



GKKE

**Gemeinsame Konferenz
Kirche und Entwicklung**

Joint Conference Church
and Development

Honesty is of paramount importance

**Contribution of the GKKE to the evaluation of German
military engagement in Afghanistan**

1. Introduction	3
2. Elements of an honest and comprehensive evaluation	4
a) The first step: Self-critical reflections on the engagement and the ethics of peace of the churches	4
b) Reflection on the peace policy concept of <i>State Building</i>	5
c) Reflection on the significance of the ethnic and religious dimension of the conflict	6
d) Reflection on the German development cooperation	8
e) Reflection on the German contribution to the international military engagement in Afghanistan	11
f) Reflection on the accompaniment of people during and after the military engagement	14
3. Lessons learned – a summary	16
Attachment: Members of the Task Force “Contribution to the evaluation of German military engagement in Afghanistan” of the GKKE	19

1. Introduction

Who we are

“The Joint Conference Church and Development (GKKE) is an ecumenical, Protestant-Catholic work forum relating to development policy. As a joint voice of the two great churches in Germany, GKKE intends to increase the political weight of the notion of ‘One World’. It discusses with parliament, government, and civil interest groups on topics of North-South politics and development cooperation.” (Self-description of the GKKE). Our background for reflection is the guiding principle of a Just Peace as formulated in the basic documents of the two churches. (The German Bishops: A Just Peace, 2000 and the Council of the EKD: Live from God’s peace – care for just peace, 2007)

Occasion, purpose and origin of the statement

On 29 June 2021, the military mission of the German Armed Forces in Afghanistan, which had been mandated several times by the German Bundestag, officially ended after 20 years; the last soldiers were withdrawn with the evacuation on 26 August. With the return of the Taliban to power, many civilian support and reconstruction programmes for which employees of governmental and non-governmental organisations were deployed in Afghanistan also came to an end.

The Catholic and Protestant churches in Germany are connected with people in Afghanistan in many ways. Through Caritas International and Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe, both churches are involved in humanitarian aid for Afghanistan. Misereor works in Afghanistan with partner organisations in education, health, rural development and refugee work. Bread for the World supports partners in neighbouring countries who work with local civil society initiatives in Afghanistan.

Both churches have critically accompanied the deployment with peace-ethical reflections and considered the peace-ethical implications of the deployment in academies, discussion events and statements.

The Catholic Military Chaplaincy and the Protestant Chaplaincy in the German Armed Forces have accompanied soldiers on deployment and reflected with them on the meaning and purpose of the deployment. The Protestant Chaplaincy in the German Armed Forces runs a programme, also open to civilian personnel, to accompany people who have suffered deployment stress and their relatives. Out of our lasting attachment to the people in Afghanistan, our responsibility towards soldiers and civilian personnel, and in terms of a necessary follow-up for all those who were deployed in Afghanistan, with this paper we want to make a contribution to coming to terms with the mission. In doing so, we limit ourselves to essential insights that church actors have gained in the course of the comprehensive mission. We place special emphasis on the different levels of the mission; we want to avoid focussing on the military components of the mission and draw attention to broader experiences. The specific church perspectives are considered in the political and security-military context. These are just a few examples and do not claim to be exhaustive.

For this statement, various hearings were organised in which people from Afghanistan and the Afghan diaspora contributed their views. In addition, hearings were held with experts from academia and political consultancy as well as with responsible persons from politics, diplomacy and the German armed forces. Confidentiality was agreed for all hearings.

Reflection on the reviewing process in Germany

Although over the years there have been many voices from those involved in the mission calling for an evaluation, a comprehensive evaluation of the entire Afghanistan mission has never taken place. The churches have also called for a thorough, comprehensive and independent evaluation of the Afghanistan mission in statements about the years of the mission. That is why we welcome the current review process at the various levels. Our statement is intended as a church contribution to the overall process of coming to terms with the Afghanistan mission. In our discussions, we repeatedly encountered the urgent demand for an honest evaluation. In our opinion, this requires the significant participation of Afghans living in the diaspora in Germany as well as those who remain in Afghanistan. In addition, the experiences of the many civil society organisations, some of which have been active in Afghanistan for a long time, should be included.

The currently initiated evaluation processes, which review the mission after 20 years, are to be assessed differently: The interdepartmental evaluation of the Federal Foreign Office, the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development and the Federal Ministry of the Interior and Home Affairs has the shortcoming that they only look at developments in Afghanistan from 2013 onwards. The Federal Ministry of Defence has formulated its own report, which must now be included in the inter-ministerial evaluation. The committee of inquiry on the withdrawal of the Bundeswehr is urgently needed, but is also limited to a very narrow time period. A comprehensive evaluation of the deployment can best be expected from the commission of inquiry. The commission will have to prove that it can arrive at results independently of party-political interests. A reappraisal must be unbiased. The different processes of reappraisal should be related to each other in order to meet the demands of a comprehensive evaluation.

2. Elements of an honest and comprehensive evaluation

a) The first step: Self-critical reflections on the engagement and the ethics of peace of the churches

In addition to a humanitarian, diaconal and charitable commitment to the people in Afghanistan and the refugees, the two large churches in Germany focused on the ethical peace debate on the Afghanistan mission. In the process, the different positions of the population as a whole were also reflected among the church members and those bearing responsibility in the Church.

On the one hand, the churches, with their statements and discussion forums, offered a space for the necessary public debate that was lacking elsewhere. The annual Afghanistan Conference of the Villigst Protestant Academy, which has taken place since 1984, makes an important contribution in this regard. On the other hand, we as churches must also ask ourselves whether we have offered enough orientation in the public debate with the polyphony and partial contradictoriness of the statements to soldiers, civilian forces and those politically responsible.

We have to ask ourselves,

- whether we have audibly enough pointed out the lack of an overall concept under the primacy of politics, of a systematic and independent impact analysis and of an exit strategy;
- whether in principle we have not asked enough whether military interventions make sense at all under conditions such as those that prevailed in Afghanistan and whether we ourselves have given in to the illusion that a stronger civilian and, above all, development policy component within the framework of civil-military interaction would have led the mission to success;
- whether we paid enough attention at an early time to the human cost of those who were deployed in Afghanistan and, above all, of the Afghan civilian population.

b) Reflection on the peace-policy concept of *State Building*

The transfer of Western-style rule-of-law institutions to Afghanistan was based on socio-cultural preconditions that were not and are not widely present in Afghan society. In Europe and the USA, for example, the democratic rule of law emerged from a centuries-long struggle. The target perspective of political action was and is the individual with his or her fundamental rights. The diverse democratic decision-making processes serve to realise these fundamental rights and the interests of the citizens, so that the social ideas of values and the good life are reflected in the law. One task of state institutions is to implement these laws agreed upon in the democratic process.

In Afghanistan, the international community of states has wanted to rebuild the Afghan state according to plan since December 2001 - in part with different ideas and methods. Overall, however, it has proved to be highly problematic that in the intra-Afghan dispute over the right social and thus legal order, the external actors have taken the side of the small urban, Western-oriented Afghan population group, neglecting the approximately eighty percent majority of the more traditionally-minded rural population. This is where the Taliban's resistance was able to start.

In Afghanistan, therefore, it was generally not society itself that discussed and developed its idea of a good life and the right way to live together in a laborious social struggle. Rather, essential decisions have been enforced by external actors. Law and the institutions that implement it have not been produced by the political process of Afghan society, but both have been imports "established" by external stakeholders. When there is a gap between the indigenous idea of proper coexistence and the law that is supposed to regulate that coexistence, the legal system lacks acceptance. External actors must limit themselves to a "role of midwives" in order to enable the respective society to develop its own model of social and political coexistence. For such a process of state building, time horizons of at least two generations are realistic.

After the surprisingly rapid fall of the Taliban regime in November 2001, international politics and Afghan actors were faced with the challenge of establishing a reliable state order in Afghanistan that would no longer pose a threat to international security. UN Security Council Resolution 1375 of 14 November 2001 and the 1st Afghanistan Conference at Petersberg determined the first steps towards a transitional government, a constitutional process and the first free elections involving the assembly of all tribal leaders (Loya Jirga). UN resolutions and the German government repeatedly

emphasised the primary responsibility of the Afghan government and the supporting role of the international community.

The actual state-building process, however, proceeded differently. It was accompanied by an enormous underestimation of the challenge presented by this task. The under-resourcing of German diplomacy on the ground and of the German Police Project Office are examples of the lack of a target-means-relationship. Different approaches to state building among the international partners and a constantly changing strategy made the development of political structures even more difficult. The implementation of a presidential system, the non-admission of parties in elections and the preferential treatment of former warlords - often war criminals and extremely corrupt - when returning to positions of power were promoted by key allies and hindered reliable statehood.

In this context, the endemic corruption in Afghanistan, which prevailed above all at the top of the state and the political elite, must also be addressed. During and after the international mission, it has been pointed out again and again. However, little attention has been paid to the causes of corruption and the international actors who promote it. Corruption, understood as the taking of personal advantage - which in the case of public funds is at the expense of the common good - is not a phenomenon exclusive to fragile or failed states, but also occurs in functioning constitutional states. In fragile or failed states, however, there are additional, promoting circumstances: rampant corruption either expresses a lack of trust in the functioning of state institutions or indicates their absence. In Afghanistan, clientelism, nepotism, patronage, externally overpriced projects and bribe payments fuelled the population's distrust of their government. For example, high security allowances from donor countries led to an imbalance with the local wage structure and a division of society into beneficiaries of the system and the unappreciated. Envy and further alienation of the rural poor from the government were the consequences. Even the top echelons of the state did not completely believe in the state-building project in Afghanistan and took precautions in time by shamelessly reaching into public coffers.

This latent process of personal advantage-taking has been considerably fuelled by the actions of the international community: the process of state-building was to be steered in the desired direction and also accelerated with increased financial resources. The desire to push political reforms with a lot of money was an approach pursued by all external actors - with varying degrees of intensity - which at the same time directly promoted corruption. Clever politics must consider in advance which measures can be used to contain excessive corruption and gradually overcome it within the framework of state building.

c) Reflection on the significance of the ethnic and religious dimension of the conflict

Afghanistan is a deeply divided country, characterised by tribal structures with a large number of different ethnic groups. The four largest groups are the Pashtuns (predominantly Sunni) in southern and eastern Afghanistan (as well as northwestern Pakistan), the Tajiks (Sunni) in the Herat region and northeastern Afghanistan, the Uzbeks (Sunni) in northern Afghanistan, and the Hazara (Shia and the most disadvantaged group) in central Afghanistan.

With 35-45%, the Pashtuns are the dominant ethnic group. They see themselves as the true Afghans (linguistically, Afghans and Pashtuns are synonymous terms), which also implies a "right to govern". This ethnicity is based on the belief in a common ancestry, a shared code of honour and tribalism, as well as a pronounced cult of masculinity, combined with the disregard of women. Pashtuns make up a large proportion of the Taliban. There are close ethnic ties here: The Taliban also follow the traditional Pashtun moral law.

In addition to ethnic and tribal references, Islam plays a central role in the lives of Afghans. 99.9% of the Afghan population are Muslims (of which about four-fifths are Sunnis and one-fifth Shiites). While the population had practised their religion in a socio-cultural way for a long time, this changed with the Soviet occupation in Afghanistan. In rejection of Soviet modernisation efforts and anti-religious Soviet propaganda, Afghans who were attached to tradition began to radicalise themselves. Thus, in the political vacuum of the country after the withdrawal of Soviet troops and the lack of international support, the Taliban also emerged. Their fighters were recruited and trained mainly in the refugee camps and Koranic schools in northern Pakistan. Under the rule of the Taliban, who proclaimed the "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan" in 1996, an ultra-conservative Islam was established. The Taliban advocate a strictly traditional Islamic doctrine. This encompasses the whole of Afghan life - the social, political and legal spheres. Reverting to the old Pashtun moral order, cohabitation is also strictly controlled. With the renewed takeover in 2021, this constellation seems to be repeating itself.

A central goal of the Taliban was the liberation of Afghanistan from "foreign rule". They see themselves as the "saviours of Afghanistan" who want to help the country achieve peace by resorting to a traditionally understood Islam. This combines religiously motivated resistance with the Pashtun claim to dominance. This development was initially directed against the Soviet occupation, and since the 1990s, and increasingly since 11 September 2001, against the Western alliance.

The international missions OEF and ISAF were accompanied by central misjudgements - with regard to the ethnic and religious dimension of the conflict: one of the biggest mistakes was equating the Taliban with other Islamist groups. In the US-led war on terror, no distinction was made between the Taliban, al-Qaida and later the Islamic State (IS). All three groups are radical Islamists, combined with a fundamental rejection of values considered Western, but they are separated by more than they are united by: First, they are not ideologically the same. According to Taliban doctrine, the believer - following Pashtun moral law - has to live in a morally good community. IS Afghanistan, which emerged in 2014 from an offshoot of al-Qaida in Iraq, invokes Wahhabism. It claims to be the only one to represent the true Islamic teachings. Not only dissenters and unbelievers, but also Muslims who follow a different Islamic school of law must be fought as "enemies of God", including the Taliban. Secondly, they have different zones of influence. While al-Qaida and IS operate worldwide, the Taliban have no international agenda. Their focus is exclusively on Afghanistan. Thirdly, various interdependencies have been established. In contrast to the majority Pashtun Taliban movement (especially among the rural population), al-Qaida and the IS are not anchored in the Afghan population. And fourthly, there are varying relationships between the Islamist groups. While the Taliban and IS have never cooperated with each other and are enemies, the Taliban have granted al-Qaida

a right of hospitality since the 1990s. The Pashtuns had already granted this hospitality to Arab tribes in Afghanistan, from which al-Qaida also emerged, in the face of the war against the Soviet Union in the 1980s. The tradition goes back to Pashtun moral law and is considered "sacred" - one reason why the Taliban refused to hand over Osama bin Laden to the USA. However, this right of hospitality ultimately also divided the Taliban, whose pragmatic representatives were in favour of his extradition.

All these differences and necessary differentiations were hardly taken into account or not even noticed in the OEF and ISAF missions. As a result, the Taliban, as one of the central Afghan forces, were not involved in the conflict resolution and the planned reconstruction of the country; they were not integrated into the political process. The fact that the Petersberg Afghanistan Conference 2001 took place without the Taliban is undoubtedly due to the historical situation. However, this was a missed opportunity to bring all politically relevant parties - including the difficult ones - to one table.

Another misjudgement was to underestimate the Taliban's support among the Afghan population, especially the rural population. On the one hand, this support stemmed from the common resistance against foreign rule; on the other hand, there is a high degree of cultural autonomy among the Afghan population. For most of them, the tribal, ethnic and religious structures are far more familiar than modern social models that the Western alliance tried to establish.

d) Reflection on the German development cooperation

When assessing the impact of development cooperation during the war years 2001-2021 in Afghanistan, a distinction must be made between international, German governmental and non-governmental (here church) development cooperation. Here an attempt is made to relate their impact, which has been achieved with considerable financial resources over the last two decades, to the economic and political situation in Afghanistan today. It must be taken into account that the initial situation in Afghanistan and the framework conditions were extremely unfavourable and difficult. The fundamental question arises as to how effective development cooperation can be if it is to be carried out at the same time as the military operation and the fight against terrorism, and if the funds go to the Afghan government and its authorities according to bilateral principles.

The German government's development cooperation was able to achieve partial successes, especially in the areas of basic education and vocational training as well as in refugee aid by building shelters for internally displaced persons. With German and international support, the beginnings of a vibrant civil society emerged in the cities and articulated itself freely. Self-confident girls and women have grown up, exercising their right to education and conquering public space as ambassadors, governors, mayors, policewomen, etc. In 2020, 21% of Afghan civil servants were women. The lower house of parliament had a legal quota of 30% women. There was media diversity and unrestricted access to information. Maternal and infant mortality rates were significantly reduced through the development of public health services. Jobs were created through road construction and other infrastructure development, e.g. drinking water supply, which boosted the local economy. Local government structures have been established in some municipalities and the administrative sector has been improved through training of staff.

Despite these partial successes, more far-reaching and sustainable goals such as the rule of law or the ambitious goal of gender justice in view of the patriarchal society were not achieved. Unnecessary pressure to spend money by providing too much funding made it difficult to spend it wisely and, above all, in a controlled manner. Complex projects aimed at economic development, behavioural change, institutional capacity building in the Afghan administration, rule of law or gender were rarely successful. Instead of gender equality, in some regions, the promotion of women has been successful at best on a selective basis. According to UN OCHA, for example, the current literacy rate of women in Afghanistan is a meagre 23% despite considerable investment in education over two decades; other sources even speak of only 17%. In addition, the coexistence of reconstruction efforts and the ongoing situation of violence until the Taliban came to power was problematic and hindered development goals, e.g. basic education. So it was too dangerous for many children to go to school.

Studies on the effects of development cooperation in Afghanistan can only lead to the conclusion that with a lot of money comparatively little has been achieved. In many cases, insufficient coordination between the different departments was criticised. Moreover, the international engagement had to deal with different ideas of the NATO countries, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the local governments in Afghanistan.

Strategic evaluations for timely course correction did not take place because many regions were inaccessible due to the war or because staff members were threatened by the Taliban. Local governments did not implement fundamental reforms against the patronage system, abuse of power and human rights violations. Linking the self-management of funds provided to efficiency and effective measures to fight corruption and its structural causes did not succeed, and the Afghan central government remained inactive in this regard. No relationship could be established with local government officials because they changed frequently or were distracted by internal power struggles. In addition, the centralism of the Kabul government and its lack of delegation of authority were not questioned enough; most international funds continued to be channelled centrally through Kabul. As most of the professional staff remained predominantly in Kabul, there was a lamentable lack of civilian professional staff for administrative capacity building at provincial level. As a result, there was little knowledge of the complex local structures and their relation to the central government - characterised by unclear responsibilities and powers - and the urban-rural divide grew. In any case, international government development cooperation did not reach 60% of the country, but concentrated on the cities and on safe regions with military bases.

Overall, it can be concluded that the capacity and willingness of Afghan governments was chronically overestimated which led to overambitious planning and expectations. Simple projects at the local level, such as small irrigation projects or projects for the advancement of women, were successful, but these successes could not be transferred and institutionalised. In addition, the international community failed to consistently prevent the insurgents from tapping into funds. They were able to do this mainly by controlling access to some regions and promoting their support groups there. It could not be prevented or rather it was allowed that the Taliban already exerted influence

in the economy and politics in the two decades before they seized power - without being politically involved.

Church development cooperation and humanitarian aid organisations support civil society structures beyond the respective governments and therefore find it easier to reach and strengthen civil society. The projects are implemented by local staff, are locally based and thus context-related as well as target group-oriented. Instead of external control, an important principle of church development cooperation and church humanitarian aid is the promotion of "ownership", the consistent assumption of responsibility on a local level. Years of personal relationships have created networks and, above all, trust based on reliability. The Church's international cooperation agencies such as Misereor, Caritas International, Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe and others do not fundamentally cease their involvement when things get difficult, but show flexibility when a deteriorating security situation makes changes in project management necessary. This constancy and reliability have been an important anchor for the people in need during volatile times marked by insecurity and the chaos of war.

Another example is the *Ziviler Friedensdienst* (Civil Peace Service) (ZFD), which was active in Afghanistan from 2004 to 2017 through the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit* (German Agency for International Cooperation) (GIZ) and, at the time, the *Deutscher Entwicklungsdienst* (German Development Service) (DED) with approximately 30 publicly funded peace experts. Even if this number is low for an entire country and the work is to be regarded rather as an example, valuable work of inclusive peacebuilding and civil conflict transformation was also carried out in provinces where the central government had hardly any power to govern. Although the security situation became more difficult, 14 projects could still be continued. In particular, for example, awareness of human rights was raised in training courses, media people were trained in ethically responsible journalism, curricula for schools were developed with elements of peace education; traditional councils were familiarised with methods of non-violent conflict management and the formation of civil society networks was promoted. A considerable 120 Afghan civil society NGOs had joined forces to form the "Afghan Civil Society Organisations Network for Peace", which was supported by the ZFD. The staff of the Civil Peace Service (ZFD) also drew attention to the fact that the international community of states tended to neglect safer areas, so that unstable zones could spread quickly there. Unfortunately, these warnings were little heeded.

Self-critically, it can be said that the projects of church development cooperation and church humanitarian aid (with their limited resources) such as Misereor, Caritas International, Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe and others only had a selective effect in a few regions and could not be transferred to society. The partners explored what was possible in a particular region. The claim to serve as a model and the hope that the demand for similar projects from other regions would grow could not be sustained because networking processes of civil society were hardly possible in times of war.

Despite all this, there have also been many successes in the last 20 years. It must therefore be said that Afghan society has been massively set back in its development by the Taliban's seizure of power. Nevertheless, the international community, including the German government, must remain committed to Afghan civil society, because it bears a clear share of responsibility for its desolate

situation. In addition to short- and medium-term humanitarian aid, long-term commitment is also necessary for which a broad anchoring in society is important.

e) Reflection on the German contribution to the international military engagement in Afghanistan

After the terrorist attacks on the USA on 11 September 2001, alliance solidarity with the USA and the restoration of collective security were the driving motives of the German government: in the prosecution of the terrorist masterminds, in the elimination of the safe haven of international terrorist networks in Afghanistan and in the prevention of further terrorist attacks. After the swift fall of the Taliban and after the Petersberg Conference, Germany supported the United Nations' goal of stabilising the country, which had been shattered by 23 years of war, promoting reliable statehood and development and securing it through the international support force ISAF. This approach of comprehensive and structural terror prophylaxis seemed to make sense in terms of security and peace policy. And the German political and military leadership, as well as some other allies, were right not to want to become occupiers but to support the Afghan transitional government on the difficult path to more security and peace and not to patronise it.

The reality of the international Afghanistan mission, however, developed differently.

Among general political mandates, it lacked a common and coherent civil-military strategy. The consistent incoherence of the strategic priorities of important allies was serious: On the US side, the "War on Terror" and the goal of defeating the Taliban militarily dominated for long stretches, with little regard for the civilian population. On the part of the United Nations and several European allies, including Germany, the goal of stabilisation, security and state-building support dominated. The coexistence of three military operations (OEF, ISAF, special operations of the CIA) and different approaches of nations and international organisations (e.g. in establishing police forces or in development cooperation) were further areas of strategic incoherence.

Germany's participation in the multinational ISAF mission, which was led by NATO from 2003 onwards, was significant. The forces of the German Bundeswehr, the Federal Foreign Office, the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development and the police, which were weak in comparison to the size of the operational area, met in Camp Marmal and with the German Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT) in Kunduz and Feyzabad to coordinate their work within the framework of "networked security" (later "networked approach"). On a day-to-day basis, distances between the departments were reduced and interdepartmental cooperation was promoted. However, it must be soberly noted that the practice of the networked approach still falls considerably short of the key role attributed to it, especially by security policy. Even before taking the lead role in the north, Germany assumed the lead role in (coordinating) international reconstruction assistance for the Afghan police. However, this task, which is fundamental for sustainable security, was inadequately staffed and financed in the first seven years. With the help of the German police project, important components of a civilian police force were promoted. However, the training of the majority of the ordinary police forces was left to the USA, which limited itself to short military training for counter-insurgency operations.

In the first years, ISAF forces in the northern region achieved significant stabilisation progress, which promoted many reconstruction activities and gave rise to hope. In the following years, however, the security situation deteriorated seriously and the initiative got lost. The German contingent's force deployment, armament and operational concept were initially not adapted to the growing threat. The air strike of 4 September 2009 near Kunduz with many civilian casualties was the low point of this development.

Under President Barack Obama, the USA, and thus also ISAF, switched to a strategy of political-military counterinsurgency (COIN), in which winning the "hearts and minds" of the population was to be the decisive method for weakening the insurgents. With increased forces, German ISAF forces now also carried out offensive operations, followed by rapid stabilisation measures by the Federal Foreign Office. In this way, insurgents were pushed back in 2011/12 and the enormous increase in security incidents was reversed for the first time in years. However, with the announcement of the ISAF withdrawal by the end of 2014, it was pre-programmed that security progress at the tactical level would not be sustainable. Moreover, those knowledgeable about Afghanistan fundamentally doubted that a social-technocratic COIN strategy could be strategically successful given the complex loyalties in the fragmented Afghan society, the predominantly poor governance and in the face of a locally anchored insurgency fuelled from Pakistan.

With the follow-up mission "Resolute Support", NATO-led security support was considerably reduced: Withdrawal to the main base of the respective major region, advising Afghan security forces only on the high ground of the corps far away from the implementation level, explicitly without combat mission. Parallel to the ISAF withdrawal, the security situation deteriorated considerably. With the Taliban attacks on the German Consulate General in Mazar in 2016, the German Embassy in 2017 and on "Green Village", where German GIZ staff and police officers were also accommodated, Germany lost all bases of a civilian foreign, development and security policy. These setbacks were exemplary for an intensified security situation since 2016. In 2019, 41% of all people who became victims of terrorist attacks worldwide died in Afghanistan.

Even if al-Qaida had been weakened, the strategic goals of sustainably containing terrorism and promoting a safer environment with the help of sustainable security forces were missed. The unconditional, hasty and uncoordinated withdrawal announced by two US presidents was a unilateral denunciation of alliance loyalty and reliability to allies on the ground. It resulted in a human, political and moral disaster. This failure was essentially caused by a systematic dishonesty that was to be found as a basic pattern of dealing with the mission at various levels of the political and military hierarchy.

There was no clear designation of foreign and security policy interests. For the top echelons of the German government, loyalty to the alliance was the decisive motivation for a German mission in Afghanistan. However, this loyalty was not underpinned by a common strategy of the international partners and was not questioned even in the face of erroneous developments. Thus, German forces were repeatedly confronted with the alliance dilemma: on the one hand, German soldiers were dependent on survival assistance from US forces in critical situations, and on the other hand, they

learned of US troops' operational methods that did not reliably comply with international humanitarian law and thus thwarted the mission objective.

The reconstruction of a war-torn country and the promotion of human and women's rights were partly instrumentalised to politically legitimise the mission. For many of those who carried out Germany's Afghanistan engagement, however, these were decisive motives.

As a result, political mandates and missions remained abstract. A designation of clear, realistic and verifiable goals was omitted. In this respect, the German mission lacked a clear focus on impact: at the tactical level of operations, operational experience, measures and projects, analyses of effectiveness and experiential learning were part of everyday professional life, but systematic, interdepartmental and independent impact studies (evaluations) of the mission as a whole were always refused by the federal government - and the respective coalition majorities - until the year the mission was called off. This refusal prevented the early analysis and correction of undesirable developments in the mission. The fact that this did not happen in Germany was a collective political failure of leadership and denied responsibility towards the people in Afghanistan and the women and men sent there by the Federal Government and the Bundestag. The examples of some other allies, on the other hand, have shown that impact analyses were indeed possible.

Knowledge of the country and an intercultural-historical understanding of conflict were lacking. The highly complex and fragmented Afghan society was all too often approached by the leadership levels of international actors with power politics, security policy wishful thinking and illusions of feasibility. Existing scientific and experiential competencies were not sufficiently taken into account, especially by those with political responsibility in Germany. As a result, the incompatibility of counter-terrorism and simultaneous reconstruction was massively underestimated and Germany's own possibilities for action in the Afghan environment, which is difficult to understand, were overestimated. Far too little attention was paid to the fact that more than three quarters of the Afghan population live in rural areas. International politics and its actors were mainly oriented towards urban Afghanistan. Political visitors from Germany were most likely to come into contact with representatives from politics and urban civil society, but hardly ever with the rural population.

There was a lack of perception of reality. Many allies including Germany and the media, had a tunnel vision of their own area of responsibility and Kabul. What happened in other parts of the country, such as the intensive war zones of Helmand and Kandahar, was largely ignored. The role of the neighbouring states, especially Pakistan, without which a pacification of Afghanistan cannot be achieved, was not sufficiently considered, either. For many years, reports on the security situation to parliament were limited to mere reports on security incidents, operations and measures, but did not provide a picture of the situation with trends, focal points, etc. Realistic situation reports and reports from operations passed through filters of soft focus and whitewashing on the way up, promoted by political pressure of expectations, career consideration and a lack of error culture. As the security situation worsened, the barricades of wagons grew, contacts with locals shrank and the picture of the situation was diluted.

Initially, the deployment of personnel and resources was very low-key and characterised by an enormous underestimation of the challenge Afghanistan posed. Demands for reinforcements from the

field were either rejected (until 2009) when it came to increasing and arming the Bundeswehr, or largely ignored in politics and the media when it came to strengthening the minimal diplomatic and weak police forces.

The massive misjudgement with regard to the central government and the Afghan army led in the end to a disastrous evacuation operation that left many local forces behind. To this day, a narrow definition and a restrictive admission policy leave people behind who are at great risk due to the cooperation with the Bundeswehr and other German institutions.

f) Reflection on the accompaniment of people during or after the military engagement

In the following section, a change of perspective is made, because it deals with the question of how the mission has affected the people from Germany who have been involved in Afghanistan over the past 20 years. The account is given from the point of view of those having provided pastoral care and focuses primarily on the Bundeswehr soldiers.

20 years of deployment in Afghanistan - that also means 20 years of pastoral care for people before, during and after their deployment. In 2002, the first military chaplains went to Camp Warehouse in Kabul with the first contingent of soldiers. The last military chaplain accompanied the troops carrying out the evacuation measures in the summer of 2021. About 80 Protestant and 80 Catholic military chaplains were providing pastoral care in Afghanistan.

Their area of responsibility was not limited to the Bundeswehr contingents. Military chaplains have also supported German embassy staff and the German police missions in Afghanistan. Moreover, they have accompanied staff of the Gesellschaft für internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development and German non-governmental organisations.

Pastoral care in Afghanistan initially meant sharing with people the time and world of their lives, their worries, needs, sorrows, hopes and joys on the ground in the Hindu Kush. The chaplains comforted in cases of death and wounding and offered rituals for overcoming grief and fear. Especially in cases of death and injury, there was close cooperation between military chaplains and representatives of the medical and psychological services. It became apparent that only through cooperation between the various services people could be effectively accompanied. The mutual complementarity and support have grown a lot over the years.

The Protestant Association for the Care of Soldiers in the Federal Republic of Germany (EAS) and the Catholic Association for the Care of Soldiers (KAS) set up care facilities, so-called OASEN, first in Kabul and later in Mazar-e-Sharif. They were, as it were, Christian community centres and at the same time an important place for the soldiers to stay when they were off duty.

Twenty years of deployment: people have worked for peace and stability. From Germany alone, 59 soldiers died. Others returned with severe injuries to body and soul, from which they are still suffering today. Marriages and families were torn apart by the strain. These burdens do not only affect soldiers, but many people who have been involved in Afghanistan. In this emotional situation, pastoral care was and is required. It is a task not only of military chaplains, but of the churches as a whole, to seek contact with the people entrusted to their care, to be open to conversation, to allow

grief and lamentation or to formulate all this on behalf of the people in conversations, in prayer and in church services. This is not exclusively the task of the churches and their pastoral workers, but of society as a whole. Not only soldiers complained about the lack of interest shown by many in society which presented an additional burden on the forces in Afghanistan.

It has taken years for the churches and political leaders to realise as well what a heavy burden the mission in Afghanistan placed on the people involved and their families.

In 2007, bereaved families of soldiers who were killed or died in Afghanistan turned to the military chaplaincy for more support, because they felt that the Bundeswehr was not providing enough. This marked the beginning of the military chaplaincy's intensified commitment to people suffering from the consequences of deployment. Together with the psychologist of the Special Operations Command, an interdisciplinary (psychology/chaplaincy/grief counselling) planning team was established and the format of weekends for bereaved people was developed and has been conducted since 2008.

From this initial event arose the need and necessity to provide more intensive pastoral care for those who have been traumatised and injured in the Afghanistan mission, and not to lose sight of former soldiers and their families. In 2012, a comprehensive pastoral counselling service for traumatised and wounded persons was launched, which has evolved into ASEM (Arbeitsfeld Seelsorge für unter Einsatz- und Dienstfolgen leidende Menschen) (Pastoral care for people suffering from the consequences of deployment and service). The target groups of ASEM are active and former members of the Bundeswehr who have suffered physical or psychological wounds in the line of duty, together with their families or close relatives, surviving dependents of members of the Bundeswehr, members of the Bundeswehr Psychosocial Network and other supporters ("help for helpers").

The programmes are organised by the military chaplaincies under the direction of a chaplain. The work is done in interdisciplinary teams from the Bundeswehr and the civilian environment, in which social, psychological, medical, creative and therapeutic competences are represented. The teams are led by military chaplains. Needs-based and unbureaucratic help is offered in a protected setting. In autumn 2021, many people followed the shocking events in Afghanistan. Shock, bewilderment, helplessness, rage, anger - these are the words used by soldiers and military chaplains when they spoke or wrote about their emotional state. Some of them reported a chaos of emotions that gripped them. This was especially true of those who had been in Afghanistan for the past twenty years.

Some want to know what the point of the mission was. They speak of futility and frustration. Others experience a loss of confidence in the political leadership.

Some still fear for the lives of the locals with whom they had worked during the mission. They were stunned by the late evacuation of the local forces. Some speak of being hurt morally. Some fear that the wounds that have already healed will reopen in people who have been affected by the mission, and that traumatised people will be retraumatised.

The time delay between an event and the recognition of massive stress up to illness will continue to move and challenge the Bundeswehr in pastoral care, medicine, psychology and social services for

a very long time. For many of those who were deployed in Afghanistan, the mission is not yet completed. It accompanies them day and night. All of us in Germany bear responsibility for them. Those who were deployed in Afghanistan outside the Bundeswehr in other institutions and organisations have not yet been considered. They also need offers to help them come to terms with the traumas and stresses they have suffered. In all of this, it is important to bear in mind that it is above all the Afghan population that suffers from trauma. It is part of the extended international responsibility to offer them support - even if this seems practically impossible under the given circumstances.

In view of the soldiers who died in Afghanistan, the question of appropriate funeral services arose. In cooperation with representatives of the Federal Ministry of Defence, a schedule was agreed that took into account the wishes of the bereaved families. Together with representatives of the military chaplaincy, the EKD's Centre for the Culture of Preaching and Worship developed drafts for (multi-religious) funeral services for soldiers killed in action.

The need for appropriate memorials for the fallen also arose. The military chaplaincy supported and accompanied the bereaved families in their initiative to create a first memorial site (Bundeswehr memorial).

3. Lessons learned – a summary

Against the background of the guiding principle of a just peace, the experiences of the forces in Afghanistan and out of a lasting responsibility for the people in Afghanistan, GKKE wants to make a contribution to the evaluation of the Afghanistan mission. The order of the day is consistent honesty in the reappraisal, the consideration of the different levels of the mission (civilian, political, developmental, military, etc.) and the inclusion of the Afghans. Even though this is about coming to terms with the German mission in Afghanistan, the suffering of the Afghan population must be taken seriously. Supporting the Afghan people still remains Germany's responsibility.

The failure of the Afghanistan mission on a large scale does not mean that the mission of the men and women sent to Afghanistan by German politics was a complete failure: with the goal and motivation of helping the battered Afghan people to build peace, they committed themselves fully, even at risk, achieved partial progress and gave hope.

The international mission in Afghanistan has shown the following:

- A comprehensive and independent impact evaluation of the Afghanistan mission has never taken place and has prevented timely learning from undesirable developments. The lesson to be learned from this is that every mission - whether civilian or military - must be evaluated early, regularly and independently with the participation of the country's population in order to counteract undesirable developments and to answer the question of whether a mission continues to make sense.
- The two major churches have participated in the public debate on the Afghanistan mission with different and contradictory statements and must ask themselves whether they have offered enough orientational knowledge. The lesson to be learned from this is that there is

a need for an intensive treatment of the questions of peace ethics that is appropriate to the complexity of the situations and thus provides a suitable space for public debate.

- In promoting lasting statehood or state building in Afghanistan, the international allies have, in different ways, proceeded on the basis of Western-style rule-of-law institutions and socio-cultural preconditions that were not and are not present in Afghanistan. The lesson to be learned from this is that external actors should limit themselves to a "role as midwives" in state building in order to enable the respective society to develop its own model of social and political coexistence. Time horizons of at least one to two generations are realistic for such a process.
- There is endemic corruption in Afghanistan, mainly found among the top of the state, the political elites and questionable partners. A lot of money from international actors has also fuelled corruption. The lesson to be learned from this is that smart politics must consider in advance which measures can be used to contain excessive corruption and successively overcome it within the framework of state building.
- One of the biggest mistakes of the Afghanistan mission is the lack of knowledge and differentiation of the religious-ethnic context and the equation of the Taliban with other Islamist groups. Thus, the Taliban were not involved in the conflict resolution and the reconstruction of the country. The lesson to be learned from this is that a sound knowledge of the religious, cultural and historical background of a country and a comprehensive understanding of the conflict are fundamental prerequisites for the success of an operation on the ground - both military and civilian. In a political conflict resolution and a possible reconstruction of a country, difficult negotiating partners - such as the Taliban in Afghanistan - should also be involved, if possible.
- In development cooperation, some progress has been made for the Afghan population, but more far-reaching goals such as the rule of law or the ambitious goal of gender equality in view of the patriarchal society have not been achieved. Comparatively little has been accomplished with a lot of money. The lesson to be learned from this is that development cooperation can make a difference under the conditions of a failed state if it grows from the bottom up with modest, context-sensitive goals, is designed for the long term and consistently based on the assumption of responsibility, and is anchored in society.
- The decisive motive for the German Afghanistan mission was alliance solidarity with the USA. Among general mandates, however, there was a lack of a common, coherent, civil-military strategy among the allies. The international military mission in Afghanistan failed to achieve its strategic goals of a secure environment for (state) building and development and a sustainable fight against terrorism. The lesson to be learned from this is that alliance solidarity is generally not a sufficient reason for a deployment of such magnitude. Rather, it must be underpinned by a common strategy, sufficient understanding of the conflict, coherence, feasibility realism and an impact orientation aimed at human security.

- The strategic failure of Germany's Afghanistan mission was essentially characterised by persistent dishonesty. There was a lack of a clear definition of foreign and security policy interests - mandates remained abstract, realistic images of the situation were softened and glossed over, and the need for personnel and resources required for a successful mission was underestimated. The lesson to be learned from this is that before and in any political-civil-military engagement in another country, an honest interdepartmental and coherent analysis, a realistic assessment of the target-means ratio and a continuous honest and independent evaluation are necessary in order to be able to justify an operation.
- Soldiers and employees of other institutions had to pay a high price for the mission in Afghanistan. It took years for those with political responsibility - and also for the churches - to realise what a burden the mission in Afghanistan meant for the people and their families. The lesson to be learned from this is that appropriate support structures must be established at an early stage. As a democratic society, we bear responsibility for the people who are sent on foreign missions, whether they are soldiers, police officers or other civilian employees at governmental and non-governmental level.

Attachment: Members of the Task Force “Contribution to the evaluation of the German military engagement in Afghanistan” of the GKKE

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