

Germany: The Left Party embarks on a war course

By Johannes Stern
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As Germany's ruling elite discuss a more aggressive foreign policy to defend their economic and strategic interests internationally, the Left Party is openly advocating foreign military missions and a more active role for German imperialism.

In a collection of essays entitled "Left-wing foreign policy: prospects for reform", recently published by the think tank *WeltTrends*, leading Left Party foreign policy makers openly call for German military operations, the defence of imperialist alliances and treaties, close transatlantic cooperation with the US, and a greater international role for Germany.

Up to now, the Left Party was the only parliamentary party to officially oppose overseas missions of the *Bundeswehr* (German Armed Forces)--criticizing US foreign policy and even calling for the dissolution of NATO in its party programme. This is now officially over. After the general election, the Left Party is dumping whatever empty phrases might become obstacles to supporting whatever wars Berlin might wage in the future.

In a contribution entitled "The Left Party and military operations," Left Party defence spokesman Paul Schäfer, who also represents the party on the Parliamentary Defence Committee, openly advocates supporting military operations. Schäfer demands the Left Party develop "accurate and particularly restrictive criteria" in order to "define our attitude to such military missions".

At the same time, Schäfer makes clear that in reality, his party places virtually no limits on what future military deployments it will consent to. Missions would "not be rejected a priori" that are "legitimized and carried out by the United Nations with which a [...] peace agreement is to be enforced, [and] which lead to the implementation of agreements or which reflect the legitimate concerns of the hitherto oppressed or disenfranchised".

Furthermore, military operations should be supported that "are expressly advocated by 'civil society' actors such as human rights groups, humanitarian organizations, trade unions within a country and internationally".

In other words, the Left Party is willing to give all Germany's military missions of the last two decades its retrospective blessing and to share responsibility for those to come. In fact, there is not a single Bundeswehr deployment, neither in Kosovo nor in Afghanistan, which would not fall under one of the above criteria listed by Schäfer. That would also apply to a war against Syria, where the Syrian opposition groups supported by the Left Party have long been calling for a military strike.

Like the representatives of the other parties in the Bundestag, Schäfer tries to justify his support for a brutal imperialist war policy by cynically using human rights propaganda. He asks, "Doesn't making an absolute prohibition on interference reach a moral and legal limit when it comes to genocide or mass murder?"

He insists, "As the Left Party, we cannot refuse solidarity towards those in hopeless situations who confront their oppressors and persecutors".

Of course, Schäfer is aware that behind the "humanitarian" military interventions he advocates lie tangible economic and geostrategic imperialist interests. He writes, "The return of Africa to the stage of world politics; the not to be overlooked avaricious eyes of the US, but also of France, Germany and China towards the forgotten continent, has to do with the discovery of new mineral resources (oil, oil, oil)".

And for this reason, Schäfer supports them! He writes, "Anyone who thinks, however, that this means the subject of international military operations is resolved fails to reach the mark. Could it not be that such operations, though perfectly guided by certain interests of capital utilization and the expansion of political influence, contribute nevertheless to supply[ing necessities] and the return of refugees, and to saving hundreds of thousands of lives and a de-escalation of violence?"

This is the cynical language of former Stalinists, who now advocate defending the interests of German imperialism with military means. From 1970 to 1988, Schäfer was a member of the DKP (German Communist Party, the West

German satellite of the Stalinist state party in East Germany).

The Left Party is not content to give existing Bundeswehr operations its retrospective blessing, but explicitly calls for German imperialism to act more aggressively. It agrees with the chorus of the entire ruling elite, which after decades of restraint, now demands that Germany again play a much stronger role internationally.

In an article entitled “Reforms to strengthen the UN are necessary and apparent”, Left Party foreign policy experts Paul Schäfer, André Brie, Stefan Liebich, Ernst Krabatsch and Gerry Woop declare that Germany should use its “non-permanent seat on the Security Council for two years” to stake out its “influence”. The Left Party wants, also as an opposition party in parliament, to “make a contribution” and foster “the discussion process”, especially “in view of the special responsibility and influence of the Federal Republic of Germany”.

The stated objectives include “fighting terrorism” and imposing “sanctions as enforcement measures under Chapter VII of the UN Charter”.

The Left Party is making clear that it is also prepared to defend the interests of German imperialism in a close diplomatic and military alliance with Washington. The neo-colonial wars against Iraq and Afghanistan were conducted under the guise of the “war on terror”; the NATO bombing of Libya two years ago was preceded by a resolution under Chapter VII of the UN Charter.

In another contribution under the heading “The left between anti-Americanism and alliance issues”, Gabriele Kickut, deputy director of the Centre for International Dialogue and Cooperation of the Left Party-affiliated Rosa Luxembourg Foundation, argues that US imperialism can play a “progressive” role. According to Kickut, one must understand US foreign policy as “imperial liberalism”, and assume that “liberal political objectives can be pursued, including through the use of military force or by the construction of hegemonic structures”.

Kickut demands this approach “be given more attention in the design of left-wing transatlantic foreign policy”. She emphasizes that “the global challenges of our time [...] can only be solved in cooperation and not in confrontation with the United States”. Especially, “left-wing politics” cannot “avoid the United States in the future”.

Finally, André Brie makes a mockery of the programme of the Left Party. In the essay “Globalization or world society”, he writes that the principle “pacta sunt servanda” (agreements must be kept) should form the basis of any “left” foreign policy. The principle is “not only for public and private contract law an almost civilizational necessity, but equally for international relations, organizations,

intergovernmental agreements and international law as a whole”.

In this way, NATO, which the Left Party supposedly wants to abolish, and the associated network of international treaties are therefore considered untouchable.

Support for Bundeswehr operations abroad, the maintenance of close foreign policy relations with the US and the defence of existing alliances such as NATO are a prerequisite for participation in government at federal level. With the new “reform prospects” for the Left Party’s foreign policy, the party is making clear it is seriously preparing for such an eventuality. Already in the election campaign, the central political demand of the Left Party was for a coalition government of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Greens.

Gregor Gysi, the leading candidate of the Left Party, raised in early August the possibility that he might serve as foreign minister.

The fact that Gysi has written the foreword to this volume shows that the new foreign policy course is supported by the entire party. Only last week, Gysi was confirmed in office as chair of the Left Party in the Bundestag.

During the election campaign, the Left Party tried to hide its pro-war politics, claiming it would refuse to support overseas Bundeswehr missions or war. Some workers and young people voted for the party because they wanted to express opposition to war and militarism.

The brochure “Left-wing foreign policy” leaves no doubt, however, that the Left Party--like the Greens 15 years ago--is turning into an open party of war. It will play a key role in the return of German imperialism to the world stage.

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