

# Germany to send troops into northern Iraq

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On Thursday, Germany's *Bundestag* (parliament) agreed to send armed troops to northern Iraq. In February, Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) troops will deploy to Iraq, supposedly to train Kurdish Peshmerga to fight the Islamic State (IS). The marching orders were issued by a large majority; 457 of the 590 parliamentary deputies voted for the deployment, 79 voted "no," and 54 abstained.

Rolf Mützenich, the foreign policy spokesman for the Social Democratic Party (SPD) parliamentary group, justified the government's military intervention, calling the struggle against the IS a "military challenge." The "liberation of Kobane [shows] that this struggle needs to be conducted militarily," he said. Fighting ISIS encompasses more "than just a military approach, but without the military approach there will be no basis for political solutions," Mützenich said.

A year after President Gauck, Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD) and Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen (CDU, Christian Democratic Union) announced the end of German foreign policy restraint at the Munich Security Conference, German foreign policy is ever more militaristic.

Last week, Chancellor Angela Merkel (CDU) announced expanded German engagement in Africa and support for a regional intervention force against the terrorist militia Boko Haram. Earlier this year, von der Leyen raised the prospect of new arms deliveries to the Kurds. Also yesterday, the *Bundestag* decided to extend the deployment of German Patriot missile batteries in Turkey.

The mission in Iraq heralds a new stage in the return of German militarism. For the first time since the terrible crimes of German imperialism in two world wars and the defeat of Nazi Germany, Berlin is sending troops into a war zone without an international mandate.

Such actions are not covered by the German

constitution and set a precedent for the global deployment of the *Bundeswehr* into crisis areas. Strictly speaking, the constitution only allows the use of the Armed Forces in cases of national defence. After German re-unification in 1990, the Supreme Court reinterpreted the law in a judgment and declared foreign missions constitutional if they were part of "mutual collective security". As a result, interventions agreed by the UN or NATO were legally covered.

The deployment of troops to Iraq is yet another legal quantum leap. It is not covered by a UN nor a NATO mandate. Germany is *de facto* intervening unilaterally into a war zone in order to arm one of the parties to the civil war—in this case, the Kurdish Peshmerga—to train them and, if possible, to support them in combat operations.

Only recently, it was announced that Canadian soldiers were attacked by IS fighters with mortars and machine guns. They were also officially sent there as "trainers", in reality they were immediately involved in fighting the IS. As the Canadian Special Operations Forces' commander Mike Rouleau admitted, the "trainers" supplied targets for the US-led air war against the IS in northern Iraq and Syria.

In his speech, the foreign policy spokesman for the Green Party in the *Bundestag*, Omid Nouripour, frankly admitted that in reality, the deployment is a combat mission. "There's a novelty," he said. "We are sending mandated soldiers. It may be that they get involved in combat operations; otherwise we would not have to mandate them."

The former pacifists in the Green Party, who ever since supporting the 1999 Kosovo war have supported every *Bundeswehr* mission abroad, largely abstained. However, they left no doubt that they support the intervention in principle. "We are for training," Nouripour said. His only objection was that it was "irresponsible" to send the soldiers on a mission

“without rules of engagement.”

By supporting the Kurdish *peshmerga*, German imperialism is returning to classic forms of colonial politics. Even during World War I, plans for “alternative conduct of war” were developed in the foreign ministry in Berlin. At that time, the German ruling class worked closely with the Ottoman Empire and Arab Bedouins to pursue its geo-strategic and economic interests in the Middle East—aiming to weaken their opponents England, France and Russia, by stoking an “Islamic revolt.”

Significantly, German papers of the time repeatedly pointed out that the name of the town, Kobane, was not of Kurdish but German origin, and was based on German-Turkish collaboration. During the construction of the Baghdad railway in 1912, a small railway station was built, which the Kurds called Kobane, referring to the German “company” that was responsible. Over time, it became the Kurdish “Kobani.”

In an article titled “What is German in Kobane,” the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* wrote: “They were Imperial German railroad barons, dashing nobles who came and led the command; the construction of the rail track should fulfil their imperial dream of a connection between Berlin and Baghdad, the planned route went through Aleppo and Mosul.” It continues, “The route of the track of the former Baghdad Railway today marks the border between Syria and Turkey. This is what the victors of the First World War, Britain and France, wanted as they divided up the Ottoman Empire.”

Berlin’s intervention in Iraq is in line with in the historic interests of German imperialism. While the imperialist powers are not (yet) engaged in military struggle with each other, unlike a century ago, the tensions among them are mounting under the surface of the joint fight against the IS.

Mützenich tried to justify Germany’s solo effort, saying, “Some advice says we should seek a European framework. That may be. But yesterday, in the Foreign Affairs Committee, the foreign minister indicated—and we should clearly say that in public—how difficult this process is with the European partners. To mention that is part of being honest; because different governments follow different goals.”

The Left Party, which voted unanimously against the military mission, plays a key role for German imperialism in the region. It functions both as an

“adviser” to help formulate imperialist policy, and to open doors across the region.

Like the representatives of the government and the Greens, Left Party foreign policy spokesman Jan Van Aken also praised military action against ISIS. “I think we should first of all celebrate together that this week Kobane has been freed,” he said at the beginning of his speech, adding: “My thanks and my deep respect to the men and women who have fought in recent months against the misanthropists of ISIS, risking their lives, which some of them lost.”

The Left Party’s criticism of the military mission is purely tactical, however. Van Aken, who regularly visits the region, said Berlin’s unilateral support of the Peshmerga would “strengthen and not weaken [ISIS] in the long term,” because it “drives forward the division of Iraq”. Even if one supported weapons deliveries and a *Bundeswehr* intervention, Van Aken said, “then this intervention is exactly the wrong one”. It entailed training “the wrong people for the wrong goals,” he claimed.

The Left Party’s representatives were the first to call for arms deliveries to the Kurds and demand a massive military operation against ISIS. In his speech, Van Aken took up this aggressive line, advising the government about how best to fight the IS militarily. If Berlin followed the Left Party’s ideas, he said, Germany would not only arm the Kurds, but install new puppet governments across the region.

“If you want to fight ISIS militarily, then you can only if you get rid of the hatred by installing a broad, a fair government in Baghdad which will share the wealth fairly between the Kurds, Shiites and Sunnis. This must be the political goal.” He added, “If you want to act effectively militarily against ISIS, then shut the borders and apply pressure on Turkey.”



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