Plans for major military build-up after Germany's federal election

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Several comments have appeared in German and international media outlets on the boring federal election campaign, which is dragging on without provoking enthusiasm or fighting spirit. But by contrast, one finds no explanation, or only very superficial ones, as to why this is so.

In reality, there are two key reasons. The first is that the ruling elite has planned a major military build-up after the election that they do not want to speak about publicly due to its extreme unpopularity. And the second is that all parties are in agreement on this issue and are disputing publicly over second-rank issues and trivialities.

Background analyses not intended for a mass audience make clear that German capitalism faces its biggest crisis, or "challenge" as it is positively formulated, since the establishment of the Federal Republic. The economic, geopolitical and social framework within which German capitalism has operated since the founding of the Federal Republic no longer exists or is rapidly breaking apart.

As in the first decades of the twentieth century, the ruling class has only one answer to this: a massive build-up of the military and state apparatus at home and abroad, and a return to war and dictatorship.

On August 25, *Handelsblatt* published an analysis entitled "Red alert," which over the course of several pages described with remarkable openness the global crises confronted by the German economy.

It begins by stating, "Several geopolitical crises threaten the global conjuncture. Standing in the eye of the storm is Germany, which more than any other country depends on trade without borders. The most important task for the next federal government is therefore: Save the global free market!"

It becomes clear in the article that this "saving" will not be confined to diplomacy and goodwill, but will include major military interventions and a resort to the methods of great power politics.

"It is no longer economic imbalances which are the main threats to growth and wellbeing. Instead, it is the many mounting political crises, which, unlike in the past, the US is inciting rather than resolving," writes *Handelsblatt*. The United States has become "since the election of Donald Trump as US president a threat rather than a saviour." The political crises are "poison for the German economy." If they are not resolved, "Germany's bliss will soon be over."

Handelsblatt examines seven crisis situations in detail—North Korea, the South China Sea, Russia, Brexit, Turkey, the Middle East and North Africa, and Venezuela—and it becomes clearer following each case that the concern is not resolving the conflict and overcoming the crisis, but pushing out rivals. For example, the newspaper refers to the "important role" played by China "in the industrialisation of Africa," and remarks with regard to Russia, "Political power is also the issue at stake in the Middle East."

The section on Venezuela makes unmistakably clear that what *Handelsblatt* is speaking of is a bitter struggle for the imperialist re-division of the world in which Germany must participate.

Venezuela has "become a powder keg—with potentially global political consequences. Because in the Caribbean state…the global powers Russia, China and the US are testing their strength," the article states. For Russia, "Venezuela [provides] an opportunity to establish a foothold in the US's backyard." And China, "Venezuela's largest creditor by far," possesses "an important card in the geopolitical balance of forces with its influence on the regime in Caracas." President Trump is making threats "without much credibility of a 'military intervention,'" and is "basically looking on passively as a second left-wing regime à la Cuba is established."

The article concludes with the declaration, "Germany and the German chancellor have to be urgently clear about

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which part of the leadership vacuum left behind by the United States they are prepared to fill. Just like in Venezuela, others stand ready to take over this role."

It is easy to understand what this means if one considers how the US has practiced its "leadership role" over recent decades: by conquering and destroying entire countries like Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya.

Handelsblatt is merely stating openly what large sections of Germany's ruling class are thinking. Similar considerations are to be found in other publications. The German Society for Foreign Affairs (DGAP) published a 40-page dossier in the summer on "Foreign policy challenges for the next federal government," which like the *Handelsblatt* article treats the various crisis situations around the world.

It warns of the danger "that the US significantly weakens the institution-based international order and uses its power for short-term gain." The "growing competition between the US and China" could "meanwhile destabilise the Asia region, while potential conflicts are growing in the Middle East and the Gulf region."

The DGAP urges the next government to "forcefully implement the comprehensive security policy approach that was introduced under the slogan of 'new responsibility.' " This is a reference to the paper "New power, new responsibility," which announced Germany's return to militarism and an aggressive great power policy four years ago.

Britain's *Financial Times* has also identified the problems confronted by Germany and describes Chancellor Merkel as appearing "to understand that the days of free-riding are over." However, she only speaks to the voters in vague terms, it continues, "as a serious discussion of the international role Germany can no longer avoid has been missing in the campaign."

The reason for this, as was noted at the outset, is the deep popular opposition in wide sections of the population to militarism and imperialist policies. However, the systematic rearmament of the German armed forces is being pushed forward behind the scenes, and it will assume entirely new dimensions after the election—regardless of who wins and which parties form government. This is not only accepted by the Social Democratic Party, but also by the Left Party.

The German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP) recently published an article entitled "Ambitious framing nation: Germany in NATO," which enthuses about the "ambitious plans" Berlin is pursuing in security and defence policy. According to the article, the German government is ready to assume "a political-military leadership role within the alliance." The German army should explicitly "become the backbone of a European defence capability within NATO."

The article provides extensive detail on the measures being taken to increase the number of brigades ready for deployment to 10. "Regarding potential deployment scenarios" it is also necessary "to lay the basis for multi-national combat-ready divisions around the framing nation, Germany." This is "new and politically and militarily very ambitious. The role of Germany in these units and structures, on land, at sea and in the air would be significant."

Under the heading "High financial demand," the article goes on to state, "The armed forces' plans require long-term increases in defence spending." Already in 2020, "the NATO goal of spending 20 percent of defence spending on investments in arms is to be achieved."

These issues are not being discussed in the election campaign because they are opposed by the vast majority of the population. Instead, all parties are advocating a massive expansion of the police and intelligence agencies, because they expect major resistance and bitter class struggles if the costs for the military build-up and the horrific economic consequences of new wars are offloaded onto the backs of working people.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP) is the only party that has placed the struggle against militarism and war at the heart of its election campaign. The SGP fights for a programme that connects the opposition to war with the fight against capitalism, and aims to construct a socialist movement in the international working class.

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