

German parliament votes to station Patriot missiles on Syrian border

By Ulrich Rippert
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On December 14, the German parliament (Bundestag) voted overwhelmingly to send 400 German soldiers and two units of its Patriot air defence system to Turkey, to be stationed on the country's 900-kilometer border with Syria. All parliamentary parties, with the exception of the Left Party, voted in favour of the military deployment.

The parliamentary mandate also clears the way for the use of AWACS reconnaissance aircraft stationed in the region. The aircraft are to monitor air space over the border.

The deployment was justified in parliament as a purely defensive measure in line with Germany's commitments to its allies, i.e., to protect its NATO partner Turkey from missile attacks by the Syrian army.

In reality, the parliamentary resolution is a prelude to military intervention in Syria. For months, the United States, together with other NATO states, has intensified its pressure on the Syrian government. NATO is systematically fuelling a civil war by inciting religious and ethnic differences and sending armed mercenaries to the country.

Official propaganda has sought to portray the conflict as a popular uprising against the regime of Bashar al-Assad. In fact, what is taking place is a campaign to bring about regime-change in Syria while weakening the position of Iran.

Turkey is now a major staging ground for assembling imperialist troops to be used against Syria. The government in Ankara has been providing the so-called "rebels" with weapons and equipment for months. It is also offering the services of Turkish officers as consultants to opposition militias. It has allowed the opponents of Assad to operate from Turkish territory and is home to a CIA base from which American

intelligence officers pass on arms, money and intelligence to the insurgents.

Contrary to propaganda claims that the deployment is aimed at combating Syrian missiles aimed at Turkey, the Patriots can prevent operations by Syrian military aircraft in northern Syria. This would facilitate the creation of a no-fly zone, permitting easy access to Syria by Assad's opponents. A similar move was carried out by the US and NATO in Libya last year as the first step in direct military intervention.

The decision of the Bundestag to back the stationing of missiles marks a new phase of imperialist violence in German foreign policy. During the campaign against Libya last year, the German government abstained in the United Nations Security Council on the issue of military involvement. In retrospect, this decision was considered a major foreign policy error by political and business circles.

For years, the German army operation in Afghanistan was described as a "humanitarian measure," and any talk of direct military intervention was denied.

Now the situation is changing. Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle (Free Democratic Party—FDP) has been criss-crossing the Middle East and travelled to Turkey several times in the past few months. The German government had already made up its mind about the Patriot missile deployment prior to the request from Ankara, with Westerwelle announcing that Germany was ready and willing to send missiles, troops and aircraft.

There was broad unanimity in the discussion in parliament last Friday. The spokesperson for the Greens, Omid Nouripour, thanked Defence Minister Lothar de Maiziere (Christian Democratic Union—CDU) for providing comprehensive information about the mission and for his willingness to

accommodate “Green concerns”.

In the parliamentary Defence Committee, the Greens had raised two conditions. First, the Greens opposed having German troops operate under Turkish command and insisted that the command be wielded by NATO. Second, the Greens wanted the missiles to be kept a safe distance from the Syrian border to ensure that they did not end up in Syrian territory. The Greens applauded when de Maizière assured them that he would comply on both points.

Social Democratic (SPD) spokesman Rolf Mützenich praised the government for reaching out to the opposition and making it possible to discuss the deployment of German troops in a “prudent, independent and careful” manner. He emphasized the “purely defensive deployment, the defensive formation of missiles”, and described the stationing as a significant step in German and international security policy.

To the applause of Christian Democratic Union, Christian Social Union (CSU), Free Democratic Party and Green deputies, Mützenich attacked the governments of Iran and Russia, which have “expressed concerns about the deployment”. He blamed them for fuelling the conflict by sending arms to the Syrian government. The responsibility for the carnage was, he insisted, the fault of the Assad regime. He concluded: “We Socialists will not shirk our responsibility... you can count on us.”

Left Party spokesman Jan van Aken explained the negative attitude taken by his parliamentary group. He made clear that the issue was not a fundamental one for the Left Party and indicated that its faction was voting “no” with the knowledge that the measure would pass without its support.

Van Aken sarcastically addressed the defence minister, who had referred in his own contribution to the danger of Syrian chemical weapons: “I think, Mr. de Maizière, if you once again raise the issue of chemical weapons you should be condemned to years in purgatory, stuck between Colin Powell and George W. Bush.”

Instead of criticising the German government and military leadership, he attacked the Turkish government, which had long been seeking “to be a regional power.” He appealed to the CDU-led German government, saying, “You really cannot, you must not

show any allegiance, because Turkey is pursuing its own interests.”

The same weekend, it was announced that van Aken, who is also vice chairman of the Left Party, signed the petition entitled “Freedom Needs Assistance,” which calls for support for the “insurgency” in Syria. Other signatories include Left Party leader Katja Kipping; Green Party Chairperson Claudia Roth; SPD General Secretary Andrea Nahles; the chairman of the Foreign Policy committee, Ruprecht Polenz (CDU); and a number of other politicians, scientists and artists. Behind all manner of pacifist phrases, the petitioners call for intervention in Syria by the great powers and provide ideological cover for a military offensive.

One hundred years ago, on the eve of World War I, the major powers divided up Africa, Asia and the Middle East. Now, led by the US, they are seeking to carve up once again the Near and Middle East. As was the case a century ago, all of the parliamentary parties have shifted to support imperialist war, revealing their thoroughly reactionary character.

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