

Sending Heavy Weapons to Ukraine in German Interests?

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*Political polarization in Germany continues to increase. Currently, there is strong pressure for German **Chancellor Olaf Scholz** to take a more incisive stance on the Ukrainian issue. The opposition insists on the need to send weapons to support Zelensky, endorsing the speech spread by NATO and the EU. It is evident that by refusing to take such positions, Scholz is trying to look for the interests of his country, but it remains to be seen whether he will be really strong enough to deal with the pressure coming both externally, from Brussels and London, and internally in Berlin.*

Recently, Scholz met in London with his British counterpart **Boris Johnson** to discuss the Ukrainian conflict. During the conversation, Johnson clearly pressed Scholz to go along with the UK and the rest of the West in their stance of absolute opposition to Russia in the conflict. The Chancellor, however, avoided giving clear answers and maintained his ambiguous position on the possibility of supporting Kiev militarily, preventing from doing more incisive statements and preferring silence.

What happened next was even more remarkable and symbolic: the British prime minister traveled to Kiev to meet with Zelensky while Scholz returned to Germany in order to promote electoral campaign. The international mainstream media took advantage of the fact to intensify its pro-NATO propaganda, claiming that Scholz is concerned only with his internal political condition, ignoring the current international situation, while the Western world is supposedly “concerned” and takes the Ukrainian issue as a “humanitarian” priority.

In Germany, Scholz’s opponents are also increasingly agitated to criticize the chancellor, taking benefit of international pressure to intensify polarization and generate a crisis of legitimacy against him. Obviously, this was a predictable attitude on the part of opposition groups, but the main problem currently is that Scholz is losing support within his own coalition. The Free Democratic Party (FDP) and the Green Party are deeply dissatisfied with

Germany's unwillingness to send weapons to Kiev and use the case as a pretext to point to Scholz as a "big problem" to be solved through an electoral overthrow. And, in this sense, his situation is really worsening day after day.

In general, Scholz's enemies demand that he takes a more active stance on the German role in the conflict. The chancellor is characterized by an extremely passive posture, avoiding making decisions until they become inevitable. Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann, a member of the FDP and head of the Defense Committee in parliament, for example, recently commented that Scholz needs to "take the baton in his hand and set the rhythm." In other words, opponents are asking Scholz to guarantee Germany a leading role on the European stage, as might be expected from the continent's greatest economic power.

The central problem in this topic is that Scholz already seems to have realized that the most strategic thing for Germany is to remain as neutral as possible and away from any involvement in activities that harm the partnership with Russia, which is a very important commercial pillar for Germany. Scholz did not want to adhere to large-scale economic sanctions, especially regarding the SWIFT ban and the energy boycott. But he was forced to slowly accept such measures as other Western countries implemented them. This has been his typical behavior: postponing but, in the end, passively adhering to all Western measures when he finds himself "isolated".

In this sense, the opposition is right on one point: Scholz has to change his attitudes and assume a leadership position, since this is what is expected from a country like Germany, which for years has consolidated itself as one of the "leaders" of the European bloc. The oppositionists' problem is that they are pressuring Scholz to assume a leadership stance that is as damaging to German interests as his current indecision and passivity.

It is naive to think that sending heavy weapons to Ukraine benefits German interests in any way. On the contrary, it only extends the abyss between Moscow and Berlin even further, and with practically no benefit in return for the Germans: neither Ukraine will be sufficiently strengthened to win the conflict by receiving such heavy weaponry, nor will Germany reassume a supposed role of "leadership" in Europe.

It is not by chance that the greatest pressure on the Germans so far has been exerted precisely by Boris Johnson. The UK is not part of the EU and therefore does not care about the German role in the bloc, but, on the other hand, it is one of the most important members of NATO and tries to elevate its status in the military alliance as a way of boosting its international image in this post-Brexit context. In fulfilling British requests, Scholz would only be pursuing non-German and non-European interests.

It is obvious that there is also pressure within Europe and within Germany itself, but this pressure belongs to an outdated view of what the role of Germans and Europeans in the Western world should be. Scholz's opponents apparently still expect a totally submissive stance on NATO from Berlin. This is also a very active thought in Brussels, with a strong tendency to see the entire European continent as a mere annex of the American military umbrella, ignoring that Europe has its own interests, which can often collide with those of the Western military alliance. That is why, in trying to prevent Germany from getting actively involved in the Ukrainian case, Scholz proves to be a really pragmatic politician who prioritizes the interests of his own country, but without the political force necessary to guarantee them.

In addition, there is a topic that needs to be mentioned, which is the German military passiveness of the last seventy years. Although it is active within NATO and has been trying to reform its defense forces in recent years, Berlin remains a virtual-demilitarized country, with an army of low offensive potential, outdated weaponry and a low-investment war industry.

In order to send heavy weapons to Ukraine, Germany would have to start a broad military industrial investment, which would cost it not only millions of euros, but a change in its international image, returning to being a nation of effective participation in international conflicts. Of course, improving its military status is a German right, but it must be taken into account in the name of what Berlin intends to do so. Would it really be strategic to break with seventy years of pacifism to defend the interests of the Maidan Junta in a conflict where Russian victory is highly predictable?

Scholz needs to be strong and active in defending German interests. His posture of passivity and silence demonstrates weakness and damages the image of both him and his country. But his stance must not be to subject Germany even more to foreign interests: on the contrary, he must assert what is in Berlin's interests and pragmatically defend it, even if he has to clash with the NATO's plans to do so. If Germany is interested in neutrality and maintaining good relations with Russia, Scholz must not only refrain from adhering to the new Western sanctions but also revoke those taken so far.

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