

No to the German-European security zone in Syria!

By Johannes Stern
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The call by German Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer (Christian Democrats, CDU) for an international security zone in northern Syria, marks a new stage in the revival of German militarism. Discussions are under way on the deployment of between 30,000 and 40,000 troops, under German-European leadership. This would be the largest German military operation since the end of World War II.

The historical and political implications of Kramp-Karrenbauer's proposal, which she will present today to NATO defence ministers in Brussels, can hardly be overstated. Only 80 years have passed since the outbreak of World War II. In the course of their wars of conquest and annihilation, the Nazis laid waste to large swathes of Europe, the Soviet Union, North Africa, and the Middle East.

The proposal by Germany's Defence Minister, a likely successor to Chancellor Angela Merkel (CDU), stands in this tradition. Germany's military intervention in Syria is not aimed at combatting "terrorism," or securing "deescalation" or "peace," as the official propaganda claims. The real war aims are the neocolonial subordination of the country, as well as the energy-rich and strategically important Middle East region, and the deportation of hundreds of thousands of refugees to a war zone.

It is vital to clearly identify the consequences of Kramp-Karrenbauer's plan, which violates international law. Germany would send troops into a conflict that has already been raging in Syria for eight years, and for 28 years across the region, claiming millions of lives, injuring many more, and forcing still more from their homes. The goals would be to continue the United States' campaign of destruction, in which the German army has, to date, played only a supporting role, under German leadership, and to strengthen the influence of the European imperialist powers in the region.

In the case of France and Britain, this influence goes back as far as the partition of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I. In the case of Germany, it is even older. In the First World War, Germany was aligned with the Ottoman Empire, and played a direct role in the genocide against the Armenians.

The region today, like the Balkans prior to World War I, has become the flashpoint for international conflicts and competing interests. The establishment of a German-European security

zone would not only represent a major violation of Syrian sovereignty. It would dramatically heighten the likelihood of a direct clash between the major powers and fundamentally transform German society.

The mobilisation of thousands of soldiers would require the reintroduction of conscription and the suppression of anti-war opposition. The military budget, which is already slated to surpass €50 billion next year, would explode further. Workers and young people would have to bear the cost of the war in a number of respects, from the attacks on social spending to pay for rearmament, to their use as cannon fodder on the battlefields, and attacks on their democratic rights.

In 2014, the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP) had already warned, in a resolution passed at an emergency Congress against war, about the far-reaching consequences of the return of German militarism. Just a few months after the Foreign Minister and current German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier (Social Democrats, SPD) declared at the Munich Security Conference that Germany was "too big and economically too strong merely to comment on world politics from the sidelines," we wrote,

"History is returning with a vengeance. Barely seventy years after the crimes of the Nazis and the defeat in the Second World War, Germany's ruling elite is resorting to the policies of conquest, pursued under the Kaiser and Hitler. The propaganda of the post-war era—that Germany had learnt from the terrible crimes of the Nazis, had arrived at the West, had embraced a peaceful foreign policy, and had developed into a stable democracy—is exposed as lies. German imperialism is once again showing its real colours, as it emerged historically, with all of its aggressiveness at home and abroad."

Five years later, it is clear how correct this assessment was. Despite its historic crimes in the 20th century, the ruling elite accepts no limits to the pursuit of its imperialist interests in the 21st. Bourgeois politicians and media outlets compete to advance the most aggressive war propaganda, and attempt to convince the population that, after seventy years of relative stability in foreign policy, it is now necessary, once again, to wage major wars in pursuit of economic and geopolitical interests. The demands go as far as obtaining nuclear weapons.

"One must interpret the militarisation of Europe as a

progressive project,” notes a column in the weekly news magazine *Die Zeit*. “For the Europeans,” the following conclusions must be drawn from the retreat of the Americans: “They must become an independent actor in power politics... Europe should either adopt a joint army, or at least strengthen its national armies and establish a credible nuclear deterrent.” This is “unavoidable in a world in which old alliances are dissolving.”

Many other opinion pieces have celebrated Kramp-Karrenbauer’s proposal as a long overdue implementation of the shift in foreign policy. In a piece entitled, “Engagement at last” on *Spiegel Online*, the Defence Minister’s decision was praised as “nothing less than a foreign policy sensation, a turning point in Germany’s security policy, a break with Germany’s culture of military restraint, which, in spite of all the calls for more political responsibility in the world, has continued to define its policy.” Europe must “engage more strongly in Syria following the retreat of the United States,” and cannot afford to “leave the crisis region south of Europe...to the Putins and Erdogans of this world.” Germany is “too rich, too big, and, yes, too powerful, to continue to shrink from its responsibilities.”

This offensive also enjoys the support of all the major parties, which, like the media, have been gripped by war fever. The only criticism of Kramp-Karrenbauer’s proposal came from the standpoint of its strategic orientation, and how to prepare the security zone more professionally

The right-wing extremist Alternative for Germany (AfD) described the government in its statement as a “chaotic army,” but insisted it agreed in principle with the proposal. Armin-Paulus Hampel, the AfD’s foreign policy spokesman, demanded in parliament last week that Germany must “push in the United Nations for the creation of a safe zone in Syria...backed up by a robust UN mandate, and an international force that is ready to shoot if anyone tries to enter.”

The SPD also indicated its support, although leading party figures repeatedly complained that they had not been consulted on Kramp-Karrenbauer’s decision. “The fact that we are discussing here in Germany about what we ourselves can do to stabilise the situation is not illegitimate,” said Fritz Felgentreu, the SPD’s representative on the parliamentary defence committee. The “discussion” about a safe zone “should be conducted, but in the end something realistic has to emerge from that.”

The Left Party and Greens also endorse a more aggressive assertion of German imperialist interests in the region, demanding that it must, above all, be directed against Turkey’s military operations.

“Chief priority” must be “given to applying pressure on Turkey to withdraw from northern Syria and stop persecuting the Kurds in these areas,” wrote Green parliamentary group leader Anton Hofreiter in a statement. The German government responded “far too reluctantly to the illegal Turkish military

intervention,” and was now “trying to conceal its tip-toeing around Erdogan.”

The Left Party, which has been a party of war in the Syrian conflict since the outset, struck a similar tone. The government had “thus far failed to expend all political possibilities to stop President Erdogan’s march into northern Syria,” complained Özlem Alev Demirel, deputy chair of the security and defence policy committee in the European Parliament. “Before Kramp-Karrenbauer thinks aloud about a military intervention, the government should do its political homework.”

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei is the only party that opposes the Grand Coalition’s war plans and seeks to mobilise the enormous opposition among workers and young people. To prevent the ruling elite from once again imposing its programme of militarism and war with fascist methods of rule, this mounting opposition must be harnessed on a conscious political basis. An anti-war movement must be built, based on the principles advanced by the International Committee of the Fourth International, in its statement, “Socialism and the fight against war.” These principles include:

- The struggle against war must be based on the working class, the great revolutionary force in society, uniting behind it all progressive elements in the population.
- The new anti-war movement must be anti-capitalist and socialist, since there can be no serious struggle against war except in the fight to end the dictatorship of finance capital and the economic system that is the fundamental cause of militarism and war.
- The new anti-war movement must therefore, of necessity, be completely and unequivocally independent of, and hostile to, all political parties and organizations of the capitalist class.
- The new anti-war movement must, above all, be international, mobilizing the vast power of the working class in a unified global struggle against imperialism. The permanent war of the bourgeoisie must be answered with the perspective of permanent revolution by the working class, the strategic goal of which is the abolition of the nation-state system and the establishment of a world socialist federation. This will make possible the rational, planned development of global resources and, on this basis, the eradication of poverty and the raising of human culture to new heights.

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