

German parliament votes for military intervention in Syria

By Ulrich Rippert
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On Friday, the *Bundestag*, the German parliament, voted to participate in the war in Syria by a large majority. The decision to launch a major deployment of the *Bundeswehr*, with far-reaching and unpredictable consequences, was rushed through parliament in expedited proceedings.

On Tuesday, the cabinet had decided to send 1,200 soldiers, six Tornado jets and a frigate to participate in the war. Only afterwards were the parliamentary deputies informed. On Wednesday, the first reading in the Bundestag took place; the time allotted for questioning the government was limited to a total of 30 minutes. On Friday, the second and third readings followed in a session that lasted just two hours. At 11am the voting began.

445 deputies voted for the combat mission in Syria, with 146 voting against and seven abstentions. The “yes” votes came almost exclusively from the grand coalition—the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU). The majority of Left Party and Green deputies voted against.

Not since World War II has a decision on participation in war been taken so quickly. The government could count on a compliant parliament, whose members regard themselves as its agents. These tactics served to suppress all public discussion of the significance of the Syrian mission, its risks, its consequences and its lack of an international legal and constitutional basis.

The government knows that there is deeply rooted popular opposition to war and militarism. The crimes committed by the German army during the First and especially during the Second World War are not forgotten, but are branded into the social consciousness.

One hundred years ago, the SPD approved the Kaiser’s war credits in August 1914; today, the Social Democrats play a key role in muzzling critics of the war course.

Before the debate started, SPD parliamentary leader Thomas Oppermann rejected criticism of expedited Bundestag proceedings, declaring they were justified and necessary. “France has asked us for help,” he said, seeking to end debate and stressing that after intense public discussions, “we are in a position to be able to take a responsible decision.”

Justice Minister Heiko Maas (SPD) defended the grand coalition’s decision and dismissed legal concerns about the military mission. “Germans can be sure: the *Bundeswehr* deployment to Syria does not violate international law or the constitution,” he told the *Berliner Tagesspiegel* on Thursday.

In support, Maas cited the 1994 Federal Constitutional Court decision that *Bundeswehr* missions overseas are justified, if they are part of a collective security system: “There are three resolutions adopted by the UN Security Council against IS [the Islamic State militia] that cover the present mandate. Moreover, according to the EU basic treaty, France can also rely on the defence commitment of its EU partners.”

This is flatly untrue. Even the archconservative *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* admitted, “There is no resolution of the UN Security Council which would legitimize the deployment.” As for the EU basic treaty, it does not allow military intervention in Syria—where France, the United States, Turkey and other countries have been seeking regime change for years and are conducting a proxy war against Russia and Iran.

SPD deputy leader Rolf Mützenich defended the German war mission by accusing those who contend

that *Bundeswehr* missions increased the risk of attack in Germany were ignoring the facts, as “Germany has long been in the cross-hairs of the terrorists.”

That too is untrue, as previous military interventions in the “war on terror” have shown. “The war on terror has not only increased the number of terrorists,” the *Frankfurter Rundschau* commented, “It has also enlarged its geographic base.” Security experts also believe that entry into the war massively increases the risk of attack in Germany.

SPD defence expert Rainer Arnold replied to accusations from Left Party parliamentarians that the *Bundeswehr* mandate was being rammed through parliament at a “gallop” by asking: “Haven’t we perhaps been waiting far too long and everything is too late?” Arnold added demagogically, “We can talk for hours about the fact that a military operation carries risks. I do not want to gloss over this. But we are not sending our soldiers on an adventure.”

The Greens and the Left Party play along with this game. They are not in principle opposed to military intervention and have supported different factions in the Syrian war for years. Their “opposition” primarily serves to create the false impression that a serious public debate about the war is in fact taking place.

This was clear from the contribution of Green Party leader Anton Hofreiter. He stressed that the Greens’ rejection of the *Bundeswehr* mandate did not mean they did not want to take military action. They were merely rejecting inconsistent and ill-considered actions of the government.

“First present a clear mandate!” he cried, complaining that all important questions were open: “Who will command? How will you deal with Russia? How will you deal with Assad?” He could not see “any clear strategy”, he said, blaming Defence Minister von der Leyen for constantly changing her positions and contradicting herself.

Left Party chair Sahra Wagenknecht lamented the rush with which the decision was being pushed through, proclaiming, “War makes things worse!” She added that war will only produce new terror and asked if the West really wanted to compete with IS to see who can kill more people. She was attacked for this by the other parliamentary factions.

At the same time, Wagenknecht made clear that her rejection of the war was particularly directed at the

United States and its dominance in the NATO alliance. “It is a big failure of European policy to have supported the United States in its wars,” she declared.

The debate shows that the struggle against war requires an independent movement of the working class and youth. None of the parliamentary deputies pointed to the obvious fact that Germany’s military intervention in the Middle East has been prepared for years.

The attacks in Paris merely provided a pretext to put these existing plans into practice. Two years ago, President Gauck, Foreign Minister Steinmeier and Defence Minister von der Leyen proclaimed the “end of military restraint.” Germany was “too large to comment on world politics only from the sidelines,” they said, and must “be prepared to intervene in foreign and security policy matters earlier and more decisively and more substantially.”

All the parliamentary parties support the return of German militarism and great power politics in what is, despite various tactical differences, a veritable conspiracy for war against the population.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (PSG, Socialist Equality Party) have long warned of the growing danger of war. In September 2014, the PSG Special Conference adopted a resolution against war, which states: “Under the pretext of the struggle against the terrorist militia Islamic State (IS), which was built up and supported by the US, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, a further violent division of the raw material-rich region has begun, threatening to prove even bloodier than the previous wars in Iraq, Libya and Syria.”

Now, Germany is participating militarily in this violent re-division of the resource-rich region.

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