

German government approves biggest military intervention since Second World War

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The decision to deploy 3,900 soldiers for the military campaign “against international terrorism” means the Social Democratic-Green Party coalition government is leading Germany into a war whose scope, duration and consequences are immeasurable.

The cabinet decision, which the *Bundestag* (parliament) is set to approve this week, authorizes the government, for the period of one year, to carry out military interventions without specifically fixing their timing, the opponents, the operational area, the number of soldiers assigned in each case and the operations in which they should participate. The government is being given full discretionary powers, while parliament disempowers itself.

The decision is without parallel in post-war German history. Before unification in 1990, the constitution prohibited all military interventions that did not serve the territorial defence of Germany or the NATO alliance against a foreign aggressor. In a sensational decision in 1994, the Federal Constitutional Court smoothed the way for military operations outside the NATO area. But even this decision insisted that every operation required the agreement of the *Bundestag*—a legal prerequisite that is now being annulled, just like the previous limitation restricting military interventions to the areas directly impinging on NATO, such as in the Balkans.

The area of operations cited in the government’s decision includes half the globe. As well as the territory of all NATO members including the USA and Turkey, it especially names “the Arab peninsula, Central Asia and northeast Africa, as well as the adjacent sea areas”.

According to Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, the biggest contingent—approximately 1,800 naval forces, including sea-air forces—would be used in the Horn of Africa, off the coast of Somalia, which has been named most recently as the next target for attack in the “war against terrorism”. German troops could thus be involved in active fighting far quicker than expected.

In addition, an 800-strong ABC (Atomic, Biological, Chemical) defence force is being placed on standby, about which there is no further information as yet, as well as a 250-strong medical corps, 500 air transport troops, 450 from other support units and 100 special forces. The latter is thought to involve members of the elite KSK special commando unit, and might be the first troops engaged in active combat missions.

This unparalleled military operation is being justified by the government as a contribution to the “war against terrorism” and in “solidarity with America”. Both reasons do not stand up to closer examination.

If it really were a matter of fighting terrorism, then the US government would not be reducing one of the poorest countries in the world to rubble, driving millions of civilians to take flight. It would not form an alliance with the very powers who have been terrorising their own population for years—like general Musharraf, who led the Pakistani military putsch; the feudal dictatorship in Saudi Arabia or the Likud-led government of Ariel Sharon in Israel, which has made the targeted murder of the Palestinian leadership official policy. Both can only serve to strengthen the widespread feeling of humiliation, powerlessness and uncontrollable rage against the West, on which the perpetrators of the September 11 attacks rest.

For the American government, the attacks in New York and Washington offered a welcome pretext to strike against governments that it had regarded as a thorn in the side for a long time, with the aim of “ending states”, as Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz explained. It is about the new division of the world after the end of the Cold War with its rigid fronts, it is about political influence, strategic positions, trade routes, pipeline routes, raw materials and oil. In short, it is about a return to the classic policy of colonialism. Political thinktanks and geostrategists had discussed the strategic importance of Central Asia for a long time, before anyone had heard about the Taliban and Osama bin Laden.

German participation in the war does not arise out of solidarity with the USA and certainly not at all with the American people. On the contrary, it is an expression of the rivalry between the two strongest economic powers on either side of the Atlantic. Things should be called by their name: German participation in the war—despite the declarations to the contrary by the chancellor—is exclusively because of Germany’s own interests.

This was already made clear by the fact that the chancellor lied publicly when he said the deployment of 3,900 German soldiers was a response to American requests. Shortly afterwards at a press conference, US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said there had been no specific request by the US government. There had merely been a completely general inquiry, whether German support was possible in five specialist areas. Schröder promptly transformed his own offer into an American demand.

Schröder is pressing forward against his own party and his Green coalition partners. Resistance is growing within both parties the longer the war continues. “The principle of party loyalty is slowly being replaced by a critical discussion about what is the correct

course of action,” the SPD’s foreign policy spokesman Gernot Erler recently stated. Schröder wants to call a halt to this discussion, by forcing the SPD parliamentary faction to decide about entering the war. The chancellor has “seized the initiative” because he wants “peace on the ship” of state, can be heard emanating from government circles.

Schröder and his Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer (Green Party) are insisting on participation in the war because otherwise they fear Germany may lose out in the new division of the world. Their strategic calculation is simple: Only those who keep up militarily can also have a political voice afterwards and remain economically in the game. Therefore they are pushing the USA to accept a German military contribution.

Karsten Voigt, responsible in the government for German-American relations, has frankly admitted this in an interview with the *Berliner Zeitung*. “In America, the only ones to play a role are those partners seen as relevant,” he said. “Because we have also participated militarily, our word has been taken seriously in the peace solution in the Balkans... Naturally only those who now prove themselves as militarily relevant partners can later influence the political set up.”

This course is disputed. First of all in the press, but also within the government parties, voices are gathering which warn about “undying loyalty” and “vassalage” towards the USA. “If Chancellor Schröder and his [Defence Minister] Scharping continue to try and curry favour in Washington, they should not be surprised if they are drawn into the maelstrom of world-wide anger,” warned Rudolf Augstein, chief editor and co-publisher of Germany’s influential newsweekly *Der Spiegel*.

These differences of opinion are of a tactical nature. They turn on the question of how Germany can best assert its interests and anticipate future conflicts with the USA, which will inevitably develop.

War is not compatible with democracy.

Germany’s entry into the First World War coincided with the political disenfranchisement of the population. The political parties, including the SPD, concluded a political truce and pledged not to express their differences any more in public, leading to Kaiser Wilhelm II’s famous words: “I no longer recognise parties, only Germans.” The *Reichstag* (imperial parliament) renounced its right to co-rule, passed an enabling act and adjourned until the end of the war. The military commanders took over responsibility for domestic security and press censorship.

The current decision to enter the Afghanistan war is also being accompanied by a massive assault on democratic rights.

This starts with the practical disenfranchisement of the *Bundestag*, which in agreeing to the cabinet decision gives up any influence concerning the escalation of the war for twelve months. Agreement is considered certain, because both the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) and the Free Democrats (FDP) have signalled their consent. Chancellor Schröder, who won office in 1998 thanks to an unambiguous vote against the outgoing Christian Democrat/Free Democrat coalition, now rests on these parties, in order to silence dissenting voices in the ranks of the SPD. Critics are being placed under massive pressure and intimidation.

In order to push through German participation in the war, and supported by Vice Chancellor Fisher, he is even prepared to conscience the end of the “red-green” coalition, possibly during the next days or weeks, but no later than the next federal election in a year’s time. “If we vote against participating in the war, we fly out of the coalition, and the party breaks apart. If we vote for it, nobody in the rank-and-file will campaign for us in the elections and we will fly out of parliament,” is how one Green Party member described the dilemma facing the party. Fischer himself has threatened to resign if the Greens’ *Bundestag* faction votes against the war.

The Greens have themselves to blame for their present predicament. Rarely before has a party abandoned its campaign pledges and self-declared principles so quickly and thoroughly as the Greens have done since joining the Schröder government. Beginning with the Kosovo war, the former pacifists have agreed to every foreign intervention by the German armed forces and will most probably repeat this in Afghanistan. But under conditions where the initiative to change the government comes from above, it strengthens the rightwing. Schröder and Fischer are clearing the way back to power for the FDP and CDU/CSU, without the voters being able to have any influence on events. Although a widespread mood against the war prevails in the general population, there is scarcely any serious public debate about it. Moreover, both the domestic security packages proposed by Interior Minister Otto Schily provide the police and secret services with extensive powers, enabling them to monitor, intimidate and suppress all those expressing divergent political views.

Taken together, these attacks on democratic rights and the participation in the Afghanistan war represent a much greater threat to the general population and its social and political rights than the fight against terrorism they are supposed to serve. The SPD and Greens have not only proved their complete incapacity to oppose this threat, they have proved themselves essentially more effective in carrying it out than the conservatives, who would have inevitably encountered massive resistance.

The defence of democratic rights and the fight against war require the construction of a new party, which organises working people as an independent force on the basis of an international, socialist programme.



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