

German government prepares new military doctrine

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19 February 2015

German Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen on Tuesday heralded the adoption of a new military and security strategy for Germany. Her speech, on the occasion of the first meeting of those preparing the “White Paper 2016,” underscored the turn by the German ruling elite to an aggressive foreign policy 70 years after the end of the Second World War.

Almost ten years after the publication of the last White Paper in 2006, “a new White Paper is overdue,” von der Leyen said at the beginning of her presentation. She referred to the changed “security environment,” pointing in particular to “the alarming development of transnational terrorism” and “the behavior of Russia in Ukraine,” which, she said, had “wide-ranging consequences.”

Saying she hoped the Minsk ceasefire would be implemented, she warned that one should “have no illusions.” She continued: “The new policy of the Kremlin began before the crisis in Ukraine and will keep us busy for a long time to come.”

Now the task was to find “the appropriate reaction by the West to the attempt to establish geo-strategic power politics as a way of pursuing interests,” and to Russia’s efforts “to replace internationally established rules and regulations with dominance and zones of influence.”

The defense minister ignored the fact that the crisis in Ukraine was the result of the putsch carried out by fascist forces with the support of Berlin one year ago. However, she implicitly acknowledged that the real background to the new White Paper was not “Russian aggression” in Ukraine, but the end of German restraint with regard to foreign policy, announced by President Gauck, Foreign Minister Steinmeier and herself at the Munich Security Conference at the beginning of 2014.

To reduce the need for the new White Paper to the “changed environment” would be “too reactive,” said

von der Leyen. Rather, the paper had to “serve the purpose of self analysis and self assurance.” It “should explain our actions and our intentions clearly. It should offer a narrative,” she added.

The contours of this “new narrative” have already become clear over the past year. In numerous speeches, commentaries, interviews and think tank strategy papers, German politicians, journalists and academics have repeatedly demanded that Germany take on “more leadership” and “responsibility” in Europe and the world. To this end, they have argued, Germany requires a foreign policy strategy that clearly formulates German interests, along with the provision of the necessary military means to defend these interests.

Von der Leyen’s speech was a continuation of this basic line. She emphasized that “our intentions with regard to German security policy have changed quite fundamentally.” What was important was “leading from the center” and “readiness to engage.” She allowed no room for doubt that what she meant by this was the development of a globally oriented militaristic foreign policy.

She explicitly excluded any political, geographic or other restriction on military intervention. She declared, in effect, that the German army was free to intervene anywhere around the world, noting that there was no “rigid prescription for action that sets immovable geographic or qualitative boundaries.”

In other words, everything that German imperialism deemed to be necessary was permissible. There was “no checklist for foreign engagements,” “no compulsion to engage,” but also “no taboos.”

“More responsibility” could mean “fighting together to establish or preserve peace,” she declared. It could mean “training together in fragile regions, educating, building.”

Von der Leyen praised the German interventions in northern Iraq, in Afghanistan, in Kosovo, off the coast of Lebanon, in Mali and in Eastern Europe. Germany was “deeply committed” to the buildup of NATO forces in these areas, she said. Together with “partners,” it was “introducing the new rapid spearhead force” and expanding NATO headquarters in Szczecin.

At the end of her speech, the defense minister let the cat out of the bag: Germany had to massively rearm! It was necessary “to maintain the armed forces as long term partners and provide them with the necessary means.” Consequently, the White Paper would discuss “efforts to secure modern weapons,” an “up-to-date personnel policy” and an “appropriate budget.”

Von der Leyen announced her first weapons deal the same day as her speech. The Defense Ministry plans to purchase 138 helicopters for the army, including 80 multi-purpose NH90 helicopters and 40 “Tiger” combat helicopters. The deal will cost 8.7 billion euros.

Because of broad opposition to militarism and war within the population, the government had previously raised the question of increased military spending with caution. The aim of the White Paper is to change this.

The president of the Armed Forces Association, André Wüstner, said on the fringes of the meeting in Berlin that “it is high time for new strategic guidelines.” The defense minister had to “break free” to “fully equip the army against the backdrop of current crises and conflicts.” Two weeks ago, at the Munich Security Conference, Wüstner had called for the arming of Germany and preparations for war.

This sentiment was echoed in a guest column in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* by Christian Mölling, a staff member of the foundation Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (German Institute for International and Security AffairsSWP), which works closely with the government. He wrote that Von der Leyen had to explain in the White Paper “what role German soldiers, helicopters and tanks should play in foreign policy and in crises.” He argued that the “parameters of defense policy” depended “on the actual capabilities of the army and not on external dangers.”

The SWP published a strategy paper under the title “New Power, New Responsibility: Elements of a German Foreign and Security Policy for a Changing World” in the fall of 2013. This paper provided a template for the return of German militarism. While at

that time meetings about a new, aggressive German foreign policy were taking place in secret, the current discussion on the White Paper is to take place in full view of the public.

Von der Leyen concluded by saying she looked forward “to cooperation with experts from different government agencies, with parliament, with foundations and with academia.”

To this end, four working groups, under the headings “Security and Defense Policy,” “Partnerships and Alliances,” “Armed Forces” and “National Frameworks of Action” have been established. Among the participants are leading security policy makers, journalists, academics, military personnel and representatives of German and American think tanks.

They include: Sylke Tempel, chief editor of the journal *Internationale Politik*; Thomas Bagger, head of the planning staff of the Foreign Office; General Major Hans-Werner Wiermann, commander of the Territorial Missions Command of the armed forces in Berlin; Winfried Nachtwei, former security policy spokesperson of the Green Party; Henning Otte, defense policy spokesperson of the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) fraction in parliament; Constanze Stelzenmüller, former security policy editor of *Die Zeit* and fellow at the US Brookings Institution think tank; Lieutenant General Heinrich Brauß, adjunct general secretary of NATO for defense policy and military forces planning; and Humboldt University Professor Herfried Münkler.



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