

German parliament celebrates 70 years of NATO and demands escalation of military rearmament

By Johannes Stern
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In response to the deepening global capitalist crisis and mounting tensions between the major powers, the German ruling elite has unleashed an unrestrained outburst of nationalism and militarism. This was underscored by the ceremony in Germany's federal Bundestag [parliament] Thursday marking the 70th anniversary of the founding of NATO. Politicians from the governing and opposition parties took turns delivering euphoric praise for the largest military and war-making alliance in history and demanded an escalation of the rearmament of the German army.

Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen (Christian Democrats, CDU) got the ball rolling. "It is painful that many of our partners, and it's not just the Americans, question Germany's willingness in principle to fulfil our alliance obligations," she said. Germany is the second largest troop and net financial contributor to NATO, has served reliably and loyally in Afghanistan for 18 years, and is the "only continental European power protecting the eastern border as a framework nation," she continued.

In the future, Germany will invest "more in the modernisation of its army," von der Leyen assured her audience. It is "firmly committed to the goal of spending 1.5 percent of gross domestic product on defence by 2024, and to work towards the 2 percent target in subsequent years."

One day earlier, Foreign Minister Heiko Mas (Social Democratic Party, SPD) confirmed Germany's support for the rearmament target, saying at the official NATO commemorations in Washington, "Our commitment is solid. ... We have clearly stated our intention to invest more in defence, and we keep our promises. We know in Europe that our security cannot be taken for granted

and that, in our own interest, we have to assume responsibility to ensure it in the future."

Mas boasted that the grand coalition has reversed the trend of declining defence spending, which has "increased significantly by 40 percent since 2014." It will now "increase further, initially to 1.5 percent of gross social product by 2024. Mas even signed a statement in Washington in which the NATO foreign ministers restated their commitment to reach the 2 percent target by 2024. For Germany, this translates into an increase in the defence budget to around €80 billion.

The project of finding additional billions annually for the military is being systematically pursued by the SPD. According to the budgetary plan of SPD Finance Minister Olaf Scholz, the defence budget will rise to over €45 billion next year. Further increases are being worked out behind the backs of the population. "The coalition remains committed to its promise," said SPD defence policy expert Fritz Felgentreu in parliament. The party has "demonstrated this with the continuous increase in defence spending," and will "stick to the timeline for the target in the future."

One of the most hypocritical speeches praising NATO came from the Greens' Jürgen Trittin. "If you look back over the period from the 16th century until today, you notice that the average duration of such alliances is typically 15 years. From that perspective, NATO is four times as old. That is undoubtedly a success," he declared. Trittin knows what he is talking about. As environment minister in the SPD/Green government led by Gerhard Schröder, he was directly involved in the illegal NATO war on Serbia, which marked the first foreign military intervention by

German troops since World War II.

The deputy leader of the Left Party's parliamentary group, Heike Hänsel, criticised NATO's 2 percent target. This criticism is being driven above all by the mounting tensions with the United States, and the fear of the development of an international anti-war movement based on the working class and fighting for a socialist programme. In her speech, Hänsel complained "that the German government often one-sidedly adopts US positions," and appealed for "a collective security alliance that includes Russia." She added a warning, "According to the latest polls, the support for NATO in the population continues to decline, in Germany to 44 percent."

The commemoration underscored how closely the ruling elite is allied with the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) to impose military rearmament in the face of widespread social and political opposition among the population. Parliamentary Vice President Thomas Oppermann (SPD), who chaired the sitting, welcomed the AfD speakers as "colleagues" and thanked them for their contributions.

The tirades from the AfD deputies were in substance little different from those from the other parties. They lauded NATO, advocated the government's 2 percent spending target, and in the process formulated in particularly stark terms what the return of Germany to a militarist great power foreign policy means: the militarisation of all areas of society and preparations for new wars of aggression.

"We Germans have to get on with it and say, Yes, absolutely, we will reach the 2 percent arms goal as we promised. We want to make the army so strong that no enemy can reckon with the army and come to the conclusion that it is easily beatable. That's where we have to get back to," demanded foreign policy spokesman for the AfD parliamentary group, Armin Paulus Hampel. The first reform must be "the reintroduction of military service." He ended his speech with the declaration, "*Si vis pacem, para bellum*, whoever wants peace must be armed for war."

It is only a matter of time until the established parties integrate the AfD into government. AfD deputy Mariana Harder-Kühnel, who enjoys close ties to right-wing and volkish-nationalist forces in the party around AfD Thuringia leader Björn Höcke, failed in her third attempt to be elected as a vice president of the

federal parliament. But with 199 votes, she secured more than 100 from non-AfD deputies. Prior to the vote, both CDU/CSU parliamentary group leader Ralph Brinkhaus and Free Democratic Party leader Christian Lindner backed her election. Representatives of the SPD and Greens also met prior to the vote with Harder-Kühnel for talks.

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