

German officer responsible for Kunduz massacre promoted to rank of general

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German army Colonel Georg Klein, who gave the order which led to a massacre near the city of Kunduz in Afghanistan on September 4, 2009, has been promoted to the rank of general. He will belong to the elite of the German officer corps, which includes only 200 (soon to be reduced to 180) generals.

German Defence Minister Thomas de Maizière authorised his promotion. Klein is slated to take over as head of a new department of the German army (*Bundeswehr*), the Office for Human Resources, responsible for the recruitment and selection of professional soldiers.

The Office for Human Resources emerged from the transformation of the *Bundeswehr* into a professional army. It consists of six departments: executive offices (I), recruitment (II), personnel management of soldiers, reservists and civilian personnel (III-V) and payroll (VI). According to the “State of the reorientation of the *Bundeswehr*,” published in September 2011, Klein will control 7,400 civilian and 2,150 military employees following his promotion.

Klein’s promotion and responsibility for personnel aims to send a political signal. His name is associated with the most notorious massacre of civilians ordered by a German officer since the end of World War II.

According to NATO reports, up to 142 people were killed in Kunduz after Klein ordered the bombing of two fuel tankers previously stolen from the *Bundeswehr* by rebels. There were a large number of civilians surrounding the vehicles, including children from nearby villages, who hoped to siphon off fuel. Klein ordered US fighter pilots to attack, though they proposed warning the civilian population first, by

carrying out a low level over-fly.

Klein argued that the destruction of the tankers was necessary to protect the nearby German camp. In fact, the truck had been driven for hours away from camp and had become trapped in a river bed.

The federal government responded to the massacre with a systematic campaign of disinformation, with the defence department increasingly entangled in a web of contradictions and lies. It was only after press releases and announcements from US sources that the real extent of the incident emerged. Defence Minister Franz Josef Jung (CDU), Inspector General Wolfgang Schneiderhan and State Secretary Peter Wichert all subsequently quit their posts.

It remains unclear whether Klein established contact with his superiors before giving the order to attack. Using US air reconnaissance, Klein had observed the kidnappers for over four hours and had plenty of time to contact his headquarters before giving orders to attack.

Another suspicion is that elite KSK special forces were involved in the attack on the tanker. According to these reports the aim of the attack was not retaliation for theft of the tanker but rather the killing of suspected Taliban leaders previously targeted by KSK agents.

Before the massacre, military and right-wing circles in Germany had been campaigning for some time that the remit of the *Bundeswehr* intervention, officially designated a stabilization and peacekeeping operation, be expanded to permit troops to conduct open warfare.

Klein evidently sought to put this proposal into

practice. In February 2010 the federal government followed up, declaring the conflict in Afghanistan to be civil war, thereby justifying the killing of civilians. This also explains why the defence ministry and government went to such lengths to defend Klein and German military operations in Kunduz.

The legal treatment of the Kunduz massacre was a farce. Disciplinary proceedings against Klein were rapidly dropped. Investigations against Klein by the Attorney General's office in Karlsruhe were terminated in April 2010. Klein remained unpunished, and the army received a free hand to carry out similar actions in the future with impunity.

The Attorney General's office was well aware of the consequences of its action. Its official statement declared: "For the first time ever in a meticulous process of examination, the circumstances of a military attack with far-reaching deadly consequences ordered by German soldiers have been subjected, from a factual and legal standpoint, to an extensive penal investigation."

The *World Socialist Web Site* commented on the ending of the investigation as follows: "The federal prosecutor has now given Klein a free pass, absolving him of any criminal responsibility for the massacre in Kunduz. This will give the army a free hand to perpetrate similar massacres in future." (See, "The return of German militarism")

The promotion of Klein and his elevation to head of Human Resources is a clear signal to newly recruited soldiers that the German government believes killing is part of their job, and that they can kill civilians with impunity.



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