

Calls grow for deployment of German ground troops in Syria

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Developments have proceeded rapidly following the decision by the German parliament on Friday in favour of military participation in Syria. Just a few hours after the vote, the German frigate Augsburg was under way for Syria. According to a spokesman for the Mission Command in Potsdam, it has been alongside the French aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle since Sunday. At a Luftwaffe (air force) base near Kiel, German Tornado combat aircraft are being prepared for their deployment to Turkey.

Even as the officially-acknowledged war preparations are in full swing, a report in the current edition of newsweekly *Der Spiegel* makes clear that even more far-reaching plans are being discussed and prepared behind the backs of the population.

Germany could “be drawn into a ground war in the medium term”, the news magazine writes under the revealing headline “On the helter-skelter”. In Berlin, there was agreement that “IS cannot be defeated just from the air.” According to Luxembourg Foreign Minister Jean Asselborn, “all the experts say that you cannot win from the air alone in the fight against IS.”

Der Spiegel cites one Harald Kujat as an “expert”. The retired general and former Inspector General of the Bundeswehr (armed forces) paints a scenario with tens of thousands of Western ground troops deployed in Syria. “Right now, we have to assume that the Western strategy is working. Should this not be the case, then the West is faced with the question whether it intends to deploy ground troops,” Kujat said. The general then drew a parallel to the NATO mission in Yugoslavia in the 1990s and declared, “We would then have to send 50,000 to 60,000 soldiers into the country under the leadership of the United States or NATO.”

So far, the official government line has been to refrain from any discussion about the use of German

ground forces in Syria, at least in public. Now *Der Spiegel* quotes high-ranking politicians who are demanding exactly that.

According to former Defence Minister Franz-Joseph Jung (CDU, Christian Democratic Union), German special forces could be used “on Syrian soil” to free German Tornado pilots, should they fall into the hands of IS. According to Jung, “such acts of liberation” have already been “carried out successfully by the Bundeswehr in Afghanistan.” The foreign policy spokesman of the Christian Democrat faction in the Bundestag, Jürgen Hardt, also brought the issue of German ground forces into play. He could “imagine a deployment of German soldiers on the ground in Syria in the context of a peace agreement for Syria and in the context of a UN resolution supporting this.”

In the opinion of *Der Spiegel*, “the question of German soldiers on Syrian territory” could soon be posed. On Wednesday, the Syrian opposition wants to agree upon their representatives at a meeting in Saudi Arabia. Should it come to an agreement on a transitional government, Germany could “hardly ... back down.” “Steinmeier and Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen [had] spoken too often of the fact that Germany will take on more responsibility in the world.”

The news magazine is alluding to Germany’s return to an aggressive foreign policy and great-power politics. At the beginning of 2014, the SPD foreign minister and von der Leyen, together with German President Gauck, announced the “end of military restraint” at the Munich Security Conference. Germany was “too big to comment on world politics only from the outside” and must “be prepared to get involved in foreign and security policy earlier, more decisively and more substantially,” they said.

This policy is now being implemented with Tornado jets, warships, at least 1,200 soldiers and possibly soon with German ground forces in Syria. Von der Leyen recently admitted that, in effect, the German war effort in Syria was part of a veritable foreign policy conspiracy of the German elites.

In a recent interview with business daily *Handelsblatt*, under the headline, “It will be a long struggle”, she declared, “In the spring of 2014, the current situation was not foreseen by anybody. ... And yet it was good that the President, the Foreign Minister and I have initiated this debate almost simultaneously: We have discussed issues and developed standpoints there on which we could rely in real crises a few months later.”

Now, it becomes more and more clear which “standpoints” these are. German politicians, the military and their lackeys in the editorial offices of major newspapers cannot wait for German soldiers to finally fight, bomb and kill again.

For example, in an editorial, the conservative *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung* over the weekend accused the government of only “fighting with cameras” in Syria. While “the leading European nation in terms of morals and budgetary discipline” had so far limited itself to “providing some assault rifles to Kurdish guerrillas in northern Iraq and to organizing shooting practice,” it was now inclined to “send Tornado aircraft with high resolution cameras, a frigate and about 1,200 servicemen and women to the war region.”

For the author, Peter Carstens, the single largest foreign deployment of the Bundeswehr, like all previous ones, is entirely insufficient. It is “closed-minded to once again hide behind others in words and deeds.” Whether in “Sarajevo, Priszren, Afghanistan and northern Mali,” it has always been a matter of “being as far away as possible from the fighting, if possible not to shoot. Fighting, suppressing opponents or killing them should be done by others.”

The deployment of “photo-Tornados in Syria” now “stands in this tradition” rails Carstens. However, “reality also means: The Bundeswehr has been reduced for a quarter of a century to a tiny troop with poor resources, to a few soldiers and low combat effectiveness.” Whenever it comes time “to fight,” it is said: “Germany does not want to, Germany cannot.”

In reality, Carstens’ editorial makes clear which “tradition” the policy of the government is following; it is to the traditions of German militarism which, after two world wars, is once again massively rearming in order to defend the interests of German imperialism worldwide by military means.

Over the weekend, André Wüstner, the chairman of the Federal Armed Forces Association, repeated his call for an increase in the size of the Bundeswehr. In the Saturday edition of the *Passauer Neue Presse*, he declared, “The challenges are enormous. The personnel ceiling must be raised and the equipment of the troops improved.” In the Bundeswehr reforms in 2011 and the associated reduction in troop levels, politicians did not contemplate the deployment to Syria nor the crisis in Ukraine. “We cannot undertake more and more tasks with the significantly reduced number of soldiers,” said Wüstner, demanding at least 5,000 to 10,000 additional troops.



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