

US surge in Afghanistan exposes dilemma of German foreign policy

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On December 27 German Defence Minister Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg told the *Bild am Sonntag* newspaper that he did not believe it was possible to bring Western-style democracy to Afghanistan. “I have long come to believe that Afghanistan, because of its history and its characteristics, is not suited as a model for democracy by our standards,” the minister declared.

Until now, Berlin has sought to justify the participation of the *Bundeswehr* (armed forces) in the Afghan conflict on the basis of democratic and humanitarian arguments. German politicians have repeatedly criticised the US military’s brutality in the context of “Operation Enduring Freedom,” and tried to distinguish this from the Bundeswehr’s activities. The International Security Assistance Force has been presented as a “peace mission,” “stabilization operation,” or “reconstruction mission,” that is, as a sort of “armed development assistance.”

As late as the summer of 2009, the German government claimed that the main task of the *Bundeswehr* in Afghanistan was to provide security for the presidential elections, although the extent of the corruption, nepotism and growing criminality of the Karzai government in Kabul had long been known.

On December 3, the German parliament voted by a large majority to extend the military’s deployment in Afghanistan for another year. The vote was based on a motion by the government, which cited the establishment of democracy in Afghanistan and the economic reconstruction of the country as the principal justifications for extending the mandate.

The government asserted it was pursuing the goal of the “consolidation of democratic institutions and processes through supporting the 2010 general elections, as well as proposed projects for the

implementation of the planned census to establish a credible voters’ register.” In addition, the government was striving, it said, “to continue its contributions in the field of economic and social reconstruction and development of the country.”

Berlin’s Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) intends to “continue its long-term work in the priority sectors of Afghan-German development cooperation (basic and vocational education, sustainable economic development, water and energy supply),” the government motion also claims.

With his brief remarks revealing that he considers a democratic development in Afghanistan unrealistic, Defence Minister Guttenberg has brushed aside the current war propaganda. His statement demonstrates that the reasons cited by the government for extending the military mandate have no relation to reality, and that it is dispatching soldiers to a war zone under false pretences and with false arguments.

After eight years, the true character of this war can no longer be hidden. The massacre in Kunduz at the beginning of September, in which at least 142 people died, including many civilians, has made it clear that the Bundeswehr is not acting as an armed auxiliary force to secure economic development, but as an occupying army.

A war has a logic of its own, and its aims determine the methods employed. The targeted killing of a large number of insurgents at the cost of civilian casualties is characteristic of a colonial war, as conducted by France in Algeria or the United States in Vietnam and Iraq.

While Defence Minister Guttenberg has abandoned the previous propaganda that the army is pursuing democratic and humanitarian aims, he has not revealed the true driving forces of the war. These become clear

when one examines the history of the present conflict. For several decades, Afghanistan has been at the centre of the geo-strategic interests of the United States in Central Asia. Through the military occupation and the establishment of a puppet regime in Kabul, the US government intends to establish its strategic and economic dominance over the resource-rich region.

Thirty years ago, the Carter and then Reagan administrations financed Islamist insurgents and supplied them with weapons to fight against the Afghan government, which at that time was supported by the Soviet Union. In the 1990s, the Clinton administration encouraged its allies in the Pakistani government to assist the Taliban to come to power in Kabul. This was done in the belief that the Taliban regime would work with the major American energy companies then developing oil and gas projects in Kazakhstan and other Central Asian countries, and which wanted to build pipelines through Afghanistan. Finally, the US government prepared a direct conquest of the country. The terrorist attacks of 11 September provided the pretext to put this long-prepared plan into action.

In addition to controlling access to raw materials, the US is pursuing yet another goal with its military occupation of Afghanistan. Washington wants to establish an outpost in the region, in order to contain its rivals—mainly Russia, China, India, and Iran.

The decision of the Obama administration to increase the number of American troops by a further 30,000, intensifying the war and extending it into Pakistan, has put the German government under pressure in two respects, both domestically and in terms of foreign policy.

Domestically, it has become increasingly difficult to justify a war whose colonial character is so transparent. Even before Guttenberg cast aside the official aims being pursued in Afghanistan, after eight years of war, the country's social and political collapse contradicted the official war propaganda.

According to human rights organizations, eight million Afghans are suffering from hunger and malnutrition. Some 75 percent of the population has no access to clean drinking water. The war is being aimed ever more directly against the Afghan population. Already, civilians form the majority of the 50,000 official war victims.

On the one hand, the corrupt regime being kept in

power in Kabul by NATO forces rests on the billions from the so-called donor countries, and on the other, it relies on the proceeds from the ever-expanding drug trade and other criminal activities. With 9,000 tons of raw opium, the past year saw a new record in drug production.

In foreign policy, the various efforts by the Merkel government to reach out to Washington and establish closer cooperation have not succeeded. Transatlantic tensions are increasing on all levels. The hopes associated a year ago with the inauguration of Barack Obama that unleashed a storm of so-called “Obamania” are long gone.

Berlin expressed disappointment when the American government decided on its troop increase and expansion of the war without consulting its allies. On the economic front, the US administration is exploiting the low dollar to pursue trade war ends. Chancellor Angela Merkel was snubbed both regarding the fate of auto manufacturer Opel and at the climate summit in Copenhagen where she had wanted to score points as a former environment minister, but the US prevented any agreement.

So far, Germany has been able to pursue its interests in the wake of the United States. With growing transatlantic tensions, the question of Germany's foreign policy orientation has flared up again. At the same time a German withdrawal from Afghanistan would shatter the NATO alliance, and the government wants to avoid this under all circumstances. Berlin also fears the economic and military consequences of an open confrontation with Washington.

The Merkel government has responded to this dilemma by attempting to strengthen its influence, not only economically and politically, but also militarily. Thus the Bundeswehr deployment in Afghanistan and the massacre in Kunduz have become the springboard for an intensive military build-up and an overall revitalization of German militarism.



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