

Pompeo visit exposes deepening tensions between Germany and US

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US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's visit to Berlin on Friday was dominated by sharp political conflicts. This could not be concealed by empty phrases from German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas about a "deep-rooted friendship" between the US and Germany, or Chancellor Angela Merkel's assertion that the US is Germany's "most important partner outside of the EU."

The circumstances surrounding the visit make clear how tense and fragile relations between the two countries have become. Pompeo had been in office for over a year before travelling to Berlin. Three weeks ago, he cancelled a long-planned visit at short notice and flew to Baghdad instead. When he eventually arrived in Berlin on Friday, his visit was restricted to a brief meeting with Foreign Minister Heiko Maas, a 45-minute meeting with Merkel, and two short press appearances with both.

The visit to Berlin was in essence aimed at repeating long-standing and well-known differences and threats. There were no indications of reconciliation or agreements. Differences ranged from issues related to trade, military policy, and foreign policy orientation.

The US is threatening to impose tariffs on cars imported from Europe, which would hit the export-dependent German economy more than most. US President Donald Trump postponed the tariffs for six months, during which time the Europeans are supposed to consider imposing voluntary export quotas.

The US government is also trying to block the construction of the NordStream 2 gas pipeline through the Baltic Sea, even though it is almost fully complete. US Energy Secretary Rick Perry has announced sanctions against companies participating in the project.

The US is also pushing Europe strongly to exclude Chinese technology firm Huawei from the European

5G network, which would throw Europe back two years in its technological development.

A day prior to Pompeo's visit, Chancellor Merkel gave a speech at Harvard University in which she criticised the nationalist and protectionist policies of Trump without mentioning him by name.

But Pompeo paid little attention to this, offering no concessions. Instead, he once again accused Germany of failing to spend 2 percent of its GDP on the military, even though Berlin has massively increased its military budget.

Iran was at the heart of the various conflicts. Germany, like most of the European powers, is standing by the nuclear accord with Iran, which the United States unilaterally abrogated, and is opposed to the tougher sanctions and threats of war made by Washington against Tehran.

The US has significantly intensified its war preparations against the country of 82 million people over recent days.

US National Security Adviser John Bolton accused Iran on Wednesday in Abu Dhabi of being responsible for "sabotaging" four oil tankers off the coast of the United Arab Emirates and claimed there had been a previously unknown attempt to attack the Saudi oil port of Yanbu as well. He threatened a "very strong response" from the US. According to Bolton, Pompeo intends to present evidence of Iran's guilt to the United Nations over the coming week.

In recent weeks, the US has dispatched an aircraft carrier and heavy landing vessel to the region and increased its 50,000 troops deployed in the region around Iran by a further 1,500. The Pentagon has also drafted plans to deploy a further 120,000 troops to the region. This was the same number of troops sent to the Middle East prior to the Iraq war in 2003.

Pompeo is travelling through Europe to whip the NATO allies into line. In addition to Germany, he visited the Netherlands, Britain and Switzerland, where he attended a meeting of the Bilderberg conference, a secret gathering of influential individuals from business, politics, the military, the media, universities, the nobility and the intelligence services.

Washington is threatening European and other international firms that refuse to follow the US sanctions against Iran with exclusion from the US market. Just prior to Pompeo's arrival in Berlin, Bloomberg news agency also reported that the US Treasury Department is preparing sanctions against INSTEX, the European financial settlement mechanism, which was established by the EU to allow companies to bypass US sanctions. According to this, INSTEX, and anyone with connections to it, would be excluded from the US financial system. In Berlin, which is working to maintain the nuclear accord, this was interpreted as a provocation.

However, Germany's opposition to the US Iran policy has nothing to do with pacifism or humanitarian concern for the Iranian population. Rather, it is driven by the recognition that Washington's drive to secure its hegemony over the Middle East cuts across the political, economic and geostrategic interests of the European bourgeoisie.

Maas therefore appealed to his American colleague to cooperate. He repeatedly told Pompeo that the US and Germany were pursuing the same goal in their policies towards Iran. "We agree on the necessity of stopping Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons," he said. Differences merely exist over the means to achieve this end, he added.

Germany's Foreign Minister stressed several times that Germany and the US are dependent upon each other in their conflict with Russia. "Many of the conflicts that concern us can only be resolved through German-American agreements," he said, and referred to Ukraine as an example. He also attacked China, which the US views as its chief rival, saying that it must adhere to international norms.

In 2003, when sharp differences erupted between Germany and France on the one side, and the United States on the other, over the Iraq war, the WSWs published a comment by David North headlined, "How to deal with America: the European dilemma." It is

well worth re-reading this article today, since the predictions made in it have been confirmed at a much higher level.

North pointed out that the alliance between the United States and the Western European powers after World War II represented a departure from the historical norm. He wrote, "The more basic tendency of American capitalism, rooted in its somewhat belated emergence as a major imperialist power, had been to augment its world position at the expense of Europe."

He continued, "From the standpoint of France and Germany, the behavior of the United States is utterly reckless and raises the danger of a complete breakdown of whatever remains of the entire legal and institutional framework that regulated the affairs of world capitalism."

"For the Western Europeans to submit to the diktats of the United States would mean to accept their relegation, in the words of the conservative French daily *Le Figaro*, 'into a simple protectorate of the United States,'" North went on. "But to openly resist would raise the risk of a potentially catastrophic military confrontation with the United States. Either alternative, or even some middle road between the two, would profoundly destabilize relations among European countries. Moreover, the social consequences of conflict between the US and the 'old' Europe would inevitably intensify internal class tensions."

Today, this development is much more advanced. Germany, France and other powers are implementing massive rearmament programmes to violently enforce their global interests independently of and in opposition to the United States. The European Union is being torn apart by internal divisions, and class tensions are reaching the breaking point. Under these conditions, only a united socialist offensive by the European and international working class can prevent the relapse of the continent and the entire world into barbarism and war.



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