

German President Gauck's human rights imperialism

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14 February 2015

Last Tuesday, President Joachim Gauck invited so-called civilian crisis helpers to his official residence, Bellevue Palace. Among them were lawyers, police officers, aid workers and officials of various crisis prevention and conflict management initiatives. The theme was “Experts for peace—Germany’s civilian contribution to international conflict resolution.”

The invitation referenced Gauck’s speech at the Munich Security Conference last year, where he declared that the time for military restraint was over; Germany must again play a role “in Europe and the world” actually corresponding to its size and influence. “In a world full of crises and upheavals,” he said, the country needed an active and military foreign policy.

One year later, the initial results of the resurgence of German imperialism are visible. Ukraine, where Germany brought “its size and influence” to bear, is on the verge of a war that threatens to plunge all of Europe into a nuclear inferno. In Iraq, where Germany abstained from joining the US-led invasion in 2003, *Bundeswehr* (Armed Forces) soldiers are acting as instructors for one of the parties to the civil war. Opposition to such military operations by the general population continues undiminished.

The meeting on Tuesday aimed to launch a further escalation of German militarism and justify it in the name of human rights. The invitation reads, “One year after the President’s opening speech at the Munich Security Conference regarding Germany’s role in the world, this forum at Bellevue will illuminate Germany’s comprehensive commitment to international peacekeeping missions.”

Gauck began his speech with the words, “Behind us is a moving, even a dramatic year—marked by wars and crises.” In the same breath, he blamed Russia for this situation. “Europe suddenly experienced a violent shift

of borders, including annexation,” he declared. In Iraq and Syria, a regime of terror “enslaves people, tortures and kills.” The same was true, he said, of Boko Haram in Africa.

The president did not mention the fact that the Iraq war and support for armed Islamist militias in Syria by the US and its European and Arab allies produced the Islamic State (IS) and created fertile ground for its development.

Instead, just as British and American colonial policy used to be promoted as the “White Man’s Burden,” Gauck tried to justify the imperialist intervention in the Middle East as a moral duty in the interests of stability and peace. “Terrorist scenarios and asymmetric wars,” he said, “force states and civil society to strengthen their commitment to the global common good—for security, stability and peace.”

Gauck justified German intervention in Ukraine, Iraq and Africa by declaring, “the crises on the periphery of Europe and all over the world are moving closer towards us,” and that Germany was “not protected from the turmoil of the time.”

“Germany has taken responsibility, in different forms, depending on the problem and interests, and according to its possibilities,” he said. He said that support for the coup in Ukraine and the economic sanctions against Russia amounted to an intensive intervention “for a political solution.”

Gauck stressed that Germany will increase its political and military interventions in the coming year. Last year, Berlin had “taken important steps and increased its help maintaining the system of international security and order to assist people in need,” he said. However, the international order, “from which the Federal Republic has so far benefited greatly as an above average globalized country,” was far more

threatened than expected.

The conflicts in Ukraine and Syria showed, Gauck said, “how hard it is today for the world community to respond effectively to crises within the existing international norms and institutions.” Gauck called therefore for an intense debate on German foreign and security policy, on “what role Germany—given its values and experiences, its interests and international importance—is to play in the world.”

Gauck made clear that the purpose of the event was to integrate various civilian and humanitarian organizations and initiatives into the new German war policy. Germany’s “civilian expertise” in international crisis management was of great importance, he said.

“The spectrum is wide,” said Gauck, listing “conflict prevention and development cooperation; the fight against hunger and disease; crisis prevention and management through medicine and technology. What is crucial for successful international interventions is conceptual and scientific work at home”. He called for Germany to be “strategically capable.”

As contributors to imperialism in the name of human rights, Gauck named “scientists from research institutes, experts from think tanks, representatives of foundations and other committed citizens [who] contribute in Germany and in the world to the successful prevention and resolution of conflicts.”

Gauck thanked them all profusely and cried, “You are important representatives of our country. You are ambassadors of peace, and you are ambassadors of our democracy.” He explicitly stressed that this was also true “for the experts and activities of the German political foundations that are active worldwide implementing and strengthening democratic values.”

As in earlier times, when the great powers dispatched their missionaries and cultural ambassadors ahead before they conquered foreign countries with troops and tanks, Berlin is deploying civilian organizations and humanitarian associations to promote its new great power politics.

Among “civilian reconstruction workers,” Gauck included police officers and lawyers, who were well represented at his “Bellevue Forum”. They have the task of building up the state’s police powers in future “partner countries”.

Where this imperialism in the name of the rule of law and human rights leads can be seen very clearly in

Ukraine. While Gauck complains that the crisis has worsened dramatically, and he is “very concerned,” both he and the German government are constantly pouring fuel on the fire. They are using the crisis they provoked in Ukraine to militarily encircle Russia and to equip Ukraine with modern weapons. In this, NATO is risking a nuclear conflagration.



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