

# President Gauck demands more support for Germany's army

Wolfgang Weber  
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Joachim Gauck has held office as president of Germany for more than 100 days. If anyone still believed that his predecessor Christian Wulff had been driven out of office by the media due merely to unpaid hotel bills or acceptance of other “little gifts”, then he will have since been disabused.

In the latest instance, the president's speech to the German military commanders' academy on June 12 should have made abundantly clear why Gauck was given the job. He has been commissioned to contribute to a rapid and energetic turn to a more aggressive domestic and foreign policy despite all opposition.

For this purpose, the president is endowed not with any far-reaching political powers, but rather with a very specific ideological agenda. Gauck tackles his tasks most energetically and in a manner carefully coordinated with the government and its advisers.

In a remarkable commentary in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* in early May, Jan Techau, director of the right-wing think tank Carnegie Europe, identified opposition on the part of the German population as the main obstacle to a militarisation of the country's foreign policy. He writes: “Whether it likes it or not, Germany is today the largest and strongest geographically central country in Europe and therefore the continent's leading power.... But Germans find it difficult to accept this fact.” Techau goes on to explain why: “The trauma of its own history”—by which he means the barbarism of two world wars and Nazi-fascism—“continues to hold sway”.

The result of such a “purported innocence in response to the awareness of historical guilt” is a cowardly “holding back” or “ducking out of the way”—as in the case of the war against Libya, Techau maintains. He concludes: “Germany will only be able to find its role in world affairs when it makes peace with itself: We need to forgive ourselves—without forgetting”.

Techau called for Germany to make a more robust “material and intellectual” contribution to the development of NATO. It should no longer “back down when it comes to combat operations”. Instead of “cowering away, and showing itself as inhibited, timid and fearful”, Germany must “accommodate the past by accepting responsibility for the future, and bear that responsibility boldly, decisively and energetically”. These are the words Techau uses to invoke what essentially can be termed the militarisation of foreign policy, or the return to war as an instrument of policy.

However, as combat missions are still largely rejected by the population, Techau ended his newspaper commentary with a direct challenge to President Gauck to address this problem, to help end the general “ducking away”, to break the opposition and thus “create domestic preconditions for an appropriate foreign policy”. Techau writes: “Who, if not the ... man of God Gauck”—Gauck is a Lutheran pastor—“could make it clear to Germans in a great speech that they can only live in freedom and peace within themselves, with their neighbours and the world, when they can muster the courage to forgive themselves”.

Gauck promptly complied with this request and delivered a “great

speech”—to the Bundeswehr (German army). As is so often the case, he struck an anti-communist note at the start of his speech. As a “victim of decades of dictatorship” in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR), he declared that he was now besotted with happiness to be able to stand before the German arm—the armed forces that, in contrast to the East German army, supposedly consisted of a real “people's army”, dedicated to the “battle for peace and freedom”:

“I stand before the army that I have been able to call ‘my army’ for the past 22 years. ... After all the crimes of the Nazi dictatorship and the horrors of war, we are so fortunate to have managed to create such an army in this land: an army of the people in the best and only real sense of the words; not a state within a state, not an army of a party, but a parliamentary army, tied to democratic values, the constitution and military law ... And so, for me, the army is part of the ‘democratic miracle’ that took place in western Germany following the Second World War—and then in the east of our country a little more than two decades ago”.

This “democratic miracle” deserves to be looked at more closely. In October 1950, Gustav Heinemann—later to become the federal president, but then still a member of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU)—resigned from the office of federal interior minister in Konrad Adenauer's first federal cabinet in protest against this “democratic miracle”! It had become known that Chancellor Adenauer not only had agreed with the US behind the backs of the cabinet to a course of military rearmament; in May 1950, he had already taken practical steps in this direction, namely, the creation of the entirely secret—secret even to the cabinet!—Centre for Homeland Services (ZfH). Led by former Reichswehr general Gerhard Graf von Schwerin, the ZfH became a department in the federal chancellery subordinated directly and only to Adenauer personally. Its task was to immediately cooperate with numerous Reichswehr generals and officers to systematically prepare for the construction of a new national army, although this—five years after the end of the war!—had not been sanctioned in parliament, let alone by a popular referendum. [1]

Gustav Heinemann sharply criticised these proceedings, justifying his resignation from office thus: “The chancellor thinks in terms of authoritarian decision-making and proxy commitments. ... If the will of the German people is to play a role in any issue, then it certainly should do so in the question of rearmament”. [2]

The formation of the Bundeswehr was never subjected to a democratic decision on the part of the German people, any more than were the currency reform, the establishment of the West German state or the constitution. All these measures were aggressive Western initiatives in the wake of the Cold War, aimed at putting economic, political and military pressure on the Soviet-occupied zone and the Soviet Union and drive it to collapse, i.e., to achieve a “reorganisation of all of Eastern Europe”, as Adenauer put it. The Stalinist bureaucracy in Moscow and East Berlin, which up to 1952 pursued the goal of establishing a neutral, disarmed Germany as a buffer state between East and West, was simply left to

respond however it could.

Gustav Heinemann did prove to be a reliable chief witness with respect to those developments as well, since as a long-time legal adviser and coal mine director of the huge Rheinstahl Group he was completely above suspicion of harbouring “socialist inclinations”. “At the time, I came to believe”, he later wrote, “that the general political situation was developing along extremely dangerous lines, and was above all being pushed by the Americans with the aim of putting the East under military and political pressure”. [3]

Something else should be noted about Gauck’s “democratic miracle”. People who criticised Adenauer’s rearmament policy and demonstrated against it faced the threat of long prison terms and hefty fines up until the mid-1960s. The treason and high treason legislation, abolished by the occupying allies as a relic of the Nazi-rule, was reintroduced into criminal law in the summary proceedings of the First Criminal Law Amendment of May 1951. On this basis, the blatantly politically motivated judiciary opened a total of 250,000 criminal proceedings against not only Communist Party members and their families, but also members of peace initiatives, left-wing unionists and Christian opponents of war. Merely due to their opinions, an estimated 10,000 opponents of the Adenauer government were branded “enemies of the constitution”, “communist rodents” or “stooges of Pankow” (the East Berlin government) and sentenced often to substantial fines and lengthy incarceration in detention centres or prisons [4]. The judges who imposed such sentences had for the most part previously held their positions in the Third Reich and had been seamlessly taken over by the post-war German state—just like countless generals, officers, police and secret service officials. Conversely, not a single one of the approximately 3,000 Nazi military judges was held accountable for the 30,000 death penalties carried out against conscientious objectors and deserters.

But this was only the prelude to the “great speech”. The prelude was followed by the chorale. Gauck heaped praise on the transformation of the Bundeswehr into a global combat force for war operations: “While we sit here, thousands of our army’s soldiers are stationed on missions on three continents. Armed forces in the Balkans, on the Hindu Kush and the Horn of Africa are in action against terrorists and pirates ... Who would have believed it possible twenty years ago? So, dear men and women of the army are trained today with the clear prospect of being sent on such missions—with all the associated dangers to body, soul and life”.

However, he did not confine himself to mere war propaganda. The hymn to the armed forces was closely accompanied, as required, by an attack on the “looking-the-other-way, ducking-out-of-the-way, don’t-want-to-know attitude of the people”—an attack on “the middle of society(’s)” lack of appreciation and support for the military and its operations.

“All of this should not only be debated at management levels and in parliament”, stressed Gauck. It needs to be debated, “where the importance of our armed forces should be recognised: in the middle of our society”. The head of state continued: “We don’t like to think there are again wounded veterans in our midst today. People whose service to Germany has cost them their physical or mental health. And society finds it hard to bear that once again German soldiers are killed in action.”

Gauck called for more public discussions with soldiers and officers to overcome the reluctance to accept war operations: “Generals, officers, army soldiers, you should be back at the centre of our society!” He returned to this demand several times, obviously suggesting that soldiers and officers should appear more often and express themselves in the press and on talk shows in order to set the right tone. According to the president, there was “in our society still too little of the same readiness to make sacrifices” as shown by Bundeswehr soldiers, too little readiness to die; instead, people were contenting themselves with a virtual “addiction to happiness”.

Gauck was scathing about such a pursuit of happiness: “The fact that there are once again German casualties is hard for our happiness-seeking society to bear.... We can’t have freedom without responsibility. For you, dear servicemen and women, this is self-evident. Is it also self-evident in our society? The securing of our freedom and well-being is seen by many as the responsibility of the state and democracy. Some confuse freedom with thoughtlessness, indifference and hedonism [enjoying life]. Others are very good at exercising their rights or, where necessary, vehemently demanding them. And they forget all too easily that a functioning democracy also requires effort, vigilance, courage, and sometimes the most a human being can give: life, one’s own life”.

This “willingness to make sacrifices” had become rare nowadays, according to Gauck. “But”, he said, “here, among the armed forces, I meet people who are willing to dedicate themselves to something—people who are, so to speak, ‘courage-citizens in uniform’!”

By using the term “courage-citizens in uniform”, Gauck announced the departure from the notion of “state citizens in uniform”, the overall concept of the Bundeswehr reform since the 1970s which had implied that the difference between soldiers of the Bundeswehr and other normal citizens in the post-war period was not killing and dying, but just a uniform. Moreover, Gauck thereby raised the soldiers’ fighting spirits and willingness to die to an ideal for all citizens without uniforms: to an ideal countering what Gauck sees as the reprehensible pursuit of well-being and happiness.

Already two years before his election as president, in an interview with the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Joachim Gauck had violently attacked people’s longing for happiness. “People must raise themselves from the hammock of expecting happiness through pleasure and prosperity!” the pastor declared. And to the reporter’s question, “Are things going too well for us?” he responded: “It’s the result of a life that no longer has to be won every day anew. It’s different in times of crisis or dictatorship”. Today he would probably add: “and also in times of war”. “When everything is going well for us, life’s challenges are not so noticeable ... and there’s a search for meaning.” The reporter asked: “Are we too materialistic?” and Gauck replied: “Honestly, yes, I think so. It’s not just our epoch. People’s craving for immediate satisfaction in order to count themselves happy is part of the dark side of human nature.”

With these remarks Joachim Gauck directly echoes the “cultural critique” of bourgeois ideologists and writers in Germany prior to the First World War. These intellectuals used almost identical words to complain about the predominance of “materialism” in society, the loss of high ideals or rather the unwillingness to die for them. They welcomed crises, poverty and war as “liberation from decadence”, “purifying disasters”, “heroic tests for a meaningful higher existence”—concepts that supplied militarists then as now with all the ideological ammunition they required.

Colmar Freiherr von der Goltz, a senior German empire general and brutal organizer of the occupation of Belgium during the First World War, wrote seven years before the start of the slaughter: “Most of all, I do wish the German fatherland two good things, namely, complete impoverishment and punishing war lasting for several years. Then the German people might perhaps be able to rise once again and save themselves from moral disintegration for centuries.” [5]

It is not only with the invocation of crisis, war and sacrifice as opportunities for “meaningful, more worthy existence”, transcending the “dark side of human nature”, that Gauck harks back to the ideologues of German imperialism before the First World War. His tirades against the “pursuit of happiness” are also in line with this tradition.

Philosophers such as Max Scheler, sociologists such as Georg Simmel and economists such as Werner Sombart indulged in exactly the same lamentations, often invoking Friedrich Nietzsche and his scattered aphorisms against “materialism” and “hedonism”. They thereby expressed their bitter hostility to the growing labour movement, which had

adopted a revolutionary socialist program in its fight for social equality, and was unwilling to tolerate any longer a tiny minority reveling in wealth at the top of society while the majority sank into poverty and adversity.

Joachim Gauck's sermons against the "addiction to happiness and prosperity" also amount to targeted attacks by a representative of the propertied class on the basic social and democratic rights of working people in Germany and throughout Europe. The opposition of Greek or Spanish workers to the misery dictated by Berlin and Brussels; protests against austerity drives to "save the banks"; opposition to colonial wars in Afghanistan and Somalia—this is what Gauck castigates as "addiction to happiness" and "aspiration to well-being".

The American Declaration of Independence counts the "pursuit of happiness" together with freedom and the right to life among the inalienable rights of all people. For the wealthy financial elite in Germany and its political and ideological representatives in Berlin these rights are no longer acceptable, no longer compatible with their rule.

That was the subtext of the speech by the German president to the Bundeswehr.

**Notes:**

1. For details, see Mathias Molt, *Von der Wehrmacht zur Bundeswehr*—continuity and discontinuity in the structure of the German armed forces from 1955 to 1966, Heidelberg, 2007; pp. 74ff. As an indiscretion on the part of Count von Schwerin brought Adenauer's secret operation to the attention of the press, he was removed from office and the ZfH dismantled after only six months, and replaced by the so-called "Blank Department", which was however given the same tasks.

2. Quoted from Heinrich Hannover, *Die Republik vor Gericht 1954-1974*. Memoirs of a troublesome lawyer, Berlin 1998, 2nd Edition, p. 70.

3. Ibid.

4. See Heinrich Hannover on the trial of the Düsseldorf Peace Committee 1959/60, op. cit., pp. 57ff.

5. Quoted from Wolfram Wette (Pub.), *Schule der Gewalt. Militarism in Germany 1871-1945*. Berlin 2005; p. 53.



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