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## Former Minister: Germany Must Fight in Southern Afghanistan

**Germany's Bundeswehr will have to fight in the more dangerous southern region of Afghanistan in the foreseeable future, according to former Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer.**

In an interview with the *Tagesspiegel* daily, published on Sunday, May 4, Fischer said once a new president is inaugurated in the United States, the German government will no longer be able to refuse NATO allies' requests that it deploy troops to the South, where soldiers from the US and other NATO countries are fighting a fierce Taliban insurgency.

German troops are now stationed in Kabul and the relatively calm northern part of the country.

"With a new American administration, we are going to have to fight in the south sooner or later," Fischer said.

He added that a new US president would put much more pressure on Germany to fulfill what many allies see as its duties in Afghanistan than the Bush administration has.

The former foreign minister called it a "big mistake" that the current German government has refused requests by allies such as the US and Canada to move troops into the South. Even if Berlin does order troops to be deployed eventually, Fischer said, Germany is likely to be seen as the "bad guy" who missed the opportunity to act on its own initiative.

"In Germany, we've forgotten why we're even there," he said in the interview, which was conducted at the Munk Centre for International Studies at the University of Toronto.

### German opposition

German public support for the six-year-old mission is slipping with a majority saying they oppose continued deployment.

There are about 40,000 NATO and 20,000 US-led coalition soldiers in Afghanistan. NATO commanders said at the end of January they need about 7,500 more troops to carry out their mission.

In January, US Defense Secretary Robert Gates reportedly sent an "unusually stern" letter to German Defense Minister Franz Josef Jung demanding combat troops, helicopters and paratroopers for Afghanistan and charging that some NATO states were not pulling their weight. Southern Afghanistan has seen the worst violence since the Taliban was ousted in the US-led invasion in 2001.

But Germany has rejected the call for troops in battle-ravaged southern Afghanistan, insisting Berlin's focus on reconstruction efforts in the relatively calm north was justified. Germany has insisted German troops are making headway in stabilizing the north.

Fischer, in the newspaper interview, said it needed to be made clear that the Afghanistan mission is a reaction to the terrorist attacks in the US on Sept. 11, 2001, and warned that if similar attacks could follow if the fight against the Taliban and al Qaeda is not successful.

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