

Germany makes a diplomatic response to the military intervention in Syria

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On 25 August, according to a statement from 10 Downing Street, Chancellor Angela Merkel in a conversation with Prime Minister David Cameron admitted that the international community had to respond firmly to the use of chemical weapons during an attack which was most likely carried out by the Syrian regime. On 26 August, the German Minister of Foreign Affairs, Guido Westerwelle, announced that if this information was confirmed, Germany would join the group of countries demanding consequences for this attack – in coordination with the UN and its allies. The media and foreign agencies have interpreted this as a statement that Germany has backed the military intervention in Syria, even if the UN Security Council (UNSC) were not to grant its mandate.

Commentary

- The government led by Angela Merkel has been trying to reconcile two contradictory approaches to the Syrian issue. On the one hand, it respects the German doctrine, which provides for strengthening international law and German participation only in those international operations which have received mandate from the UNSC. It is aware of the fact that the situation in Syria and in the entire region could develop in unpredictable ways were the international community to intervene. It is also aware of the scepticism of German public opinion (according to polls, two-thirds of respondents are opposed to the intervention) in the context of upcoming election to the Bundestag in September this year. On the other hand, the government does not want – following the experiences with Libya and Mali – its policy to be seen again as being in opposition to the actions of its strongest allies, and for Germany to be presented as a supporter of Russia and China.
- The Federal Foreign Office and the Chancellery expressed their rhetorical support for the need to make the Syrian government accountable should the information on the use of chemical weapons be confirmed and in doing so thus backed the Western political and military pressure on Syria and above all on Russia and China. The pressure has been aimed at obtaining the mandate of the UNSC to take action in order to protect the civilian population in Syria. However, none of the announcements from the government

contained an explicit statement of support for the intervention without a UNSC mandate. For the needs of domestic policy, the spokespeople of the CDU/CSU, the SPD, the FDP and the Green Party have expressed more critical opinions on a possible intervention.

- If the USA and its European allies decide to intervene without a UNSC mandate, Germany will probably not take part in the operation officially for the reasons stated above (it has the required capabilities – Tornado aircraft equipped with Taurus long-range cruise missiles). On the level of rhetoric, it may claim that the intervention is contrary to international law, but it may also express its understanding for its allies' decision. Germany will be emphasising its contribution to the air defence of Turkish territories bordering Syria – as part of the NATO-led operation Germany deployed two batteries of the Patriot air and missile defence system there in early 2013. They will not take part in the establishment of a potential no-fly zone over Syria – the Bundestag's mandate does not provide for this; they are deployed too far from the Syrian border, anyway. Germany could, however, secretly co-operate with the USA, e.g. offering support in signal intelligence (Oste class ships in the Mediterranean Sea) and, if the UNSC were to grant consent for a stabilising operation in Syria, Germany could participate in it.