

# WikiLeaks: The German Armed Forces and the policy of targeted killings in Afghanistan

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The more than 92,000 documents published by WikiLeaks have revealed the true character of the war in Afghanistan. They show the brutality with which NATO soldiers have acted against the Afghan population in order to suppress the growing resistance against colonial occupation. War crimes are not the exception, but the rule.

Combat reports by US soldiers show that the death of civilians is a routine occurrence in air strikes. At roadblocks, brutalized occupying soldiers shoot Afghans in their vehicles. Special units, such as the Task Force 373, operate according to so-called "Capture/Kill" orders in the style of the Nazi SS. They are subject neither to the ISAF command, nor the responsible regional command, Centcom. They receive their orders—the killing of alleged Taliban members—directly from the Pentagon.

The documentation shows that these special units operate according to an "enemies list", which is arranged according to priority and operational order. In the "working through" of this list, which runs to four figures, the death squads invade houses and kill countless innocent men, women and children.

In a country awash with drugs, war lords and tribal feuds, often a denunciation from a political rival suffices to place one on the list, and thereby receive the attention of the US special forces and drones. The policy of targeted killing equates to the execution of political opponents without any charge being laid or a trial being held, something that is characteristic of totalitarian dictatorships and their intelligence agencies. It runs contrary to the most basic legal principles.

Ever since the beginning of the Afghanistan war, German governments of all political persuasions and the parliamentary defence committee, on which representatives of all the political groups represented in

the Bundestag (parliament) sit, have deliberately kept the German population in the dark about the nature of these "special operations". Last autumn, the government was still claiming that the "core mission of Task Force 373" was merely the "investigation and arrest of persons belonging to al Qaeda or possibly the leadership of the Taliban".

The published documents reveal these claims to be lies and provide information not only about the deadly actions of the special commando units, but also about the involvement of the German armed forces.

Since the summer of 2009, approximately 300 men from Task Force 373 have been stationed at Germany's Camp Marmal in Mazar-i-Sharif, where they plan and carry out their operations. According to *Der Spiegel*, the leaked documents show that for the German ISAF leadership the "targeted killings of enemies of the Bundeswehr...is semi-official, as a sort of service on offer".

But as *Der Spiegel* reports, this is not the complete story. In the spring, when seven German soldiers were killed in a few days, "a high-ranking US officer at the headquarters in Kabul" promised the highest-ranking German ISAF officer, General Bruno Kasdorf, that "those behind the attacks on the Germans would be hunted down and killed". It is a proven fact that a short time later, several alleged Taliban were liquidated.

Under the pressure of these revelations, the spokesman of the Defence Ministry, Christian Dienst, said last week in Berlin that the Defence Ministry was trying to "draw a clear line between the German and American special operations forces in Afghanistan". The Bundeswehr was providing support for the "hunting down of terrorists", but not with the intention of killing them, he said.

According to Dienst, the Bundeswehr itself is

drawing up NATO wanted lists and calls for the detention of terrorist suspects. Moreover, the German commander in Mazar-i-Sharif was kept informed about the operations of American special forces. Based on what Dienst presented, *Spiegel Online*, in an article entitled "Germany tolerates targeted killings", concluded: "German soldiers do not deliberately kill, but their knowledge sometimes helps—and the federal government takes this into account."

In further comments, Dienst had to admit that German special commandos also carried out targeted killings themselves and actively participate in such operations. First, he said that "targeted killing was in accordance with international law". Germany, however, had imposed the restriction to seek arrests. When making arrests in combat situations, however, it could happen that suspects might be killed by German soldiers.

How many Afghans had been killed already in operations by German special forces, Dienst would not specify. The government would be informing parliament on 23 August.

Following the Kunduz massacre last year, there have been indications that the KSK German elite unit, which is top secret and, like its American counterpart, operates outside the ISAF command structure, has been targeting insurgents.

According to *Der Spiegel*, the order to attack the two tankers in Kunduz had come from Bundeswehr Colonel Georg Klein, leading to 147 mainly civilian victims, because he suspected local Taliban leaders were nearby. The KSK, whom Klein consulted before the attack, had been following these Taliban leaders.

While the media and politicians try to downplay the publication of the WikiLeaks documents, it is increasingly clear that the Bundeswehr has cast off practically all the restrictions that were imposed upon it when it was first established in the aftermath of World War II. Meanwhile, it has adopted the policy of targeted killings, as practiced by the American, British and Israeli armies for a long time.



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