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The German intervention in Iraq

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The German intervention in Iraq marks a new stage in the country's shift to aggressive great power politics.

In last Sunday's interview with public broadcaster ARD, Chancellor Angela Merkel placed the government's decision to supply weapons to Iraq, the first such shipment to a war zone, alongside a series of other "significant decisions" by German governments since reunification in 1990. Merkel included among these "participation in NATO's mission in Yugoslavia" and the "sending of combat troops to Afghanistan after September 11."

The government decided to ship weapons as well as nonlethal equipment to the Kurdish Peshmerga militia in northern Iraq. Details remain unclear, but it is thought that Germany will send tank-busting "Milan" missiles. Modern G36 assault rifles from the firm of Heckler and Koch are also being discussed. In the interview, Merkel did not exclude sending German military advisers to train Kurdish fighters.

The sending of German weapons and possibly troops to Iraq is the high point to date of the foreign policy shift announced by President Joachim Gauck, Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Defence Minister Ursula Von der Leyen at the Munich Security Conference in early 2014. In an interview in the latest edition of the political weekly *Die Zeit*, von der Leyen

repeated her call for Germany to intervene around the world “earlier, more decisively and more substantially.”

“Chequebook politics are long past,” the defence minister said. “We don’t live on an island. Things affect us. If we act globally in economics and politics, then we are challenged around the world on security policy,” she continued, adding that “whoever holds back has no influence.”

One could hardly formulate it more clearly. After years of relative restraint, Germany is intervening to assert its global economic and geostrategic interests by military means. The speed with which aggressive German imperialism has returned is breathtaking.

In 2003, the Social Democratic Party (SPD)-Green Party government did not take part officially in the US war of aggression against Iraq, which was carried out in violation of international law. Only three years ago, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU)-Free Democratic Party (FDP) government, under Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle, abstained in the NATO attack on Libya.

Then things moved rapidly. Westerwelle was replaced by Steinmeier and Gauck was installed as president. Only a few weeks after the speeches at the Munich Security Conference, Berlin, in close collaboration with Washington, organised a fascist-led coup in Ukraine to bring a pro-Western puppet regime to power in Kiev and undermine Russia.

Now, the German bourgeoisie has decided it will not stand aside on the issue of the redivision and control of the strategically important Middle East, a region that is also rich in raw materials.

Germany’s new militarist policy is the result of a conspiracy by the ruling elite against the population. Although all polls show that two-thirds of Germans oppose weapons exports to Iraq, the policy has been vehemently defended by all of the parliamentary parties and substantial sections of the media. The most aggressive supporters of the weapons shipments are the Green Party and Left Party, both of which have been fully incorporated, as opposition parties, into the war conspiracy.

In language reminiscent of Nazi propaganda, the Green Party-aligned *taz* newspaper published a column entitled “Weapons for Kurdistan,” stating, “One can answer these lynch-mob murderers only in a language they understand. The only way to halt them is to cut short their journey to the sought-after 72 virgins.”

Already last April, representatives of the Left Party voted with the other parties in favour of a military operation by the German army against Syria. Now, Left Party parliamentary faction leader Gregor Gysi was the first to demand the export of weapons to Iraq.

The Left Party’s role has been so decisive in Germany’s intervention in Iraq that even the conservative *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* published an editorial entitled “Iraq conflict: Weapons exports thanks to the Left Party.”

What lies behind Germany's new militarist policy? How is it to be explained that after its crimes in the previous century, the German bourgeoisie today so brazenly goes on the offensive?

As it did 100 years ago, prior to World War I, and 75 years ago, before the outbreak of World War II, the German ruling class is responding with war and militarism to a profound crisis of the capitalist system. Twenty-five years after the reintroduction of capitalism in East Germany and six years after the outbreak of the global economic and financial crisis, the international order is just as unstable as in the first years of the 20th century and again in the 1930s.

Germany attempted twice—in 1914 and 1939—to secure its imperialist interests by military means and violently subordinate the world to German domination. The terrible consequences are well known.

Today, once again, the German ruling class is calling for Germany to exert leadership. In this, the German bourgeoisie is responding to the relative decline of the United States since the Second World War.

Von der Leyen stated in the *Die Zeit* interview: “The declining role of the US is certainly not the cause of the current conflicts. But it has allowed a power vacuum to emerge. The EU members have to agree their foreign and security policy much more efficiently among themselves to fill the gaps that have emerged.”

Die Welt was even more blunt on Sunday, appearing under the headline “World policeman Germany.” The editorial stated: “The Americans now have only a limited desire to play the role of world policeman, in part because new domestic oil supplies have made the oil in the Middle East less important. And Germany? The pattern of responding locally is unravelling just as much as global events. The international situation is forcing decisions on politicians that they would much rather avoid due to the unpredictable consequences. In spite of this, the German government intends to supply weapons to the Kurds in Iraq—a sharp shift in German policy that follows the call to assume more responsibility.”

In reality, the policies of the German bourgeoisie are not “unravelling.” Rather, German imperialism is once again showing its true face: militarism, dictatorship and war.

Since the beginning of the year, there has been an intensive discussion over war guilt in World War I. Posing the question of war guilt in 2014, there should not be the slightest doubt that faced with economic and social problems for which it has no progressive solution, the ruling elite is preparing once again for war.

Anyone who thinks the politicians, journalists and academics involved in the current war conspiracy will not go as far as their forefathers in 1914 is fooling himself. The reality is that Gauck, Merkel, Steinmeier, von der Leyen and their lackeys in the editorial offices and universities are imposing no fewer limitations on themselves than in the past.

There is only one social force capable of stopping the return of German militarism and preventing a third world war: the international working class. The struggle of the Partei für

Soziale Gleichheit (Socialist Equality Party) for the building of a global anti-war movement of the working class against imperialism and capitalism is posed with the greatest urgency.