

EU foreign ministers push for regime change in Damascus following Syria attack

By Peter Schwarz
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Following the air strikes by the United States, France and Britain on Syria, the European Union's foreign ministers appealed on Monday for a "political solution." By means of pressure on Russia and Iran, they hope to accomplish what they have not been able to achieve with the help of the now largely defeated Islamist militias: regime change in Damascus.

Although the attack on Syria was in clear violation of international law, the EU foreign ministers' meeting in Luxembourg explicitly endorsed it. "The Council understands that the targeted US, French and UK air strikes on chemical weapons facilities in Syria were specific measures taken with the sole objective of preventing further use of chemical weapons and chemical substances as weapons by the Syrian regime to kill its own people," declared a resolution adopted unanimously. "The Council is supportive of all efforts aimed at the prevention of the use of chemical weapons."

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said during the meeting that everyone with influence in the region should be involved in a political solution, but not the Syrian government. Anyone deploying chemical weapons against his own population could not be part of the solution, he declared.

Maas went on to say that since a resolution within the framework of the United Nations was not possible due to Russian vetoes, another route would now be sought. However, Maas added, bringing peace to Syria without Moscow would not be possible.

German government spokesman Steffen Seibert spoke along similar lines in Berlin. Although he left open the possibility of a transitional period, he stressed that "a long-term solution is therefore conceivable in our view only without Assad."

In several French media outlets, French President

Emmanuel Macron offered his services as a mediator in a new diplomatic initiative aimed at Russia and Turkey. France has the task of "speaking to everyone," he said.

Macron boasted that the "perfectly executed" air strikes were a complete success. He claimed that he convinced US President Donald Trump not to withdraw US troops from Syria and to restrict the attacks to chemical weapons sites.

The calculations in Berlin and Paris are clear. They expect that Russian President Vladimir Putin, who has indicated his willingness to reach a compromise on numerous occasions and is under increased pressure due to economic difficulties brought on by US sanctions, will back down.

But regardless of how Moscow responds, this can serve only as a further escalation of the Syrian conflict. Leading representatives of the US ruling elite, including opponents of Trump, have let it be known that they will not relent until Washington has reestablished its unchallenged preeminence in the Middle East, where it has been waging war for the past 25 years.

France, the former colonial power in the region, and Germany are pursuing definite imperialist interests. The alleged gas attack in Douma, for which no reliable evidence has been presented, served as a deliberate provocation to escalate the war.

Former Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel, who is seen as more hostile to the US and more Russia-friendly than his successor Maas, has also called for a harder line in the Syria conflict in articles and public appearances over recent days.

In an opinion piece in the daily *Tagesspiegel*, the Social Democratic politician effusively praised the latest attacks. It is "right and necessary," he wrote, "to show the Assad regime and thereby all other similarly

structured systems of power and militaries: we will not look away and watch on impassively.”

Gabriel complained of “the lack of a Syria strategy from the West” and made clear that he meant by this a stronger military intervention. “Already at the beginning of the conflict,” he complained, “the entire West—Germany and Europe included—was not prepared even to impose a no-fly zone on the Syrian army.”

In 2011, the establishment of a no-fly zone was the cover for a brutal US-NATO air war that brought about the overthrow of the Gaddafi regime in Libya, plunging the country into civil war and completely subordinating it to the imperialist powers.

Now, Gabriel continued, Europe must deal with the consequences of its inaction. “When we were needed, we weren’t there. And today, in a world of carnivores, nobody is interested in us as vegetarians. We are standing on the sidelines of the conflict because the strategy of ‘clean up the world, but don’t get wet’ resulted only in we Europeans having to deal with the consequences of the civil war... but having no influence on the course of the conflict. Germany least of all, since while Donald Trump consulted with the presidents of Turkey and France and the British prime minister about what to do, he did not consult with the German government.”

Gabriel, who as foreign minister tirelessly advocated a more aggressive pursuit of Germany’s great power ambitions, knows very well what he is talking about. He was among the first signatories of a statement from the Carl-Friedrich von Weizsäcker Foundation that appeals to “the powerful of this world” to “search, with the common application of reason, for new pathways out of the danger.”

The statement explicitly warns of the danger of a nuclear world war. “An era of growing political tensions and military confrontations between the major powers [is] emerging, with the return of an arms race,” it states. Through the use of conventional and nuclear technology, the internal dynamic of this armament “is coming ever closer to the ‘point of no return.’ beyond which nobody really dares or wants to go,” it states.

“None of the structural reasons that led to the First World War has really been overcome,” the statement continues. This is a remarkable admission.

What precisely were these structural reasons? The transition of capitalism into its imperialist phase, the

emergence of monopolies, the dominance of finance capital over industrial capital, and the struggle among the major powers for the redivision of the world that results from this.

The claim that the war danger can be averted through the “common application of reason” is absurd, as demonstrated by the experiences of World War I and World War II. It is also refuted by looking at the first signatories of the statement, who, together with some artists and academics, include leading personnel from the military and political establishment.

The statement was initiated by the former general inspector of the German Army and chairman of the NATO Military Committee, Harald Kujat. Signatories include former SPD Interior Minister Otto Schily, the editor of the military journal *European Security and Defence Review*, Hartmut Bühl, right-wing extremist historian Jörg Baberowski, and many representatives from business, including the former chair of the Herbert Quandt BMW Foundation, Jürgen Chrobog.

These people are not concerned with avoiding war, as Gabriel repeatedly makes clear in his public appearances, but with remilitarization and securing for Germany, as was said prior to World War I, a “place in the sun.”

“A weak Europe,” Gabriel wrote in *Tagesspiegel*, “will not be respected by anyone. Not by the strong—the US, Russia and China—and not by the weak, for example, many African states. Europe will be able to enforce its position, values and interests in the world only if we stand together much more than before in uncomfortable and high-risk situations such as in Syria.”

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