

Massacre in Kunduz bares real nature of Afghanistan war

Statement by the Socialist Equality Party

9 September 2009

An air strike ordered by the German army at the end of last week has resulted in one of the worst massacres in the history of the eight-year-old NATO war in Afghanistan.

It is now clear that in the course of Thursday night at least 125 persons were killed in the attack, which had been ordered by the military commander of the German “Provincial Reconstruction Team” (PRT) in Kunduz, Colonel Georg Klein. In addition to armed fighters, the attack wiped out many inhabitants of neighbouring villages. The incident was one of the bloodiest air strikes since US forces invaded the country in the autumn of 2001.

Such a massacre is not the result of “bad decisions”, an alleged “disregard of NATO rules” or an “unclear situation”. It is the inevitable result of the objective logic of the US-led military intervention in Afghanistan.

The pretext used by the US and its allies to occupy Afghanistan eight years ago was the terror attacks of September 11, 2001. The declared aim of the invasion was to wipe out the bases for international terrorism and overthrow the Taliban regime, which had granted refuge to Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda. In fact, plans for the military occupation of the country had been drawn up long before 9/11.

Afghanistan, which lies in the midst of one of the world's richest deposits of raw materials, is of central strategic importance for both the US and the European powers. This was why, in the 1980s, these powers financed the resistance against the regime in Kabul, allied with the Soviet Union in a war that ravaged the entire country. At that time, among the allies of the US were Al Qaeda, as well as many of the drug barons and warlords, who now possess considerable power and influence.

In the meantime the conflict in Afghanistan is assuming all the characteristics typical of the colonial wars fought in Algeria, Vietnam and many other countries. This is clear from the growth of resistance to the US-led invasion of the country. While the Western media invariably describe this resistance as the “Taliban”, it is evident that the opposition is increasingly being drawn from diverse sectors of the local population.

The reason for such a development is not difficult to understand. On the one hand, the Afghan population is confronted with the brutality of the occupation troops, whose bombardments have repeatedly claimed the lives of numerous civilians; on the other hand, they are faced with the country's new ruling powers, the drug barons and warlords, promoted by the US and NATO.

President Hamid Karzai, once hailed as a beacon of progress and reason in the region, has become so synonymous with filthy corruption and nepotism that some Western governments feel compelled to distance themselves from his rule—above all because he cannot deliver them what he had promised.

The claims put forward by the German Social Democratic Party and the Greens to justify the original intervention into the war by the German army—i.e., that the issues at stake were rebuilding the country, establishing democracy and the emancipation of women—have long since been revealed as myths. German soldiers have been increasingly embroiled in armed confrontations with insurgents, resorting to the use of heavy weapons and tanks. It was only a matter of time before they became involved in such a brutal attack as the one carried out last Thursday night.

With three weeks to go until a federal election, the massacre at Kunduz comes at a highly inconvenient time for the German government. It bears responsibility for the escalating involvement of the German army in a brutal colonial war, under conditions in which there has been no public discussion. According to opinion polls, 71 percent of the German electorate reject the occupation in Afghanistan. The government has been doing everything it can to keep the war out of the election campaign. Indeed, Defence Secretary Franz Josef Jung still refuses to term the intervention by Germany in Afghanistan a “war deployment”.

When the first reports of the massacre in Kunduz emerged, Jung and German Chancellor Angela Merkel defended the German action. Even on Sunday, two days after the attack, they still claimed that only “armed Taliban” had been killed in the air strike and no civilians had been harmed. They justified the massacre with the statement that the air strike had prevented two captured fuel tankers from being used to attack a German field camp.

However, they became increasingly entangled in contradictions. A flurry of new facts negated their attempts to justify the bombardment. The governor of the province, Abdul Wahid Omarkhel, told the German press agency that he had handed to President Hamid Karzai a list of the victims, which included a number of children between the ages of ten and 16. Photos of children with severe burns were circulated across the world.

On the same day, the American newspaper, the *Washington Post*, published a detailed report. With special permission from the American commander in chief in Afghanistan, General Stanley

McChrystal, a *Post* reporter carried out an on-the-spot investigation, interviewed villagers, visited victims in hospital and also attended meetings between German and American commanders.

According to this newspaper report, Colonel Klein had requested the air support from American bombers on Thursday evening to bomb two fuel tankers kidnapped by resistance fighters. A B1 bomber crew then detected the two trucks, which had become bogged down in sand in a river. Although the tankers were stuck in the sand, Colonel Klein then ordered additional air support.

The American F-15 combat aircraft that arrived on the scene sent live videos to German army headquarters. The videos clearly showed scores of people surrounding the two tankers. Allegedly, Colonel Klein received information from an informant that the people shown on the videos were exclusively “armed Taliban fighters”. Whether this discussion took place or not, at around 2:30 a.m. Colonel Klein instructed the fighters to carry out a bombing run, which in a few seconds transformed the scene into a blazing inferno, excluding any chance of survival.

According to the *Washington Post* report and numerous eye-witnesses, inhabitants from nearby villages, including many children, had rushed to the scene in the middle of the night to collect some of the gasoline carried in the tankers. The gasoline, which was due to have been delivered to German occupying troops, is a luxury item for the vast majority of Afghans.

According to all available information, the massacre in Kunduz was a war crime. The tankers bogged down in a sand bank did not represent any direct threat to German soldiers. Even if those responsible for ordering the attack genuinely believed that no civilians were at risk, that still does not justify the elimination of dozens of resistance fighters in a blazing inferno. The brutality with which many persons were killed invariably calls to mind the retaliatory attacks carried out by German troops against partisans in the occupied areas of southern Europe, Eastern Europe and Russia during the Second World War.

Responsibility for this crime rests with all the parties in the German parliament that gave the green light for deploying the German army in Afghanistan. They have since unanimously used the massacre to reaffirm their support for this war. At most, they are prepared to criticise the unsatisfactory information policies of the Defence Ministry, in light of the stream of lies issued by both the ministry and the German army high command.

Both Chancellor Angela Merkel (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) and Defence Secretary Jung (CDU) expressly justified the actions of the German army and assured the soldiers in Afghanistan of their “political support”. For his part, the German Foreign Minister, Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD) was convinced that the German troops in Afghanistan would continue to have “a very good reputation”—despite the massacre.

The Greens, who were responsible, together with the SPD, for sending German troops to Afghanistan in the first place in 2001, are fearful over the future of the deployment. The Green chairperson, Claudia Roth, explained, “There should not be a war in Afghanistan against the civilian population, which undermines confidence in the international soldiers and effectively harms the Afghanistan deployment.”

The Left Party has taken over the task of neutralising the broad opposition to the Afghanistan war. It is the only party in the German Bundestag to oppose the German intervention, but the most notable characteristic of its position is the party’s refusal to acknowledge the colonial character of the war. It regards the NATO invasion as part of the so-called “fight against terrorism”, which in the opinion of the Left Party, should be conducted with other means and officially legitimised by votes and discussion in the Bundestag.

The criticism of the Left Party is also directed at the subordination of German interests to America. In light of the increasing tensions between the two NATO partners, this is a stance that could quickly win support from other political parties.

The fact that the war crime in Kunduz came to the light so quickly—despite all the attempts at cover-up by the German army and government—is primarily bound up with the growing tensions between the US and Germany. The exposures carried out by the *Washington Post*—promoted by American commanders—and the hypocritical visits to the hospitalised victims of the bombardment by General McChrystal were aimed at laying the blame on America’s “allies” and increasing pressure on Germany to tailor its military intervention to the needs of the US.

This is also the understanding of the German high command. According to *Spiegel-Online*, German army officers described the American behaviour as “abominable insolence” and “tit-for-tat”.

The only unity among the NATO partners is that demonstrated against the Afghan population, which they are seeking to suppress. In fact, the conflicts between the “allies” over the allocation of booty and zones of influence in Afghanistan and the entire region are intensifying. The sharp tone of the exchanges between the German and American military commands is a warning that these conflicts could rapidly lead to a new global inferno.

The German Socialist Equality Party calls for the immediate withdrawal of all German troops from Afghanistan. We demand the dissolution of the German army and the utilisation of the billions spent on weapons and war to meet urgent social needs. Not only those responsible military commanders, but also the initiators of the German army deployment—Merkel and Jung (both CDU), Steinmeier and Peter Struck (both SPD), Jürgen Trittin and Renate Künast (both Green Party)—must held to account for war crimes.

These aims can only be realized when the working population intervenes into political life independently of the established parties on the basis of an internationalist and socialist program. The PSG is running its own candidates in Berlin and North Rhine-Westphalia for the federal election to build a party to fight for this program.



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