

Germany to withdraw military aircraft from Turkey

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The German cabinet has decided to transfer some 260 German soldiers, along with Tornado reconnaissance aircraft and a tanker aircraft, to Jordan from the Turkish air base at Incirlik.

“In view of the fact that Turkey is currently unable to allow German parliamentarians visits to Incirlik, the cabinet has today agreed that we will move the Bundeswehr [Armed Forces] from Incirlik to Jordan,” Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen (CDU, Christian Democratic Union) said following the cabinet meeting on Wednesday.

A parliamentary vote on the continuation of the operation against the Islamic State (IS), in which the Bundeswehr has been involved since the end of 2015, and which is also directed against the Syrian government of Bashar al-Assad, was not necessary, she said. “The unanimous opinion was that there is no need for a new mandate, because the [existing] mandate itself does not specify Incirlik as a base, but the area of deployment—and that concerns Syria and Iraq and the neighbouring states.” Von der Leyen said the German military deployment in Syria and Iraq would continue from Jordan.

The withdrawal of German troops from Turkey is a foreign policy watershed. It is the first time that a NATO member has withdrawn its forces from a support base in another member state due to political conflicts.

The US-led military alliance was critical about the planned withdrawal of the Bundeswehr. Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg was “in regular contact with the Turkish and German governments regarding this issue,” and it was “regrettable that this matter could not be resolved otherwise,” a NATO spokesman told German daily *Die Welt*.

The official reason for the German withdrawal is a ban on visits to Incirlik by Bundestag (federal

parliament) deputies imposed by the Turkish government, which was not lifted even following the visit of German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel (SPD, Social Democratic Party) to Turkey on Monday.

The Turkish government justified this policy attitude by citing Germany granting asylum to Turkish officers who were involved in the failed coup in July 2016. A total of 414 Turkish soldiers, diplomats, judges, and government employees, who are suspected by the Turkish government as being part of the coup, have filed asylum applications in Germany. For Ankara, the *Die Welt* correspondent Deniz Yücel being detained in Turkey, whose release the German government has called for, is also a matter of “terrorism” and “espionage”.

German-Turkish relations were in a deep crisis even before the failed coup attempt against Erdoğan, which enjoyed at least the tacit support of some in ruling circles in America and Germany.

In June 2016, the Bundestag passed a resolution describing the mass murder of up to 1.5 million Armenians in the Ottoman Empire as a “genocide”. Erdoğan warned at the time that the initiative could lead to “damage to the diplomatic, economic, political, and military relations between the two countries,” and prohibited Bundestag members from visiting German soldiers stationed at Incirlik.

In recent months, political conflicts between Germany and Turkey have intensified. In the runup to the Turkish constitutional referendum, the German authorities imposed bans on Turkish government members from visiting several cities, and German politicians and the media organized a veritable hate campaign against Turks. In addition to the right-wing extremist Alternative for Germany (AfD) and the Christian Social Union (CSU), the Greens and the Left

Party were also particularly prominent in the campaign.

Even now, the supposed opposition parties are supporting the decision of the government. In the Left Party newspaper *Junge Welt*, the Left Party representative in the Bundestag Defence Committee, Alexander Neu, described the announcement by the government as a “long overdue step.” He wrote, “After an eternal back and forth, the government now also seems to have concluded that there is no alternative in the conflict about visitation rights for Bundestag deputies to German soldiers in Incirlik than to withdraw the Bundeswehr from there.”

Speaking to broadcaster ARD, Green leader Cem Özdemir demanded arms supplies to Turkey also be stopped: “The only possible answer must now be to make it clear that we are withdrawing the soldiers. I will only believe this government when they are gone. No more support for Incirlik, and an immediate stop to arms supplies to Turkey.”

Far-reaching geopolitical questions lie behind the withdrawal of the Bundeswehr from Turkey. In the context of the collapse of the postwar order and growing conflicts between the great powers, German imperialism is feverishly trying to develop as an independent great power and to reorient its strategy for the Middle East.

In particular, representatives of the Greens and the Left Party have long believed that a too close cooperation with Ankara places limits on the operations of German imperialism. They argue for more open cooperation with Kurdish militia such as the PYD, linked with the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK), which is banned in Germany, but which plays an important role as a proxy force in the war for regime change in Syria.

In this regard, Left Party spokesperson Katja Kipping warned: “Even if the Tornados are launched from Jordan, no one can rule out the results of their reconnaissance being passed on to the Turkish army within the framework of NATO, and being used to attack Kurdish units in Syria, which are a real bulwark against the terror of IS.”

At the same time, Kipping demanded that thought be given to the exclusion of Turkey from NATO, which was in a “deep political crisis”. “We should seriously discuss whether Turkey can remain a member of NATO.” Erdogan posed a “blatant security risk” and was destroying “not only the rule of law and freedom in

Turkey, but he is also bolstering the military crisis in Syria and Iraq with his expansionist plans.”

The attempt by the Left Party to market German imperialism and NATO as a pacifist alternative to Erdogan is a mockery. Germany has repeatedly participated in NATO and the USA’s wars of aggression over the past 25 years and is now increasingly prepared to act against its American “ally”, further increasing the danger of war.

During his last visit to Washington, Gabriel had threatened that Germany would not only withdraw the Tornado reconnaissance aircraft stationed in Incirlik, but also German crews on the NATO “Awacs” reconnaissance aircraft at Konya in Turkey. For him, the conflict was far more than “a bilateral problem”. The Americans were “clear what serious consequences it would have for the fight against IS if the Bundeswehr had to be withdrawn there.”

Yesterday, Gabriel delivered a vehement denunciation of the Saudi offensive against Qatar, which is supported by President Trump, and which is ultimately aimed at Iran. Gabriel supported the emirate and warned against “Trump-ising” the Middle East. The “recent massive armaments deal of American President Trump with the Gulf monarchies” would exacerbate the risk of a new arms race. This was “a completely wrong policy, and certainly not Germany’s policy.”

While Trump and the Saudis are heading towards a confrontation with Tehran, the German government is banking on opening up the country to develop new energy sources and markets for German exports in the Middle East. To impose its interests, Berlin is increasingly ready to forge its own military alliances in the region.



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