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Germany's grand coalition extends military operations in Syria and Iraq

Germany's grand coalition has officially extended the military operation in Syria and Iraq, which has now been running for over four years. The government took the decision last week.

The decision concerned the extension until March of next year of operations by Tornado fighter jets and refuelling aircraft, which operate from the Jordanian base of al-Azraq. The army's training missions in central Iraq and in the Kurdish-controlled north were extended even longer, to 31 October, 2020.

The proposal by Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer to establish a security zone in northern Syria with 30,000 to 40,000 European troops led by Germany is also being worked on intensively. *Der Spiegel* reported last weekend that Germany could send 2,500 soldiers to intervene in Syria. The German military has assumed a scenario whereby the zone would be divided up into sectors 40 kilometres wide and 30 kilometres deep. In one of these sectors, Germany could lead an international force as a "framework nation," and supply three combat-ready battalions.

The news magazine gives a glimpse of how concretely the war plans are being prepared. The military strategists in the Defence Ministry speak of a "complete package" which they will present: "reconnaissance, special forces units, 'boxer' tanks, heavy weaponry, artillery, soldiers, and mine sweepers." The German army also believes it can provide its own air support for its troops, "Both reconnaissance missions with 'Tornado' fighter jets

and armed combat with ‘eurofighters’.” There are only two areas where “we would be reliant on assistance: helicopters and medical care.”

In a statement entitled “**No to a German-European security zone in Syria!**” the *World Socialist Web Site* recently explained that the government’s plans stand in the traditions of the Nazis’ policies of war and conquest. We wrote, “Germany’s military intervention in Syria is not aimed at combatting ‘terrorism,’ or securing ‘deescalation’ or ‘peace,’ as the official propaganda claims. The real war aims are the neocolonial subordination of the country, as well as the energy-rich and strategically important Middle East region, and the deportation of hundreds of thousands of refugees to a war zone.”

The debate in parliament over the extension of the missions already under way underscored how correct this assessment was. Eighty years after the end of the Second World War, leading politicians from all parties openly advocate policies of war and military violence, arguing that this is the only way to defend German imperialist interests in the Middle East and around the world. During the discussion of the motion tabled by the grand coalition, representatives of the government and opposition parties sought to outdo each other with their militarist tirades.

For the government, the most aggressive speech was delivered by Johann Wadephul. “What happens in Syria and Iraq must be the focus of our security interests,” declared the deputy leader of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group. “Our fundamental security interests, our German, our European interests compel us to continue the fight against the despicable IS regime.” The intervention in the Middle East corresponds in particular with “our responsibility. We are the strongest nation in Europe. We are currently in the UN Security Council. With the Bundeswehr, we have one of the strongest conventional fighting forces in the Western world.”

Wadephul gave his explicit backing to Kramp-Karrenbauer’s war plans. In northeastern Syria, “our very own security interests, our international obligations, and the expectations of our partners, who require assistance, determine what we do.” It must “be recognized that the United States of America is in full retreat, it is no longer fulfilling its responsibility as the so-called world policeman, and as the guardian of Western interests.”

The German elites’ conclusion is clear: Berlin and Europe must replace the United States in the future as the “world policeman” and leading imperialist war machine. “That’s why it’s correct,” said Wadephul, “that we’ve been having this debate in Europe for some time. The debate began in 2014 at the Munich Security Conference with contributions from the

German President, Foreign Minister, and our Defence Minister. As Germans, we know: we have to assume more responsibility in these types of crises.”

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The opposition’s criticisms of the government’s war policy came exclusively from the right. Gerold Otten, who sits on the Parliamentary Defence Committee for the right-wing extremist AfD, boasted that Kramp-Karrenbauer’s proposal was first made by his party. “For a long time now, the AfD has demanded the creation of a UN protection zone and Russia’s integration on the issue of Syria’s future.” However, what remains unclear is “how this security zone will be enforced in practice.” Germany’s political influence, he said, is “minimal ... due to decades of self-imposed weakness.”

For the Free Democrats, Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann, an alternate member of the parliamentary assembly for NATO, demanded that the missions continue beyond the timescale proposed by the government and that they be integrated further into NATO structures. “The Tornado operations will not be complete in five months. At this point in particular, it needs to be extended ... The training mission in Iraq will be integrated into the NATO mission. If you do that, we’ll support you,” she declared.

The war policy is also supported by the nominally left-wing opposition parties. To the extent that they express criticisms, their concerns revolve around the strategic orientation and more aggressive assertion of German imperialism in the Middle East.

According to Alexander Neu, Left Party representative on the Parliamentary Defence Committee, Kramp-Karrenbauer “embarrassed the federal government in the eyes of the Federal Republic,” because she did not confer with “the Syrian government, the allies, and coalition partners” about her “idea.” Neu complained that “Germany and the West” have “no influence and no credit in Syria,” which makes “the initiative proposed by AKK...a moot point, of no consequence.” He called on the Chancellor to “finally declare what Turkey is doing in Syria ... a breach of international law.”

Green Party defence policy spokesman Tobias Lindner spoke along similar lines. “If we really want to achieve something internationally,” he said, you can’t “go about it in a way that the coalition partners, the CSU, the public, and even the military leadership in the Defence Ministry find out about it through the media.”

He then stated that his party supports the return of German imperialism to the world stage, but added that it has to be better prepared. “Yes, we Greens also see Germany having a responsibility in the world ... But anyone who seriously talks about Germany’s

responsibility in the world ... cannot afford to conduct such an ill-conceived and irresponsible foreign policy as was the case over recent days.”

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