

# German government plans combat mission against Syria

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Behind the backs of the German people, the grand coalition of Christian Democrats and Social Democrats is preparing a massive combat mission against the Syrian government of President Bashar al-Assad. According to a report in the *Bild* newspaper published on Monday, Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen (Christian Democratic Union—CDU) is examining possible reprisals by the Luftwaffe (Air Force) against Syrian government troops should chemical weapons be used against “rebel”-held areas in Idlib province.

The *Bild*, which has close connections to military and intelligence circles, describes a “simulation game” being conducted: “If Assad were to attack his own people with poison gas, then, besides the US being joined again by Britain and France (and possibly other new allies), armed Luftwaffe tornadoes could fly missions against military infrastructure (barracks, air bases, command posts, ammunition depots, weapon depots, factories, research centres).”

The newspaper reports that the preparations by the Ministry of Defence are in response to a request from the US government to the federal Chancellery. The *Bild* writes that two weeks ago, at high-level talks, “various options were discussed in the ministry.”

In subsequent talks, options discussed included “reconnaissance flights and damage analysis following a possible attack (‘Battle Damage Assessment’), as well as possible participation in combat missions in which German tornadoes would drop bombs for the first time since the Balkan War.”

To carry out the mission, parliamentary oversight powers laid down in the Constitution are to be effectively abrogated. “Parliament would be consulted only retrospectively in the event of a rapid intervention, due to time pressure,” the newspaper reports.

In response to questions from the newspaper, the government all but confirmed the plans. The *Bild* cites a

joint statement of the defence ministry and the Social Democratic Party-led foreign ministry declaring that “The situation in Syria gives rise to the highest concerns.”

The statement continues: “Of course, we are in close contact with our American ally and European partners during these times. We constantly exchange information at all levels about the current situational view, possible further crisis scenarios and common options for action. The aim is for the parties to the conflict to avoid an escalation of the already terrible situation for the affected people. This is particularly true in regard to the use of banned chemical weapons, which have previously been used by the Assad regime.”

At a press conference, government spokesman Steffen Seibert hinted at the possibility of German air strikes against Syria. He said: “The situation in Syria, the situation in Idlib in particular, is such that you really have to worry that horrific events in other Syrian battlefields could be repeated, under conditions where hundreds of thousands of people are in grave danger.” Seibert added that the situation was being discussed with allies and partners.

The Christian Democratic parliamentary defence spokesman, Henning Otte, was even clearer, stating: “The pictures and reports reaching us are difficult to bear. Countless people in Idlib are suffering from the terror of Assad’s bombing of his own people. It is therefore important that we examine all options for action. We must, of course, also consider military action. We are in constant contact with all our partners so as to exchange situational information. There is no question that the use of chemical weapons in Syria must be prevented at all costs.”

In the *Tagesspiegel*, former Defence Minister Volker Rühle (CDU) threatened: “If the Syrian dictator uses poison gas again, the Bundeswehr (armed forces) should participate in attacks on Syrian ammunition depots. This

is the point of a common European security policy with France.”

The assertion of Social Democratic Party (SPD) leader Andrea Nahles that her party would “not agree to German participation in the war in Syria” is pure hypocrisy and has nothing to do with pacifism. In fact, while in government, the SPD pushed Germany’s entry into the Syrian war at the end of 2015 and, since the 2014 Munich Security Conference, has been the driving force behind the return of German militarism.

For the SPD, the issue is how to enforce Germany’s own interests—if necessary against the United States—in a possible military offensive against Syria. “It is in our own interests to strengthen the European pillar of the North Atlantic alliance...because we cannot leave things to Washington to the same extent as in the past,” wrote Foreign Minister Heiko Maas (SPD) recently in *Handelsblatt*.

The so-called opposition parties are participating in the war propaganda and have signalled to the ruling class on which side they stand in the event of an attack on Syria. The Green Party leader in the parliamentary defence committee, Tobias Linder, limited himself to demanding: “If the government plans such a commitment, it must first ask the Bundestag for consent and also explain how, in its view, this is compatible with international law.” He added that Germany had to make use of all avenues provided by the United Nations to prevent a chemical weapons attack by the Syrian regime.

Stefan Liebich, the Left Party parliamentary foreign policy spokesman, who has long beaten the drum for a more aggressive intervention by German imperialism in the Middle East, wrote on Twitter: “Using poison gas would be a terrible war crime. But according to the Constitution, Bundeswehr combat missions are still decided by parliament and not the government!”

In other words, the leaderships of the Left Party and the Greens are not opposed to military intervention in Syria in principle. They merely want to be included in the war planning!

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party—SGP) is the only party that has resolutely condemned military intervention in Syria and opposed the return of German militarism, basing its opposition on an international socialist programme.

When the German Air Force entered the Syrian war in late 2015, under the guise of fighting the Islamic State, the SGP warned: “The deployment of reconnaissance aircraft is just the beginning. If the Bundeswehr is once

again involved in war, demands for an increased engagement, including the use of ground troops, will soon follow. Germany is getting involved in a war that, like the Balkan conflicts before the First World War, has become the focal point of irreconcilable international conflicts.”

And this past April, when the German government backed the illegal air strikes by the United States, France and Britain against Damascus, we wrote: “The attack of the imperialist powers on Syria must be condemned in the strongest terms. The military strikes that were carried out by the US, French and British forces on Friday night with the support of the German federal government are a violation of international law that threatens to trigger a conflict with Russia, the world’s second-greatest nuclear power.”

If the imperialist powers are now planning new air strikes against Syria, it is with the aim of saving the “rebels,” led by at least 10,000 Al Qaeda fighters, whom they and their regional allies have built up and financed since the Syrian proxy war began seven years ago. Washington, Paris, London and Berlin are not concerned with human rights, but with enforcing their geo-strategic and economic interests in the Middle East, in alliance with the most reactionary forces, and rolling back the influence of Iran and Russia in Syria and throughout the region.

As for the warnings about a chemical weapons attack in Idlib, these amount to an invitation to Al Qaeda fighters to stage an incident to provide a pretext for air strikes by the imperialist powers. The Syrian government has denied responsibility for alleged poison gas attacks, such as in Douma this year and in Khan Shaykhun in April 2017. Nevertheless, both were used as justification for illegal missile and air strikes. The German government is now enlisting to participate in a new round of such attacks.



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