

German government extends war mission in Middle East

By Johannes Stern
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The Grand Coalition is continuing the war mission of the Bundeswehr [Armed forces of Germany] in Syria and Iraq and will deploy its contingents in the region beyond its current mandate. This was decided by the federal cabinet last Wednesday.

The decision is supported by both government factions. Already last Monday, Social Democratic Foreign Minister Heiko Maas and new German Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer (CDU) had informed the parliamentary group leaders in the Bundestag about the plans in a joint letter.

A central point is the extension of the deployment of the Luftwaffe [German Air Force], which operates with fighter jets and tanker aircraft from the Jordanian military base in al-Azraq, for another five months until the end of March 2020. The training mission of the German Armed Forces in central Iraq and in the Kurdish autonomous region in the north of the country will be extended for a further year until 31 October 2020.

In their letter, Maas and Kramp-Karrenbauer justify the extension of the missions by invoking a continuing threat from the so-called Islamic State (IS). Even after the loss of its territorial areas in Syria and Iraq, the letter claimed the Islamist militia still had thousands of fighters and supporters at its disposal, thus posing a threat to the stability of Iraq, the region and the security of Germany and Europe.

That is the old propaganda. In reality, Germany and the other powers involved in the US-led mission are not concerned about the fight against the IS, which is itself a product of the US military intervention in Syria and Iraq that killed hundreds of thousands and destroyed large parts of the Middle East. It is about imperialist interests and the control of the resource-rich and geostrategically important region.

Comments in the bourgeois media and strategy papers of the foreign policy think tanks openly discuss this. “It’s about domination,” the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* commented two months ago. The conflict in the region “is not only about freedom of navigation and the smooth supply of the world economy with the lubricant of oil. The overarching objective is rather to control a region whose strategic importance in a world that continues to depend on oil should not be underestimated.”

The German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP) argues in a recent paper, headlined “A ship will come”, for a European naval mission in the Persian Gulf led by Berlin. It states: “The unimpeded use of transport, supply and trading lines as well as the security of raw material and energy supply are among the foreign and security policy priorities of an export-dependent nation like the Federal Republic of Germany.”

In their letter, Maas and Kramp-Karrenbauer claim that the core of the missions in Syria and Iraq is “the German civilian commitment in the areas of humanitarian aid, stabilisation and the creation of the foundations for reconstruction”. In fact, it’s about war. “For the work of the civilian measures”, “the fight against the IS with military means remains necessary and the German military contribution indispensable”, the letters stresses.

The German government is stepping up its military intervention in the region at a time when US war preparations against Iran are escalating.

The ruling class is well aware of how dangerous the situation is. “The region has now reached the border of war,” warned Norbert Röttgen, Chairman of the Bundestag’s Foreign Affairs Committee, on Deutschlandfunk radio. “It [the region] is facing a large-scale military escalation. You could say it is very

close to war.” An “escalation” would no longer be “local” but would affect “the entire region with all the implications of strategic, political, economic dimensions, oil production and so on.”

In other words, imperialist warmongering has brought the world to the brink of a new Middle East war that could escalate into a conflict between nuclear powers. In an official letter to the United States last week, the Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif warned. “I make a very serious statement about defending our country. I am making a very serious statement that we don’t want to engage in a military confrontation. But we won’t blink to defend our territory.” Asked what the consequence of a US or Saudi military strike on Iran would be, he said, “all-out war.”

Germany and the EU have reacted by essentially lining up with the US war drive. Yesterday the heads of state and government of France, Germany and the United Kingdom issued a joint statement condemning “in the strongest terms the attacks on oil facilities on Saudi territory” and accusing Iran of “responsibility for this attack”. If the European powers stick verbally to the nuclear agreement with Iran, it has nothing to do with pacifism. They are pursuing their own predatory imperialist interests aimed, ultimately, at elevating themselves to the hegemonic power in the region.

“We Europeans must take political care of this region. It’s our neighborhood region. If there is a bang there, we are most directly affected,” warned Röttgen. Two weeks ago, German Chancellor Angela Merkel (CDU) had already threatened in her government statement that Europe would “leave a footprint ... in conflict resolution in the world”. Among other things, it would have to “become more visible in resolving the situation in Syria” and also “make its contribution” in Libya. Germany was “not only a strong economic nation, but we also contribute to the security and peace in the world, in all areas.”

Germany’s militarist course is supported not only by the far-right AfD and the FDP, but also by the nominally left opposition parties. Tobias Lindner, the Green Party’s spokesman for security policy, criticised the Grand Coalition for its non-existent Great Power strategy: “If we really want to assume responsibility in the world ... then this federal government would finally need a strategy on how to deal properly with Iran and the withdrawal from the nuclear agreement”. It was not

enough “to hold phantom debates here about ships in the Strait of Hormuz”.

The speaker of the Left Party, Michael Leutert, also condemned the Bundeswehr’s lack of operational readiness. “We still have the problem that the equipment does not fly, does not float, or does not drive,” he complained. In the White House there is “a madman ... who does not solve problems on a global level, but always incites new ones.”

The Left Party, which has long acted as a tool of German imperialism in the region, has been criticizing the current extension of the missions in Syria and Iraq mainly because it is playing into the hands of US war policy. The government must not “involve the Bundeswehr in a war against Iran initiated by US President Trump [...], not even indirectly through its ‘Tornado’ reconnaissance missions in neighbouring countries,” Sevim Dagdelen, the deputy leader of the Left Party faction in the German parliament declared in an official statement.

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