

US bases in Germany critical to assault on Iraq

Schröder government complicit in war

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7 April 2003

Officially, the German government rejects the war of aggression against Iraq. However, the Social Democratic Party (SPD)-Green Party coalition in Berlin is providing substantial logistic and military support to the US and Britain. This support is in open contravention of the German constitution and makes the SPD-Green government culpable for the brutal war being waged against the Iraqi population.

Germany has become the most important military transport hub for the American war command. For weeks, many of the troops and much of the matériel being transported by the US military has moved through US military bases in Germany. Even after the war began, Berlin granted American and British military aircraft unrestricted rights to German airspace. German military personnel also comprise a third of the crews serving on the AWACS (Airborne Warning and Control System) flights in the Gulf. A further 100 soldiers have been sent to reinforce German atomic-biological-chemical detection units in Kuwait.

Thus German participation in the war is substantial. The 25 largest US military bases in Germany form part of the crucial military infrastructure Washington needs to carry out operations against Iraq.

In February and March, thousands of the over 70,000 American soldiers stationed in Germany received their marching orders for the Gulf. Important war matériel and the First Armoured Division of the US Army were transported from Bavaria and US bases in Baden-Württemberg, Hesse and the Rhineland-Palatinate to Bremerhaven, from where they embarked for Iraq.

The same applied to the First Armoured Division of the British Army, which is also stationed in Germany. This division was transported to Iraq from its military

base in Wiesbaden, together with a supplies unit. A large part of the Fifth Corps, with 40,000 soldiers, has its headquarters in Heidelberg, and was sent to the Gulf to form the northern front. A fleet of helicopters and a military police brigade were ordered to Kuwait from Mannheim.

The air base at Ramstein is the largest US Air Force facility outside America. From here supplies were airlifted to soldiers deployed in the wars in the Balkans and in Afghanistan. According to Brigadier General Erwin F. Lessel, in the war against Iraq the 86th Airlift Wing (AW) in Germany has the task of “building air bridges for the transport of personnel and material, including support and auxiliary goods, and of evacuating soldiers in an emergency”.

Ramstein is considered an important operational hub in the war. Coalition partner Britain can also use this US base.

Nearby can be found the Baumholder military base, where 8,000 US troops are stationed. This base is envisaged for airlifts between northern Iraq and Germany. In the Afghan war it operated an air bridge for soldiers, war matériel and auxiliary supplies between Turkey and Germany.

The US air base at Spangdahlem also plays an important military role. By 2005, the base is to be extended so as to serve as a substitute for the Rhine-Main air base. There are already 92 airplane shelters and 70 ammunition shelters in Spangdahlem. It is from here that the F-117-A stealth bomber is launched. The 52nd US Air Force Fighter Wing stationed here has already been dispatched to the Gulf. The base is home to 5,000 soldiers, together with three fighter squadrons and a command squadron.

The Rhine-Main air base in Frankfurt—the second largest US Air Force base in Germany—is also heavily involved in troop transports to the Gulf. The enormous American Galaxy and Globemaster military transporters make an intermediate stop here on their way to the war theatre.

The powerful KC-135 Stratotankers are stationed here. These are used in air-to-air refueling of fighter planes and transport aircraft.

From Rhine-Main non-stop flights depart directly for the front, loaded with bombs, munitions and soldiers. On the return flight they bring back wounded soldiers, who are sent to US hospitals in Wiesbaden and Landstuhl.

One of the most important US control centres for the Iraq war—Eucom (European Command)—is located in Stuttgart. Last autumn, the commander of Eucom said the facility would play a “central role” in the air raids against Iraq.

The *TAZ* newspaper described Eucom as a “virtual command centre for all of the actions of the US Air Force, Army and Navy between Greenland and the Cape of Good Hope.” For years, Eucom headquarters in Stuttgart has coordinated bombing missions in the northern and southern no-fly zones of Iraq. It is from here that the military operations of the various US bases are coordinated.

Since the beginning of February, entire divisions, corps and battalions from various military bases in Germany have been transferred to the Gulf. To name but a few of the bases involved: Ansbach, Giessen-Friedberg, Bad Kreuzach, Bamberg, Darmstadt, Büdingen, Hanau, Illesheim, Kitzingen, Schweinfurt.

At the beginning of the year, the “Victory Scrimmage” computerised manoeuvres took place in Grafenwoehr, the largest US troop exercise area in Europe, as a direct preparation for the war. One thousand US officers practised a computer-simulated attack on Iraq. In addition, on the enormous site at Grafenwoehr, high-tech manoeuvres were carried out in preparation for the Iraq war involving 3,000 soldiers.

During the 1991 Gulf War, Grafenwoehr was the most important US training camp in Europe. All US special forces in Germany will shortly be assembled here to form a globally acting “rapid response force”.

The German government is providing further assistance to the US war by mustering 3,800

Bundeswehr soldiers to guard 95 US military installations. In doing so, Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer are acting on a specific request from US Defence Secretary Rumsfeld. This assistance from Berlin frees up American soldiers to be deployed in Iraq.

Some 600 German marines stationed in the Horn of Africa have also been used in preparation for the Iraq war, providing protection to American naval forces on their way to the Persian Gulf.

Since 1982, the AWACS base in Geislenkirchen has provided NATO with an airborne control centre. Some 3,000 soldiers and civilian employees are employed at this location, near Aachen. In previous wars, the AWACS reconnaissance planes were used predominantly by the American command for “communications support for air operations” and to support ground troops. There is no doubt that this is also the case in the present war.

Last week, the German Ministry of Defence announced that the government would send three high speed Navy vessels to the Straits of Gibraltar. This was said to satisfy a United States request made to NATO. Their mission will include providing protection to coalition warships on their way to the Gulf. The German frigate “Augsburg” is already in the eastern Mediterranean and is directing shipping there for the US.

As this review makes clear, without the substantial military assistance of the German government the war-making capacity of the US in Iraq would be significantly weakened.



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