Munich Security Conference

German defence minister advocates German-European war policy

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In her opening address to the Munich Security Conference yesterday, German Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen declared that "the most prominent characteristic of the new security landscape" is "the return of competition between the major powers." She followed this up by adding, "Our American friends recognised this early on. We also recognise and see, whether we like it or not, that Germany and Europe are part of this competitive struggle. We are not neutral."

Von der Leyen's entire speech made very clear what this means. Almost 75 years after the end of World War II, the imperialist powers are openly preparing for a new round of military conflicts. In front of over 600 politicians, military personnel and intelligence service operatives, including 35 heads of government and 80 defence and foreign ministers, von der Leyen appealed for an independent German and European defence policy to enable Berlin and Brussels to play an independent role in the coming struggle.

"We Europeans have to step it up a gear," stated von der Leyen, who also vowed to increase military spending. There is a clear plan: "The white paper and capability plan shows how we will modernise our army by 2025. But we are also realistic," she added. "We know we have to do more. Especially we Germans. We are firmly committed to the 2 percent goal. Just like how the federal government recently reassured NATO, and how it is included in our coalition agreement."

NATO's 2 percent goal, which the federal government together with other governments agreed at the NATO Wales summit in 2014, amounts to at least a €35 billion increase in the German defence budget over the course of a few years. The cost for this madness, which recalls rearmament under Hitler during the 1930s, will be borne by workers and young people, who will be used as cannon fodder in new wars and suffer the consequences of social spending cuts to pay for military rearmament.

"We have set out towards a European defence union," boasted von der Leyen. "We have finally found ways and means to overcome our fragmentation. We are harmonising our planning, purchasing of equipment, and readiness to deploy. This is resulting in the emergence of new, European capacities. It enables we Europeans to act in a crisis. And this is also transatlantic burden-sharing. To step things up a gear, however, we have to clear up a few contradictions."

The defence minister left no doubt about what the German ruling class wants to "clear up." After its horrific crimes during two world wars, it now intends to use armed force to uphold the interests of German imperialism. "We Germans shouldn't claim to be more moral than France, or more far-sighted on human rights policy than Britain," added von der Leyen. "We have to summon up the political force for a reliable common line that connects our security interests with our humanitarian principles."

When European politicians bluster about "humanitarian principles," "responsibility," or "peace," they mean brutal military interventions, which rely on the forcible suppression and plundering of the targeted country. Von der Leyen boasted that the German government also agreed this week to extend its mission in Afghanistan for another year. "With that, we are making very clear that we stand by our responsibilities."

The military interventions in Syria and Iraq, which

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have laid waste to both countries and caused hundreds of thousands of deaths, must be continued, added the defence minister. “Our mission continues,” von der Leyen told her audience. Islamic State is not yet fully defeated and has been transformed into an underground network. The central focus therefore moves “from the military component to stabilisation.” In Iraq, it is necessary to support the newly-formed government and “integrate those into reconstruction who fought bravely on our side.”

Von der Leyen noted that a joint European force and military policy would be a benefit to NATO, but the first day of the conference underscored how sharp the tensions between the European powers and the United States have already become. German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas used his remarks to launch a frontal attack on Donald Trump’s trade policy. Tariffs and protectionism don’t lead in the right direction, he stated, before describing American tariffs on steel and aluminium imports as “a classic case of lose - lose.”

Maas also declared his desire, along with France, Britain and the rest of the EU, to retain the Iran nuclear accord. At a Middle East conference in Warsaw on Thursday, US Vice President Mike Pence, who will speak in Munich today, demanded that the Europeans “stand with us” by abrogating the nuclear accord and supporting Washington’s war drive against Iran.

The conflicts within the EU are also more intense than at any time since the end of the Second World War. After a months-long conflict, France withdrew its ambassador from Italy last week. And tensions between Berlin and Paris are rising, in spite of their agreement on rearmament.

Additionally, French President Emmanuel Macron cancelled a joint appearance with German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Munich at short notice. Instead, von der Leyen appeared alongside British Defence Minister Gavin Williamson and stressed the need to deepen the countries’ defence cooperation, particularly in the context of Brexit.

Williamson focused in his speech in Munich on threats against Russia. He “welcomed Ursula’s personal efforts to push ahead with investments in German defence,” and declared that a common European military policy must above all be directed against Russia. “Let’s respond to the Russian violation of the INF treaty [The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty] and the threat posed by new Russian missiles. Let’s be prepared to deal with these provocations. Russia’s adventurism must come with a price.”

Although the imperialist powers are preparing for new horrific wars, which will call into question the very existence of humanity, no opposition to this within the establishment parties exists. In an interview with *Deutschlandfunk*, Alexander Neu, the Left Party’s representative on the parliamentary defence committee, made clear that his party supports the German-European great power plans in all essentials. The German government cannot “hide behind the US any more, or behind NATO,” he declared. “European security must be framed and realised by the Europeans themselves, not by the United States.”

The only party to call the war danger by its real name and oppose it on the basis of a socialist programme is the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP). Against the capitalist warmongers around the world, we counterpose the international unity of the working class. Under conditions where all of the fundamental problems of the 20th century are erupting with full force once again, this perspective assumes tremendous urgency.

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