, that Afghanistan is a failed state and that it has to be reconstructed.

Although Germany is fighting a war, one is not allowed to call it a war. It is a stabilization mission, an attempt to support the state-building process. It is not allowed to be called a war, since in terms of international law war presupposes a sovereign opponent, and because insurance companies do not pay up if a death occurs in a war zone.

The dispute concerning the proper terminology is only one among the many dishonesties which are part and parcel of the German Army mission in the Hindu Kush. But it is symptomatic of the gigantic political self-deceit to which the country has succumbed. Many aspects of this Afghanistan mission remain unsaid, half-baked, untrue and indeed hypocritical. The mission is an awkward one, and probably it is also unwelcome and unwanted. The Red-Green German government decided to send out soldiers in 2001, primarily for reasons connected with the politics of the NATO alliance, and the Grand Coalition has repeatedly reconfirmed the decision.

In the eighth year of the mission it is becoming more apparent than ever that policymakers and the public in Germany can no longer keep up with the dynamic nature of what is going on in Afghanistan. The inhibitions which accompanied the mission from the start have coalesced into a tangle of contradictions, political half-truths and military nonsense. In the meantime the situation in Afghanistan is changing rapidly. What at some point in the past started off as a stabilizing mission designed to protect the central government is developing into a veritable battle of survival for the new Afghanistan. In the face of the onslaught by the resurgent Taliban, the world community has come to realize that its credibility would be at stake if it now left the country in a hurry and condemned it to yet another cycle of war and violence.

As its first foreign policy move the new US administration under Barack Obama commissioned a strategic review of the whole mission. The results are now available, and they are impressive. For the first time since the start of the war the US seems to have understood the complex nature of the Afghanistan problem. For the first time all of the ethnic, religious, cultural, geographical and economic factors have been put together to produce an overall picture that actually makes some sense. The real geographical origins of the war, the Pashtun tribal areas on both sides of the Afghan-Pakistani border, are now considered to be the central problem. This is a very apposite insight, for the Taliban, like a pack of hungry wolves, are in the process of descending on the weak Pakistani state, where they are hoping to ignite the next big conflict. The US strategy is dedicated to resolving the issue, and in essence it consists of two messages. We need to stop the hypocrisy and be far more honest about the gigantic nature of the task. Secondly, Afghanistan can certainly be saved, but only if everyone joins in the mammoth task, both in military terms and with regard to civilian reconstruction.

Germany refuses to listen to this message. As if they were part of a conspiracy of silence, the German government, the members of the German Parliament, and the heads of the German Army have joined forces so that for the time being they do not have to deal with the unpleasant and problematical aspects of the mission. It is difficult to be honest because the mission is overshadowed by a terrible threat, which is that Afghanistan can easily be misused in the election campaign. 2002 demonstrated that the issue of war and peace can decide the outcome of an election. Complex foreign policy problems can be transformed into a domestic policy battering ram without going to a great deal of trouble. The fear that the issue will be abused for the sake of party politics immobilizes policymakers and sends shivers down the spines of the military leadership.

On the other hand, it would be sign of honesty to admit that the relatively stable north of the country does not actually require the presence of so

many soldiers. And even if the military planners consider it necessary to house 3,500 members of the German armed forces securely in three camps, they might at least admit that a stable north is of little use if the south, and later perhaps even the capital, Kabul, fall into the hands of the Taliban. It would be honest to admit that as far as the soldiers are concerned, their defensive assignment leads to absurd military situations. Indeed, the self-imposed restraint actually endangers the soldiers instead of protecting them. It would also be honest to admit that the Tornado warplanes sent to Afghanistan with a great deal of political razzmatazz are operationally useless and merely serve as a smokescreen designed to make people forget that other contributions have not been made elsewhere in the alliance. Moreover, it would also be honest to admit that Germany has failed miserably in the area of police training. The country which promised to build an Afghan police force was defeated by the size of the task. And finally, it would also be honest to admit that civilian reconstruction has developed a frightening kind of routine which does not do justice to what is really needed, especially in the south of the country.

Early in 2009 the German Army came under unwonted pressure in the north of Afghanistan. The Taliban had regrouped and also began to mount more attacks in the German sector. A soldier died in an ambush planned with military precision. Suddenly the troops found themselves getting involved in firefights of a kind which had otherwise occurred only in the south. Afghan reality had finally caught up with the Germans, and all of a sudden they began to react. Was it a change of strategy? Or only a brief spasm of self-assertion? The German government and the German Army leadership displayed signs of nervousness as they faced up to the new kind of tension generated by military provocation and domestic policy pressure a few weeks before the general elections.

Germany was one the patrons of political reconstruction in Afghanistan. For a century it maintained excellent relations with the rulers in Kabul, and even today Germans are highly regarded by the Afghans. However, this esteem is not reciprocated. Today Germany is not really interested in the country, even though it is a place where it exposes its soldiers to great dangers, and despite the fact that in the Hindu Kush it is putting its foreign policy credibility on the line. But the public discourse is no longer sensitive to such issues. Afghanistan is a far-away country, and the war does not really worry people. The soldiers of the German Army are aware of this indifference. And they see the contradiction between their mission and what the far-away country actually needs. They communicated their unease to the Military Ombudsman, who in his 2009 report complained that the troops did not feel that they were being taken seriously. This feeling is not an illusion. The soldiers are the ones who have been betrayed. They are in fact the real victims of self-deceit on a grand scale.

2. The Wild Country

The Basic Laws of Afghanistan

Afghan historiography tells of a Golden Age which begins in 1963 and ends in 1978. In these paltry 15 years the country acquired a constitution, and five prime ministers governed a constitutional monarchy. The last five years of this period were dominated by an autocrat, Mohammad Daud, who had toppled the monarchy, provoked domestic and foreign opposition, was at odds with the various factions of the (communist) party system, and was finally killed in a surprise coup. A small blemish to an otherwise benign era.

An epoch consisting of 15 years is short by any stretch of the imagination. And nothing illustrates the despair of the Afghan people better than its transfigured recollection of this pitiful period, although, going by the decades and even centuries which preceded it, it was largely peaceful and stable. In fact these 15 years also witnessed domestic unrest, malnutrition and hardship. But fewer people died, and there was less fighting. For this reason the Afghans like to think back to this era. They venerate their last king, Zahir Shah, who spent the years after the 1973 coup in exile in Rome, came back to Kabul in 2002 full of hope for the future, and died in July 2007.

History has not been overly kind to people who consider a mere 15 years to have been a Golden Age. Hardly any other region on earth has seen so much misery as Afghanistan, which is wedged in between the civilizations of India, Persia, China and Russia. Even the linguistic origins of the name of the country point to the fact that it was a buffer state. Until the 19th century the territory was not normally referred to as Afghanistan, a name which the British first applied to the area to the north of India, the colonial jewel in their crown, as they strengthened their border in the Pashtun tribal areas. It was a no-man's-land that suffered unceasingly under the competition between Iran, Russia, and British India. Afghanistan was not the name of an old-established state, but a term which described a stateless vacuum that gave rise to strife and discord and nothing else.

If geography can have such an adverse effect on the fate of a country, it seems only logical to say that attempts to achieve internal stability were bound to come to grief as a result of external pressure. This determined the conditions within the artificial state, the borders of which had been drawn by the Russians and the British. Within this state there was competition for power and

influence between ethnic groups and tribes, families and valley communities, religions and political parties. To this day the fragmentation of the nation is the most important reason for the simmering unrest. None of the groups was ever strong enough to enable it to become the natural leader. No governmental model was flexible enough to accommodate all the diverging interests.

The Pashtuns, who constitute the largest single ethnic group, live in a settlement area that is divided by the Durand line, an artificial border drawn by the British and the Russians which later separated Pakistan from Afghanistan. The group is united not by religion, but by common ancestry and a code of conduct (Pashtunwali) that is based on notions of honour and property. Pashtuns consider themselves to be the real Afghans, and their language, Pashto, makes no distinction between an Afghan and a Pashtun.

Both the Sunnite and Shiite forms of the Islamic faith have been espoused by the various ethnic groups (some sources put their number as high as 200), and instrumentalized by external powers (especially Saudi Arabia and Iran) in order to influence intra-Afghan disputes. But in point of fact, when it comes to the reason for conflicts, religious differences are of secondary importance when compared with the significance of clan structures and tribes.

There are many reasons for cultural differences in Afghanistan, and they repeatedly lead to tensions which erupt in violence. The Pashtun tribal rules with their specific code of law and honour come from a pre-Islamic age. Fraternities, religious movements and clan structures produce strong leaders who can be in power for decades, and can usually be toppled only by the use of force. In the last 200 years only two Afghan rulers have lost their lives or power naturally. All the others died violent deaths or were forcibly expelled.

For centuries the fragmentation of society encouraged a well-nigh chaotic set of alliances. Any accord could quite suddenly turn into bitter enmity. An arch-enemy could only a day later become one's most important ally against a third party. Loyalty is an elastic concept in Afghanistan, and reliability is valid only until the next provocation occurs, or until another player is prepared to pay a better price.

The enmity between the various groupings is exacerbated by the barren nature of the inhospitable terrain, which never produced enough to feed the local inhabitants. Illness, a lack of water, heat, cold, bad paths, and the natural barrier of a range of mountains that rises as high as 7,700 metres in places contributed to the hardships of a population used to suffering. Enmity is bound to flare up if an irrigation channel is destroyed or if one is denied access to pastureland.

Centuries of war and deprivation have left their mark on the Afghan population, which is now estimated to comprise about 33 million people. The average life expectancy is 44 years, and the average age 17 years. People say that one

stands a chance if one manages to get to the age of five. More than 60 per cent of the adult population can neither read nor write. The Afghans are clearly divided into urban and rural populations. Townspeople, above all the inhabitants of Kabul, have relatively modern views and thus seem suspicious to the rural population, which is trapped in its archaic traditions and family ties. The cleavage between towns and countryside is a source of continual and recurring tension, and is something which in recent years the Taliban in particular have used to their advantage.

In spite of the supposedly small population and the size of the territory (which is twice as large as Germany), the Afghans live in close proximity to each other. The inhospitable terrain forces people into the few areas along the waterways and in the vicinity of the oases which can be used for agriculture. They are now located along the Afghan ring road, the only traffic artery, which twists around the country in a kind of circle. This is another strategic burden which Afghanistan imposes on its people. The handful of transport routes are of course also the country's vital arteries. Those who control the roads are the masters of the country. But at the same time the rugged and inaccessible mountains provide perfect cover and protection for any enemy. Those who are not masters of the country can always evade the rulers, and at the very least ensure that there is insecurity by resorting to guerrilla tactics.

Protracted Suffering

In the last 30 years Afghanistan has gone through one of the worst periods of warfare in its history. The coup against Mohammad Daud initiated a murderous sequence of occupation, civil war and tyrannical government which visibly traumatized and brutalized the country. Since the average life expectancy is 44 years, there is hardly a single adult Afghan with memories of peaceful times.

Over Christmas in 1979 the Soviet Union occupied Kabul and later the rest of the country in response to an intra-Afghan power struggle within the Communist Party and because it was afraid of a kind of encirclement in the Cold War. Afghanistan once again shifted to the centre of global politics, as had already been the case in the 19th century, when the country became the playground for the "Great Game," the geopolitical contest in which the colonial powers vied influence, secure borders and access to the sea.

On three separate occasions the British were forced to acknowledge that there were limits to their military might, most painfully perhaps in the first

Anglo-Afghan war, which led to the greatest defeat in their colonial history. "With thirteen thousand the campaign began / Only one came home from Afghanistan," wrote Theodor Fontane in 1858 when describing the catastrophic eviction of the British garrison from Kabul.

The Soviets were destined to relive the British experience in a brutal way 130 years later. Their occupation regime came to grief because the US and Pakistan used the Afghan resistance movement in order to wage a proxy war, and the intra-Soviet upheavals under Mikhail Gorbachev had no use for neo-Communist dreams on the periphery. Thus Afghanistan had once again demonstrated that it could not be controlled. Up to 1.6 million Afghans are said to have died in the war, and almost half of the population became refugees.

The country did not manage to return to unity after the withdrawal of the Soviet troops. The opposite was the case. Although they had just been united in their opposition to the invaders, the resistance fighters now proceeded to attack each other. In their regions the mujahedeen were more powerful than ever, and the country split up into independently functioning sections which competed with each other and engaged in a struggle for power in Kabul. After the overthrow early in 1992 of Mohammed Najibullah, the proconsul installed by the Soviets, the militias and warlords maintained their autonomy and thus contributed to the ongoing decline of the state. The fighting was primarily for control of the capital, Kabul. In the wake of the mujahedeen onslaught against the Soviet invaders it now bore the brunt of the civil war.

In 1994 a new movement appeared on the scene which upset the traditional war scenarios with their warlords and tribal chiefs. The Taliban or students of religion were recruited from the madrasas in the Pashtun tribal areas, and attracted mainly young men without a future, and frequently orphans. Their rise would have been unthinkable without the Islamization of the population of the refugee camps, but above all without manipulation by and financing from the Pakistani intelligence service ISI, and indirectly the American intelligence service, CIA, although the US did not exercise a direct influence on the Taliban. The ISI hoped that the movement would provide new opportunities of shaping the internal situation in Afghanistan and weakening the Pashtun groups which continued to press for an independent Pashtun state in the border area. On top of this it wished to create a stable ally in the west in order to obtain room for manoeuvre in the conflict with India.

The victorious progress of the movement was impressive. Between 1994 and 1996 the students of religion conquered all the strategically significant towns in the south, and finally Kabul. By 1998 they had extended their sphere of influence to the north and terrorized the population with evil brutality. By and by they subjected the country to their strict rules of conduct and above all imposed on the towns the hard punishments provided for by the sharia.

In contrast to what is widely assumed to be the case, the Taliban did not initially forbid the cultivation of poppies. The reverse was true. Together with a flourishing contraband trade in goods of all kinds it financed its existence and the war with drug trafficking. The production of poppy seed was drastically reduced only in the summer of 2001, a few weeks before the terrorist attacks in the US, presumably on account of a buyer's market which had led to a collapse in the price of heroin.

In contrast to the militias and tribal troops, the Taliban were held together by a higher ideological goal. This was the establishment of a theocratic state, even though its system of values was based more on a crude mixture of Pash-tun tribal rules and Islamist views than on a strict interpretation of the Quran.

Its Islamist alignment and, after 1998, its systematic policy of isolation made the Taliban state attractive for militant jihadists from all over the world. In Afghanistan they were able to pursue their goals unmolested and set up training camps for the ongoing global jihad. Charismatic figures such as the al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden purchased influence and power within the Taliban structures and in return were assured of reliable protection.

Until 2001 the Taliban were treated as pariahs, as indeed was Afghanistan. They were isolated by the United Nations, and deemed to be insignificant as international actors. Those responsible for terrorist attacks in Kenya, Yemen, Saudi Arabia and elsewhere were traced back to Afghanistan, and in the West the brutality within the country, the lack of respect for its cultural heritage, and above all the harsh repression of women made it plain that the Taliban represented a threat. Yet al-Qaeda was growing in their shadow and with it a new kind of terrorism. This threat and its new dimensions remained unnoticed by the vast majority of people in the West. And all this did not add up to a good enough reason to justify intervention.

A Declaration of War on the World

The terrorist attacks in New York and Washington suddenly brought Afghanistan back to the centre of world politics. This time round it was not Britain, the colonial great power, or the Soviet Union, a crumbling superpower, which believed they had been provoked or forced to invade. It was America, the last and only remaining superpower, the empire with a commanding lead on account of its military, political and cultural predominance, which was attacked from the "heart of darkness," as Afghanistan quickly came to be known. On the

one hand there was the unipolar power, the leader of the mightiest alliances in the world, and on the other a geopolitical nobody, a failed state without any kind of structure and inner authority, caught up in grinding poverty and backwardness.

Even the less imaginative inhabitants of the Muslim world and many other people elsewhere saw that this unique constellation constituted the subject for an epic drama. It was also a constellation which al-Qaeda and its leader Osama bin Laden had deliberately contrived. In their frenzied pain America, the West and the mauled democracies were supposed to lash out in all directions. Nothing would unite Muslims all over the world more than the towering rage of the hated West, nothing would make the oppression and discrimination of the Muslim masses more visible. It was the perfect emotional mixture with which to unite the Islamist movement.

Immediately after the 9/11 attacks the Taliban and the foreign al-Qaeda fighters withdrew from their camps in Afghanistan, where they would have been very easy targets for American Cruise missiles. Osama bin Laden ordered his leadership group to leave the country, and, when the US Air Force began Operation Enduring Freedom on 7 October, the Northern Alliance, a coalition of former mujahedeen and warlords, was ready to take the ground war towards Kabul. The Taliban gave up the capital at the beginning of November without a fight, and Kandahar, their last bastion in the south, on 8 December. They then withdrew to the Pashtun tribal area on Pakistani territory, and their leadership evaded a battle, as did the leadership of al-Qaeda.

The US was not alone in the war, even if it organized the period of direct combat after 11 September on its own and won with the help of the Northern Alliance, which was only too willing to fight. Invested with a mandate from the United Nations and supported by countless declarations of loyalty from allies all over the world, Washington was able at the beginning of 2002 to play one of its most important trump cards. Directly after the terrorist attacks NATO had invoked Article 5 of its constitution, the mutual defence clause which commits members to use force to protect and defend a member who has been attacked. Article 5, the cornerstone of the alliance, had never before been invoked in the history of NATO. And no one had ever imagined that the US would be the target of an attack.

A New Era Begins

After the eviction of the Taliban Germany took the initiative and triggered a political process which was intended to sort out the future of Afghanistan. The most important actors of the Afghan theatre were brought together at Petersberg in Bonn in November and December 2001 in order to discuss a post-war order. The make-up of the conference was more or less accidental because at that point Afghanistan did not have any active political parties, and domestic policy groups had been either destroyed or forced into exile by the Taliban. Four groups agreed on the appointment of a transitional president, Hamid Karzai, and the convocation of a constituent assembly. Karzai himself did not take part in the Petersberg talks. Under the protection of troops mandated by the United Nations (International Security Assistance Force—ISAF) he was later taken to Kabul, where he began his official duties at the end of December. Early the next year a grand tribal assembly (Loya Jirga) confirmed him in his role.

Loya Jirga, the constituent assembly, adopted a new Afghan constitution two years later. It was the first to facilitate regular elections. The presidential elections had a remarkably high turnout of about eight million voters, and returned Karzai to office. As many as 15 million voters have registered for the second presidential elections scheduled for August 2009.

However, reconstruction of the country and protection against the Taliban were quickly overshadowed by another important military occurrence, the American invasion of Iraq in the early part of 2003. A year and a half after toppling the Taliban, Washington concentrated single-mindedly on the supposedly more important goal, the removal of Saddam Hussein. As a result of strategic and political miscalculation and spurred on by an unsatisfied craving for revenge after 9/11, the American military machine turned round to focus on the mammoth target of Iraq and began to neglect its task in Afghanistan.

The first months of the Karzai government were encouraging. Violence seemed to be on the decline, and even specialists such as Lakhdar Brahimi, the UN special envoy for Afghanistan, advised the use of a “light footprint,” that is, a low-key presence and the cautious deployment of personnel in Kabul. On top of this America displayed a glaring lack of interest in the development of Afghanistan after the eviction of the Taliban. Power was initially handed to the warlords, who were supplied with large sums of money and degraded the central government to the level of a bogus organization, or attempted to secure new sinecures for themselves as cabinet ministers.

So confidence was short-lived. It is true that the international community gradually extended its presence so that it covered the whole country, and from 2003 onwards provincial reconstruction teams assumed responsibility for the regional coordination of security and reconstruction. However, what was a

good idea in theory turned out to be problematical in practice. First, these developments were not underpinned by the genuine interest and the creative will of the US administration, which felt quite categorically that it was not responsible for state-building. Conflicting concepts and actors led to a waste of resources and time. Secondly, Afghanistan suffered under the tension between the warlords in the provinces and the central government, which, with a vacillating president at its head, missed many opportunities. And thirdly, the war against the Taliban was not over. In fact, it had not even started.

As early as 2002, and then in a serious way at the beginning of 2003 the Taliban demonstrated their presence with attacks in the provinces of Helmand and Zabul. After their eviction from Afghanistan the leadership around Mullah Omar received support and financial aid from the Pakistani intelligence service ISI. It regrouped in Quetta in Pakistan, where it built up a new command structure. The area straddling the Afghan-Pakistani border became its new power base. It quickly took control over strategically important towns in Pakistan. As a result the government in Islamabad no longer had any kind of control over the border provinces in the tribal areas reaching from Baluchistan to Waziristan and Bajaur. Under the pressure built up in Afghanistan the conflict shifted to the east into core Pakistani territory.

But the Western alliance was also unable to keep the Taliban out of Afghanistan. At first the jihadists launched sporadic attacks on the international troops, and subsequently they mounted a series of full-scale military operations. In August 2003 these had already led to the deaths of 220 Afghans. By the autumn of the same year the Taliban, in keeping with their traditions, had once again declared war on their enemies, but neither the US, which had just embarked on hostilities in Iraq, nor the other Western nations took the problem seriously.

The Taliban's potential for causing trouble increased after the PRT (Provincial Reconstruction Team) troops moved to the provinces. In the turbulent south the British, the Dutch and the Canadians in particular were involved in fire-fights immediately after arrival. Especially in the province of Helmand and in the Taliban stronghold of Kandahar the Western soldiers were forced to come to the conclusion that they were dealing with a well-organized army which sent what amounted to combat battalions to the front line, set up supply routes and depots, and could not complain about not having enough weapons. The myth of the lonely guerrilla fighter very quickly evaporated. Late in the summer of 2006 NATO troops were able to prevent the fall of Kandahar at the last moment. The violence increased to such an extent that it made the reconstruction of state institutions unthinkable. Western troops seized huge caches of arms and even discovered a Taliban field hospital. In the second half of 2006 alone Allied troops flew 2,100 sorties as a result of which many civilians

also lost their lives. The Taliban expanded their tactics, made increasing use of suicide bombers, and constructed primitive roadside bombs which turned out to one of the greatest dangers for Western troops. The civilian population was misused as a protective shield, and the foreign troops became more and more bogged down in a dirty war.

Up to the year 2008 Afghanistan experienced a continual increase in violence, which went hand in hand with a reinforcement of the troop contingents. By the end of 2008 about 60,000 foreign soldiers were stationed in the country, and in the summer of 2009 they will have been joined by 20,000 additional American troops. European military participants also announced a (modest) increase in the size of their quotas, officially in order to provide protection during the presidential elections. In fact governments everywhere were well aware of the dangerous crisis which had emerged in Afghanistan. "Don't fool yourselves, we are losing this war," said American ISAF commander-in-chief David McKiernan in the autumn of 2008 in order to make countries which are militarily involved aware of the gravity of what is happening.

The trend has not been reversed by any stretch of the imagination. NATO does not give any exact figures. It only reveals benchmark numbers. But on this basis there were in 2008 27 percent more attacks using booby traps, 119 percent more attacks on Afghan security forces, 50 percent more murders and kidnappings. Only the suicide bomber rate receded. But in total the number of violent incidents rose by 33 percent, the number of dead Western alliance soldiers by 35 percent, and the number of Afghan civilians killed by up to 45 percent. And 90 percent of these deaths were due to the Taliban.

The statistics also reveal the reasons for this steep increase. The fact is that the 60,000 soldiers of the alliance were gradually joined by battalions of the Afghan army (kandaks) which had reached operational strength. 13 of these kandaks came into service in 2008, and thus 48 Afghan battalions were in a position to carry out independent operations. The Afghan security forces began increasingly to bear the brunt of the fighting, and also accepted the risks that this entailed.

This made it possible to mount an ongoing offensive against Taliban strongholds in districts which Western troops had hitherto not been able to keep under surveillance and had thus fallen under the control of the Taliban. It also helps to explain the increase in the number of violent incidents. A mild winter made things even worse.

In this phase the presidential elections in the US constituted an important caesura. The transition from George W. Bush to Barack Obama gave the American government apparatus and US allies an opportunity to take a fresh look at the mission. Thus Afghanistan, after years of neglect, returned to the centre of the international stage. As his first foreign policy measure the new president

gave orders for a strategic review. As a result of this Obama turned his back on Iraq, which he considered to be increasingly pacified and capable of survival, and once again focused US attention on Afghanistan. Iraq had been George W. Bush's war, and Obama did not wish to identify himself with it. For the new US administration Afghanistan is an ongoing task. In fact, it is the task which became apparent at the time of the terrorist attacks. Obama has taken it upon himself to deal with this conflict.

At the centre of the new Afghanistan policy is the long overdue broadening of the strategic perspective. The real origins of the conflict, the tribal areas straddling the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, were identified for the first time since the eviction of the Taliban. This is the real safe haven and the recruiting ground of the Taliban, and here the movement operates under the protection of the Pakistani intelligence service ISI, which to all extents and purposes set up and financed the Taliban at the beginning of the 1990s. Pakistan always considered the Taliban to be a tool with which it could destabilize Afghanistan. The goal of the Pakistani government was to preserve the country from a two-front conflict, with India on the southern flank and Pashtun separatists on the north-western flank. India was always suspected of wanting to weaken Pakistan with the help of forces within Afghanistan. With their religious motivation the Taliban, in the eyes of the ISI, seemed to be a surefire way of nipping Pashtun separatism in the bud and preventing the emergence of an Afghan front against Pakistan.

But suddenly the Taliban and the above all the radical Islamist fighters operating under the cloak of the Taliban assumed a life of their own and threatened the very existence of Pakistan, their protecting power. The attack on the Marriott hotel in Islamabad on 20 September 2008 sounded a shrill warning cry for President Asif Ali Zardari, who had just come into office.

In the last two years of the Bush administration the US was coming to realize that it could no longer tolerate Pakistan's double-dealing. It was faced with a dilemma. On the one hand it had to secure the support of the moderate leadership in Islamabad, if only in order to ensure that it had control over Pakistan's nuclear weapons. On the other hand the situation in Afghanistan made it necessary to extend the war against the Taliban to the group's safe haven areas in Pakistan. The latter's vacillating policy turned out to be the real problem for security in the region. Apart from the US, states such as Germany had very little influence on Islamabad. The Pakistani government was used to negotiating with no one but the US about its strategic interests. Germany, even though it maintains an officer exchange programme with Pakistan, has little to offer. Relations with India, the second important player, were also in bad shape. Thus Berlin was forced to look on from the sidelines with regard to this key foreign policy issue.

For the first time since the start of America's struggle with Islamist terrorism, US policymakers began to obtain a realistic picture of the complexity of this war. Seven years after 11 September 2001 a strategic perspective emerged which was not clouded by a palpable thirst for revenge, imaginary battles and ideological packaging. The democratization fantasies originally espoused by the American neo-conservatives; domino theories about the collapse of Islamic regimes; and the feeling of omnipotence of an incomparably powerful war machine: all this made way for sober analysis.

American policymakers suddenly began to study the historical and cultural roots of the war, to understand the regional idiosyncrasies of the occupied territory, and to readjust what they expected of an Afghan central government, and turned their attention to the regional political leaders. For the first time factors which had an important bearing on the war such as the cultivation of narcotics and arms smuggling were incorporated into the equation. For the first time the influence and interests of Afghanistan's neighbours, above all Iran and Pakistan, but also Tadjikistan and Uzbekistan, were being taken seriously.

But above all the US adopted an anti-terror and reconstruction strategy, something which had been neglected in the preceding years. As a result of the experience of insurgency in Iraq, the military leadership realized that in the long run the deployment of very large combat groups and air superiority achieved with the help of drones and Flying Fortresses could not guarantee security. The policy of "a thousand small steps," which the mujahedeen had already used with success against the Soviet invaders, could also lead to a situation in which the new foreigners might bleed to death.

Afghanistan is to get what amounts to a second chance, or, better still, the international coalition is giving itself a second chance in order to prevent a disgraceful defeat and a humiliating withdrawal. The most important motive for this renewed attempt is the insight that Afghanistan is too important and potentially too dangerous to leave to its own devices. This territory has too often been at the mercy of historical processes, and has influenced fateful events far beyond its own borders. Afghanistan should never again become a buffer zone, a pawn played with by its neighbours, a breeding ground for radicalism of all kinds.

The backwardness of Afghanistan is not only a problem that concerns a few million people and the local clans, warlords and drug barons. Despite its apparent insignificance, Afghanistan is of global political significance. Whilst it does not have direct access to the sea, it is wedged into the middle of the largest land mass of the earth, and has four nuclear powers and a would-be nuclear state as neighbours: India, Pakistan, China, Russia and Iran. As the world's largest producer of heroin it is responsible for flooding the international narcotics

markets. There is a flourishing arms trade within its borders, and there is an abundance of oppression and illegal activities which go completely unchecked.

After 30 years of war, civil war and a fanatical reign of terror the country was exhausted. There were no longer any resilient structures—no administration, no leadership personalities, none of the infrastructure needed for education, commerce or mobility. Afghanistan as a state had disintegrated and possessed no more than a skeleton order which provided a home for oppression, crime and terror. As one of the poorest countries in the world Afghanistan was susceptible to every kind of abuse, and it was certainly abused in all kinds of ways.

Thus the mission of the international community was guided by the necessity to provide assistance, and was also an act of self-protection. The world community reacted to the greatest terrorist threat that had ever arisen in its midst. And it satisfied the security need that suddenly became visible. It had all the features of a new kind of disorder in the globalized world, with fanatical non-governmental groups using the techniques of asymmetrical warfare in order to sow instability and discord. In Afghanistan they did this for the first time under the protection of a sovereign state, which they were able to acquire with the help of money and by ingratiating themselves in ideological terms.

This was not only a problem for the US, even though it could see itself as the primary target of the new asymmetrical kind of warfare. America was a fitting bogeyman because it was the largest surface area at which the radicals could hurl their grievances. Dissatisfaction and anger about one's backwardness, poverty, and cultural dominance, fantasies of power and xenophobic excesses in a world moving closer and closer together—all this was vented through the vehicle of the global jihad, a religious struggle which admittedly had something to do with religion only in a superficial way. And at the epicentre of this cultural conflict lay Afghanistan with its geography and its history. It was an entity which in fact made it possible to come to only one conclusion. This land cannot be brought under control. This country will always evade order of any kind because it has no gravitational centre. Afghanistan, and this is something that history teaches us, will always be a wild country.

3. German Self-Deceit

Attack on the Rest of the World

Late in the afternoon on 14 September 2001, three days after the destruction of the World Trade Center, a hundred thousand people came to the Straße des 17. Juni in front of the Brandenburg Gate to take part in a demonstration. The attacks had also paralyzed the public in Berlin, and US ambassador Dan Coats, who had just arrived in the country, stood on the platform stage to accept expressions of German solidarity. The most emphatic had been spoken in the German Parliament by Chancellor Gerhard Schröder himself two days earlier when he assured President George W. Bush of Germany's "unconditional solidarity." But in front of the Brandenburg Gate someone in the crowd, between all the American flags, held up a handwritten placard, clearly perceivable by the television cameras. "Mr. President, no war!"

The fear was not wholly unfounded. After the terrorist attacks it was immediately clear that the superpower would not leave a challenge of this kind unanswered. War had been declared on America, and America was going to accept the challenge. But who had issued it? Where and against whom was one supposed to fight? How could the US demonstrate its dominance? And when would all this come to an end?

The international community reacted with great unanimity. On 12 September the NATO Council decided unanimously that the Alliance was under attack, and Article 5, the central mutual assistance clause, was invoked for the first time in its history. On the same day the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1368, the basis for the American military mission Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), which facilitated the fight against terror on four continents and the invasion of Afghanistan. On 20 December the UN Security Council approved the establishment of an international security force (ISAF) for Afghanistan at the request of the participants at the Petersberg conference (Resolution 1386). ISAF was supposed to protect the interim Afghan government and to maintain security in Kabul and the surrounding area. Two days later the German Parliament voted in favour of deploying German soldiers within the framework of the UN mission. The advance party arrived in Kabul on 2 January and went out on patrol for the first time two weeks later. After the remarkably short war and the eviction of the Taliban Afghanistan seemed to be moving towards reconstruction protected by multinational armed forces. The German government

declared that it was prepared to make a contribution towards the defence of the new government.

An Unclear Mandate

But what contribution did Germany actually want to make? What in fact was its task in Afghanistan going to be? And did the German government and the German Parliament know what they were letting themselves in for?

The basis of the German dilemma regarding the mission was already implicit in the mandate. Or more precisely, with the mandates which evolved out of the two UN resolutions. On the basis of the first mandate the US embarked on Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), the war against al-Qaeda and the Taliban, in order to enforce a change in the government of Afghanistan and to pursue wanted terrorists. On the other hand ISAF, which was based on the second mandate, was supposed to protect the new Afghan government and to stabilize the country in the reconstruction process. In 2003 the ISAF command was placed in the hands of NATO. At the same time the UN Security Council gave permission to extend the ISAF mandate to areas beyond the confines of Kabul.

In order to get on top of the growing insecurity in the provinces, the foreign forces were supposed to demonstrate their presence gradually and to set up "Provincial Reconstruction Teams" (PRT). Germany took responsibility for its first PRT, which at the time was called "Island," in the town of Kunduz, which had already been the scene of fierce battles between the Taliban and militia leaders in the 1990s. Shortly afterwards ISAF also extended its mandate to the south and the east of the country, where more and more troops were taken out of the OEF command structure and placed at the disposal of ISAF. A separation of the mandates made less and less sense in geographical and mission-specific terms.

The US finally managed to overcome the parallel worlds in the command structure by cleverly placing ISAF and OEF under the same American commander. After years of confusing command structures and unclear mandate assignments it was obvious, when the Taliban war began to flare up, that the ISAF troops in the south often had to perform the same tasks as the OEF troops, which had an unmistakable combat mandate. A clear separation of tasks in this unstable region was naïve. When units came under fire they had to defend themselves. When a detachment of Taliban was detected, it had to be pursued. When whole districts were intimidated and began to be terrorized by

the students of religion, a NATO unit had to demonstrate its presence, defend its territory, offer protection to the civilian population, and wrest control from the Taliban.

Yet the German government used the differing mandates as a way of constructing a division of tasks to which it clings to the present day. In keeping with this the rules of engagement for the German contingent were defined on defensive lines. In public awareness and in the political debate it became the accepted view that ISAF was pursuing a soft task dedicated to reconstruction and security, whereas OEF sought to fight the Taliban and al-Qaeda in an offensive manner. This division has in fact nothing to do whatsoever with the reality on the ground, especially in the south. Nor with the way the mandates are interpreted by other countries.

In the southern provinces, but also in what was actually the quiet north, a member of the Taliban was not in the least interested in whether he had run into an ISAF patrol or a group of OEF soldiers. The goal of the Taliban attacks was and is to strike at all foreign troops, no matter whether they are in the capital, Kabul, at the airport, in the north in Kunduz, or in their old stronghold, Kandahar. The goal of the Taliban is to evict the occupying troops and to return to power. The Taliban do not discuss the mandate question when they approach the camps of the foreign garrisons. And even the Afghan government and the newly established Afghan army have never understood why the mandates should be divided. It is simply impossible to make such neat distinctions when one is faced with this kind of threat.

The mandate of the United Nations states that ISAF should support the Afghan government "in the maintenance of security" so that the authorities and international staff can work "in a secure environment." In order to attain this goal the resolution states that UN member states can take "all appropriate measures," a formulation which includes the use of military force. The Canadian, American and Dutch troops refer to this mandate in the conduct of the war against the Taliban in the south. For the NATO troops stationed in this area it is clear that they can only be victorious in a hostile environment if they fight and defeat the Taliban. Those who do not take on this challenge are simply surrendering whole districts and turning themselves into targets. The laws of strength and superiority are quite unambiguous in Afghanistan.

The Way the Germans See It

NATO's geographical division of labour made it easy for the Germans to maintain the artificial division between a reconstruction mandate and an anti-terror mandate. The peaceful northern sector fitted in with the mandate concepts ideas of the German government, which in 2003 could no longer reject American requests to establish regional teams. North Afghanistan was the ideal location for the German army, for here, at least to a certain extent, the German interpretation of the mandate and the situation on the ground coincided.

The decision to move to the north was taken shortly before the outbreak of the Iraq war. The German government under Chancellor Gerhard Schröder had declared its categorical rejection of George W. Bush's second grand military venture, and had spearheaded the resistance of various European countries to the policy of the US administration. The positions were miles apart, and tensions within the European Union reached unprecedented levels. Transatlantic relations had not been subjected to such pressures since 1945. Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer looked for a way in which he could retain strategically important relations despite the strain imposed by Iraq. With the help of NATO the answer turned out to be Afghanistan. Germany, it was thought, could do justice to its responsibilities as an Alliance partner and yield to pressure for greater military involvement, not in Iraq, but in Afghanistan. NATO's role as general contractor for the ISAF mandate also afforded proof that at this critical moment in time the traditional structures of the transatlantic alliance continued to work normally.

The Atlantic alliance took command of ISAF in Kabul, which had certainly been weakened by continual changes in the leadership. Europe made a symbolic contribution and showed that in spite of everything it could still act together. And Germany, Fischer reasoned, would be able to extract itself from its responsibilities in the capital and accept a new task in the largely stable and safe north of the country, which, as advance teams of the German Army had quickly discovered, was an ideal operational location.

Germany's strategy proved to have been an astute move, since the extension of the mission to the provinces was in the final analysis part of the new American policy. Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld in particular had for a long time placed his bets on the support of the Afghan warlords. This strategy from the opening phase of the Afghan war was now at an end. Germany had played its cards wisely by urging NATO to accept responsibility and persuading it to embark on its most difficult mission. The political reasoning now had to be followed up with deeds.

The first German outpost was set up at Kunduz in the province of the same name. It was followed by a field camp at Fayzabad in the province of Badakh-

shan in the north-eastern tip of the country. And finally the German Army built a gigantic field camp in Mazar-e Sharif, the provincial capital of Balkh. Here Germany, on 1 June 2006, took over the northern regional command. Mazar-e Sharif was to become the command headquarters for the whole of the north and with its professionally equipped airstrip now also serves as a logistics hub for all of the NATO troops.

The relocation of the German contingent to the north led to an irrevocable split in the multinational force. The fact was that the security situation in the various parts of the country could not have been different. But instead of acknowledging this fact and at least providing moral support for the NATO units stationed in the south, German policymakers began to pretend that they knew better. They praised the exemplary nature of the German reconstruction concept in the north, and at the same time criticized the tactics of the troops operating in the south, in particular those of the Americans. Not enough civil aid was being supplied in this area, too many sorties were being flown, the soldiers looked far too martial, there was insufficient networking between the armed forces and policymakers, and the reconstruction effort was not making enough progress.

These analyses from afar exacerbated the cleavage in NATO and led to an anti-German mood in Canada, Britain and the Netherlands, whose armies had suffered great losses in the battles with the Taliban. Germany refused to admit that reconstruction in the south could not function in the absence of security. Here NATO was dealing with a classical insurgency movement, with an offensive by the regrouped and reorganized Taliban, which from 2003 onwards had taken control of more and more areas of the country, and in general terms were endangering the grand design, a stable and politically managed Afghanistan.

Caveats Are NATO's Operational Cancer

Every NATO state has the right to subject a mandate to a national legal review and a political feasibility test. In this way idiosyncrasies of a nation's legal interpretation or political reservations can be incorporated into the operational rules. These national instructions for how to behave during the mandate are assembled in the "Rules of Engagement" (ROE). At the same time every nation informs the commander-in-chief of its reservations and issues orders that the troops in question may be deployed only on the basis of the national rules.

In NATO these national stop signs are known as “caveats,” that is, reservations. Caveats are a necessary evil in an alliance which at the time consisted of 26 nations with differing legal interpretations and different historical memories concerning the deployment of their soldiers. However, caveats are also “NATO’s operational cancer,” as Jim Jones, the then NATO commander and currently security adviser to President Obama, has pointed out. In 2006 71 of these reservations had to be respected and reconciled. Some nations were forbidden to engage the Taliban in an offensive manner, others were not permitted to protect school buildings, and others yet again were unable to help in preparations for the elections. Virtually every nation has insisted on registering caveats. Only the US operates in a largely unrestricted way.

The reservations of the Germans shocked their international partners and triggered a political and military discussion which has not subsided to this day. The basic criticism is that the German operational caveats have little to do with reality in Afghanistan, that they are more defensive in character than those of virtually any other nation, and that they do more to impede than to help the operational freedom of the commander of ISAF.

Caveats are not published, being part of the kind of tactical information which might be of use to an enemy. But it is not necessary to read German caveats, for they are clearly visible. The German Army does not take part in offensive operations, nor is it permitted to support an offensive operation indirectly. It refuses to allow its warplanes and helicopters to fly at night because the pilots do not have the kind of night vision equipment needed in Afghanistan. The German Army has refrained from combating the narcotics problem in every conceivable way. And it adheres strictly to its operational area. All that a member of the Taliban has to do if he wishes to spend a quiet night is to make his way to a neighbouring province.

Fuzzy Rules of Engagement

The caveats are mirrored in the rules of engagement which pool all of the political and military leadership’s reservations and guide the troops as they go about their daily tasks. First, according to the German rules of engagement soldiers may use their weapons only for purposes of self-defence. Secondly, the soldiers are told to adhere to “appropriate means,” a term that needs to be explained in more detail. The interpretation provided by the German government is quite clear on this point. The troops are to act in a strictly defensive

fashion. Offensive operations are forbidden, as is participation in multilateral offensive operations. True, the use of force is permitted, but only “as a last resort,” only in cases of “imminent danger,” and only if collateral damage can be excluded. Collateral damage signifies the death of a civilian. Yet how does one distinguish between a civilian and an enemy in a classical insurgency situation in which the Taliban deliberately seek the proximity of innocent bystanders, hide in houses and mosques and misuse children as living shields?

According to the legal stance adopted by the German government an opponent has to clearly demonstrate his hostile intentions before the German Army can make use of its weapons. This is called “imminent danger” not only in the terminology employed by police forces. It requires a police officer to do everything in his power before using a weapon as a last resort. The German Army is subject to the same strict rules, even though there is not the same level of security in Afghanistan as on Kurfürstendamm in Berlin. So a soldier has to recognize that an enemy is just about to commit an act of aggression. Then he is permitted to react to it. Pursuit of any kind is forbidden if the attacker abandons his target or is already fleeing.

As a result of this catalogue the German Army is clearly aware of all the things that it is not permitted to do: the active and indeed proactive repulsion of insurgents, house searches, hunting for insurgents. Everything which can turn the German Army into an actor in this theatre of war is forbidden. The troops are only supposed to react. Getting embroiled in a fire-fight, the unintentional killing of innocent bystanders, or endangering oneself are out of the question. The German Army units involved in the mission clearly understand that the political and military leadership does not want any fuss and bother.

In view of the broad UN definition of the mandate (support for the Afghan government and the provision of security) the concept of self-defence and the action radius of the German armed forces did not really have to be narrowed down. But the German government was in favour of these restrictions. The Red-Green Coalition, which initially had to decide on the shape of the mandate, evidently did not dare to give itself more room for manoeuvre for what was always an unpopular war. The Grand Coalition also recognized the political danger associated with an extension of the rules of engagement, and kept away from the subject. “Now Germans Can Hunt Taliban” would have been a horrendous kind of headline, even if it had little to do with the reality of events in Afghanistan. Thus it curtailed the room for manoeuvre, and passed this on to the soldiers to deal with as best they could. In the final analysis the soldiers have to decide what is and what is not appropriate, when their security is threatened, and when they get embroiled in a life-threatening situation. These are difficult decisions for a soldier who, whilst operating in an aggressive environment and aware that he is perpetually under a threat, is always in the

process of weighing up the pros and cons of anything he proposes to do. That can only lead to inaction.

The Rapid Reaction Force, Germany's combat troops in the north, is confronted in particular with a dilemma emanating from the defensive nature of the rules of engagement, since it is in the nature of its task to proceed in an active way against insurgents and to limit their room for manoeuvre as soon as possible. Soon? That, according to the rules, is not possible, since there would not of course be any "imminent danger." Today, now that all military operations are carried out with the newly reconstructed Afghan National Army, there is another problem. How can the German Army explain to an Afghan soldier that according to the German rules of engagement he is not allowed to fire at a fleeing member of the Taliban, or that a troublemaker who is making good his escape is deemed to be fleeing and can thus no longer be attacked because the immediate threat has been banished. At any rate, in the Afghan Army the custom of not pursuing the fleeing enemy is not very widespread.

Official announcements by the German Army state that German forces use "lethal power only as a last resort and specifically for purposes of self-defence." The defensive character of the mission cannot be defined with greater precision. For this reason German soldiers cannot be upbraided for preferring to remain within the security of their own army camp instead of showing the flag in their operational area, because they could quite easily get into a situation where they had to assess the pros and cons of taking action. And that is simply asking too much.

The rules of engagement are handed out to a soldier in so-called "amplifying instructions" which are written down on their military or pocket maps. They explain in simple language how far he is allowed to go, and how far he cannot. The British in particular, after their experiences in Northern Ireland, insisted on a clear definition of the rules of engagement, since it is in the nature of guerrilla warfare that the enemy remains unseen, that it will mix with the civilian population, and that it will avoid open combat. In order to relieve soldiers from conflicts of conscience and to give them a clear picture of their task, these pocket maps are as a rule written unambiguously and are there for their protection. However, weighty legal advice is needed in order to understand the German pocket maps.

Just how complicated the interpretation of the rules can be is demonstrated by the case of a major who was engaged in a training exercise with a group of about a dozen soldiers on the firing range in Mazar-e Sharif. Suddenly more than a hundred Afghans stormed onto the area from all sides and ran towards the soldiers shouting loudly. Up to the last second it was unclear to the soldiers whether this was an attack and whether they should shoot at the Afghans in self-defence. The major, luckily for him, decided not to shoot. In fact the Af-

ghans were merely interested in the empty cartridge shells which they were able to sell on the non-ferrous metal market. In this case the restrictive policy paid off. But what happens if a patrol reacts too late because it misreads the intentions of a group of Taliban? Examples of this kind are related by every soldier after returning from his spell in Afghanistan. The rules have unsettled the troops, and they are on the defensive because the most important maxim continues to be that the German Army will not of its own accord intrude upon its surroundings. At the most it will react if it is provoked.

When the Chancellor came to Kunduz in April 2009 to visit the troops, American F-15 warplanes flew over the camp close to the ground in order to deter would-be assailants. The German Tornados in the operational area are forbidden to give a “show of force” as a result of the mandate. This kind of flying is deemed to be offensive. They are merely permitted to exhibit a “show of presence,” which means overflight at a comfortable and safe height. And they are not allowed to provide air support in a combat situation. Presumably they would in fact find it difficult to hit a target because there is no one on the ground who can relay its exact coordinates.

20 minutes after the Chancellor had left in a helicopter, two missiles with a range of about seven kilometres were fired at the German Army camp, as has happened on numerous occasions in Kunduz. The missiles missed their target, though the gunners scored a triumph nonetheless. They had managed to put on a show of strength immediately after the visit of the most important German politician. And the German Army had obviously not been in a position to protect Merkel more effectively. For example, as a deterrent they could easily have sent patrols through the well-known “missile” villages in the vicinity of the camp. One cannot demonstrate with any greater clarity that one is insufficiently willing to engage in self-defence and emphasize the importance of deterrence.

The German rules of engagement are characterized by a very high degree of caution. The military camp in Mazar-e Sharif was turned into a veritable fortress of concrete and steel for \$ 70 million. It sends out one message in particular: safety first. Most of the soldiers never leave the camp and devote themselves to administrative work and to operating the airstrip. Patrols as a rule come back to the camp at night, and are sent out only now and then. True, a few long-distance patrols are on the go for days on end, but criss-cross the operational area in only a haphazard manner. In this way it is impossible to keep in touch with the local population. In contrast to American units in the south, the German Army is not setting up mobile bases in its operational area. Thus it cannot make a lasting impression. Each platoon commander starts from square one when he drives into a village with his unit. The German Army strikes one as being a reactive military force which allows itself to be driven along by

events and avoids taking the initiative. Every fencer knows that on the fencing court he cannot win merely by reacting. He has to go on the offensive. The political leadership of the armed forces believes that the German Army is not actually engaged in combat. After all, it is only supposed to protect the reconstruction effort.

This defensive strategy endangers the soldiers, makes them feel ill at ease, and does not help to protect them. The need to exercise caution is so deeply ingrained in the minds of the soldiers that they prefer to make a detour around a risk instead of demonstrating their superiority, which they actually possess as a result of their equipment, informational advantage and tactical training. The best examples are the missile attacks to which the camps in Kunduz and Fayzabad are subjected to on a regular basis. None of the projectiles has as yet caused any serious damage to the camps, and there have as yet been no victims. And yet the attacks convey the message that the enemy can act in any way it pleases. If it had more precise projectiles, then it would not hesitate to use them. The German Army knows where the missiles are launched, and is familiar with the "missile" villages and their inhabitants. And yet it finds it impossible to develop an effective strategy against the attacks.

The German Army is unable to return fire with artillery grenades because these weapons are not covered by the German interpretation of the mandate, and thus are not available in the camp. Artillery shells could hit innocent civilians. Yet the selfsame civilians make it possible for the Taliban to enter their villages and farmsteads, which are the places from which the primitive missiles are launched. Furthermore, the German Army is not allowed to put pressure on these civilians by threatening to retaliate if they extend hospitality to the wrong people. After all, it is usually not possible to perceive an immediate danger when a patrol drives through the villages. The German Army can only prevent a missile attack shortly before the projectile is actually launched, if, that is, there is imminent danger, and even then an exact reading of the law would make it necessary to prove that the projectiles really endangered one's own safety directly.

So in cases of doubt nothing happens, and the firing shows what the local resistance fighters think about the efficacy of the German Army. Within the broad spectrum provided for by the rules of engagement, which ranges from an inappropriate display of power to hesitation and reticence, the German Army at any rate has decided in favour of the more cautious path.

Alliance Solidarity

Between 2004 and 2008 the German government came under a great deal of pressure, especially from its American, Canadian, Dutch and British allies, to change its policy with regard to caveats, which in particular rules out the permanent deployment of the German Army in the south of the country. The German government replied unanimously, though here again it refused to face up to the actual facts. According to official pronouncements Germany, with the third-largest contingent of troops comprising 3,500 soldiers, was tied down in the north and had enough to do. After all, the German Army had assumed responsibility for the whole northern part of the country. An extension of the mandate and above all an increase in the number of troops was asking too much of the armed forces. It was claimed that 3,500 soldiers were only just sufficient for the northern provinces. Dividing up the contingent or deploying additional units, even if it were only a parachute battalion in the south, would make little sense in operational terms.

Such arguments sound convincing, though they tell only part of the truth. To this day the German government continues to ignore the real grievance of its allies with troops deployed in the south, which is that Germany refuses to do the dangerous work in the region where 90 percent of the fighting with the Taliban is taking place and where, in the final analysis, the stability of the country and the security of the government will be decided. Germany has withdrawn to a relatively safe area with far more soldiers than it actually needs. In the meantime Afghanistan's fate is being decided in the provinces of Helmand, Kandahar and Khost, where not enough troops are stationed in order to resist the onslaught of the Taliban. In these areas there are not enough soldiers who can permanently occupy and defend territory that has been conquered so that security for the work of civilian reconstruction can be guaranteed.

The grievance conceals a topic which is a sensitive issue for NATO, the notion of solidarity in the alliance. The idea is the lifeblood of NATO. It is the basic idea of the alliance, the insurance policy which its members once gave to each other. However, the policy applied to one's own country, the core area of NATO which in the Cold War had to be defended against the Warsaw Pact. For West Germany it was a rather low premium, for a military conflict with the Warsaw Pact would most probably have taken place on its own territory. Germany profited more from NATO solidarity than anyone else.

And now this inequality in Afghanistan. Suddenly people began to ask critical questions. Was it not true to say that the burdens of the alliance had always been distributed unevenly? Was it not true to say that the US on account of the size of its armed forces and its nuclear capabilities had always been the leading nation which determined the course of the alliance? Was it not true to

say that, when it came to the crunch, solidarity was no more than an empty promise, the myth of an alliance the cohesion of which had never really been put to the test?

In the final analysis these are existential questions for NATO, and they have come to the surface with the division of the operational areas in Afghanistan and the differing interpretations of the mandate. Jaap de Hoop, the Secretary General of NATO, turned the whole dilemma into the leitmotif of the mission by announcing on more than one occasion that what was being decided in Afghanistan was nothing less than “the fate of NATO.” This was based on fears entertained by the new NATO members in eastern Europe. The world had just witnessed the demonstration of Russian power in Georgia. What would happen if their territory were to be threatened by an aggressive Russia? Would NATO stand together? Would Germany rush to their defence?

Germany displays remarkably little sensitivity when it comes to such existential fears. It is of course true that many NATO countries have contributed far smaller troop contingents. But Germany has always been one of the members which has borne the burdens of the alliance, from which in the past it profited most. Its involvement in Kosovo took a great deal of pressure off the US. In Afghanistan it played a crucial role in transferring the mission to NATO. But now the political leadership in Berlin is unwilling to adjust to this new kind of war. The various strains and burdens of the mission in Afghanistan are clearly apparent. In practical terms the troops are operating under exactly the same mandate, and yet the Germans find it impossible to send helicopters to help in the south because quite possibly they might not get back to the camp before nightfall. It is obviously impossible to concede a more robust mandate to the Tornado reconnaissance planes so that if they were needed they could provide assistance and act as a deterrent.

This behaviour contrasts starkly with the political situation on paper. After all, the alliance did in fact invoke the mutual assistance clause. The irritation of some of its allies goes so far that they want Germany to make an “appropriate contribution to the fulfilment of its duty to provide assistance,” the sharpest demand that can be made within NATO. Here what is being criticized is not necessarily the size of the German contribution in the north of Afghanistan or its unwillingness to head south. Perhaps the Canadians, British and Dutch would quietly accept Germany's contribution and its third-largest contingent of troops, even though the massive nature of German involvement in the north stands in stark contrast to what is actually needed for the reconstruction and stabilization of the country. The accompanying political noises emanating from Germany are the real problem, the scarcely concealed assertion that its contribution in the north is just as demanding and dangerous as the pacification of the south. Then there are the insinuations that the operational tactics

in the south are actually wholly misguided, in other words, that Afghanistan would be a far more peaceful country if the troops in the south spent more time on civil reconstruction than on fighting the Taliban.

The mantra-like recital of this analysis is grotesque and reveals a great ignorance of the situation on the ground. The soldiers stationed in the provinces bordering on Pakistan are simply too few in number to provide a comprehensively stable and secure environment for civil reconstruction. If NATO troops or civilian aid workers enter a village during the day to discuss an aid project, the Taliban will come at night to warn the inhabitants of what the consequences of such cooperation are likely to be. The local population, which has served many masters over the past 30 years, knows only too well that in case of doubt the staying power of the foreigners is smaller than that of the Taliban. But in Germany people pretend that the Taliban do not have to be taken seriously, that the operational area has not changed dramatically since 2003, and that the allies have not had new rules forced upon them.

If an ISAF commander had been free to do as he saw fit, he would have moved more troops to the south of the country at an earlier stage and would have paid far less attention to the relatively quiet north with its largely intact order upheld by warlords and governors. But now NATO has cemented the geographical division of Afghanistan, which in the past has so often led to disaster and conflict. The north, which is dominated by Tadjiks and Uzbeks, continued to obey the traditional rules of the Northern Alliance, with the exception of a few Pashtun pockets which offered shelter to the Taliban. However, the Pashtun south remained an area of unrest.

The rift in the alliance also had quite practical military consequences. In NATO it became apparent that not all of the nations were equal with regard to equipment, alliance capability and combat morale. Combat morale is a difficult concept which in Germany still sends shivers down one's spine. In Canada, the Netherlands and Britain ordinary people are certainly perturbed when their soldiers are killed. However, the German government told NATO that it might not survive news of fighting and even deaths. The stability of the government would be endangered if German soldiers were to become involved in combat situations.

In addition to this there are practical reasons which lead one to question whether the German Army could actually be deployed in the south. It simply does not have the equipment needed for the difficult conditions of a guerrilla war. Vehicles were fitted with armour far too late, and there are no helicopters, even in the north-eastern camp in Fayzabad. And above all the troops do not have a modern reconnaissance system, that is, the so-called third level consisting of drones and satellites, which provide the Americans with such an inestimable tactical advantage.

ISAF headquarters is now looking with some concern at the northern region where the weak NATO nations have assembled, that is, Italy, Sweden, Hungary, Norway, Belgium and Germany. These are the armies which cannot keep up with the transformation of the armed forces, these are the military basket cases.

Policymakers as Army Commanders

The German Army is a parliamentary army, and its commander-in-chief is a minister. The German Parliament issues orders and acts as a monitor. Thus the mission in Afghanistan reflects the political status quo, and for this reason it also mirrors the fears of policymakers. "Policymakers" is an imprecise term which people in Germany like to use when there are complaints about an unsatisfactory state of affairs. In the case of German Army missions abroad it is comparatively easy to name the policymakers involved. There is the German government with the Chancellor at its head, and the Defence Minister, who, as the person entitled to issue orders and commands (IBUK), even has the insignia of office on his baseball cap. On top of this there is the Minister for Foreign Affairs, who is responsible for relations with other countries, and thus also with Afghanistan and its neighbours. Then there are portfolio ministers, particularly for Home Affairs and Development Aid, who also make a contribution. There is above all the German Parliament, which has the right to send soldiers out on a mission. The German Parliament is in fact the real commander, because by approving or rejecting a mandate it decides how the German Army can operate.

The 612 members of parliament accept this responsibility with varying degrees of enthusiasm. Many of them have never been to Afghanistan. In any case, foreign and security policy is not among the things for which German parliamentarians tend to evince a predilection. In contrast to Britain or the US, where long-serving elected politicians with the experience of a political lifetime are appointed to key foreign policy positions in the parliament, the discipline enjoys only a shadowy existence in Germany. For this reason there are no debates about strategy, about the overall situation in Afghanistan, about the role of Pakistan, and about Germany's possible influence on Islamabad. In the case of the nations mentioned, and especially in that of murky players such as the Pakistani intelligence service, the impression arises that Germany does not understand the political context. As a nation it prefers to say nothing

in public and leaves it perhaps to a state secretary or the Minister for Foreign Affairs to convey its disquiet.

The German Parliament's operational proviso is a powerful weapon which Germany deliberately assigned to the parliament as a result of its historical experiences. All the same Germany—and this is hardly surprising—does not have a great deal of experience when it comes to its armed forces and foreign missions. The handful of internationally legitimated missions—Somalia, Cambodia, the Balkans, DR Congo and Afghanistan—always led to heated domestic policy controversies which not infrequently ended up in the German Constitutional Court. Germany has a distorted relationship with its armed forces or, to put it in grander terms, with its global role. The country is uneasy about having to project its military might—even if it is in the interests of other people. A nation which for the first 50 or so years of its (divided) existence was able to delegate almost all its foreign policy responsibilities and assigned the security of its citizens to others is not used to making life-and-death decisions. The mere alternative sounds rather over-emotional. An American president would say it in a very self-evident manner.

At any rate the German Parliament is not up to this task. The members of parliament tend to get lost in micromanagement and in the German Army people speak with contempt of the plethora of mini commanders. Things are actually even worse than this. Members of parliament look at the policy of sending soldiers on missions through a simple prism. What does the decision mean for my chances of re-election? Foreign policy as an election-clinching criteria is a new but particularly effective element in the country's political life. In the summer of 2002 Chancellor Gerhard Schröder was running against Edmund Stoiber, the candidate of the CDU/CSU parties. As he embarked on the election campaign, there was doubt about whether he would be re-elected until, that is, he seized on the imminent Iraq war and turned it into the central issue of the contest. The mobilizing power of the topic was enormous, and the polarization in the electorate was dramatic. Schröder became Chancellor, and the peace election campaign had been invented. Since then there is nothing the CDU/CSU fears more than a polarizing debate about war and peace. Complex messages about the internal reconstruction of Afghanistan, the influence of the Pakistani intelligence service or the long-winded nature of a stabilization mission with a military dimension have no effect on the electorate if it is offered the simple alternative of war and peace.

Thus the least predictable element in the German Army's Afghanistan mission is not the Taliban, the drug barons or the warlords, but the political leadership and the members of the German Parliament. In public Chancellor Angela Merkel shows little interest in Afghanistan. She gave her first important speech on the subject in November 2008 to the German Atlantic Society. One still no-

tices that she was traumatized by her predecessor's peace election campaign. Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier spends a lot of time on the strategic significance of the mission for the region and for NATO. But in public he is evidently afraid of how his party might react. The BND investigative committee, which shed light on his role in the deployment of agents at the beginning of the Iraq war, is something he has not yet forgotten. And Defence Minister Franz Josef Jung, who, after a shaky start in office, has developed a passion for Afghanistan, has not demonstrated a great deal of understanding for the profundity of the problem. At least he cannot get the message across. It has not been forgotten that, when seeing off a contingent of soldiers, he wished them a safe journey home. The wish was surely legitimate and heartfelt, but if this is the minister's greatest worry, then one cannot blame the soldiers if they prefer the security of their own camp to a dangerous patrol.

The soldiers would be at the mercy of a public mood in favour of bringing them back home if the mission that is so difficult to explain were to cause problems, for example, after an attack on the troops, combat involvement, a mass kidnapping, or an attack back home in Germany.

The opportunities for political blackmail are particularly high every four years before the elections take place, but in fact only recede slightly in the intervening period. This is due on the one hand to the political constellation within a Grand Coalition, where Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor share responsibility for foreign policy and the rivalry between the departments has led to speechlessness and a loss of trust. The appointment of a Special Representative for Afghanistan demonstrates the problem in an exemplary manner. The Foreign Minister appointed Ambassador Bernd Mützelburg without consulting the Office of the Chancellor, which would in fact have had little objection to the candidate concerned. Although it is true that the Foreign Minister did not overstep the mark with this decision, he succeeded in making the point that in his opinion the Special Representative had been appointed by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and not necessarily by the German government. Interestingly enough it was the Ministry of Development Aid, which is very much involved in what is going on in Afghanistan, which protested most vociferously against being represented by Mützelburg. Now the Special Representative has an additional problem. On consultation trips he has to eschew the epaulettes of a government emissary and is forced to travel in his capacity as a ministerial representative. This does not make it any easier to gain credence.

The second reason for the fact that policymakers are permanently susceptible to blackmail is the annual decision on whether to extend the duration of the mandate. The German Parliament reserves the right to prolong the mandate since it is the institution which has the authority to send soldiers out on a mission. At regular intervals the members of parliament do not merely tweak

the small regulating screws of the operation, but keep asking the same basic questions. Why are we in Afghanistan in the first place? Do we want to stay there? How do we get out of this conflict? Turning the spotlight on aspects of the mission in this way fails to do justice to the country, since it boils down to an unsubtle choice between everything or nothing at all. The annual vote creates a kind of political insecurity and a brief mandate vacuum which in Germany is at the mercy of the political mood of the day. When a financial crisis leads to a significant increase in the number of people who are unemployed and there are rescue packages to the tune of untold billions, then it is difficult to explain why money should be made available for a distant country in Central Asia.

The political insecurity also has an obvious influence on the soldiers, who in the period leading up to a mandate decision try to avoid any hint of unrest and insecurity which might give rise to political disputes. However, the real message during these weeks will be going out to the enemy. The goal of the Taliban is the destabilization of the multinational troops in Afghanistan, or their departure, which would be even better. At no point is the German contingent so vulnerable as in the period shortly before the mandate debate in the German Parliament, and this happens year in, year out. The decision is made in the light of the current political situation with its swiftly changing moods, in the absence of any great knowledge of the country and under pressure from the electorate. An assault with a number of dead soldiers a few days before a mandate prolongation could cause the mood in the parliament to sour. An attack could influence the outcome of elections. This is the dangerous irony of a parliamentary army. The soldiers are most at risk during the mandate prolongation period. The members of parliament, who are so very much concerned about the safety of the soldiers, partly because it is in their own interests, actually do a lot to endanger them.

The defensive interpretation of the mandate and the fear of political vulnerability in parliament weaken the troops. They are evidence of the fact that politicians find it difficult to justify their actions towards the soldiers, and increase the chances that the enemy will attack. All in all the parliament mirrors the general unease with the mission, the significance and necessity of which were have never been clearly explained.

Legalization of the Mission

Article 2 of the UN Charter issued a clear ban on violence for the members of the international community. In addition to this the institution of the International Court of Justice and the express inclusion of soldiers under the jurisdiction of this court enhanced the ban contained in the Charter, which—and this is also postulated in Article 2—wished to put an end to violence between sovereign states. But what happens when violence within a state gains the upper hand? What happens when non-state actors such as terrorists perpetrate acts of violence? The notion of sovereignty included in the UN Charter is a remnant of international politics after the Second World War, with which the globalized world and today's problems have little in common.

For this reason, after its experiences in Kosovo, the UN increased the area of protection and stated that there was a general duty, “the responsibility to protect,” and that it included one's own population. This enhancement of international law also applies to the mission in Afghanistan. However, the rules of engagement still have to be in conformity with national law. For a country with a highly developed legal system such as Germany this represents a new and difficult subject.

Anyone who tries to transfer a mirror image of national law to an area where the rule of law does not obtain, as in Afghanistan, and which is a combat zone to boot, is bound to come up against certain problems. This starts with what seem to be definition problems. The notion of a combat zone is avoided for political reasons, and so there is talk of the area of responsibility. Furthermore, Germany is not allowed to be in a war because the declaration of a state of war under international law requires a sovereign opponent. If the German Army were actually embroiled in a war it would raise legal questions relating to insurance issues. Life insurance policies, including those of the soldiers, have exclusion clauses for certain eventualities, for example, when the cause of death is a war. So a war simply cannot be allowed to exist.

When Defence Minister Franz Josef Jung was asked during a visit to Afghanistan in the autumn of 2008 whether he was in a war, he refuted the suggestion in no uncertain terms and said “We are not in a war.” Next to him stood ISAF commander-in-chief General David McKiernan, who has no use for semantic games and is not afraid to speak the unpleasant truth. “Of course we are in a war,” he told the minister to his face in the presence of witnesses. How else was the highest-ranking NATO soldier in the host country supposed to describe the situation in the south, where members of the alliance are coming under fire or are being targeted by insurgents virtually on a daily basis?

The German soldiers are obviously in a strange and undecided mood. There is little talk of war among the servicemen, but the soldiers know that this is

the most dangerous mission in the history of the armed forces. At any rate it is not a stabilization mission, even though the Defence Minister never tires of claiming that it is. Yet it is noteworthy that in the autumn of 2008 Jung spoke for the first time of men who had died on the battlefield when he paid his respects to two dead soldiers from the Saarland. The soldiers were slightly irritated because the political leadership had not sufficiently appreciated the special nature of their mission in the crisis area. A soldier can also “lose his life” in Germany, for example, in a car accident. The troops demanded some recognition of their work, asking for a mission medal, for a flag for the bases in Afghanistan, for terminology which did justice to a military campaign. The soldiers sensed instinctively that the reality of their lives had less and less to do with the depiction of the mission back home. On this occasion Jung softened up the rhetoric for the first time.

Germany has not created a legal framework for the foreign missions of the new era in which it finds itself. The idea for a Missions Deployment Act is regularly rejected by the German Parliament because it does not want its powers to be transformed into an automatic process. That it is necessary to introduce certain changes in the law in view of the new operational situation is demonstrated by the case of a staff sergeant who came into conflict with the law in August 2007. 27 August was a black letter day for the German Army when a patrol along the Kunduz river was hit by a booby-trap. An unseen combatant pushed the detonator of the home-built street bomb just as an armoured vehicle was passing the spot. It killed the co-driver, a first sergeant. Less than 24 hours later, in Kunduz, where everyone was rather edgy, the German Army had put up a road block manned by a private and the aforementioned 27-year-old master sergeant. A car approached the checkpoint, ignored all the signals telling it to stop, and simply rolled on. At this point the 27-year-old opened fire as specified in the rules of engagement. The female driver of the vehicle and her two children were killed.

The Afghan population was outraged, and so were people in Germany. It was the first time that a German had killed innocent civilians in Afghanistan. However, the soldiers were absolutely livid when it became known that the state prosecutor had initiated legal proceedings against the marksman and that the German Army had intimated to the man that he should secure the services of a lawyer, and pay for him himself. At this point the soldiers protested very vociferously. But it was only after the military ombudsman had taken the matter up that the Defence Minister issued a general order two months later stating that the costs of such proceedings would be borne by the German taxpayer. Subsequently the military ombudsman wrote in his annual report: “The soldiers cannot understand why, for the initiation of investigative proceedings on foreign missions, exactly the same yardsticks are applied as at home.” It should

have been made clear to the soldiers that killing someone would trigger an investigation by a state prosecutor, “though it would not lead inexorably to the start of criminal proceedings.”

The soldiers had in fact not been told that such proceedings would begin automatically. And they led inexorably to another difficulty. Who was supposed to conduct the investigations? They were the responsibility of the state prosecutors who covered the home bases of the soldiers concerned. Such prosecutors deal with murder and manslaughter in Germany, but do not have any knowledge of Afghanistan, do not have any experience of conducting investigations abroad, and are not familiar with the complexity of a combat operation. So how were they supposed to do the required forensic work? How were they going to question Afghan witnesses? How would it be possible to reconstruct what had actually happened? The German government refused to countenance the use of special military courts on account of the historical associations, even though during the Cold War such orders were tucked away in drawers and would have been available if they had been needed. In the end it supported the establishment of two special state prosecutors. This led to protests from the federal states, which felt that their responsibilities had been infringed upon. A fast decision was ruled out by the cumbersome nature of German policymaking. The investigative proceedings against the master sergeant dragged on for more than seven months before the case was closed.

The soldiers thought that this dispute was rather naïve. In fact, the political controversy after the incident on 28 August 2008 immobilized the troops and politicized a mission that was complicated enough as it was. Ever since this episode the soldiers, when in doubt, have acted in a defensive manner and have tried to avoid taking risks. Commanders report that the much-admired task-based tactics employed in the German Army have been emasculated. The consciously encouraged responsibility of the soldier for his own actions and the right kind of self-confidence at critical moments is disappearing and giving way to the classical responses of command tactics, which the Germans in particular have criticized so passionately, especially with regard to the decision-making practices of the US military.

In the German Army there is now a growing tendency, in cases of doubt, to make decisions only after having received an order. Soldiers who take risks are a vanishing breed. “Reporting sets you free” is what it is now known as in military jargon. This kind of leadership behaviour goes against all the basic principles of the modern German Army, and is producing a new generation of officers which is fearful and fights shy of taking responsibility. In the final analysis a decision is made on the basis of political criteria, and thus the fundamental rule of “the primacy of policy” has acquired a deleterious, new and constricted significance.

The Tornado Farce

The absurd kind of self-deceit to which adherence to the letter of the law and the injunction to adopt a defensive stance can lead is demonstrated by the deployment of the reconnaissance Tornados, which were sent to the operational area by the German government in February 2007. These so-called RECCE Tornados are equipped with aerial cameras which make it possible to take exact pictures of emplacements and troops on the ground. The pictures are taken during a normal flight and subsequently analyzed. In this way they complement the situational picture which has already been created on the basis of satellite images or pictures taken by drones. Since the Tornados do not supply real-time pictures, and provide information at the earliest a few hours after an event once the pictures have been developed, the technology is of little use. The pictures are evaluated and digitalized, and then sent to ISAF headquarters, where they are analyzed. This is rather laborious, for the technology has been out of date for quite a long time. The Tornados do not provide anything that drones and other reconnaissance platforms have not already supplied faster and possibly in the shape of moving images.

After eight years of ongoing operations, Afghanistan is one of the most photographed countries on earth. The still images taken by the German Tornado pilots, mockingly called snapshots by the troops on the ground, are of no value whatsoever in operational terms. The Taliban have stopped building emplacements. ISAF knows where the old camps are. And on the basis of still images it is difficult to decide whether a group of men is approaching an ISAF position with hostile intent, and above all, where the group has moved to since the pictures were taken. In the south of the country, where aerial surveillance is absolutely essential, the US operates a dense network of drones. This so-called third dimension gives the units an unbeatable informational advantage. This is the reason why no one waits for the Tornado pictures, since the information emanating from the Germans' photographic department is completely out of date only a couple of hours later.

But over and above its operational insignificance, the deployment of German Tornados brought up all sorts of legal problems which finally ended up by being discussed in the German Constitutional Court. Because Germany had been expressly forbidden to take part in the OEF mission, it had to ensure that the information supplied by its aerial photographers was not used for the American anti-terror mission being conducted in the framework of this mandate. But in the meantime the distinction between the mandates had evaporated, especially in the south of Afghanistan. The German Parliament nevertheless debated the question of how information from the good mandate could be prevented from falling into the hands of the operators of the evil mandate.

It decided that a German officer at ISAF headquarters had to ensure that the pictures ended up with the right man, in practice a laughable procedure. The German officer now gives the images to a NATO operations planner working for the ISAF mandate. However, since the operational centre does not function in separate compartments, it could well be that this officer might put on his OEF hat a moment later and use the pictures for the wrong mandate. Of course the German officer had done what he had been ordered to do and handed the material to the correct recipient. But in any case no one actually needs these photographs.

So why did the German government agree to this mission? Why did it offer the warplanes to NATO, and why did it go to inordinate lengths to install infrastructure in the north of Afghanistan which can protect all this expensive equipment? The answer is simple and was given by the German government itself when it presented its arguments at the German Constitutional Court in a constitutional validity dispute about an urgent motion concerning the Tornados. If it were not possible to send out the Tornados, it reasoned, the security situation of the German soldiers would quite clearly deteriorate. Furthermore, it was to be expected that Germany would be upbraided for displaying insufficient solidarity in the alliance. This was a dangerous accusation, especially in view of the fact that Germany was dependent on NATO partners since it lacked combat groups of its own. Germany's NATO partners were calling into question its predictability and alliance capability, indeed its credibility and political reliability.

This needs to be translated into less diplomatic language. Germany was compelled to deliver the goods because the pressure deriving from its insufficient participation had become too great. The Tornados constituted a great opportunity in this regard. Their deployment meant that a few hundred additional soldiers who were needed for the intricate flight operations maintenance would be sent to Afghanistan at one fell swoop. This would significantly increase the size of the contingent. And the Tornados also flew to the south, a welcome fact which helped Germany to refute the charge that it was shirking its responsibilities. Germany needed a placebo and was clearly looking for a substitute activity. In this connection military considerations played no more than a subsidiary role, and other possible approaches to the mission were out of the question as a result of the restrictive rules of engagement.

A Good Reason for Conscientious Objection?

The Tornado saga was followed by another episode which was of concern to the leadership of the German Army and shed a cold light on the shaky political foundations on which the Afghanistan mission is based. 573 members of parliament voted in favour of sending the Tornados, and 157 against. The SPD parliamentary party lifted the whip because it considered the vote to be a decision of conscience. A lieutenant-colonel of the German Air Force took this as a cue to stop working on the logistical preparations for the Tornado mission because his conscience told him that he could not obey his orders. His reservations with regard to constitutional law, international law and criminal justice were simply too great. The man was assigned to other duties “in order to enable him to do work that he can reconcile with his conscience,” which is how it was expressed in the officialese employed by the German Army.

The dispute attracted a great deal of attention, but at the same time it was quite legitimate. The Second Military Service Chamber of the German Administrative Court came to the conclusion in the middle of 2005 that no soldier in the German Army had to carry out an order which conflicted with his conscience. The judges defined the preconditions for this kind of moral dilemma in the broadest possible way. It was sufficient to adduce a compelling need to decide between good and evil. In the case of the Tornados the burden of proof was simple. If even the SPD parliamentary group is speaking of a conscience-based decision, if the German Constitutional Court is considering lawsuits relating to the mission, if its legality under international law is being discussed by legal experts, then it must be conceded that a lieutenant-colonel can also be faced with a moral dilemma. The refusal to obey his orders was legally correct. The German Army acted speedily and transferred the person concerned to another post elsewhere without kicking up a great deal of fuss. If the case were to be widely copied, it could serve as the basis for a mass refusal to carry out orders among the rank and file.

The episode demonstrates above all how political indecision, the fact that the German government is not comfortable with the mission and a lack of political justification can have a profound effect on how the soldiers understand their task and on their morale. Once policymakers start to get cold feet and become anxious about the fact that decisions which have been made are vulnerable to attack, this can have a dire effect on the whole system. The political and legal room for manoeuvre which the German government and the leadership of the German Army have provided in order to be able to react more flexibly to hostile behaviour is now being utilized. If the leadership of the state permits people to entertain doubts about the mission, why should not a lowly soldier be able to do the same?

The Police Is Neither a Friend Nor a Helper

Germany committed itself right at the beginning of the Afghanistan project in 2002 to assume responsibility as lead nation for the reconstruction of the country's police force. It was a Herculean task which clearly placed a very great strain on the German government and turned out to be more than it could handle. Why the German government agreed to this gigantic project and thought it would be able to shoulder the burden that it involved remains a mystery. Presumably the godfather of the Petersberg process felt compelled to make a grand symbolic gesture on a par with that of the US, which intended to guarantee military security, and Italy, which was proposing to reconstruct the judicial system. However, it quickly became clear that Germany had bitten off more than it could chew.

Afghanistan is a country which covers 647,000 square miles and is divided into 34 provinces with 366 districts. According to the estimates of the Afghan government and international aid workers a territory of this size needs a police force of about 60,000 men. But these calculations on their own make little sense. When the foreign troops arrived in the country they found only the shell of a state, and important elements were missing even from the skeleton. When all is said and done the reconstruction of the police force touched on the central problem of the country. Would you mind telling me what structure it is supposed to have? Can a centrally led police force actually function in a state with a fragmented power structure? And how should such a force be organized, bearing in mind the significance of local militias in the north, which are directly controlled by the commanders of the Northern Alliance, and sometimes by the governors? How is a police force supposed to show that it differs from the tribal structure of the Pashtuns in the south? And, the biggest problem of them all, how is it supposed to work for law and order if the very idea of law and order does not exist in a war-torn country marked with lawlessness, and if (although it may seem a banal point) a policeman cannot even read the laws which he is later supposed to be enforcing? The reconstruction of the police force should in fact be at the centre of the state-building process.

In contrast to the armed forces, the Afghan police had not completely disappeared when the foreign alliance arrived in the country. However, it functioned on the basis of laws which were peculiarly its own. The police has always been and continues to be the embodiment of corruption and arbitrary rule. Warlords and powerful men had their own police forces, and their members financed their activities by collecting customs duties and of course bribes. And last but not least they formed the backbone of the opium trade by protecting the cultivation of the plants, by maintaining the production laboratories, and covering up the smuggling or even organizing it themselves. A policeman cannot live

on a salary of \$70 a month, which is the amount that was originally envisaged, and, more to the point, it makes it impossible for him to enforce his authority. Important chief of police appointments were in so many words auctioned off by the regional rulers, especially in the north. The jobs went for up to \$100,000 to the highest bidder, a militiaman who nonetheless had to continue to reach agreement with the governor. The police did not protect public order; it systematically exploited the public.

Germany did as if these were non-existent problems and set about the task in a systematic manner and with the usual thoroughness. Under the aegis of the Ministry of the Interior it sent a training team to Kabul and oversaw the reconstruction of the police academy and the headquarters of the traffic police. German instructors paid particular attention to the border police. Outposts of the academy and training centres were set up in Kunduz, Fayzabad and Mazar-e Sharif.

However, the German government began to notice that it had reached the limits of its capacities. Police instructors were not particularly willing to join a mission abroad, especially since a lower foreign service allowance was paid in Afghanistan than, for example, in Kosovo, from where it was also cheaper and easier to organize a flight back to Germany to see one's family. Even Georgia was better paid, and not half as dangerous. Apart from this the deployment of police officers always entails rather laborious coordination work back home in Germany. Policing is the responsibility of the federal states, and Bavaria, for example, will not on principle send any of its police officers to serve in Afghanistan. In 2007 the German government attempted to Europeanize the police mission. The EU decided to embark on its own police mission with up to 400 instructors who were supposed to take over the training. However, the European deployment exercise turned out to be even more of a fiasco than its national predecessor. The financial resources for the mission failed to materialize, and the designated vacancies have not been filled to this day. The 20 or so contributory states have still to agree on common training guidelines, which requires a high degree of coordination among them and keeps them from the actual work itself.

In this tough environment Germany, which has about 40 permanent and more than 100 part-time instructors, has since 2002 trained about 7,000 Afghan policemen at the Kabul Academy and another 17,000 elsewhere. That is not a bad achievement when measured by the small number of instructors, but no more than a small contribution when one takes into account the real needs of the country. At this speed it would have taken a very long time indeed for an Afghan police force to emerge. The police are the favourite target of Taliban assailants. In fact, in Afghanistan recruits and civil servants have the highest death toll of any societal groups.

The lack of instructors is felt in a particularly acute way when working together with the Afghan police leadership. In the state institutions the reconstructor nations have done their best to supply the new Afghan leadership with so-called monitors who are supposed to both advise and observe. However, it would be wrong to assign a German police constable to an Afghan police general, since an Afghan would also consider that to be an insult.

Thus it is impossible to overlook the international criticism of the slow speed of police reconstruction. The US in particular has complained about the weak state of the police force and is incensed by the German style of training, which takes its bearings from police work back in Germany and is based on the image of an officer who, since he is a person whom the citizens of a community trust, can restore order by his mere presence. In the training camp in Mazar-e Sharif the Afghan cadets learn the finer points of retrieving evidence at a crime scene, dressed in white protective suits and holding the small evidence collection kits which have just been donated to them. So what, say the Americans. Afghanistan does not need a criminal investigation department, traffic wardens or policemen on the beat, at least not now. Afghanistan needs a police force that is ready to fight, which is almost up to taking on military tasks in order to get on top of the security problem in the country. But above all Afghanistan needs a training system which covers the country in its entirety. It was clear that Germany did not want to and could not perform the task. Probably the best independent expert on Afghanistan, the journalist Ahmed Rashid, writes of a "pathetic and in fact useless effort."

The US, which assumed responsibility for police training as early as 2005 and provided financing amounting to \$1.1 billion, is planning to send another 1,500 instructors to the country in order to speed up the reconstruction of the police force. They will be mainly members of the military police, who will be using a rather different kind of training. In this way the US intends to train policemen from 52 districts. Germany with the capacities at its disposal can manage just about eight districts, though it is quietly appalled by the pseudo-police which the US is putting on the streets. In fact Washington has hitherto entrusted the gigantic task to a private police instructor, pumped large sums into training courses, put the policemen through basic paramilitary training for a few weeks, and then sent them back to the provinces, where they promptly returned to their traditional ways. Use for the state-building process? None whatsoever. Confidence-building measures for the central government? Zero.

But Germany should not in fact complain too vociferously. What it managed to do was simply not particularly good. If someone thinks they can do a better job, let them get on with it. In Germany there is no structure or police force with which one could carry out a reconstruction mission of this magnitude.

€35.7 million a year for training simply disappears down nooks and crannies in a country like Afghanistan.

Narcotics and Where the War Has its Origins

Those who wish to reconstruct Afghanistan will have to think about one of the most important reasons for the demise of the state. It is heroin. 30 years of war and civil war would have been inconceivable without the narcotics trade. Power struggles between warlords and militias, the rise of the Taliban, the resistance movement against the Soviet invaders—all of them were paid for and driven by heroin. Afghanistan's self-destruction would not have been possible without the brown juice from poppy flowers which is formed into a sticky cake and is later transformed into white powder in heroin kitchens. 93 percent of the heroin consumed in the entire world originates in Afghanistan. The country has a monopoly, and is the purveyor to the court of addicts throughout the world. These narcotics not only lead to addiction and death, but incite violence and crime, and are the reason for money laundering, corruption, and arms dealing, and, in the final analysis, war. Afghan heroin is the driving force behind all sorts of conflicts. There is no problem in the country which cannot in some way or other be traced back to narcotics.

Ten percent of the Afghan population are directly involved in the narcotics trade, and many more people depend on it for a livelihood. The annual turnover with the powder is up to \$3.5 billion, a third of the official gross domestic product. Up to \$500 million are believed to flow directly into the conduct of the war. 8,500 tons of opium were harvested in 2007, though in 2008 the amount was down by 19 percent, which is better than nothing. It is said that cultivation has been eradicated in 18 of the 34 provinces. But in other centres of narcotics cultivation, above all in the province of Helmand, the cultivated area has continued to grow. Business is booming.

Contrary to a widespread belief, the Taliban, during their reign of terror, always encouraged and utilized the narcotics trade. The logic of the jihadists was simple. Heroin destroys the life of the infidels, so let them buy it. On the other hand, the cultivation of cannabis was strictly forbidden, and the consumption of hashish, which is quite normal among Afghans, was banned since it was said to be against the basic tenets of Islam. In the summer of 2001, not long before their removal, the Taliban, in a radical policy reversal, stopped the cultivation of poppies, but not because they had become amenable to reason and now re-

garded the cultivation of drugs as reprehensible. The reason was that the price of heroin on the global market had fallen sharply as a result of a supply glut. Shortly after the Taliban had been removed, when the planting season began, the peasants went back to sowing their fields.

Britain, which has assumed the lead in combating narcotics, now knows that there is no ideal way of containing this evil. And for this reason neither the Afghan government nor the allied nations have been able to adopt a generally accepted policy. What they can do is to look at the results of their indecision. In the embattled provinces in the south in particular poppies bloom in large quantities. For the poor peasants they hold out the promise of a decent income, and an even better deal as far as the Taliban are concerned. The jihad-ists make money from the harvest, charge transport tolls, and pocket a share of the selling price. Narcotics are said to have contributed hundreds of millions of dollars to their war chest. This enables them to purchase weapons, pay fighters, finance farmers, and to engage in bribery—a slightly different circle of addiction and dependency.

There is no method of combating narcotics which has not been discussed or even tried out by the powers supporting the Afghan government. Poppy plants have been sprayed from the air, fields have ploughed up or burnt off, farmers have been supplied with alternative seeds. A purchasing programme was a failure because the money disappeared in murky channels. Some governors were persuaded to pursue hard-hitting policies, whereas others gave themselves a clean bill of health. Mohammed Atta, the governor of Kunduz, who in April 2009 was Chancellor Merkel's talkative host, proudly claims that his province has eradicated the cultivation of poppies. What he does not say has in the meantime been confirmed by the intelligence services. Evidently the mobile laboratories in which the juice of the poppies is turned into pure heroin keep appearing in the province. The laboratories, which are actually more like a Druid's cauldron as depicted in an Asterix comic, can be detected by infrared satellite imagery. NATO knows exactly which cauldron is on the boil and where.

When the German Army set up its first camp in the north, there was—according to certain slightly ironical accounts—a field of flowering poppies in the vicinity. The soldiers are said not to have recognized the plants. German policymakers refused to get involved in the narcotics issue and prevented NATO from adopting a more offensive attitude to the heroin trade. Berlin gave up its opposition to the narcotics issue in NATO only in 2008. From this time on every nation, acting on the basis of its own rules, could move against the narcotics cultivators and their helpers. However, nothing has changed with regard to the restrictive policy governing the activities of the German troops. It is quite simple. Narcotics policy is not part of the mandate. A policy of destroying the

crops would merely anger the peasants, who might perhaps be prompted to give shelter to Taliban fighters in order to revenge themselves. The argument is not necessarily wrong. Destruction affects the weakest link in the narcotics chain and will not work as long as only some of the cultivated areas are razed to the ground. Actually, it can make matters worse. Partial crop destruction is to the advantage of the dealers, at least in the short term, because it will cause the price of this scarce commodity to rise. Furthermore, the German Army has not incorporated the pursuit of narcotics dealers and couriers and the destruction of narcotics laboratories into its programme. It is as if a patrol were to come across a weapons cache only in order to turn back immediately. It is none of our business—because the policymakers do not want to have anything to do with the issue.

Berlin is right to argue that combating narcotics is a matter for the Afghans themselves, at least to a certain extent. That, it says, is why Afghan policemen are being trained. But in fact the German government is capitulating in the face of the problem. It knows quite well that the Afghan state is permeated with corrupt officials and politicians who will never manage to agree to consistent policies. The feuds between the commanders of the Northern Alliance, whose area of influence is dominated by the German Army, are not about petty matters. These gentlemen often quarrel about smuggling levies and revenues deriving from narcotics. The heroin is the fire which keeps the Afghan kettle on the boil, and Germany, as most of the other NATO states, prefers to ignore the heat because it does not believe that it can actually douse the flames.

4. An Honest Strategy

Germany's Security

“Germany’s security is being defended in the Hindu Kush area.” Peter Struck, who was German Defence Minister from 2002 to 2005, had to face a great deal of derisive criticism for his statement, which to this day remains the most memorable that the public debate in Germany has produced on the subject of Afghanistan. The conjunction of security and Hind Kush sounded much the same as if the future of Germany as an exporting nation depended on the balance of trade with the Fiji Islands. Yet despite the ridicule which greeted Struck’s remarks, the SPD politician was right. The future shape of German security policy has quite a lot to do with the fate of Afghanistan, not exclusively so, but certainly to an important extent. Those who accuse Struck of being platitudinous are simply demonstrating the outmoded character of their security policy thinking. Even if the two countries are 5,000 kilometres apart, German citizens will have to get used to the idea that their personal well-being, their physical security and the preservation of their lifestyle can also be protected by a few thousand German and several thousand NATO soldiers in the distant operational area of Afghanistan.

In Germany, after the end of the Cold War, there was a growing disinterest in security policy topics, and the country was imbued with a feeling of well-deserved stability. The life and fate of other nations became increasingly unimportant, as long as they did not impinge on the holiday areas directly. Germany was a nation blessed by good fortune. After centuries of hardship for which it had only itself to blame, it was finally at peace. Other people were entreated not to do anything which might change this state of affairs. A pleasant feeling of pacifism descended on the country which left no room for the harsh alternatives to which a society is exposed under less favourable circumstances. Conflict control, conflict management, and a willingness to talk about problems were, fortunately enough, highly developed, and in cases of doubt the equalization payments were so generous that genuine pain, real brutality and naked violence were no longer as important as they had been in the past. Germany was a highly developed island of prosperity which no longer had a feeling for the fact that most of the world does not function on the basis of such carefully adjusted regulations. So how, if you do not mind my saying so, is the fate of Afghanistan in any way of importance for the security of Germany?

As a leading industrial nation and as the world's foremost exporter who is totally dependent on trade, Germany has an elementary interest in problems of security everywhere in the world. With the help of the European Union the country has created for itself an area of stability which has no parallels in history. The west European political system with its structures and values in conjunction with its transatlantic anchor and a market economy in an interlinked world—that is the foreign policy playing field on which Germany's security and prosperity were first able to thrive.

The Challenge of 9/11

Hardly any other event has shaken this Western model more powerfully than the attacks of 11 September 2001. The terrorism of al-Qaeda and Islamic fundamentalism, which are being hatched by the forgotten underclass from the Pashtun tribal areas, are no longer regional phenomena. A global security problem has arisen which can without much ado be seen as being on a par with the historically familiar confrontations of world history. The short phase of eternal peace, the "end of history" after the Cold War, lasted for two decades. Now the world is in the midst of its next great conflict.

In this conflict the threat as far as the Germans are concerned seems abstract and distant, much farther away than the confrontation of the Cold War. The perception was not exactly improved by the fact that it was the US which had to bear the brunt of the terrorist assaults. Even though there were major terrorist attacks in Spain and Britain, even though governments were overthrown in Italy and Japan on account of their anti-terror policies, in Germany the feeling predominated that it would come out of the whole affair unscathed. Being on one's best behaviour, a widespread mood suggested, protects one from terrorist attacks. In the US the administration of George W. Bush with its confrontational, unilateral and ideology-driven policies was primarily responsible for promoting such strategic decoupling and actually became the compelling reason for the emergence of an inner distance. Terror, Taliban, jihad and Islamism: these were America's problems.

But they were not only America's problems, for it was not in Germany's interests to allow the most populous region on earth with the most important sources of raw materials, crucial trade routes and traditional partners to drift off to become a gigantic zone of instability and war. Islamic fundamentalism had expressed a clear claim to power, and only naïve people were unwilling to

take it seriously. And even if, blinded by anger and for no reason whatsoever, the Bush administration decided two years after the 9/11 attacks to open up a new front in Iraq, the epicentre of the new instability was located in Afghanistan and in neighbouring Pakistan. It took seven years and a change of government for the American superpower to come to these conclusions.

Peter Struck's statement may have been made because he was concerned about Germany's sedate foreign policy, very much on the lines of Joschka Fischer's erstwhile statement that it was imperative to prevent a second Auschwitz from taking place in Kosovo. But evidently such rhetorical baseball bats are needed in order to make the Germans understand that their responsibility does not end at the borders of the European Union—because their interests do not end there either. The central security policy problem of the early 21st century, whether we like it or not, comes from the Islamic world, and especially from the border area between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Furthermore, Germany has for the past 60 years been one of the historical winners of the age, and as such has a kind of moral duty not to forget those who were less fortunate in this epoch.

Morality is of course an honourable pillar of support in foreign policy, but one should in fact start by assessing the interests and opportunities involved. Here again it was not difficult for Germany to perceive that it had a duty towards Afghanistan. Links that were as close as those to Afghanistan existed with hardly any other country in Central Asia with the exception of Iran. Even if this bilateral history has now been forgotten in Germany, the Afghans know quite well that for almost a century Germany was one of their better allies.

Germany's Afghan Roots

Relations between the two countries date back to the time of the First World War, when a daring expedition led by the German officer Oskar von Niedermeyer reached Kabul with the aim of trying to convince the ruler of Afghanistan of the advantages of pursuing active confrontation with the British and the Russians. Germany hoped that this would take some of the pressure off other theatres of war. The attempt at geopolitical persuasion may have been a failure, but the great and towards the end absent-minded King Amanullah, who ascended the throne in 1919, remembered the advances that had been made by the far-away country. He later in fact travelled to Berlin and was given a lavish reception—one of only two state visits to the internationally very much

isolated Weimar Republic. The king was flattered by the way he was treated. For the first time Afghanistan as a state was offered a partnership on an equal footing, and this enhanced the stature of its ruler. The 1920s and 1930s saw a deepening of relations, the establishment of trade links, and the construction of educational establishments. Thus the German vocational secondary school in Kabul became a respected educational institution in the country, Afghans came to study in Germany, and even the Nazi regime flattered Afghan rulers with the help of its racial policies, stating that both nations were of Aryan origin. Germany maintained close links with Kabul right up to the time of the Soviet invasion. Afghanistan was always at the top of the list when it came to the disbursement of development aid, and many Afghans came to Germany to complete their vocational training and to study.

Germany's historically neutral and respectful role meant that in 2001 the German government seemed to be the ideal host for the grand conference on the future of Afghanistan. In the late 1990s there had already been covert attempts by Berlin to encourage the Taliban and the Northern Alliance to reach a ceasefire. In this context Germany never sought to impose its own agenda. For this reason all the parties and groups, some of them bitter enemies, were willing to accept when in 2001 Germany issued invitations to the Petersberg talks.

Berlin, it was believed, could act as an honest broker. The German soldiers sent first to Kabul and then to the north were treated with the same kind of respect. Germany enjoyed a good reputation and, compared with other NATO nations, was able to point to its lead in the security field and its more approachable politicians. The political significance of Berlin was taken seriously in Afghanistan, and the country placed its hopes in German influence. And one of the most important events of the fledgling Afghan state in the post-Taliban era was only able to function with German help. The Loya Jirga, the grand assembly of all the tribes and leaders, which had to agree on a new constitution, took place under the awnings of a German beer tent that had been specially flown to Kabul for the occasion. In the ruined city there was no hall big enough for the reconciliation assembly.

The Fear of the Truth

Germany's security policy interests in Afghanistan and its potential room for manoeuvre in the crisis stand in stark contrast to the hesitant manner with which this central foreign policy topic is treated in Berlin. Afghanistan, so it seems, is a politically misbegotten country for which no one really wants to be responsible. A small inter-ministerial circle of experts from the ministries which are in some way involved, usually the state secretaries, regularly scrutinizes the clumsiness of the German mission; the German intelligence agency supplies analyses of the political situation in the north; and the political leadership occasionally visits the troops in order to counter the impression that the soldiers have been forgotten. In fact it is precisely this complaint from the operational area which is relayed by the military ombudsman. The troops feel that they have been left in the lurch, and that they do not get enough support. In contrast to other nations, there is virtually no public support for the German contingent. Policymakers do not aggressively tout the aims and successes of the mission, insofar as they exist. Nor is the public emotionally involved to any great extent. The situation is quite different in Canada, for example, where the large number of fatal casualties among the soldiers has led to national solidarity. And the public at large discusses whether there is any point to the mission, and what its prospects are.

The almost deafening silence in Germany is dangerous because it means that the mission has simply been omitted from the republic's list of duties. The country and its policymakers are not able to discuss the real dimensions of what is happening in Afghanistan, and the consensus on the goals and purpose of the mission is rather shaky. For this reason the decision-makers continue to adopt an immobile stance and are full of hope. They hope that the north will remain quiet. They hope that the pressure from within the alliance will subside. They hope that the battles in the south will die down and that the additional US troops will get on top of the Taliban problem. And finally they hope that the grand delusion and the mendacity about Afghanistan are not exposed for what they are, at least not before the next elections to the German Parliament.

This conspiracy of silence works because the most important participants have an interest in it. In the Grand Coalition both the parties have supported the mission for reasons connected with alliance solidarity, perfectly well aware of the fact that it will take a long time before their voters can be persuaded to support it. The SPD would seem to be lacking in credibility if it were to do a volte-face and come out in favour of withdrawing the troops, which is what the Left Party is doing, even if it would help to garner support in an electoral campaign. The CDU is at pains to avoid talking about the contradictions and

problems of the mission, because it is also afraid that it will lose the support of its voters and lay itself open to attack from the SPD. The obstruction which we have encountered in the German government is repeated in the German Parliament. However, when a subject hits the public unawares, there is a sense of outrage, as in the case of the lethal use of a weapon by a German staff sergeant who killed an Afghan mother and her two children, or when President Hamid Karzai disappoints the love and admiration which many feel for him, governs indecisively and signs a marital law which is supposedly designed to regulate the frequency of sexual intercourse.

The military leadership of the German Army also behaves in a defensive manner. Political orders are not called into question, although there are enough complaints from the troops, who would dearly like to remove the operational obstacles and lift the operational restrictions. Middle-level commanders and liaison officers to ISAF headquarters report a division in the NATO structure between countries which take part in combat missions, and those which adopt a defensive stance. Countries with far-reaching operational restrictions such as Germany are excluded from meetings and discussions. In the meantime many NATO nations have garnered experience with insurgent movements and asymmetrical warfare from a military point of view. In this regard German Army commanders have come to feel that they are second-class soldiers because they have no modern operational experience. The German Army considers its behaviour as lacking in solidarity and as detrimental to the alliance, but the political decision remains. Germany must act in a defensive manner.

The public relations work of the German government is also on the defensive. Instead of explaining the complexity of the problems to the electorate, there is total silence. And take the example of narcotics. There is no obvious solution for the intra-Afghan cancer. But it would also be the duty of Germany to come up with a strategy for its own reconstruction area in the north. Crop purchasing, destruction, alternative plants—it has all been tried out by other nations. In the final analysis only a combination of various measures will be a success, not least of which will be the establishment of a courageous state prosecutor's office for narcotics crime. Only one thing is not at all helpful: pretending not to see anything, as is currently the case.

The risks of the evasive German strategy are considerable. The public is given the impression that there are two kinds of conflict resolution in the Hindu Kush area, a good one and a bad one. The good operations are being conducted by the German Army and reach their objectives without the use of force. Proof of the success of this work is the fact that things continue to be relatively quiet in the operational area assigned to the German Army.

This distorted picture obscures the fact that a defensive strategy could not possibly work in other parts of Afghanistan. If NATO had behaved in a defen-

sive manner in Kandahar it would have been evicted quite a long time ago. The south would soon have been under the control of the Taliban, followed a short time later by Kabul and presumably also by the north. Secondly, the picture suggests that German reconstruction is a success. It is impossible to ascertain the veracity of this assertion. True, the German government is investing sizable sums in reconstruction, is running hundreds of meaningful small projects and is trying to enlist the support of the Afghan population, which is actually supposed to be taking part in the projects. But what does this mean for state-building or for the state structures? To what extent is the authority of the central government being underpinned? Or are the German government and its soldiers merely stabilizing the warlords in the northern provinces, who since 2001 have taken liberally from the community, have strengthened their own power structures, and have simply left the Karzai government in the lurch?

And a third danger is in the offing. The public will be irritated and may perhaps react in an irrational manner if it is unprepared for and surprised by an escalation, by more violence, by fatal casualties, or attacks. A realistic picture of Afghanistan cannot be pieced together overnight. No politician will be able to stem the tide of the massive pressure for withdrawal which can mount, for example, in the wake of an act of violence.

An Honest Strategy

The advent of a new presidential team in the US has quite suddenly removed the encrusted structures of the old administration and made it possible to take a fresh look at the Afghanistan problem. A similar strategic review should also be carried out in Germany. Realistically this can happen only after the elections to the German Parliament. The German Army, the Afghans, the German public—Germany owes it to them to look honestly at this mission and to correct its strategy. A review of the policy on Afghanistan would have three purposes:

1. The subject of Afghanistan must be described in all its complexity. The division of the mission into north and south begins in one's head, and that is where it must be terminated.
2. The German interpretation of the mandate needs to be adjusted, if only in order not to jeopardize the security of the soldiers.
3. There is a need for a clear political goal which will also make it possible to terminate the mission at some point in the future. In order to reach

this goal, the German government should massively increase its civilian activities. The faster the Afghan state grows, the faster the international armed forces can withdraw.

Honest Policymaking

Honest policymaking should go hand in hand with honest language. What most people consider to be a war should be called a war. It is at least rather silly to speak of a stabilization and support mission in a situation where the Taliban have been increasing their attacks for four years and the success of the whole mission hangs in the balance. Honest language and an honest analysis will preempt the danger that perceptions in Germany and what is really happening on the ground will drift apart. The electorate has a right to be taken along as these difficult decisions are made.

Part of an honest analysis is to perceive Afghanistan as a single operational area. What happens in the south also affects security in the north. Those who wish one day to leave behind a country that is safe cannot exclude the classical sources of unrest from their field of vision. Honesty includes calling military nonsense such as the Tornado mission nonsense. It includes the compilation of a sensible needs analysis for the troops in the north. What contribution does the contingent, which is largely confined to the three camps, make towards stability? Would it not be just as stable in the north if the German Army withdrew, simply because the regional rulers have long since staked their claims, as has always been the case in Afghan history and will continue to be so in the future?

An Honest Mandate

The United Nations mandate would also permit a robust deployment of the German Army in the south. The German government merely has to decide whether or not it can carry out and survive military operations in a more dangerous area in political terms, and whether the German Army is up to meeting this military challenge without subjecting the soldiers to unacceptable levels of

danger because, for example, they lack the right equipment (drones, helicopters) and experience. Whatever conclusions the German government comes to as a result of this reassessment, the fact is that the hypocritical interpretation of the mandate that is currently being pursued stands in the way of a realistic perception of Afghanistan and in fact poses a threat to the soldiers.

It would probably be wrong to expect that the German Army will be deployed in a more dangerous operational area such as the border with Pakistan, because it could not take the political and military pressure. Yet there are provinces in the Afghan core area or in the immediate vicinity of Kabul in which, it is to be hoped, the remaining pockets of insurgents will have been dealt with by the summer of 2010, and where a military presence will be required in order to prevent the Taliban from returning. Moving a part of the German contingent to these provinces would take the pressure off other nations and facilitate a genuine pacification of Afghanistan in the dangerous provinces in the south.

But a more aggressive interpretation of the mandate is also necessary for the mission in the north. In 2009 NATO is opening up new supply routes via the states bordering on Afghanistan in the north because the supply routes through Pakistan are becoming increasingly unsafe. The northern connections will traverse the area under German protection. Here the Taliban or local warlords will try to interrupt the links and make the roads impassable. In 2007 and 2008 they managed to do this with large sections of the ring road in the south. However, those who control Afghanistan's few roads also control the country.

An aggressive mandate in the north does not mean that trigger-happy German soldiers will be the cause of a new resistance movement. However, the self-imposed restrictions have a debilitating effect on the soldiers, and lead to a situation where they simply remain in their camps. These self-restrictions are the product of domestic policy fears, and have nothing to do with the requirements of the country itself. They make the soldiers vulnerable, because their opponents know and make use of such operational constraints. First, an offensive mandate would lift a political burden from the troops and enable them to pursue a more confident mission that is more in touch with people on the ground. The beginnings of a more aggressive approach were in evidence early in 2009. The German government was forced to react to new military pressure from the Taliban. Attacks were responded to, and provocative acts received an appropriate answer.

An Honest Goal

Afghanistan is a difficult country in which foreign powers have never managed to be much of a success. So why should NATO, why should 42 nations from all over the world do the trick and help the country back on its feet? The international community should be honest to admit that it cannot currently predict the outcome of the Afghan experiment. But unlike its historical predecessors, the UN mission in Afghanistan and its military wing, the ISAF mission, will no doubt achieve a great deal. In contrast to the Soviet occupation or British attempts at subjugation, the foreigners are now generally welcome. After 30 years of war, people value their contribution to stability. Their help for people right at the bottom of society is upright and unselfish. Afghans recognize that their country has to become capable of surviving on its own and that it has to extricate itself from subservience to the destructive influence of rival factions and foreign powers. That has never happened before in history.

On the other hand, historical experience nurtures doubts about whether this goal can ever be attained. The implosion in Pakistan, the Islamist activities on the northern border with Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, the Iranian influence and Tehran's interest in achieving regional supremacy keep up the pressure from without. Within the country the balance between the central government and provincial rulers has still not been struck by any stretch of the imagination. The warlords in the north as representatives of large ethnic groups and the Pashtun majority with the foreign body of the Taliban in its midst are not going to give up the struggle for dominance. Poverty and the narcotics trade will remain a part of life for decades to come, as will corruption, inefficiency and exploitation. The country not only lacks an elite, it lacks even a simple level of education.

But the greatest danger emanates from the Taliban, who cannot be defeated militarily. The Taliban are a religious movement. They are fed by anger, nurtured with false ideologies, and recruited from among the army of have-nots, the forgotten inhabitants of the tribal areas. Every year 60,000 young men celebrate their 16th birthdays here, and this means that every year there are hundreds of new potential Taliban fighters. The movement will never suffer from a shortage of recruits. Sensible ideas on how to integrate the Taliban and make them less dangerous are taking a long time to reach fruition. They include political participation, concessions and above all material incentives such as work, a livelihood, and dignity for one's family. The equation is not difficult to understand, but it will take a long time before it is resolved.

That is the reason why in the final analysis state-building in Afghanistan is of the utmost importance. If the state is weak, it can be attacked. If their

livelihoods are threatened, people will turn to other saviours. In the absence of education it is impossible to overcome archaic rules of conduct.

So much for the theory. In practice Afghanistan has heard quite enough about democratization models, federal structures and governance role models. The theoretical twaddle from the forward planning departments of the international army of aid workers breaks apart very quickly when it gets to the Hindu Kush area. Simple things remain: a school, an irrigation channel, a dam, a bridge. It is a great achievement if an Afghan craftsman can get hold of a new tool and can suddenly employ someone to help him. It is an achievement if a farmer learns a new ploughing technique or constructs an irrigation channel which does not have to be cleared of mud or even entirely rebuilt year in, year out. Even better if this farmer can learn to apply modern methods of cultivation which will increase the size of his crops. What is needed is an administrative official in a small town who can handle a budget, who can draw up and adhere to a financial plan and in the process does not have to defer to the fact that the town's corrupt police chief would like to have control over the money himself. Doctors are needed who can give a helping hand to their Afghan colleagues in district and local community hospitals. And when it comes to doctors, the country simply cannot get enough of them.

As it moves towards this honest strategy the German government must ask itself whether or not it is doing enough. There are no agricultural advisers in the north, and no administrative officials either. There are far too few police instructors in the country, and members of the Afghan elite could learn more if they were sent for a couple of semesters to study at a German University of Applied Sciences. A handful manage to secure scholarships, but not enough by any stretch of the imagination. The German Army could also send more of its doctors out into the countryside instead of operating clinics in the camps which are on the same level as an extremely up-to-date district hospital in Germany. And in any case, where are all the medical aid workers and educators from Germany? It is unlikely that those who give the Afghans help of this kind will be attacked.

The German mission suffers from the same recurring problem. People do not take Afghanistan seriously; they underestimate the extent of the task; they do not have a feeling of duty. The German Afghanistan project is self-deceit, though it will be unable to evade the truth implied by one piece of Afghan wisdom. The country has never allowed anyone to escape from its clutches who has not paid the requisite tribute. It is now up to Germany to shift this pattern to its advantage. A lack of rectitude has never been rewarded in Afghanistan.

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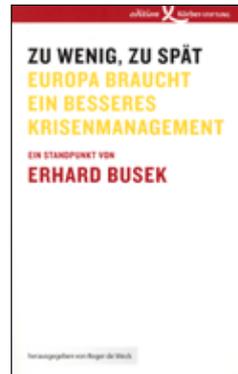
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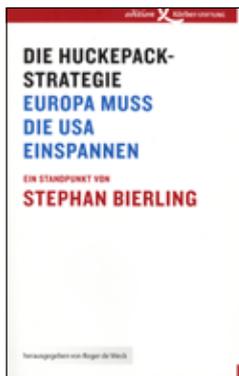
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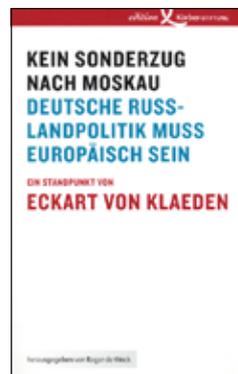
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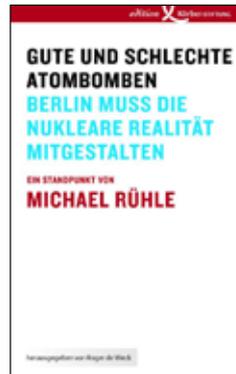
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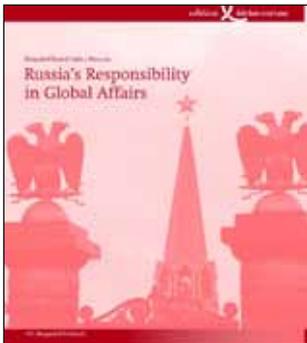


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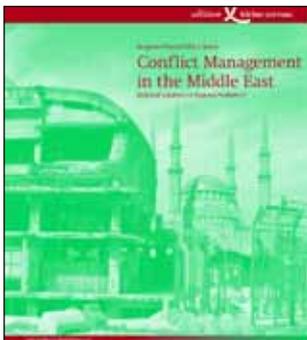
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141st Bergedorf Protocol

April 2009
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Nearly two decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has assumed a new international position. As an independent and self-confident actor and as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, it bears great responsibility in international politics.

At the 141st Bergedorf Round Table in Moscow politicians, diplomats and experts, including Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov, discussed the goals and interests of Russian foreign policy and talked about relations between Russia, NATO and the EU. What should be the response to President Medvedev's proposals for a new Euro-Atlantic treaty, or to Russia's behaviour in the Georgia conflict? Also the discussion focused on Central Asia, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan.



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