

German Chancellor promotes rearmament and war in speech to parliament

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The government statement delivered to the German parliament in Berlin Thursday by Chancellor Angela Merkel demonstrated what the real purpose of the new grand coalition will be. It will launch a massive military build-up, enforce new German military interventions, initiate a new round of social austerity and adopt the far-right's policies on refugees.

Merkel focused in particular on strengthening Europe's common military and great power policies so as to enable Germany to pursue its economic and geostrategic interests in conflict zones around the world. At the beginning of her speech, Merkel stated that Europe is "exposed due to its geographic location," because "these wars and conflicts in Syria, Libya and Ukraine are not taking place somewhere else in the world but only a few hours flight from Berlin."

She is "therefore convinced that, firstly, the world won't wait on us—neither in Germany nor in Europe—and secondly, we urgently need European answers to the major problems of our time." For this reason, it is "no accident that the first chapter of the coalition agreement between the CDU, CSU and SPD is devoted to Europe," Merkel said. At stake is "our national response to the European agenda."

Merkel left no doubt about the fact that this "national response" includes rearmament and war. At the European level, "a common foreign and security policy is important," she said. "An essential contribution to this" is "the further strengthening of cooperation in the areas of security and defence policy." After "a remarkably short preparatory phase," Germany and France have "fired the starting gun for permanent structured cooperation," and now the issue is to "get moving with the first concrete projects."

Merkel and the entire German ruling class are planning a military build-up on a scale comparable only

with Hitler's rearmament of the Wehrmacht prior to the Second World War. To the applause of the CDU/CSU, as well as deputies from the Free Democrats (FDP) and Alternative for Germany (AfD), Merkel called for a determined push to reach the NATO target of spending 2 percent of GDP on the military, something which the coalition parties have confirmed in their agreement.

It is "correct and important" that "the parliamentary armed forces commissioner identified... the army's shortcomings." But it is "also only correct and important not to forget what has been achieved. We have to be careful not to end up taking conflicting positions internationally: on the one hand always complaining about what isn't appropriate or doesn't work for us, and on the other calling into question the spending target range we agreed to and are obligated to achieve."

In numerical terms, the "target," which former Defence Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier first agreed to at the NATO summit in Wales in 2014, amounts to an increase in the military budget to more than €70 billion per year by 2024!

At the Munich Security Conference last weekend, Defence Minister Ursula Von der Leyen (CDU) and Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel (SPD) underscored that the rearmament programme is paving the way for the army to engage in new and more expansive foreign military interventions. Merkel has now joined in the chorus of praise, declaring, "Our army has performed excellently in its international deployments." Germany is "the second largest troop contributor within NATO, including the deployments to which it contributes soldiers." Germany plays "a critical role."

Then, to the applause of the CDU/CSU, SPD, FDP, and Greens, Merkel threatened to expand Germany's military operations in Syria. The Syrian government's

“massacre” has “to be condemned,” she said, and Germany must “oppose it with a clear no.” Germany is “also called upon to try and play a greater role in ending this massacre. That is what we Europeans have to attempt, ladies and gentlemen.”

The Left Party also supports this approach. “I want to comment that you, entirely correctly, criticised the actions of Assad and his government in Syria. I share that view,” said Left Party parliamentary group leader Dietmar Bartsch in support of Merkel. But it is “simply unacceptable,” that the Chancellor did “not, under these conditions, mention Turkey’s aggression in northern Syria.” “A war in violation of international law is being waged” there, he added, and it is as bad as “the aggression, the madness from Assad.”

In other words, if Germany is going to intensify military operations in Syria, it should direct them not only against the Syrian government, but also against stopping the Turkish offensive in the Kurdish regions.

Left Party deputy leader Heike Hänsel spoke along similar lines. Like “Mrs. Merkel in her government statement,” the Left Party also condemns “in the strongest terms the attacks on eastern Ghouta. They must be stopped immediately.” But it was not right that “the Chancellor did not mention the Turkish offensive, the war of aggression against Afrin and the Kurds of northern Syria.” This is “really shameful” and shows “the double standards of this government,” she added.

The Left Party’s “standards” and goals are no better. While the government is seeking to repair relations with Turkey, Green Party and Left Party representatives have led the way for some time in arguing that too close an alliance with Ankara risks German imperialism’s offensive in the Middle East. They appeal for closer relations with the Kurdish YPG militias, which played a key role in driving ISIS from territory in northern and eastern Syria.

All of the Left Party’s phrases about a “peaceful foreign policy” are just as duplicitous as those of the government. In fact, prior to Germany’s formal entry into the Syrian conflict in December 2015, the Left Party supported the pro-imperialist Syrian opposition and advocated a more aggressive German intervention. In October 2014, 14 leading Left Party members signed a statement entitled “Save Kobane!” which called on the government to launch a massive military intervention in Syria and Iraq.

Under conditions of deepening divisions between the major powers, the Left Party is in the camp of the grand coalition. At the end of his speech, Bartsch declared that he hopes “something results from” the coalition agreement, which is entitled, “A new beginning for Europe, a new dynamic for Germany, new cohesion for our country.”

The Socialist Equality Party (SGP) represents an entirely different perspective. The coalition agreement lays the basis for the most right-wing government in the history of the Federal Republic and must be rejected. Along with the military build-up, Merkel announced new “reforms” in her speech to “improve competitiveness in the euro zone” and a “major” strengthening of “the European border protection force Frontex.”

The SGP calls for new elections and fights for a socialist programme against social cutbacks, militarism and war. The reactionary policies pursued by the conservative parties and SPD, which are supported in all essentials by all parliamentary parties, must be stopped through the independent intervention of the working class.



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