

Peace-building and COIN in Afghanistan: The view of NGOs

What is really needed?

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Abstract: To build peace in Afghanistan, the humanitarian needs of the local population must be identified and selectively satisfied. First and foremost, humanitarian agencies have to deliver basic needs such as water, food and shelter. Accomplishing this is usually a complex and highly difficult task. These difficulties involved are increased by so-called complex emergencies or post-conflict or asymmetrical warfare, or insurgencies. This article aims to identify lessons learned on more effective peace-building in complex emergencies or COIN environments. As such, the dilemma between the need to establish a unified approach and the risk of blurring the lines between civilian and military actors, the search for civil-military guidelines, the various NGO approaches, and lessons learned will be analysed.

Keywords: Peace-building, Afghanistan, military actors, civil actors, NGOs, CIMIC
Friedensaufbau, Afghanistan, Militär, zivile Akteure, NRO, CIMIC

1. Finding an adequate response to a complex set of needs

In order to address the humanitarian needs of a population, one must first define which particular “needs” are to be satisfied in a given crisis. In cases of disaster there is a common understanding of what the “basic needs” are: the shock-ridden population needs water, food and shelter for its mere survival. These are the first goods humanitarian agencies must deliver, a task which – even in the absence of political conflict – can already cause huge logistical problems, as the international relief operation after the earthquake in Haiti on 12 January 2010 demonstrated.

The task of defining needs becomes even more challenging in so-called complex emergencies or in the midst of post-conflict or asymmetrical warfare, such as an insurgency. Controversies may arise over issues such as (i) agreeing on a set of needs which surpasses the commonly accepted “basic needs”; (ii) prioritizing the needs, i.e., sequencing must be optimized in order to avoid the risk of doing more harm than good; (iii) reaching consensus on the available as well as appropriate means to satisfy the needs; (iv) involving suitable actors and assigning them tasks according to their specific expertise; (v) taking the timeline into consideration, i.e., determining which strategies are best suited to a given phase of a particular conflict, depending on whether it is advancing towards stabilization or relapsing into unrest; and last but not least, (vi) responding to the changing demands of the local population, who may become increasingly frustrated or even turn hostile because their needs and expectations have not been met.

The question of how to satisfy a broad range of needs in a hostile environment has provoked a controversy among military strategists and civilian planners. In the Afghan context, the controversy was intensified when, in late 2002, the

US introduced their military-dominated model of Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) and, in 2003, put pressure on their NATO and OEF allies to take over US PRTs or to establish new ones. When from spring 2006 onwards the security situation markedly deteriorated due to growing insurgent activities, military strategists realized that they had to engage different categories of actors and address different sector-wise demands arising from the complex set of needs. They argued that military organizations like NATO should work more closely with non-military organizations such as the UN and international donor governments but also with the Afghan government and called for a “Comprehensive Approach”. At the NATO summit in Riga in November 2006 it was agreed that such an approach should be adopted in Afghanistan, but NATO failed to conceptualize a strategy which could be effectively implemented.

Efforts to translate the political declaration into military practice were renewed when the Obama Administration assumed office and, in summer 2009, nominated General Stanley McChrystal as the new ISAF commander. President Barack Obama’s speech on 1 December 2009¹ marked a strategic revision. Responding to General McChrystal’s request for more troops, Obama announced a three-fold strategy: (i) A “military surge” of 30,000 additional US troops would be deployed. (ii) This surge would be complemented by a “civilian surge”: a broad range of civilian experts, advisors and trainers – many of them in military fatigues – would work in the weak government institutions and improve the poor governance of the Karzai government. Furthermore, and (iii) both surges were meant to pave the way for a process of “Afghanization”, i.e., from 2011 onwards actual authority was to be gradually transferred to the Afghan government and national security forces.

1 Cf. Barack Obama, Remarks by the president in address to the nation on the way forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Delivered at the US Military Academy at West Point, New York, 1 December 2009; <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-address-nation-way-forward-afghanistan-and-pakistan>.

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The complementary military and civilian surges can be expected to further intensify the controversy between military strategists and international NGOs working in Afghanistan. Since the establishment of PRTs, international aid workers have strongly criticized that “humanitarianism is under deep threat in Afghanistan” and that there is “no humanitarian consensus in Afghanistan and very little humanitarian space”.² They justify their harsh criticism by citing statistics according to which aid workers in general, and Afghan staff members of international NGOs in particular, have been increasingly targeted by insurgent groups. They argue that the “blurring of lines” between the military and civilian domains has, in fact, increased the risk to civilian aid workers and narrowed the space for providing basic services to the local population in rural areas. As a result, the demands of local people have been frustrated and efforts to stabilize and develop remote or insecure regions have been undermined.

To identify lessons learned on how to approach peace-building more effectively in complex emergencies or in a COIN environment, the following aspects will be analysed: first, the dilemma between the need to establish a unified approach and the risk of blurring the lines between civilian and military actors; second, the search for civil-military guidelines; third, the various NGO approaches; and fourth, lessons learned on how to meet people’s needs.

2. Civil-military relations: “Unity of effort”

In spite of their different positions, politicians, military strategists and civilian planners all agree that in order to successfully build peace in an insurgent environment, the support of the local population must first be won. Quick-impact tactics such as “buying” the support of local authorities, informants or disillusioned insurgents will only result in short-lived military advantages. Instead, to win the lasting support of the local people and pave the way for a sustainable peace, the systemic roots of local grievances must be effectively tackled. Here, the decisive element is the multi-causal nature of local grievances. Although security is the first priority, it is certainly not the sole remedy in fighting an insurgency. Unless security measures are complemented by other initiatives such as delivering basic public services or creating jobs, attempts will fail to wean local people from insurgent groups. Lessons learned have shown that the military is not the appropriate actor to deliver complementary services and that in aiming to do so it needs to team up with civilian actors and their specific expertise.

Consequently, a pool of various actors with complementary expertise is needed to respond to local demands in a conflict environment. David J. Kilcullen describes the conflict environment as a “conflict ecosystem” in which, as in the case of Afghanistan, militant non-state groups struggle with state representatives (and their international supporters) for control

over a “contested political space”.³ The conflict ecosystem is shaped by “pre-existing social networks” and “a complex social, informational and physical environment”. In such a combative environment local people will side with the dominant power in order to survive. Only if they develop sufficient trust that their immediate survival as well as their long-term well-being are better guaranteed by state actors and international forces will they risk distancing themselves from insurgent groups. The pool of actors is therefore faced with the challenge of organizing their broad expertise so effectively that they are perceived by the local population as credible suppliers of much-needed services. It may be noted in passing that “credible supply” also implies the “sustainable delivery of services”, which, in general, cannot be provided by military actors but requires the involvement of civilian actors over a longer period of time.

Kilcullen rightly points out that “you cannot command what you do not control” and concludes that instead of “unity of command” actually “unity of effort” is required.⁴ He advocates such a cautious approach as the second-best option if a “shared command and control hierarchy” is not feasible in a complex, multi-agency COIN ecosystem. Under these circumstances, at least a “shared diagnosis of the problem” should be achieved and the pool of actors made to collaborate and to share information.

Kilcullen’s argument is reinforced by the U.S. manual on “Guiding Principles for Stabilization and Reconstruction”, which also highlights the need for “unity of effort”.⁵ The manual claims not to be an officially authorized document or doctrine of the US government but instead intends to present “strategic principles” for all major activities in stabilization and reconstruction missions in one publication. With regard to civil-military relations, the manual is based on a comprehensive list of official US documents, which are in line with the US traditional preference for close interaction in comprehensive missions; out of respect for the sensitivities of non-governmental actors, the authors emphasize that the strategic principles have also been reviewed by a number of NGOs.

The manual identifies seven cross-cutting principles that, taken together, provide overarching guidance for organizing the division of labour among all the members of a diverse pool. Among them is “unity of effort”. A “shared understanding of the environment” is required, as well as cooperation in working towards common objectives “even when the participants come from many different organizations with diverse operating cultures”.⁶ Interestingly, this definition is influenced by military thinking, as can be concluded from the reference to a standard

3 Cf. David J. Kilcullen, *Three pillars of counterinsurgency*. Remarks delivered at the U.S. Counterinsurgency Conference, Washington D.C., 28 September 2006; p. 2; http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/uscoin/3pillars_of_counterinsurgency.pdf.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

5 Cf. *Guiding Principles for Stabilization and Reconstruction*, jointly published by the U.S. Army and Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute / U.S. Institute of Peace, Washington D.C. 2009, http://www.usip.org/files/resources/guiding_principles_full.pdf.

6 *Ibid.*, quoted from section 3.1. The other six cross-cutting principles are: host nation ownership and capacity, political primacy, legitimacy, security, conflict transformation, and regional engagement.

2 Quoted from: Antonio Donini, *Afghanistan: Humanitarianism under threat*. Briefing Paper. Tufts University, Feinstein International Center, Medford, MA, March 2009, p. 2; <http://wikis.uit.tufts.edu/confluence/display/FIC/Afghanistan+-+Humanitarianism+under+Threat>.

military document of 2008: the US Army's Field Manual 3-07 on stability operations.

The German government, too, feels the need to identify principles for "crisis prevention as a shared task". In May 2004 it created the Interministerial Steering Group for Civilian Crisis Prevention, a forum which was mandated to submit a progress report, the so-called Action Plan, to the German Parliament every two years.⁷ The Action Plan promoted the idea of closer interministerial cooperation and acknowledged the complementary task of civil society and non-governmental actors.

However, so far none of these initiatives has addressed the deep concerns of civilian actors regarding a mutually acceptable form of cooperation in actual practice. Civilian actors see the need for agreeing on principles, but they question whether the military is really prepared to tolerate "diverse operating cultures" in a comprehensive mission. Based on their previous experience on the ground, they may even dismiss such military declarations of intent as merely paying lip service for political reasons.

3. Integrated missions: The increased risk of "blurring the lines"

The scepticism seems to be justified. A united effort may aggravate the risk that the military and civilian domains cannot be clearly distinguished ("blurring the lines") or that the military even dominates the civilian domain. The ambiguous nature of civil-military relations has also sparked controversy with regard to terminology. NATO uses the term "civil-military cooperation" (CIMIC) and sees a two-fold function. In a narrow sense, CIMIC serves as an operational-tactical tool for protecting one's own forces; in a broader sense, CIMIC forms part of a comprehensive politico-strategic policy of supporting security sector reform (SSR).⁸ By contrast, most NGOs consider the term civil-military cooperation a "purely military concept" according to which civilian objectives are subordinated to military goals. NGOs deny that CIMIC has anything to do with "development cooperation" or "humanitarian aid"; hence they prefer the term "civil-military relations".⁹

This dispute over terms reveals a basic controversy about the aims of intervening in complex emergencies or in a COIN environment. The debate must be seen in the context of advancing from the narrow term of "security" to the broader concept of "human security" and the corresponding shift of UN peace-keeping missions to more complex "integrated

missions". "Human security" – as proposed by the UNDP's 1994 Human Development Report – transcends the state-centric concept of "security", which entails supporting the state in its fight against anti-government forces or insurgents with the primary focus on the cessation of fighting ("negative peace").¹⁰ By contrast, "human security" is understood as "positive peace", which – in line with the 2005 Human Security Report – rejects the assumption that "secure states ... automatically mean secure people". Human security aims at guaranteeing – beyond physical security – the economic, social, environmental and political well-being of the local people.

This conceptual broadening has been accompanied by a shift in UN operations, which have advanced from peace-keeping to peace-building and were converted into "integrated missions". "Integration" in this context meant that all instruments of foreign, security and development policy are to be coherently oriented towards a common political goal – a conceptual revision promoted by the Brahimi Report on UN Peace Operations of 2000.¹¹ The NGO community have criticized the Brahimi Report's treatment of "unity of effort", arguing that the authors of the report regard humanitarian aid merely as an element of conflict transformation, turning it into a non-combatant function of the military.

The deep concern among NGOs regarding the growing tendency to blur the lines is reinforced by the emergence of so-called third-generation civil-military relations. While previous operations by UN blue helmet peace-keepers have been classified as "first-generation" and the PRT concept as "second-generation" civil-military relations, the "third-generation" is embodied by the "US military-driven 'holistic' civil police reform project in Afghan, the so-called Focused District Development (FDD) program.¹² This new type of civil-military interaction has been developed by the US to build up the Afghan National Police (ANP). The approach consists of assigning military personnel and private security companies with the task of training the Afghan police in basic skills as well as anti-riot tactics, thereby vindicating the policy adopted by Germany, which preferably entrusts civilian police mentors with training a uniformed police force. The US military develops civilian capability and at the same time also engages various civilian agencies, with the holistic aim of reforming the police force as well as state institutions as part of security sector reform. This new quality has been aptly described as follows: "A defining feature of third-generation civil-military relations is the vanishing difference between military and civil work areas."¹³ The fact that the new approach amounts to a paradigmatic shift in US engagement in Afghanistan is illustrated by President Obama's announcement of a complementary military and civilian surge, with civilians quite often working in uniform.

7 Cf. "Crisis prevention as a shared task", 2nd Federal Government Report on the implementation of the Action Plan "Civilian crisis prevention, conflict resolution and post-conflict peacebuilding", 16 July 2008; website: <http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/diplo/de/Aussenpolitik/Themen/Krisenpraevention/Downloads/Aktionsplan-Bericht2-en.pdf>.

8 Cf. Michael Paul, CIMIC in the ISAF mission: conception, implementation and development of civil-military cooperation in the Bundeswehr abroad. Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Berlin 2009, p. 9; http://www.swp-berlin.org/en/common/get_document.php?asset_id=5889.

9 Cf. Peter Runge, The Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan: role model for civil-military relations? Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC), Bonn 2009, p. 9; http://www.bicc.de/uploads/pdf/publications/papers/occ_paper_04/occasional_paper_IV_11_09.pdf.

10 Cf. Julian Brett, Recent experience with comprehensive civil and military approaches in international operations, Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS), Copenhagen 2009, pp. 15-16; http://www.diis.dk/graphics/Publications/Reports2009/DIIS_Report_2009_09_Recent%20Experience_Comprehensive_Civil_Military_Approaches_web.pdf. The quotations are taken from the report.

11 Cf. Peter Runge, *ibid.*, p. 9-10.

12 Cf. Frederik Rosén, Third generation civil-military relations and the 'New Revolution in Military Affairs' / Frederik Rosén; Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS), Copenhagen 2009, p. 7; http://www.diis.dk/graphics/Publications/WP2009/WP09-03_New_Revolution_in_Military_Affairs_web.pdf

13 Quoted from Frederik Rosén, *ibid.*, p. 11.

4. Clarifying civil-military relations: The need for guidelines

The more the “integrated” nature of UN missions and comprehensive “whole of government” approaches continue to blur the lines between military and civilian tasks, the more the need is felt to clarify the ambiguous relations between military and civilian actors. Hence, the development of a broader concept of human security and integrated peace missions has been accompanied by repeated attempts to formalize the rules governing civil-military relations. Pivotal in this endeavour is the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), which published the “Guidelines on the Use of Military and Civil Defence Assets in Disaster Relief” in 1994. These guidelines soon turned into a reference document for the use of military resources in natural disasters or environmental emergencies, henceforth called “Oslo Guidelines” and updated in 2006.¹⁴ When additional clarification was needed on the deployment of international military and civil defence personnel, OCHA published guidelines in 2003 known as MCDA Guidelines. Another attempt to preserve the separation between the humanitarian and military spheres was made in 2004, when the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) in Geneva issued a reference paper on the “Civil-military relationship in complex emergencies”, which, among other aspects, also proposed practical considerations for aid workers on how to engage in civil-military coordination without compromising their humanitarian agenda.

The underlying intentions of such guidelines – but also their basic weakness – can be illustrated by the recent attempt in Afghanistan to formalize rules for civil-military interaction. The UNAMA-led “Afghanistan Civil-Military Working Group” was constituted because “military actors become increasingly involved in operations other than war” and “security and humanitarian activities and their outcomes are often interconnected”.¹⁵ The Working Group comprised UN agencies; the NGO coordinating body ACBAR; ISAF; OEF forces; and Afghan government security forces. In May 2008 it published the “Guidelines for the Interaction and Coordination of Humanitarian Actors and Military Actors in Afghanistan”. This document summarized a set of principles both for military and humanitarian actors. It identified five principles regarding international military and Afghan forces, among them “respect for the neutrality and independence of humanitarian actors”. It also contained four principles regarding humanitarian actors and called on all actors to be “respectful of international law and Afghan laws, culture and customs”.¹⁶ Procedures for monitoring compliance with and reporting breaches of the guidelines were outlined and a periodic review by the Working Group agreed.

However, in view of the US military surge, which is to be completed in the course of 2010 and enables the US and NATO

to organize large-scale COIN operations, the basic weakness of such guidelines becomes obvious: their “non-binding” nature. Hence, civilian actors are deeply concerned that the agreement will not stand the test during the forthcoming COIN operations in insurgency-infected districts of Afghanistan.

5. Identifying the various NGO approaches

Civilian actors do not constitute a homogeneous group. They can be subdivided into governmental organizations (GOs) and so-called humanitarian NGOs. Governmental organizations function as preferential implementing partners of their governments and therefore have limited authority to decide whether or to what degree they will cooperate with military actors in a COIN environment.

Even among the large number of humanitarian NGOs, distinct approaches can be identified. The NGOs differ on policy orientations in general, but also with regard to the special issue of interacting with PRTs in Afghanistan. Yet, in spite of their internal variations they share a common position on the ultimate aim of UN “integrated missions” in complex emergencies and have similar reservations regarding the NATO COIN strategy in Afghanistan.

With regard to their general policy approach, the spectrum of international humanitarian NGOs¹⁷ can be divided into four different types.¹⁸ (i) *Principled NGOs* follow the “Dunantist” tradition of Henri Dunant, founder of the ICRC. They strictly adhere to neutrality, impartiality, and independence. (ii) *Pragmatist NGOs*, although recognizing the importance of principles, give preference to action and, to a certain degree, are willing to follow the policy line of their home governments whose funds they utilize. (iii) *Solidarist NGOs* focus on the root causes of conflict and its political nature. They perceive themselves as developmental and human rights advocates and engage in anti-poverty efforts and social transformation. (iv) *Faith-based NGOs* follow religious traditions (Christian, Islamic, etc.). They embody humanitarian affirmations and obligations, though they usually do not proselytise.

The controversial issue of whether or not to engage with PRTs in Afghanistan has also resulted in different approaches. Again four categories can be distinguished:¹⁹ (i) the *principled approach* for NGOs staying away from the PRT out of principle; (ii) the *sceptical approach* for organizations keeping the military at arm’s length; (iii) the *pragmatic approach* for actors that reach a compromise in order to operate in complex emergencies; and (iv) the *supportive approach*, which sees NGOs actively engaging with the PRT.

In particular, sceptical and pragmatic NGOs have a rather nuanced view. Although they are concerned about the ambiguous proximity between civilians and the military in

17 Domestic NGOs of the conflict country, e.g. the broad spectrum of Afghan NGOs, are excluded from the following classification.

18 Cf. Antonio Donini (team leader), Larissa Fast, Greg Hansen, Simon Harris, Larry Minear, Tasneem Mowjee, Andrew Wilder: *The State of the Humanitarian Enterprise. Humanitarian Agenda 2015: Final Report*. Tufts University, Feinstein International Center, Medford, MA, March 2008, p. 11; website: <http://wikis.uit.tufts.edu/confluence/download/attachments/14553671/HA2015+Final+Report.pdf?version=1>.

19 Cf. Peter Runge, *ibid*, p. 24.

14 For the following overview cf. Peter Runge, *ibid*, p. 16.

15 Cf. Guidelines for the interaction and coordination of humanitarian actors and military actors in Afghanistan, published by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, New York, 20 May 2008, version 1.0, p. 3; <http://ochaonline.un.org/OchaLinkClick.aspx?link=ocha&docId=1091345>.

16 *Ibid*, p. 6.

UN-defined “integrated missions”, they acknowledge that “some form of engagement” with political and military actors is necessary.²⁰ They accept the need for “coherence” but adjust the particular form of coherent interaction to the requirements of the actual conflict situation. However, the NGOs reject any attempt to instrumentalise them in serving paramount military purposes. One author explicitly clarifies this sensitive issue: NGOs strongly object to any form of interaction in which they are seen as “merely tools within integrated approaches to conflict management”.²¹ Hence, for these NGOs the following issues constitute prerequisites for their working relations: the institutional framework, the concrete conditions of multi-organization cooperation, and a credible commitment to respect different “operating cultures”.

However, the basic challenge in achieving an acceptable interaction is of a more fundamental nature: Do NGOs and military actors pursue a common aim? Do they share a common understanding of the root causes of the conflict and agree on the ultimate objective of the international intervention? This question takes the argument back to the above-outlined redefining of UN peacekeeping missions to include the broad concept of human security understood as positive peace. Does the military confine its COIN strategy to “stabilization” in terms of *physical* security only? Or do all actors pursue a long-term common agenda oriented towards building a *sustainable* peace? What do the military actors need civilian organizations for in operating in a COIN environment? NGOs have become disillusioned and contrast the opposing intentions of providing humanitarian aid as follows: “Aid agencies seek to deliver aid because people need it, while armed forces undertake such action as a means of winning the hearts and minds of the population.”²²

The new COIN strategy is designed to replace previous CIMIC operations, focusing on quick-impact stabilization and a population-centric approach. But the conceptual gap between this new COIN approach and the agenda of humanitarian NGOs focusing on long-term sustainable peace-building seems to be growing. The new strategy was introduced by General Stanley McChrystal upon his takeover of the ISAF command in summer 2009. It has been summarized by the phrase “shape – clear – hold – build – transfer” and postulates close cooperation among various actors: The military has to “clear” an area of insurgents so that in the transition from the “holding” to the “building” phase, local representatives of the Afghan government as well as many civilian actors with broad expertise in security, administration, and socio-economic development can be brought in.

From an NGO perspective, the COIN strategy must be criticized on two grounds. The first objection concerns the long-term effects: Can the strategy contribute to building a sustainable peace if it strongly relies on the collaboration of an Afghan government which is widely perceived as corrupt, inefficient and dominated by political patronage systems and in which

the seeds of new power rivalries may already be sown? The second objection refers to a problem of principle: The strategy is seen as militarily dominated, subordinating the civilian components to the prime goal of containing an insurgency without systematically addressing the structural root causes of the insurgency.

6. Lessons learned on how to meet people’s needs

In order to identify lessons learned, it is not sufficient to take into account only the arguments of *international* NGOs. Rather, the role of bad governance and its detrimental effects on international stabilization and peace-building efforts (the problematic reliance of the NATO COIN strategy on a poorly performing Afghan president and his co-opted power brokers of questionable reputation) also need to be addressed. To add this dimension to the complex issue, the perspective of *Afghan* NGOs and representatives of the *Afghan* civil society must be included as they have proved to be the most vocal advocates of better governance.

In November 2009, VENRO²³, the umbrella organization of German NGOs, organized an Afghanistan Conference in Berlin.²⁴ Among the Afghan participants was Aziz Rafiee, Director of the “Afghan Civil Society Forum” (ACSF), an umbrella organization of 137 Afghan NGOs. Rafiee summarized the causes of the growing insurgency from an *Afghan civil society perspective*. He identified five causes:²⁵ (i) poverty and unemployment; (ii) government weakness and corruption; (iii) Taliban; (iv) interference by neighbouring countries; and (v) lack of justice, which has been on neither the national nor the international agenda. Rafiee advocates sharing “one common agenda and priority list of ‘maintaining security, eradicating poverty and fighting corruption’”. And he has appealed to both Afghan and German representatives of civil society to add “maintaining justice and ending the impunity culture” to the list in order to conclude “our strategic partnership”.

Rafiee’s appeal to broaden the “common agenda” was also corroborated by a document which 15 Afghan and international organizations submitted to President Hamid Karzai in view of his expected re-election, which, after a three-month-long fraud-ridden electoral process, finally took place with his inauguration on 19 November 2009. The eight-page “Memo to the President: key recommendations to the next Afghan government” was released to the Afghan public on 15 October

23 VENRO is the umbrella organisation of development non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Germany; it was founded in 1995 and consists of around 120 organisations. The German homepage is: www.venro.org, the English homepage is: www.venro.org/english.html. Not all VENRO publications have been translated into English.

24 Cf. VENRO, *Mission impossible am Hindukush? (Interim assessment of the new international Afghanistan policy, report of the VENRO-organized Afghanistan conference at Berlin on 24 November 2009)*; published on VENRO’s German homepage on 20 January 2010, just before the International Afghanistan Conference in London on 28 January 2010; http://venro.org/fileadmin/redaktion/dokumente/Dokumente_2010/Home/100120_Webansicht_Vorschau_Venro_AfghanistanDoku_j-gelb.pdf.

25 Cf. *Statement of Aziz Rafiee, Director of the Afghan umbrella organisation „Afghan Civil Society Forum“ (ACSF) at VENRO’s Afghanistan conference in Berlin on 24 November 2009*; downloaded from the conference report of 20 January 2010 via VENRO’s German homepage, but from spring 2010 onwards no longer accessible.

20 Cf. Donini (team leader) et al, *The State of the Humanitarian Enterprise*, *ibid*, p. 17.

21 Raja Rana, here quoted from: Peter Runge, *The Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan*, *ibid*, p. 19.

22 Quoted from Peter Runge, *ibid*, p. 19.

2009.²⁶ While the Memo highlights significant progress in areas such as healthcare and education, it strongly criticizes the new military COIN strategy for not achieving what it has proclaimed as its new focus: protecting the population. On the contrary: violence has further increased; public trust has been undermined; and fear and resentment have been created because the new military strategy has not improved the performance of the Afghan National Security Forces, which stand accused of being abusive and corrupt. The authors appeal to the incoming Afghan President to address the root causes of the deteriorating conflict by taking key actions in areas which have been particularly neglected such as governance, agriculture and rural livelihoods, protection of civilians, and the rights of women and girls.

The Memo's final conclusion summarizes the "common agenda" of civil-military interaction: "The Afghan people desperately want both human and physical security – this means protection, jobs, basic services, and transparent and accountable state institutions. ... With sufficient political will, greater accountability and the support of a wide range of actors including both civil society and international donors, these recommendations can be implemented."

Against this background, the following lessons learned can be summarized:

- *Common agenda*: Not only a common agenda but also a *broad* agenda is needed – one which includes both human and physical security. To achieve this end, the conceptual approach should be guided by the primacy of the *political* aim of building a sustainable peace. Military COIN operations should be seen as a means of achieving this long-term political aim rather than as a means of merely stabilizing the situation on the ground as an end in itself.
- *Protection of civilians*: This is part of the overall common agenda but needs to be re-emphasized due to its crucial role in sustaining local Afghan support for the intervening international military forces and promoting popular acceptance of the legitimacy of the Afghan government. Protecting Afghan local workers of internationally funded projects who are particularly vulnerable to insurgent attacks is particularly important.
- *Complementarity of actors*: Since the expertise of a variety of actors is needed for long-term peace-building, the division of labour must be based on respective comparative advantages.
- *Clear distinction of mandates*: Aid organizations are committed to the humanitarian imperative, while the military follows political orders and military logic. Intermingling humanitarian aid and military CIMIC operations for purposes of "force protection" (NATO CIMIC doctrine) may violate the principle of "do no harm" and put aid workers (both international and Afghan) at risk of being targeted by insurgents.

²⁶ Cf. Memo to the President: key recommendations to the next Afghan government, Kabul, embargoed until 15 October 2009; most of the signatories were well-established Afghan NGOs and a few well-known international NGOs like Oxfam International. Like Aziz Rafiee's statement the Memo could be downloaded from the conference report of 20 January 2010 via VENRO's German homepage, but from spring 2010 onwards it was not accessible any more.

- *PRTs as a "symbol of hybrid civil-military co-operation"*: VENRO's interim stock-taking of German PRTs summarizes the general criticism of international NGOs: The PRT concept "serves as a paradigm of the attempt to integrate humanitarian aid as part of an overall political-military strategy in conflict and post-conflict situations in the context of 'integrated missions'".²⁷ Therefore, a clear separation of the different mandates and tasks is strongly advocated.
- *Guidelines on civil-military interaction*: Guidelines should be respected and the compliance of donors and military actors monitored. In particular, information-sharing should be regulated very carefully in order to guarantee the safety of civilian staff.
- *Preparation before mission deployment*: Before departure for military missions or civilian project work, military personnel, government officials and GO and NGO workers should be better prepared. Communication among the different actors should be optimized; tolerance of diverse operating cultures among international actors promoted; and a thorough understanding of the cultural values and traditions of the host country imparted.

To conclude, at the International Conference Afghanistan in London on 28 January 2010, international donor governments faced strong pressure by the Obama Administration to increase their engagement in Afghanistan. Instead of deploying more troops, many governments – among them Germany – have opted for a political alternative and significantly increased their multilateral and bilateral aid for Afghanistan. However, instead of merely increasing the amount of development aid, it is more important to re-orient the development agenda to the needs of the local people, i.e., to replace the donor-driven agenda by a needs-oriented approach. If the manner in which such enormous amounts of funds are being spent is not properly controlled, there is a danger that more aid will further fuel corruption due to the low absorption capacity of Afghan state institutions and civil sector organizations. Hence, the basic lesson learned is that it is not the amount of money as such that matters, but, in fact, whether that money is used to build Afghan capacities for the sake of long-term peace-building.

Abbreviations:

ACBAR	Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief
ANP	Afghan National Army
FDDP	Focused District Development Program
GO	Government organization
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee, based in Geneva
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OEF	Operation Enduring Freedom
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
SSR	Security Sector Reform
UNAMA	UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
VENRO	German umbrella organisation of development non-governmental organisations

²⁷ Quoted from: VENRO, *Five years of German PRTs in Afghanistan: an interim stocktaking from the angle of the German aid organisations*, VENRO Policy Paper 1/2009, Bonn, January 2009; website: http://www.venro.org/fileadmin/Publikationen/PDFs_engl/Afghanistan-Paper_engl_neu.pdf.