

German grand coalition planning major military build-up

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Dozens of commentaries have appeared in the media in recent days describing the power struggles over the direction of Germany's new government as if they were merely a competition between individuals, conflicts between generations, or fateful Greek tragedies. The daily *Süddeutsche Zeitung* referred to Social Democrat (SPD) leader Martin Schulz as a "tragic figure" and titled an article about current SPD Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel "Game, set, defeat."

One searches in vain for an analysis of the political questions driving the conflicts. There is a simple reason for this. Bitter conflicts are raging between and within the political parties over foreign policy, in particular Germany's relations with the United States. But nobody wants to discuss this openly, because the vast military build-up they are planning would then become clear. This would be met with strong opposition from the population.

In the January/February edition of *IP* magazine, published by the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP), there is a piece titled "In a predicament" which gives a glimpse of the foreign policy debates taking place behind closed doors.

The piece distinguishes between two camps: the "Atlanticists" hope "that after Trump's term in office, America will return to its role as the anchor of the liberal world order," and want to "'maintain' the transatlantic relationship even in the era of Donald Trump." The "post-Atlanticists" fear "that the United States' retreat [is] permanent," and want to "emancipate themselves from the United States" and "focus much more strongly on Europe."

The *IP* authors are of the opinion that both sides "fail to recognise the scale of the challenges confronting Germany and Europe." These challenges are mainly seen in the military sphere. A huge increase in military

spending will be necessary both to retain the alliance with the United States, and in particular to decouple from Washington.

Even if the attempt to retain the alliance with the US works in the long term, there will be "no return to the status quo ante." The demand for "balanced burden-sharing between Europe and the US within NATO" will outlive Trump, and the United States will be "increasingly less willing to tolerate European pacifism," according to *IP*.

In other words, the Atlanticists' perspective is realistic only if Germany is prepared to participate in the United States' future wars and at least double military spending to reach the NATO target of 2 percent of GDP, which would amount to additional annual military spending of between €30 and €40 billion.

The post-Atlanticists' plans would be even more expensive, according to the *IP* authors. They accuse them of underestimating "radically the continuing significance of military power and the dependence of the Europeans on the United States in all security matters." Post-Atlanticism is "nowhere near as easy to implement as its representatives would have us believe."

In any case, the "government will have to spend much more than the current 1.2 percent of gross domestic product on defence," the *IP* piece goes on. Of even greater importance is "that the government [plays] a more active role in European security policy in the future," that "corresponds to the reality of the country's economic and political weight."

The idea that the other European powers will allow themselves to be "protected" by Germany is considered by the *IP* authors to be an illusion. They recall that "European integration after 1945 was only made

possible by the American security guarantee,” and go on to write, “Divisions within NATO are always also internal European divisions.”

If Germany wants to rely on France—“the only remaining nuclear power and by far the largest conventional military power within the EU” after Britain’s exit—it would “presumably have to, in the form of a quid pro quo, make concessions on economic policy, something which it has persistently resisted doing.”

There can be no doubt that these questions were discussed in detail during the coalition negotiations between the conservative parties and SPD, and that they will determine the incoming government’s foreign policy. The same edition of *IP* contains a speech delivered by Foreign Minister Gabriel, on 11 December, 2017, at a memorial service for *IP*’s editor-in-chief, Sylke Tempel, who suffered a fatal accident. In it, he explicitly put himself in the camp of the post-Atlanticists, with all of the consequences that entails.

Gabriel did not share “the hope of many German Transatlanticists, that after an exceptional period under the Trump presidency we will return to our old partnership.” New facts have been created under Trump that make “a ‘back to go’ no longer possible.” “The self-evidence with which we viewed the American role as protective” is beginning “to break down.” This can be seen in the fact that “we are at odds with the US on central issues—whether on the agreement with Iran or on global free trade.”

In the United States, they “perceive us as a competitor and sometimes even an opponent,” noted Gabriel. “The world is no longer seen as a global community, but, as in the already famous *New York Times* article by Cohen and McMaster, as an arena for battle in which conflicts rather than binding agreements with each other will regulate the world.”

Gabriel left no doubt that this means a return to the German great power policies prior to 1945. “We cannot seal ourselves off from the world’s problems,” he stated. “That means we also need to define our interests and no longer be contented with the well-intentioned claim to be pursuing a values-based foreign policy. I believe that we must recognise the need to formulate our interests and have a strategic view of the world.”

This revival of militarism and great power policies forms the core of the coalition deal agreed between the

Christian Democratic Union, Christian Social Union and SPD. The chapter “Germany’s responsibility for peace, freedom and security in the world,” comprises 20 pages, and refers to numerous countries, regions and continents considered by German imperialism once again to be its spheres of influence: from the Western Balkans to Russia, Ukraine, Afghanistan, Turkey, the Middle East, Africa, Latin America and Asia.

The section “Modern army,” promises “to make available the best possible equipment, training and care to the soldiers,” so that the army “can properly fulfill the tasks issued to it in all of their dimensions.” In addition, the SPD and conservative parties committed to increase military spending to 2 percent of GDP by 2024 with the formulation, “We want to reach NATO’s agreed upon capacity goals and close capability gaps.”

The coalition agreement makes clear that the wide-ranging rearmament and great power ambitions have been worked out in close cooperation with the foreign policy think tanks in Berlin. In the section “Securing strategic capacities to act in foreign, security and development policy,” the document states, “Given the international challenges, Germany must strengthen its capabilities for strategic analysis and intensify its strategic communication.” To this end, the government will “invest in the expansion of expertise in foreign, security and development policy,” and strengthen “existing institutions.” This will include the Federal Academy for Security Policy, the Munich Security Conference, the German Institute for Foreign Affairs and the German Council on Foreign Relations.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei opposes the grand coalition, and demands new elections, the publication of all secret agreements reached during the coalition talks and lists of participants in them. The SGP also calls on SPD members to vote against the coalition agreement.



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