**Introduction**

The dramatic events in Afghanistan twenty years after the attacks in New York and Washington, that were the trigger for the intervention of the international community in the first place, obviously raise questions about long term and short term CT strategies.

Short term firstly because there is good reason for the concern that Afghanistan may again turn into a safe haven for AQ and related terrorist organisations. And secondly because Afghanistan may become a new and attractive theatre for ISIS fighters and their activities. Long term because the failure of the intervention in Afghanistan exposes some of the weaknesses of the existing counter terrorism approaches. The amount of money spent in Afghanistan over the period of twenty years was clearly not the obstacle. Resources were not scarce. On the contrary. The figures are astonishing. So it must be the policy choices or the way in which the money was spent. A couple of observations are key in this respect.

1. The Taliban managed to win hearts and minds of a large chunk of the population over the last decade(s). Unlike the foreign actors and the newly installed government, they were able to gain the necessary local support. This fact contains an important lesson for any future approach.
2. The official government was (perceived as) corrupt and unjust and seen as serving their own or foreign interests. Poor governance, corruption and foreign interests are common drivers for traction of political violent organisations, Facts that should be taken in serious consideration in any future CT approach. The acts of governments are as relevant as the acts of non-state actors. A factor often ignored in P/CVE actions plans and approaches.
3. Many high ranking officials who served in Afghanistan have indicated that a lack of proper understanding of the Afghan reality is one of the main reasons why the intervention has failed. Understanding the environment is key to any intervention in a conflict zone.
4. A military approach is much more effective in an environment where the opponent is a State actor. Fighting a non-state actor with an army is hardly ever successful. A lesson that has implications for future CT approaches.
5. The position of Pakistan in the region is of extreme importance for the political realities and conflict dynamics in Afghanistan. For a number of historic and contemporary reasons this fact has not been properly taken into consideration or addressed. It became clear for instance that Taliban fighters and supporters have recently joined the Taliban rulers in Afghanistan from neighbouring Pakistan.

Any future approach should therefore focus on (1) nonmilitary means and approaches, should focus (2) on winning the hearts and minds of the population, should (3) take government actions, faults and failures to deliver justice and services into account, should (4) be rooted in sound knowledge of the local realities plus conflict dynamics and should (5) take the position and developments of neighbouring states into account.

These pillars on which a security paradigm must be constructed are important to keep in mind when defining long term policies, also for Afghanistan and the region.

Any choices for short term approaches should not contradict these long term strategic orientations. On the contrary, the short term choices that are inspired by immediate European security considerations, should follow the same logic and should ideally prepare the ground for future -long term- strategic options. If not this may boomerang in terms of credibility and trust and it may proof ineffective in the long run. The most immediate security headaches are the potential surge in ISIS activities and the movement of fighters between countries in the region and from the region into Europe.

**Short term**

Since direct CT cooperation with the de facto government of Afghanistan is complex -if not impossible- intel exchanges with informed players for instance in the Gulf and the `Stans` is second best and should be a priority. This may open doors and create the necessary ties for future cooperation.

Since the presence and tactics of ISIS are a shared concern, it is advised to explore possibilities to open channels of communication with the `de facto` government of Afghanistan on these security related issues.

At the same time exploring further future options for soft power (P/CVE) cooperation with relevant players in the region (Pakistan and the Northern Stans) should be prioritised.

Cooperation in the area of border control should be a explored and initiated or enhanced as a matter of priority.

Prevention of radicalisation in vulnerable refugee situations and assistance for recipient countries to ensure that vulnerabilities are addressed and resilience is build where it matters most.

**Long term**

* Investment is required in expertise and understanding of conflict dynamics and local interests in (political) developments. This includes:
  1. Drug production and trade and other aspects of the (potential) economic drivers of local conflicts;
  2. The India/Pakistan animosity and the situation in Kashmir plus radicalisation in the STAN Region;
  3. Activities of recruiters and other brokers of violence and hate speech
  4. Bad governance, corruption and lack of government services (including security and justice);
  5. Abuse of (government) power by security actors or other civil servants
  6. Gender aspects and violence against woman also in relation to masculinity and traditional values;
  7. Local mechanisms of conflict resolution and local perceptions of justice;
  8. All aspects of human security and resilience in both Pakistan and Afghanistan.
* Investment is required in early warning mechanism on different levels:
  1. Strategic early warning (political developments, analysing push and pull factors);
  2. Early warning in terms of incidents and patterns related signals that may contain elements for a necessary early action;

* 1. Early warning in terms of individuals at risk of radicalisation and identification of hotbeds of radicalisation.
* Investment in nonmilitary approaches of counter terrorism is a must. The choice of all these actions should be based on a proper analyses of root causes This includes:

1. Resilience building measures at the community level;
2. Deradicalization programs;
3. Addressing hate speech;
4. Protection of targets;
5. Small arms and explosives control;
6. Addressing economic factors like drug trade and other illegal activities that sponsor conflicts.

* Investment in all aspects of governance to improve government-public relations is key;

1. Improve justice and other service delivery systems;
2. Promote effective local conflict resolution mechanisms and local inclusive justice mechanisms;
3. Address human rights abuses by security apparatus;
4. Focus on government actions that induce radicalisation for example violations of Human rights, corruption or bad governance.

* Investment in the region and in conflict resolution/mediation and prevention from a regional rather than a purely national perspective is preferred. Working for instance on reduction of the tensions between India and Pakistan is as relevant as the internal dynamics in Afghanistan itself for any lasting peace and stability to develop. In other words, invest in initiatives that address the Kashmir conflict. The `Stans` north of Afghanistan may also play a key role in this respect. Their position and the developments in these countries may define the security situation in parts of Afghanistan.

**In Conclusion**

Recent developments in and around Afghanistan have proven that, even though there seems to be a need to act quickly, investing in local expertise, early warning and analyses is equally important. Twenty years of GWOT have proven that it is more effective to profoundly understand the environment than to assume that we understand the issues and know the answers.

Local knowledge is clearly not lacking. It is tapping into that knowledge that is the challenge. To get access to such knowledge there is a need for cooperation on many different levels:

1. Intelligence and information sharing;
2. As always it is important to look into donor coordination mechanisms;
3. It is obvious that the Netherlands should work closely with the EU and the UN;
4. Security actors should step out of their silos and work with development actors and humanitarians;
5. Local CSO`s and community based organisations understand local dynamics and human security concerns and are a good source of information and partners for cooperation;
6. Localise the information and expertise exchange by connecting those that are working on soft power approaches in the region by creating networks of actors and use the successful EU RAN model as an inspiration.

Peter Knoope

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