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## No to German intervention in Syria!

28 November 2015

The decision of the German government to participate in the war in Syria marks a new stage in the resurgence of German militarism. A bloody adventure is being prepared behind the backs of the population.

On Thursday, the federal government agreed to participate in the US-led international military coalition bombing Syrian positions of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), by deploying six Tornado jets, at least one tanker aircraft, a warship and satellite reconnaissance. There is no doubt that the move will gain the approval of the Bundestag (parliament), since both the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) as well the Social Democratic Party (SPD) support the military action.

Although the Tornado fighters will not carry any bombs and will be used for surveillance purposes, it is clearly a combat mission. Following the war in Yugoslavia (1999) and the war in Afghanistan (on-going since 2001), this is the third combat mission in the history of the postwar German Armed Forces.

The high-precision data collected by the Tornados will be forwarded directly to the other members of the coalition and used to select and attack targets. The SPD defense expert Rainer Arnold left no doubt about the character of the operation. The reconnaissance fighters are “a contribution to the active fight, we do not need to beat around the bush about this,” he said. It makes “no difference ethically whether you select targets or attack the targets.”

The deployment of reconnaissance aircraft is just the beginning. If the Bundeswehr is once again involved in war, demands for an increased engagement, including the use of ground troops, will soon follow.

Germany is getting involved in a war that, like the Balkan conflicts before the First World War, has become the focal point of irreconcilable international conflicts. A “proxy war” has been conducted in Syria for more than three years, which “could be transformed into a hot war between Russia and the United States,” wrote the conservative daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung* on October 18.

The shooting down of a Russian fighter by Turkish warplanes, which was publicly defended by President Obama, confirms this danger. Tensions continue to escalate between the US and Russia. Nevertheless, or perhaps precisely because of this, the German government has decided to participate in the war.

As with all wars, one must distinguish between the alleged and the real reasons.

Officially, the military intervention is being justified by the request of French President François Hollande following the attacks of Paris. According to the official justification, the aim of Germany’s intervention is to fight international terrorism and the defeat of the terrorist militia ISIS. In reality, Germany’s military intervention in the Middle East has been prepared for years. The attacks in Paris offered only the pretext to put existing plans into practice.

Since the war in Libya four and a half years ago, leading figures in the media and political establishment have argued that Germany’s decision not to participate was a mistake. More than 50 leading politicians of all parties, journalists, academics, military and business leaders elaborated a new foreign policy strategy under the auspices of the pro-government think tank *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik* (SWP). This culminated in the demand that Germany must once again take on an international “leadership” role politically and militarily because, as a “trading and exporting nation,” it relies on the “demand from other markets and access to international trade routes and raw materials” more than almost any other country.

Based on this paper, President Joachim Gauck, Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Defence Minister Ursula Von der Leyen demanded an “end of military restraint” at the beginning of 2014. Germany was “too big to comment on world politics only from the sideline” and must “be prepared to get involved in foreign and security policy issues earlier and more substantially,” they declared.

Now, in an interview with the business daily *Handelsblatt*, Von der Leyen justified military intervention in Syria on the grounds of the conceptions she developed last year. “In the spring of 2014, the current situation was not foreseeable by anybody,” she declared. “And yet it was good that the president, the foreign minister and I initiated this debate almost simultaneously: We have discussed issues and developed viewpoints there, on which we could rely in real crises a few months later.”

These “viewpoints” were put into practice for the first time in Ukraine, where Germany, together with the United States, supported the right-wing coup that brought a pro-Western regime to power and provoked a sharp conflict between NATO and Russia that continues to this day.

In the midst of the Ukraine crisis, the PSG warned of an escalation of the conflict in the Middle East. A resolution, adopted by a special conference of the Socialist Equality Party against war in September 2014, states: “Under the pretext of the struggle against the terrorist militia Islamic State (IS), which was built up and supported by the US, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, a further violent division of the raw material-rich region has begun, threatening to prove even bloodier than the previous wars in Iraq, Libya and Syria.”

Meanwhile, large parts of Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan have been destroyed. Millions of people have fled to neighboring countries and to Europe. The entire region is a highly explosive powder keg, in which the international and regional powers pursue conflicting interests. The USA, Russia, Turkey, France, several Arab countries and soon the UK are bombing targets in Syria and Iraq and arming local militia.

The conflicting interests are immensely complex and contradictory. Indeed, within each country there are bitter conflicts over international policy. But the main line of conflict over Syria is as follows: The US wants to overthrow the Assad regime, which rests not only on its own army but also on Iranian militia and the Lebanese Hezbollah. Russia defends the Assad regime and bombs its opponents, including the Al-Nusra Front, the Syrian branch of Al-Qaeda, which is supported by the US and its allies.

Germany and France are seeking to bring the US and Russia, and some of the local adversaries, to the table, because they fear an uncontrolled collapse of the Assad regime would drive millions more refugees to Europe and plunge Syria into a permanent civil war. Nevertheless they exacerbate the situation by intensifying the war. The shooting down of the Russian fighter by Turkey served not least to thwart Franco-German plans.

Turkey, like the US, seeks the overthrow of Assad, but simultaneously wants to prevent a strengthening of the Kurds, who are trained and armed by both the United States and Germany. Germany, in turn, depends upon Turkish support to stop the flow of refugees into Europe, which threatens to break apart the European Union.

The more complex and dangerous the situation, the more aggressively the great powers thrash about. Napoleon once declared, “On s’engage et puis on voit,” or “One jumps into the fray, then sees what happens.” In the Middle East, the motto seems to be, “One bombs everything to bits and then sees what emerges.”

While increasingly heavier military equipment is being deployed, none of the belligerents have any idea of how the conflict can be ended. This is clear to many commentators in the media. For example, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* commented on Thursday that there will soon be enough military equipment available around Syria to hit ISIS hard. “But there is a lack of unity among the many belligerents as to the purpose for which the massed military power should be used. And what would follow a ‘victory’ over ISIS?”

By escalating the war in the Middle East, the United States, Germany and the other major powers are responding to the deep crisis of the capitalist system. “The revival of militarism is the response of the ruling class to the explosive social tensions, the deepening economic crisis and the growing conflicts between European powers,” we wrote in the above-cited resolution. “Its aim is the conquest of new spheres of influence, markets and raw materials upon which the export-dependent German economy relies...and the militarization of society as a whole, including the development of an all embracing national surveillance apparatus, the suppression of social and political opposition, and the bringing into line of the media.”

The economic and political logic of imperialism leads to ever wider and more destructive conflicts. Even if national leaders hope to limit the scale of the conflicts, the escalation of tensions has consequences that are neither foreseen nor controllable. In such a situation, the working class and its vanguard must avoid political complacency—that is, the hope that “reason will prevail” in an irrational system.

Only an international antiwar movement that mobilizes the working class on the basis of a socialist program can prevent the risk of a Third World War, this time with nuclear weapons, which is beginning to take shape in the Middle East and other regions of the world. The struggle against war and the struggle against capitalism are inextricably linked.