

The 2017 German budget: Billions for the military and war

By Johannes Stern
28 November 2016

The 2017 federal budget passed by the grand coalition government marks a turning point in German post-war history. Almost three years after outgoing president Joachim Gauck and the German government officially announced the end of military restraint, a massive build-up of the military domestically and abroad stands at the centre of the budgetary plan.

In the next year, the defence budget alone will be raised by almost €2.5 billion, to €36.61 billion. The funds for military acquisitions will climb by approximately €1 billion, from €10.16 billion to €11.1 billion. The Foreign Office of Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier (Social Democratic Party, SPD) is to receive €5.23 billion in 2017, around €420 million more than this year. The funds for the Christian Democratic Union (CDU)-led Federal Ministry of the Interior will be increased to €8.98 billion. That is more than a billion more than this year and far more than designated in the original governmental draft (€8.34 billion).

The additional billions for security forces and the military are only the beginning of a massive campaign of military build-up. On Thursday, the *Handelsblatt* featured the following headline: “Merkel promises higher military spending: Chancellor wants NATO commitment to meet 2 percent of economic output.” In its report, the mouthpiece of German industry and the banks calculated: “Germany would have to spend 23 billion more euros for defence in order to fulfil the NATO stipulation of 2 percent of GDP.”

What was long considered virtually impossible is now the official policy of the government. In her governmental declaration on Wednesday, Chancellor Angela Merkel (CDU) announced: “[W]e are approaching that which we all—not just Christian Democrats, but also Social Democrats—pledged as a

contribution to NATO, ladies and gentlemen.”

The German government seized on the victory of Donald Trump in the US presidential elections as a pretext to advance its plans for a more independent foreign and military policy. While Merkel did not mention Trump once by name in her governmental declaration on Wednesday, even bourgeois commentators considered her speech a reaction to Trump’s pledge to withdraw from free trade agreements like the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP).

“Openness will bring us more security than isolation,” declared Merkel, holding out the prospect of a greater role for Germany in world politics. While Germany “obviously cannot solve all problems,” the question remains: “Are we ready, with our experience of social market economy, for a social order which I believe as before brings with it the highest degree of economic strength and social justice, to champion an intensification and organisation of globalization? Or are we not ready and are withdrawing into ourselves?”

Who is Merkel trying to fool with her propaganda? The worldwide diplomatic offensive of the Foreign Office and the military missions in Afghanistan and Mali or in Syria and Iraq have nothing to do with “social market economy” or “justice,” but rather the defence of the geo-strategic and economic interests of German imperialism by the most brutal means.

The official “Federal Financial Plan 2016 to 2020” explicitly states: “the values, interests and priorities of the Federal Republic of Germany identified in the White Paper on security policy and the future of the Bundeswehr form the strategic framework for the mission and tasks of the Bundeswehr as an instrument of German security policy.”

Germany must “provide an active contribution to political conflict resolution, which is appropriate given

the political aspirations and the weight of Germany in the world.” It continues: “To counter the risks and threats to Europe and Germany appropriately and as far as possible, a variety of security and defence policy options must exist, including the use of military instruments.”

What then follows reads like a recipe for the preparation of military interventions like those the United States has long carried out: “The armed forces of the 21st century must have a wide range of capabilities as well as a high degree of operational capacity.” Moreover, “flexible and professional structures, highly-qualified personnel, and adequate equipment ... are necessary for conducting stabilization operations up to high-intensity combat missions.”

A core goal of the financial plan is the pursuit of stronger foreign policy independence and flexibility. “In training, exercise and possible future missions, new and existing forms of cooperation—especially in the realm of further developing bilateral relations—can be vitally important,” reads the section on “Military Defence.”

The German government is aware that a large majority of the population rejects the return of militarism and war, above all because of the terrible crimes committed during the Second World War. This explains the massive military build-up taking place domestically. The ruling class is alarmed at the increase in political opposition and is preparing itself at the same time for serious social conflicts.

Merkel declared she was “very happy that in the area of domestic security considerable efforts were being made.” “Among the authorities of domestic security,” she said, “thousands of new positions” had been created. She added, provocatively, that she could “only hope that the offers are so attractive that enough people will choose to accept them. That is, of course, of the greatest importance to us.”

While in parliament the Left Party and the Greens vote against the budget as nominal opposition parties, they agree with its general direction. Representatives of both parties have attacked the government from the right in several speeches. Anton Hofreiter, the leader of the Green Party’s parliamentary faction, criticized Merkel for not having done enough “to oppose the coming apart of the European Union” as the “chancellor of the most powerful country in the EU.”

In addition to this, he wished that “one or another here in the House would issue a clear statement” against Russian “war crimes” in Aleppo.

Michael Leutert of the Left Party celebrated the fact that, in part, the budget bore the fingerprints of his party. Under pressure from the Left Party, more funds were allocated for the Foreign Office and for humanitarian aid during negotiations. Nevertheless, German foreign policy was “essentially incapable of taking action at the moment.” He had “at least not yet heard that the civil war in Syria and Iraq was ended, that the situation in Ukraine or Afghanistan had calmed, or that the conditions in Africa turning people into refugees had disappeared.”

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