

German politicians and media urge military action in the Persian Gulf

By Ulrich Rippert and Peter Schwarz
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For a long time, Germany, France and Great Britain acted as if they wanted to save the nuclear agreement with Iran. But the more the US pushes ahead with its preparations for war against the country, the louder are the voices in Europe urging military action. It is becoming clear that the Europeans were never concerned about peace, stability or the like, but rather about pursuing their own naked imperialist interests.

The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ)*, the mouthpiece of the Frankfurt Stock Exchange, stated this with exceptional frankness on July 15:

“The conflict, the broader framework of which is the Iranian nuclear programme, is not only about freedom of shipping and the smooth supply of the world economy with the lubricant oil,” wrote *FAZ* editor Rainer Hermann. “The overall objective is rather to control a region whose strategic importance in a world that continues to depend on oil is not to be underestimated.”

“America and Europe cannot, out of their own interests, leave the Gulf region to other actors,” Hermann declared with naked imperialist arrogance, “neither to any other external power, such as Russia, nor to the Islamic Republic of Iran, for a Pax Iranica would endanger the present order of a region in which half of the known oil reserves lie.”

According to the *FAZ*, a “war for oil” is “only one reason for the great Western interest in the Gulf region.” It also cites the petrodollars invested by the Saudis and other Gulf monarchies in Western government bonds and Western economies. This, according to Herrmann, has particularly paid off for the UK, where the Gulf states have rescued banks, financed the high current account deficit and bought real estate. The “order books of the Western weapon producers” are also filled by the Gulf states.

Since this commentary appeared, the crisis in the Persian Gulf has intensified massively. After Great Britain illegally seized the supertanker “Grace1,” loaded with Iranian oil, off Gibraltar on July 4, Iran confiscated the British tanker “Stena Impero” in the waters of Oman on July 19. Since then, the British government has been pushing for a European military mission, allegedly to ensure free navigation through the Strait of Hormuz. Around one fifth of the oil traded in the world is transported through the 21-nautical-miles-wide strait.

France, Italy and Denmark immediately signaled their support, while Germany delayed a firm commitment. While Theresa May’s old British government had talked about a purely European military mission, its successor under Boris Johnson has now

openly stated that the real issue is a joint operation with the United States, which has been preparing for months for a war against Iran and has transferred military forces to the region for this purpose.

“I think it would be important for the initiative to have US support to make it viable,” the new British foreign secretary, Dominic Raab, told the BBC. Raab roundly rejected a proposal by Iranian President Hassan Ruhani to swap the two confiscated tankers.

On Tuesday, the German Foreign Ministry officially confirmed that a written request had already been received from the Trump administration a few days ago to participate in a military Gulf mission. Last week, US Secretary of Defence Mark Esper also spoke on the phone with his German counterpart, Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer.

Then on Wednesday, Foreign Minister Heiko Maas (SPD) announced during a trip to Poland that the Germany government would not officially participate in the US government’s proposed operation but explained that Berlin would be working in “close coordination with our French partners.”

The attempts to keep the Iranian nuclear agreement alive against the will of the US have now largely failed. Europe, Russia and China have not kept their promise to continue trade with Iran despite US sanctions. And Tehran officially regards the deployment of European warships in the Gulf as a “hostile signal.” A crisis meeting held in Vienna on Sunday to rescue the nuclear treaty failed to produce tangible results.

Although the US is heading more and more openly towards a military catastrophe that could claim millions of victims and expand into a nuclear world war, the demands for war are also getting louder and louder in Europe. Especially in Germany, where the overwhelming majority of the population vehemently rejects a military intervention, the media and politicians are demanding a military mission.

The news magazine *Der Spiegel* appeared on Saturday with an editorial entitled “When, if not now?” In an aggressive tone, Deputy Editor-in-Chief Christiane Hoffmann demanded the participation of the Bundeswehr in a military mission in the Strait of Hormuz.

“Of course, the dangers of such an operation would be considerable: at worst, Europe and thus the Bundeswehr could be drawn into a military conflict with Iran,” she wrote. For the mission, “if it is to be credible,” must also be ready to “use violence.”

“Nevertheless, it would be a mistake for Germany to once again hide behind the culture of military restraint,” Hoffmann continued. “More than a quarter of a century after the first armed deployment of the Bundeswehr, Germany can no longer shirk its responsibility.” For years, the Federal Government has been talking about “no longer wanting to stand only on the sidelines internationally. What’s Berlin waiting for? When, if not now?” she wrote indignantly.

One day later, the leader of the Munich Security Conference, Wolfgang Ischinger, sang the same tune in the *Welt am Sonntag*. Germany must “leave the reserve bank” and participate in the European protection mission in the Gulf, he wrote. “Hardly any other country is as dependent on the freedom of international shipping as Germany, the world champion in exports.”

The Federation of German Industries (BDI) also spoke out openly in favour of the deployment of the Bundeswehr in the Persian Gulf. BDI President Dieter Kempf justified this with the fact that a functioning merchant shipping industry is of outstanding importance for Germany as an export nation and industrial country. The Strait of Hormuz was by far the most important route for transporting oil and gas worldwide. The point was to secure the strength of international law with a “defensive deployment.”

“It is a question of solidarity among us Europeans that Germany as a trading nation should also take part in such a mission,” Kempf declared.

CDU foreign policy expert Norbert Röttgen told the *B.Z. am Sonntag*: “Iran’s behaviour demands a European response.” Iran had attacked free shipping, the “basis of free trade, export and thus our prosperity.”

According to the news network RND, Foreign Minister Heiko Maas (SPD) had also spoken out in favour of a Bundeswehr military operation in the Strait of Hormus. At a special meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committee on July 24, Maas has said: “We want to be there.” There was also intensive dialogue with the governments in London and Paris.

Positive signals also came from the Greens—garnished with the usual reservations about a UN mandate and a “peace mission,” which are then dropped when decisions are taken.

Omid Nouripour, foreign policy spokesman for the Green parliamentary group in the Bundestag, told the *Passauer Neue Presse* that “a prudent reaction to the Iranian provocation” was necessary to prevent an overreaction by the Iranians or the Americans. In view of the tensions in the region, a deployment of the Bundeswehr could contribute to “de-escalation.”

Franziska Brantner, European policy spokeswoman for the Green parliamentary group in the Bundestag, insisted that a military operation with German participation would have to take place in the Strait of Hormuz under the cover of the European Union (EU). “A coalition of the willing under de facto American leadership would be legally and politically difficult, its de-escalating effect questionable.” In general, Germany “bears a special responsibility here, as in all European issues.”

The Left Party is playing its usual confusion game. While it is currently against sending German soldiers to the Gulf under current circumstances, it does not want to exclude such a military

operation in general.

In an interview with *Deutschlandfunk Radio*, Stefan Liebich, the foreign policy spokesman for the Left Party in the Bundestag, said: “Before we act militarily, I want to know what has happened.” Since Germany is currently a member of the UN Security Council, Foreign Minister Maas should advocate there for “an independent commission of inquiry.” If one then knew what had happened, “one could also draw consequences.”

Similar to the Greens, the Left Party only wants to send Bundeswehr soldiers into the Strait of Hormuz if they act independently of the US Army and fight for purely German or European great power interests. If this is guaranteed, it dresses up foreign interventions of the Bundeswehr as “means of de-escalation” and “consistent peace policy.” As early as 2014, Liebich had vehemently advocated the participation of the German Navy in the destruction of Syrian chemical weapons, because this was “without doubt a good thing.”

Having abstained militarily in the Libyan War in 2011, the German bourgeoisie today is determined to be part of a much larger war against Iran so as not to be cheated by its imperialist rivals and not to be left empty-handed in the distribution of the spoils.

The most important task now is to build a global antiwar movement led by the working class. Only in this way can the struggle against the war conspiracy of the ruling class and its cause, the capitalist profit system, be waged. The workers of Europe and the US must unite with the workers of Iran and the Middle East and fight for an international socialist perspective.

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