

Berlin Forum for Security Policy—popularising war once again

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A meeting was held in early December under the auspices of Impulse 21—the Berlin Forum for Security Policy. Impulse 21, an initiative of Germany's defence ministry, has held meetings since 2003 involving senior military leaders and politicians to discuss questions of foreign and domestic security, NATO, relations with the European Union and the tasks of the Bundeswehr (Federal Armed Forces).

In the past, these had usually been meetings where political specialists like former defence ministers Volker Rühe (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) and Peter Struck (Social Democratic Party, SPD), or Bavarian Interior Minister Günther Beckstein (Christian Social Union, CSU), met alongside representatives of the military. In 2006, however, Chancellor Angela Merkel (CDU) attended for the first time to report on the "goals and interests of German security policy." The recent gathering was addressed by federal president Horst Köhler, Germany's highest political representative.

In his speech, Köhler made clear that 63 years after the end of the Second World War Germany's ruling elite has decided it may again need to conduct wars. The only snag—the population shows no agreement with this position.

In the future, according to Köhler, there should be less controversy over whether an army deployment is for humanitarian purposes or "to maintain the peace." Instead, what was necessary is that this should be "conveyed and implemented with political conviction, including ... in the domestic population, because in a democracy, military commitments abroad stand or fall by their general acceptance." What this means is an increase in the military budget, to be spent on more modern war technology, "a question," he said, "that we should not evade." It should not be allowed to happen "that we pursue good aims with insufficient means."

Also, Köhler said, it is not enough to simply refer to the mutual obligations of the NATO alliance. "Loyalty to the alliance alone is not a sufficient argument as far as our citizens are concerned, who require convincing reasons to

justify the most difficult military interventions." Recognising such reasons, according to Köhler, could "strengthen insight into the political necessities" of German interests. This presupposes, however, "that we convincingly define our interests, argue for them and then follow them through with determination."

Köhler was critical that the general population was not sufficiently aware of the "foreign circumstances for our liberty and our prosperity," so the readiness was lacking "to stabilise and maintain these factors." He pleaded for more "education" in this direction.

However, the pictures of torture from Guantánamo, the brutal methods of the US troops occupying Iraq, and the repeated military attacks on the civilian population in Afghanistan were detrimental to German enthusiasm for war. Köhler said NATO needed to return to the military alliance's "community of values."

The former IMF boss then posed the question: "What are our values worth to us?"

In order to counter popular opposition, Germany's great power politics and its geo-strategic and military interests should be subordinated to higher ideals. With such tried and true slogans as "the defence of human rights," "preserving the peace," or, in Köhler's own words, opposition to the "world market for drugs and the trade in illegally obtained raw materials," against the "decay of state order," or against the "lack of opportunities for generations of young people," some pacifists may perhaps in future be placated.

Köhler's humanitarian clichés, however, meant to ensure Germany's "political interests" are realised, lack originality and recall the propaganda about a "civilizing mission" used to justify Kaiser Wilhelm's colonial policy before the First World War.

In the first decade of the 20th century, when Germany's bloody colonial war in southwest Africa (in what today is Namibia) met with opposition in the German population, Berlin advocated a more "moderate" colonial policy. The atrocities of colonialism were hidden behind a verbal barrage about the humanitarian and civilizing role of the

German occupation. Even prominent social democrats like Eduard Bernstein repeated this propaganda and talked of a "socialist colonial policy."

In more recent times, the Green Party and its foreign minister, Joschka Fischer, took the lead in advancing humanitarian justifications for Germany's warmongering. In spring 1999, the SPD-Green Party federal government justified its participation in NATO's war against Serbia with the necessity of preventing "genocide" in Kosovo. When popular opposition in Germany would not dissipate, Fischer stepped up his demagogy and claimed that the behaviour of Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic could only be compared to "Adolf Hitler's contempt for human beings." Speaking to journalists, Fischer said that the actions of the Serbian militias toward the exhausted and starving refugees reminded him of the worst pictures of the destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto.

Since then, military missions in Afghanistan and elsewhere have all been justified with reference to their "humanitarian" aims. The concept of "interlinked security" implies a supposed amalgam of diplomacy, development aid, police and uniformed support, which control the levers of war, but that only use them if the situation cannot be stabilised in any other way. The concept is increasingly being considered for use in dealing with difficult situations inside Germany.

The recent attacks in Mumbai were also discussed at the forum. Köhler stated that if such attacks were to take place in Germany the police would be completely overwhelmed.

The highest representative of German politics said he expected the following of the population: No army in the world can rely only on modern weapons; it also needs the "support of fellow citizens" and "involvement in its dangerous service."

To the applause of the assembled military top brass and politicians, Köhler exclaimed, "What we need are regard, solidarity and gratitude for our soldiers. Those who fall in the fight against terrorism and violence and who put at risk their lives and health for Germany's community and a better and safer world should be held in high esteem."

Köhler's words were also emphasised by the laying of a foundation stone for a memorial in central Berlin honouring fallen soldiers due to be opened next summer. Clearly, plans are already well developed for an increasing number of fallen soldiers, whereby the term "fallen" has only recently come back into official parlance.

The importance of propaganda, particularly in questions of war, was underlined by the fact that alongside the defence ministry the *Berliner Tagesspiegel* newspaper was co-organiser of the forum.

Behind such open ideological preparations for war lie the rapid changes, fractures and strains in international economy

and politics, which are intensifying both foreign and domestic tensions to an extraordinary degree.

In the years since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Bundeswehr has been reequipped—from a component of NATO intended for territorial defence "against communism" into a highly modern army of intervention in the interests of Germany's new great power politics. In the meantime, the necessary "re-orientation of the Bundeswehr from territorial defence into an army capable of [foreign] deployment ... has succeeded completely," Köhler noted with satisfaction.

Ordinary people, who will be expected to "bear the pain," were excluded from the forum. Only a selection of accredited journalists was permitted to attend. In order to exclude possible surprises, the job of chairing proceedings was assigned to a leading editorial board member of *Zweite Deutsches Fernsehen*, the state-run German television channel. And like a pupil undergoing an examination, *Berlin Tagesspiegel* boss Stephan-Andreas Castorff was allowed to provide a summary of the discussion from the podium. The subservience of the media could hardly have been more obvious.

Significantly, the new war memorial will be erected on land belonging to the defence ministry. Unlike the Greens, who had argued for it to be placed near to the Bundestag (federal parliament), the government seems to be looking ahead to a time when the war memorial could become the focus for public protests against war. Nearby, on Potsdamer Platz, is the site where in 1916 Karl Liebknecht delivered his famous speech against the First World War. The sobering and horrific experiences of that war for many young soldiers and their families became a powerful impulse for the German revolution of 1918.



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