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German government supports possible attack on Syria

The German federal government would politically support a possible attack on Syria, Chancellor Angela Merkel (CDU) and Foreign Minister Heiko Maas (SPD) made clear in recent days.

At a press conference Thursday with visiting Danish Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen in Berlin, Merkel said: “It is right to show a common line here without Germany participating militarily.” Should the permanent members of the UN Security Council however “take steps that go beyond diplomatic measures,” the federal government would act supportively.

It is about the “very concrete question” of making clear that “the Assad regime and its allies understand that chemical weapons cannot be used,” Merkel continued. This must be done “with all due care ... but just doing nothing” would also be “difficult.” The German government supports, “everything that is done to signal that this use of chemical weapons is unacceptable.”

The Social Democratic Foreign Minister Heiko Maas commented similarly. During a trip abroad to Ireland and the UK, he said that the US and France have not called on the German government to participate in a possible military strike in Syria. “So far, there is no request,” he said in Dublin. He emphasized that the Western powers should stand together on this issue, saying, “If you want to maintain the pressure on Russia, then the Western partners cannot diverge now.”

The statements of Maas and Merkel underscore that Germany supports the launching of an illegal war of aggression that could trigger a confrontation between the nuclear powers. On Thursday, Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vasily Nebenzya warned in New York that the issue was now about averting the threat of a wider war. When asked if he meant a war between the US and Russia, he replied, “Unfortunately, we cannot rule anything out.”

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Sakharova warned that all members of the international community should “seriously consider ... the possible consequences” of allegations, threats and, above all, action against Syria. No one has authorized Western politicians to “take on the role of world police” while being “investigators, prosecutors, judges and executioners” at the same time.

Sakharova reacted to the recent threats of an attack by Washington and Paris. On Thursday afternoon, French President Emmanuel Macron said on TV TF1: “Yes, we have evidence proving that chemical weapons were used last week, at least chlorine gas, and that they were used by the regime of Bashar al-Assad.” France will “make a decision in due course, when we will consider it to be the most useful and effective.”

Macron is in close contact with Washington. US President Donald Trump declared on Thursday that the decision about a possible US military strike against Syria will be taken soon. “We now have to make some more advanced decisions. They’ll fall pretty soon,” Trump said in Washington. The day before, he threatened on Russia on Twitter. “Get ready Russia, because they [missiles] will be coming, nice and new and ‘smart!’”

The German government’s claim that it will “not militarily” participate in the impending attack on Syria is pure window-dressing. In fact, since the end of 2015, Germany has been officially a war party in Syria and tightly integrated into the US-led war coalition. On Wednesday, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ) published an article titled “Trump’s missile threat: Which role can the Bundeswehr play?” The article lists the capabilities of the German military “that could play a role in an air offensive and would be available in the region.”

The article identifies the four Tornado fighters stationed at Al-Azrak Air Base in Jordan, that are currently flying reconnaissance missions as part of the US-led “Inherent Resolve” mission against the so-called Islamic State (ISIS). In addition, an Airbus A310, which could be used for air refueling, is stationed there.

“As an alternative to the reconnaissance role,” German fighter jets “could also be used as fighter-bombers, for example, to attack enemy radar positions,” notes the FAZ.

In addition, the German Navy frigate Saxony, whose “main capability” is air defense, is deployed in the Mediterranean. That was “a contribution that the Americans appreciate,” the newspaper wrote. A second German frigate, Hesse, has operated since January together with the US carrier strike group led by the aircraft carrier USS Harry Truman. According to the FAZ, the group began its deployment to the Middle East and Europe on Wednesday and is “scheduled to support the attacks,” although the aircraft carrier has just left its home port in Norfolk, Virginia, and will not arrive in the war zone for some weeks. Even if the federal government does not deploy German warplanes and warships directly, it is unlikely that the Bundeswehr will play no role in the broader intervention against Syria. Even in the war against Libya seven years ago, which had not officially been supported by the German government, the Bundeswehr was indirectly involved, with over 100 soldiers operating in NATO command centers.

Merkel declared that she will not support an attack on Syria militarily for two main reasons.

First, the ruling class fears the opposition to war and militarism in the working class. One year ago, when the US government, with the support of Berlin, attacked the al-Shayrat air base in Syria, the vast majority of the German population opposed it.

At that time, only 29 percent supported US military action against the Assad regime, according to a poll by Infratest dimap. And only 18 percent were of the opinion that the Bundeswehr should participate in military strikes if asked by the US. Some 75 percent said that the Bundeswehr should not participate if asked. During the past year opposition against militarism and war has been growing and now a powerful strike movement is developing in Germany and France.

Second, there are fierce discussions in the ruling class about Germany’s foreign policy orientation. Influential circles in the government and the opposition argue that Germany and Europe must develop their own, more independent strategy to enforce their economic and geostrategic interests in the Middle East.

In an interview with Deutschlandfunk, Norbert Röttgen (CDU), the chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the Bundestag (German parliament), complained that “there is no European, no German Syria policy and no policy for the Middle East at all.” It is obvious that the “Europeans are starting to take care of their own interests by engaging more strongly and systematically in the Middle East, and yet it does not happen.” Germany should take responsibility now and “push for a Western and international Syria policy and make sure that it will not be abandoned again.”

Röttgen left no doubt that a German influenced Syria policy would not be less militaristic. The US military strike a year ago was “right,” he said. However, he had “pointed out at that time that a one-time campaign will remain without consequences.” Trump’s recent call to withdraw US troops from Syria, “would be another US decision to leave power politics in the region to Iran, Russia and Turkey. And that would not bode well.”

In addition, the warmongers in the German media mainly criticize Trump mainly for having no real military strategy. If an “attack really deterred Assad from continuing to gas people like vermin, it should not confine itself to the symbolic destruction of abandoned barracks or empty aircraft hangars,” commented the *Rheinische Post*. “It would have to target the regime’s military nerve centers. It would be a real intervention in the Syrian war. But one doubts whether Trump is capable of such decision.”