

German army intervenes in Iraq

Ulrich Rippert
18 August 2014

Last Friday morning, four Bundeswehr (German army) Transall transport planes flew relief supplies of medicines, food and blankets to Erbil, the capital of the autonomous Kurdish region in northern Iraq.

The aid was delivered by United Nations (UN) agencies for distribution to civilians, who had fled from the radical Islamic units of ISIS in the Sinjar mountains.

Although a spokesperson for the UN mission in Iraq (UNAMI) had declared on Thursday that the situation had eased and only about a thousand people were trapped in the Sinjar mountains, the German government announced it was working at full speed to organise further relief supplies.

“Of course, this is only the beginning,” said Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen (Christian Democratic Union, CDU). The supply of equipment such as helmets, protective vests and four-wheel drive trucks may also be “implemented in the coming days”.

Under the headline, “First relief aid, then weapons?”, the *n-tv* news channel yesterday reported: “Whether the humanitarian aid marks the beginning of a more intensive German involvement in Iraq was still an open question. Chancellor Angela Merkel commented cautiously in the debate on possible arms sales to Kurdish Peshmerga fighters, indicating her support for such a decision up until now, but unwilling to rule out alternative courses of action.”

In an interview with the *Hannover Allgemeine Zeitung*, Merkel said on Thursday, “There is always a degree of political and legal leeway for the government when it comes to arms exports, and we may have to exploit that.” In this respect, she said Germany would be coordinating its policies with those of its partners, “especially with the US”

What “people in northern Iraq—Yazidis, Christians and others—had to suffer at the hands of the Islamic State (ISIS) terrorist movement” was “appalling”, said

Merkel. Stopping the advance of these extremists and helping people in danger were tasks for the entire international community, she claimed.

The chancellor emphasised that German security interests also constituted an important issue in the consideration of possible arms sales. She referred to a passage from official German guidelines on the prohibition of weapons transfers to conflict areas. The guidelines state that arms supplies are permissible if the situation involves “particular foreign or security policy interests of the Federal Republic of Germany, which concern its alliances”.

Defence Minister von der Leyen expressed her support for weapons deliveries to Northern Iraq more directly. She told the *Bild* tabloid newspaper: “If only German weapons can prevent a genocide, then we must help.” Whether a UN mission is required will become apparent, as will whether the Bundeswehr should participate in it, she continued. For the moment, she is examining “what other kinds of military equipment we can send”.

The German government is preparing to take part at the very start in the current resurgence of the Iraq war. It no longer opposes German involvement, as did the former social democratic-led government in 2003.

Eleven years ago, the US government launched its military intervention on the basis of lies about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. Although the full extent of the resulting human, political and military catastrophe in Iraq is today clearly visible, the German ruling class is now jettisoning its former stance in favour of open participation in the war.

The current government is thus continuing the foreign policy shift that it announced earlier this year. In late January, President Gauck, Foreign Minister Steinmeier and Defence Minister von der Leyen declared that the period of military restraint was over. In the future, Germany would again be conducting military

interventions more independently and self-confidently in the world's crisis areas.

Since then, the federal government has pursued a reckless and confrontational foreign policy. In February, it cooperated with the US to organise a coup in Kiev with the support of fascist forces, and has subsequently been driving the escalation of tensions with Russia. It is now continuing this aggressive imperialist policy in the Middle East.

On Friday evening, Steinmeier travelled to a special meeting of EU foreign ministers in Brussels to negotiate joint military action in Iraq. He planned to fly to Iraq in the weekend to discuss on-the-spot "German and European aid" and further courses of action.

He said Europe must not allow Yazidis and Christians to be "persecuted and slaughtered" by Islamist fighters. It was not enough to welcome the US air attacks against the jihadists and "praise the courageous struggle of the Kurdish security forces," declared Steinmeier before his departure. Europe, he said, had to provide active assistance.

The government's war drive is supported by the opposition parties, the Greens and the Left Party. The same parties that organised anti-war demonstrations at the start of the Iraq war more than a decade ago are today the leading warmongers.

Omid Nouripour, foreign policy spokesman for the Greens' parliamentary faction, said in a *Der Spiegel* interview that the Bundeswehr should support the US air force's attacks on ISIS positions with jet fighters from the German air force.

Claudia Roth, former chair of the Greens and current vice-president of the Bundestag (federal parliament), commented rather more tentatively. In the "Morgenmagazin" television broadcast on Thursday, she said she was currently visiting the Kurdish city of Erbil and had a good understanding of the local situation. European assistance was urgently needed. She warned against German arms shipments, because the Kurdish fighters would not know how to use them. But there were many other ways to support the fight against ISIS terrorism, said Roth, without commenting on Nouripour's proposal.

Gregor Gysi, parliamentary leader of the Left Party, told the *taz* daily newspaper last Monday that Germany and NATO should intervene to stop ISIS. Along with this, weapons were to be delivered to the Iraqi

government and the 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 so. Letters of protest aren't going to be enough to stop IS [Islamic State, another name for ISIS]."

In this way, the Greens and the Left Party are participating in the revitalisation of an aggressive and militarist German foreign policy, using the crisis in northern Iraq as a pretext to justify an escalation in the international activities of the German army.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact