

# What lies behind the warmongering by Der Spiegel?

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Since the crash of the Malaysian Airlines passenger plane MH17 over eastern Ukraine, the anti-Russian propaganda campaign in the German press has taken on a new quality. A confrontation with the second largest nuclear power in the world is being ever more openly demanded, with Germany's leading news magazine *Der Spiegel* playing a leading role.

Last Monday, the magazine appeared under the title "Stop Putin Now!" Pictures of dozens of MH17 victims were in the background. In the edition's lead article, the editors directed a verbal tirade against Russian President Vladimir Putin and the rebels in eastern Ukraine. It declared that all diplomacy had failed and that a firm response from the West was necessary.

Only a day after its publication, *Der Spiegel* was compelled to acknowledge on its online platform that the edition had provoked a number of strong reactions, particularly on social media. Furious readers had described the title page as "warmongering." The editors described the accusation of warmongering as an "absurd claim." *Der Spiegel* had not demanded a military offensive against Russia, they insisted, but merely "tough economic sanctions."

This is a poor effort at denying the obvious. Economic sanctions are a prelude to war. If a country is placed under economic pressure and politically destabilised, the danger of a military conflict inevitably arises.

*Der Spiegel's* lead article is disgraceful war propaganda. Authored in militarist tones, it is full of lies and animosity. Although it remains totally unclear who shot down the Malaysian passenger plane, *Der Spiegel* declares that the rebels in eastern Ukraine, and President Putin along with them, are responsible.

"The trail of evidence is clear," the magazine wrote, even claiming that this was murder. The rebels had thus

deliberately shot down the plane with the intent to kill.

Without providing any evidence for such charges, *Der Spiegel* called for the European powers to force Putin to cooperate and ditch their "cowardice." "The wreckage of MH17 is also the wreckage of diplomacy," the magazine stated. This is an explicit call for a military confrontation with Russia, which could result in a nuclear war.

Even Jakob Augstein, joint owner of *Der Spiegel* and a regular columnist on *Spiegel Online*, admitted that the logic of this policy leads to military conflict. He wrote in a column last Thursday, "A trade war is also a war." As before the First World War, sanctions intensify conflicts and increase the danger of war.

Augstein does not represent a principled antiwar position. He is expressing much more the worries of a section of the ruling class at the current confrontational course against Russia. The position of this layer is also illustrated by the financial daily *Handelsblatt*, which has warned that the economic consequences of a policy of sanctions for Germany would be enormous. In addition, the danger of a Russian-Chinese alliance was growing. Augstein concludes by describing a course of confrontation as ill-considered and risky.

Augstein then sharply attacked the media, accusing it of putting the government under pressure. "With rare unanimity, the German media has pushed the policy in Ukraine," wrote Augstein. "The German government is constantly having to justify its restraint. But after the shooting down of the Malaysian plane there was no more holding back, finally we can go after Russia! In this summer of 2014, our journalists are having their own August moment."

This is undoubtedly a correct description of the media drive over the last weeks and months. However, it raises more questions than it answers. If the media is

pressurising the government, who is providing the media with its line?

Augstein knows more about this than he admits. He represents his family, including 24 percent of the shareholdings, in Spiegel Publishing's shareholder meetings. As joint owner, he must know why Germany's largest news magazine is campaigning for an aggressive policy, which by his own admission amounts to nothing less than the issue of war or peace. He must be well informed about the background to the war propaganda, but leaves it at a general critique, without naming those responsible by name.

The *World Socialist Web Site* pointed out that the US magazine *Time*, Britain's *Economist* and *Der Spiegel* published very similar articles simultaneously, which all bore the signature of the CIA. Several months ago, the WWSW reported on the close connections between German journalists and US think tanks, and showed how they systematically prepared the return of German militarism.

*Der Spiegel's* chief editors were completely changed last year. Since September 1, the chief editor has been former DPA journalist Wolfgang Büchner. One of his first personnel decisions was the hiring of the editor of the tabloid *Bild* newspaper, Nikolaus Blome, as head of the paper's Berlin office and member of the editorial board. In these roles, Blome is heavily involved in working out the line of the magazine.

The appointment of Blome took place against the wishes of the other editors and provoked sharp debate. For the first time in the history of the liberal magazine, a journalist took on a leading position at *Der Spiegel* who had worked for 16 years at the right-wing, conservative and pro-US Axel-Springer publishing house.

Blome came to prominence at *Bild* for his backing for the former German defence minister, Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg. He also publicly defended the removal of German President Christian Wulff, in which *Bild* played a major role.

Since Blome began working at *Der Spiegel* on December 1, he has been a leading participant in the anti-Russian propaganda campaign and the calls for a return to German militarism. In April, the magazine published a sympathetic interview with a member of the fascist Ukrainian Right Sector, which was heavily involved in the overthrow of elected president Viktor

Yanukovitch. Several *Spiegel* articles on Ukraine have been written directly by Blome, including the article on the title page of the latest edition.

Augstein was one of the few employees who welcomed and defended Blome's appointment. "Good people always get the breaks," he commented at the time of the debate on Blome's move. Since January 2011, Augstein and the former Springer journalist have been debating on their own talk show on the Phoenix news channel, where Augstein plays the "left" and Blome the conservative.

So what does Augstein know about developments behind the scenes? Who ensured that *Der Spiegel* led a propaganda campaign for war against Russia? Augstein is silent on these issues, in both his *Spiegel* column as well as in his own weekly magazine *Freitag*.



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