

German instructors to replace Tornado aircraft

On 22 September, the German Defence Minister Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg decided to withdraw six Tornado reconnaissance aircraft, which had been used for surveillance tasks in the ISAF mission in Afghanistan. Germany's withdrawal of the aircraft, which were utilised in controversial tasks and generated high costs, will enable an increase in the number of German instructors in Afghanistan.

General David Petraeus, the US commander of ISAF, requested the German defence ministry withdraw the Tornado aircraft. He suggested that Germany could send more instructors for the Afghan police and army instead of Tornado aircraft. Given the current NATO strategy in Afghanistan, greater combat or training engagement by allied states is considered more valuable to ISAF. At present, surveillance tasks can be performed by unmanned aerial vehicles, which are cheaper to operate. Since Germany will not decide to reassign Tornado aircraft from surveillance to combat missions (air support for land operations), the Bundeswehr will send more instructors for the Afghan police and army.

Furthermore, the withdrawal of Tornado aircraft from Afghanistan may partly soften the criticism of the Bundeswehr's participation in the ISAF mission at home. The use of Tornados in Afghanistan was criticised in Germany because the information gathered by those aircraft was used by ISAF troops as guidance for attacks on the Taliban. <jus>