
US CALLS FOR GERMAN GROUND TROOPS IN SYRIA

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A top US diplomat has formally asked Germany to send troops to Syria to help fight the terrorist militia Islamic State. James Jeffrey said allies needed to provide technical support for the Kurdish-led opposition.

US Special Representative for Syria Engagement James Jeffrey has called on Germany to send military trainers, logistics specialists and technicians to help the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in the fight against the Islamic State (IS) terrorist group.

"We want ground troops from Germany to partially replace our soldiers," Jeffrey said in an interview with the German Deutsche Presse-Agentur news agency and the weekly Welt am Sonntag newspaper, before adding that he expected an answer from the German government this month.

Jeffrey was in Berlin on Friday on a mission to draw pledges of military and financial support from the German government. "We are looking for volunteers who want to take part here and among other coalition partners," Jeffrey told the German news outlets, though he added that he had not asked for a specific number of soldiers.

He also said that troops would not necessarily be required to engage directly in fighting with the jihadi group.

"It is better to force IS back with local Syrian forces," he said. "But a certain international presence is needed to secure air support, for logistics, training, and technical help."

He also said combat should not be ruled out since ground troops would need to be prepared to defend themselves.

The Bundeswehr currently sends reconnaissance planes over Syria from Jordan

Johann Wadephul, an ally of German Chancellor Angela Merkel, has called for Berlin to consider Jeffrey's request.

Wadephul, deputy leader of the parliamentary caucus of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and Christian Social Union (CSU), told DPA on Sunday that the request shouldn't be "rejected in a knee-jerk reaction."

"In this region, it's about our security and not American security," said Wadehul, who could possibly be a successor to German Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen should she leave for Brussels to become the new European Commission president.

Fight not yet finished

Some 80 countries belong to the anti-IS coalition, with Germany's current contribution to the fight including reconnaissance jets, a refueling aircraft and military trainers stationed in Iraq.

During a visit to Iraq in June, Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said Germany would be ready to extend the mission beyond October, when it is due to expire.

Maas said at the time that the mission was "vital to prevent IS setting up new structures underground." But the decision of whether to extend the mission is not his to make alone, since, under German law, the parliament must approve all foreign military missions.

War with no end

Syria has been engulfed in a devastating civil war since 2011 after Syrian President Bashar Assad lost control over large parts of the country to multiple revolutionary groups. The conflict has since drawn in foreign powers and brought misery and death to Syrians.

US President Donald Trump last December stated his wish to withdraw the 2,000 US troops currently stationed in northeastern Syria, where they are supporting the SDF, an alliance of opposition forces led by the People's Protection Units (YPG), a Kurdish militia.

This alliance has brought tensions with fellow NATO member Turkey, whose government considers the YPG an ally of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which has been fighting against the Turkish state for the autonomy of the Kurdish people for decades.

The SDF took over the last IS stronghold in Syria in March, but the terrorist militia is known to be active underground, and the US has recently pledged to keep 400 troops in the area.

"We hope that the Germans will be able to do more," Jeffrey said. "I am optimistic. Some allies will deploy ground troops, I'm sure of it."