
Political Constraints: Germany and Counterinsurgency

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This article examines the challenges for the German armed forces, the *Bundeswehr*, to adapt to the counterinsurgency (COIN) challenge in the context of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. It argues that prevailing German strategic thought makes it very hard for the *Bundeswehr* to adjust for COIN in a comprehensive way. While adjustments have been made, these are largely on the operational and tactical level. The political and the strategic level of the armed forces are far from embracing COIN as a strategy and as a major task for the *Bundeswehr*. Germany's allies and partners like Australia need to recognise the structural factors putting brakes to a rapid transformation of the *Bundeswehr* for COIN.

The NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan is faced with a sustained and complex insurgency. Adapting to this challenge is a major difficulty for all Western armies involved in the conflict. Even the US military faces hardship in adjusting strategy, doctrine and tactics to the principles of counterinsurgency (COIN). Whether ISAF can succeed in Afghanistan will depend to a significant degree on allied capability to develop and execute a COIN strategy. Among those allies who struggle hard to adjust for COIN is Germany, a major European player in NATO and the third largest troop contributor to the ISAF mission, after the United States and Great Britain. The *Bundeswehr* also has assumed responsibility for security in Northern Afghanistan, in the context of the Regional Command North (RC North). How Germany has adjusted to the COIN challenge is, therefore, an important question to NATO allies and partners like Australia.

In general, unique historical, political and societal settings influence the adaptation for COIN in any country, and Germany is no different. However, specific characteristics in the German environments make it particularly difficult for the *Bundeswehr* to comprehensively adjust to the COIN challenge. There is a missing link between the political, strategic, operational and tactical level involved in the making of German COIN. As a result, Germany's allies and partners, including Australia, need to recognise that the prevailing German strategic thinking obstructs a substantive *Bundeswehr* transformation for COIN, and must manage their expectations accordingly.

Counterinsurgency: Strategy or Operational Concept?

In Anglo-Saxon strategic debate COIN is perceived as a strategy, as opposed to being only a military operational concept. In this line of strategic thought COIN is “all measures to suppress an insurgency”; it is a form of “counter-warfare” that “applies all elements of national power against insurrection”.¹ COIN comprises political, economic and military instruments. Key to any COIN strategy is the political goal to protect a legitimate government and its citizens against those elements (insurgents) wanting to overthrow the system. As the Commander International Security Assistance Force (COMISAF), General Stanley McChrystal has made clear, he regards COIN as a strategy of which the military dimension is but one. In laying out the new American strategy for Afghanistan (and Pakistan) in December 2009, US President Barack Obama followed this logic.² The same is the case in British strategic thinking.

What is obvious to Anglo-Saxon strategists, however, is contested within large parts of the German political and military elite. In fact, not only is the term ‘counterinsurgency’ alien to German political debate, even those in the military and the strategic community who discuss COIN predominantly perceive it as an operational concept for the military. Further, the concept of ‘counterinsurgency’ is perceived in the German political arena with a high degree of scepticism. Disregarding the complexity of the Anglo-Saxon approach to COIN as a strategy “applying all elements of national power”, many politicians and analysts portray COIN as an US-driven doctrine that emphasises the use of offensive military force. Instead, German key stakeholders prefer the term “comprehensive approach” when talking about strategy for Afghanistan, and perceive COIN as a kinetic aspect of the overall campaign.

Further, for the German political elite COIN does not fit into their preferred model of conflict and the tasks to be conducted by the *Bundeswehr*. “Small wars” does not belong to the vocabulary of German strategic decision-makers. Despite having deployed to operations both within and beyond Europe after the end of the Cold War, German political elites still have reservation about using military power in offensive ways.³ Instead, military force ideally should be used in a defensive operational mindset only and as

¹ David Kilcullen, ‘Counter-Insurgency *Redux*’, *Survival*, vol. 48, no. 4 (Winter 2006-07), p. 112.

² General Stanley A. McChrystal, *COMISAF’s Initial Assessment* (Kabul, Afghanistan: Headquarters International Security Assistance Force, 30 August 2009); The White House, ‘Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan’, West Point, 1 December 2009, <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-address-nation-way-forward-afghanistan-and-pakistan>> [Accessed 2 December 2009].

³ T. Noetzel and B. Schreer, ‘All the Way? The Evolution of German Military Power’, *International Affairs*, vol. 84, no. 2 (March 2008), pp. 211-21.

part of a neutral multinational coalition. Put differently, the concept of COIN runs counter to prevailing German political paradigms.

This divide between Germany and most of its allies is more than just an issue of different wording. To the disbelief of many allies, the German political leadership has been reluctant to recognise the primary mission of the NATO-led ISAF in Afghanistan to be a COIN operation. Despite a rapidly deteriorating security situation throughout Afghanistan in recent years, with the insurgents gaining the initiative, the German political elite maintained that the *Bundeswehr's* main mission was primarily a stabilisation operation.

Lack of Top-Down Support

The mismatch between the logic of COIN and the German concept of the use of force is fuelled by additional factors. Unlike many of its allies and partners such as the United States, Great Britain, France and Australia, Germany and the *Bundeswehr* do not have any historical experience with being engaged in a sustained COIN operation. During the Cold War, German military posture in the context of NATO was restricted to territorial defence against the Soviet Union. Deterrence was the major purpose for the armed forces, and doctrine, command and control arrangements as well as force structure were developed accordingly. Only during the 1990s did German forces deploy abroad, with operations in the Balkans being the most challenging until the Afghanistan mission. Lacking any COIN experience, German political and military elites have (mis-)used historical analogies from other countries in current debate as evidence why Western forces can hardly prevail in the Afghan operation. Citing American lessons in Vietnam and the Soviet Union's in Afghanistan, the chances of 'winning' in the Hindu Kush are often said to be low, and large efforts to adjust are considered to be rather futile.

Yet, it is reasonable to assume that German political scepticism towards COIN is also driven by a desire to avoid a debate on the failure of policy. In general, "accepting the existence of an organised insurgency ... has immense political costs".⁴ It would require the German government to acknowledge the failure in political and military strategy of its Afghanistan operation. Adjusting for COIN also requires significant political, financial and personnel investments, including the acceptance of a higher risk of civilian and military casualties. Such willingness, however, has been lacking despite a very different operational reality in Afghanistan. Therefore, efforts to adjust the *Bundeswehr* for COIN take place in an environment where the political leadership does not embrace this concept. There is no 'top-down support' for developing COIN capability, and Germany has been reluctant at the

⁴ Steven Metz, 'Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq', *Washington Quarterly*, vol. 27, no. 1 (Winter 2003-04), p. 26.

political level of NATO to support a greater recognition of COIN as a major challenge for the Atlantic alliance.

Moreover, the political and military leadership in the German Ministry of Defence (MoD) has also not been in full support for readjusting the *Bundeswehr* for COIN. The former Minister of Defence, Franz-Josef Jung did not support the concept given that it threatened to undermine his emphasis on a “comprehensive approach”; and it remains to be seen if his successor, Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg will spend more political capital on pressing for institutional and doctrinal change towards COIN capability. Further, the German military leadership so far also largely has not supported initiatives to direct more resources to this part of the mission spectrum. Given the lack of political support and a culture of strict subordination of military leaders under the guidelines set by politics,⁵ the incentive for the military leadership to advocate for COIN has been rather low. In addition, many members of the senior military leadership do not have any wartime operational experience, especially fighting insurgencies.

Finally, the German MoD suffers from, for the most part, operating with a peacetime management structure using peacetime practices. There is a gap within the ministry between those officers having experienced operational realities in Afghanistan, i.e. facing a sustained insurgency, and those that are concerned with the administration of the armed forces. This internal divide between advocates and critics of investing greater resources in COIN capacities, and the lack of support from the politico-strategic level, contributes to limits in institutional strategy-making capabilities for COIN within the defence bureaucracy.

As a result, there has been a missing link between the German political, strategic, as well as operational and tactical levels when it comes to adaptation for COIN.⁶ Neither at the politico-strategic, nor at the operational level was the *Bundeswehr* ready to meet a growing Afghan insurgency. Yet, as the recent US example in Iraq has demonstrated, success in adjusting for COIN critically depends on linking efforts at these different levels.⁷

Adaptive Armies: The German Case

As shown above, the German ‘setting’ is not supportive of a top-down approach when it comes to adapting the armed forces for COIN. This lack of political pressure to reform had two major implications for the *Bundeswehr*.

⁵ Klaus Naumann, *Einsatz ohne Ziel? Die Politikbedürftigkeit des Militärischen* (Hamburg: Institut für Sozialforschung, 2008).

⁶ T. Noetzel and B. Schreer, ‘Missing Links: The Evolution of German Counterinsurgency Thinking’, *RUSI Journal*, vol. 154, no. 1 (February 2009), pp. 16-22.

⁷ T. Renard and S. Taillard, ‘Between Clausewitz and Mao: Dynamic Evolutions of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq (2003-2008)’, *Small Wars Journal*, 14 October 2008, <<http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/2008/10/between-clausewitz-and-mao/>> [Accessed 25 January 2010].

First, changes towards greater COIN capability at the strategic and institutional level have remained rather fragmentary. Second, the armed forces predominantly rely on bottom-up initiatives for reform, where much has been done in the face of a radically different operational environment in Afghanistan.

THE POLITICO-STRATEGIC LEVEL

To date, the German politico-strategic level continues to display its difficulties in adapting to the COIN challenge. Despite a dramatic change in operational reality in Afghanistan, the government and leading members of Parliament have not drawn the conclusion that the *Bundeswehr* needs to be directed towards COIN or *Aufstandsbekämpfung*, the German equivalent. As indicated above, German political elites emphasise a ‘comprehensive approach’ to be the best strategy—unlike their Anglo-Saxon allies which see COIN as a strategy and comprehensive approach as a means to implement this strategy. Further, the German government maintains that the *Bundeswehr*’s primary mission in Afghanistan is still a stability and reconstruction operation.

Further, COIN as a principle for guiding complex operations like Afghanistan is also not accepted at the bureaucratic level. Unlike in the United States for example, there have been no interagency COIN initiatives with regards to doctrine or structural change.⁸ Ministries involved do not see eye to eye on the nature of the operation. But even the MoD has yet to produce COIN doctrine that could serve as a basis for better interagency COIN coordination. Lacking political resolve to create better interagency institutional structures besets German strategy-making for COIN. The results are ongoing inter-ministerial rivalries and a significant lack of cooperation regarding civilian contributions to military operations. In sum, the German government

lacks a strategic decision-making centre to integrate and to formulate strategy. Authority over the making of strategy is diffuse. Institutional space for strategic decision-making is absent and the development of an inter-ministerial whole-of-government approach to military operations remains an illusion.⁹

The result is that on the inter-ministerial level, Germany has not made significant progress towards interagency coordination on COIN. Change at the institutional level of the MoD has also been rather piecemeal.

The most important development in this area to date has been the establishment of the so-called *Einsatzführungsstab* (Joint Commitment

⁸ See for example US State Department, *U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Guide* (Washington, DC: US Department of State, January 2009).

⁹ Timo Noetzel and Martin Zapfe, ‘NATO and Counterinsurgency: The Case of Germany’, in Christopher M. Schnaubelt (ed.), *Counterinsurgency: The Challenge for NATO Strategy and Operation* (Rome: NATO Defense College, November 2009), p. 135.

Staff). Based on lessons learned from the Afghanistan operation, the new structure aims to minimise the problem of fragmentation of the ministry's strategy-making capabilities. The staff comprises all staff elements relevant for operations and is under direct control of the Chief of Staff (*Generalinspekteur*). This structure will improve decision-making between the leadership of the MoD, other relevant ministries and the Parliament in order to improve interagency co-ordination. The new staff therefore combines civil and military capacities for military operations. While the setting up of the Joint Commitment Staff was highly controversial within the MoD, reflecting the rift between reformers and traditionalists, it nevertheless was an important step towards improved capabilities for operations such as in Afghanistan.

FORCE STRUCTURE

Leadership in the MoD has been slow to adapt force structure for COIN. Many senior military leaders question whether COIN really will become an integral part of the *Bundeswehr's* mission spectrum; particularly in times of increased budget pressure the will to divert scarce resources away from traditional platforms like fighter aircraft and ships for conventional warfare is rather low. Force generation for COIN is therefore quite challenging. While urgent operational requirements for the Afghan operation have long been identified, German defence planning documents for 2009 acknowledged that capabilities for 'robust' missions of the 'stabilisation forces'—which are earmarked for operations against irregular forces—could only be improved in the long run.¹⁰

Further, while the German defence transformation process stresses the principal aim of improving the armed forces' deployability and agility, i.e. to make the *Bundeswehr* more expeditionary, the development of COIN capabilities has remained an under-resourced part of force restructuring. After action reports by German commanders in Afghanistan in 2009 have underlined that the *Bundeswehr* is critically short of capabilities to conduct COIN.¹¹ For example, the Army's seventeen infantry battalions today consist of one light infantry battalion; one battalion-sized regiment of air-mobile infantry; four paratrooper battalions; three mountain infantry battalions; and eight mechanised battalions. In addition, the Air Force (*Luftwaffe*) can deploy two and the Navy (*Marine*) one light battalion for security roles.¹² Therefore, the *Bundeswehr's* capability to conduct COIN operations is significantly restrained with regard to highly specialised infantry which often make the difference in so-called "shape, clear, hold, and build operations".

¹⁰ Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, *Bundeswehrplan 2009* (Bonn: Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, June 2008).

¹¹ See Geopowers, 'Afghanistan III, 18. Kontingentbericht: real', 18 September 2009, <www.geopowers.com/Kriege/inn_kon/afg_kon_III/afg_kon_iii.html#18Kontingent> [Accessed 18 January 2010].

¹² Noetzel and Zapfe, 'NATO and Counterinsurgency', p. 137.

Additionally, the *Bundeswehr* so far has not systematically invested in capabilities to provide field commanders with political and cultural advice on the ground. Moreover, compulsory conscription proves to be an impediment for improving force structure for COIN. Finally, the armed forces lack critical platforms such as strategic and tactical air mobility, assets for close-air support, as well as reconnaissance and surveillance capabilities. Counterinsurgency to date has not been given a high priority in German defence planning.

DOCTRINE

Doctrine constitutes an area where at least some progress has been made if restricted to the Army and not in the context of a joint document. Two existing documents contain at least conceptual fragments for COIN operations. The basic document guiding land force deployment is the Army field manual *Heeresdienstvorschrift (Hdv) 100/100—Truppenführung von Landstreitkräften*.¹³ The document does deal with aspects of ‘small wars’; it does not, however, explicitly deal with COIN. *Hdv 100/100* states that field commanders have to prepare for sudden changes in the operational environment and in the spectrum conflict, including asymmetric threats. Further, the document points to the need to deal with operational concepts such as General Krulak’s famous ‘Three-Block-War’ model which focuses on the soldier being capable of conducting combat operations, peacekeeping, and delivering humanitarian aid simultaneously.¹⁴

Yet, while the document contains some references to COIN it does not formulate a coherent COIN approach for the German armed forces. Rather it establishes as a principle that the primary mission for the ‘stabilisation forces’ is to conduct defensive reconstruction operations.¹⁵ Further, the doctrine appears to have a ‘Balkan-centric’ focus, i.e. it is based on operational experience gained in the Balkans where the spectrum of violence and the behaviour of hostile elements hardly ever moved beyond a relatively stable stabilisation mission. Consequently, while the field manual addresses operations against irregular forces from a tactical perspective it does not discuss irregular warfare as part of an organised insurgency. The

¹³ Inspekteur des Heeres, *Heeresdienstvorschrift 100/100 Truppenführung von Landstreitkräften* (2008).

¹⁴ Charles C. Krulak, ‘The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three Block War’, *Marines Magazine*, January 1999, <www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/usmc/strategic_corporal.htm> [Accessed 18 January 2010].

¹⁵ At the core of German defence transformation are plans to structure the armed forces by 2010 along three categories: ‘intervention forces’ of about 35,000 troops, earmarked for high-intensity conflict in the context of the NATO Response Force and the EU Battlegroups; ‘stabilisation forces’ of about 70,000 troops, designed for stability and reconstruction operations including robust missions; and ‘support forces’ of about 137,500 troops to provide force enablers, logistics and other joint capabilities for operations. Federal Ministry of Defence, *Defence Policy Guidelines* (Berlin: Federal Ministry of Defence, May 2003).

field commander does not receive guidance on how to operate in a COIN environment that is quite different from the 'Balkan' scenario.¹⁶

The second core doctrinal document for the German Army is the 2005 *Einsatzkonzept Operationen gegen irreguläre Kräfte*. This document deals with operations against irregular forces and claims that its approach is equivalent to the Anglo-Saxon COIN concept. However, on closer inspection this does not hold true. The document focuses exclusively on kinetic operations against irregular forces; there is no mention of non-kinetic principles of COIN.¹⁷ Thus, existing *Bundeswehr* doctrine perceives COIN not so much as a strategy but rather as a kinetic military operation. The two documents do not reflect a comprehensive COIN doctrine. Against the background of the Afghan operation and doctrinal developments in allied countries, such as FM 3-24 in the United States, some parts of the military leadership in the German MoD have recognised the conceptual deficits in Army doctrine.

In 2008, work started on a COIN doctrine that would spell out the implications for training, tactics, structure and equipment for this mission spectrum. The document *Konzeptionelle Grundvorstellungen zur Wahrnehmung militärischer Aufgaben im Rahmen von Counterinsurgency*¹⁸ (Conceptual Basic Thoughts Concerning Military Efforts in the Framework of Counterinsurgency) was largely based on NATO COIN doctrine. It stated that COIN will become a crucial element of the *Bundeswehr's* future mission spectrum. The document also laid out the characteristics, dynamics and functions of previous insurgencies, and conclusions for COIN strategy. Moreover, like COIN doctrine of its allies it had a population-centric approach guiding strategic, operational and tactical considerations.

At the same time, crucial elements of a comprehensive COIN doctrine were missing in the document. For instance, there was an emphasis on kinetic military means of COIN operations while civilian aspects are largely neglected. At least three factors account for this deficit. For one, the Army still seems to cling to the notion of COIN being largely a set of military tactics, and not a comprehensive civil-military strategy. Additionally, the civilian ministries were not part of the drafting process, thus preventing the introduction of an interagency approach to COIN operations. These ministries still retain significant scepticism regarding the contribution of civilian capabilities to (offensive) military operations. Finally, as already mentioned there is no political support for a doctrine which supposedly stresses the need for increased offensive military operations in the context of COIN, thereby contradicting German official policy that the *Bundeswehr's*

¹⁶ Noetzel and Zapfe, 'NATO and Counterinsurgency', pp. 138-9.

¹⁷ Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, *Einsatzkonzept Operationen gegen irreguläre Kräfte* (Bonn: Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, 2005).

¹⁸ For the following see in detail Noetzel and Zapfe, 'NATO and Counterinsurgency', pp. 140-2.

primary mission is primarily reconstruction with military force only to be used for the purpose of self-defence.

Despite its shortcomings, had it been approved by the senior military leadership, the document would have constituted a crucial step in developing *Bundeswehr* doctrine for COIN. In the end, however, the lack of support at the strategic level of the *Bundeswehr* led to the almost complete demise of the doctrinal effort. In 2009 the former Chief of Staff, General Schneiderhahn, declined to approve the document, with no apparent efforts having been made by the senior Army leadership after his resignation to rescue the core COIN elements of the concepts. At the time of writing the Germany army still lacks a comprehensive COIN doctrine. Consequently, COIN will not be the guiding principle for German military and civilian capabilities deployed in theatre. Moreover, the doctrinal gap between Germany and its major allies and partners continues to exist, implying a potential for serious misunderstandings during future missions.

THE OPERATIONAL AND TACTICAL LEVEL

In the face of a deteriorating security situation in Northern Afghanistan, the German area of responsibility, commanders in the field reacted to increasing insurgent attacks on patrols, convoys and bases. Bottom-up pressure to adapt for COIN led to several significant changes.

The most important change was a greater willingness to conduct offensive operations against insurgency elements, i.e. to change the *Bundeswehr's* defensive operational mindset. One indicator was the silent dropping of some of the caveats restricting the use of lethal force, which was a prerequisite to conducting 'shape and clear' operations in the context of COIN. Thanks to pressures from field commanders the Rules of Engagement (RoE) for German troops were adjusted during 2009 to allow for the offensive use of lethal force to counter insurgent attacks.¹⁹ Training for German troops earmarked for deployment to Afghanistan was also adjusted to include significant preparation to counter insurgent attacks. German troops have started to change their defensive operational mindset and started to conduct a number of offensive operations against insurgent forces in their Area of Responsibility (AoR).²⁰

However, these missions also demonstrated some of the deficiencies identified above. A German-led operation in the fall of 2007, code-named Harekate Yolo II, displayed many of the endemic problems of the *Bundeswehr's* COIN conduct that continue to restrain its effectiveness at the time of writing this article. The then-commander of RC North, General Dieter

¹⁹ Stefan Löwenstein, 'Deutsche dürfen früher schießen', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 27 July 2009.

²⁰ Nicholas Kulish, 'German Limits on War Are Facing Reality in Afghanistan', *New York Times*, 27 October 2009.

Warnecke, had designed a campaign plan based on comprehensive COIN thinking to prevent Taliban elements to establish control in the provinces of Faryab and Badghis in north-western Afghanistan. The goal was to 'clear' the theatre of operations of the insurgents by using lethal force while simultaneously starting a 'building' phase by using civilian instruments. While German-led ISAF troops and Afghan security forces succeeded in quickly defeating Taliban resistance, the civilian support necessary to fill the vacuum was not forthcoming. Further, the political and strategic leadership in the MoD did not fully endorse this operational concept; subsequently tight operational restrictions were imposed and the Commander RC North was not put in a position to provide for a long-term troop presence. Instead, forces were removed from the area after the end of combat operations. Consequently, integrated civil-military *quick impact projects* to produce a rapid improvement in local security and economic conditions could not be realised. Even worse, the Taliban were able to reassert control over the provinces; particularly Badghis province which experienced a dramatic increase in violent insurgent activities.²¹

Despite bottom-up initiatives to develop better operational and tactical capability for COIN the *Bundeswehr* continues to be hampered a number of shortfalls. Despite political rhetoric about a 'comprehensive approach', German bureaucracies are unable to provide for integrated civil-military operations in Afghanistan. There simply is no interagency coordination on COIN that could be brought to bear on the ground. Further, the *Bundeswehr* lacks critical shortages in both personnel and equipment to conduct sustained offensive operations against insurgents. Not much progress has been made in these two crucial areas of COIN. Yet, most significantly resistance on the political and strategic level of German strategy-making will serve as important brakes for bottom-up initiatives.

Conclusions and Outlook

COIN has become an operational reality for German troops in Afghanistan. As a consequence, pressure to adjust the armed forces has increased, particularly driven by bottom-up initiatives of field commanders. Efforts within NATO to improve capabilities for COIN operations have added to that. As shown, a number of changes were introduced on all levels of the *Bundeswehr*. Yet, significant obstacles to a comprehensive COIN posture remain. The most severe of those is the lack of political/civilian support for an interagency approach to COIN. COIN as strategy is not accepted at the political level; this essentially would require a changing German approach to the use of military power, one that recognises that participating in 'small wars' is sometimes a necessity to pursue national interests. German COIN thinking in an Anglo-Saxon sense can only evolve when there is a link

²¹ Noetzel and Schreer, 'Missing Links'.

between the political, civilian and the military sector involved in making and executing strategy for military operations.

Further, without strong top-down pressure for change, stronger support with the senior military leadership will probably not emerge. A joint concept for COIN does not exist, and even within the Army leadership there is a constant battle over resources. The deficits in doctrinal documents outlined above are indicative of a fragmented German thinking on COIN. Moreover, there is a growing belief among the political and military elite in Berlin that Afghanistan might reflect an exception rather than the norm of future German military deployment. As a result, the pressure for more change may become even lower.

The next eighteen to twenty-four months in Afghanistan will be a litmus test of Germany's approach to COIN. US-President Barack Obama on 1 December 2009 outlined a new US strategy for Afghanistan (and Pakistan). In his address to the nation, he basically described the main pillars of a COIN strategy to turn the tide at the Hindu Kush: (1) a military strategy to reverse the Taliban momentum; (2) a civilian 'surge' to strengthening the credibility and effectiveness of the central government in Kabul; and (3) the development of more comprehensive relations with Pakistan at all levels.²² Obama largely followed the advice given by the COMISAF, General Stanley McChrystal who in his interim assessment of August 2009 had advocated for a strategy based on 'shape, clear, hold and build' operations, and who had demanded much more risk-taking on part of allies and partners.²³ Importantly, the new US strategy contains all the elements that some allies, including Germany, had demanded, particularly with regard to civilian aspects. The COMISAF called on the *Bundeswehr* to change its operational conduct in Afghanistan, including a willingness to expose troops to greater risks to contribute more effectively to a population-centric strategy. The general also demanded more German troops to regain the initiative in RC North.²⁴

Will German contributions meet this test? In all likelihood, the picture will be rather mixed. Leading German politicians, including Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle, have made it clear that they are sceptical of sending additional combat troops to Afghanistan.²⁵ The Defence Minister, Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg called demands for additional 2500 German combat troops unrealistic.²⁶ At the same time he indicated that German forces might

²² The White House, 'Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan'.

²³ McChrystal, COMISAF's Initial Assessment.

²⁴ Matthias Gebauer, 'Isaf-Chef fordert neue Bundeswehrstrategie', *Spiegel* (online), 20 January 2010.

²⁵ 'Westerwelle droht mit Boykott der Afghanistan-Konferenz', *Spiegel* (online), 28 December 2009.

²⁶ 'Guttenberg blockt US-Truppenwünsche ab', *Spiegel* (online), 6 January 2010.

change their way of training Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). Responding to the COMISAF's demands for a change in German operational tactics, the minister announced that units might adopt the American model of 'partnering' while training Afghan indigenous security forces. This would require German troops to embed with ANSF and to operate with them, including in dangerous offensive operations against the insurgents.²⁷

Thus, the German contribution to the new US/NATO strategy for Afghanistan will probably focus on efforts in the area of training indigenous forces. This constitutes one vital part of allied COIN strategy and, even more importantly, is far less controversial back home. That said, German troops will hardly be able to significantly contribute to the remaining elements of that strategy. It is difficult to imagine that more civilian capabilities will be provided as part of an interagency COIN strategy, despite political rhetoric stressing the civilian aspect of the overall campaign. Likewise, German troops will continue to face substantial constraints on conducting sustained offensive operations. In short, the *Bundeswehr* will politically and institutionally not be able to contribute effectively to a 'shape, clear, hold, and build' operation—a core concept of the COMISAF's military strategy over the coming months. Aware of German constraints, General McChrystal has sent 2500 US troops into the German AoR to train the Afghan National Army and to conduct offensive operations against the Taliban. The US military has established a forward operating base at Kunduz Airport, four times the size of the nearby German camp.²⁸ Allies and partners, including Australia, will have to live with the fact that COIN is still largely alien to current German strategic thinking. Attempts to adjust at the operational and tactical level will continue, but will remain limited given the lack of support at the political and strategic level.

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²⁷ Matthias Gebauer, 'McChrystals Strategie-Appell. Gutenberg will in Afghanistan mehr riskieren', *Spiegel* (online), 20 January 2010.

²⁸ Matthias Gebauer, 'USA schicken 2500 Soldaten in Bundeswehrgebiet', *Spiegel* (online), 4 January 2010.