

Three German soldiers killed in Afghanistan

Grand coalition pushes ahead with military deployment

Ulrich Rippert
24 May 2007

The deaths last Saturday of three German soldiers at the hands of a suicide bomber in the northern Afghan city of Kundus make a mockery of the propaganda by the German government that the deployment of its soldiers as part of the ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) mission is first and foremost a “humanitarian enterprise.”

A total of 11 persons died in the blast on Saturday. An additional 5 German soldiers, 1 translator and 16 civilians were injured—some seriously. The suicide bomber self-detonated in direct proximity to the German soldiers, who were conducting a “militarily supervised shopping visit” to a market in Kundus. The soldiers killed were attached to a supply and administrative unit of the German army, which is not trained for fighting. A radical Taliban organisation claimed responsibility for the attack.

The bomb attack had been obviously prepared some time in advance. Press reports spoke of witnesses who said the incident had been filmed to be used for propaganda purposes, an indication the assault—the biggest to be launched on the German army since 2003, when four German soldiers died in Afghanistan—may be part of preparations for further attacks.

The attack must be seen as a direct reaction to the decision by the German government to send Tornado fighter planes to Afghanistan, whose task is to conduct surveillance flights and support American troops active in the south of the country. Although the overwhelming majority of the German population rejected such an expansion of the German war effort (69 percent were opposed, according to an Infratest Dimap poll), the government ignored all the warnings of an increasingly perilous situation in Afghanistan and voted to send its aircraft.

The dead and wounded soldiers are a consequence of the aggressive military policy introduced by the former Social Democratic Party (SPD)-Green Party coalition. The current grand coalition government of the SPD, Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and Christian Social Union (CSU) has considerably intensified this military strategy. The leaders of the coalition responded to this latest blow with a

series of declarations that the German army should not give way. Politicians from all the ruling parties are avidly seeking to stifle any discussion about a possible withdrawal of German troops.

Chancellor Angela Merkel (CDU) declared she had learnt “of this cowardly attack” with “great concern and deep sadness.” “This perfidious murder fills us all with abhorrence and shock,” she said. It should be noted there was no mention of “abhorrence and shock” or “perfidious murder” a few days ago following the deaths of 40 civilians in the south of Afghanistan, who were killed by US bombs relying on information supplied by German Tornados.

Defence Secretary Franz Josef Jung (CDU) immediately rejected any adjustment to the scope of the German mission in Afghanistan. The deadly assault on German soldiers must not serve as cause “for any change to the delineation of tasks,” he said, during a visit to the German army operational centre in Potsdam. The task, he continued, was to increase support for the soldiers instead of debating over the usefulness of their deployment.

At the same time, Jung explained that one had to expect more soldiers’ casualties in the future. German soldiers had to be prepared to accept risks in future arising from their mission in Afghanistan. “Unfortunately, there is no 100 percent protection,” Jung stated.

Similar remarks were made by the chairman of the foreign committee of the Bundestag, Karl Theodor Freiherr zu Guttenberg (CSU): “A withdrawal would be absurd and only increase the danger of international terror. The demands placed upon us and other states will increase.”

The same theme was taken up by the main coalition partner. SPD parliamentary group deputy Walter Kolbow warned against raising any doubts in the few months remaining before the mandate for the German army mission in Afghanistan comes up for renewal. “An extension of the mandate is justifiable—although the incident is very bad, we cannot make our total evaluation dependent upon it,” Kolbow stated.

His party colleague, Foreign Minister Frank-Walter

Steinmeier, flew to Kundus for a visit on Tuesday in an effort to strengthen troop morale. Steinmeier met with soldiers of the German reconstruction team (PRT), who have been active in Kundus since November 2003. “Your work deserves all of our praise. Our country is proud of its reconstruction helpers and soldiers,” Steinmeier told the troops.

The suicide bombing in Kundus has provoked such an anxious reaction by the German government because it destroys the myth that the presence of the German army in Afghanistan is a “peace deployment” aimed at providing “development aid” while protecting a “democratic government” and that it enjoys the sympathy of the local population.

These arguments have been used by both the SPD-Green government and the current grand coalition to counter the widespread opposition to what is the biggest deployment of troops in the history of post-war Germany. Both governments had sought to distance themselves from the military operations of US forces in the south of the country, while at the same time cooperating closely with their transatlantic partner in the context of the ISAF mission and Operation Enduring Freedom. The brutal operations conducted by US troops in the south have so far led to the deaths of thousands of civilians and alleged Taliban fighters—only increasing popular opposition to the occupation troops.

For its part, the Bush administration has urged the German army to intervene in the counterinsurgency in the south instead of limiting itself to patrols in the relatively calmer regions in the north.

Following the Kundus blast, US President George W. Bush stepped up this pressure and once again called for a more forceful intervention by the “European partners” alongside the US. In a meeting with NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer at his ranch in Texas earlier this week, Bush expressed his disapproval at the decision by a number of NATO countries to refuse to make troops available for combat missions to Afghanistan. The partner countries “must assume a larger burden and all must share the same risks,” Bush insisted.

The sending of the Tornado reconnaissance aircraft was a direct response by the Merkel government to pressure from Washington. The bomb blast in Kundus now makes clear that the German army is being drawn into a bloody war of occupation in Afghanistan and that German soldiers are increasingly being seen as enemies and occupiers.

From its outset, the driving force behind the war in this central Asian country was the attempt to realise imperialist aims. Plans for regime change in Afghanistan—a country systematically destroyed by a CIA-sponsored civil war

lasting more than two decades—had been drawn up long before September 11, 2001. The terrorist attacks in New York and Washington served as a pretext for the implementation of these plans by the Bush administration.

Afghanistan is of great importance for strategic access to the oil- and gas-rich central Asian republics of the former Soviet Union. In addition, the occupation of the country was part of the campaign by the US to bring the entire Middle East under its control and in preparation for its offensive against and invasion of Iraq.

The German government could not restrict itself to the role of onlooker. It could not allow the US to dominate a region in which Germany has pursued its own extensive interests for the past hundred years. It therefore decided to participate in the Afghanistan war, although popular opposition was so broad that Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (SPD) only obtained the necessary majority in 2001 to do so by turning the issue into a vote of confidence.

At the end of 2001, then-German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer (Greens) organised a conference near Bonn to secure the installation of the puppet regime led by Hamid Karzai. Karzai is so weak and unpopular that his influence does not extend beyond the capital city of Kabul. He is totally dependent on the imperialist powers and is forced to base his rule on various warlords and drug barons in order to exercise influence in other regions. The protection of the Karzai regime was the most important task assigned to the German army.

Now the true character of this deployment is coming to light. At the same time, the German government is determined not to back down—even if this involves a growing pile of dead soldiers and civilian victims. Chancellor Angela Merkel relies not only on the support of the parties of the grand coalition—the SPD, CDU and CSU—but also on the Greens, who have made clear they are opposed to any withdrawal of German troops.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact