

German parliament approves shipment of weapons to Kurdish forces in Iraq

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3 September 2014

In a session characterised by cynicism and a complete disregard for history, the German parliament on Monday used the 75th anniversary of the beginning of World War II to push German politics a step further in the direction of militarism, dictatorship and war.

At the beginning of the emergency session, at the centre of which was the announcement of German weapons exports to Iraq, Parliamentary President Norbert Lammert of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) called on all deputies to rise from their seats to observe a minute of silence. That was hardly over when representatives of the German government and opposition delivered warmongering speeches the likes of which have not been heard in parliament since the Nazi dictatorship. The tirades were full of threats against Russia and demands for a more aggressive German foreign policy.

Chancellor Angela Merkel opened the proceedings with a government statement. She began by recalling the horrors of the Second World War, declaring, “On 1 September 1939, Germany invaded Poland. The war triggered by Germany, and the crimes of National Socialism caused the deaths of millions and immeasurable suffering for many peoples. Six million Jews and many other people were murdered in ghettos, death camps or in regions near their home.” These crimes, she warned, should “never be forgotten.”

This did not prevent the chancellor from proceeding to attack, with lies and distortions, the country, Russia, against which Germany carried out a terrible war of annihilation, causing the deaths of 27 million people, the highest number of any country in the war. Although Washington and Berlin organised a fascist-led coup in Ukraine in February of this year and have been systematically provoking the crisis ever since, Merkel claimed that Russia had violated “the fundamentals of our peaceful post-war order” and international law.

“Russian behaviour will not be tolerated without

action,” Merkel said. She noted that in close consultation with the US, the European Union had already adopted sanctions and was now preparing further “significant sanctions moves.”

The upcoming NATO conference in Wales would “further strengthen the alliance’s reaction and defence capabilities.” The chancellor gave her explicit backing to the Eastern European states, which have been driving the conflict with Russia most aggressively. Germany would stand by its “alliance obligations.” Article 5 of the NATO Charter applied “to all, to the Baltic states just as to Poland,” she declared.

After having made clear that the German government was preparing for possible war with Russia, Merkel came to the session’s central matter—the German government’s decision to supply weapons to the Kurdish Peshmerga militia in northern Iraq.

As with all of the government and opposition politicians who spoke after her, Merkel sought to sell the intervention as a humanitarian mission. “A terror group by the name ‘Islamic State’” was committing “incomprehensible war crimes in Syria and Iraq and marauding across the region, plundering and murdering.” All those seeking to defend themselves had to “fear for the worst.” ISIS currently controlled an area half the size of Germany and was committing “crimes against humanity,” Merkel added.

Aside from the fact that the German government supported the Islamists in their struggle against the regime of President Bashar al-Assad in Syria and therefore bears political responsibility for the emergence of ISIS, the extent of the weapons being supplied by Germany makes clear that they have nothing to do with “humanitarianism.”

The German government intends to export weapons totalling €70 million to Iraq. These include 30 “Milan” anti-tank missile systems with a total of 500 missiles,

16,000 G3 and G36 assault rifles, and 10,000 hand grenades. Included as well are 40 machineguns, 4,000 protective vests and helmets, utility vehicles and five “Dingo 1” armoured patrol vehicles.

As with previous military interventions, the current war in Iraq is not about human rights or the protection of religious minorities, but rather the realisation of imperialist interests. In a shift from Germany’s position 11 years ago when the US and Britain invaded Iraq, and three years ago when the US and NATO waged war on Libya, Germany wants to be present when decisions are made about the carve-up and control of Iraq and Syria, a strategically important, oil-rich region.

The German intervention in Iraq and its aggressive posture towards Russia are part of the foreign policy shift to German great power politics announced by President Joachim Gauck, Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen at the beginning of the year at the Munich Security Conference.

Social Democratic Party (SDP) fraction leader Thomas Oppermann, who was the second government spokesman to speak in support of the shipment of arms to Iraq, repeated almost word for word the call made at Munich for Germany to assume greater international responsibility, including militarily, in correspondence with its economic strength. “As an economically strong country, we could not simply turn away when an entire region is threatened with genocide,” he stated. Germany could “not just look to the US to take responsibility and do nothing itself.”

The bourgeois press, which has been campaigning for militarism and war for months, spoke out even more explicitly on the issues. The latest edition of the weekly magazine *Stern* hails von der Leyen on its front cover as “war minister,” describing the shipment of weapons as a “historic decision.” It writes of the move as a milestone in Germany’s “new role as a force for stability” and a watershed moment in “the militarisation of German policy.”

Under the militarist headline “Open Fire,” the magazine writes: “What had in the past been considered a core principle of German foreign and security policy has been thrown overboard in a few days. Germany will supply weapons to northern Iraq. It is the end of restraint, which has been carefully cultivated in this country for over six decades. A window has been opened, and it will be very difficult to close this window ever again.”

The decision to “open the window” for the return of

German militarism precisely on the 75th anniversary of the invasion of Poland is not only provocative, it carries with it more than a whiff of dictatorship. The overwhelming majority of the population opposes the shipment of weapons, but the decision was already finalised by the government in a ministers’ meeting led by Merkel the day before the parliamentary sitting, and backed in principle by all parties in parliament.

Most aggressive in the parliamentary debate were the nominal opposition parties. Representatives from the Greens and Left Party attacked the government from the right and in their majority voted against the government statement.

Gregor Gysi, fraction leader of the Left Party, who was one of the first to call for weapons to be supplied to the Kurds, is now appealing for a massive intervention by United Nations forces. He declared, “In order under international law to combat the forces of the terrorist army of Islamic State, on which we all share agreement, we need the Security Council of the United Nations.” In the UN Charter, he continued, “its own army was planned” for such a situation, but had “never been created.”

Jutta Jelpke, the second spokesperson for the Left Party, confirmed that the government’s decision did not go far enough for her party. “We demand a lot more for Syria and Iraq than what has been decided here,” she declared at the end of her speech.

Anton Hofreiter from the Greens began his speech with a hateful tirade against Russia. Russia’s actions could not “continue without consequences,” he warned, demanding a “unified and decisive response from the EU.” From last weekend’s EU emergency summit he would have “wished for a clearer signal in this direction.” He added, “Putin has to know that he will pay a price for his doublespeak.”

With reference to the situation in Iraq, Hofreiter said, “It is right that we review the use of military force” and “discuss what Germany can do.” He continued, “It was right and necessary that the US proceeded with air strikes against ISIS.” But this was insufficient. Like Gysi, Hofreiter demanded a major international military intervention: “We need an international strategy under the principle of the international responsibility to protect.”



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