

German defence ministry spent billions on wars abroad

Johannes Stern
22 February 2016

The German military has spent at least €17.2 billion on 55 operations abroad since 1992, according to a new paper from the German defence ministry seen by Spiegel Online.

By far the costliest was the ISAF mission in Afghanistan, which devoured nearly €9 billion between 2001 and 2014. This is followed by combat missions in Yugoslavia, where the Bundeswehr had participated for the first time in an illegal war. The document lists the cost of the KFOR mission in Kosovo, ongoing since 1999, at €3.4 billion, and the SFOR I and II missions in Bosnia-Herzegovina and in Croatia (1996-1998) at €1.2 billion.

The Enduring Freedom mission in Kuwait and the Horn of Africa (2001-2010) cost €1.1 billion and the ongoing Atalanta mission cost €0.45bn.

The officially stated figure of €17 billion is already huge. By comparison: This is more money than the Federal Ministries of Education and Research have to spend in any one year (€16.4 bn) or health (€14.5bn).

In reality, this is only a fraction of the actual amount that has been spent on military operations. According to the defence ministry, the costs of seven missions can “no longer be ascertained.” In two operations in the former Yugoslavia it is no longer even possible to “reconstruct the number of soldiers deployed.” There were also “gaps” in large-scale operations, such as the mission “Allied Harbour” in 1999 in Kosovo and Macedonia, in which up to 1,000 soldiers were deployed, or an OSCE mission in Georgia between 2008 and 2009.

The figures that the defence ministry produced at the request of the chair of the Parliamentary Budget Committee, Gesine Löttsch (Left Party), could “not always be clearly identified for various reasons,” a spokesman for the ministry told Spiegel Online. For

example, it has allegedly “not been considered necessary to record all the respective expenditures separately.” Moreover, the electronic budgetary procedures used at the time are “today almost completely no longer used”, and older data was often unavailable.

It is completely implausible that the very ministry that for months has listed each missing screw allegedly needed to equip the troops has no detailed overview of the enormous expenditure on worldwide Bundeswehr military adventures. Rather, the ministry is concealing the actual expenditure because it fears popular resistance against the unpopular war and austerity policies of the federal government.

A recent publication by the former commander of the Armed Forces Support Command, Retired Lieutenant General Ulf Krause, comments on the growing use of the “military as a means of foreign policy”. He states, “And here ends the willingness of the German population to follow the political elites, who previously tended to dress up missions as ‘humanitarian,’ to avoid the accusation of a militarization of foreign policy.”

How true! Eighteen years ago, the Social Democratic Party-Green Party coalition government of Gerhard Schröder and Joschka Fischer initiated the first combat operations by German troops since World War II. Then in 2003, the Agenda 2010 welfare and labour “reforms” initiated the deepest social cuts in the history of the Federal Republic of Germany. The established parties and media sought to present these measures as a struggle for human rights and democracy, and the securing of the future of Germany.

In his infamous government statement of March 14, 2003, Schröder cynically justified the “harshness” of Agenda 2010 saying, “people are being given new opportunities, opportunities to develop their skills and

to perform at their best.” In relation to the Iraq war, he stressed that “we have insisted on the logic of peace, rather than entering into a logic of war.”

Now there is nothing left of these propaganda lies, which even then incited the anger of workers and youth, and triggered large protests. If Schröder had been honest, he would have declared at the time: “We are cutting your benefits, wages and pensions and are making savings in education and health above all, so that we can upgrade the German army, and so the German people finally get the chance to ‘enter into the logic of war’ and ‘develop their skills and perform at their best’ in global military deployments.”

This is exactly what happened in the following years and is now to be continued.

Thirteen years after Schröder’s Agenda 2010 speech, and two years after President Gauck, Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD) and Defence Minister von der Leyen (CDU) announced the end of military restraint in Germany at the 2014 Munich Security Conference, German soldiers are not only in Iraq (110 soldiers), but also in Syria (445), Mali (310), Somalia (9), Afghanistan (855), Western Sahara (4), Liberia (3), Darfur (8), Sudan (16), Kosovo (648), in the Aegean Sea (175), in the Mediterranean off the Libyan coast (280) and off the Somali coast (109). This is clear from the “current situation reports from the areas of deployment of the Bundeswehr” of February 17.

In January, the defence ministry announced raising the expenditure on equipping the armed forces “to a total of around €130 billion in the next 15 years” to “ensure a flexible function fulfilment.” From the standpoint of the elites, it is already clear who is to bear the cost: working people—as cannon fodder in war, through a new round of social cuts, and the dismantling of democratic rights.

The above-cited study gives an idea of what is again being discussed behind the closed doors by the generals and defence politicians more than 75 years after the end of World War II. Without mincing his words, General Krause is demanding that the “political elites ... influence society so that it develops a ‘war waging culture’.” In order for that to prevail as a “basic mental attitude ... society would have to provide the necessary resources to make its army one of several instruments of foreign policy,” according to Krause.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact