Warmongers united: Germany's Left Party welcomes former top army general

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Germany's Left Party, like the Greens more than a decade and a half ago, is in the process of transforming itself into an openly pro-war party. Not much doubt about this remains after Thursday. On World Peace Day (of all days!), the Left Party's parliamentary group invited the former Chief of Staff of the Bundeswehr [German armed forces] and chairman of the NATO military committee, Harald Kujat, to its meeting in Hannover.

The invitation to someone who was once the highest-ranking German military officer was initiated, according to media reports, by Left Party parliamentary group leaders Sahra Wagenknecht and Dietmar Bartsch. Kujat's topic for discussion was "German foreign and security policy with the particular challenges of relations with Turkey and Russia." Nothing about the content of his speech was released to the public. But Kujat's role as one of the leading warmongers in post-war Germany is a matter of public record.

The retired general has been known for many years as a leading architect and trailblazer of German militarism. After his training in the Luftwaffe [air force] in the early 1960s, he began junior officer training which led to him to take a position in the defence ministry in 1972 under Georg Leber (SPD, Social Democratic Party). In 1977, he became a staff officer with the minister and in 1978 an advisor to the army command office in the ministry of defence.

Under the Helmut Schmidt (SPD) government, Kujat was advisor on security policy in the strategy department of the Chancellor's office. In 1988, he completed the 72nd Course of the NATO Defence College in Rome. In the same year, he became head of the office for the German military representative to NATO's military committee in Brussels and in 1992 a deputy representative.

Since at least the onset of the SPD/Green Party government in 1998 under Gerhard Schröder and Joschka Fischer, the name Kujat has more than any other been associated with the transformation of the German army into an imperialist and interventionist force. During the Kosovo war, the first German combat intervention since the end of World War II, Kujat led the planning office in the defence ministry and was considered the right-hand man of then SPD defence minister Rudolf Scharping.

During his term as Chief of Staff, Germany's second combat mission, the intervention in Afghanistan, followed in 2001. During the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, Kujat was chairman of the NATO military committee in Brussels. On 16 June, 2005, he was retired with honours in Berlin by then defence minister Peter Struck (SPD).

Since then, Kujat has played a central role as a strategist for the return of German militarism, which was declared in early 2014 by German President Joachim Gauck, foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD) and defence minister Ursula Von der Leyen (CDU, Christian Democratic Union) at the Munich Security Conference.

Shortly after the right-wing coup in Ukraine orchestrated by Washington and Berlin, Kujat demanded in *Die Zeit* in March 2014 the reintroduction of military service and a significant strengthening of the German army. He was the first to advise the German government to undertake a "fundamental reevaluation" of the security policy environment and emphasised "that national defence as alliance defence belongs at the centre of planning."

In the event of a Russian attack on the Baltic states, according to Kujat, there was a lack of "even aircraft to rapidly transport heavy equipment to the crisis region." The German army had "too few combat planes and helicopters, too few heavy weapons and, above all, too few soldiers." His conclusion: "Either the profession of a soldier becomes much more attractive—meaning better pay—or compulsory military service is reintroduced."

In 2015, Kujat repeatedly demanded an escalation of

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German interventions in Afghanistan and the Middle East. After the fall of Kunduz to the Taliban in October 2015, he told the newspapers of the Funke media group, “Only a renewed major combat intervention by NATO can clean up the situation.”

A few weeks later in *Der Spiegel*, he advocated the deployment of Western ground troops in Syria: “At the moment we must hope that the West’s strategy comes together. If that is not the case, the West confronts the question of whether it wishes to deploy its own ground troops,” stated Kujat. He drew a parallel with the NATO intervention in Yugoslavia in the 1990s and said, “Then we would need to send 50,000 to 60,000 soldiers into the country under the command of the US or NATO.”

Over recent months, Kujat has repeatedly expressed support for Russia’s military intervention in Syria and strongly called for an uncompromising stance towards Turkey, like Wagenknecht and large sections of the Left Party.

Kujat’s invitation by the Left Party is a signal to the entire ruling elite. Two weeks prior to the state election in Berlin and one year before the federal election, the Left Party is ready to fully endorse Germany’s war policy (as part of an SPD/Green/Left Party government).

Kujat made no secret of why he accepted the Left Party’s invitation. He thought it was “good and courageous” that the Left Party “invited a former chairman of the NATO military committee,” the general told the *Mitteldeutsche Zeitung*. Perhaps this would have “an influence on the Left Party’s foreign and security policy positions.” He made clear: “The Left Party would be considered for a coalition only if they significantly clean up their act on foreign and security policy.”

In fact, the “clean-up”—or more appropriately pro-war transformation of the Left Party—has already been in full swing for some time and is far advanced. The *World Socialist Web Site* has closely followed and documented it over recent years. The Left Party participated in the drafting of the SWP [German Institute for International and Security Affairs] paper “New Power—New Responsibility. Elements of a German foreign and security policy for a world in turmoil,” the central strategic document of the foreign policy shift, and was from the outset a pro-war party in regard to the Syrian situation.

In recent weeks, Left Party representatives have openly declared their support for NATO and a militarist foreign policy.

At the end of July, Wagenknecht said in the ZDF summer interview, “Of course Germany would not exit NATO on the day we enter government.” In an interview with *Der Spiegel* appearing almost simultaneously, Bodo Ramelow, the first Left Party minister-president in Thuringia, stated, “We are not pacifists.” He thought it was “wrong” if the Left party did not in the future give support to German army interventions abroad.

This week, Gregor Gysi, the former parliamentary group chair and the public face of the party, told the conservative *Die Welt* that he had “never demanded that Germany leave NATO.” On questions of foreign policy like the Syrian war “an agreement could be achieved” with foreign minister Steinmeier and the SPD, Gysi said.

Sections of the Left Party are concerned that the true character of the party is being so openly exposed. According to reports in the *Mitteldeutsche Zeitung*, party chairwoman Katja Kipping and her deputy, Jan van Aken, criticised the invitation given to Kujat. One ought not to have invited the “warmonger” Kujat alone, but only together with a representative of the peace movement. Otherwise, the impression might arise that the Left Party was not always against war.

Others have warmly greeted the cooperation with the German general staff and are urging a more aggressive pro-war shift: “With all appreciation for the views that some parliamentary group members may have on this—to listen to Kujat, to have a cultivated, that is constructive, dispute with him face to face, does not make anyone more stupid,” the Left Party paper *Neues Deutschland* commented.

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