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# "The Americans have nothing to do in Afghanistan"

The former CDU parliamentarian and media manager Jürgen Todenhöfer calls for a withdrawal of German troops from Afghanistan within the next three years. This would also correspond to the wishes of Afghan President Hamid Karzai, who rejects an increase in German soldiers. The military action of the American, but also German troops had "not strengthened German security in the Hindu Kush, but weakened it."

Jürgen Todenhöfer in conversation with Jochen Spengler | Oct 07, 2008



**Jochen Spengler:** Today, the German Bundestag is convening for a special session to debate the Bundeswehr's mission in Afghanistan and to decide on the first reading. The German troop contingent for the NATO-led ISAF protection force is to be increased by 1,000 men to 4,500 soldiers. In addition to the ISAF mission, which is intended to secure the reconstruction of Afghanistan militarily, there is also the so-called "Operation Enduring Freedom", the anti-terror mission led by the USA.

The Bundestag will vote on the extension of Germany's participation in it at the beginning of November. However, the German government has now announced that the 100 elite soldiers of the Special Forces Command will no longer be made available for this purpose.

On the phone, I welcome the former CDU member of the Bundestag Jürgen Todenhöfer, media manager, author and publicist, who has made a name for himself as a critic of the Iraq war in particular, but who has also recently travelled to Afghanistan. Good morning, Mr. Todenhöfer.

**Jürgen Todenhöfer:** Good morning, Mr. Spengler.

**Spengler:** Mr. Todenhöfer, do the Afghans no longer want the help of the West and the missions against the Taliban?

**Todenhöfer:** The Afghans? Who is "the Afghans"? I have spoken to many and most Afghans I have met have been appalled by NATO's strategy, especially the strategy of the Americans, who, many Afghans told me, have long since bombed themselves from the

role of liberator to the role of occupier.

But to make it more concrete: I also asked President Karzai whether he wanted more German soldiers and more combat missions by German soldiers, and he told me unequivocally: "No! He doesn't need that and he doesn't want that."

What Karzai wants: Karzai wants a different strategy. He wants to stop these indiscriminate and terrible bombings, in which civilians are constantly killed, and Karzai wants the Afghan National Army to be better trained. And I do indeed see a very important point here. A member of the Afghan National Army earns just under 100 dollars. A Taliban gets between 200 and 400 dollars.

It is very easy to imagine what a young Afghan who is unemployed – and more than half of the people there are unemployed – would choose. He decides to fight for the Taliban rather than for the Afghan National Army. We can do a lot here!

**Spengler:** That means we should send more money instead of soldiers?

**Todenhöfer:** Money for training and paying for the Afghan National Army. Because the presence of German troops in Asia cannot be a permanent solution, we should gradually withdraw our German troops within the next three years.

**Spengler:** This anti-terror operation, which is mainly led by the Americans and the British, which you criticize, doesn't make it possible for the ISAF protection troops to help rebuild the country with some success?

**Todenhöfer:** I don't think so. I believe that the growth which the Taliban have received in the last few months, which is very astonishing, because these Taliban had been despised and chased away by the Afghan people...

**Spengler:** You are not a friend of the Taliban either?

**Todenhöfer:** I think the Taliban are a horrible group. But the fact that this group is gaining popularity again is firstly due to the fact that they have money, but even more so to the fact that the Americans attack some villages almost every day and then it turns out that two-thirds and sometimes even 100 percent of those killed are not Taliban, but civilians.

**Spengler:** What are American troops supposed to do if they are repeatedly attacked from Pakistan, if the Taliban deliberately mix with civilians?

**Todenhöfer:** Unfortunately, guerrillas always mingle with the civilian population. They see themselves as part of the civilian population. Guerrillas don't live in barracks. The Americans have nothing to do in Afghanistan either.

I don't understand how one can come up with the idea of defeating terrorism with wars anyway. Terrorism can be defeated if, firstly, we would start treating the Muslim world as we ourselves would like to be treated. We have not done this in recent decades and, by the way, since the beginning of colonization.

And secondly, fighting a terrorist, for example a global terrorist who is planning attacks

against Madrid or New York, is a matter for special police forces and intelligence operations, but not for armies. It has never happened that an army could defeat a terrorist movement.

**Spengler:** Don't you think Germany's security is being defended in the Hindu Kush?

**Todenhöfer:** At the moment, the bombings by the Americans, who are constantly killing civilians, but also incidents in which Germans have killed civilians – the Germans admitted this a few weeks ago – are not strengthening German security in the Hindu Kush, but weakening it, endangering it, because these images of the killed children who are then pulled out of some rubble, and where the Americans then say that they are really Taliban, go around the world.

They lead to the fact that there are always radical young Muslims who then say, we can't stand idly by. I consider the current strategy in Afghanistan to be completely counterproductive. The Afghan president also believes so. This strategy needs to be changed.

The solution is basically three things. Firstly, we need a regional peace conference in which Afghanistan, Pakistan and India are involved because of the Kashmir conflict. Secondly, as I said earlier, we need to strengthen the Afghan National Army. Only Afghans can defeat Afghans. And we need a time for the withdrawal of all these troops, because Western troops have no place in the Hindu Kush.

**Spengler:** What is the goal or what should it be? Be the target of the Western troops while they are still there? They want them to be withdrawn within three years.

**Todenhöfer:** I'm not talking about the Western troops first, but we also have development workers there. The goal must be to create jobs there through major projects. These major projects were to be secured militarily in the coming years. But the goal is not to constantly claim in some villages that there are Taliban and then to get children or women out of the rubble.

**Spengler:** Are the Taliban actually terrorists for you?

**Todenhöfer:** Most Taliban work with terrorist means. For me, this means above all that they attack civilians. But the global terrorism that we in Germany are afraid of, this global terrorism has nothing to do with the Taliban.

**Spengler:** Mr. Todenhöfer, and how do we convince the Americans?

**Todenhöfer:** Maybe you can tell them, where do you stand now after seven years of war. The Taliban were chased away, they were despised and they have never been as strong as they are today. This is the result of this bomb strategy.

This strategy has failed in Iraq, where the Americans have fewer casualties only because they are no longer or hardly moving out of their military bases, and this strategy is currently failing dramatically in Afghanistan.

I have not met a single politician who has not told me in Afghanistan – including Pakistan,

by the way – that the situation is getting worse from week to week, from month to month. And if we send more soldiers there now, we are sending the wrong signal. Anyone who tells German voters and German soldiers that more soldiers are now needed in Afghanistan and that more combat missions are needed is deceiving the German population and deceiving the German soldiers as well. This is not an Afghan demand; this is an American demand and we should close our minds to this demand.

**Spengler:** Thank you, Jürgen Todenhöfer, ex-politician, media manager and author of the bestseller "Why do you kill, Zaid?".

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