

Steinmeier Takes On The U.S. War Party

by William Jones

March 13—German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, speaking at a Statesmen’s Forum event at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington yesterday, warned against any attempts to provide lethal aid to the Ukrainian military. “This could catapult the conflict into the next phase in which it spirals completely out of control,” Steinmeier said.

The foreign minister was in Washington for talks with Secretary of State John Kerry, and he took the opportunity of an invitation from CSIS to try to bring some sanity to a debate in Washington over arming Ukraine, which he said is “spiraling out of control.”

Steinmeier was warmly greeted by Kerry at the State Department, with whom he has a fairly close relationship. But concerns had already been raised by the Germans about provocative statements by U.S. Air Force Gen. Philip Breedlove, the head of U.S. European Command, who has been clearly hyping the situation in Ukraine, apparently eager for a “show of force.” According to Sputnik News, Steinmeier had had words with NATO General Secretary Jens Stoltenberg over some of Breedlove’s outlandish statements.

While expressing concern about the Russian annexation of Crimea and the fighting in eastern Ukraine, Steinmeier said that it was absolutely key that the West continue to maintain its channels with Moscow and not to try to isolate it entirely, in order, in the future, “to explore a path to a more cooperative relationship.”

The Minsk agreement among Russia, Ukraine, Germany, and France provides the basis for this coopera-

tion, Steinmeier said, and should be pursued in spite of occasional violations on various sides. “We see some progress,” he said. “The violence has been significantly reduced, and both parties finally, with some delay, started their withdrawal of heavy weapons. The OECD has deployed monitors in some areas, and while more must be done, we must proceed in this direction.”

In his prepared comments, which he presented in

English, he was quite clear in his rejection of military action. “The discussed alternative to our approach [i.e. military build-up] has the potential of increasing the number of victims, extending the zone of conflict and expanding the conflict into the next phase of escalation, perhaps to a point of no return,” Steinmeier warned. Citing Henry Kissinger, he called for “strategic patience.”

Nevertheless, not everybody was happy with his statesmanlike reasoning. In the question-and-answer period, he was pummeled with questions regarding a possible sale of weapons to the Ukrainian Army, including one from that

maestro of “shock therapy” Ander Aslund, the mild-mannered Swedish economist, whose economic theories reduced Russia’s population and almost destroyed its economy during the Yeltsin era, and who has been at war with President Putin ever since he helped Russia recover from the damage Yeltsin and “shock therapy” had dealt it.

Reverting in the Q&A to his native German, the foreign minister seemed more inclined to take off the gloves against his irate interlocutors. While admitting that the Ukrainian Army was having a difficult time in facing the separatists (in spite of the proliferation of Ukrainian Nazi bands operating on their own steam), he felt that pouring in weapons to the Ukrainian army, as hawkish layers among both Republicans and Democrats are calling for, would not have the desired effect, and could lead to a more dangerous conflict. “We should move for a quick end to the conflict,” Steinmeier urged.

“If weapons are provided to the Ukrainian army, Russia will increase the support to the separatists. The



CSIS video

German Foreign Minister Steinmeier said in Washington March 12 that arming Ukraine would “expand the conflict into the next phase of escalation, perhaps to a point of no return.”

differences between the two forces will be unchanged, but the level of escalation will have increased,” he pointed out. “Here, there is the risk that we catapult the conflict into the next phase, where we in some way reach a point at which the conflict spins completely out of control. We then come into a lengthy conflict that can lead to a situation where the Ukrainian Army is directly confronting the Russian Army. And this is not in anyone’s interest, and certainly not in Ukraine’s interest,” he said.

Steinmeier also noted how military engagement often leads to consequences that no one has foreseen, referring pointedly to the lack of success in most military undertakings (all initiated by war hawks in the U.S.) during the last few decades.

While the question period was dominated by questions on Ukraine, Steinmeier was also asked about Iran. He used the opportunity to express his concerns about the letter signed by 47 U.S. Senators, warning that any deal that might be negotiated over the Iranian nuclear program would not pass Senate muster and would not survive the next U.S. President. Steinmeier called the letter “unhelpful.” “This is not a trifle,” he said. “The negotiations are difficult enough, so we didn’t actually need further irritations.” For some time, Steinmeier

noted, the problem in the negotiations had to do with Iran’s credibility in keeping promises that might be made in an agreement. “The letter from the Congressmen now lets them question *our* credibility,” Steinmeier said.

Within 24 hours, Steinmeier was attacked by Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), one of the signers of the letter, ostensibly because of his comments about the letter. But it was obvious that there was more bothering the irascible McCain. He accused Steinmeier of belonging to the “Neville Chamberlain school of diplomacy” in his policy on Ukraine. “The foreign minister of Germany is the same guy that refuses—and his government—to enact any restrictions on the behavior of Vladimir Putin, who is slaughtering Ukrainians as we speak,” McCain told reporters. “He doesn’t have any credibility in any way to me.”

It’s obvious that the German foreign minister got under the skin of the unstable Arizona Senator, who really hasn’t seen a war that he didn’t want to fight. McCain has been one of the key proponents for the U.S. arming of the Ukrainian Army, as he did the Syrian “liberation fighters.” It is hoped, however, that cooler heads may prevail, and that the wise words of this German statesman may have the desired effect in preventing an Armageddon.

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