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By Johannes Stern
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German President Steinmeier calls for German-European great power politics at Munich conference

The ruling class in Germany is determined to promote the return of militarism by all means. Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier (Social Democratic Party, SPD) underlined this in his opening speech at this year's Munich Security Conference.

"The world today is not the same as it was in 2014," he warned right at the beginning of his speech. "Six years ago exactly," he said, "I spoke here about how German foreign-policy responsibility had to prove its validity." Much had "changed since then" and he therefore wanted to "speak plainly" about how "today's world appears from the German vantage point."

As a result, the German head of state did not mince his words. He drew the picture of a world in which the imperialist powers openly prepared for war and the redivision of the world, as on the eve of the First and Second World Wars. One was witnessing "an increasingly destructive dynamic in international politics." The "idea of the 'great power competition' is not only influencing the strategy papers of today." He said. "It is also shaping anew the reality all across the world, and its tracks can be followed right to the unending wars with huge loss of life in the Middle East and Libya."



Frank-Walter Steinmeier

Seventy-five years after the end of the Second World War, in addition to Russia and China, German imperialism again counts the United States among its international adversaries. “Our closest ally, the United States of America, rejects the very concept of an international community. Every country, it believes, should look after itself and put its own interests before all others. As if everyone thinking of himself meant that everyone is being considered. ‘Great again’—even at the expense of neighbours and partners,” Steinmeier criticised.

His conclusion: the establishment of an independent German-European military and great power policy that will enable Berlin to play a role in the coming conflicts and to assert its economic and geostrategic interests worldwide. “For Germany, Europe is not simply something that is nice to have for when other partnerships wilt,” he explained. “No, it is our strongest, our most fundamental national interest. Today and tomorrow, Europe is the indispensable framework for us to assert ourselves in the world.”

Steinmeier left no doubt that this “self-assertion” meant massively increasing Germany’s armaments, war and imperialist crimes, as in the past. “The military instrument is indispensable for our security,” Steinmeier reminded his audience at the Hotel Bayerischer Hof. The effort to achieve NATO’s agreed 2 percent target was “correct and necessary,” he said. Overall, he said, we should not “overburden our foreign policy with the expectation that it will bring salvation,” since “morally guided positions are more likely to close rather than open our eyes to the necessity and actual possibilities of our actions.”

What is being said is unmistakable: In order to assert German interests worldwide, one must get one’s hands dirty. “Whoever wants to make peace in Libya needs to shake a great

many hands, not all of them clean,” Steinmeier said provocatively. “Whoever wants to combat terrorism in the Sahel region—and we have a few years’ experience in Mali—cannot simply make it a case of ‘military—yes or no?’ but must above all tackle the complex causes of the conflict on the ground to successfully ensure stability. There can be no conflict resolution, far less understanding, otherwise.”

In a subsequent speech, Foreign Minister Heiko Maas (also SPD) expressed himself in a similarly bellicose manner. “To put it plainly: Germany is prepared to become more involved, including militarily,” he announced. “But this military commitment must be embedded in a political logic ... Former Defence Minister Peter Struck was right. He once said, German security is also defended in the Hindu Kush. And today we must add, also in Iraq, Libya and the Sahel—but also at the negotiating table in New York, Geneva or Brussels.”

Steinmeier and Maas cynically tried to sell their aggressive pleas for a German-European world policy in close alliance with Brussels and France in response to the “lessons of German history” and the return of fascist and right-wing extremist forces. “Today, the evil spirits of the past—ethnocentric thinking, racism, anti-Semitism—are emerging in our country in a new guise. So we—in Germany, but by no means only in Germany—are called upon once again,” said Steinmeier.

The speeches of Steinmeier and Maas, as well as the entire political development in Germany, underline that the ruling class has not learned the least thing from the disasters of the 20th century. As in the 1930s, it is reacting to the deep crisis of capitalism with militarism, war and fascism.

Last week, the decision of the Thuringian Christian Democratic Union (CDU) to elect a state premier together with the extreme right Alternative for Germany (AfD) has made visible how directly the German bourgeoisie is already relying on extreme right-wing forces to push through its militaristic and anti-working-class course against the resistance of the population. Steinmeier himself plays a central role in this.

Shortly after his appearance at the Munich Security Conference in 2014, as then foreign minister, Steinmeier solidarized openly with fascist forces in Ukraine. During the Berlin-backed coup, he welcomed Oleh Tyahnybok at the German embassy in Kiev, the leader of the fascist Svoboda Party, which until then had mainly been an ally of the neo-Nazi German National Party (NPD). Tyahnybok is notorious for his anti-Semitic tirades in which he incites “against Jewish pigs and other riffraff.” His role models are Nazi

collaborators like Stepan Bandera and Roman Shukhevych, who were involved in the mass murder of thousands of Ukrainian Jews.

After the AfD moved into the Bundestag (federal parliament) in September 2017, Steinmeier used his speech on German Unity Day to promote closer cooperation with right-wing extremist forces in Germany itself. Speaking about the AfD's election results, he declared, "Our differences must not become enmities—differences must not become irreconcilability." At the end of November 2017, he invited the then-AfD cochairs Alexander Gauland and Alice Weidel to political talks at his Bellevue Castle official residence. The now planned rearmament of the Bundeswehr (armed forces) and war offensive will not stop the cooperation with the AfD, but will intensify it further.

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