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Generals tell Berlin to leave Afghanistan

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BERLIN, Feb. 29 (UPI) -- Former Soviet generals have told the German government not to expand its engagement in Afghanistan and instead think about pulling out its troops.

"More troops won't solve this problem, that's our experience. They only increase the tragedy," Lev Serebrov, a former Soviet army general and now a parliamentarian in the Russian Duma, said earlier this week in Berlin, according to the Berliner Zeitung newspaper. Germany, he said, shouldn't be thinking about sending more troops to Afghanistan, but "how it can pull out" of the country.

A serving Russian military official, Gen. Ruslan Aushev, said the situation in Afghanistan reminded him strongly of the military operation the Soviet Union had in the country in the 1980s.

"We were there for nearly a decade, first with a battalion, then with a division, then with 100,000 troops -- and in the end, we were forced to retreat," he said at the same Berlin event, which was sponsored by RIA Novosti.

He warned Germany to keep focusing on reconstruction and not to send its troops into volatile southern Afghanistan. If Germany did that, there will be "a lot of casualties." No one had ever succeeded in imposing a social model onto Afghans.

Serebrov said the international community should pull out of Afghanistan and let the Afghans handle their problems on their own. That would lead to civil war, he noted.

"But help from outside will only have an effect when the forces of violence have worn out," he said, as quoted by the Berliner Zeitung.

The remarks come as NATO officials and most recently U.S. presidential hopeful Barack Obama demanded that European powers become increasingly engaged in southern Afghanistan.

Obama had said it can't be that U.S. and British troops do all the "dirty work" in southern Afghanistan, where NATO is fighting the Taliban, while other European countries are refusing to take part in the heaviest fighting.

Germany has more than 3,000 troops stationed in Afghanistan as part of the NATO-led, U.N.-mandated International Security Assistance Force. The German parliamentary mandate forbids German troops from fighting in southern Afghanistan, except when called in for emergency aid missions.

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