

German militarization and Trump's withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal

By Johannes Stern
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Following US President Donald Trump's withdrawal from the Iran nuclear accord and under conditions of US preparations for war with Iran, the German bourgeoisie is intensifying its campaign for militarism, rearmament, and war.

In an extraordinary video message over the weekend, German Chancellor Angela Merkel extended a "heartfelt thank you" to the German army and "what our soldiers do both at home and abroad." Germany's security "also depends on what happens in other parts of the world. And that's why we participate in foreign interventions with the army," she stated.

At the invitation of Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen (CDU), Merkel held the opening address yesterday at a German army conference in Berlin. The main issue at the meeting between top military and defence policy figures will be the revival of German militarism, which was officially announced at the 2014 Munich Security Conference.

The conference is "in content under the rubric of the army's ongoing process of comprehensive modernisation," wrote the Defence Ministry. Von der Leyen will "formulate the goals of this process and outline a plan for the army's future." This will include attaching "great significance" to "the equal importance of crisis prevention, and national territorial and alliance defence in the 21st century, as already presented in the government's white paper 2016." After "important strategic milestones were defined and the necessary changes in course were implemented in the last legislative period," the issue now is "to continue along this path."

The "changes in course" refer to the major expansion and rearmament of the army. The white paper pledged a return to "national territorial and alliance defence" so as to legitimise Germany's resort to a militarist great

power foreign policy. The Defence Ministry is now drafting a new "concept for the army" so as to implement these plans in practice. For this reason—and not due to Trump's demand to do so—the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union and Social Democrats agreed in the coalition agreement to increase defence spending to 2 percent of GDP by 2024.

The reintroduction of military service is also being considered. Oswin Veith, head of the association of army reservists and a parliamentary deputy for the CDU, declared Friday that young people should "engage for at least a year in medical care, in the armed forces" or commit for several years "to a German emergency organisation like the German Red Cross or Federal Agency for Technical Relief (THW)." The "incorporation of all young people into society as part of such a service" could "strengthen their cohesion and readiness to resist, and encourage them to identify with their country."

It is becoming ever clearer that the German bourgeoisie's military offensive is closely bound up with the breakdown of the post-war order and the transatlantic relationship with the United States. German politicians and media outlets have responded with a mixture of shock and outrage to Trump's reimposition of sanctions against Iran, including penalties for German companies if they do not withdraw from the geostrategically important and energy-rich country.

"Our relationship with the United States cannot be described as a friendship, not even a partnership," states the lead article in the latest edition of *Der Spiegel*. Trump has "adopted a tone that ignores 70 years of trust. He wants trade tariffs and demands subordination." The issue now "is not, as it was in the

past, if Germany and Europe will be involved in a military mission as in Afghanistan or Iraq; the issue is whether a transatlantic economic, foreign, and security policy actually exists. The answer: No.”

Even sections of the German bourgeoisie which were previously vehemently pro-US and enthusiastically backed every one of Washington’s aggressive wars have responded defiantly and are drumming up support for a more aggressive German-European great power policy. “Lamenting won’t do any good,” declared Klaus-Dieter Frankenberger in the daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. “To be heard and gain attention, and pursue its interests, Europe has to throw its weight around more. World power is not achieved in the seminar room, smug speeches, or being insulted.” The Germans in particular must “draw the appropriate conclusions if they want to achieve something in global politics and the Atlantic alliance.”

The demands for German “world power” or “global politics” make clear the traditions Germany’s ruling class are drawing on. The German empire and the Nazis used the same conceptions to justify their aggressive imperialist policies of expansion and conquest, which inevitably culminated in two world wars. Twenty-five years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and after more than a quarter century of imperialist wars in the Middle East, they have once again found their way into the vocabulary of German government policy.

“In the face of enormous challenges,” it is “no longer certain that we are the ones determining the course of the world,” complained Merkel in her speech at the ceremony for the awarding of the Karlspreis to French President Emmanuel Macron last Thursday in Aachen. “With regard to a common foreign policy,” Europe “is still taking baby steps,” but such a foreign policy will become “existentially necessary,” according to Merkel. Ultimately, “many major global conflicts are taking place on Europe’s doorstep,” and it is “no longer the case that the United States of America will simply protect us, but Europe must take its fate into its own hands.”

The ruling elite is well aware that its policy threatens to unleash a catastrophe. Together with Britain and France, Germany has “defended its stance on the Iran accord,” stated Merkel. But it is clear that we “confront an extremely complicated situation,” she added. “The

escalation over the past few hours” shows that “it is truly about war or peace.” She therefore called upon “all participants,” to “practice restraint.”

Merkel’s entire speech underscored that the German government is no more “restrained” than all of the other “participants.” While German imperialism believes it can pursue its economic and geopolitical interests independently of—and if necessary in opposition to—the United States, there can be no doubt of the side German imperialism would be on in the event of an assault on Iran. Last week, the German government defended Israel’s strikes on Iran in Syria, which threaten to provoke a region-wide conflagration and trigger conflicts with the nuclear powers Russia and China.

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