

The German Left Party's pursuit of war in Syria

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20 September 2013

In the course of the German federal election campaign, the Left Party has attempted to conceal its backing for the Syrian war. In fact, the party is playing a key role in the imperialist offensive and preparations for a military strike against Syria, which was not cancelled by the recent diplomatic offensive of the US and Russia, but merely postponed.

The Left Party has functioned for the past two years as the extended arm of the German foreign ministry. It has systematically bolstered the pro-imperialist Syrian opposition in order to effect the overthrow of President Bashar al-Assad's regime and its replacement by a pro-Western puppet regime. Attempting to obscure its role, it initially claimed that—in contrast to the federal government—it was working with supposedly “peaceful” and “democratic” sections of the Syrian opposition. It pretended to reject the war policy of the US and its regional allies.

However, as preparations for a military strike advanced, the real nature of the Syrian opposition forces supported by the Left Party became ever clearer. These are the groupings that call loudest for a military strike to overthrow the Assad regime, and most aggressively represent the interests of US imperialism and its regional allies.

Among the Left Party's most important allies are Syrian opposition activist Michel Kilo and the “Michel Kilo's Mass” opposition alliance, which he leads. Kilo is one of the leading spokesmen for military intervention. In an August 30 interview on the SyriaDeeply.org web site, he called for a US military strike to overthrow the Assad regime and destroy Russian and Iranian influence in Syria.

Responding to a question about whether a US military strike was necessary, Kilo said: “I think it is necessary for the U.S. and the international community to help Syrians become free, and that the U.N. Security Council takes action against an Assad regime that has, for two and a half years, used all kinds of weapons against its people.”

Kilo stressed: “The U.S. is now obligated to carry out the strike. If President Obama decides not to launch this attack, after he said that it's unacceptable for [Bashar al-]Assad to hide behind Russian support, it would be a huge defect for the U.S. to pull back. And after all its declarations, stating openly that a chemical attack is unacceptable, after all the announcements that a chemical attack will not go unpunished, [abandoning the strike] would be a major boost for the Assad regime.”

Kilo then explained the military and strategic goals of the military action required from the US president. “This strike is the beginning of a change in the military balance in Syria. And it changes the international relations [at play] in Syria; it puts a limit on the influence of Russia and Iran in Syria. And it would signal that the Russian and Iranian sway over the fate of Syria is over.”

Kilo is a former Syrian Stalinist with close connections to the leadership of the Left Party, which has consistently promoted him over the last two years. Left Party representative in the Bundestag (federal parliament) Foreign Affairs Committee Wolfgang Gehrcke, a former member of the Stalinist German Communist Party, warmly refers to him at jointly attended events as “my friend Michel.”

Over the last year, Kilo has often spoken at events held by the Left Party to focus on the Syrian war, including at a meeting of the Left Party-affiliated Rosa Luxembourg Foundation titled “Another Syria is possible!” and also at a conference entitled “Syria: Is a political solution possible?”

The Left Party also regularly provides Kilo with a platform in its publications. Its political mouthpiece, *Neues Deutschland (ND)*, has published at least three in-depth interviews with Kilo and many more with his supporters, since the beginning of the imperialist offensive against Syria.

Gehrcke also includes an essay on Kilo in his recent book on Syria. Gehrcke cynically refers to him in the preface as “among the men and women of Syria who reject violence as a means of resolving the Syrian conflict”.

The Left Party tried to cover for Kilo's real political views as long as possible. But now it is clear that “its man” is playing a leading role in the preparations for a military strike against Syria. Kilo's faction and Ahmed Jarba now constitute the leadership of the National Syrian Coalition (NSC), which is recognised by the imperialist powers and their regional allies as “the legitimate representative of Syria” and aggressively advocates Western intervention.

Jarba is leader of the influential Shammar tribe, whose members spread throughout Iraq, Syria, and parts of Saudi Arabia. He was already a member of the NSC before Kilo and his followers were accepted into the organisation in late May. Jarba, backed by Saudi Arabia, campaigned within the coalition for Kilo's inclusion.

The alliance between former Stalinist Kilo, the tribal leader Jarba and the Gulf monarchy of Saudi Arabia may seem surprising at first glance. In fact, the formation of the alliance was a gambit on the part of Saudi Arabia, designed to curb the influence of Qatar, which works mainly with the Muslim Brotherhood.

Under conditions of a looming military strike, Kilo is virtually the ideal man for imperialism, because he maintains good relations with all possible stakeholders in the fragmented Syrian opposition and is thus in a position to rebalance tensions arising between the imperialist powers and their regional allies.

After much haggling, his inclusion in the NSC was ultimately accepted by Qatar and the Muslim Brotherhood, with whom Kilo has had closely ties since the so-called Damascus Spring of 2000 and the Damascus Declaration of 2005. Due to his Stalinist background, he can also exploit close contacts within the highest political circles of the West, especially in France and Germany.

From the outset, Kilo and the Left Party sought to unite the various Syrian bourgeois opposition groups, to hasten Assad's downfall with the aid of the imperialist powers and their armed mercenary forces.

Kilo summed up his strategy in an interview given to *ND* in early May. “Let us first get rid of this regime and then work together”, he pleaded, adding: “Now we must unite so that Syria is not lost. We, the democratic

opposition, require an extension of the [National] Coalition to achieve a national balance. We require the formulation of a contractual document between us and the Islamists, committing us to working together during the transition period.”

In other words, Kilo manages to include the support of Saudi Arabia because he is willing to work with the ultra-right Islamist terror organisations, which are mainly financed by Saudi Arabia and form the backbone of the so-called rebels. In the interview with *ND*, he makes it clear that the “united front” he favours ranges from the so-called secular opposition to the al-Qaeda-affiliated Jabhat al-Nusra.

While Kilo half-heartedly tries to distance himself from al-Nusra, he simultaneously covers for the organisation and justifies its acts of terror. He explains: “Most of the people in al-Nusra were peaceful protesters. I too believe that a lot of weapons are now coming into the country, but compare that to the roughly 100,000 tons of munitions that have been fired on the population. You can’t imagine how violently the regime is still engaging with the Syrian people.”

Kilo’s defence of Islamic terrorists is not new. In a report of television broadcaster *France 24*, Kilo declared in February that there must be an end “to abusing people by making them afraid of extremists”. He said: “I’ve been in Syria and I met there members of Jabhat al-Nusra and Liwaa Ahrar Souria. These are brigades of free Syrian men that you call fundamentalists. I’m a Christian, but they welcomed me with open arms, hugged me and gave me decorations.”

Kilo’s defence of Jabhat Al-Nusra and its call for a military strike speaks volumes about the reactionary character of the Left Party. To secure German imperialist influence in Syria after Assad’s fall, it has built up forces like Kilo’s, which aim to assume power in Damascus by supporting a policy of mass murder and destruction, and courting the aid of US bombers.

The terrorist brigades, cynically labelled by Kilo as “peaceful protesters” and “Free Syrian men”, spread sheer terror throughout the Syrian population in the parts of the country under their control. Their executions and beheadings of dissenters and political opponents are documented in gruesome videos on YouTube. The military strike that Kilo advocates would not only strengthen the terrorist groups; it would also threaten the lives of tens of thousands of Syrian soldiers and civilians.

Like all of Germany’s other bourgeois parties, the Left Party does not dare to openly declare the real nature of its policies. But it is in fact politically and morally responsible for the crimes against the Syrian population, committed by imperialism and its Islamist shock troops.

In an article on Syria entitled “Determined in the second row”, which also appeared in Gehrcke’s book, Left Party parliamentary foreign affairs secretary Johanna Bussemer summarised her party’s aims in the form of a criticism of the federal government’s Syrian policy.

She argues that “two problems in particular” are evident in relation to Germany’s policies in Syria: “First, there was a lopsided focus on certain opposition groups during the second phase of intervention in the internal political process”. Second, “Germany’s contributions to regime change [were] only sporadically, if at all, made transparent to the German public. To this day, both parliament and the German people have been left largely uninformed about most their country’s role, such as the monitoring of Syria by the German espionage ship, the Oker, and the logistical and material support given to the armed opposition”.

Bussemer particularly accuses the federal government of “failing to pursue its own consistent strategy in the Syrian conflict”, although it “wants to actively fashion policy in a central position of the region”.

In short, the Left Party criticises the federal government for failing to engage in the Syrian war aggressively enough and advocate regime change in Damascus. The party therefore assumes the task of strengthening the position of the German foreign ministry by supporting elements of the Syrian opposition, to which the federal government

initially had little or no contact.

The Left Party’s significance for German imperialism in the Syrian war is becoming clearer. In an interview with the Egyptian *Al-Masry Al-Youm* daily newspaper in early September, Kilo’s confidante Jarba stressed that Germany should play a central role in the “reconstruction” of Syria.

He said, “We are drafting a United Arab Emirates-German project for the reconstruction of Syria. We signed the contract recently in Germany, as there is an international fund for the reconstruction, where many countries including South Korea, Japan, the European Union, the United States and the Gulf states also are taking part. But implementation on the ground depends on the stability of the situation first.”

Jarba was alluding to the so-called Syrian Reconstruction Fund that he and German foreign minister Guido Westerwelle signed at a meeting in Berlin on September 2. The fund is administered by the Reconstruction Credit Institute (KfW), a government-owned credit bank, and serves to provide “civil support to the National Coalition”. According to a foreign ministry press release, Germany and the UAE jointly chair the working group for economic reconstruction and development project run by the Group of Friends of the Syrian People.

In other words, the Left Party is serving as a “door opener” for German imperialism in the Syrian conflict. Behind the linguistic euphemisms and Orwellian formulations of “reconstruction” and “development” lie plans for the destruction and looting of Syria by German finance capital.

The Left Party and its allies in the Syrian opposition also have concrete plans to secure “stability”, which Jarba seeks and is necessary for the plundering of Syria.

Kilo spoke about his “vision” for Syria in an interview with Al Jazeera in mid-July. First of all, there has to be the fall from power of those “who have destroyed Syria, which means only 150 people”. Then comes the stage of weeding the roots of tyranny “out of the hearts and minds” of people in the state administration and the society. This must be done by a national unity movement in cooperation with the military, because the army is “the foundation of the regime”. After several years, estimated by Kilo to be “three, five or seven”, the era of a democratic regime can then begin.

In other words, Kilo advocates replacing the leadership of the regime, but leaving the military and security apparatus intact, in order to establish a new dictatorship over the people.

This plan is supported by representatives of the Left Party. In an interview with *ND* in early September, Berlin Left Party member Rim Farha—a Syrian woman who is also a member of Kilo’s opposition group—responded to the question of whether she advocates a military coup: “We want the military on both sides to come together and—if they so want—carry out a coup in Syria”.

The demand for military governments in the Arab world has become part of the programme of the Left Party. In July, *ND* published a strategy paper proposed by the Left Party-affiliated Rosa Luxembourg Foundation, calling for an “arrangement” with the Egyptian military government (see “How the German Left Party supports the counter-revolution in Egypt”).

The support for war and dictatorship on the part of the Left Party and its allies in the Syrian bourgeoisie is a reaction to the return of the working class as a revolutionary force. Deeply shocked by a new era of revolutionary struggle that began with the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt in early 2011, they have shifted completely into the camp of imperialism. Former Stalinists like Kilo and Gehrcke personify the increasingly deeply right-wing middle-class layers that form the new social basis for imperialism, suppress the development of a socialist revolution, and organise neo-colonial campaigns.

Workers should not be fooled by the slogans on the posters of the Left Party and the statements of its leading politicians in the recent election campaign. These are lies intended to hide its reactionary policies. To understand the class character of the Left Party, one must evaluate what it

does in Egypt and Syria. It will also favour a policy of bloody oppression and terror in Germany, as soon as the working class mounts the political stage as an independent political force.

The working class must prepare for this by consciously opposing the Left Party and raising the German Socialist Equality Party (PSE) into the position of a new revolutionary leadership. This is the only way it can prepare for the coming political struggles.



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