

German parliament backs extension of military operations in Iraq and Syria

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14 November 2016

With the votes of the governing coalition of the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) and Social Democratic Party (SPD), the German parliament last week approved an extension of the country's military missions in Iraq and Syria. This involves the continuing participation of the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) in combat missions as part of the so-called Anti-IS Coalition with other Western countries and regional governments in the Middle East.

The motion introduced by the government permits the dispatch of up to 1,200 soldiers, reconnaissance Tornados, tanker aircraft and a naval vessel until December 31, 2017. The "mission-related additional costs" alone for the German military forces will amount to about €133.6 million.

The list of tasks is long: it includes "logistics support through aerial refuelling"; "escort and security of the naval force"; "sea and air surveillance"; "the exchange and comparison of situational information with other actors in the international anti-IS coalition"; "the carrying out of liaison, advisory and support tasks for the HQs of the multinational partners" and "ensuring the management, linking, protection and support tasks for implementing the deployment of German forces".

German soldiers will be deployed on NATO AWACS reconnaissance missions, which fly from Turkey into international airspace over the Mediterranean to gather intelligence on the situation in the region. The planes start out from the Konya base in south Turkey. The Bundeswehr is providing about one-third of the AWACS personnel for NATO.

In total, there are currently about 500 German soldiers deployed in the anti-IS operations. Most of them are stationed at the Incirlik base in Turkey, from where they launch Tornado fighter aircraft on

reconnaissance flights over Syria and Iraq, providing target data for the bombing missions carried out by the coalition. In addition, a German air tanker is used to supply Bundeswehr and allied planes. German soldiers serving aboard the frigate *Augsburg* are tasked with accompanying and protecting the French aircraft carrier *Charles de Gaulle* in the Mediterranean.

The size of the mission area is worth noting. "The deployment of German armed forces takes place primarily in and over the area of operations of the terrorist organization IS in Syria, on the territorial area of neighbouring countries, whose respective governments have granted permission, as well as in the Eastern Mediterranean, Persian Gulf, Red Sea and adjacent sea areas", according to the draft parliamentary motion.

In other words, German troops are involved in a comprehensive combat and war mission in the Middle East, which is escalating the attacks on the metropolis of Mosul in Iraq and the so-called "IS-capital" Raqqa in Syria. The forces deployed have been expressly granted the right to "use military force".

Civilians have been repeatedly killed since the beginning of the German mission. This week, the US Army admitted that at least 64 civilians had been killed in 24 coalition airstrikes in Iraq and Syria, between November 2015 and September 2016. The real number is far higher. At the end of October, Amnesty International published a report on 11 different attacks by the US-led coalition, in which a total of about 300 civilians were killed. Other observer groups calculate that well over a thousand deaths are due to Western bombing in Syria.

Last Thursday, Amnesty International accused the Iraqi security forces of having abused and killed civilians during their offensive in Mosul. According to

information from the human rights group, the incidents occurred south of Mosul. Several residents of the liberated area were tied up or beaten with cables and rifle butts before some were shot. Some bodies were found mutilated or blindfolded.

The Bundeswehr is playing an important role in the battle for Mosul. In close proximity to the front, up to 150 German soldiers are training and arming Kurdish Peshmerga units, which are advancing from the north of the city. Germany has admitted to delivering more than 2,200 tonnes of arms, ammunition and other military equipment to the Iraqi Kurds since 2014. As early as last April, Amnesty International accused the Kurdish militias of having “looted, set on fire, blown up or destroyed by bulldozers ... thousands of homes”.

Niels Annen, foreign policy spokesman of the SPD parliamentary group, who campaigned for the mandate on behalf of the government in parliament, nevertheless had the chutzpah to call the German war effort a “humanitarian contribution”.

He knew “no other European country, which had acted in such a way over the recent weeks and months so that the support for the already visible consequences of this offensive ... succeeded”, he added cynically. “Even in the preparation of this operation”, Germany had “helped, [so] that refugee facilities were built and that the means were there so that liberated areas had water, that there were health care provisions and that the infrastructure was restored”.

In reality, the Bundeswehr is not building up the “infrastructure” let alone “health care provisions”, but is spreading terror and chaos. This can be seen most clearly in Afghanistan, where the Bundeswehr has been active for 15 years. On Friday, a bomb was detonated in front of the German Consulate General in Mazar-i-Sharif, killing at least six people and injuring more than a hundred. The Taliban described the attack as retaliation for an airstrike by the Western occupation forces on November 3 in Kunduz, which cost the lives of at least 30 civilians, including many women and children.

The German forces are responding with brutal counter-violence. After the attack, the *Quick Reaction Force* was deployed, the NATO Response Force from the *Resolute Support* mission, which is run from the German field camp at Marmal outside the consulate. Shortly afterwards, German soldiers shot two Afghan

motorcyclists who had approached the scene of the attack and who had allegedly not stopped when warned.

Instead of pausing and halting the madness of its missions abroad, Berlin is now using the election of the new American President Donald Trump as an excuse to push forward German militarism.

In his speech to parliament, Annen appealed, “I hope that the Bundestag will make it clear that our country, the Federal Republic of Germany, with the soldiers that we have sent, and with the skills that we want to provide [...] is regarded as part of the coalition, that we take responsibility and—particularly in view of the election in the United States and the uncertainty that this election result has caused—that we want to be seen as a reliable partner. This is more important than ever”.

For tactical reasons, the Greens and Left Party voted against the motion, but agree with the call for a more independent German foreign and military policy. For example, on election night, the Left Party representative in the Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee, Stefan Liebich, cheered the prospect of a more aggressive German great power politics.

Germany and Europe must “act more strongly, more independently, more self-assuredly in future foreign policy”, said Liebich. The times in which we oriented ourselves to the US were now over. “The task now is to strengthen European foreign and security policy. ... We will in future say a louder and clearer No to what Washington wants. It’s now time to end the pussyfooting”.

This does not prevent the Left Party, when necessary, from working closely with the United States to enforce the economic and geo-strategic interests of Germany in the Middle East. On Friday, the pro-Left Party newspaper *Neues Deutschland* published a propaganda interview with the Peshmerga Brigadier General Hazhar Omar Ismail, “the first US-trained Kurdish military cadre”. In 2013, he “graduated from the Pennsylvania Military College”, notes the paper. Now he is closely coordinating the offensive against Mosul with the Western powers.



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