

## **Statement by Federal Chancellor Dr Angela Merkel**

### **on the German Armed Forces' mission in Afghanistan**

**delivered in the German parliament on Thursday, 22 April 2010**

Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues! The day after tomorrow, we will be paying our last respects to four German servicemen who died in the line of duty last Thursday in Afghanistan. We will be bidding farewell to Thomas Broer, Marius Dubnicki, Josef Kronawitter and Jörn Radloff. Only two weeks ago, we had to say goodbye to Martin Augustyniak, Nils Bruns and Robert Hartert. They had lost their lives on Good Friday in Afghanistan, along with six Afghan soldiers.

All of them died because they wanted to rid Afghanistan of terror and fear. I extend my deepest sympathy to their families, comrades and friends. I do so on behalf of the entire German government and the members of this house of parliament, as well as on behalf of the citizens of our country. Our thoughts are also with the wounded, and I speak for myself and for all of us in wishing them a complete and swift recovery.

On the occasion of the swearing in of young Bundeswehr recruits on the anniversary of Stauffenberg's assassination attempt, former Federal Chancellor Helmut Schmidt said on 20 July 2008 in front of the Reichstag, and I quote:

"You young soldiers are lucky to serve a peaceful nation and its state today governed by the rule of law. You should be aware that your service may entail risks and dangers. But there is one thing that you can rely on: This state will not misuse you."

Yes, this state, which last year turned 60 and this year is celebrating the 20th anniversary of its reunification, demands much of its servicemen and women - a very great deal, as we have painfully come to realize these days. But it will never misuse them. It asks them to serve the cause of the free and democratic values of this country.

The service members who fell in Afghanistan, like all their fixed-term and professional comrades, have sworn the following oath:

"I pledge to faithfully serve the Federal Republic of Germany and to bravely defend the law and the freedom of the German people."

Yes, the soldiers who have fallen in the line of duty and whose memory we are honouring today were faithful servants of the Federal Republic of Germany; they fulfilled a mandate that the German parliament adopted and renewed several times during the last eight years, with various majorities and at the request of differently composed Federal Governments. This mandate defies all reasonable doubt in terms of international and constitutional law.

It is based on UN Security Council Resolutions, and it remains fully valid.

Our soldiers who fell in the line of duty were brave, because they carried out their mission to defend the law and the freedom of our country, fully aware of the dangers to life and limb. There is no bravery without vulnerability – this is the painful truth that first they and their families, and later all of us, have come to realize.

All of us, therefore, owe it to every single fallen soldier to carefully preserve their memory. Our Minister for Development Aid, Dirk Niebel, accompanied back to Germany the three servicemen who fell on Good Friday. Our Defence Minister, Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg, returned to Mazar-e-Sharif immediately following last week's battle. Two weeks ago, I travelled to the commemoration ceremony in Selsingen, and this Saturday I will attend the ceremony in Ingolstadt together with the Federal Foreign Minister and the Federal Defence Minister. We all participate not only as members of the Federal Government, but also, like many of you, as members of the German parliament. Because we also voted for this operation as members of parliament, thus assuming responsibility for the employment of our servicemen and women. Our public commemoration must focus on what our soldiers who have died have done for us.

I have said so on many occasions in the past few days and weeks, and I will repeat it today: I can well understand that most servicemen and women call what they experience in Afghanistan on a daily basis civil war, or just war. If every day you live with the fear of being ambushed or coming under enemy fire, you do not care for legal niceties. Anyone experiencing such a situation must rather fear that those using the correct international law term of a “non-international armed conflict” are trying to play things down. That is why I unmistakably state the following: None of us are playing things down; none of us who has voted either for or against the mandate in the German parliament are playing down the suffering that is being inflicted on our servicemen and women and on their families, and on the families of innocent civilian Afghan victims.

On 10 February 2010, Federal Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle declared on behalf of the Federal Government to this parliament, and I quote:

“The intensity of the fighting against insurgents and the military nature of their organization have led us to the conclusion that the ISAF mission, also in northern Afghanistan, should be designated an armed conflict as defined under international humanitarian law.”

This, ladies and gentlemen, is what is widely referred to as combat or war.

Every member of this parliament who has given serious consideration to this issue – and I assume everyone here has done so – was aware of this prior to the vote on the current mandate. We cannot expect bravery of our service members if we ourselves lack the courage to stand by our decision.

In an interview published in last Sunday's edition of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung*, Sergeant First Class Daniel Seibert gave a detailed account of coming under fire on 4 June last year. When asked whether he himself fired his weapon and killed a person, he gave the following answer:

I shot him. In this situation, it was either him or me.

Owing to Daniel Seibert's actions during the fire fight, a patrol could be freed from where they were trapped by the Taliban. Sergeant First Class Seibert was honoured for his bravery. As he says in the interview, this does not mean much to him. What is more important is receiving recognition and respect for the difficult conditions of his mission – recognition and respect from all of us, from all citizens, respect for him and for all service members who live through extreme situations that we in Germany can hardly or not at all imagine.

On the occasion of receiving the Nobel Peace Prize on 10 December 2009, US President Barack Obama said the following:

So yes, the instruments of war do have a role to play in preserving the peace. And yet this truth must coexist with another - that no matter how justified, war promises human tragedy. The soldier's courage and sacrifice is full of glory, expressing devotion to country, to cause and to comrades in arms. But war itself is never glorious, and we must never trumpet it as such.

In other words: We must admit there has been suffering. Since our operation began, 43 Germans in uniform have lost their lives in Afghanistan. 24 of them died through so-called enemy action and in combat. Uninvolved people have died, also as a result of German actions, such as in the air strike on Kunduz on 4 September last year.

Each death not only puts an end to their lives, it also always impacts human relations, love, hopes and dreams. That is why it is important that we again and again take a close look at why we are sending young women and men to a distant country where their physical and mental health and their lives are repeatedly put at risk.

It is essential that we politicians call a spade a spade. It is essential that we express our doubts, also as members of the Federal Government and of parliament, that each and every one of us has or has had: doubts about whether this combat mission in Afghanistan is truly unavoidable. Only by facing up to these doubts can we credibly assume responsibility for the mission. That at least has been my experience. Despite all of this, I, like the large majority of this parliament, support this operation.

Our mission in Afghanistan has borne fruit: today, Afghan women have more rights, girls are allowed to attend school, roads are being built, and a great deal more has been achieved.

So there is a benefit, and it is worth the effort.

This alone, however, would not justify the engagement of our service members in Afghanistan. In so many other countries in the world, human rights are disregarded, people's right to training is obstructed, and living conditions are catastrophic – and still the international community does not send in troops to take up military engagement. No, in Afghanistan, something else is at stake.

To me, the famous sentence spoken by our former Defence Minister Peter Struck hits the nail on the head. Several years ago, he said: "Germany's security is also being defended in Afghanistan".

To this day, no one has more clearly, precisely and accurately expressed what is at stake in Afghanistan. Yet so far, this sentence has maybe not been followed up by sufficient debate on what the precise meaning is of "Germany's security is also being defended in Afghanistan".

Today, the certainty we have that we can live in a free state based on the rule of law is threatened by developments that can originate from far beyond our borders. This in itself is not a new development, but in the age of globalization it has taken on a new quality.

International terrorism and the so-called asymmetrical threat posed by individuals who care nothing for their own lives – this is one of the darkest sides of globalization. But as little as we can abolish globalization – which I do not want to do, and which would be impossible even if one should so desire – we must also not slacken our efforts to fight the threats to our country's law, security and freedom where they arise.

It is useless and completely unnecessary to discuss here what connection may exist between the historic events of 1989 and 1990 that led to the end of the Cold War and the withdrawal of Soviet soldiers from Afghanistan, which was also completed in 1989. I neither can nor want to discuss this here, but one thing is clear: The victory of the Taliban some years later transformed Afghanistan into a safe haven for international terrorist organizations, such as al Qaeda.

The terrorist attacks of 11 September were rooted in the al Qaeda training camps in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan. This is where the terrorists who committed the New York and Washington attacks, and later those in London and Madrid, were secretly trained. Many of these groups lived among us in disguise. They meanwhile have also plotted horrible attacks here in Germany. We have so far merely been lucky enough to prevent them in time.

However, it would be wrong to conclude that Germany is not a target of international terrorism. The 9/11 attacks foreshadowed what has meanwhile been confirmed: in the age of globalization, the challenges to our security policy following the end of the Cold War have dramatically changed. In future, the focus will be much less on conflicts between states. Rather, it is asymmetrical conflicts that will dominate our future security policy.

It is the Taliban and their allies in Afghanistan who seek and find cover behind tribal and village structures and thus even behind women and children – only to carry out military attacks. It is pirates off the Somali coast who jeopardize our trade routes with their attacks. The dangers that do not conform to the classic, customary pattern of conflicts and wars can in the blink of an eye and even from a great distance directly affect us.

Still: it is not, and will not be, primarily a military task to counter this threat. On the contrary, the Bundeswehr mission is and will remain a last resort.

It can only ever be the last resort, and must strictly comply with international and constitutional law.

Also due to its history, and not only in Afghanistan, Germany exercises military restraint. I say that Germany has good reason for such military restraint. Military restraint and the use of military means as a last resort – that is the Federal Republic of Germany's *raison d'état*, in connection with the political responsibility that we assume due to our economic strength, our geographic location in the heart of Europe, and as a member of international organizations.

We are partners with our allies in the European Union and NATO. On our own, we cannot achieve much or anything at all. Through partnerships, however, we can achieve a great deal.

Since 1990, that is since reunification and the end of the Cold War, our country has come a long way.

As part of reunification, we managed to build up a Bundeswehr that since 1990 covers the entire Federal territory, including the territory of the former GDR. Step by step, Germany has assumed responsibility at an international level together with our allies in NATO, in the European security policy, and on behalf of the United Nations, also outside of the NATO area.

Only a few years after German reunification, the Bundeswehr participated in peacekeeping missions in Somalia and the Balkans – something that had been totally unthinkable during the Cold War. In 1999, Germany became a part of the Kosovo mission. Without a doubt, such missions abroad now essentially characterize the Bundeswehr's mandate, structure, and day-to-day affairs.

Currently, Germany is participating in eleven missions with approx. 6,600 servicemen and women. German soldiers are deployed in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in Kosovo, in the Sudan, off the Lebanese coast, in the Mediterranean and in Afghanistan. The Federal Constitutional Court took several decisions that form the legal foundation for these missions abroad, which are also based on German parliamentary mandates. Through the members of parliament, these mandates send an important signal that the citizens of our country stand behind our men and women in uniform.

This is more important than ever. For the Bundeswehr will only be able to fulfil its mandate if it can rely on the necessary support in our society, and if this support is visibly demonstrated.

Based on this legal foundation for our Bundeswehr, I unequivocally state: We are ready to deploy the Bundeswehr within a multilateral framework such as the United Nations, the European Union and NATO if this serves to protect our populations or our allies.

Anyone today calling for the immediate and possibly unilateral withdrawal of German forces from Afghanistan without regard for our allies is acting irresponsibly.

This would not only plunge Afghanistan into chaos and anarchy, it would be impossible to foresee the consequences for the international community and the alliances through which we have assumed responsibility, as well as the implications for our own security. The international community went in together, and it will also go out together. Should it do otherwise, the consequences – and that is my firm conviction – would be far more devastating than those of the 9/11 attacks.

One look at a map will clearly illustrate this: Afghanistan directly borders on the nuclear power Pakistan. We must assume that another direct neighbour of Afghanistan, Iran, is making every effort to become a nuclear power. Some days ago, at the invitation of US President Barack Obama, I, together with many other heads of state and government, took part in the Nuclear Summit in Washington. We agreed that nuclear terrorism is one of the major threats to global security. Organizations such as al Qaeda are attempting to obtain nuclear weapons or nuclear material to build so-called dirty bombs, that is conventional weapons which disperse radioactive material.

The situation in Pakistan, Afghanistan's eastern neighbour, is particularly dangerous. The situation there is already today very fragile. If we did not consistently pursue nuclear disarmament, as we undertook in Washington, and if we were to haphazardly exit Afghanistan, there would be a much greater risk that nuclear weapons and material could fall into the hands of extremist groups. This must be prevented, ladies and gentlemen.

We must never forget what is at stake for us in Afghanistan: This is not a conflict between the so-called Occident and Orient, it is not a confrontation between Christianity and Islam. Leaving moderate Muslim forces in Afghanistan in the lurch through a precipitous or even unilateral withdrawal would serve only one purpose: it would provide an incentive for all extremists that would extend far beyond Afghanistan and its neighbours. That is why we cannot say often enough: In Afghanistan, we are defending Germany's security, as well as that of Europe and that of our partners throughout the world.

The international community knows that we cannot make Afghanistan a Western-style democracy. This is not the point. Now that a little more than eight years have passed since the operation began, we must admit – and I am also being self-critical and not blaming anybody else – that we have seen some progress and too many setbacks; what is more, some of our goals were unrealistically optimistic, or even wrong.

Some three months ago at the London Afghanistan Conference, together with the new government of Afghanistan, we made major new readjustments to our course in Afghanistan; the significance of this achievement cannot be overestimated.

The strategy of networked security was adopted, which closely interlinks security and development policy.

The London strategy involves all political forces in Afghanistan. It also aims to be an offer to all those among the Taliban and the insurgents who are willing to renounce violence and terror. It is an offer to those who want to participate in building up a bright future for their country.

According to the London strategy, the Afghan security forces are to be swiftly enabled to assume responsibility for the security and stability of their own country. The responsible handover is scheduled to already begin in 2011.

The London strategy coordinates our reconstruction and training efforts with the development measures of our partners. It expressly envisages periodic reviews of benchmarks, goals and measures. There will be a first stocktaking at the next conference in Kabul on 20 July 2010, which will be attended by Federal Foreign Minister Westerwelle.

In a nutshell, the London strategy creates the preconditions for a responsible handover. It is this, a responsible handover, that should be the chief priority of the international community, and not an irresponsible withdrawal, or an attempt to make Afghanistan a Western-style democracy. This would disregard our own security interests or be doomed to failure, because it would not take into consideration the cultural, historical and religious traditions of Afghan society. It is true that we are not familiar with the traditions of tribal assemblies and Loya Jirga in Afghanistan, these are foreign to us. But it is also true that these assemblies are a truly Afghan tradition of consensus-oriented decision-making which, in its own way, can help foster rule-of-law principles.

Not only because of my own experiences in the GDR do I consider a state based on the rule of law to be the greatest achievement of civilized humanity.

By the rule of law, I mean not only, but primarily, the individual's freedom from arbitrariness and oppression, from anarchy and chaos, and from a situation where she or he must live in fear of being persecuted or killed. Only when people are freed from this constant fear, only when the state is able to meet its population's basic need for security, only then are they given the opportunity and freedom to devote their attention to building up their country, their educational system, their economy and their social harmony.

It is the international community's chief task to assist Afghanistan in establishing such an order, precisely because this furthers our own security. This is the mission that NATO and its allies, and thus also the servicemen and men of the Bundeswehr, fulfil there. It is true that, in the long term, there can be no security without development, but it is equally true that security is both the precondition for all development and what prevents countries such as

Afghanistan from again becoming breeding grounds for international terrorism, which can threaten us in Europe and the rest of the world. The two are closely interconnected. The international community will maintain its military presence as long as is necessary, no more and no less. Our engagement is not meant to be long term, but rather reliable. This is at the core of the responsible handover, which we initiated in London and will bring to a successful conclusion.

Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues, the 43 service members who lost their lives in Afghanistan while serving their country paid the ultimate price that a service member can pay. They helped to protect us Germans from becoming victims of terrorist attacks in our country in this age where security has taken on a global dimension.

All soldiers serving in Afghanistan deserve our solidarity and our compassion. They live in constant fear of being wounded or killed. They live with this fear so that those of us at home in Germany can live without fear. For this we owe them our gratitude, our deep respect, and our support.

Thank you.