

# German army begins military intervention in Syria

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The German army played a supporting role in air strikes by the international coalition against the Islamic State on Tuesday night. According to a spokesman for the German army's operational command in Potsdam, a German air force Airbus 310 MRTT was in the air for five hours to refuel fighter jets from the international anti-terrorism coalition.

The operational command did not provide any details about the origin of the aircraft, or their mission. Participants in the attacks on ISIS positions in Syria and Iraq include the US, France, Britain and jets from Arab countries. The bombing raids have repeatedly caused civilian casualties. Just last Monday, in a strike on the small village of Al-Khan in the Syrian district of Al-Hasakah, 36 civilians were killed, including 20 children.

The German intervention in Syria officially began with the refuelling flight. After the German government rushed the decision through parliament on December 4, things began moving quickly. Already in the hours after the vote, the German frigate Augsburg was on its way to Syria. It has been cruising alongside the French aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle for several days.

According to a report in the German army's newspaper *Bundeswehr Aktuell*, the German air force has been present at the Turkish Incirlik military base with aircraft and soldiers since last Thursday. "At the base: around 40 soldiers from the air force's tactical squadron 51—the Bundeswehr's forward command in the fight against 'Islamic State' under Brigadier General Andreas Schick," states the latest edition of the German army's news and propaganda magazine.

According to General Schick, the goal is "to begin with the first reconnaissance flights in mid-January." Until then, the forward command must "verify how to work with the facilities at Incirlik, conduct the first

flyovers, test radio traffic with flight security locally, establish logistics, construct offices." *Bundeswehr Aktuell* cited Schick as saying, "The air force is ready for deployment and has proven how rapidly it can respond in the wake of the parliamentary decision."

The media has also left no doubt about what is at stake with the intervention. *Spiegel online* wrote, "It is the third offensive combat operation in the German army's 60-year history, after the participation in the Kosovo deployment in 1999, and the NATO operation in Afghanistan, which ended in 2014. The army will participate with up to 1,200 soldiers in the mission."

However, the article suggested that behind the scenes, discussions are underway about deploying German special forces and ground troops. Only a week ago, US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter urged more support from the German army going beyond that already agreed in a letter to Defence Minister Ursula Von der Leyen (Christian Democrats, CDU).

Over recent days, leading politicians, above all Chancellor Angela Merkel (CDU) and Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD), have firmly defended the intervention.

Berlin could not look on as "the brutal and inhumane IS terrorists continued to advance," the chancellor declared in two newspaper interviews last weekend. She excluded any cooperation with Syrian government troops. Referring to Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad, she said, "There can be no future for him as the head of the state." Nonetheless, there had to be "talks between all groups in Syria about a political resolution of the conflict."

Steinmeier advised at an SPD party congress last weekend "not to place Assad's future at the centre of discussions at the moment, put this off and begin with the questions we agreed upon at the negotiating table in

Vienna.” Only in this way could “the dog eat dog fight in Syria be ended” and “the construction of a transitional government … begun.”

Steinmeier’s imperative to the SPD, greeted with great applause, says more about the interests of German imperialism in the region than he would have liked. With the military intervention, Germany is pursuing the goal of bringing all of the warring parties together around a table so as to install a puppet regime in Syria under the pretext of combatting terrorism, while enabling Berlin to pursue its geostrategic and economic interests throughout the entire Middle East.

For the warmongers in the editorial offices of the bourgeois press and in the universities, Germany’s military intervention thus far is nowhere near sufficient. In an interview with the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung*, military historian Sönke Neitzel stated that the Syrian intervention was “a footnote in comparison to Afghanistan with its correct military operations.”

Neitzel accused the chancellor of having neither a “strategy” nor “great foreign policy visions.” His demand: “We need generals who speak up on critical issues. We have almost 200 generals. They are the ones with the expertise, which we civilians lack. And unfortunately, there is no noteworthy participation of the military leadership in public debate.”

“Behind closed doors,” Neitzel went on, “several” were “very critical,” but “not in public.” The generals were a “functional elite, which carries out what the politicians say.” Of course there was a “clear primacy of politics. But when it comes to security issues, they are not always dealt with by a full understanding.” His demand was “not a rebellion of generals,” but he wanted “a critically thinking elite, which sometimes clearly says—and says it in public—this can’t go on! We won’t do that!”

Neitzel’s colleague, Herfried Münkler, made clear in an article last week for *Die Welt* what was meant by the call of the German ruling elite for stronger participation of the military in German society. “For some time, a leading role in Europe has fallen” on Germany, he wrote, “and it consists above all in the expectation of other member states that the power in the centre, the power of the centre, make proposals to resolve crises and carries the bulk of the burden itself.”

The Humboldt University professor then gave free

rein to his great power fantasies. “However now, much more is involved, and one can see how German politics is struggling to take on and perform the role it has been assigned without having done anything.” By accepting refugees, Merkel had “only bought time, and in this time one must tackle the real problem, the collapse of order in the Middle East, on the Mediterranean coast across from Europe and in many African countries stretching from Mali and Nigeria to Somalia.”



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