

Greens and Social Democrats back German government's military reform

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In a government policy statement issued last Friday, German Defence Minister Thomas de Maizière (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) presented his new concept for the Bundeswehr, the national army. His programme won the support not only of the governing Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) and Free Democrats (FDP), but also the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Greens. For the Greens, the planned expansion of international military interventions does not go far enough.

De Maizière's concept calls for increasing the number of soldiers available for long-term deployments abroad from 7,000 to 10,000. To this end, the armed forces are to become smaller and more effective, and consist almost exclusively of professional soldiers. Command structures are also to be simplified and transferred from the civilian to the military level.

The imperialist objectives of future military deployments were clearly formulated in the new defence policy guidelines that were released by de Maizière together with his reform plans. According to the guidelines, the worldwide deployment of German armed forces is to become an "expression of national self-assertion and sovereignty".

Specific objectives of future military missions, designated in the guidelines, include the maintenance of free trade routes and a secure supply of raw materials; access to natural resources; control of migration flows and upheavals arising from the collapse of dictatorial regimes; participation in international decision-making; and homeland security i.e. military deployment at home. (See "Germany's new military doctrine of 'national self-assertion'")

Before addressing parliament, de Maizière gave several interviews to promote his ideas about military reform. In a long exchange with the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, he named Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia and Sudan as possible locations for future deployments of the armed forces. "I'm expecting that Germany, too, will be asked to engage in these countries, if necessary", he said.

Citing the formulation of 19th century German military theorist Carl von Clausewitz, "War is a continuation of

politics by other means", de Maizière affirmed that these operations would be closely geared to foreign and economic policy. "Soldiers are a part of foreign policy", he stressed.

Addressing parliament, the defence minister then expressly called for the assumption of worldwide responsibilities "which we and others are confident we can carry out, and which others expect from us". Although he fell short of referring to Libya by name, his statement was understood as a stark criticism of the FDP-led foreign ministry, which rejected German participation in the Libyan war.

De Maizière cynically justified his doctrine of global military intervention by alluding to the social obligation attached to property, enshrined in the German constitution. Because Germany is so wealthy, he declared, it is obliged to interfere militarily all around the world. "Prosperity involves obligations, and indeed more than hitherto known or accepted in Germany".

To the surprise of many members of the Bundestag, the Greens' parliamentary faction leader, Jürgen Trittin, expressed his complete agreement. Trittin, who began his political career in a Maoist group, was federal minister for the environment from 1998 to 2005, and is considered a possible Green candidate for chancellor in the next federal election. His flattery of de Maizière, combined with attacks on the FDP, sounded like an offer to form a coalition with the CDU.

Trittin began his contribution by complimenting de Maizière on the defence ministry's new decisiveness, with "the orientation of Germany's strategy and security policy" no longer decided in the foreign ministry, but in the defence ministry. He stated his explicit agreement with de Maizière's "important basic strategic decisions", including the goal of increasing the number of troops for international deployment. "We share the view that we have to maintain 10,000 soldiers for operations abroad", he said.

In this regard, however, the defence minister's plans did not go far enough for Trittin. He accused him of continuing to regard traditional defence measures as "more important than the task we have all identified as crucial: namely,

providing more army units and more troops for deployment in operations abroad". Trittin added, "We believe that you are not being consistent. It is the task of the Federal Republic of Germany to fulfil its international responsibility more robustly".

International responsibility meant not only securing natural resources, but also "facing up to the security threats that are emerging in this world", Trittin stressed. Relevant here were "typically asymmetrical conflicts", "operations in mixed civilian-military missions", as well as "threats arising from failed states and the like". "We must not tolerate any lawless region on this planet", he exhorted.

In other words, the Greens demand that the German army should intervene in the internal affairs of other states anywhere in the world. "In this context," Trittin added, "more will be expected from Germany than in the past. That is something that has to be openly stated in a debate like this".

What was required was "a consistent development of the armed forces in line with multilateral operations commissioned by the United Nations to stabilise failing states; that will be the core requirement". Trittin referred to the "the separation of Southern Sudan and Sudan" as an example of an imminent deployment of the German army.

The SPD also supported de Maizière's plans. Rainer Arnold, defence spokesman for the SPD, credited the defence minister with "reason and objectivity", and reiterated the readiness of the SPD parliamentary faction to "take joint responsibility for the soldiers".

Arnold reminded his audience that the SPD and Greens had sent troops to East Timor when they were in government, although no direct German defence interests were involved there. He assured the minister of defence that the Social Democrats were also prepared to discuss the securing of "commonly understood economic interests", as well as the "commonly understood interests of stability in northern Africa".

But de Maizière's plans also did not go far enough for Arnold. He criticised the minister for adhering to a savings target of €8.3 billion and the government for regarding austerity at any price as being more important than security policy. According to Arnold, substantial military funding was a prerequisite for confidence in the reform process. He also complained that the military profession was not attractive enough. He said the SPD had drafted 82 proposals on how it could be made more attractive.

The only criticism of de Maizière's plans came from the Left Party faction. Their defence expert, Paul Schäfer, censured de Maizière for issuing the army with a "licence for interventionism" and shouted: "Not with us!"

As is so often the case with this party, however, it exploits

ostentatious verbal protest to cover a swing to the right. It has now come to accept and support the German army. But it should be a bit smaller, according to the Left Party. Schäfer told the parliament his party would approve a 125,000 soldier force, but not de Maizière's 185,000.

The virtually unanimous support of the parliament for de Maizière's war plans should be seen as a warning. In the 1950s, a number of SPD politicians were at the forefront of protests against German rearmament, although the majority of the SPD supported the army at the time. At the time of its founding around 1980, the Greens closely aligned with the peace movement which mobilised millions in opposition to the deployment of American intermediate-range nuclear missiles on German soil.

Now, thirty years later, the SPD and Greens have positioned themselves completely on the side of German militarism. And Left Party's opposition is serving merely as a bargaining chip to be exchanged for future participation in government, when circumstances require.

The peace movement of the 1950s was directed against the integration of Germany into the Western military alliance, and that of the 1980s opposed the deployment of American nuclear warheads in Germany. Today the national interests of Germany are directly at stake. Since the reunification of the country, German imperialism has become increasingly self-confident. Deep divisions have appeared in the Atlantic alliance and the European Union. To assert its national interests every major power is increasingly relying on military force.

In view of mounting international tensions, the SPD and the Greens have placed themselves unconditionally on the side of the ruling class, and assumed the task of enforcing a military build-up despite the mistrust and outright opposition of broad sections of the general population. Only an independent working class movement, resolved to confront capitalism, can put a stop to the growth of militarism and the related threat of war.



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