

## **Is Europe willing and able to stabilise Afghanistan?<sup>1</sup>**

*To justify Germany's military mission in Afghanistan, former Defence Minister Peter Struck once said: "Our security must also be defended on the Hindukush." This realisation seems to be lost in Europe. The readiness to send troops is almost non-existent and even the EU's civilian contribution in Afghanistan seems hardly adequate. Meanwhile, the security situation in Afghanistan is deteriorating. Six years after the collapse of the Taliban regime, US, Canadian and European troops are fighting a resurgent Taliban. Should Europe reinforce its military and civilian involvement? How should its military capacities be deployed in relation to NATO and the UN? What role can the EU's special Representative in Kabul play? Can Afghanistan be stabilised without engaging Pakistan and, finally, is it possible and advisable to negotiate with the Taliban?*

### **Introduction**

With some 8.000 deaths, 2007 was the deadliest year in Afghanistan since the Taliban were ousted. French president Sarkozy has promised more troops (probably 1.000, added to the current deployment of 1.500), but France wants to see the NATO strategy clarified. Australia, the largest non-NATO ISAF contributor, has asked for new NATO strategy. Germany is under pressure to send more troops, remove the constraints on the mandate of those already there and to deploy them in more dangerous areas. The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) has 47.000 soldiers. Outside ISAF, the US has another 14.000 troops. Is the gradual increase in troop numbers a sufficient answer? Has the NATO summit in Bucharest which decided to send 2.000 more troops basically just contributed to a further deterioration of the security situation in Afghanistan?

### **Europe's role in Afghanistan**

ISAF is a UN-mandated, NATO-led operation and the worst thing Europe could do is add a military mission or mandate to that. This would only create more confusion than we already have. What Europe could or should do is enhance its military contribution, reduce and eliminate the caveats that exist and be able to deploy also to the southern provinces where fighting is toughest. The point is that Europeans are unwilling (Western Europe) or unable (Eastern Europe) to contribute worthwhile numbers of troops to Afghanistan, especially the southern provinces where fighting is the toughest. And the Dutch are

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<sup>1</sup> Guest speakers were *Christa Meindersma*, Deputy Director External Affairs and Director Conflict Management at The Hague Centre of Strategic Studies, HCSS, *Daniel Korski*, Senior Policy Fellow, European Council of Foreign Relations and *Bettina Muscheidt*, European Commission, External Relations Directorate-General/H4, Desk Afghanistan. The debate took place under Chatham House Rule. The opinions expressed do not necessarily represent the opinions of the Heinrich Böll Foundation

pulling out. On the civilian side, there should be an enhancement of the European Union activities: rule of law political, regional approach and also the political process. As regards the rule of law, last year ISAF decided that a complete overhaul of the police is necessary, because its quality is very low. After these reports came out, an ESDP police mission was launched in 2007 – however, the EU had trouble even recruiting 170 police trainers. The *European Justice Programme* has just begun. A lot could be done to enhance the European role in terms of rule of law, including police, and justice. Governance is the other area where the EU has a role to play. Governance and rule of law are they key to stabilisation. In fact, most interventions of the international community do not achieve what they could achieve because they fail to establish some sort of resemblance of governance which is necessary from day one. The key to stabilisation in Afghanistan is to establish good governance and provide tangible improvements to the life of ordinary Afghans. It is advisable not only to offer financial, but also political assistance. The greatest security concern of Afghans is not the Taliban but the absence of governance or the fact that the representatives are corrupt which enables the Taliban to fill in that gap. The weakness of local governance has allowed criminal elements to assert themselves thus undermining reconstruction efforts and aggravating security. NATO does not want to establish a parallel government, but on the other hand it is coming up to the fact that there is no structure of authority they can work with and that the population trusts.

### **Regional approach**

A regional approach is necessary to achieve a resolution in Afghanistan. Relations with Pakistan, Iran and the central Asian republics bordering Afghanistan are the key to the stabilisation of Afghanistan and the wider region. Especially the situation on both sides of the Durand-line, the contested border between Pakistan and Afghanistan, asks for a coordinated approach to the Pashtun-inhabited tribal belt straddling the border.

Statements the new government in Pakistan has made emphasise the need for a political process, coordinated with reconstruction efforts and possibly some military involvement as well. Pakistan has indeed a strategic interest in a stable Afghanistan and vice versa, and the international community has an interest in both. Therefore, instead of pursuing separate initiatives in Afghanistan where the international community has a very strong presence and Pakistan where its presence is much more related to the support for the war on terror and some individual country initiatives, the approach to Pakistan and Afghanistan should be joint, especially for the Pashtun area. For the Pashtuns, that border does not exist. It is one area whether we accept that or not. Here Europe is really in a unique position to take up the challenge and to facilitate a regional approach.

Europe has long standing relations with both, Afghanistan and Pakistan, at different levels from different aspects of Europe. In Asia in general Europe is seen as different from the United States. It is respected as the experiment it is, an experiment in regional cooperation. It has a different inroad, a different credibility with countries like Afghanistan and Pakistan. A joint commission with Pakistan meets annually to discuss issues like good governance and regional cooperation.

The EU is also Pakistan's largest trading partner and Afghanistan's second trading partner. Europe could use its position as an observer position to SAARC, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, of which both Pakistan and Afghanistan are a member to enhance and facilitate regional approaches and regional cooperation. Some overtures have been made particularly at presidential level, but also at military level.

As far as the regional situation is concerned, the hope is that the Pakistani elections have delivered a mandate too much more moderate forces. In the border areas people have voted for moderate parties. There are now plans to change the status of these areas, to bring them more into the main stream. There is a tremendous political will. The EC has regional funds which could be very openly deployed between the two countries. The dialogue between the two presidents has improved, there is the aid initiative. We need the Afghan government to be much more committed. They need to take the process forward. They need to create the conditions for assistance, sustainable skills levels have to be developed.

The European Commission Strategy for Afghanistan from 2007-2013<sup>2</sup> is interesting, because it proposes a number of cross-border initiatives, but it proposes them in the north and the area directly east of Kabul. It would be interesting to see if those kind of initiatives would be feasible in the southern Pashtun-inhabited regions.

### **The security situation**

The NATO-summit did not turn into a nasty squabble about how many more troops to send to Afghanistan. And the European Foreign Ministers for the first time met to discuss Afghanistan, which is amazing seen the fact how much money flows into Afghanistan and how many European soldiers are there and how many European soldiers have died. They have scheduled two more meetings on Afghanistan and Pakistan in May and June.

The security situation in Afghanistan has deteriorated. Safe areas are rare. Even Kabul which used to be safe is now difficult to operate in for NGOs and even for the international military forces. The drug economy, the criminalized economy is now eating its way into the fabric of the state providing very few legitimate alternatives for economic development.

We created a Potemkin state in Kabul which is not able to deliver some of the key services outside the city limits. Right now the president finds it not only difficult to rule Kabul, but its own government and even part of the presidential palace. Speaking of Karzai, one of the challenges is that he is looking towards re-election in 2009 and whether he will be able to rally his Pashtun base and worry whether the Northern Alliance is able to strike some deal with various Pashtun elements or come up with an alternative candidate. So, we're dealing with an electoral process and an elected leader who like all elected leaders is focussed very much on keeping his job.

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<sup>2</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/external\\_relations/afghanistan/csp/07\\_13\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/afghanistan/csp/07_13_en.pdf)

### **Outreach as a strategic priority**

There has been an incredible uneven development. No doubt in some areas we have seen an amazing progress. The country can roughly be divided into three: the quiescent north where a complex but probably corrupt equilibrium exists between the warlords and the international alliance; the international hub in Kabul which still has elements of a lifestyle which you are more accustomed to see in the Middle East. And the insurgency-ridden south and east where hardened insurgency groups are fighting the international forces. Finally, we have a serious problem with the way we have done „outreach“ to various insurgency groups. We have a „cafeteria approach“: we have accepted people who crossed over to the government's side, if they walked into our „cafeteria“. If they have volunteered to engage, we have engaged with them.

US and UK forces have followed this approach. It hasn't been a strategic priority: we have not strategically decided who we want to engage with, thought about ways we entice them to join our side be it by financial inducement or threat of violence. This cafeteria-style approach has not been particularly effective.

The situation in Afghanistan is a political problem, there is no military solution to the situation in Afghanistan. 8.000 people were killed last year. Some of those people are allegedly Taliban, others civilians. That seems to be a military success. However, there is a discrepancy between what international forces may consider Taliban and how the locals see it, i.e. as their sons which under Pashtun code of honour may be an obligation leading to more recruitment for the Taliban. Therefore, we should be prepared for negotiations between the Taliban and the Afghan government. The EU can facilitate the process, they should not be the one to conduct this very complex process. There are initiatives on the way and it is up to us using them in the process. The Taliban can be easier beaten politically than militarily.

Nobody consists president Karzai's claim that everybody has to sign up to the constitutional frame. However, in most cases the constitution is not relevant for people's lives. A wide-spread disenfranchisement on the side of the Pashtun is leading a lot of people to search for other forms of protection, that easily leads to support for various insurgency groups. Despite of what president Karzai says it is not believed that it is the government's strategic priority to negotiate with people.

Europe cannot turn this situation around on its own, but we have to think about what is it we want the international community to do differently. Bucharest should have become the fountain head of that process of developing a new strategy. Perhaps Paris will be. But it is indeed important to first ask what could be done cross the border, before one can ask what the EU should do differently. A new plan needs to focus on outreach making it a much more strategic priority, finding the resources using, the skilled people to assist Afghan government in doing this outreach.

The bottom line is: there is no military solution, an outreach has to be an element of this. We have to focus much more on local government. We have created a series of state structures which cannot deliver on the ground. How do we take an expensive

development desiderata where each NGO is plodding along on their own and together it does not add up to much. At the Paris Conference we have to narrow down our focus to a few priorities with which we and the Afghan government can pursue for the next two years. It looks like the Afghan development strategy is not going to be this narrowed focus.

It is crucial that we are honest with ourselves and admit that Afghanistan is not going to achieve all these great things we had planned. We need some sort of Baker-Hamilton style committee in Europe with prominent Europeans like Joschka Fischer and Kugler.

### **Towards an integrated approach**

How can US and EU join forces? Let's talk in terms of integrating the EU's instruments. It was appalling to see how the EU was doing in the Balkans, in Kabul it is even less coordinated. There is no way out of an integrated approach.

- Afghanistan and Pakistan have to be regularly on the EU agenda.
- NATO and EU need to regularly talk...
- There needs to be a high level responsible person for Afghanistan in Brussels like in US.
- There needs to be a high level responsible in the Council for Afghanistan.
- A lot more people need to do police reform, maybe the EU gendarmerie force should be transferred from Sarajevo to Afghanistan.
- We need to find new ways in which to conceive development assistance. Let's take the twelve largest cities in Afghanistan, and let the EU take charge of reconstruction in those cities. If we loose these cities, we find ourselves in big trouble as does the Afghan government. Something drastic needs to be done similar to what was done in Mostar and Bosnia and certain parts of Kosovo.

### **The role of the European Commission**

The European Commission is certainly willing to stabilise Afghanistan: it has a seven year commitment towards Afghanistan. That long-term commitment makes the Commission exceptional compared with other donors. This enables the Afghan government to plan ahead with a certainty. The Commission has also proven that it is able to contribute to Afghanistan's stabilisation: in 2002 the European Commission had pledged 1 billion dollar for the period of five years and that pledge was fulfilled in 2005 already. It now stands at 1.2 billion dollars that have been committed. There can be no doubt about the Commission's ability. To stabilise is actually a low aim, we have to aim at success. Afghanistan has to become a stable and prosperous member of the community of nations. We have to be very clear about our long-term commitment. It needs to be a comprehensive approach: political and military solution cannot be separated. The new special EU envoy in Afghanistan, Francesc Vendrell, emphasises clear strategic goals and good donor coordination.

There are three focal sectors: rural development; governance; and health. There are also three non-focal areas: social protection; mine action; and regional cooperation. The activities in the non focal areas directly or indirectly reinforce specific activities being

pursued in the priority focal sectors. The CSP's proposed focal areas are all priority sectors of the *i-ANDS*. The new CSP aims to contribute to addressing the fundamental challenges facing Afghanistan in dealing with the narcotics economy and in establishing a proper functioning rule of law. Although there will be continued support to central ministries and national programmes, there is an increased emphasis in this CSP on strengthening the rule of law and structures of government at the provincial and district level.

The importance of good aid coordination is central. Ideally it would be the Afghan governance to fulfil this role. In the absence of such guidance, all hope goes out to the UN and the new envoy. It would help to organise the donors in talking to the Afghan government. Unity and coherence are absolutely important.

The opium economy is linked to poverty as well as the absence of governance. The Commission's answer to this is to work in a number of regions in the east of the country where rural development is addressed in a comprehensive way. Of the 160 million invested there, a large part goes to rural development. There have been serious and sustainable reductions of opium poppies. Where people have an alternative, there is an overall reduction.

The EC is one of three key donors in the health sector. Seven years ago, Afghanistan had a 7% health coverage – now it is eighty percent. And the child mortality rate has been reduced by 25%. You will have to look into recent history anywhere in the world to find such an achievement. We should not brush over that kind of thing easily. 80% health coverage means that any Afghan has in one and a half hours of walking distance a facility of primary healthcare. That matters in everybody's life.

### **Security and justice**

Success also means a better link between security and justice. A paper in run-up to Bucharest conference said „State building requires security, but durable security requires a legitimate state.“ That motivates very much the focus of the European Commission's focus on reform of the justice institutions. That is a focus that ties in with the police mission. Afghanistan at this moment has a legal system where some lawyers have no training, some have had a training under Soviet times, others had training under the Taliban. Also, there is no legal aid. Therefore, the Commission has launched - in keeping with the national planning for justice reform- a programme in its pilot phase that would aim at professionalising the justice systems of the country so that it can become credible in the eyes of the citizens and actually deliver justice to citizens. It will be crucial that the Afghan government embraces that reform, only then we will be able to channel a major part of the funding under this bi-lateral aid programme in the next years to the justice sector. The Commission has been since 2002 the biggest donor to the police sector reform and salaries. Some 200 million Euros were put into a trust fund for this. How this aid is delivered is crucial, because aid will decrease. The levels of the Tokyo conference cannot be sustained over a very long time. The EC gives over 50% of its funding to the trust funds that are managed by the UN, the Worldbank. First of all this is important to facilitate coherence of donor interventions. The EC is also in keeping with

the Afghanistan Compact<sup>3</sup> which is a morally binding commitment between the donor community and the Afghan government.

We need more commitment in terms of fighting corruption. More could be done to uphold human rights and press freedom. Corruption and human rights are sometimes also brushed aside by some international partners. We have seen some encouraging development over the last year, but all of a sudden we see press freedom being curtailed, the religious council is allowed to overrule the wider concerns of democratic state-building values like freedoms of expression and media. The Afghans have to ask themselves serious questions like what kind of state they want and what project they want us to support. Keeping in mind that we all have our own domestic constituencies and people are asking themselves very serious questions when they read that soldiers die and on the other hand someone who downloaded material from the Internet is being put up for a death sentence for that. That diminishes domestic support in Europe.

### **The role of NGOs**

When the international community started in 2002, the institutional basis for doing anything was close to zero. The Commission followed a dual track. Through the trust funds, but also with individual projects that support rural development and the health sector where it worked with private providers and with NGOs, local or international.. All of that is done under the strict umbrella of the Afghan National Planning and with a political emphasis on the UN as central coordinating force. This is the only way we can go forward. If we don't strengthen the Afghan government, if we don't make it credible to the people, then: why are we there?

Especially with the military there is a huge misperception about what NGOs are: sometimes there is a huge outcry for NGOs to come in and take over – but it doesn't work that way. NGOs have their own mandates, funders and priorities. They act pretty independently. That also raises a lot of questions in a local context concerning working parallel to or in support of local institutions and authorities or not. There is a need for a comprehensive approach which should include everyone. But one has to accept the special character of NGOs. Trying to get the NGOs to do what you want will be impossible. What we really need is a civilian rapidly deployable expeditionary capacity that can be directed, that works in tandem with the military or police effort that is going on in a certain country. That is not what you can expect from NGOs. Those skills would be in the area of rule of law, governance, institution building. It is wrong to look at NGOs in that respect: NGOs are not politically accountable. But we need civilians who can bring in those skills from day one when an intervention takes place.

### **Conclusion**

The EU has no strategic plan. There are different plans, but no overall strategic concept. There is the Afghan Compact, there is the Afghan national development strategy that is not really a strategy, there is the NATO public plan. We will have to talk about what to focus on over the next years and we will have to have the commitment to do it. The problem in Afghanistan is not that we do not know where things are going wrong. We do

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.nato.int/isaf/docu/epub/pdf/afghanistan\\_compact.pdf](http://www.nato.int/isaf/docu/epub/pdf/afghanistan_compact.pdf)

know. There is a lack of political will and we have to persuade the European populations. We need to win the hearts and minds of population at home. It's about being honest. European citizens need to know what we are doing there.