

Germany extends military mission in Afghanistan and arms Qatar

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On April 18, German foreign minister Guido Westerwelle (Free Democratic Party) and defence minister Lothar de Maizière (Christian Democratic Union) announced that the German army (Bundeswehr) will keep at least 800 soldiers in Afghanistan beyond the official date for the withdrawal of NATO combat troops at the end of 2014.

On the same day, the German media reported that Germany is sending 62 tanks and 24 howitzers to the semi-feudal state of Qatar.

The offensive by German imperialism in Central Asia and the Gulf region is closely coordinated with the US, which Berlin regards as a key ally for the enforcement of its geo-strategic and economic interests internationally.

Thus far, the US government of President Barack Obama has not announced how many troops it intends to keep in Afghanistan and is still negotiating with the regime of Hamid Karzai terms of their deployment, which Washington insists must include complete immunity from prosecution for war crimes and other offences.

The top US commander in Afghanistan, Gen. Joseph Dunford, told a Senate hearing last week that he will make a recommendation in November 2013 after seeing how Afghan puppet troops perform during the so-called summer fighting season. Reported proposals have ranged from as few as 6,000 troops to as many as 20,000.

Following a NATO ministers' meeting in February, de Maizière announced that Washington had decided to leave 8,000 to 12,000 troops behind after 2014, but US defence secretary Leon Panetta quickly called the report inaccurate.

Germany has played a leading role in the occupation of the country since the invasion of Afghanistan. Since 2006, Germany has been a so-called "lead nation" in the International Security Assistance Force mission and heads the ISAF Regional Command North, which covers nine provinces and an area of more than 162,000 square

kilometres.

Germany is the third largest contributor of troops after the United States and Britain and will play a leading role in the ISAF successor mission, "Resolute Support," after 2014.

The Foreign Office describes Germany's role in the new strategy for Afghanistan occupation as follows: "As part of this model, the armed forces would be involved in Kabul. In addition, Germany would take responsibility in northern Afghanistan, as the 'framework nation' for all local training, consulting and support services.... After two years, Germany will then focus on the area of Kabul."

In other words, Germany is planning an indefinite presence in Afghanistan and participation in the long-term military occupation of the country together with its NATO allies. It will advise the imperialist-installed puppet government in Kabul and train and support the Afghan military in suppressing domestic opposition by the Afghan people to foreign occupation.

In common with the US ruling class, the German bourgeoisie also regards Afghanistan as strategically important for its interests. Afghanistan represents a bridgehead between the resource-rich regions of the Middle East and Asia, and also has its own considerable natural resources.

Germany has extensive interests in the resources of the region and already has raw material partnerships with Kazakhstan and Mongolia. German imperialism is intensifying its military activities in order to satisfy the hunger of the German economy for resources and energy.

The *World Socialist Web Site* commented recently on an article in *Handelsblatt* that made clear that Germany is making intensive preparations to once again wage war over resources. Many of the important raw materials for the German economy such as rare minerals, copper ore, iron ore and lithium are to be found in Afghanistan.

The extension of the Afghanistan mission is also linked to Germany's upgrading of the Qatari military. Both are aimed at increasing the influence of German imperialism in the Middle East and Central Asia in close military cooperation with Washington.

The delivery of German tanks to Qatar valued at €1.89 billion was announced just as the United States concluded its own huge arms deal with its allies in the Middle East. According to the *New York Times*, the US is supplying missile systems and fighter jets worth about US\$10 billion to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Israel.

The arms are directly linked to the preparations for a direct military intervention in Syria and a war against Iran, which have been intensified in recent days.

At the start of his Middle East tour, US defence secretary Chuck Hagel announced on Sunday that the arms deal sends a "very clear signal" to Iran. "The military option is one

option that remains on the table, must remain on the table." He added that the US intelligence agencies were investigating whether the Syrian government of President Bashar al-Assad has used chemical weapons.

For some time, the Obama administration has threatened direct military intervention in Syria in the event of any alleged use of chemical weapons by the Assad regime. On Tuesday, the Israeli intelligence chief, Brigadier-General Itai Brun, claimed that Syria "has increasingly used chemical weapons".

In bilateral talks last week between German chancellor Angela Merkel and the prime minister of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim Al-Thani, it became clear that the German arms sales to Qatar are directly bound up with preparations for war against Syria and Iran.

Merkel declared that, together with Al-Thani, she believed "there should be no nuclear-armed Iran" and "that Assad has lost his legitimacy."

Germany and Qatar have long been driving forces in the preparations for war against Syria. Qatar plays a central role in financing and arming the majority of Sunni extremist rebel groups in Syria, which serve as imperialism's shock troops in the country. Germany has set up two Patriot missile defence systems in Turkey, and both the German Navy and the German Federal Intelligence Service are involved in intelligence work for the Syrian opposition.

Last weekend, the so-called Friends of Syria, which includes both Germany and Qatar, announced at its meeting in Istanbul that it would increase its support for

the Syrian opposition. US secretary of state John Kerry announced plans to double its financial support for the opposition to US\$250 million and supply body armour, night vision equipment and armoured vehicles to the rebels. Westerwelle, who until now has officially rejected any direct arming of the opposition, spoke at the fringes of the conference in favour of a possible relaxation of the European Union arms embargo against Syria.

While the federal government is pushing for war, the German media is beating the military drum. On Sunday, *Die Welt* demanded more arms for the pro-imperialist opposition: "The so-called Friends of Syria know their partners within the Syrian opposition. They should supply them in a responsible and controlled manner with everything they need for their struggle against Assad's regime of terror. It is a fight to the death, one in which any compromises or peaceful political settlement no longer seems possible. For such it is far too late."

After more than a decade of combat and the brutal occupation of Afghanistan, the German elite increasingly regards war once again as a legitimate and "normal" means of politics.

In an interview with the British *Guardian*, Defence Minister de Maizière said on Monday: "In Afghanistan, German soldiers had to fight for the first time because of necessity. Some of our partners thought we were 'cake-eaters', and not up to the task.... But the German armed forces proved to be able to fight. Germany had to learn that fighting is important." He then quoted the Prussian general and military historian Carl von Clausewitz, who said, "War is the continuation of politics by other means."



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