

The German president's call to arms

By Peter Schwarz
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On Saturday, German president Joachim Gauck reiterated his call for a more aggressive German foreign policy and more military interventions.

At the end of a three-day visit to Norway, Gauck told the radio station *Deutschlandfunk* that he had “the feeling that perhaps our country should set aside the restraint that prevailed in recent decades in favour of a greater acceptance of responsibility.”

Previously, he said, there had been “a well-founded reluctance on the part of Germans...to engage internationally in accordance with the size and economic importance of Germany”. That was no longer the case, because “Germany is a solid and reliable democracy and a state governed by law.”

Gauck repeatedly insisted on the greater use of the military. In “the struggle for human rights or the survival of innocent people it is sometimes necessary to resort to arms,” he said. This meant that it was necessary “not to exclude the use of military means from the outset.”

Gauck expressed similar positions last October on the anniversary of German unification, and then again at the Munich Security Conference in January. Now, he has repeated his call for a more active military role for Germany, under conditions in which armed conflicts are spiraling out of control in both Ukraine and Iraq.

Gauck was quite explicit that his concern was Germany's imperialist interests rather than human rights. “If the federal government is now very active in the Ukraine conflict, this is exactly along the lines that I suggested,” he said.

In Ukraine, the German government supported a coup against the elected president, Viktor Yanukovich, and worked closely with fascists in the Svoboda Party and the Right Sector. Now, it is backing the new president, Petro Poroshenko, a multibillionaire oligarch, who is deploying the army against opposition in eastern Ukraine, intensifying the conflict with Russia and

thereby risking a nuclear conflict.

The background of Gauck's interview left little doubt about his political goals. He was full of praise for the Norwegian government, a coalition of the Conservative Party of Prime Minister Erna Solberg and the extreme right-wing Progress Party. The latter advocates the destruction of the Norwegian welfare state, the privatisation of state enterprises, tax cuts for the rich, and a close partnership with the US and Israel, together with an extremely restrictive, xenophobic immigration policy.

When asked if his three-day state visit to this right-wing government was pleasant, Gauck replied, “Pleasant would be an understatement. It was a terrific visit, close friendship, no conflicts, a coincidence of diverse interests, and all based on shared values.”

Gauck advocates a fundamental change in German foreign and domestic policy that combines the military defence of imperialist interests (in Gauck's newspeak: “acceptance of responsibility”) with the dismantling of the welfare state (“freedom”). This agenda has the support of the entire ruling class. His speeches on the Day of German Unity and at the Munich Security Conference had been carefully prepared and welcomed from all sides (see “How the revival of German militarism was prepared”).

This time, however, Gauck met with some subdued criticism. The SPD foreign policy expert Rolf Mützenich told *Spiegel Online* that the world was being “rocked by a multitude of conflicts.” Germany was proceeding cautiously with these conflicts. “In my view a demand for more military engagement at this point is incomprehensible.”

Green Party security policy expert Agnieszka Brugger described Gauck's utterances as “irritating”. “Military operations must not be declared a normal part of foreign policy,” she said.

And the foreign policy spokesperson of the Left

Party, Jan van Aken, compared Gauck with a “general and world policeman”. “Human rights cannot be bombed into being, the president is well aware of this,” he declared.

Gauck won support, however, from another Green Party leader, Anton Hofreiter. “Germany is not an island in the world”, Hofreiter told the *Passauer Neue Presse*. In principle, the appeal by the president was correct.

The various criticisms of Gauck were not directed at his call for a greater military role for Germany. Since taking over the foreign ministry, the Social Democrat Frank-Walter Steinmeier has systematically pushed for an expanded German role in the world and even set up his own web site, Review 2014, for this purpose. As for the Greens, they have agreed to every foreign deployment of the *Bundeswehr* since 1998 and are constantly demanding more “humanitarian” military operations. And Left Party deputy Stefan Liebich was involved in drafting the strategy paper that forms the basis of Gauck’s war propaganda.

If Gauck now encounters some restrained criticism, it is because his heavy-handed war propaganda is strengthening rather than weakening the widespread opposition to militarism. Another reason is the timing of his remarks. While there is general agreement within the political establishment that the German armed forces should play a greater role in the defence of German economic and geopolitical interests, there is little inclination to be dragged into the debacle in Iraq, for which the US is seen as mainly responsible.

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