

German parliament extends foreign military missions with support of the far-right AfD

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On Tuesday and Wednesday, the Bundestag (German parliament) agreed to extend a total of seven foreign missions of the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces). Despite the ongoing government crisis, all parties are driving forward the militarization of foreign policy.

With a large majority and yes-votes from the ranks of the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU), Social Democratic Party (SPD), Free Democratic Party (FDP), Greens and Alternative for Germany (AfD), military missions that would have expired in the coming weeks have been extended by three months initially. These concern:

“Sea Guardian”: The NATO mission in the Mediterranean, in which the Bundeswehr is participating with warships and a current maximum of 650 soldiers, officially serves “the fight against people smuggling” (Defence Ministry). In fact, it is about sealing off fortress Europe against refugees from the war zones in the Middle East and Africa as well as the preparation of new neo-colonial forays.

In the Bundestag debate, SPD deputy Karl-Heinz Brunner bluntly declared the entire region was part of the German sphere of influence: “Africa is on our doorstep, a few nautical miles from Europe. Stability and perspectives for the states of North Africa—if they have any perspectives at all—and the countries in the Middle East are already in our very own interest. Failed states in the immediate vicinity of the EU would also pose threats to us. Otherwise the whole thing could blow up in our faces.”

“Counter Daesh”: In the war effort in Syria and Iraq, the Bundeswehr is involved with up to 1,200 soldiers. The mission includes reconnaissance flights by German Tornado fighters and air refuelling using A310 aircraft from Muwaffaq Salti Air Base in Jordan. In addition, the Bundeswehr crews the NATO AWACS

reconnaissance aircraft based in Konya in Turkey.

The continuation of the mission, even after the official defeat of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), underlines the fact that Berlin, from the beginning, was not concerned with the supposed “fight against terrorism.” Germany also wants to be present in Syria and Iraq when it comes to dividing up the spoils of war. The thousands of civilian deaths are part of the strategy. “I believe that in a war zone, the distinction between military and civilian victims is difficult and that it is probably unavoidable that there are consequences of military operations affecting the innocent and non-combatants,” said the foreign policy spokesman of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group, Jürgen Hardt.

The mandate to **arm and train the Kurdish Peshmerga in northern Iraq** was also extended for a maximum of 150 Bundeswehr soldiers. In the debate, Johann David Wadehul, a CDU member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, praised the mission as a “paradigm shift for German foreign and security policy” and as “epochal.” He meant thereby the German claim to replace the USA as a “great power for order.”

The intervention in Iraq had “shown that we have responded to a withdrawal of the United States.” It will happen “more often in the future that we are posed with the question: how do we act as Europeans? How do we act as Germans?” One cannot take a “narrow view and say: The Bundeswehr is responsible for defending the national borders, the territorial integrity of Germany and Europe. Of course it is responsible for this. But to use an old word from Peter Struck [SPD defence minister under Gerhard Schröder], we must defend our freedom, our independence, in other regions of the world.”

“Resolute Support”: With the votes of the CDU, CSU, SPD, FDP and Greens, the deployment of currently 980 Bundeswehr soldiers in Afghanistan has been extended. In the debate, Thorsten Frei (CDU) argued for an increase in the occupation forces despite the overwhelming rejection of this in the population. He considered, “the decision of the American president to send 4,000 additional soldiers to Afghanistan” to be “correct.” Those who criticized Trump for his statement, “We are only killing terrorists”, and continued to push for “nation-building” should not say, “We cannot send four-digit numbers of German soldiers to Afghanistan.”

In reality, the Bundeswehr has never pursued “nation-building” in Afghanistan, but propagates murder and manslaughter. From 2001 to 2014, German troops have been involved in a brutal combat mission as part of ISAF. The terrible climax of this was the “Kunduz Massacre.” In this air raid on two tankers on September 4, 2009, ordered by Colonel Georg Klein, the then Bundeswehr commander of Kunduz, up to 142 people were killed or injured, including many women and children, according to official NATO statements.

In the extension of the **missions in Africa** it became clear how closely all parties are cooperating with the AfD on the return of German militarism. In addition to “Sea Guardian,” the UNAMID and UNMIS missions in Sudan and South Sudan were also extended with the support of the right-wing extremists. The respective recommendations for resolutions were drafted by all parties in the newly established Main Committee of the Bundestag and bear the signatures of members of all parliamentary groups. The Left Party is represented there by Klaus Ernst, Heike Hänsel, Gesine Löttsch, Sabine Zimmermann and Petra Sitte as co-chair in the Main Committee.

Above all, the debate on the extension of the Bundeswehr mission in Mali revealed the objective logic flowing from the involvement of the AfD. Under conditions of growing tensions between the imperialist powers, German imperialism is acting with increasing aggression and nationalism in order to assert its interests.

AfD politician, and former staff sergeant in the armoured division, Jens Kestner complained, “French interests in Mali, in the West of Africa” were being followed “with precipitate obedience”, where “German

interests are clearly in the foreground.” Mali was “three times the size of Germany” and could “not be pacified, stabilized, let alone secured with a mandate cap of 1,000 soldiers and currently 968 comrades in action.”

Representatives of other factions stressed that in the future, the military would also have to play a greater role in the Bundestag.

CDU defence spokesman Roderich Kiesewetter said that from his point of view it was not enough to say “that we hold the annual debates on military mandates—about 16, twice a year hold a budget debate and a debate on the report of the Bundeswehr Commissioner.” He said this “also as a retired colonel,” but “not to thank my old profession, but vice versa: I think our soldiers expect more from us, namely, an evaluation of the missions, an accounting for the missions and a regular debate in the Bundestag about our international commitments.”

In her speech, Siemtje Möller from the SPD saluted Colonel Oliver Walter, who “today is a guest in the visitors’ gallery as a representative of the wardens regiment” (of the German Luftwaffe).

Although the Left Party was the only faction not to agree to any military missions, it left no doubt that it shares the general thrust of German imperialism. Its parliamentary leader Dietmar Bartsch had already welcomed the speech of Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel (SPD) last week: “We support Sigmar Gabriel and wish that this would quickly become government policy.”

In the parliamentary debate, Matthias Höhn, until recently general secretary of the Left Party, went in a similar direction. The decision to extend the mandates only temporarily for three months was in no way justified, he said. “I ask myself, what we will do in three months if we still do not have a new government. Will we renew for another three months, hoping that we will have a new government then? I think that's an absurd procedure.” This was “also [being] inappropriate towards the soldiers we send on this mission.”



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