

Warmongering and historical falsification on 75th anniversary of German invasion of Soviet Union

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On 22 June, 1941, the German Wehrmacht invaded the Soviet Union without warning and initiated a war of annihilation that took the lives of 27 million Soviet citizens. In Germany, the 75th anniversary of this historic crime is taking place against the background of new preparations for war by NATO against Russia. In ongoing maneuvers, German tanks are once again rolling toward the Russian border. At the same time, the criminal character of the 1941 attack on the Soviet Union, called “Operation Barbarossa” by the Nazi regime, is being minimized.

The German government has refused to organize any form of official commemoration of one of the greatest crimes in human history. President Joachim Gauck did not regard the anniversary of the attack as a reason to travel to Russia. Instead, he visited Romania and Bulgaria.

In the hour-long debate held by the Bundestag (parliament) to mark the anniversary, superficial and empty professions of German guilt for the horrors of the Eastern campaign were overshadowed by aggressive rhetoric against Russia. Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier accused Russia of breaking the Helsinki Final Act with its annexation of Crimea. He urged a strong German “defence readiness” and demanded that “military capabilities” be adapted to the changed security situation.

Christian Democratic Union (CDU) parliamentary deputy Elisabeth Motschmann accused Russia of regarding war as a political instrument of foreign policy. Germany had to remain “ready to defend itself” by means of the Bundeswehr (German military) and NATO. Left Party deputy Gregor Gysi attacked Russia for the “annexation of Crimea contrary to international law.”

Three-quarters of a century after German imperialism reduced the continent of Europe to ruins, Germany’s ruling elite is reviving its militarist traditions. That it is using the anniversary of Operation Barbarossa for this purpose is cynical and criminal in the extreme.

At the beginning of 2014, Steinmeier, Gauck and Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen announced “the end of [German] military restraint.” This return to military great power politics required that the monstrous crimes of German imperialism be glossed over. Hence the turn to historical falsification.

For example, Green Party parliamentary deputy Marieluise Beck said at the beginning of her speech in the Bundestag that the Second World War was initiated not only by Germany, but also by the Soviet Union’s invasion of Poland.

Christian Social Union (CSU) deputy Alois Karl even called the Soviet Union an “aggressor” that had made common cause with the

Nazi regime in the division of Central and Eastern Europe into spheres of influence. He quoted an elderly lady from Latvia, according to whom “both aggressive regimes” were responsible for the victims in her home country.

Stalin’s crimes were used to downplay Germany’s war guilt and the bestial nature of the war of annihilation. This was stated even more bluntly in an article in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung* on 20 June. Nikolai Klimentiouk accused Steinmeier of referring to the Germans as perpetrators “as if Nazi Germany had invaded the peaceful Soviet Union in an ahistorical space outside any context.”

Klimentiouk made the Soviet Union responsible for the civilian and military victims of the German attack. The “high death toll of the USSR in the German-Soviet War” was “just as much due to the Soviet Union as the German aggressor,” he wrote.

The author directly combined this stunning historical falsification with a call to prepare for war against Russia, which he accused of continuing its “Great Patriotic War” up to the present day. Germany should not close its eyes “to this military aggression” or stand idly by and watch the “abuse of a common traumatic history,” Klimentiouk wrote.

The falsification of history to justify the revival of German militarism could not be more brazen. To this end, Klimentiouk as well as a number of speakers in the Bundestag employed lies previously used only by far-right revanchist tendencies.

After World War II, the Nazi myth that the German attack was mounted to forestall an imminent assault by the Soviet Union was maintained by right-wing circles in Germany. When historical research showed this argument to be completely baseless, Ernst Nolte provoked the so-called “Historikerstreit” (Historians’ Dispute) in 1986 with his claim that the war of annihilation had been an understandable response to the violence of the Bolsheviks. Nolte too has been thoroughly refuted.

Those who now claim that the Soviet Union was an aggressor just like Nazi Germany build on these discredited myths.

The Nazis’ racist war of extermination against the Soviet Union expressed the historic interests of German imperialism and international capitalism, which sought to destroy the Soviet Union and create “Lebensraum in the East.” Hitler’s will to destruction, which he formulated in *Mein Kampf* in 1925, is meticulously documented.

Stalin’s politics, unlike Hitler’s, were not directed at imperialist conquest. Behind Stalin’s policies was the fear of the counterrevolutionary bureaucracy he headed that the Soviet proletariat

might rise up against its rule. In the Great Terror of 1937-38, the Stalin regime had already liquidated the officer corps of the Red Army and the leaders of the 1917 October Revolution, severely weakening the Soviet Union.

The bureaucracy no longer based the defence of the Soviet Union on the international working class, but rather on alliances with imperialist powers--first with France and England, and then, when these powers did not oppose Hitler at Munich, with Nazi Germany. Stalin's 1939 pact with Hitler disoriented the international working class and facilitated Germany's long-planned attack on the Soviet Union.

Despite this, after initial setbacks, the Red Army and the Soviet people mounted a heroic struggle. The counteroffensive of the Red Army that began in December of 1941 embodied the anti-fascist resistance of the Soviet masses and the international working class. The crushing blows delivered by the Red Army broke the back of the Wehrmacht and played the main role in Hitler's defeat.

Knopp, Baberowski and Neitzel

Today, to justify the Bundeswehr's present wars, this historical truth is under attack. Guido Knopp has taken up this task on public television. The right-wing historian and journalist, who studied under the revisionist historian Werner Maser, has long been known for his distortion of history on Germany's public channel number two (Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen).

On June 19, he focused his broadcast for the *Phoenix* news program on the theme: "Operation Barbarossa--turning point in World War II?" To this end, he invited two right-wing historians, Jörg Baberowski and Sönke Neitzel, as well as Kristiane Janeke.

Baberowski is one of the leading representatives of German historical revisionism. In February 2014, he declared in an article in *Der Spiegel*: "Nolte was wrongly treated. Historically speaking, he was right." In his own work, he implies that Stalin had considered an attack on Germany and that he and his generals had forced the Wehrmacht to adopt the methods of a war of annihilation.

Neitzel also relativizes the crimes of German militarism. In January 2014, in the daily *Die Welt*, he claimed that Germany had pursued defensive objectives in the First World War.

The discussion on the *Phoenix* program unfolded accordingly. At the very beginning, the host, Knopp, questioned whether the Eastern campaign had been planned as a war of extermination, something that had been generally deemed a historical and legal fact ever since the Nuremberg trials.

"Was it the implementation of Hitler's long-cherished plan of Lebensraum in the East, or was he reacting, first of all, to the war situation?" asked Knopp.

"It was a bit of both," Neitzel said. "There is always the question of whether we can really believe that Hitler had a plan."

Knopp then went on to make the Soviet Union jointly culpable for the Nazis' methods of destruction, saying, "Barbarossa was conceived from the outset as a campaign of destruction, but as long as it lasted, this war was conducted brutally, yes, by both sides. A bloody spiral of violence. Had both sides mutually incited each other?"

"Absolutely," replied Baberowski, and later added: "The interesting thing is that the Bolsheviks--who had already shown this during the occupation of Poland--acted with very similar methods in the rear.

Deporting imaginary enemies, collective stigmatization, weeding out entire groups of people from society. That was horrible in a different way, but it followed, so to speak, the same logic, the same principle."

Baberowski went on to equate the actions of the Red Army with the planned racist extermination of European Jewry: "To make this clear in an example: when the Wehrmacht conquered Rostov-on-Don in 1941, all the city's Jews were murdered. A little later, when the Red Army recaptured the city for a short time, all Germans and minorities suspected of collaborating with the Germans were killed. Not along social, but ethnic lines."

Neitzel seized on this claim to argue that Soviet soldiers had served as a model for the Nazis in their extermination strategy. "And partly, yes, even Goebbels said: We must learn from the Red Army... The way the Red Army conducts war, there were perceptions, today we would speak of transfer history, how they do things, so radically, that is actually the way we have to do it."

The participants in the programme inflated these outrageous historical falsifications to the point of asserting that one had to "refute" the "myth" that the Red Army liberated Eastern Europe and Germany. "Was that liberation?" asked Knopp. "Mass rape, replacing one dictatorship with another. Not only in the Baltics, also in the GDR [East Germany]. Can one really objectively speak of liberation? Some claim, yes, the liberation began only on 9 November 1989 [the day East German officials opened the Berlin Wall]."

"We have decided for ourselves, in the self-representation of our state, that we want to see this as an act of liberation," Baberowski observed critically. "The historian is the one who refutes the myth. We are not here to confirm a view of history by governments or societies. And then one would say: liberation, yes, for concentration camp inmates, yes. Not for Nazis, of which there were quite a few. There one would say, they were not liberated. Nor raped women."

By citing cases of rape by Red Army soldiers, Baberowski sought to refute the "myth" that the Soviet army had liberated Europe from Nazi terror. This argument, and many others rolled out in the *Phoenix* broadcast, in the Bundestag and in the conservative *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, are the stock in trade of far-right circles. These same arguments are now being utilised to whitewash the crimes of German imperialism and prepare new wars.



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