

German liberal and “left” media beat the drums for war

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The German ruling elites see the war drive against Syria as an opportunity to return to defending their imperialist interests militarily, returning to the type of power politics of the first half of the twentieth century. Numerous recent comments in the German liberal and “left” press make this abundantly clear.

On Monday, in a *Süddeutsche Zeitung* editorial titled “Obama’s Colt: The President risks much, but forces us to take responsibility”, Stefan Kornelius welcomed President Barack Obama’s decision to consult Congress about a military strike against Syria.

Kornelius does not support Obama’s plan because a vote in Congress might, in line with massive popular opposition to war, thwart Washington’s plans for a war based on lies. On the contrary, Kornelius insists that a limited “punitive action” is not enough: “A rap across the knuckles, to make us feel better? That would sell short the message conveyed by retaliation.”

Kornelius asks Obama to “think about the “foreign policy big picture”, which could lead to a major war and require the support of the American public and Congress. Kornelius asks, “What to do when Iran takes the next steps towards making [an atom] bomb?” Given “the nation’s war-weariness,” he adds, Obama is taking “a wise step now by starting a debate at home.”

Kornelius supports a vote in the US Congress if it sets the stage for a massive war aimed not only against Syria, but also against its close ally, Iran. The Cameron government’s defeat in the vote on military action in the British parliament last week unleashed a crisis in the alliance of warmongers. Kornelius now sees Obama’s initiative as an opportunity for Obama to reposition himself, better prepare for war, and push it despite massive popular opposition.

Kornelius will brook no opposition. Obama’s initiative is having “an immense substantive effect that

neither the Congress nor the world can escape”, he declares, making clear that he believes Berlin and other European governments must participate in a military intervention: “the West must take the same road. Nobody is spared from responsibility.”

Numerous editorials in the supposedly liberal media agitate against all those who oppose war, even if only verbally. In an editorial titled “Only reassuring their own conscience”, Robert Leicht, the former editor of *Die Zeit*, denounces the “total pacifism” of the Left Party and the Evangelical Church. He writes that slogans such as “bombs don’t solve problems” and that calls for mere “political solutions” are “luxury slogans.”

In the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* last week, Daniel Brössler disparagingly dismissed the demand “No war in Syria” as “moral megalomania”.

In an editorial titled “Nothing but words”, Joseph Joffe, along with former chancellor Helmut Schmidt (SPD), one of the co-editors of German weekly *Die Zeit*, succinctly expressed the war-mongering mood in Germany’s ruling elite.

Joffe criticises German foreign policy for not pursuing its interests aggressively enough. He complains that Germany approaches world crises with the attitude, “Don’t do anyone any harm, least of all oneself.” He particularly criticises Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle, who “jets from one hotspot to another”, but merely to leave behind “his characteristic platitudes”.

Behind the “phrases” of the foreign minister, according to Joffe, lies “a fundamental problem of German foreign policy”. Germany lacks “the means to move from words to deeds” and also has “no strategy”. This is “all the more surprising as it is the largest in Europe and the fourth-largest economy on earth”.

The historical reasons for this state of affairs are well known, he says. Germany had “twice raised its head in the 20th century” and afterwards had to “tend its garden for forty years behind the wall of American power.” This has led to the growth of a “culture of abstinence” and a “not with me” attitude.

The fact that Joffe’s comments come on the 74th anniversary of the German attack on Poland, which was the prelude to the Second World War, underscores the German media’s role in promoting vile propaganda for war and militarism. On the eve of a military attack against Syria that has the potential to unleash a conflagration across the Middle East and even a third world war with China and Russia, the German bourgeoisie is revealing its true colours.

In fact, Germany is anything but “abstinent” when it comes to participating in war. Under the SPD-Green Party government, Germany was involved in the illegal assault on Serbia, stationed troops in Kosovo, and supported the US-led campaign in Afghanistan.

After abstaining from the NATO war in Libya—which the ruling class now considers a big mistake—Germany participated from the beginning in the US-led intervention in Syria, which aims to overthrow President Assad and install a pro-Western puppet regime in Damascus. Germany is building up the pro-imperialist Syrian opposition, has stationed Patriot air defence systems in Turkey, and is patrolling the Syrian coast with an espionage ship to supply the pro-Western rebels with data in the event of a military strike by US and French bombers.

However, all this is still not enough for the German bourgeoisie. They no longer want to be merely the lackeys in military operations, but to take on “leadership” themselves. As Germany’s ongoing election campaign makes it inconvenient for bourgeois politicians and parties to openly praise an unpopular war, the hired hacks in the editorial offices are rushing in to beat the war drums in their place—as if two world wars, with their tens of millions dead, and for which the German bourgeoisie bore heavy responsibility, had never taken place.

What are the reasons for the aggressive return of German imperialism and militarism after decades of restraint? Joffe’s comments emphasise that from the perspective of the German bourgeoisie, the period after the Second World War was just a historical interlude.

With the intensification of the global economic crisis, the breakup of the European Union and the intensification of class antagonisms in Germany and internationally, the German bourgeoisie increasingly seek to enforce their geo-strategic and economic interests militarily.

The new social basis for the return of German imperialist aggression is the well-off upper middle class layers, who have further enriched themselves at the expense of the working class since the outbreak of the 2008 financial crisis. Like the entire German bourgeoisie, they and their political organisations have moved sharply to the right and regard the plunder carried out by US imperialism in the Middle East as a means to defend and expand their own social privileges.

One example of the corruption and cynicism of this layer can be found in an editorial by Tom Strohschneider, the chief editor of *Neues Deutschland*, the house organ of the Left Party, on the traditional anti-war day of September 1. Under the title “Syria needs peace”, Strohschneider tries to win his readers over for military intervention.

He asks, “while there is little to be said in favour of anyone taking new military action, one should nevertheless consider the doubts that arise about any appeal against intervention: mustn’t something be done—and if so, what?—against the murderers?”

Daniel Cohn-Bendit, the leader of the Greens in the European parliament and former spokesman for the Paris student riots in 1968, who has long been notorious for his open war-mongering, expresses most clearly the real position of Strohschneider and the entire Left-Green milieu of the wealthy upper middle class.

In an interview with *Spiegel Online* last Friday, Cohn-Bendit bluntly answered the question concerning Germany’s military involvement in Syria: “Yes, the government should be involved, together with other EU countries, in the preparation of military action.” He said he was for “military strikes, if a common front of the West stands behind them”.



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