

German and US defence ministers announce increased troop deployment to Germany

Peter Schwarz
13 April 2021

The United States and Germany want to return to close military cooperation. This was the pledge made by US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin and German Minister of Defence Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer following a meeting in Berlin. Austin promised to increase the number of troops deployed to Germany by 500 instead of cutting the deployment by 12,000, as the Trump administration had planned.

Austin is the first Biden administration official to visit Berlin. He travelled from Israel and will travel on to Brussels and London to consult with leaders of NATO and the British government after a brief stopover with American troops in Germany.

At a joint press conference, Austin and Kramp-Karrenbauer sought to outdo each other with professions of friendship. They carefully avoided discussing controversial topics.

Austin recalled his military service as a young lieutenant in Germany and invoked the “common values of freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.”

The stationing of 500 additional troops in the Wiesbaden area, according to the former general, would strengthen defence and deterrence in Germany, make available more capacity for the waging of war in space, cyberspace, and electronically, and “increase the readiness to fight and win.”

Germany will continue to be an important economic and security partner for years to come, promised Austin. The strengthening of relations with Germany has a high priority for the Biden-Harris government, he continued. “We are further expanding the Transatlantic relationship and partnerships with NATO allies,” he said.

Kramp-Karrenbauer returned Austin’s compliments and hailed the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, which she said is based on values and freedom. The contribution of the US to the security of Germany and Europe is a “decisive pillar of our peace and freedom,” she said, adding that she is confident that a strong NATO alliance can overcome any challenge together. “We need a NATO capable of action with a corresponding German contribution,” she remarked.

Kramp-Karrenbauer emphasised that Germany will spend €2.5 billion more on its military this year, and would stick to the goal of increasing defence spending to 2 percent of GDP. She pledged to work together with the US to bring the

Afghanistan operation to an end.

Kramp-Karrenbauer made great play of Germany’s decision to send a frigate to the Indo-Pacific so as to show its presence in the region. With the overseeing of sanctions on North Korea and the securing of free navigation through the South China Sea, it was sending a signal. Austin explicitly praised this. Asked by a journalist about the mounting tensions in eastern Ukraine, Kramp-Karrenbauer praised the “restraint on the Ukrainian side” and expressed concern about the “Russian mobilisation.”

The reality is that the explicit solidarising of Austin with Kramp-Karrenbauer has nothing to do with freedom, democracy, human rights, and the other values mentioned. Rather, it is part of the war preparations against China and Russia, which the Biden administration has been pushing ahead with tremendous energy since he came to power.

As far as the oft-sworn friendship between Berlin and Washington is concerned, it has the character of an alliance between mafia bosses against a common enemy, while the weapons for the future mutual settling of accounts are being prepared in the background.

The Biden administration did not have to alter Trump’s ruthless pursuit of imperialist interests under the slogan “America First,” but merely the subjective and erratic manner in which he pursued this goal.

While the Democrats agree with Trump that the rise of China poses the greatest strategic challenge to the US and must be stopped by any means, they viewed Trump’s stance towards Russia as much too soft. Instead of intensifying pressure against Russia, Trump repelled NATO allies like Germany, who are useful for the US at least in the short term.

The journal *Foreign Affairs*, an important voice in the US foreign policy establishment, has published a series of articles recently calling for a tougher line against China.

“Many analysts wrongly assume that Russia is a declining power,” wrote Michael McFaul, who served as the US ambassador to Russia for two years under Obama. But Russia remains “one of the world’s most powerful countries – with significantly more military, cyber, economic, and ideological might than most Americans appreciate,” and “one of only two nuclear superpowers.”

“Biden and his national security team,” continued McFaul, “must retire outdated perceptions of the Russian threat and formulate a new policy to contain the Kremlin’s economic, military, and political influence.” This requires a military strengthening of NATO and an increase of “U.S. military, political, and economic support for Ukraine.”

A *Foreign Affairs* article from 6 April entitled “U.S.-Russian Relations Will Only Get Worse” recalled that NATO was retained and expanded eastwards after the dissolution of the Soviet Union so as to keep Europe under control. “For the United States, NATO was the right instrument to achieve European stability and security because it enabled the United States to remain in charge,” stated the article.

Austin’s visit to Berlin takes place under conditions where the conflict with Russia is threatening to erupt into open warfare. During its first three months in power, the Biden administration has systematically intensified pressure on Russia by inciting the Zelensky regime in Ukraine, which is threatening to capture Crimea, by intensifying the war in Syria, and by supporting Israel’s provocations against Iran. The situation in Ukraine is on the verge of spiralling out of control.

Berlin supported the right-wing coup in Kiev in 2014, which brought a corrupt, pro-Western regime of oligarchs to power, and it is now once again backing the Zelensky regime. The renewal of the NATO alliance by Austin and Kramp-Karrenbauer is thus aimed at paving the way for a war that would have devastating consequences for the whole of Europe. At the same time, it contains the germ of future inter-imperialist wars, since the interests of German and American imperialism, which fought two world wars against each other, are by no means identical.

Germany certainly wants to push back Russia so as to strengthen its own position in Eastern Europe, Ukraine, and the Caucasus. But unlike the United States, Berlin does not want to totally economically isolate Russia, which has been among one of Germany’s most important energy suppliers since the 1970s. This is the background to the unresolved conflict over Nord Stream 2, the gas pipeline that the United States wants to halt, while Germany insists its construction must continue.

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas recently warned, “An economic isolation of Russia would result in one forcing Russia and China closer together. And that can’t be part of our strategic interests.”

Berlin and Washington are also pursuing divergent interests with regard to China. The German government and European Union no longer view China as a “partner,” but as a “strategic rival,” and are supporting the campaign over the oppression of the Uighur minority in Xinjiang province. But in spite of the China-American conflict, they do not want to be left out of the lucrative Chinese and Eastern Asian markets.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel personally ensured that prior to the change of government in the US, the EU concluded an investment treaty with China that Washington opposed. She

justified this by saying that on this issue, it is “absolutely clear” that there is “no identity” with America.

It is noteworthy that the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, the mouthpiece of German capital, is debating which side Germany should take in a war between the US and China.

“With the fate of the pitiable Muslim minority in northwest China, this provides a pretext to act,” wrote the FAZ with incredible bluntness on March 29. “What this is all about is geostrategic jockeying that is gradually affecting all of world politics.”

“America has already decided where it will stand in this major conflict,” it wrote. “The old world power wants to hinder the rise of new countries and prevent them from drawing level with the US.” For Germany, the calculation is not so clear cut. “Exports are the most important pillar of German prosperity, it plays a much larger role for us than it does for America.”

According to the EU statistics agency, China surpassed the United States last year as the EU’s most important trading partner. “While in the first year of the coronavirus pandemic, trade with the ‘rest’ of the world fell, exports and imports to and from China grew. In this, Germany is the dominant actor: it accounted for 48 percent of the EU’s goods exchanged with China.”

If Germany is now sending a frigate to the South China Sea, it is to pursue its own imperialist interests. This is why Kramp-Karrenbauer repeatedly noted that the increase in defence spending is aimed at “our own security and our own interests,” and not “doing the US a favor.”

In the final analysis, the reason for the growth in militarism and the threat of a third world war lies in the bankruptcy of the capitalist system. As in 1914 and 1939, the ruling elites in Germany, the United States and all other imperialist powers are responding to the mounting social and international contradictions by driving humanity as a whole into the abyss. Only an international movement of the working class, connecting the struggle against exploitation and war with the fight against capitalism, can stop the danger of war.



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