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Searching for the right audience: The military's ISAF experience

The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan started its mission in 2001. With a military presence of only 5,000 troops, its task was to assist the Afghan Security Forces in providing security in Kabul. ISAF remained separate from the US-led anti-terror mission Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). In support of the *Bonn Process*, however, ISAF included more and more OEF troops and resources as the operation progressed. Until the summer of 2003, the mission was led by four individual nations, Great Britain, Turkey, Germany and the Netherlands, at which point NATO took over the headquarters in Kabul and the mission. In October 2003, UN Resolution 1510 extended the ISAF area of responsibility beyond the borders of Kabul.

In the dialogues of specialists, politicians and – to a far lesser extent – in the perception of the European public, civil-military Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) have been the central ISAF tool to stabilize Afghanistan. These PRTs, originally established as part of OEF and based on experiences gained in Iraq, covered a continuously growing number of provinces (28 installations in October 2011), and were each manned with up to several hundred military and civilian personnel. Functioning as a kind of Western bridgehead, their ultimate goal was to enhance the popular legitimacy of the Afghan government by developing Afghan capacities to conduct reconstruction, and to support the provision of security and good governance. Designed as interdepartmental teams, the PRTs coordinated, developed, and funded local projects in close coordination with the Afghan government. This included the distribution of school and medical supplies, construction work to improve the local infrastructure, as well as police training, programs to support the Afghan law enforcement authorities and the funding of education projects. In practice, however, the overwhelming majority of PRT personnel were military, including civil and public affairs, information operations, engineers, medical staff, logistics, and for security and force protection.

Between 2002 and 2013, the PRTs in Afghanistan faced many challenges for only limited results. After 2006, a deteriorating security situation in many parts of the country and escalating battles against a growing guerilla – subsumed under the term »Taliban movement« – brought the purely military aspects of the mission to the center of public attention. Until the Afghanistan conference in London (2006), optimistic (neo)liberals announced that »failed states« in the »Third World« could be cured with surgical interventions; that new military-technical means would make it easier and cheaper to successfully fight asymmetrical enemies. Afghanistan proved this an illusion.

In the west and north, the escalation of violence and the intensity of military operations reached their peak in 2010 with hot spots in Badghis, Faryab, Kunduz,

and Baghlan Provinces. In Europe and the US, the public became aware that the intervention did not reach all desired effects. Although vast resources were invested in the mission, it is evident that the civilian and military engagement did not meet the expectations – neither those of the international community nor those of most of the Afghans. Instead, the length of the intervention, the exorbitant costs, the loss of human life, the lack of legitimacy and very complex demands for leadership had to be explained to the US and European publics.

This book focuses on the European military forces as part of the security and stabilization architecture in Afghanistan. It outlines how, in the tremendously difficult and changing Afghan environment, the PRTs, meant as a primarily civilian instrument for reconstruction, got pulled into a military mission and, temporarily, into a war. The authors give various insights how »the« ISAF mission functioned on the different operational levels of the PRTs, Regional Commands, or HQs, and how these levels interconnected. The case studies also show how, despite the existence of comprehensive, interdepartmental, and civil-military conceptions, ISAF and the PRTs were in fact driven by individual actors and their specific logics, being they national, civilian, military, political, or economic. Designating the PRTs as catalyzers of diverging national philosophies and understandings, we try to show how these installations worked on the diplomatic-political level, and as parts of national bureaucracies and inter-agency collaborations. In selected cases, we examine the performance and effectiveness of the PRTs on the ground, including Afghan perceptions, and ask how commanders and soldiers experienced their missions from an individual perspective. Finally, we discuss the way in which the ISAF and the PRTs were connected with the troop contributing countries and in what way the Afghan experience changed the European armed forces and the understanding of crisis and conflict management or stabilization operations in general. Admittedly, what this book does not offer is a comprehensive analysis and balance of the international and interdepartmental stabilization efforts in Afghanistan.

Venus and Mars? The Afghanistan setting

The PRTs were designed for a more or less peaceful environment after the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001 when organizing elections, physical reconstruction and the disarmament of militias seemed to be the main challenges in Afghanistan. To stabilize a war-shaken country with the help of diplomats and civilian specialists seemed to fit perfectly into the self-ascription of peaceful European democracies. In Afghanistan, the PRT tool obviously enabled a nation to determine what was needed most in the country. The presence of PRTs would, the public expected, create a functioning, more stable society, willing and capable to resist extremist attacks. Therefore, the civilian portion of the PRT was increasingly strengthened, at least in the underlying conceptions and regulations. In the first years of spreading ISAF from Kabul to other parts of Afghanistan, even small European NATO members literally competed to become part of the PRT initiative. In the US and,

to a lesser extent, in Europe, the PRT system was seen as an opportunity to prove national capabilities and – sometimes in a quite naïve way – to transport cultural and political values to the »underdeveloped« and suffering Afghan society.¹

European countries ran – with the exception of the US in Farah Province – all PRTs in the Regional Commands (RC) North and West. In this book, the European engagement in Afghanistan is described in detail and the war led by the US in the south and east, supported by the UK, Canada, and Australia, is not in the focus.² The European perspective seems important and relevant insofar as the Afghanistan mission was a new experience for most of the European troop contributors and therefore had far greater implications on their military and political systems as in the US or UK.

In Germany, for example, ISAF was discussed as »Trial by Fire for a whole Nation.«³ Italy, the Nordic troop contributors, Hungary, Lithuania or Spain also belonged to the group of nations characterized by Robert Kagan in 2002 as »coming from Venus and not from Mars«: In the post-historical paradise of Europe, Kagan argued at that time, these states counted on trans-, inter- and supranational cooperation to secure peace and wealth. In contrast, the US were convinced that only military power would enable a nation to hold its ground. The military strength of the US, eventually, gave the Europeans the opportunity to stay on their comfortable Venus planet for many years after the Berlin Wall had come down.⁴

ISAF developed momentum at least to put the Venus-Mars-dichotomy to discussion. In the early years of the mission, the spreading PRT-net on the one hand and OEF on the other seemed to perfectly represent these two diverging philosophies.⁵ ISAF PRTs in the north and west were explicitly designed to contribute to the Afghan state-building project in a »good«, humanitarian understanding. The PRT concept was ground laying in broadening the scope of peace support and stabilization-type effort. But when the security situation deteriorated more and more, the Europeans from Venus were confronted with Mars attacks in the form of an insurgency described as »Taliban.« Moreover, the US sent enormous troop reinforcements, thus progressively militarizing the ISAF mission.⁶

¹ Mike D. Capstick, »The Civil-Military Effort in Afghanistan: A Strategic Perspective,« *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 10, no. 1 (2007): pp. 1-27.

² To the US mindset in Afghanistan, see David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerilla. Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), which is dealt with in several articles of this book.

³ *Bewährungsproben einer Nation. Die Entsendung der Bundeswehr ins Ausland*, ed. Christoph Schwegmann (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2011).

⁴ Robert Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003); German ed. *Macht und Ohnmacht. Amerika gegen Europa in der neuen Weltordnung* (Berlin: Siedler, 2003).

⁵ Markus Gauster, »Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan,« Occasional Paper Series, 16, George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies (January 2008); ISAF PRT Handbook, Edition 4 (NATO, March 2009), accessible on <http://publicintelligence.net/isaf-provincial-reconstruction-team-prt-handbook/>.

⁶ For an analysis of the various PRT models see Oskari Eronen, »PRT Models in Afghanistan: Approaches to Civil-Military Integration,« *CMC Finland Civilian Crisis Management Studies* 1, no. 5 (2008); Nima Abbaszadeh, et al., *Provincial Reconstruction Teams: Lessons and Rec-*

In an increasingly difficult situation, all troop contributors experimented with varying national approaches for stabilization and reconstruction. This created a kind of laboratory situation in their respective provinces. In the meantime, the PRT operators themselves were put into this laboratory situation as well. In the Italian and German cases, two deeply unmilitary and pacifist European societies were faced with a growing military engagement in northern and western Afghanistan, including intense fighting in several districts on an almost daily basis. The ISAF engagement caused a fundamental debate within the various political and intellectual communities and think tanks on how to proceed in Afghanistan. As the level of violence mounted, at least for a short time even the public took part in a discussion on how peace-enforcement, peace-keeping, or various stabilization efforts in »failed states« should be dealt with in the Afghan case as well as in comparable future missions, and which role the military should play.⁷

Originally, all PRT concepts designated the role of armed bystanders to the military. Soldiers would enable other actors to do the real reconstruction and stabilization work. Sometimes, however, as the only considerable party in a province, the military would get into a precarious position between the order to establish the secure conditions for the political buildup of Afghanistan, and the need to directly pursue political objectives itself.⁸ In 2009, the European militaries progressively introduced the so-called »COIN (Counter-Insurgency) strategy« as panacea to change the course of history in Afghanistan, reflecting this balancing act. The »COIN« strategy was an attempt to adapt the ISAF efforts to an environment that differed from conventional war scenarios, where a conflict was decided between distinguishable sides or parties. In practice, »COIN« was meant to evaluate an area, and clear it of the enemy with »kinetic« military means. The area would then be secured for the Afghan government with the help of permanently deploying Afghan Security Forces (ANSF) and economic measures, flanked and supported by the so-called »key-leader-engagement« (getting the support of local leaders), info operations etc. COIN was meant to »win the hearts and minds« of the populace and legitimize the ISAF cause.⁹

For the US or the UK, COIN was a steadily further developed doctrine, based on experiences made with guerrilla warfare in the 20th century and, in the British case, linked with the colonial past of the Empire. As the mission to support the Afghan government met with increasing armed opposition, countries like Germany or Italy participated de facto in COIN operations. For a very long time, however, they did not develop national COIN doctrines or strategies

ommendations (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Relations, 2008).

⁷ See *Aufstand und Demokratie: Counterinsurgency als normative und praktische Herausforderung*, eds. Martin Sebaldt and Alexander Straßner (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2011); *Einsatz für den Frieden. Sicherheit und Entwicklung in Räumen begrenzter Staatlichkeit*, eds. Josef Braml, Thomas Risse and Eberhard Sandschneider (München: Oldenbourg, 2010).

⁸ *Statebuilding in Afghanistan: Multinational Contributions to Reconstruction*, eds. Nik Hynek and Péter Marton (London: Routledge, 2012).

⁹ See *Understanding Counterinsurgency. Doctrine, Operations, and Challenges*, eds. Thomas Rid and Thomas Keaney (London, New York: Routledge, 2010).

themselves. For example, for a long time, Germany continued to emphasize the primacy of the reconstruction element of its mission and tried very much to stay clear of combat operations against an insurgency. The reasons for this lay in the almost exclusively negative perceptions of experiences during the short period of German colonial history before 1918. This applied even more to the anti-partisan warfare (*Bandenkrieg*) the Wehrmacht and SS conducted as part of Hitler's war of extermination in the occupied parts of the Soviet Union between 1941 and 1944.¹⁰

From the military's perspective and on the practical level, the COIN strategy here and there turned out to be an operational directive born out of necessity for engaging insurgents. It was very seldom that the necessary means to conduct effective COIN operations were available at all. And, if the planning had been finished successfully, single measures were not coordinated well enough to have lasting effects. As a German PRT commander bitterly remarked in his after-action report in 2010, COIN frequently ended up with unclear operational execution, vague definitions, and »strategic statements, even at the sub-tactical level« which made the doctrine an inept means of orientation for the units and single soldiers.¹¹

Afghanistan deeply changed the European Armed Forces. The Afghan mission demanded new professional skills and shaped a new professional self-conception within the European armies. For the responsible commanders, ISAF was a new and challenging task already with regard to the quickly changing own and enemy's tactics, techniques, and procedures. But in addition to their strictly military expertise, military leaders now were expected to develop a new quality of understanding of the environment they acted in. A classical military conflict required capabilities to collect information on the order of battle and probable intention of the antagonistic party. Now, battlefield reconnaissance was replaced by the Intelligence Preparation of the Battlespace (IPB), to be conducted in continuous cycles.¹² In a COIN environment, an IPB theoretically covered structures, groups, relations and conflicts, relevant for combined military-civilian efforts of a mission. In simple words, ISAF commanders in Afghanistan were expected to understand and assess the local environment in full depth. They were tasked with affecting a social and economic system as complex as global climate. It goes without saying that this demand sometimes overburdened the responsible military and civilian personnel.¹³

Last but not least, military forces had to act in an environment of a complexity previously unknown, including the political sphere. From an organization-

¹⁰ Eric Sangar, *Historical Experience. Burden or Bonus in Today's Wars? The British Army and the Bundeswehr in Afghanistan* (Freiburg i.Br.: Rombach, 2014).

¹¹ Einsatzsammlung (Mission collection) of the Bundeswehr Center of Military History and Social Sciences (ES ZMSBw), Erfahrungsbericht (Mission Report) 21. DtEinsKtgt ISAF, 26 March 2010, Anlage B, Teil C, Zusammenfassung wesentlicher Einzelerkenntnisse und Feststellungen des Kommandeurs, Nr. 137.

¹² For an unclassified overview see (US) National Geospatial-Intelligence College, Intelligence Preparation of the Battlespace, http://www.dsg.eb.mil.br/seminario_eua/arquivos/H-010%20Intelligence%20Preparation%20of%20the%20Battlespace.pdf.

¹³ The author served 2010 and 2012 as Intelligence Staff Officer in northern Afghanistan. Experiences in theatre, as well as with the national and NATO pre-deployment training have been integrated in this article.

al perspective, the military became part of a relationship network and had to maneuver between different audiences in Afghanistan and elsewhere.¹⁴ Firstly, US or European armies acted within joint and national military structures and networks in which decision-makers had to address different audiences to be successful. NATO or ISAF Head Quarters, the steadily growing staffs of the Regional Commands, or the isolated worlds of PRTs in remote areas partly functioned as closed systems, which kept themselves busy. Although part of strictly hierarchic military organizations, specialized branches or temporary projects led a life of their own, kept or developed their own logics, rationalities, or patterns of work. They tended to secure themselves and to demonstrate their own *raison d'être* within the whole structure. National military cultures and conditionings, or attempts to distinguish oneself with projects appealing to the current ISAF *zeitgeist*, sometimes were more important for the conduct of operations than considerations on what to do how and where in Afghanistan.¹⁵

Secondly, the military had to coordinate with security stakeholders such as the United Nations or with the numerous governmental or non-governmental organizations. Communication and cooperation were not always simple, sometimes due to the lack of respective structures and procedures, sometimes as result of different philosophies between civilian and military partners. Thirdly, the ISAF mission as a neutral observer and mediator strongly required the support of political, social, or economic groups within Afghanistan itself. The Afghan populace was defined as the central audience of all military efforts. However, increasingly, the Western military became part of a conflict which was often reduced to and improperly simplified as contention between the insurgency on the one side and the Afghan government and the Western coalition on the other. In truth, the OEF and ISAF operations targeted a complicated system of religious, tribal, economic, narco or other bonds and tensions. Local Afghan environments consisted of traditional as well as modern elements which were sometimes simply not understood or decoded even with the help of categories and concepts used by the western stakeholders.¹⁶

Within the world-wide information space, fourthly, the western presence was under very critical observation by neighboring countries (Pakistan), the Muslim world, or groups assessing NATO's functioning and structure. Finally, the stabilization efforts depended fundamentally on the support of the governments and societies within the troop-contributing countries: a German or Italian RC Commander reported to the COM ISAF in Kabul, but also on the national chain

¹⁴ See Emile Simpson, *War From the Ground Up: Twenty-First-Century Combat as Politics* (London: Hurst & Company, 2012), pp. 1–14. I use the term *audiences* as developed by Simpson.

¹⁵ Robert M. Cassidy, *Counterinsurgency and the Global War on Terror, Military Culture and Irregular War* (Westport, London: Stanford University Press, 2006).

¹⁶ *Local Politics in Afghanistan: A Century of Intervention in the Social Order*, ed. Conrad Schetter (London: Hurst & Company, 2013). Secondary literature to all aspects of this book is provided in the selected bibliography and will be therefore reduced to a minimum in the footnotes of this chapter.

of command to Berlin or Rome, closely connected with national developments and forced to satisfy the respective national audiences.¹⁷

As part of the described relationship network, the military found itself in a precarious situation. Only the full, civil-military supply of services would create an atmosphere where the local populace could trust the efforts of the international community. But in many cases, the necessary civilian capabilities and strategies still had to be developed when the PRTs were already operating.¹⁸ When only a small part of the pledged civilian personnel was deployed to Afghanistan, the military, sometimes the only organization present, had to assume responsibility. In matters such as police training or rule of law-initiatives, ISAF and the military took the lead for the respective tasks from overstrained European governments or non-military entities. Over several years, military operations and military engagement dominated the activities, whereas the civilian part dragged behind and lacked sufficient means to do substantial reconstruction. Very often, the military was blamed for the shortage of projects although this kind of work was never part of its original mission.¹⁹

A changing mission

In the north and west, Germany and Italy drifted into the role of lead nations, responsible for co-ordinating the reconstruction efforts of several countries. Germany, in 2003, agreed to take over the previously American-led OEF PRT in Kunduz Province and to assume overall command of the new ISAF Regional Command (RC) North (Stage 1 Expansion, map on page 37). In 2004, Germany opened an additional PRT in Fayzabad (northeastern Badakhshan Province). In the following years, installations in Pul-e Khumri (Baghlan Province, lead nation Netherlands, later Hungary), Maymanah (Faryab Province, lead nation Norway) and Mazar-e Sharif (Balkh Province, lead nation Sweden, both PRT taken over from the United Kingdom in 2005 and 2006) and Sheberghan (Jowzjan Province, lead nation Turkey) were added. For military experts, the north promised calm deployments.²⁰

German military activities in the areas of development and reconstruction were astonishingly limited, as were the available resources of German civilian

¹⁷ As a convincing example (for the German experience) see Klaus Naumann, *Der blinde Spiegel. Deutschland im afghanischen Transformationskrieg* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2013).

¹⁸ See for the German example Federal Government, »Aktionsplan »Zivile Krisenprävention, Konfliktlösung und Friedenskonsolidierung«, 12 May 2004, http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/DE/Aussenpolitik/Friedenspolitik/Krisenpraevention/Grundlagen/Aktionsplan_node.html. The site offers several more ground-laying documents which illustrate the German understanding of crisis prevention, conflict solving, and peace consolidation efforts.

¹⁹ Paul Burton, »Developing disorder: Divergent PRT models in Afghanistan«, *Jane's Intelligence Review* 20, no. 10 (2008), pp. 30–33.

²⁰ See the articles in part 2 of this book, with further literature on the PRTs in RCs North and West, and the ISAF chronology (annexes).

agencies.²¹ The government's *Afghanistan-Konzept* (concept for Afghanistan) provided only general and vague objectives. An interagency approach was based on the notion of networked security. Given only a very general guidance, individual PRT commanders were forced to find their own appropriate operational strategy to achieve the political goals like a »peaceful balance between different ethnical groups and local power-holders.«²² But, despite the Bundeswehr's light footprint approach and progress in the area of civil reconstruction, the level of violence in strategic hotspots increased slowly but steadily. By 2009, the Taliban had succeeded in establishing their shadow structures in many districts within RC North. In late 2009, the German political leadership and military eventually came to recognize that the mission in Afghanistan presented a »warlike situation« and granted the Bundeswehr more resources and tactical autonomy to conduct offensive operations.²³

For a short time, a substantial amount of money from other governmental agencies was poured into the three German PRT provinces of Kunduz, Takhar, and Badakhshan. German operational design was thoroughly adapted in late 2009 to allow for systematic operations along the COIN model of shape – clear – hold – build.²⁴ Norwegian, Dutch, Hungarian, Swedish and Turkish PRT operators within RC North had similar experiences as more and more US troops were deployed to the provinces and districts of the north especially for training purposes of the ANSF.

Italy, the second European lead nation, assumed command of the RC West in 2005. It took over the Herat PRT, established as part of OEF, from the US as part of the ISAF Stage 2 Expansion. Located in the capital of the homonymous Province, Herat PRT came under ISAF control together with bases in Qala-ye Naw (Badghis Province, lead nation Spain), Chaghcharan (Ghor Province, lead nation Lithuania) and Farah (Farah Province, lead nation USA). The four Provinces of RC West included a variety of areas. The spectrum ranged from the relatively safe boom-town Herat with its prospering trade routes to underdeveloped districts in Badghis, where the ANSF wouldn't even be able to enter certain valleys due to the local dominance of organized crime and terrorist groups.²⁵

²¹ Website German Foreign Office (see note 22) and the critical discussion of the »action plan« by Winfried Nachtwei, Member of Parliament 1994–2009, <http://nachtwei.de/>.

²² See Federal Government, »Das Afghanistan-Konzept der Bundesregierung,« August 2007 and September 2008, <http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/cae/servlet/contentblob/395916/publicationFile/3342/AFG-Konzept2007.pdf>; http://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/Anlagen/2008/09/2008-09-23-broschuere-afghanistan-konzept.pdf?__blob=publicationFile. See also Philipp Münch, *Strategielos in Afghanistan. Die Operationsführung der Bundeswehr im Rahmen der International Security Assistance Force*, SWP-Studie, 2011/S 30 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, November 2011).

²³ Timo Noetzel, »Germany's Small War in Afghanistan: Military Learning Amid Politico-strategic Inertia,« *Contemporary Security Policy* 31, no. 3 (December 2010): pp. 493–494.

²⁴ See the official publication of the Federal Government, »Fortschrittsbericht Afghanistan zur Unterrichtung des Deutschen Bundestages,« Zwischenbericht, June 2012, <http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/cae/servlet/contentblob/620692/publicationFile/169627/120622-Zwischenbericht.pdf>.

²⁵ Francesco Rui Sacco, *Ricostruzione e conflitto in Afghanistan post-2001. Lo strumento dei provincial reconstruction team e il caso italiano* (Pisa: Università degli Studi, 2008–2009); Manuel Solastri, »L'evoluzione del PRT italiano di Herat,« *Rivista Militare*, no. 5 (2009): pp. 36–41.

Different government departments shared the responsibility for the Italian PRT project. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ministero degli Affari Esteri, MAE), the Ministry of Defense (Ministero della Difesa, MdD) and the Italian Development Cooperation Department (Direzione Generale per la Cooperazione allo Sviluppo, DGCS), a subordinate directorate within the MAE that is responsible for traditional development work, theoretically worked hand in hand. The Italian government saw its PRT primarily as a temporary substitute for missing development tools and managed the Herat PRT with personnel located in the MAE and the MdD in Rome. An integrated command structure was never established. Whereas the Italian military received orders from higher ISAF commands, the military part of the PRT was also – like in the German case – controlled by the national Ministry of Defense. With MAE and DGCS added on, three separate national chains of command connected Herat with the Italian capital.²⁶

Even with increasing military and civilian capacities, the PRTs in the north and west failed to stabilize Afghanistan as a state. In 2010, Norwegian and German forces in Faryab, Kunduz, and Baghlan Provinces faced severe fighting on an almost daily basis. The ISAF reached its strength peak with about 135,000. More and more troops were tasked to train the ANSF and to support Afghan military operations, in order to pass the lead to the Afghan government.²⁷ Parallel to the intensified military efforts starting in 2009 and 2010, most countries reinforced their financial engagement. In February 2011, Afghan President Hamid Karzai fundamentally criticized the PRT concept when he accused the PRTs of undermining efforts to build up the state's institutions by creating parallel structures. (The disproportional presence of PRTs in the hard-fought provinces of the south and southeast, by the way, was ironically criticized as »insurgency reward«.)

Karzai announced that Afghan forces would take over the responsibility for security in all parts of the country as soon as possible. Civilian Afghan losses, a demanding Afghan government, and exploding costs of the ISAF mission led to a new and public discussion about the future of the international engagement in Afghanistan. Growing doubts among the voters and tax payers in the US and Europe with regard to the success of ISAF contributed to the current planning for a withdrawal in 2014. In November 2013, a Loya Jirga in Kabul accepted a treaty with the United States, laying the groundwork for a continuing western military presence in Afghanistan after ISAF. In April 2014, however, the treaty had not yet been approved and signed by a new Afghan president. The planning of NATO

²⁶ See the official presentation *Italian Contribution to National Solidarity Programme*, ed. Italian Development Office (Kabul: Italian Embassy, 2011); and the likewise very optimistic publication on *Italy and the Rebirth of the Rule of Law in Afghanistan. The Italian contribution to justice reform over the decade 2001–2011*, ed. Michela Perathoner (Kabul: Italian Embassy, 2011).

²⁷ Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos. How the War Against Islamic Extremism Is Being Lost in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Central Asia* (London: Penguin, 2008); Antonio Giustozzi, *Decoding the New Taliban: Insights from the Field* (London: Hurst & Company, 2009); Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop: The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan* (London: Hurst & Company, 2008); Anthony Bell, David Witter and Michael Whittaker, *Reversing the North-eastern Insurgency*, Afghanistan Report 9 (Washington D.C.: Institute for the Study of War, April 2011).

training mission »Resolute Support« and its national contributions still were left hanging in the air.²⁸

In retrospect, the experimental PRT concept was widely embraced in most NATO capitals, but many questions remained about its practical implementation. In Afghanistan, western countries had to do a kind of dilemma management. Their PRTs served different masters (ISAF, national governments and departments). They fulfilled their tasks in an environment that was shifting from peace to war. Diametrically opposed to the idea behind the PRT concept, many Afghans perceived the foreign military as an active party in running conflicts instead of an impartial observer and conciliator. National stabilization strategies for Afghanistan were very general. They did not always help to define key areas where an intervention made sense and would meet the mental, cultural or economic preconditions.²⁹

To make things worse, western militaries as well as civilian agencies became aware of how limited their understanding of Afghanistan was only in the course of the ISAF mission. Accumulating cultural and political expertise to assist the deployed personnel understand their environment was a tedious process. Every single nation tried, in parallel to relying on the NATO and ISAF tools and capabilities in theatre, to build analysis, training and intelligence infrastructure and capacities on its own. With every rotation of the military, a high percentage of newcomers in the Afghan environment arrived in theatre. Although presumably trained at home, they had to acquaint themselves with the basic functionalities of the Afghan culture, as well as with regional and local conditions and power structures.³⁰

All PRTs in Afghanistan exhibited limited capabilities as learning institutions. On a national level, expertise, experience, system knowledge as well as personal relationships with Afghan key personalities were lost in the sometimes very short, if non-existent change of command phases between contingents in theatre or parent units at home. Dwindling knowledge and the disruption of stabilization efforts multiplied in the international context. Between 2004 and 2006, the Dutch Armed Forces operated a PRT in Pul-e Khumri, Baghlan Province. When the Dutch center of gravity was shifted to the south, the base in Baghlan was handed over to Hungary. But the Dutch troops took what they had learned and achieved in northern Afghanistan with them to Uruzgan, without passing on their lessons learned to the Hungarians who then had to basically start from scratch in Pul-e Khumri. The early experiences in Baghlan contributed to a *national* political discourse and learning process within the Dutch Forces, which was also fuelled by

²⁸ See »NATO Reduces Scope of Its Afghanistan Plans,« *The New York Times*, 27 October 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/28/world/asia/less-extensive-mission-planned-in-afghanistan.html?_r=0.

²⁹ *Common or Divided Security? Western Responses to 21st Century Security Challenges: Perspectives from Norway and Germany*, eds. Robin M. Allers, Carlo Masala and Rolf Tamnes (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2014); *International Crisis Management: Squaring the Circle*, eds. Walter E. Feichtinger, Ernst M. Felberbauer and Erwin A. Schmidl (Vienna, Geneva: Geneva Centre for Security Policy – GCSP, 2011).

³⁰ *The Comprehensive Approach: Challenges and Prospects*, ed. Flemming Splidsboel Hansen (Kopenhagen: Royal Danish Defense College, 2009).

Dutch experiences in Iraq. But these lessons were largely missing where they fitted best and were needed most: in Baghlan Province.³¹

In many cases, the western perception of the Afghan environment was a one-dimensional, one-way approach. Changing philosophies and attempts to change the Afghan state and society were broadly debated in the ISAF family and in the troop contributing nations. But the results and effects sometimes stayed as vague to them as the Afghans' perception of their presence. Many Afghans welcomed and trusted the foreign personnel, tried to profit as much as possible from the western engagement in their country and established resilient relationships with the PRT teams. For others, the western factions remained something afar and foreign like stranded spaceships with strange beings inside who did not adhere to the cultural rules of Afghanistan. The Afghan perception of ISAF operations could not always be fully assessed by the NATO countries and this difficulty was amplified by the problems achieving purposeful effects based on a comprehensive analysis and intelligence preparation of the local battlespace.³²

The PRTs were designed to set the groundwork for a swift takeover of responsibility by the Afghan government, whose capabilities were notoriously overestimated in the west for a long time. In reality, the PRTs were attempting to support a state that existed only in a rudimentary form. In order to give the Afghan state legitimacy, the western interventionists had to rely on historical, political, and societal references that were barely congruent with the western canon of values, advertised to the Afghan populace like a mantra. The PRTs were faced with the Afghan state's perceived illegitimacy at a grassroots level and were forced to deal with this fundamental deficit. The higher echelons in both civilian and military infrastructures took much longer to realize that Afghan state power was worth little without local acceptance.³³

Structure and intent of this book

Reflecting the diversity of the ISAF organization and the differences between single provinces and districts within northern and western Afghanistan, it would not make sense to discuss »the« PRTs in Afghanistan – each of them was a small unique conglomerate of different national contributions. A collection of essays, in contrast, does give voice to different national solutions of how to deal with the Afghan challenge. It also provides an insight into how different civil societies perceived their political decisions and decision makers as well as their own armed forces. To reflect on these links seems especially important as the ISAF

³¹ See *Der Einsatz der Bundeswehr in Afghanistan. Sozial- und politikwissenschaftliche Perspektiven*, eds. Anja Seiffert et al. (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2012), and chapter van Loo in this volume.

³² Local Politics in Afghanistan (see note 16).

³³ See Jan Rasmus Böhnke, Jan Koehler and Christoph Zürcher, *Assessing the Impact of Development Cooperation in North East Afghanistan: Approaches and Methods* (SFB 700 Working Papers 43), Berlin 2013, SFB 700 Governance in Areas of Limited Statehood; Astri Suhrke, *When More Is Less: The International Project in Afghanistan* (London: Hurst & Company, 2011).

mission and the international burden-sharing in Afghanistan always depended very much on national discourses, perceptions, and reservations.

The perspectives and methodologies, used in the volume, represent academic disciplines including history, political science, and the social sciences. They also vary as a function of the available sources. As an example, the German Ministry of Defense granted Bundeswehr historians exclusive access to all available official data in 2010. The MoD also generally permitted the use and publication of restricted (*Verschlussache – nur für den Dienstgebrauch*) national documents without an individual check or a case-to-case de-classification.³⁴ In other countries, restrictions in dealing with military documentation are much stricter, even if the researchers do belong to ministerial think tanks or internal historical branches. In several states, military documents are completely inaccessible for historical or political research for a term of at least 30 years, depending on the level of classification. After the publication of the Afghan War Diary in July 2010 and other ISAF data by WikiLeaks, the NATO archive further tightened the already strict terms of use for documents produced by the alliance. Several of the authors, here represented, had to rely exclusively on published studies and documents or reports provided by the World Wide Web. Others have created their own sources by conducting surveys and interrogations among soldiers and civilians who were part of the mission structure in Afghanistan.³⁵

This volume offers three different slices of the PRT puzzle. Part I deals with evolution and structures, as well as with the performance of the PRTs in Afghanistan. *Peter Dreist* describes the development of the PRT system from OEF and ISAF from its very beginnings until the end of 2013. His organizational history covers a period of twelve years in which the size and character of the ISAF mission changed dramatically, as did the participating armed forces. Dreist's introductory survey is linked to the milestones of international law which created the framework for the stabilization efforts in Afghanistan.

Philipp Rotmann and *Lauren Harrison* present a careful assessment of the PRTs' performance in Afghanistan. The authors put much emphasis on the fact that lessons learned in the conflict should be identified with the help of detailed studies and with local examples. Nevertheless, they indicate several general blind spots, strategic inconsistencies and contradictions in the PRT concept. Rotmann and Harrison examine the PRTs at the diplomatic-political and bureaucratic levels, but give special attention to the »on-the-ground« performance. It was there that the PRTs achieved their most positive results, albeit as long as they performed

³⁴ The German case of available sources on the Bundeswehr as Army on Operations has recently been dealt with by Andreas Waleczek, *Quellen zu den Auslandseinsätzen der Bundeswehr. Entstehung, Beispiele und Aspekte der Überlieferung* (B.A. Thesis, University of Applied Sciences Potsdam, Department of Information Studies Archive, 2014).

³⁵ See *Bianka Adams*, »U.S. Historians in Combat and Stability Operations,« *Auftrag Auslandseinsatz. Neueste Militärgeschichte an der Schnittstelle von Geschichtswissenschaft, Politik, Öffentlichkeit und Streitkräften*, ed. Bernhard Chiari (Freiburg i.Br., Wien, Berlin: Rombach, 2012): pp. 399–408; *Richard van Gils*, »The System of Operational Diaries in the Netherlands,« *ibid.*: pp. 409–414; *Ineke Deserno* and *Gregory Pedlow*, »NATO in the Balkans: Collecting and Managing the Operational Records of a Coalition,« *ibid.*: pp. 415–420; *Andreas Kunz*, »Transformation, Network Centric Warfare und Facebook. Quellenüberlieferung zur jüngsten deutschen Militärgeschichte,« *ibid.*: pp. 389–398.

in an environment not directly challenged by the insurgency. Although Afghan key personalities generally profited more from the ISAF and PRT presence than did the populace, the PRT worked effectively as transportation and distribution channels for international money and projects. A rather mixed evaluation concerns the effect on »good governance.« However, in their attempts to change the Afghan political culture, the PRTs achieved, at best, rather fleeting results.

The Afghans' perception of the West's military presence and the changing picture of ISAF in the country is dealt with by *Jan Koehler*. His paper illustrates that intended and detectable effects of improved physical security, produced as result of COIN, did not necessarily improve the subjective perception of security in local environments. Western forces were seen as an external, temporary phenomenon without a lasting effect on the Afghan society. In contrast, the populace understood the respective capabilities of the Afghan government and especially the presence and performance of the Afghan Security Forces (ANSF) as a benchmark of improvement. In this context, the necessity to rely on local militias to keep key areas clean of Taliban influence gives Koehler's assessment for the time after the end of ISAF in 2014 a rather pessimistic outlook.

The last two papers in this section address the outsiders' understanding of Afghanistan. *Conrad Schetter* deals with the knowledge on the country accrued in the West. His paper concentrates on the institutional structures of political consulting, the quality of collected expertise, and the mental predispositions of the experts. The Afghan example makes it very clear that, due to career paths, the lack of communication channels and/or the functioning of bureaucracies as closed systems, the academic community was not ready to systematically provide useful knowledge to political decision-makers. Many researchers did not even want to get involved in political and military processes at all. *Bernd Lemke* analyses different national approaches to counter-insurgency and their historical roots. He demonstrates that in the US, Great Britain and Germany the understanding and historical attribution of COIN operations differed widely, and why it was, therefore, extremely difficult to execute a consistent COIN strategy in Afghanistan.

Part II of this volume is dedicated to case studies, describing and analyzing the national contributions of all PRT operators in the RC North and West. The different PRTs and the underlying political conceptions are dealt with by authors with necessary access to national sources and fundamental awareness of national discourses and particularities with regard to the different European cultures of intervention and the role of the military in general. The papers give an overview of the structural and financial tools of the PRT, as well as of their development in the course of the ISAF mission. Time and again, the amplitudes of national engagements in Afghanistan are correlated to domestic political events and debates and shown in their interdependency.

Guy Harrison outlines the British engagement in Afghanistan. Before Germany even thought about sending troops from Kabul to the north, the US had installed a small PRT, then as a part of OEF, in Kunduz. Great Britain was the second country to bring a PRT mission to the north. With a base in Mazar-e Sharif the ground was prepared for the later ISAF Stage 1 expansion. The British forces understood

their mission – as the US troops of OEF did – as counter-insurgency, relying on both examples from their colonial history, including three Anglo-Afghan Wars in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and on their experiences in Iraq. Harrison shows that Great Britain had some difficulties adapting to the corresponding ISAF guidelines when the German-led RC North came into existence in 2006. When Great Britain took over more and more responsibilities in the south, the PRT in Mazar-e Sharif was handed over to Sweden in that year.

Two papers (*Bernhard Chiari* and *Christian Stachelbeck*) follow the German initiative to stabilize the northern provinces of Kunduz, Takhar and Badakhshan with the help of the »lighthouse concept.« Starting in 2003, Germany took over the PRT in Kunduz from the US forces and had a second installation in Fayzabad, Badakhshan Province, operational by 2004. The presented case studies demonstrate how both PRTs adapted to the more and more difficult security situation in the north. Whereas organized crime, drugs and weapons trading remained the main challenges for the security in Badakhshan, Kunduz became one of the focal points of the insurgency in the north. Starting in 2006, the Bundeswehr in Kunduz changed from a party of armed development workers, oriented towards the »good« humanitarian missions of the past, into a fighting army on operations. It took the German parliament as well as the German public a long time to accept this. At the same time, the complex Germany inter-agency structures turned out to be at the best partially effective to provide a coordinated effort in Afghanistan although the system was permanently adjusted to the changing challenges.

Two articles cover the development in Baghlan Province, another area of strategic importance and hot spot of the insurgency within RC N. *Erwin van Loo* reflects on the Dutch decision to establish a PRT in Baghlan's capital, Pul-e Khumri, in 2004, a fact widely forgotten in the Netherlands due to the Dutch deployments in southern Iraq (2003–2005) and Uruzgan in southern Afghanistan, where Dutch troops fought from 2006 to 2010. Van Loo describes the Dutch presence as a sequence of tentative steps to grip the local structures and needs in Baghlan. When the mission became effective, the PRT in Pul-e Khumri was taken over by Hungary in 2006. *Péter Wagner* critically assesses the following period. Lacking the financial means spent in Baghlan by the Dutch, the Hungarian contingent had also to live with a widely absent interdepartmental co-operation in Budapest, national restrictions and insufficiencies of arming and equipment. These circumstances did not always allow the PRT in Pul-e Khumri and the Hungarian troops to play as active a role intended by higher ISAF-echelons.

The central part of the RC North is covered by *Jan Willem Honig* and *Ilmari Käihkö* who deal with Swedish-Finnish co-operation in Mazar-e Sharif. The authors focus on the question if there was a distinct Nordic peacekeeping tradition manifested in Afghanistan. They conclude that the mechanisms observed in Balkh, Samangan, Jowzjan and Sar-e Pul Provinces, for which the PRT was responsible, reflected political and military cultures in Europe in general rather than unique Nordic perspective. Looking at Mazar-e Sharif, Honig and Käihkö describe the dialogue, political logic and burden sharing between the governments in Stockholm and Helsinki which drove the common mission forward, independent of the conceptions made in ISAF headquarters or NATO staffs. *Lene*

Ekhaugen and *Ida Maria Oma* examine the western Province of Faryab, the second critical area in RC North beside Kunduz and Baghlan Provinces. Norway, in 2005, took over the PRT in the capital Maymanah from Great Britain and large scale combat operations were conducted on the border with Badghis Province (RC West). Norway understood its local task in an almost strictly military way and concentrated on security issues rather than on governance and reconstruction. Although this practice distinguished the country from most other PRT operators and presented a contradiction to valid ISAF rules and principles, Norway successfully claimed a substantial room for national manoeuvre in the allied operation.

The same can be stated for the last established PRT within RC North. In summer 2010, Turkey opened a base in Sheberghan, Jowzjan Province. In full contradiction to the Norwegian PRT, the Turkish base relied almost exclusively on civilian structures, directed by the Ministry of Foreign affairs in Ankara. *Haldun Yalçınkaya* puts the Turkish example into a historical context and follows the cultural and political relationship between Turkey and the Turk population in Afghanistan. His chapter studies how the Turkish foreign policy unfolded their effects under the umbrella of the ISAF mission. *Yalçınkaya*, thus, completes the overview on the heterogeneous structures and diverging preconditions within RC North and its PRTs.

Four papers are dedicated to the Italian-led RC West, located in the capital of Herat Province and established as part of the ISAF Stage 2 Expansion in 2006. *Gastone Breccia* has contributed a very personal essay on the Italian installation in Herat. Breccia accompanied Italian PRT personnel in their daily routines. During one of his visits to Camp Vianini in spring 2011, he witnessed one of the most severe attacks on Italian troops during the ISAF mission. Breccia describes the Italian PRT's conception and its practical implementation from a COIN perspective, through the eyes of the soldiers in the field. *Alejandro Pizarroso* and *Aldara Martitegui* give an outline of the Spanish engagement in western Afghanistan. In 2005, Spain – one of the biggest troop contributors within ISAF – took over a base in Qala-ye Naw, Badghis Province. The local PRT was responsible for one of the most underdeveloped and, especially in the districts bordering Faryab Province in the north, most dangerous areas in the West. The authors link their outline of ISAF history to domestic political developments in Spain. They demonstrate how a single event left its mark on the Spanish ISAF mission. In May 2003, on their way to Afghanistan, 62 Spanish soldiers died in an air crash in Turkey. The accident affected the Spanish PRT concept, the operational guidelines for the troops in Badghis, as well as the amount and commitment of money to Afghanistan. Pizarroso and Martitegui also illustrate how pictures of the ISAF mission were exploited in political campaigns and interpreted in different ways by the audiences in Spain.

With his examination of Lithuania's PRT, *James S. Corum* describes one of the smallest NATO members responsible for a PRT. Located in Chaghcharan, Ghor Province, the Lithuanian facility had to overcome difficulties resulting from a weak economy and very limited national resources. Corum tells the story of the PRT in Chaghcharan as a journey on a bumpy road to demonstrate the Lithuanian

military capacities and to show the ability of the armed forces to meet the standards of operational competence within NATO. To be respected as full-fledged member of the western alliance became a driving force for Lithuania to develop a specific doctrine and local strategy for Ghor Province.

The fourth PRT within RC West was located in the capital of Farah Province, bordering Helmand and Nimroz Provinces in the south. *Kenneth M. Holland* indicates that the this PRT was obliged to follow the orders of the Italian Commanders of RC West as part of the US structures within ISAF and OEF. With continuity back to the first OEF PRTs in Afghanistan, the American engagement in Ghor can only be understood as the result of and an integral part of the US version of COIN, executed in the hard-fought Provinces of the Afghan south and east. Holland makes this obvious by comparing the PRTs in Ghor and Khost, the latter located in the east on the Pakistani border between Paktia and Paktika Provinces.

Part III of this book highlights, using the examples of Germany and Italy, how the ISAF mission changed the participating armed forces and is reflected by the soldiers in Afghanistan themselves. *Klaus Naumann* uses the PRT example to prove that the military's role in the Afghan environment shaped a »new soldier« who has to be competent in various fields far in excess of the purely military sphere. Covering the macro, meso and micro levels of professional change, Naumann concentrates on the dynamic interdependency between military skills and political planning and decision-making. He shows how the complexity of the mission and the daily duties and routines in Afghanistan brought the traditional courses of action and patterns of military training and education to their limits. To what extent hierarchical military organizations will really accept that military leaders – PRT commanders would be an outstanding example – need substantial autonomy to be successful, finally, is a question Naumann leaves unanswered.

For many years, *Anja Seiffert* has accompanied German soldiers during their pre-deployment training at home and when they served abroad. She has also looked into the long-term effects the ISAF mission has had on the organizational culture and the self-image of the Bundeswehr. Her sociological insights are summarized in a chapter on »Generation Kunduz,« complementing Naumann's findings with more concrete research results from the field. Seiffert describes how soldiers experienced the first German combat mission after World War II, and how the Kunduz experience changed their professional identities and self-conceptions. Whereas ISAF stood in a long row of comparable missions for US or British forces, the return of the Taliban and rampant spread of military resistance in Kunduz became formative for the Bundeswehr contingents deployed there and for the German Armed Forces in general.

Giuseppe Caforio and *Fatima Farina* give the reader an insight into how service members experienced their missions, and how they adopted to an environment they often saw as difficult, backward and hostile, using sociological methods. Whereas Caforio covers a wide spectrum of military functions and ranks, Farina concentrates on the group of females within the Italian Armed Forces. She identifies various roles and identities a female would adopt to cope with the complex situation of a professional soldier in a male-dominated military environment. Although Caforio's and Farina's chapters do not claim to present representative

results, they allow the reader to immerse themselves into the individual lives, daily routines, perceptions and coping strategies of soldiers on a difficult and dangerous mission.

A third article on Italy by *Valentina Albini* and *Nicola Labanca* deals with how the newspapers communicated the death of soldiers killed in Afghanistan. Based on several individual vignettes, the authors try to work out how the stories were told, in which context the Italian losses were put, and what the Italian public learned about the reasons for the country's engagement in ISAF and, thus, the quality of the Italian contribution itself. They demonstrate that, with regard to the Afghanistan mission, the link between the Armed Forces, the media, and the public was barely developed. As a society that lacked the experience of combat operations after World War II, the Italian public was confronted with heroic, dichotomic narratives on the »good« mission, whereas a critical discourse on the Afghanistan engagement never came into existence.

The last two articles bring up the professional implications of the ISAF mission for the military, demonstrated through the example of the medical service. *Volker Hartmann* and *Ralf Vollmuth* show exemplarily how equipment, structures, and tactical procedures were adapted to the special environment in northern Afghanistan. Hartmann gives an overview on the respective capabilities developed by the medical service of the Bundeswehr in PRT Fayzabad, and describes the daily challenges German medical personnel faced in Badakhshan Province. Vollmuth completes this survey by looking at the ethical and fundamental implications of missions like ISAF for the self-image of military doctors and officers of the medical service.

Editorial remarks

The English language, not to speak of the different European languages and their transliteration systems, has numerous spellings for expressions and names from the languages of Afghanistan. We have orientated on an English phonetic transliteration, broadly used in the community of Afghanistan and development studies, and not on the philological precise transcription, preferred by linguists. Although we try to apply a consistent system within this book, Afghan geographical and place names eludes western attempts of universal systematics – and has done so successfully during the many years of ISAF and NATO presence in Afghanistan. Two map inserts (front and rear covers) show the areas of responsibility (AOR) of the RC North and West as of 2010, including provincial and district borders. Abbreviations other than common acronyms such as ISAF or NATO are written out after first use in each paper. Additionally we offer an index of acronyms, as well as an index of toponyms and personal names. Wherever possible, we quote English editions of cited literature. Document titles from languages like Turkish, Spanish or Hungarian have been translated in the footnotes, whereas secondary literature is cited only in the original version if no English edition is available. Internet addresses and URLs were rechecked for the last time in June 2014. The

selective bibliography contains an overview on the available literature in English and German. Titles from other languages have been included when they are essential for the respective national example. Grey literature, army manuals and guidelines or sources from the military, governmental agencies etc. as well as articles from news portals, newspapers or other media are listed exclusively in the footnotes of single papers.

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