



ATLANTIC MEMO # 3

Afghanistan Mission: A Hard Sell in Germany

Members of the Atlantic Community question German participation in OEF, support ISAF and want increased emphasis on social issues in Afghanistan. The German Bundestag will soon decide whether to renew the three mandates that currently engage the Bundeswehr in Afghanistan: OEF, ISAF, and the Tornado surveillance mission.

These are the four main policy recommendations from the authors and commenters on Atlantic Community:

1. Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) is in doubt.

Of all the mandates, OEF has been questioned the most, although German participation is minimal. The focus is on OEF's legitimacy: NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer and German MPs Ruprecht Polenz, Werner Hoyer, and Gert Weisskirchen all question whether ISAF could take over OEF's mandate to fight the Taliban. G.M. Roper argues that pulling German troops out of OEF would send a signal of weakness to the Taliban and weaken the international alliance in the fight against terror. But German MP Niels Annen asks how long the right of self-defense should hold. SWP researcher Markus Kaim adds that OEF and ISAF have become difficult to distinguish from one another. At the Atlantic Initiative's "Atlantic Happy Hour," Norman Paech therefore called for an end to both OEF and ISAF and Kerstin Müller suggested that the mandates be merged.

2. There are reasons to keep going.

Most authors agree that all three missions should be kept up in Afghanistan, but members of the Atlantic Community show dissension in their comments. Most of the American and Canadian authors point out that a decision to pull German troops out would severely damage transatlantic relations: Roper warns that the United States could turn away from Germany in times of need. And David Haglund declares that Canadians are already alienated by their ally; they are taking a large risk in Afghanistan, while Germany is not.

3. Civil projects are key.

Although policymakers point out successes in Afghanistan—Weisskirchen, for instance, hopes for a reduced military presence once the Afghan Compact is realized in 2010—many Atlantic Community members disagree, demanding a stronger focus on social issues. As military tools can only "buy time to prepare political solutions," in Annen's words, commenter Hauss recommends accepting the tribal Afghan society as-is and giving Karzai the authority he needs to rule the country. Michael John Williams comments that more troops to stabilize the country cannot be the solution. As Kaim writes, the focus must lie on building up a police force through EUPOL and an Afghan National Army that can keep up security. Decision-makers (Annen, Müller) and commenters (Vollmer, Hauss) agree that stabilization is only possible in the long-term if civil concerns are also a priority.

4. Should there be German troops in the South?

Recently, German NATO allies and the Secretary-General himself have repeatedly asked Germany to deploy troops in areas other than the North to help fight against the Taliban. Authors Roper and Haglund both emphasize that Germany is rarely involved in combat missions and is focused instead on reconstruction and peacekeeping. Germany has been reluctant to send troops to the South and Karsten D. Voigt reminds readers that according to the mandate, Germany's role was to deploy troops in the North; leaving would destabilize the area. Williams disagrees, asserting that the mandate must change according to the Afghani situation. Rafael Pantucci adds that since ISAF is an allied effort, it would be irresponsible for Germany to simply wait for the mission to collapse somewhere else.

Atlantische Initiative e.V.

Wilhelmstraße 67
10117 Berlin
GermanyTel: +49.30.206 337 88
Fax: +49.30.206 337 90**Atlantic Memo Contributors**Authors:NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer
Niels Annen, Social Democratic Party, Member of the German Bundestag
David G. Haglund, Queens University
Markus Kaim, SWP
GM Roper, Valley Counseling Centers
Karsten D. Voigt, Auswärtiges AmtCommenters:William C. Curtis, Lieutenant Colonel, U.S. Marine Corps (ret.)
Oliver Hauss, Independent
Raffaello Pantucci, International Institute for Strategic Studies
David Vollmer, University of Mannheim
Michael John Williams, Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies

Atlantic Memos showcase the best ideas and arguments from debates in the Open Think Tank on atlantic-community.org. All policy recommendations in this document were made registered members of the Atlantic Community.