

Four more German soldiers killed in Afghanistan

Sven Heymanns
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The German army in Afghanistan has suffered further casualties, barely two weeks after deadly skirmishes in the Kunduz region claimed the lives of three of its soldiers on Good Friday.

Last Thursday afternoon, three more German soldiers died, and another five were wounded during an attack on an army vehicle near the town of Baghlan. Battle raged for hours in a subsequent rescue operation, in which another soldier—a major in the medical corps—was shot dead.

The online publication of *Die Zeit* newspaper reported that the German vehicle had apparently been expressly targeted for the bomb attack. The German army vehicle was the last in a joint convoy of the Afghan army (ANA) and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). All the vehicles passed the spot where the Taliban had concealed a roadside bomb, but it was detonated by remote control only when the Eagle IV all-terrain vehicle of the German army drove over it. The force of the explosion tore the vehicle apart, and the three passengers were killed.

Having detonated the bomb, insurgents attacked the whole convoy. An intensive gun battle between ISAF and the Afghan army, on one side, and the Taliban, on the other, only came to an end some six hours later. The insurgents not only employed assault rifles during the ambush, but also bazookas, mortars and grenade launchers. According to *Zeit-Online*, this was confirmed by Afghan security forces and a spokesman for the Taliban who claimed responsibility for the attack. A police spokesman for the province of Baghlan, Habib Rahman, told the BBC that three Afghan police had also been killed in the fighting.

After visiting troops last Wednesday, Defence Minister Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg (CSU—Christian

Social Union) made his way back to Germany, but decided to return to Afghanistan immediately. His visit to the soldiers after the attack on Good Friday was described as an “encouragement tour.” He promised military leaders more support and heavy combat equipment.

After this recent attack, with the highest loss of German life in seven years, Guttenberg stressed that the provision of better equipment for the army must now be implemented at top speed. He said that all those who talk of a withdrawal would have to ask themselves whether they could justify this to the soldiers, who are risking their lives every day.

Chancellor Angela Merkel (CDU—Christian Democratic Union)—who was visiting the US on Thursday—also emphasised that, despite the tragic events, there was no alternative to the army’s operation in Afghanistan. The chancellor stressed that she was convinced of the appropriateness of the German army’s deployment, and would intensify her efforts to assist the soldiers. Delivering a speech to students, she declared that the Afghanistan operation was about “achieving security for us and all the Western democracies.” The operation had to be continued.

The SPD (Social Democratic Party) backed the government and defended the military deployment in Afghanistan. Reinhold Robbe (SPD), the federal parliament ombudsman for the armed forces, said in a special German ARD television broadcast that a debate about a specific date for withdrawal would only encourage the Taliban to intensify their attacks on German troops. Although he feared renewed attacks in the future, the operation had to go on.

The government reacted to the attacks by promising a major upgrading of equipment for the German troops. Guttenberg thus announced: “Two armoured howitzers

will be transferred to Kunduz as soon as possible—a defence system that can hit targets 30 to 40 kilometres away. In addition, the troops are to get “TOW” armour-piercing rockets, as well as “Marden” armoured personnel carriers. The Ministry of Defence also issued an urgent requisition for 60 “Eagle IV” armoured vehicles.

During his visit to Germany this week, Stanley McChrystal, commander-in-chief of the US and NATO troops in Afghanistan, will be calling for a special combat training programme for German soldiers in Afghanistan. As reported by the *Leipzig Volkszeitung* newspaper, McChrystal also expects the German army to make “a significant contribution” to the major offensive against the Taliban in the coming summer.

Meanwhile, anti-war sentiment is increasing within the population. According to a rapid survey, carried out by ARD television for the Forsa polling institute on the day of the recent attack, 70 percent of those polled supported an end to the war and an immediate withdrawal of German troops.

The government’s claim that the war is being waged to achieve economic reconstruction and the creation of democracy in Afghanistan is misleading on two counts.

First, social conditions have significantly declined since the start of the war. The growth of armed resistance is directly related to the indescribable misery experienced by the civilian population—some 8 million suffer from malnutrition, 75 percent have no access to clean drinking water, a new record was reached with last year’s production of drugs from 9,000 tonnes of raw opium. As well as this, the supposedly “democratic” government in Kabul is notorious for corruption, lawlessness and despotism.

Secondly, it is becoming more and more obvious that the German government—allegedly trying to install democracy in Afghanistan—is blatantly disregarding the declared will of the majority of the German people.

The escalating brutality of the military operation is the typical outcome of a colonial war, as witnessed in the Vietnam War, and it is bound to increase further.



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