

New German foreign minister threatens Russia and intensifies militarism

Johannes Stern
17 March 2018

On March 14, the new German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas (Social Democratic Party, SPD) delivered his inaugural address in the so-called Weltsaal (World Hall) of the Foreign Ministry. He emphasized that the third grand coalition under Chancellor Angela Merkel (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) will accelerate Germany's return to an aggressive foreign and great power policy.

In his speech, Maas stressed the continuity with his two Social Democratic predecessors, Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Sigmar Gabriel, who in the last four years were among the architects of Germany's shift to an aggressive foreign policy. "My predecessors have not only described our country's growing responsibility, but they have above all seized on it," said Maas. He wanted to "continue to do so" and to "recognize and accept joint responsibility, where it beckons us."

He added, "Of course, no country in the world needs a German foreign policy that overestimates itself. But what is just as wrong and, possibly even more dangerous in this world situation, is a foreign policy that ducks away."

Maas made clear what he meant by that. Among other things, the plans for upgrading Germany's military capabilities and pursuing the great power aspirations outlined in the coalition agreement between the Christian Democrats and SPD must be implemented swiftly. "In building up a capable EU foreign policy and an effective EU security and defence policy ... important steps have been taken just in the last few months" and there should be "no let-up". In the spring, Germany would "apply for a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council" and must "prepare for tough decisions" to be taken there.

While Gabriel had sharply criticized US foreign

policy during his term of office—and also in his farewell speech on Wednesday—and had called for a lifting of sanctions against Russia, Maas has opted to pursue an aggressive anti-Russian course.

"Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and the ongoing aggression against Ukraine cannot be accepted," he pointedly told all those present, along with the diplomats in 230 overseas foreign ministry stations who were watching live. The "Ukraine Crisis" remains "a test of our determination and our unity in the European Union, but also of the American allies."

Maas also backed the aggressive US and UK action against Moscow in the Skripal case. "We are extremely worried about the events surrounding the poison attack and take the assessment of the British government very seriously," said Maas. "That Russia does not appear to be ready to contribute to the clarification" of this incident should not "be without consequences". "The perpetrators" should be "held accountable", and he could "fully understand that Britain had to respond."

With this, Maas is renewing the confrontation course against Russia, which was already at the centre of German foreign policy four years ago. In February 2014, then Foreign Minister Steinmeier and the US administration supported a right-wing coup in Ukraine to bring to power a pro-Western oligarchic regime in Kiev. Since then, Western politicians, the media and the intelligence agencies have repeatedly whipped up anti-Russian sentiments to advance NATO preparations for war against Russia. Berlin plays a leading role in this. For the first time since Hitler's war of extermination against the Soviet Union, Germany again stationed combat troops in Eastern Europe last year.

Maas and the new government are also joining in the latest propaganda offensive against Russia to suppress growing popular opposition against militarism and war.

“What we used to regard as internal and external is almost impossible to separate,” said the new foreign minister. “We need to register, and we need to respond if other powers try to shake our inner order—cyber-attacks, propaganda tricks and various forms of exercising economic and cultural influence play a growing role in international relations. And in the age of globalization and digitization, defending one’s interests starts at home.”

What is this all about? Under the pretext of the fight against Russian “propaganda,” “cyber-attacks” or “fake news,” left-wing and socialist anti-war websites have been suppressed for some time. For almost a year now, Google has been censoring left-wing and progressive websites, most notably the *World Socialist Web Site*, in close consultation with German government circles. Maas plays a key role in this. As former justice minister, he initiated the so-called Network Enforcement Act, which is repeatedly used to censor left-wing content, including Twitter messages from the satirical magazine Titanic against the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD).

The attempt by Maas to cover up, at least partially, his reactionary foreign and domestic policies with phrases about “peace,” “democracy” and “human rights,” was only surpassed in its cynicism by his assertion that he “went into politics because of Auschwitz.” In reality, he and the German ruling class have long since begun to build upon the aggressive imperialist foreign policy that led to two world wars and the worst crimes in human history in the 20th century.

As in previous speeches and interviews, Gabriel explicitly referenced Humboldt Professor Herfried Münkler in his farewell speech in order to plead for a German great power offensive. One should “not be content with giving normative answers, feeling comfortable in citing one’s own values, so to speak,” Münkler had said. What is also necessary, was the “formulation” and “enforcement of our interests: politically, socially, economically and, ultimately, also militarily.”

Maas may (at least for the moment) have taken a different foreign policy orientation than his predecessor. However, he fully agrees with Gabriel’s maxim of aggressively enforcing Germany’s interests against its international rivals. “The future was hardly

ever so uncertain and competition for the global order so keen. But I believe just as firmly and confidently, we can surely accept this contest,” boasted Maas. To do this, Germany would, “for better or worse,” have “to expend more effort in defining our interests and advocating them.”



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