

Europe backs Afghanistan strategy aimed at “regionalization”

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The US and its allies are planning a massive escalation of the war in Afghanistan. In a television address next Tuesday, delivered from the West Point military academy, US president Barack Obama will announce his plans to increase the current American military contingent of 68,000 by an estimated additional 30,000 soldiers.

The NATO secretary-general Anders Fogh Rasmussen is at the same time seeking to drum up an additional 10,000 soldiers from European countries. There is every indication that he will get what he wants. Despite increasing economic and political tensions with the US, the European powers are completely behind the war in Afghanistan. Having supported the war from the start, European powers would suffer the consequences alongside the US of any Vietnam-style debacle.

According to the new German defense secretary, Karl Theodor zu Guttenberg, the United States and its allies are condemned “to success” in Afghanistan. The deployment is “a litmus test, not only for the transatlantic alliance, but for the entire west,” he has said.

The decision by president Obama was preceded by fierce disputes within the American leadership and NATO. The result is not only a substantial increase in troops, but also a new strategy, the precise implications of which are being played down with the term “regionalization”.

During his inaugural visit to Washington, Guttenberg said it was necessary to put aside “the romantic idea of democratization of the whole country along the lines of the western model” and instead “transfer control of

individual provinces step by step to the Afghan security forces.”

Such plans are obviously shared by the American government and have been arrived at in discussions with the US administration. Guttenberg, who only took office four weeks ago, was received in Washington with open arms. He has long maintained close transatlantic contacts to such influential politicians as Defense Secretary Robert Gates, Senator John McCain and Deputy Secretary of State Jim Steinberg. Gates greeted his younger colleague as a “respected voice” in security policy and a “great friend” of the US. The president of the foreign policy think tank Center for Strategic and International Studies, John Hamre, called Guttenberg “the politician in Germany and probably Europe, who was most frequently a guest in Washington”.

Guttenberg conveyed the readiness of the German government to expand its commitment along the Afghan-Pakistan border and also assume an “increased burden”. Officially any decision will wait until the international conference on Afghanistan planned for January, but the German defense secretary left no doubt that his government would support the planned expansion of the war.

The new strategy of “regionalization” is aimed at dividing Afghanistan into individual cantons—in a similar manner to what took place in Lebanon and the former Yugoslavia. Up to now the US-NATO occupation supported the government of Hamid Karzai and sold the process to the public as “democratization”. However, occupation forces are moving increasingly to hand over power directly to regional warlords and their

militias—on the assumption that such regional forces will follow the orders of their imperial masters. As soon as there is no more danger in a specific province, Guttenberg declared, then the international troops should be withdrawn from that area.

The *Frankfurter Neue Presse* commented on the new strategy in Afghanistan as follows: “Afghanistan is a tribal and clan society, in which clan leaders determine which presidential candidates should be selected by his subjects. Whoever has the support of sufficient clan leaders wins the election.” The newspaper then quotes the British general Paul Newton, who in an utterly cynical fashion summed up the new war strategy by declaring one should pack “bags of gold” in order to buy the co-operation of regional rulers.

Hamid Karzai, the puppet of the occupying powers, had also only been able to hold on to power by purchasing the favors of the most important regional clan leaders. While the occupation powers are publicly calling upon Karzai to proceed against corruption and favoritism, they have now adopted a strategy aimed at co-operation with the most corrupt elements in Afghanistan.

The Taliban, the vilification of which has so far played an important role in US-NATO propaganda justifying the war, is also included in such co-operation. According to newspaper reports, the US government has already established contact with “moderate Taliban” elements in Afghanistan. According to the German magazine *Der Spiegel*, the chief mediator for these contacts is the Saudi royal family.

The new war strategy will have catastrophic consequences for the population of Afghanistan. The increase in troop levels will lead to an expansion of the conflict and a correspondingly higher level of civilian victims. The strengthening of the status of regional clan leaders and warlords will increasingly paralyze the country and plunge it into even more tribal and civil conflict.

The incessant manipulation of regional conflicts reduces the country in the long term into a plaything for

imperialist interests. In his own presumptuous manner, Guttenberg terms this a “self-sufficing security structure”. In fact it is the oldest tactic in the colonial war book: divide and rule.

The true character of the Afghanistan war is becoming ever more evident. The issue was never democratization, nor the driving out of the Taliban or the punishment of Al Qaeda, whose supporters in Afghanistan are currently estimated at only a few dozen. The issue at stake is imperialist control of a country that for decades has been of great geopolitical importance due to its location between Iran and the Indian subcontinent and the two most productive oil regions of the world, the Gulf and Central Asia.

The war is not only directed against the Afghan people, it is taking place against the will and to a large extent behind the backs of the American and European population, the majority of whom reject the war.

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