

## Newsletter, April 22, 2021

Dear Friends,

So that you don't miss it, I'll put something organizational at the beginning: we have problems with the mailing of these newsletters. They are sent by wix.com, the company that also takes care of our homepage. The sender is therefore wix.com. Wix.com is a large, international company. Many companies that send unsolicited advertisements or more dubious things do so via wix.com. As a result, many recipients block their e-mail from being sent from this sender. In such cases, we are informed that the mail cannot be delivered. Therefore, we got our own address ofarin.org at wix.com. The newsletters are now sent with this address. Unfortunately, this has not improved the mailing. It is hard to see a pattern of who is blocking receipt and why. Often this are addresses that reveal names of organizations after the @, like info@ofarin.de. Otherwise, especially t-online.de is notorious. T-online always blocks some of its addresses for ofarin.org, usually not all. Negotiations with them showed that they don't know why and what they could do. We were neither surprised nor pleased by this information. t-online.de has deep roots in the stagecoach era and will still need decades until it reaches the 19th century. But who changes the provider just because of our newsletters? The effort to switch all contacts to a new e-mail address cost a lot of money and certainly causes losses. Unfortunately, we have a t-online address ourselves. But when a good fifth of around 600 circulars are reported to us as undeliverable and we have to resend this fifth "on foot", i.e. as an attachment to e-mails, then we are pissed off. Therefore, the request to all who have a special e-mail address to check your spam filters and other protection devices and possibly unlock them for ofarin.org. Maybe someone can even help us who knows how we can send newsletters without this hassle.

Now I have a confession to make. So far we have paid out a good 2,600 € for Corona aid to our teachers and students. We had not accrued the income for this against the other income for the schools, because in many cases it was not clear what had been donated for. Surely more than 2600 € of the donations were "meant" for Corona-help.

Now it has been reported that our seven year old student Beheshta has had an injured eye for some time, probably the result of a quarrel with older siblings. In Afghanistan an operation was not possible. The father brought his daughter to Pakistan.



But there he could not pay for the operation. Father and daughter returned to Kabul without having achieved anything. Now the eye hurts again and bleeds. OFARIN was asked to help finance treatment. Five years ago, we had the eyes of all teachers and students tested and treated if necessary. Since then, OFARIN has also been considered responsible for the eyes. I have agreed that we will cover costs up to 2000 € for a treatment. If a treatment is still useful now, this amount is probably not sufficient. Father and daughter will travel to Pakistan accompanied by an employee of OFARIN and visit an ophthalmologist there. After that we will decide what we can do. The father is employed by a company as a cleaner and can only now, in Ramadan, get the necessary leave. A treatment would surely consume the remaining Corona funds, if we had determined them. We will report on further developments.

In previous newsletters, I had commented several times on the decision to withdraw U.S. and allied troops from Afghanistan. I had hoped that the Biden administration would take the time to reconsider the modalities of this withdrawal. But I guess that was no longer possible. The twittering wrecking ball had done too much damage worldwide. The new government cannot patch up all the damage at once.

At first glance, Afghanistan is not the Biden administration's most important construction site. The troop withdrawal that Donald Trump had heralded was already too far advanced. It was no longer possible to extend it by the period of time that would have been necessary for a reasonable solution to the problems. Thus, after a brief hesitation, the Biden administration decided not to make any more significant changes to Donald Trump's withdrawal plan.

Even Trump's negotiator, the shady Zalmay Khalilzad, who had already done damage in 2002 as special envoy for President Bush Jr. in Afghanistan, the country of his ancestors, was no longer replaced by President Biden.

The United States certainly could not have settled all the region's problems. But getting the Kabul government and the Taliban to come to an arrangement would have been worthy of a serious attempt.

Gerd Müller, the German Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development, assured the audience that Germany would continue to provide civilian support to the Afghan government. After all that Germany has shown in this area over the past 20 years, this is not necessarily good news. Germany has spent a lot of money on Afghanistan, no question. Every year, hundreds of millions of dollars have been given to Afghan contractors with virtually no serious oversight. This has fueled tremendous corruption and helped a number of Afghan oligarchs to fabulous real estate holdings in the Gulf states. It would be good to drastically reduce this aid to a level that can be strictly and seriously controlled by German authorities.

German Foreign Minister Maaß wants to make humanitarian aid conditional on the success of intra-Afghan peace talks. There is a lot of talk now.

Will the Taliban win autocracy and then reassert Taliban principles as they did until 2001? Women who do not leave the house fully veiled are beaten with electric cables. They are not allowed to work. Girls are not allowed to go to school. Men who maintain their beards or even shave are imprisoned. Music is

forbidden. Anyone who owns phonograms is jailed. No photos are allowed except passport photos.

One cannot rule out that it will happen again. If it does, the U.S. and the countries that are just withdrawing their troops will not be able to enjoy for long the relief they are getting from the withdrawal. Afghans will leave their homes in large numbers and seek refuge in Asia, as well as in Europe. China in the east of Afghanistan cannot afford a radical Islamic neighbor beyond its Islamic western territories. Shiite Iran in the west will not tolerate a radical Sunni neighbor to its east. Both countries will use military means against the Taliban sooner rather than later. Pakistan will be Afghanistan's sole support - better: colonial protectorate power. Any support for the Taliban regime from radical donors, as once provided by Osama bin Laden, will be most welcome. The U.S. will have no means to prevent hotbeds of terrorism from settling in Afghanistan.

But why did the Taliban present such a terrible picture when they dominated Afghanistan until 2001? The Taliban movement was assembled by Pakistan's ISI intelligence agency primarily from Afghan refugees. The ISI imbued the movement with a radical Islamic ideology. This was supposed to give it the aura of special piety among Afghanistan's conservative rural population. But it was also intended to keep Afghanistan backward and isolated from developed countries. The Taliban had to adopt this ideology because they were totally dependent on Pakistani support. Even then, the Taliban's relationship with Pakistan was anything but a matter of the heart.

Now the Taliban are supplied with weapons and are not heavily dependent on Pakistan. They can have no interest in making an enemy of Iran or China and isolating themselves from other countries. They would do well to keep open the option of an arrangement with the Kabul government. The role of the Islamist bogeyman does not fit the current situation.

Afghanistan still has the warring faction of the Da'esh, or "Islamic State." In Afghanistan, it is assumed that the "Islamic State" has nothing to do with the movement of the same name that has been raging in Syria and Iraq. Rather, it is believed that the Afghan Da'esh were also created by the ISI. For more on this, see previous newsletters. In any case, the Taliban and the Da'esh are deeply hostile.

The Taliban are currently acting resolutely, refusing to negotiate peace with the government while U.S. troops are still in the country, and the government is

countering with bellicose determination, also blaming the Da'esh attacks on the Taliban. One can hope that both warring parties will begin to seriously consider an arrangement. This need not be done in public. The Western powers may well be helpful in this regard, even if they are virtually absent militarily. Much will depend on the extent to which Taliban supporters have internalized the Taliban principles enumerated above. I have come to know the Taliban as a very heterogeneous organization whose members tend to act pragmatically.

Even before 2001, most Taliban perceived their ties to Pakistan as a necessary evil. If this evil proves to be no longer necessary, there will also be no need to uphold Taliban principles. Pakistan might try to retain influence in Afghanistan through the Da'esh, but this is not a permanent prospect.

What does this mean for OFARIN? In the next few months, not much will change in Afghanistan. Later, there will be Taliban participation in power, perhaps sole rule. OFARIN will continue to work under all these constellations. OFARIN started its program during Taliban rule - and at the request of the Taliban. Our program area in Logar province is partially dominated by the Taliban. We expect that the Taliban will not object to our program in the future.

The elementary education that OFARIN provides is urgently needed in Afghanistan. At OFARIN, we have always worked together in a spirit of collegiality and mutual respect. Even in the Taliban era, this was seen as exemplary and inspiring. OFARIN would like to continue to set this example for Afghan society. It is also needed there. There is no reason to give up these important tasks just because there is no longer a Bundeswehr stationed in Mazar-e-Sharif.

Best regards,

Peter Schwittek