

# German government prepares new combat mission in Afghanistan

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The German government is making plans to send another 100 troops to Afghanistan, raising the size of its deployed force to 980 personnel. These plans were reported last week in a blog post by military journalist Thomas Wiegold, who cited sources within the government.

The report was then effectively confirmed by Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) defence spokesman Rainer Arnold, who told the *Berliner Zeitung*, “The order is not being changed. But the Bundeswehr [army] must be put in a position to fulfill it.”

According to *Spiegel Online*, the cabinet will decide the text of the mandate for 2016 on Wednesday. Subsequently, the Bundestag (parliament) will debate and then vote on it in its last session before the Christmas break. According to the magazine, the Bundeswehr will also remain in northern Afghanistan longer than originally planned. The training mission in Mazar-i-Sharif, the fourth-largest city in the country, will be continued until at least the end of 2016.

The US halted its military withdrawal from Afghanistan in mid-October. Under the new plans of the Pentagon, the current contingent of about 9,800 US troops is to be maintained over the coming year. Contrary to earlier withdrawal plans, the strength of the American troops is only to be reduced at the end of 2016 or even the beginning of 2017.

So far, the German government and a majority of the media are trying to play down the escalation. The claims that German soldiers will not participate in “combat operations” has been repeated ad nauseam.

Wiegold reports, however, that the mandate of the Bundeswehr would be changed in one point. “In the new mandate, support for the Afghan consultative level by German forces will no longer be limited to meetings and the like, but would also be possible in the situation on the ground,” Wiegold writes.

In plain language, this means that German soldiers can “accompany” and “advise” Afghan forces trained by them in combat situations. One need not be a military expert to understand the consequences of this decision. The German “trainers” and “advisers” will be directly involved in hostilities and if necessary “defend” themselves. The official announcement of new Bundeswehr combat operations in Afghanistan is then only a matter of time.

A comment by *Spiegel Online* reporter Mathias Gebauer, points to the far-reaching consequences of the decision: “However succinct the changes to the mandate are, they illustrate nothing less than a radical shift in policy on Afghanistan. In fact, the government has now abandoned a foreseeable end to the mission. Instead, the decision as to how long the mission will last will be taken in the coming years based on the situation on the ground.”

The “situation on the ground” is disastrous for the pro-Western regime in Kabul and the Western occupying forces. For this reason, leading members of the German military and politicians have recently called for a massive escalation of the German commitment. The most vociferous was Hans-Lothar Domröse, the highest-ranking German NATO general and head of NATO’s Allied Joint Force Command in Brunssum in the Netherlands. On the periphery of the massive NATO manoeuvres referred to as “Trident Juncture,” which took place under his leadership, he called for a reconsideration of the rules of engagement.

He said this should include a resumption of combat operations and air strikes against the Taliban. “If we see that there is a Taliban attack, we must be able to defeat it,” he said, and according to *Spiegel Online*, demanded NATO military assistance for the Afghan forces be “once again considered.” These would include, “in addition to possible air strikes during Taliban attacks on towns or military bases, providing better support for the local

security forces with reconnaissance images, operational advice and tactical support.”

The increase in German troop numbers in Afghanistan and the aggressive tenor of the German military are a response to the growing strength of the Taliban in recent months. Since the Taliban were able to bring the northern Afghan city of Kunduz briefly under their control in a surprise attack at the end of September, the widely hated puppet regime of President Ashraf Ghani is under increasing pressure and the country is threatened with a new civil war. Hundreds of thousands are fleeing.

The fall of Kunduz was a debacle for German imperialism. The city and the entire province were for years under German control. The Bundeswehr has a major camp in Kunduz. For many years, up to 5,350 Bundeswehr soldiers have been stationed at any one time in Afghanistan, or about 130,000 in total. The military operation, which officially ended in December 2014, devoured nearly 9 billion euros.

Fourteen years after the SPD-Green Party coalition under Gerhard Schröder and Joschka Fischer marched into Afghanistan alongside the US, the German elites are seeking to defend the interests of German imperialism in Afghanistan “if necessary with all our capabilities.” Last Wednesday evening, at the “grand tattoo” for the 60th anniversary of the Bundeswehr outside the Reichstag (parliament building), Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen reiterated the need for “reliability in difficult, jointly decided operations.”

“In a few days, 20 nations will come to Berlin to discuss with us the common way forward in Afghanistan,” she declared, adding threateningly, “For decades, we Germans have relied on our partners’ promises of protection. In return, they expect that if necessary we will be there for them with all our skills and will make preparations to do so. The Bundeswehr has learned this in their missions.”



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