German government aids anti-Assad forces in Syria

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The German military and related intelligence agencies are playing a far greater role in supporting anti-Assad forces in Syria than previously reported. On Sunday the *Bildzeitung* published a report on German army and Federal Intelligence Service (BND) operations on the Syrian border, where they are providing military aid to the Free Syrian Army (FSA).

The paper reported that a German reconnaissance ship was stationed off the coast of Syria, employing the latest BND technology to monitor the country. On the same day a spokesperson for the German Defence Ministry confirmed the report. It is "true that a ship is currently on a several month deployment in the region", he said.

Although the Ministry declined to designate the ship as a "spy boat", it admits that the ship in question is the *Oker*, part of the German navy's fleet of "early warning, communications and reconnaissance units".

The spokesperson refused to confirm whether BND technology was on board, saying that no operational details of the current use of the ship would be issued. A member of the parliamentary control committee (PKG), Fritz-Rudolf Körper (Social Democratic Party) confirmed, however, that BND technology was being used.

According to the *Bildzeitung*, the ship's instruments can observe troop movements up to 600 kilometers inside Syria. This data is then shared with the United States and Britain, as well as with Syrian rebels.

The newspaper also pointed out that BND agents were stationed at the Turkish NATO post of Adana, monitoring telephone and radio communications in Syria. The German operation also involves maintaining informal contact with sources in the immediate vicinity of the Assad regime. According to an anonymous US intelligence official, "No Western intelligence has such good sources in Syria as the BND".

Under German law the deployment of the *Oker* requires a mandate from the German parliament. The ship is part of the ongoing UNIFIL mission in the region, but has no mandate to carry out its mission of military intelligence. So far, however, all measures have been carried out in secret and without a vote in the German parliament.

German military and intelligence assistance to the rebels joins a long list of similar maneuvers that have come to the attention of the German public piecemeal in recent weeks.

In July the weekly newspaper *Die Zeit* revealed that the German government set up a secret think tank in Berlin at the start of this year. Its aim is to provide support to Syrian rebels for the "day after"—i.e., for the period after the toppling of Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad. To this end the organization has flown in up to 50 Syrian "rebels."

Together with the United Arab Emirates, Germany is also fronting the "Economic Reconstruction and Development" working group as part of the "Group of Friends of the Syrian people". The working group is tasked with developing plans for the mass privatization of state enterprises and the introduction of a market economy after Assad's overthrow.

Both projects are supported directly and indirectly with millions of euros from the federal government. In addition German navy vessels are patrolling the coast of Lebanon where large shipments of arms to the Syrian rebels take place. Although the official job of the navy is to prevent arms smuggling, no delivery to the rebels has so far been intercepted.

In early August the German Foreign Office set up a cross-departmental "Task Force Syria" aiming, in the words of Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle, to "co-

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ordinate even more intensively the numerous tasks of the federal government." This working group will be led by the Middle East representative of the Foreign Ministry, Boris Ruge, who previously claimed that the main problem in the region was the growing influence of Iran and Hezbollah.

The latest revelations on the activities of the German armed forces make it clear that the remit of the Task Force includes working closely with the FSA to impose regime change in Damascus.

Regime change in Syria would be a direct preparation for destabilizing Iran. Regarding Israeli preparations for war against Iran, German Chancellor Angela Merkel told the Knesset in 2008: "As German chancellor I regard the security of Israel as non-negotiable—and this means that we cannot respond with mere words in the hour of danger."

This doctrine has been put into action, with the delivery of submarines largely funded by the federal government to Israel. A report in the news magazine *Der Spiegel* reveals that upon arriving in Israel, the submarines can be equipped with nuclear cruise missiles that could then be used against Iran.

All of these military operations are deeply unpopular with the German population. A recent survey found that only 12 percent of the population agrees with German military intervention in Syria. Just 13 percent favor military and financial support for the anti-Assad forces.

This opposition, however, finds no echo amount in the political establishment. While individual members of the Greens and the Left Party have called for a parliamentary vote on the deployment of the *Oker*, both parties support the actions of the German government and refuse to organize any opposition.

Former Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer (Green Party) even advocated setting up a no-fly zone over Syria like that established in Libya, as a pretext for direct military intervention.

"A major humanitarian disaster is looming there," he argued. "That's why I'm generally in favor of setting up a no-fly zone."

The Green Party parliamentary leader in the Bundestag, Jürgen Trittin, also complained that the UN observer mission was unable to prevent massacres in Hula and the mission should therefore be "strengthened". He did not say what such "strengthening" would entail.

In a few statements, the Left Party expresses its opposition to arms shipments to the rebels as well as to the Assad regime. But at the same time they demand all means be used to support the country's opposition to bring about regime change.

During the Iraq war and the occupation of Afghanistan, some limited opposition was organized by Germany's peace movement. Today, however, most of its representatives have shifted completely into the camp of imperialism. Rather than condemning the warmongering of the Western powers, one prominent initiative—*Friedenskooperative*—is active collecting money for the rebels as part of its "adopt a revolution" campaign.

The standpoint of these groups shifts according to the orientation of German foreign policy, which is assuming an increasingly aggressive form. They are bound with multiple ties to the government and official opposition and share their basic interests.

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