

# How the revival of German militarism was prepared

By Johannes Stern  
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The German government's aggressive action in Ukraine and the massive propaganda campaign accompanying it have surprised many. German politicians and opinion makers have almost unanimously backed the fascist-led coup in Ukraine. They seek to outdo each other with demands for tougher measures against Moscow and denounce the German people, the majority of whom are clearly opposed to the war propaganda.

What shocked many was carefully prepared. For more than a year, 50 leading politicians, journalists, academics and military and business figures discussed a more aggressive German foreign policy in a project under the auspices of the government-aligned Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP, German Institute for International and Security Affairs) and the Washington-based think tank German Marshall Fund (GMF).

At the conclusion of the consultations last autumn, a paper was published entitled "New power, new responsibility: Elements of a German foreign and security policy for a changing world." It provides a blueprint for the policies that are now being implemented in practice in the form of sanctions against Russia and the rearming of NATO. With the document, the German bourgeoisie is returning to militarist, great power politics following two world wars and horrific crimes.

From the start, the SWP paper makes clear that Germany has to "lead more often and more decisively in the future" to pursue its global interests. The document states: "German security policy can no longer be conceived otherwise than globally. That said, Germany's history, its location, and scarce resources are reasons to be judicious about its specific strategic objectives."

The paper leaves no doubt about what the ruling class understands as "judicious." As a "trading and export nation," Germany "benefits from globalisation like few other countries" and relies on "demand from other markets, as well as on access to international trade routes and raw materials." Therefore, the "overriding strategic goal" has to be "the preservation, protection and adaptation of the liberal world order."

The openness with which the document asserts German spheres of influence and calls for these to be secured militarily is remarkable. "A pragmatic German security policy, particularly concerning costly and longer-term military deployments" must "concentrate primarily on the increasingly unstable European vicinity from Northern Africa and the Middle East to Central Asia," the paper declares.

As "instruments of German security policy," the document speaks of "a combination of civilian, police and military forces." Military interventions should "range from humanitarian aid to military advice, support, reconnaissance, and stabilisation operations, all the way to combat operations."

The call for Germany to assume a "leading role" runs like a thread through the paper, and is explicitly linked to military operations within the framework of NATO. The military alliance, with its "standing political and military structures, a broad range of instruments and capabilities for collective defence" is said to be "a unique amplifier of German security policy interests."

The document continues: "Germany must use its increased influence to contribute to shaping the future orientation of NATO. It has an interest in the continued existence of a strong and effective NATO, because the alliance is a proven framework for political consultation and military cooperation with the US."

But, ultimately, "more contributions" at the "military-operational level" are required. Europe and Germany have to adjust to this and "develop formats for NATO operations that rely less on US contributions." The paper adds, "This requires greater investment in military capabilities and more political leadership."

A key component of the project is how to impose the transformation of foreign policy in the face of widespread popular opposition. The paper complains of a "sceptical public," which calls "the future direction" into question.

In a section headed "The domestic dimension of German foreign policy," the paper warns that "a more prominent German role on the global stage" could "exacerbate issues of legitimacy at home." It therefore bluntly calls for "policymakers and experts" to address the "public's lack of understanding of foreign policy." Policymakers must "learn to communicate their foreign policy goals and concerns more effectively to convince Germany's own citizens, as well as international public opinion."

## The extent of the conspiracy

The way the document came about is just as important as its content. For almost a year, major figures from politics, the media, business, the universities, ministries, NGOs and foreign policy think tanks discussed among themselves to arrive at a common position.

An article that appeared on *Zeit Online* in early February described this process in detail. Under the revealing title "A Global Course," *Zeit* editors Joachim Bittner and Matthias Nass indicated how the return to German great power politics was prepared.

They wrote: "This new foreign policy alliance is no accident. The change in course has a pre-history, a pre-history that can be reconstructed. It stretches back as far as November 2012, and it took place in different locations—Bellevue Castle, the official residence of the German president, in the Foreign Office at the Werderian Market, and under the auspices of the Foundation for Political Science, the German government's think tank. Over months of repeated round table discussions, preparations were made for what culminated in Munich."

The change in course was prompted by Germany's abstention from the military intervention against Libya, which provoked harsh criticism of then-Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle. The authors of the article reported that "dissatisfaction with Germany's lethargy had been mounting in the Berlin foreign policy community."

They continued: "Four years of Westerwelle, four years without a clear course, but with even more frustration among the alliance partners. All of this had caused dissatisfaction to increase. The grumbling had been

clearly audible.”

Then “for one year, from November 2012 to October 2013, a working group met in Berlin to discuss a foreign policy strategy for Germany. Officials from the chancellor’s office and the Foreign Ministry discussed together with representatives of think tanks, professors of international law, journalists and leading foreign policy representatives from all parliamentary fractions.”

### **The cooptation of the media**

*Die Zeit* neglects to mention that Joachim Bittner was himself a member of the working group that elaborated the new foreign policy.

Nikolas Busse from the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ)* was added to the list of participants in the project. Bittner and Busse are among those German journalists with close ties to the German and American governments, the European Union (EU), NATO and numerous foreign policy think tanks.

As correspondent for the *FAZ* on NATO and the EU in Brussels, Busse is well connected to leading EU politicians and NATO military figures. He writes insider reports about NATO’s rearmament in eastern Europe. Already on February 25, three days after the coup in Ukraine and a month before Crimea joined with Russia, he reported under the headline “Turmoil in Ukraine: NATO Fears New Flashpoint in Europe” that military officials had “in the meantime even developed plans to defend alliance territory against Russia.”

Bittner was *Zeit* correspondent for Europe and NATO from 2007 to 2011, and in 2008 and 2009 a participant and reporter at the Brussels Forum, a partnership of the German Marshall Fund and the Bertelsmann Foundation.

On November 4 of last year, he published a programmatic article in the *New York Times* with the headline “Rethinking German Pacifism,” which advocated a more aggressive German foreign policy. In it he agitated against the “too deeply ingrained pacifism” among Germans and called for more “military interventions.”

If one wishes to understand why the German media has virtually unanimously beat the drums of war and not raised a critical voice, a study published in 2013 by the media studies academic Uwe Krüger is worth examining. It researches the links between leading German journalists and government circles in Germany and the United States and transatlantic think tanks. The study shows how the “journalistic output” of journalists is influenced by their links to the “US and NATO-oriented milieu.”

Professional scribblers like the co-editor of *Die Zeit*, Josef Joffe, and the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*’s Stefan Kornelius, both of whom have been leading the propaganda drive for war with Russia in recent weeks, are active in organisations concerned with foreign and security policy and the consolidation of transatlantic relations, “which are maintained to a great extent through the NATO common defence alliance.”

Their connections are wide-ranging. They participate regularly in the Munich Security Conference and have close ties to transatlantic think tanks such as the American Institute for Contemporary German Studies and the American Council on Germany. Joffe participates in the secretive, elite Bilderberg Conference, and Kornelius is a member of the executive of the German Atlantic Society. Both are involved in the German Society for Foreign Policy (DGAP), whose director, Eberhard Sandschneider, took part in the SWP project.

### **The emergence of Gauck, Steinmeier and Von der Leyen**

While the ruling elite were agreeing on the key components of a new imperialist policy, the former pastor Joachim Gauck was installed as German president after a campaign in the press against his predecessor, Christian Wulff. It was Gauck’s job to announce the new shift in foreign policy publicly.

For this purpose, Gauck chose October 3, 2013. In his speech on the day

commemorating German reunification, he summarised what had been discussed over the course of a year. He stated that Germany was “not an island” that could keep out of “political, military and economic conflicts.” It had to play a role in Europe and globally commensurate with its economic weight and influence.

Some of Gauck’s formulations were directly taken from the SWP paper. This was no accident. Gauck’s chief of staff, and one of the most important figures in the president’s office, is Thomas Kleine-Brockhoff. The former US correspondent for *Die Zeit* was among the initiators of the SWP project as then-director of the German Marshall Fund. Bittner reports in his article that “all Joachim Gauck’s speeches cross his desk.”

The timing of Gauck’s speech was deliberate. It took place only days after the 2013 federal election and set the agenda for coalition talks. This was seen with full clarity at the start of this year. Shortly after the assumption of power by the grand coalition, Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier (Social Democratic Party) and Defence Minister Ursula Von der Leyen (Christian Democratic Union) announced the course that had been decided at the Munich Security Conference.

In formulations almost identical to Gauck’s on October 3, Steinmeier declared that Germany must “be prepared to intervene earlier, more decisively and more substantially in foreign and security policy.” In a thinly veiled critique of his predecessor Westerwelle (Free Democratic Party), he attacked the “culture of restraint” and said, “Germany is too big just to comment on foreign policy from the sidelines.”

Steinmeier ran down a list of countries viewed as part of German imperialism’s sphere of influence. He declared: “Syria, Ukraine, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Mali, the Central African Republic, South Sudan, Afghanistan, tensions in East Asia—that is the incomplete list of hot spots in the coming year. Foreign and security policy will not run out of work.”

Von der Leyen struck a similar note. She stated that “for a country like Germany, indifference [is] not an option.” It is “a country of considerable size” and it has to “fulfil its international responsibilities.” This includes international missions by the EU and NATO. Concretely, she pledged to “strengthen the contribution in Mali,” to participate in the “destruction of the rest of the chemical weapons from Syria,” and to support “the coming European Union intervention in the Central African Republic.”

### **The incorporation of the Left Party and Greens**

The so-called opposition parties in the German parliament were incorporated at the highest level in the foreign policy shift. Omid Nouripour for the Greens and Stefan Liebich for the Left Party participated in drawing up the SWP paper. Both are among the leading foreign policy spokesmen in their parties. Nouripour is a representative on the Parliamentary Defence Committee, and Liebich is a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee. In addition, Liebich sits on the Left Party’s executive.

The participation of the Greens is no surprise. The former pacifists were the strongest critics of Germany’s abstention in the Libyan war. Since they agreed on German participation in NATO’s war on Serbia under then-Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, they have enthusiastically supported every foreign intervention by the German army.

The incorporation of the Left Party is of particular significance. The party gives up its pacifist phrases at a point when German imperialism returns once again to the world stage. Liebich is a member of several foundations and think tanks, including the Atlantic Bridge and the DGAP.

While Liebich cooperated in the development of the new foreign policy under the auspices of the SWP, an agreement was reached within the Left Party in favour of a more aggressive foreign policy. Already last autumn, a collection of essays was published by *WeltTrends* with the title “Left foreign policy: perspectives for reform.” In it, leading Left Party politicians argued in similar terms as the SWP strategy paper. They spoke out in favour of military deployments, closer transatlantic cooperation

with the US, and a greater international role for Germany.

The Left Party is now implementing this course in practice. In April, five party members, led by Liebich, voted together with the government parties for a foreign intervention by the German army. This marked the first-ever vote by Left Party delegates in support of a German military deployment. Another leading Left Party member, Christine Buchholz of the state capitalist Marx21 group, accompanied Defence Minister Von der Leyen on the latter's recent visit to German troops in Africa.

### **Ideological support from the universities**

An important component of the foreign policy shift is the involvement of German universities. Professors from the Free University Berlin, the Friedrich Schiller University in Jena, the Johann Wolfgang Goethe University in Frankfurt/Main, the European Viadrina University in Frankfurt/Oder, and the Humboldt University in Berlin took part in the discussions sponsored by the SWP and GMF.

The incorporation of the universities in the state's war propaganda is a violation of the principle of the independence of research and teaching. There are horrific precedents for such collaboration in German history—notably, professors in the Third Reich who sought to provide a scientific basis for racist ideology, such as Carl Schmitt, who interpreted the law in the spirit of the Nazis, and Martin Heidegger, who provided Hitler with his philosophical blessing.

Significantly, the legal scholar Georg Nolte represented the Humboldt University in the discussions. He is the son of historian Ernst Nolte, who provoked the so-called Historians' Dispute in 1986 by downplaying the crimes of the Nazis.

The revival of German militarism requires that the history of the twentieth century be rewritten and the crimes of German imperialism in two world wars be trivialised. Humboldt University has specialised in this task for some time. The head of the department of Eastern European History, Jörg Baberowski, has dedicated his work to the rehabilitation of Ernst Nolte. *Der Spiegel* recently cited Baberowski saying, "Nolte was done an injustice. He was historically correct."

In the future, the state and big business will provide the war ideologists in the universities with even greater quantities of research funds to enable them to serve, under the cover of science, as the ideological cadre-trainers of militarism.

In the SWP document it states: "A more complex environment with shortened response times also requires better cognitive skills, knowledge. Knowledge, perception, understanding, judgment and strategic foresight: all these skills can be taught and trained. But that requires investments—on the part of the state, but also on the part of universities, research institutions, foundations, and foreign policy institutions. The goal must be to establish an intellectual environment that not only enables and nurtures political creativity, but is also able to develop policy options quickly and in formats that can be operationalised."

This is the new Orwellian language of German imperialism in the twenty-first century. Behind conceptions like "intellectual environment," "political creativity," "strategic foresight" and "quick and operational political options" stands the call to once again "think militarily" and return to a "politically creative" policy of war. This is the way in which the ruling class is responding to the deepest crisis of capitalism since the 1930s.

The scale of this war conspiracy and its meticulous preparation is a serious warning. On two occasions in the last century, German imperialism threw the world into the abyss. The international working class cannot and will not allow it to happen a third time. This underscores the critical role of the International Committee of the Fourth International in building the new, revolutionary leadership of the working class in Europe and internationally.

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