

German media demand accelerated rearmament

Peter Schwarz
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As the new year begins, the editorials of the leading German media are marked by a mixture of fear and aggression. Fear—because the world political framework that enabled Germany to rise to the status of an economic superpower and to keep the class contradictions in check is at an end. Aggression—because they consider more extensive military action and another round of social cuts inevitable in response to the global crisis of capitalism.

On January 1, the conservative *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ) itemised the dangers confronting Germany in 2019. “The future is in the dark. Sometimes it seems easier to cast light into the darkness, sometimes it seems impossible,” the article begins. International politics had been predictable for long stretches of the East-West conflict. Even after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, “the new pattern had become predictable fairly quickly.” Today’s situation, on the other hand, did not resemble either situation.

“We live in troubled times,” the FAZ concludes. “It is the result of a series of incalculable, sweeping and long-lasting developments and actors: an American president unbridled by all the opposing poles in his cabinet; an EU paralysed by Brexit chaos; protectionism slowing the world economy; the almost unstoppable triumph of populists, who lay on Western democracies like mildew. The list could go on.”

The paper then lists five risks that could “directly affect us.” First and foremost is the “Trump Chaos Factor.” With the resignation of James Mattis as defence secretary, “from a European perspective, the last transatlantic voice of the American government has turned its back.” What is certain is that “Trump will no longer coordinate his security policy steps with his partners.” As further risk factors, the FAZ names the

strengthening of the Taliban in Afghanistan, the “chaos in Syria,” “Russia *ante portas*” (before the gates) and a return of Al Qaeda.

The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* too sees “Trumpism” as the greatest challenge for Germany. The American president had so far been a terrifying but ineffective “Twitter troll.” That has now changed. Like the FAZ, Stefan Kornelius, who wrote the *Süddeutsche* editorial, cites as evidence the letter of resignation of Defence Secretary Mattis and a nationalist speech by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in Brussels against the European Union. “Both events prove Trumpism is not a personality problem, behind Trumpism stands an ideological movement that could not be more radical.”

Kornelius attempts to depict the EU as a “response to totalitarianism and nationalism.” It defended “liberalism, multilateralism and a conception of alliance that once seemed to show Europe a way out of the cycle of war and hatred,” against Trump’s nationalism, he claims. “Never before have modern Europe and the United States been so divided on such a fundamental issue of peace and order.”

That is nonsense, of course. The EU and its members have been involved in almost every criminal war in the Middle East in the last three decades. Kornelius himself is a fervent NATO supporter. In 2014, during the Maidan coup in Ukraine, he was one of the most furious warmongers against Russia.

What has changed is the relationship between American and European—and especially German—imperialism. The times in which Germany was able to rise to become “export world champion” in the slipstream of American foreign policy are over. Instead of being partners, the United States and Germany once again meet as rivals. And since Germany continues to be militarily inferior to the US, it

is trying to sell the defence of its own economic and geopolitical interests as a struggle for liberalism and multilateralism against US nationalism.

This started long before Trump's election. As early as 2014, representatives of the German government had announced that Germany had to stop commenting on "world politics only from the side-lines" and play a role in military terms that corresponded to its economic weight. Since then, a systematic military rearmament has been carried out.

The commentary in the *Süddeutsche* also closes with an urgent appeal to finally wake up. Europe and Germany "still do not recognize the urgency of the moment," complains Kornelius. "Trump paralyzes, hypnotizes—but where is the anti-Trump?"

Newsweekly *Der Spiegel* is even clearer. In the editorial of the New Year edition, Christiane Hoffmann calls for accelerated rearmament. The increase in arms expenditure to 2 percent of economic output, about €70 billion per year, as laid down in the coalition agreement, is obviously not enough for her.

The present world is a "world without America," she writes under the headline "More courage." NATO's guarantee of assistance no longer deserved its name. It might still be a vague hope, but no guarantee. That is why German politics "must finally have the courage to openly debate how much security Germany wants after America, how much money it is willing to spend and how much sovereignty it is willing to give up for its defence, which can only be European."

In her New Year speech, Chancellor Angela Merkel reaffirmed her intention to rearm more rapidly. "We must take on more responsibility in our own interests," she demanded. In the next two years, Germany would "become a member of the UN Security Council and work for global solutions." In return, "our defence spending would also be further increased."

There is no opposition to the return of German militarism among the parties represented in the Bundestag (parliament). From the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) to the Greens to the Left Party, all are in favour, especially if the rearmament is justified as a reaction to Trump. Militarism, on the other hand, has little support among the population. The Bundeswehr (armed forces) have great difficulty in finding enough recruits, and the vast majority reject the increase in arms expenditure and the deployment to

NATO at the Russian border.

This is the reason why the monitoring and police apparatus is also being systematically built up and the right-wing extremist AfD is being strengthened by ever new smear campaigns against refugees. With the revival of militarism, the ruling class is also returning to authoritarian methods of rule to suppress all resistance to war and dramatic levels of social inequality.

As in the First and Second World Wars, the world is heading for disaster if the working class does not intervene in time. The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party) and the International Committee of the Fourth International are fighting to build an anti-war movement based on the international working class that combines the struggle against war with the struggle against its cause, capitalism.



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