

After the Afghanistan debacle, Berlin and Brussels pursue independent European war policy

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Germany and the European Union are stepping up their offensive for an independent European war policy after the debacle in Afghanistan. At an informal meeting in Kranj, Slovenia, the EU defence ministers discussed on Thursday the establishment of a rapid reaction force that could also act independently of the US military.

The US withdrawal from Afghanistan will prompt the EU to establish its own permanent force, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borell said after the meeting.

“It’s clear that the need for more European defence has never been as much evident as today after the events in Afghanistan,” Borell said. “There are events that catalyse history. Sometimes something happens that pushes history, it creates a breakthrough, and I think the Afghanistan events of this summer are one of these cases.”

The European powers had initially reacted with a mixture of disillusionment and outrage to the withdrawal of US troops and the rapid collapse of the pro-Western puppet regime in Kabul. Now they seek to position themselves so that in the future they will be able to carry out military operations like the one in Afghanistan without Washington’s support.

European defence policy will “only be credible if we are also able to launch complex military operations outside our borders,” the acting EU Commissioner for Internal Market and Industrial Policy Thierry Breton told the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. This would require an EU intervention force that could be mobilised quickly, “with all that that implies in terms of logistics, preparations and command structures—and with a view to the risks for those men and women who would be deployed for Europe.”

Even before the meeting in Kranj, Borell had published a guest column in the *New York Times*. Under the headline “Europe, Afghanistan is Your Wake-up Call,” he pleaded for the establishment of a European military force and a further increase in European defence spending.

“Alongside increasing pivotal military capabilities—airlift and refueling, command and control, strategic reconnaissance and space-based assets—we need forces that are more capable, more

deployable and more interoperable,” he wrote, adding, “But we must go further and faster. The European Defence Fund, established to boost the bloc’s defense capabilities, will receive close to 8 billion euros, or \$9.4 billion, over the next six years. That should be used to significantly support collaborative research and the development of much-needed defense technologies.”

Borell left no doubt that the EU is not concerned with “human rights” or “democracy,” the propaganda used to justify US-led military interventions in Afghanistan, Libya and Iraq, but with the enforcement of imperialist interests through war.

“A more strategically autonomous and militarily capable EU would be better able to address the challenges to come in Europe’s neighborhood and beyond” and “to defend its interests,” wrote Borell in the *Times*.

The EU would not only have to fight “threats,” such as “the risk of renewed terrorist attacks” and “irregular migration,” but also fight back against other powers. “China, Russia and Iran will have greater sway in the region, while Pakistan, India, Turkey and the Gulf monarchies will all reposition themselves,” he warned. Europe cannot “cannot let them be the only interlocutors with Afghanistan after the Western withdrawal” and “along with the United States, has to reframe its engagement.”

German imperialism is behaving particularly aggressively. In a statement, German Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer (CDU) complained that Europeans had not been able to prevent the withdrawal of Western troops from Afghanistan. “We Europeans hardly offered any resistance to the US decision to withdraw because we were unable to do so for lack of our own capabilities,” she complained on Twitter.

That is unequivocal. If Berlin had had its way, the brutal 20-year war effort, which has cost hundreds of thousands of lives in pursuit of imperialist control and exploitation of the resource-rich and geostrategically important country, would have continued. For Kramp-Karrenbauer and the German bourgeoisie, the central lesson from Afghanistan is not less but more rearmament and war.

According to the defence minister, “Europe must now

become stronger in order to make the Western alliance as a whole stronger on an equal footing with the USA.” In doing so, one should not stop at “the question of whether we want a ‘European intervention force’ or not.” The central question for the future of the European Security and Defence Policy is “how we finally use our military capabilities together in the EU! With what effective decision-making processes, real joint exercises and joint missions.”

In order to implement the war plans, “coalitions of the willing could move forward in the EU after everyone has made a joint decision.” It would also be necessary to examine whether EU member states “establish regional responsibilities for security, train special forces together and jointly organise important capabilities, such as strategic airlift and satellite reconnaissance.” Germany was already “in discussion with interested EU states on these issues.”

Workers and youth across the continent must take this as a warning. The ruling class in Germany has long been working feverishly to organise Europe under its leadership in order to rebuild itself as a major foreign policy and military power after losing two world wars. After German reunification and the dissolution of the Soviet Union by the Stalinist bureaucracy 30 years ago, leading politicians and military leaders have been pleading for a stronger role for Germany in Europe and the world.

At the Munich Security Conference in 2014, then Federal President Joachim Gauck and his Social Democratic successor Frank-Walter Steinmeier, together with the current President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen (CDU), finally announced the return of German militarism. This was followed by a massive rearmament of the Bundeswehr, the redeployment of German combat troops to the Russian border and new war missions in the Middle East and Africa. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the ruling class is now exploiting the debacle in Afghanistan to push forward the offensive it has begun.

The federal government can only appear so aggressive because its course is also supported by the nominally “left” opposition parties. More than two decades after the Greens helped launch the first German war mission since the end of World War II in Kosovo, they are at the forefront of the German-European war offensive.

In the current election campaign, the Green candidate for chancellor, Annalena Baerbock, consistently criticises the Grand Coalition from the right with regard to a German-European great power policy. In the last television debate, she accused the CDU/CSU and SPD of “ducking away” internationally and called for a “more active German foreign policy.”

The Left Party also has both feet in the camp of German imperialism. In the elections, it is eyeing a government alliance with the SPD and the Greens and has long since made it clear that as a governing party it would support NATO and German

missions abroad.

On August 25, the Left approved the “deployment of armed German forces for military evacuation from Afghanistan.” While the majority of the parliamentary group abstained, five MPs, including its spokesperson on security policy, Matthias Höhn, openly voted for the deployment.

There is something megalomaniac about the plans of the ruling class to replace the US as the leading interventionist power. But they must be taken with deadly seriousness. Ultimately, the same fundamental contradictions of capitalism that lie behind the aggression of US imperialism and which, after the withdrawal from Afghanistan, increasingly directly conjure up the danger of nuclear war with Russia and China, are fueling the German-European military offensive.

This in turn intensifies the conflicts between the imperialist powers themselves—also within Europe.

The only way to prevent a catastrophic third world war is to build an anti-war movement of the international working class. The objective conditions for this are rapidly maturing. In its perspective on US President Joe Biden's latest speech on the debacle in Afghanistan, the WSWs wrote:

The humiliating retreat from Afghanistan signals the failure not just of US policy in that one country but of an entire strategy, world view and program of global domination and domestic reaction that has persisted for 30 years. This debacle, which is intersecting with an escalation of the class struggle in the US and internationally under the impact of growing social inequality and the homicidal, profit-driven policies of the world's ruling classes in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, has profoundly revolutionary implications.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) is fighting in the federal election to arm the developing struggles of workers, including the important strikes of train drivers, nurses and delivery workers in Germany, with a socialist and internationalist perspective to stop the development of war and eliminate its cause, the capitalist profit system.



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