

German media in war mode over Syria

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Following the intensification of the military conflict in Syria, the German media have switched to war mode. Editorial writers try to outdo each other in their expressions of moral outrage, calling for military action and calling for “toughness against Russia.” Unrestrained demagoguery is mixed with outright lies and the suppression of basic facts.

Reading some of these editorials, one could believe that the Middle East was a haven of peace before Moscow decided to intervene militarily a year ago in the Syrian civil war on the side of the Assad regime.

The devastating wars of the US and its allies in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya, which have claimed millions of victims and driven millions more to flee are ignored, just like the support for jihadist groups by US allies Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey. In Libya as in Syria, the United States is relying on militias close to Al Qaeda to bring about regime change. Before the Iraq and Libyan wars there had been no Islamist terrorist groups in Iraq or Syria.

The German media has made Moscow solely responsible for the failure of the last truce agreed between the US and Russia, despite the agreement failing because American fighter jets bombed a Syrian government base, killing 60 soldiers, and because the so-called “moderate rebels” were not ready to split from the Syrian Al Qaeda offshoot, the Al Nusra Front, recently renamed Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, which provides most of the combat units among the Assad opponents.

A similar campaign of lies and disinformation in the German media was conducted in the spring of 2014, denying the leading role of fascist militias in the Kiev protests, glorifying the coup against the elected Ukrainian President Yanukovich as a “democratic revolution” and presenting his successor, the corrupt, pro-Western oligarch Poroshenko, as the embodiment of democracy.

A bloodthirsty editorial in the latest edition of *Der Spiegel* compares Aleppo with Srebrenica, where a brutal massacre was perpetrated in the Bosnian war—also fuelled by the US and Germany. “The Srebrenica of today is

called Aleppo. It’s just much bigger,” writes Clement Höges, who has worked for the news magazine for over 25 years. “Can Europe and the USA look on again when this time, Shiite mercenaries from Iran slaughter Sunni civilians in the rebel territory of Aleppo, once Putin and Assad have bombed the way clear for them?”

It does not get more mendacious! The incitement of hostility between Sunnis and Shiites is one of the most important tools of the Western powers, since these began to subjugate the oil-rich Middle East militarily. For example, in Iraq, the United States bombed a Shiite regime to power, whose thuggery against the Sunni minority significantly contributed to the growth of the Islamic State. In contrast, in Libya, they worked with Sunni terrorist militia to overthrow the Qaddafi regime. Some of these then moved on to Syria, where they reinforced the opposition to the Alawite (Shiite) Assad regime.

But that leaves the moralisers in the German media as cold as the slaughter of Shia Houthi rebels in Yemen by the Saudi air force. They celebrate the battle for Mosul, which has recently begun, as a “liberation,” although observers expect more than 1 million refugees and a wave of ethnic cleansing following the use of Shiite and Kurdish militias against the primarily Sunni city.

Where Kaiser Wilhelm once invoked German greatness and honour before the bloody colonial war against the Boxer Rebellion in China, Höges now introduces nothing less than the “ideals of the West, and even more: the ideals of modern civilization” to justify his warmongering and the call for “new, expanded sanctions against Russia, and perhaps against Iran.”

He scornfully derides three state premiers from eastern Germany, who with an eye to agricultural exports from their region had spoken against further sanctions: “If they are not even willing to give up cheese exports, they betray their ideals in front of the whole world.”

Richard Herzinger writes in a similarly aggressive manner in *Die Welt*. For him, it is not just moral issues that are at stake in Syria but “the geopolitical

consequences of a Putin victory.” The Russian president is using “Syria as a test of how far he can go in his mobilization against the West.” In Syria, Moscow is demonstrating “that international law and rules do not apply to it.”

Herzinger is not content with calling for “sanctions against Moscow,” but also argues for “the supply of trapped Syrian rebels with air defence weapons” and “exemplary strikes against the positions of the Assad regime”—a recipe for unleashing a third, nuclear world war.

Against the reservations that exist in broad sections of the population and even in some political circles against such a suicidal course, he writes angrily: “In Germany, however, there continues to be a prevailing mood of downplaying the greatest acute threat to freedom. ... A form of equidistant thinking is running rampant that makes the US and Russia equally responsible for the Syrian catastrophe without any factual basis.”

As an example of the “great success of the Kremlin’s strategy of subversion, which—in the old Soviet tradition—aims at the decoupling of Europe from America,” Herzinger cites the “mass demonstrations against the transatlantic free trade agreement TTIP and Ceta on German streets.”

Where *Die Welt* stirs up animosity, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ) is not far behind. Rainer Hermann criticizes the “war-weary [sic!] America,” for “not having the strength to consider smaller military interventions in parallel with the failed negotiations.” He does not consider sanctions against Russia to be advisable, with the remarkably honest reason: “because they would then have to be imposed against Saudi Arabia for its war crimes in Yemen.”

His colleague Reinhard Vesper, however, sees things differently. He accuses the West of “helplessness,” on which the Kremlin is building, and therefore urges “new sanctions against Russia.”

The loudest warmongering is that of the parliamentary group leader of the Greens, Katrin Göring-Eckardt, in the FAZ. She too compares the Syrian-Russian offensive to retake Aleppo with the massacres in Srebrenica and Rwanda.

The Green politician, who as a former president of the Synod of the Evangelical Church is well versed in questions of double standards, then called for the war in Syria to be escalated in the name of “more than 350,000 Syrian refugees and millions of volunteers who help them here.” This “directly linked Germany to the suffering in

Syria,” she declared. “We cannot be indifferent to what happens there just on moral grounds.”

There follows a long list of the political and military escalations: sanctions against Russia, a joint Syrian strategy of the European Union, putting more pressure on Assad and Putin, establishing a no-fly zone and the prosecution Assad for crimes against humanity.

The Green Party Chairman Cem Özdemir raised similar demands in an interview with *Spiegel Online*.

He accuses Assad of the “most serious war crimes” and violation of international humanitarian law. Putin wants “to keep a mass criminal in power who actually belongs before the World Criminal Court in The Hague” and “demonstrates the incapacity” of the West and Washington. Therefore, the EU must “extend its economic sanctions against Russia.”

Özdemir calls for “a comprehensive international threat of a no-fly zone,” if necessary without a UN mandate, and also supports the war policy of the United States retrospectively: “I’m not a radical pacifist. I still think it’s wrong that Germany stood aside in the Libya intervention and I have agreed to the military mission in Afghanistan.”

It is significant that it is the former pacifists of the Green Party who are today among the most vociferous warmongers, and that as well as conservative papers such as the FAZ and *Die Welt*, also liberal outlets such as *Der Spiegel* and the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* bang the drum for war. The latter published an editorial on Monday headlined, “Against Putin, only toughness helps.” They speak for better-off middle class layers, who have turned sharply to the right in the face of growing national and social tensions in Europe.



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