

Sigmar Gabriel's UN address: German great power ambitions in pacifist garb

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Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel underscored Germany's claim to great power status in an address to the United Nations General Assembly on Thursday, just days prior to Sunday's federal election. After a flood of pacifist phrases, he concluded his remarks with an explicit call for greater German "responsibility" in world affairs, including a permanent seat on the UN Security Council.

"Ladies and gentlemen, Germany is ready to assume additional responsibility," he declared to his international audience. "This is why my country is applying for a seat on the United Nations Security Council for the years 2019 to 2020."

Germany, he added, has "a clear course. Peace and security, global justice and human rights are inseparably bound together." Germany wants "to cooperate in partnership with all members of the United Nations—in Africa, Asia, America and Europe."

Phrases about "peace," "human rights" and "global justice" are rhetorical window dressing for Germany's renewed turn to imperialist "Realpolitik." Unlike the 1930s, when the German Reich left the League of Nations to rearm and prepare for war, today Berlin seeks to pursue its global imperialist ambitions within existing international organisations.

Now, as then, Germany identifies the United States as its chief rival. Gabriel did not once refer to US President Donald Trump. But his speech was a clear rejection of Trump's "America First" strategy, to which Gabriel counterposes an ostensibly more "peaceful" German policy.

"If one looks around the world," Gabriel declared, "it appears as though a world outlook has imposed itself that considers one's own national interests to be absolute and avoids seeking to reconcile the interests of the world's nations and states." He rejected such an

outlook, proclaiming "national egoism" to be unsuitable "as an organising principle for our world."

He went on to say that "this world outlook" is dominated by "the international law of the strongest and not the strength of international law." He was certain that "we must engage to oppose this world outlook." Again wrapping himself in the mantle of international law, he declared, "We need more international cooperation and less national egoism, not the reverse."

Leon Trotsky, the leader of the Russian Revolution along with Lenin, wrote in the founding program of the Fourth International: "The bourgeoisie and its agents use the war question, more than any other, to deceive the people by means of abstractions, general formulas, lame phraseology: 'neutrality,' 'collective defense,' 'arming for the defense of peace.'"

In Gabriel's case, the phrases of choice are "reconciliation of interests," "international cooperation" and "international law."

All such formulas, Trotsky continued, "reduce themselves in the end to the fact that the war question, i.e., the fate of the people, is left in the hands of the imperialists, their governing staffs, their diplomacy, their generals, with all their intrigues and plots against the people."

Gabriel's "lame phraseology" cannot conceal the fact that he and the Social Democrats (SPD) are playing a leading role in the return of German militarism and, like Trump, are preparing for war. Significantly, he did not utter a word of criticism of Trump's fascist threat to "totally destroy" North Korea, a country of 25 million people.

Just a few days earlier, in an interview with *Handelsblatt*, Gabriel laid out his own militarist programme for the German government. "In essence,"

he said, “the issue is to make Europe a global political actor” capable of standing up to the US as well as China. To this end, he said it was necessary “to double the efficiency of the European defence policy.” He described the “abolition of military service” and cutbacks in the budget for the armed forces as mistakes.

In his recent book *Remeasuring*, Gabriel calls for the construction of a European army capable of imposing the continent’s global interests independently of NATO and the US, and, if necessary, in opposition to the latter.

“Europe’s security is Europe’s own responsibility,” he writes. “We have to become capable of acting strategically, because currently we don’t do so sufficiently. This includes defining our European interests and articulating them independently of the US. This requires an emancipation, to some extent, from adopting positions developed in Washington.”

He continues: “Anyone with his own goals should develop the capabilities to achieve them. The EU must see itself increasingly as a security policy power. Our defence budgets must be adjusted accordingly. Europe’s military equipment must be modernised and reoriented towards operational readiness and military tasks.”

Gabriel’s criticism of Washington has nothing to do with pacifism. He opposes Trump’s threats to destroy North Korea and blow up the Iran nuclear deal because they undercut German imperialist interests. Berlin, like Paris and London, has signed multi-billion-dollar deals with Iran and wants to further open up the country to secure new energy sources and new markets for Germany’s export-dependent economy in the Middle East.

With regard to North Korea, Germany, which is one of the few countries to have an embassy in Pyongyang and North Korean diplomatic representation in Berlin, is pursuing similar goals. German Chancellor Angela Merkel said in an interview with *Deutsche Welle*, “Even though in terms of distance it is far away from Germany, it is still a conflict that affects us. And that’s why I am prepared and the foreign minister is prepared to assume responsibility for this. In the Iran agreement, which I believe to be correct... we also took part in the negotiations.”

Behind the call for more “responsibility” in the North Korea conflict lie the economic and geo-strategic

interests of German imperialism. Rüdiger Frank, the leading German North Korean expert, describes the North Korean economy in his recent book as an “uncut diamond.” He writes: “The geographical position, between some of the largest and most dynamic markets in the world, which have substantial deposits of raw materials and largely well-educated, disciplined populations,” offers “realistic prospects for growth and economic success.”



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