

Possibilities of Cooperation in the Central Asian Region Between Major Regional and Global Actors

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I.

When looking for possibilities for cooperation in Central Asia one must be aware that we are confronted there with a situation that is determined by new uncertainties, by illegal migration, by transnational crime, terrorism and drug trafficking, by asymmetric threats and strategic risks of the globalization.

The global Islamic terrorism, the Djihad terrorism, stands in the forefront of dangerous developments – pursuing three objectives. This terrorism will ideologically interlink action fields in North Africa, in the Near East, Central Asia and on the Indian Sub continent. This terrorism will give ethnic conflicts an Islamic dimension. And finally this terrorism will exploit cooperation with organized crime, money laundering, drug trafficking and trade of men and women.

This situation proves the thesis that the stabilization of conflict regions cannot be limited to military interventions. The new forms of terror and conflict do express an attack on the world order and require a broad and imaginative strategy that brings all dimensions to bear – the political, the diplomatic, the cultural and economic dimension - and military interventions as last resort. All the new challenges are fundamentally transnational. For this reason, they need to be countered with the most energetic mobilization of resources for international cooperation.

II.

60 % of global energy reserves are concentrated within a circle of 3000 km around Teheran; but this circle does also contain the most dangerous potential for conflict. The unpredictable political leaders of Iran and their ambitious nuclear program give reason for grave concern.

The international community is decided to deny Iran the access to nuclear weapons. In order to come to a political solution one has to understand the Iranian motive for the nuclear ambitions. Iran feels encircled by nuclear powers, by US presence in Iraq, Turkey and Afghanistan and by increasing instability in the region. The government of Iran - supported

by the Iranian people - is firmly decided to stick to the legitimate right of peaceful use of nuclear technology. Iran wants security in a destabilized region

So far all talks with the Iranian government have been *solely focused on transparency and denial* and on the related question whether Iran is trying to get nuclear weapons and to prove this suspicion. It may be that Iran wants to be able to build the bomb without actually doing it. Iran would become sort of a “nuclear power in being”. Other countries like Brazil do have this kind of status; and Iran is trying to cooperate closely with these threshold states.

Further talks with Iran should be based on a wider approach. The security situation of the entire region has to be taken into account. – including the future *cooperation with Iran on Afghanistan*. Everybody knows: there will be no regional stability without Iran.

The US is also well advised not to count too much on a military option. This option will not lead to a solution. One must not be a strategic genius in order to fore see Iran`s reactions on airstrikes: attacks on US forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, a blockade of the Strait of Hormuz and the complete cut of oil flow from the Arabian Gulf – not to speak about terrorist attacks and an immediate solidarity of neighboring Arabic countries.

A solution of the crisis has to give something to everybody: no Iranian nuclear options, but also security for Iran in a potentially threatening neighborhood. With other words: Security against Iran demands security for Iran.

III.

During the last months we have heard alarming news from Afghanistan. NATO`s ISAF troops can guarantee security and public order only on a very limited scale. The radical Islamic Taliban have expanded their influence and are present on more than 70 % of the territory. NATO has suffered from many victims and that had and has an impact on the public acceptance of the war in Afghanistan – not only in Germany, but also elsewhere. Canada has decided to leave Afghanistan until 2011. Dutch troops will leave in July 2010.

Now a substantial collective effort is aiming to achieve in the next two years as much stability and security as possible for the Afghan people.

Some developments complement each other in a very negative way - like the relationship between the Taliban, the international drug cartels and Al Qaida in the region. The situation in Pakistan does complicate the whole situation enormously. It is difficult to stabilize a country that is divided by ethnic conflicts and rivalries between war lords. The drug problem is adding a particular dangerous dimension. The international organized crime has enforced instability in Afghanistan since many years. Today about 92 % of the global demand for heroine is coming from Afghanistan. Taliban, war lords and even parts of the government are protecting the heroine production that creates enormous economic values. Drug cartels and Taliban are mutually supporting each other in an un-holy alliance. In plain language: Afghanistan is a corrupt country run by drug cartels.

The new strategy for Afghanistan has therefore to focus on the development of the country and on the fight against poppy cultivation. The Foreign Relations Committee of the US Senate has underlined that the Talban cannot be defeated and the Afghan government cannot function unless the flow of money that stems from the drug industry will be stopped.

The radical Taliban which amount to about 8000 fighters pursue a national objective in contrast to Al Qaida that is internationally oriented. They want to create a caliphate run by fundamentalists. Such a development would certainly have a catastrophic impact on the role of Muslims in Pakistan and India.

IV.

Any new strategy should not be limited to Afghanistan proper but should be widened to a regional approach. Regional neighbouring countries have to be included – of course Pakistan, but also Russia, China, India and Iran. Iran is very interested to get refugee migration and drug trafficking under control.

The political and strategic situation in the wider Middle East in general and on the Indian subcontinent in particular is determined by the danger of destabilization. The whole region could be destabilized by cross border terrorism, ethnic and religious rivalries and weak governments which are not able to cope with new challenges. The attacks on Mumbai in November 2008 had a wide ranging effect on Indian policy. This terrorist attack had a new quality because it was perceived as an armed aggression in an asymmetric war. As a consequence the overall security situation in South Asia has decreased severely and is now similar to the situation in the Near East. Islamic terror does now stretch from the Mediterranean region to Myanmar.

The Indian government does not hesitate to say that Pakistan seems to be a failed state. But Indian crisis management does pursue several options simultaneously – being prepared for the worst but also being ready for a constructive dialogue with Pakistan – well knowing that the Pakistan army as well as the intelligence service are hardly under political control. The most dangerous scenario, however, is access to nuclear weapons by terrorists. And that has to be avoided by all means.

V.

With view to our security we have to answer the question – what can we do in order to master the challenges in the Southern Arc of Crisis. There Europe, the United States and Russia have common interests – since we all are challenged by the same problems like terrorism, the growing threat by missiles with nuclear war heads, by proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the instability of the region as a whole.

And how does NATO react? Does the Alliance contribute to the Near East peace process? Does NATO pursue a comprehensive regional strategy in order to stabilize Afghanistan *and* Pakistan? What does the precarious security situation in India mean for Europe? Why is NATO so slow and reluctant to engage in a constructive dialogue with Russia on the future security architecture in Europe? It is obvious: the Alliance needs more visionary leadership and must make a serious effort to regain a credible public profile. NATO urgently needs strategic orientation.

In the context of a multi polar world NATO should understand itself as a strategic clamp of the three power groups which are confronted with common challenges – America, Europe and Russia. Common challenges in the Wider Middle East require common responses. Russia should be invited to participate in this effort in order to contribute to a joint approach. Russia

should be encouraged to live up to this role as a strategic partner sharing common interests, common strategic principles and a joint responsibility. At stake is how to enhance stability in a region that is determined by the most dangerous potential for crisis and conflict and harbors at the same time the biggest energy reserves on earth.

Central Asia harbors all ingredients for crisis and conflict: almost unlimited energy reserves, a vast potential for ethnic and religious disputes, Islamic fundamentalists and also conflicting interests of the engaging world powers. Whoever is playing with that powder cag has lost from the very beginning. To make Georgia member of NATO would be such a temptation. We have no vital interest in Georgia that has to be defended militarily. In this context it becomes obvious that NATO should not open her doors for countries which are not mature for membership and do not contribute to common security and regional stability but would rather become a burden.

NATO urgently needs to establish a new consensus. Otherwise we will neither come to terms with common challenges like how to cope with the Iranian nuclear issue or with the urging question how to deal with Russia. Right now Europe is divided on this issue. Most East European states define their security mostly in terms of protection against Russia and many of them even want NATO to draw up specific plans for defense against Russia. This attitude is in direct conflict with Germany's interest of entangling Russia in partnership rather than confronting it. NATO needs a new political strategy in order to master the challenges of tomorrow. Globalization is not only an economic phenomenon but is also relevant for the global challenges to our security. This development can only be mastered by a concept of international burden sharing, in which specific capabilities for crisis management are tied to regional responsibilities. Afghanistan is the best example. Henry Kissinger has rightly pointed out, that the country has powerful neighbors or near neighbors – Pakistan, India, China, Russia, Iran. Each one has substantial capabilities to defend interests against threats emerging in Afghanistan. But they all have chosen to stand more or less aloof. This leads to the conclusion that international organizations have to coordinate their strategies. Russia, China and the countries in Central Asia do coordinate their policies on energy and counter-terrorism in the Shanghai Organization for Cooperation. They see the drug industry as the most important problem not only for Afghanistan but also for the region as a whole. We are well advised to share this view.

Remarks: Opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author.

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