



Die
Bundesregierung

Input Paper on German Support for the Peace Process in Afghanistan

Report to the German Bundestag

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I. Context

1. Through joint efforts by various ministries, Germany is making an important contribution to international endeavours to foster peace, stability and development in Afghanistan, including by providing just under 14 percent of total ODA and stabilisation aid to Afghanistan, as one of 39 NATO and partner countries in the Resolute Support Mission with 7.7 percent of the troop contingent, and as part of the bilateral German Police Project Team (GPPT) with approximately 50 federal and Land police officers. In its March 2018 'Report on the status of and outlook for Germany's Afghanistan engagement', the Federal Government redefined the strategic goals of this engagement on the basis of an inventory of the current situation and Germany's interests.
2. These goals are:
 - to reduce the violent conflict to a level that can be controlled by the Afghan security forces and minimises the threat to Germany, its allies and the region;
 - to create a state that enjoys legitimacy and thus facilitates stability, including through its effective safeguarding of security and justice, and particularly of human rights;
 - to ensure economic and social development that gives people prospects for the future beyond poverty, (forced) migration and extremism;
 - to foster an Afghan-owned peace process that is supported by other countries in the region.
3. Since this report was published, Afghanistan has only partly come closer to achieving these goals. On the one hand, the Afghan government was able to present achievements under its reform programme at the Geneva Conference on Afghanistan on 28 November 2018, including the restructuring of public procurement and recruitment law and the introduction of a digital registration and remuneration system for the security forces, and has agreed new reform goals with its development partners to be achieved by 2020. Despite huge organisational challenges and high security risks, the large voter turnout for the parliamentary elections in October 2018, which had been postponed several times, was proof of the public's support for the democratic constitutional order. Progress has been made with regard to reaching a political settlement to the conflict, with a comprehensive peace offer made by the government, a three-day ceasefire and the appointment of a US Special Representative. On the other hand, the level of violence and the security situation have not improved significantly over the course of the year. According to reports by the United Nations, 8050 Afghan civilians were killed or injured as a direct result of the conflict in the first three quarters of the year, compared with 8084 people in the same period in 2017.

4. The Federal Government is of the view that the violent conflict in Afghanistan can only be ended by a political negotiation process that includes both the Afghan government and the Taliban, shifts the conflict to the political level, and enables the Afghan security forces to protect the Afghan population in the longer term without international military support. All Afghan players and the international community agree with this assessment.
5. A key goal of German engagement in Afghanistan is thus to maximise the chances of success for a political process and not to take any steps that could impede it. The Federal Government thus concludes that it should continue its diplomatic, civilian and military engagement in agreement with its partners to the same extent as before. In order to achieve the above-mentioned goals and to strengthen reform-oriented players in the Afghan government, the Federal Government will continue to make as much of its support as possible contingent on reforms and better cooperation. Until a political settlement is reached, the Federal Government believes that continuing military engagement will help to create the security prerequisites for civil engagement being able to become effective in its current form.
6. In the longer term, the Federal Government is preparing for various scenarios:
 - In the best-case scenario, a political process will create a viable foundation in the foreseeable future for permanently reducing the violence on the basis of comprehensive reconciliation in Afghan society and for bringing German and international engagement to a successful conclusion. The Federal Government will respect and support a peace agreement between the parties to the conflict provided that it ensures an end to the armed conflict and to all connections to transnational terrorist organisations, and protects the universal human rights guaranteed in the constitution for all Afghan citizens. An unprecedented opportunity has now arisen for paving the way to such a peace process.
 - However, the experiences of the past years suggest that work on a political process will last several years, especially given the complex Afghan and international negotiating situation, without there being either decisive breakthroughs or complete failure. The Federal Government believes it should continue its engagement in Afghanistan, in agreement with its international partners, in order to continue playing its part in bringing about a successful political process without jeopardising it, provided there are realistic prospects for a political settlement.
 - The allies make decisions on the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission through consensus. Should the US, in particular, significantly reduce its military engagement, the Federal Government will review its own actions in Afghanistan in depth. Under such circumstances, it would be necessary to review with our partners whether and how such a decision by the US could be offset by redistributing the burden among NATO partners. In the view of the Federal Government, this is not currently the case

(see paragraph 15). However, we cannot preclude a situation in which the US separates its future military engagement from endeavours to bring about a peace process and withdraws partially or fully from Afghanistan without consulting extensively with its partners. This scenario could have an impact on international engagement in Afghanistan. This would first need to be evaluated and discussed at multilateral level in NATO before decisions, particularly on NATO activities, can be made on further military engagement.

- Germany's engagement would require a thorough review should diplomatic efforts to bring about a political process collapse entirely.

II. Latest developments

7. Over the past year, the Afghan government has taken several initiatives to further a comprehensive Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process. At the Kabul Process for Peace and Security Cooperation in Afghanistan, a conference of Afghanistan's most important partners, including Germany, which took place on 28 February 2018, President Ghani stated that he was willing to negotiate with the Taliban without preconditions and on all contentious issues, including the future constitution and the international troop presence. This offer met with broad support from Afghan politicians and the Afghan public, and was also welcomed outside Afghanistan. Meetings of renowned Islamic religious scholars in Bogor (Indonesia), Kabul, and Mecca also called for direct intra-Afghan negotiations.
8. To mark the end of Ramadan, the Afghan government announced a temporary unilateral ceasefire (excluding "Islamic State" in Khorasan Province and al-Qaida) as a confidence-building measure. The US armed forces took part in this ceasefire. The Taliban accepted the ceasefire for three days (15 to 17 June 2018), but explicitly excluded foreign targets from it. During this time, fighting ceased almost entirely and there were scenes of fighters from opposing sides fraternising. Since then, however, the Taliban have not responded to offers to extend or renew the ceasefire.
9. At the November 28, 2018 Geneva Conference on Afghanistan, President Ghani presented further measures aimed at launching a peace process, such as the appointment of a 12-member negotiating team and an advisory committee comprised of important representatives of the government, opposition, and civil society. The Afghan Government expects to be able to conclude a peace process, both among the Afghan parties to the conflict and with foreign players such as Pakistan and the US, within a period of five years. It insists on upholding the continuity of the constitutional framework.

10. The leaders of the Afghan Taliban movement have rejected this initiative so far, as they regard the internationally recognised Afghan government as an illegitimate accomplice of foreign powers without the authority to make its own decisions. The Taliban see themselves as having been unjustly overthrown in 2001 and as the de facto ruling government of the “Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan” in large swathes of the country. To date, it has only stated its willingness to negotiate with the US and has authorised its unofficial “Political Office” to conduct such talks. Comprised of several members of the former Taliban regime who are based in Doha (Qatar), the “Political Office” is to be led by the former deputy to the “Emir”, Abdul Ghani Baradar. Although some members of the Taliban who have distanced themselves from the current leadership take different positions on the peace process, the nationwide ceasefire following Ramadan in 2018 shows the vast majority of the group follows orders from their leader, “Emir” Hibatullah Akhundzada, and his deputies Sirajuddin Haqqani, Muhammad Yaqub, and Abdul Ghani Baradar.
11. The Taliban’s main demands are that “the occupation be ended” and for the establishment of an “Islamic system” in Afghanistan (according to its last published speech, which was given in Moscow on 9 November 2018). These vague concepts have occasionally been specified – albeit not consistently – as an internationally endorsed commitment by the US and its partners to a time frame, agreed with the Taliban, on a complete ending of the international troop presence and the adoption of a new Afghan constitution that is based, to a greater extent, on Islamic principles, particularly in the governmental and legal systems.
12. At least rhetorically, the Taliban promise to prohibit Afghan territory from being used for interference abroad, to combat illegal drug cultivation and trade, to prevent harm to civilians, and to facilitate humanitarian assistance. As confidence-building measures during the peace process, the Taliban demand the lifting of international sanctions (including travel restrictions imposed by the United Nations), the release of prisoners, and permission to set up an official representative office. Representatives of the Taliban claim that the aim is not to return to being the sole power, as was the case prior to 2001; however, it remains unclear so far how they perceive their political role after a peace agreement.
13. The US refuses to hold negotiations with the Taliban without the Afghan Government, as only the latter can legitimately make decisions about Afghan security forces, their need for international support, and changes to the system of government or foreign policy. However, Trump’s Administration has stated its willingness to support peace talks between the Afghan parties to the conflict, including through preliminary talks and as a negotiating partner. At their meeting on 5 December 2018, the NATO Foreign Ministers recognised that the international community’s future military role in Afghanistan will also be discussed in an Afghan-owned peace process.

14. On 24 September 2018, US Secretary of State Pompeo appointed Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad as the Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation. In talks with Afghan and regional stakeholders, Khalilzad is working intensively to achieve confidence-building measures and negotiations in a format acceptable to all parties. The aim is to reach a breakthrough before Afghanistan's presidential elections scheduled to take place 20 July 2019. The Taliban reject these elections as illegitimate. The release of several Taliban members from detention in Pakistan and the participation of members of the Taliban leadership in talks with representatives of the US, Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia in Abu Dhabi between 17 and 19 December 2018 are the first results of this engagement.
15. The success of these efforts will depend on the degree to which the US and its allies are prepared to use their military and civilian support for Afghanistan as a lever. The Trump Administration is seeking to bring about an early political solution so that the US contingents in the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission and in the US counter-terrorism mission, Operation Freedom's Sentinel, can be significantly reduced. The time pressure this creates could weaken the negotiating position of the US and the Afghan government if such a reduction in troops cannot be tied to concessions from the other side as a milestone in a negotiated road map. Within the framework of its South Asia Strategy, announced in August 2017, the US Administration committed to continuing the mission until the desired benchmarks have been reached. In this strategy, President Trump clearly distanced himself from his predecessor's policy, which he called a "hasty withdrawal" based on calendar timetable. The approach of making changes to the mission contingent upon developments on the ground forms a valid basis for the Resolute Support Mission, as was confirmed by NATO heads of state and at their summit on 12 July 2018. The US considerably increased the number of troops sent to Afghanistan in 2017 and 2018. Media reports on plans to reduce the US troop contingents stationed in Afghanistan have not been confirmed to date by representatives of the US Administration, including the commander of US troops in Afghanistan, General Miller. The Federal Government is pressing for coordinated action within NATO. In both political and practical terms, the Bundeswehr mission in Afghanistan hinges on reliable and calculable multilateral cooperation.
16. The states in the region, whose interests are directly affected by the political and security situation in Afghanistan, are increasingly keen to play a role in the peace process. For example, the new Uzbek Government hosted a ministerial conference on 27 March 2018, which was also attended by Federica Mogherini, EU High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy. The new Pakistani Foreign Minister has already visited Kabul three times since taking up office in August 2018 and has declared that resolving the Afghan conflict is a priority for his government. However, time will tell whether Pakistan is willing and able to make the necessary changes in the way it deals with the Taliban, whose leadership continues to enjoy safe havens there. As Pakistan's close

partner, China bears special responsibility. Among other things, this takes the form of a trilateral dialogue, which includes Afghanistan (most recent meeting in Kabul on 15 December 2018) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation's Afghanistan Contact Group (most recent meeting in Beijing on 28 May 2018). On 9 November 2018, Russia organised a meeting of states in the region ('Moscow Format'), which included a Taliban delegation for the first time. However, as the Taliban refused to meet the Afghan Government, the only representatives from Kabul were members of the independent High Peace Council. Iran, too, has intensified its contacts with the Taliban and has expressed interest in being involved in an Afghan peace process.

III. Germany's role

17. The success of the peace process is a key goal of Germany's involvement in Afghanistan. It, therefore, wants to do everything in its power to advance such a process. Germany bears special responsibility, due to its current role as Afghanistan's second most important partner (by a wide margin behind the US), its history as host of the International Conference on Afghanistan in December 2001 and as mediator in the establishment of an unofficial Taliban political office in Doha, as well as the considerable standing and trust it has gained in Afghan society over decades. This influence must be used strategically to foster the peace process.
18. In diplomatic terms, the federal government is using its contacts with a broad range of Afghan political stakeholders to highlight the key importance of a peace process for the country's stability and development, as well as for the continuation of German and international support, and to press for constructive steps. In doing so, it has warned that women as well as all ethnic and religious groups must be included in the negotiating process from the onset. Among other things, the federal government is funding projects aimed at developing the capabilities of negotiating teams and at promoting talks on access for humanitarian assistance for those in need. In addition to this, Germany has stated its readiness to offer its support to help foster the peace process if requested by the parties to the conflict, for instance by hosting a further Petersberg conference encompassing the Taliban at a suitable stage of the negotiations.
19. As Chair of the International Contact Group on Afghanistan (ICG), Germany has been helping to create consensus in the international community on support for the peace process and to bring together relevant initiatives in a coherent strategy. In the foreseeable future, a top priority will be to harmonise the efforts of the US and Russia, the former operating a rival process with the 'Moscow Format'. Furthermore, Germany is using its bilateral relations with countries in the region, such as Pakistan, Iran, China, and Russia, to urge them to cooperate constructively on a peace process. The Federal Government encourages the US to strengthen the leadership of Afghan negotiating

parties and lead a peace process that defends key achievements in the reconstruction of Afghanistan since 2001. As a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council in 2019/2020 and co-penholder with Indonesia on Afghanistan, Germany will advocate for the United Nations to play an active role in the resolution of the conflict and in the implementation or verification of a peace agreement.

20. The Federal Government is calling for all relevant EU instruments to be used to foster a peace process in Afghanistan. At the Geneva Conference on Afghanistan on 28 November 2018, the EU High Representative named five areas in which the Union can contribute: the inclusion of all sections of society in the peace process, the implementation of an agreed reform of the security sector, the reintegration of fighters, as a guarantor for a peace process, and the promotion of cross-border trade and infrastructure projects. Based on its support for the 2016 peace accord with Hezb-e Islami led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the EU has established a peace facility to fund appropriate measures. Afghanistan's neighbours could be prompted to play a positive role in any peace process by the EU's support for regional connectivity and integration, for instance within the scope of the EU Strategy for Central Asia, the new version of which – scheduled for release this year – is to focus more on Afghanistan.
21. Since 2015, Germany's military engagement within the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission, in line with the mandate adopted by the Bundestag on 22 March 2018, has helped enable the Afghan security forces to assume long-term security responsibility throughout Afghanistan, so that the Afghan-owned peace process, as well as the civilian reconstruction efforts and the reform and development efforts of the Afghan Government, are given the time and space they need to be effective. To this end, the international military engagement, the advisory services for the police, training and equipment aid, development policy, and diplomatic efforts for a political settlement in keeping with the interministerial approach are mutually reinforcing. In view of the current opportunities for a peace process, Germany is actively involved in a discussion within NATO on the future dovetailing of these lines of action.
22. The future of the international troop presence in Afghanistan is one of the main contentious issues among the parties to the conflict and will therefore be a subject of future negotiations. For instance, discussions on the scope or mandate of international troops must focus on an agreed upon Afghan-owned road map for peace and appropriate steps to be taken by the Taliban. As soon as a future Afghan government no longer needs international support for its security forces and the cross-border terrorist threat from Afghan soil has been minimised, there will no longer be a basis for the NATO-led train, advise, and support mission. Once the mission has been concluded, NATO could continue to support Afghanistan within the framework of "Enduring Partnership", agreed in 2010.
23. The continued international support for the Afghan security forces within the Resolute

Support Mission is currently a key factor in efforts to persuade the Taliban to engage in serious negotiations. The Afghan government's enhanced capacity to defend itself against military attacks by the Taliban, made possible by the mission, means that in a peace process it could assert demands vis-à-vis the Taliban which are also in Germany's interest – for example, measures to combat international terrorist organisations in Afghanistan such as al-Qaida or the so-called Islamic State in Khorasan Province, or obligations to protect human rights, especially those of women and ethnic minorities. In the present crucial phase, therefore, the prospects of success for an Afghan-owned peace process depend in particular on the necessary international support still being available to Afghan security forces.

24. The parties to the Afghan conflict have expressed their interest in continued international civilian support. The international community can therefore provide key incentives to reach an agreement and comply with its provisions. Germany has declared its willingness, in principle, to support development and stability in Afghanistan after a peace accord has been concluded. In order to strengthen the socio-economic foundation for peace, the participants in the Geneva Conference on Afghanistan on 28 November 2018 agreed to discuss economic initiatives with a view to fostering the return of Afghan money from abroad, including investments, work opportunities, and regional economic cooperation, once a peace agreement has been reached. Furthermore, if headway is made in the peace process, specific measures could be examined in the areas currently controlled by the Taliban, provided the security situation allows them to be carried out.

IV. Outlook

25. It should become clear in the course of the year whether the current initiatives to kick-start an Afghan-owned peace process could succeed. This will be indicated by the consent of the parties to the conflict to a format of talks which includes both the Taliban and the Afghan Government. It is too early to say whether the participation of further Afghan or international players in the talks or international mediation is necessary. Ambassador Khalilzad is currently exploring with the Afghan Government, the Taliban, and regional partners the possibility of two parallel negotiating strategies: on the one hand, indirect US-mediated talks among the parties to the conflict on combating terrorism and the troop presence and, on the other, direct talks among the parties to the conflict on issues relating to the system of government. In such a case, confidence-building measures could come at the start of the process. In a next step, a road map of mutual steps in the security sphere with time and substantive targets could be agreed. This could include a temporary or permanent reduction of international troops. The final step would be an understanding on a new constitutional framework in which a balance would have to be found between continuity and the symbolic fresh start the Taliban

want to see, between democratic and traditional Islamic legal principles and between centralised and sub-national government structures. If a breakthrough is achieved and a peace process commences, its conclusion will most certainly take many years, during which – as experience has shown in other contexts – interruptions and setbacks are to be expected.

26. An Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process offers the chance to stabilize the security situation in Afghanistan and to effectively combat cross-border terrorism. This remains the rationale of the international military and civilian engagement triggered by the attacks of 11 September 2001. The immense human resource and financial outlay currently required for safeguarding security could be invested in economic development. Regional trade relations could benefit from this as well. A peace agreement would also pave the way for the return of more Afghan refugees. Progress in a peace process would thus make it possible to adapt and reduce German and international military and, in the longer term, civilian engagement in Afghanistan.