

Five years of German PRTs in Afghanistan:

An interim stocktaking from the angle of the German aid organisations

2009



VENRO Policy Paper 1/2009

1. Introduction

This paper is a continuation of the VENRO Policy Paper “Armed Forces as humanitarian aid workers? Scope and limits of co-operation between aid organisations and armed forces in humanitarian aid”, (original German version published in 2003), which explains VENRO’s basic position on the issue of civil-military co-operation, describes the increase of military engagement in humanitarian aid since the beginning of the nineties and provides case studies of armed forces involved in humanitarian aid. Since the policy paper was concluded in spring 2003, only possible a brief account could be given there of the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in Afghanistan which were set up for the first time towards the end of 2002.

Since the introduction of the PRT concept in Afghanistan six years ago, 26 PRTs have started operating in Afghanistan that are under NATO command. There is no uniform PRT concept within NATO. Thus the 26 PRTs in Afghanistan, which are supported by 14 different nations, are pursuing different mandates, methods and goals. On the 1.1.2004, Germany took over the PRT in Kunduz from the USA, followed by the PRT in Faizabad in autumn 2004. Also, since 2006, Germany has been in military command of the entire Northern Region with headquarters in Mazar-i Sharif. The performance so far of the PRTs and co-operation among the four Federal Ministries involved has been referred to by the German Federal Government as a “tried and tested civil-military approach”.¹ While the German PRT approach does at least partly differ considerably from the PRTs of other NATO countries, such as the USA, CIMIC activities, Quick Impact Projects and the military securing of the German reconstruction activities belong to the range of activities that the German PRTs are involved in.

The German non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have criticised the PRT from its inception because, for one thing, the mandates of civil and military actors are mixed up. Second, the German Armed Forces partly also assume tasks in the area of reconstruction and food aid in order to win over the “hearts and minds” of the people in Afghanistan. But through this, they are severely jeopardising the independence of humanitarian aid, which is not oriented on political considerations but is committed solely to the “humanitarian imperative”. It is against this background that the German aid organisations are levelling criticism against collaboration between civil and military actors, which has been institutionalised in the context of the PRTs and which is making a distinction between the CIMIC activities and the Quick Impact Projects of the German Armed Forces with a military objective on the one hand and on the other, the humanitarian aid programmes of NGOs more and more difficult. Moreover, there are fears that in many respects, the highly volatile concept of civil-military co-operation in Afghanistan, which in many respects is dominated by the military’s force and power potential, will be transferred to other conflict or post-conflict scenarios.

This Policy Paper takes a look at the PRTs in Afghanistan, in particular at the German PRTs, analyses the im-

pacts on the aid organisations and performs an interim stocktaking.

The following issues are at the centre of interest:

- How has the security situation in Northern Afghanistan developed and what role are the PRTs playing in this context?
- What impacts does civil-military co-operation have on the acceptance of the aid organisations among the Afghan population?
- How should the concept of Provincial Development Funds, introduced by the German PRTs in 2007, be assessed?

2. The development of the PRTs

After the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), resolved towards the end of 2001, was initially explicitly limited solely to Kabul and its surroundings, US military officials developed the geographically limited security concept of Joint Regional Teams for Afghanistan, for a country-wide military occupation of this area state would have required a multiple of the current troop strength. In accordance with this concept, under American leadership, security and development are to be extended to the Afghan provinces. Given the worsening security situation, the government in Washington had decided prior to this that nation building be emphasised in order not to jeopardise keeping to the schedule of the timetable for the reconstruction of Afghanistan and for the handing over of political power to a legitimate government. In addition, military leadership at the Pentagon recognised that in view of the precarious security situation, improved force protection, i.e. securing the military operation by civil measures, would help improve the image of the American soldiers in Afghanistan, thus reducing threats to the American troops.

However, it was not only the US government but also Afghan President Karzai who was seeking an improvement of the security situation by PRTs in order to strengthen the power of the Kabul central government in the provinces. Thus, inspired both by military and domestic considerations, the first Joint Regional Teams (JRT) from the USA were set up in the cities of Gardez, Bamian and Kunduz early in 2003. In mid- 2003, at the request of President Karzai, they were renamed from Joint Regional Teams to Provincial Reconstruction Teams. As a rule, these mixed civil-military

1 Cf. “Afghanistan-Konzept der Bundesregierung vom 7. September 2008”, p. 24.

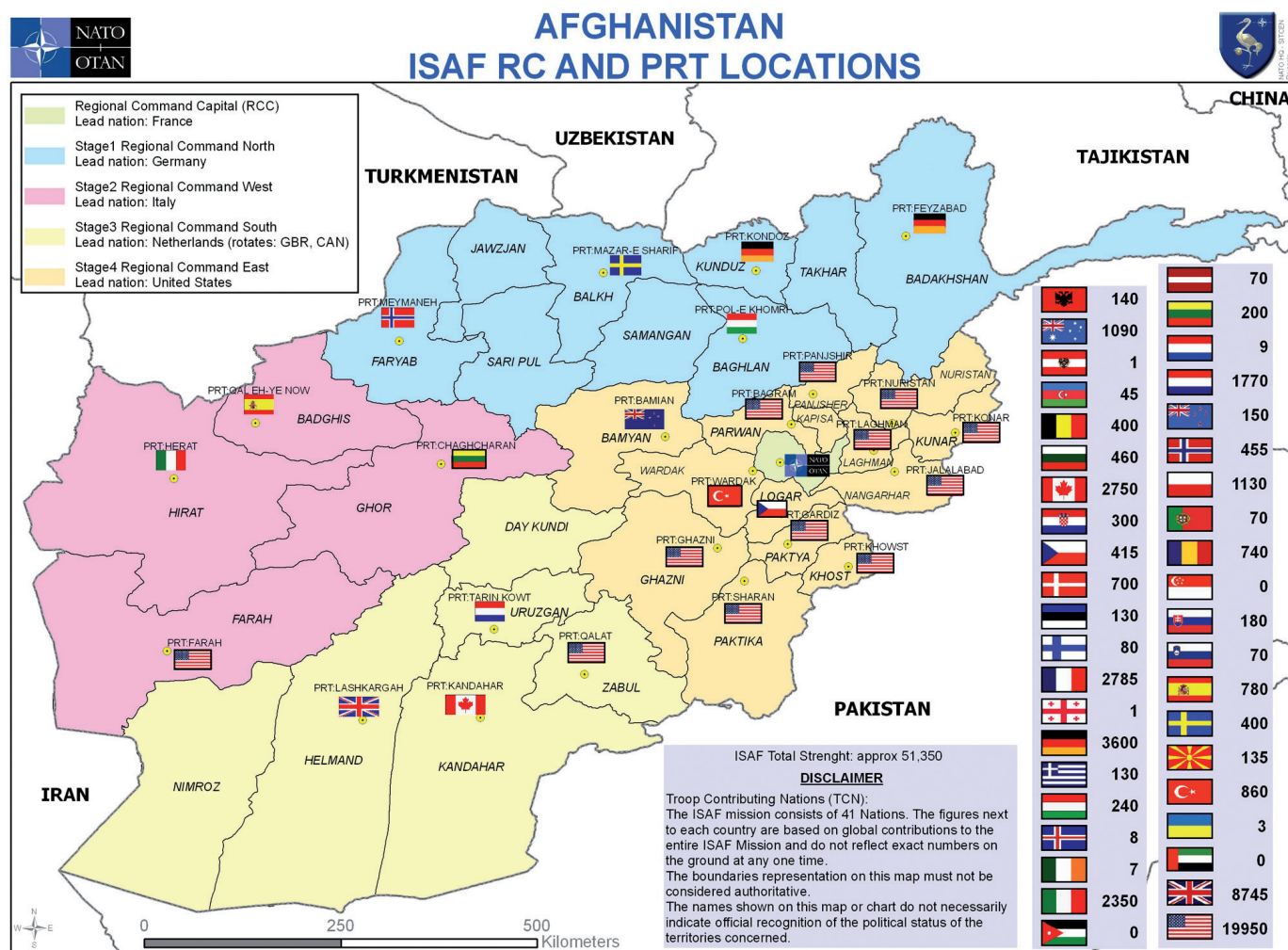
teams consisted of around 250 to 300 soldiers and some civil experts. Basically, the following central tasks of the PRTs can be identified: promoting security and stability, extending the influence and control of the Government in Kabul to the provinces and supporting and securing reconstruction activities.² On the part of the Karzai government, PRTs are regarded as heralds and signals of a future central state structure based on the rule of law.

Following the introduction of the PRT concept, the model of the civil-military reconstruction teams was swiftly internationalised. Now, more than 40 nations have provided troops for the 26 PRTs in Afghanistan (see map below). The prerequisite for this was the United Nations Security Council resolution of October 2003 to extend ISAF's involvement, which had previously been limited to Kabul and its surroundings, to all of Afghanistan.

2 Cf. Julia Hett: "Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan: Das amerikanische, britische und deutsche Modell", ZIF-Analyse 04/2005, p. 8.

3. The German PRT Model

Since the deployment of ISAF by the United Nations Security Council towards the end of 2001, Germany has been involved in the ISAF stabilisation mission. In addition, following its announcement of "unlimited solidarity" with the USA in the wake of the terrorist attacks of the 11th September 2001, Germany has also been engaged in Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) to combat terrorism in Afghanistan. Germany's effort in Afghanistan as well as the overall increase in the country's involvement in multinational military missions over the last few years must be viewed in the context of the German Armed Forces being transformed into a mission force. As a study of the "Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik" of May 2008 states, the German Armed Forces' range of activities has shifted from a stabilisation mission to an



Source: NATO, www.nato.int/multi/map-afghanistan.htm

Data valid as of 1 December 2008

operation focusing on combating insurgence since the beginning of its Afghanistan mission. In the context of the ISAF mission – unlike in previous overseas missions – the German Armed Forces were “no longer a neutral peacekeeping force but a conflict party”.³ In future, as an intervention army, the German Armed Forces are to be capable of responding to international conflicts, asymmetrical threats, terrorism and weapons of mass destruction in the context of the EU, NATO or the UN. The political justification of German Armed Forces overseas missions culminated in former Defence Minister Peter Struck’s statement that the security of the Federal Republic was also being defended in the Hindu-kush.⁴

Since the end of 2003, Germany has been engaged in a stepped-up military presence beyond Kabul and its surroundings in the context of the PRTs in Kunduz and Faizabad. The content background to take over two PRTs in the region of Kunduz was the inter-ministerial Afghanistan concept of the Federal Government adopted on the 2nd September 2003. Under the motto “No development without security”, this cross-department concept of the Federal Government of 2003 provided for up to 450 soldiers of the German Armed Forces assisting in securing reconstruction, the democratisation process and the authority of the Kabul central government in the region of Kunduz. After several extensions and the adaptation of the German Armed Forces mandates to Afghanistan, in 2008, around 570 German soldiers as well as about ten civilian staff – chiefly representatives of the Foreign Office (AA) and the Federal Ministry of the Interior (BMI) – were deployed in the PRT Kunduz. In 2008, the PRT Faizabad had a military strength of around 400 German Armed Forces soldiers. In total, in the context of Regional Command North, the German Armed Forces are responsible for security in an area of 20,000 km².

The German PRT deployment area in Northeast Afghanistan comprises the three provinces of Kunduz, Takhar and Badakshan. According to the Federal Government’s Afghanistan concept, and unlike in the American PRT model, political, economic and social reconstruction should be at the forefront of German engagement. This is why the German PRT concept provides for different foreign and security policy and development pillars of the PRTs.

In detail, the following core tasks are envisaged:

- Political activities (liaison, dialogue and convincing activities, strengthening civil society and UNAMA);
- Supporting and flanking the reform of the security sector;
- Implementing development co-operation programmes and their co-ordination with other international and national state parties and NGOs.⁵

Unlike the PRT model of the USA, in which civil experts, e.g. from the American implementing organisation USAID, are embedded in the military mission, in the German PRTs, each of the four Ministries (AA, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development [BMZ], Fede-

ral Ministry of Defence [BMVg] and BMI) is in control of its activities in self-responsibility within the framework of the overall objective set. Activities are mutually attuned and co-ordinated at local level, but each Ministry answers for its own sub-targets, programmes and projects. While the German PRT model has a conceptual division of the various fields of activities that is also outwardly visible as well as largely separate financing, co-operation is strongly counteracted by the different department interests. For example, the BMZ and its implementing organisations initially refused to be accommodated in the field camp of the German Armed Forces in Kunduz. Instead, a separate “Deutsches Haus für Entwicklungspolitik” (German house for development) was set up. Cross-departmental co-operation has obviously improved in the meantime, although only recently, the former Chairman of the German Armed Forces Association, Colonel Bernhard Gertz, pointed to insufficient political co-ordination among the different areas of activity.⁶ In spite of the participation of four Federal Ministries, the German PRTs are perceived as military mission forces, which is also reflected in the above-mentioned numerical ratio of military and civil staff.

In order to maintain a permanent presence in those provinces without a PRT, the German Armed Forces set up an initial Provincial Advisory Team (PAT) in Taloqan in the Province of Takhar in 2007. Establishing PATs, which are also outwardly represented by a civil-military leadership, is a further element in the extension of the civil-military approach in Afghanistan. In co-ordination with the Swedish-led PRTs, more PATs are planned for the Provinces of Jawsjan, Sar-e Pol and Samangan. The PATs follow the civil-military logic of the PRTs, but only have a reduced staffing volume. A maximum of 40 persons are provided for the PAT in Taloqan, including five civil staff.

The concept of Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC), developed by NATO, plays a special role in the context of the PRTs. In public, the restructuring of the German Armed Forces is also justified with new demands in the field of crisis response and humanitarian aid, for example in the “Weißbuch zur Sicherheitspolitik Deutschlands und zur Zukunft der Bundeswehr” (white paper on German security policy and the future of the German Armed Forces). Accordingly, the German Armed Forces have developed a CIMIC concept of their own (“Teilkonzeption Zivil-Militärische Zusammenarbeit der Bundeswehr” – sub-concept for civil-military co-operation of the German Armed Forces) that describes the co-operation of military service units with civil institutions and into the range of duties of which, in military understanding, “targeted influencing and/or support of the civil

3 Timo Noetzel und Martin Zaepfe, “Aufstandsbekämpfung als Auftrag: Instrumente und Planungsstrukturen für den ISAF-Einsatz”, SWP-Studie, Berlin, May 2008, p. 5.

4 Cf. Press Release by the Federal Ministry of Defence of the 5.12.2002.

5 Cf. “Afghanistan-Konzept der Bundesregierung vom 1. September 2003”, p. 8.

6 Cf. “Wir haben unsere Verpflichtungen nicht erfüllt”, Tagesspiegel, 10.11.2008.

decision-makers in the sense of a mission's own political, military and/or humanitarian aims"⁷ also falls. The chief purpose of CIMIC is to support the implementation of the military assignment. This above all includes force protection, comprising trust-building measures for the local population to raise the acceptance of the military mission. These flanking measures of the military assignment may also include immediate support measures for the population, such as repairing schools or hospitals in the context of CIMIC or handing out food in 2007/2008 in the context of "Winterhilfe in Afghanistan" (winter aid for Afghanistan). From the angle of the armed forces, such "hearts and minds" activities are a tried and tested way to raise acceptance among the population and, hence, raise one's own security.⁸

While CIMIC activities did play a certain role at the beginning of the mission in Northern Nord-Afghanistan in the context of force protection, the aid measures that the German Armed Forces themselves have implemented in Afghanistan are negligible in terms of their extent and volume. Unlike with the missions in the Balkans, the German Armed Forces are not running any extensive CIMIC projects in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, a total of around 40 German CIMIC staff have been deployed in Northern Afghanistan. But the German Armed Forces are still engaged in Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) with the following targets that are defined as of a clearly military nature: "QIPs are measures to be implemented on a short-term basis the origin of which ... can directly be identified by the target group, through the immediate impact of which on the civil environment a stabilising contribution is achieved and which thus contribute to raising force protection."⁹ In addition, CIMIC and QIPs serve the purpose of providing a domestic policy legitimisation of the Afghanistan mission, which is increasingly being rejected by the German population.

As an element of civil-military co-operation, the Provincial Development Funds (PDF) introduced in the context of the German PRTs in 2007 have since considerably gained in significance as well as financial volume. In terms of their concept and volume, the PDF reach way beyond the CIMIC approach since a committee comprising equal numbers of representatives of the four ministries and Afghan local administration has, in the meantime, decided on the financing of mainly infrastructural small-scale measures. The PDF are aimed at awarding projects to Afghan communities in a transparent and participatory manner, thus contributing to visible improvements in living conditions. The PDF funds are employed in the Northern Afghan provinces of Kunduz, Takhar and Badakshan, which are also assignment areas of the German Armed Forces. From 2006 up to and including 2008, 4.72 million euro was approved by the BMVg for the PDF. In parallel, the BMZ provided funding to the tune of 3.5 million euro for the first projects in the framework of the PDF and for their expert and administrative support.¹⁰ The "Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit" (GTZ) assesses and administrates the applications for projects and supports the communities in project implementation.

4. What the humanitarian aid organisations criticise about the PRTs

The above-described change in the role of the German Armed Forces and their perception and the integration of the various departments as well as the CIMIC components have had a considerable negative impact on the work of the humanitarian aid organisations and on those of development co-operation. From the angle of the NGOs, the most important point of criticism is that they are not sufficiently assuming their chief role, that of ensuring stability and security for the population, and that simultaneously, the blurring of the distinction between military engagement and humanitarian aid is threatening the independence of the NGOs. In public debate, there is frequently a one-sided understanding of security in Afghanistan being the protection of the soldiers or the international aid workers, but from the angle of the aid organisations, the aim must above all be to effectively protect the civilian population.

The stabilisation of the security situation in Afghanistan with the aid of the PRTs has generally not been successful. This is also due to the limited scope of action that the troops have. Since a Defence Ministry decree of 2006, troops may only go on patrol in armoured vehicles and in convoys with medical support. A survey published in March 2008 by the "Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik" dealing with the security situation in Afghanistan and options for action of the German Armed Forces arrives at the conclusion: "Since the beginning of the mission in Northern Afghanistan, the security situation has deteriorated."¹¹ The Federal Government's updated concepts for Afghanistan of 2006, 2007 and 2008 also note that the security situation has considerably worsened in several regions: "Disappointment is spreading among the population about the absence of a – not always to a realistic extent – hoped for improvement of their living conditions, and success in combating drugs has

7 Federal Ministry of Defence, Teilkonzeption Zivil-Militärische Zusammenarbeit der Bundeswehr, Berlin, Oktober 2001, p. 5.

8 Thus the German Armed Forces frequently create the impression in the public that the soldiers are "uniformed aid workers", e.g. in the Magazine of the Süddeutsche Zeitung of the 6th June 2008.

9 Jan Koehler and Christoph Zürcher, Quick Impact Projects in Nordost Afghanistan: Eine Studie im Auftrag des BMVg, 2007, p. 17.

10 Cf. Foreign Office, Krisenprävention als gemeinsame Aufgabe: 2. Bericht der Bundesregierung über die Umsetzung des „Aktionsplans Zivile Krisenprävention, Konfliktlösung und Friedenskonsolidierung“, p. 83.

11 Sascha Lange, Die Bundeswehr in Afghanistan: Personal und technische Ausstattung in der Einsatzrealität, SWP-Studie, March 2008.

This is contradicted by an interim evaluation of the Development Ministry published early in 2008 according to which 99 percent of the households in the North-East of Afghanistan are of the opinion that security has improved. BMZ, Friedensmissionen in Nordost-Afghanistan – welche Wirkungen hat die Entwicklungszusammenarbeit? BMZ-Evaluierungsbericht 031, 2008.

not materialised.”¹² For 2008, the Afghanistan NGO Safety Office (ANSO) recorded the as yet worst security situation since the beginning of the international mission in Afghanistan. Even in the North of the country, which had originally been regarded as relatively peaceful, a significant increase in violence has been observed. It cannot be overlooked that the North of the country is coming more and more under the influence of violent groups attempting to spread their guerrilla war from the South and the Pakistani border regions. Thus a development already identified in 2007 is continuing.

Violence against NGOs has also risen considerably, too. Already in the first seven months of 2008, more NGO staff were killed than in the whole of 2007. The volatility of this development is additionally increased by a decisive shift in the quality of violence. According to ANSO, the ratio of criminal attacks to political attacks on NGOs has seen a crucial change. Whereas the lion's share of incidents could still be traced back to criminal origins in 2007, two thirds of the attacks in 2008 are now based on political motives.¹³

A number of observations suggest that the increasing threat to NGOs is due to no clear distinction being possible between military and humanitarian actors. For example, a Danish NGO had to abandon a project site because military units paid a visit to the project that they had not announced. As a result, the village elders no longer saw themselves in a position to guarantee the NGO's security. The absence of clear marking of military actors, such as members of the US armed forces who are on patrol in Kabul in civilian clothes but bear weapons and are carrying out undercover military operations as well as the use of white vehicles that are not marked as military vehicles has a similar effect. The compilation of a civil situation report by German Armed Forces soldiers is resulting in an indirect threat to NGOs, too. For the German Armed Forces, one important element of the civil situation report is also the establishment of data on the humanitarian situation in the military assignment area. In this manner, expectations are roused among the population that the aid organisations are then confronted with. If these expectations are not met, a loss of trust will occur that may have a negative impact on the work of the humanitarian aid organisations even if the German Armed Forces are not conducting or commissioning any aid measures of their own.

From a humanitarian angle, PRTs are a symbol of hybrid civil-military co-operation. By intermingling humanitarian aid and military objectives, aid organisations slip into the maelstrom of a general loss of trust among the Afghan population. Already before the PRTs had been established across Afghanistan, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) had urgently warned against mixing the concepts and operations of the different mandates: “The distinction between humanitarian, political and military action becomes blurred when armed forces are perceived as being humanitarian actors, when civilians are embedded into military structures, and when the impression is created that humanitarian organizations and their personnel are merely tools within integrated approaches to conflict management.”¹⁴ Over the last few years, one of the reasons given by NGOs

that have suspended their aid activities is that owing to the humanitarian mandate being turned into a tool by the military, independent aid can no longer be performed. The NGOs condemn the increasing dominance of security policy considerations that view development co-operation “in the slipstream of military interventions”, such as former US Secretary of State Colin Powell, who referred to NGOs as “force multipliers”.

Not only has the PRT since become the symbol of mixing the mandates of the different civil and military actors, but it also 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”. A survey commissioned by the Ministry of Defence and published early in 2008 clearly refers to the strategic benefit of PRTs aid measures: “The measures that are implemented via the Provincial Development Funds are needs-oriented and generally suitable to raise the acceptance of international engagement among the Afghan population.”¹⁵

5. Summary

From the angle of humanitarian aid organisations, the institutionalised form of civil-military co-operation in the form of PRTs is rejected. In its policy paper “Perspektiven für Frieden, Wiederaufbau und Entwicklung in Afghanistan” of October 2007, VENRO raised the clear demand that armed forces solely concentrate on their core mission, military peace-keeping, and leave humanitarian aid, reconstruction and development co-operation to civil actors.¹⁶ Therefore, a clear division of labour should be agreed on the basis of the different mandates of armed forces and aid organisations committed to the humanitarian imperative.

In a post-conflict country like Afghanistan, the work of the aid organisations is above all based on their acceptance among the population. This acceptance can only be main-

12 Afghanistan-Konzept der Bundesregierung vom 12. September 2006, p. 2.

13 Cf. ANSO Quarterly Data Report, July 1st – September 30th; October 2008, p. 1.

14 Ray Rana, Contemporary challenges in the civil-military relationship: Complementarity or incompatibility? In: International Review of the Red Cross, September 2004, p. 565-591.

15 Jan Koehler und Christoph Zürcher: Quick Impact Projects in Nordost Afghanistan: Eine Studie im Auftrag des BMVg, 2007. In VENRO's opinion, the survey overlooks that the PRT and PDF measures usually have no sustainable perspective, that they are predominantly oriented on acute security interests and that they are only based on professional needs analyses in exceptional situations.

16 VENRO, Perspektiven für Frieden, Wiederaufbau und Entwicklung in Afghanistan, VENRO-Positionspapier, October 2007.

tained as long as the difference between military and civil actors remains recognisable and comprehensible. According to the assessment of the humanitarian aid organisations, institutionalising civil-military co-operation in the form of PRTs bears more risks than advantages. Therefore, already in 2004, a study by Save the Children raised the political demand that given the threat to the independence of humanitarian aid by CIMIC activities, proof be given of the value added by the PRTs: "It is imperative that militaries, and their political masters, either prove that the risks posed by 'hearts and minds' operations are outweighed by the security benefits, or else they should cease including them in their portfolio of military activities"¹⁷ (Save the Children 2004:51).

In its policy paper of March 2008, ACBAR, the umbrella organisation of the NGOs working in Afghanistan, also arrives at the conclusion that the PRTs have to once again refer to their original mandate of stabilisation and security. Since they were planned from their inception as a merely transitional solution, the PRTs should be scaled down in the foreseeable future, and the funds they have absorbed

should flow into the national development plans.¹⁸ A realistic timetable for a military exit strategy would considerably enhance the credibility of the West in terms of its truly aiming to bring peace and development to Afghanistan rather than pursuing strategic interests of its own. Moreover, the PRTs represent a double structure alongside Afghan governance that should be dissolved again as soon as possible in parallel to progress made in Afghan state-building. In addition, CIMIC activities and QIPs of the German PRTs ought to be independently evaluated regarding efficiency, impacts and sustainability.

17 Save the Children, Provincial Reconstruction Teams and humanitarian-military relations in Afghanistan, London, 2004.

18 Matt Waldman, Falling short: Aid effectiveness in Afghanistan, ACBAR Advocacy Series, March 2008, p. 5.

VENRO is a voluntary association of more than 100 German non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The VENRO members are private and church-oriented agencies of development co-operation, emergency relief and development education, public relations and lobbying activities.

This policy paper was compiled in the framework of the VENRO Humanitarian Aid Department in which around 20 organisations involved in emergency and disaster relief are active.

Imprint

Publishers:

Verband Entwicklungspolitik
deutscher Nichtregierungsorganisationen e.V.
(VENRO)
Kaiserstr. 201
53113 Bonn
Germany
Phone: + (0) 49 2 28 / 9 46 77-0
Fax: + (0) 49 2 28 / 9 46 77-99
E-Mail: sekretariat@venro.org
Homepage: www.venro.org

Authors: Timo Christians, Katrin Radtke, Hubertus Rüffer (all Welthungerhilfe), Peter Runge (VENRO), Herbert Sahlmann (Stiftung Nord-Süd- Brücken) as well as Thorsten Hinz (Caritas international) and Jürgen Lieser (Caritas international/VENRO)

Editorial office: Kirsten Prestin

Picture credits: Welthungerhilfe / Gutschker

Layout: Kava-Design, Bonn, www.kava-design.de

Date of appearance: January 2009