

Think tank sees coronavirus crisis as “opportunity” for German militarism

By Gregor Link
4 May 2020

The world economic crisis triggered by the coronavirus pandemic has become a catalyst for the plans of German imperialism to force Europe under its hegemony and to grasp for world power again.

This is most openly expressed in a recent paper by the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP), an influential German think tank. Under the title “Deterrence and Defence in Times of COVID-19”, it says: “As the unprecedented economic fall-out of this crisis is starting to become apparent, it may seem tempting to curtail defence spending. However, “current volatility in the world,” according to the authors of the study, would make this “irresponsible.”

Christian Mölling, the main author, is well networked in foreign policy circles. Before becoming DGAP research director and program director for security and defence, he worked for the German Marshall Fund of the United States and the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, SWP), which jointly published the programmatic paper “New Power, New Responsibility” in 2013.

“Europe”—meaning, above all, Germany—“can still shape its own destiny,” write Mölling et al. “Germany’s upcoming EU presidency” offers “a genuine opportunity” to emerge from the crisis “intact” and “possibly even stronger.” In order to achieve this goal, the advisers to the German government call for a “comprehensive conflict strategy” in the confrontation with rival powers, both within the borders of Europe and at the global level.

With a view to Germany’s EU Council presidency in July, the authors write: “This may have looked like a routine job—until now. The fact that the largest EU economy, the largest defence spender and the second largest military force in the EU takes over in midst of the crisis gives Berlin leverage to shape outcomes in the defence realm.” Germany should use its leadership role to “shield key European defence and industrial capabilities”

and “propose a pragmatic redesign of instruments like the European Defence Fund and PESCO [Permanent Structured Cooperation].”

PESCO is the preliminary stage of a continental European military alliance being promoted by Germany in particular. Except for Denmark and Malta, all EU states belong to it. Founded in November 2017, the cooperative “is to be seen as a direct reaction to the British [EU] exit referendum,” Ronja Kempin of the SWP told the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* in 2019.

As a basis for German options for action, the DGAP authors draft various scenarios of political developments on the European continent.

The common starting point of these scenarios is the following situation: “From 2020 onwards, European countries are likely going to find themselves under a double strain: While public finances will come under stress, the need for continued or even increased defence investment will remain as the security environment deteriorates.”

The DGAP paper argues that the military and weapons are indispensable for managing the political upheavals arising from the crisis and at the same time to assert German and European geostrategic interests against international rivals: “Europe cannot take a tough stance on Russia in the east and neglect the south. It is not possible for Europe to focus on just one pillar. It must address deterrence, defence and crisis management simultaneously.”

The paper describes the effects of such a policy as follows: “As some governments are forced to declare bankruptcy, the remaining forces are needed for internal security tasks.” This would result in a lack of investment in the national armed forces. The security situation would be “tense as Russian analysts assume that the nuclear threshold has been lowered due to the loss of conventional capabilities.”

Elsewhere it says: “Given the lack of US leadership in the global response to COVID-19, Beijing is currently positioning itself as the alternative provider of soft power. Beijing is presenting an image of control and benevolence, delivering medical equipment and test kits to Europe and elsewhere, while the United States is barely able to handle the crisis at home.”

In fact, the United States was the greatest “source of uncertainty” from the German point of view. The DGAP paper states that it is possible that the “deep rift in US society” and the “enormous strain that the fight against the pandemic puts on the US economy” could lead to a political withdrawal of the United States from Europe.

The result of such an “Ami goes home” [Yanks go home] scenario would be “an intra-European debate on nuclear deterrence. Given that Europe includes nuclear powers as well as countries that have signed and ratified the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, internal cohesion is strained. Both budget and nuclear debates meet with political resistance in individual states. This paradoxical situation of having to spend more while budgets are becoming tighter exacerbates political rifts between Europeans. Just as during the last crisis, Europeans have different spending priorities. Diverging spending patterns impact defence industries differently across Europe.”

From the German point of view, the goal in this situation must be to politically “integrate” countries that have fallen behind in the meantime. To this end, a political instrument should be developed that corresponds to NATO’s national framework concept.

The idea that the global crisis—despite considerable challenges—presents itself above all as an opportunity for German imperialism runs like a red thread through the DGAP study.

With a view to major European armaments projects such as MGCS (Franco-German battle tank) and FCAS (joint European air combat system), the paper recommends, for example, that the German government take the initiative immediately. This crisis “offers a chance to overcome national sentiment in organizational and defence industrial cooperation.” It should be seized even though political resistance is to be expected. Germany should “envisage the next generation of defence industrial cooperation and consolidation.”

But the stubborn nationalism of other EU countries is not the only brake on German ambitions that could now finally be “overcome.” Another “obstacle” that needs to be removed is the “firewall that traditionally separates

civilian and military R&D in Europe.” Instead, the aim must be to use all available means more “creatively” to achieve military and strategic goals. If even this does not produce the desired results, “alternative means” must be used.

The paper literally states: “Conflict has already spilled out of the conventional military domain. If military means prove more expensive or less effective than alternative ones, it is prudent to consider a more comprehensive way to engage in conflicts and deter adversaries. Such a *comprehensive conflict strategy* could build on the lessons learned from *hybrid warfare* and foreign influence operations against Europe” (emphasis added).

These lines leave no doubt that the German bourgeoisie, despite its defeat in two world wars, is preparing new historical crimes behind the backs of the people. In 2005, the American military strategist Frank G. Hoffman defined “hybrid warfare” as a “combination of conventional and irregular ways of fighting in connection with terrorist actions and criminal behaviour.”

When German military advisers speak of “alternative means” in this context, this must be taken as a serious warning. The “elements” of such hybrid warfare are, according to the definition, among other things the use of “nuclear, biological, chemical and improvised explosive devices,” the implementation of “disinformation and propaganda campaigns” together with cyber-attacks, as well as the “deployment of covertly fighting troops, or soldiers and military equipment without national emblems, operating on foreign territory.”

To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>