

The Munich Security Conference and Germany's return to world power politics

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21 February 2018

The interventions of German Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen and Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel at the Munich Security Conference reveal what the central task of a future grand coalition government will be—namely, the return of Germany to militarism and great power politics, which led in the last century to two world wars and the most terrible crimes in human history.

As early as 2014, von der Leyen of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and Gabriel's Social Democratic (SPD) predecessor Frank-Walter Steinmeier announced the end of military restraint at that year's Munich conference.

"Germany must be ready to engage in foreign and security policy earlier, more decisively and more substantially," Steinmeier stated at the time, adding, "Germany is too big just to comment on world politics from the sidelines."

Von der Leyen is now coming forward to implement this policy.

"We have assumed responsibility," she boasted, citing the German role in Ukraine, the strengthening of NATO's eastern flank and Germany's military missions in Iraq, Syria and Mali. At the same time, she announced a comprehensive programme of rearmament that will double German military spending within a few years.

Von der Leyen indicated her determination to deploy the new weapons. "Building up capabilities and structures is one thing," she said. "The common will to actually use the military force when circumstances require is another."

Gabriel struck a similar tone. Europe needs "a joint projection of power around the world," he stated. It cannot do without military means "because as the only vegetarian, we will find it damn hard in a world of carnivores."

He warned against the "beginning of a new Asian era" and urged the assembled military figures and politicians "to face the challenges of a far more uncomfortable and dangerous world." He bragged that the coalition agreement between the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union and the Social Democratic Party provided for "massive investment in foreign, security and development policy." He added that "at the heart of the incoming government's foreign policy" there would be "a comprehensive concept of interconnected security."

Looming over the Munich Security Conference were

intensifying tensions between the US and Europe along with war threats against North Korea, Iran, Russia and China. Key speakers such as the conference chairman, Wolfgang Ischinger, and UN Secretary-General António Guterres warned that the world has never been so close to nuclear conflict since the end of the Cold War.

Germany's ruling class is reacting to this crisis as it has done throughout its history—by rattling its sabres, rearming and developing mad great power plans.

Gabriel declared that the member states of the European Union had to "develop strategies and instruments" to assert their interests in Africa and the region "from Eastern Europe to Central Asia." He threatened Russia, China and the United States, declaring that "no one should try to divide the EU."

The German government is relying on close cooperation with France and invoking European unity so as to obscure the true nature of its great power plans. Von der Leyen opened the conference with her French colleague Florence Parly, who also presented a comprehensive rearmament program. Parly said, "We have made a political move to create an 'army of Europeans!' Germany and France are ready to jointly continue the European project, and we invite all Europeans to move forward."

The rhetoric invoking Europe has nothing to do with unification of the continent in the interests of its inhabitants. It is an expression of the German desire to dominate Europe in order to act as a world power. The European heads of government are so divided that some refused to sit together on a podium, which drew complaints from Munich Conference chairman Ischinger.

The Munich Security Conference triggered a militaristic frenzy in the media and political parties. The German newspapers are full of reports of how "neglected" and "under-resourced" the army is. The generals feel their power growing once again.

Harald Kujat, former inspector general of the army, spoke on Deutschlandfunk and sharply criticised the responsible politicians. He described the state of the army as a "tragedy" and called for a "course correction." While noting that the defence minister had announced "an arms program of €130 billion by 2030," he complained that "unfortunately nothing

has happened so far.”

Even the bloodthirsty language of the past is returning. When EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker demanded in Munich that Europe “strive for global political capability,” the German press enthusiastically seized on the term. An article in *Die Zeit* was titled “More capabilities for world politics, please!” while the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* wrote, “Europe must become more capable in world politics.”

The term comes with considerable historical baggage. “World politics” was the slogan under which the German Empire, in the two decades before the First World War, embarked on a course of imperialist expansion, uniting land owners, industrialists and the petty bourgeoisie behind a programme of naval rearmament, which inevitably led to conflict with Great Britain and the United States.

In his standard work on German history, *The Long Road to the West*, Heinrich August Winkler subtitled the chapter on the years 1890 to 1918 with “World Politics and the World War.” He wrote, “When Germany, to which the foundation of the empire had already given half-hegemonic status on the European continent, decided to pursue world politics,” the consequences could only be “defensive efforts by the major powers affected by this.”

“World politics” was also directed against the enemy within—the working class and the rapidly growing, at that time still Marxist, Social Democracy. Winkler quoted from a letter written by Rear Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz in 1895. The author of the programme of naval armament wrote that Germany had to progress to world politics “not least because the great new national task and the associated economic gain is a strong palliative against educated and uneducated Social Democrats.”

Today, it is the SPD, in alliance with the CDU and CSU, that is carrying out “world politics,” with all the consequences that entails: internal and external rearmament, social spending cuts, the co-option of the media by the state, Internet censorship and the strengthening of the far right in the form of the Alternative for Germany (AfD).

There is no resistance to this in the Bundestag (parliament), including from the so-called opposition. The Free Democrats (FDP) and the AfD, whose deputies and officials include numerous ex- and reserve officers, are fully on the side of the military.

The Greens are attacking the new grand coalition from the right. Tobias Lindner, the Greens’ defence policy spokesman, accused the defence minister on Deutschlandfunk of not doing anything to solve the army’s problems. The army is lacking highly complex weapon systems, he said, adding, “What about the ships, what about the planes?”

The Left Party supports the revival of great power politics. Stefan Liebich, Left Party representative on the parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee, expressed enthusiasm for Gabriel’s speech. Rethinking and reorienting the relationship with the US was “long overdue,” he told the broadcaster *Phoenix*. “We are a

sovereign country with our own interests, which very often coincide with the interests of the United States, but sometimes do not,” he added.

Within the SPD, proponents and opponents of the grand coalition are avoiding the issue. The proponents are not addressing it because they do not want to stir up opposition. In its sales pitch promoting the SPD’s participation in the government to party members, who are currently voting on the coalition agreement, the party executive did not once mention foreign policy or the army. The opponents of the grand coalition avoid the topic because they agree with Gabriel on this question.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP—Socialist Equality Party) is the only political tendency that rejects great power politics and militarism and seeks to mobilise workers and youth in opposition to them. We reject the grand coalition and call for new elections.

The coalition agreement shows what monstrous plans a grand coalition would pursue. At the same time, it raises many more questions. We demand the publication of all of the secret agreements and arrangements reached by the SPD, the CDU/CSU and their military and foreign policy advisers in the course of months of closed-door coalition talks. How is the doubling of the military budget to be financed? Is Germany planning to purchase nuclear weapons? Are there similar agreements with France and NATO?

The fight for new elections is the first step in countering the ruling class conspiracy that is preparing a historic catastrophe. The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei is carrying out an intensive campaign in the working class and at schools and universities to expose the ruling elite’s machinations and build, together with its sister parties in France and Britain, a powerful socialist movement against war, dictatorship and capitalism.

Come to our events to discuss these questions! Join the SGP and the youth organisation of the Fourth International, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality!



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