Obama in Germany: New joint aggression and growing imperialist rivalries

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An extremely ominous development is concealed behind all of the mutual flattery and declarations of friendship between German Chancellor Angela Merkel and US President Barack Obama over recent days.

Obama's fifth trip to Germany was not simply a visit to the 2016 Hanover Fair, or a farewell tour by a departing American president, but rather was aimed at escalating both imperialist aggression in the Middle East and NATO's military build-up against Russia. At the same time, it initiated a new stage in the return of German militarism.

Already at the joint press conference in Hanover on Saturday, Obama and Merkel spoke very openly about their plans. Merkel stated early on, "We have used the opportunity to discuss the various challenges of the international agenda." These were "of course Syria, Libya and Afghanistan, but also Africa and the crisis between Russia and Ukraine."

They had been in agreement "that the issues of security in the area around Europe could only be resolved through joint Transatlantic efforts for which European engagement and also German engagement on many issues [was] necessary." Merkel noted that Germany had "shown in recent months that it [had] undertaken additional efforts in many places," such as in Iraq, the "struggle against terrorism" in Syria and "Mali or other regions where we are now active."

In addition, Berlin was prepared to "further engage militarily" and strengthen its armed forces. Merkel said reassuringly, "Germany is in it for the very long term in several areas, in which we will continue." Weapons had been sent to the Peshmerga and thereby "supplied to a tense region, which in light of our historical development [was] a completely new step." "Assuming responsibility in Africa" was "apart from the Congo mission, which we had for a short time previously, a new area."

On Germany's prior decision to increase the defence budget Merkel stated: "I know that we obviously have to make additional efforts as regards our possibilities to defend ourselves. We have to put in more equipment, more personnel." She recognised "the targets set for us by NATO" and said she "believes that the overall deployment of the German army now fully reflects our sense that we need to shoulder this international responsibility."

Obama, who repeatedly praised Merkel in the highest tones, hailed Germany's new war policy. "Germany is a vital member of the coalition to destroy ISIL. German aircraft support the air campaign, and German personnel in Iraq are training local forces. German assistance is helping to stabilise Iraq and rebuild the areas it liberates from ISIL," he stated.

At the same time, Obama warned of the need to retain the "strength of our NATO alliance" and to strengthen it against Russia. With a threatening undertone, which was certainly aimed at those sections of the German ruling elite who prefer a closer strategic orientation to Russia, he declared, "We continue to augment, on a rotational basis, NATO forces in Eastern Europe, including the Baltic states. As I've said from the very beginning of my presidency, we have a treaty obligation to defend every NATO ally—and we will."

These are not empty words. According to a news report by *Der Spiegel*, Obama called on Merkel at a so-called G5 meeting on Monday involving the prime ministers of Britain and Italy and the French President, to participate "significantly in the planned stationing of permanently rotating NATO units on the eastern border of the alliance." Berlin had thus far taken a back seat in the planning and pointed to the German army's significant participation in NATO's new rapid reaction force.

It now appears increasingly likely that the government is ready to further strengthen its forces in Eastern Europe. Already at a 20 April press conference in Berlin with

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visiting Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaite, Merkel reaffirmed that the "decisions from Wales" would be "further developed" at the coming NATO summit in Warsaw, and "we will do our part in accordance with this."

Journalist Thomas Wiegold, who has close connections to the military and security establishment, commented on his blog "Eyes front!": "The question is therefore not now whether the German army is to be present with troops on the eastern flank of NATO (and that means in part: practically on the Russian border). They have been for a long time. The question is much more if this presence is to be significantly strengthened. And if the German army will operate in continuous rotation with other troops at battalion strength, not company strength or less."

Since the federal government announced that Germany would again play a role in world politics "corresponding to the importance of our country," (Federal President Gauck on October 3, 2013), it has used Washington's aggressive foreign policy to build up its own military and advance its own imperialist interests.

Significantly, it was announced on Monday that Germany would establish its own military base for Tornado fighter planes in Turkey. According to information from *Spiegel Online* the German government reckons "with a very long German intervention against the Islamic State" and is therefore planning a long term deployment at the Turkish Air Force Base in Incirlik. According to internal documents, a total of around €65 million is to be made available for a separate airstrip, accommodations for German soldiers and a fully equipped command post. In addition, the Bundeswehr is negotiating a long-term agreement with the Turkish government for the long-term stationing of German soldiers.

The much-vaunted close economic relations between the US and Germany are also increasingly marked by rivalry when it comes to profits and markets. At the industrial fair in Hanover, both Obama and Merkel made remarks with critical undertones. When they mounted the podium in Hall 3, Obama declared, "Now is another opportunity for me to say, 'Come to us and buy American goods.'" Merkel had already stated at the opening of the fair on Sunday evening: "Buy German would also be very good" and added: "We love competition. But we also like to win."

In a commentary titled "Obama and Merkel in Hanover: Each with their separate view," *Spiegel Online* wrote, "The World's Largest Industry Fair with host country USA is more than ever a test of strength between the largest and the fourth largest economy in the world."

It is against this background that one can understand the ongoing tensions around the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership agreements (TTIP) that the EU is currently negotiating with the United States. Despite all the claims that the US wanted "to hurry" (Merkel), all the nations involved are seeking to negotiate the best conditions for their own interests and thereby make as few concessions as possible. *Die Zeit* wrote succinctly that "TTIP will not happen so fast" because each side is worried "they will not be able to rewrite the rules for other markets to benefit their own business lobby."

What lies behind the German-American axis, which appears to take the form of close military and economic cooperation but where explosive tensions are developing ?

One indication is the interview given by the German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD) in the weekend edition of the *Handelsblatt*. Under the heading "The situation is more dangerous than in Cold War," he stated, "The old order has not yet been replaced by a new one," and he continued "This struggle for influence and hegemony is not taking place in a peaceful seminar environment, but is exploding violently."

In other words, just as was the case prior to the First and Second World Wars, a new race for "influence" and "hegemony" is taking place between the imperialist powers that will once again "explode violently" if the working class does not intervene on the basis of an international and socialist program.

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