

German academics Münkler and Baberowski promote imperialist foreign policy

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The setting matched the content. Against a backdrop of Prussian militarism, political scientist Herfried Münkler and historian Jörg Baberowski talked about violence Monday evening.

The chairman of the Museum Association, Peter Voß, had invited the two professors from neighbouring Humboldt University to the Schlüterhof Discussions at the German Historical Museum. The topic was “Violence: The essence of history?”

The Armory, in which the museum is located, served Prussia in the 18th century as a weapons arsenal and in the 19th century as a military museum and hall of fame. In the 20th century, Hitler gave his annual *Heldengedenktag* (Day of Commemoration of Heroes) speech at the Schlüterhof, the museum’s courtyard.

The Armory is surrounded by scenery that combines relics of Prussia’s past glory with a permanent building site. The pretentious Berlin Cathedral stands next to the shell of the reconstructed Hohenzollern castle, the State Opera behind scaffolding, and the main building of Humboldt University, which originally served as the residence for the brother of Frederick the Great.

While the ghosts of the past were pervasive, the two professors spoke mainly about the present. Violence is, for them, not only “the essence of history,” it is also, and above all, the essence of the future.

After attending such an event, it is easier to comprehend how so many German professors threw themselves into Hitler’s arms after he assumed power in 1933. No sooner have German soldiers once again been sent into war and right-wing parties gained support in Europe than the successors to the pro-Nazi professors of the past have ditched the democratic and pacifist principles they were forced to profess in the wake of World War II and embraced the cult of military and state violence.

There was no sign of opposition, not even a disturbed drawing of breath, from the audience, which was overwhelmingly elderly and with an academic background. Instead, polite applause broke out when a speaker expressed

himself graphically. It was appropriate for the occasion that in the front row, directly facing the speakers, sat Thilo Sarrazin, whose book *Germany Abolishes Itself* made xenophobia respectable in Germany once again.

A core theme was evident throughout the two-hour discussion: the period had ended when Germany could base its foreign policy, and therefore its domestic policy, on democratic principles, precepts of international law and moral reservations. As Voß summed it up, “We must shift from too much emphasis on moral politics to a greater emphasis on realpolitik.”

Münkler formulated the same idea by stating, “We stand on the verge of a fundamental revision of the conception of foreign policy that we have always had, and which, I believe, is called ‘value-oriented foreign policy.’ We are being forced to return to a classical realpolitik.”

In relation to the Middle East, this meant one could no longer say, “We have nothing to do with these people with dirty hands, these dictators, and we do not want to have anything to do with them,” Münkler explained. As an example, he mentioned the Egyptian ruler al-Sisi.

We are dependent on him, he insisted, “to make sure that Egypt does not blow up.” One must consider “what the stabilising powers in a region are and how we deal with them to produce something akin to stability, with the lowest possible costs and risks and with the forces available in the area.”

Münkler sketched the geographical area within which Germany had to practice its “classical realpolitik.” He said, “We have two post-imperial areas which are of concern to us. One runs from the western Balkans to the Caspian Sea, and the other is roughly the entire Arab world.”

At another point he declared, “The great challenges of European stability and security” stretch “from the eastern Balkans to the Caucasus” and from “the area between Mesopotamia and Libya, the Levante and the Indian Ocean” to the “opposite Mediterranean coast and the other side of the Sahara.”

If one studies the plans for world power and conquest

developed by German strategists, business associations and military staff prior to World War I and World War II, one finds virtually the same geographical goals. Münkler is drawing on the traditional expansionist policy of German imperialism.

Münkler insulted those describing him as a warmonger, calling them “brainless,” but in the next breath he bitterly attacked those who declare from the outset, “Military power is totally out of the question and we will not send troops anywhere and we will not participate in anything of this kind.”

He concluded his contribution by voicing the conviction that the “the way the Federal Republic politically sees itself will shift dramatically in the next period.” He insisted, “We will have to engage once again in a very different way with our surrounding environment. We don’t like that. In principle, we found it advantageous to make ourselves so small that nobody saw us. We progressed happily with that, but we can’t go on playing like that.”

The two professors buttressed one another throughout the evening. While Baberowski did not outline such grandiose geopolitical plans as Münkler, he spoke more ruthlessly about the brutal methods required to realise such a policy.

Already a year ago at the Schlüterhof Discussions he declared that if one was not prepared “to take hostages, burn down villages and hang people to spread fear and terror,” one had best keep out of the fight against terrorism. Now he invoked as a shining example the Ochrana, the tsar’s secret police, which brutally suppressed all opposition to the autocratic regime.

Making use of his inimitable armchair psychology, Baberowski asserted that social, political and ideological factors played no role in terrorist violence. “If one wants to explain how violence emerges and how it can be ended, one has to occupy oneself with humans,” he said. “There will always be young men who are aggressive, violent and frustrated, feeling excluded from everything. ... There will always be violent groups, there will always be terrorism.”

But terrorists also behave by conforming to a group, he continued. Therefore, the key issue was eliminating the leaders. “When one eliminates a leader who is bringing these people together, the goal has been achieved.” This was, he said, exactly what the Ochrana did. “They eliminated the leaders.”

That Baberowski, a specialist on Russia, cites positively the Ochrana speaks volumes about his political stance. He could also have mentioned the Gestapo as an effective example of “combatting terrorism”. The Ochrana not only ruthlessly suppressed all democratic and socialist opposition, it was notorious for its anti-Semitism and the anti-Jewish pogroms it organised to distract attention from social

tensions—at the cost of thousands of lives.

Moreover, the Russian terrorists had absolutely nothing in common with today’s Islamic State. The terrorist attacks by the Narodniks were not directed against ordinary people, but exclusively against the person and the representatives of the tsar, whose murder they saw as a means of agitating the people and fighting for democracy. This method was wrong. This, and the emergence of the Social Democrats, who based themselves on the mobilisation of the working class against tsarism, were the reasons for the decline of the Narodniks, and not the repression by the Ochrana.

The method of eliminating leaders proclaimed by Baberowski has been standard procedure since the First World War for all reactionary regimes and intelligence agencies, from the German Freikorps and Hitler’s SA to the American CIA. Before Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht were murdered in 1919, placards were hung in the streets of Berlin declaring: “Strike the leaders dead”.

Münkler and Baberowski first appeared together in February 2014. At that time, *Der Spiegel* presented them, together with the Nazi apologist Ernst Nolte, as key witnesses for a “transformation of history,” the essence of which was to downplay the crimes of German imperialism in the First and Second World Wars.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) at Humboldt University sharply attacked this at the time. In a letter to the University Board it wrote, “The attempts to establish a historically false narrative come at a critical point in German history. ... The revival of German militarism requires a new interpretation of history that downplays the crimes of the Nazi era.”

When the IYSSE and *World Socialist Web Site* continued their critique of Münkler and Baberowski, and students criticised Münkler’s lectures on the *Münkler Watch* blog, the media unleashed a vicious propaganda campaign. They accused the IYSSE and *Münkler Watch* of censorship, mobbing and similar practices, placing the criticisms of the reactionary Humboldt professors on a par with bomb and murder threats. The conflict is documented in the book *Scholarship or War Propaganda*.

The joint appearance of Münkler and Baberowski at Schlüterhof for the purpose of legitimising war and state violence has fully vindicated the criticisms made by the IYSSE.



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