

The revival of German militarism: One year on

Peter Schwarz
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One year ago today German President Joachim Gauck announced that Germany once again is striving to be a world power.

In his speech on the Day of German Unity, marking the country's reunification after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Gauck demanded that Germany play a role "in Europe and the world" commensurate with its size and influence. "In a world full of crises and upheavals," he said, the country needed a much more aggressive military and foreign policy.

A year later, this orientation not only determines German foreign policy, but domestic policy as well. Berlin is playing an active political and military role in the two main imperialist interventions—in Ukraine and in the Middle East. The principal parties and the media have buttressed this policy with relentless war propaganda reminiscent of a dictatorship. State surveillance and the apparatus of repression are being systematically expanded to target all opposition.

In Ukraine, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier are following in the footsteps of Hitler and Wilhelm II. In the First World War, pushing back the Russian border and control over Ukraine were among the main war aims of the German Reich. Hitler's eastern campaign was a seamless continuation of these goals. At that time, domination of "Mitteleuropa" (Central Europe) was regarded as the key to Germany's rise to a world power. Today, the German government pursues the same aim by integrating Ukraine into a European Union dominated by Berlin.

The fundamental nature of the aggressive shift in policy, in the form of a return to the past, is demonstrated by the attitude towards Russia. In 2001, President Vladimir Putin was celebrated with a standing ovation in the Bundestag; now he is cast as the

principal villain. Instead of the Russian oligarchs, the German elites are now embracing their Ukrainian counterparts, including their fascist bodyguards.

So far Germany has not sent war planes to the Middle East. It lacks the bases and aircraft carriers needed to play more than a minor role in Obama's "coalition of the willing". However, with its supply of arms to the Kurdish Peshmerga the German government has cast its first throw of the dice in the resource-rich region. It is well aware that the bombing of the terrorist militia Islamic State is only the beginning of an imperialist redivision of the Middle East, in the course of which alliances and front lines will invariably change. And this time Germany is determined to be on board.

Gauck's speech was the outcome of a political conspiracy. After the German abstention in the Libyan war, politicians of all stripes, leading journalists, academics, military officers and representatives of big business discussed the need for a new, aggressive German foreign policy. The result was a strategy paper, "New power, new responsibility". Gauck chose the Day of German Unity to formally announce Germany's third bid for world power.

Why does the German ruling class want war again? The period in which German big business could quietly conduct its global affairs in the shadow of the United States is long gone. The crisis of world capitalism, which brought the global financial system to the brink of disaster in 2008, imparts an extremely tense character to all international relations.

For the past thirty years the US has waged one war after another in order to compensate for its economic decline through its military superiority. The battle for raw materials, markets and profits is increasingly being fought with military means. This is what Foreign Minister Steinmeier meant when he said that Germany

was “too big and too important” to restrict itself “to merely commenting on world politics from the sidelines”. This is the unadulterated language of German imperialism.

Also behind the revival of German militarism are the sharp social tensions in Germany and Europe. The ruthless austerity policies dictated by Berlin and Brussels have driven the continent to the brink of social explosion. Tens of millions of people across Europe live in abject poverty and unemployment, while a tiny elite has indulged in an orgy of speculation with the cheap money that the European Central Bank has flooded into European markets.

Imperialism, according to Lenin, is “political reaction all down the line”. Militarism serves to funnel internal conflict onto an external enemy, mobilize the reactionary dregs of society and impose a state of emergency at home.

All of this is well advanced. One year after Gauck’s speech, the German media is agitating on a daily basis against Russia, relentlessly demanding increased defense spending and accusing the government of cowardice because it has not (yet) dropped its own bombs on Iraq. At the same time, compliant historians strive to play down German crimes in both world wars of the twentieth century.

For the time being, the revival of German militarism is taking place under the umbrella of NATO. Its members support German rearmament and call for Germany to make a major military contribution. But this harmony is deceptive. Behind the facade, the NATO “partners” view one another with suspicion and spy on each other. In France it does not go unnoticed that its archenemy in three major wars is once again rearming. And despite all the talk about common interests, Germany and the US confront one another as economic rivals in Asia, the Middle East, Africa and Latin America.

The return of German imperialism to the battlefields of the world, like the return of Japan, is a profoundly destabilizing factor in an already unstable world. The speed with which this is taking place is a measure of how quickly imperialism is careering towards a new world war.

Mankind is threatened with catastrophe if the working class does not intervene. As is the case internationally, the vast majority of the German

population opposes war and militarism. This opposition, however, does not find any expression in official politics. All of the parties, from the Christian Democrats to the Social Democrats, Greens and Die Linke support the new aggressive foreign policy.

The central strategic task in the struggle against war is to build a party that unites the international working class on the basis of a socialist program—the *Partei für Soziale Gleichheit* and the International Committee of the Fourth International. The struggle against militarism and war is inextricably bound up with the struggle against its root cause, the capitalist system.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has analysed the return of German imperialism step-by-step. At a special conference against war on September 13 and 14, the PSG passed a resolution that gives a political orientation for the struggle against war. We urge our readers to study this document and make the decision to take up the fight for socialism.



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