

German government to send combat troops to Iraq

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15 December 2014

The year began with the announcement by senior government politicians that Germany would have to take more responsibility in foreign policy. As the end of 2014 approaches, the intention is now to launch in Iraq a military operation that would violate all the constitutional restraints on such a move and serve as a precedent for the unrestricted use of German armed forces throughout the world.

On Thursday, Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen and Interior Minister Thomas de Maiziere resolved to present to the cabinet in the middle of next week a draft parliamentary mandate that allows for a huge expansion of the Bundeswehr (German army) deployment in Iraq.

According to a report in the *Bild* tabloid newspaper, the draft legislation provides for the posting of more than 100 armed German soldiers in the Kurdish region of Iraq. The combat troops are to be used there to train Kurdish military organisations at war with the Islamic State (IS) terrorist group.

Armed German soldiers, initially proposed as military trainers, have already been assigned to a combat mission in Afghanistan. However, the training was conducted “in warfare conditions” and the German “trainers” were thus directly involved in combat operations. The mission ultimately developed into the longest and deadliest intervention of the German army since the Second World War.

In a *Bild* interview last Sunday week, von der Leyen made it clear that the German government is planning a comprehensive war effort in Iraq. “We have to defeat the terrorist militia militarily,” she told the tabloid. She also announced that the struggle against IS would “take years”. The expansion of the Iraq deployment had been discussed in the ministries for months.

So far, the Bundeswehr has stationed 18 unarmed

trainers in the northern Iraqi city of Erbil in order to equip and train up to 10,000 fighters with machine guns, bazookas, rocket-propelled grenades and vehicles. The government resolved to initiate the mission without a parliamentary mandate in August this year.

This time, however, the foreign office and the defence ministry agreed that the mandate should have the legislative backing of the Bundestag (federal parliament). Parliamentary consent is constitutionally required for combat missions of the German army. But the government is determined to pursue its course also via this route, because the mission is seen to have historical dimensions.

For the first time in the history of the Federal Republic of Germany, the government is to send combat troops into a war zone without a mandate from the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) or United Nations (UN).

In fact, the Basic Law (German constitution) permits the use of armed forces abroad only for the purpose of defence. In 1994, however, a ruling by the Federal Constitutional Court reinterpreted the law, declaring foreign missions involved in a “system of reciprocal collective security” to be constitutional. This meant that operations under the leadership of the UN and NATO became a legal possibility.

The deployment of combat troops in Iraq goes far beyond that. It takes place exclusively at the request of the Iraqi government. “Such interventions requested by other governments are not provided for in the constitution,” constitutional law professor Stefan Talmon told the *Spiegel Online* news magazine. “In my view, it is over stretching the concept of defence to claim that a military operation in a localized, non-international armed conflict on another continent is a

matter of defending Germany.”

In the professor’s opinion, the legislation permitting the Iraq deployment sets a clear precedent: “Ultimately, any foreign mission of the Bundeswehr could be constitutionally justified in this way,” he declared.

Almost 70 years after the end of World War II, the German elite wants to free itself from all the restrictions imposed on it following the historical crimes of the Third Reich. The German army is to be able to deploy anywhere in the world and at any time to defend German political and economic interests.

This far-reaching initiative is the result of a systematic campaign. At the Munich Security Conference earlier this year, Steinmeier, von der Leyen and Federal President Joachim Gauck used virtually the same words to announce the end of military restraints on Germany. Since then, the government has put this programme into action in Ukraine and the Middle East. In doing so, it has been accompanied by a wave of unprecedented war propaganda on the part of the media. At the end of the year, the German military is now to be exempt from all restrictions.

The federal government is supported in this project by the opposition parties. The Greens declared themselves willing in principle to accept the Iraq deployment. “Unlike the arms shipments, such a training mission could in principle be, under certain conditions, a meaningful contribution,” says Agnieszka Brugger, the security policy spokeswoman for the Green Party. Their parliamentary faction was unwilling to deal with the issue in detail until next week.

In the debate on arms sales to the Kurds, the Greens criticised the federal government from the right, demanding from the very start a comprehensive military operation in Iraq. At their convention in November, Green party chairman Cem Özdemir had urged that “more Bundeswehr personnel (were) urgently needed” to train the Kurds.

Representatives of the Left Party announced they intended to reject the mandate in the Bundestag. However, their justifications for doing so left no doubt that they support the aims of German imperialism in the Middle East. Jan van Aken, the foreign policy spokesman for the Left Party parliamentary faction, accused the government of “helpless activism” in the struggle against the IS, because they look at the conflict “only from the military” point of view.

Alexander Neu, the Left Party deputy in the parliamentary defence committee, openly advocated training fighters to use weapons supplied by Germany. “The obvious solution would be to train the Kurdish and Iraqi security forces in Germany. It would also be more effective and safer,” he said.

If the party votes against the mission, such a step will amount to nothing more than a cynical attempt to disguise its own true nature as a party of war. Even prior to the government’s resolution, faction leader Gregor Gysi had joined his faction colleague Ulla Jelpke to demand weapon supplies to the Kurds. In October, 14 leading Left Party politicians published an appeal for a massive military operation against the IS.



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