

All-party conspiracy of silence on German army role in Afghanistan

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Last week German chancellor Angela Merkel (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) struck an agreement with her former foreign minister and head of the social democratic (SPD) faction in parliament, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, to keep “the deployment of the German army out of all party-political wrangling”.

According to an article in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* last Saturday, Merkel and Steinmeier have reached a consensus for an extension of the mandate for German military intervention in Afghanistan. According to German law, such mandates must be approved by parliament on an annual basis.

The article shows Steinmeier and Merkel agree that the military deployment in Afghanistan should continue, even though the September 4 massacre in Kunduz initiated by German army officers has revealed the criminal character of the war. According to recent opinion polls, over 70 percent of the German population is opposed to the presence of German troops in Afghanistan.

Confronted with massive public opposition to the war, the German coalition government (CDU, Christian Social Union, Free Democratic Party) has forged an alliance with the SPD in order to continue Germany’s military intervention in defiance of public opinion, bypassing the German parliament.

The government has let it be known that chancellor Merkel is determined to get the SPD “on board,” to avoid a situation “where only the government parliamentary factions approve the deployment of the army”.

There are differences of opinion within the various government and opposition parties, over whether it is advisable to increase the level of German troops while the overall military leadership of the war remains in the hands of the US. But all parties agree that the German

mission should continue, and they all determined to defy the anti-war sentiment within the German public at large.

At the beginning of January, away from the public spotlight, Merkel set up a cabinet committee to discuss Afghan policy. The committee, which has already met on two occasions in the chancellery, includes foreign minister Guido Westerwelle (FDP), the minister for economic aid to developing countries Dirk Niebel (FDP), defense secretary Karl Theodor zu Guttenberg (CSU), interior minister Thomas de Maiziere (CDU), and chancellery minister Ronald Pofalla (CDU).

The task of the cabinet committee is to prepare for the Afghanistan conference scheduled for January 28 in London, aiming to develop a consensus policy on how to proceed. Then the government will submit a new mandate, which is to be rushed through parliament on February 26.

As part of the cabinet committee’s war propaganda exercise, Afghan president Hamid Karzai has been invited to Berlin on January 26 to win the allegiance of the German parliament for the new military line. In Afghanistan itself Karzai is despised for his corruption and rightly seen as little more than a puppet of the US occupation. Karzai was only able to hold onto power last summer through manipulation of the election. His half-brother Ahmad Wali Karzai plays a key role in the country’s growing opium trade.

Nevertheless, Hamid Karzai will be greeted in Berlin as Afghan head of state and will meet with heads of the various parliamentary groups and special committees, to demand more troops and funding for the NATO occupation of his country.

As has been repeatedly the case in its inglorious history, the SPD is standing ready to support this display of militarism with its rifle at its side.

At a special meeting held at the SPD headquarters in Berlin yesterday, the SPD tried to arrive at an “internal party consensus” on the war, i.e. to suppress any sort of critical standpoint against official support for the war. SPD faction head Steinmeier and the party chairman Sigmar Gabriel have developed a certain division of labour to this end. Steinmeier has undertaken to ensure SPD support for the upcoming vote on a new mandate in February, while Gabriel has the task of countering any critical voices in the party and winning them over for the war alliance.

In this respect the upcoming Afghanistan conference in London is of great importance. In a commentary for the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Stefan Kornelius writes: “In the view of government circles, the conference offers a final opportunity. Afterwards the deployment must succeed, or it will fail altogether.”

Kornelius then indicates what is at stake for the government: “Above all Merkel needs the conference as a lever for the domestic debate about strategy, mandate and troop levels. Due to the federal election and the formation of a government, Germany was unable to discuss a new strategy with the US in the autumn.”

An especially pernicious role in this process is played by the Left Party. For public consumption the party strikes a pacifist pose and declares war to be an inappropriate instrument to further German interests. With government circles, however, the party uses every opportunity to signal that it will not campaign in any way against government policy. The Left Party has four members in the parliamentary defense committee and strictly abides by its oath of silence (See “Germany: The Left Party and the parliamentary Defence Committee”).

While right-wingers on the committee are prepared to feed tidbits of information to the press to further their own political ends, the delegates of the Left Party maintain a deathly silence. In fact the real role of the committee is to provide political cover for the German army’s deployment in Afghanistan and other parts of the world. It smoothes the way for the passage of the annual defense budget and defense expenditure through parliament, though parliamentary deputies and the population as a whole have no real idea of what the German army is doing. The defense committee has less to do with controlling the army than with covering up

its activities.

The Left Party has two aims with its cynical policy of pacifism in words, war collaboration in practice. Firstly, it was to demonstrate its credentials to the ruling elite as a constitutional party which can be relied upon, and secondly, it seeks to channel and suppress the growing opposition to the war.

Even before a renewed mandate comes up for discussion, a cartel of parties are intent on conspiring to strip parliament of any say on future military deployments. All parties are agreed that the anti-war sentiments of the majority of the German population must find no political expression. The meeting held this week by the Bundestag defense committee, which has the task of investigating the background to the Kunduz massacre, is part of this undemocratic conspiracy against the German population.

In this respect it is significant that the Chief Federal Prosecutor has rejected any moves to prosecute the German officer—Colonel Klein—who ordered the bombardment at Kunduz. Press releases have stated that the public prosecutor’s office is preparing to close its investigations, supposedly on the basis of international law. According to the argument of the public prosecutor, the deployment in Afghanistan is to be regarded as a “non-national armed conflict”. The Kunduz massacre would then fall within the remit of humanitarian international law, which allegedly permits such military tactics.

The failure to prosecute those responsible for the most horrendous war crime committed by the German army since the massacres conducted by Hitler’s Wehrmacht will only serve to fuel German militarism. In light of the all-party conspiracy, the demand of the Social Equality Party for an unconditional and immediate withdrawal of German troops acquires special significance. It must become the starting point for an anti-war movement which opposes all the parties of war and their “leftist” apologists.



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