

NATO to station AWACS radar aircraft in Turkey

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NATO plans to send Airborne Early Warning and Control System (AWACS) reconnaissance aircraft from a base in Geilenkirchen, Germany, to the Turkish airbase of Konya. A third of the soldiers involved in staffing and servicing the aircraft are to be drawn from the German army (Bundeswehr)—a significant expansion of its deployment in Turkey.

Representatives of the 28 NATO member states decided in Brussels on December 18 to significantly increase the alliance's military presence in Turkey. Turkish airspace is to come under stricter surveillance by NATO fighter jets and AWACS reconnaissance planes, and further warships are to be dispatched to carry out exercises based in Turkish ports.

The AWACS can produce a precise image of airspace from hundreds of kilometres away, and serve as a command centre for the coordination of troop movements. With the assistance of highly developed radar technology on board, AWACS planes can track and identify aircraft more than 400 kilometres away. Unlike ground-based radar, the AWACS supplies detailed data on low-flying aircraft.

According to NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, the AWACS deployment is “part of a package of security measures for Turkey in the context of the volatile situation in Syria.” The German government declared that the reconnaissance aircraft would be a contribution to secure Turkey's southern border.

Neither Stoltenberg nor the German government has stated what this contribution precisely consists of. NATO is not expecting an air attack by the Syrian regime, which is regarded as being incapable of launching such an attack. Just days earlier, NATO withdrew the Patriot missiles from Turkey that had been stationed there for three years to protect the

country against air attacks. The Jihadi Islamic State militia, which NATO members are bombarding in Iraq and Syria, does not have an air force.

The only object of observation can therefore be the Russian armed forces, which have been operating in Syria since September, supporting Syrian ruler Bashar al-Assad and regularly bombarding ISIS targets and other Islamist militias. Following the shoot-down of a Russian jet by NATO member Turkey at the end of November, Moscow installed its comprehensive air missile defence system S-400 in Syria, which can be tracked by the AWACS.

After the downing of the jet, NATO demonstratively gave its backing to Turkey and announced it would provide Ankara with military assistance. Turkish president Erdogan subsequently requested support for monitoring Turkey's airspace. NATO has followed up these words with deeds by announcing the latest deployment. By conducting surveillance of airspace with the AWACS, they will be able to follow the movements of Russian planes in detail and attack within seconds when required.

The stationing of AWACS reconnaissance aircraft thus heightens the tensions between NATO, the most powerful military alliance in the world, and the nuclear power Russia. It also establishes the necessary infrastructure for a further expansion of the wars in Syria and Iraq, in which all of the major and regional powers are implicated and which threatens to trigger a third world war.

The German government has therefore gone to considerable lengths to play down the significance of the new deployment and adopt it without a vote by the German parliament (Bundestag). The government intended to use the holiday period to carry out the move with the least possible public scrutiny.

Although the mission had been planned for several weeks, the German government only sent a brief two-page report announcing the deployment of additional soldiers to Turkey to the parliamentary committees responsible on December 18, the last day of parliamentary sittings before Christmas.

In the paper, there were no firm figures for the number of German soldiers, or anything about the goal of the deployment. “The number of Bundeswehr soldiers concretely affected is not yet confirmed. NATO is still in the planning stage,” a defence ministry spokesman said. It is however clear that one third of the international crews of the AWACS aircraft will be members of the German armed forces.

The government claimed in the paper that no parliamentary mandate was necessary for the mission because no violence is anticipated from any side. Defence Ministry spokesman Boris Nannt repeated on Monday that the deployment will be a “purely defensive measure.”

In Germany, all deployments by the Bundeswehr that could result in violent conflict must be approved by the Bundestag. This was reaffirmed in 2008 in a ruling by Germany’s Constitutional Court on the flights by German AWACS planes in the lead-up to the 2003 Iraq war.

The government has sought to avoid this regulation with fraudulent arguments. Since there is no indication of the political will from the Syrian regime “to deploy its own air force against Turkey,” and since there are no concrete indications “that Russia intends to use its air force against Turkey,” the paper states, the reconnaissance flights are not an armed intervention.

This is a transparent lie. If there were no danger of a military escalation, there would be no point to the AWACS mission. In reality, the German government, which could be sure of a large majority in parliament, wants to avoid any public debate about a further expansion of German military operations.

Although the approximately 140 German soldiers who took part in the Patriot missile deployment over the past three years have just returned to Germany in recent days, the German government has already announced a major military operation in the Middle East with Germany’s participation in the Syrian war. Up to 1,200 soldiers will be involved in the Syrian deployment, most of whom will operate from Turkey,

where some have already arrived. At the same time, the government has expanded missions in Afghanistan and Mali.

Given the brazen character of the AWACS intervention, it is noteworthy that the government hardly faced any opposition to its attempt to secretly adopt the mission over the head of parliament. No deputy on any of the committees informed the public about the statement of December 18. Only when the *Bild* newspaper reported the news nine days later and Reuters took up the report did opposition members express concern.

Green Party defence spokeswoman Agnieszka Brugger urged the government to improve its communication with the opposition, but left open the possibility that the Greens would vote for the mission in the end.

The parliamentary leader of the Left Party, Sahra Wagenknecht, expressed her anger about the actions of the government on Sunday, although she had been informed of the deployment on December 18. “The actions of the German government show that our apparent freedom to act in foreign policy can only be won back if Germany withdraws from the military structures of US dominated NATO alliance,” she said. In reality, the German government is fully intent on pursuing its own imperialist interests in the Middle East, a goal that the Left Party fully supports.



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