

Germany, US push aggressive policies at Munich Security Conference

Stefan Steinberg
3 February 2014

This weekend, some 400 leading international political and military figures and representatives of defense contractors, banks and corporations gathered at the Munich Security Conference (MSC) to discuss the global military and security situation. Both John Kerry and Chuck Hagel participated, marking the first time the US secretaries of state and defense both attended the conference.

The MSC featured a series of speeches by top German officials announcing an aggressive military policy, effectively repudiating the traditional restraints on German militarism that have existed since the collapse of the Nazi regime at the end of World War II. The belligerent tone of the conference was laid down by the former East German pastor and current president of Germany, Joachim Gauck.

Declaring that Germany must stop using its past—i.e., its role in starting two world wars in the 20th century—as a “shield,” Gauck called for the country’s armed forces to be used more frequently and decisively. “Germany can’t carry on as before,” Gauck argued. It was necessary to overcome German indifference and European navel-gazing, he said, in the face of “rapid” and “dramatic” new threats to the “open world order.”

This was a signal that German imperialism intends to intervene, militarily if need be, in the world’s major conflicts—the Middle East wars, most prominently the US-led proxy war in Syria; Berlin’s conflict with Moscow over Ukraine; and East Asia, where the US is carrying out a “pivot to Asia” against China.

Gauck made clear that the interests of German imperialism spanned the globe and raised a number of questions: “Are we doing what we can to stabilise our neighbourhood, both in the East and in Africa? Are we doing what we have to in order to counter the threat of terrorism? And, in cases where we have found convincing reasons to join our allies in taking even military action,

are we willing to bear our fair share of the risks?”

“When the last resort—sending in the Bundeswehr [the military]—comes to be discussed, Germany should not say no on principle,” he concluded.

Gauck’s global call to arms was reiterated at the conference in separate contributions by Germany’s new defence minister, Ursula von der Leyen (Christian Democratic Union), and Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier (Social Democratic Party).

Von der Leyen said: “The audience does not need to look at the program of this conference to become aware of the current crises and conflicts we are facing today: the appalling war in Syria, the gloomy situation in Libya, the deteriorating situation in some parts of our neighboring continent, Africa... To sit and wait is not an option. If we have means, we have capabilities, we have the obligation and we have the responsibility to engage.”

Steinmeier called on Germany to be “ready to engage in foreign and security policy issues earlier, more decisively, and more substantially.” He called for the elaboration of a joint European security policy in close collaboration with the United States, also calling for talks with Russia to secure Western interests in Ukraine and Iran.

Steinmeier was one of the first to greet Kerry when he landed in Germany for the conference, both men stressing their close and friendly relationship.

The main opponent addressed by all of the advocates of a renewed role for German militarism is the German population. A recent poll by the ARD “Morgenmagazin” concluded that 61 percent of the population are opposed to any increased intervention by the German army in Africa. Another survey published last Friday revealed that 45 percent believe the Bundeswehr is already doing “too much” overseas.

Serious divisions emerged at the conference over Ukraine, where Germany and the United States have taken lead roles in backing anti-government protests by

the pro-European Union opposition, which is politically led by far-right elements, including the fascistic Svoboda (Freedom) party. Russian and Ukrainian officials criticized the Western policy.

While Ukrainian Foreign Minister Leonid Kozhara complained that the opposition had not negotiated with the Ukrainian regime in good faith, Ukrainian opposition leader Vitali Klitschko accused the regime of using “terror and violence” against his supporters.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov also criticized US and EU claims that by supporting the opposition, they were promoting democracy. “What does incitement of violent street protests have to do with the promotion of democracy? Why do we not hear condemnation of those who seize government buildings and attack police and use racist, anti-Semitic and Nazi slogans?” he said.

Western officials bluntly dismissed these comments. Kerry claimed the fight for a democratic European future was nowhere more apparent than in Ukraine. In his remarks on Ukraine, Kerry dismissed the prominent role played by neo-fascist thugs in the recent protests in Kiev as “unsavory elements” to be found “in the streets in any chaotic situation.”

Kerry’s own speech to the conference was riddled with distortions and evasions. At one point, he boasted of the accumulation of wealth in America, claiming that, based on “marketplace” principles, “in the 1990s... every single quintile of our income earners [saw] their income go up... We created the greatest wealth the world has seen during the 1990s, greater even in America than the period of the Pierponts and the Morgans and the Rockefellers, Carnegies, Mellons, much greater.”

In another part of his speech, Kerry justified the spying activities of the National Security Agency, which have met with massive international criticism, particularly from broad layers of the German population. Declaring that democracy in America has “always been a work in progress,” Kerry defended the expansion of worldwide surveillance by the NSA under the Obama administration and applauded the government’s recent plan for a “review and revision of our signals intelligence practices...”

Ignoring the enormous growth of social inequality in America and the attacks on democratic rights carried out by his own government, Kerry announced: “We have detected a disturbing trend. Through many parts of Eastern Europe and the Balkans, the aspirations of citizens are being trampled beneath corrupt and oligarchic interests, interests that use money to stifle political

opposition and dissent, to buy politicians and media outlets.”

The hypocrisy of Kerry’s remarks is staggering. The principle role models of the oligarchs in Eastern Europe are the billionaire financiers and asset strippers on Wall Street. In the course of the past 25 years, oligarchs in Russia, Ukraine and elsewhere have made their fortunes on the basis of the same “marketplace” principles Kerry defended in his speech.

In his remarks, Kerry essentially demanded that Russia agree to allow Ukraine to be brought into the sphere of influence of German imperialism, under the aegis of the US-backed European Union.

At the conference, US Defense Secretary Hagel emphasized that the “pressing security challenges to Europe and the United States are global,” including “political instability and violent extremism in the Middle East and North Africa, dangerous non-state actors, rogue nations such as North Korea, cyber warfare, demographic changes, economic disparity, poverty, and hunger.”

Hagel concluded by defending the Obama administration’s “Pacific turn,” identifying China and Russia as the main threats to the transatlantic alliance. He declared that “as we confront these threats, nations such as China and Russia are rapidly modernizing their militaries and global defense industries, challenging our technological edge in defense partnerships around the world.”

In the round of discussion following their statements, both Kerry and Hagel rejected claims that America was retreating from the world arena and declared their intention to press ahead aggressively against Syria and Iran.

Replying to a journalist’s question, Hagel said: “I have never seen a full inventory of exactly what we’re doing everywhere, but I would venture to say the United States is more present doing more things in more places today than maybe ever before.”



To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact