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European Languages

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Deutsche Welle

Afghans condemn German colonel's promotion

By Waslat Hasrat-Nazimi

08/14/2012

Afghans are outraged at the promotion of German Colonel Georg Klein, who ordered an airstrike on two hijacked fuel tankers, killing over 100 people, mostly civilians, in 2009. Many see it as a provocation.



The German military is paying \$5,000 in compensation to every family that lost a member in a German-ordered airstrike in Afghanistan. But the seemingly generous gesture is just the latest twist in a bizarre dispute over how much the life of a dead civilian is worth. This Sept. 5, 2009 photo shows Rahmatullah, a 19-year-old victim of the bombing, in a hospital in Kabul. (Der Spiegel)

People in Afghanistan aren't particularly fond of the name Klein. On the night of September 3, 2009, Colonel Klein ordered an air strike on two oil tankers which had been hijacked by Taliban operatives in Aliabad, near the German army base in Kunduz.

Over 100 people were killed and many were injured in the strike, most of whom were civilians. Among the dead were also children.

After the attack, Klein became subject of a military and a public prosecutors' investigation in Germany. No charges were pressed, however, and the case was dropped nearly a year later in August 2010.



**German Officer
May Have Misled
US Fighters in
Civilian Disaster**

Gave false info to pilots
in Afghan tanker strike

Sep 21, 2009 7:08 AM CDT

Amid accusations they withheld information about the strike from lawmakers, the then former Defense Minister Franz Josef Jung resigned from his new post as labor minister and the Bundeswehr's inspector general - Germany's highest ranking officer - also stepped down from his post.

'Standard' procedure

Because the investigation was closed in 2010, Klein's promotion to general is in line with the German army's "standard" procedure. He is to be named head of a new office for the Bundeswehr's personnel management early next year and is expected to be promoted to brigadier general by the end of next year.

There are predominantly critical voices coming out of the German press on the issue. What the German defense force views as "standard" procedure is a different story on the humanitarian and foreign policy levels. "This is not how the West will win the hearts of Afghans," wrote one journalist.

Lawyer for the survivors of the victims of Kunduz, Karim Popal, voiced his disappointment over Klein's promotion and Germany's Afghanistan politics.

"The promotion of Colonel Klein and his deputy in the Federal Republic of Germany is equivalent to a slap in the face for Afghan civil society."

He added the step ran contrary to the West's attempts to create trust and "we Afghans deeply regret that."

Karim Popal is in close contact with the surviving victims and families of those killed. He said they wrote a detailed letter to the German government demanding that those responsible for the killings of their children, fathers and families be brought to justice.

'Halfhearted' compensation

Klein's promotion was an insult to the families of the victims, the lawyer added; the memories of what happened on that September night in 2009 were still too fresh.

Sayed Rasoul, brother of one of those killed in the attack, is very upset. He has been taking care of his brother's children since his death and can barely make ends meet.

"The money they give us amounts to pennies," said Rasoul. "Had we known that we would not have any long-term help, and that the orphaned children would be forgotten as early as three years after the attack, we would have never agreed. Those responsible must be brought to justice."

Noor Jaan, who was badly injured in the strike, was very upset at the news from Germany.

"I lost a hand and half of the bones are missing in my shoulder. They promised they would operate on me. But up to now, nothing has come of that."

Noor Jaan said they would have never agreed to any compensation had they known it would only be paid out "halfheartedly." The families of 91 casualties and 11 badly injured victims were promised 5,000 US dollars in humanitarian aid.

"We have not forgiven Colonel Klein. It would be a big disappointment to us should the German government forgive him. He should be tried according to German law. Over 100 people were killed or badly injured. And he is simply forgiven? Who will take care of the widows and the orphans?" Noor Jaan said.

The letter written by the families of the victims is to be made public soon. Karim Popal will represent them and hopes justice will be served in the so-called Kunduz Affair.