

German foreign minister defends targeted killings in Afghanistan

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Following a meeting of the German cabinet last Wednesday, Foreign Minister and Vice-Chancellor Guido Westerwelle (Free Democratic Party, FDP) declared that the policy of so-called targeted killings carried out by NATO troops in Afghanistan was legal.

Westerwelle declared that the legal situation on this issue was clear. “We have to know that rebel fighters in a non-international armed conflict covered by the framework of humanitarian international law can and must be deliberately fought,” he said.

Westerwelle boasted that he was the first politician to have legally re-evaluated the German army mission in Afghanistan as an “armed conflict” in a government statement last February. He expressed his surprise that his declaration has met with so little attention, although it had far-reaching and self-evident consequences.

A few days before the foreign minister’s latest declaration, Defense Ministry spokesman Christian Dienst had explained that “targeted killings are also in conformity with international law”.

The statements by Westerwelle and Dienst are a direct reaction to the recent publication by WikiLeaks of thousands of documents pertaining to the Afghanistan war. The documents make clear that the method of targeted killings is systematically used in Afghanistan in order to break oppositional resistance to the NATO occupation of the country. The German army is deeply implicated in such operations.

The documents reveal that 300 elite soldiers from US Task Force 373 are stationed at Germany’s Camp Marmal in Mazar-i-Sharif. From this base the taskforce conducts its secret missions involving the targeting and deliberate assassination of rebel forces and any members of the local population who get in the way. In the course of their operations this terror squad is responsible for the killing of innumerable innocent

men, women and children. The German army supplies information on targets which, according to the documents, range into thousands of names. These targets are then systemically hunted down by commandos in “capture or kill” operations.

There is now increasing evidence that German soldiers are not only involved in supplying information to be used in connection with the assassination of alleged members of the Taliban, but that they are also directly involved in the killings. One week ago and following the publication of the WikiLeaks documents, government spokesman Ulrich Wilhelm acknowledged that members of German commando Task Force 47 were actively involved in the arrest of suspect rebels. Defense Ministry spokesman Dienst then followed up with the comment that in the course of such arrests in combat situations, suspects “may” have been killed by German soldiers.

Westerwelle did not expressly address the role of the German army in relation to targeted killings in Afghanistan. He did point out, however, that the legal re-evaluation of the German army deployment in February was in reaction to the bombing of two tankers in the Kunduz region. The bombardment by US planes, which resulted in the deaths of 147 Afghans, had been ordered by the German commander Colonel Klein. According to media reports Klein gave the order for the airstrike because he assumed that a number of local Taliban leaders were in the vicinity of the tankers. Prior to giving his order Klein had consulted with the German KSK elite unit that had been tracking the movements of Taliban leaders.

Now, following the massacre at Kunduz and the publication of the WikiLeaks documents, the German government is going on the offensive to publicly justify the policy of targeted killing as has been practiced

already for some time by the US, Britain and Israel.

The armies of the latter countries have used targeted killings for years in the course of their colonial wars against Iraq and Afghanistan and in the suppression of the Palestinian population. Political opponents lacking any recourse to legal means of defense are summarily executed in the manner long practiced by the secret intelligence agencies of dictatorial regimes. Such methods, which blatantly violate basic legal norms, have become increasingly common following the terror attacks of September 11, 2001.

Westerwelle's claim that the policy of targeted killing is compatible with international law is patently wrong. The Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 forbids military attacks against unarmed civilians. The International Pact for Civil and Political Rights of 1966 also forbids executions without any legal judgment. The majority of states worldwide reject the policy of targeted killing because it contradicts the notion of a constitutional state and the practice has been regularly condemned by the United Nations. The former UN secretary-general, Kofi Annan, sharply condemned Israel for its policy of liquidating Hamas leaders, stressing that such acts violate international law.

Not only does targeted killing contravene international law, it also recalls the most horrific crimes carried out by German armed forces during the Second World War. The German Wehrmacht committed massive crimes on the Eastern Front. As acts of revenge for the deaths of German soldiers, the civilians of occupied territories were massacred in the hundreds and thousands, while partisans and prisoners of war were shot down in cold blood. The overwhelming majority of the officers and soldiers responsible for such massacres were never called to account, in part due to the lack of any relevant international law. It was only after the war that a series of edicts and regulations were drawn up on an international basis for the purpose of preventing, or at least punishing, those responsible for such crimes in the future.

By undermining international law and officially condoning the policy of targeted killing, the German bourgeoisie is making clear it will not be intimidated by the war crimes of the Wehrmacht. Just as media reaction to the WikiLeaks documents has been muted, so to Westerwelle's latest statement exposing the brutal character of the Afghanistan war has been uncritically

received by media and political circles in Germany.



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