

# German troops intensify attacks on civilians in Afghanistan

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11 June 2011

Four German soldiers have been killed in the last two weeks in Afghanistan. Two were killed in a bomb attack on their patrol vehicle, and two more were victims of a bombing of a meeting of senior military and security forces in Taloqan, the capital of Takhar Province, in northern Afghanistan on May 28.

The attack in Taloqan also claimed the life of the northern Afghanistan police chief, and the German regional commander of ISAF, General Markus Kneip, was injured. Kneip is the highest-ranking foreign officer to be the casualty of an attack since the NATO invasion commenced.

The number of German military personnel killed in Afghanistan in ten years of war has thus increased to fifty-two; the number of all foreign soldiers killed has risen to more than 2,500. The figures show that, contrary to official statements, the war is escalating. Despite this, both the German government and the “opposition”—the Greens and the Social Democratic Party (SPD)—firmly support the continuation of the war.

The increasing number of attacks on foreign troops is a result of the intensification of the war by the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). American troops in particular have been following a strategy of escalation since last year.

As a result, the official number of Afghan civilians killed in a single year, no doubt a gross underestimation of the real figure, reached its highest level in 2010 at 2,777 dead. According to the UN Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), this was 15 percent more than the previous year. Since 2006, the number of civilians killed has risen year on year.

In recent months, numerous Afghan civilians have been injured or killed by US attacks. The latest example is the death of twelve children and two women as a result of a helicopter attack in late May; six other civilians were also injured in the episode.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai, a puppet of the invasion forces, felt compelled to protest, in order to appease the anger of the population. If further civilian houses were destroyed by bombing, foreign troops would come to be regarded as occupiers, he threatened. A government spokesman added: “The mood of the population is now tilting against NATO, if nothing happens”.

German troops are increasingly exposed to the anger of the Afghan population and are responding with brutality. On May 18, German soldiers in Taloqan shot mourners attending a funeral parade who were moving towards a German outpost. The mourners were carrying four victims of an American air strike for burial.

According to the local authorities, twelve people were killed and over 80 injured in the funeral procession, which also involved Afghani police officers. The German Defence Ministry initially claimed only signal-fire weapons had been used, and later declared that one participant had been killed. Images from the surveillance cameras at the site are being kept under wraps. According to *Spiegel Online*, a UN investigation has found that German troops fired live rounds and three participants were killed.

Following the shootings at the funeral in Taloqan, the first fatal attack on German troops in the district of Chardarah occurred on May 25. Three days later, there was the attack on the German-Afghan security meeting at which the north Afghan police chief and two German soldiers were killed, along with five other participants in the meeting, and General Kneip was injured.

The assassination of high-ranking German and Afghan military shows the deep-seated popular hatred of the occupation troops. *Spiegel Online* quotes a senior NATO officer as saying: “Whoever can place a bomb in a building guarded by soldiers and the police must have accomplices in the security forces reaching right up to the

governor”.

After the attack, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), Christian Social Union (CSU) and Free Democratic Party (FDP), as well as the Greens and the SPD, all issued statements to the effect that there was “no alternative” but to continue the mission in Afghanistan. All the establishment parties criticized the Afghan security apparatus.

For example, Rainer Arnold (SPD) said the attack had further damaged “confidence in the Afghan security apparatus” and would lead to a change “in the behaviour of German soldiers”. Green politician Omid Nouripour said, “The blame lies with the Afghans”.

Suggestions ranged from the introduction of a system guaranteeing the reliability of the Afghan security forces (Nouripour), the collection of biometric data (FDP), to the use of dogs able to detect explosives (Henning Otte, CDU).

Ernst-Reinhard Beck of the CDU went so far as to call for an “escalation of events in Regional Command North”, i.e., a direct counter-attack. Although his demands encountered verbal resistance, the deployment of German troops in Afghanistan runs in this direction.

Earlier this year, the Bundestag (German parliament) renewed the mandate for the Afghanistan mission for another year. The SPD justified the decision by declaring that an exit strategy would only be drawn up by the end of 2011. Together with the Greens, they stressed the supposedly “peace-keeping” character of the war.

The so-called exit strategy is only provisional—and a prerequisite is that “the situation permits” such a move. This has been accompanied by a practical escalation of the war: the number of German police instructors was increased and in March the Bundestag approved the deployment of 300 additional soldiers by a large majority. With up to 5,300 German troops, the number of Bundeswehr (armed forces) soldiers stationed in Afghanistan is at its highest level ever.

It is also worth noting the specific composition of the troops on the ground. The number of snipers has been increased six-fold since 2006, with a total of 140 deployed last year.

Officially, German soldiers are forbidden to kill outside of direct combat. However, this official stance is contradicted by reality. According to *Spiegel Online*, for example, one German soldier was tasked with observing a particular individual day and night, and then assassinating him—entirely outside of any combat situation. According

to the Green Party’s Hans-Christian Ströbele, the German government has never declared what role snipers stationed in Afghanistan should be playing.

The vast majority of the German population rejects the war in Afghanistan. According to a recent survey by *Stern* magazine, 66 percent support the complete withdrawal of German troops, by the end of the year at the latest. Unlike the Iraq war, however, there is no broad anti-war movement. The reason for this lies in the rightward turn all the parties in parliament have made.

Ten years ago, the SPD and the Greens sent the Bundeswehr to Afghanistan. The then-Social Democratic Defence Minister Peter Struck later justified the deployment by saying, “Germany will defend its interests in the Hindu Kush”. The SPD and the Greens have maintained this position to the present.

They are providing the crisis-ridden federal coalition with the backing necessary to continue the war in Afghanistan, and prepare the German armed forces for other foreign missions. In May, when the new defence minister, Thomas de Maiziere (CDU), unveiled his plans for a reform of the military, providing for an increase in the number of soldiers available for foreign operations, he received broad support from the SPD and the Greens.

The Left Party verbally rejects the Afghanistan mission. However, it has no intention of following its words with deeds, and organizing resistance against it. The Left Party is keen not to spoil its relations with the SPD and the Greens, with whom they cooperate closely in many German states and with whom they are seeking to form a coalition at the federal level. In essence, they too are for international military operations, as was shown by the call for a no-fly zone over Libya by Left Party ex-chairman and Member of the European Parliament, Lothar Bisky.



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