

# German government plans massive military expansion in Iraq

By Johannes Stern  
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The new grand coalition in Germany is planning a massive expansion of the German army (Bundeswehr) mission in Iraq. This was announced by Foreign Minister Ursula von der Leyen (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) in the course of her trip to the Middle East last weekend.

Von der Leyen praised Germany's cooperation with the Peshmerga [Kurdish military forces] during her visit to Erbil, the capital of the Kurdistan Autonomous Region in northern Iraq. The Bundeswehr has been arming and militarily supporting the Kurdish force for three and a half years. It was "impressive to see the great success of the Peshmerga training mission," she said, thanking "Bundeswehr soldiers" on the spot.

Von der Leyen then announced that in future the Bundeswehr would be deployed throughout Iraq. There will be "another mandate," she said, "a mandate with a new balance ... between Baghdad and Erbil on equal terms on both sides." The defense minister made no concrete statements about the planned operation, but left no doubt she envisaged a long-term military engagement throughout Iraq.

"Both in Kurdistan, as well as in the central government in Baghdad," there is "a request above all to help in the implementation of reforms, in the construction of ministry structures," the minister said. In Erbil, for example, "the construction of an entire sanitary unit is necessary," but this also involved "of course the entire planning, organisation, recruitment and training." There is also "considerable demand" for logistics. Germany wanted to "make its contribution" to provide Iraq with "independent, loyal operational forces for the long term."

In Baghdad on Saturday, von der Leyen justified the German offensive by referring to the fight against the Islamic State (ISIS). She "had experienced a country

that, on the one hand, is heavily marked by the devastation left by ISIS, but, on the other hand, is full of pride that it has succeeded ... in beating ISIS." Everybody knew, however, that "ISIS has been hit hard, but is still not completely defeated."

Von der Leyen's attempt to portray the deployment of the Bundeswehr as an "anti-terrorist operation," or as part of the fight against the "devastation" of Iraq, is pure propaganda and lies. It is common knowledge that the US invasion under George W. Bush in March 2003 initiated the destruction of Iraq, and that ISIS was the product of the country's subsequent occupation and Western cooperation with Islamist militias in the regime-change wars launched against Libya and Syria.

In the cases of Iraq and Libya, Germany largely abstained from participating in the US-led wars, but it has been playing an active role in the war against Syria from the start. The Bundeswehr has resorted to terrorist methods, both directly and indirectly, to defend the economic and geo-strategic interests of German imperialism in the Middle East. The allied Peshmerga units and Iraqi forces killed tens of thousands of civilians in the so-called liberation of Mosul from ISIS, with the German air force providing target coordinates for massacres carried out by the anti-ISIS coalition in Syria.

Instead of ending the Bundeswehr's brutal and unpopular foreign deployments, the new federal government plans to intensify them. In Baghdad, von der Leyen openly stated that the expansion of the mission in Iraq corresponded to the plans drawn up by a new grand coalition. She told her partners in Iraq that "in the coalition negotiations we agreed we will move from our mandate in the fight against terrorism to another form of engagement."

In the coalition agreement, the Social Democratic

Party (SPD) and the conservative Union parties also agreed to continue their “commitment within the framework of the anti-ISIS coalition ... and to adapt it.” In addition, the section on “current foreign missions” reads: “The Bundeswehr mission in northern Iraq was successful, the ISIS there has been largely pushed back militarily. Therefore, we can phase out and end the training mandate in northern Iraq ... In a further step, we plan to develop this mandate for a comprehensive stabilisation and sustained fight against ISIS terror, in particular through capacity building.”

Over the weekend, leading SPD politicians criticised von der Leyen’s announcement. “The defence minister’s commitment to a future mandate in Iraq is premature and has not been agreed by the acting government,” declared SPD vice-chairman Rolf Mützenich. Only a new federal government could decide on a new mandate. In addition, “the statements of the defence minister” did not reflect, “what was agreed in the coalition agreement.”

What was agreed in the drafting of the coalition agreement, and what are the concrete plans of the SPD leadership for “capacity building” in Syria and Iraq? Workers and young people, but also the over 450,000 SPD members who are due to vote on the coalition pact in the coming weeks, have a right to know exactly what was agreed. It is becoming increasingly clear that far-reaching military decisions were made behind the scenes. At the end of last week it was revealed that the German army is to establish a new NATO headquarters in Germany.

The Socialist Equality Party rejects the coalition pact, which focuses on the return of Germany to an aggressive foreign and great power policy, and calls for the disclosure of all the talks. Under conditions of escalating warfare in Syria and Iraq, and US preparations for war against North Korea, which threaten to provoke a Third World War, this demand, along with the demand for new elections, is becoming increasingly urgent.

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