

# Herfried Münkler declares Germany to be Europe's "hegemon"

Johannes Stern  
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For three weeks, we heard nothing from Herfried Münkler. Now, the Humboldt University professor and ideologist of contemporary German imperialism seems to have returned from his vacation, and, unsurprisingly, Herr Professor is continuing exactly where he left off. In a recent commentary in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, he repeats his infamous mantra—that Germany is called upon to take the lead in Europe and the world.

Under the headline, “We Are the Hegemon,” Münkler declares Germany to be the “European central power, whose task it is to tame the dramatically increasing centrifugal forces within the [European] Union, to bring together the different interests of North and South, Western and Eastern Europeans while seeking a common line, and, finally, to ensure that the challenge at one edge of the EU also addresses the opposite side of the EU.”

Münkler's calls for German leadership in all directions are not only legion, they are an indicator of the speed and aggressiveness with which the German lust for power and historical grievances among the elites of Berlin, long believed overcome, are returning.

While the professor declared in July that Germany, as “currently the strongest power in the EU,” must form a “core Europe” together with France, he has now apparently reached the conclusion that the former arch enemy of German imperialism can't play any role. He writes that while France had been “together with Germany over decades” in the European project, it had now “lost the leadership position” and “completely fallen behind.”

Münkler concludes that only Germany can lead Europe. He writes: “The problem is that if the Germans fail, there are no alternative or substitute candidates ready to step in to take on this role. To put it bluntly: If Germany fails to carry out the tasks of the European central power, then Europe fails.”

Münkler, whom some of his political supporters

admirably compare with the nationalist and anti-Semitic historian Heinrich von Treitschke (1834-1896), who rose to prominence in the heyday of the Kaisers, stands in the “best” traditions of German imperialism and militarism. The ideologists of both the German monarchy and the Third Reich had, like Münkler, repeatedly stressed the need to unite Europe under German leadership and warned that otherwise Europe would be doomed.

Walter Rathenau, the head of Germany's War Commodities Authority, who strongly influenced the September (1914) Programme of Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg, said at the beginning of World War I: “The final leadership of Europe [is] indispensable, because an emerging central power like Germany again and again suffers the jealousy of its neighbours if it does not have the strength to annex these neighbours organically... It is Germany's task to manage and strengthen the old-European body.”

The April 1943 guidelines of Nazi Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop for a newly created European Committee state: “What is certain ... today is that the future Europe can endure only if the hegemony of the Greater German Reich is fully enforced. Securing this hegemony is therefore to be regarded as the core of the future new order.”

A few weeks later, Joseph Goebbels noted in his diary: “It must remain the goal of our struggle to create a unified Europe. But Europe can experience a clear organization only through the Germans. Another leading power is virtually non-existent.”

The parallels between the concepts of Europe of Münkler and the current German government and those of the Nazis and the Kaiser's Empire are striking. The attempt of the professor to gloss over the objectives of German imperialism likewise recalls previous propaganda strategies. The representatives of the Kaiser's Empire and the Nazis depicted their aggressive approach as a

defensive response. Similarly, Münkler claims that Germany is under pressure from its neighbours to accept the role of the hegemon.

The German Empire in World War I spoke of a “defensive war” against the Entente powers. The Nazis justified their extermination campaign against the Soviet Union as a “pre-emptive strike” against a “conspiracy of Jewish-Bolshevik warmongers” in the Kremlin. For his part, Münkler writes that it took “several challenges from the outside until finally, at least within the political class, the understanding prevailed that the Federal Republic [of Germany] had to accept and consciously play the role for which it had long been prepared, to do it justice and not fail.”

In reality, Germany’s new “grab for world power,” supported by Münkler, has long been planned, just like the Schlieffen Plan before the First World War and the Nazis’ fantasies of world conquest before the Second World War. One might add that, no less than its predecessors, the current version of German imperialist hubris is condemned to fail.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has detailed in many articles how the revival of German militarism was prepared and is now being implemented.

Here is a brief summary: Between November 2012 and September 2013, 50 leading politicians, journalists, military and business figures and professors collaborated on the strategy paper “New Power—New Responsibility.” It laid the foundations for the foreign policy reversal that was announced by German President Gauck and the federal government at the Munich Security Conference in 2014. This turn to an expansionist and militarist foreign policy has already been expressed in NATO’s rearmament in Eastern Europe, the military intervention in the Middle East, and the plundering of Greece.

“New Power—New Responsibility” includes many formulations that soon after its publication were found word for word in the speeches of President Gauck, Foreign Minister Steinmeier and Defence Minister von der Leyen. Among other things, it demands that Germany, as a “trade and export nation,” defend its economic and geo-strategic interests more aggressively. “Costly and long-term military operations” would be part of “a pragmatic German security policy,” it states.

Münkler’s name does not appear on the official list of authors of the strategy paper. But the theme of Germany as the “central power in Europe,” or the “power in the middle,” which Münkler aggressively develops, can be found in the document. In the section entitled “Why

Europe?” the paper says Germany will “have to lead more often and more decisively.” It explains this is due to Germany’s “history, its location, but even more its current economic strength and its new geopolitical weight.”

Another theme of the paper, which the professor takes up in his latest commentary, is the need for the state to exert “more effective political control” and engage in “more committed communication with the German public” in order to more effectively explain state foreign policy and “persuade its own citizens.”

Münkler writes in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* that in order to “meet the challenges that are posed to the central power in Europe,” Germany requires “the willingness of the majority of the electorate to address these challenges and to take on their related burden.” What is required, he continues, is “a public debate ... in which the opportunities and risks of the central power role are openly addressed and discussed.”

It takes chutzpah for Münkler to talk about the need for a “debate.” Together with his ideological brother-in-arms, Humboldt Professor Jörg Baberowski, Münkler has sought to silence all those at Humboldt University, notably the student group Münkler-Watch and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, who openly address the “opportunities and risks” of Germany’s turn to great power politics and its historical continuity, as in 1914 and 1939, with war and destruction abroad and dictatorship and oppression at home.

Despite two years of deafening war propaganda, Münkler and company are increasingly desperate over the fact that, after the horrors of two world wars, the German population refuses to be roped into a third “grab for world power,” and that resistance to militarism and war is growing. Against this background, Münkler’s outpourings at least have the merit of making clearer the goals Berlin is pursuing, underscoring the need for the working class to intervene politically before German imperialism once again plunges Europe and the world into a catastrophe.



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