

# German foreign minister Steinmeier agitates for war

Ulrich Rippert  
20 June 2014

The 100th anniversary of August 4, 1914—the disastrous day on which the SPD (Social Democratic Party) faction voted in the Reichstag for the Kaiser’s war credits to finance World War I—is only weeks away. The SPD is preparing for the anniversary by pressing for renewed German militarism.

At the end of May, Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD) opened a new web site for the foreign office with the title “Review 2014—Rethinking foreign policy.” The goal of the site is to combat long-standing public opposition to war and militarism.

With the support of the German federal government and the president, Steinmeier declared at the beginning of this year that the country’s previous policy of military restraint was at an end. In the future, Germany would intervene independently, “including militarily,” in crisis regions around the world. The foreign minister justified this by saying that Germany was “too big and too important” to limit itself “to merely commenting from the sidelines of world politics.”

Although this return of an aggressive German foreign policy underwent long and intensive preparation and was supported by all parties in the Bundestag as well as practically the entire media, it has met with the opposition and hostility of the majority of the population.

That is now supposed to change.

With the words “Allow us all to think further about foreign policy,” Steinmeier presses on the new web site for a foreign policy change. However, the mistrust and rejection of militarism and war are deep-seated. The despicable crimes of the Nazis and the Wehrmacht have embedded themselves deeply into the consciousness of broad layers of the population. The demands “No more war! No more fascism!” have shaped generations.

Steinmeier’s reaction to these sentiments leaves no room for doubt that from the point of view of the foreign ministry and the chancellor’s office, the return of great power politics is a settled matter. At the same time, he is attempting to create the impression that it is not the German government and business interests that are pushing for great power

politics and militarism, but rather that voices outside Germany are demanding “more leadership.” To this end, he has commissioned several dozen foreign “experts” to produce articles and assessments.

The advertisement for “Review 2014” claims: “For this web site we asked 50 renowned experts: ‘What, if anything, is wrong with German foreign policy? What must be changed?’ ”

In this regard, it should not be overlooked that these “renowned experts” in one or another way are dependent on and paid by the foreign ministry. The form and content of their assessments clearly correspond with this dependence. Politicians, scientists, journalists and many countries all demand that Germany give up its cautious stance and take on a greater “leadership role” in security and military matters.

The demand for a German leadership role in Europe and the world has never been so shamelessly and forcefully raised in an official publication of the foreign ministry since the end of Hitler’s “Führerstaat” approximately 70 years ago.

Timothy Garton Ash, professor for European Studies at the University of Oxford, demands Germany take on a “greater leadership role” in the European Union (EU). Thomas Risse, head of the Working Group on Transnational Relations, Foreign and Security Policy at the Free University of Berlin, writes in an article entitled “Germany as a leading power” that the Berlin government must live up to its European leadership responsibilities.

Volker Perthes, director of the Foundation for Science and Politics (SWP), which played a central role in the preparation of the change in foreign policy, emphasises, “Leadership depends on trust!” Perthes adds, “Foreign observers praise the professionalism of the German Foreign Service, but repeatedly complain that Germany plays too small of a role in international affairs—or otherwise promotes its own economic interests—and shies away from responsibility as well as leadership or shared leadership.” In another article, Perthes states, “Leadership means setting

priorities.”

Kishore Mahbubani, a professor of political science at the National University of Singapore, is the clearest. He entitles his article “Germany’s destiny: leading Europe in order to lead the world.”

Nazi propaganda defined the character of Germany in a similar manner: “Today Germany belongs to us—tomorrow the entire world!” is part of the text of an infamous Nazi song.

Professor Mahbubani does not contest this. He declares that Merkel’s “European crisis management” has made Germany’s leading role in Europe unmistakably clear. “France and Great Britain can no longer fulfill this role,” he writes.

Professor Mahbubani does not worry about the fact that Germany committed unspeakable crimes in the previous century. Instead, he deplores the fact that it lost two world wars. He now wants to correct this.

He writes: “The twentieth century was a bad one for Germany. It lost two world wars and was divided and occupied.” The second half of the century was indeed better and brought Germany peace and prosperity. However, German society is “psychologically ill” with feelings of guilt about its past. This guilt complex must be overcome so that the twenty-first century “can become a great century for Germany.”

Steinmeier uses these remarks as justification for declaring that “foreign lands” have placed “great expectations” on German foreign policy. German politics should no longer ignore the cherished hopes and expectations “of our friends”.

With respect to the opening of the conference “Review 2014—Rethinking foreign policy” on May 20 in the foreign office’s “world hall steeped in history,” Steinmeier made it clear he wants to overcome the contradiction between “the great expectations placed on German foreign policy by foreign lands” and the ongoing opposition to a stronger stance on the part of the German population.

He says, “At the time I assumed office for the second time a half a year ago, I formulated a thesis in this world hall: Germany is somewhat too big and economically too strong for us to merely comment on world politics from the sidelines.” Now, he intends to explain and impose Germany’s new role in the world.

To this end, Steinmeier has planned numerous events over the course of the summer. He will no longer tolerate the public resistance to the return of militarism and war. For Steinmeier, democracy does not mean accepting the view of the majority and then acting. For him, a government that is “democratically legitimated by elections” has the task of defining German interests and imposing them against all

opposition. It is the voice of the ruling financial oligarchy that tolerates no contradiction.

In the federal election of last autumn, this foreign policy turn was not introduced into the discussion, although it had been prepared for a long time in think tanks and ruling circles. Instead, political issues of secondary importance were endlessly discussed, from gay marriage to a highway toll.

A few days after the election, President Gauck demanded that Germany once again play a role “in Europe and in the world” that corresponded with its actual influence. This was made a central theme of the coalition negotiations, and now the coalition is driving forward to resurrect German militarism.

Steinmeier is a typical Social Democratic representative of the state, who works on behalf of economic interests and the financial oligarchy and views the population as an enemy. Symptomatic of this attitude was his angry outburst at an election meeting in Berlin at which he shouted down his critics who had called him a “warmonger.”

Steinmeier cried, “You have no right!” and meant it literally. In an interview published in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* shortly after the European election, he called for the maintenance of an electoral threshold for small parties designed to maintain the dictatorship of the already established political parties.

A hundred years after the great betrayal by the SPD in August 1914, the Social Democrats have become the leading party of German imperialism and spout war propaganda on behalf of German militarism. Only one thing has changed: the SPD long ago lost its influence over the working class. The hostility between the Social Democrats and the workers is mutual.



To contact the WSW and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**