

German think tank demands greater foreign policy independence from the US

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Just days before the US presidential election, the German government-aligned think tank German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP) published a paper entitled “Even without Trump much will change.” It calls for a more aggressive German and European foreign policy, which, “regardless of the election result,” is prepared to impose its economic and geopolitical interests with greater independence from, and if necessary against Washington.

The candidacy of Republican Donald Trump makes “clear that [...] a US policy is possible that would demand from Germany more independent action than in the past,” according to the author of the paper and the leader of the America research group, Johannes Thimm. The possibility of Trump entering the White House compels “German politicians to ask themselves difficult questions.”

Trump’s rise to prominence has provoked considerable trepidation within broad sections of the ruling elite in Germany and internationally. “With Trump as president [...] there would be a high degree of uncertainty about US foreign policy,” the paper stated. Germany could “certainly not rely on Trump’s unpredictability or extreme positions being ‘discarded,’ either through advisory staff, the cabinet, the military or Congress.”

But even with an election victory for Democrat Hillary Clinton, “corresponding strategic considerations [would be] necessary,” and Germany would “do well not to take the easy way out of wait and see.” Instead, Berlin should, “regardless of the election result, consider how the Transatlantic relationship and the future world order are to be organised.”

In line with the article written for *Foreign Affairs* in June by German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier (Social Democrats), the SWP paper calls

into question the claim of the US to global leadership. In the section “A strategic America policy,” it states, “the balance sheet of American engagement in the world [is ...] mixed at best.” Among other things, “the US policy” – such as the “invasion of Iraq in 2003” or the “ongoing Saudi Arabian intervention in Yemen” – is “simply counter-productive for a stable order.”

“If similar types of situations arise in the future,” the paper states provocatively, “it would be important for Germany (possibly with Europe) to take a clear position and adopt its own estimation at an early stage.” Even though options are limited, “Germany and Europe [should] not leave the area of planning the political order to the US alone.”

Concretely, this means, among other things, “to question the view, based on the self-portrayal of the US as exceptional, that American interests are per se global interests.” It is also necessary “to consider how to respond if US behaviour is, from Germany’s standpoint, counter-productive.” In this, “good transatlantic relations” should not be “an end in themselves and [placed] before other considerations,” otherwise, one would be robbing oneself of the “possibility of acting strategically.”

It continues, “Without the willingness to argue with the US government ... many options for exerting influence [are] excluded from the outset.”

Nobody should underestimate the historical, political and military implications of such statements. Two years ago, the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) warned: “At present, Washington is pursuing these objectives with the collaboration of the other major imperialist powers. However, there is no permanent coincidence of interests among them. German imperialism, which fought two wars with the US in the 20th century, is reviving its imperial

ambitions.”

At the beginning of this year, the ICFI wrote in its statement *Socialism and the Fight Against War*: “Seventy years after the fall of Hitler’s Third Reich, the German ruling class is once again demanding that its state assert itself as the unquestioned overlord of Europe and as a world power. In the face of deeply felt anti-war sentiments within the German population, Berlin is deploying military force to assert its interests in the Middle East and Africa. It is pouring money into rearmament, while apologetics for the crimes of the Nazi regime are being advanced across the political establishment, media and academia, with the aim of justifying the revival of German imperialist ambitions.”

The SWP played a central role in this revival from the outset. In 2013, it organised a project involving 50 leading politicians from all parliamentary parties, journalists, academics and military and business representatives to elaborate a strategy for the return of German militarism. At the end of the discussions, the paper “New Power–New Responsibilities. Elements of a German foreign and security policy for a world in turmoil” was produced, which formed the basis of Steinmeier’s and President Gauck’s imperialistic speeches at the Munich Security Conference in 2014 and the army’s 2016 white paper.

The German ruling elite is now using the deepening international crisis in the wake of the Brexit vote and the political chaos in the US to press ahead with its great power ambitions. In a current essay entitled “Europe is the solution,” Steinmeier writes, “We must grant ourselves the concrete instruments necessary for a joint foreign [EU] policy.” This includes “practical capabilities: for joint situation analysis, financial instruments for stabilisation and crisis prevention, and ultimately joint military capacities, such as joint command structures or maritime task forces.”

These, according to Steinmeier, are “the concrete steps we now face.” Then, “the creation of a European army [should] be discussed ... when we have proven that Europe can do it better than any national state alone.” This would be the significance of a red-red-green (Social Democrats (SPD), Left Party and Greens) federal government! It would have the task in foreign policy of pressing ahead with the return of German militarism behind phrases about “responsibility,” “humanity” and “human rights,” while at the same

time developing an independent German foreign policy increasingly at odds with that of the United States.



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