

Germany's Grand Coalition intensifies war policy in the Middle East

By Johannes Stern
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The German government intends to continue the war mission of the Bundeswehr (Germany's Armed Forces) in Syria and deploy the Air Force in the entire region beyond October 31, contrary to the provisions of its current parliamentary mandate. This was announced by government spokesman Steffen Seibert at a press conference in Berlin earlier this week.

For years, Germany has made "a considerable and internationally recognized contribution to the anti-IS coalition," explained Seibert. The Bundeswehr was "active in aerial reconnaissance, in aerial refuelling and also in the training of Iraqi units." Now the German government "together with our allies, with the American side, is talking about how the engagement in the region should develop further."

The deployment of German ground troops, as formally requested by the US government and its special envoy for Syria, James Jeffrey, for the training of Kurdish fighters in northern Syria, is allegedly not planned, according to Seibert. At the same time, he made it clear that the German government was preparing to expand its involvement in the US-led anti-IS coalition behind the back of the population.

This would involve "a whole series of both military and civilian components that could be suitable for achieving stabilization on the ground in the region." The German approach was that "we want to continue our previous measures as far as possible." For one thing is clear: "The challenge posed by the so-called Islamic State has by no means disappeared. The coalition has succeeded in taking over areas that ISIS previously held in Syria and Iraq. But the danger of the Islamic State continues."

That's the familiar propaganda. In reality, the main concern of the imperialist powers is not the struggle against ISIS, which itself is a product of the brutal war for regime change in Syria, which cost 400,000 lives and destroyed large parts of the country. The actual war aim was and is the overthrow of the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and the installation of a pro-Western puppet regime in Damascus.

In contrast to the attack on Iraq in 2003 and the Libyan war in 2011, Germany participated in the Syrian intervention from the very beginning. As early as 2012, the Federal Foreign Office, together with the government-linked think tank Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP) and part of the Syrian opposition, launched the project "The Day after" and published a "Vision for a Post-Assad Order."

Now that Assad and his Russian and Iranian allies are nearing a military victory and the United States is escalating its war preparations against Iran, the European powers are increasing their own military presence in the region to assert their economic and geostrategic interests.

According to media reports, France and Great Britain have responded to the US government's request and agreed to send additional soldiers to Syria. Paris and London would increase their troops by 10 to 15 percent, a US government representative told *Foreign Policy* magazine on Wednesday. Italy is also on the verge of sending additional armed forces. Similarly, a number of Balkan and Baltic states are "almost certain" to send soldiers to replace US troops, the magazine writes, citing another source.

In Germany, too, leading politicians of the governing parties are pleading for the deployment of ground troops to Syria. CDU chairman Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer said in an interview that German ground troops in Syria were "a big leap for us." But one must "always be aware: it is also a matter of our own security in Germany, not just what the United States wants."

The deputy chairman of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group, Johann Wadephul, told representatives of the German Press Agency that the request from Washington should not be "reflexively rejected." After all, "this region is about our security and not American security."

The CDU defence expert and chairman of the Bundestag's reservist working group RAG, Patrick Sensburg, emphasized in an interview with *Focus* that the US demand for ground troops was by no means off the table. It was also "our obligation to ensure peace in the region" and "to assume greater responsibility." After all, "the fight against

the IS is far away from the USA and close to Europe ... You can't always say, 'Let the Americans do it.'

Leading social democrats, who had already strongly condemned US plans to withdraw from Syria last December, have also made it clear that they essentially support Washington's request.

The USA had "moved away from its withdrawal plans because of international criticism, among other things. Because the IS is still a real danger in the region," said Fritz Felgentreu, defence policy spokesman for the SPD parliamentary group in the Bundestag. "Now the U.S. expects support from the same countries. That's understandable." One should "therefore evaluate with the other countries of the anti-IS coalition what is still necessary now and which country can take over which task."

Even the opposition parties in the Bundestag are not fundamentally opposed to an expansion of the mission and the deployment of ground troops. However, they stress that it must serve German and European interests in the region to a greater extent.

Alexander Graf Lambsdorff, deputy leader of the FDP parliamentary group, told the German daily *Die Welt*: "As long as there is no political solution for Syria, we don't need to talk about German ground troops." The US inquiry, however, showed that it would not work in the medium term without a European contribution. "The condition for this must be that Europe be equally involved in the development of a new political order in Syria. It can't continue with the previous approach."

Tobias Lindner, the Greens' spokesman on defence policy, made similar remarks according to *Die Welt*. "German ground troops in Syria would only be conceivable at all if there were a mandate from the UN Security Council and a credible peace perspective," he said.

Most aggressively, the Left Party, which from the beginning has been pursuing a policy of war in Syria, is pushing for greater foreign policy independence from the USA. Dietmar Bartsch, leader of the parliamentary group of the Left Party in the Bundestag, demanded that Germany should not be a "recipient of orders from the United States." Tobias Pflüger, the Left Party's spokesman on defence policy, warned that the US administration was "concerned only with replacing its soldiers, so that they also have a free hand in other fields." Germany should "not allow itself to be drawn further into the Syrian war."

In fact, German-European military planning is not limited to Syria. On Thursday, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* published a comment calling upon the German and European powers to join the anti-Iranian military coalition to secure the Strait of Hormuz that US President Donald Trump is seeking to establish. "Freedom of navigation is a great good, especially

for a nation as dependent on exports as Germany. It must also be defended in crisis regions such as the Persian Gulf."

The newspaper's proposal: "Warships from Europe or Asia" should "secure the bottleneck from the Gulf of Oman to the Persian Gulf", through which "40 percent of the world's oil exports" passes, and the Bab el-Mandab Strait, the entrance from the Gulf of Aden to the Red Sea.

European ships "would be less provocative for Iran than American or Saudi patrol boats" and at the same time "a further signal to Tehran that Europe wants to maintain the nuclear agreement but does not accept the aggressive regional policy of the Islamic Republic unopposed."

The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* claim that another armada of warships in the powder keg of the Middle East would be "a contribution to crisis prevention" is obviously absurd. It would rather increase the danger of a direct military confrontation with Iran, which could quickly ignite the entire region and lead to a possible confrontation with the nuclear powers Russia and China and thus to a third world war.

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