

German Left Party calls for military intervention in Iraq

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At the start of this week, the German federal government declared it would not supply weapons to the Kurdish militias in northern Iraq, which are at war with Islamist fighters of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). On Monday, government spokesman Steffen Seibert said Berlin was fundamentally opposed to providing any weapons to forces in combat zones.

The opposition did not last long. The German government has now announced it will send so-called “non-lethal” military aid to the Kurdish militias. The decision came after a fierce campaign this week in the German media and by politicians to allow arms sales in such regions and for military intervention. A central role in this campaign is played by the Left Party, which has functioned as a servile mouthpiece for a war policy supposedly based on “humanitarian” goals.

Gregor Gysi, leader of the Left Party in the Bundestag (German parliament), told the *taz* daily newspaper on Monday that Germany and NATO should intervene to stop ISIS. In addition the government should deliver weapons to the Iraqi government and Kurdish forces in the north of the country.

"Actually, I'm strictly against the export of German arms," said Gysi. "But as Germany is a major arms exporter, it could be permissible for us to send weapons there in this exceptional case, if other countries are not immediately able to do the job. Letters of protest are not going to be enough to stop IS [the Islamic State, another name for ISIS]."

Gysi not only beat the drum for German arms exports; but also implied support for the NATO military alliance. In Sunday's "Summer Interview" on ARD television, Gysi had already declared that Germany had to help the Kurds.

He said that a German military operation in Iraq also

had the backing of Ulla Jelpke, the defence policy spokesperson in the Left Party's parliamentary faction. Jelpke is also a speaker for the "Anti-Capitalist Left", a pseudo-left faction inside the Left Party. She explicitly called for intervention in Iraq in an interview with *Deutschlandfunk* radio on Saturday.

While attempting to hedge her words, she said: "The other thing is, of course, that one has to look at the whole picture and come up with a strategy to pursue against these barbaric Islamists, and maybe that will also involve having to resort to measures of a military nature.[...] I'm no military expert, but one can't simply leave people with these kinds of problems to fend for themselves."

Later, Jelpke issued a statement opposing shipments of arms from Germany, but urging Berlin to create conditions for the Kurdish militia to obtain "the necessary means to defend the population."

On the other hand, some Left Party representatives spoke against arming the Kurdish forces. Left Party foreign policy spokesman Jan van Aken declared that arms sales are not the way to defeat ISIS. "No matter who you supply with weapons right now, nobody's going to benefit, and you'll only be fuelling the conflict," he told the *Neues Deutschland* daily.

Asked whether he thought it right to oppose ISIS with military force, however, he replied: "Yes, of course."

Other representatives of the Left Party have already openly called for military intervention under the fig-leaf of the United Nations. Stefan Liebich, Left Party deputy in the Bundestag's foreign affairs committee, said: "The UN Security Council must not abandon the Yazidi people, but must guarantee their protection." Liebich left it open as to whether German troops should participate in a UN mission.

Dominic Heilig, spokesman of the Forum for

Democratic Socialism within the Left Party, made a similar point in an article for *Neues Deutschland*. He accused the EU and the federal government of leaving refugees from the war zone to look after themselves and failing to provide them with safe escape routes.

"The Left Party should not be ducking the debate," writes Heilig. "(A)fter weighing the whole situation and all the reports so far furnished by independent non-governmental organisations", the party had to discuss "whether it could justify a UN mission to protect the refugees and those people in the region who are being held by the IS as virtual hostages."

This position has now been adopted by the party leadership, including Gregor Gysi. "Of course, the Kurds have the right to defend themselves, but we think this is a situation in which the UN must act," said party leader Bernd Riexinger. "The UN should move to bring about a lasting peace settlement based of international law. I've also again spoken to Gregor Gysi about this and we agree on the matter."

On Tuesday, Gysi, Riexinger and party chair Katja Kipping published an official statement, in which they call for a UN intervention. "In this emergency situation, threatening hundreds of thousands, the international community in the region must speak and act with one voice," it declared.

The Left Party is using humanitarian crisis in northern Iraq as an excuse to justify foreign intervention by the German military. The German ruling class does not intend to stand idly by as the US increases its troop levels and launches bombings in Iraq.

The claim that this intervention is motivated by the humanitarian concerns of the imperialist powers is a blatant fraud. Up to a million people have been killed in the US war against Iraq. Germany and the United States support the Israeli genocide of the Palestinians in Gaza and the Ukrainian army's brutal war against pro-Russian separatists in the east of the country. Germany and the United States themselves are responsible for the worst humanitarian disasters.

Support for this hypocritical approach is not limited to individual representatives of the Left Party. Such a war policy is fully in line with the party's general principles. Originating from the bureaucratic apparatuses of former East and West Germany, the party has been on the side of German imperialism since

its inception. From the very beginning, its professed pacifist positions were adopted merely to obscure this basic orientation. The more German militarism dares to make a come-back, the more the Left Party changes the packaging of its policies.

When politicians, media representatives and academics were working in recent years in various think tanks to prepare the return of German militarism, the Left Party was involved from the beginning. Left Party representatives advocated an end to German military restraint in various position papers.

The Left Party played an active role in the German government's support and arming of the Syrian rebel opposition, from whose forces ISIS has emerged. Leading members of the party noisily demanded a stronger military commitment from Berlin. In April this year, Left Party parliamentary deputies then voted for the first time for a German military participation in the Syria conflict.

The Left Party was already the driving force behind the campaign to attack and defame the anti-war movement protesting the Israeli attack on Gaza. It has now become the political force most aggressively seeking to justify military intervention in Iraq on humanitarian grounds.

On this basis, the Left Party is already deeply integrated in the shaping of the federal government's war policy through its representatives in various committees and boards. Like the Green Party in the 1990s, it also could be brought into government to mobilise for war the affluent layers it represents.

In the "Summer Interview", Gysi made it clear that his party would ensure that the foreign policy positions of the Left Party would not jeopardise a future red-red-green (i.e., Social Democrats, Left Party and Greens) federal coalition government.



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