

German Social Democrats, Left Party back Merkel's anti-US stance

Peter Schwarz
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German Chancellor Angela Merkel's anti-US stance has been endorsed by all of the establishment political parties and most of the media. They are exploiting outrage at US President Donald Trump's arrogant behaviour at the NATO and G7 meetings to mobilise support for Germany to adopt an independent great power policy.

At a meeting of the Bavarian Christian Social Union (CSU) in a beer tent in Munich on Sunday, Merkel called into question the alliance with the US, which has been the cornerstone of German foreign policy since the founding of the Federal Republic 70 years ago. "The times when we could completely depend on others are over," she said. From this she drew the conclusion, "We Europeans must really take our destiny into our own hands" and "fight for our future."

Merkel's Social Democratic (SPD) coalition partner gave its unreserved backing to this stance. Martin Schulz, who hopes to replace Merkel as chancellor in the federal election in September, tweeted, "The best answer to Donald Trump is a stronger Europe."

Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel (SPD) said the US was missing as an important nation. Under Trump, the US could no longer play a role in the "Western community of values," he declared. The G7 summit was "a signal for a shift in global power relations," he continued, adding, "The West is becoming somewhat smaller."

The Left Party sought to outdo Merkel and the SPD. Party Chairwoman Katja Kipping called in the *Bild* newspaper for a tougher approach to dealing with Trump. Germany had to stop being "a yes-man towards the US," she wrote. The friendliest thing she could think of to say to the US president was that "he is an infantile narcissist." Europe had to move closer together in response to Trump, she added.

Merkel also received international support. EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker pushed for more European independence and decisiveness. The

Commission had already presented ideas related to this, his spokesperson Margaritis Schinas said. "This is precisely about ensuring that Europe determines its own fate."

The French newspaper *Le Monde*, which is aligned with President Emmanuel Macron, published an editorial titled, "One must respond to Merkel's appeal." Brexit and the retreat of the Americans have destroyed Europe's equilibrium, it stated. But Germany did not want to be the only continental power.

"When Angela Merkel says 'we Europeans,' she is directing an appeal to France, her only refuge if the Americans and British disappear in the dust," the newspaper declared. Macron had to respond positively to this appeal and not lapse into Gaullist superiority.

However, Merkel's speech was sharply attacked by Britain's *Financial Times*. "It is easy and appropriate to blame President Trump for this state of affairs," wrote columnist Gideon Rachman. "But despite her cautious phrasing, Ms. Merkel has also behaved irresponsibly--making a statement that threatens to widen a dangerous rift in the Atlantic alliance into a permanent breach."

The *Financial Times* accused Merkel of deliberately deepening the split not only with the United States, but also with Britain. "If Ms. Merkel's government pursues the Brexit negotiations in the current confrontational spirit--demanding that the UK commit to vast upfront payments, before even discussing a trade deal--she risks creating a self-fulfilling prophecy and a lasting antagonism between Britain and the EU," Rachman continued.

An article in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ) indicates that these are the plans of the German government. It views Britain's withdrawal from the EU and the rift with the United States as an opportunity to reorganise the EU as a military and political alliance

under German dominance, and make this the starting point for a new, independent great power policy.

Under the headline “A secret plan for Europe,” the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* wrote that after the rift with Trump, Merkel had activated “plan number 2: Europe,” which was composed of “several facets.” The refugee issue was of central importance: “Stopping the flight across the Mediterranean is seen in the Chancellor’s Office as critical for the future of the European Union.”

The second point identified by the newspaper is “defence.” Merkel wants to “spend more money” and allow “the cooperation of the armies to continue unhindered.” The concept of a “European army,” which is vehemently opposed by Britain, had for this reason been carefully avoided thus far, the paper added.

The German army was offering its services as an anchor to smaller NATO members so as to strengthen their military capabilities and establish practical milestones for the creation of a European armed forces, wrote the FAZ. Joint units already exist with the Netherlands, France and Poland, and there are agreements with Romania and the Czech Republic.

The third point noted by the FAZ is the “economic and currency union.” In this area, the German government was prepared to compromise with Macron on the creation of economic governance for the euro zone and joint bonds (euro bonds), but, with regard to the latter, only on the condition that “structural reforms” are adopted, i.e., further attacks on social welfare programs and working conditions. As a concession to Germany, the appointment of Jens Weidmann to succeed Mario Draghi as president of the European Central Bank is under discussion, the newspaper reported.

Spiegel Online went even further than the FAZ, raising the possibility of new geo-strategic alliances. Columnist Henrik Müller, a professor of economic and political journalism, appealed for a European-Chinese strategic partnership against the US.

Trump’s verbal outbursts, he wrote, show “that the US is no longer a dependable partner.” Trump’s retreat from America’s traditional role as a leader was having a destabilising impact. As a consequence, global economic policy was in flux. “The other two large economies--the EU and China--are looking for new partners to solve international problems.”

The most important areas for “intensified European-Chinese cooperation” were global trade and climate change policy, wrote Müller. The US, as “the West’s

leading power,” had once supported “the global economic institutions of the post-war era”--the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization’s predecessor, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). Now it was necessary for “Europe and China to jointly fill the global regulatory vacuum.”

Müller recommended cooperation on climate change policy “out of pure economic interest,” and not because of “ecological conviction.” The rapid progress in productivity in renewable energy promised massive competitive advantages for the future. This would require long-term investments, the basis for the calculation of which would be destroyed by policy shifts and the zigzag course being pursued by Trump, according to Müller.

The German government and the EU are both eagerly seeking to expand their economic and political relations. The EU is exploiting Trump’s protectionism to conclude trade agreements around the globe. Negotiations are currently under way with 20 countries.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit Berlin today, accompanied by several government ministers. An EU-China summit is scheduled in Brussels on Thursday and Friday to be attended by Prime Minister Le Keqiang.

The conflict between the major powers and the forming of new alliances recalls the period between 1890 and 1914, when the blocs that dragged the major powers into the First World War in 1914 were formed as a result of economic and political rivalries. As in that earlier period, the contradictions of the global capitalist order are threatening to plunge humanity into a catastrophe. Only an independent movement of the working class that connects the struggle against war with the fight against capitalism can prevent this.



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