
Interview: Brig. Gen. Heinz Karst (Ret.)

‘Marching Off Into An Adventure?’

Germany’s General Karst spoke with Angelika Bereuter-Raimondi and Michael Liebig, which interview appeared in the LaRouche movement’s German newspaper Neue Solidarität, in early November.

If you visit Brig. Gen. Heinz Karst (ret.) at his home on the Bodensee, you must expect that the conversation will be interrupted, since the telephone is always ringing. Many people inside and outside the German army, the Bundeswehr, want his assessment, want to speak about problems, and seek his advice. And that goes especially for the current situation, in which the German government coalition of the Social Democrats (SPD) and Greens wants to immediately send troops from the hollowed-out Bundeswehr into war situations in West Asia or the Middle East.

General Karst belongs to the circle of the “Fathers of the Bundeswehr,” who, along with their own war experience, built up the military forces of the German Republic. Although he formally retired long ago, he has never really “retired”: For more than three decades he has been writing books and essays, giving lectures, participating in roundtable discussions, and being active in a variety of institutions. Karst’s concern is the Bundeswehr, but he approaches it from a broader strategic view—not merely military. Conversing with him, you quickly notice that, in the period between his captivity and his joining the Bundeswehr, the history of literature was his *métier*. But, he is a soldier, and knows that the protection of the vital interests of the German Republic, as well as its obligations to the NATO alliance, can mean going to war.

Therefore, it is even more noteworthy, that in the current situation, this tough, old General declared that he is “against German soldiers being sent into an adventure in Afghanistan or in the Middle East. Therefore I must set myself against Chancellor [Gerhard] Schröder, should he expect there to be unconditional followers for German troops to stand at ‘readiness’ for Afghanistan.” Ultimately, there is the official oath of German soldiers, in which they solemnly vow to valiantly protect the law and the freedom of the German people, he says: “Whether, in chasing down bin Laden in Afghanistan or in overthrowing the Taliban regime, one is ‘valiantly defending the law and freedom of the German people,’ is a question which the government has still not answered. Does

Chancellor Schröder know what it can mean, if he talks about ‘unlimited solidarity’? Has he considered what it can mean if it really becomes a long war?”

The Beginning Of The Causal Chain

In addition, there is a second question of fundamental significance, which “not only I have posed, but which is placed before others in and out of Germany: Is bin Laden, who is obviously sick with kidney disease, really the chief person responsible for the attacks of Sept. 11? I am not convinced of it,” said General Karst. “It might be that bin Laden was involved, but that he would have been the central figure for planning and carrying out such a complicated, huge action, is not clear to me. Therefore the observations of [Egyptian President Hosni] Mubarak, who was an experienced Air Force officer and war pilot, interest me. He said that it would be impossible for an inexperienced aviation student, such as for example, the Egyptian [Mohammed] Atta, to have done this.”

If it comes down to war or peace, Karst said, then the basis for such a literally life-or-death decision, must be clear. There should be no shoving aside of “such questions, unwelcome as they may be.” Lyndon LaRouche, “whose political work I have followed for almost 20 years, advocates two theories about Sept. 11: First, there was internal American cooperation for the attacks. Second, the attacks occurred in a moment when a severe financial and economic collapse is obvious, and not only in America. Are there people in America, who stay in the background, but who possibly have an interest in bringing about an emergency regime—in view of a situation which can be compared with the worldwide economic crisis of the 1930s?”

There are terrorists who make their political message known with terrorist acts, said General Karst. “Only, where was the political ‘message’ from the gruesome Sept. 11? That has me perplexed. But an effect was produced: America finds itself, since Sept. 11, in a state of war—abroad, but really also at home. One must think about the attack in Oklahoma City. There also there was no ‘message.’ The former soldier McVeigh was executed, and never talked about his backers or accomplices.”

Historical Lessons Of War

General Karst said that he views the course of the American war in Afghanistan with astonishment. “The Russians have already shown, that they could not break the resistance of the Afghans—despite having a huge army, which they deployed there, and which, militarily speaking, did not fight badly. Now volunteers from Pakistan want to fight against the Americans. In the Islamic world, the view is spreading that the Americans cannot make it in Afghanistan. At the same time anti-Americanism is rising and growing to the benefit of Islam.”

Should either Iraq or Sudan be attacked by the Ameri-

cans — “and that is what is implied,” General Karst allowed — then it would be dangerous. “I have not read Huntington’s book [*Clash Of Civilizations*], but I know about his thesis on the ‘clash of civilizations.’ Then there could occur a worldwide fight against Christendom. Just think about what happened last Sunday in Pakistan — the massacre in the Catholic church.”

Should a Bundeswehr deployment on the side of the United States be demanded, in the face of this situation, it would be “irresponsible,” for the German government to give

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in. Not only because “the causal chain, which led to this demand, is so dubious” — the real responsibilities for Sept. 11. “It is irresponsible for this demand to have been accepted at a point when the Bundeswehr is engaged in rebuilding. In other, sharper language: The Bundeswehr finds itself in the worst crisis of its history. In a situation, where it is being rebuilt and reduced, parts are being drawn into a war for which we are not prepared. The majority of the ‘Red-Green’ politicians have truly little awareness of military matters,” said General Karst.

Therefore, said General Karst, no one should be surprised if there is “widespread unrest” in the Bundeswehr. Bundeswehr members are currently taking part in events, lectures and roundtables on the strategic situation in unknown numbers. But higher-ranking officers, who refer to the obvious problems, “have been advised by the politicians from the ’68 generation, that the soldiers are supposed to leave the thinking to them — the politicians — if you please. Do they remember, what the people who today sit in positions of government, used to say a short time ago, about ‘slavish obedience’ of the Wehrmacht officers” before and during World War II?

It is no secret that the Bundeswehr would at this point only be capable of deployment in part, General Karst confirmed. “The army has only five divisions. Special forces, paratroopers, mountain troops are ready to deploy. We have some good Air Force squadrons, especially the ERC-Tornados. Our small Navy has little significance for the Americans. Altogether, the Bundeswehr at this point is functioning ‘by the skin of its teeth.’ ” They would need billions to again become a modern standing army. Bundeswehr Inspector General Horst Kujat has correctly made that point.

The higher-ranking officers know that you cannot easily deploy even the best parts of the Bundeswehr into Afghani-

stan or the Middle East. The commander of the Special Forces, Brigadier General Guenzel, has pointed that out, before he was then “corrected.” “And we have 7,000 troops in the Balkans — Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo — and they are good people. That means that the units stationed here at home have been cleaned out. Whereas we could handle one theater of war with 10,000 men, we couldn’t handle a second one at this point.”

“It is thus the case, if the Bundeswehr goes first into a war deployment — in Afghanistan or somewhere — and if it is only involved to a small extent,” General Karst stressed, “that is then, as is well known, rarely the end of it. Then there come new demands. It is the old experience. Therefore you must say: Don’t start! Chancellor Schröder has eagerly acceded to the American demands. But he then added to it: ‘We don’t want to get into an adventure.’ But the question now is, what is the difference between an adventure and deploying Fuchs tanks or Special Forces units into Afghanistan or the Middle East? Where does the border between an adventure and a politically necessary and militarily compelling deployment lie?”

Dubious Invocation Of Article 5

Article 5 of the NATO treaty was invoked, “although without unequivocal evidence of an attack ‘from outside’ being presented. You know, Article 5 says, if one of the 19 nations has been attacked from the outside, then the others must come to its aid. The amount of aid is voluntary. And I can suppose that the majority of the German soldiers — except some mercenaries who are in every army — don’t really want to be deployed to Afghanistan or the Middle East. Not out of shirking, but because, in a reasonable evaluation, there is the impression that you are being thrown into an adventure.”

Then General Karst emphasized: “The foundations for a deployment into Afghanistan or the Middle East are unclear, the goals dubious. The consequences are unimaginable. Think about the starting point of the First World War: The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife in Sarajevo — an act of terrorism! Then came the German ‘*Nibelungentreue*’ — unlimited solidarity — with the Austrian allies. Where did that bring us and the world?”

“This is a dramatic and tangled-up situation, but we must, in my view, bring about somewhat of a clarification,” the General said. “Are there American supporters who stand behind the attacks of Sept. 11? What should we then think about the secret services, which obviously paid not the slightest attention to what was brewing before Sept. 11? Or, were they prohibited somehow from following definite tracks? There are unclarified questions. Second, the connection with the worldwide economic crisis. We are compelled to put these things clearly on the table — and not be ‘made available’ on dubious grounds, with unclear goals, and with inadequate assumptions for an incomprehensible situation.”