

Germany's foreign policy shift 2.0: A call for German imperialism to "get going"

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In the lead-up to the G20 summit in Hamburg, and three months prior to Germany's federal election, a new frenzy of nationalism and militarism is gripping the ruling elite. One of the most blatant examples is the latest edition of the magazine *Internationale Politik* (IP), which is published by the German Society for Foreign Policy (DGAP).

The magazine issue is entitled "Let's get going, Germany," and there is a picture of Chancellor Angela Merkel (Christian Democrats, CDU) on the front cover holding a beer stein. The editorial by chief editor Sylke Tempel declares that Merkel's call in a Munich beer tent for a more independent German foreign and great power policy is a "turning point in German foreign policy."

Merkel's statements—"The times in which we could fully depend on others are to some extent over", and "We Europeans must really take our fate into our own hands"—sound "so simple but could hardly have greater significance," Tempel writes. It is now necessary for "the great task" of building "a unified European security policy"—i.e., a European military power under German leadership—to begin. "Soft power" is required for this, "but also hard power and abundant resources...Let's get going, Germany."

The ruling class' new preferred slogan, "Let's get going, Germany," is repeated throughout the entire edition. On the first double page, which again shows Merkel in a beer tent, it is provocatively stated, "Let's get going, Germany. Something has changed over the past twelve months. There is now a consensus that Europe must stand on its own two feet and that the Germans in particular are called upon to engage more strongly. High time for German foreign policy to become more strategic."

Whom is IP trying to impress with this? There is no consensus on Europe launching a major military build-up and Germany returning to an aggressive foreign policy:

The majority of the population oppose this! There is merely a consensus in the ruling class, which is conspiring against the population to make Germany Europe's leading military power once again, in spite of its crimes in two world wars.

In 2014, then German President Joachim Gauck, his Social Democrat successor Frank-Walter Steinmeier, and Defence Minister Ursula Von der Leyen announced the revival of German militarism at the Munich Security Conference. The ruling class is now exploiting Britain's exit from the European Union and the election of Donald Trump to press ahead with the offensive it had already begun.

In the latest edition of IP, leading politicians and journalists boast in a manner that recalls even rhetorically the great power plans of the ruling class under the Kaiser and during Nazi rule. Under the headline "More toughness, more generosity, appeal for a new German foreign policy in uncertain times," the foreign policy coordinator at the politics desk of weekly magazine *Die Zeit*, Jörg Lau, warns, "Today, speaking dramatically, the issue is Germany's self-assertion in a crumbling West."

Lau considers "Germany's self-assertion" to mean nothing less than the enforcement of German imperialism's global interests "if necessary without, and perhaps even against the US government." Lau does not only include in Germany's sphere of influence the "immediate EU surroundings" and the European periphery, which is "formed by a crescent from Rabat to Donetsk." There is also "the third ring, hardly anchored in the German consciousness," which runs "between the islands thrown up by the People's Liberation Army in the South China Sea (through which German goods are shipped) to North Korea."

To realise his dream of a renewed grab for world power, Lau calls for a major military expansion. "Instead of making the federal election a referendum over an

allegedly dangerous military build-up, we should clarify the public about the new logic of German security: We must spend much more on defence, not because of, but in spite of Trump, not because he orders it, but because we want to counterpose something to his erratic policies.”

In an interview provocatively entitled “We grow with our tasks,” Von der Leyen explains how far the government has already gone in doing this. It had been important “to determinedly steer a new course and initiate a shift in spending trends due to the disparity between more challenging security situations and inadequate capabilities.” The military budget has been increased several times since 2014 and will “rise to €42 billion by 2021.” In addition, she “presented a plan to invest €130 billion” last year. This was “the minimum of equipping if we are to fulfill by 2030 the tasks we already see today.”

To clarify the vast scale of these figures: this is more than three times the amount of the entire annual budgets for the departments “Education, science and research,” (€17.6 billion), “Health” (€15.1 billion), and “Families, elderly, women and youth” (€9.5 billion).

But the ruling class is not only concerned with making working people pay for the military build-up through social cuts. It also wants them once again to defend German imperialist interests, arms in hand, and by committing new crimes. In a piece entitled “Dare to have more ambitions,” Jan Techau, director of the Richard C. Holbrooke Forum at the American Academy in Berlin, writes, “Germany’s supreme national interests are not freedom, peace and prosperity but remaining morally untarnished.” In his current book *Germany: a leading power*, he writes, “Whoever goes to war must generally take responsibility for killing people. Including the killing of non-participants and innocents.”

When one reads such statements, it is easy to understand why leading media outlets, academics and politicians so aggressively defended Humboldt University’s right-wing extremist Professor Jörg Baberowski in spite of his defeat in court. As the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP) and International Youth and Students for Social Equality have demonstrated from the outset, his agitation against refugees, his call for waging brutal wars, and his downplaying of the crimes of the Nazis are directly bound up with the foreign policy shift of the ruling class.

Significantly, IP’s advisory council includes Josef Joffe (*Die Zeit*), Günther Nonnenmacher (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*), and Markus Spielmann (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*), all representatives of newspapers that daily drum up support for the return of German militarism

and all of which defended Baberowski against his critics with lies and slanders. Jörg Lau is the husband of Mariam Lau, who recently defended Baberowski in a two-page article.

A glance at the leadership of the DGAP also reveals why the Left Party and its pseudo-left satellites have raised no opposition to the sharp shift to the right in German foreign policy. They are themselves part of this shift and are deeply integrated into the institutions of German imperialism. Along with the SPD’s foreign policy spokesman Nils Annen, and the CDU’s Elmar Brock, Sevim Dagdelen represents the Left Party on the DGAP’s presidium.

The SGP is the only party which has exposed the foreign policy conspiracy from the outset and has placed the struggle against the return of German militarism at the heart of its federal election campaign. Its election statement declares,

“The SGP and its sister parties in the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) are today the only organizations worldwide fighting for a socialist response to the global crisis of capitalism.

“We reject all imperialist alliances and military blocs. We are for the dissolution of NATO and the European Union and fight instead for the United Socialist States of Europe. Our ally in the struggle against German militarism is the European, American and international working class.

“We call on all those who are not willing to accept the return of German militarism, the increase in poverty and the rise of the right wing to support the SGP and its election campaign.”



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