

How Germany is supporting Burma's ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya

Johannes Stern**22 September 2017**

It would be difficult to find an event that has exposed the hypocrisy of German human rights imperialism more clearly on the eve of the federal election than the fate of hundreds of thousands of Rohingya Muslims forced to flee from the brutal violence of the Burmese military.

Although there is substantial evidence suggesting that the Burmese army is burning down villages and torturing and raping victims, the German government has refused to call the ethnic cleansing by its real name, not to mention condemn it.

In fact, Social Democrat Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel published a statement on September 8 that partially blamed the persecuted Rohingya for the army's lethal crackdown.

Gabriel noted that he was "extremely concerned by the renewed fighting in the state of Rakhine in Burma, which was provoked by attacks on the army and police stations, and once again triggered a large influx of refugees to Bangladesh." Gabriel appealed "to all sides to contribute to de-escalation and protect the civilian population."

The foreign minister's statement is cynical and criminal. The violations of human rights by the Burmese military are flagrant and well-documented. Around 80 Rohingya villages have been burnt down over recent days, according to Human Rights Watch. Eye witnesses report that the regime is pursuing a "scorched earth" policy. "The army came and burnt our houses down. They killed our people," reported 55-year-old Usman Goni.

The *World Socialist Web Site* already noted in a previous commentary that the Western governments' reactions would have been entirely different had the ethnic cleansing occurred a decade ago, when the Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi was still

under the military's house arrest. At the time, the Western imperialist powers confronted the Burmese military with its long history of violations of human rights and even threatened it with a "humanitarian" intervention.

What has changed since then?

Suu Kyi is now the de facto prime minister in Burma and the Burmese military has become a Western ally. *Handelsblatt* reported Tuesday in an article headlined "A dubious visitor" about the close ties between the German government and Burma's notorious army chief Min Aung Hlaing. He was welcomed "with military honours" to Berlin in April and passed "through open doors into German political and business circles."

"Min Aung Hlaing's assumption that he could carry out ethnic cleansing without resistance was only strengthened when he was embraced internationally in spite of human rights violations," Mark Farmaner, head of the human rights organisation Burma Campaign, told *Handelsblatt*.

Already earlier this year, a UN report documented "Accusations of systemic violence: Executions, rapes, torture." Nonetheless, the Inspector General of the German Army, Volker Wieker, and Markus Ederer, state secretary in the Department of Foreign Affairs, met personally with the general. In addition, the Defence Ministry arranged "a visit to a German army training facility, as well as business contacts" for the Burmese general.

To put it bluntly: the same politicians and military figures who justify the German army's military interventions with phrases about "peace" and "human rights" bear joint responsibility for the mass murder in Burma. To enforce German imperialism's geostrategic and economic interests in Asia, they collaborate with forces which openly pursue policies of ethnic cleansing.

According to media reports, Min Aung Hlaing once allegedly described the Rohingya question as “unfinished business” from the Second World War.

With the return of German militarism, the Nazis’ policies of extermination are once again being revived in ruling circles in Berlin.

As part of a panel discussion at the German Historical Museum titled “Germany—an interventionist power?”, three years ago, Humboldt University Professor Jörg Baberowski declared, on the struggle against terrorist groups, “And if one is not willing to take hostages, burn villages, hang people and spread fear and terror, as the terrorists do, if one is not prepared to do such things, then one can never win such a conflict and it is better to keep out altogether.”

This is precisely the agenda being pursued by the Burmese military, with the backing of the German army, Defence Ministry and Foreign Ministry—and not against “terrorists,” but innocent civilians.



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