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By Johannes Stern
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As US withdraws troops, German politicians, media step up militarist campaign

Against the background of growing tensions between the great powers and the worldwide intensification of the class struggle, the German ruling class is aggressively pursuing its campaign of militarism and war. The Trump administration's announcement that 9,500 of the nearly 35,000 US soldiers stationed in Germany might be withdrawn and transferred to other European states has been met with defiant criticism and calls for a more independent German-European military policy.

"The plans once again show that the Trump administration is neglecting an elementary leadership task: the involvement of the Allies in decision-making processes," said Johann Wadephul, the deputy chairman of the Christian Democratic (CDU/CSU) parliamentary group in the Bundestag.

Everyone benefited "from the cohesion of the alliance, only Russia and China from discord," he added, with a warning that US plans were "another wake-up call for us Europeans to take our fate more decisively into our own hands, also in terms of security policy."



German occupation forces in Afghanistan [Credit: AP Photo/Anja Niedringhaus]

Representatives of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the grand coalition partner of the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union, as well as spokespeople for the opposition parties expressed similar sentiments. According to Fritz Felgentreu, defence policy spokesman of the SPD's parliamentary group, Trump's plan underlines "that the reliability of the US as a partner and a force for order in Europe is no longer a given in the traditional way." He said the withdrawal of the US troops would be a "test of European security policy as it adjusts to this situation." This applied in particular to the "trouble spot, Russia."

In an interview with the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung*, Tobias Lindner, defence policy spokesman for the Greens, called Trump a "transatlantic wrong-way driver." On Twitter, he threatened that the US "should not be surprised" if it "suddenly becomes very lonely internationally. ..." Lindner promoted the "long-term goal of a European army" last year in a **guest** article for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* titled "Why Green Foreign Policy Needs the Bundeswehr [Armed Forces]."

The Left Party is the most aggressive advocate of a German-European defence policy independent of the US. In an entry on her Facebook page, former parliamentary party leader and leading spokeswoman of the Left Party Sahra Wagenknecht described the planned withdrawal of US troops as "a good start."

She said the German government should now work "for a withdrawal of all 34,500 US soldiers still stationed here," along with the "US nuclear weapons stored in Germany." Germany could "play a more important and positive role internationally through greater independence," she said. It was "high time that Germany and the EU develop an

independent foreign policy that respects international law and democracy and works for diplomatic solutions and disarmament!”

This is the well-known propaganda. In reality, German and European imperialism are not one bit more democratic or lawful than American imperialism. The European powers have long participated in Washington’s campaigns of conquest in the Middle East, which flout international law, and continue to commit war crimes. If they are now striving for greater independence, it is not a question of disarmament or democracy, but of asserting their own economic and geostrategic interests even more brutally.

German imperialism is showing its true face once again, 75 years after the fall of Hitler’s Third Reich. The German elites are massively rearming, boosting the Alternative for Germany (AfD), an extreme right-wing party, and using every opportunity to push for Germany’s return to an aggressive foreign and great power policy.

In the economic stimulus package passed last week by the grand coalition government of Christian Democrats and Social Democrats, 10 billion euros have been earmarked for the armament of the Bundeswehr. Point 10 of the programme states that “security projects, as well as new armament projects with a high German value-added share, which can still be started in 2020 and 2021, will be implemented immediately (project volume: 10 billion euros).” Previously, the Bundestag **extended and expanded** numerous Bundeswehr foreign missions despite the coronavirus pandemic and initiated the **procurement** of 138 combat jets.

In his speech at the opening of the 18th German Ambassadors’ Conference at the end of May, Foreign Minister Heiko Maas (SPD) stated that Germany had to make use of the effects of the coronavirus pandemic to step up its foreign policy offensive. He said: “Let us take the question of who will emerge as the supposed victor in the geopolitical wrangling of these days. Most bets are on China. But is it that simple?” He went on to argue that while some people saw the “EU in a struggle for survival,” Germany would, in the course of its EU presidency from July 1, “bear a special responsibility to counter this narrative clearly, in words and deeds.”

What this means is clear. Berlin is pursuing the goal of dominating Europe so as to act as a world power and satisfy the hunger of export-dependent German industry for markets and raw materials.

Maas explained that the “European imperative” required “all member states” to “understand European interests as national interests, to consider national interests also

European—and of course to act accordingly.” Under the “keyword, European sovereignty,” he added, one must “urgently reduce dependencies in strategically important areas: in the health sector, but also in energy, information technology, food, logistics and raw materials such as rare earths.”

The bourgeois media are impressing upon their readers that Germany and Europe must prepare themselves for future conflicts between major powers—if necessary, including the US.

“There is a high probability that the competition between the US, Russia and China will intensify between the West, East and East,” wrote the former editor-in-chief of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Kurt Kister, in a commentary on Trump’s withdrawal plans. Even if Trump were not re-elected, he wrote, the US “would further distance itself from Europe and the post-war alliance.” The European NATO states had to “find a common response to this—whether through a reorientation of NATO or through a European security alliance that presumably could not grow out of the EU’s consensus apparatus.”

If Trump wants “to reduce the US forces in Germany, he should do so,” wrote Kister. Today, “the stationing of US troops in Germany” was “in terms of security policy, primarily in the interest of the US and its more or less strong engagement in the Orient, the Gulf and Africa.”

For Germany, the loss of the troops would have only “a certain economic significance, because the 36,000 military personnel and their families who are now still in the Army are reviving the economy.” Referring to the US nuclear weapons stored in Germany, Kister said that “there are other ways to secure so-called nuclear sharing if you want to.”

Other ruling class mouthpieces fear that a hasty withdrawal of US troops would weaken German imperialism. In an angry commentary titled “Madness without method,” the notorious warmonger and editor of *Die Zeit*, Joseph Joffe, said the US would cut not only its “own flesh” with a withdrawal of troops, but that “the blade would certainly also go into the German flank.”

Germany, Joffe argued, was currently not able to defend itself—that is, to wage war on its own. Whoever wanted a “contested divorce” had, therefore, to “offer viable alternatives and not beautiful but distant dreams.” Germany “would have to shoulder risks and accept sacrifices, not to mention the billions spent on armament.”

A member of numerous pro-American think tanks, Joffe urged the United States not to forget that Germany was “a bastion of US security policy in Europe and further afield—in

the Middle East and Africa.” It was from here that “supplies are organised.” The Ramstein Air Force Base was home to the European headquarters of the US Air Force as well as the Supreme Command of the NATO Air Force, and “from here, the US waged drone war in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Somalia. Ramstein covers airspace from the North Cape to Antarctica.”

Trump’s plans have also provoked strong reactions within the United States itself. On Tuesday, 22 congressmen from Trump’s own Republican Party sent a letter to the White House asking the president to reconsider the plans. “We believe that these steps would significantly weaken US national security and at the same time weaken our position vis-à-vis Russia,” the congressmen said.

The former commander-in-chief of US land forces in Europe, Lieutenant General Ben Hodges, had already called Trump’s plan a “colossal mistake.” In an interview with *Der Spiegel*, he described the US troops stationed in Germany as “essential to American security”—especially regarding NATO’s offensive against nuclear-powered Russia.

Irrespective of what the US administration ultimately decides and how Germany reacts—according to the German government, Berlin has been officially informed about the withdrawal plans, but a final decision is still pending—the danger of war is growing. Thirty years after German reunification and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the same contradictions of capitalism that triggered two world wars in the 20th century are again leading to extreme militarism and war.

At the same time, opposition to capitalist violence is growing, as is currently seen in the global protests against the police murder of George Floyd. The international working class must oppose the rearmament plans of capitalist governments both internally and externally, by means of its own independent strategy. It must build a socialist movement against war and capitalist oppression. This is what the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party) is fighting for, together with all of the other sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International.

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