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German militarism and the debacle in Afghanistan

The takeover of power by the Taliban in Afghanistan has not only led to the complete collapse of the puppet regime headed by President Ashraf Ghani and the Afghan army, it has also exploded the mountain of lies used to justify the longest, biggest and most expensive military mission conducted by Germany's post-war army (Bundeswehr).



Soldiers of the German army in Afghanistan

For 20 years, the government, the opposition and the country's servile media have led the German public to believe that the Bundeswehr was in Afghanistan to drill wells, enable girls to go to school and encourage nation building. None of this was true. The Afghan war was a dirty colonial war from the very start, with all that entails: massacres, torture, crime and corruption.

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Bagram was not only the largest American airbase in the country, but also a prison and torture centre where political prisoners from all over the world were interrogated and transferred to Guantanamo. Two Kabul prisons alone held close to 10,000 political prisoners who were set free by the Taliban when they took over the city.

According to official figures, almost 165,000 Afghans were killed during the war. The actual number is probably many times higher. Thousands of civilians died under a hail of bombs from American planes. The largest such massacre, which claimed the lives of over 130 civilians and numerous children, was ordered by a Bundeswehr officer, Colonel Georg Klein, near Kunduz, on September 4, 2009.

Even before the Bundeswehr entered the north of the country, the ally of the Western powers, Abdul Rashid Dostum, had murdered between 3,000 to 8,000 captured Taliban fighters. They were squeezed like sardines into containers, where they died in agony from lack of oxygen, overheating and thirst. Those who survived the ordeal were shot.

The Afghan governments of Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani, who installed, propped up and funded to the tune of billions by the Western powers, were, like other imperialist puppet regimes in Africa, Latin America and Asia, brutal, ruthless and corrupt to the bone.

The Afghanistan Papers—internal US government documents leaked in 2019—estimate that 40 percent of the US aid of over a trillion dollars landed in the pockets of corrupt officials, officers, warlords and criminals. President Ghani had \$169 million in cash when he fled the country last week, according to the Afghan ambassador to Tajikistan, Mohammad Zahir Aghbar.

This is the reason for the precipitous collapse of the Afghan government and army after imperialist troops left. Ghani's supposedly democratic regime lacked any social support, apart from a layer of Kabul's narrow middle and upper class. For the vast majority of the Afghan population, his regime and the imperialist occupation were hell on earth.

When the German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas and Chancellor Angela Merkel now declare in unison that "we misjudged the situation," this can only mean that they earnestly believed their own propaganda and have lost all sight of social reality. In fact, there was never the slightest doubt, even in Berlin, about the real aim of the war.

When the US used the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 as a pretext to attack Afghanistan and overthrow the Taliban regime, it was putting into action plans prepared long before. In reality, the American strategy was, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, to dominate a region of extraordinary importance with regard to geopolitics and energy supplies.

“By attacking Afghanistan, setting up a client regime and moving vast military forces into the region, the US aims to establish a new political framework within which it will exert hegemonic control,” wrote the WSWS, three days after the war began, in the statement “Why We Oppose the War in Afghanistan.”

German imperialism could not and would not stand aside. Since the reunification of Germany in 1991, there have been intensive discussions in leading political and military circles about how Germany could once again play a global political and military role in line with its economic interests. In 1999, the SPD and the Greens dispatched the Bundeswehr to Yugoslavia to conduct its first post-World War II foreign combat mission. Then the opportunity arose to gain a foothold in one of the world’s most important geostrategic regions.

On October 11, 2001, four days after the start of American hostilities in Afghanistan, Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (Social Democratic Party, SPD) announced to the Bundestag a fundamental reorientation of German foreign policy. The period during which Germany had merely participated in “international efforts to secure freedom, justice and stability” through “secondary aid” was “irretrievably over,” he declared. “We Germans in particular ... now also have an obligation to do full justice to our new responsibility. This explicitly includes—and I say this unequivocally—participation in military operations.”

One month later, the Bundestag decided by an overwhelming majority to provide 3,900 Bundeswehr soldiers for the fight “against international terrorism.” In addition to the governing parties, the SPD and the Greens, the conservative opposition at that time led by Angela Merkel, also voted in favour of the Afghanistan mission.

In addition to foreign policy aims, the intervention also served domestic political purposes. German soldiers were once again expected to get use to killing and dying on the battlefield, following decades of abstinence from war, while the broad mass of the

population was expected to overcome its deep, historically rooted anti-militarism and become enthusiastic about war missions.

Since then, more than 150,000 German servicemen and women have received their baptism of fire in Afghanistan, 59 died and thousands more have been injured and traumatised. At the same time, the mission has become a breeding ground for right-wing extremist tendencies. When the extent emerged of the influence of far-right elements in the Special Forces Command (KSK)—which carried out behind-the-lines operations in Afghanistan—the German Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer felt compelled to disband one of the four KSK companies.

The debacle in Afghanistan is a major blow to German militarism. “The willingness of the already pacifistically inclined Germans to choose militarily robust means to enforce security policy interests will decline even further in view of the images of the past few days,” complained the right-wing *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*.

However, this will not stop the German ruling class from pushing ahead with its militaristic plans. It will rely even more than ever on the far-right Alternative for Germany and repressive measures against opponents of war. The plans by the Berlin police to ban demonstrations and the hanging up of posters throughout the entire government district during the course of the official ceremony to salute soldiers returning from Afghanistan on August 31 must be seen as a warning.

Militarism is supported by all parties represented in the Bundestag. While they blame each other for the Afghanistan debacle in the current election campaign, not one of them denounces the criminal character of the war. This is also true of the Left Party, which has long signalled its willingness to support Bundeswehr war missions if the party is accepted as a coalition partner by the SPD and the Greens at the federal level.

The Socialist Equality Party (SGP) is the only party that categorically rejects militarism and war and is contesting the federal elections with a socialist programme aimed at eliminating its root cause, capitalism.

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