

Germany clashes with US over NATO funding

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A sharp clash took place at Friday's NATO meeting between German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel (Social Democrats, SPD) and his American counterpart Rex Tillerson.

Tillerson demanded that NATO's European members and Germany in particular issue a statement on how they intend to meet the goal of spending 2 percent of GDP on defence with "annual milestones and progress commitments." According to the official text of Tillerson's remarks, published on the US State Department's website, he added, "Allies that do not have a concrete plan to spend 2 percent of GDP on defense by 2024 need to establish one now." Such plans are to be presented prior to the NATO conference in Brussels on 25 May.

Gabriel bluntly responded that he thought it was "completely unrealistic to believe that Germany will reach an annual military budget of more than €70 billion." He was aware of "no politician who believes that this is achievable or even desirable in our country." In addition, he had "absolutely no" idea "where we would put all of the aircraft carriers that we would have to buy in order to invest €70 billion in the German army every year."

Gabriel's remarks have nothing to do with pacifism. The Social Democrat Foreign Minister left no doubt about his commitment to the substantial rearming of the German army which was agreed to by his predecessor Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD) at NATO's 2014 summit in Wales. "We have a plan—it is called a budget plan," Gabriel said. "We are increasing military spending, but on a scale that we deem responsible."

Gabriel's message was clear: Germany is rearming and preparing an expansion of its policy of military interventions, but only on its own terms. "We Germans are currently spending a lot of money on accepting

refugees. They come because military interventions went wrong. And because there was no stabilisation afterwards. So we know what it means when the only focus is on military spending," he stated.

This was a thinly-veiled criticism of the US-led wars in the Middle East, against which Gabriel counterposes an imperialist European foreign policy dominated by Berlin.

In his speech in the German parliament (Bundestag) on continuing the German-European intervention in Mali, the foreign minister stated on Thursday, "Europe is being asked more than ever before to be a global actor, which is also ready to assume responsibility, and this is even though the European Union was not constructed as a global political actor. It was never made for that. Despite this, we cannot be indifferent to the conflicts going on around us."

The "deployment of German soldiers as part of the European training mission EUTM Mali" shows "that where Europe is ready to do so, we engage jointly and can certainly achieve good results." It was a "European strength" that "we deal with crises with a broad range of instruments: with diplomatic, civilian and police capabilities, and also militarily."

A few days earlier, Gabriel announced a "new orientation" for Germany's "Asia policy" and stated, "In many areas of international politics, we are currently experiencing crises, upheavals and new dynamics. One has the sense that this world is being measured anew—and everybody is using their own tape measure to do so. One thing is clear: Asia's rising powers will play a key role in this."

This is the old language of German imperialism. In the new scramble among the imperialist powers for raw materials, markets and cheap labour, Germany is once again laying claim to "a place in the sun." The task is

to “intensify [German] relations with Asia and organise them more strategically so they correspond to the rapidly rising significance of this region with 4 billion inhabitants and rapidly growing sales markets,” Gabriel wrote.

He had “decided, therefore, to establish an independent Asia department within the Foreign Ministry for the first time, which will better consolidate and further expand our regional competencies.” It was “high time that the composition of our team in the Foreign Ministry appropriately reflects the further growth of Asia’s weight.”

But this could “only be a first step. It is vital that Asia be seen as the key region of the future in our thinking and daily politics—in the Foreign Ministry, in the federal government and in the EU.” Ultimately, “the road to resolving our global task” runs “ever more frequently through Asia.”

As in the periods prior to the first and second World Wars, the “global tasks” of German imperialism are leading to growing conflicts with the United States and these will culminate in trade war and military conflict unless the working class intervenes.

On the same day as the clash with Tillerson, Gabriel demanded that the EU resist the “anti-dumping” measures against European steel producers being pushed for by the United States. He acknowledged the proceedings “with a large degree of incomprehension.” The goal was clear to him, “American industry is to be protected by disadvantaging the better German steel industry.”

There was no question that the United States was practicing “trade warfare” and was thereby violating international trade law so as to secure a competitive advantage for their companies, according to Gabriel. A clear position had to be taken against the US government and “the EU now had to consider whether to file a complaint with the WTO. I would strongly support that.”

In a comment on Monday, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* warned, “Trump has to realise: if America adopts protectionist measures, Germany, the EU and China will adopt counter-measures, immediately, ruthlessly and without compromise.” This would involve “direct consequences, counter-tariffs, other penalties, but also publicly effective lawsuits at the WTO.” Europe and China would have the privilege of being “strong

enough for such a course.”

The author, Marc Beise, then gave free rein to his great power fantasies for Germany, noting, “That also applies to Germany, which likes to play small politically, but which as an economic power is a great power that can afford to assert itself.”



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