

German Chancellor Merkel's refugee policy and the growing danger of a war with Russia

Ulrich Rippert
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In her government statement on Wednesday, German Chancellor Angela Merkel reiterated her well-known positions on refugee policy. In the process, she declared her intention to expand Germany's close collaboration with Turkey, which is pressing for a military confrontation with Russia in Syria.

At the beginning of her speech, Merkel stressed that her policy was geared towards a "significant reduction" in the number of refugees arriving in Europe. This anti-refugee policy had three aspects, she said. First was the fight against the causes of flight. This required intensive political and diplomatic initiatives and financial assistance to support refugee camps in the immediate vicinity of war and crisis.

Second, the EU's external borders must be effectively protected before, thirdly, the distribution of refugees within the European Union could be tackled. The differences within the ruling classes of Europe on this last point are well known. Of the 160,000 refugees that the EU agreed to distribute via a quota system last autumn, less than a thousand have been accepted. The question of refugee quotas will not be central to the summit, Merkel said. What was more important was the effective protection of the EU's external borders.

On this issue, Merkel answered her critics who are demanding the closure of national borders by arguing that such a move would destroy free movement within the Schengen Area and with it one of the most important foundations and achievements of the single European market.

As an alternative, she proposed the "securing of Europe's external borders", which means nothing more than the expansion of Fortress Europe. The EU must learn to protect its external borders effectively, she said, adding, "Therefore, I am for the use of NATO in the Aegean". NATO units should be sent to support

Frontex and the Turkish army "in the fight against people smuggling" and to secure the maritime border between Greece and Turkey.

Therefore, in Merkel's view, cooperation with the Turkish government is essential. Much had already been achieved in talks with Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, she said. Once the three billion euros promised to Turkey were released by the European Union, the construction of a huge internment camp for refugees will proceed on the Syrian border.

However, the real significance of the cooperation with the Turkish government became clear when Merkel reiterated her call for a no-fly zone in Syria, a demand repeatedly raised by the Erdogan government with far-reaching and explosive military consequences.

Merkel did not speak in such terms, however. Rather, she portrayed a no-fly zone as a humanitarian corridor to protect refugees. "That would be a sign of good will," she said. "It would in any case, reassure many, many people if no one else had to perish in Aleppo and in the territory up to the Turkish border, and no more people had to try and escape."

But this is just a smokescreen. The demand for a no-fly zone in Syria has nothing to do with humanitarianism and helping refugees. Rather, it is part of a further intensification of the military confrontation between NATO member Turkey and Russia.

Since Russia intervened militarily in Syria last September, the Erdogan government has responded with increasing aggression. In November, when a Russian fighter jet supposedly violated Turkish airspace for a few seconds, it was shot down by the Turkish Air Force.

Syrian government troops, with the active support of Russian bombers, have now launched a military

offensive in the battle for Aleppo. They have recaptured rebel-held areas and simultaneously cut an important supply route for the Islamist militias.

The US government and its allies in the region, especially Saudi Arabia and Turkey, have reacted furiously. The rebels, among whom Islamist militias like the Al-Nusra Front play a leading role, have long been supported by Ankara, Riyadh and Washington with arms, money and logistical assistance.

A no-fly zone would create the conditions for Turkey to once again build up its military and logistical support for the Islamist anti-Assad militias. Moreover, Ankara wants at all costs to prevent the Syrian Kurds from gaining ground under the protection of the Russian Air Force on the Turkish border. This could quickly lead to the formation of a Kurdish state.

To counter this, the Turkish government has intensified its attacks and is preparing for the deployment of ground troops. Such an escalation could quickly lead to a direct confrontation between NATO and Russia.

Just hours before the chancellor spoke, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* published an article with the headline, “When the Cold War gets hot.” It began, “NATO against Russia—such an escalation is no longer unthinkable.” The trial of strength has long since become a showdown in which an escalation is dependent on decisions made in the US or Russia, the newspaper wrote. The two countries are overestimating their ability to control the situation.

The editorial then describes the events of recent weeks in Syria and poses the question: What happens if there is a further conflict between Turkish and Russian troops, and Turkey demands the support of NATO? “To deny Ankara support under the NATO mutual defence clause would mean the end of the alliance; to invoke it would mean ending a cold war and starting a hot one.”

Almost exactly five years ago, the UN Security Council approved a no-fly zone over Libya. The action was justified by citing the protection of civilians and support for insurgents against a dictatorial regime. In reality, it marked the start of a terrible bombing campaign by the imperialist powers, in which countless people died and the Libyan state was destroyed, resulting in endless streams of refugees.

At that time, Germany was not involved and regarded

the western intervention as a major foreign policy mistake. Since then, Berlin has undertaken a sharp rightward turn in foreign policy and made the decision to pursue great power politics and military rearmament.

Merkel’s collaboration with the Turkish government and her support for a no-fly zone in Syria has far-reaching consequences. It underlines the intention of the German government to sharply escalate its participation in the war in Syria and beyond.



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