

Christian Patz

Conference Report

Counterinsurgency and State-building in Afghanistan: Danish and German Lessons Learned

18-17 January 2013, Atlantic Hotel, Kiel, Germany



in cooperation with





Christian Patz

Conference Report – Counterinsurgency and State-building in Afghanistan: Danish and German
Lessons Learned
Kiel, April 2013

Lectorate:

Sebastian Bruns, M.A./Florian Wätzel, M.A.

Legal Notice:

Publisher:

Director of the Institute for Security Policy
at the University of Kiel (ISPK)

Prof. Dr. Joachim Krause

Westring 400

24118 Kiel, Germany

ISPK.org

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the publisher or the Institute for Security Policy at the University of Kiel (ISPK).

© 2013 Institute for Security Policy at the University of Kiel (ISPK)

Content

1 INTRODUCTION 1

2 EVOLUTION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF GERMAN AND DANISH COIN DOCTRINES 1

3 COUNTERINSURGENCY OPERATIONS, SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES 3

4 TRAINING OF AND INTERACTION WITH AFGHAN SECURITY FORCES AND LOCAL MILITIAS 4

5 CIVIL-MILITARY INTERACTION IN COUNTERINSURGENCY AND STATE-BUILDING 7

6 COUNTERINSURGENCY, STATEBUILDING AND PUBLIC ATTITUDES AT THE HOME FRONT 10

1 Introduction

In February 2013, the Institute for Security Policy at the University of Kiel (ISPK), together with the Department for War Studies at the University of Southern Denmark (SDU), held a two-day conference in Kiel, Germany, bringing together German and Danish academics and practitioners to review their respective countries' experiences and lessons learned in Afghanistan.

Motivated by the fact that while both Germany and Denmark had been engaged in the country since the early stages of the intervention, their experiences had never been compared to each other, the conference was held under the title of "Counterinsurgency and State-building in Afghanistan: Danish and German Lessons Learned."

The underlying goals of the conference revolved around (1) reviewing and comparing Danish and German civil and military actors' operational experiences and lessons learned in several areas:

- a) evolution and implementation of German and Danish "counterinsurgency doctrine";
- b) counterinsurgency operations involving special operations forces and new technologies;
- c) training of and interaction with Afghan security forces and local militias;
- d) the evaluation of civil-military interaction, as well as
- e) the analysis of public attitudes at the home front in both Germany and Denmark.

In addition, the project aimed at (2) identifying the complexities and challenges of contemporary multilateral operations that include counterinsurgency as an integral part of state-building.

Finally, the insights generated in this process were to be used to help (3) identifying critical capacity and capability gaps for both civilian and military actors and institutions.

To further an informal and open atmosphere that provided an opportunity for a candid exchange of viewpoints and honest opinions,

the conference adhered to the "Chatham House Rule"¹.

On the Danish side, representatives from civilian and military agencies (the Danish Defence Supply Agency; the Danish Army's International Logistics Center (DANILOG)) as well as research institutions (Royal Danish Defence College) and civilian universities (University of Southern Denmark) were in attendance. The group of German participants was comprised of practitioners and academic researchers from military and civilian institutions, respectively. In addition to members of the ISPK, these included representatives of the German Armed Forces Command & Staff College (Führungsakademie der Bundeswehr, FüAk), the German Federal Ministry of Defence (Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, BMVg), the Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), and the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP).

2 Evolution and Implementation of German and Danish COIN doctrines

The comparative evolution of the Danish and German COIN doctrines and their subsequent implementation in Afghanistan highlighted different points of departure and diverging trajectories in both countries. Nevertheless, the problems and shortcomings revealed in this process turned out to be remarkably similar in light of the realities in Afghanistan and the international coalitions' shifting strategic and operational priorities over the course of the conflict.

While counterinsurgency had been a long-time companion for some countries, only isolated elements that today would be considered belonging to a comprehensive understanding of COIN were included in Germany's military doctrine before 2009. These concepts found their way into the Army Regulations ("Heeresdienstvorschrift") only in the context

¹ <http://www.chathamhouse.org/about-us/chathamhouserule>: "When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed."

of stabilization operations and the fight against irregular forces. The relative scarcity of original German doctrinal documents dealing with counterinsurgency (and the overall avoidance of the term “doctrine” on the part of the Bundeswehr) influenced the writing process of the so called Counterinsurgency Guideline (“Leitfaden Aufstandsbewältigung”) that relies on terminology and key elements of NATO, British and U.S. COIN doctrines. It was only in 2009 that the German armed forces, having to find a way around the term counterinsurgency itself (“Aufstandsbekämpfung” in German) due to its negative historic connotation, began to work on a series of documents that dealt with counterinsurgency. These can be considered the first stepping stones in a doctrinal development process. In 2011, one of these papers was further developed by the Army Working Group Joint and Combined Operations (AG JACOP) and led to what was qualified as “first real doctrine product in the German armed forces,” the fifty-page-long Counterinsurgency Guideline.² On the practical level, the Bundeswehr’s approach reflects an understanding of doctrine that combines classic doctrinal elements with operational experiences. The resulting German definition of COIN is “almost the same as it is in the NATO doctrine and [...] quite similar to the [...] father of all definitions, the American Field Manual 3-24” which helps to avoid a German “Sonderweg.” The commonalities between the German doctrine and doctrines of other ISAF nations are not confined to the definition of counterinsurgency, but also include the principles, understandings and elements of the doctrine.

In the end, even the task of developing a counterinsurgency doctrine revealed itself to be a challenging and still ongoing task. Among others, two key points were made in this regard: First of all, while having made considerable progress, today, the Bundeswehr’s process of COIN-doctrine writing needs to be sped-up; and secondly, the doctrine itself has to be more actively promoted in the face of skepticism amongst traditionalists within the

military. Beyond the writing process, the struggle to practically implement lessons learned and concepts of counterinsurgency in Afghanistan without a clear doctrinal model revealed numerous shortcomings and difficulties. In this regard, five core problems were identified by the contributors to the conference as having hampered the operational efficiency of the Bundeswehr’s stabilization efforts:

- 1) The German Government’s “Afghanistan Concept” neither qualifies as a coherent *strategy* nor is its execution based upon an integrated inter-ministerial planning process, operational plans or clearly stated goals: “The number one problem with strategy in Afghanistan is [that] we have no strategy”, as one participant remarked. On the operational level, this results in a lack of clearly defined operational orders for civilian and military personnel deployed in the field.
- 2) The execution of projects in the field takes place in absence of effective *structures* for civil-military cooperation and is highly dependent on individual initiatives of personnel involved on the working level. Civil-military cooperation therefore becomes “a matter of luck”.
- 3) This problem is exacerbated by a lack of civilian manpower that not only limits project implementation but, more importantly, reduces civilian visibility, resulting in the inability of civilian agencies to take the initiative or lead in planning and execution on the operational level. An additional hindrance for a compatible and comprehensive civil-military inter-agency approach turned out to be the civilian side’s lack of an operational level to parallel that of the military.
- 4) Furthermore, regarding *information*, a severe lack of databases and their systematic use coupled with an overemphasis on significant kinetic events (SIGACTs). In addition, the limited number of available analysts has ham-

² The drafting process of this document was supported by the ISPK, which, at that time, conducted a research project on COIN for the BMVg.

pered an effective situational assessment.

- 5) Finally, the Bundeswehr's *operational focus* and stability project implementation in northern Afghanistan has frequently been based on opportunity (or military operational planning) rather than the calculus of tackling the sources of instability in accordance with ISAF's overall campaign plan. This reduced the impact and effectiveness of these efforts.

Possible future measures aiming at the improvement of Germany's performance in stabilization operations, therefore, could include pre-deployment trainings for civilian and military key personnel; the creation of a stabilization-department within the Foreign Office working towards implementing and institutionalizing the lessons learned; longer durations of deployment for personnel in key positions in order to increase institutional memory for the respective civilian and military organizations involved.

On the Danish side, the realities of state-building and counterinsurgency in Afghanistan stand in stark contrast to the public declarations of successive governments in Copenhagen. While the prevalent public image created here depicts Denmark as a frontrunner in implementing a comprehensive approach and NATO-conform strategic and operational conduct, the Afghanistan campaign has revealed a number of deficiencies:

- 1) The fact that "Denmark preaches population centric counterinsurgency but [in reality conducts] 70 percent combat and 30 percent confidence-building", as one speaker underlined, led to a far more kinetic and enemy centric approach to COIN than proposed by NATO doctrine.
- 2) This resulted in shortcomings in the training of Afghan Police and Military Forces that were further aggravated by the lack or non-replacement of civilian personnel.
- 3) Consequently, skewed assessments of own performances in these fields – accompanied by a practice of dealing

with public and journalistic criticism by classifying lessons learned reports – prevented a wider public and academic debate over possible ways to improve the country's approach to state-building operations "under fire".

- 4) Finally, these problems could be considered rooted in the training procedures and routines of the Danish Army. In the eyes of some of the Danish participants, these often amounted to not more than "checking boxes [when it came to] non-combat related tasks essential to COIN/complex operations."

While ISAF's Afghanistan engagement is drawing to a close and some analysts and commentators – in Denmark as well as in the U.S. – already see the pendulum of military focus swinging back to "the old way of doing business" by full-spectrum, kinetic operations, there is strong evidence to support the claim that ironically, it has been a very conventional army mindset [that was] limiting effectiveness in Afghanistan.

3 Counterinsurgency Operations, Special Operations Forces and New Technologies

The Danish experience of deploying Special Operations Forces (SOF) in Afghanistan in the context of stabilization operations and counterinsurgency in Afghanistan has shown that, while Danish SOF have been used as gap fillers and reinforcements in worst-case situations, their use – though often successful – remained on a mere tactical level, revealing a lack of understanding that SOF should better be used as strategic asset.

Another lesson to be learned here is to reconsider the use of SOF as a tool in conflict phases other than combat operations. Relying on their specialization in military assistance and due to the fact that they are composed of more seasoned and experienced soldiers, SOF units are more capable in training and monitoring indigenous security forces than regular units. The neglect of the SOF expertise in military assistance may also be

attributed to a lack of academic research on the pronounced strategic use of SOF.

In late 2010, “Operation Halmazag” (meaning “lightning” in Dari) saw the German Bundeswehr in a leading role in planning and executing a counterinsurgency operation for the first time. The operation obviously provides a number of lessons to be learned and may serve as an example which highlights the conditions of success for conducting an operation of this type:

- 1) Close partnering has proven essential to mitigate communication problems between Germans and Afghans. It also helped to overcome the Afghan Army’s reluctance to operate in Pashto areas, which were considered more dangerous.
- 2) Adhering to COIN principles and implementing the idea of the comprehensive approach has turned out to be another condition for success. Practically, this was achieved by means of integrated operation planning from the very beginning as well as close coordination with Afghan and coalition forces and civilian agencies (in this case the German Foreign Office), with the latter taking the lead in implementing projects in the building-phase of the operation.
- 3) The joint and combined nature of the operation created an impression of superiority which aimed at convincing the local population “sitting on the fence” and waiting to side with the party of the conflict that proves to have gained the upper hand in the operation.
- 4) As “Halmazag” was deliberately designed according to the principles of a COIN-mantra following the sequence of SHAPE, CLEAR, HOLD, BUILD, the conduct of the operation followed the use of predominant force; putting constant pressure on the insurgents while simultaneously establishing close contact to the local population as means of information gathering; clearing and consequently holding the area while

again keeping the contact to the local population, and finally “leaving the building to the ‘professionals’” (technical and development agencies) whenever possible.

4 Training of and Interaction with Afghan Security Forces and Local Militias

The international community’s contribution to the training and build-up of the Afghan Security Forces (ASF), generally considered to be a central pillar for a stable future Afghanistan, has produced a great amount of skepticism amongst a number of participants at the conference.

If, according to NATO criteria, a successful transition requires that ASF are to be rendered capable of tackling existing and new security challenges without the continued support of ISAF, several factors are limiting the chances of success of this endeavor. Not only does the transition depend on the development of a stable political and economic situation in Afghanistan, which seems unlikely in light of the country’s continued dependence on foreign financial assistance, the Afghan led process of reconciliation with the insurgents also failed to provide positive impulses partly because it is spoiled by Pakistan, which supports certain elements of the insurgency. In addition, the international community’s ability to influence the framework conditions for good governance will remain a persistent challenge especially after 2014.

The first approach to create the ASF, as laid out in the 2001 Bonn Agreement, has proven to be an ineffective short-term solution. It lacked the time to build confidence and produce capable forces. Because the approach primarily focused on a quantitative build-up, it has led to the inclusion of militias as well as the reliance on auxiliary forces. Under this framework, the Afghan National Police (ANP) program received even less training, material and funding than the Afghan National Army (ANA). An additional problem was the divergent approaches pursued by the U.S. and European nations, with the former establishing a

paramilitary police force and the latter modeling the ANA after a civilian police force.

Today, even ANA units rated as capable of independently conducting operations remain dependent on the provision of certain critical capabilities and enablers (e.g. combat, logistic and medical support). The same is true for the ANP (in January 2012, only 10 percent of all ANP units were rated as capable of conducting operations independently). Furthermore, the re-orientation from a paramilitary force to a civilian police force will pose new challenges for the ANP.

For the ANA, the creation of logistics and support structures critical for sustainment remains incomplete and will “keep the ANSF depending on ISAF support [...] up to at least 2016, assuming that there will be enough ISAF troops left to support them”, according to the prediction by one panelist.

At the same time, NATO’s decision to reduce the ANSF budget from \$ 11 billion to \$ 4.1 billion per year by the end 2017 implicates a reduction of the planned ANSF force level by one third from its currently envisioned size of 350.000 troops. This shift is motivated by financial considerations on the side of the donor nations rather than political reality in Afghanistan.

To add a further problem, ISAF’s reliance on local powers and militias has supported the formation and empowering of local power centers and strongmen. For example, the build-up of local defense forces, as illustrated by the case of the Afghan National Auxiliary Police (a program that was launched in 2006 and cancelled in 2008), has in some cases proven to have “created more insecurity than security for the population”. Local defense forces got even less training (3 weeks) than the ANP. Resorting to militias as a quick security fix, on the other hand, has a tendency to create a force without sufficient control and oversight, integration or ministerial control over the long run.

While sustainable government structures should be considered a prerequisite for a long-term success of the transition, considerable improvements in this field are still needed. The government’s ministries often remain vulnerable to criminal penetration and the

problems of patronage networks in specific ministries persist, though less in the Ministry of Defense than in the Ministry of Interior, which is charged with overseeing the ANP. Thus linking the build-up of ministries with the broader process of governance while taking into account the distinctions between formal as well as informal power structures will remain a central problem after 2014. The responsibility for this process has to be gradually transferred from the U.S. and NATO to the Afghans: “Afghan ownership means also holding Afghan authorities accountable.”

According to one contributor to the conference, possible avenues of improvement for the coalition include:

- 1) Lowering the level of ambition while simultaneously focusing on stabilizing bureaucratic structures, reducing civil-military imbalances as well as inter-ethnic competition in the security sector.
- 2) At the same time, ISAF needs to review its approach of relying on militias and local defense forces that carry the potential of undermining ANP and ANA structures.
- 3) The Afghanistan strategy might still be compromised by tensions between counterterrorism (CT) and counterinsurgency (COIN) that will likely continue to persist within the ISAF strategic debate.
- 4) While the current structure and force level of the ASF have proven to be unsustainable, “[their] built-up now has stopped and the downsizing has already begun.” Future Afghan security forces, therefore, will be “smaller, lighter and less well trained” and will also have fewer combat service and support assets.

Beyond the more abstract analysis on the broader strategic level, a closer look at the Danish experiences in capacity building via “Training Mentoring and Liaison Teams” (TMLT) – the central instrument for the training and build-up of the Afghan security and police forces in Helmand Province – can provide useful insights to the problems, challeng-

es and daily realities of executing ISAF's strategy at the operational and tactical level.

The Danish mentoring teams included more senior and experienced soldiers who underwent specific preparation such as cultural awareness and language training. Yet, the mentoring itself turned out to be a completely new experience for the Danish forces and still required significant "on the job training". In hindsight, a number of factors can be considered as crucial for success:

- a) the reliance on seasoned Afghan army personnel that had often been trained by Russian advisors in the 1970s and 1980s,
- b) working on a collegial basis and focusing on practical and professional matters, as well as
- c) partnering *with* instead of only mentoring the Afghan side.

Taken together, these measures led to a higher level of cooperation and increased the quality of training. Equally important, the individual talent of senior Afghan personnel in controlling and keeping Afghan soldiers and policemen in line was identified as additional factor ameliorating the efficiency of the training process.

Beyond these lessons, success of the Danish TMLTs was attributed to a variety of other factors. These include measures following the notion that "Afghan solutions are sustainable solutions", notably adapting the goals and targets of training programs to local conditions by optimizing training methods while on the job. This approach also took into account the idea that foreign leadership, if to be successful, had to rely on Afghan initiatives and responsibilities. For the Danish TMLT, this also meant to accept the fact there were no perfect solutions. It hence proved to be more sustainable to implement Afghan solutions, rather than seemingly more evolved Western approaches. Relying on the situational awareness of the ASF and adapting their working pace have proven to be efficient in achieving progress, reducing the frustration among Danish forces while simultaneously providing a higher level of security for the TMLTs themselves: "If you take the Afghans seriously

when working together, they will do everything to protect you" stated a panelist with TMLT experience.

Possible scenarios for the international community's future efforts for Afghanistan after 2014 were identified as depending on five core issues, all of which are related to the outcome of ISAF's efforts of "building institutions in [a] countr[y] that did not or still do[es] not have any":

- a) defining the bilateral relationship between the U.S. and Afghanistan;
- b) developing a new NATO Concept of Operations (CONOPS) for the country;
- c) clarifying the linkages between the future training mission and a possible Security Sector Reform (SSR)-mission;
- d) creating a common framework mechanism for the financing of the ASF and, finally;
- e) establishing the office of the senior NATO civilian representative in Afghanistan.

While the development of NATO's CONOPS is supposed to be completed by February 2013, the post-2014 training mission will focus on institutions with trainers only present at academy, corps and brigade headquarters level. This also means that enabling, mentoring and training in the field or outside military training facilities will not take place. Several issues involving the future training mission still remain opaque:

- a) The modalities for the establishment of an SSR mission including command and control mechanisms;
- b) a clearly defined relationship with the training mission itself;
- c) a framework mechanism for the financing of the ASF that assures the distribution of the funds earmarked by the international community, as well as
- d) the inclusion of the above mentioned office of a senior civilian representative for Afghanistan.

In retrospect, the international coalition's overall record of institution building in the wake of the Bonn Agreement turned out to be

mixed at best. According to one participant, addressing the Afghan government with the notion of “We inspire, you built” proved to be “an invitation to hijacking [...] [to] people „who believed they could use it to promote themselves.” This dynamic only changed in the years 2008/9 with U.S. “shaking up those institutions” and introducing COIN as a way to buy in to the institutional investment need for Afghanistan. This provided the final incentive for the allies to give up the distinction between stabilization and war fighting or stabilization and counterterrorism they had previously maintained by all means. Later branded as the “McChrystal effect”, the process of making ISAF embrace COIN contributed to the concept’s portrayal as the new “magic wand” only to fall short of the expectations as it turned out to be “too short lived, too costly and too much directed from the outside.”

The current transition phase reflects a much lower level of ambition with the ASF as a national security institution modeled as legal, rational and rule-based entity. Reflecting a Weberian type of legal-rational governance, this concept largely ignores the traditional or charismatic forms of authority much more common in the Afghan society, leading to the “building of legal rational institutions in a country full of bazar politics.”

Taking into consideration these factors, three possible scenarios for Afghanistan’s future have been laid out at the conference in Kiel:

- 1) A less likely containment scenario, with the ANSF as the single legal-rational security institution able to contain Afghanistan and at the same time willing to serve as the anchor or foundation for a slow maturation of Afghan politics.
- 2) A control scenario in which the ANA takes control of a pre-modern state resulting in the ANA losing its rational-legal character only to become a player in the game of “bazar-politics.”
- 3) The final variant represents a scenario of state capture that will result in the fragmentation of Afghanistan, where the ANA will be captured by former Northern Alliance power-brokers to be

turned into an instrument against the Pashto-dominated south.

5 Civil-Military Interaction in Counterinsurgency and State-building

Fighting the insurgents proved to be not the only challenging task for ISAF in the latter part of the decade-long intervention. As it turned out, one of the most complex tasks was to establish and manage the coordination and cooperation amongst a plethora of organizations in the civil-military realm.

The Danish experience with facilitating civil-military interaction, as presented at the conference, provides useful insights into how these difficulties first arose, and how they were solved (if solved at all instead of just being managed). Generally, the most basic problem of civil-military interaction in an ISAF-type coalition turned out to be not how each individual contributing nation perceived its tasks, envisioned strategic end-state or campaign plan, but how they were perceived by the coalition as a whole. In the words of one participant, “If we are to take away anything from ISAF [...] then it certainly is [that] in spite of the naiveté underlying the argument, we must try to pursue a common strategic end-state.” While the efforts of the international coalition started off with the U.S. strategic end-state – a counter-terrorism approach based on a light military footprint – this overall framework was subject to continuous debate in ISAF nations. It consequently developed a life of its own while being redefined and adapted to national caveats and policy agendas. This process eventually caused ISAF to embrace a strategic end-state emphasizing a “human security”-based approach. In 2009/10, General David Rodriguez, then head of ISAF Joint Command, promoted the “broadest possible definition of human security for Afghanistan”. This consequently resulted in a widened concept involving competing narratives of what has to be achieved in Afghanistan: It turned out to be “completely impossible to maneuver in [...]. [We] ended up with at least 48 different narratives of our reasons to conduct a C[omprehensive]

A[pproach] or pursue civ-mil interaction”, according to one observer.

The center of gravity of ISAF civil-military efforts were identified as three main points:

- 1) The Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) proved themselves to be useful instruments to facilitate civil-military interaction whereas the fact that they were underlying national command and therefore obeying diverging policy agendas turned out to be “unhealthy.” While it can surely be considered unrealistic to assume that all PRTs could be organized to be NATO-commanded, the focus of national strategic plans made the otherwise promising concept of PRTs turn out to follow “political-rationality perversion” rather than pursuing a common understanding of a strategic end-state. Here, the case of Denmark’s “Afghanistan strategy” proved a point: while the strategy was “good to sell in Copenhagen”, it represented a “drinking-straw focus on Helmand” while doing “very little towards a common understanding of where we are going with our little assets“.
- 2) Making the Comprehensive Approach work was quiet difficult for Denmark and others. Not only did diverging national approaches make ISAF’s efforts in some parts of the country look like different worlds at times. They also revealed the difficulties of making the approach work between the strategic level and the implementation in the field. As it turned out, this task posed the biggest challenge as, like in the case of Denmark, ISAF nations were often focusing on improving and adapting domestic ministerial and administrative structures to facilitate the execution of a common approach. All the while, they were neglecting conceptual issues that went beyond simple procedural problems of coordination.
- 3) Hence, it was structural deficiencies such as filling the gap between the strategic level and the implementation on the ground that first and foremost require substantial future readjust-

ments. While the military is used to go about this problem by creating doctrine, this approach is not workable for agencies in the civilian realm: “It is a good medicine for [the] military [...], but it just doesn’t solve the problems. We can’t talk to civilian agencies [...] through doctrine”.

The case of RC South provides an illustrative example of how these structural problems manifested themselves in actual cases of civil-military operations, and what lessons could be drawn from the field:

- 1) With five provinces to be covered by four PRTs, the center of gravity for civil-military operations rested on the operational level for the simple reason that when translating resources into meeting popular demands by delivering political, social or public goods, the orientation had to be on the area where the delivery of these goods was to be made.
- 2) On the practical level, civilian planning under military command proved to be “an absolute illusion.” Despite an agreement on a governance-oriented application of kinetic violence (violence was not to be used unless serving a government purpose), civilian agencies were not only unwilling to place themselves under military command, but in many cases even refused to talk to military PRT staff (this included government agencies). Taken together, this problem boiled down to a “catch-22-like” problem, laying bare a fundamental difference of perspectives between civilian and military agencies. The former saw the military’s orientation towards an integrated approach as “linear, staff based, focused on injecting operational plans where none were necessary” whereas the latter conversely regarded this very integration as key to inject civilian resources where they were needed. This resulted in a division of labor providing coherence only when related to the question of where to take action, but not with re-

gard to a sequencing of effects. As a panelist put it, the idea of “effect based planning” finally ended up being an illusion “that we can just insist on the civilians coming into the military headquarters [to] be part of our staff [...]. We have to invent other ways of going about it.”

The only possible way, as identified here, is to introduce a bottom-up approach by developing a common understanding of what has been referred to as the “Three Ps”: principles, procedures and practices. This means an agreement on:

- a) how to develop principles civil-military interaction is based on,
- b) which procedures can be invoked to facilitate a common working-process, and
- c) the design of common practices of how the concrete implementation of projects is realized.

One conclusion that could be drawn from Danish ISAF-experience, therefore, might be the need to give up the illusion that just because NATO has invented the Comprehensive Approach, all other actors outside the military can be integrated under NATOs/ISAFs terms or conditions. While integrated concepts are still to be considered the right way of conducting stability operations, the top-down approach has proved to be inadequate.

A second account of civil-military interaction and the lessons learned from Denmark’s engagement in Afghanistan’s painted a somewhat different picture. When considering the individual as center of gravity or point of departure for a COIN approach, counterinsurgency necessarily refers to local ownership and governance. Following this logic, providing citizens with governance and government services becomes the highest priority in trying to prevent them from joining an insurgency. This translates into starting counterinsurgency on the civilian side and conceptualizing it according to a bottom-up approach that emphasizes a civilian footprint that goes beyond simply adding civilian capacity to an otherwise

military-oriented framework. While the common perception of ISAF’s strategic shift to civil-military interaction holds that NATO’s engagement was somewhat “McChrystalized” around the year 2009, the process can more accurately be described as a gradual change already beginning in 2006. A series of shortcomings were identified during this phase of intensive conceptual review:

- 1) When engaged in counterinsurgency-style operations, military forces in Afghanistan have proven to be too few and too dispersed to effectively hold cleared areas.
- 2) There was not only a lack of jointly planned and executed operations but also an overemphasis on key areas (such as regional capitals and key terrain districts) as the reality had shown that ISAF has not been able to conduct a sustainable campaign down to the district level.
- 3) ISAF has underperformed in avoiding collateral damage and civilian casualties.

In addition, the lessons drawn from Afghanistan indicate that a future improvement for counterinsurgency-style operations will require the development of a political, military and civil understanding leading to an integrated 3D-concept (Diplomacy, Development and Defense) based on a common planning process prior to the deployment of resources. While improvements have been made, even today, ISAF has no coherent 3D-concept to coordinate upon.

While the overall analysis provides a rather mixed picture, the participants to the conference drew a number of conclusions from Denmark’s experience with contributing civilian resources to ISAF:

- 1) As lessons learned-approaches are usually slow processes, the consequence of applying a learning-by-doing approach for more than twelve years in Afghanistan is that “we are losing this war on time”.
- 2) In contrast to previous findings of this conference, bottom-up approaches can be expected to run into difficulties

when trying to harmonize Afghan national priorities with the demands at the regional or provincial level. In this regard, one indicator of success for ISAF's efforts will be the question whether Afghanistan can, as one panelist stated, "still be considered a [single] country five or ten years from now. If not, we have not really provided a minimum of stability to Afghanistan and the region."

For these purposes, the civilian capacity has been too small and often not been taken serious enough while at the same time, the military has been overstretched.

Seen from the angle of a government agency such as the German "Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit" (GIZ), the perspectives of Afghanistan's security and the international coalitions efforts in stabilizing and developing the country look very different. The particular feature most affecting the role of civil governmental organizations tasked with providing development and governance support is that their local status is not regarded as neutral. Development workers in Afghanistan are commonly identified by insurgent groups as supporters of the Afghan central government or even agents of foreign (anti-Islamic) interests. Therefore, they have been targeted by the insurgents, though with much lower frequency than ISAF, ANSF and other Afghan governmental organizations.

Against this backdrop, a risk management approach as pursued by the GIZ introduced a number of measures that has enabled its civilian personnel to operate in what is commonly perceived as high-risk environment. By ensuring the freedom of movement, projects could be implemented even under critical (security) conditions. Risk management, therefore, is generally based on a three-pronged approach of

- a) determining risks,
- b) minimizing risks and
- c) facilitating access.

The concept thereby relies on dedicating resources to meet key persons (ranging from local tribal, political, religious etc. representa-

tives at the village level to people with ties to insurgent groups) as well as gain acceptance for development projects.

A key lesson from Afghanistan is that getting security guarantees from the local population is often uncomplicated for projects that are demanded and hence supported by the local population. To put it differently: If a project has not received a security guarantee, it should not be implemented. Experience shows that local acceptance of often depends on the nature of the projects planned and their degree of cultural invasiveness. While infrastructural projects (constructing roads, providing electricity etc.) have frequently proven to be embraced by the local population, Rule of Law or gender-related projects turned out to be less likely to gain support.

The facilitation of access as a prerequisite for a successful project implementation also involves countering the religiously motivated insurgents narrative which propagates "Western" engagement in Afghanistan as enemy occupation, serving the purpose of secularism, the establishment of a puppet government in Kabul that oppresses the population, and the spreading of structures and cultural institutions that are considered immoral according to their interpretation of Islam. As the Taliban's narrative is naturally closer to the common people's believe than NATO's, the argument was put forward by one of the participants that a long-term Taliban rule will slowly but steadily gain acceptance amongst the local populace. Consequently, countering this type of narrative will remain a supreme challenge for ISAF in the years to come.

6 Counterinsurgency, Statebuilding and Public Attitudes at the Home Front

With its final panel, the conference turned its look inward to include the perceptions and images of the ISAF mission in Denmark and Germany. The look at the domestic side of the conflict revealed a number of commonalities, still unanswered puzzles as well as clear differences in public perception and support for the engagement in Afghanistan.

The case of Denmark proves an interesting “puzzle” as the general public perception has indicated for a long time that “the Danes seem to be loving th[e] war.” A fact often neglected is that, when looked at in terms of number of troops, financial and economic assistance per capita and GDP, Denmark’s contributions outranked the majority of ISAF nations by far and place the country second after the U.S. in these categories. This intensity of engagement also extends to the area of risk sharing, where Denmark is amongst the nations with no caveats in its Rules of Engagement, which is directly linked to Denmark being the country with the highest number of casualties in proportion to the size of its population.

The central argument put forward in the discussion was grounded on the theoretical assumption that, although policy makers are commonly perceived as being influenced by public opinion, the causality of this argument runs both ways. Political decision makers have the ability to influence the public via means of shaping a “strong strategic narrative”, which directly leads to the question of what exactly has constituted this narrative and how effective it was in influencing public opinion in Denmark. While classic theoretical explanations attested no or little explanatory value to public opinion and rather focused on elite consensus, the theoretical view gradually shifted after the Vietnam War. In its aftermath, theorists started to consider the number of casualties a relevant factor in determining public support for a war. This concept was further refined during the 1980s and 1990s by including contextual factors into the equation, leading to the assumption that the type of war fought (national security vs. humanitarian intervention), the prospects of success of a war (the prospects of imminent success is likely to increase public support for a war) as well as elite consensus (consensus among national public elites approving of a war positively affects public support) are to be considered relevant. More recent explanations factored the concept of “strategic narratives” (described as “compelling story-lines that provide rationales for the use of armed force” by Lawrence Freedman) into a possible theoretical explanation by acknowledging policy mak-

ers’ ability to frame issues, define “national role conceptions” and thereby influence public endorsement.

For Denmark, the strategic narrative provided by the government proved to have been very effective in creating a lasting level of support for the mission in Afghanistan that represented an “anomaly” amongst the ISAF-nations. Building on a strategic narrative revolving around the issues of counterterrorism/national security (one particular phrase repeatedly used by politicians ran “We need to meet the terrorists in Helmand in order not to meet them in Copenhagen”) as well as the export of liberal values, the Danish case shows that the following factors were crucial in order to sell the war in Afghanistan:

- a) a clear mission purpose,
- b) a realistic portrayal of success including minor setbacks,
- c) an elite consensus (the political opposition must have the opportunity to buy into the strategic narrative), and
- d) strategic communication lasting on a “synchronized, coordinated and consistent message.”

While the last factor might have been absent at times, all in all, the Danish case of generating public support for the mission in Afghanistan proved to be an example of success.

Compared with the case of Denmark, the German government’s narrative of reasons for the country’s participation in the ISAF mission appears largely similar. Nevertheless, the underlying agenda as well as the government’s perception of the political success in Afghanistan may result in a different picture.

German public support peaked at around 64 percent at the beginning of the campaign, fueled by a then predominant image of the mission based on the “Balkan template of drilling wells, of supporting [the] population and building schools”, and later dropped to less than 44 percent during the periods of heavy fighting in 2009/10.

Nevertheless, Germany’s involvement in Afghanistan – despite of all its flaws and deficiencies – might ultimately turn out to be a success for German political decision makers.

This indicates that aside from the obvious metrics of success for Afghanistan as defined in NATO strategy papers, consecutive German administrations pursued a number of “unspoken war aims” that diverged from the publicly stated overall goals of the ISAF mission. These criteria of success included (in order of priority):

- a) preserving NATO and keeping the U.S. engaged in Europe,
- b) avoiding letting the Afghanistan mission cause a disturbance of the domestic political agenda in Germany, and, less importantly,
- c) guaranteeing operational success in Afghanistan itself.

Generally, all these criteria have been met. NATO has proved itself to be resilient and adaptive and the vehicle of choice for a more coherent COIN approach in the latter years of the U.S. engagement in Afghanistan. Furthermore, though higher casualties have clearly affected domestic politics at certain points of the campaign, they nevertheless did not lead to the Afghanistan mission becoming a decisive issue in national elections. This is equally true for the third aspect of operational and tactical success in Afghanistan. During the years 2009 until 2011, Germany effectively engaged in COIN and proved to be successful in handling and stabilizing a fundamentally changed security situation, a success that certainly has been affected by the support of U.S. forces, enablers and further resources.

Success at the overall political level came at a price: The German Bundeswehr – as a consequence of political restraints – followed the dictum of casualty avoidance, resulting in “years wasted on operational passiveness”. The Afghanistan mission also clearly revealed that “it was bottom-up pressure that led to innovation in the field.” In addition, Germany’s long-time passive stance in the RC North may have given the insurgents the opportunity to entrench, affecting the costs of the later COIN-campaign to expel them from the area. This political calculus was influenced by two underlying assumptions:

- a) military effectiveness was never debated and declared a taboo by the political elites;
- b) as a prerequisite for this political agenda to work, Germany never really had to have a vital interest in the outcome of the conflict.

Taken these factors into account, drawing lessons learned from Germany’s performance in Afghanistan is difficult as the lack of clear and obvious failure (at least in terms of the politicized metrics of success referred to above) did not lead to the necessary degree of pressure for the higher ministerial echelons to act upon. There has simply been “no conducive environment to implement lessons learned as there is no public push for doing better next time.” Therefore, an adaptation to operational realities will likely be slow and limited in future scenarios in which Germany will be involved as part of a multinational operation. Casualty fear and, consequently, force protection combined with a low level of public support for missions that are non-related to national security will likely remain common features of the German political attitude towards foreign military deployments.

The author is a research fellow at the Institute for Social Science, Section Political Science and the Institute for Security Policy at the University of Kiel (ISPK), Germany.