

Conflict between Europe and America dominates NATO summit

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The first trip by US President Donald Trump to Europe has exposed the deep rift in the transatlantic NATO alliance.

Officially, agreement was reached at yesterday's NATO summit for all members to increase defence spending to 2 percent of gross domestic product and for the alliance to join the US-led coalition against the Islamic State. However, the conflicts between the imperialist powers, and between the United States and Germany in particular, are now so sharp that they are becoming increasingly difficult to conceal.

Prior to the evening's "working dinner," Trump raked the visibly concerned European leaders over the coals. "Twenty-three of 28 member nations are still not paying what they should be paying," blustered the US President. This was unfair to "the people and taxpayers of the United States." Trump then repeated his assertion that many member states owe the alliance "massive sums of money" from previous years.

He also called on the NATO states to intensify their joint struggle against terrorism. "We must be tough, we must be strong, we must be vigilant," said Trump, declaring that terrorism threatens humanity as a whole. "The NATO of the future must include a great focus on terrorism and immigration, as well as threats from Russia and on NATO's eastern and southern borders."

Shortly before Trump's warning, German Chancellor Angela Merkel described Germany's planned increase in military spending as sufficient. She added that NATO was merely going to confirm its 2014 agreement to increase defence spending, but would go no further. "Confirmed means nothing more and nothing less," she stated.

There can be no doubt that Trump's statements were directed above all at Berlin. According to the German news magazine *Der Spiegel*, during a meeting with

European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker and Council President Donald Tusk, Trump declared, "The Germans are bad, very bad." He reportedly added, "Look at the millions of cars they sell in the US. Terrible. We're going to stop that."

Shortly after Merkel's visit to Washington in March, Trump wrote on Twitter, "Germany owes vast sums of money to NATO & the United States must be paid more for the powerful, and very expensive, defense it provides to Germany!"

Since then, the economic and geostrategic conflicts between Washington and Berlin have intensified. Trump's speech in the Saudi Arabian capital of Riyadh last weekend, in which he described Iran as "the most important state sponsor of terrorism," was met with sharp criticism in Europe. Berlin is not seeking war with Iran, but rather an opening up of the country in order to secure new energy supplies and markets for German exports.

Berlin is also opposed to the US confrontation with China, which had already accelerated under the Obama administration, but has been aggressively intensified under Trump. China is a major source of profits for the German auto industry, and Berlin is also interested in Beijing's new "silk road" project, which aims to integrate the Gulf region and Russia to develop trade ties with Europe.

Significantly, German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel made it to the NATO meeting only by cutting short a visit to China. Shortly after his appointment to the post of foreign minister, which came just a week after Trump's inauguration, Gabriel announced the creation of an Asia strategy to "exploit the spaces vacated by America."

Ahead of the Brussels meeting, Gabriel began a coordinated offensive against US foreign policy with

Martin Schulz, the SPD (Social Democratic Party of Germany) candidate for chancellor. Both criticized the US demand for Germany's defence spending to be increased to 2 percent of GDP by 2024. There would be "absolutely no way to double military spending in Germany," Gabriel said in an interview, adding that he had "no idea what we would spend the money on."

In an op-ed published in *Der Spiegel* titled "Invest in peace—not weapons," Schulz warned, "The debate about NATO's alleged 2 percent goal" revealed "a dangerous tendency." It would "mean almost a doubling of Germany's annual defence budget to a gigantic €70 billion." He then hypocritically asked, "Did the founding fathers have this picture of Germany in front of them in 1949? United, firmly integrated in Europe, surrounded by friends and partners—but armed to the teeth?"

In reality, Schulz's comment has nothing to do with pacifism. He is not concerned with reducing military spending, but rather with securing Germany's independence from Washington. He does not want military policy to be dictated by the White House, but instead intends to strengthen the German and European militaries to the point where they can act independently of—and in opposition to—the US.

Schulz appealed in his *Spiegel Online* comment for a massive military build-up of the German army and more foreign military interventions. He wrote, "The army will take part in interventions in conformity with international law in the future. Our soldiers need the best possible equipment for that."

At the same time, Schulz demanded an expansion of Europe's defence policy and the creation of a European army dominated by Germany: Europe had to "finally make progress on the EU's joint security and defence policy. Together with our partners in the EU, who are pursuing the same goal, we want to agree on the foundation of a European defence union." The "exit from the EU of Britain, which always blocked progress in this area," provides "new opportunities" along these lines.

Schulz's call for a German and European great-power policy, pursuing imperialist interests around the globe independently of and in opposition to Washington, is unmistakable.

The EU has to "finally leave the side-lines and take up an active role on the stage of international policy for

peace," he urged. This is "uncomfortable" and will "certainly lead to wide-ranging discussions." But there is "no reasonable alternative" to a "more active role for Europe." He added, "Because many of the other global political actors—including those who are our allies—have no or merely a limited interest in such a new policy for peace."

The attempt by Germany's Social Democrats to peddle European imperialism as a pacifist alternative to US militarism is a fraud. Over the past quarter-century, the European powers have participated in the illegal wars of aggression waged by US imperialism and are now pursuing policies all down the line that are similar to those pushed by the multibillionaire at the head of the US state. They are slashing social spending throughout Europe, engaging in a military build-up and strengthening the state apparatus. They are also increasingly prepared to take action against their American "ally."

The reason for this dangerous development is to be found in the insoluble crisis of capitalism, which is incapable of overcoming the contradiction between the international character of production and the nation-state system. As on the eve of the First and Second World Wars, the scramble among the imperialist powers for raw materials, markets and spheres of influence is provoking sharp conflicts that will inevitably culminate in a major war unless the working class intervenes with its own, independent socialist program.



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