

Germany in Afghanistan

The Pitfalls of Peace-Building in National and International Perspective

By Wilfried von Bredow

The Afghanistan Shock

“*Will Germany’s army ever be ready for battle?*”: this headline of a *Time* magazine article (dated 27 June 2009) reflects widespread scepticism among foreign observers of the country’s military policy. When, ten years after the close of World War II, the Bundeswehr was founded in what was then West Germany, its soldiers became part of a deterrence posture which included preparations for the military defence of NATO territory in Central Europe. The defence mission was, however, mainly a psychological element of deterrence. “*We prepare with all military credibility for a war scenario in order to avoid it*”, was a slogan of the 1960s and 1970s. Despite the fact that many officers and NCOs of the new armed forces had been soldiers of the Wehrmacht (or even the Reichswehr), the Bundeswehr self-consciously did away with the militarist culture of previous eras. Instead, it turned itself into an organization under tight political control, both external (within the framework of NATO and the West European Union) and internal (under strict legal provisions and carefully crafted institutions designed to narrow the gap between the military and civil society).

The advent of the new post-Cold War era of international relations in 1990 rendered the strategies of deterrence and territorial defence in Central Europe anachronistic. New threats, risks and dangers in a globalizing security landscape demanded a structural reform of Germany’s security policy and military organization (von Bredow, 2009). The missions for which the Bundeswehr now had to prepare were mainly out-of-area multilateral peace and stabilization missions, provision of first aid programmes by governmental and non-governmental organizations, as well as fighting transnational terrorism and organized crime. To some extent, these new missions served to “constabularize” the military. But they did not, however, change the core focus of the profession of arms – war-fighting and the use of force.

The Bundeswehr had practically no experience with multilateral peace and stabilization missions – and it had had no previous encounter with war-fighting. So its structural adjustment to the new conditions proved a much more difficult process than in other armed forces within NATO. My contention is that it took about two decades for the Bundeswehr to become fully aware of the new situation and really wake up to its implications. The final clarion call came, beginning in 2009, with dire echoes from Afghanistan. German soldiers there had for some time had a rather clear picture of the

collective wishful thinking and self-delusions of politicians and military leaders back home – not to mention the German public as a whole. From about 2006 onwards, the quasi-internal communications (e.g. military blogs) among soldiers with overseas experience have reflected rising dissatisfaction with their political masters and uniformed superiors in Berlin. As such dissatisfaction grew sharper in the last two years, it began to pop up in books and publications. The authors of these books are either former soldiers with first-hand experience in Afghanistan,¹ or journalists who have frequently visited that theatre of operations.² Their common criticism is directed at the political and military leadership of the armed forces for trying to “*cover up the truth about Afghanistan*”.³ But they are also directed against the German public which does not appear to be interested in the Afghanistan mission, in fact in most missions undertaken by the Bundeswehr. The “Afghanistan shock” resides in the sudden awareness that ISAF is not merely about civil reconstruction projects and State-building – it is immersed in a war.⁴

War Prevention and Disaster Relief

There are many reasons for Germany’s reluctance to regard the military as an ordinary instrument of political purpose. The most important is, of course, the deep-reaching structural change of Germany’s political culture after 1945. Militarism, in both its authoritarian (Prussian) and totalitarian (National Socialist) versions, has been washed out of the German collective mentality : the three Western occupation powers were quite successful in initiating and, for some years, controlling a process by which (West) Germany became a democratic country, and not only a peaceful but also a pacifist society at heart.⁵ While that attitude has hardly ever translated into hostility towards the soldiers of the Bundeswehr, the new German armed forces had been founded in 1955 in the face of rather strong dissent in the Bundestag and the public. Such opposition later faded away because, in the threat perception of the Cold War, the Bundeswehr acted as a war-preventing agent. After the Cold War had turned into East-West détente, that public image lost some of its persuasive power. The organized protest against NATO’s double-track decision of 1979 was nowhere as widespread as in the Federal Republic of Germany.

In 1990, with the Cold War’s end and ensuing German reunification, it became of paramount importance for the government in Bonn to defuse the mistrust and fears of neighbouring States about the possibility of renewed German striving for hegemony and

¹ Groos, 2009 ; Hoppe & Brinkmann, 2010 ; Schwitalla, 2010 ; Timmermann-Levanas & Richter, 2010 ; Werner, 2010 ; Wohlgethan, 2008 and 2009.

² Chauvistré, 2009 ; Kornelius, 2009 ; Lindemann, 2010 ; Reichelt & Meyer, 2010.

³ Subtitle of the book by Reichelt & Meyer (2010).

⁴ The term “war” with regard to the situation in Afghanistan was, until recently, a kind of taboo in Germany. When Chancellor Angela Merkel used this term during a visit in Afghanistan in 2010, all newspapers found this so remarkable that they reported and commented on this semantic innovation : see FAZ.Net, 18 December 2010.

⁵ The case of the Soviet Union in the fourth occupation zone was somewhat different with respect to democratic values and attitudes. The military in East Germany always remained under tight control of the SED.

military dominance in Europe. In some left-wing circles, the idea of completely abolishing the Bundeswehr was propagated. That idea met with practically no public resonance. The new status and role of Germany in the international system generated some reasonable expectations from the United Nations, the CSCE and the European Union under the new CFSP, that Germany should take part in multilateral humanitarian missions. The idea of humanitarian intervention became very popular in the 1990s even when it turned out that, however difficult it is to measure the success of such interventions, they were not as effective as initially hoped for. The Germans (like the Europeans as a whole) supported the concept of interventions with (primarily) civilian means. The role of the armed forces on such missions was the protection of NGOs and of the population most exposed to internal violence, as well as the supervision of local and regional cease-fires.

The outcomes of such endeavours left much to be desired, as indeed was the case in Somalia or during the multi-layered civil war in Yugoslavia. ‘Classical’ peacekeeping thus changed into ‘robust’ peacekeeping and ‘military operations other than war’ (MOOTW). In the wake of political conflicts about the participation of the Bundeswehr in multinational missions, the German Constitutional Court (*Bundesverfassungsgericht*) decided on July 12, 1994 that a majority of Bundestag members could, under certain conditions, give the government a mandate to deploy German soldiers on such missions. Chiari & Pahl (2010) count 35 military missions of the Bundeswehr since 1990 (UNPROFOR/ IFOR/ SFOR/ EUFOR in Bosnia, KFOR in Kosovo, ISAF in Afghanistan and UNIFIL II off the coast of Lebanon chief among them). The number of strictly civilian disaster relief missions of the Bundeswehr since 1990 approximately equals that total.

Public Support of the Armed Forces

Each year, the Bundeswehr’s Social Science Institute (SOWI) publishes the results of a public opinion poll it conducts on security matters and German attitudes towards the armed forces. That state-of-the-art survey has an excellent reputation among social scientists outside the defence establishment. In recent years, the general attitude of a majority of German citizens towards the Bundeswehr has remained fairly constant. The confidence in the armed forces is solid: among 15 public agencies and organizations, the Bundeswehr ranks third, only surpassed by the police and the Constitutional Court (with, one might add, political parties at the bottom of the list). When asked about their personal attitudes towards the military, the percentage of Germans who answer “very positive”, “positive” or “slightly positive” varies between extremes of 76% in 1997 and 86% in 2003 and 2007. These are figures that indeed please the political and military leadership of the armed forces. They conceal, however, two unobtrusive characteristics of that generally positive attitude: (a) it is not really based on a thorough interest in the armed forces and knowledge about them, and (b) the soldiers are highly esteemed for all sorts of disaster relief and humanitarian actions, but decidedly not for the military part of their job.

So the degree of information about out-of-area missions of the Bundeswehr is relatively low, as Table 1 illustrates:

Table 1: *Have you heard or read about some of the Bundeswehr's recent missions ?*

	Comprehensive knowledge	Some knowledge	Some vague knowledge	No idea
ISAF Afghanistan	7%	44%	45%	4%
ATALANTA – Somalia coast	4%	28%	49%	19%
KFOR – Kosovo	3%	27%	62%	8%
EUFOR – Bosnia	2%	24%	59%	15%
OEF – Horn of Africa	2%	16%	47%	35%
UNIFIL – Lebanon	1%	14%	50%	35%

Source: SOWI Population Survey 2009

When asked about the priorities of Germany's foreign and security policy, the most prominent issues and goals, with high degrees of concurrence among Germans, are : (1) disaster relief, (2) environment protection, (3) secure peace and (4) Germany's supply of energy and raw materials, (5) enhance respect for human rights, (6) fight climate change, (7) support international law abidance, (8) fight suppression, repression and exploitation, (9) contain international terrorism. The most readily accepted missions of the Bundeswehr in foreign countries are (1) disaster relief, (2) evacuation of German citizens from crisis zones, (3) liberation of German citizens taken hostage, (4) impeding an attack by terrorists on German territory, (5) aiding another NATO member if attacked, (6) stabilizing security in a European crisis, and (7) prevention of genocide.

There is little doubt that these are all honourable goals. With the exception of energy and raw material supply concerns, they are all either well within the realm of *Idealpolitik* on a global scale, or limited to local crises. This reflects the persistent distance of a majority of Germans to any kind of *Realpolitik* with military means. While there is a remarkably high and stable amount of support for the armed forces as such, it is combined with a political distaste of what armed forces are usually for. When this 'acceptance without liability' (von Bredow, 2008, p.83) is put to the test, it is likely to dissipate. ISAF in Afghanistan is a case in point.

Afghanistan Mission: Discrepancy Between Elites and Citizenry

The Afghanistan mission started in 2001-2002 as a coordinated international endeavour to assist in the process of reconstruction and stabilization of a legitimate Afghan government. This was clearly expressed in its name : *International Security Assistance Force* (ISAF). The terror regime of the Taliban had been crushed, and nearly everybody in Afghanistan and among exiled Afghans was supposed to feel liberated and fully motivated to build a functional, perhaps even a democratic political system and a peaceful civil society. This was probably an illusion, but it was fully internalized by the German (Schröder/Fischer) government, then bent on reviving traditional links between Germany and Afghanistan.⁶ In the eyes of the German Cabinet (and public), ISAF was a "soft"

⁶ For an overview of Germany's involvement in Afghan politics from WWI until today, see Möller, 2008.

mission, in contrast to the other international intervention mission in Afghanistan, *Operation Enduring Freedom* (OEF), which was part of the American-led “*global war on international terrorism*” mainly designed to hunt down Al-Qaida and other terrorists on several continents and thus also in Afghanistan.

The Bundeswehr contingent was first deployed to Kabul, but in December 2003 it additionally became jointly responsible for the northern part of Afghanistan. Kunduz and later Feyzabad and Mazar-e-Sharif were the places in which Bundeswehr soldiers were to protect civil reconstruction projects and instruct Afghan security forces (mainly police personnel). In 2005, the number of German ISAF soldiers came close to 3,000 as an enlarged mandate cleared the German Parliament with a comfortable majority. This was understandable, for the northern part of Afghanistan seemed to be a quiet place with only few obvious security problems. For the political and military leadership, and for most of the media, the Afghanistan mission was a burdensome though not explicitly risky venture – in other words, good for the Afghans and good for the international image of Germany.

Due to that perception of the Afghanistan mission, the yearly renewals of the Bundestag mandate were nearly always supported by majorities of over two thirds. Only a handful of CDU/CSU and FDP MPs voted against it. The SPD and the Green Party, while in office, had initiated the Afghanistan mission, but in both parties there was (and still is to this day) a considerable number of opponents, especially after 2005 and even more so after 2009. In turn, public opinion polls always revealed a significantly more sceptical population. Such scepticism has grown stronger over the years. In December 2009, according to an Infratest Dimap survey, 69% of Germans favoured an immediate withdrawal of the German soldiers ; only 17% wanted the mission to continue (Focus, December 3, 2009). In September 2007, 52% wanted the Bundeswehr to pull out of Afghanistan, while 43% wanted the mission to continue. Two years earlier, in September 2005, only 34% were against German participation in ISAF ; 60% were in favour of the mission (FAZNet, Nov 12, 2008). In March 2002, 62% supported German participation in ISAF ; only less than one third of them were against it (*Hamburger Abendblatt*, July 1, 2009).

Table 2: *Growing Dissatisfaction with the ISAF mission*

The Bundeswehr should leave Afghanistan now :

March 2002	30%
April 2004	47%
July 2006	56%
July 2007	55%
September 2008	60%
July 2009	69%

Source: Infratest Dimap, *Der Spiegel*, July 6, 2009

Quite obviously, a gap has opened between the attitude of political elites and the German population (Schoen, 2010, p.396).

The Unexpected War

Most NATO governments, probably with the exception of the United States,⁷ calculated that after the overthrow of the Taliban regime, military violence in the country would steadily decrease. It turned out that this was not correct, and thus some ISAF contingents, notably the Dutch, the British and the Canadians, found themselves drawn into a kind of nasty guerrilla war. “*Nobody predicted the resurgence of the Taliban. It came as a surprise*”, said Canadian General Rick Hillier in an interview in May 2007 (Stein & Lang, 2007, p.289). But Canada was not the only country in Afghanistan that stumbled into an “*unexpected war*”.

For the Germans, the war in Afghanistan came as even more of a surprise than with all other ISAF contingents. German public discourse about humanitarian intervention and peace-building is characterized by a decidedly civilian perspective. Military aspects are not only regarded as secondary, but are systematically played down.

There are, as usual, more than one or two reasons for such political behaviour. Some of them have already been mentioned, but a few others can be cited:

- the German political culture which developed after 1945 has an unmilitary, and in some circles even antimilitary, flavour; Germany, as was often declared in the years of the East-West confrontation, will never again become the source of organized violence and war⁸ – an altogether welcome sociopolitical transformation, and a reassurance for Germany’s neighbours;
- the Bundeswehr was founded in order to strengthen Western deterrence against the Red Army; its soldiers were trained and equipped for a territorial defence mission should a Warsaw Pact aggression materialize;
- after the end of the East-West stand-off, Germany only reluctantly responded to the expectations of other actors to become a security provider in other parts of the world: while political elites were willing to take over this new role, they were also rather cautious because they knew that this return to politics with military means did not really sit well with their electorate;
- the necessity to renew the parliamentary mandate of German participation in the ISAF mission boosts the temptation for both the majority and the opposition to inject populist arguments into the debate;
- since the very beginning of ISAF, a common populist argument in the public and parliamentary debate has been that the “soft” German approach to Afghanistan and its reconstruction problems is much more adequate than the “hard” American approach. This difference stems from the American-German dissonance regarding Iraq. For the SPD-Green Schröder/Fischer Cabinet, the American-led military intervention in Iraq was a political leap in the dark, badly prepared, without sound legitimation and with dangerous consequences. The German government regarded its involvement in

⁷ The United States went into Afghanistan with deceptively high hopes to succeed with a combination of military operations against the Taliban, nation-building (Rupp, 2006) and even democracy-building (Mullen, 2008). Such optimism within the Bush Administration proved unfounded.

⁸ The exact German phrase used by politicians in West and in East Germany was: “*Von deutschem Boden soll nie wieder Krieg ausgehen*”.

Afghanistan instead as a relief operation on invitation, an operation which would soon bear political fruit. This image of the Afghanistan mission persisted even after it was clearly contradicted by the ‘hard’ political and military facts ;

- such a perception rift is also reflected in the German debate about the “nasty” OEF *vs.* the “good” ISAF. Indeed, critics of Western involvement in Afghanistan may have a point : they are two parallel but different missions. Their difference, however, never became a contradiction. But in Germany, many observers perceive the relationship between OEF and ISAF as a kind of zero-sum game. OEF operations often generate civilian victims. Unaware of the fact that such victims (often referred to as “innocent civilian victims”) of civil wars and guerrilla warfare are often used as pawns by enemy propaganda, the German public likes to indulge in anti-American sentiments : US soldiers are not sensitive enough ; they fight the Taliban, but alienate the non-partisan population. That kind of self-flattering condescension disappeared only after the unfortunate fuel truck incident near Kunduz in September 2009 ;
- not unlike other national contingents of other nations, Bundeswehr soldiers came to Afghanistan without the slightest notion about what they would have to cope with. The equipment and the training of the military units were deficient. This serious problem was not discussed in Germany until the number of soldiers killed and wounded in mostly unexpected action began to rise ;
- ISAF contingents have to live with different national caveats. These are rules and regulations about what the soldiers are allowed or not allowed to do when dealing with the enemy. The German caveats were meant to keep the Bundeswehr out of war-fighting. As ISAF was seen as a basically peaceful mission, certainly not a war, the soldiers were instructed to stay out of military fights. This was, as German soldiers frequently reported, rather embarrassing for them because their comrades in other contingents could not understand that enforced restraint.

Caveats, Bureaucratic Clumsiness and Domestic Over-Protection

National caveats in multinational missions are usually not made public on the strength of the argument that adversaries should not enjoy the opportunity to take advantage of divergent norms of military behaviour among the various allied contingents. It is, however, possible to make educated guesses about their contents. All national contingents in ISAF work with some caveats, mainly due to the different domestic legal frameworks and political cultures in which the armed forces have to operate.

The German caveats are especially rigid and not very popular among other national contingents. When Bundeswehr soldiers of the ISAF mission⁹ came to Afghanistan, they were not allowed to take part in any offensive operation. They were also forbidden to support such operations, however indirectly.¹⁰ The use of weapons was only permitted in self-defence. No active dispersion of Taliban fighters and other insurgents, no interference

⁹ There was also a small contingent of German special forces in Afghanistan, as part of the OEF mission. The ISAF caveats, of course, did not apply for these soldiers.

¹⁰ A typical German debate about the exclusion of any indirect support of offensive operations in Afghanistan began in 2007 when the Bundestag decided to send six Tornados to Afghanistan. They were to improve aerial reconnaissance. The Bundestag made it clear that the Tornados should not be used for close air support.

with the drug business were allowed. When, in 2007, 19 German military instructors of an Afghan infantry battalion near Kunduz were asked to accompany it as a mentoring team on a mission in a southern province, the ministry of Defence in Berlin prohibited this by arguing that the mandate delivered by the Bundestag was strictly limited in territorial terms (Jungbauer, 2010, p.67).

For the most part, the German contingent hardly ever leaves camp and busies itself with paperwork and airport logistics (Kornelius, 2009, p.49), or with implementing the rules and regulations for the sorting of waste – a concern of seemingly salient importance on German installations in Afghanistan. The mandate and the mission were designed to avoid any resemblance with a “real” war situation. Or, in the words of one disappointed German veteran of the ISAF mission: “*Germany was only ready to participate in the post-conflict reconstruction because the government felt it would suffice to smile and wave to the Afghan population. Good intentions would generate only friendly responses*”.¹¹

One of the darkest aspects of German unpreparedness for the Afghan mission is the bureaucratic way the ministry of Defence reacted when German soldiers were wounded or killed on duty. Understandably, the Bundeswehr has considerable difficulties in developing some dignified procedures to honour fallen soldiers. The lack of dignified treatment of wounded soldiers is less excusable. There seems to be a blind ambition among defence bureaucrats to keep the number of soldiers with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as low as possible (Timmermann-Levanas & Richter 2010).

Many of these deficits and problems were recently identified and tackled by the then new Defence Minister Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg (in office from 28 October 2009) and the new Bundeswehr Chief of Staff, Gen. Volker Wieker (appointed on 12 January 2010). Despite the immediate context of budget constraints, as of now, there are, however, more than just the usual handful of reform projects¹² and transformation goals waiting for implementation without delay. Unfortunately, Minister zu Guttenberg had to leave office in March 2011 due to an academic plagiarism scandal. His successor, Thomas de Maizière, is less buoyant than zu Guttenberg but firmly devoted to the military reform agenda.

The Kunduz Tragedy

On September 4, 2009, two 500-pound, type GBU-38 bombs exploded in a small river bed near Kunduz. USAF pilots had been called by a German colonel for close air support. In the afternoon of the day before, the Taliban had hijacked two fuel trucks on their way from the Tadjik border to Kabul. Their escape route was suddenly cut when the trucks hit a sandbank and got bogged down in the bed of the Kunduz River. The stranded trucks were soon surrounded by over a hundred people, both Taliban fighters and Afghan civilians from the next village who were curious and wanted to get their share of the loot. The decision process of the German commander and other actors involved remains

¹¹ Lindemann, 2010, p.22.

¹² The most important of these reform projects is the abolition of conscription. Starting in 2011, the Bundeswehr will become an all-volunteer force of eventually 185,000 soldiers (about 25% less than today).

somewhat unclear, but apparently the colonel wanted to hit as many Taliban fighters as possible. The air strike killed all the people surrounding the trucks – between 95 to 142 men and children, many of them innocent bystanders.

In Germany itself, the immediate media response to that incident was enormous. For the first time since WWII, a German officer had been responsible for taking the lives of a hundred or more people in a situation where neither he nor anybody else could discriminate Taliban fighters from civilians. The tragedy occurred about three weeks before the general elections in Germany; the almost worst-case scenario had come true.

A strange ballet followed of erroneous communiqués by the Minister (“no civilian casualties”), strong, later somewhat watered-down, statements by US General McCrystal, a moral indictment by the French Foreign Minister and some of his European colleagues, and reports by several inquiry commissions. The title-story of *Der Spiegel* on February 1, 2010 read : “*A German Crime*”.

The general uproar in the German media first centred on the colonel who had once and perhaps for all time tarnished the image of the German military as a soft, friendly, protective, never-deadly force. Later, when the situation in the local headquarters became a little more transparent and the colonel’s share of the blame was relativized, the Minister, his Chief of Staff, General Schneiderhan, and the ministry’s public information department became the media’s main targets.

The Kunduz tragedy generated two partly contradictory developments:

- it was a wake-up call for the defence bureaucracy and the politicians who represented it – the role of the Bundeswehr in Afghanistan had to be reconsidered; the self-perception of Germany as a peace-builder in Afghanistan had been lost ;
- the decision of the voters in the general elections of September 27, 2009 was hardly influenced by the huge media reporting and the political debate in the Bundestag. A majority of Germans did not support the Afghanistan mission, and the number of its critics rose after the Kunduz incident. But the electorate did not send a strong signal to the political parties to take notice of its mainly negative attitude towards the mission (Schoen 2010, p.405).

Exit Strategy

Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg styled himself as a young and dynamic defence minister with a huge reform programme, who did not shy away from frank statements. He pushed the limits of German Afghanistan mission semantics from “*stabilization mission*” to “*warlike conditions*” to “*war*”. The chancellor reluctantly followed suit. Guttenberg was not very popular in the Ministry of Defence, but the Bundeswehr soldiers in Afghanistan seemed to like his more open approach because it was accompanied by some badly needed improvements in their equipment. Since then, unfortunately, the security situation in Afghanistan, notably in the Northern provinces, has hardly changed for the better. Meanwhile, with other national contingents on their way out of ISAF, the German debate has started to concentrate on the last stage of the mission, its exit strategy.

The earlier goals of Germany and other Western countries in Afghanistan are now regarded as politically naive, over-ambitious and even counterproductive for long-term relations with the Muslim world. This is probably a realistic view ; yet, to change the perspective from inconsiderate optimism to indifferent pessimism is not the solution to this complicated problem: it, in fact, complicates it further. For the more serious observers of the situation in Afghanistan, it is evident that behind the internal difficulties of that country lurk some dangerous macro-regional entanglements – Pakistan as a fragile State with nuclear weapons and its territorial conflicts with India, the geopolitical role of Iran, and the weakness of most (formerly Soviet) Central Asian countries.

It is thus more than understandable that most NATO countries now want to remove their contingents from Afghanistan. The domestic pressure in the Netherlands, Canada, and the United States has been mounting over the last two years. The German government just published a *Progress Report* of the Foreign Office about Afghanistan.¹³ Its language is more subdued than in earlier publications from Berlin on the topic. The report paints a ‘mixed picture’. But it also makes clear that Germany will start to hand over its share of responsibility for the security of the country to Afghan agencies in 2011, a process it expects to complete by 2014. Meanwhile, there is a felt political competition between the political parties and their security policy experts as to the pace of the disengagement. The slogan “Leave Afghanistan NOW !”¹⁴ was to date only used by the far-left party, Die Linke, and a handful of journalists like that most famous veteran among Germany’s war reporters, Peter Scholl-Latour. It is now quietly gaining more and more support from other parties. In turn, public opinion polls serve to emphasize the dissatisfaction of Germans with the country’s involvement in Afghanistan, but also their indifference as to what happens there. The turmoil after the Kunduz tragedy of September 2009 has faded away.

Which Lesson to Learn?

Considering the wasted hopes and good will of the Afghan people, one may be tempted to call the Afghanistan mission a complete failure. However, this would be premature. The expectations and promises of three successive German governments¹⁵ were politically unprofessional. It is only a small excuse to point to other governments which made more or less the same promises and had the same expectations. The nearly ten years of Western presence in Afghanistan have had an impact on the country, but it is too early to precisely predict what will remain of it.

One of the foreign policy lessons one can learn from the Afghanistan mission is that governments should either avoid comprehensive out-of-area missions or provide them with the necessary, both financial and military, means if or when needed. Once a decision to intervene has been taken, the stabilization process should be supported without delay. A ‘diet intervention’ does not elicit any useful results.

¹³ See Anonymous (Bundesregierung), 2000.

¹⁴ In German : “*RAUS aus Afghanistan !*”.

¹⁵ “Red/Green” (Schröder/ Fischer) until 2005 ; “Great Coalition” (Merkel/ Steinmeier) until 2009 ; “Black/Yellow” (Merkel/ Westerwelle) since 2009.

Germans seem to have learned that if the political use of military means is legitimate and necessary, it does not make sense to use them half-heartedly. Resort to military force always runs the risk of damaging the ‘wrong people’. That is one of the main reasons why democratic governments should be extremely cautious in making use of the military. The Afghanistan mission, and especially the Kunduz tragedy, caused shock. Introducing the Progress Report Afghanistan on 13 December 2010 in the German Bundestag, Foreign Minister Westerwelle said concerning the Bundeswehr mission there: “*We said goodbye to the image of the development aid worker in uniform*”. While the ‘new’ militaries of Western countries sometimes function, indeed, as arms-bearing social workers, this is only part of their job description; the other part, to the chagrin of all post-heroic sentiments in our societies, includes the efficient use of organized violence.

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