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www.afgazad.com

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By Johannes Stern
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German government to continue military operations in the Middle East

The German grand coalition government, consisting of the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats, intends to continue its military operations and participation in the US offensive in the Middle East in the aftermath of Washington's January 3 drone missile assassination of Iranian General Qassem Suleimani, a clear violation of international law.

Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer and Foreign Minister Heiko Maas made this clear in the course of visits to Jordan and Iraq over the past several days. Speaking Wednesday in Erbil in northern Iraq, Kramp-Karrenbauer said, "The men and women here are full of passion. They are doing a great job. They are highly thought of and want to continue this work, particularly the training of Iraqi forces." The German army (Bundeswehr) has been arming and training Kurdish Peshmerga units in Erbil for the past six years.

This engagement, which was extended to the whole of Iraq in 2018, is expected to continue despite the recent vote by the Iraqi Parliament to expel all foreign troops. "To this end, I had political talks in Iraq today," the defence minister said.

One day earlier, Maas visited the al-Azraq military base in Jordan and declared: "The German soldiers who are currently in Erbil, Jordan and Kuwait will remain."

According to the Bundeswehr Operations Command, German Tornado fighter squadrons stationed in al-Azraq resumed operations as part of the US-led "Inherent Resolve" campaign last Saturday. Tornado flights had been suspended for three days after the killing of Suleimani and the Iranian counterattack on military bases in Iraq.

On Wednesday, a debate “on the current situation in the Middle East” was held in the parliament (Bundestag). It confirmed that all of the parties in the German parliament basically agree with the government’s military course. In order to assert the economic and geo-strategic interests of German imperialism against all rivals, they are pressing for an even more aggressive military policy.

According to Henning Otte, defence spokesman for the “Union” faction in the Bundestag (the Christian Democratic Union and Christian Social Union), “One thing is clear: where a vacuum appears, others go in.” He continued: “Russia in particular is taking the initiative... to increase its influence, not only in North Africa and Libya, but also in this region.”

Therefore, it is “only appropriate that our defence minister is currently in Iraq to make our own assessment there, to hold talks and make it clear in Erbil and Baghdad: We stand by our commitments.”

Both government and opposition politicians defended Suleimani’s murder and threatened Iran. “The general who was killed wasn’t just some sort of Iranian military attaché in Baghdad,” thundered CDU politician Johann David Wadehul. “He was one Iran’s most brutal military leaders. Ladies and gentlemen, we must counter this Iranian hegemonic policy, which is being enforced through military power.”

Wadehul was applauded for his words by Armin-Paulus Hampel, the foreign policy spokesman of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), which vehemently advocates a more aggressive and independent German military policy. His proposal to withdraw German troops from Iraq, which was rejected by all of the other parties, had nothing to do with pacifism. On the contrary. According to Rüdiger Lucassen, the defence policy spokesman for the AfD and a former Bundeswehr general, the German government was “unable to draw up a strategic plan based on national interests.”

Lucassen added: “The slowdown in German foreign and security policy is harming our country. The good thing is: it is self-inflicted and can therefore be changed.”

Ultimately, all of the parties represented in the Bundestag agree with such a policy. Under conditions of increasingly criminal behaviour by the United States and growing conflicts between the major world powers, the German political elite is convinced that Germany and Europe must pursue their interests more independently and eventually establish themselves as an armed military force capable of waging war and overtaking the United States as the world’s leading imperialist power.

Combining arrogance and hubris, the chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Bundestag, Norbert Röttgen (CDU), explained: “The actions and decisions taken by the United States probably mean that the US has less political leeway. There may be less acceptance of the US when it comes to diplomacy in the region. Who, if not us, should compensate and replace the diminishing political possibilities? We have assumed more responsibility following the recent events.”

He continued: “I think there is a large majority here in the house prepared to sign up to these goals, but they also have to answer the question: What is our proposal, how are we to achieve the goals? Ladies and gentlemen, the goals alone are not enough. We now need instruments and means. My second thesis is that the new situation has increased our responsibility to achieve these goals. We may not like that, but part of the new reality is that we have assumed more responsibility.”

Behind the propaganda mantra of “more responsibility,” the ruling elite is forging ahead with a return to German militarism, as laid down in the new foreign policy announced in 2013-2014. In the Middle East, this means the subjugation of Iran and, ultimately, the political and military recolonisation of the entire region.

“We will be able to fulfil our responsibility only through a comprehensive deployment that includes civilian construction... diplomatic work, a nuclear agreement, and a military presence on the ground,” Röttgen stressed.

This policy has been basically embraced by the nominally “left” opposition parties in the Bundestag. The Green Party, as part of a coalition government with the Social Democrats, organised the first post-World War II German combat operations abroad—in Kosovo (1998) and Afghanistan (2001). Now it, along with the Left Party, is amongst the fiercest advocates of an independent European foreign policy led by Germany.

“Stop being just a spectator!” Agnieszka Brugger, a leading Green and member of the Bundestag Defense Committee, told the government. “Don’t be afraid to face up to the US on this issue. Keep your promises and allow INSTEX [founded by Germany, Great Britain and France in 2019 to promote trade between the EU and Iran without using US finance] to finally prove effective!”

What was needed, she continued, was “a strong, common, preferably European response that would regain trust in the region and make possible a solution ensuring security and conflict resolution for the people of Iraq.” Since Kramp-Karrenbauer and Maas had “failed to deliver in the past few months,” she continued, the chancellor had to take up this issue,

make it a priority, and offer Germany as an offensive mediator, as was the case in Ukraine and Libya.”

The “offensive mediator” role of the German government in Ukraine since the extreme right-wing coup orchestrated by Berlin and Washington in February 2014 has been to assist NATO’s military offensive against Russia, a nuclear power.

Germany’s imperialist engagement in North Africa is no less aggressive. The so-called Libya conference, due to take place in Berlin on Sunday, recalls the notorious Congo conference, which began on November 15, 1884 in Berlin at the invitation of German Chancellor Bismarck. Today, as then, under the guise of “diplomacy” and “peace,” the main subject on the agenda is the enforcement of imperialist interests and the exploitation and division of the resource-rich African continent.

Despite this fact, the Libya conference, attended by the country’s warring parties as well as the leading imperialist powers, plus Russia and China and the most important regional powers, has the support of the Left Party.

“The federal government must do everything it can to make the conference in Berlin a success,” stated a press release issued by Left Party deputy group leader Sevim Dagdelen.” Although it is late, it is only right that German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas is doing everything possible to convince the conflict parties within Libya to attend the conference in Berlin.”

The only demand in Dagdelen’s text was that Greece, Cyprus and Tunisia also be invited.

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