

Interview:

The State Secretary of the Ministry of Defense, Thomas Silberhorn, speaks with “Deutsche Welle” about the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan.

Mister Silberhorn, is now really the right time to pull out of Afghanistan?

Silberhorn: We always said we went into Afghanistan together and we will go out together. So we have been in sound consultation in recent weeks and so we are not surprised about this decision taken by the NATO council and we are all well prepared for this withdrawal and for the redeployment of our troops.

You have also always said that it is not about dates or timetables. What about the situation on the ground? We have just heard that the situation isn't good. The security situation. The Taliban is resurged; there are real concerns about what might happen to women's rights. What support can Germany offer then going forward?

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Silberhorn: First of all: the core military goal to deploy troops to Afghanistan was to avoid future threats for us from Afghans soil. This core military goal has been accomplished. But the political goals beyond this military perspective have not been

fully achieved, of course. And it remains the question for political leaders and for all actors in Afghanistan how to find reconciliation to a peaceful development, to new elections and to stabilization in this society which is already suffering from civil war from four decades.

German forces have been offering training and support to Afghans security forces as we said. Do you think that Afghans security forces are now in the position that they are well trained enough to provide security for the Afghan people?

Silberhorn: Well, they are much better trained than before and our approach has been in full line with all our NATO partners. So we did a brilliant job I think. Our soldiers deployed in Afghanistan are engaged until the end of April. This mandate will be closed and finished but we accomplished what we had to do from our military standpoint. And of course, threats remain in the civil society and in this dualism between legitimate government of Afghanistan and the Taliban forces. And this ground for violence and civil war in Afghanistan has to end and has to lead to a political process of reconciliation and stabilization. And I think the announcement to end the presence of the international troops should give new motivation and new speed to the negotiation process ongoing in Afghanistan.

Mister Silberhorn, you just said yourself that threats are remaining. We have heard of Afghans who say they are really concerned about what might happen of a country after troops withdraw. Would it not be better to put some sort of conditions upon this withdrawal to give the Taliban for example some incentive to take part in peace talks and not to start violence once again?

“This mandate will be closed and finished but we accomplished what we had to do from our military standpoint.”

Silberhorn: I think it's true that the Taliban forces will have to be in close contact to the international community. They are in no way capable to finance their government ambitions and to finance their forces. So the civil society in Afghanistan as a whole will depend on support from the international community. And this has some preconditions. So when it comes to the redeployment of troops it is now time-based and no longer condition-based. But when it comes to the future development of Afghanistan, some more conditions have to be met in order to ensure additional international support. And this should be the momentum for the political actors in Afghanistan, in particular for the Taliban, to come to the table.