

German defence minister visits the frontline in Afghanistan

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20 December 2014

Last weekend, German Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) spent two days visiting German troops on the war front in Afghanistan.

The official reason for the visit was the end of NATO's ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) mission in two weeks time, which will also mean the nominal end of Bundeswehr (German Armed Forces) combat operations after 13 years of war. From 2015 on, international troops—including 850 Bundeswehr soldiers from an original 5,000—will remain in the Hindu Kush, supposedly only for training purposes and only until the end of 2016.

Nevertheless, in speeches to German soldiers, von der Leyen underlined that talks in Kabul with members of the Afghan government and President Ashraf Ghani meant that NATO forces will likely be deployed into 2016, and that the nature of their deployment will entirely depend on future assessments. She warned against an “abrupt withdrawal” of NATO forces and the Bundeswehr. In other words, the minister reckons on a longer deployment of German troops and prolonged fighting.

Publicly, the minister spoke vaguely of the “partial success of the Bundeswehr mission in Afghanistan.” In reality, after 13 years of war and imperialist occupation, the situation in Afghanistan is disastrous.

After the attacks of September 11, 2001 in the US, President George W. Bush dispatched American troops under the pretext of the “war on terror” to overthrow the then Islamist Taliban government. However, the US government had planned the invasion long before. The goal was to bring a compliant puppet regime to power, which would keep the local population under control and turn the country into a reliable military base for the United States and its allies in their long-term campaign

against China and Russia.

Even from the standpoint of these imperialist war aims, the war and the participation of the Bundeswehr have been a disaster.

This year alone, more local security forces (police and army) have been killed by attacks and in fighting than ever before: 6,000 alone by mid-November, which is more than in the previous 12 years combined. In addition, according to official figures, some 3,000 civilians have also been killed. However, the real figure is probably much higher.

Three thousand ISAF troops have been killed since 2001. Most of those killed were Americans, and 55 were German.

On the day of the German minister's visit, 20 people died in the capital Kabul as a result of a suicide attack, including 6 soldiers. Two days earlier, a German member of an aid organization was killed in an attack on a school, and another was seriously wounded. In July, insurgents succeeded in killing a nephew of then President Hamid Karzai and destroying the president's helicopter with a missile. And this was after ISAF forces had recruited and trained 350,000 Afghan soldiers and police officers.

According to an internal report by the Special Representative of the Foreign Office of the Federal Government, quoted by *Der Spiegel*, a “largely uncontrollable security situation” prevails in the east and south of the country. Things are not much better in northern Afghanistan, where the Bundeswehr is leading ISAF forces. The report states that in the main population centres, the Afghans can provide a “sufficiently controllable” security situation; this is, however, “heterogeneous and localized”.

In plain English, this means the security situation is—with some tenuous exceptions—out of control.

Economically, according to the German government's internal report, the country is totally dependent on foreign subsidies. Corruption and mismanagement flourish as never before. The country's judicial system and police are completely dysfunctional. The only sector that has grown in the course of the war, by a factor of 26, is the cultivation and sale of opium, the raw material for the manufacture of heroin. According to the UN Office for Drug and Crime (UNODC), the cultivated areas have increased during this period from 8,000 to 209,000 hectares.

Following June's presidential elections, the puppet regime functions to some extent externally, but internally it is completely divided. The government only came together following lengthy negotiations under strong pressure from the US administration, and after both candidates, Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, had each declared themselves the "real victor". Ghani now acts as president and Abdullah as head of government.

Financially, the war by the imperialist powers has become an unending disaster, which, within the NATO countries themselves, will inevitably result in sharp attacks on the working class.

The US government has spent a trillion dollars on the war since 2001. Hundreds of billions in interest payments alone will follow in the near future. Eighty percent of this gigantic sum has been incurred under President Obama.

According to estimates by the German Institute for Economic Research, the German government has spent 22 billion euros since the beginning of the deployment. Officially, it should initially have been only about 500 million, and later a billion euros per year. Meanwhile, the Institute estimates that in the coming years spending will rise to an annual sum of at least three billion euros.

Given this devastating balance sheet, the question arises: What is the Bundeswehr doing in Afghanistan? What is the purpose of the war effort, which is supported by all parties in the Bundestag (parliament)?

From the outset, the aim of Germany's participation in this criminal war was to transform the Bundeswehr into a fighting force capable of worldwide deployment. A total of 135,412 German soldiers have been deployed in Afghanistan, some several times. The consequences of the first ground combat mission by German soldiers

since the Second World War could be seen on September 4, 2009, when Colonel Klein ordered the bombing of unarmed villagers, causing the cruel deaths of over 120 innocent people, mostly children, young people and the elderly.

The Bundeswehr mission in Afghanistan was a crucial preparation for the "foreign policy change" introduced by the Grand Coalition in Germany, aimed at taking "more responsibility" and conducting military operations throughout the world. German imperialism does not want to stand on the sidelines in the battle for the redivision of the world that has unfolded since the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the reunification of Germany in 1990/91.

Afghanistan, bordering China and Russia, has taken on great strategic importance.



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