

German media backs confrontation with Russia over Ukraine

Peter Schwarz
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The massive pressure exerted by the US to arm the Kiev regime, a move that would intensify the war in Ukraine, has produced a panicked reaction in the German media. While some commentators have come out in support of supplying weapons, most adopt the position of the German government, which has thus far opposed it.

Not a single major newspaper rejects the course of confrontation with Russia, however, though many openly admit it could lead to a nuclear conflict and world war. The differences are over tactics. At the heart of this is Germany's relations with the United States. Although a series of comments stand firm by a close alliance with the great power across the Atlantic, calls are growing for Germany to realize its imperialist interests independently.

For example, it is feared that even with additional weaponry, the Ukrainian army and regime are not ready for an intensified conflict. The result would either be a military debacle for the Kiev regime or a direct confrontation between Russia and NATO, with terrible consequences for Germany and Europe.

This was stated most explicitly by the former inspector general of the German army and chair of the NATO military council, Harald Kujat. In a talk show on German television hosted by Gunther Jauch, Kujat described it as "idiotic" for the West to consider a military solution: if Russia wanted, it could end the war within 48 hours by sending regular troops in to Ukraine.

Others fear that an escalation against Russia could divide the EU. Even the economic sanctions that have been implemented were only accepted reluctantly by some EU members.

All of the comments are united by their attacks on Russia and President Putin. To the extent that they oppose arming Kiev, they call for intensified economic sanctions against Russia so as to weaken the country prior to a military confrontation.

The flagship publication of the rightward-leaning

Springer publishing empire, *Die Welt*, left no doubt that Europe was on the eve of catastrophic conflict. Sascha Lehnartz compared the situation to the days prior to the First and Second World Wars. "These February days will perhaps some time be spoken of as July 1914 and September 1938 are described today: a time when the world stood on the edge of the abyss, but no-one wanted to acknowledge it."

Lehnartz described the recent Munich Security Conference, which brings together leading European and US security officials. While a "care-free, consumer-driven public" wandered through Munich, he wrote, "a few hundred metres away in the rooms of a luxury hotel, a twenty five-year period of relative relaxation in East-West relations (had been) finally brought to a close."

This dramatic estimation of events did not prevent Lehnartz from fanning the flames of war, however. He attacked the Russian government, accusing it of "living in a parallel universe," in a "world where sick great power pride has turned into the desire for conquest...in which there is no interest in resolving conflicts peacefully."

He concluded, "The clearer this becomes, the weaker is Merkel's slogan that the conflict cannot be resolved militarily." If Merkel's diplomatic efforts failed and Ukraine received NATO weapons, he went on, "Nobody knows how high the costs will be for us then."

Stefan Kornelius backed Merkel's course in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and strongly attacked the US delegation at the Munich Security Conference, which had heavily criticized Merkel. He compared them to schoolchildren who learned about "the current situation and the role of their country in a speech by Victoria Nuland [the US undersecretary of state for Europe], which could have been delivered in the locker room by any football coach before kick-off."

Behind the debate over arming Kiev, according to Kornelius, there lurks the question: "how strong is

America?” Due to the upcoming presidential election campaign, “the ideological struggle in Washington” had blown “over the Atlantic”, claiming Merkel as a victim.

Cornelius has close links to US think tanks and was one of the leading journalists who campaigned diligently in favor of the coup in Ukraine and confrontation with Russia a year ago.

When he criticized the US intelligence community for its espionage activities in Germany last summer, the WSW commented: “For the time being, Kornelius and other bourgeois scribblers and politicians have decided to adopt a stronger tone towards the US. His future orientation will ultimately depend on the course the German ruling elite steers as it tries to return to an aggressive and militarist foreign policy. It seems safe to say that, due to his on-the-spot ‘research,’ Kornelius will be excellently informed as to which way the winds are blowing.”

This assessment has been confirmed. While Kornelius is outraged by the tirades launched against Merkel by American politicians and US great power politics in general, he calls, in another comment, for a more aggressive foreign policy on the part of Germany and Europe in the name of *Realpolitik*.

“This war has a few bitter lessons” for Germany and the rest of Europe, he writes. “The peaceful order in Europe has reached its limits. Peacemaking on the basis of legal means and EU promises of prosperity are evidently not strong enough to stand up against brute force and a notion of a balance of powers rooted in Europe for centuries.”

The “political postmodernism [that] spared Germany some tough decisions collides with ancient Russian fears of encirclement and foreign domination,” he concludes. “The real political lessons will sharpen the EU’s imaginative powers.”

Alongside Kornelius, another leading German journalist, Klaus-Dieter Frankenberger of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* also campaigned in favor of the US/German-backed coup in Ukraine and a confrontation with Russia a year ago. He, too, is clear about the seriousness of the situation. “It is no wonder that many people have the impression that Europe is at a crossroads, with Russia and the West headed for a direct confrontation,” he writes in the *FAZ*.

But while Kornelius promotes an independent German great power policy, Frankenberger is intent on maintaining an alliance with the US. “The debate about the best means to support Ukraine, now and in the long term, must not allow Americans and Europeans to drift

apart,” he stressed. Although Merkel’s diplomatic efforts were “worth a try”, the German government “had to take note that sections of US politics were losing patience.”

One again it is the *taz* newspaper, which has links to the German Greens, which advocates a military confrontation most stridently. Without beating about the bush, the paper fully backs the arming of Ukraine. Under the headline “A right to bear arms,” Dominic Johnson writes: “A sovereign, internationally recognized state has a duty to take action against perpetrators of violence. Whoever denies this right supports impunity for crimes. The state monopoly on violence is one of the foundations of any rule of law.”

The *taz* columnist dismisses “fears of an escalation and an arms race” as unfounded. The spiral of violence arises “from the current military imbalance.” A political solution in eastern Ukraine will only be possible “once the armed forces of Ukraine are strong enough to promptly repel any attack.” *Die Zeit* warns against such a stance: “One cannot stumble into an arms race.” The principal issue for the paper is to get the timing right. “In fact the possibilities for Ukraine to arm itself are not so bad,” writes Michael Thumann. The most important question is “the right time. Arms deliveries and training have already decided wars. In Bosnia, for example.”

In the case of Ukraine, however, it was too early to deliver weapons. “The price for Putin of disrupting Ukraine must be ratcheted up.” Such pressure should not be of a military nature, but rather at the diplomatic, economic and political level.



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