

# German officials demand aggressive response to Trump's inaugural address

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The coming to power of Donald Trump has led to fierce reactions in Berlin. German politicians, business leaders and the media are increasingly realizing that the new US president regards Europe, and above all Germany, as economic and political rivals. In response, they are formulating their own economic and geopolitical aspirations with increased aggressiveness. The demands range from a more independent European foreign policy to discussions about alternative military and economic alliances with Russia and China.

Trump's interview with the *Bild* newspaper a few days before his inauguration had already caused a shock in Berlin's ruling circles. In it, Trump had welcomed the breakup of a European Union dominated by Germany, declared that NATO was "obsolete" and threatened the German car industry with import duties of 35 percent if it maintained its plans to build new production plants in Mexico. Now Trump's inaugural speech has destroyed the last hope that he would be more "presidential" or "willing to compromise" after taking office.

Trump's inaugural speech on Friday was largely seen as a "threat." *Spiegel Online* commented, "Whereas previous inaugurations were always marked by conciliatory tones, this was the exact opposite: a challenge to all opponents, a radical departure from all previous certainties, a display of his own, unstoppable strength, regardless of the rest of the world, without looking at history, just always ahead. This president will not compromise."

"We will have to dress up warm," said Germany's minister for economic affairs and Social Democratic Party (SPD) chairman Sigmar Gabriel. However, there is no reason for Germans or Europeans "to be afraid or submissive." Rather, following Trump's "highly nationalistic tones," one should "firmly" define and pursue one's own interests. Germany was "a strong country" and Europe "a strong continent, which must stick together." If the United States "starts a trade war

with China and throughout Asia, then we are a fair partner," he added. Germany and Europe needed a new orientation toward China and Asia. There were new opportunities, although China is not an easy partner.

Representatives of the Left Party, which hopes to be part of an SPD-Left Party-Green Party coalition following the next federal elections, possibly under SPD chancellor Gabriel, argued in a similar fashion. On broadcaster Deutschlandfunk, leading Left Party foreign policy expert Stefan Liebich said that Trump had "started a dispute with the Peoples Republic of China without any cause." In an interview with *Neues Deutschland*, the party's parliamentary group leader Sahra Wagenknecht demanded that the German government "get out of [its] subordination to US policy" and replace NATO "through a collective security system which includes Russia."

One indicator of the depth of the transatlantic tensions is that even those sections of the German elite which had previously been aggressive supporters of US war policy are now pleading for a more independent German and European defence policy. Klaus-Dieter Frankenberger of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* called Trump's speech "a challenge without precedent." Europe and Germany should "understand this as a wake-up call." He added, "Now more than ever, it comes down to them, their performance and their willingness to take responsibility, so that the West can withstand the storms of the present."

Josef Joffe, another formerly notorious pro-American war propagandist, warned in *Die Zeit*, Trump could "wreak terrible damage in four years." But the "despised EU" is "certainly not helpless. "The 'economic giant' must now tell Trump of the consequences of acting "tit for tat." That demands "cold blood and nerves of steel." Because, "who would have thought that Europe needs to take the part of the United States to save the liberal world order?"

Whenever Joffe used the phrase “liberal world order” in recent years, he was defending the US-led wars of aggression against Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and Syria. Now, when US imperialism under Trump is preparing to target Germany and Europe in the struggle for markets, raw materials, cheap labour and key strategic positions, Joffe takes the side of German imperialism. Following defeat in two world wars, German imperialism is raising its head again.

In a commentary in *Bild am Sonntag*, German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD) said bluntly that with Trump’s election, “the old world of the 20th century was finally over” and “also the post-war order and the quarter century after the fall of the [Berlin] Wall [...] was history.” He continued: “Which notions of order prevail in the 21st century, how the world will look tomorrow, is not fixed, is fully open.”

In June, Steinmeier wrote an article in *Foreign Affairs* titled “Germany’s new global role,” which not only described Berlin as a “major European power,” but also questioned the leadership of the United States. The German government is now using Trump’s election to more aggressively confront the US. Now it was a question of telling the new US administration “our attitudes, our values and interests” and “making our expectations clear of a still to consolidate partnership of equals between Europe and the US,” says Steinmeier.

Former conservative defence minister Karl Theodor zu Guttenberg demanded the government respond to Trump’s “crude ideas, constructively and, if necessary, firmly.” He added, “this may well be the moment to finally replace the long-fostered ‘culture of restraint’ with a ‘culture of responsibility’, he wrote in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* newspaper.

“We should set ourselves the task of doing more here,” Guttenberg continued. “It would be disastrous if German politics in an election year only served the military scepticism of our population.” Given the geopolitical threats to Europe, the weakness of many member states and the weakening American commitment Berlin must grow into “a leadership role inevitably, whether it wants to or not.”

While Guttenberg presents German rearmament plans and plans for leadership as externally being “imposed,” they in fact correspond to a policy that Berlin has long officially pursued. At the 2014 Munich Security Conference, Steinmeier, on behalf of the entire ruling class, announced that “Germany must be ready to engage in foreign and security policy issues earlier, more

decisively, and more substantially.” It is simply “too large to comment on world politics only from the side-lines.”

In a 2014 resolution, entitled the “Return of German Militarism,” the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (Socialist Equality Party) warned that the post-war order had “resolved none of the problems that had led to war. The economic power of the US made possible a temporary stabilisation and the post-war boom. The Cold War not only kept the Soviet Union at bay, but also kept Germany under control. But with the reunification of Germany and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the period in which German business could conduct its affairs in the wake of the US and the German army could restrict itself to national defence was irrevocably over.”

It continued: “The revival of militarism is the response of the ruling class to the explosive social tensions, the deepening economic crisis and the growing conflicts between European powers. Its aim is the conquest of new spheres of influence, markets and raw materials upon which the export-dependent German economy relies; the prevention of a social explosion by deflecting social tensions onto an external enemy; and the militarization of society as a whole, including the development of an all embracing national surveillance apparatus, the suppression of social and political opposition, and the bringing into line of the media.”

This analysis has now been confirmed. There is a social force that is able to stop the return of German militarism and the danger of a new war between the great powers: the international working class. The mass protests against Trump on Saturday were the largest globally coordinated demonstrations since the antiwar protests against the attack on Iraq in 2003. Under these conditions, the struggle of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) for the building of an international antiwar movement against imperialism and capitalism is of decisive significance.



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