

## **Extract of Final Report**

**Study Commission on Lessons from Afghanistan for Germany's  
Comprehensive International Engagement in the Future\***

---

\* Established by Decision of 5 July 2022 in Bundestag printed paper 20/2570



## Foreword from the Chairperson

Ladies and gentlemen,  
Readers,

Over and above the major wars and conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East, crises are proliferating around the world. Data from leading research institutes, such as the Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research and Uppsala University, show that the number of wars, particularly the number of international conflicts, is rising. While the influence of the Global South is growing at the expense of the West, vacuums have formed in many regions which regional powers and, increasingly, violent non-state actors are using to expand their power.

It is not yet possible to foresee all the long-term effects of those profound changes. What is already clear, however, is that rising powers like China and India are confidently asserting their aspirations with regard to shaping the international system. Even if such claims for greater influence are in many respects legitimate, they have far-reaching ramifications for global institutions and norms. In part, moreover, they are opposed to our liberal values and the rules-based international order we would wish to see.

Looking at the BRICS group, which expanded at the start of 2024 to include Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia and the United Arab Emirates, we see on the one hand an example of that development, but we also see, on the other hand, how heterogeneous the group and their various interests are. Not infrequently, they support different sides in conflict regions and pursue divergent objectives. We must assume that instability and vulnerability to crisis will increase and characterise the 21st century, a multipolar age. It will take time until the global order has stabilised and international institutions have been adapted and reformed to take account of the changes.

Direct threats and conflicts in Europe's immediate neighbourhood have led to the Federal Government's National Security Strategy putting national and collective defence back at the top of the agenda. That is the logical response, but it must not be at odds with international crisis management, which, in an amended form and coordinated at the European level, remains indispensable as a tool of Germany's foreign and security policy.

Setbacks such as the involvement in the Sahel and, not least, the strategic failure of the 20-year operation in Afghanistan, which led to the creation of the Study Commission, underscore the need for a comprehensive or integrated approach in our foreign and security policy. Our humanitarian, development, diplomatic and, where necessary, military instruments need to operate in even closer conjunction if we intend to contribute to crisis management in conflict regions.

That approach can only succeed if future decision-makers take the lessons of past operations seriously. That begins with interministerial coordination, particularly in Berlin, but also means according genuinely equal value to civil and military instruments. Not least significantly, international crisis management, just like national and collective defence, will not be free; it all costs money.

If we neglect international crisis management, the costs will end up disproportionately higher. Many of the conflict regions around the world are in our geographical neighbourhood and cannot simply be ignored. If we do not get involved, others will involve themselves all the more strongly, with every conceivable consequence. Crisis management that is embedded in Europe, adequately funded and guided by realistic objectives is therefore in our basic strategic interest.

The conclusions and recommendations set out in the following final report as a cross-party effort and in collaboration with external experts, after three years of work, supply the Bundestag and future German

Governments with guidance for Germany's comprehensive international engagement in the future. The report identifies specific proposals for improving cross-ministerial work, coordinating information and not only couching objectives and strategies in more realistic terms in future but also reviewing them on an ongoing basis.

However, the report is also addressed to the numerous governmental and non-governmental organisations involved, the personnel deployed and, not least, the interested public. If Germany and Europe wish to continue playing a role on the world stage and are to contribute to a more peaceful world, then the global changes we are facing and questions about how we deal with them affect us all.

**Michael Müller, Member of the Bundestag**

Chairperson of the Study Commission on Lessons from Afghanistan for Germany's Comprehensive International Engagement in the Future

## 1 Introduction

In this final report, the Study Commission on Lessons from Afghanistan for Germany's Comprehensive International Engagement in the Future sets out its recommendations for action regarding Germany's contribution to international crisis management. Prior to this report, the Commission published its analysis of the 20-year operation in Afghanistan and the lessons to be drawn from it in an interim report on 19 February 2024 (Bundestag printed paper 20/10400).<sup>1</sup> The interim report was discussed in the Bundestag on 23 February 2024 (minutes of plenary proceedings 20/155).

### Conclusions drawn in the interim report

The most important conclusions drawn in the interim report included the following findings:

Fundamentally, there was no coherent strategy that was realistically possible to implement, the objectives set were too ambitious, and continuous, self-critical stock taking was lacking. The personnel provided, particularly civilian and police personnel, were also insufficient, a problem that was exacerbated by the inadequate adaptation to the situation of Bundeswehr equipment and capabilities. In addition, the report concludes that cooperation between the ministries, although it did improve, nevertheless remained insufficient over all, and the maintenance of ties within the Bundestag was likewise inadequate. Furthermore, the competing interests of the numerous stakeholders rendered the coordinated allocation of resources difficult at the international level. There was moreover an inadequate degree of consideration for the culture, history, religion and traditions of Afghanistan.

The Study Commission came to the conclusion that Germany and its international partners failed at a strategic level in Afghanistan. The multinational operation took a great toll in terms of human casualties, and the costs were vast. The Commission did also note that there were partial successes in the course of the operation which led to improved living standards for the people in Afghanistan and to progress on infrastructure and in the healthcare and education sectors. They did not prove lasting, however, because of the Taliban's return to power. The members of the Study Commission expressly commended the personal and professional dedication of the German personnel deployed. Although the Commission has ended its work on Afghanistan in producing its final report, it remembers the casualties of the operation, including the German servicemen, federal police officers and members of German aid and development organisations who fell or lost their lives, and it has not forgotten Afghanistan and its people or the catastrophic humanitarian situation there.<sup>2</sup>

### Thematic working groups to develop recommendations

On the basis of the lessons from the 20-year operation in Afghanistan that were set out in the interim report, the members of the Study Commission formed five working groups ('cluster groups') on the following topics: strategy and mandate creation; international coordination; parliament and coordination of the executive; knowledge, monitoring and evaluation; capabilities, implementation and effectiveness. In accordance with the Study Commission's mandate (Bundestag printed paper 20/2570), the cluster groups formulated general recommendations for action, on the basis of the Afghanistan operation and

---

<sup>1</sup> Alongside the Study Commission, which considered the full duration of the operation in Afghanistan, the Bundestag established a Committee of Inquiry (Bundestag printed paper 20/2352). The Committee of Inquiry looked at the period between the conclusion of the Doha Agreement on 29 February 2020 and the end of the Bundestag mandate to deploy German armed forces for the military evacuation on 30 September 2021 and the withdrawal from Afghanistan.

<sup>2</sup> Dissenting opinions on this sentence were delivered by the external experts Winfried Nachtwei and Egon Ramms, Bundestag Members Philip Krämer and Merle Spellerberg (Alliance 90/The Greens) and the external expert Dr Katja Mielke.

beyond, regarding Germany's contribution to international crisis management in the context of Germany's future comprehensive engagement in foreign and security policy.

The Study Commission and its cluster groups conducted public and closed hearings as part of that work. The members of the Commission thank all the external experts who participated for their expertise and proposals. The Commission is also grateful for the suggestions provided by the operation personnel who took part in the discussion event Lessons from Afghanistan – the Perspective of Operation Personnel held on 19 March 2024.<sup>3</sup>

### **From the comprehensive approach to integrated security**

Under the comprehensive international engagement which the Study Commission examined, the intention is for military, police, diplomatic, development, humanitarian and economic instruments to operate in conjunction in the context of international crisis management and peace missions. In view of the changing security environment, that approach is now being further refined into the concept of 'integrated security'. This encompasses international crisis management and national and collective defence as well as new challenges such as defence against cyber attacks, disinformation campaigns and sabotage.

### **Altered context for crisis management**

The Study Commission was aware that its work on the recommendations was taking place against the backdrop of fundamental change in the security situation in Europe. Russia's attack on Ukraine on 24 February 2022 marked the end of the European security order that had prevailed hitherto. For Germany as for others, this means new threats and risks which have ramifications for security and defence policy. National and collective defence has been at the top of the agenda ever since.

The altered context for international crisis management includes the partial obstruction of the United Nations Security Council, which must nonetheless not be permitted to leave the international community incapable of responding to threats to world peace and international security. Those states which stand by the rules-based global order should credibly uphold and defend the fundamental tenets of the UN Charter and avoid double standards. The fundamental tenets of the UN Charter remain key: the principle of settling disputes by peaceful means, the prohibition of aggression, the maintenance of international peace and security, and collective measures to suppress breaches of the peace.

### **International crisis management still a high priority**

In the assessment of the Study Commission, next to national and collective defence, participation in possible future international operations should retain great significance. Germany should be able and prepared to contribute to missions of international crisis management alongside its allies and embedded in international coalitions. The international community expects Germany to continue to shoulder responsibility in future.

### **Recommendations and their implementation**

As a result of its work, the Study Commission presents 72 recommendations on many different areas and proposals for their implementation. They include institutional and organisational proposals on better

---

<sup>3</sup> Records of the public hearings and the event held with operation personnel can be found (in German) on the Bundestag website: [https://www.bundestag.de/ausschuesse/weitere\\_gremien/enquete\\_afghanistan](https://www.bundestag.de/ausschuesse/weitere_gremien/enquete_afghanistan).

preparation, on staffing and equipping operations, on more efficient coordination within the German Government and on stronger parliamentary oversight.

The recommendations are primarily directed towards the German Government, the *Länder* and the Bundestag. One of the Study Commission's findings is that more public discussions about foreign, development and security policy are needed and more information should be available to that end. The present report is in part intended to serve that purpose.

The Study Commission exists only for the duration of the 20th electoral term and cannot itself ensure that the recommendations are implemented. That will require the efforts of future German Governments, the parliamentary groups in the Bundestag and civil society, which can raise, comment on and expand the recommendations and push for their implementation. It would be useful if the ministries and Bundestag committees concerned with international crisis management were to review, during the second half of the next legislative period, to what extent the Commission's recommendations have found expression in political practice or what has prevented such change.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Dissenting opinions on section 1 were delivered by Bundestag Members Jan Nolte and Joachim Wundrak (AfD) and by the external expert Reiner Haunreiter.

**Members of the Study Commission****Chairperson**

Michael Müller (SPD)

**Deputy Chairperson**

Serap Güler (CDU/CSU)

**Members of the Bundestag****Members**SPD parliamentary group

Michael Müller

Christoph Schmid

Derya Türk-Nachbaur (*Group Coordinator*)**Substitute members**Professor Lars Castellucci (*until 21 November 2022*)Hakan Demir (*from 13 December 2023*)Sebastian Fiedler (*21 November 2022 to  
13 December 2023*)

Aydan Özoğuz

Nadja Sthamer

CDU/CSU parliamentary groupPeter Beyer (*Group Coordinator*)

Serap Güler

Susanne Hierl

Michael Brand

Dr Marlon Bröhr

Dr Katja Leikert

Alliance 90/The Greens parliamentary groupShahina Gambir (*Group Coordinator*)

Philip Krämer

Deborah Düring

Merle Spellerberg

FDP parliamentary group

Knut Gerschau

Christian Sauter (*Group Coordinator*)

Dr Ann-Veruschka Jurisch

Frank Müller-Rosentritt

AfD parliamentary groupJan Ralf Nolte (*Group Coordinator*)

Joachim Wundrak

The Left Party parliamentary group

Andrej Hunko (*Group Coordinator*)  
(*until 6 December 2023*)

Heidi Reichinnek (*until 10 May 2023*)

**External experts**

Professor Anna Geis	Professor of Political Science, Helmut Schmidt University/Bundeswehr University Hamburg, Institute of International Politics, Hamburg
Professor Hans-Joachim Gießmann	Director Emeritus at the Berghof Foundation Berlin, Schenefeld, Schleswig-Holstein
Reiner Haunreiter	Colonel (retired), lecturer at the Technical University of Deggendorf, Bavaria
Dr Michael Lüders	Political scientist and Islamic scholar, Berlin ( <i>until 19 February 2024</i> )
Professor Carlo-Antonio Masala	Professor of International Politics, Bundeswehr University Munich, Neubiberg, Bavaria
Dr Katja Mielke	Researcher at the Bonn International Centre for Conflict Studies (BICC)
Winfried Nachtwei	Former Member of the German Bundestag, Münster, Westphalia
Egon Ramms	General (retired), former Commander of NATO Allied Joint Force Command Brunssum (NL), Meckenheim, North Rhine-Westphalia
Professor Ursula Schröder	Director of the Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg (IFSH), Hamburg
Jörg Vollmer	General (retired), former Chief of the Army, former Commander of NATO Allied Joint Force Command Brunssum (NL), Meckenheim, North Rhine-Westphalia
André Wüstner	Colonel, Chairperson of the Bundeswehr Association, Berlin
Dr Ellinor Zeino	Head of Foundation Office Turkey at Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V., Ankara

## 2 Executive Summary

Despite the focus on national and collective defence, Germany will continue to play its part in international crisis management in future. Building on the lessons from Germany's 20-year operation in Afghanistan which were set out in the interim report, the Study Commission has formulated specific recommendations for Germany's comprehensive international engagement in the future.

The recommendations are based on the conclusions drawn in the interim report, the findings subsequently gleaned from the work of five thematic working groups within the Study Commission, the hearings with experts from the armed forces, politics, academia and civil society and the specialist knowledge brought to the Commission by its external experts and Bundestag Members.

Future operations will need a fully articulated strategy that specifies clear, verifiable and realistic objectives and intended effects. In line with the mission's stage of development, an exit strategy coordinated with our allies must be decided on. Independent evaluations must also be carried out on a regular basis. Key factors in successful implementation are ongoing coordination and cooperation at the national level, between the ministries and the parliament, and at the international level, particularly with the European Union (EU), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the United Nations (UN), and regional and local partners. The strategy should clearly state German interests and define interim objectives but should also be able to adapt to developments on the ground and realistically take into account our own capabilities and impacts.

Operations should be accompanied by clear communication from the German Government. That, too, requires the setting of short- and long-term objectives and collaboration across ministries. To combat disinformation campaigns, analysis capabilities should be enhanced, particularly on social media platforms, and the cooperation of security authorities should be intensified, between the federal and *Land* levels as well as internationally. Our communications in the country of deployment should be tailored to the target audience and take account of the cultural and religious context.

In the interests of identifying crises early on and being able to respond strategically, it is essential to maintain a broad knowledge base and cultivate pooled expertise. That will require a long-term funding architecture for university and non-university institutions and a more intensive exchange of ideas between academia, politics and practice. To enhance the cultivation of ties and foster a shared understanding of contexts, academics should be accorded a greater role in ministerial work. Similarly, greater use should be made of practitioners' experience in academic institutions. During operations, as much local knowledge as possible should be collated and systematically analysed. When creating a common operational picture, it is advisable to process additional information from personnel returning from deployment, allies and partners in civil society and channel it into ongoing planning and implementation. If artificial intelligence is used, its use for systematising the knowledge base should be considered. At the same time, potential savings should be exploited on an interministerial basis and redundant duplicate structures should be eliminated.

Successful international engagement requires a harmonised institutional monitoring and evaluation structure. Independent evaluations should be conducted during and after every integrated operation. Communication between personnel deployed on operations and those in the political or strategic sphere also needs to be intensified. Institutional learning from operational experience should be spread as widely as possible across the organisation in question and should also be incorporated into basic and continuous training for future operations by making use of personnel returning from deployment with experience to share.

The interim report noted that improvements are needed, particularly at the political and strategic level, for Germany to achieve coherent foreign, development and security policy action. In the interests of better interministerial strategic planning and implementation of crisis management operations, the Commission recommends establishing a new Cabinet committee or expanding and intensifying the regular security policy meeting of state secretaries. Both options would involve a joint situation centre where strategic situation assessments, analysis and prognoses are compiled into an interministerial overall picture.

The regular flow and exchange of information between the ministries and the Bundestag should be intensified. For example, the German Government should give the Members of the Bundestag a classified security and strategic foresight report once a year.

To enable the parliament to exercise its power of oversight more effectively and compile a cross-portfolio situation assessment of its own for its own purposes, a separate committee or subcommittee on comprehensive or integrated crisis management operations should be created. In the case of follow-on mandates, the Bundestag should make greater use of the scope for parliamentary participation and review effectiveness and the achievement of objectives more strictly. Debates on mandates and discussions in specialised committees should give due consideration not only to the military aspects but also to the civil, diplomatic and police components of operations.

The UN remains a key player in the pursuit of international agreement. To safeguard the UN's effectiveness for the future, reform efforts should be supported and the UN should be provided with the material and human resources it needs. At the European level, greater capacity for action is needed for crisis management. Germany should advocate in that context for closer liaison with the aim of using Europe's influence more meaningfully within NATO and around the world.

For international operations, a register of contributors would facilitate the best possible allocation of resources, not least with a view to not overloading the recipient country's absorptive capacity. A sense of ownership on the part of the local society and greater consideration of women are key to the success of an operation and should be taken into account and continuously reviewed by international coordination mechanisms at all levels.

For combating and preventing terrorism, organised crime and corruption, Germany should prioritise joint EU action and specifically foster partnerships with non-EU countries in order to enhance the effectiveness of measures at all levels by means of collective action.

To organise international crisis management more effectively, it is advisable to have standardised principles of procedure that apply for all the ministries involved and define requirements specific to the operation so that its effectiveness can be measured and adjustments can be made. For financing projects in the country of deployment, the possibility of long-term process support rather than short-term project funding should be investigated.

In pursuit of self-sustaining reform and reconstruction processes, greater consideration should be given to non-state actors and civil-society players in the country of deployment as well as smaller projects that can be implemented on the ground and are embedded in the local population. Selecting them with the aid of institutionalised context and partner monitoring could improve the legitimacy, local ownership and sustainability of support measures. The dedication of local workers should have support from the German Government, the treatment of local staff in particular should be organised on an interministerial basis, and the extent of Germany's responsibility should be transparently communicated to the relevant parties.

With a view to responding to crises at short notice, it is advisable to build up a strategic reserve of civilian personnel. In the Bundeswehr, international crisis management capabilities of relevance to operations should be maintained and the associated funds for training, equipment and preparations secured. Given their shared responsibility for looking after ill or injured personnel, the German Government and Bundestag should continue to expansively express their public appreciation and support for the personnel deployed on international crisis management.

The submission of this final report marks the end of the work of the Study Commission on Lessons from Afghanistan for Germany's Comprehensive International Engagement in the Future. Numerous conflicts, global power shifts and growing instability in many regions of the world have a direct impact on Germany and Europe. Adapting Germany's crisis management to new developments and challenges is urgently necessary in view of the experience gathered in Afghanistan. In the lessons from 20 years of engagement set out in the interim report and the recommendations proposed in this final report, the Commission has supplied future German Governments and the Bundestag with numerous specific means of improving Germany's international crisis management. From the 21st electoral term onwards, their implementation should be monitored on an ongoing basis in the ministries and committees concerned.