

# German Luftwaffe joins the Syrian war

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6 January 2016

On Tuesday, four Tornado combat aircraft of the German Luftwaffe were deployed to the Turkish airbase at Incirlik to support the war against ISIS in Syria. According to the official web site of the Bundeswehr (German Armed Forces), the combat jets will conduct their first sorties toward the end of this week. On January 12, two more fighter jets will follow.

The Tornados are equipped with highly sensitive cameras capable of monitoring every movement on the ground and detecting enemy fighters. According to media reports, they will transmit live data identifying targets for the American, French, British and Arab militaries participating in the war. While the official task of the Tornados is surveillance, they are armed with sophisticated IRIS-T short-range infrared air-to-air missiles and 27mm Mauser on-board cannons that can be used against targets both on the ground and in the air.

From both a historical and political standpoint, the significance of this development cannot be overstated. It is just 70 years since the end of World War II. In that war, the Luftwaffe became identified with the savagery and brutality of the Nazi war machine as it rampaged across Europe, the Soviet Union and North Africa. The Stuka dive bomber with its wailing sirens inspired terror amongst the countless victims of the German imperialist blitzkrieg assaults that devastated cities from Warsaw and Stalingrad in the east to Rotterdam and London in the west.

Even before Germany's carpet bombing of Warsaw in 1939, the Luftwaffe established itself as an instrument of mass murder in the 1937 incineration of Guernica during the Spanish Civil War.

After the war and the full disclosure of the horrific crimes of German imperialism, the official position of the German ruling class was to eschew military violence. While this façade had increasingly eroded in the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union and

reunification of Germany a quarter century ago, it is within the past two years, driven by the imperatives of German capitalism and the global crisis that erupted in 2008, that the German bourgeoisie has repudiated its previous restraint and announced its return to the militarism and realpolitik of its past.

The entry of the Luftwaffe into the Syrian war, backed by some 1,200 German soldiers and a frigate, opens a new and ominous chapter in the resurgence of German militarism. It comes two years after President Joachim Gauck, Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen and Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier proclaimed "the end of military restraint" at the Munich Security Conference in January 2014. Pointing to the underlying economic and geopolitical interests behind Germany's return to great power politics, Steinmeier provocatively declared that Germany was "too big and too important" to limit itself "to merely commenting from the sidelines of world politics."

Recent comments by leading politicians, journalists and academics make the far-reaching implications of these statements even clearer. The current German intervention is only the beginning. The demands raised include new weaponry for the Bundeswehr, the expansion of German military interventions in the Middle East and Africa, including the deployment of German ground troops in Syria, and the reintroduction of compulsory military service.

On the eve of the new year, German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble, in a lengthy interview with *Bild am Sonntag*, called for "more deployments, more money for the armed forces, and more soldiers," as well as the creation of a "European army."

He spelled out the plans of the German government for 2016: "My prediction for the next year is that the insight will prevail that the refugee crisis can only be solved together. For Germany, this means, however, that the demands on us in regard to foreign and security

policy are greater than perhaps we would like. We will not stabilise the Middle East without a stronger European engagement. The same goes for Africa.”

Paraphrasing Trotsky, not every German bourgeois politician is a Hitler, but a particle of Hitler is lodged in every German bourgeois politician.

How is this rapid and ferocious revival of German militarism to be explained?

As in the 1930s, the German ruling elites are responding to the deep crisis of global capitalism and the nation state system on which it is based with calls for great power politics and war. Analyzing the objective driving forces that led to the rise of aggressive German imperialism, Trotsky wrote in 1932: “As the productive forces of Germany become more and more highly geared, the more dynamic power they gather, the more they are strangled within the state system of Europe—a system that is akin to the ‘system’ of cages within an impoverished provincial zoo.”

The consequences of the German elites’ attempt to break out of this “system of cages” are well known. In 1933, Hitler was made chancellor and the subsequent attempt by Nazi Germany to “conquer Europe in order to rule the world” left entire countries in ruins and took the lives of millions of people.

Seventy years after the military defeat of Nazi Germany, it is clear that the post-war order resolved none of the problems and contradictions that led to two world wars in the twentieth century.

Although Germany is currently re-militarizing within the framework of NATO and the Luftwaffe is operating as part of the US-led coalition against ISIS, there can be no doubt that the escalating war for the re-division of the Middle East and the struggle for control of Eastern Europe and Eurasia will lead to growing tensions and conflicts between the US and Germany.

The German ruling elite has long been elaborating plans for pursuing its own national interests. A strategy paper from the Christian Democratic Union-aligned Konrad Adenauer Foundation published in 2001 defined the “fundamental German interest” in the Middle East as follows: “It is directed towards the stabilization of the affected states and countries so as to prevent the endangering of [Germany’s] security and that of its partner European countries, secure an unfettered supply of raw materials, and create export opportunities for German business.”

The study pointed to the significance of the “export markets of the region’s core states (Egypt, Turkey, Iran), but above all the solvent Gulf states” for Germany’s export-driven economy. It was appropriate “to therefore make a contribution to secure sales markets, obtain as far as possible unhindered access to markets, and take on the competitors—the US, Eastern Europe states, and also the East Asian industrial states.”

In recent months, growing tensions between the German-dominated European Union and the right-wing nationalist government in Poland, which is oriented toward a close alliance with US imperialism in its war drive against Russia, have further exposed divisions among the great powers. The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* recently complained of the Polish “vision” of an “Intermarium, an alliance of states stretching from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea as a counterweight to Russia and Germany, the new Hegemon in Europe.”

The entry of the German Luftwaffe into the war in Syria opens up a dangerous new stage in the militarization of world capitalism.



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