

Germany rejects Washington's call for deploying ground forces to Syria



Berlin, July 9 (RHC)-- Germany has rejected a call by the United States to deploy ground troops in Syria, a stance that will most likely anger U.S. President Donald Trump who wants the European country to commit to a bigger military role in the Middle East.

German government spokesman Steffen Seibert made the comment during a regular press briefing in Berlin on Monday, a day after U.S. special representative on Syria James Jeffrey told reporters in Berlin about Washington's call on Berlin about the Syria deployment.

"When I say the government envisages sticking to the current measures in" the anti-Daesh "(military) coalition, this includes no ground troops, as is well known," Seibert said.

Jeffrey, who was on a visit to the German capital for Syria talks, said Sunday that he expected an answer this month but apparently Germany didn't need that long to reject the call.

The U.S. and its allies, including Germany, have been bombarding what they call Daesh positions inside Syria since September 2014, without any authorization from the Damascus government or a UN mandate.

Germany has so far deployed surveillance aircraft and other non-combat military support in Syria, but it does not have ground troops in the Arab country, unlike the US which has deployed some 2,000 forces there. The request by the US comes after Trump's announcement last year that he was withdrawing most of American troops from Syria.

Jeffrey said Sunday that Washington wanted “ground troops from Germany to partially replace our soldiers.” He added that the German ground troops, if ever deployed, might not necessarily need to engage in combat and could rather ease the burden on the remaining U.S. forces by helping with air support, logistics, training and technical assistance. Nevertheless, he said combat should not be ruled out since ground troops would need to be prepared to defend themselves.

Any change in the mandate requires approval by the German parliament – the Bundestag – where Chancellor Angela Merkel would be likely to face opposition even from parts of her fragile coalition government. The Social Democrats, the junior partner of Merkel's governing coalition, are highly likely to oppose any prospect of deploying ground troops to the Arab country.

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