

Regional Security Strategies for Afghanistan and Its Neighbours – A Role for the OSCE?

The OSCE in a Time of Failing States: Neighbourhood Assistance for Afghanistan?

Politico-strategic thinking during the Cold War was dominated by a bipolar interpretive schema that described violent conflicts at the periphery of the international system as “regional conflicts”, considered to be expressions of the global confrontation of systems. In contrast, the early years following the end of the bipolar world order were characterized by a politico-strategic vacuum. Only after 11 September 2001 was a new interpretive paradigm able to take the place of the old bipolar system of co-ordinates. The security doctrines of the most important states and international organizations are now almost unanimous in defining international terrorism, the collapse of state authority, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction as the greatest threats to national and international security. The causal connection between international terrorism and state failure, in particular, is often stressed. Today, these phenomena appear as both the most important causes of conflicts and a central strategic challenge for the international community.¹

Strictly speaking, there may be little empirical evidence for this connection. However, if terrorism is understood as a catch-all concept for various kinds of illegal and illegitimate (political) non-state violence, there are good reasons to argue that the failure of state structures is a measure of their social and institutional embeddedness – or rather disembeddedness. At the level of political practice, this formula certainly prevails for the time being. The strengthening of state authority by means of state or nation building² has become a central task of foreign and development policy. This not only provides the interventionism of the 1990s (Kosovo, Sudan, Haiti, Bosnia) with *ex post facto* strategic justification, it also makes regime stabilization and/or transformation a key foreign and security policy priority – and an expanded concept of security, one that encompasses political systems, becomes its fundamental prerequisite.

1 Cf. Ulrich Schneckener, *How Transnational Terrorists Profit from Fragile States*, SWP Research Paper 2004/S 18, Berlin 2004, p. 18.

2 Nation building is frequently used in reference to military interventions to which state building (the establishment of state institutions) is an adjunct. In fact, nation building correctly refers to the secular process of social and political mobilization within the borders of a state (whether these are accepted or contested); cf. Karl W. Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication. An Inquiry into the Foundations of Nationality*, New York 1953. When talking of fragile statehood, it is hence more correct to speak of state building, cf. Francis Fukuyama, *State Building, Governance and World Order in the Twenty-first Century*, Ithaca 2004.

This development should play into the hands of an institution like the OSCE, which adopted an expanded concept of security earlier than other collective international political actors. The recognition that minimizing conventional security risks at the level of state relations depends on domestic matters within the countries in question and can be promoted by means of both domestic and international confidence- and security-building measures is one of the key lessons of the CSCE process. But the “new” threats to security also create challenges for the OSCE that extend beyond the scope of its existing activities: A plethora of security risks in the OSCE area, e.g. in the Western Balkans, in the Caucasus, and in Central Asia, are increasingly being compounded by destabilizing influences emanating from state and non-state actors in neighbouring regions. Afghanistan is the most prominent case here. The “new” OSCE participating States, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan are all neighbours of Afghanistan, and each registered a deterioration in its security situation during the period of Taliban rule.³ After the overthrow of the Taliban and the establishment of a US and NATO politico-military presence, the immediate danger of cross-border-operating non-state actors may have been banished at first, but the instability on the OSCE’s southern flank remains: Afghanistan’s internal fragility, cross-border criminality, and the general lack of trust between states in the region provide enough explosive material for political crises that could become serious problems for some of the OSCE States that themselves still lack stability. From the perspective of the Organization and its participating States, the stabilization of Russia’s southern periphery, which is developing stronger links not only with Southern Asia and the Persian Gulf, but also with China, could also be significant with regard to Islam as a political “factor” in the region.⁴ A successful “neighbourhood policy” with regard to a country such as Afghanistan could in this way also exert a stabilizing influence on the OSCE States themselves.

If we follow this logic and understand the stabilization of the OSCE’s neighbour Afghanistan as a task that the Organization should undertake, we can distinguish between two basic approaches: The promotion of inter-state co-operation between Afghanistan, the bordering OSCE States, and other neighbours in the region, on the one hand, and measures aimed directly at the internal stabilization of Afghanistan, on the other. In this context, Afghanistan’s becoming an OSCE Partner for Co-operation on 3 April 2003 can be understood as a political signal, with which both sides acknowledged the importance of a stable environment. The OSCE’s support for the monitoring of the Afghan presidential elections in October 2004 is an example of the kind of “services” that the OSCE can provide to directly aid the rebuilding of Af-

3 Cf. International Crisis Group, *The OSCE in Central Asia: A New Strategy*, Osh/Brussels 2002, p. 8.

4 Cf. Arne C. Seifert, *The Islamic Factor and the OSCE Stabilization Strategy in Its Euro-Asian Region*, CORE Working Paper No. 4, Hamburg 2001.

ghanistan.⁵ The remainder of this contribution takes a more detailed look at the potential tension between these two dimensions and at the OSCE's regional environment in general. It starts by identifying needs in domestic and foreign security and goes on to discuss ways in which they might be met.

The Need for Regional Security-Policy Co-operation in the Process of State Building

If we consider the network of causal factors underlying the Afghanistan war that has lasted since 1978, it can be considered a genuine "regional conflict", in which a large number of state and non-state actors operate across national frontiers. But if Afghanistan was treated as a regional conflict from the start, this was only a linguistic convention of the Cold War: The Afghan conflict parties appeared to be dependent ("regional") agents, whose ("global") principals were located in Moscow and Washington. The independent will and power of the regional and local actors were generally underestimated, or even dismissed – the consequences of which included the events of 11 September 2001.

The conflict that followed the withdrawal of Soviet troops was characterized, first, in terms of an ethnopolitical paradigm, and then in terms of cultural conflict.⁶ Today, it is seen as a test case for the fight against international terrorism and nation building. But it is now time to approach Afghanistan as a regional conflict in the literal sense, and to pay more attention to the regional dimension of state building. It is true that the major challenges of state building are, in the first instance, national matters: establishing an effective *monopoly of force*, without which there can be no security and which is also a precondition for the effective exercise of authority on the part of a state and hence for any form of (basic) legitimacy, an *extractive capacity*, which allows the state to collect taxes and other contributions, enabling it to provide social security services, and a *legal capacity* that enables public institutions to make (democratically) created law effective in society and thereby to integrate state and society (the citizens).⁷ However, in addition to these three fundamental capacities, which together comprise the core of statehood, there is a fourth, to whose development international institutions such as the OSCE can make a particular contribution: an *external relations*

5 Cf. Robert L. Barry, The Future Tasks of the OSCE, in: Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg/IFSH (ed.), *OSCE Yearbook 2004*, Baden-Baden 2005, pp. 27-32, here: p. 29.

6 Cf. Gilles Dorronsoro, *Revolution Unending. Afghanistan 1979 to the Present*, London 2005, pp. 5-18.

7 Cf. Boris Wilke, *State-Building in Afghanistan? Taking Stock of the International Presence in the Hindu Kush*, SWP Research Paper 2004/S 30, Berlin 2004, p. 13, and Andreas Wimmer/Conrad Schetter, *State Formation First: Recommendations for Reconstruction and Peace-Making in Afghanistan*, Center for Development Research, Discussion Paper on Development Policy No. 45, Bonn 2002.

capacity. For, just as the law only considers those political entities to be states that are recognized as such by the state environment, the quality of a country's statehood is influenced by the entire range of its neighbour states' political conduct towards it, apart from the question of formal recognition. For instance, the threat of military action made by one state on another directly affects the latter's internal constitution. The constitution of a state is thus not only determined from within, but also from outside. For this reason, regional co-operation and security, by enabling states still lacking stability to shape their external relations in ways that allow the minimization of conflict, also have a key role to play in state building.

There can hardly be a state of which this is more true than Afghanistan, which owes its very existence to its neighbours' interests and the imperatives of the international system. Unlike the states of Europe, Afghanistan was not created in a state-building process involving competition between various powers. Nor – as in the case of its neighbours India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka – is it the product of colonial state building. Rather, it was created as a “buffer state” to separate the British, Russian, and Persian spheres of influence. While in countries such as India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka political institutions developed out of the internal exigencies of colonial rule, Afghan statehood is a result of balancing the interests of external powers and the political calculations of local rulers, who secured annuities thanks to the status of their country as a buffer state. This not only resulted in two tracks of post-colonial development, with corresponding differences in the strength of political institutions, but also created a geopolitical imbalance between powerful states such as India and Pakistan, on the one hand, and the “black hole” of Afghanistan, on the other. As Afghanistan became first the canvas on which regional power struggles were projected and then the arena of activity of violent non-state actors, the institutional divide only widened.

This meant that Afghanistan's domestic political elite were highly dependent on external actors. Instead of following the path pursued in other historical state building processes and extorting “protection money” from the populace to fund the creation of state institutions, from the late 1950s, the rulers of Afghanistan relied on aid money for over 40 per cent of the cost of running their state, thus making Afghanistan a special sort of *rentier* state.⁸ This dependence of the state elites on external actors, which was reflected in the inability to establish domestic hegemony, translated into a strong dependence on external powers. This brought with it a susceptibility to political and

8 Cf. Conrad Schetter, *Kleine Geschichte Afghanistans* [A Short History of Afghanistan], Munich 2004, p. 12. In this context, “aid” should be understood not only as development assistance or emergency aid, but as encompassing all kinds of transfer activities – i.e. also including military aid or the cost of unwelcome external intervention. As a category in the sociology of the state, aid is the second most important source of revenue for the state after extraction proper (tax, contributions, duty, profits from state monopolies, etc.). For more on “protection money”, cf. Charles Tilly, War Making and State Making as Organized Crime, in: Peter Evans et al. (eds), *Bringing the State Back In*, Cambridge 1985, pp. 169-191.

military intervention that finally led to the decline – and finally the collapse – of state authority: A chain of events that stretches from the Soviet intervention in the seventies, which exacerbated the antagonism between city and country that led to the civil war, via the Western protection and arming of the Mujahideen that made them a powerful cross-border violent actor, to the intervention of the anti-terror coalition testifies to the contemporary impact of Afghanistan's historical legacy.

The Regional post-Conflict Situation and Afghan Ownership

As a buffer state, Afghanistan is not only a *product* of hegemonic ambitions and political calculations – its current (post-)conflict situation is also determined by the cross-border character of the problem complex. The dependence of all actors in Afghanistan on external support makes it possible for neighbouring countries and regional powers to export their conflicting interests into Afghanistan. This was as much a cause of the failure of early attempts to solve the “problem of Afghanistan” as the irreconcilable interests of the two blocs.⁹ In the meantime, many of the “Afghan” problems have (once more) started to encroach on neighbouring states. The diffusion of violence typical of long-lasting armed conflicts was accompanied by a proliferation of conflict parties, whose activities range across national borders: from religious solidarity networks, to international militias.¹⁰ Not only arms and drug trafficking are organized on a cross-border basis, but also the supply of the conflict parties with international fighters, whose radius of activity has expanded in the last decade from Kashmir via Afghanistan, Central Asia, and the Caucasus, as far as the Balkans.¹¹ This is the underlying reason why Afghanistan experienced not peace but rather an unprecedented escalation of violence following the end of the Cold War.

Against the backdrop of this cross-border conflict situation, it appears remarkable that the regional dimension of the peace-consolidation process has so far played a minor role. Unlike the earlier “six plus two” arrangement, in which Afghanistan's neighbours participated, and the USA and the Soviet Union acted as guarantors, the “Bonn process” and the forthcoming “Kabul process” foresee these states remaining outside observers. The “Kabul Declaration on Good-Neighbourly Relations”, signed by Afghanistan and its six neighbours – China, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Iran – merely updates the principles of non-interference and good-neighbourly relations in the context of the war on terrorism. While it does provide a

9 Cf. Barnett R. Rubin, *The Search for Peace in Afghanistan. From Buffer State to Failed State*, New Haven/London 1995.

10 Cf. Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars. The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001*, New York 2004.

11 Cf. Mariam Abou Zahab/Olivier Roy, *Islamist Networks. The Afghan-Pakistan Connection*, London 2004.

framework for consultations and conferences – one that has already been made use of¹² – it provides for no consultation mechanism between Afghanistan's neighbours and the states currently intervening in the country.

While it is understandable, in the light of historical experience, that the strategy of strengthening Afghan "ownership" as propounded by the United Nations and the states currently intervening in Afghanistan deliberately seeks to keep the country's neighbours out of the "Bonn process", it remains to be seen whether this is realistic. It is not at all clear whether peace can successfully be brought to Afghanistan without the neighbouring states' active participation, especially since the states currently intervening, most of which are Western, are constantly seeking to exercise a direct influence on political events in Kabul and are perpetuating Afghanistan's structural dependence by means of bilateral agreements on political and military co-operation, such as recently agreed between the United States and Afghanistan.¹³ Nor is it certain that an international armed force from another part of the world that currently consists of slightly over 20,000 troops will be capable, via military or political means, of preventing clandestine intervention by neighbouring states in the long term.

Alongside the question of effectiveness, the issue of legitimacy also needs to be considered. In the eyes of the international community, the international sponsors of the Karzai government, who include not just the USA and its allies – the UN-mandated International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) – but also private security companies, may differ from other, undesirable "destructive elements" in terms of degree of legitimacy. However, as experience shows – from Somalia via Afghanistan to Iraq – legitimacy cannot be simply be decreed by external powers – and certainly not for a whole region. In the medium to long term, the international presence will again be seen for what it really is: the expression of a structural problem of legitimate rule and the dependency of the Afghan state.

Potential Roles for the OSCE and Other International Organizations

It is thus doubtful whether an approach that largely ignores Afghanistan's neighbouring states but rather builds upon its dependence on external actors can succeed in the long term. If the inability of the Afghan state to support itself financially and to secure its borders means that Afghan societal rela-

12 The Berlin Declaration on Counter-Narcotics was adopted on 1 April 2004. Since then, conferences were held in Doha (May 2004) and in Riyadh (February 2005) on police co-operation and counter-terrorism policy, respectively.

13 On 23 May 2005, Presidents Bush and Karzai signed the Joint U.S.-Afghan Declaration for Strategic Partnership, which gave the USA the right to maintain its own military bases and to carry out, in consultation with the Afghan authorities, military operations on Afghan territory, e.g. as part of counter-terror and anti-drug operations. In return, the USA guaranteed medium to long-term financing of the Afghan military, see: <http://usinfo.state.gov/sa/Archive/2005/May/24-124331.html>.

tions in general are being internationalized and are tending to ignore national or ethnic boundaries, the “problem of Afghanistan” can only be solved as part of an integrated regional approach.¹⁴ Whether an individual state such as the USA is suitable to act as Afghanistan’s guarantor in the long term appears highly dubious – at least when considered in terms of Washington’s highly changeable relationship to Western and Southern Asia over the last 50 years.

For Afghanistan, regional security is not a question of “balancing” threats but rather a strategically necessary aspect of the state- and nation-building process. Analogous to the small states in post-War Europe, Afghanistan will only find the necessary supportive environment in the form of a regional peace regime. In this connection, Afghanistan’s geopolitical position between Southern Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East becomes problematic. In terms of geographic focus, topics of concern, or (a lack of) institutionalization, organizations like the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) are currently not in a position to play the role of a “security community”¹⁵ in Asia in either the short or the long term.¹⁶ Consequently, Afghanistan will be reliant on either importing security for the foreseeable future or on participating as a neighbour in existing security and co-operation arrangements.

Two organizations come into question: NATO and the OSCE. As the area of operation of the NATO-led Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) is expanded to all four sectors of Afghanistan, and given the more difficult operating conditions that this will presumably create, the question of an institutionalized security policy dialogue with (at first individual) neighbouring states will inevitably be placed on the agenda.¹⁷ Whether this will occur within the scope of the Partnership for Peace or in a different institutional context, there will inevitably be a qualitative transformation of Afghanistan’s relationships with both NATO itself and with the NATO member states that are currently engaged in Afghanistan. However, because NATO’s agenda will at first focus on military matters (perhaps later encompassing a broader range of security-policy issues) and will not deal with regional co-operation

14 Cf. Barnett R. Rubin/Andrea Armstrong, Regional Issues in the Reconstruction of Afghanistan, in: *World Policy Journal* 1/2003, pp. 31-40.

15 Karl W. Deutsch, *Political Community in the North Atlantic. International Organization in the Light of Historical Experience*, Princeton 1968.

16 Here it is necessary to draw the following distinction: SAARC, from which Afghanistan could benefit the most – thanks to the central importance of the Afghanistan-Pakistan opposition for state and nation building – is structurally hindered by the antagonism between India and Pakistan. If the SCO were to be expanded to include Pakistan, India, and Afghanistan, it could play a stabilizing role. The ECO has so far remained peripheral in every respect.

17 NATO is scheduled to take over command of the PRTs currently under US command in the west (Phase 1), the south (phase 2), and the east (phase 3) of Afghanistan in 2005 and 2006. The last two areas are considered unsafe and require a new interpretation of the NATO/UN mandate. Cf. Paul Adams, Questions for Nato in Afghanistan, BBC NEWS, 28 May 2005, at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/from_our_own_correspondent/4587185.stm.

in a narrow sense, there is room for the OSCE to play a role that could, to some extent, be described as complementary. Afghanistan's status as an OSCE Partner for Co-operation could help smooth the way for the development of a regional security strategy, initially focusing on the collective threats of state failure and terrorism. From this starting point, it could expand to take in questions such as border regimes, co-operation in the fight against cross-border organized crime, and energy and water security, thereby supporting Afghan statehood from outside.

The outlook for this kind of security and regional policy agenda, however, does not appear so bright if we consider the OSCE's sobering experiences in Central Asia.¹⁸ This agenda is blocked not only by the reluctance of the Central Asian participating States but also by the path dependence of an OSCE that has for a long time seen itself as less the guarantor of external security for Central Asia and neighbouring countries, than an exporter of human rights and democracy. If the OSCE's existing (limited) involvement in observing the Afghan presidential elections of October 2004 proves indicative of the shape of things to come, it would be reason for significant scepticism. For even if "technical" support may be essential at first, every activity that promises direct assistance within the country raises questions of institutional compatibility. The local institutions in a traditional society such as Afghanistan are not easily recognized as such by organizations dominated by the West such as the OSCE. It is also necessary to take into account that the OSCE would thereby become part of the internationalized structure of governance that has been established in parallel to the emerging native Afghan apparatus of state. Each activity needs to be examined to determine whether it creates or strengthens parallel structures instead of supporting state institutions. This applies equally to police training and other forms of external state building.¹⁹ As in the case of election monitoring, it is important to ensure that the police are not made to become answerable to the international community, but to the government and the people of Afghanistan. In addition, guaranteeing human rights requires a social consensus on the legal system that is to be upheld by the state – something that remains a rather distant prospect for Afghanistan. The current existence of a plurality of state and non-state regimes of violence is hard to reconcile with the OSCE's "acquis of norms, standards, and commitments".²⁰

The ability of the OSCE (and CSCE) process²¹ to serve as a model thus ends precisely where, within a process of political discussion and co-operation,

18 For more information, see: Marie-Carin von Gumpfenberg, *Die Organisation für Sicherheit und Zusammenarbeit in Europa, Stabilisierendes Moment in Zentral Asien?* [The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. A Stabilizing Factor in Central Asia?], SWP Research Paper 2002/S 33, Berlin 2002.

19 Cf. Barry, cited above (Note 5), p. 29.

20 Emily Haber, The OSCE in a New International Landscape – Eleven Theses, in: *OSCE Yearbook 2004*, cited above (Note 5), pp. 33-40, here: p. 34.

21 Cf. Margret Johannsen, The "Helsinki Coup": A Model for American Democratization Efforts in the Middle East? In: *OSCE Yearbook 2004*, cited above (Note 5), pp. 517-532.

the principles of rule of law, democracy, and the market economy are made preconditions for co-operation. Societies like Afghanistan face quite different external and internal problems from those dealt with by the CSCE/OSCE States during the Cold War and the subsequent phase of post-bipolar co-operation: States that are limited in their ability to manage the use of force and the privatization of security are combined with the existence of a large number of groups seeking to achieve military and political hegemony. Not only are three regional and global powers, China, Russia, and India, seeking to follow their largely conflicting interests in the region; mid-sized powers, such as Iran and Pakistan, also have the power to disrupt, not to mention thousands of interlinked non-state violent actors, some of whom co-operate with state actors in pursuing their “security policy goals”. A modest degree of activity on the part of the OSCE that allowed Afghanistan’s western and eastern neighbours to profit from the security zone in the north would be the most suitable way to support the long-term process of Afghan state and nation building.