

# Denkwürdigkeiten



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## LEADOFF

### Liebe Mitglieder,

Die Demütigung des Westens und das unrühmliche Ende seiner Intervention in Afghanistan haben tiefe Spuren hinterlassen. In den Köpfen westlicher Entscheidungsträger und der kritischen Öffentlichkeit dort. Aber auch bei islamistischen und/oder machtpolitischen, systemischen Opponenten, die subjektiv „Oberwasser“ bekommen und ermutigt werden mehr zu wagen.

Die Erfahrungen aus Afghanistan, aber auch aus Syrien und Mali müssen im eigenen, westlichen Interesse aufgearbeitet werden. Es ist nicht gelungen effektive Strategien zur Stabilisierung zu entwickeln. Zudem ist aus Klima bezogenen, demographischen und wirtschaftlichen Gründen zu erwarten, dass die Zahl der schwachen Staaten in Europas Nachbarschaft zunehmen wird. Wir dürfen mit deutlich mehr Migranten und Flüchtlingen als bisher rechnen. Diese Denkwürdigkeiten beleuchten tektonische Verschiebungen bisheriger geopolitischer Machtbalance. Deutschland und Europa kommen dabei nicht gut weg. Der Weg der USA muss sich erst noch bewähren.

*Ralph Thiele, Vorstandsvorsitzender*

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## THEMEN

### Hat der Islam gesiegt?

Im Dezember 2001 wollte die internationale Gemeinschaft auf dem Petersberg bei Bonn die Weichen für eine friedliche Zukunft Afghanistans stellen. Der damalige Bundesverteidigungsminister Peter Struck verkündete: „Deutschlands Sicherheit wird auch am Hindukusch verteidigt!“ Heute stellen sich die Fragen:

### Weshalb ist der Westen gescheitert? Was sind die Folgen?

„Wir wollen eine Bürgerpolizei für die afghanische Bürgergesellschaft!“ Für diese gut gemeinte Absicht erhielt eine Bundestagsabgeordnete 2006 den Beifall des Plenums. Noch im Sommer 2021 glaubte Außenminister Heiko Maas, eine „starke afghanische Zivilgesellschaft“ werde die rasche Machtübernahme der Taliban verhindern. Aber mit der westlichen Militärintervention scheiterte auch der politisch-ideologische Anspruch, in Afghanistan ein gesellschaftliches Modell westlich-liberaler Prägung zu verwirklichen. Diese Vorstellung erwies sich ebenso als Illusion wie der sowjetische Versuch, am Hindukusch eine sozialistische Gesellschaft aufzubauen. Triumphiert nun der politische, radikal-fundamentalistische Islam?

Auch eine nur vorläufige Antwort hat die Religion als strategischen Faktor zu berücksichtigen. Oft wurde in den letzten Jahren die Friedensverantwortung des Islams betont. Seine mobilisierende Wirkung und Bedeutung für die Formulierung und Umsetzung politischer Ziele trat dabei in den Hintergrund. Doch hat gerade in Afghanistan der Islam seit Jahrhunderten eine zentrale gesellschaftliche Funktion: „Dawlat-e-khodadad-e Afghanistan“, „Das von Gott gegebene Afghanistan“, lautete die offizielle Bezeichnung des Landes unter Emir Abdur Rahman Khan, der das Land am Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts mit eiserner Faust zusammenführte. Nicht nur die dominierenden Paschtunen glaubten fest daran, Afghanistan sei das ihnen von Allah verheißene Land. Alle Volksgruppen machten sich diese Überzeugung zu Eigen. Sie entfaltete in dem geographisch, ethnisch und sprachlich zersplitterten Raum eine starke

geistige Wirkung und prägt bis heute die Identität des Landes. Sicherlich beeinflussen im Vielvölkerstaat Afghanistan ethnische Zugehörigkeit, persönliche Beziehungsgeflechte und nicht zuletzt materielle Zuwendungen interessierter Dritter politische Strukturen und Aktionen. Das ändert aber nichts an der grundlegenden Tatsache, dass sich in Afghanistan dynamische Machtverschiebungen in einem vom Islam bestimmten Rahmen vollziehen.

### Zweite Machtergreifung

Taliban ist die landessprachliche Bezeichnung für Koranschüler. Aber es waren keine Jugendlichen, die im August 2021 in Kabul die Macht ergriffen, sondern politisch und militärisch erfahrene Männer. Für manche unter ihnen war es bereits der zweite Einmarsch in die Hauptstadt, denn schon 1996, also vor einem Vierteljahrhundert, hatten die Taliban Kabul erstmals besetzt. Zwar wurde ihr „Islamisches Emirat Afghanistan“ im November 2001 von den USA und deren Verbündeten in einem kurzen Feldzug zunächst besiegt und die Führung aus Afghanistan vertrieben. Aber sie konnte sich ins benachbarte Pakistan zurückziehen und von dort ihre Rückkehr vorbereiten. Während der gesamten Dauer der westlichen Intervention existierte in großen Teilen des Landes das „Islamische Emirat Afghanistan“ im Untergrund weiter. Regelmäßig verbreitete „Nachtbriefe“ informierten die Afghanen über die Gebote und Weisungen der Führung. Die Flugblätter wurden gelesen, weitergereicht und diskutiert. Viele afghanische Familien zogen daraus eine verständliche Konsequenz: Ein Angehöriger arbeitete für die Regierung in Kabul oder als Ortskraft für die Interventen. Ein anderes Familienmitglied pflegte den Kontakt zu den lokalen Taliban.

Die USA, des kräftezehrenden und aussichtslosen Abnutzungskrieges schließlich überdrüssig, sicherten den Taliban in Doha im Februar 2020 den Abzug aller ausländischen Interventionstruppen zunächst bis zum 1. Mai 2021, dann nach einer Fristverlängerung bis zum 31. August 2021 zu. Nach diesem Separatabkommen, an

dem weder die Regierung in Kabul noch die Verbündeten der USA mitwirkten, war der Zusammenbruch der von den Interventionstruppen gestützten afghanischen Regierung nur noch eine Frage der Zeit. Die letzten Stunden des Abzugs auf dem Flugplatz von Kabul verliefen dramatisch. Aber dennoch vollzog sich der Machtübergang im Unterschied zu den Kämpfen der vorangegangenen Jahre ohne größeres Blutvergießen. Am 6. September 2021 besetzten die Taliban nach kurzem Kampf und dem Einsatz bewaffneter Drohnen auch das Pandschirtal, das sie während der gesamten Zeit ihrer ersten Herrschaft gegen den hartnäckigen Widerstand von Kommandant Ahmad Schah Massud nicht hatten einnehmen können.

Zwei Tage nach diesem Erfolg stellte eine Regierungsliste die neuen Machthaber vor. Von den 33 genannten Personen – alles Männer – waren alle bis auf drei Angehörige der paschtunischen Bevölkerungsgruppe. Ihre Mehrheit gehörte zur Stammesföderation der Ghilzai, die seit der Mitte des 18. Jahrhunderts der rivalisierenden Stammesföderation der Durrani die Vorherrschaft im Land streitig machte. Immer wieder rebellierten die Ghilzai gegen die Durrani und der Kampf der Taliban gegen die nach 2001 vom Westen eingesetzte Regierung Hamid Karzais, eines angesehenen Durrani-Paschtunen, trug zumindest zeitweise den Charakter eines innerpaschtunischen Stammeskrieges. Aufgrund dieser Erfahrung deuten manche Beobachter die Einnahme Kabuls im August 2021 auch als vorläufiges Ende eines jahrzehntelangen tribalen Machtkampfes.

### Der Islam als Ordnungsfaktor?

Mit dem Sturz der von Moskau zurückgelassenen Regierung Najibullah hatten 1992 blutige innerafghanische Auseinandersetzungen begonnen. Die verschiedenen Gruppierungen der Mujahiddin, die finanziert von den USA und Saudi-Arabien den Widerstand gegen die Sowjetunion getragen hatten, kämpften nun gegeneinander, jeder gegen jeden. Es ging den Anführern um Macht,

um Einfluss, Privilegien und Geld. Angesichts einer Abfolge blutiger Gemetzel in wechselnden Allianzen hielten interessierte Dritte spätestens ab 1994 eine ordnende Hand für unerlässlich. Aus ihrer Sicht konnte nur eine starke Organisation die gegensätzlichen Stammes- und Parteivalitäten zügeln, sie unter Kontrolle bringen und auf einer gemeinsamen Grundlage zusammenführen.

Vor allem Pakistan war daran interessiert, durch Afghanistan einen sicheren Korridor nach Zentralasien zu öffnen. Die Öl- und Gasreserven der ehemaligen Sowjetrepubliken lockten die Regierung in Islamabad ebenso wie die Aussicht auf neue Absatzmärkte für pakistanische Industriegüter. Der Generalstab wollte strategische Tiefe gegenüber dem Erzfeind Indien gewinnen. Folgerichtig schuf der pakistanische Geheimdienst ISI, ein mächtiger Staat im Staate, dafür das geeignete Instrument. Kleinere paschtunische Gruppen, die auf beiden Seiten der Durand-Linie, der afghanisch-pakistanischen Grenze, lebten, wurden unter Mullah Omar, einem einäugigen Veteranen des antikommunistischen Widerstands, zusammengeführt. Seine Gefolgsleute waren überwiegend arme Ghilzai-Paschtunen, die sich innerhalb der Stammeshierarchie marginalisiert fühlten und von der politischen und wirtschaftlichen Entwicklung Afghanistans enttäuscht waren.

Den Nachwuchs für die vom ISI aufgebaute Organisation stellten Koranschulen auf der heute pakistanischen Seite der Durand-Linie. In ihnen hatte schon während der britischen Kolonialherrschaft die Deobandi-Bewegung im Namen des Islam Knaben und junge Männer zum Kampf gegen die Ungläubigen und ihre Helfer aufgerufen und nach 1919 die Beibehaltung des Kalifats in Konstantinopel gefordert. Unter der spirituellen und politischen Leitung des Kalifen sollten, so die fromme Hoffnung, von fremder Vorherrschaft befreite islamische Emirate zusammenarbeiten und gemeinsam handeln.

In der Nachfolge der Deobandi-Bewegung und unter Berücksichtigung paschtunischer Stammestraditionen wurden nun die jungen Taliban mit der Vorgabe indoktriniert, in Afghanistan ein von Paschtunen beherrschtes Emirat auf Grundlage der Scharia zu errichten. Diese Zielbestimmung mag für eine westlich-liberale Öffentlichkeit schockierend sein. Aber sie entspricht den in Afghanistan herrschenden Verhältnissen vermutlich mehr als die Idee einer Bürgergesellschaft oder eines modernen Verfassungsstaates westlichen Verständnisses, dessen geistige Grundlagen der überwältigenden Mehrheit der Afghanen fremd sind. Dafür kennen sie die Vorschriften des Koran. Diese werden „im gottgegebenen Afghanistan“ zumindest in den ländlichen Gebieten als Rechtsordnung stammesübergreifend akzeptiert.

So war die Fahne der Taliban nicht die traditionelle Staatsflagge Afghanistans, sondern ein weißes Tuch mit Worten des Propheten. Unter diesem Banner eroberten sie 1994 Kandahar, bevor sie 1996 Kabul besetzten und schließlich ab 1998 nahezu das ganze Land kontrollierten. Nur im Nordosten konnte sich die international anerkannte Regierung unter Präsident Rabbani, einem tadschikischen Führer der Mujahidin, und seinem Feldkommandeur Ahmad Schah Massud behaupten.

Pakistan, Saudi-Arabien und die Vereinigten Arabischen Emirate erkannten die Taliban-Regierung an. Die kalifornische Erdöl- und Erdgasgesellschaft UNOCAL eröffnete gemeinsam mit der saudischen Firma Delta Oil in Kabul eine Repräsentanz. UNOCAL verfolgte die Absicht, durch das von den Taliban mit Hilfe der Scharia befriedete Land eine Gas- und Öl-Pipeline von Zentralasien nach Pakistan zu führen. Zum Beraterkreis der Firma gehörten einflussreiche amerikanische Landeskenner, etwa der frühere US-Botschafter in Pakistan Robert Oakley oder der im politischen Washington bestens vernetzte, gebürtige Afghane Zalmay Khalilzad. Er war es, der im Februar 2020 im Auftrag von Präsident Donald Trump das Rückzugsab-

kommen mit den wieder erstarkten Taliban unterzeichnete und auch unter Präsident Joe Biden bis Oktober 2021 US-Sonderbeauftragter für Afghanistan blieb.

### Die Taliban & der Terrorismus

Die US-amerikanischen Kontakte zum Emirat unter Mullah Omar endeten erst, als sich die Taliban weigerten, Osama bin Laden, den charismatischen Führer der islamistischen Terrororganisation al-Qaida, auszuliefern. Bin Laden war den zuständigen amerikanischen Diensten gut bekannt, denn mit seiner Hilfe hatten sie junge, abenteuerlustige Muslime aus der arabischen Welt über Pakistan in den Kampf gegen die Sowjetunion geschleust. Nun versuchten sie vergeblich, ihn zu liquidieren oder zumindest zu entführen, denn nach dem 1991 von den USA geführten Krieg gegen den Irak und der Stationierung von US-Truppen auf der arabischen Halbinsel, dem historischen und geistigen Zentrum des Islams, war er zum gefährlichsten Gegner Washingtons geworden.

Osama bin Laden fand 1996 in Afghanistan Unterschlupf. Von dort aus organisierte er die Anschläge auf die US-Botschaften in Kenia und Tansania im August 1998. Spätestens seit Anfang 2001 bestand dann kein Zweifel mehr daran, dass Osama bin Laden und al-Qaida mittels finanzieller Zuwendungen entscheidenden Einfluss auf die Taliban-Führung um Mullah Omar gewonnen hatten. Im Auftrag von al-Qaida zerstörte ein tschetschenisches Sprengkommando im März 2001 die Buddha-Statuen von Bamiyan. Bereits zuvor hatten trotz des Widerspruchs gemäßigter Taliban fanatisierte Bilderstürmer begonnen, im Nationalmuseum von Kabul die weltberühmte Sammlung hellenistisch-buddhistischer Ghandara-Skulpturen zu zertrümmern.

Nachdem im Frühjahr 2001 die international anerkannte Regierung Afghanistans unter Rabbani kleinere militärische Erfolge gegen die Taliban erzielt und Ahmad Schah Massud vor dem Europaparlament zum gemeinsamen Widerstand gegen die internationalen Dschihadisten aufgerufen hatte, schlug al-Qaida zurück. Am

9. September 2001 töteten zwei als Journalisten getarnte tunesische Selbstmordattentäter Massud in dessen Hauptquartier. Zwei Tage später folgte der lange und sorgfältig geplante Angriff auf die USA. In New York zerstörten zwei entführte Flugzeuge die Zwillingstürme des Welthandelszentrums, ein drittes traf das Pentagon in Washington. Lediglich das vierte Flugzeug konnte vor Erreichen seines Ziels zum Absturz gebracht werden.

Kein Afghane war unter den Selbstmordattentätern des 11. September 2001, die überwiegend aus Saudi-Arabien und Ägypten stammten. Auch spricht einiges dafür, dass die Taliban-Führung vom Angriff auf die USA ebenso überrascht war wie die Weltöffentlichkeit. Aber das ändert nichts an ihrer Mitverantwortung. Gastfreundschaft und Duldsamkeit gegenüber al-Qaida waren nicht nur das Ergebnis finanzieller Unterstützung. Viele Taliban betrachteten Osama bin Laden und seine Mitstreiter als Glaubensbrüder, deren Gewaltaktionen sie mit Sympathie und Respekt verfolgten.

### Der Islam als Motivationsgrundlage

Die religiös motivierte Bereitschaft zum Selbstmordattentat belegt, welche Bedeutung der radikale Islam sowohl für al-Qaida als auch für die Taliban besitzt. Im Oktober 2021, knapp zwei Monate nach der Einnahme Kabuls, lud Sirajuddin Haqqani, der amtierende Innenminister der neuen Regierung, Angehörige von Selbstmordattentätern in die Hauptstadt ein. Er selbst wird international als Terrorist gesucht und für Hinweise, die zu seiner Ergreifung führen, hat die US-Regierung ein Kopfgeld von zehn Millionen Dollar ausgesetzt. Nun empfing Haqqani die Verwandten der „Helden des Islam und des Landes“ im ehemaligen Intercontinental-Hotel, das während der westlichen Intervention mehrfach Ziel blutiger Anschläge gewesen war. Die Eingeladenen erhielten für den Tod eines Sohnes oder Bruders etwas mehr als 100 Dollar, für arme Afghanen ein ansehnlicher Betrag, und außerdem das Versprechen der künftigen Zuteilung von Land.

Die Taliban hatten bereits 2006 und 2007 die Verantwortung für eine Serie von Selbstmordanschlägen übernommen, die Kabul erschütterten. Einige der Attentäter konnten vor Ausführung der Tat gefasst werden. Andere schreckten im letzten Augenblick vor der Selbsttötung zurück und stellten sich den Sicherheitskräften. Ihre Befragung ergab, dass es sich um Jugendliche aus armen Familien handelte, die die Koranschulen im pakistanisch-afghanischen Grenzgebiet besucht hatten und von Schleusern nach Kabul gebracht worden waren. In der Nacht vor dem geplanten Anschlag erhielten sie Beistand und Zuspruch, bevor sie sich schließlich nach dem ersten Morgengebet in ein mit Sprengstoff beladenes Auto setzten. In diesem Augenblick fühlten sie sich nicht als Opfer, sondern als Täter. Sie waren bereit für ihren Glauben zu kämpfen und zu sterben, aber auch – und nicht zuletzt – um für ihn zu töten. Diese Motivation unterscheidet sie von christlichen Märtyrern, die ihr Selbstopfer für den Glauben nicht mit der Absicht verbinden, anderen das Leben zu nehmen.

Die militärischen Kerntrouppen der Taliban unterstehen Verteidigungsminister Mullah Mohammed Yaqoob, einem Sohn Mullah Omars, des Gründers und ersten Emirs des „Islamischen Emirats Afghanistan“. Bei diesen Kämpfern handelt es sich nicht um Selbstmordattentäter, aber auch sie sind stolz darauf, Angehörige einer kämpfenden Glaubensgemeinschaft, einer *ecclesia militans*, zu sein. Im Verlauf einer nur wenige Wochen dauernden, generalstabsmäßig vorbereiteten Offensive überrollten sie im Sommer 2021 die Armee der Kabuler Regierung. Als die Truppen der Taliban schließlich in die Hauptstadt einmarschierten, taten sie dies in der Überzeugung, ihr Land für den Islam zurückerobert zu haben. Ihre religiös motivierte Durchschlagskraft hatte sich als stärker erwiesen als die moderne Ausrüstung der afghanischen Armee, die für die westlich inspirierte Zivilgesellschaft und den Verfassungsstaat einer Regierung kämpfen sollte, die sie schlecht oder gar

nicht besoldete und am Ende im Stich ließ.

### Der Islam an der Macht

Nicht nur im Nahen und Mittleren Osten betrachten viele den Erfolg der Taliban als schwere Niederlage der USA und ihrer Verbündeten, deren Leitideen trotz finanzieller Unterstützung in kaum zu beziffernder Milliardenhöhe am Widerstand einer islamistisch motivierten Bewegung gescheitert sind. Der Reputations- und Prestigeverlust des Westens ist nicht zu übersehen. Daher ist nicht nur in Washington die Versuchung groß, die Erinnerung an das Debakel am Hindukusch zu verdrängen. Dennoch – und gerade deshalb – kommt es jetzt darauf an, die Lage nüchtern zu betrachten und aus den Fehlern der Vergangenheit zu lernen.

Mit dem Sieg der Taliban ist die Machtfrage in Afghanistan vorerst geklärt. Nach der Flucht von Ex-Präsident Ashraf Ghani gibt es, anders als in den Jahren 1996 bis 2001, weder im Land noch im Exil eine international anerkannte Gegenregierung. Stattdessen arbeiten die Botschaften der wichtigsten Nachbarländer Afghanistans, nämlich Pakistan, China, Iran und Usbekistan, ebenso wie die Botschaft der Russischen Föderation in Kabul weiter: *business as usual*. An einer in Moskau organisierten Konferenz mit Vertretern der neuen afghanischen Regierung nahm sogar Indien teil. Die Taliban hatten bei ihrer Machtübernahme moderne Waffen und Munition in großen Mengen erbeutet und Delhi befürchtet, dass ein Teil davon in die Hände islamistischer Gruppen gelangen wird, die die Unabhängigkeit Kaschmirs von Indien anstreben. Durch die Teilnahme an Gesprächen mit den Taliban lotet die indische Regierung aus, welche Risiken und Handlungsmöglichkeiten sich aus der neuen Situation ergeben. Am Ende werden auch europäische Staaten entsprechende Überlegungen anstellen müssen und sich entschließen, in Kabul, in welcher Form auch immer, diplomatisch präsent zu sein. Die Ankündigung des deutschen Außenministers, einem von den Taliban geführten Afghanistan jede Hilfe abzu-

schneiden, hat sich jedenfalls innerhalb weniger Wochen als voreilig und unüberlegt erwiesen.

Die Taliban benötigen zur Konsolidierung ihrer Herrschaft dringend materielle Hilfe. Aber auch westliche Staaten, nicht zuletzt Deutschland, haben ein Interesse daran, in Afghanistan den völligen Zusammenbruch gesellschaftlicher Daseinsvorsorge zu verhindern, gilt es doch, den absehbaren Massenexodus Richtung Europa einzudämmen. Für eine wirkungsvolle Nothilfe sind Gespräche mit der Regierung in Kabul unausweichlich. Tatsächlich gibt es innerhalb der Taliban-Führung gemäßigte Kräfte, mit denen Kontakte schon vor anderthalb Jahrzehnten möglich waren. Sie stammen überwiegend aus dem Süden des Landes. Als lokal verwurzelte paschtunische Traditionalisten und fromme Muslime haben sie zwar kein Verständnis für Grundsatzdiskussionen über die weltweite Friedensverantwortung der Religionen oder Menschen- und Bürgerrechte. Aber sie sind an der Lösung konkreter Probleme interessiert, etwa am Bau von Brunnen, und denken sogar über Schulunterricht für Mädchen nach, jedoch nur in strikt nach Geschlechtern getrennten Schulen.

Anders verhält es sich mit dem Haqqani-Netzwerk, das nach dem aus der Stadt Khost im Osten des Landes stammenden Vater des amtierenden Innenministers benannt ist. Seine Anhänger, jünger und stärker ideologisch-religiös geprägt als die Traditionalisten aus den südlichen Provinzen, rivalisieren mit den gemäßigten Kräften, die sich um den stellvertretenden Premierminister Mullah Ghani Baradar gruppieren. Die Motive des radikalen Haqqani-Netzwerks können nicht eindeutig nach Prioritäten geordnet werden. Geht es ihm vorrangig um Geld und Macht oder um die fundamentalistische Durchsetzung des Islams? Jedenfalls unterhält das Netzwerk enge Beziehungen zum pakistanischen Geheimdienst ISI und steht zudem der Ideologie von al-Qaida nahe. Der Nachfolger Osama bin Ladens, Ayman al-Zawahiri, hat den Taliban mehrfach seine Loyalität versichert und

dabei wohl in erster Linie an das Haqqani-Netzwerk gedacht.

Noch schwerer einzuschätzen ist eine undurchsichtige Organisation, die bereits seit einiger Zeit mit zunehmender Brutalität gegen die Taliban kämpft. Der „Islamische Staat Khorasan (IS-K)“ hat sich seit Mitte August 2021 zu mehreren blutigen Terroranschlägen in Kabul, Kandahar und Kunduz bekannt. Seine lokale Basis scheint in der Provinz Kunar nördlich von Jalalabad zu liegen. Hier waren schon im 19. Jahrhundert wahhabitische Missionare aufgetaucht. Auch Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, der auf dem Gelände der Universität Kabul begrabene Gründer des Panislamismus, soll aus dieser Gegend stammen. Angeblich hat der 2014 in Irak und Syrien ausgerufenen Islamische Staat (IS), auch „Daesh“ genannt, bereits kurz nach seiner Gründung von der Taliban-Führung ihre Einordnung in den panislamischen Kampf verlangt und ihre Forderung nach einem politischen Sonderstatus für Afghanistan zurückgewiesen. Jedenfalls verfügt die Organisation, die dann ab 2015 in Afghanistan aktiv wurde, über erhebliche Mittel, deren Herkunft ungeklärt ist. Sie erlauben die Anwerbung von Kämpfern und die Finanzierung von Terroranschlägen, die sich vor allem gegen Schiiten richten. Neben der Schwächung der Taliban-Führung können diese Attentate auch die Absicht verfolgen, die bisher erstaunlich pragmatischen Beziehungen der neuen Regierung zum schiitischen Nachbarland Iran zu belasten und zu stören. Sollte dies der Fall sein, dann würde die politisch-ideologische Ausrichtung des IS-K verdeckte Verbindungen zu Personen und Organisationen etwa auf der arabischen Halbinsel nahelegen, die den Iran für gefährlicher halten als sunnitische Dschihadisten. Der IS-K selbst begründet seine Terroranschläge mit der Behauptung, die USA hätten aufgrund von geheimen Absprachen in Doha der Taliban-Führung die Macht mit dem Ziel übergeben, Afghanistan langfristig zu einem Klienten Washingtons zu machen.

## Europa & der Sieg der Taliban

Vor diesem Hintergrund sehen sich Deutschland und die Europäische Union mit einer Lage konfrontiert, die wesentlich gefährlicher ist als nach dem 11. September 2001. Damals konnten in Erwartung eines schnellen Erfolgs der von den USA geführten Intervention optimistische Konzepte für die Zukunft entworfen werden. Zwanzig Jahre später ist das politisch-militärische Engagement des Westens gescheitert und die Wirtschaftslage in Afghanistan katastrophal. Der bevorstehende Winter wird zu einer Hungersnot und einer weiteren Verarmung der Bevölkerung führen. Innerhalb des islamistischen Spektrums zeichnet sich eine neue Runde gewaltsamer Auseinandersetzungen ab.

Die internen Probleme Afghanistans ändern allerdings nichts an der Tatsache, dass das Scheitern des Westens die weltweit vernetzte dschihadistische Bewegung beflügeln wird. Für die Sympathisanten und Unterstützer der Taliban, der al-Qaida oder des IS-K, die außerhalb des territorialen, ökonomischen und geistigen Rahmens der afghanischen Gesellschaft agieren, hat der Islam am Hindukusch bewiesen, dass er als Kampfreligion seine Kriege gegen die Ungläubigen als heilige Kriege erfolgreich zu führen versteht. Die Mitgliedsstaaten der Europäischen Union tun in dieser Situation gut daran, nicht nur die Not der Afghanen durch schnelle humanitäre Hilfe zu lindern. Sie müssen sich auch auf die rasch ansteigende Migrationswelle vorbereiten, deren erste Ausläufer die Ostgrenzen der Europäischen Union erreichen, und zudem mit einer Zunahme dschihadistischer Gewalt rechnen.

*Dr. Hans-Ulrich Seidt*

Botschafter a.D. Dr.Dr.h.c.mult. Hans-Ulrich Seidt, geb. 1952, war bis November 2021 stellvertretender Vorsitzender der PMG. Von 2006 bis 2008 war er deutscher Botschafter in Kabul. Der Beitrag gibt die persönliche Auffassung des Autors wieder.

## THEMEN

### The MENA region remains a hotbed of Islamist terrorism

The threat to Europe could grow again

The Middle East and North Africa are Europe's immediate neighborhood. When the so-called Islamic State (IS/ISIS/Daesh) expanded into Syria in 2013, its ties to Europe also grew. From 2011 to 2015, around 5,000 Europeans travelled to Syria and Iraq to join ISIS. Several perpetrators of the November 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris (killing 150) and the March 2016 bombings in Brussels (killing 32) were Europeans who had trained or fought with ISIS in Syria and/or Iraq – in these as in other attacks, there were concrete links to the organization. However, the majority of attacks linked to ISIS were perpetrated by individuals inspired by ISIS propaganda and radicalized in small groups of like-minded people, mainly online or in European prisons. For propaganda purposes, ISIS also claims responsibility for attacks where security authorities could find no evidence of their involvement. Despite ISIS's diminished outreach capabilities since it lost control of its last territories, its ideological influence remains virulent in Europe today. For a variety of reasons, it is feared that young male migrants and asylum seekers in particular may turn to ISIS's Islamist ideology and become radicalized.

The Assad regime's reign of terror has driven millions of people to flee, a substantial number of whom have come to Europe. Due to the ongoing terrorist threat in the Middle East, the continued propaganda work of ISIS in relevant networks, as well as the growing activities of Islamist terrorist groups, especially in the Sahel region of Africa, both the migratory pressure on Europe and the threat of terrorist attacks in Europe are likely to remain high for the foreseeable future – and even to grow again.

The MENA region must therefore become an even stronger and

permanent focus of German and European foreign policy.

### **Iraq and Syria remain the core regions of Islamist terrorism**

With the fall of Baghuz, the last stronghold of the terrorist organization Islamic State on the Syrian-Iraqi border on 23 March 2019, the Islamist caliphate is, at least territorially, a part of the past. This was an important milestone in the four-year military and civilian fight against Islamist terrorism that led to the liberation of 7.7 million people who had suffered under the cruel regime of ISIS in Iraq and Syria. At the height of its territorial expansion, ISIS ruled over 110,000 square kilometers including several major cities in Iraq (including the metropolis of Mosul) and Syria. During this time, ISIS was able to attract over 40,000 foreign fighters (Foreign Terrorist Fighters/FTF), some of whom moved with their families to the proto-state and self-declared caliphate.

For more than two years now, this terrorist organization has held no territory, neither in Syria nor Iraq, but it is far from being eliminated. The challenges in the former core region of ISIS remain high for the international community. They can only be overcome through the joint action of the international anti-IS coalition, international and local partners, as well as the Iraqi government and with the support of the people on the ground.

### **Defeated but not eliminated – Iraq's fight against ISIS**

Since the recapture of Mosul and the subsequent complete loss of all controlled areas in 2017, ISIS has not been capable of any significant operations in Iraq. The fighters who remained in Iraq retreated to the mountains and inhospitable desert regions from where they carry out attacks against Iraqi security forces and infrastructure (power lines, oil fields) with small mobile task forces. The attacks are often filmed and disseminated for propaganda purposes via the Telegram platform to ISIS supporters and sympathizers worldwide.

The activities are concentrated in the former ISIS „strongholds“ in

the western and northwestern provinces of the country. In the areas disputed between the central government and the autonomous region of Kurdistan – especially Kirkuk and Diyala – it uses the vacuum thus created for targeted attacks on security forces – Kurdish peshmerga, Iraqi army (ISF) and Shiite militias (PMF). The attacks (hit-and-run) are mostly no more than pinpricks, major terrorist acts such as the suicide attack on 21 January in Baghdad (the day after the inauguration of US President Biden) with 32 dead and over 100 injured are the exception.

The number of active ISIS fighters in Iraq (including women and children) is currently estimated at 3,500 to 5,000 and the number of inactive fighters, who can be mobilized at any time, at 8,000. The active fighters are regularly paid the equivalent of about 30 euros a month. ISIS can fall back on money reserves from the time of the caliphate, when large amounts of money from local banks came under their control, especially in Mosul. Today, ISIS's main source of income is protection rackets, ransom payments for kidnappings, as well as robberies and smuggling activities – which further undermines their support among the population.

The pressure of persecution by the Iraqi security forces supported by the international anti-IS coalition as well as by Shiite militias (PMF) remains high. Hardly a week goes by without the Iraqi security forces reporting successes (including the arrest or killing of IS fighters and the excavation of weapons caches) in the fight against ISIS. An important role is played by the militias (PMF), which are predominantly formed by Shiites and are at best only partially controlled by the Iraqi government. The PMF, which were set up as a result of a fatwa by Grand Ayatollah Sistani to push back the IS, have made a decisive contribution to defeating the IS, paying a considerable toll in blood. This founding myth celebrated by the PMF and their initially strong support among the population have increasingly turned the PMF

into a state within a state, which is accompanied by activities that are difficult to control and increasingly illegal. Coordination between the Iraqi security forces and the PMF as well as the Kurdish Peshmerga is also in need of improvement. This is now to be improved, especially in the disputed regions, through the establishment of new joint coordination centers. The implementation has been accelerated after recent clashes between ISIS and the Peshmerga, in which the Kurds also lost numerous fighters. Joint „operation headquarters“ had already been established in Baghdad and Erbil in November 2020.

The IS has lost its appeal among Sunni Iraqis after losing its last territories and also due to its cruel regime. Nevertheless, ISIS continues to recruit young men through coercion, intimidation but also via financial incentives, thus at least compensating for its own considerable losses. This is mainly due to the current economic situation in the country. The state institutions are marked by corruption and dysfunctionality and are perceived as such by the population. The state structures that were dismantled in the aftermath of the US intervention in 2003 have not yet been replaced by new functioning units. Mismanagement, the low oil price and the Covid 19 pandemic have further aggravated the economic situation. According to the United Nations, 4.1 million Iraqis are currently dependent on humanitarian aid. The World Bank estimates that 12.4 million residents are at risk of poverty. Macroeconomic data paints a dramatic picture. The country's economy collapsed by 10 per cent in 2020 and the national debt has reached a new high. Sixty per cent of the population is under 25 and youth unemployment stands at 25 per cent. The 700,000 young Iraqis who enter the labor market every year further aggravate the situation. At the same time, the education system is underfunded and does not reach many children, resulting in growing illiteracy. One third of Iraqis between 15 and 29 are now either completely illiterate or have insufficient basic skills. More than 1.4 million Iraqis remain

internally displaced for various reasons and have not returned home. This also includes the so-called „IS families“, who do not dare to return home for fear of reprisals.

A combination of political nepotism, economic decline, a collapsing social system, and insufficient reconstruction efforts, especially – but not only – in the areas liberated from ISIS, threaten the foundational stability of the country.

Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that the IS remains attractive to young Sunnis less for ideological reasons than for economic ones. ISIS membership means paid work, is identity-forming and an alternative to the Iraqi armed forces – which are dominated by the Shiite majority. The main incentives for recruitment are therefore neither religion as such nor the radical Islamist ideology, but economic incentives as well as power and influence. Another IS recruitment reservoir are the children and young people who have grown up and been indoctrinated under its rule – the so-called „Fourth Generation“. In the Al-Hol camp on the Syrian-Iraqi border, 30,000 Iraqi families of former ISIS supporters live together in a tightly congested area. In the camp itself, radical Islamic law is said to be enforced by the henchmen among the internees by means of oppression and extortion, up to and including cruel murders – by beheading – of those who oppose it. It is also believed that internees regularly flee the camp to join local ISIS groups in Iraq and Syria.

However, Iraq's stability is not currently threatened by ISIS, but rather by the numerous militias, some of which were founded explicitly to fight the IS and some of which operate illegally under the umbrella of the PMF. With about 150,000 fighters, they are far stronger than the IS and are attractive to young Shiites for similar reasons (regular pay, power, and influence). The PMF militias are increasingly acting like a state within a state and are increasingly perceived by the population, whose Shiite majority once hailed them as liberators from the IS

threat, as bloodsuckers who collect road tolls and extort protection money at the checkpoints they control. The PMF's reputation has also been greatly diminished by their bloody role in the crackdown on demonstrations in 2019, which claimed the lives of over 600 Iraqis, mostly youths, and by the intimidation of and murders of activists, journalists, and other critics of the government. The PMF are therefore now perceived by the general population as a far greater threat than the sporadic attacks by ISIS in the outskirts of the country, outside the cities.

For a lasting pacification of Iraq and the improvement of the security and human rights situation, it is therefore not only necessary to fight the IS and prevent its resurgence, but it is also important to remove the PMF from power. With its attacks and the real danger of its resurgence, the IS is slowing down reconstruction and stabilization, especially in the liberated areas. The smoldering, currently rather abstract danger from the IS is in turn used by the militias as a *raison d'être* to increasingly increase their own position of power and access to the resources of the state through violence and repression. This could lead to the collapse of the fragile state, which in turn would favor a resurgence of the IS. To escape this vicious circle, Iraq continues to need massive international support.

#### **Defeated in Syria too, but high potential for a new IS resurgence**

Even though IS no longer holds any territory in Syria, the terrorist organization is still active in the country. It has even expanded its activities in recent months and carried out numerous attacks. Obviously, the IS has succeeded in adapting and consolidating its underground structures to the new situation. Highly radicalized fighters continue to adhere to the inhuman radical Islamist ideology and try to spread it beyond Syria.

Syria's catastrophic situation after ten years of civil war provides fertile ground for a resurgence of ISIS and other terrorist groups (including the emergence of new

groups). The United Nations counts 13.5 million people in need, including 6 million internally displaced persons (IDPs). 12 million are at permanent risk of hunger. In the north-east of the country, the former main IS operating area around Raqqa, there are 600,000 IDPs and in Idlib, in the north-west of Syria, 2.7 million IDPs are crammed into a small space and completely dependent on humanitarian aid, which is repeatedly obstructed by the Assad regime. Idlib is held by anti-Assad militias, including the Al-Qaeda-affiliated Hai'at Tahrir ash-Sham (HTS) (Committee for the Liberation of the Levant). After clashes between government forces supported by the Russian air force and Turkish units, which resulted in the deaths of 34 soldiers on the Turkish side, and the Turkish military offensive „Spring Shield“, Russia and Turkey agreed on a ceasefire on 5 March 2020, which has largely held until today.

Today, Syria is de facto divided into four parts. Thanks to Russian and Iranian support, the Assad regime once again rules over about 60 percent of the country, where President Assad recently allowed himself to be re-elected in a massively rigged election. In the northwest, opposition militias rule Idlib under the protection of Turkey, which also controls the Afrin region together with militias close to it, as well as a border strip between Tal Abyad and Ras al-Ayn (120x30 km), from which the Kurdish militia YPG/Democratic Forces of Syria (SDF) have been ousted. These in turn, with US support and other forces of the international anti-IS coalition, have borne the brunt of successfully defeating the radical Islamist terrorist group. Thanks to the presence of the US, the Turkish army's action against the Kurdish YPG, which is close to the PKK, which is fought as a terrorist organization in Turkey, was limited to the border region. This prevented the YPG from having to defend itself against overwhelming Turkish forces. This would almost certainly have meant that they would have been forced to give up securing the areas taken from IS and possibly even guarding the IS supporters (including well over

10,000 non-Iraqis and non-Syrians), who number between 40 and 60,000, especially in Camp Al-Hol. Nevertheless, a larger number of ISIS supporters, including some Europeans – also Germans – were able to flee during this period.

A particular problem is posed by the Foreign Terrorist Fighters, who have been interned in camps by SDF forces and are guarded by them to the best of their ability.

All existing relevant actors rely on armies and militias and thus constitute state/quasi-state/non-state armed groups at the same time. Violence, arbitrariness and political persecution are the order of the day; the very things against which the popular uprising 10 years ago was directed, and which were brutally put down by Assad's dictatorial, neo-patrimonial regime (ranked 164 out of 167 in the Economist's Democracy Index). Against this background, the negotiation of a new, nationwide social contract remains hopeless for a long time to come. Syria thus remains a fertile breeding ground for terrorist groups such as the IS and others, which not only threaten the long-suffering local population, but also expand into other regions of the world, especially Africa, and threaten us in Europe.

### **The specific problem of the Foreign Terrorist Fighters and their families**

By mid-2021, several tens of thousands of Islamists are in prison because of the collapse of jihadism and political Islam in the MENA region – mainly in Syria, Iraq, Egypt and Tunisia.

Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTF) in Syria, interned in various camps by the Kurdish-dominated SDF, pose a particular problem. About 13,500 non-Syrian and non-Iraqi women and children are interned in various camps, mainly in al-Hol on the border with Iraq. The number of male FTF is estimated at around 2,000, with the largest group held in a temporary prison in Hasakah. The numbers vary greatly, as in many cases the identity of the inmates is not clear to the Kurdish authorities.

German authorities believe that a total of more than 1070 people travelled from Germany to Iraq and Syria to join the terrorist organization during the heyday of the IS. The main recruiter – Abu Walaa, head of the IS network in Germany – was sentenced to 10 ½ years in prison in 2020 after a three-year trial. In the first quarter of 2021 alone, the Attorney General opened nine cases for membership of or financing a foreign terrorist group and preparing terrorist attacks.

The number of Germans held in Syria and Iraq is currently still estimated at around 80 to 100 – of whom around 30 are men and 50 women. In addition, there are about 150 children.

Although almost all governments have spoken out in favor of the repatriation of the more than 600 children, this is proceeding very slowly. Germany has repatriated a few very recently. It is likely that this reluctance will soon be a matter for national courts and the European Court of Human Rights.

The issue of repatriation of FTF is a highly delicate matter in all countries. In Norway, such repatriation led to the fall of the government.

If repatriation of at least the adults or the male FTF is not wanted for (security) political reasons, the question arises of what to do with them in Syria. A years-long detention outside any legality – a kind of European Guantanamo – is out of the question.

Most governments have argued that the FTF should be tried where they have committed crimes, i.e., either in Syria or Iraq. The idea of an international tribunal has already been rejected as unfeasible and too expensive. Prosecution in Iraqi courts or before bodies of the internationally unrecognized Kurdish autonomous authorities in Syria also faces major legal and practical concerns.

Even if the FTF were convicted in Syria and Iraq and served their sentences there, this would at best postpone the problem for their European countries of origin.

It is well known that many Islamists have become radicalized in European prisons. This danger is many times greater in Syria and Iraq, where they would serve their sentences under much harsher conditions, but above all because they would be sitting with some of the most dangerous terrorists in the world.

Moreover, there is a great danger that some will be released prematurely through prison escapes, liberation operations, through corruption or through their political instrumentalization.

Therefore, European governments must ask themselves whether Syria and Iraq are the right places to hold the „most dangerous“ European individuals. Once free again, many might succeed in returning to Europe. Or whether it is not better to take law enforcement and de-radicalization into one's own hands – for reasons of security as well as for legal and ethical reasons.

### **The metastases of Islamist terrorism**

From its epicenter in the Middle East, Islamism and Islamist terrorism spread to almost the entire Islamic world, with attacks in the US, Europe, South Asia, Australia and New Zealand.

By mid-2021, however, the jihadist movement is again as fragmented as it was 20 years ago, when Al-Qaeda was just one of many jihadi groups. And the threat posed by global jihadism to Western states is also currently rather low. Despite all the fragmentation, the movement currently has three essential poles: Al-Qaeda with its six offshoots from Afghanistan to West Africa; the Islamic State with its diverse provinces from East and South Asia to North Africa; and the HTS in north-west Syria, which used to be linked to Al-Qaeda.

Al-Qaeda and ISIS have by no means abandoned global jihadism, but are currently involved in numerous regional conflicts (and local politics) and face permanent pressure from the US-led anti-IS coalition.



Of particular relevance for Europe is the expansion of Islamist terrorism in Africa.

### **Pushing back Islamism and Islamist terrorism in Northern Africa**

With the so-called Arab Spring, political Islam came to power in Egypt with the Muslim Brotherhood through democratic elections and was ousted from there again by the military in 2013. Since then, more than 22,000 Brotherhood supporters have been imprisoned in the country. The military was able to contain the threat posed by Islamist terrorist groups linked to Al-Qaeda and ISIS in the Sinai with successful operations, without eliminating them completely.

In Tunisia, moderate political Islam plays a state-supporting role and was also involved in the government until the recent de-facto coup. About 1,000 Islamist terrorists, including returnees from Syria and Iraq, are in prison.

In Libya, where representatives of political Islam were also instrumental in the overthrow of Gaddafi, ISIS was able to gain the strongest foothold and at times take control of a larger territory.

In Algeria, „al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb“ (AQIM) emerged from the Salafist „Group for Preaching and Combat“ and initially benefited from the overthrows in Tunisia and Libya in 2011. The leadership is still in Algeria but has moved its main activities to the Sahel.

### **The Sahel region as a new hotbed of Islamist terrorism**

In North-West Africa, jihadism is advancing further and further from north to south – like the desert.

The Sahel region – from Mauritania on the Atlantic to Chad – is the poorhouse of Africa, with extremely fragile states and large areas without effective state control. All states are plagued to a greater or lesser extent by ethnic conflicts and separatism and increasingly threatened by the advance of Islamist terrorist groups, against which armed militias have formed, some of which in turn contribute to the escalation of violence.

Mali has been in crisis since 2012, when the state almost collapsed in the face of a separatist rebellion in the north, a military coup, and a regional drought. Islamist insurgents allied with the separatists in the north, equipped with modern weapons from Libyan stocks, were prevented just in time by the courageous intervention of France from advancing on the capital Bamako and the other main settlement areas of the country.

To stabilize the country, the UN Security Council deployed the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) in 2013, in which Germany is participating with up to 1100 soldiers. In parallel, France has established the anti-terrorism operation Barkhane (formerly Operation Serval) and is leading the counterterrorism mission Takuba, formed by various European countries from special forces. For its part, the EU launched the EUTM training mission in 2013 – also with German participation – to train the Malian armed forces, which has since been extended to all Sahel 5 states.

However, renewed military coups in August 2020 and most recently in May 2021 show that the stabilization of the country has not yet succeeded despite considerable foreign aid and the substantial presence of foreign – including German – security forces. Thanks to the West African regional organization ECOWAS and its mediator, Goodluck Jonathan, the path of transition to new elections in 2022, which has received substantial support from the international community, can probably be continued.

The security situation remains extremely tense: On 12 June 2021, 12 German and one Belgian soldier were injured, some seriously, by a suicide bomber during a patrol operation.

The advance of armed Islamist groups can also be observed in the eastern neighboring country of Niger, a key partner of the West in the region. The Niger-Malian border area is now considered the heartland of the Islamic State in

the Greater Sahara (ISGS), where they have long harassed the local population and attacked Nigerian and Malian security forces. The attacks are mostly carried out on motorbikes, which gives them a mobility advantage over the armed forces in the prevailing terrain.

In neighboring Burkina Faso, attacks by Islamist terrorist groups affiliated with Al-Qaeda or ISIS have also steadily increased since 2016, including bloody attacks in the capital Ouagadougou. Large parts of the country are de facto under the control of these groups. The country is fighting Islamist terror on three fronts. On 4/5 June 2021, the worst terrorist attack in decades occurred in the north, with 160 civilians killed, marking the peak (so far) of a new wave of terrorist violence.

While the government focuses on the threats in the north and east, in the southwest the Hamza group, formed by nomadic Peulh (Fulbe) and linked to the IS-affiliated Groupe de Soutien à l'Islam et aux Musulman (GSIM), is expanding its activities to the north of Côte d'Ivoire. Here, the huge Comoe National Park on the Ivorian side is an ideal retreat. The border regions in the triangle of countries – Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, as well as Burkina Faso, Benin and Niger – also form traditionally insecure regions and are the sites of (lucrative) illegal activities and thus ideal breeding grounds for jihadist groups.

To counter cross-border terrorism more effectively, the G5 Sahel (Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Burkina Faso, Chad) was established in 2017, which agreed to coordinate military operations in border areas – albeit with little success.

The second major area of operation for Islamist terrorist groups is the Lake Chad region, which includes not only Chad but also parts of the neighboring states of Nigeria, Niger and Cameroon. This region has been terrorized for years by the Islamist insurgency Boko Haram and a splinter group affiliated with IS – the „Islamic State West Africa Province“ (ISWAP). In Nigeria alone, some

40,000 people have already fallen victim to this conflict, which has also driven many out of their ancestral homeland.

The death of Chadian President Idriss Déby on 19 April 2021 as a result of injuries sustained during a visit to fight FACT militias threatens the stability of a country that is central to the fight against terrorism in the region and the Sahel. Chad has the most powerful armed forces in the region, providing significant troop contingents both for MINUSMA (1800 soldiers) and within the framework of G5 Sahel. In addition, Chad is the base of the French operation Barkhane, from which France could at least partially withdraw for domestic political reasons in view of the presidential elections in 2022 due to the high costs.

If Chad fails as an actor in the Sahel and the Lake Chad region and as a „firewall“ between the conflicts from Libya via (South) Sudan and the Central African Republic to the Sahel region, destabilizing forces threaten to gain the upper hand in the entire large region, which could lead to the collapse of entire states.

But Islamist terrorism has also been rooted or on the rise in other parts of Africa for some time.

In Somalia, the al-Qaida-linked al-Shabaab is fighting the country's government and the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and has also carried out several bloody attacks in Kenya. A small IS-linked terrorist group has also established itself in the north of the country.

In southern Africa, Mozambique is particularly at risk, threatened since 2017 by a widening domestic insurgency in Cabo Delgado province along the border with Tanzania. The group, which claims to be part of the Central African ISIS province, has carried out numerous attacks on villages and state institutions, killing over 3,000 people already.

### Conclusion and recommendations for action

- Islamist terrorism has been significantly weakened by the anti-IS coalition and other measures, especially the strengthening of Iraqi state institutions, but not eliminated. The danger of a renewed strengthening of ISIS is great, especially in Syria. The anti-IS coalition should be held together and the extensive reconstruction work in Iraq should be continued despite setbacks.
- The problem of the Foreign Terrorist Fighters held by the Kurdish-dominated SDF, especially in Syria, urgently needs to be solved. In particular, the politically delicate repatriation of the European FTFs must be addressed for lack of other acceptable options. The repatriation of the more than 600 children should be a top priority.
- Cooperation with the North African Mediterranean states should be further expanded. Important goals here are reestablishing democracy in Tunisia as well as the pacification and stabilization of Libya, for which there is (finally) new hope thanks to the „Berlin Process“ initiated by Germany.
- The Sahel and the Lake Chad region have developed into a new hub for Islamist terror, mainly due to state dysfunctionality and fragility with large state-free spaces, the great poverty and lack of prospects of the young population and numerous unresolved, mainly ethnic conflicts, which now also threaten the states of the Gulf of Guinea from there. The Sahel must become even more of a focus of European cooperation. Together with the effects of climate change, the growing Islamist terror could lead to even greater migration flows towards Europe in the future. The Council Conclusions adopted in April

2021 represent the long overdue new EU Sahel Strategy. This must now be implemented swiftly with national action plans and concrete projects for each country.

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Opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author.

### THEMEN

## Ho Chi Minh City, Afghanistan, Is Here

On 19 August 2021, the Taliban officially reinstated and reaffirmed the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. The date chosen was singularly important. This is the Afghan Independence Day that commemorates the Anglo-Afghan Treaty of 19 August 1919 and the relinquishing of the British protectorate status. The Taliban compared their victory and the end of „the US occupation“ to the end of the British occupation and influence 102 years ago. In so doing, the Taliban were paying homage to the establishment of the modern Afghan state. This move reinforces the moderate image the Tali-

ban currently seek to project globally – even when this image contradicts the Taliban's declared commitment to eradicating the modern state (Da'ula) and replacing it with an Islamic Emirate. Ultimately, for the Taliban, 19 August 2021 was a celebration of the US withdrawal and the triumph of the Taliban's twenty-year-long Jihad.

The US ignominious withdrawal from Afghanistan was expected the moment the US signed the Doha agreement with the Taliban back on 29 February 2020.<sup>1</sup> For the Islamist leadership – both the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban and their Pakistani sponsors – the Doha agreement amounted to the US and Western acceptance of the demise of the modern centralized Afghan state and possibly of the Pakistani state as well. The Taliban's working assumption was that they would be able to seize power the moment the US withdrawal was completed. Hence, the Taliban started preparing for the revival of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan with the help of Pakistan, Iran and Qatar. This would be a very challenging undertaking given the inner-working of the Afghan Taliban themselves.

### Centers of power

The Afghan Taliban have never been a coherent well-defined entity. Although calling themselves Afghan – the Taliban are a predominantly Pushtun organization with far greater affinity to the Pushtuns of Pakistan than to the non-Pushtuns minorities of central and northern Afghanistan.<sup>2</sup> The Taliban are divided into three centers of power – each of them with distinct priorities, distinct leaders, and separate relations with key sponsors such as the ISI, the IRGC's Qods Force, Qatari Intelligence, as well as the non-Pushtun forces and warlords of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The first center of power is the Leadership Shura. The Shura is under the direct control of Mawlawi Haibatullah Akhundzada – the Taliban's supreme leader. The Shura is located in Quetta, Pakistan. The Shura is responsible for formulating the theological and practical policies of the Taliban

and their Jihadist allies and proteges. Officially, the Shura is supposed to be the supreme decision-making council for religious, political and military affairs. Akhundzada is considered „the Emir of the Faithful“ and thus the supreme Islamist-Jihadist authority in the region. Therefore, all key Jihadist leaders operating in Afghanistan-Pakistan, starting with Al-Qaida's Ayman al-Zawahiri and the East Turkestan Islamic Movement's (ETIM) Abdul Haq al-Turkistani (real name Memet Amin Memet or Mehmetiming Memeti) and Hajji Furqan, have sworn personal allegiance (Bay'ah) to Akhundzada. The Shura approves the presence and operations of these Jihadist entities in the Pushtun-populated areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Shura also coordinates policies with the highest authorities in Islamabad.

The second center of power is the Military Shura or the Shura's Army/Force that is responsible for running the military, terrorist and civilian operations in Afghanistan, as well as the practical cooperation with the Taliban's two main sponsors – the ISI and the IRGC's Qods Force. The Military Shura is a loosely organized entity that is based on the cooperation of predominantly Pushtun local commanders – usually in return for lavish supplies of weapons and funds. The Shura is nominally run by two young commanders who are the sons of legendary mujahedin leaders – Sirajuddin Haqqani (the son of Jalaluddin Haqqani) and Mullah Muhammad Yaqoob (the son of Mullah Omar). The Military Shura coordinates all the activities of the local chieftains, war lords and commanders; as well as the flow of military and financial resources from the center to the local forces.

In recent years, facing reality, the Military Shura has expanded cooperation to the non-Pushtun population of Afghanistan – starting with Sunni Tajiks and Uzbeks, and then even the Shiite Hazara. Among the Taliban's key non-Pushtun commanders are Qari Din Muhammad (Tajik from northern Badakhshan province), Mawlawi Abdul Salam Hanafi (Uzbek

from the northern Faryab province), and Qari Faseehuddin (Tajik from northern Badakhshan province who coordinates with the Jundullah and other large groups of foreign Jihadists in northern Afghanistan). Ultimately, these initiatives have made the Taliban forces even more fractured, less cohesive, and largely uncontrollable by the top leadership.

The third center of power is the Political Shura that is largely located in Doha, Qatar. The Shura is responsible for the Taliban's relations with „the rest of the world“ – from ostensible friends like China and Russia to sworn enemies like the US, Europe and the Afghan Government in Kabul. The Shura is under the direct leadership of Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar – the closest friend of the founder of the Taliban Mullah Omar. This gives Baradar immense authority within the ranks of the movement. This also caused frequent clashes with the ISI, that, in turn, led to Baradar's lengthy house arrest and isolation by the ISI (2010-18) when he was considered uncontrollable. Another key Shura member is Mullah Abdul Haq Waseeq. He is considered the head of the Taliban's Foreign Intelligence. Waseeq spent 12 years (2001-13) in Guantanamo where he learned English and the American mentality. Also of great importance is the presence in Doha of Anas Haqqani (the young brother of Sirajuddin Haqqani) because he manages the complex coordination between the Political and the Military Shuras. The Political Shura cooperates closely with Qatari Intelligence and rarely dares not to abide by their „advice“.

### Undermining rule of power

In Spring 2020, the Political Shura concluded that the most expedient way to victory would be by undermining the Kabul Government's ability to rule over the country. Hence, on advice of the Political Shura, the leaders of the Military Shura instructed all their key commanders throughout Afghanistan to initiate clandestine negotiations with the Kabul Government's local senior officials/representatives, local senior Military/Police/Security officials, as

well as tribal chieftains, religious leaders, and anybody else who exercised authority over the population and local resources. Significantly, the entire web of negotiations was conducted via blood relatives and close personal friends of the Kabul Government's personnel. This way, the mere existence of these contacts and discussions was not disclosed to the Americans. The Taliban emissaries argued that the US has given up on Afghanistan in Doha, and that the return to power of the Taliban was only a question of time. The Taliban, they explained, would like to reach local „arrangements” on non-violent conduct that would prevent unnecessary bloodshed when the Taliban marched on Kabul.

The initial cycles of communications had mixed results. Some seniors would not believe that the US was abandoning them. Still, the ISI, that monitored closely most of the negotiations, and the Qods Force, that monitored closely the negotiations along the Iranian border and in the Shiite populated areas, were encouraged by the progress and the mere willingness of so many Kabul Government senior personnel to entertain the Taliban's proposals, and, most important, by the fact that they did not warn the Americans about these Taliban initiatives. Hence, by early 2021, both the ISI and the Qods Force concluded that it would soon be possible to reach numerous „arrangements” throughout Afghanistan.

In Spring 2021, Islamabad could not fathom what the new Biden Administration was going to do. There was trepidation in Islamabad that with the declared commitment to reverse all of Trump's policies – the US would also renege on the Doha agreement and resist the ascent of the Taliban. Therefore, Islamabad reached out to Moscow in quest of a security-political umbrella against the US. (Beijing was reluctant to escalate the already bitter face-off with the US.) On 6-7 April, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov visited Islamabad to ascertain the extent of the Pakistani and Taliban commitments, and what exactly they

expected Russia to do. While the discussions were extremely friendly (all the more so since Lavrov had completed unsatisfactory talks in India on 5-6 April), both sides agreed that all concrete steps and policies would have to be formulated and committed to only after they could ascertain Biden's intentions and policies. They did not have to wait long because, on 14 April, Biden announced the US intent to complete the withdrawal from Afghanistan before 11 September 2021.

Immediately, the Political and the Military Shuras coordinated a twin-track surge in order to enable the Taliban to capitalize on the American and NATO withdrawal in order to seize power in Kabul and revive the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.

#### **Twintrack surge**

The first track was the marked intensification of the negotiations with local authorities and personalities throughout Afghanistan. Emboldened, the Taliban's emissaries now approached the most senior and venerable leaders in order to reach „arrangements” on cooperating with the forthcoming ascent of the Taliban. This time, the Taliban found their interlocutors eager and ready to abandon and betray the Kabul Government in return for promises that they and their coteries would not be harmed, that their local power positions and influence be tolerated, and that their property would not be confiscated. After the US escape from Bagram on 2 July in the middle of the night, virtually all Kabul Government interlocutors were eager to finalize deals and „arrangements” with the Taliban. As instructed, the Taliban emissaries agreed to everything in return for ironclad assurances that no effort would be made to block the forthcoming Taliban assault on Kabul and the toppling of the Government.

Among the key officials the Taliban reached deals with at this time were Daoud Laghmani, the provincial governor of Ghazni, who exercised immense influence on the southern and eastern approaches to Kabul; and Rohullah

Khanzada, the provincial governor of Qandahar, who oversaw a web of complex negotiation with the powerful Popolzai tribe. In Herat, the Taliban reached a deal with Ismail Khan – one of the most venerable leaders of the anti-Soviet Jihad since early 1978. Indeed, on 14 August, Ismail Khan would be the nominal leader of the first Taliban delegation to the Presidential Palace in Kabul.

This process culminated in a secret conference in Tehran on 8-9 July, and a follow-up gathering ten days later.

The Iranian decision to actively support the Taliban in order to hasten the US withdrawal and topple the pro-US government in Kabul was made by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei himself between 20 and 25 June. The decision was top secret as the Iranian media was encouraged to continue attacking the Taliban for their staunch anti-Shiite positions. However, on 27 June, Kayhan – the Iranian newspaper funded by the office of the Supreme Leader – published analysis by Jafar Bolouri of the situation in Afghanistan. „The Taliban today is different from the Taliban that used to behead people,” he wrote. Bolouri argued that „the Taliban have not committed any crime against the Shia population of Afghanistan.” He warned that the US withdrawal could „give a hard time to Iran” if not properly addressed. The US is fermenting widespread armed resistance to the ascent of the Taliban that, if left unchecked, would evolve into „a bloody civil war” that would then „turn into a Shia-Sunni conflict”. Bolouri implied that it is the vital interest of Iran to prevent this scenario from happening. Bolouri's article was drowned in the continued anti-Taliban rhetoric in the Iranian media.

Iran's road to preeminence in the eviction of the US/NATO from Afghanistan and the ascent of the Taliban has been long and largely unknown. The Iranian effort has been run mainly by the IRGC's Qods Force. Significantly, the current commander of the Qods Force, Brigadier General Esmail Qaani, rose in the 1990's as the

chief of intelligence and paramilitary operations in the Khorasan Province (that borders Afghanistan, Turkmenistan and Pakistan). Qaani focused on furthering Iranian priorities in the east – including providing support for the Northern Alliance in its fighting with the Taliban. Qaani's main contact man in dealing with the Northern Alliance was Abdallah Abdallah, who now leads Afghanistan's High Council for National Reconciliation. After becoming Deputy Commander of the Qods Force in 1997, Qaani and Qassem Soleimani divided responsibilities: Soleimani focused on the areas west of Iran while Qaani remained responsible for the areas north and east of Iran.

Moreover, the Qods Force has been building Iran-controlled Shiite forces in central Afghanistan since 2011-2 in order to protect the Hazara from both the Government and the Taliban forces. These forces became larger and more professional starting 2015 in the aftermath of a deal with the Taliban signed by Soleimani and Qaani. The Taliban promised to stay out of the Hazarajat in return for weapons, funds and training to be provided by the Qods Force. At the core of the revamped Shiite forces are veterans of the Liwa Fatemiyoun (Fatemiyoun Brigade) – an Afghan Shiite militia formed in 2014 to fight in Syria. Although later joined by Pakistani Shiite recruits – it is still 2/3 to 3/4 Afghan. Members of the Liwa Fatemiyoun undergo thorough training by the IRGC in Iran and Syria. As of late 2017, the unit numbered between 10,000 and 20,000 fighters (depending on the intensity of fighting in Syria and Iraq). Rotations of the troops last anywhere between three months and two years. The trained and combat tested Hazara fighters return to Afghanistan with Iranian financial support, and join the local force run by the Qods Force. In Spring 2021, Qaani dispatched to Afghanistan a group of Iranian and Shiite-Iraqi trainers to form the Hashd ash-Shia militia that is tailored after the Iran-controlled Hashd ash-Sha'abi militias in Iraq. They are better trained and better equipped than the local forces based on veterans of the Liwa Fatemiyoun.

Significantly, the Iran-sponsored build-up was done with a tacit acknowledgment of the Taliban. Mullah Abdul Raziq, the Taliban top commander in Herat and Farah provinces, has been responsible for the cooperation with Iran. He accepted the Iranian build-up in the Hazarajat in return for massive supplies of weapons, ammunition and training from Iran for his own forces. Taliban fighters are sent to Iran for advanced military training in Qods Force camps. Gradually, the Taliban-Iranian cooperation intensified to the point that Iranian Qods Force fighters were participating in combat in support of the Taliban. In early July 2021, Mullah Abdul Raziq noted that „IRGC forces” in Afghan uniforms „fought alongside Taliban [forces]” in western Afghanistan. As well, he said, „Iranbacked operatives” set up field clinics to treat wounded Taliban fighters in two villages in Farah province. Badly wounded Taliban fighters were then transferred to Iranian hospitals for further treatment.

Meanwhile, the Iranian political involvement also intensified. The Iranians played a crucial role in the secret intra-Afghan talks on 8-9 July and 18-19 July. The Iranian official position was that the crisis in Afghanistan must be resolved by the Afghans themselves, with foreign powers providing help only if requested. Seyed Rasoul Mousavi, Director General of the Department of South Asian Affairs at the Iranian Foreign Ministry stressed that Tehran „considers peace to belong to the Afghan people and believes that the only way to achieving that is through intra-Afghan dialogue and that the role of foreign countries should only facilitate this process.”

### Conference Diplomacy

Significantly, these conferences were originally planned for Islamabad where the ISI planned to closely monitor the discussions and manipulate the outcome. However, the conferences were moved to Tehran because the Pakistani and Iranian security personnel in charge decided that Tehran was the only place where US intelligence would not be able

to spy on the events and attempt to manipulate their outcome.

The primary objective of the 8-9 conference was to firm up and reconfirm the validity of the myriad of „arrangements” reached between the Taliban emissaries and their local interlocutors. The Taliban representatives came from the Military Shura. „All influential and powerful tribes in Afghanistan participated in this meeting, and it was not only the Government and the Taliban, but also various other groups and movements,” explained Hossein Akbari, the Deputy Secretary-General of the World Assembly of Islamic Awakening (that was the formal sponsor of the conferences). Since the bulk of the deals were reached between individual Kabul Government officials and their blood-relations speaking for the Taliban, the Tehran venues, for the first-time, enabled Taliban seniors to confirm the validity of these deals to emissaries of their interlocutors. The Taliban also announced their impending march on Kabul.

In the second conference on 18-19 July, representatives from Afghanistan's neighbors and regional states – including Pakistan, China, Russia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Iran – discussed with emissaries of the Taliban and their „arrangements” interlocutors the character of the future relations between Afghanistan and its neighbors. Ultimately, everybody – both Afghans and foreigners – agreed and committed to expediting the non-violent surge of the Taliban and the march on Kabul. The Taliban were forthcoming and promised leniency and no strict Islamist regime. „The Taliban of 2021 is not the Taliban of 2001,” was a point repeatedly made by the Taliban leaders.

### Campaigning to convince key powers

Concurrently, at the urging of Islamabad, the Political Shura launched a campaign to convince key powers – starting with Russia and China – to support the Taliban's surge. Official Islamabad was a direct participant of this campaign.

First, a Taliban delegation traveled to Moscow on 8-9 July mainly to assure Russian senior officials and area experts of the Taliban's sincerity. They emphasized their intent to adhere to the policies the Pakistanis discussed with Lavrov. The Taliban also repeated the commitment to prevent foreign Jihadists from operating across Afghanistan's borders into Central Asia. They specifically promised to not support foreign Jihadists from Central Asia, Russia and China. Although the Russians remained skeptical about the Taliban's willingness and ability to prevent Jihadist activities – at the end, Taliban rule of Afghanistan was deemed preferable to a continued US/NATO presence.

Second, and far more important, was the Pakistani and Taliban interaction with China – the would be primary financial and political sponsor of any Taliban regime. Islamabad's initiative came at a very awkward time. On 14 July, a martyr-bomber blew-up a minibus near Dasu, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Nine Chinese working on the Dasu hydropower project were killed. The perpetrator was identified as a mujahid of the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (The Taliban Movement in Pakistan) – a Pushtun Jihadist group that is ISI-sponsored and very close to the Afghan Taliban and other Jihadist groups in Afghanistan-Pakistan. However, in meetings with Chinese senior security officials, the ISI insisted that the bombing was a plot of the Indian and Afghan intelligence services launched from Afghan territory.

Beijing swallowed the ISI's claims and, on 24 July, held in Chengdu the 3rd round of the China-Pakistan Strategic Dialogue. The delegations were led by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and his Pakistani counterpart Shah Mahmood Qureshi. Both sides had „in-depth exchange of views on international and regional issues of common concern.“ Wang Yi and Qureshi agreed that „the Afghan situation has come to a crucial juncture“, and that the hasty US withdrawal is turning Afghanistan into „a new security black hole“. Both concurred that it

was imperative to „prevent Afghanistan from spiraling into a full-scale civil war“ and that only the Taliban could achieve this. However, the Taliban must commit to „political reconciliation and building a broad-based and inclusive political framework“ if they want Chinese and foreign support. China insists on a Taliban commitment to „combat terrorism“ and especially ETIM. If the Taliban deliver on their part, China would „promote coordination and cooperation among Afghanistan's neighboring countries [and] explore the building of Afghanistan-related cooperation platforms“ leading to „lasting peace“ and the „stability of Afghanistan“.

Although Qureshi insisted that he could guarantee things in the name of the Taliban, Wang Yi insisted that he wanted to hear everything directly from the Taliban. Hence, on 28 July, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar led a nine-member Taliban delegation to meet Wang Yi and his team in Tianjin. In an intentional affront to Washington, Wang Yi met Baradar in the exact room where he had just hosted US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman.

Baradar told Wang Yi that the Taliban consider China as a „friend“ of Afghanistan. The Taliban want from China not only economic aid to rebuild Afghanistan, but also help in attaining „international legitimacy“ for their government. Baradar reiterated in very clear terms the promise of „never allowing any force to use the Afghan territory to endanger China.“ He assured Wang Yi that the Taliban would break relations „with all terrorist organizations including ETIM.“ In response, China agreed to „play an important role in the process of peace, reconciliation and reconstruction“ in Afghanistan. China also pledged to support „the Taliban's role in Afghanistan's reconstruction“. Wang agreed to „bring the Taliban back into the political mainstream“ of the international community. All, provided the Taliban deliver on their promises.

In early August, with the US withdrawal nearing end, the Taliban's

march on Kabul started to pick up pace. Between 7 and 14 August, it turned into the final sprint. During this week, the Taliban captured virtually all the provincial capitals, the border crossings, and the key military bases of Afghanistan. There were no fighting and no resistance. The negotiated „arrangements“ were honored by both sides. Indeed, large units of the Afghan National Army surrendered and handed over their US-supplied arsenals – thus enabling the Taliban forces to increase their pace of advance. On 13 August, the Taliban encircled Kabul, and negotiated a „peaceful handover“ with the acting Interior Minister Abdul Sattar Mirzakawal. Once the order to enter was given, it took the Taliban forces eight hours to complete the capture of the city. All over Kabul, the arriving Taliban forces were aided by several hundred of activated in-place clandestine cells. Kabul was also taken without a fight.

On 14 August, Ismail Khan led the first Taliban delegation to the Presidential palace. The real leaders were key members of the Political Shura – Amir Khan Muttaqi and Anas Haqqani. They started discussions about the handover of power and the possible forming of an interim government. Ismail Khan also delivered a Taliban ultimatum that Afghan President Ashraf Ghani must leave Kabul immediately. The key interlocutors from the Kabul „establishment“ are Abdallah Abdallah, former President Hamid Karzai and former mujahedin leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar – all of whom are anti-American. On 15 August, Baradar flew from Doha to Qandahar – overflying Iran. Baradar told confidants he would not go to Kabul until the negotiations are over. However, he tightly controls everything from his old house in Qandahar. Meanwhile, as demanded, Ghani escaped Kabul for Uzbekistan and an exile in the UAE. By day end, the Taliban declared that the „war is over“ and that they controlled the entire territory of Afghanistan.

On 17 August, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid announced a moderate, inclusive policy. Muja-

hid reiterated publicly all the promises made by the Taliban to their foreign interlocutors. He stressed the Taliban's commitment to moderation and tolerance. The Taliban „seek no revenge” and „everyone is forgiven,” Mujahid stated. He also announced the Taliban's intent to form „an inclusive government” – albeit „within the bounds of Sharia Law.” Taliban seniors negotiating the handover of power did not rule out the forming of a „transition administration” with a non-Taliban interim president. The front runner is Ali Ahmad Jalali – a former Interior Minister who is a US citizen. Back in 2014, Jalali was barred from running for president because he refused to renounce his US citizenship. Abdallah Abdallah, who is mediating the administration forming, is convinced that the Taliban are sincere. Throughout, the real power will be in the hands of Baradar who will ultimately become the head of government.

However, the Leadership Shura in Quetta has different ideas about the future government of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. On 19 August, one of the Shura's top advisors, Waheedullah Hashimi, articulated the Shura's plans. Afghanistan will be ruled by a „ruling Shura” that will be placed above the government. Hashimi expects Akhundzada to be the head of this Shura. While everyday governing and state affairs will be handled by the government – the Shura will supervise and guarantee the Islamic character of the country. Hashimi expects Baradar to be the head of the government. Hashimi emphasized that the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan will be an Islamic state and that there will be no compromises on this issue. „There will be no democratic system at all because it does not have any base in our country,” Hashimi stated. „We will not discuss what type of political system should we apply in Afghanistan because it is clear. It is Sharia Law and that is it.” Hashimi stressed that the promises made by Mujahid are valid within the framework of Sharia Law.

On 21 August, Baradar finally arrived in Kabul at the head of a high-level Taliban delegation

comprised of members of the three Shura councils.

Taken together, the US ignominious withdrawal from Afghanistan and the rise of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan are a game changing event on a global scale. The issue is not what will happen inside Afghanistan – but how the regional foreign powers, led by Russia and China, will capitalize on the crisis in Afghanistan in order to profoundly transform their geopolitical and geoeconomic posture.

Rhetoric notwithstanding, Afghanistan will remain a dysfunctional state. Like all Afghan governments before them, the Taliban will not be able to impose any policy outside the center of Kabul. On the contrary, the „arrangements” that facilitated the spectacular march on Kabul gave the local commanders, chieftains and mullahs who delivered far greater power and self-rule in their respective areas of influence. The Taliban's Afghanistan will thus be a loose amalgam of fiercely independent tribal, ethnic and regional entities. The Kabul Taliban have neither the intention nor the power to impose anything on the rest of the country. Domestically, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan will continue to function on the basis of ad hoc „arrangements” between Kabul and the local foci of power. This will apply to the extent of imposition of Sharia Law, socio-economic development, individual rights, export of opium and support for foreign Jihadists.

Whether foreign Jihadists will be able to have training camps or other facilities will depend on the local leaders on whose territory they are – not on Kabul. These facilities will be defined as refugee camps for foreign „brethren in distress” – which is an Islamic obligation. According to Jundullah leaders, there is an „understanding” with the foreign Jihadists that they will not launch attacks on neighboring countries from Afghan territory in order „not to embarrass the Taliban”. However, Jundullah Jihadists will be able to deploy to a forward base in the nearby Fergana Valley and strike out from

there. The same principle will apply to supporting the Taliban's Jihadist allies in Pakistan – Jihadists whose contribution to the Taliban's war since the early 1990's has been incalculable.

In practical terms, a lot will depend on the implementation, if any, of the „four secret annexes” and/or the „four secret understandings” of the original Doha agreement.<sup>3</sup> They include the definition of the presence of US and allied intelligence personnel in order to sponsor the forthcoming Jihads into China, Russia and the Central Asian 'Stans. The presence of any American personnel is now out of the question. However, Turkish Intelligence (MIT) expressed interest in taking over the project. The MIT, with the assistance of the ISI, are already discussing these issues with the Taliban. Since Doha is extremely supportive of this endeavor – it will be nearly impossible for Kabul to say 'No'. Ultimately, however, the Turks and the Qataris will have to make their own deals with the local Taliban authorities. Taliban senior commander Qari Faseehuddin, who handles the high-level contacts with the Jundullah, is said to be most interested in sponsoring the foreign Jihadists and helping them spread their Jihads back home.

#### **Chinese and Russian views**

Both the Chinese and the Russians have no illusions about the real situation concerning the foreign Jihadists in Afghanistan. They accept this as an inevitable cost of doing business in and around Afghanistan. But China and Russia have far higher priorities – namely, to capitalize on the US/NATO withdrawal from their only bastion at the Heart of Asia in order to further consolidate their effective control over Eurasia – implementing the Greater Eurasian Partnership starting with the Central-South Asia bloc.

Between China and Russia there is already an agreed upon long-term grand strategy that is being implemented through extremely close cooperation. There is distribution of labor: China focuses on the economic and soft power aspects through the sponsorship of



local development and trade. Russia focuses on security issues, mainly counter-terrorism and subversion, through both the empowerment of the local militaries and security forces, and the maintaining of very impressive military intervention capacity should the need arise. In August, both Russia and China conducted military and anti-terrorism exercises with Tajikistan and Uzbekistan near the Afghan border. Russia also provided large quantities of modern weapons and other military supplies to several armies in Central Asia. As well, Russia and China conducted a major military exercise in north-western China – where the terrain is similar to northern Afghanistan. The exercise saw breakthroughs in military cooperation and interoperability, as well as the ability to conduct joint long-range intervention operations.

However, the primary objective of China and Russia objective is to ensnare Afghanistan is a web of regional development projects and political undertakings. China and Russia prefer multilateral programs rather than bilateral ones that might challenge the Taliban. The primary venue for the main programs will be the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Afghanistan and Iran are observers, and Iran is in the final stage of becoming a full member. Turkey is a dialogue partner of the SCO. Hence, the Taliban will be able to justify certain undertakings as prerequisites emanating from commitments made to the SCO by previous Afghan governments. The SCO will also provide the Taliban with cover for continuing to deal with regional powers.

China also intends to present the Chinese projects as international undertakings. Ultimately, the Chinese economic development projects are Afghanistan's only chance to sustain the country economically without total reliance on opium trade. China wants to integrate Afghanistan into the Chinese-dominated Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and particularly the sub-program China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). There are already concrete plans for an economic and transportation corridor

from the Pushtun-populated western Pakistan to the Kabul area that will be the natural extension and expansion of CPEC.

Given Afghanistan's geographic location, Afghanistan's integration will permit the marked expansion of the New Silk Road – both regionally and globally. In the longer term, rail-lines and pipelines will cross Afghanistan from Central Asia to the Chinese port in Gwadar, Pakistan, on the Arabian Sea, and via Iran to Europe. Once Afghanistan's transportation corridors and national infrastructure start becoming viable, China and its allies will be in position to start extracting Afghanistan's huge natural resources – starting with rare earths and minerals. Their value, in current prices, is estimated at over two trillion US\$. In Tianjin, Baradar committed the Taliban to giving China near monopoly over the extraction of Afghanistan's riches. Russia will provide the security umbrella for the whole undertaking. Under these circumstances, it would be impossible to challenge the Russian-Chinese influence over the Central-South Asia bloc and the New Silk Road.

Meanwhile, the US is out of the region – completely. The mistrust and bad blood are not going to evaporate for a long long time. This puts an end to the Western efforts to isolate Russia and contain China via the New Silk Road. If Europe – both the EU and individual states – would like to grab some crumbs from the regional development – they will have to do so via the good graces of both Russia and China. And this will have a high price concerning the European relations with the US, as well as Eurasia, China and Russia.

The rise of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan ushers in and facilitates a new era in the Heart of Asia. The integration of Afghanistan into the tapestry of the New Silk Road and the SCO enables China and Russia to jointly complete the epoch-making transformation of the Heart of Asia, and the entire Eurasia, they have been working on for decades. With Western threats to this endeavor removed – China, Russia and

their local allies can concentrate on implementing their historic vision for Eurasia and beyond. Europe will ultimately tilt eastward because only China and Russia can facilitate the recovery and modernization of European economies. And so, the ascent of a viable Eurasia received a major boost from the upheaval in Kabul. The acceleration of the ascent as led by China and Russia is bolstered by the new realities in Central-South Asia. Correct and timely capitalizing on the historic opportunities made possible by the regional ramifications of the establishment of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan will benefit the entire Eastern Hemisphere for decades to come.

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## THEMEN

### Putins neue Sicherheitsstrategie: „Kampf gegen die Verwestlichung“

Am 2. Juli 2021 unterschrieb der russische Präsident Wladimir Putin die neue Sicherheitsstrategie.<sup>1</sup> Sie löst die nationale Sicherheitsstrategie vom 31. Dezember 2015 ab, die nach der Annexion der Krim im März 2014 entwickelt worden war. In einem Interview in der Zeitung *Rossijskaja gasaeta* am 31. Juni 2021 erklärte der Sek-

<sup>1</sup> <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/ru/QZw6hSk5z9gWq0pDI1ZzmR5cER0g5tZC.pdf>



retär des Sicherheitsrats, Nikolaj Patruschew, dass nach dem föderalen Gesetz über die strategische Planung die Nationale Sicherheitsstrategie alle sechs Jahre aktualisiert werden müsse.<sup>2</sup> Die Vorbereitung des 44 Seiten umfassenden neuen Dokuments habe etwa ein Jahr gedauert. „Der Arbeitsgruppe gehörten Vertreter von Ministerien und Ressorts, der Wissenschaft und der Öffentlichkeit an.“

### Das Dokument

Die neue Sicherheitsstrategie besteht aus folgenden Kapiteln:

- „Allgemeine Lage“;
- „Russland und die moderne Welt: Trends und Chancen“;
- „Nationale Interessen der Russischen Föderation und strategische nationale Prioritäten“;
- „Gewährleistung der nationalen Sicherheit“ mit den Unterabschnitten „Verteidigung des Landes“, „Staatliche und öffentliche Sicherheit“, „Informationssicherheit“, „Wirtschaftliche Sicherheit“, „Wissenschaftliche und technologische Entwicklung“, „Umweltsicherheit und rationelle Nutzung natürlicher Ressourcen“, „Schutz traditioneller russischer spiritueller und moralischer Werte, Kultur und historische Erinnerung“, „Strategische Stabilität und für beide Seiten vorteilhafte internationale Zusammenarbeit“:
- „Organisatorische Grundlagen und Mechanismen zur Umsetzung dieser Strategie“.

Die Sicherheitsstrategie (in Klammern die Abschnittsnummer) wird einleitend bezeichnet als „Basisdokument der strategischen Planung, das die nationalen Interessen bestimmt und die strategischen nationalen Prioritäten der Russischen Föderation, die Ziele und Aufgaben der staatlichen Politik im Bereich der Gewährleistung der nationalen Sicherheit und der nachhaltigen Entwicklung der Russischen Föderation auf lange Sicht“ (2).

Der Westen wird folgendermaßen eingeschätzt: „Das Bestreben westlicher Länder, ihre Hegemonie zu bewahren, die Krise moderner Modelle und Wirtschaftsentwicklungsinstrumente, die Stärkung der Ungleichgewichte in der Entwicklung von Staaten, die Zunahme des Niveaus der sozialen Ungleichheit, das Bestreben transnationaler Konzerne, die Rolle von Staaten zu begrenzen gehen mit einer Verschärfung innenpolitischer Probleme einher, mit der Stärkung zwischenstaatlicher Widersprüche, mit der Schwächung des Einflusses internationaler Institutionen und der Abnahme der Effizienz des globalen Sicherheitssystems“ (7). Ohne Länder oder Regionen zu nennen zielen „Aktionen einiger Länder“ darauf ab, in den GUS-Ländern „Desintegrationsprozesse zu inspirieren mit dem Ziel der Zerstörung der Beziehungen Russlands zu seinen traditionellen Verbündeten“. Eine „Reihe von Staaten“ bezeichnen Russland als „Bedrohung und sogar als militärischen Gegner“ (17). Vor dem Hintergrund der Krise des westlichen liberalen Modells, welche die Sicherheitsdoktrin meint feststellen zu können, „versucht eine Reihe von Staaten, traditionelle Werte bewusst zu untergraben, die Weltgeschichte zu verzerren, die Ansichten über die Rolle und die Stellung Russlands darin zu revidieren, den Faschismus zu rehabilitieren, zu innerethischen und interreligiösen Konflikten anzustacheln“. Informationskampagnen würden zur Herausbildung eines feindlichen Russlandbildes gezielt durchgeführt (19). „Unfreundliche Länder“ würden „bestehende sozioökonomische Probleme“ zur „Zerstörung der inneren Einheit“, zur „Inspirierung und Radikalisierung der Protestbewegung, der Unterstützung von Randgruppen und zur Spaltung der russischen Gesellschaft nutzen“ (20).

Unter den „verstärkten militärischen Gefahren und Bedrohungen“ wird der Aufbau der „militärischen Infrastruktur der NATO nahe der russischen Grenze“ genannt (35). Den USA wird vorgeworfen, vor dem Hintergrund der Entwicklung eines globalen Raketenabwehrsystems verfolge sie ei-

nen „konsequenten Kurs des Verzichts auf ihre internationalen Verpflichtungen im Bereich der Rüstungskontrolle“. „Die geplante Stationierung von US-amerikanischen Mittel- und Kurzstreckenraketen in Europa und der asiatisch-pazifischen Region gefährdet die strategische Stabilität und die internationale Sicherheit“ (36).

Bei der Festlegung der Landesverteidigungsaufgaben steht an fünfter Stelle der „Schutz der nationalen Interessen und Bürger der Russischen Föderation außerhalb ihres Territoriums“ (40). Diese Bestimmung zielt auf die russischen Staatsangehörigen in den nicht-russischen Nachfolgestaaten der Sowjetunion, in den ostukrainischen Separatistengebieten, in den georgischen Republiken Abchasien und Südossetien sowie in Transnistrien. Mit der Begründung, sie schützen zu müssen, kann notfalls eine militärische Intervention in diese Territorien gerechtfertigt werden.

Bestehende Probleme in Russland werden durchaus eingeräumt: „Trotz der ergriffenen Maßnahmen bleibt in bestimmten Gebieten der Russischen Föderation eine hohe Kriminalitätsrate bestehen. Groß ist die Anzahl der Vermögensdelikte“ (42). An vierter Stelle rangiert unter den Aufgaben der staatlichen Politik die „Stärkung des Vertrauens in die Strafverfolgung und die Justiz“, was zeigt, dass es daran mangelt. An zehnter Stelle wird zur „Verringerung der Kriminalität im Wirtschaftsbereich, einschließlich des Kredit- und Finanzwesens sowie in den Bereichen Wohnen und kommunale Dienstleistungen“ aufgerufen. An 14. Stelle wird zur „Verbesserung der Institution der Verantwortlichkeit der Beamten für Handlungen (Untätigkeit)“ aufgefordert (47).

Kritisiert wird die „Verabsolutierung der Freiheit des Einzelnen, die aktive Propaganda der Freizügigkeit, der Unmoral und des Egoismus, die eingepflanzt sind in den Kult der Gewalt, des Konsums und der Lust, die Legalisierung des Drogengebrauchs, die Gemeinschaften formen, die den natürlichen Fortbestand des Lebens

<sup>2</sup> <https://rg.ru/2021/05/31/patrushev-raskryl-neizvestnye-podrobnosti-zhenevskoj-vstrechi-s-sullivanom.html>

verweigern“ (85). Konkret wird den „USA und ihren Verbündeten sowie den transnationalen Konzernen, ausländischen nichtkommerziellen nichtstaatlichen, religiösen, extremistischen und terroristischen Organisationen“ vorgeworfen, die „traditionellen russischen spirituellen, moralischen, kulturellen und historischen Werte aktiv anzugreifen“ (87).

Auf dem Feld der internationalen Zusammenarbeit werden Länder und Organisationen in folgender Reihenfolge genannt: GUS, Abchasien und Südossetien, die Eurasische Wirtschaftsunion (Russland, Belarus, Armenien, Kasachstan, Kirgistan), die Organisation des Vertrags für kollektive Sicherheit (Russland, Belarus, Armenien, Kasachstan, Kirgistan, Tadschikistan), der Unionsstaat (Russland und Belarus), China, Indien, die Shanghaier Organisation für Zusammenarbeit (Russland, China, Kasachstan, Kirgistan, Usbekistan, Tadschikistan, Indien, Pakistan), die BRICS-Staaten (Russland, China, Indien, Brasilien, Südafrika) und die RIC-Staaten (Russland, Indien, China) (101).

### Russische Stimmen

Die Internetzeitung *Gaseta.ru* überschrieb ihren Artikel über die neue Sicherheitsstrategie mit der Überschrift „Kampf gegen die Verwestlichung“. <sup>3</sup> Von den Prioritäten Moskaus zählte *Gaseta.ru* die Cybersicherheit, die Zusammenarbeit mit China sowie Indien und die Politik zur Eindämmung von Bedrohungen aus dem Westen auf.

Laut der Zeitung *Kommersant* gehen die „Strategen davon aus, dass gegen Russland eine gezielte Eindämmungspolitik betrieben“ werde. „Eine Möglichkeit, wirtschaftliche Sicherheit zu gewährleisten, besteht darin, den Einsatz des Dollars zu reduzieren und die Produktion inländischer Impfstoffe zu erhöhen.“ <sup>4</sup>

Für Dmitrij Trenin, Oberst a.D. der sowjetischen Armee und Direktor

von Carnegie Moskau, ist dieses „wichtigste strategische Dokument“ ein „Dokument von besonderer Bedeutung“. <sup>5</sup> Es sei nicht nur eine aktualisierte Version der 2015er Strategie, sondern ein „Manifest für eine neue Ära“. „Im Jahr 2015 glaubte man, dass sich die Beziehungen zum Westen aufgrund der Ukraine-Krise zwar verschlechterten, aber nicht hoffnungslos waren. Die aus den 1990er Jahren geerbte liberale Phraseologie war immer noch in Gebrauch, und die Welt schien immer noch eine zu sein.“

Die Autoren der Strategie zeichnen eine Welt in einer schwierigen Transformation. „Die Hegemonie des Westens gehe zu Ende, das führe zu zahlreichen und intensivierten Konflikten. Diese Kombination aus historischem Optimismus (die Erwartung des Endes der westlichen Hegemonie) und tiefer Besorgnis (der Westen wird immer härter Widerstand leisten) erinnert ein wenig an das berühmte stalinistische Postulat, dass sich der Klassenkampf auf dem Weg zum Sozialismus intensivieren wird.“

Das Hauptziel der neuen nationalen Sicherheitsstrategie bestehe darin, Russland an eine Welt anzupassen, die noch immer miteinander verbunden sei, aber einen Prozess der Fragmentierung und Uneinigkeit durchlaufe, in der neue Frontlinien weniger zwischen den Ländern als innerhalb dieser verlaufen. Es müsse also größtenteils innerhalb ihrer eigenen Mauern gewonnen bzw. eine Niederlage erlitten werden.

Der westliche Druck auf Russland nehme viele verschiedene Formen an. In der Wirtschaft sehe es sich mit einem unlauteren Wettbewerb in Form zahlreicher Beschränkungen konfrontiert, die ihm schaden und seine Entwicklung bremsen sollten. Im Sicherheitsbereich wachse die Gefahr einer Gewaltkonfrontation. Im Bereich der Moral würden traditionelle russische Werte und das historische Erbe angegriffen. In der Innenpolitik müsse sich Russland mit ausländischen Interventionen auseinandersetzen, die darauf abzielen,

das Land zu destabilisieren. Diese Bedrohungen würden als zunehmend und langfristig andauernd betrachtet.

Die Strategie erwähnt beiläufig die Notwendigkeit, die Korruption auszurotten, aber in Wirklichkeit – so weiter Trenin – sei das Problem viel größer. Russland werde von einer Klasse regiert, die zum größten Teil nur ihren eigenen Interessen diene und persönliche Bereicherung suche, ohne sich überhaupt um die Gesellschaft und das Land zu kümmern. Big Money sei für diese Gruppe zum Hauptwert und zum „zerstörerischsten Faktor“ im heutigen Russland geworden. „Dies ist vielleicht seine Hauptschwachstelle.“

*Prof. Dr. Eberhard Schneider*

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## IMPRESSUM

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Die **Denkwürdigkeiten** erscheinen mehrfach jährlich nach den Veranstaltungen der pmg.



<sup>3</sup>

[https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2021/07/03\\_a\\_13697408.shtml](https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2021/07/03_a_13697408.shtml)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4887854>

<sup>5</sup> <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/84904>