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## Germany backs dialogue with 'moderate Taliban'

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Germany's defense minister says he supports talks with 'moderate' Taliban in war-torn Afghanistan, days after a committee was formed to probe a deadly German-ordered airstrike which resulted in heavy civilian casualties.

In an interview with the Welt am Sonntag newspaper, Defense Minister Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg said on Sunday that he favored keeping open channels of communications with moderate Afghan tribes and communities but cautioned against potential risks.

"Not every insurgent is a direct threat to Western society...There is a difference between groups who have the goal of fighting our culture out of a radical rejection of the West and those for example who see culture as connected to the place where you live," he was quoted as saying.

While rejecting a hasty commitment to US President Barack Obama's call for extra soldiers, Guttenberg attacked opposition Social Democrats for rejecting any boost.

He also noted that the scheduled conference on Afghanistan in London would offer a chance for establishing strategies "that reflects our own experience," instead of blindly following in the footsteps of the US policies.

"I would be careful with the words: one has to follow Obama...The first logical step of any new strategic approach is not to say we will send more troops and then figure out the strategy, but to formulate the strategy and then decide how many troops and civilians we will need," he said.

The remarks come as the country's unpopular presence in Afghanistan remains in the limelight since a raid called by a German commander killed 142 people in Kunduz just weeks ahead of Federal elections.

Public outrage has been mounting steadily over allegations of state secrecy to salvage the election, and questions on whether Germany's rules of engagement in Afghanistan have changed.

Analysts believe this will make it significantly harder for re-elected Merkel to argue in favor of a US request for extra troops at a time when the parliament's expansion of the troops' mandate has already met with strong opposition.

Guttenberg has personally come under fire after one of the top officials he forced to step down, former military chief of staff Wolfgang Schneiderhahn, said he had informed Guttenberg of the strike's details, including the civilian toll.

The defense minister has firmly refused to resign over the controversial airstrike near the northern city of Konduz, which Kabul says killed 30 civilians, despite forcing two top officials to step down for withholding 'details'.

Opposition is also concerned with media reports alleging that Germany's KSK (Special Forces Command) may have been involved in the bombing.