

German media on the Syria war: Foaming at the mouth

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Some in the German media have reacted with unconcealed anger and disappointment at the delay of the war on Syria announced by President Barack Obama earlier this week. Many comments read as if the author felt he had been cheated of a highly anticipated drama because no bombs and cruise missiles have rained down on Syria's densely populated cities.

German political parties, fearing a loss of votes in the upcoming general election, have toned down their war propaganda, and the media have therefore taken on the task of promoting an unpopular military strike. Significantly, not only conservative publications, but especially those close to the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Greens, are leading this campaign.

The worst offender is *taz*, the Greens' unofficial central organ. On Tuesday, the head of their international department, Dominic Johnson, attacked those who criticized the US administration's war propaganda. Under the headline, "Idleness? Or rather, be idle?", he claims that all the parties in the Bundestag (parliament) rejected a military strike against Syria against their better judgement.

Johnson accuses the chancellor of viewing "the absence of morals in politics as a virtue", because she had only signed one of the anti-Syria resolutions proposed by the US after a day's delay. He accuses the governing parties, the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) and the Free Democratic Party (FDP) of "waiting."

Johnson attacks the SPD because SPD Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder once described Russian President Putin as a "flawless democrat", and the Left Party for throwing "itself protectively in front of all US enemies" and confusing "international law with the right of veto."

He accuses the Greens of having "dispatched their mastermind of humanitarian interventionism into the desert" and of withdrawing into "never again Auschwitz" and "Veggie-day"—a nod firstly to Green Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, who justified German participation in the war in Yugoslavia in 1999 with unsurpassed cynicism by reference to German responsibility for Auschwitz, and also to the Green Party campaign calling for a meat-free day every week.

Johnson is particularly incensed by scepticism regarding accusations that the Assad regime is responsible for poison gas

attacks. This is "a deeply cynical and dubious attitude in a country that had once invented industrial mass gassing, and in which afterwards the prescribed viewing of photos of concentration camp victims belonged to [the] de-Nazification [process]", he writes.

In the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, under the heading "Madame No plays at being a dove of peace", Nico Fried attacks Chancellor Angela Merkel because she had ruled out German military participation in a war against Syria. "Disguised as a dove of peace, the Chancellor is overtaking the political competition as rapidly as the Euro-fighter jet. Domestically, she believes she is unassailable with her comprehensive 'not with me' approach. On a foreign policy front, the chancellor's position simply cannot be understood", he wrote.

Fried—who has reported for the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* for years from Berlin's corridors of power, not infrequently travelling around the world on board the chancellor's official jet—knows very well that Berlin is implicated up to its neck in war preparations against Syria. Germany is monitoring Syria with a spy ship in the eastern Mediterranean, has long supported and organised the Syrian opposition, has stationed Patriot rockets on the Turkish-Syrian border, and as a NATO member would automatically support Turkey in the event of war. None of this prevents Fried from demanding Germany aggressively support war, however.

The presenter of the ZDF-TV news show *heute journal*, Klaus Kleber gave free rein to his anger at the delay of a military strike against Syria Tuesday evening. Syria's President Assad must "now do no more than dispense with the chemical weapons that he should never have used, and suddenly, a man who has probably killed almost one and a half thousand people with poison gas is a partner in a process of disarmament, and the American military strike is averted for now", he said. "For the regime—for which survival means victory—that is worth a lot."

The hateful language recalls the infamous anti-communist ZDF magazine programme of Gerhard Lowenthal at the height of the Cold War. "The host of the evening news show on Russian state television was almost bursting with pride", it reads. "With relish, she tells the Russian audience how Obama has had to admit in the American media that the plan for a

military strike may be redundant. ... One nil to Moscow. The Kremlin has scored a surprise coup and is driving the White House before it.”

On September 5, in the pro-SPD *Die Zeit*, deputy editor Bernd Ulrich bangs the drum for Obama’s war plans under the headline, “Field Marshal seeks troops”. If Obama finds no majority in Congress, Ulrich warns, “not only can he forget the rest of his presidency, the West too has abdicated as a world power, and all dictators have free rein to attack their people... The West would be politically disarmed.”

Ulrich, who was active in the 1980s in the peace movement and in the Greens, where he led the party’s parliamentary office, openly pleads for the “West” to play the role of world hegemon, i.e. a concert of imperialist Great Powers. He castigates German parties because they are not arguing for these goals aggressively and openly enough. Germany, he complains, had “re-established an unacknowledged pacifism across all parties.”

In the same paper on September 9, *Die Zeit* editor Robert Leicht stated even more clearly that an attack on Syria should take place without a UN mandate. Trying to dismiss objections over the obvious illegality of such an approach, he argued that “the opportunist veto of a permanent member of the Security Council [i.e., Russia] shamelessly abrogates morals and legal thinking of international law.”

It is Leicht who is actually shamelessly abrogating international law when he calls for an unprovoked attack on a sovereign country, which international law clearly prohibits. The fact that, without a shred of evidence, he accuses Syria of violating the international law prohibiting chemical weapons shows the cynicism of his argument. For him, international law is simply the law of the jungle.

In reality, the war in Syria is not about chemical weapons, but strategic power interests. *Die Welt* expresses this far more frankly and openly. On September 3, the right-wing historian Michael Stürmer argued openly for the recognition of the US as the world’s policeman.

“The power factor that has so far kept all the region’s imbalances in check, with air forces and naval units, military bases, and that paid-for diplomacy, is America alone,” writes Stürmer. “The Americans are also, in a tragic and increasingly lonely role, the last ones standing up for world order in a world that is going off the rails—not only with trite words, like many, but also in deeds, like no one else.”

Stürmer accuses the Europeans of not “wanting to understand that placing hope in the Security Council and its wisdom in the face of Russian-Chinese blockades is an illusion. ... Without the United States, there is no guardian of the treaties, no world policeman, no global order. Whoever believes in the ‘world community’—or, more precisely, the United Nations—sets hope against experience, and will pay a terrible price in the end.”

The war propaganda, which extends from the pro-Green *taz*, the social-liberal *Zeit* and *Süddeutsche*, to the conservative *Welt*

expresses a change in sentiment in the wealthy upper middle class layers, from which the editors of these publications are recruited. The period in which they advocated military restraint in light of German history is over.

While the first foreign military mission of the German Armed Forces in Yugoslavia was dressed up with references to the alleged threat of genocide and other “humanitarian” lies, and German participation in the Iraq war was rejected, their endorsement of imperialist war aims in Syria is coming increasingly openly to the fore.

They are reacting not only to growing international tensions, but also to the intensification of social contradictions at home. The German elections are taking place in the midst of the deepest international economic crisis since the 1930s, growing conflicts in the European Union and a deep social division in society, without any of these questions being discussed in the campaign. They will be expressed even more fiercely after the elections.

The ruling class and well-off upper-middle-class layers are reacting to the prospect of class struggles by moving closer together. The situation recalls the period before the First World War, when the educated and well-off upper-middle class found their enthusiasm for imperialism. The German Navy League, which advocated the building up of the Kaiser’s navy, had over one million members at its height. In the end, the leadership of the SPD also submitted to the growing imperialist pressure, betrayed its own programme and whipped up millions of young men, sending them to war where they died on the altar of imperialist interests.

The media’s growing enthusiasm for war is a warning: The working class needs its own independent party, the Socialist Equality Party, which uncompromisingly rejects and fights imperialist war on the basis of an international socialist programme.



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