

German government sends more troops to Afghanistan

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The recent decision by the German government to increase the number of German troops deployed in Afghanistan and transfer 250 soldiers to the city of Konduz in the north of the country is directly bound up with increasing Afghan resistance to the American occupation.

Armed conflicts with the Taliban and Al Qaeda fighters, some of whom have evidently allied themselves with the rebel warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, have been growing. Last weekend two US soldiers were killed in a shootout in the south of the country. Two months ago, four German soldiers were killed and another 29 injured, many seriously, in an attack on German troops in Kabul.

At present, Germany has around 2,000 troops stationed in Afghanistan and up until now has limited its intervention to the capital city of Kabul. The decision by the so-called “security cabinet” of the German chancellery to expand the German military presence in Afghanistan means that the German army will, at least indirectly, become part of “Operation Warrior Sweep”—the name given to the military offensive by the US army to repulse Afghan resistance. German relief of the US army in the north of the country is aimed at allowing US troops to intensify their military offensive in the south. At the same time, German reinforcements in Afghanistan enable the US to free up troops for its war in Iraq.

At the end of last week, however, both German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (SPD—German Social Democratic Party) and Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer (Green Party) sought to play down this connection. Both men emphasised the civilian character of the German intervention, declaring that the purpose of the mission in the north was to set up civilian assistance in Konduz for the reconstruction of roads, schools and hospitals, as well as to train police. The job of the German army, they said, would be to protect civilian aid workers. In this connection, the German chancellor referred to a “reconstruction dividend” which had to “make itself felt” for the people of Afghanistan. This was the only way to prepare and ensure the success of elections planned for Afghanistan next year.

The chancellor’s propaganda, however, cannot conceal the real aim of German military expansion. When asked at a press conference if the German mission was aimed at helping free up American troops in the troubled regions of eastern and southern Afghanistan to fight in Iraq, the chancellor responded that “one can answer this with no.” Schröder went on to add that there could be no doubt that US troops will “remain active in the country.” According to journalists for the newspaper *Tagesspiegel*, the chancellor’s defensive assertion that US troops would remain in Afghanistan was an indication that the German government does in fact see a very close connection between efforts to establish stability in both Afghanistan and Iraq.

There has been some speculation in German newspapers about an agreement between Berlin and Washington to increase German military involvement in Afghanistan to relieve US troops. In return the US would take into account German interests in Iraq. This, however, has not been officially confirmed. What is clear is that the government of Schröder and

Fischer is doing everything it can by way of offering support to the Bush administration, which urgently needs assistance following a series of setbacks in both Iraq and Afghanistan. At the same time, the German government is using the situation to put pressure on Washington and is seeking a new UN resolution to break the US monopoly in Iraq.

Remarks by the American president two weeks ago praising the “great work of the German army in Afghanistan” were greeted with considerable satisfaction in Berlin. The German chancellery and foreign office also welcomed similar comments made just a few days ago by the head of the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Richard Lugar. Following these comments, Schröder pushed ahead with his plans. He instructed the German defence minister to prepare plans for an expanded intervention in Afghanistan and instead of waiting for the scheduled meeting of the German cabinet, drummed together his “security cabinet” to make public the intention to increase German military presence.

In fact, the “security cabinet” is a non-elected body called together by the chancellor “when necessary in light of the security or political situation” (German government homepage). In addition to the chancellor and the interior and foreign ministers, leading military figures can also be invited to attend the meetings of the cabinet. On this occasion, the meeting was attended by the German minister for economic collaboration and development, Wiczorek-Zeul, who afterwards travelled on to Afghanistan. The speed of the entire operation testifies to Schröder’s readiness to demonstrate his collaboration with Washington and improve his bargaining position prior to a likely personal discussion with the American president at the end of September at a scheduled United Nations gathering.

The northern province in Afghanistan selected for the intervention of the German army plays an important role in the continuing war. The region, which is dominated by Pashtun tribesmen and surrounded by Tadchiki and Uzbek militias, is known to be a hiding place for Taliban fighters. The final unequal battle between the US military and the Taliban took place in Konduz at the end of November 2001. After the battle of Konduz, American troops occupied the fortress of Qala-i-Janghi, killing hundreds of Taliban in the process.

According to eyewitness accounts, several thousand Taliban fighters—figures vary between 3,000 and 8,000—who had surrendered to US and allied forces supported by troops led by local warlord General Raschid Dostum, were subsequently tortured and killed.

Instead of taking up the issue of these war crimes and demanding that those responsible be brought to justice, the German government responded by supporting the American army in occupying and colonising the country.

One and a half years after the official end of the war in Afghanistan, all of the propaganda used to justify the invasion after the terror attacks of September 11, 2001 has long since been disproved. Instead of improving conditions for the people of Afghanistan, as promised, the situation with regard to housing and food has deteriorated. Instead of the promised

democratic reforms, Afghanistan is dominated by feuding local warlords and clan chiefs, who finance their activities with drug dealing, prostitution and bribery.

Konduz lies at the heart of the north-south axis of the country connecting the capital Kabul to the former republic of Tajikistan—a significant route for trade. Trade between the two countries was an important source of finances for the Northern Alliance during its resistance to the Taliban. Today the region is mainly characterised by opium growing. “Heroin ... now under the protection of the German army?”—this was the provocative question posed by the former defence minister Willi Wimmer (CDU—Christian Democratic Union) in a letter to his current counterpart Peter Struck (SPD), warning of the consequences of a military intervention in Konduz.

Political power in the northern province rests in the hands of the Afghan defence minister, Mohammed Fahim, a key figure in the Northern Alliance whose militias were the first to press into Konduz two years ago. On a series of important issues Fahim has stood up to Afghan President Hamid Karzai only then to arrive at a series of high-priced compromises.

The expansion of German military intervention in Afghanistan is aimed not merely at supporting American troops and improving Berlin’s standing with the Bush administration. It is also directed at advancing Germany’s own substantial interests in the region. For some time, German foreign and military policy has paid considerable attention to the extraordinary strategic importance of the country lying between the Indian Ocean and Central Asia and sharing borders with three former Soviet republics—Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan—as well as Iran, Pakistan and China. In the last century, the region had central significance for German colonial policy.

At the beginning of the First World War, foreign ministry diplomats sought unsuccessfully to win over Afghanistan to Germany in its war against the British presence in India. Following the establishment of diplomatic relations between Germany and Afghanistan in 1921, a cultural agreement was concluded between the two countries that led to the foundation of a German school in Kabul, the construction of railways and the dispatch of German technicians to the country. Close economic links towards the end of the 1920s meant that Germany was the single most important western economic and trading partner of Afghanistan.

In March 1933, Adolf Hitler declared his readiness to allow favourable terms for Afghan orders to German companies and guaranteed credits amounting to nearly 2 million reichsmark—a figure which later increased. This was followed by a 15 million mark credit to Afghanistan for military purposes

In December 1939, the National Socialist foreign ministry drew up a general plan for all sectors of the Afghan state and pledged to make German officials available to the Afghan government. In addition, German police officers undertook the reorganisation of the Afghan police and secret intelligence services.

On February 17, 1941, the supreme commander of the German army noted in his diary: “The Fuhrer desires a detailed plan for a deployment in Afghanistan against India to commence at the end of Operation Barbarossa” (the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union). A short while later, Afghanistan was the theme of a discussion in the German general staff, and from the spring of 1941 on the German foreign ministry intensified its preparations for a military offensive in Afghanistan. Only defeat and the end of the war prevented the realisation of German plans.

Following the foundation of the Federal Republic of Germany in 1949, the German concern Siemens-Schuckert received a major contract to complete work on the power station in Sarubi in the east of Afghanistan. Work on the project had already commenced before the war. In 1950, the Federal Republic awarded its first trading credits and one year later the Afghan trade representation was founded in Munich. In 1952, a trading agreement was struck between the two countries.

Between 1962 and 1967, Bonn increased its financial support for Afghanistan in order to win the country to the western alliance in the course of the Cold War. Germany made available credits and loans of 260 million marks. The Afghan head of government at the time, Yussuf, even contemplated an association between his country and the European Economic Community (EEC).

The close economic collaboration was disrupted by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, but economic and political relations were again intensified following the capture of Kabul by the Taliban in September 1996. At the end of 1998, it was announced that Siemens had been in discussion with the Taliban leadership for some time regarding the installation of a new telephone system. The representative of the Taliban in Germany, Nek Muhammad Nekmal, declared that Siemens and the major German chemical concern Hoechst had informed him of their considerable interest in close economic collaboration.

As a consequence, an international consortium was established under German direction—the Afghanistan Development Co. The consortium then sent experts to the region south of Kabul to explore for copper and other mineral deposits. In 1998, with the approval of the German government, the Taliban was able to open up a so-called diplomatic representation in Frankfurt am Main, which issued visas, passports and also spied on the activities of opponents of the regime.

Upon taking power in 1998, the current SPD-Green Party government continued the policy of its conservative predecessor and, according to the television news magazine *ARD-Weltspiegel*, secret talks took place two years ago in the summer of 2001 between government officials and representatives of the Taliban government. This information was made public by the journalist Matin Baraki, who has also written a book on German-Afghan relations (*Die Beziehungen zwischen Afghanistan und der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1945-1978*, Frankfurt/M. 1996).

The expansion of German military operations to Konduz is directly bound up with German business interests and is part of a neo-colonial policy being pursued by Chancellor Schröder and Foreign Minister Fischer under the guise of humanitarian assistance. Irrespective of their previous criticism of the US-led war against Iraq, they are prepared to recklessly plunge into a military adventure when it serves the political and economic interests of German big business.



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