

War propaganda in the German Historical Museum

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The German Historical Museum (DHM) in Berlin is currently showing an exhibition dealing with the horrors and crimes of the First World War. In the very same building, a meeting took place last week which proclaimed the necessity of new wars and war crimes.

In his contribution to the meeting, Jörg Baberowski, Chair of East European History at Humboldt University in Berlin, made the following remarks referring to US-NATO wars conducted against forces such as the Taliban in Afghanistan and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria: “And if one is not willing to take hostages, burn villages, hang people and spread fear and terror, as the terrorists do, if one is not prepared to do such things, then one can never win such a conflict and it is better to keep out altogether.”

Baberowski by no means rejects German participation in such wars. His precondition is, however, that one is prepared to follow it through to the end: “So on the one hand: Yes, of course, Germany should assume such a role and it is important that Germany accepts responsibility, especially in such conflicts which affect it. But one should consider (a) what type of war is one prepared for, and (b) whether one can win. And if you cannot win then one should leave it. That is my opinion on the matter.”

A little later he added: “In the case of an institution such as ISIS, the military can quickly deal with the head choppers. That's no problem. The Americans can solve this. One can liquidate the leaders of this band with hit squads. That's no problem. This is doable. But then the question arises: If state structures have been completely destroyed by a long civil war and there is nothing there, then the question arises: Okay and what now?”

One has “to be aware that this will cost a great deal of money and you have to send soldiers and weapons into

a power vacuum. In order to separate the parties from each other in the first place. And above all, and this is the most important thing ... you need the political will and political strategy and above all, you have to say that in order for this to work, we will go in. And it has to be worth it. That costs money. We have to send troops in. Countries like Iraq, Syria and Libya are no longer able to solve this problem themselves.”

Baberowski made these remarkable statements on October 1, as part of the so-called “Schlüterhofgesprächs” (Schlüter court discussions) in DHM. Under the topic heading “Interventionsmacht Deutschland?” (Germany as Intervention Force?), a group of prominent figures from academia and politics discussed the demand raised a year ago by President Gauck for Germany to end its post-World War II policy of military restraint.

Next to Baberowski on the podium sat Horst Teltschik, who played a central role in German reunification as vice chancellor chief for Helmut Kohl (chancellor 1982-1998) and head of the Munich Security Conference between 1999 to 2008. Other panelists included the military historians Sönke Neitzel and Michael Wolffsohn.

The event was hosted by Peter Voss, one of Germany's most prominent television political journalists, who currently has his own interview show “Voss fragt”.

None of the participants in the discussion expressed any sort of discomfort with Baberowski's statements, which graphically evoked dreadful memories of the most horrific war crimes carried out by the Nazis. Prior to the start of the German onslaught on the Soviet Union in World War II, Hitler had called for “first rapid elimination of the Bolshevik leaders” and the use of the “most brutal methods” to win the war.

Baberowski's own demand to act with more brutality than the enemy, and not to fear taking hostages, burning villages, hanging people, sending "hit squads," and spreading "fear and terror," corresponds precisely to the logic of a war of annihilation.

All of those on the podium agreed that Germany is, and should be, a force for intervention. The discussion was dominated by calls for military force and a policy of imperialist war, recalling the rhetoric and methods of the German elite in the First and Second World Wars. Participants repeatedly attacked the foreign policy of the German government from the right, claiming that it lacked "any strategy," and that it was neither ready to wage war with the necessary aggressiveness, nor to confront mass popular opposition.

Teltschik called for the formulation of clear war aims and for more soldiers to be sent on missions. "I told the defense minister at the time, tell the German people why Africa is so important to us. Do we have strategic interests in Africa and if that is the case ... then explain to the Germans the strategic importance of Africa for Europe and the west, and then you can say that is why we are now sending the German army to the Congo or Mali."

In a cynically arrogant manner, he then called on the government to take less note of public opinion. It should not "just look at polls" and declare, "Wow, 70 percent are against the German army going here and there. Then you can just disarm on the spot and stay at home. It's the same with every military intervention, the majority of Germans, for emotionally understandable reasons, will say, 'No, we have no business there. We won't do it.' On the contrary, in politics you sometimes have to make decisions."

Voss suggested that the new intervention policy be anchored in law and argued for a change to the constitution. "But is it not necessary to say basically that, speaking generally, when human rights are in danger in the world we have to intervene militarily," he said, "and the majority would be with you, then we will change the constitution with a two-thirds majority and carry out this discussion, so that even the ones who say they are very uncomfortable with it, shift position and join the rest."

The open advocacy of militarism, war and dictatorship at a podium discussion in the middle of Berlin must be taken as a serious warning and wake-up

call. One hundred years after the outbreak of World War I and 75 years after the start of World War II, politicians, historians and journalists are systematically downplaying and glossing over the historical crimes of German imperialism in order to prepare the way for new crimes.

Baberowski plays a central role in this campaign. Last February he declared in *Der Spiegel*: "Hitler was not a psychopath, he was not cruel." In the same article, he defended the ultra-right historian Ernst Nolte, declaring that Nolte was "wrongly treated. Historically speaking he was right."

What does Baberowski mean by this? The current issue of *The European* magazine features a contribution by Nolte in which he openly seeks to rehabilitate Hitler and National Socialism. Under the title "Break the Taboo," Nolte complains that after Germany's defeat, Hitler was transformed from a "liberator to the 'absolute evil.'" Nolte concludes, "We are still hampered by this one-sided view today."

If one takes the meeting in the DHM as an indicator of the plans of the ruling class, then this "one-sided" view is about to change.



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