

# German government urges tougher action against Russia and Syria

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As the Syrian army advances in the east of Aleppo with support from Russia, and with the conflict between the US and Russia intensifying dramatically, the German government has hardened its attitude towards Moscow. On Friday, leading German politicians called for fresh sanctions against Russia, the massive arming of the Islamist opposition and even the use of German ground troops.

On the same day, leading German business daily *Handelsblatt*, reported that Angela Merkel advocated “the withdrawal of Russian troops” from Syria in a speech in Magdeburg. Directly addressing the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, the chancellor declared, “I can again only appeal to Russia, Russia has a lot of influence on Assad. We must end this horrible crime as soon as possible.”

Given the “truly appalling situation” in Aleppo, the German government considers new sanctions against Russia a possible reaction. The German government was “considering all the options,” government spokesman Steffen Seibert said in Berlin.

Beforehand, the chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the Bundestag (parliament), Norbert Röttgen (CDU, Christian Democratic Union), had called for tougher sanctions against Moscow. He told the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, “A war crime that had no consequences or sanctions would be a scandal.” At the same time, he also complained that European governments had only done what absolutely needed to be done under their “obligations”.

Speaking on ARD television, the chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the European Parliament, Elmar Brok (CDU) also called for sanctions, to “put pressure on” Russia and “punish” her. In particular, he called for technological sanctions that inhibited the development of weapons—“as we have done during in

the Cold War”.

Brok provided an insight into the far-reaching, aggressive plans that are being discussed in government and military circles behind the backs of the population. “The only option to do something would be to go in,” said Brok. “But who in Germany would be willing to send the army in there?” One must ask, “Are we ready to do something ourselves and go in with the army?”

He added: “Perhaps the only way—if that is possible technically, from the logistics—is to provide some of the rebels [...] with ground-to-air missiles”. It had been shown that Russia herself was not prepared to engage in “selective cooperation”. For Russia, it was “just a matter of power, of ruling this country”.

The Social Democratic Party (SPD) is supporting the aggressive war policies of the Christian Democrats. For example, in the *Rheinische Post*, SPD foreign policy expert Niels Annen said, “Instead of dispatching warships to the region and terminating agreements, for example concerning the destruction of plutonium, Russia should finally assume its responsibilities as a permanent member of the Security Council and respect international humanitarian law”.

In September, Social Democratic Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier had already demanded a no-fly zone to advance the West’s objective of regime change in Syria. Such an action would be the exact opposite of promoting “international humanitarian law”. In March 2011, the establishment of a no-fly zone in Libya was the prelude to a massive NATO bombing campaign against the oil-rich country and the overthrow of the Gaddafi regime by Western-backed Islamist rebels.

Unlike the Libyan war, Germany has been in the vanguard of the imperialist powers against Syria from the beginning. In 2012, the German foreign ministry in

cooperation with the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP) and parts of the Syrian opposition, brought to life the so-called “The Day After” project to outline its “vision for a post-Assad regime” in Syria. Since the end of 2015, Germany’s Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) have been a direct party to the war in Syria, operating with tornado jets, reconnaissance technology and a warship.

To the extent that the Russian intervention in Syria is thwarting the plans of the German government and has brought the Western-backed Islamist militias to the brink of defeat, the German media has beaten the drum for war and militarism ever more hysterically.

A commentary in the current issue of news weekly *Die Zeit*, headlined “Can Europe really just look on in Syria”, warns that currently “some 10,000 pro-Assad fighters” are preparing “to storm East Aleppo”. Should the city fall into the hands of the Syrian regime in the next weeks, “this would be a strategic success for Bashar al-Assad”.

The counter-strategy advocated by *Die Zeit*: “The delivery of weapons with which the insurgents can prevail against the permanent air onslaught”, as a “first military step”. The author of the article, Andrea Böhm, who in an earlier comment had defended Al Qaeda, openly says who should be supported. “The pro- Al-Qaeda Jabhat Fateh al-sham” is “as strong as ever” and has “established itself as the most effective faction defending civilians against IS and against Assad”.

In an editorial in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* on Wednesday, Tomas Avenarius mused: “Finally delivering to the rebels the weapons they had long called for after years of reluctance: anti-aircraft missiles, which can bring down Russian jets from the sky. In the Afghanistan war 30 years ago, such US missiles had helped the jihadists inflict a defeat on the Red Army”.

If German politicians and media representatives are now beating the drum for sanctions against Russia, for the massive rearmament of Al Qaeda and the deployment of ground troops to Syria, they do so not as followers of the US government, which is also constantly fuelling the conflict, but as representatives of European and, above all, German imperialism.

“The second step must take place in Brussels and especially in Berlin”, Böhm emphasized in *Die Zeit*. The war in Syria must “be understood as a matter of

supreme national security”. Avenarius is incensed that the US was not able to guarantee “a Russian defeat in Syria”. “Thanks to earlier hesitancy”, the US “no longer” had the power “to prevent” the cementing of Russian power aspirations.

To defend Germany’s geo-strategic and economic interests against Russia, but also increasingly against the United States, the German elites are prepared to foment a conflict which they themselves know could trigger a third world war. The current edition of news magazine *Der Spiegel* appears with a front page headline reading, “World power struggle: trouble spot Syria—Putin’s work, Obama’s contribution”, and speaks of a “world war for Aleppo”.



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