

German foreign minister calls for no-fly zone over Syria

Johannes Stern
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After the initial proposal by US Secretary of State John Kerry, German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier (Social Democrats, SPD) joined calls Wednesday evening for a no-fly zone over Syria. “The situation today in Syria is on a knife edge,” an official statement on the Foreign Ministry’s web site declared. “If the ceasefire is to have any chance whatsoever, the only way is to have a time-limited but complete ban of all military aircraft movements over Syria, at least for three, or even better, seven days.”

Like Kerry, Steinmeier justified his demand with humanitarian phrases. With a no-fly zone, the United Nations had “the possibility of reestablishing their humanitarian aid shipments to the suffering and besieged people.” At the same time, it would create “space for precise agreements in the Syrian support group on coordinated action against IS and al-Qaida and a path back to negotiations on a transitional government for Syria.”

In reality, a no-fly zone imposed by the US, Germany, or other NATO members would not be a peace initiative but rather a massive escalation of the more than five-year-old war for regime change in Syria incited by the Western powers. In March 2011, the establishment of a no-fly zone in Libya, justified on the same “humanitarian” grounds, was the prelude to a NATO-led air war against the oil-rich country. It reached its brutal climax several months later with the murder of Gaddafi by Western-backed Islamist rebels.

Steinmeier speaks of “coordinated action against IS and al-Qaida.” With this transparent pretext, Germany and the Western powers routinely seek to legitimise their military operations in Syria and Iraq. In fact, the imperialist powers continue to collaborate with al-Qaida and even the IS militias to overthrow the government of Bashar al-Assad and install a pro-

Western puppet regime in Damascus. Just a few days ago, German weekly magazine *Die Zeit* defended the Syrian al-Qaida forces as the “life insurance for many moderate rebel groups.”

On Saturday, American, British and Australian planes bombarded an outpost of the Syrian army near the Deir ez-Zor airbase, killing or injuring close to 200 soldiers in the process. In parallel with this, IS fighters began an offensive on the Syrian army airbase. Reports indicate that the German army (Bundeswehr) provided images of the area under attack. A spokesman for the Defence Ministry stated on Monday in Berlin that he did not want to talk about “operational details which are subject to secrecy.”

Steinmeier’s “Syrian support group,” with which Berlin and the other imperialist powers are closely collaborating—the so-called High Negotiations Commission (HNC)—is chiefly financed by Saudi Arabia, supports armed Islamist militias in Syria and has long demanded the removal of the Assad government. When Steinmeier, Kerry or the general coordinator of the HNC, Riad Hijab, speak of a “transitional government” or a “transitional process” in Syria, they mean the installation of a pro-Western puppet government in Damascus.

The demand for a no-fly zone in Syria increases the danger of a direct clash with nuclear-armed Russia, the main backer of the Assad regime. Russian deputy foreign minister, Sergei Ryabkov, described “this initiative,” according to Russian news agency Interfax, as “at least for the moment impossible to implement.” First, the US and its allies had to apply pressure “on those forces who think that only war can solve the problem.”

If Steinmeier is currently supporting the US initiative, he is not doing so as a follower of US war policy, but

rather as a representative of the interests of German imperialism. In June this year, he authored an article in the *Foreign Affairs* journal titled “Germany’s new global role,” which not only described Berlin as a “significant European power,” but also called US predominance into question. The German Foreign Ministry is now exploiting the escalation of the war in Syria to expand German influence in the Middle East and internationally.

“We want to stand up and assume responsibility, contribute to justice and peace,” Steinmeier also said on Wednesday at the launch event for Germany’s campaign to secure a seat on the UN Security Council in 2019-20. Germany was one of the “most active players, when “overcoming conflict, stabilization and crisis management” were involved. “We show engagement, we show responsibility, and we find good will and support for that,” Steinmeier proclaimed. During the UN General Assembly this week, he held numerous discussions with colleagues and believed “that Germany will find a lot of support for its candidacy.”

Anybody who needs convincing of the rapacious interests that lie behind Steinmeier’s verbal euphemisms and the German UN campaign should examine the German army’s new white paper. There it is stated in section 3 under the heading “Germany’s strategic priorities” that German business is “equally as dependent upon guaranteed supplies of raw materials and secure international transportation routes as it is on functioning information and communications systems.”

The nominal opposition Left Party and Greens, which are preparing for a so-called red-red-green coalition in the state of Berlin with Steinmeier’s SPD, are playing a key role in encouraging German imperialism back onto the world stage and concealing its insatiable appetite for export markets and raw materials with humanitarian arguments.

On Thursday, Left Party foreign policy spokesman Jan van Aken accused the “Syrian regime” on Deutschlandfunk of waging an “extremely brutal war of starvation against Aleppo ... They want to starve the population there to force them to leave their homes so they can assume control of Aleppo at some point.” Germany had to step up pressure now so that “the foreign powers bring their partners under control—that applies to Russia and the Syrian regime, but also the

US and their partner Saudi Arabia,” van Aken said in summing up his position.

Jürgen Trittin, who was a member of the SPD/Green cabinet of Hartz IV social welfare reforms and war between 1998 and 2005 under Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, appealed in *Die Zeit* on Thursday for a “left” military and great power policy. “We see what is expected from Europe and therefore from Germany. Europe should guard against globalisation. And Europe should provide citizens with security. That includes us dealing with the instability in our neighbourhood—especially when it is provoked by mistaken interventions like Libya.” Now, “anyone who is politically left [must] assume responsibility,” Trittin wrote.



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