

German media lurches further to the right after Paris attacks

Peter Schwarz
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In the wake of last week's terrorist attacks in Paris, Germany's media has shifted sharply to the right. On Sunday, conservative newspapers such as the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and *Die Welt* pushed for war and the strengthening of the state. Traditionally liberal media outlets such as *Die Zeit* and *Süddeutsche Zeitung* have now followed suit.

The call for an expanded military intervention, including the deployment of drones and the arming of local militias—measures previously considered objectionable—has become part of the mainstream debate in the German media. The German domestic and foreign intelligence agencies, which have been in the headlines recently for their involvement in neo-Nazi crimes, illegal government spying and lying to parliament, are to be strengthened and better equipped. The familiar war and law-and-order rhetoric of American neoconservatives and their German supporters is now spreading throughout the liberal media.

Thomas Avenarius summed up this shift in an opinion piece for Tuesday's *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. Entitled "Also include the military," it demanded that Islamic State (IS) "be militarily combatted, and if possible, destroyed in the Middle East."

The long-standing Middle East correspondent for the newspaper argued that political control over the army, i.e., an army responsible to parliament, which is anchored in Germany's Basic Law, must be lifted and the military given the power to determine how it intervenes. "Uniformed personnel must tell the politicians if and how the Bundeswehr can participate," he wrote. Military affairs are a craft that should be left to those trained in them, he continued.

Avenarius characterized the task of elected representatives and government officials as ensuring

"support in society for the part of the fight against the IS" that "can only be led by soldiers."

Since Avenarius considers, based on the experience in Afghanistan, that air strikes and ground interventions do not hold out the prospect of succeeding in destroying the IS, he argues in the manner of a colonial overlord for the arming and "purchasing" of local forces.

"Western soldiers, and yes, even Germans, can train Iraqi and Kurdish forces more and better, advise, assist and even accompany them to the front lines," he wrote. "Along with air strikes and supporting local forces," he added, it was necessary to "use other, more Middle Eastern methods: Sunni groups in Iraq can be bought off and militias for the fight against IS can be built and armed."

Avenarius also advocated the increased use of killer drones and commandos. "The deployment of armed drones should not be understood solely as a means of extra-legal executions. An attack on the jeep in which the Khalif is traveling endangers fewer people than the intervention of troops and tanks. And the end of Osama bin Laden proved that terrorist kingpins can sometimes be targeted using risky commando missions."

He concluded with a call to strengthen domestic police and intelligence services. "A much more expansive intervention by the police and intelligence agencies is required in Europe than our welfare societies wish to accept."

Karsten Luther made similar arguments on *Zeit Online*, but in contrast to Avenarius, he urged a massive deployment of ground troops. "Revenge is one thing to defeat the terrorist militia, but quite another when it is viewed purely militarily," he wrote.

He considered the French air strikes on Raqqa as ineffective. "To raze everything to the ground from the

air cannot be the solution, unless one wants to create thousands of new fanatics at a stroke. Reconquering Raqqa and other cities will be impossible without ground troops, at least in the tens of thousands, as American military strategists predict.”

Above all, Luther insists that the goal of a Western intervention must be the overthrow of the regime led by Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. He writes: “Only when the Syrian regime stops waging war against its own people and there is a political perspective for all of those interested can the struggle against the ‘Islamic State’ have any chance.” He is thus determined to continue and expand the very policy that has driven Syria into the current catastrophe.

This is despite the fact that the Paris attacks were carried out by the very types of Islamist forces promoted by Western governments in their efforts to topple Assad. After everything that is known about the suspected attackers and their alleged mastermind, Abdelhamid Abaaoud, it is, in addition, hardly credible that the intelligence agencies knew nothing prior to the attack. Abaaoud had been in the sights of the intelligence agencies for some time, having been linked to several earlier attacks.

This enthusiasm for war and authoritarianism is no mere spontaneous reaction to the terrorist attacks in Paris. The shift in opinion among journalists and other representatives of the upper-middle class, who previously viewed the build-up of the state and militarism with skepticism, is connected to deeper social processes. Under conditions of an ever-deepening social and economic crisis, these social layers increasingly see the state as the defender of their own relatively privileged position.

Their evolution recalls the period prior to World War I, when leading intellectuals, along with broader sections of the upper-middle class, embraced militarism and enthusiastically hailed the outbreak of the war. Then as now, they were responding to the growth of national tensions and the sharpening of social contradictions.



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