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## Classified Report - Reality Contradicts Plans for Afghan Withdrawal

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Berlin maintains that Afghanistan is on the right track for German troops to withdraw by the end of 2014 as planned. But a classified report by the German foreign intelligence agency paints a different picture.



Karzai's activities have been focused on "holding on to power" and "maintaining the status quo," rather than toward reforms and the promised battle against rampant corruption.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai likes to tell the West what it wants to hear. "We will fight corruption with great determination," he says. Or: "We will relentlessly strive for good governance."

Such messages are well received in the West, because they correspond with the rosy picture that Western officials like to relay to the public themselves. German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle, for example, has become somewhat of a master at this game. "We are on course to realize the withdrawal of international and German combat troops by the end of 2014," he recently said, while also pointing out how important it is to integrate former Taliban fighters into Afghan society.

"Susceptibility to corruption, influence peddling by individuals and nepotism will continue" - Report

It is clear to everyone involved, however, that none of this is true. Karzai's government is corrupt to the core and only interested in maintaining power. More Western soldiers will also likely be needed in the country after 2014 to provide stability. Furthermore, there are hardly any indications that erstwhile Taliban fighters will contribute to peace efforts.

All of this becomes even clearer in an in-depth analysis by the Bundesnachrichtendienst (BND), Germany's foreign intelligence agency. The 21-page report, entitled "Afghanistan until 2014 - A Prognosis," has been designated "classified/confidential" as a precautionary measure, given that its carefully compiled facts don't match up with statements made to the public.

In September, copies of the dossier went to the Chancellor as well as the defense, foreign, interior and development ministries. There, the report landed on the desks of select department heads, senior generals and the ministers themselves. "After taking a look," grumbled one of the readers, "many wished that they'd never gotten hold of this document in the first place."

The dossier avoids discussing any catastrophe scenarios. Instead, it matter-of-factly lists several areas in which reality has failed to meet the West's wishes.

### Clinging to Fiction

Afghan President Karzai looks particularly bad in the BND analysis. "Susceptibility to corruption, influence peddling by individuals and nepotism will continue," it says. Likewise, it claims that all of Karzai's activities have been focused on "holding on to power" and "maintaining the status quo," rather than toward reforms and the promised battle against rampant corruption. Karzai would prefer to make concessions to insurgents, it concludes, than to push ahead with reforms.

Karzai's assurances to the West "remain declarations of intent," the document says. It also claims that Karzai wants to establish his older brother Abdul Qayum as a candidate for the presidential election scheduled for 2014, adding that he probably has the best chances of securing the decisive Pashtun vote in the country's south. With this move, the BND figures, Karzai wants to safeguard "the protection of family interests and retain power."

Chancellor Angela Merkel's government is aware of all of this. Development Minister Dirk Niebel was forced to postpone a conference planned for mid-September on raw materials at the

last minute. The meeting was meant to discuss a long-promised law on protecting foreign investors that had yet to be passed, but now it will have to wait even longer.

Nevertheless, the government is tenaciously clinging to the fiction that things could still improve with Karzai. If the Western allies were to abandon the man they have relied on there for years, it would be the final admission that they had failed in Afghanistan.

Chancellor Merkel and her ministers will have been even less pleased about what they read in the chapter about the security situation in Afghanistan. The most recent Defense Ministry report on this subject was submitted last week to the Defense Committee of the Bundestag, Germany's parliament. Although it says that the massive efforts of the United States have contributed to "breaking the momentum of the Taliban," the truth isn't quite so pretty. The BND report predicts that the number of attacks that members of the Afghan security forces carry out against Western soldiers will continue to increase. It also predicts that the program for reintegrating former Taliban fighters who have renounced violence will have "no effects" on the peace process.

The BND also believes the Afghan government's efforts to hold talks with insurgents have no chance at success. It says that the latter only want to negotiate with the US and not with Kabul, and that "no greater progress" is to be expected by 2014, the year of planned withdrawal, from the confidential discussions in Qatar between the United States and the Taliban. In the BND's view, the Americans' hands are tied by the presidential election, and the Taliban is merely marking time before the targeted withdrawal date of foreign soldiers.

### Unrealistic Expectations

The report's predictions for how things will be after 2014 are also politically problematic for the German government. Foreign Minister Westerwelle, in particular, has been adamant in his public statements about saying that no more foreign combat troops will be stationed in Afghanistan after 2014.

But the Foreign Ministry's expectations are unrealistic. Up to 35,000 foreign soldiers -- mostly trainers for the Afghan army, combat troops required to protect the trainers and as many elite soldiers as possible to hunt down terrorists -- will be needed to stabilize the country, according to the BND analysis. It also says that when the current mission of NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) ends, even though the United States will provide the majority of the fresh troops, the other NATO member states will still be expected to contribute roughly 10,000.

The report names no concrete figures for the Bundeswehr, but if Berlin plans to remain the third-largest contributor of troops to the Afghanistan mission, Germany will have to leave some 1,500 soldiers in the Hindu Kush region. Doing so would mean withdrawing only about two-thirds of the 4,500 German soldiers currently serving there.

Chancellor Merkel and her foreign and defense ministers want to avoid a debate on Germany's post-2014 contribution to the Afghanistan mission at all costs. The ministries say that a decision

on the share of German soldiers in Afghanistan after 2014 will be made at the appropriate time.

Merkel's center-right coalition government fears that Afghanistan could become a campaign issue. It's a justified worry, because members of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the main opposition party, are already bringing it up. "Having German combat soldiers stationed in Afghanistan after 2014 is out of the question," says Hans-Peter Bartels, a defense policy expert and parliamentarian for the SPD.

But that is exactly what could happen, judging from comments made on Sept. 25, when the German automotive and defense company Rheinmetall hosted a so-called "parliamentary evening" in Berlin. Volker Wieker, the inspector general of Germany's military, the Bundeswehr, betrayed in a side remark what the German government really thinks about the situation in Afghanistan. After 2014, Wieker said, there will presumably be a mandate "according to Chapter VII of the UN Charter."