

German Air Force involved in war crimes in Syria

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German Air Force (Luftwaffe) planes have resumed operations in Syria and Iraq as part of the US-led coalition against ISIS. According to official reports of the armed forces (Bundeswehr), German air force Tornadoes have been conducting reconnaissance flights daily from their new base in Jordan. Military sources told the German press, “Full operational readiness was achieved following the transfer of the contingent from Turkey to Jordan.”

In June, the German parliament (Bundestag) decided to withdraw the Luftwaffe from Incirlik Air Base and move closer to the war zone, following a series of foreign policy conflicts with Turkey. The Muwaffaq Salti Air Base in northern Jordan is around 50 kilometres from the Syrian border and is a base for Jordan’s air force. Within the framework of Operation Inherent Resolve, US and Dutch military units are already stationed at the base alongside the German Tornadoes.

“Full operational readiness” means that the Luftwaffe is again providing targets for the air raids carried out by the US-led coalition. The number of aerial attacks has increased considerably since the start of the offensive against Raqqa, the last stronghold of the IS in Syria. The coalition has been supporting the siege of the city, which is being carried out primarily by forces under the leadership of the Kurdish YPG.

The air raids and the shelling of the city by artillery have led to a massive increase in civilian casualties in the Syrian war. According to the United Nations more civilians died in Syria in September than in any other month this year. In light of this bloodbath, the UN called for an armistice at the end of August to allow more than 20,000 trapped civilians to flee Raqqa.

The UN special adviser for Syria, Jan Egeland, said he could “imagine no worse place” in the world than

the neighbourhoods under attack by the coalition. According to media reports, civilian facilities, including schools and the al-Mawasah Hospital, have been repeatedly bombed and hundreds of people killed or injured. Those who did not die through the bullets of the coalition have been forced to eat grass and leaves to survive.

The US government has rejected a truce. The longer the “liberation” of Raqqa took, the more civilians would be killed by IS—this was the reasoning of the American side.

A report in the German TV magazine *Monitor* last week underlined the cynicism of this argument. After three months of siege, Raqqa is in ruins. Only shells remain of the city’s houses; ruins are everywhere and house-to-house fighting and air raids continue incessantly.

Coalition forces have dropped nearly 30,000 rockets, bombs and other projectiles on the densely populated city since June. According to the absurd figures given by the coalition, only five civilians were killed and a few others were injured during this period.

Such figures fly in the face of numerous reports from the inhabitants of Raqqa. One of them, Abu Ahmad, told *Monitor* how his relatives were killed by coalition forces while fleeing from ISIS. He reported 21 deaths alone in the house of one relative. In total, six houses were razed to the ground.

Based on such reports, the non-governmental organisation, Airwars, assumes that, according to the most conservative estimates, at least 1,100 civilians have died in the siege of Raqqa. According to Airwars, these are cases which were not only reported, but could also be proved. The actual number of victims is undoubtedly much higher. In view of the massive destruction in Raqqa, one must also assume that

thousands are still buried under the rubble.

The German military has been directly involved in these crimes. The coalition attacked a school in the village of al-Mansoura near Raqqa, with German Luftwaffe Tornadoes providing air reconnaissance and target coordinates. In the bombing of the school, dozens, possibly hundreds of people were killed. According to Airwars there were up to 100 refugee families in the school building, which was completely destroyed.

Despite their shared responsibility for war crimes, tensions between the major actors in the anti-ISIS coalition, in particular Germany and the US, have risen sharply in recent months. The tensions erupted most recently over the Iranian nuclear agreement. US President Donald Trump's aggressive attempt to sabotage the deal has been strongly criticised by the German government, which fears for its major business contracts with Iran. It also fears that a further conflagration in the Middle East could endanger the interests of German imperialism in the region.

Against this background of growing transatlantic tensions, the Bundeswehr is preparing to intervene militarily independently from the US. Behind the backs of the population, the German Defence Ministry is working on a rearmament plan, based on the so-called "provisional conceptual guidelines for the future capability profile of the Bundeswehr," presented by the responsible department head in the defence ministry, Lieutenant General Erhard Bühler.

According to the guidelines, the German air force is to be "put in position to lead a multinational coalition" in the next few years, capable of flying up to 350 reconnaissance and combat missions daily. The German air force must "be able to maintain aerial dominance over Germany and, together with its allies, establish superiority over an operational area."



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