

German media gripped by war fever

Peter Schwarz
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Following the withdrawal of US troops from northern Syria, a clear case of war fever has gripped the German media. Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer's proposal to send tens of thousands of soldiers to the region to establish a security zone has been accompanied by opinion pieces full of militarist enthusiasm.

It is remarkable how little effort is made by the journalists to conceal their battle cries behind the usual phrases about "peace," "human rights" and "democracy." Instead, they openly declare that the issue at hand is the defence of German great power interests, which they believe are not being defended by their erstwhile alliance partner, the United States.

The mere prospect that the horrendous wars in the region could be concluded on terms that weaken the Western powers and their regional allies, including the blood-soaked dictators al-Sisi in Egypt and Crown Prince Mohammed bin-Salman in Saudi Arabia, has left the media columnists no longer able to restrain themselves. They are unconditionally committed to continuing the bloody military interventions to prevent the expansion of Russian and Chinese influence, even though these wars over the past three decades have transformed the region into a living hell for its residents.

In a op-ed for the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Paul-Anton Krüger complained that in the Middle East "everyone now understands how unreliable the US is under Trump." Along with Russia, China is filling the power vacuum, he continued. "By contrast, the Europeans, for whom the Middle East and North Africa are part of their immediate neighbourhood, are standing on the sidelines like a knight without his armour: unable to act, lacking ideas, and powerless."

Defence Minister Kramp-Karrenbauer intended to "counteract this with her proposal for a security zone in northern Syria." But this has "fundamentally failed."

Instead, she has exposed "the miserable state of German and European foreign and security policy, notwithstanding all of the chatter about strategic autonomy. Nobody should be surprised that Europe and Germany, in a region that is so critically important to them, are no longer taken seriously," concluded Krüger.

Mark Schieritz in *Die Zeit* was blunter still. "One must interpret the militarisation of Europe as a progressive project," he stated. "Donald Trump's betrayal of the Kurds" threatens "the global order and our security" and marks "the beginning of a new era."

"Power does not recognise a vacuum," wrote Schieritz. "Wherever the Americans retreat from, other powers will spread their influence... This means for the Europeans: they must become an independent player in power politics." The decisiveness shown in the sphere of economic policy is also required in defence policy, he added. "Europe should either adopt a joint army, or at least strengthen its national armies and establish a credible nuclear deterrent. This is unavoidable in a world in which old alliances are dissolving."

For the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Kramp-Karrenbauer has proven her credentials to be the next German Chancellor with her proposal. "She's got grit," wrote F.A.Z. editor Berthold Kohler in praise of the Defence Minister. The proposal "could be the breakthrough that she urgently needs on the domestic political front if she wants to retain her chance to succeed Merkel."

Kramp-Karrenbauer's plan, according to Kohler, corresponds "to the demand that Germany should assume more responsibility in global affairs." "Only those who think Germany should stick its head in the sand and stay out of all conflicts" could condemn the proposal in principle. "But that would be a denial of reality... Where should Germany assume the much-demanded greater responsibility for security and peace

if not in a region on Europe's doorstep that Washington has now left entirely to Moscow and Tehran..."

Torsten Krauel, editor-in-chief of *Die Welt*, also judges that Kramp-Karrenbauer is a suitable candidate for Chancellor based on her readiness to send tens of thousands of soldiers to war and to their deaths. "Whether AKK's proposal will be realised or disappears in the hubbub of international politics is of secondary importance in this regard," he opined. "The important thing is that Kramp-Karrenbauer has proven, like Merkel, that she possesses alpha female genes."

Christiane Hoffmann, who after 19 years at the F.A.Z. switched to *Der Spiegel* in 2013, struggled to contain her excitement over Kramp-Karrenbauer's "courage." "Her proposal for a security zone in northern Syria is nothing less than a foreign policy sensation, a turning point in Germany's security policy, a break with Germany's 'culture of military restraint', which in spite of all of the calls for the assumption of more political responsibility in the world has continued to define its policy," she enthused on Spiegel Online.

Germany's defence minister has "proposed that Europe should engage militarily in its neighbourhood, which is unfortunately the most dangerous in the world," wrote Hoffmann. "And she's right. Europe must engage more strongly in Syria following the retreat of the United States, it is in its interest to play a role in determining the future of the region, the stability of which is so important for Europe's security."

According to Hoffmann's conclusion, "Kramp-Karrenbauer's proposal could be a first step towards an ending of the restrained and passive foreign policy of recent years, which waited until catastrophes developed before responding with emergency measures." German foreign policy has "lacked courage over recent years. Germany is too rich, too big, and, yes, too powerful, to continue to shrink from its responsibilities. And the crisis region south of Europe is too dangerous to leave permanently to take care of itself, or to the Putins and Erdogans of this world."

Hoffmann virtually copied the concluding sentences of her article word for word from a speech in which then foreign minister and current German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier announced the "end of military restraint" at the Munich Security Conference five-and-a-half years ago. Ever since, the *World*

Socialist Web Site has repeatedly warned that Germany's ruling class is returning to its militarist and fascist traditions. The enthusiasm for Kramp-Karrenbauer's plan, which is not only shared by right-wing and conservative newspapers, but also more liberal publications and those aligned with the SPD, confirms this.

The ruling elite's virtually unanimous embrace of militarism, which is opposed by the vast majority of the population, recalls the period prior to the First World War. In his classic work "The nervous Great Power," Volker Ulrich described how German nationalism, which initially clothed itself in liberal and emancipatory garb, and aimed to change the existing order, was transformed with the formation of the Reich in 1871 into an "illiberal, state-conformist ideology of integration," which "declared the nation and the Reich to be one and the same."

At the time, campaign organisations were founded calling for colonialism, the building of battleship fleets, and an imperialist foreign policy. The most aggressive was the All-German Association, which recruited among the "notables of the educated middle class: head teachers, professors, journalists, the self-employed, and state officials." Among its leading figures was Krupp head Alfred Hugenberg, who later as leader of the German National People's Party and a media mogul would play a major role in Hitler's accession to power.

A similar development is taking place today. The enthusiasm for Kramp-Karrenbauer's proposal in the media demonstrates that opposition to the return of militarism can only come from below—through the mobilisation of the working class for a socialist and anti-capitalist programme.



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