

The German debacle in Afghanistan: Politicians and media drum up support for renewed military deployment

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Politicians and the media in Germany are reacting to the Taliban advance following the withdrawal of NATO troops from Afghanistan with a mixture of disillusionment, anger and calls for a renewed military intervention.

The Afghan people had been “handed over to the resurgent Taliban,” Klaus-Dieter Frankenberger wrote in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. It was “cynical to say that it is the right of the Afghans to determine their own future,” he continued. “They will not be able to do that, because only the new masters will decide.” To “talk of diplomacy” now was “eyewash.”

In *Die Zeit*, Wolfgang Bauer expressed outrage that for “most Germans” the withdrawal of the Bundeswehr from Afghanistan was “a moment of relief.” This proved “once again how detached the mood of the German public has become from large parts of world events.”

Bauer, who in earlier years reported on war crimes committed by US troops in Afghanistan, is now incensed by their withdrawal and complains about the West’s unwillingness to intervene militarily once again. One could “not help just with money,” he wrote, or with “meagre expressions of sympathy from our foreign ministers.” Like “Pontius Pilate after Jesus’ death sentence,” the West was washing its hands of the matter.

Der Spiegel called for a “military option” to force the Taliban back to the negotiating table. “International troops would have to draw a protective wall around Kabul, the capital, and the surrounding provinces, from the air but also on the ground,” it declared.

The chair of the parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee, Norbert Röttgen (Christian Democratic Union—CDU), is beating the drum particularly aggressively for a renewed war effort. On Wednesday, in an interview with Deutschlandfunk radio, he castigated “the hasty, premature, unnecessary, unilateral decision by the USA to withdraw from Afghanistan, made without any consultation with the allies.” Now it was a matter of “countering the offensive of the Taliban... with something.”

Röttgen pleaded for a massive air war, in which the Bundeswehr would actively participate. The US had already “intensified air strikes from its military base in Qatar,” and had now to “do so even more intensively.” Germany had to support the US mission, he said. “Whether it’s logistics, whether it’s other help they need, then we should say, of course we’re ready to use that.”

Foaming at the mouth, Röttgen demanded that the German government force through an intervention and take the lead role. If one pursues “a No policy” and says, “we will do nothing,” then “nothing will happen,” he argued.

This was “no longer the world” of the 20th century, with “Germans saying we will do nothing but formulate expectations for others,” he declared. Germany would have to “manage this change,” and then we would see what the Americans say.

With remarkable candour, Röttgen stated that the invasion of Afghanistan and the subsequent occupation were never about human rights or democracy, but about imperialist interests.

“Turning Afghanistan into a modern democracy” was “never pursued by anyone” and was “real nonsense,” he said. It was “our interests that were always at stake.”

Röttgen noted that as early as 20 years ago, Peter Struck, the then-Social Democratic defence minister, had declared that “Germany’s security is defended in the Hindu Kush.” And that was exactly how it was. Germany could not defend its security “only within our walls, and that is why we now have the opportunity to stop this until winter sets in.”

The reasons for the aggressive calls for a renewed war offensive in Afghanistan are clear. The fall of Kunduz and numerous other provincial capitals to the Taliban within a few weeks is not a debacle only for Washington, but also for German imperialism.

After the Social Democratic-Green Party government of Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (Social Democratic Party—SPD) and Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer (Greens) decided to support the US invasion in 2001, the Afghanistan mission was the Bundeswehr’s most important war operation in almost two decades. For many years, there were continuously several thousand Bundeswehr soldiers stationed in Afghanistan. Over 160,000 soldiers were deployed in all. The mission officially cost some 10 billion euros.

The province of Kunduz, which has now been overrun by the Taliban, was in the Northern Regional Command of NATO’s International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission and was thus under German control for a long time. Beginning in October 2003, the Bundeswehr maintained a field camp in Kunduz, which it handed over to the Afghan forces 10 years later.

The Taliban advance has once again revealed the real nature of the Afghanistan mission and exposed the official propaganda. The

Bundeswehr has brought not “stability” and “security,” nor “human rights” and “democracy,” to the country, but chaos and war. The fact that the Taliban can take the country back by storm shows how hated the pro-Western regime in Kabul and its backers in Washington, Brussels and Berlin are within the Afghan population.

German troops were engaged in a bloody combat mission from the very beginning. In the strategically important north, the Bundeswehr conducted Operation Harekate Yolo in October and November 2007, the first offensive military operation under German command since the end of World War II.

The fighting had deadly consequences not only for the Bundeswehr (a total of 59 soldiers killed), but above all for the local civilian population. According to research by the broadcaster ARD’s *Monitor* programme, up to 27 civilians were killed in Operation Halmazag (“Blitz”) alone in the autumn of 2010.

The horrific climax of the German mission was undoubtedly the “Kunduz massacre.” On 4 September 2009, the then-Bundeswehr commander of Kunduz, Colonel Georg Klein, ordered an air strike on two tanker trucks. At the time of the bombing, hundreds of people, including many women and children, were near the trucks. According to official NATO figures, up to 142 people were killed or injured in the flaming inferno.

Neither Klein nor any other responsible military figure or politician was held accountable for the crime. On the contrary, in 2013 Klein was promoted to brigadier general and head of the personnel management department, responsible for recruiting and leading soldiers. Lawsuits by the victims’ relatives were repeatedly rejected by German and European courts.

At present, it remains to be seen whether the dreams of Röttgen and company of a renewed military intervention in Afghanistan will come to pass. Although the US intelligence services now assume that the capital, Kabul, will fall to the Taliban within the next 30 to 90 days, on Tuesday, President Joe Biden defended the withdrawal of US troops. The Afghans had now to “fight for their state themselves,” he declared cynically.

Then, on Thursday, the Pentagon announced it was sending 3,000 US soldiers and Marines to Afghanistan—with the ostensible mission of securing US diplomatic facilities in Kabul and organising the evacuation of American civilians.

Regardless of whether this is the case or whether the troops are just the vanguard for a new military intervention, what is at stake is an intensification of the disastrous war policy that has killed millions of people, turned tens of millions into refugees and destroyed entire societies over the last three decades. In a recent perspective on the US intervention, the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote:

Far from deterring the growth of American militarism, the debacles produced by the “war on terrorism” have only paved the way to the shift of US global strategy to “great power conflict,” in the first instance, confrontation with nuclear-armed China and Russia. The withdrawal from Afghanistan was carried out not to end America’s longest war, but rather to shift the Pentagon’s resources to the

South China Sea, Eastern Europe and the Baltic.

The same fundamental contradictions of capitalism that lie behind the explosion of US imperialism and raise the danger of a third world war are fuelling Germany’s war and great power offensive. Since the beginning of this month, the “Bayern,” one of the largest German warships, has been on its way to the Indo-Pacific with the declared aim of asserting Berlin’s geostrategic and economic interests in the region—above all against the nuclear power China.

Amid the coronavirus pandemic, the ruling class is now seeking to exploit the withdrawal from Afghanistan to push for the return of German militarism. On 31 August, the German government plans to commemorate “the end of the twenty-year deployment of the Bundeswehr in Afghanistan state-wide,” according to the official website of the Ministry of Defence. A roll call is planned in the Bendlerblock, with its imperial military connotations, with Federal President Steinmeier as keynote speaker. This is to be accompanied by a grand tattoo in front of the Reichstag, the former imperial and now federal parliament building.

The images of German soldiers parading at night with weapons and blazing torches in the middle of Berlin will further fuel the opposition to militarism and fascism that is deeply rooted in the population after two world wars. This opposition needs clear political leadership and perspective. The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party) is fighting in the federal elections to build an anti-war movement of the international working class aimed at eliminating the root cause of war—capitalism—and building a global socialist society.



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