

Germany's Left Party embraces military rearmament and war

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As a member of a potential German federal coalition government with the Social Democrats and Greens, the Left Party would fully support the continuation of Germany's foreign military operations and the rearmament of the armed forces. Anyone who doubts this should read the paper "Left-wing security policy" by Matthias Höhn. Between 2012 and 2017, Höhn was the Left Party's head of federal affairs and serves today as the Left Party parliamentary group's spokesperson on security policy.

The paper, released January 19, is virtually indistinguishable from the strategy papers advocating rearmament produced by foreign policy think tanks and the Defence Ministry. On all essential points, it supports the Christian Democrat/Social Democrat (SPD) grand coalition government's militarist agenda. Höhn defends NATO, demands a massive rearmament programme for Germany's armed forces, and calls for the establishment of a European army and the conducting of more "humanitarian" interventions under German leadership.

Höhn's paper begins with the statement that the world is sorting itself "geopolitically anew" and that, as a consequence, the Left Party must be even more aggressive in its advocacy of German imperialism. Höhn writes that the Left Party can no longer afford "to react with knee-jerk reflexes or simply adopt the narratives of other states." He continues, "The United States, Russia or China: Ultimately all sides are focused on geopolitical influence and economic interests, and all are ultimately prepared to break international regulations for their own benefit." This is "never acceptable for a left-wing policy."

Höhn's line of argument corresponds with the official line of German foreign policy. This is that under conditions of mounting conflicts among the major powers, which have been intensified by the coronavirus pandemic, Germany and Europe must develop an independent imperialist foreign policy to enforce its geopolitical and economic interests more firmly against Russia and China—but above all against the United States. "The EU [European Union] must understand that it is a political actor with independent

interests, goals and values, and act as such. This can and will repeatedly result in conflicts of interest, including with the United States," he writes.

Höhn then appeals for the Left Party to set itself up explicitly as a militarist party. Its pacifist phrases must be replaced by a genuine agenda for rearmament and war. "The task arising out of this for the Left Party is to seriously agree on the goals and methods for a European security policy," he states. "Isolated appeals for peace and disarmament come nowhere near to making the EU an active player in security policy. The people expect more."

Höhn's concrete proposals of course do not correspond to the views of the people who oppose militarism and war following the two catastrophic world wars during the 20th century. Rather, they align with the demands of the most aggressive sections of German and European capital.

Here is a summary of Höhn's most important demands:

Like leading representatives of the SPD and Greens, Höhn appeals for the transformation of the EU into a military union with its own army. "The almost exclusive national sovereignty in military and arms affairs to date cannot be a permanent left-wing answer," writes Höhn. "The call for the EU's greater strategic independence from the United States makes a deeper agreement within the EU on aspects of security policy unavoidable." This includes "in the final analysis the abandonment of independent national sovereignty over the military and the replacement of at least relevant parts of the national armies with a unified European armed forces."

The Left Party paper fully embraces the official propaganda about a depleted and totally run-down armed forces so as to justify the largest programme of rearmament since the end of World War II. Höhn writes, "The policy of defence spending austerity in the 1990s bled the armed forces dry materially, and it is said that many systems are completely outdated. Everyone has been talking for years about the poor combat-readiness of many core weapons systems. Nothing moves, nothing flies. This cannot be entirely dismissed. The reality is that many of these systems

are reaching their third or fourth decades.”

Höhn cynically calls for the conducting of an “equipping debate” rather than a “rearmament debate.” This would mean that his party would have to more openly support the armed forces’ comprehensive armament procurements. “As long as the Left Party doesn’t demand the short-term dissolution of the armed forces, but instead correctly orients towards a new definition of its tasks ... it must be capable of defining the means they wish to use to accomplish these,” according to Höhn. During previous legislative periods, “the Left party parliamentary group voted for almost no procurement for the armed forces, from the equipping of its personnel to the purchase of fighter jets.” This “blanket opposition” is “not a security policy doctrine.”

In the section “Invest 2 percent in security,” Höhn gives his backing to NATO’s 2 percent target for defence spending, which the German government first committed to at the NATO summit in Wales in 2014. This would mean an increase of the defence budget to more than €90 billion per year. Höhn argues that there are “good grounds to demand that societies collectively invest a minimum contribution in international security.”

The Left Party politician merely proposes shuffling the spending around a bit. “Those who conceive of security comprehensively and do not see military force as the only guarantor of stability” must “find other ways to fulfil such a target.” While the “current armed forces plan” assumes “that the 2 percent goal can be reached in personnel, equipment and financially by around 2030, this budgetary volume should instead be set aside for an equally balanced allocation for international cooperation and structures on the one hand, and the defence budget on the other, which would mean a 1-plus-1 percent goal.”

This proposal has nothing to do with pacifism, but on the contrary is aimed at strengthening and expanding Germany’s foreign interventions. In the final section of the paper, titled “Enforce the United Nations’ monopoly of force,” Höhn complains that the United Nations has been “significantly weakened over recent years as an actor in conflict prevention, and, when necessary, in conflict management.” he shares the call for “a stronger German engagement in UN peacekeeping missions” and “the appeal to Germany, under conditions of the suspension of payments by the US, to bear the cost of ensuring a greater financial independence for these missions.”

This is unambiguous. A federal government involving the Left Party would not mean fewer foreign interventions by Germany’s military, but more. Germany’s first military intervention since World War II in Kosovo was sold by the SPD/Green government at the time as a “peacekeeping mission.” The same applies to the current military mission in

Mali and the army’s operations in the Middle East and Central Asia. “Conflict prevention” and “conflict management” are also well-known euphemisms for the military and civilian intervention into and occupation of geostrategically important and resource-rich countries.

The fact that the Left Party’s security policy spokesman has presented such a warmongering paper just weeks ahead of the party’s congress at the end of February does not come as a surprise. The Left Party has supported the return of German militarism from the outset and was involved, in the person of its former foreign policy spokesman, Stefan Liebich, in the drafting of the notorious think tank paper “New power—new responsibilities” in 2013. The document served as a blueprint for the imperialist speeches of then German President Joachim Gauck and his successor, the Social Democrat Frank-Walter Steinmeier, at the Munich Security Conference in 2014.

Since then, the Left Party has ever more openly endorsed the German government’s aggressive foreign policy agenda, including the far-right coup in Ukraine, and the imperialist interventions in Syria and Iraq. Over recent months, parliamentary group leader Dietmar Bartsch and current foreign policy spokesman Gregor Gysi have repeatedly declared their support for NATO and the German armed forces’ foreign interventions.

With its latest paper, the Left Party is serving as an out-and-out mouthpiece for German militarism. In the appendix to his remarks, Höhn acknowledges for the record that his proposals were not only “motivated by discussions with many of our party’s comrades,” but also “with members of the armed forces.”



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