

Calls for military buildup and great power politics grow amid German coalition talks

By Peter Schwarz
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The voices calling for the adoption of an aggressive foreign policy and a major military buildup by a future “Jamaica coalition”—named for the black, yellow and green party colours that match those in Jamaica’s flag—are growing louder.

The talks between the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), Christian Social Union (CSU), Free Democratic Party (FDP) and Greens are entering their decisive phase this week. After two weeks of exploratory talks, leaders for the four parties met to establish the basis for future consultations. By mid-November, concrete proposals are to be finalised, on the basis of which parties will decide whether to begin formal coalition negotiations. If they agree on a coalition deal, it would have to be passed by a committee from each party prior to the formation of the new government.

Although the conservatives, liberals and Greens are in broad agreement on foreign and military policy, the fear is growing that a four-party coalition could prove to be too weak and unstable to implement the hard-line foreign policy demanded of it by influential circles in big business and the state.

In the exploratory talks thus far, repeated disputes have emerged between the FDP and Greens over climate change and energy policy, and there are differences between all four parties on refugee and transport policy. In addition, CSU leader Horst Seehofer is coming under pressure from the right wing of his party and is threatened with losing his post if he makes too many concessions.

FDP leader Christian Lindner has already raised the possibility of fresh elections and stated at the weekend that his party did not fear such an outcome. He was contradicted by Chancellor Angela Merkel (CDU), who warned against considering new elections in the event

of a failure of talks. The Greens also want to avert the collapse of the coalition talks.

External pressure is growing for the key ministerial posts to be given to figures who will not be influenced by internal squabbling within the parties. The director of the government-aligned German Institute for Foreign Affairs (SWP), Volker Perthes, published a guest comment in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* on Monday arguing along these lines.

In a piece called “Heavyweight in the foreign office,” Perthes called for foreign policy to be placed “at the forefront of exploratory talks between the potential coalition partners,” because the incoming federal government will be “challenged more on foreign policy than the last government.” It will “have to navigate through international crises” that will be “closely connected with questions of domestic coexistence, our democracy and our well-being.”

This does not only apply to the “conflict in Syria and the wider Middle East,” but Germany would be affected “also by a military confrontation between North Korea and the United States.” The same would apply “if China makes the rules with its wide-ranging geopolitical and geoeconomic projects in large parts of Eurasia and exports an authoritarian state model.”

Perthes’ advice is to base the “elaboration of foreign policy strategy” on the European Union. Europe can “not hope for orientation and leadership from Washington during Donald Trump’s presidency. The more unpredictable the president’s actions are, the more we must strive for our own orientation.” The United States is “no longer our most dependable ally.”

“Cooperation with China” would be “unavoidable on specific global issues.” But it was “not to be expected in the foreseeable future” that China could become an alliance partner “in the struggle to frame an

international order.”

Perthes’ conclusion is that Germany requires a strong and well-equipped army—“the army acts as a foreign policy, security policy instrument”—and a foreign minister who “brings political weight to his post.”

The scale of the military plans that have already been developed was revealed by a secret Defence Ministry paper cited in the latest edition of *Der Spiegel*. According to the magazine, the document describes in detail “a possible failure of the EU with potentially unpredictable consequences for Germany’s security. And at the same time, official future scenarios are being drafted to which the army should orient itself—with a concrete rearmament plan that is to be developed in the coming years. That has never existed in this form before.”

The “worst-case scenario” which details the Defence Ministry’s “strategic outlook,” is a “collapsing EU” and “the US, a former leading power, which resists without success the erosion of the world order,” a world of “economic decline” in which “global crises escalate.”

The paper outlines the framework for the army’s future plans. It does not contain any concrete goals, but it is easy to imagine the demands military commanders will make based on it.

Defence Minister Ursula Von der Leyen (CDU), under whose leadership the paper emerged, published an appeal in the *Bild* newspaper to be given another four years in office. The soldiers have “grown close to my heart,” she wrote, before appealing for more money. “Anyone who doesn’t want to invest money in the army also has to say, we are leaving the army with gaps and not equipping it properly,” she added. “A parliament cannot do that with its parliamentary army.”

The most strident advocate for a military buildup and German great power politics is Social Democrat Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel. In an interview with *Bild am Sonntag*, he strongly attacked American President Donald Trump and the US, and criticised the parties negotiating a so-called Jamaica coalition for dividing Europe on foreign policy and weakening Germany.

“Our liberal, Western-influenced world order is in acute danger,” said Gabriel. “The US, which was previously the guarantor of this liberalism, is abandoning it.” President Trump wants to “replace the

strength of law with the law of the strong internationally.” He understands the world as “an arena, a battleground” where only the strongest can prevail.

Asked if “world peace is at risk,” Gabriel answered, “Yes, of course. We confront the beginning of a new global rearmament. Because everyone distrusts each other on all sides.”

Like Perthes, Gabriel advocated strengthening Europe militarily and accused the parties negotiating a Jamaica coalition of having a “big empty space” on this issue. Angela Merkel has “no idea on how to move Europe forward,” and is leaving “French President Macron isolated with his proposals for closer cooperation.” The FDP is pursuing “a national economic course like the AfD did at its founding,” and the Greens are “too weak to resist this.”

As the largest opposition party, the SPD is preparing to egg on the incoming Jamaica coalition on the issue of militarism. Like the entire ruling class, the SPD is responding to the rise of Donald Trump and the growing threat of war by calling for rearmament and the preparation of new wars.

SPD leader Martin Schulz and parliamentary group leader Andrea Nahles have thus far rejected a continuation of the grand coalition with the CDU/CSU in the event the Jamaica talks collapse. “If Mrs. Merkel can’t put a government together, there will have to be fresh elections,” said Schulz.

But this could change. On the issues of militarism and foreign policy, all of the major parties agree in principle. The composition of the incoming government will ultimately depend on who is able to impose these policies most effectively and suppress the widespread opposition in the working class and among the youth.

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