

Merkel announces massive military buildup

Johannes Stern
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Germany plans an unprecedented military buildup. This was clear from the speech given by Chancellor Angela Merkel to the Business Forum of the CDU in Berlin on Tuesday night. “We confront asymmetric conflicts, of hitherto unknown proportions,” Merkel told German business leaders. “The defence capability of the European Union,” however, is “still not geared up to ensure security even in our own territory.”

The conclusion of the chancellor: “There has to be convergence between a country like Germany that today spends 1.2 percent of gross domestic product for defence and a country like the United States of America, which outlays 3.4 percent of gross domestic product on defence.” It would “not be expedient in the long run to say simply that we will hope and wait for others to undertake our burdens of defence,” she said.

Merkel’s speech has been greeted in the bourgeois media for what it is: Another milestone in the return of German militarism following the announcement of the about-turn in German foreign policy by Federal President Joachim Gauck, Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen at the Munich Security Conference in early 2014.

On Thursday the *Handelsblatt* proclaimed in large print “Germany upgrades” and called Merkel’s declaration a “turning point.” In the past 25 years, the paper wrote, “Federal governments of different persuasions gratefully pocketed the peace dividend” and the proportion of military expenditure to GDP had fallen by 3.4 percent in the mid-1980s to just 1.2 percent. Now Merkel has signalled “that she is ready to up the ante.”

The business newspaper indicates what is meant by the federal government “upping the ante.” The *Handelsblatt* cites the military commissioner of the Bundestag, Hans-Peter Bartels (SPD), who states that in order to recruit the planned additional 7,000 soldiers

and equip the army “with tanks or helicopters,” the Bundeswehr (armed forces) must “increase the proportion of GDP in the foreseeable future by 1.4 to 1.5 percent.” The paper then concludes: “As of today, that requires an extra €9 billion a year.”

To justify the massive upgrade, the paper repeats the official mantra of the federal government of a “world out of joint” that forces Germany to act. The “new era” had not come “by chance.” The Ukraine conflict and terrorism have alarmed Berlin, simultaneously increased “the expectations of its allies” and placed special new demands on the Bundeswehr in relation to “NATO deterrence plans directed against Russia.”

The *Handelsblatt* is well aware that the military upgrade involves the acquisition of raw materials and new markets for Germany’s export-hungry industry. In early 2013 the newspaper ran an editorial headlined “Expedition Resources: Germany’s New Course,” noting that “current policy to secure raw materials has reached its limits” and that Berlin must once again be ready to wage wars over resources.

Merkel’s announcement that Germany seeks to “converge” with US military spending to “secure its own territory,” underlines that the German elite is again prepared to secure its economic and geostrategic interests against its former post-war allies if necessary.

In a recent long article on the referendum on United Kingdom membership of the European Union, *Der Spiegel* warned that the EU’s disintegration could lead to the breakup of its alliance with the US. As the “biggest central power on the continent” Germany would then “finally be forced to take the leading role,” the magazine wrote.

In another recent article in *Foreign Affairs* titled, “Germany’s New Global Role,” Foreign Minister Steinmeier distances himself from the US and highlights Germany’s new claims to be a superpower. He bluntly declares Germany to be a “major European

power,” which was forced “to reinterpret the principles that have guided its foreign policy for over half a century.”

Behind the backs of the population, the military upgrade is already taking place at full speed. *Handelsblatt* reported that the same German armament giants who built up Hitler’s Wehrmacht in the 1930s are currently preparing new tanks for the German army. “Krauss-Maffei Wegmann (KMW) and Rheinmetall have set up a depot in a “secret location” where they collect used battle tanks from Austria and Sweden.” In total, German industry has already bought up more than 100 Leopard 2 combat tanks. “Well maintained and oiled” they are now to be “brought up to the armament standard of the 21st century” for €5 million each and receive “a second life in the Bundeswehr.”

The tank upgrade is just one project among many. The current military report of the government lists “more than 20 projects with a budget of over €60 billion.” On the list are various tank models, “Tiger” support helicopters, A400M transport aircraft, “Euro Fighters,” missile-type “Iris-T” and “Meteor” warships (including frigates, corvettes and the 180 multi-role vessel) and a tactical air defence system.

Just 75 years after the invasion of the Soviet Union by Nazi Germany, Merkel’s latest speech made terrifyingly clear that the German elite is quite prepared to follow in the footsteps of its wartime predecessor.



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