

German Defence Minister Announces Military Intervention in Libya

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Global Research, January 21, 2016
[World Socialist Web Site](#)

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

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The German government is planning a new military mission in Libya, Defence Minister Ursula Von der Leyen (Christian Democrats, CDU) announced in an interview published by the tabloid Bild on Monday.

Responding to the question of whether she would send the German army to to the North African country, Von der Leyen replied:

“Libya is opposite the coast of Europe—separated only by the Mediterranean Sea. The most important thing now is to stabilise the country, and ensure that Libya gets a functioning government. The [new government] will rapidly require assistance to impose law and order in this massive state. And at the same time to combat Islamist terrorism, which is also threatening Libya.”

She added, “Germany will not be able to escape the responsibility of making a contribution there.”

The next “contribution,” i.e., military intervention by the army, could soon be a reality. A defence ministry spokesman declared on Monday that there was not yet any concrete plan for a German army intervention in Libya. But this could change if a unity government was established there that can “act in conformity with international law.”

In the meantime, Libya’s various competing governments have agreed on the formation of a unity regime under the auspices of the United Nations. This was announced by the Libyan presidential council on Tuesday. A major role in the talks was played by the UN special representative for Libya, Martin Kobler. He is a German and headed the office of former Green Party foreign minister Joschka Fischer.

Kobler welcomed the formation of the unity cabinet and called upon the internationally recognised parliament in Tobruk to “quickly” recognise the government. From the standpoint of the imperialist powers, the new government is to supply a “legal” fig leaf for their intervention in Libya as quickly as possible.

The conservative newspaper *Die Welt* made this explicit in an article several weeks ago under the revealing title “Libya: the next battlefield in the fight against IS.” It commented:

“The only thing missing for a military intervention is the legal framework. As soon as the new Libyan unity government is formed, it can proceed. When Libya has a united and to some extent legitimate government again, then

there is someone in response to whose request a western military intervention can take place within the framework of international law.”

As in the recently adopted missions in Mali and Syria, the German government is justifying the intervention in Libya on the basis of the “fight against Islamist terrorism.” Von der Leyen responded to a question in the *Bild* interview as to whether the recent attack in Turkey was a reaction to “our Syria intervention” by noting: “We could not confuse cause and effect. ISIS initiated terrorism and brought it to Europe. The Islamists are fighting against our free values. Already prior to the Syria intervention, we were in the crosshairs of the terrorist militia.”

Who is guilty of confusing cause and effect? Everyone who knows the dramatic history of the Middle East over recent years knows that the original “terrorism” was carried out by the Western powers. They are not fighting for “freedom,” but have rather under US leadership attacked and destroyed Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria, killing millions and turning millions more into refugees.

Islamic State is not simply an indirect product of Western military policy, but was rather built up by the imperialist powers and their allies Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey. In the NATO-led war on Libya in 2011, the Western powers worked closely with Islamist militias to overthrow the regime of Colonel Gaddafi. The plan was to bring the Syrian government of Bashar al-Assad down in Syria in the same way, with the goal of establishing a pro-Western puppet regime in Damascus.

In reality, the military intervention that Germany now threatens to carry out in Libya has long been in the works. The talk of a struggle against an “axis of terrorism” from Syria to Mali (Von der Leyen) is simply the propaganda smokescreen behind which the long-discussed plans are being implemented in practice.

Already in 2009, a study by the government-aligned Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP) entitled “Germany’s Middle East and north Africa policy,” summarised Germany’s economic and geo-strategic interests in the region in the following manner:

“In the 1990s, the Maghreb still played a marginal role in foreign policy; there could be no talk of a clear formulation of German interests. Since the new millennium at the latest, the region has gained significance for German foreign policy for three reasons: the greater value of energy security, the reduction of migration as well as the fight against terrorism and organised crime.”

The energy interests take first place in this analysis:

“The interests which guide Germany’s activity in the Maghreb are above all of an energy and security nature. First of all, the supply of oil and gas from these states will become ever more important for Germany’s energy provision. Today, Libya is Germany’s fourth most important supplier of oil; Algeria comes in eighth place. [...] In the longer term there will be an equally strong interest in renewable energies, particularly solar energy, but this remains behind the desire for fossil fuels from the Maghreb in the short to medium term.”

Following the 2011 bombardment of Libya, the German ruling elite became convinced that

its failure to participate was a grave mistake and that its “short to medium term interests” had to be enforced via military means.

From November 2012 to October 2013, 50 leading politicians from all parties together with journalists, academics, military officials, and business representatives outlined a strategy for the return of Germany to an aggressive imperialist foreign policy, issuing the document entitled “New power—New responsibilities. Elements for a German foreign and security policy for a world in transition.”

The SWP paper made clear that Germany would have to “lead more often and decisively in the future,” and pursue its geo-strategic and economic interests worldwide. “German security policy” could “no longer be conceived other than as global. Germany’s history, its position and lack of resources will repeatedly provoke the clear formulation of concrete strategic goals.” As a “trading and export nation” it needed “more than perhaps any other country [...] demand from other markets as well as access to international trade routes and raw materials.”

The Middle East and north Africa were identified as an important area of German influence, which had to be stabilised militarily. “A pragmatic German security policy, particularly when costly and long-term military interventions are considered” had “to concentrate above all on the increasingly unstable European surrounding from north Africa through the Middle East to Central Asia,” the paper stated.

Based on this paper, German President Gauck, Foreign Minister Steinmeier and Defence Minister Von der Leyen officially announced the “end of military restraint” at the 2014 Munich Security Conference. Germany was “too big only to comment on world politics from the sidelines” and had “to be prepared to intervene earlier, more decisively and substantially in foreign and security policy,” they declared.

In May 2014, these goals were further developed in the “Outline of a policy for Africa for the German government.” Among other things, it called for the strengthening “of political, security policy and development engagement by Germany in Africa.” The German government was pursuing “the goal, based on values on human rights and oriented to its interests, to act early, quickly, decisively and substantially.”

Military operations were explicitly included in this policy. The government intended to “across all departments...deploy the entire spectrum of its available capabilities, political, security policy, development policy, regional policy, economic, academic, cultural.”

The foreign interventions adopted since then, in northern Iraq, Syria, Mali, and now soon to come in Libya, mark the return of the German ruling elite to an aggressive imperialist foreign policy. As before the First and Second World Wars, this requires the massive rearmament of the German armed forces. “If we are demanding all of this from our German army, we have to invest in personnel, as well as modern, reliable equipment,” Von der Leyen noted in the *Bild* interview. She would “present this with strong justification to the finance minister.”

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