

The German offensive in Afghanistan

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The German army has dramatically intensified its intervention in Afghanistan in the past few days. In the course of a major offensive in northern Afghanistan, it has deployed heavy weaponry including Marder armed personnel carriers and Mörser mortar artillery.

For the first time since Hitler's troops laid waste to large parts of Europe, the German army is again conducting major military operations against "rebellious elements." According to press reports, the 21-cm Mörser 18 was one of the main weapons used by Hitler's Wehrmacht on all of the fronts of the Second World War. Now, the same weapon in its modern form is being used once again to rain down destruction upon the enemy.

The decision for the latest deployment was not made by the German parliament, but rather by the army high command itself. With unprecedented arrogance and self-assertedness, Brigadier General Wolfgang Schneiderhan announced the military action with the words: "It was simply time to undertake this escalation."

The weaponry had been transported to the war zone some time previously. The military leadership in the field had the responsibility for deciding if and when the weaponry would be used, and they had come to a decision, Schneiderhan stated.

German Defence Minister Franz Josef Jung (Christian Democratic Union) has sought to play down the significance of the latest deployment. It was, he said, merely an operation conducted by the Afghan security forces in the struggle against the Taliban, involving 800 Afghan soldiers and 100 Afghan police officers with "300 German soldiers supporting the offensive."

This is why, he continued, it was not necessary to obtain an extension of the existing mandate for the German army, or conduct any debate in parliament. The current deployment is "entirely in accordance" with the mandate already agreed by the German parliament, he claimed.

Jung added that it would be no problem to send a further 1,000 soldiers to Kundus in order to expand the German contingent to 4,500. The security situation had worsened

considerably in the past few weeks, but there is no need for a new mandate, Jung stressed.

Jung's comments make clear the worthlessness of the claim that the modern German army is responsible to parliament, unlike its predecessor, the Wehrmacht. The repeated claim by politicians that one of the most important lessons to be drawn from German history is that German military policy must no longer be determined by the German high command, but rather by elected representatives of the people, has proven to be nothing other than an exercise in deception.

Following the crimes committed by the German army 70 years ago, the army command was forced for decades to sit on its hands. Now, this period is over and the army leadership is re-emerging, brimming with its traditional arrogance.

General Schneiderhan has made absolutely clear that the high command will make the important decisions on the deployment of the German army in future and decide when the German parliament should write a blank cheque for the army's actions. Minister Jung emphasised the close collaboration between the military leadership and the government, warning at the same time that the German army lacked sufficient support in the German population. Indirectly, he called upon parliament to intensify its efforts to justify the military interventions conducted by the army.

With an eye on the Left Party, which has spoken out on occasion against the Afghanistan war, the defence minister stated it was utterly irresponsible to use the intervention of the German army in Afghanistan as "ammunition in the election campaign." The radical Islamic Taliban, he said, had deliberately selected the German army for its attacks because it was aware of how unpopular the war is inside Germany itself.

Jung sought to imply that opponents of the war are accomplices of the Taliban and share responsibility for the death of German soldiers.

The government is well aware that an overwhelming majority of the population is opposed to the war.

Nevertheless, the government is ready to agree to the deployment of heavy weaponry and is planning to extend the operations of the German air force—accepting the high levels of Afghan casualties, the deaths of more German soldiers and the increased danger of terrorist reprisals within Germany itself that will inevitably result. In the manner of a military junta, it uses arguments that suggest that the general population, which opposes the war, is responsible for the growing number of victims.

Some of the most ferocious proponents of war are to be found in the Social Democratic Party (SPD). In the tradition of the SPD leader Gustav Noske, who built up the mercenary Freikorps at the end of World War I and was responsible for the shooting down of thousands of revolutionary workers, social democrats today are demanding the suppression of opponents of the war.

“I am angry about the fact that the Germans are so unwilling to support this war,” commented former SPD Defence Minister Peter Struck in the latest edition of *Die Zeit*. He added, “Now it is up to Frau Merkel. As German chancellor, she must strive to overcome this mood.”

This demand for the government to proceed in a more authoritarian manner against the population is tantamount to an appeal for repressive and dictatorial structures, and is not restricted to the issue of war. In light of the dramatic consequences of the economic crisis—growing unemployment and increasing poverty—there is a growing fear in ruling circles of social unrest. In response, Struck and other politicians are calling for authoritarian measures to be undertaken by the state in order to maintain law and order.

There is a growing opposition to the war in Germany. One of the latest polls puts popular opposition at 85 percent. The close connection between the issue of war and the social questions, however, means that no establishment political party, nor any trade union, is willing to call for protests against the war. The protest rallies that took place some years ago against the Iraq war have been silenced, and the Left Party refrains from calling any protests for fear that a popular mass movement could also turn against the anti-social policies pursued by the Left Party in Berlin, where it shares government power.

Although the Left Party has called on a number of occasions for the withdrawal of German troops from Afghanistan, its main orientation is towards political collaboration with the SPD—one of the main proponents and defenders of the war.

In order to disguise the real aims of the war, Jung

continues to claim that the deployment of German troops is an armed deployment but does not constitute intervention in a war. However, the current offensive makes a mockery of government propaganda about a deployment based on “aggressive humanitarianism.” The roads that have been built in the name of humanitarian aid are now being destroyed by tanks and armoured carriers, while many of the recently constructed buildings lie in ruins as a result of the latest escalation of the war.

With every day that passes, it becomes increasingly evident that Germany, which has the third largest military presence in Afghanistan after the US and Great Britain, is directly supporting the colonial war of conquest being carried out by the US and NATO. In so doing, the German ruling elite is pursuing its own interests and drawing on a long-standing tradition of Great Power politics.

In a book on German-Afghan relations, Martin Baraki, a professor at the University of Marburg, wrote: “The ruling class in Wilhelmenian Germany carefully followed the course of domestic policies in Afghanistan and sought for the first time to exploit the striving by the Afghan people for independence from British dominance for Germany’s own military aims in the First World War.”

The same author’s description of the lengths to which the Hitler regime went to maintain good and enduring relations with the ruling clique in Kabul underlines the enormous importance of Afghanistan for the geopolitical ambitions of Germany.

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