

German general demands military build-up after federal election

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In the US, the dominance of high-ranking military officers over the government has been increased in the aftermath of a series of White House personnel changes, including the firing of Donald Trump's chief strategist Stephen Bannon following the fascist rampage in Charlottesville, Virginia. A similar process is underway in Germany, where the general staff is rearming and preparing once again to intervene actively in foreign and domestic affairs.

A foreign affairs comment by retired General Hans-Lothar Domröse that appeared in Monday's edition of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* is a warning in this regard. In a piece entitled "World in turmoil," he wrote, "As Europe's biggest economic power, Germany can fulfill its global responsibilities only if it possesses an appropriately equipped military." In the future, he continued, units should "not be established for specific operational scenarios, but equipped according to military principles."

This statement comes only four weeks before Germany's federal election. The intervention of a high-ranking general into the election campaign underscores how far advanced is the return of German militarism. Seventy years after the end of World War II, the "primacy of politics over the military" guaranteed in Germany's Basic law is being transformed into its opposite. As in the Kaiser's Reich, the Weimar Republic and under the Nazis, leading military figures are once again emerging as spokespeople for foreign and war policies.

Domröse's demands read like a shopping list for politicians to prepare for Germany's third grab for world power: "This includes helicopters and planes able to fly day and night; tanks capable of communicating by radio, driving and shooting, and army units with command structures able to lead."

Although many things had moved "in the right direction," he said, they had been "implemented too gradually." Now was the time to abandon "half-heartedness."

He continued: "The airborne forces are barely capable of tactical operations. The Navy is not qualified to operate as a NATO marine force. It cannot assume a leading role within NATO. The manned and unmanned flight systems in the Air Force are sorely lacking. We have too few of them and they are too old. Cyber operations needs defensive and offensive capacities. All of these imbalances impact the internal fabric and also trust, as well as the armed forces' reputation."

Domröse left no doubt that his plans for a military build-up are aimed at preparing to wage war. "Only well trained soldiers with the best equipment can cope with the burdens of deployment," he wrote. "That is the measure by which a professional army must be tested. The separation from friends and family is only one of many burdens. Modest accommodation, heat, dust and fear affect everyone. Combat, the noise of battle, death, wounds and misery demand everything. Operations are dangerous, otherwise other people would be sent."

As in the past, new imperialist conquests, in the pursuit of which the general staff intends to dragoon a new generation, require the militarisation of politics and society. "The soldiers deserve thanks," demanded Domröse. "Their superiors, who are discussing the purpose of the Army in the election campaign, have the task of creating the best conditions for them and standing full-square behind them."

Domröse is not some individual, overwrought general who has lost touch with social reality, but the authentic voice of German militarism. His father, Lothar Domröse, fought in the Second World War as a Wehrmacht company commander on the Eastern Front.

In 1956, as a result of German rearmament, he joined the Bundeswehr, Germany's newly created post-war armed forces, and enjoyed an impressive career in the military. In 1975, he became chief of staff of the armed forces' high command.

In the years prior to his retirement, Domröse Jr. drew upon the central war aim fought for by his father in the Second World War and the Cold War: the military subordination of Russia. As supreme commander of NATO's Allied Joint Force Command in Brunssum in the Netherlands, he organised the massive NATO military build-up against Russia of the past several years, including the stationing of the first German troops in Eastern Europe since the Wehrmacht's war of annihilation against the Soviet Union.

While sharp disputes are raging within the ruling class over Germany's future foreign and military policy orientation--Domröse, for his part, appeals in his article for a global role for NATO, in which Germany and Europe should play a prominent part--all parties represented in parliament agree on the need for an offensive to strengthen the military and wage war.

In a recent interview with the Army magazine *Bundeswehr Aktuell*, German Chancellor Angela Merkel praised the latest military spending increase as a necessary step in preparing the army for new interventions. She said: "The latest budgets and the government draft for 2018 are a strong signal to the soldiers. It was all urgently required. The number of crisis situations is increasing, there is a lot of instability in Europe's neighbourhood--and for us that means we must invest more in our security, and above all in our soldiers."

The Social Democrats (SPD) and their candidate for chancellor, Martin Schulz, went even further in their recently released "Principles for a Social Democratic security and defence policy." This document stated: "To be equal to the increased demands for international deployments to tackle crises, cyber defence and the defence of our own population, we need a modern armed forces capable of action. We need an army in which... troops capable of deploying are ready for crisis situations. For this we have to better equip the army with personnel and material."

The paper attacks Merkel's Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Christian Social Union (CSU) from the right and presents the SPD, with which the

Left Party and sections of the Greens are so keen to form a coalition, as the prime party of German militarism.

"Rather than adapting our armed forces to the challenges of the 21st century, the CDU/CSU defence ministers zu Guttenberg, de Maiziere and Von der Leyen have bungled the reform of the Army and allowed the Defence Ministry to degenerate into a career platform for over-ambitious CDU politicians," the SPD complains. The ending of military service, for example, had been "rushed through... without preparing the process politically or organisationally." The Army now had "to struggle with a lack of structures and poor equipment as a result of the CDU/CSU's arbitrary cost-cutting programme."



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