

After the Afghanistan debacle: German media and parliamentary parties on course for war

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Since the Taliban took power in Afghanistan, German media and the country's main political parties have been working around the clock pumping out propaganda. The ignominious collapse of the Afghan regime and its army, which the German government and its Western allies supported and armed to the tune of over \$1 trillion, has shown the German public that it has been systematically lied to for 20 years.

There is only one plausible explanation for the collapse of the government of Ashraf Ghani and his army: Apart from a narrow upper- and middle-class elite in Kabul, Ghani and his cronies do not have the slightest social support. Corrupt, criminal and deeply implicated in drug trafficking, Ghani's regime served as a puppet for the imperialist powers to consolidate their domination of a region of major geostrategic importance.

Its collapse is a major blow to German militarism, which has always justified the German army's (Bundeswehr) longest and bloodiest post-war combat deployment by claiming that German soldiers were fighting for freedom, democracy, women's rights and security in the Hindu Kush.

The campaign currently underway has two goals:

Firstly, it aims to revive the lie that the military intervention was aimed at strengthening Afghanistan's civil society and did not install a brutal colonial regime that wallowed in luxury while three-quarters of the population lived in abject poverty.

Secondly, it aims to create an ideological basis for an accelerated military build-up of Germany and Europe by blaming the US withdrawal for the debacle.

Klaus Kleber, Caren Miosga and other German TV presenters have turned their daily half-hour news programmes into propaganda events in which carefully selected interview guests contrast the benefits of the occupying regime with the alleged crimes to come of the Taliban.

The Bundestag followed the same line when it debated the Afghanistan mission on Wednesday and approved the "deployment of armed German forces for the military evacuation from Afghanistan" by an overwhelming majority of 538 votes (with nine against and 89 abstentions).

Bundestag President Wolfgang Schäuble opened the session with a tribute to soldiers who had "sown the seeds of freedom" in Afghanistan. The desperation of people at the airport in Kabul wrenched his heart and shook the self-image of the West, Schäuble continued. "What we in the Alliance helped build up over two decades collapsed in a few days. It is a tragedy for those Afghans who now fear for their lives—among them women and girls who were allowed to learn to live self-determined and confident lives." In our claim to "transform Afghanistan according to our ideas and values," he concluded, "we" have failed.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who opened the debate with a government statement, claimed that the "international community" in Afghanistan had set itself the goal of "building liberal structures, training security forces, strengthening the rule of law and democracy, defending human rights—above all the rights of girls and women—promoting journalists, artists and entrepreneurs and strengthening civil liberties."

Green Party leader and chancellor hopeful in the federal election in September, Annalena Baerbock, sounded the same note, claiming to speak on behalf of Germany's soldiers. The troops felt "morally violated" by the government, which had allotted a higher priority to domestic considerations than "Germany's foreign policy responsibility."

Dietmar Bartsch, leader of the Left Party parliamentary group, claimed that "twenty years of war on terror" and "the attempt to export democracy" had failed. Echoing the Greens, he accused the government of failing to evacuate civilians and local aid workers at an earlier date.

Parliamentary head of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) Alexander Gauland also maintained the fiction that the Bundeswehr had tried to export Western values to Afghanistan—and drew racist conclusions: The failure of the mission showed that different cultures could not be reconciled. Instead of defending Germany's security in the Hindu Kush, as proclaimed one time by then Defence Minister Peter Struck (SPD), the Hindu Kush was now coming to Germany. Gauland strongly opposed allowing Afghan refugees into Germany, apart from a handful of aid workers.

The real nature of the war in Afghanistan

The German media only rarely publishes reports that shed light on the real character of the war in Afghanistan. One such exception is the cover story of the latest issue of *Der Spiegel*. Written by *Spiegel* reporter Christoph Reuter, who has travelled across the country repeatedly for 20 years, it paints a devastating picture of the occupation regime.

He describes how wedding parties were bombed and massacred by the occupying forces. And how US special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad ensured in 2002 that various warlords were admitted to the Grand Council: "Militia leaders who had ruled with fear and aggression before the arrival of the Taliban; they were men like Mohammed 'Marshal' Fahim, a Tajik leader who stood accused of perpetrating

massacres and kidnappings. And Rashid Dostum, the Uzbek leader who murdered several hundred imprisoned Taliban and later had his opponents raped with bottles. Both of them would go on to serve as vice president of the country. ... They immediately set about exacting revenge on their former enemies and plundering the new government."

The report continues in a similar vein for several pages. While the new rulers stuffed "billions of dollars earmarked for construction projects, roads and power plants" into their pockets and bought court rulings, farmers "remained poor and were bullied by the militias of the new rulers. The fighters would show up to hunt down the Taliban, but would then cut down the farmers' almond trees and plunder their villages."

On the role of the Bundeswehr, Reuter writes that at the beginning it "rhapsodized at the time about the quiet in the provinces under their watch. When a new police chief was then appointed and he established a regime of horror in Kunduz, beating farmers and destroying their market stands when they didn't pay sufficient protection money, the German troops stood by and watched from their hill overlooking the city." So the Taliban returned to Kunduz, "taking control of village after village."

Reuter also describes how assassins murdered 30 UN staff in 2009 along with American security officials who were supposed to monitor the presidential election in 2009 after President Hamid Karzai rigged the first round of voting. The affair was hushed up and Karzai was confirmed in office. Later, when British elite soldiers "happened across a gigantic opium storehouse near Kandahar that belonged to the president's half-brother, all British diplomats were ordered to keep quiet about it."

Reuter had already concluded in 2007 that the Taliban were advancing once again because the "ill will toward everything foreign, toward Americans, toward Tajiks, toward police, was seamlessly nourished by real wrongs."

Röttgen (CDU) calls for military build-up

This political reality is being suppressed by most of the media and Germany's parliamentary parties because it discredits all future combat missions of the Bundeswehr. Instead, they try to blame the Afghan security forces or the sudden withdrawal of US troops for the defeat in Afghanistan.

Chancellor Merkel explained in the Bundestag that there had been an underestimation of "how breathtakingly fast the Afghan security forces would give up their resistance to the Taliban after the withdrawal of troops." This had "accelerated even more when the Afghan political leadership fled the country."

While Merkel refrained from any open criticism of the US, Christian Democrat MP Norbert Röttgen—a possible future foreign minister—was unrestrained: "The fact that the American president unnecessarily ended this mission to prevent Taliban rule, without any compelling reason is, in my opinion, a moral and political failure of the West," he said.

Röttgen called the ending of the military intervention in Afghanistan a "catastrophe." The Europeans had been compelled to follow the US "because Europe lacks the military capabilities to protect ourselves." This "European impotence" must be ended, he said. This was "a

national imperative."

"We have to create the prerequisite that we can implement what we think is right in terms of foreign policy," Röttgen stressed. "Not only in cases where we agree with the USA, but also in cases of dissent. ... We will not be able to realise our goals if we are not able to secure them militarily."

Wolfgang Ischinger, probably Germany's most influential diplomat, expressed similar views to Röttgen's in an article for the *Munich Security Report*. "Germany's previous business model has become obsolete in terms of security policy and foreign economic policy," he concludes from the debacle in Afghanistan.

"We are faced with a fateful decision: Either we commit ourselves to the 'European imperative,' to a more capable EU. Or Germany refrains from shaping change, leaves it at the status quo, and adjusts to the fact that we and our EU partners are seen internationally at best as auxiliary brakes in a system dominated by other powers to our detriment."

Left Party shifts into the camp of militarism

In principle, all parties agree with these conclusions. Not a single speaker in the debate, least of all from the Left Party or the Greens, disagreed with Röttgen. In view of the disaster in Afghanistan and widespread opposition to militarism, all of the parties represented in the Bundestag are closing ranks.

This is also reflected in the decision to send 600 German troops to Kabul, which the Bundestag had to approve retrospectively after the government dispatched troops two weeks ago, arguing on the grounds of an "emergency." There has never before been such unanimity in the Bundestag.

All of the MPs in attendance from the governing parties CDU/CSU and SPD, the opposition Greens and FDP, voted unanimously in favour. The AfD delegation was split with 26 voting in favour, 45 abstentions and one "no" vote.

The Left Party, which until now has always voted against Bundeswehr missions abroad, for the first time called on its MPs to abstain. Forty-three complied, seven voted against and five—Klaus Ernst, Matthias Höhn, Alexander Neu, Helin Evrim Sommer and Kersten Steinke—voted in favour of military deployment.

The Left has thus taken a step from which there is no turning back. It recalls the decision by the Greens 23 years ago to support the war in Yugoslavia. Since then, the party has become the most ardent supporter of German military interventions.

At that time, however, the Greens were riven by conflicts, including a bag of paint being tossed at the German Foreign Minister and Green Party leader Joschka Fischer at a party conference. This time around the Left Party has taken this step quietly and as a matter of routine. In fact, the party has long been—as the WSWS has repeatedly declared—an integral prop of German militarism.



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