

German Chancellor Merkel announces major rearmament program

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17 May 2018

Facing a deepening conflict with the United States, Berlin is massively upgrading its military capacity to enable Germany to use its armed forces to pursue its economic and geo-strategic interests around the world. Chancellor Angela Merkel and Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen made this clear on Monday at the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) conference in Berlin.

The biennial gathering saw the civilian and military leaders of the Bundeswehr meet with representatives from politics and business to discuss the strategic direction of the army. For the first time in six years, the Chancellor took part in the discussion.

Merkel used her opening speech to announce a massive rearmament programme and campaign for new and brutal wars. She justified this by referring to the growing conflicts between the US and the European powers. She described the unilateral termination of the Iran agreement, the US exit from the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the “rise in protectionism” as the expression of a “crisis-ridden multilateralism.”

It is therefore more important that Germany comply with its commitment to NATO and increase defence spending by 2024 to two percent of its gross domestic product, said Merkel. That would amount to an increase from the current total of 37 billion to between 70 and 75 billion euros, and would far exceed the increase of 5.5 billion euros previously set in the budget over the next four years. This is the biggest expansion of German military spending since the end of World War II.

Merkel emphasized that “the fulfilment of the tasks—our international operations plus alliance and national defence—makes this value necessary.” For the Bundeswehr to function, it needs more equipment. “That’s just the truth,” said Merkel. In her speech, the

defence minister also advocated a massive rearmament and declared that “operationally ready forces,” i.e., military power, was the “central instrument enabling us to act in foreign and security policy.”

Merkel elaborated further on this claim in her speech. She invoked the role of the Bundeswehr as an international army of intervention, enforcing German interests across the globe. The civil war in Syria has developed into a “conflict over spheres of influence in a strategically extremely important region,” from which Germany cannot disengage, said the chancellor.

She celebrated the brutal campaign against Afghanistan, which cost tens of thousands of civilian lives and which has pushed the country into poverty and chaos, as a shining example for further wars. Germany can be proud of its involvement in that conflict, Merkel declared. The Bundeswehr is already involved in twelve foreign missions with 7,100 troops, and Merkel and von der Leyen are seeking to massively expand these deployments.

Under the euphemism of “national and alliance defence,” the chancellor spoke of a further confrontation with Russia. The Bundeswehr had made great progress. “For example, airspace control in the Baltic, reassurance in Poland and in the three Baltic states. We are leading the enhanced forward presence—these are all great words—and working as a framework nation in Lithuania.” What the chancellor calls “great words” is the preparation for a military confrontation with nuclear-armed Russia.

In addition to increasing the capacity of the Bundeswehr, Merkel wants to increasingly use mercenary troops in foreign countries to pursue German interests. She advocates not only training but also arming soldiers in Mali, Iraq and Afghanistan. Germany must also ensure that they get “decent pay.”

Such involvement of local militias is a “very important aspect” of German foreign policy, Merkel said, suggesting that it could be funded through development aid rather than the military budget.

Von der Leyen made it clear that the Bundeswehr will use its own forces and such mercenaries around the world to defend the interests of the German ruling elite. According to the minister, the tasks of military operations also included the fight against “fake news campaigns”, i.e., the suppression of freedom of the press; against “the infiltration of irregular forces on the borders of the alliance territory; cyberattacks against critical infrastructure, government networks and our banking systems; the threat of missiles of any range and power; attacks on our trade routes at sea,” and “deployments of drone fleets against civilian targets.”

These goals can only be achieved through the massive military rearmament Merkel announced. Von der Leyen spelled out what this implies. She proudly reported that Germany had already undertaken a significant military upgrade in the last four years. Every year, more money had been spent than was allocated to the army at the beginning of the annual budget process.

The result was extensive new purchases, including 181 armoured personnel carriers, 51 armoured fighting vehicles, 31 combat helicopters, 16 transport aircraft, two submarines and 1,800 other military vehicles.

In addition to this upgrade, armaments investments totalling €31 billion have already been launched. “Of course, all this is not yet ready to roll—but much is already in sight,” said von der Leyen. Over the next four years, at least another 129 wheeled armoured vehicles, five new tanker aircraft, 15 marine helicopters, 50,000 suits of body armour, over 33,000 modern digital radios, and more than 70 armoured cranes are scheduled to be delivered to the German military.

But all this is still within previous budget planning, which the planned doubling of the military budget will put in the shade. The aim is to upgrade the Bundeswehr to a fully operational intervention and assault army, and at the same time to promote the “European Defence Union,” which Germany is seeking to direct. For the first time, the European Defence Fund means money from the European budget will be spent on the military.

The German government’s great-power ambitions are supported by all parties in the Bundestag (parliament).

The Left Party has proven itself in recent weeks as among the most aggressive advocates of a policy of German imperialism independent of the United States.

This all-party coalition for great power politics confirms what the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) wrote earlier this year on the formation of the grand coalition of the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats. In February, the SGP declared that the coalition agreement was the “basis for the most right-wing German government since the downfall of the Nazi regime.” It is “the outcome of a conspiracy involving the banks, the employers’ associations, the military, the intelligence agencies and the bourgeois parties... [who] have spent four-and-a-half months negotiating and intriguing to bring a right-wing government to power.”

The SGP pointed out that workers not only have a right to know the contents of the coalition agreement, but also all the secret arrangements made in the course of the negotiations. The SGP pointed to NATO’s declared goal of rearmament and called for the disclosure of all agreements on the specific structuring of armaments projects and their financing. While cutbacks are being imposed on social spending, billions are being spent on armaments and war.

The correctness of this assessment has been confirmed in subsequent months. Merkel and her cabinet have drawn up very concrete plans for a massive military upgrade, which they now want to implement step by step. The conclusion drawn by the SGP in February—“The right-wing conspiracy, which is supported by all the parliamentary parties and large sections of the European bourgeoisie, can be stopped only by the independent political mobilisation of the working class on the basis of a socialist programme”—now acquires even greater significance.



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